

# IN THESE TIMES

Editorial

## Myth and reality play in Youngstown

The Lykes Corporation's shutdown of the Youngstown Sheet & Tube Campbell steel works last September, idling 5,000 workers, and the frustrated attempts since then by workers and community people to reopen the plant (see David Moberg's story, *ITT*, Aug 9.), throw into sharp relief some basic myths and realities about corporate America.

Myth: "Private enterprise" maximizes citizen initiative and self-reliance, local autonomy and self-determination. The reality, as typified in the Youngstown situation, is that corporate enterprise centralizes control in absentee ownership that reduces workers, citizens, and local communities alike to powerless dependency.

Myth: "Private enterprise" in pursuit of profit maximizes social well-being. The reality is that profit-making through corporate ownership of society's productive capacities is socially irresponsible and destructive of the economic and social health of countless individuals, their families and their communities.

Myth: "Private enterprise" cherishes individual dignity. The reality is that the dignity of the individual investor or property owner takes precedence over that of the individual worker.

Myth: "Private enterprise" is synonymous with democracy. The reality is that corporate concentration of wealth preempts the people's ability to determine their living and working conditions by democratic processes.

Myth: Everybody is equal under the law. The reality is that the law bestows upon property owners powers and privileges denied to everyone else.

The Youngstown city council, or other such elected public body, even if it wanted to, could resume plant operations only if it had the money to buy the property from Lykes. But the corporations have the money; city councils don't. Similarly, the coalition of workers and community leaders seeking to restore plant operation does not command the wealth with which legally to assume ownership, even if Lykes would sell. Banks and other private investors who have been invited by the coalition to supply some of the needed



funds for purchase and development of the facility have balked, candidly stating that their profit-interest is inconsistent with worker-community control of the enterprise.

Myth: Federal intervention, in and of itself, necessarily centralizes power in distant government destructive of local initiative. The reality is that a federal role could bring power closer to home—if federal law empowered localities with first option to assume worker-community ownership of enterprises shut down by private investors, and provided the funding for doing so. Such federal law would be necessary to prevent interstate and multinational corporations from playing states and localities off against one another and against foreign countries.

Instead, the Carter administration has opted for corporate control. Attorney-

General Griffin Bell has sanctioned the merger of Lykes with LTV Corporation (owner of Jones & Laughlin Steel), against the recommendation of the Justice Department's own anti-trust division. The effect is to head off efforts at creating a worker-community owned enterprise, and to remove power over Youngstown's destiny to still father reaches of an absentee corporate bureaucracy. This kind of federal intervention is the "inaction" corporate executives and "anti-big government" conservatives applaud.

The Youngstown situation has nevertheless brought to public attention creative proposals by the worker-community coalition for socially responsible economic arrangements suited to restoring local initiative, democratic processes, and worker and citizen self-reliance. At least rudimentarily, the proposals also embody a

model of organization pointing toward a non-statist socialist democracy. They call for ownership of the steel enterprise, not by government but by workers and community groups who would be responsible for management and empowered to use profits for investment in plant improvement and for funding local social services, instead of profits being siphoned off to absentee owners as under existing corporate ownership.

But the Youngstown situation also dramatizes problems for and weaknesses of the socialist left that need attention. We mention here only a couple of the more compelling ones.

After long conditioning under capitalism to forego self-reliance and responsibility for the enterprise as a whole, most workers, as became evident in Youngstown, have difficulty with the idea of self-management; lacking self-confidence, many positively fear it. Workers' uncertainty and fear of exercising their own capacities in the workplace extend into the wider political arena, where they tend to defer to the authority and prestige of their "betters" rather than trusting themselves to "run the country."

In essence, democracy is self-government. Without a self-confident working class, ready to govern itself at work and in society at large, there can be no democratic socialism in the U.S. The current mutilation of workers' self-esteem is a basic ideological problem confronting American socialists as well as others seriously concerned for the prospects of democracy in the U.S.

Youngstown reminds us, furthermore, of the paucity and weakness of socialists' roots among working people (as distinct from what are in effect socialist-tending ideas and sentiments). In the absence of an organized socialist movement, popularly respected and trusted, Youngstown-area workers turned to the clergy who responded with a vigorous secular practicality. Is it too much to ask that we socialists put aside our doctrinal wrangling over sacred texts and esoteric jargon and at least match the secular political acumen of our religious brothers and sisters? ■

## Ferency and socialist electoral politics

Zolton Ferency's campaign in the Michigan Democratic party's gubernatorial primary has brought into sharper focus questions relating to socialist participation in electoral politics (see John Judis' "Inside Story," *ITT*, Aug. 16).

Unlike other socialist campaigns for statewide or national office, Ferency ran as a major party candidate explicitly advocating socialism. And in addressing himself to specific issues, he offered socialist proposals as practical remedies for widely felt social ills such as unfair taxation, unemployment, and inflation, rather than treating socialism as some far-off vision unrelated to people's specific grievances and problems.

The Ferency campaign differed in two other ways. Far from running for "educational purposes," Ferency ran to win, and to win as a socialist. And he ran as a front-runner, taking not some small token share of the vote but, in a field of four, attracting 26 percent, finishing second to State Sen. William Fitzgerald's 39 percent.

Ferency's campaign offers substantial reason to believe that there is a popular base in Michigan for socialist politics in the electoral arena. It suggests that socialists in other states may discover and build a similar base by candid advocacy

of socialist remedies for problems of immediate popular concern.

The Ferency campaign lends strong support to the view that electoral politics is an effective area of socialist political work. It does so, that is, if like the Ferency people, we see electoral politics broadly as a long-term commitment involving on-going political activity, not sporadic biennial or quadrennial slate-running, and a step-by-step process of building a popular socialist presence in American politics that in spite of losing this election or that has enduring staying power. Bourgeois political movements don't pick up their marbles and go home upon losing an election, and neither should socialists; they know the importance of staying in the game, and so should socialists.

With such a commitment, socialist electoral politics is effective in spreading socialist views and values, making them familiar to Americans as a legitimate part of the political scene, and identifying socialist alternatives to capitalism as practical programs for change. It is also effective in accustoming socialists to advocating socialism in ways suited to the American people, that is, respecting the people and talking with them, rather than down to or at them, or past them.

But some may argue that a popular or "winning" electoral politics will require "diluting" socialism. But socialists who fear popularity as the road to "dilution" or anticipate winning only at the expense of principles are evading the task of adapting socialism to their own people's historical circumstances and in effect are relinquishing the hope for a socialist America in our times.

Undoubtedly popular socialist politics will generate all the vexing problems ranging from opportunism and dogmatism to personal rivalries and programmatic disputes. But having to deal with them as problems of a real popular movement would be a long step forward. And dealing with them in public subject to the participation and judgment of the people at large, not just leaders and cadre of semi-private parties, is the best way of making socialism the people's business and the potent force for social change it has become in other countries.

The Ferency campaign also indicates the viability of running for office as a socialist within the formal framework of a major party. We don't think it shows major party candidacy is the only way, or even necessarily the preferable way. Ken Cockrel's election as an independent socialist to the Detroit city council (though

not a statewide office) indicates otherwise. This, we think, is a practical, not a doctrinal question, to be approached flexibly according to circumstances.

The Ferency campaign also reminds us of questions we socialists have neglected. His victorious opponent, William Fitzgerald ran strongest in blue-collar white working class areas, where Ferency ran poorly. The socialist left, old as well as new, has long neglected building a political base among white blue-collar workers. Socialist electoral movements must seek to expand their base in that direction. Otherwise, a popular socialist movement capable of combatting racial and sexist division among working people cannot be expected.

We know that many will disagree with some or all of the conclusions drawn here. But what is new and important about the Ferency campaign, especially if it should develop into a movement for the long haul, is that it has made debate on these issues unavoidable for socialists and relevant to larger numbers of Americans. That marks an advance for socialist politics in the U.S., however gloomy the times may now seem. For in the real world of the American people, if you're out of electoral politics, you're out of politics. The Ferency campaign has pointed a way back in. ■

# Letters

## Is Marschall anti-NAM?

I HAVE READ MANY OF DAN MARSCHALL'S labor columns, and have always respected his writing and his analysis. However, Marschall does not seem to be able to cover left conventions quite so well.

Like Marschall, I was at the recent NAM convention in Milwaukee. Unlike Marschall I came away from the convention with a good feeling about NAM as an organization. My impression of the convention was not nearly so dreary and bleak. Perhaps Marschall's report was influenced more by his personal feelings about NAM than by what he observed in Milwaukee. Marschall's introduction betrayed a certain ill will toward NAM, which led me to believe that the "many" Marschall referred to as having "low expectations" toward the convention may simply have been Marschall and a few of his friends. Certainly the people I talked to about the convention did not come away as depressed as he did, but rather, seemed to be revitalized.

-Bob Quartell  
Chicago

### Dan Marschall replies:

Like Bob Quartell, I also came away from the NAM convention with a "good feeling about NAM as an organization." Far from being "dreary and bleak," the convention was exciting. It indicated that NAM has made significant progress in the last year. In fact, two-thirds of the article—beyond the first four paragraphs discussing NAM's historic problems—describes convention debates, NAM's deepening involvement in labor work, and its range of other activities positively. As a NAM activist in several chapters for the past seven years, I certainly harbor no "ill will" towards the organization.

Bob Quartell's objections apparently stem from the fact that I discussed NAM's stagnation between 1975 and 1977. This perception has been common among left activists in and around NAM. Accurate news analysis should not downplay such weaknesses. I agree that it is not accurate to say that "many" NAM members did not think this malaise would change. "Many" probably would not agree that a malaise existed in the first place. Regardless, the convention showed that NAM is moving towards overcoming its deficiencies.

## Public health

THERE ARE CERTAIN PREMISES in the debate on professional school admissions policies which both sides seem to accept, and which therefore need to be questioned.

First, why should test scores weigh so heavily in the admissions process? Can "ability" be precisely measured by any test? It seems to me that the use of more subjective criteria might yield doctors just as technically competent, but with a greater ability to communicate with patients, and a greater desire to promote health regardless of remuneration.

Second, it is taken for granted that the school should decide, within certain limits, what the admissions policy will be, yet the public will have to live with the results. Shouldn't we have a bit more say?

Third, why are there so few medical schools? More fundamentally, why is the knowledge and power of healing concentrated in so few minds?

The legal barrier against people's learning more about healing serves to transfer tremendous wealth to the medical industry, and also blocks desperately needed progress in preventive medicine. I believe that it would be more healthy for the medical profession to come down from its hegemonic position, share what it knows, and give free rein to a variety of healing alternatives that are currently discouraged or suppressed.

-Geoffrey Young  
Cambridge, Mass.

## Honesty and class struggle

I'D LIKE TO QUESTION THE PROPRIETY of your giving a full page spread reviewing a vulgar exploitation game (*Class Struggle*, *ITT*, Aug. 9) in view of the following:

1. The owner of the game has been advertising it for months in *IN THESE TIMES*;

2. You never (to my knowledge) reviewed any other game.

If *ITT* plans further participation in this kind of shoddy rip-off, please cancel my sub. I thought you were honest.

-Marvin Mandell  
Cuttyhunk, Mass.

*Editor's Note: We thought so, too. The ads are our own—we sell the game to make money. The owner has not advertised yet.*

## Enlightenment's child

CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR special section on "Christian Witness" (*ITT*, Aug. 2). I hope you will continue to report on the religious dimension of socialist struggle.

While the left's historical insensitivity to religious phenomena is understandable, it is not enough to treat the religious question in isolation. Charles Slap in his piece casually remarked, "Religion, like the flag, has been abandoned by the left." There is more than coincidence in the connection.

The failure to comprehend religion by the left is part of the general failure of Enlightenment rationality to comprehend the dimension of symbol, especially as it is rooted in and flows from popular culture. Antonio Gramsci and James Connolly before him were probably the first Marxists to begin to understand this. But for the most part in modern history, the socialist movement has been the radicalized child of the Enlightenment, sharing the same weakness in the area of symbol with its older sibling, liberalism. Except that by radicalizing the weakness, the socialist tradition has left itself even more vulnerable before a right wing only too willing to manipulate popular symbol.

If there is a counter-theme within the socialist tradition, it is with the metaphor of art. The poetry of Pablo Neruda, for example, is filled with symbolic imagery from three key areas—national identity, fruitful sexuality, and religious traditions. It is to popular artists, then, rooted in their imagination within popular culture, that we may look for a socialist outlook that can transcend the sterility of Enlightenment culture and reach both forward and backward to what the philosopher Paul Ricoeur has called a "second naivete."

-Joe Holland  
Washington, D.C.

## Charting unknown waters

I APPRECIATE YOUR PAPER BECAUSE it provides stories and viewpoints not found in other papers. Yet I find myself disagreeing with you often, and sometimes disappointed with the narrowness of your vision and perspective.

Most disconcerting is your differentiation between the public and private sector and simplistic calls for expansion of the former at the expense of the latter.

We are charting unknown waters. To say that what people need is more education, better health care, improved

housing only addresses our most superficial needs as human beings. Our needs transcend the physical and will not be "solved" by our owning the means of production.

I question how much greater the individual's control over his/her life would be in a state-dominated society. I think we need to regain our power through new smaller institutions, such as cooperatives. When our physical and spiritual needs are met by organizations/people that we know and control in more than a symbolic sense then we might begin to see the transformation towards a more meaningful life. Multinational corporations are part of the problem, but more central is patriarchy, bureaucracy, and an over-reliance on nationality.

-Mark Friedman  
Terants Harbor, Me

## A good teacher?

ENCLOSED IS A CONTRIBUTION to help you out. I am on a limited income and I wish I could give more. Your newspaper is necessary, vital and informative. As a welfare mother I find myself leaning more to leftist activities and to socialism in particular. What I appreciate about *IN THESE TIMES* is that you don't assume that *everyone* knows Marx's theories and explain attitudes without being patronizing. We are all learning; it's best with a good teacher. Thank you.

-Geneva Clark  
Oakland, Calif.

## We deserve another slap

BEGINNING WITH CHARLES Slap's contradictory clichés about religion, your special section on "The Left Hand of God" (*ITT*, Aug. 2) is irritating to find in a socialist periodical. Repeating exaggerations—even for 2000 years—does not make them true. Generalizing from exceptions produces sophisms.

As a former evangelical christian, I have been interested to discover how knowledgeable Marx and Engels were concerning religious scriptures, and also how frequently one comes across formerly religious people in movement efforts. Of course, within the movement one also finds active members of religious groups.

However, the vast majority of church, synagogue, mosque and temple-going individuals care mostly for themselves. Those who crave true social improvements for all cannot depend upon those who repeatedly ask "How long oh Lord?"

Instead, they seek self-motivated people who really care about others, who have courageously stopped looking for some outside force to solve problems, who have done their homework to avoid repeating the errors of the past.

Anne Braden of the Southern Organizing Committee for Economic and Social Justice, while speaking before a Nashville Methodist congregation in March 1977, had the imagination and courage to observe, "I fail to see how one can apply Christian principles to the world of today *unless* one has some understanding of a Marxist analysis."

There is a lot of similar dialogue going on around the country, but your special section only touched on it. You deserve a lambasting from your readers.

-Gordon A. Chapman  
Washington, D.C.

## The opiate of the people

AS A SOCIALIST ATHEIST FEMINIST I must respond to both your section on Christian "Marxism," and Michael Stone's letter concerning the so-called "right to life" movement. Martin Luther King and Caesar Chavez were leaders and in the forefront of progressive movements not because of their religion but in spite of it. Religion is the dead reactionary handmaiden of the dead reactionary capitalist system. It dictates good habits, family size, it censors cinema, theater, television, even education, it dictates life values and life styles,

religion is politics, and always the most authoritarian and reactionary politics.

Zionism, the so-called "right to life" movement, and opposition to gay rights are based on the insanity of biblical precepts, as well as on other lies and half-truths. Michael Stone states that the "right to life" movement is not intrinsically reactionary and that progressive forces have been present in the movement. The "right to life" movement is not only intrinsically reactionary but also totalitarian. It is *inherently* anti-woman. It is also anti-Semitic as well.

To the "right to lifers" the lives of women maimed or killed by illegal abortions are less important than the "right to life" of the fetus. The "right to life" movement is part and parcel of the Catholic Church's quest for power in the U.S.

-Karen Moshowitz  
Indianapolis, Ind.

## Religion and the left

MANY THANKS FOR YOUR consideration of the church and social justice (*ITT*, Aug. 2).

Those of us who are both Christian and socialist are often very lonely. The church, still a staunch defender of capitalism and its works, wants nothing to do with us because we are socialists. (I recently returned Rev. Jerry Falwell's questionnaire in *TV Guide* with all the "wrong" answers.)

Likewise, most left groups are suspicious of us because we are Christians who believe that human beings are more than flesh and blood. We are immediately classed with Billy Graham and Anita Bryant as "reactionaries." Living in a rural area like mine only intensifies the problem.

*IN THESE TIMES* has become the first general-circulation publication on the left to take seriously the view that a person may be both Biblical and socialist. Congratulations and thank you.

-George Derringer  
The Hutchinson Leader  
Hutchinson, Minn.

## Toward rationality

I COULD HARDLY BELIEVE MY eyes as I read Charles S. Slap's article in your Aug. 2 issue. Yes, we must recognize the subversive aspect of religion, and not just pass over it, as Slap passes over the unending history of crimes committed in the name of God. And, yes, also we must recognize that much of the left is left struggling "without a rootedness in the ultimate sources of life." The point, however, is not to cry out for a return to some hypothesized "pure religion" which will allow us to measure all things. We ourselves are the only measure we have.

Rather than turn backwards to ancient modes of "thought," we must struggle forward to a new synthesis of human knowledge, to a new understanding that unites 2500 years of philosophy and science.

Only in the continuous and critical application of reason can we be true to and make the most of our heritage. Faith may for a moment lead us down the right path. But faith itself contains a great danger—for faith is precisely the relinquishing of *human* freedom and *human* responsibility in the name of something "higher." And for man there can be no such thing; which point, for me, when form was reduced to content, was brought home by the Gospels themselves.

-Robby Bick  
Seattle, Wash.

*Editor's note: Please keep letters under 250 words. Otherwise we must make drastic cuts, which may change what you want to say. Also, please type and double-space letter, or at least write clearly and with wide margins. Letters must be signed, with a return address. We will withhold your name or use a pseudonym if you wish, but we will not print unsigned letters or those without addresses.*