DISARM!

Staff: John Demeter.

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INTRODUCTION

When Ronald Reagan charged in early October that participants in the American "nuclear freeze" movement were "being manipulated by those who seek to weaken the United States," it was a scene reminiscent of the 60s. At that time, similarly clever charges ("agents of a foreign power") were tossed in the midst of Civil Rights and anti-war movements. Their purpose remains twofold: to confuse the issues raised by a large growing social movement; and, by appealing to an endemic nationalism, to isolate those within the movements who seek to bring about radical social change.

Following the articles in Radical America's Spring, 1982 Special issue (Vol. 16, Nos. 1-2), we are continuing to address in these pages the program, content and direction of the disarmament movement in the United States. It is our clear intent to pose, urgently and provocatively, the need for the American left to enter the movement and its debates. For the many already involved, we offer what we hope are perspectives that will push this broad movement closer to transforming this society rather than being coopted by it.

While "conventional" wars from Central America, to the South Atlantic, to the Middle East, have commanded most of the world press' attention these past few months, the social and political shock waves from the massive mobilization against war of the nuclear variety continue to reverberate throughout Europe and North America.
The Reagan reaction is but one small litmus of the effects of a groundswell that has reached a crossroads in its life.

In RA’s previous discussion of the movement, we raised the need to incorporate a feminist and anti-imperialist perspective in both the structure and program of the disarmament forces. We primarily drew on experiences of activists within the Boston campaign to mobilize for the June 12 U.N. Second Special Session on Disarmament rally in New York. That those questions continue to be addressed by the movement is a small but hopeful sign. It is also critically important that left media continues confronting the racism duplicated in some of the disarmament mobilizations. This latter question surfaced most openly in the New York June 12 preparations with the strained attempts to include Third World forces in the rally program and planning.

Our intent with the articles included in this issue is to recognize the nature of the differences that have surfaced and reflect on their implications for socialists and feminists. We need to reflect on the lessons of the mobilizations of the last two decades if we are to avoid the marginalization of women and radicals and previous failures to overcome race and class barriers. Additionally, the disarmament movement needs to realize that its form, constituency and program are all laden with political meaning and intent. Challenges to hierarchical structures within a group or coalition, linkage of disarmament to intervention and the nuclear staging ground known as “conventional war,” and preferences for grassroots rather than electoral arenas, should be considered equally with the agendas of mainstream organizations.

This is no easy task. The American left is a small force intervening in a movement representing a broad cross-section of the populace. So, while polls, referenda and mobilizations across the country reflect a large and deepening awareness of the ghastly consequences of “cold war” strategy or “mutually assured destruction,” they also belie an openness to manipulation by this country’s military and government. As for most of our 37 year co-existence with “the bomb,” the population has been plied with images of a Russian bogeyman who stole a secret that “God” placed in our hands, as Harry Truman would have us believe. If Russia represents an illogical superpower bent on world destruction, what does America’s role in the arms race portray? Are we not a country that has considered the use of atomic weapons

“To reverse the momentum of arms spending in the United States requires, in the end, a new social and political order—perhaps one alien to many mustering to the freeze movement. A broad movement must self-evidently, remain broad, but the demands of “consensus” should not extinguish politically debate or seemingly uncomfortable propositions.” Alexander Cockburn and James Ridgeway, Village Voice, June 15, 1982.

“. . . Not that we must accept the Freeze as an end in itself, or embrace ‘conventional’ militarism as an alternative to nuclear militarism. The point is simply that with extinction hanging over us we must set aside our differences in order to insure our common survival. Ideological bickering is inappropriate when two-thirds of the American people favor a weapons freeze. After all, in order to reverse directions we must first stop going in the wrong direction.” Letter to the editor, It’s About Times, Sept.-Oct. 1982.

“Unilateral?
Bilateral?
Either way,
We’re the Collateral!” Sign at June 12 rally for disarmament, New York.
in Indochina, Korea, Cuba, North Vietnam and the Middle East—despite continual first strike denials!

The history of U.S. participation in the arms race, as outlined in Marcy Darnovsky’s “Let’s Fake a Deal:” directly challenges those 37 years of Cold War rhetoric and manipulation. More urgently, it also challenges the logic of such electoral double-speak as the Ted Kennedy freeze proposal that would substitute a conventional military build up for the nuclear arsenal. Any honest appraisal of the recent British-Argentinian showdown and the carnage visited upon Lebanon by Israel should call into question the callous military-minded estimation of “tolerable” death-counts and casualties that logically extends to nuclear overkill. What is to restrain these and other members of the Western nuclear family as they reassert colonial muscles in the face of severe economic and social and political problems at home? At what point is a trade-off estimated to save the lives of white soldiers at the expense of darker-skinned “examples”—the rationale for Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

As Tom Athanasiou points out in “Cure for the Common Cold War,” the disarmament mobilization in Europe offers one of the greatest possibilities for dismantling the Cold War by challenging that continent’s relationship to the United States. His summary of the European Nuclear Disarmament (END) conference in Brussels and his report on the peace movements in the NATO countries suggests issues that the American peace movement will need to quickly assess.

Athanasiou’s report offers clear suggestions for a truly international program to challenging present sites of social and political power. He also carefully draws out the obscuring of imperialist influences in the Third World engendered by some of the proposals for “European autonomy.”

While Americans and Europeans are equally haunted by the fear of instant annihilation—the ultimate crime in the streets, it is the latter who can draw upon memories of war-time crossfire to oppose this reemergence in the American Pershing and Cruise missile plan. In response, Western Europeans have organized the largest demonstrations in their history. Representation at disarmament conferences, like the one in Brussels, spans Eastern bloc and NATO countries. Such a rapid change in the political landscape has now emerged fullscale in this country: last June’s massive rally in New York followed mobilizations across the nation. Hundreds of cities and towns, and now entire states, have gone on record in support of a “nuclear freeze.” The “freeze” has become an issue in the upcoming off-year congressional elections—second only in importance to the “referendum” on Reagonomics. As with the issues of the 1960s, it challenges a divided ruling class and it’s structure and relation to other classes and other nations.

Unlike the other movements of past history, the peace initiative is more exclusively based (at least, originally) in predominantly white professional and religious sectors. It is propelled by “self interest” more than grand egalitarian or humanitarian goals. It is a movement correctly perceiving that time is short. It has clear blind-spots. A number of those are presented in Marcy Darnovsky’s “Smile and Say Freeze.” Her humorous, but hard-hitting commentary, reflects her experience as an anti-nuclear power activist.

As for the crossroads that the peace movement is approaching, it is as laden with hope and with anxiety. Protest and survive is a catchy but apocryphal rallying slogan. But if the hor-
rors of war are to be fully addressed, the jockeying of our nation’s youth in the nuclear-conventional war sweepstakes known as the draft should be taken up. Native American protests over uranium mining and Southern black resistance to hazardous waste disposal are linked to a nuclear industry that simultaneously feeds on natural resources and, in eliminating its waste, violates the same land. Similarly, the peace movement must move beyond the inability to address racism and sexism as the experiences in New York and Boston reveal. It is a movement that confronts a population filled with intense feelings of anger, frustration and, not insignificantly, some openness to radical ideas.

In the midst of a worldwide economic crisis, military and nuclear madness stand as clear examples of priorities that have fed the crisis. We need only point to the facts that per capita expenses for soldiers average $19,300 worldwide as compared to $380 spent on a school-age child’s education. Or that for every 100,000 people there are 556 soldiers and only 85 physicians. 32 countries spend more for military purposes than for education and health care combined.

A narrow unity in the peace movement will ultimately undercut any ability to address the causes of war rather than simply its byproducts. And, it is three minutes to midnight.

CORRECTION
In issue 16:1-2, two pages of Rosalind Petchesky’s article “Woman’s Body, Woman’s Right and the Current Reproductive Rights Movement” were reversed in layout. Page 158 through the first full paragraph on page 159 should be moved to the end of the article as it now stands to restore the author’s original order. This shift in the order in which the article was laid out, as you will see, also shifted the author’s emphasis and political intention. We apologize for this error.

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IMPEDIAMOLO

Hans Erni, Let Us Stop It, 1954
SMILE AND SAY "FREEZE"

Marcy Darnovsky

If you can forgive me for dispensing with unnecessary politeness, I'll try not to carp and whine. I'll make my criticisms of the Freeze campaign frankly yet in a comradely manner. I'll maintain a spirit of cooperation and openness — even though the Freezers refuse to take a stand against nuclear power, after we spent years trying to make the connection. Oops. This might be harder than I think.

Not that I'm completely against the Freeze. It deserves credit for having focused public opinion, put nuclear war in the headlines, and given Teddy Kennedy a shot at rejuvenating the Democratic Party.

And I'm honored to be part of a movement that embraces ex-CIA directors, ex-members of the National Security Council, and retired rear admirals. Then there's that nice Republican couple I read about in the San Francisco Chronicle — the ones with the $450,000 home in Orange County who were inspired to action when they realized that a nuclear war might not be so good for the property values. Is this what they mean by appealing to the lowest common denominator?

The Freeze really does have something for everybody. It gives liberals the moral capital (and, if the predicted flood of contributions materializes, the real stuff) that wins elections. It gives the bishops a chance to emulate the political relevance of their Polish and Latin American counterparts. For scientists who have spent their whole lives dreaming up monstrous new weapons systems, and retired admirals like Hyman Rickover who spent his
whole life building the nuclear Navy, it provides a late-hour salve for troubled consciences and a last-minute claim to be Men of Peace.

Well, at least we know we’re not alone. To paraphrase an ex-poet, when Hyman Rickover’s scared, I’m scared.

If Teddy Kennedy gets his Freeze — the one he says will require a substantial buildup of conventional arms and armies — even the military will get what it wants. With the Falklands fresh in their minds, the Pentagon planners might well warm up to the Freeze. After all, it would ensure that there will always be wars they can actually fight.

Sure there are a lot of sincere and intelligent disarmers in the Freeze campaign, along with the cynical manipulators and professional bandwagon-jumpers. I don’t go in for guilt by association. But I have noticed the phenomenon of timidity by association, myopia by association, and liberalism by association. I’ve seen a lot of worry about respectability and little cultivation of rebelliousness.

There is a peculiar evangelistic flavor to disarmament respectability. Who would have thought all those hard-nosed, socially responsible professionals would find the faith at a pediatrician’s revivals?

Not that the Freezers can be held responsible for Helen Caldicott’s Joan-of-Arc complex. Caldicott’s antipolitical hysteria and her mother-cult tirades are a step beyond the general level of moral frenzy.

Yet the Freeze too is grounding its appeal in horror and fear. Tricky business. True, some people will be frightened into fighting back. Others will freeze (no pun intended) and wait for the danger to go away. There are also those who will thrive on the titillation that accompanies recitations of disaster. Like other wars, the Cold War and the threat of nuclear war overwhelm the dissatisfaction that otherwise brew social conflict. Even if nuclear apocalypse never makes it as a national pastime, despair therapy may come to compete with est.

Sour grapes notwithstanding, I’ve got to say that the Freeze is very good at getting into the newspapers. Why, it took Three Mile Island for the anti-nuclear-power movement to get a fraction of the attention. But that was a movement with distracting features like grass-roots organization and silly ideas like participatory democracy. Well, at least the leaders of the Freeze don’t try to push the rank and file around. They seem satisfied if you sign the petition and go home till Election Day.

At the risk of seeming petty and picayune, what do we get if we get a Freeze? There’s still that little matter of 25,000 American nuclear warheads — the ones that can destroy every Soviet city with a population over 100,000 forty times over. And from what I understand, the Russians have a few megatons themselves.

Then there are those “conventional” weapons — napalm and other chemical unpleasantness, biological scourges, firestorms. Among this arsenal are the weapons that have actually been used since World War II, to the tune of 25 million deaths.

If we get a Freeze, have we thwarted the Cold War? Have we challenged the superpowers’ ability to use their arsenals to absorb the rest of the world into their market nexus?

Yes, I know. You’ve got to start somewhere. The Freeze is a first step. Seems to me, though, that if you want people to stick around for the second step, you’d encourage some analysis and insight into the social institutions that are supported by the Bomb and that serve it so well.

There have been great upsurges of popular revulsion against nuclear war before this one. They too were apolitical, substituting fear and moral fervor for analysis. And they faded away like the hula hoop.

The most heartbreaking example is the large campaign against nuclear testing that persisted throughout the late fifties and early sixties. This movement focused on the health hazards of radio-
active fallout, and in 1963 won a reprieve from atmospheric testing with the partial test ban treaty. A victory to be sure. But the treaty merely moved the testing underground, away from the narrow vision of the antitesting forces.

The movement also failed to notice that the military’s terms for agreeing to the treaty were stiff: promises of greatly increased levels of spending, research, and development. The partial test ban treaty turned out to be an excuse for new spirals in the arms race. The terms of this devil’s bargain weren’t clear until afterwards, but by then the movement was nowhere to be seen.

The Freeze’s single-issue focus is less extreme. It is willing to consider the effects of nuclear weapons. But the Freeze campaign makes no attempt to deal with their causes or political underpinnings. It’s still disarmament in a vacuum.

Now that I’m getting warmed up, just who’s running this Freeze anyway? All I know is what I read in the newspapers — that the millionaire who funds the California campaign says he likes to call the shots. And that he doesn’t like people with radical ideas, especially not in his movement. According to one of the pitches that came in the mail, “there is no way that even the most distorted mind can call these [Freeze supporters] ‘crackpots’ or radicals.”

Well, I can take a hint as well as the next crackpot. But I do think the antiwar movement of the sixties and the anti-nuclear-power movement of the seventies (along with Ronald Reagan) can take some credit for the current nuclear concern.

And I was hoping that the new upsurge would provide an opportunity for discussion about the social systems that create the nukes and use them to enforce wage slavery, hierarchical control, and geopolitical domination. I did wish that the moral fervor would create some room for intellectual passion and social imagination. That the debate would move beyond slogans as well as statistics. That the causes of war, as well as its consequences, would be considered.

I’m not asking for anything fancy. Just a little space in which to explore some slightly radical ideas. A little niche in the movement will do. Something a bit bigger than a bomb shelter.
LET'S FAKE A DEAL

A History of Arms Control

Marcy Darnovsky

At long last the public's passions have been aroused and aimed at the horrors of nuclear war. But an aroused populace is not necessarily a discerning one, and groundswells driven by fear and moral fervor can quickly ebb away or be sidetracked by image manipulation from on high.

The growing ranks of disarmers have already forced Reagan to temper his overconfident bellicosity and to advance "bold new" arms control proposals. While he is still drawing deeply from the bag of tricks filled with missile gaps, windows of vulnerability, and the-Russians-are-coming, the president has opened a second sack of illusions. This one, every bit as well-worn as the first, contains heartfelt declarations of shared goals and promises of negotiations for arms reductions.

The majority of disarmers will see through the crude sleight-of-hand that Reagan is proposing: to proceed with a vast military buildup while talk about reductions soothes the public. Administration officials have said as much. On May 8, they described Reagan's proposals as "an effort to turn public attention away from the antinuclear movements in the United States and Western Europe."

Other politicians have come up with "arms control" schemes only fractionally less
obscene than Reagan's. Ted Kennedy, for example, supports a nuclear freeze — in exchange for increases in conventional arms and armies. There will be many more proposals.

The coming arms control extravaganza represents nothing new. Between World War II and 1980, officials of the US and the Soviet Union met more than six thousand times to discuss arms control. Yet the superpowers have not been able to agree on eliminating a single existing weapon. The nuclear buildup has survived a test ban treaty, an ABM treaty, a SALT I and a SALT II. It has weathered storms of public protest almost as easily as it has bloomed in the more common climate of apathy. Instead of reversing the arms race, the six thousand meetings have institutionalized it.

In the course of all this talk, there have been only a few fleeting episodes in which the superpowers came close to even partially diverting the arms race. These moments of opportunity were found and lost in each side's shifting perceptions of its military and political advantage. And each side has kept at least one eye focused on its image as a seeker of peace, a focus that sharpens considerably, as it is sharpening today, whenever protest erupts.

A History of Illusion

In the service of the status quo, history is best obliterated while illusion is made resilient and recyclable. Taking advantage of this modern axiom, Vice President Bush pointedly recalled in an April speech that just after World War II a generous American proposal for stopping the arms race before it started was met with "a loud 'nyet.'"

It is true that many Americans at that time were anxious to bring the atom under cooperative international control. Even before the 1945 attack on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, some of the scientists who created the Bomb tried to prevent the dizzying nuclear arms race they correctly predicted it would set off.

In June of that year, a group of them submitted a memorandum known as the Franck Report to Secretary of War Stimson, asking that the first public demonstration of an atomic explosion take place on a remote deserted site rather than over a Japanese city. The report also suggested that the US then renounce the use of this weapon if other nations would do the same. These suggestions were not given serious consideration.

After the Hiroshima and Nagasaki devastation, more scientists, a significant percentage of the public, and even some politicians concluded that the secret of the atom must be shared among all
the nations of the world if disaster was to be avoided. Stimson himself, who had supported the bombings, proposed an “atomic partnership” with the Russians.

But other policymakers had quite different ideas. General Leslie Groves, the military overseer of the wartime bomb project, was typical of those who pushed for a hefty military share in the control of the atom. This was the same crew that strongly opposed international cooperation in nuclear development. A debate between them and proponents of civilian and international control raged for months in Congress.

One of the lobbying methods of the Groves group was to whip up public hysteria with scare stories about the need to protect the “secret of the atom” from Russian “atom spies.” In reality, “technical secrets” were of secondary importance. The basic principles of atomic explosions were known to scientists from many countries, and American scientists testified that the Russians would have the Bomb within a few years. (What was kept secret was an ambitious and inevitably futile effort directed by Groves to corner the world’s supplies of uranium and thorium.)

In 1946, Congress passed the Atomic Energy Act, making it illegal for American scientists to continue to share nuclear information even with England or Canada — whose scientists and engineers had made large contributions to the wartime effort that produced the Bomb, and who, after all, were America’s closest allies. The act also gave the military much of the control over nuclear development that it wanted.

Still, there continued to be so much high-level sentiment for international control of the atom that the US submitted to the United Nations what now seems a drastically liberal proposal. The first version of what later became known as the Baruch Plan declared that the United States was willing to submit to a world authority for the Atomic Era.

The Soviet Union was not impressed. Some historians attribute its wariness solely to Stalin’s paranoia. The fact is that the “world authority” would have been constituted through the United Nations, which at that time was effectively controlled by the Americans. Soviet suspicions grew — with growing reason — as the plan went through several revisions, each considerably less magnanimous than the last.

One of the early but already fatally flawed versions of the plan was drawn up by a group of scientists, military men and executives from corporations which had played key roles in the Bomb’s development. The major drawback of this plan was a requirement that the Soviet Union immediately hand over control of its uranium deposits to the “international authority.” The US was asked only to promise to share its nuclear secrets and stop producing bombs at some unspecified future date, whenever the international body could agree on a permanent treaty.

The plan was further butchered when President Truman chose financier Bernard Baruch to translate it into “more workable” terms. Baruch’s yet-more-hawkish group insisted on a provision for “swift and sure punishment” of any nation that violated the ban on nuclear development. This threat was clearly aimed at the Soviets, who had already begun a frantic scramble for a nuke of their own.

In the words of journalist I. F. Stone, by this time the proposal “must have seemed to Moscow the blueprint for a world capitalist super-state in which the US would retain its atomic monopoly behind the facade of an international organization under US control.” Dean Acheson, then undersecretary of state and one of the authors of the plan, admitted years later that the Baruch revisions “meant certain defeat of the treaty by Soviet veto.”

The Soviet counter-proposal, offered by its UN delegate, Andrei Gromyko, called for the destruction of all nuclear weapons in existence and the
cessation of their production. The American response came four days before the formal rejection. On July 1, 1946, the US set off its first postwar test explosion over Bikini Atoll.

Alva Myrdal, a Swedish diplomat who spent twelve years as an arms controller and then wrote a book called The Game of Disarmament: How the United States and Russia Run the Arms Race, writes of this period, "The pattern . . . had been set: both sides would present proposals for disarmament agreements, of often wholesale dimensions, but would be careful to see to it that those would contain conditions which the opposite side could not accept."

The A-Bomb's Big Brother

The next serious sidling up to arms control came in 1955, after the arms race had gained considerable momentum. The Soviets had exploded their first atomic bomb in 1949. The US detonated the first hydrogen bomb, massively larger than the fission type, in 1952; the USSR matched this feat a year later.

Arms negotiations had been stuck for years on the issue of inspection of military sites: the US accused the Soviets of wanting disarmament without inspection, while the Soviets felt that US proposals called for inspection without disarmament.

Then, on May 10, in the middle of arms control

Ellen Shub, Hiroshima Survivor, June 12, 1982
talks being held in London, the Soviet Union suddenly announced it would agree to the West's plan for international inspection of nuclear sites and to its figures for ceilings on conventional armies. These proposed limits on armed forces were attractive to the Soviets because of their fear that West Germany, which had joined NATO on May 5, was about to rebuild a large army. The Soviets virtually plagiarized their new position from British and French proposals, which in turn closely reflected the American negotiating position.

European diplomats were jubilant at the breakthrough. "It's almost too good to be true," the French delegate enthused. The American and British delegates both issued statements confirming that the Soviet proposals were in large measure the same as theirs.

In Washington, however, the response was strangely restrained. Perhaps because its arms control offers had not been meant to be taken seriously, the US made a startling turnaround of its own. President Eisenhower began making speeches questioning the wisdom of letting Soviets inspect US military sites. After a recess, the US delegate returned to the London negotiations to announce the withdrawal of every previous American proposal — including the ones that were so close to what the Soviets now said they'd go along with.

The Soviets had agreed to every substantial American condition, and the response from the US was that it hadn't really meant it that way. It was this "no," not a "nyet," which scuttled the closest approach to a real arms control agreement ever.

Shortly afterward, a new factor entered the arms control equation. Popular protest against nuclear weapons, which had been extremely muted during the decade following the war, made an appearance.

Fear of Fallout

The catalyzing event for the protest was a 1954 American nuclear test on the Bikini Atoll. Fallout from the multimegaton explosion, blown by the wind in an unanticipated direction, rained onto hundreds of Marshall Islanders and a Japanese fishing boat called the Lucky Dragon. The Marshallese were quickly moved to another island by the US Navy, but many fell ill. (They and their children continue to feel the effects of their exposure to this day.) All the Japanese fishermen got radiation sickness, and one died of it six months later.
The fate of the Lucky Dragon touched off an investigation of the health effects of radioactive fallout. Many prominent scientists, including Albert Einstein and Linus Pauling, supported the disturbing findings, which launched nearly a decade of protest against atmospheric testing.

Unfortunately, the danger from the use of nuclear bombs on real targets was either too little understood or too overwhelming to be targeted by the antitesting campaign. It was the cancer predictions and the strontium-90 in the baby’s milk that evoked a frenzy of fear and widespread dissent.

The peace movement picked up the ball and ran. It looked like a winning strategy: concentrate on the fallout, downplay the possibility of nuclear holocaust, and ignore the politics of the arms race.

By the late fifties, a campaign to push for a comprehensive test ban treaty was well under way. It won the backing of significant majorities in the United States, Western and Eastern Europe, Japan, and many other countries. In Britain, ban-the-bomb sentiment grew into a movement, with sit-ins, rallies, and huge demonstrations like the Aldermaston Easter March in 1960.

A group of “nonaligned” countries, responding to anti-Bomb sentiment in their own backyards, worked out a detailed plan for a comprehensive test ban treaty. Most nonnuclear countries declared themselves willing to sign a multilateral ban, despite the fact that it would hamper their efforts to develop nuclear weapons and would thereby institutionalize the superpowers’ monopoly.

The protests and negotiations lasted for several years. These were years during which the arms race passed several important mileposts of escalation, with unfortunately little reaction from the testing-preoccupied protest movement. The superpowers first stopped the atmospheric tests, then, led by the Soviets, started them again. The Soviets launched the Sputnik and shot down an American U-2 plane secretly spying over its territory; Eisenhower warned of the military-industrial complex; Kennedy invented a fictional “missile gap” and faced down Khrushchev in the Cuban missile crisis.

The Arms Race Goes Underground

Finally, in 1963, the Soviets again backed down on a long-held negotiating position. This time they gave up their insistence that an agreement cover all kinds of testing. Abandoning the ongoing multilateral efforts to achieve a comprehensive test ban, the US and the USSR began bilateral talks in Moscow. Within weeks, they had concocted a partial test ban treaty.

The partial ban merely moved the tests underground. It was by no means a barrier to further nuclear development on either side: the US was already setting off more test explosions underground or underwater than in the atmosphere.

Not only did the partial treaty fail to contain the arms race, it wound up clearing the way for its escalation. Despite the fact that Khrushchev had given in to Kennedy’s terms, right-wing politicians in the US accused the president of being soft on the Commies. The support of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was finally won by the administration’s argument that forcing the tests underground, where they are more difficult and expensive, would hamper the Soviet nuclear advance far more than the American one. But the real selling point for the hawks was Kennedy’s pledge of lots of new, more sophisticated weapons.

As limited as the treaty was, and as sweetened with promises of arms escalation, it met with resistance in the Senate. George McGovern finally exclaimed in exasperation that “the Administration has been called upon to give so many assurances of our continued nuclear efforts . . . that a casual observer might assume that we are approving this treaty so that we can accelerate the arms race and beef up the war-making facilities of our country!”

To most people, this judgment was not so clear.
at the time. Alva Myrdal, who had been instrumental in the multilateral push for a comprehensive ban, remembers, “I only gradually experienced this fateful turn of events as a rude awakening. So hopeful were we that we euphorically hailed this agreement as of utmost importance. We took it for granted, as we were told, that it was the first step towards the discontinuance of all testing of nuclear weapons.” Later, Myrdal wrote that the partial ban “can hardly be considered among disarmament measures,” though “it should be given some credit as a public health measure.”

The partial test ban was greeted by the peace movement as its greatest victory. The campaign that had fed on the fear of fallout swallowed the treaty hook, line, and sinker. Then, unprepared to deal with any but the narrowest of nuclear concerns, it practically vanished.

In the following years, underground testing proved adequate for the development of all kinds of new weapons. The most destabilizing of these were MIRVs, multiple independently targeted reentry vehicles, which allow a single missile to deliver numerous nuclear warheads to different targets. Because the number of warheads per missile can no longer be easily verified and because their precision makes possible a first strike against the other side’s strategic missiles, MIRVs helped make arms control more unlikely than ever.

“Why SALT Spells Fraud”

Starting in 1967 and through the seventies, arms control centered on the Strategic Arms Limitations Talks (SALT). Two superpower agreements, together known as SALT I, were reached in 1972: one limiting the deployment of antiballistic missiles and another limiting the increase in strategic arms (nuclear-tipped missiles with intercontinental range). SALT II, signed in 1974 but never ratified by the US Senate, established a ceiling on the number of MIRVs each side was allowed.

None of the SALT agreements meant elimination or even reductions of weapons. On the contrary, in the words of Myrdal, “there is only haggling over marginal differences in their continued increase.” In fact, the ceilings to which the superpowers agreed were amazingly close to the numbers they had planned to deploy anyway. No limitations at all were placed on tactical (short-range) or conventional weapons or on qualitative improvements of strategic missiles or warheads. Work on the cruise missile, one of the most destabilizing new weapons of the last decade, was begun after the SALT I agreement was signed. According to Fred Kaplan (Boston Globe, July 19, 1982), the cruise program was funded by the Nixon administration “as a bargaining chip to strengthen the US hand in SALT II negotiations.”

(The cruise is a small, jet-powered missile that is supposed to be able to evade radar detection by flying close to the ground with the aid of a terrain-following computer guidance system.)

One difference between SALT and earlier arms control agreements is the extent to which commentators immediately saw it as a charade. In 1969, three years before the first treaty was signed, I. F. Stone wrote an article called “Why SALT Spells Fraud.”

Myrdal commented, “By no stretch of the imagination can SALT II be called arms limitation. Instead it is a mutually agreed continuation of the arms race, regulated and institutionalized.”

Keep On Talking

Although arms control is little more than what Stone calls a “theater of delusion,” we can expect endless curtain calls. Talk about arms control will keep pace with new rounds in the arms race.

The arms control ritual allows each superpower to hail its valiant efforts for peace, efforts (each one laments) that have been tragically foiled by the other side. The basic decency of each govern-
A strong movement needs a strong movement press.

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The blood of their people runs rivers down my face
My stomach wrenches from the hideousness of their suffering
Head bursts with shrieks for their dead,
    shouts in the streets of their villages
Mere survival
    Land and liberation buried deep in crumbling wall
    Once hope, now artifact

And the invaders smile for the photographers
    Arrogant, boastful
My people — of blood and history —
    but are the Palestinians not my people, too?
Were your plots on the West Bank not disgrace enough?
    elected mayors exiled
    universities slammed shut
    demonstrators slain in the streets
The master (by what right?) could tolerate no resistance
And still the Palestinians continue
    to say their names
    to defend their past
    to crave their homeland
    to demand their state
    to call you killer
    to dream of freedom
    to breathe
    and so, to struggle

What’s that I hear you say?
“Once again the Jew who cares more for the causes of others
    than the suffering of her own people.”
“Like others before you, naive American woman,
    you are lulled by the quiet,
    and do not listen for the whispers only a Jew can hear.”
Did I not cry the years of my youth
for parents and grandparents
died Warsaw, Auschwitz, Treblinka?
Have I not heard the screams in the silence?
“Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas!”
“Happy Easter!”
“That pushy Jew!”
“Did he Jew you down?”
“What Holocaust?!”
Do I not know that our struggle, like that of my sex,
will follow me all the days of my life?

As we survived our holocaust,
among the most wretched the earth has known,
As we survived our holocaust,
will they not survive this brutal massacre?
It will win us no safety
no freedom
no friends
no pride
You, my people, are too blinded by your fears
blinded by our past
blinded by your “mission”
blinded by your jets
blinded by your “allies” and their press

You say you roll the tanks in the name of all Jews
“My name?,” you ask

Mine be Shame today

— Sharon Kurtz

6/82
A CURE FOR THE COMMON COLD WAR:

The European Resistance to the New Missiles and the American Peace Movement

Tom Athanasiou

The backpacks piled in the lobby of the European Parliament building in Brussels were a mark of the meeting’s success. The three-day convention of European Nuclear Disarmament (END) — held in these chambers to take advantage of translation facilities — had drawn about a thousand peace activists, some from as far away as Iceland and Turkey. END hadn’t intended to make any big decisions or arrive at any grand strategy. Its purpose was to bring together different sectors of the movement and provide a place for them to meet each other.

The END conference followed a year in which international coordination among the peace movements of Europe grew rapidly. Demonstration dates are already coordinated internationally for maximum effect, and two organizations (END and the Dutch Interchurch Peace Council, IKV) act as channels for movement networking and coordination. Neither plans to evolve into a decision-making body, but joint planning has been shown to be both possible and desirable. The next END convention has already been announced — a full week in May 1983 in West Berlin. There is sure to be more emphasis on strategy at that one — Cruise missile deployment, scheduled to start next September in Greenham...
Common in Britain, will be just around the corner.

Movement Overview

Many commentators have noted the role of the Reagan administration’s bellicosity in frightening the Europeans into action. Certainly his comments in August 1981 about fighting a limited nuclear war in Europe were highly catalytic. But fear of American militarism isn’t the only ingredient simmering in the European peace movement. There is fear of the Russians too, a fear that is stronger in the wake of the Polish crackdown. There is the complex desire for “European autonomy” from the bloc system in which Europeans have been trapped since Yalta. There is the confluence between this desire and the interests of European capital, which, with the slow, grinding advance of the “recession,” are increasingly divergent from the interests of the Americans. Finally, and perhaps in the end most importantly, there is the new kind of political opposition that is developing in the European peace movement, an opposition that has drawn in not only preexisting anti-military groups, but the “new social movements” as well.

The European peace movement is wonderfully diverse in its radical traditions. There are Social Democratic members of parliament and Communist Party bureaucrats, but there are also Green Party nonleftist eco-radicals, pacifist feminists, liberal professionals against annihilation, and anarcho antimilitarists. All of them are against the new missiles, and together with the hundreds of thousands of ordinary people who fill out the demonstrations, they constitute a movement that has already fundamentally altered the European political scene.

Do all these different kinds of activists have trouble working together? The answer is “Yes, but...” Yes because there are real disagreements about emphasis, organization, and style, and but because, on the whole, the European peace movement seems more able than the American movemen—
two groups would not be without its occasional quarrels. This was obvious right from the opening plenary, when a seemingly never-ending stream of statements from dignitaries provoked some of the bluejean-attired conventioneers to come to the stage and post signs — in five languages — calling for “more action, less talk.”

This opening plenary was recognized by everyone as a mistake. Even Stewart Holland, the British Labor Party activist who chaired it, felt that the politicians should perhaps have been scheduled to appear at the opening press conference. This might have pacified them without provoking so much unease among the rank-and-file activists — many of whom were coming directly from small towns and local organizing efforts.

The most clearly articulated frustration with the parliamentary tone of the plenaries came from the women of the Greenham Common protest camp in Britain. This camp, now about nine months old, is located directly outside the construction area of what is scheduled to be the first Cruise missile deployment site. The Greenham women criticized the proceedings in terms unfortunately confined to a rather simple-minded feminism (“male-dominated”), and then sang one of their protest songs. They were well received by the crowd.

Wandering in the lobby a little later, I heard a concrete suggestion for how to deal with the politicians. Let them organize a “Politicians for Social Responsibility” and send delegates to meetings. That’s good enough for the doctors, the scientists, and the “Generals for Peace.”

But on the whole, frictions such as these were balanced by tolerance. There is a strong feeling in END, as among many European activists, that the parliamentarians must be involved in the movement. As I was told many times, this is necessary to ensure that the pressures being generated in the streets are translated into action at the state level. Jorn Lambert from Agenor — the Belgian group that hosted the convention — felt that such action is essential “so that all these thousands who are marching for the first time will not get disillusioned and drift towards cynicism, apathy, and the Right.”

Yet this perception is balanced by a very high level of sensitivity to the danger that involvement in state politics could disempower the movement. As many times as I heard that the state must be forced to respond to the pressures from the mass movement, I heard twice as often of the movement’s need to maintain its “independence.” The Dutch IKV, for example, is far less oriented toward the Socialist parliamentarians than is END, and even within END there is disagreement about the role of the left parties. Edward Thompson, who is less than happy with the degree to which parliamentarians have become involved, was not present at the Brussels convention.

One conference participant told me that, since the European movement is so diverse and dynamic at the local level, people are “aware of the need for independence, but not worried about losing it.” Even the Italians, whose peace movement has developed within the context of a largely party-dominated left scene, were quick to stress the importance of nonparty groups within the movement, as well as its overall independence.

Mediterranean Perspectives — Spain

A month before the convention I had been in Spain, where I had glimpsed the divergence between a local antimilitary movement and its parliamentary echo. Spain had just joined NATO under terms less than pleasing to the great majority: the present center-right government, put on notice by the landslide victory of the Andalusian Socialists that it will soon be losing power, joined NATO precipitously in June, presumably on the theory that it is easier to join NATO than to quit. A survey published in El País on October 20, 1981,
showed that only 18 percent of the population favored the move.

The Spanish Socialists continually proclaim that they will withdraw from NATO as soon as they take power, but not everyone believes them. The left wing of the party would certainly withdraw, but the leadership declared its support for NATO even as it declared its opposition to Spain’s entry. The anti-NATO movement itself consists of a few left-wing parties (but not the Socialists), ecologists, conscientious objectors, and others. They are organized in a manner more reminiscent of the Anarchist tradition than the left parties, with only loose national coordination and highly autonomous regional committees. Several activists from these committees predicted that the Socialists would simply try to extract some political concessions from NATO in exchange for remaining in the alliance — possibly the return of Gibraltar to Spain. Many Socialists argue that NATO membership, strongly desired as it is by the military, helps to prevent a coup, but the counter-example of Turkey speaks for itself.

In such a context the level of frustration is high. In Barcelona I witnessed a confrontation between some members of GAMBA (Grupo Anti-Militarista de Barcelona) and three young, arrogant, black military cops from a US destroyer berthed in town. GAMBA members regularly follow and torment American sailors, and this time there was a fight, complete with club swinging (on the part of the scared cops) and a bloodied Spanish head. By the time the Barcelona police managed to save the American sailors, the rapidly growing and obviously angry crowd numbered well over a thousand.

In Brussels I got more of a chance to speak with members of the anti-NATO committees and, while recounting this tale, was angrily interrupted — in anticipation of a pacifist critique of GAMBA. But when I suggested, instead, that it would be a good idea to leaflet the sailors and tell them why everyone was so pissed off, I got only agreement.

Mediterranean Perspectives — Greece and Turkey

In Greece, the Socialist Party, PASOK, came to power on the crest of a political upsurge that was almost as much anti-NATO as it was pro-Left. Still, the Socialists have not carried out their promises to close US military bases and withdraw from NATO. Why? There are at least two reasons.

First of all, the US had not been standing still while the Greek Socialists got themselves elected. It has both pressured the Greeks to be “reasonable” and concentrated on cultivating its relationship with Turkey, where NATO is now planning to base Cruise missiles. Secondly, the Greeks know that the Turkish junta would find it difficult to go to war with Greece over the long-disputed western Aegean islands as long as Greece is still in NATO.

But the real politics of international power are not sufficient to explain why, in a country with a peace movement as old and powerful as Greece’s, there has not been more pressure on the government to keep its promises to withdraw from NATO and to close US military bases. The interpenetration of the peace movement and PASOK completes the picture. The movement has had difficulty in organizing itself to pressure “its” government, and the government, in its turn, has not acted in the absence of pressure. This situation will not continue indefinitely, but its significance should not be overlooked. The attempt to negotiate a nuclear-free zone with Rumania and Yugoslavia will run up against the same opposition as the attempt to withdraw from NATO, and it is impossible even to conceive of the formation of the zone without a massive movement of peace activists to call the government to account.

Meanwhile, Turkey is giving the lie to those who claim that membership in NATO is a democratizing force. Since September 12, 1980, Turkey
has seen the largest and most systematic wave of repression in its recent history. On February 26, 1982, the US- and NATO-supported junta arrested the leadership of the Turkish Peace Association, and they have been in prison ever since. The TPA itself has been banned just as completely as the recently founded, and almost as recently suppressed, independent Soviet peace movement.

The Two Germanys and the Eastern Bloc

In Germany, the proximity of the Eastern bloc weighs on the movement. Social Democracy here, as in France, means support for the Euro-strategic missiles, if not for the new US-inspired cold war with which they have become entwined. And the even-handed internationalism of END, in which Eastern dissident and peace movements are constantly proclaimed as essential parts of the anti-

cold-war movement here, seems to many to be naive and even dangerous.

While visiting Berlin a few weeks before the END convention, I was lucky enough to be invited to a big "peace workshop" in East Berlin. Pastor Eppelmann, at whose church it was to take place, had invited peace activists from the West, and it was in the company of members of the West German Fellowship of Reconciliation that I was turned back at the border. I had been given an invitation with the address of the meeting, and it was found in my otherwise empty notebook. As worried as my guides had been about the appropriateness of Western activists attending the meeting in large numbers, they were still steeped enough in the ambience of detente to neglect to stress to me the importance of being really clean. Others were turned away as well, many for the first time in their lives. An Eastern guard confirmed, as we waited for our passports, that special instructions had been issued to stop Westerners from attending the meeting.

The meeting, which was the culmination of a series of similar but smaller gatherings throughout East Germany, was attended by several thousand antiwar citizens. I was later to hear that it was "like a dream." Platforms were set up on the lawns, and anyone could stand up and address the crowd. Many of the participants, especially the youth, were indistinguishable from the Westerners. There were a few cops, of course, but more obvious were the proponents of the official line of the East German Peace Council (affiliated with the World Peace Council), who deplored the extent to which concern was focused upon the militarization of everyday life — children’s books and toys, for example — instead of upon what they saw to be the far more crucial question of the new missiles in the West.

There were public displays of rewritten and decontextualized quotes in the state press, with both the original and the final versions being provided
for comparison. Paper and pencils were provided for all who wished to make themselves copies in the absence of Xerox machines. Music and networking and speechmaking all took place within an atmosphere of openness and debate.

The question in East Germany is not when repression will start, but what will make it get serious. In Russia, of course, such a meeting would not be possible. In East Germany things are not as loose as they were just a few months ago. People seen wearing “Swords into Plowshares” patches are now routinely, though mildly, hassled. The patch contains a picture of a statue recently given to the United Nations by the USSR. It has become the symbol by which East German opponents of militarism recognize each other, and now, with its disallowance, they have taken to wearing blank patches as protest.

The Eastern “movement” is still very nascent, existing mostly in the form of activities, like the printing and distributing of the patches, which are tied to the Lutheran Church but not officially sponsored by it. There have been a few initiatives that did not originate within the Church, but without the Church’s protection it would in no way be possible to speak of a social movement. The Church provides a framework for its activities, both institutionally and in terms of resources like printing, and protects it from state repression. Many say that the Church is too powerful to be repressed, but with the death of detente a real possibility, nothing is certain.

The movement in the West, too, can affect the terms within which the Eastern state views these stirrings. This is made clear by the simple fact that the hassling of the “Swords into Plowshares” movement began with the publication of the “Berlin Appeal” in West German newspapers—a joint appeal of Western and Eastern individuals for the end of the arms race and the establishment of a German Nuclear Free Zone. The hassling of Western activists at the border is also a new phenomenon, and it is clearly intended as a move against the increased interaction of the Eastern and Western movements—the same interaction and symbolic unity so strongly advocated by END.

END activists, and some members of the West German movement as well, tend to regard all hesitation to “support” the East German movement as apologism for the state-capitalist regimes of the East. Others, like the church groups of West Germany and Holland, have been carefully building networks with Eastern activists for years; they fear that associating themselves too strongly with the new movement in East Germany will give the East German state an excuse to repress the new movement on the grounds that it is controlled from the West. In their view there are those among the Western movement who, as it was put to me by Jon Bohme of West Berlin Fellowship of Reconciliation, “instrumentalize” the Eastern peace movement. “They are loudly proclaiming their solidarity with the Eastern movement to cover themselves against the Right, which is attacking them for being pro-Soviet.”

After the declaration of martial law in Poland, these sorts of tensions became greatly exacerbated,
not only in Germany but throughout Europe. The British and the Italians have reacted strongly, but the German movement, in particular, seems to have been trapped within a malaise of equivocation and has been unable to protest. Not that all sectors of the German movement were unsupportive of Solidarity — the Green Party and the Anarchists/Spontie house squatters in West Berlin were quick to react. But on the whole the crackdown provoked dismally little protest. Seyla Benhabib, writing in Telos, has attributed this to the inability of the West German Left to develop a critique of “authoritarian state socialism,” and there may be some truth to this. But it seems that the Germans, in particular, are in a good position to know the reality of the East and so we might well wonder if this is an adequate explanation.

Perhaps another factor can be found in the looming presence of the East itself, and in the reality — which must seem very pressing from within the nuclear armed camp which is West Germany — of the Western assault on the Soviets. Certainly there are Soviet apologists by the droves in Germany, but I think the bulk of the problem is not apologism but rather a strangely compelling pessimism about the possibility of changes in the East in the face of the enormity of the threat of war.

This pessimism may be misplaced and certainly it leads to political conservatism, but it is not simple apologism. When the Greens decided to hold a press conference in April of this year, to publicly denounced the anti-Reagan rally coalition for refusing to adopt a platform that opposed the SS-20s as strongly as it opposed NATO modernization, they were perhaps being somewhat “instrumentalist.” Their action did help to shift the ground from beneath the feet of the numerous real apologists, but certainly such a strong anticomunist line could not have hurt the Greens’ position in the polls.

The Basis of the European Coalition

Largely following the lead of Edward Thompson and END, the European peace movement has come to conduct the bulk of its public political analysis in terms of the demand for “European autonomy” from the bloc system and the Cold War. These formulations, like the notion of a “Freeze” in the US, are politically charged — they are intended to shape the image and self-understanding of the movement. Like the Freeze, they tend to structure the movement in subtle and yet powerful ways, and to both facilitate and limit the
complex process of self-education and agitprop crucial to any dynamic political movement. They are the lowest-common-denominator demands of the European movement, and, while they are not as limiting as the Freeze, they contain the same implicit notion of political coalition — a notion that, since it is only implicit, is not visible and available for criticism.

The call for European autonomy from the world system organized by the clash of the superpowers has led to the charge that this movement is implicitly nationalistic, in the sense that it posits a new European national identity. This charge is too simple in a number of ways, not the least of which is that it reduces the complex contemporary reality of the movement to one of the dangers it faces.¹ The call for autonomy is, among other things, a tactical move intended to help organize the very real commonalities of interest among the European people — at the most banal level, the common interest in not being blown up — into a coalition with enough political power to drop out of the arms race.

Neither is it clear that this commonality of interests is fated to obscure the social conflicts within European society, and thus to retard the radicalization of the movement, though this is also a danger. Unlike the Freeze, the “Cold War” is not a framework that requires the suppression of all real criticisms of social power.

Still, there is a latent depoliticizing character in the idea of an autonomous Europe, for it can and does tend to obscure very real conflicts, and very different interests, within society. Specifically, it doesn’t prepare the ground for an understanding of the different interests in Europe in opposing the Cold War, and so it doesn’t help movement activists understand the terms of their own coalition. The existence of a strong economic and political justification — on purely capitalist terms — for an opening to the East can hardly be doubted, and so the allegiance of European capital to the Cold War system is far from assured. Indeed, a crucial function of NATO has long been to impose such an allegiance on Western Europe, and NATO thus plays a key role in the production of the desire for autonomy that, while certainly not identical with the desire for peace, does in fact make fertile ground for it.² There are elite interests well served by the classless overtones of such an abstract entity as “Europe.” And there is even the danger that, in the words of West German political analyst Walter Suss, the peace movement could become the ground for a “movement” with which it would have little in common: a European “nationalism” that — if it were to succeed — would be the bearer of a “European nuclear force.” Whoever doubts such a possibility should examine Mitterrand’s policies.³

This is, however, still only a danger.

The fast and loose way in which the European movement talks about autonomy from the bloc system may be dangerously confusing, unless it is consciously balanced by more radical discourse about social conflict. Certainly opposition to the Cold War inclines the movement towards a coalition with European capital, which is heavily dependent on trade with the Eastern bloc. At the same time it pressures European states to resolve their conflicts with the US by breaking with it and opting for a renewed and deepened detente. All of this is fine, but none of it seriously challenges the geo-economic structure of the Cold War system. There is a price for pandering to capital, even if that pandering is only rhetorical. There is a great need for the movement to help people to see the reality of their lives as Europeans, and this reality is far less flattering than the image of a continent held helpless by the exterminist forces of the Cold War.

To put it bluntly, Europe has strong imperialistic interests in the Third World parallel to those of the US, and it depends on American militarism to maintain the international conditions for its
Europe and in the rest of the world as well. In the words of the Italian Lucio Magri, such a world would, at the minimum, presuppose a qualitative change in [European] development. Such a change would have to involve the reorientation of the European economies away from the quantitative multiplication of goods for consumption and export, and the wastage of natural resources that goes with it, towards another style of development.5

Surely this “qualitative change” will not be the outcome of a movement whose shared goals fail to go beyond the jargon of European autonomy from the Cold War system.

It is undoubtedly true, as is often said, that real revolutionary changes are not possible until the structure of the Cold War is dismantled. Noam Chomsky emphasizes this with his persistent claim that the Cold War is a device by which the superpowers control their own domestic populations.6 My point is that, while the Cold War must be broken down, it cannot be allowed to delimit the public political analysis of the movement. It sometimes does so,7 for it is broad enough, as a conceptual framework, to allow quite a wide range. In the end, though, the problem of capitalism must be publicly broached.

The US Peace Movement and The Euro-Strategic Missiles

The need to create a new model of American antimilitary politics to compete with the Freeze is becoming pressing with the escalation of the 1984 presidential skirmishing and the drift of the movement into the electoral definition of political opposition. This definition will never be complete, but it could become dominant enough to undercut the growth of the new radicalism that lies latent within the struggle against war.

There are movements other than the Freeze, of course, but against its great orthodoxy they appear as mini-movements; none of them is positioned to
challenge its overall drift. The antiintervention movement is still too plagued by Marxist-Leninists to become a mass movement, and besides, it doesn’t address the nuclear issue directly enough. The antidraft movement, the new direct-action coalitions against the weapons laboratories, and the increasing attempts to link the arms race to the economic crisis, as crucial as they all are, seem similarly too distant, too sectoral, or too diffuse to constitute a global alternative to the Freeze. An American campaign against the Euro-strategic missiles might have slightly better chances, for it would unfold together with what will almost certainly be a very flashy European resistance. On an equally important level, it would tend to attract a compelling and even radical anti-cold-war politics.

The defensive character of the Freeze campaign drastically restricts the arguments that it can make. But the need to be defensive is not, fortunately, the need to have defensive politics monopolize the movement. The possibility of a more radical antimilitary politics should be welcomed, and there are reasons to believe that a campaign against the Cruise and the Pershing II could help bring those politics about:

First, taking place as it would within the context of a preexisting international opposition, it would create the conditions for establishing a concrete new form of American radical internationalism. Such an internationalism would not be “other-centered” in the sense of glorifying the European opposition, but would recognize the limits of forms of political education that rely too
heavily on appeals to self-interest. The "don't fry our children" mode of agitprop has already reached its political limits.

This campaign would intend to strengthen the European movement in its opposition to this critically important escalation, and at the same time put both movements in more of a position to learn from each other. Certainly an American movement in regular contact with a more diverse and often more politically sophisticated European movement would be a movement more prone to healthy self-examination: American activists would gain more familiarity with the sorts of questions Europeans ask themselves, and with the respect for political diversity which they have had to develop.

Second, an American campaign against the Euro-strategic missiles would be positioned directly within the myriad conflicts being stirred up by the renewed Cold War — and this would give it a real opportunity to widen the spectrum of political analysis. These missiles are, in Walter Suss's terms, "political weapons," for they are used even when they are not exploded. They serve to impose the centrality of American geo-economic interests on Western Europe, and to back planned adventures in the Third World. It is not hard to see the opportunities for political education which would be afforded by a campaign against them.

Finally, since it is to be assumed that this campaign would proceed concurrently with the Freeze, it is interesting to note that a campaign against the Cruise and Pershing II would not only complement the Freeze but underscore its political weaknesses. This has been pointed out by the organizers of the Stop the Cruise/Pershing II Clearinghouse in Philadelphia, a small group arguing for the emergence of a campaign to oppose the Euro-strategic missiles within the context of an acceptance of the Freeze strategy:

The problem here is timing. The most optimistic timeline for the success of the Freeze Campaign strategy in having a nuclear weapons freeze become US governmental policy puts such a date after the deployment of these two weapons systems. Without an anti-Cruise/Pershing II component, the Freeze Campaign will become obsolete and virtually irrelevant just as it seems within reach of its goal.

A New Left?

The problem is not just how to create a mass movement, but how to create a radical mass movement, for this movement cannot succeed unless, in the end, it becomes capable of challenging the most basic aspects of modern society. The arms race runs too deep, with logic that is bound too closely with the structure of social power, to be eliminated solely by a strategy of reform.

Despair is not in order — this is a real possibility. The crisis we are entering will be long and profound, and in its course the postwar system will be radically transformed. No matter what the new international division of labor turns out to be, the economic preconditions for widespread affluence are gone — possibly for a very long time. With the redefinition of the "middle class" to include a far smaller cross-section of the population than it did in the 1950s, it is not unreasonable to assume many will come to find the great American dream a good deal less enchanting. There will be an increase in anger, frustration, and openness to radical ideas.

This is a dangerous situation. Anger and frustration can be easily turned to nationalism and the support for strong leaders. The Falklands/Malvinas fiasco showed just how easily: the British peace movement is very strong, as these things go, but it was a frail reed in the winds of Falklands fever. We must expect that nationalism and war will become more important than they have been in the past as methods of social control, for the more civilized liberal alternatives — depending as they did on a high general level of affluence — have become unworkable. We must look forward to a more barbaric and more chaotic world, a world of
small but deadly wars, poverty, brute force, ideological manipulation, and rising tension.

If there is anything we do not need, it is a monolithic agreement that radicalism is not on the political agenda. The new peace movement has awakened an immense revulsion against nuclear weapons, but as wonderful as the mass movement that it has spawned is, this movement — as it currently exists — is not nearly enough. There is a crying need for a radical movement which can speak directly to the daily, routine misery that enslave the population, and not only to the apocalyptic fears which this misery engenders.

This will not be a movement which panders to the dominant lies, nor one that finds its major expression in the arena of professional organizations and electoral politics, but neither will it be a movement that deludes itself that these lies have lost their hold on the population, or that the politics of the state can be ignored. It will have to become a new movement, one that is able both to confront power on its own terms and to construct a believable vision of a desirable world beyond the sinkhole of capitalism.

In order for this new movement to emerge, the old, alienated images of radical politics will have to be deconstructed at the same time as new ways of being oppositional are developed. Already, several years ago, this deconstruction had begun, with the decline of the Marxist-Leninist posture (in at least Germany and the US) — a decline that is at least partially attributable to the development of the then-new politics of the grassroots antinuclear movement.

Today, the process of rebuilding a real opposition is proceeding at a new level, within the context of an economic, military, and political crisis that compels new forms of political organization. These forms must get results in the shortterm, but without constraining longer-term political development. For this, one thing is required above all others: a culture of open dialogue in which the political developments of the day are understood by all participants, and where strategic discourse is a public activity. Here maybe we can learn something from the Europeans, for as far from this ideal as they are, they do seem capable of being
both critical and ecumenical, and they are more tolerant of complexity than most American radicals. Unity is valued, but it isn’t expected that agreement will be easy, or that disagreements will be kept quiet.

The problem is that there is not much time. We cannot afford to lose this wave of protest to either abstract radicalism or irresponsible reformism. Edward Thompson said a few months ago that the new movement will have to be more sharply anti-statist and libertarian than anything in the dominant Communist or Social Democratic traditions, or in Marxist theoretical orthodoxy: nothing less will be tough enough to meet the opposition, and maybe repression, of the opposed militarized states.14

This is true, but it is not enough — as Thompson recognizes. This new libertarian politics will also need an ability rarely seen on the antistatist left: an ability to make fine political distinctions and even accommodations with power. It will have to practice the “total tactics”15 that refuse the abstract distinction between grassroots organization and intervention into the decision-making process, that can understand not only the realpolitik of the state, but rebellion and sabotage too, as necessary parts of the same battle.

Footnotes

1. This notion of a new European left-nationalism is similar to the oversimplification that occurs with the new “German nationalism.” See Russell Berman, “Opposition to Rearmament and West German Culture,” in Telos 51 (Spring 1982), p. 142, for typical usage. For a more interesting discussion of the same problem, see the article by Seyla Benhabib in the same issue.

2. See Mary Kaldor, “The Role of Nuclear Weapons in Western Relations,” in Mary Kaldor and Dan Smith, eds., Disarming Europe. See also Mike Lucas, “The Crisis of the Cold War System,” unfortunately available only in German in Probleme des Klassenkampfes, 46.


4. Ibid., p. 66.


8. IKV (Postbus 18 747; 2502 ES ’s-Gravenhage) describes the situation as one in which three major factors are operating: (1) The end of “pure” deterrence and the trend towards nuclear warfighting postures and strategies; (2) The end of arms control as a potential force in stopping the arms race and its new role in “controlling” public protest rather than weapon developments; (3) The end of nonproliferation and therefore of nuclear deterrence as a bipolar system. For a description of the specific dangers of the new Euro-strategic missiles, see Walter Suss, “NATO,” pp. 55-58, or Allan Krass and Dan Smith, “Nuclear Strategy and Technology,” in Kaldor and Smith, eds., Disarming Europe. If you want more, see Carl G. Jacobsen, “Reagan’s Sins of Omission,” in ENDPAPERS 3, published by the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation Ltd., Bertrand Russell House, Gamble Street, Nottingham NG7 4ET. Jacobsen believes that the Soviets will respond to Pershing II deployment in Europe by basing SS-20s in Cuba.

9. “In order to understand the political concept of nuclear deterrence, a distinction must be drawn between political weapons which exist only to threaten, and actual weapons of war. This distinction is often dismissed as merely ideological, but its reality appears obvious: since the end of World War II, 20 million to 25 million people have been killed by conventional arms, while nuclear arms (with the exception of the massacres at Hiroshima and Nagasaki) have killed no one, and still the ‘political weapons’ have probably had a greater influence on world history than all subsequent conventional wars.” Suss, “NATO,” p. 55.

10. Aside from the catastrophic effect that the Freeze could have on the movement itself by drawing it into electoral politics, the strict bilateralism of the Freeze is a great problem. This is not only because nothing can ever happen on strictly bilateral terms except a Freeze (actual reductions are only likely to happen with a series of small, reciprocal unilateral steps), but also because it is difficult to go on from a position of bilateralism to put toward the very unilateral ‘nature’ of the arms race, in which the US has been almost uniformly responsible for escalations in.
the capacities of the nuclear forces. This is clearly shown in this table (*Sojourners* magazine):

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>US (Action)</th>
<th>USSR (Reaction)</th>
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<tr>
<td>First chain reaction</td>
<td>12/2/42</td>
<td>12/24/46</td>
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<tr>
<td>First atom bomb exploded</td>
<td>7/16/45</td>
<td>8/23/49</td>
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<tr>
<td>First H-bomb exploded</td>
<td>11/1/52</td>
<td>8/12/53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European alliances in effect</td>
<td>8/24/49</td>
<td>5/14/55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tactical nukes in Europe</td>
<td>1954</td>
<td>1957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic missile build-up</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>1966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First supersonic bomber</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>1975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First nuclear submarine</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>1968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solid fuel in missiles</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>1968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple warheads on missiles</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>1973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penetration aids in missiles</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>None to date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-speed warheads</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>1975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIRVs</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>1975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computerized guidance</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>1975</td>
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11. “A Call to Stop the Cruise and Pershing II Missiles,” from Stop the Cruise/Pershing II Clearinghouse, 4811 Springfield Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19143.

12. See *Exterminism and Cold War* for a debate on the structural underpinnings of the arms race.
15. The idea of a “total tactic,” as far as I know, came out of a battle against a high-voltage powerline being waged in Minnesota a few years back. The local farmers, after having exhausted all legal recourse, began a long, strongly supported, and very funny campaign of sabotage against the powerline towers. They continued legal action, however, and felt that only because they did so was their extralegal campaign perceived as legitimate. Also worth noting is the mutually reinforcing effect which exists between the civil disobedience of the antinuclear alliances and the legal maneuvering of straight environmentalists.

TOM ATHANASIOU is a left-communist and computer programmer interested in technology and its effects on capitalist restructuring — or in this case destructuring.
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—Gabriel Kolko

"...a passionate and stinging indictment of the vast networks of terror supported by Washington...the best systematic account of the highly selective and biased reportage of human rights violations..."

—James Petras, author
Politics & Social Structure in Latin America

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The scene is the early 1950s, and the woman — a young, politically conservative nurse — is being questioned about an old college friend who may have become a Communist sympathizer. The woman is torn: she is patriotic and anticomunist, but she also feels loyalty to her college friends, and she refuses to answer her self-righteous interrogator’s questions. He threatens to destroy her career: she remains firm. Her current friends — the show’s heroes — have a private chat with the man. The woman has never had a political thought in her life, they assure him: the only thing she ever thinks about is sex. A sleazy and disquieting sort of “defense,” until we realize what the guys are up to. The smug interrogator immediately goes to the woman, attempts to bribe her into sex, and, when she refuses, tries to force himself on her. The closet door pops open, and one of the heroes jumps out and snaps a picture. The good guys cheerfully blackmail the Red-hunter, and the nurse is off the hook.

* * * * *

A guerrilla fighter from the enemy side has been injured. The army doctors patch her up, but are forced to turn her over to their allies for an “interrogation” that they, and she, know will be brutal torture. She is hostile and abusive to the men who are trying to save her, perceiving them as the enemy. They know she’s right, and they know they’re helpless
to save her. The last scene is a closeup of the hero, and his anguished face reflects the evil, the stupidity, the unheroism of war, especially the war they are in the midst of, in which the “enemy” is the land’s inhabitant, the “patriot” an invader from continents away.

* * *

The pilot is a nice kid. He’s been injured slightly in a bombing accident, and he chats with the doctors about his job. He enjoys the flying, the sky around him, the precision of dropping bombs. Doesn’t it bother him to know that he’s bombing civilians? No, it’s his job, and they’re the enemy. So the doctors take him into the operating room and introduce him to a few patients—a dying child, a pregnant woman, an old man. They are the victims of his, or someone else’s, bombing raid. And a look of horrified self-recognition comes over the handsome young face.

* * *

The scenes, of course, are from “M*A*S*H,” the most astoundingly progressive show that’s ever been on television. And it has been progressive not only vis-a-vis the cultural climate it exists in but also in terms of itself. I doubt that any television show has ever made such dramatic, and heartening, changes as this one has.

Indeed, for all the talk about how courageous and important “M*A*S*H” was at its inception, it is far more courageous and important today. In the early ’70s, when “M*A*S*H” began, the social climate was quasi-liberal. “Radical chic” was in, and people were increasingly disenchanted with the Vietnam War—not so disenchanted that it wasn’t risky to produce a show like “M*A*S*H,” but enough so that there was reason to think that the public would be at least tolerant of its message. On a 1980 Public Television documentary about “M*A*S*H,” one of its producers commented that if it were now a new program, they could never sell it.

He was right, and in this lies the tremendous political importance of the show today. As right-wing power continues to flourish, as the old familiar glorification of war to “protect American interests” or to “show them that they can’t push us around” once more defines the public consciousness, “M*A*S*H” may be the one force in mass culture that insists that war is ugly and petty; that “police actions” in foreign countries are immoral; that those who question, who refuse to fight, who demand that the humanity of the “enemy” be recognized are the real heroes.

Korea, in “M*A*S*H,” was clearly an allegory for Vietnam; it is no less an allegory for an interventionist situation the US gets into in the future. If its politics are not quite radical, they are liberal in the best sense of the word, and they are humane; as the swing to the right continues, humanness may once again become a radical stance. President Carter’s insistence on a policy of human rights was hypocritical, but we have moved into an era when hypocrisy is no longer required, when the Secretary of Defense can publicly dismiss the need for human rights in favor of an attack on “international terrorism.” In the midst of this, “M*A*S*H” implicitly declares that such attacks are themselves the true acts of terrorism.

Yet even now, with the urgency of fighting the Right so desperately upon us, I could not speak with any enthusiasm of “M*A*S*H” if it remained what it was in the beginning. If the early “M*A*S*H” mirrored the best of contemporary liberalism, it also mirrored the worst of it—and of contemporary radicalism as well. Despite Alan Alda’s much-vaunted support of ERA, it was one of the most sexist shows on television. There was only one regular female character, and she was the stereotypically uptight, hypocritically puritanical (but always horny) castrating bitch. The three good guys were all womanizers, in spite of the fact that two of them were married, and we were not expected to be angry at their treatment of wom-
en. While shows like "Mary Tyler Moore" and "One Day at a Time" were depicting women as multidimensional human beings, "M*A*S*H" was perpetuating the crudest female stereotypes, and portraying oppressive male behavior as both healthy and delightful.

But somewhere along the way, things started to change. Perhaps Alda began to take his own profeminist speeches more seriously; perhaps his power on the show grew greater; or perhaps new actors like liberal activist Mike Farrell made a difference. In any event, as several characters left, they were replaced with new ones that represented a major shift in values.

The first addition was B.J. Played by Farrell with the skill and sensitivity that has become the show's hallmark, Hawkeye's new roommate and cohort brought a dimension lacking in the characterization of Trapper John, who was a sort of Brooklyn-born clone of Hawkeye. B.J. has several personality differences from his friend. Politically, the most important of these is his attitude toward women. He is happily and faithfully married; he takes his commitment to his wife very seriously. He likes and respects women; since he isn't constantly on the make, he is more easily capable than Hawkeye of forming real friendships with them. Tolerant and nonjudgmental toward Hawkeye's womanizing, he never shares in it.

The next big change was ushered in by the departure of Colonel Blake and the entrance of the older, mellower Colonel Potter. Potter is a character who, written or played with less finely tuned sensitivity, would be painfully corny. He's full of homespun aphorisms, and his hobby is painting Norman Rockwell-style pictures. But he is a man
so wholly composed of wisdom and compassion that his cliches are both believable and utterly dignified, because they are so deeply felt. When Potter gently rejects a seduction attempt because of "the girl whose picture is on my piano," the trite expression becomes a simple statement of a profound commitment. His marital fidelity is less surprising, but no less moving, than B.J.’s.

But the most impressive change has been the magnificent metamorphosis of Margaret. The castrating "Hot Lips" has become a complex, sensitive, highly intelligent woman — a woman who loves the army but hates war; who is honestly sensual in a world that divides women into whore and madonna; who has learned to give and inspire deep, loyal friendship. Interestingly, Margaret is now the one character whose sexuality is neither monogamous nor promiscuous. She would like a good traditional marriage, but till she finds it, she has an occasional and unapologetic brief affair.

Much more subtle, but no less significant, is the change in Hawkeye. He is still a womanizer, but in the framework provided by his new companions, his womanizing has become something very different. It’s still amusing, but it’s no longer a model of good male behavior — it’s become an adolescent, diminishing, and sometimes annoying character flaw in an otherwise exceptionally decent man. I can’t say that I like it any more than I used to, but it’s certainly representative of a predominant kind of male behavior, and surrounded by the behaviors of men who don’t act that way and of a woman who clearly commands respect, it has become much, much less offensive.

Unfortunately, Margaret is still the only female regular. But the women appearing in individual episodes are almost always strong, impressive characters. In the show in which the woman makes a pass at Colonel Potter, she is a warm, independent, and likable character. She is clearly neither tramp nor fool — and there is no trace of suggestion that a woman in her fifties lacks either sexual appeal or sexual integrity.

As is not always the case, the political improvements in "M*A*S*H" are also artistic improvements. The greater range of characters, their personality differences, and their combination of human flaws and basic human decency create a believability rare in television fiction. Even the gentle chaplain, Father Mulcahy — a character who could easily fall into a "Going My Way" stereotype — comes across as a distinct, complex, and vulnerable human being. And the relationship between the stuffy aristocrat Major Winchester and the very working-class Corporal Klinger, with its constant antagonism interspersed with occasional flashes of reluctant affection, is an exquisite achievement.

Like its characters, "M*A*S*H" is far from perfect. Black characters are infrequent, gay ones virtually nonexistent. And paradoxically, as it becomes more sensitive to its characters’ interrelationships, it becomes less involved in the war that is their context for being together. There are episodes in which we can almost forget that war is brutal and ugly.

Almost — but never quite. Always there is something, some reminder — the helicopter bringing in the wounded and the dying; the blood-hungry general who sends his men to senseless deaths; the likable young soldier who dies on the operating table; the poverty in a gutted Korean village. And even in the most frivolous episodes, the images from the more somber ones stay with the viewer: Hawkeye deciding to desert because "the wounded keep on coming, no matter what I do"; B.J. falling in love with a Korean family that he loses when they flee their bombed-out village; the peaceful, bittersweet Christmas celebration broken by the arrival of an ambulance full of dead and wounded. Hawkeye and B.J., though in Korea, are in a very real sense resisters. And we are in great need of images of resisters who are heroes.
“M*A*S*H” is now going into its last season—a fact to be lamented when both “Barney Miller” and “Lou Grant” have been cancelled (the latter probably as a result of star Edward Asner’s openly pro-El Salvador stance). This leaves only “Hill Street Blues” reflecting any progressive values on prime-time TV. Fortunately, “M*A*S*H” reruns remain nationally syndicated, and according to TV Guide are among the country’s most popular reruns. As we get closer and closer to another war, “M*A*S*H” may be the only voice that millions of Americans regularly hear crying out that the glory is not in war but in defiance of war, not in killing but in living and fighting for life. Alexander Haig, that apostle of international terrorism, could well be a character in a “M*A*S*H” episode—evil, destructive, the antithesis of every decent human value. If “M*A*S*H” helps the American people to understand the tawdry reality behind the rhetoric glamorizing our “police actions” in third-world countries, it will have played a worthy role in the resistance struggle of the 1980s.

KAREN LINDSEY is a poet and writer, author of Friends as Family (Beacon Press, 1981).


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11. I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete: John P. Demeter, Editor.
The Sadness of Public School Teachers

Like the sadness of anyone there are
certain times it will be noticed or felt — —
in a tone of the voice a way of holding
the body some piece of information
about life away from where school is

but this is infrequent: more often this great
swollen sadness of public school teachers
is kept hidden — — it is the child called
"idiot" and chained to an iron bed
in the back attic chamber of the heart
that child whose moans are never heard or else
mistaken for distant laughter and then

one morning early when you get to the
empty school before the kids have arrived
you realize that you are hearing that
laughter from somewhere — — it's behind the door
of the faculty lounge sounds like a party
though who would have thought so at this hour

so that entering it's as if you had
come upon raucous life in an otherwise
abandoned building — — just one small furnished room
crammed with people telling Polish jokes.
teasing each other about sex and age
ridiculing some of the kids or their parents

when they run out of stories and insults
they laugh at themselves for being afraid
of their own school principal inside them their
sadness is so huge that if they stop laughing
here even for a minute it will swell
up to crack and burst them apart

what makes them so sad is it something in
their own lives they feel cheated out of is it
some insight they have after years of teaching
about the effect of school on students
they have loved they never seem able to
tell us what it is although I have seen
sometimes pain in their eyes rising almost
to the surface just before eight o'clock
when they go to their rooms to teach again

— Dick Lourie
The Housewife’s Poem

for Virginia Woolf

Each morning
I make coffee begin
my journey to my own room

Sneak past the breakfast dishes
too late the teapot’s spotted me
mutinous forks snap at my ankles
and the egg-turner tries
to block the hall door I reach it
just miss being crushed
a frying pan clatters uselessly
against wood

Pass the bathroom now where towels
encouraged by the clamor
ambush twine damp coils
round my neck tie my hands
as the clogged sink spits
hair and bits of soap
into my face

and the dust under the bed
begins a low complaining whine
rises to shriek as plants
choke in their cracked, dry pots

and windows gasp for sunlight

Reach my room at last but
the door refuses to shut

and yesterday’s coffee mug
has spilled itself in my notebook
I grab for my typewriter
something has eaten the ribbon

all my pens are clogged
ashtray and pencil sharpener

exchange smug glances
I ignore them reach

for a cigarette dip it

in my coffee
begin to write

Bronwen Wallace

These Things Happen

and the TV news records
the discovery of a new born baby whose mother left him
in a Salvation Army used clothing bin in downtown Detroit

but not how her face
looked empty curve of her hands as the lid banged shut
sharp metal echo through the dark streets the city closing
in around her

the reports are indignant
although they wouldn’t be if she’d seen him off to war and he’d

been killed then we’d see her face

that lost bewildered look
such women have as they lay flowers on some monument

these things happen
and the official language indicates their meanings
although in other words it comes to the same thing

flesh has its own vocabulary

the dulled eyes and broken gestures of a woman’s hands

that speak of how the life she makes

can be sloughed off

like an old suit something that doesn’t fit

and nothing ever new

or ever really her own

Bronwen Wallace

First published in Descant.
Labor Day demonstration, Clinton, Iowa.
FIGHTING UNION BUSTING IN THE '80s

Dan Clawson, Karen Johnson, and John Schall

The US trade union movement is currently facing an explicitly class-conscious capitalist offensive on a scale unprecedented since the 1930s. From massive capital flight to takeover contracts to legislative losses, organized labor is reeling from one defeat to the next, doing little to shore up its crumbling defenses. The most significant indication of the changing nature of capital-labor relations has been the phenomenal rise in union busting.

The official machinery for legally "decertifying" a union was put into place by the Taft-Hartley Act in 1948. If 30 percent of the members of a bargaining unit sign a decertification petition, the National Labor Relations Board will come in and conduct a decertification election, in which a simple majority decides whether the union stays or leaves. For the first year of a strike, both scabs and strikers may vote on decertification of the union; after the strike has gone on for one year, only scabs may vote. Since that time, decertifications have increased from 66 in 1948 to 156 in 1968, to 645 in 1978, to more than 900 in 1980. The actual numbers, however, tell only part of the story. For each union actually busted, there are many more that have accepted takeaway contracts — often gutting union strength — from fear of being broken.

Capitalists have been planning this open class warfare for some time. The Business Roundtable, consisting of high executives from two hundred of the largest corporations,

*Special thanks to Rick Fantasia, who was important both in these strikes and in helping us with this article.
was established in the early 1970s specifically to bust construction unions. More recently, in 1979 the National Association of Manufacturers established the Council on a Union Free Environment to assist companies in preventing unions from forming or in decertifying already-existing ones. In addition, the number of law firms and consulting firms that specialize in union busting has grown from a mere handful in the late sixties to over a thousand today. Fortune, perhaps the most class-conscious of the business journals, ran a cover article in November 1981 on “The Decline of Strikes,” which began by noting that “a historic shift appears to be looming in the balance of power between labor and management.” The article is basically a call to management to break strikes — and unions along with them. The article concludes:

The big news about labor-management warfare these days is not the new tactics of labor but the new, increasingly militant posture of management. Managers are discovering that strikes can be broken, that the cost of breaking them is often lower than the cost of taking them, and that strikebreaking (assuming it to be legal and nonviolent) doesn’t have to be a dirty word. In the long run, this new perception by business could turn out to be big news not only about labor relations but about the health of the U.S. economy.¹

Organized labor, on the other hand, has been slow to acknowledge this breakdown in the postwar labor truce. Acting on good faith in the late 1940s, labor accepted managerial rights to control the workplace and participated in the purge of progressive trade unionists in return for being granted recognition and wage and benefit concessions that would insure a stable piece of an ever-growing pie. The economic conditions on which this truce was reached and which made it acceptable to capital have now changed, and capitalists’ tactics have changed along with them. The truce has been cancelled.

The AFL-CIO bureaucracy does not yet seem to understand this. Their RUB (Report on Union Buster) sheets and COPE (Committee on Political Education) memos frequently make an implicit distinction between the professional union busters — consultants and law firms — and big capital, which is appealed to as if it were being hoodwinked by unscrupulous shysters. Perhaps the feelings of the official labor leaders are best summarized by Thomas Donahue, master of ceremonies at Solidarity Day and secretary-treasurer of the AFL-CIO.

The business community has a choice: either learn to live with the American trade union movement or face the consequences which would result from its destruction.

I don’t think most American businesses have really thought that question through. They should.

No free society ever survives if a free labor movement is destroyed. If companies seek to deny workers their voice in the economic system through their own unions, then the voice the companies will hear speaking for workers will not be one they like.²

The resurgent Right has failed to respond to this plea from organized labor but has instead continued attacking the liberal resolutions (i.e., the welfare state and mass industrial unions) that emerged from the last major economic crisis faced by the US in the 1930s. The left response can not be to argue for the preservation of discredited liberal institutions and approaches. Rather, we must attempt to create a genuinely left alternative. Bureaucratic business unionism is unable to stop union busting; the labor movement must learn to call up, to accept, and to use a renewed rank-and-file activism, for nothing else will work.

This article is about two struggles against union busting. One of these was short and highly successful, while the other has been protracted, with the outcome almost certain to be a decertification. Our involvement in both instances was as members of support groups, not as workers in the unions.
affected. (We should also emphasize that our experiences have been with unions in relatively small communities and not in large metropolitan areas.) We think the contrast between the two campaigns is illuminating, but obviously two cases are a limited sample (though we also draw on some other instances where we had less major involvement). We have masked the locations of the strikes and the identities of the unions in order to make possible a full and frank discussion, and because we believe what is important, what must be rethought, what must be changed, is not particular individuals but the character of the labor movement as a whole.

The first major case was at “University Nursing Home” and we were intimately involved in it long before the strike began. The nursing home had about sixty-five workers, almost all women, all earning extremely low wages (more than three-quarters received minimum wage; the pay after nine years on the job was only $4.10 an hour). It had formally been unionized for some time, but the union had been poorly run, and the national office had recently switched jurisdiction to a different region. A new organizer came in and revitalized the local and pushed for a much better contract. The home was locally owned, half by a woman who managed it (and some of whose relatives worked there), and half by an absentee real-estate millionaire. They brought in an area law firm which was notorious for union busting, and began trying to provoke a strike.

The home was located only about a mile from a major university, which could have affected the issue either way — students could have provided an almost limitless source of scabs, but the feminist and progressive communities were potential sources of strike support. Preparations for the strike were extensive: two informational pickets were held, ten thousand leaflets were distributed on campus, and, most important, dozens of community groups were approached and enlisted. This included not just the obvious progressive student groups, but also local unions (on the campus and off), religious leaders, a range of feminist groups, and all sorts of other groups and individuals.

When the strike did begin, the 30 workers whose shift was on strike had the support of perhaps 150 other pickets. The whole first day, essentially nothing went into the home. When the owner’s car tried to drive in, we surrounded it, banged on the hood, and pushed it back out, and the police couldn’t mobilize enough people to get the car through. Later that day the police came back in force, but when a hundred people sat down in the driveway, it took the police more than a half hour to clear the driveway. The police were only normally brutal in doing so, but many many people were shocked at what normal police brutality involves. This and many other incidents dominated the local news, split the community, and led to considerable pressure by town officials for a settlement. A march at the end of the week drew more than 350 people. Six days after the strike began, the nursing home settled and accepted approximately the compromise offer the union had proposed before the strike began.

The second strike was (and still is) at a metal shop about thirty miles from the university, in a working-class town. The plant is locally owned, but the owner also has five other plants around the country. There are about 65 or 70 workers, and for the last twenty-five years they have been represented by one of the largest national unions, with a reputation as progressive. The workers were all male and almost all white, earned more than $7.50 an hour, and had an average of twenty years’ seniority.

The company provoked the strike with a set of extreme takeaway demands (e.g., an end to seniority on job bidding) which, if accepted, would have meant the effective end of the union. For the
first three months this was a normal strike; the workers held solid and the company did not try to produce. But at that point the company began to hire scabs: first the relatives of managers, then others. About ten days or two weeks later, our labor community support group became involved. The first day we went down to the line there were many other unionists there, but this was the first time there had been any outside support.

Members of the support group started coming to the picket line on a regular basis, offered many suggestions, and helped plan further activities. A week or so later the strikers and supporters went to the city council meeting; a week after that there was mass leafleting, a week later a rally. A front-page story in a local alternative paper with mass circulation helped counter some of the media bias. But there were gaps between each of these activities, and while the workers stood firm they became somewhat dispirited, resentful of the union, and demoralized. Negotiations resumed, and for a while it seemed the strike might be settled, but then they broke off again. By this time, five months after the strike began, the company was up to perhaps fifty scab workers and recruiting more all the time. A month later the workers were demanding something be done, and the union (with our help) organized a mass picket one morning. When the scabs tried to drive — in the bus the company provided — from the parking lot on one side of the road to the plant on the other, we blocked their way. When the police tried to push pickets aside, we sat down. The town’s entire police force was there, but it still wasn’t enough police to clear us out, and they had to send for cops from other towns. More than ninety people were arrested, and the event dominated local news reports (and received some national coverage). After this, there was again a lull in activities. The strike, now in its eighteenth month, is almost certainly going to lose.

Union Busting is the Issue

As the economic crisis has deepened, an ever-increasing number of companies have “gotten tough” at the bargaining table. At what point this should be understood as not just tough bargaining but as preparation for a full-fledged union-busting campaign, is not always clear. Workers need to think about union busting whenever foremen and
supervisors become stricter about observing fine points of the contract, forcing more and more grievances, or when the company gets tough on grievances by forcing them through the step system and on to arbitration. This can be used later on by the company to argue both for the ineffectiveness of the union and for its existence as an unnecessary source of friction and antagonism. One of the surest signs is if you find that the company has hired a consultant firm specializing in union busting, or switched to a law firm with union busting experience. This occurred in both of the strikes we are describing, though by now the knowledge of how to bust a union is widespread and this is certainly not a necessary step.

While you don’t want to “cry wolf” every time management gets stubborn, whenever management refuses to budge over issues vital to the maintenance of union power (seniority, union security clause), you need to consider the issue of union busting. At the first hint that union busting is the goal, you must make it the issue in the eyes of the community, at the same time that workers are preparing for a fight.

At the nursing home, a large informational picket line was set up a week before the strike. A leaflet explaining union busting was handed out throughout the community, and press coverage helped spread the word. Three days before the strike the law firms’ offices were picketed, providing more press coverage. The union was able to define the issue as union busting (with consultants paid more than $100 an hour while workers took home $100 a week), and to identify the union with quality health care (only possible if staff turnover was reduced through higher pay).

In all cases it is important to take the initiative early, making the company respond to issues you raise and not vice versa. In addition, in the early informational work, the issue of unionism must be constantly connected to the workers in the workplace, who are community residents and taxpayers, rather than to an international union which can be easily portrayed as an “outsider.” At the same time, the campaign should not hesitate to label multinationals, union-busting firms, and nonresident owners as outsiders who are disrupting the life of the community.

The Picket Line

The point of a strike is for workers to withhold their labor, making it impossible for the company to produce (and therefore impossible to make a profit). In almost all strikes since the 1940s, companies have recognized workers’ solidarity and ability to mobilize, and have therefore not tried to run the plant during the strike. Union busting is totally different: the company keeps the plant open and actively tries to recruit a replacement labor force. If the company is able to recruit a scab labor force, and if they can get out production without the striking workers, the company has little or no reason to settle, and much reason to resist a settlement.

Once the company begins to hire scabs, that is the point of no return: they are unequivocally out to bust the union, and unless an immediate and effective response is made, they stand a good chance of succeeding. The company will hire more and more scabs until it has a complete replacement workforce. At that point, they can have a worker file for a decertification election (at which both strikers and scabs can vote) or they can wait until the strike has been running for a year, at which point strikers are no longer eligible to vote. Moreover, in order to recruit replacements the company must make explicit or implicit commitments to scabs, and these commitments become a factor in attempting to achieve a settlement, as the company insists it is honor-bound to keep scabs in preference to strikers. At the same time that the company hires scabs, it can discharge strikers, for
any reason or no reason. Workers have only their solidarity to protect them, unless the NLRB declares the strike an unfair labor practice strike (which will be increasingly unlikely given the Reagan board and the budget cuts leading to lengthy delays).

Once scabs are hired, it is a fight to the finish: either the scabs are stopped or the union will (probably) be broken. Of course, that's what a picket line is for: to stop scabs and/or people trying to deliver or pick up goods. But in 1982, workers who walk a picket line might as well have one hand tied behind their back and be blindfolded, since the law shackles workers and prevents them from doing what is necessary to keep scabs out. Having said this, we need to consider what is possible, but not necessarily legal. This is important because for the labor movement to beat the current union-busting campaign, unions will have to violate the law — there is no other way. Most of the important progressive advances in this country (whether for labor, or blacks, or antiwar causes) have required massive illegal activity, and so it will be this time as well.

It is essential that strikers establish contact with scabs, to persuade them verbally — and if this is unsuccessful, physically — to honor the picket line. Verbal persuasion can be a successful tactic when potential scabs do not know how a union works or what a strike means. Old-time union members sometimes jump to the conclusion that scabs know exactly what they are doing and can therefore be presumed to be totally without morality, the lowest form of life imaginable. But some strikebreakers don't know the meaning of scabbing and others don't know why you are on strike. Still others may feel they are behaving in a moral way. This was true of those at the nursing home.

Another strike in which we were involved can serve as a model of how to deal with scabs. This was a housewares factory strike where three-quarters of the 200 workers were women. A well-staffed and militant picket line was organized. When potential job applicants began to approach the picket line, the strikers positioned themselves between the potential scabs and the entrance to the plant. In an unobtrusive and nonthreatening way, they created a situation where the scab had to take decisive action to go apply, and where in doing so the scab would risk physical contact. At the same time, the strikers initiated friendly conversation, explaining the situation, asking the applicants to honor the line. This kind of friendly but firm presence persuaded all but a handful of potential job applicants to leave.

We participated in many of these discussions, and it quickly became clear that education about unions is so weak that many of the people who came intending to apply for a job had no understanding of what was happening. Some thought that it would only be scabbing if union members went back to work, and that since they weren't in the union it was okay to apply for a job. Others had a general understanding of the situation but were shocked at the depth of feeling and commitment by the strikers. Workers at the metal plant, on the other hand, assumed that the scabs knew the full meaning of their actions. The strikers made little or no effort to persuade people not to scab. Instead, they simply threatened people who did apply for work or begin to scab, but this was done in a haphazard, unsystematic way, and little or nothing came of the threats.

The company will try constantly to isolate the scabs from the workers; strikers and supporters must establish contact and exert continuing pressure in many different ways. When the metal shop picket line began to become effective, the company bought a bus to bring the scabs in to work. The union never developed an effective response. The scabs did not have to confront the strikers
face to face, and the scabs therefore did not have to think about what they were doing.

One way to reach the scabs is to use the non-violent sit-down tactics of the civil rights movement, as was done at both the nursing home and the metal shop. At the nursing home, this happened spontaneously on the first day of the strike. In the late afternoon, as the pickets thinned down to perhaps eighty, two cars of scabs tried to drive in, and the pickets simply sat down in the driveway and linked arms. It took the police half an hour to pull people out of the way (since we weren't arrested, people kept going back over and over). Police behavior was about average, which is to say there were numerous instances of illegal brutality, which upset many people and became a continuing issue. (Two pickets have since won civil judgments for police brutality.) At the metal shop, a similar sit-down was held six months into the strike. It took the police more than two hours to get the scabs in, more than ninety people were arrested, and much favorable publicity was generated. However, since the sit-down came three months after scabs began working, and since it was an isolated incident rather than part of a systematic campaign, it had no lasting impact.

Given the resources of the company, the bias of the law, and the power of the state, it is highly unlikely that the picket line alone will be enough to stop scabs from going in. Therefore, workers must find other ways to establish contact with the scabs. First, strikebreakers have to be identified (by their license plate numbers, by following them, by the help of an office worker, through high school yearbooks). Then a group can peacefully picket the scabs' homes, talking to neighbors, explaining the issues in the strike, distributing a leaflet, and asking people to talk to the scab. A stronger tactic is to produce a leaflet with the names (and if possible the pictures) of the scabs; such a leaflet can be posted all around the town, which obviously has a powerful effect on scabs.
and people who are considering scabbing. This will be especially effective when people work and live in the same community.

The more effectively and persistently these things are done, the less likely it is that anything else will be necessary. But if scabs continue to go in, and their numbers increase, the strike will be lost. If the union is committed to scrupulously abiding by the law, and if the management wants to bust the union, strikers might just as well forget about picketing and go look for jobs at other shops. Therefore, it is common (and in our opinion, frequently necessary) for workers to take stronger measures: midnight raids to slash scabs’ tires, pouring sugar in their gas tanks, and in other ways destroying their property. It is upsetting that conditions should be such that workers feel this must be done, but in the words of a great labor leader, “destroying property isn’t violence.” Scabs are putting their individual financial advantage ahead of the good of the group — are in effect stealing from the strikers. A response to change the financial calculus is something most workers can understand and support.

Community Support: The Key to Victory

Union busting is an attempt to destroy workers’ authority, control, and power in the workplace, but the fight against it is often won outside in the community. Developing more worker commitment, involvement, and militance is necessary, but it isn’t usually enough by itself. Community support is needed, both in the form of activity — marching on the picket line, coming to rallies, contributing money — and in the more passive but equally crucial climate of opinion which makes militant actions possible. People need to understand that union busting hurts the whole community: that wages (and therefore tax receipts) in the area will go down, that families will be broken (and battered — one of the frequent side effects of long strikes), that many of these people will never work again or work only at minimum wage, that property values will fall as people are forced to sell their homes, that all progressive causes will be hurt by the loss of union strength and by the increasing climate of fear. Understanding this, people need to join in the struggle, to support and defend the militant tactics needed to break union busting.

Community solidarity was particularly important at the nursing home. Here, the workers were relatively inexperienced unionists; the union workforce was too small in number to effectively close the facility; and the fact that it was a nursing home made a strike particularly vulnerable to anti-union propaganda. Without community support there is no way this strike could have been won. The preparations of the organizer can serve as a strong example of how to fight union busting.

The organizer put together a group of community activists to build a sphere of support before the strike. First, this group prepared and distributed leaflets to make the issues of the strike clear. It was explained that the workers at the home were almost all women, nearly all of them making the federal minimum wage, that staff turnover was well over 50 percent every six months, and that the key issue in the strike was union busting. It was easy to show that this was not just a labor issue, it was a women’s issue; that residents were harmed by the incredible turnover rate; and that management’s refusal to give workers a minimal pay raise because “they couldn’t afford it” was contradicted by their willingness to pay outside union busters more than $100 an hour. Without this preparation for the strike, the strikers could have been portrayed as callously producing miserable conditions for seniors, simply for their own material gain. Instead they were able to connect the issues of this strike to its harmful effects on the nursing home residents, on the community, and on working women.
After the strike begins, the picket line and worker morale activities will take up a lot of time and energy. Nonetheless, it is crucial that community support activities be continued and increased. Leaflets should be distributed in the community, letters should be sent to all local newspapers, and people in the media should be called. But dispersing information about the strike is not enough. You must also solicit the active participation of individuals and groups who could be listed on a leaflet. Religious support can be especially important.

At the metal shop, there was essentially no attempt to build community support before the strike, or even for the first three months of the strike. Only after scabs were hired did the union make any attempt to reach out. At that time, most of the strikers and their families were mobilized to attend a city council meeting to raise the issue of police bias on the picket line and to dispel false and misleading press characterizations of strikers (who had been labeled “terrorists” in a local editorial, though there had been no violence on the picket line). This went well; press incompetence and police bias were exposed, and both were better thereafter. However, there was no follow-up campaign directed at the city council members. If a petition had been drawn up calling for some specific step, this could have been an organizing tool, and if successful it could have made a material difference.

As the strike dragged on, metal shop strikers developed tremendous community sympathy and support. However, this was never mobilized in any way, and as a result it had much less impact than it should have had. Mobilizing community support is not an end in itself (as opposed to keeping out scabs); it must be directed to some end or it remains ineffective. Thus, at the metal shop, the visit to the city council meeting had some effect, but it would have had much more if there had been a follow-up. The rally that was held had a good turn-out, but it did not increase the level of community involvement to anywhere near the degree it should have. During the nursing home strike, a march and rally were held on two days’ notice. The large turnout to that event made it clear that community support for the strike was building, increased the political pressure on the town through the implicit threat of future disruptions, and was a significant factor in forcing the management to settle. At the metal shop, the rally was larger (but not by a great deal, and it came after two weeks’ preparation), but it was an isolated event, not part of a campaign; it was not used to mobilize people and draw them into further activities.

One of the most potent weapons for providing support can come when the families of strikers are mobilized to carry on support work. During a union-busting strike in Clinton, Iowa, the home town of one of the authors, the “concerned citizens” were organized by wives of strikers and the committee carried on for the duration of the strike, collecting donations and mobilizing other families for the picket line. When spouses and children are organized, it can have a tremendous effect for the following reasons: (1) it provides a double or tripling of the energy which strikers have themselves (among people who have as much at stake in the strike as the strikers); (2) it lets the community see the human dimensions of union busting: that whole families are under attack; (3) it keeps the whole family unit involved in the strike. When a strike drags on, it places a tremendous emotional (as well as financial) burden on a family. The strikers are depressed easily. Getting the rest of the family involved helps everyone see the commonality of the struggle; it keeps families from feeling isolated in such an insecure time; and most important, it keeps families together at a time when divorce and frustration are common
(in Clinton, an incredible amount of divorce and divorce-talk went on as the strike progressed over the months).

At the metal shop, an attempt was made to bring the wives into the strike in a formal way. Strikers were asked to bring their wives to a community support committee meeting. About twenty to thirty wives came and many did get involved in building for the march, but their involvement largely ended when the rally did. A crucial mistake was made by not having the wives meet together on their own. At the meeting they did attend, by and large, the husbands spoke up for their wives and the wives were definitely inhibited. This seems to have been so partly because of the male domination of the meeting and strike, but also because the wives had never been involved in anything like a strike before and had no opportunity to express their lack of experience. Had they met as a group alone, there is little doubt that much more energy would have been released; that they would have had an opportunity to express their fears and anxieties about the strike itself; that they would have collectively realized their lack of experience and then gone on to organize through learning how to organize. As it was, a crucial source of energy and creativity was never adequately tapped.

One obvious goal of community support is to
provide material aid, both in cash and in kind. As soon as a strike begins, and if possible well before that, a finance committee and a food committee should be established — the former to solicit cash donations from other unions, local merchants, community groups and individuals, and the latter to solicit food donations from local stores and restaurants. These actions are not only important in and of themselves, they also serve as a message to management that you are digging in for a long fight. One of the best fundraising techniques is to go to workplaces, both plant gates and offices, and solicit “a buck a week” for as long as the strike continues. A dollar a week, collected on pay day, is not enough for anyone to feel the pinch too much, but if the strike continues for very long it can amount to much more than would be collected by periodic solicitations. Moreover, it keeps the community involved and interested, and it forces the strikers to keep reaching out to and talking with other workers in the area.

Another important community resource is cultural support, especially music. In our area we have been fortunate in having a terrific semi-professional folk singer who is committed to left struggles. His presence can transform a picket line, lift workers’ spirits, and increase their determination. He has also involved others of his musical friends in support work, and has even written a song specifically about this strike, which the union has released as a 45 RPM single. But in any area, it should be possible to find people who can play a guitar and sing; get them down to the line and print up song sheets with the words to “Solidarity Forever,” “Union Maids,” “We Shall Not Be Moved,” and other standbys.

The Union’s Relation to Its Members

The sort of militance outlined earlier clearly requires workers to display far more commitment, initiative, creativity, discipline, and leadership than is shown in the average strike. The relationship which has developed in the last forty years between workers and the union bureaucracy makes it difficult to develop the kind of worker militance which is required. The metal shop strike can serve as a textbook example of this. On the one hand, the workers were very committed to the union: not a person has gone back (or come close to it) during the eighteen months of the strike. Moreover, the workers strongly supported the union, saw it as a symbol of their collective solidarity and strength. On the other hand, the workers weren’t very militant or effective during the strike, and the union representative’s actions served to stifle workers’ creativity and limit their participation.

The day-to-day course of the strike thus served to reproduce the same social relations of authority that existed on the shop floor. A strike clearly needs leadership, but the purpose of the leadership should be to develop people’s capacities and commitment, to teach them to do things they have never done before, to prepare them to control their own activities and run their own strike. The point is to unleash people’s creativity. To do this, the rep or other person in charge of the strike (official of the local, whoever) must delegate authority and encourage people to become involved by supporting and developing their ideas.

This did not happen at the metal shop, or happened to only a small degree. It is hard to determine to what extent this was due to the personal characteristics of the rep, to what extent to the character of the workers, and to what extent to the structure of the situation.

Whatever the reason, the operative concept seemed to be that only experts (i.e., union staff) could run a strike; as at work, the strikers were necessary to carry out the decisions that others had made, but they did not have much more control over activities out of the shop than they did in it. At least at the beginning of the strike, work-
ers made many promising suggestions about actions to take. (This happened at weekly union meetings, well attended because that is when strike benefits were paid.) The rep put down essentially all of these suggestions, sometimes offering a good reason (though one that could have formed the starting point for a discussion — "that's an interesting idea but the problem would be . . .") — but instead was said in a tone that discouraged any follow-up) and sometimes invoking various mysterious forces which only union experts could know about but which could lead to big trouble if ignored. His favorite here was the law, and the threat that the international union would be sued into bankruptcy because of the rash actions of a handful of hotheads at a small plant.* Obviously, the law does need to be considered, and many of the ideas were unworkable or needed significant modification. But a great many good ideas were lost. Even more important, workers lost enthusiasm and commitment. Since their ideas were not taken up, or when taken up were presented as if they were staff suggestions (after a week or two of delay), workers did not feel enthusiastic about the activities, didn't have a sense of pride, a feeling that they were in control. The workers' feelings were rational and justified, and they responded in the "sensible" way: they did what they were told, but did not really try to initiate and follow through on their own suggestions.

An example (one of many) from the metal shop illustrates this. About a month after scabs began going in (and right after the rally), a higher union official called for the workers to begin a candlelight vigil at the owner's house. Most of the workers showed up for the first vigil, the media were there in force, and it was generally very successful. The vigil continued night after night, and it was very effective both in gaining public support and in having an impact on the owner. After about ten nights, however, the workers urged that the vigil

be moved around, be held at the plant manager's house one night, a scab's house the next night, and so on. Despite considerable worker support for this idea, the rep vetoed it outright, never considering putting the question to a vote or even an open discussion. "We" had said the vigil would be at the owner's house until he settled, and there it would stay.** In our opinion, the workers were absolutely right: the candlelight vigil had had its impact on the owner, could have been effective at other houses, and even for the owner would probably have been more of a threat if it had been unpredictable (since he just left the house for a two-hour block of time each evening — an inconvenience which probably made him unhappy but became routine). When the workers' suggestion finally was taken up, more than a month later, it was presented as a staff mandate.

Relations With Other Unions

Given the relationship we have just described between the national staff bureaucracy and workers, it is easy to understand the relationship with other unions. Other unions (for the most part) had the same top-down authority structure and the same minimal membership involvement. Therefore, when other unions were called, this generally meant calling the staff of the other union, and they were no more able or willing to turn out their membership than the staff of the union we were working with.

*If they put out a leaflet identifying scabs — later done with tacit union approval, but not as an official action — or tipped over the bus (scabs would claim they had been permanently disabled and the union would have to support them for life), or any of a host of other actions.

**The rep's response was probably based on his unwillingness to cross his boss, the "we" who had unexpectedly announced at the rally that the union would have a candlelight vigil at the owner's house until he settled. The rep was answerable to his boss, but not really to the workers.
On the very limited number of occasions when the union staff tried to get help beyond the local, they would call the staff of other unions in the area. Thirty such phone calls might produce as many as ninety people out on the picket line. These ninety people might represent twenty unions, with an average of four or five people from each union, at least half of them some sort of staff. Their support was important, and these people came willingly on the few occasions they were called.

But turning them out could not really build a movement to stop union busting. These people were already committed to support any strike, but at the same time they did not have extra time or energy. In their own unions they were probably unwilling to undertake militant struggle or to risk arrest; of course this was even more true for someone else’s struggle. When they came to a picket line or rally it resembled a machine politician’s appearance at a funeral — they were careful to check in and out, did what they could in their
limited time there, but expected basically to stand around. (Perhaps more would have been done if more had been asked for, but this is all that did happen.)

The strikers themselves did not very often make contacts with workers in other plants, but one such contact provides an illuminating contrast. During the strike, one of the workers took a job at another nearby plant. He did a good enough job of presenting the case that one day after work 125 people from that plant marched over to join the picket line. Unlike the staff representatives from other locals, these people wanted action, i.e., to tip the bus over and teach the scabs a lesson. That could have been a turning point in the strike; unfortunately, the striking workers were so effectively socialized into passivity that they refused the offer of help. The workers from the other plant left saying that they didn't want to come back just to watch the scabs drive through; they were ready to be called when the strikers were ready for some real action. More than a month later, the union rep from the metal shop called the union rep (or local president) for that union to try to turn people out for the mass arrest/mass picket/sit-down, with the result that no one came. (Admittedly, a peaceful sit-down, losing a day's pay, getting arrested is not the equivalent of a mass-action scab stomping, but then that too is a part of the contrast.) To beat union busting, workers need to establish links with other rank-and-file workers, not simply go through the union bureaucracy.

Relations With Support Groups

None of our experiences with union busting have been as workers in the union being busted. In each case, we have been outsiders, members of a support group. Moreover, we ourselves are university-based, and so is the most active component of the membership of our support network, though there are community people and some trade unionists as well. That is, in each case we have been "outsiders" and perhaps even "communists" and had to deal with the risk of being labeled as such by the union, the cops, the company, the media, and the workers themselves.

Outsiders are clearly in a very different position from workers at the plant. It was not our struggle, and we could not take the lead, could not press for actions more militant than people were prepared for at that point, could not take on the union in the way we would have done had we been members. At the same time, our lives and experiences meant that we had some self-confidence and skills (writing, speaking, knowing the law, organizing a meeting, etc.) that the workers at the plant generally did not have.

The workers generally welcomed our presence. At the beginning of the strike at the nursing home, the workers were overwhelmed by the number of supporters, and some of the students who came down for brief periods were undisciplined enough to "show their militance" by doing something extreme (shouting obscenities, etc.) without knowing enough to have an appropriate target. At first, therefore, there were some problems in making sure that it remained the workers' strike, but in just a few days the core group of supporters established good relations with strikers. At the metal shop there were excellent relations from the very beginning, since the workers had been on strike for sixteen weeks without having any support to speak of on the line. People immediately began telling us all about the strike, welcoming us.

The union staff had less reason to welcome us because we made the strike less predictable and because they had had (or heard of) unfortunate experiences with other left groups. At the nursing home strike, the organizer was much like us (a graduate school dropout) and the union had a left character, so relations were never a problem. Over time the metal shop union came to trust us
and rely on us more and more. One strike supporter in particular became, at least for this strike, essentially an unpaid organizer for the union (receiving gas money and having other expenses reimbursed).

In fact, if anything, the problem became that we were too close to the union, that we were seen — by both the workers and the union staff — as more a part of the leadership than the workers and their elected leaders. We frequently became in practice another group to do things for the workers instead of a group helping to involve them. On a number of crucial occasions, actions were planned by us and the union staff without any workers present, or with only minimal input from them.

A key issue in relations of the support group with the union was sexism. From the first day we joined the picket line at the metal shop, it became clear that women’s participation was most welcome, but women’s ideas, unless transmitted through the men in our support group, were not. The women of the support group worked as hard if not harder than the men to organize and implement actions for the strike at the metal shop. They helped make hundreds of phone calls, organized transportation for would-be pickets, wrote, produced, and distributed leaflets, made banners and posters for the rally, offered physical support to the picket line, and attended many of the union meetings. Despite the incredible amount of energy they put into this strike, they received very little recognition by the union officials. Many of the ideas generated by the women were used during the course of the strike, but they were more often than not referred to as the ideas of “Steve’s group.” On the other hand, when men made suggestions which later became part of the union’s strategy, these men were singled out and praised. Women simply were not listened to and taken seriously.

Despite the behavior of the union reps, women continued to contribute their time and energy to the strike. But over time this treatment wore them down, and they tended to withdraw from active participation. In a sense they had no choice, since they could not be real participants in planning and decision making, even if they attended the same meetings as men. Nor did they receive first-hand information about what the union was thinking or planning. In many ways, the active men in the support group came to be treated like junior-grade union reps — befriended by the union staff, consulted, listened to, and taken more seriously, in practice, than were the workers. The active women in the support group, however, were treated much like the workers — allowed to speak their piece but not really taken seriously, given tasks to do but not being allowed to plan or decide. As a result, over time, these women — despite their experience, articulateness, and awareness that they had good ideas — became much less active.

**Conclusion**

On the simplest level, the lesson is clear: to win, a union needs to build a militant struggle, engage the active participation of a significant part of the workforce, reach out to the community early on to actively build support, and have good leadership that is consistently there. A union that insists on observing legalities and accepting the limits this imposes, stifles worker creativity and thus limits commitment and involvement, is late to build community support and does not channel it effectively, and has inconsistent leadership will probably lose. Or at least it seems clear to us. But most unions obviously do not agree. They resist mounting the kind of struggle we have called for, or do so only as a last resort, after normal tactics (and inaction) have put them in a very difficult situation.

When we think about our involvement in union busting struggles, past, present, and future, it is
hard to be optimistic. More and more companies are going to be busting more and more unions, and the political-economic conditions for doing so will be moving in favor of capital. As yet this has been a relatively limited phenomenon, but each success by management makes the next attack easier (and more likely). If the labor movement does not make some significant changes soon, it is likely to suffer devastating defeats that will lead to further demoralization and weakness. The busting of unions at small shops is proceeding apace; another year or two of such successes and we may see the first attempt to bust a major national union, though continued union concessions make this less necessary.

There is a positive side: union busting attempts often provoke an incredible level of militance; if unions allow it, these struggles develop new forms and change workers’ consciousness. If such struggles take place, and especially if they are based on careful preparation, with union leadership and commitment, the struggles will win. The unions that emerge from such struggles, however, will have to be very different from the bureaucratic unions of today. Ideally, such unions should be built before there is any hint of union busting. A union that develops this kind of community involvement and support, that mobilizes worker energy and initiative, that supports other unions and community groups in their struggles — such a union is in a permanent state of readiness. The “problem” with such a union is that it may pose great difficulties for a union bureaucracy that wants to keep things quiet and under control. But it is rapidly reaching the point where the choices for the labor movement may be to be destroyed by union busting or else to build more democratic, participatory, and militant movements.

Union busting must be of concern not just to unions, but to all progressive people wherever they are located. In the late 1940s, anticommmunism began by throwing Communists out of unions (aided by Taft-Hartley) or expelling entire unions. That was the key struggle; that was what destroyed the social base for the Left. With no movement to back them, with no material base of support, the Communists (and other progressives) who were left were extremely vulnerable. In those circumstances, McCarthyism was simply a mopping-up operation — vital to be sure, but one whose outcome had already been decided. Today as well, if unions are destroyed or greatly weakened, every progressive cause will suffer, from women’s issues to academic freedom. Joining the struggle against union busting is not an act of charity, it is a necessary form of solidarity, for if they come for them in the morning, they will come for us in the evening.

That said, it is unclear what involvement is possible for those who do not work in the union which is then being broken, unless the union accepts and mobilizes such support. Our experiences in this regard have been very positive in some respects, very frustrating in others. We have found that the union staff does welcome us — as long as we do what they tell us and do not push too hard for more militant actions. The workers in the shops, and the leadership of the locals, have given us overwhelmingly positive receptions. Unions have taken a great many of our ideas and have put them into practice. In terms of specific tactics and suggestions, the union at the metal shop has (eventually) done almost everything we could think of.

Since the first draft of this article was written, the union has tried many innovative tactics, often based on ideas generated in discussion with support group members, and often carried out with our participation. Here is a quick run-down on some of the things the union has done:

(1) It has initiated a nationwide boycott of the products of this company; the product is not intended for consumers, so the boycott depends on
other unions’ refusing to handle these goods.

(2) Members followed the owner several times when he went out to lunch, then went into the restaurant in a group, with the folksinger making an announcement: “Ladies and gentlemen, sitting over here is Mr. X Y, owner of [the metal shop]. He’s made millions off the backs of his workers, many of whom have been there for thirty years and built the company from nothing into the thirty-million-dollar-a-year business it is today. Now Mr. Y has thrown those workers out into the street and is trying to break their union. This is a little song about him.” Then the group sang a song of the Depression, whose chorus is: “I don’t want your millions, mister; I don’t want your diamond rings; All I want is the right to live, mister; So give me back my job again.” After a few choruses, the group left (it took the manager that long to get after us).

(3) It has attempted to get at the company through its board of directors and connections with other companies. The owner of the metal shop was on the board of a local savings bank. Preparations were made to pass out pledge cards, asking people to pledge to withdraw their money from the bank, a hundred people per week until the strike was settled or the owner resigned from the board. That campaign aborted because the owner resigned as soon as we asked the bank to remove him from their board.

(4) The local folksinger wrote a song about this strike, and the union produced a record of it, thousands of copies of which have been sold (some in the local area, but most to other locals of the union around the country) to get out the message and to raise some money.

(5) A local documentary filmmaker has made a fifty-minute professional-quality color video about the strike, with film footage of various events (especially the mass sit-down) and extensive interviews with the strikers and their families.

(6) Free Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners were distributed to the strikers and their families and Christmas presents provided for them.

This is an impressive list of tactics, and it is fair to say that the union is open to and interested in any sort of innovative idea. However, two constants remain:

(1) None of these ideas is pursued systematically as part of a campaign which builds relentlessly. The owner was followed three or four times and sung to, but did not have to live with a continuing campaign of public exposure and accountability. The video documentary is powerful and moving—but six weeks after its release it had been shown just once in the local area (and a half dozen times at our colleges). Six months later it still had been shown only a handful of times.

(2) Though the union has been very innovative in the tactics used, it has never changed the social relations of the strike. The union bureaucracy remains in control—they decide what is to be done and control the execution of each significant step. The workers have little say in their own strike, and
by now, many of them are understandably miserable and discouraged. Some of this feeling is vented in hostility directed at the union. In discussions with the most militant and committed workers, two phrases come up over and over: "They're [the union staff] very dominating sorts of guys" and "They think since they pick up the tab they can call the shots." Unfortunately, this has not led the workers to assert their own right to run the strike, but rather to a kind of bitter withdrawal, expressed over and over in phrases like "You can't tell them [staff] anything. I just tell the guys, they [union staff] pick up the tab, so they can call the shots. Don't argue with them, there's no use." Workers have had requests from other groups to see the video, but the workers can't get the video from the union to show it (or that at least is their perception, based on one key part of reality, but probably they have not done all that they should to get the video from the union). Some workers are bitter about the Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners, feel that they are charity, that it is degrading to take such charity, and that the union makes a public spectacle of them (having them receive their dinners in front of television crews), with no respect for their feelings.

The struggle will continue, and it is hurting the company, but it is unlikely that the relations between the workers and the union will change significantly, and it is hard to be optimistic about the final outcome of the strike. By now it seems that the only possibility for success would be to have militant mass picketing by hundreds of people, the kind of picketing which leaves scabs in hospitals. There are dozens, perhaps hundreds, of members of the national union (and some other supporters) who would be willing to do so, but the union is understandably unwilling because it would make them vulnerable to major penalties and still would probably not be enough to win. It seems likely that the strike will be lost; we can only hope that this strike, which has been a learning experience for all those involved, will lead this national union (and others) to respond more effectively to the next union-busting strike.

Postscript

A decertification election has been held and is now being contested. Assuming (as is highly likely) the NLRB upholds the company, scab votes will count and striker votes will be thrown out, and the union thus will be decertified. The boycott will continue, but there will be only a very slim chance of success.

Footnotes


The authors of this article are members of the Western Massachusetts Labor Community Support Network. DAN CLAWSON is author of Bureaucracy and the Labor Process and teaches sociology at the University of Massachusetts/Amherst. KAREN JOHNSON is a graduate student in sociology at the same school. JOHN SCHALL is a member of the South End Press collective and is working on a study of the effects on workers of union decertifications.
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Dear friends,

We hope you agree with the above sentiment—particularly with regard to Radical America. As some of you may know, we are facing the most serious financial crisis in our history. We need to raise $10,000 to keep publishing; we have bills we just can’t cover with our ordinary revenues. This is a small amount of money by the standard of some left publications, but it is more than we have ever had to raise before. We think we can do it, but it won’t be easy.

The reason we want to keep going is that we think RA is a unique voice on the left at the present time. We feel this journal’s influence extends well beyond our subscription list. Articles from our pages have been reprinted in numerous publications in this country and around the world, many of our pieces have appeared in books and numerous pamphlets and reprints have been used by study and organizing groups alike. Our record over the last sixteen years—and our ability to probe new issues while retaining the same values—shows that a lot would be lost if Radical America were to be silenced. We think our most recent issue, an anthology of articles, poems and art from the first fifteen years, shows that we have kept the faith. Our political commitment to a truly egalitarian socialism has remained steady over the years. Experience has made the magazine more sophisticated but not jaded or cynical.

As can be expected, such efforts have brought little reward from American high finance and the U.S. Postal Service. Instead, in the midst of this “depression by any other name,” we have faced skyrocketing printing costs and a tremendous increase in second class postal rates. It is a combination that has wracked small, alternative publications like Radical America. We must also assume some of the responsibility.

This financial crisis has been aggravated by several factors that we think represent inexperienced management rather than a fundamental instability. This is how we see our mistakes: We printed too many copies of our special issue on the New Right (Jan.-April 1981). It has been one of our best selling issues ever, but we gambled on reaching an audience twice our normal size and didn’t. We let our printing costs creep upward instead of shopping around to compare costs. Now we have obtained estimates which could save us well over $1,000 an issue. Our lack of experience with a financial crisis of this magnitude led us to ignore the warning signals as we put our Spring 1982 issue together; because we had many articles on hand that we liked a lot, we printed them all and produced a much more expensive issue than we should have. Given the current economic situation, we will continue to need ongoing support from our readers, but we are taking steps to correct our financial miscalculations and do not expect to face another deficit of this magnitude or immediacy.

We need your help. Some of you have already been contacted by us, for others this may be the first time you have heard of our predicament. We are hoping for contributions from as many people or organizations as possible. Every little bit will help. If you are unable to make a large donation, you can consider a gift sub for a relative or friend (at only $10), becoming a sustaining subscriber ($50* per year) or renewing your sub early.

We appreciate the continuing support of our readers.

*Checks for $50.00 or more are tax deductible and should be made payable to Capp St. Foundation and sent to Radical America at the above address.

In solidarity,

The Editors
FRANCES FOX PIVEN & RICHARD A. CLOWARD
THE NEW CLASS WAR
Reagan's Attack on the Welfare State and Its Consequences
THE POLITICS OF WELFARE

Ann Withorn


The capitalist welfare state is easy to criticize. It provides inadequate income and services to people in a degrading and dehumanizing manner. During times of unrest it expands — to quell dissent and buy off militants — and then it dismantles or weakens programs during times of quiet. The substance of most social programs reinforces existing power relationships, blames society's victims, and upholds the dominant individualistic ideology. Bureaucratic structures are convoluted and make direct, caring contact almost impossible. Programs for special groups create animosity within the working class. The list of criticisms is familiar and could be offered by any serious socialist, populist, or left liberal.

For the past fifteen years, Frances Piven and Richard Cloward have supplied the basic information and analysis for such a critique. Their welfare rights activity, their influential book Regulating the Poor, and their other writings helped a generation of leftists and progressive social workers to gain a perspective on the social control functions of the welfare state. They used extensive historical examples to examine the political and economic functions of welfare in a capitalist society and gave support for a profound
distrust of the motives and impacts of government programs. The standard argument of liberal technocrats — that the welfare state was simply a natural outgrowth of industrial development and changing social roles — was no match for Piven and Cloward’s expose of the class functions of the liberal state.

Indeed, it was exactly the acceptance of Piven and Cloward’s critique which often separated human service activists from traditional social workers. Still, this analysis left many human service workers confused about the meaning of our work. While we accepted the social control functions of social welfare, we were also confronted with the enormity of the need for caring social programs and the reality that many people wanted and depended upon such programs for their economic and social survival. We could intellectually explain the positive aspects of the welfare state as a “contradiction” of capitalism, but it was often difficult to personally reconcile our sense that our work has some positive — even liberating — effects with our understanding of the negative purposes of the welfare state.

In the current climate of reaction, our personal confusions become serious political liabilities. Commentators of the far Right even (selectively) cite liberal and left criticisms of the welfare state in their efforts to dismantle it. They too argue that the bureaucracies are unwieldy and degrading, that they hurt people instead of helping them. Although the Right’s underlying reasons for attacking the state are different from ours, we are often so bound by our own instinctive hostility to capitalist welfare programs that we find it difficult to justify our (equally instinctive) sense that social programs must be defended from such assaults. We flounder around like liberals, only able to talk about the human pain and suffering caused by the cuts — which are real enough — but little able to offer a systematic analysis of what should be defended in the welfare state and why.

In The New Class War, Piven and Cloward offer a brief but significant corrective to their earlier analysis and suggest the beginnings of a way out of our current confusions. More explicitly Marxist than their earlier work (and more addressed to a left audience), the book provides a more dialectical interpretation of the development of welfare programs and suggests the elements of a progressive defense. The book is sketchy. It was written quickly and is already dated in some discussions of the Reagan program. But it is important because it points the way to a struggle to defend welfare programs without glossing over their deficiencies. Unlike social democrats who would now join ranks and have us defend all social programs without qualification, Piven and Cloward provide the arguments which allow us to criticize the failures of the welfare state while also seeing it as a positive, and limited, result of previous class struggle.

In brief, Piven and Cloward make three separate arguments in The New Class War. First they discuss the nature and impact of the current attack. They see it as an attempt by the ruling class to push back the popular, democratic claims on the capitalist economy which have grown in extent and popularity since the 1930s. They argue that the current welfare programs are more extensive than has been recognized and are deeply imbedded in the institutional structures of this society. While they acknowledge that programs have been used to discipline workers, as they argued in the past, here they also contend that such programs are hard-won victories which serve to limit the power of capital over workers’ lives. Social Security, unemployment insurance, welfare, social services, and medical benefits do, indeed, protect the poor from the worst economic calamities and serve as a check on capitalist exploitation. It is this entrenchment of “subsistence rights” which the Right is attempting to weaken with the current cuts.
Second, most of the book offers a brief historical overview of the struggle for subsistence rights through three periods of capitalist development and crisis. As capitalism emerged in late-medieval England, they argue, many displaced peasants turned to the state for a guarantee of basic subsistence, regardless of the vagaries of market forces. However, early capitalists responded by denying state responsibility for most people — except the absolutely unproductive "worthy poor" — and by asserting that only the capitalistic job market could be depended on for economic survival.

During the US capitalist crisis of the late nineteenth century, this separation of economic demands for subsistence from political demands for civil rights was reaffirmed in a "democratic" context. Government was to be officially uninvolved in economic affairs, even in the face of severe economic unrest. Militants might criticize government intervention on the side of big business — much as sports fans might protest an unfair referee — but the expectation that the state should supply direct economic relief was not won. The state was to provide noneconomic services, to develop "expertise" in relation to policy questions, and, sometimes, to protect civil rights. But the presumption was reaffirmed — even by trade unions — that bosses, not the government, were responsible for jobs and economic well-being.

The Depression of the 1930s ended this uneasy separation. The economic connections between capitalism and government became more clear with the failure of the private economy. Workers and militants began once again to demand that the state which helped the capitalists should help the people too. The demand for subsistence rights for the whole working class grew and resulted in governmental guarantees — however compromised — for economic and employment security. While most New Deal programs were "universal" pro-
grams aimed in fact at the white, stable workforce, there was also an important acceptance of federal support for welfare benefits for the poor. Just as the "neutral" state became more involved in supporting the position of capital during this crisis, so it too was forced into acknowledging and providing minimal protection for the rights to economic survival for the working class.

Third, Piven and Cloward conclude that the post-Depression expansion of state responsibility, due to labor and popular demands, has created a surprisingly strong base for popular unity. They argue that the workers who benefit from Social Security and Unemployment can unite with the poor who receive less-popular welfare benefits and with human service workers in a broad-based coalition to defeat attempts to shrink subsistence rights. It is too late, they contend, for the ruling class to withdraw from the commitments its state has made to protect people from capitalistic excesses. Employment programs, medical benefits, and basic income supports have, since the 1960s, increasingly become expected rights of the poorer members of the working class. Minorities, women, the elderly and the handicapped have combined older "Social Security" benefits won in the thirties with newer services available through recent social programs to create a package of social benefits which allow them to survive, despite a hostile economic and social environment. While welfare programs do serve all the negative functions attributed to them, they also create deep social expectations that the government will help people. And Piven and Cloward argue that too many people now benefit from social programs for the state to pull back peacefully, no matter what the worldwide economic pressures.

Piven and Cloward are, then, ultimately optimistic, in ways which many of us find difficult to be these days. They have come to see the welfare state as strengthening workers in their fight against
the power of capital, because it gives them, indeed, more “social security.” They are hopeful that a collective recognition of the hard-won benefits of social programs will create a national coalition of working-class, minority, women’s, elderly and other constituencies which will fight to retain a continued social expectation that basic subsistence will be guaranteed by the political system. While never trusting the capitalist state, they argue that the ruling class has gone too far, that, in spite of themselves, they have provided welfare programs which strengthen people enough so that they can, and will, fight to keep and expand their subsistence rights.

Continuing Questions

In many ways, Piven and Cloward have jumped to the other side of the debate. Before, human service workers often wanted to remind them of the complexities of human needs, to explain how deep were the demands for social and economic security, and how useful services could be, even though they were provided badly and for all the wrong reasons. Now, in emphasizing the positive functions of welfare, the authors force human service activists to raise with them new and perhaps more important strategic questions.

First, the structural, economically dominated nature of their discussion leaves us still unsettled

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I Love That Man
He's No Welfare Scum!

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about a range of ideological issues which surround welfare. By emphasizing the undeniable economic (subsistence) benefits which have been gained from the state, the authors tend to ignore the negative role welfare has assumed in the popular ideology. Anyone who has done welfare organizing knows how hostile most white working- and middle-class people are to the idea of welfare. Many people will not even apply for what they deserve and are convinced that most recipients are cheats and shirkers. Examples to the contrary are ignored or explained away as deserving exceptions.

Here we must acknowledge that the Right is not manipulating public opinion, it is reflecting it. We cannot respond with academic arguments to such attitudes, nor can we simply blame them either on past failures of the welfare system or on false consciousness engendered by elites. Instead, we must consider the roots of such attitudes and develop alternative proposals. Perhaps, as the authors seem to suggest, the widespread crunch of our current depression will force people away from such values, but we cannot assume this. Like racism and sexism — and directly linked to them — attitudes about welfare may be so strong as to support actions that run counter to narrow economic self-interest. It would be naive to assume that antiwelfare attitudes will recede as material conditions worsen. So activists must be prepared with an explicitly ideological counter-attack.

In Boston, women in the Coalition for Basic Human Needs (a statewide welfare advocacy group) have taken such issues head on. In addition to traditional organizing against cuts, they have also made sophisticated use of street theater and radio/TV talk shows. They have attempted to put forward a more personal, emotional, and challenging message: “We are just like you. We work taking care of our children and receive inadequate return on the taxes we have paid and our families pay — just like you receive inadequate return for your taxes. We are all being squeezed. What would you do in our situation?” They attempt to create a unity around shared needs and common lack of services and income. They often argue forcefully with callers, pushing them to offer alternatives to welfare for the single, poorly educated female parent. Sometimes you can hear responses which indicate small breakthroughs.

Obviously, the effects of such “organizing” are uncertain, but at least they bring to the fore a critical ideological debate. They offer a direct response to the moralism of the New Right, not the dry factual analyses or rhetorical flourishes which have so often characterized the past.

Similarly, Piven and Cloward’s arguments minimalize the special situation of women on welfare. Poor women have always been a large segment of welfare recipients. Now, increasingly, income maintenance programs are women’s programs, as more and more formerly middle-class women become single parents or grow older alone, and as more poor men can depend on a working wife’s income. The Reagan cuts have been most dramatic on those programs which have the greatest impact on women. The authors recognize this as a reason why women should organize, but they do not explore the complex ways in which welfare programs reflect women’s status in this society, nor the explicit defense of the patriarchal family which is as much a part of the Reagan program as is the defense of capital.3

Women are on welfare (AFDC) because it is often the most rational option if they wish to raise their children without the support of a man. Even if they find work, they are often still poor enough to qualify for welfare, although recent cuts have limited this work support. In short, many women turn to the welfare system not only for economic subsistence but also for recognition and support for their chosen, or unavoidable, major life role —
primary parent for their children. Thus, supporting welfare rights becomes more than a simple recognition of economic needs. It also is a validation of women’s rights to live without men and without a “second job” outside the home.

Taking this position requires a big leap in consciousness, one which even many Marxists may be unwilling to make. Many who support women’s fight against cuts and for livable benefits will still balk at the demand that women have a right to stay home with their children if they so choose. Even if full day-care were available and decent breadwinner’s wages were accessible to all — huge ifs — some women would still want the right to choose the full-time work of child-rearing for a period of their lives. Certainly in this society, where single parents face extensive economic and social pressures, the option for a woman to see the raising of children and self-development as worthy of full-time support seems essential. Yet such arguments go beyond economism and force us to think about broader social goals. They do undermine the necessity for two-parent families; they do call into question the sanctity of paid work as the essential element of human dignity; and they do suggest that economic “dependence” may not always be so bad.

Of course, the current welfare system is so degrading that it scarcely embodies these utopian alternatives. Yet it is precisely because of this open-ended potential — as well as because of its competition with low-wage labor — that welfare is attacked by the Right. They see it as expanding women’s options and limiting patriarchy, and they oppose it for those reasons. Any defense of welfare must be prepared to defend the broader feminist freedoms involved in welfare and not try to hide behind simple economic arguments.

Issues of race are similarly complicated. Third World people are disproportionately clients of the welfare system because they are disproportionately poor due to racism. Therefore, attacks on social programs are especially harmful to black and Hispanic people. Furthermore, it also seems that many minorities have been less brainwashed by the American dream and thus are less opposed to receiving social benefits when they need them. Some blacks and Hispanics may be less ashamed of being on welfare because they are less likely to blame themselves for their poverty. This rational understanding of how to survive within a hostile system, however, becomes labeled “welfare dependency,” and is seen as proof of a “vicious cycle of poverty” and as creating a pathological, generational “underclass.” Such arguments are then used, in turn, to pretend that program cuts are ultimately in the best interests of recipients.

These attitudes both reflect and foster racism within this society. They trap Third World people in a nasty double bind. A racist economy makes them most likely to need benefits. Their sophistication about the limits of this system allows them to take what “benefits” they can get from it as rights, without experiencing as much ambivalence as whites about the attached stigma. Then they find themselves further discriminated against both because they are poor and because they are more able to withstand the degradation of the system. Even when sympathetic legislators and TV commentators want “showcase” welfare recipients, they ask for white people “so that people won’t think that everyone on welfare is black.” Yet stressing the numbers of whites on welfare can undermine the special problems of the black poor and can gloss over the racist factors which indeed do make a welfare system which disproportionately serves minorities.

Such complexities are not contained in a simple notion of welfare rights as subsistence rights. They affect the ability of whites and blacks to unite around the welfare issue. (For example, in another Boston welfare rights group the white women are
often more interested in talking about the demeaning aspects of welfare, while black women seem more concerned with demanding more. Such subtle differences can cause internal distrust.) They affect the possibility of campaigns for more welfare, not just for more jobs. In the end, they complicate Piven and Cloward’s hope for unity around welfare issues.

Finally, Piven and Cloward are optimistic about the ability of workers within the welfare bureaucracy to unite with their clients because both now face cutbacks. Here again the continuing social reality of the existing “class war” in the welfare office may make such alliances difficult. Professionalism has made many social workers strive for “distance” from their clients, and fundamental class differences between most workers and clients have reinforced this distance. Current cutbacks and reduction in worker autonomy may heighten rather than reduce the anger workers may feel toward clients. Clients have few good reasons to trust social workers, who are often the cops of the poverty system. Our new understanding of the benefits of the welfare state cannot allow us to overlook this basic daily reality. Again, activist social workers can attempt to create new relationships based on new, shared vulnerabilities but to depend on such alliances forming naturally would be to deny all we have learned about the negative functions of the welfare state.

The New Class War could not answer all these questions in its brief 150 pages. Its purpose was different. Its goal was to convince activists and other leftists that there are important benefits to be fought for in the current welfare state and that the system of benefits itself provides some base for an organized defense. Piven and Cloward suggest that under advanced capitalism we are all dependent on the state, either for the set of economic props which allow the economy to provide jobs or for the array of welfare programs which provide subsistence to those not “working.” For these insights alone the book is important.

It also allows us to move forward to the task of making the welfare state even more troublesome for capitalism. By attempting to criticize the current welfare system and to expand and protect its benefits, we may help ourselves and others to better understand the need for the types of alliances dreamed of by Piven and Cloward. In the process we may be able to convince ourselves, and others, that truly meaningful gains can be made by making certain strategic demands on the state. Such gains will never be enough, but they may be one part of a socialist strategy which builds social expectations rather than shatters them.

Footnotes

1. Their most influential book was Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare (NY: Pantheon, 1971), although since then there have been a great number of influential articles in numerous publications.
4. The latest version of this tendency is Ken Auletta, The Underclass (New York: Random House, 1982).

ANN WITHORN is an editor of Radical America and is currently finishing a book on the links and tensions between service work and radical politics.
Grapes

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Al Grierson
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THE MAJORITY AS AN OBSTACLE TO PROGRESS:

Radicals, Peasants, and the Russian Revolution

Esther Kingston-Mann

A group of peasants listen, as an educated Russian despairingly laments their refusal to make even the simplest change in their usual routine. Silently and politely they stand, as he presents them with a lengthy history of their broken promises and evasions. At last, when he is finished, one of the assembled peasants blurts out, “I guess we’re just bad, that’s all there is to it.” And he walks off, followed by the rest of his friends and neighbors.

In this scene, pictured by the Russian novelist Gleb Uspenskii long before the Bolshevik revolution, we recognize a difficulty which seems to arise whenever pressures for change are perceived as external. For the gap which separated Uspenskii’s educated Russian from his audience did not simply emerge because he was wise and they were foolish. Both speaker and listeners were bound by a traditional mode of interaction based upon profound differences of culture and class. Assertions of the right to guide, praise, and blame the Russian peasantry had flourished in the soil of gentry privilege ever since the first imposition of serfdom upon a reluctant rural populace. In the eighteenth century, economically innovative serfowners enthusiastically forced peasants to accept both their sound and their unsound projects for change, and equated any rejection of their authority with a rejection

I want to thank Daniel Clifford, John Clifford, and Michael Quirk for sharing with me some of the lessons of their experience, and I am very grateful to Lou Ferleger, David Hunt, and Michael Quirk for critical comments and suggestions.
of Reason itself. Later, tsarist and Soviet policy makers implemented programs for economic development founded on the premise that peasants had to be forced into a modern world which they would never have chosen on their own.\footnote{1} Peasant response to centuries of this sort of guidance and persuasion was shaped by the suspicion that a progressive was like any other socially privileged person, profoundly ignorant of peasant experience yet confident nevertheless that peasants could possess no knowledge worth preserving.

It is from this vantage point—keeping in mind both the attraction which missionary conceptions of change held for a variety of elites and vanguardists, and the reluctance of peasants to convert en masse and without hesitation to strategies imposed upon them from above—that I will consider problems of Russian rural development. More specifically, I will focus upon the efforts made by Marxists and Populists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to appraise the peasantry without sentimentality (the overriding Marxist fear) and without contempt (a major Populist concern). As we shall see, Marxists and Populists disagreed about the costs of progress and the viability of indigenous peasant institutions and values, while peasants strove with little success to become the subjects rather than the objects of change.

Marxism

The writings of Marx himself offered little guidance on such issues. However confident he may have been about the proletariat’s capacity for revolutionary political action, Marx never investigated the social relations which working people themselves created in order to survive materially as friends, relatives, workmates, or neighbors as well as victims and rebels. Defining peasants and proletarians only within the hierarchical frameworks which their masters and employers had imposed from the top down, he did not take it upon himself to demonstrate that the lower classes possessed any constructive social potential. In contrast, Marx enumerated at some length the social and economic contributions of the bourgeoisie, and in the Communist Manifesto, he claimed that the defection of privileged social elements to the workers’ cause marked a most important stage in the collapse of an exploitative regime.

In the writings of Lenin, the role of the privileged defector becomes more central. Less optimistic than Marx about the revolutionary integrity or the good sense of the proletariat, Lenin found peasants even more in need of external guidance. Either serf-like primitives or potential capitalists and proletarians, they were not even a social class in Marxist terms. As products of the “idiocy of rural life,” peasants were in Lenin’s view quite capable of rejecting any economic change, however rational, if it appeared to threaten their outmoded habits and traditions. To Lenin and the other radical intellectuals who founded the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party in the last years of the nineteenth century, peasant solidarity could only express itself in blind and elemental attacks upon established authority or in reactionary outbursts against Jews, doctors, schoolteachers, or professional revolutionaries. G. V. Plekhanov, the “father of Russian Marxism,” found peasants lacking in “solidarity, broad social interests or ideas.” Marxists who had themselves broken with friends, family, and social class to join the revolutionary cause did not make use of peasant traditions of reliance upon family, friends, and community as a corrective to their own tendencies toward “heroic individualism.” Instead, they found in peasant social bonds an explanation for primitive apathy, bigotry, and lack of initiative. In Plekhanov’s words, the Russian peasantry were “like the Chinese, barbarian-tillers of the soil,
cruel and merciless, beasts of burden whose life provided no opportunity for the luxury of thought.”² While Plekhanov was less tactful than Lenin, his assumptions about the peasantry were quite typical. One would be hard put to discover a Russian Marxist (either then or later) who believed that there were any constructive lessons to be learned from the peasantry’s social or economic experience.

continued to characterize the peasants as individualistic, economically backward petty capitalists who had to learn collective solidarity and anticapitalism from the urban proletariat (and its revolutionary vanguard).³

Some Views From Below

As we have suggested earlier, “vanguards” looked quite different from the peasantry’s perspective. Even before the time of Uspenskii, peasants had become accustomed to the appearance of enthusiasts who demanded that they take some new and unheard-of risk for the sake of some future good. Time and time again, progressive landlords and reforming officials of the tsarist regime used administrative and police pressure to conquer peasant resistance to their innovative proposals, and left in their wake a crisis of land erosion and cattle starvation. Keenly aware that when a modernizer suffered a temporary setback, subsistence farmers might suffer irrevocable ruin, peasants were often skeptical about the benefits of change. When political dissidence was at issue, they suspected that a radical found in their midst would be far more likely than any peasant to land on his feet. Better defended, and imprisoned under less harrowing conditions, intellectuals could make use of many options which were unavailable to working people — most fundamentally, the luxury of returning to a home far more comfortable than a peasant’s hut if their projects for economic or political change should fail. Radicals like G. V. Plekhanov, Vera Zasulich, and Lev Deutsch were far more able than the peasantry to shift their allegiances. Attempting to be “at one” with the peasantry in the 1870s, they were certain by the 1880s that peasants were hopeless as a revolutionary force and turned to Marxism and the urban proletariat as more appropriate objects for their interest. Later, Marxists like P. B. Struve, finding the proletariat insufficiently civilized, made their

Anonymous German, Lenin Points the Way, 1928-1932

Given such assumptions, a principled and positive Marxist peasant policy was difficult to come by. While Lenin responded enthusiastically to the recurrent outbreak of revolutionary violence in the Russian countryside during the years before 1917, he remained nevertheless true to his class analysis and continued to deny that peasants could ever be fighters for socialism. After 1905, when peasants of mixed income organized to demand the abolition of private property in land, to seize land collectively, and to resist government efforts to destroy their communal institutions, Lenin
way to the side of the industrial entrepreneur in order to better carry on the battle against Russian backwardness. To the peasantry, such defections were not unusual; benefactors filled with hope or with despair had always mysteriously come and gone, leaving peasants to survive as before by relying on their ties to family, land, and above all their traditional communal institutions.

Peasant Communes: Imperfect Collectives

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the overwhelming majority of the Russian rural population belonged to repartitional land communes which periodically redistributed allotments to their members according to family size, the number of able-bodied workers per household, or some other collective social principle. Within each commune, a village assembly which included the head of each family and one or more elected village elders would decide how and when the process of repartition, planting, and harvesting would take place. With power to deal with general community tasks ranging from fire prevention to the care of orphans, widows, or the aged, the commune was far more than an economic institution. The peasantry’s local disputes were settled by the village assembly, or by elected peasant courts which recognized labor within the family and community as the most powerful claim to the ownership, use, and inheritance of property.

Like grass-roots organizations elsewhere, commune assemblies were not ideally fair or democratic gatherings. As patriarchal as any nineteenth- or early twentieth-century political institution, they embodied the male peasant’s traditional judgment on women: “The hair is long, but the mind is short.” Assembly meetings often degenerated into shouting matches, drinking bouts, and fist fights, with the village elder able to impose his will because of age, physical size, wealth, or ability to hold his liquor. Commune members were not equal in either income or resources. Tools and livestock were privately owned, and the more prosperous were frequently able to manipulate the decision-making process so as to exclude the poorer elements and even deprive them of land. Nevertheless, with all of their failings, the communes were far more egalitarian than the world outside (perhaps even more so than the Marxist groups which were advocating their destruction). In the words of a well-known peasant proverb, “A thread from each member of the commune makes a shirt for the naked man.”

Inconsistently democratic and collectivist, commune institutions were also ambivalent in their responses to the challenge of economic development. At the same time, it should be pointed out that the level of rational agricultural practice was quite low in every sector of the Russian rural economy — on commune land, on private peasant farms, and on peasant-cultivated gentry estates. Everywhere, peasants survived at the edge of subsistence on the basis of the most immediate and short-term considerations. Nevertheless, in the late nineteenth century, communes purchased land, agricultural machinery, seeds, and fertilizer, and in several northern provinces they introduced intensive cultivation on their own initiative. Where improved tools were cheap and immediately useful, there was no evidence that any “natural” peasant resistance prevented their widespread use. Farm implements were costly, after all; imported tools were being taxed in order to protect Russian infant industry. The real question seemed to be whether the peasant paid out in exchange for the plow a share of the crop which was larger than the difference which such a plow might make in the productivity of the family allotment. Peasants were thus no more able to be steadfastly progressive in their economic behavior than radical intellectuals were able to be steadfast in their political behavior.
The Populist-Marxist Controversy

In the late nineteenth century, Marxists were not the only dissidents who found themselves party to the apparent conflict between the modernizer and the peasants who were to be modernized. The Russian Populist movement was at that time far larger, and from the perspective of the tsarist regime potentially more dangerous, than the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party. The leading Populists were in the main no more plebeian than Marxists in their social origins; they clearly did not form part of a massive grass-roots popular upheaval. But Populist terrorists had succeeded in assassinating Tsar Alexander II in 1881, Populist organizers helped to establish unions of rural schoolteachers and peasant brotherhoods in the 1890s, and Populist scholars exerted a powerful influence over Russian academic life, particularly in the field of economics. In ideological terms, Populists were much more difficult than Marxists to classify. Within their ranks, there were old-fashioned romantics who called upon the educated to prostrate themselves at the feet of the saintly Russian peasant. But in addition there was S. N. Iuzhakov, a general’s son who advocated international peasant revolution, the peasant Maria Sukloa, an organizer who focused on the immediate needs of rural and urban workers, and the scholar Alexandra Efimenko, who investigated peasant law and popular custom. The economists V. P. Vorontsov and N. F. Daniel’son were “Legal Populists” who believed that the peasant commune was a viable socio-economic institution and argued at the same time that Rus-
sia's authoritarian political tradition would remain unbroken regardless of any successes which might be achieved in the field of economic development. The Populist Kablits was even more vicious in his denunciations of the "Jew capitalist" than the Marxist Plekhanov. What Populists had in common, however, was (1) a belief that the indigenous, collectivist peasant institutions to which the majority of the population belonged had to constitute the basis for any Russian economic and social development in the direction of socialism, and (2) an opposition to unlimited pressure on the peasantry for the sake of future economic benefits.  

These two principles became a bitter point of controversy between Russian Marxists and Populists in the period before the outbreak of World War I. During that time, the tsarist regime, fearing that a backward Russia might suffer the fate of nineteenth-century India or China, launched an industrialization program which was financed by a steadily escalating tax burden on the peasantry. Imposed in the midst of an unprecedented population increase, Russia's experiment in state capitalism brought with it all the horrors of primitive accumulation. Novelists like Uspekhii and a host of poets and journalists began to describe the exploits of the village kulak, who eagerly lent money to families unable to pay their taxes and used the wealth he acquired to deprive his poorer neighbors of their land. Marxists generally wrote of the expropriation of the peasantry as an inevitable and progressive phenomenon, however costly in human terms. Equating the rich with the economically rational, they saw the peasant bourgeoisie within and outside the commune as the initiators and the prime beneficiaries of any improvement in peasant agricultural practice. As the Marxists repeatedly pointed out, a poor and progressive peasant who lacked the capital to invest in improved seeds or agricultural tools would not get very far.  

In response, Populists criticized what they saw as a Marxist obsession with capital—rather than labor-intensive strategies, with the purchase of tools rather than changes in plowing techniques (which did not involve money and could benefit the community as a whole). They claimed that Marxists ignored evidence that communal decisions were often made for the general welfare as well as the private economic interests of the most powerful members. Although available contemporary research did not establish whether the rich were the only economic innovators, it did confirm the Populist claim that communes were improving their plowing techniques, and revealed as well a rising demand for communal tenure in areas where it had not previously existed.  

N. F. Daniel'son  
The most comprehensive and unromantic Populist analysis of the relationship between the peasantry and the requirements of Russian economic development came from N. F. Daniel'son, an enthusiastic admirer of Marx and the first translator of Capital from the German original. Unlike many of Marx's Russian admirers, Daniel'son was not a "disciple." He took at its face value Marx's statement that his theories and proposals were derived from the study of West European experience. And while Daniel'son agreed that Western proletarians might well have nothing to lose but their chains and a "world to win," it was not clear to him from the study of Capital whether radicals in peasant societies could do anything but look on as their majority, the small producers, were proletarianized, i.e., were driven from the land and delivered into the arms of the industrial capitalist.  

Within the Russian situation, Daniel'son argued that it was therefore essential to focus upon communal as well as capitalist relations of production.  

Although Daniel'son's investigation of Russian economic life confirmed the existence of capital-
ism in the cities and in the countryside, his importance as a Populist economist lay in his massively researched thesis that capitalism could not bring development to a peasant society in a world dominated by more advanced nations. Daniel’son’s evidence suggested that the Russian state, short of capital and unable to compete for foreign markets except by exporting agricultural goods, was forced to extract what it defined as “surplus” from a subsistence peasantry on such a scale that both consuming and tax-paying capacities were lowered. Daniel’son pointed out that such draconian measures did not prevent Russia’s defeat in the world market by already-modernized nations which used rails and steam instead of carts and barges for the transport of grain. Domestically, as the state increased taxes drastically and sponsored urban industry which destroyed the peasantry’s artisanal trades, peasants were driven to adopt economically irrational farming strategies. Outside the commune, they struggled to survive within an expanding and fluctuating grain market by exhausting the soil in more and more intensive cultivation. On a much smaller scale, the impact of the capitalist market generated identical practices within the commune. In Daniel’son’s view, the human suffering which capitalism inflicted upon a peasant society led neither to success on the international market nor to the adoption of more productive economic practices. Instead, as he wrote to Friedrich Engels in 1892, after a crop failure resulted in famine, “You see that the peasants protest the rise in taxation by an increase in the death rate.”

According to Daniel’son, the difficulties of Russian rural development were not temporary. In his view, an economic policy which emphasized private profit would never enable Russia to catch up with the West or to satisfy the actual needs of the majority of the population. A market economy which responded only to demand expressed within the limits of capitalist production and exchange would not, he argued, tend to produce inexpensive clothing, tools, and shelter for the Russian peasant. Instead, capitalist industry would find it more profitable to form “enclaves” intended to satisfy an upper-class demand for luxury goods. For Daniel’son, who found such economic behavior both predatory and short-sighted, it therefore became essential to devise a strategy to develop the productive forces of the population so that they could be used not only by an insignificant minority but by the whole people. He argued that it was necessary to attempt a synthesis between the traditional, communal foundations of Russian economic life and the knowledge and experience of the West. A half-century before the Chinese revolutionary experiments in commune-based economic development, Daniel’son was already arguing that agriculture and industry should be combined in the hands of already-socialized production units. Without ever claiming that peasants were “naturally” good, democratic, or socialist, Daniel’son claimed that production might be raised without annihilating the majority of the small producers. As he put it, it would be difficult but not impossible for Russians to lean on our historical inheritance and cease to destroy our ancient historical form of production, a form based upon the ownership of the means of production by the direct producers. It is necessary to do this in order to avoid the danger which threatens every nation which departs from the age-old foundations of its welfare. All efforts must be directed toward a unification of agriculture and manufacturing industry in the hands of the direct producer, but a unification not on the grounds of a small-scale fragmented production unit — which would be tantamount to the “decree of universal mediocrity” — but on the grounds of the creation of a massive socialized production based on the free development of science and technology, with the aim of satisfying the well-being of the whole population. Such arguments were not intended as a comprehensive program for rural development. In his
writings of the 1880s and 1890s, Daniel'son's aim was only to sketch in rough outline the concerns which he believed were central to any effective and reasonably humane Russian strategy.

It is significant that Daniel'son's views made no impact whatsoever upon the Russian Marxist movement in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For beneath the bitter struggle which divided Bolsheviks from Mensheviks in the years before 1917 lay a common agreement that capitalism represented an inevitable, rational, and ultimately humane stage in any nation's historical development. And at the basis of that common agreement lay the unquestioned assumption that peasant institutions and values were without exception enfeebled and reactionary.

The Destruction of the Commune

In the years which followed the Bolshevik seizure of power, the commune steadily increased its power and influence as a land-equalizing mechanism until it was destroyed by the Stalinist "forced collectivization" campaigns. Between 1917 and 1927, Soviet leaders considered the system of communal tenure essentially private because commune allotments were cultivated separately by

Yefim Cheptsov, Meeting of a Village Party Cell, 1924
each family. Despite the commune’s social control over the means of production, and the extraordinary range of its power to affect the lives of its individual members, no attempt was made to use it as a potential foundation for further “socialization in agriculture.” Instead, the admiration of Soviet leaders for capitalist efficiency led them to pursue wildly fluctuating policies toward the entrepreneurs within the rural population. Envy- ing bourgeois economic talent and filled with hatred for bourgeois politics, they brandished the carrot or the stick, while searching in vain for a rural proletariat willing to act in revolutionary opposition to the rest of the peasantry. The utter failure of the Bolsheviks to detach the rural poor from their friends and neighbors of the commune only deepened Bolshevik fears that an unreconstructed peasantry would act to destroy their most cherished economic, social, and political ideals.

In Soviet domestic policy, peasant backwardness became the justification for a retreat from democratization of the workplace and the army. The existence of peasant bigotry and property fanaticism served to explain the disenfranchisement of the majority by the weighted voting system in the first Soviet constitution. Grain shortages were attributed to hoarding rather than to low productivity or to the impact of invasion and civil war upon a primarily subsistence peasantry. Lenin, Bukharin, Trotsky and Preobrazhenskii repeatedly categorized the peasantry as landed proprietors at a time when most land was held by communes.

Then, as earlier, it was possible to justify repressive and burdensome economic policies once those in power were convinced that the majority of the population were unregenerate economic reactionaries.

Yet in reality, as Daniel’son (and Marx) had come to understand, peasant institutions and values were not invariably at odds with the improvement of agricultural techniques and practices. Peasants were never consistently progressive, but then neither were the middle classes or even the proletariat. In order to understand why the peasantry turned inward and away from the policies of the world’s first socialist state in the early Soviet period, it may be useful to consider the plight of even the “ideal” peasant as he was described in contemporary Bolshevik literature: Hardworking, young, respectful toward Soviet authority, and eager to learn, Nikolai or Matvei or Mikhail pores over the Bolshevik propaganda pamphlets, happily surrenders his grain to the Red Army’s shock detachments and informs them of the secret hoard which his neighbor has buried in the dirt behind his one-room hut. A real enthusiast, he soon leaves his land and community to work on a large-scale agricultural enterprise (either a collective or a state farm). Making his way toward revolutionary consciousness through the writings of Lenin, Trotsky, and Bukharin, he reads about peasant stubbornness and lack of culture, petty-bourgeois anarchism, the backwardness of the commune, and the evils of the “herd” instinct. He finds many references to peasant cruelty, bigotry, and greed; he learns that even the revolutionary proletarian is weakened and brought low because he is “semi-peasant.” From a socialist point of view, he is judged progressive only if he is willing to accept without question the demand that he sacrifice his material interests for an indefinite period of time, and repudiate his individual and collective past as an assortment of horrors and stupidities.

In contrast, members of the revolutionary vanguard did not consider their own, predominantly middle- and upper-class backgrounds as a drawback, but rather as the source of their skills and knowledge of the world. Whatever their mistakes and failures, the Soviet leadership expected to learn nothing of constructive value from their contacts with the more backward social elements. Eager to understand the defects of the peasantry
as typical of the petty bourgeoisie as a class, they
did not attribute their own suspicions of the ma-
majority to their own privileged social origins. Change
was conceived as a one-way process, with the
peasantry exhorted to get on board the revolution-
ary train driven by their social betters and leave all
traces of their backwardness behind. The evolu-
tion of the peasantry into the most recalcitrant,
least “socialist” element in Soviet society was
unsurprising. Uspenskii’s peasant, recognizing an
all-too-familiar pattern of appeal and reproach
grounded in ignorance and lack of respect, might
have commented once more, “I guess we’re just
bad, that’s all there is to it.”

Footnotes

1. For a recent re-statement of this point of view, see
Theda Skocpol, States and Social Revolutions (Cam-
bridge, England, 1979), pp. 128-40; 206-35. Skocpol
shares with the Soviets and many other modernizers of
the twentieth century an assumption that peasants were
unregenerate reactionaries whose regrettable backward-
ness provoked a brutal Soviet intervention.
2. G. V. Plekhanov, Sochineniia (Moscow, 1923), pp. x,
129.
3. For a more detailed discussion of Lenin’s position on
the politics and economics of the peasant question, see
E. Kingston-Mann, “Proletarian Theory and Peasant Prac-
tice: Lenin and the Peasantry, 1901-1904,” Soviet Stud-
ies, October 1974; “Lenin and the Challenge of Peasant
Militance: From Bloody Sunday, 1905, to the Dissolu-
tion of the First Duma,” Russian Review, October 1979,
pp. 434-55; and “A Strategy for Marxist Bourgeois Revo-
lation: Lenin and the Peasantry, 1907-1917,” Journal of
Peasant Studies, January 1980, pp. 131-55. Two of Len-
in’s key writings on the subject of peasant strategy are
To the Rural Poor (1903) and The Agrarian Question and
the “Critics of Marx” (1908); both are included in his
Collected Works.
4. Before 1906, the commune (mir, or obshchina) was
the predominant form of peasant landholding except in
the western provinces, where limited forms of hereditary
tenure prevailed. After 1906, the tsarist regime tried un-
successfully to induce the peasantry to leave the com-
mune in order to become rural entrepreneurs. When the
Bolsheviks came to power, the commune increased its
power but received no state aid or support.
5. E. Kingston-Mann, “Marxism and Russian Rural De-
velopment,” American Historical Review, 86 (October
6. Ibid., pp. 734-35.
7. A brilliant discussion of Marx and Daniel’son in the
context of the Populist-Marxist struggle may be found in
A. Walicki, The Controversy Over Capitalism, Oxford,
1974.
8. I am indebted to Tetteh Kofi, formerly of the Food
Research Institute, Stanford University, for the “enclave”
formulation.
9. N. F. Daniel’son, Ocherki nashego poreformennago
khooziastva, St. Petersburg, 1885, II, p. 344.
10. Teodor Shanin, The Awkward Class: Political So-
ciology of Peasantry in a Developing Society, Russia
11. B. S. Martynov, Zemel’nyi stroi i zemel’n’ie otno-
sheniiia RSFSR, Leningrad, 1925.
12. For example, throughout Bukharin and Preobra-
zhenski’s ABC of Communism (1918), the peasant is re-
ferred to as a small landed proprietor. See ABC of
13. By the end of his life, Marx himself had come to
agree with Daniel’son. Encouraged by Daniel’son, Marx
had learned Russian well enough to study Russian statis-
tical investigations on his own. By 1881 he had come to
believe that “this community [the mir] is the main-
spring of Russia’s social generation. . . .” Karl Marks i
F. Engels’ Sochineniia (Moscow, 1961), pp. xix, 401. See
discussion in Walicki, op. cit.

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