

Tallying the Balance Sheet

Max Elbaum reflects on *CrossRoads*' journey to see what can be learned from the experience

Six years after *CrossRoads*' pilot issue rolled off the press, the magazine is ceasing publication. Working with *CrossRoads* has been an extremely rich experience, and along the way we've made a modest contribution to the hard-pressed U.S. left. It's especially rewarding to note the positive relationships that have been built among the diverse activists involved in this project. When *CrossRoads* began many of us were distant from - or even hostile to - one another. It's rare to see a radical project end in an atmosphere of comradeship rather than mutual recriminations and distrust.

Yet despite strong bonds among its core activists and a track record of conscientious work, *CrossRoads* was unable to develop sufficient political momentum and institutional strength to survive these difficult times. Beyond the shortcomings and misjudgments of those of us who took responsibility for the magazine, *CrossRoads*' demise is one more manifestation of the U.S. left's continuing crisis. It also removes one of the collective vehicles devoted to overcoming that crisis.

MAX ELBAUM
is the Executive
Editor of
CrossRoads.

The damage can be kept to a minimum, and the accomplishments best carried over into future efforts, if we can learn something from *CrossRoads*' experience. It is too early to develop a comprehensive evaluation, and there is not unanimity among the *CrossRoads* Board and Editors concerning all that happened and why. Yet it is possible to share some initial reflections on the *CrossRoads* experiment.

ENTHUSIASTIC BEGINNING

In launching *CrossRoads*, we identified our mission as promoting "left dialogue and renewal"; we hoped to foster a "candid look at new realities" and a "cross-fertilization of ideas." Above all, our goal was to aid in "regrouping activists from different socialist and radical traditions to

rebuild an effective U.S. left." Today these phrases have the familiar ring of oft-repeated clichés. But it's worthwhile recalling how fresh and meaningful they sounded in 1989-1990.

At that time decades-old ideological logjams were just beginning to break up. Perestroika and glasnost in the (now former) Soviet Union had unleashed an upheaval in every quarter of the international left. Though the effort at socialist renewal in the USSR failed, it opened the door to unprecedented re-examination and debate across the left globally.

Many participants in this ferment also believed it was a time of new opportunities in practical politics. During the brief moment between the dismantling of the Berlin Wall and the Gulf War, the Cold War straitjacket on U.S. political life seemed to be losing its grip and popular excitement stirred at the prospect of a "peace dividend." Jesse Jackson's seven-million-vote 1988 presidential campaign was still fresh in activists' minds: though the Rainbow Coalition was floundering organizationally, Jackson's breakthrough seemed to signify the emergence of a broad-based, Black-led progressive current as a powerful nationwide force. The moment seemed ripe for initiatives aimed at hammering out fresh strategic perspectives, overcoming sectarian divisions, and building an energetic socialist presence within a resurgent popular movement.

Galvanized by this prospect, a set of activists who had gravitated (from different directions) toward the idea of "left regroupment" began to lay the groundwork for launching *CrossRoads* in 1989. The core group of a few dozen people was drawn mainly from two organizations with roots in the "new communist movement" of the 1970s. One was the Line of March, a Marxist-Leninist group which had just disbanded after conducting a critique of vanguardism and ultra-leftism. The other was the North Star Network, a broader 1980s effort to unite Marxists who were critical of sectarian party building efforts. Line of March and North Star began

the process by making plans to merge their existing publications (*Frontline* newspaper and *North Star Review* magazine respectively) into a united effort. A number of individuals from other circles and groups also took part.

This initial core brought many of the positive characteristics of the "party/cadre" model to the new project while shedding many of the traditional negatives. The assembled activists were prepared to commit large amounts of volunteer time and money to *CrossRoads*, while rejecting past practices of undemocratic decision-making and the stifling of debate. The *CrossRoads* core was also multiracial, uncommon among initiatives focusing on the explicitly socialist left during this time. The group included a number of people with extensive experience in left journalism. And from the beginning the magazine connected to circles of activists in a dozen or more cities across the country who provided contacts, articles and material support.

The fundamental premise of *CrossRoads* was that activists in and around the traditional socialist left could play a pivotal role in reviving a broader left presence in U.S. political life. We did not believe the organized left could accomplish that task on its own. On the contrary, we considered the resurgence of a broader progressive movement to be a decisive factor, and we knew such a rebirth was not under the left's control. But given the end of the Cold War, the potential exhibited by the 1988 Rainbow/Jackson effort, and the host of innovative organizing efforts underway in localities across the country, the *CrossRoads* core thought it likely that a period of renewed progressive motion was on the near-term horizon. Our goal was to maximize the degree of clarity and unity within the self-conscious left so it could play a significant role in shaping the direction of that popular motion.

CrossRoads did not begin with a bulging bank account. But we did have sufficient assets to make a reasonable start. Merging *Frontline* and *North Star Review* meant *CrossRoads* started up with a subscription base of over 1,000, as well as 100-plus sustainers donating \$10 or more each month. Line of March turned over all its post-dissolution resources to the new project, which meant enough equipment to set up a functioning office plus a crucial \$40,000 in seed money. This allowed the new publication to hire two paid staff - an Executive Director/Business Manager and a Managing Editor - to anchor the magazine's volunteer work collectives. On that foundation, *CrossRoads*' pilot issue - featuring a symposium titled "It's a Whole New World Out There" - was published in June 1990. Regular monthly publication began the following September.

THE HEYDAY OF LEFT REGROUPMENT

The new magazine had all the usual start-up problems, but overall the first year saw considerable progress. The Editors collective developed a harmonious style of work and

produced the magazine on-deadline every time. The installation of a new Board of Directors for the Institute for Social and Economic Studies (ISES, the non-profit entity that published *CrossRoads*) was a big boost: decision-making responsibility for the project was now assumed by a diverse set of activists within which no single tendency wielded a



Pick Gelfater

controlling majority. On the ISES Board, members of the Communist Party USA, Democratic Socialists of America, and smaller groups from the Maoist and Trotskyist traditions worked alongside "independents" and former members of Line of March and North Star - not in a tactical, single-issue coalition or in organizing a one-shot conference, but on a common, ongoing socialist project. This was almost unprecedented on the U.S. left, and was decisive in institutionalizing *CrossRoads*' non-sectarian character. Even further, the interaction between once-warring activists proved to be substantive, democratic and exciting. People found it politically and intellectually stimulating to get to know one another and tear down previously insurmountable barriers.

This dynamic within *CrossRoads* both mirrored and contributed to a much broader process underway on the left. Dialogue seemed to be breaking out all over and there was widespread hope that discussion would soon translate into organization-building initiatives. The early '90s saw a series of conferences around the country where ideas were exchanged with a degree of mutual respect that could not have been imagined even five years earlier. Activists affiliated with *CrossRoads* played central roles in two of these gatherings: "Socialist Upheaval and the U.S. Left," drawing 800 participants in Berkeley July 7, 1990, and "Toward a New Majority for Justice and Peace: A Conference for Activists of Color," which drew 300 also in the Bay Area April 26-28, 1991. (*CrossRoads* published the main presentations from the Socialist Upheaval conference in a widely

distributed pamphlet, and devoted a special issue - No. 11/June 1991 - to the Activists of Color gathering.) Simultaneously, new forms for interaction were springing up on the local level. A Socialist Dialogue group came together in New York, and "Progressive Unity Councils" were formed in Philadelphia, Los Angeles and other cities.

We also drew inspiration from left renewal efforts around the world. Though we did not have any "model" in mind of what a revitalized socialist movement would look like, we were enthusiastic about approaches that did not fit neatly into either the classical communist or social democratic mold. We identified with attempts to unite diverse strands of the left in a single organization - such as the Brazil Workers Party or Germany's Party of Democratic Socialism - and with groups that challenged orthodoxies of all varieties - such as the South African Communist Party and the Zapatistas. The strategies and organizational methods such organizations were experimenting with received extensive coverage in *CrossRoads*. We were also excited about ties being built between diverse left forces internationally, for example the Latin American/Caribbean dialogue launched at the 1990 Foro Sao Paulo. (See "A Glimpse of Bolivar's Dream" in *CrossRoads* No. 25/October 1992.)

CrossRoads also interacted extensively with the most ambitious U.S. regroupment initiative of this period, the formation of the Committees of Correspondence. The Committees were launched by several hundred activists who left the CPUSA after efforts to democratize and renew the CP were stymied by the central leadership at the party's December 1991 Convention. Inviting other socialists to join with them in creating a new, pluralist organization, the

Committees' first national conference (July 17-19, 1992 in Berkeley) mobilized 1,300 activists to discuss "Perspectives for Democracy and Socialism in the '90s." The first major split in the CPUSA in decades, followed by the breakaway group reaching out to one-time opponents, aroused intense interest. *CrossRoads* offered unique in-depth coverage of these developments. (See "Conventions at a Turning Point," No. 17/January 1992, and "A Jump Start and No Turning Back," in No. 24/September 1992). Several *CrossRoads* Editors, Contributing Editors and Board members joined the Committees. Though there was no official affiliation between the two institutions, it was widely recognized that they both were manifestations of the impulse toward renewal within the Marxist left, and shared many goals and perspectives.

The left's rethinking process spurred a new round of debate on "big" historical and theoretical questions. These occupied a major portion of *CrossRoads*' pages during our first three years. In the process the magazine established its pattern of "theme issues" featuring different authors (frequently coordinated by a guest editor) tackling a single topic. The "Whole New World" symposium in our pilot issue and several follow-ups - including a special issue on "The Global Economy" (No. 12/July-August 1991) - debated the shape of the post-Cold War World. Ever-contentious controversies over the character of the Soviet system were tackled in *CrossRoads*' "Socialism: What Went Wrong?" issue (No. 26/November 1992) and a flurry of replies in subsequent numbers. Strategic perspectives and organizational models were the focus of "A Red-Green Socialist Strategy?" (No. 15/December 1991), "Innovation in the Revolution"

(No. 19/March 1992) and "Sisterhood Is Still Powerful" (No. 29/March 1993). *CrossRoads* helped forge a new climate and high standard for discussion, demonstrating that leftists holding different views could debate matters of substance without name-calling or caricaturing opposing views.

At the same time, *CrossRoads* took up the most pressing questions posed by current mass movements. Our top priority from fall 1990 through spring 1991 was coverage devoted to building the movement against the Gulf War. Besides issues of the magazine, *CrossRoads* also published (jointly with Global Options and Global Exchange) a series of handouts entitled "Questions and Answers About the Gulf War." Thousands of copies were used by antiwar groups across the country. *CrossRoads* also tackled knotty issues like the "Queer Relations" between the left and the gay and lesbian movement (No. 15/November 1991); established a tradition of publishing a Black History Month issue every February; and from its first year gave more attention to Chicano and Latino struggles than just

CrossRoads always balanced its support for building the left with an honest appraisal of its target audience. The uniquely diverse core of organizers recognized that in the 90s, activists, even self-proclaimed Marxists, rarely took part in political work that had anything directly to do with socialism.

Post-Cold War despair played a role in this turn, but so did economics. Most activists, being workers, have had to put in more work-hours just to survive. The time committed to political work became more precious, and those who remained active devoted that time to tangible efforts on immediate issues. Activists who found socialism too weak in addressing non-economic forms of oppression looked to various forms of identity politics as an alternative, only to become more politically marginalized than ever. Narrow localism and fragmentation rapidly became the norm.

Meanwhile, with police repression and economic attacks escalating, class conflict began to grow, especially in communities of "the lower strata of the working class," as the old party-building movement would say. Mass alienation, fear, hunger and anger were reaching unprecedented levels, but the left could not muster a serious response. Many activists, and nearly all left intellectuals, were situated far away from the site of ferment. Here we find ourselves at yet another "crossroads," and the search for ways to address these problems will go on. As *CrossRoads*' last act closes, the need for a renewal of socialist politics, of coordinated, class-conscious organizing with a strong, broadening theoretical overview, is more urgent than ever.

- Ethan Young, *CrossRoads* editor

about any other general left publication in the country. (See especially *CrossRoads*' first Cinco de Mayo issue, No. 10/May 1991 and "A Salute to Latinas in the Arts," No. 31/May 1993.) Combining left-unity and grassroots-oriented perspectives, *CrossRoads* published a joint issue with *forward motion* magazine on environmental activism (No. 20/April 1992). *CrossRoads*' special issue following the Los Angeles uprising, "A Sledgehammer Message from L.A." (No. 22/June 1992) was especially well-received, as was our in-depth follow-up on the uprising's first anniversary, "Who Killed L.A.? - The War Against the Cities," by Mike Davis (No. 32/June 1993). "Who Killed L.A." was used in discussion groups and classrooms in several cities and colleges around the country. Our pages also sparkled with Tim Patterson's "Season of the Weird" humor column, which many of our subscribers consistently told us was the first article they read each month.

WARNING SIGNS

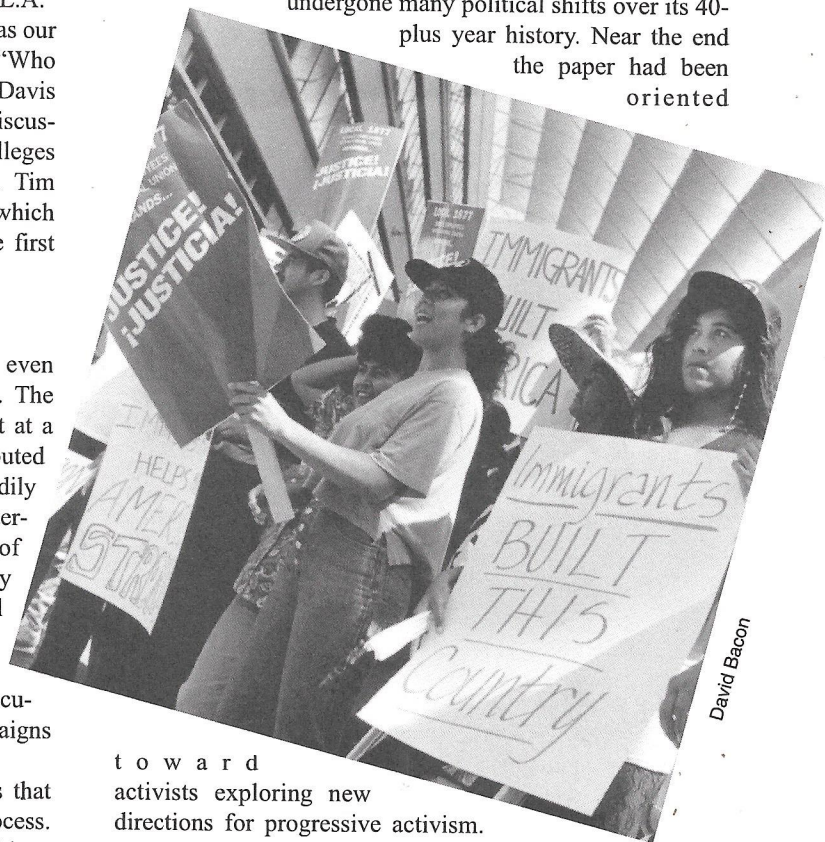
The initial mood at *CrossRoads* was upbeat. But even early on there were warning signs of trouble ahead. The number of *CrossRoads* subscribers remained stagnant at a little over 1,000 (another 600-1,000 copies were distributed via bookstores and bundle agents). Though we steadily picked up new readers, an almost equal number of veterans were falling away. We expanded the ranks of *CrossRoads* sustainers to about 200 and raised nearly \$20,000 a year in our annual campaigns - but we still had to dip regularly into our \$40,000 start-up fund to meet annual expenses of \$85-100,000. By the end of 1993 our reserve was more than half gone. We never accumulated enough funds to conduct promotional campaigns that reached beyond a few thousand activists.

Less tangible but more important were the limits that soon became evident in the broader left dialogue process. The interaction between activists from different traditions produced a certain energy by its very novelty, and many harmful stereotypes were laid to rest. But soon the excitement of getting-to-know-each-other sessions passed. Beyond consensus on a few generalities - democracy, non-sectarianism, etc. - little was produced in the way of strategic unity or theoretical insight into a new model of socialism. Better ties between activists were built, but the "socialist regroupment" current was unable to generate sufficient momentum to conduct large-scale joint campaigns or undertake any major cross-tendency organizational realignment. A noticeable "generation gap" - few under-30 activists were attracted to socialist renewal efforts - began to be registered as a serious problem.

These limitations were necessarily reflected within *CrossRoads*. We were forceful in advocating a wide-ranging dialogue, and our insistence on the centrality of anti-racism and movements of peoples of color was a valuable contribution. So were our efforts to open up the left's thinking to new models for socialist strategy and organization. But, along with others, we had far less to offer regarding what specific direction the U.S. left might take, either in strategic or orga-

nizational terms. We were also unsuccessful in efforts to build a stronger publication through further mergers. Though we approached a few other small periodicals, we were unable to work out mutually agreeable arrangements.

Probably the biggest danger signal was the collapse of the *Guardian* in summer 1992. A cornerstone institution of the U.S. left, this "independent radical newsweekly" had undergone many political shifts over its 40-plus year history. Near the end of the paper had been oriented



toward activists exploring new directions for progressive activism.

This layer included, but was much broader than, the people focused on socialist regroupment. Though there had been signs of trouble for some time, in the end the *Guardian*'s collapse was quite abrupt. There was no public announcement from the staff about what was taking place, and no organization or combination of left organizations were capable of even attempting a serious rescue attempt. The calamity of the paper's folding, exacerbated by the unfortunate ending process, was a major blow to the non-sectarian left. It underscored the fact that better relations among once-competing tendencies were not sufficient to sustain large-scale projects - even one with a long tradition of accomplishment.

This array of problems within the left was of course linked to harsh developments in national and international politics. Through the early '90s transnational capital moved aggressively to assert its power and counter all impulses toward a "peace dividend" or more equitable world order. Though Clinton's defeat of Bush in '92 may have slowed the ascent of the extreme right somewhat, his administration dedicated itself to advancing big capital's agenda, pushing through NAFTA, social austerity measures, etc. Meanwhile,

though some new ground was being broken in progressive organizing in various localities, the main trend nationally was toward fragmentation and decline. Short-term prospects for anything like the 1988 Rainbow movement - whether inside or outside the Democratic Party - were rapidly fading.

BEYOND SOCIALIST DIALOGUE

As a result of these developments, calls for regroupment and dialogue were no longer sufficient to give direction or dynamism to *CrossRoads*. By the end of 1993 our Board and Editors identified this dilemma, though in hindsight we clearly did not grasp its full depth and implications. We concluded that the magazine needed to shift focus somewhat. While keeping one foot in the traditional socialist milieu, we would attempt to reach a broader audience and try to build links between socialists and non-socialist grassroots activists, as well as between different components of the progressive movement. We decided to give special priority to building ties with the next political generation and bridging the gap between activists who turned to radicalism in the 1930s, the 1960s, and the 1980s and '90s.

Our new direction was first articulated in "*CrossRoads*, Act II," which was published as part of a special issue on "Reconstructing the Left" in December 1993 (No. 37). Step-by-step, our shift in emphasis began to be reflected in the magazine. We solicited an increasing number of articles by activists 'outside the organized left. While we continued to publish debates among different tendencies within socialism (as well as regroupment efforts), more prominence was given to material addressing a wider set of concerns. In 1994, for example, *CrossRoads* featured such theme issues as "El Salvador, ¡Presente!" (No. 40/April 1994), "Stonewall 25" (No. 42/June 1994), "Building the New South Africa" (No. 43/July-August 1994), Fighting California's anti-immigrant Proposition 187 (No. 44/September 1994), and "Rebuilding the Labor Movement" (No. 45/October 1994). We opened up a debate on post-modernism (issues No. 36, 37 and 40) and gave extensive coverage to the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas (issues No. 38, 39, 41 and 46), both hot topics outside traditional Marxist ranks. For our Fifth Anniversary Celebration in 1995, *CrossRoads* sought a keynote speaker whose appeal went beyond committed anti-capitalists, sponsoring a successful Bay Area program featuring "kickass populist" Jim Hightower. We also worked to maximize our contribution to the fight over affirmative action, producing thousands of copies of a "Questions and Answers on Affirmative Action" handout (see No. 52/June 1995). At the end of our Anniversary year we initiated a new set of columns to allow more frequent commentary on topical issues.

Top priority was given to bridging the left generation gap. The first issue of *CrossRoads* edited by and focused on new generation activists had appeared in May 1992 (No. 21, "Student, Youth and Education Struggles in the '90s"). We followed with "Youth and the Future of the Left" (No. 34/September 1993), "Solutions from a Dissed Generation" (No. 41/May 1994) and "Youth in the Forefront,

Worldwide" (No. 47/December 1994). A round of promotional work (limited by our tight budget) was conducted on college campuses, and we set up arrangements with several campus publications in which they ran ads for *CrossRoads* in exchange for blanket rights to reprint *CrossRoads* articles. In summer 1994 we initiated ISES's most ambitious program (not counting *CrossRoads* itself) by organizing our first youth-oriented Summer Media Institute. The program drew together some two dozen new generation activists for four days of skill-sharing and political discussion. A larger and broader, if somewhat uneven, Media Institute was sponsored in summer 1995.

We also undertook a systematic effort to integrate younger activists into all levels of the *CrossRoads* structure. Several interns made valuable contributions to the magazine and a number of talented people were recruited to our Board, Contributing Editors and Editors collective. The most important step in our drive to build an intergenerational institution was hiring Kim Benita Furumoto to take the Managing Editor's post beginning in summer 1995. Kim had just graduated from UC Berkeley where she worked on *diatribe*, a collectively run, progressive newspaper addressing issues of communities of color. She was able to rapidly take the editorial helm and guide the publication of issues focusing on current movements, such as "The Border Crossed Us" (No. 57/December 1995), "Women's Activism After Beijing" (No. 59/March 1996) and "Labor Gets Moving" (No. 60/April-May 1996). Kim also overhauled the cover design and graphic dimension of the magazine.

The heightened presence of '90s-era activists in the pages and structure of *CrossRoads* was our main source of energy and fresh ideas in the last year or two. At the same time, we recognized that our core base - which still supplied the bulk of financial support and volunteer energy - remained veterans from the organized left. Our hypothesis was that these veterans approved of the generational transition at the magazine; further, that they would continue to offer material support through the transition required to build a solid base in new, broader constituencies.

UNDERESTIMATION OF WHAT WAS REQUIRED

For awhile it worked - at least to a degree. But in retrospect it's clear that we vastly underestimated what it would take to build a consistent readership beyond those veterans ideologically committed to socialist renewal.

The mid-'90s progressive movement includes thousands of determined activists, many of whom are hungry for information, analysis and discussion. But the popular movement is at least as fragmented as the socialist left. Its participants are also short on time and money; and there is no easily identifiable agenda or set of questions that pulls the movements toward common venues for debate. And despite many exciting manifestations of new generation activism, a large layer of youth has not yet turned leftward with a shared sense of purpose. This means that any publication (or organization) seeking to get a durable foothold in these diverse constituencies needs large-scale resources for outreach, pro-

motion and trial-and-error experimentation. Also crucial are programs that go beyond the print media (for example, aggressive use of the Internet, speakers bureaus, forums, discussion groups, direct links with practical campaigns, etc.). *CrossRoads* lacked the funding to even begin such efforts in more than a haphazard way. Our turn outward did lead to an increase in our subscription base by a hundred or two, but this was not enough to make a qualitative leap.

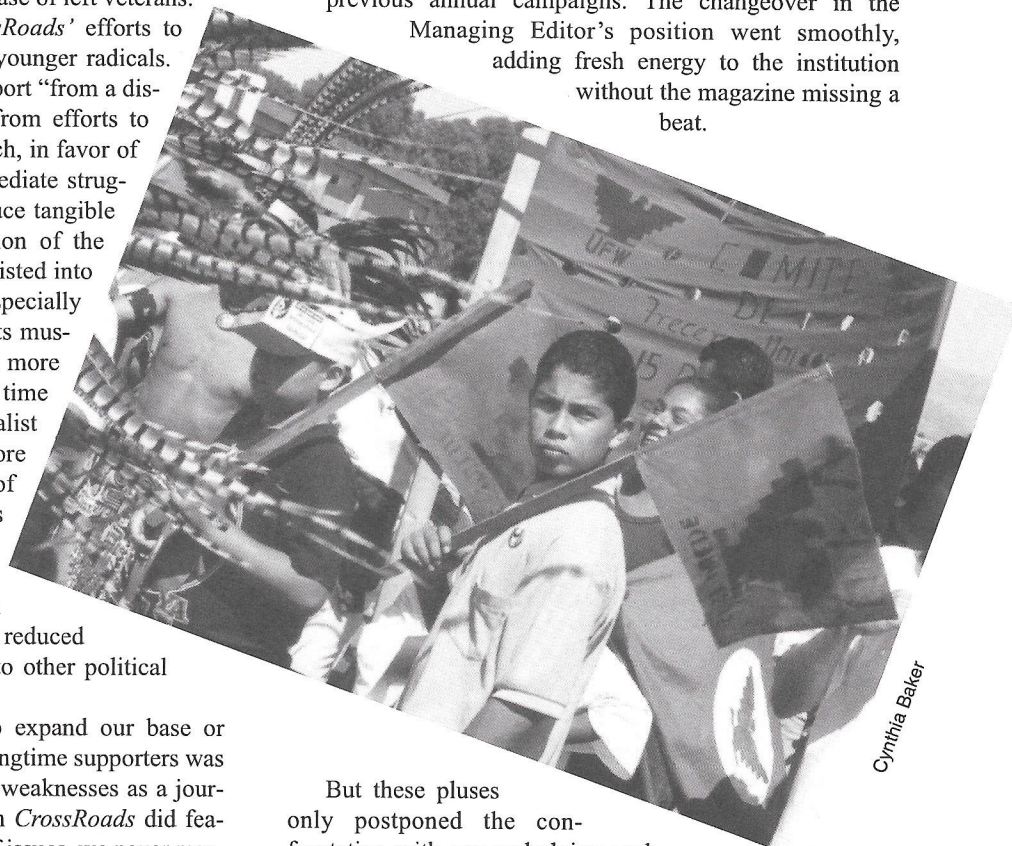
Additionally, we miscalculated the extent and pace of the changes taking place within our base of left veterans. Most were enthusiastic about *CrossRoads*' efforts to reach out and especially to involve younger radicals. But this translated primarily into support "from a distance." The main trend was away from efforts to build explicitly left institutions as such, in favor of putting energy and money into immediate struggles and campaigns that might produce tangible results. As the crisis of every section of the international socialist movement persisted into the '90s with no end in sight - and especially after the Gingrich-led right showed its muscle in the 1994 elections - more and more veteran socialists concluded that the time was simply not ripe for efforts at socialist revival. Rather, they believed it more productive to engage one or another of the urgent battles facing the people's movement right now. The activists who held up *CrossRoads*' infrastructure were hardly immune from this widespread pattern. This meant reduced time put into the magazine relative to other political projects.

Finally, *CrossRoads*' inability to expand our base or retain high-level commitment from longtime supporters was directly connected to the magazine's weaknesses as a journalistic and political product. Though *CrossRoads* did feature different viewpoints on a range of issues, we never mastered the art of organizing direct, head-to-head clashes of opinion on hot-button topics. The magazine was uneven in addressing breaking controversies: we responded quickly to the L.A. rebellion and the uprising in Chiapas, but we missed the boat on the Bosnia debate. The magazine had a conspicuous California tilt; we never managed to give adequate attention to struggles in the East, Midwest or South. We featured discussion of new approaches to left organization, but were unable to develop coverage consistent and deep enough to make a significant difference in the direction actually taken by activists on the ground. Despite many provocative issues and valuable articles, we did not succeed in making *CrossRoads* "must reading" beyond the circles of our closest supporters.

LOOMING CRISIS

Again with the benefit of hindsight, it's apparent that these problems were affecting *CrossRoads* as early as the end of 1994. But they were masked by the outpouring of

support we were able to mobilize for our 1995 Fifth Anniversary campaign. We went all-out, calling in every political marker we had laid down in five years of hard work. We put together an impressive Honorary Committee. More than 600 people turned out for our Bay Area Anniversary Celebration featuring Jim Hightower, Cecilia Rodríguez and Eva Paterson; it was the biggest event ever sponsored by *CrossRoads*. Our full-court-press fundraising effort raised more money (over \$35,000) than any of our previous annual campaigns. The changeover in the Managing Editor's position went smoothly, adding fresh energy to the institution without the magazine missing a beat.



Cynthia Baker

But these pluses only postponed the confrontation with our underlying problems. And at the end of 1995 these began to assert themselves with a vengeance. The most pressing predicament was financial. The money raised in 1995 had covered that year's operating deficit as well as some small promotional efforts, but we didn't meet our \$60,000 target and thus were unable to replenish our depleted reserve. So from the beginning of this year we were immersed in a daily battle with the incoming bills. And our financial troubles weren't limited to each day's checkbook balance. Many long-time supporters who donated generously in '95 indicated that they could not or would not continue that level of support in the future; this was a direct reflection of the drift away from commitment to explicitly left forms within our base. The Anniversary effort had raised our visibility somewhat, but we had been unable to translate increased public presence into a substantial increase in major donors or sustainers. Paid circulation remained stagnant at 1,200 or so subscribers and 800-odd single copy sales.

Financial and circulation woes, in turn, were connected

to our other difficulties. With the ebb in socialist regroupment efforts, *CrossRoads* lost its link to the process which had previously infused our pages with the sense that something was at stake in the outcome of debates. And we were unable to translate our post-1993 perspective of "bridge-building toward an activist, multiracial, intergenerational left" into a more concrete focus capable of filling this vacuum. So the magazine began to drift. Specific issues might be as good or better than ever, but overall we weren't able to offer more than a vague notion of what "reviving the left" might mean.

Our lack of focus put heightened strain on the Editors Collective. This body had been set up on the premise that the magazine would be rooted in an active left current that generated debate and required publications to air its ideas and perspectives. We didn't envision a situation where the magazine essentially "floated" as a general left publication with only the broadest of guidelines for utilizing our pages. To meet this kind of challenge, our Editors Collective - which had no editorial staff, no formal network of correspondents, and no funds to pay writers - would have been in over our heads even if there were no competing demands on our time. A greater and greater burden fell on the (tiny) paid staff.

At our Board's first meeting after the Anniversary campaign (January of this year) we recognized that *CrossRoads* was approaching a crisis. We took some immediate steps to

address our financial problems by instituting a few belt-tightening measures, appealing to our largest and most committed donors for special donations, and seeking out new sources of funds. But we put our main emphasis on trying to develop a viable long-range plan to preserve the magazine in some form. We identified two possible routes toward this end, and began to take steps to explore both.

One alternative was merging with one or more of the other small and struggling socialist periodicals. Socialist renewal was proving to be far more lengthy and difficult than we had once anticipated, so even a joint publication would probably come out less frequently than once a month. We would also have to reconcile ourselves to functioning with a subscription base roughly at *CrossRoads*' current level for at least several more years. The main argument for pursuing this course was the importance of maintaining explicitly socialist nationwide institutions through this extremely difficult period. The challenge would be to gather enough persistence and resources so that some kind of magazine rooted in the non-sectarian socialist left (besides the organs of its constituent organizations) could stay afloat.

The second course was investigating a joint effort with one or more progressive - but not socialist - periodicals to produce a new magazine capable of reaching large numbers (10,000 or more) of grassroots activists who are not attracted to the existing left press. In this scenario, the distinctly

**Don't Miss Out! This is a partial list of available CrossRoads back issues.
See the back cover of this issue for information on how to order.**

#28 BLACK HISTORY MONTH 1993: THE 125TH ANNIVERSARY OF W.E.B. DU BOIS' BIRTH (February 1993)

Encounters with the Patriarch, Jan Carew; Tribute to Audre Lorde, Barbara Christian; Blacks and Native Americans, Paris Williams; On Malcolm X, Charles Simmons; Du Bois and Black History, guest editor Frances M. Beal; Undeclared War on Black Women, Barbara Ransby; And of the Heart It Took, Linda Burnham; Congressional Black Caucus at a Turning Point, James Steele; Global Fight for Self-Determination.

#29 SISTERHOOD IS STILL POWERFUL (March 1993)

Speaking Up When Others Can't, Frances M. Beal; A Call for Chicanisma, Elizabeth Martínez; Back to My Revolutionary Roots in Radical Feminism, Roxanne A. Dunbar (Ortiz); The Changing Economy: How Far Have Women Come?; Pornography; Same Old Censorship; Asian and Latina Women Take on the Garment Giants, Miriam Ching Louie; "Nannygate" or "Sanctionsgate?"

#31 A SALUTE TO LATINAS IN THE ARTS (May 1993)

Featuring numerous Latina novelists, playwrights, poets, essayists, painters, graphic artists, dancers, singers, musicians and performers.

#32 WHO KILLED L.A.: THE WAR AGAINST THE CITIES (June 1993)

Feature article by Mike Davis; *Todavía ando sangrando/I am Still Bleeding*, Gloria J. Romero; *Specific Intent*, Gary Phillips; *The UFW Was a School*; *A Tribute to César Chávez*.

#35 CUBA: HARD TIMES, TOUGH DECISIONS (October 1993)

Cuba's Zero Hour, Ethan Young; Change and Continuity, Juan Antonio Blanco; Intransigence or Regeneration, Marifé Pérez-Stable; *The Cuba That Was, Is and Can Be*; Cuba and the HIV Pandemic; Race Relations in Cuba. Also, *Audacious Hope and a Sense of History*, Cornel West.

#36 IMMIGRATION TODAY: SCAPEGOATING WITHOUT BORDERS (November 1993)

Immigrants in a Global Economy, Saskia Sassen; *Battling*

INS Abuse at the Border; Fighting Anti-Asian Violence; Environmental Justice Needs No Green Card; Puerto Rico: Exchanging People for Capital; Native-Born Blacks and Immigration.

#39 WOMEN ORGANIZE FOR THE 90s & UPRISING IN CHIAPAS (March 1994)

Grassroots Women Organize, Miriam Ching Louie; P.C. Backlash: A Woman's Story; Leslie Simon; *The Global Fight for Women's Rights; Asian Immigrant Women Fight Domestic Violence; Chiapas: A Message from "Deep Mexico," Arturo Santamaría Gomez; Roots of Rebellion, María Elena Martínez; Help Wanted: Radical Youth and the Labor Movement.*

#43 BUILDING THE NEW SOUTH AFRICA (July/August 1994)

Transition of an Unexpected Type; A Mass-Driven Transformation, Jeremy Cronin; *Making History: The South African Election, Frances M. Beal; The Future Is in Our Hands, excerpts from the ANC's Reconstruction & Development Programme.*

#44 KALIFORNIA POLITICIANS: YOU CAN'T GESTAPO ME NOW! (September 1994)

S.O.S.: Scapegoat Our State, Lisa Hoyos & Tim Patterson; Single Payer, Many Players, Mike Greer; PVLA Communiqué: Subcomandante Chuy Unmasked!, from *POCHO Magazine*; "Occupied Aztlan," interview with Yolanda M. López; *Committees of Correspondence: Settling in for a Long Haul, Max Elbaum.*

#48 THE BELL CURVE: RESURGENCE OF "SCIENTIFIC" RACISM (February 1995)

The Bell Curve: Recruiting for the FBI, by Linda Burnham; Genes = IQ = Fate; Science or Pulp Fiction?; The Hidden History of "Scientific" Racism, by Troy Duster; The Bell Curve Demands an Activist Response.

#50 LESSONS OF THE U.S. ANTI-APARTHEID MOVEMENT (April 1995)

The Free South Africa Movement, by Cecelie Counts-Blakey; Notes from My Diary, by Sylvia Hill; Solidarity as an

Organizing Principle; Churches at the Forefront; The International Link, an interview with Gay McDougall; Everything for Everybody, Nothing for Ourselves, by Cecilia Rodríguez; For Whom the Taco Bell Tolls, by Elizabeth Martínez.

#51 MEXICO: HISTORY IS MOVING FASTER, AND THE RED/GREEN IMPERATIVE (May 1995)

Mexico: History Is Moving Faster, an interview with Carlos Ramírez, by César Guemes; The Resurgence of Mexico's Popular Movement, by Arturo Santamaría Gómez; The Red-Green Imperative, by George Dolph & David Schwartzman; 50 Years Is Enough!; An Alternative to NAFTA and GATT, by Ruth Caplan.

#52 CROSSROADS FIFTH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE! (June 1995)

Terribly Wrong: Robert McNamara "Revisits" Vietnam, by Michael Myerson; Affirmative Action: Don't Give an Inch, by the CrossRoads Editors; Questions and Answers about Affirmative Action, by Phil Hutchings, Elizabeth Martínez, Nancy Stein and Cathy Tashiro; a symposium on The Radical Experience: Reflections and Anticipations.

#57 THE BORDER CROSSED US (December 1995/January 1996)

A History of Chicanos in the Southwest; contemporary militarization of the border; Chicano historian defeats UC Regents. Also, commentaries on the Million Man March, post-OJ racial politics, and the AFL-CIO Convention.

#59 WOMEN'S ACTIVISM AFTER BEIJING (March 1996)

Beijing and Beyond, an overview of the international women's conferences in China, Linda Burnham; Taking on the Global Economy; Breaking the Cycle - women organize in response to the "feminization of labor" and the "feminization of migration"; Cyberspace is Womenspace.

#60 LABOR GETS MOVING (April/May 1996)

"America Needs a Raise," Greg Tarpinian; New Voice for U.S. Workers? - an analysis of the AFL-CIO election convention, Kim Moody; Immigrant Workers at the Pivot. Also, Military Security: Confronting the Oxymoron.

socialist and “left unity” politics associated with *CrossRoads* would maintain a voice in a new initiative, but it would most likely be a subordinate one. The reasoning behind this direction identified the energy right now among activists organizing around day-to-day issues in oppressed communities and certain sectors of the labor movement. Many of these activists - who for the most part do not come out of the ideological left - are more concerned than previously with coalition-building and political strategy issues. The challenge would be to forge effective working relations between people from the community organizing tradition and the more flexible wing of the socialist left, obtain large-scale financial backing, and produce a magazine attractive, informative and provocative enough to be of real use to grassroots activists.

Each of these alternatives - as well as different hybrids and variations - had proponents within the *CrossRoads* Board and Editors. And there was universal sentiment that we needed to direct our energies outward and “stir the pot”: sit down with other publications (and organizations), compare notes, and see what possibilities existed for working together. From January to May, then, we devoted all the time we could spare to exchanging ideas and exploring merger options with others.

These discussions were valuable. But from a practical point of view they mainly confirmed our hypothesis that many other institutions were afflicted with problems similar to ours. In terms of the socialist left, our meetings showed again that the breadth of energy for regroupment/renewal had diminished considerably since 1990-92. Still, efforts to strengthen ties between the main pluralist organizations continue: this spring a number of friendly meetings were held between representatives of the Committees of Correspondence, Democratic Socialists of America, Socialist Party, Solidarity and Freedom Road Socialist Organization. But in regard to *CrossRoads*, it quickly became apparent that this quarter could not provide a solution (via mergers or other means) to the magazine’s political or resource problems. As reported in our April/May issue, when *Independent Politics* could no longer continue we were able to work out an arrangement with its editors and sponsoring organization (Solidarity) to add *IP* readers to the *CrossRoads* subscription list. This was a welcome example of cooperation, but far too small to make a difference in terms of *CrossRoads* survival.

In the broader realm of progressive publishing there are a number of periodicals with solid resource bases and good prospects for the coming years, including *Third Force* magazine, which will be fulfilling the remainder of *CrossRoads* readers’ subscriptions. There are also encouraging steps being taken to set up a formal network for cooperation among grassroots-based publications. (This process was initiated by several participants in February’s “Media and Democracy” conference in San Francisco.) But it will have to be one or more of these other publications that tests out the hypothesis that a significant political space exists for a progressive magazine aimed at ‘90s grassroots organizers. *CrossRoads*’ Board and Editors’ concluded that at this time



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the differences in approach between *CrossRoads* and potential merger partners from this sphere were too great for a merger to succeed.

Once these assessments were thrashed out at the May meeting of the *CrossRoads* Board, the body was left without any option on the table that offered prospects of survival beyond a few more months. Whatever differences that existed among Board members regarding the two alternative courses noted above became moot. Neither one was now a practical possibility. Both had depended not only on what a majority of *CrossRoads* people thought, but on another periodical entering into an arrangement with us, and/or some other source of large-scale money and energy appearing on the horizon.

Seeing no light at the end of the tunnel, the Board rejected the idea of making an emergency appeal for funds. We did not think this could accomplish anything except postpone the end for a few months. And we did not feel it was responsible to ask readers to dig deep into their pocketbooks when we did not have any viable plan to put *CrossRoads* back on a firm footing. Instead, we made the decision to cease publication in an orderly manner, wrapping up with this issue evaluating *CrossRoads*’ experience. (The Board also decided to meet again in September to explore the possibility of maintaining ISES to contribute to networking, dialogue and left unity efforts through more modest projects. Your input is appreciated; *CrossRoads*’ post office box and e-mail will be open at least through that meeting, so write us at P.O. Box 2809, Oakland, CA 94609 or e-mail <crossroads@igc.apc.org>).

WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN DIFFERENT?

Could things have turned out differently? Today it’s possible to identify a number of miscalculations that hindered our effort, the most important being our 1993-94 underestimation of what it would take to “turn outwards.” Of course, recognizing the need for more clarity and resources is not at all the same as obtaining them. Still, we would have been in a better position to jump these hurdles if we had accurately identified just how high they were. At the least, we would have had more time to engage in discussions with sub-

scribers and close supporters about our problems and options. And perhaps if we had approached other periodicals to talk about mergers earlier and more aggressively, our discussions could have borne more fruit. Though it is to *CrossRoads'* credit that we made a sustained attempt to break new ground on the left, in retrospect it seems that we were still too conservative in our approach; we were unable to change rapidly or radically enough to meet the needs of dramatically changed circumstances. We were also weakened - materially and in terms of morale - by the fact that the political groups we were closest to (the other institutions and organizations of the non-sectarian socialist left) seem afflicted by considerable inertia and aversion to taking the kind of risks required to build durable joint institutions.



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But then, the survival of this magazine for its own sake is not the point. The stark reality is that the political assumptions on which *CrossRoads* was launched do not apply today. Thus a qualitative shift in the institution's character and mission would have had to take place no matter what. Bottom line, our founding vision of the non-sectarian wing of the socialist left on the upswing, renewing itself with greater clarity, unity and strength as it interacted with a rebounding mass movement, simply did not come to pass. The situation in the U.S. is hardly unique in this regard.

There are certainly bright spots in the progressive movement, the changes underway in labor probably being most important right now. And there are numerous indications

that a large-scale backlash against "Contract-On-America"-style politics is brewing beneath the surface. Thus it would be foolish to rule out the possibility of progressive popular activism gaining a new head of steam sometime in the next few years. (Yet equally foolish to base any concrete institution-building plan on the premise that an upsurge is right around the corner.) But given the unrealized hopes and setbacks suffered by traditional socialists since the late 1980s, it seems all but certain that this section of the left will not be able to play as large a role in whatever comes next as many of us (inside and outside of *CrossRoads*) once hoped. Our belief that socialist and Marxist perspectives remain crucial to revitalizing progressive politics may be unchanged. But the evidence is overwhelming that our expectations about the near-term role that can be played by the specific groups and institutions which today claim allegiance to those ideas must be scaled back.

This is the underlying reason why *CrossRoads* as it existed from 1990 to 1996 reached an impasse. It is unfortunate that our attempt to transform this project into one with an outlook and mission updated to the late 1990s was unsuccessful. It means that another thread of institutional continuity will be broken, in a left that can ill-afford further weakening of its collective structures.

To be sure, the activist energy that has been devoted to *CrossRoads* will be expressed in other ways. Some participants in this experiment have concluded that further efforts to revitalize the organized socialist left at this time are doomed to failure. They believe that a future rebirth of socialist politics will come from sectors of the popular movement that move leftward in the course of mass activity - and that the best way for veteran socialists to use their energy is to position themselves in broad institutions "where the action is." Others disagree, stressing the importance of sustaining formations that base themselves on a socialist outlook and work to pass on the lessons of the left's experience to new generations. They argue that if these organizations are small and confused, it only makes it more urgent for veteran socialists to do everything possible to keep them alive. Whatever course members of the "*CrossRoads* family" choose, one thing the different viewpoints have in common is an emphasis on the importance of building institutions and organizations through which to engage in politics. If no other lesson is learned from *CrossRoads*, the experience has demonstrated that it is possible for activists with differing views to work harmoniously on a common project; and that we could accomplish far more functioning as a group than we could as scattered individuals.

CrossRoads leaves a legacy of improved relationships within the left and new ties built across political, sectoral and generational lines. We also leave a wealth of information and analysis in written form - 62 issues of a magazine, many of which will remain valuable references for years to come. We hope these are useful to the institutions that survive - and to new ones formed in the coming years - which take on the still-urgent challenge of rebuilding a relevant left in the United States. ■