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Moving On

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Towards a socialist America

EDITORS

Chris Riddiough, Bill Barclay,
Rick Kunnes, Holly Graff

PRODUCTION

Bob Quartell, Jim Rinnert,
Diane Scott, Dolores Wilber

DESIGN DIRECTOR

Dolores Wilber

The New American Movement: A Political Perspective

by Roberta Lynch

In its ten-year history NAM embraced populism, socialism, democracy and feminism. It tried to unify these sometimes contradictory tendencies. It has contributed to the development of a larger political tendency that may yet bring us a few steps closer to the vision of a human community.

An Interview with Dorothy Healey

by Gina Lobaco

Dorothy Healey has been involved in political activity for 53 years, nine of them in NAM. She talks about her years in NAM and her perspective on the organization.

NAM: A Few Glances, 1971-1982

A photo essay

Special Note to Moving On Subscribers

This is the last issue of *Moving On*. On March 20, NAM and the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC) are merging. By early April you will receive your first issue of *Democratic Left* which will be the publication of the Democratic Socialists of America.

Special thanks are due to Roberta Lynch and Dolores Wilber who contributed so much to *Moving On's* first years and have again contributed to this issue.

3 NAM and DSOC: Merger Becomes a Reality 10

by Holly Graff

The real significance of the NAM/DSOC merger lies in its potential to catalyze a much larger coming together of democratic socialists.

6 Reagan After One Year 11

by Bill Barclay

After one year the Reagan administration finds itself in a lot of trouble—and socialists have a lot of opportunities.

6 Eleven Years with Pittsburgh NAM 12

by John Haer & Joni Rabinowitz

Two long time members take a look at the successes and growth of one of the most vital, active chapters in NAM history.

8 Democratic Socialism: Becoming Visible in the South 14

by Glenn Scott

Traveling in the South Scott has found that many radicals are still active, building local community groups and activist programs. They can be an important part of the new democratic socialist organization.

NAM National News 15

A round-up of what's been happening locally and nationally in NAM.



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By Roberta Lynch



The New American Movement: A political retrospective

While I was visiting my family over the Christmas holidays, I got together with some old friends from high school days. As we sat discussing my political activities, one of them turned to me and said, "Do you really think you've accomplished anything all these years?" The question wasn't hostile, only perplexed. We had John Kennedy then.

Roberta Lynch has been a member of NAM since its founding. She has served in various leadership positions. She writes regularly for In These Times.

We have Ronald Reagan now. If I—and others like me—had simply lived our private lives for the last fifteen years—as my friend has done—would the world really be much different or much worse?

I can't help but believe that everyone in NAM has asked him or herself this question in one form or another, at one time or another. Translated to a political context, it is simply: Does it matter that NAM existed? When the meetings seemed to drag on endlessly, or the internal squabbles turned ugly, or the de-

bates approached the level of angels and pin-heads—there were probably few who could refrain from wondering if crocheting blankets for the elderly might not be a more fruitful life work.

Yet for some reason we held on, and in holding on, we changed and we changed others. And for that reason alone, I have to answer the above question in the affirmative. It's too soon—and I'm too close—to say what it all has meant, but let me try to say a little

Continued on the following page.

MOVING ON 3

Continued from the previous page about what it has meant to me.

The New American Movement—we called ourselves an organization, but we were really more of a project—a valiant experiment in keeping alive hope and creativity amidst a society that keeps trying to stamp them out and a left tradition that is itself prone to rigidity and dogmatism—even, in its worst moments, to a kind of cynical despair.

As an organization we were weak—too few members, too little money, no driven messianic leaders or entrepreneurial builders. But as a project we were pioneering, risk-taking, a crucible for testing ideas and activities that of-

ten spread to other segments of the left. Because we were willing to live with doubts and questions, we were also able to learn from our own mistakes and to grow in that process.

We began with exaggerated ideas about the possibilities for radical change and our own role in them. Today we have a much more complex and long-term view of how change will occur and a much more modest understanding of our own part in it. We began with much talk of the working class, but with little understanding of the reality of the contemporary labor movement. Today our members are officers and activists in dozens of local unions and we have a much greater appreciation for the dil-

emmas that the labor movement faces. We began with an emphasis on “anti-imperialist” politics that often led us to useless rhetoric and sectarian left coalitions. Today we work against U.S. involvement in El Salvador and the nuclear arms race with church groups and community organizations. We began with an almost extra-parliamentary approach to elections and a scorn for participation in any form in the Democratic Party. Today we are developing a working knowledge of the levers of political power and a progressive presence within the existing arenas of electoral activity.

Yet even as we have grown in these and other areas, we have remained painfully aware of how we have not grown. We were never able to have an impact on national policies or a presence on the national political map. We didn't develop a fundraising style or recruiting methods that would have allowed us substantially to increase in size. We found it difficult to develop a practice that genuinely incorporated—and expressed—the range and depth of our political theory. And we were not, despite all our efforts to do so, able to become a truly multi-racial organization. Some of these problems were due to our own collective limitations; others were more the logical result of American political realities in these times. In either event, because we were willing to face them directly, they served as a kind of shield against arrogance or illusions of vanguardism, as well as providing the impetus to take a step as bold as merging with another organization.

Looking back, it seems to me that there were four elements that have been at the heart of NAM since its inception and that will remain with us even as we change organizational forms. They are: populism, socialism, democracy and feminism. What made NAM unique was not that we embraced any particular one of these, but that we embraced them *all*, when, for many people, any two or three of them stood in contradiction to each other. Nor were we simply content to let them stand idly side by side on the pages of political documents. Rather we were constantly trying to find ways to unify these different elements and give them meaning in life. The effort to do so—the faithfulness to these basic principles—was, I believe, what kept us from succumbing to sectarian politics or settling for progressive pragmatism. I want to briefly discuss each of them individually and then talk about what the larger meaning of such efforts might be.

The populist tendency in NAM was a reaction to the ways in which the New Left had been largely divorced from the realities, experiences, and needs of so many ordinary Americans. Yet because



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so many in the organization were themselves descendants of that New Left tradition—with its animosity toward all of American culture—there was a continuing tension within our ranks around this issue.

At its best, NAM worked to develop language and symbols that were rooted in the history and struggles of our own nation. We rejected a reliance on either the methodology or the symbols of other revolutions. Moreover, we were determined to participate in those progressive activities that working people themselves defined as important, rather than leaning on outworn dogma to make our priorities. It is interesting to note, for instance, that NAM was among the first organizations in the country to recognize the importance of energy/utilities organizing. It was NAM chapters that formed many of the early utility organizations in cities such as Pittsburgh, Buffalo and Dayton—and that helped to give political direction to the anger and frustration that so many people felt. It is also interesting to note that we were roundly criticized by many on the left for undertaking such “non-Marxist” activity.

The populist impulse was what enabled many of our strongest chapters to survive and to have a political impact in their cities. It was, in essence, this effort to understand and relate to people at a grass roots level that gave NAM its continuing vitality at the local level. Although it at times produced chapters with widely varying styles and activities—making it hard to forge a national identity—on the whole it was a force for realism and experimentation that created a number of enduring local organizations that have had—and will continue to have—a valuable role in their local areas.

The fact that NAM defined itself as a socialist organization set it apart from many citizens groups, women’s organizations, etc., that worked on similar issues or had similar short-term goals. For many left-leaning people, socialism was better left in the closet, a liability in achieving immediate reforms, a useless appendage in building credibility.

One of the binding concepts of NAM, however, was the belief that socialism could never be legitimized as a political possibility unless its proponents were open and unashamed in their advocacy of it. We felt that reforms or popular movements would remain limited unless they could in some way be related to a larger vision of social and economic transformation.

Even our own efforts have not always been able to effect that relationship. Many times our members have found themselves deeply involved in some organization or activity, yet unsure how to relate it to NAM or socialist politics.

Nonetheless, although socialism is far from a household word, over the last decade there have been large changes as open socialists have become an accepted part of universities, the labor movement, political coalitions, and even the major media. While *In These Times* and the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee deserve much of the credit for these developments at the national level, it is probably fair to say that in many local areas, the work of the NAM chapter or leading NAM activists has contributed significantly to this change. Through socialist schools, socialist newspapers or newsletters, and through our continued struggle to develop our socialist identity—without seeming sectarian or arrogant—as we participate in popular movements, we have altered the political landscape of our cities in a small but significant way.

Our commitment to democracy has been fundamental to so much of NAM’s

organization’s founders were also active in the women’s movement, from its inception NAM saw itself as both a socialist and a feminist organization (even referred to itself as “socialist-feminist”). Its structure reflected this by requiring that half of all leadership bodies be women. And its practice reflected it in its focus on such issues as reproductive rights and child care.

NAM’s theory never adequately accommodated these two historical tendencies which at times have rivalled—even battled—each other. But there were creative attempts to do so throughout our years, and each one took a small piece of new ground in the attempt to achieve a synthesis without ignoring the real contradictions that exist.

In addition to bringing to NAM a passionate opposition to sexism in all its forms, the feminist movement also contributed an insight which was to shape our entire history: the recognition that

“At its best, NAM worked to develop language and symbols that were rooted in the history of our own nation.”

political development, helping to shape both our external activities and our internal life. It takes on particular meaning for the development of a genuinely American socialist movement, because the strength of the democratic ideal in our own country means that no socialist politics will ever emerge here unless they place that ideal at their center. Moreover, the distortions of socialism that have occurred under various governments around the world have made it imperative that we openly and forcefully emphasize our conviction that democracy is in fact the essence of true socialism.

This has meant recognizing the importance of the democratic rights that have been secured in American society and consistently working to defend and extend them. It has meant developing a practice that has at its core the effort to empower people so that they can begin to affect the decisions that shape their lives. And it has meant engaging in our organizing in ways that are not manipulative and that genuinely seek to encourage other people’s ideas rather than to simply impose our own.

Within the organization, this commitment to democracy produced an open and flexible internal process, with regular rotation of leadership, full discussion of issues, and plenty of disagreements and debates.

Finally, feminism has been perhaps the most consistent feature of NAM’s political identity. Because many of the

personal life and cultural concerns are in fact integral elements of political transformation.

From this insight grew our abiding concern with creating within our own ranks the social space that could allow people to grow and expand their own capacities, as well as to allow for personal concerns to be expressed and taken seriously. Moreover, it also generated a lively cultural life both at national events and in many chapter circles. And, I believe, it equipped us with particular sensitivities in all of the organizing work that we undertook. It made us more aware of the complex interaction of personal, cultural, social and economic factors that shape people’s consciousness, that make them open to or resistant to change, and that make them multi-dimensional human beings.

What does it all add up to? We certainly can’t answer that question now in any ultimate sense. But I think that the fact that we are merging to form a new, larger and more potentially influential organization suggests one way of looking at our history of the last decade. For what we have done is to contribute to the development of a larger political tendency on the American left that embodies the elements that I have described here, that enhances the possibility of strengthening and actualizing them, and that may yet bring us a few steps closer to that vision of human community that has sustained us all these last ten years. ■

Continuity in struggle:

An interview with Dorothy Healey

By Gina Lobaco

Where there's smoke, there's usually Dorothy Healey with the ever-present cigarette. But there's also a blazing intelligence and incendiary wit behind her blue eyes. For many in the L.A. NAM chapter, Dorothy is both a mother confessor and political mentor. Tirelessly voluble on all things political, Dorothy possesses a vast store of knowledge acquired for a voracious reading habit and 53 years of non-stop political activity.

Her years as a union organizer among California's farmworkers during the '30s, and for the CIO in the '40s, enlivened her theoretical understanding with the human drama of those struggles. In 1945, she became secretary of the Southern California Communist Party (USA) and served as one of its most dedicated and public members for the next 30 years.

Earning the dubious distinction as America's best-known woman Communist, Dorothy stirred up controversy in the establishment press which dubbed her the "Red Queen" during her 1951 Smith Act trial. For her efforts on behalf of the CP, Dorothy spent a year in jail, was arrested numerous times and faced countless investigations.

But the professional anti-communists of that era weren't the only ones who found her notorious. Dorothy managed to provoke hostility within the Party itself which she had joined as a teenager in 1929. A constant and open critic of the CP's lack of internal democracy, Dorothy took strong exception to the Party's support of the

Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Fueled by other disputes, the rift grew until she resigned in 1973.

She joined NAM shortly thereafter, bringing with her the accumulated wealth of her rich history. Sitting in her large easy chair, surrounded by her pipes, piles of reading materials and the incessantly ringing telephone, Dorothy spoke to *Moving On* about her eight years in NAM:

Let's talk a little bit about why you joined NAM.

Well, there were two reasons. One was the pressure of my dear son, Richard Healey, who insisted that if all I'd done previously had any meaning, then I had no right to turn my back on the new challenges and should be a part of this new organization. The other reason was that the factors that had first made me a revolutionary were still present: the capitalist system was still present in all of its outrages and "conscience doth make organizers of us all." There had to be new ways of finding continuity in one's struggle.

What did you expect from NAM?

Two things: One was a more organized way to analyze what was going on. I don't think that significant analysis can be done too effectively by individuals. It needs a collective interplay. Second, to find ways in which to intervene in politics to become part of either ongoing movements or to help initiate movements of struggle.

I remember the first NAM convention I attended was an enormous cultural shock [chuckles]. We didn't have a

political committee and there was an absolute resistance to any body of NAM making proposals on activities or having any defined responsibility.

What has impressed me most is watching NAM's development in finding its own way and processes to strike a leadership balance that can provide some initiative in political activity and yet not become a bureaucracy.

Some of the reactions I had were mostly a feeling of *deja vu*. I could sit through meetings and listen to debates I clearly remembered from some 40 years earlier in the Young Communist League (YCL). And my reaction was, "Oh, my God! Doesn't anything change?" [laughter]

What was surprising or memorable about your NAM experiences?

The most important difference, of course, was the emphasis on socialist-feminism and the approach of the personal being political. I had been political in an atmosphere where considering the personal to be important was to be subjective and *that* was the most pejorative term one could apply to an individual.

I would say that was the positive side. On the negative side, what appalled me the most was the lack of responsibility for what one undertook to do. My experience was that if you undertook an assignment—if it was to distribute leaflets or be at a demonstration, or carry out some activity—you did it, no matter what the problem.

Party discipline?

That's right! I was totally appalled and startled to find the airiness with which that kind of responsibility was dismissed. If you did it, fine. But if you didn't do it, nobody cared.

Do you think NAM became more efficient?

Oh, yes. And I would consider its high mark to be an organization that has improved enormously since its earliest years. But it's still the biggest problem NAM has had. When NAM held its first major organizing convention in '71 and '72, people believed that all those who had been so active in the '60s in either the feminist, anti-war or civil rights movements would all come flocking into this new national socialist organization. As you know, that didn't happen. It's hard to build a new organization in the absence of huge mass struggles. That was and continues to be a very hard problem.

What do you see as NAM's contribution to the U.S. left?

To me, the last NAM convention was a tribute to its activists. What NAM has contributed is a body of

young people throughout the country who have developed an ability to think politically, to organize on a grassroots level and to find meaningful ways to be active in unions and mass organizations of one kind or another.

Just to have watched this group—or what other organizations would call a cadre—of people who are committed and dedicated and self-sacrificing in building an organization has been very rewarding. No organization can grow without self-sacrifice: Some people *have* to be responsible for thinking about an agenda for a meeting ahead of time. Even a PTA can't grow without that kind of self-sacrifice.

I think another important contribution is that NAM has demonstrated that it is possible to build a non-dogmatic multi-tendency organization; that it is unnecessary to have the correct line for everything which everyone will automatically follow without question or challenge.

So I think there's a great deal to be proud of because NAM—unlike many

involved and convinced. You can't do it by dicta or by directives that come from a leadership. Individuals have to be a part of decision-making.

NAM's greatest weakness—and this is true of many organizations—is its inability to recruit people of color. It has been the first time in my life I was in an organization that was overwhelmingly white. I find it very uncomfortable and disconcerting to have that situation. It is, I think, the biggest challenge the combined organizations will face. Unless an organization can organically unite black, brown, Asian, Native American and white people together, it will always be fighting with one hand tied behind its back.

We talked earlier about the personal and the political. How did that combine for you in NAM?

It's been an enormous education for me. After all, since I am a person who was shaped, influenced and molded by the struggles of the society and organizations of the '30s and '40s, I have found that when totally new things

tions of organizational know-how. A distinct memory I carry from the Australian Communist Party convention I attended two years ago was the combination of old and young. It was wonderful to see that what I was experiencing personally in the L.A. NAM chapter was happening in an entire organization. Old people are learning from young people what is new and what has to be reckoned with. Young people are learning from the old about the experiences, history and methods of work that also are important.

One story in particular sums up my experience. In 1976 and '77, I was being urged to run for the National Interim Committee (NIC). I was reluctant to do so because my son, Richard Healey, was a member of the Political Committee and was on the NIC and it didn't seem to be right that both of us should be there. It seemed like I was intruding on his experience.

I was eating lunch with a group of Ohio delegates and I expressed my reluctance about running. One of them



© Marshall Meyer 1982

organizations of the New Left that formed in the '70s and have mostly disappeared today—grew, consolidated itself and remained on the scene. NAM was also able to take the important step of uniting with DSOC and undergoing an enormous internal debate on the merger question while still growing as an organization.

What was personally illuminating to you from your NAM experience?

The emphasis on process was a wholly new experience for me. That it's as important *how* you do a thing as what you're trying to do. People have to be

happen, I have to do a double-take. My first reactions are rarely the right ones; I am, in a sense, simply echoing the history from which I evolved. I have learned tremendously from a young generation to challenge old axioms and things I took for granted as facts of life. I learned that different viewpoints can be valid if Marxism is to retain its capacity to look at a changing world.

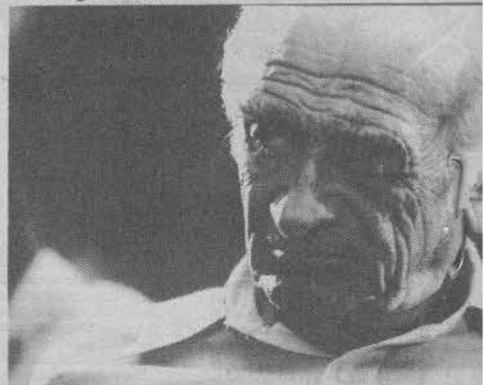
And people have to change with it. I wish NAM had more members of my generation because I think we have something to contribute. Continuity of tradition is important, as well as ques-

said to me: "I don't understand you, Dorothy. We don't have any provision that precludes our members from recruiting their parents. After all, Richard was in this long before you. If he wanted to recruit his mother, we don't see anything wrong with you playing a role." That really kind of summarized what was different about NAM from my own past experience. ■

Gina Lobaco is a member of L.A. NAM. She is a regular contributor to In These Times and has written for The Progressive, the L.A. Times and Politik.

NAM: A Few Glances, 1971-1982

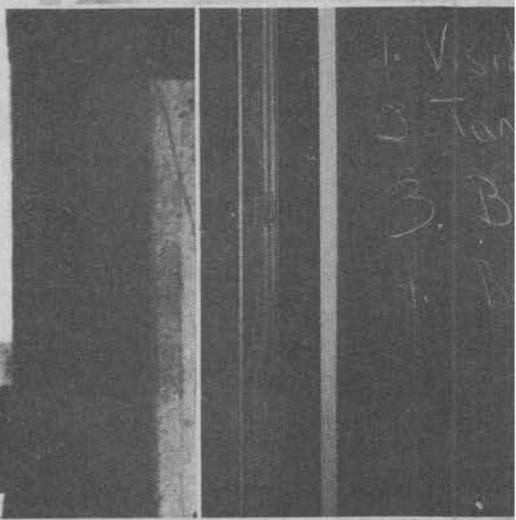
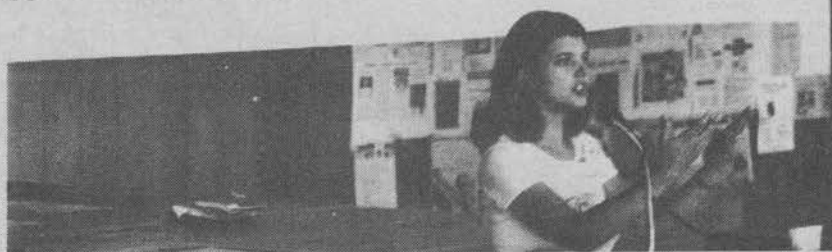
Ben Dobbs
Los Angeles NAM



Tom Simonds



Ann Hill
Cleveland NAM



Jim Shoch (left), John Beverly
East Bay NAM, Pittsburgh NAM
Barbara Baron
East Bay NAM



Tom Simonds

Judy MacLean (left) and Carol Becker
East Bay NAM and NAM at-large member



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Rick Kunnes, Richard Healey
NAM Political Committee and Boston NAM

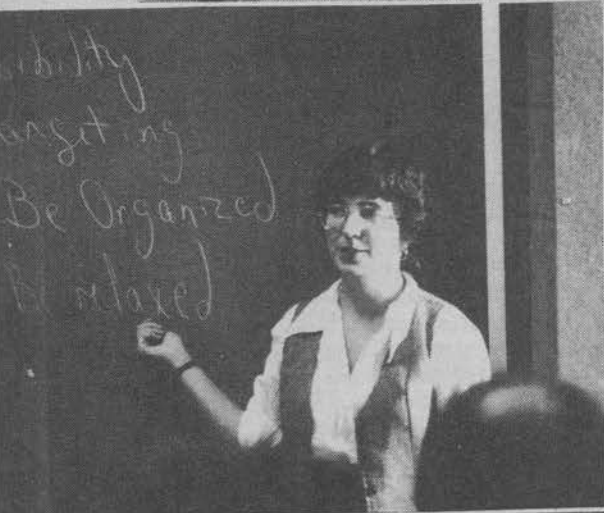


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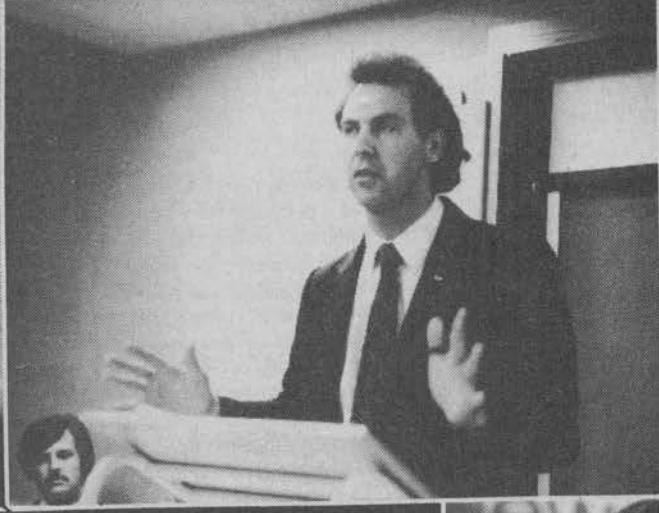


Holly Graff (left) and Roberta Lynch
NAM Political Committee and Chicago Northside NAM

Tom Simonds



Betty Arenth
Pittsburgh NAM



Bernie Demczuk
Washington, D.C. DSOC
and NAM

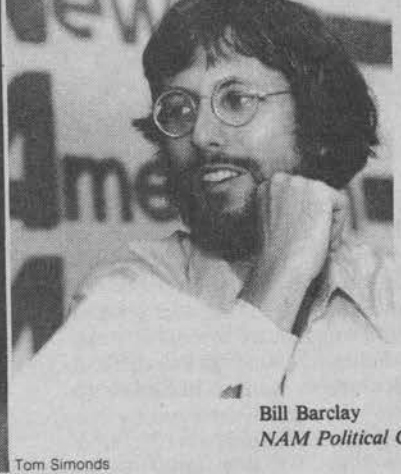
Scott Van Osdol



John Lurie



Glenn Scott (left) and Susan Meade
Austin NAM and Pittsburgh NAM



Bill Barclay
NAM Political Committee

Tom Simonds



Mark Mericle
Dayton NAM

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NAM and DSOC: Merger becomes a reality

By Holly Graff

March 20, 1982, will be a historic date for the socialist movement in America. On that day delegates from the New American Movement and the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee will come together to begin the founding of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). At this March meeting, founding documents will be approved and leadership elected. This meeting will also mark the beginning of an outreach campaign intended to draw unaffiliated democratic socialists into the organization. This outreach campaign will culminate with a large Unity Conference to be held in San Francisco in August.

With the frightening political initiatives of the right, all of us know that we are facing difficult times. But NAM and DSOC are not merging simply because we recognize the need for the greatest possible unity in face of the right. Rather, we believe that despite the difficulties we face, there are also immense op-

Holly Graff is a member of the NAM Political Committee and the Chicago Northside Chapter.

portunities—opportunities for building effective progressive coalitions with both national and local manifestations and opportunities for creating a presence within such coalitions for our vision of socialism. We believe that the best possibility of responding to the opportunities and difficulties we will be confronting involves building a particular kind of socialist organization—a socialist organization which is nationally visible, diverse in its membership, readily accessible to potential members, multi-tendency, and clearly committed to a democratic, feminist, and anti-racist vision of socialism. We believe that the merger of NAM and DSOC will be the basis for the building of this organization.

The NAM/DSOC merger is an unusual event not only because socialist organizations have split more often than they have come together but also because NAM and DSOC are very different organizations. DSOC's geographical concentration is on the East Coast while NAM's greatest concentrations are on the West Coast and in the cities of the Industrial Heartland. NAM and DSOC to some extent represent different generations politicized under different circumstances and within different traditions. (DSOC has many members in the 40-60 age group and on campus, while most NAM members are between 25 and 40 or over 65.) DSOC has emphasized work within the left wing of the Democratic Party, within the labor movement, on campus, and within the religious community; NAM has emphasized work within the women's movement, community organizing, and organizing around numerous specific issues such as energy. Perhaps most significantly, DSOC has emphasized building on a national level through coali-

tions and outreach conferences and has recently begun to build strong locals. In contrast, NAM first emphasized building strong local chapters that could have impact in their cities and hoped they would combine to produce national presence and practice, as has occurred in some instances.

The differences between NAM and DSOC represent complementary strengths, and this complementarity has always been a key reason for seeking merger. Of course, the differences between NAM and DSOC also create the basis for misunderstandings. Because of geographical differences, NAM members and DSOC members often haven't had clear pictures of the other organization. Because of our different emphases, it has been possible for each organization to doubt the commitment of the other organization to what has not been most heavily emphasized. Our different generations and traditions mean that even when we intend to express the same idea we often use different language. Thus, the differences between NAM and DSOC necessitated a long process (almost three years) of discussion, joint work, and negotiation. Although this process has sometimes been frustrating, the time and effort was well spent since we have now created a basis of trust and understanding which will be the foundation of a strong organization.

The merger of NAM and DSOC will bring into existence an organization that is already greater than the sum of its parts. But the final significance of the merger does not lie in this. Rather, the final significance of merger lies in its potential to catalyze a much larger coming together. We hope that those who have shared our everyday work but have questioned whether an effective socialist organization can be built in America in the 1980's will now join us. We hope that with increased national and local presence those who share our perspectives but have not yet thought of themselves as socialists will join with us. We further hope that those who share our politics but have felt that neither NAM or DSOC provided a real place for their specific concerns will now see the beginning of an organization broad enough to include those specific concerns and flexible enough to accommodate diverse needs and levels of participation. In the coming months we will work as hard as we can to make these hopes into realities and to build an organization that will have a real effect on the politics of our country. ■

Reagan fumbles: Can the left take the offensive?

By Bill Barclay

Much of contemporary American political commentary borrows the language and metaphors of sports—winners, losers, superstars, team efforts. Ronald Reagan knows this language and these metaphors—and certainly he is aware that one of the favorite sports metaphors, momentum, is at stake in his recent budget proposals. After all, if there was ever an administration that had political momentum when it came into office, it was this one. And, like a good coach, Reagan used that momentum to get all he asked for in the fight over tax and budget policies last year.

However, momentum, as the sportscasters say, has shifted. It may not yet be with the opposition but it is no longer with Reagan. Growing budget deficits, rising unemployment, the failure of interest rates to descend below their historic highs, the refusal of corporations to invest the harvest they are reaping from supply side tax breaks—Reagan has discovered that making the economy respond to Reaganomics is a lot harder than winning one for the Gipper. The immediate impact within the Reagan administration has been growing conflict as the uneasy alliance of supply siders, traditional conservatives, and corporate investment stimulators begin to fall out among themselves. So far the supply siders have lost and the emerging victors are the traditional conservatives—recession is good for us like

medicine that tastes bad going down but will cure us in the long run.

But the loss of political momentum has meaning far beyond the breakup of the Reagan policy coalition. Reagan built his momentum, and the very definition of his administration's success or failure, around the economy. Further, he did this in a manner unique for a Republican administration in the last half century. After all, Reagan did not come into office with the promise of hard-to-swallow medicine for long-term economic health. On the contrary. He promised the conservative free lunch—declining inflation and unemployment would be coupled with economic growth. His high share of the union vote (relatively better than any other Republican president since pre-FDR days) was predicated on that promise, on the ability of the Reagan program to counter high inflation and unemployment. Thus the fate of this administration rests on the success or failure of economic policy.

What does the failure of Reaganomics mean for the left? To begin with, it should be obvious that we cannot respond by reasserting the policies and programs of the past—in this respect the supply siders are right, we cannot go back. A large part of the Democratic paralysis flows from the sense that there is no going back coupled with an inability to see a way forward. Instead, we need to develop a coherent and politically accessible alternative economic policy. Coherent—one that looks at the interrelations of snowbelt industry and urban crisis, sunbelt growth and federal energy policy, federal budgets and employment. Politically accessible—one that is no longer the property of academics and/or socialist intellectuals but

that can become part of the common sense of U.S. politics.

But there is a second meaning that the failure of Reaganomics has for the left. We must be clear—Reagan and his advisors mean to create a Republican majority, not just for 1980 and 1984 but for the rest of the century. If this cannot be done around the economy they will try to do it elsewhere. Already part of that elsewhere is emerging—foreign policy. Reagan is the true nostalgia president. For him all conflicts between the U.S. and the third world are “really” conflicts between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Is there trouble in Nicaragua—the Sandinistas are Soviet “inspired”; is the El Salvadoran government unable to retain the support of its own people—the Soviets, by way of their Cuban conduits, are pouring arms into the rebel army. And so it goes. The politics of the new cold war—bipartisan foreign policy, acquiescence to White House definitions of the “national interest,” and increased arms spending—are designed to recreate the political and social solidarity that characterized the U.S. of the 1950s. But again Reagan faces failure and we face opportunity. The West European peace movement is not impressed by Reagan's disarmament proposals, and even Republicans will come down on the side of cutting arms spending when the Gypsy Moths face the voters with 9% unemployment and 9% inflation—after cutting CETA, Trade Readjustment, and the Women/Infants/Children programs.

Finally, what about the vaunted social agenda of the right? Much of the moral majority/Jesse Helms axis is already disgusted with Reagan's failure to actively push such measures as the Family Protection Act or a constitutional amendment against abortion. Here too, we have a unique opportunity. The largely unmentioned-upon gender split in the 1980 presidential vote has continued and, if anything, is increasing. Women—and women beyond the boundaries of the organized feminist movement—are more likely than men to disapprove of Reagan's policies from the economy

Continued on page 15.

Bill Barclay is a member of the NAM Political Committee and the Lucy Parsons Chapter.

Eleven years with

By John Haer & Joni Rabinowitz

Active, vital and creative local affiliates of our nationwide socialist organization—that's always been a key organizing goal in NAM. Looking back on 11 years of political work in building Pittsburgh NAM, we can only say we've learned some lessons, both good and bad.

In a country as vast and culturally diverse as ours, the task of melding local, regional and national political concerns is difficult. While it is true that our socialist critique of the American system provides a common analysis relevant from Anchorage to Miami, it doesn't necessarily follow that organizing projects that work in Boston will also work in San Diego. Similarly, decisions made in Washington impact in different, often contradictory ways throughout the nation. That's why active local units that can mobilize people at the grassroots level are the essential building blocks of a national political movement. Of course, the converse is also true: local formations that do not address national issues or link up with broader constituencies will have very limited horizons and make only minimal gains.

In Pittsburgh, employing admittedly subjective measures, we can claim at least modest success in chapter building. We have a current membership of 60, a bi-monthly publication mailed to a broad periphery of 900, committees for planning and evaluation of our work, and regular cultural and educational events for members and non-members. With these, and the involvement of members in most of the popular progressive political movements, we feel we cut a wide swath in the progressive community. Organizationally, our chapter has good working relationships

with non-socialists as well as the rest of the left. This past October, together with a local feminist college group, we sponsored and organized a Robin Tyler concert which drew an audience of 650—the largest turn-out for a socialist-sponsored local event in recent history.

How has the chapter maintained itself and grown through these past 11 years? To those who helped form the chapter when NAM began back in 1971, the answer seems to lie within a set of various factors. We've certainly seen members come and go, but a dedicated core and critical mass have always been around to keep things going. Four founding members remain active in the Pittsburgh chapter, and 20 of the present 60 joined before 1978. In comparative terms, this makes us an experienced group. Despite some rough times, we've been able to forge common expectations for each other, a key ingredient in any collective endeavor.

At its best, our local organization serves as a training ground for political education and skills. Training occurs on a formal level through such structures as political education sessions and classes, help in giving presentations and laying out leaflets, and regional schools. It occurs informally through observation and emulation, social activities that lead to personal history sharing, and friendships that are formed. In this sense, our collectivity has provided real returns, on both the teaching and learning sides. To see, as we have, new members develop confidence in their own political capacities, developing into effective speakers and capable organizers, is a wondrous thing. Such experiences are particularly important and significant in connection with women's leadership.

We take special pride in having spawned capable leaders now active in a range of popular organization. Chapter-initiated organizing projects have grown, through these people, into important political movements and organizations. These have included energy work, clerical organizing, reproductive rights and labor work.

In 1975, we began organizing around utilities issues, bringing together similarly interested organizations. This ef-

fort evolved into Pennsylvania Alliance for Jobs and Energy (PAJE), a city-wide energy organization with nine regular paid staff, a canvassing operation, and a public presence and significant organizing victories. A NAM member was on the first staff of PAJE, a NAM representative is active on the PAJE Steering Committee, and NAM members are mobilized for PAJE's activities. Several new members have been recruited to NAM since PAJE began in 1978.

Similarly, clerical organizing at the University of Pittsburgh, a campaign initiated in 1977, was instrumental in the formation of a strong chapter of National Organization of Working Women (Pittsburgh Working Women), staffed by two NAM members. Several graduates of that 1977 drive have gone on to take positions in other Working Women's chapters across the country, and on the national staff of District 925, the clerical division of Service Employee International Union.

We think it's fair to say these members learned many of their organizing and analytic skills, and made many of their important contacts through membership and participation in the chapter; that the growth of these organizations has been strongly influenced by the presence of the Pittsburgh chapter; that the chapter, in turn, has benefitted from these organizations. Thus, we feel we've been able to affect our political environment in important ways.

Pittsburgh NAM has also provided strong competent leadership and activists for other chapters and organizations throughout the country. Former Pittsburgh chapter members have assumed important roles in Chicago NAM and on our National Political Committee and Negotiating Committee. Pittsburgh "graduates" are active in Washington, D.C., Seattle, Cleveland and Los Angeles NAM, as well as in Working Women and other community and labor organizations. Again we attribute these influences, not readily seen by the casual observer, largely to the skills developed through our collective work.

With such useful social interchange, a host of other good things happen as well. Friends are made. Resources are shared. New people join. New ideas build on old ones. Working together becomes much more than the mechanics of getting a task done. We've seen several marriages, many long-term relationships, and more than a few job opportunities, and at least three dramatic presentations emanate from our political association.

No one chapter structure can guar-

Joni Rabinowitz and John Haer have been active in Pittsburgh NAM since 1971, and John is on NAM's NIC. He also is on the staff of SEIU Local 585, and both work on the chapter's Outreach, Newsletter and Labor & Urban Politics Committees.



Pittsburgh NAM at chapter retreat in 1976.

Pittsburgh NAM

antee results, and none can meet everybody's needs. We've had more than our share of models over the years, and we seem to re-organize about every two years. We've had times when members were required to serve on committees; when at least one meeting occurred every week, usually more; when meeting minutes were reproduced nearly verbatim and mailed out twice a month. We've had chapter projects. We've had centralized and de-centralized structures. We've had two chapters, a chapter with two branches, and one chapter with committees. We've had periods when new members had to attend a three-session orientation and others when members joined by mail and never met anyone else. And we've had times when chapter meetings were so painful that they were closed to non-members.

We're flexible about structure, as long as the essential work can be performed and people act responsibly, because we've seen the failures as well as the benefits that can arise from most any structure. No model can guarantee that members will develop satisfying relationships with each other. People have political and personal likes and dislikes, loyalties and suspicions, and styles of life and work that inevitably differ. Things don't always run smoothly. There is always a tension between the collectively defined needs of the group and the felt needs of the individual. A chapter structure can define a desirable framework within which individuals communicate, but it cannot insure that that communication is mutually beneficial.

Because of socialist feminist insights and sensitivities, we think NAM is more immune from harmful personal interaction than most other groups. But when political differences are allowed to be expressed with hostility or suspicion, with sarcasm or with apparent malice, then little or no collective benefits obtain. We've seen plenty of that dynamic as well.

That's our experience in Pittsburgh—11 years of plugging away. While we claim substantial success, we have a long way to go. We see the new merged organization as an excellent opportunity for great advancement in both numbers and political potency for both our chapters and the national organization.

One recent event heartens us. A former member, who left NAM in 1975, has recently rejoined the chapter.

"I feel that both I and the chapter have matured over the last seven years," she says. "I've made some discoveries about myself, and I've observed NAM move out of its adolescence. I'm glad to be back." ■

Becoming visible in the South

By Glenn Scott

Of late a number of writers have pondered the whereabouts of those million some people who said in a poll in 1971 or 1972 that they considered themselves sympathetic to left politics. After traveling 3,000 miles, to visit eight cities in the Deep South for NAM the past two months, I think I can offer at least part of an answer.

A lot of those folks are still out there, even subtracting the people who gave up politics to go into real estate or Sears middle management, or, like David Stockman, jumped the tracks to a dressed-up version of right-wing politics. And no small number of those radicals are still in the South. After all, the civil rights, anti-war and women's movements produced thousands of leftists in the South—from the lunch counters in Durham to the movie houses in Dallas, from the Miami Republican convention to the Austin SDS convention.

Yea, but where *are* they, say. My contention, and it's nothing startling, is that while there have not been the large street "demo's" of the 60's and early 70's, thousands of people who were politicized during that time, or as a result of those struggles, have been doing a wide range of political work in more quiet and far less visible ways, but nonetheless essential for long range social change. Political work like providing legal services and organizing assistance to poor people, raising children, establishing rural self-help projects, knitting to-

Glenn Scott is currently serving on the National Interim Committee of NAM and has been a member of Austin NAM for almost seven years. She is currently traveling for NAM and the new organization in the South.

gether a women's community ten miles from where the local Klan holds cross burnings, taking over county Democratic committees, leading a union local, writing poetry, activating one's church to oppose U.S. intervention in El Salvador.

Then why haven't there been more socialist chapters in the South? To put it bluntly the importance of a nationwide socialist organization has not yet been compelling enough to parts of the 'hinterland.' This is compounded by the sense of many Southern activists that national left organizations have been unwilling to embrace regional differences. Many still suspect the South is largely seen through California, Chicago or Northeast sunglasses. For many in the South there has been plenty of organizing to be done and the extra work of building a socialist organization either seemed too much work, too controversial or just too abstract.

A veritable rock slide of developments is beginning to change that—Reaganomics, the heated-up arms race, El Salvador and Nicaragua, Poland, the Moral Majority, the new attention paid the South by international unions. Also, NAM and DSOC are finally putting tangible resources and concern into working with and learning from socialists and progressives in the South. Because of all these things the people I met with did seem more open to the importance of a nationwide democratic-socialist organization.

Another interesting twist to my travels was that NAM people and chapters all over the country have actually contributed (maybe unwittingly) to the growing interest in a nationwide socialist organization. A woman in Orlando who was working for the ERA and lesbian rights in NOW had gone to school six years ago in Michigan where she had worked with women in Red Cedar NAM. She plans to work with the NAM/DSOC organizing committee that is forming. A Legal Services attorney in Orlando stopped by a NAM table at a local Solidarity rally to say that he had worked with the Binghamton NAM chapter in New York while in college. He is also interested in joining. A community college teacher at the same rally had known about NAM for four years through *Moving On* and *In These Times*, but said, "I never knew anyone else in Gainesville or Orlando that was interested too." Now he does.

A man from Savannah Georgia now active in the Atlanta DSOC local said that he had felt closer to NAM ever since his radical group in Savannah helped bring Roberta Lynch there five years ago. Three years later he moved to Atlanta and joined DSOC. I told

him I was struck by how similar the DSOC local seemed to the NAM chapters I had visited.

Many of these folks would have joined NAM several years ago, *if there had been something to join in the South*. It's a big leap to organize a chapter, particularly without enough leadership experience in another chapter, and especially without another chapter within 500 miles. Those skills are still frighteningly rare. How to run good meetings, how to help people plan chapter work, how to recruit, how to do public outreach, how to balance organizing with study and socialist presence.

I think there are more and more people ready and willing to learn this stuff. It's more a question of are *we*, the 6-7,000 socialists in this merger, going to do whatever it takes to pass on what we know to these people? And if I'm not too far off base, passing it on to a lot more people than we have thought possible in the last five or six years in NAM.

Some of these people have actually been *waiting on us*.

A woman at last year's Southern Regional Conference of Democratic Socialists said it the best. We had a women's caucus and went around the room to say a little about ourselves. This woman had been living in West Virginia working with Legal Services for the last four years. She said, "I went to that conference on Socialist Feminism back in 1975 in Yellow Springs. A lot of NAM women were involved. I thought it was a great conference, but I never heard any more about it. Where did everybody go?"

So the next time I hear someone ask why aren't there more socialists visible in the South, I'm going to say "Who's visible to whom?"

The fact is we've all been pretty invisible.

But that's changing. At the 1979 NAM convention 14 of us met in the first Southern caucus. We were gleeful to find that among us we could compile a mailing list of 80 contacts. In the two years since then NAM has sponsored a regional tour for Manning Marable, and with DSOC, a regional conference filled to capacity, a Southern newsletter that reaches over 400, and a Southern traveler who will have met with groups in 15 cities. Our new living, breathing Southern region is also planning for a second regional conference that shows signs of being twice the size of last year.

Now all this is still so much chicken feed to Jerry Falwell, but it may be enough to be what we leftists call critical mass, or what folks around here say "will cut the mustard." With 10 to 50 socialists in 15 cities from Texas to North Carolina we have the ability to

coordinate ERA countdown support, help organize Jobs for Peace actions this spring, circulate education on Klan terrorism, exchange skills on organizing and electoral campaigns. And maybe, in a few cities, begin to put on that proverbial table elements of a local and national anti-corporate alternative to a Reagan or Carter program. An alternative that might finally convince that 'missing' million that living *without* our democratic socialist organization is going to be hazardous to our country's health—not to mention its future. ■

Team efforts

Continued from page 11

to the ERA to social spending cutbacks. The impact of the feminist movement, like the impact of the movement for black liberation in the 1960s, has spread well beyond those who have been part of feminist organizations and has diffused the beginnings of a new political consciousness in large segments of the female population. Any more on Reagan's part to cash in on his far right support around the social issues that were implied promises of his campaign will trigger this consciousness, making politically visible the gender gap.

This is an optimistic assessment of where we are today, optimistic in terms of the opportunities that face us. Yet I believe it is also a realistic assessment. It is hard to remember an administration that came into the office with so much going for it politically and that, after only one year, found itself in so much political trouble. Talk of gains for the Republicans in the Senate and hopes of taking over the House have faded. Now the party hopes only to hold its own in the Senate and concedes the loss of several House seats. Looking back at this administration the verdict may be that it was strong out of the starting gate but couldn't go the distance.

Obviously the political articulation of an alternative economic policy, cutting the Reagan arms budget, and turning the gender gap into votes is a big order. To even begin this task requires a level of unity and organizational development that has eluded the socialist left for several decades. The coming together of NAM and DSOC—and the political traditions each represents—provides the possibility of responding politically to the failure of the Reagan administration and the paralysis of the Democrats. The synergy of merger described by Holly Graff is the path by which we can reach the key constituencies without which there will be no socialist politics in the 1980s—labor, women, minorities. ■

NAM Chapter News

Buffalo NAM held a forum on Poland featuring a speaker from the Polish-American community. On January 23 they held their fourth annual "Lizard Ball"—an event which mocks the upper class social event, the "Blizzard Ball."

Denver NAM held a forum on "The Selling of the Rockies" on January 29 and 30. Panels focussed on the labor movement in the Mountain States, agriculture and the environment, and community organizing. Keynote speaker was Regis Groff, the Colorado Senate Minority Leader.

Eugene NAM member Susan Sowards is running for the Eugene city council. The election will be held in May. Susan has been working as an aide to a member of the Oregon legislature.

Madison NAM/DSA member Mike Konopacki is running for Dane County Board. He has the endorsement of several area union groups, as well as the support of the DSA there.

Chicago Northside and Lucy Parsons NAM's Second City Socialist School is entering its fourth year. The highlight of the session is a forum on feminism and the family featuring NAM members Barbara Ehrenreich and Judith Gardiner.

Rainier NAM members were active in a recently won statewide initiative which calls for voter approval on all types of power plant construction and related cost overruns. In a second chapter organizing project, four Seattle neighborhoods gained re-use of their community schools which were closed due to declining enrollment. The schools were re-opened as badly needed community centers.

Pittsburgh NAM's Reproductive Rights Committee has been working with local pro-choice activists who, with statewide

coordination, were able to force Gov. Thornburgh's veto of a highly restrictive anti-abortion law. In another project several NAM members working as staff and volunteers for PA Alliance for Jobs and Energy and Penn Public Interest Coalition organized a successful joint rally of over 500 people to oppose deregulation of natural gas.

The Socialist Feminist Commission is coordinating an effort to gain members for the NOW/ERA message brigade. This is a part of NOW's "Countdown to Equality Campaign" to ratify ERA. The deadline for ratification is June 30, 1982. Members of the message brigade send in \$2 and receive several action alerts, calling on them to write to political figures in support of ERA.

A Southern Conference will be held at Scarritt College in Nashville on May 29 and 30. The conference will be the first public event in the region for the new organization and will be directed towards recruitment and outreach. For more information contact John Buckley, 2014 E. Indianhead, Tallahassee, FL 32301, or Bill Barclay at the NAM NO.

Austin NAM's electoral strategy began in the 1981 city council elections. In late 1981 the Austin Citizens for Decency put an anti-gay proposal on the city ballot. In response the Citizens for a United Austin was formed, including labor, Democratic Party clubs and minority organizations along with Austin NAM. On January 16, 1982, the proposed ordinance was defeated. NAM member Scott van Osdol was office manager for CUA and the chapter staffed phone banks, worked precincts and did fundraising.

Cleveland NAM's excellent publication, *The Cleveland Beacon*, celebrated its first anniversary this February. Chapter member Andrea Gundersen has accepted a position as Illinois organizer for SEIU's new District 925.

San Francisco NAM/DSOC continues its successful work around housing. The chapter initiated Affordable Housing Alliance mobilized over 300 people for a hearing by a Board of Supervisors' Committee on strengthening the San Francisco rent control ordinance. Like the rest of California NAM, the chapter is also involved in the statewide Nuclear Freeze initiative.

Rosa Parks NAM is working as part of the citywide coalition on Mobile's International Women's Day celebration. The chapter also helped coordinate the Gulf Coast leg of the World Peace March and is organizing for the NAM/DSOC Southern Conference.

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