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## A History of LMV



Written by John Reimann

*(author's note: This document was written in the late 90s. There has been a lot of water under the bridge since then and some of my views have been modified. A second piece and some explanation is attached that will explain this. However, I think its more accurate to present this document as it was written and produced on the LMV web site for quite a few years.)*

Labor's Militant Voice has a history in the United States of about 20 years. We first got started in the early 1980s under the name of "Labor Militant". At that time, we were associated with an international socialist grouping called the Committee for a Workers' International. Some of those who first joined this tiny band of worker militants and socialists were union activists. We were looking for something beyond union activism. Of course, the unions are tremendously important here in the United States. This is because these are the only major organizations that workers formed in their struggle against the employers. (This is different from many other countries, including all of Western Europe as well as parts of Africa, Latin America and Asia, where workers also formed their own political parties.) We strongly believed in the unions, but it was clear to us that something had to change, that the unions had to take a more

fighting (militant) position and that the leadership of the unions was holding this back.

In our day-to-day struggles, many of us were increasingly feeling the need for a broader perspective. By this we mean that we were feeling the need to look beyond the immediate, to get a sense of how things were shaping up in the class struggle, where things were likely to go from here. We also felt a need to figure out more clearly how to link up the particular, day-to-day struggles with the long term goals, including the issue of socialism.

What was Labor Militant helped provide this for us, but it also helped provide a sense of "perspectives". By this we meant the following: Most socialist groups start from the point of view of what its goals are and what it should be doing. Any discussion of what is happening in the world around them is all mixed in with this issue. It becomes impossible to distinguish the objective events from the subjective activities. Using the methods of Marxism, as encouraged by the CWI, Labor Militant took a different approach: It started by trying to analyze the basic forces at work. What was happening in the US and world economy. What was happening in the struggle between the US and the Soviet Union, etc. From this, we tried to look at what was the consciousness, the thinking, of different sectors of the working class and how events such as economic developments would shape that thinking. In other words, we tried to figure out what were the major forces at work in society and how these forces would interact and based on this how a movement of workers would develop and where it would lead. It was our task to figure out how our tiny forces could best involve itself.

As the reader will see, some of what we thought turned out to be wrong in important ways. Some of it was right. Much of it had elements of both. However, the method of developing "perspectives" was unique and was fundamentally correct, we believe. With some changes in exactly how we do this, we still follow this method today.

In the first place we sought to provide an explanation of the economic situation of the time. This was the early 1980s. The post (WW II) war upswing had ended, but it was difficult for most workers to be able to figure out exactly why or what was in the cards. The early Labor Militant explained this:

It explained that the post war economic upswing (1940s to early 1970s) was based on a couple of factors. One was the fact that Europe

needed rebuilding from its devastation of the War. Given that the US emerged unscathed from this war, this provided a tremendous market for US industrial goods. Not only that, but there was no effective competition for the US at that time. This also meant that the US could provide a certain stability in the world capitalist market. The US's economic domination was also strengthened by the rivalry with the Soviet Union. Although the Soviet Union was ruled by a corrupt, dictatorial bureaucracy, it was still a competing force with US and world capitalism. It also held a certain appeal to workers and peasants in the former colonial world (Africa, Asia and Latin America). These people saw the Soviet Union as an alternative to the imperialist powers that had so ruthlessly conquered and dominated them for centuries. This competition meant that the other capitalist powers were afraid of open divisions within their ranks so they had to rely on their "leader" - US imperialism. All of this meant a certain stability to world capitalism as well as steady economic growth.

By the early '70s, however, this was starting to fall apart. The US was no longer the dominating force internationally that it had been. Its markets were being cut into by Japanese capitalism as well as by others. There was no chance of returning to the days of the post war boom. Furthermore, US employers were starting to find that they could open up shop in other, low wage countries and ship jobs over there. They were starting to use this as a club against US workers to drive down wages.

By the late '70s, things were getting even worse. In the last days of the Carter presidency (1976-80) workers were experiencing "stagflation" as it was called. This meant a near-stagnant economy with inflation at the same time. There was widespread unease and anger, but also a lack of an ability to explain what was happening or why. It was in this context that Labor Militant started to grow here.

In addition to its ability to explain what was happening economically, Labor Militant had another great thing to offer - international links. In the early '80s, for instance, the revolution against apartheid in South Africa was charging ahead. Workers were starting to take the lead there and were forming their own, independent unions. The CWI had a group there called "Congress Militant" (named after the African National Congress - the main organization of black South African workers). Congress Militant was right in the thick of things, including playing an important role in the development of these new, militant unions. Although it was not pacifist by any means, it argued against the method of guerrilla warfare, especially in a largely urbanized

country like South Africa. It explained that this meant excluding the bulk of the South African workers. Also, it explained that it would be necessary to split the white workers away from loyalty to the white bosses. This would not be possible through guerrilla struggle. Finally, it said that it would not be able to fundamentally change anything on the basis of capitalism, that a democratic socialist state would be necessary. But even there, it would not be possible for a socialist South Africa to stand alone; it would have to join with and encourage workers to rise up and take power throughout Africa and internationally.

The fact that the CWI actually had groups working in places like South Africa, and the fact that they were working in this way, was a tremendous attraction for the early members of Labor Militant.

Within the United States, we had the following perspectives: We explained that the post war boom was over, for the reasons put above and argued that we would see increasingly shorter and weaker economic booms and longer and worse economic down turns. We explained that the attacks of the employers, the capitalist class, would intensify, but that the union leadership would be found wanting in the attempts of workers to ward off these attacks. We looked at the unions as the "mass traditional organizations of the working class," that they had been built in struggle by workers in the past. We reasoned that workers would not easily abandon these mass traditional organizations, but that they would move to fight back through these organizations, the unions. In the course of this struggle, we argued that the workers would also transform the unions, make them into democratic, independent, fighting organizations.

As part of this process, we argued that workers would move to build their own political party. As all this developed, we argued that there would be splits within the bureaucracy of the unions and a wing of it would take a more fighting, more independent, more left position. This is what happened when the CIO was built in the 1930s, and we believed that we would see a repetition of this. This "left" wing of the establishment leadership would spur the movement forward for a time. Ultimately, however, it would be unable to resolve the problems, as those problems were built into the capitalist system itself. Increasingly, workers would be driven to seek a more radical - a revolutionary - solution. If a leadership was there, linked to the struggle and to the workers' organizations, then the working class would take up this approach and be able to rid itself and the world of the capitalist system. If not, then a reactionary wave would sweep the

country.

Of course, there was another whole part of the world - the Soviet Union and the eastern European bloc countries (East Germany, Hungary, Poland, etc.) It is probably fair to say that the perspectives for this part of the world were not thoroughly thought through. To the extent that they were discussed, we argued that workers in these countries would ultimately rise up against their bureaucratic dictators. We argued that they would not return to capitalism, that this was ruled out, but that they would overthrow their bureaucracies and build healthy, democratic socialist states.

Throughout the 1980s we organized based on these views. The other side of what we did was develop what Trotsky called the "transitional method". This meant building a bridge between the necessity for socialism and the day-to-day struggles. As one worker explained it, "if you cannot fight for toilet paper in the bathrooms at work, how can you expect workers to listen to you about capitalism vs. socialism?"

We sought to apply this approach in our day-to-day political work. However, political work during this period was very difficult. These were the Reagan years when the political mood amongst young people was at a low ebb. Nevertheless, we helped a vigorous youth group to develop in Seattle. This group helped a layer of young people campaign around the issues that were important to them, including a struggle for entertainment facilities and a struggle for the right to ride skateboards. Some of the main work we did was inside various unions as well as inside the labor movement as a whole. This was the period when some very bitter, prolonged strikes were fought, including Greyhound and others. We agitated for support for these strikes as well as seeking to build a more militant approach. Within the various different union locals where we had members, we were very active both helping lead struggles against the boss as well as for a stronger union movement. We also were very active in the international arena. We built support for the South African labor movement (just newly emerging at that time). We had a prolonged campaign for Mahmoud Masarwa, an Israeli Arab trade unionist and socialist who was in prison on trumped up charges. In the main, however, this was not an easy period in which to be political activists.

In 1986, Labor Militant held its founding conference to formally

establish itself as being connected with the CWI. At that time, we published a document called "Perspectives for the United States." There was much that was valid and positive about this document, starting with how it described the method in which we worked. We wrote: "In order that the forces of genuine Marxism develop the skill to correctly use the perspectives they must listen to the working class and youth. The task is not to teach the working class. It is to learn the lessons of history, participate in and understand the day-to-day struggles and developments and draw out the general lessons as a guide to continued action."

We started with an analysis of the US and world economy, which was as explained above. Fundamentally, this analysis was correct. However, what it implied as far as the timing was wrong and served to confuse the members over the years that followed. We wrote, for instance: "At some stage, though possibly not in the coming recession, there will be a crash similar to what occurred in 1929..." In describing what had been happening under Reagan, we wrote: "The huge level of deficits, and the massive level of military spending, will inevitably re-fuel the fires of inflation.... "

While such statements did not directly say so, the implication was that a massive economic crisis, possibly on the scope of 1929, was likely to happen soon. Here we are almost 20 years later, and this has not happened. This clearly confused the members and led them to certain other expectations that weren't borne out.

Another important failing was that we did not discuss the perspectives for the Soviet Union. Although things were starting to shake there, the entire CWI had ruled out the possibility that the Soviet Union and the other Stalinist countries would return to capitalism. Yet just three years later, this is exactly what started to happen. This set in motion a huge chain of events that fundamentally altered the world situation, both economically and politically. It also had a major effect on the consciousness of workers in the US and internationally.

We did not prepare ourselves for these events at our 1986 conference.

We placed a lot of emphasis on the US labor movement, and for good reason. We explained the unions' traditions, including the struggles to change the unions themselves. We correctly explained how a working

class movement would tend to be channeled into and through the unions. But this was on the basis of the unions existence as it had stood up until that time. The collapse of the Soviet Union a few years later and the continued economic boom meant that a workers' movement was delayed far longer than we anticipated. As a result, the union leadership was given time to further consolidate its grip on the unions. And this leadership went even further to the right.

Other aspects of the document were really excellent. For instance, it explained the role of racism in capitalist America, how it is a central strategy of the capitalist class to divide and rule the working class. While correctly explaining this, it did not fall into the mistake that earlier socialists had made of simply thinking that racism was not a key issue in and of itself, of simply thinking that it could be more or less ignored and that it would go away after capitalism had been overthrown. What it did was to pose the issue as one for the entire working class. It put forward a program that could unite all workers in the struggle against the special oppression of racism. It also took a similar approach regarding the oppression of women.

Another weakness was that the document did not deal with the issue of the environment. This issue was not as acute then as it is now, but even at that time it could have been foreseen that it would be a critical issue.

The reason that it is useful to analyze this document is that it served as a general reflection of our thinking and a guide to our action.

At that time, we started publishing our newspaper, "Labor Militant." Edited and produced in New York City, the paper had some great strengths, and some weaknesses also. It correctly placed the blame for the lack of a mass fight back where it belonged - on the union leadership. We repeatedly placed demands on this leadership, who had the power to build a mass workers' movement.

Many on the left criticized our approach and refused to place demands on the leadership. Their reasoning was that this leadership is so corrupt that placing demands on them amounts to sowing illusions in this leadership within the rank and file. They claimed that this leadership would never move to mobilize workers. We answered in the first place by explaining that if you don't place demands on the leadership, you are in effect voiceless within the unions. If you are in

the midst of a contract struggle, for instance, what do you say? Do you simply call on the workers to organize themselves? In practice, this always comes off as making demands on the workers, and then when they don't carry out your demands, then you are in the position of criticizing the workers, rather than the leadership. Further, it is not correct to say that the entire leadership would never change. We pointed to the example of John L. Lewis, head of the miners' union in the 1930s. A right wing, conservative bureaucrat, Lewis shifted sharply to the left under pressure of a mass uprising of the workers in the early and mid 30s.

Many of those same critics also opposed the position of our comrades in Britain. There, "Militant" as it was known, was the Marxist wing of the British Labour Party. Fighting for a more radical, socialist position within this mass party of the British workers, Militant has built up a considerable support amongst British workers and youth. It had several Members of Parliament elected. It was regularly attacked by the big business press - always a sign that you are doing something right.

The left critics of Militant said that it was wrong to work inside this pro-capitalist party. Somehow, simply by being inside this party, Militant would become automatically tainted with opportunism. Exactly why this was so they never explained.

It is interesting to see where some of those critics of ours are today. In some cases, they have actually joined the union bureaucracy here in the US. In other cases, while they have not joined this bureaucracy, they fail to criticize those who have and fail to criticize those bureaucrats who hypocritically support some left-wing causes.

Our paper clearly showed how those who were involved in it were also directly involved in workers' struggles, especially strikes. However, a weakness of the paper was that it was too general at times. It would have very good general articles on the economy, on unemployment, on low wages. However, it did not often enough show the human face behind this. For this reason, often it was not lively enough.

In 1987, the stock market crashed. We took this as a confirmation of our perspectives. We put forward the slogan, "the process of the American revolution has begun." Our explanation of this was that a

revolution does not happen just out of the blue; there is a more drawn-out process, involving the break-down of social stability, that leads to a revolutionary situation. We almost categorically predicted that the US economy was now headed into a crisis from which there would be no serious, long term recovery. This would set in motion all sorts of revolutionary processes. Of course, we were dead wrong in this analysis of that stock market crash. (Incidentally, the entire CWI had this analysis.)

In 1990 we published a document called "Facing the Challenge of the '90s". In it, we dealt with the question of the return of capitalism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. It was impossible at that time to ignore this likelihood, and we accepted the possibility. However, even there, we underestimated the importance of the consciousness that existed. We explained that the reason for the return to capitalism was simply the lack of a revolutionary Marxist leadership in those countries, thus making it impossible for workers to find the revolutionary socialist road. In retrospect, however, it is clear that the mood, the consciousness in those countries was different from how we saw matters. It is clear that "socialism" had become so synonymous with the rotten Stalinist bureaucracies in the minds of the great majority of workers that there was no interest in socialism of any sort.

While posing the possibility of a political revolution and the building of healthy socialist societies as a possible outcome of the events of that time, we also considered other possibilities. One possibility we raised was the "Lebanonization" of some of those societies. "Religious and national divisions could explode out of hand." In the years that followed, this is exactly what happened in Yugoslavia, for instance.

The main bulk of the document was devoted to combating the triumphalist propaganda of US capitalism of those years. "We have won" chortled the Wall Street Journal. Another capitalist historian, Francis Fukuyama, claimed that we were facing "the end of history" in which stable capitalist societies would be built everywhere and would just go on and on forever. We quoted Karl Marx: "Capitalism is not an absolute, but only an historical mode of production corresponding to a definite and limited epoch in the development of the material conditions of production." It must be borne in mind that this was an extremely difficult period. The capitalist propaganda was affecting all layers of society, including the anti-capitalist left. Among the youth, there was a general wave of individualism and concern for individual careers. Much of the left tended to capitulate to the reformist union leadership or even to the liberal Democrats. It was

vital that a harsh struggle against this be carried on, and "Facing the Challenge of the '90s" did this.

In its economic analysis, its political analysis, its analysis of world relations, it stressed the contradictions and the instabilities. It also correctly restated the basic points concerning the role of the union leadership, and concerning racism and sexism. While it overstated the case in some cases, and while it was not clear as far as how prolonged many of the processes would be, it was correct in standing against the prevailing thinking of the time. In other words, while it erred in emphasis and timing, it was much better to err in the direction it did rather than in the direction of conciliation to pro-capitalist forces.

It sought to bolster the members of Labor Militant and those around us in our struggle against reformism. As the following years showed, we were only partially successful in this effort.

Throughout this period, we involved ourselves in many different campaigns. We were involved in many strikes. We campaigned around the issue of domestic violence, which we alone on the left recognized as a political issue, not a personal one. We had one comrade who was intimately involved in the union struggle in his local - AFSCME Local 444. It is not an exaggeration to say that for some time Local 444 was probably the most left wing union local in the country. It supported campaigns to free socialists and trade unionists throughout the world. It took a strong position in favor of jobs for all.

In Oakland we had a major campaign to elect one of our members to the Oakland City Council. Although we never expected to get the comrade elected, this campaign got us out in the streets, talking with hundreds of ordinary workers, and helped define the difference between a capitalist politician and a workers' leader running for public office.

We were also very active internationally. We campaigned for the freedom of Mahmoud Masarwa, an Arab Israeli trade unionist and socialist who was imprisoned and tortured by the Israeli regime. We campaigned for trade union rights in Nigeria and South Africa. We sent comrades to Canada to make links with activists in the labor movement and in OCAP there. We sent a comrade to Mexico to make

links with the Mexican labor movement and sent a comrade to Chiapas to attend the first Zapatista conference in the heart of the jungle there.

A key event in what AFSCME Local 444 accomplished was the calling of a meeting on the issue of the need for a Labor Party at which the keynote speaker was Tony Mazzocchi. Mazzocchi was the former national Treasurer of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers union (OCAW). He had long spoken in favor of a labor party.

This meeting that Local 444 sponsored was the first public meeting specifically on this issue that Mazzocchi spoke at. The meeting was such a success that a follow-up meeting was held in New York City at which Mazzocchi spoke also. Members of Labor Militant played a key role in helping to organize and build for these meetings. Shortly following these two meetings, Mazzocchi called for the formation of "Labor Party Advocates" a group that would devote itself to advocating for the building of a Labor Party. Mazzocchi himself later said that it was the success of these two meetings that led him to found the LPA, and Labor Militant was the key to the success of these meetings.

The founding of LPA was a step forward at the time. It helped establish the idea of the need for a labor party in the minds of many union activists, even though this was only a small layer of the union membership itself. On the other hand, from its inception, LPA had problems. Mazzocchi was determined not to have any serious struggle with the rest of the union leadership, which was wedded to the Democrats. And the only way that such a struggle could succeed would be with the involvement of masses of union members. But the conservative approach of Mazzocchi and those around him ensured that this would not happen.

Members of Labor Militant were intimately involved in the building of LPA and its successor, the "Labor Party" (although it was never a true political party). We helped advertise it and helped build its meetings. We were delegates to its conventions.

However, some differences started to develop, starting with our perspectives for this Labor "Party". Some of us, a minority within Labor Militant, started to doubt how far it would go. We noticed in some of the strikes of the time, that no opposition to the conservative,

timid strike policies of the leadership developed. We reasoned that if an opposition around the issue of contracts and strikes didn't develop, then what were the chances of such a true rank-and -file opposition developing around the issue of a Labor Party? And if there was not a real push from below, then what would be the base for this new party? We certainly didn't see Mazzocchi really leading very much.

We, the minority in the group, started to also raise some more general questions on perspectives. We started to ask whether a mass movement would initially be most likely to channel itself through the traditional workers' organizations in the US - the unions. We were starting to see how stifled the unions were by their own leadership, and we reasoned that when workers moved to fight that they might feel forced to fight outside the unions in order not to have to deal with this leadership. We started to raise the possibility that new movements could more easily develop through community organizations, single-issue organizations, etc. The majority within Labor Militant, especially the majority of the leadership, disagreed with this emerging view.

A difference in approach also developed. Some, this same minority, started to feel that the group was tending to put too much energy into simply building the Labor "Party" without sufficiently fighting for our program within the LP. We felt that the socialist program was not being raised enough.

A struggle within the organization was in the offing. In retrospect, it is clear that the majority of the comrades in Labor Militant had developed incorrect methods of working. They were not clear enough on the role of the "progressive" wing of the union hierarchy. They did not sufficiently struggle to build an independent base in the unions and in the Labor "Party". They had become prey to the same pressures that others in the anti-capitalist left were subject to. Unfortunately, because of how spread out over the entire country we were, this only became clear too late.

The majority, whose leadership were operating as a secret faction for some time, struck the first blow, with a long document on lack of democracy within the organization. The rest of us, the minority, were taken completely aback by these charges. We had worked together on the leading bodies of the group for years and had never heard such complaints from them. They appeared to come out of nowhere. In fact, they came from the membership of the branches where this

minority was leading things (mainly on the East Coast); it was a complaint against this same majority leadership, which the majority successfully turned against us, the minority. Another clever aspect of this approach was that they successfully diverted attention away from the political differences that were developing.

A huge, bitter, ugly faction fight developed. We, the minority, officially declared ourselves a faction, meaning that we had the right to organize amongst ourselves within the larger group. The majority continued to function as a faction, without admitting that this is what they were doing.

The founding convention of the Labor Party came up in early 1992. Our position had been that this convention should nominate a candidate for president of the United States. To the argument that it was "too late" we answered that such a candidacy would really mobilize millions of working class people and transform politics in the United States. This was the official position in our newspaper. However, at the convention itself the majority faction refused to call for this. They held a secret meeting in which they agreed to back off from this position, but never informed the minority of this decision. Then, later, after we in the minority continued to fight for the "official" position that this convention should put forward a candidate for president - then we were accused of "violating discipline" by taking a public position which was contrary to that of the organization - a position that had been changed behind closed doors.

What hypocrisy! This struggle got dirtier and dirtier as it progressed, with all sorts of lies and slanders thrown against us. Underneath it all, the reason for all of this was that these comrades reflected demoralization within the group as a whole. We had not prepared ourselves properly for the prolonged booms of the 1980's and later of the '90s. We had not prepared for the return to capitalism in the former Stalinist world, and the consequences of this. We had not prepared ourselves for how delayed the workers' movement would be. Some, a minority of us, continued to believe in the independent struggle of the working class, while we sought to understand these new and unexpected developments. Others abandoned hope and sought to make accommodations with the liberal wing of the union hierarchy. Of course, they could not admit this so they did their best to cover this up with all sorts of organizational and personal accusations.

The leadership of the CWI internationally involved itself in this

struggle. Or, to be more accurate, they helped foment this struggle. The reason was the following: While it was true that the entire international was too centrally organized, some of the leading members who were most "democratic" in their orientation were part of the minority of the leadership of Labor Militant.\* One comrade, in particular, had been a member of the leading body of the CWI internationally and had left that body exactly because he objected to many of their methods. He was seen as a threat to be eliminated at all costs. The leading members of the CWI internationally were simply biding their time, waiting to act against him. Another member of the minority had been a delegate to the international delegate body. In this role, he had repeatedly raised issues that made the international leadership uncomfortable (such as that of the environment). He, too, was seen as a threat.

Now, in retrospect, all of this seems incredibly petty. How could alleged revolutionaries act in this way? Some will be inclined to "explain" it in terms of the individual qualities of those involved. But why did those qualities come to dominate?

The explanation lies in the incorrect perspectives of the entire CWI, as explained above. Linked with this was an overly centralized way of functioning. All major ideas had to emanate from one or two top leaders. Any other source was suspect. During the boom years, and when Stalinism was still alive, the world was a much simpler place, and these methods were not an absolute barrier to the organization's developing. More or less correct perspectives were developed and a more or less correct method of functioning was developed.

But what happened when the perspectives were not borne out? Then a confusion and a questioning developed amongst the membership. The majority of the leadership reacted by circling their wagons to defend themselves. Rather than listen to the questions and doubts and encourage an open discussion, they acted to squash any criticism. Hundreds of solid, working class members drifted into inactivity and out of the group in Britain, where the organization was strongest. As this happened, the leadership reacted by being even more defensive.

So it was that this bitter, dirty internal struggle was carried to the international level. There, it must be said, that the leadership of all the other sections of the CWI (except one) proved themselves unequal to

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\* In retrospect, I must admit that it was not only the International but also Labor Militant itself. This will be discussed later.

their task. One by one, they lined up behind the international leadership without even questioning what was happening. In the case of the one leader who took an independent position, insisting on making decisions based on his own understanding of the issues, a dirty war was started against this individual and he and his entire group were driven out of the CWI ultimately.

In other words, the CWI leadership took a policy of "rule or ruin." In most cases, they ended up doing both. After the minority faction in the US was officially expelled (1996), the rest of the group rapidly degenerated. For a year or so, their entire effort was devoted to building the Labor "Party". When this came to naught, then they took up other campaigns. Internally, they fought amongst themselves and continued to decline.

The expulsion of the Minority Faction came as a shock to those comrades - five in all. They had devoted themselves to the building of this group. They had made huge sacrifices. With the possible exception of the one leading comrade, who was well hated by the international leadership, any of the other four could have "recanted" and remained in the group, but towards what ends? We would have had to abandon the very principles that drove us to revolutionary politics in the first place.

However, the expulsion certainly was a huge blow to us; it was a shock, even though we were expecting it by that time. In reality, it took some time for us to orient ourselves. For several of us, who had been full timers, it meant figuring out how to make a living. One of us went into moving furniture. Two others went back to work in construction. In part, we all had to simply get out personal lives in order once again.

But we never abandoned the revolutionary project. Our first order of business was to figure out just what the hell had happened. In struggling to understand how the CWI had become so morally corrupted, we were forced to come to grips with some issues. First and foremost was the matter of perspectives. We were forced to stand face to face with the errors of our perspectives as explained above. Further, we had to reconsider the issue of how we had organized. We had to admit that the entire CWI had been too centralized. Traditionally, Marxist groups held to the organizational principle that when the majority in the group takes a position on an issue, that everybody has to defend that position publicly. There could continue

to be internal debate, but the public face must be united.

But this is not how it always was within the Marxist movement. Even the Bolsheviks had huge public battles. Different sides even published their own papers at times. And in this confusing period, how could different approaches and positions be really tested out, and argued out, if we could not argue them in front of a wider layer of workers?

We concluded that different opinions, including minority opinions, must be allowed to see the light of day, that members must be allowed to air their views openly. Only in this way could the real energy and creativity of a new movement, especially a youth movement, really be brought into our group.

Politically, we were far more open to dealing with new issues. We started to discuss the issue of the environment more. We also held debates on issues such as whether HIV causes AIDS.

We also maintained our involvement in the struggle. In Chicago, our lone comrade was intimately involved in the Direct Action Network that developed out of the protests in Seattle in 1999. Arising from this, a wing of DAN came together to focus on the working class movement. In the SF Bay Area, we maintained our union involvement. In 1999, a crisis developed in the carpenters union around an inferior contract that the leadership was forcing down the throats of the members. The two members of what was then Labor's Militant Voice were instrumental in helping to organize a widespread wildcat strike against this contract, and one of those comrades was subsequently expelled from the union as a result of this (as well as his long history of struggle against this union's hierarchy). We maintained our close involvement in AFSCME Local 444 also. We also organized and helped to build the Campaign for Renters Rights. This tenants' rights group helped renters take direct action - picketing etc. - against abusive landlords. In San Diego, we were instrumental in initiating the California Coalition Against Poverty, which is partially modeled after the Ontario (Canada) Coalition Against Poverty, where a key organizer is also a member of Labor's Militant Voice.

Politically, we have helped develop several issues: In the first place, we have tried to clarify the general process of the working class being

driven back by the capitalist offensive. The key task for the anti-capitalist movement, we believe, is to explain this process and put forward a program and strategy to reverse this offensive. This can only be done, of course, if this anti-capitalist movement is involved in the day-to-day struggles of workers - the struggles for decent housing, for medical care, for a good education, against racism and sexism, and for decent jobs and decent wages, etc. We believe that the anti-capitalist forces must not simply abandon their position that capitalism is at the root of these issues, but rather that it must learn to link this overall view with the specifics of any individual struggle. In so doing, it will help the movement draw wider conclusions. Also, a key ingredient that we must bring to these struggles is the tactic of "direct action". This means that workers and young people must not feel bound by the capitalist laws and rules; that it must be prepared to challenge and defy these rules on a mass basis. This is what the wildcatting carpenters did in the bay area in 1999; this is what the youth (and some workers) did in Seattle in that same year.

Around the world, the working class is on the defensive against the attacks of global capitalism. A key task of the anti-capitalist movement is to unite to help reverse this process, to help the working class build a movement to take back what has been taken from it over the recent decades.

We have also drawn some conclusions regarding how an anti-capitalist movement will grow and develop. In the old CWI the belief was that this body, itself, would build a leadership that, when linked with the masses of workers, would be capable of overthrowing the capitalist system. This view is clearly not viable. We point to the way in which the First International, the International Working Man's Association, grew. It developed out of all sorts of different forces in the working class movement. We believe that this is how a new, truly working class international will develop - as a general anti-capitalist international. Within this international there will be all sorts of different trends - anarchism, revolutionary socialism, elements of social democracy. As a workers movement rises more and more to its feet, different ideas, programs, strategies and tactics will be tried and tested out. Some will be found wanting. Others will be combined together. In this way, a truly revolutionary leadership will be built that will be capable of leading the overthrow of the capitalist system.

Today, no task could be more pressing. In a form totally different from how Fukuyama posed it, the true "end of history" threatens. It looms as a threat to the very existence of human society itself. This

threat takes the shape of wars, environmental destruction and the end of the oil economy as the peaking of oil production nears. Far from being able to resolve any of these problems, capitalism stands at the root cause of them. No task could be more urgent than developing an understanding of how capitalism functions, how this understanding can be linked with the day-to-day issues that workers face, arising from this how this reactionary system can be ended once and for all and building and organizing around this.

#### **Addendum**

*As explained, this document was written over 15 years ago. A lot has changed since then, including my own personal situation, including the fact that Labor's Militant Voice no longer exists and my relationship with my then fellow comrades – those of us who founded LMV – has been ruptured.. That is a story in itself. I, myself, have personally moved on, but others have not. If comrades want to hear about that, I will reproduce some of the documents to explain my view of what happened. However, I'm not so sure it would be very helpful. I will say, though, that I agree more in retrospect with the criticisms the majority comrades of Labor Militant made about that group being too centrally organized. This refers, in particular, to the main leading comrade of the group. That, however, was not really the issue as the political debate that is explained above shows. It is unfortunate that Socialist Alternative – what Labor Militant became – has gone even further down the road of cohabiting with the union leadership. And the whole complaining about over centralization has also been shown to be a smoke screen since things are even worse in Socialist Alternative, with the heavy hand of the full time apparatus acting to discourage independent thinking and any voice of differences.*