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BULLETIN MATTERS

In this issue are three items which were not written especially for the Discussion Bulletin. The first, by Steve Coleman of the Socialist Party of Great Britain, was originally his presentation of the case for socialism in a debate with a British Labor Party Member of Parliament. The second is the preface to a report produced at a recent national conference of Internationalism, the U.S. Section of the International Communist Current (ICC). The publishers invite discussion of their report, information for the ordering of which can be found in our "Publications Received" section below. The ICC, unlike most groups in our political sector, sees potential allies in the "revolutionary milieu," its term for what we call "third force socialism." This seventeen-page, 8 1/2 by 11 inch pamphlet includes a well-documented economic analysis of contemporary capitalism, a balance sheet detailing its vulnerability to continued depression, a prediction on working class response to progressive austerity measures, and a program for revolutionary action by our "milieu."

The last item is a one-page leaflet produced by IWW activists during the Hormel strike. Readers interested in LIBERTARIAN LABOR REVIEW, the publication of the Champaign/Urbana IWW Group should write to the address given at the end of the leaflet. As always, we solicit your letters and articles responding to the contents of this issue or on any matter of interest to "third force, non-market" socialists. Please -- narrow, 3/4 inch margins and single spaced.

Frank Girard
for the DB Committee

PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED

REPORT ON THE NATIONAL SITUATION; a conference report by Internationalism; $2 from Internationalism. P.O. Box 288, New York, NY 10018.

FACTSHEET FIVE (No. 21); A 76-page annotated list of hundreds of magazines, newsletters, and other publications on all imaginable topics, including politics, by all imaginable kinds of individuals and small groups; $2.75 from Mike Gunderloy, 6 Arizona Ave., Rensselaer, NY 12144.

INTERROGATIONS: SUR LE MOUVEMENT DE DECEMBRE 1986; A pamphlet consisting of 8 1/2 by 11 inch reproductions of about 25 leaflets distributed by various groups during the student uprising last December; all in French including a two-page introduction; no price; for information write to Interrogations, c/o Insecuirite Sociale, B.P. 243, F-75564 Paris Cedex 12, France.

WHAT IS A SITDOWN STRIKE?; Besides a brief history of the sitdown strike movement of the thirties and its successes, this 12-page Cont'd on p. 23
“Society Would be More Secure Without Police, Prisons or Armies”

The above motion was debated at Conway Hall at a Forum meeting on Sunday afternoon October 12, 1986. This month the Ethical Record publishes the mover’s advocacy of the motion—Dr. Stephen Coleman, who is a lecturer in the History of Ideas.

The opposer was Chris Smith, who is M.P. for Islington South and Finsbury. His contribution should appear next month.

For most of human history people lived in a condition of what historians in our age have described, with all of the arrogance and condescension of civilised snobbery, as “primitive backwardness”.

For something like 40,000 years of the earliest evolution of human society our ancestors were “primitives”. And what did it mean to suffer this terrible primitive fate of not being born into civilised times such as ours? It meant that they lived co-operatively; what they had they used in common; what they gathered from nature they shared on the basis of free access; what rules for living they governed themselves by were not alien “laws” made by superior beings called legislators and enforced by feared bodies of bullies devoted to the organised judgment and repression of others.

Primitive rules and customs reflected the consciousness of the community. Where people made such rules for themselves there was no call for primitive Judges to dress in bizarre costumes and pontificate in pompous tones about laws made by the few in order to regulate the conduct of the many. As for violence, the only weapons known to the earliest humans were those required for the conquest of the natural environment in the perpetual struggle for survival and comfort.

Now we are no longer primitive. With the help of large supplies of gunpowder and sustained intakes of religious opiates the mass of humanity has “been civilised”. Reagan and Gorbachev, with their fingers upon buttons which could annihilate the planet at a push, are civilised. The one in five scientists throughout the modern world whose wisdom has been bought by the military establishments are civilised.

The Police Chief of Manchester, Mr. Anderton, who a few years ago instructed his officers to enter the clubs of Greater Manchester with a view to arresting people committing the crime of “licentious dancing”, is civilised.

The prison officers who beat up inmates in their cells and those who have murdered prisoners while in police or prison custody are civilised. The men who stand guard, like well-trained Nazis, on the untried inmates of the British-controlled concentration camp at Long Kesh are all being very civilised. The police who have employed the most brutal force against striking workers—not only in Poland and South Africa, but in Britain also—they will always tell you how civilised they are. We are all civilised now.
It is part of the myopic complacency of those who imagine that the way we live now is the only way we could live to assert that we must have police and prisons and armies. It is natural that they should exist. And if you question what is natural you are a utopian. And if you are a utopian then you are indulging in a futile battle against immutable reality. I hope that my opponent will not commit the crass error of thinking that history is immutable and that institutions which some think are natural will in fact last forever.

I am an opponent for civilisation. I favour an uncivilised alternative to the detestable "law and order" of the present social system. When they asked Ghandi what he thought of Western Civilisation he replied that it would be a good idea if they ever tried it. Civilisation is that period of history in which the tyranny of property has prevailed. To be civilised is to submit oneself to a structure of power based upon the ownership and control of property by a minority. Civilised morality is an ethic of reverence for those who possess. Civilised law and order prevails as long as property is safe.

What are property relationships? They are essentially relationships of exclusion. The pen is mine—therefore it is not yours. You take this pen and I will call the police. It is no use pleading with them that the words of a brilliant new poem have just come into your head and you feel inspired to write them down at once. You may be a second Shelley—I may be illiterate; but if I possess twenty pens and you own none the police will not decide who to arrest on the basis of a poetry competition.

This factory is mine; therefore I own all that is produced in it. It does not matter that I may never visit my factory and would not be able to operate the machines if I did—I take what the producers in the factory make and if they take any they are criminals who must be reported to the police and dealt with.

The same applies to dwellings: if I own a house you can only enter by paying me money or else you are a trespasser. The conflict between property and need was well illustrated in 1971 when some squatters occupied some empty houses owned by the London Borough of Southwark and the Council (which was Labour controlled) took the homeless people to court. Now, in addition to their misfortune of being homeless they also had the bad luck to have their case judged by Lord Denning—a man who always strikes one as the unintelligent man’s idea of what it is to be wise—and in his summing up on the case Denning said,

If homelessness were once admitted as a defence to trespass, no one’s house could be safe. Necessity would open a door which no man could shut. . . . The plea would be an excuse for all sorts of wrong-doing. So the courts must, for the sake of law and order, take a firm stand. They must refuse to admit the plea of necessity to the hungry and the homeless: and trust that their distress will be relieved by the charitable and the good.

Death from Starvation: Arms Protect “Private Property”

So it is that, whilst according to UNESCO there are 40,000 children dying of starvation each day, armed police in India stand in the defence of grain warehouses which are “private property”.


Armies perform the same function. (The speaker then quoted from two military sources in order to demonstrate that militarism is but an extension of commerce.) Naive people say that armies exist to make us secure.

Is there anyone present who wakes up each morning and thinks of the Cruise Missiles at Greenham Common and the Exocets which tore the skins off young men in the South Atlantic and the plastic bullets which are now being used by the state terrorists in Belfast and will soon be used by the police here and the deranged officers being trained in the psychopathic arts at Sandhurst and thinks to themselves, "My word, I do feel safe. What a dangerous world this would be without skilled killers and sophisticated murder weaponry in order to make us secure". That is what the opponent of this motion must argue: that without armies we would be less secure.

The case which I am putting rests upon the contention that police forces and prisons and armies are essentially in existence in order to secure the tyranny of property. The only serious alternative to that tyranny is socialism, by which I mean a social system based upon the common ownership, as opposed to private or state ownership, of social resources. The only way we will obtain a genuinely secure society to live in will be by transforming social relationships from those based on property and exclusion to those based upon common ownership and free access to the goods and services of the earth.

In a society of common ownership there will, by definition, be no owners and no-owners, no bosses and bossed. There will be no hereditary entitlement to parasitical idleness and affluence. There will be no babies born to suffer the miserable inheritance of deprivation.

People cannot steal what they own in common. That disposes of 90 per cent of "crimes" committed today. Home Office statistics confirm the fact that if you emptied the prisons of those convicted for crimes against property you would virtually empty the prisons.

And what would armies, dedicated to the cause of mass destruction, have to do in a community of common ownership? There will be no more murderous trade wars for them to perform in. No Empires. No anachronistic nationalist disputes about which gang of thieves controls which territory. How could such a system of society ever consider wasting its energies and resources upon the perverse venture of an organised institution for killing people: an army? The insane violence which civilised fools call "healthy competition" would have no reason to occur in a society of common ownership.

It will be conceded by many people that it would be very pleasant if we could all share the planet as sisters and brothers and that, indeed, most crimes and wars are property-related. But there is "something there"—something in "human nature", that vague term which no scientist has yet seriously defined or located—and this "something" leads us to require all of these forces of coercion to protect us from ourselves.

I reject emphatically the suggestion that there is "something natural" in human beings which needs to be repressed and restrained; I reject it because I regard it as being but a watered down version of the stale old religious dogma that we're all evil sinners at heart.

To those who speak of motiveless, inexplicable anti-social behaviour I
respond that if we look hard enough at what society does to brutalise and
desensitise and degrade human personalities you will find the motives. If
you want to comprehend soccer violence, then talk to those who glorify
nationalism in the classroom and urge children to take pride in imperial
violence and plunder. If you want to comprehend the mind of the rapist,
then talk to the editor of *The Sun*. If you want to comprehend sense-
less, gratuitous violence against defenceless victims, then study the bombing
of Dresden when men were commanded to fly above their defenceless
victims and to assault, molest and murder not just one innocent old lady or
powerless little child, but many thousands of them.

Before arriving at unhistorical conclusions about “human nature” one
should remember that for most of human history there were no wars or
muggings or banks to be broken into by armed men because there was no
cause for these things.

I predict that my opponent will tell me that even if he accepts all that
I have said it is politically pragmatic for us to work to reform the system
we have now.

After all, people *feel* that they need police and prisons and armies—
they may not be justified in doing so, but that is how they have been con-
ditioned to *feel*. I do not dispute that this is how most people feel.

But it is also the case that most people would feel safer if hanging was
re-introduced. Most people feel that not only do they need the protection
of an army, but they favour some kind of what is laughably called nuclear
defence.

But if those feelings are false—if my opponent cannot with sincerity and
logic support those feelings—then he has an obligation to say to people,
“Well, that may be what you feel, but you are wrong. And this is why you
are wrong.” If one does not challenge such feelings, then what is to stop
other pragmatists from riding to power on all kinds of other irrational
feelings and prejudices?

The motion in this debate concerns a fundamental matter of our political
culture: What is power to be? Is it something above us, threatening us,
bullying us—the Harvey Proctor conception of authority which humiliates
the powerless and gives a deranged illusion of strength to the dominator?
Or is power something which we shall enjoy as of right because we are
conscious and creative human beings with immense capacities for develop-
ment? When you perceive power in the latter sense (the socialist sense)
you do not require unformed thugs to protect humanity from its own
potential.

Society will be more secure when we establish a system which does not
require police, prisons and armies—it will be more secure because once we
have removed the power over us there is almost no limit to what we can do
with power between us.
PREFACE

We publish this Report on the National Situation, adopted at the recent National Conference of Internationalism, the U.S. Section of the International Communist Current, in order to circulate and stimulate discussion among militant workers and groups in the proletarian milieu.

We have decided to do so at this moment because the milieu in America has unfortunately shown a real weakness in dealing with the issues that confront the working class struggle. Indeed most groups don't even recognize the existence of a proletarian milieu distinct from leftist -- the far left political groupings composed of capital apparatus, i.e., the Trotskyists, Maoists, Stalinists, traditional anarchists. When we speak of the proletarian political milieu in America, we refer to those groups which are an emanation of the working class in its struggle to confront capitalism and change the world, groups which often have many political confusions -- even holding bourgeois political positions on certain issues -- but which nonetheless reflect the process by which the working class comes to consciousness. These groups include various libertarian groups, groups which identify with the traditions of the left communists, the DeLeonist breakaways, and an increasing number of discussion circles.

In general the groups that comprise this small proletarian milieu in this country do not adequately understand either the gravity and potential inherent in the current situation in the U.S. or the indispensible role revolutionary minorities within the working class must play in the struggle. Rather than analyze the dynamic of the current situation in the U.S. in an international context, and thereby determine how best revolutionaries can intervene in ongoing struggles to contribute to the process by which the working class comes to consciousness, the groups in the American milieu too often fall into a simplistic perspective. Too often when they do bother to attempt an analysis of the situation in the U.S. they tend to focus on the U.S. as a unique entity, rather than as a part of the global picture.

The existence of an international wave of class struggle which began in Belgium in the public sector strike in 1983, has gone unmentioned in the pages of virtually all publications in the American milieu, the first of a new phase in this wave of class struggle in Belgium in the spring of 1986, characterized by tremendous strides in the extension of strikes, and conscious efforts to unify struggles against the head-on austerity attacks launched by the capitalist state, is not recognized. Nor are the implications of these developments in the struggles of the world
working class for the activities of revolutionaries even discussed.

This is a real shortcoming, a real failure to live up to the responsibilities revolutionaries have to their class. Revolutionary groups are minorities within the class, an emanation of the class in its struggle against capitalism, grouping together those militants who come to recognize the necessity of preparing for a revolutionary destruction of capitalism. Revolutionary organizations exist to intervene in the class struggle, to act as an indispensable element in the classwide process of coming to consciousness and confronting the capitalist state. The specific way revolutionaries fulfill this role depends upon the nature of the historic period, and the character of class struggle. In depths of the triumphant counter-revolution, small groups of revolutionaries struggle against the current, against the dominance of bourgeois ideology, to keep intact the lessons of past struggles, to help draw the balance sheet of those struggles and to pass them on to new generations of the working class. In other periods when workers are not politically or physically defeated by the ruling class, when they are beginning once again to actively confront the system, revolutionaries have a much more concrete intervention to make in the struggle. They have the responsibility to make clear the connection between the historic lessons of the world working class as a whole and the immediate struggles the class engages in.

Since the late '60s, world capitalism has been in the grips of an open economic crisis, a classic crisis of overproduction, in which a saturated world market is no longer capable of absorbing what capitalism produces. Unlike the crisis of the '30's, today's crisis is not characterized by an immediate collapse of world trade and economic activity. Rather it has been phased in slowly -- but inexorably -- over two decades because of the machinery of state capitalism which has been in place since the '30's (the New Deal in the U.S.) History has shown that capitalism has only one solution to its crisis and that is world war -- an interimperialist bloodbath destroying human life and the means of production in unprecedented proportions, leading to a redision of the world market. In the 20th century decadent capitalism has kept itself alive on the bones of over 75 million butchered in two world wars and countless "little" wars. Today the development of the technology of destruction by capitalism means that the next time capitalism imposes its "solution" to the crisis might mean the end of civilization.

However the ruling class is not free today to unleash global war, because the working class is not mobilized behind its war ideologies, is not crushed politically or physically. The working class today, in the east and in the west, is not defeated, but is rather feeling its way towards reappropriating the lessons of the past. Not without defeats, some small and some big, the working class is resisting the austerity drives of the capitalist state in country after country. The course of history today is not towards war, but towards crucial class confrontations between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. On the outcome of these
confrontations hangs the future of humanity.

History poses tremendous responsibilities on revolutionaries, no matter how few their numbers currently are. We have utilized the ICC's international framework to analyze the situation in the U.S., both as to its specificities and the ways it echoes the characteristics of the global class struggle. We have tried to analyze reality in order to understand how to act to help change that reality. This report on the National Situation in the U.S. is both a warning and a call to action: a warning about the onslaught of new austerity attacks directed at every aspect of life of the working class, and a call to action to resist this attack and to contribute to the development of class consciousness. This report analyzes the economic crisis, the onset of a new recession, the condition of the working class, the strategy of the bourgeoisie for imposing new austerity, the evolution of the class struggle and perspectives for class struggle and the intervention of revolutionaries. We urge other groups and militants to read, discuss and debate these perspectives and analyses, to respond to them, to write to us about agreements and disagreements, to publish reviews or critiques in other publications in the milieu, or to develop alternative views on these pressing issues.

--INTERNATIONALISM - JANUARY, 1986
P.O. Box 288, New York, NY 10018

REVOLUTIONARY UNIONS: LABOR'S NEXT MOVE

The outcome of the Hormel strike proves the bankruptcy of attempts to reinvigorate the AFL-CIO. The militant meatpackers are now trying to breakaway from the UFCW and build their own rank-and-file run union. Unfortunately this has come too late to make much of a difference for the Hormel strike, but it might show the way for the rest of the labor movement.

Time and again we have seen that for workers to have a direct impact on things, they must act outside the traditional business union establishment. Within the last few years there have been numerous rank-and-file revolts, beginning with the wildcat strike wave in the coal industry, thru the formation of dissident groups within the Teamsters and other corrupt unions, and most recently the creation of unofficial strike support and "solidarity networks" in numerous communities. Where labor has had any success at all in obstructing the employer onslaught, it has been through the efforts of these unofficial labor organizations.

Yet inspite of all this evidence that the AFL-CIO is an obstacle to labor solidarity, many otherwise intelligent radicals claim that all we need do is return to a mythical golden age of CIO-style "social unionism". They ignore the fact that the CIO was a palace revolt of AFL business union leaders desperate to gain control of a similar wave of rank-and-file worker militancy in the 1930's. The CIO would be better described as "political business unionism", which replaced the old style "apolitical" class collaboration of the AFL, with a new triple alliance of
There can be no return to this phoney golden age because the conditions of the mid-twentieth century, which made it possible, no longer exist. In order for workers in a few key unionized sectors of industry to be guaranteed a decent standard of living, and at the same time maintain profits for the capitalists, the government must be able to regulate and control the national economy. Yet we now live in a global market economy dominated by large multinational corporations which can play nation-states against each other. Even in countries where socialist pro-labor governments have come to power, such as France, Greece, and Spain, we see many of the same cut-backs in employment and living standards as these governments try to make their national economies "more competitive".

Labor only has a future if it organizes itself on a global, industrial and revolutionary basis. Political business unionism is a dead end. Political parties and nation-states must by their very nature put the narrow interests of their own national fief ahead of the needs of the working class. Workers must sever their dependency on politicians and begin to break out of the strait jacket of national self-interest. An injury to workers in any country is an injury to us all. Only an organization ready to put this principle into action through international strikes and boycotts can have lasting impact. Only a global economy run by and for workers, is a solution to the ills of international capitalism.

Champaign-Urbana IWW Group: P.O. Box 2824, Champaign, IL 61820

WHAT IS A SIT-DOWN STRIKE?

This 11 page pamphlet commemorates the 50th anniversary of the Great American Sit-Down Strike Wave of 1937. It describes the struggles in auto and rubber and the spread of sit-downs through small shops across the U.S. WHAT IS A SIT-DOWN STRIKE? covers "direct action" from the Wobblies to the 1930's, looks at the decline of the tactic, and asks if there can be a new wave of sit-downs.

Receive a single free copy by sending a STAMPED, self-addressed envelope to:
WD Press, Sit-Down
P.O. Box 24115
St. Louis MO 63130

The cost of multiple copies is:
$3 for 10 copies;
$5 for 20 copies; or,
$10 for 50 copies.
The Editor,
Discussion Bulletin,

Dear Sir,

"Harmo" is no doubt acquainted with the statement by Frederick Engels, Marx's co-worker, that with the establishment of Socialism "the government of persons is replaced by the administration of things, and by the conduct (direction and management) of the processes of production." Does not this mean that administration in Socialist society will be concerned essentially with the production and distribution of human needs? This involves the administration of the industries and services, which obviously must be a democratic administration. The question is how are the industries and services to be run democratically, and by whom? Who will have the final authority and make the final decisions on how they are to be managed? Harmo apparently doesn't believe it should be the workers who operate them, through their own democratically elected economic bodies responsible to them, as proposed by the Socialist Labor Party. Since without democratic control of the economy there can be no Socialism how does Harmo think production and distribution should be administered, by whom and by means of what administrative organs?

He argues that with the worker-control advocated by the S.L.P. the workers would "have interests separate from the rest of society? Why so? "Such a concept", he says, "can only arise in a class-divided society." He also speaks of it as an "era of political divisions." Where political divisions come into this industrial representative administration I cannot fathom, nor where the class divisions come in. Where are the separate interests? Harmo seems to think that because the workers participating in production would administer the industries and services they would dictate to the rest of society.

Maybe Harmo would like to have everybody, regardless of whether or not they were engaged in industry, have a voice and vote on it's management. Well, if people not so engaged had the knowledge and qualifications to have that voice and vote, I'm sure there would be no objections. But there will also be people who will be content to work in the home, the aged, people suffering from infirmities, mental illness, etc, who will not be participating in the industries or services or in their administration. These people would be members of the families of the workers. Would the workers choose to dictate to, oppress or exploit members of their own families? The interests of the workers would be identical with those of everyone else—of providing an abundance of life's needs for all to enjoy.

Possibly Harmo has the idea that worker-control of the economy would mean that the workers would decide for the whole of society
what should be produced. But why would they want to? The people themselves would decide their wants by reporting them to their local industrial councils. This information would be transmitted to an All-Industry Congress, which on the basis of this information and also information from industry, would calculate social needs, the labor time required, etc., production being organized accordingly.

Harmo states that "organizing workers on the basis of individual industries is really dividing instead of uniting them." This is the case with today's unions, committed to capitalism's economic jungle, where the principle is every union for itself, and where crafts in the same industry continue to work while others are on strike, etc.

But Socialist Industrial Unionism, proposed by the S.L.P., would be one union based on the interests of the whole proletariat. Although it will need divisions and sub-divisions there will be a co-ordination of these divisions for the common purpose of achieving one goal—the substitution of Socialist industrial administration for the political administration of capitalism.

Similarly with the workers in the industrial administration of Socialist society. They would be divided, not in social aims and purposes, but for the purposes of production. Their goal would be the common goal of producing, for the equal benefit of all members of society, their collective needs.

Harmo asserts that "the S.L.P.'s concept of a Socialist society was and still is not fundamentally different from that of the party of Social Democracy." Just what the capitalist political policies of the Social Democrats have in common with the revolutionary industrial representative democracy advocated by the S.L.P. I do not know. He also states that the S.L.P. "believes in Vanguardism", where a political party rules supposedly in the name of the people. I would suggest Harmo read the S.L.P.'s pamphlet, "After the revolution who rules?" which deals largely with the so-called Vanguard parties.

There will be no political rule in the non-political Socialist Industrial Commonwealth. All authority will rest with, and all final decisions made in the management of the economy by the workers collectively through their own industrial councils, the administrative organs of bona-fide Socialism.

The workers will elect their representatives in their industry or service, also to local and national industrial councils to administer and co-ordinate that industry or service on a local and national scale, and to an All-Industry Congress. They will be responsible to and removable at will by the workers they represent. Can there be more economic democracy than that?

This requires more than just a political vote. While the workers must organize on the political field to educate other workers in the principles of Socialism and contest the issue at the ballot-box, they must also organize on the industrial field into a Socialist La-
ustrial Union, to fashion the industrial constituencies of Socialism whereby they can enforce their victory at the ballot by assuming the functions of economic self-rule.

James Minal

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Words are almost all we have to communicate our ideas to other people. If we use words that mean one thing to us and something totally different to the people we are talking to, then we don't communicate. There are some words that mean good things to people who read the Discussion Bulletin but mean bad things to most of the world. When we use them, we at best fail to communicate, at worst create suspicion and antagonism. I think this is an important factor in our isolation and frustration.

One of the key words is Socialism. Almost everybody in the world, when they hear that word, think it means the system of Russia and/or Sweden. You can argue that this is wrong, unjust, that Socialism "really" means a free society with working people in control. But what a word "really" means is what it communicates. Say Socialism and, whether you want to or not, you are saying "authoritarian and/or liberal bureaucracy".

Another key word is Revolution. Whatever it may "really" mean to us, to almost everybody it now means the kind of thing that happens in Iran and Lebanon. While it is true that in some parts of the world, such as Nicaragua and South Africa, Revolution still has a good meaning, we are not living in those parts of the world. For the people we need to talk to — American working people — Revolution means conspiracy and terrorism.

To fight for the "true" meaning of these words is a lost cause and a waste of time. The important thing is not the words we use but the meanings we communicate. We need to start talking to people using other words which carry the meanings we want.

I think we should talk to people in terms like these:

We need a better economic system. The reason we need it is that the existing system causes unemployment, homelessness, ecological disasters, and other serious problems. What kind of system do we need? Well, if the person you're talking to is interested enough to ask that question, you can get a really productive discussion going.

How do we get a better system? Well, that's a question that deserves really serious thought and discussion. Clearly a very drastic change is required. To get it we will have to organize. What do you have in
mind specifically? Again, if the person you're talking to is interested enough to ask tough questions like these (questions that are tough for all of us) you can get a really productive discussion going.

By forcing ourselves to explain what we mean without using the key words, we not only can communicate better with the rest of the world — we also can make our ideas clearer to ourselves. We can involve new people in a dialog, which is far healthier than trying to "convert" or "recruit" them. By giving up the battle of the words, we not only stop wasting time on a lost cause — we also take steps towards building a more open, healthier movement.

Ed Jahn
Newport News, VA

Imagine a democratic socialist party 7393 Rugby St.
Philadelphia, PA 19138
March 13, 1987

Dear Friends:

Imagine, if you will, a socialist political party which had no political line that all had to uniformly adhere to, but which rather permitted free dissent.

Imagine a party in which some thought of socialism as meaning government ownership managed by administrators appointed by elected officials, and where others in the party thought of socialism as meaning government ownership but with management elected by the workers in their businesses and industries, and still others in the party rejected government ownership and thought of socialism as meaning ownership and control by socialist industrial unions, and still others in the party who objecting to the centralization of all these above ideas as inimical to freedom and genuine direct democracy thought of socialism as decentralized worker and consumer owned and managed cooperatives, and still others in the party who favored the last idea but only if it were coupled with the abolition of government itself, and yet still others who disagreed with all of the above ideas of what socialism meant and favored still some other, and finally others who thought that all of these ideas had merit but that some might be suited to particular businesses and industries but not a single form to all.

Imagine a party in which some thought that economic forms of ownership and control was the important thing for the party to focus on, but where others felt that the arms race and war were such great threats to life that they had to be the primary focus of the party, and yet many more felt that racism and sexism had to be the primary focus, and still more felt that questions of environmental destruction and ecology should be the primary focus,
and then there were those who disagreed with having any one primary focus but instead wanted to work on all these and many more issues.

And imagine a party in which some advocated violent revolution, and others peaceful revolution, and still reformist evolution. Some of these comrades felt that only an independent socialist party could bring socialism, others feeling that socialists should work in larger non-socialist but essentially working class parties, and still others who felt that both of these strategies where false illusions and that socialism could only be brought about by working in the unions, protest groups, and other non-electoral arenas. And still some felt that such strategies transcended national boundaries and time, and others who felt that some strategies fit particular national and historical circumstances and hence was not universal.

And yet, with all these and many more differences in this socialist party there was the common basis of agreement that no one had the right to purge other members or censor them because they disagreed with the democratically arrived at majority decisions of the party with respect to these and above issues. In such a party, the idea of multi-tendencies within it was not merely tolerated, it was a fundamental constitutional principle. Such a party would believe not only in socialism whatever it may mean to its different members, but also at the core in civil rights and civil liberties - the freedom to participate fully and the right to be different and be free of the tyranny of the majority.

Would always such a party be in the right and make no mistake in strategy or tactics? No, for this is a party of imperfect men and women, not gods. Yes, the would make mistakes - opportunist when they should have been bold and adamant - no matter what the cost; adventurist when it was foolish and resulted in their own harm and even partial destruction. These and a thousand other mistakes were made, because democracy does not always lead to the right ideas or actions. Time and time again the majority voted for what was proven in time to be bad or positively disastrous. But the democratic method had one great advantage over authoritarian methods: When a mistake was evident, the majority could see it, and listening to what had been the former minority and seeing that what they were saying made sense now whereas before they scoffed at and rejected their advice, could now correct the mistake rapidly. The authoritarian parties on the left and on the right tolerated no dissent and generally would not make a change in bad policies until the disaster was so great that they were forced to relent, or until the leader died. For the future is not something that can be determined in all its particulars, but only in its general outlines if even that, and so people were bound to make mistakes.
Whether those mistakes would be corrected easily or with great difficulty, destruction and death was up to them and the kind of institutions they created.

And what would this imaginary socialist party we are discussing be called, with all its orthodox Marxists, revisionists, Fabians, cooperativists, syndicalists, Greens, etc., etc?

Democratic socialist! Heaven help them, for they are not imaginary parties, but are struggling, arguing, making mistakes and correcting them, and very much alive.

Socialist Party of Greater Philadelphia (an SPUSA local)

Fraternally,

Donald P. Busky
Local Chairperson

Dear Frank,

The three I.U.P. writers all in some measure (though particularly, Louis) repeated De Leon's habit of somewhat disingenuous logic in polemics with opponents.

To claim that because someone argues that at this moment unity may be premature, & that they believe that unity will be forged in the course of revolutionary action, that this means they are saying that unity is not needed until after the revolution, is neither logical nor honest; unless they are seriously claiming that revolution looks so imminent that any delay in attaining unity must inevitably postpone it until after the revolution.

Similarly the argument used by De Leon & Louis about the ballot, (quite apart from the fact that in 1908 only a very small minority of those De Leon dismissed as "The Bummers" did in fact oppose voting,) depends on the equation of two distinct concepts.

De Leon - as Louis says - predicted that "the IWW would have to degenerate into conspiracy". If Louis examines the context, not as it was remembered in subsequent polemics, but as De Leon initially wrote that prediction, he was alleging that in an union movement was not connected to a party it would have to become conspiratorially organized as had been the
Molly Maguires & other previous American union movements.

A few years later, faced with the impact of the strikes the IWW had waged, the capitalist government quite arbitrarily declared the IWW to be a criminal conspiracy and enacted laws against it. The fact of the IWW's connection or non-connection with this or that political party was irrelevant to the issue; had the SLP been as successful & as militant at the time it would undoubtedly too have been similarly penalised.

But De Leon, - since events had not produced any evidence whatsoever of the IWW degenerating along the line of the Molly Maguires, - chose to accept the Government's claim that "criminal syndicalism is a conspiracy" as evidence vindicating his earlier prediction.

It is hardly surprising that the IWW saw this rewriting of the history of the split as an exercise in bad faith & regarded De Leon's eagerness to use government attacks on the IWW to bolster his own arguments, as a cowardly manoeuvre.

De Leon was seen - to use a more modern idiom - to be jumping on a witch-hunter's band-wagon. (Indeed more extreme IWW polemicists actually believed that De Leon had denounced the IWW to the state, & unjustly pressured the government of the IWW's conspiratorial nature.)

Louis - like De Leon - gives no evidence for the claim that because one does not think you can achieve socialism by the ballot box, one must therefore engage in conspiracy. Or, since the word conspiracy is inexact & a capitalist might claim that any desire to overthrow capitalism by whatever means is a conspiracy, that the fact of voting prevents such degeneration.

But the most marked case of dishonest argument comes in the paragraph which Louis chooses to begin with the words "it is perverse logic". For he ends that paragraph: "If they will be discouraged from performing such simple acts as voting, how can they be reliable material for affecting the revolutionary act?" After
he has mentioned that the discouragement comes from revolutionaries who have persuaded those workers concerned that the vote will not achieve anything.

The honesty of Louis's case can simply be tested by considering those who are under the delusion that you can attain socialism by voting for Jesse Jackson. Louis will no doubt attempt to discourage them from so doing. If he is successful, will Jesse's organizers have justice in complaining, "If they will be discouraged from performing such a simple act as voting for Jesse, how can they be reliable material for affecting the revolutionary act?" No, Louis will rightly say, of course not, voting for Jesse would not in the least have advanced socialism. But that is precisely equivalent to the anarchist argument against voting at all.

fraternally

Laurens A. ter

Dear Comrades,

It was interesting to hear from one of the founders of the Third Camp in America in David McReynold's letter in the January issue of DB.

He is right: the three-part series on the international movement ended with the formal winding-up of that movement in February 1958, and no attempt was made to track down successor organisations in US or elsewhere.

Perhaps because of this the concluding paragraphs of the third article may have seemed unfair, even offensive to A.J., Bayard Rustin, Charles Walker and others who were Third Camp pioneers, but who abandoned that organisation in favour of what seemed more promising initiatives. While many of us thought, and still think, that this was a strategic error, it was not intended to dismiss the fine work they later did in civil rights and during the Vietnam War, which we heard about through the media, any more than we would want to dismiss their British comrades continued fight for peace and justice in bodies like CND. None of these were recorded because they were post-3rd Camp/UAW.

A final word to David McReynolds - we didn't know of the 1961 initiative that led to the International Peace Bureau, but some of us here in Britain still remember the loyal and active support given to the 3rd Camp/UAW right up to the end by Arlo Tatun of the WRI.

Yours fraternally,

Friends: I first sent something about "my understanding" of socialism, falling to account for the Socialist Labor Party, which I had previously studied. I r. Braid sent it back, thank you. I agree with his circumspect treatment of the subject (3233, page 19). At this time the media is so thoroughly regulated that you need to vote for the state forever in order to buy the PR to speak against it. Meanwhile, they cheerfully concoct "socialism" (and I must call myself a socialist while attacking Republicanism), and cheerfully call Lebanon or selected violent historical circumstances "anarchy" (I still call myself an anarchist however, meaning no government), and the only term left is libertarian, soon to cheerfully revised with the aid of one more bigger-name politician. So I don't vote right now. But I see only one basic third alternative. "Third force socialism" still seems harmless, in spite of the Trotskyists. At least the reader will wonder what the third alternative actually is. In the meantime, the bulk of my comments can be gotten from me directly. Allen Sawyer; P. O. Box 12272; Gainesville, FL 32601.

Dear Comrades,

It is something of a disappointment to me that the term "industrial feudalism" is not applied to the Soviet Union as well as to world capitalism. Even though De Leon first used the term industrial feudalism, his SLP successors created the expression bureaucratic state despotism in reference to the Soviet Union. Following the crowd, the SLP described a reactionary form of capitalism as fascism but did not explain that fascism is not the same as industrial feudalism because of the absence of a planned economy. What is more, every political state today in a class divided society is bureaucratic and despotic as were political states of the ancient past under feudalism and slavery. The great thinker Thomas Paine said in the second paragraph of COMMON SENSE, "Society in every state is a blessing, but government, even in its best state, is but a necessary evil, in its worse state an intolerable one...." To escape from the contradiction that a Marxist country like the Soviet Union should have a political state, the hope has been held out that the state is dying or withering away. If you look for a quick end to the state, it is supposed to die, but if you believe it will linger longer, it is withering away. Is it possible that the new ruling class of the Soviet Union so aroused the imaginations of Marxists that Socialism was in the air, that the SLP was reluctant to let all the hot air out of their balloon with the sobering description "industrial feudalism?"

We live in a time of crises today as was the case when Thomas Paine wrote COMMON SENSE and his Crisis essays. Today people believe that the capitalist system will not survive another depression because the rate of exploitation of labor is so great and all types of debts overwhelm the creditors. It is believed that an ordinary recession can tip the delicate balance to a full-scale depression because of a trade war and outstanding credit. The awareness of people that a depression is growing worse will transform them into patriots anxious to create their own industrial unions which will be the governing of the new social system. The reality of change for the better made Thomas Paine and his adherents shine. Surely today's reality can make the wretched ones who labor soar to ever greater heights.

Fraternally yours.

Monroe Prussack
In the discussion over the alternatives of free access and labor vouchers, in a socialized economy, it seems to me that a distinction is being missed. The article excerpted from Revolution International is directed against the classical 19th century concept of labor time vouchers, which were advocated by the so-called "collectivists" of that era as a "perfect" means of exchange, that is, one that would reflect labor contributions. I generally agree with the arguments that RI brings to bear against the assumption of trying to measure and compare the "labor contribution" of each person against others.

However, if the advocates of free access think this is sufficient to establish their case, I think they are mistaken. To begin with, I will point out that some of the arguments that RI deploys against the labor voucher scheme could also be brought to bear against free access. Take the problem of cheating. RI asks rhetorically, "What would prevent an enterprise from overstating their hours and thus giving themselves too many vouchers?" Of course, if there were a market system, this would be prevented by the fact that they would be limited to the number of vouchers they receive for their product. But, then, as RI rightly points out, if you have separate enterprises operating in a market economy, you will have an evolution back into capitalism. Why? Because the vagaries of the market are likely to lead to enterprises becoming insolvent. But once enterprises go broke, what becomes of those workers? What is to prevent the workers in other enterprises hiring them as wage-labor? This sort of evolution has happened in recent years among the plywood cooperatives in the Pacific Northwest, where workers are hired as non-members, and paid a lower rate than full members of the coops. This process is the beginnings of class differentiation.

However, critics of free access could also point to the possibility of cheating under that system. What is to prevent individuals or workplaces from knocking off early, doing little work, degrading quality to save themselves some trouble, taking extremely long vacations, or just not working at all? It's true that if everyone did this, social productivity would decline towards zero and nobody would have anything. But the point is, the individual or small group is assuming that everyone else will still continue working as before while they slack off. In other words, this is the so-called "free rider" problem.

Advocates of free access have sometimes tried to avoid the problem of "freeloaders" by making work a requirement of access to the social product. For example, this was the position of Isaac Puente, stated in his book Libertarian Communism, written in the early '30s.
However, there is another problem that afflicts free access, as usually advocated, that is not related to the possibility of cheating or freeloaders. If we are materialists, we will say that a viable replacement for capitalism will not lower the capacity of society to satisfy wants. Society does not willingly retreat to a lower level of productive capability. Or, to put this somewhat differently, the working class will not fight a revolution in order to have a lower material standard of living than it has now. Thus, we have to consider how effective a proposed social structuring would be in satisfying the wants of the populace.

A problem with free access, as typically stated, is that it would very likely lead to misallocation of the community's labor time and resources. That's because it can only register the existence of demand or wants for goods, it can't effectively register relative preferences among possible productive outcomes. In other words, the usual free access idea is that the "signal" to the production organizations that more of a particular product is needed is that it is disappearing from the shelves. But this only tells us that demand for a given product exists.

But effective satisfaction of wants also requires that we know what the preferences are between a given product and other productive possibilities. That's because if the community expands production of X, the worker-hours that go into producing X cannot be used to also produce Y. Any decision about what to produce inevitably involves trade-offs.

For example, if cameras and stereos are disappearing from the shelves, this signals a need to expand production of those items. But when more of the community's labor is soaked up in producing cameras and stereos, that same labor cannot be used to produce shoes and watches. But if everyone in the community is now working to produce things that are disappearing from the shelves, and shortages begin to appear of certain items, say shoes, this would mean that less would have to be produced of other items -- maybe cameras? -- in order to expand shoe production. But how to decide which items we should produce less of? And how much less? If we want a total social product that is most effective in satisfying wants, such decisions must be made on the basis of information about relative preferences of people among various possible goods and services.

Thus, what if we get around this problem by giving all workers a set of votes on what to produce? We could call these "consumption credits". There need not be any assumption that a worker's consumption credits are supposed to measure his/her "labor contribution." We're not talking about trying to find a "perfect" method of exchange here. Since each person would have a finite set of votes in a given period, the use of these credits to acquire goods and services would provide information about the community's cumulative preferences among the possible goods and services.

The basic issue here is information. In order to have a system of production that effectively satisfies the actually existing mix of
wants in the community, it is necessary to know what the relative preferences are among possible outcomes. The usual sort of free access scheme, which merely involves people taking goods off the shelves, cannot provide that kind of information to the producers' organizations.

Advocates of the market typically argue that the consumers' relative preferences among possible outcomes can only be measured by purchases in the market. However, I think this information could be obtained by the production organization in a socialized economy without a market if everyone were given a finite set of consumption vouchers to use in acquiring consumer goods and services. Since the whole social product is owned by everyone, the issue isn't finding a perfect system of exchange, of one worker's labor for another's, but of measuring the cumulative relative preferences for possible productive outcomes. What this really amounts to is a voting system for consumer goods and services, a voting system that allows proportionality to the various preferences that exist within the community.

I'm not sure that this system of "consumption credits" doesn't have hidden defects, just as the labor voucher system does. I'm not sure it is the best alternative, but it's the best alternative I've yet found for getting around the information problem that I've referred to above. If others have a better solution, I'd like to hear about it.

Lastly, in saying that "'my' consumption...is absurd", RI seems to be advocating some scheme of totally collectivized consumption. Though there are certainly many areas where collective consumption can be expanded (e.g. better public transit), there are limits to how "collective" consumption can be since each human exists, inevitably, as an individual organism. If this is not allowed for, then you can end up with schemes that try to impose some sort of barracks-like uniformity on the populace. But, that, too, means a decrease in the material standard of living of the populace. Each person's privacy and freedom of choice is also a part of the quality of their lives.

-- Richard Laubach
One may add to Hunsrig Arbeiter's list of desired demands "anti-family violence", "anti-prostitution", "anti-drug", "anti-pollution", and a host of a thousand demands. Afterall, such demands get the attention of the workers. One can even join the U.S. SWP. The SWP surely beleives such "transitional demands" will get attention and lead the workers by the nose into "socialism"!

Daniel Deleon said the one demand for a socialist republic of labor encompasses all other worthwhile demands for change. This famous dictum never ruled out "socialists" participating in anti-war or other causes but always with the knowledge that we are aiming to destroy all of capitalism and not meerealy its component parts. There was no need then for immediate demands and there is no need now. When our American Revolutionary forefathers had decided to forego all ties with "mother England" they did not list a host of demands. They had only one -- "independence!"

"Thunder"
23 March 1987

Cont'd from p. 2

pamphlet by Workers' Democracy considers the sitdown strike as a contemporary tactic is sections headed "Can There Ever Be a Sitdown Again?" and "A Word to the Wise..." In the former WD raises the discussion from the level of militant unionism one finds in most radical treatments of sitdown strikes to that of revolutionary change. See the ad on page 10 for ordering information.

TWO TEXTS FOR DEFINING THE COMMUNIST PROGRAMME by L.L. Men. In the "two texts," one dealing with state capitalism and the other with developments in Russia from 1917 to 1921, the author carries on a polemic with the political grouping he is closest to ideologically, the International Communist Current. A quick skimming of the book shows it to be lucidly written with insights available only to someone able to read Chinese Communist documents; 289 pages; 4L/US $5 from International Correspondence, P.O. Box 44007, Shaukeiwan Post Office, Hong Kong.

SOCIALISM AS A PRACTICAL ALTERNATIVE; this 36-page pamphlet, we were told in DB20, will contain the answers to questions raised by the Socialist Party of Great Britain's pamphlet, FROM CAPITALISM TO SOCIALISM, reviewed in DB18. I hope to have a review in the next issue. In the meantime the pamphlet is available for 30 pence from the SPGB, 52 Clapham High Street, London SW4 7UN, England. [Send a dollar bill and ask for it air mail.]

THE BATTLE OF DEMOCRACY: CONFLICT CONSENSUS AND THE INDIVIDUAL by Keith Graham. This full-length book (261 pages, Weathshef Books), written by a SPGB member and containing a section applying Marxism to
democratic theory, deserves a full-length review, which I hope will appear in an early DB; in the meantime: L8.95 from Melvin Tenner, Books on Politics, 51 Gayford Road, London W12 9BY, England.

LITTLE FREE PRESS (Food for Thought Since 1969) This is a series of free leaflets printed on 14 inch paper. The publisher of this long-running series, Ernest Mann, clearly belongs to our political sector judging by his advocacy of free access and a stateless social system. The series includes correspondence, numbers 58 and 59 featuring Adam Buick. Free from 2714 1st Av. S., Minneapolis, MN 55408.