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**A critique of  
the RWH's  
"Realignment, Reagan  
and Our Tasks"**

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**Jane Fong**

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Marxist-Leninist Debate Series  
Position by the U.S. League of Revolutionary Struggle (M-L)

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## A critique of the RWH's "Realignment, Reagan and Our Tasks"

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by Jane Fong  
for the League of  
*Revolutionary Struggle (M-L)*

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The following article was written as a response to the pamphlet by the Revolutionary Workers Headquarters (RWH), *Realignment, Reagan and Our Tasks*. The RWH pamphlet was published as their contribution to the current debate in the Marxist-Leninist movement on key questions of the U.S. revolution, on the topic of the period of the revolutionary struggle and the tasks of communists. The position of the League of Revolutionary Struggle (M-L) on this topic was published for the debate in the pamphlet, *Repression, Reaganomics, War and Revolution*. It is available for \$1.00 from UNITY, P.O. Box 127, Oakland, CA 94604. (see last page for more information)

The RWH pamphlet can be obtained by writing the RWH at Pole Publications, P.O. Box 5597, Chicago, IL 60680.

The League welcomes comments and criticisms on the views in its pamphlet, this response to the RWH and generally on this topic.

JANE FONG is a member of the Central Committee of the League of Revolutionary Struggle (M-L).

**A**t last. The debate has begun. The Marxist-Leninist movement has started to debate various perspectives on the state of our movement and the requirements of the revolutionary struggle at this time. Together we may be able to inject a current of fresh air into what is at present a stale atmosphere of confusion, demoralization, innuendo and sectarianism which has developed in sections of the communist movement.

Hopefully, the debate can help to achieve a more open and broad sharing of views and experiences than has been the case up till now. If so, this can help clarify different points of view and develop a sharper sense of how we can best proceed to build up the forces of revolution and communism in the U.S.

It is unfortunate, though, that some comrades seem to feel at home in the present stuffy ideological atmosphere which exists in parts of our movement. These comrades find it fashionable to constantly lament the "sorry state" of the Marxist-Leninist forces and to use this as a rationale for liberalism, narrowness and localism and for reformist and vague approaches to the tasks of this

period.

This is the case with the Revolutionary Workers Headquarters (RWH). In our view, their pamphlet, *Realignment, Reagan and Our Tasks*, is a political reflection of the cynicism and frustration that is affecting many today. We believe it is also a reflection of the fact that the RWH has not yet grasped some of the salient lessons that our movement should have learned from the past decade or so.

We would like to offer a critique of some of the main points of the Headquarters' pamphlet. I encourage all comrades to read it for themselves and to give thought to the serious implications of the RWH's point of view on the state of the movement and the

tasks facing us at this time.

### Two different approaches

If comrades read the RWH pamphlet and the one put out by the League of Revolutionary Struggle (M-L), *Repression, Reaganomics, War and Revolution*, they will notice vastly different approaches to the topic. It may even seem that the two papers don't even address the same thing.

In fact, the first topic in the debate series was to define the basic features of the *revolution* in the U.S., including the current political and economic situation in the country, the state of the mass and Marxist-Leninist movements, and the main tasks for communists at this time. We in the League attempted to address these issues by presenting an overview that linked our long-range tasks and principles with our responsibilities today. We also tried to show how our present work must be based on a concrete assessment of the state of our movement and what it will take to raise it to a

higher level.

In contrast to this approach, there is no integrated overview in the RWH paper. It omits consideration of how anything it advocates doing is connected to any long-term objectives. It is preoccupied with how to gain a position in the anti-Reagan activities in a superficial and shortsighted way. In short, in a paper that was supposed to discuss the basic perspectives and work of revolutionaries, the RWH leaves out the revolution.

This does not mean that the RWH simply omitted the word "revolution" or a list of "principles." The RWH paper is devoid of a *consistent revolutionary perspective*, a down-to-earth view of how we should try to develop the revolutionary movement to achieve socialism. Instead the RWH presents vague exhortations and unreal plans, all rationalized by expediency or cynicism.

The RWH's basic view is that the communist movement in the U.S. is in such a mess that we should pin all our efforts and hopes upon trying to "steer" the anti-Reagan front. If we are unable to accom-

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plish this task within the next few years, the RWH melodramatically cries: "If we do not rise to this challenge, then we deserve to fold, and fold we will." (page 1)

According to the RWH, the nature of all communist political, theoretical, propaganda and organizational work should be determined by the anti-Reagan context. There is no clear connection, however, between the RWH's anti-Reagan work and the strategic struggle against monopoly capitalism. It is precisely this connection (the link between what we are doing now and our long-term goals) that should have been clearly defined in order to give direction and meaning to communist work today.

### Appeal to demoralization

It is possible the RWH position might appeal to some comrades at first glance. Many in the U.S. communist movement are feeling "burned out," confused and demoralized because of the serious problems that have affected different groups in the last several years. Many of these comrades are still doing mass work, but feel as if they have butted their heads against a wall, for years making so many sacrifices for an elusive revolutionary cause that seemed unconnected to immediate mass work gains.

Some of these comrades may initially see a "way out" in the RWH position. They may mistake its cynicism about communism for realism. They may mistake the RWH's political vagueness and expediency for practicality. The idea of an anti-Reagan front which communists can possibly "steer" may seem a way of providing a broader focus for their work, and as an appealing way to have communists quickly become a force in society.

I hope, though, that these comrades will not be taken in by the surface gloss of the

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*Don't mistake the RWH's cynicism about communism for realism. Don't mistake their political vagueness and expediency for practicality. The RWH's view does not offer a "way out," but only another dead-end "get rich quick" scheme and a fast demoralization.*

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RWH's position. I hope they will read it carefully and see that it offers not a "way out," but only another dead-end "get rich quick" scheme and a fast lane to even greater demoralization.

This is because, on closer study, it is evident that the RWH position lacks any substantial basis for its far-reaching premises and gives no real concrete perspectives for the short-term or long-term work. It offers, for instance, no proof for its crucial assertion that a new coalescence of new and different forces in the ruling class has assumed dominance, giving rise to a whole new context for the people's struggle.

In terms of actual guidance, it really does no more than exhort people to join the anti-Reagan front, to "build it," to "fight for felt needs of the American people," to "build left cores" and to "affect realignment." These are nothing more than generalities and catch phrases. They give no con-

crete sense of how we are to build up the strength of revolutionaries in this next period, much less how we are going to "steer the anti-Reagan front" so that we can affect realignment.

The RWH does not answer how the front should be built, what are the main "felt needs of the people" or even how it proposes to contend with the Kennedys, Frasers and others who also wish to "steer" the anti-Reagan front. The RWH doesn't even address which *class* and what interests it will represent in the anti-Reagan front.

And what will come from putting all efforts into working in this front? The RWH simply says that communists will "be in a better position to deal with the next set of contradictions and opportunities thrown up by this decaying system." (page 12)

I don't think these empty exhortations provide the type of guidance needed by our movement. But this is exactly the type of elusiveness which runs consistently through the RWH pamphlet.

### Need for a clear plan

**W**hat communists need is a concrete plan of the main type of work we should be doing now to advance the mass movement and develop our forces, and the relationship of this immediate work to a long-range strategy for revolution.

Communists must always have a clear understanding of the objective situation and base their actions upon this. The essence of Marxism is to understand time, place and circumstance and act accordingly. We need to understand the strengths and weaknesses of ourselves, as well as the enemy. A line or plan is correct if it is based on an accurate assessment of the situation and leads communists to make the maxi-

mum impact they possibly can at that point.

These perspectives guided the writing of our paper, *Repression, Reaganomics, War and Revolution*. We analyzed that we are still in the first stage of the revolutionary struggle, where the vanguard forces are not yet united, and there is an absence of an overall broad line and program to lead the struggle. We are not yet in the period where we have the forces and position to lead major onslaughts against the enemy (or even to propose we try to "steer" the anti-Reagan front). Of course, this is our eventual aim, and we should do what we can now to build the anti-Reagan struggle. But the entire question of Marxist-Leninist strategy is to determine how we will get from where we are today, *i.e.* a relatively weak and isolated force, to where we want to get, *i.e.* a powerful force that will be able to challenge and eventually overthrow the bourgeoisie.

This requires that we analyze basic conditions and how we will step by step, stage by stage, be able to tackle the problems we can, gather forces, tackle still larger problems and so on. If we lose sight of our long-range goals and the protracted nature of our revolution, we can make many mistakes. We can wind up working only for the most immediate tasks, forgetting that these must be part of the building of greater objectives. On the other hand, we might only look at the magnitude of our long-range goal and become discouraged or perhaps seek some short cut to gain some illusory power, again forgetting that attaining our strategic goal requires a patient and practical building of forces and struggles.

In the U.S., this means that communists must recognize that the revolutionary process will be a protracted one. The enemy is tremendously powerful and the revolutionary forces at this point are very small. On

the other hand, the struggles of the people are vigorous, there are elements who want revolution and progress, and there are communists who have deep roots in important sectors of the people. The young communist movement has now an entire decade of direct experience to draw from.

It must be our goal at this stage of the revolution to unite the revolutionary forces into a communist vanguard party that will be able to give overall and unified guidance to a nationwide struggle. The League elaborated in its position paper on how we saw this being done, taking into account the different factors of line, unity of communist forces and mass work.

Regarding the deployment of our forces, we assessed where we thought the bourgeoisie was weakest and the people strong-

est, focusing especially on the lower stratum of the working class and the oppressed nationalities. We need to focus on these areas to develop their struggles, develop our ties and increase our forces and strength as quickly as possible. It is in these areas where communists can have maximum impact with our limited strength at this stage.

Our assessment is based on what we believe to be a concrete evaluation of U.S. society, and we think it is confirmed by the experience of everyday events. The question of concentration of forces is a fundamental ques-

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*What is fundamentally missing from the RWH's paper is, based on a concrete assessment of the objective conditions, a strategic plan of how the forces of socialism will be built up in a patient, careful and solid way.*

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tion, as it is directly related to the task of the expansion of our ranks, deepening our class base and contributing the most we can to the mass movement.

In contrast, the RWH's paper is completely lacking in strategic perspective, in clarifying where anything it proposes will lead to a higher level of struggle. *What is fundamentally missing from the RWH paper is, based on a concrete assessment of the objective conditions, a strategic (step by step) plan of how the forces of socialism will*

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*The "American Marxism" the RWH speaks about is little more than anti-administration politics, not the understanding we need of basic social conditions in the U.S., the features of our revolution, and the key social forces.*

*be built up in a patient, careful, down-to-earth and solid way.*

#### The "Intellectual's disease"

**T**he RWH's whole attitude is symptomatic of what I would call the "intellectual's disease," a disease which has plagued parts of the communist movement in the U.S. for quite some time.

The symptom of this disease is an abiding sense of demoralization, cynicism and despair about communism. This is expressed in the RWH's various assertions that the Marxist-Leninist movement represents virtually nothing in the body politic and is in no position to have any type of strategic views about the U.S. revolution. In fact, says the RWH, "it is entirely possible that (the Marxist-Leninist movement) will not survive the next year as anything more than an ambulatory corpse." (page 5)

It is reflected in the flippant and sarcastic way the RWH refers to Marxism and questions that confront us. And even further, the RWH claims that communists have no satisfactory answers for anything, this being an important reason for their opinion that communists should ignore strategic questions and limit our view to the problems of building and steering the anti-Reagan front.

The "American Marxism" the RWH speaks about is little more than anti-administration politics, not the understanding we need of basic social conditions in the U.S., the features of our revolution, and the key social forces.

But this symptom of demoralization and cynicism coexists with an equally serious and contradictory one: a wildly exaggerated view of the immediate possibilities for the

development of the Marxist-Leninist movement, a short cut to power. This new short cut is, of course, the plan to "steer" the anti-Reagan front.

The RWH says we can solve all our most important problems through the anti-Reagan front and actually hope to direct this struggle (which includes almost all the basic social forces in the U.S.) in a way that will affect a new social alignment of forces. All this within the space of a few short years.

It would seem to me that what we have here is a very serious case of an "intellectual disease" of cynicism, yet wild ambition. If this disease is not fought with a vigorous

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*What we have here is a serious case of an "intellectual's disease" — cynicism, yet wild ambition — and if this disease is not fought with a vigorous prescription of reality, it will set sectors of our movement back even further in confusion when it becomes evident that the anti-Reagan cure-all and be-all doesn't materialize.*

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prescription of reality, it will set sectors of our movement back even further in confusion when it becomes evident that the anti-Reagan cure-all, be-all doesn't materialize.

I must also note that national chauvinism seems to be a part of the illness as well. The Afro-American and other oppressed nationality people are mentioned only in passing in the RWH pamphlet and are assigned marginal roles in social struggle. The RWH gives no attention to the strategic role, position or activity of the oppressed nationalities to the struggle against monopoly capital.

Despite the fact that one of the most obvious social phenomenon in the U.S. today is the great discontent and anger existing among the oppressed peoples, the RWH states only that the situation is "unclear how various national groups will respond and how large a part they will play in the anti-Reagan Administration motion."

#### What kind of organization is this?

One final point that is most striking about the RWH paper: its views on organization. Consistent with its general ap-

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*And what would become of internationalism in an organization which includes communists who oppose Soviet superpower imperialism and those who may support the same imperialism?*

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proach of elusiveness and expediency, the RWH advocates forming a "Marxist-Leninist organization" which would include Marxist-Leninists, "revolutionary social democrats," and "folks from the 'anti-revisionist, anti-left' trend," united on the basis of "common work and political discussion and debate." (page 15)

In the first place, a communist organization can never be built on the basis of "discussion and debate." Poor, oppressed

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*The perspectives we have presented in our pamphlet and the criticisms we raise of the RWH are based on what we believe are some undeniable truths of American social conditions — the protracted nature of our revolution, the strategic alliance of the workers and oppressed nationality movements, the international character of our struggle, the significance of the lower stratum of the working class and oppressed nationalities, the necessity of a Leninist party, the need for a strategic view, and others.*

and working revolutionary people (and genuinely revolutionary intellectuals) are not looking for a debating circle, but a militant fighting organization which can seriously help them confront and fight the bourgeoisie.

Secondly, an organization such as that described by the RWH would *not* be a Leninist organization. Social democrats, no matter how revolutionary their hopes, still have serious differences with Leninism. After all, this is why there are such different groupings as "social democrats" and "communists." What would be the aims, program and methods of an organization of social democrats and communists? And what would become of internationalism in an organization which includes communists who oppose Soviet superpower imperialism and those who may support that same imperialism?

As the League has emphasized more than once, a Marxist-Leninist organization is a strictly voluntary association of revolutionaries. As such its necessary discipline and unity comes from having, at the very least, a common view that we are all fighting to

overthrow monopoly capitalism, as well as on the basic strategy and methods for achieving that goal. This is an important difference with the type of organization advocated by the Headquarters.

In a country like the U.S. today, where there is a great deal of flux in all spheres and major reactionary dangers on the horizon, it is important for the working and revolutionary peoples to have political organizations which are as strong as possible. Without strong and well-disciplined organization, we cannot hope to hold our own with the trade union bureaucrats, politicians and intellectuals who are themselves (along with us) seeking to "realign" society and fight Reaganism.

The experience of the U.S. anti-revisionist movement itself and the experience of all other revolutions shows that such discipline and organization must come from the operation of democratic centralism in *both its aspects*. Yes, we must have discussion, debate and airing of opinions. But these must be directed to *achieving* unity and discipline. How else are we to help the people face up to what is becoming one of the most far reaching attacks on their well-being in recent history; and how else can we help them through this next period, not only intact, but in a stronger position to continue the struggle?

Certainly not in the way advocated by the RWH.

#### **A Marxism based on American conditions**

**W**hat the League advocates is not "dogmatism." It is a perspective to analyze some of the specific, concrete requirements of the U.S. revolution. These perspectives didn't come from a book or a

ouija board, but from a practical effort to scientifically understand and participate in our revolution. The League believes Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought can help us to understand and lead the revolution — not because someone said so in the past, but because the real, living experience of our movement shows this to be the case.

The perspectives we have presented in

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*Yes, we have "bumped our heads" a lot, but we believe we have tried to learn from our mistakes. We have been able to build our ties among the masses to a certain extent. We have developed concrete and fairly comprehensive views on several important aspects of the struggle, and we have created an organization which really unites fighters from different nationalities on the basis of equality. . . .*

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our pamphlet and the criticisms we have raised of the RWH are based on what we believe to be some undeniable truths of American social conditions: the protracted nature of our revolution, the strategic alliance of the workers and oppressed nationality movements, the international charac-



ter of our struggle, the significance of the lower stratum of the working class and the oppressed nationalities, the necessity of a Leninist party and the need for a strategic view, among others.

It seems to us, on the other hand, that it has become common in some circles to belittle the revolution — as if it is some nasty

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*I have always thought Marxist-Leninists are both optimists and realists. We know our task is difficult, especially in a country which is a superpower, where divisions among the people are strong and historically rooted. But we never lose our confidence in the struggle or in the fact that socialism in the U.S. is not only necessary, but possible and inevitable.*

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memory left over from a misspent youth. Those who feel this way seem to be unable to break loose from the general wave of pessimism and demoralization generated by a ruling class which sees no way out of its own self-created economic, political and moral dilemma.

An important strength of our new and still young communist movement is that we

do have a concretely based, revolutionary vision. This reflects the most fundamental ideals and aspirations of the masses of American people: peace, genuine democracy, progress and socialism.

It is our responsibility to help give form to and direct the people's very real hatred of the monopolists in a revolutionary direction and to give life to the highest ideals of communism.

I have always thought that Marxist-Leninists are both optimists and realists. We know our task is difficult, especially in a country which is a superpower, where divisions among the people are strong and historically rooted. But we never lose our confidence in the struggle or in the fact that socialism in the United States is not only necessary, but possible and inevitable.

In part, our optimism and realism comes from an ability to learn from and profit by our own mistakes. It would be impossible to seriously try and do revolutionary work without committing any errors. The League has no blueprint or how-to book for conducting mass work, building an organization of many nationalities and backgrounds, developing an effectively functioning organization on a national level, producing a sophisticated and consistent newspaper, training leadership and cadres, and so on. And we have made both right and "left" mistakes in these endeavors.

Yes, we have "bumped our heads and bruised our knees," but we believe we have tried to learn from our mistakes. We have been able to build our ties among the masses to a certain extent. We have been able to develop concrete and fairly comprehensive views on several important aspects of the struggle. We have been able to create an organization which really unites fighters

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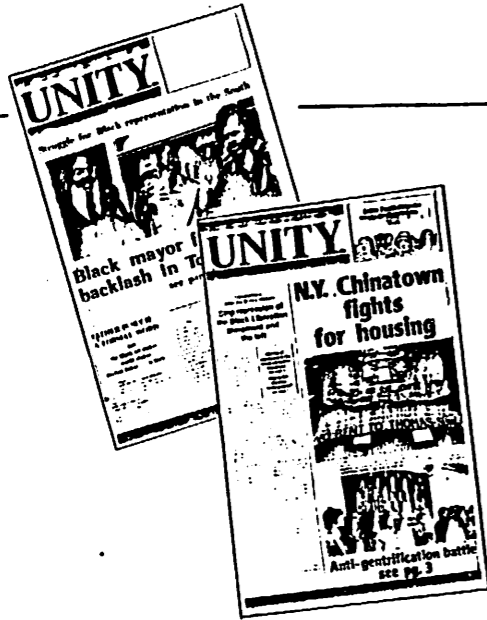
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from different nationalities on the basis of equality, to train new leadership, etc. While experiencing setbacks at times, we have never let the difficulty of our tasks, or the fact that we did not do everything right the first time, cause us to call into question our entire history and the history of our movement. We do not dismiss the revolutionary ideals which drew us to communism in the first place.

I hope comrades will consider the above perspectives and critique of the views of the

RWH. The Marxist-Leninist movement in the U.S. is in a crucial period and the decisions each of us makes today has important implications for the collective future of our movement. Some very real differences in opinion exist and it is critical that these be clarified, keeping our focus on politics and the basic interests of the revolution. We must strive to accomplish this, as this itself will be a contribution to advancing the communist movement in the U.S. on a militant and constructive path.



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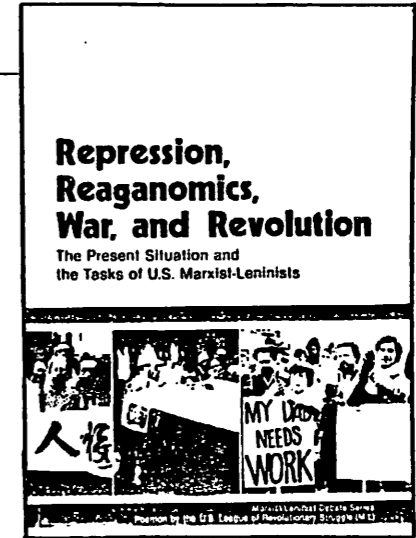
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 P.O. Box 127, Oakland, CA 94604

Read:  
**Repression,  
 Reaganomics, War  
 and Revolution**



In this recently published pamphlet, the League of Revolutionary Struggle (M-L) explains its views on the current period in the U.S. and the tasks of communists. It contains an analysis of the international and domestic situations, some history of the Marxist-Leninist movement in the U.S., and why Marxist-Leninists should form a unified communist party. This pamphlet is the first in a series of Marxist-Leninist debate papers.

The pamphlet costs \$1.00, plus 50¢ mailing costs. Send your \$1.50 to:  
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