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John Martin — Forward Photo

Challenges for the Left in Electoral Politics

Looking to the 1990s

THE 1980S WERE A PERIOD OF growth and expansion for progressive politics. Despite the

right-wing climate of the Reagan years, the development of the African American and Latino empowerment movements resulted in major gains: the election of Harold Washington as mayor of Chicago in 1983, the election of Henry Cisneros as mayor of San Antonio and the election of Federico Peña as mayor of Denver. And most prominent of all were the successes of the Jesse Jackson presidential campaigns of 1984 and 1988, which built a multinational coalition and have laid the foundation for a new progressive electoral majority.

Especially during the past year, thousands of activists and leftists entered the electoral arena, many for the first time.

The seven million votes won by Jesse Jackson reflect the many sectors of society drawn into a new electoral motion by

the powerful message of the Jackson campaign and, at the grass roots, the translation of this message into painstaking voter registration and precinct efforts in cities across the country.

In the aftermath of the 1988 elections, we need to assess the potential and define an electoral strategy that will continue to build the broad coalition against the right, empower the masses at the grass roots, and

build the people's movements in a way which furthers the struggle for socialism.

Looking Forward to the 1990s

Looking at the gains of the '80s, we can expect increasing potential for



Frank Ogletree — Forward Photo

Registering to vote, 1988.

African Americans are demanding the right to participate in the political process of the U.S.



Voter mobilization drive in San Francisco Chinatown.

People of color face many official voting barriers. Expanding the electorate is an important part of empowering minority communities.

change in the electoral arena in the 1990s. Although George Bush won the November election, the victory was deceptive, because a margin of only 535,000 votes would have put Michael Dukakis in the White House. We should also remember the impressive gains of the Jackson campaign in bringing 1,100 delegates to the Democratic National Convention (900 of them African American) and winning 35 out of 38 of its progressive platform planks.

During the next decade, we can expect economic and social conditions to propel the masses toward more political action. As important sectors of the economy have declined, it has exacted a terrible toll on working people and is threatening the virtual destruction of African American and minority communities. The deluge of mergers and takeovers, combined with loss of manufac-

turing jobs, has brought deep economic problems which will last through the new decade. Most economists are forecasting a major recession as well.

The driving out of small farmers and the continually larger gap between the rich and the poor is giving rise to deep dissatisfaction, which is translating into more struggle in the electoral arena, as one front of the mass movement.

The trade unions, long battered and attacked during the Reagan administration, can also be expected to launch increasing protest. As the rank and file grows more militant, a growing number of the trade union leadership will respond. In the past several years, a progressive voice has emerged from the public sector unions, as well as unions with a substantial number of African American and Latino workers.

The growth of the African American

and Chicano/Latino political empowerment movements in the 1990s will also propel progressive politics forward. Hard-fought electoral battles of the '80s will continue in the decade to come. As a result of lawsuits over voting rights, district elections will replace at-large elections in many states. In 1989, six to eight African American judges could be elected in Mississippi as the result of newly created districts. In California, Chicano representation on city councils, school boards and county government will increase dramatically as district elections take place throughout the Central Valley.

After the 1990 census, new congressional and legislative districts will be formed. The main gains will be in the South and Southwest, with new congressional seats in Georgia, North Carolina, Texas and California opening the possibilities for more African Americans and Chicanos to serve in Congress.

The 1990s will offer the left new opportunities to participate in, and be an integral part of, the movement for electoral empowerment.

The Struggle for Democracy

In order for leftists and socialists to participate constructively in electoral politics, we must understand that the essence of the struggle for electoral empowerment is democracy.

As socialists, we do electoral work because we recognize it is integral to the expansion of democracy for the people and in building a mass base for the left. The winning of electoral reforms, such as changing unfair electoral laws and putting progressives into office, is important in improving the lives of working people and improving their conditions to organize and fight.

Because the U.S. has a long tradition of electoral politics, we can expect that

the exercise of democracy through the ballot box will play a big role in shaping U.S. politics over a long period of time. Any revolution in the U.S. will include elections and other expressions of the public will.

Because of the actual limitations of democracy under capitalism — for example, the fact that even today in the South and Southwest, African Americans and Chicanos are terrorized by armed white vigilantes at some polling sites — the fight for greater democracy will fuel the fight for more fundamental social change and help strengthen the fight for socialism.

We need only look at the Jesse Jackson campaign to understand the powerful democratic sentiments of the people. To millions of people, the Jackson campaign represented the voice of the African American people

*Electoral work is
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opening the door and putting the democratic demands of all oppressed people and the working class on the agenda of the day. The Jackson campaign championed the interests of African Americans and the oppressed, and galvanized broad sectors in the fight against the right.

The campaign showed that this country is more open to left/progressive alternatives than appeared on the surface of the Bush victory. While Jackson him-

self is not anti-capitalist or a socialist, his campaign advanced the growth of progressive and left politics, as record numbers of new people became politically active, joined the Rainbow Coalition, built grass-roots and electoral organizations, and examined socialist alternatives for the first time.

The lesson of the Jackson campaign is that the left must be in touch with and lead the powerful sentiment among the people for the expansion of democracy. The power of the Jackson message was its appeal to the basic democratic needs of the people — for a quality education, for basic health care, for the right to a job, for freedom from the scourge of drugs. The left cannot sit on the side, apart from these democratic struggles, and hope to win the people to socialism.

In fact, the desire for democracy is integrally connected to the fight for socialism, because socialism will only be a real alternative if it concretely improves people's lives.

New Electoral Majority

The Jackson campaign also pointed the way towards a progressive electoral strategy, which the left needs to develop as part of its immediate political program. Concretely, this means developing strategies to expand and shift the electorate, and breaking the so-called conservative electoral "lock" in the South and Southwest, which has upheld the right-wing edge in the last four presidential elections.

People of color now approach 30% of the U.S. population. The changing



Photo Courtesy of Lyndon Baines Johnson Library; Okamoto

The 1964 Civil Rights Act is signed into law.

Rev. Martin Luther King (center) and other civil rights leaders met with Pres. Lyndon Johnson when the bill was signed. The Civil Rights Movement played a key role in winning this historic law.

demographics in the U.S. will make oppressed nationalities the majority in California and Texas by the turn of the century, and they will comprise a steadily increasing proportion of the population as a whole. With increased voter registration and participation, Black, Latino, Asian, poor white and other historically disenfranchised voters can constitute a new, progressive electoral majority.

This new electoral majority, with its base in the South and Southwest and key Northern industrial areas, can make the critical difference in future elections. It provides the electoral basis for reversing the right-wing direction of American politics. Electoral work is thus an important aspect of our work to build the mass movement against the right, and for democracy and social progress.

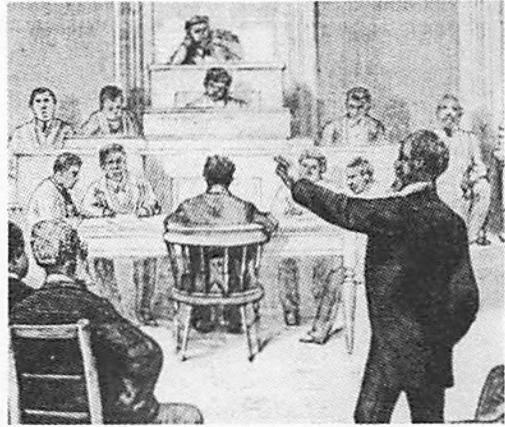
The Focus of Our Work

Within the left, there are many approaches to electoral politics, ranging from the liberals and some social democrats who work in the Democratic Party exclusively to others who advocate third parties now. Some activists call for a boycott of the electoral arena and think electoral politics is diversionary.

In my view, a correct approach calls for building up working class and grassroots forces by linking electoral work with issues affecting the day-to-day lives of the people, while nurturing broad alliances in the electoral arena to advance progressive causes, including supporting the Democratic Party and independent candidates.

Our electoral strategy must proceed on two fronts. The left must be in the forefront of helping to forge a broad united front against the right, and at the same time aim our organizing efforts towards increasing the strength of the working class within the electoral arena.

The two tasks go hand in hand. But



Forward Photo

The struggle for democracy has a long history.

Top: A Reconstruction era national convention of African Americans, April 1876.

Middle: The suffragette movement won women the right to vote in 1920.

Bottom: Latino struggle for fair representation in California's San Fernando Valley, 1986.



Jennifer Brouhard — Forward Photo

Latino support for Jesse Jackson.

Rev. Jackson's presidential campaign gave voice to the interests of those locked out of the political system.

because of the relative weakness of the left, we must put our relative emphasis on building up the strength of the working class.

Jesse Jackson and the Democratic Party

A pivotal question in determining our strategy is how we should view Jesse Jackson, the Rainbow Coalition and the Democratic Party.

Quite simply, the left should recognize Jackson's role as an historical figure who has led in opening up the attack against the right, and in uniting almost all class forces in the Black Liberation Movement around a common motion for democracy and political power. We need to wholeheartedly support Jackson, with the goal of electing him president, and to build the Rainbow Coalition as a broad-based coalition reflective of

the seven million Jackson voters at its base.

This also means, at this point, uniting with Jackson's program to open up and expand the Democratic Party. Whether we like it or not, the electoral arena today is dominated by the two-party system. The left must participate in the existing system, while building toward viable alternative forms. This could include the formation of a third electoral party, but this will not happen until or unless significant sectors of people are willing to break with the Democratic Party.

While both the Republican and Democratic parties represent the interests of the capitalist class, the traditional base of the Democratic Party has been among African Americans, Latinos, labor, the elderly, among others. There is a tremendous amount of flux and struggle going on within the ranks of the Democratic Party over its future direction, and Jackson may be able to lead a motion which may eventually form an anti-right or even separate Democratic Party. This will undoubtedly be a long and difficult struggle.

The left must also recognize that Jackson is a representative of the African American capitalists and middle class, which today lead the African American Movement. Jesse Jackson is not a socialist, nor is the Rainbow Coalition a vehicle for revolution. We should support Jackson, build the Rainbow Coalition and join in efforts to expand the Democratic Party; but we also need to develop our own independent vehicles to organize and strengthen the working class component of the united front, from progressive mass formations to socialist organization. In the long run, it will be the strengthening of the working class and progressive movements at the grass roots that will

be instrumental in producing an electoral victory for Jackson in the decade to come, and progress towards socialism.

Tasks in Electoral Work

At a time when the left is just coming into its own in the electoral arena, we need to have a clear focus to our work. Aside from our continuing support of Jesse Jackson, the left needs to focus on several tasks in the upcoming period of time.

First, we need to participate in the fight to remove barriers to the participation of the working class in the electoral arena. This includes involving ourselves in national, statewide and local efforts to reform voter registration laws, campaign funding laws and all other legal barriers to democratic participation in

the electoral process.

We need to remember that only 49% of the eligible voting-age population voted last fall. The bulk of non-voters were not registered, because the U.S. has one of the most backward voter registration programs of all the Western democracies. The voter bears the burden of registration, unlike European nations, where registration is a function of the government and is done automatically as the person reaches legal voting age.

We need to pay attention to the 1991 redistricting, and fight for district elections and fight to accord voting rights to immigrants as well.

Mass Issues

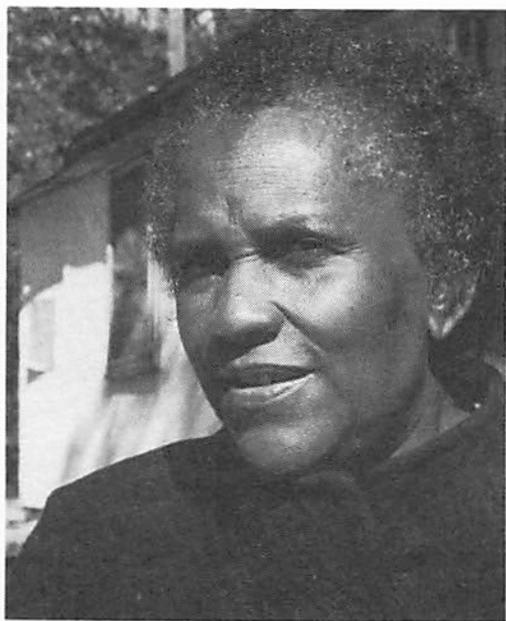
Secondly, we must do electoral work



Bon Ferris — Forward Photo

Black voters welcome Jesse Jackson in Tyler, Texas, 1988.

The African American struggle for democracy gave the main impetus to Rev. Jackson's presidential bid.



Ellen Spears — Forward Photo

Mayor Emma Gresham of Keysville.

For 55 years, Keysville, Georgia, was denied the right to a city government. Mass struggle forced elections in 1988, with a Black majority winning office.

in an ongoing way which is tied to mass issues, especially as a component of work in the African American and other oppressed nationality communities. Sentiments for minority representation have aroused revolutionary consciousness in the African American and Chicano communities. Community and labor organizing must have an electoral aspect — for example, community campaigns on educational rights, including lobbying legislative bodies and supporting candidates for school board.

This is particularly important because many people do not vote, due to deep alienation with the political process. It is no accident that low turnout often occurs in communities with the most oppressive conditions, and which have histories of militant struggles on other fronts. The fact is that many people do not vote because they believe that politicians have nothing to offer in

terms of solving the immediate concerns of drugs, crime, unemployment and social decay.

The left needs to address this alienation and organize the people by bringing the fight for these issues into the arena of political empowerment for the locked out. Herein lies the potential for the left to grow and become a significant force in U.S. politics.

Lastly, the left should support and run grass-roots candidates for office. These candidates should be leaders of struggles involving masses of working people. They can run either as Democrats or independents, depending on the circumstances, but the content and stance of their program and campaign should be independent. Some examples would be fielding candidates who are leading strikes, organizing tenants' struggles or leading struggles for better education in the public schools.

The left can give working people an option and voice by running mass-based campaigns and showing that there is no contradiction between being a leftist, a mass leader and holding office in an effective and responsible fashion. These candidates can also win support among broad forces by demonstrating both their mass base and personal credibility in the course of struggle.

As with our other work for economic and democratic reforms, the left's electoral work should be combined with education on the nature of capitalism, and on socialism as the only social system where there is economic justice and thorough-going democracy for the people. If properly conducted, electoral work can be an important aspect of socialist work to build the people's struggle against the injustices of capitalism and for greater democracy, and building the working class' political independence.

“Voo-doo” Economics and “Déjà-voo-doo”

The legacy of Reaganomics and the advent of the Bush economy

by Peter Shapiro

THE REAGAN-BUSH ADMINISTRATION of 1981-88 marked a major watershed for the economy, a turning point whose influence will continue long into the future. During these years, a set of blatantly pro-business, anti-popular economic policies — often referred to as Reaganomics — was put in place to deal with serious problems in U.S. capitalism. Reagan fundamentally altered the approach to economic policy which had been followed for the last half century through Republican and Democratic administrations alike. While proving a boon to big business, Reaganomics created serious problems for the people and even weakened the basic structure of the economy.

George Bush criticized Reagan's economic policies during the 1980 presidential campaign as “voo-doo economics,” but as vice president, Bush changed his tune and became an ardent supporter of the Reagan program. Bush now vows to pursue the same policies during his term in the White House, what might be called an era of “déjà-voo-doo” economics.

This article will examine Reaganomics — its emergence, program and impact on

the economy — and then look at what can be expected from the economic policies of President Bush.

The Emergence of Reaganomics

The mandate for Reaganomics came with Ronald Reagan's victory in the 1980 election. This election turned on many issues, but a crucial one was the economy. After 30 years of growth, the economy in the early 1970s began faltering. Inflation skyrocketed, with prices climbing 15% in 1978 and interest rates peaking at close to 20%. Unemployment reached double digits, while the rate of growth of productivity (output per worker) ground nearly to a halt. The term “stagflation” was coined to describe this problem of simultaneous inflation and stagnation.

How did these problems come about? There were three main factors.

Massive increases in military spending were required in the 1960s to pay the enormous costs of the Vietnam War. The proportion of the gross national product spent on the military increased from 7.5% in 1965 to 9.6% four years later. But Presi-

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dents Johnson and Nixon, to minimize popular resistance to the war, did not raise taxes to pay for it. Instead the government paid its bills by printing more money. This was a key reason why inflation spiraled out of control in the 1970s. (Inflation is where each dollar is worth less, leading to rising prices and interest rates.)

It was also during the 1970s that *U.S. corporations began to face more serious competition from overseas businesses*. After years of virtually unchallenged control of many global markets, U.S. businesses began encountering stiffer rivalry from Western Europe and Japan, whose economies had finally recovered fully from World War II.

The third factor was *third world countries taking control of their natural resources*. For decades, U.S. corporations had dominated the production of raw materials in much of the third world, but this began changing in the 1960s. The most striking example was OPEC.

By the mid- to late-1970s, almost every U.S. economic indicator — overall growth, the gross national product, new job creation, etc. — showed significant weakness. For example, productivity growth in the mid-1970s fell to 0.7%, compared to 2.6% in the period 1948-66. This was the context in which Reaganomics emerged.

Reaganomics: The Theory

The economic policies promoted by Ronald Reagan aimed at doing whatever was necessary to restore the profitability of corporate America and reassert U.S. global power.

Reaganomics came packaged in a theoretical framework, dubbed “supply-side” economics to distinguish it from the “demand-side” economics of Keynesianism, the view which had governed



Reagan deregulated key industries.

Trucking, the savings and loan industry and the airlines were all damaged by the dismantling of government regulations.

economic policymaking since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

In the Keynesian view, special attention must be paid to the "demand" side of the economy — consumption — to stimulate growth and prevent stagnation. The government itself served as a major consumer of goods and services, and also stimulated public consumption by putting more money in the hands of consumers through social programs.

Supply-side economics, in contrast, emphasized the "supply" side of the equation — production — to stimulate the economy. In this view, cutting taxes for the rich encourages more investment in business, while cutting business taxes and government regulation increases production.

Supply-side economics is a new version of the infamous "trickle down" theory, which holds that when business becomes more profitable and the rich grow richer, their prosperity will filter to the rest of the people down below.

Reaganomics: Its Program

How did Reagan's economic theories translate into a specific program for the economy? Six areas will be highlighted.

• First, *attacking the power of organized labor*, weakening its standing vis-à-vis management. Unions were a major target of Reaganomics, starting with the air traffic controllers. Under Reagan, the percent of the work force unionized dropped from 23% to 17%.

• Second, *reducing and eliminating social programs*. Reagan attacked the social programs of Keynesianism as a millstone around business' neck. Dismantling these programs freed government money for other purposes, especially the military. Reagan cut social programs by \$125 billion, leaving the "social safety net" in tatters. Some pro-

grams were eliminated, such as federal revenue sharing and the job training program CETA. Aid to Families with Dependent Children was cut 13%, while housing subsidies were slashed 80%.

• Third, *reducing government regulation of business*. Reagan dismantled regulations on affirmative action, environmental protection, worker safety and consumer protection. Whole industries such as airlines, banks and savings and loan institutions (S&Ls), trucking, and telecommunications were freed from government rules. He also precipitated a wave of corporate mergers and buyouts — "merger mania" — by jettisoning Justice Department regulations against monopolies and endorsing tax laws which gave more favorable treatment to mergers than to productive investments.

• Fourth, *revising the tax codes to reduce the tax "burden" on the wealthy and the corporations*. These tax changes led to a massive redistribution of income from the poor to the rich. Compared to 1977, the poorest 10% of the population now pays 20% more in taxes, while the richest 10% has been favored with a 20% tax cut. Corporate income taxes have dropped from 13% of government tax revenue in 1980 to 8% today.

• Fifth, *Reagan supported the "tight money" policy of the Federal Reserve* — pushing interest rates up to keep a lid on inflation. These high interest rates put the squeeze on working people trying to buy a house or needing to borrow money to make ends meet. They also hurt many small businesses, whose costs of doing business were forced up.

• Sixth, *Reagan embarked on a major effort to reassert U.S. global influence* through the most massive peacetime military buildup in history. In 1988, the Reagan administration spent \$298 billion on the military, *twice* the amount before he came into office. Reagan aimed to

strengthen U.S. corporations' ability to operate in the international arena and halt anti-U.S. sentiment in the third world. He attempted to win popular support for his enormous military budgets through strident anti-communism, racist anti-foreigner rhetoric, jingoism and blind patriotism.

Over the past eight years, much of the Reagan economic program was implemented. Corporate leaders endorsed his policies and many conservative Democrats in Congress supported key parts of the Reagan program. More recently Reagan's economic proposals suffered some setbacks in Congress, but this came only after most of his platform was laid in place.

The Consequences of Reaganomics

Reaganomics brought a sweeping transformation to the U.S. economy. The lives of the people as well as the econom-

ic structure itself were drastically altered.

For the people, Reaganomics meant hardship for millions and economic uncertainty for most. Under Reagan, the gap between rich and poor grew tremendously. While Reagan touted falling unemployment and low inflation, 44% of the new jobs created between 1979 and 1985 paid poverty-level wages. The number of poor families with children rose 35%. Meanwhile the top 1% enjoyed a 50% increase in income, and corporate profits jumped from \$92.4 billion in 1980 to \$179.4 billion in 1986.

For minority nationalities, the situation was even worse. The income gap between white and minority families grew to the widest in years. Thirty percent of African Americans and Latinos now live in poverty. Reagan's budget cuts fell hardest on these communities, not to mention the growth in racism and roll-back of affirmative action and civil rights.

Real wages (adjusted for inflation) fell — between 1977 and 1987 they dropped over 10%. Many families can make ends meet only with two breadwinners. For the first time in generations, young workers today can no longer count on living a better life than their parents.

Worsening social problems such as crime and drug abuse stem in large part from economic factors, and are an integral part of Reagan's legacy.

Reaganomics also caused suffering abroad. Third world countries have borrowed billions of dollars, often at unfavorable terms, to try to develop their economies. To pay these debts, many third world governments have been forced to deeply cut domestic spending with devastating consequences, such as in Mexico, where the standard of living has fallen by half in the 1980s.

Indeed, supply-side economics was implemented with a vengeance. Reagan took from the people and gave to the



Forward Photo



Older worker at McDonald's.

In the 1980s, many were forced into lower-paying jobs with few benefits.

wealthy and the corporations — what Jesse Jackson called “Robin Hood in reverse.”

Weakening the Economic Structure

But the damage of Reaganomics was not limited to the livelihood of the people. The structure of the economy itself has also been damaged. Among the main problems are the “twin deficits” — the budget deficit and the trade imbalance — and deterioration of the economy’s infrastructure.

Budget deficit. The Reagan administration consistently spent far more money than it collected in tax revenue, leading

to a massive increase in the national debt. In only eight years, Reagan sunk the federal government into deeper debt — \$2.8 trillion — than was incurred during the entire 200 previous years of the U.S. combined.

The national debt is an ominous specter on the economic horizon. A larger share of each year’s budget must go towards interest on the debt — in 1980 it was 9%; by 1987 it rose to 14%. This directly cuts into money which could be spent on economically productive activities.

At this time the government is in effect borrowing more money just to pay interest on the debt. This enormous borrowing, much of it from abroad, cannot continue forever. But Reagan left to the future the burden of paying his massive bills.

Trade deficit. Under Reagan, the U.S. balance of trade with other countries went deeply into the red — the U.S. imports far more from overseas than it sells. In 1987 the negative trade balance hit an unprecedented \$168 billion. To pay for these imports, the U.S. has had to borrow billions of dollars from abroad. The U.S. became the world’s largest debtor nation under Reagan, where as it used to be the world’s largest creditor nation.

The negative trade balance stems from several factors. One is the decline of U.S. industries. Under Reagan, corporate leaders found they could make more through mergers and financial speculation than from new plants and technology. For example, USX (formerly U.S. Steel) recently bought an oil company rather than renovate their deteriorating U.S. mills.

In more and more areas, U.S. companies have fallen behind their overseas competitors in the technology race. In the U.S., research priorities are heavily influenced by military needs. West Ger-



Sony Kim — Forward Photo

Jesse Jackson leads march at New York's Williamsburg Bridge, April 1988.

Because of inadequate government funding, this bridge became unsafe and had to be temporarily closed.

many and Japan devote proportionately more resources to research with practical applications, enabling them to produce higher-quality consumer goods.

Another factor is the continuing overseas flight of factories owned by U.S. corporations. Taking advantage of lower labor costs in the third world, U.S. companies are increasingly shifting production overseas and importing these goods back to the U.S., undercutting domestic production.

Deterioration in the economy's foundation. The infrastructure of the U.S. economic system has declined in recent years as a direct result of Reagan's budget priorities. The country's highways, bridges and cities are in serious disrepair.

Even the educational system has suffered from declining federal support, with inadequate school buildings, growing class sizes and falling educational achievement.

There are other signs of serious economic weakness:

- In the last two years, more banks and savings and loan institutions went bankrupt than at any time since the 1930s. The government insurance agency which guarantees S&L deposits is bankrupt and had to borrow over \$10 billion last year. The final cost of rescuing the failing S&Ls may be \$100 billion, money that may come directly out of taxpayers' pockets. Another problem is that third world countries may find it impossible to pay off

the billions in loans they have with U.S. banks.

• Merger mania has led to a massive increase in corporate debt. Billions have been borrowed to finance these takeovers, leading to the highest level of corporate debt in decades. In an economic downturn, many companies could find themselves unable to pay their debts and be forced into bankruptcy. It has been estimated that if a moderate recession hits in the next two years, 10% of the largest U.S. companies could go belly up.

From Reagan to Bush

In his final economic report, published January 1989, Reagan lavished praises on his own economic achievements. From the standpoint of corporate America, Reaganomics was successful in many respects. Profits rose. Business tax and personal income tax rates for the wealthy dropped. The work force is less unionized and has been forced to accept lower wages.

But growing alarm is being sounded from many sectors about the damage Reagan's policies have done. Among the people, there is growing dissatisfaction and anger over budget cutbacks, lower wages and economic insecurity. Even some corporate leaders are becoming worried about the structural damage wrought by Reagan and fear a major disaster is looming. The October 1987 stock market crash was precipitated in large part by the worries of investors over these enormous problems.

One week after the 1988 presidential election the head of the General Accounting Office (GAO) reported that the economy had deteriorated to an alarming extent, and said the costs of repairing it would be "staggering."

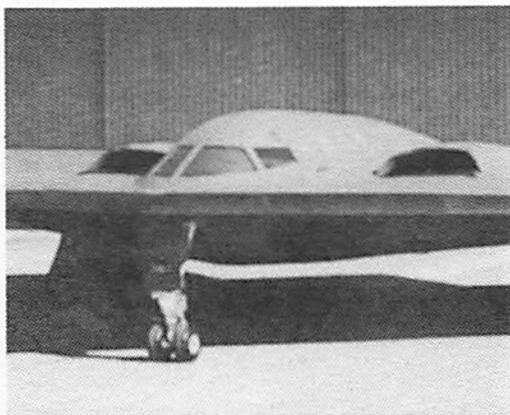
This, then, is the economic legacy left by Ronald Reagan. What can be expected

from his successor?

The Era of George Bush: "Déjà-voo-doo"

During the 1988 campaign, George Bush praised Reagan's economic policies and claimed the economy was booming, and his philosophy and program closely mirrors Reagan's. The main pillars of the Bush economic program revealed so far are a "flexible budget freeze" and "read my lips: no new taxes." What do these policies involve?

• *Flexible budget freeze.* Bush has vowed to keep federal spending constant (adjusted for inflation). If more money is



New \$520 million B-2 bomber.

While buying expensive new weapons, Reagan/Bush ignored basic social needs.

spent on one program, an equivalent amount must be removed from another. Bush claims a budget freeze would resolve the deficit problem, because tax revenues would increase as the economy expands, while expenditures remain constant.

But Bush's theory is widely disputed because it fails to account for the possibility of a recession, which many economists feel is a virtual certainty after six



Exxon oil spill, Valdez, Alaska.

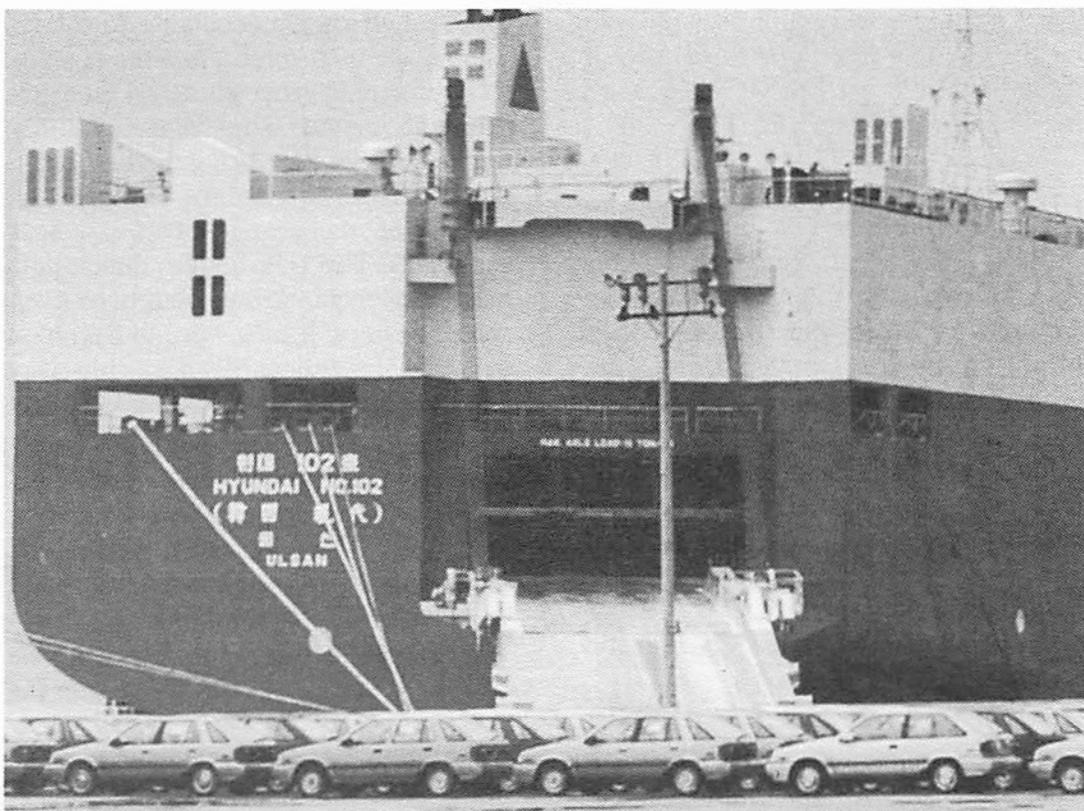
The oil industry has been given free rein to pillage Alaska's resources, and is responsible for one of the worst environmental disasters in U.S. history.

years of expansion. Even if the country avoids recession, Bush's figures may not hold up since they are based on interest rates staying low, productivity increasing, and no worsening of the banking/S&L crisis. If any of these assumptions do not hold up, then all bets are off.

The other problem with a "budget freeze" is that more military spending will inevitably mean less social spending. Bush's first budget, announced in February 1989, does just that. While allowing military outlays to increase with inflation, Bush proposes to cut social programs by \$12 billion. Other than slashing \$5 billion from Medicare, Bush has avoided specifics about how much to take from where. His strategy is to leave the dirty work to Congress, hoping they will get the blame. On the chopping block may be housing, welfare, veterans' benefits, mass transit and environmental protection. Bush is also eyeing Social Security.

•*No new taxes.* Not only has Bush stated he will allow no new taxes, he is also committed to a huge additional tax *cut* for the rich. His proposal to lower the capital gains tax would put millions in the pockets of the wealthy, worsening the budget deficit. Bush rationalizes this tax break with the same supply-side notions used by Reagan — that giving the wealthy more money will stimulate the economy. But he has tried to gloss over the reality that this policy did not create a more productive economy, but led mostly to a massive redistribution of wealth from poor to rich and increased pressure to cut social programs.

Even Bush knows that raising taxes is almost unavoidable. His "no new taxes" pledge was a deceptive campaign tactic designed to placate the right and win support from people afraid of further tax hikes. Bush will avoid the word "tax," instead proposing "revenue enhancers"



Hyundai cars unloading at U.S. port.

The U.S. balance of trade worsened significantly under Reagan, due largely to the decline of U.S. industry.

like a surcharge on alcohol, tobacco and gasoline, or higher "user fees" for the national parks and various federal licenses. Such taxes-in-disguise would fall hardest on working people and the poor, forcing them to shoulder an even larger share of the federal tax burden. If "tax increases" *are* instituted, Bush will make sure that Congress is held responsible.

Bush's other initial foray into economic policy was his plan to remedy the savings and loan industry crisis. More S&Ls went bankrupt under Reagan than any other time since the Depression years of the 1930s. Bush's plan will force taxpayers to shoulder the lion's share of the cost of bailing out insolvent S&Ls, which is estimated to exceed \$100 billion. Those responsible for the crisis — the

Reagan administration, which deregulated and reduced government supervision of the S&L industry, and the S&L industry itself — are getting off easy.

As of this writing, much of the rest of Bush's economic program has yet to be made public, and there are still many question marks. It remains to be seen how he will deal with the array of problems confronting the economy — the trade imbalance, declining infrastructure, increasing corporate debt and others.

The coming four years will undoubtedly see additional attempts by Washington to impose new austerity measures on the people to pay for the wild borrowing and massive debt accumulation of the Reagan years. The assault on people's

living standards will continue, amid calls for the need for everyone to sacrifice in the national interest. But some are clearly sacrificing more than others.

Future Prospects

The coming years could see greater economic volatility than at any time in recent memory. A serious recession could hit within the next two years, and a major depression is not out of the question.

Any number of events could trigger this scenario. A moderate recession might be started by high interest rates or cuts in government spending. The economy could then slide into a depression as bankruptcies mount.

A crisis in the banking/S&L industry

could set off a major economic downturn. The failure of several major financial institutions could prove too costly for a government bailout. The failure of these banks could in turn bring down the corporations they are tied to.

Another scenario involves overseas capitalists. The U.S. budget deficit is financed largely by bonds bought by overseas investors. If they were to decide in substantial numbers that it was too risky to keep their money in the U.S. and stopped lending the U.S. government money, a major financial collapse could occur.

While it cannot be said with certainty that a recession or depression is inevitable, the array and depth of the problems facing the economy is quite serious.



Daniel Aaron

Deteriorating housing in Detroit, Michigan.

Under Reagan's budget cuts, the country's infrastructure has decayed to an alarming extent. Homelessness has spread like an epidemic as federal housing funds have been slashed.

Even if an acute economic crisis is avoided, it is likely that the erosion of the last eight years will continue. Continued deterioration could, over time, qualitatively weaken the economy in what could be characterized as a chronic crisis.

The Struggle Against Bush's Economic Policies

Popular resistance to Reaganomics has increased in recent years, and Bush will have a hard time preventing the spread of discontent. People are rejecting the continuing assault on their livelihood — what Jesse Jackson has called “economic violence” — and refusing to be made the scapegoat for the economy's problems.

Progressives and socialists are developing alternatives to the program of austerity being promoted by business and government. These alternatives aim to defend the interests of working people and the oppressed nationality communities.

No complete program of struggle has yet been formulated, but some of the main points of a progressive economic agenda include the following:

- *Reduce the federal budget deficit by cutting the military budget and raising taxes on the wealthy.* Reducing military spending will free up money for needed social programs. The U.S. has the know-how and resources to feed, house and educate its people, and there is no reason we need to accept an era of austerity, as the government is threatening to impose. A progressive tax policy would place a greater share of the tax burden on the wealthy and place more money in the hands of poor and working people, which would stimulate the economy more than giving greater wealth to the wealthy. In addition, tax policies should be changed to encourage more investment in produc-

ive endeavors and discourage unproductive speculation.

- *Restore progressive government regulation over many areas of the economy.* Workers' health and safety rules need to be restored. Regulation of the banking/S&L industry to restrict speculative and risky financial practices needs to be implemented. Environmental protection regulations need to be reinstated and strengthened. Merger mania and speculation need to be curbed.

- *The right of workers to organize unions should be upheld and strengthened.* Employers should be required by law to negotiate with their workers in good faith and uphold union contracts. The National Labor Relations Board should protect workers' right to organize rather than be a vehicle for sabotaging this right.

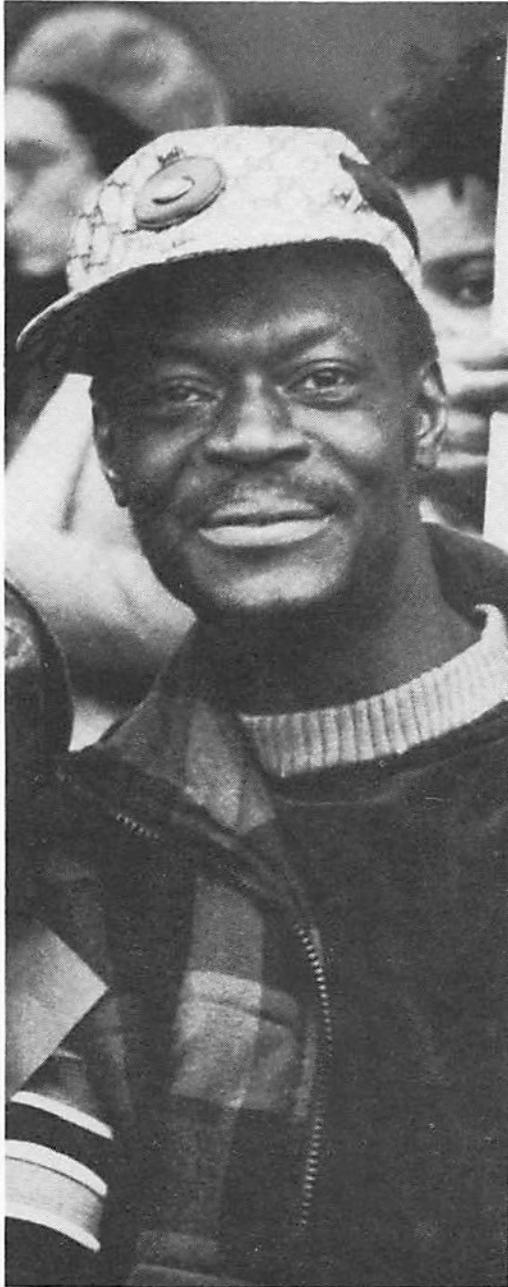
- *The people must have the right to a decent standard of living.* The minimum wage should be raised to make up for all the ground lost during the Reagan years when it was frozen. All people should have guaranteed health insurance, secure pension plans and access to affordable housing.

- *Affirmative action programs must be strengthened throughout the economy, in both government and private industry.* They should be applied in all phases of contracting, hiring and other areas.

- *Oppose protectionism, national chauvinism and foreigner-bashing* that attempt to blame the problems of U.S. capitalism on other countries. Legal restrictions should be imposed on the export of jobs and capital overseas. U.S. companies which conduct business overseas must be required to respect workers' rights in those countries, including the right to unionize and to a fair wage.

- *Family farmers must be allowed to make a living.* Government policies which favor large corporate landholders over family farmers should be aban-

done. There should be a moratorium on farm foreclosures. Adequate income-support policies must be adopted to enable family farmers to continue pro-



Michael Tsukahara — Forward Photo

Homeless activist, Brooklyn, N.Y.

Residents of Brooklyn Arms hotel are fighting the government's effort to force them onto the streets.

ducing food and meet their expenses.

• *Invest in rebuilding the infrastructure of the economy.* Our urban areas, roads, bridges and rail lines all need reconstruction. By investing money in such projects, the society as a whole would benefit, jobs would be created and the economy would be stimulated.

• *The U.S. should write off a portion of the third world debt and negotiate more favorable terms for debt repayment.* Third world countries have already suffered enough, providing the U.S. with cheap raw materials and labor power for decades. Writing off much of this debt would enable these countries to develop their economies, which could be a stimulus to the U.S. economy as well as the world economy.

• • •

The stage is set for a contest of wills over the direction of the U.S. economy. Reagan and Bush have shown themselves to be irresponsible caretakers of the people's interests, sacrificing the welfare of millions for the short-term gain of the wealthy. They have taken the economy to the brink of disaster and are unwilling to change course.

But increasing numbers of people are standing up and calling for a change in direction. Seen most clearly in the millions who supported Jesse Jackson's presidential campaign, sentiment is growing in this country for an end to the devastation of Reaganomics. People are organizing to fight Bush's policies and turn the country onto a humane and prosperous path.

Lenin's Conception of Socialism

Learning from the early experiences of the world's first socialist revolution

by Richard Fleming

Editors' note: What is socialism? If we are socialists, what are we actually fighting for? This question, long a subject of debate on the left, is receiving even more attention today because of the momentous changes taking place in China and the Soviet Union. Many activists are being challenged by developments in these and other countries to rethink their conceptions of socialism.

Part of the confusion comes from a tendency in the left to view socialism as an abstract theoretical issue. Some seek a universal set of principles that "define" socialism, a checklist which determines if a country is "really" socialist. Others say socialism is simply public ownership of the means of production, and other criteria are irrelevant. Still others argue there are no socialist countries in the world today.

The problem with such approaches is

their stress on finding the "right definition" somewhere in the writings of Marx, Engels or Lenin. However, Marx and Engels never provided a detailed picture, nor did Lenin before the October Revolution

of 1917. And since the Russian Revolution, there has been a great variety of forms of socialism in different countries, and even in different periods in the same country.

In the Soviet Union today, for example, Mikhail Gorbachev is experimenting with various approaches to questions of how socialism develops and how socialist democracy operates.

He is trying to discard outmoded views and policies that have created problems for the country's progress.

The following article does not attempt a comprehensive analysis of what is socialism. Rather it aims to open a discus-



Lenin and his wife, N. Krupskaya.

Lenin's success rested on creativity and flexibility in applying Marxism to Russia.

Richard Fleming is an editor of Forward.



Interview in Moscow, February 1920.

Lenin being interviewed by an American journalist. His ideas captured the imagination of people around the world.

sion by looking at the work and experience of V.I. Lenin, who led the world's first socialist revolution. We welcome readers' comments.

IN EXAMINING LENIN'S HISTORY and writings it is clear he had no set conceptions about what socialism would look like. His views on socialism changed and developed as he gained experience with the tactics and methods of constructing it. But the thread which runs through Lenin's writings is his view that socialism should be a society where the working people control their own fate, a society organized to benefit the vast majority. This view was the foundation for Lenin's efforts in socialist construction.

**The Early Days:
October 1917 to June 1918**

At the time of the victory of the Russian Revolution in October 1917, Lenin's views on socialism and how to build it were limited. He held that socialism was characterized by several principal features. These were public ownership of the means of production, an end to exploitation,¹ and the dictatorship of the proletariat.²

As of October 1917, Lenin had not yet translated these general points into an actual plan for socialism in Russia. This reflected not a lack of preparation on Lenin's part, but rather his approach to political problems. Lenin was an eminently practical person. During the long years of struggle before 1917, he devoted little attention to the question of socialism because it was not yet an immediate issue. In Lenin's words, "We must bear firmly in mind that we have never set ourselves 'insoluble' social problems." ("Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?" Sept. 1917).

It was not until the revolution was nearing victory, and the problem of building the new society loomed as a practical matter, that Lenin devoted more attention to the question. He approached the issue of socialism not by looking *primarily* to Marx's writings for answers, but to the actual situation in Russia. Marx offered no blueprint for socialism and had written little about Russia. And the world had changed considerably since Marx's time, especially with the development of imperialism.

Lenin struggled against the view, common among some revolutionaries, that Marxism was a precise plan for socialism. He criticized those who endlessly recited Marx's *words*, but knew nothing about practical revolutionary work and were befuddled by reality. In Lenin's view, these dogmatists transformed Marxism from a guide to action into a set of lifeless formulas:

Either they do not know the facts of life, do not see what actually exists and are unable to look the truth in the face, or they confine themselves to abstractly comparing 'capitalism' with 'socialism' and fail to study the concrete forms and stages of the transition that is taking place in our country.³

A creative approach was especially important, since conditions in Russia differed markedly from those Marx thought necessary for socialist revolution. Marx expected socialism to develop first in one of the highly developed capitalist countries of Western Europe, with their extensive industrial production and large urban proletariat. Russia's population was mostly peasantry, and the industrial working class was small. Some European Marxists viewed Russia as the backward stepchild of Europe which would be one of the last countries to have a socialist revolution.

But Lenin saw in Russia the potential,

and desperate need, for socialism. The oppression endured by the Russian people was extreme. Peasants barely survived tilling the fields of wealthy landlords, and workers labored 14-hour days in the industrial sweatshops of Russia's capitalists. Frequent uprisings against these conditions rocked city and countryside, and the people were open to revolutionary ideas. Lenin and the Russian Communist Party (the Bolsheviks) showed the people that the source of

Lenin's views on socialism changed and developed as he gained experience.



Workers at a factory school, 1920s.

The Soviet government set up schools which gave many workers their first access to higher education.

their oppression was capitalism, and the solution lay in socialism.

Socialist Government

But how was this new society to be achieved? The critical first step, in Lenin's view, was taking political power, replacing the government of the capitalist class with the rule of the working people.

Lenin took Marx's views and further developed them. Marx held that under

Socialism should uphold the rights of working people to a decent standard of living and a life free from exploitation. Society should be run in their interests.

socialism the government would be a dictatorship of the proletariat. The working class, the most politically advanced class, would rule society and lead the other laboring classes — the petty bourgeoisie and the peasants — in building socialism and stopping the bourgeoisie from regaining power.

But in formulating these views, Marx had Western Europe in mind. In Russia, the proletariat was small and 80% of the population were peasants. What role was this vast majority to play in the new government? Lenin held that in Russia

the peasantry must be an integral part of the socialist government, because of their numbers and because the peasants, especially the poor peasants, overwhelmingly supported socialism. He explained that given Russia's particular conditions, a dictatorship of the proletariat *and poor peasantry* was needed.⁴

Lenin's conception of socialist government was an example of his creativity. Some "orthodox" Marxists of the time opposed the peasants' participation in government, claiming it violated Marxism and would corrupt the government with the peasants' petty bourgeois ideology. But Lenin held that these critics failed to understand Russian reality and underestimated the revolutionary sentiments of the peasantry. Their approach would narrow the government's base of support and ensure its eventual downfall. Lenin won most of the party to his view.

The new socialist government set up in Russia after the victory of the revolution was composed of mass organizations called soviets, councils democratically elected by workers, peasants and soldiers. The soviets arose spontaneously in 1905 during a democratic uprising, but were suppressed when that revolution failed. Soviets re-emerged in 1917 as the popular struggle intensified.

Lenin described the soviets as the institutions developed by the Russian Revolution which best represented the interests of the oppressed. He identified some of the key features of the soviets: they were an armed force of workers and peasants; they provided an intimate bond with the people; their personnel were elected and subject to recall at any time; and they helped train and educate the oppressed, among other features.⁵

One of the key functions of the socialist government, in Lenin's view, was



Election of a rural council in the early Soviet Union.

Women played an active role in the revolutionary government.

guaranteeing democracy for the working people. Under capitalism, government existed to ensure the bourgeoisie's right to make profits. As Lenin put it, "Even in the most democratic bourgeois republics, [the people,] while possessing equal rights by law, have in fact been debarred by thousands of devices and subterfuges from participation in political life and enjoyment of democratic rights and liberties."⁶

Under socialism, the government was to defend working people's rights to a decent standard of living and a life free from exploitation. The socialist government should end the oppression of minority nationalities and women. Working people should rule society in their own interests.

Consolidating the Socialist Government

The new Soviet government was still organizing itself when it became clear that the issue of who controlled the state had not been resolved. The overthrown bourgeoisie and the rich landlords retained tremendous clout through control of crucial sectors of the economy. Within days of their overthrow, they began furiously organizing to regain their lost influence.

Lenin pointed out that the political strength of the capitalists and large landlords would be decisively broken only by dismantling their economic power, and this was one of the Soviet government's earliest goals. On October 26, 1917, the government decreed

the abolition of private property in land to break the power of the large landowners. Over the next several months their massive estates were subdivided and the land turned over to the poor peasants. Food hoarded by the rich landlords was seized and distributed to the people.

Next came the large capitalists. On January 18, 1918, all factories, mines and transport were declared government property, and over the following months many industries were nationalized. Workers' councils were set up to oversee the factories and defend workers' rights on the job. These initial steps helped weaken the bourgeoisie and consolidate the power of the Soviet government. By early 1918, the Soviet government's hold on power was secure, at least temporarily.

But more difficulties lay ahead. The conditions Lenin faced at that time were bleak. Russian society was in collapse. The country was devastated by years of fighting in World War I, large areas of its territory were occupied by foreign troops, domestic counterrevolutionaries were plotting the overthrow of socialism, and the economy was a shambles. Starvation and disease were commonplace.

How were Lenin and the Bolsheviks to solve these problems and organize socialism? How were they to organize the economy, get agriculture and industry back on their feet, and set up new political structures? There were no easy answers. Later, Lenin was even led to say that organizing socialism was a far more difficult task than overthrowing the bourgeoisie.⁷

Lenin's Views Evolve

As Lenin began formulating policies on these questions, some of his views



Vegetable merchants, mid-1920s.

A limited free market flourished under the New Economic Policy.

about socialist construction began to change. The actual experience of trying to solve problems brought out new factors not previously foreseen. For example, prior to the revolution Lenin felt organizing the socialist economy would be quite easy. In August 1917, Lenin said:

Accounting and control — that is the *main* thing needed to achieve the 'smooth working,' the correct functioning of the *first phase* of communist society [socialism]. . . . The accounting and control necessary for this have been simplified by capitalism to the extreme and reduced to the extraordinarily simple operations — which any literate person can perform — of supervising and recording, knowledge of the four rules of arithmetic, and issuing appropriate receipts.⁸

After six months of intensive work trying to remodel the economy, Lenin

realized this task was much more complex. To transform Russia's backward economy into a modern socialist economy was a massive project. Much more was required than simply "accounting and control." In April 1918, Lenin described the task this way:

In every socialist revolution . . . the principal task of the proletariat, and of the poor peasants which it leads, is the positive or constructive work of setting up an extremely intricate and delicate system of new organizational relationships extending to the planned production and distribution of the goods required for the existence of tens of millions of people. . . . [It is a] difficult problem.⁹

On a series of other questions as well, Lenin's views evolved. For example, he changed his view on the possibility of building socialism in one country. In March 1921, Lenin said at the Tenth Party Congress that the struggle for socialism in Russia could not succeed without the victory of socialism in other European countries. Two years later, in the article "Better Fewer, But Better," Lenin said history had shown socialist revolutions were not imminent in other European countries, but this did not mean Russia could not succeed in its own socialist revolution. Other issues on which Lenin's views evolved included whether to use money or a system of labor certificates to reward work, how extensive centralized planning should be, and whether the overthrown bourgeoisie should be allowed to vote, to name a few.

What can we say about Lenin's views on socialism in the late spring of 1918? By then it had become clear that setting up socialism in Russia would be a far more complex process than he envisioned even a year before. The prevailing form of economy in Russia in 1918 was individual production on small

farms, with only scattered industrial production. Lenin said it would take much time and effort to overcome this state of affairs, and any ideas about immediately setting up socialism were illusions. Russian society was not at that time socialist, said Lenin; it was moving *towards* socialism. In May 1918, he put it this way:

No one, I think, in studying the question of the economic system of Russia, had denied its transitional character. Nor, I think, has any Communist denied that the term Socialist Soviet Republic implies the determination of Soviet power *to achieve the transition to socialism*, and *not* that the new economic system is recognized as a socialist order.¹⁰

In the same article, Lenin pointed out that even state capitalism would be a step forward compared to the primitive level of production prevailing in Russia.¹¹ Immediate emphasis had to be given to modernizing and developing the economy.

"Capitalism can be utterly vanquished, and will be utterly vanquished by socialism creating a new and much higher productivity of labor."

War Communism: June 1918 to December 1920

In the summer of 1918, a major development forced radical alterations in Lenin's plans for socialist development.



Soup kitchen under "war communism."

The invasion by foreign capitalist governments created harsh conditions for the people.

In June, a group of imperialist countries, fearful the Soviet revolution might inspire revolt in their own lands, invaded Russia to restore the bourgeois order. Thousands of French, British, U.S. and Japanese troops attacked from east and west, occupying large areas of Russian territory. The imperialist countries also sponsored uprisings by Russian counterrevolutionaries to try to topple the Soviet government.

This assault by four of the world's strongest countries profoundly affected socialism in Russia. All plans for economic development had to be adjusted, and most of Russia's resources and efforts for the next two-and-a-half years were devoted to the war.

At the time of the invasion, Russia

was poorly equipped to defend itself. Industry and agriculture had still not recovered from the devastation of World War I. The imperialist troops scored some initial successes and within a matter of months were advancing on Russia's major urban centers. A severe crisis loomed, leading Lenin and the Soviet government to adopt a series of drastic policies called "war communism." "War communism" profoundly affected all aspects of society. Food was desperately needed, and Lenin said that all food over a set amount for each peasant must be turned over to the government for distribution to the cities and the army. This policy of "surplus appropriation" did not accord with the classical Marxist principle of distribution under socialism.

Marx had said that during socialism, every person would be rewarded according to the amount of work he or she performed. The more work a person did, the more of society's goods he or she would receive. Under "surplus appropriation," no matter how much a peasant worked, he or she still received only a fixed amount of food.

Lenin knew this system could not be sustained indefinitely. It would eventually sap morale and undermine the peasants' enthusiasm for production. But he saw the measure as critical to obtain the vast amounts of food needed, and he felt the peasants would agree since the policy defended the revolution that brought them land.

The war also forced a delay in what Lenin hoped would be the orderly collectivization of agriculture. Lenin saw collectivization as crucial to transform the peasants' individualistic ideology and to modernize and mechanize agriculture. In December 1918, Lenin called for merging individual plots into large collective farms. But little collectivization actually took place over the next several years. Implementing collectivization at the time would have required tremendous effort by Lenin and the party — educating the peasants about its advantages, helping them carry it out, and following up on problems. But defeating the invasion required most of Lenin's attention. Consequently the number of collective farms increased only slightly, from 3,100 in 1918 to 4,400 in 1920, accounting for just a fraction of agricultural production.¹²

The demands of the war also altered industrial development, which Lenin had hoped to develop in a balanced way. Because of the desperate need for workers in the war factories, Lenin supported an extreme policy known as the "militarization of labor," which treated indus-

trial workers essentially as soldiers. The government ordered a general mobilization of workers in April 1919, making labor in defense industries compulsory for everyone able to work. Wages were paid not in money but in food, clothing and limited quantities of household goods. Long hours were required, sometimes longer than those worked before the revolution. Lenin had not anticipated imposing such conditions after the revolution, but he saw very little alternative.

Mikhail Gorbachev's effort to reform the Soviet Union is of immense importance to the Soviet people today. His aim is to invigorate the economy and end bureaucracy.

After two-and-a-half long years, the efforts of the Russian people succeeded. The domestic reactionaries were defeated and the foreign troops driven from Russian soil. This historic victory over four global powers ensured the survival of the Soviet government, but it came at a high cost. Russia's efforts to build and modernize its socialist economy were sidetracked. Thousands of people, including many veteran party members, were killed. The lives of the working people were in many respects even worse than 1917.



Gorbachev meets the people.

His dramatic reforms aim at revitalizing socialism in the Soviet Union.

Some Russian leftists criticized Lenin's "war communism" policy as too drastic and a departure from socialism, but Lenin sharply disagreed. In "A Great Beginning," written in 1919, Lenin said that socialism does "not take shape in fantastically harmonious, 'ideal' conditions, but in the real conditions of the frantic resistance of the bourgeoisie which assumes many and diverse forms."

After the defeat of the imperialist intervention, it was even clearer to Lenin that Russia must modernize its economy as quickly as possible. He explained the ultimate key to socialism's success in "A Great Beginning":

Capitalism can be utterly vanquished, and will be utterly vanquished by socialism creating a new and much higher productivity of labor. This is a very difficult matter and must take a long time; but it has been started, and that is the main thing.

**New Economic Policy:
From January 1921 on**

By the end of the imperialist interven-

tion, Russia was in deep economic trouble. Industrial production was one-seventh the 1917 level and few consumer goods were being produced. Agricultural production was half the 1917 level. The peasants had little incentive to increase output since any extra food was taken by the government. Their standard of living was falling, as was their enthusiasm for socialism. In several regions, unrest among the peasants began flaring in late 1920.

Lenin compared Russia to a man beaten within an inch of his life. The country had passed through seven years of almost continuous war. Lenin realized that "war communism" must be dismantled and replaced by policies to stimulate agriculture and industry, yield more consumer goods, and revive the flagging trade between urban and rural areas.¹³

Over several months, Lenin formulated a set of measures — collectively called the New Economic Policy (NEP). He introduced the NEP in March 1921 at the party's Tenth Congress.

The New Economic Policy brought sweeping changes. In agriculture, the "surplus appropriation" system was replaced by a "tax in kind," a fixed quantity of goods owed the government. The peasants kept all production over this amount; the more the peasants produced, the more they kept. Some private trade was allowed to develop so the peasants could sell their surplus food. While the government retained primary control over trade to minimize speculation and profiteering, Lenin felt the government should not monopolize all trade. At the Tenth Party Congress he explained why:

The vastness of our agricultural country with its poor transport system, boundless expanses, varying climate, diverse farming conditions, etc., makes

a certain freedom of exchange between local agriculture and local industry, on a local scale, inevitable. In this respect, we are very much to blame for having gone too far; we overdid the nationalization of industry and trade, clamping down on local exchange of commodities. Was that a mistake? It certainly was.

Lenin saw agricultural collectivization as premature, given the devastation of the countryside. Collectivization required higher productivity and more equipment than existed at the time. Politically, the peasants were not yet ready for collectivization. For the most part they were reluctant to give up the individual plots they had so recently won.

The NEP brought significant changes to industry. It placed a higher priority on light industry and consumer goods. Fuel and raw materials were allocated especially to these areas. Many small enterprises nationalized during the war were leased to individuals, who ran them and took responsibility for their profits or losses. Lenin held it was not efficient for the government to administer tens of thousands of small enterprises. Individual initiative could be utilized to revive production and trade without jeopardizing the socialist principle of public ownership of the means of production. Strict limits were placed on denationalization, and the largest and most important factories were still operated by the government. A government survey in 1923 showed that 88.5% of Russia's industrial enterprises were privately owned or leased, but 84.5% of all industrial workers were employed in state-run factories.¹⁴

To modernize production, Lenin also called for wider use of "bourgeois experts" in industry. "Bourgeois experts" might not support the revolution, but had valuable scientific, technological or administrative skills. Lenin was careful

to explain that utilizing such experts did not mean turning factories over to the bourgeoisie. Workers' councils still guided production and oversaw the bourgeois experts.

We must not be afraid of Communists 'learning' from bourgeois experts, including merchants, petty capitalist co-operators and capitalists The results of the 'learning' must be tested only by practical experience and by doing things better than the bourgeois experts at your side.¹⁵

Under the NEP, Lenin also opened the door to foreign economic investments on a selective basis. While this policy incurred costs, Lenin felt on balance it benefited socialist development. The capital invested invigorated the economy, and strict limits were placed



Unity Photo

Market in Kazakhstan, U.S.S.R., 1988.

Limited free markets are part of the current effort to invigorate the economy.

on the profits foreign capitalists earned from these enterprises.

Controversy Over the NEP

The NEP was a drastic shift from “war communism” and generated substantial controversy. Lenin was sharply criticized by some Marxists, both in Russia and abroad. From the “left” came criticisms that Lenin was retreating into capitalism. They claimed that to build socialism, collectivization of production had to always advance to higher levels and individual production had to be steadily curtailed. They were shocked that Lenin was actually *increasing* the scope of individual production.

Others’ criticism came from the right.

They claimed the dire problems in Russia’s economy proved that constructing socialism in Russia was premature. Marx never talked about building socialism in such an economically backward country, they said. What was needed was a prolonged period of capitalism to develop the productive forces. After capitalism was fully developed, socialism could be considered.

Lenin responded sharply to these critics of both “left” and right. He pointed out that neither side understood what was required to build socialism. Lenin told his “left” critics that they failed to realize that socialism could not exist without a qualitative modernization of the economy. Otherwise, Russia was doomed to being red and poor. The NEP



A farming couple in Hungary, 1988.

*Agricultural organization has widely varied under socialism.
Hungary’s farming is collectivized.*

was a retreat, said Lenin, but a temporary retreat carried out under the firm hand of the socialist government. Socialism could never be built through constant advances; retreats were sometimes necessary. If Russia's economic problems were not solved, the people themselves would overthrow socialism.

Addressing his critics from the right, Lenin pointed out that Russia's economy would be most quickly modernized not under the rule of the capitalists, but under a socialist government. Under the bourgeoisie, there was tremendous waste as the capitalists diverted their profits into luxury goods, speculation and other activities of little benefit to the people. Under socialism, more resources could go into economic development. Lenin pointed out that his critics were actually pessimistic about the possibility of *ever* building socialism and were just looking for excuses to return to capitalism.

Lenin stated at the First Congress of the Communist International in June 1921:

The development of capitalism, controlled and regulated by the proletarian state (i.e. 'state' capitalism in this sense of the term), is advantageous and necessary in an extremely devastated and backward small-peasant country (within certain limits, of course), inasmuch as it is capable of hastening the immediate revival of peasant farming.

Through intense struggle, Lenin won over the majority of the party and the people, and the NEP was adopted. Over the next several years, production dramatically increased. Food output climbed, and industrial production leapt from 35% of the 1912 level in 1921 to 54% the following year.¹⁶ As the economy improved, people's enthusiasm for socialism grew.

Lenin's adoption of the NEP reflected

his evolving view of socialism. He realized that while Russia's political system was the most advanced in the world, its economic system was among the poorest. This problem was critical, since if

*Socialist construction
is not a straight path;
twists and turns are
inevitable.*

socialism could not ultimately provide a higher standard of living than capitalism, why would people want socialism?

The protracted nature of building socialism became clearer to Lenin during these years. Lenin also saw the need for experimentation in building socialism. Since there was no road map to socialism, different methods had to be tried to see what would be successful. As he put it in a 1919 article:

If the Japanese scientist, in order to help mankind vanquish syphilis, had the patience to test six hundred and five preparations before he developed a six hundred and sixth which met definite requirements, then those who want to solve a more difficult problem, namely, to vanquish capitalism, must have the perseverance to try hundreds and thousands of new methods, means and weapons of struggle in order to elaborate the most suitable of them.¹⁷

Unfinished Business

Unfortunately, Lenin's health began failing after a stroke in March 1922. Though he recovered, his work schedule was sharply curtailed. In March 1923, Lenin suffered a more serious stroke which ended his political career.

He died in January 1924 at the age of 53.

Socialism was very much in its infancy. The NEP was still in full swing and plans had not been formulated for ending it. The collectivization of agriculture had barely started. National eco-

*The means by which
society produces its
wealth – factories,
mines, farms – are
transformed to public
ownership and
exploitation is largely
eliminated. Socialism
can unleash the
creativity of the
people.*

conomic planning hardly existed. Many problems still confronted the party. One can only conjecture how Lenin might have approached these problems as his views on socialism continued to develop.

A critical problem that occupied much of Lenin's attention during his last year of work was the problem of bureaucracy. Before the revolution, Lenin viewed the socialist state as inherently less bureaucratic than the capitalist state. The socialist state apparatus would be smaller and simpler than the capitalist state and would begin to "wither away" as soon as it was set up.

As time went by, though, Lenin be-

gan to see the matter differently. The socialist state had vast responsibilities, including reorganizing and overseeing the national economy, developing and maintaining new political institutions, and ensuring that the overthrown exploiters did not return to power. These tasks were complex and generated a tendency towards spontaneous growth of the government machinery.

The Soviet state apparatus grew steadily larger, with a proliferation of agencies and institutions. As time went by, Lenin increasingly saw danger in this trend. He felt the Soviet government was losing touch with the people, and he stressed the need for the government to be controlled from below.

Despite Lenin's concern with bureaucracy, the problem worsened in the early 1920s. In 1923, in one of his last articles, Lenin warned:

Our state apparatus is so deplorable, not to say wretched, that we must first think very carefully how to combat its defects We must reduce our state apparatus to the utmost degree of economy. We must banish from it all traces of extravagance, of which so much has been left over from tsarist Russia, from its bureaucratic capitalist state machine.¹⁸

Unfortunately, Lenin died in 1924 and was unable to follow through on this problem. The fact that the struggle against bureaucracy was not pursued later led to serious problems for the Soviet Union.

Conclusions

What can we say about Lenin's view of this new social system? On the most basic level, Lenin saw socialism as a society dedicated to the interests of the working people, who make up the vast majority of the population. The basic

means by which society produces its wealth — factories, mines and farms — are transferred from private to public ownership, and exploitation is for the most part eliminated. Socialism unleashes the creativity of the common people, who are capable of tremendous advances when not laboring under a system of exploitation.

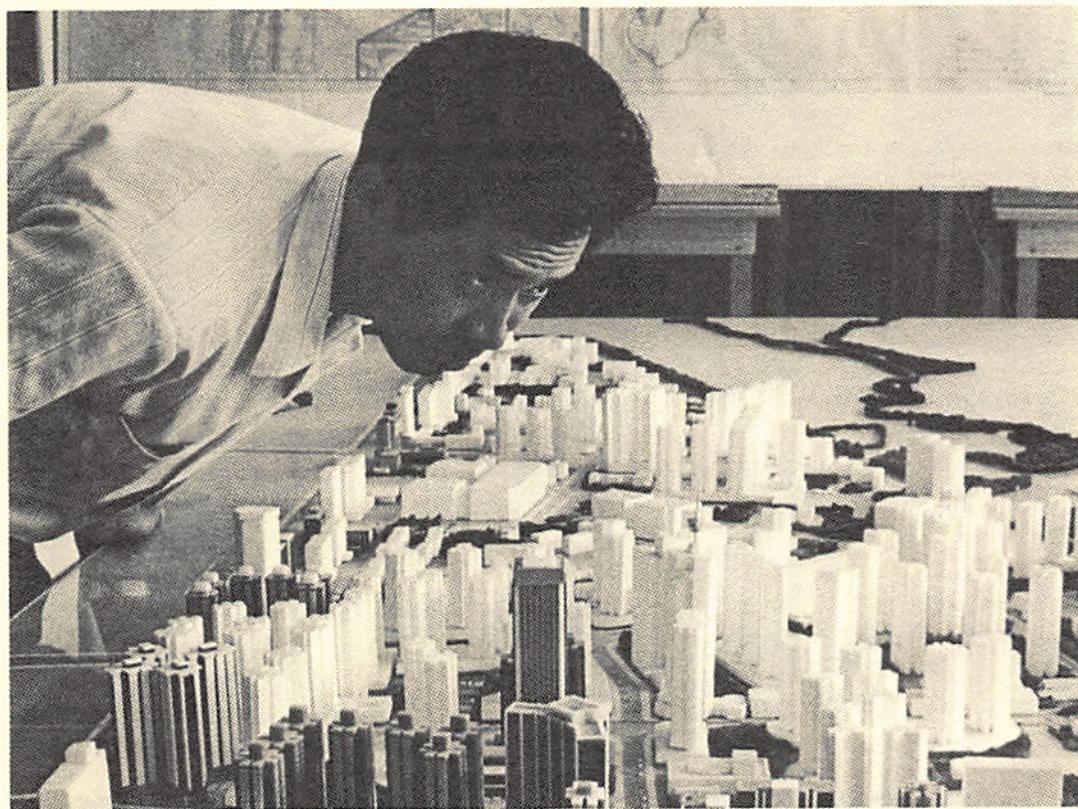
Lenin held that capitalism could not be eliminated and socialism fully established at one stroke. It took time to phase out the old capitalist machinery, set up new economic and political institutions, and remold people's way of thinking.

Lenin believed that socialism would eventually replace capitalism worldwide because it would prove economically

superior and would provide a better quality of life for its people.

Realizing socialism's potential for economic progress required flexibility and innovation. While Lenin upheld the basic Marxist tenets of social ownership of the means of production and "to each according to his work," he utilized a variety of methods.

In the political sphere, Lenin held that socialism should be far more democratic than the most democratic capitalist state. Socialism provided rights and freedoms for working people that capitalism did not offer, such as the right to a job, the right to health care and to financial security in old age. Socialism also provided rights capitalism *promised* but did not deliver, like the right to



City planner in Shenzhen, China.

Shenzhen, a "special economic zone," attracts foreign investment. China's leaders hope capitalism can help build socialism.

genuinely participate in the government. Minority nationalities were guaranteed the right to develop their own culture, use their own language and govern themselves. Working people controlled the socialist government through their own political party, the Communist Party. The socialist government defended the rights of the working people and ensured that the overthrown bourgeoisie did not return to power. In fact, socialism could only be built if the majority of the people supported it and were actively involved in building it.

Lenin cautioned that Russia's path to

socialism should not be mechanically applied to other countries. Each country had to find its own way, based on its particular situation. In a speech to a gathering of Marxists from other countries at the First Congress of the Communist International in 1919 he said, "In our revolution we advanced along the path of practice, and not of theory."

As for what socialism in the U.S. will look like, no one can predict exactly. Socialism has never been built in a country like this. We will face very different problems than those Lenin confronted in 1917, and we do not aim to copy the



Linda Brown Smith (at door) won historic 1954 school desegregation case.

Under capitalism, such victories are often temporary. Smith has reopened the case on behalf of her children because of continuing segregation and unequal schools. Under socialism, inequality can be eliminated, and a more just society created.

example of Russia under Lenin. Socialists in the U.S. cannot take the approach of seeking a model in another country.

The form socialism takes here will inevitably be shaped by this country's particular conditions, including the highly developed capitalist economy, long history of bourgeois democracy, multinational population, vast geographical re-

sources and particular cultural heritage. While it would be impossible to describe exactly what this new social system will look like, it will be a positive new era in which the insecurity, oppression, and injustice characteristic of the U.S. today will be eliminated, and the potential for a better life and social progress can be realized.

Footnotes

1. When Lenin talked about ending "exploitation," he meant the process of capitalists not paying workers the full value of what they produce. The capitalists withhold as profits part of the wealth that workers produce, a process called "exploitation." "The dictatorship of the proletariat" refers to the nature of government under socialism, in which the working people hold state power. They operate the government in the interests of the overwhelming majority of society and ensure that the overthrown capitalists do not return to power.

2. It should be noted that Lenin never gave a single precise definition of socialism in any one article. The features mentioned are derived from several of Lenin's writings, including "Karl Marx," "Tasks of the Proletariat in our Revolution" and *State and Revolution*.

3. "Left-Wing Childishness and the Petty-Bourgeois Mentality," May 1918.

4. At different times, Lenin used different phrases to describe the socialist government, including "dictatorship of the proletariat" and "dictatorship of the proletariat and poor peasants." In his "Address to the First Congress of the Communist International" in 1919, Lenin said: "The substance of Soviet government is that the permanent and only foundation of state power, the entire machinery of state, is the mass-scale organization of the classes oppressed by capitalism, i.e., the workers and the semi-proletarians (peasants who do not exploit the labor of others and regularly resort to the sale of at

least part of their own labor-power)."

The main point is not the exact phrase Lenin used at any given time, but his *conception* of the socialist government. It is clear Lenin saw the poor peasants making up an integral part of the government.

5. "Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?" September 1917.

6. "Address to the First Congress of the Communist International," 1919.

7. "A Great Beginning," June 1919.

8. *State and Revolution*.

9. "The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government."

10. "Left-Wing Childishness and the Petty-Bourgeois Mentality," emphasis added.

11. By "state capitalism" Lenin meant a system where capitalist economy predominated and where the government, or state, administered the key sectors of the economy.

12. See E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, Vol. 2, Penguin Books, 1952, p. 159.

13. In "The Tax in Kind," written in April 1921, Lenin stated:

"It was the war and the ruin that forced us into War Communism. It was not, and could not be, a policy that corresponded to the economic tasks of the proletariat. It was a makeshift. The correct policy of the proletariat exercising its dictatorship in a small-peasant country is to obtain grain in exchange for the manufactured goods the peasant needs. That is the only kind of food policy that corresponds to the tasks of the

proletariat, and can strengthen the foundations of socialism and lead to its complete victory.”

14. Carr, *Bolshevik Revolution*, p. 302.

15. “The Tax in Kind,” April 1921.

16. *Ibid.* p. 309.

17. “A Great Beginning.”

18. “Better Fewer, But Better.”

Art, Politics, and the Life Force

by Cliff Joseph



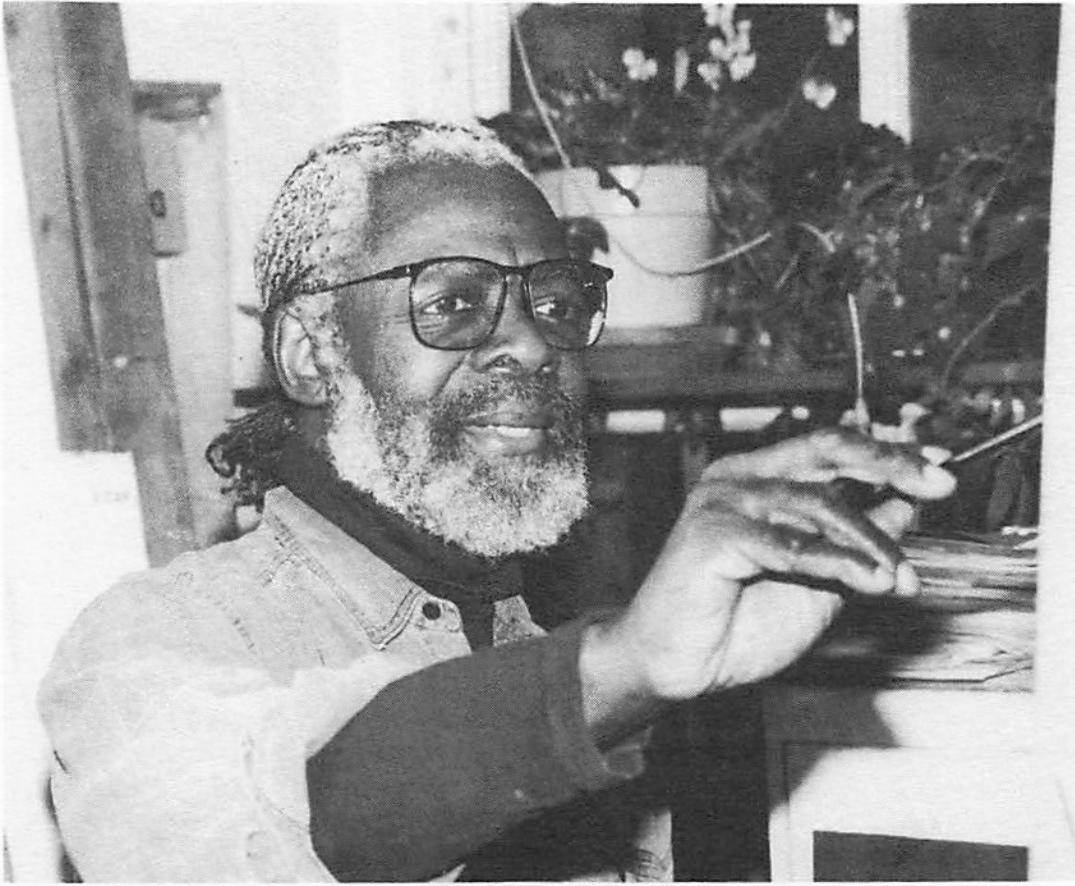
"The Militant"

Oil on canvas, 16" X 20", 1966.

This work was done to show the unity that developed between Black and white civil rights workers.

There is a tradition in the arts that comments on society either directly or by implication. This tradition has always been both overtly and covertly resisted by power structures. Unfortunately, the 20th Century has produced too few truly effective social commentators among those of us who like to be regarded as socially concerned artists. Too many of us today are too evasive, self-centered, and overly preoccupied with the precious techniques of art, to notice or care about the crying inequities that exist in a world that can correct them.

Cliff Joseph is an African American painter living in New York whose works have been exhibited nationally and internationally. He is an activist in Art Against Apartheid, was co-chair of the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition, and served as New York co-chair of Artists for Jesse Jackson.



Michael Tsukahara — Forward Photo

Cliff Joseph

The artist at work in his New York studio.

We live in a society dominated by values which favor imperialist exploitation and wasteful technological striving, as it disregards human dignity, and violates the ecological principle upon which all life depends. Artists and their art are faced with an inevitable and persistent challenge. That challenge, which requires the assumption of sacrificial responsibility, is met for the most part with timid response, or total indifference; leaving humanity with less than the vital creative power it needs to confront and expose the dehumanizing, life-destroying forces of our time, and to set into motion the creative alternatives art can suggest.

In my view, confrontation is the truest function of art, in a world bent on resisting the admonition of truth. In this context, confrontation is synonymous with social action, which, to be taken seriously as art and as socially functional, must achieve unity with aesthetic principle.

It is increasingly urgent to recognize the vital links between culture and the artistic expression of oppressed peoples. Historically, the impact of such expression, reaching us most profoundly through the unconscious, has brought sustenance within the culture, and opportunities for insight and growth to all.

Through music, dance, drama, poetry, novel and playwriting, and the visual arts, Blacks have contributed to the artistic and cultural growth of America, while

portraying their country in its truest light to their fellow citizens and the world. Jazz, the greatest art form America has produced, grew out of African-American roots to enrich the musical reservoirs of human expression throughout the world. The art of Hispanics, Asians and Native Americans has added depth, breadth and power to the expression of universal spirituality.

The incessant corruption of the ruling culture, however, makes heritage difficult to maintain. American Blacks, for the most part, do not listen to jazz preferentially. Latino (as well as Black) youths play disco and rap on their portable radios, too often ignoring the rich African elements of Salsa. Some Chicano and Native American people turn their crafts into meaningless commercial objects, as they struggle to survive. With this same urgency, many Black painters produce works indistinguishable from those of their white colleagues.

In more recent history, however, efforts for creative response to our country's and the world's social, economic and political ills grew and became more focused. In the '50s and '60s, street musicians in Black and Hispanic communities celebrated ethnic power and pride, and mourned the inevitable tragedies of oppression, in a context of sharing and caring.

Sixties rock music articulated white youth's awareness of its own oppression, as it protested war, economic injustice, and alienation from the accepted values of the industrial age. Western folk music fused with Blues, and sometimes Eastern harmonies, seeking a more universal truth.

In the '70s, significant statements on urban reality were made in subway graffiti. Quality of expression was frequently policed within the culture, as graffiti artists sought to eliminate inferior work. For the sensitized mind, much of the work was aesthetic, relevant, and essentially affirming of mental health and the need for positive change.

Then came Electric Boogie, Popping, and Break Dancing, countering the confusing and steadily failing models of adult authority, in a world of unparalleled hypocrisy, corruption, and apocalyptic thrust.

These art forms held the potential for mastery, fulfillment and unity. Sadly, however, the "dream-deferred" has left us today with regressive expression, destruction and hopelessness. Street culture today has few new answers for its salvation. Our only defense against drugs and moral corruption is a futile effort to reinforce dying structures. Illusion hides the profound nature of our impotence.

Much has been lost. And the danger of continued loss is tied not merely to the shrinking art funds, but to the frayed fabric of our deteriorating communities as well.



"Stamp for SNCC"

Ink on paper, 7 1/4" X 14", 1967.

This work was done for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to be made into a stamp used by SNCC workers all over the country. SNCC was a major force in the struggle for Black liberation in the 1960s.

While art which denies the essential challenges of our time prospers on the investment market, too little relevant art finds meaningful connection to the less privileged classes. For if creative expression is to flourish, the relationship between artist and audience must be nurtured.

Such nurturance evolves naturally in simpler times, but in today's world, public effort is needed. Such effort has precedence in our history. During the administration of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, for the first time in American history, thousands of artists were paid by the government in the Works Progress Administration (WPA) to work productively and develop their art. Musicians were paid for playing in community bands, and writers were hired to write local or state histories. There was money for public murals and for teaching children to sketch and paint. Such generous government support for the arts, particularly as it affected artists of the lower economic class, was not given without careful assessment of the investment's potential return in cultural, capital and political assets. In order to secure that investment, care was taken to provide the broadest range of opportunities, to the most deserving among artists, in service to the public's need for



"Hands of Freedom"

Ink on paper, 14 1/2" X 23 1/2", 1968.

This work commemorates Michael Schwerner, Andrew Goodman and James Chaney, three civil rights workers murdered in Mississippi in 1964. The artist was a personal friend of the Goodman family and gave the original to them.

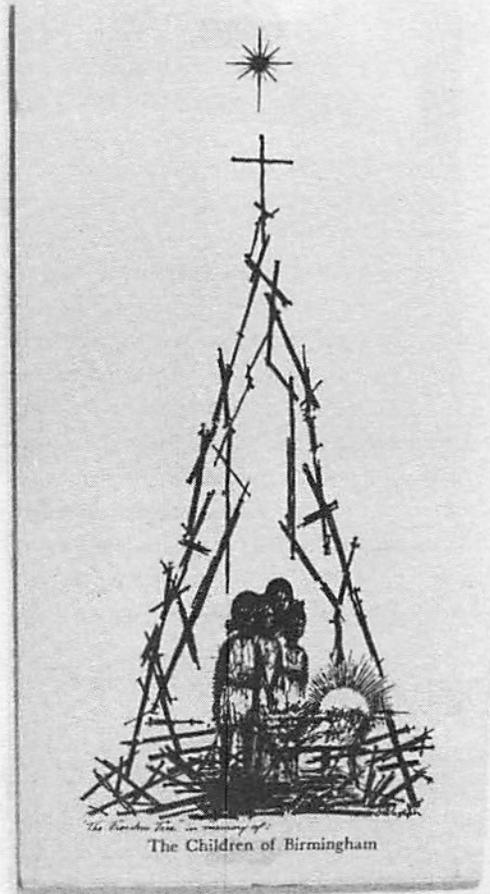
artistic nurturance. It is this concept which spawned the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). In contrast to Roosevelt's WPA, however, it is important to note that NEA's support to artists contemporary with its evolvment has been minimal.

The sixties brought another era of creative productivity. With unprecedented ferment, Black artists built on the creative traditions of their people, to nurture newly responsive audiences. Postwar prosperity had created a larger Black middle class, better able to afford the arts, while the civil rights movement had brought greater pride in Black culture.

That generation gave birth to new expressions among whites also. In the shadow of massively destructive wars and the development of a technology capable of total destruction, faith in Western science and rational progress was countered by a growing disenchantment. Enriched by Black, Eastern and Native American cultures, dissident white artists drew on their own roots to confront America with its contradictions. The "beats" and "hippies" of the period drew inspiration from Black protest, Black music, and Black life styles.

But the movement was short lived. For Blacks, the turning point was probably 1968, with the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. For dissident whites, 1967, with the inevitable defeat of hundreds of thousands of people who dared to carry their anti-war protest to the Pentagon. The supreme power of technocracy set the course for today's generation — mechanization, destruction, apathy and selfishness.

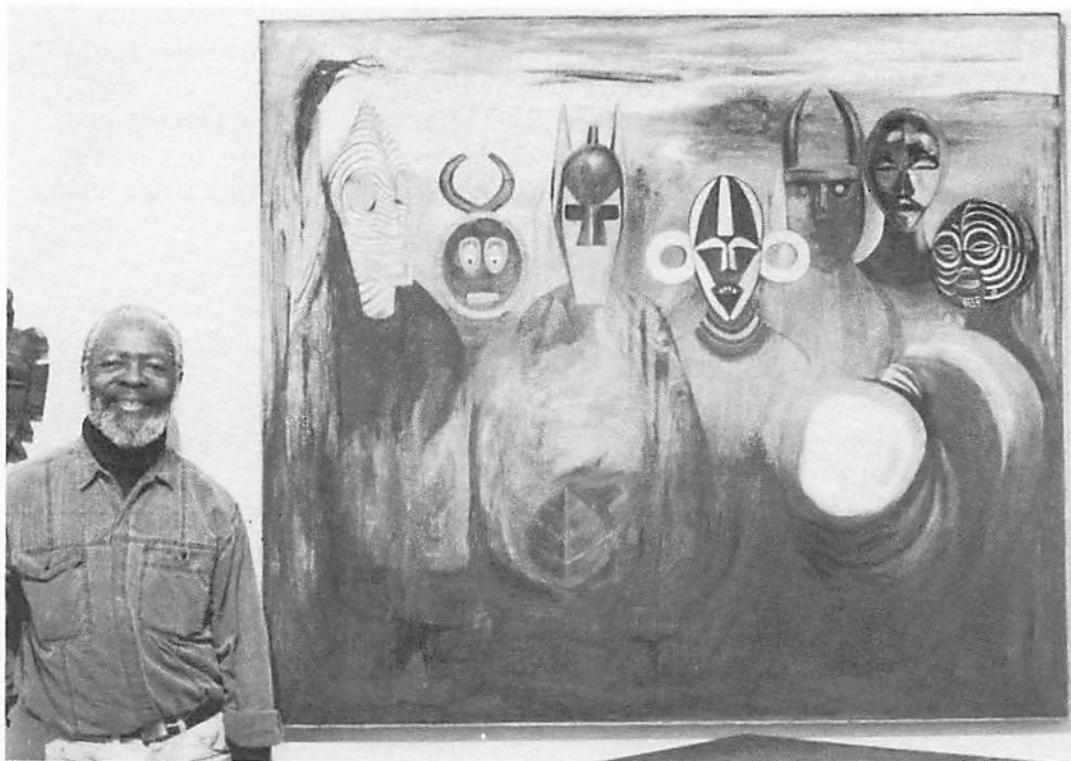
That the assassinations of King and Malcolm, and the repression of other Black leaders and their allies, should leave our Black communities so shattered is perhaps a failure in the broader trust of our creative leadership. What was the relevance of our artistic expressions to the masses of poor people in our urban ghettos? Were the abstract powers of our music, our poetry, drama and dance integrated into the lives of our people? Did it help them connect their spiritual roots to the struggle for integrity in an alien world? Unless they were actively involved in the creative process, probably not. As Jose Arguelles in *The Transformative*



"The Children of Birmingham"

Ink on paper, 9" X 17", 1966.

This work was done for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to be used as a Christmas card. It commemorates the four African American children killed when a Birmingham, Alabama, church was bombed in 1963. It shows the debris of the church formed into a Christmas tree and a manger. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote a thank-you letter to the artist after he saw this work.



Michael Tsukahara — Forward Photo

Cliff Joseph and his painting "Ancestral Affirmation"

This work was done in 1987 to recognize the African heritage of African Americans.

Vision has summarized, "The problem of art cannot be solved apart from the problem of life."

The Transformative Vision is a thorough analysis of the history of human expression, an analysis which bases its hope for the future on the fully realized individual. Its fundamental contemporary concern is "the tyranny of reason over vision, woman, the earth and 'minority' views and cultures."

Neither art nor religion, as traditionally practiced, can afford total relief from this situation. As a summer evening's escape, the subtle complexities and contradictions of modern jazz fall on ears clogged with the realities of meaningless work, frustrating relationships, impotence and hopelessness. The anger engendered by such alienation responds better to repetition and amplified noise. Jazz musicians remain poor, not only because funding is limited, but because the reality of our culture makes the immediacy of disco appear to be more relevant.

Many Black visual artists create paintings and sculpture which are only available to the affluent. Yet, when democratic conscience stirs the artist to produce inexpensive prints, most working class consumers ignore their efforts. Better for them, a Woolworth pastoral, denying the reality of feeling, of contradiction, of life.

There are those who would have us believe that the cultural choices of the masses are, at best, the result of limited education, at worst, a reflection of innate inferiority. It is obvious, however, that Salsa did not evolve from academia, nor did

the aesthetically beautiful religious objects of Africa or Native America depend on the scholarly rigor of advanced education. The creative expressions of a people whose formal education seldom extended beyond puberty has been valued for centuries, while much of what is created today will be forgotten tomorrow.

As discouraging as this picture is, support for the arts is more essential now than ever before. Within this framework of technocracy, art stands as a vital force, preserving the values of psyche, the intuitive base from which all life-affirming action springs. We must organize our communities in the struggle for more, not less NEA support, and to demand that our taxes be used not for bombs, missiles and their inevitable by-product, death, but for creation, education, culture and life preserving human services.

The essential nature of the American political and economic system has not changed, and people are no less in need of spiritually enriched artistic nurturance which can sustain them in times of stress, and inspire them to seek self- and community-actualizing alternatives to status-quo living.

The popular attraction to such movie spectacles as *Star Wars* indicates a deeper public need than momentary escape into a fantasy world of the future. In spite of the other-worldliness of the scenes and characters of *Star Wars*, there is much that is identifiable with our world today, as we know it, and our everyday life as we live it. We can recognize immediately the similarity of basic issues which set the stage for struggle in both realms: Life vs. death; good vs. evil; psyche vs. techne; Princess Leia and Luke Skywalker vs. Darth Vader; working-class people vs. the imperialistic ruling class.

Viewed in this framework, is it such a curious fact that Ronald—Star Wars—Reagan, a celluloid "hero" of the past, survived politically to enjoy the adulation of reelection. Do we need to ask how one whose fame and fortune was built largely portraying one of film's fair-haired Indian slayers qualifies for such awesome responsibility in the real life picture, with his trigger finger poised to fire nuclear bombs? Those of us who are familiar with the *Star Wars* epic will recall that Darth Vader had been a disciple of Obie Ben Kenobi, the patriarch committed to the force. Just as the Angel Lucifer, who attempted to usurp the power of God for evil purposes, Darth Vader fell from grace to become the Imperial Ruler, representing the dark side of the force. In that capacity, he held awesome powers, for use in service to evil, destruction and death.

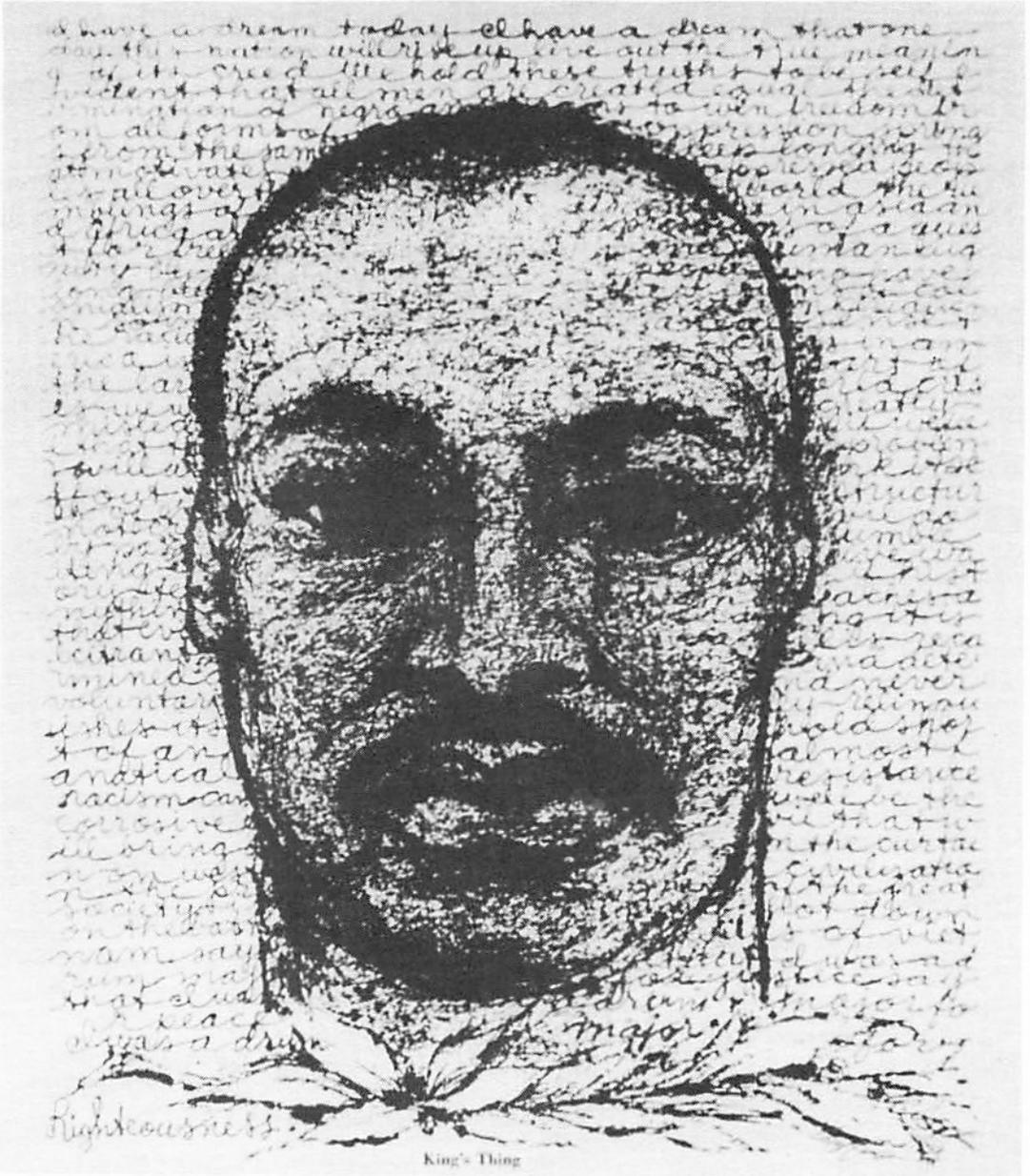
In our world, with his pretensions to concern for human rights, Reagan symbolically represents and is a false hero, shaped by the land of make-believe, revered



"No Man Is Free Until All Men Are Free"

Ink and watercolor on paper 8" X 10", 1972.

This work was done at the time of the Attica prison rebellion. The title of the painting is written into the barbed wire.



King's Thing

"King's Thing"

Ink on paper, 9 1/2" X 17 1/2", 1968.

Overlaying the portrait of Rev. Martin Luther King are the words of his "I have a dream" speech.

by the worshippers of plastic legend. The presumption of his right to real power in the real world made him a useful pawn in the hands of those who persist in the unreality of their dominance over all humanity.

Except in terms of megatonic capability, Reagan's access to destructive nuclear power was no greater than any American president since Truman. But this is 1989, and the media message daily proclaims this to be an apocalyptic time; a time when

the fabric of all that is life-affirming is being systematically ripped apart; a time when needed human services are forced to defer to nuclear proliferation; a time when vital artistic expression and creative growth are sacrificed in favor of military bands.

The artist draws from the life force wherever he/she finds it, to celebrate its victories and to expose and confront the forces of evil which work against it. While many look upon "the artist" as an individual apart from the majority of humankind, it is the creative force in us all that leads to spiritual fulfillment. Whatever our roles in life, we have a responsibility for self-actualization, for loving, learning, and working effectively. By getting more in touch with our own artist within, we develop a new sense of wholeness. Art which is received passively is used as a defense *against* creativity, an ego adornment to disguise a multitude of evils.

In order to serve our spiritual needs, art must evoke an active and honest response. Those of us who paid attention to the historical details of World War Two are familiar with the impressive art collections and adoration of 19th Century composers that involved the interest of so many Nazis during Hitler's reign of terror. A culture which had produced Goethe and Beethoven defended itself against the life force by its exploitation of the life force.

History can teach us a heavy lesson. We now live in a time when art as commodity is flourishing, but still today, art is too often a defense against concern, a defense against commitment.

Art has a sacred function, as a vital expressive power which can inspire humanity to expose and confront the dehumanizing, life-destroying forces of our time, and set into motion creative life-respecting alternatives. Street culture, driven by the necessity of psychic survival, often comes closer to meeting this function than the approved modalities of bourgeois art.

There are those who believe that an art intended to transform emotions and consciousness must be based on a transformed life, a life in a setting uncontaminated by today's world. Many of us, however, feel that creative communication depends on the existential reality of living in the technocracy which oppresses us all. Perhaps both paths are valid.

We are all of one flesh. Creative communication is our responsibility, not only to ourselves and our oppressed communities, but to our oppressors as well. We must demand the economic means for our survival, and for theirs. As artists and members of humanity's global community, we cannot separate ourselves from the political process which will decide our ultimate fate. Our work is political, regardless of pretensions to purity. It supports the status quo; it questions it; it condemns it; and, if our work transcends the present world, we must struggle to make this transcendence a possibility for all.

*As artists . . . we
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■

In our struggle for transcendence, we cannot separate our professional efforts from the totality of our day-to-day lives. Resolution of contradiction is the essence of the creative process, in artistic production and in our commitments to social cause. Our creative gifts obligate us to a larger responsibility in the course of history. We have the opportunity in this new year of political decision making, to look honestly at the reality around us, and to make choices consistent with the affirmation of life, choices that can generate the power of positive collective influence over the new president, George Bush, swaying him from the negative, destructive aspects of the Reagan legacy.

Beloved

by Toni Morrison

Review by Amanda Kemp

BELOVED

by Toni Morrison

Plume, 1988

275 pp., \$8.95 (paperback)

TONI MORRISON'S PULITZER Prize-winning novel *Beloved* is a lyrical but hard-hitting discussion of slavery and its effect on the African American psyche. Rich with irony, wrought with bitterness and pain, Morrison's work dares to explore our breaking points and weaknesses as well as our mighty ability to survive under the worst circumstances.

Beloved is the story of the slaves of Sweet Home, a Kentucky plantation, who are reared to think of themselves as men as opposed to niggers. Early on, the reader catches the irony of the plantation's name because, though they are treated as men, they are nonetheless owned; and though they might work the land and make the plantation prosper, they are barred from owning it; and though they might live on the plantation and raise their children there, it is never really home.

The illusion of respect and allusion to freedom is shown to be nothing when their owner, Mr. Gardner, dies and Sweet Home becomes a living nightmare. Their new master, "school-teacher," finds them too much like white

men (meaning human beings) and so launches a deliberate program to destroy their minds and souls so they will become the beasts of burden they were born to be. They are subject to beatings and strange experiments; they are fed less and worked more; but what moves them all to run is the knowledge that they will be sold, destroying the family they have created.

Beloved is in part the story of the Sweet Home men who decide to run but none of whom can leave Sweet Home behind. Sixo and Paul D are caught as they are approaching the Ohio River, but Sixo does not surrender and instead laughs as they set him afire. Paul D is sold to a chain gang of incorrigible slaves who are kept locked up underground in grave-like cells, extinguishing the desire to live as humans. With their sledgehammers, the chain gang slaves "killed the flirt whom folks called Life for leading them on. Making them think the next sunrise would be worth it. . . ." And Halle, Sethe's husband, suffers a mental breakdown after seeing her raped and her milk-swollen breasts sucked by the new master's boys. Paul D explains why: "Let me tell you something. A man ain't a goddamn ax. Chopping, hacking, busting every goddamn minute of the day. Things get to him. Things he can't chop down because

Amanda Kemp is a writer and student, and a leader of the California African/Black Student Statewide Alliance.

they're inside."

But *Beloved* is especially the story of Sethe, Sweet Home's female slave, who lives through the rape and brutal whipping, leaving her with a tree-like scar on her back. Although she was six-months pregnant, Sethe still runs away, driven by the desire to get to her first child, a nursing baby whom she had sent on ahead. Sethe gives birth prematurely but makes it to Ohio. However, she too can never escape the memory of Sweet Home, spending her days trying to beat back the memory which is part of her present-day reality. Sethe was so determined to keep her children out of reach of Sweet Home that she killed one of her children when the slave-catchers found them in Ohio. Sethe's reaction upon seeing schoolteacher was described by Morrison in dreamlike and yet altogether real language. "Simple: she was squatting in the garden and when she saw them coming and recognized schoolteacher's hat, she heard wings. Little hummingbirds stuck their needle beaks right through her headcloth into her hair and beat their wings. And if she thought anything, it was No. No. Nono. Nonono. Simple. She just flew. Collected every bit of life she had made, all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful, and carried, pushed, dragged them through the veil, out, away, over there where no one could hurt them. . . ."

Finally, *Beloved* is a powerful commentary on love. Morrison makes a compelling case for love as the healer, the salve that allows the ex-slaves to remember, to recognize the day-to-day attempts by the larger society to destroy us without disintegrating. Sethe feels this when she sees Paul D 18 years after Sweet Home and the killing of her child. Hearing Sethe recount her rape and separation from her babies, Paul D

holds her. "Behind her, bending down, his body an arc of kindness, he held her breasts in the palms of his hands. . . . rubbed his cheek on her back and learned that way her sorrow. . . ." In his arms she thinks that she might be able to feel the pain in her back and allow herself to remember "because the last of the Sweet Home men was there to catch her if she sank. . . ." Similarly, Paul D recognizes that Sethe's love, because it is so thick, is part of her determination to be free. Morrison ends the novel with their mutual need for love.

At the end of the book, Sethe is struck with the exhaustion Halle's mother exhibits in the very beginning of the novel. She is tired of fighting the "rememory," tired of loving and ready to die. Although Paul D had left her after discovering that she had killed her own daughter, he comes back in the end because he needs her. "She is a friend of my mind. She gather me, man. The pieces I am, she gather them and give them back to me in all the right order."

Despite the obvious pain involved in a novel about slavery, Morrison has delivered us a novel of hope. Like Sethe and Paul D, we are all ex-slaves living in the collective memory of slavery. Today still, though we might have the illusion of respect and the allusion to freedom, the masses of African Americans are struggling every day with awry plans, unrealized dreams or just coping, caught between the "nastiness of life and the meanness of death." Through loving and supporting each other, we can redefine ourselves in a society that has desecrated our humanity, and we can make America our Sweet Home that we control in an equal way.

A Brief History of Time

by Stephen W. Hawking

Review by Peter Saltzman

A BRIEF HISTORY OF TIME
by Stephen W. Hawking
Bantam, 1988
198 pp., \$18.95 (hardcover)

DID THE UNIVERSE HAVE A beginning, and if so, what happened *before* then?" I could not remember the last time I had seriously thought about questions like this, and so I decided to read Stephen Hawking's book, *A Brief History of Time*.

Hawking is one of the most famous physicists alive today, and his book has been steadily on the *New York Times* best-seller list for the past year. A victim of Lou Gehrig's disease, a nervous system disorder which left him paralyzed, Hawking has to write and communicate by using one finger to locate words on a computer screen. He has inspired many people with his ability to continue his work despite his severe disability.

His book covers a variety of topics and includes a fascinating description of black holes, stars that have burned up all their fuel and developed a gravitational pull so strong that nothing, including light, can escape from inside. (Fortunately, our own sun has enough fuel left for another 5,000 million years!)

Hawking describes several examples

of how scientific ideas have developed over time through the interaction of experiment and conceptual innovation. For instance, the theory that the earth is at the center of the solar system was not discarded until centuries of observations showed that it did not correctly predict the positions of the planets, whereas the new theory with the sun at the center did. In a similar way, Newton's theory of the universe was replaced in the twentieth century by Einstein's theory of relativity.

Relativity theory, which describes large-scale phenomena in the universe such as gravitation, was unable to account for later discoveries concerning very small-scale phenomena, such as the forces within the nucleus of an atom. To do that, another theory known as quantum mechanics evolved alongside relativity theory. Surprisingly, these two theories conflict with each other, and a single theory able to account for all the forces in the universe has yet to be found. This search for a "grand unified theory" has occupied the world's greatest physicists for over half a century.

As Hawking describes it, physicists have moved over time from static, unchanging models of the universe to ones that incorporate change as basic. It was

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especially interesting to me that the dialectical principles of contradiction and change that Marx used in his theories of history and society, although not mentioned by name, seem to be directly relevant to some of the key developments in modern physics. For instance, the contradiction between large- and small-scale phenomena, as witnessed in the conflict between relativity theory and quantum mechanics, is an important aspect of Marxist dialectics. Also, the dialectical principle of the "identity of opposites" is beautifully illustrated in the "uncertainty principle" of quantum mechanics, which implies that the notions of velocity and position, or of wave and particle, must be treated not as distinct concepts, but as different aspects of the same concept.

In contrast to military research, the scientific work described in this book impressed me with its internationalist scope and perspective. The discoveries Hawking discusses came from Europe (Hawking himself is British), the U.S.S.R., India and the U.S. They remind us that humanity progresses furthest as the result of international discourse and cooperation.

Most of Hawking's book is concerned with the search for an answer to the question I started with: did the universe have a beginning? Hawking shows his fascination with the origin of the universe by asking, "What is our place in [the universe] and where did it and we come from? Why is it the way it is?" Thousands of creation myths from around the world testify to the keen interest in these questions over the centuries.

Until recently, most scientists found no reason to believe that the universe had a "beginning." But in the mid-twentieth century new data about the radiation reaching us from distant galaxies led some to guess that a "big bang"

might have created all matter and energy. Many scientists, however, are unsatisfied with this idea: a point at the beginning of time when none of the laws of physics yet applied and anything conceivably could have happened has many paradoxical implications.

Nevertheless, in 1970 Hawking and another physicist, Roger Penrose, gave strong credence to the "big bang hypothesis" by showing it was actually a subtle consequence of Einstein's relativity theory. However, it is not known if it will remain a consequence of the as yet undiscovered "grand unified theory." In fact, as stated in the book, Hawking believes that the new theory, if found, will imply that there was *no* "big bang" and *no* beginning of the universe. So the final answer is still uncertain, and that is where the book leaves us.

Although I still do not know if the universe had a beginning, Hawking's book gave me a new perspective on our struggle for socialism today. In emphasizing our unique position as one of the few, if not the only, intelligent life forms in a vast universe, the book brought home to me in a new way our responsibility to maintain life on this planet. By fighting against the short-term interests of the wealthy, which threaten our growth and survival, we can build a future in which the human race is able to further its destiny in the universe.

At times Hawking's book is densely written and difficult to understand. This may in part be due to the difficulty he has in writing: it takes him one minute to produce just ten words. As long as one doesn't expect to catch every word, though, the book is fascinating and well worth reading for the wealth of topics it covers.

