

September, 1978

50 cents

Moving On

MONTHLY MAGAZINE OF THE NEW AMERICAN MOVEMENT

NAM Convention '78
Union democracy
Capitalism makes you sick



photo by Dorothea Lange

Letter from Appalachia

This issue of MOVING ON—coming on the heels of the New American Movement's National Convention—features a number of changes. They grow out of conversations with members and friends from around the country who've provided very helpful feedback on MO's direction and conception.

Perhaps the strongest theme to emerge in these discussions was the desire for more news about NAM itself and for a stronger presentation of NAM's political views. So we are initiating an expanded NAM News section (beginning next month), a regular column by a member of our national leadership, and more articles on NAM-related activities. We'll also be including these opening comments in each issue.

We're moving our "Letters" section to the back of the magazine, but we still consider it to be one of MO's bright spots. We welcome—in fact, urge—responses to articles that we print. We believe that the dialogue that goes on in the "Letters" pages is an important part of the lively spirit that keeps MOVING ON on the side of creativity rather than dogma. Our only request: please try to keep your letter under 400 words.

We're also working on improving MO's graphic image. We know that some of the photos in the last few issues have not been up to our previous quality, and we're now attempting to work out new procedures for better screening of our pictures. Dolores Wilber has developed new designs for several pages to make the magazine more inviting.

Our next issue will include a special section on the "tax revolt." It will feature interviews with people in California on the impact of Proposition 13 on their lives; debate on how the left should respond to initiatives like Prop 13; and an exploration of progressive alternatives for tax reform. If you don't have a subscription, fill out the blank in this issue, and send it on now so you can begin receiving MOVING ON regularly.

Roberta Lynch

Comment

CAPITALISM IS MAKING YOU SICK 3

Rick Kunnes

Stress-related diseases are soaring. Nobody knows just how many illnesses are directly or indirectly caused by stress, but possibilities include: hypertension, stroke, cancer, heart disease, and diabetes. What causes much of the stress is clear: specific social and economic policies of capitalism.

Getting Together

NAM CONVENTION '78 6

John Haer

The New American Movement annual gathering took place on a rapidly changing American political terrain. The organization has survived and even grown—in spite of the hard times. The meeting reflected some new strengths as well as old problems as NAM continues to mature. Articles on Convention discussions and resolutions, NAM's participation in the labor movement, and the organization's new leadership.

Looking For America

LETTER FROM THE MOUNTAINS 13

Michelle Russell

Michelle Russell writes of the poverty and economic depression found in Appalachia. But she also tells of the people who refuse to concede to spiritual depression—of the energy, strength, and love that manages to grow in those hollows. And of the young people who are its future.

FILMS—FOR PLEASURE AND POLITICS 16

Laurie Alexandre

A new batch of political films is entertaining as well as educational. Six of the most popular films shown at the NAM Convention are briefly described with comments on their possible political uses and praise for their ability to engage viewers.

The Long View

UNION DEMOCRACY—MAKING THE LABOR MOVEMENT WORK 17

Paul Schrade

The future of the labor movement depends on its ability to involve and inspire its own members—and to reach out to the millions of unorganized workers. Paul Schrade argues that an array of policies—some endorsed by the present union hierarchy—are being pushed by the corporate powers-that-be to undermine the potential for such a revitalized movement.

WE GET LETTERS 21

Our Readers

NAM News & Views

LEFT TURN 22

Richard Healey

Political opinion from NAM's Political Committee

OTHER VOICES 23

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CAPITALISM is making you SICK

Stress diseases on the rise

by Rick Kunnes

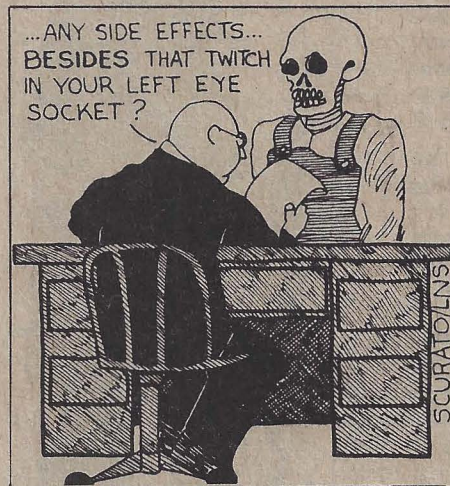
Capitalism is literally making us sick. In fact, it is killing many of us. In both popular and conventional medical terms disease is seen as an isolated "thing" that attacks the human machine more or less arbitrarily from the outside. Society, in this model, is only a passive medium through which germs or their equivalent pass en route to the individual.

Yet there is mounting evidence to suggest that the major causes of disease and death in the United States and other advanced capitalist countries—hypertension, stroke, cancer, heart disease, diabetes, suicide, mental illness, auto accidents, etc.—are a byproduct of the capitalist system itself.

The key link between the economic system and disease is stress. Medically recordable stress arises in situations in which an individual is called upon to cope, but in which she/he is unable to do so—or uncertain about her/his ability. No matter what the cause of stress, the pituitary gland puts the body in an emergency state, and not a single cell is left unaffected by alterations in nervous and hormonal activity. Over time, this chronic state of emergency can interfere with the body's capacity to repair itself.

It is now believed, based on considerable research, that stress can strongly contribute to coronary heart disease, atherosclerotic heart disease, and hypertension. Other stress-related diseases are ulcers, diabetes, increased susceptibility to pneumonia and influenza. Even cancer may be due to stress partially suppressing the immune response mechanisms.

Some diseases are the result of our adapting to chronic stress: the rate of cirrhosis of the liver rises with alcohol consumption and that of lung cancer rises as tobacco smoking increases.



Comment

When people are asked to rank what they find most stressful, family break-up, death of relatives, job loss and job changes, and migration are generally at the top of the list. And, in fact, all of these major stresses are linked with a statistical rise in the death rate from diseases associated with stress. They are also a part of business as usual today under capitalism.

The United States ranks 23rd among the world's nations in life expectancy for males and twelfth for females. In spite of continuously expanding medical care, there has been little improvement in life expectancy for adult males since the 19th century. For some parts of the population, the death rate beyond adolescence is actually on the rise.

Conventional medical wisdom says that high death rates from chronic diseases are actually the result of our excellent system of medical care. Eliminate the contagious killers like smallpox, control infections with antibiotics, and everyone will get old enough to suffer

from cancer or heart disease, goes the argument.

If this were so, the highest death rates from chronic disease should appear among those with the longest life expectancy and the best medical care. However, the opposite is true. The same groups with high death rates in childhood from acute disease have high rates of death from chronic disease as they get older. Blacks have a higher death rate at all ages than whites; urban death rates are higher at all ages than rural; men have higher death rates at all ages than women. Urban death rates are much higher than rural ones, even though rural medical care is inferior. For example, Cypress, with a large rural population, has lower death rates than the U.S. for all ages beyond 35. Considering that modern medical care is concentrated in cities and urban countries, these figures seem particularly dramatic.

If better medical care were the cause of the rise in death by chronic disease, then supplying better care to rural areas undisturbed by capitalism should mean the death rate from these causes should rise. In fact, it falls.

Job Insecurity

The most dramatic indicator of the relationship between socially-induced stress and death is that between job insecurity and the suicide rate. For men of all labor market ages, there is a peak in suicide for each peak in unemployment. The fluctuations of the suicide rate for women during this century are not nearly as large as those for men, presumably because women have not yet been as "exposed" to work outside the home, and thus unemployment. (As more and more women enter the job market, this may begin to change.)

Major stresses hit two age groups hardest. At 15-30, migration, unemployment, job change, marriage and divorce

THE DESPAIR OF UNEMPLOYMENT

The Sept. 30 issue of *Solidarity* carried several pages of interviews with jobless workers as part of the coverage of nationwide Full Employment Week. The issue drew many comments from readers, but none as moving as the following, which is printed in its entirety:

Today we received *Solidarity* for Sept. 30. In it was an article, "Who Are the Jobless?" It was an excellent article but you failed to go far enough. I want to ask my own question and then answer it: "What is it like to be unemployed?"

My brother is unemployed. He's 21 years old. He tries day in and day out to find a job. Every morning, he dresses up, shaves, and takes off. He goes anywhere and everywhere.

When he gets home, he's either excited or depressed. It just depends on how many promises of employment he gets. Some days he comes home and cries like a baby. Or he'll crawl into a shell, not talking or eating. He'll just lay staring at the ceiling. Once in awhile he gets so short-tempered that he will yell at the boys or hit them. One day we found him in my parents' room with a gun to his head. It was even loaded.

He was hired for full-time work, but when the emergency was over, they fired him. He enjoys machinery. There is a local sawmill here that's had four owners in five years. Everytime he goes up to find work, they'll hire him for a day or two; then, boom, he's fired. He'll come home angry and take it out on everyone else.

He makes all of us climb the

"My brother is unemployed. . . . He tries day in and day out to find a job. . . . Others who have a job sometimes forget the unemployed. And the bosses aren't willing to train people. My parents and I know how it is with my brother. . . . But how long does our government think we can hold up?"

Solidarity illustration by Susan Davis



walls with his moods. Everytime he's out of work, he's moody—and it changes from being in a shell to cryin' to being angry. But when he's working, he's always smiling or excited. He comes home and he has to tell us about his day.

Others who have a job sometimes forget the unemployed. And the bosses aren't willing to train people. My parents and I know how it is with my brother. We try to be patient with him. But how long does our government think we can hold up? He's an ogre when he's unemployed.

Every day we hear the same thing: "If you were a woman or black, you could have the job." Or "you're not trained." Or "there are plenty of jobs; you've just got to look." I believe the people who say these things are blind, deaf, or dumb.

I'm a 20-year-old woman and I haven't a job. The one thing they ask is "Are you a libber?" No. I'd prefer to wait for a job until my brother has one first. I'm not in as bad a need as he is. Besides, I have parents. I keep telling my brother that some day his ship will come in and he'll have a job. He'll say, "It sunk, so shut up."

America is supposed to be the best and richest country. Then how come there's supposed to be jobs and there aren't? We don't even know what money is in our family. So you can add my brother and me to your unemployed list.

Thank you for your time. I didn't get into the unemployment scene as well as I wanted to in this letter. I failed to put in that children whose parents are selling everything to survive are afraid of being sold. Or that unemployed parents often take out anger on innocent children. Or that the unemployed often get depressed and commit suicide.

Sharon Ferguson
Gladwin, Mich.

Sharon Ferguson's father is a UAW member at Pontiac Motors in Pontiac, Mich.

This article appeared in the November 11, 1977, issue of *Solidarity*, the publication of the UAW.

all peak. At 55-65 people retire, face higher unemployment rates, and their friends and relatives die.

Economic cycles, a feature of capitalism, disrupt communities every 3-4 years, bringing a rise in stressful events: unemployment, migration and family break-up. But even in normal times, chronic, competitive striving—the central characteristic for success under capitalism—is synonymous with chronic stress. Its extreme form is the pattern that leads to heart disease. Those who fail to adapt turn to alcohol, ulcers, mental illness and suicide.

The death rate among young people in the U.S. is on the rise. Growing evidence suggests a generation is entering the labor market faster than it can be absorbed without stressful social conditions. If this is true, as this generation ages it will experience continued stress, enormously intensifying our health care crisis.

Since the '30s, the number of young people entering the labor market has been poorly matched with the number of jobs available, resulting in large fluctuations in the level of competition and stress.

After 1955, a new, large group began to enter the labor market and the competitive situation for young people intensified. The unemployment rate of young people not in school or the army doubled from the '50s to the '60s. This increase was matched by the rise of suicide and other causes of death during a period in which the unemployment and suicide rates for older groups were steady or falling.

Within this young group, the rich have gotten richer and the poor, poorer. After 1968, with the decline of the draft and the return of Vietnam veterans, a large number of young people were dumped into the labor market. These vets have confronted high unemployment, due both to the stagnating economy and their relative educational disadvantage.

The demoralization of the Vietnam experience has combined with the above factors to produce an extraordinary rise

of stress for vets. The suicide rate for this group has surpassed previous historical peaks and is still rising. The ulcer death rate has turned upward, in contrast to the rapidly falling ulcer death rates at older ages. If past experience with the first high-stress generation of an earlier part of the 20th century is a valid guide, these baby boom children will suffer a large increase in death rates from cirrhosis of the liver, cancer and heart disease, *et al.*, as they move into high risk ages for these diseases by the 1990's.

Superficial Response

How has medicine responded to the problems of stress? Superficially, for the most part. Methadone is prescribed for addicts, anti-depressants for depression, tranquilizers for the anxious. Many treatments for stress-related illnesses act not by removing the causes of the illness, but by destroying the capacity of the stressed organ to respond to the cause or by severing its connection to the brain. Thus, the current cure for ulcers is to remove either the duodenum and/or part of its nerve supply. The cure for hypertension may be to block the sympathetic nervous system.

Stress-related diseases are the source of an increasing proportion of deaths and it is costing us more to treat them. Male life expectancy has remained unchanged for the past 15 years. However, the proportion of the GNP for health care has escalated from 4.6% to almost 10%. This rise is due to the medical establishment's preference for high-cost, technologically sophisticated cures as opposed to preventive health services for the entire society.

Even if such technical advances could be developed cheaply, their use is questionable. For example, there are claims that cingulotomy (a psychosurgical operation) is "effective" in treating alcoholism. Destruction of the cingulum may relieve feelings that lead to drinking and the economic cost of such surgery is low. However, what sort of society deals with the problems of 9 million people by permanently destroying

their capacity to feel tension?

The problem lies beyond the scope of medical science as it is usually defined. Stress diseases are not mere defects of the body's machinery. They are dramatic evidence of the fear and pain pervading people's lives.

The most human solution—and the only real one in the long term—is to halt social disruption and its associated stress, and create a relaxed community.

This is obviously easier said than done. While it may be possible, for example, to transform a demoralized low-paid factory worker into a college graduate with high income prospects, it is clearly impossible to do this within capitalism for all, or even a majority, of low-income people. In a pyramid of social power, which always has the same dimensions, the rise of one individual is matched by the relative fall of another.

However, statistics on death rates can provide some clues. During mass strikes and popular uprisings, the suicide rate declines sharply, rising back to its previous level as these movements decline. Strikes and uprisings relieve stress and it may be that the genuine community-forming processes that occur there are the most effective therapy for chronic stress diseases. This kind of community—in other forms—could provide the basis for a new kind of social organization. Certainly more medical research needs to be done on this effect and its practical application.

But death and disease are too important to leave solely in the sullied hands of medical science. One aspect of struggling for socialism is changing the capitalist relations that are making us sick and working to create a truly healthy nation. We might almost say: Workers of the world: unite, organize, struggle—and relax.

Grateful acknowledgement to Joe Eyer and Peter Sterling for use of "Stress Related Mortality and Social Organization" from The Review of Radical Political Economics, Spring, 1977. Rick Kunnes is chair of the NAM Health Commission.

NAM Convention '78

by John Haer

For five brief days, the world was a much smaller place. On July 19-23, 450 members and observers attended the New American Movement's seventh annual National Convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

It was NAM's largest Convention ever, reflecting the steady, if modest, growth of the organization. Delegates representing some forty local chapters and pre-chapters came from thirty states. They brought the issues, concerns, ideas, and visions that have emerged from their collective political work and from the traditions of American socialism of which NAM is a part.

To the first-time observer, the convention would have appeared a smorgasboard of many issues, constituencies, and strategies. Participants discussed such seemingly diverse topics as organizing to stop the construction of nuclear power plants, winning unions for women clerical workers, defending gay and lesbian rights, and forcing university divestment of stocks in corporations that do business in South Africa.

Workshops and educational sessions explored questions of theory ("Introduction to Gramsci's Marxism," "Critique of Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital*," and practice ("Becoming Effective in Your Local Union," "Racism in Personal and Political Life"); history ("Lessons of the 30's Labor Movement") and current events ("What's Happening in Minority Communities?," "Report on the Spanish Communist Party"); organization building ("Recruitment and Orientation of New Members," "How to do a Fundraising Concert") and coping with political/personal life ("Chapter Dynamics," "Raising Socialist Children").

Experiences were shared between organizers among such diverse constituencies as undocumented Chicano work-

ers in Texas, black tenants in Buffalo, steelworkers in Chicago, and students at Yale.

The unifying factors among such diversity, however, would soon become apparent.

The New American Movement is unique among revolutionary organizations in the U.S. in emphasizing a broad political approach rather than set programmatic lines.

In a detailed, 15-page Organizational Report prepared by NAM's Political Committee (the organization's elected, full-time leadership) and read and studied by members in local chapters in preparation for the convention, this approach is further defined:

"We (NAM) are about the task of intervening in the daily life and struggles of the American people in order to change consciousness. Consciousness is not simply a collection of ideas in people's heads—it is that plus all the var-

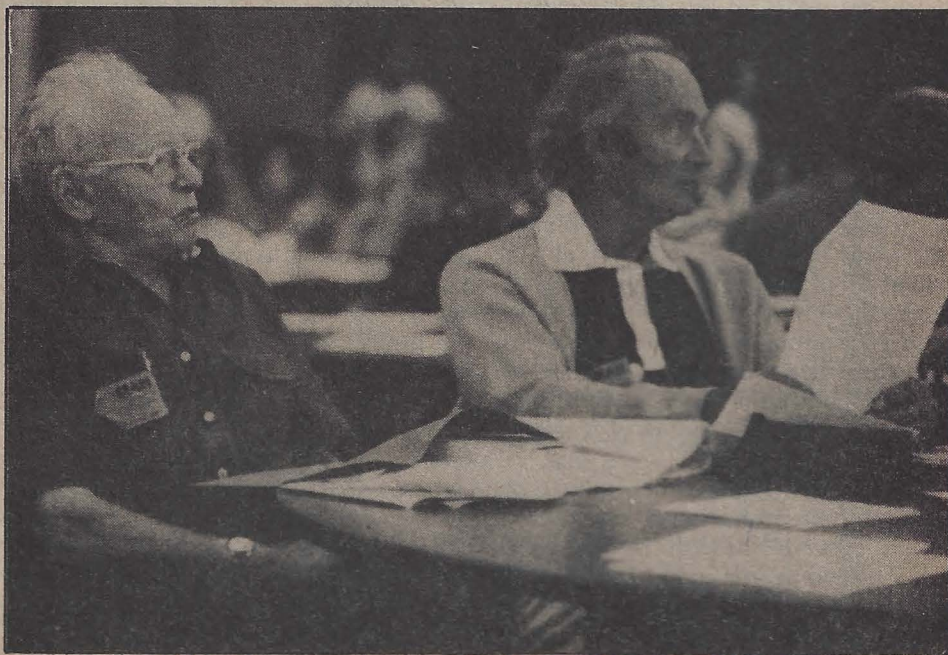
ious types of behavior and activity that people engage in that can be thought of as their 'worldview'. A key aspect of changing consciousness is changing how people view and live their lives—from atomized, privatized lives to ones in which they experience and recognize their collective, organized strength.

People thinking that socialism is a nice idea is by no means socialist consciousness," the report continues. "Thus we stress the building of mass democratic organizations, and also building our own socialist organization."

Chapters therefore are encouraged to be involved in a wide range of organizing activities that speak to all aspects of life in capitalist society and to participate in progressive movements in which people are coming together to work for change.

Necessary Alliances

NAM is also unique in recognizing a



Leon Blum, NAM at-large member from Florida, and Lou Zemel, NAM at-large member from Connecticut.

Photo by Carol Becker



photo by Elaine Wessel

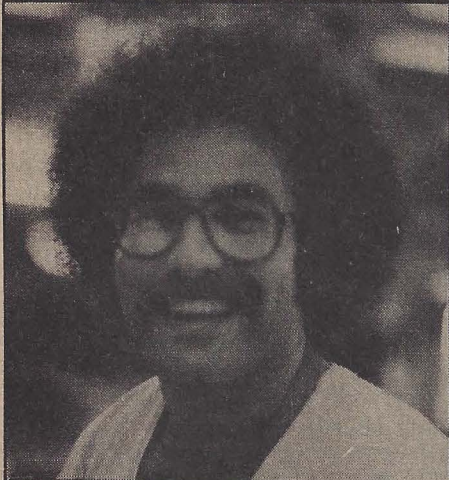


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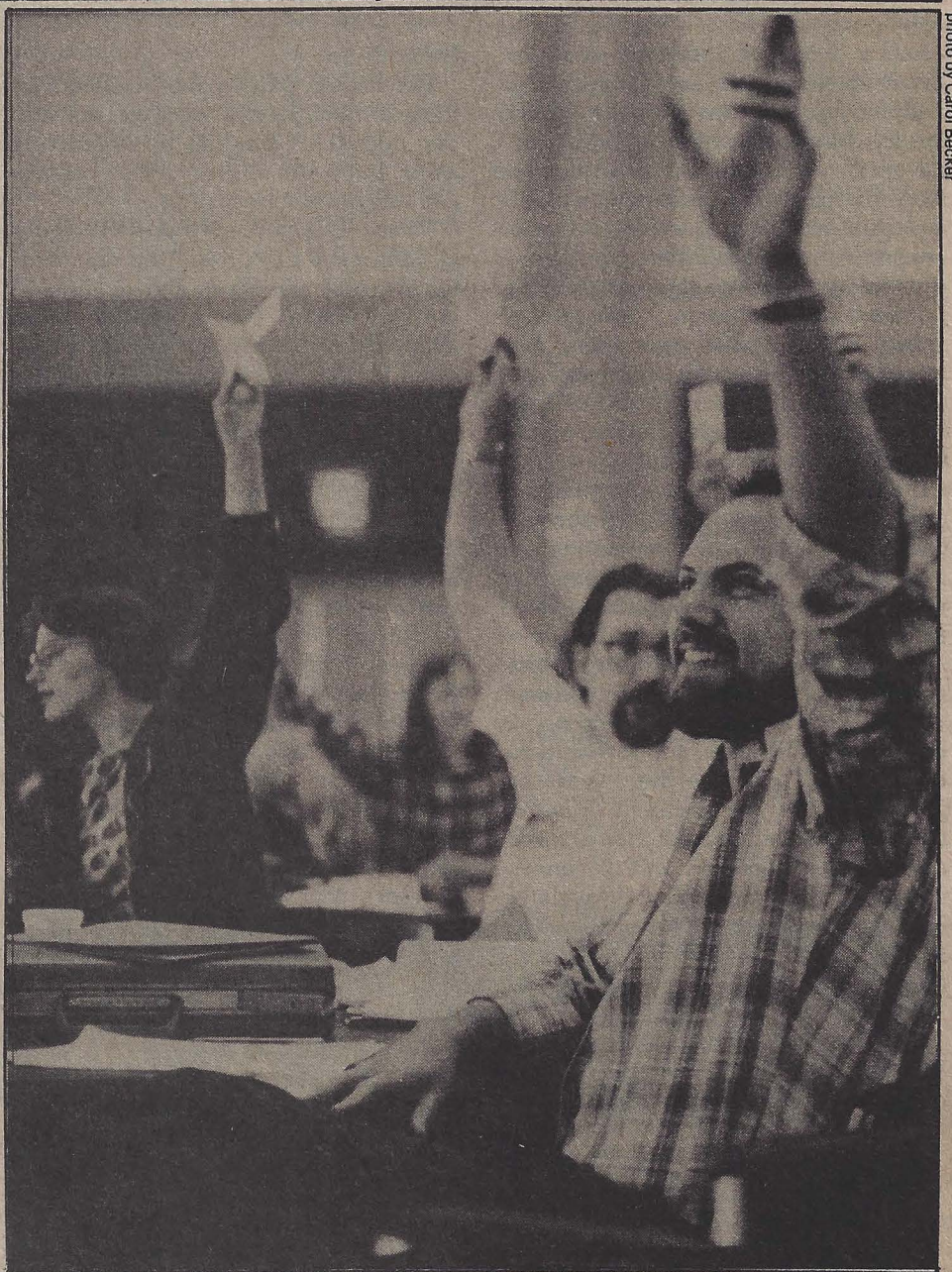


photo by Carol Becker

Clockwise from upper left: Michelle Russell, Detroit political activist; Andrea Gundersen, Pete Weiss, and Richard Healey from Chicago Northside NAM; Caryn Berman from Blazing Star (Chicago) NAM; and Gordie Alexandre from Harriet Tubman (Los Angeles) NAM.

Getting Together

need for the development of various local strategies within the framework of a nationally and internationally defined reality. But despite differing local conditions, from San Francisco to Boston, from Baltimore to Austin, participants agreed on one central, ominous fact of current American political life: public discussion of political issues is moving far to the right.

In California, the right wing has seized the initiative on "meat ax" tax cuts like Proposition 13. In Illinois, the anti-feminists blocked passage of the ERA; in Texas, Chicano immigrants are made scapegoats for unemployment, in Missouri, the "Right to Work" (for less) Committee is pushing union-busting legislation, and, in several states, Anita Bryant's campaign of homophobia is stirring a fervor of religiosity.

Nationally, this rightward shift is also readily apparent: The revival of the cold war, tax cuts for the middle and upper classes, new "liberties" for corporations to fund and publicize their views on political issues, the apparent defeat of Labor Law Reform, prohibition of medicaid-financed abortions and the undermining of affirmative action through the

Bakke decision.

Convention participants stressed that the growth of the new right was not simply due to its funding or organizing skills, but to its ability to play on people's fears and insecurities.

"There is a pervasive sense of dislocation in the U.S.," said the organizational report mentioned above, "as people get 'urban renewed' out of older neighborhoods, forced to move to new cities to find work, or transferred by corporations. There is insecurity about losing, or never finding a job and fear of city streets where random crime makes women, and increasingly, men, unsafe."

The report further detailed the causes of the rise of the new right, situating its growth in the crisis of modern capitalism with its selective fall-out in the decay of the fabric of the nation's urban areas, chronically high inflation and unemployment, and the flight of industry. It pointed out that it is racial minorities who are particularly hurt by these developments.

"Effective responses to the conditions we face will depend on our ability to make strong political alliances," said Stanley Aronowitz, speaking at a plenary



photo by Laura Guzzillo

Berenice Reagon, feminist musician.

ary on the future of NAM. "We must see our role as socialists in these struggles as one of strategists linking issues and constituencies, building united opposition to the assaults on the living standards and democratic rights of working people, and through time and effective education, turning these defensive struggles into aggressive counterattacks on capital in the name of control of society by working people."

In several of the workshops, participants described attempts to implement this strategy in their particular local areas. For example, in the Boston area, members of Middlesex NAM are working to link the anti-nuclear power issues articulated by the Clamshell Alliance with the interests of labor, emphasizing how such capital intensive technologies as nuclear power lead to an eventual loss of jobs. In California, Santa Cruz NAM is seeking to involve the constituencies with whom it worked to block the recall of three progressive city supervisors, in a statewide campaign to oppose the Briggs Amendment, which would result in the firing of gay and progay school teachers.

Several of the national programs endorsed by the Convention also embody this linking strategy. For example, chapters were encouraged to research and investigate their local tax situations, with the goal of creating labor and community alliances around progressive tax reform. A "Bill of Reproductive Rights"

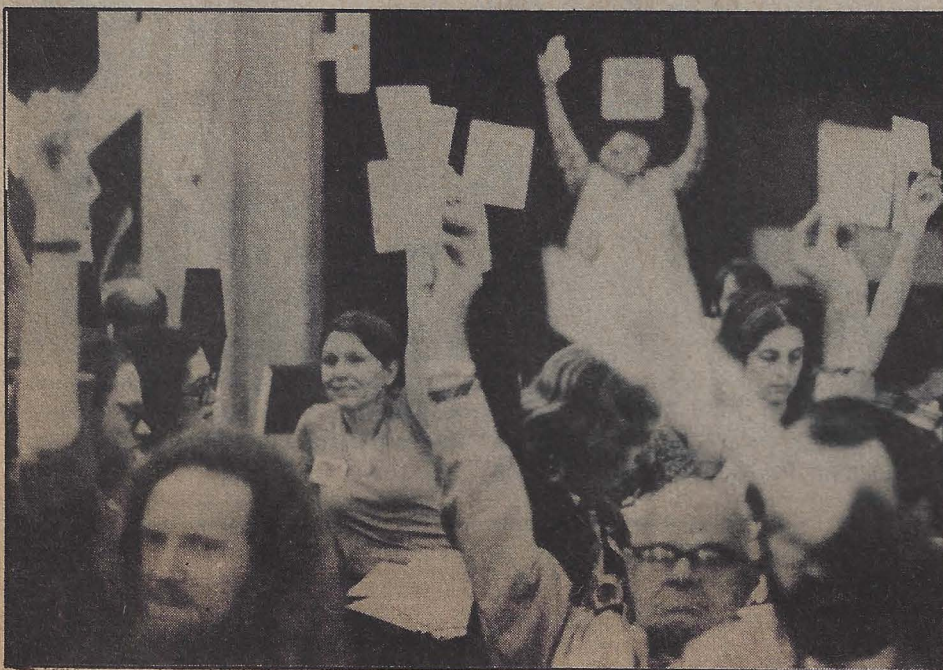


photo by Carol Becker

NAM members voting in resolutions plenary.

was passed that links the right of women to abortion, to free and adequate health and child care, to safe contraception, to be free from forced sterilization, and to pregnancy benefits. And a resolution on health organizing encourages chapters to engage the constituencies for both national health insurance and a national health service in local struggles around popular control of health planning and financing.

Cultural Themes

Another key element in the organization's overall political approach is its emphasis on the creation of political culture. This was conveyed at the Convention in several ways. A member of the Milwaukee chapter displayed a series of silkscreen and print graphics. Media House, a film collective in Dayton, Ohio, which includes NAM members, conducted showings and led discussions of several newly produced films with political themes. (See accompanying article.)

The Convention's major cultural event featured singer Bernice Reagon, whose songs and powerful voice blended the traditions of black American spirituals with the aspiration of all people for liberation.

In addition to these examples of the use of culture as a political tool, the notion of culture in a broader sense, that is, culture as an expression of people's daily lives, found voice in a variety of contexts. Manning Marable, a professor at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, described the positive and negative aspects embodied in expressions of Black Nationalism.

Speaking in a workshop on socialist-feminist theory, Barbara Ehrenreich discussed the strengths represented in the commonly expressed notion of "feminine nature." And in a forum on union democracy, Bill Perkins from Pittsburgh outlined some of the barriers in co-workers' self-perception that must be overcome if there is to be active participation in unions.

Political culture was also emphasized as an integrating factor in the life of chapters. Members from several chap-

ters described how their socialist schools have become centers for the radical community in their cities and have helped create a broader circle of support for chapter efforts.

In addition to drawing on NAM's strength, the Convention also grappled with organizational problems. It noted NAM's difficulty in having an impact on national political issues—and pointed to the resultant need for greater unity with those left and progressive forces that have maintained a reasonable political approach and some viability.

It noted the difficulties that many members still have in participating in political discussion or in applying our political approach to their work—and committed the organization to a more in-depth and comprehensive program of internal education.

It noted that our work sometimes seems diffused and fragmented, without an overall unifying focus—and set out to improve communications among the various NAM commissions and to strengthen the leadership bodies responsible for the clarification of our perspectives.

It also noted that NAM still has many

weaknesses of style, process, consciousness, and politics that tend to restrict the organization's membership. However, it was probably in this area that the most disagreements existed about how to change.

Some members felt that the Convention (and other aspects of NAM) needed more discussion of personal experiences, more space for people to express their feelings, more attention to sexist attitudes in the organization. Others argued that we can best change through involvement in common work with people from a variety of backgrounds. Sexism and racism—our own and others—can best be dealt with in this process.

Yet despite the problems and the differences, overall the Convention indicated greater internal unity and solidarity than ever before in NAM. New members and old alike shared in the sense that they were part of a vital and challenging political project.

Resolutions Adopted

More than previous national gatherings, Milwaukee was a working Convention. The agenda had been planned to

continued on page 20



Michael Kreisberg, NAM at-large member from Missoula Montana, and Laurie Alexandre, from Harriet Tubman (Los Angeles) NAM.

photo by Carol Becker



Photo by Elaine Wessel

Dean Pappas, Roberta Lynch, Rick Kunnes, Marilyn Katz, Dolores Wilber, Holly Graff, Stanley Aronowitz, Judy MacLean, Mike Rotkin (from left to right); Carolyn Magid and Richard Healey not shown

NAM leadership chosen

NAM's national leadership—a three-person Political Committee based in Chicago and an eight-person National Interim Committee from around the country—is chosen annually by membership vote at the National Convention. Those elected to these positions for 1978-79 are:

Richard Healey (Political Committee). Healey has been a member of the PC for two years and previously served on the NIC. He played a central role in the development of NAM's internal political education, particularly focusing on the relevance of Antonio Gramsci's thought for NAM's theory and practice. He is committed to furthering this process in the coming year through regional schools and an organization-wide educational program.

Marilyn Katz (Political Committee). Katz has been a member of the PC for the past year. She was previously a member of the NIC and of Los Angeles NAM. She has been a leading force in the development of NAM's work around reproductive rights—organizing against the attacks on abortion and against forced sterilization. In the coming year, she hopes to foster more coalition work in order to build a national presence on these issues.

Judy MacLean (Political Committee). MacLean has been on the PC for the past year and was previously a member of the NIC and of Pittsburgh NAM. She also worked as a reporter for *In These Times*, a socialist newsweekly. MacLean has been a strong advocate of analysis of chapter work within NAM. She helped initiate an organization-wide evaluation of local practice and has traveled extensively in order to develop a first-hand view of chapter life.

Stanley Aronowitz is the author of several books and numerous articles. He has been a labor activist, a writer, and a teacher. He is currently teaching at the University of California and has worked with both San Diego and Los Angeles NAM chapters. He feels it is essential that NAM establish priority areas that are concentration points for its work.

Holly Graff is the Chairperson of NAM's Socialist Feminist Commission and editor of the bulletin, "Women Organizing." She has been on the NIC for two years and has been very active in developing NAM's political education program. She is a college teacher and member of Pittsburgh NAM.

Rick Kunnes is the Chairperson of NAM's Health Commission. He is a member of AFSCME and of Detroit NAM. He has done extensive writing and speaking on health-related issues. He favors moving toward greater organizational unity with those forces on the left who share our political approach.

Roberta Lynch is an office worker in Chicago and a member of Northside NAM there. She writes a regular column for *In These Times* which is syndicated in college and alternative newspapers. She is also the managing editor of *MOVING ON*.

Carolyn Magid is a member of Middlesex NAM in the Boston area where she teaches at a local college. She was a member of the NIC last year with primary responsibility for the development of NAM's Northeast Region. She is committed to stimulating more focused political discussion at all levels of the organization.

Dean Pappas is a member of Port City NAM in Baltimore where he has been active in energy/utilities organizing. He believes that the key political task for NAM in the coming year is the development of greater organizational coherence.

Mike Rotkin is a member of Santa Cruz NAM and AFSCME. He was active in the civil rights and anti-war movements and has worked as a community organizer. He is particularly interested in working to strengthen and coordinate NAM's work against racism.

Dolores Wilber is a community organizer and a member of Northside NAM. She has worked as the staffperson for the National Office of NAM and is currently the Production Coordinator for *MOVING ON*. She plans to also focus on region-building in the Midwest.

Bringing labor into focus

by John Haer

"Today," began Mark Mericle, chair of NAM's Labor Commission, "the American labor movement is under attack. And it is not fighting back effectively. As socialists," he continued, "we have a unique contribution to bring to workers' struggles. We must realize that a strong labor movement and a growing and vital political left go hand-in-hand."

Mericle was addressing the Milwaukee Convention's major plenary on the labor movement and the role of socialists. This session and a series of workshops, educationals, and commission meetings throughout the five-day gathering provided a forum for extensive membership discussion and debate. A significant portion of NAM's membership is now involved in workplace activity.

The Convention discussions were geared toward understanding the situation of U.S. workers today, clarifying organizational policy for labor work, and strengthening and coordinating the work of NAM's labor activists on a national level. "Our task," said Paul Garver from Pittsburgh, "is to collectively decide the most intelligent use of our small organizational resources."

Convention discussions outlined the general political terrain that labor activists face today. In a word, the outlook for improved wages and working conditions for American workers is bleak. More and more, management, facing the post-Vietnam realities of a decline in U.S. world economic expansion, is forced to extract its capital surplus from the workers at home. Recent contract negotiations show that the bosses are pressing for the whole loaf, including the crumbs. Unions are having difficulty holding on to gains won in previous contracts.

Overall, real wages are declining. The

percentage of the unionized workforce is steadily declining. And labor's vaunted political muscle has apparently atrophied—as witnessed by the failure of Congress to pass several key priority items of labor's legislative program: Common Situs Picketing, Labor Law Reform, Full Employment, and National Health Insurance.

Public sector workers are feeling the effects of this assault on labor. And minority and women workers in that sector are particularly affected. With the passage of Proposition 13 in California and the subsequent wildfire spread of "meat-ax" tax cut proposals in other states, public workers face massive lay-offs. The country's needy, many of whom are women and racial minorities, face wholesale cut-backs in essential public services. And average tax-payers see their miniscule savings from tax cuts dwarfed by the windfall savings of big business. In short, these "tax reforms" seem to be a means to redistribute social wealth back to private capital.

The situation cries for the mobilization of worker-community coalitions with the will and political muscle to push for responsible tax reform—reform which guarantees meaningful work and job security for public employees, services for the country's needy under their control, and revenues to pay for the services from taxation of the wealthy.

Speakers attributed labor's growing weakness in the face of these problems to the country's stagnant economic situation, the rise of the small but politically effective "new right wing," and the failure of most of the major trade unions to politically educate and mobilize their own membership.

New Problems

"Unions are still fighting these new problems the way they always have," said Mericle, "by relying almost exclusively on Congressional lobbying and working for the election of primarily Democratic Party candidates. But this strategy is not yielding even the partial gains that were won in the past. Meanwhile, the needs, concerns, and participation of the vast majority of working people in whose name the battle is fought are virtually ignored. Only recently have some labor leaders realized



photo by Tony Heriza

Mark Mericle.

Convention discussions were geared towards understanding the situation of U.S. workers today, clarifying organizational policy for labor work, and strengthening the work of NAM's labor activists.

that they must seek new allies—the women's movement, the citizen action groups, and the political left—to win these struggles."

"The labor movement desperately needs a socialist analysis," concluded Mericle. Such an analysis would stress the priority of human need over private profits, an independent political role for labor, the connection between the struggles of unionized workers with the struggles of all sectors of the whole working class, and the centrality of the development of a politically conscious, activated movement of workers at the grassroots—in the workplace, the community, and in the home.

How should NAM members work in the labor movement? On the general political analysis stated above, convention participants seemed in full agreement. On several tactical questions, however, differences emerged.

On the question of how NAM members should envision building a base for socialism in the labor movement, some members argued that NAM should build upon its existing strengths by encouraging its members to take jobs in the predominantly public sector workplaces where most NAM members are presently situated. Working within these unions, they argued, activists can then build coalition links with other sectors of the workforce.

Other members, while agreeing that the general crisis in the public sector afforded NAM a unique opportunity for programmatic work on a national level, argued against encouraging members to seek jobs exclusively in public sector fields. Rather than attempting to maximize the organization's influence or strength in any one sector or union, they reasoned, at this stage it is most important for members to be involved directly in jobs where the opportunity to help build strong rank and file movements exists, including industrial unions. Members should be encouraged to take jobs that best further this goal in each local situation. Cross-union coalitions are best built with NAM members participating in the rank and file in all sectors.

The convention majority agreed that NAM should not concentrate its efforts in any one workforce sector or union, and must build bases in both industrial and non-industrial workplaces. In addition, NAM chapters were encouraged to mobilize around progressive tax reform, placing a priority on the building of coalitions between labor union and community groups.

Another debate arose over the question of union leadership. While all convention participants agreed that the goal of NAM's labor work should be the development of an active rank and file movement, some members argued that this commitment required a policy statement which recognized that the chief obstacle to the achievement of

The needs, concerns and participation of the vast majority of working people are virtually ignored.

union democracy is the top-down centralization and bureaucratic maneuvers of top union leadership, including those in the progressive wing of the AFL-CIO who generally oppose George Meany. They drafted a resolution of position which stated a recognition of "fundamental divergences in perspectives and interests between NAM and the segment at the top of the trade union hierarchy." The resolution implied this divergence was permanent and intrinsic.

Opposing this resolution, other speakers argued that the problem of union democracy is more fully understood in terms of the political consciousness of

the rank and file. "It's clear that in many unions the rights of rank and file workers are stifled by union bureaucrats," said a speaker from Pittsburgh. "In these unions, we should work with rank and file groups to oppose this leadership. But in many unions, formal democracy does exist. The problem is one of developing active participation of rank and file workers, of showing through education and militant activity that workers really can control their lives, and of breaking through the stranglehold of bourgeois ideology that affects all of us. This problem cannot solely be blamed on union leadership."

The later argument won and the resolution failed to win majority support.

Practical Sessions

In addition to this kind of discussion of overall approach, the Convention was rife with sessions that focused on specific areas of labor organizing: strikes and strike support; problems of women on the job; racism in the labor movement; organizing the unorganized; labor and the political process; and many more. There were also caucuses based on occupation and union.

These sessions enabled members to bring an analytic perspective to bear on their own work and to gain concrete ideas for both practical accomplishments and political consciousness-raising on the job. Taken altogether, they provided a basis for beginning to deepen NAM's work in the labor movement and for overcoming some of the weaknesses this work has had.

Several other labor-related resolutions received overwhelming support from the NAM convention:

- Recognizing the repressive approach of President Carter's immigration plan, participants adopted an alternative immigration policy—work that would strengthen the ability of undocumented workers to organize into unions, would criticize the U.S. role in maintaining poverty in Latin America and would attack the right of capital to move across the border was encouraged.

Continued on page 20



Looking For America

LETTER FROM THE MOUNTAINS

IN SEARCH OF HIGHER GROUND

BY MICHELLE RUSSELL

IT IS PEAK COLOR SEASON in Dickenson County, Virginia. The air has a bite, an edge, a touch of frost. This year, the rains have been heavy, promising a green winter. A bad sign. One of many.

Flooding has completed the work of the strip-mining companies, sweeping before it even the hope of reclamation for those who live in its wake. It seems as though nature, itself, is in conspiracy against the survival of the poor.

A series of natural disasters augmented by the refusal of the government in the form of TVA to take any responsibility for relief, results in the rise of charismatic religion, a concrete belief that the world is coming to an end, backwater blues, and rage.

This is a time in the land when a good dream is roasting a fattened hog. A time of death. But there is humor, too, and hope.

In Nora, Catherine Counts sits in the midst of eight dogs, more cats, three monkeys, as many children, and an undone mountain of laundry—sharing bread, family snapshots, and speaking of survival. Taking time out. Ten years ago she looked like Marilyn Monroe in her prime. Now, at forty, she feels that and more.

Proud and embarrassed by turns, she rehearses the resemblance to beauty in her life. She mourns the passing of the baby possums she tried to raise, but kept too warm; celebrates outlasting two men, keeping others out in the cold; worries about her ten-year-old daughter's straying ways; and calls herself the strip-job queen of the county. Mostly, her story adds up to how she hasn't been, wouldn't allow herself to be, whipped. No matter what anyone says, Cat counts.

Her best friend, Christine Rose, is younger but looks older. Doctors who years before put her on a diet of sugar for energy now treat her for diabetes. She gets through the day smoking cigarettes, drinking diet soda to lose weight, putting another layer of wallpaper on a

house that needs a new foundation, caring for a father going blind and a son limp from blood gone thin, taking aspirin for a migraine that, somehow, just won't go away.

She can't even be the man she'd like to be—breadwinner, liquor-drinker, stoop-sitting, stomp-down man. And, she *hates* cats.

They can't stop themselves from laughing at it all over cornbread, though, teasing each other. Canning, caricaturing, piecing together, preserving their humanity so that it will keep, in the morningtime kitchens of their lives, they laugh. It is their best defense.

They will only admit there's an ener-

gy crisis when—what? They act like even the sun not rising could be taken in stride, a fitting complement to the already washed-out bridges and perpetual darkness of the mines.

FARTHER ON DOWN THE ROAD, in a little hollow called Clinchco (so named for the coal company whose claws became embedded in its soil) lives Earl Gilmore, a free spirit of indeterminate age. He survives by steering clear of doctors for his health.

He is attentive to the call of the crow, can smell snakes moving through the rocks, brews tea, teaches the children ring games in that hollow, sings songs

of freedom in flight, and stays put.

In his weathered one-hundred-year-old house of three winding rooms he sustains many life-times, places, and thought spaces. History—from horse shoes to hub caps. A banjo from Kenya, an upright piano from New Orleans: instruments losing the ornamentation but kept meticulously in tune. Family photos, programs, sheet music. Stories and songs arranged for everyday use. Bells, books, and candles. Malcolm and Garvey and DuBois. Cultural compost. Fishing line. His own canned preserves, sweet autumn apples. A store of provisions set by against hard times.

He feels he has been saved, and so approaches life from that shore, encouraging the children in his care to create songs like:

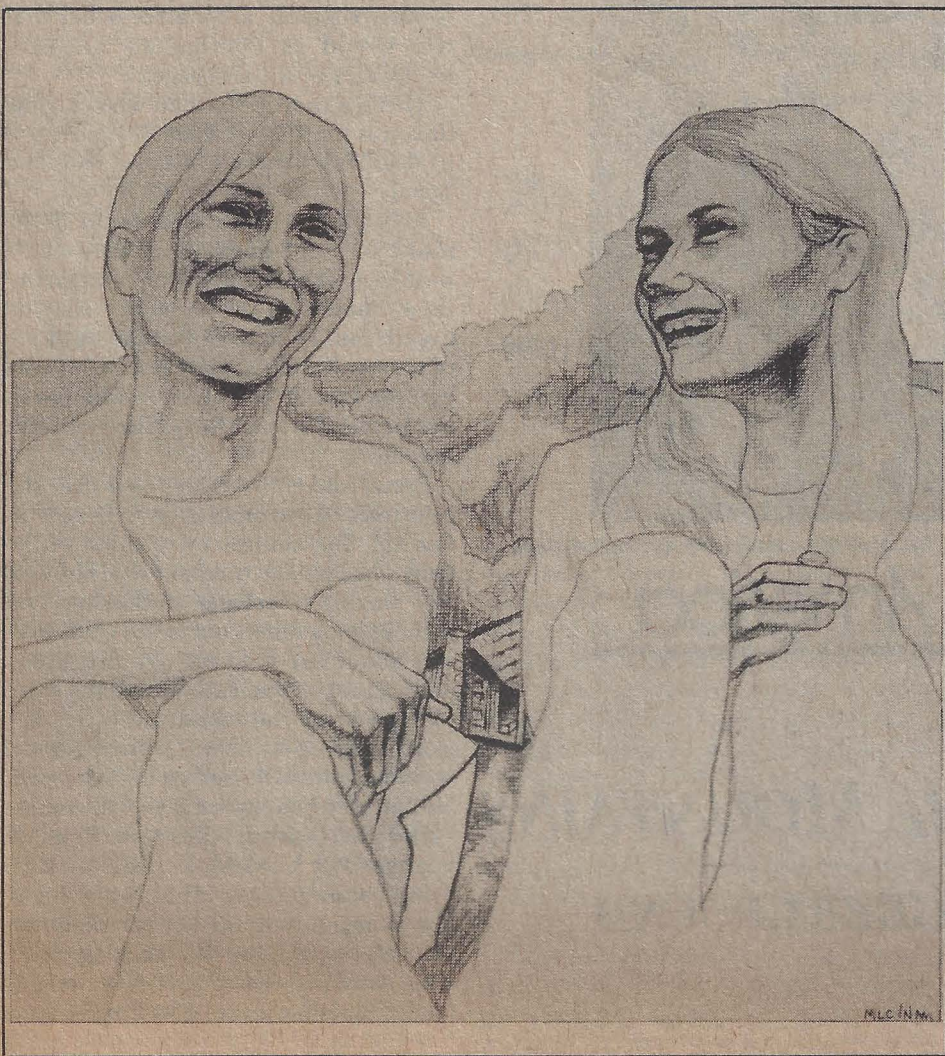
*You can't get to heaven in a bathing suit,
'Cause God don't think your legs are cute.*

He has no need to be reverent of anything outside the wonder of life in the midst of calculated decay.

His bridges hold firm—to family, memory, territory. The Caribbean, Africa, Georgia, Mississippi, and Chicago all flow through the days of the people on that slowing-up dirt road in the hollow called Clinchco because of him.

IN HARLAN, LIFE IS HARDER. The sun don't hardly shine. The wind is damp. Georgetown, the Bottom, once black, is almost entirely gone. Three floods this past spring even rose up to the doors of the town bank, rousing the comfortable to alarm.

There, Wylda Harbin sits in the trailer which substitutes for the two houses she built, now washed away, trying to keep her head above water and her eyes dry. Which is also hard—because like Cat and Chris, and Earl, she laughs in the telling of her life. Laughs as she lays newspaper to keep the mud—everywhere outside—at bay in this makeshift excuse for a home; laughs as she shares pictures—before and after—of the community that used to be; and laughs



drawing by Mary Clark



photo by Doris Ullman

again as she prepares for the same thing to happen again in a few months—a little time to search for higher ground.

She is different from her neighbors only in that she's made more active enemies in her efforts to keep things together. In a situation where even equal access to sewage systems entails a three-year battle in the courts and you have to make the point that people are not just another form of garbage, getting a bad reputation is easy. When it started, forty-three families lived in Georgetown, the gathering place of Harlan's four hundred black folk. Then, a combination of "urban renewal," highway construction, stripping, and flooding, made the bowl run over and the people spill out

—to Dayton, Cleveland, Detroit.

Still, Wylda stays on with her family of fourteen. She fought the courts, and won; fought the banks, and won; fought even the "developments" that surround and cut Georgetown off from everyone and everything except sinking mud.

She is only losing to time.

IN KNOXVILLE, MARYVILLE, New Market Tennessee, images of survivors multiply by the road. And young folk so full of energy that mountain-moving-day seems almost at hand are lively in the city. Their hearts are large.

But their minds. Mostly they're fastened on love (Jackson-Five, Earth Wind & Fire, Barry White syle), Big Mac's, and, at best, a piece of the action at the car wash. Then, it gets to Middle America. Starsky and Hutch. Cancer gulch.

Begging constantly for the driver's seat and not a clue about where to go. Without even a learner's permit, let alone a road map. Having children and hardly out of training pants themselves. Fresh. Which is something to behold.

It's enough to make you cry—which is to say, laugh, which is to say hope—and return to contribute something, whatever you can. Yourself, mostly, and the truth as you see it.

And when, no matter where you are, people start telling you that you look familiar and meaning it, it feels good to agree, and return the impression, and extend the association, and forge the links. Particularly this autumn, when ain't nothin' else good happenin' to these people, except each other.

Michelle Russell is an author, teacher, and political activist living in Detroit.

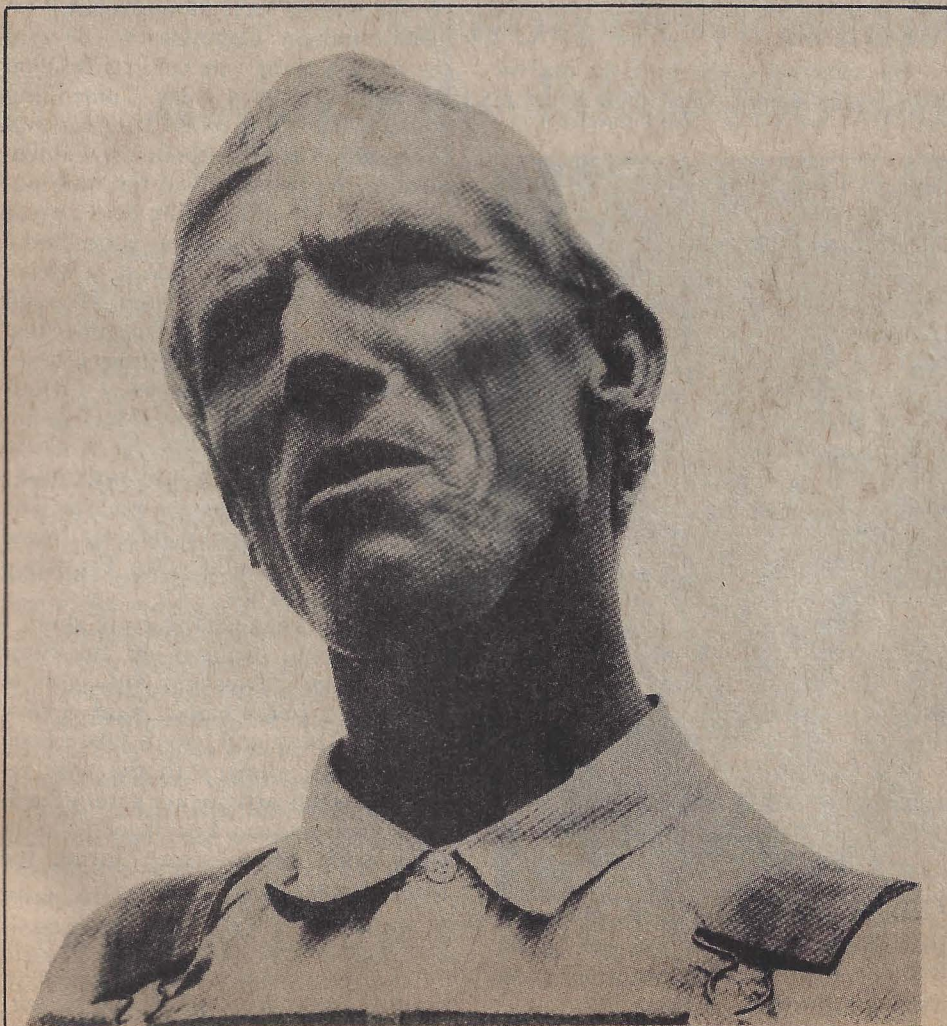


photo by Arthur Rothstein

Films — for pleasure & politics

by Laurie Alexandre

Unquestionably, some of the best political films of this year were shown at NAM's 1978 Convention. They are reviewed here with a focus on their usefulness for organizing.

With Babies and Banners

A good number of the films dealt with labor history and working-class movements. *With Babies and Banners* is an excellent new 45-minute film which recounts the story of the Women's Emergency Brigade of the Flint, Michigan, sit-down strike. Although history books have rarely recorded their story, these women were the backbone and cutting-edge of that strike. While lay-offs, poverty wages and hazardous conditions were daily realities in the 1930's, women workers suffered the added burdens of sexual harassment and double workloads at home and in the factory. Through interviews, songs, and great historical footage, the film gives us a stimulating and educational treat to use at public showings. It is available through New Day Films, PO Box 315, Franklin Lakes, New Jersey, 07417 (rental: \$60).

Eugene Debs

Eugene Debs and the American Labor Movement tells the struggle of working people during the turbulent years of the rise of capitalism. Debs' life spanned the Civil War to the 1920's, first as a conservative craft unionist and later as a revolutionary socialist. Unfortunately, the film presents a history which is often times flat. The basic weakness lies in the film's structure of eyeing the period through one man's writing. While this is an interesting technique, it does not treat the audience to the intricacies and debates concerning the IWW, the Socialist Party, or the Communist Party. Although the 44-minute film has structural problems, it can be used effectively in situations where further discussion can be provided. The film is available from Cambridge Doc-

umentary Films, Box 385, Cambridge, Mass. 02139 (rental: \$55).

Inheritance

An older film, *Inheritance*, recounts the militant history of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union. Intertwined with a wonderful series of slides on immigration and the early years of the century militancy, is an incredibly sensitive and humorous sound-tract which literally makes the slides come alive. The only criticism to be made of the film is its backpatting view of the contemporary union and the current period. The film is available through the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union and is well worth seeing.

Word Is Out

The convention also hosted a marvelous feature-length film, *The Word Is*



From *Word Is Out*—Harry Hay and John Burnside. Harry was one of the founders of the Mattachine Society, an early gay liberation organization.

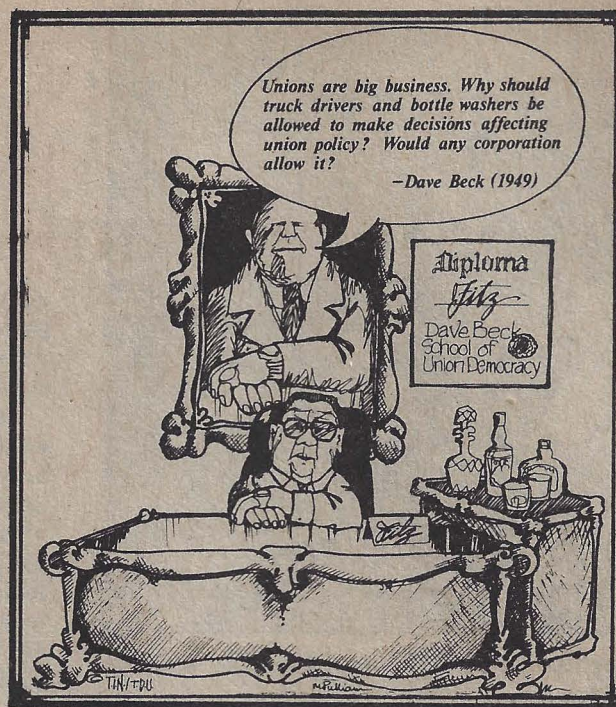
Out, which is a remarkable documentary of interviews with 26 men and women about gay and lesbian life and struggles in this country. The film talks about personal feelings of loneliness, about societal rejection, the sexism of major institutions, and the need for loving relationships. It looks at the current struggle for gay liberation and where we can fit in. *The Word Is Out* offers NAM people a great opportunity to educate ourselves and do outreach in our communities. The film is available through New Yorker Films, 16 W 61 St., New York 10023 (Rental: \$150).

Controlling Interest

One of the results of this year's convention was the formation of a NAM Internationalism Commission. Several convention films can help us develop our anti-imperialist work. *Controlling Interest: The World of the Multinational Corporation* is a comprehensive documentary on the world of the multinationals. The 45-minute film does a great job of connecting runaway shops in the United States to exploitation in Africa and Asia to the Chilean coup. Through revealing interviews with 'unsuspecting' executives, the audience is given a birds-eye view of blatant racism, a furious drive for profits, and a total lack of humanity. *Controlling Interest* is easily understandable to people unfamiliar with the economics of imperialism. The film is available from California Newsreel, 630 Natoma St., San Francisco 94103 (rental: \$60).

In an effort to keep this guide short, I am unable to examine all the films shown at the Convention. Among those left out are: *Union Maids*, *South Africa: Freedom Rising*, and *Love It Like a Fool*. These films, along with the ones reviewed in this article, are great educational tools that can be utilized for political work and pleasure during the coming year.

Laurie Alexandre is a member of Harriet Tubman NAM in Los Angeles who has done research on culture and the left.



Union democracy — making the labor movement work

The following article is the transcript of a speech given by Paul Schrade, a UAW activist, at the National Convention of the New American Movement, July 19-23, 1978. He was speaking on a panel on "Union Democracy."

by Paul Schrade

This is my first NAM convention, my first year in NAM; I joined on Labor Day last year when Dorothy Healey was talking on the radio. I said I might as well do a labor action today since there's nothing being celebrated—and so I joined my first socialist organization.

I've been very active in the United Auto Workers Union and it's been the organization of my choice for a long time. I think, though, that this NAM Convention has been one of the most helpful learning sessions that I've had in a long time. And that's because of the way it's been conducted. UAW conventions are very often machine-line, although there is always some expression allowed.

I get the idea that there is sometimes on the left an overly critical attitude to-

ward unions. I've always seen unions as one of the important places where struggle for democracy goes on. Often the fight is lost or not even made. But be that as it may, I think unions must continue to be the arena for the struggle for democracy, both within the union itself and throughout the workplace because that's essential if we're going to have democracy throughout the community. That learning experience, that practice, has to be done inside local unions so that it can become more widespread.

I think NAM itself is, and should continue to be, a model for democracy and socialism because that is essential if we are to make our contribution to workers and to unions generally.

The union's greatest failure today is that only about one-fourth of us are organized into unions. The other failure is that there has been a real shortage of development of workers as full human beings. And that is in part the responsibility of union officials.

In being a union representative for a long time as well as being a rank-and-

file activist in my early days, I learned a great deal. And going back into Rockwell in 1972 after I was defeated over policy differences with President Woodcock in the UAW, I know that my experience in the bureaucracy was very valuable in doing rank-and-file organization again, which I've been doing for the last five years.

I've been working in the Rockwell B-1 bomber plant, no longer the B-1 bomber plant because the B-1 was—fortunately—cancelled. In that plant I've had an opportunity to see my local union throughout many, many years.

The problem with the B-1, of course, was the useless, and very expensive, weapons system that was being pushed by the company and by the union and by the war machine of the United States. The problem I had was that there was no back-up program for conversion because it looked like Carter was going

The Long View

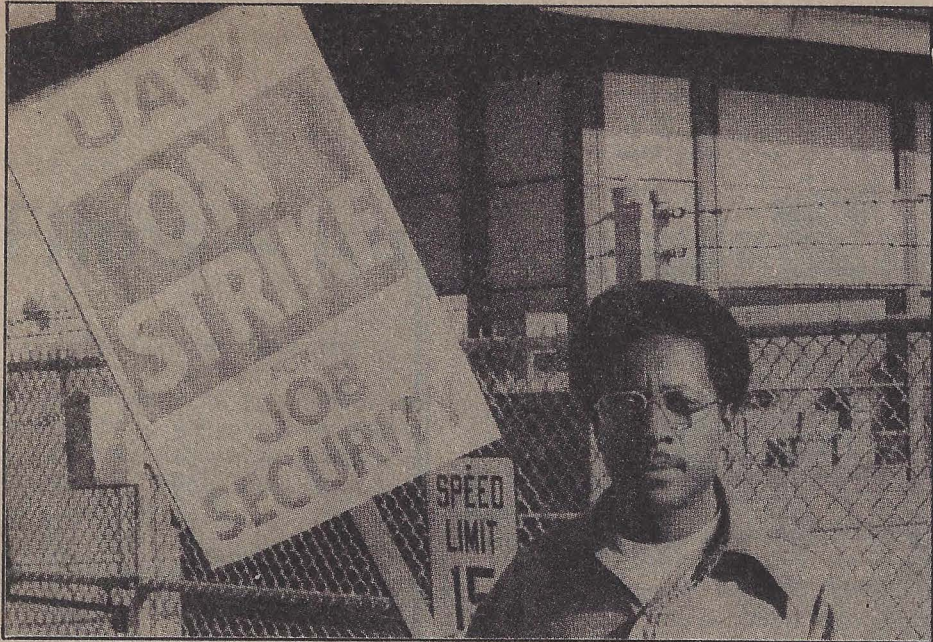


photo by Phil Mezey

When Ford workers struck for a month in September, 1977, one of their chief demands was for reduced work time and job security.

to cancel it.

I opposed the B-1, but always stood for conversion, so my political position in the union was fairly well-accepted—except by the leadership. Since the B-1 was dropped, there has been no conversion. Many thousands of people have been laid off and are without jobs as a result. And a large capital investment by the taxpayers has become useless to the workers who've been laid off.

Deeper Problem

A lot of this has to do with very close collaboration between our union and the Rockwell management. This may be beginning to change. Doug Fraser, who recently became president of the union, in the first session of Rockwell negotiations, told the Rockwell Corporation that the cozy relationship between the union and the company had to end.

But the problem goes much deeper. It has to do with certain institutional practices that tend to move the union away from the membership. For instance, in my plant we now have full-time committeemen. That seems like a worthy goal and it was an important one for the union for a long time. But as the cost of that, of having five or six full-time committeemen in a plant of several thousand, the shop-steward system was destroyed. The shop steward's presence is no longer felt on a day-to-day, hour-to-hour, minute-to-minute basis by the membership. Workers can no longer easily see a union representative. The

union representatives are often over in the labor relations sections of corporations (with desks) and get out to the shops only as the fires build, or as we build them.

Another example: in union elections, we found that dissenters in unions are kept pinned down on their jobs or are exiled to areas where there can be no contact with membership. Full access to the membership is then granted to the incumbents as long as they are getting along with the corporate management. So, you have this imbalance in access to the membership, with the incumbents who favor company positions getting a better hearing.

Another problem that's been developing is the further refinement of the dues check-off system. The check-off cards, as well as membership cards in the union—are now presented to new workers by the corporate management on hiring. So, there's not even any sign-up of members by the union any more and no education program along with it.

Or take the question of dues increases. The UAW solved the problem of the membership voting on dues increase or even delegates to conventions voting on dues increases, by setting out a very simple—and strict—formula: two hour's pay. And what that means is that every time there is a cost-of-living allowance you double the hourly increase and it goes into dues, and is automatically checked off. Or when there is an annual increase, that also is doubled and

goes into the new dues increase. So, there's no voting on dues anymore. It's a tax system, like withholding tax, constantly increasing as you go.

There's another situation that's just started in which arbitration decisions are not being decided by the local union membership, but by the international union. And in the last contract the arbitrator is now going to be decided in the international office, not by the local unions. So, all of these decisions are being pulled out of the hands of the local union membership.

Corporate View

It's also important to look at not only what my experience has been, but the corporate view of what's been happening in the UAW. In 1950, General Motors top executive, Alfred P. Sloan, Jr., who had accused the union of bringing socialism to GM during the sit-down strike, was able to claim in his autobiography:

"In the end, we were successful in combatting the UAW invasions of management rights. And we have retained all of the basic powers to manage.... The issue of unionism in General Motors is long since settled. We have achieved workable relations with the UAW."

There's no longer any sign-up of new members by the union — management does it for them.

More recently, GM's chief negotiators bragged again about their victories over the UAW. One said, "GM's position has always been 'give the UAW the money—the least possible, but give them what it takes.' Most importantly, from our point of view, there were no compromises in preserving management responsibility to manage."

That was after the GM strike of 1970.

Our unions have been under attack by larger corporate policies as well. The world economic crisis is having its impact directly on union membership—not just in terms of inflation, unemployment, excessive taxes, high interest rates, and extortionist insurance premiums—but also in the reduction of rights.

Let's take a look at some of the other things that are going on. The attacks on workers' rights to organize and the right to have representation has manifested itself in the struggle going on at J.P. Stevens or the vicious campaign against Coors workers. The whole history of the farmworkers union. And we have seen it recently in General Motors attacks on the UAW in the new southern plants where the workers are yet to be organized. These kinds of attacks are continuing to go on and will intensify as this economic crisis intensifies in the United States.

For this reason, one of the things that really bothered me was the kind of support that the Bill for Situs Picketing received. As a trade unionist, I would grant you that Situs Picketing, which gives unions the ability to strike on a broader basis on construction sites, is an important weapon. But tied in with that was Title II of that act, and what that did was set up a presidential commission—made up of a third presidential appointees, a third from the Building Trades Unions national officers, and a third business men of the construction industry.

The function of this commission was a very important one. It was to review every local union's strike action, and decide on whether to mediate, stall it, or do something about it. In other words, it was putting for the first time, the right

to strike not only in the hands of the national officers (who've never had it, because it's always been a local decision), but in the hands of the construction industry itself, and the president of the United States. That restriction of the right to strike is a very important aspect of that bill, and yet it was almost totally ignored by the labor movement.

The right to strike has been further curtailed by the Steelworkers Union. It was bargained away without membership approval by the leadership of the Steelworkers Union and has been confirmed by Federal Courts. So, the workers have no right to strike in basic steel. That denial is going to have its impact on everyone else because almost no one has spoken out against it in the trade union leadership of the country.

The right to ratify a union contract is also under attack. Steelworkers do not have the right to ratify their own contracts. Although they are ratified by a 600-person council made up of local union officials, it isn't a democratic decision because of the kind of control that the National leadership has over this council. And there have been

erosions of workers' rights to ratify throughout other unions.

We have to begin to educate ourselves about these kind of attacks on democratic rights. We have to analyze them very closely and decide on what kind of struggle can be made to resist them. It's important to realize that they are moving very rapidly against workers' rights and the opportunity to win on these issues declines as time goes by.

NAM's Role

I think that NAM has an important responsibility in terms of working with unions, and with workers generally. I would like to see NAM generally reaching out to workers in many, many ways; and to learn ourselves what unions are about—what's wrong with them, as well as what's right with them—so we can respond in a particular way to workers' problems.

We can work on better communications. And we need more comprehensive analysis and planning. Also, we've talked during some of our sessions about leaflets and pamphlets. I would add that we should do some work with films. There's a lot of very good labor films coming out these days. I'm not talking about *F.I.S.T.* and *Blue Collar*, I'm talking about *Union Maids* and *Harlan County* and *Babies and Banners*, and others that are being developed now.

Let me wind up by saying that as a result of fuller analysis and planning, I think that NAM can begin a general campaign for workers' democracy that could turn into something quite good if we build the resources to do that. It might even become a movement. I think that NAM has that potential, and I would like to join in trying to develop that.

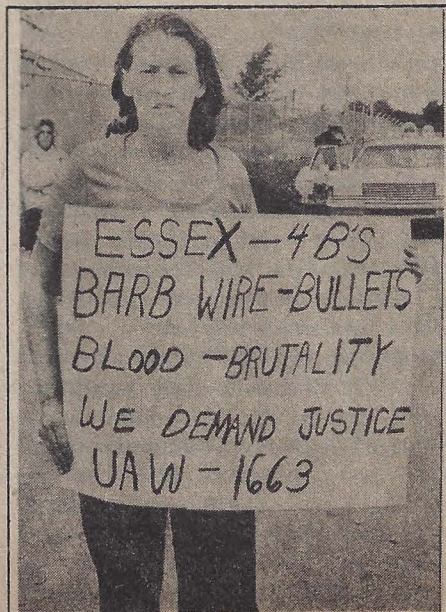


photo by Earl Dotter

Essex wire workers on strike in Elwood, Indiana, in September, 1977.

Paul Schrade is a long-time member of the UAW and an at-large member of NAM in Los Angeles.

NAM Convention '78

from page 9

maximize the opportunity for members working in each of the nationally coordinated arenas of organizing—labor, energy, socialist-feminism, anti-racism, culture, health and the urban crisis—to follow a “track” of workshops, educationals, and miniplenaries relating to the problems and prospects of organizing in each arena. Several meetings of the national commissions were scheduled to produce resolutions relating to future policy and organizing. And produce they did.

In addition to those resolutions mentioned above and those related to labor mentioned in an accompanying article, the Convention acted to:

- Endorse the creation of a National

Health Service as proposed in Congress by Rep. Ron Dellums;

- Create an International Commission. Priority items will be the preparation of discussion materials for an organization-wide debate to arrive at a new NAM policy statement regarding the Middle East at next year's Convention and the coordination of organizing around Southern Africa issues. The Convention also passed a resolution urging U.S. government recognition of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

- Establish a Campus Commission;
- Establish a Gay/Lesbian Task Force of the Socialist-Feminist Commission;
- Authorize the National Interim Committee to create an *ad hoc* Committee to recommend several constitutional

changes including changing the name of the organization, the titles of officers and the structure of NAM's National Interim Committee.

Due to time limitations, several other resolutions were referred to the National Interim Committee.

At the Convention's concluding plenary on Sunday afternoon, one limp participant was heard to ask the rhetorical question, “Why is it that the more we accomplish, the more we have to do?”

The answer, if any, is best expressed in lines from the poem “To Be of Use” by Marge Piercy, quoted to conclude the Convention's organizational report:

*The pitcher cries for water to carry
and a person for work that is real.*

John Haer is a member of Pittsburgh NAM. He would like to thank Joni Rabinowitz (Pittsburgh NAM) and Dean Pappas and Claudia Leight (Baltimore NAM) for their help in writing this article.

**“Pessimism of the mind,
optimism of the will.”**

—Antonio Gramsci

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Bringing labor into focus

from page 12

- NAM reaffirmed its general commitment to work with the J.P. Stevens Boycott Campaign, and the intention to participate in a National Boycott Support Week in September.

- NAM endorsed Pete Camarata's campaign as the Teamsters for Democratic Union candidate for president of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. The election is in 1981.

Summing up NAM's approach to labor, one speaker echoed the sentiments of the Convention: “The labor movement needs capable, committed activists. And NAM needs the kind of concrete learning experiences that work in labor can provide. Perhaps most importantly, the people in the labor movement and the people in NAM need each other in order to build a working class socialist movement that can speak to the needs and aspirations of all working people.”

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We get letters...

Noble criticized

I was extremely pleased to read Nancy Wechsler's article, "Out of the Closet and Into a Trap," in the June issue of *MOVING ON*. Nancy's rebuttal of Christine Riddiough's paean of glory to lesbian Massachusetts Democratic State Representative Elaine Noble accurately pinpointed the reactionary voting record of this public official. It is impossible to point to a single "progressive" vote ever made by Elaine Noble—because there hasn't been.

In her pursuit of support for her career and, supposedly, a gay rights ordinance, Elaine Noble jettisoned every progressive principle she espoused on the campaign trail. In the end, even this proved a dead end. Elaine Noble witnessed both the defeat of the gay rights ordinance and the evaporation of her base of support in the gay community.

Last summer, Elaine Noble's district was substantially combined with that of Democratic State Rep. Barney Frank, a straight gay advocate. At that time I was working on a special gay membership recruitment drive in my capacity as membership director of the Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts (CLUM). This summer-long drive put me in intimate contact with hundreds of gay organizations in the Greater Boston area.

In these organizations there was virtually unanimous support for Barney Frank and opposition to Elaine Noble. This factor goes a long way in explaining why Elaine Noble is now a candidate for the Democratic nomination to the U.S. Senate instead of a candidate for re-election to the State House against Barney Frank.

I would like to correct one more mistaken notion of Christine Riddiough's. It is not Elaine Noble, but Kathy Koza-chenko, of the Human Rights Party, who

has the honor of being the first avowed, public and unashamed gay to win public office, being elected to the Ann Arbor City Council a full year before Elaine Noble decided to become a pol.

*Eric Leif Davin
Cambridge, MA*

Tax revolt

I appreciated Robert Niemann's recent article on the tax revolt (*MOVING ON*, July-August, 1978). As an observer on the East Coast it seemed to me that the left was lost in left field during the campaign around Proposition 13. The only alternative to the landlord-association sponsored initiative seemed to be the weak liberal Proposition 8 that was supported by Governor Brown.

The left has just not seen the inherent possibilities in a conservative-initiated tax revolt. Public services do not have to suffer because of tax cuts. What the left should be doing is developing a comprehensive program of tax reform that includes both local and national aspects: local property taxes could be reduced for small homeowners and renters could get rebates for property taxes that they help pay for, while the left could push for national legislation increasing and equalizing corporate property taxes.

National legislation would be needed to keep corporations from moving to different areas of the country to escape "excessive" taxes. This type of program could also open up other areas where national restrictions on corporations would benefit communities and workers: on runaway shops, on impact in single-corporation communities, etc. This is not to say that the left should spend an inordinate amount of time lobbying; these are areas where mass organizing can take place.

*Michael Padwee
New York City, NY*

Talking back

I read the article on socialism ("Talking About Socialism," *MOVING ON*, June, 1978). I was really surprised at how readable it was. I only had to look up *one* word. Some parts I underlined are:

"Yet every other socialist country has eliminated rape. And capitalism is unable to do it." Very good point.

I was disappointed that you really didn't answer this question to the point though, because it's one of the most important to me. It runs: "But it's not realistic. There's no incentive to work under socialism..."

You answered with socialism bettering capitalism in that they could feed, clothe, and house everyone. But that really wasn't the question.

A terrific point is that: "In existing socialist countries, in fact, there is little or no unemployment."

I think that the article was very precise, organized, and to the point. And it covered my question on the differences between socialism and communism. It really helped clear my brain on some things.

*Erin Chapman
Age 14
Ithaca, NY*

Better issue

Because I was previously critical and cast aspersion on *MOVING ON*, I hasten to express satisfaction with the June issue. It is very good. If there is one criticism to make, I would fill half the issue with brief, half-page or even half-column, activity reports from all the chapters. That should be the character of the paper.

*Leon Blum
Plantation, FL*

NAM News&Views

by Richard Healey

The United States is a nation steeped in pragmatism—proud of its practical nature, its concrete accomplishments, its common sense. It is rare that “pointy-headed intellectuals” are honored, unless like a Henry Kissinger they can prove their “worth” in the world of *realpolitik*. Our citizens’ intellectual abilities are discouraged: we are fed junk not just on TV, but too often also in our schools. Thinkers are separated from doers, creating an elite that controls knowledge.

And at the same time a resentment is created against that elite that takes the form of contempt for knowledge. The collective ignorance that results serves well those who already have power—leaving the mass of people without the tools to understand their society or to change it.

There are many people today who are active in current struggles and who also see themselves as trying to build toward a socialist society. Yet they often neglect to examine the theoretical underpinnings and implications of their work, or to look beyond the narrow boundaries of their specific tasks.

Some of them are doing very creative and important organizing work. But because it is based on unstated assumptions, it becomes nearly impossible for the organizers, or those with whom they’re working, to understand or criticize those assumptions.

The defeats of so many progressive issues in the last year are yet another reminder that goodwill, common sense or intuition are not enough if we are to win significant victories in this period and go on to lay the groundwork for a new society. We face the difficult situation that underlies the growing offensive of the right and the big corporations.

American society is deeply fragmented. It is divided by class, race, sex, ethnicity, age, region, and religion. Families seem to be disintegrating, and people live in an increasingly lonely and individual fashion.

Not only is the terrain on which we fight fragmented, but so too is the way in which we fight. Historically, the trade union movement works by itself on one set of issues. Neighborhood organizations work on another set of issues, seldom in conjunction with unions. The women’s movement has its agenda, the anti-nuke people theirs, and so on. Coalitions never get beyond a pragmatic and short-lived stage.

If Marxist theory only told us that capitalism had something to do with all those issues, and that they should be “linked up,” it would be of limited use.

Rather, for an example, theory should give us an analysis of exactly what the connections are under capitalism between nuclear power and unemployment. It should suggest ways in which that connection can be given programmatic flesh, something that people can work on. Theory and analysis can help forge organizations and alliances strong enough to withstand changes in political climate such as the one that undermined SDS and the student movement in the early seventies.

Marxist theory helps us to understand the context and the



Richard Healey is National Secretary of the New American Movement.

Left turn

Ideas that work— making theory relevant

consequences of our work. With that understanding we can begin to move beyond the treadmill of always working for immediate reforms. This work is essential—in fact it is the basis for longer range changes—but by itself it can frequently just be incorporated into the existing system.

The sophistication and complexity of American capitalism makes the development of analysis and strategy particularly vital. And the current right-wing offensive makes it particularly urgent. Yet the American left has always been one of the weakest in this respect.

One of the key problems for us has been the divorce between theory and practice—between the thinkers and the doers. Marxist intellectuals are often very knowledgeable—but they frequently lack an understanding of the real political problems and tasks facing the mass movements and the left. And, as I noted previously, many activists ignore the importance of theoretical work.

To overcome this split, it is essential that a socialist organization like NAM take seriously the role of theory. For it is in the context of an organization that practical work can be evaluated and shared, providing an essential dimension for theoretical work. And it is in this context that the destructive division between intellectuals and activists can be bridged through common work, common study, and collective responsibility.

That is why the convention adopted a resolution calling for a deeper organization-wide study of marxism, of collectively participating in a kind of political education and training that allows us to be aware and critical of our work.

By political education we don’t just mean the study of Marxist classics, but the kind of shared dialogue that goes from the specifics of our concrete organizing to more abstracted theory, and then back to the concrete again. It is only within that kind of reciprocal process in which all of us engage that we will be prepared to help transform this society.

NAM in Brief

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 an 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

- 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 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 form.

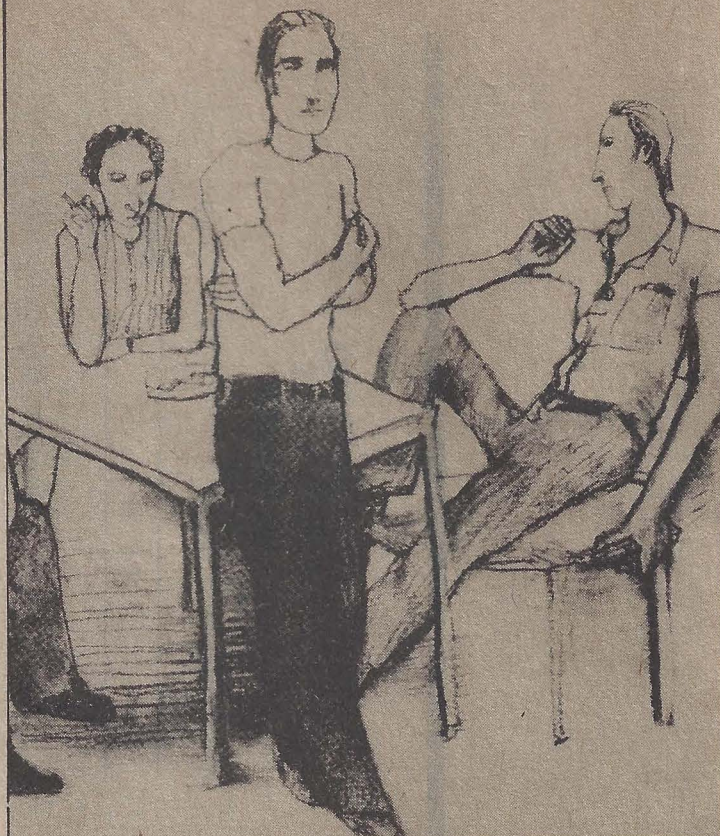
- The fate of socialism in the United States is tied to the rest of the world. We support struggles for national liberation and human freedom wherever they occur.

- 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.

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 by and united by certain basic political ideas:



From the Grassroots

Most working people never make it into magazine articles or onto TV shows. They are seldom interviewed and rarely quoted. Yet throughout history it has often been the buried voices of such people that provide the most dramatic and moving picture of how capitalism damages our lives—and that suggest alternative ways to live. Each month we hope to feature on this page the words of those whose voices are rarely heard. We will include both historical and current quotes. We welcome contributions from our readers—things you've read, heard, or said.

I think the campesino's life is beautiful, very sad, very hard, but very beautiful. Very bitter but very beautiful. Because it's experience that speaks and it's experience that matters. Education is good. I'm not

against education. I'm against the exploitation that comes about because of the education that some people have.

And it shouldn't be that way. You've got to study agriculture to sow, to plant crops. But if you don't have experience then reading and studying are worth nothing to you. There are certain plants and seeds that need a certain amount of soil. And they need different ways of planting—not all seeds are sown alike. Each kind of seed has its own way and its own amount—onions, carrots, beets, beans, corn.

Also to keep plants alive that are already up, they need to be fed as well. You should water them at their own time. Because if you water when the plant won't use it, doesn't need it, then just like us it'll get sick, do you see?

—Julio Coreno
Texas Farmworker

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