
Considerations on a Revolutionary Situation in the United States: Likely Triggering Factors, Potential Political Contours by M. Upshaw

This manuscript was submitted for publication in Revolution by an author who is a long-time student of the line of the Revolutionary Communist Party. For some time, the RCP has emphasized its responsibility of preparing for a revolutionary situation in this country. But Marxist-Leninists need to understand much more about the nature of revolutionary situations in general and the specific ways in which a revolutionary situation might develop in the United States. That is why we are enthusiastic about publishing this essay. Although it is built around hypothetical scenarios, the details of which are obviously somewhat arbitrary, the overall analysis goes a long way towards fleshing out just what a revolutionary situation might look like in this country

There are no miracles in nature or history, but every abrupt turn in history, and this applies to every revolution, presents such a wealth of content, unfolds such unexpected and specific combinations of forms of struggle and alignment of forces of the contestants, that to the lay mind there is much that must appear miraculous.

— Lenin, *Letters from Afar*

To be successful, insurrection must rely not upon conspiracy and not upon a party, but upon the advanced class. That is the first point. Insurrection must rely upon a *revolutionary upsurge of the people*. That is the second point. Insurrection must rely upon that *turning-point* in the history of the growing revolution when the activity of the advanced ranks of the people is at its height, and when the *vacillations* in the ranks of the enemy and *in the ranks of the weak, half-hearted and irresolute friends of the revolution are strongest*. That is the third point. And these three conditions for raising the question of insurrection distinguish *Marxism from Blanquism*.

— Lenin, *Marxism and Insurrection*

It's silly to get upset over the fact that the masses, at any given time, follow the ruling class. Of course they do: the ruling class generally has their allegiance. The point is that the ruling class has to lose that allegiance *just once* . . . and then it's a whole new ball game!

— Anonymous

What might a revolutionary situation look like in the United States? True, never has a revolution been made in an advanced capitalist country, and a full-scale challenge to this social order will present novel features and pose new prob-

lems. But are there historical and contemporary episodes from which general lessons can be drawn? In view of the current world situation, what are some of the possible "tripwires" for massive crisis? What might one expect in terms of duration and intensity? And what does ongoing analysis of the political economy and social fabric of "late imperial America" suggest about the onset and likely contours of a conjunctural crisis in this country? These are far from academic questions. But they require intense theoretical reflection.

While Mao, particularly in his post-1949 writings on the relationship between stages and leaps in social development, advanced Marxism's philosophical understanding of the basis for revolutionary transitions to a new level, Lenin had paid special attention to the development of revolutionary situations in the advanced countries, emphasizing that such situations are characterized by a sharp break from the ordinary flow of events, by the rapid contraction of a social order's absorptive capabilities and, with this, the sudden and mass perception of entirely new prospects.

Revolutionary situations by their very nature imply great contingency, complexity, and fluidity. But in considering the conditions of existence of a revolutionary situation in the United States, one is not dealing with an unknown (or unknowable) quantity but with a concrete social formation inserted into, and occupying a strategic position within, an international economic and political order that is itself defined by specific structures and alignments. And it is possible, given what can be learned from the past and discerned from the present, to project probable turns and combinations of events that might throw the United States into great disorder, perhaps even in the very near future.

To simulate in this way is not to cast about for the "best of all possible" revolutionary situations, nor, for that matter, to fixate on worst-case scenarios (and even the most "desirable scripts" are writ large with peril, danger, and potential for massive destruction). Rather, simulation is a creative and scientific anticipation of what is most likely to occur and what are likely to be the most favorable aspects residing in such situations.

This paper consists of three major sections. The first examines the general characteristics and historical emergence of revolutionary situations. The second section attempts to forecast some of the core developments that might make revolution the order of the day in the United States — four scenarios, each involving the potential for revolutionary crisis, are considered. The third section raises some general issues for further study and deliberation.

If revolution is a conscious act, it is also a leap into the untried and incalculable; but if revolution is compounded of exceptional circumstances, exceptionality is precisely the rule of revolution. To the lay mind, Lenin wrote, revolutionary situations appear miraculous. In an overall sense, this paper seeks to identify some of the laws and general features of just these sorts of miracles.

On Leninism and "Hot Mixes"

A revolutionary situation can be usefully conceptualized along three dimensions. First are its *deep structural causes*. Among such causes are the underlying political economy of a given social formation including its modes of integration into the imperialist world economy, the social and class structures of the formation, as they have evolved over particular historical periods, and, in relation to all of this, the social formation's "active past," more specifically, the alignments, movements, and struggles that have shaped its political terrain. Second are the *proximate causes* of a revolutionary crisis. These are the specific triggering events that shatter social stability or that at least begin to strain the social order in such a way as to call its "permanence" into question. History has shown not only that a convulsive chain of events can occur virtually overnight but also that precipitating conflicts can occur over the least expected of developments. Third is the actual *unfolding and resolution of revolutionary crisis*. This involves the ebb and flow of struggle in a situation that now threatens to transform basic power relations. Of defining importance is the fact that a crisis of this magnitude must be resolved within a very definite, typically brief, time frame (although its *ultimate* resolution will generally reside in a civil war that could last for years). The (relatively) long-term future of the system now turns on sudden displacements of the relation of forces around state power and a compressed cycle of action and reaction (or inaction) focused around the preservation or conquest of that state power.

The downfall of the Shah in Iran can be viewed through this conceptual prism. The longer-term causes of the 1977-79 crisis lay in the contradictory character of imperialist-sponsored development and transformation in the Iranian countryside and cities (see the important article by the Union of Iranian Communists [Sarbedaran], "The Forging of a Weak Link," in *A World to Win*, 1985, No. 2). The oil boom of the early 1970s led to a massive assault on the economy by foreign capital and domestic bureaucrat capital, throttling those sections of the bourgeoisie not tied to the Shah's inner circle and ruining vast sectors of the petty bourgeoisie. An associated run-up in military expenditure fueled inflation and balance of payments difficulties. Unplanned urbanization and agricultural stagnation were the underside of the oil bonanza, with massive unemployment one of its chief social expressions. A major catalyst of the explosion of urban discontent was the inability of the Shah to develop integrative political mechanisms that could adequately regulate social and economic modernization. Conflicts and contradictions grew within ruling circles, including a heightening of the estrangement of many mullahs (and the institutions under their control). The precipitants of the revolution lay in what the oil boom wrought: extreme political rigidity and economic mismanagement. Outrage and anger exploded into the open, embracing broad (and ever-broadening) segments of the population. By 1978 the regime was facing the most serious challenge to fifteen years of relatively stable rule. And here loomed a factor of enor-

mous importance, and one that is operative in any revolutionary situation: subsequent events would be profoundly influenced by how an embattled regime, in this case the Shah's, responded to mass discontent and organized protest, by how successfully a regime can combine repression with deception. That the Shah failed the initial tests of a regime in crisis had everything to do with the speed with which the old order collapsed.

In considering the "problem-field" of revolutionary conjunctures in imperialist countries, the experience and practice of the Bolsheviks stand as the necessary point of reference, and Lenin's political writings of the 1917 period repay close study. One of the more interesting of these pieces is *Letters from Afar* (V.I. Lenin, "First Letter," *Collected Works* [LCW], Vol. 23). The February Revolution, Lenin explains,

required a great, mighty and all-powerful "stage manager," capable, on the one hand, of vastly accelerating the course of world history, and, on the other, of engendering world-wide crises of unparalleled intensity — economic, political, national and international. Apart from an extraordinary acceleration of world history, it was also necessary that history make particularly abrupt turns, in order that at one such turn the filthy . . . monarchy should be overturned at *one stroke*.

This all-powerful "stage manager," this mighty accelerator was the imperialist world war. (p. 298)

The actual crisis, Lenin goes on to write, was precipitated

by the series of extremely severe defeats sustained by Russia and her allies. They shook up the old machinery of government and the old order and roused the anger of *all* classes of the population against them. . . .

But while the defeats early in the war were a negative factor that precipitated the upheaval, the *connection* between Anglo-French finance capital, Anglo-French imperialism, and Russian Octobrist-Cadet capital was a factor that hastened this crisis by the direct *organization of a plot* against Nicholas Romanov. (p. 301)

The Tsarist regime could absorb neither the economic chaos nor the social strain of a prolonged war; in some ways it was not even ready for such a war, in consequence of Russia's backward industrial base and ruined peasantry. Against a backdrop of battlefield defeats and the specter of mass risings, palace intrigues and conspiracies threatened the Tsar.

In assessing all of this, Lenin then makes an astonishing observation:

That the revolution succeeded so quickly and — seemingly, at the first superficial glance — so radically, is only due to the fact that, as a result of an ex-

tremely unique historical situation, *absolutely dissimilar currents, absolutely heterogeneous class interests, absolutely contrary political and social strivings have merged, and in a strikingly "harmonious" manner.* (p. 302)

Diverse trends and conflicts fused into a peculiar, even paradoxical, contagion. Yet it was just such a "hot mix" that produced an opening for revolution. Part of that hot mix was disorientation within ruling circles. The nobility, the industrial bourgeoisie, and liberal bourgeois forces could neither come up with a viable political solution to the crisis nor produce (and vest their confidence in) a new political leadership. They found themselves divided at the worst possible time. The regime was so weakened by three years of war, and its economic and institutional supports had so thoroughly rotted, that it was, in a sense, susceptible to a "push." This condition should not be regarded as a general feature of revolutionary situations. Similarly, that "harmonious" merging of different currents of which Lenin speaks should be seen as a function of the particular alignment of interests of specific class forces in February 1917. (It is not necessarily and characteristically the case that the overwhelming majority of the population will swing into the camp of opposition in a revolutionary situation.) But the phenomenon of a "hot mix," of wild and discordant struggles and conflicts that tear through society, is of universal significance and should be seriously thought about.

Now the exact accumulation and combination of circumstances and contradictions that produced the February crisis could not have been predicted in advance — and even the Bolsheviks were, to a certain extent, caught off-guard: "The Bolshevik slogans and ideas *on the whole* have been confirmed by history; but *concretely* things have worked out *differently*; they are more original, more peculiar, more variegated than anyone could have expected" (V.I. Lenin, *Letters on Tactics*, "First Letter," LCW, Vol. 24, p. 44). But the Bolsheviks under Lenin were able to specify the significance of what had unfolded so "originally," to undertake necessary reconsiderations of major positions, and, most important, to act on this conjuncture *from within*. This was Lenin's sense of the moment.

The article "Defeated Armies Learn Well" (*A World To Win*, 1985, No. 4) offers many valuable insights into the question of revolutionary hot mixes. The investigation centers on a period that saw a major crisis take shape in Iran (in the winter of 1981), and the polemic is aimed at gradualism and economism. In the development towards a revolutionary situation,

all the contradictions of society become increasingly intertwined. This intensification and interconnectedness of the contradictions makes it easier for social pressure to break them. Under certain conditions, the conjuncture will be shaped and the ground will be provided for a serious rupture to take place in the form of chain-like actions and reactions, con-

vulsing the entire social organism and social life. A single spark can start a prairie fire. For this reason, the starting point of a revolutionary period could be a struggle, collision or friction in a secondary arena.

Society does not enter a revolutionary situation in a straight line or gradually, but leaps into it. Under certain circumstances, even the most peaceful opposition of the most reactionary strata of liberals against the ruling regime can be a spark for mass uprising where the struggle leaps to a higher level. . . . (p. 50)

The reference is to a March 1981 meeting called by then-President Bani Sadr to commemorate Mossadegh (martyr of the struggle in the early 1950s against the Shah and his U.S. masters). Thousands of people gathered and then took to the streets in heroic opposition to the Islamic regime. Thus, even when mass resistance is occasioned by a split within ruling circles, and even though the mass movement at the outset may be under the ideological sway of some section of the ruling class, exactly within a concrete historical context a particular outburst may constitute that starting point for revolutionary struggle. The article suggests further that an initiating challenge to a regime may in fact originate in struggle over questions of seemingly minor importance (here the reference is to violent anti-Khomeini street demonstrations that started at a football stadium).

These dual phenomena of the shifting of the main arena of conflict to a secondary sphere and the intertwining of many contradictions into an explosive knot radically alter the field (and horizon) of revolutionary struggle. Two important points need to be stressed. First, revolution, as Lenin emphasized, is not a matter of two hostile blocs, each homogeneous, the one declaring its allegiance to socialism, the other to imperialism, neatly squaring off against one another. A social formation is more complicated than that — as is a political crisis, in which polarization and all kinds of social dislocation take place. Consequently, the significance of various political movements, struggles, and conflicts in conjunctural periods cannot be assessed merely by reference to the class origins (or interests) of the actors involved. Second, it is in such periods of intensifying social stress that a vanguard force must, precisely on the basis of an understanding of underlying power relations and the limitations of various class forces, be able to draw the necessary lines of demarcation (as reflected in program and tactics) in order to pursue, with maximum strength, its strategic objectives, toward which the effective (insurrectionary) means of action may soon be at hand.

In elaborating their argument against those forces for whom an upsurge of economic struggle among the workers was the necessary precondition or awaited signal for an assault on the state power, the Union of Iranian Communists (Sarbedaran) points out that political crisis does not develop in lockstep with economic crisis, that there is no one-to-one correspondence between the two. This is another way of expressing the uneven development of social contradictions and the fact that politics, while it is concentrated economics,

is by no means a passive reflection of economics. Moreover, the ensemble of political relations is itself dynamic. What this emphasizes is that the inherent nature of different class forces can only be partially predictive and evaluative of their interaction with and action on other forces. Their actual role and objective function will also depend on the specific political conjuncture, on the forms of combination and displacement specific to a social formation in (or approaching) crisis.

It may not be the case, for instance, that on the eve of nuclear war millions of workers will be taking to the streets chanting, "Don't press that button." Indeed, a mass upsurge could very well take shape over another, perhaps quite secondary, question, and one that might initially engage the energies of nonproletarian strata. But what are the motive forces that underlie all of this, what is its significance at a given turning point in international relations, and how are the tasks of revolutionary diversion to be understood at such a turning point? To formulate questions in such a way is to embrace a Leninist politics.

The experience of the Russian Revolution and the recent episodes in Iran and the Philippines seem to suggest that the middle classes can be expected to play a major role in the unraveling of the old order. From relative dormancy and even active support for a regime, the middle strata have often undergone rapid disaffection, thrown alternately into panic and outright opposition to the status quo. Several commentators have seen in Iran a classic case of a middle class that had traded away political rights in exchange for material security and tangible improvements in its lot. When these were no longer forthcoming, and as corruption became more of a drain on rather than a source of benefits, the political compact began to erode. This was obviously a factor of great importance during the recent Marcos crisis, and not a few U.S. analysts see in the squeeze on the Mexican middle class an even more dangerous threat (the character of postwar urbanization in the Third World is a major factor in all three situations).

In many cases, middle-class opposition not only presents an initial and destabilizing challenge to the old order but also sets a certain tone of expectation and framework for resolution. Many among these strata are inexperienced in politics and, as they awaken, given to great exhilaration and naïveté. In the Russian case, large sections of the middle classes fell away from the Tsar but just as quickly put their confidence in the new bourgeois government. The working class was hardly immune to this influence. Lenin wrote that "a gigantic petty-bourgeois wave has swept over everything and overwhelmed the class-conscious proletariat, not only by force of numbers but also ideologically; that is, it has infected and imbued very wide circles of workers with the petty-bourgeois political outlook" (see the discussion in *History of the CPSU* [Short course], Chapter 6). How to take advantage of such dislocations and mass disaffection without being swamped ideologically and organizationally has been a major problem for revolutionaries. The Bolsheviks acquitted themselves well; but no one since has come close in cir-

cumstances more or less similar. What is required in such a situation is a vanguard with a program equal to the monumental and complex tasks of the day, and a vanguard with sufficient connections among the basic masses enabling it to lead a decisive section of the proletariat onto the political stage in a period of upheaval and breakdown. Thus, and only thus, can the thousands become the requisite millions and the revolutionary program of the proletariat acquire material force.

If a revolutionary situation is marked by its relative brevity, it nonetheless passes through stages. Consider Lenin's assessment of the dual power ushered in by the February Revolution. Through June, two state powers were interlocked; under conditions of unstable and divided rule, Lenin envisaged the possibility of the peaceful development of the revolution. By July, undivided rule passed into the hands of the bourgeoisie. The slogan "All Power to the Soviets" was withdrawn, as it could have been construed as a "simple" appeal for the transfer of power to the present Soviets [which were controlled by the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries], and to say that, to appeal for it, would now mean deceiving the people" (*LCW*, Vol. 25, p. 190). But the slogan was reassessed once more in late September. It was to be linked to the political and material preparation for insurrection; the slogan now embodied the violent struggle for the establishment of a popular state apparatus. (In early September Lenin had again entertained the possibility of peaceful development of the revolution — this was following the defeat of Kornilov — but that possibility evaporated in three days!) That a revolutionary situation, no matter how compressed, will have its own stages and turning points is extremely important to grasp insofar as large sections of the masses may view a particular stage, when more limited objectives are the order of the day (and that could mean literally 24 hours), as an end in itself.

The February to October period saw major shifts and displacements: new forces hurled themselves into struggle, mass aspirations changed rapidly, class relations underwent realignment, and political authority itself was a shifting patchwork. The very fluidity of the situation called forth a high degree of precision in strategic analysis, as the question of class alliances took on life-and-death importance and placed a premium on tactical finesse and tactical boldness. And lest it be forgotten, the Bolsheviks in this period were forced to modify their previous understanding of the two-stage revolution. Yet the specification of the tasks of the moment, especially the tasks of the decisive moment, flowed from the perspective of the relation of different class forces to the most essential of questions — the question of state power.¹ Lenin was able to identify the specificity of critical

¹ It is useful in this regard to contrast the Bolsheviks' practice with that of the German party in the 1920s and 1930s. Lenin's pitbull grasp on the question of state power, along with his living sense of the motion of power relations among key social forces, stands out.

turning points without falling into empiricism or spontaneism. Hence the significance of the *current situation*:

Such, and only such, is the way the situation developed. Such, and only such, is the view that can be taken by a politician who does not fear the truth, who soberly weighs the balance of social forces in the revolution, who appraises every "current situation" not only from the standpoint of all its present, current peculiarities, but also from the standpoint of the more fundamental motivations, the deeper interest-relationship of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, both in Russia and throughout the world. (*Letters from Afar*, "First Letter," *LCW*, Vol. 23)

Crisis Scenarios, Implications for Struggle

It has been argued by Bob Avakian that if a number of things had been different in the 1960s, including the overall world context, then the mass uprisings of Black people and the societal stresses produced by the war in Vietnam might have provided the opening for a serious bid for power (see interview in *Revolution*, No. 54, Winter/Spring 1986). It's a provocative point. But to simulate a scenario for revolution in the setting of the 1960s is hardly the stuff of science fiction. The ghettos were seething, and among the Black masses there was a widely shared perception of a "state of war." The campuses were careening out of control. Institutions of authority, from the presidency to the local police, were held in contempt by large sections of youth. Violence was widely seen as a two-way street. Many within the prisons were "ready." Revolts in the military were seriously undermining discipline and battlefield capabilities; not a few veterans were returning to America with experience they wanted to put to insurrectionary use. By 1969, the Black Panther Party was commanding considerable political authority. Clearly, hundreds of thousands of people in the United States were motivated by a vision of revolution, and certainly tens of thousands were ready to die for it. By 1971, mainstream America was turning against the war in Vietnam, and the ruling class was increasingly on the defensive. Henry Kissinger recounts that "conservatives were demoralized by a war that had turned into a retreat and liberals were paralyzed by what they themselves had wrought" (Henry Kissinger, *The White House Years* [Little, Brown, 1979], p. 513). Not only was the ruling class's self-confidence shaken by what the war had sown, its ranks were no longer as united. Discord over the handling of the war seems to have been an important element of the Watergate scandal. The postwar domestic consensus was fractured as never before.

What might have been the effect of a significant and mass military initiative, and one guided by a genuinely revolutionary program, at that time? Would it have struck a sympathetic chord among even broader numbers of the basic masses? What impact would a vicious imperialist counter-

offensive have had on social order? To what extent could the ruling class have relied on the middle strata in the conditions of looming civil war? What sorts of divisions within the ruling class might have developed? How would all of this have reverberated through the Western alliance and Third World? These are real questions to mull over. Of course, one can only conjecture about what would have been an extremely wild chain reaction of events; but such a chain reaction certainly could have opened the possibility of revolution (and maybe even elsewhere more so than here).

In the interview cited above, Avakian notes that a situation like that of the 1960s could erupt again. He also notes that events would be far more telescoped and would occur in a very different world context. Is this a correct reading of the contemporary situation? And if so, what kinds of political questions are posed? What follows are several crisis scenarios, each constructed around particularly defining characteristics of U.S. society and the U.S. position in the world. The scenarios focus on specific trigger events that might quickly multiply and broaden into major social and political crises. Relevant analytical and political issues will be addressed in the course of discussion. How plausible are these scenarios? Readers will have to judge for themselves.

Scenario 1: A Variation of Looking Glass²

Following the death of Ayatollah Khomeini and a power struggle among the senior ayatollahs, leftist groups that have been patiently building their cadre strength underground and abroad see their opportunity and stage a coup d'état in the capital. Within a few months the new government in Teheran declares Iran a People's Republic, signs a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the Soviet Union, and receives Soviet advisers and military equipment. The professional army, seeing the total breakdown of political order throughout the country, decides to take matters into its own hands and with significant popular support in the countryside marches to overthrow the new government in Teheran. In the face of the army's successful advance, the leftist government in a panic calls on the Soviet Union for "fraternal" assistance.

The Soviets decide to stage a massive intervention in the northern half of the country with approximately twenty of the thirty divisions stationed in the Transcaucasus, North Caucasus, and Turkestan Military Districts, as well as by the Group of Soviet Forces in Afghanistan. The initial objective is occupation of the country down to a line running through Hamadan, Qazvin, Teheran, and Mashhad. By consensus the

² This scenario is reproduced from Francis Fukuyama, *Escalation in the Middle East and Persian Gulf* (Rand Corp., 1984, pp. 16-20). The title "Looking Glass," from the cable TV docudrama of the same name, is used in this essay as short-hand for nuclear war scenarios.

primary objective is the preservation in power of the pro-Soviet government, much as it was in Afghanistan in 1979, but a powerful faction within the leadership argues that Iran presents an opportunity of historic proportions for the Soviet Union to seize a significant portion of the oil reserves of the Persian Gulf and deal a decisive setback to the U.S. before the latter has a chance to complete its long-term defense modernization plans. In this way Western Europe and Japan can be split apart from the U.S. once and for all, it is argued, at much smaller cost and risk than by a frontal offensive in central Europe. Hence military plans are made to seize not only the oil fields in southern Iran but in Kuwait and parts of southern Iraq and northern Saudi Arabia as well.

Warned of a massive Soviet intervention, the U.S. puts into motion its elaborate plans for the deployment of Central Command forces to the Persian Gulf. Along the way, however, some unforeseen problems arise. The Gulf states with which the U.S. has contingency basing plans refuse to permit precautionary U.S. Air Force deployments before the actual Soviet crossing of the border; once it occurs, they are thrown into such a state of panic that they seek to propitiate the Soviets by continuing to refuse access to the U.S. This means that air interdiction can be mounted only from bases in Turkey, by B-52s operating out of Egypt and B-1Bs from the continental U.S., and from the carrier battle groups concentrating just south of the Straits of Hormuz. A second problem is that the U.S. can find no one in legal authority in Iran who will issue an invitation for U.S. forces to intervene; in fact, the provisional Islamic government still in power in the southern provinces denounces both superpowers and states that an American intervention would be opposed by force.

Soviet columns advance into Iran quickly along the six major axes in northern Iran and from Afghanistan, meeting minimal resistance from Iranian forces. The U.S. National Command Authority (NCA) decides to interdict them with conventional air strikes while they are still in the constricted Elburz passes, but without access to land bases in the Gulf finds it impossible to launch a sufficient volume of sorties. Ground forces could be deployed in southern Iran only after a prolonged and costly amphibious landing along the Persian Gulf coast. Thus the president reluctantly decides to accept the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) recommendation to launch a limited tactical nuclear strike against selected choke points in northern Iran with B-52s operating out of Egypt.

The decision to use nuclear weapons is governed by two considerations: first, it is believed that the limited use of five or six weapons will in itself impose significant delays on the Soviet advance; but more importantly, the U.S. NCA hopes that this demonstration of resolve will force the Soviets to stop and reconsider their invasion before reaching the southern oil fields.

The strike is successful in slowing the Soviet advance and causes several thousand Soviet casualties. The Soviet leadership decides not to back down, however, arguing that the Soviet Union will look weak if American first-use is not met with a response in kind; that mounting domestic pressure in the U.S. and Europe will prevent further

American escalation; and that they are in any event close to achieving their original invasion objectives. The Soviets launch selected nuclear strikes with Backfire bombers against the U.S. carrier battle groups concentrating in the Persian Gulf.

At this point, significant developments begin to take place in other theaters all over the globe. U.S. and Western European leaders take a number of precautionary moves against lateral escalation: NATO forces are put on a higher state of alert; mobile theater weapons like Pershing IIs and ground-launched cruise missiles (GLCMs) are deployed out of their containment areas; ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs), including those of Britain and France, put to sea. Popular European and Japanese opposition to U.S. military moves in the Gulf, strong to begin with, bursts into outright violence as groups take to the streets protesting any cooperation with U.S. aggression. Finally, the North Korean regime sees U.S. preoccupation in southwest Asia as the opportunity it has long been patiently waiting for, and launches a full-scale ground invasion of the South with the immediate objective of taking Seoul.

The U.S. is stunned by the attack on its naval forces and by the sudden escalation of the conflict to Asia. The standard plan for the defense of Korea cannot be executed because of combat losses and the disruption of mobilization assets and plans by the conflict in southwest Asia. Since the only U.S. forces capable of responding to the continuing Soviet advance in Iran are Air Force units in eastern Turkey, the U.S. persuades the Turkish government to permit it to launch a further series of selective tactical nuclear strikes against Soviet forces, and against the air bases from which bomber strikes originated in the Soviet Union itself. This is the first point at which the homeland of either power has been touched.

At the same time the war expands at sea. After the loss of two carrier battle groups, remaining U.S. naval commanders in the Indian Ocean, fearing further Soviet preemption, begin "defensive" conventional strikes against the Soviet naval task forces deployed near their own units. Since the Soviets have already attacked U.S. naval forces in the area, this step is taken on the basis of standard operating procedures, without specific authority from the U.S. NCA. Because it seems that a general naval war has begun, fighting between U.S. and Soviet combatants erupts and rapidly expands eastward from the Gulf along the major sea lanes all the way back to northeast Asia, resulting in the destruction of a large part of the Soviet Pacific fleet.

The U.S. strike against airbases in the Soviet Union is militarily effective and produces heavy civilian casualties in nearby towns. The Soviets are surprised by the Turks' action and feel that they have to be taught a lesson. Responding in kind to the American attack, the Soviets strike with small-yield nuclear weapons the bases from which the U.S. aircraft originated, as well as a few main operating bases in western Turkey for good measure.

Now there has been a direct Soviet nuclear attack on a NATO country. Instead of standing firm behind Turkey, the major Western European governments tend to blame the

U.S. for the initial escalation to nuclear weapons and draw the lesson that they will suffer the same fate as Turkey unless they disassociate themselves from the U.S. Britain and France withdraw their independent nuclear deterrents from any semblance of joint NATO planning or control and put them on a higher state of alert in case they have to be used unilaterally. All European military forces move to higher states of alert as a precaution. In the meantime, the massive North Korean invasion of the South has bypassed and cut off the strong defenses surrounding Seoul and is pushing the Republic of Korea Army and the U.S. Eighth Army southward to Pusan in a replay of the late summer of 1950. Since Korea is not receiving its planned augmentation — naval forces have either been destroyed or are committed to southwest Asia, while ground and air forces based in the continental U.S. are moving to Europe — the U.S. NCA feels it has no alternative and uses tactical nuclear weapons against North Korean forces in the Kaesong and Chorwon corridors.

The Soviet leadership decides that the pattern of American behavior up to this point — first use of nuclear weapons in Iran, higher alert rates and dispersal of nuclear weapons in Europe in the face of strong European protests, expansion of the war to sea, direct nuclear attacks on the Soviet homeland, and now nuclear use in Korea — are all signs of a reckless U.S. leadership virtually out of control. In addition, they entirely misinterpret British and French efforts to separate their nuclear forces from U.S. operations, seeing them as preparations for joint strikes with the U.S. The Soviets do not view American actions as a response to their initial invasion of Iran and the North Korean invasion of South Korea, but rather as a calculated attempt to inflict damage on the Soviet Union and take advantage of the situation created by the current crisis. Some members of the Soviet leadership have a more sinister interpretation of U.S. behavior, believing that higher U.S. alert rates are a preparation for a massive American nuclear strike. The military argues that the U.S. cannot be permitted to whittle away at their forces and those of allies like North Korea; that according to doctrine a nuclear war once begun cannot be limited, and that any advantages of preemption will be lost if American forces proceed to yet higher alert rates. Hence the Soviets themselves launch a massive countermilitary strike against U.S. overseas bases and several selected important targets in the continental U.S. A countermilitary strike, unlike the U.S. [officially-stated] concept of a counterforce strike, does not deliberately seek to avoid hitting civilian targets and minimizing collateral damage; hence, while some Soviet nuclear weapons hit isolated military installations like Shemya Air Force Base in the Aleutians, others hit population centers like the ports of Bremerton, Washington and San Diego, California. The U.S. then feels compelled to respond in kind.

Discussion:

This scenario, whose level of realism is heightened in the atmosphere of Irangate, raises some rather important ques-

tions. Several chilling international crises have occurred over the past few years. KAL 007, Lebanon, and Libya are prime examples. But they did not escalate into all-out and global military confrontations. That they *did* not has led many to conclude that they *could* not. Others, while not ruling out the possibility of world war, regard it as extremely unlikely; after all, the superpowers have certainly been eyeball-to-eyeball with one another before and pulled back from the nuclear precipice. On the other hand, the Revolutionary Communist Party has argued that a war between the two imperialist blocs "could easily break out of any particular 'local' conflict, or any particular eruption of *sharp* conflict of interests in a specific part of the world" (Avakian, op. cit., p. 5). This view — and "easily break out" is a strong statement — would seem to be the correct one, given the acuteness of the imperialist system's contradictions. The bilateral competition, risk-taking, and local crises of an earlier period did not lead to war precisely because of the less severe state of the world system; the absence of world war was not the result of a perception of "shared danger" or abiding respect for the "firebreaks" (limitations derived from the situation-context).

Still, within the framework of the overall compulsion to redivide the world, there remains an element of deliberation and choice as to when and where to throw down the gauntlet. Thus the discernment and assessment of

the nature of the threat, the intensity of the crisis (high as opposed to low), the values of the objectives involved (central as opposed to peripheral), time pressures (acute as opposed to less acute), the sense of urgency to act and the realization by decision-makers of an increased probability for miscalculation, and the impact of the potential outcome in terms of immediate and future relations and for future power and status in the global system. (J. Ranney, "Insights from the Theoretical Literature," in Robert J. Sullivan, *The Potential Effect of Crisis Relocation on Crisis Stability*, System Planning Corp., 1978, p. 46)

What kind of crisis, then, might impel the escalation to nuclear weapons? It would seem that any conflict that endangered an absolutely vital interest, such as in the Persian Gulf, or that involved the crossing, in some form or another, of a "red line," like the East-West divide in Europe, would be a likely avenue to world war. But it would be misleading to associate a "Looking Glass" situation strictly with a threat to or a violation of some preset hierarchy of interests. To begin with, phenomena other than direct political or military action could set in motion a series of events leading to a superpower confrontation (in the actual Looking Glass TV docudrama, the "ultimate crisis" is touched off by financial collapse). Moreover, a confrontation — again, given the character of the underlying world crisis — could be sparked by a wholly unanticipated, or relatively minor, development.

In addition, there is the role of specifically military fac-

tors. The Rand study from which the above scenario was taken examines several ways in which a conventional conflict could quickly escalate:

The first and most obvious consideration is conventional military deterrence in the subtheaters of the [Middle East] region. The probability of war will generally be lower where the state favoring continuation of the status quo (in this case, the U.S.) has a preponderance of conventional military capabilities. The most dangerous situations are likely to be those in which the status quo power finds its conventional options limited and is tempted to compensate either by escalation to nuclear weapons or through expansion of conventional conflict outside the theater. Force imbalances between rival regional powers can also encourage attack, as in the case of Iran, whose apparent weakness and internal disarray was one factor prompting the Iraqi attack in 1980. Superpower clients that find themselves losing wars are usually quick to call upon their patrons for intervention, as the Arabs have done in each of their wars with Israel. Finally, many states in the Middle East have substantial military organizations that themselves invite, limit, or otherwise affect the superpowers' use of force.

A second category of military considerations concerns special incentives for preemptive or early use of force by the superpowers. The most unstable situations are those in which technical military considerations dictate prompt resort to either conventional or nuclear weapons by the superpowers, thereby shortening time for both internal decision making and negotiation. (Fukuyama, op. cit., p. 14)

These are factors which promote *vertical* escalation, the straightforward increase in the risks involved, and this implies resort to higher-yield and, in all likelihood, nuclear weapons. But just as important are those factors, and these things cannot be so finely separated, which promote *lateral* escalation, that is, the uncontrolled "spillover" of a particular conflict, or its calculated extension, into different geographical theaters, involving a widening range of both issues and participants. The Rand study suggests two important ways in which regional conflicts may become quickly globalized. The first is the use of alerts or higher states of force readiness. Such alerts have usually served two functions: as a precaution against unforeseen developments and as a statement of intent. But what precisely is intended and how such signals are read by the adversary are aspects of both the "gamesmanship" and "fog" of modern conflict management. The second element involves the use of naval forces:

Naval forces play a similarly important role in globalizing regional conflicts. This is because: (1) naval forces are the easiest to deploy in regional

conflicts, where they either become instruments of intervention or targets; (2) to have naval combatants in close proximity with one another is destabilizing in a crisis because the general rule in naval warfare is that whoever shoots first wins; and (3) war at sea, once begun, is very difficult to contain geographically

Naval forces present special problems because they are likely to be deployed early into a Middle East/Persian Gulf crisis, and constitute vulnerable, high-value targets in the event of war. Naval warfare introduces a destabilizing element into regional conflicts by putting a premium on preemption, a situation aggravated by the U.S. and Soviet navies' practice of staging realistic maneuvers and exercises which might be taken for the real thing in a crisis. Standard naval operating procedures, which in some cases permit individual commanders to initiate conflict on their own authority in self defense, could be a source of accidental escalation. (Fukuyama, *ibid.*, pp. 25, 33)

These observations are useful to think about in light of superpower naval jockeying in the Mediterranean (for instance, during the Libya crisis). It is perhaps also useful to speculate on the possible significance of criticisms that have been leveled by some military specialists at the Reagan team for excessive reliance on naval force.

Finally, in dealing with specifically military factors that might precipitate a showdown, there is this paradox: a high degree of technological sophistication and capacity for flexible response is not matched by a comparable degree of battlefield experience with much of the weapons arsenal, nor by a capacity to improvise (given the nature of training and the level of weapons specialization). What comes into play here is a certain "logic of decision-making," in view of preset and relatively rigid operational plans and, especially, that premium placed on preemption, which actually enlarges the role for miscalculation (including the misreading of an adversary's intentions, as is written into the Rand scenario) and accident in precipitating crisis and/or war. The latter point is not to be sneezed at. A big military (nuclear) accident or miscalculation may be the spark for a major political or social crisis (it may also, strangely enough, be the development that would have to be seized upon if revolution were to prevent world war). Is there still a place for "crisis management"? Could escalating moves, including what is described as the "willingness to appear irrational" (Ranney, *op. cit.*), be deployed by one opponent to force the other to back down over a specific dispute? This certainly can't be ruled out. But just as a military maneuver or exercise can easily lead to the real thing, so too can a "managed" crisis be the immediate prelude to an "unmanaged" one.

Any of the following situations should be considered likely tripwires for global military conflict: (1) crises that threaten vital interests; (2) the simultaneous outbreak of conflicts in geographically remote theaters (as simulated in the

Rand scenario and the outlines of which could be observed in the two-front Libya/Nicaragua crisis of 1986), since lateral escalation is already underway and a series of crises can make direct superpower homeland nuclear attacks more likely (as also occurred in the above simulation); (3) a *direct* confrontation between the two superpowers, since it is one thing to indirectly retreat through a client and quite another to back down in a face-to-face collision (although there are clients and there are clients — Libya versus Syria, for example, with the Soviets probably drawing a "red line" around the latter); finally, and plainly ominously, (4) the movement, for any reason, to the "preparation phase" for world war, that is, the full generation of all forces and command, control, and communication assets by both sides, along with the forward deployment of conventional forces, since the situation could quickly get out of hand. Things need not necessarily move along these axes; and while it is vital to learn better how to read such international developments, it would be deadly erroneous to passively await them.

The Looking Glass scenario presents serious challenges to revolutionaries, not the least of which is the time element: a full-scale military confrontation can develop in short order. In the face of impending thermonuclear holocaust, a kind of "now or never" urging beckons the revolutionary proletariat — not as some moral imperative but as a matter of grasping historical necessity and possibility: as quickly as a Looking Glass could develop, so too could the social landscape change.

World War 3 will be neither the World War 2 of "victory gardens" and war bonds in the U.S. nor, quite obviously, the painless and precision combat of that imaginary, high-tech, anywhere-but-here conflict that has been seared into the popular mind in this country particularly. How does the bourgeoisie instill confidence with the specter (or radioactive glare) of mass destruction and dislocation looming? One defining feature of a Looking Glass is that the ruling class must rapidly mobilize the population — without discussion, ratification, or the mildest toleration of dissent — for Armageddon. Now this kind of situation will divide sharply into two. On the one hand, when the awful reality of world war dawns on different segments of the population, it could produce an enraged "Can the governments be this crazy?" reaction among some middle forces. The line of "peace through strength," while still having a hold on some people (and the bourgeoisie would attempt to repackage it to suit new conditions), might lose much of its mass, seductive appeal, especially if mobilization for world war had been preceded by some bungled military operation(s) and if there had already been some fracturing of the social order. The conditions for the kind of great vacillation among the middle strata, of which Lenin spoke, could come into being, and with this might come even more widespread discrediting of prevailing authority among different sections of the petty bourgeoisie as people realize what's actually in store for them.

On the other hand, in the lightning succession of events leading up to world war, spontaneity may not necessarily be

working in favor of revolution. The principal spontaneous response to a Looking Glass might well be feelings of paralysis and impotence, as opposed to outrage and resistance. Having to face something as uncertain and horrific as world war, people will be looking for direction, consolation, and, certainly not least, protection. And for many, given the norms of capitalist society and the ideological dominance of the bourgeoisie, who else is there to turn to but the state? The notion that if we stick together and do what the government tells us then somehow we'll be able to get this thing over with as soon as possible will undoubtedly be an attractive one. Not only is this what the bourgeoisie is counting on but it is what they have been training people in, through the use of minor crises as test-drills. In France, for instance, the government has used terrorist incidents to create a siege mentality and to instruct people that threats to life and property can only be dealt with if people rally behind their leaders and allow them to take appropriate (repressive) measures to safeguard the social order. In sum, spontaneity cannot be relied upon under conditions of extreme social stress.

In an approaching war situation, it may very well be the case that middle and progressive middle-class forces move first. There may be the latter-day equivalents of the Daniel Ellsbergs in various positions of authority, in or out of government, who decide to leak high-level information about a planned military action or nuclear strike. Such acts of conscience (or freak-out), and ghastly revelations or exposures in general, might both galvanize mass opposition and set off tremors within ruling circles. Damaging disclosures could signify major intraruling-class discord — and coups are a definite possibility. (A question: why has the Reagan administration earned the reputation for being the most "leak-conscious" of any since 1945?) It is also possible, if current anti-Star Wars sentiment is any barometer, that from within the scientific community, from those on the technical frontlines, so to speak, and in a position to know what lies ahead, may come acts of noncooperation and, even beyond this, attempts to "stop the war machine."

In considering the potential of the progressive petty bourgeoisie, it must be noted that the current position of these people is more contradictory than it was in the 1960s — much more is at stake. But at the same time, the experience of the 1960s has made a broad and significant impact among these strata. And while a crisis situation will open the floodgates to all sorts of middle-class prejudices, the very gravity of the situation will jar their sensibilities. It is more than likely that enlightened middle strata, and veteran and newborn antinuclear and antiwar activists, will take to the streets in heroic, if sometimes desperate, action — perhaps with the intent of concretely interfering with war preparations (whether this be civil defense population relocations or troop movements). National unity might not come that smoothly in the early stages of a Looking Glass crisis. And the bourgeoisie will not treat these forces with kid gloves in the way that was sometimes the case in the '60s. Police-state tactics might swiftly become the order of the day, and many popular illusions might just as swiftly shatter, although

social-democratic and revisionist remedies will continue to have currency among such people.

Mass psychology is a phenomenon that cannot be overlooked in a Looking Glass crisis. If the "real deal" is likely to provoke determined resistance from enlightened quarters, it will also produce panic, confusion, and demoralization among the more backward. The truth of the matter is that the American populace is not accustomed to large-scale social readaptation. (It has been commented on, in connection with Chernobyl, that the Soviet people have some experience and schooling in responding collectively to disasters and hardships.) In the 1970s the bourgeoisie floated some ideas about mass evacuation of the cities in the event of a world war; but every study they commissioned pointed to immense logistical and psychological difficulties — from the proverbial traffic jams in the metropolitan areas, as people attempt to flee expected targets, to the sacking of stores...to mass suicide. Conceivably, a nuclear conflict may have pauses, with death and damage initially confined to certain areas. But this would not diminish mass anxieties. Moreover, the likely coupling of social trauma with social breakdown could also uncork some of the more animal-like forces and elements pent up in capitalist society. Nor should one discount the potential for fanatical religious and millennial ("from holocaust to salvation") movements to gain mass followings in such a period.

These phenomena among the populace, in conjunction with the tremendous strains that crisis response, both domestically and internationally, would in all likelihood place on basic, controlling institutions, could combine to produce various kinds of "gaps" in authority structures. A sort of crazy, patchwork quilt of severe repression and anarchy might develop. In these conditions, the gaps created could potentially be filled by initially small forces of the proletariat; but these initiatives could have broader, manifesto-like significance (beyond the immediate areas in question).

Resistance from progressive middle forces could be a major spur and encouragement for militant outpourings from the proletariat. Even the kind of panic described above could have the positive effect of driving home to the basic masses the truly urgent character of the situation. It is entirely possible that advanced actions may come first from those "in the know" in the field, that is, from within the military. And rebellions in the armed forces may at once be a signal of imperialist plans for war and a clarion call for mass resistance. Protest and disobedience from the enlightened middle strata combined with, or perhaps even stimulating, a major initiative from the proletariat could effect a rapid realignment of social forces within American society. Thus might the state of mind among large sections of the middle strata switch from moods of panic, of paralysis, and of political reformism to one of support for revolution. In any event, the bourgeoisie is not counting on gradually winning people to its war program; similarly, the proletariat does not have the luxury of gradually winning others to its revolutionary program — which only emphasizes the necessity of earnest and creative political work aimed at seizing on key junctures.

Scenario 2: Financial Collapse

On at least six occasions since the epochal global downturn of 1973-75, the international financial network has come perilously close to a wholesale collapse. It could have been touched off by the German Herstatt and Franklin National bank failures of 1973 and 1974, the run on the dollar during 1978 and 1979, the Mexican debt distress of 1982, and the Continental Bank panic of 1984, among other emergencies. That a financial catastrophe has been averted thus far has been due largely to two factors: swift central bank and government intervention, along with the ability to quarantine problem institutions, and the residual strength of the world economy (for instance, the 1982-85 recovery of the U.S. economy stimulated substantial export growth in Latin America).

But instability continues to grow, and the international financial and monetary order is in fact building towards an even bigger explosion than that which might have occurred some years ago. This is a moving contradiction; different elements assume greater or lesser importance as possible triggers. In 1985 and 1986, any of several developments could have been the catalyst for global financial disaster: the collapse of the Singapore stock market and the London-based, world tin market; revelations and murmurings of monumental banking fraud; mounting uncertainties and disturbances associated with global banking deregulation and the wild and uncontrolled proliferation of new debt instruments, feeding on and breeding speculation; and the continuing external debt saga of Latin America (with Mexico once again the focus). Significantly, security concerns have come increasingly to the fore in attempts to tame the crisis.

Any serious probing of banking and financial crisis would have to reckon with the internationalization of the circuits of capital, the particularities of dependent reproduction, and the relationships between productive and loan capital. But in this discussion, the focus is on potentially disruptive phenomena at the institutional level of world finance and the resulting political fallout. In order to conduct analysis and simulation, it will be necessary to introduce several key concepts (the exposition draws on Guttentag and Herring, *Disaster Myopia in International Banking*, Wharton Press, 1985).

The first of these is the notion of a *shock*. A shock is any unexpected development that wipes out a substantial portion of a financial institution's net worth. Essentially, there are four kinds of shocks to which financial institutions (as well as government borrowing entities) are subject: interest-rate shocks, which involve unexpected changes in interest rates; credit shocks, which involve unexpected increases in the percentage of outstanding loans believed to be uncollectible; foreign exchange shocks, which involve sudden changes in the exchange rates of different currencies; and funding shocks, which involve sudden changes in the availability of credit. The largest multinational banks are highly susceptible to such shocks — because often they have few liquid assets with which to meet deposit drains and because they

depend heavily for liquidity on their ability to refinance, or roll over, their borrowings. Banks borrow in order to lend to others, let's say to Third World countries. But these loans have, over the years, often been of longer maturity than that of the borrowings of the banks. So the banks have to continually refinance their maturing liabilities (the money they borrow to lend to others). If for some reason this is no longer possible, disaster is not far off. Next is the "go for broke strategy." This refers to the attempt by a troubled financial institution to protect its positions by engaging in high-risk ventures that perhaps involve expected losses far in excess of gains but which allow losses to be pushed onto others (creditors, insurers, etc.). Finally, there is the *run*. This is a rush by creditors to convert claims quickly, to collect debts, before other creditors do and before the resources of the debtor(s) in question are exhausted. As bankers cynically put it, "if you're going to panic, panic first."

A global financial crisis, of an order that would dwarf the financial panics of the nineteenth century, is a real and strong possibility. The world economy is highly integrated, with the international financial network acting both as a stabilizing agent and a transmission belt of instability. Not only is a country like Mexico highly sensitive to short-term external fluctuations, such as oil price swings. It is also the case that several key countries of the Third World are prone to collapse, given the extraordinary degree of capitalist development and urbanization since World War 2, in a way that a semifeudal and often stagnating China in the 1920s and 1930s, for example, was not. Extraordinarily harsh austerity measures remain the order of the day in many Third World countries; and more so than ever since the end of World War 2, political upheavals in these countries can have devastating impacts on economic stability.

The U.S. is very much enmeshed in all of this — as lender, enforcer, and as the imperialist power with the greatest volume of investments in the Third World. Back in 1983, Data Resources Inc. (a forecasting unit) undertook a study of the effect of a Latin American default on total output, exports, and jobs in the U.S. (see *Business Week*, 7 November 1983, p. 118). If Brazil repudiated its debt, the U.S. GNP would decline by nearly \$25 billion, almost 400,000 jobs would disappear, and the federal funds rate (interest charged on borrowings made by banks from the reserves they are required to deposit with the Federal Reserve Bank) would increase 0.6 percentage points. A default throughout Latin America would cost the American economy \$70 billion in GNP, 1.1 million jobs, and increase the federal deficit by \$26 billion. By the same token, major disturbances in the U.S. economy would have serious consequences for Latin America.

What are some of the outstanding problems faced by the international banking system? First, the world debt crisis. The Third World countries taken together now owe Western private banks some \$630 billion, much of which is, for all intents and purposes, unpayable. These countries are annually transferring some \$30 billion in financial resources to the advanced countries. They must run up huge trade surpluses or

walk away from their credit obligations (in the absence of massive new funding, which is not forthcoming). But what makes the situation especially dangerous is the concentration of the lion's share of this debt among, and the related vulnerability of, a handful of Third World countries in which U.S. and Western capital have huge economic and political stakes. Second, a large share of this debt is owed to a small circle of Western banks (this is quite different from the situation of the 1930s, when loans were more spread out). In the late 1970s and early 1980s, eight of the largest ten U.S. banks had loans in excess of 100 percent of their equity to Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and Yugoslavia. Third, an increasingly extensive and uncontrolled network of interbank deposits has developed over the past two decades. It has been estimated that two-thirds of the deposits of the Eurobanks (the American, European, and Japanese financial institutions that turn over \$300 billion each day in the London Eurodollar market³) are other banks' deposits. A few major pins could knock down many others and in the process wreak incredible havoc. In the late 1980s, it does not seem that the international trade and financial system could absorb a simultaneous downturn in the United States and Japan.

The Looking Glass docudrama began with a financial collapse. In the following scenario, the dimensions and implications of such a development will be expanded upon (an article appearing in the *Wall Street Journal* in late 1982, "Script for Collapse," suggested some ideas for the simulation conducted here):

Some turn of events, perhaps plummeting primary commodity prices and a sudden contraction of demand in the advanced countries, reduces the revenues of several "newly industrializing" Third World countries carrying heavy debt loads. The resulting economic distress makes it next to impossible to honor external financial obligations. At the same time, International Monetary Fund austerity measures have touched off food riots. Domestic political pressure mounts to refuse repayment on debts — and several governments withhold payment, largely for demagogical purposes. Two major international banks with heavy loan exposure to Latin America are now experiencing a credit shock. They scurry for new sources of cash. Meanwhile, it is disclosed that these same banks are also saddled with nonperforming energy and agricultural loans. The markets are rife with rumors of massive withdrawals by Japanese investors. Huge sums of money begin to move electronically around the world. A run is now underway. Some investors begin to speculate on gyrating exchange rates, bidding up and down the value of already unstable currencies. World financial markets are spinning out of control. In short order, the Hong Kong real estate market collapses. With storm clouds gathering, Western financial ministers meet to map strategy.

All of this could break out very quickly and could spread

very quickly. Further, there is no emergency plan to handle a world banking crisis; no international authority or institution can fulfill a "lender-of-the-last-resort" function under such circumstances. But to return to the simulation. The debt moratorium spreads to all the countries of Latin America. With the lending capacity of many U.S. banks shrinking, the U.S. economy starts to feel the damage. Frightened credit markets push up interest rates. A number of other U.S. banks come under pressure as a result of "tiering," that is, the emergence of one set of interest rates for banks thought not to be in trouble, and another spread of rates for those considered potentially unsafe. The so-called "go-go" companies, operating with huge debt-to-equity ratios, find themselves locked out of credit markets. Trading on the New York Stock Exchange is halted as a safety measure. Interest rates kick up further. Farm loans are no longer forthcoming. Interest-rate-sensitive sectors, like housing and auto, show signs of recession. Exports drop sharply as bankers and governments stop extending credits to Third World countries. The Federal Reserve is forced to take a "shotgun" approach and pumps massive amounts of money into the economy. But this ignites inflationary fears; some foreign investors bolt the dollar, and interest rates stubbornly refuse to come down.

Output continues to fall in the United States. Japan, far more trade-oriented than any other advanced capitalist country, plunges into its sharpest and most devastating recession of the postwar period. Labor unrest mounts. Meanwhile, the moratorium in Latin America shuts these countries off from vitally needed financing. In Brazil, hungry mobs are looting supermarkets; rightists demand the restoration of order. Revisionists on the continent demand that the moratorium become an outright repudiation — debt peonage has gone on too long. With support from sections of the military and from within the national labor confederation, pro-Soviet forces stage a coup in Argentina. Back in the United States, New York City cannot meet its bankroll. A credit crunch is on, and the city is not able to raise interest rates on its bond and note offerings to a level that will entice investors who are leery about rising property tax delinquencies and a sudden decline in sales tax revenues. Layoffs are announced; garbage collection is cut back. Welfare and health-care services are seriously threatened in a city where, every two weeks, 500,000 households receive AFDC and food-stamp payments,⁴ without which it would be difficult to survive. A coalition of Black community leaders issues a call for federal assistance. There is high-level concern about the potential for disorder in the poorest sections of the city.

⁴ New York is one of twenty-one states that requires its local county governments to contribute to the support of cash assistance for the AFDC (welfare) program and Medicaid payments. The cities in the northeast still remain the most vulnerable to financial distress. On the other hand, it would be instructive to assess the effects of the oil-price collapse on Houston's ability to deliver social services to the poor.

³ A Eurodollar is basically a dollar that leaves the U.S. and does not return home.

Rather than go further with this scenario (just as things are getting exciting), we would do well to take note of some likely characteristics of such a crisis. With respect to the Third World countries, we are dealing with four possibilities: a default, which involves the inability to meet debt repayments (and which today is forestalled, or masked, by debt reschedulings and emergency loans); a moratorium, which means that debt repayments are temporarily suspended; outright renunciation of debt, which means that the debtor refuses repayment and simply walks away from payment obligations; and a collapse, that is, the bottom falling out of any or several of these economies. As far as time-frame goes, a world financial crisis (and collapse) could materialize over the course of a few weeks. A global economic crisis, with depression-like features in several countries, could unfold within a few months. Some countries would be more immediately, and harder, hit than others. Japan's heavy reliance on trade might make it the industrial country first to be dragged down by financial chaos (and its quiet emergence over the last few years as a major banking power only increases its vulnerability).⁵

In the United States, significant sections of the middle classes (small investors and depositors) might be wiped out overnight. Much of the new entrepreneurial and speculative wealth (into which many yuppies are plugged) could get yanked away rather quickly. The farm sector, already strapped, could be devastated. From among these forces might come the first wave of struggle, and it is likely that their plight will provide fertile ground for snake-oil salesmen and demagogic appeals (from LaRouche-type forces, for instance). But such a crisis might also lead to rapid political differentiation among farmers — and the proletariat certainly needs more than a few progressive farmers in its camp. As with the Looking Glass scenario, panicked reactions and/or struggles, which would probably erupt first among these petty-bourgeois strata, might be a kind of stimulus to the proletariat — at least to grasp the seriousness and precariousness of the situation, the growing social instability, and potentially the need to act. Furthermore, as suggested above, many of the lifelines on which the poor depend could also be cut in the early stages of such a crisis. The cities might be thrown suddenly into turmoil; some revolutionary opportunities could open.

Internationally, the kind of situation written into the scenario is very much the stuff of coups. Pro-Soviet forces are clearly positioning themselves, if not waiting in the

⁵ Another collapse scenario might begin this way: skyrocketing U.S. government deficits undermine foreign confidence in the dollar; the ensuing flight from the dollar (foreigners finance a large part of the federal deficit) brings the dollar's exchange rate crashing down, leading to an extreme credit crunch in the U.S.; in response, the U.S. opts for currency devaluation, the burden of which falls on the Japanese, who hold about half of the dollars the U.S. owes foreigners; panic and protectionism spread.

(palace) wings, in anticipation of a similar turn of events. Statements by the Soviets and Castro calling for the renunciation of Third World debt are suggestive. Revisionist battalions would not only seek to capitalize on domestic discontent but also, perhaps directly in step with global strategic maneuvers by the Soviet Union, selectively attempt to cut off critical supplies and materials to the West. Southern Africa would be a major focus of their efforts.

A major conclusion to be drawn from this overall analysis is that the tightly drawn financial network is highly susceptible to shocks that could quickly translate into global economic disturbances. But such shocks could even more quickly be displaced into the political and military realms before they spread. This underscores a sobering point: the U.S. might have to go to war, in part, just to prevent the Western alliance from falling apart.

Scenario 3: Regional Crisis and Domestic Fragmentation

A Mexican upheaval holds unthinkable implications for the world economy, for the control of inflation, for the role of the dollar, for NATO, for the ability of the United States to project military power elsewhere in the world, and hence for the Soviet Union. It could alter world history for the next generation.

— Alvin Toffler, *The Washington Post*, 2 March 1986

One cannot be sufficiently reminded that on its southern border the United States is abutted not only by a large and populous Third World country but also by one within which developments can profoundly influence the prospects for, and course of, revolution in the United States. The world's most advanced and powerful country shares a 2,000-mile border with a country where the birth rate is higher than that of Bangladesh, where the daily minimum wage is \$3.60, and where unemployment stands at about 40 percent. For the better part of this century, Mexico has been a valuable asset for U.S. imperialism — economically, as an outlet for investment capital and a source of cheap labor, and geopolitically, as a buffer against more volatile conditions to its south and as a military and economic gateway to the rest of the continent. But in the potential for economic collapse and/or political upheaval in Mexico, as part of the generally deteriorating situation in Central America, *the United States now faces its gravest regional crisis of the twentieth century* — and not just at any time, but with a situation marked by heightening developments toward World War 3. In its severest manifestations, such a regional crisis might very well provide the most favorable circumstances for a serious bid for power by the proletariat in the United States.

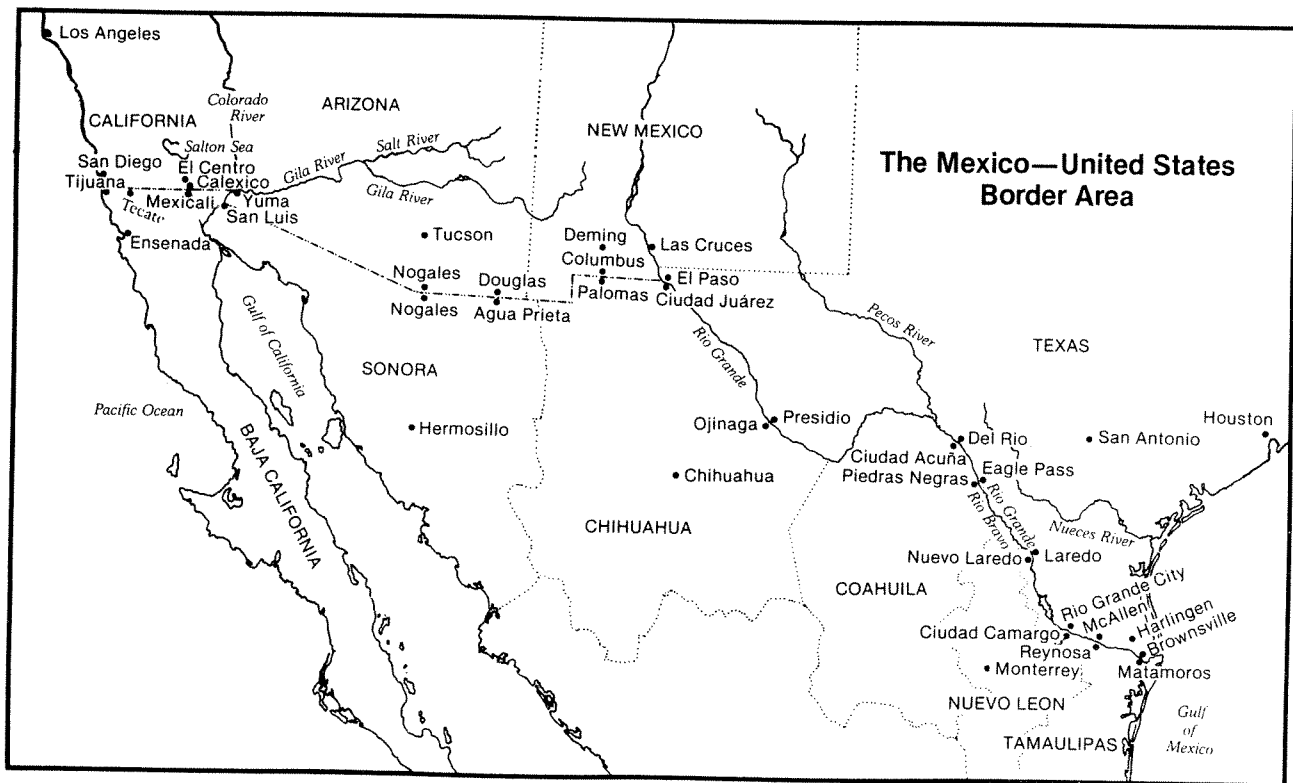
Mexico's foreign debt stands at about \$100 billion (\$25 billion of which is owed to U.S. banks alone). About 50 per-

cent of Mexico's export earnings go towards debt service. Oil accounts for about 75 percent of the country's foreign exchange and half of its tax revenues. But the drop in oil prices will have reduced export earnings by some one-third in 1986. In March 1986 Pemex, the state oil monopoly and the country's largest single purchaser of industrial materials, announced a thirty-day freeze on payments to its domestic suppliers and creditors. Growth has declined over the past few years (many half-completed industrial and infrastructural projects dot Mexico City), and inflation has been running at 65 percent. Almost twice as much capital has been fleeing the country as has been coming in as new borrowings.

For the masses, the situation — even before the earthquake — has been desperate. Real wages are 50 percent below what they were three years ago. Existing patterns of land distribution, the development of an advanced but export-oriented agro-industrial sector, and the reliance on imported foodstuffs for a large part of popular consumption make Mexico's food system especially vulnerable. The rural areas are racked by massive unemployment, mass migration, and widespread malnutrition. It is estimated that 800,000 jobs must be created each year just to keep pace with the growth of the labor force. As indicated earlier, the middle classes seem to be growing more restive; slackening growth

has limited material improvements and social mobility. While this restiveness is certainly contradictory — with expressions of support for openly right-wing programs a significant factor — it both reflects and furthers the destabilizing of the established order and power configurations as they have been maintained for decades. The general program of cooperation, corruption, and repression no longer furnishes a workable framework. Splits are reported in the military. A recent *Foreign Affairs* analysis described the country as being "on the brink of disaster": Mexico needs modernization, austerity, and a new political consensus, the basis for which does not exist.

Mexico has extensive linkages with the U.S. economy. U.S. agribusiness has huge investments — much of the fresh produce consumed in the United States comes from Mexico. It has been said that the San Diego/Tijuana border, in terms of the movements of commodities, labor, and information, is the busiest such border in the world. Indeed, the border industrialization program begun in 1965 has made Mexico the most important partner of the United States in assembly activities abroad. The approximately 600 maquiladoras that stretch from Tijuana to Matamoros, adjacent to Brownsville, Texas (see map), employ about 150,000 Mexicans, mainly young women who have migrated to the northern border



areas. They soak up some unemployment and make an important contribution to Mexico's foreign-exchange earnings. For the U.S., the benefits derive mainly from the combination of cheap labor and access to the border; thus Mexican assembly operations can process and assemble for reexport to the United States a product mix, which includes critical inputs into the dynamic, high-tech sectors, as well as the apparel industry, with significantly lower transport costs than that of U.S. operations in Hong Kong or Taiwan (on the maquiladoras, see Joseph Grunwald and Kenneth Flamm, *The Global Factory*, Brookings, 1985, Chapter 4). Further, a large portion of wage earnings is spent by workers on the U.S. side of the border. The border population of northern Mexico has grown faster than that of any other region in the country except Mexico City (and Tijuana's rate of growth has been faster than that of Mexico City). The combination of high unemployment and rising expectations in this region adds another combustible element to the Mexican crisis.

The flow of legal and illegal labor from Mexico to the United States is not only massive but essential to the profitable functioning of U.S. capital: two-thirds of the garment labor in Los Angeles, 10 to 20 percent of the workforce in California's Silicon Valley, and one-third of the workforce in construction in Houston are made up of illegals (see the special series on Hispanic labor in the *Wall Street Journal*, 7 May 1985). Mexican labor has been absolutely vital to the well-being of U.S. agriculture and to the transformation of the Southwest into a major growth center of the United States. Functionally integrated into the economy of the Southwest borderlands, undocumented Mexicans have increasingly fanned out to other parts of the United States.

While one can speak of a coherent borderland economy in the United States, regional development in the Southwest is by no means homogeneous. It is possible to identify these subregions (as indicated on the map and as delineated by Niles Hansen, *The Border Economy*, Univ. of Texas Press, 1981): (1) the San Diego metropolitan area; (2) the Imperial Valley, a major center for agribusiness; (3) the Arizona borderlands, which include a major distribution point for food crops and cotton, copper mines, and some industry; (4) the El Paso economic region, which is an important manufacturing center and which is completely interrelated with Juarez (about one-third of all Mexican transborder commuters work in El Paso); (5) the Middle Rio Grande region of Texas, where farms and cattle ranches predominate and which is also a major packaging and redistribution point for fresh Mexican agricultural produce; (6) the South Texas region, which includes Laredo, the largest inland port of entry into the United States, and San Antonio; (7) the Lower Rio Grande Valley, where McAllen and Brownsville are located, whose principal mainstays are agriculture (relying heavily on migrant and nonmigrant seasonal labor), shrimping, food processing, and apparel manufacturing, and where the starkest, Third World-like poverty in the United States can be found. If the phrase "culture shock" has relevance anywhere in this country, it is certainly in the Southwest. And it applies not only to the experience of the oppressed

from Mexico and Central America who enter this country but also to the local population, many of whom spontaneously see in this stream of uprooted and persecuted the major pollutant and threat to America. In one sense, the borderland economy is (to paraphrase Carey McWilliams) a zone of interlocking economic, social, and cultural interests; in another sense, it is compounded of a truce between clashing universes, a truce based on repression, intimidation, and cultural subjugation.

A number of factors have accelerated industrialization in the southern zone of the United States. Long-standing regional disparities have provided certain advantages which capital has finally been able to profitably tap on an extensive scale; international competition has pushed much manufacturing capital out of the traditional industrial corridors of the U.S.; the Vietnam War boom fed new opportunities (in aerospace and electronics) and the merger wave of the late 1960s thrust many regionally based firms into stronger positions. Moreover, Los Angeles and Houston have emerged as major international financial centers. If there is a "new right" capitalist bloc, it would be fair to say that it derives some coherence from a complex network of investment and speculative activity in the Sunbelt, as well as from an international portfolio that includes major investments in Mexico and Central America. The "yankees vs. cowboys" model of intraruling-class divisions, the debate over which much ink was spilled in the late '60s and early '70s, was riddled with conceptual and empirical problems. But clearly new constellations of economic activity (and power) evolve over time, and the likely existence of a bloc with substantial "collective" interests in the Sunbelt (and south of it) may bear on crisis response from and unity within the ruling class. Yet and still, the U.S.'s southern flank is a critical concern of the whole ruling class. This is certainly borne out by the big, conventional military buildup (bigger, perhaps, than in any other region during the Reagan reign) of the "Southern Command," as well as by the ideological offensive around the question.

Turmoil in Mexico could trigger the sort of collapse outlined in the preceding scenario. A financial cave-in would certainly imperil several large U.S. banks and immediately hurt the South and Southwest, which depend greatly on Mexico as a trade partner. The food production and distribution network of the United States would be severely disrupted. Economic breakdown and/or mass upsurge in Mexico could destabilize Central America to a degree that called into question, as never before, the U.S. hold on the region. In the southern portions of Mexico dwell some of the country's most impoverished peasants, as well as increasing numbers of Guatemalan refugees. And not far off are the conflicts in Nicaragua and El Salvador. To Mexico's north lies not only the borderland economy and the larger Sunbelt but also missile testing grounds and major military installations — San Diego is the home port of the Seventh Fleet, and the Fort Bliss military complex in El Paso is headquarters of the U.S. Army Air Defense Center. The specter of hundreds of thousands of people fleeing a disintegrating and battle-

scarred Mexico and the potential "spillover effect" of upheaval in Mexico on America's Chicano population, which numbers in the millions in California, Arizona, and Texas, and whose loyalty to America is by no means assured, are matters of grave concern to policy planners.

If not already militarized, the U.S.-Mexican border has become a highly repressive checkpoint. The border arrests and detentions that immigrants face are of course the norm. But harassment and hysteria are reaching a higher pitch. The KKK and other right-wing paramilitary forces are operating brazenly in the border areas. The idea that many refugees from Latin America may in fact be (or become) terrorist infiltrators and would have to be rounded up at some time is a theme being sounded by ruling-class spokesmen of various kinds and through various means. Over the past few years, under the guise of combating drug cultivation and smuggling, spy planes have been pressed into regular service to fly over California forests, while the National Guard and the military have been synchronizing their border activities with the U.S. Customs service. (A question: might the U.S. be thinking of imposing an Israeli-like "South Lebanon security zone" on northern Mexico in some form, while further militarizing the U.S. side of the border?) Although immigration to the United States is still regarded as an important safety valve for Mexico's internal problems, the flow of immigrants is also viewed as a destabilizing force in the United States. "Operation Jobs," carried out in 1982, was a highly publicized "dry run" for dealing with some of the contradictions posed by a large and potentially "disloyal" immigrant population in time of crisis. More recently, the Rex '84 rehearsals for coping with some undefined national emergency have apparently included a contingency plan for the round-up of 400,000 illegal aliens in the event of U.S. mobilization for military action in Central America. (Information on such plans for domestic repression in connection with U.S. military operations in Central America has been gathered by the Christic Institute.)

In order to better understand cross-border influences and the potential feedback of crisis, much more needs to be learned about the occupational distribution, life experiences, and attitudes of the Latino sectors of the U.S. proletariat. Los Angeles contains the second largest urban concentration of Mexicans (after Mexico City). All told the Mexican-origin population increased from 4.5 million in 1970 to 8.7 million in 1980. Add to this some 1.4 million undocumented Mexicans who had settled in the U.S., and the total Mexican-origin population had more than doubled to 10.2 million over the decade — and this is not counting the "sojourners," or temporary illegals, who greatly outnumber the settlers in the undocumented population (see Harley L. Browning and Ruth M. Cullen, "The Complex Demographic Formation of the U.S. Mexican Origin Population, 1970-1980," in Harley L. Browning and Rodolfo O. de la Garza, eds., *Mexican Immigrants and Mexican Americans: An Evolving Relation*, Univ. of Texas Press, 1986).

In California, native-born Latinos and Mexican immigrants hold a large share of farmer and laborer jobs, as

well as a major proportion of semiskilled manufacturing jobs. Spanish-origin persons in Los Angeles, Orange, and San Diego counties represent 21 percent of the total labor force in the area. Yet, they have an average labor force participation rate of 69 percent, with almost half employed in the manufacturing sector. Over 35 percent of all women employed in manufacturing in southern California are Hispanic. Within electronics manufacture in the three counties mentioned, 67 percent of the female workforce in the "operators, fabricators, and laborers" category belongs to a minority group, and of those 51 percent are Hispanic females (data taken from Maria Patricia Fernandez Kelly, "Advanced Technology, Regional Development, and Hispanic Women's Employment in Southern California" in Richard Gordon, ed., *Microelectronics in Transition*, Westview Press, publication forthcoming). Some studies suggest that there is considerable labor segmentation between *indocumentados* and Chicanos in three situations: where *indocumentados* worked and Chicanos were not present; where *indocumentados* worked with Chicanos present only as supervisors; and where *indocumentados* occupied different jobs than did Chicanos within the same enterprise. These work situations, combined with a Mexican frame of reference of the undocumented, tend, according to the study, to contribute to significant intergroup differentiation between the undocumented and Chicanos (Browning and de la Garza, eds., *Mexican Immigrants and Mexican Americans*, pp. 148-9).

How significant, and politically relevant, such differences may be can only be understood through further investigation. But it is clear that many undocumented workers have little desire to stay within the U.S. Many might migrate southward to join the struggle in a period of crisis. Others among them might jump at the chance to use some of the evasive skills they have acquired, as well as direct experience in armed struggle, to hit back at the beast. For the bulk of the politically intermediate Mexicans in the U.S., the effects of a collapse in Mexico would be manifold. Were large numbers of Mexicans to stream north across the border, this would cause significant economic strains — increasing competition for jobs and housing, as well as for emergency assistance. Also, while it is often the case that Mexicans in the U.S. send part of their earnings back to members of extended families still in Mexico, this is a two-way street: to some extent, subsistence activity in Mexico enables families to temporarily separate and males, in particular, to migrate north. But if the bottom fell out in Mexico, these arrangements could be severely tested. Finally, anti-Mexican sentiment would not discriminate between various demographic groupings, and many Mexicans and Chicanos resident in the U.S. would find their status (and security) most tenuous.

A major intervention by the U.S. in Central America could lead to incredible turmoil in Mexico; and it is certainly not inconceivable that the Mexican government would call upon the U.S. for assistance in quelling disorder touched off by such an action or by the disintegrative forces at work within Mexico itself. (The Mexican state would probably be reluctant and hesitant at the outset to call for direct U.S.

intervention — an attitude which itself is probably soil for further political conflict at the top, including with the U.S., and for coups.) Any significant unraveling in Central America, especially one that had as an accompaniment new inflows of refugees into the United States, could provide the pretext for pogroms and "race riots" in the U.S. Indeed, if revolutionary struggle were to spread across the border, the real prospect of territorial fragmentation, and the greater danger that such struggle might spread further, could prompt attempts at massacres of unspeakable proportions: aerial bombardments and mass executions might be resorted to quickly as a means to contain and suppress resistance.

The array of social forces and history of struggle and repression in Texas merit close study in this connection. The situation facing Mexican-Americans and Mexicans in Texas in the postwar period does appear to have been tenser than it has in California (this also applies to Black people). Brownsville, Corpus Christi, El Paso, Laredo, McAllen, and San Antonio, cities on or near the Mexican border, all have large Mexican-origin populations — 45 percent or more of the total — while the absolute Mexican-origin population in Houston is probably around half a million. Texas is where things could get ugliest and sharpest, and perhaps very quickly.

The point is that a high level of combat could erupt in the Southwest under conditions when struggle in the rest of the country was at a considerably lower level. This might be the first serious challenge to the ruling class, and, as indicated, the tack of the ruling class would be to isolate and crush it mercilessly, in short, to bare its fangs and set an example. But this would in all likelihood set off immediate and violent reactions, both south and north of the border. To the south, anti-Americanism could take a quantum jump, and weaker regimes in Central America would probably have a hard time holding on. In the United States, a border upsurge (and/or massacre) would probably unleash a wave of anti-immigrant terror (including pogroms). But among the progressive petty bourgeoisie, there would be reason to expect not only rumblings of discontent but, from the more active, open defiance of the government and militant support for the border struggle and the Latino masses.

The sanctuary movement shows some of the potential for this (Renny Golden and Michael McConnell, *Sanctuary: The New Underground Railroad*, Orbis Books, 1986 is essential reading). In a curious way, that movement combines features of both the civil rights movement and a liberation support movement. The religious left (clearly marked by contradictory trends, including revisionism, social democracy, and a real left) is considerably larger, and more influential, today than it was in the 1960s — both worldwide and here. They identify strongly with the struggles of the oppressed in the Third World, particularly in Latin America. Impassioned appeals and heroic actions from the religious left would come quickly on the heels of the events described above. Actually, sanctuary-type forces might be the initial models for and links to broader forces. That many of these people are willing to fight and become martyrs for their

ideals has already caused great concern and alarm in the ruling class,⁶ and they would certainly come under heavy repression early in the game.

A border uprising and reign of terror would be widely perceived by many lower strata of the proletariat as an "early warning sign," if not, at least figuratively, as a call to arms — the more militant the resistance and the more savage the repression, the greater will be the reverberations. The Operation Jobs exercise also showed the lengths to which the ruling class would go to divide immigrants from other oppressed nationalities (in Chicago, jobs vacated by illegals in detention were given to Blacks, with Jesse Jackson's PUSH playing a negative, divisive role). But it is also the case that "pogroms do not play well in the ghetto"; the sentiment that "peoples of color" face a common enemy and must make common cause in struggle would in all likelihood take hold rather quickly among large sections of the oppressed nationalities. Moreover, lots of civilians, both in the border regions and the major metropolitan areas, would be meeting "the enemy" face-to-face — which was not the case during the Vietnam War or other U.S. expeditionary operations (this is something that worries the bourgeoisie vis-à-vis the sanctuary movement today). It is important to note that the Mexican migration has spread to cities outside the Southwest and that the Mexican population in many large U.S. cities is quite substantial (and rapidly growing). These factors underscore the volatile potential of a regional crisis.

One last point. If the Nicaraguan situation deteriorated to a degree that compelled direct U.S. intervention and were Mexico convulsed by a state of disorder that threatened to spill northward, it is entirely possible that *the U.S. imperialists might not respond regionally to a regional crisis*; to put it differently, a real or contrived threat on the U.S. border could be the pretext for World War 3. Here is an example of how scenarios like those presented here do not represent completely isolated developments: these developments are bound to be closely interrelated.

⁶ Listen to Elliott Abrams from the Reagan administration: "The battle for Central America is a battle for the high moral ground. And it is much harder for us to win that battle when a lot of church groups are opposing us and saying we don't have it. . . . I think they mislead many churchgoers around the country and others in human rights groups around the country, thinking that there is some horrendous 1930s-type situation and that if they don't act thousands will die by the end of the week." In attempting to discredit the sanctuary movement, the Reagan administration has made use of the so-called Banzer Plan, named after the Colonel who took power in Bolivia in 1971. The idea is to attack the part of the church that is most progressive, while steering clear of wholesale attacks on the church as an institution (and even less on the bishops as a group). Democracy needs its church. (Quoted in *Sanctuary: The New Underground Railroad*, pp. 88-89)

Scenario 4: Urban Crisis, Urban Uprisings, and the Black Masses⁷

The urban landscape of "late imperial America" can best be understood in terms of the "dual city": glittering and overbuilt downtown districts, complete with glass-encased office towers, luxury hotels, and new residential high-rises or condominiums side by side with hundreds of thousands of families locked into deteriorating neighborhoods and ghettos, often displaced by urban renewal projects (or fire zones created by developers and landlords), and unaccounted-for tens of thousands living in abandoned tenements. Finance capital has been housing itself, building monuments to itself, and barricading itself in the central city. The deterioration of one portion of the city is the condition for the lavish and often speculative expansion of the other. This is a tale of rebirth and decay, of the haves and the have-nots, of "peripheralization within the core." It is within the cities that the internal contradictions of U.S. imperialism are the most sharply defined and posed. It is within the cities that the proletariat is most favorably situated — indeed, the proletariat is probably the largest single social class in the cities, enjoying a plurality, if not an absolute majority. And herein lies a central contradiction of American society: the major cities are the nerve centers of financial and corporate decision-making, and yet in their very heart are concentrated millions of desperate, restless, and potentially rebellious proletarians.

American cities have always been patchworks of rich and poor, and the middle classes have traditionally led an uneasy (and buffer) existence within their residential zones. Violence and alienation are nothing new to the urban centers. But changes in the demographics and economic functions of the city over the span of the postwar period have created new stresses and dislocations that have both undermined the revenue base of the city and exacerbated its bipolarity (see Sternlieb and Hughes, "The Uncertain Future of the Central City," *Urban Affairs Quarterly*, June 1983).

Of overarching importance to any analysis of urban growth and decay in the postwar period are the decentralization and internationalization of much manufacturing activity (traditionally centered in the old-line urban centers) and, relatedly, the leading role of the United States in the international political and economic order, which has resulted in the headquartering into a city like New York of the economic command and control functions of global expansion and the related growth of necessary support services in capital markets, law and accounting, media and advertising, and administration (along with other "postindustrial" activities).

⁷ Some of the commentary and statistical material on the political economy of the city and on labor force trends is drawn from "A Perverse Recovery in Strategic Perspective," by Raymond Lotta (*Revolutionary Worker*, No. 287, 4 January 1985), with some additional data also taken into consideration.

At the same time, another fundamental change was taking place: the massive transformation of southern agriculture and the helter-skelter herding of Blacks into the urban ghettos wherein specific economic, social, and political processes would determine the conditions of existence of abundantly cheap labor power. The oppressed nationalities, especially Black people, became the inheritors of decaying inner cities. Starting in the 1970s a new stream of immigrants would flow into the major urban centers, to be incorporated into backward, though not necessarily declining, sectors in manufacturing and services that rely on low-paid, unorganized, and highly controllable workers.

These structural trends, along with the effects of the fiscal crisis of the cities and federal government cutbacks in social services, have produced increasing polarization in the economic situation of the urban populace. Many of the better-paying jobs in manufacturing have disappeared, as have some good jobs for middle-level-income workers, while high-income jobs in white-collar industries producing highly specialized services have expanded. In the thirty years between 1950 and 1980, 200,000 legal jobs in the New York apparel industry vanished. But while in 1970 there were fewer than 200 garment factory sweatshops, by 1980 there were between 3,000 and 4,500 sweatshops in New York, employing between 50,000 and 70,000 persons (see Rinker Buck, "The New Sweatshops," *New York*, 29 January 1979, and Franz Leichter, et.al., "The Return of the Sweatshop," Office of New York State Senator Leichter, 26 February 1981). At the same time, the ranks of the unemployed and underemployed in the large metropolitan centers have mushroomed over the last fifteen years (in New York, they number perhaps 400,000). Commenting on the overall situation, one observer pointed to the seeming collapse of what he calls the "social democratic minimum" (standard of reproduction). Although the city is still an "articulated" patchwork of extremes, larger segments of the urban population (and urban grid) are being left to rot.⁸

The oppressed and proletarian portion of the "dual city" begins to take on certain bantustan-like qualities. A vast reservoir of cheap labor, in this, the most industrialized country in the world, finds itself drawn into the labor force ever more often in a modern-day servant role, catering to the lifestyle requirements of the privileged. The polarization one

⁸ Not that this is without its functionality:

"The immigrant community can be seen as a sort of holding operation which, in the context of severe decline in the physical structure and loss of native population, operates as a low-cost complement to upper class 'gentrification'... as a small-scale investment of direct labor, e.g., neighborhood upgrading, and of capital, e.g., commerce, in the city's economy" (Sassen-Koob, "Recomposition and Peripheralization at the Core," *Contemporary Marxism*, Summer 1982, p. 97).

observes in the cities really reflects broader labor market trends. Between 1970 and 1984, some 23 million people entered the nonagricultural workforce. But only 1 percent of these entered manufacturing (where wages are traditionally higher than in the services). Over 30 percent of the jobs added between January 1980 and March 1986 were in retail trade, and the average yearly earnings for these jobs fall below the poverty level for a family of four as defined by the government (*New York Times*, 7 June 1986). Actually, between 1978 and 1984 about half the new jobs created overall in the U.S. economy paid near-poverty-level wages; this compares with a figure of 23 percent in the fifteen years between 1963 and 1978 (data from Bluestone and Harrison, *The Great American Jobs Machine*, Joint Economic Committee, 1987).

There is an explosion of low-wage jobs in services and manufacturing. Some of this involves the cheap manufacture of components for high-tech firms and various forms of subcontracting, which have given some strength to the U.S. economy. It's no exaggeration to speak of a perverse industrial renewal in America which has been based in large part on the borderland economy discussed earlier and the reemerging sweatshops of the cities on the one hand, and job-displacing rationalization on the other. With respect to rationalization in the traditional smokestack industries, a congressional study found that 40 percent of the 11.5 million workers who lost jobs because of plant shutdowns or relocations from 1979 to 1984 did not find new ones. For those who did find new jobs, 45 percent took pay cuts, and two-thirds of these workers were earning less than 80 percent of their former income (U.S. Office of Technology Assessment, *Technology and Structural Unemployment*, 1986, pp. 11-13).

These developments have contributed to growing earnings and income polarization. A recent study divided full-time workers in 1982 into three numerically equal earnings classes (based on usual weekly earnings). Full-time workers earning under \$239 per week increased their share of total employment from 32 percent in 1973 to almost 36 percent in 1985. The middle third of full-time workers, those earning between \$239 and \$385, saw its share of total employment decline from just under 35 percent to less than 32 percent over the same period (see "The Declining Middle Class: A Further Analysis," *Monthly Labor Review*, Sept. 1986). In point of fact, what has been referred to as "the real proletariat" is growing, both absolutely and relatively — partly at the expense of well-paying factory jobs in traditional manufacturing, and partly in consequence of the growth of the service sector. In 1984 about 8 million workers received wages at or below the minimum wage of \$3.85 an hour, and 6 million more received wages just above that level (*New York Times*, 7 June 1986).

Thus, about 15 percent of the total nonagricultural labor force is made up of the working poor, and were we to remove middle- and upper-strata employees from the total labor force numbers, it would become even more apparent that a substantial chunk of the U.S. working class finds itself in pretty desperate straits (an estimated 10 million nonsupervisory

workers, mostly in retailing, service industries, and agriculture, are not even covered by the minimum wage). Almost half of the minimum-wage workers are 25 years or older, and one of every four heads a household. Throughout most of the 1960s and 1970s, a full-time minimum wage job would allow a family of three to live just above the poverty level. Today, this same family would require a minimum wage of \$4.38 an hour to get above the official poverty level. A full-time minimum-wage worker in 1985 earned income equivalent to only 76 percent of the poverty level for a family of three. Actually, the minimum wage is now 38 percent of the average hourly wage, its lowest level by this measure since 1949 (data from *New York Times*, 30 March 1986). This is another index of polarization.

The high-tech promise of engineering and data-processing is yielding far fewer jobs than have been lost in manufacturing. And, according to projections made by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the ten job categories which can be expected to grow the most in the next decade are mainly outside of high tech: the top five are cashiers, registered nurses, janitors and cleaners, truck drivers, and waiters and waitresses. These are extremely low-wage jobs — the average weekly earnings for the ten job categories in 1984, and this includes the higher paying accountant and auditor categories, was \$344, with cashiers averaging \$194 a week (see the interesting analysis of the "new service economy" in *Business Week*, 3 March 1986). Alongside this absolute and relative growth of the real proletariat is the fact that it tends, increasingly, to labor in smaller-scale, more specialized, and more geographically scattered production units than has been the norm in traditional manufacturing. It would seem important to think through some of the consequences of this "fragmented environment" for various forms of struggle — economic, political, etc. — now and in the future.

The Census Bureau in 1984 estimated that more than forty million Americans were living in families of four with earnings of \$200 or less. The rapid rise of mass poverty has much to do with the phenomenal growth of the "new poor" — the newly unemployed, the underemployed, the homeless, many farmers, and people who fall outside the "safety net" of government assistance — and continuing immiseration in the cities. Indeed, *at the core of the urban cores in the United States are to be found conditions of work and well-being that are, in many respects, more like those of Third World countries than they are of other advanced countries* (see R. Ross and K. Trachte, "Global Cities and Global Classes," *Review*, Winter 1983).

New York is the pacesetter and the most extreme case. Illegal garment workers in the late 1970s were earning average wages of less than \$1.75 an hour, which puts them more in the camp of apparel workers in Singapore and Hong Kong than in the camp of their counterparts in Sweden and the Netherlands. Table 1 makes some comparisons in connection with infant mortality rates. The poorest areas of Brooklyn have infant mortality rates comparable to those of the Dominican Republic and Venezuela. A Black child born in Chicago in 1985 stood a greater chance of dying in his or

Table 1
Infant Mortality Rate for New York City
and Average of the Five Highest Infant
Mortality Areas in Major Boroughs (1980),
Compared to Selected Countries

Area	Infant Deaths (1000 live births)	Country with Comparable Rate (Actual)
New York City	15	Austria (13) West Germany (13)
Weighted Average of Five Highest Areas in:		
Manhattan	54	Philippines (53) Colombia (55)
Brooklyn	42	Sri Lanka (43) Venezuela (40)
Bronx	33	Malaysia (30) South Korea (33)
Queens	25	Taiwan (25)

Sources: The World Bank (1982); New York City Department of Health (1982).

Table 2
Population Share of Black Men
Over Age 16 With Jobs,
Selected Metropolitan Areas, 1985
(%)

Atlanta	73	Los Angeles	60
Washington, D.C.	73	New York	57
Houston	68	Chicago	52
San Francisco/ Oakland	62	Detroit	45

Source: U.S. Department of Labor (1986)

her first year than did an infant born in Costa Rica or Cuba.

In the late 1970s, over a third of renter households in the Bronx and Brooklyn were paying over 40 percent of their incomes for rent, and about half of these people were living in dilapidated structures; the rent burden in New York City, as measured in rent/income ratios, had steadily worsened between 1960 and 1978 (see Peter Marcuse, *Rental Housing in the City of New York*, New York Housing and Development Administration, 1979). In 1970 one in five of the city's children were poor; in 1982 the figure approached one in two. The poverty rate for Hispanic people is estimated to be in the range of 45 percent (data from "New York's Poor Grow in Number," *New York Times*, 16 December 1984).

The employment rates for Black men in twenty large

U.S. cities (see Table 2) are rather telling. In Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area the population share of Black men over age 16 with jobs was 60 percent; in Detroit only half the Black men over age 16 had legitimate jobs! Table 3 reveals another striking phenomenon: the growth of poverty in the cities parallels the growth of the cities' minority populations. Minorities (Hispanic, Black, Asian, and others) now make up more than 50 percent of the total population in New York, Baltimore, Chicago, Detroit, and Cleveland, for example.

How do people subsist under the circumstances that have been described? Raymond Lotta points to four institutionalized axes of survival. First is the low-wage, high-turnover job market into which the basic masses are crowded. Multiple wage-earning situations are quite common for lower-strata households (often involving teenage service employment). Second are various government support programs, including AFDC, food stamps, housing and health assistance. Transfer payments and welfare are absolutely critical for many within the social base of real proletarians. Third is the informal or irregular economy. This economy includes everything from off-the-books employment and casual services extended in the ghetto to criminal activity, especially in drug dealing. (The latter occupation is hardly marginal; not a few mothers will refrain from asking questions when a teenage child contributes cash to the family kitty.) Finally, there are the "networks of care," issuing in part from extended family situations, and the general pooling of resources. This takes on great importance in the realm of housing: the New York City Housing Authority has 175,000 units of public housing with 500,000 legal occupants and another 100,000 people, mostly relatives of tenants, living in them without permission; Chicago's Cabrini-Green has 13,500 official and perhaps 7,000 illegal residents. For many in the lower rungs of the proletariat, these conditions stand as immediate obstacles to taking up sustained political activity: welfare can be cut off, people can be evicted from public housing, and the heat that might come down from political involvement can spill over to necessary but subterranean economic activity. Closely linked to these means of survival, then, are various authority structures and control mechanisms — some more disguised than others — that regulate, fragment, and tend to demoralize the masses.

In considering the possibility of major and multiple ghetto eruptions or uprisings, the scenario at hand, it is necessary to examine some likely faultlines. As for the relative calm of today, Bob Avakian makes the observation in his work *A Horrible End, or An End to the Horror?* that the daily struggle for survival, combined with an awareness that broader sections of the population are not very receptive to radical ideas and action right now, weighs very heavily on the basic masses. But the complex web of monetary and nonmonetary activity on which people depend is also, as "Perverse Recovery" points out, extremely tenuous, and the associated struggle for survival is becoming ever more desperate. A particular "hot mix" might not only undermine this already fragile mode of existence; it could also suggest to millions

that this is no way to live . . . and that there is now a chance to strike back. But the tenuousness of daily life also raises the possibility of actual "commodity riots" — uprisings occasioned by conditions of privation.

In a previous scenario, the possible disruption of the welfare system as a result of a financial collapse was indicated. That could trigger the equivalent, in an imperialist country, of what has been called an "IMF riot," disturbances touched off by the sudden withdrawal of subsidies and support systems as part of austerity programs imposed on Third World countries from without. More generally, further cut-backs in social programs and continuing social decay could produce an intolerable situation for millions, a situation that would seriously increase the potential for mass disorder and violence. And the bourgeoisie is preparing. What lends weight to these speculations is not only the direction of social policy — very clearly, social welfare programs are being roped in as a first step towards even more massive cuts — but also the ideological offensive, whose basic theme has been summarized by Lotta: the poor have not been helped by these programs but rather offered disincentives to work that have led to unprecedented levels of crime, illegitimacy, and family breakup, that is, to a rising tide of social dysfunction

that now threatens to pollute the rest of America." The ruling class is signaling that people will be expected to fend for themselves; those who do not make the necessary adjustments will be kept on a tighter leash.

In this regard, it is useful to compare the current political climate with that of the '60s. As has been noted by analysts of many different political persuasions, the riots of the time were strongly conditioned by rising expectations, or by a sense of the betrayal of those expectations by those in a position to deliver on the promises of "the affluent society." The riots certainly gave vent to the alienation and anger of Black people, but to some degree people also hoped to gain something by rioting and to receive greater attention from government. The political terrain today is very different — both ideologically, with the demise of liberalism, and economically. Reagan cannot quite be charged with

⁹ This message was sounded in a Bill Moyers TV special and was given typically Reagan-esque treatment in his 1986 budget address. For an academic, though no less vile, presentation of the "new realism," see the special issue of *Society*, Jan./Feb. 1986.

Table 3
The Growing Minority Population of American Cities

		Total Population	Minority Population*	Percent of total
New York	1970	7,895,000	2,833,000	36%
	1980	7,072,000	3,403,000	48
	1985	7,380,000	3,987,000	54
Philadelphia	1970	1,949,000	702,000	36%
	1980	1,688,000	725,000	43
Baltimore	1970	906,000	431,000	48%
	1980	787,000	445,000	57
Chicago	1970	3,363,000	1,364,000	41%
	1980	3,005,000	1,706,000	57
	1985	3,083,000	1,875,000	61
Detroit	1970	1,511,000	691,000	46%
	1980	1,203,000	801,000	67
	1985	1,131,000	809,000	72
Cleveland	1970	751,000	304,000	40%
	1980	574,000	274,000	48
	1985	545,000	301,000	55

* Minority refers to Blacks, Hispanics, Asians and others.

Source: University of North Carolina (*New York Times*, 22 October 1986).

hypocrisy in the same way as were proponents of the Great Society. The Miami riot of 1980 had its particular underpinnings in the character of the city and in the structure and evolution of the Black community. But a study commissioned by the Ford Foundation drew some ominous conclusions (for the ruling class) with respect to the riot's possibly broader significance:

What claim the Miami riot has to a significant place in the history of racial unrest in the United States does not, as we have seen, spring from its having been the most costly riot in terms of property loss. Nor did it result in the most deaths. . . . [But] whereas the violence in Miami was not as broadly destructive as it was during the biggest riots of the 1960s, it surpassed Watts, Newark, and Detroit in its intensity. Indeed, to find a precedent for the random killing of whites, one would have to reach back before the 20th century, to the Nat Turner-style slave rebellions. . . . The disorder in Miami also differed from its earlier counterparts, in that the rioters had little reason to believe their actions would result in better living conditions for themselves. (Bruce Porter and Marvin Dunn, *The Miami Riot of 1980*, pp. 173, 175)

The ferocity of the masses in Miami is perhaps a harbinger of what is in store if the ghettos erupt again. To be sure, an "important change in the inner city. . . is that there has developed a corps of hardened, street-type urban dwellers who operate in a shadow economy of hustle and crime. . . first cast off by the working of the economic system, then frequently asocialized in youth homes and prisons, from which they bring a rather fierce and brutal institutional culture to the streets" (Robert Curvin and Bruce Porter, *Blackout Looting*, p. 184). But these were not the principal actors in Miami (although they played a certain role in the initial stages of the riot). What is more important is that simmering just below the surface is an even greater sense of entrapment — after all, there are fewer avenues out of ghetto conditions for the basic masses today. And while any future riots will undoubtedly contain an element of the desire to improve conditions in the Black community, what might more define future disturbances is a kind of "settling of accounts" — people have not forgotten the child murders in Atlanta and the MOVE massacre in Philadelphia, and there may be some more such outrages, of an even more horrific character, before the dam bursts. While the 1977 New York blackout looting was not so ferocious as the Miami rebellion, it is also worth studying for the notice it delivered of the extensive and spreading character of urban poverty (ironically, some statisticians made use of looting patterns to locate where the New York poor were — and found them in many more places than expected!) and for the widespread attitude of "break the rules when the lights go out."

It is impossible to assess the prospects for ghetto uprisings without considering the interrelations among different

sections of Black people. Particularly important here is the broader social impact on the basic Black masses of a reawakening of, and realignment within, the Black petty bourgeoisie. Its dormancy over the past period of years is linked in part to political disorientation and exhaustion, in part to new economic and social opportunities. But people's expectations and sights can change, either as a result of an explosive international development or some significant domestic shift.

Internationally, the struggle in South Africa, whose fallout in the U.S. has proven to be more and more politically radioactive, could be a social detonator. An all-out civil war in South Africa might not only be among the bloodiest in history but also one that forces the U.S., perhaps under the pretext of warding off the Soviets, to directly intervene (the excuse could also be the "desire to prevent further bloodshed"). Under the circumstances, sections of the Black petty bourgeoisie could become radicalized to the point of taking bold and militant initiatives. The ghettos could get quickly energized. People might take to the streets and lash out at symbols of authority and oppression for a multiplicity of reasons: racial solidarity, or just the boiling over of rage and resentment. Similarly, a major defeat for the U.S. somewhere in the Third World, combined perhaps with tangible Soviet advances, might be the signal to some revolutionary nationalist forces to "intensify the struggle." It is entirely possible that such forces might launch urban guerrilla-type activity which could, especially if the social fabric at home were tearing, both ignite social outbursts and attract a following. Thus, some forms of armed conflict of this type might precede a fully ripe crisis. A dialectic of repression and resistance could be set in motion in which forms of armed struggle would become part of the objective situation.

Paradoxical as it might appear in the wake of the MOVE bombing, a situation could arise in which attacks on Black mayors and the associated political infrastructure become lightning-rods for mass struggle. Conceivably, the bourgeoisie might sum up that "neocolonial" arrangements no longer serve the purposes of containment (especially in anticipation of unruliness with the onset of war or deep crisis) and that an undisguised iron fist is required. The orchestrated or forced removal of some of these collaborators might be viewed by the masses as a prelude to something heavier (which could very well be the case). Further, there are not a few potential "wild cards" in these Black administrations — operatives with gang connections, former revolutionaries, etc. — who could just as easily try to stir the ghetto up as they would try to cool things out (there were elements of this in the '60s). The continual thwarting of the aspirations of some sections of the Black middle class in this kind of political atmosphere could lead a Louis Farrakhan (of the Black Muslims), or someone like him, to enter into more open confrontation, even combat, with the powers that be.

The Miami rebellion is also instructive in relation to the contradictions involving middle strata among Black people (even taking into account the particularity that there has been more of a "shutting out" of the Black petty bourgeoisie

in Miami than is the case nationally). First, of course, is the fairly well-known fact that many people from the Black petty bourgeoisie — and even bourgeoisie — supported the rebellion, with some middle-class elements even taking part in it. But also of interest are several episodes involving some "poverty-pimp" and normally reliable "political firemen" types. A good chunk of the local "poverty-pimp" structure apparently became quite pissed off when the local power structure went right over their heads and directly called in Jesse Jackson. In addition, a local leader of the Urban League pointedly went out to play golf (of all things!) when he was called upon to play his fireman role. (He shot a score in the mid-eighties, including four birdies; he must have been feeling pretty good.) (Bruce Porter and Marvin Dunn, *The Miami Riot of 1980*, pp. 68-69)

So there can be some important, if partial, defections and conflicts when the state calls in its chips on these strata at crisis time. And, especially in even more acute situations than Miami was, the reactions of the authorities to such partial desertions can also be a precipitating, and complicating, factor.

A major role in a ghetto uprising situation could be played by organized reaction. The city embodies much that is alien and threatening to "mainstreet America." It is not only inhabited by Blacks and foreigners but by "cosmopolitans" as well. The city also stirs resentment among many of those seeking cover in the suburbs. Under the banner of "taking back the city," with or without the sanction of the state, right-wing paramilitary forces could certainly carry out, if they are not already planning, assassinations of some Black leaders (elements of local police forces should also be factored into this kind of activity). Pogroms should also be regarded as real possibilities: they could be launched in connection with a situation of rising war-fever running up against a mood of "uncooperativeness" in the ghetto (the two previous world wars saw some of this) or in association with a vengeful "put shiftless and dangerous Black youth back in their place" offensive. But in virtue of the much larger, and more volatile, concentrations of oppressed peoples in the cities than was the case during the last two world wars, such violence could produce a massive counterresponse (which would certainly be decried as "race war" by the bourgeoisie).¹⁰ Thus, in the context of more intense harassment and repression of the basic masses, political destabilization and right-wing violence could produce chain reactions leading to major ghetto explosions.

¹⁰ Having said all of this, it would be wrong to rule out the South African tack of state-sponsored Black vigilantism — perhaps under the local direction of Black mayoral administrations — as a means to curb radical influence. Exposures today of "Black faces in high places" are few and far between. Those that have been done by various forces are timely and necessary — and might well play a similar role in some respects to the Bolsheviks' exposures of the Kerensky government in the months following February 1917.

There is uneven development among, and social histories specific to, individual ghettos. The Miami rebellion occurred in relative isolation. But in the scenarios presented here, the potential for simultaneous uprisings, or for multiple uprisings following on the heels of others, is considerable. The fact remains that there are general (deteriorating) conditions in the ghetto and an increasingly hostile climate. A political crisis or attack could spawn a new-found sense of Black consciousness and common purpose, perhaps focused around the issue of national survival itself (the question of genocide did assume significant proportions in the '60s). The bourgeoisie realizes that ghetto uprisings could rapidly spread, even as "copy-cat" riots, and in the event of an initial riot or opening salvo of riots, the ruling class would not wait for others to erupt city by city. Politically and logistically, the bourgeoisie would try to "cordon off" any serious disturbances. How to push things forward in such a situation will be a major challenge for revolutionary forces. On the other hand, a preventive clampdown (about which more later) could backfire and provoke precisely what it was designed to forestall.

Obviously, poverty or police brutality does not in and of itself beget riots. Nor, in trying to understand what causes the outbreak of mass disorder, can a recurrent "precipitating event," of the sort the Kerner Commission sought to isolate, be abstracted from the larger package of political-social conditions and popular expectations in which such outrages become fuses. On a deeper level, what is involved is the sharpening of the overall situation and an altered field of perception as to what the future holds (or does not hold) and what kinds of risks are worth taking. Given the realities of Black social existence in late imperial America, and the kinds of shocks that the empire will in all likelihood have to absorb, it is quite possible for the frazzled but no less real "social compact" binding the basic Black masses to the system to come undone very quickly.

Concluding Considerations

Other equally plausible crisis scenarios could be constructed (a Three Mile Island or Chernobyl-type accident in which damage control — both materially and politically — proves ineffective would certainly be an important thought-experiment). The four scenarios presented here are instructive insofar as they capture some of the more defining and explosive features of the current situation — any one of these scenarios could pop up literally overnight — and reveal, in a rudimentary way, that domestic and international factors are bound to be highly intermixed and interactive.

This takes on special significance in light of the highly urbanized character of this country. Yet there is no equivalent of a Petrograd in the United States: "In the Russian empire, with its long tradition of strong, arbitrary rule from the center, the political situation in Petrograd, especially control of the institutions and symbols of national power, was of im-

mense significance in determining the course of the revolution throughout the country. In addition to being the governmental hub, Petrograd, with a war-inflated population of 2.7 million in 1917, was the country's most important commercial and industrial center" (Alexander Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks Come to Power*, [New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1978], p. xvi. But economic and social developments since the first two world wars have created a situation in which cities are subject to greater stresses and strains, with all that implies for social order and regulation. Furthermore, in consequence of the growing and more complex interplay of economic and technological functions, a major city now becomes highly sensitized to all manner of disturbances and dislocations in other urban centers. And this has more than local or regional significance in any of the four scenarios, given the interdependence of the world economy: the major cities of the industrialized world have become netted with each other to form an interlocking web of vital functions. The vast international migrations of labor since World War 2 represent an important strand of this web. In short, *the potential for the generation and transmission of urban crises and disruptions is enormous.*

If, for analytical purposes in this study, some aspects of social life and social response were emphasized more than others in particular scenarios, this should not blind the reader to the likely eruption and merging of "dissimilar currents," recalling Lenin's description of revolutionary Russia. The wild displacement and condensation of contradictions are of the essence of a "hot mix." But a revolutionary situation doesn't come out of nowhere; nor are its constitutive elements created out of whole cloth. Certain prominent features of American society, certain social issues, will be integral and central to any foreseeable "hot mix" in this country. And among these will clearly be the woman question.

So much of what defines and tears at the social fabric of late imperial America is bound up with the position and changes affecting women. *Occupationally*, we are dealing with the large-scale and long-term entry of women into the labor force. A substantial chunk of the "real proletariat" is made up of women (and the "industrial renaissance" referred to earlier very much involves women of the oppressed nationalities). *Socially*, we are dealing with extraordinary transformations of the nuclear family and traditional gender roles, which have at once given further impetus to the quest for independence and magnified the burden placed on women. One out of three families headed by women, and one out of every two Black families headed by women, lives in poverty. *Politically*, with the battle around abortion, we are dealing with a question that is violently polarizing American society (what other issue today provokes demonstrations of tens of thousands on both sides?). A film like *The Color Purple*, along with other cultural expressions of the struggle against women's oppression, sets off major storms. Women's studies programs and feminist research and scholarship in general are leaving a big mark on the intellectual landscape and greatly influencing alignments within the intelligentsia.

For many tired and reconciled veterans of the 1960s, things got out of hand and went too far; for many women, things never went far enough! The Revolutionary Communist Party has correctly emphasized that the struggle against women's oppression is an ideological touchstone for proletarian revolution. Indeed, the pervasiveness of and depth of response to women's oppression, both in advanced capitalist society and the colonies, have created a more favorable basis for a program of "all-the-way revolution." Much more needs to be thought through in terms of how the sharpening of this contradiction will influence the social and political conditions of pre-World War 3 America. Plainly, it will have profound "scenario consequences." A few suggestive aspects of the question will be focused on here.

The return to traditional family values is a hallmark of the imperialist ideological offensive. The article "The Making of the Christian Soldiers" (*Revolutionary Worker*, No. 379, 3 November 1986) observes that

from the mid-'70s until today, the religious and "pro-family" coloration became the prism through which the whole familiar range of reactionary issues were projected. White racism now masqueraded as a fight "of concerned parents against having their children bussed across town to inferior schools." The counteroffensive against science and progressive ideas was presented as "a fight by concerned parents to control what their children are taught, and to defend them against moral relativism, sex, pornography, perversion, and godlessness."

But "defense of the family" is no merely ideological ruse, nor is it a simple backlash to the '60s and '70s. Of great concern to the bourgeoisie is how the state of the family, in particular the role and attitudes of women, impacts on social stability — not only today but especially, projecting forward, in a highly stressful crisis situation. Not a few of the social changes wrought by the movements of the earlier upsurges represent problems in the path of "know-nothing" war mobilization. And the swelling ranks of alienated and angry women is viewed with great alarm by the bourgeoisie. How the bourgeoisie has been trying to effect an ideological synthesis reflective, on the one hand, of the deep-going changes in the structure of social life that have taken place in the last twenty-five years and, on the other, of the requirements of reactionary, imperialist war preparations is a complex issue that warrants further investigation. But "putting women back in their place" has emerged as a key rallying cry, and organizing center, for patriotic traditionalism.

The antiabortion movement has been pivotal to this feverish mobilization. It has served to glue together, both ideologically and organizationally, various strands of obscurantism and backwardness. It has served as a vehicle through which loyal Americans can overcome their demoralization. And it has served as a training ground for proto-fascist activity: blacklists and smear campaigns directed against prominent women who speak out in favor of

abortion and doctors who perform them, firebombings of clinics, kidnappings and other terror directed against the women's health movement, and the creation of self-styled martyrs to the "cause of life." But all of this has stirred greater outrage and a more militant response on the other side of the barricades. This is likely to become increasingly the case.

An analogy can be usefully drawn between the role of the draft in the 1960s and the abortion issue in the contemporary political setting. There is a sharp "us versus them" ("them" being the federal government and the powers that be) edge to the question, made even sharper by the meager support that proabortion activists receive from government authorities and liberal politicians. The question could become ever more of a dividing line, and one that could lead to mass disaffection with the system. But there is more involved. Might some of the features of the clashes preliminary to a civil war situation be prefigured in the abortion battles today? Might this become a training ground of another sort for progressive forces? To go further: might pogrom-like attacks on women, perhaps coming from more organized, paramilitary right-wing forces, be a tripwire for broader social combat?

In trying to extrapolate strategically from the four scenarios, it is evident that some crises have greater potential for social disorder, and greater potential for producing a more favorable alignment of forces for the revolutionary proletariat, than do others. But this has to be understood dynamically. We have seen how initial outbursts, progressive or reactionary, from different social strata can have an effect on others. For the ruling class, the real danger of things spreading in any such crisis situation puts a premium on the capacity to quarantine disorder.

The ruling class is hardly ignorant of the possibilities for revolutionary upheaval inherent in the crisis situations of the sort that have been outlined here. Though sometimes obscured by self-serving "crisis games" and "conflict theories," the imperialists take the threat of societal breakdown quite seriously (as indicated earlier, a number of high-level studies examined the likely effect of population relocation, in the event of a war alert, on social stability). The upsurges of the '60s have not been written off as aberrant or unrepeatable phenomena (interestingly, the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration report on the Miami rebellion chides local authorities for complacency in riot control) (see Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, *Prevention and Control of Civil Disorders: Issues for the 1980s*, 1980, pp. 43-51). And the concern over Mexico suggests the degree to which the ruling class understands the realities of the "hot mix." This raises the issue of crisis response and repression.

That repression will come down, probably with a ferocity never before seen in this country, and that the fallout from and the response to it will greatly influence the political situation, is a given in these simulation exercises. Not only won't the U.S. imperialists kneel over to a superpower rival, they'll also stop at nothing to exact the submission at home

that they will need to wage world war. And so they have been strengthening the repressive machinery at the same time that they have been expanding their military arsenal. There have been a number of disclosures over the past few years about the activities of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the so-called Rex '84 exercises linked to contingency planning for a domestic crisis (see Golden and McConnell, *Sanctuary*, p. 93). What has been reported is the existence of standby legislation for broad emergency powers which would allow for the extreme centralization of government and economic functions, as well as censorship, suspension of the Bill of Rights, and the imposition of martial law (including mass detentions of immigrants and "political subversives"). Recent speeches from Attorney General Meese in which he raised questions about the constitutional doctrine of the "presumption of innocence" are of more than philosophical interest.

In the world war and regional crisis scenarios, a probable crisis response from the bourgeoisie would be some form of preventive detention. By this is meant government-sponsored round-ups, jailings without trial, and occupations of oppressed communities *in anticipation* of social breakdown and social conflict. (The Polish crackdown in 1981 and 1982 is instructive in this light.) It would also seem that the "specter of terrorism" and anti-immigrant hysteria would figure prominently in state-organized or state-backed efforts to meet the potential for mass upheaval. A latter-day Reichstag fire (the Nazi excuse for fascistization), only this time blamed on real or imagined terrorists, would be a most suitable pretext for the installation of a police state. The point is that anything even beginning to approach a 1960s level of disorder and confrontation — and the urban uprisings scenario drives this home even more — would be met with savage force.

The popular response to large-scale repression is likely to be very contradictory, particularly in its early stages. Police-state tactics will be met with awe and fear by large sections of the population. The middle classes would probably experience a profound psychological shock, unaccustomed as they are to the extreme centralization of authority or to its unbridled use on a mass scale and in a way that cannot be ignored. And the question of authority is so critical since, generally speaking, the middle classes see the government as their protector (something which takes on special relevance in world war). Thus the withdrawal of democratic rights in exchange for the promise of the earliest possible return to normalcy may have more than limited appeal, although the idea that there's nothing much you could do about it anyway is just as likely to influence such opinion. On the other hand, when the "real deal" dawns on some of these strata, that is, when it becomes clear that the bourgeoisie is serious about waging world war, allowing neither discussion nor dissent, and is prepared to stop at nothing to put down rebellion and resistance, then some of these people may undergo a rude awakening. The specific terms, and turns, of mass struggle will of course bear heavily on popular perceptions, and if the bourgeoisie commits any major blunders or reveals

weakness, then middle forces may vacillate in a more socially significant way.

A preemptive clampdown would be aimed principally at revolutionary forces, various progressives from movements judged to be dangerous, and oppressed proletarians in their vast numbers (there is probably something in this regard to be learned from the state of siege that exists today in the working-class slums of Santiago, Chile). Now the oppressed masses in this country do not have the same experience of conducting their daily lives and waging political struggle in conditions of extreme repression, as did, for instance, large sections of the masses in Tsarist Russia or in Iran under the Shah. But neither would this be a totally foreign situation: living in the ghetto does provide people with some important survival and evasion skills, and many immigrants do bring with them to this country direct experience with such situations. Dragnets in the oppressed communities and round-ups of youth are bound to provoke resistance on some level. But here again the question of consciousness and political preparation assumes extraordinary importance. People have to begin to grasp the stakes and probable contours of the sort of situation that might quickly unfold. There is the greatest need for a conscious vanguard force to lead in creating the strongest political and organizational basis for the masses to act within and transform an extremely difficult situation.

In any situation of social stress and/or collapse, right-wing forces would be fielding large battalions. It's not too difficult to imagine an updated version of the German "free corps movement" (disgruntled soldiers from World War 1), maybe made up of a section of Vietnam veterans claiming to have been stabbed in the back by soft-hearted liberals, becoming a political force. It's also probable that right-wing paramilitary forces will be pressed directly into the service of martial law. But in being unleashed by "save America" madness, some of these forces may run amok and start getting out of hand, even from the standpoint of their ruling-class masters. Such "loose cannons" could further destabilize things and fuel greater hatred for the ruling class. (In Germany after World War 1, right-wing activity, with greater or lesser backing from on high, touched off several crises and opened significant revolutionary opportunities.) It is also possible that in wildly attacking various sections of the masses, perhaps in the border regions or the inner cities, the reactionaries may find the going a lot rougher than what they had bargained for. Setbacks or defeats for them in local engagements (although the bourgeoisie is not likely to stand aside when things reach such a point) might provide the inspiration for broader rebellions and the opening for more organized revolutionary offensives.

The revolutionary masses and their vanguard cannot afford to underestimate — and history bears this out repeatedly — the lengths to which a ruling class will go to quash actual or potential resistance and rebellion. But this is no cakewalk for the rulers. Lenin's observation in the *Collapse of the Second International* that "never do governments stand in such need of agreement with all the parties of the ruling classes, or of the 'peaceful' submission of the oppressed classes to that

rule, as in the time of war" is most relevant. This is so not only in connection to world war but also (and relatedly) in specific application to the conditions that would surround any major moves over repression, even a more full-fledged, Rex '84-style fascism. The imperialists will need to weld, and in short order, a high degree of unity and, as already noted, to greatly centralize authority. But while a consensus on "what's up in the world" exists within the ruling class, actual war mobilization and moves towards institutional centralization are likely to produce discord within ruling circles. Some officials suddenly cut out of the action may balk; elements in Congress may drag their feet and even, however feebly, resist.

In projecting forward from a clampdown, there looms this most important mood-creating factor: how the revolutionary forces targeted for attack respond to the initial waves of repression. If revolutionary forces could withstand a preliminary assault and continue to influence the political situation, this would represent a terrible blow to the bourgeoisie and radically alter popular expectations. A failed attempt at suppression might not only embolden fiercer resistance (maybe among oppressed nationalities facing pogroms) and broader resistance (perhaps among progressive middle strata): the resurgence of revolutionary forces would also, in the context of grave dislocations, give credibility to revolutionary political programs and solutions. By the same token, the ineffectuality and bankruptcy of other political programs would become increasingly apparent to many different strata of the population. Such a resurgence might also contribute to an ungluing of things on top. The combination of chaos and enhanced prestige possibly enjoyed by revolutionary elements could precipitate significant splits within the ruling class, which in turn could produce temporary paralysis and disorientation — perhaps leading to constitutional crises or even coups (as well as the appearance of liberal knights on white horses). Thus a very different dynamic than that of unrelieved and unanswered terror could be set in motion relatively quickly.

All of these considerations underline the importance of the comment quoted at the beginning of this article: the ruling class has to lose the allegiance of the masses just once. If they seriously mishandle a turning point, and neither they nor serious revolutionaries are counting on gradually winning people over, then it's a whole new ball game — for both sides. But this also emphasizes that a vanguard must think and act as a vanguard in a situation of unprecedented danger and opportunity. Spontaneity cannot be counted on. Revolutions don't happen; they are made!

Historically, the emergence of forms of dual power has been integral to the process of proletarian revolution. In Russia in 1917 dual power took shape as soviets; in China it was armed base areas in the countryside. These embryonic institutions of proletarian state power have allowed the masses to translate their class interests into social and political practices that give concrete expression to their capacity to run society, and in a way completely different from the bourgeoisie. At the same time, forms of dual power

have enabled revolutionary vanguards to mobilize the masses for the armed struggle. More recently in South Africa there have been attempts to exercise popular control in the townships — the so-called "comrades" have set up shadow local administrations. And there is experience worth studying from the mass upsurges of the late '60s and early '70s in this country: instances where police and other armed forces of the state were driven out of urban areas during violent rebellions in the ghettos and barrios; building takeovers and occupations; People's Park in Berkeley; and the more prolonged and threatening exercise of alternate power that occurred during the Wounded Knee struggle of American Indians in the Dakotas.

Is it possible to envision dual power emerging in the highly telescoped and highly repressive conditions that are likely to define a revolutionary situation in the United States? The answer is that it would certainly be to the advantage of the revolutionary proletariat to bend every effort to bring such a thing (or things) into being. The question of whose authority will be followed in a period of crisis — that of the bourgeoisie or the proletariat — is more likely to be answered in the proletariat's favor if it is actually wielding some authority. Every revolution has produced its own distinctive forms of dual power. The particular demographic and regional features of American society, as well as the specific nature of a revolutionary crisis, will influence the possibilities for and the actual character of dual power when the situation ripens here.

An issue deserving full examination in its own right but which can only be touched on here is what might be expected from the Communist Party, USA. The CP can be presumed to be in for the long haul and to be functioning with a perspective of power. Their gradualism and pathetic cautiousness are not indications of any lack of seriousness but rather linked to a view of how power will be achieved. They are also "waiting but not just waiting." In effect, the CP has its own conjunctural orientation, which seems to be predicated on two interlinked developments: major international advances by the Soviet Union, or outright victory, and major (incapacitating) splits within the U.S. ruling class. That the CP seriously intends to exploit such developments is one reason why it so closely monitors alignments and divisions within the U.S. ruling class (one is continually amazed at how finely-grained are revisionist analyses of financial groups in the United States) and snuggles its operatives and agents into positions of influence in high places and high office.

Initially, the CP might gain strength and a mass following in the crises considered here — for several reasons: they already have some numerical strength, they do have friends in high places, and they may be the principal target of repression and garner support and derive some prestige as a result. A regional crisis can be seen to provide the revisionists with some openings in view of the strength of pro-Soviet forces south of the border. Upsurges within the United States would be evaluated by the CP from the standpoint of how they serve the program of "revolution from above" (and

towards its fulfillment the CP must position itself in mass movements). An extreme constitutional crisis would probably be the preferred doormat to the chambers of power-sharing; but it would be naive to think that revisionist-inspired armed struggles and/or putschs are beyond the pale of possibility or somehow alien to this general strategy.

Despite some favorable possibilities for the revisionists, the bankruptcy of the CP and its program could become exposed. In the face of repression, and leaving aside their wholesale elimination by the bourgeoisie, they could certainly capitulate and/or undergo severe splitting. They might be forced to justify Soviet atrocities in various parts of the world. And, importantly, in a chaotic crisis situation, they might have to range themselves against more radical and disruptive forces who threaten necessary blocking and compromising with bourgeois forces at critical turns. In any event, the revisionists have to be taken very seriously.

It should be obvious that much more needs to be understood about revolutionary situations in general and the likely contours of one in this country. The particular focal points of each of the four scenarios warrant more thorough investigation, but regional crisis is the one about which least is understood (by this author, in any case), especially with respect to the political economy and demography of the borderlands. In this connection, but with broader significance as well, the immigrant question cries out for further analysis (some useful work has been done "in the field" by radical academics). Theoretical and empirical work around the woman question needs to go deeper. Plainly, it is crucial to know more about the strata of the proletariat that the RCP has identified as the social base for revolution in the U.S.: who is in it, its occupational distribution and concentration, characteristic forms of resistance, and the sociology of its daily existence. Many such proletarians are up against the "despotism" of the factory system (Marx's term). Should major shop struggles and more Watsonvilles (a cannery employing many immigrant workers that has been the site of a prolonged and intense strike) be expected? And what role might such struggles play in a situation of more serious social strife? It is also important to assess developments among the more privileged layers of the proletariat. It's clear that many workers who have been recycled downward, or who face that prospect, are somewhat shell-shocked, hanging on to what can be hung on to, at present. But then there is the Hormel strike. Might similar struggles erupt in the future? And how might such economic struggles interact with a political crisis? Is there anything to be summed up about the miners' strike in Great Britain of a few years ago which struck a sympathetic chord among broad sections of the population?

Work of revolutionary preparation requires the ability to seize on key turning points, and the scenarios presented here would certainly lend support to that orientation. In a revolutionary crisis, a vanguard would have to win diverse social forces — forces that are likely to alternately bolt and join different camps, but without some section of which it will not be possible to take power — to the camp of revolution over a

short period of time. This can only be done on the basis of program, which itself must be given material expression in the strength and authority that the revolutionary proletariat commands. Of what relevance is this to the schooling of the revolutionary proletariat and its vanguard?

In general, the RCP has honed its skills of exposure. Its work around the MOVE bombing is a positive expression of the proletariat bringing its strength and outlook to bear upon a major outrage. Still, there remains the always vexing question of how, and to what degree, the proletariat mounts the political stage in a prerevolutionary situation. And what about the time when program and solution come more directly to the fore (not that exposure will be any less important in a wrenching crisis situation)? Under what circumstances is it correct and crucial to begin to assist the struggling masses in formulating fighting demands? Today, Jesse Jackson goes into the farmbelt, with a program of sorts, and creates a definite impression. Back in 1979, members of the Miners Right to Strike Committee went to Washington, D.C. to support, and struggle with, farmers from the American Agricultural Movement. This too created a definite impression. Since then the RCP has developed a new party programme that contains a fairly sophisticated section dealing

with agriculture. But there is, I believe, the need to go beyond that to make a more specific analysis of the farm problem and to offer for more popular consideration the solution to it. A crisis such as that affecting farmers reveals in miniature the shifting array of political forces and programs, along with many of the contradictory tugs and pulls, that will be operative in a scenario-type situation. Is there perhaps important experience to be gained through creative forms of intervention? More generally, how does the party learn more about different social strata and expand its influence among them?

In concluding, it is necessary to emphasize that the purpose of simulating specific crisis situations is to try to anticipate the kinds of problems, tasks, and challenges that lie ahead. Not only must revolutionaries heighten their vigilance. They must also sharpen their capacity to recognize and evaluate changes in the objective situation in order to theoretically and practically bear into a conjuncture, to act on an historic moment, pregnant with possibility, from within. This is no mere exhortation, because as Bob Avakian points out in his 1986 interview, "We know the world as it is is not for long going to be able to remain as it is, and one way or another it's going to be radically and dramatically changed."