

Working Class Self-Activity: A Response to Kim Moody

by Lee Holstein

In a three-part series in *Socialist Changes** (the International Socialists' magazine) on the Marxist theory of revolution and those questions that underlie it, Kim Moody addresses the question of working class self-activity, and, based on his conception of it, advances a strategic approach for organizing for revolution in the U.S. The strategic conclusion drawn by Moody is that active participation on the part of leftists in workers' struggles *for better wages and working conditions* is of immediate and *overriding* importance. This conclusion is based on Moody's assertion that ". . . the industrial and trade union struggles are the only context in which any sort of political fight can be made to advance class consciousness, because they are virtually the only form that working class self-activity has taken in America, as yet." Although I have no disagreement with leftists being active in the reform struggles of the working class, I do not agree that it is the strategy for revolution in the U.S., nor do I believe that revolutionary working class consciousness develops in a progressively linear fashion. I disagree entirely with Moody's dubious and unsupported premise and conclusion.

The introduction to this series (author unknown) provides a context for the development of Moody's conception of working class self-activity. The thrust of the introduction is an interesting critique of the debasement of Marxism represented by ". . . both Stalinists and social democratic proponents of 'socialism,'" and "the new versions of 'Marxism' that came in the wake of student and Third World rebellions in the 1960's. . .," all of which, the

author claims, undercut or negate entirely the role, or even the concept of working class self-activity. The introduction goes on to say that the lifeblood of a renewed interest in Marxism is "The growth of working class self-activity around the world. . . ."

This critique of the politics of the '60's fails to point out the influence of France and Italy — the "spirit of '68" — one element of the new trend in Marxism. The content of this trend was a critique of traditional trade union and party approaches. Its mainstay was the development of extra-union workers' organizations and activities. STO grew out of this "spirit of '68" and the first major split in IS occurred as a result of political differences over how to approach production work, directly influenced by the same spirit. The analysis of the IS majority was based largely on Stan Weir's investigation of "Primary Work Groups," which he argued were the basic working class organizational form. Weir provided the theoretical underpinnings for the debate in IS which followed with a split in that group. The position of the majority — "Struggle Groups" — was that the Trade Union bureaucracy had developed into a social stratum which was above and, essentially, against the working class. This bureaucracy acted primarily to police the contract, and, its formal structure, the trade union, had forsaken shop floor struggle. Because of this development, separate organizations of the rank and file were needed to function both inside and outside the trade union structure. These organizations would be mass organizations of defense and offense. Direct action, presumably outside the legal bounds of the contract, was necessary because of the demonstrated inadequacy of the trade unions.

The majority held to the traditional approach — "boring from within," replacing "bad" leadership with "good" and changing the union from within the officialdom.

The mass upsurge of the left in the '60's had both positive and negative effects. While it had anti-working class content, it also had its opposite.

For Moody to use this introduction without being clear to himself or to the reader about the history, not only of the left, but of his own organization, is dishonest. He uses a quote from Hal Draper without any mention of the fact that Draper was the leading exponent of the other side of the IS split — the minority who adhered to the traditional trade union approach. This is not so minor a point as it may seem. What appears to be merely an oversight in the content of the introduction, turns out to be a chronic disease as Moody's argument unfolds.

The first hint we are given on the meaning of working class self-activity is contained in the introduction — a critique of a particular relationship between the party and the masses. "The working class itself is granted little or no role in the formation of the party or the forging of its program and outlook. At best, the working class seems to be viewed as a collection of prospective buyers, who will be sold on the party at a later date; at worst the workers are to remain an audience in the whole process of revolution."

The apparent basis of the above critique and the second hint we are given on the meaning of self-activity is forwarded in a quote from Hal Draper in the opening paragraph of the series. It is from an essay entitled "The Two Souls of Socialism."

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The heart of socialism-from-below is its view that socialism can be realized only through the self-emancipation of activated masses in motion, reaching out for freedom with their own hands, mobilized "from below" in a struggle to take charge of their own destiny, as actors (not merely subjects) on the stage of history. "The emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves": this is the first sentence in the Rules written for the First International by Marx, and is the First Principle of his lifework.

The ideas contained in the above quotes set the approximately correct stage, but the plot thickens as almost immediately new characters — who do not fit comfortably on this stage — are introduced in Moody's "elaboration of working class self-activity."

I intend to demonstrate that this beginning for Moody's series is not only misleading, it contradicts his conclusions. Throughout the course of his articles, Moody turns the quotes cited above upside down in — his own brand of "debasement of Marxism" and a one-sided arbitrary reading of history and international alignments of forces.

In an attempt to be as fair as possible, I will use Moody's own words to illustrate the above. Since the error made by Moody is fundamentally theoretical, I will begin with a quote capsulizing his theoretical position.

On page 36 of the first article in this series, Moody puts forth his formal definition of working class self-activity.

Self-activity, therefore, must be activity that strikes out against capitalist domination. It is activity that resists or attacks one or another degree of the rule of the capitalist. It is activity which increases the political and organizational autonomy of the working class.

This passage can be summed up follows: "Working class struggle for reform is self-activity."

Is it really fair to Moody to re-

duce this selection to "Working class struggle for reform is self-activity"? After all, his first sentence, "Self-activity, therefore, must be activity that strikes out against capitalist domination," is absolutely true. In fact it is so true, so obvious, that it is meaningless. Such truisms mush together the reform and revolutionary aspects of resistance and insurgency, treating forms of resistance and insurgency which are confined within the framework of capitalism in the same way as those which break out of that framework. In this sentence he trivializes the important distinction between reformist and revolutionary activity — a distinction upon which Marx put a premium.

Capitalist relations of production dictate that workers will resist. Capitalism is premised on the fact of subordination, and subordination necessarily implies resistance to it as well as acceptance of it. "Strike[ing] out. . ." may be too dramatic a word, but when you analyze virtually any example of working class behavior, including the most slavish, it will be seen to contain some element of "resistance to capitalist domination."

The second sentence of Moody's definition, "It is activity that resists or attacks one or another aspect or degree of the rule of the capitalist," confirms that the confusion between reform and revolution, which is implied in the first sentence of his definition, is actually there. What is ". . . resisting] and attack[ing] one or another aspect or degree of the rule of the capitalist" but the method by which-the working class barter for better terms of sale of their labor power? The very concept of thinking in terms of "aspect" or "degree" implies a reformist outlook. That's the language of reformers — dealing not with quality or essence, but with form.

There is nothing wrong with an attempt on the part of the class to make the best of the system by getting the most that's possible under the system. Beyond this, the experi-

ence of the struggle for reform is a necessary part of that process which renders the class "fit for political dominion." However, when that struggle is *limited to* reformism, it is also one of the central ways through which capitalist domination is secured. When this is done within the framework of trade union 'consciousness' it entails an acceptance of capitalism.

Reformism is the political outlook which says that reforms have no limits. Reformism accepts the basic structure of the system while striving to modify certain institutions and internal structures. *The experience of the struggle for reform* is different. It clarifies the need for revolution — a change of the basic structure — by demonstrating the limits of capitalism.

Moody is defining working class self-activity as essentially the trade union struggle. Within the framework of capitalism, the trade union struggle is legitimate and necessary but it is not the same category as self-activity. Self-activity is not just resisting and attacking, but resisting and attacking in a way that undermines capitalist power, destabilizes its institutional framework, and foreshadows and demonstrates, in the form and content of the current struggles, the potential of the workers to he rulers. While it is true that trade union struggles contain aspects of revolutionary self-activity, the dominant aspect is not a break with capital but a wedding to it.

Moody's definition confuses the reform and revolutionary aspects of the class because it does not make a distinction between them nor indicate that both features are part of the trade union struggle. The function of revolutionaries is to attempt to integrate the specific anti-capitalist forms of resistance into a comprehensive alternative T6 capitalist social relations, not to confuse them.

The contribution of the last sentence of Moody's definition is confusion. "It [self-activity] is activity which increases the political and

organizational autonomy of the working class." Of course! However, in the sentence immediately preceding, Moody talks of "... resist [ing] or attack[ing] one or another aspect or degree of the rule of the capitalist," which has nothing necessarily to do with "... increase [ing] the political and organizational autonomy of the working class." We would like to believe that Moody meant *only* those forms which actually *do* increase the political and organizational autonomy should be categorized as self-activity. But the fact is, we know his conclusion — that the trade union struggle is the primary expression of self-activity — and we are, and Moody should be, aware that while the trade union struggle, in exceptional circumstances, increases the political and organizational autonomy of the working class, usually it does not. Working class self-activity is working class autonomy — autonomy from capitalism. When self-activity is (rarely) manifested in trade union struggles, that's fine. The point here is that a distinction must be made between the two.

The root of Moody's confusion of the different aspects of working class life lies in his "lash of the bourgeoisie" concept:

Marx clearly saw, as we have seen, that the working class would have to make itself fit for political power. Further, he was clear that this could only be done through that actual experience of self-activity. And further, he clearly laid out that the motive driving the working class toward self-activity was the lash of the bourgeoisie itself. Particularly in times of capitalist crisis, the capitalist would seek to solve the economic crisis at the expense of the working class. The workers would be impelled to fight, not just because there was a crisis, but because the crisis would drive the capitalists to action against the rights, working conditions and living standards of the workers.

Marx said that the transforma-

tion of the class from a class in itself to a class *for* itself, was impossible without a qualitative leap — such as moving from "a fair day's pay for a fair day's work" to the abolition of wage-slavery. Marx was clear that in the development of the class struggle, the capital relation would create favorable conditions for this transformation, but not that "the working class is impelled toward self-activity by the lash of the bourgeoisie" in the way Moody asserts.

This point deserves elaboration. Moody's incorrect definition of working class self-activity stems from his failure to comprehend the dual and contradictory character of the class — what I will term, following Antonio Gramsci, dual consciousness. In *Preliminaries To A Study of Philosophy*, Gramsci explains dual consciousness:

The active man-in-the-mass has a practical activity, but has no clear theoretical consciousness of his practical activity, which nonetheless involves understanding the world in so far as it transforms it. His 'theoretical consciousness can indeed be historically in opposition to his activity. One might almost say that he has two theoretical consciousnesses (or one contradictory consciousness): one which is implicit in his activity and which in reality unites him with all his fellow-workers in the practical transformation of the real world; and one, superficially explicit or verbal, which he has inherited from the

verbal conception is not without consequences. It holds together a specific social group, it influences moral conduct and the direction of will, with varying efficacy but often powerfully enough to produce a situation in which the contradictory state of consciousness does not permit of any action, any decision or any choice, and produces a condition of moral and political passivity. Critical understanding of self takes place therefore through a struggle of political "hegemonies" and of opposing directions, first in the ethical field and then in that of politics proper, in

order to arrive at the working out at a higher level of one's own conception of reality.¹

A few pages earlier, Gramsci had stated:

This contrast between thought and action, i.e., the existence of two conceptions of the world, one affirmed in words and the other displayed in effective action, . . . when the contrast occurs in the life of great masses . . . cannot but be the expression of profounder contrasts of a social historical order. It signifies that the social group in question may indeed have its own conception of the world, even if only embryonic; a conception which manifests itself in action, but occasionally and in flashes — when, that is, the group is acting as an organic totality. But this same group has, *l&* for reasons of submission and intellectual subordination, adopted a conception which is not its own but is borrowed from another group; and it affirms this conception verbally and believes itself to be following it, because this is the conception which it follows in "normal times" — that is when its conduct is not independent and autonomous, but submissive and subordinate.²

Dual consciousness is the manifestation of the internal dynamic within the working class between the productive individual as a use-value and an exchange-value. It has its objective material base in the capitalist process of production and social reproduction. This distinction is elaborated in Marx's conception of the two-fold character of labor found in the first chapter of *Capital*.

In a letter to Frederick Engels, dated August 24, 1867, Marx emphasizes the importance of this point: "... The best points in my book are: 1) the *two-fold character of labour*, according to whether it is expressed in use value or exchange value, (*All* understanding of the facts depend upon this.) It is emphasized immediately in the *first* chapter...."³ [Marx's emphasis]

Marx explains:

At first sight a commodity presented itself to us as a complex of two things — use-value and exchange-value. Later on, we saw that labour, too, possesses the same two-fold nature; for so far as it finds expression in value, it does not possess the same characteristics that belong to it as a creator of use-values. I was the first to point out and examine critically this two-fold nature of the labour contained in commodities. As this point is the pivot on which a clear comprehension of political economy turns, we must go more into detail.⁴

This point, the "pivot," is one which many Marxists miss in their study of *Capital*. But without an understanding of the two-fold character of labor, one is left with a superficial and therefore inadequate interpretation of Marxist fundamentals, expressed in the phrase "the main contradiction of capital is between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat" or as Moody says: "the motive driving the working class toward self-activity is the lash of the bourgeoisie itself."

This is not Marx's explanation for the motive force of self-activity. His explanation is contained in the concept of the two-fold character of labor. «The worker, treated as a thing, as a commodity like any other, reacts by both wanting to be free *from* and free *to*. — free from harassment, monotony, dirt, danger and lack of control and creativity; free to reappropriate the use-value labor power, to pursue, develop and create.

This contradiction is called alienation. Alienation is the dialectical relationship, between exchange-value/abstract labor and use-value/concrete labor. The pole of alienation which is exchange value/abstract labor is what the worker wishes to be free from. The other side of alienation develops from the worker as use-value, as the active component of concrete labor engaged in the process of production which has come to the point tech-

nologically of harnessing nature. It is this latter side of this contradiction which is, in fact, that which propels the movement toward self-emancipation.

Capitalism develops, on a social collective level, the capacity to fulfill the needs and potentials of humanity while it at the same time increasingly fragments, thwarts and denies that capacity to the social individual and uses this tremendous technology arbitrarily and waste-fully in contradiction to the need' of humanity, both social and individual.

Capital itself is the moving contradiction, [in] that it presses to reduce labour time to a minimum, while it posits labour time, on the other side, as sole measure and source of wealth. Hence it diminishes labour time in the necessary form so as to increase it in the superfluous form; hence posits the superfluous in growing measure as a condition — question of life or death — for the necessary. On the one side, then, it calls to life all the powers of science and of nature, as of social combination and of social intercourse, in order to make the creation of wealth independent (relatively) of the labour time employed on it. On the other side, it wants to use labour time as the measuring rod for the giant social forces thereby created, and to confine them within the limits required to maintain the already created value as value. Forces of production and social relations— two different sides of the development of the social individual — appear to capital as mere means, and are merely means for it to produce on its limited foundation. In fact, however, they are the material conditions to blow this foundation sky-high. "Truly wealthy a nation, when the working day is 6 rather than 12 hours. Wealth is not command over surplus labour time [real wealth] but rather, disposable time outside that needed in direct production, for every individual and the whole society." (*The Source and Remedy*, etc., 1821, page 6)

Nature builds no machines, no locomotives, railways, electric tele-

graphs, self-acting mules, etc. These are products of human industry; natural materials transformed into organs of the human will over nature, or of human participation in nature. They are organs of the human brain, created by the human hand; the power of knowledge objectified. The development of fixed capital indicates to what degree general social knowledge has become a direct force of production, and to what degree, hence, the conditions of the process of social life itself have come under the control of general intellect and been transformed in accordance with it. To what degree the powers of social — production have been produced, not only in the form of knowledge, but also as immediate organs of social practice, of the real life process.⁵

The most developed machinery thus forces the worker to work longer than the savage does, or than he himself did with the simplest crudest tools.⁶

We presuppose labour in a form that stamps it as exclusively human. A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labour process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement. He not only effects a change of form in the material on which he works, but he also realizes a purpose of his own that gives the law to his modus operandi, and to which he must subordinate his will.⁷

Is Marx speaking of the "lash of the bourgeoisie" in the above quotes? What is this "lash of the bourgeoisie"? The answer to this question is in dispute among Marxists. I maintain that the above quotes from Marx represent one side and Moody's answer represents another, in this debate. To Moody the "lash of the bourgeoisie"

means the role played by the functionaries of capital — management, foremen, credit agencies, etc. In the context of these three articles, Moody is talking about the managers and overseers of production primarily. These functionaries devise methods (speed-up, mandatory overtime, harassment, layoffs, etc.) to force the most production from the workers. In an economic crisis these methods are intensified. Threat of job security, matched with a decline in real wages and increased pressure (heightening "alienation" as more and more aspects of the control of the workers over their lives is encroached upon and controlled) causes the workers to resist. Life gets harder and they just can't stand it any more so they attempt to repel and lessen the encroachment. As the whip falls on the backs of the workers ever more and ever harder, the workers are more inclined to rise in struggle. This interpretation is inherently inconsistent with the notion of working class self-activity. Above we have a picture of workers freeing themselves by something other than "self" — a whole mess of people reacting reflexively to immediate conditions, responding angrily to get relief from their miserable lives. This view of the class, as reflexive responders, in no way elaborates or even indicates a capacity to create a new society. But the elaboration of this capacity is the essence of working class self-activity.

However, Moody's interpretation deals only with one dimension of the class. As Marty Glaberman points out, "It is not oppression, poverty and despair that causes revolutions; it is the possibility of a new society, a possibility of ending alienation. . . ."⁸

Certainly, as Moody says, the class does not react. What Moody fails to see is the other side — the class acting. His limited perspective of the potential of the class is a perversion of the term self-activity.

Does "self" refer only to the reactive nature of the class? Indeed,

is it appropriate to link reactivity and self-activity together in any sense? Must not the essential ingredient be the working class's ability to construct, produce and create? Moody would answer "yes, of course" and still maintain that the essential contradiction is between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. It is difficult, in fact impossible, to find the "self" of self-activity in his position. Such a conception of self-activity is hardly better than the dominant one held on the left, which is to ignore totally the concept of self-activity.

What is missing in both these positions is the "pivot" — an understanding of the two-fold character of labor embodied in a commodity. The "lash of the bourgeoisie" is capital. Capital is commodity production. The basis of commodity production is exchange. Exchange is possible only if there is usefulness of one sort or another to the product (commodity). Every commodity contains both use-value and exchange-value. The use-value of the labor-power commodity is the property of the capitalists — it is estranged from the worker. Use-value represents social collective power, a unit of the creative productive capacity. For the individual worker under capitalism, what is his or hers is the exchange-value of the commodity labor power. Exchange-value refers to numbers how much how fast; the human being as machine. Exchange-value refers to the commodity labor power as if it were like any other commodity. Thus the worker, as the commodity labor power, exchanges his or her productive capacity with the capitalist for fixed wages — "stored up" past collective labor power. The capitalist gets the use-value, the productive capacity of the commodity labor power in this exchange.

Of course, under commodity production the worker is a commodity. Each day the class recreates itself as a commodity functioning as the proletariat. But the

worker is a strange commodity. Even the most dominated workers know that they're not just cogs in the great machine of bourgeois life. And even the most advanced workers sometimes act as if they were, to the extent that they define their interests within the framework of capitalism and not as potential ruling class, and to the extent that they separate out their needs and demands from the needs and demands of all the exploited and oppressed.

The tension in the commodity labor power, between use-value and exchange-value, between concrete and abstract labor, is the contradiction of capital. As the proletariat, workers are enslaved by the conflict with their own past collective labor — a frustrating and dehumanizing situation which provides nothing but the repeated recreation of commodities. The fact that it is recognized, expressed, and acted on as frustrating and dehumanizing provides evidence that another view is in existence — an alternative view — which is shown in the worker's daily life and normal activities and attitudes individually, and, at times, by the class acting together in sporadic attempts to express collectively an alternative based on human needs.

Marx elaborates on the contradiction of capital — the tension between use-value and exchange-value in the commodity labor power — in *Wage, Labour and Capital*:

But the exercise of labour power, labour, is the worker's own life-activity, the manifestation of his own life. And this *life-activity* he sells to another person in order to secure the necessary *means of subsistence*. Thus his life-activity is for him only a means to enable him to exist. He works in order to live. He does not even reckon labour as part his life. It is rather a sacrifice of life. It is a commodity which he has made over to another. Hence, also, the product of his activity is not the object of his activity. What he produces for himself is not the silk that he weaves, not the gold

that he draws from the mine, not the palace he builds. What he produces for himself is wages, and silk, gold, palace resolve themselves for him into a definite quantity of the means of subsistence, perhaps into a cotton jacket, some copper coins and a lodging in a cellar. And the worker, who for twelve hours weaves, spins, drills, turns, builds, shovels, breaks stones, carries loads, etc. — does he consider this twelve hours' weaving, spinning, drilling, turning, building, shoveling, stone breaking as a manifestation of his life, as life? On the contrary, life begins for him where this activity ceases, at table, in the public house, in bed. The twelve hours' labour, on the other hand, has no meaning for him as weaving, spinning, drilling, etc., but as *earnings*, which bring him to the table, to the public house, into bed. If the silk worm were to spin in order to continue its existence as a caterpillar, it would be a complete wage-worker.⁹

The class cannot become a butterfly if it is always spinning a cocoon. The worker must destroy him or herself as a wage-earner in order to become a producer. Alienation is rooted in the worker recreating himself as a wage-earner confronting past collective labor as capital. This condition is a volatile one, because it is contrary to the real needs and capacities of the social individual at a time when those needs and capacities have become increasingly incompatible with their expression in labor time. What propels the class toward self-emancipation is the continual expansion of its social potential juxtaposed to the "barricaded" increasing development of capitalist technology. Recall the quote from Marx cited earlier: "Forces of production and social relations — two different sides of the development of the social individual — appear to capital as mere means, and are merely means for it to produce on its limited foundation. In fact, however, they are the material to blow this foundation sky-high."

Dual consciousness is not just a theoretical construct, but a fact

which can be observed in any workplace. In fact, in the same day, the same hour or the same sentence, the working class consistently demonstrates this duality. A worker will say one thing, then do another — quite perplexing to organizers who hold a characterization of the class as one-dimensional.

How can this observable contradictory behavior be explained by the "lash of the bourgeoisie" adherents? When the class is revolutionary, it's because of the increased intensity of oppression by the capitalists; when it's not revolutionary, it's because of the decreased intensity of oppression?!? Marx said that the development of capitalism would increase the emiseration of the working class; that in both good times and bad, the workers' lot is continually worsening.

... all methods for raising the social productiveness of labour are brought about at the cost of the individual labourer; all means for the development of production transform themselves into means of domination over, the exploitation of, the producers; they mutilate the labourer into a fragment of a man, degrade him to the level of an appendage of a machine, destroy every remnant of charm in his work and turn it into hated toil; they estrange him from the intellectual potentialities of the labour process in the same proportion as science is incorporated in it as an independent power; they distort the conditions under which he works, subject him during the labour-process to a despotism the more hateful for its meanness; they transform his life into working-time, and drag his wife and child beneath the wheels of the Juggernaut of capital. But all methods for the production of surplus-value are at the same time methods of accumulation; and every extension of accumulation becomes again a means' for the development of those methods. It follows therefore that in proportion as capital accumulates, the lot of the labourer, be his payment high or low, must grow worse.¹⁰

In the Hal Draper quote, which

Moody thinks he's elaborating and building on, we see an expression of duality. When Draper says: "... take charge of their own destiny, as actors (not merely subjects) . . .", he is telling us that workers function as both subject (movers) and object (proletarians). When the class moves as an "organic whole," history is made.

Moody's reduction of the concept of working class self-activity to "that which is impelled by the bourgeoisie" is not compatible with the thrust of Draper's position as indicated in his quote. Moody's position places the class squarely in the position of being "objects" of history — objects which can never be self-emancipating, which can never think or act freely, and pawns of the apparently "true" makers of history. In Moody's analysis, the bourgeoisie has a monopoly on the historical initiative, even if Moody thinks it (the bourgeoisie) doesn't understand the consequences of its initiative. Here are the forces, outside the working class, pushing it, propelling it, directing it. If, or when, it is not the bourgeoisie, then it must be the party. For Moody, there is no sense in which the working class is "subject" or "actor" on its own.

I don't know if Moody's position on the trade unions is determined by his theoretical conceptions, or conversely, if his theoretical conceptions were determined by his estimate of, and strategy toward, the trade union struggle. However, the errors and inadequacies of his theoretical construct are related to his failure to see both beyond and within the trade union struggle. Because the trade union struggle is all he sees, and, *on some level*, he wants a revolution, Moody locates the revolution within the trade union struggle. This notion is both too broad and too narrow — too broad because it characterizes as revolutionary virtually every noticeable movement of the workers at the workplace; too narrow because it fails to see the revolutionary as-

pects contained in the trade union struggle — in the real relations of production and in the actions, individual and collective, which embody the reality and potential for revolutionary working class self-activity. Then his position ignores a whole range of activity outside the workplace, which also contains revolutionary aspects. Even worse than not seeing the specific revolutionary aspects of working class self-activity is his failure to understand the inter-relationship of the revolutionary and nonrevolutionary aspects of the working class in all sides of its existence.

The point is that both categories apply to the working class and its activities. We should be instantly skeptical of general and abstract characterizations such as "passivity," "cynicism," "conservatism," and "defeatist." Moody's whole analysis rests on such abstract and general characterizations.

I indicated earlier, before laying out the conceptual framework, that capitalist relations of production dictate that workers will resist. The revolutionary component — self-activity — is manifested on a daily basis in the process of production. Individual resistance is part of that construct. However, this resistance always has contradictory elements. It is manifested in thousands of ways — sabotage, perfecting styles of work, reducing or increasing production, manipulation, self-improvement, absenteeism, etc. These manifestations are as varied and creative as the number of individuals who make up the class.

Take an example from a piece-rate shop. The individual who continually produces above the required quota does so for two basic reasons. One is the recognition that money must be made in order to survive; the other is the knowledge that such activity allows a certain amount of control over life in the shop. Once this activity is regulated, the worker can keep the foreman off his back and maintain some free space. The worker is also in a better position to barter for con-

cessions or improvements in his shoplife by threatening to cut back. In most left perspectives, such individualism would be seen only as the basis of scabbing or potential scabbing. There are some other left perspectives, however, which would romanticize it into a revolutionary strategy. Neither would see the dual and contradictory nature.

Let's follow this worker out of the shop, at the end of the work day. When he punches out, he is conscious of relief, and though he may be exhausted from the hours of labor (or non-labor), he is aware of the fact that this is his own time — distinct from the time put in at the shop. This is the time to be himself, free from the constraints of a foreman, a demanding machine, noise, fumes, and to do whatever he wants to, more or less. The worker knows that this time is qualitatively different than the time in the shop. He still views himself as a worker, a wage-earner. That view dominates his life whether in the shop or at home. But despite that fact, and within it, a distinction is made between life at the shop and life outside the shop.

This acceptance by the worker of himself as a wage-earner, this "borrowed world view," even as it dominates all aspects of his life, contains another side. Moreover, particularly at the workplace, this worker will act in ways which demonstrate another view. Adherence to 200% production contains elements of such an alternative view even as it demonstrates the opposite. The worker expresses both revolutionary and nonrevolutionary elements.

Moody concludes that U.S. leftists must participate in the trade union struggles because those

...struggles are the only context in which any sort of political fight can be made to advance class consciousness because they are virtually the only form that working class self-activity has taken in America, as yet.

For the American left today, this

must mean an increased participation in the actual struggles of the working class. . . . The only real handle on advancing working class consciousness in America lies in the strategic focus on industrial and trade union struggles of the moment, (page 20, third article)

The particular function of leftists is to lead and direct the working class to ever higher stages of revolutionary class consciousness. The arena for this teaching is the trade union struggles, particularly in the context of a capitalist crisis.

For the crisis, or more particularly the ruling class' attempts to resolve the crisis at the expense of the workers and other subordinated classes, make the reality of the system more visible. Higher, more complicated levels of Marxist theory become easier to grasp in practice, as they are revealed in the practice of the ruling class. The crisis of the system opens more and more doors to the organized revolutionaries to raise the consciousness of more and more workers through the interaction of self-activity (practice) and consciousness (theory), (page 39, first article)

Trade union struggles are recently demonstrating a resurgence of militancy. The degree of militancy represents a corresponding degree of revolutionary working class consciousness, if the militancy is displayed at the point of production.

The more active the workers are in the class struggle, the more easily they recognize the truth of Marxism, whether or not they know it by name, and hence the higher the level of consciousness.

Finally, the crisis of capitalism helps to raise the level of activity and hence the level of consciousness, (*ibid.*)

The "lash of the bourgeoisie" drives the workers to respond with working class self-activity, which is channeled or demonstrated through the industrial and trade unions.

. . . there is . . . a general crisis of

the system and an intensifying employers offensive against organized labor. This is the lash which drives people to activity and resistance.

The working class is backward and conservative because it has no socialist tradition to draw upon.

There is not even an active ongoing socialist tradition rooted in the working class.

Socialist organizations, ideas and traditions were destroyed and uprooted by a long and complex process. And the results are devastating. While there are individuals, and small groups of working class socialists, there is no continuous tradition shared by even a section of the American working class.

The trade union struggle is not backward and conservative.

. . . anti-union attitudes among workers, particularly in the South. In other words, more often than not, the consciousness that has been shared "outside the plant" is the opposite of class consciousness, it is false consciousness. The reason that consciousness has not been formed, as class consciousness, in the plants or workplaces has been the relatively low level of class struggle during the years of postwar prosperity. . . . We are discussing the origins of class consciousness and self-activity in the relations of production as the counter-thrust to the bourgeois perceptions of life that workers learn in most other institutions of society, (page 39, first article)

To create a political workers' movement in America requires concentration and focus on the industrial and trade union struggles of today and the coming years.

The key element in the strategy for building a revolutionary workers' party in the United States is participation in active workers struggles over wages, working conditions, etc. (pages 21-22, third article)

As workers engage in trade union struggles and militancy intensifies, the class will progressively become

more and more conscious, with the help of U.S. leftists.

The task is to become an integral part of the process that impels workers to self-activity and to use that process to advance consciousness.

We are speaking of the integrated notion of the party as the carrier and disseminator of revolutionary class consciousness in the form of Marxist theory, as translator of theory into practice in every realm of political, economic and social life; and finally as the practitioner of the "art of insurrection." (page 38, first article)

When Moody says that the U.S. working class is conservative and that only in the trade union struggle can the revolutionary base be found, he has it backwards. It's debatable whether the working class is backward and conservative (certainly not as backward and conservative as the U.S. left); however, every instance of working class self-activity is a break with the trade union struggle. Every break with the trade union struggle is a break with bourgeois hegemony. The workers, in these instances, jump out of the capitalist framework, rejecting its validity and legitimacy. In these instances the working class becomes autonomous of capital and acts for itself. This is revolutionary working class self-activity.

It is hard to see the working class doing anything in a mass way that embodies its revolutionary potential which doesn't immediately break with the trade union structures — that is, that doesn't challenge the capitalist ownership of the means of production; the capitalist definition of productivity and efficiency; the capitalist separation of the -work process from social life in general; the capitalist forms of parliamentary tradition — bourgeois legal structures like elections and voting in the trade unions; and the capitalist sanctity of private property. This type of activity — revolutionary self-activity. — does not *develop* revolutionary class con-

sciousness, it is revolutionary class' consciousness.

Moody's conception of self-activity is static and nondialectical. It isn't surprising then that his view of revolutionary working class consciousness is also static and nondialectical. Revolutionary working class consciousness cannot be taught — even by the most masterful of teachers. It can be encouraged, pointed out, distinguished from bourgeois consciousness, but it cannot be taught. It does not progress in a linear fashion, from one stage to another in higher and higher levels of grasping Marxist theory. It rises to the surface in action which is a break with routine, and then resubmerges.

The premise upon which Moody builds his argument is that revolutionary working class consciousness does not exist in the presently constituted U.S. working class and that the way revolutionary class consciousness develops is through the process of leftists integrating themselves in the trade union struggles of the moment, "disseminate[ing] . . . revolutionary class consciousness, in the form of Marxist theory . . . , explain[ing] the new situation," enabling "bearers of socialist ideas" to teach the class "higher, more complicated levels of Marxist theory. . . ."

Moody is wrong about how revolutionary class consciousness develops, and about the specific form he maintains it will be developed in. An accelerated form of the current trade union struggles will not inherently provide the basis for revolutionary aspects of the class to surface. It is not a break with routine, no matter how accelerated. But when Moody speaks of the trade union struggles of the moment, he is indicating that they are revolutionary or at least the road to being revolutionary. I will concede that the trade union struggles sometimes are the arena where revolutionary aspects of the class are demonstrated, but that is as much an accident as when these aspects are displayed in any other bour-

geois arena.

On page 38 of the first article in this series, Moody says something which is right, although in the context of the three articles, it is totally wiped out.

Sharp struggle shatters old ideas and prejudices, making room, so to speak, for new ones. New ideas that reflect or conform to real experiences are grasped in moments, as the situation changes rapidly. What it took years for a small section of the class to learn in "normal" times is now understood by masses of workers in the course of days.

What Moody is referring to is a "dialectical leap." Too bad his overall analysis doesn't involve this concept.

Because it doesn't, Moody's conception of the role of the party ends up being the very concept which is critiqued in the introduction:

The working class itself is granted little or no role in the formation of the party or the forging of its program and outlook. At best, the working class seems to be viewed as a collection of prospective buyers, who will be sold on the party at a later date; at worst the workers are to remain an audience in the whole process of revolution.

Moody's position on working class self-activity dictates that the worst is in store. Because he sees the bourgeoisie as 'the enemy, failing' to recognize the internal dialectic within the working class, he states that the bourgeoisie, pure and simple, is the barrier to revolutionary working class consciousness.

For the working class this [problem of consciousness and self-activity] means, above all, a recognition of the position and function of the capitalist class. The meaning of working class consciousness is not simply a recognition of the general common position of all workers — a sort of horizontal awareness. It is an understanding' of its opponent class, and what makes it an opponent class.

There are few workers who do not recognize "the position and function of the capitalist class." They do not or may not understand it in the most precise way but there is a very clear understanding of how they make a living, that, they *must* work in order to eat, and who hands out their paychecks. The problem of recognition comes from the other side. The working class must, above all, recognize the potentials and capacities of itself to be a ruling class. This is the basic requirement for revolution and revolutionary class consciousness. This is the "self" of self-activity and self-emancipation. Without this fundamental recognition, what will the class do with "the recognition of the position and function of the capitalist class"?

Well, Moody's article contains the answer to that question. The class is supposed to recognize and adhere to the revolutionary dictates of the disseminators of revolutionary Marxist theory.

Though it is surprising to me and, I suspect, any others who are not steeped in the culture of left politics, the dominant trend among Marxists, including Moody, is to ignore the working class in its human-ness. The typical approach is one which treats the working class in the same way as the capitalists do — as a thing. This may seem a bit harsh, but how can any other conclusion be drawn — especially in light of the proclaimed "successes" of "socialist" revolution? Moody may very well hold the same criticisms of the Chinese and Soviet post-revolution societies as I do, but his political approach — on a practical and theoretical level — does not indicate it.

The "lash of the bourgeoisie" adherents have no other choice but a party-centered strategy. If the externally applied "lash" (whip) is the reason for the workers to rise, what will be the reason/motive/way for them to proceed beyond that rising? It must also be something which is externally applied — the party. If the working classes are not

able to free themselves, they will not be able to recreate society. Guidance, direction, and party wisdom will be needed. Substitution of the all-knowing party, leading the pitiful masses for their self(!)-emancipation is the essence of the modern deformation of Marxism, which the introduction to Moody's article bemoans.

The dichotomy of crisis/teaching, which comes from Moody's perverted and pessimistic conception of working class self-activity, based on his theoretical "lash of the bourgeoisie" interpretation, requires that somebody/thing do the teaching. But it will not work.

Footnotes

1. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (International Publishers, New York, 1978), page 333.
2. *Ibid.*, pages 326-327.
3. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Correspondence* (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1975), page 180.
4. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume I (International Publishers, New York, 1975), New World Paperbacks, page 41.
5. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (Vintage Books, New York, 1973), Martin Nicolaus translation, page 706.
6. *Ibid.*, pages 708-709.
7. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, *op. cit.*, page 174.
8. Martin Glaberman, *Theory and Practice* (Facing Reality Publishing Committee, Detroit, 1969), page 11.
9. Karl Marx, *Wage Labour and Capital* (Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow), pages 33-34.
10. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume I (Progress Publishers, Moscow), page 604.

Correspondence

MORE ON FASCISM

Dear Comrades:

In *Urgent Tasks* number 4, Noel Ignatin criticized the old Comintern definition of fascism, using it as a foil to bring some much-needed new ideas into the discussion of fascism. In the face of the growing offensive of the right, which no doubt includes some would-be Hitlers, it is necessary to smash out of the confines of the usual left dogmas. However, I would like to raise two points where I think Noel has made mistakes.

First, Noel simply defines out of existence all examples of fascism which are likely to defy his analysis.

The indiscriminate use of a term which is meant to apply to a specific form of rule that arises in definite circumstances can and does obscure the reality of modern society and the forms of social motion which appear within it, including the emergence of a revolutionary social bloc. (page 25)

Quite right. But he goes on to discuss almost exclusively Germany under the Nazis. In fact, except for two passing references to Italy, the entire refutation of the Comintern definition relies on the German example.

What argument about fascism can dismiss so quickly the first movement to call itself Fascist? Or the many other countries whose regimes often aligned themselves with the Nazis, and were commonly referred to as fascist, such as Spain, Hungary, Romania, Lithuania, Poland and Austria, among others? One of Hannah Arendt's best points in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* is that the Nazis (and, according to her, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union) were a new type of "government," qualitatively different from these other regimes (including Italy), all of which became more ordinary one-party dictatorships.

The latter did not involve dynamic movements that constantly created new fronts to hide behind; they did not massacre huge sections of their own populations (compare the fates of the Basques and the German Jews); they did not have pretensions to world mastery. All of these governments used nationalist appeals — and, at least in the case of Italy, foreign adventures — to mobilize the population to greater exploitation in the name of the future.

These regimes certainly were chauvinist, terrorist (aiming mainly at "the suppression of conscious opponents"), and as imperialist as they could manage. For instance, the Balkans in the thirties were a hotbed of national oppression and complicated state-inspired subversions among Yugoslavia, Albania, Hungary, and the rest. At least the Comintern definition has a chance with these regimes. However, I agree with Noel (and the MIR) that it lacks value in describing various non-fascist military dictatorships, such as present-day Chile. I also tend to believe that it doesn't adequately describe Ethiopia or Afghanistan, although the Eritrean People's Liberation Front has made a plausible case for the former.

Germany was a special case that cannot be assimilated to one-party dictatorships, such as Italy; military dictatorships, such as Chile; or bourgeois democratic empires, such as the United States. The Nazis were masters of the creation of organizations and "movements" in a constant political shell game. They carried out massacres on a really incomprehensible scale. They definitely saw themselves as a European movement, and actively aspired to world domination. Their relation to the German bourgeoisie was at least ambiguous; the Nazis themselves certainly despised the capitalists as small thinkers.*

But Noel misses two important

points in the following passage:

The aim of the Nazis was not the establishment of German supremacy, although they occasionally referred, for mass consumption, to that goal. The aim of the fascists was the establishment of the master race, which they insisted was just beginning to make its appearance, and which would be drawn from the "Aryan" elements of all the peoples of northern Europe. They repeated often that, for them, the conquest of the German state was simply a stage on the path to the reconstitution of Europe, that fascism was a movement, not a state. As Hannah Arendt points out, they treated Germany itself as a conquered nation, the first of all the nations of Europe to receive the benefits of their racial purification policies. It is no exaggeration at all to observe that fascism, far from being motivated by nationalist considerations, in fact tended toward *internationalism* — not of the proletarian type, to be sure, (page 30)

First, the Nazis conflated "Aryan" with "Germanic." The "Aryan elements" they intended to mobilize were the remnants of the waves of Germanic tribes that overran Europe in the first millennium A.D. (The history of this notion is in G. L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology*.) This explains both the

*The bourgeoisie, for their part, probably laughed at allegations that *they* controlled the Nazis. The I. G. Farben plant at Auschwitz had to settle for 75% efficiency from its workers because the SS refused to feed them adequately, since they were to be gassed anyway. And after four years, worker resistance, combined with conflicts with the extermination goals of the SS, yielded this result:

Despite the investment of almost 900 million Reichsmarks and thousands of lives, only a modest stream of fuel and not a single pound of Buna rubber was ever produced. (J. Borkin, *The Crime and Punishment of I. G. Farben*, Free Press, page 127)

partiality of the Nazis to the northern European nations (which Noel mentions), e.g., the formation of French, Dutch, etc. Waffen SS divisions, but not Italian, Spanish, or Greek SS; and the antagonism between Hitler, Franco and Mussolini. (Italy and Germany almost went to war over the Austrian Anschluss in 1938.) On the other hand, their notion of Aryan certainly excluded the descendents of Aryan-speakers in Iran. In fact, they didn't include any non-northern-Europeans in their master race — not even their allies, the Japanese military elite.

Second, the Nazis did carry out a process which admitted most Germans to the privileges of Aryanism: the process of making Germany "Judenrein," or Jew-pure:

... the Nazis gave their members at least the psychological equivalent for the initiation ritual of secret societies when, instead of simply excluding Jews from membership, they demanded proof of non-Jewish descent from their members and set up a complicated machine to shed light on the dark ancestry of some 80 million Germans. It was of course a comedy, and even an expensive one, when 80 million Germans set out to look for Jewish grandfathers; yet everybody came out of the examination with the feeling that he belonged to a group of included which stood against an imaginary multitude of ineligible. (H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Meridian edition, page 377)

Hitler said, "World Empires spring from a national basis, but they expand soon far beyond it." (Quoted in *ibid.*, page 359) The world empire springing from the German nation was to be based on the "Germanic race." That is why Hitler also said, "Incidentally, I am not the head of a state in the sense of a dictator or monarch, but I am a leader of the German people." (Quoted in *ibid.*, page 357) This is a notion so rooted and soaked in the swamp of "extreme nationalism of an oppressor country" as easily to rate the name of national chau-

vinism.

What is the significance of all this for us as we confront the right-wing offensive? First, the atomization of the white workers in the U.S. — i.e., a loss of any sense of an identity within society that is the basis for a Nazi-like movement — is decisively held back by the system of white supremacy. As long as white skin privilege persists, the white workers will continue to feel at home in the white oppressor nation, located in their minds in a definite social location: on top of Third World peoples. No such alternative to both atomization and class consciousness existed in Weimar Germany. From a different angle, Don Hamerquist once wrote:

... So long as the bulk of the white working class sees its interests mainly in terms of skin color, not class position, the likelihood of fascist rule being extended to the society as a whole is minimal. The dominance of the white supremacy within the white sections of the working class works effectively against the development of a mass revolutionary movement on that terrain. However, at least some elements of such a movement are needed to mount a serious challenge to U.S. capitalism. Since this serious revolutionary threat is a necessary factor to convince the ruling class of the necessity of fascism, it follows that, contrary to Litt's assertions, there is little likelihood that the ruling class will resort to fascism to "maintain social control" over the working class as a whole while white supremacy is doing such an admirable job. To a large degree bourgeois democracy in this country is a white privilege. (*Fascism in the U.S.*?, STO, page 6)

Second, I believe that the model for U.S. fascism we must look at is Nationalist South Africa, rather than Nazi Germany. Both the U.S. and South Africa are white settler colonies with large populations of white workers. Both have a history of opposition to British imperialism, and a tradition of frontier democracy based on the internal

oppression of Third World peoples. In contrast to the U.S., though, South Africa is ruled by a popularly-based white party, the Nationalist Party, which has put the country on a permanent war footing; brought the government into the economy in a big way; and which has responded even to white dissent with a range of repression from house arrest to hanging. (Of course, this still, with a few exceptions, doesn't touch the magnitude or severity of the response to Black dissent.) It is controlled by a semi-secret society with a stable structure, the Afrikaner Broederbond, which bears a striking resemblance to the Ku Klux Klan — right down to the pose of anti-imperialism (either against British or Northern imperialism, as in "Free the land — join the Klan"). These differences between the current situations in the U.S. and South Africa are why the latter can be described as fascist, while the former cannot.

Although most elements of the Comintern definition of fascism should be discarded, we must not neglect the importance of white national chauvinism in U.S. fascism. As the present crisis deepens, we must be ever-vigilant to the growth of a U.S. fascist movement.

Dan Robie
STO — San Francisco

Reply: I concentrated my attention on Germany because I believe it represented most fully the *type* I was studying. This is the Marxist theoretical method, to identify a social phenomenon and seek to discover how it would look when fully developed. Thus Marx based *Capital* on a study of England, although at the time he was writing, English society was no more representative of the average form of capitalism than Nazi Germany represented the "average" fascism. Robie's citing Spain, Hungary, Romania, Lithuania, etc. (which were not universally regarded as fascist even in their own day) or Italy can refute me only if he is using these cases to

make one of two points: (1) that Germany was an individual deviation from the fascist type, or (2) that there is no fascist type.

There is some truth in Dan's criticism that I "define out of existence" examples which defy my analysis, but that is my right. Definitions are not right or wrong; they are useful or not useful. I think it is useful to differentiate fascism from other forms of right-wing dictatorship; the key element in my definition that serves this purpose is the important role of the autonomous mass movement.

On Robie's second point: the racialism of the Nazis was not an outgrowth of nationalism but the negation of it. Hitler's myth of the "Germanic race" had no more relation to the realities of nationhood in Europe than would a similar myth of a "Celtic race" including the Irish, Welsh, Scottish, Cornish and Breton peoples of today. Imagine a "Celtic Hitler" who set out to "Celticize" Spain, France and southern Europe all the way to Turkey — all areas where Celtic languages were once spoken and where Celtic peoples have mingled their blood with others to give rise to modern nations!

Finally, I urge Dan Robie to elaborate the point (which he drops in passing) that the U.S. is a white settler colony. I and other readers of *Urgent Tasks* would, I'm sure, love to debate that one.

Noel Ignatin

HOW LONG?

Comrades,

Having read your latest *Urgent Tasks* I am surprised the lengths some will go to give credibility to their analysis. I am speaking of the article "Black Liberation or Black Separation" in issue number 8.

The title is another attempt to tell Black people how to define the struggle.

The individual who wrote the article has falsified history with his

long critique. He calls Black self-determination a defensive reaction. I will not argue that, I will just say, how long must Black people die and be abused before they seek to change the things that destroy them every day?

Also, I see he is very selective in what he says and then he interprets that to mean what he wishes it to mean. He says that Black self-determination is Black separatism. Then he tries to use the RNA to support this by having the reader believe that the RNA is talking about an all-Black nation with the exclusion of whites, the same trick imperialists tried to employ in Africa. In fact the argument as presented follows that line.

The other major error is the fact he keeps alluding to the fact that the Panthers, RAM, and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers just stopped on their own, never even mentioning the racist police attack on them and jailing of hundreds. No, to read the article, the seventies was a time when Blacks were just interested in being part of the system. This was the period of the Black Liberation Army and the call for self-determination from all the progressive elements in the Black, Red, and Brown communities.

I guess we lived in different countries because I missed that whole era he is talking about. Also, if he reads Lenin and studies dialectics a little better he would understand that history does not define your position (nor can any individual); it helps you to understand it and offers ways in which you can use it to help you resolve the situation.

What I really want to know is, can you direct me to where I can find the books in Part IX of your Study Guide to Marxist Dialectics in issue number 7 and the books of C. L. R. James? Thank you.

The Struggle is Now
Be Strong
TEKA

Modern Politics and many other writings of C. L. R. James can be ordered from Bewick/ed, 1443 Bewick, Detroit, MI 48214. Photocopies of the out-of-print readings in the dialectics study guide can be obtained from STO. Note to the Reader: Both the editors and, we are sure, the author of the article referred to in TEKA's letter wish to stress that the article was an attack on STO's position on the Afro-American national question.

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