After the Revolution: Who Rules?

A socialist critique of the "Marxist-Leninist" left.

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Introduction

The articles compiled here were prompted by a call for the formation of a "new communist party" issued in June of 1977. The call came from the New York-based radical newspaper, the *Guardian*, and was one of several proposals for a new party to come out of the U.S. left over the past few years.

In a broader sense, however, these articles are not so much a reply to the *Guardian* as they are a general critique of the theory and programs of the various "Marxist-Leninist" groups. As a consequence, they include an important discussion of basic Marxist concepts and of the fundamental content of a revolutionary socialist program.

As mentioned in the text, the pro-Maoist Marxist-Leninist groups enjoyed a period of expansion in the U.S. and Europe during the late 1960s and early '70s. This expansion came on the heels of the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution" in China and the emergence of the People's Republic from over 25 years of relative isolation. China's influence, combined with the intense opposition throughout the capitalist world to U.S. imperialism's war on Vietnam, produced a sizable number of youth whose radicalization was expressed in terms of "Marxism-Leninism Mao Tse-tung[1] Thought."

However, those tied to China's rising star soon found themselves in a dilemma familiar to all who allow bureaucratic governments in Peking, Moscow or elsewhere to do their thinking. The PRC, guided by its own narrow nationalist interests, began to pursue a rapprochement with U.S. capitalism. This led it to take up an increasing number of embarrassingly reactionary foreign policy positions. At the same time, the demise of the aging Mao leadership brought another round of internal chaos to the ruling Chinese Communist Party.

By 1975–76, China could be found in bed with the U.S. State Department in a dozen places around the globe, most glaringly during the Angolan civil war. Simultaneously, purges in China had deposed or jailed all the leaders of the Cultural Revolution, including Mao's wife Chiang Ching.[2] The revolutionary image which had once drawn western radicals to Peking was hopelessly compromised, and the western Maoist movement became fragmented and disoriented.

But while these political developments brought a fairly rapid decline in the

[1] Mao Zedong.
[2] Jiang Qing.

attraction of Maoism, they are of only secondary importance to the issues discussed in this pamphlet. More significant are the theoretical assertions and the Marxist-Leninist programs which continue to have an impact on the U.S. left, and on those workers who come into contact with M-L ideology in their search for socialist ideas.

Accordingly the issues discussed in these articles, first printed in the *Weekly People* in July and August of 1977, will remain very much on the agenda for years to come. They include the real meaning of the much-used, little-understood slogan "the dictatorship of the proletariat," the role of a revolutionary party, the nature of the state, the tasks of working class organization, the nature of socialism and post-revolutionary society and other related questions. The waning of Peking's influence has in no way cleared up the rampant confusion extant on these matters.

This pamphlet sets forth the Socialist Labor Party's position on these issues. Leaning heavily on the ideas of Marx and De Leon, it shows just where the dividing line lies between the SLP with its program of Socialist Industrial Unionism and the "Marxist-Leninists" with their blueprints for bureaucratic statism.

December 1977

1. M-Ls and 'Party-Building'

For several years now, "party-building" has been topic A within certain sections of the U.S. left. And to judge from the latest developments, a number of organizations that have been on the drawing board for quite some time are in the process of going into mass production.

Every revolutionary socialist, of course, recognizes the importance of building a party. Only anarchists believe that capitalism can be overthrown without the political organization of the working class and only dreamers think socialism will come into existence "spontaneously."

But in this case, the "party-building movement" refers not to the above truism, or even to a general debate on the kind of party socialists should seek to build. Instead it refers to the specific activities of the "Marxist-Leninist" or Maoist current within the left (both here and abroad) which has assigned itself the task of constructing a new revolutionary vanguard.

The growth of a Maoist movement in the U.S. traces back to the '60s. At the time, large numbers of students, some young workers and others were becoming radicalized under the influence of the civil rights and antiwar movements. Simultaneously, the Cultural Revolution was under way in China, and, for many radicalized youth, the militant rhetoric of the Chinese Communist Party made Maoism appear to be the most revolutionary and most appealing tendency in the sharply divided international Communist movement. Added to the impact of the anti-imperialist movements in the third world, these factors drew a significant fraction of the left in the direction of Maoism.

The first group to come out of this stream was the Progressive Labor Party, whose dogmatic manipulation led to the split and collapse of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in the late '60s. Following that collapse, a number of tendencies emerged from SDS, still moving in the Maoist direction.

As the radicalization of the '60s receded, some elements sought to overcome the transient nature of New Left groups and were also tending toward a more systematic—though not necessarily more rational—study of Marxism-Leninism. More defined and more permanent groups began to take shape and looked for ways to transform themselves into vanguard parties.

Best known of these were the Revolutionary Union (RU) and the October League (OL), two currents tracing back to SDS which over the past two years have

declared themselves parties. RU became the Revolutionary Communist Party, and OL, more recently, dubbed itself the Communist Party (M-L).

These two groups head the more orthodox or more dogmatic wing of Maoism in the U.S. They are more subservient in their adherence to Peking and more apologetic, if not completely supportive, of China's increasingly reactionary foreign policy. (OL, which outdoes itself in following the PRC's lead, has apparently won the "Peking franchise" and regularly gets the nod in the *Peking Review*.)

Each of these attempts at "party-building" has been little more than the consolidation of the earlier organizations under new titles. They are nevertheless active in various parts of the country, put out a number of publications and attract both students and workers who are in search of a revolutionary opposition to capitalism.

A less orthodox and "more critical" Maoist tendency has emerged in opposition to the above groups. This current has been less able to digest the PRC's rapprochement with U.S. imperialism, its reactionary conduct in Chile and Angola, and its internal zig-zags so acutely brought into focus by the campaign against the "gang of four." It has also been somewhat more susceptible to reality and tends to recognize the impossibility of lining up the U.S. working class behind a rigidly Maoist party slavishly devoted to carrying out the line from Peking (particularly when that line currently calls for an alliance with the U.S. ruling class against the Soviet Union).

Emerging as the national spokesperson for this element has been the *Guardian* newspaper, a New York-based "independent radical newsweekly," which has undergone considerable political shifts in its more than 30-year history. For the past five years or so, the *Guardian* has more and more become the semi-official voice of probably the largest Marxist-Leninist tendency in the country.[3] With a special supplement in its June 1 issue outlining "29 principles of unity," the *Guardian* too has now launched the start of yet another "new communist party."

Despite its policy differences with RU and OL, the *Guardian* operates from the same starting point. And though its party-building supplement is primarily an "in-house" document for circulation among those already committed to its essential

[3] "Marxist-Leninist" is used here to refer primarily to groups tracing back to Maoism. Both the pro-Soviet CPs and Trotskyists also claim Marx and Lenin as their own. The CPs, however, generally save their "M-L face" for internal consumption, where they retain it at all. Externally they have taken on an increasingly reformist, social democratic appearance. The Trotskyists, while also claiming to be the only true Leninists, generally use the Trotskyist label for identification.

premises, it is well worth examining.

As can be shown in detail, just a few of the *Guardian*'s "29 principles" are enough to demonstrate that the political program of its "new communist party" would not lead to socialism or the emancipation of the working class, but to the bureaucratic rule of a single party.

Unlike Marx and Engels, it does not aim at the abolition of the wages system, but at the establishment of a state-owned economy run by agencies aside from the producers themselves.

In contrast to even Lenin's best writings, the *Guardian*'s conception of socialism is not democratic, does not involve the abolition of classes, includes no workers' government based on soviets (i.e., workers' councils) and in no way frees society from coercive state power.

Most of these "defects" are predictably submerged beneath militant rhetoric about the revolutionary strategy needed to overthrow the enormously powerful class enemy. However valid some of these points (and undeniably some are correct), the fact remains that the purpose of fighting for workers' emancipation is to make sure it's won. A party that does not understand what such a victory consists of is hardly fitted to lead the charge.

The *Guardian* supplement bears this assessment out in any number of ways and gives a good indication of what to expect from its "new communist party," should it finally be formed.

According to the *Guardian*, the new party "must be based on the principles of scientific socialism as developed principally by Marx, Engels and Lenin, further developed in the modern era by Mao Tse-tung, amplified by the contributions of Stalin, Ho Chi Minh, Kim Il Sung, Enver Hoxha, Amilcar Cabral, among others. . . ." This is obviously a diplomatic roster carefully constructed to list the *Guardian*'s leading ideological lights in roughly descending order of importance.

In general, the *Guardian* has been less vociferous about its admiration for Stalinism than its counterparts in the Maoist left, though it has not concealed its evaluation of the Soviet despot as one of the "greatest Marxist-Leninists in history." This reflects the *Guardian's* arrival at Marxism by way of Chairman Mao, whose estimation of Stalin ("30 percent bad, 70 percent good") has become something of a guideline.

The *Guardian* regularly treats opposition to Stalinism as proof of either anti-communism or "Trotskyism" in disguise. Several years ago it published a "polemic"

against Trotskyism in defense of Stalin which was worthy of the 1930s Communist Party (CP) at its worst.

The *Guardian*'s approval of Stalin's Russia, Kim Il Sung's Korea, Enver Hoxha's Albania, etc., as models of socialism for workers here to look to, involves much more than evaluations of individual historical personalities. These are enormously repressive, closed societies in which workers are forced to give up all democratic rights and social freedoms in exchange for the dubious benefits of a bureaucratically planned economy. The *Guardian*'s admiration for them is indicative of the kind of society it would apparently like to usher in here.

Paralleling its preference for Stalin's U.S.S.R. over Krushchev's, is the *Guardian's* view that the CPs of the past, including the CPUSA, were revolutionary parties, while the post-Stalin CPs are "revisionists." Nowhere is the bankruptcy of the "new communist movement" exposed more thoroughly than in its eagerness to pick up where Stalin and the Third International left off.

For example, the *Guardian* supplement declares, "From Chile to Italy to India, revisionist communist parties have pursued a course of action which has led to tragic defeats and class collaboration." Such declarations ring extremely hollow from a tendency which apparently considers the German CP of the '20s and '30s, the Spanish CP of the Civil War era, and the post WWII CPs in Italy and Greece—all of whom led workers to disaster—to be models of revolutionary organization.

These and many similar indications suggest that there may be little that's new in the "new communist movement."

But the key point, as any Marxist-Leninist will tell you, is the dictatorship of the proletariat: what it is, how it functions and how it should be organized. For decades M-L groups have shrouded this concept in mythology and used it as a club against opponents. Since the dictatorship of the proletariat is offered, virtually without exception, and usually without explanation, by M-L groups as their ultimate political program, it deserves some attention in detail.

2. Marx, Engels and Proletarian Dictatorship

The *Guardian*, like all "Marxist-Leninist" tendencies, continually emphasizes the "dictatorship of the proletariat" as the "strategic aim" of a workers' revolution. *Guardian* editor Irwin Silber never tires of pointing to this idea as the "critical dividing line" between Marxist-Leninists and all others, and as the central point upon which "all other debates hinge."

Yet for all the attention paid to this goal, Marxist-Leninist groups almost never explain what the dictatorship of the proletariat means in concrete terms, or how it translates into a program for a workers' government. This is a characteristic omission which the *Guardian* carries over fully in its draft principles for a "new communist party."

What is ostensibly the key point in its political program is listed as point 10:

> "The form of working class political power is the dictatorship of the proletariat. This dictatorship is based on an alliance between the working class and other anti-capitalist classes and sectors. It is the decisive instrument for gaining power and consolidating that power over the deposed class. Because it is, for the first time in history, a dictatorship of the majority over the minority, it is a democratic dictatorship prepared to defend the workers' power against the inevitable attempts at counterrevolution by the overthrown bourgeoisie. The dictatorship of the proletariat is the form of political power throughout the entire period of socialism since classes and class struggle continue to exist in socialist society."

This is a choice piece of Maoist mystification. The dictatorship of the proletariat, as formulated by Marx and Engels, is a relatively straightforward idea readily grasped by those with an understanding of history and a dialectical perspective on the development of the socialist movement. But for Maoists, the dictatorship of the proletariat is wrapped in layers of dogma which, when peeled away, are found to hide a repressive conception of post-revolutionary society that has nothing in common with socialism or workers' emancipation.

To many workers unfamiliar with the ideological history of the socialist movement, polemics about the dictatorship of the proletariat may seem like abstract "arguments over scripture." To be sure, quotes from Marx, Engels, Lenin and others are all too frequently flung in the air with an apparent disregard for the capitalist reality that a revolutionary movement seeks to transform.

But behind these debates are issues of basic importance. They not only involve the kind of theory workers will use as a guide in the struggle against capitalism, they reflect the lessons which various groups have drawn from the past history of the working class movement. Only a working class theoretically informed about its revolutionary tasks and knowledgeable about its own past will be able to emancipate itself.

The Marxist idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat springs from the Marxist conception of the state. According to the materialist conception of history, all states are instruments of class rule, i.e., the machinery of government is generally controlled by the economically dominant class in society and is used by that class to maintain its position. As Engels put it, "the state is nothing else than a machine for the oppression of one class by another class."

In this sense, every state, whether a feudal monarchy, a bourgeois democratic republic, or a workers' commune (e.g., Paris 1871) is an instrument of class dictatorship. It is an apparatus used to maintain the social conditions necessary for the rule of a particular class.

This contrasts sharply with the bourgeois democratic illusion that the state represents all of society. It is also distinguished from the social democratic view that state institutions are neutral and can be used to mediate the conflict between exploited and exploiting classes.

Instead the Marxist analysis of the state emphasizes not only its class character, but also brings into focus the essentially repressive nature of state power itself. It emphasizes that in the final analysis the authority of the state rests on the organization of force and coercion—on the police, the army, the courts, the jails, the bureaucracy, etc. And all these arms of the state are basically controlled by, and act in the interests of, the class which holds the dominant economic position.

In explaining their theory of the state, the founders of socialist science produced a rich historical analysis of its development. They showed how the state was inextricably bound up with class antagonisms, and how in ancient, tribal communal society, where there were no class divisions, 'here was no state apparatus. Only as society became split into classes did the necessity for a state arise and, in fact, the appearance of the state was one of the first direct manifestations of those class conflicts.

While the form of the state have undergone considerable change as history progressed, its essential character as the instrument of the dominant class has

remained unchanged. Marx and Engels held that the state and its repressive power would disappear only when classes had been abolished, i.e., under socialism, where the need for an apparatus of class domination would disappear. Engels summed up the theory in a famous passage:

> "The state, therefore, has not existed from all eternity. There have been societies which have managed without it, which had no notion of the state or state power. At a definite stage of economic development, which necessarily involved the cleavage of society into classes, the state became a necessity because of this cleavage. We are now rapidly approaching a stage in the development of production at which the existence of these classes has not only ceased to be a necessity but becomes a positive hindrance to production. They will fall as inevitably as they once arose. The state inevitably falls with them. The society which organizes production anew on the basis of free and equal association of the producers will put the whole state machinery where it will then belong—into the museum of antiquities, next to the spinning wheel and the bronze ax."[4]

It is in the full context of their theory of the state that Marx and Engels spoke of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The idea referred not to despotic rule or the existence or nonexistence of democracy. It referred to the fact that in order to break the existing dictatorship of the capitalist class, the workers would have to overthrow bourgeois state power, organize themselves as the dominant class and assert their majority interests over whatever non-proletarian or anti-proletarian elements remained in society. It was *the organization of the proletariat as ruling class* during a period of transition to the total abolition of classes that, for Marx, constituted the dictatorship of the proletariat.

It cannot be overemphasized that in speaking of the dictatorship of the proletariat, Marx was not referring to a specific form of government, but to its essential class content, i.e., to the fact that it would be a government that allowed the workers to impose their collective will on society.[5]

The dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, for example, had taken many varied forms—a democratic republic, a constitutional monarchy, a Bonapartist regime, etc. It was logical to assume that the specific forms of a proletarian dictatorship would

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[4] *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State.*

[5] Lenin also clearly recognized that the dictatorship of the proletariat was not a form of government. In *State and Revolution* he wrote, "The transition from capitalism to communism is certainly bound to yield a tremendous abundance and variety of political forms, but the essence will inevitably be the same: the dictatorship of the proletariat."

also vary, or at least could not be laid down in advance.

Only after history produced an example of such a government—the Paris Commune—did Marx and Engels draw some specific guides as to the form of a proletarian government (guides that are, as we shall see, completely ignored by the "Marxist-Leninists").

In light of a Marxist understanding of these concepts, the *Guardian*'s formulation of the "central strategic aim" of the workers' revolution is a total muddle.

It declares, "The form of working class political power is the dictatorship of the proletariat." In itself, this is totally meaningless. It is a tautology that does not in any way explain what the dictatorship of the proletariat actually is. It characteristically evades what must be the central issue in any program for socialist revolution, namely *how does the proletariat organize its rule?*

The *Guardian's* 29 principles have virtually nothing to say on this score, but it is clear where it and other Marxist-Leninists, stand (and in this case, we have indeed arrived at a "dividing line").

The Maoists say that the instrument of proletarian dictatorship is a vanguard party, which is sovereign above all other workers' organizations and which in practice is the repository of the state power supposedly seized by the proletariat during the period of its dictatorship.

The SLP, and all who wish to remain in the tradition of Marx and Engels, hold that the organs of proletarian rule must be the classwide, democratic organizations of the workers themselves based at the point of production. It is they, not a party, that will be the source of power and the building blocks of a proletarian government.

The more fully one examines these conflicting premises, the wider the gap becomes between the M-Ls' one-party dictatorship and the Marxist concept of a workers' government. It becomes clear that the *Guardian*'s repeated proclamation that "the working class cannot simply take over the bourgeoisie's state apparatus, but that it must smash that apparatus and build its own," does not even go skin deep. In the Maoist program, it is the party that builds its own apparatus, not the workers.

The *Guardian* has accomplished the feat of drafting principles for a revolutionary socialist party that make no mention of organizing the working class itself (aside from the small vanguard that is to join the party). It has written

columns upon columns about the dictatorship of the proletariat without ever mentioning soviets, workers' councils, or Socialist Industrial Union-type organizations, which Marxists have always understood to be the basis of any proletarian government.

At the same time, the *Guardian* regularly attacks "workers' control of the factories," "mass socialist consciousness" and "democratic majority revolution"—all of which are essential to a socialist victory. Instead, the M-Ls contend these are "utopian" or "anarchist" distortions of Marxism.

Even for a Marxist-Leninist group this is incredible. The classic M-L text on the dictatorship of the proletariat—Lenin's *State and Revolution*—makes virtually no mention of the role of a vanguard party. Lenin's entire argument in support of the dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia in 1917 rested on the seizure of state power by the *soviets*—not the Bolshevik party. "The soviets," he wrote later, "are the Russian form of the proletarian dictatorship." And though Lenin clearly retreated from this position in subsequent years, it does not alter the fact that to speak of the dictatorship of the proletariat without mentioning soviets or their equivalent, is a significant distortion of Leninism, let alone Marxism.

More important than historical distortion, however, is what such a view reveals about the M-L program for post-revolutionary society. This equation of the dictatorship of the proletariat with the rule of the party is what allows the *Guardian* to present Albania, North Korea, China and other CP states as workers' governments and models of socialism.

Moreover, the *Guardian* incorporates the characteristics of these one-party governments into its proposed program. According to the supplement, "The U.S. communist party must be the single, unified party of the multinational working class." This self-appointment as the "single party of the working class" reflects the M-L position that only it has a legitimate right to existence as the "correct vanguard." As shown repeatedly, once such an organization takes power, it suppresses and outlaws all other parties.

Furthermore, even this single party is beyond the reach of working class control. It is a party centralized from the top down which is organizationally responsible only to its own hierarchical structure. Workers are permitted no democratic control over their own "vanguard." Instead all workers' organizations, where they are permitted to exist, are answerable to the party.

Even within the party, democratic majority rule does not prevail. As the

Chinese CP, the model for the current generation of M-L groups, has stated, "the lower level is subordinate to the higher level, and the entire party is subordinate to the central committee."[6]

The same party rule prevails throughout society. Again quoting the Chinese CP, "As regards the relationship between various organizations at the same level, of the seven sectors—industry, agriculture, commerce, culture and education, the army, the government and the party—it is the party that exercises overall leadership; the party is not parallel to the others and still less is it under the leadership of any other."[7]

This bureaucratic blueprint for one-party state repression has nothing whatsoever in common with the democratic organization of the dictatorship of the proletariat as envisioned by Marx and Engels.

Compare, for example, the M-L program with Marx's description of the "self-government of the producers" in the Paris Commune (a government Engels called a practical example of what the dictatorship of the proletariat looks like).

A key question for the Commune was the organization of the necessary armed force to defend itself against its class enemies. In response to this need, Marx wrote, "The first decree of the Commune, therefore, was the suppression of the standing army, and the substitution for it of the armed people." Furthermore, "Instead of continuing to be the agent of the central government, the police was at once stripped of its political attributes and turned into the responsible and at all times revocable agent of the Commune.[8]

These historic measures were classic examples of how the "dictatorship of the proletariat" dismantles the old state apparatus, and turns whatever necessary functions remain over to its own removable agents. By contrast, all the CP states have maintained a separate military bureaucracy, and even raised the organization of political police to new heights.

Compare, too, the M-L program of top-down centralism and party domination with Engels' remark that "From the very outset the Commune had to recognize that the working class, having once attained supremacy in the state . . . if it was not to lose the position which it had just conquered had . . . *to secure itself against its own representatives and officers by declaring them to be removable, without exception*

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[6] *The Tenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China (Documents)*, Foreign Language Press, 1973, p. 52.

[7] *The Tenth National Congress...*, p. 52.

[8] *The Civil War in France.*

and at all times.[9] (Emphasis added.) This is in total contradiction to such common M-L practices as party appointments, rule by bureaucratic decree, and the subordination of mass workers' organizations to party domination.

Marxists, of course, do not make a fetish out of the specific measures of the Paris Commune, or ignore the fact that the conditions of class struggle at any given time will govern the possibilities and prospects of a workers' government. But in formulating a theoretical program of working class emancipation, the inclusion of the democratic principles behind the Commune (in other words, those behind the Marxist idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat) is absolutely essential.

In addition to rejecting the basics of workers' democracy, the M-L program drops another fundamental premise of revolutionary socialism: the call for the abolition of wage labor.

For Marxist-Leninists (and here one could include most Trotskyists as well), the key economic relation in capitalist society is private ownership of the means of production. Accordingly, they contend that eliminating private ownership is sufficient to establish a workers' or socialist-based economy.

By contrast, Marx and Engels both realized that state ownership of the tools of production did not necessarily abolish wage labor. Engels went so far as to say that "every movement which does not keep the destruction of the wage system in view the whole time as its final aim is bound to go astray and fail."[10] This view has been borne out by the history of nationalized economies in both the East and West which retain wage labor in its essentials.

The M-L program of centralized bureaucratic management of the economy is fully reflective of the vanguard, statist premises of the whole M-L theory. It is quite possible to end private ownership and "expropriate the expropriators" through government decree backed up by the armed force of the state. But it is impossible to put an end to wage labor without the conscious, active participation of the producers themselves. The social relation known as wage labor can be eliminated only when the workers themselves organize a different set of relations. This is why direct management of the economy (centrally coordinated and democratically planned) by the workers' organizations is indispensable for socialism.

The M-Ls adopt only the portion of the socialist economic program that can be accomplished by or through the state. For them, the demand for the abolition of

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[9] Introduction to *The Civil War in France*.

[10] Engels to Frederick Sorge, November 29, 1886.

wage labor that Marx raised a century ago is a "syndicalist deviation," or a dream to be indefinitely postponed.

Having come this far, there are a number of important questions which remain to be answered. For example, how does the Socialist Industrial Union program of the SLP and Daniel De Leon correspond to Marx and Engels' idea of a workers' government? How does the SIU lead to the abolition of classes and the elimination of the state? And what is the role of a revolutionary party in bringing about the successful overthrow of capitalism and the emancipation of the working class?

These are fundamental questions. But to discuss them it is necessary to leave behind the Maoist premises of the *Guardian*'s party-building supplement. In that respect, the fundamental distinction between the program of Maoism and the program of revolutionary socialism has already been drawn.

3. Which Program Leads to Socialism?

As already shown, the Marxist concept of a workers' government is based upon a realization that the working class faces several basic tasks in its revolution:

• It needs to overthrow and dismantle the bourgeois state which the capitalists use to maintain their rule.

• It needs to erect its own government and defend its revolution against its enemies.

• It needs to transform a capitalist economy into a socialist one, abolishing the whole set of social relations bound up with capital and wage labor.

All of these are necessary to reach the classless, stateless society Marx and Engels called socialism. None are separate or isolated acts. They describe an entire revolutionary *process* whereby workers become conscious of their social situation as a class under one system and actively organize to establish a completely different system with new relations in every sphere of life.

In short, the overthrow of the old and the building of the new society are inseparably intertwined. Moreover, by emphasizing that the emancipation of the workers must be the result of their own classconscious activity, Marx indicated that only certain methods of struggle and certain forms of organization could lead to socialism.

Any revolutionary program for the working class in the advanced capitalist countries must take all these factors into account. But the Maoist program, drawn from the experience of underdeveloped countries where the proletariat was a tiny minority of the population and the material basis for a socialist economy was absent, distorts the revolutionary transformation Marx described beyond recognition.

It turns the Marxist idea of a "self-government of the producers" into a one-party state. It replaces Marx's concept of "united cooperative societies [regulating] production upon a common plan" with a state-owned, bureaucratically managed economy. In place of an all-sided struggle for power by the classwide organizations of the workers, it substitutes an essentially military campaign led by a vanguard party.

Maoism further overlooks Marx's fundamental premise that "the political rule of the producer cannot co-exist with the perpetuation of his social slavery,"[11] and

[11] *The Civil War in France.*

instead projects the existence of class-divided society far into the future, putting off the abolition of wage labor "for a whole historical epoch." (This last notion, that workers could somehow keep political power for decades without abolishing wage labor and gaining direct social domination over the economy, is an especially glaring distortion of Marx's ideas.)

However much one might try to rationalize these revisions of Marxism in the context of underdevelopment, they are absolutely bankrupt in societies where the overwhelming majority of the population is working class and where the material basis for a socialist economy is already in existence.

For decades the main obstacle to the establishment of socialism in the developed countries has been the failure of the working class to achieve sustained classconsciousness and to organize along revolutionary socialist lines. Overcoming that failure and nourishing the "subjective factor" in the revolutionary process is the basic task confronting socialists today. The Maoist program, which begins and ends with the premise that the "subjective factor" means the party rather than the consciousness and activity of the class itself, fails on every count and leads to a totally different end.

By contrast, the De Leonist program of the SLP does correspond to the organizational and theoretical projections made by the founders of modern socialism. More importantly, its essential validity as a program that meets the requirements of socialist revolution has been confirmed by the practical experience of workers' struggles throughout this century.

The core of De Leon's Socialist Industrial Union program is its insistence on the necessity of both political and economic working class organization and its explanation of the relation between the two.

Following Marx, De Leon understood that every class struggle is a political struggle, and that political organization is essential to confront and defeat the centralized political apparatus of the bourgeoisie, i.e. its monopoly of state power. Without dismantling the capitalist state, workers would never be able to reorganize society in any fundamental way.

Waging that battle required a party: to represent proletarian interests on a classwide basis; to promote classconsciousness and educate for a total social revolution; and to emphasize the necessity of workers organizing their class strength on the economic field as well. In the SLP, De Leon helped build such a party, solidly based on a socialist program which kept the revolutionary objectives

of the working class movement in central focus.

Despite the anarchist criticisms of his day that all politics was a "parliamentary delusion," De Leon knew that to abstain from organized political struggle would itself be suicidal. Abstention would divert workers' attention from the need to conquer and overthrow the existing political power. Without such a generalized class struggle for political power, the workers' movement would be localized and fragmented, losing sight of its broad social character. It would become infinitely harder to gather the class forces needed for a unified socialist movement.

At the same time, a disciplined party would help hold the class together with clear theoretical analysis and classconscious education. Such a weapon is especially essential to a class like the proletariat, which can only act as a united social force if it possesses a common understanding of its situation and objectives.

However, De Leon's theory and practice outlined clear limits to the role of the party. In doing so, he avoided both the social democratic reformism that was rampant in his day, and the "vanguardism" that was to engulf the movement later.

First, De Leon stressed the limits of electoral activity. He knew that socialist candidates elected to office could never emancipate the proletariat or fundamentally alter capitalism, and he spent his career exposing those who made such promises as reformers sowing illusions.

Second, De Leon emphasized that even a revolutionary socialist party could not remake the bourgeois state into a workers' government or consummate a revolution on its own. That required the fulfillment of the other side of the De Leonist program.

It was in the SIU form that De Leon saw both the real organs of proletarian power and the mass democratic councils of workers that would be the basis for future socialist government.

This Socialist Industrial Union movement would be rooted at the point of production, where the working class gains its strength from its strategic location in capitalist society. As the only indispensable and productive class, the proletariat, once it is organized, is capable of seizing control of the entire productive process and cutting off the fundamental source of ruling class power.

The SIU would be organized along industrial lines, uniting all workers in a given industry. Within each industry, workers at the plant, regional and national levels would be unified into an integrated body that could wield their collective strategic power, instead of leaving it divided against itself in craft union fashion.

Class solidarity would extend among all industries, bringing workers from all fields into a single revolutionary union movement. Such a network of organization would turn classconsciousness into a powerful social force.

At the foundation of this revolutionary structure would be the local socialist union guided by the principles of workers' democracy carried over from Marx and the Commune. Authority would stem from a general assembly of all those at the workplace. Delegates and representatives would be chosen by the rank and file to perform necessary tasks, but would be accountable and revocable at all times. They would receive no bureaucratic privileges and no special pay. These democratic principles would prevail throughout the SIU structure as the movement was coordinated at all levels.

In De Leon's conception, the SIUs would begin by mobilizing workers to fight the class struggle on a day-to-day basis, organizing the employed and the jobless, and fighting all the manifestations of exploitation. Their classwide solidarity, their opposition to racist and sexist practices of all kinds, and their general revolutionary outlook would make them infinitely more effective and more responsive to the workers' needs than the craft-type unions dominated by the labor fakers and capitalist ideology.

At the same time, the SIU movement would be building toward a revolutionary goal, disciplining and educating its members to that end. Once it had amassed sufficient strength, it would challenge the very existence of capitalist rule, and move to take, hold and operate the entire economy.

This revolutionary majority organized into SIUs would be the driving force behind the revolutionary socialist party which would mount the assault on the existing state power. Once that power had been captured, all its arms would be dismantled. In its place, the SIU organizations would become the government power and the source of all authority.

As for repressing class enemies and defending against counterrevolution (issues used so often by Maoists, to rationalize the need for a vanguard and to denounce classwide SIU-type organizations as "utopian"), the organized industrial bodies of the workers would be capable of fielding any armed force necessary, under their own direct authority.

De Leon's revolutionary strategy takes full advantage of all the democratic forms of struggle open to the working class and gives the fullest scope (not just lip service) to the possibility for a peaceful development of the revolution. At the same

time, it is not a pacifist program. De Leon recognized that if the organized majority was attacked, it would have to defend itself, and the SIU program makes full provision for that possibility.

To the degree that the proletariat is organized in a disciplined fashion at the moment of revolutionary confrontation, to the degree that it commands effective control over the crucial economic resources (e.g., communications, transportation, etc.), and to the degree that the revolution has won over or destabilized the bourgeois army and other bourgeois organs of force, to that extent significant military resistance by the capitalists will be undercut. But wherever capitalist reaction does make the armed enforcement of the workers' majority will a necessity, such force will be organized by the SIU itself and not issue from an independent structure under party control.

This De Leonist program, of course, can in no way be seen as a detailed blueprint for a revolutionary process that will develop in extremely complex and undoubtedly unforeseen ways. But it is a necessary anchor for maintaining a steady course on the road to socialism. And it stands as an important contrast to the endless statist programs for turning the future revolutionary crisis in a completely different direction.

It also meets the fundamental tasks outlined by Marx. It replaces the capitalist state with the democratic organizations of the workers themselves. At the same time, these new organizations are an industrially organized force capable of abolishing wage labor, instituting the planned self-management of the producers, and advancing toward fully developed socialism.

This is not the place to fully trace the development of De Leon's ideas and the factors which influenced him, or to assess his place in the history of the socialist movement. To do justice to that subject would take a series in itself.

But it should be noted at this point that, in many ways, De Leon's SIU theories are even more striking in historical perspective. They anticipated many of the characteristics of later revolutionary struggles, and still testify to the creativity with which De Leon applied Marxism during his lifetime.

Even before the appearance of soviets in Russia in 1905 and 1917, the subsequent appearance of workers' councils in Germany in 1918, worker-peasant collectives in Spain in the 1930s, or the many other practical examples of the importance of such organization, De Leon had formulated a program that gave central importance to the creation of mass democratic workers' bodies as the basis

of the revolutionary struggle.

Even before the concept of "dual power" became generally recognized in revolutionary theory as an inevitable stage in which the new workers' organizations would confront the old bourgeois organs of power at a critical juncture, and where one or the other would win out and proceed to dominate society, De Leon had put forth such slogans as: "The industrial union is at once the battering ram with which to pound down the fortress of capitalism, and the successor of the capitalist social structure itself," or similarly, "Industrial unionism is the socialist republic in the making; and the goal once reached, the industrial union is the socialist republic in operation."[12]

Even before the Russian Revolution had shown—both by its successes and failures—that it was necessary for a workers' political party to seize the old state power, dismantle it and turn power over to the workers' organizations themselves, De Leon had declared, "If the political triumph does find the working class industrially organized, then for the political movement to prolong its existence would be to attempt to usurp the powers which its very triumph announces have devolved upon the central administration of the industrial organization."

None of the great figures in socialist history have been able to fully predict the course of history or point out a smooth road to a victorious revolution. Those who made the greatest contributions have been those who used their theoretical insight and practical experience to sum up the basic tasks confronting workers in their fight for emancipation, and left that legacy for others to build on. In clearly formulating the SIU program, De Leon made just such a contribution on which the SLP builds today.

[12] "Industrial Unionism," *Daily People*, January 20, 1913.

4. Socialism, Classes and the State

The program of Socialist Industrial Unionism developed by De Leon was a continuation of Marx's and Engels' ideas on a workers' government. In all its essentials—political and economic classwide organization, the break-up of the old state, workers' democracy, the seizure of social power by the organized producers and their socialist reorganization of the economy—the SIU concept conforms to the conclusions arrived at by Marx and Engels, especially after the Paris Commune.

In this respect, the SIU program is a far-more accurate expression of the democratic premises underlying Marx's concept of a proletarian dictatorship than the one-party state rule of the "Marxist-Leninists." For Marx, as has been shown, the dictatorship of the proletariat was a revolutionary government that allowed the democratically organized proletariat to assert its collective will. It would therefore be quite correct to define the SIU as a form of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the advanced capitalist countries.

Because the phrase has become so closely identified with the M-L program and the Sino-Soviet states, and because in the SIU concept De Leon provided a much fuller and more exact formulation of the program for socialist revolution in the U.S., the SLP has not built its propaganda around the "proletarian dictatorship" slogan. But in view of the M-L proposals currently masquerading in its name, it is especially relevant to reaffirm that in theory and content, the SIU is fully compatible with a Marxist use of the term.

Marx, however, also said that the dictatorship of the proletariat was a transitional form of *state*. It was an apparatus of proletarian domination over bourgeois class elements during a period of transition to the abolition of classes and the stateless socialist society. How does the SIU program correspond to these ideas? Is the SIU a state? Does it require a transition period, and if so, does this constitute a distinct historical epoch between capitalism and socialism?

To answer these questions it's necessary to retrace the material and social transformations that Marx saw as necessary for the abolition of classes and the state, and the emergence of socialism. It's also essential that they be approached in a dialectical way, i.e., with a realization that these goals will be achieved not by single acts or decrees but by a social process. What's important is to discern the nature and decisive steps of that process.

According to Marx, the classless socialist society required certain material

prerequisites which capitalism was more or less bringing into existence. These included large-scale socialized production, the potential for producing abundance, and the transformation of the overwhelming majority of the population into wage workers. Only on this foundation of highly developed productive forces would the establishment of socialism be possible.

While this material base was coming into view in the 19th century, it had not fully matured. The proletariat was a minority in every country in continental Europe and the level of economic development was very uneven. In this context, Marx urged the working classes to seize the state power, organize their domination over society and accelerate the development of the social and material prerequisites for the abolition of classes and with them the state. This would be a "transition period" during which classes and the state would continue to exist, but where the proletariat would be moving society in the direction of socialism. The *Communist Manifesto* described the transformation this way:

> "When in the course of development, class distinctions have disappeared, and all production has been concentrated in the hands of a vast association of the whole nation, the public power will lose its political character. Political power, properly so-called, is merely the organized power of one class for suppressing another. If the proletariat during its contest with the bourgeoisie is compelled by the force of circumstances to organize itself as a class, and as such sweeps away by force the old conditions of production, then it will, along with these conditions, have swept away the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms, and of classes generally and will thereby have abolished its own supremacy as a class."

This projection of the revolutionary transition to socialism was deepened as Marx and Engels drew on the revolutionary experiences of their time. The most important developments came after the Commune when they concluded, and proceeded to emphasize repeatedly, that the workers could not accomplish their ends by seizing the existing state apparatus, but would have to smash it and build a wholly different apparatus of their own. Moreover—and this point remains a dead letter for today's Marxist-Leninists—the new workers' government, the dictatorship of the proletariat, would in many respects no longer be a state at all.

Writing to August Bebel about a party platform four years after the Commune, Engels declared, "The whole talk about the state should be dropped, especially since the Commune, which was no longer a state in the proper sense of the word."[13]

[13] Frederick Engels to August Bebel, March 18–28, 1875.

Engels meant by this that the government of the Paris workers had immediately "lopped off" a host of features historically associated with the nature of the state.

It was no longer a separate force above the masses of people, but was identical with their own organization. Its military and bureaucratic arms had been dismantled, while their remaining functions reverted to the cooperative producers themselves. It was no longer a parliamentary institution, but was a working body composed of ordinary citizens. In these and other respects, the Paris dictatorship of the proletariat "was no longer a state in the proper sense of the word."

To the degree that it was necessary for the Commune (or any subsequent workers' government) to establish organs of authority not directly concerned with the administration of production, or to repress its class enemies, to this extent it may be legitimate to speak in some measure of a state power. Borrowing Marx's phrase from *The Critique of the Gotha Program*, a workers' government may conceivably be required to perform certain "social functions analogous to the present functions of the state."

But as soon as the organized proletariat steps forward to seize power and collective ownership of the means of production, the state has begun to "die out." The bourgeois state is smashed and in its place is a proletarian government that is "not a state in the proper sense of the word." From the outset, the state's fundamental character down through the ages, as an oppressive apparatus of a ruling minority over the majority of the population, will give way to the democratic organs of the workers.

The abolition of classes will follow much the same process. A class's existence is determined by its relationship to the means of production, but with the socialization of those means, *every member of society joins the ranks of active producers*. Eliminating private ownership of the productive forces at once creates the basis for the elimination of class distinctions.

To be sure, if private ownership is replaced by bureaucratic state ownership, the basis will remain for the emergence of a new ruling class and the perpetuation of class society. But if capitalist control is fully negated by the democratic socialization of the economy under workers' management, the abolition of class distinctions will inexorably follow.

Here again, remnants of defeated exploiting classes may resist militarily for a time. But they will be repressed in their counterrevolutionary efforts by the organized majority, while the collective seizure of the economy levels the decisive

blow at the whole social basis of their existence.

As implied throughout, the abolition of classes and the abolition of the state are inseparably intertwined. In Engels' famous description:

> "The proletariat seizes political power and turns the means of production into state property. But, in doing this, it abolishes itself as proletariat, abolishes all class distinctions and class antagonisms, abolishes also the state as state....The first act by virtue of which the state really constitutes itself the representative of the whole of society—the taking possession of the means of production in the name of society—this is, at the same time, its last independent act as a state. State interference in social relations becomes, in one domain after another, superfluous, and then dies out of itself; the government of persons is replaced by the administration of things, and by the conduct of processes of production. The state is not 'abolished,' it dies out."[14]

To restate the essence of the argument: The coming forward of the organized workers' government in the name of society "abolishes the state as state" and the basis for class distinctions. What "dies out" are those secondary functions (analogous in some sense to a state power) which arise from the continued remnants of classes or the legacy of class-divided society.

In sum, the Marxist idea of the transition from state to stateless society, from class divisions to classless socialism, is a dialectical, revolutionary process. And in every essential respect the Socialist Industrial Union program meets the demands of this transformation and helps assure that the necessary tasks are carried out, all the while the advance is being made to the socialist "administration of things." In contrast, the U.S. Maoists, by dropping out "little details" of the revolutionary transformation here (soviets or their equivalent), or by postponing certain aspects there (the abolition of wage labor), put forth a program that would perpetuate class society indefinitely.

It is, of course, impossible to predict the exact course or length of the revolutionary transition to socialism. But a century after Marx, it can be safely said that the development of the productive forces in the industrialized nations has all but eliminated any constraints imposed by material limitations. There a transition period will consist mainly of consolidating the SIU's operations, isolating and defeating its enemies and advancing toward full socialist relations as fast as the consciousness of the producers allows.

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[14] *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*.

True, the integration of revolutions in the capitalist countries with each other, and the establishment of a global socialist order, could take a substantial period. Imperialism and the accompanying internationalization of the revolutionary process have immeasurably widened the horizons of the socialist movement. Today, capital has made the entire world the workshop of its overthrow. But there is nothing in any of this which contradicts the validity of the SIU organization or requires putting off the movement to the classless, stateless socialist society for a "whole historical epoch."

5. Role of a Socialist Party

This series began in response to a proposal for "party-building," and it is appropriate to return to that question in closing. For despite the many fundamental lines of distinction that have been drawn between the program of the SLP and that of the U.S. "Marxist-Leninists," there is no disagreement on the need for revolutionary socialists to build a party. The question is what kind of party and how to build it.

The answers various tendencies have provided to this question reflect not only the role assigned to the party in the revolutionary struggle, but a whole range of political premises and ultimate aims. Organization is the link between theory and practice, and the type of organization a group conceives as necessary for the revolutionary process is in part a crystallization of all its premises and goals.

In this respect, the M-Ls' vanguard programs are consistent with their initial premise that the working class is inherently incapable of emancipating itself or overcoming "trade union consciousness" unless it submits to party direction. Likewise the model of an elite organization of professional revolutionaries under the unquestioned discipline of a central committee is consistent with the bureaucratic, statist society which they project as the revolutionary goal.

De Leon proved that it was possible to have a disciplined, programmatically sound revolutionary party without falling into the trap of vanguardism. But this was because he always held up a conception of socialist revolution before his class and his organization which clearly delineated the limitations as well as the tasks of a party in the revolutionary process.

For M-Ls, the party's self-defined role is to gain leadership in every workers' struggle and fight for the hegemony of the vanguard over all other forces, groups and organizations—in fact, to gain hegemony over the workers themselves. This is not done simply by winning a majority to its views, but by all manner of manipulative, administrative and exclusionary practices that succeed primarily in discrediting the revolutionary movement in the eves of huge numbers of workers and feeding anti-communist prejudices about the "undemocratic nature of socialism."

Ironically, while Maoists endlessly profess their "faith in the masses," their theory and practice reflect a total lack of confidence in the ability of the majority of workers to achieve classconsciousness and their own emancipation. How else can

one explain a theory that insists that the collective wilt of a 200-million strong working class be "expressed" through a single party controlled by a handful of leaders, rather than through the workers' own democratic organs—Socialist Industrial Unions. Clearly the idea that the masses can govern themselves is revolutionary not just to the ruling class, but to certain leftist political tendencies as well.

The corollary Maoist premise is that the party will be infallible on questions of theory and have sufficient "ties to the masses" and "self-correcting" mechanisms to insure its reliability as a vanguard. But this too is part of a whole mythology Maoists have built around the vanguard party, a mythology more suitable to a religion than to revolutionary Marxism.

One of the liberating features of the socialist movement is its capacity to make the theoretical knowledge necessary for self-emancipation available to the class itself. The role of a party should be to promote the self-activity and self-organization of the entire class. Only in this way does classconsciousness truly become a "material force."

This is why De Leon described the party's primary objective as the stimulation of classconsciousness so the workers themselves would be capable of initiating the required revolutionary organization. Once those organizations emerge—no matter how embryonic in form—it is the party's role to ceaselessly defend them, to emphasize their indispensable role in the revolutionary struggle, and to relentlessly fight all efforts to downplay their significance or contain their activity.

Marxist-Leninists, however, begin by treating theory as the specialized preserve of leaders. Even their mass propaganda is not designed to educate the class as a whole (M-L theoretical training is reserved for "cadre"). Instead, the vanguardists tend to manipulate the consciousness and needs of the workers in an effort to line them up behind the party. On the one hand this strategy leads to "militant reformism," while on the other it finds the supposed vanguard trying to hold back the class at crucial points in the struggle so as not to relinquish its "leadership."

This fundamental difference in understanding precisely what the role of the party is separates De Leonism from the organizational practices of the Marxist-Leninists at the very start. De Leon saw the party as the political organization of the most conscious workers within the working class, not as a separate detachment of professionals with the self-appointed role of leadership. Its task was to assess the

existing social context and find ways to promote the cohesion, solidarity and consciousness of the proletariat in a way that would lead to the creation of mass revolutionary bodies.

Once those organizations came into existence, De Leon held that the worth and contribution of a revolutionary party would be determined by its behavior in relation to them. He was so free of vanguardism that he explicitly raised the possibility that the mass revolutionary industrial movement would give rise to its own political organization, in which case it would be the duty of revolutionists to enter and support that organization, rather than dogmatically insist on a vanguard role for themselves.

De Leon's confidence and reliance on the latent revolutionary potential of the workers, however, should not be mistaken for a "theory of spontaneity," or for passive social democratic ideas about the organization of a socialist party.

In fact, De Leon, like Lenin, was one of the first socialist leaders to react against the reformism and "evolutionism" of the social democratic parties in the Second International. He was one of the first to realize that the conscious, organized intervention of a theoretically sound party of revolutionary socialists was a necessary part of the struggle against capitalism. In *Two Pages From Roman History* (1902), he declared:

> "The socialist republic is no predestined, inevitable development. The socialist republic depends not upon material conditions only; it depends upon these—plus clearness of vision to assist the evolutionary process. Nor was the agency of the intellect needful at any previous stage of social evolution in the class struggle to the extent that it is needful at this, the culminating one of all."

De Leon realized that the "subjective element" would not arise of itself, but would have to be prepared and promoted in an organized fashion by those who came to a conscious understanding of the task. This could not be done by amorphous groupings of vaguely socialist sympathizers, as many social democratic parties were at the time.

"Other revolutions could succeed with loose organization and imperfect formation . . . " he wrote. "Otherwise with the proletariat. It needs information for ballast as for sails, and its organization must be marked with intelligent cooperation. The proletarian army of emancipation cannot consist of a dumb driven herd."

The kind of party De Leon sought to build was one that was democratically united, self-disciplined, clear and uncompromising in the integrity of its organization and program. Moreover, he put these ideas into practice without falling into the error of substituting the party for the class. The SLP continues to proceed from these premises today.

It would seem that the impossibility of achieving a sizable increase in socialist consciousness and organization among the working class without an active, vital socialist party to aid the effort should be self-evident. Unfortunately, it is not.

There still remain large numbers of individuals sympathetic to—even informed about—the tasks and objectives of socialism, who abstain for a variety of reasons from organized socialist political activity.

Some, often new to the movement, are discouraged by what they see as needless factionalism and sectarianism among those opposed to capitalism. They despair of progress and withdraw from organizational efforts altogether. Not infrequently one hears from such quarters, "The time is not ripe for a revolutionary party. I'll be there when it is," or similar variations on the theme that the process of revolutionary organization will develop spontaneously or otherwise take care of itself.

Others, also quite genuine in their sentiments, are convinced that any attempt to build a revolutionary socialist party in the U.S. is by its very nature a sectarian, isolating project. They contend that the painstaking, methodical and, at this point, necessarily slow-paced organizational activity needed to build a revolutionary party is a "diversion" from the struggles of the day.

Those who hold this view generally take up "more practical" approaches to changing society, designed to meet with more success and popularity. Invariably these "more practical" strategies have reduced themselves to one of two alternatives. Either they lead to reformist activism—which may produce a spate of mass activity, but can bring no lasting advances in socialist consciousness or organization—or, even worse, to proposals for "working within the system" which generally come down to "intervention" in the Democratic Party.

Those who doubt that a rejection of the need to build a revolutionary socialist party here and now leads to such ends need only look at the New Left of the '60s or the latest evolution of the New American Movement and those around the journal *In These Times*, which began in healthy opposition to Marxist-Leninist dogmatism, but has been moving steadily to the classic posture of social democracy and activity

inside the Democratic Party.

There simply is no alternative to building a revolutionary socialist party. If those who understand the fallacies of the Maoist strategy do not likewise see the need for a socialist party to counter the proliferating M-L vanguards, they will succeed only in abandoning their class to those who can never aid it in the fight for a socialist future.

(THE END)