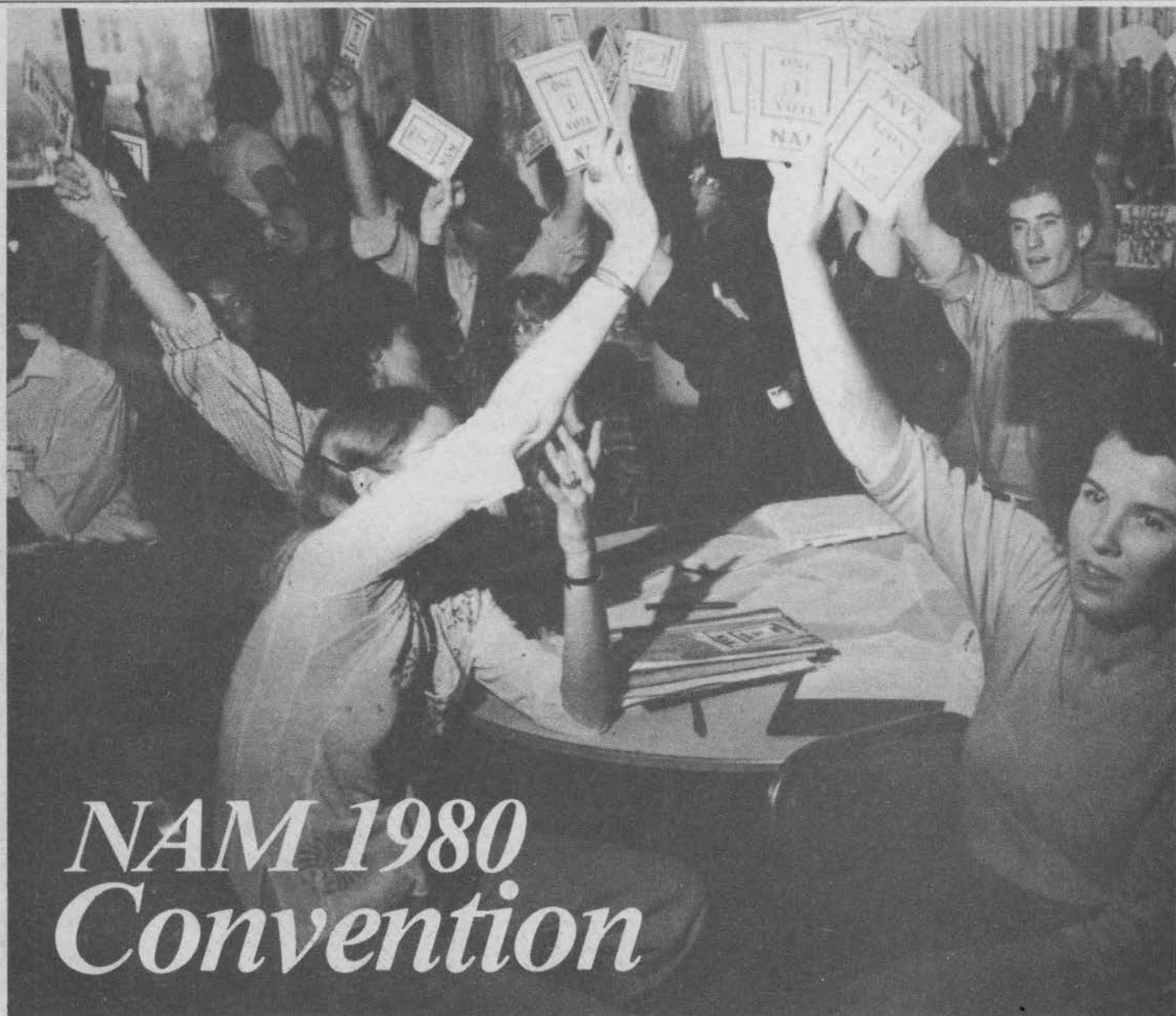


SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 1980

50 CENTS

Moving On

MAGAZINE OF THE NEW AMERICAN MOVEMENT



NAM 1980 Convention

Scott Van Osdal

Parents' Groups Challenge Isolation

Fast Food—Losing Our Chains

The City in Corporate America

Moving On

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 1980

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Towards a socialist America

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HOPE

by Ron Aronson

There is both reason *and* need to hope. Without the critical element of hope, revolutionary theory and practice by themselves are not sufficient. The reasons for hope, while limited, are there.

Getting Together

NAM: THE 1980 CONVENTION

by Judy Johnson

This year's convention continued a move toward left unity while developing NAM's political involvement in a wide range of mass movements. Debates and discussion were lively, intense, and comradely.

BEYOND THE CONVENTION

by Roberta Lynch

The NAM Convention suggests that we are facing a reshuffled capitalist deck. And we're refusing to succumb to either cynicism or despair, in part because we have begun to fill the gap between our vision and reality with concrete steps that can aid in the development of a more viable democratic left. The most important of these steps is the agreement to enter into merger negotiations with the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee.

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**By Ronald Aronson
and Charles Rooney**

WE ARE WRITING A BOOK about hope. Why a book about hope? The project dates back to a course we taught at Wayne State University in 1976. As socialist teachers we had entered political activism in the 1960s, one of us as a priest who had gotten involved in the anti-war movement, then left the priesthood; the other as a graduate student who became a community organizer in a northern ghetto. Throughout the 1970s we continued to be active, the one in Christians for Socialism, the other in the New American Movement. Having kept our commitments alive in action, we saw ourselves as battling the cynicism that had become endemic to American society by the middle of the decade. Our working-class students certainly had absorbed what we came to see as the ideology of despair, but so had so many of our movement brothers and sisters.

Ron Aronson is a member of Detroit NAM, Charles Rooney is a member of Christians for Socialism.

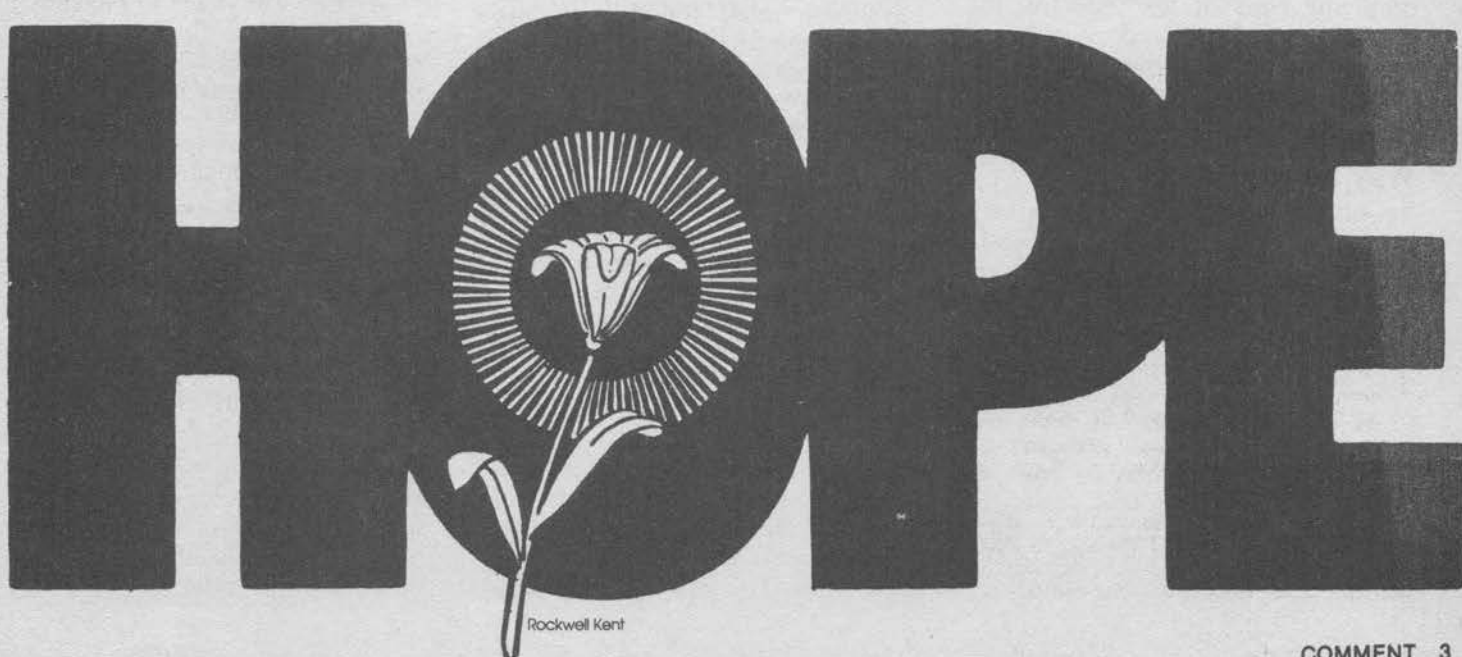
So few in the anti-war movement, for example, recognized our monumental victory against the war in Vietnam, just as so few in the civil rights movement recognized the advances black people had made due to those struggles—just as so few among the New Left recognized our achievement in reopening space for opposition and survival in American society. The two of us were going to prove the validity of hope by studying some of the twentieth century's major promises and disasters, including the Russian Revolution and the First World War, the Chinese Revolution and the Holocaust.

In the course and the book project which grew out of it, a deeper problem emerged than proving hope to the hopeless. We ourselves began to doubt. An early draft of the manuscript was largely a statement of our faith, that, yes, there was still reason to hope today, in spite of everything. But as we pondered the Holocaust, the horrors wrought by the United States in Vietnam, the grim mood of the 1970s and the generally dismal fate of socialism in the world, we ourselves became caught up in the depression we had set out to combat.

And not simply as writers: one of us,

having left the priesthood for graduate school now, as a Ph.D., with a family, saw his job vanish due to university cutbacks, and soon was unemployed and preparing for yet another career. The other, having won tenure after a major political struggle, woke up to find himself marginalized by being placed in an equally unstable part of the university. Like virtually all other Americans we too had begun to disbelieve in the future, and were beginning to think with increasing anxiety of the world our children would inherit.

As the 1970s wound on and our "official" position on hope became weaker, we slowly stopped merely refuting the neo-conservatism of the Kristols and the Novaks, and even the pessimism of the Heilbroners and the Lasches. We began, first, listening and, second, letting their gloomy messages connect with deeper levels of our own experience and outlook than we had ever known existed. We began to acknowledge the present as a time of profound crisis, without definite political or intellectual bearings. Marxism as we knew it offered little illumination about the mad technological messianism still guiding the planners, about the hundred million people



Rockwell Kent

slaughtered in the century, about the political passivity of the most advanced working classes, about the intractable problems faced by advanced industrial societies which seemed more and more to be bound up with industrialism itself, or perhaps, more troubling, with civilization itself.

Slowly, in spite of ourselves, we began to sense that Marxism as we knew it was not an adequate guide through the questions we were encountering. We knew in advance what had become of so many Marxists before us, their collapse into cynicism or their withdrawal into a kind of doctrinaire Marxist Platonism. We knew that to see our project through meant reconsidering the outlook itself without abandoning the commitments that had brought us to it. Marxism had, after all, originally struck us both as *the* social theory of hope. What is hope, after all, if not action, and what hope is not ultimately self-defeating if limited to improving just this or that area of life without seeking to create a fully human world? For those determined to act in order to make the world a truly human place, Marxist dialectics have been the dialectics of hope for over 100 years. During that time Marxism displaced religion as being the basis of liberation in this world and displaced theories of bourgeois society as being the only outlook pointing to real freedom and wellbeing not just for a few, but for everyone.

Why Hope?

Yet since at least 1914 the human story has been as much a history of tragedy and destructiveness as of the struggle for freedom, of technology creating people in its own image as of human beings laying hold of it for their liberation of the deformation of socialism as of its realization. Instead of defending hope against the cynics, our purpose became to ask whether, in spite of everything, there was still reason to hope. In other words, to see if a reality-based vision of liberation might still be possible after taking off our blinders of

socialist optimism and absorbing the negative reality of our century. All political outlooks, from Left to Right, seem to carry their own blindness. Slowly, reluctantly, we have decided to challenge the tendency of Marxists to ignore, for example, the twenty million lives sacrificed to building Soviet socialism—and return to Marxism not as another ideology, but as the critique of all ideology.

Which means confronting what socialism has meant in practice. The naive hopes of a Lenin are barred to us: sixty years of socialist history leaves progressive intellectuals in their deepest malaise since before the French Revolution—that is, with no sense of how the good society might be achieved or who might bring it about. Certainly socialist movements and societies have enormous accomplishments to their credit. But there have been enormous disasters as well, symbolized in the 1930s by the Soviet camps and in the 1970s by the Cambodian holocaust, the Chinese attack on Vietnam, the boat people, and the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia. The dominant existing models of revolutionary socialism are, for the most part, thoroughly oppressive, even after all allowances have been made for their “historic tasks,” their technical backwardness, world conditions, etc. The Soviet Union for example has become a culturally, politically and economically arrested society. Today it is no longer plausible to speak about its future flowering once scarcity is overcome.

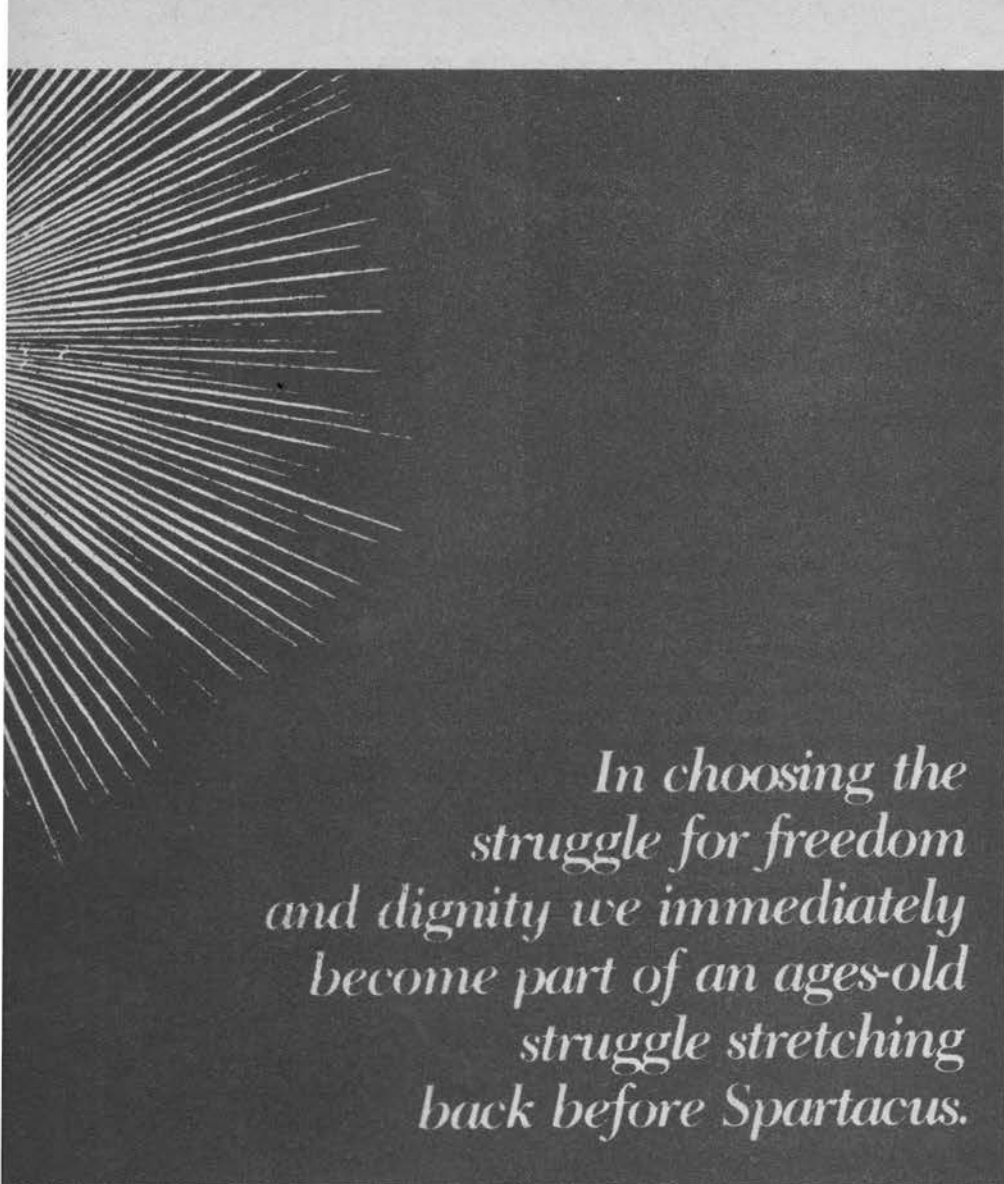
Since 1968, Soviet troops have similarly rendered Eastern Europe no longer imaginable as a zone of hope. On the other hand, the counterrevolution in Chile, a great success for American economic and foreign policy, extinguished the most promising democratic road to socialism. And those who placed their hopes in Third World socialism are slowly coming to the awareness that socialist strategies have enabled no ex-colonial society to



extricate itself from the vise of underdevelopment and imperialism. The great hopes aroused by Eurocommunism have so far proved ephemeral in the face of historic antagonisms and capitalist crisis. And finally, after considerable experience of power in Europe, Social Democracy has too often proven itself to act in practice just as its left critics have always argued it would: to accept the dominant logic of capitalism; to regard as its primary enemies those who attack the system root and branch; to foster the allegiance of the working class to class society, to perpetuate the illusion of the gradual reforming of capitalism into socialism.

The Validity of Hope

The universe of socialism is not entirely without hope. The Nicaraguan left was able to organize overwhelming popular support in its revolution against Somoza, and has brilliantly begun what will be a long and tortuous project of re-



*In choosing the
struggle for freedom
and dignity we immediately
become part of an ages-old
struggle stretching
back before Spartacus.*

Rockwell Kent

building that country, Equally brilliant has been the road to power, and the first steps in power, of the revolutionaries in Zimbabwe. Cuba rightly continues to remain a beacon of revolutionary hope in Latin America. Vietnam, having accomplished the world-historical feat of conquering American might, still seems determined to construct a humane society.

Nevertheless, these revolutions, and the conditions they must overcome, are not ours. At the root of our crisis is the realization—not limited to the Left—that contemporary capitalism is bankrupt. But we are disheartened that, especially in capitalism's darkest hour, socialism seemingly has so little light to offer, and so little appeal.

A task of the dialectics of hope, then, is to lay out the terrain that must be covered if hope is to be regained, not the least of which is: the Holocaust, the war in Vietnam, the fate of socialism. The Holocaust challenges

our very faith in the human species; the war in Vietnam as well as its aftermath leads us to wonder whether technological madness in defense of domination doesn't triumph even in defeat; the twisted history of socialism leads us to wonder whether escape is indeed possible from the destructive logic of both industrialism and class society.

We ask these questions not as the disillusioned for whom "God has failed," but rather as committed activist-intellectuals. Our goal is a Marxism adequate to reality, one which needs not pass in silence over Nazi death camps because of a complicity with the Soviet death camps. We believe that without its eyes completely open to this century of disaster Marxism will only be one more ideology.

Indeed, what sort of revolutionary theory, if any, is adequate to the years ahead? Certainly only one which is "scientific" in the original sense of Marxism: able to face actual trends and

potentialities and, in the closest connection to those in struggle, elaborate the logic of their suffering and their potential paths of struggle. But also one which has absorbed the experiences of the past hundred years—not only the promises but the defeats and devastation.

Is there reason to hope, today? The answer is both subjective and objective, demanding an exploration of human attitudes and actual histories. It involves emphasizing that even in the most dismal situation space exists within one to wage the struggle to be human. Whether it is arranging one's few remaining belongings by a concentration camp bunk or organizing to take state power, the situation, and our wishes, defines our space for struggle. In choosing the struggle for freedom and dignity we immediately become part of an ages-old struggle stretching back before Spartacus. Not only do human beings seem never fully to accept unfreedom or oppression or inequality, but they also reopen the struggle again and again and again. That this struggle has existed, and has produced significant results, is the objective pole of the dialectic of hope.

This struggle has borne fruit over the long course of human history, no matter how limited its prospects have seemed at any given moment. Slavery has been abolished, as has feudalism; no matter how oppressive, wage-slavery simply is not as bad. And today, no society in the world can justify itself without a fundamental ideological appeal to one or another form of democracy, be it bourgeois or socialist. Granted the appeal is everywhere contradicted by practice. Nevertheless, the human temper today, so different from two thousand years ago, insists on at least the claim of some form of democracy in human society. If we are not unthinkably far from total destruction today, neither are we unthinkably far from the whole of humanity insisting on the reality of freedom for all. □

C *New American Movement* CONVENTION

By Judy Johnson

WITH THE COMBINATION OF hope and hesitation that has characterized much of its near-decade of existence, the New American Movement (NAM) held its ninth annual convention at the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee.

The five-day gathering carried out its conventional business with relative ease. New leadership was chosen at national and regional levels, and Commission chairs were named for the bodies that do much of the program development in the organization. In addition, a number of resolutions were adopted that represent a continuation of policies and programs already set out in the organization and that received nearly unanimous support from the delegates. Among them were:

From the Urban Commission the convention adopted a proposal for regional schools on urban politics. These schools will emphasize questions of taxation and budgets, housing and land use, and transportation while continuing to develop NAM's understanding of the urban fiscal crisis. The schools will also provide NAM urban

Judy Johnson is a long-time NAM member and a journalist who lives in Moss Point, Mississippi. During the last year she has helped to found the new Rosa Parks NAM chapter in Mobile, Alabama.

activists with a chance to share experiences in the emerging urban coalitions. Both the Urban and the Labor Commissions urged NAM participation in struggles around plant closings as a central issue facing these new coalitions.

The convention supported an Energy Commission resolution that calls for initiatives to raise the issue of public ownership and control of the oil industry. The Commission will also produce an analysis of the costs and benefits that would be obtained from public ownership. As part of a continuing effort to bring together labor and the anti-nuke movement, the convention mandated the Energy Commission to participate in the first National Labor Conference for Safe Energy and Full Employment in October of this year.

Delegates to the convention also responded to the new international context and the resurgence of U.S. militarism. From the International Commission the convention adopted a proposal to become a member of the Coalition for a New Foreign and Military Policy, a lobbying group that resists the growth of the defense budget and opposes the development of the MX missile. Several delegates participated in a local anti-registration demonstration during the convention and the entire convention called for chapter involvement in organizing against both registration and the draft.

NAM and DSOC

However, at the heart of this year's debates and discussions was an issue that

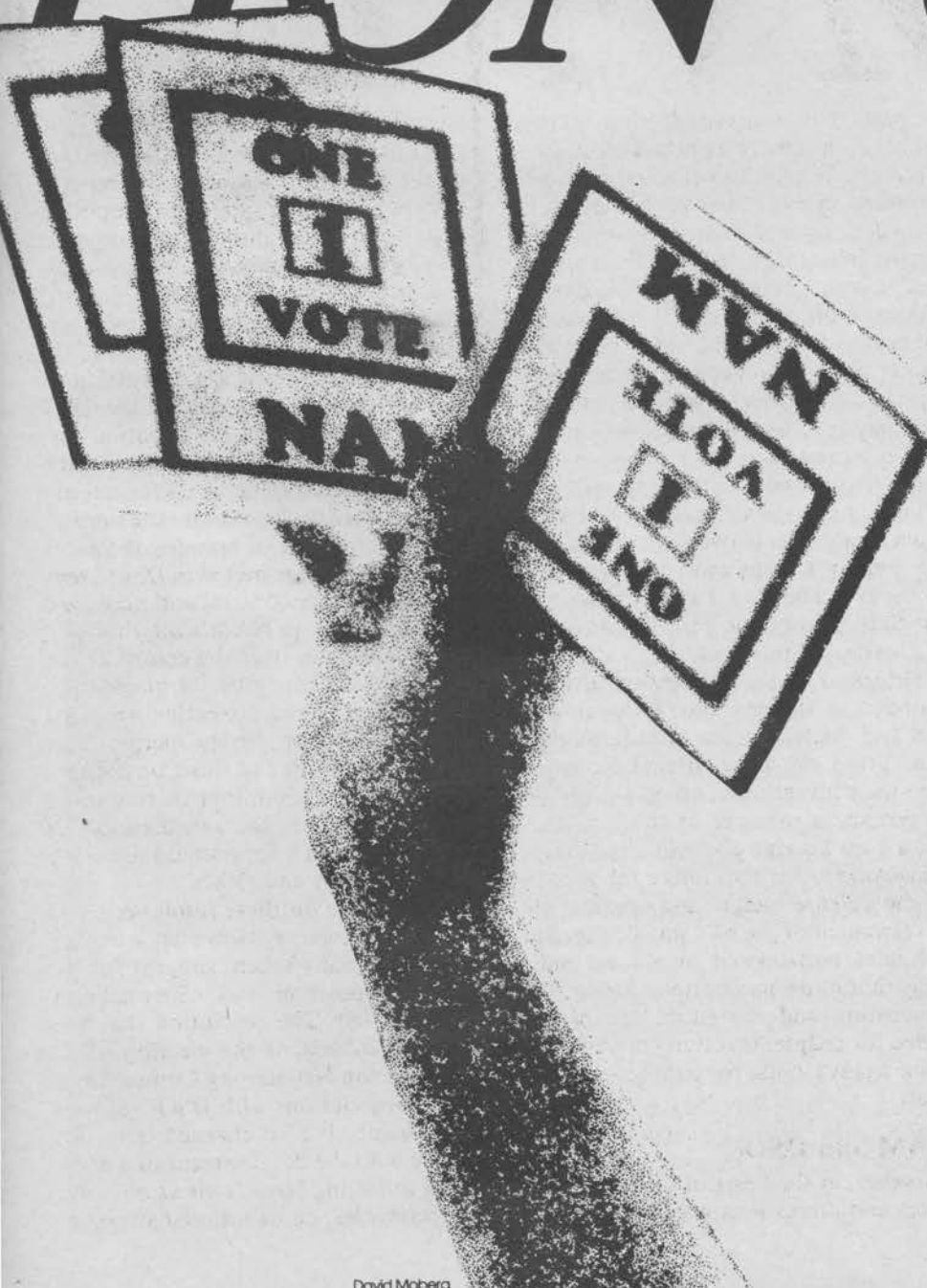
has caused deep divisions within the organization and that could alter the face of the American left. The controversy centered around a resolution proposing that NAM enter into merger negotiations with the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee with the goal of forming a new democratic socialist organization.

The resolution was a continuation of a discussion that started at the 1979 Convention when the organization voted to encourage joint work between the two groups and to set up a formal national committee to explore the similarities and differences between them.

That committee met with DSOC representatives several times and published several reports in NAM's internal Discussion Bulletin over the course of the year. The majority of its members—with one member dissenting—drafted the resolution proposing merger talks that was submitted to this Convention. The Committee's minority resolution called for a halt to consideration of merger, though it supported joint work between NAM and DSOC.

The debate on these resolutions was heated and intense. However, when the vote was finally taken, support for the majority position was overwhelming (404 to 208). The resolution that was adopted mandated the election of an eight-person Negotiating Committee to begin negotiations with DSOC as soon as possible. It also charged this committee with the development of a document reflecting NAM's views on political principles, constitutional structure,

ment TION '80



David Moberg

and strategy to be circulated to all chapters and then submitted to the December National Council meeting. This document will provide the basis for NAM's participation in the negotiations.

Although many of the delegates who voted "aye" seemed to do so not so much out of a firm conviction about the possibility of merger as out of a firm commitment to pursuing every possible path that might enhance the strength of the left in this difficult period, the overall mood in the wake of the vote was one of guarded optimism.

The only serious disaffection came from the August 7th Caucus which had spearheaded the opposition. It met for long hours after the vote and a number of its members questioned whether they could remain in NAM. However, at the Convention's conclusion, representatives of the Caucus announced that it had no plans to withdraw from the organization and that it planned to continue to try to recruit NAM members to its ranks and its views over the course of the coming year.

The End of Either/Or

On the whole, most people familiar with left debates were impressed with the conduct of the delegates—and with the openness demonstrated by the outcome of the vote. As one observer put it: "I thought the Convention displayed a willingness to question received wisdom that is all too rare in left circles."

Two other key discussions at the

gathering also indicated NAM's flexibility. The first was around electoral politics and the particular configuration of the 1980 elections. The Convention endorsed the candidacies of Barry Commoner and LaDonna Harris for President and Vice-President and encouraged chapters to get involved in the work of the Citizens Party where it could get on the ballot and represented a viable alternative.

However, the body also adopted a resolution which warned against any simple reliance on third party politics as a means of participating in the electoral arena. It stressed the importance of local electoral work in a time when the left's influence on the national level remains limited, and it urged a dual approach in that work, noting that the Democratic Party remains an arena of political struggle that socialists must be willing to participate within.

The Convention also adopted resolutions on NAM's work on feminism that indicate a similar dual approach. This perspective essentially urged that chapters support issues and participate in organizations that include mainstream forces and that can reach out to millions of women. It emphasized the importance of being able to work with those with whom we do not always agree in order to build the strongest possible movement for women's liberation.

At the same time, the Convention affirmed NAM's membership in the Reproductive Rights National Network, a formation that seeks to define a totalistic politics that can represent the vision that socialist-feminists have developed in recent years and bring that vision to the abortion rights struggle.

Building the Organization

At the organizational level, something old, the National Interim Committee (NIC) was brought back into existence. The NIC will meet periodically over the course of the year to assess program development and improve internal communication. And something new, the



Edna Weissel

National Council, which was first introduced last year, was retained.

Elected to NAM's full-time leadership body, the Political Committee, were Holly Graff, Rick Kunnes and Bill Barclay. Graff will move to Chicago to take up her duties as Organizational Secretary, leaving behind a job as professor of philosophy and a record of strong commitment to her chapter in Pittsburgh. Kunnes, who moved to Chicago originally from Detroit, and Barclay, who came from San Diego, are returning to the National Office for second terms as National Secretary and Political Secretary, respectively.

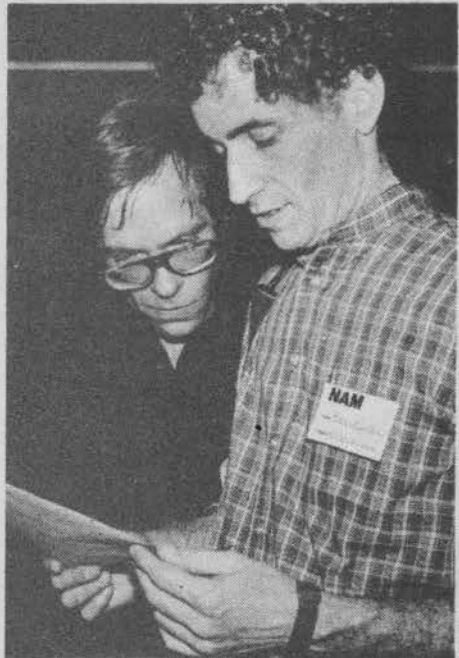
The only contested race in the PC elections was for the post of National Secretary, where Cathy Christeller of Chicago Northside faced Kunnes in a hard-fought race seen by many as a face-off between the pro-merger negotiation and the anti factions within the organization.

(In the other race expected to be a contest, Eric Chester of Oakland-Berkeley NAM withdrew hours before ballots were distributed for the post of Political Secretary, leaving Barclay to run unopposed.)

The newly-elected PC members bring a strong socialist-feminist perspective to their work, which has encompassed a variety of NAM's practice. Graff was a founder and long-time chair of the Socialist-Feminist Commission and has

also done local work in this area. Kunnes has concentrated much of his work in the Health Commission and in outreach to other organizations, while Barclay's involvement with the Urban Commission and the Labor Commission has focused on plant closings and runaway shops.

Halli Lehrer, who came to Chicago last year from Baltimore and served one term as Organizational Secretary, and Jacquie Brown, originally of Lansing, Mich., NAM's staff person, are



Lower left: Mark Mericle (Dayton); National Secretary Rick Kunnes. Right: Manning Marable, member-at-large; Joni Rabinowitz (Pittsburgh).

both leaving the national staff to do local political work in Chicago. Craig Merrilees from Santa Cruz NAM will succeed Brown.

Lehrer will not be removing herself totally from the national leadership, however. She has been elected, along with seven others, to the NIC. Serving with her will be Robert Shaffer of New York NAM, Chris Riddiough of Blazing Star NAM (Chicago), Glenn Scott of Austin NAM, Laura Berg of Portland NAM, John Haer of Pittsburgh NAM, Steve Tarzynski of Los Angeles NAM and Nelson Brown of Chicago Northside NAM.

In another round of elections, eight people were chosen as members of the NAM-DSOC Negotiating Committee. They are Frank Ackerman and Richard Healey of Somerville NAM, Roberta Lynch of Chicago Northside NAM, Joanne Barkan, Katherine Kennedy and David Dollar of New York NAM, Anne Hill of Cleveland NAM and Liz Weston of Buffalo NAM.

Culture, Politics & the Future

The 1980 Convention was not all work and no play, though. There were a number of well-planned parties and even more unplanned ones—and sing-alongs were frequent. Even older young folks in child-care got into the act, forming a water balloon caucus and positioning themselves where they could rain their barrages without drenching anyone.

The Convention's cultural event featured Robin Tyler, a nationally-known comic. Tyler's concert was an unqualified success. With a rapid-fire delivery that could barely keep up with the pyrotechnic pace of her cosmically comedic mind, Tyler had people laughing and crying at the same time—the mark of a truly insightful comic.

The evening was emceed by NAM member-at-large Torie Osborne, who provided background on women's culture in her introduction to Tyler and also introduced Portland NAM's Rhys Scholes. Scholes' entertaining pitch for the "redeeming light" of NAM and his



auctioneering talents netted the organization more than \$13,000 in pledges for the coming year.

For many the real meaning of the Convention was in the educational and workshop sessions. Thought-provoking talks by Manning Marable, a NAM member who is a leader of the National Black Political Assembly, and Diane Avila of Mujeres Latinas en Accion were among the most well-received presentations. And remarks by members of the Palestine Human Rights Commission, the New Jewish Agenda, and the American Friends Service Committee provided a measure of the breadth of views represented.

NAM's growing body of practical experience was evident in the meetings of the Commissions, program-oriented task forces on issues such as energy, labor, urban problems, feminism, racism, health, and culture. Many of these sessions were intense and lively as members shared their work of the past year and hammered out goals and guidelines for the coming year.

However, with all the progress and

continued vitality, there was an aura of hesitancy that hung about the Convention. NAM is still without a clear understanding of what makes its chapter structure work in some places and fail in others; nor does the organization have an answer to the question of how to go about integrating socialist politics into effective popular organizing. It is still grappling with the thorny problems posed by historical developments that have shaken socialist movements around the world and led to a reexamination of basic questions of vision and strategy.

These questions will not go away, whatever the outcome of the NAM-DSOC negotiations. In essence, they are the questions that challenge the democratic socialist movement as it strives to become a serious political force in a country that has largely lost all memory of its radical past and that has lost its moorings in the present. They will remain on the agenda of Convention delegates as they return to their own locales to take up that challenge in their day to day work.

Right: Feminist comic Robin Tyler brought laughter and tears to Convention delegates and friends. Below left: Jeff McCourt (Pittsburgh); Organizational Secretary Holly Graff.

BEYOND THE CONVENTION

By Roberta Lynch

THE FORTUNES OF THE AMERICAN left in the 1970's may not be the stuff of high drama. But when the historical record is finally written, the progressive developments of that decade may prove to be as profound as those of the 1960's.

- A populist citizens movement, primarily based in the city neighborhoods, but also having a strong rural component, took up the cry for local decision-making and for the redistribution of resources to meet local needs.

- The black movement, frustrated in its attempt to end the poverty and injustice that are the fruits of racism, nonetheless began to consolidate a political base within the major urban centers and to lay a foundation for expanding its influence.

- There was the women's movement with its attention to economic inequities and its probing of all sexually-assigned cultural roles.

- And there was the gay liberation movement, which provided a direct challenge to many gender-based assumptions.

- The labor movement—awakening from its near-malaise—began to revitalize its organizing through efforts such as the J.P. Stevens boycott and

through attempts at labor law reform.

- And a democratic socialist left emerged that had a firm commitment to rooting itself in these popular movements while keeping alive a larger vision of a society based not on profit but on meeting human needs.

When the decade is seen in synopsis like that, it seems remarkable that progressives should be embarking on the '80's under such a dark cloud. Yet there are two essential—and closely related—features of the past ten years that have drastically limited the scope and impact of these movements.

A Reshuffled Capitalist Deck

The first is an altered economic climate far beyond the inflation/recession cy-

cle of the last few decades. Today we are faced with what may well be a re-shuffling of the entire capitalist deck: the death of some of our most basic industries; a crisis in our cities that makes the "war on poverty" appear to have been one of history's greatest military debacles; and a failure of governmental fiscal solvency that has played havoc with taxing policies as well as social welfare programs.

This changing economic climate had far-reaching implications for all political issues as it contributed to a shift in the popular mood. In many quarters there was a kind of shrunken spirit to match the shrunken purses and it brought into bold relief the "dog eat dog" philosophy that underlies so much of American capitalism.

The second feature of our recent past that has adversely affected the growth of a left movement has been the inability of the various progressive forces to coalesce into a unified effort that could offer a cogent alternative direction for our society.

Not surprisingly, traditional conservatives, new right movements, and business interests have, on the other hand, been able to find substantial common ground and to define social and econ-



Roberta Lynch is a veteran national NAM leader and a popular syndicated columnist.



omic goals that are based on perpetuating inequality, increasing international hostilities, and maintaining conservative values.

Given this context, it is difficult for any gathering of the left these days to be suffused with optimism or self-confidence. Yet for all the frustrations that face us in this election year, the 1980 New American Movement Convention was distinguished by its refusal to succumb to either cynicism or despair.

At the same time, the Convention did not fall prey to the fault of many progressives in this period—the presumption that our old answers will suffice if we can only convince someone to listen to them. There was, instead, a recognition that the ground is shifting beneath our feet and that the left in America will have to begin to develop innovative programs and tactics if it is to address these changing conditions.

Another problem facing left organizations in this period is the gap between our vision and our present reality, between what we would be and what we actually are. How a group fills this gap is in essence the indicator of how much in touch it is with real world politics. For there are few things more suggestive of collective derangement than to observe a small band of a few hundred people that lacks a base or public presence trumpet its plans to “smash the state” or whatever.

This is not simply a matter of devel-

The 1980 NAM Convention was distinguished by its refusal to succumb to either cynicism or despair.

oping transitional programs, but rather of being able to assess our own limitations and potential at any given moment—and to shape our discourse accordingly. Most of the left is mired in sectarianism precisely because of its inability to do this. It simply fills the gap with rhetoric and rushes headlong into fantasy.

While NAM cannot be said to have completely escaped occasional flights of fancy, on the whole this Convention demonstrated an admirable determination to recognize our strengths without inflating them and to acknowledge our weaknesses without breast-beating. The result was an ability to begin to fill the gap with concrete steps that can aid in the development of a more viable democratic left.

The most important of these—precisely because of its immediate practical impact—was the overwhelmingly approved resolution to enter into merger negotiations with the Democratic

Socialist Organizing Committee.

It is difficult to recall another moment on the American left when two organizations demonstrated such a willingness to transcend their own organizational interests in order to chance the creation of something new.

The actual meaning of this decision is, of course, yet to be written. It will depend fundamentally on whether or not the negotiations can be successfully completed. But it will also depend on whether any new organization that is formed can respond to changes in the world socialist movement, particularly the increasingly perplexing question of the nature of the state and the transition to a democratic socialism in an advanced capitalist society.

Program for Crisis

And most urgently, it will depend on whether the new formation can develop a program and a political approach that will enable it to respond to the deepening crisis of American society. Whether it can develop sufficient roots among working people and sufficient public legitimacy to play a meaningful role in whatever struggles emerge.

There were three areas of concern at the NAM Convention that seem to me likely to be essential elements of such a response, although our work on them is still in the very exploratory stage.

The first is an emphasis on the crisis of our cities and on the formation of new urban coalitions that can challenge corporate solutions.

Our cities remain the primary arena of racial politics in America. Within them minorities have begun to make a bid for political power—however truncated it may be. And within them corporate policies are even now being devised that could insure the perpetuation—even the extension—of all the poverty and unequal distribution of resources bred by discrimination. It is difficult to imagine a strategy for challenging racism in our society that does not take as one of its central battlegrounds the urban political structure.

Moreover, many of the community organizations that have sprung up over the past two decades are based in the neighborhoods of our major urban centers. After years of limiting themselves to the most local of issues and of evading cooperation beyond their own borders, these groups are beginning to experience a deep frustration with their inability to alter overall decline or to fundamentally affect the redlining of their community, their schools are falling into decay. Even as they enforce building code regulations, their community is being "gentrified" for a return of the middle class.

Such organizations are not restricted to the poor and minorities. They include many white working people who have received powerful lessons in political action in the course of their participation. They—along with neighborhood-based electoral efforts—represent the potential for the development of a multi-racial alliance that seeks to affect the overall conduct of political affairs in our cities on the basis of a new progressive agenda that provides an alternative to the corporate agenda.

Such an alliance may also be able to win to its ranks elements or organized

labor, many of whom are frustrated with the anti-labor policies of local elites. In particular, the attacks on collective bargaining for public employees and the unwillingness to recognize public sector unions is prompting a re-examination of labor's traditional allegiance to the mainstream of the Democratic Party in many locales.

While it is clear that any strategy for addressing the crisis of our cities is circumscribed by national policies—in particular the lack of a full employment program for our country—it is also the case that it has proven more than difficult to convince people that they can have any effect on the national level. The accessibility of the local political structure provides an important first step in the development of a sense of power and in the testing of alliances that can lay the basis for eventual national action.

There are obviously many problems yet to be faced in the development of such coalitions, and even the best of intentions on the part of left activists may not be able to overcome them. Still, it seems to me that there are very valuable roles that a democratic socialist organization can play in this process.



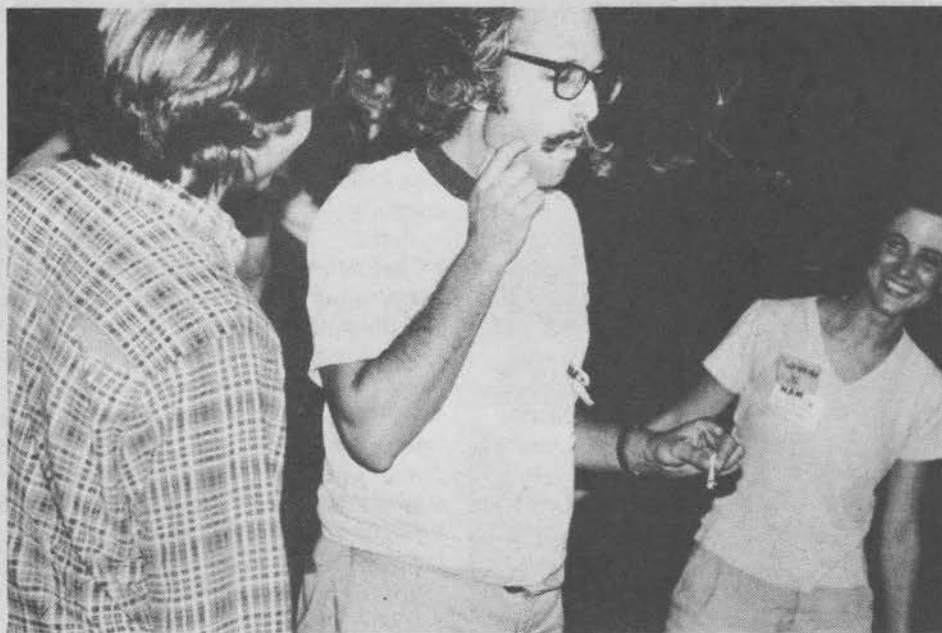
To begin, it will be necessary to develop organic—and ongoing—links between electoral activity and grass-roots organizing. Only through such a process can we insure that the political coalitions we build are representative and have a real base of power. The increasing involvement of NAM and DSOC members in issue-oriented or neighborhood-based movements, combined with our growing orientation toward certain progressive campaigns within the Democratic Party, can offer us a unique opportunity to concretely seek out ways to develop such linkages.

Secondly, there is an urgent need for sensitivity to the difficulties posed by the historic divisions based on race. The problems of building trust, of recognizing the necessity to directly address the present unequal distribution of resources, and of finding common ground for action will not be overcome overnight. They will require of us an avoidance of moralistic posturing combined with a direct involvement with various forces over time to allow an understanding of the complexities of the particular local situation.

An Animating Vision

Thirdly, there is the hard task of developing an animating vision that can provide a basis for ongoing joint activity—even if it is not in the form of a formal coalition—that can go beyond the occasional and transitory alliances that now spring up.

Such a task is made all the more dif-





Clockwise from top: Counting ballots for national officers. Political Secretary Bill Barclay. Mike Pincus' infamous \$20-a-smoke-ring fundraiser; he blew 75 smoke rings.

difficult by the fact that there are contradictory short-term interests even among those whose larger interests are in common. And it is made all the more complicated by the power of corporate propaganda which has rendered standard anti-corporate ("tax big business") rhetoric almost useless by creating a climate that links urban survival with the revitalization of the present industrial order. Socialists, by the dint of our awareness of the larger forces that are operating on our cities and by dint of our concern with alternative models of development, have a particular responsibility to aid in the articulation of this new urban program.

There is probably no other single issue in recent years that has so shaped the terms of local debate as that of job loss. This was a second area of concern that emerged as a focus among labor and community activists at the NAM convention.

The dramatic increase in plant shut-downs—and the widespread social and economic dislocation that is left in their wake—has begun to receive considerable public attention. Organizations have developed—both in local communities and at a state-wide level—to try to enforce a measure of corporate responsibility to workers and communities. But business forces have their own game plan. They are using the threat of disinvestment to win tax and zoning concessions—without ever themselves making any concessions when it comes down to the actual ques-

tion of go or stay.

The stakes in this debate are high ones. On the one side are the jobs and well-being of millions and of working people and the stability of scores of local communities; on the other, not just the perennial issue of higher corporate profits, but perhaps more basically, the fundamental question of public control of private investment decisions.

As a result, corporations are fighting very hard on this issue. Even seemingly mild attempts to require a fixed period of notification to employees in the event of a closing have met with widespread corporate hostility—and business lobbyists are hard at work at discrediting such plans in state legislatures across the country.

A Potentially Explosive Force

What happens at the level of public debate, however, may be another story from what happens in the homes and on the streets of those who are thrown out of work. The anger of these work-



ers who find themselves with mortgages to pay off, health insurance policies to buy, utility bills to pay, and so on, may not be readily contained within the framework of the present debates.

This is not to make any simplistic predictions about popular upsurges, particularly given the way in which job loss can rob people of any sense of their own potential, but it is to suggest that, like the long-term unemployed in our nation's ghettos, this growing number of the newly-unemployed constitutes a potentially explosive social force.

The issue of plant closings—which many liberal politicians refuse to address because of their inability to challenge business climate arguments—offers an opportunity for involving traditional community forces, such as churches and small businesses, in the formation of labor-community alliances. Many communities are already being forced to seek new solutions to a problem that has clearly proven itself to be immune to the blandishments of corporate rhetoric.

It is essential that socialists begin to develop programs that can speak to this need. The Convention session on plant closings demonstrated that NAM has already initiated important research in this area. We will need now to join with other forces in order to give this work meaning in local communities and to seek ways to relate it to an overall urban program.

For an Integrative Feminism

The third area of concern at the NAM Convention that has particular relevance for the development of a new political orientation was the continuing emphasis on the integration of a feminist politics into all of our work. This does not only mean working on "women's issues," although such work is already essential. Nor does it mean a focus on internal process or a purist approach to popular organizations that still embody traditional patterns or at-

titudes.

Rather, it offers us a way of understanding the world around us that can go beyond narrow political categories. For instance, it enables us to see that the crisis of our cities represents a unique intersection of personal and political concerns that can produce a particularly intense reaction among their citizens. The failure of schools, the de-

terioration of our neighborhoods—these not only affect the material quality of our lives, but they represent an erosion of the structures that have provided a sense of stability for many people and an erosion of the values that have helped them to make sense of their world.

This view explains in large measure why so many women are at the core of

community organizations today—for it is women who have traditionally been the caretakers of the personal realm—and it is this realm that is so profoundly threatened by our current urban crisis. (Moreover, many of these same signs of crisis are beginning to appear in many small cities and even in some lower-income suburbs.)

As these community organizations move toward larger political involvements, they may provide an important vehicle for the growth of these working-class women into political leaders and for the integration of their concerns with traditional political issues.

Our feminist perspective can also help us to see beyond the right-wing thrust of a number of current political movements to the fear of change and the loss of identity that motivates many well-intentioned women who have been attracted to them. Such an understanding may aid us in formulating our own approaches in a way that takes into account the deep resistance to disruption and the yearning for a sense of purpose that leads women themselves to hold to what may seem oppressive forms and ideas.

In essence, feminism can and should teach us not righteousness, but sensitivity. It provides an ability to grasp the importance of existing structures in peoples lives as the only sources of community and support that they have ever known. It can teach us how to build out from those structures—not necessarily uncritically accepting them or being limited by them, but not believing that we can ignore them or assault them either.

For what the left in America needs as much as a program is a voice, an ability to speak in a language that grows out of popular tradition and that arises from a common experience of work and community and faith in the American people.

I do not necessarily mean by "faith" a religious sense of things (although I don't exclude that), but rather a shared awareness of the potential for change and a shared vision of a new order.

We are still far from that now. And I do not know whether any new organization formed by a merger of NAM and DSOC will necessarily bring us closer. But I have a sense that if such an organization can consciously build on these three aspects of our present work, it will carry us far beyond the present confines of the left. □

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BLACK RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

Parents' Groups Challenge Isolation

By Alice Allgaier

IN A RECENT STUDY OF APES, IT was discovered that when parent apes raised baby apes in isolation from other parent apes (for example, in a zoo), they usually neglected the baby apes and often abused them and even killed them. On the other hand, when parent apes raised their babies in the company of other parent apes, there was no incidence of neglect or abuse. While animal studies don't always apply to humans, there seems to be enough violence in our American human society that the isolation of parents, especially mothers, in raising children has been a major factor contributing to child abuse and neglect.

When I became a mother recently, I looked around and thought that I would find numerous organizations that would help me solve the problem of being a new mother isolated in the home. There was the LaMaze class, but that was no help after the baby was born, and there was the La Leche League to help out with breastfeeding problems. But where would I meet the other mothers with newborns who lived in my highly mobile, inner city neighborhood?

Parent Self-help

Fortunately, I was one of the lucky ones. Family Focus, an organization that provides services and activities specifically for neighborhood parents and their children, had opened their doors in Lincoln Park in 1978, just one year before my baby was born. And through Family Focus, I found one other organization that served parents, especially mothers, with newborns—Northside Parents Network. As it turns out, the need for these kinds of organizations is great. Family Focus, after being featured in a short TV spot, was so innun-

dated with isolated mothers and children that they were forced to define boundaries to exclude those who did not live in the immediate neighborhood. Mothers had flocked to Family Focus because there are no such organizations in their own neighborhoods. And at Northside Parents Network's last meeting 50 mothers with one or two newborns or toddlers each showed up to meet other mothers, drink coffee, compare babies, and enjoy some adult company.

Both Northside Parents Network and Family Focus are parent self-help organizations. The parents themselves initiate activities based on their needs and organize the events and services according to those needs. There is no sense in either organization that anyone is there to help these poor, neurotic mothers. On the contrary, the mothers and fathers seem quite well, and are simply very aware that they cannot raise their children well and survive themselves in the isolation that modern American society forces upon them.

Family Focus started four years ago in Evanston, Illinois, a well-to-do older Chicago suburb that has a decent-sized black population. It was meant to serve 50 families and today serves 800. In 1978, Lincoln Park Family Focus, the only volunteer-run branch, opened, and soon after a branch opened in Woodlawn, a black Southside Chicago community. Each of the branches is community based, and parents have a considerable role in determining the programs that are offered. Each branch has the autonomy to serve the very different needs of the very different communities.

Blanca Almonte, a Mexican social worker, is the director of the Lincoln Park branch of Family Focus. She describes herself as a social worker in the tradition of the settlement house. In fact, she thinks of the center as a new kind of settlement house. She believes that there are few social service organizations that serve parents in a way that can help prevent problems from arising.



Alice Allgaier, a Chicago NAM member-at-large, is a parent and a copy-editor.



The Northside Parents' Network.

"Most services only intervene if something terrible happens. Family Focus is meant, first and foremost, to provide support for normal, healthy parents and their children," she said.

The Lincoln Park center consists of a children's room well stocked with safe toys, a parents' room where coffee and tea are served, a library filled with books on mother care and child development, a discussion room, a playroom where children can climb and play with large, moving toys, and an office. A newsletter publishes the schedule each month, and a number of discussion groups meet weekly. There are groups in which mothers discuss how to get time for themselves and not feel totally guilty, how to toilet train twos, and sexuality after delivery. The Parents Group meets once a month to advise the staff about the programs they would like to have. Both the staff and the parents who go to the center come from diverse backgrounds, races, and language groups.

Finding good childcare and how to go back to work are two of the most discussed topics among the informal groups of parents who drop in at the center. After leaving the children with the competent but overburdened children's room staff, mothers can meet and talk together, sew, get some work done, join a formal discussion group, read, nap, or just sit in the parent's room or the library. Feelings of relief are often expressed by mothers in the parent's room where they say things such as, "I can't believe I'm actually reading the newspaper."

Mushrooming need

Northside Parents Network is another northside Chicago parents' organiza-

tion, but it is quite different from Family Focus. It was founded approximately six years ago by three LaMaze instructors who were inundated with calls from new mothers who had questions about new motherhood. The instructors decided to get all of the mothers together so that they could answer each other's questions. They began by holding a coffee once a month in the mothers' homes. The response was so overwhelming that the organization had to break into five geographically-determined branches. The instructors left the coffees and the organization in the hands of the mothers, and coffees are still going today in many parts of the city and suburbs. The interesting and amazing fact about the Network is that some of the branches survive despite the loose organization and the constant turnover of new mothers. Leadership in the organization passes from old mothers to new mothers as the babies become toddlers for whom other resources are available. The various branches have little communication with each other, and the task of organizing and accommodating new mothers is left to whoever is willing to take over the job in each area.

Recently the Northside Parents Network branch was left in the hands of one woman who was responsible for arranging bi-monthly coffees, putting out a newsletter sporadically, sponsoring fundraisers, answering new mothers' questions, making referrals, organizing mothers to speak at LaMaze classes about the Network, calling the new mothers to come to coffees, and trying to keep in touch with other parents' groups.

At the Northside Parents Network coffees, mothers bring tiny infants as

well as toddlers to the park district fieldhouse where they socialize, exchange information (and coupons), organize informal playgroups, and listen to speakers who discuss poison control, or infant nutrition, or child development.

Recently these coffees have begun to get larger and larger as the over 30s baby boom hit, and the task of organizing became overwhelming. But, at the same time, more new mothers were becoming interested in volunteering to do various tasks. Eight or ten new mothers would show up for a monthly organizing meeting where only three had shown up before. Mothers with all kinds of talents lent their services. A graphic artist re-designed the Network's promotional leaflet, an editor took over the newsletter, another artist re-designed it, and it is now coming out on a regular basis. Another mother is organizing informational programs at the coffees. Fundraising was done well, and one of the biggest money-makers was the sale of a T-shirt emblazoned with "Every mother is a working mother." The shirt is now a collector's item among mothers in the area.

Tentative Activism

One more recent development has been that several mothers have expressed a desire to do more pressure-group oriented activities. Several stores in the area do not permit strollers on their premises, and many mothers are incensed. There are also few stores or public places that have facilities for nursing or changing a baby in any of their women's rooms. And although the Network did not endorse the ERA march in Chicago in May, several Network mothers with their husbands and children marched under the banner "Parents for ERA."

Both Family Focus and Northside Parents Network are social self-help groups that cannot be considered to be in the vanguard of revolutionary activity. But, they have encouraged women who may never have joined a group or

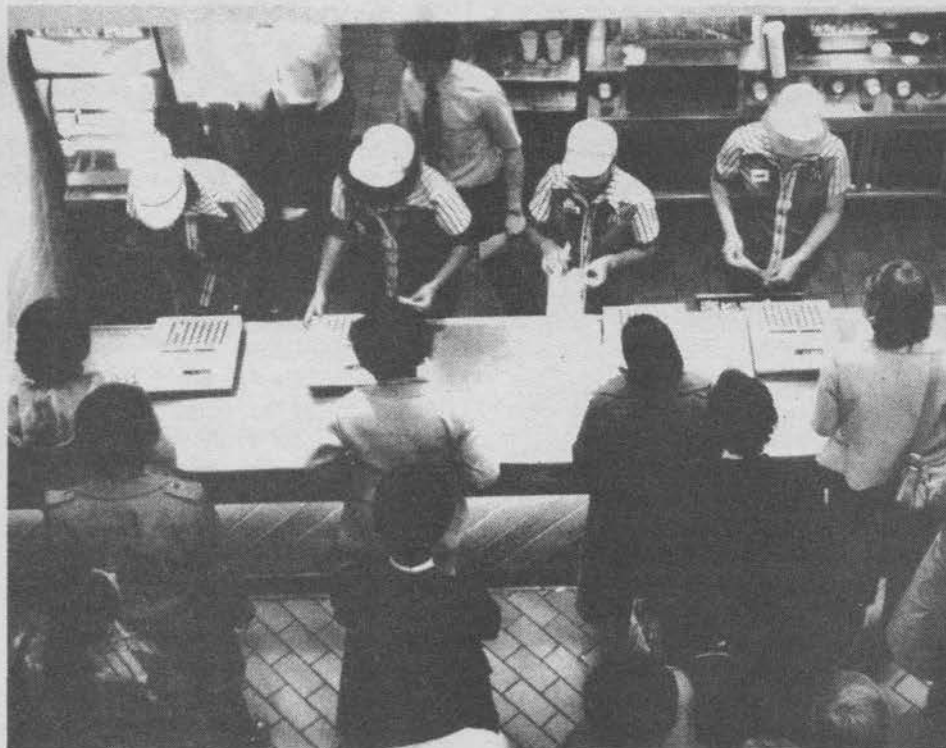
Continued on page 23.

By Jeff Weinstein

IN ORDER TO ILLUSTRATE THIS short piece about fast food, I went to the McDonald's in my New York neighborhood, the East Village, a bit north of the Lower East Side. A few years ago McDonald's had not broken into the Manhattan market; so to defuse protest and accelerate the inevitable, the chain proposed to let the decor of each new restaurant "reflect" the neighborhood it would inhabit. Perhaps I should have anticipated the inclination of the advertising mind, but it's still a shock: the East Side McDonald's is brightened by plastic murals of Jacob Riis immigrant families, collaged with all sizes of the Statue of Liberty, and imprinted over all: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses...."

It was easy enough to photograph the outside, but I could not invade customers' privacy to prove that the above exists. While there, however, I tried (for the first time in five years—I've been boycotting the chain) a cheap cheeseburger to see if it is as sweet and greasy as I remember—more like ham-

Jeff Weinstein, a member of the gay liberation work group of New York NAM, is restaurant reviewer for the Village Voice.



Ken Frestone

burger cake. I used to like them, and still could.

As I left, an embarrassed, well-dressed stranger asked me for some change, because it was the end of the month and she wouldn't have food money till the first. She took it, and ran into McDonald's.

Fast food is easy to bad-mouth because the examples we have now are so

vile in so many ways. The international McDonald's web is the clearest example of cultural imperialism you can eat. It takes the hedging out of hegemony. McDonald's (and its "rivals") have successfully lobbied to keep the Federal minimum wage down and teenage wages below it; have successfully prevented thousands of employees from improving miserable working conditions; have successfully kept the price of wholesale—and retail—beef where they want it. McDonald's defines public relations the way the CIA does. Arch-enemy Ray Kroc may not be structurally different from a freely enterprising Mildred Pierce, but if I were Dante, Kroc would sit at the frozen center of my hell, an evil, undefrostable patty.

Also, most fast food is garbage. Anyone with a Big Mac in his or her hand would smile and agree.

In spite of the conglomerate forms it takes, the *idea* of fast food is worth keeping. Fast food is fun food, still fast, still relatively cheap—and still un-

FAST FOOD

We Have Nothing To Lose But The Chains

avoidable. It's a major choice outside of New York City, and even here a Whopper on a lunch break leaves enough time to pick up a Cuisinart blade and some Killer Bee Honey at Bloomingdale's. Fast food continues to save householders from boredom and exhaustion in the kitchen and enables some kind of affordable escape.

Any vision of economic or social change must include alternatives for how we are fed—or how we feed ourselves. Charlotte Perkins Gilman understood that it was not enough for a woman to learn to cook nutritiously for herself or her family—though Gilman wrote clearly enough about that. “No, the human race is not well nourished by making the process of feeding it a sex-function,” and she coolly proposed the preparation of food as a professional communal arrangement—meals cooked in an apartment-house kitchen and served either in separate living quarters or a common dining area. I prefer the more human-sounding socialist possibility in Ursula LeGuin's novel, *The Dispossessed*, where people jockey for tables in the eating halls where the best chefs work—not unlike trying to get into a New York restaurant after a three-star review in the *Times*, except that everyone can afford to eat in LeGuin's.

You Deserve a Break

Robert L. Emerson, in *Fast Food: The Endless Shake-out* (Lebhar-Friedman, New York) surveyed “heavy users” of fast food (four times or more a month), and asked them what they were unhappy about. Here's a list of complaints in order of their frequency (from *Restaurant News*):

1. The restaurant is too crowded at mealtimes (according to 69% of respondents).
2. There's too much ice in the soft drinks (67%).
3. You can't get a table during busy periods (61%).
4. They don't give you a condiment package unless you ask for it (59%).
5. The hamburgers are too thin (59%).
6. Their food doesn't stay hot if you take it home (59%).
7. Packaging for take-out food doesn't keep it warm (59%).
8. The advertising is aimed at children (58%).
9. The counter people have long hair (57%).
10. Their tables are too small for large groups of people (56%).

How would we imagine ideal fast food? Are any reformist fast food fantasies possible in an economy where the chains are so binding? A three-restaurant-chainlet in San Diego called Future Foods jumps over the nutrition problem with tacos, salads, modular smoothies, and sandwiches (called the Ranchero or the Del Mar Special) based on tuna, cheese, avocado, bean sprouts, and a soy-mayonaisse dressing. Working shifts are arranged to let the surfers out

when the surf's up; but wages are low, and a Del Mar Special is now over \$2. Falafel/pita places in New York and Chicago are doing well, but these are probably limited to big cities because of the somewhat specialized appetites they seem to require.

Are there general rules for food, uncorporate, various fast foods? (1) Use regional products: corn in Iowa, clams on Cape Cod, avocados (or most anything else) in California. Restaurants often make deals with local farms; fast food restaurants could do the same. (2) Keep the menu small; innovation doesn't always work. (3) If you don't have meat, there should be something to satisfy that cultural hunger. Pizza or tuna does well; beans or soy-dogs do not. (4) Keep it cheap (unlike, for example, Arthur Treacher's), keep it healthy, keep it tasty—or close it up.

I don't think this means we should all open restaurants, but it is valuable to know what could be realized, what one could fight for. Of course the question for many will be—do we eat at all? When the government sets up breadlines, I have a queasy feeling who will get the concession. If it takes a revolution to topple McDonald's, I guess we'll have to have one. □



Ken Frestone

Urban Strategy

by Richard Healey

I SUPPOSE IT COULD BE SAID THAT coming to Buffalo to talk about "life in the city" is indeed an example of carrying coals to Newcastle. As bad as is Chicago, where I come from, I'm sure you all could tell me something about life in a northern, industrial, declining city—the so-called gritty cities. But what I want to do tonight is to put all this in perspective a bit. First, I'll go over some of the arguments about what being part of a larger capitalist system does to cities, and does to human beings. Then, I'll talk a bit about what this has to do with

Richard Healey, former National Secretary of NAM, is currently working on Occupational Safety and Health issues in Boston, Mass. Transcribed from a speech given in Buffalo, N.Y.

the "urban crisis." Finally, I'll sketch out some of our notions, in NAM, about these problems and the directions we think urban struggles have to go in.

It's important to begin by understanding that cities don't just happen to grow up in any old kind of way around workplaces, or lakes, or on rivers. Rather, from the start they have a fundamental relation to the larger social and economic system. In a capitalist society, the city is both defined by and reproduces what you could call the particular capitalist form of social relations. It's worth asking what makes this kind of social relation different, and what it does to us and our cities.

Perhaps the most basic thing about capitalist social relations is the way they fragment our world, and the way we view it. One of the central separations is between community and workplace, so that it appears as if these were in different spheres, one social and one economic. Related to this is the way in which capitalism shapes our consciousness to make these separations and everything around us—work, family, relationships—seem somehow "natural," as if they were some eternal truth involved in this particular order of things. So, even problems in the city come to seem natural, and unavoidable "fact." How many times have you heard a variation of this: "Problems? Oh, you know, there are *always* problems in a complex society with a growing urban population, always crime and pollution and housing displacement, you know, they're all sort of natural city problems."

One Vast Ugly Grid

But actually there's very little that's "natural" about cities. Under

capitalism, the main point is to exploit resources for profit, and this becomes true of the cities that develop within capitalism. If you look at the layout of the city, take Chicago for example, you see that capitalist priorities have dictated a flat, ugly, regular grid, unlike what we have in Europe, or even older, pre-capitalist eastern U.S. cities like Boston. One vast grid—because under capitalism this is the shape of tracts of land easiest for buying and selling, the easiest to make efficient and productive, the one organized like a factory plant floor. And you can follow this out—the dictates of profitability and their urban consequences—in every aspect of social life, from public transportation to health to housing.

Worse yet, human beings are forced to follow these dictates, too. Just as capitalism fragments our view of the world, it also fragments the relationships that make up our social life. It



Winston McCoy

fragments community, separating it from workplace in that the people you work with are likely to live in a fifteen mile scatter from the factory or office. In fact, all the community forms that make a network, that make us feel human, give us a sense of our own social identity, these are all things that, at best, are simply superfluous to capitalism, and that it tends to break up and dispense with.

This is reflected in what happens to peoples' perception of their own human needs. Just as people get fragmented from each other, atomized, our needs get put in terms of individual rather than collective services and facilities. People work desperately to get enough money to buy a car or pay for a doctor, but not to build a collective struggle around public transportation or health care. Or on energy: I read recently of people during the gas shortage trying to purchase holding tanks they can put in their backyard, so they can buy a thousand gallons of gasoline. Now *that's* an individual response!

And what's ironic is that this corresponds perfectly to capitalism's priorities—to prioritize only what is good for the profitability of an individual corporation. Capitalism can't take into account the community costs of an investment choice, or the social benefits of pollution control devices. It can't take these into account—and it reproduces that inability in us as individuals.

This leaves a vacuum of collective needs, and that's where the State comes in. It steps in to deal with those areas that private enterprise finds insufficiently profitable, and it steps in, largely, in response to the demands of masses of people. But because the State is dominated by capital, by corporate interests, it tends to shape those collective responses in ways that are most beneficial to capital, and least beneficial to those people who have struggled for them.

Look at public transportation, for instance. All the new systems have been designed and built, essentially, to carry



Writer McCoy

people to work and to buy. For example, in San Francisco, the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) doesn't run to recreational areas, or between communities, and it does not run at all on weekends. What is it designed for, then? It is designed to facilitate business, not human beings. And it's very typical. Look at the route pattern of the new Washington, D.C. system. And especially look at the plans for the Buffalo system..

Now what happens is that because of the very limited way the State handles our collective needs, we're forced to satisfy them in the private market—to buy back from society the very things it deprives us of. We buy fresh air by saving money to go on vacation, we buy fresh bottled water, we try to buy back some kind of companionship by going to singles bars. People in cities are forced to spend money in order to satisfy a whole variety of basic human needs. That is really one of the most destructive things about life in the capitalist city, and the point is that this is a logical, predictable outcome of the nature of that city as I have been describing it.

Strategy for Change

What do these comments mean in terms of a socialist approach, and a strategy for change? Well, an analysis focused on how cities fragment our lives and our world suggests we need an approach that can bring these things together. One lesson we learn from the urban crisis is that, in terms of people's consciousness and understanding, those

struggles that lie outside the workplace, or that link it to a wider community, may be as important in challenging the grip of capitalism as those that take place inside the workplace. But it's important to choose those issues and struggles carefully if community work is to lead to these broader understandings. I want to offer a number of criteria for this.

Probably the most basic point is the need to define those issues which allow for collective struggle and action, and which allow people who are generally apathetic or cynical or frustrated to engage on some level in a struggle they understand to be their own and legitimate. They should also be the issues that have the possibility of giving people the realization of some sense of power and victory. This is absolutely basic to overcoming the atomization, isolation, and fragmentation which is the bedrock of city life under capitalism.

But just as important is the need for real organization. I think we have to look beyond spontaneous upsurges, or sudden mobilizations around a narrow issue. There are activists who argue that the task is simply to support all such mobilizations. The trouble with this idea is that these upsurges don't really instill in people a sense of what they've won. This is so partly because, once the upsurge has died down, whatever gains have been achieved may be taken away, and partly because people don't learn the basic skills they need to get a sense of their own abilities. You can't really get a sense of power without a sense of long-term collectivity. Because that collectivity, that comes from something more sustained than a spontaneous upsurge around an issue, is the source of working class power.

Third, in this community work we need to look for allies and, especially, we need to work with labor. If we are ever going to help break down the mental division between workplace struggles and community issues, we have to help get people organized in workplace groups, and unions involved in com-

munity struggles. The issues lead us toward this unity, anyway. It seems to me the key struggles in the coming decade will be overlapping ones—the environment, nuclear dumping, reproductive rights, and so on—which require organizing across the fictional workplace/community gap. Probably the best urban example of this is “disinvestment” and runaway shops, since there is nothing more crucial to the future of northern cities than factory closings. But clearly, they can only be tackled when you get union groups and community groups working together.

Difficulties of Organization

I don't want to minimize the difficulties in building a movement in this way, even though it's the way we in NAM feel we have to go. I want to mention three major difficulties—localism, pragmatism, and reformism. They are really all aspects of the same thing, and it comes back to that fragmentation of reality I spoke of at the start.

First, there is localism. Because we work in small community areas, on problems real to people there, we often get trapped in a narrow approach focused solely on that local situation. As organizers, working in our specific constituencies, it is often hard to raise the larger connections, all those links to other struggles and to the larger system.

The second problem, pragmatism, characterizes a lot of the organizing done by New Left people. Actually, it reproduces the older, traditional American anti-theoretical, anti-intellectual approach. It's related to what can be called the “illusion of populism,” the idea that we-the-people, an amorphous group, if we can just get together on some issue, are going to win real power. It is presented as pragmatism, but it really turns out to be very impractical, for it breeds illusions about the nature of the system—about where power resides, and what can be accomplished. In the long run, socialists who are “ideological,” who have some theoretical perspective on this system, are going to turn out to be much more

realistic, much more practical, than our anti-ideological friends in the populist movements.

Finally, there is the old problem of reformism—the idea that we can change this system by reforming it. First we solve this problem, which will lead to solving the next one, and lead onward to the next problem. Reformism can't succeed in making change because the system just doesn't work that way. And it's bad organizing because it doesn't give people a perspective on that system, or on the fact that power does not reside in community control. Though it would be a nice thing, you cannot have socialism in one neighborhood, or even one city. This approach reproduces the basic capitalist way of seeing things in fragmented terms, an issue here, a problem there, and it can be a real trap.

Building a Working Class Movement

So, let me conclude with the point that the new community issues present real opportunities, but also real dilemmas. Community struggles—I mean them in all their variety, from housing and health to disinvestment, education, pollution, transportation—are exciting because they are new evidence, urban evidence, of the basic contradictions in capitalism. And they are exciting because they bring into play new groups of people that have never been active before. They cut across traditional class lines, and the logic of the issues leads in the direction of a broader anti-capitalist struggle.

But to say these struggles may be anti-capitalist is not to say they're socialist. That is, they do not necessarily point to a vision of how the problems they challenge could be solved. And yet, this vision is absolutely necessary. The problems we're talking about are so deeply rooted in the fundamentals of capitalist social relations in cities, that they can only be solved as part of a socialist movement that understands those social relations as a system, and has a vision of an alternative.

So we've got a difficult situation. All these movements opening up, but lacking what I think of as a center—that center being a working class politics that looks towards a socialist solution. This means we have to see our task as we work on the urban crisis as a dual one: simultaneously trying to understand what a working class politics in the broadest, socialist sense would be; and at the same time, working for tangible and immediate goals in community struggles. We have to do basic education, theorizing, and organization building at the same time as we are working in these movements, movements that rise out of the contradictions of capitalism's urban crisis.

It is a difficult task, but it seems to me one we can take on with some hope, because the issues are there. More and more people are sensitive to them, and receptive to the kind of analysis we are able to offer. I feel a certain guarded optimism as we reach the end of the '70's, and I hope the '80's prove this to be valid. □

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MOVING & SHAKING

Lucy Parsons NAM, a newly-founded chapter on Chicago's southside, is off to a good start. Members will be learning more about local community issues, and eventually set their sights on a target for a chapter organizing effort. If the promise of an exciting organizing project isn't enough to recruit new members, their potluch dinners which follow every meeting should cinch it. This month's meeting received five red stars (the highest possible rating!)

Santa Cruz NAM continues to be actively involved in municipal politics. Chapter members will be supporting progressive Supervisorial candidate Joe Cuchaira's fight against a conservative incumbent this Fall. Work will center on twelve key precincts which could greatly help an effort to win a progressive majority on the City Council in '81. The neighborhood organizing project continues with an important victory which saved the neighborhood branch library from the jaws of the current Santa Cruz Council majority.

"**Northern Lights**" NAM will soon become a full chapter based in the cities of Moorehead, Minn., and Fargo, N.D. Members are working to establish essential women's health services in the community and also organizing opposition to draft registration. A teach-in is scheduled in September, leading to a week of activities during Anti-Draft Week: October 13-18.

Los Angeles NAM brought out nearly 200 persons who came to hear well-known attorney/activist Leonard Weinglass speak about his recent trip to Iran with the Ramsey Clark delegation. A full lineup of forums and classes is now in the works for the very successful Socialist School.

Baltimore NAM has not given up in their fight for affordable housing in a

city that recently voted for rent control, only to have the measure thrown out in court at the bequest of special interests. Work is now underway to force the City Council into adopting some type of control, which promises to be a tough fight. The next stop is to help build a city-wide coalition around a variety of housing concerns.

Morgantown, West Virginia pre-chapter is already involved in local concerns. The Morgantown area is a likely site for a new coal liquifaction complex. Members are involved in an effort to allow greater community control and accountability over this and other industrial development. A film series has also been scheduled to begin in the coming month.

Mobile, Alabama, promises to insure that the south will rise again; but on a very different program. Mobile's first contribution will be to collect NAM membership dues. The activists forming that chapter are already involved in anti-draft registration efforts. NAM members are helping to launch a major lawsuit against the cities of Mobile, Ala., and Pensacola, Fla., aimed at municipal structures and policies which are inherently racist. Members are also active in promoting a Rape Crisis center and Women's Space (a cultural center), and gay/lesbian rights work.

HOT OFF THE PRESS!!

Two excellent publications are available from the National Office:

"**Job Related Stress Diseases: Program and Prevention.**" This booklet is an excellent and complete overview of this relatively new area of concern. The introduction sets the context, both from a traditional view and the emerging socialist critique. A structural analysis of stress as a component of capitalist social relations follows. The causes and contributions of stress are then item-

ized and explained. Finally, an intermediate program aimed at combatting stress and its underlying causes is offered. This excellent pamphlet is available for only 25¢, bulkrate available.

"**NAM Bulletin on Plant Closings**" is a fine collection of articles that address this serious problem. An introduction gives a good summary of the issues and argues why this issue will be crucial for activists to address. The strength of this pamphlet is that it not only offers an analysis of the causes and forces behind plant closings. It gives an account of the concrete organizing experiences of groups seeking a progressive solution. This includes experiences of labor activists, as well as legislative approaches. Only 50¢, bulk rate available.

CHANGING OF THE GUARD

All of us will regret the departure of **Jacquie Brown** from the National Office. As staffperson, she has worked tirelessly to complete the day-to-day work that allows us to function as a national organization. Her bright character kept us afloat during even the most dreary winter days. Jacquie is now seeking work as a community or labor organizer in Chicago. We wish her the best of luck, and expect her intellect and diligence to bring her rewards in whatever path she chooses. Jacquie will continue to be an active member in the Northside Chicago chapter.

It's a hard act to follow, but **Craig Merrilees** has accepted the challenge as new staffperson. Craig has been a member of NAM for five years, all of them with the legendary Santa Cruz chapter. After losing an early bid to move the National Office to Santa Cruz, Craig moved to Chicago where he has joined the Northside chapter. Craig has worked as a neighborhood organizer, school teacher and bureaucrat. He can't balance his checkbook, but promises to learn the marginal

budgeting techniques essential for work in the National Office. Good luck!

"NAM WAS THERE"

NAM members played an active and visible role at the **6th annual Alternative State and Local Public Policy Conference** held recently in Pittsburgh. **Stanley Aronowitz** and **Manning Marable** gave major addresses, while over 20 other NAM members participated in workshops and discussions. Response to the NAM speakers was generally very good. Participants who have attended past conferences felt there was a growing receptiveness to a democratic socialist perspective. NAM members were better organized this year, co-sponsoring a reception with DSOC which drew 75 persons. For more information about the Conference, contact Randy Cunningham: 802 Ferndale Ave., Dayton, OH 45406, (513)275-6690.

Parents

Continued from page 16.

organized a fundraiser, to join with other women who are in the same isolated position to help themselves out of that isolation. Besides learning useful organizing skills or much needed information about childrearing, mothers often get their consciousness raised about their true position in our society while participating in discussion groups. And for single mothers, these groups are lifesavers—extended families with lots of other kids. As Blanca Almonte, Family Focus director, said, "If a mother gets up in the morning and knows that she's not stuck between those four walls with a fussy baby, if she knows that she can get away for an hour or two and meet other mothers, enjoy some adult company, she is less likely to batter or neglect her children." She believes that such organizations do

prevent child abuse.

Parents' groups are a new form of social reorganization that responds to the problems of fragmentation and isolation that often make modern family living unbearable. And they may be fertile recruitment grounds to encourage mothers and fathers to become involved in other issues such as equal rights for women, reproductive rights, and anti-draft activities—all very related to having children. Besides this, the groups provide recent child development information to parents who may not be familiar with it. All of these groups are also concerned about how to get fathers involved with raising their children.

Parents' groups take one big step out of isolation. It is a step that parents who keep these organizations together have taken themselves in recognition of the alienation our society has imposed and the dangers to themselves and to their children, often in terms of life and death, that such isolation and alienation bring.

The New American Movement...

The New American Movement combines a Marxist analysis with careful attention to the current realities of American politics. It combines a deep commitment to its socialist principles with a tactical flexibility in its political approach. It combines a focus on the development of theory appropriate to our times with activist orientation that stresses involvement in the crucial issues of the day. And it combines a vision of a socialist future based on democracy and human freedom with efforts to project in our work elements of that future.

NAM has over 35 chapters involved in organizing for labor union democracy, against nuclear power, for abortion rights, against violence against women, for affirmative action, against apartheid in South Africa, and much more. Chapters also organize cultural and educational events that attempt to present a new and challenging socialist perspective on our world.

All of this work is informed and united by certain basic political ideas:

- NAM is committed to working toward a socialist society in which material resources and the decision-making process are democratically controlled by all people.

- We are committed to a socialism that has equality and respect for all people at its core — one that carefully balances the need for collective planning, ownership, and decision-making with a high regard for individual rights and freedom.

- The development of a movement for socialism in America will require

the growth of socialist consciousness within the working class—all those who have to sell their labor power (even if they are not directly paid) in order to survive. For it is only a broad-based movement representative of the diversity of the American people that can fundamentally challenge the power of capital.

- American capitalism is a powerful and entrenched system. Yet it is also rife with contradictions. Organization is key to changing power relationships and exposing these contradictions. We are committed to the development of a socialist party that can carry out these tasks, as well as to the growth of the most strong and progressive possible popular organizations.

- Democracy is central to the process of building a movement for socialism. Only as working people become active, organized and begin to take control over their own lives can a new society take shape.

- NAM sees the struggle for the liberation of women as integral to a socialist movement. We value the contributions of the women's movement in showing how revolutionary change must deal with all aspects of people's lives. And we defend now, and in the socialism we project, the liberation of gay women and men.

- Racism cripples national life—it denies the humanity of minorities and thwarts the potential of the working class as a whole. NAM is committed to fighting against racism and national oppression in all forms.

- The fate of socialism in the United States is tied to the rest of the world. We support struggles for national liberation and human freedom wherever they occur.

- NAM supports the positive achievements of the existing socialist countries. However, we are also critical of various aspects of their policies, and see no one of them as a model for our own efforts.

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