

The "Sunbelt Strategy" and Chicano liberation

William Gallegos

In the last quarter of a century, United States monopoly capitalism has undergone profound changes internationally and domestically, changes which may call for revolutionaries to rethink many long-held conceptions about the socialist revolution in this country. This article presents an initial analysis of some of those changes, looking particularly at what is often called the "Sunbelt Strategy," and its effect on the southwestern U.S. Some ideas on the strategic implications of these changes are offered, indicating that while the U.S. bourgeoisie may look to the Sunbelt for salvation, they instead may have found their final graveyard.

The most important change in the situation of U.S. monopoly capitalism (or imperialism) is the erosion of its world empire. The United States has tumbled from its post-World War II pinnacle of unchallenged global economic and political dominance. Since the late 1940s it has suffered major setbacks in one country or region

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(Facing page) East
Los Angeles, looking
toward downtown

after another: China, Korea, Cuba, Viet Nam, Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Nicaragua and Iran, to name an incomplete list. In the last decade, Europe and Japan have grabbed large chunks of the U.S. world market, as well as chunks of the U.S. home market. The former colonies have developed into the powerful third world, with much greater control of important national resources and markets, and a much larger degree of political independence and clout. Finally, the U.S. has had to contend for world supremacy with a powerful and aggressive Soviet rival.

During this same period, U.S. capitalism has had to sustain an ever burgeoning, and largely unproductive, military apparatus and government bureaucracy, while its industrial plant — mainly centered in steel, auto and rubber — has aged and lost much of its edge to more modernized competitors.

The upshot of these and other factors is that *U.S. monopoly capitalism has to stake a large share of its future on the increased exploitation of its so-called Sunbelt — the southern and southwestern region of the country.*

There are many definitions of the Sunbelt, some of which include even parts of the Ohio Valley. The most common definition is the geographic region encompassing North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, southern Nevada and southern California. The Sunbelt area includes or is near the territories of the African American Nation in the South, and the Chicano Nation in the Southwest. Some-Marxist-Leninists (and other revolutionary forces) hold that African Americans constitute an oppressed nation in the so-called Black-belt area of the South, and that Chicanos-Mexicanos are an oppressed nation in a part of the Southwest.

When I refer to a "Sunbelt Strategy," I am not referring to a conscious long-term plan hatched by U.S. monopoly capitalism. At the very least their cutthroat competition precludes the development of such a strat-



John P. Ocker, Fayette County
Tennessee

egy. I use the term strategy in a looser sense, to refer to the greatly increased economic and political importance of the Sunbelt to the capitalists. The shift to the Sunbelt is largely due to causes outside their control, and represents mainly their immediate reaction to those causes. It was only after much of this shift occurred that most bourgeois economists began to study it, and to explain it as a more long-term phenomenon.

During the past quarter century, the domestic industrial and economic foundation of U.S. monopoly capitalism withered and stagnated in the old factory centers in the Northeast and Midwest, and underwent rapid growth in the so-called Sunbelt area.

This article will show that much of capitalism's "base of operations" has shifted to the Sunbelt. This has tremendous implications for both the Black and Chicano liberation struggles as well as for the U.S. socialist revolution. The U.S. has undergone a massive demographic, industrial and political shift to the Sunbelt, a phenomenon not explainable simply as due to uneven economic development. The movement of population, capital and industry to the Sunbelt is not a temporary phase in U.S. monopoly capitalism. It is highly unlikely that the Midwest and Northeast will ever again occupy the predominant place in the U.S. economy they held in the past.

The "Sunbelt Strategy" of U.S. monopoly capitalism means a greater long-term reliance on the South and Southwest in order to assure energy resources, maintain significantly higher rates of profit, "protect" the border with Mexico, and facilitate investment and trade in the Pacific Rim. The "Sunbelt Strategy" represents an effort to counteract the decline of the economy in the older regions of the U.S., and offset the shrinkage of the U.S. market internationally.

For the purposes of this article, I will focus on the implications of these developments for the Chicano Nation. A more complete study needs to be done to examine the implications for the African American Nation, the Native American Indian nations, the Asian nationalities, and the multinational working class in the



Chicanos are the mainstay of the work force in the Southwest — Kelly Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas.



Laid-off steel workers in Braddock, Pennsylvania

**The Sunbelt
Strategy of
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Sunbelt. There also needs to be a more complete study of the implications for the Northeast and Midwestern regions of the country, the old industrial heartland. The economic decline of this area has created a terrible set of hardships for the proletariat and oppressed nationality peoples. This is bound to give rise to a powerful social revolt in those parts of the country as they become more of a "backwater" of the U.S. economy, with their industrial plants abandoned, inner cities decaying, and increasingly difficult social problems.

When the industrial heartland was king

From the end of the Civil War until the late 1950s, the bedrock of U.S. capitalism was in the eastern half of the country. The decisive centers of U.S. industrial and financial power were east of the Mississippi, where the large industrial corporations were located. These included the auto, steel and rubber industries, and all the spinoff industries which developed around them.

These giant industries dominated the economic and political landscape of powerful industrial cities such as Chicago, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Cleveland and St. Louis.

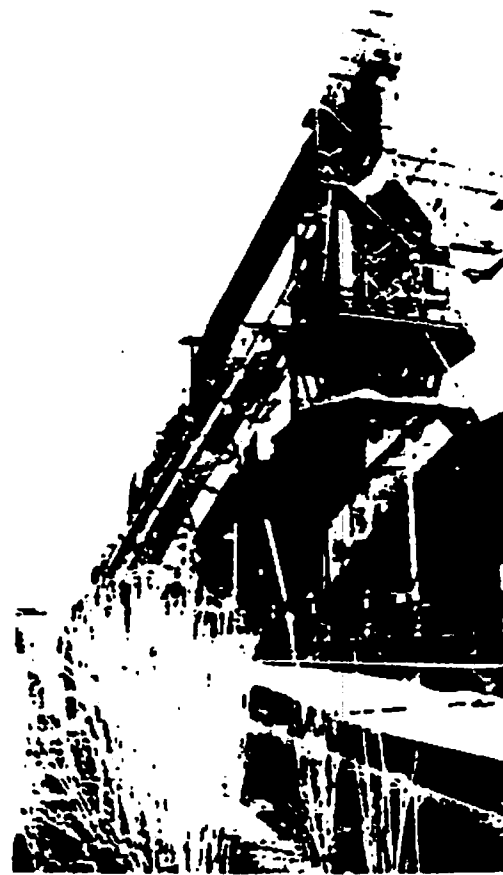
From these cities they spanned the globe, for many years exerting unchallenged dominance of the world market and employing a vast network of millions of workers.

To produce for and service this powerful corporate triad — auto, steel and rubber — the bulk of the U.S. population was centered in the Northeast and Midwest. Political power was clearly concentrated in this region as well: the great majority of Congress came from this area, as well as almost every elected president since Lincoln.

Before the 1950s, people did not migrate *out* of the industrial heartland; they eagerly moved *into* it, especially from the South. California was the one important exception. Following World War I, there was a massive migration from the South to the Midwest and East, as poor Black and white workers, farmers and sharecroppers sought to escape the grinding poverty and, for Black people, the pervasive oppression of the Southern plantation system. A similar trend was repeated, to a somewhat lesser degree, during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Most went north looking for jobs in the massive smokestack industries.¹

After the Civil War, the South was considered the economic basket case of the country (a historical irony, since the Southern cotton and tobacco industries had once been the economic backbone of the fledgling American nation), while the Southwest was considered (California largely excepted) an economic stepchild where tourism, agriculture and mining were the only real "growth" industries. The population of the South suffered a large and steady decline from the First World War until the 1970s, while that of the Southwest, except for California, was relatively small. There was some growth in the Southwest during this time, but it was quite slow.

It is no accident that a great many of the important working class and revolutionary struggles of the past 50 years took place in the East and Midwest. The great organizing drives of the auto and steel workers, the great urban Black rebellions, and other important social



Closed steel factory in New York

The enormous population shift to the Sunbelt cannot be overstated, either in its scope or significance. In the first half of the 1970s, 85% of the growth in the U.S. population took place in the Sunbelt.

movements largely developed in the industrial heartland. The great strength of the old Communist Party USA (CPUSA) was centered in these areas as well, since they contained large numbers of lower stratum workers in what were called the "trustified industries." Even the CPUSA's base among African Americans was largely in the East, although they had some base in the South with the Sharecroppers Union. It has long been a common conception among Marxist-Leninists that the "center" of the revolution would be in the country's industrial heartland, but the changes discussed in this article call for a reassessment of that view.

Over the last 25 years, the industrial plant in auto and steel aged, leading to declining productivity and quality. Vigorous competition from Europe and Japan quickly showed up the relative backwardness of many U.S. industries. Declining profit margins ultimately led to a prolonged series of plant closures and drastically reduced utilization of plant capacity. Millions of workers in the Northeast and Midwest were permanently thrown into the streets, and the entire region was reduced to a much smaller share of its former industrial power. These developments ultimately led to an increased migration out of the region and a relative decline in population.

Accompanying the decline in economic strength and population was a decline in political clout. In 1980, the Midwest and Northeast lost 17 seats in Congress, while the Sunbelt gained 11. While the industrial heartland retains an absolute majority in Congress, the trend is clear — political influence is rapidly shifting westward. Now, since 52% of electoral college votes come from the Sunbelt, it is not surprising that every elected president since 1964 has come from the South or Southwest.

Spectacular growth in the Sunbelt

The growth of the Sunbelt is reflected in every realm — economic, demographic and political. In the early to mid-1800s, the western frontier served as a "safety valve," allowing U.S. capitalism to partly defuse the class struggle by promising cheap land to disgruntled workers. In similar fashion, the Sunbelt is today seen as the new promised land for U.S. corporations; a place where land is cheap, labor even cheaper, and there are

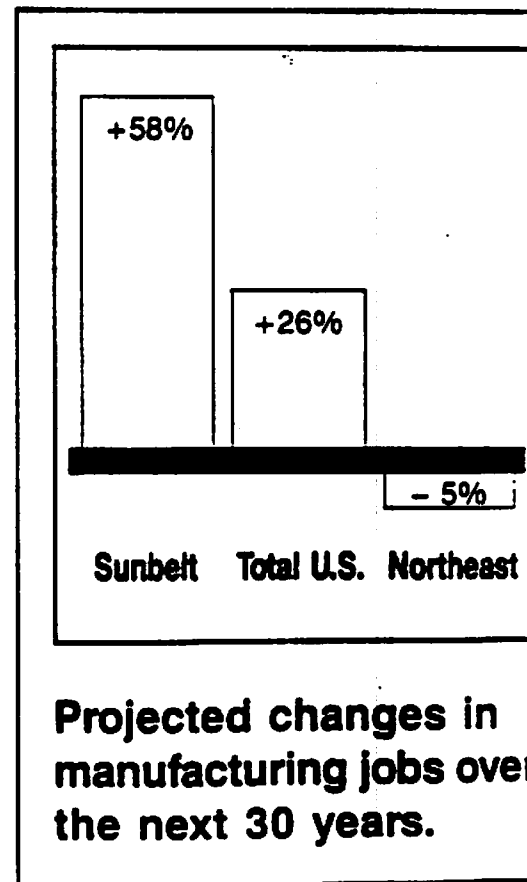
few nasty trade unions or "meddling" governments to restrict the pursuit of profits.

During the last 25 years, the Sunbelt experienced a gigantic growth in manufacturing jobs, military industry, and federal employment. The phenomenal development of the Sunbelt is not primarily due to the relocation of older industries from the Midwest and Northeast, but to a massive increase in federal employment, the spectacular growth of the military industry, and the development of new industries in the region. Industrial relocation from the Midwest and Northeast has been a more limited factor in this growth. For example, General Motors has based almost all its new plants in the South, including the Saturn facility to be built in Tennessee. This plant, to be the most modern manufacturing plant in the world, will produce GM's answer to high-quality Japanese compacts.

Many of the Sunbelt's new manufacturing industries are in the high-tech field, with the great majority of computer, microchip and electronics production centered in the South and Southwest. Federal employment also accounts for a large share of the increase in Sunbelt employment. Between 1960 and 1975, for instance, only 16,000 federal jobs were created in the Northeast, while the Sunbelt added 405,000 federal workers to its job rolls during the same period.

The increasing militarization of the economy, and the more aggressive posture of U.S. imperialism worldwide, also raises the relative importance of the Sunbelt. Most U.S. military installations, with large service industries around them, are in the Sunbelt. The South and Southwest are today home to over 140 military installations, whose payroll is greater than in all the military facilities in the rest of the country combined, including Alaska, Hawai'i, and U.S. bases in Puerto Rico.

The combination of these factors, as well as the rapid growth of the service industry, has produced jobs in the Sunbelt. From 1970-1980, the overall growth in the employment rate in the Sunbelt was twice that of the



Projected changes in manufacturing jobs over the next 30 years.

U.S. as a whole. Over the next 30 years, manufacturing employment in the Sunbelt is expected to increase by 58%, compared to 26% for the U.S. overall, and a projected *five percent decrease* in such employment in the Northeast.

Looked at from another angle, 118 jobs were destroyed in the industrial heartland through plant closures for every 100 jobs created during the period from 1969-1976. In the Sunbelt during that same time span, 100 jobs were created for every 76 lost through plant closures. (The significance of these figures is that they are for the period *prior to the late 1970s*, when the great wave of auto, steel and rubber plant closings took place in the East and Midwest. Even though a similar wave of closings occurred in California, the overall loss of jobs does not begin to compare with those lost in the old industrial centers.)

Between 1960 and 1980, the population of the Sunbelt increased by 44% compared to an 11.4% growth rate for the rest of the country. The total population of the Sunbelt in 1980 was 118,515,000, or a little over 50% of the U.S. total population at that time. Of these, 93,829,000 are white (an increase of 14% since 1970), 16 million are Black (an increase of 19.5%), and approximately 14 million are Chicano and Latino (including estimates of the undocumented Latino population). The Chicano and Latino population in the South and Southwest has increased by 75% since 1970. Put another way, the population growth rate of the Sunbelt was over one-and-a-half times that of

the rest of the U.S.!²

The enormous population shifts cannot be understated, either in their scope or their significance. In the first half of the 1970s, 85% of the growth in the U.S. population took place in the Sunbelt. A cursory look at the situation in some of the older power centers shows that between 1970 and 1980, St. Louis lost 28% of its population, Detroit lost 21%, and Cleveland lost 24%. In the newer power centers during that same period, Houston grew by 26%, Phoenix by 34%, and San Jose by 36%. We are not witnessing a phenomenon of simple



Utah International Inc.'s "Navajo" mine, on the Navajo Indian Reservation, Four Corners, New Mexico

uneven growth, but a more fundamental demographic and industrial restructuring of U.S. monopoly capitalism.

These changes in and of themselves have profound implications for the development of the U.S. revolution, but they take on even greater significance when we examine the population growth rates by nationality. Both the Black and Chicano-Latino populations have much higher growth rates than that of whites. Although whites constitute a large absolute majority of the Sunbelt's population, the minority nationalities are expected to constitute much larger percentages of the overall population within the next several decades. By the year 2000, Black people and Chicanos-Mexicanos in the Sunbelt could conceivably number 53 million people. The white population will number roughly 121.7 million.

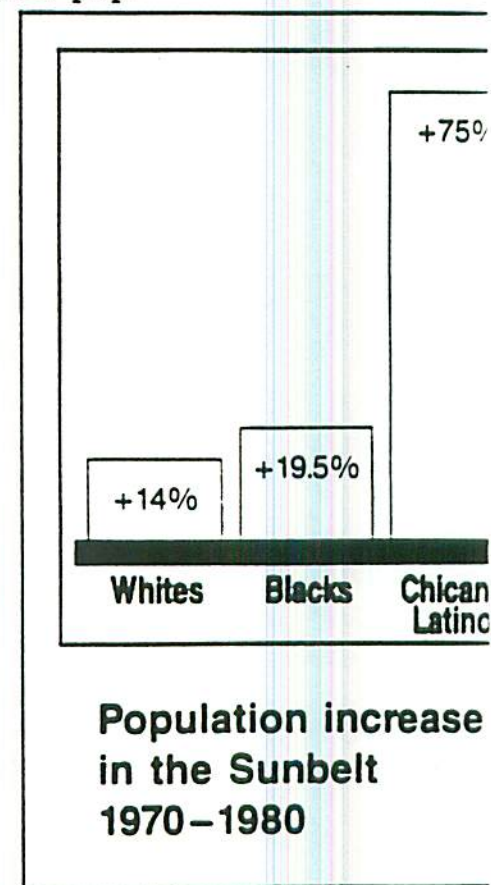
This means that the Black and Chicano-Mexicano populations would constitute over 30% of the total population in the region, concentrated in extensive territories in the Deep South and Southwest. These figures do not take into account other oppressed nationalities in the region, such as Asians and Native Americans. For Asians especially, the growth rates are quite high, in some areas surpassing that of the Latino population. Inevitably the Sunbelt will become more and more a "Third World" region in the next 20 to 40 years, which will exert a profound influence on the overall situation (i.e. for *all nationalities*) in the area.

Why the Sunbelt?

What accounts for the spectacular growth of the Sunbelt, and what are the essential conditions that make it of increasing strategic significance to monopoly capitalism?

Certainly one of the most important factors in the industrial development of the Sunbelt is what business analysts call "a favorable business climate." In plain words this means it is much easier to exploit the working class in the Sunbelt for higher rates of profit than elsewhere in the U.S.

The legal inducements for capital take the form of extensive "right-to-work" laws, lower rates of corporate





United Farm Workers' memorial for Rufino Contreras, killed during lettuce strike in California's Imperial Valley.

taxes, weaker government regulation of working conditions, and lower rates for unemployment insurance, workers' compensation and disability. Fourteen out of the 19 states in the country with "right-to-work" laws are in the Sunbelt. A large and fast-growing state like Texas (with Houston the shining symbol of Sunbelt glory) not only has a "right-to-work" law on the books, but also laws against mass picketing and secondary boycotts. It is not surprising that the United Farm Workers Union has been unable to win even a single contract in Texas after more than five years of organizing. Texas is truly a capitalist's dream come true.

The rate of unionization in the Sunbelt, and specifically in the Southwest, is lower than even the dismal figure for the country as a whole, which is currently about 18% of the work force. In New Mexico, only 12% of workers are unionized, in Colorado 15%, in Arizona only 13%, and Texas has a sad 11% figure. California is the only outstanding exception, with a union rate of 23%.

Corporate-minded state and local governments have also engaged in cutthroat competition with each other

to offer large corporate tax breaks. Corporate taxes in the Sunbelt are at least 13% lower than in the rest of the U.S., resulting in an annual corporate windfall in the hundreds of millions, if not billions, of dollars.

Federal spending in the Sunbelt has also played no small part in creating the "favorable business climate." The majority of federal dollars spent in the Sunbelt have gone towards the military, the military industry, farm subsidies, highway construction, and federal civilian employment. This is in stark contrast to federal spending in the Northeast and Midwest, where the bulk of federal monies go for welfare and social services. Obviously the capitalists prefer the Sunbelt type of federal largesse, which is much more profitable than feeding, housing, and taking care of "obsolete" workers who no longer have a useful (i.e. profit-making) social value.

Another critical factor in the growth of the Sunbelt is its lack of democracy. Bourgeois democracy, with all its severe limitations, is the form of government in the entire U.S. But nowhere is it so restricted as in the Sunbelt. The principal reasons for this are the existence of an oppressed Black Nation in the South and an oppressed Chicano Nation in the Southwest. From a historical point of view, these nations represent the legacy of slavery and the plantation system in the South, and the military conquest of Mexico's former territories in the Southwest.

Today, the African American and Chicano peoples are heirs to that legacy. They continue to bear the burden of the survivals of slavery and annexation in the form of the denial of democratic rights and the most brutal forms of national oppression. In the sphere of political power, this is expressed in the myriad of laws, "customs" and bureaucratic loopholes which operate to disenfranchise millions of Black people, Chicanos and Latinos. In a certain sense, the "move to the right" that everyone talks about began in the Sunbelt. The "conservative," that is, reactionary, politics of the Sunbelt have nothing to do with rugged individualism, a "frontier mentality," or the peculiar personal quirks of a James Eastland, a Ronald Reagan or a Barry Goldwater. It is a historical outgrowth, reflected in the political sphere, of slavery and annexation.

That is why, as more and more industrial and politi-

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cal power develops in the Sunbelt, the entire country "moves to the right." The national politics of the United States are more and more being dictated by a monopoly capital centered in the most conservative region of the country. This explains why "right-to-work" laws are so pervasive in Sunbelt states, why corporations have such a free hand to exploit and destroy the environment, why employee health and safety protections are so minimal, and why spending on social services is so low compared to the rest of the U.S.

The monopoly capitalists have "moved to the right" in order to try to reassert their world domination, and to bolster the falling rates of profits occasioned by the erosion of their power and influence internationally. This has not occurred because of the shift to the Sunbelt. But that shift *facilitated* and *gave impetus* to that important change in bourgeois policy which began in the latter stages of the Carter administration and continues in the Reagan era.

The higher profit margins, derived partly from the weak democratic structures in the Sunbelt, are the underlying reason why the capitalists are so intent on preventing Black people and Chicanos from voting in large numbers; why there have been attempts to weaken the Voting Rights Act, attack Black voter registration drives in the South, eliminate the bilingual ballot, maintain discriminatory gerrymandering patterns, and deny immigrants the right to vote in local and state elections. The ruling class understands the implications of the rapid population growth among the minority peoples.

Of course, the existence of a large, politically powerless pool of Black and Chicano workers is itself an attractive inducement for monopoly capital to flow to the Sunbelt. The added "fringe benefit" is that this massive reserve army of unemployed and superexploited workers is used to force down wages *generally* in the region. Although the majority of the new industries in the Sunbelt are in the so-called "high-wage" category, the jobs largely went to white workers, and even those "high wages" are lower than in the old industrial centers because of the large numbers of unorganized and jobless workers, not to speak of the millions of workers without any rights at all — the undocumented workers.



On the U.S.-Mexico border

One further impact of these developments is the increased stratification of the working class in the Sunbelt. This can be seen most clearly in the new high-tech industries. The upper stratum workers in this industry are mostly white males and get high pay and excellent benefits. But the assembly workers, who are primarily oppressed nationality women, get low wages, poor benefits, and have the worst working conditions.

This stratification is the product of a very profitable wage differential between white and non-white workers in the Sunbelt. The average difference in wages between white and Black or Chicano-Mexicano workers is at least 12%. This wage differential operates to keep wages for almost all workers in the Sunbelt "in line" with the capitalist pursuit of maximum profits.

Geopolitics, energy, and the military factor

There are other important factors which make the Sunbelt such a key center for monopoly capitalism, having to do with geopolitics, militarization and energy dependency.



Farmer near Somerville, Tennessee

During the last 25 years, the United States has become increasingly concerned with its southern flank. It has viewed with great alarm the continuing upheavals in Latin America, and watched with a jaundiced eye as the tide of revolution has steadily moved towards Mexico. From the standpoint of U.S. imperialism, Mexico is the most important nation in Latin America, primarily because of its huge oil reserves and the large amounts of U.S. capital invested there, and because of its 2,000-mile border with the U.S. The oil is key because the U.S. realizes that its "access" to the Middle Eastern oil fields is becoming more and more problematic, and that in case of "emergency," say a prolonged war, it must be able to fuel its industrial and military machines. Mexico is the logical supplier — willingly or unwillingly.

The U.S. also worries about Mexico because the bulk of that nation's \$96 billion foreign debt is owed to U.S. banks and lending institutions, or to institutions in which the yankees have a dominant voice, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

The United States simply cannot afford to allow a revolutionary situation to develop in Mexico, because

it would threaten U.S. investments, access to the oil fields, and, very importantly, because of the "spill-over" which could affect the southwestern U.S.

Mexico's population is expected to double by the end of the century, and its economy is already in deep trouble with no relief in sight. It presently suffers an unemployment rate of 40%-50%, and by the year 2000 the situation could reach a critical mass, resulting in a tremendous flow of Mexicanos into the U.S., where they will join with a Chicano-Mexicano population itself growing at a rate of more than 65% per decade, and themselves the victims of tremendous social problems. Certainly the 2,000-mile border with Mexico is an increasingly important factor in the "Sunbelt Strategy."

The growing U.S. dependence on Mexico for future oil supplies serves to illustrate its more general energy problems — problems which highlight the importance of the Sunbelt. Ever since the Arab oil embargo of 1973, the U.S. has sought to secure a stable energy supply for its domestic economy, its military machine and its key allies in Europe and Japan. The Sunbelt is the largest repository of many domestic U.S. energy resources. U.S. coal reserves in the South and Southwest are greater than anywhere else in the country. Large petroleum deposits are still to be found in the Sunbelt, as well as large deposits of uranium. It is not coincidental that the membership of the powerful and militant United Mine Workers Union has declined at the same time that many large coal operations have shifted to the South and Southwest. The net effect has been to weaken one of the strongest sectors of the U.S. labor movement, while at the same time the capitalists have reaped even higher rates of profit.

The importance of the Sunbelt is further accentuated by the increasing militarization of the U.S. economy, and the critical role the military plays in the pursuit of U.S. foreign policy objectives. The Sunbelt is truly a military bastion for U.S. imperialism, home not only to 140 military installations, but a great concentration of military-related industry. This is certainly another



Hanna Petroleum oil rig in the Southwest

reason the Sunbelt is so crucial to the long-term perspectives of monopoly capitalism.

An additional factor in the Sunbelt's strategic significance is its role as a gateway to the Asian-Pacific area, a region of growing importance for U.S. imperialism. The U.S. has billions of dollars invested in the Asian-Pacific area and sees it as a key source of raw materials for U.S. industry and the military. Militarily, the Pacific Rim holds a critical place in U.S. strategic planning, as the outer defense perimeter against Soviet expansion. The Sunbelt, especially southern California, serves as a major link to the Asian-Pacific region.

World and domestic events have combined in a remarkably short period to plunge U.S. imperialism into a difficult and protracted crisis. While this crisis has ebbs and flows, the long-term decline of U.S. monopoly capitalism is both inevitable and irreversible. Never again will the U.S. grab Arab oil for \$2 and \$3 a barrel. Never again will the U.S. regain the many "lucrative" countries it has "lost" in the third world. Nor will the U.S. ever be able to dominate the world auto and steel industries as in the past. And of course history has proven that it is impossible for the United States to reverse the revolutionary tide sweeping through many parts of the world, including the U.S. "back yard" in Latin America.

U.S. monopoly capitalism has been compelled by events beyond its control to move to the Sunbelt, and to stake its survival on future developments there. This critical evolution must necessarily shape our conceptions of the revolution against monopoly capitalism, and our perspectives on the development of the strategic alliance between the working class and the oppressed nationality movements. Cer-

tainly it requires that due consideration be given to the role the Chicano Movement will play in the U.S. revolution.

The Chicano Movement: a flaw in the Sunbelt Strategy

While U.S. monopoly capitalism has probably given



Chicano drill sergeant, basic training



East Los Angeles

itself more breathing space with its "Sunbelt Strategy," it has also created a double-edged sword which could hasten its own destruction. One edge is an impoverished and decaying industrial heartland. As the capitalists close shop there and move their capital elsewhere, they leave behind dying inner cities, millions of jobless, hunger and misery.³ These conditions form the seeds of rebellion, especially for the large populations of Black people, Latinos and working class whites in the old industrial centers. The oppressed nationalities especially have a very recent tradition of urban revolt and uprising. We can expect more of the same in the future.

The other edge to its sword of self-destruction are the oppressed Black and Chicano Nations in the Sunbelt. The "Sunbelt Strategy" *means* increasing oppression for both those nations, as well as for the other minority nationalities who inhabit the region, and the large numbers of lower stratum white workers as well.

The Chicano Nation is already feeling the brutal imprint of U.S. monopoly capitalism's efforts to extend its life and maximize its profit margins. In the final analysis, one of the great "amenities" of the Sunbelt

In the final analysis, one of the great 'amenities' of the Sunbelt is the oppression of the Chicano Nation.

Nation within a nation



While the exact borders of the Chicano Nation remain to be determined, even publications such as the National Geographic recognize the uniqueness of the Southwest.

is the oppression of the Chicano Nation: monopoly capitalism's ability to exploit its labor (including the rapidly growing sector of immigrant Mexicano and Latino workers — part of the lower stratum of both the multinational proletariat and the Chicano Nation), the theft of Chicano resources, and the availability of large numbers of Chicano youth as cannon fodder for U.S. aggression.

The Chicano Nation refers to a vast expanse of land stretching across the southwestern United States. Its population includes the nearly 15 million Chicanos, Mexicanos and Latinos who inhabit the Southwest. This nation has historical roots going back more than four centuries, to the time of Spanish colonization of that region. The nation was formed following U.S. annexation, the consolidation of which forced Chicanos into permanent second-class status in U.S. society. The nation's territory stretches from southern Texas, through New Mexico and southern Colorado, including southern Arizona and a large part of California. Spanish is the predominant language of the Chicano Nation, and its culture has largely been shaped by its more than century-

long struggle against oppression.

Recent statistics help provide at least a beginning portrait of Chicano-Mexicano oppression — nearly one-third of the population living in poverty; continuing double-digit unemployment; high school drop-out rates over 50%; alarming increases in infant mortality; high rates of Chicanos living in what is euphemistically called "structurally inadequate" housing (when they can find housing at all); and the pervasiveness of sickness, drug abuse, and a vast array of social problems.

In the past several years we have also witnessed a growing brutalization of the undocumented by the *migra* (the Immigration and Naturalization Service), causing massive dislocation, family breakup, injuries and death. We have also seen the stepped-up efforts to crush Chicano-Mexicano culture through the suppression of the Spanish language — by steady and well-financed efforts to outlaw every language except English. And finally there is the daily toll of police brutality, causing dozens of deaths among Chicanos and Latinos in the Southwest each year.

These statistics and facts cannot really give a complete picture of Chicano oppression. They only scratch the surface of the suffering endured by *campesinos* who are not provided sanitary facilities or allowed to drink water on the job in the scorching agribusiness fields of the Southwest; the life span of farm workers is still just 49 years. It does not tell of the slow death of Chicano and Latino foundry workers who each day swallow or inhale critical amounts of silica, lead and mercury at their jobs. It does not reveal the millions of daily humiliations Chicanos suffer as they try to obtain employment with almost no ability to read, write or spell; skills made more and more critical even in "menial" jobs in a high-tech U.S.

This oppressive reality is the wellspring of the Chicano National Movement, a movement based on the fastest-growing population in the country. In the decade before 1980, the Chicano-Mexicano population grew by a rate of 65%. And this does not account for the one to two million undocumented Mexicano and Latino immigrants who live in the U.S., most as part of the Chicano Nation.

Demographics are critical to an assessment of the

importance of the Chicano Nation. We can expect a continuing rapid growth of the Chicano-Mexicano population in the Southwest. The average age of Chicanos-Mexicanos is 22. Forty percent of the population is under the age of 18, and 25% under the age of 12. This means that a Chicano baby boom lies ahead for the next two decades. There is also the high probability of continued high immigration from Mexico and Central America into the Southwest. As Mexico's economic and political situation worsens, immigration could conceivably increase beyond the one million per year now estimated to enter the U.S. And as the military situation in Central America intensifies, immigration from that region too is likely to grow.

By 1990, it is possible that the Chicano-Mexicano-Latino population in the Southwest could number 22 million. And it could very well top 30 million by the year 2000. The implications of this, for both the capitalists and the revolutionary movement, are staggering, especially given the volatile nature of the Chicano Movement.

The Chicano Nation has a long history of resistance to oppression, including armed revolts, urban rebellions, major strikes, and periodic calls for self-determination, independence, or secession. Given the importance of the Southwest to the future development of U.S. capitalism, it is essential that the ruling class crush, *in one way or another*, the revolutionary potential of the Chicano Movement, *and* prevent the unity of the multinational proletariat in the Sunbelt.⁴

The capitalists, recognizing the potential danger from the Chicano Movement to their long-term efforts to "secure" the Sunbelt, have undertaken different methods to defuse that movement. The "stick" approach is represented most graphically by the activities of the hated *migra*. The ruling class utilizes the *migra* to terrorize the poorest and most oppressed sector of the Southwest, and create an anti-immigrant hysteria among other nationalities. (Even a fair number of Chicanos have been infected by this hysteria.) The capitalists realize that as long



San Diego, California

as they can keep millions of Mexicanos and Latinos terrorized and deprived of even the most elementary human rights, they will be able to strictly limit the revolutionary potential of the Chicano Movement as a whole.

The "carrot" approach is what I call "Hispanismo." In a certain sense, Hispanismo represents an effort to buy off a small stratum of the Chicano middle and upper classes. Economically this occurs through some limited promotion into middle and even a few upper management positions in the corporate and government sectors, and the limited expansion of Chicano business. Politically, Hispanismo negates the interests of the working class within the Chicano Movement, or, more precisely, identifies those interests entirely with those of the middle and bourgeois classes. Its thrust is to dull any sense of heightened national awareness and identity, and to push the entire movement to the right.

1980 Census figures reveal that in the past decade the Chicano bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie gained some small measure of economic, social and political ground in the Southwest. These gains form the material basis for the development of Hispanismo. But, and this is an important "but," these gains are extremely small and very, very fragile. Already the Chicano middle class is learning just how fragile their progress has been as they watch Chicano Studies programs being gutted, as affirmative action becomes only a fading memory, as Chicano businessmen find credit increasingly hard to obtain, and as markets become difficult to penetrate because of domination by monopoly corporations. It is very likely, given an expected increase in the level of mass struggle in the Chicano Movement, that we will see an erosion of the influence of this trend in the next period.

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to underestimate the influence of Hispanismo as a political and ideological trend. It will continue to be essential for revolutionaries to seek unity with Hispanismo-oriented leaders and organizations around concrete issues of Chicano oppression, while maintaining an independent perspective, striving to exert as much initiative as possible, and steadily creating the conditions for the working class to develop its leadership of the movement. In opposition to the



Jesse Jackson campaign in Birmingham, Alabama, 1984, which inspired widespread Black voter registration.

narrow reformism, assimilationism, and blind faith in capitalism which the Hispanic forces advocate, revolutionaries must creatively promote an outlook of revolutionary struggle, internationalism, national pride, and conscious opposition to monopoly capitalism as the fundamental source of Chicano oppression.

The Chicano Movement is in a position to play a decisive and strategic role in the struggle against monopoly capitalism, more so than most revolutionaries ever imagined in the 1960s and '70s. The Chicano Nation is in a position to "hit it where it hurts," and, along with the multinational working class and other national movements, help achieve socialism in the U.S. The role of the Chicano proletariat will be especially critical in forging the revolutionary unity needed to win socialism. The Chicano proletariat has the dual role of being the staunchest fighter for Chicano liberation and a detachment of the multinational proletariat, the most revolutionary class in U.S. society.

The Black and Chicano Nations could be an Achilles heel of U.S. imperialism. They have the potential, in alliance with the working class, to jeopardize the capi-

talists' creaky house of cards in the Sunbelt — their tremendous superprofits, their energy supplies, their border with Mexico and their best access to the lucrative Asian-Pacific region. And, what is very important from a revolutionary point of view, it even threatens their military capacity.


Important arenas of struggle

The experience of the last several years points to certain key areas of struggle in the Chicano Nation which can serve as rallying points for the further revolutionary development of that movement. I offer the following as a beginning point for future discussion in the movement, to define the most important issues and the best methods for developing unity and for building up the revolutionary forces.

Any discussion of critical areas for organizing must begin with the Chicano-Mexicano workers. The Chicano-Mexicano proletariat (working class), is the largest sector (85%) of the Chicano population, and the great majority of Chicano workers are in the lower stratum of the multinational working class. Because of these factors and the severity of the oppression and exploitation they suffer, they are in a position to play an important and even leading role in both the working class and Chicano National movements.

Unfortunately, the rise of the Sunbelt has been accompanied by a decline in the organized labor movement. This is largely because the labor bureaucrats have not considered it important to organize low-paid Black and Chicano-Mexicano workers. Now they are being compelled to do so, for the sake of the survival of the union movement, and to try to regain their clout within the Democratic Party.

This means that the ground today is very fertile for organizing Chicano-Mexicano workers. We can see evidence of this among the farm workers, where active organizing drives are taking place in every Southwestern state except Colorado, among service workers, and among the so-called "bucket shop" foundry and manufacturing workers. For example, last year in California's San Fernando Valley, 1,200 Mexicano and Latino workers at the Superior company, maker of automobile rims, brought in the UAW. This was the largest UAW organiz-



Any discussion of critical areas for organizing must begin with the Chicano-Mexicano workers. They form more than 85% of the Chicano population and are its most oppressed and exploited sector.

ing victory (and possibly one of the largest union organizing victories) of the entire year. Witness also the strike of the mostly Chicano Phelps-Dodge copper miners in Arizona — where several thousand workers waged a long and extremely bitter strike in spite of mostly terrible misleadership by union officials.

Of critical importance to *our* "Sunbelt Strategy" is increased organizing among Chicano-Mexicano workers, especially the unorganized workers. A strong labor movement, which in the Southwest presumes a well-organized sector of Chicano workers, would be a tremendous blow to the "Sunbelt Strategy" of the capitalists, which is predicated in large part on the lack of united labor in the region.⁵

The struggle for immigrants' rights will be another key arena in this next period. The capitalists are counting on a continued supply of low-wage and terrorized Mexicano and Latino labor in the Southwest. This is critical to their agriculture industry, to the fast-growing service sector, and to the garment and "bucket shop" industries. Denial of basic democratic rights to immigrants is also crucial to their denial of democracy to the entire Chicano Nation. The cutting edge of the bourgeoisie's terror tactics, as stated previously, is aimed at the undocumented Mexicano and Latino. But make no mistake about it — their impact is meant for the whole Chicano Movement.

The immigrants' rights movement has picked up quite a bit of steam in the last ten years, and the potential for it to develop as a major component of both the labor and Chicano movements is very good. However, to restrict this movement solely to the question of immigrants' rights would be a mistake. There is a much larger question involved for the Mexicano immigrant. He is coming to land which his Chicano brethren have built, suffered, died and fought for. Their struggle is for much more than a green card or the right to organize. It is for the right of self-determination — for land and political power.

This is the perspective which should guide work among this sector. The monopoly capitalists may finally be willing to concede some rights for immigrants, as have many bourgeois governments in Europe. But what gives them nightmares is the idea that Chicanos-



Opposition to anti-immigrant legislation. Los Angeles. June 30, 1984.

Mexicanos may demand control of the oil in Texas, the coal in Colorado, the uranium and copper in New Mexico and Arizona, and the lush and highly profitable agricultural lands in California. They fear even the slightest *possibility* that the demand for self-determination will become popular, because they realize that it could mean the final bell has begun to toll.

But as critical as the immigration question is to the future of the Chicano Nation, the electoral issue may be even more so. The capitalists' "Sunbelt Strategy" depends in no small degree on the lack of democracy for Chicanos-Mexicanos. It allows them a much freer hand to exploit the labor and resources of the Chicano Nation and to more freely exploit workers of *all* nationalities who live in the region. Therefore the struggle for democracy in the electoral arena will assume a greater importance in the Southwest as time goes on.

We have already seen evidence of this in the past few years, in the great mobilizing power and impact of the Henry Cisneros mayoral campaign in San Antonio, the Federico Peña mayoral campaign in Denver, and several others throughout the Southwest. Electoral

struggles almost immediately illustrate the narrow confines of capitalist "democracy," and point out the need to struggle to "change the rules." This means progressives should fight not simply to get more Chicanos into office, but to expand the field for mass participation. We must fight to defend the bilingual ballot (which has been eliminated already in Los Angeles County, home to the largest number of Spanish speaking people in the country), fight against gerrymandering and at-large elections, and fight for the right of immigrants to vote in local and state elections.

While this demand may seem unrealistic in the midst of the prevailing anti-immigrant hysteria, it is essential to fight for, at least as a long-term objective. Otherwise millions of members of the Chicano Nation will be unable to participate in this arena of struggle, the movement will never realize its full potential or win important gains, and it will be even more difficult for the working class to place its imprint on this critical sphere of political action.

And finally I want to make at least brief mention of an important, but often forgotten, part of the Chicano Movement — the land struggle.

Given the capitalists' increasing energy dependence on the Sunbelt, the land struggle of Chicanos and Native American Indians assumes greater importance. These struggles, because they frequently involve lands rich in key minerals and resources, often include a wide variety of spirited resistance — from petitions to the United Nations, from lengthy court battles, to violent forms of combat. They not only threaten the capitalists' easy and highly profitable access to many resources, but also bring out in sharp relief the whole question of

self-determination.

The well-known struggle which is unfolding between the federal government and the Native American Indians at Big Mountain in Arizona proves just how important this issue is to big business. The government is threatening to launch a full-scale military action against the *Indios* to remove them from their land.



NS Western Regional Commissioner Harold Ezell calls arresting illegal immigrants "fun," and says, "if you catch 'em, you ought to clean 'em and fry 'em yourself."



Denver rally, January 1986, opposing government's proposed forced relocation of thousands of Navajo and Hopi Indians in Big Mountain, Arizona.

so they can exploit the mineral resources. This struggle has gathered tremendous support from the Chicano-Mexicano people, because they can identify very closely with the whole issue of the land. When Chicanos and *Indios* demand land, they want more than a small plot on which to plant beans or raise sheep. In the final analysis they are demanding the return of national territory and the right to govern that territory themselves.

The fight for socialism

The socialist revolution will finally be the result of a powerful mass movement and uprising led by the working class in alliance with the oppressed Black and Chicano Nations. Only these critical social forces are powerful enough to unite all other anti-imperialist forces and effect the defeat of monopoly capitalism. For the Chicano Nation to help fulfill this destiny, communists must be in the forefront as advocates and fighters for that nation's right to self-determination.

By the right to self-determination, I mean the right of the Chicano Nation to political independence — for

the Chicano-Mexicano people to freely *choose* whether they want to form an independent state, maintain the status quo, federate with Mexico, or choose some other national form, such as regional autonomy. The kernel of the demand for self-determination is to be found in many of the demands of the Chicano Movement, such as community control, for recognition of the rights of the land-grant heirs, for greater political representation, etc. Ultimately the slogan "Chicano Power" is a demand for self-determination. It is essential that communists, representing the most advanced perspectives of the working class, uphold this democratic demand among all nationalities as a way to forge the equality and unity of the proletariat.

And for those communists whose roots are from and who work in the Chicano Movement, this demand is important to help link together all the diverse aspects of that struggle, give it orientation and a common focus, and help unleash its full revolutionary potential. This demand poses one of the great threats to the basic structure of U.S. monopoly capitalism and exposes its fundamental vulnerability to an organized, aroused and politically conscious Chicano Movement. Ultimately, to achieve full self-determination, the victory of socialism in the United States is necessary. As long as monopoly capitalism exists, the bourgeoisie will do everything in its power to deflect, undermine and erode any and all democratic gains won by the Chicano people. It is only when the multinational working class itself runs the country that the Chicano people, and other oppressed nationalities, will be guaranteed the freedom to exercise their national rights in a thoroughgoing way.

The "Sunbelt Strategy" can bode well or ill for the socialist revolution. It will ultimately work against the revolutionary cause if we fail to analyze its meaning and draw out its full political implications. But it can work in our favor if we seriously study these important new developments in the structure of monopoly capitalism and recognize especially the increasingly important role that the Chicano and Black Nations can play in the effort to develop a strategy for overthrowing monopoly capitalism and establishing socialism. Capitalism rests on a fundamentally weak and crumbling foundation; in the third word, in the decimated areas of the



Phelps-Dodge strikers, Clifton, Arizona. (Center) Dr. O'Leary, head of the People's Clinic, and Anna O'Leary, president of the Morenci Miners Women's Auxiliary.

Northeast and Midwest; and in the volatile oppressed nations of the Sunbelt. But there is no escaping the fact that if we want to organize a successful revolution, our political center of gravity must shift south and westward. This is the most important implication of the "Sunbelt Strategy." It presents new and exciting challenges for the communist movement, challenges which they can meet only through a break with outmoded conceptions of strategy, and with a creative eye towards the new possibilities arising from the Sunbelt.

Notes:

¹ The tremendous concentration of capital in the Northeast and Midwest made that region (specifically New York City), a financial center as well. The most powerful U.S. banks — Chase Manhattan, Morgan Guaranty, Manufacturers Hanover, etc. — are still based in New York. Some economists hold that because the financial center is still in the East, the importance of the Sunbelt analysis is greatly overstated. But no important capitalist economic trend ever develops smoothly and evenly. To say that the industrial heartland

has lost much of its former economic position is not to say it has no importance at all. The Sunbelt analysis merely shows the undeniable development of industry and employment, population, and political influence in that region of the country. Inevitably, these developments have their impact on the financial centers as well, as more and more investments, both domestic and foreign, become linked to the Sunbelt economy.

² Of the 3.8 million *legal* immigrants who entered the United States between 1975 and 1980, nearly 60% settled in the Sunbelt.

³ Even though the basic trend for U.S. capital flow is to the Sunbelt, this does not mean that capitalists will not also try to take advantage of the traumatized Northeast and Midwest as well. Governments in these areas are practically giving away the store to try to induce companies to set up in their cities and states — promising lower corporate taxes, tax moratoriums, "special economic zones" with cheap labor, no unions, etc., etc. This will probably result in some sporadic economic upturns in some regions in the former industrial centers as a scavenger capitalism moves in to pick the bones of the region it has destroyed. But it will not mean, at least for the foreseeable future, that the heartland will ever be restored to its former dominant position.

⁴ The Sunbelt may also be the Achilles heel in another sense. A large percentage of the U.S. military is composed of African Americans and Chicanos-Latinos. They constitute a very shaky military foundation for U.S. monopoly capitalism, for they too suffer national oppression. Soldiers could very well vacillate, especially given good organizational efforts among them, when it comes to shooting down their brothers and sisters in cases of urban uprising, strikes, etc. This is exactly what happened in the 1960s during the great Black rebellions, when quite a number of Black soldiers and guardsmen refused to go into action against their own people.

⁵ An important factor to consider in this regard is the differentiation among the multinational proletariat in the Sunbelt. The economic growth of the Sunbelt, insofar as it has "benefited" the workers at all, has only done so for whites. As more and more "high-wage" jobs opened up in the Sunbelt, they usually went to white labor. This is true in the military industry, in the large auto plants in the South, and in the high-tech industry. This had the impact, along with other factors, of sharpening the divisions within the working class, and setting conditions for racism and chauvinism to flourish. One of the key tasks for communists is to help white workers understand the critical importance,

for their long- and short-term benefit, of supporting the struggle for self-determination of the Black and Chicano Nations. This work is essential to unite the class, and to establish its strategic alliance with the Chicano Movement.

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