

From the Grassroots Toward a united black strategy

The chief failure of black leadership since the '60s has been the inability to unite around a common strategy. Some black leaders like Jesse Jackson of Operation P.U.S.H. emphasize "self-help" programs and a possible coalition with Republicans. The NAACP recently endorsed the energy-policy ideas of the major oil corporations in a feeble attempt to construct a black-oriented energy strategy. Some blacks accept without reservation the Carter administration's initiatives in economic planning and cutbacks in social service programs; still others cling to the illusions of the past decade. Seldom, if ever, do black intellectuals and activists propose basic tenets or a policy statement from which *all* energies may be channeled.

During the Great Depression, W.E.B. DuBois attempted to create such a general program. DuBois was probably the greatest black writer, intellectual and activist in American history. A founder of the NAACP, for 24 years he edited the *Crisis*. His major works, including *Souls of Black Folk*, *Black Reconstruction* and *Darkwater*, are among the most influential writings in Afro-American literature.

Corresponding extensively with young black educators and political activists, DuBois drafted what he called "A Basic American Negro Creed," a statement of basic principles from which all black economic, educational and cultural planning could be directed. DuBois attempted to publish the "Creed" under the topic, "The Negro and the New Deal," published by the American Association for Adult Education. DuBois' views were considered "too controversial" by both the white and Negro

educators; the "Creed" went unpublished for several years. Finally, in his autobiography *Dusk of Dawn*, published in 1940 by Harcourt, Brace and Company, DuBois finally expressed his ideas for black solidarity. Once again, almost four decades later, the need for a "Basic American Negro Creed" has become even more urgent. We print a shortened version of the "Creed" below, to stimulate discussion and to motivate black people toward the rewriting of such a "Creed":

Basic American Negro Creed.

A. As American Negroes, we believe in unity of racial effort, so far as this is necessary for self-defense and self-expression, leading ultimately to the goal of a united humanity and the abolition of all racial distinctions.

B. We repudiate all artificial and hate-engendering deification of race separation as such; but just as sternly, we repudiate an enervating philosophy of Negro escape into an artificially privileged white race which has long sought to enslave, exploit and tyrannize over all mankind.

C. We believe that the Talented Tenth among American Negroes, fitted by education and character to think and do, should find primary employment in determining by study and measurement the present field and demand for racial action and the method by which the masses may be guided along this path.

D. We believe that the problems which now call for such racial planning are Employment, Education and Health; these three: but the greatest of these is Employment.

E. We believe that the labor force and

intelligence of 12 million people is more than sufficient to supply their own wants and make their advancement secure. Therefore, we believe that, if carefully and intelligently planned, a co-operative Negro industrial system in America can be established in the midst of and in conjunction with the national industrial organization.

F. We believe that Negro workers should join the labor union movement. We believe that Workers' Councils organized by Negroes for interracial understanding should strive to fight race prejudice in the working class.

G. We believe in socialism: that is, common ownership and control of the means of production and equality of income.

H. We believe that we can abolish poverty by reason and the intelligent use of the ballot. We do not believe in war as a necessary defense of culture; nor in violence as the only path to economic revolution.

I. We conceive this matter of work and equality of adequate income as not the end of our effort, but the beginning of the rise of the Negro race in this land and the world over, in power, learning and accomplishment.

J. We believe in the use of our vote for equalizing wealth through taxation, for vesting the ultimate power of the state in the hands of the workers; and as an integral part of the working class, we demand our proportionate share in administration and public expenditure.

K. This is and is designed to be a program of racial effort and this narrowed goal is forced upon us today by the unyielding determination of the mass of the white race to enslave, exploit and in-

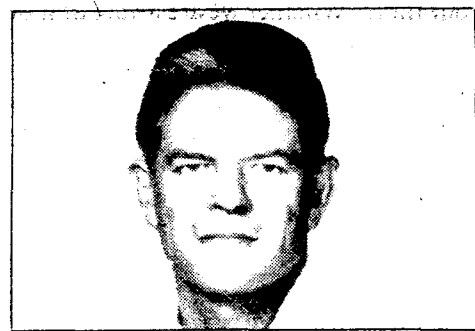
sult Negroes; but to this vision of work, organization and service, we welcome all men of all colors so long as their subscription to this basic creed is sincere and is proven by their deeds.

* * * * *

In several respects, the "Basic American Negro Creed" by DuBois no longer fits today's economic or cultural realities. In 1940, less than two-thirds of all black people were literate; educated blacks thought of themselves as a kind of "Talented Tenth." DuBois' suggestion that intellectual blacks "should find primary employment in determining by study...the present field and demand for racial action" is profoundly elitist. Points H. and J. emphasize the importance of the ballot, written at a time when fewer than one in ten black adults were allowed to vote. In the aftermath of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and other Civil Rights legislation, we have discovered that ballot box power is significantly less important than economic power.

However, DuBois' "Basic American Negro Creed" is an ambitious, clearly-conceived statement of principles which retains much of its freshness and vitality. The need for black-controlled and operated cooperatives, for both consumers and producers, is greater today than in 1940. Full employment, adequate health care and the principle of racial pride are just as important for us now as they were in DuBois' era.

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Staughton Lynd

Labor and the Law The steward vs. the union

The Dave Newman case, reported by *ITT* July 12, and on which Newman himself commented in a letter (*ITT*, Aug. 2), presents a fascinating and fundamental legal issue: To whom is a shop steward responsible?

There have thus far been three court decisions.

In the first decision, District Court Judge Knapp began by rehearsing the facts. He observed that Newman was one of the job stewards in Local 1101 of the Communication Workers of America, which represents 11,000 communications workers in Manhattan and the Bronx. Although Local 1101's bylaws provide that job stewards may be either appointed or elected, since 1972 all job stewards have been elected. The CWA Stewards Manual highlights the role of the steward both in interpreting union policy to the membership and in passing on the workers' feelings to local union officers and staff representatives.

Newman was elected job steward in 1973 and removed from that position the same year. Prior to his removal, Newman worked with and spoke on behalf of a committee of 60-70 members that published leaflets concerning upcoming contract negotiations. After his removal Newman ran for reelection and won, but the union refused to certify him. In 1975, Newman ran again for steward, won, and this time was certified. He contributed a column to a newsletter critical of the union leadership. At a meeting prior to 1977 contract negotiations, Newman spoke from the floor in support of certain resolutions that the union president opposed. He was thereupon again removed from his position as steward.

Judge Knapp's legal discussion began

by noting that a steward is not an "officer" for purposes of the Landrum-Griffin Act. Accordingly the Court viewed the facts solely from the standpoint of Title I of the Act, the so-called "bill of rights," without considering Title IV, which regulates the election of officers.

The Court found that the union had disciplined Newman solely for exercising a right to free speech, which the Act protects. It found further that Newman's removal "chilled" the speech rights of other stewards. In a footnote Judge Knapp remarked:

"We reject as absurd the defendants' general contention that a steward must believe in and cannot criticize Union policies in order to be able to explain them, and thus that any shop unsympathetic with Union policies may elect only stewards opposing the view which the voters hold."

On appeal, the Second Circuit Court of Appeals reversed. The appellate court endorsed what Judge Knapp had termed "absurd." Its opinion declared: "Unless the management of a union, like that of any other going enterprise, could command a reasonable degree of loyalty and support from its representatives, it could not effectively function very long." The appellate court set aside the preliminary injunction issued by Judge Knapp, and remanded the case to the District Court with instructions that the Court reassess the facts. The test to be applied was the following:

"The inquiry in each case...must be to determine whether a member's opposition to the union's program or policies may be reasonably viewed as precluding him from acting effectively as its representative, and whether this removal from his

official position would tend to prevent him or others from exercising their rights as members under Title I...."

In an opinion just issued, Judge Knapp again reviewed the facts in the light of the test mandated by the Court of Appeals—and came to the same conclusion as before!

The testimony, according to the Judge, "established that Newman's views did not preclude him from performing his duties and effectively acting as a representative of the Local." Newman's handling of grievances was concededly exemplary. Further, in regard to Newman's duty to transmit union policy to the members, "Plaintiffs produced several witnesses, whom we find to be credible, who testified that Newman had fairly explained to them the leadership's position and had supported Local fund-raising and petition drives despite his belief that these activities were not in the members' best interests."

The Court then considered the appellate court's additional requirement that Newman show the purpose of his removal to have been "to inhibit or stifle his exercise of free speech rights as a union member." The removal had this purpose, the Court found. On balance, the Court held that since Newman's criticism of the leadership's bargaining stance preceded the union's firm adoption of a policy, Newman should be reinstated even under the test imposed by the Court of Appeals. (Readers will note the Court's adoption of what in other contexts is termed "democratic centralism.")

This new decision will now again be appealed.

The Newman case is important because the role of the shop steward is critical to

a democratic labor movement. In the better unions, full-time business agents or staff are former stewards who work closely with their successors and leave the final decisions about grievances to those most intimately involved. They function as teachers and advisers, not as dictators. Even in the better unions, however, tension is likely to develop between those who have left the workplace to work full-time for the union, and the stewards and ordinary members still in the shop. The rank and file must rely on the steward to keep the full-time functionaries sensitive to their needs.

In the more bureaucratic or corrupt unions, the steward's role is enlarged. He or she then takes on the tasks that full-timers ought to perform. In such a situation the tendency is for the official union to act as an intermittent policeman on behalf of labor peace, while a network of shopfloor contacts built around the stewards becomes the real union. Thus, in one such situation with which I am familiar, two stewards were discharged for seeking to represent a fellow worker. The business agents discouraged the stewards from trying to get their jobs back and actually testified against them at a National Labor Relations Board hearing. Meantime, one of the discharged stewards has become the shop's *de facto* business agent, coordinating the defense of members subject to discipline and otherwise providing the representation which the official union does not give.

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PERSPECTIVES

□ FOR A NEW AMERICA □

Socialism confronts cult of individualism



By Robert Hyfler

The notion that the individual may exist as a physical and psychological entity independent of history, culture, and accidents of birth; that her or his actions may be analyzed, judged, and rewarded in isolation from those of others, has been the catalyst for much that has passed for progress in the past hundred years. American "heroes" from Edison, Teddy Roosevelt, and Lindbergh, right down to James Dean, Spiderman, and Evel Knievel have ridden to fame on the backs of our national fetish of individualism.

That today, so many of our prominent individualist heroes are either in films, comic books, or circuses is testimony to the degree to which the dream of individualism is now but a strong memory. As Michael Harrington is continually saying, collectivization is the basic truth of our times. Whether we are aware of it or not, we are a social people, with socially defined tastes and wants, involved in the social production of that which we consume. Marx wrote *Capital*, in part, to show the intellectual trickery and mystification by which essentially collective labor is transformed into private individual property.

Profits of individualism.

Yet contemporary champions of individualism are persistent. They range from libertarian theorist Robert Nozick to Republican politicians and corporate elites. Mobil Oil, whose multinational corporate existence itself points to individualism's death, is fond of taking out ads in major publications to argue for individual initiative and private enterprise. It is of course obvious to many that these corporate elites and their spokesmen in the GOP are out to use the exaltation of individualism to perpetuate their own hegemony in a world that is anything but in-

dividualistic.

But the banner of individualism is raised by others as well. The foot-soldiers of the radical right are not people of great wealth and power, and can never hope to be. Neither were the pseudo-counter culture types of the past decade who were apt to speak of "doing your own thing" much as their parents proclaimed, "mind your own business." Success-at-any-price students continue to fill college classrooms. They come from all races, genders, and social strata.

Perhaps the most conspicuous of all American individualists is the underclass lawbreaker who seeks a redistribution of income on the level of the individual. It is the misfortune of these "criminals" that unlike those who sit in corporate board rooms, they have neither the money nor the access to power so as to secure rules by which they could play the game of individualism honestly.

Illusionary promises and destructive realities notwithstanding, Americans seem hesitant to part with philosophies of individualism. Although as a political slogan it seems to come with a Republican copyright, no Democratic office-seeker would dare challenge individualism's basic tenets. With nobility and naivete, the Democratic Party has stood firmly for "equal opportunity," the establishment of a fair individualism. Rather than attacking the competitive nature of our society, many within the Democratic Party content themselves in devising equitable criteria for a just competition, even while Democrats have sponsored much social welfare legislation to mitigate the pains that go to the game's losers: the poor, the old, the unsuccessful. However, as the policies of the Carter White House more than indicate, the Democratic Party is not as yet prepared to abandon their loyalties to the goals and principles of individualism and competitive capitalism.

Few Democrats are prepared to make the statement, "If the system cannot afford national health insurance, then the people cannot afford the system."

Rejecting socialism as unattainable, dominant segments of American labor, dating back to Samuel Gompers, have also rejected individualism as a philosophical model for the worker. The mainstream of the labor movement has implicitly, yet consistently, argued that the worker must accept the permanence of both the existence of classes and his own class position; the aim being to improve the condition of his class through collective action. For labor, social legislation exists more as palliative than panacea.

However, the pessimism and limited nature of labor's argument is hardly inspiring to those asked to accept the inevitability of being part of an underclass, albeit cushioned by social reforms. Working class creativity, dissent, and dissatisfaction finds its ways into aimless wildcat action, subtle acts of industrial sabotage, and egoistic ways of thinking that shun unionism in favor of personal advancement. Having rejected the accommodationism of mainstream labor, and being often unprepared to embrace a more radical model of social change, many a worker falls back on a variant of old-fashioned individualism. Little wonder that American workers remain the most underorganized in the western industrialized world.

Socialism and the individual.

Contrary to the assertion of liberal critics, the socialist tradition does not ignore the individual. Important segments of the left have always maintained that the individual is at once the basic unit in society, and, at the same time, a social creature with interdependent ties to other individuals. Socialists have rejected a concept of individualism that ignores people's need for social interaction, and that defines individual needs, wants, abilities, and contributions in such a way as to isolate them from the influence of society and the relationship of the individual to other people. Human happiness, socialists argue, is better served through collective solutions than individual ones. However, so strong did Marx see self-interest as a motivating factor in human affairs that he believed that only the working class, which had the most to gain collectively and as individuals from the endeavor, could be expected to overthrow capitalism.

As an alternative to the old individualism Marx wrote of allowing each "to assert his true individuality," and of creating a social order that would "give everyone social scope for the assertion of his vitality." The Russian anarcho-communist, Peter Kropotkin, popularized a similar concept, calling it "individualization." He understood this to mean that each per-

son should obtain "the full development of all...faculties, intellectual, artistic and moral." Many early socialists, whether Marxist or anarchist, never doubted that the life of the individual could only be enhanced under the new social order that would supplant capitalism.

Admittedly, individualization did not always develop as the favorite battle cry of the left. Second International Socialists of the pre-World War I era, aware of the evils of an overtly brutal capitalism, emphasized the need for greater democracy and a more equitable distribution of wealth. The architects of the soviet experiment were concerned with peace and an end to scarcity, while the socialists of the great depression years found it sufficient to advocate a planned economy based on production for use rather than private profit. In times of acute suffering and blatant exploitation socialists were content with obtaining jobs, decent wages, and security.

In the struggle against the archaic individualism of the 19th century, some thought it necessary to champion class over individual needs and aspirations. Sadly, Stalinists, Maoists, and social democrats alike have tended to defer talk of individualization to some future utopia. Other socialists, while discussing individualization, have done so in elitist terms. The Fabians in Britain, and socialists such as Victor Berger and Norman Thomas in America, presupposed an unequal distribution of natural talents so that individualization became compatible with a stratified social order directed by the "genius" of experts.

An egalitarian focus on individualization as a key element of a socialist program would demand serious thought concerning the reorganization of our political and economic institutions. If we assume that "genius" and talent is rather uniformly distributed among people, then individualization also implies restructuring the division of labor, so as to make creative work available to all. It presupposes bold proposals for change and the possibility that such change might not be brought about as smoothly as our delicate sensibilities might desire. Yet only by offering the individual a setting in which full realization of her or his potential becomes more than an opportunity, and enabling people to share equally in making decisions that affect their lives, can socialism hope to appeal to large numbers of people, hardly wealthy or powerful, who live above the level of human misery in an industrialized world. For them, socialism must transcend the notion of material security implicit in the welfare state. Only a socialism imbued with the idea of individualization is capable of dislodging an age-old individualism from people's minds and put the socialist message in contact with the self-interest of modern individuals.

Can a new left emerge and grow successfully in the United States in the 1970s and '80s?

Not unless its participants know about the success and failures of the American left from 1900 to 1970. In those years, three movements—the old Socialist Party, the Communist Party and the New Left of the 1960s—started and failed. Without knowledge of these experiences a new movement will have no more chance of survival than its predecessors.

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