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WAR TOYS

*Fantasy or
Indoctrination?*

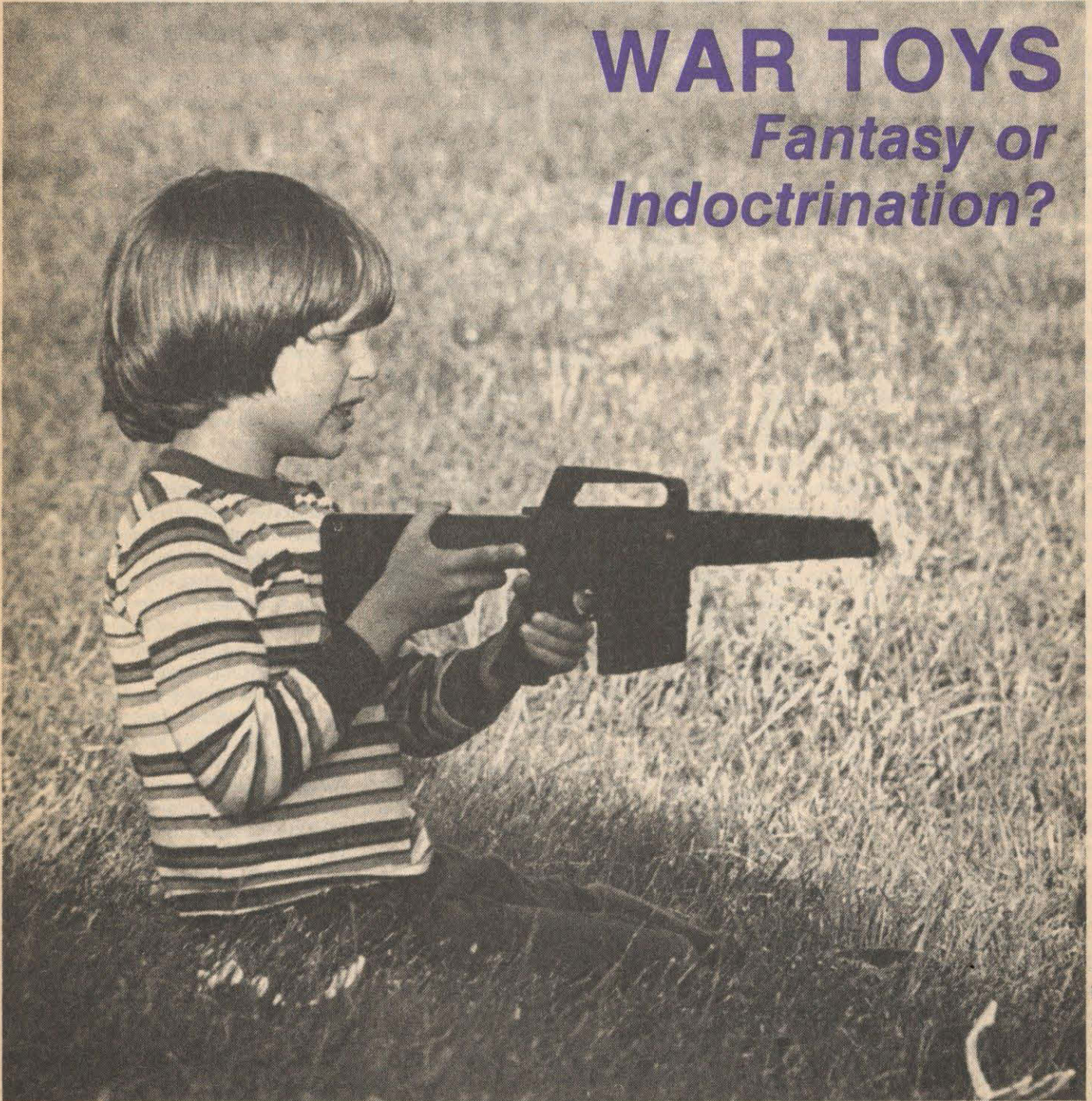


Photo by Jim West

ALSO: KINNOCK, MARTIN LUTHER KING, IRANGATE

EDITORIALS

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

America's national celebration of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday offers all of us a valuable opportunity to reflect back on the achievements of the civil rights movement during the 1950s and 1960s. It also gives us an appropriate occasion to consider the challenges that remain and to ponder the serious obstacles that confront present-day proponents of equal rights and economic justice.

The King holiday, however, brings with it certain risks as well as substantial virtues. Two particular risks stand out. First, in celebrating the spirit and achievements of Martin Luther King, Jr., the man, it is crucial that we not forget or minimize the substance of his message. King's political agenda for changing and improving American society reached far beyond what the movement achieved during his own lifetime. Second, in commemorating King's courage and commitment, it is essential that we not focus too exclusively on the civil rights contributions of King alone, and thereby unjustly slight or ignore the vital roles played by thousands of others. Perhaps the greatest potential harm in an excessively individualistic celebration of King's birthday would be to give tens of thousands of younger Americans the idea that only through the presence of a charismatic symbolic leader can meaningful political change take place in America.

Nowadays some retrospectives of the 1960s portray King as a completely successful American reform leader whose dream was fulfilled by America's abolition of officially-sanctioned racial discrimination. In truth, such a portrayal of King is seriously inaccurate. In the last years of his life King thought of himself as something far more than a racial reformer, and his explicit political agenda reached far beyond such measures as the 1964 and 1965 Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts. They were years of deep and painful regret that America was unwilling to pursue economic justice at home or non-militaristic policies abroad,



Photo by Donna Binder/Impact Visuals

plus personal anguish at his own inability to alter those self-destructive national priorities.

Too often today the Martin Luther King, Jr., whom most Americans see is only the remarkable orator of the 1963 March on Washington and the successful reform leader who desegregated public facilities and opened up the South's ballot boxes between 1955 and 1965. Rare indeed are the occasions when Americans are reminded of the later substance of King's life and message, a message that is challenging rather than reassuring, and profoundly discomforting for those who would prefer to make Martin Luther King, Jr. into a safely mythical American hero rather than struggle with the profound present-day implications of his unfulfilled political agenda.

— DAVID J. GARROW

A SCANDAL BY ANY NAME . . .

Many of my friends on the left are not enjoying Iran scam (or Iranagua, or Iranamok) as much as they could be. "It damages the very concept of government," says one DSA activist and friend. "The Democrats are in no shape to take advantage of it," says another.

But we do not get to choose the crisis of the moment, and when something like this comes along, we ought to make the most of it. We need a massive public education effort linking Iran scam to the larger scandal of Reaganism. And we need to focus on shifting public indignation away from the narrow question of what may or may not have been *illegal*, and onto the issue of what — in Iran scam and the policies it grew out of — was surely *immoral*.

First and most obviously, there couldn't be a better time for forums and teach-ins on Nicaragua and the intended beneficiaries of all this hanky-panky, the contras. The media and Congress will focus on the criminal aspects of the North/Second contra-supply system. We ought to be talking up the criminal nature of the contras themselves, and just what it is about the Sandinistas' revolution that so enrages the far right around the world.

Then there's the issue of arms sales. So far all the indignation focuses, understandably, on the sale of weapons to people whose favorite chant is "Death to America." But what about the larger issue of the U.S. as a world-wide arms pusher? Morally, the sales of arms — especially to the military elites of hungry third world nations — has to rank somewhere below dealing crack to schoolchildren. Now's an ideal time to hammer away Socialist International president Willy Brandt's favorite theme: how the traffic in arms distorts the world economy and widens the gap between north and south.

This is also a good time (when isn't) to raise the larger issue of the militarization of our own economy. Why should the \$30 million or so hustled from Iran to arm the

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Bang, Bang — You're Dead!

by Maxine Phillips

The headlines may feature stories about the Iranian arms sales, but if you're a parent or relative of a young child, chances are you're also concerned about arms sales to the pre-school set. Since 1981 sales of war toys have risen by 500 percent to about \$1.2 billion per year. More than 218 million war toys and accessories were sold in 1985, approximately five for every child in the country. The G.I. Joe Team (G.I. Joe, who disappeared during the Vietnam War, has returned as part of a special freedom-fighting force that opposes a fearsome terrorist organization named COBRA) was the best-seller of 1986. In the New York area a child can start the day with a "Rambo" cartoon at 7 a.m. and "Defenders of the Earth" at 7:30, then settle down after school with "She-Ra" at 3:30 p.m., "He-Man" or "G.I. Joe" at 4, and "Thundercats" or "Transformers" at 4:30. All of these shows feature small "action figures" — since the primary market is boys, these are not called "dolls" — that operate in gangs. The parent who is relieved to find that an action figure can cost as little as \$2.99 (and doesn't have Barbie's wardrobe) soon learns that the little mannequin has lots of friends, enemies, and environments that must be purchased to make the play correspond to what happens on the TV screen.

Deregulation in children's television has had a major impact on toy marketing. In 1983 the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) lifted all guidelines for children's programming. In 1984 it ruled that any number of commercials could be shown per show, and in 1985 it reversed a previous ruling that banned product-based shows. FCC Chairman Mark Fowler, A Reagan appointee, has resisted all consumer complaints, saying that television is "just another appliance. It's a toaster with pictures."

Television and toy industries have been quick to take advantage of the situation. Now toys and accessories are created

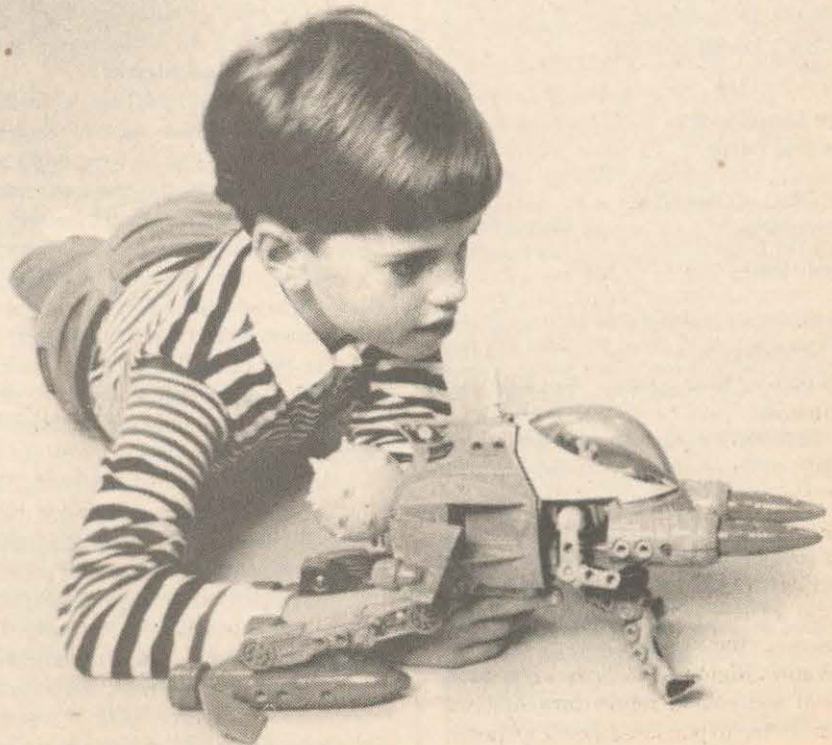
on which shows are then based. As a result, most children's cartoon shows are in effect feature-length commercials for toys. The number of cartoon series based on war toys jumped from zero in 1983 to ten in 1985. Toy manufacturers often share the cost of producing the show with animation companies and offer them to local stations at little or no cost in return for the right to sell advertising. One company, Lorimar-Telepictures, splits the profits from the toys with local stations.

The Debate

Is this explosion of war toys leading to more violence among children and an acceptance of war and violence as ways to solve conflicts? What relationships exist between the vast toy arsenals and real-life ones, between war play and warmongering? What should a concerned parent do about these toys at home, and about the

increased emphasis on them in society? Is this in fact an issue that democratic socialists need to care about?

Opinions differ. Douglas Thomson, president of Toy Manufacturers of America, Inc., believes that the issue has been blown out of proportion. "We sell more crayons than we do guns," he told participants in a recent conference on war toys sponsored by Educators for Social Responsibility. Then "why is it that when I go to a store I see aisle after aisle of exact replicas of sophisticated weapons?" countered Elin McCoy, author of a forthcoming book on children's toys. Children want to be part of the real world, Thomson says, and such things as the commercials for the armed forces contribute to their fascination with the weapons and the action figures. Exactly, responds psychologist Ernest Drucker, who believes that the toys foster a passive acceptance of militarism. He points to the similar rhythms and images of the



We believe it's called a "Centurion."

cartoon shows and the armed forces ads. "The recruiting ads are the teenage extension of these shows. They have the same uncritical assumptions," he says.

War toy opponents believe that playing with these toys gives children a political education that makes them accept militarism and leads to increased aggression as well as actual physical harm. Some 19,000 children were injured through the use of toy guns in 1985 says Stevanne Auerbach, director of the Institute for Childhood Resources in San Francisco, and some 350 were killed playing with real guns that they thought were toys. Opponents also find the racism and sexism of the toys upsetting. Rambo has several nonwhite enemies, no nonwhite friends. The female munitions expert who aids the Joe Team is described as acting like one of the boys, but "sure doesn't look like one."

Critics of these toys can't distinguish between playful aggression and real aggression, responds Brian Sutton-Smith, psychologist, folklorist, and author of *Toys as Culture*. He notes that one of the most

"My wife is more uneasy . . . than I am."

often cited studies showing that violent toys are associated with twice the level of antisocial behavior as nonviolent toys is based on sample groups of only ten and thirteen children. "They dropped the girls after the first sample group because they didn't fit the picture, which suggests that gender roles and socialization are as important as the toy," he charges, calling for more careful research. Toys reflect the larger culture, and he agrees that it's no accident that war toy sales have skyrocketed along with the defense budget. "If there is a change in administration in two years, you'll probably see a change in the type of popular toy," he says.

What's a Parent To Do?

The most frequent responses to these toys by parents and schools have been either to ban them or ignore them. Banning may work in an individual home, but the child most likely has easy access at friends' houses. In schools, children sneak them in, playing surreptitiously and feeling guilty. "It was a terrible discipline problem at my daughter's nursery school," recalls one parent. "It took months to get the kids to stop bringing them in." Parents who take a laissez-faire attitude either don't think the toys are harmful or hope that if they don't make a big thing out of the toys, the child will eventually lose interest.

Despite the entry of She-ra (He-Man's sister) into the market, most of these characters are played with by boys, while much of the concern seems to come from women. "I'm part of the boycott committee, so I don't allow G.I. Joe in the house," laments one mother, "but my ex-husband, who is also a peace activist, doesn't think war toys are a big issue, and he lets my son play with them at his house." For many men, the argument seems to boil down to, "I played with guns when I was a kid and I turned out okay."

Recent research by early childhood specialists Diane Levin and Nancy Carlsson-Paige offers a possible synthesis. The two views of play — as political education and as part of the developmental process — are both legitimate, they say. Their own research, conducted at preschools and in interviews with parents, leads them to believe that children's play is becoming more repetitive and rigid as a result of the scripted shows and characters. (Action fig-

ures come with cards describing their personalities.) If parents and teachers ban the toys, they give up any chance for dialogue with the children. But if they ignore it, they leave the political education to the toy companies.

Their reluctant conclusion is that parents and teachers must join in the play to try to shift the political focus. Change the script, they argue. Bring in complexity and ways for the characters to relate besides fighting. For instance, suggests Levin, "Why not have all the guns shoot glue today?" Having to depart from the script could result in more inventive, imaginative play. After a regular war-play scenario, they advise talking about whether the enemy figures have families and what they're like. "Don't do any heavy moralizing," warns Sutton-Smith. He stresses that adults who enter into children's play have to be prepared to overdramatize and fantasize. However, with so many parents working outside the home and so many children watching cartoons when adults are not around to discuss them, this approach — while it may be politically and educationally sound — could be difficult to implement.

We asked some DSA parents how they deal with the issue. Skip Roberts, president of the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation and a DSA National Executive Committee member, remembers playing with toy soldiers as a child, but won't let his six-year-old son Chris have Rambo or G.I. Joe. "They glorify war too much," he says. "Chris knows I was in Vietnam and we've talked about how those toys don't show what war is really like." A friend gave Chris some G.I. Joe equipment for his birthday in December and "It's still in his room, unopened," says Roberts.

Chris does play with Masters of the Universe, one of the TV-based sets of action figures. "My wife is more uneasy about those than I am," says Roberts, who believes that the battle axes, swords, and science fiction equipment make them less like "real war" characters. "It seems to me that ninety percent of Chris' time is spent setting them up. The big attack only comes when we tell him it's time to put them away and then they're destroyed." And as most parents of boys know, whether toy guns are allowed in the house or not doesn't stop war play. "From the time he was two years old he would use a stick as a gun. Now his flashlight is his laser sword," notes Roberts.

"Fantasy play helps them work out their aggression," argues sociologist Jan Rosenberg, mother of Jake, 6, and Harry,

DEMOCRATIC LEFT

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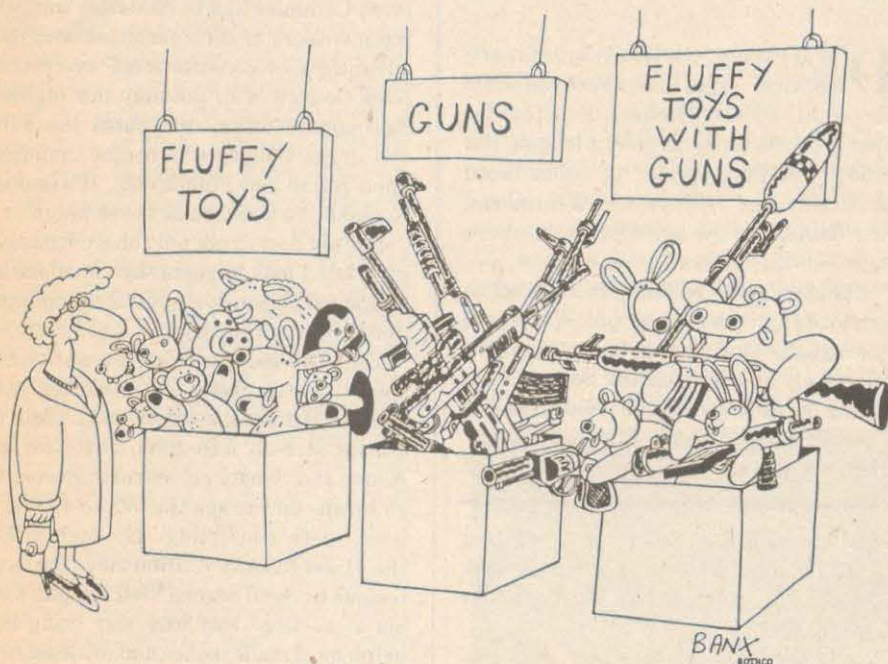
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9. Rosenberg and her husband Fred Siegel put no restriction except cost on toys. "I played with rifles, cap guns, and six-shooters when I was little and I turned out alright," says Rosenberg. Nonetheless, she wouldn't let the boys have Rambo. "It offended me in a way that the others don't, probably because of the connection with Vietnam." She agreed with the decision of Jake's nursery school to ban the toys: "The kids were obsessed with them." Harry even wrote an article for his school newspaper on how teachers hate G.I. Joe and kids love it.

Rosenberg does not believe the toys have taken over her children's play lives.

opinion about the rewriting of history got the doll's locale changed from Vietnam, and pulling in the Arab-American Anti-Discrimination League was crucial in causing the company to discontinue production of one of Rambo's enemies, a "heartless terrorist" called Nomad. The League urges parents and teachers to create "War Toy Free Zones" in homes and schools.

On the legislative front, such groups as Action for Children's Television and the National Coalition on Television Violence are trying to limit the amount of violence shown on television and restore the regulations concerning children's advertising. Sweden and Finland have banned the sale



(c) Punch

At first she worried that the shows would keep them from developing their own story lines, but hasn't found that to be true. "The programs are very high-tech but the play still seems like what children have always done," she says, adding that they build Lego constructions in which to place the G.I. Joe dolls. They also memorize the facts on the cards that come with the dolls and enjoy filing them, just as children have with baseball cards for decades.

For parents who are worried about the influence of these toys, what can be done after taking action on the homefront? On the political front approaches range from boycotts to legislation.

The New England War Resisters League began a "Stop War Toys" campaign when Coleco Industries, makers of the Cabbage Patch dolls, announced its plans for the Rambo action figure. Consumer

of war toys, and some U.S. activists would like to start here with a ban on the sale of toy handguns. They urge hearings by the House Subcommittee on Children and Youth on the issue. If a parent is upset by the toys, says Levin, it's important for the child to see the parent actively involved in trying to change the situation, whether through an organized campaign or letters to manufacturers.

Some leftists would argue that the only way to achieve toy disarmament is to change the larger war-oriented culture. But as we work for those changes, can we really afford to leave the political education of a generation of children in the hands of the toy industry? ●

Maxine Phillips is managing editor of Dissent and was formerly executive director of DSA.

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Editorials

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contras be any more scandalous than the billions that has been siphoned from domestic programs, year after year, to feed the Pentagon?

To my friends who fear to add to the brouhaha over Iransecam, I would say: Forget the "concepts of government" for a moment. It is the practice of democracy which has been violated, and it is our job, once again, to stand up for it — including the possibility of democratic, above-board foreign policy. Government, even in the sense of an expanded public sector, is not a good in itself; and without democracy, it is usually a positive evil.

As for the Democratic party, or the powers-that-be within it: When, in recent memory, have they been ready for any opportunity? The party that let the recession of 1982-83 go by with hardly a murmur of dissent might well sleep through the impeachment proceedings of '87, should things come to such a happy pass. We stand ready, as usual, to help the party out with intelligent ideas about economic alternatives and humane policies. But we have our own agenda and, right now, nothing should rank higher than the efforts to draw the moral lessons of Iransecam — in every forum we can find or create.

— BARBARA EHRENREICH

STANDING FAST

It's no secret that these are hard days for socialists. The Reagan years have been oppressive; political trends have turned rightward; the unions have suffered; other social movements are in trouble; liberalism is in disarray. All of this makes it hard for the small band of American socialists to hold fast.

Some people drop away, not because they disagree but because they grow tired or discouraged. That's unfortunate. But it's not the end of the world. Let conditions change a little, and some of them will come back — if only there's a movement to which they can come back.

Other socialists find useful work in a range of arenas, from the unions to the women's movement, from peace groups to environmentalism. Fine. We care about immediate human need; we don't just content ourselves with advocacy of a fundamental change in society. But there's always a danger of losing balance in the press of daily tasks, so that the socialist perspec-



ROTHCO

GLEE

David Broder, the *Washington Post's* political sage, has reproved *New Republic* editor Michael Kinsley for openly proclaiming his glee at Iragua. His fellow pundits, joined by sober-faced politicians and newspaper editorialists, fear damage to the presidency. We have heard all this before.

Bunglers and criminals in high office patriotically endeavor to put Watergate or Iragua behind them in order to govern effectively and prevent the Soviets from taking advantage of the leader of the Free World's disarray. Serving military officers do right to take the Fifth

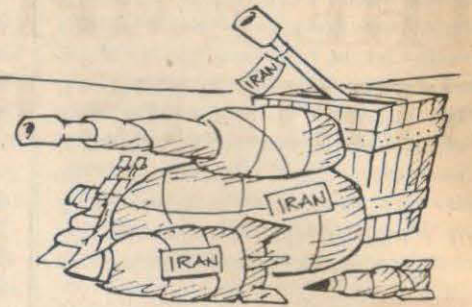
tive — which remains, I think, the best guide for day-to-day political/social work — gets lost. And then even the day-to-day work suffers.

In bad times there's all the more reason for democratic socialists to hold together, not in sectarian huddles or self-righteous postures, but with a patient commitment to our goals and a fraternal feeling for our friends. The society we live in is still marked by shameful inequities and glaring injustices. The socialist perspective of democratic and egalitarian transformation remains a good one. So we have to keep a balance between the near and the far, between the things we do today and the vision that inspires our hopes for the day after tomorrow.

That's why it's important that we maintain our institutions (groups like DSA, magazines like *Dissent*), fragile as these may be. They may not be all we would like them to be, but they are what we have — and it's very hard work to keep them going.

Each affirmation counts, no voice is wholly lost.

— IRVING HOWE



Amendment. Only yesterday, Joe McCarthy was lacerating Fifth Amendment Commies and universities were firing members of their faculties who took advantage of constitutional protection. Now George Will, possibly our highest-paid conservative, celebrates the Fifth and urges Congress to confer immunity upon North and Poindexter. It's enough to make the proverbial horse laugh.

For my part, I not only share Kinsley's glee, but I look forward with keen anticipation to the paralysis of this administration in its expiring months. Let Lawrence Walsh, the independent counsel (a.k.a. special prosecutor), assemble his staff with all deliberate speed. May their inquiries stretch into 1988. Ditto for the House and Senate select committees. By all means encourage the White House to issue more conflicting statements. Get the Hasenfus story. Interview the mysterious General Secord. Sell Reagan's teflon at auction. May each day bring new helpings of malfeasance and misfeasance.

This administration has presided over calamitous foreign policies. Its illegal contra war, deliberate escalation of the arms race, refusal to match the Soviet moratorium on nuclear testing, violation of the Salt II treaty, and Star Wars follies have all made the world a more dangerous place, confused our allies, and damaged our own economy. Domestically, Reaganomics has redistributed income to the already obscenely rich, broken unions, starved social programs, and tolerated persistently high unemployment. Our society is nastier now than it was in 1980.

If initiative shifts from the president and his reactionary helpers to a Democratic Congress, each of us should stand and cheer the alleged crisis of the presidency.

Let's hear it for glee!

— ROBERT LEKACHMAN

THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

by Peter Mandler

By all accounts, British Labor Party leader Neil Kinnock's recent visit to the United States to explain his party's non-nuclear policy was not a success. Stephen Rosenfeld of the *Washington Post* declared himself "traumatized" by an encounter with Kinnock. A whole host of "U.S. officials," "experts," and "even Democrats" have denounced Labor's plan to wind up Britain's independent nuclear deterrent and ban nuclear weapons from its NATO bases as the beginning of the end of the Atlantic Alliance. William Safire of the *New York Times* agreed that the plan was disastrous, but charitably concluded that it would never see the light of day: it was "for internal party consumption, not to be taken seriously." Safire predicts a compromise based on abandonment of Britain's own nukes but retention of the U.S. nuclear umbrella.

The assumption, however — a very American assumption — has been that "expert" opinion can set the terms and limits of mass politics. Win the hearts and minds of the bureaucrats and commentators, and you have won the war. Thatcher's Britain has hardly been immune from this assumption. The London *Sunday Times*, for instance, in offering its own assessment of Kinnock's week of speeches and dinners, concluded definitively that his policy "commands no serious support in any important or influential quarter," least of all "in Washington's tight political circle."

That is true enough. But Kinnock's visit was not primarily designed to persuade "Washington's tight political circle." It was intended to give momentum to gathering support for Labor's non-nuclear policy among the electorate at home. Polls show that a third of British voters support the non-nuclear policy in its totality (up from a fifth six years ago), and that parts of the policy — like banning U.S. cruise missiles from British soil — are approved by an absolute majority. On this evidence, even Safire's "compromise" solution is upside-

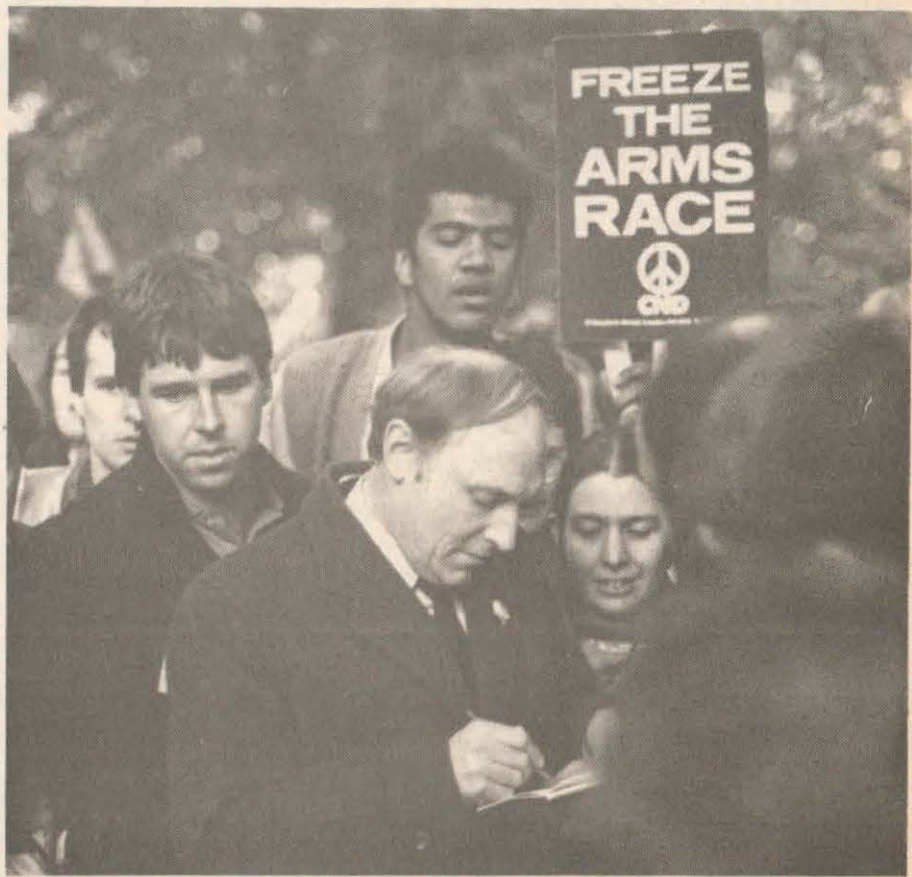
down: the most popular halfway policy would be banning the Yanks and keeping the British bomb, not vice-versa.

Why is unilateral nuclear disarmament gaining ground in British public opinion? There is, of course, the general breakdown in the case for nuclear deterrence, as S.D.I. and battlefield nukes have weakened even the Reaganites' faith in strategic weapons. Then Britain has reasons of its own to question its role in NATO, a particularly onerous one which involves accommodating 135 U.S. bases (in a country the size of Wyoming!), paying for its own nuclear deterrent, and committing sizable sea and land forces to the common defense. That role was defined during the Second World War, when Britain was still a major power and in some sense an equal partner with the U.S. Now that Britain is neither, it is stuck with the worst of both

worlds: responsibility without power. Even quite moderate Britons are asking why their country shouldn't adopt a lean, non-nuclear defense like Spain, Norway, and Canada, all "loyal" NATO partners.

Another reason for Labor's relative success at sticking to a non-nuclear policy is the solidity of its electoral base in Britain's Northern industrial wasteland and blighted inner cities. American pundits are simply wrong when they suggest that Labor's defense policies are a liability among its poor and working-class constituency. A disastrous showing in the 1983 General Election, when Labor polled less than 28 percent of the vote, was due more to the general disarray of the party, public dismay at its weak leadership, and the threat of Trotskyist infiltrators (who opposed the non-nuclear policy!) than to its defense program. Since then, reassured by the new Kinnock leadership and its confident moves against the far left, traditional Labor voters have returned to the fold and boosted the party's standing to 36 to 38 percent. That core vote has remained unshaken by the NATO, media, and "expert" onslaught on unilateralism.

It is, of course, true that unilateralism becomes a liability as Labor seeks to move beyond its core vote towards an absolute



Neil Kinnock at 1984 C.N.D. rally.

Photo by David Vitis/Impact Visuals

majority, although the vagaries of the British electoral system would award Labor an absolute Parliamentary majority with its current 38 percent of the popular vote if the centrist Alliance also polls well. But in the current state of British politics, you can't build a popular majority simply by tacking towards the center. Far from moving towards the American model, where two catch-all parties vie for possession of crucial centrist voters, Britain has already passed through its "American" phase into an era of diversity and fragmentation.

For the three decades before Margaret Thatcher's 1979 victory, Labor and Conservative governments alternately

sus vote has disappeared entirely; in fact, it has consolidated, as moderate defectors from Labor formed the Social Democratic Party in 1981, and joined the older Liberal Party in the Alliance shortly thereafter. But the Thatcher experience has not revitalized the center, either. If anything, economic stagnation and cultural rebellion have divided the country even further. Longstanding class divisions have been compounded by a geographic split between a decaying North and a booming South, so that, while Labor wins no Southern seats except in inner London, the Conservatives have been wiped out in the North and Scotland. Even within the middle class, there is

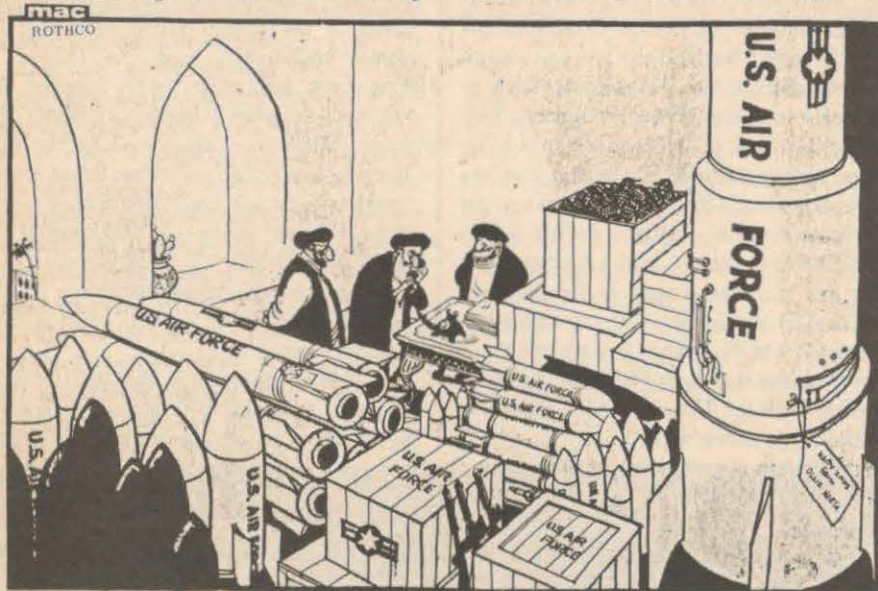
done them. The expulsion of the Trotskyists and acceptance of checks on trade union power have sent the message that Labor is not a ghetto party. Nor is Labor any longer so closely identified with the grimmer aspects of consensus society. The great bureaucratic nationalized industries, massive blocks of soulless public housing, an "anything goes" social policy.

It is easy — and empty — to say what you are not. The Alliance specializes in this line of politics, distancing itself from consensus and from "extremist" alternatives. Most important of all, Kinnock's team has begun to move beyond negativism to specify what measures of social and economic reconstruction Labor would put in the place of failed policies. A successful "Jobs and Industry" campaign last spring put forward innovative ideas on mobilizing capital for industrial reinvestment, new forms of "socialization" designed to avoid the expense and bureaucracy of nationalization, and decentralized public spending in aid of private sector jobs.

Having captured attention and credibility on the domestic front in the spring, Labor has this past autumn been focusing quite deliberately on its defense program, with Kinnock's American journey and a subsequent "re-launch" of the non-nuclear defense package at home. Long criticized in the consensus period for its "revolutionary" politics — passing bold resolutions at party congresses and then timidly ditching them in the heat of election campaigns — Labor is now finally playing politics in the highest sense, campaigning on a detailed platform in an effort to persuade neutrals and doubters. Kinnock's trip can only be understood and evaluated in this context. Labor is — at last — taking itself seriously.

There will be a General Election in Britain before June 1988, most likely by autumn of this year. For the first time in decades, Labor could enter an election campaign with a program of which its membership approves and in which its leadership believes. It remains to be seen whether the electorate can be persuaded to approve and believe, too. It may be that the vote will divide much as it has divided in the polls beforehand, leaving no party with an absolute majority. But that is one of the chances all starters must take in a democratic system. Fortunately for Labor, in this election U.S. "experts" and journalists don't vote.

Peter Mandler teaches history at Princeton University and is active in the Princeton, N.J. DSA local.



"Hello, Ronnie — I was wondering, what are you going to do with all those nuclear weapons that Neil Kinnock isn't going to have?"

presided over a "consensus" based on a comprehensive welfare state, strong trade unions, a grudgingly liberal social agenda, and an Atlanticist foreign policy. This consensus was generally considered more the left's creation than the right's, and indeed Labor held power for eleven of the final sixteen consensus years, including the last five — 1974 to 1979 — when the general economic crisis of the West demolished an already-tottering structure. Consequently, Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Party was able in the late '70s to develop a critique of consensus which pinned the blame on the left alone — that is, on trade unions, public spending, and permissiveness — and win the 1979 General Election with votes from all across the political spectrum. Following this debacle, Labor also broke with the consensus by adopting a radical foreign and domestic program and choosing two successive leaders from its left wing, Michael Foot in 1980 and, in 1983, Neil Kinnock.

This is not to suggest that the consen-

now a yawning gulf between a proletarianized public sector of idealistic professionals and an Americanized private sector of yuppies and techies. The former vote Labor, the latter — once the Alliance's great hope — are increasingly Conservative.

If Labor trims towards the center, it runs the double risk of reminding the electorate of the disasters of 1974-79 and of recreating those disasters with the old policies. When pundits sneer at Kinnock for his inexperience and extol Social Democrat David Owen for his service in government, they underestimate the benefit Kinnock derives from his youthful image and the discredit Owen accrues for having held high office in the last consensus government.

Kinnock's task is therefore not to rebuild consensus, but to duplicate Thatcher's coup: to capture centrist voters with a radical alternative. So far, he has done much to reassure moderates that Labor's post-consensus drift has not aban-

LIMBO

Democrats in the Twilight Zone

by Harold Meyerson

In the wake of the 1986 elections and the Iran-contra scandal, the leadership of the Democratic party has been empowered a little and emboldened not at all. Herewith some current tidbits of mainstream Democratic fare:

—Democratic National Chairman Paul Kirk's Democratic Policy Commission issues its 100-page statement of Democratic positions without managing to find anything to say, pro or con, about aid to the contras. It applauds an increased governmental role in education and retraining, but makes no reference to job creation, workers' rights, or the status of minorities and the poor, to list just a few of the omissions.

—Incoming House Speaker Jim Wright, who against all odds maintains a streak of Texas populism, suggests that the most benign way of reducing the deficit in 1987 may be to delay the tax cut for the uppermost income bracket. He is instantly and almost universally repudiated by the Democratic legislative leadership.

—To a party about to be charged with a greater share of responsibility for national policy, and with no clear policies to pursue, Iranscam offers not only a legitimate opportunity but a course of least resistance. The Congressional delegation has been handed an investigative agenda. In the consultants' offices where Presidential campaigns are being planned, themes of trust and competence are being tested and honed — suggesting either that no one can remember Jimmy Carter or that no one can conceive anything better.

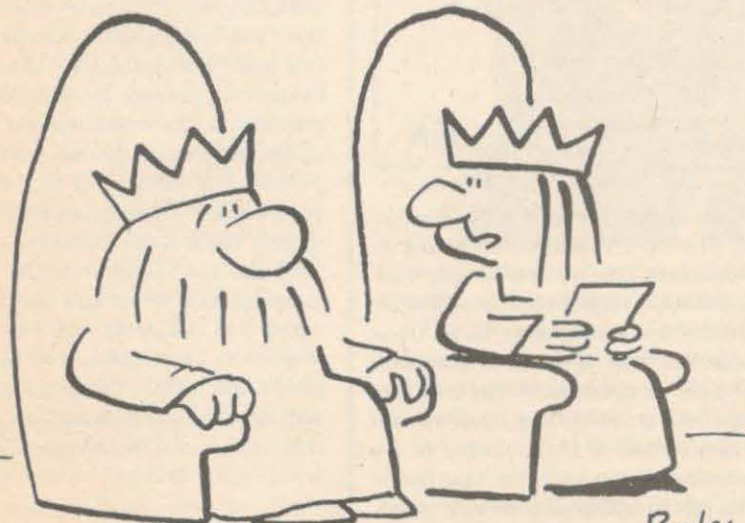
Betwixt and Between

We have reached a peculiarly dispirited juncture in American politics: the Reagan revolution has run its course, but nothing as yet has risen to take its place. With only a few notable exceptions, the Democratic campaigns of 1986 avoided confronting Reaganism head-on, and the party paid a greater price than is commonly realized for its unwillingness or inability to articulate a more progressive politics. To be sure, the elections demonstrated that progressives can win in the heartland, and the

democratic left should take particular encouragement from the victories of Kent Conrad and Tom Daschle in the Dakotas and Wyche Fowler, an avowed opponent of contra aid, in Georgia. By the same token, though, even the most thorough-going populists muted their politics in 1986 — and got back a muted mandate.

For, in the face of an uneven recovery and the failure of the Democrats to deliver a coherent economic message, the Democrats' vote in 1986 showed a considerable decline from 1982. In '82, when many Democratic candidates returned to the old-time Keynesianism, the Democrats pulled 57% of the vote for House members across the nation. This year, despite significantly greater Senate gains, they won just 52%, holding their own only among the party's most peripheral supporters and suffering their greatest declines precisely among core constituencies. In 1982, for instance, the Democrats got 73% support from voters with incomes under \$12,500; in 1986, they got only 56% of that vote. Conversely, in 1982, they won only 44% of voters whose incomes exceeded \$35,000; their 1986 total among these voters rose to 50%. Their vote among blue collar workers fell by 9% over those years; among the unemployed, by 8%; in union households, by 5%. Their vote among self-described liberals fell by 9%; their support from conservatives remained unchanged.

These changes in voting patterns reflect rather closely the changes in Democratic doctrine: today's Democratic thinking could not be better calculated to produce marginal gains at the party's periphery and significant losses at the party's core. Underpinning these changes in doctrine is a widely-shared strategic assessment: that the Democrats can and should tap into the electorate's anti-establishment populism, but that Ronald Reagan has so delegitimated government that this must be populism without public undertakings for public purposes. As America's position in the world market con-



"I've been keeping track, and you've flip-flopped on all the issues!"

tinues to deteriorate, both Democrats and Republicans have abandoned the near total reliance on the market that characterized Reaganism in its purest forms. (Indeed, Bill Brock's Labor Department may even propose some plant closing notification legislation). But the new consensus has it that the state should intervene to fund individual education and retraining and to foster individual investment through tax cuts, but refrain from jobs programs or making taxes more progressive.

What's Wrong With This Picture?

Populism without government, reform without redistribution — this is a narrow political terrain with narrow political appeal. Nor, except perhaps in the areas of health care and trade, is the 100th Congress likely to improve on the economic policies of the 99th. But for better or worse, the Democratic agenda of the coming period will be defined less by Congress and more by its presidential candidates. Here, there are four existing tendencies and one historic void. Taking them right-to-left:

First, there are the conservatives grouped around the Democratic Leadership Council, most notably Senator Sam Nunn and former governors Chuck Robb and Bruce Babbitt. This is a tendency that distinguishes itself from the Democratic center in two ways: first, by its support for much of Reaganism abroad — not only the military build-up, but also contra aid; second, by its ongoing attacks on increasingly marginal sectors of the party — labor, blacks, women — for being too powerful in party circles.

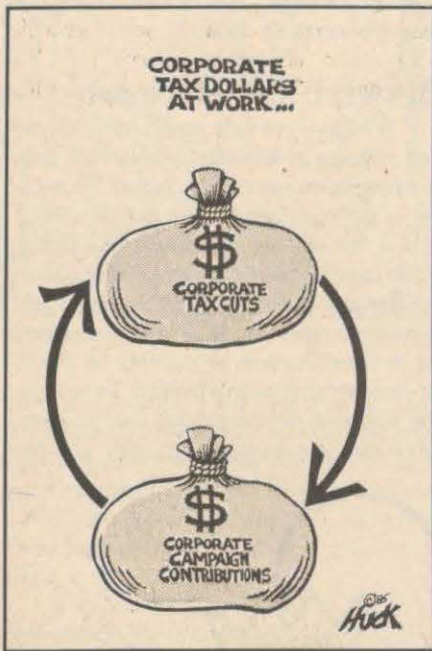
Second, there are the centrist neo-liberals, Senators Joseph Biden and Bill Bradley and Representative Richard Gephardt. They tend to oppose the military build-up and overseas adventures (though Bradley supported contra aid in 1986). They favor a more aggressive role for the state in trade and education policies, but take pains to distinguish themselves from those they consider more liberal, which is anyone who exhibits a modicum of support for public spending.

Third are the more progressive neo-liberals, Mario Cuomo and Gary Hart. Cuomo remains the most eloquent defender, not of the welfare state, but more narrowly of its existing safety nets. He has yet to divulge any substantial foreign policy direction at all, which should inspire some nervousness. Hart is the most avowedly anti-interventionist of the mainstream candidates, a position balanced by his advocacy

of a toughened military. Responding to the withdrawal of Ted Kennedy from the presidential arena, Hart has moved somewhat leftwards since 1984, opposing Gramm-Rudman-Hollings and attempting to repair his relations with labor and other core groups. Nonetheless, by neither word nor deed has either Cuomo or Hart moved toward advocating a fullblown interventionism designed to promote growth through equity.

Fourth is mainstream social democracy, represented in 1988 — for the first time since 1928 — by nobody.

Fifth is marginalized social democracy, whose standard bearer is Jesse Jackson. Many of Jackson's domestic positions were normal Democratic fare ten years ago; there is nothing he says on full employment and health care that wasn't being said at that time by, say, Scoop Jackson. Rev. Jackson is also, of course, the candidate of anti-imperialism and of black empowerment.



If the 1984 Democratic presidential contest saw the first internecine attack on the Democrats' core constituencies, 1988 marks a further step in their marginalization: for the first time in sixty years, these constituencies have no electable candidate. The absence of mainstream social democracy from the array of Democratic choices in '88 is a refraction of the decline of the social democratic forces in both the nation and the party, and the Democrats' corresponding reliance on business as a source of funding. Indeed, the Democratic party of the mid-Eighties looks and sounds a good

deal like the party of the mid-Twenties, the last period which saw business so ascendant, labor so peripheral, and progressives so exhausted. The warnings from today's Leadership Council echo those of the party's 1924-standard bearer, Wall Street lawyer John W. Davis, who proclaimed in 1925, "God forbid that the Democratic Party should become a mere gathering of the unsuccessful!"

Alternatives

There are alternative directions to the rightward drift, carrying with them electoral opportunity as well as some risk. Genuine progressive tax reform, as distinct from last year's sham, has consistent support in the polls. With a widespread belief in the need for economic reconstruction, there is political space for such directions as empowering workers, reigning in speculation, or establishing a vested, progressively-funded social security fund that could be invested in economic enterprise. Should these remain roads not taken, the Democratic party will remain, as it has been since Jimmy Carter's time, chiefly a party of negative virtues — opposing third world interventionism, the fundamentalist right, and extreme militarism. As befits a party of negative virtues, the best thing the Democrats will have going for them in 1988 will be the post-Reagan Republicans even more lacking in ideas than the Democrats whose current front-runner, Bob Dole, harks back to the Hoover-Landon tradition of belt-tightening and sacrifice that marginalized the party for decades.

"Between grief and nothing," says the suicide-contemplating artist in the last line of Faulkner's novel *The Wild Palms*, "I will take grief." The stakes in the 1988 elections will be high: the future of America's role in the world, the level of poverty and hunger in America, the condition of progressive social movements — all will turn on the outcome of the election. Trying to pre-judge the outcome of that election two years out, the smart money today might tilt slightly towards the Democrats. Trying to pre-judge the *character* of the impending campaign two years out, and the way in which the electorate will perceive their choice, the smart money's all on Faulkner: grief seems a likely standard for Bob Dole's Republicans, and Nothing, the most probable consensus of directionless Democrats.

Harold Meyerson is a Los Angeles-based political consultant and serves on DSA's N.E.C.

TAKING CONTROL OF OUR OWN LIVES

D&A's Transitional Economic Program

We all want to be in control of our lives. Few of us feel that we are. We want the plant to stay open. It closes and moves to Manila. We want to find day care that we know is safe and nurturing. We can't find it — and we couldn't afford it if we could find it. We want jobs that are satisfying and pay us enough to live decently. If we're "lucky," we get one or the other. If not, we take what we can get and hope things don't get worse.

What can we do to stop these daily assaults on our sense of self worth? What can we do to resist the ongoing attacks of the corporate rich against working people, trade unions, women, people of color, the elderly, the poor? How can we stop the new class war, which is an undisguised attempt to destroy the gains made by generations of people in union organizing, in civil rights work, in the women's and gay rights movements, and in environmental and peace activism?

All of us who are excluded from Reagan's good society of the rich for the rich know what we need: more power over our own lives and more power over those who now control so much of our lives — the corporations and the government. The problem is how to get it.

Capitalist Limits on Reform

As socialists we do not expect to get full equality, justice, or sharing of power within a capitalist society, no matter how "reformed" it is. As long as the productive resources of this country are in the hands of an elite and as long as production is determined solely by profit — as it must be within a capitalist economy — there is no possibility of shaping an economy according to the usefulness of products and services, people's needs for stability and security in community and family life, or the peaceful preservation of the planet's resources.

Today we see the erosion of even the limited reforms of capitalism won during the last 50 years. This means that we cannot start off with plans for a "socialist economy." We must start from where we are and look for ways to get more control over our daily lives. If we are ever to move toward socialism in the United States, ordinary Americans must come to believe that they can take control of their lives and their society. Then they must act on that belief.

A democratic socialist transitional economic program must, therefore, focus on *empowerment*. It must push against the limits of the possible within capitalism in order to expand people's control — in their



families, in their workplaces, in their communities, and as citizens of the world.

Our proposals embody a vision of empowerment: socially useful wage work combined with shared parenting; democratization of the workplace and workers' control over the production process; community control within overall democratic planning; demilitarization of the economy to benefit both U.S. citizens and those now suffering under U.S.-supported Third World dictatorships.

Our proposals also embody a strategy. Greater power over our lives is not something that corporations or government will give us. It is something we must win. Our proposals require much legislation, but laws can neither be passed nor enforced without political pressure. We must, therefore, mobilize some power in order to get more power.

Political mobilization must be based on a recognition of shared interests. But we can reach this recognition only if we acknowledge the real divisions within our potential progressive majority. We must identify inequalities rooted in racism and

sexism so that we can select structural reforms that will erode those inequalities and help create greater political unity. We must identify the bases for shared struggle. For example, we can analyze ecological devastation, occupational hazards, and militarization of the economy in a way that enables workers, environmentalists, and peace activists to see their common interest in the conversion from military to civilian production within safe, democratically-controlled workplaces.

Finding Shared Interests

The U.S. economy, like all capitalist economies, is built on an unequal division of power and wealth between the few who own and the many who must work for wages to survive. But the U.S. economy also rests on an unequal division of labor and rewards between whites and people of color and between men and women. Since its origins in slavery, U.S. capitalism has been structured by racism. People of color — particularly blacks and Latinos — have been largely segregated into the poorer paid, less secure, less unionized “secondary job market.” Women of all races have been an invisible and unpaid domestic labor force.

Recent economic developments — de-industrialization, technological job destruction, transnationalization of capital, polarization of the occupational structure, inflationary erosion of real wages — are causing serious problems for those unionized, industrial workers who had been able to wrest some benefits from the liberal welfare state. Disinvestment in industry is matched by disinvestment in the farm belt. There is no credit for family farms in Reagan’s “prosperity;” as a result, they are failing in record numbers. Meaningful economic proposals must respond to these problems. We must create new productive enterprises and design transitions from old to new industries that do not devastate communities and entire regions. We need farm policies that can protect family farmers.

However, recent economic developments — and the Reaganomic cuts in social services that have accompanied them — fall most heavily on those who have benefited least from unionization and the “universal” entitlements of social security and unemployment insurance. Poverty in America cuts across lines of race, gender, and generation. Soup lines and shelters for the homeless are among the most integrated institutions in the United States today.

Although the majority of the poor are white, the higher incidence of poverty among people of color has vicious effects for those concentrated in urban ghettos. Family and community life for blacks and Latinos is devastated by rising unemployment (particularly among youth), by permanent underemployment, and by the decay of inner cities. Children suffer the most. Today half of all black children and one-third of Latino children live in poverty, with little hope for a better future. Even

those black men who have broken into basic industry find their jobs under attack. Racism structured into the economy and into the way society identifies problems is also evident in the organized opposition to immigrant workers and in the renewed attempts by agri-business to use controlled “guest workers” to weaken farm workers’ unionization.

For most white women, the effects of economic change are more contradictory. Economic and social forces have pulled increasing numbers of married white women into wage labor, creating possibilities for greater independence and equality. But most women have been integrated into poorly paid, nonunion “women’s jobs.” They find themselves burdened with the “double day” that has always been the lot of women at the bottom of the economy — a day divided between underpaid wage labor and unpaid domestic labor. Thus, growing numbers of white single mothers share the condition of their black and Latina sisters: poor and getting poorer; dependent on the continually shrinking, means-tested, bottom half of the welfare system.

We must challenge the capitalist ideology that holds “managerial prerogative” sacred.

If we are to gain greater control over our lives, we need economic security. We must build that security by changing the structures that divide us: the segmented labor market, the dual welfare system and the sexual division of labor in the household. Our objectives should be (1) a decent income guaranteed to every person, not by means-tested “hand-outs,” but through an expanded social wage made up of universal entitlements; (2) an economy that offers *full-and-fair employment* (including a redefinition of “work” so that taking care of one’s own children or elderly or disabled relatives is recognized as socially useful work and is compensated fairly); (3) the expansion of democratic control by workers over their workplaces.

A strong union movement that includes a large part of the workforce and is antiracist and antisexist is crucial for achieving these goals. Unfortunately, in these hard times, we lack such a movement. But small gains in each area — the **universal social wage, full-and-fair employment, and workplace democracy** — can strengthen workers’ solidarity and help build the strong movement we need. At the same time, small gains in themselves give

us, bit by bit, more control over our daily lives.

The Social Wage

We share with the National Conference of Bishops the belief that “the time has come for . . . the creation of an order that guarantees the minimum conditions of human dignity in the economic sphere for every person.” We reject outright the mean-spirited claims of all the neos — from “liberal” to conservative — that we cannot have both growth *and* justice. We are absolutely unwilling to accept that the wealthiest nation in the world can no longer afford social justice and social compassion.

We support a greatly expanded social wage — that is, government programs that pay for basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter for those Americans who cannot provide for themselves and programs that help all Americans by paying for necessary basic services such as education, health care and daycare. Through the social wage, we affirm our collective responsibility to guarantee everyone economic survival and dignity. In supporting a greatly

expanded social wage, we also recognize that guaranteed universal benefits strengthen workers in their struggles to secure decent wages and working conditions. The struggle for the social wage is therefore a part of the larger struggle of working people to gain more power over their jobs and their lives.

To move toward a meaningful social wage we must:

(a) expand social security and unemployment insurance to make them genuinely universal. Both programs must cut across the racial and gender divisions in the segmented labor market. Social security must be reformed so that women’s unpaid labor as housewives is recognized in benefits.

(b) create a national health service, emphasizing preventive medical care in decentralized clinics. We can draw on democratic models of patient/care-giver relationships and preventive self-care developed with women’s health collectives.

(c) provide family allowances to all families with children, as is done in most Western industrialized countries.

(d) develop comprehensive daycare and preschool programs. We need job-site

infant care so that nursing mothers can return to work without being separated from their infants. Both union campaigns and government tax breaks will be required to pressure employers to provide such infant care. We also need quality preschool programs for young children, and before- and after-school programs for the school-age children of employed parents. These programs should be provided through the public schools in order to equalize access to care and to provide continuity for children even when their parents change jobs. Whether job-site or school-site, programs must be parent- and provider-controlled, yet funded through government and corporate programs.

(e) expand federal support for education, focusing on three vital areas: programs in inner city schools, job training with pay for the never employed, and retraining programs for displaced industrial workers and displaced homemakers.

(f) create a system of direct grants to support those not covered (or not fully covered) by entitlements or by wages in a full-and-fair employment economy.

Full-and-Fair Employment

To create a society in which we can combine socially useful wage work with parenting, caretaking, and housework, we must be able to provide a job at a living wage for everyone who wants one. At the same time, we must create conditions in which job expansion means union expansion, and union expansion of justice for all workers, including women and people of color.

To move in this direction, it will be necessary to:

(a) greatly expand jobs in both the private and public sectors. A strong public sector employment program offers the opportunity for expanded public sector unionization. An expanded and organized public sector could then spearhead the restructuring of jobs to accommodate the particular needs of couples with children, single parents, and those such as the elderly or the disabled who can work only part time. "Everyone who wants a job" must also include immigrant workers. The solution to worker competition is not to exclude categories of workers, but to organize them.

(b) reduce the work day and work week; extend full benefits to part-time jobs; and provide for sick-child care and for newborn parental leave for men as well as women. To win these changes, we must

transform our personal lives so that men and women can share equally in domestic labor, parenting and leisure.

(c) provide wages for the full-time caretaking in the home of one's own children or elderly or disabled relatives. This would be public sector employment and an alternative to jobs outside the household.

(d) aggressively promote affirmative action and pay equity in the public sector, the private sector, and in unions themselves. This would be done by means of direct government and union action in their own areas and through legal pressure on the private sector. If the specific issues of race and gender are not addressed, women and people of color will still end up on the bottom, "employed" but overworked and underpaid. As Jesse Jackson put it, "Black people had full employment under slavery." That is not our model.

Democratizing the Workplace

Our vision of democratic socialism is not one of centralization and bureaucratization, where power is concentrated at the top and workers feel powerless over their lives. Rather, we envision workers controlling production through their own democratic organizations, within a socialist economy organized to produce on the basis of social usefulness, not quick profit.

Current "quality-of-worklife" programs that create so-called "labor-management cooperation" as an alternative to adversarial bargaining are much more likely to weaken unions and strengthen management control over the labor process. They rarely introduce any real "democracy." Even worker owned and controlled collectives, which may succeed in democratizing internal work relationships, must still swim in a capitalist sea. Worker-owners may be free of bosses, but they are not free of capitalism.

Nonetheless, as in other aspects of our lives, we must start from where we are. We must measure attempts to increase democracy in workplaces or to create worker collectives not against an ideal of "real socialism" but against our immediate needs. Does a particular worker collective actually empower workers? Do members interact democratically and challenge racism and sexism? Does belonging strengthen a member's belief in democratic action to change society? Does a particular "quality-of-worklife" program offer workers any greater control over their worklife? Is it possible for workers to maintain a tough, union-defined agenda involving

safety, automation, and job stress? Does participation in the program help build workers' confidence in their ability to take control of their own jobs and lives?

Since unions are crucial in democratizing workplaces (except in small worker-owned and -run collectives), we cannot strengthen workplace democracy without strengthening workers' ability to organize. We need labor law reform that will help unions organize and secure contracts. Labor laws must grant union organizers equal access to worksites, impose meaningful penalties on labor law violators, certify unions immediately when a majority signs cards, and enable unions to invoke binding interest arbitration to win the initial contract if an employer refuses to bargain in good faith with a newly certified union.

At the same time, union-based worker control within the workplace must be extended through labor law reform and collective bargaining. In order to fight for union-based worker control over technological restructuring (as envisioned in the IAM's Technological Bill of Rights) and over plant closings, we must challenge the capitalist ideology that holds "managerial prerogatives" sacred. This means supporting reforms that give unions access to employers' financial records and require employers to bargain with unions on all matters of concern to workers.

We need increased government support for worker ownership and control, not only through grants and matching funds for worker buy-outs (which usually involve "failing" enterprises), but through the creation of new worker-owned and worker-controlled enterprises. In agriculture, this means support for both family farms and rural collectives. We need programs that will help small farmers get direct access to markets, breaking the corporate stranglehold. We recognize the need to challenge racism and sexism with worker-run enterprises within unions and within "quality-of-worklife" programs. Without such challenges, we could find ourselves creating yet another version of "democracy for the few," even as we try to build people's confidence in their ability to take control.

How Do We Get There?

We cannot move toward a more humane and productive economy without democratic planning. Such planning is coordinated but decentralized. It is supported by federal funding and is characterized by significant worker and community control.

A primary goal of democratic planning

is the demilitarization of the U.S. economy through plant conversion and the retraining of workers. Huge military budgets increase the threat of war instead of increasing our security, and so we support significant cuts in military spending on that ground alone. But militarization of the economy also diverts capital into production that creates useless jobs, allows military priorities to dominate research and development, leads to inflation, steals money from social services, and props up Third World dictatorships that offer opportunities for runaway shops. Demilitarization of the economy is, therefore, key in promoting healthy economic growth and social justice both in the United States and in the Third World.

Democratic planning requires a monetary policy subject to democratic controls by planning boards. It is not enough to change the membership of the Federal Reserve Board or to elect its members. It must be transformed from an autonomous body into part of a coordinated democratic planning network.

Democratic planning must also be linked to democratic investment. Obviously, the corporate elite will not willingly give us the capital to challenge their control of the economy. Local "alternative credit unions" can provide some funds for the development of small worker-owned and run enterprises. But they can't reach enough people with enough money. We need control over significant investment funds. Appropriate mechanisms for this would be a public bank charged with supporting worker-controlled and community-controlled projects; worker, union, and community control over pension funds; and workers' "mutual funds" like those in Sweden.

To support the levels of social spending we need, demilitarization of the economy will not suffice. There must be real tax reform and real tax increase that take the rich off "welfare" and make corporations pay their fair share.

We must win plant closing legislation that forces corporations to absorb the costs of relocating. We must also win union-based regulations for ecologically sound growth and worker control over technology choices. These are, in fact, political choices and should be democratically controlled.

An International Perspective

We must acknowledge that the era of exclusively national solutions to economic problems is over. National economic health

in today's internationalized economy can be accomplished only by raising wages and incomes throughout the world, by demilitarizing all economies, and by cooperating to stop global pollution. In a world economy it is never in the interests of the American people to support regimes that repress their citizens and depress their incomes or that let their countries be used as the staging grounds for U.S. war games or the dumping grounds for U.S. toxic wastes.

We are committed to social and economic justice not only for Americans but for people throughout the world, and we are particularly concerned with supporting attempts by people in the Third World to gain a decent standard of living. Greater economic justice in the Third World can be a stimulus to greater justice in the United States *if we have the right industrial policy*. We must retrain U.S. workers to move into high value-added jobs as Third World countries move into basic industrial production for export. We must promote ecologically sound development programs that enable Third World countries to become self-sufficient in food production as part of their own agricultural and industrial development.

Understanding the connections between U.S. foreign policy and our own daily economic problems can create a new sense of international solidarity with the poor of the Third World. It could eventually initi-

ate a new foreign policy and new domestic economic policies in the United States.

Mobilizing Power to Get More Power

Our proposals constitute a direct assault on corporate power over the economy and over U.S. foreign policy. Nobody is going to give us that power. We must organize to take it. We must bring together groups of people with sometimes conflicting interests, groups that have been set against each other by the divisions of class, race, and gender that permeate this society.

But what we share is more important than what now divides us. We share the anger of seeing the rich get richer while we work harder and harder just to survive. Out of that shared sense of injustice, we must reach new understandings with each other, build new networks, forge new coalitions. By working to change the structures that divide us — the segmented labor market, the dual welfare system, the sexual division of labor in the household — we can empower ourselves. At the same time, we can create the conditions for even greater political unity.

Step by step, we can build a progressive majority and a more humane and just society. If we want more control over our lives, we must start taking it now. ●



Change the USA! Join the DSA!



Members of the Democratic Socialists of America work in every day-to-day struggle for social justice. We bring a strategy for building alliances among all the movements for social change. And we bring a vision of a society that can satisfy the demands for dignity and justice—a socialist society. Join the people working to bring together all the movements for social change . . . and to bring together day-to-day battles and long-term strategies and visions.

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DSACTION

Edited by Guy Molyneux

Introduction: With this issue, **DSACTION** debuts as a regular section of *Democratic Left*. In its pages we will bring you reports, announcements, and analyses of political activities and developments around the country. We are hoping it will tell you a little bit more about the directions, debates, successes, and even disappointments of your organization. Harry Fleischman will continue to compile 'On the Left' as part of **DSACTION**. We expect the section to be somewhat eclectic — part bulletin board, part reportage, even a smidgen of gossip — and welcome input from our readers. Send your contributions to Democratic Left, 15 Dutch St., Room 500, New York, NY 10038.

UPCOMING

• Excitement continues to grow about the spring **Central America/South Africa Mobilization**, planned for April 24-27 in Washington, D.C. Local coalitions are already forming in most cities west of the Mississippi to publicize the mobilization and arrange transportation (a parallel event is also scheduled for the San Francisco area). The call to the event, which will be officially released on January 28, has over 40 signatures of prominent religious and labor leaders. Among the signators are: Owen Bieber, U.A.W.; William Winpisinger, I.A.M.; Gerald McEntee, A.F.S.C.M.E.; Ken Blaylock, A.F.G.E.; Cleveland Robinson, District 65; Arie Brouwer, National Council of Churches; Avery Post, United Church of Christ; Roman Catholic Bishop Thomas Gumbleton; C.J. Mallory of the Progressive National Baptist Convention; and the Reverends Walter Fauntroy, Jesse Jackson, and Joseph Lowery. Matthew Countryman, our new anti-intervention coordinator, is both organizing DSA's involvement and playing a leading national role in organizing students for the march.

If you want to join the organizing effort (and every local should!), contact Matthew at the national office. And don't be misled by the current weakness of the President — contra aid is by no means dead yet. Many conservatives in Congress, both

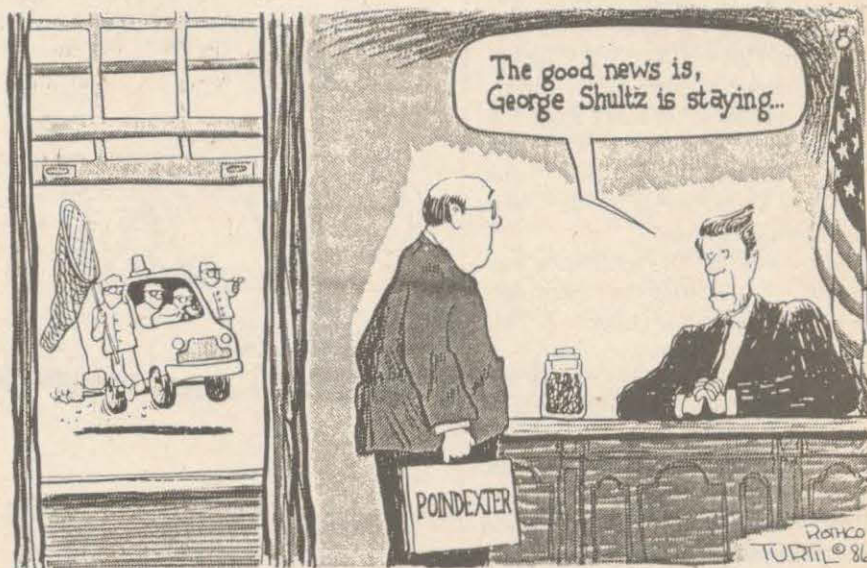
Democrats and Republicans, are striving valiantly to separate the principle of contra aid from the Administration's illegal support for them. We dare not be complacent now: when your opponent's on the ropes, you don't return to your corner. Be there.

• Hundreds of the nation's best leftwing scholars will again convene this spring at the annual **Socialist Scholars Conference**. Sponsored by the City University of New York branch of DSA and a number of radical publications, the Scholars Conference always provides three days of provocative debate and analysis of a wide range of historical, theoretical, and political issues. This year's conference will be held over the April 10-12 weekend at the Boro of Manhattan Community College. For more information write to R.L. Norman, C.U.N.Y. DSA, Room 800, 33 West 42nd St., New York, NY 10036.

tions include: AFSCME D.C. 37; the Albany, Saratoga, and Troy Federations of Labor; NYS and NYC A.D.A.; NYS Citizen Action; C.W.A. District 1; NYS N.O.W.; NYS Rainbow Coalition; and the U.A.W.

To register, send \$25 (\$15 low income) to Democratic Alternatives, 15 Dutch Street, Suite 500, New York, NY 10038, or for more information call Jo-Ann Mort at (212)962-0390.

• The weekend of February 13-15 will see hundreds of student activists come to Columbia University in New York City for the DSA Youth Section's annual **Winter Youth Conference**. This year's looks to be one of the best, with such confirmed speakers as Michael Harrington, Richard Barnett, Ruth Messinger, Rep. John Conyers, Harry Britt, and Sarah Miles. These conferences provide some of the best political



• The first followup event to the May New Directions meeting (see report below) will be the Albany **Democratic Alternatives Conference**. To be held February 27-28 at the Albany Hilton, the conference will focus on alternative social policies and will feature such participants as Barbara Ehrenreich, Robert Lekachman, William Julius Wilson, Stanley Hill, Noreen Connell, Jan Pierce, Ethel Klein, Steve Max, Sam Meyers, Franz Leichter, Frank Barbaro, and Mary Jo Bane. Sponsoring organiza-

education anywhere, and also provide young radicals with an invaluable opportunity to share experiences and insights. If you are interested in attending, or know young activists who you think should hear more about the conference, contact Bill Spencer at the national office.

REPORTS

• DSA members Paul Garver, a Service

Employees International Union (S.E.I.U.) staffer from Pittsburgh, and Mike Urquhart, president of a Washington, D.C. local of the American Federation of Government Employees (A.F.G.E.), were among the 170 North American participants in the **In Search of Peace** conference held in San Salvador, El Salvador in late November. The conference was sponsored by the National Union of Salvadoran Workers (U.N.T.S.).

Fifty members of the U.S. delegation came from organized labor, most of them officially representing their unions. There were also a large number of Catholic and Protestant clergy, as well as staffpeople for four U.S. congresspersons, including Michael Espy, the newly elected black representative from Mississippi. As the direct representative of AFGE President Ken Blaylock, Mike Urquhart emerged as the unofficial leader of the delegation, ably assisted by Paul.

The Salvadoran participation in the conference included representatives of the Lutheran and Episcopal churches, the National University of El Salvador and the Jesuit University of Central America, and two political parties: the Social Democratic Party and the Party of National Conciliation (a large moderate conservative party). The largest participation came from the various unions associated with the U.N.T.S. and from various non-governmental human rights, student, and community organizations.

Paul reports that the conference was very useful in familiarizing the foreign delegates with the current situation in El Salvador — the growing casualties, the role of U.S. intervention in propping up the unpopular Duarte regime, the crucial role of the urban labor movement in the fight for peace, the negative role of the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD) — and served as well to advance the movement within El Salvador.

All in all, the conference constituted an important step along the road to peace and democracy in El Salvador, and we are pleased that DSA was so well represented.

- The coalition which convened the New Directions conference in Washington last May (see *May-August Democratic Left*) is now planning several regional **Democratic Alternatives** followup conferences. The conferences will seek to define progressive alternatives to the current rightward shift of the Democratic party in key policy areas, and rally rank-and-file Democrats around

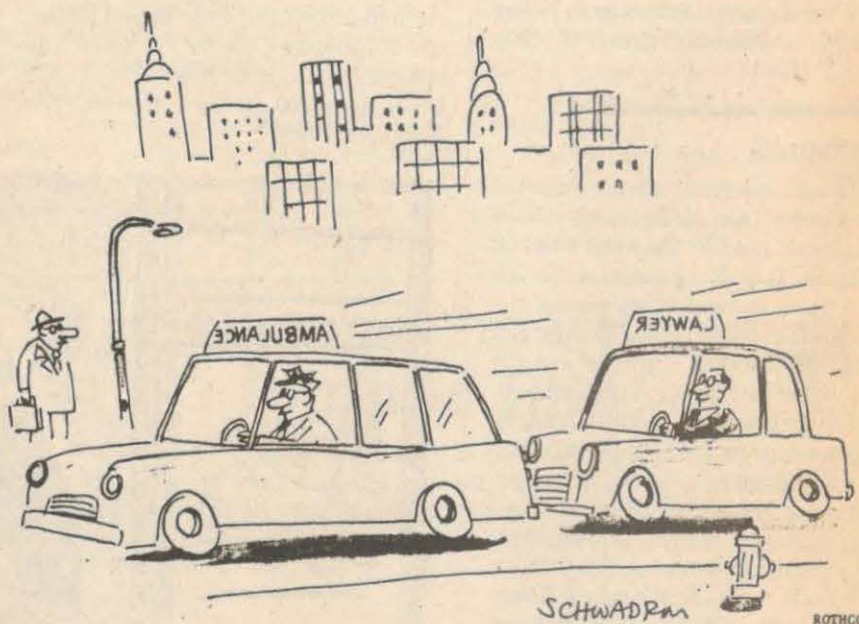
that agenda. The first two will be held in Albany, N.Y. on February 27-28 and in Kansas City on June 19-21, with meetings also tentatively scheduled for Chicago, Detroit, Boston, and Los Angeles.

- The **DSA Youth Section (YS)**, the nation's largest radical student organization, has had a busy fall semester. More than fifty campuses have been visited since Labor Day by either Youth Organizer Bill Spencer or a member of the YS's national executive committee. New chapters are being organized at Yale, Georgia State University, University of Maryland at College Park, and University of Montana. And Secretary-Treasurer Paul Baer will spend two weeks this winter working with nascent chapters in Texas, with expenses covered by generous contributions from DSA locals in Houston and Austin.

ranging for a U.S. campus tour of young Sandinistas in the spring.

RESOURCES

- DSA's Labor Commission has just published the first issue of its flashy new newsletter, **Labor Voice**, which replaces the old *DSA Labor Memo*. The premiere issue includes interesting pieces on non-intervention organizing within the labor movement, health and safety issues, women and the CWA strike against AT&T, the Shell boycott, a comparison of labor in the 1920s and 1980s, and South Korean labor and the American labor movement. The Commission has an ambitious publication schedule, hoping to bring out *Labor Voice* every two months. We wish them luck — DSA urgently needs such a publication. Congratulations to editorial commit-



The anti-apartheid struggle continues to be a major focus of activity on the campuses, and many chapters hosted visits by Susan Mnumzana of the ANC during her national tour for DSA. The YS is spearheading a national effort to pressure universities to grant honorary degrees to Nelson Mandela at spring commencements. Reproductive rights has also been a priority, as reflected in a special issue of *Days of Decision*, a developing activist network, and a week-long Student Mobilization for Reproductive Freedom held in November. Finally, a number of activists are spending two weeks of January on work brigades in Nicaragua, and the YS is ar-

tee members Jim Coppess, Suzanne Crowell, Carl Goldman, Tim Sears, Kurt Stand, and Karen Tramontano on a great first issue. You can join the subscribers list by writing to: DSA Labor Commission, P.O. Box 28408, Washington, DC 20038.

- **Learning About Work** is a package of materials produced by the American Labor Education Center for teaching labor in the classroom. The package includes a 52-page book, *What Do You Do At Work?*, which describes in detail the labor-in-the-schools project the Center conducted at a D.C. public school, as well as an 80-slide presentation with accompanying discussion guide. The

complete package is available for \$50 from American Labor, 1835 Kilbourne Place N.W., Washington, DC 20010.

• In **First Steps Toward a New Civilization**, Michael Harrington analyzes contemporary American capitalism and develops an immediate agenda for radicals. The 16-page essay is published by DSA and is available individually or in bulk. **Taking Control of Our Own Lives**, the DSA transitional economic program published in this issue of *Democratic Left*, is also available in pamphlet form. To order either item, see the literature ad in this issue.

• The Institute for Democratic Socialism and the Analysis and Policy Press (founded by Philadelphia DSA members Joan and Jay Mandle) have begun joint publication of an exciting new pamphlet series — **ALTERNATIVES** — which will address a wide range of analytical and policy-oriented topics. The first two pamphlets in the series are: Ruth Sidel, *A Call for a U.S. Family Policy*, and Gar Alperovitz, *The Common Good*. Single copies are \$1.50 each. Subscriptions to the entire first 8-pamphlet series are \$12.00. To order, write Analysis and Policy Press, Box 374, Bryn Mawr, PA 19010.

JOB OPENING

The DSA Youth Section is a progressive, activist organization with chapters at over 40 campuses, working in coalitions to build a movement for peace, economic justice, and social equality, and working to build a socialist student movement. They are hiring a new national youth organizer.

Duties: travel and speak on campuses; organize socialist conferences; work with elected leadership to organize national political projects; service chapters, produce literature, and administrative tasks.

Qualifications: writing, speaking and general communication skills; organizing experience; commitment to DSA; knowledge of a broad range of issues; ability to work long hours. Salary starts at \$13,000, plus major medical insurance.

To apply: send letter of application and resume by March 1, 1987 to the Youth Section hiring committee c/o DSA Youth Section, 15 Dutch Street, Suite 500, New York, NY 10038. Women and people of color encouraged to apply.

Recent Books by DSA Members

Note: If there are multiple authors, DSA members are noted by an asterisk().*

Howard Winant* and Michael Omi, **Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960's to the 1980's**, Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Irving Howe, **Socialism in America**, Harcourt, Brace, and Jovanovich.

Robert Zieger, **American Workers, American Unions, 1920-1985**, Johns Hopkins University Press.

Paul Buhle and Alan Dawley, eds., **Working for Democracy: American Workers from the Revolution to the Present**, University of Illinois Press.

Robert Wood, **From Marshall Plan to Debt Crisis: Foreign Aid and Development in the World Economy**, University of California Press.

Michael Storper* and Allen J. Scott, eds., **Production, Work, Territory**, Allen and Unwin.

Manning Marable, **Black American Politics**, Verso.

Manning Marable, **W.E.B. DuBois: Black Radical Democrat**, Twayne.

Carole Joffe, **The Regulation of Sexuality: Experiences of Family Planning Workers**, Temple University Press.

Harry Boyte, Steve Max*, and Heather Booth, **Citizen Action and the New American Populism**, Temple University Press.

Harry Boyte and Frank Riessman*, eds., **The New Populism**, Temple University Press.

Gary J. Dorrien, **The Democratic Socialist Vision**, Rowman & Littlefield.

Larry Mishel, **The Polarization of America: The Loss of Good Jobs, Falling Incomes & Rising Inequality**, Industrial Union Department (AFL-CIO).

Deborah Rosenfelt, et. al, eds., **Feminist Criticism and Social Change: Sex, Class, and Race in Literature and Culture**, Methuen.

John Rajchman and Cornel West*, eds., **Post-Analytic Philosophy**, Columbia University Press.

Lester Thurow, **The Zero-Sum Solution: Building a World Class Economy**, Simon and Schuster.

Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschmeyer*, and Evelyne Huber Stephens, eds., **States Versus Markets in the World System**, Sage.

Michael Kazin, **Barons of Labor: The San Francisco Building Trades and Union Power in the Progressive Era**, University of Illinois Press.

Melvyn Dubofsky* and Warren Van Tyne, eds., **Labor Leaders in America**, University of Illinois Press.

Arthur Shostak, **The Air Controllers Controversy: Lessons from the PATCO Strike**, Human Sciences Press.

Elliott Currie, **Confronting Crime**, Pantheon.

Phillip Green, **Retrieving Democracy: In Search of Civic Equality**, Rowman and Allenheld.

David Garrow, **Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Council**, Morrow.

John Stephens and Evelyne Huber Stephens, **Democratic Socialism in Jamaica: The Political Movement and Social Transformation in Dependent Capitalism**, Princeton University Press.

Ruth Milkman, **Gender and Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation During World War II**, University of California Press.

Ruth Milkman, Ed., **Women, Work and Protest: A Century of U.S. Women's History**, Simon and Schuster.

Stanley Aronowitz* and Henry Giroux, **Education Under Siege: The Conservative, Liberal and Radical Debate Over Schooling**, Bergin and Garvey.

Judith Stein, **The World of Marcus Garvey: Race and Class in Modern Society**, Louisiana State University Press.

Noam Chomsky, **Turning the Tide: U.S. Intervention in Central America and the Struggle for Peace**, South End Press.

Robert Heilbroner, **The Nature and Logic of Capitalism**, Norton.

Juliet Schor, David Kotz, et. al., **The Economic Report of the People**, South End Press.

John Logue and James Quilligan, **Buy-out! Employee Ownership as an Alternative to Plant Shutdowns**, Kent Popular Press.

Apologies to anyone whose book we've omitted. We'll be updating this list regularly, so please send us titles of books by DSA authors whenever you come across them.

ON THE LEFT



by HARRY FLEISCHMAN

California

A newly-revitalized DSA youth chapter at U.C. Berkeley helped form a new feminist student caucus and distributed literature on the anniversary of the death of Rosie Jimenez, the first known victim of an illegal abortion after passage of the Hyde amendment . . . Los Angeles DSA co-sponsors a film series with the Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research. "Hiroshima Mon Amour" was shown in December. The local was active in the Fall elections . . . The LA Socialist Community School held Fall classes on "The Union Movement: Challenge and Response," "Socialist Revolutions of the World," "Current Issues Facing Socialist Feminists" and "Introduction to Marxism" . . . San Diego DSA has two branches now: one in the city and the other at San Diego State University. They worked in the successful campaigns of Senator Alan Cranston and congressperson Jim Bates. The campus chapter sponsored several anti-apartheid rallies, a "Take Back the Night" march in response to recent rapes on campus, and co-sponsored "Alice in Blunderland," a play about nuclear disarmament . . . San Francisco DSA has concentrated on housing/anti-high-rise activism for many years. Its city ballot proposition to limit the growth of San Francisco's downtown financial district passed after several earlier defeats.

District of Columbia

Roger Wilkins, civil rights activist, and Gar Alperovitz, co-author of *Rebuilding America*, spoke to DC/MD DSA in November on "What Happened: A View of the 1986 Elections" . . . The local is hosting a Mid-Atlantic Retreat June 26-28, 1987 at the Claggett Center in Buckeystown, Md.

Maryland

A new DSA youth chapter has gotten off the ground at the University of Maryland/College Park . . . Montgomery county DSA is consolidating its two branches — Takoma Park/Silver Spring

and Bethesda/Rockville — into a single countywide branch with more than 100 members.

Massachusetts

Boston DSA and the Radcliffe-Harvard DSA chapter helped defeat Ballot Question 1, a constitutional amendment which would have allowed the state legislature to restrict or prohibit access to abortion in the state . . . Radcliffe-Harvard DSA is organizing student support for a union drive on campus . . . Chapter activities also included organizing Coors boycott publicity and pickets . . . In Boston, a non-binding ballot question calling for black neighborhoods to secede from the city and form a new city, Mandela, was defeated 73% to 27%. The proposals lost heavily in both black and white districts.

Michigan

Red-baiting by Republican Congressman Carl Pursell against his Democratic opponent Dean Baker may have helped his re-election to a sixth term but it also helped win many new members for Ann Arbor DSA. Baker was not the first Democrat to be accused of socialist leanings by Pursell. Ten years ago, it was Edward Pierce, now mayor of Ann Arbor . . . Detroit DSA carried banners for democracy and human rights in Detroit's Labor Day parade. A new chapter has been formed at Michigan State University in Lansing.

Missouri

St. Louis DSA members are active in the Missouri Citizen/Labor Coalition. They worked on John Bass' campaign for State Senate and are backing the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union in a struggle against Angelica Corporation.

New Jersey

Stockton State College Students for Democratic Alternatives, a DSA youth section affiliate, is focusing its work this semester on Central America. Six members went to Nicaragua last year. The chapter is cooperating with a newly formed Student Union on local issues such as the development of a military/industrial research park on campus grounds.

New York

SUNY Binghamton DSA helped call a

pro-choice rally of 200 from campuses around the state. They have also exposed a local bogus abortion clinic and are planning more work on Central America . . . Albany DSA helped Mark Green carry Albany on election day. Their upcoming Debs dinner will honor Frank Barbaro, head of the Assembly Labor Committee and an anti-contra aid activist. A Democratic Alternatives Conference will be held in Albany in February . . . Rochester DSAers helped elect progressive Louise Slaughter, who unseated a conservative Republican Congressman . . . Ithaca DSA has a strong chapter at Cornell which plans a study group and public forums . . . Nassau County DSA held a benefit party Dec. 27 with proceeds going to NEST (New El Salvador Today) . . . Local DSA leaders Charlie Russell and David Sprintzen appeared in a three-page feature in *Newsday* on "Dissent in the Suburbs" . . . The Workers Defense League had AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland as its guest of honor at its 50th Anniversary Dinner Dec. 4. Kirkland quoted approvingly the comment of Norman Thomas, the Socialist leader who founded the WDL, that he and the WDL were not champions of "lost causes," but only "causes not yet won." And labor's troubadour, Joe Glazer, composed a song for the occasion summing up the evening's theme: "Look at the things we've done, But we've only just begun" . . . A new DSA youth chapter has been organized at SUNY Stony Brook, and is bringing films on South Africa, Nicaragua, and hunger into the dormitories on campus . . . The Barnard-Columbia youth chapter worked with other student groups on a Reproductive Rights Week of Action.

Ohio

Cleveland DSA held a chapter retreat. The local is working on a campaign to make Cleveland a Sanctuary City. It plans a regional socialist-feminist retreat in the spring . . . Oberlin DSA has been involved in a substantial amount of labor support and anti-apartheid work. When the CIA came to recruit on campus, DSA organized a teach-in which drew over 150 people . . . Mike Harrington spoke to 320 people at Bowling Green State University in November. Sponsored by the Graduate Student Senate, DSA members from Dayton, Cleveland, Lima, Findlay, Tiffin and Toledo were present as well as representatives from several unions . . . Kent State University DSA held a series of

DSACTION

bi-weekly programs in November and December on "Socialist and Ecology," "Socialism and the State," "Socialism and Freedom," and "Does Worker Ownership Work?"

Oregon

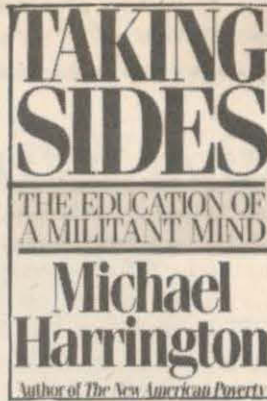
The Portland local held a workshop with over 30 members and friends on Economic Literacy . . . Oregon DSA worked actively to defeat Oregon Ballot Measure 6 which would have limited low-income women's right to have an abortion.

Pennsylvania

"Eugene Hasenfus and I arrived the same day in Nicaragua — his landing was rougher than mine." That's how Jack Spooner began his talk Nov. 9 to Central Pennsylvania DSA in Harrisburg. Spooner was one of four DSA representatives to the International League of Religious Socialists Congress in Managua. He was "cautiously optimistic" that fence-mending between the Roman Catholic Church and the Sandinista government may become a reality . . . Bucknell DSA has 25 members, supports a local soup kitchen, put on the film "Debs and the American Labor Movement," and are putting together a lecture series on "Labor in Crisis." (Norman Thomas went to Bucknell for a year before spending the rest of his college days at Princeton) . . . Swarthmore DSA has been every active in Central America organizing, as well as in anti-apartheid work . . . DSA is working with other groups to back pay equity in Philadelphia . . . A new DSA youth chapter has been organized at Carnegie-Mellon University in Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh DSA is active in a coalition to prevent the U.S. Department of Energy from shipping contaminated radioactive debris from the Three Mile Island Nuclear Reactor through Pittsburgh . . . They held a workshop on understanding the media, and have an ongoing Socialist discussion group. They also helped spawn a youth chapter — Three Rivers DSA.

Texas

Houston DSA's Cultural Critique Group discussed "Democratizing the Private Sector: Populism, Capitalism and Capital Strike."

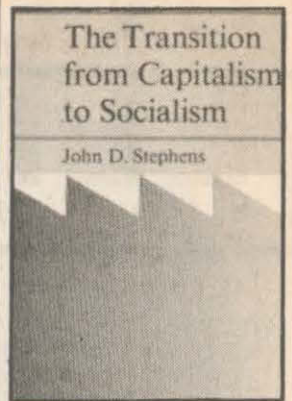


TOWARD A SOCIALIST THEORY OF RACISM

by Cornel West



Published by the Institute for Democratic Socialism and the Socialist Workers' Conference



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REVIEWS

A Revolution Revisited

by Anthony Borden

EYES ON THE PRIZE: AMERICA'S CIVIL RIGHTS YEARS, 1954-1965. A six-part documentary to be broadcast on PBS beginning January 21, produced by Blackside, Inc. Executive producer, Henry Hampton.

Waiting for the subway as I headed to a screening of *Eyes on the Prize*, I watched an argument heat up between a white policewoman and a black male messenger. He had lost his money and asked her if he could skip the turnstile this one time. When she said no, he remained standing by the entrance, hoping someone would give him a token or, she must have assumed, waiting until she was gone so he could then hop the gate. She got angry, demanding that he leave and threatening him with a summons, while he stood there and said little. After a rich-looking woman reached over the fence to provide the token, the policewoman realized that her firm policing stance was being bought off for a buck, so she refused him entrance anyway. A white person's story would be believed, but this black man could be seen only as a chronic gate jumper.

I was amazed by the coincidence of what I'd just seen and what I was on my way to see, an extraordinary documentary from the Cambridge-based, minority-owned production company Blackside that covers the activities of the civil rights movement from 1954 to 1965. Twenty years later, black voters are harassed by members of the Republican Party in Louisiana; in Massachusetts a stampede of up to 1,000 white students chase after a dozen blacks who are fans of the victorious New York Mets; racial violence results in the death of Michael Griffith in Queens. And traveling downtown on the Broadway local, you see a black man with a token denied access to public transportation. It is too easy these days to forget the political and moral victories of the civil rights movement, to forget that all the participants were heroes—not only the various leaders, but every activist or marcher who risked death for social change. The enormous scope of this documentary puts their struggle in its courageous context, and also gives perspective on the fight facing activists now.

Eyes on the Prize is composed of archival footage intercut with recent interviews with participants, narration by Julian Bond, and stirring gospel music (from which the title is taken). Roughly chronological, each of the six parts that make up the series is tightly focused around specific events. Beginning with two personal acts of courage—Mose Wright's testimony against the murderer of his nephew in a segregated courtroom in Summer, Mississippi, and Rosa Park's arrest on a bus in Montgomery—the series then turns to the collision of states' rights loyalists and federal authorities in the integration battles at Central High School and the University of Mississippi. The third hour-long



M.L. King and advisors at 1965 requiem mass for slain civil rights worker Viola Liuzzo.

segment shows the power of the movement spreading, as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee stages lunch counter sit-ins in Nashville and then joins with the Congress of Racial Equality in the Freedom Rides to integrate interstate bus travel. The next section concentrates on three key events that helped make Martin Luther King, Jr. the nationally recognized leader of the movement: the protest campaigns in Albany, Georgia; Birmingham; and the March on Washington. Shifting back to youth organizing, the series then focuses on the Mississippi Freedom Summer, which begins with the deaths of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner and ends with the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party's challenge of the party's regular white delegation at the 1964 Democratic National Convention. The final program describes the struggle to achieve the march from Selma to Montgomery in the face of the violence of the authorities and the pressures within the movement that would soon cause it to splinter.

During the course of that long saga, old images return. There are the remains of Wright's nephew, Emmett Till, who was shot in the head and then dumped in the Tallahatchie River for speaking to a white woman. A battered Jim Zwerg, the white Freedom Rider who was permanently injured from a beating, says from his hospital bed why the rides must continue. And the brutality of Alabama is replayed in famous footage: the firehoses and police dogs of Bull Connor in Birmingham, and (though in a 1986 interview for the film the Gov'n says he was angry it happened that way) the billy clubs and tear-gas bombs of George Wallace on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma.

continued on page 22

“I Am Tired”

by Maurice Isserman

BEARING THE CROSS: MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., AND THE SOUTHERN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE by David J. Garrow. New York: Morrow, 1986. \$19.95, hardcover.

A hundred years from now, when historians will have consigned Ronald Reagan to the vegetable bin of presidential history, our times will probably and properly be remembered as the era of Martin Luther King, Jr. Look at the most obvious precedent. The original Martin Luther's name has survived in popular and historical memory while that of Leo X and subsequent Popes who attempted to undo the Protestant reformation have faded into obscurity. In the long run — and perhaps even in the short — Reagan's counter-reformation will prove even less able to withstand the challenge posed by King's egalitarian heresy. After all, no 16th century Pope ever found it politically expedient to make Martin Luther's birthday a religious holiday.

Dave Garrow's new biography, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference*, is likely to remain the definitive work on King well into the next century. He has poured a staggering amount of research into the book, including a thorough mining of King's and the SCLC's papers, hundreds of interviews with King's family, friends, and confederates, and mountains of confidential FBI reports and correspondence (much of which Garrow was instrumental in springing through his zealous employment of the Freedom of Information Act).

Garrow's biography has been criticized by some reviewers for a lack of unifying interpretation, for supposedly piling up fact upon fact without ever coming to grips with the larger patterns and significance of King's life. I think those critics have mistaken Garrow's purpose and strategy, but it is a mistake that is, unfortunately, easy to make with this book. About a hundred pages could easily be pruned from *Bearing the Cross* — and about fifty pages should have been added. For all the wealth of detail provided (and the occasional repetitiveness of the narrative), the book is marked by some curious omissions. To give one example, Garrow describes King's 1956 visit to the left-wing Highlander Folk School in Tennessee by writing “There were new people to meet; songs were being sung, and a photographer was snapping pictures . . .” but he neglects to add that those pictures would later appear on billboards throughout the South purporting to show King in attendance at a “Communist training school.” It's almost as if Garrow assumes the reader has already studied King's life in some depth, and thus he has no need to go over such familiar territory once again.

All the same, I think that Garrow's biography is superior to previous efforts precisely because he avoids the temptation to cast King's life in the most conventional and accessible mold — that is, as a long series of arduous climbs up successive “mountaintops” (Montgomery, Birmingham, the March on Washington, Selma) leading to the inevitable and oft-foretold martyrdom in Memphis — the interpretation that one finds, for example, in Stephen Oates' 1982 biography of King, *Let the Trumpet Sound*. In this



Author David J. Garrow

Photo by Susan Kuklin

account there are no unalloyed moments of joy and victory for King, no mountaintops gleaming in the sunshine — the view is always obscured by the surrounding clouds. Even in the midst of triumph King could never free himself from worry and self-doubt. Nor, apparently, could he ever enjoy the luxury of catching up on his sleep. *Bearing the Cross* is the story of a life devoted without respite to the struggle for black equality, and the adjective Garrow most often attaches to King is “exhausted.” I found it very poignant to learn of King's repeated musings about the possibility of taking a year's sabbatical off from the movement, perhaps to teach or to go off to Switzerland to write a book. But as Garrow makes clear, King could never put down the “cross” he had taken up during the Montgomery bus boycott.

The cross that King bore was an intense spiritual sense of responsibility for changing the world; but it was a cross that weighed all the heavier on King's shoulders because of the particular organizational requirements of the movement he led. If King had been, let us say, a union leader, once he had gotten over the hurdle of organizing a given workplace or industry he could have taken a breather. He would have had a contract to administer, dues coming in, and so forth — the stuff of “normal” organizational existence. The civil rights movement however, was a very different proposition. SCLC could not rest on its laurels: each time it triumphed, its very existence as an organization was threatened. Crisis was SCLC's lifeblood. It had no way of generating income without a Birmingham or a Selma in the works. Why should

anyone send in a donation to keep SCLC's office open and its organizers in the field, unless something new and exciting was happening and making the front page of the newspapers?

Given the pressures King faced — including those deliberately concocted by the army of eavesdroppers, burglars, and provocateurs J. Edgar Hoover unleashed against him in a malicious ideological vendetta that two of the century's most liberal presidents did nothing to curtail — it's not surprising that he made some mistakes and lost some battles. What made King a great leader was not his infallibility, but his own enduring commitment to the struggle and his ability to inspire that kind of commitment in others. There is a characteristic tone of weary doggedness in a speech King made to Chicago city leaders in 1966 on the question of whether or not SCLC should continue its marches in white neighborhoods, a strategy that had led to violent attacks on the marchers:

Let me say that if you are tired of demonstrations, I am tired of demonstrating. I am tired of the threat of death. I don't want to be a martyr. And there are moments when I doubt if I am going to make it through. I am tired of getting hit, tired of being beaten, tired of going to jail. But the important thing is not how tired I am; the important thing is to get rid of the conditions that lead us to march.

One feature of Garrow's book which should make it of particular interest to readers of DEMOCRATIC LEFT is its stress upon King's radical beliefs. King was not the first revolutionary to have his birthday declared a national holiday — that distinction belongs, of course, to George Washington — but he was certainly the first socialist to be so honored. King was understandably reticent to reveal these deeply held socialist convictions, not least because of Hoover's campaign, but as Garrow recounts there were occasions when King "let (down) his rhetorical guard," as in a 1965 speech to A. Philip Randolph's Negro American Labor Council: "Call it what you may, call it democracy, or call it democratic socialism, but there must be a better distribution of wealth within this country for all of God's children."

The best measure of King's radicalism was not his occasional endorsement of democratic socialism; rather it lay in his consistent effort to link seemingly disparate issues together. In the 1950s King spoke of the connections between the struggle he led in Montgomery and the anti-colonial independence struggles that convulsed Africa, and he became an early proponent of U.S. disinvestment from South Africa. In the 1960s he spoke of the connections between racism and militarism, and he became an outspoken advocate of nuclear disarmament. And perhaps the best known example of King's breadth of political concern was his decision to come out in open opposition to the war in Vietnam, despite the warnings of some of his closest advisers and allies that to do so would sever all possibility of gaining further backing from Lyndon Johnson for the civil rights movement. On April 4, 1967, a little over a year before his death, King told a New York City audience that the Vietnam War was "an enemy of the poor" in America. For him the war was more than a lamentable accident: it was a mirror of everything wrong with American society. As he told his audience: "If we are to get on the right side of the world revolution, we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must rapidly begin the shift from a 'thing-oriented' society to a 'person-oriented' society."

King is justly remembered for the inspirational qualities of his "I have a Dream" speech of 1963; he should be remembered as well for the depth of radical conviction expressed in his anti-war speeches.

Some aspects of the story that Garrow tells are likely to

provoke controversy on the left. He reveals King's personal flaws, including his highly traditional views of the proper relations between men and women, his compulsive infidelity, and his neglect of his own family. He also recounts King's antagonistic relations with a number of other civil rights leaders: the fact that King didn't get along with the NAACP's Roy Wilkins or SNCC's Stokely Carmichael is well known, but his less-than-flattering assessment of his own lieutenant in the SCLC, Jesse Jackson, comes as a surprise.

Bearing the Cross is a rich and complex account of the interaction between one man's life and the movement he came to embody. It is an indispensable book for those who want to learn about the 1960s, about the civil rights movement, and about the organizational dynamics of mass movements. ●

Maurice Isserman teaches history at Smith College. His book on the American Left in the 1950s and early 1960s will be published this fall by Basic Books.

Eyes

continued from page 20

Those tragedies, and the poverty and disenfranchisement that precipitated them, make clear the bravery of the people who were involved. In a way that most studies of the period haven't, often because they are biographies or memoirs, *Eyes on the Prize* shows the breadth of commitment to the movement. King does receive the most attention. But by presenting so many of the participants and by sketching the different strategies and projects of the several organizations the series emphasizes that this was, in the words of NAACP lawyer Constance Baker Motley, "a genuine revolution on the part of black people."

In an obligatory paragraph in his review for the *New York Times*, Walter Goodman warns that the series is not "even-handed," then struggles to explain that, given the context, this may be all right. In fact, *Eyes on the Prize* does tread a fine line, pointing out the cynical maneuvers of three presidents, the cautious and sometimes less-than-constructive figurehead role of King, and the divisive impatience of SNCC. No judgments are passed on any of these actors, and the one weakness of the documentary might be in leaving the impression that the fading of the movement was as historically inevitable as its beginning. Yet, from an organizer's perspective, *Eyes on the Prize* teaches the difficulty of building coalitions, even when the goals are clearly shared.

If the suffering revealed in the footage takes your breath away, the faces of the interviewees effect a more complex, though no less powerful, emotion. Note the grin of community leader Rufus Lewis, as he describes the jubilation after the Montgomery bus boycott, or the purposeful countenance of Rosa Parks, as she relates the exchange between her and the arresting officer. Perhaps the best storyteller is black Freedom Rider Frederick Leonard. Watch his eyes as he explains how a pummeling he took in prison wounded him less than it did the black inmate forced by white authorities to do the beating. The intense nostalgia these people feel is beautiful and it is their due. But it may not be ours. Their stories of lonely struggle are all the more poignant because the country could not maintain the momentum for social justice that these men and women began. ●

Anthony Borden is a freelance journalist who writes frequently on the South.

LETTERS

To the Editors:

It was unpleasant to face the red-baiting and name-calling every day, but it was not unexpected. I was touring the country to promote my new book, *No Contest: The Case Against Competition*, which argues that competing is inherently destructive and unproductive in all arenas of human life. On "The Phil Donahue Show," I was asked in quick succession whether I was a Communist and whether my opposition to competition didn't simply mean that I was a loser.

In nearly one hundred interviews, I explained what the evidence from many different disciplines makes clear: an arrangement that conditions one person's success on another's failure is devastating to self-esteem, ruinous to our relationships, and counterproductive in the workplace and the classroom. Strong resistance to such subversive sentiments was entirely predictable. But I did not expect to find a vigorous defense of competitive sports — for five-year-olds, no less — in *DEMOCRATIC LEFT*. Mark Naison's "Notes of a Little League Coach" (Nov.-Dec. 1986) made me feel rather as if I had walked into a doctors' lounge and found the air thick with cigarette smoke. Surely radicals can find more appropriate role models than Vince Lombardi.

There is no evidence to support the bromide that sport builds character. Indeed, my file cabinets bulge with studies documenting the psychological destructiveness of competition. But if we take "building character" to refer instead to the socialization process, then sport is powerfully effective. Competitive games shape exactly the kind of character that is most useful for corporate capitalism. They teach children to regard each other as rivals, to accept the value of an adversarial relationship in place of solidarity and collective effort. In team sports, the lesson to be learned is that cooperation is simply a means to victory. In short, participation in sports amounts to a kind of apprenticeship for life in contemporary America. David Reisman put it well: "The road to the board room leads through the locker room."

Naison defends his "total enthusiasm about athletic competition" — and presumably would distance himself from mainstream coaches — on the grounds

that he gives special encouragement to girls. I devote a full chapter of *No Contest* to the issue of women and competition, but my argument comes down to this: the fact that males are doing something does not in itself make it worthwhile. Participating in activities that are based on triumphing over others, adopting the worst of male values, is not my idea of a constructive response to sexism. The challenge is to help our sons resist competition rather than to encourage our daughters to be made over in its image.

Naison says he wants his daughter to learn discipline, emotional support, confidence, strength, and sociability. These are fine goals. The good news is that none of them requires a win/lose structure. The playing field doesn't have to be turned into a battlefield in order to have fun, get a good work out, or feel a sense of accomplishment. Sports psychologist Terry Orlick, for example, has collected hundreds of cooperative games that involve strategy and group effort without triumph and defeat.

One of the most refreshing features of the socialist critique is its focus on the structural basis of social ills. Replacing misguided individuals or fine-tuning the laws will not solve problems that are systemic. This orientation is particularly germane to competition. I can think of no better example of the liberal, reformist mentality than the assumption that a more enlightened coaching style will eliminate the poison of competitive encounters. So long as my success depends on your failure — whether in the classroom, the office, or the athletic field — the trouble will not go away.

Let us not leave our radical perspective behind when the topic is fun and games. The competition that we rightly indict during the week does not suddenly become benign on Sunday afternoons.

Alfie Kohn
Cambridge, MA

Author's reply:

Gimme a break, Alfie! Your rap may go down well in Cambridge, but not on Flatbush Avenue. No one is more competitive than radical intellectuals peddling their ideas. What makes competition and assertiveness acceptable in radical publications, but not on the playing fields?

Mark Naison

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION

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