



# the yankee radical

Institute for  
Democratic  
Socialism

(617) 354-5078 <http://dsaboston.org/>

April 2001

## Let's Fight Sweatshops!

by Lisa Gallatin and J. Martov

This Spring the struggle against sweatshops moves into two legislative arenas.

In the Boston City Council, local unions, including UNITE (Union of Needle Trade, Industrial and Textile Employees) and the Greater Boston Central Labor Council, along with The Workmen's Circle, a Jewish cultural and social justice organization, plan to submit an ordinance which would require that all apparel purchased by the City be certified as sweatshop-free. Similar policies have been adopted in approximately 30 municipalities around the country from Fall River, MA to, most recently, New York City; Mayor Menino has expressed past support. This procurement strategy has also been successfully pursued by campus anti-sweatshop groups.

This particular campaign grew out of the Workmen's Circle annual children's protest against sweatshops. Ini-

tiated in 1997 by 11 year-old students in the Workmen's Circle Shule (Sunday school), the children's protest offers an opportunity to engage in social justice protest as a family activity. Once the Boston procurement ordinance is taken up by the City Council, activists will request that the public hearing be scheduled at the end of the day, making it possible for grade school and high school aged children to attend. The Workmen's Circle will be organizing a rally and testimony led by and geared toward children — but for everyone!

Over at the Statehouse, Rep. Jay Kaufman (D-Lexington) and Sen. Diane Wilkerson (D-Boston) are lead sponsors of the Workplace Disclosure Bill, which would compel state vendors and subcontractors to disclose the working conditions of their employees. This information would then be made public and "inform the state procurement process." The bill would monitor com-

pliance with local requirements for wages, maximum work hours, health, safety, child labor, forced labor, anti-discrimination policies, the right to organize, and adherence to the International Labor Organization's Fair Labor Standards. Key backers include the Massachusetts Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice and the American Jewish Congress.

The hearing date for the Workplace Disclosure Bill is Tuesday, April 23, 11 AM at the Statehouse, Room B 1. Supporters of both pieces of legislation urge DSAers to attend hearings and write or call our elected officials.

For more information on the City Council bill call Lisa Gallatin at the Workmen's Circle, 617-566-6281 or [wcircle@gis.net](mailto:wcircle@gis.net). For the Statehouse bill call Mass. Interfaith Committee, 617-574-9296.

### FTAA —



for

### Environment?

Speakers TBA

Tuesday, April 24

6:30 – 9:00 PM

Cambridge Library,  
45 Pearl St.

T: Red Line to Central Sq.

The DSA co-sponsored series of monthly talks on economic globalization continues. Our April forum is part of Northeast Global Alternatives 2001 (see Mike Prokosch, pg. 4). Although we've been unable to nail down a specific speaker before the YR deadline, we're bound to come up with somebody. (If you want to make sure, call 617-497-5273.) Anyway, the topic is the possible impact of FTAA — the latest proposed "free trade" treaty — on the New England environment. Last month's talk with Kevin Murray of Grassroots International reporting back from the World Social Forum in Brazil was one of our best attended.

## Working Family Agenda 2001

by David Knuttunen

The Working Family Agenda has proved it can deliver for the people of Massachusetts. In the 1999 legislative session we won over a billion dollars in new wages and benefits for working families and retirees, including a 50% increase in the state Earned Income Credit, a \$25 million dollar increase in the senior pharmacy assistance program, nearly \$100 million additional

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By Mike Pattberg

### In Case You Missed It

A sparsely attended Boston DSA members meeting met last January to elect an Executive Board for another year and discuss political priorities. It was decided to continue our work with the Working Family Agenda since the WFA combines many good issues in one package, provides a handy voting guide at election time, and targets center-right dominated state politics rather than the mostly liberal Congressional delegation. It was also agreed to take part in local anti-sweatshop efforts.

As for the Executive Board, all current members were re-elected with the exception of Harris Gruman, who declined another term as Chair to focus on his new position as Director of Massachusetts Neighbor to Neighbor. Former DSA National Director Jack Clark will replace Harris as Chair. Returning E Board members include Dave Knut-tunen, Martha Older, Vic Bloomberg, Jack Bray, and Barry Hart. Dave Keil and Mike Pattberg were also re-elected Yankee Radical editors; so was Joe Morgan as Treasurer Emeritus. In addition, two new recruits were “drafted,” Allen Graubard and Adele Greenberg.

The DSA January forum was a lively exchange of views on the prospects for third-party politics before about 30 people. Rose Gonzalez of the Green Party and David Cohen of the United Electrical Workers contended that now is the time to build a third party of the left; outgoing Boston DSA Chair Harris Gruman and Rich Marlin of the state AFL-CIO responded that this view is unrealistic and counterproductive, advocating insurgencies in Democratic Party primaries instead.

Some arguments never change.

### NOW March on D.C.

President Bush is off to a fast start. While issuing a number of Presidential orders which have appalled trade unionists, environmentalists and public health advocates, he hasn't neglected to re-impose the “global gag rule” of the Reagan-Bush years on U.S. funding for international family planning. He has also appointed anti-abortion hardliners like John Ashcroft and Tommy Thompson to key government positions. In response, the National Organization for Women is organizing a march on Washington for Sunday, April 22, to support abortion rights and mobilize for the next

Supreme Court nomination. Buses depart from the Boston Common 11 PM Saturday after a 10 PM rally; tickets are \$65. (617-232-1017)

### EJ in the 'Hood 2001

The sixth annual conference of the Greater Boston Environmental Justice Network will take place Saturday, April 28, 9:00 AM – 3:00 PM, at the Reggie Lewis Track and Athletic Center at Columbus Ave. & Malcolm X Blvd., Roxbury (T: Orange Line to Roxbury Crossing). Workshops on public health, transportation and air quality, development, etc. For more details call Liza Goldman Huertas, Alternatives for Community and Environment, 617-442-3343 x27.

### Happy Birthday, Workmen's Circle

Democratic Socialists of America and its predecessor organizations share some history with the Workmen's Circle, including the late Julius Bernstein, who was a leader in both groups. To celebrate their 100th anniversary, this Jewish cultural and social justice organization is staging a somewhat unusual festival, “From the Lower East Side to Blue Hill Avenue.” The festival flyer urges you to “stroll through a re-creation of an old Boston Jewish neighborhood. Pick up a nosh at the local deli. Take a seat at the children's shule and learn a bit of Yiddish. Cast your ballot in the garment workers' union vote.” Photographs, children's craft activities, live klezmer music, dancing. Sunday, April 29, 2-5 PM, Temple Regim, 1860 Washington St., Newton. Adults \$15, children \$5. (617-566-6281)

### Limousine Liberals Fight Union

Businessman Gerald Schuster stated in Boston Magazine that “unions have no place, in my opinion, in the health-care industry.” This is a problem because Schuster and his wife Elaine own the Wingate nursing home in Wilbraham, MA, and have been stonewalling efforts by SEIU 285 to negotiate a contract ever since the Wingate caregivers voted for the Union two years ago. The NLRB has cited management for numerous violations of labor law, and Wingate is on the Department of Public Health “watch list” because of past serious problems with the quality of care.

Nonetheless the Schusters, whom

SEIU describes as “top Democratic Party fundraisers and prominent liberal socialites,” have continued to make major donations to the Democratic National Committee. SEIU 285 is asking the DNC to publicly refuse all money from the Schusters until they clean up their act; we should ask our Democratic Party elected officials to speak out as well (617-442-4100 x 305).

### Cuban Embargo

Joining with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Pope, the Massachusetts Chapter of the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement has called upon Congress to end the U.S. economic blockade of Cuba. Copies of the LCLAA resolution are available from Gabe Camacho of the Hotel Workers Local 26 (gabe@bostonhotelunion.org). Congressman Charlie Rangel (D-NY) has proposed a bill to abolish the embargo which has no chance of passing, but may be useful to organize around.

The AFL-CIO still supports the blockade, although in 1999 it called for allowing medicine, medical supplies and food to the island. The October 2000 issue of *Labor Notes* carries a well-argued piece, “The AFL-CIO Should Oppose the Blockade of Cuba,” written from a democratic socialist viewpoint essentially in line with past DSA resolutions (www.labornotes.org). Also worth reading is another article by one of the authors, Sam Farber, on his recent trip to Cuba in *New Politics* #29 (www.wpunj.edu/newpol).

### Shorter Takes

MASS-CARE has again submitted their single-payer health care bill — the Massachusetts Health Care Trust — to the new State Legislature, this time with 14 Senators and 52 Representatives already signed on. Gayle Neave suggests computer literate DSAers check out the MASS-CARE Web site (www.masscare.org) to see if their legislators are on board (S.599/H.2165)...

Longtime member Geraldine Whitmyer from Danvers would like to come to DSA meetings again but finds it difficult, since she's become slightly disabled and is without transportation. She's wondering if anyone in her area planning to attend a DSA event could give her a ride? (508-774-0992)...

Thanks to Webmaster David Knut-tunen, Boston DSA has a new Web site, <http://dsaboston.org>.

## The Working Family Agenda 2001 Legislative Agenda

### INCREASING ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING

- Housing Bond Bill
- Increase funding for affordable housing (RAFT, public housing maintenance, expiring-use preservation, Housing Trust Fund)

### INVESTING IN CHILDREN AND EDUCATION

- Increasing the Foundation Budget to reduce class sizes and provide all-day kindergarten
- Expand after-school programs

### INCREASING ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

- Increase the tobacco tax to expand health insurance for the uninsured
- Reduce the cost of prescription drugs

### EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY AND SECURITY

- Increase the minimum wage by indexing it to the cost of living
- Welfare – Help families overcome barriers to employment and expand education and training opportunities
- Paid family leave

### FAIR TAXATION

- Act to Simplify the Income Tax — Tax capital gains at the same rate as wages and salaries — \$400 million in NEW STATE REVENUE

#### **WFA 2001 – Cont'd from page 1**

spending on child care subsidies, and a \$1.50 increase in the state minimum wage. In 2000, we proved the power of our coalition by electoral victories, including the ouster of 10-year State Rep William McManus of Worcester by Working Family Agenda ally Jim Leary (see January 2001 *Yankee Radical*). The strategy of the Working Family Agenda – combining the efforts of progressive organizations and progressive legislators with grassroots, door-to-door organizing – clearly works.

Boston DSA has again endorsed the WFA for 2001 (see sidebar). Agenda items target affordable housing, increased funding for after-school and education, and increased access to health care. One bill resumes the struggle to index the minimum wage to inflation. Other bills would help families adversely impacted by welfare “reform,” and provide paid family leave for Massachusetts’ working parents. And the WFA has jumped on the “tax simplification” band wagon – by demanding that capital gains be taxed at the same rate as wages and salaries. No more special deals for those special interests (rich folks)! Now how simple (and equitable) is that?

DSA will be helping the Working Family Agenda effort by issuing action

alerts, and urging members in targeted areas to call their legislators in support of agenda items. If you want to get make sure you get the alerts, call the DSA office at (617) 354-5078, or call DSA Project Coordinator David Knuttunen at (781) 398-0278. Alerts will also be posted to the new DSA web site at [www.dsaboston.org](http://www.dsaboston.org).

Endorsers of the 2001 Working Family Agenda include: Massachusetts AFL-CIO; Coalition Against Poverty/Coalition for Social Justice; Commonwealth Coalition; CPPAX; DSA; Educational Association of Worcester; Family Economic Initiative; IUE Local 201; Leominster Spanish American Center; Mass. Campaign for Children; Mass. Federation of Teachers; Mass. Project for Family Economic Self Sufficiency; Mass. Senior Action Council; National Organization for Women; Neighbor to Neighbor; North Worcester County Central Labor Council; Parents United for Child Care; SEIU Local 285; Tax Equity Alliance of Massachusetts; United for a Fair Economy; Women’s State-Wide Legislative Network; Worcester/Fitchburg Building Trades Council; Worcester/Framingham Central Labor Council.

*David Knuttunen is a member and former Chair of the Boston DSA Exec Board.*

## Question 5 Post-Mortem

*By Alan Meyers*

In the spring of 1999, a group of activists launched a campaign for a statewide binding referendum designed to stop the transformation of health care in Massachusetts into a commodity marketed primarily for the benefit of large corporations. Question 5 would have mandated the state government to create a plan that guaranteed health care coverage for all residents of the state by July 1, 2002; it would also have placed a moratorium on the conversion of not-for-profit hospitals and health plans to for-profit status, implemented a patients’ bill of rights, and required that at least 90% of all health care expenditures be for patient care, research, and education, and no more than 10% for administrative expenses. The movement was led by the Ad Hoc Committee to Defend Health Care, a group of health care workers including nurses, physicians, and mental health clinicians, and was joined by other progressive organizations.

The movement for Question 5 faced daunting obstacles. After nearly 100,000 signatures were gathered, the legislature offered to pass a managed care reform bill – now known as Chapter 141 – in exchange for the abandonment of Question 5. The deal split the coalition of organizations backing Question 5, which effectively hobbled its organizing efforts, and consequently most voters never heard the arguments in favor of the necessarily complex and dense language of Question 5. And arrayed against Question 5 were all the forces of the insurance “indus-

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# Northeast Global Alternatives 2001

By Mike Prokosch

It has been more than a year since the Battle of Seattle. During that time demonstrations in the US, Asia, and Europe have confronted and sometimes confounded meetings of the WTO, the IMF, the World Bank, and the other institutions of globalization. They have met with striking success. Advocates of corporate globalization have been put on the defensive and forced to change their rhetoric if not their practice. In some cases popular protest has concretely impacted the policies and practices of decision-makers. More importantly for the long run, in the words of Newsweek Magazine, there are now two visions of globalization on offer, one led by commerce, one by social activism.

The next major event in the construction of the new global economic order will occur in April in Quebec City when negotiations resume for a new Free Trade Area of the Americas agreement. This agreement would expand the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to all of the Americas. Trade ministers and officials from all of the countries of the hemisphere, except Cuba, will meet behind the walls of Quebec City. Outside demonstrators from Quebec, the US, Canada, and oth-

er countries of the Americas will gather to demand that the people's voice be heard.

In both Canada and the US demonstrations are planned in a number of cities leading up to the Quebec meeting. Activists from labor and community groups have begun to mobilize for these demonstrations and to coordinate internationally. They hope that the events surrounding the FTAA meeting can serve to cement ties between popular movements on both sides of the border. Given the long-standing ties between Quebec, the Maritimes, Newfoundland, and New England there is a solid foundation for regional cooperation.

As important as protest has been and will remain as a means to check the unbridled growth of corporate globalization, we must begin the task of creating alternatives. A vision is needed that can unite the many social forces who find themselves in opposition to the dominant discourse that the market will determine everything. In Quebec, a world people's summit is being planned that will discuss these alternatives. There is a growing recognition throughout the world that the globalization from below movement which has emerged to challenge the corporate

version offers real opportunities to promote international understanding and social justice.

To that end, the Northeast Global Alternatives 2001 will be held in Boston April 22 – May 1 in conjunction with the FTAA negotiations. Sponsored by Jobs with Justice, the Campaign on Contingent Work, Boston Global Action Network and United for a Fair Economy, Northeast Global Alternatives 2001 will be a week-long series of forums and events bringing together people from a broad spectrum of society to identify the impact of globalization on New England and Eastern Canada and to propose solutions to problems the region faces. The events will tackle the difficult questions of how people can organize and mobilize locally, regionally, and globally to promote their interests. In addition, groups from around New England will be encouraged to hold similar meetings in their own localities or concurrent events on specific facets of the globalization process (for instance, media, energy policy, or sports).

The tentative line-up of events for Northeast Global Alternatives is as follows:

## 1. Fighting for basic labor rights

*continued on page 5*

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### **Post Mortem – Cont'd from page 3**

try", which spent well over \$5 million, and \$4 million in television advertising alone, to defeat it. The Yes on 5 Coalition had no money at all for TV ads and only \$10,000 (donated by the Massachusetts Nurses' Association) to spend on radio spots in the final days of the campaign. Yet Question 5 lost by a margin of only 52% to 48% – a swing of 2 percentage points and it would have won – and in fact it did win most of eastern and western Massachusetts, thanks in large part to the efforts of some tireless organizers.

The story of Question 5 reveals the depth of the voters' dissatisfaction with the status quo in health care. The narrow margin of its defeat in the face of an overwhelming disadvantage in funding and advertising proved that voters

want change and that this desire can be harnessed. This lesson has not been lost on the authors and backers of Question 5. While the Ad Hoc Committee to Defend Health Care is playing an active role in the implementation of Chapter 141, the managed-care reform bill whose passage was a direct consequence of the campaign for Question 5, discussions are in progress about another run in the 2002 election. The question will not be the same – indeed, state law prohibits the same question from being repeated in the subsequent two election cycles. But the time may be right to place the argument before the electorate for a single-payer, publicly-financed universal health insurance system: a "Massachusetts Medicare" which would exclusively cover all

residents of the state in a comprehensive, universal, uniform, simplified, and exclusive plan. Such a plan has been advanced in the legislature for several years by a coalition of organizations under the umbrella of MassCare ([www.masscare.org](http://www.masscare.org)). Placing the question on the ballot is not without risk, as it will surely provoke another massive response by the insurance "industry", who would be the big loser in any such plan. But the battle for Question 5 shows that a referendum campaign has the potential to impel forward the movement for fundamental change in health care like no other single strategy. Stay tuned.

*Alan Meyers is a pediatrician at Boston Medical Center and a member of DSA.*

# Radicals at Sea

*Reviewed by Mark Schneider*  
**Working for Utopia, 1937-1953.** By Mark Walker. Quixotic Press, Concord Ca. 317 pgs.

At eighteen, Mark Walker abandoned his native central Maine for what would become a fifteen year stint as a merchant seaman, itinerant worker, and Trotskyist revolutionary. Arriving in Boston in 1937 during the Depression, he plunged into the intellectual maelstrom that characterized leftist working class circles in those days. Sixty years later he has remembered these events, having survived with his idealism, if not his Marxist certainty, intact. *Working for Utopia* shows the difference between the radicalized labor movement of the late 1930s and the relatively complacent state of labor today.

When the young Walker's farming and lumbering parents split up, he was

sent to the equivalent of an orphanage. There he graduated high school, was accepted at Bowdoin, and declined enrollment for lack of funds. In like fashion did tens of thousands of intellectually capable youths wind up in working class jobs; they brought their curiosity, courage, and frustrated ambition with them to work. Mark and a buddy took a cheap room in Charlestown, near Sullivan Square, surviving on peanut butter sandwiches while working at dead end jobs and exploring the big city.

A Boston Common orator led young Walker to a brief membership in the West End branch of the Young Communist League. When one of his comrades was dramatically expelled for talking with a Trotskyist, Walker protested and was himself kicked out. Later, his relentless curiosity led him to throw in his lot with the fledgling So-

cialist Workers Party.

The reviewer here offers a disclosure to YR readers: I joined the same party some thirty-odd years later, stayed for about the same time, and followed roughly the same ideological trajectory as the author. I knew many of the people described in this memoir and therefore enjoyed the story more than I suspect some others will. Nonetheless, Walker's admirable blend of realism, idealism, and personal honesty should appeal to a wider left-wing public.

Walker turned his modest kitchen skills into seven years before the mast, first as a messmate and later as an able-bodied seaman. Here his story is at its best. We get a good look at the excitement and tedium of a young life at sea. Walker discovers tequila in Acapulco, loses his virginity in a San *continued on page 6*

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## **Global Alternatives – Cont'd from page 4**

**and standards.** Footloose corporations have become adept at searching the world for cheaper labor. The global economy has become like a vast hiring hall in which workers are, in effect, put into competition with each other to see who will work the cheapest with the fewest protections. The result is a race to the bottom. Reversing this means building a floor below which wages and working conditions cannot fall. And it means developing strategies to fight for the basic rights needed to enable people to organize to improve their wages and working conditions.

This forum will draw on examples from New England, Quebec, and Eastern Canada. Activists, workers, and experts will discuss campaigns such as living wage fights; innovative organizing campaigns by unions, immigrants, and contingent workers; anti-sweatshop fights; political fights for new legal protections; and efforts to protect the social safety net.

**2. Building a democratically-controlled community based economic sector.** Huge corporations that have little attachment to any locality shape the global economy. Communities are often at the mercy of decisions made by

faceless executives in corporations headquartered far away. Inner cities and rural areas are often bypassed completely by the global economy because they offer little opportunity for profit.

This forum will feature ways to create innovative community economic development strategies. Among strategic initiatives to be discussed: how unions and communities are bargaining around job retention and creation issues to preserve the local job base; lessons New England can learn from the rich experience in Quebec and the Maritimes with community loan funds and co-ops; and new community economic development strategies.

**3. Promoting economic stability, not capital mobility.** Global corporations are skilled at playing communities and governments against each other in a bidding war for incentives ranging from tax abatements to infrastructure improvements to direct grants. Governments face a choice: they can use public revenues for the public good and fight the race to the bottom by enacting regulations and promoting sustainable jobs, or they can accelerate that race by cutting regulations and engaging in a destructive competition for jobs.

**4. Creating a healthy environment.** Pollution flows easily across borders. In a drive to cut costs and increase profits, corporations pressure communities to lower environmental standards to attract or retain jobs. This forum will explore local and regional responses to environmental problems such as building labor and environmental coalitions; creating sustainable industries in fishing, logging, and agriculture; producing power in a sustainable manner; promoting effective public transportation.

**5. Linking up with others locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally.** Globalization presents common problems and opportunities for people across borders to address those problems. Local campaigns can be linked together as part of a strategic puzzle that offers a democratic alternative to the corporate global order.

*Mike Prokosch works with United for a Fair Economy. For information about the April 20-21 Quebec protests, call 617-524-8778, or [www.bostonglobalaction.org](http://www.bostonglobalaction.org). For more details about Northeast Global Alternatives 2001 (April 21-May 1), call Gail Nicholson at 617-338-9966, or [ccw@igc.org](mailto:ccw@igc.org).*

# Blacks and Reds: Lester Rodney and the Integration of Baseball

By Tom Gallagher

“The whole history leading up to Jackie Robinson has usually been that an electric light went on in the head of the noble Branch Rickey one morning and he ended baseball discrimination.” As the lean, white-haired Lester Rodney speaks in his living room in Ross-moor, the sprawling retirement community east of San Francisco, these events are now nearly half a century and three thousand miles removed. Important details now seem in danger of being lost forever. Given the power of the pen he once wielded and its influence in baseball’s integration, the former *Daily Worker* sportswriter might well have written the history himself. But everything in life — no matter how long a life it may be — is a matter of priorities, and in recent years Rodney has switched his from writing about sports to playing them. Had he taken the time to write the book, he might not have stayed in such extraordinary shape and might never have become the first top-

ranked tennis player in California’s 85 years-and-over bracket. So, for now, an important chapter in the story is known mostly to those who know Rodney — and who happen to ask. Rodney doesn’t mean to minimize the credit due the Dodgers president. It’s just that he knows there were a lot of other people generating the electricity that finally turned on that light.

Not the least of them was Rodney himself. In fact, by the time Robinson took his position at first base in Ebbets Field on April 15, 1947, more than a decade had passed since Rodney first took up the cause of integrating baseball as sports editor of the Communist Party’s New York *Daily Worker* newspaper. Today the concept of a “communist sportswriter” seems a very strange proposition. In Rodney’s day it was not quite so exotic, but still no one would confuse the *Daily Worker*’s sports department with the “toy department” of any other newspaper. By tradition, the

sportswriter’s job is merely to interpret the world of sports; the communist sportswriter’s job was to change it. The first thing Rodney tried to change was what the 1923 *Sporting News* called baseball’s “tacit understanding that a player of Ethiopian descent is ineligible.” The basics of the story are, of course, familiar to baseball fans: Rickey signed Jackie Robinson and took him from the Kansas City Monarchs of the Negro American League; sent him out of the country for a season of minor league ball in Montreal and finally put him in Ebbets Field the following year.

But until the 1995 publication of David Falkner’s *Great Time Coming: the Life of Jackie Robinson from Baseball to Birmingham*, no mainstream publication had ever provided any detail of how in 1936 “the *Daily Worker* began a steady and unremitting campaign for integration ... spearheaded by

*continued on page 7*

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## Radicals – Cont’d from page 5

Francisco warehouse, survives a storm at sea, and has other Dickensian adventures. Most important, he recalls the struggles between the independent Sailors’ Union of the Pacific (later the Seaman’s International Union) and the Communist Party-led National Maritime Union. The Trotskyists, naturally, backed the independent militants, who refused to subordinate the sailors’ interests to Soviet foreign policy. In their Popular Front period from 1935-1939, the Stalinists called for full cooperation with all Roosevelt administration policies, including an obnoxious “fink book” which allowed captains to finger troublesome sailors. The CP later reversed course with the signing of the Stalin-Hitler pact in 1939.

Walker’s life at sea spared him the intensity of land-based party branch life, but ruined most of his romances. He learned of Trotsky’s murder and of Pearl Harbor while aboard ship. The SWP opposed the U.S. declaration of

war, treating World War II as Debs had World War I. For this its leaders were imprisoned under the Smith Act. The party split, launching its youthful intellectuals such as Hal Draper, Max Shachtman, Irving Howe, and Dwight MacDonald into political careers more luminous than those of their former comrades. James P. Cannon, Joe Hansen, Farrell Dobbs, and George Novack, among Trotsky’s loyal followers in this split, remain entirely unknown. They deserve better portraits than the brief mention they get in Walker’s account; one suspects the author feared to bore his readers.

Nor does Walker tell us whether he tried to carry the party line on the War (his glass eye left him 4-F) among his shipmates. Maybe he wisely clammed up. A reasonable fellow with a sense of the mood around him, Walker drifted away from the movement after 1945, which is when this account really ends.

The Socialist Workers Party degen-

erated into a Castroist sect after its veteran leaders died in the late 1970s, and its few thousand members dwindled into a few hundred cultists, along with the rest of the Leninist left. Walker does not dwell on this disillusioning phase of the story. He is proud of his radical youth, which was born of his lived experience. He matured among Marxists who encouraged genuine discourse and free inquiry. Trotsky and his few thousand followers in the late 1930s championed a certain notion of democracy, emphasizing the totalitarian nature of Stalinism at a time when millions of “progressives” apologized for the famines, purges, show trials, and burgeoning gulags with little thought. Shorn of Marxist certainty, Walker’s refreshing utopianism survived undiminished, and he has something to say to a new generation of activists.

*Longtime rail labor activist Mark Schneider is a member of Transportation Communications Union 1089 and DSA.*

## Rodney – Cont'd from page 6

sports writer and editor Lester Rodney,” or noted that it was not even until “A year or so after the *Worker* began its push,” that “the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the most widely circulated Negro weekly in the nation, initiated its own campaign.” Rodney’s method was quite simple. He would ask questions other sportswriters wouldn’t or couldn’t. The first goal was to locate the exact whereabouts of that “tacit understanding” regarding black ballplayers. He recalls, “First we’d go to the top officials and they’d say, ‘There’s nothing written, it’s up to the club owners.’ We’d go to the owners and they’d say, ‘My heart is with you but the players would never stand for it.’ Then you go to the players and shoot that down.” A typical July 19, 1939 *Worker* story, “Big Leaguers Rip Jim Crow,” quoted members of the Cincinnati Reds. (The franchise often found its fate intertwined with that of Rodney’s organization: according to one team historian, each “crisis in affairs between the United States and Soviet Russia” brought new demands “that the management change the team’s name” despite the fact that “the Reds have been the Reds since 1869, one year before Nicolai Lenin was born and ten years before Stalin’s birthday.”) Manager Bill McKechnie claimed, “I’d use Negroes if I were given permission.” Pitcher Bucky Walters declared them “Some of the best players I’ve ever seen” and back-to-back no-hit pitcher Johnny Vandermeer concluded “I don’t see why they’re banned.” “Sensational stuff in 1939,” Rodney remembers.

In 1941 Rodney and his confederates stepped up the campaign, sending telegrams to every major league team owner asking them to try out black players. “The only fully positive response we got was from William Benswanger of the Pittsburgh Pirates. The next spring we arranged a tryout for Roy Campanella — who was about 20 then — and two other players. And then Benswanger came under intense pressure — I’ve never known the exact nature — not to hold the tryouts and he backed out as gracefully as he could. *Invisible Men*, Donn Rogosin’s 1983 history of the Negro Leagues, is fairly

typical of the short shrift usually accorded the Communists’ efforts, dismissing the Benswanger affair as a “non-existent tryout,” and concluding that “the black players and the black press were unimpressed by the Communist campaigns.” The Communists, however, clearly impressed at least one black player: Roy Campanella’s eponymous 1952 biography acknowledges that the *Daily Worker* had “pounded hard and unceasingly against the color line in organized ball.” What makes this recognition particularly compelling is the fact that the book’s author, *New York Daily News* sportswriter Dick Young, was known neither for left wing sympathies nor graciousness. It was the Hall of Fame catcher himself who insisted on it.

“You know, Jules Tygiel’s book (*Baseball’s Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy*) was the first to acknowledge our efforts and that wasn’t until 1983,” Rodney recalls. “In that Ken Burns series (the 1994 PBS documentary of baseball history) it mentions that Leo Durocher told a sportswriter that he would use some of the great Negroes in a minute on the Dodgers if he were given permission. I’m the sportswriter he told that to. Burns, of course, had a big corporate-funded series and he did manage to push the role of the Negro to the center, as he did with his Civil War series. But even PBS is not so radical on these things,” he adds with a grin, “as you can tell by how many radicals you’ll see on the McNeil-Lehrer news hour.” It’s probably less accurate to say that Rodney and the integration campaign — eventually including “End Jim Crow in Baseball” petitions with two million signatures gathered by the Young Communist League and labor organizations like the National Maritime Union — were written out of history than that they were just never written into it in the first place, although David Falkner’s recent book noted how “remarkable was the passion and the insistence of the campaign which was generally lost on white America — though not on those in government who were always vigilant on the twin menaces of communist agitation and black unrest.”

Foremost among the vigilant was

FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, who singled Rodney out for individual mention in *Masters of Deceit*. “We’re sort of considered folk heroes by many young people now, but things like that created problems for our children in high school in the 1950’s,” Rodney says today. Rodney himself was no Red Diaper Baby; he recalls his Republican father displaying a window sign in their Brooklyn house mourning the death of President Warren G. Harding in 1923. But then “in 1931 or 32 — during the depression — three of us rented a cold water flat on McDougal Street in Greenwich Village — ten dollars a month. We were there for the bohemian atmosphere, the cellar clubs, poetry readings. We were poor as hell but we didn’t know it.” Bohemianism never dulled Rodney’s interest in sports, so one thing that was clear to him about the Communists was that when they addressed sports it was an embarrassment. When he told them so in a letter to the *Worker*, he was invited in to discuss it and he wound up doing the occasional weekly piece — gratis. By 1936 the Communists were eager to shed sinister or foreign identifications in the public mind and entered their “Popular Front” period. “Communism Is Twentieth Century Americanism” replaced “Towards Soviet America” as the party’s slogan. The *Daily Worker* now wondered whether it should deal with popular concerns like sports on a more regular basis. When a poll of *Worker* readers came back 6-1 in favor of daily sports coverage, the paper asked Rodney to take it on. Of course, since this was the Communist party’s newspaper, the question would not be settled as simply as that — there were those who thought the paper should cover “people’s sports” like soccer, not “corporate sports” like baseball. But eventually the paper decided that a commitment to “Twentieth Century Americanism” required coverage of the “National Pastime.”

“I was a fan,” Rodney reiterates today. “That’s crucial. They couldn’t have hired just an ideologue to run the campaign. You had to know baseball.” Since Rodney usually operated as a one-man sports section it might take him a while to get to every sport, but there wasn’t *continued on page 8*

**Rodney – Cont'd from page 7**

much he missed. Given that more than three out of every four current National Basketball Association players are black, it will surprise some to know that there ever could have been an issue about letting blacks play the professional game, but there was. And the Worker was in the middle of it. “Joe Lapchick, who was the center on the original Celtics, coached the Knickerbockers, the first New York professional team, and his son Richard later told me that his father, a devout Catholic, said “That damned *Daily Worker* has done more good helping me to get Sweetwater Clifton (the team’s first black player) on the Knicks.” This came after Jackie Robinson and it just flowed out of it. There was no big fuss about it. We wrote about it, but not in a scolding way as if the Knicks are the only sinners. There was actually more work done on basketball integration in Boston (where the Celtics signed the first black NBA players) than in New York.”

It’s over forty years now since Rodney

left the Communist Party following publication of Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev’s speech acknowledging the crimes of former leader Joseph Stalin in 1956. While Rodney may now think of himself and his comrades as having been “rigid simpletons” back then, he has never renounced the goal of social equality that led him to join. When Rodney moved to LA in 1958 — coincidentally the same year as Walter O’Malley turned the Trolley Dodgers into Freeway Dodgers — he continued in journalism, eventually becoming religion editor of the *Long Beach Press Telegram*. After retiring, he joined the senior tennis circuit at age 65 with mixed results, but reached #7 ranking in Southern California in the 70+ bracket. From then on he has just outlasted or maybe outlived the opposition, eventually becoming the top ranked doubles combination in Southern California in the 80+ category.

Rodney still keeps his hand in journalism with the occasional article for the *Rossmoor News*, a weekly with a

circulation of 8,600. In a 1995 piece he explained the secret of his tennis success: a player’s best chance for attaining high ranking in any five year age bracket comes in the first year when they are still relatively “young” and he predicted that “Come 1996 yours truly will magically metamorphose from a tired old 84 to a frisky young 85.” And sure enough, after winning his first two singles tournaments Rodney finally achieved the number one spot — at age 85. For the moment, Rodney has dropped out of the tournament scene and just plays several times a week for fun. But we might look for a comeback in 2001, when he turns 90!

*Tom Gallagher is the YR’s Foreign Correspondent, currently stationed in San Francisco, and a former first baseman for the Sharks. This piece was drastically condensed from the 1999 Baseball History Review published by the Society for American Baseball Research, where Tom is described as “a socialist for all of his adult life and a Dodger fan for longer than that.”*



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