

DIALOG

Rosenbergs' sons dispute findings

On September 13, James Weinstein reviewed *The Rosenberg File*, by Ronald Radosh and Joyce Milton. The following is a response to the review and the book by Robert and Michael Meeropol, the children of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg.

By Robert and Michael Meeropol

Since 1974 we have often publicly cited the facts behind our firm belief that our parents, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, were framed. Simply put, they were not guilty of "conspiracy to commit espionage." We remain convinced that they did not conspire and that they did not commit espionage. These conclusions are not based on our emotions, to which we readily admit, but rather on a careful sifting of the fruits of over 30 years of investigative work.

The evidence is overwhelming and remains uncontroverted in spite of Ronald Radosh and Joyce Milton's book, *The Rosenberg File*. The chief prosecution witnesses, David and Ruth Greenglass, and Harry Gold, repeatedly lied during the trial. These lies were critical to establishing the government's case. It also remains uncontroverted that key pieces of evidence were either fabricated or did not prove what they purported to show. We will concentrate here on five crucial examples, elaborating on each.

- David and Ruth Greenglass lied when they said our parents' console table had been a gift from the Russians. Ruth Greenglass lied when she said it had a hollowed out section so it could be used for microfilming. The table was not introduced at the trial, but was found later. Testimony established it had been purchased at Macy's as our parents had testified. It had three drill holes, but no hollowed out portion. The table is of critical importance because it is one of the only pieces of physical evidence that third parties could view in order to determine who was lying. In a conspiracy trial, where the case boils down to the defendant's word against the prosecution witnesses, credibility is the key.

- The Greenglasses lied when they said that our father convinced them to have passport photos taken. Walter and Miriam Schneir in *Invitation to an Inquest*, proved these photos, introduced at the trial, were family snapshots. Readers of the Radosh-Milton (henceforth R-M) book are never informed that the Greenglasses ever gave this testimony, let alone that it has been proven false.

- David Greenglass lied when he said our father had stolen a proximity Fuse from Emerson Radio where he worked during World War II. In our book, *We Are Your Sons*, we showed that our father could not have done this. The government, in fact, learned that no whole proximity Fuse was missing, and we provided evidence that our father could not have pieced a new fuse together from discarded parts while on a garbage detail. (*Sons* . . . pp. 190-192.) R-M reiterate the charge of theft but ignore the government's statement and our evidence.

- The Greenglasses lied when they said, "Ethel did the typing." R-M admit that the FBI got the Greenglasses to concoct that critical evidence against our mother only two weeks before the trial. But, R-M ultimately conclude that our mother probably was involved anyway.

- Like the Greenglasses, Harry Gold has been exposed as a liar. R-M admit that Gold had a long history of lying. They

admit that he created a fictitious life and once stated on the witness stand, "I lied so often it's a wonder steam did not come out of my ears." Yet they chose to believe most of what he said at the trial. The files show that Gold was putty in the FBI's hands. They show that his statements, just like those of the Greenglasses, changed in key ways between his arrest and the trial. R-M note that one such change occurred because Gold "corrected himself." (p. 45.) They ignore the pattern of changes in the course of the government's "development" of this testimony.

R-M claims to rise above the debate and describe their effort as an uninvolved "search for the truth." James Weinstein concludes in *In These Times* (9/83) ". . . any reader not encumbered with an ideological axe to grind would find Radosh's and Milton's conclusions convincing. . . ." *In These Times* readers should be skeptical of such statements. No doubt many readers noted the arrogance behind Weinstein's pronouncement that reasoned conclusions other than his own are impossible.

Because a conclusion supporting our father's guilt cannot be established from the trial testimony or evidence, R-M focus on data in the government files that was not used at trial. They claim that there is extensive circumstantial evidence of a second spy ring that our father voluntarily organized. They then rely on the existence of this spy ring to conclude that Gold and the Greenglasses told the essential truth.

What is distilled from almost 200,000 pages of government documents depends on the perspective of the researcher. Perspective provides the basis for determining what is important and what is not. Since the FBI has been known to fabricate evidence, a perspective also helps figure out what in the files to believe. We admit our perspective, but R-M fail to admit theirs. We view the McCarthy period as the government's effort to gather support for U.S. global economic and military expansion. We believe the government used a series of spy trials to help convince the public that its international post-war poli-

Radosh and Milton take much of what the FBI says in the files at face value.

cies were defensive, as well as to "prove" that domestic communists were really agents of Stalin. The revelations of the Vietnam War period, Watergate, and CoIntelpro have shown a police pattern of political frameups, harassment, and assassination. The government's files were also designed for prosecutorial purposes. Thus, we are extremely skeptical of what is in the files.

R-M, on the other hand, take the position that the American Communist Party's blind support for the Soviet Union would naturally lead young zealots into espionage activities. As a result, R-M take much of what the FBI says in the files at face value. However, they claim to have believed in our parents' innocence in 1974. While this may be true, it was Radosh's conclusion that our father was guilty of "something" that led him to start working on this project. Far from an objective search for the truth, his work is an effort to marshal all the facts possible to bolster a set of preconceived ideas. Thus, his use

of the files not only reflects his perspective, but his determination regardless of the facts to reach the "right" conclusion.

Here are a few examples of how R-M misused the files. There are many more that space limitations will not permit us to cover.

J. Edgar Hoover, writing during the Korean War, asked if the activities of William Perl (a scientist and supposed member of the "other spy ring") had resulted in the Soviets using American designs to build the MIG-15. The *World Telegram* ran this story as proof of the damage done by the spy ring. R-M include this story. However, in the FBI files are statements from three government agencies that there was no evidence of any American design in the MIG-15. R-M ignore these files.

A key argument in the book is their acceptance of the credibility of Jerome Eugene Tartakow, a jailhouse informer incarcerated with our father. Why would our father confess to this man in a presumably bugged cell, and then go to his death proclaiming his innocence without a word to his family and lawyer? R-M's acceptance of Tartakow has two parts: his supposed friendship with fellow inmate Eugene Dennis, head of the U.S. Communist Party, and accepting that Tartakow's stories "checked out." Simply put, he could not have known some of the things he told the FBI if our father had not told him.

R-M, echoing earlier work by Sol Stern and Radosh, use an uncorroborated (and subsequently denied) interview to make their arguments. They write that Dennis' friendship with Tartakow is proved by the fact that Dennis wrote a recommendation for him to Emmanuel (Manny) Bloch, our parents' lawyer. Bonnie Brower, who at the time was one of our attorneys working on our Freedom of Information Act lawsuit, is supposed to have told Radosh and Stern this. She denied it and called them liars. Her denial aside, how could she have known, she was a child at the time? Have R-M any other evidence to support this charge? No. Only Tartakow corroborates Tartakow. There is nothing in the FBI files about such a letter.

Tartakow suggested to Stern and Radosh that the reason our father confided the details of his espionage activities to him in jail was so that Tartakow would relay the messages to Dennis. Yet the FBI files show Tartakow telling the FBI that Eugene Dennis was among our father's friends in the prison. Thus, there was no reason for Tartakow to relay messages. The files are consistent with the memory of Dennis' widow, Peggy, whose arguments are dismissed by R-M because they ignore this crucial document. Here, the confirmation of Tartakow is torpedoed by Tartakow himself!

James Weinstein is very impressed that Tartakow independently corroborates his (Weinstein's) meetings with our father in Ithaca. However, the FBI had the basic outline of the trip to Ithaca before Tartakow mentioned it. Our father testified at the trial that he made at least one trip in an effort to borrow money. Revealingly, Tartakow's "independent corroboration" of this story was not given to the FBI until well after the trial. R-M ignore these facts. They also ignore Tartakow's more outrageous statements, including the evidence that led the FBI to believe that Weinstein himself was part of the spy ring.

R-M ask in reply, "Why would the FBI stuff untrustworthy material into its own files? What would have been the purpose of such an exercise?" The files show that the prosecution warned the FBI in February of 1951 that the judge might grant any defense motion demanding to see a record of all bureau statements that could be used as background to trial testimony. Thus, if the FBI ever wished to use any of the "Tartakow tales" against our parents, they had to have a record of them. The same is true for any material given after the trial in the event that a new trial was granted. R-M ignored this document and never considered this possibility.

In addition to abusing documents, R-M

misuse interviews. Two key individuals they quote extensively are John Gates and Junius Scales, former officials of the Communist Party. Walter Schneir recently re-interviewed them. Scales stated that the quote, "I had no doubt about the involvement of the Rosenbergs," does not apply to his knowledge in 1950. Scales stated that a third party told him in the 1960s that the manner in which our parents' *Daily Worker* subscription was cancelled was evidence of their guilt. Meanwhile, John Gates reiterated that he had indeed said: "Julius Rosenberg was very active . . . and one fine day he disappeared. We knew there was only one explanation. . . ." (Here R-M added that Gates made it clear that espionage was the only explanation.) But when Schneir asked if Gates had ever heard of our father before 1950, he said he had not. In fact, he had never heard of a Rosenberg subscription to the *Daily Worker* being cancelled. "I was an editor, what did I know about circulation?"

The key issue is whether these men had been in a position in 1945 or 1950 to know anything that would support the R-M hypothesis that our father and mother dropped out of the Communist Party and cancelled their subscription to the *Daily Worker* in order to become spies. Neither Gates nor Scales knew if they had dropped out or if they had cancelled a subscription. So what do the interviews with Scales and Gates prove, except that they believe 30 years later that our parents were guilty?

Have Radosh and Milton any other evidence to support this charge? No. Only Tartakow corroborates Tartakow.

What about James Weinstein's two meetings with our father? We can't prove no espionage was going on. The files are incomplete and so is our knowledge. However, R-M provide absolutely no evidence that those meetings had anything to do with espionage.

Why is James Weinstein so easily convinced that *The Rosenberg File* "is a thoroughly and carefully researched book?" Weinstein claims his opponents have an ideological axe to grind, but he admits to none. Is it merely coincidence that his conclusion that our parents were "spies and victims" bolsters his already articulated views of the American Left? There is also an unadmitted personal involvement. Weinstein and Radosh have been personal friends for years. Radosh is a "sponsor" of *In These Times*. It was Weinstein's personal story that set Radosh in motion. Perhaps Weinstein believes *The Rosenberg File* is a thoroughly researched, objective book because Radosh told him so.

Weinstein also finds the fleeing to the Soviet Union of alleged spy ring members convincing "proof" that the espionage ring existed. However, *anyone* associated with our parents was harassed during this American inquisition. Does flight prove guilt? R-M claim that if those who chose to run were not guilty, they would have returned. Why? Those who left the U.S. developed successful careers in the Soviet Union, while those who stayed had their careers, reputations and lives ruined.

Is *The Rosenberg File* solely motivated by a search for the truth or is it a fraudulent attempt to stretch the data to reach exciting conclusions while bolstering previously held political beliefs? After all, a scholarly review of the files that concludes that doubts remain about the credibility of the Greenglasses, Gold and Tartakow, would never make the best seller list, would it?

Working Class Hero: A New Strategy for Labor

By Stanley Aronowitz
The Pilgrim Press, 229 pp.,
\$18.95

By Michael Harrington

Stanley Aronowitz' *Working Class Hero* is an important, fascinating book that appears at a critical time in American labor history.

Currently, there is a management offensive against workers organizations of a viciousness not seen since the days of the "yellow dog contract"; there is overt strikebreaking; there are contracts negotiated that give away the rights of those not yet hired and thus lay a basis for generational conflicts within the unions; and there are women and minorities, who desperately need economic solidarity if they are to end their structural inferiority in the labor force, looking toward unions that are laying off staff rather than engaging in new organizing drives.

Aronowitz' new book, like his previous writings, combines scholarly depth and militancy. His historical analysis has a political point: that unions were the key element in the New Deal coalition, which was as far left as American society ever went, and that they must play a central role in a new political bloc if there is to be a left response to the crises of the '80s and '90s. But labor will not play that role unless it realizes that it is in crisis and that there must be new thrusts, particularly with regard to the "technical intelligentsia," women and minorities.

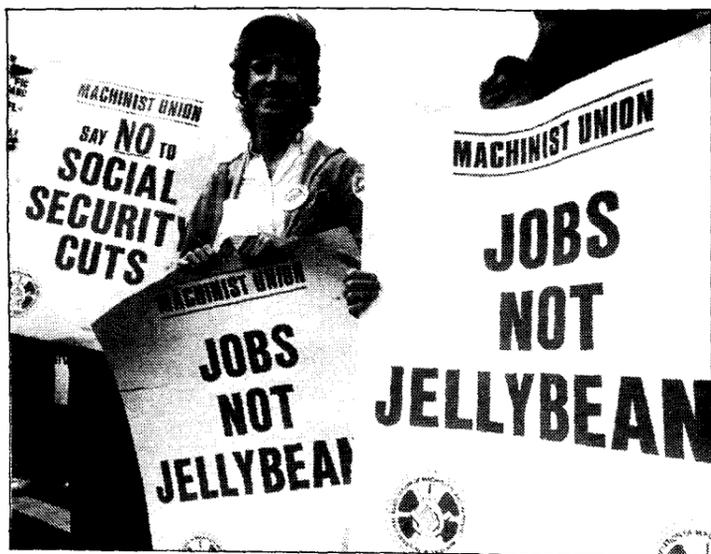
One element in that trade union revitalization, Aronowitz rightly argues, must be the realization that a "corporatist" perspective—the unions trading off social peace for a steady, but non-redistributive share of a constantly growing economic pie—no longer works. Labor must look far beyond the "social contract unionism" that was the ideological basis of that trade-off strategy, or else it will become even less of a force in society.

Working Class Hero illuminates this political perspective by way of both historical and socio-economic analysis. In the former discussion I have some ambivalencies and criticisms—but then, Aronowitz is ambivalent on these points. But his attempt at present and future strategy for labor on the basis of economic and occupational trends requires few qualifications.

Anti-personality.

In his historical section, Aronowitz rightly takes issue with the cult of anti-personality that is sometimes encountered on the left: that the failure of socialism in the American labor movement is due to the malign influence of Samuel Gompers. Gompers, Aronowitz understands, was a complex, and in some ways even admirable man. He was opposed to "those for whom the goal was everything, the movement nothing." In an American labor movement, which until the foundation of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) in the 1880s had too often been a debating society for contentious utopians, that was a positive point of view.

Gompers' distrust of the state, his insistence that the workers rely on their own economic power rather than putting trust into "politicians," was an American attitude (the suspicion of central authority is, as Samuel Hunting-



INPRINT

LABOR POLITICS

Solidarity Day forever

ton rightly noted in a recent book, one of the themes of our history and Gompers had a proletarian version of it). But it also had a certain similarity to the French anarcho-syndicalists, a fact recognized by the young William Z. Foster who (quite correctly to my mind) thought that revolutionary trade unionists should work within the AFL rather than moving to the Industrial Workers of the World.

Aronowitz also recognizes that Gompers had moved well beyond a narrow business unionism early on. After all, the fight for the eight-hour day—and the creation of May Day as a workers' holiday—came out of the AFL under his leadership. Even more to the point, Aronowitz shows how Gompers changed over time, becoming more political as he grew older.

So far so good. My criticisms have to do with the analysis of why the movement that Gompers led in his life and influenced so profoundly followed him after his death. Why, to take up the age-old question, was there—is there—no independent working-class party in the U.S.? That, Aronowitz well knows, cannot be explained in terms of the mesmerizing qualities of Gompers.

Working Class Hero gives two somewhat conflicting reasons for the failure of a labor perspective in the Gompers period. Aronowitz stresses that, in the U.S., in contrast to Britain, "a fraction of capital sought grounds for class compromise" and this acted to keep the class struggle out of the political realm. Now there is no doubt that the National Civic Federation (NCF), the institutionalization of that class collaboration tendency, played a certain role in the period prior to

Labor must play a central role in a left response to the crisis of the '80s.

World War I. But that was also a time of the most fierce class struggle and it is wrong to suggest that the NCF ideology dominated the entire labor movement.

A conscious deal.

But throughout his book Aronowitz tends too much to account for American history in terms of a *conscious deal*: "Labor leadership became oriented to forging a new partnership between trade unions and those sections of the political directorate and capital-

Aronowitz' second reason for the non-emergence of an independent working-class political movement is much more on the mark: the fact that "fragmented immigrant labor increasingly dominated the new industrial workplaces" at the decisive moment of transition to corporate capitalism.

Aronowitz then carries the analysis into the '30s and argues that, "as early as 1933, the industrial union upsurge led by an amalgam of socialists, Communists and voluntarist trade unions had already abandoned class struggle or redistributive perspectives." This, he holds, was a major reason for the failure of

the labor party perspective in that period. But as I look back on those times, it was the Communist Party in its Popular Front phase that made dramatic political gains and the Socialist Party, which maintained a "left" critique of Roosevelt, that went into disastrous decline. In the post-World War II years, Aronowitz notes, the continuation of the old tradition was not primarily a consequence of the intrusion of the Cold War into the unions (e.g., the bureaucratic expulsion of the "left" unions in the CIO),

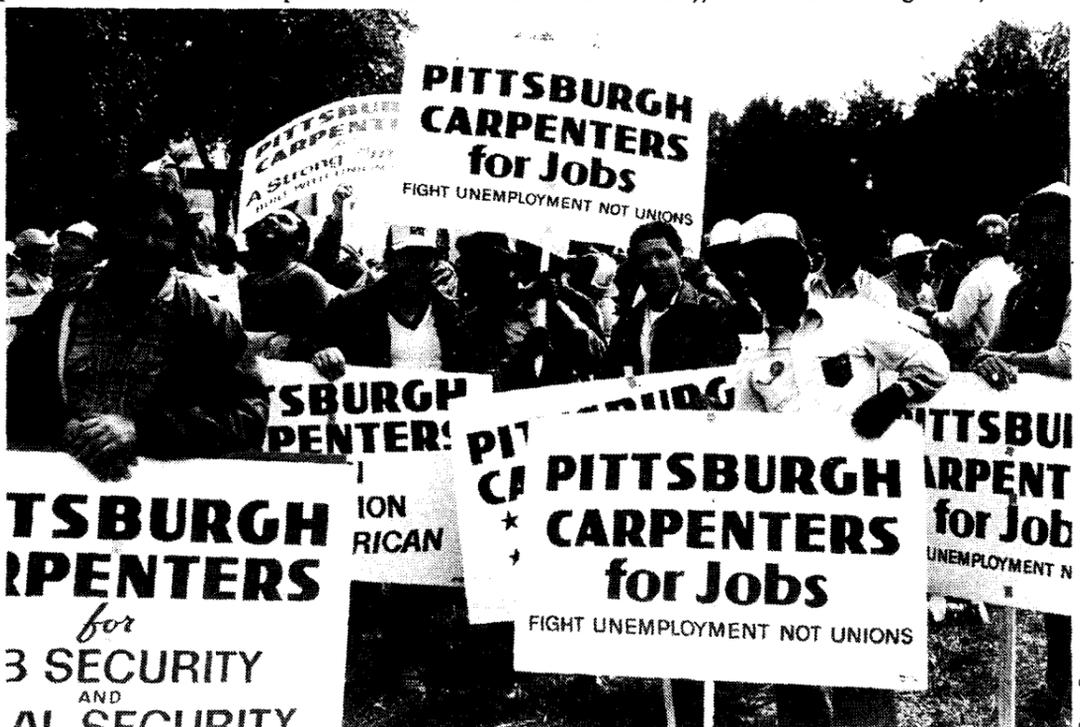
where the social unionists like Walter Reuther and O.A. Knight were concerned.

I also think, as Democratic Socialists of America leader Jim Chapin has pointed out, that the continental, presidential character of the American system has destined us to the two-party politics that have dominated the nation since the time of Lincoln. We are so huge that geographic coalitions often undercut class-based alliances; and our non-parliamentary government structure makes a Canadian, New Democratic Party development much less likely. This is a major reason why there is no independent working-class party.

New political blocs.

So much for the criticism. When Aronowitz comes to the present and future, I am in agreement. However one accounts for the historical development of a perspective that sees the unions as a partner—a junior partner—in a growth-based capitalist society with an endlessly growing surplus, that perspective no longer works. The surplus has become much more of a problem and will remain so into the foreseeable future, even in the current recovery. More to the point—and here Aronowitz' analysis is devastatingly compelling—the occupational structure is changing so that a politics based primarily on the resources of the industrial working class must fail. This is not to say that Aronowitz blithely writes off industrialization. On the contrary. He is for re-industrialization, but he understands that this battle cannot be won by the industrial working class alone.

The relative decline of that industrial working class, Arono-



The Solidarity Day demonstration in 1981 (above) assembled a "new political bloc" of labor and other social movements that Aronowitz sees as essential—but it didn't go anywhere.

ist class able to envision a society based upon social justice within the framework of the prevailing order...." That this describes the fact of much of American labor history does not prove that the pattern was intentional. World War II ended unemployment—but Roosevelt did not lead the nation into it in order to accomplish that end. The unions did indeed operate within a framework that accepted the established order, but they did not do so out of some long-range and conscious arrangement. Indeed, I would suggest that the fraction of British capitalists prepared to strike such a deal, located in the Liberal Party, was much larger and more sophisticated than the businessmen of the NCF at precisely the time of the emergence of the Labour Party.

but based upon the deeper economic and social trends he had analyzed earlier. Here I am in agreement and it is precisely because Aronowitz is putting more of an emphasis upon the non-intentional.

Aronowitz is right to stress the way in which the post World War II focus upon "fringe" benefits took much of the steam out of the drive toward independent labor political action. If strong unions could win good medical and retirement packages there was less reason for them to take the commitment to national health as seriously as they otherwise might have done and less need for a party to carry on the fight. This development, Aronowitz shrewdly notes, was often a matter of "necessity" rather than of "design," particularly

witz holds, is of a piece with the rise of a "technical intelligentsia." That tertiary sector labor force is not being "proletarianized" exactly as Serge Mallet once thought it would be, but it is becoming an organizable workforce. Issues having to do with the human consequences of technology—the isolated "work station" with its VDT (video display terminal)—have become critically important. In many cases—like the VDTs—these trends impinge particularly upon women. At the same time, there is yet another working class—recruited from the minorities, the undocumented workers and the like—that is becoming more and more important.

All of this leads Aronowitz to his notion of a "new political

Continued on page 14