

# NEWS & LETTERS

Theory/Practice

'Human Power is its own end'—Marx

Vol. 40 — No. 3

APRIL 1995

25¢

## General strike is in King legacy



by John Marcotte

"All labor has dignity. It is a crime for people to live in this rich nation and receive starvation wages." Martin Luther King spoke those words in 1968, addressing the striking Memphis sanitation workers. I saw this in the movie *At The River I Stand*, and those words brought back to me a different world than today, when meanness and poverty now seem to be taken for granted.

The ground of the debate has shifted so much since then. We've elected politicians who promise to kick out the immigrants who pick our food, deny schooling to their children, and take food out of the mouths of hungry children. We're told the richest country in the world is broke. The federal government is broke, the states are broke, the cities are broke. But they always seem to find the billions when it's a question of some foreign operation to make the president look good when he's having trouble at home. They find \$50 billion on one week's notice when it's a matter of bailing out some big U.S. investors in Mexico.

This reminds me of the boss at contract time. Don't you know the boss is always broke at contract time, no matter how good a year the business had? The boss just doesn't want to give a penny back to us, just like the government doesn't want to spend a penny anymore to put milk in a baby's mouth.

Let them at least be honest and state it openly: we don't care if you poor are sick and die. We don't need you. You built this mighty country, your ancestors made us rich with their sweat and blood, planted the cotton, built the steel mills and the cities. Now we've got automated production: we don't need you, go away and die.

(Continued on page 3)

## Black World

### Rethinking high-tech & Frantz Fanon



by Lou Turner

The challenge from the new retrogressive reality is beginning to generate new radical thinking on two of the fundamental issues that are at the cutting edge of many of today's debates, namely, high technology and the "crisis of the subject." Two conferences I participated in recently revealed that the distance between these two subjects is more apparent than real, though the only basis for showing how intimately they are related is provided by dialectical philosophy.

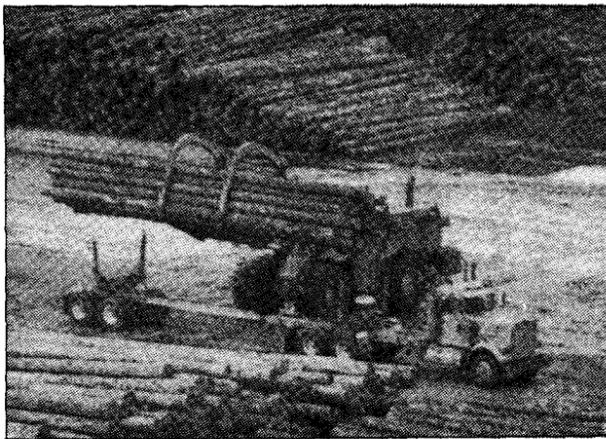
The "Midwest Conference on Technology, Employment and Community" was held March 2-4 at the University of Illinois at Chicago, and a two-day symposium in honor of the Black revolutionary thinker Frantz Fanon entitled "Fanon Today: Rereadings, Confrontations, Engagements" was held March 23-24 at Purdue University. The main organizers of the high-tech conference were Abdul Alkalimat and Doug Gills, while Lewis Gordon was the principal organizer of the Fanon symposium.

To be sure, more questions were raised than answered at the two gatherings, but there was a sense that Black left intellectuals are beginning to rethink Black reality. Getting behind the phenomenal forms in which today's crises in the Black community appear requires more than the temporizing discourses of such careerist "public intellectuals" as Cornel West, Henry Louis Gates, and bell hooks. But while it is significant that the participants at the high-tech and Fanon conferences are also actively engaged in practical political issues, in the end, that neither distinguishes them from the likes of West, Gates and hooks, nor is it what the present historic moment requires of us.

As one Latino trade unionist in the steel industry said at a panel discussion at the high-tech conference, we need an analysis of the situation we're in and a vision of where we need to go to change it. A similar view was expressed by two African intellectuals at the Fanon symposium. Indeed, while there were numerous references to relating the revolutionary thought of Frantz Fanon to the raw contradictions of Black life in the U.S., there was never any sustained engagement with the concrete problems of the Black social crises, whether that be the

(Continued on page 8)

## Congress unleashes 'free market' to devour environment



Stripping the earth and fouling the air—sustainable capitalism? No thanks!

by Franklin Dmitryev

The Great Lakes reeking with rotting fish and a river aflame. The last old-growth trees falling to saw blades. Wilderness preserves transformed into mines and oil wells. Replays of the 1952 London smog that killed 4,000 people in three weeks. Toxic zones growing in every city, mostly near African-American or Latino neighborhoods. Factory and farm workers unknowingly exposed to new chemicals untested for safety. Is this a nightmare of the past or the vision of our environmental future inscribed in the fine print of House Speaker Newt Gingrich's "Contract with America"?

Under the banner of "revolution," Congress is pressing an agenda that aims to alter all aspects of life, rolling back achievements of popular social movements going back over 100 years. Enveloping all is the ideological crusade which spews vicious lies and numbing Newtspeak to glorify the free market and blame social ills on the masses.

If successful, the Republican initiative to restructure the state and, with it, society would reduce taxes on capitalists, slash regulation and social programs and shift resources even more toward the military and prisons. It would realign the court system toward criminal cases (excluding corporate crimes) and reduce access to civil suits, except for capitalists fighting regulation.

Opposition to this reactionary onslaught is coming together from many sectors. It is vital at this moment to help build the opposition and at the same time to lay the conceptual ground to keep it free of the free market ideological trap.

### ALL-OUT ATTACK ON REGULATION

An integral part of the drive to restructure the state is the all-out attack on environmental regulations. The word "environment" does not occur in the "Contract" because the pollsters know that most people want environmental regulations strengthened, not gutted. The only mandate to cut regulations comes from the capitalists who bankroll the politicians. Capitalism in economic crisis is prepared to sacrifice every bit of protection of human health and the environment to capital's insatiable hunger to grow. The inhuman program of Gingrich's Congress is all-encompassing:

● The "Personal Responsibility Act" aims to demonize

(Continued on page 10)

### ON THE INSIDE

RAYA DUNAYEVSKAYA • Labor power in the high-tech economy..... page 4  
ESSAY • Black 'everyday resistance,' organization and Idea of Freedom .. page 5

## Turkey invades Iraqi Kurdistan as West looks on

London—The Turkish army took its position on the Iraqi border very early on this year. Kurds were expecting that something like Turkey's invasion of Iraqi Kurdistan, March 20 was going to happen. Everybody could see the tanks sitting on the border. The main two parties in conflict in northern Iraqi areas—KDP and PUK—deny that they had prior warning of a Turkish attack. They say they had no word that Turkey was actually going to come in when they did [and have condemned it].

The town of Zakho is about 10 minutes from the border with Turkey. It is a large town of 50-60 thousand people. The Turkish army is now going house by house and making searches from Zakho all the way up to the mountain areas where there are camps from the influx of refugees from the Turkish side of the border a year ago. They are arresting anybody who they feel is suspicious, Iraqi Kurds and Turkish Kurds.

Turkey has effectively crushed the democratic voice of the Kurds within Turkey. It has imprisoned Kurdish parliamentarians and given them very long prison sentences. The ordinary people can no longer say anything. They are not allowed to even leave their areas. There is a kind of curfew imposed upon the existing villages that haven't actually been destroyed. Those who have crossed to the other side of the border from Turkey are being hounded and forced to go back into Turkey, many of them as prisoners.

Every Kurdish New Year [Nowruz, March 21] there has been a clash between the Kurdish Liberation Movement and the Turkish armed forces. This year, in a ploy to de-Kurdify Nowruz, the government declared it a Turkish holiday. Instead of saying this is a Kurdish national holiday which we respect, they are trying to turn it into something Turkish again and take it away from the Kurds. Also there have been so many soldiers in the Kurdish region, nobody has been out to celebrate with any enthusiasm.

The [Islamic fundamentalist] demonstrations we have seen in the western part of Turkey are a symptom of the level of political frustration that is being reached in Turkey. Because there are very few people able to survive in

the Kurdish areas anymore, there has been a huge influx to the western cities. These are the people who have been protesting. The assassinations of Kurdish businessmen, journalists, cafe owners have gotten out of control in the west as much as in the eastern part of the country.

There is nowhere near enough support work being done. The only reports with any tone of support at all have been from Amnesty International expressing concern about the welfare of ordinary Kurds on both sides of the border. Similarly the UNHCR [United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees] has issued some strong reports concerning what the journalists from the ground are saying—about Turkish soldiers arbitrarily arresting refugees and ordinary Kurds. Some people have disappeared already. We don't know what has happened to them.

Meanwhile the Western governments are being very slow to respond in any way that is having any effect on actually stopping Turkey from carrying on with its intended slaughter of a handful of guerrillas. There is no justification for the force of 35,000 troops, helicopters, and jets bombarding the Kurds. It is a lot against an estimated two or three thousand guerrillas. Instead they are going through civilian areas. They don't know how to distinguish one Kurd from another. They are wearing the same clothes. They all speak Kurdish.

The Kurds should have a voice in this situation. Yet the media are only talking to the Turkish authorities and to the heads of the Western countries, who are quite keen to forge the new cast in steel. The Kurds are the victims here—Iraqi Kurds, Turkish Kurds, whichever side they are on. Nobody seems to be asking them why this is happening and why again they are the victims of a very powerful government.

—Sheri Laizer

Sheri Laizer is the author of *Into Kurdistan: Frontiers under Fire* (Zed Books, 1991) and a forthcoming book on developments since the Gulf War. She was interviewed on March 23 for N&L by Cyrus Noveen.

# Republican plan brutalizes young women

by Terry Moon

It's amazing how just the one phrase, "innocent children," reveals the hateful prejudice and criminal ignorance embodied by the unprecedented vicious attacks on poor women unleashed by the Republican election conquest. As they gut foster care and adoptive services for the poorest children in the U.S., the Republicans' lying claim that gutting welfare will not hurt "innocent children," reveals who else they aim to hurt—those they believe are not innocent—poor women. If they are teenagers or Black, so much the guil-

## Woman as Reason

The Republicans' frantic rush to push through their disgustingly named "Personal Responsibility Act" to criminalize young single women for daring to have babies reveals an all-consuming desire to impose their right-wing ideology on all others, and to force poor women to give up their children, lose their homes and starve.

Their latest twisted idea is an "illegitimacy ratio," which would reward states that reduce the proportion of abortions plus out-of-wedlock births compared to all births. Forced by anti-abortion fanatics and the Catholic hierarchy to concede that their punitive welfare plan would cause poor and teenaged women to have abortions—not covered under Medicaid—they hatched this misogynist "illegitimacy ratio," to encourage states to make abortions even more inaccessible.

When one looks at the reality of poor women's lives, the inhuman nature of this legislation is striking. While the Republicans care not one whit about these realities, others are looking closely at the abuse a shocking number of young women face. They are pointing out that too often, young women's experience with sex, as with welfare, has nothing to do with either their desire or choice.

● A study of 12 welfare work programs revealed that over half the women experienced physical or mental abuse by boyfriends or husbands. At one training center, 58% of the women were in abusive relationships and a further 26% had been beaten in the past. Mounting evidence shows that abusive men sabotage women's efforts to find work and get off welfare.

● Two thirds of women interviewed in a 1992 study, who became pregnant as teenagers, had been sexually abused, almost always by fathers or relatives. Further, 60% of women who had sex before they were 15 were "coerced," often by a man six or more years older.

● A U.S. Justice Department study shows just what "coerced" means: 51% of rapes in 1992 in the U.S. happened to women under 18; that number jumps to 61.6% when it includes rapes not reported to the police. A fantastic 29.3% of those rapes happened to girls younger than 11. The rapist is most likely her father or a relative.

This reality reveals the overwhelming brutality of the Republicans' plans. They would force teen moms to live at home, cut off additional money if a woman has another baby, cut off all benefits if the mother doesn't name the baby's father, deny all cash to single mothers under

## Singapore executes maid amidst Filipino outcry

**New York**—Many Filipinos and others here and around the world protested, waited and watched in utter horror as the Singapore government on March 17 sent to death by hanging Flor Contemplacion—a Filipina who traveled abroad to work for pitiful maid's wages in the home of a rich family that murdered a colleague of hers after their son died and then framed Contemplacion for her death.

Demonstrations began just days before she was executed and have intensified since, involving thousands throughout the Philippines and elsewhere. Though Filipina migrant workers in Hong Kong demonstrated, the Singapore government had warned the 75,000 workers from the Philippines not to take part in protest demonstrations or vigils.

Ms. Contemplacion's lawyers advised her to plead not guilty—not because she didn't commit the crime, but on account of insanity. She spent four years in prison after being arrested in 1991. Her four children were allowed to travel to Singapore to see her for a final reunion just this month. Reports reaching Filipino activists here say that the Singapore government refused to allow Ms. Contemplacion to hold her children and hug them in their last meeting before her death.

The 1991 U.S.-Iraq war briefly exposed the hellish conditions of Filipino migrant workers, especially women, in the Persian Gulf area. At the time, Corazon Aquino and others pleaded that they intended to change the way Filipino workers were exploited overseas. Fidel Ramos, her successor, did no more than make a show of concern hours before Contemplacion's execution.

In response to the nearly insurrectionary mood in the country which surged March 26 when Ms. Contemplacion was buried in her hometown of San Pablo, Ramos recalled the Philippines Ambassador to Singapore, outlawed travel by Filipinos to Singapore to take jobs, and offered any workers from the Philippines now in Singapore free transport home on military jets.

Before the spontaneous upsurge of protest and revolution, Ramos was still ignoring the situation, looking forward to receiving Singapore's prime minister in mid-April. The Prime Minister was expected in the Philippines, given its apparent new-found political stability at the time the visit was arranged.

—Victor Hart

18, and have voted in the House Appropriations Committee to allow states to refuse Medicaid-funded abortions for victims of rape and incest. Yet the most "responsible" thing a woman living in an abusive household might do is leave home, not name the baby's father, or have an abortion.

Although many young poor women are leading such difficult lives, it is important to single out their resiliency and that young women are "responsible:" teen contraceptive use has risen and teen pregnancy rates fell 19% between 1972 and 1990.

The racist debate has also obscured that more than 75% of Black single women work; 90% of 15- to 17-year-old Black women are childless as are 76% of those 18 and 19; the number of out-of-wedlock births for Black women has remained constant from 1970 to 1990.

It is Republicans, drunk with power, not poor women, who need a "Personal Responsibility Act" as they toil to end any support society offers poor women and children. They are on the fast track to neo-fascism, where not only "innocent children" will be crushed, but so will all who don't subscribe to their sexist, racist, homophobic, capitalist ideology. And as they well know, those with power have no need to act responsibly—especially with the Left in such disarray.

While the urgency is to create the widest possible coalition to stop the Republican juggernaut, it won't be easy and it can't be done by ignoring the class and race differences in the women's movement. Nor can we support Clinton—he opened the door to the Republican onslaught against "welfare as we know it" in the first place. Working out what we are for, which is the absolute opposite of what the Republicans want, will create a unifying vision of the future and a meaningful and principled resistance to this new stage of retrogression.

(See "Young women speak out," page 11.)

## March 8 protests assail 'Contract on America'

### Chicago

**Chicago**—On International Women's Day, women here demonstrated against the Republican "Contract with America," and signed onto a "Women's Real Contract with America." Our contract addressed inadequate housing, domestic violence and rape, under-funded health care, and racist, sexist and homophobic attacks.

More than 100 women and men gathered at Federal Plaza at noon and more joined as the drums sounded and the march traversed the downtown area. Speakers included representatives from the Women's Action Coalition, the National Organization for Women, the Ketzal Center, the Public Welfare Coalition and the Thousand Waves women's self-awareness and defense organization. While some onlookers cheered, many women could not be convinced to take free carnations offered in commemoration of the date.

With women of many colors and interests represented, the event managed to disrupt traffic and raise a few spirits. However, a call to the action and organizing most desperately needed in these times was not a prominent feature. Neither were links clearly made between local, national and international politics. I heard no connection to my Italian or Russian or Palestinian sisters also demonstrating. I was not to be educated about Illinois' own contract, which was moving through the state General Assembly at a clip that would put Newt to shame.

Illinois' recently approved welfare reform, the most onerous of any state, was discussed, but pending legislation that these hundreds of women could impact was not targeted. Now we are days away from laws that will further restrict access to abortion services for women under 18 and women dependent on Medicaid. These proposals and others would decimate women's rights to self-determination on the most local level.

While I was glad of our official recognition of a holiday born in women's revolutionary struggle for basic human rights to safe working conditions and decent economic compensation, I was sorry not to leave with an action plan. I should have shouted myself that most important was the grassroots mobilization that will take government out of Newt Gingrich and Illinois state representatives Pate Phillip and Lee Daniel's hands and deliver it back to the people who will bear the brunt of these laws.

We are our only salvation. While the vote and the lobbying phone call are not the answers, they are tools that should be included in our arsenals. Only if we all shout loudly enough in every way possible, can we hope to compete with the reactionary politics orchestrated by capitalist strongmen.

—Feminist activist

### San Francisco

**San Francisco**—On March 8, over 100 women and men gathered in pouring rain for International Women's Day. Standing on the steps of the new State Building, women held a bright pink banner, "WOMEN HAVE A REASON TO RAGE." And rage we did, against Newt Gingrich and the Contract on America, against Proposition 187 and the "Three Strikes" law.

After a march to the old State Building, women spoke from a variety of organizations. "Loving women is not part of the Republicans' plan," one said. She attacked Newt's plan to punish women having babies "out of wedlock," which reflects on lesbians and women who do not live with men.

A Filipina woman spoke about the system of mail-order brides. Recently one man shot and killed his wife in divorce court because "She just wasn't the same once

## E-MOSA rally in U.S.



News & Letters

**Los Angeles**—On March 8, International Women's Day, 12 women workers from the E-MOSA maquiladora in Tijuana, Mexico, owned by the National O-Ring company, traveled here to rally outside the National O-Ring plant in Downey.

Their rally was joined by the Comité de Costureras Unidas (CCU, Committee of Seamstresses United) and the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. The workers at the Downey plant were encouraged by the Mexican women workers to join but were quickly threatened by their boss, Mr. Shahib, when word got out about the rally.

The 12 Mexican workers representing their co-workers at the Tijuana E-MOSA plant have filed suit in California court against Mr. Shahib, president of National O-Ring, for sexual harassment, non-payment of wages and infliction of emotional distress (see March N&L).

The E-MOSA workers in Tijuana are very determined in this fight in spite of having been blacklisted as troublemakers by other maquiladoras.

—Mary H.

she got to America'...This is because she began to get a mind of her own, and he didn't like it!"

A speaker from a Latino gay and lesbian organization called for a stronger sense of internationalism to fight growing fascism in the world. One Latina from Women Against Rape denounced the attitude many college men have that they should be allowed to force a woman to have sex, "if she turns him on." The Political Ecology Group speaker showed how the Republicans are trying to make us pay corporations to stop dumping toxics on people of color. And a worker from Fuerza Unida of San Antonio, Texas, spoke about their campaign against Levi-Strauss (See page 3).

The Lesbian Avengers performed a ritual where they "ate fire" to protest fires set against gays and lesbians in New York. They chanted, "The fires of hate will not consume us if we take it and make it our own."

—Julia Jones

### San Jose

**San Jose, Cal.**—The Women's Resource Center at San Jose State University shaped International Women's Day into an urgent discussion on issues facing women at this year's upcoming UN World Conference on Women in Beijing. The fact that the Chinese government is actively obstructing visa applications of women from Tibet and Taiwan, and of open lesbians and bisexuals worldwide, roused fears that this could not be an honest meeting of all the world's women. However, keynote speaker Linda Burnham, director of the Women of Color Resource Center in Oakland, underlined that no matter what retrogressive forces like the Vatican or the Chinese government desire, "it's hard to hijack 30,000 women!"

In a workshop on violence against women, Ruby, a Latina who had survived domestic abuse, spoke movingly of her life, infusing it with philosophic reflection. Ruby recognized that her dreams were crushed by abuse. Her self-development started when she was able "to remember I was a human being, that I deserved better than this, and I wanted my life back." Her story became a touchstone for the large gathering of 125 people, mostly students. But the full richness of Ruby's thought was not elaborated, because the need for the most basic information about domestic violence and rape crisis help seemed more immediate to the panelists.

In the workshop "We Are All Workers," Helen Kim from Asian Immigrant Women Advocates told us of the beginning of AIWA 12 years ago as a "workplace literacy" program organized by a hotel worker's union for Chinese and Korean women. The panel ended with Evelyn Royales from the Salinas office of United Farm Workers. Her talk made it very clear that when women fight for their rights, whether it's health care, or pesticide use, or low wages and dismal living and working conditions they are in fact fighting for all people.

During a speak-out session, Jennifer's comments of taking back our heads and liberating philosophy from university halls generated enthusiastic applause. During the discussion a young Asian activist called for a "Take Back the Night" march later in the month, which materialized two weeks later, when a small but enthusiastic group took to the walkways of the campus. The coordinator of a local rape crisis center spoke of "freedom and safety as our birthright—they should be ours from the moment we enter the world as babies." The student organizer for the event related how feminist activism had empowered her in the aftermath of three sexual assaults.

—Jennifer and Urszul

# Human cost high for immigrant workers

**New York**—It is hard enough to live in a foreign country where every day you are made to understand that you are not welcome for many reasons such as the color of your skin, your customs, your inability to communicate, or your level of education. Add to the fact that you are considered the cause of the problems of this country and you will know how immigrants suffer emotionally.

Even worse is the fact of being alone, separated from your loved ones—parents, brothers and sisters, spouse, children. Your life day after day is basically limited to working, with workdays not less than ten hours long (in restaurants up to 16 hours), six and seven days a week. This makes impossible any communication with your own people with whom you could make friends and share your problems.

The fact of having left your family alone in a country so far away, exposed to every kind of danger, weighs constantly on your mind, which means that although you live here physically, you live mentally in your native land.

Not only the immigrant but also his whole family depends on his salary. The immigrant pays a huge human cost in order to save a few dollars, in many cases paying with life itself or by losing his family. Many families have broken up under the pressures of time and distance. The fact of being undocumented means the person cannot return to his country nor can he bring his family here, making this a situation without a remedy.

The life I have described is brutal and inhuman. So why do immigrants keep coming to this country? The reason is purely economic, the desire for a better future, maybe for a home for your family, and to escape the poverty in which you live in your country. But the economic gain the immigrant obtains here in no way gives him a great fortune. Rather, it may afford him the means to the most elemental necessities, to which everyone, as a human being, has a right anywhere on earth—housing, clothing, food, education.

If politicians are going to blame immigrants for the economic problems here, it is important to talk about the fact that economic problems in the countries the immigrants come from are largely the responsibility of the developed countries such as the U.S. The aggressive creation of debt makes it impossible for them to control their internal economies and constantly devalues their money. To cite one example, in Ecuador not many years ago the sucre was 25 to the U.S. dollar; now it is around 2,200 to the dollar, which means the devaluation of its buying power at home. So the politicians are wrong to pose the problem by blaming one human group unilaterally, the immigrants.

—Immigrant worker

## Sinai Kosher time grab

**Chicago**—We don't know what time we're supposed to come to work from one day to the next at Sinai Kosher. The regular time used to be at 4 or 5 a.m. and sometimes they brought you in an hour early on Friday, just to finish up by the end of the day. Now you come in at 8 a.m. one morning, then 4 a.m. the next morning—or it could be 5, 6, or 7 a.m.

They claim the kitchen, which makes the product, is not ready to send meat to all three packaging lines. So they don't need to have packaging people come in and stand around for two or three hours. You never know when you're going to leave either; they keep us late to finish the orders.

Nobody likes it, but they've got you over a barrel. If you want a job and you have kids, you have to figure out how to put this problem aside and come to work. I have two kids and it's always a problem getting someone to look after them. We live on the telephone, checking on our children. It messes up your rest, too. So you don't have any life. You just let the plant stay in control. They won't hire more people, which would take care of this problem.

—Working mother

# Bury Chinatown slavery

**New York**—Protests continue at the Jing Fong restaurant in New York's Chinatown led by Silver Palace workers, members of a unique independent union, Local 318 Restaurant Workers Unions, and Chinese Staff and Workers Association (CSWA), a workers center.

At a large rally on March 12, Chinese workers from across trades, some Latino workers from other workers centers, Asian-American youth, and other activists came together to unveil a coffin, to put to rest slave labor conditions in Chinatown. While it may seem trite to many, the coffin is a powerful symbol to Chinese Americans and the protesters' use of it has been harshly criticized by the mainstream press.

Adding to that spirit were counter-protests launched by management to encourage patrons to break the boycott urged by the workers. As the leader of CSWA video project pointed out, "Last year (at Silver Palace) we were faced with a feeling that no one cared. Now the counter-demo seems to give us more importance."

The pretense for management's counter-protest is the fact that workers are still working (under the slave-like conditions of 75¢ per hour, 70-hour workweeks, 30% of tips skimmed off the top by management). They chant "Chi-Chi Geng Fong" (Support Jing Fong) and have signs saying "We the Worker Support Jing Fong," when it is clearly managers dressed in suits and ties who are leading the chants. And CSWA has found out that over a dozen of the 40 waiters refused to participate in the protest—quite an act of resistance considering that workers have been fired for far lesser acts of disobedience.

The pickets remain the highlight of the struggle. One construction worker wrote a scathing poem criticizing management that picketers read in unison at the bosses.

And the sheer determination of the workers of Silver Palace who seem to have dedicated their whole lives, all of their free time, to struggle against the whole slave labor system in Chinatown, transcends inspiration for socialists like me. Through the process of struggle I have come to a deeper understanding of the workers center form of organizing—a movement from practice that is itself a form of theory. Join us Sunday and Friday nights; call CSWA at 619-7979 for info. —Worker Center activist

## Workshop Talks

(Continued from page 1)

Let's not be fooled by the demagogues and false populists who try to do this in the name of the working people. Just because they steal so much taxes from my paycheck does not mean they are helping me when they starve the child on welfare. They are robbing both of us.

Now the newest thing from these bankers turned populists is the cry against affirmative action. By crying "reverse discrimination!" they hope to get the votes of white workers. The supposedly broke bosses and their broke government want to get us fighting each other for crumbs off their table. They don't give a damn about the white worker any more than about the Black.

This movie about the 1968 strike by Black workers in Memphis made me think about this too. There you had Walter Reuther, president of the UAW, which was a powerful union back then, supporting the strike. But he was supporting with words alone! I thought, here was a man with the power to shut down the auto shops, call his workers out to support the Black workers down South, and what did he do? Worse than just talk.

In those very years he was using his power to break the wildcat strikes against racism in his own auto shops—all those years of wildcats against racism and speedup and inhuman working conditions, and it was the UAW leaders who would finger the wildcat leaders so management could fire them. Yet there he was in the movie, talking like he supported the strikers in Memphis! Black and white auto workers streaming into Memphis, the factories shut down, could have transformed race and labor relations in this country.

But it was not Reuther, but King who, addressing 6000 strikers and their Black supporters, raised the idea of a "general work stoppage." The very next day he was gunned down. And those who had the power to call such a work stoppage never did.

Today, we reap the results of this inaction of the labor leaders. Today they want our support when they too are under attack, when big business has decided they can do without them. But let's not forget what they are guilty of, as we struggle today.

Black and white labor could have achieved a lot more than a few token "affirmative action" jobs and a few welfare programs in the '60s, had the labor leaders not stood in the way. Let us be clear about this today and get our minds free of the fake populists and the fake labor leaders.

## Historic mines to close?

**Morgantown, W. Va.**—Consolidation Coal Company recently announced that it will either sell, lease or close its three remaining mines in this northern West Virginia region.

Layoffs at the three mines—Arkwright, Humphrey and Osage—have already begun, and at a meeting with United Mine Workers (UMWA) President Richard Trumka, company officials stated that if they couldn't sell or lease the mines, they would close Arkwright and Osage this summer, and Humphrey in 1997.

This development reflects the continuing demise of Consol as a coal power in the U.S. Following World War II, Consol became the largest American commercial coal producer in the world and was among the first to introduce automation, the continuous miner, into the industry.

Consol had played a leading role in coal developments during the 1949-50 miners' general strike and in the 1951 Consol strike that resulted in the first seniority clause to be negotiated in a national contract. In the 1949-50 strike, the first against automation in the nation, Consol's voice proved decisive in the negotiations. The 1951 strike, a wildcat walkout of all miners in Consol's 13 northern West Virginia mines, forced then UMWA President John L. Lewis to negotiate a seniority agreement with Consol before the contract had expired, with that same seniority language included in the next national contract the following year.

Prior to that time, Lewis had used seniority as a trade-off during contract negotiations, but automation resulted in such massive layoffs that the rank and file demanded, and got, that minimal job security. Even so, within 10 years, the economic devastation of automation slashed the number of union miners from 450,000 in 1950 to some 120,000 in 1960. Today there are about half that number, some 60,000 union miners, who have virtually no national power, whereas before they could paralyze the nation economically with a general strike.

—Andy Phillips

*Editor's note: Andy Phillips is co-author, with Raya Dunayevskaya, of The Coal Miners' General Strike of 1949-50 and The Birth of Marxist-Humanism in the U.S. To order, see page 7.*



Chinatown garment sweatshop "day care."

## Workers say Boycott Levi's

**San Francisco**—On March 10, over 50 people joined the women workers of Fuerza Unida in their struggle against the Levi-Strauss Company which is headquartered in San Francisco.

One woman who had been a worker at Levi-Strauss in San Antonio, Texas for ten years spoke in both Spanish and English of her reasons for helping to organize Fuerza Unida. She told us of the terrible working conditions she endured when she was working, and how Levi up and moved their factory to Costa Rica five years ago. She moved to San Francisco last May to fight against Levi-Strauss which enjoyed \$500 million in profits in 1993 while the women who dedicated their lives to the company go without work.

Another worker declared, "We are all responsible for the next generation. We must fight together." A Latino union organizer explained, "This struggle represents the movement of capital from country to country and the deterioration of working conditions. We are a banding together of workers to improve our lives."

The group marched through rain to the Levi-Strauss building where we formed a picket line. We shouted, "No Justice, No Jeans!" and, "People do you think it's funny? Levi stole our pension money!" Many carried signs reading "Boycott Levi Jeans." One person had a kneeling stick figure with "We want justice, we want peace, we want Levi's on its knees!"

The group is organizing a continuous struggle against Levi-Strauss, including another rally on April 14 which marks the five-year anniversary of the workers' last paycheck. Some supporters have agreed to fast until justice for the workers is won.

—Julia Jones

## Black leaders value dollars over workers

**Memphis, Tenn.**—The issue everyone here is talking about is the closing of the Defense Depot. The federal government announced that they were going to close it last month and lay off about 1,200 workers, most of them Black. The Depot is out by the airport, and it is one of the few places left in Memphis where there are a lot of Black workers making good wages and benefits.

Most of these workers were hired in the 1960s and '70s, when the government changed its policies on hiring and promoting Blacks. Very few were hired in the '80s and '90s, only part-time VA [Veterans Administration] workers. The Defense Depot workers have a lot of seniority; many have never worked anyplace else.

When the announcement of the shutdown came out, the first thing they said was the number of people to be laid off, but right behind that they said how much revenue would be lost to the Memphis economy and the impact on the Black community economically. All of a sudden, every leading Black politician and minister jumped

on the bandwagon, protesting the closing—Congressman Harold Ford, Mayor Herrenton, all of them.

I am against the closing, but this whole attitude makes me very angry. The way they think, it's all about "revenue." That's the word that makes them jump. When we were on strike at Dobbs for a whole year, we had to struggle and fight to get the politicians and the ministers to even listen to us, to get involved on our side. It's because we were 125 workers making \$5 or \$6 an hour, not like the Depot, with 1,200 workers making \$11 an hour. It's all a matter of "revenue" to them.

Some of my friends say I shouldn't think like this, but we fought to get these Black politicians in office, and then they make decisions just the same way the whites do. Don't people who make \$5 an hour count? It's the small people who make the world go round, and in Memphis lately, there are more and more workers making the low wage. Our fights are the ones they should be paying attention to.

—Black labor activist

### NEWS & LETTERS

Vol. 40, No. 3

April 1995

News & Letters (ISSN 0028-8969) is published 10 times a year, monthly, except bi-monthly January-February and August-September for \$2.50 a year (bulk order of 5 or more, 15¢ each) by News & Letters, 59 E. Van Buren St., Room 707, Chicago, IL 60605. Telephone (312) 663-0839. Fax: (312) 663-9069. Second class postage paid at Chicago, Illinois. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to News & Letters, 59 E. Van Buren St., Room 707, Chicago, IL 60605. Articles may be reprinted verbatim if credited to "News & Letters."

Raya Dunayevskaya

Chairwoman, National Editorial Board (1955-1987)

Charles Denby

Editor (1955-1983)

Olga Domanski, Peter Wermuth, Co-National Organizers, News and Letters Committees; Lou Turner, Managing Editor; Michael Flug, Marxist-Humanist Archivist; Felix Martin, Labor Editor.

News & Letters is printed in a union shop.



From the Writings of Raya Dunayevskaya  
**MARXIST-HUMANIST  
 ARCHIVES**

**Editor's Note**

The need to develop a comprehensive response to Newt Gingrich's effort to "complete the Reagan revolution" is powerfully spoken to in Raya Dunayevskaya's analyses of Reaganism in the mid-1980s. We here publish excerpts from two of her many writings on this subject: 1) her discussion on "The 'New Economy'" from the "Draft for Marxist-Humanist Perspectives, 1983-84" (first published in *News & Letters*, July 1983) and 2) her discussion of "The U.S. Economy and Its Imperialist Tentacles vs. the Mass Struggles, Here and Abroad" from the "Draft for Marxist-Humanist Perspectives, 1985-86" (first published in *N&L*, August-September 1985). Footnotes are the author's.

by Raya Dunayevskaya  
 Founder of Marxist-Humanism

President Reagan, that supreme artificer, who had enough economic and nuclear might to christen the global death weapon, the MX missile, the "Peacekeeper," could say nothing that deceitfully dramatic about the economy. Thereupon, the pundits went on inventing new words for that "New Economy." Consider the extreme narrowness of the "conceptual breakthrough" of the one who called for the creation of a "brainstorming group" and proposed eliminating the space between two words so that "worldeconomy" as a single word would lead us to go beyond "national interests" and see that "our present crisis is one of values, world views, and economic philosophy...we seem to have lost (the capacity) for rediscovering the fundamental values we have in common."

What exactly can writing "worldeconomy" as one word do when the reality shows the uncontrollable contradiction between capital and labor? The present capitalist onslaught against the unions, both in rolling back the hard-won wages and in worsening the conditions of labor, has not deterred the labor bureaucracy from its class collaborationism in forcing down the workers' throats those unconscionable wage concessions to produce ever-larger profits for the capitalist coffers. Just as the capitalists keep stressing what they call the "new economy" as if that absolves them from unabating unemployment, so the labor bureaucracy is using the question of the new technology to cover up its do-nothingness on the unemployment front.

The truth is that unionization would never have been born if the working class had buckled under to what Marx had called the capitalist "werewolf hunger" for ever higher and higher profits. Instead they intensified their struggles, never abandoning their vision of a better world. The struggles for higher wages, for unionization, for changing the sweatshop conditions of labor, for shortening the working day, are what Marx called "a century of civil war between capital and labor." Indeed, it was only in that way that a modicum of success could be achieved. The fact that the labor leadership has since become nothing more than the bodyguard of capital will not stop the struggles.

What does the "new economy" with its robotics offer working people that the old capitalist economy didn't? Does it change the mode of production in any way to decrease the unemployed army? Quite the contrary. Of the 32 million unemployed in the industrialized West many will never be reabsorbed in the labor force. The fact that the U.S. has the highest number of unemployed—11 million that are admitted to—doesn't mean that the situation is relatively different in any of the other countries, be that Tory England or Socialist France, or, for that matter, the state-capitalist pole, Russia, where officially they have "no unemployment."

One thing state-capitalism calling itself Communism knew from the start was that living labor alone is the source of all surplus value (profit). What both Western capitalism and Russia (and Japan which has been labeled the "West") have pursued in common is the intensification of labor—cutting the labor force, having one worker do two jobs. So great by now are the concessions that have been wrung from labor that in many shops relief time and wash-up time have been given up; even highly skilled craftsmen, as at Goodyear for example, have agreed to work 25% of the time outside their crafts; and since women still earn only 59% of what men are paid, there is the continued drive to hire women at lower rates for many jobs...

The fundamental truth, however, is that the greatest contributor to those high and immediate profits of U.S. industry is cheap labor, whether from U.S. or Third World workers.

At the same time, capitalism's excrescence—the State—has so insatiable an appetite and demand for global dominance that the rulers will not tolerate any diminution of the endless billions—and now trillions—needed to finance the military. Which is why its ideologues are now declaiming: "But can the U.S. allow its basic industries to atrophy and still remain a major industrial and military power? McDonald's now employs more workers than U.S. Steel."<sup>1</sup> John Nevin, chairman of Firestone Tire & Rubber put it this way: "It's utter nonsense that we are going to become a high-tech and a service economy. The high-tech companies have more manufacturing offshore than here. The idea that we can have an economy by selling hamburgers to each other is absurd." And Harvard's Robert B. Reich, author of *The*

# Labor power in the high-tech economy

Next Frontier, says: "The choice is not between a smokestack America on the one hand and high technology, on the other. That is a false choice." The challenge confronting the U.S., we are told, is "how to use high technology in the smokestack industries." Therein is the rub.

The retrogression in all areas of human life, beginning with the attack on the conditions of labor, has also seen Reagan storm-troop his way blatantly into the field of education...

The attack on public education and the cutbacks in federal financial aid for everything from school lunches to libraries, and on everyone from Head Start to the post-graduate level, has been the most devastating to Black students and Black colleges, whose students are going into Black communities across the country to beg for money to keep their schools open. The joint Center for Political Studies has published a report by Black scholars voicing alarm that the entire "30-year drive to enforce Black civil rights" is now threatened by the Reagan-inspired rebirth of white racism.

The truth is, however, that although the pundits have no trouble using such dehumanized expressions as "Human workers will go the way of the horse," the rulers know that they not only have a need for human cannon fodder, but that human power has also been known throughout all of history for making revolutions—and they are worried about how to keep short of provoking those. They wonder how long that artificer, Reagan, with his skyrocketing military spending and one hundred billion dollars-plus deficits, can confine the restless masses at home.

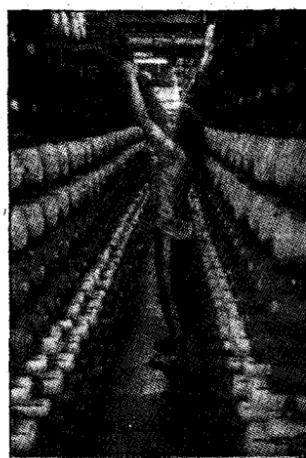
And what about the Third World? Donald Kimmel, Director of the UN Food and Agricultural Organization, has spelled out what absolute poverty means for the 800 million people there: they face the worst food shortages since the 1970s when no less than 200 to 300 thousand men, women and children starved to death. The 18 African countries threatened with the worst famine in a decade are Botswana, Cameroon, Cape Verde Islands, Chad, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Ghana, Lesotho, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Mozambique, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

It is clear that the genocidal nature of imperialism has not changed ever since it first appeared at the end of the 19th century. It was because of the barbarism of German imperialism and because the leadership of the German Social-Democracy showed such opportunism on the question—and such insensitivity to what was happening to the African peoples under the whip of imperialism—that Rosa Luxemburg issued an outcry that can be heard to this day:

"The poor victims on the rubber plantations in Putomayo, the Negroes in Africa with whose bodies the Europeans play a game of catch, are just as near to me (as the suffering of the Jews). Do you remember the words written on the work of the Great General Staff about Trotha's campaign in the Kalahari desert? 'And the death-rattles, the mad cries of those dying of thirst, faded away into the sublime silence of eternity.' Oh, this 'sublime silence of eternity' in which so many screams have faded away unheard. It rings within me so strongly that I have no special corner of my heart reserved for the ghetto: I am at home wherever in the world there are clouds, birds and human tears..."<sup>2</sup>

—July 1983

## Marx's Capital and Today's Global Crisis



by Raya Dunayevskaya

"The abstract materialist who views technological development outside of the class relationship also slips back into considering the capitalistic factors of production as mere factors of any social form of production. That is why Marx created new categories to describe the manner in which machines and labor unite under capitalist economy. Marx developed his analysis of capitalist production in opposition to all Planners—abstract as well as idealist."

To order, see page 7.

To us as American revolutionaries, it is Reagan's retrogressionism at home that is the immediate enemy. That has priority over all else. What have the "four more years" Reagan won in the last election meant to the American masses? Even if we take the question of the American economy "in general"—as if people are not involved (as is characteristic of economists)—Martin Feldstein, the former head of the Council of Economic Advisers under Reagan, is forced to conclude that nothing short of the economy itself is in danger.<sup>3</sup> We must remember that Feldstein had approved Reagan's union-busting. He tries to hide his own anti-unionism under the accusation that the American workers are bound by what he calls "rigidities." That is to say, they are union men and women who have fought hard to win decent wages and conditions of labor.

"Pragmatism" cannot hide the fact that the American economy is going down. Furthermore, it isn't true that this characterizes only agriculture and the timber industry, which have reached the lowest levels since the Depression. Feldstein admits that basic industries like steel, chemicals and even high-tech have become second-rate. The truth is that our so-called "prosperity" is totally misleading. There has been an increase of ten million in the number of poor since 1978. And, since Reagan has assumed power, the poor, writes Joseph Lelyveld (*New York Times*, June 16, 1985), "are generally further below the poverty line—now calculated by the Census Bureau to be \$10,610 for a family of four—than they were then."

"There is a real danger...that the capital inflow and the rising dollar are giving Americans a false sense of well-being," Feldstein bemoans, as he points to the "new inflow of nearly \$100 billion from abroad." The mighty U.S., he concludes, has become a "debtor nation..."

What Feldstein fails to see—precisely because politically he thinks like Reagan when it comes to opposing workers' unionism, which he calls "rigidities"—is that Reagan has deliberately created deficits in order to get the Democrats, too, to agree to dismantle what has been achieved since the New Deal, over a whole half century—whether that be welfare programs, or labor rights legislation, or creating institutions like the National Labor Relations Board.

In 1984, Senator Ernest Hollings of South Carolina told the Association for a Better New York that Reagan had "intentionally created a deficit so large that we Democrats will never have enough money to build the sort of government programs we want."<sup>4</sup> And in the *New York Times* of July 21, 1985, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan develops in full "Reagan's Inflate-the-Deficit Game," revealing a discussion with David Stockman, the Budget Director (who was his former student) on the question of using the budget process to eliminate programs: "The driving motive has been to dismantle fifty years of social legislation..."

In the face of all these myriad crises in this nuclear world, the question of "What to Do" becomes more urgent than ever because it demands, at one and the same time, the concretization of what we intend doing in the objective situation and our own organizational responsibilities. Put otherwise, the expression we discussed in our last Perspectives—"Not by Practice Alone, the Movement from Theory"—must be rooted in the fact that time is, indeed, running out, as the rulers have changed the very nature of the debate on nuclear war by suddenly talking about the fantastic concept that a nuclear war is "winnable."

It is this that makes it clear that the expression "not by practice alone" cannot be left as a generality. Organizational-Philosophic-Journalistic responsibility requires that, in the analysis of current events, the dialectics of thought is singled out from the expression "dialectics of thought and of revolution." It is Marxist-Humanism which has insisted on seeing Marx's "new Humanism" as a whole new continent of thought and of revolution. In singling out the dialectics of thought this year, we are showing that to practice it, it must be made inseparable from the dialectics of revolution. That, indeed, is the only proof that we will have become practicing dialecticians for the philosophy of Marxist-Humanism.

This motivation, and not any sort of mere 30th birthday celebration, was the red thread running through the 30-year retrospective of *News & Letters* [The Myriad Global Crises of the 1980s and the Nuclear World Since World War II], which could not be separated from all our books and pamphlets. That red thread is the universalization of practice, which becomes reality because there was a theory that looked for it, anticipated it and could transform it into a dialectical philosophy of thought and of revolution.

—August 1983

1. "The New Economy," *Time*, May 30, 1983.
2. This letter from Luxemburg to Mathilde Wurm, dated Feb. 16, 1917, was written from prison, where Luxemburg was confined because of her anti-war activities. It is quoted on p. 63 of *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation, and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution*.
3. See "American Economic Policy and the World Economy" Martin Feldstein, *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1985.
4. Quoted by Tom Wicker in his *New York Times* article, June 19, 1985, "A Deliberate Deficit." He here expands on the whole question and contrasts it to Reagan's public statement that cutting taxes "would expand the economic base and increase revenues. In his 1980 campaign he even contended that the increase in revenues resulting from the tax cut would pay for the military buildup he also planned."

## Essay Article

by Michael Flug

*Race Rebels: Culture, Politics and the Black Working Class*, by Robin D.G. Kelley (New York: Free Press, 1994).

*Civil Rights and the Idea of Freedom*, by Richard H. King (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

In today's Gingrichian ideological landscape, the Black working class and the Black poor, whether in the inner cities or in Southern rural counties, loom large. As "low-skill" workers who endanger America's global competitiveness, as "welfare moms" to be put to work, as threatening "criminals" to be locked in prison, they are the "Other" against whom white America—including the white working class—is to be mobilized.

Such an ideological offensive has deep roots, of course. Precisely because the Black masses have been the vanguard of all revolutionary development in American civilization, the soul of U.S. capitalism in time of crisis has always been racism. What is new about the present offensive, however, is seen not only in the horrors being enacted by Congress, but in the great conceptual and organizational difficulties that opposition forces, even within the Black community, are now experiencing. This is as true in Los Angeles, three years after the L.A. rebellion, as it is in Mississippi, despite the recent upsurge in Black labor activity there.

Robin Kelley's *Race Rebels* and Richard King's *Civil Rights and the Idea of Freedom* both seek to illuminate new pathways to help the movements of the 1990s. In a foreword to Kelley's book, George Lipsitz argues that "we don't know enough about how egalitarian social change takes place, about how social movements start and how they succeed...*Race Rebels* arms us with what we need to know." King's own foreword insists that a study of "what was central to the [Civil Rights] movement and what might be retained or revitalized from it" is "not merely an academic exercise" in light of "events over the last three years in China, the Soviet Union and East Europe."

The two books proceed along profoundly different lines of investigation. But both authors are drawn to spontaneous oppositional expressions of the Black masses and to the forms of organization emerging out of that spontaneity. For Kelley, the impetus comes in part from his own teenage work at McDonald's and from his reading of C.L.R. James' study of "ordinary working people...rebellious every day in ways of their own invention."<sup>1</sup> King tells us that the origins of his book lie in his exposure to SNCC's work in Tennessee and Alabama in 1965-66 and in his discovery at the same time of Hannah Arendt's *On Revolution*, with its praise of workers' councils and soviets "as the embodiment of free action in concert."

What the scope of the two books taken together poses is the liberatory power and great theoretic difficulty of a crucial triangular relationship—the relationship among Black masses as revolutionary Subjects, the forms of organization they create and encounter, and the freedom ideas which both reflect and animate their struggles.

### 'INFRAPOLITICS' DOWNPLAYS MOVEMENT

*Race Rebels* opens with Kelley's demand that we "break away from traditional notions of politics" (p. 4), focusing not on labor or "mainstream" civil rights organizations, but on Black working-class life and activity previously relegated to the margins. From anthropologist James C. Scott, Kelley draws the concept of "infrapolitics," daily struggles which, "like infrared rays, [are] beyond the visible end of the spectrum." (p.8) Often evasive and circumspect, such moments embody a "hidden transcript," which might involve a range of actions as varied as low productivity or theft, "loud talk" or "dressing up." In the course of *Race Rebels*, Kelley follows "infrapolitics" from 19th century Blacks workers' mass migration to escape sharecropper oppression, through the zoot suit culture during World War II, to gangsta rap in Los Angeles of the 1990s.

Conceptually, the terrain of the "everyday," which stems from Martin Heidegger's work of the 1920s, is seen as the locale where human consciousness is formed in a ceaseless repetition of social processes. The key to understanding the development of self is thus seen in the interaction between the seemingly insignificant minutiae of daily life and the social formations of class, race and gender-divided society. Developed and popularized since World War II by Henri Lefebvre and the German *Alltagsgeschichte* movement, the study of everyday life has often been more concerned with comprehending the reproduction of dominant, oppressor-produced ideology than with digging into everyday resistance.<sup>2</sup>

Kelley does focus on resistance, and he is at his best in "Congested Terrain," his chapter on the way Blacks in World War II Birmingham, Ala., resisted white racist practices on public transportation. Aiming "to 're-map' black working-class opposition by shifting focus away from the workplace and community to public space," (p. 56) he argues that such "public space" often offered the most embattled sites of conflict.

Depicting Birmingham's buses and streetcars as "moving theaters," Kelley reveals both the armed, bru-

# Black 'everyday resistance,' self-organization and the Idea of freedom

tal repression enforced by drivers, conductors and white male passengers, and the diversity of creative resistance offered by Black passengers in the heart of the Jim Crow South. "At the forefront of the resistance," he writes, "were young people who had been radicalized by the war and whose backgrounds ranged from servicemen to zoot suiters, militant female high school students to young household workers." (p. 63)

Virtually all of the World War II-era Birmingham protests analyzed by Kelley, however, were spontaneous acts of individuals or small groups. When Kelley attempts to comprehend the upsurge of civil rights organizations and mass activity in Alabama a decade later, the theoretical vantage point of "everyday resistance" does not prove as satisfying. The "everyday" is so much the determinant that when the mass movement arises, it is sharply downplayed, and no investigation is launched of the leap in ideas and organization experienced by the Black masses in the South.

Indeed, in his one comment on Frantz Fanon's con-



Black residents organized their own transportation system in the Montgomery Bus Boycott, 1955-56.

cept of the mass uprising of the oppressed as a transformative process, Kelley argues that "what appeared to be a transformation in personality was really a change in the public posturings of the black poor." (p. 256 n. 29)

In Kelley's landscape, spontaneity and organization appear very nearly as opposites. Posing what he terms one of the "driving questions" of the whole book, he asks: "How do African-American working people struggle and survive outside of established organizations or organized social movements?" (p. 8)

### FROM VANTAGE OF C.L.R. JAMES

To see the theoretical underpinnings of Kelley's vantage point, we need to return to where Kelley began—with C.L.R. James. James' 1948 *Notes on Dialectics* sought to situate the problem of workers' organization in a study of Hegel's *Science of Logic*. "Organization," James wrote, "You know nothing about organization unless at every step you relate it to its opposite, spontaneity...Organization as we know it is at an end. The task is to abolish organization. The task today is to call for, to teach, to illustrate, to develop spontaneity—the free creative activity of the proletariat."<sup>3</sup>

The organization of the Alabama Black working class with which the modern Civil Rights Movement began—the Montgomery Bus Boycott—suggested to some a sharply different relationship between spontaneity and organization.

Writing just as the boycott had broken segregated buses, Raya Dunayevskaya hailed it as a world historic event no less important than the Hungarian Revolution. For her, the workers' "way of knowing"—the double rhythm of destroying the old while creating the new—was what marked off the boycott as a leap. Far from only protesting segregated buses and demanding Black drivers, they organized their own transportation system and their own form of mass direct democracy. Dunayevskaya argued that "because the spontaneity of the walkout and the organization of their forces to keep up the boycott was a simultaneous action, it is here that we can see what is truly historic and contains our future."<sup>4</sup>

Curiously, Kelley does privilege one organization. He devotes two chapters of the book to African Americans in the Communist Party, concentrating on the 1930s. In focusing on the *Liberator*, the newspaper of the CP-backed League of Struggle for Negro Rights, and on the roughly 80 Black members of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade who fought in Spain, Kelley explains that Black CP'ers "put their own stamp on the Party."

It is not possible here to disentangle everything that Kelley gets knotted—his insistence that Black participation in the CP of the 1930s was superior to that of the 1920s; his evaluation of the role of the International Brigades in the Spanish Revolution; his soft-pedaled discus-

3. C.L.R. James, *Notes on Dialectics* (1948, 1980), 117. Later, James suggests that the rejection of organization can lie side by side with an acceptance of the vanguard party: "The party is the knowing of the proletariat as being. Without the party the proletariat knows nothing." (p. 172)

4. Raya Dunayevskaya, *Marxism and Freedom* (1957, 1986), 281. For other discussions of the self-organization of Montgomery's Black workers in the boycott, see Charles Denby, *Indignant Heart: A Black Worker's Journal* (1989), and Jo Ann Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It* (1987).

sion of CP attacks on independent Black protest during World War II.<sup>5</sup>

What is more disconcerting are the methodological confines of the final chapters devoted to "The Riddle of the Zoot Suit" during World War II and to "Gangsta Rap" in "post-industrial Los Angeles" of the 1990s. Kelley's tendency to counterpose spontaneity to organization, even in the aftermath of the L.A. rebellion, leaves him stuck in old dualities and prevents any new conception of how ideas expressed among those "way, way, below" get posed organizationally as a challenge to capitalist society.

Kelley does offer thoughtful observations on the impact of deindustrialization on the Black poor and on the connection between deindustrialization and gangsta rap. He sharply poses the alienation of inner-city L.A. youth from the Black middle class and politicians, terming the youth vantage point "the politics of Ghetto-centricity," while warning that "like Afrocentricity, it draws its arsenal from the dominant ideology." (p. 212)

And yet, even though the chapter was finished over a year after the L.A. rebellion, the discussions of "Ghetto-centricity" and of the controversy over the "highly masculinist imagery" of gangsta rap are as close to an assessment of the present state of freedom ideas as Kelley gets. For the lessons of the L.A. rebellion, all Kelley can offer is this: "If we learned anything from that fateful night of April 29, it is that, whether we like the message or not, we must read the graffiti on the walls and, as Ice-T puts it, 'check the pulse of the rhyme flow.'"

After so much checking the pulse at the transition points between everyday resistance and "formal politics," perhaps the conclusion sounds weak-voiced because Kelley's probe of the relationship between the subjectivity of the Black masses and the problem of organization they face is not mediated by any plunge into philosophy, into the development and struggles of the Idea of Freedom.

### IDEAS PART OF 'SURPRISING' 1960s

Richard King's *Civil Rights and the Idea of Freedom* does plunge into freedom ideas as developed and articulated by Civil Rights Movement activists ranging from Martin Luther King and Robert Moses to rank-and-file women, workers and youth. He recognizes that there is discontinuity as well as continuity between the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and the struggles of the previous decades, arguing that the 1960s movement was different: "Like most great movements of historical change, the civil rights movement was a great surprise." (p. 38)

Furthermore, while warning that one cannot "assign causal force" to political ideas, King writes that "the goods that people attempt to gain through politics are not exclusively material ones...and the ideas they deploy in the process of attaining these goods are neither mere smokescreens behind which lurk so-called 'real' interests nor products of 'false consciousness.'" (p. 11)

Proceeding from Hannah Arendt's view that political freedom is of necessity public and open, and that it involves action to open up spheres previously foreclosed, King outlines how the practice of such a concept of freedom brought protesters into irreconcilable conflict with the forces of the state in the South. Central to his analysis of this first decade of the movement is the notion that "self-respect," "the necessary transformation of the self experienced by those actively engaged in direct action," was inseparably bound up with the concept of Black collective liberation.

For a "socially-based, dialectical account of self-formation," King turns to the "master-slave" relationship in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*. It is here that the truth of "self-certainty," Hegel's initial category of "self-consciousness," gets tested in struggles to win recognition from the "Other."

While questioning the applicability of the "master-slave" dialectic to the actual history of American slavery, King contends that "Hegel's analysis is still the necessary starting point for understanding the psychology of domination and self-formation." (p. 230 n. 28) Frederick Douglass' *Narrative* and W.E.B. DuBois' *Souls of Black Folk* stand out—the latter in a consciously Hegelian mode—as "canonical" accounts of this struggle that Hegel calls a "formative process of self-enfranchisement." For DuBois, the struggle to overcome "double-consciousness," to win self-respect, was necessarily a collective struggle, and both political and cultural.

What is most valuable in King's account is the way he connects the organizational trajectory of the Civil Rights Movement, especially SNCC (Student Non-Violent Co-ordinating Committee), to the development of the Idea of Freedom, and specifically to the debates on Black identity which gripped the movement at its crossroads in the mid-1960s, after the passage of the *Civil Rights and Voting Rights acts*.

At this crossing, the incompleteness of the concept of freedom in the movement that came to birth demanding "Freedom Now" was challenged from multiple vantage points. From the Northern (and as Kelley shows, Southern) inner-city poor, it was challenged in a series of

(Continued on page 8)

5. Readers seeking an assessment both of the debates on race and class in the U.S. Communist Party of the 1920s and of the CP's attacks on Black protest during World War II should consult News and Letters Committees' statement, *American Civilization on Trial*.

1. Grace C. Lee, Pierre Chaulieu, and J.R. Johnson (*C.L.R. James*), *Facing Reality* (1958), 5. James's unmediated enthusiasm for spontaneity is combined in this work with an explicit rejection of the need for revolutionaries to engage in philosophic comprehension.

2. An approach to the problem of the "everyday" quite different from the one employed by Kelley can be found in Thomas Holt's "Marking: Race, Race-Making, and the Writing of History," *American Historical Review*, Feb. 1995, 1-20.

## MEXICO AT A TURNING POINT AND A 'NEW LANGUAGE'

The scene gets more complicated day by day since the devaluation has been followed by the financial crisis, the flight of capital from the country, and the economic recession which threatens to shut down enterprises and result in massive layoffs.

All of this is enclosed by repressive politics aimed at the Zapatistas, social activists, workers and the poor in general. The country is living through a general crisis, knowing that the political system, which has dominated the country for over 75 years and which hasn't undergone any change that would guarantee justice, liberty and democracy, might instead move toward full authoritarianism, widespread injustice and the denial of social and political freedom. The picture isn't pessimistic but realistic. Thus, even though the problem of migration is central, it's beginning to be minimized by even sharper social and political problems.

Alejandro Galvez  
Mexico City

The March 1995 N&L articles on the war between Ecuador and Peru and the "in person" reports on Mexico, as well as the one on the maquiladora workers struggle, reflect today's importance of the revolutionary voices of Latin America for Marxist-Humanists all over the world. These articles/reports show clearly that "subjective" factors can change "objective" events." Unfortunately, the introduction to the lead article, "Mexico at a turning point" written by Mary Holmes and Mitch Weerth, shows a contradiction when it states that "[t]he failure of the Mexican army's invasion and occupation of EZLN-held lands in Chiapas state...is linked to an array of government 'failures'...to solve Mexico's accelerating crises." Definitely, the failure of the Mexican army is not only a consequence of the failure of the Mexican capitalist state, but primarily due to the struggle of both the Zapatistas and the masses that went into the streets to protest the invasion. It is this struggle that is the subjective factor.

Carlos Varela  
New York City

The Lead on Mexico was powerful in giving a clear direction to what is needed. It ended on hearing the new voices because that is where our task begins and it cannot be taken for granted that we even know the "new language." But what is important is that while Marcos and the EZLN are for very new relations of peasants to intellectuals and to society, including woman to man, too many hear those voices and say all that remains is practice, rather than accepting the hard labor of working out what Marxist-Humanists are calling "the dialectics of organization and philosophy."

John Marcotte  
New York

Mexican art critic and left intellectual, Alberto Hajar, has been falsely accused by the Mexican government of being one of the top leaders of the insurgent EZLN. The witch hunt is intended to intimidate into silence intellectuals whose protests, combined with street demonstrations of hundreds of thousands of ordinary citizens, have twice stopped the unleashing of a blood bath against the Zapatistas. Protest letters (sent to President Ernesto Zedillo, Los Pinos, Mexico, D.F.) can make a difference. Copies should be faxed to (525) 573-4882 or sent to:

Alberto Hajar Defense Com.  
Tezoquipa 46, Tlalpan  
Mexico, D.F.

Everyone in Mexico knows how corrupt the system is, but that is not the same as knowing the way out. The Zapatistas have been pointing to the truth that human beings are what the struggle is about — humanity, humanism.

Mexican revolutionary in  
California

The conservative elements in this country have put the economic crisis on the backs of unwed mothers. The new Secretary of the Treasury sees the American crisis as due to the fact that there is no internal money to develop

American industry. Breaking down trade barriers becomes paramount. Which is why the crisis of the peso got all the contenders together and overnight they came up with 40 billion dollars.

Observer  
San Francisco

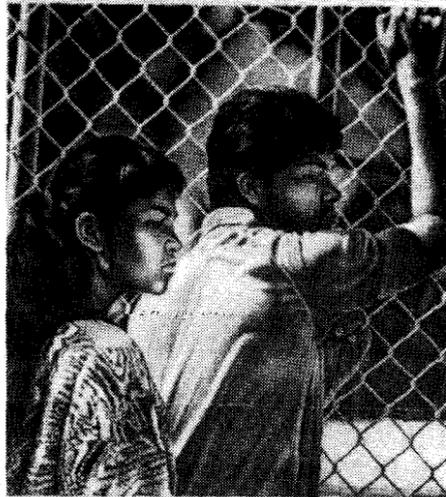
When I read about repression in other countries, I always come back to thinking about conditions here in the U.S. The incomes of people here are going down, and the prices are going up. I'm not saying it's the same as Mexico, but it's bad. What are we going to do to fight back? It seems the government always knows how to suppress or co-opt resistance.

Discontent and angry  
Los Angeles

There have been many solidarity meetings and protests in the San Francisco Bay area. Some have been small protests at street corners in the Mission district of San Francisco. There was one at the Mexican Consulate and then another at the Stock Exchange that drew several hundred. We also went to a weekday meeting in San Jose that heard a lot of discussion about the recent events and some of the new books that have come out on the rebellion. Something new is brewing. The liberating potential of the revolt is sinking in, along with a great deal of disgust at the reaction to it by the Mexican and U.S. bureaucracies.

Participants  
Bay Area

### NINGUN SER HUMANO ES ILEGAL



### NO HUMAN BEING IS ILLEGAL

The Zapatistas have shown that it is possible for a small movement to capture the consciousness of the entire Mexican people, who say "We are all Marcos," and that the Idea of Freedom in the Zapatista struggle cannot die, even if Marcos were captured and killed. The battle of the Mexican peasantry has uplifted the Mexican community within Los Angeles, where the anti-immigrant Prop. 187 has been passed. If implemented it would be a defeat for immigrant labor, that is, for all of labor.

There is a picture being circulated against Prop. 187 which shows a young Latino/a man and woman looking through a chain-link fence at the border between Mexico and the U.S. It states that "No human being is illegal." No law can be set up against humanity as a whole and the right to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" — or is that expression only for the whites and rich?

Gene Ford  
Los Angeles

Your coverage of movements like anti-Prop. 187 needs to be broadened. The socialist cause can be reconstituted in the U.S., but Marxists are going to have to wage a struggle within to gain respect of the newest new forces now in motion. Also, one of your unique contributions was the exposure of state-capitalist regimes masquerading as "workers' states." You do not put enough emphasis on this today. The ruling class bombards the workers each day and hour that "socialism has failed and Marxism is dead." We could all do better showing how real socialism is related to the day-to-day struggles. Showing what socialism is not is part of hitting capitalist ideology. Polemics are a good way of learning Marxist political economy.

Supporter  
Los Angeles

# Readers' Views

## RUSSIA AND CHECHNYA

Your article on Russia and Chechnya (January-February 1995 N&L) was a thoughtful piece of work. The situation in Chechnya is tragic. One cannot do other than sympathize with the sufferings the Chechen people underwent during the time of Stalin and their war against Russia which is still ongoing. Nevertheless, it cannot be viable as an independent state. It is surrounded by Russia, has no sea ports or external boundaries, and the fact that it sits on oil wells cannot be discounted. The position of the Chechen people seems analogous to that of some Native Americans. The Indian Reservations of the U.S. cannot exist as separate states. It is unfortunate but every tiny people cannot be independent.

History professor  
Colorado

Your Lead on Russia and Chechnya was striking in pointing out that nobody even questioned Russia's "right" to prevent Chechnya from seceding. Except the Chechen people, of course. And Marx, 140 years ago, as you pointed out.

Reader  
Illinois

## 'PRIVATE ENCLAVES' AND THE WLM

What worries me are the unconscious forms of bourgeois privatization and rampant indulgent individualism in feminism today. The "private enclave" formed by women's studies in many universities serves to isolate a tamed form of feminism within the status quo of the universities. Very few women's studies departments are following Adrienne Rich's dictum to be disobedient to the wishes of the patriarchy! These "private enclaves" not only separate theory and activity, they foster and encourage an anti-total thought which one of my colleagues dubbed "comparative patriarchy studies." She meant that women's studies courses now devote considerable time to investigating differences between male systems of dominance and comparatively little to exploring women's resistance and creativity.

Women's Liberationist professor  
San Jose, Cal.

My tendency is to want everything "translated" and broken down for me. That may be why I liked the essay in the March N&L on Hegel's chapter on "Life" so much — and that may be a bad sign. But I liked seeing what Olga Domanski thought each idea of Hegel might mean to the Women's Liberation Movement without in any way pretending to exhaust that question. "Kind" meant nothing to me until it was translated as "what kind of freedom, what kind of organization..." Then I got really excited. In the essay I could see the "practicality of philosophy" as the engagement of Hegel with the movement to freedom.

Labor columnist  
New York

The March essay on Hegel's chapter on "Life" and Dunayevskaya's concept of "private enclaves" is a fine exposition and clarification.

Book editor  
New York

## SPONTANEITY AND LOGIC

What "mediated" the whole March issue of N&L for me was Raya Dunayevskaya's column, written in 1969 and called "Spontaneity and logic of the dialectic." Because this philosophic piece appeared within a paper full of activities, analyses, and politics as well as theoretical articles (including the essay on "absolute method" and the Black World column on "organization"), the whole paper manifested the relationship between subjects of revolution and dialectics.

Where Dunayevskaya in that column talks about subjects determining the course of history while at the same time being bound by it, I couldn't help think-

ing about the little story on "Mushroom pickers march for UFW vs. company union." But, the truth is I could relate nearly every article to something in that column. Most of all, the whole issue showed that the time is now for the movement from theory to not only hear the masses' ideas and struggles, but to take responsibility for history with the development of a dialectical philosophy.

Sonia Bergonzi  
Chicago

I found the March issue especially powerful in combining organization and philosophy in its pages. While I have read many articles detailing the horrors people will suffer if the Republican's "contract" becomes reality, none of them had the same concentrated power and passion contained in many articles — and especially the Readers' Views. The unyielding determination expressed by so many to battle these efforts to destroy the little livelihood they have left was striking.

Retiree  
Detroit

## THE GLASGOW SCENE

There is no good political news from here—but community grass roots activity continues to spring up and keep hope burning. In Glasgow young people are fighting to prevent a motorway being driven through lovely park land used by local people. Such actions reinforce our trust in fundamental instincts of communities.

Longtime subscriber  
Glasgow

## WHAT ABOUT DIALECTICS?

I've been taking a class in Marxism, but the professor puts all the emphasis on Marxism as materialism. I want to know: what about dialectics? what about method?

University student  
Los Angeles

A dialectic critique of existing society does not deny the importance of democratic freedoms as they exist within capitalism, but rather shows how, despite their existence, the ordinary person is still exploited and manipulated throughout life, in work and in leisure, at the mercy of social forces outside his or her control. A worker may have to make land mines or cigarettes, print a book by Charles Murray or bury more English countryside under yet another motorway, despite believing that these things are useless and harmful, because of the need to earn a living. In re-creating the dialectic for our own age, we can expose the one-sided, inadequate nature of freedom in capitalist society and work towards a genuinely free society in which people can decide for themselves, in accordance with human goals, how they will use their labor power, to what end, in what manner, at what pace and for how long.

Richard Bunting  
Oxford, England

## GAY IRISH FIGHT BACK

The reason for the large gay turnout at Chicago's St. Patrick's Day parade was to show solidarity with gay people in Boston and New York who were barred from participating in St. Pat's celebrations in those cities. Boston's parade was billed as an anti-gay and lesbian protest. The theme of the religious holiday's celebration was hatred and intolerance. To show his disagreement with Boston's parade organizers, the mayor of Boston forbade any city employees from marching in the parade there.

In Chicago, one marcher noted, "This is the first year that no one threw bottles at us, so that's good." There were quite a few boos and hand gestures, but those were quickly overshadowed by the wild cheers of people who supported the gay groups, mostly teenagers.

Tom Williams  
Chicago

LOOKING FOR THE WAY OUT OF A 'CLEAR-CUT' FUTURE

The definition of the word "clear-cut" in the Oxford Dictionary is "well-defined," but these days we immediately associate it with the forest.

The future of our young people can very well also be defined as "clear-cut"—as "well-defined" and "bleak and barren" as the jobless, and homeless, or at best McWorkers in the "no minimum wage" paradise of Mr. Gingrich and Co.

Laszlo Gati
Vancouver, B.C.

The police picked up a homeless man here and put him in jail for eight months. When he was finally found not guilty of the charges against him the police and lawyers said everything was OK.

Linda T.
Michigan

I met Kathleen Cleaver (the former Black Panther) recently. She is still involved with radical causes. She still has that fire of determination in her eyes, which as a young Black woman today I find very inspiring.

has gone so far backward, and people have forgotten what it means to be human—so that there's no way we can get out of this! I'm not sure that "a dialectical philosophy of revolution can point a way out of today's retrogression"—but I'll be attending your Marxist-Humanist classes to see.

High school student
Los Angeles

The suburbs of Los Angeles are in an uproar. Once a week an influx of poor and homeless people pillage residential recycling bins and trash cans for bottles, cans and other recyclable material that are left out for weekly garbage collection day.

Joseph S.
Los Angeles

The "mechanization of thought" is very frightening. To see what it means, all you have to do is think of how much easier it will be to cut off someone's Medicaid on a computer screen than when you're sitting across from that person face to face.

Worried
Chicago

Although an old comrade of mine once told me that the big cities are the "hot-houses" of revolution, the anger of the workers here, on strike at the Ralston cereal plant over job security, makes me think maybe the revolution will start right out here in the boondocks.

Postal worker
Battle Creek, Mich.

Editor's note: As we go to press, the Ralston strikers have been out for more than a month. Look for a story on the strike next issue.

BOSNIA AND THE NEEDED AMERICAN REVOLUTION

The discussion after a showing of the film on Sarajevo, "Ecce Homo," included some criticisms for letting it seem that the suffering in Bosnia was equally distributed, when in fact it is the Muslims who have borne the brunt of Serbian ethnic cleansing.

Most interesting to me was that eight copies of our Bosnia pamphlet sold at the meeting. None who bought it seemed to have thought before about the relationship between what is happening in Bosnia and the needed American Revolution, which was raised at the meeting.

Michelle
Los Angeles

I have never wanted any division between races, and I am for the idea of "multiculturalism." But sometimes it seems to me, as an African American, that the idea of "multiculturalism" gets used to downplay the historic experience of Black people in America.

Black woman
California

THE REAL CRIMINALS

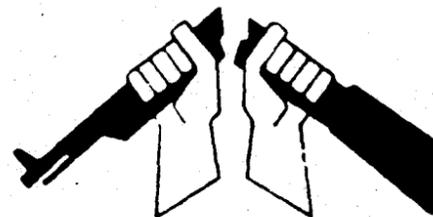
I saw a sign in a subway car warning that soliciting of funds was a felony subject to prosecution. Under it someone had written: "Who are the real criminals in society?"

Just before I had boarded the car, two middle-aged women had been cited by plainclothesmen for "turnstile jumping." I talked to one of them, who told me a

sad and angry tale of her own daughter's misfortunes. She makes the trip, six days a week, to care for her granddaughter. Her citation was \$50.

I say let's uproot the real criminals.
Subway rider
New York

RESISTING WAR AND TAXES



The flier the War Resisters League puts out each year prior to April 15 on "Where Your Income Tax Money Really Goes" is a sobering reminder of the direct link between each person's daily labor and the ever-mounting arms buildup.

Wally and Juanita Nelson
New York

It's that time of the year again! Are people aware that 51% of the federal budget for 1996 is allotted to current and past military spending? That we're being asked to feed the military arsenal instead of the bellies of needy children, who now may even be deprived of their free school lunches?

Sheila
New York

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS FROM NEWS & LETTERS

Marxist-Humanist Literature Catalog
A full list of publications (many publications are not listed here) available from News and Letters Committees
55¢ postage

BOOKS

BY RAYA DUNAYEVSKAYA

- Marxism and Freedom: From 1776 until today
1988 edition. New author's introduction..... \$17.50
Philosophy and Revolution: from Hegel to Sartre and from Marx to Mao
1989 edition. New author's introduction..... \$14.95
Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation, and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution
1991 edition. New author's introduction. Foreword by Adrienne Rich..... \$12.95
Women's Liberation and the Dialectics of Liberation: Reaching for the Future..... \$15.95
The Marxist-Humanist Theory of State-Capitalism: Selected writings by Raya Dunayevskaya ..... \$8.50
The Philosophic Moment of Marxist-Humanism: Two Historic-Philosophic Writings by Raya Dunayevskaya
Contains "Presentation on Dialectics of Organization and Philosophy of June 1, 1987," and 1953 "Letters on Hegel's Absolutes."
\$3 paperback, \$10 hardcover

BY CHARLES DENBY

- Indignant Heart: A Black Worker's Journal
1989 edition includes Afterword by Raya Dunayevskaya ..... \$14.95

PAMPHLETS

- American Civilization on Trial, Black Masses as Vanguard Statement of the National Editorial Board. Includes "A 1980s View of the Two-Way Road Between the U.S. and Africa" by Raya Dunayevskaya, and "Black Caucuses in the Unions" by Charles Denby ..... \$2
NEW! Harry McShane and the Scottish Roots of Marxist-Humanism by Peter Hudis.... \$3
Bosnia-Herzegovina: Achilles Heel of Western "Civilization" ..... \$1
Marx's Capital and Today's Global Crisis Includes critiques of Ernest Mandel and Tony Cliff ..... \$2
The Coal Miners' General Strike of 1949-50 and the Birth of Marxist-Humanism in the U.S.
by Andy Phillips and Raya Dunayevskaya ..... \$2
25 Years of Marxist-Humanism in the U.S.: A History of Worldwide Revolutionary Developments by Raya Dunayevskaya..... \$1.50
Myriad Global Crises of the 1980s and the Nuclear World Since World War II
by Raya Dunayevskaya ..... \$2
Theory and Practice, by Rosa Luxemburg First English Translation ..... \$2
Nationalism, Communism, Marxist-Humanism and the Afro-Asian Revolutions
by Raya Dunayevskaya ..... \$1.25
Frantz Fanon, Soweto, and American Black Thought by Lou Turner and John Alan ..... \$3
Selections from Raya Dunayevskaya's writings on the Middle East ..... \$2.50
Working Women for Freedom by Angela Terrano, Marie Dignan, and Mary Holmes ..... \$2

- Dos ensayos por Raya Dunayevskaya ..... \$2
News and Letters Committees Constitution ..... 32¢ postage

ARCHIVES

- Guides to Collection and Supplement to the Raya Dunayevskaya Collection: Marxist-Humanism: A Half-Century of Its World Development Full description of 15,000-page microfilm collection. .... \$4.50
The Raya Dunayevskaya Collection -- Marxist-Humanism: A Half-Century of Its World Development A 15,000-page microfilm collection on 8 reels available from Wayne State University, Detroit, MI 48202 ..... \$165

NEWSPAPER

- News & Letters subscription Unique combination of worker and intellectual, published 10 times a year (request information about gift subscriptions) ..... \$2.50/year
NEW! Bound Volumes of News & Letters. 1970-77, 1977-84, 1984-87, 1987-94 ..... \$25 each
N&L is also available on microfilm from University Microfilms International, 300 Zeeb Rd., Ann Arbor, MI 48106. N&L as well as other Marxist-Humanist literature is available on audio tape.

MAIL ORDERS TO:
News & Letters, 59 East Van Buren,
Room 707, Chicago, IL 60605
Phone (312) 663-0839

Enclosed find \$\_\_\_\_\_ for the literature checked. Please add \$1.00 for each item for postage. Illinois residents add 7% sales tax.

Name \_\_\_\_\_
Address \_\_\_\_\_
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

## Black/Red View

## Return to 'Gilded Age'

## Essay Article

by John Alan

In his article "Newt Gingrich's Revolution" Garry Wills indicated that Gingrich is aware of Mark Twain's *The Gilded Age* and Henry Adams' *Democracy*, but he won't recommend these books to his students (*New York Review of Books*, Mar. 23, 1995). Unfortunately, Wills failed to elaborate why Gingrich did not like Twain or Adams. Could the reason be that the reactionary political agenda that House Speaker Newt Gingrich and his ideologues in Congress are now enacting into laws, if not stopped by massive opposition, could send this country back to the kind of inhuman class, race and sex social relationships which existed in the 19th century's Gilded Age?

The Gilded Age is the name that Mark Twain gave to those 36 years between 1865 and 1901 when unprecedented large accumulations of capital in railroad and industrial monopolies concentrated the means of production until machines dominated workers in the labor process as never before. The Gilded Age were the youthful years of U.S. monopoly capitalism, when it was unregulated by statute and left free to exploit labor and nature universally and absolutely.

Mark Twain saw the phenomenal results of this domination in the conspicuous consumption of the new industrial magnates and in the poverty of the working class. Henry Adams saw it in the political corruption of all levels of government. William E.B. DuBois more accurately called the Gilded Age "a new capitalism and a new enslavement of labor."

But even in this period of a laissez-faire capitalism, the Gilded Age was far from a tranquil heaven for capitalism. It was shaken not only by severe economic depressions, the panics of 1873 and 1893, but by militant opposition to unbridled power coming from new organizations of labor, women and Blacks such as the National Labor Union, the National Colored Labor Union, the Working Women's Protective Union and the National Colored Farmers' Alliance.

The urgent issues for unions and the civic reformers of that time were to gain security for the workers and the poor against a life of permanent poverty, to establish rights for workers, Blacks, women and immigrant workers, and to protect the national resources from commercial exploitation. Although they may differ in form and in articulation, the urgent issues at the end of the 19th century remain those at the end of the 20th century.

African-American freedom, which was germane to the birth of monopoly capitalism, is equally germane to the present crisis in U.S. capitalism, a crisis expressed politically in the fight over the balanced budget, so-called welfare reform, the repeal of affirmative action, in-

creased "law enforcement" and so on. These are the phenomenal forms of the crisis in capital accumulation. Yet even these phenomenal forms engender their own phenomenal forms, such as Black single welfare mothers, crime in the Black community, angry white males opposing preferences given to Blacks and women.

This crisis challenges the philosophy of the Black elite which sees freedom for African Americans as a constitutional problem dependent upon the aspirations of the "upwardly mobile" in a perpetually expanding capitalist economy. This philosophy, if we can call it that, originated in the gilded age of monopoly capitalism in the struggle between William E.B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington, although back then, the legal and economic paths were opposed, not united. Washington was so overwhelmed by Black poverty and white terror (187 African Americans per year were lynched between 1889 and 1898) and the total ineffectiveness of the 15th Amendment to the Constitution (that promised suffrage) that he gave up on the issue of constitutional equality and opted for economic mobility. DuBois instead held fast to constitutional freedom.

The Washington-DuBois debate was the main dividing line in Black thought until the modern Civil Rights Movement, which opened a new ground for a philosophy of African-American liberation. Today history, and life, are demanding a new philosophy and a new dividing line. The masses of African-American people know from life that the limit to their freedom is not merely constitutional. Nor can the issue of freedom be resolved as long as the job market is shrinking, and especially when conservative state governments narrow the difference between work and prison. In fact, Texas is now renting some prisons to electronics firms who employ the prisoners as cheap laborers. This and other measures reveal that Newt Gingrich's "contract with the American people" is really a "contract with American capitalism."

Although deregulation of industry, privatization of government and cuts in welfare and other social programs have the appearance of returning to 19th century capitalism, any real backward journey in history is impossible. But today's capitalism does have a relationship with the past, particularly the incessant need to accumulate capital by exploiting labor, nature and society in general. This historic character of capitalism informs its present problem.

For even with deregulation and cutting deficit spending, there is little possibility that its rate of accumulation will meet its need to expand. However, the true creator and energizer of human development is the notion of freedom. This notion stands in opposition to capital, and history shows that in every age capital accumulation is dedicated to the stamping out of freedom. To define a new philosophy, then, a new dividing line in Black thought will begin by embracing neither constitutional nor capitalist economic freedom, but with struggles to uproot capital accumulation and its ideologues.

## Black World

(Continued from page 1)

various forms of violence in the Black community, the class contradictions and limits of political power, or the ideological recidivism of Black neoconservatism and Afrocentrism.

What, however, was immediate and sustained was the engagement of Fanon's thought with the neocolonial-bred crises of today's Africa that Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* so profoundly analyzed at their birth with national independence. An Eritrean intellectual related Fanon to the failure of African unity and the problems of post-independence reconstruction, followed by a Nigerian intellectual who gave a scathing depiction of the corruption and ineptitude of today's Nigerian bourgeoisie in the very spirit in which Fanon assailed Africa's lumpen-bourgeoisie.

However, where such conferences, indeed all conferences for that matter, inevitably lead is to the question: where do we go from here! Where they need to go, it seems to me, is beyond a certain kind of thinking that, no matter how radical, still accepts the parameters of the given, that is, existing social reality and thought.

Thus, the politics of the high-tech conference, no matter how diverse the voices, seemed never to get beyond a kind of radical reformism aimed at making capitalism work more fairly for the oppressed. What motivates the need to go beyond the theoretical limits of the given at the symposium on Fanon is the current rubix-cubing of the Subject by postmodernist discourses. Here, a kind of epistemological reformism operates that goes no further than playing with the shifting boundaries of identity and difference.

There is no doubt that we must be engaged in reform struggles in a retrogressive period like the present one. But, as Fanon so emphatically reminds us, "there must be an idea of the future of humanity," a rapid transformation of a consciousness of social and political needs into a new humanism. Otherwise reform struggles lead up a blind alley.

In this respect, the thought of Black radical intellectuals has yet to peer beyond the horizon set by the 1992 Los Angeles rebellion which while placing American capitalist "civilization" on trial also opened up new vistas onto the reason why we need a revolution in this country, as well as the philosophic need to finally confront the organizational problems involved in doing so.

(Continued from page 5)

urban rebellions. From Black feminists came a challenge to the "bipolar model" of Black consciousness first conceptualized by DuBois and adopted by SNCC and CORE by 1966. Asserting that the freedom idea needed to be tested in the dialectic of male-female relations within the movement, they demanded that the concept of organization (or at least organizational practice) take note of the "quadripolar" nature of Black experience.

## RESTRICTIONS ON FANON'S THOUGHT

In this period, many Black radicals turned to the writings of Frantz Fanon because, King argues, "his vision resonated with and radicalized the search for freedom as a new sort of individual and group character...Such a transformational vision seemed a way out of the impasse the movement had reached by the mid-1960s." (p. 174)

Unfortunately, King's extended discussion of Fanon and the Civil Rights Movement's reading of him focuses nearly exclusively on Fanon's encounter with Hegel in *Black Skin, White Masks* and on the chapter entitled "Concerning Violence" in *Wretched of the Earth*. He reads the chapter in *Black Skin, White Masks* as a way of understanding the alleged centrality of violence in *Wretched of the Earth*. Further, King burdens Fanon's discussion of Hegel with the writing of Alexander Kojève and his discussion of Fanon's chapter on violence with aspects of Sartre's viewpoint.

We can barely hear Fanon speaking for himself, as he critiques Hegel's dialectic of master-slave from the vantage point of the "colonized," and as he separates himself from Sartre, who considered the fact of blackness to be a "minor term." What we are left with is King's argument that the Fanonist vision of self-transformation through violent uprising of the colonized was Fanon's flawed contribution to the Civil Rights Movement's search for a new philosophical foundation.

Fanon's brilliant discussions of the difference between "nationalism" and "national consciousness," and the "pitfalls" within "national consciousness," do not appear, despite their evident relevance to King's concerns about SNCC's debates on "Black identity." Nor, except fleetingly, is there any recognition of Fanon's concept of a "new humanism" emerging from the revolutions of the Third World.

Most puzzling of all is the lack of discussion of Fanon's argument on "Spontaneity: Its Strengths and Weaknesses" in *Wretched of the Earth*, which, on the one hand, rejects the "fetish" of the vanguard party, and on the other, links the development of self-mobilized organization out of spontaneity to the "enlightening of consciousness." The path that this "enlightening" follows, until it reaches what Fanon called "an original idea propounded as an absolute," is a path not taken here. What King misses in Fanon reflects what he hasn't worked out on the dialectics of organization and philosophy as a whole.

The limitations of King's and Kelley's studies suggest that no resolution of the problem of the relationship of the revolutionary and often spontaneous subjectivity of the Black masses to the forms of organization they create and encounter is possible outside a much deeper plunge into the Idea of Freedom. It may be that neither King, who does recognize the subjectivity of philosophy, nor Kelley, who is silent on the question, could go beyond the limits reached in the experience of the Black masses over the whole post-World War II period. If so, in the changed world facing us today, it is a task that remains to be done.

JOIN US FOR THIS CLASS SERIES  
Can a Dialectical  
Philosophy of Revolution  
Point A Way Out of Today's  
Retrogression?

In response to the ongoing effort of the Gingrich-Republicans to "complete the Reagan revolution" through a concentrated attack on women, immigrants, Blacks, youth, gays, and working people, News and Letters Committees is holding a class series on the development and future of the Marxist-Humanist concept of organization. We are doing so in order to discover whether this concept of organization can help provide ground and direction for unfurling a banner of total opposition to the deep retrogression sweeping this country today.

We will focus on the full expanse of Marxist-Humanism — from its origin in Raya Dunayevskaya's 1953 *Letters on Hegel's Absolutes* to its development in the face of new objective and subjective events in the 1960s and 1970s, to its new moments in the 1980s when the need to work out a new relation between dialectics and organization became of paramount importance. Far from viewing this history as past, we will view these developments in relation to the challenges facing us today — both in terms of unfolding objective events and the theoretic challenges posed by such thinkers as F. Fanon, T. Adorno, C.L.R. James, and J. Derrida.

For a syllabus, as well as dates, times and locations, contact the News and Letters Committee in your area. See the directory on this page.



VOICES FROM  
WITHIN  
THE PRISON  
WALLS

Society  
punished

When I came to prison years ago we were fighting for how to make life behind the walls better for all of us. All that is now being taken from us and the whole prison camp is just going downhill. All the talk around here now is about the upcoming new slave camps soon to be built. They will not work. They will have to come up with a much better program to stop crime or change the criminal offender. You cannot reach the human mind with hate and only punishment.

The prison officials are not running this camp, which is divided into separate parts with different jailhouse gangs or organizations. It keeps us on lockdown all the time. Prisoners who are not in a gang are just here. Some have to pay for a cell to live in. The only good thing about the gangs is that they hold meetings and talk about peace and try to show some form of unity. It lasts for two or three months until another lockdown.

If they keep working at it maybe we will be able to really live in peace behind these walls some day. But the plans of the officials are a waste of taxpayers' money. The way it is now the criminal offender, prison officials and society as a whole are all being punished.

—Prisoner, Illinois

## How to contact

## NEWS &amp; LETTERS COMMITTEES

CHICAGO	NEW YORK
59 E. Van Buren, Room 707 Chicago, IL 60605 Phone 312 663 0839 Fax 312 663 9069	P.O. Box 196 Grand Central Station New York, NY 10163 212 663 3631
<b>MEETINGS</b> Call for meeting information	<b>MEETINGS</b> Sundays, 6:30 p.m.
OAKLAND	LOS ANGELES
P.O. Box 3345 Oakland, CA 94609 510 658 1448	P.O. Box 29194 Los Angeles, CA 90029 213 960 5607
<b>MEETINGS</b> Sundays, 5:30 p.m. 412 Monte Vista, Oakland (near Oakland Ave.)	<b>MEETINGS</b> Sundays, 5:30 p.m. Echo Park United Methodist Church 1226 N. Alvarado (North of Sunset, side door)
DETROIT	FLINT, MI
P.O. Box 27205 Detroit MI 48227	P.O. Box 3384 Flint, MI 48502
<b>MEETINGS</b> Thursdays, 7 p.m. Central Methodist Church Woodward and Adams	

## Philosophic Dialogue

*Editor's note: The focus of this discussion is the review by Peter Hudis of Moishe Postone's Time, Labor and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory, published in the January-February 1995 issue of N&L. All page references are to Marx's Capital, vol. 1 (New York: Vintage, 1977).*

### Capital's 'immanent dynamic'

Peter Hudis faults Postone for not locating the revolutionary subject as internal to the value-form. But Postone is interested in the immanent dynamic of which there is no conscious control. As he puts it, "An immanent dynamic implies a logic of development, above and beyond conscious control, which is based on a contradiction intrinsic to the system."

Many Marxists have attempted to explain that dynamic solely by the pressure of wages on profits as the accumulation process exhausts the reserve army of labor, strengthens the position of labor and forces capital to replace living with dead labor. However, Marx put great emphasis on the progressive increase in the reserve army of labor, giving us good theoretical grounds to doubt any explanation of capital's immanent dynamic based solely on the worker threat to profit. Moreover, as Postone points out, such resistance from labor only forces capital to operate upon its own true basis: relative surplus value.

Postone explains how the dual function of labor in capitalist society itself generates this dynamic, which does indeed escape conscious human control. Postone is attempting to understand the antihuman logic of capital, not to invoke the "human dimension" only when it is itself constituted by and constitutes capital.

He is also interested to show how this dynamic, without abolishing itself, points beyond itself (especially because of the potentialities in dead labor, which Hudis does not recognize). The fact that Postone emphasizes that capital does not abolish itself underlines the importance he puts on revolutionary action based on the immediate and possible needs of "people" themselves.

—Economics student, Berkeley

### On the commodity-form

Peter Hudis wrote an excellent critique of Moishe Postone. However, his interpretation of Marx's view of the commodity-form introduces some serious flaws. It is not because he dismissed my view that Marx saw the commodity-form as a "nothingness" whose positive content was Marx's own re-creation of the Hegelian dialectic which he called "the power of abstraction." More importantly, it is crucial to rescue precisely what Marx meant

### A response to some criticisms

One sign of the richness of Moishe Postone's book is the range of thoughtful responses we have received to its review. Ron Brokmeyer has raised some especially important issues concerning Marx's Capital.

To see what Marx means by form in Chapter 1 of Capital, we must recall his statement that products of labor "only appear as commodities, or have the form of commodities, in so far as they possess a double form, i.e. natural form and value form" (p. 138).

The value-form of a commodity is determined not by its physical properties, but by the socially necessary labor time needed to produce it. Value is an abstraction from the material properties of use-values. Since "not an atom of matter enters in the objectivity of commodities as values," the commodity-form "has absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity."

But this does not mean the commodity-form is totally separated from materiality, since the value-form shows itself through the relation of one physical commodity to another. While value is indifferent to the material content by which it is borne, it must be borne by some material content to step forth as value.

This is clear from Marx's treatment of the simple commodity-form, which he defines as the unity of the relative and equivalent forms of value. The equivalent form defines the principle of abstract equivalence underlying the exchange of commodities. The relative form defines the way value must show itself through the "physical body" of another commodity. Marx writes, "Since a commodity cannot be related to itself as equivalent...it must be related to another commodity as equivalent, and therefore must make the physical shape of another commodity into its own value-form" (p. 148).

Far from this "unity-in-difference" of the relative and equivalent forms of value applying only to an early stage of Marx's analysis, the internal opposition between a logic of abstraction and concrete contingency contained within it carries through all of Chapter I of Capital. Marx writes, "The antagonism between the relative form of value and the equivalent form, the two poles of the value-form, also develops concomitantly with the development of the value-form itself" (p. 160).

For this reason "the development of matter cannot be separated from the development of value form."

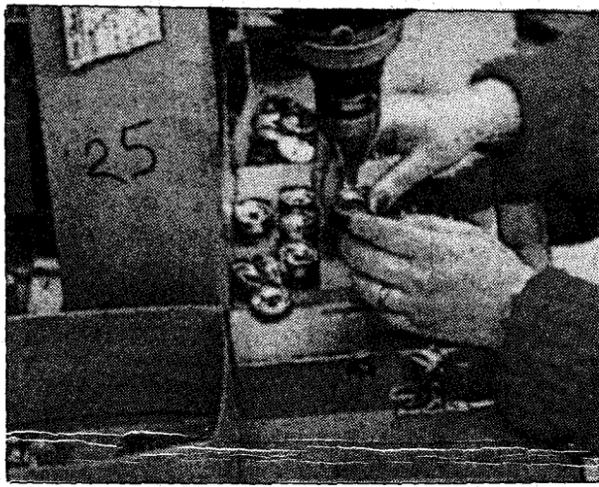
It is true that this internal opposition seems to dissolve when we reach such "abstract" forms as money. Money has no smell or taste: it is without sensuousness. Money is the ideality of the value-form. At this stage, the Money-form, Marx "absolutely separates" the com-

modity-form and materiality.

Hudis points to Marx's discussion in a previous section of Chapter 1 of Capital where the commodity is a "unity-in-difference of use-value and exchange-value." On that basis, he reunites what Marx absolutely separates: the commodity-form and materiality. Then he refers to Marx deriving use-value and exchange-value from the commodity as a "concretum," as though that meant for Marx that "the commodity-form is not utterly lacking in materiality."

In this section of Capital, form means, for Marx, the subjective experience of an external object or the necessary form of appearance of such an object to the subject. He prepares the reader by referring to ordinary seeing as one kind of subjective experience of an external object. But in ordinary seeing there is a physical connection in light "transmitted from one thing, the external object, to another thing, the eye." "As against this," Marx continues, "the commodity-form, and the value relation of the products of labour within which it appears, have absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity and the material relations arising out of this."

Marx repeats, in many different ways, that this supersensible form of appearance of the object derives not from its use-value but rather emerges in the value relation where a completely phantom property in things, the amount of socially necessary labor time to produce them, becomes a property of the object. Further, capitalist human relations assume the form of a phantasmagoria, social relations between things, because that's what in reality "they really are." In other words, Marx's view of the concrete includes not only those aspects of human experience that relate to materiality but also that of a real illusion, a gestalt over social life processes, whose transcendence is crucial to liberation.



modity-form and materiality. But he quickly adds that to avoid being blinded by this glittering abstraction, we must return to the simple commodity-form, whose internal opposition of use-value and value expresses the unity of concrete and abstract labor. This allows us to see that the abstract universality of money does not exist on its own account but derives from a material process of production—namely, concrete labor being pounded into abstract labor. This serves as the transition to the famous section on the "Fetishism of Commodities." As Marx put it: "The riddle of the money fetish is therefore the riddle of the commodity fetish, now become visible and dazzling to our eyes" (p. 187).

In Specters of Marx, Jacques Derrida emphasizes the abstract, "illusory" nature of the commodity-form. There is nothing "ironic" about this: it is fully consistent with structuralist, post-structuralist, and deconstructionist readings of Marx. By viewing the commodity-form as a mental abstraction, Derrida spirits away the material use-value side of the contradiction. As a result the civil war between capital and labor, which Marx shows is hidden in the commodity-form, is replaced by Derrida with a battle between the "phantasmagoric" nature of capitalism and the "spectral ghost" of a "Marxian" critique. This fits with his effort to avoid referring to embodied subjects of revolution to uproot capitalism.

The question is not whether, as against Derrida, one affirms that subjects of revolt are needed to uproot capitalism. The question is whether this flows from one's analysis or is brought there by an act of will. This is decisive given today's need to elicit new forces of opposition through a comprehensive philosophic framework.

Though, as the Berkeley economics student notes, our high-tech world forces many living laborers out of production, this hardly proves Postone's contention that "dead labor" and not the living laborer is the "subjective agent" of emancipation. After all, high-tech remains based on sweated labor, even if much of that labor is no longer on the production line. Moreover, high-tech bloats the army of the unemployed—the very force which according to Marx does not maintain capitalism but rather brings it down.

Though the very nature of high-tech has created a necessary illusion that production has been "uncoupled" from employment, it is an illusion nonetheless. To avoid falling prey to this illusory reality in which "all that is solid melts into air," we must grapple anew with the methodological approach of Capital which never separates the value-form of a product of labor from the internal emergence of "new passions and new forces."

—Peter Hudis

## Is Marx's Capital still relevant?

Ironically, it is Derrida who catches Marx's meaning in his Specters of Marx as he is trying to fight today's new fetish of globalized capitalism as an end of history. Yet he insists that Marx is wrong in claiming the commodity's "mystical character owes nothing to a use-value." He thus ends up seeing not freely associated labor but the fetish as a universal when he writes "as soon as there is production there is fetishism."

The reason the issue of the meaning Marx gave to the commodity-form is so important today is that what today's ideologues aggressively project as a given is a concept of objectivity totally detached from all materiality. That is the form in which they are reaching back to the pre-1930s in their rhetorical and material war on workers and the poor. They have latched onto the barest ideological thread to prop up capitalist reality, that is, "uncoupling" of an entity they call "the economy" from jobs, material production, human rights, and so on. The libertarian anti-statism fashionable now in bourgeois politics is not freedom but is merely hanging onto the ideological thread of the commodity-form.

Marx's idealism reveals workers' drive for free association as the absolute opposite of the commodity-form, reveals that this form of objectivity can be transcended and that workers' subjectivity need not be coupled to anything but its own determinateness. If one truncates Marx's idealism, there is no way to unite philosophy and organization.

—Ron Brokmeyer

### Capital, the 'absolute subject'?

Though Peter Hudis' essay showed the one-sidedness of many aspects of Postone's interpretation of Capital, more can be said, particularly with respect to the categories of abstract labor and capital-as-Subject.

Hudis seems to endorse Postone's understanding of abstract labor. Postone does rightly emphasize the dual character of labor and the historical specificity of abstract labor. Yet his position is an explicit, conscious critique of Marx's view that abstract labor "is an expenditure of human labor-power in the physiological sense" (p. 137). Postone thinks "physiological" implies transhistorical and non-social because he does not understand that the specific character of capitalist production separates the workers' physical activity from their thinking, desires, and intentions: "human labor-power [is] expended without regard to the form of its expenditure" (p. 128).

Postone thus does not recognize that the workers' physiological activity itself has a dual, self-divided, character. He misconstrues the dual character of labor as a distinction between essence and appearance. Physiological laboring activity for Postone is solely concrete, whereas he sees capitalism turning concrete activity into the form of appearance of an abstract mode of societal organization. The revolutionary potential of working people that arises from within capital—from within their self-divided experience—is theoretically negated precisely at this point, since Postone reduces their physical activity to a mere appearance of an external, abstract imperative.

Postone argues that, for Marx, the Subject of capitalist society is instead capital. As Hudis points out, this view is rooted in Postone's interpretation of Chapter 4 of Capital, in which Marx speaks of value, in the movement of capital (M-C-M'), as a "self-moving substance" and thus as "an automatic subject" (pp. 255-56). Postone manages to conceive capital's "self"-expansion as limited only by the "internal" contradictions of some abstract value-substance.

What Postone seems not to recognize is that Chapter 4 deals with the fetishism of the capital-form. In the formula M-C-M', value "presents itself as a self-moving substance" (p. 256, my emphasis). It seems that value has the "occult ability to add value to itself" (p. 255). But Marx's whole point is that this is just a mystified and contradictory appearance. As he begins to show in the next chapter—"Contradictions in the General Formula"—the real expansion occurs in the "hidden abode of production" (p. 279), during the interruption of the M-C-M' movement. It occurs through dead labor sucking up living labor. Capital increases not through itself, but through its opposite.

Moreover, as Marx makes clear, the worker, not "labor," enters production. Capital's "self"-expansion depends on a being alien to it, a human being. This human being can limit and has limited capital's "self"-expansion through struggles to limit the length of the workday and, in our age, through battles against automation's production of relative surplus-value as well.

His one-sided reading enables Postone to treat the capital/labor relationship as only the subsumption of people to a "quasi-independent" principle of social organization. Postone continually uses this prefix, "quasi." He thus tacitly acknowledges, but avoids theorizing, capital's dependence on the worker. Because, conversely, Marx located the human being in the very center of capital's existence, he was able to treat the same relationship consistently as an opposition: "Right from the start the worker is a victim who confronts it [the process of alienation] as a rebel and experiences it as a process of enslavement" (p. 990).

If and when the universality of philosophy helps develop the worker's own quest for universality as against his/her self-divided (slave/rebel) experience, it is not a mirror of capital's abstract logic of domination, but a force that can help transcend this system and its logic.

—Andrew Kliman

\* "Notes on Chapter 1 of Capital: Its Relation to Hegel's Logic," by Raya Dunayevskaya in The Marxist-Humanist Theory of State-Capitalism (Chicago: News and Letters, 1991), 91.

## Editorial

# Rwanda, Bosnia and genocide in the 1990s

It is April 1995. Three years ago, the genocidal Serbian "ethnic cleansing" against the Muslim population of Bosnia began, and, even though the multiethnic Bosnian forces have gained strength in recent weeks, the Serbian neo-fascists still hold 70% of Bosnia's territory. One year ago, the coldly planned genocidal massacre of 500,000 members of Rwanda's Tutsi minority by government-sponsored Hutu militias began. Although the perpetrators of the genocide were eventually defeated on the battlefield by the multiethnic Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), they continue to control several million Hutu refugees in UN-run camps in Zaire.

Even as the leaders of Europe and North America celebrate the 50th anniversary of Hitler's defeat, Hitler's legacy lives on, nowhere more than in Bosnia and Rwanda. Hitler's claims that it was really the Jews who were plotting to take over Germany and the world lives on in the Serbian neo-fascists' absurd claims of atrocities and aggression by their chief victims, the Muslims. The Serbian leaders make these claims even though, as reported recently (*Le Monde*, Feb. 2-5, 1995), near the besieged town of Bihac they have built new concentration camps where captured Muslim men are slowly dying, and new rape camps for captured Muslim women.

Hitler's legacy also lives on among the Hutu militia and government leaders in the refugee camps in Zaire, who usually don't even bother to deny their role in the massacre of Tutsi. Also, in a strategy pioneered by another group of mass killers, the Khmer Rouge, the Hutu militia leaders keep the Hutu refugees under totalitarian control, cutting them off from outside information and, when necessary, using public killings to keep the population from returning to live under Rwanda's new multiethnic government.

### LEFT LOOKS AWAY

Rwanda and Bosnia. Bosnia and Rwanda. Do we dare to face these horrific realities of the 1990s, to stare this negativity in the face? Or do we look away? Looking

away has been the main response of the great powers and the UN. But even on the Left, the response has usually also been to look away, to dismiss these events as the products of "age-old" ethnic hostilities in far-off parts of the world.

In a few short weeks in 1994, the Rwandan killers managed to murder half of the country's Tutsi minority, which means that between 6 and 11% of the entire population died (see Alain Destexhe, "The Third Genocide," *Foreign Policy*, Winter 1994-95). In Bosnia the UN has given at least token food aid to the victims, but in Rwanda little or no aid has gone to the new multiethnic Rwandan government. Aid has poured into the camps in Zaire, nourishing not only innocent Hutu refugees, but also thousands of killers from the Hutu militia, who lord it over those same refugees.

Far from age-old ethnic rivalries, the genocides in both Bosnia and Rwanda were the product of a deliberate strategy by members of entrenched ruling classes to hold onto their power. In Rwanda in the early 1990s, the authoritarian Hutu-led regime scapegoated the Tutsi minority as the cause of the country's problems at a time when it was under pressure to hold multi-party elections and when the economic crisis, including shortage of land in the villages, was becoming more and more severe.

In playing the Hutu against the Tutsi, the leadership was continuing in reverse form the policy of the German and Belgian colonizers of Rwanda and Burundi, who had established "ethnic" i.d. cards and used the Tutsi minority to rule over the Hutu. The unfinished nature of the African revolutions of the 1960s meant that demagogic military regimes like that in Rwanda came to power almost everywhere by the 1970s, as the earlier dreams of African unity, socialism, and humanism were left largely unfulfilled by the first generation of African independence leaders.

In Yugoslavia, the Tito regime, itself a product of a mass anti-Nazi resistance movement, never fulfilled its revolutionary promise either. A totalitarian single-party

state replaced the prewar Serbian-dominated Yugoslavia with a formally more multiethnic political structure, but by 1989, this essentially state-capitalist regime was on the verge of collapse.

Some of the Serbian Communist leaders now began to claim that it was not they who had generated the crisis. Instead, they claimed the problem was that the Serbs, the dominant group, were supposedly being "oppressed" by the other ethnic groups, especially the virtually powerless Muslims of Bosnia and Kosovo.

### LESSONS FOR OPPORTUNISTS

Today, as genocide continues in Bosnia and its horrendous aftermath continues in Rwanda, other racist and opportunistic political leaders around the world are drawing the lessons, even if the Left is not. All over the industrially developed world, political leaders on the Right are appealing to ethnic and racial hatred against minorities and immigrants to stay in power.

In Russia, the openly fascist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy is the main supporter of the "democrat" Boris Yeltsin's brutal war in Chechnya, and both of them support the Serbian fascists. In Burundi, which borders Rwanda, and whose military is still controlled by members of the old Tutsi aristocracy, the multiethnic elected government which includes both Hutu and Tutsi has little real power. Today, racist Tutsi extremists are playing with fire as they drive Hutu out of the capital in a form of "ethnic cleansing" as the army does nothing.

Facing, drawing the correct lessons from, and then acting against genocide in Rwanda and Bosnia is not a separate question from combating racism and fascism at home—it is the same question—one which has been put off for too long. The longer we do so, the closer looms the visage of Hitler. We need to support and learn from the emancipatory, multiethnic forces in Bosnia and Rwanda which, under tremendous pressure to mimic their enemies' ethnic chauvinism, have instead attempted to remain true to the ideal of a non-racist society.

## Congress unleashes 'free market' on environment

(Continued from page 1)

the poor, especially women and would worsen homelessness and malnutrition with draconian cuts in welfare and food programs.

- Over \$2 billion is to be cut from education falling hardest on urban public schools serving the poorest students, especially African Americans and Latinos.

- The "Stop Turning Out Prisoners Act" is designed to strip prisoners of the few rights they have.

- Gingrich is also maneuvering to gut the Food and Drug Administration and replace it with a "council of entrepreneurs."

Congress's far-reaching onslaught against the environment involves several measures in various stages of passage. The "Job Creation and Wage Enhancement Act," passed by the House with significant Democratic support, includes a moratorium on regulations, retroactive to last November and extending to the end of 1995. Although the bill is not yet law, the Clinton administration is already scaling back proposed regulations, such as the occupational health standards for repetitive motion and indoor air quality.

### DOLLARS FIRST, HEALTH LAST

The EPA is under court order to adopt a new standard for particulate pollution, recently found to increase the death rate by 15% in the cities with dirtiest air. The moratorium would block the new standard, as well as rules on parasites in drinking water and bacteria in meat. The same bill would raise economic considerations above health standards and require 23 new sets of cost analysis. Each analysis could be challenged in court by industry, making it almost impossible to adopt a new regulation.

What is most striking is that the costs of polluting industries are to be weighed against the lives of their victims. Cost-benefit analyses also hide the uneven distribution of hazards, meaning greater risk for people of color and workers.

Finally, the "takings" or property rights measure in this bill would require the government to compensate any owner whose property value was judged to be reduced by 20% or more by regulations protecting wetlands or endangered species. The stated intention is to prevent regulations from being enforced. The mentality behind "property rights" is exemplified by one advocate who mentioned in a public speech that the emancipation of the slaves was an uncompensated "taking."

Another bill—the unfunded mandates bill, already signed into law by President Clinton—invalidates new laws imposed on states but not funded. This will make it harder to force the states to protect everything from the environment to civil rights. The House has also passed three "tort reform" bills with vast implications for the legal system. They could make someone who files a civil lawsuit pay the opponent's legal fees, and would limit punitive damages and product liability claims.

One of the effects would be to make it virtually impossible to sue a toxic waste dumper, one of the few avenues neighboring communities have had to get cleanup. It would also allow corporations to risk causing disasters like the Exxon Valdez oil spill, since any court-awarded damages would be too small to affect overall profit calculations.

The new chairs of the Natural Resource Committees of the House and Senate, Alaskans Don Young and Frank Murkowski, are thirsting to open the Arctic Na-

tional Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling and the old-growth Tongass National Forest to unchecked logging. The 104th Congress is also guaranteed to stall any attempts to restrain global warming, while pushing aside scientific objections to speed the opening of a "permanent" nuclear waste burial site in Nevada.

### CLEAR-CUTTING ENVIRONMENT LAWS

As for environmental laws already on the books, the House is considering a revision of the Clean Water Act that was essentially written by the polluting industries themselves. It is a massive rollback of not only federal but state controls. In fact, Republicans are gearing up to "streamline" all the basic environmental laws: the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Air Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act, and the Superfund law.

If revisions begun by the last Congress give any indication, one feature will be a more selective approach to cleanup. A site intended for use as a parking lot or factory will get less cleanup than one intended for housing. Therefore an urban or poor rural area will often have to settle for the existence of toxic hot spots, so that a site can be used by a business, providing a handful of much-needed jobs. Moreover, the budget will undermine environmental laws by cutting funds for their enforcement. Endangered species protection has already been targeted, just when species are dying off at an incredible rate.

The unexplained decline of frog populations worldwide and the decimation of edible ocean fish are just the tip of the iceberg. What does it say about the environment humans are growing up in? Those who rail against burdening our grandchildren with debt are perfectly willing to leave them a world where nature's wealth has been wasted irrevocably.

What Karl Marx observed still resonates: "Capital...allows its actual movement to be determined as much and as little by the sight of the coming degradation and final depopulation of the human race, as by the probable fall of the earth into the sun...Apres moi le deluge! is the watchword of every capitalist and every capitalist nation. Capital therefore takes no account of the health and the length of life of the worker, unless society forces it to do so."

Clinton and the Democrats cannot be relied upon to stand up to Gingrich. Already the Forest Service has begun a "forest health" program that intensifies logging in national forests. Interior Secretary Babbitt has proposed rule changes to weaken endangered species protection.

The Republican Right is trying to undermine support for environmental protection through Congressional hearings that they call "War Crimes Trials." "Ordinary" citizens—who happen to own businesses or property worth hundreds of thousands of dollars—bring tears to the eye with tales of money lost and businesses closed due to heartless regulators preventing them from extinguishing species, or greedy lawyers suing them for ruining workers' health or harming consumers.

### ATTACKING ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Clearly the object of Gingrich's holy war is not so much the regulators as it is the movements that have forced fetters onto capital or threaten its rule. On the environmental scene, while the radio demagogues rant about the big environmental groups, what is most threatening is the environmental consciousness that has spread so widely that local battles have affected decisions from siting an incinerator in Robbins, Ill., to allowing logging of the last privately owned old-growth forest

in Northern California. These are struggles organized from below by people like Hazel Johnson, fighting the toxic encirclement of Chicago's Altgeld Gardens housing projects, and like Lois Gibbs, whose work led to action on Love Canal. Now the environmental justice movement has especially taken hold of communities of color, and many Native American reservations have become centers of environmentalism.

The proposed restrictions on regulations and lawsuits are clearly aimed in part at battles like that of the Chipewaw of Wisconsin, who have gained the help of nearby townspeople in opposing Exxon's plan to open a giant mine in the North Woods; and the Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Tribe in California who held a blockade last October to keep trucks from bringing toxic sewage sludge to an illegal dump on their reservation.

The opposition from below is just getting off the ground. Gingrich and his Contract have faced active protests from community groups and labor unions, Latinos and homeless people, while NOW has called a March for Women's Lives—and against the Contract—for April 9 in Washington, D.C. Over 2,000 students and environmentalists at a conference in Philadelphia in February mobilized for the 25th anniversary of Earth Day on April 22, and the Public Interest Research Groups and Sierra Club announced a campaign beginning Earth Day to oppose the Republican "Polluters' Bill of Rights."

### THE IDEOLOGICAL TRAP

Yet three years ago this same Sierra Club joined a population stabilization coalition with the racist anti-immigrant group Federation for American Immigration Reform. Isn't it true that this only gave impetus to California's racist Proposition 187 and the anti-environmentalist takeover of Congress? Far from immigrant workers being the enemy, farmworkers have been the most important opponents of the indiscriminate use of pesticides. As a first step to dispel the lies of Newtspeak, it is necessary to be aware of the years of struggle it took to get the limited but significant measures Congress now is gunning for.

Rewriting of history has from the beginning been part of an ideological counter-campaign that tries to divide environmentalism from the social base that burst out into movements in the 1960s and '70s. It portrays environmentalism as concerned only with wilderness, as if that is far removed from questions of public health and conditions in the workplace and community. Opponents play on real class and race divisions to depict environmentalists as elites, and all too often the latter's choices of issues and leadership bear this out.

A new stage of ideological pollution — as perilous as the ecological pollution — has influenced even the Left. The climate of worship of the free market has created a pull to conceive all questions in a capitalist economic framework. A portion of the movement has endorsed market "solutions" and free trade agreements. Even opposition to cost-benefit analyses has weakened.

This ideological framework means that, for the sake of profits, parts of nature will be destroyed irreversibly. An extinct species can never be revived. Nor can a human being who dies prematurely. Our future is impoverished. This is already happening; the new laws would take the brakes off the process. The movement to stop the legislative onslaught has begun. The urgent challenge is to deepen it in both activity and thought.

## Youth

## Derrida and the promise of Marxism

by Gregory Chavez

So few people today are seriously engaged in the search for an alternative to capitalism. It seems that in my lifetime this has always been the case. Even so-called radical theories in these "postmodern" times seem to have abandoned the hope for a totally new society.

That's why when I read Kevin Anderson's essay, "Derrida on Marx: (Re)turn or De(con)struction" (N&L, November 1994), I was surprised to find that in his latest book, *Specters of Marx*, Jacques Derrida calls for a return to the work of Karl Marx. I was surprised not only because Derrida, as Anderson points out, has long been involved with deconstructing the tradition of Western thought, including Marx, but also because Derrida's call comes at a time when reigning ideologies have attempted to bury Marxism amidst the rubble of Communism.

In turning his attention to Marx in such a sustained and systematic way, Derrida disavows the popular notion that "Marxism is dead." As Anderson suggests, Derrida has opened up space for debate on the meaning of Marx today among youth, feminists, and other intellectuals.

## MARXISM AS PROMISSORY SPIRIT

Unfortunately, however, a return to Marx for Derrida means a return to only a certain "spirit" of Marxism, one among many, and one seemingly void of the possibility of actual transcendence.

Anderson argues that Derrida replaces the Hegelian-Marxian dialectic with his own deconstructive methodology, which Derrida believes is a necessary corrective to "some of Marxism's worst flaws" including "its 'anthropo-theology' rooted in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind* [and] its 'untenable humanism'" (Anderson). So why, then, does Derrida return to Marx? What is he returning to?

In addition to returning to, or as he puts it, taking "inspiration from,"<sup>1</sup> a certain Marxist spirit of radical critique, Derrida also takes inspiration from what he calls a certain promissory spirit of Marxism. For me, this is what makes his return to Marx so compelling, especially in today's ultra-conservative political climate. Upon closer inspection, however, I think this is also what makes his take on Marx so unsettling.

According to Derrida, "a promise must promise to be kept...to produce events, new effective forms of action, practice, organization, and so forth. To break with the 'party form' or with some form of the State or the International does not mean to give up every form of practical or effective organization" (89). This is the fundamental promise of a certain spirit of Marxism that Derrida holds on to—the promise of new forms of organization.

<sup>1</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, The Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans by Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 88. Further pagination directly in the text.

## Ashamed to be American

*Joliet, Ill.*—On Monday, Feb. 27, the Marxist-Humanist Society at Lewis University was given the opportunity to speak to several Hispanic study halls at a high school in a suburb of Chicago. Two other members and I discussed Proposition 187, informing the students of the law and discussing its ramifications. We explained to them why we believe that 187 is unjust, racist, immoral and inhumane. We also showed a five-minute videotape of the march and rally we had against Proposition 187 at Lewis. All in all, the day was a success. After each presentation students came up to us and asked what they could do to get involved, and they were very eager to give us their addresses and phone numbers so they can be notified of our plans for future rallies and marches.

During each discussion the students were receptive to the points that were made about Proposition 187. One student inquired as to whether similar bills will be passed in Illinois, and we informed him that there are bills being proposed in Illinois that will have the same far-reaching effects that Proposition 187 will have in California.

One thing that we did discover that infuriated the three of us had to do with the issue of school lunches. As most people are aware, "Newt and Co." want to abolish school lunches and nutrition regulations altogether. One of the teachers showed us a letter that came from the principal's office asking for the Social Security numbers of all the students for the school's "records" so they know who has a number and who doesn't. The teacher who showed us the letter said that she feels that this is just the beginning and it may lead to an eventual denial of free breakfasts and lunches to needy students who happen to be the sons or daughters of undocumented workers. The same teacher also said that the students may also be denied free books for their classes. The teachers are not positive this is what the school has in mind, but they are very worried that it could eventually lead to something of this nature.

With the possibility of measures like this being taken in Illinois, even without a formal "Proposition 187," and occurring at a very local level, the three of us continually question how long it will be before this reaches the federal level.

We continue to ask ourselves, how can one human being do this to another? Does the fact that someone is not a citizen make them so unworthy that they should not even be able to eat, much less receive an education? It is actions like these that make us ashamed to call ourselves Americans.

—Jennifer Linden

Derrida here seems to be putting the burden of transforming existing social conditions predominantly on the shoulders of practical activity; but at the same time, the promise of Marxism appears to be manifest in the possibility of new forms of organization. Thus, as a deconstructive approach would have it, the promise of Marxism remains always "to come." In short, the promise is infinitely deferred, and never fully achieved. An alternative society is possible, but always only possible.

## END OF HISTORY OR NEW FUTURE?

Perhaps this has something to do with why Derrida points up the undeconstructability of "a certain experience of the emancipatory promise" (59), that is, in order to distance deconstruction from today's liberal democratic discourse which brazenly announces the end of history and proclaims the global triumph of free market economies. The most widely known example is probably Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man*.

For Derrida a deconstructive method always acknowledges the "irreducibility of affirmation" (90), the possibility of the promise. Therefore, he maintains, it is more in keeping with a certain Marxist spirit of immanent critique than with complacent claims that the absolute democratic ideal has arrived. In fact, Derrida takes Fukuyama to task for such claims, for if history has reached the ideal end, then why do new social movements for freedom continue to arise?

Derrida thus invokes the emancipatory promise in what appears to be a challenge to the notion of "the end of history," and this is what I find disturbing. Doesn't his overarching concern with maintaining only the possibility of the promise, "a certain emancipatory and messianic affirmation" (89), foreclose the total transformation of existing society?

If Fukuyama would have us give up hope for a better world, it almost seems as if hope is all Derrida would have us do. Neither lays the ground we need to fight for a totally new society.

## Young women speak out

*Chicago*—With a powerful indictment of "the hit men sitting in Washington, D.C., aiming at women all over the country, and children all over the country," Brenetta Howell Barrett, Executive Director of the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League (NARRAL) of Illinois, opened an urgent forum entitled "Reproductive Rights, Parental Notification, Welfare Reform." It was sponsored by a coalition of the Chicago Abortion Fund (CAF), the Illinois Caucus for Adolescent Health (ICAH) and NARRAL Illinois on March 18.

In Illinois a number of pieces of anti-abortion and anti-welfare legislation are on a "fast-track." Some laws that will cut off AFDC payments will go into effect April 1, while six others must wait for the federal approval that is sure to come (unless we act), since Title I of the Republican House welfare plan includes most of the same features (horrors) of those in Illinois.

What is so sad and maddening is that the hope for the immediate life and death battle seems to lie in trying to force the supposedly pro-choice, pro-poor legislators to protect us—who, Brenetta said, "have stabbed us in the back and in the chest...and then have dared to look us in the eye." House Bill 955 (parental notification), which passed out of the Illinois House Judiciary Civil Committee on March 15, has been called "a compromise" between anti-choice and abortion-rights supporters. But the truth is in a statement put out by the coalition: "The only compromise represented in HB 955 is the compromising of young women's lives." That is why this coalition is determined to hold these politicians accountable.

Two young African-American women, both graduates of the YWCA program "Parents Too Soon," spoke on what "welfare-reform" means to them. Angel, a student at Olive-Harvey College, who described herself as an educated 20-year-old with one child said, "Who has the right to tell me I can't do with my body what I want...[and] Not only have you taken away the jobs in my community but now you're taking away welfare....Passing these laws isn't going to help me!"

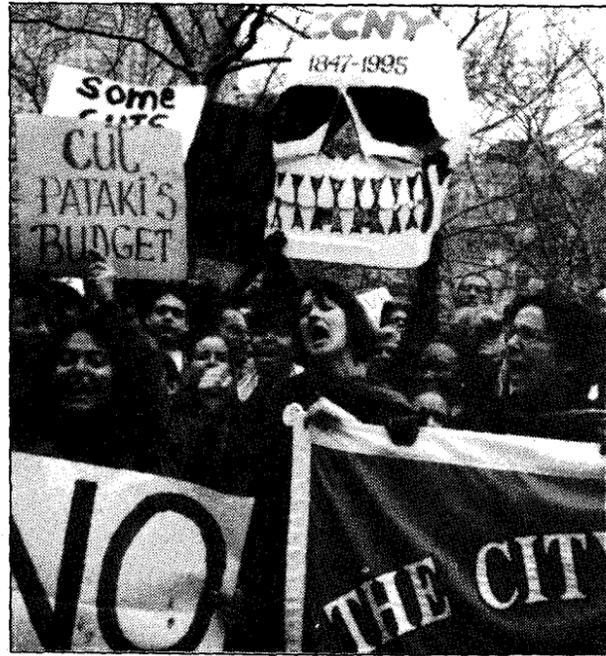
Tonesia, a 19-year-old with a three-year-old daughter, who is currently a student at Harold Washington College said, "I'm here to say how these laws will affect me." She told us there will be no money for her to continue school, no transportation money to get there and no child care when she's there. "They're trying to hold me back. They say they're getting people off welfare to get jobs, but there are no jobs. So you try to better yourself by going to school and they won't let you."

Having Karen Bell, the mother of Becky Bell, who was the first young woman to be murdered by a parental consent law in Indiana, speak at this moment was just so intense. Although everyone was in tears, Karen's strength was so inspiring that it made you feel and know we will never give up; we will win because it is in us, it is in her, and it was in Becky—there's no other choice. As Karen said, any parental involvement is a "killer law...The anti's want me dead...[but] I'll never stop speaking out. As long as you're out here, I'll be out here speaking to people who matter." Vivian, a 19-year-old Latina, described having to go to Illinois for an abortion because of the parental consent law in Wisconsin.

It was really this statement—"the people who matter"—that provided the ground for fighting the immediate situation as well as providing a future perspective of women's subjectivity and self-organization as the force that can transform this world well beyond the point of the struggles we must engage in today.

—Sonia Bergonzi

## No to slashing education!



News &amp; Letters

*New York*—Twenty thousand college students and their supporters rallied at City Hall, March 23, against proposed budget cuts that will decimate the city and state higher education systems. Students from many city and state university colleges as well as high school students and teachers turned out after weeks of intense organizing. One city college student summed up the budget cuts: "We're the future and we can't get an education." Another youth said simply, "It's Pataki or us," indicating someone's throat would be cut.

A wall of police kept the demonstrators from marching as planned, and those who broke through the barricades were arrested. A woman was seriously injured when she was kicked in the face by a police horse. Some demonstrators called for a student strike and for trying to shut down the city.

A majority of the demonstrators were Black and Latino. A Black woman told this newspaper, "We have to support our brothers and sisters, no matter what color they are." A Hunter student said, "The budget cuts affect everyone—city and state university students, teachers and everyone who rides the subway."

Pataki, the new Republican governor, and Giuliani, Republican mayor for the past year, have proposed drastic cuts to the colleges. Tuition will be raised at the same time financial aid is nearly eliminated. A Queens college student who had been able to go to college with loans explained that now she will have to come up with about \$5,000 a year or go part-time.

Moreover, many teachers and classes will be eliminated. Students and professors bore signs mourning the deaths of their colleges, some of which date from the last century and others which were started in minority neighborhoods in the last few decades. Two huge pictures of tombstones read, "R.I.P. Brooklyn College" and "R.I.P. Opportunity."

Other proposed city and state budget cuts will mean loss of subway service and a fare increase, reduced health services—30,000 hospital workers rallied against the plans recently—and welfare cuts. Twice in the last few weeks, welfare women protesting proposed cuts prevented the mayor and the governor from speaking. The federal government's proposed cuts were also targeted at this demonstration. A group of Latina mothers wore handmade signs saying, "Don't cut education...Don't cut children's lunches."

Professional Performing Arts, a small public high school, had 90 students walk out and join the demonstration. One student reported, "I thought it was great—everyone finally came together. People who didn't care about politics came out. A lot of us want to go to college, but if this goes through only the rich kids will be able to go. If the fare increase goes through too, we won't even be able to afford the transportation to college."

"Our principal and teachers tried to stop us, but we organized it all in advance and walked out at 11:00. We got in line and walked from Times Square down to City Hall. We were all together, regardless of color. Some of the Black kids were worried with so many police around us that they would be shot. Before this there was a lot of tension between Black and white students, but now for the first time we all came together and race didn't matter."

!! Your newsletter is an excellent medium to learn about international movements for freedom. We use examples in our work amongst Indian peasants and students.!!

Chowdhary Dharatarai Pawar  
All India Youth Forum for  
Peace and Solidarity  
DELHI, INDIA

Subscribe to

News &amp; Letters

Only \$2.50 per year

See literature ad on page 7.

## Our Life and Times

by Kevin A. Barry and Mary Holmes

Despite the Mexican government's announcement March 14 that it would withdraw thousands of soldiers to the borders of villages it took over in the Feb. 9 invasion, Chiapas state remains an occupied land. President Zedillo was prompted to make this gesture for two immediate reasons.

First is the failure of the state's massive military superiority to crush or capture the EZLN or its leaders. Instead, the occupation has been met by the resistance of the Indians who abandoned their homes and fled with the EZLN into the Lacandon forest. Although there was no widespread armed conflict between the army and

## Chinese dissident petitions

A group of 12 Chinese intellectuals launched a dissident petition drive addressed to this year's meeting of the National People's Congress which convened in early March. The first petition attacked the corruption rampant among Chinese rulers on all levels and in effect challenged the absolute rule of the Communist Party: "In our view, the reason the ruling party's repeated injunctions against corruption have proved of little effect and corruption has become more serious as the campaigning against it has intensified lies in the fact that the existing measures against corruption do not constitute institutionalized restraints on the supervision of the ruling party itself."

"Corruption" has become the metaphor and reality of the decaying crisis in China, with massive urban unemployment and rural isolation, rampaging inflation (25%), and an increasingly conspicuous flaunting of wealth by a growing elite within the ruling class. At the same time, various factions within the Chinese Communist Party are maneuvering into position for the inevitable end of Deng Xiaoping. The petition points to the pervasive "invisible corruption": "...the malpractice of trading power for money by 'entering by the back door' [hou men] has become a social practice that has been almost legalized...The so-called spiritual vacuum... is to a big extent the result of the pernicious harm done to the entire nation's soul by the corrupt political concept that 'power is everything'."

A second petition by the same group called for restraints on the arbitrary and "unconstitutional" power of the police who have rounded up thousands of prisoners and held them without charges. Both documents were signed by Wang Ruoshui and Wu Xuecan, former editors of *People's Daily*, Chen Ziming, Xu Wenli and eight other dissidents.

Two other petitions were submitted by another group including Wang Dan, a student leader of the 1989 Tiananmen Square movement. They called for an end to state persecution of dissidents, including Wang Wanxiang, a Beijing worker who took part in the 1989 uprising and was later arrested and imprisoned in a psychiatric hospital.

The state has not tolerated the slightest manifestation of open criticism since 1989, and the signers publicized the petitions to the world at great risk. They represent a manifestation of the deep opposition boiling within China today.

## Chiapas rebels resist Mexican occupation

guerrillas, the government's own National Commission on Human Rights admitted nearly 400 reports of abuses in Chiapas.

Other Indians who stayed behind confronted the army's initial attempts to establish absolute control, which resembled the brutal campaign against Indians in Guatemala. One peasant leader replied to the attempt to control by occupation, "...we have walked a bit, we comrades, and they have to recognize our rights as Indians." In this situation, Zedillo's law to suspend for 30 days the arrest warrant for Subcomandante Marcos and other EZLN leaders is meaningless. The EZLN has communicated that they will renew talks, but not until the army has withdrawn from all the occupied territory.

The second and related feature is the continued battering of the Mexican economy. President Clinton's direct \$20 billion aid package in January, together with another \$30 billion from the International Monetary Fund and other international banks, has not stanchied the outflow of capital from Mexico. Zedillo's Chiapas gesture came after he was forced to enact a new austerity plan on March 9. Prices for commodities under the state's control shot up overnight. Gasoline (and trans-



In spite of a ban on demonstrations, 50,000 people marched in Mexico City on March 8 to observe International Women's Day and to welcome Amando Avendano Figueroa, who heads a "transitional government in rebellion" in Chiapas.

portation) went up 35%, and electricity 20%. The value added tax, a type of piggy-back sales tax, went up by half, from 10% to 15%. Inflation for the year is officially projected at 45%, but for most daily consumer items it is much higher. Some interest rates have soared to a usurious 90%.

For workers covered by minimum wage laws, salaries were to be raised in April from \$2 a day to around \$2.60. But workers who aren't covered have been abandoned. Already in 1995, 250,000 Mexican workers have lost their jobs, and it is expected another 500,000 will be laid

off in the next two months. The government clearly expects Mexico to sink into economic recession, but for most people it will be what one U.S. columnist called a "revolutionary depression."

The scandals, corruption and factionalism wracking the ruling PRI are unprecedented. Zedillo's government broke ranks, first in casting blame on the previous administration of Carlos Salinas for the economic debacle, then in indicting Salinas' older brother in last September's murder of a high-ranking PRI official.

And for the first time, a PRI administration could not establish its usual pact with business interests and the labor bureaucracy to present a united front for its economic austerity plan. It is one more mirror of class conflicts which may boil into the next eruption in Mexico.

## German workers win strike

German employers were forced on March 7, to capitulate after a firm two-week strike in the Bavaria region by members of I.G. Metall, the metalworkers union. Before the strike, which threatened large companies such as Siemens, Volkswagen and BMW, employers had tried to cow the workers by demanding wage cuts, "flexible" work times and, most importantly, putting off something gained and instituted gradually since the big 1984 strike: introduction of the 35-hour week by Oct. 1, 1995.

Employers clearly miscalculated, since 1995 has seen a slight drop in the unemployment rate and a combative mood among workers anxious to make up for concessions granted last year. In Bavaria, the strike was approved by 88% of union members. Once it started, posters included such slogans as: "We are striking against our bosses' arrogance." The result was a no concession contract with a 7% raise over two years, the 35-hour week by Oct. 1 as scheduled, and no additional "flexibility" over work times conceded to capital.

Germany's labor movement is probably the most powerful in the world today. I.G. Metall, with over three million members and a strike fund of over \$500 million, was able to offer strike benefits of 70% of wages. It has fought hard against capital's plan to make eastern Germany a low wage zone, and today East German wages in the unionized metal industries stand at 90% of western rates, with the gap to close completely in 1996.

Yet even in Germany, this appearance of labor's strength is deceiving. The union is losing 10% of its membership annually, mainly because of layoffs. New layoffs due to high-tech are coming.

## Boycott of Nigeria

As repression deepens in military-ruled Nigeria, key African-American leaders have, in an unprecedented step, called for a total boycott of that country. Joined by prominent figures such as Maya Angelou, actor Danny Glover, Judge Leon Higginbotham, and jazz musician Quincy Jones, TransAfrica leader Randall Robinson stated: "We must isolate Nigeria, politically, socially, and economically in the same way we were able to isolate South Africa and Haiti" (*New York Times*, March 17, 1995).

Robinson is calling for protest actions outside the Nigerian embassy and stronger U.S. economic sanctions against the regime of dictator Sani Abacha. In so doing TransAfrica was following the lead of Nigeria's greatest writer, Nobel Prize winner Wole Soyinka, who has urged such action since December, after fleeing the country to avoid arrest.

In March, word leaked out that a whole group of former military rulers had been detained for plotting against Abacha, including the highly popular retired general, Olusegun Obasanjo. Another sign of crisis was the in predominantly Muslim and conservative Northern Nigeria, the region from which the military rulers have always drawn their biggest support, Abacha's government has done nothing to stop attacks by Islamic extremists threatening the country's delicate ethnic and religious balance.

## Taliban rise in Afghanistan

Nearly 20,000 people have died in the three years of bloody faction fighting in Afghanistan which followed the 1992 victory by the CIA-backed Islamic faction over the previous Russian-backed government. Mass disillusionment with this situation has set the stage for a new force to enter the scene, the Taliban or so-called religious students.

These "students," who often carry the Koran in their breast pockets as shields, are not winning only because of their "faith," however. They are also armed with more worldly instruments such as machine guns and tanks given to them in large quantities by their backers in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. The Taliban, who now have a 25,000 strong military force, have taken over large part of the country, and stand at the gates of Kabul, the capital.

The Taliban are so ultra-fundamentalist that the make those ruling Kabul today seem almost like pluralists. In Taliban-controlled areas, women are forbidden to work outside the home, to appear on the streets unveiled, or to appear on the streets without a male relative accompanying them. They have banned alcohol and soccer, smashed TV sets and VCRs, and announced that schools for women and girls will be closed "temporarily."

## Who We Are and What We Stand For

News and Letters Committees is an organization of Marxist-Humanists that stands for the abolition of capitalism, whether in its private property form as in the U.S., or its state property form, as in Russia or China. We stand for the development of new human relations, what Marx first called a new Humanism.

News & Letters was founded in 1955, the year of the Detroit wildcat strikes against Automation and the Montgomery Bus Boycott against segregation—activities which signaled a new movement from practice that was itself a form of theory. News & Letters was created so that the voices of revolt from below could be heard unseparated from the articulation of a philosophy of liberation. We have organized ourselves into a committee form of organization rather than any elitist party "to lead."

Raya Dunayevskaya (1910-87), founder of the body of ideas of Marxist-Humanism, became Chairwoman of the National Editorial Board and National Chairwoman of the Committees from its founding to 1987. Charles Denby (1907-83), a Black production worker, author of *Indignant Heart: A Black Worker's Journal*, became editor of the paper from 1955 to 1983. Dunayevskaya's works *Marxism and Freedom...from 1776 until Today* (1958); *Philosophy and Revolution: from Hegel to Sartre and from Marx to Mao* (1973); and *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation, and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution* (1982) spell out the philosophic ground of Marx's Humanism internationally, as American Civilization on Trial concretizes it on the American scene and shows the two-way road between the U.S. and Africa. These works challenge post-Marx Marxists to return to Marx's Marxism.

The new visions of the future that Dunayevskaya left us in her work from the 1940s to the 1980s are

rooted in her rediscovery of Marx's Marxism in its original form as a "new Humanism" and in her re-creation of that philosophy for our age as "Marxist-Humanism." The development of the Marxist-Humanism of Dunayevskaya is recorded in the documents on microfilm and open to all under the title *The Raya Dunayevskaya Collection-Marxist-Humanism: A Half Century of Its World Development*, on deposit at the Wayne State University Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs in Detroit, Michigan.

Dunayevskaya's philosophic comprehension of her creation and development of Marxist-Humanism, especially as expressed in her 1980s writings, presents the vantage point for re-creating her ideas anew. Seeking to grasp that vantage point for ourselves and make it available to all who struggle for freedom, we have published Dunayevskaya's original 1953 philosophic breakthrough and her final 1987 Presentation on the Dialectics of Organization and Philosophy in *The Philosophic Moment of Marxist-Humanism* (1989), and have donated new supplementary volumes to the Raya Dunayevskaya Collection. News and Letters Committees aims at developing and concretizing this body of ideas for our time.

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