

# IN SHORT

## ...but four's a gang

Chinese authorities have reissued a sex manual that gives the official positions on reproductive matters. First published in 1963, "Information on Sex" offers this sobering anecdote concerning "nymphomania": "A certain female cultural worker married a music teacher 10 years her senior. The man's sexual desires were normal, but the girl's were more developed and she could never get satisfaction. This caused anguish and affected her work...."

The pamphlet recommends the adoption of "correct communist attitudes" as a cure for sex-related "nervous weakness." We tried it, and it works.

## Chemical welfare

This past Veterans Day marked the third anniversary of the Agent Orange controversy. The ever-cautious Veterans Administration has yet to acknowledge any general connection between exposure to the pesticide and health problems among Vietnam vets and their offspring. As it now stands, the burden of proof is on each individual to convince the VA that such a link exists.

The VA has been equally frigid toward atomic veterans. As many as half a million American soldiers, according to Pentagon estimates, were exposed to radiation from nuclear weapons tests in the South Pacific and Nevada between 1945 and 1962, yet it's been nearly impossible for any of them to get federal compensation for their service-related illnesses. The National Association of Atomic Veterans (NAAV) and the Clergy and Laity Concerned are establishing 40 referral centers across the country to help locate atomic test vets. For details, write to the NAAV at 1109 Franklin St., Burlington, Iowa 52601.

## Friendly competition

It's time to change ribbons, dust off that old Royal manual with the hydraulic touch and whip up an entry for the second annual award of the Eugene V. Debs Foundation, named after the organizer of the American Railroad Union and longtime leader and candidate of the old Socialist Party. Six hundred dollars will go to the author of "the best article or essay (published or unpublished) clearly identified with a theme of social protest or social justice in the Debs tradition." The deadline for submissions is April 30, 1981, so there's plenty of time to send a self-addressed stamped envelope to the Bryant Spann Memorial Prize Committee, History Dept., Indiana State University, Terre Haute, IN 47809; you'll get back the complete application instructions.

## Waste on wheels

The Critical Mass Energy Project, a wing of Ralph Nader's Public Citizen Inc., has released a study showing that the frequency of transportation accidents involving shipments of radioactive materials has mushroomed in the last four years. Last year, 122 such accidents were reported—a 23 percent jump over 1978 figures and nearly twice as many as in 1976.

But even these figures understate the problem, say the authors of the report. A crucial shortcoming in the present system of radioactive shipments is "the near total lack of adequate...inspection or record-keeping activities by local, state or federal agencies." Right now, the U.S. Department of Transportation is drafting regulations that will further reduce the ability of some 100 state and local governments to regulate atomic shipments through their communities, while the DOT makes no promises of increased federal monitoring or improved safety measures.

Other findings of the CMEP study:

- There was a seven-fold increase—from \$26,386 in 1978 to \$187,044 in 1979—in the total dollar figure for property damage caused by nuclear transport accidents.
- All but 19 of the 122 mishaps in 1979 occurred during highway transit, with 92 attributable to a single trucking firm, Tri-state Motor Transit Co. of Joplin, Mo.
- Though accidents were reported in 22 states, more than half were in South Carolina, home of the Barnwell radioactive waste dump.

## It's a jungle out there

The coming months will find Pat Aufderheide, our culture editor, wintering in the Brazilian jungle (where it is now spring). While Pat does anthropological research with the Kreen Akarore Indian tribe, Robert Schaeffer, who has twice served as *In These Times*' managing editor, will fill in. Robert will return to the jungle of academe when Pat comes back.

—Josh Kornbluth



On Nov. 18, 114 of 1,500 demonstrators were arrested for blocking entrances to the Pentagon. The all-female action was organized to protest the escalation of U.S. militarism and sexism. Demonstrators earlier encircled the Pentagon and planted these symbolic gravestones.

## Will hard times for labor spur on a new left politics?

The threat of declining manufacturing jobs and plant closings is uniting an increasing number of labor unions and community organizations in what may become—along with coalitions on other issues, such as energy—a foundation of left politics for the coming decade. Already the Ohio Public Interest Campaign has built on its early work for legislation regulating plant closings to create a broad coalition that mounted a serious, albeit losing, progressive tax reform initiative this year.

At its fifth annual convention on Nov. 15, the Illinois Public Action Council expanded its campaign for legislation that would require notification of plant closings and provide severance pay, community assistance and continuation of health insurance after closings, similar to legislation reportedly introduced now in at least 13 states. But the job-loss conference of 350 people on the day after the convention, co-sponsored by Public Action and 15 unions, took a new twist by emphasizing early warning signals of potential plant closings. Public Action hopes to pressure the state's Department of Commerce and Community Affairs to establish a special task force for early identification of plant closings and provision of assistance to workers and the community.

"Don't be too comfortable," former local union leader Melba Meacham said, reflecting on her experience at Hiram Walker in Peoria. "You can't afford to. Just because it's profitable, don't think they won't close your plant." Public Action estimates that 140,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost from Illinois in the past 10 years. The organization is working not only to dampen the blow from the shutdowns but also to mobilize union pension funds, if possible, to create new jobs.

In the past two years, Public Action has brought in 25 unions as

affiliates and expanded its community affiliates in Chicago, where the statewide federation of 80 affiliated groups had been weak. Jim Wright, the new regional director of the UAW and a new board member of Public Action, said that he favored more coalition work as a way to regain political initiative after the recent conservative victories and to become less dependent on the Democratic Party organizational machinery. Public Action maintains projects on city neighborhoods (emphasizing crime, tenant rights and redlining), utilities and tax reform as well as on plant closings.

—David Moberg

## Battered killer won't be tried

The state of Connecticut has declined to prosecute a woman who killed her lover in part because he had a history of beating her.

Wallace Quiller had been drinking at a neighbor's party that night, Oct. 15, 1979, and his girlfriend, Edna Louise Pipkins, had a good idea what to expect. For the two years they had been living together in Hartford, his drunken episodes had led him to violent acts, invariably directed against Pipkins.

In fact, as the prosecution told the court Oct. 31, Pipkins had called police with assault complaints nearly once a month since they had lived together. Twice, Quiller was arrested. Twice, Pipkins had to be hospitalized. Invariably, the police would remove Quiller from the apartment in the low-income housing project where they lived, and Quiller would invariably return.

Pipkins said once in an interview that she tolerated Quiller's behavior because she loved him. She also said she couldn't move because she couldn't afford it while supporting four children, one of them by Quiller, on a welfare recipient's income.

Battered women's advocates came to her aid and presented a petition of 1,000 signatures gathered from across the country to the prosecutor, John M. Bailey. But Bailey said his decision not to prosecute was influenced less by the evidence: a hysterical phone call to police the night of the incident, an apparent act of self-defense by Pipkins and the history of abuse she endured.

—Bruce Kauffman

## They did right, voted for left

A bright spot in the Nov. 4 elections was the state of Minnesota, where results ran sharply counter to the national right-wing landslide. Cartoons in Minnesota papers now depict boatloads of refugees landing on the state's shores, begging "Please take us in. We're liberals." In Minnesota, the voters not only turned thumbs down on Reagan, but also gave a net increase of legislative seats to the Democratic Farmer-Labor Party (DFL), which suffered a major defeat two years ago.

From a democratic left perspective, the results were brighter still—especially for the Farmer-Labor Association (FLA), a movement begun in 1976 to revive Minnesota's left heritage and restore the principles of the Farmer-Labor Party (a third party that dominated Minnesota in the 1930s and merged with the Democrats in 1944).

With a program and vision similar to that of the Citizens Party, the FLA has chosen to compete for power within the DFL. The 700-member organization has so far established chapters in nearly a dozen Minnesota communities, attracted a wide following among farmers and won city election races in Minneapolis, Duluth, St. Cloud, Two Harbors and other small communities.

This trend continued on Nov. 4, with the election of FLA candidate Karen Clark to the Minnesota legislature by a margin of better than two to one. A nurse and lesbian feminist with a background of neighborhood, union and gay activism, 35-year-old Clark won in a Minnesota district with one of the highest concentrations of senior citizens in the nation. Stressing neighborhood concerns and the value of citizen cooperation in solving problems, and articulating an anti-corporate economic program to combat inflation in the necessities, she out-organized her primary and general election opponents.

Clark campaigned for a state bank and a public energy corporation, control of inflation through rent control and an investigation of Minnesota's giant food monopolies. Her work in AFSCME and the FLA's active strike support work resulted in solid union support for her candidacy.

In addition to the Clark victory, incumbent FLA members in the Minnesota legislature were returned to office with majorities averaging better than 70 percent. And in a western Minnesota farm district that voted 60 percent for Reagan, FLA candidate Earl Hauge, a Lutheran minister, upset the Republican incumbent. Another FLA challenger, former air force major John Considine, narrowly lost. All in all, it was an impressive showing for an organization with a program as left as that of the Citizens Party.

—John de Graaf



# IN THE NATION

## INITIATIVES

# Prop. 13 was never like this

By Robert Goodman

BOSTON

**O**N ELECTION DAY, MASSACHUSETTS passed a clone of California's Proposition 13. The Massachusetts referendum mandated the legislature to limit local property taxes to 2.5 percent of market value. An unusual 82 percent voter turnout passed it by an overwhelming three-to-two margin.

One thing is sure—the effect of a lid on property taxes in Massachusetts is going to be very different from that in California. Massachusetts doesn't have a near-\$7-billion state surplus to shift back to local communities, communities that will lose an estimated 18 percent of their tax revenue in the first year alone. For years now, Massachusetts had been scrambling for ways to cut public expenses and increase state income.

Proposition 2½ is not timid. It's a grab-bag of anti-tax measures that goes beyond Proposition 13. It not only effectively slashes average property taxes by more than 25 percent and limits any further increases to 2½ percent over the previous year, but also gives tenants the right to deduct half their yearly rent for income tax purposes and cuts the state's auto excise tax (a big source of local revenue) by more than 50 percent.

The proposition eliminates a local school board's ability to determine its own budget, eliminates binding arbitration for police and fire contracts, and eliminates the power of the state legislature to pass any laws that require additional expenditures by cities and towns. Like Proposition 13, it requires a two-thirds vote by the local electorate to override any of its provisions. This is, in short, the single most sweeping popular referendum vote to come out of Massachusetts in a generation.

Some of 2½ could have been written by the left. For example, the local property tax takes a big bite out of working people's incomes; tenants being able to deduct half their rent from state income taxes helps some working people. But 2½ was created, nurtured and carried to the people by the right.

The line-up on 2½ went like this—a Massachusetts group called Citizens for Limited Taxation (CLT) got the required signatures to put 2½ on the ballot. A number of CLTers are known for their ultra-right-wing views. Former CLT executive director Donald Feder, for example, calls for eliminating public works departments and having private ownership of streets. Schools and fire protection, says Feder, should be provided by private companies; government should be limited to providing an army, a police force and the courts.

Joining CLT and providing a good share of the financial support for media advertising was the High Technology Council, a group of more than 90 of the state's noted computer, electronic and aerospace industries, including Digital Equipment Company, Wang Laboratories and Prime Computer.

Although leaders of these industries may not publicly espouse a right-wing ideology, they were ardent supporters. The direct financial gains of real estate tax relief for the individual High Tech Council companies will be minor—they were primarily concerned with improving the state's high tax image in order to attract out-of-state engineering and scientific personnel at lower salaries.

Opposed to 2½ was a group of strange bedfellows: the executives of the private finance community, the major public unions, statewide citizens action groups,



Proposition 2½ is a grab-bag of measures that, among other things, strips local school districts of their budget powers.

occasional Chambers of Commerce, left legislators and, nominally, the private sector labor unions. The financial community, affectionately described by some politicians as "the lenders and spenders," was represented by the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation, a group comprised of corporate leaders from the state's financial community. The Foundation's executive committee reads like a mini-directory of big state and international financing companies: First National Bank of Boston, New England Mutual Life Insurance, Paine, Webber, Curtis and Jackson, etc.

Like the financial community's fight against Proposition 13 in California, the financiers here were troubled that a drastic property tax cap could wreak havoc with public services: schools, roads, police and fire-fighters needed to keep and attract industry. They were also concerned about the outstanding debt owed them by localities and their ability to market future bonds; business that thrives on debt doesn't want to see its sources go dry. The stark reality is that if budgets are drastically cut some communities may be forced to default, or at least be very late in paying. Many may simply be unable to go into debt in the future.

As the dust settles, the players are already positioning themselves for the next step. State legislators, including most of those who fought the proposition, typically proclaim that the electorate has

spoken and promise to do their best to make it work. One state senator, who after the election declared the proposition a disaster and said he would immediately file a bill for its repeal, was barraged with irate and threatening phone calls.

Proposition 2½ bears close attention. This is no example of the ordinary folk being outspent by their corporate opposition. The proponents of the proposition were outspent by their opponents—a major part of whose funds came from the Massachusetts Teachers Association.

What happened in Massachusetts and tax initiatives in other states begins to flesh out the meaning of the "Taxpayers' Revolt." Tax limitation initiatives have been approved by voters in more than 10 states, but voters are not simply moving to the right or prone to pass any kind of tax limit proposals.

As Bob Kuttner points out in *The Revolt of the Haves*, people may want lower taxes, but they also want good public services. In this past election tax limitation initiatives lost in more states than they won. Tax limits won approval in Arkansas, Missouri, Montana and West Virginia, but they went down to defeat, sometimes by substantial margins, in Michigan, Oregon, Arizona, Nebraska, Nevada, South Dakota and Utah.

Massachusetts voters didn't simply vote down taxes, they voted down property taxes—the highest, after Alaska's, in the country. More than 55 percent of

all local revenues are produced by the local property tax in Massachusetts, compared to a national average of 33 percent. In all the states that defeated tax caps this year, property tax rates were about 30 percent less in proportion to per capita income than in Massachusetts. And over the past 10 years, Massachusetts has suffered the effects of private disinvestment; between 1970 and 1978, the state had one of the lowest rates of industrial growth in the country. Proponents of 2½ argued that without tax cuts even fewer jobs would be created.

The rising costs of local public services, spurred by inflation and private disinvestment and coupled with a local public financing system that relies heavily on the property tax, provided a natural organizing ground for a drastic attack on the property tax, a tax that fell hardest on working people who owned their own homes. It was in the poorest communities, with the highest property taxes like Boston, Chelsea and Somerville, that people were forced to make the no-win choice between voting for higher taxes or lower services.

"I don't think it's perfect," said one homeowner who also teaches in an affluent suburb little affected by the proposition. "I'd rather see a graduated income tax. But I'm afraid not to vote for it because then nothing will happen."

In carrying the banner for 2½, the right chose a battlefield where it could successfully coopt the left's program for lower taxes for working people. Of course they also provided these benefits (albeit in more luxurious sums) for the wealthy. But with nothing better to vote for, the right was able to carry the day, positioning itself as a champion of the common folk against big, unresponsive government.

The next phase in Massachusetts tax reform will decide whether or not the state's working-class communities can retrieve their public services. The battle has shifted to the state house, where politicians and leaders of elderly, welfare, and community organizations are hoping to draft legislation allowing the state to make up the shortfall in local funds caused by 2½; there is talk of broadening the sales tax or a graduated income tax (a proposal that failed on three previous initiatives). There is also talk of allowing local communities to override 2½ with a simple majority vote.

As the effects of drastic cutbacks in teacher, fire and police services become real, the mood for a thorough overhaul of the state's tax structure could grow. Some legislators see it as a new opportunity to create a graduated state income tax to replace the current flat rate. State Senator Dennis McKenna, who represents several working-class communities, personally favors the graduated tax. "The people have indicated they're outraged at the archaic tax structure...they expect us to act," says McKenna. But he, like a number of other legislators, worries about the possibility of getting support for a tax that failed by substantial margins in the past. Although he considers the sales tax "regressive on its face," he believes there may be ways of making it progressive, such as taxes on machinery.

Battle plans for the next phase of the Massachusetts tax reform war are now being drawn. If the state's progressive leadership is to avoid their reactive position on 2½, fighting a proposal a large part of which they could have written themselves, they will need to act quickly.

Leaders of the fight to pass 2½ (Citizens for Limited Taxation) have already served notice they will oppose any form of graduated income tax. Meanwhile, the financial community (the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation) is touting cost cutbacks in education, public transit and human services, and lobbying to include more goods and services under the state's sales tax. Said Foundation president Richard Manley, "You're taxing the poor guy out of his house—so what if he has to pay a little more for his clothing."

Robert Goodman's latest book is *The Last Entrepreneurs: America's Regional Wars for Jobs and Dollars* (Simon & Schuster). He works at the Center for the Study of Public Policy in Somerville, Mass.