

Vicente Navarro

Occupational safety and health vs. the right of capital accumulation

The initial UN Declaration of Human Rights speaks not only about civil and political rights, such as the rights to life, to freedom of organization and expression of opinion, but also displays a commitment to the rights to work, to receive a fair wage, to security and retirement, and to health and education. Most current discussion in the U.S. focuses on civil and political rights. Our financial and corporate establishments and their servants in government, media and academe, assuming that these rights exist in the U.S., trumpet the superiority of our system while maintaining a deafening silence about other human rights. A quick look at the U.S. shows why they are silent.

Lets start with the civil right to life. This right assumes not only the right to life but also the right to protection against physical injury, harm or suffering that is inflicted on someone against his or her will. The ultimate in such harm is, of course, killing someone. But the right to life in our capitalist system clearly conflicts with the right to private property, which gives Capital—*vox populi* calls it big business—the right to control the process of production. This process is not intended to optimize workers' welfare, nor to insure the protection of life, but to maximize capital accumulation. Because of the dominant influence that Capital has over government, the rights to life and to freedom from harm are dependent on and secondary to the right to pursue capital accumulation.

An overwhelming amount of legislation in our society protects private property. This contrasts dramatically with the meager, obviously insufficient legislation to protect workers against injury and loss of life at work. The dimensions of that harm are enormous.

Four million workers contract occupational diseases every year, causing as many

as 100,000 deaths, with the number of on-the-job injuries exceeding 20 million per year and the number of deaths in work-related accidents reaching approximately 28,500. Most of this is preventable. The dramatic dimensions of this harm at the work place are there for all to see. In terms of American lives and injuries, the harm and damage done far outweighs that caused by the Vietnam war.

These appalling conditions are even worse for occupations like coal mining. On the average, one miner is killed every other day in American coal mines. And 4,000 miners die every year from black lung disease. One out of every five working miners is a victim of black lung. This is a tragic picture of the dramatic and overwhelming violations of the right to life of our working population, perpetuated daily for the glory and benefit of Capital. Very little is done to correct such violation of human rights.

As indicated in a memorandum published by the Senate Watergate Committee, a Nixon official promised the business community that "no highly controversial standards (i.e., cotton, dust, etc.) [would] be proposed by the Occupational Safety and Health Agency (OSHA) during the coming four years of the Nixon administration." The record of the Ford and Carter administrations is not much better. Legislation to protect workers' lives and safety is extremely meager.

The U.S., having one of the highest mortality and disease rates in the work place among developed capitalist countries, also has the poorest legislation to protect the worker. After three years of operation, only two firms have been convicted of criminal violations, and the average fine for OSHA violations has been \$25. The concern expressed by the Carter administration that the normative functions of OSHA not impair the func-

tioning of the economy shows a similar set of priorities: life and safety must be subject to a more important aim: the assurance of the unalterability of the process of capital accumulation. There is, in summary, a clear violation of the rights to life and to freedom from harm of many and large sectors of our working population—a violation of human rights met by a deafening silence in both our legislative chambers and in our media.

Neither does the U.S. compare at all favorably in respect to socio-economic rights with the majority of other countries, including other capitalist developed countries. This explains the U.S. establishment's silence about such rights.

Think about the right to work: The U.S. has the highest unemployment rate among capitalist developed countries (8.5 percent in 1975, or over 7.5 million people. Similarly, concerning the right to fair wage; the number of workers who, in spite of working full time, do not receive adequate income to provide a decent standard of living totals 7 million, or approximately 7.5 percent of the U.S. labor force. Adding the unemployed, discouraged workers (able people who would like to work but have given up the hope of finding it), involuntary part-time workers and low-paid workers, over one-third of the U.S. labor force is unemployed, or under employed and underpaid. Their human rights to work and a fair wage are regularly violated. Here again, we find a clear incompatibility between full employment and fair wages and the nature of the capitalist system. Capitalism needs a reserve army of idle and unemployed workers to establish a sense of both insecurity and discipline in the labor force. But this unemployment is not only in violation of the socio-economic rights of the unemployed, it is also a denial of civil rights, such as the rights to life and to safety.



Indeed, unemployment causes and is responsible for much harm and damage. As indicated by a recent congressional report, every increase in unemployment of 1.4 percent determines 51,570 deaths (more than all casualties of Vietnam put together), including 1,540 suicides and 1,740 homicides, and leads to 7,660 state prison admissions, 5,520 state mental institution admissions, and many other types of harm, disease and unease.

Similarly, in other areas, such as health and education, the U.S. is the only developed capitalist country that has not yet accepted that the access to comprehensive health care is a human right. And even regarding education—usually considered a human right in the U.S.—none other than President Johnson indicated, in 1965, that over one-quarter of Americans—54 million—had not finished high school. To finish this quick sketch of the status of the socio-economic rights of our American people, let me finally say that our system of social security is among the least developed in the Western capitalist world. And this underdevelopment of social security is very much a result, again, of the overwhelming political dominance of Capital and the political weakness of our laboring population.

In summary, that overwhelming dominance that Capital has over our political, social and economic institutions determines the dramatic insufficiency of the political, civil, social and economic rights of the majority of the U.S. population today and (as I will show in the second part of this article) of large sectors of the world population as well. Capitalism and human rights are incompatible.

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DIALOG

The Chicago version of Paul Robeson is far different from the one ITT described

On Nov. 25, I saw the play *Paul Robeson* in Chicago. When it ended the entire audience, including myself, gave a standing ovation to James Earl Jones (who plays Robeson) and to the play. The house, filled to capacity, was overwhelmingly black.

My reaction to the Chicago version was completely different from that of David R. Roediger (*ITT*, Nov. 16), who saw the play in St. Louis. I understand that the play has been changed a great deal since then, which may account for the standing ovation in Chicago.

From Roediger's review, my greatest concern was about the politics; did it truthfully reflect Robeson's thoughts and actions in the 1930's, '40s and '50s? Having participated in the political and social struggles of these times (with

Robeson in some of them), I approached the play with a good deal of trepidation.

There is nothing wrong with the politics of the play. It truly reflected the anti-fascist struggle of those times, against Hitler, racism and for peace and Robeson's leadership role. The meaning of Naziism in Germany, the centrality of the struggle in Spain, the anti-fascist position of the Soviet Union and the need for the unity of all peoples against fascism and appeasement, all stand out very clearly through Robeson's words and deeds. The thought that if the world only had listened and followed Robeson, the lives of millions of people would have been saved kept running through my mind.

Other political aspects of Robeson were also clear in the play. His understanding and identification with the black people of Africa in their struggles for freedom, his fight against Jim-Crow and racism in the U.S., his courageous stand against the cold war, McCarthyism and the House UnAmerican Activities Committee (HUAC), all came through without any ambiguity. All these political struggles were in the second act.

Portraying a man as great as Paul truthfully reflect Robeson's thoughts and actions in the 1930s, '40s and '50s? Having participated in the political and social struggles of these times (with Robeson against the background of his times is very difficult. It seems to me

James Earl Jones gives an excellent performance. For those who knew Paul Robeson as a man bigger than life, a unique person, well, only Robeson could play Robeson. Perhaps this is the heart of the artistic problem of the play—and there is no solution to that.

The play has weaknesses, but to attack its present version, which shows the history of a great man, one of the outstanding leaders and artists of his time, one of the greatest leaders of the fight against fascism and racism in the '30s, '40s and '50s, is to do a disservice to Paul Robeson. All supporters for freedom, justice, equality should see the play, support it, help develop it further. As I left the theater, I thought, one cannot understand the civil rights movement of the '60s and the struggle against the war in Vietnam, without understanding the role of Paul Robeson fighting fascism and racism in the three preceding decades.

—Milton M. Cohen
Chicago

Paul Robeson, in the version seen by Milt Cohen, will open Dec. 6 at the National Theater in Washington, D.C.

Solution to last week's puzzle

A	B	E	L	S	P	A	S	M	L	O	O	P
P	O	D	A	L	E	R	O	I	I	T	S	A
O	N	E	Y	E	A	R	O	L	D	Z	E	A
S	O	R	E	A	I	S	S	L	I	M		
				R	A	I	S	E	A	R	C	S
S	D	A	S	C	H	I	N	A	P	E	L	K
K	I	S	S	E	S	I	N	D	I	R	R	A
L	A	M	A	S	E	S	T	E	S	K	O	A
A	N	A	D	P	A	T	Q	U	E	S	T	I
R	A	I	L	W	A	Y	N	T	L	A	E	F
				L	O	A	N	G	A	S	P	S
				W	R	A	P	I	T	H	E	A
D	A	M	S	C	H	A	U	T	A	U	Q	A
O	M	S	K	H	E	N	R	Y	S	U	N	G
N	I	S	I	E	N	T	E	R	S	A	K	E

More letters

Not good enough

Editor:

I am a dedicated reader of *IN THESE TIMES*, and a strong feminist. I have a serious criticism of your paper. More than any other socialist magazine I've seen you include women writers and articles on women's issues. However, you must go further than that. You must look at every subject you write on with a feminist perspective in mind, the same way you would look at an issue and question—How does this affect working class people, or minorities? Two examples of your negligence in this area are your recent coverage of the S-1 Bill and the discussion of the Humphrey-Hawkins Bill in your article on the Democratic Agenda Conference.

The S-1 Bill contains (along with its many other faults) some very repressive language concerning rape. In it a rape performed by the victim's husband or the man she lives with is *not considered a criminal offense*.

In discussing the Humphrey-Hawkins Bill, Dan Marshall quotes the Black Caucus and Urban League leaders (both very male-dominated groups), yet makes no mention of the impact the bill will have on women. Throughout the two-year development of the bill, women's groups—notably the Women's Lobby and the League of Women Voters—worked with the bill to make it more responsive to the employment needs of the 9.2 percent unemployed female population.

—Kit Miller
Washington, D.C.

International Womens Year in Houston

Sisterhood triumphed in Houston. But by itself it will not be enough. History is made by those with power.

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the National Plan of Action, which includes support for federal funding of abortions for poor women, family planning services for teenagers and sex education in the schools, provoked the most emotional debate of the conference.

Right-to-lifers sported glossy photos of aborted fetuses, and called the resolution the "antithesis of the women's movement" because it promotes the "oppression of the less powerful."

The abortion vote was probably the "closest" of the conference, but at least 75 percent of the delegates rose in favor of a woman's right to choose.

Veteran feminists who have participated in dozens of conferences addressing the same issues uniformly noted at least one significant difference in Houston—the overwhelming acknowledgement by delegates of lesbian rights as a women's issue.

The resolution on sexual preference, debated and passed in a relatively short period of time, supports civil rights for homosexuals, the repeal of laws restricting private sexual behavior between consenting adults and the prohibition of a parent's sexual preference as a consideration in child custody cases. (Similar resolutions were adopted at 30 state and territorial meetings, largely because of organizing efforts coordinated by the women's caucus of the National Gay Task Force.)

During debate, only one speaker made it to a microphone to denounce homosexuality as anti-family and contrary to "natural law," while two speakers urged defeat of the resolution on the grounds that gay rights is an "inappropriate" issue for the women's movement, and that public acknowledgement of it as a serious concern would further impede ERA ratification.

The latter arguments, which have had

widespread acceptance in women's movement circles for years, were rejected in Houston. Former NOW president Betty Friedan, previously a vocal proponent of the old line, urged support for lesbian rights as a women's issue, noting that the ERA by itself would "do nothing for homosexuals."

Other speakers reminded the delegates that lesbians have worked tirelessly for years in the movement on the full range of feminist issues, and that the fundamental philosophical basis of the movement is a woman's right to choose how she will live, and to control her own body, a concept which clearly must include the right to exercise one's sexual preference.

Straight feminists who earlier translated their own fears into political "reality" have apparently learned that the opposition will call *any* woman who dares to challenge the patriarchy on *any* grounds a lesbian, no matter what she calls herself or how she lives. The overwhelming acceptance of the sexual preference resolution by the very diverse group of women meeting at the NWC hopefully implies a new level of pro-woman awareness and unity.

The threatened right-wing disruption of the NWC itself failed to materialize, although some 10,000 people did attend a counter rally at the Houston Astro-Arena.

Right-wing political elements, as well as anti-abortionists and religious conservatives had descended *en masse* at several of the state IWY meetings—stalling plenary sessions, disrupting workshops, electing some delegates and passing anti-woman resolutions. These tactics were largely unsuccessful, however, in all but a few states, and the right controlled less than 20 percent of the voting body at the NWC.

The "pro-life, pro-family coalition" as these delegates called themselves, succeeded in some attempts at parliamentary delay, and made a substantial amount of noise during debate on ERA, abortion, child care and lesbian rights, but generally failed to influence proceedings in any substantive way. (The right-wing presence at the conference did serve to draw other delegates closer together.) Substitute motions and amendments were prepared on almost every issue, but few reached the floor.

The minority complained constantly of being "railroaded" and not having their opinions heard, but as one femin-

ist sitting in a divided delegation put it, "They never got out of their chairs." Of 24 anti-ERA delegates in the Illinois contingent, for example, only three ever made it to the microphone in all four plenary sessions.

More significant, perhaps, than the minority's strategy (or lack of it) during the plenary sessions, was its rhetoric. For the first time in a women's movement arena, the focus on abstract "ideals" of family and exalted womanhood gave way to ringingly clear expression of more traditional right-wing concerns. A compilation of proposed substitute motions circulated to the press calls for provision of social services by the private, volunteer sector, decreased federal regulation and spending and the return of government control to the state and local level. The document is also riddled with homages to the "free enterprise economic system."

Similarly, in floor debate on the ERA, con speakers passed over the specter of unisex toilets and young mothers in combat zones to denounce instead "section two" of the proposed constitutional amendment, which gives Congress legislative enforcement authority. This would lead, opponents said, to further federal intrusion on individual rights.

Some political observers have been suggesting for some time that the right-wing has targeted the women's movement because it needs a platform from which to gain public visibility and, by playing on emotional issues, promote an entire political agenda.

The analysis was brought into sharp relief, and the links of the right-wing political coalition now in the process of formation became eminently clear in Houston—as delegates sprinkled across the floor rose together again and again to vote against every issue except enforcement of the Equal Credit Opportunity Act, as ERA opponents wept for aborted fetuses, as right-to-lifers denounced child care centers and social security for homemakers.

As speaker after speaker ascended the rostrum, delegates heard the Houston conference called an "historic" event. The NWC was likened again and again to the first national women's rights convention, held in Seneca Falls, N.Y., in 1848. Many were anxious to draw parallels between the first, suffragist wave of

American feminism and the current rebirth of women's struggle.

Houston was historic, at the very least as the first congressionally mandated and publicly funded national women's meeting ever held. With national attention focused upon them, the largest and most diverse group of women ever to meet together on their concerns as women reached consensus on a broad range of policy issues.

The potentially enormous impact of the modern feminist movement was made abundantly clear as members of women's organizations of the political center, union women, staunch feminists, civil rights activists and elected officials—people who only a few short years ago couldn't even agree on the need for ERA—joined hands in an attempt to place women's equality squarely on the American political agenda.

Whether we will succeed, how Congress and the President will respond to the NWC recommendations, what the effect of anti-women right-wing escalation will be, remains to be seen.

If history was made in Houston, it is also in the making in Congress, where men debate women's right to choose; in the state legislatures where ERA ratification is stalled; in the courts, where affirmative action is under attack and in the job market, where women still earn only 59 cents for every dollar earned by men.

Sisterhood triumphed in Houston, and women's consciousness and spirit are wonderful indeed. But by themselves they are not enough. History is made by those who have power.

The National Women's Conference was perhaps the strongest affirmation ever that American women do share common concerns, and that by joining together can force attention to those concerns. We must continue to do that.

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Progress on the Humphrey-Hawkins bill

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etta Scott King, also a co-director of the council, noting that the agreement doesn't "spell out every detail."

But the widow of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. firmly maintained that the bill would have the desired effects. "Once the President sets some goals, which he has to do, then he'll be in serious trouble if he doesn't reach them," she said.

Kenneth Young, associate director of legislation for the AFL-CIO, stressed that the Humphrey-Hawkins framework was "only a first step" toward full employment in the first place. "We're not fooling ourselves... this is not a job-creating bill *per se*," said Young. "We're going to have to enact the economic stimulus programs that would actually provide the jobs."

Supporters frankly acknowledged the possibility that the President—and Congress—could simply pay lip service to the planning requirements in the bill without making substantive efforts to bring unemployment down.

"You can't impeach the President if a goal isn't reached," said economist Leon Keyserling, who helped draft the present version.

But, emphasizing the use of the targets as a yardstick against which to measure performance, supporters clearly intended to make it politically difficult for either branch to ignore the requirements.

Business interests, which still found much to dislike about the measure, were similarly dismayed to see the new version

portrayed as harmless.

"We feel it's a hoax—telling people they'll be provided with useful jobs," said Millicent Woods of the legislative staff of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. "The bill still makes a lot of promises that aren't deliverable by the government."

Jack Carlson, the Chamber's chief economist, claimed it would cost the government at least \$30 billion to meet the goals of the current proposal and predicted double-digit inflation and higher taxes would result. Carlson further faulted the planning requirements for significantly adding to government regulation of the economy.

The agreement was not instantly condemned by all business groups, however. The Business Roundtable, though critical of the previous versions, had not yet decided about this one.

Revised provisions.

During their negotiations with Carter, supporters of the Humphrey-Hawkins bill reworked the last version (HR-50) approved by the House Education and Labor committee in 1976 and reintroduced in January. Sponsors plan to submit new legislation containing the Carter-supported provisions when regular sessions of Congress resume.

Despite Carter's endorsement of HR-50 during his campaign, it took considerable prodding from black leaders and other Humphrey-Hawkins supporters to win Carter's backing this time. Even after the campaign pledge, Carter kept his

distance from the controversial bill, and his top economic advisers were openly hostile to it.

Compared with HR-50, the new version strove for a more flexible attitude toward the planning requirements, allowing the President to determine appropriate mixes of strategies without outlining a use for each type of program each year.

Other differences involved the anti-inflation provisions. Price stability targets, for example, were added to the list of economic goals, though supporters insisted that the unemployment targets took precedence.

In summary, the version agreed to by Carter:

- Declared a federal policy commitment to full employment, balanced growth, price stability and related objectives, directing the use of "all practicable means toward such ends."

- Declared a right to "useful paid employment at fair rates of compensation" for all Americans "able, willing and seeking to work."

- Declared inflation "a major national problem" likely to require special efforts in addition to anti-inflationary monetary and fiscal policies. Suggestions for supplementary approaches included productivity and supply incentives, stockpiling of critical materials, changes in federal regulatory requirements, and strengthening of antitrust enforcement.

- Required the President every year, as

part of his annual economic report, to designate numerical targets for employment, unemployment, production, real income and productivity. Goals on all items were to be laid out, year by year, over a five-year period.

- Set interim goals of 4 percent unemployment among all workers (aged 16 and older) and 3 percent unemployment among adults aged 20 and over, to be achieved within five years of passage of the bill.

- Permitted the President to modify the unemployment goals or timetables if, at least three years after enactment, any of them appeared unreasonable.

- Required the President to submit a budget compatible with the yearly targets.

- Required a thorough description from the President of the approaches and specific programs needed to reach the targets.

- Listed such options as public works, public service employment, anti-recession aid to states and cities, programs for depressed areas, training, counseling and special youth programs for the administration to consider.

- Required the government to create additional jobs directly—through new or existing programs—if its other efforts to achieve the unemployment goals failed.

- Stipulated that any jobs available through the programs set up by the bill pay at least the minimum wage and no less than the amounts earned by others doing the same work for the same employer.