

Perspectives on the Political Situation in the U.S.A.

A continued downward flight of capital and its accumulation process is the chief characteristic of the social situation of North America. This crisis of political economy most dramatically expresses itself in the massive indebtedness of the State.

For 1984 the federal deficit was a record \$175 billion, and Office of Management Budget head David Stockman now predicts a \$210 billion short-fall for 1985 rather than the pre-election figure of \$168 billion. Without new revenues (taxes) or spending cuts, the OMB calculates a total \$846 billion red-line for Reagan's second term raising the total national debt to \$2.2 trillion! Interest payments on the national debt alone for 1984 came to \$134 billion.

The Gross National Product has dropped from 8.6% growth during the first half of 1984 to 2.7% in the third quarter. During October the "leading economic indicators" went down again - the third such reading in the last five months - and economic "experts" are calling this state of affairs a "growth recession". The by-word at the Chamber of Commerce is currently "Can Santa Save the Economy?" But consumer buying for the holiday period would have to jump 20% over third quarter purchases to clear out the huge inventories which are now built up, and such a commodity grab is just not in the business tarot cards.

Official unemployment, listed at 7.4%, is about to rise again as applications for lay-off claims went up in November. Because of the high value/price of the dollar against other foreign currencies/commodities, the US has posted a record \$125 billion trade deficit. Another gripping statistic is the incredible growth of the poor in the US - 35.2 million people, or 15.2% of the population, were officially cited as under the poverty line (\$10,178 yearly income) for 1983.

The Reagan Administration's new budget proposal calls for spending cuts totalling \$4.2 billion in 1985, the enactment of which would serve as a further impoverishment of society as a whole. Besides billion dollar cuts in the main social-wage programmes - Medicare and Medicaid - Stockman wants a 5% pay reduction for all federal workers, plus a huge write-down for federal workers' and railroad pensions, veterans' health and housing funds, child nutrition and school lunch programmes, black lung and food stamp funds, and electric power subsidies. As for the federal programmes scheduled to be eliminated, they number the gamut of New Deal/Great Society inventions: farm-ownership loans, dairy and rural housing subsidies, the Rural Electrification Administration, community development grants, federal revenue-sharing grants, the postal system subsidies, the Small Business Administration, the Export-Import Bank, the Job Corps, Head Start, the Legal Services Corporation, the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, urban mass-transit aid, federal water and sewer grants, and federal library funds.

And although the defence of some of these state-capitalist programmes will be grist for the

mills of the liberal/left politicians on the outs, passage of portions of the "freeze-plus" package will signal a real lowering of the standard of life of the the entire American population and especially its working-class. Moreover, what the liberals can salvage from "The Great State-Capitalist Society" will be counter-balanced with new taxes outright or through new indirect sales taxes (the "value-added tax") which again will hit at the meagre incomes of US workers. Obviously, a new round of austerity is actually what Reagan meant by: "You ain't seen nothing, yet!" And, oh yes, Stockman wants an \$8 billion paring of the military budget leaving the Pentagon to toy around with a \$317 billion sum so as to "protect the US"!

Reagan will make the pitch for the new "Nothing, Yet!" with his January Inaugural Address: "You know, things aren't quite as rosy as we had hoped, there", but "Remember da Duke" and "Let's all pull together for the Gipper now". In the meantime, as the "supply-side" illusion finally peters out and the "economic recovery" is shown to be a total farce, the American bourgeoisie will also backtrack on its "peace and disarmament" at Geneva, and pursue its very real course toward World War Three. As former "Cap the Knife" Weinberger maintains, the military budget, America's death machine, is the fattest and most sacrosanct piece of the State apparatus. The Washington Post disclosure about the military intent of the next space shuttle-shot, and the recent naval and aircraft "incident" in the Sea of Japan near Vladivostok are warnings to humanity that the contention between the US and Soviet blocs is real and mounting, and will spell annihilation for all life on earth if these mutual systems of exploitation are not removed by workers' revolution.

Along with the military build-up a new "anti-terrorist" campaign has been launched by the Reagan Administration with Shultz and Weinberger, each reflecting the ideological prejudices of his own bureaucratic bailiwick, debating the finer points of "the military option". But the real aim of this campaign is an ability to maximise the defence of the State in the event of social explosions by the proletariat:

Washington's policy makers still are debating the uses and limits of American military power - not only in the realm of nuclear weapons ... but in much greyer areas. The question: how and when should US military might be used to combat global terrorism, revolution and other crises that fall short of total war but still challenge American interests?

(Newsweek, 10/12/84)

The federal government has its main international "counter-terrorist" commando unit at Fort Bragg, Fayetteville, N.C. - the Delta Force directed by Major General Richard Scholtes. The Delta Force and their adjunct naval units (the Seals) are trained to perform more than 30 "special military operations", and are equipped with the most

sophisticated of weaponry - night-vision devices, stun and silencer guns, and it has just been leaked, back-pack nuclear launchers! Expenditures for these units came to \$100 million last year, and Congress has allocated more than \$500 million in 1985 for "special operations programmes".

The national command post for "terrorist attack" is in Washington, D.C. located on the sixth floor of the FBI building - the "Emergency Operations Center". Its head is FBI assistant director Oliver Revell who has at his finger-tips a state-of-the-art communications network tying in phone links to the White House, the Defence and State Departments plus all of the country's FBI offices. Besides all of the enormous data of the FBI's own computer banks, the command centre also possesses the "Surrogate Traveller", a video display machine which can beam out laser pictures of all the major buildings of America's big cities in the event of seizures.

With the Right fully entrenched in power here in the US, we have witnessed the immediate mobilization of the Left in Opposition. Can the confluence of publicity about poverty in America, the end of the so-called "economic recovery", starvation in the "Third World", the new "anti-Apartheid" campaigns led by the old liberal coalition of civil rights, union and Democratic Party officials be merely coincidental? We think not. And why weren't these media features aired during the Presidential campaign? Because these spectacles would have helped Mondale, and the re-election of Reagan was the number one priority of the American bourgeoisie. As the budget cuts and tax hikes are enacted, we will again see the US Left - led by Jackson, Kennedy and Cuomo - try to pre-empt social anger and frustration, and channel this class discontent into civil disobedience and electoralism in an attempt to inoculate American workers from British Miners' Fever.

Of course the biggest ideological diversion of 1984 was the Presidential Campaign where a conscious coordination of the main factions of the US bourgeoisie ensured a second term for "Bombing-in-Five-Minutes" Reagan. It cannot be stressed often enough how the mass communications media - and especially the television set - all converge at a visual/ideological vortex when certain results are required. In this sense television "coverage" of the 1984 campaign resembled nothing more than TV wrestling bouts - simple and controlled morality, politics and "action" all neatly tailored for the eye of the camera, and the ready identification of the passive spectator (and the beta brain-waves of fatigue) and with the "commentators" going along with the act.

The politics of image making and entertainment reached their zenith in 1984 where form and appearance - the essence of bourgeois society - are everything. Which two transient and hollow personae when not programmed with the right coding messages do not describe Ronald Reagan and Gary Hart? Each of these mannequins was adeptly controlled by a team of bright politicians - one around the White House's Richard Darman and the other by Democratic Party free-lancer Pat Caddell. In fact, Caddell's scenario was actually a computer program in search of the correct automaton on which to play it. These image-makers are all too aware of the reality that they are marketing lies:

"A stifling mugginess overhangs the current political environment," Caddell said; the Capital had become a "circus", the government a "medieval bazaar" and politics a spectator sport "managed by mercenaries and illusionists", "like myself," Caddell lamented - with no larger purpose than winning. The only solution, in his eyes, was a new Democratic candidacy of the "radical center" (?) with the youth, the vision (sic) and the daring to redeem "the fading promise of the American future" while there was still time.
(Newsweek Election Edition, Nov/Dec 84)

Or this from a campaign memo of Dick Darman:

"Paint Mondale as ... soft in his defence of freedom, patriotic values, American interests," Darman wrote in June. "... Paint RR as the personification of all that is right with or heroised by, America. Leave Mondale in a position where an attack on Reagan is tantamount to an attack on America's idealized image of itself - where a vote against Reagan is, in some subliminal sense, a vote against a mythic 'AMERICA'.

(Newsweek, ibid)

And according to a Yale Professor Robert Abelson: "Feelings are three or four times as important as issues or party identification."

Abelson believes there are four crucial emotions: if a candidate can push the hope and pride buttons and avoid touching the anger and fear buttons, he will probably win. "Politics is theater," he says. "We just didn't know yet exactly where the public gets its impressions - from facial expressions, style of delivery, incidents that signify decisiveness." Indeed, some researchers have found that voters develop strong opinions about candidates simply by watching them on television without hearing what they are saying.

(Time, 12/11/84)

Darman and Richard Wirthlin, another Reagan handler pushed these buttons: REAGAN - nice guy, grandad, strong, "economic recovery", Grenada, remember D-Day; MONDALE - Carter, wimp, Khomeini, inflation, "malaise", abortion. The TV networks went right along with it, claiming this was the "national mood" heralding a major "political realignment". This same kind of "circus" or political "theater" is employed by Jesse Jackson and will be used more forcefully in the coming period by leftist politicians.

One encouraging statistic in the Presidential election is that the percentage of those eligible who actually voted fell to 51.4% from 52.6% in 1980 meaning that more people than ever are turned off completely by the electoral charade.

The defeat of Mondale has put the Democratic Party into a very interesting quandary. The party is now split into two distinct wings - the Old Guard Liberals comprised of aging New Dealers, union bureaucrats and black and Hispanic politicians, and the Neo-Liberals made up of Yuppies, Yumpies and preppies, with the feminists sprinkled into both camps. These two social strata are just not ideologically compatible, and in all likelihood will not remain in the same political organization. A purge seems inevitable, but which way?

The old school Democrats and union hacks show no

signs of a willingness to relinquish their structural authority and welfare-state policies - they would have to be driven out by the Neo-Liberals who would then take over the Democratic Party allowing Gary Hart, Bill Bradley and Bruce Babbitt to come to the fore. Such an event would then permit space for the realization of the Leftist wet-dream of the building of a "Labor Party" led by the likes of Lane Kirkland, William Winnispinger and Michael Harrington, and with an army of leftists (Social Democrats, ex-Maoists and Trotskyists, etc) more than ready for electoral shit-work. Jesse Jackson and friends might even want to chime in here as well.

A more probable scenario though is an arrogant exit by the Neo-Liberal faction and their gravitation towards a "new" third party candidate like John Anderson, a Yuppie senior. This would leave the Old Guard Democrats in place and cue Mario Cuomo and Jesse to veer toward a more "populist" line. Again, the US Left would follow behind here, and America would then have a genuine political realignment of Left: the Democrats, Centre: Anderson, and Right: the Republicans. Both of these possibilities would provide gobs of TV time and expanded political options for the US bourgeoisie.

One more note on the 1984 election - if Anderson had run and taken say 13-15% of the vote, since almost all of this Yuppie vote Anderson might have received went to Reagan, then Mondale would be President! Anderson, perplexed at why his 1980 financial sources rebuffed him in 1984, simply didn't understand what the wiser heads of the ruling class had determined for this election: the Right in power, the Left outside!

In the meantime, the situation of the American working class is that, while the new impending turn of misery is certain to accelerate class combativeness, their consciousness is still lagging behind the more advanced struggles in Western Europe, just as there is a temporal gap between West Germany and the more radical workers' resistance in Great Britain, Italy and Spain. Although one can gauge a partial readiness within the US workers for class battle in the violence at the AP auto parts plant in Toledo and at the Phelps Dodge copper mines in Arizona, the capitalist agency of the trade union is still using its charms of "realism", protectionism, and "job security" to harness in the proletarian steed. The slick handling of the General Motors deal by the UAW and the easy settlement with "no concessions" by the UMW shows that the union bureaucrats have persuaded the workers that siesta time in the face of the economic crisis is in the offing.

And now we finally come to the pathetic condition of the North American "revolutionary milieu". The paramount statement about revolutionary political forces in the US is to recognize that they hardly exist at all. While most of the former-Maoist groups slide steadily into social democracy and the Trotskyists do likewise (where they don't obversely support Russian-bloc imperialism), the so-called "anarchist" and "anti-authoritarian" elements have also been drawn by such liberal tides and should be thereby labelled as what they are: de facto Leftist sects, and as such, supplemental and marginal components of capitalism. The rottenness of these fake anarchist formations has been vividly illustrated in the "Processed World/Bob Black Affair" where the overwhelming majority of North American

"anarchists", in their Hegelian/Kautskyist anxiety to defend that which are - bourgeois progressives - have sided with a modernist literary machine whose essences are State Power, Deceit, Hierarchy, Manipulation, Artism and Repression against a lone revolutionary critic. The sooner such Leftist groups disappear - not only Poison World, but Kick it Over, Anti-Authoritarian News Network, Circle A, Strike! and Ideas and Action (sic) - the better.

Other legitimate revolutionary tendencies such as Internationalism, The New Socialist, and The Alarm have undergone internal traumas and demoralization



to a certain degree. There is one hopeful sign in the activity of the DeLeonist circle around The Discussion Bulletin, but the participants here, although real proletarian voices, are still debating rudimentary issues such as unionism (the "socialist industrial unions") whose class nature has been resolved by the revolutionary movement 70 years ago.

The scattered individuals of authentic communism across North America cry out for a revolutionary organization of the KAPD-type. But most of those with the consciousness and ability to participate in such a project are still mired in the fear of Leninist substitutionism, and prefer the silent, fatalistic comfort of Dostoevskian Man - the alienated radical intellectual. Not only the self-emancipation of the proletariat and the solution to the riddle of human estrangement, but the very existence of homo sapiens and all planetary life, now in jeopardy because of imperialist contradictions, must now compel this revolutionary minority to act and to act quickly.

Tampa Workers Affinity Group
December, 1984