

# SOLIDARITY— FOUNDING STATEMENT

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**FOR A  
SOCIALIST  
ALTERNATIVE  
IN  
AMERICA**

Nearly two decades ago, United States and world capitalism entered the first phase of a protracted, system-wide crisis. This still unfolding crisis has demonstrated the classic features well-known to Marxist crisis theories, but also new ones. Since the early 1970s we have witnessed the reassertion of boom-and-bust cycles, of intensified national economic rivalries evidenced by protectionism and other measures; and a visible expression of the falling rate of profit.

New developments, however, have also given this period of crisis a unique character: "stagflation" recessions in which inflation continued despite high unemployment and economic contraction; an explosion of international debt which threatens to swallow the banking system alive; and perhaps most unexpected for Marxists, the system's unprecedented ability through government intervention to produce short-term solutions, even at the cost of deepening underlying contradictions such as permanent high structural unemployment in the U.S. and Europe.

The long crisis has produced glimpses of revolutionary possibilities, beginning with France in 1968. If the revolutionary left's anticipations of imminent social revolution in 1968 proved highly optimistic, nonetheless the following years did see the first phases of potential working-class revolutions—Chile preceding the 1973 coup, Portugal during 1974-75, South Africa today. National liberation movements won independence in the former Portuguese African colonies and in Zimbabwe. In Vietnam, U.S. imperialism suffered its greatest historic defeat. Recent years have seen the opening up of profound social struggles and democratic movements in countries of "peripheral" capitalism such as South Korea, Brazil, Mexico, the Philippines and the Central American region. A victorious revolution occurred in Nicaragua and revolutionary struggles continue to unfold in Guatemala and El Salvador.

A dramatic feature of present-day struggles in many "peripheral" or Third World capitalist states is the growing social weight of the working class—as expressed both in its own class organizations and in its alliance with the peasantry and urban "marginalized" masses. The rapid growth of the working classes in Latin America, Asia and South Africa makes even more relevant the application of Marxist analysis

and politics in these struggles. The emergence of militant mass labor movements in repressive conditions has confirmed the potential for the working-class movement to lead the struggle for democracy, for the transformation of political to social revolution and the possibility of building authentic working-class revolutionary parties.

Eastern Europe has also experienced its own crisis. The bureaucratic stranglehold on the economy engenders low productivity, inefficiency, and inability to meet elementary consumer needs. In some cases, the crises of these states has also been linked to the contradictions of capitalism, as the ruling bureaucracies seek Western bank loans and investment to cover up their own failures.

This crisis exploded most dramatically in the Polish workers' movement Solidarnosc in 1980-81. From a struggle for the elementary right of independent trade unions, the movement spearheaded by Solidarnosc rapidly evolved into a classic proletarian revolutionary challenge—a form of dual power—before being tragically defeated by the imposition of martial law. That movement represents the high point so far of the struggle for socialist freedom in the Eastern bloc.

As revolutionary socialists in the heartland of imperialism we are deeply inspired by all these struggles, and are committed to study and build solidarity with them. This is a task to which further discussion will be given later in this statement. Nonetheless, the hard reality remains that the protracted crisis has not produced any generalized revolutionary upsurge. Indeed, the general trend of the past decade for the working classes of the "advanced" industrial capitalist countries has been one of declining union strength and, to some degree, political conservatism. As labor became disoriented, rightist forces gained ground.

There are important exceptions, to be sure: the limited victory won by German metalworkers for a shorter work week; the tremendous resistance shown by the British miners, although their struggle was lost because of the passivity of the British labor bureaucracy; the successful U.S. miners' strike of 1978 and the beginnings of important strikes resisting further concessions in the past year. In at least one country, Britain, the revolutionary left played a significant role in defeating an incipient fascist movement.

Nonetheless, contrary to the expectations of virtually all shades of opinion in the U.S. and Western European left, the line of march of the working class of the "advanced" countries has been one of retreat. The forces of the revolutionary left were, of course, much too small to reverse this process, even had we fully understood it. It is not surprising that as the workers' movements of the U.S. and Western Europe have retreated, the revolutionary left has also declined in these countries.



At the same time as the combativity of the organized workers' movement has receded, the broad social and political "issues" movements such as feminism, environmentalism and anti-militarism have persisted, with ups and downs. These movements play a critical role in raising a visible challenge to the most odious aspects of the deepening capitalist assault. They keep alive a spirit of debate and resistance, which often succeeds in winning the sympathies, if not the active participation, of the majority of working people.

This is demonstrated most dramatically in the deep anti-war, anti-militarist sentiment in the advanced capitalist countries, which has become a factor the capitalists must take into account in pursuing their war plans and spreading their nuclear arsenals. The anti-missiles movement that swept Western Europe and the anti-intervention movement in the U.S. are recent examples.

The challenges raised by these social movements also serve to deepen the debate in the workers' movement and shake the collaborationist complacency of its leadership. The hard-won official pro-choice position of the Canadian New Democratic Party and the controversy within the American AFL-CIO on the issue of Central America testify to this capacity.

The continued existence of such movements has also been critical to the left's very survival. As activists within them, we seek to maintain

their independence from the capitalist lesser-evil electoral trap. We also seek to deepen their connections with and integration into working class political life in order to prepare the way for the emergence of a working-class movement that can address the totality of political and social questions facing it.

Over the past decade in most of southern and western Europe, as well as Japan, the revolutionary left has deeply declined or self-destructed. Meanwhile the reformist "Eurosoci-alist" parties have come to power in France, Greece, Spain and Portugal—and proven to be dismal failures in confronting the crises of their own societies. They have broken every electoral promise, whether it was breaking free from NATO, creating democratic economic reforms, ending unemployment, liberating women or allying with Third World liberation struggles. Clearly social democracy has not created an alternative to working class retreat, but is only one political expression of that retreat.

### The American Scene

But nowhere has the decline and disorientation of the left been as acute as in the United States, and for revolutionary socialists in the U.S. this must be our practical starting point. *The small forces of the revolutionary left in the U.S. face an acute crisis of perspective. That crisis cannot be overcome by ignoring it, or resolved by means of admiration and support for struggles in other countries.*

A profound conservatism of the left, caused in part by the decline of dynamic mass opposition movements, has pulled many former radical activists into the Democratic Party. We are completely against this disastrous course, and we regard combatting this trend as a basic task of socialist politics. There has been a smaller but equally disastrous drift toward Stalinist politics and a tendency toward organizational bureaucratism falsely packaged as "democratic centralism." We believe that revolutionary socialist regroupment, and the general political approach to be outlined in this statement, is a *first step* toward overcoming this crisis and rebuilding effective socialist politics and organization in the U.S.

The need for such politics and organization has never been greater than at present. The construction of such an alternative must begin from the realities of the U.S. working class, the movements of the oppressed and the left. All of these have been deeply disoriented by the ascendancy of Reaganism and weakened by the employers' offensive.

The politics of Reaganism, however, are a symbol and symptom of an increasingly aggressive stance by U.S. capital—not its cause. On the other hand, economic changes in the past several years have begun the "restructuring" of U.S. industry and of the working class itself, to

the profound disadvantage of the traditional labor movement. Older industries and their unions have been thrown into decline. A larger proportion of jobs are low wage, disproportionately filled by women and oppressed minorities, while the proportion of the industrial and blue-collar working class within the population as a whole has decreased. At the same time a large sector of affluent professionals and managers has been created. This newly prosperous layer greatly swells Reagan's political base, and has helped create the tone for the policies of deliberate social neglect in mainstream politics as well as the calculated viciousness of the right wing.

On the other hand, business does not feel it can afford expensive reforms, whether at the level of collective bargaining or social spending, which characterized previous periods of prosperity. Even more to the point, *capital does not feel a threat from below that would force it to deliver such reforms.* Rather, its strategy is to impose the full costs of making U.S. capital competitive and profitable on organized and unorganized workers, on the Black community and on women. The fruits of this strategy are visible everywhere, in a thousand daily atrocities. In the Black inner cities, infant mortality rates are at Third World levels—a predictable result of the slashing of pre-natal nutrition programs. "De-industrialization" has ruined whole regions. The percentage of unionized workers has fallen to 18%.

From the late 1960s to the mid-'70s, a mass-based women's movement created a new atmosphere in which reproductive freedom, childcare and a decent job began to be seen as *rights*. It is only natural, within the context of a capitalist system which from its inception has been built on foundations of male supremacy as well as class exploitation, that the imposition of austerity and right-wing political solutions entails a counter-assault to wipe out women's recent gains.

Nonetheless, the struggles that produced the limited victories for women were the result of real-life conditions which still exist—the large-scale entry of women into the work force by both necessity and choice, the percentage of families now headed by women, etc. The model of the male wage-earner-centered family held up by the right wing is increasingly a myth. *Against whatever odds, therefore, women's struggles for basic rights will continue.* The recent call by NOW for demonstrations in support of abortion rights, the cutting edge of the right-wing attacks on all women's rights, is undoubtedly an expression of this reality. Participation in these struggles must be central to the revival of a labor movement, as well as a left, worthy of the name.

Special attention must be focused in the present phase of the capitalist crisis on escalating militarism. Far from being a transient phase or a particularly grotesque feature of one right-wing Ad-

ministration, dramatic and continuing increases in military spending are deliberately built in as part of the effort to "reflate" a slump-prone economy. The fact that these increases boost a ruinous deficit, itself a threat to the economic confidence of the ruling class, has created political contradictions which are still being fought out.

At the same time, politically the escalation of "defense" spending is part of the effort to construct a consensus for policing the Third World, under the cover of stopping "Soviet expansionism." Such a consensus is necessary in order to make millions of American workers feel they have a stake in policies which are, in fact, destroying their jobs, their communities and their lives.

In this situation, the task of constructing a socialist alternative in the U.S. *begins* with the building of resistance, in large battles and small ones, in the unions and the broader social movements, to the economic and social assaults of capital. The participation of socialist activists in these daily struggles is far more important than the elaboration of complex schemes of "structural reform" for which there is no means of implementation.

We try to introduce relevant political ideas into these daily struggles, in any way we can, helping to link them together, to build alliances and ties of solidarity between them. This means participating in all fights for reform. But it also means introducing a broader vision of a society without exploitation or oppression. Such a society cannot be handed down from above; it requires that ordinary working people take control, collectively and democratically, over their lives.

Socialism is the society that workers and the oppressed will begin to build when they have taken power through a revolution that grows out of their daily struggles. It must be based on workers' democracy, meaning both workers' control of production and the exercise of political power through mass democratic institutions. Only through such institutions of workers' democracy can the working class keep the power it has won and use it to construct a new society.

Our socialist vision is therefore profoundly revolutionary and democratic, visionary and rooted in daily struggle, working class and feminist, anti-capitalist and anti-bureaucratic. Only by forging such an alternative at home can we ultimately fulfill our obligations to the struggles for freedom around the world.

## INTERNATIONALISM: A POLITICS OF SOLIDARITY

For us as revolutionary socialists, the struggle for freedom is worldwide and indivisible—from Central America to South Africa, from Puerto Rico to Poland. Internationalism has particular significance for socialists in the U.S., whose ruling class commands the largest nuclear arsenal and which plays the greatest role in perpetuating misery in defense of its world empire. As sections of the American working class begin to resist such corporate assaults as concessions, union-busting and plant closures, one important political responsibility for socialist activists is to patiently explain the commonality of these struggles with the movements of working people and the oppressed for political freedom and social justice in Latin America, South Africa, the Philippines and elsewhere.

Our internationalism begins at home, with the fullest possible participation in movements opposing U.S. imperialist intervention in the Third World, its continued colonial occupation of Puerto Rico and the Micronesian archipelago, and its arms buildup which threatens humankind with annihilation. Contrary to ideologues of liberalism and even to some who call themselves part of the left, we do not distinguish "progressive" versus "reactionary" forms of U.S. intervention. *The American ruling class has no progressive role to play anywhere in the world.*

In Central America, whether the United States government is backing death squads or the ultra-right or Christian Democratic "reform" from above, its objectives remain the same. Usually, in fact, it pursues both tactics at the same time, toward a common aim: to keep the region open to U.S. investment and the worker and peasant masses disciplined by poverty, powerlessness and fear. These conditions are generally known as "stability," "social harmony" and "favorable business climate."

In South Africa, "constructive engagement" and the mildest of cosmetic sanctions against apartheid are two sides of the same pro-racist U.S. policy. South Africa is an economic pillar and regional military bulwark of the Free World, and under no circumstances is the U.S. prepared to allow the Black majority to jeopardize this arrangement. Indeed, while indulging in purely verbal gestures against apartheid (a system to which, of course, no one except explicit Nazis give *open* approval), the U.S. has strengthened its military partnership with South Africa by moving toward open support of the South African-backed UNITA movement in Angola.

The same considerations apply with respect to the United States' relationship to dictatorships in the Third World, as they did to the late Shah of Iran, Sadat of Egypt and Marcos of the Philippines. These client dictators retain the full support of the U.S., regardless of how alienated and hated they are within their own countries, unless repression fails and the threat of revolution from within undermines "stability."

In the Middle East, the United States, together with its ally and junior partner Israel act in concert to suppress all expressions of the Palestinian people's nationhood and aspirations for justice and human rights. Unlimited U.S. military and economic support to Israel are the underpinning both for Zionist expansionism in the Middle East and for Israel's increasing global role in Third World repression, including the genocide in Guatemala.

In virtually all these cases, the imperialist foreign policy of the U.S. capitalist class is backed up by bi-partisan Congressional consensus, by mass media silence or complicity, and by the implicit and often active support of the trade-union bureaucracy. An important first step in breaking through the pro-imperialist consensus is to force an open debate. This has now begun to take place within the unions around the issues of Central America and South Africa. On many other issues, however—notably the Middle East—there is virtually no serious discussion inside the institutions of the labor movement, the media, or anywhere else.

### Stopping Intervention

As anti-intervention and solidarity activists, we work in a wide range of movements: the unions, the Pledge of Resistance, Sanctuary and in the Salvadoran, Nicaraguan and Guatemalan solidarity networks. We see the building of the anti-apartheid movement as a major priority. In addition, the strengthening of the movements in solidarity with the Palestinian people is a key task, especially given the continuing attachment of much of the left to Zionism.

There can be no single formula for building all the movements. We support any form of activity that mobilizes people and raises consciousness. However, the general drift to the Democratic Party has made itself felt in the movements, a retreat which in fact demobilizes activists, eases pressure on Congress and the Administration and thereby indirectly contributes to the drift to the right in both capitalist parties.

We favor strategies that combine a range of activities such as independent electoral activity or local initiative campaigns, broad unified mass actions, civil disobedience where this helps build the struggle, and ultimately a broad mass mobilization that links the

struggle against intervention abroad to workers' struggles against austerity at home.

### Anti-Bureaucratic Struggles

Where the American capitalist class expresses support for democratic movements in Eastern Europe, such as the struggle for independent trade unions in Poland, or the efforts of dissidents and independent peace activists in the Soviet Union, it is purely hypocritical. Washington has no real interest in the victory of the Polish workers' movement—its concern lies in discrediting socialism by falsely identifying it with a police state which cannot tolerate any form of independent working-class institutions (unions, parties, newspapers, etc.). Indeed, the victory of the movement for trade union rights inside Poland would only have served to highlight the contrast between the fantastic rank-and-file democracy and militancy of the Solidarnosc movement in 1980-81 with the bureaucratic and supine character of the union movement today in the U.S.

The suppression of Solidarnosc by the Polish bureaucracy not only discredits the name of socialism, but provides political ammunition for U.S.-sponsored anti-communist crusades and repression—including the "disappearances" and death squad assassinations of unionists in Guatemala and El Salvador. Here again the AFL-CIO leadership—with its rhetorical support for "free trade unions" and its very real alliance with the CIA to manipulate labor movements in the name of "free trade unionism" in Central and South America, Africa and Asia—is a pillar of U.S. foreign policy.

*We as revolutionary socialists are unconditionally in support of the Solidarnosc movement and support the extension of the movement for genuine unions, socialist democracy and working-class power to the other states of Eastern Europe and the USSR.* We believe also that workers' struggles of even greater magnitude will ultimately shake the bureaucratic regime in China to its foundations.

We support these struggles, not in counterposition to the struggles of workers for the right to organize and win political freedom in South Africa, Turkey, Chile and Palestine—but because we consider that these struggles have a common historic destiny and strikingly similar dynamics. It is a remarkable feature of today's social struggles, East and West, whether under capitalist or non-capitalist rule, that the movement from below of the exploited and oppressed is spearheaded by working-class self-organization. Such organization points to the possibility of genuinely socialist societies without bosses or bureaucrats; it therefore poses a common revolutionary challenge to rulers and privileged elites of all types.

### New Workers' Movements

Another prominent feature of struggle today is that world capitalism and so-called transnational corporations have brought about economic transformations, however distorted, leading to the formation of militant new workers' movements in the Third World. Whether in traditional manufacturing facilities relocating to the Third World or in new high-tech silicon chip sweatshops, often based on the superexploitation of women in 19th century conditions, new working classes are being forged.

The workers' movement in South Africa is the most dramatic example of a newly-arising proletarian movement with revolutionary potentialities. This movement will unquestionably play the leading role in the destruction of apartheid.



In Brazil and Mexico, in south Asia and elsewhere, these new workers' movements will through heroic effort and sacrifice create their trade union and political organizations which ultimately challenge imperialist hegemony and capitalist social relations. In many countries of the Third World, where the burden of the international debt crushes all possibilities of social progress, workers and peasants are faced with starvation to pay off a debt which they never agreed to acquire and from which they receive no benefit. The militant workers' movements of these countries are the best hope for waging a struggle to repudiate these debts contracted between international bankers and local ruling classes over the heads of the peoples.

### The Central American Revolutions

The revolutionary struggles unfolding in Central America require special attention today, not only because of their great intrinsic importance but also because of the enormous threat they face from the United States. While struggles of great importance are unfolding in many countries from South Africa to the Philippines, the one *immediate* revolutionary threat to U.S. domination is in Central America, since the Sandinista victory in 1979 and the development of a revolutionary crisis in El Salvador from late 1979 to the present.

This fact is both tragic and inspiring. Tragic because in the absence of revolutionary challenges in other larger countries, U.S. imperialism is able to concentrate all its savagery on the task of crushing Central America's revolutions in the bud. But also profoundly inspiring, because after more than seven years Nicaragua continues to withstand the onslaught and because the popular movements continue under the most difficult conditions of rural air war and repression in El Salvador and genocide in Guatemala.

We stand on the side of the Nicaraguan people, whose revolution led by the Sandinista National Liberation Front is a giant step toward liberation. Likewise we are in solidarity with the Salvadoran struggle led by the Farabundo Marti National Liberation army and the Revolutionary Democratic Front (FMLN-FDR) and the Guatemalan resistance led by the United Guatemalan National Resistance (URNG). We recognize that the extreme difficulties facing these struggles are overwhelmingly due to the forces arrayed against them by the U.S. and its regional puppets such as the Honduran regime, the Nicaraguan contras and increasingly the government of Costa Rica.

The Nicaraguan revolution in particular presents both a source of inspiration and complex theoretical problems for Marxist analysis. Under conditions of extreme underdevelopment and the relatively low social weight of the working class, the possibilities for the development of classic forms of proletarian power (e.g. the exercise of power through workers' councils) are limited. Nonetheless, in marked contrast to many Third World revolutions, Nicaragua since the victory of July 1979 has seen the emergence of an important element of revolutionary democracy.

In this process a major role has been played by mass organizations that have a life not controlled by a party-state monolith. Deep inroads have been made against capitalism and bourgeois authority; at the same time, basic human rights and most democratic political freedoms have remained intact under conditions of severe economic crisis, invasion and bourgeois provocation. All these factors represent a *first step* in constructing a post-revolutionary state that is non-bureaucratic and non-authoritarian.



Given the chance to develop free of outside intervention, the still-fragile institutions of revolutionary pluralism in Nicaragua might develop further, placing greater direct power in the hands of the masses. Such a transition would not, of course, be guaranteed even under the most favorable conditions, but would depend crucially on the political orientation of the FSLN. Under the actually existing conditions confronting Nicaragua, in which the survival of the revolution and the nation depend *first and foremost* on defeating an imperialist-sponsored contra invasion that has internal allies within the rightist political opposition and the church hierarchy, the degree of revolutionary democracy is more likely to contract than expand for the duration of the war.

A political attitude toward the Sandinista government of Nicaragua cannot be based either on wishful thinking or on predictions of an "inevitable" bureaucratic degeneration, but on the FSLN's *actual record of struggle* during and since the revolutionary victory. This record shows that the FSLN has both waged an intransigent anti-imperialist struggle and placed its confidence in the Nicaraguan masses to advance the revolution. We therefore support the Sandinista government unconditionally in its struggle against US. imperialism, the contras and the pro-capitalist forces in Nicaragua.

We demand the end of all economic aggression and military threats by the U.S. against Cuba. As Noam Chomsky has pointed out, Cuba has been the target of more "international terrorism," including nuclear terrorism, in the past 25 years than any other country in the world. Only the people of Cuba have the right to determine how their country is to be governed and with what other countries it will be allied.

We do not share a common political attitude toward the Cuban government and Castro leadership, nor do we share complete theoretical agreement on the character of Eastern European societies.

In fact, as will be discussed in a subsequent section, we believe it is a mistake for American revolutionaries to construct organizations today on the basis of total agreement on precise theoretical interpretations of historical events, or complete agreement on every current question.

What unites us is our support of the struggles for freedom everywhere, as symbolized by the Polish workers' movement and the Nicaraguan revolution. We are committed to learning from the struggles of workers and the oppressed everywhere, and building solidarity with them. We come together not because we share total commonality of views, but because *we are on the same side* of the struggles of workers and the oppressed everywhere.

## U.S. LABOR

The enormous changes in capitalism that have taken place in the past decade or so and those that are yet to come require a thorough transformation of organized labor in the U.S. Our vision of a renewed labor movement is one that is democratic to the core, militant in its methods of struggle, unrelenting in its advocacy of equality for all people, class-wide in its appeal, and internationalist in outlook. This requires not only the transformation of existing unions, but the organization of millions of unorganized workers in every sector of the economy and the formation of a new working-class based political party. To face capital in this era of change, labor must change itself accordingly. Perhaps the greatest single change required by labor for its survival is its relation to capital. From a relation of cooperation and dependence, labor must develop a stance of opposition and independence toward capital.

The job of transforming the labor movement belongs to the rank and file of labor. The labor bureaucracy's desperate dependence on U.S.-based multinational capital and its political parties precludes them from playing a significant role in such a change. The transformation of the union by the ranks is not something for tomorrow and not something that happens in a moment. That fight has already begun. At the moment its central focus is on the resistance to concessions and union-busting. But it is also found in other struggles of the day. Socialists participate in these struggles and attempt to draw the lessons that can move the fight from mere resistance to one for greater change within labor and within the society as a whole.

### Socialists and the Trade Unions

Socialists have always been participants in and builders of trade unions. The U.S. labor movement is no exception. Throughout American history socialists have been in the front ranks of those fighting to make them democratic organizations of the working class. The positive view socialists have of unions flows from the belief that it is the working class through its organized self-activity that is the central agent of socialist revolution. While unions themselves are not revolutionary organizations, they can play an important role in developing the consciousness, self-confidence, and power of the working class.

Since the end of World War II most trade union leaders in the developed capitalist nations have chosen the road of cooperation and social peace. In the context of an unprecedented expansion by the western capitalist economies following the war, the choice of coopera-

tion seemed logical to most leaders and acceptable to most members. This collaborationist orientation did not mean the absence of struggle altogether. Conservative governments and recalcitrant employers continued to provoke strikes and in Europe the needs of capitalist reconstruction after the war occasionally provoked confrontations over the content of the social pact. But for the most part, trade union leaders throughout the West abandoned the practice and even the ideology of class struggle.

Today, the social pact is crumbling. Ironically, it is not the working class, but the capitalist class that has broken the social pact with the labor bureaucracy. Within the last several years, capital throughout the developed industrial economies has reneged on the post-World War II deal. In part this is simply a reaction to the global economic crisis which has made the terms of the deal too expensive in an era of intense international competition and world-wide industrial restructuring. In part it is the belated realization that the labor bureaucracy still thinks as if the deal was on—or can't see beyond it even when they know—and are unable to offer any serious resistance. It is also in part a consequence of a massive political shift to the right which is itself a child of capitalist crisis.

Just as socialists participated in past resistance to bureaucratization or other effects of the social pact even when the fight seemed hopeless, so today we must be part of the response to the new capitalist offensive no matter how limited it may seem.

### Capital and Labor in the '80s

The most evident characteristics of capital in the 1980s have been fluidity, mobility, willingness to enter and leave new fields, organizational change, and unabashed globalism. Those of American trade unionism in the 1980s have been bureaucratic organization, rigidity of strategy and practice, fear of the new, narrowness of programmatic vision, and insular nationalism.

The social pact developed in the U.S. in the 1940s was based on an agreement by labor to limit wage and benefit gains to increases in productivity. In practice this meant gutting workplace organization and power in exchange for a growth in personal income commensurate with the overall growth of the economy and the expansion of profits.

Politically, this accord emerged as the institutional alliance of labor with the Democratic Party—and the rejection of a labor party direction. Labor's reform agenda would in practice be limited to what the Democrats thought feasible in the light of America's growing police function in the world. Both the industrial and political deals rested on negotiations among elites and required further bureaucratic insulation of the labor leaders from the influence of their members. Contract

negotiations increasingly became the realm of specialists. Solidarity, shop floor power, and the accrual of skills by rank-and-file members ceased to be central characteristics of unionism in the U.S.

The Black, women's, and rank-and-file movements of the late '60s and early '70s in the U.S. made significant forays against the bastions of bureaucratic power and the social pact on which it rested, but they were unable to breach the walls. By the mid-80s, vast merger movements, technological change, increased capital mobility, and above all internationalization increased capital's leverage over organized labor in the U.S. In fact, much of labor's declining clout was a result of the decline in old industries and the rise of new ones that accompanied a restructuring of the international division of labor.

Since 1979 the employers have waged an unrelenting assault on the wages and conditions of American workers. Through recession and recovery, concessionary bargaining has continued unabated. A recent study by the Brookings Institution showed that by 1985 concessions had affected virtually every industry in the unionized private sector.

The content of employer demands, however, has changed and become more or less standardized in the last few years. Employers are not satisfied with simple wage cuts or freezes. An increasing proportion of concessionary demands concern the elimination of barriers to competition among workers. Whether it is through cooperative schemes such as QWL or ESOPs, through the ability to contract-out at will, through earnings based on performance, two-tier wage systems, the goal is to eliminate the last vestiges of worker solidarity, workplace organization, and other obstacles to total employer control and "flexibility." This is sought not only in the currently organized industries, but in the new service-oriented industries as well. Scabherding, private and public organized violence and union busting have all returned to the scene and for the most part been supported by incumbent politicians: ranging from the White House, through Democratic governors such as Babbitt (Phelps Dodge) and Perpich (Hormel), down to City Hall (including Harold Washington of Chicago).

Within the last year or so, however, the fight over concessions and increasingly over unionism itself has escalated. In a growing number of situations employers have been willing to take long strikes in order to break or humiliate the union. In a growing number of instances, the companies have used organized violence (professional "security" outfits) themselves or convinced the appropriate level of government to do it for them. Phelps Dodge, A.T. Massey, Danly, Chicago Tribune, and Hormel strikers all faced a level of armed force that has not typified U.S. labor relations for years.

Resistance to the employers' offensive has also grown. Typically,



this renewed resistance is seen as a fight against concessions *and* in defense of the union. Also typically, the will to fight originates at the local level. Sometimes the international union tolerates it, sometimes it opposes it, but only rarely do the internationals organize the resistance themselves or extend aggressive support to it.

In struggle after struggle, groups of workers or local unions have sought out support from other unions. In some places this has given rise to organizations like the Massachusetts Labor Support Project or Toledo Area Solidarity Committee; more often it is ad hoc in nature. The search for solidarity from other unionized workers and from other oppressed social groups is not just the implementation of a left perspective. Such efforts have arisen not only in urban settings with large left populations, but in small towns and rurally-based plants. It has become typical for strikers to seek out other unions, farm organizations, and community groups in their areas.

Usually, some level of support is forthcoming. While no organization of significant strength and few of real durability have arisen, this search should be viewed as the first steps toward the reorganization of labor, *the first tentative steps toward a working-class response to the shift in the power relations of classes in the U.S.*

The organization of the millions of low-paid workers who increasingly compose the new center of gravity—if not necessarily the center of power—within the working class is obviously key to any strategy for transforming the U.S. labor movement. But it is not just a matter of hiring more organizers or beefing up the organizing budget of today's unions, much less of hiring media wizards or selling credit cards to the poor. It is a political question. It requires the spreading of a new consciousness that embodies opposition to capital, that breaks down barriers of race and sex as well as occupation and enterprise. This calls for a labor movement in which the concerns of workers as Blacks, Latins, and women are as legitimate as the fight for higher pay; in which the power to change life at work is once again a central concept of unionism; and in which unions are seen as leading crusaders for the underdog, not protectors of a declining turf.

It should be obvious also that the international redivision of labor that has created many of these changes requires an internationalist outlook. Strong links must be forged with the new and growing labor movements appearing in much of the Third World.

Clearly the changes so desperately needed in the U.S. labor movement will not come from the top. As socialists we put no faith in lobbying the bureaucracy much less in permeating it. Within the existing unions, hope remains at the grass roots level. It is to the base of labor that we take our ideas and proposals.

### The Tasks of Socialists in the Unions Today

The labor movement we fight to build is not simply more democratic and more "progressive" than the existing unions. Its major defining feature is not just a different set of positions or even a more militant stance in collective bargaining. *We fight to build a labor movement that has a fundamentally different relation to capital than today's unions: one of opposition, not collaboration, of class struggle, not "interest group" preservation.*

This historic task is not simply something for today's socialists; it is the job of the millions of workers who will compose the active base of such a movement. The socialists cannot substitute themselves for the class, nor can we hope to see such a development by simply propagandizing about it. Our approach rejects both substitutionism and propagandism in favor of an activist approach to existing struggles in which we participate and from which we attempt to draw the lessons that point to a greater strengthening of the movement. Our basic tasks include:

1) **Rank-and-file work at the local union and workplace level.** The fight to transform local unions, build or rebuild workplace union organization, and capture local unions for rank-and-file power are central tasks in the struggle to transform labor.

2) **Building rank-and-file opposition movements within existing international unions.**

3) **Building organized resistance to the employers' offensive.** In fighting the employers these days some level of organized resistance beyond the local union and independent of the control of the international union officialdom is needed.

4) **The struggle against racism, sexism and heterosexism in the unions and on the job.** Racism, sexism and heterosexism have always been barriers to a genuinely class-conscious labor movement in the U.S. Although the proportion of women and minority workers in unions is greater than in the past, racism, sexism and heterosexism within the unions remains a barrier to true equality in the labor movement.

5) **The fight for genuine internationalism.** The global nature of capitalism in its era of crisis and restructuring requires an internationalist response from organized labor.

6) **The fight for a labor party in the U.S.** We are convinced that a break from capitalist politics is a necessary condition for the creation of an effective labor movement. Even in terms of the defensive posture, no matter how militant, the working class is certain to take under today's circumstances, independent political organization and opposition to the pro-employer politics of both major parties is an indispensable part of the search for new forms of labor organization.

## OPPRESSED MINORITIES IN THE U.S.

Racism and national oppression have been cornerstones of U.S. capitalism since its inception. The exploitation of nonwhite peoples—both within its borders and in the colonial and neocolonial worlds—has served as a source of profit for the U.S. ruling class as well as a political tool to maintain its dominance.

The historic oppression of Native Americans, Chicanos and Puerto Ricans flows from their conquest by the U.S. Blacks were torn from their homeland and brought in ships as slaves. For Chinese- and Japanese-Americans, Filipinos and Arab-Americans, who came to the U.S. like many other workers from Europe, the virulent racism they encountered has formed their particular identity as oppressed nationalities. In some cases, special laws regulating their ability to maintain residency or own land were passed. The systematic discrimination which these groupings have suffered is different in kind from the ethnic discrimination which sections of the white working class have encountered.

The struggle for socialism thus entails a combined fight against the existing economic order and against the oppression of minorities. Although each of these struggles has its own dynamics, they are also inextricably intertwined, both by the nature of the demographics of minorities, who are overwhelmingly proletarian, and by the divisive use capitalism makes of racism.

We support the efforts of oppressed nationalities to self-organization in all spheres—in political organizations, in unions, in the women's movement, in the community, and in the society at large. We support the fight for affirmative action within integrated institutions, and the fight for political and economic liberation, including the right to self-determination.

We oppose the utilization of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) as a weapon in the hands of the employer. The threat of deportation keeps many workers from unionizing or fighting for decent wages. We also oppose the deportation of those who have fled from dictatorships or from the conditions imposed by U.S. intervention in Central America.

The current economic crisis has hit minority workers hardest. Within the minority community women, youth, and the elderly have borne a disproportionate share of the attacks. However, the depth of

the crisis has also meant that white workers facing concessions are in the same boat. The more militant and politically conscious among them are thus beginning to make the links between their situation and that of oppressed minorities.

The gains achieved by minorities in the 1960s and '70s have been eroded under the impact of the ruling-class offensive. Yet the crisis in housing and employment, the issues of police brutality and drug use, and the continuing political disenfranchisement of minority communities have not yet produced as large a fightback as existed in the Black, Chicano, Puerto Rican, Asian-American and Native American communities of the 1960s and early '70s.

Much of the resistance that has arisen in recent years has taken an electoral form. Clearly the Rainbow Coalition is the most developed expression of this phenomenon. The desire to seek allies among all who seek to fight against social injustice is at the heart of the coalition, as well as a recognition that those who are oppressed by the institutions of class rule must have a political voice. But at the same time the formation is locked within the confines of the Democratic Party.

This development flows from two reasons. One is the continuing under-representation of minorities in political life, which spurs them to fight in the electoral arena. The second is the destruction of the leadership which arose in the 1960s, through both political assassination and cooptation.

Some veterans of the liberation movements of the 1960s are still active, and the potential exists for new, younger fighters to join them in forging a new revolutionary leadership within the Black, Native American and other oppressed nationality communities that can respond to the present situation.

The crisis today—unlike the 1960s—affects all sectors of the working class. This means that the fight of revolutionaries for leadership of Black, Chicano, Puerto Rican and other minority workers will not be limited to "which way forward" for their movements. It will inevitably take up various social struggles. The links Jesse Jackson has been able to forge between P-9 members, farmers, minorities and peace groups is indicative of the potential for a multi-issue, anti-capitalist movement. Socialists can help to provide an analysis for such a movement which will strengthen its independent, class-struggle character.

Solidarity supports the fight to restore social spending programs that particularly affect minority communities and to oppose the military budget. In this fight we urge support for demands which challenge capital's "right" to determine the fate of these communities, and which lead to the community's self-mobilization and self-governance.

Because of their own oppression—and their identification with struggles of other nonwhite peoples—many members of oppressed minorities in the U.S. have been drawn, historically, to radicalism. The ability of these activists to play leading roles in the multinational movement against the U.S. ruling class, however, has been limited by the segmentation of the U.S. working class, which has been divided, historically, along racial and gender lines.

Additionally, white radicals—including socialists—have usually failed to orient correctly toward genuine collaboration with Black, Latin, Asian and Native American revolutionaries. Our own organization, by its composition, reflects this historic defect. We seek both by recruitment and regroupment to learn from, and work with, revolutionaries from communities of oppressed nationalities.

The fight for liberation in southern Africa, against intervention in Central America, and for international working-class solidarity, is part of the fight against the racism of the U.S. ruling class. Given the increasing militancy of Black workers represented by the Coalition of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), and the increasing identification of Black Americans with COSATU, the African National Congress (ANC) and other liberation groups, the liberation of southern Africa can have a profound political impact on the consciousness of Blacks in the U.S. and greatly enhance the chances of a revival of the movement under working-class leadership.

As capital guts the urban centers of the North, with their large minority communities, the fight for jobs, housing and other services in those cities, as well as the fight against police abuse and right-wing terror, must be continued. But the increasing flight of capital to the South and Southwest requires us to pay special attention to the combined economic and racial struggle in those areas: 53% of Blacks still live in the South, and the Chicanos in the Southwest will soon be the largest minority in the U.S.

There, too, Native Americans continue to fight for the right to control their land. Special attention must be paid to the struggles of Native Americans, who seek reparations for the genocide committed against their people, oppose forced removal, and raise demands against the energy corporations which threaten their very existence.

The fight of oppressed nationalities takes different forms, both urban and rural, both among the longest oppressed nationalities [Native Americans and Blacks] as well as among the most recent victims [refugees from Central America], both defending communities of oppressed nationalities and demanding affirmative action.

## FEMINISM & MARXISM

We are socialist-feminists: we hold that the struggle for socialism requires the struggle for women's liberation—we cannot make a revolution to create a society without exploitation and oppression unless women are fully part of that revolution and that new society. We also hold that the struggle for women's liberation requires the alliance of feminist movements to the class struggle. Most women cannot hope to control their lives or even achieve equality with men within a capitalist society.

The class struggle is not something that happens only at the workplace or in trade union battles. And revolutionary socialist organization will have to unify movements of all subordinated groups.

Yet, socialists have too often tried to create unity simply by insisting that class oppression "comes first." To tell women that they must postpone their struggle against male domination in the greater interest of the working class is not only to define the working class as male but also to maintain rather than overcome the divisions that already exist within the working class. Real unity is possible only on the basis of equality: equal participation of women at all levels of organization, full commitment of organizational resources to work in the women's movement, and the incorporation of feminist perspectives into all areas of socialist political activity.

A socialist movement that does not speak to women's needs and aspirations will hardly be able to mobilize women for revolution. A working class riven by sexism will be vulnerable to capitalist strategies of divide and conquer. Men's insistence that they have the right to monopolize better-paying jobs in the name of their traditional breadwinner role pits men and women workers against each other, weakening trade union organization.

A working class which has not confronted the fundamental issues of sexual politics raised by feminism will be more easily manipulated by conservative political forces. The new right's "pro-family" politics plays on real fears and real needs. Its invocation of an ideal family based on the control of women's sexuality and confinement to traditional roles may fly in the face of reality, but strikes a responsive chord when the alternative is the insecurity and disintegration of personal life, the relentless commodification of women's sexuality in the mass media, in advertising, in entertainment, and, for many women, in actual relationships. The continuing depth of women's oppression is

shown by the vicious means still used to keep women "in their place:" violence in fact and image, rape, battering, sexual harassment.

A working class not ready to challenge family roles in which men continue to have primary responsibility for income earning, while women continue to have primary responsibility for children, caring for men, and domestic work even if they also hold paying jobs, will continue to regard male wages and unemployment as serious political issues, while women's pay and women's jobs remain unimportant.

Solidarity between different groups within the working class, between trade unionists and welfare recipients, between the organized and unorganized, between the skilled crafts and service and clerical workers, will therefore be much harder to achieve. The struggles of working women for equal pay for work of "comparable value," affirmative action, equal access to all trades and professions, representation in union leadership and safeguards against reproductive hazards and against sexual harassment on the job will be crucial to achieving this solidarity.

The development of feminism—as theory of women's oppression and organization for overcoming it and as vision of an alternative society—has made a major contribution to Marxist theory and socialist politics. For example, in its call for a revolution in personal life as well as public life, feminism has helped return Marxism to its early liberatory, democratic thrust.

Socialists have been led to develop and deepen the Marxist ideal of human emancipation encompassing every aspect of life. A socialist-feminist vision aims to end not only economic exploitation, physical insecurity, and material deprivation, but also alienation from our bodies and sensuality, our capacity for intimacy, sexuality, and play.

Where traditional Marxism envisioned collective responsibility for children only to free individual women from the burden of motherhood, feminism has helped us to see further. Our goal is not just to socialize childcare but also to allow both men and women to participate in raising children. We will never have deeply humane and comradely relationships in work, political and community life until we break out of the destructive sexual division of labor in which women but not men are expected to nurture and care for others.

The struggles of women against male domination—whether for equality in the workplace, for reproductive freedom, for the freedom to live openly as a lesbian, for the end of male violence against women, etc.—are crucial not only to the building of a women's movement but to the development of a revolutionary socialist movement. Organizations run by and for women themselves develop the experience, self-confidence, consciousness, and militance of women in a way that mixed organizations can never do. In autonomous women's organizations, women learn leadership skills and come to trust and rely on each other.



And while women's liberation cannot be achieved under capitalism, women can improve the quality of their lives through the struggle for reform. Each victory that increases women's scope of action, access to economic support independent from men, ability to contest women's cultural devaluation, and so forth, contributes to the strength of women's self-organization.

Therefore, these battles also provide the experiential, material, organizational and ideological base from which women can ensure that their needs, interests, and goals are at the forefront of socialist politics. By developing political program around women's issues, by insisting that those issues be recognized in common actions with other forces, by educating and supporting women activists who also participate in socialist organizations, feminist organizations have forced the revolutionary socialist left to develop politically far beyond what would have been otherwise possible.

We are committed to building a women's movement which is multi-racial and working class. Women of color and working-class women have been underrepresented in the self-defined feminist movement. We will challenge—in our own press and in writing for others, as well as in our organizing efforts—any definitions of feminism that exclude the self-organizing efforts of working-class women and women of color to fight against their oppression.

We recognize that women of color and other working-class women have been in the forefront of struggles to gain wider societal supports for quality parenting alternatives and adequate incomes to support families, either from expanded job opportunities or from direct federal aid. We also recognize that the issues raised by the self-defined feminist movement, including reproductive rights, violence against women and affirmative action/comparable worth, are crucial to the lives of working-class women and women of color. For example, abortion for us is only the first necessary step in guaranteeing a woman's freedom to decide when and if she will bear a child. Real choices over reproduction require a broad range of rights: the right to quality, affordable childcare; the right to be lesbian; the right to safe contraception and protection from forced sterilization; the right to decent housing and safe and rewarding work at a living wage, etc.

Whether women of color choose to participate in the women's movement through autonomous structures which they set up, whether they join the broad women's movement, or whether they constitute a caucus within the movement, their participation is crucial for creating a movement to liberate women. Without the presence of women of color to champion their own needs, the feminist movement can more easily be divided. We will extend our efforts to influence the nature of national feminist campaigns to express the concerns of working-class women and women of color.

Women, like the working class and other oppressed people, utilize many forms of organization in order to fight back against their secondary status. It is important for feminists to link, therefore, with popular struggles in which women play leading roles. Women are the backbone of many community organizations, anti-racist and civil rights groups, unions, solidarity committees, anti-war and anti-nuclear organizations. Women are everywhere, and even when women do not think of themselves as "feminists," through organizing against oppression and making demands on their employer, their government, their society, they develop leadership capacities and become political people who are taking control of their lives. This is the essence of feminism.

We also commit ourselves to maintaining a focus on the interrelationships between struggles for women's liberation in the U.S. and those of women in other countries of the world. We accept the responsibility for educating the feminist movement in our own country about the extent to which U.S. capitalism profits from women's oppression in underdeveloped countries by extracting super-profits from their cheap labor while destroying the economic gains made by women's struggles in the U.S.

As we try to bring a working-class and anti-racist perspective to women's organizing, we work to bring a feminist perspective and women's issues into all areas of our work. We hope in this way to prepare and consolidate alliances between the feminist movement and other opposition forces. We organize women's groups to march in anti-racism demonstrations and strike picket lines.

We support all forms of women's organization—caucuses, task forces, committees—in unions and workplaces, in the anti-intervention, peace, anti-racism and other movements. We take responsibility for introducing feminist campaigns for gay rights, abortion rights, battered women's shelters, against sexual harassment, to our fellow trade-unionists and community activists. We take responsibility for bringing women workers' special needs into contract bargaining and other union campaigns, for example around safety.

In all areas of feminist organizing, we emphasize the self-activity and political development of women. As is true of other social movements, reliance on the Democratic Party has seriously weakened the women's struggle. We oppose campaigns, strategies, and forms of organization that encourage passivity, reliance on leaders, experts or politicians. We support strategies of direct action, educational campaigns, grass-roots mobilization. We are convinced that such strategies are the most effective way for women to win reforms. We also believe that the self-organization of women, their mobilization and development as political activists, is crucial to the re-emergence of a revolutionary socialist movement in the U.S.

## LESBIAN/GAY LIBERATION

The struggle for lesbian/gay liberation is bound up closely with the struggle for women's liberation. The two oppressions are related in the family system, which forces children into a rigid, heterosexual mold, and oppressive, limited definitions of masculinity, femininity and sexuality.

Freedom for lesbians and gay men requires a drastically expanded range of choices for all people—as sexual beings, as family members, as working people, as men or women, as children and adolescents. The visible disintegration of the traditional family makes the creation of new ways for people to relate sexually, live together and raise children more and more urgent. The autonomous organizations of lesbian/gay people have pioneered these issues, and we strongly support them.

Full civil rights for gay people would be a major step forward in this broader liberation struggle. We fight for repeal of all so-called "sodomy" laws, which are antiquated constraints on heterosexuality as well as homosexuality; for passage of local, state and federal laws banning discrimination based on sexual orientation in housing,



employment and services; for repeal of all anti-gay provisions in the immigration and naturalization laws; and for the end to any legal distinction whatsoever on the basis of sexual orientation. We also fight for the inclusion of gay rights clauses in union contracts.

Besides these moves against discrimination, lesbians and gay men desperately need support today against threats to their health, safety and lives. Funding for AIDS research and social services for people (of whatever sexual orientation) with AIDS and ARC has been inadequate and slow in coming; it must be increased manyfold. The ever-

present danger of anti-lesbian and anti-gay violence has been compounded by the despicable use of AIDS panic to fuel bigotry.

We support efforts to make the police and courts enforce existing laws against violence and to add provisions against anti-gay violence to existing laws against racist violence, as well as lesbian/gay organizing in self-defense. We oppose attacks under whatever pretext against gay institutions and gathering places. A necessary antidote to anti-gay bigotry is a realistic and sympathetic portrayal of lesbian/gay life in the media, schools and other public forums.

Finally, we support lesbian/gay struggles that challenge the existing heterosexual family system. Homosexual partnerships must be granted equal recognition and support with married and unmarried heterosexual couples and households. Lesbians and gay men must be granted full rights to custody of their children, without sacrificing or hiding the way they live. The unjustified bias in adoption and foster placement toward "traditional" or "normal" households must be eliminated. Within our own organization we will not only support the self-organization of lesbians and gay men, we will try to be supportive of the personal and sexual choices all our members make.



## FOR INDEPENDENT POLITICS

The necessity for autonomous class action is at the root of our conception of independent political action. *Class independence* is at the heart of revolutionary socialist working-class politics, which emphasizes workers' self-organization, self-activity and reliance on their own strength—including building their own alliances with the oppressed. In the electoral arena, the principle of working-class self-organization requires an independent party.

Lacking such a party, the working class and other progressive movements are reduced to pressure groups on bourgeois politics, no matter how militant their activity. This is the trap from which labor in the U.S. has yet to escape.

Just as we believe that workers, through their class institutions (the unions) should have a policy of challenging the employers rather than of accepting collaboration, we believe the same principle should apply in the arena of politics. Unlike reformists, we do not see ourselves as "critics" of the bourgeois parties, the Democratic and Republican parties, but as opponents. Indeed, in the U.S. the question of the Democratic Party is the most important principled and practical divide between the politics of reformism and revolutionary socialism.

The Party Line of reformism in the U.S. holds that the arena for progressive politics lies inside the Democratic Party. However frayed around the edges, however disunited on other issues, sectors of reformism come together on this question—from the most conservative to the most liberal wing of the AFL-CIO bureaucracy, from the middle-class women's movement leadership to the mainstream leaders of civil rights organizations to the Rainbow Coalition, from liberal cold warriors to the Democratic Socialists of America.

In fact, the Democratic Party is the graveyard of movements for social and political change. It is a party controlled by and thoroughly tied to corporate capital, and *for that reason* is irrevocably committed to the maintenance of the world U.S. economic empire. It is therefore a party of intervention in Central America, the Middle East, Southeast Asia and the rest of the Third World; at home, its ability and will to advocate social reform is strictly limited by what capital is prepared to tolerate.

Quite logically, then, in periods of capitalist prosperity the Democrats promote the institutional advancement of unions within the system, generally support social spending and programs which

more reactionary sectors of business opinion oppose, and pose as champions of equality for minorities and women. In periods of austerity the Democrats ruthlessly sacrifice social interests to the needs of the system. Thus on questions of slashing spending, attacking the gains of the civil rights movement and holding back women's struggles for equality, the Democrats have presented no meaningful or lasting opposition to Reaganism.

No matter how often the quest to capture the Democratic Party for progressive politics fails—as it always does and always will—the argument for "giving it another try" constantly revives in the wake of each defeat. The bitter experience of social movements inside the Democratic Party in the past two decades alone stretches from the betrayal of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party at the 1964 convention to the cynical putdown of Jesse Jackson's supporters in 1984; the bureaucratic reversal of the party reforms of the McGovern period; the continual Democratic betrayals of the labor movement over labor law reform, taxation and the budget, national health insurance and myriad social issues as well as basic union rights. Today, as the Democrats seek to recapture white votes and business confidence, Gary Hart's pro-corporate "neo-liberalism" has become the political center of gravity in the Democratic Party.

Nonetheless, the illusions that the Democrats are the party of working people and the "little person" continually reproduce themselves. They will continue to do so as long as the basic institutions of the American working class remain tied to the Democratic Party.

It is therefore essential that socialists continue to make the case for an *independent party* based on the labor movement. The case for a labor party must be made today, even though we know that socialist propaganda alone will not create it, and even though the politics of *today's* official labor movement are a powerful obstacle to it.

We do not pretend to know the precise structure a labor party in the U.S. would have, nor how left-wing it would be at its inception, nor whether the first mass impetus for independent politics will come from within organized labor or from mass social movements such as a revived Black Liberation struggle. Our arguments today center on the *necessity* of an independent party of the American working class; we seek to advance this idea by all appropriate means and we also support all efforts at independent politics which might set an example in this direction.

The conception that the Democratic Party is the arena for progressive politics extends deep into the left. While there are myriad strategic and tactical variations on the pattern, there are two major sets of argument put forward in favor of left involvement in Democratic Party electoralism.



The first and generally more systematic is the politics of reformism, theorized most notably by Michael Harrington and the leadership of DSA, in both its left and right wings. The core of the reformist argument identifies the labor movement with its leadership, views this leadership as the real left wing of U.S. politics, *correctly* points out the indissoluble allegiance of this leadership to the Democratic Party, and concludes that both loyalty to the working class and practical politics demand that the left focus its political attention on the struggle to change the Democratic Party to a "real labor party" or some approximation thereof.

While the reformists' strategy has no chance of success in transforming U.S. politics, their theory serves the important function of cement-

ing their own loyalty to the existing labor bureaucracy. So long as reformism is organized around the premise that the "left wing of the possible" is bordered by the political consciousness of the labor leadership, the spokespeople for reformist politics are accepted by at least a sector of that leadership as advisors and even as representatives of a certain semi-respectable version of "socialism."

In carrying out this function, social-democratic ideologues have promoted within the labor movement the notion that concessions can be progressive, that employee buyouts to rescue employers are a progressive structural reform, and other disastrous notions. In this way, some of the worst setbacks suffered by American workers become theorized as "strategic gains."

In addition, by organizing a substantial sector of radicals around working in the Democratic Party, the reformist argument promotes the accommodation by these radicals to pro-corporate notions of capitalist restructuring, the necessity of austerity, and certain crucial aspects of U.S. imperialism such as the military and political alliance between the U.S. and Israel. Thus many leftists (inside and outside DSA) find themselves working in the service of politics which they know to be bankrupt, in the belief that this is the only way to "Dump Reagan" or build a "realistic struggle for power."

A second, more radical, although less theoretically sophisticated, orientation toward the Democratic Party by the left is based on the desire to defeat U.S. intervention in Central America and ally with the Black struggle and other social movements. Spurred by the Harold Washington victory in Chicago in 1983 and even more by the Jesse Jackson movement of 1984, this orientation sees the Black movement as providing the crucial center and leadership for a "people's politics" inside the Democratic Party.

This conception is central to the political perspective of several ex-Maoist formations, to some ultra-Stalinist groupings such as Line of March, to the newly formed socialist North Star Network, and various others.

It is also the viewpoint developed by some prominent Black scholars, most notably Manning Marable, who synthesizes some of the institutional arguments of reformism (e.g. that the Black leadership represents in essence an American social-democratic mass politics analogous to a European labor party) with the more radical thrust of Jesse Jackson's Black populism.

Supporting the Rainbow Coalition represents an attractive option to the white left, which acutely recognizes its isolation from the Black community. It is also exciting to activists in the anti-intervention movement, whose priority is the desperate struggle to hold back the assault on the Central American revolutions and who see the Rainbow

Coalition as an ally with social power. In such a situation it is all too easy for leftists to convince themselves that whether Jackson and the Rainbow are *independent* of, or *within*, the Democratic Party is really only a terminological, secondary or tactical question, and that to not support the Rainbow on such grounds is hair-splitting.

We believe, on the contrary, that independence from the Democratic Party is a *decisive* question, at least as important if not more so than any particular point in a formal program or platform. The willingness or unwillingness of the Rainbow Coalition or major forces within it to break from the Democratic Party determines whether the Rainbow offers the potential to seriously challenge two-party capitalist political hegemony, or is only a pressure group within the system which can be contained, then conservatized or defeated.

Unfortunately, there is no available evidence to suggest that this question is open inside the Rainbow: rather, Jackson and the Rainbow leadership are committed to working within the Democratic Party, indeed to saving the Democratic Party. *We do not share that goal*, and therefore for us any form of political support to the Rainbow Coalition is excluded. We make it clear through our literature, statements, etc. that we regard the overall political project of the Rainbow Coalition inside the Democratic Party to be a tragic dead end which blunts the enormous potential of the movement.

On the other hand, where Jesse Jackson or the Rainbow are engaged in actual activities such as anti-war demonstrations, civil rights struggles or speaking out for a just peace in the Middle East as Jesse Jackson has done, we of course support such actions even though we may not be in full agreement with every slogan. The positive attitude of movement activists in general toward the Rainbow Coalition is understandable and normal. While our views should be clear, we do not want these differences to be an obstacle to building demonstrations and solidarity actions in defense of Central America, against racism, etc.

Under present conditions there is, unfortunately, no clear-cut electoral strategy for the revolutionary left to follow. We are not anti-electoral. That is, wherever there are local, state or national initiatives of an independent radical character (ranging from anti-war, farmer-labor, Black, Latino, or environmentalist to socialist), the question of whether to support them, and how, is open for discussion.

Members of our new organization come from a variety of political traditions with somewhat differing experiences on the strategy and tactics of independent political action. While we reject any form of support to candidates of the bourgeois parties, we recognize that the possibilities for building independent politics need to be explored with an open attitude toward various potential independent formations.

## OUR ORGANIZATION

Our aim is to establish an organization whose functioning will be distinctive within the left, an organization that will be noted for its democratic practice internally as well as its non-sectarian, activist comportment in the mass movements.

We recognize that we are only at the beginning of the struggle to build, or rebuild, socialist political consciousness in a section of the American working class. We do not pretend to have a fully worked out strategy to achieve this, and we recognize that learning how to build a revolutionary organization in the U.S. will require an experimental and flexible approach for a considerable period, as well as studying the experience of revolutionary socialists internationally.

One of the errors that many different political organizations have committed is to assume that they are not just at the beginning, but already far along the road of developing a working-class revolutionary party. This led them to posture as fully-formed vanguard organizations—despite their small size and lack of roots in the working class—and reject common work, much less unification, with other revolutionaries.

We believe that these would-be vanguards organized themselves in a way that would be counterproductive for revolutionary socialists at any time, and was especially inappropriate for the U.S. in the 1970s and 1980s. A genuine vanguard only emerges through years of immersion in the struggle of working class and oppressed people.

Even in a revolutionary period, when its leading role is widely acknowledged, it must be internally democratic, allowing all its members to present their views openly, to organize other members around these views and to change the policies of the organization if a majority is convinced they are correct. It must also be open to the working class and social movements, honestly explaining its policies and difficulties, listening to and sometimes accepting outside criticisms, adapting to spontaneous popular initiatives and engaging in a frank dialogue with other currents on the left.

In a period of defensive struggles, we must emphasize democracy within our own organization and openness to those outside it at least as much. In establishing guidelines for our organizational functioning, we are adapting the historical experience of the international revolutionary socialist movement, notably the practice of the Bolshevik party in the early years of the Russian Revolution, to suit our specific circumstances.

We consider an activist membership a necessary condition for a genuinely democratic organization. We expect members working in the same movement to coordinate their efforts and discuss their common

problems together. We aim to carry out united campaigns in support of ongoing struggles, making sure that these interventions are appropriate to our resources and level of involvement and have been preceded by adequate discussion. In all of our work in social movements, we follow the general principle that the lowest body (work group, branch, etc.) that *can* make a decision on the conduct of that work *should* make that decision, and that the opinion of those most directly involved in the work should be given the greatest weight.

Once a considered position has been reached, members have the obligation to help carry it out. Of course, a member who does not agree with a specific decision taken by any body of the group should not be placed in the difficult position of being responsible for implementing the decision; but in any event, members should not interfere with the implementation of a collective decision. We intend to carry out our decisions critically rather than blindly, keeping in mind the analysis and arguments that went into them and allowing ourselves the greatest possible leeway to reconsider and correct any mistakes we may make.

For an organization to be democratic, it must allow for a free and democratic internal life, in which criticism and debate are viewed as a necessary part of developing a program for action. Just as important, the principles of majority rule pertain, so that the decisions taken after democratic discussion are binding on the leadership of the organization and actually affect the policy of the organization. This latter method of functioning contrasts both with the social-democratic model, in which no one is bound by the decisions of the organization, and, consequently, the party leadership is not bound by the membership's decisions; and with bureaucratic models of organization, in which the leadership is out of the control of a membership that is nonetheless expected to carry out its every decision.

A truly democratic organization must be composed of activists. If the general perspective of an organization is the product of not just its general political program but also the concrete experiences of its membership in the unions and in the mass movements, then it is absolutely essential from a practical political viewpoint that its members be involved.

Since any given member only acquires direct knowledge from the work in which he or she is immediately involved in, the organization must provide as much information as possible to its membership. An activist in a trade union or an abortion rights group must be able to receive timely information about antiwar or Black liberation movement activities in order to round out his/her knowledge and allow him/her to participate in the political discussions of the organization

on the same basis as every other member. An active educational program for all members, newer and more experienced alike, is essential for this purpose as well.

In short, the organization must create a collective experience for its members. In turn, each member contributes to that collective experience by being active. We will also pay special attention to developing leadership skills and giving leadership roles to women and others who have traditionally been denied them.

On the other hand, we absolutely reject any concept that the members of the organization must present themselves as a monolithic bloc to the outside world—this is one of the features of sects that most healthy activists find repulsive. And we recognize the need to develop among all members of the organization a sense of confidence in their own abilities. This implies the necessity of not just tolerating, but understanding that members of the organization must take initiatives—not wait for some central committee in another city to hand down directives. A healthy organization must encourage its members' initiative and assure them the flexibility to assess particular conditions and translate the group's general principles to practice that meets and engages those circumstances. In contrast to the practice of groups that present a monolithic face to the outside world, not just acting in common, but pretending to think exactly alike as well, our organization has a responsibility to distinguish between the carrying out of united campaigns and the appearance of functioning as unthinking bearers of "the line."

A leadership, by virtue of the fact that it controls an organization's resources, has a distinct advantage in internal debate. For that reason, the right to form tendencies or factions is absolutely necessary to insure both a democratic discussion and the possibility that a minority may persuade enough members to become a majority. Furthermore, the organization as a whole must be educated in the idea that in any given debate, frequently no one is 100% correct or 100% wrong. Rather, it is often a case that different tendencies reflect different aspects of the same reality in an uneven manner.

## OVERCOMING SOME ERRORS

In forming a new revolutionary socialist organization, we are obligated to examine some of the errors of the recent U.S. revolutionary left, whether of the currents of which many of us were members or of other sectors.

Such an assessment must be carefully balanced. While the most important lesson of the 1970s was the failure of sectarian models of party-building, those very failures have caused many radicals to forget the even more profound lessons of the 1960s—the imperialist, racist and capitalist nature of the Democratic Party—which a large wing of the movement learned during the Vietnam war of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson.

It is of the greatest importance that a critical reassessment of the struggle for revolutionary organization lead us forward, not backward to passivity or accommodation to the political institutions of the system. Yet the very *real* dangers of reformist politics, whether expressed in the demoralized cynicism of many prominent social-democratic intellectuals or the Rainbow Coalition perspective of former Maoists, must not prevent us from examining the failures of overexpectation and sectarianism.

In the early half of the 1970s the revolutionary left overestimated its own strength and (more importantly) the pace at which the capitalist crisis would develop and the working class would respond. A plethora of small revolutionary organizations believed at various times in the 1970s that they were on the road to building a revolutionary party in America. Put together over time, several thousand militants passed through these party-building formations; thousands more went through the experience of the New American Movement, which while not “Marxist-Leninist” or Trotskyist in orientation also envisioned becoming a mass-based party for an American socialism.

It is all too easy to focus on some of the more grotesque and colorful features in the lives of such groups: cults of mini-personalities, contorted flip-flops of political line over China, bizarre debates on applying Stalinist versions of the “United Front” to trade-union and national minority work, internal purges over “white chauvinism” or other manufactured issues that destroyed whole groups, etc.

However, to focus on these aspects of the experience risks missing the more important lessons to be learned from the less obvious mistakes and misjudgments of those years. A more thoughtful approach requires us to look at the experiences of the sectors of the

revolutionary left who were fundamentally democratic and sane in their political approach.

The belief that our particular group constituted in some sense the “vanguard party,” or its core, in a situation where in reality the group had only limited influence at the base and even less actual leadership position among any group of workers, created distortions of various kinds in our politics. Such a situation inevitably generated certain tendencies, which were often justified in terms of “Leninist” or “democratic centralist” norms but which more often were a serious misapplication and incorrect reading of the actual historic practice of the Bolshevik party in Lenin’s lifetime. Such tendencies, which expressed themselves with varying degrees of intensity in the lives of different groups, included:

1) **An overcentralization of leadership at the expense of local initiative, tactical flexibility and willingness to experiment with varying styles of work.** There was a more or less continual state of mobilization—sometimes with productive results, but insufficient opportunity to evaluate experiences, with the result that strategic initiative became too much the exclusive province of the central leadership.

Political evaluation often was restricted to the discussion of a Political Committee, filtered down to a National Committee through reports, then to the ranks via NC members and “fait accompli” articles in the (always homogeneous) party press. The ranks, then, were trained (often well) to *absorb* and *defend* the line, rather than to help *generate* it. The bottom-up process was reserved for convention discussion every couple of years, and—by that very token—was largely gutted.

The overemphasis on “leadership” relative to rank-and-file initiative inside vanguard organizations was often reproduced in the groups’ relationship to the class struggle. Small groups of revolutionaries overestimated their ability to lead and sometimes even assumed their historic “right” to do so by virtue of their “advanced” politics. One distortion to which this pseudo-vanguardism gave rise was the formation of large-scale or small-scale front groups with tenuous roots in the working class or the movements of the oppressed.

We are speaking here not of broad coalitions such as existed in (for example) the anti-war movement, but rather of organizations claiming to speak for masses of workers and the oppressed which were in reality completely dominated by a sect. The front-group method of organizing sometimes produced flashy short-term results followed by collapse; on the other hand, serious rank-and-file groupings which took care from the beginning to create a democratic internal process and a leadership with a real base had much more solid long-term records of accomplishment and survival.

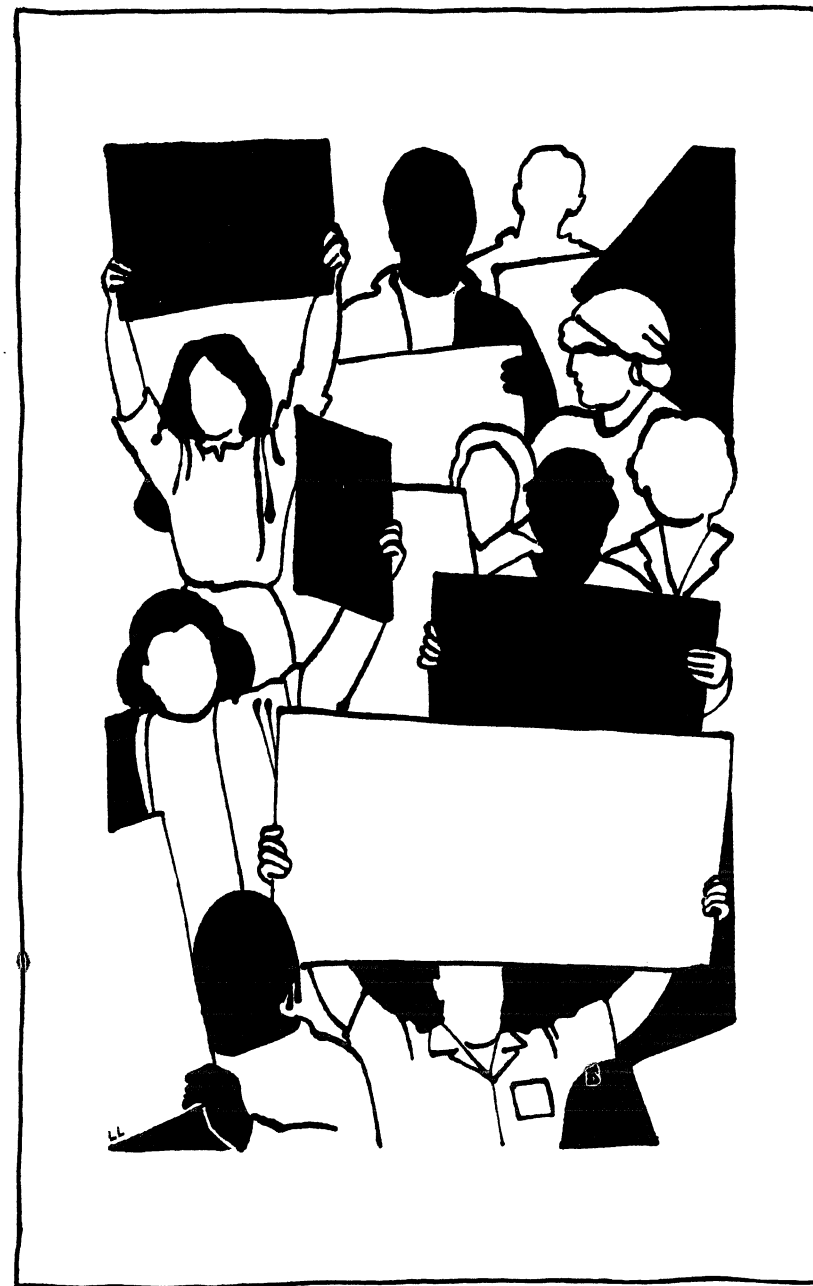
2) A vast inflation in the stakes of every political debate, whether over strategy for a union campaign or even foreign policy or theoretical issues, resulting in a tendency for factional lines to form as a rule rather than as an exception in every disagreement. Such factionalism was often in inverse proportion to the real weight of the political group in the mass movement, so that the more bitter the internal debate, the less the outcome mattered in the real world.

In Maoist or "Marxist-Leninist" groupings, all political questions were measured by their correspondence to whatever version of the "Three Worlds" or "main danger" theory was current. In Trotskyist groups the "primacy of program" conception, according to which every political difference was seen as a potential fundamental threat to the basic politics of the organization, led to bitter fights and splits on theoretical questions. In different forms such problems affected other groups, such as the International Socialists, whose insistence on too rigid strategic conceptions contributed to two damaging splits.

3) The collapsing theoretically of struggles of the oppressed into the category of "class." If proletarian revolution was on the agenda and building the proletarian party was *the* task of the hour, it became all too easy to ignore the great complexities and multiple dimensions of social movements. For example, in addressing the Black movement, the revolutionary left correctly understood in general (whatever its particular theory of the national or racial character of Black oppression) that the Black struggle, with its highly proletarian composition, is revolutionary in its overall thrust.

This correct insight, however, became oversimplified to the point of regarding every strike of Black workers or every struggle for basic democratic rights (busing, against police brutality, stopping a racist frameup, etc.) as automatically "revolutionary" even when those involved did not view it in that way at all. Both Black and white revolutionaries were prone to this error, the latter more so if they came to the struggle from the outside. (Socialists inside the unions, white or Black, dealing with the real struggles of workers on a daily basis, usually more quickly acquired an understanding of reality.)

Another example was the left's difficulties in dealing with the women's movement, which was often written off as petty-bourgeois since as every revolutionist was supposed to know, the (abstractly conceived) working class was what mattered. In the process the left often gave short shrift to precisely those issues which actually mattered most to great numbers of working-class women. Here again, members of cadre organizations who were actually engaged in working-women's struggles (whether in traditional or non-traditional industries) learned important lessons which in turn were assimilated by their political groups. But too often the views and contributions of





these members were undervalued within their organizations.

Ultimately, the hypertrophy of the role of "party leadership" combined with the failure of revolutionary expectations could lead to political degeneration. Veterans of the experience of the SWP can perhaps best testify to this dynamic: a series of turns developed by the leadership seeking keys to rapid growth; attrition of internal democracy; increasingly, the transformation of an essential and correct *solidarity* with Third World revolutions (especially Nicaragua) into a substitution of this work for party members' day-to-day participation in the political life of their workplaces and unions.

In the case of the SWP the incremental transformation of the party's consciousness ultimately expressed itself in a qualitative change in theory, towards a stagist conception of Third World revolution, and an approach to world politics which includes defense of Khomeini's murderous theocracy as "anti-imperialist," a retreat from full support of Polish Solidarnosc and a general accommodation to pro-Moscow Stalinism.

There is another, more subtle error which has exacerbated the tendency toward splintering of the revolutionary left. We believe that *it is a mistake today to organize revolutionary groups around precise theories of the Russian revolution*. We want to be clear about what this means.

Precision, clarity and rigor are the highest of virtues in developing theory and historical analysis; however, lines of political demarcation do not flow in a mechanical and linear way from differences of theoretical interpretation. Such an approach leads to unnecessary hot-housed debates on issues where long-term discussion would be more in order. It also contributes to the dynamics of factionalism and splits, which in any case have been too high owing to our history of misassessing the political realities of our own society.

In seeking to overcome this negative legacy, our new organization brings together currents and individuals with a variety of views on theoretical and historical questions, from the interpretation of the Russian Revolution and its leadership to the struggle in Central America today. We will carry on discussion and mutual education, making no public pretense of monolithism and seeking to learn from each other's views. We have in common that *we are on the same side* when it comes to struggle: with the Nicaraguan people and their revolution against imperialism, with the Polish workers and their movement Solidarnosc against the ruling bureaucracy.

Because of the unique role of theoretical debate on the class character of the USSR and Eastern Europe in the life of the anti-Stalinist revolutionary left, it is relevant to elaborate briefly on our parameters of agreement. *It is the tradition of the Hungarian Revolu-*

*tion of 1956, of the Solidarnosc movement and others that will arise to follow its example—not the regime of Poland and the USSR or other Eastern European states—which represent the struggle for socialist freedom and the socialist future of humanity*. We will stand on this position openly and without compromise.

Theoretically, some of us view these states as post-capitalist societies whose transition toward socialism is blocked by bureaucratic ruling castes and the pressures of imperialism. Others of us regard the bureaucracies as ruling classes, exploiting the working class in a new way, in a social formation which is a rival to capitalism but is no less reactionary. Others of us regard them as essentially a new form of capitalism itself, state capitalism; while still others do not have a firmly held theory or regard all existing theoretical explanations as inadequate.

We are determined that these differences will not prevent us from extending active solidarity to workers' struggles in Eastern Europe, nor from building a common socialist organization here in the U.S.

We also hold a variety of theoretical views on the nature of, for example, the Nicaraguan revolution, which will not prevent us from extending solidarity to it. We agree, at least, that no viable analysis of that revolution or others like it can be made by simply pretending it is a re-make of the Russian Revolution of 1917 in miniature.

On the question of Cuba, while united in our total opposition to all forms of U.S. hostility and intervention toward Cuba, we do not share a common view of Cuban society and its regime. Some of us feel that Cuba, despite the limitations on workers' democracy, represents a highly positive though unfinished revolutionary process with a crucial impact in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Others of us regard the Cuban regime, in its relationship to its own working class, to be no different qualitatively from the bureaucratic regimes of Eastern Europe and therefore not a positive revolutionary model. We will not seek to paper over these differences; rather, we regard our success in building a common organization which contains a diversity of views while maintaining comradely collaboration as a test of the viability of regroupment.

## BASIS OF POLITICAL AGREEMENT

1) **Capitalism is an outmoded social system now deep in crisis.** This crisis is producing the beginning of a declining standard of living and an escalating drive toward war. This crisis is the unavoidable outcome of capital's most basic drives. Humanity will only be freed from the barbarism of unemployment, poverty, declining living standards for millions and war when capitalism has been displaced by a rational, planned and democratic economic system: socialism.

2) **Socialism is the political and economic rule of the working class, in which the means of production are under the social ownership of the working class, which democratically plans economic life.** The working class organizes its political and economic rule through councils of workers and popular representatives, freely chosen among a variety of organized working class and popular parties.

3) **Socialism can only be achieved by a revolutionary mass political movement of the working class which ends the political rule of the capitalist class and private ownership of the means of production.**

4) **The aim of this organization is to build a revolutionary socialist movement in the working class and allied sectors of the oppressed.** Membership is open to all who share our principles and work toward achieving them.

5) **The capitalist parties, especially the Republican and Democratic parties, are fundamentally anti-working class, racist and sexist.** We oppose any form of participation in or support for these parties. We call for the working class and its allies to form a new, independent political party that fights for their needs.

6) **The capitalist crisis has set in motion an employers' offensive that necessitates national and international labor solidarity as well as organizing the unorganized.** The labor bureaucracy for the most part acts as a brake on labor action. We therefore support all efforts to transform the unions into militant vehicles, including rank and file groupings within the unions as well as coalitions against concessions and strike support committees.

7) **Racial and national oppression divide the working class and create poverty and misery for millions.** We join in the fight against racism, such as the struggle for affirmative action, and support the efforts of oppressed national minorities to organize independently for their liberation.

8) **We fight for women's liberation, and for women's equality today.** The oppression of women within the family and in society divides the working class, keeps women's wages low and burdens women unequally in the task of social reproduction.

9) **We are supporters of lesbian and gay liberation, of their struggles for civil rights and against all forms of anti-gay bigotry.** We support, as with all oppressed groups, the efforts of gays and lesbians to organize independently for their liberation.

10) **We are internationalists.** We support movements for national liberation throughout the world and the struggles of workers for better living standards and social and political power everywhere. Whatever may be our differing theoretical analyses of the Eastern European states, we are unconditional defenders of Polish Solidarnosc and other struggles for genuine trade unionism and workers' democracy in Eastern Europe.

11) **We actively oppose the growing drive towards war, whether that be in the form of intervention in Central America, the Middle East or elsewhere, or the buildup of the U.S. war machine.** We fight for unilateral disarmament in the U.S. and, at the same time, we extend our solidarity to the independent peace movements of Eastern Europe.

12) **Toward these ends we are committed to building an effective revolutionary socialist organization in the U.S. capable of acting together without presenting a monolithic face to the world or engaging in pretenses of being "the vanguard."**