

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 1981

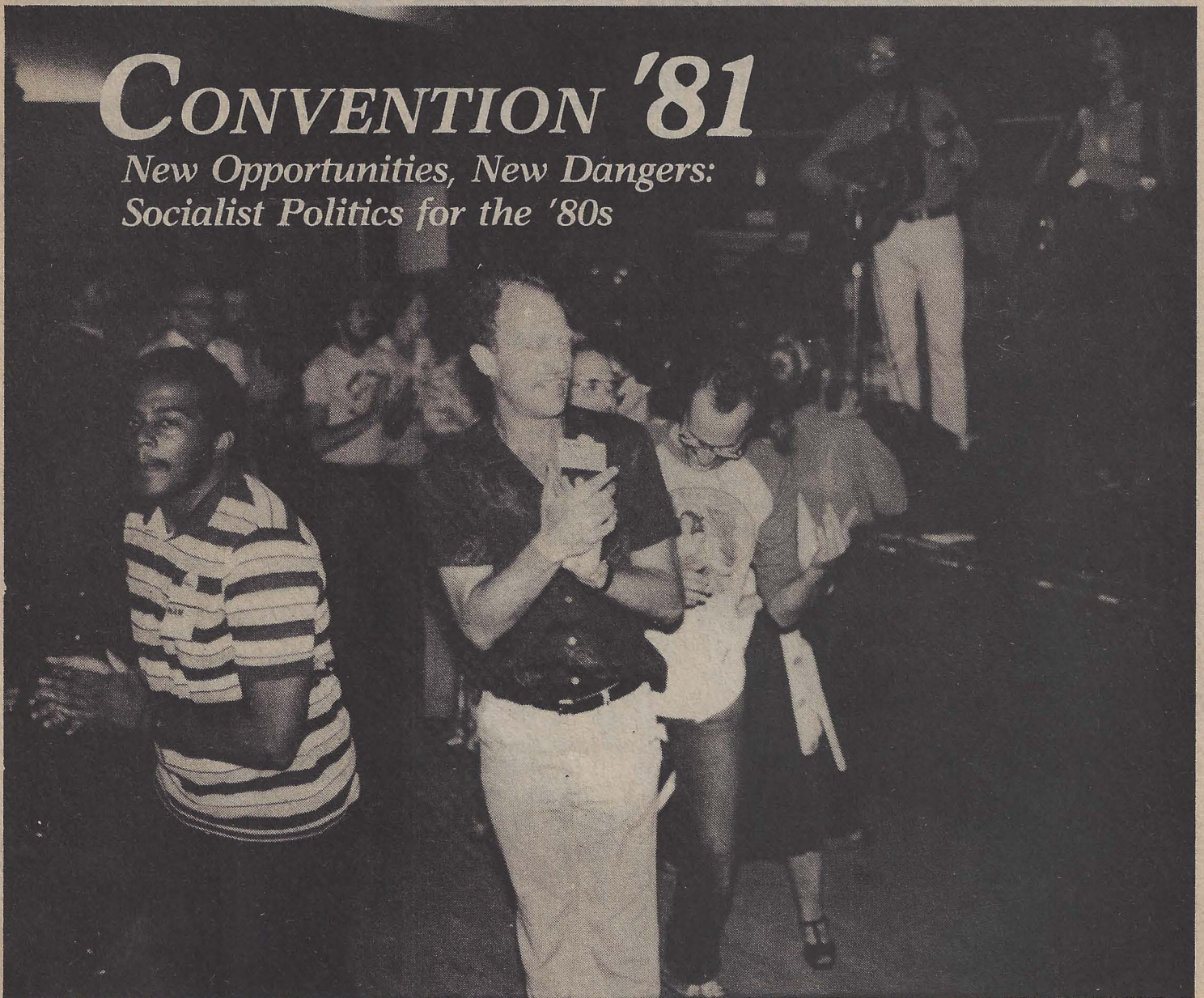
50 CENTS

Moving On

MAGAZINE OF THE NEW AMERICAN MOVEMENT

CONVENTION '81

*New Opportunities, New Dangers:
Socialist Politics for the '80s*



Scott Van Osdol

NAM members celebrate unity vote at finale of Saturday night concert.

Towards Merger

Neighborhood Politics

National News

Moving On

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 1981

VOLUME V, NO. 4

Towards a Socialist America

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NEIGHBORHOOD POLITICS

by Bob van Meter

Bob van Meter reviews Harry Boyte's new book about the citizen action movement. He indicates that the book is wide-ranging, but fails to fully address the role of socialist activists in working in the movement.

1981 CONVENTION

by Debbie Goldman

The theme of the 1981 NAM convention was "New Dangers, New Opportunities: Socialist Politics in the '80's." Debbie Goldman explores how the convention fulfilled its promise. Her article describes the political and personal excitements felt by many who attended.

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TOWARDS MERGER

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by Richard Healey

The NAM Convention voted overwhelmingly for merger with DSOC. This follows DSOC's earlier vote for merger. Richard Healey traces the history of this historic event and suggests some of the implications for democratic socialist organizing.

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NAM NATIONAL NEWS

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Neighborhood Politics

The Backyard Revolution

By Harry Boyte
Temple University Press,
Philadelphia 1981

By Bob Van Meter

HARRY BOYTE'S NEW BOOK *The Backyard Revolution* is an important account of citizen movements in the seventies that raises anew questions about the relationship of populism and socialism in America. Boyte's book is a celebration and catalogue of a very broad range of movements that he calls citizen advocacy: neighborhood organizing, clerical organizing efforts like Women Working, and public interest groups like Ralph Nader's Public Citizen. For Boyte

"...all have themes in common that roughly define the citizen advocacy tradition. They represent an old American practice of cooperative group action by ordinary citizens motivated by civic idealism and by specific grievances. They seek some kind of democratization of power relations.... And they appeal to some implicit popular conviction that there is a broad public good—a long term interest of the society as a whole."

Boyte goes on to say that citizen activists have moved to "deeper analysis" of the structure of power that the tools of "left wing analysis" can help clarify. However, he sharply differentiates the citizen advocacy tradition from the left. Thus his discussion of citizen action themes does not mention class. In fact,

Bob van Meter is a member of Northside Chicago NAM. He has been co-chair of the Energy Commission for NAM and is a community activist.



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Boyte implies that those who understand society in class terms are not part of the citizen advocacy tradition.

While Boyte was a founding member of the New American Movement and has also been a member of the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee, he has increasingly identified political-ly with the movements he reports on in this book and has been less and less involved in explicitly socialist organizations. Thus *Backyard Revolution* must be understood not only as an excellent piece of reportage on citizen organizing but as part of Boyte's own political project.

Dimensions of Citizen Advocacy

Boyte sees the citizen advocacy movement as the leading element of a full fledged challenge to American corporate capitalism. Citizen advocacy embodies the most important ideological themes of that challenge, first and most importantly democracy but also cooperation and the social good. Interestingly Boyte does not mention injustice as a primary ideological theme.

If the citizen advocacy movement is to fulfill the potential that Boyte believes it has to transform society, it must challenge corporate domination from the neighborhood to the workplace from city hall to popular culture. Boyte's descriptive chapters are organized with this view. Of course the reality of citizen advocacy today means that some chapters are richer than others. Thus Boyte is not only describing the citizen action movement; he is also outlining the elements of a full blown challenge to American corporate capitalism.

Boyte's first chapter focuses on organizing at the neighborhood level. Unlike most who have written about community organizing, Boyte gives a sense of both the history and complexity of community organizing traditions. He discusses Saul Alinsky's early efforts and the evolution of Alinskyism. In the seventies powerful community organizations rooted in Hispanic Catholic par-

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ishes of San Antonio and East Los Angeles have been organized with the assistance of the Industrial Areas Foundation. Boyte also describes the non-institutionally based model of community organizing developed first by Fred Ross in the 1940s and 1950s which became the model for the National Welfare Rights Organization and later for ACORN.

The chapter entitled "Protecting the Public" examines organizations spawned by Ralph Nader and the statewide citizen action organizations that have developed in the seventies, the Ohio Public Interest Campaign, Illinois Public Action, and ACORN. One gets a sense of how people become involved in citizen advocacy through Boyte's presentation of the stories of individual activists. This is invaluable and Boyte is at his best in these skillful interviews with citizen leaders.

In the chapter on workplace activism Boyte discusses COSH (Committee on Health and Safety) and the working women's organizations. He also discusses the role of training centers like the Midwest Academy. Boyte virtually ignores the rise of rank and file activism in a wide variety of unions, perhaps because many of the activists come out of a self-conscious socialist tradition. This omission leaves intact Boyte's distinction between the left and citizen advocacy. However, the result is a chapter that lacks the richness the first two share. The examples are more isolated, the history is sketchier. This is in fact a reflection of the state of the citizen advocacy movement in the workplace and may suggest the limits of a movement that fails to consider class as a central theme.

A chapter on citizen politics, describing the electoral manifestations of citizen advocacy makes it clear how far the movement has to go before it can seriously challenge the status quo. Boyte discusses the experience of Denis Kucinich in Cleveland, Nick Carbone in Hartford and of COPS, a Hispanic community organization in San Antonio



Scott Van Orsdal

ACORN and other non-institutionally based community organizations were based on a model developed by Fred Ross in the '40s and '50s.

that successfully ran a slate of candidates for city council.

Despite their identification as citizen politicians fighting the establishment, both Carbone and Kucinich ran afoul of community organizations in their cities. While in part this seems to be a consequence of personality, the hostility to involvement in electoral politics by community organizations and organizers is also an important source of this problem. As Boyte argues, this anti-electoral orientation is changing. However, the heritage of interest group politics reinforces tendencies towards the individualistic political style cultivated by Kucinich, Carbone, and others.

"Building a New Culture" is the final descriptive chapter. However the citizen advocacy movement has not really built a new culture. Boyte includes some anecdotes in this chapter about how the citizen movement can in fact give people the social context for new ways of relating to each other. The deep pragmatism

of community organizing seems to inhibit the cultural development Boyte sees as crucial to challenging the ideology of the marketplace.

There are other places in American society where a counter hegemonic culture is developing, including women's music and the large number of excellent documentary films being made by people on the left. Even aspects of new wave rock music have counter hegemonic elements. None of this fits in Boyte's category of citizen advocacy, but perhaps citizen advocacy as Boyte defines it is not capable of producing all of the elements of a challenge to corporate capitalism. Perhaps the movement Boyte defines and describes, while tremendously important, is not the center of a movement to transform American society but one of several major elements that will also include the women's movement, Blacks, and the labor movement.

Continued on page 15.

C O N V E

1 9

It was the best of

it was the

By Debby Goldman

NO ONE HAS ANY ILLUSIONS that 1981 is an easy time for democratic socialists. But this July's NAM national convention also revealed the other side of the Dickens quote. Speakers at plenaries and workshops described how NAM chapters throughout the country are involved in new coalitions organized to fight Reaganomics and Cold War II. At this, NAM's tenth anniversary convention, the mood was one of celebration for ten years of development and growth. But more than anything, the possibilities raised by a merger with the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC) furthered the belief that, indeed, there are opportunities to make of these hard times, the best of times.

The merger vote is the major "news" of the Convention. On August 1, at 11:30 a.m., NAM members voted 448 to 59 in favor of merger with DSOC, and in support of the political principles of unity written by the joint NAM/DSOC Negotiating Committee.

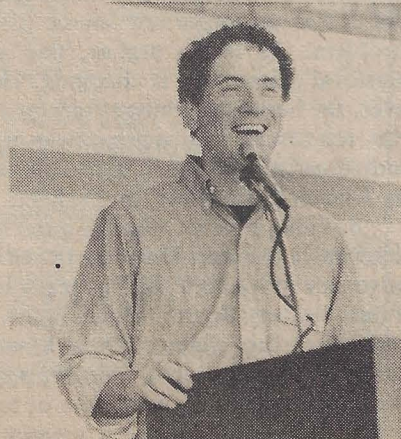
Debby Goldman is a member of greater Boston NAM.



Portland People's Power Players perform for the NAM Convention.



'Old-timers' gather at NAM convention, from left, Gabby Rosenstein, Milt Cohen, Ben Margolis, Dorothy Healey, Saul Wellman, Ben Dobbs.



NAM National Secretary Rick Kunnes.

Photos by Scott Van Osdol
and Elaine Wessel

CONVENTION

8 1

at times,
the worst of times...

For most, the mood after the vote was one of jubilation—members rose to their feet in applause.

“I was excited by the merger vote,” Jerome Rubin of Boston noted. “It showed we were putting aside our differences. I’ve been waiting for this for a long time.”

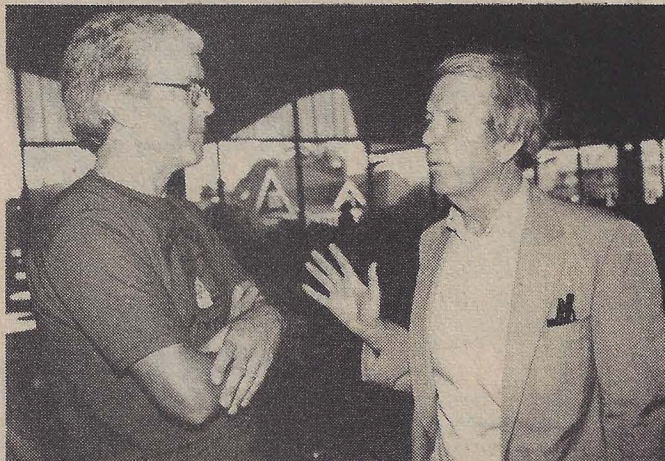
Richard Healey, co-chair of NAM’s Negotiating Committee and probably the first NAM member to hear of DSOC’s original overture towards merger two years ago, reacted to the vote with “delight...and relief.” Ruth Jordan, DSOC Vice-Chair and representative to the convention, echoed the same words.

This feeling of solidarity and new possibilities pervaded the convention. It was captured on Friday night in major speeches by Michael Harrington, DSOC Chair, and Roberta Lynch, long-time NAM national leader. Both were greeted with a warm response from the audience, with standing ovations before and after their speeches.

Harrington talked of the terrifying objective conditions we face in this country. But he also spoke of the opportunities before us, noting that the DSOC/NAM unification is the greatest chance in fifty years to build the social-



NAM National Secretary Holly Graff.

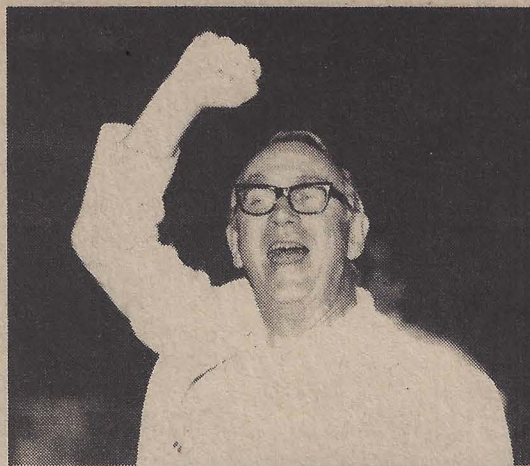


Michael Harrington (right) of DSOC talks with Paul Schrade of NAM.



NAM member votes during resolution session.

Elaine Wessel



ist movement in America. Harrington sketched his vision of a socialist society—one in which no one's life would be programmed by chance of birth, but rather by people freely choosing their own destiny. To him, collective ownership of the means of production is valid only because it is a means to this greater human freedom.

Roberta Lynch developed this theme even further. She described a socialist program that includes economic security for all, respect for individual dignity, a belief in human continuity, and a sense of community.

NAM Celebrates Its Tenth Year

It was this sense of solidarity and community that was so powerful at the convention. Conventions always include the joy of seeing old friends and comrades, but this one was enhanced by the fact that it was NAM's tenth anniversary. And on Saturday night, everyone joined in a tenth anniversary celebration that was a party to beat all NAM's parties.

It began with a real honest-to-goodness sit-down banquet—roast beef (zucchini lasagna for the vegetarians), scrubbed faces, even a few coats and ties. Mid-way through, the People's Power Players of Portland took the stage for a humorous view of NAM/DSOC relations. DSOC observers followed with several off-key songs jabbing fun at their own organization. Then, our first Awards Banquet, honoring NAM members who have worked with such dedication in building NAM and other progressive movements (see sidebar). Finally, the by-now traditional "pitch"—reminding NAM members that socialist consciousness raising includes socialist fundraising. Over \$9,000 was contributed that evening.

Then, all moved downstairs for a superb concert, performed entirely by NAM members. Fred Small of Boston sang his own songs, the People's Power Players presented a satirical skit on Reaganomics, and Kristen Lems



Elaine Wessel

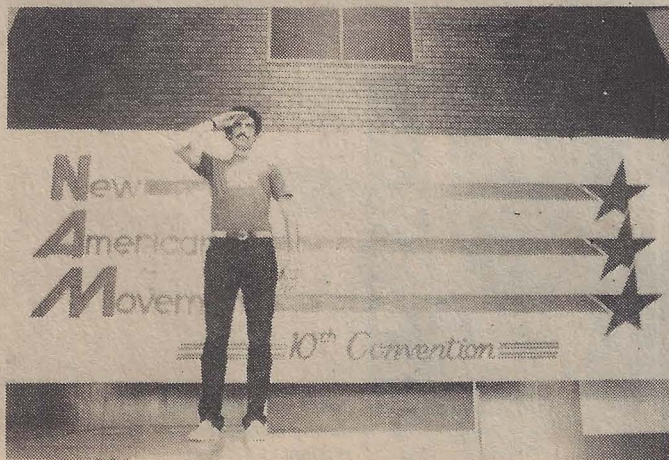


NAM National Secretary Chris Riddiough.



NAM leader Richard Healey during debate on resolutions.

Elaine Wessel



Office staff Craig Merrilees gives final salute as he leaves office.

topped the concert with her funny and touching songs. For the finale, Fred and Kristen took the stage as NAM members snake-danced around the hall, singing and clapping. As one participant noted, "The mood was as close to that of a revival meeting as I've ever seen at a socialist gathering."

There was a mood that evening, and throughout the five-day convention, that being part of a socialist movement means belonging to an extended, and raucous family. Which brings us to another major event of the convention—Michael Lerner and Barbara Enrenreich's discussion on their visions of socialism. What was planned as two distinct presentations, turned into a lively debate on the attitude the Left should take toward the institution of the family.

Lerner argued that his vision of socialism is one where loving, committed, intimate relationships predominate. In our society, one looks for these kinds of relationships to be fulfilled in the family. They often aren't; not for the reasons the "pro-family" Right gives, but rather because the economic structure of capitalism is undermining the family. Lerner believes the Left has to reclaim "the family issue" from the Right; that the progressive forces must become the pro-family lobby. He is careful to re-define the family to include gay families, single-parent families, extended families, and the like. But he believes that the Left *must* show its support for this newly-defined family, while promoting a true critique of the economic forces undermining the institution, in order to have a viable, political program for the '80s.

Barbara Enrenreich, in a word, disagreed. She claims that, to the Right, the term "family" has a clear ideological definition. By "family" the Right means the traditional nuclear family: husband at work, wife at home, two obedient kids. This family, Enrenreich sees as repressive, authoritarian, patriarchal, militaristic. The left need not, indeed cannot, embrace the institu-



NAM leader Roberta Lynch speaks at the plenary on New Dangers, New Opportunities: Socialism in the '80s.



Elaine Wessel

NAM members consider political discussion during plenary.



Elaine Wessel



Elaine Wessel

Rose Brewer speaks at the session on Reagan and Racism (left), DSOC officer Ruth Jordan speaks on Building Alliances Between Women and Labor (right).



NAM National Secretary Bill Barclay.

tion of the family, for in so doing we would be embracing the Right's definition of the term. Ehrenreich said we must put forth our own alternate moral vision—one in which human love extends beyond the family to include a larger community. She emphasized that our goal should be one of citizenship, combining a universal impulse toward human connectedness with a sense of responsibility to act on that. That, to her, is the essence of the socialist vision.

Chapter Practice.

As in most conventions, there were plenty of opportunities for chapters to share their successes in local organizing work. The focus at this convention was on the creation of urban coalitions.

Portland's Beverly Stein described in detail her chapter's work in an electoral campaign to create a Public Utility District. Milt Cohen and Dolores Wilber of Chicago talked of the creation of I-CARE, (Illinois Coalition Against Reagan Economics), composed of over 60 labor and community groups. Ben Dobbs from Los Angeles described the difficulties and prospects of building a coalition in his city for September 19 Solidarity Day.

In this spirit of coalition-building, NAM members voted to commit every chapter to work to build Solidarity Day on September 19. On that day, the AFL-CIO will stage a major demonstration in Washington against Reagan's economic policies, and plans are under

way for local demonstrations in many cities.

Participants in convention workshops and plenaries also discussed the dangers and opportunities in the labor movement. Particularly exciting were descriptions of new directions in organizing women office workers. This past year, Working Women, the national organization of women office workers, and the Service Employees Union (SEIU) reached agreement to work jointly in organizing female clericals. NAM women have been in the forefront of this movement. Ruth Jordan, labor consultant to the AFL-CIO and DSOC leader, talked of pressures women are bringing on the mainstream labor movement. At the conclusion of the convention, women labor organizers in NAM were discussing with Jordan forming a joint Women in Labor Committee with DSOC women.

Two other NAM members talked of their work in the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) to promote "political unionism." They are helping form political action committees (PACs) in their districts to work in the electoral arena to promote a progressive, pro-union program.

The 1981 Convention was like a shot of adrenalin for the participants. The sense of community, the discussion of successful work, the merger vote and subsequent unity prospect—all gave NAM members some extra inspiration to go home and continue with the hard tasks ahead. As Tom Campbell of Boston said of this, his first convention: "I was inspired by the level of commitment and depth of resource I saw. I gained a sense of support to carry on my work back at home."

Or as Fred Small sang:
*It's been a long hard time
 It's gonna be a long steep climb
 But no one's gonna change our mind
 'Bout what we gonna do.
 When the road gets rough
 And the going gets tough
 All our friends' sweet love
 Gonna carry us through.* □

1981 Convention

New Leadership

Political

Committee:

Bill Barclay
 Holly Graff
 Rick Kunes
 Chris Riddiough

National Interim

Committee:

Laura Berg
 Leo Casey
 Gill Greensite
 Andrea Gundersen
 John Haer
 Craig Merrilees
 Mike Pincus
 Glenn Scott

National Staff:

Bob Quartell

Awards

Energy

Organizing:

Jon Cameron for
 energy organizers
 in NAM

Electoral Work:

Mike Rotkin
 Beverly Stein

Chapter

Building:

Donna Wilkenson
 Joni Rabinowitz

Organizing

Women:

Anne Hill & Vicki
 Starr for working
 women organizers
 in NAM

Starting the

Reagan

Fightback:

Milt Cohen

Integrating

Chapter and

Mass Work:

Nick Nichols

International

Work:

Robert Shaffer

Organizational

Sustenance:

Roberta Lynch

Gay and Lesbian

Organizing:

Chris Riddiough

Spirit of NAM:

Dorothy Healey

Staff:

Craig Merrilees

Southern

Organizing:

Judy Johnson
 William Johnson
 Glenn Scott

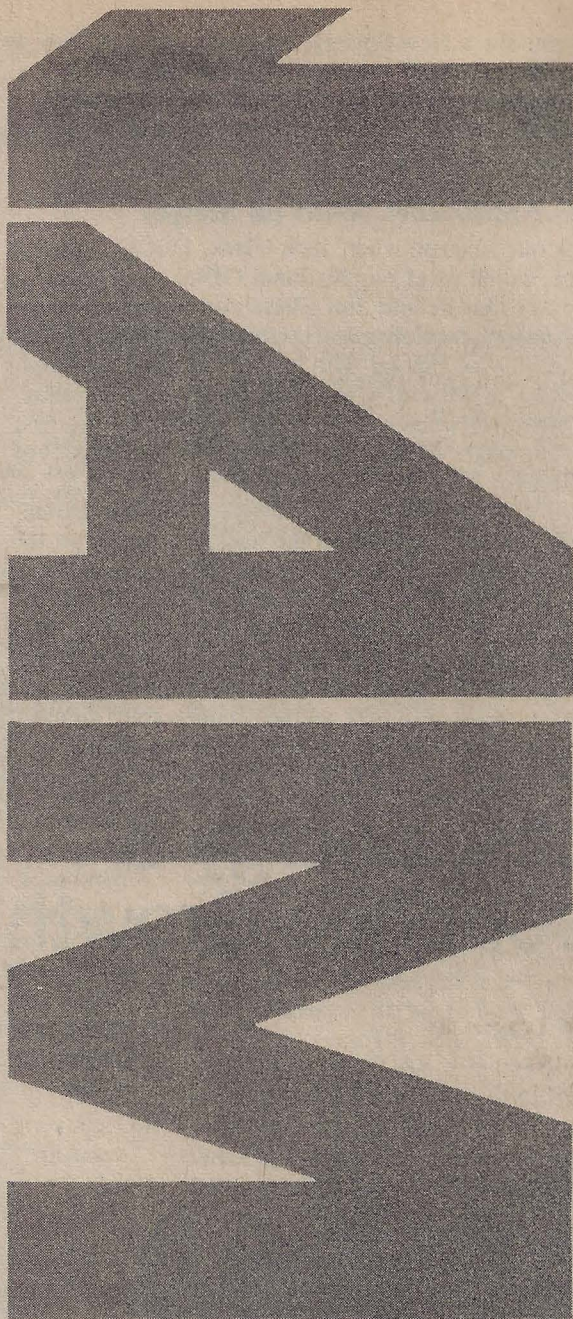
By Richard Healey

NAM WAS FOUNDED IN 1971, WHEN RICHARD Nixon was in the White House. In spite of all that Nixon's presidency represented, we began our collective life in an extraordinarily optimistic spirit, not noticeably tempered by that famous pessimism of the mind. Our optimism grew out of our participation in the mass movements of the sixties, and the sense of new possibilities these movements engendered: people could and did change and develop, our organization could grow and develop, and we would be able to change society. We were happy to admit we didn't have the final word on revolutionary Truth; far from being The Vanguard Party, NAM announced that we looked forward to merging with other groups in a continuing dynamic political process.

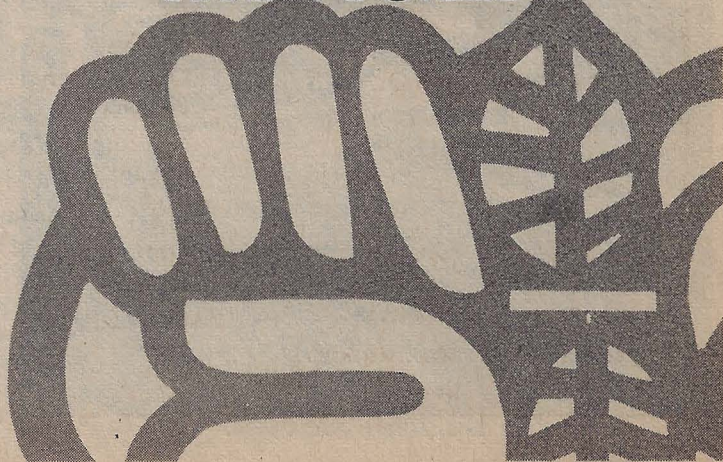
As the '70s proceeded, the groups with which we had hoped to have unity—the Socialist Feminist Women's Unions, various local groups of black radicals, the Mass Party Organizing Committee, the Wisconsin Alliance, and others—disappeared. NAM became more realistic; we learned that "we need to dig in for the long haul." We realized we had to fight self-consciously for our organizational survival, and a more coherent political identity. As fruitful and exciting as that struggle has been, it has also had its costs. One such cost is that for many of us it became much harder to admit we didn't have the franchise on the Truth; we were growing and developing on our own terms, and it became easier to ask, "what's wrong" with the person who suggests that isn't enough.

In July 1978, *Socialist Review* ran a major article by Harry Boyte, in which he urged that NAM and the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC) merge. This idea had surfaced before, but this was more serious: Boyte was one of the founders of NAM and a long-time national leader. Even more, he put his money where his mouth was—he became a member of both organizations, and also a member of DSOC's National Board. Nonetheless, few of us took the idea of merger with DSOC seriously; we were too different. NAM still reflected its origins in the New Left, and DSOC its origins in the old Socialist Party. We stressed local organizing and feminist issues; DSOC emphasized building national coalitions and a socialist presence in the Democratic Party and the trade unions. While our chapter meetings didn't have "warm fuzzy times," like our friends in the

Richard Healey is a member of Greater Boston NAM and is co-chair of the Political Education Commission. He has been co-chair of the NAM Negotiating Committee over the last year.



TOWARDS MERGER



Movement for a New Society, we suspected that they were different from DSOC meetings. For all we knew, in DSOC meetings people were silenced by a chairman standing up front with a gavel in one hand and, god help us, a cigar in the other.

DSOC Approaches NAM on Merger

Imagine our surprise when Jack Clark, DSOC National Director, called us at our National Office in January of 1979 to say that he and Jim Chapin and others in their leadership had decided to offer a resolution "to explore the possibility of merger with NAM" at their National Convention in February. Imagine the surprise of many NAM members when they heard of all this for the first time in the pages of *In These Times*: "DSOC approves resolution for unity with NAM."

DSOC's resolution was a challenge to us to evaluate seriously our commitment to the notion of unity on the left. As we looked at the realities of the approaching new decade, we had to decide how much of the differences between the two organizations was based on principle, how much on out-dated language or responses to long-past situations? If there was sufficient similarity on basic political positions to make merger conceivable, would the remaining differences be complementary or disruptive? I

Jobs, Energy & Economic Growth



**Midwest Conference on
Progressive Approaches
to Industrialization**

would guess that in 1979, a majority of NAM members were either agnostic or negative on these questions.

NAM Approves Points of Agreement

NAM debated this question for two-and-a-half years, with over 60 articles on it appearing in our Discussion Bulletin, and countless sessions at local, regional, and national meetings. We learned that some of our preconceptions about DSOC weren't accurate. It became clearer that our different emphases and activities could indeed strengthen and complement each other. The "Points of Political Agreement" which the NAM Convention voted on shows the extent to which the two organizations agree on the most fundamental ideas—our vision of socialism, the centrality of democracy, feminism, the fight against racism and U.S. intervention abroad. And finally, we decided that the two organizations could together form the basis of a much more politically effective socialist presence in the U.S. today.

I was sorry that Harry Boyte and the many other members and friends of NAM who have been hoping for the merger weren't able to see the energy and enthusiasm that followed our 85% vote in favor of going forward with merger. It had the excitement and sense of new opportunities of our first conventions.

The merger process isn't over yet, however. NAM and DSOC are just starting to work on what the structure of the new organization will be, and on how to begin building for the unified organization now, even before the official unity convention next year. We need to use this time until the convention to reach out—to friends and family, to trade unionists and independent socialists, to minorities and feminists, and many others. DSOC and NAM today add up to about 6,500 members—that's a good start, but only that. Within a month after our unity convention, we should have over 10,000 members.

I use the word "should" purposely. I think that it is a realistic goal; it is also an urgent one. We felt such a goal was urgent ten years ago with Nixon, now we have Reagan and worse. It isn't realistic to think we can fight this as isolated individuals or in small, local groups. It isn't realistic to think we can move much beyond today's defensive struggles without a democratic socialist organization that numbers in the tens of thousands and that can begin to offer a serious alternative to masses of people. Members and friends of the two organizations should start thinking now—what kinds of meetings, speaking engagements, or conferences can we arrange to promote and recruit for the new organization? How do we reach more activists in religious circles, and the trade union movement? In particular, how can we reach activists in the black and Latino communities?

So the exciting and difficult task of building this much larger and mature organization has to begin now. And we need to keep the same attitude to it that we have had in NAM—it too will not be the final and completed socialist party that we sometimes dream about. When Boyte first wrote about NAM/DSOC merging, it seemed like a crazy idea. But he also suggested that we had to look for a broader unity with organizations ranging from CED in California to the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists. If that sounds crazy...well, let's see what happens in the next few years. ■

All the News

NAM National News

Robin
Tyler



Robin Tyler Tour

Robin Tyler, nationally known comic, will be doing a tour for the New American Movement this October. The six-city tour will cover the Industrial Heartland and Midwest Regions. Tyler has appeared in concerts all over the United States and Canada. Tyler does lesbian humor but does not describe herself as a lesbian comic: "I talk about how I came out, but my material deals with everything—nuclear energy, the economy, my cats and plants." She does true women's humor. "It's easy to tell if it's women's humor," she says. "Just take a look at who's laughing."

Tyler has been active in working for women's and gay and lesbian rights. She's spoken at numerous rallies, including the 1979 March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights. She is producer with Torie Osborn of the West Coast Women's Music and Cultural Festival, now in its second year. Tyler also gave a concert at the 1980 NAM convention.

Tyler's schedule for the NAM tour is:

- October 3—Baltimore
- 4—Buffalo
- 9—Pittsburgh
- 16—Chicago

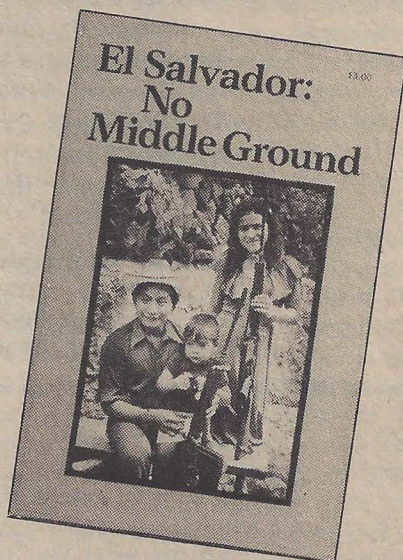
17—Madison

18—Detroit

For more information on the concerts in these cities, please call the local NAM chapter or the national office at (312)871-7700.

New Literature Available

The national office has several new literature items now available. *El Salvador: No Middle Ground* is a NAM book containing essays on the situation in El Salvador and U.S. involvement there. Edited by Rick Kunes, NAM National Secretary, the book discusses U.S. military aid to the Salvadorean regime, the agrarian reform program and other important issues. It is available for \$3. The Campus Commission has recently published "Democratizing Education," a collection of essays by socialist activists who have been directly involved in campus politics. Available for \$1.50, it covers issues ranging from transforming curricula to student



organizing to the situation of non-academic staff. "The Inflation Puzzle," three essays by NAM members, goes beyond popular explanations of inflation and explores the relationship between inflation and the overall functioning of the U.S. economy. Cost is one dollar. Issue#3 of the

PLANT CLOSINGS BULLETIN has just been published. Essays on legislative efforts to control plant closings, campaigns around the issue and analyses of plant closings and the state of the economy are included in this two dollar publication. "Lucy Parsons' Recipes for a Red Planet"—an inventive cookbook put together by "Lucy Parsons's NAM—costs one dollar. Also available are tenth convention memorabilia including mugs, T-shirts and buttons. All this and more is available from the national office, 3244 N. Clark, Chicago, IL 60657.

Caravan for Human Survival

The Caravan for Human Survival is an effort to raise consciousness about the 1982 UN Special Conference on Disarmament. Four relay caravans are being organized to arrive in New York on UN Day, October 24, 1981. These caravans will go from campus to campus en route from Miami, Minneapolis and other cities; a "Day of Concern" focusing on the arms race and human rights issues will be held at each campus as the caravan arrives. As part of this, a torch of friendship symbolizing peace and community, will be carried by runners from the starting points of the caravan to the UN. At the UN, petitions calling for a nuclear arms race freeze will be presented to officials. The NAM convention endorsed this effort and called on NAM chapters to assist in the development of the caravan. More information is available from the Caravan for Human Survival, 1011 Arlington Blvd., Suite W219, Arlington, VA 22209.

Commission on Law and Democratic Rights

A new commission on Law and Democratic Rights chaired by Laura Berg of Portland NAM has been formed. The commission will be coordinating work on repressive legislation and related issues. It will develop resources on democratic rights and make contacts

with civil liberties and other organizations doing work on these issues. Two resolutions submitted by the commission were adopted by the NAM convention. One calls for opposition to the Senate anti-crime package. This resolution further calls for education on the issues raised by the legislation, such as preventive detention and prison sentences. The second resolution on crime, introduced jointly with the Urban Commission, calls for the initiation of organization-wide discussion on a progressive program on crime.

Other commissions have made plans for the next year as well. The Socialist Feminist Commission, chaired by Liz Weston, will be continuing and expanding its work. The first issue of *Women Organizing* this fall will focus

on women and labor. It will contain articles on clerical organizing, women in non-traditional jobs and other related topics. The clerical organizing network, which will be involved in this, has expanded to become a Women and Work Task Force and is now a joint project of the Socialist Feminist Commission and the Labor Commission. An addition to the Socialist Feminist Commission's work is the development of resources on childcare and children's issues mandated by the convention. The Gay and Lesbian Task Force plans to publish a new edition of the working papers on gay and lesbian liberation—it will survey the state of the gay and lesbian movement and develop theoretical positions on sexuality and socialist feminism. This task force

is also preparing a leaflet on the Family Protection Act for use by chapters in their work opposing this legislation. The Socialist Feminist Commission also plans to work jointly with the DSOC Feminist Commission on a number of projects.

The labor Commission has been working hard to implement the convention resolution on Solidarity Day. September 19 was designated Solidarity Day by the AFL-CIO and has been endorsed by many organizations. Its aim is to give notice to the Reagan Administration that labor will not sit back while programs for jobs, justice, human rights and social progress are dismantled. Watch for reports on this event in your local paper and in upcoming issues of *Moving On*. □

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Boyte

Continued from page 5.

Boyte counterposes the citizen advocacy tradition to the "left tradition" in America. The latter is never defined and Boyte doesn't discuss Marxism or socialism. He almost always uses "left" or "leftist." In a recent article in *Democracy*, Boyte defines the American left as "the new deal coalition and its progeny, like the new left." Boyte paints the left in America (and Marx) as hostile to populism and traditional institutions where, in Boyte's view, popular resistance to the marketplace is incubated.

In short, Boyte has set out to define the citizen advocacy movement as truly democratic, American, and popular, and has, as a result, tried to distinguish it as sharply as possible from both the "left" tradition and from the increasingly anti-democratic dominant American ideology.

Boyte shares the frustrations of many who define themselves as Marxists with traditional Marxist understandings of culture and of social transformations. He is seeking to arrive at a more useful theoretical and political framework for understanding social movements and for advancing the citizen movement in this country. Since Boyte finds that Marxism and socialism do not provide all the tools he is looking for he found it necessary to reject them through caricature.

In fact, although his general remarks on the left and left tradition seem crude and simplistic, Boyte has not rejected the intellectual touchstones of the democratic socialist left. He draws upon E.P. Thompson, Antonio Gramsci (Boyte even likens the organizers of the citizens advocacy movement to Gramsci's organic intellectuals), and Herbert Gutman. In his final chapter he writes that democratic socialists like those in DSOC and NAM have an important

role to play in the emerging movement.

The book is thus an unsatisfying one, particularly for someone who is both a democratic socialist and an organizer in the citizen action movement. Boyte's relentless effort to draw a line between the two traditions prevents him from discussing (although he mentions it briefly) the personal continuity between the citizen movement he celebrates and the new left about which he is generally critical. After all, many of the organizers who have built and shaped the citizen movement were veterans of the anti-war movement and SDS. Tom Hayden, whose politics certainly reflect the themes of citizen advocacy as Boyte defines it, is not even mentioned in the discussion of citizen politics. This may be because Hayden's prominence in SDS and the anti-war movement make the personal connections between the new left and the citizen movement obvious and inescapable. Boyte is certainly well aware of that personal continuity. Some of the people he describes as citizen activists also define themselves as socialists, such as Ruth Messinger and Carl Shier, both members of DSOC. The two traditions simply are not mutually exclusive.

Boyte is seeking in his theoretical explorations to make a critique of traditional Marxist understandings of social movements and of the role of traditional culture in social change. While this analysis remains underdeveloped in *The Backyard Revolution*, Boyte's argument can be summarized as follows. Traditional institutions, perhaps most importantly the church, are places where the market does not dominate social relations as it increasingly does in other spheres of social interaction. This free social space is the crucial incubator in which oppositional movements and culture are nurtured. Boyte counterposes this analysis in factories where old social relations are broken down and people become conscious of themselves as workers.

Boyte views this difference as fundamental to the left's inability to come to terms with grass roots activism. While it

is certainly true that Marxist understandings of culture and of the role of the church has been inadequate, Boyte ignores the enormous changes occurring both theoretically and in the political practice of the left here and abroad. The historic compromise between the Italian Communists and the church in Italy and the role of the church in Latin American liberation struggles are examples of new practical relations between the socialist left and the church. Here in America the Catholic Church has taken the lead in the opposition to U.S. intervention to El Salvador and socialists and others on the left have worked closely with the church activists. But the Catholic church also remains the bulwark of the anti-abortion movement in America. Whatever the importance of traditional institutions like the church in nurturing community and resistance to the market, there are also oppressive aspects which Boyte does not discuss at all.

Socialist understanding of culture has been radically transformed in the last fifteen years with the advent of feminism. There has been a great deal of theoretical discussion of the poverty of previous Marxist understanding of cultural change. Writers like Sheila Rowbotham have analyzed the relation of cultural radicalism, feminism, and socialism in England and how the theoretical lacunae of Marxism contributed to the practical and political divisions that weakened both British socialism and British feminism. Theorists like Jurgen Habermas sought to recast Marxism's understanding of language and culture but Boyte's cursory comments on Marxist theory give no sense of the ferment in Marxism or in socialist practice.

The Backyard Revolution is an important contribution to the quickening discussion of a progressive challenge in the eighties. Boyte provides the necessary history and guide to the emerging forms of citizen activism. However, his attempt to define it politically and ideologically is both mistakenly tendentious and one dimensional. □

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