



The Development of Class Struggle in 200 Years of U.S. History
And the Inevitability of Working Class Revolution

200 YEARS IS LONG ENOUGH!

And now it is the turn of the working class to overthrow the capitalist system and build a completely new kind of society

by the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA

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The Working Class And the Bicentennial

For several years now the high and mighty have been using all the resources at their disposal — the television, newspapers, an army of politicians, you name it — to make a big to-do about the Bicentennial. But for most Americans, this kind of celebration is the last thing on their minds.

For millions of American workers, the Bicentennial leaves a sour taste in our mouths. While millions of us are out of work, praises are sung to the system that breeds unemployment. For those of us still on the job — or on it one week and off it the next — it is harder and harder to get by from one paycheck to the next. Crime and drug addiction soar while social services fall apart. The stench of impending war grows stronger every day. Yet despite all this we are told that we live in the best possible society.

A trip to the department store begins to expose something of what the Bicentennial is all about. Everything from Hostess Twinkies to toasters is wrapped in the red, white and blue.

It's not hard to see that profit margins and Dow Jones averages are spurring on the patriotic sales gimmicks. But for those who rule this country, there is much more at stake than simply an effort to increase sales. What they really want us to buy, above everything, is their system itself. With the Bicentennial as their platform, the rulers of the country are going all out to sell us "national unity," to convince us, the American workers and people, that we have a common interest and will share a common future with them — the corporation owners and millionaire bankers, the capitalist ruling class.

They yell about a "crisis of the spirit" which means to them that more and more people are losing faith in their economic and political system. And so they repeat over and over again in a thousand ways that this country is the ultimate achievement in a society so you'd better just learn to live with it.

But no amount of flag waving or appeals to the "Spirit of '76" can erase the questions that the great majority of the people have about the way things are going, especially now, with the country in the midst of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Much of the Bicentennial propaganda is aimed at glorifying the present U.S. political system and building up the myth that the common people control the government. But the crisis of the system is spreading its havoc in the political arena, scandal after scandal is shaking the very institutions the Bicentennial is supposed to sanctify. Politicians are running around exposing each other, exposing themselves, forcing a President to resign and even digging

up dirt on the already dead or disgraced.

Voting is at an all time low with fewer and fewer people buying this year's election-time traveling road show. The capitalist rulers are very worried about all of this and want to tighten their ranks to pull off their Bicentennial plans.

U.S. News and World Report, a magazine which openly reflects the views of corporation executives and similar types, calls on its fellow capitalists to go easy on the stars and stripes bubblegum and lottery tickets, pointing out how this is only helping to blow the whole point in holding a Bicentennial.

But no matter how much they might wish it otherwise, politicians continue to cut each other's throats and turn up the lights on the whole stinking mess in the process; individual capitalists will continue to make "patriotic" toilet seats as long as there is a dollar to be made in them. All of this further exposes the dog-eat-dog nature of their system, which even makes it hard for the bosses to unite to pull off an election or the Bicentennial show. And all this furthers the question on the minds of more and more people — is this the way it has to be?

The Capitalists' Solution

The capitalists admit that something is wrong in the country. Of course the main thing that worries them is *us*, is the fact that working people in the U.S. are more and more fed up with the way things are. And what solution do the bosses offer to the problems of the country? They tell us to "tighten your belts," "don't have any unreasonable expectations," "bite the bullet." They talk like we're all in the same leaky boat, and if we only sit down and shut the hell up, we'll sail through this mess together. Of course, we do the rowing, they bark the cadence.

Their basic solution boils down to the working class accepting great exploitation, putting our basic needs on the chopping block so they can make more profits. Their sales pitch bottom lines to the lie that all Americans, workers and capitalists alike, share common interests, and that the present system, capitalism, which forces the majority of people to spend a lifetime working for wages to enrich a handful, is here to stay.

Only, as the saying goes, experience is the best teacher. Working for these modern day slavedrivers and having to fight every inch of the way to keep them from pushing us totally into the dirt constantly shoots holes in this fairy tale of "common interest" and constantly makes it clearer who it is that is feeding whom.

Each day the abuses, the absurdity and the criminal injustice of a system in which the great majority

slave all their lives to put billions in the pockets of parasites, stare us in the face. Millions are thrown out of work while millions more are sped up and forced to do the work of two. Whole neighborhoods, even whole cities, fall apart while construction workers sit on the bench because no boss finds it profitable to hire them.

Young people face a bleak future, preyed upon by military recruiters offering "the only job around," while many older workers are driven to an early death, chained to jobs backbreaking enough for a man in the prime of life. Those lucky enough to survive and retire from factories and mills are discarded like a squeezed orange by those who have lived and accumulated fortunes off their labor. Blacks and other minorities are discriminated against and herded into ghettos. The ruling class fattens its profit margins through this oppression, and then turns around blaming the working people, Black and white, for this misery.

And this is the system that we are supposed to celebrate. This is the system that, in President Ford's words, is the "pinnacle of man's achievements," the best we can ever hope for.

This year the top "labor leaders" have also jumped on the Bicentennial bandwagon. Like the bosses they serve, they are singing praises to capitalism and the "democratic system," making a lot of noise about "Labor's Place in America." By this they mean their place in capitalist society — their huge salaries, their control over millions in union funds, their right to hob nob around with the monopolists themselves, all of which they receive for doing their best to shackle and derail the struggle of the rank and file.

Revolution

But "Labor's Place in America," or to be precise, the position of the working class in capitalist society, is exactly what we must fight to change. The capitalists who run this country do nothing useful, yet appropriate the wealth of society. This basic fact, together with all the hardships and misery the rule of profit causes, constantly gives rise to the desire of millions to get the rich off our backs and for more and more workers to think seriously about *revolution*, the tremendous upheaval of the working class and the oppressed which can alone wipe out the rule of the exploiters and replace it with the power of the working class.

The ruling class also speaks of revolution. After all, the Bicentennial is the two hundredth anniversary of the revolution that put them in power. But according to the capitalists one revolution is enough; the 1776 Revolution created the best possible society — then, now and forever. And it is precisely to shore up the social relations — the class relations — that the 1776 Revolution created, with the capitalists sitting on top of all of society, that the rulers have launched their Bicentennial propaganda barrage.

The only hope the ruling class has for getting over with this is to appeal to the genuine pride of Ameri-

can workers in the accomplishments of their labor and struggle over the generations. The capitalists must claim these accomplishments as their own and say that it was *capital* (their investments, their machinery, their control and domination of the workers) that is responsible for building up the country — not the labor of ten generations of American working people, together with others around the world.

Their history books make it sound like Henry Ford assembled automobiles, that Andrew Carnegie built steel mills and that the Rockefeller family dug oil wells. The millions of workers? Oh yes, they were there too — the lucky beneficiaries of the jobs that these "geniuses" of robbery and swindle provided.

The bosses tell us that the country's history is one of common interests, of harmony, of democracy and equality between workers and capitalists. But nothing could be farther from the truth. For two hundred years society has been increasingly divided into two great and opposing camps — on the one hand the millions of workers whose only means of living is to work for wages and on the other, a handful of monopoly capitalists who have grown fabulously wealthy, and control all of society on the basis of seizing the products of others' labors.

And this division, this contradiction far from being smoothed over or wiped out by the arbitration of a "neutral" democratic government representing rich and poor alike, has constantly flared into skirmishes and great battles between the opposing classes, with the government acting as the enforcer and executive committee for the "captains of industry." Far from being a history of harmony and partnership between exploiters and exploited, the history of the U.S. has been the history of class struggle.

The capitalists can offer no sensible explanation for the past, present or the future. From the history of the country they can only seize upon isolated and disjointed incidents carefully picked to try to show how great their wealthy predecessors were and how it's the natural right of the capitalists to rule society.

When they talk about the present problems facing the people they can only offer confusion and deliberate distortion. They would have us believe that foreign workers are the source of unemployment; they tell whites that minorities are the cause of crime; they tell Blacks that white workers are responsible for discrimination and oppression. They point the finger in a thousand directions and offer a multitude of explanations to try to keep us from coming to the conclusion that it is the capitalists and their system itself that is responsible for the injustices and abuses in society.

And when it comes to the future the ruling class is really at a loss for words. They offer a muddled mess of phony promises combined with a few morbid predictions about the downfall of civilization. All they can really offer is more exploitation, more decay, more wars — in other words, more of what we already suffer under this system. The only thing that comes through clearly is that they are incapable of

imagining a society without them on top, where accumulating vast fortunes by robbing the labor of others isn't the highest social value.

But the real history of the country is not a jumbled pot of confusion. It shows that the two hundred years of capitalism and the class struggle in this country has been irreversibly heading to the situation of today — a system which has long ago ceased being anything

but reactionary and putrid; with a force millions strong, the modern working class, standing in opposition to this system of robbery and oppression. The history of the country since the 1776 Revolution has prepared the ground for another revolution, this time of the working class which will lead to a completely new type of society, free of the exploitation of man by man.

Breaking the Chains Of British Colonialism

The American Revolution was a great and liberating war, an important step in the worldwide history of society, moving from the old and backward into the future. The victory of the Revolution — the winning of independence and the emergence of a modern nation out of the thirteen separate colonies — made possible the rapid growth of the country and won some important rights for the masses of people. Around the world it inspired people in many countries to rise up against feudal and colonial domination.

But the American Revolution was a *capitalist* revolution; it did not lead to the "rule of the people," nor could it have. Revolutions don't spring from the minds of philosophers or take place because an "eternal truth" happens to be discovered. Revolutions grow out of the actual conditions of social life: the way people make a living, the way society is organized to produce the necessities of life, and the suffering of the masses under the old order. This is why capitalism, the product of the 1776 Revolution, is no more "eternal" than the rule of kings and nobility that it overthrew — and which also claimed it would last for all time.

What were the conditions of life in the American colonies that forced the people to rise up against the established order and send the British packing?

Conditions of Life in 1776

They came from England, the Netherlands, Germany and other parts of Europe, driven by the harsh realities of a Europe that was developing capitalism and in the process driving millions of peasants off the land, leaving them with no means to earn a living. This economic necessity and the promise of the New World as the "land of opportunity", led millions to the colonies.

The price of passage to the colonies was steep. For most it meant seven years of what was known as indentured servitude — virtual slavery. For seven years a person would be required to work without pay, without even the most minimal of human rights such as the right to marry, to "pay off" the price of their ticket. This forced labor went to line the pockets of shipowners and the wealthy farmers who purchased

the contracts.

For the hundreds of thousands of Blacks in colonial society, conditions were horribly worse. They were kidnapped in Africa and crowded into hellish slave ships. Those who survived disease, beatings and starvation faced a lifetime of slavery pure and simple on the plantations that grew up wherever the climate and soil was favorable for the large-scale production of cash crops (sugar, tobacco, cotton, etc.)

Life in the colonies was hard for the working people. In those days there were no factories and everything had to be produced by hand. After serving their time as indentured servants, most immigrants of European origin were able to get a small piece of land on which they struggled to scratch out a living. In most families, husband, wife and all children old enough to hold a hoe, hammer or needle, worked virtually every working hour just to produce the basic necessities of life.

The whole colonial setup was based on enriching the wealthy British merchants, the slave-holding plantation owners, and the British government. The merchants grew wealthy and fat by organizing the trade between the various colonies and between the colonies and the mother country. The trade in agricultural produce, in slaves, and in selling early manufactured goods from Europe (like pins and fancy clothes), enriched the merchants and gave them a grip over the commercial life of the colonies.

Great Britain went about systematically trying to insure that the colonies would be forever dependent on Britain and continue to enrich the budding capitalists of London. An early colonial governor of Massachusetts stated clearly, "The two great objects of Great Britain in regard to American trade must be: (1) to oblige her American subjects to take from Great Britain only, all the manufactures and European goods she can supply them with; (2) to regulate the foreign trade of the Americans so that the profits therefrom may finally center in Great Britain, or be applied to the improvement of her empire."

In order to maintain this lucrative arrangement, the British passed numerous laws to make sure that nothing would interfere with their profits. It was made illegal for one colony to trade directly with

another. All products going to and from Europe had to pass through London to make sure that the London merchants got their cut. And severe restrictions were placed on manufacturing in the colonies. For example, it was illegal to sell hats produced in Massachusetts in Virginia, and the production of steel (which had only just been developed by the Europeans) was outlawed entirely in the colonies.

British rule stifled the colonies in many other ways also. Most of the colonists had come to America with visions of free and abundant land. But by 1776 most of the fertile land in the thirteen colonies was spoken for. Some of the land was already suffering from soil depletion, and many large tracts were held by people who attempted to rule like the feudal nobility in Europe, such as the aristocratic planters of Virginia, or Lord Baltimore who tried to collect rent on the whole colony of Maryland until the resistance of the people forced him to give it up.

The colonists demanded the right to settle the lands west of the Appalachian Mountains, including the fertile Ohio River valley, which had been seized from France in the French and Indian War. But the British government, fearful of the growing strength of the colonies, prevented this.

The laws, the Crown-appointed governors, and the British troops were all aimed at maintaining Britain's profits and her stranglehold on the colonies. And to hang on to their prize, the British and their loyal servants in America, the Tories, had to make it seem like the colonial system was the natural order of things. They said that the colonies would always be dependent on Britain and at the mercy of her Parliament and King, that nothing would ever change this basic relationship.

But the British ruling classes could not stop the locomotive of history, powered by the masses of people and their struggle for a better life. The grip of Great Britain was like a chain around the colonies and their people. It stood in the way of progress and had to be broken by revolution.

Preventing the development of a home-grown American capitalist class who would be in a position to challenge the British for the right to rule America was of utmost importance to the British rulers. Many of the restrictions on trade and manufacture were for exactly this reason, as well as for keeping up their immediate profits. But despite British attempts to put the clamps on it, such a development was taking place.

Rebellion Brews

In New England, and to an extent in Philadelphia and New York, a class of wealthy merchants was growing stronger and stronger. They didn't consider it "natural" at all for the British to skim the cream off the hard work of the American colonists — they wanted the profits for themselves. These merchants went in for smuggling in a big way, and simply ignored the British laws that restricted who could trade with the colonies. They carved into the lucrative slave

trade. The colonists also competed with Britain and other European powers for the take of fish off the Atlantic coast, and they developed a shipbuilding industry equal to any in the world.

As the population increased and the colonies thrived, a growing number of craftsmen set up shop in the northern cities. These *mechanics*, as they were then called, were the carpenters, masons, blacksmiths, ropemakers, and silversmiths, like the famous Paul Revere. These craftsmen were not workers in today's sense; that is, they were largely self-employed and did not work for wages. Yet it is partly from among these craftsmen, the apprentices, etc., that the working class emerged.

From the beginning the craftsmen came into conflict with the wealthy merchants who used their control over trade to control the prices of the hand-worked goods, often depressing the living standards of the craftsmen to miserable levels. But it was British rule that was the main enemy of the craftsmen, and it was against the British that their early organizations were directed.

The mechanics were the most militant opponents of British rule. They were the backbone and muscle of such radical organizations as the Sons of Liberty. British restrictions of trade and manufacture were a direct obstacle to the craftsmen's growth.

On the eve of the Revolution the colonies were seething with rebellion. So too, to a great degree, was all of the Western world. Europe was undergoing great changes as capitalism was knocking aside the decaying and stifling feudal system based on ownership of large tracts of land and on privileges and monopolies granted by the Crown. The Church, a big prop of the rule of the nobility, was coming under attack. Science developed hand in hand with the growth of the capitalists and new methods of production, knocking down many of the superstitions of the Middle Ages.

Colonial society was straining against the barriers of British rule. The capitalists demanded the right to profit off the colonies free of London's cut, the farmers and land speculators kept dreaming of the land "on the other side of the mountains", and the craftsmen grew more militant and determined than ever to knock away British restrictions. There was general rebellion against the idea that kings were endowed with some sort of sanction from God to govern the people, against bowing and scraping before English lords and ladies, and against government control over religion.

The colonies were a powder keg. They exploded in the famous Boston Tea Party which, in the short space of a year and a half, led to war to drive the British overlords from American shores.

The Tea Party grew out of an attempt by the British to enforce and strengthen their stranglehold over the commerce of the colonies. For years the merchants of the colonies had been openly disobeying the British navigation laws, conducting illegal trade with other nations, and had defeated efforts to impose

taxes on the colonies. One important item in their trade was tea.

The colonial merchants were buying tea from the Dutch and smuggling it into America. The tea under-sold British tea and helped land the British East India Company in financial trouble. To bail out the East India Company, set a precedent for future taxation, and strike a blow at the colonists in general, the King and Parliament brewed up a law that gave the East India Company the exclusive right to sell tea directly to the colonists and that provided for a small tax to the British Crown.

This made British tea cheaper than smuggled Dutch tea and threatened to cut American merchants out of the tea action entirely, including such wealthy and powerful American capitalists as John Hancock. Not surprisingly, the merchants were roused to action. Although the merchants were hurting from British rule they were hesitant about going up directly against the British. They feared both the might of the British and the prospect that revolutionary action might lead the common people to take things "too far" and threaten the merchants' own interests as well.

But the Tea Act was the straw that broke the camel's back. By themselves the merchants were powerless against the British. They were forced to make common cause with the radicals in organizations like the Sons of Liberty, composed mainly of craftsmen but led by lawyers and intellectuals like Sam Adams, who were themselves tied in with the capitalists.

The merchants, of course, could not rally the masses of people behind *their* narrow interests — "Save our Profits." Instead, they put forward the cry "Taxation without representation is tyranny!", a slogan that besides representing the merchant's interests, reflected the sentiments of the great majority.

On December 16, 1773, a party of men dressed as Indians boarded British merchant vessels in Boston Harbor and dumped \$75,000 worth of tea into the drink. This was coupled with a nationwide boycott of British tea. Colonists in other cities took similar actions against the British oppressors. It was open defiance of the old order and complete disregard for the "God-given" authority of the King and the Parliament.

England retaliated by blockading the port of Boston, demanding that the people pay for the ruined tea. Britain forced citizens to quarter Redcoat troops in their houses, further inflaming the situation. Many merchants wanted to back down in the face of the British pressure and pay for the tea. But the masses of people, despite the tremendous suffering the blockade was causing, were in no mood to buckle under, preferring to tar and feather English officials as a more proper answer to British demands.

Even though the bulk of the merchants sought a compromise with the British, the die had been cast. The issue of American independence was to be settled by force of arms.

War Breaks Out

The First Continental Congress was formed of representatives of the thirteen colonies. A boycott of all British goods was called to counter the British embargo on Boston and throughout the colonies militias began training. When the British went to seize the arms of one such militia in Massachusetts, the Minutemen met the Redcoats at Concord's North Bridge and the "shot heard 'round the world" was fired. Villagers and farmers from neighboring counties and towns flocked to Concord and joined with their brothers in chasing the British all the way back to Boston. The war was on.

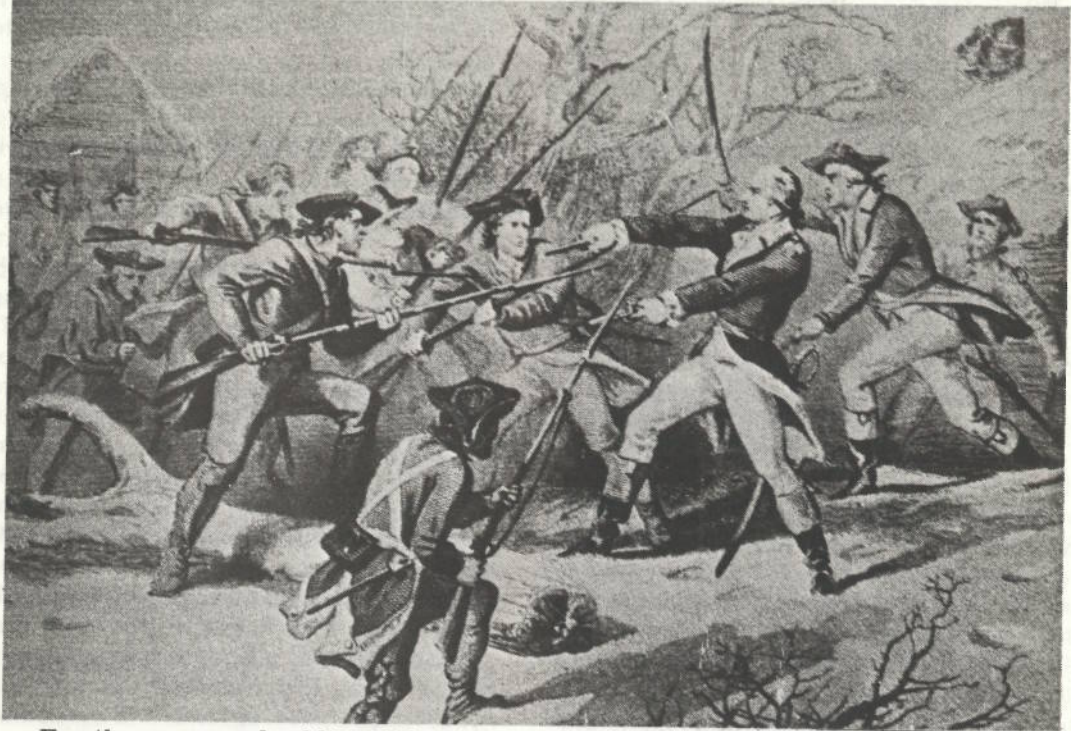
The outbreak of the armed struggle between the colonists and their British oppressors was like the breaking of a dam. Like a flood, the people swept down on the British and the American puppets; the demand for independence grew louder and louder. The Continental Congress, composed mainly of the rich and powerful of the colonies, who were caught between hatred of the British and fear of the masses, was hesitant. But on July 4, 1776, it issued the Declaration of Independence.

In the see-saw war that followed, tens of thousands of working people, farmers and mechanics dropped their tools to take up arms against the British. They were ill-trained and ill-equipped, but they were fighting for a cause whose time had come and were supported by the great majority of the people. Yet while the masses suffered and fought and died, the leadership of the Revolution remained firmly in the hands of the merchants, the slaveholders, money lenders and land speculators — the rich. And the rich used the war to enrich themselves even more. During the terrible winter of 1777-8, Continental troops died by the hundreds at Valley Forge because the funds for food, fuel, and clothing had been embezzled by various officers, merchants, and government officials.

In 1781, the bulk of the British army commanded by General Cornwallis was trapped at Yorktown by the American army and the troops of America's ally, France (which supported the colonist's cause to advance its commercial and military rivalry with England). After a bitter battle the British surrendered, stacking its weapons while a band played a popular tune of the day, "The World Turned Upside Down."

To the British ruling classes it looked as if the world had turned upside down — they had been defeated by a ragged army made up of what they looked down upon as riff-raff. For the American people the world had certainly been shaken up, their biggest oppressors sent packing, many of the more obnoxious features of colonial life (like indentured servitude) swept aside in the revolutionary upsurge of 1776, the large estates of those who sided with the Crown broken up, the West opened for settlement and slavery abolished in several northern states. But the time had not yet come for the world to be completely

the Revolt of the Line



For the masses of soldiers, life in the revolutionary army was not like it is made out to be. The men were unpaid, ill-clothed, whipped by their officers and even shot for minor infractions of "discipline." While the ranks suffered, the officers lived in the same rich and sumptuous style as they had in peace time.

Mutinies were not uncommon. On New Year's Day, 1781, the soldiers of the Pennsylvania Line, the regular troops, rose up and threw out their officers. They were determined not to be ridden by American oppressors while sacrificing to defeat the British. They elected a committee to govern themselves and to lead their revolutionary army.

After a short time, the rebellion failed, though Pennsylvania regiments won some concessions for better treatment from the officers.

and thoroughly turned upside down.

New Ruling Class Takes Power

No sooner had the British been driven from the American shores when the capitalists and slaveholders set about stepping into the shoes of the defeated British and establishing their rule over the American people. In 1786 a small-scale rebellion took place in Massachusetts where Captain Shays led small farmers in struggle to stop the courts from foreclosing on land. Many of the farmers were war veterans. Because they had hardly ever received their pay during the war they had gone into debt to feed their families. Now they were being thrown into jail or losing their land because they couldn't pay their debts. Even though the rebellion was small scale, it struck fear into the hearts of the capitalists who dispatched an army of thousands to put down the rebels and waged an hysterical campaign in the press.

Spurred on by the fear of further rebellions of the people, and the recognition of the need to establish a strong central government, the rich and influential

met in convention in Philadelphia in 1787 to draw up the Constitution.

The Constitution consolidated the grip of the capitalists and the slaveholders over the American people. It provided for a strong federal government, helping to weld the thirteen separate colonies into a single nation. This was a crucial demand of the budding capitalists who saw that only a single, unified country could provide the conditions and the market necessary for the growth of commerce and the economic life of the country from which they hoped to make their fortunes. A standing army was created, to protect the country from European powers and to back up the state militias when they were used against the common people.

The Constitution sanctified the barbaric and backward system of slavery. The "Southern Gentlemen" like George Washington, himself one of the largest owners of other human beings in the new country, had laid down their terms for fighting the British: either slavery in the U.S. or no participation from the planters. The Constitution recognized slav-

ery, held that for electoral purposes and taxes slaves would count as 3/5 of a human being, and forbade Congress from interfering with the hideous slave trade until 1808. Women were denied the right to vote or hold property, considered inferior to men by the "Founding Fathers". The Constitution didn't even include a bill of rights, despite the fact that it was under the banner of democratic rights that the revolution was fought.

No sooner had the capitalists and slaveholders emerged triumphant from the turmoil of the revolutionary years when the masses of people launched powerful struggles against them. A strong movement grew against the Constitution itself that almost defeated it, and forced the Bill of Rights to be added as the first ten amendments to the Constitution.

A struggle broke out, known as the Whiskey Rebellion, against the tax on whiskey that had been imposed by the Washington administration. Small farmers in western Pennsylvania often converted their grain to whiskey to cut down on spoilage and the high cost of transporting the bulky grain. Washington sent an army of 15,000, the size of the force that had battled the Redcoats at Yorktown, to show the farmers and the whole country that the new rulers would let nothing stand in the way of their profits.

From its earliest beginnings, the rise of capitalism compelled the people to struggle. But this resistance could not prevent the capitalists and their slaveholding allies from establishing a dictatorship over the people, nor could it change the course of history. This is because capitalism, with all its oppression, exploitation and misery, was the only system capable of developing society at that time.

Today it takes the co-operative work of millions, a whole class of workers, to produce the great wealth of the country. To make a car, for example, it takes thousands of people working together at each step of the way, from coal mining, to steel mills, to the final assembly line. But in the 1700s this was not the case. Almost all production was done by hand with the aid of simple tools, by craftsmen working in thousands of little shops. Many of these working people were small property owners, owning their own shops.

Today, with a huge and powerful working class, the common ownership and control by the producers of the productive power of society — the factories, mines, mills, etc. — is not only possible but absolutely necessary. But in 1776, without a modern working class in this country or anywhere in the world, without large scale production and with mainly small ownership, such common ownership would have been impossible.

At that time it was the developing capitalist class that rose to rule over the development of society. To meet the increasing needs of the colonies for goods of all kinds required production and trade on a larger and larger scale. It demanded workshops, roads, and canals and later on, early factories. Arising to meet this need and profit from it were the early American capitalists who developed out of the colonial mer-

chants and a few better-off craftsmen and farmers. They organized production and commerce to meet these needs and in the course of this brought together the beginnings of a modern working class to create this wealth.

Only the system of production for private profit — at that point in the history of the country and the world — could concentrate thousands of workers, the raw material and more advanced tools and machinery under one roof and propel society forward into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But such a development could only take place on the backs of the working people and compel them to struggle.

This is exactly what the early capitalists of the United States began to do. The "Founding Fathers" used their government to consolidate all the separate state debts from financing the war into the hands of the federal government, making them good again. In one stroke they put millions of dollars into the hands of the capitalists and ruined thousands of farmers who were demanding the cancellation of debts. They imposed heavy taxes to finance this enrich-the-rich scheme, and, as shown by the Whiskey rebellion, this robbery was met with the struggle of the people.

The first textile plants were established in New England using blueprints stolen from Great Britain. An extensive system of roads and canals was begun. Shipbuilding increased. Interchangeable parts, a crucial part of modern production, were perfected.

The capitalists spared no one in their drive to ever increase their profits. Thousands of Irish immigrants were driven to their deaths while building the canals and early railroads, like the famous Erie Canal. Taxation and debt bent the farmers and shopkeepers. The trade in Black slaves remained a big source of wealth for the capitalists of the North and slave labor the mainstay of the Southern plantation economy. Women and children were lured from the New England farms to live in barracks and labor 14 to 16 hours a day on the textile looms. The American Indians were brutally murdered, pushed off their lands, and whole tribes wiped out.

It was capitalism, with both its revolutionary impact on production and society and its merciless regime of misery, oppression and exploitation that was the real fruit of the American Revolution. The formal political democracy of the time — whose theme ran through the Declaration of Independence and which was spelled out in the Bill of Rights — was a big advance over the tyranny of British colonialism, but it in no way hindered the greater and greater concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the rich. And even while the leaders of the Revolution were signing their names to the famous document which proclaims the "self-evident" truth that "all men are created equal," many of them held Blacks as their personal property, and all of them intended that the principle of equality of men should in no way interfere with the rights of some men to live lives of luxury off the labor of others.

No one would want to return to the conditions of

life in 1776, without plumbing or electric power (barring the lightning striking Benjamin Franklin's kite), and when epidemic diseases regularly spread death and misery across the land. Yet the capitalists today talk about returning to the "Spirit of 1776." They like to hark back to the days of the American revolution because, for a brief interlude, the interests of the capitalists and the majority of the working people came together in the common cause against the British. They like the American Revolution because it put them on top of society.

When they speak of the "Spirit of '76" they don't mean the spirit of knocking down an old order, an old

system of oppression, they mean the spirit of rising capitalism — of "a penny saved is a penny earned" (Benjamin Franklin), of the sacred right of "property" (U.S. Constitution).

Yet these principles were revolutionary only in so far as the backwardness of the times, the primitiveness of society, required them. Today, the specific principles of the American Revolution are as outmoded as the capitalist system that grew up on the foundation laid by that Revolution. From the American Revolution, only the revolutionary spirit of the new replacing the old, of turning the world upside down, can be claimed as our heritage.

War Against Slavery

The early history of the new republic was not the harmonious road of peaceful development it is presented to be. From the beginning the motor of capitalism — the drive for greater and greater profit — increasingly sharpened the contradiction in society between the rich exploiters and the masses of people. It also sharpened the growing conflict between the two systems of exploitation existing side by side in the country, the capitalist system of wage labor in the North and the system of slavery in the South.

Slavery grew and flourished in the new republic. In 1793 Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin, making it possible to remove cotton seeds quickly and cheaply. This invention and the growth of the textile industry in Britain and New England breathed new life into the system of slavery, which many of the leaders and participants in the 1776 Revolution thought would die of its own weight.

Slave-produced cotton and the women and children in the textile mills were the basis of the modern factory system. It was in the textile plants that first water and then steam power were applied to machinery, enabling the workers to produce cloth at a vastly faster rate than any previous method of production.

The mill owners, driven by the unquenchable thirst of all capitalists to turn their workers' labor into profit, constantly upped the output of cloth. And the cotton for the cloth was provided from the back-breaking labor of slaves in the South, who were driven harder and harder from "can't see in the morning to can't see at night" to fulfill the orders. The reckless drive to grow ever more cotton quickly ruined a great part of the good land in the Southern coastal states. The plantation system spread further and further west — into Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana. Whole states (like Virginia), where the land was already depleted, became little more than "breeder farms" for the slave system, from which the slavemasters would sell husbands and wives apart from each other and children from their parents, all to the highest bidder.

In the North a different type of slavery — wage-

slavery — was booming at an even faster rate. Wave after wave of immigrants, from Ireland fleeing famine and British colonialism, from Germany on the heels of a defeated revolution, and from other parts of Europe, poured into the North. They were put to work digging the canals, building the railroads, carving the roads through the forests and sweating in the early mines and mills.

The merchant capitalists were changing. From making their wealth by buying cheap and selling dear, and from money lending, more and more were becoming industrial capitalists who invested their wealth in machines and factories, employing workers. The capitalists grabbed all the wealth that the workers had poured out their sweat to create, returning to the workers just enough for their barest existence.

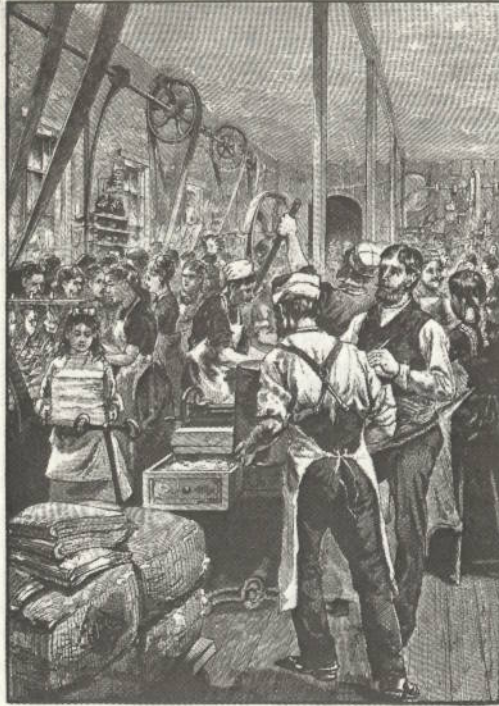
This was the beginning of modern exploitation in this country. The workers toiled 12, even 16 hours a day in factories that were dark, dirty, and dangerous. Instead of the workers benefiting from their labor, the product was stolen by the capitalist. Early attempts at trade union organization were ruthlessly suppressed. From this feast of exploitation, the capitalists grew fat.

For several decades the slave system in the South and the capitalist system in the North existed side by side. The slave-picked cotton was a pillar of the wealth of the early industrialists of the North. The federal government was shared by the two ruling classes.

But by 1820 the strain between the two social systems was beginning to show. On many issues the needs of the Northern capitalists came into conflict with the interests of the Southern planters. For example, the capitalists wanted laws and import tariffs to protect their infant factory system from more developed European competitors while the slaveowners, on the other hand, wanted the right to trade their cotton "freely" for the cheaper English manufactured goods.

And in the West, where both systems were ex-

a Popular Song of Struggle



“Labor’s Ninety and Nine”

*There are ninety and nine that live and die
In want and hunger and cold,
That one may revel in luxury
And be lapped by its silken fold;
The ninety and nine in their hovels bare
The one in a palace with riches rare.*

*From the sweat of their brows the desert blooms,
The forest before them falls,
Their labor has builded humble homes
And cities with lofty halls;
And the one owns the cities and homes and lands
And the ninety and nine have empty hands.*

*Ere the night, so dreary and dark and long
Shall that glorious morning bring,
When over the world the victors’ song
Of the ninety and nine shall ring,
And echo afar from zone to zone,
“Rejoice, for labor shall have its own!”*

panding with breakneck speed, the conflict was the sharpest. The Missouri compromise of 1820 established an uneasy peace between the two systems, yet despite this and later efforts by the Northern capitalists to come to an “understanding” with the slave-masters of the South, it became clearer and clearer that the two systems could not co-exist on the same continent forever.

The slaveowners boasted that their system was eternal and natural. They encouraged the breakaway Texas Republic movement, later adding Texas to their system, and in 1846 they eagerly took part in another war with Mexico, which annexed California and the Southwest to the U.S. They hungrily eyed the whole hemisphere for their dream of a “slave empire.”

Some spokesmen for the slavocracy even boasted they would introduce slavery into Northern factories. Yet this was not only wishful thinking, but impossible. Capitalist industry required a different type of slavery, wage-slavery. It required a more trained and educated workforce, one with the “freedom” to move around — not chained to the land but available to be laid off or hired wherever and whenever the capitalists needed workers.

Workers were forced to work, not with whips, but by the threat of starvation. Immigrants could never have been attracted to America’s new factories if they thought slave collars awaited them.

The capitalist system of production excluded direct, or *chattel*, slavery. No industrialist would be able to set up shop if first he had to invest millions in purchasing his laborers and then had to be responsi-

ble for feeding and clothing them when it came time for a layoff.

Rebellion Against Slavery

Slavery was built upon a powder keg. No people will submit to the oppression and degradation of slavery, and Blacks in America did not. There are records of over 200 slave revolts and these rebellions struck fear into the hearts of the slaveowners. At the beginning of the 18th Century, slaves in the French colony of Haiti succeeded in overthrowing the slaveowners and establishing a republic, and this tremendous rebellion influenced developments in the U.S. In 1822 the largest revolt of slaves was planned by Denmark Vesey. Five columns totaling 9000 men were to rise up and march on Charleston, South Carolina. Only a cowardly betrayal at the last moment, resulting in the execution of Vesey and several others, prevented the uprising from taking place.

Slavery was a barbaric system that acted like an anchor on the whole country, holding back economic development and the struggle of the workers against exploitation. It was an historically obsolete system and doomed to the dust bin of history, yet the slaveowners would never step aside of their own will. Every action aimed at limiting slavery only intensified the arrogance and desperation of the slaveholders. Only the most determined action of the masses of people would trample slavery into the dirt.

And as the years went by, the masses of people in the North and South geared up for the decisive battle against the slavocracy. In the North, anti-slavery

feelings ran high. Workers were beginning to fight for their interests and, hand-in-hand with this, were making their voice heard on the important issues of the day. The following resolution was passed by a convention of workers in New England:

"Whereas there are at the present time 3,000,000 of our brothers and sisters groaning in chains on Southern plantations; and whereas we wish not only to be consistent but to secure to all others those rights and privileges for which we are contending ourselves; therefore be it resolved that we will not take up arms to sustain the Southern slaveholder in robbing one fifth of our countrymen of labor. Resolved that we recommend our brethren to speak in thundered tones, and let it no longer be said that Northern laborers, while they are contending for their rights, are a standing army to keep three million of the brethren and sisters in bondage at the point of a bayonet."

For Northern workers the slave system was a scar on the country that had to be erased before the workers' own struggle for emancipation could be advanced. Early followers of Karl Marx, the founder of scientific socialism, and his co-worker Frederick Engels, took an active part in the anti-slavery cause. A fighter against slavery in all its forms, Marx wrote, "Labor cannot emancipate itself in the white skin while in the black it is branded."

Large sections of the small farmers of the North and South actively resisted slavery. The slave system threatened to gobble up the West and restrict the small farmers' ability to settle new lands. In the South, the expansion of the plantations into every nook and cranny drove the poor whites further and further into the hills and onto the worst parcels of land.

A strong abolitionist movement developed, with the support of people from many walks of life. Literature like Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the writings of Frederick Douglass played an important role in mobilizing public opinion against the slavemasters.

As the eve of the Civil War approached, more and more of the people were going over to direct, revolutionary action against the slaveholders. Thousands of people helped fugitive slaves escape along the Underground Railroad, a series of safe houses by which thousands and thousands of slaves made their way out of bondage. Federal law required that captured slaves be returned to their masters but the "legality" of slavery didn't prevent fierce struggle against this practice.

On one occasion in Boston, resistance to the slave catchers was so great that it took a battalion of U.S. artillery, four platoons of marines, and the sheriff's posse to get the escaped slave back to his master. As one historian put it, "It cost the United States some \$40,000 to return that slave to his master; and he was the last to be returned from Massachusetts."

Armed conflict broke out in Kansas where thousands of Free Soilers (farmers who fought slavery)

battled the hired goons and thugs of the plantation owners who were "campaigning for votes" to make the Kansas territory a slave state by looting towns, raping women, and murdering anyone who got in their way. The leader of the anti-slavery fighters was a white farmer, John Brown.

In 1859 John Brown led a courageous raid at Harper's Ferry, Virginia, in an attempt to spark a slave uprising. His tiny band seized the town and a federal arsenal with over 100,000 rifles. They were prepared to lead an all-out assault on the slavocracy. The next day, U.S. troops commanded by Colonel Robert E. Lee, later the commanding general of the Confederacy, surrounded Brown's group and killed or captured them.

John Brown was condemned by virtually all of "respectable society," North and South alike. The press and the leaders of the Republican Party, the party that had been established to oppose the extension of slavery, condemned Brown as a lunatic and supported his execution. Thus only a year before the Civil War was to break out in all its fury, the Northern capitalists were still seeking accommodation with the slaveowners. Lincoln himself promised not to attack slavery in those states where it existed, only to block its expansion, a position he maintained well into the Civil War itself. Thus the ruling class North and South united to hang John Brown and his fellow revolutionaries, but his name was to be sung on the battlefields by millions in the crusade against the slave system.

Lincoln's election as President set the stage for the outbreak of hostilities. Even his policy of leaving slavery alone in the slave states could not appease the slavocracy. The time had come for the force of arms to decide which social system would predominate in the country. The act of secession from the Union by the Southern states was a declaration of counter-revolution, an attempt to wipe out the capitalist system in the U.S. On April 12, 1861, Confederate artillery shelled Fort Sumter and the armed conflict began.

Crusade Against Oppression

Like the 1776 Revolution, the Civil War was a revolutionary war aimed against a class of oppressors and at freeing society from the shackles of an outmoded social system. To the workers and farmers flooding into the Union Army, the war was exactly that, a crusade against oppression. The role of Northern workers was especially important. With the help of revolutionary working class leaders and organizations they were just beginning in significant numbers to see themselves as a class with its own interests. Workers made up 40% of the Union Army, far out of proportion to the number of workers in society at that time. Many whole unions joined up, and one working class leader, Joseph Wedemeyer, a socialist in close contact with Karl Marx, became a colonel in the Union Army.

Yet for Lincoln and the class of Northern industrialists he represented, the war was not a battle against

War Against Slavery

Right is pictured one of the many detachments of Black volunteers who, over 200,000 strong, fought together with over a million white workers and farmers in the Civil War. The song printed below was the battle song of one of these regiments and points out how the leaders of the North, Abraham Lincoln and General McClellan, resisted the demands of the masses of people for emancipation and the arming of ex-slaves. General Fremont was reprimanded by Lincoln for refusing to return slaves to their "masters." "Old Jeff" refers to Jefferson Davis, leader of the Confederacy. Kentucky was one of four slave border states which did not secede.



*Oh Fremont he told them when the war it first begun,
How to save the Union and the way it should be done,
But Kentucky swore so bad and Old Abe he had his fears
Till every hope was lost, but the colored volunteers.*

Chorus:

*Oh, give us a flag, all free without a slave
We'll fight to defend it as our fathers did before
The gallant Company A will make the Rebels quake
And we'll stand beside the Union if we are allowed a chance*

*McClellan went to Richmond with two hundred thousand brave;
He said, "Keep back the niggers" and the Union he would save,
Little Mac he had his way and the Union is in tears
NOW they call for the help of the colored volunteers.*

Chorus

*Old Jeff says he'll hang us if we dare to meet him armed
A very big thing, but we are not alarmed
For first he has to catch us before the way is clear
And that is "what's the matter" with the colored volunteers.*

Chorus

a form of oppression, but a fight to preserve and strengthen their own position as exploiters. Lincoln, still not willing to abolish slavery outright, offered the slaveowners a policy of gradual emancipation, of cash payments for their property in slaves.

The highest goal of the capitalists was "preserving the Union" with themselves sitting on top. In fact to this very day the capitalists often present the Civil War as "tragic" or as a matter of "states' rights."

Despite the history books' lie that "Lincoln freed the slaves," he resisted Emancipation as long as he could. Union troops were ordered to return runaway slaves to their masters, but they righteously refused to perform this criminal act thousands of times. Throughout the country the demand for abolition of slavery grew louder and louder.

In Britain, too, workers were demanding that the struggle against slavery be carried through to the end. The British capitalists had been supporting the South, selling her naval vessels and purchasing the blood-soaked cotton. But British workers, despite the suffering that the Northern blockade of the South caused by closing down many of the cotton mills, sided all the way with the anti-slavery cause and demanded that Britain stay out of the war. Even Lincoln had to recognize the crucial support of the English workers, sending a letter to Marx and Engels and the International Workingman's Association which they led, thanking them for their support.

Besieged by public opinion at home and abroad, and forced by military necessities of the war to allow ex-slaves to fight under the Union banner, Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation which officially recognized the anti-slavery nature of the war.

200,000 Blacks joined the Union army and made tremendous contributions on the battlefields. Thousands more gathered information and carried on the war behind the enemy lines, often burning slaveowners' plantations. Ex-slave leaders played a key role, like Harriet Tubman, already famous for her heroism on the Underground Railroad, who led 300 slaves to freedom in a single episode during the war.

Faced with the fury of the slaves, the determination of the Northern workers and farmers, and the strength of the Northern capitalists, the slavocracy was crushed. On April 9, 1865, General Grant accepted Lee's surrender at Appomattox, Virginia, signalling the completion of a glorious page in the history of the struggle of people against oppression and injustice.

In the South millions of Blacks were freed from slavery. They were determined to destroy every last remnant of the social system that had held them in chains for generations. For their part, the Northern capitalists had to break the back of the defeated Southern rulers in order to establish and maintain their own domination. So the war was followed by a period known as Reconstruction.

Blacks and poor whites struggled for democratic rights and the break-up of the plantation system,

demanding the vote, equality, and "forty acres and a mule." Under the protection of the Union Army, Blacks gained numerous rights, were elected as public officials, and progressive legislation was passed, establishing, for instance, universal public education for the first time in the South. Yet despite the struggle to occupy the plantations, Reconstruction left the bulk of the landed property in the hands of ex-slaveowners and wealthy land speculators, and the backward semi-feudal system of sharecropping developed, under which as much as 50% or more of the crop had to be turned over at harvest time to the landlord.

Capitalists Betray Reconstruction

Once the capitalists had firmly brought the defeated slavocracy under their thumb, accomplishing their purpose in fighting the Civil War, they declared Reconstruction over, withdrawing Union troops in 1876. The former slaveowners unleashed a reign of Ku Klux Klan terror, murdering, lynching and raping their way across the South, attacking poor whites who had supported Reconstruction as well as the ex-slaves. Quickly, almost all of the gains of Reconstruction were wiped out. Black people lost most of their rights and the Jim Crow laws were passed which legalized segregation and discrimination against Blacks and deprived them of the right to vote. These laws stood on the books for decades until the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and '60s swept them away.

The Northern capitalists embraced the ex-slaveowners, now turned into a landed aristocracy, as their junior partners in exploitation. These "Southern Gentlemen" would enforce a barbaric and backward form of oppression in the South, the semi-feudal sharecropping system, while the Northern capitalists skimmed the cream off the sharecropping system, sucked the blood of workers throughout the country, and, increasingly, throughout the world.

The betrayal of Reconstruction and the turning over of Black people to their former masters is stark proof that, unlike the workers who fought the Civil War to eliminate a form of oppression, the capitalists' only concern then as now was profit and the maintenance of their own form of exploitation and oppression.

With the defeat of the wretched slave system, the Civil War marked the basic completion of the capitalist (or *bourgeois democratic*) revolution that had begun in the storm of the 1776 Revolution. From the Civil War until today, the capitalist class has stood for everything reactionary, backward, and opposed to the interests of the great majority of the people. The common interest that the working people and the exploiters shared in battling Britain and in smashing slavery was over and a sharper conflict came to the fore which still rages today — the struggle between the producing class, the workers, and the exploiting class, the U.S. capitalist ruling class.

The slave system, like all systems of oppression, was doomed to extinction. But it would not go away by itself. The slaveowners, like all exploiting classes, would not step into their grave voluntarily. The defeat of slavery was inevitable because it is inevitable

that oppression will breed resistance, that a system that blocks the advance of society will come to be opposed by the great majority of people, and that revolution, the mighty upheaval of the oppressed, will succeed in overthrowing the old order.

Modern America Forged As Class Battles Rage

Once slavery had been wiped out, the class nature of the capitalists as exploiters, as vicious and brutal as any gang of oppressors before them, came into sharper and sharper focus. With the last remaining obstacle to the development of capitalism, chattel slavery, swept aside by the revolutionary torrent of the Civil War, the United States underwent an unprecedented period of growth.

During the short space of thirty-five years, from Appomattox to the dawn of the twentieth century, the basic features of modern America took shape: above all, the growth of a few incredibly wealthy capitalists sitting on top of society and on the bottom, millions of workers, robbed of the wealth they produced. It was these property relations, allowing a smaller and smaller handful to pocket a larger and larger share of society's wealth, that gave rise to the increasingly powerful struggle of the working class.

With the power of a locomotive which, in Karl Marx's words, "ran with express speed from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from New England to California," a movement of workers demanding the eight hour day developed on the heels of the Civil War. Hand in hand with this came new efforts at building trade unions and other organizations to defend the interests of the workers in the face of the capitalists' relentless drive for profit.

The Civil War had ended with the capitalists' factories going full blast, spurred on by war production and war profiteering. Many of the "great families" whose very names were to become curse words for generations of American workers got their start in the Civil War. J.P. Morgan bought defective rifles from the Union Army one day and sold them back at double the price the next. Phillip Armour made millions selling salt pork to the Union Army for more than double what he paid for it.

With the slavocracy defeated and the South under military occupation, the industrialists and financiers of the North held the complete and total reigns of power in their hands for the first time. They used their control over the government to dish out hundreds of millions of dollars in aid and millions of acres in free land to the railroads which were crisscrossing the country like a spider web. They set up high tariff barriers which kept the American market closed to goods produced in the more established capitalist powers of Europe.

Driven by the very nature of their system, which compels the capitalists constantly to squeeze more profits out of the labor of the workers or face being eaten alive by more successful bloodsuckers, the capitalists set about unprecedented expansion. But besides the breakneck development, the dog-eat-dog competition, and the greater and greater exploitation of labor, the capitalist system produced one product wholly to the disliking of its chieftains — the intensified struggle of the workers, upon whose labor the whole system rested.

A million men had returned home from the Union Army with their heads high and their spirits up after crushing the arrogant slaveowners who only a few years earlier had boasted of the eternal nature of their system. The Civil War had been fought under the banner of "free labor," yet the workers returning to the capitalist profit mills found the system of "free labor" meant the freedom of the capitalists to enrich themselves off the labor of others.

After defeating an open form of slavery based on the whip and the auction block, the workers felt the chains of disguised slavery — wage-slavery — tightening down on them. The statement by a former abolitionist leader was typical of the many denunciations of the growing capitalist robbery: "We declare war with the wages system which . . . enslaves the working man . . . which robs labor and gorges capital; makes the rich richer and the poor poorer, and turns a republic into an aristocracy of capital."

First Centennial Amidst Crisis

In 1876, in the midst of this great orgy of capitalist growth, the Centennial celebration to honor the first 100 years of the rule of the rich was held. The U.S. ruling class was in the prime of life, yet sitting atop a smoldering volcano of the workers' hatred for exploitation and oppression.

The Centennial was an extravagant performance. On display were the machinery and technology that were helping to change the face of the country, but which were already towering over the workers who labored as mere appendages of the machines.

In the Centennial celebration, much like in the 1976 re-run, the capitalists wrapped themselves in the glory of the American Revolution and the Civil War. While the workers were more and more looking on the country as an "aristocracy of capital," the

capitalists redoubled their efforts to present the U.S. as a democracy run by the "will of the people" and based on equality and freedom.

But the stark realities of life in 1876 were already punching holes in that claim. Millions had fled poverty and oppression from all parts of Europe (and many from China and other places as well) and came to the U.S. in search of the famed "land of opportunity" and freedom from oppression. They found instead the hellholes of the early capitalist factories. Within sight of the Centennial celebration was the "housing" where the producers of the bosses' wealth were forced to live.

Here is a contemporary description of the slums which grew in every big city in America side-by-side with the fortunes of the exploiters:

"The room was unspeakably filthy; the furniture two or three old chairs and an old table. No fire, and the room damp, dark and cold. It was the only room the family occupied except a little dark box in the corner with no window in it — a part of the room itself partitioned off for a bedroom. And such a bed! The two oldest children dirty and ragged and leaning against the window off the side of the room. . . . The youngest . . . [was] about worn out and apparently half-starved . . . its only clothing was an undershirt that scarcely reached the waist . . . and the child was pinched with cold."

The fact that more and more workers were driven to conditions like these while the capitalists made profits hand over fist could not help but explode the idea that there could be political equality between the workers and the bosses.

Great political scandals further exposed the rule of capital lurking behind the mask of democracy. In addition to the open and legal robbery of the public coffers by the railroad owners and other capitalists, the bribery and corruption of public officials became the national pastime of the rich that it remains today.

But the real proof of the nature of the democratic government, its purpose, and who it served became clearer still as the workers' struggle against the capitalists grew.

In 1876, like today, the capitalists were very proud of their achievements. Like the slaveowners fifteen years earlier, they boasted that their system was eternal and their exploitation "natural." They invited the high and mighty of Europe to the Centennial celebration to show them how far the U.S. had progressed down the road that the capitalists in Europe had charted. And if their brother exploiters from Europe were not convinced by the slums and factories alone, the U.S. capitalists could surely have pointed to that most revealing feature of capitalism in every country it has ever existed — *crisis*.

In fact, the U.S. in the year of the Centennial was

Native Americans



American Indians, or Native Americans, were the original inhabitants of the North American continent and were among the earliest victims of capitalism's relentless drive for profit. From colonial times to today, Indians have been robbed of their lands through force and deceit, subjected to wholesale slaughter and pushed onto miserable reservations.

Native Americans waged a constant and heroic struggle against oppression. Above, Geronimo (pictured on mount at left), chief of the Apaches, led warriors in armed resistance to the theft of Indian lands until 1886.

still suffering from the effects of a major overproduction crisis that broke out in 1873. From the beginning of man's history there have been periods of famine, of shortages, of great hardship and suffering for the people. But before capitalism came on the scene these disasters were all caused by the inability to produce the necessities of life.

Only under capitalism are millions without work, treading a thin line with utter disaster because *too much* has been produced — not too much, of course, to meet all the many needs of the masses of people, but too many goods for the capitalists to sell at a price that will return them their blood-soaked profits.

Thus, even when the capitalist system was at the prime of its life, when it was as vigorous as it ever would or could be, the basic contradiction in the system erupted in crisis — millions produce everything cooperatively yet individual capitalists appropriate the products of the labor of these millions for themselves.

Just as inevitably as the capitalist system had produced crisis, it unleashed the powerful struggle of the working class. That struggle, like profits, crises, exploitation and misery, develops anywhere the capitalist system of wage-slavery prevails.

While the capitalists were holding their first "national unity" extravaganza in Philadelphia a century ago, a storm was brewing that was to erupt in full fury a year later.

The Railroad War

On July 16, 1877, a strike broke out on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad at Martinsburg, West Virginia. The strike rolled across the country like a prairie fire, shutting down most of the major rail centers. The strike was largely unorganized, spreading down the rails by word of mouth. But everywhere workers rose up in mammoth and widespread rebellion against their exploiters, casting aside the chains of wage-slavery, even if only temporarily, into the dust of the battle.

The railroad barons in those years were among the biggest capitalist exploiters. Not only were the railroad workers driven mercilessly, but the railroads played a big role in ruining countless small farmers by fixing high prices for shipping produce, etc. To large numbers of the American people, the railroads were seen as the symbol of the bloated beasts of big business. So when the railroad workers dared to defy the might of the railroad owners, workers all over the country were inspired and rose to their support.

Red flags flew along New York City's Bowery, then a working class area, in support of the railroad men. Workers in St. Louis held a general strike, and for a few days the city was actually in the hands of the workers led by the Workingman's Party, in which Marxists played an important role. National guardsmen in Pittsburgh, themselves mostly workers, refused to open fire on the strikers when ordered to by their officers.

Just as the strike brought forth resistance from

among the workers, it struck fear deep into the bellies of the exploiters. The capitalists went into a frenzied rage at this defiance of their rule and ordered both state and federal troops (some of whom had just been recalled from the South when Reconstruction was betrayed) to crush the strike. In two weeks the capitalists had gunned down at least one hundred workers.

This vicious murder exposed the nature of the state, or government, under capitalism more clearly than a thousand scandals. In every capitalist country, even the most "democratic," the state exists first and foremost to ensure that nothing will get in the way of the capitalists' freedom to exploit the workers. Elections, freedom of the press, free speech, etc., exist mainly for the capitalists to fight it out among themselves (using everything from their control over the media to outright bribery) for the best position.

For the workers these democratic freedoms are a cover to hide the dictatorship of the capitalists. When the railroad workers defied the capitalists' sacred profits, the force of this dictatorship came down on them with an iron glove.

Although the railroad strike was broken, it greatly inspired the working class to step up its struggle and organization. For the workers and capitalists alike it was an early test of strength.

Eight Hour Day Movement

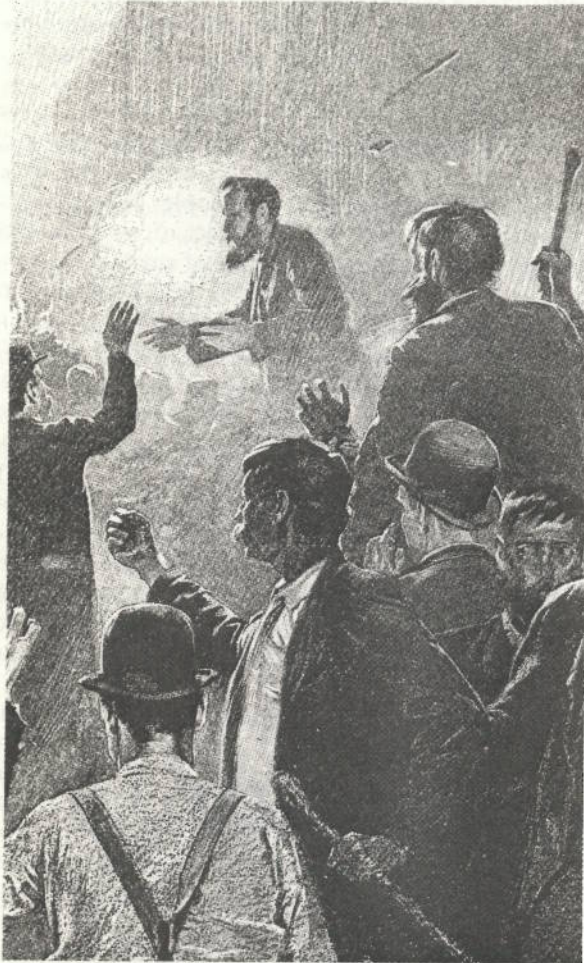
On May 1, 1886, workers of every imaginable nationality filled the streets of the nation. Some 350,000 workers struck. 40,000 workers marched in Chicago, 25,000 in New York, 11,000 in Detroit and everywhere the demand rang out for the eight hour working day. For two years the attention of the class conscious workers had been on this day when workers throughout the country were to go on strike to demand the eight hour day.

Even more than simply an attempt to shorten the burden of long hours that still were part of American industry, this was the first nationwide, organized, class conscious struggle of the masses of the working class. It was a time for the working class to flex its powerful muscles and declare to the capitalists the common sentiment of the millions of laboring people: We will not be beasts of burden, we will be men and women!

The strike was a whopping success. Around 185,000 of the workers who struck on May 1 gained the eight hour day. With this kind of struggle, 45,000 workers in Chicago won a shorter day without striking, as did over 150,000 throughout the country. The enormous strength the workers displayed on May 1 terrified the capitalists, and nowhere were they more scared than in Chicago, where the eight hour strike was most thoroughgoing and the best prepared and where revolutionary workers led the local Chicago Trades Federation.

The Chicago capitalists mustered an army to crush the workers movement — huge numbers of police bolstered by the hated Pinkerton Agents and 1350

the Haymarket and the Eight Hour Day Movement



The struggle for the eight hour day shook the entire country and won many important victories. In the face of this mighty upsurge of the workers, the capitalists in Chicago, center of the eight hour storm, gunned down several workers and condemned seven revolutionary workers to death following the Haymarket incident. On the day of his execution August Spies said, "There will come a time when our silence will be more powerful than the voices you strangle today."

This has proven to be the case, as workers the world over celebrate International Workers Day on May 1, anniversary of the eight hour day strike, and pause to commemorate the martyrs of Chicago and all the workers who have fallen in battle against the capitalists.

The following was written to commemorate the Haymarket martyrs:

*The day will come! Your shadows go
Through the earth and unceasingly recruit
fighters;
All over where the low huts stand,
Where suffering and pain and hunger are the
Companions of oppressed children,
there you
Intervene to throw a spark into their hearts.
The day will come! This you whisper
and teach
The working people to sharpen their
weapons for the struggle.*

state militiamen. On May 3, at the McCormick Harvester factory where 1400 locked-out workers were striking for the eight hour day, trouble broke out. Police were guarding 300 scabs when a few thousand workers showed up to demonstrate against the scabherding. The police opened fire and killed at least four workers and wounded many.

This outrage roused widespread protest. A meeting was called for the next day in Haymarket Square to protest police brutality. As the meeting was breaking up, police swooped down. Someone, to this day it is not known who, threw a bomb into the police ranks, killing several and wounding dozens. The police opened fire and killed more workers. It is likely that the bomb was work of the capitalists who were searching for an excuse to run roughshod over the workers movement.

Eight workers, leaders of the revolutionary Chicago workers and whose militant spirit and organizing ability had helped make Chicago the center of the workers' movement, were selected to stand trial for conspiracy in the deaths of the police. In a trial that

will forever go down in infamy, seven of the workers received the death sentence, although the prosecution never even claimed they had any prior knowledge of the bomb incident. They led workers in struggle against the capitalists and for the courts this was guilt enough.

Despite protests by workers in the U.S. and world wide, four were hung. Three of the Haymarket defendants languished in jail for many years until mass pressure on an Illinois governor won them their pardon.

The great eight hour day movement strengthened many local unions and working class organizations and further stripped naked the viciousness of the capitalists in meeting any challenge to their regime of profit.

In the period of the breakneck growth of capitalism following the Civil War, the basic features of modern U.S. society were emerging. Sitting at the top of society were a small handful of monopolists who controlled financial empires undreamed of even a few decades earlier. Each of the crises that hit the country

with the regularity of clockwork beginning in the mid-1800s, resulted in the bigger capitalist cannibals eating up their weaker rivals. Capital became concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. The billionaires of banking, high finance and stock swindles and the billionaire industrialists fused together into a monopoly capitalist class which dominated all of society and wielded the power of the government to enforce this domination.

The early period of competitive capitalism, of much-trumpeted "free enterprise," had turned into capitalism's full blown monopoly stage — its highest stage, *imperialism*.

Capitalism's rapid growth into monopoly capitalism, or imperialism, was not unique to the United States. The same process was going on in the other principal capitalist countries of Europe and Japan. By the turn of the century each of these countries was ruled by a small handful of monopolists.

Standing opposite this small handful of giant-size bandits were the millions of millions of workers, out of whose labor the capitalists had wrung their fortunes. By the turn of the century in this country, the majority of the population lived in the cities and the majority of working people were wage earners. The workers had gone through some tremendous and fierce battles with the exploiters and had increasingly organized trade unions and other forms of organization to fight for their interests.

Workers in the U.S. increasingly came to question the capitalist system itself. This development was greatly spurred on by the flood of immigrants from Europe where Marxism, the science of working class revolution, had developed and had become a strong force among the masses of European workers. More and more workers in this country saw the need to aim their struggle toward the goal of socialism, the rule of the working class.

After the Civil War the remaining virgin land in the U.S. was settled with an astonishing speed, spurred on by the railroads and the beginning development of modern farm machinery. By 1900 the American frontier was virtually closed, the best land was taken and there was little new land available for homesteading; no longer could farmers who went bankrupt plan on heading further West. They were increasingly forced into the cities to seek a livelihood as wage-laborers. Huge mail order firms, forerunners of many of today's large department stores, undercut small shopkeepers and drove even more small property owners into the ranks of the working class.

Having succeeded in extending their exploitation and plunder over the working class and other laboring people in the U.S., the small handful of giant robbers were increasingly driven to expand their already worldwide operations into a modern-day empire, looking for new areas for investment and new working people to exploit. As if to announce their arrival on the world scene and give a taste of what their rule would mean in the future, the U.S. monopoly capi-

talists launched an imperialist adventure, dragging the country into war with Spain under the now familiar pretext of spreading "democracy" and helping other peoples resist oppression. They won the Spanish-American War and seized control of Spain's colonies of Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines.

The Struggles of the Middle Classes

The monopolies oppressed not only the workers, upon whose labor their system and fortunes were based, but the great majority of people. Their empires of profit were built on the backs of workers and littered with the lives of millions of small producers who were crushed in the process. But the American people never for a moment accepted this oppression and hit back at the monopolists, or "robber barons" as they were appropriately known in those days, with wave after wave of struggle. Many sections of the people were drawn into battle against the monopolists.

Farmers waged a constant fight against foreclosures, price manipulation by the monopolies and the inflated costs of transporting their produce to market by rail. Associations of farmers were set up that often made common cause with the working class and various political parties were established to fight the monopolies.

The struggle of Black people in the South was already building against the sharecropping system and its political and social prop of Jim Crow and segregation. It was to erupt into a mighty storm against segregation and oppression throughout the country a few decades later. And the struggle against the sharecropping system united Black and white sharecroppers alike.

Among the middle classes of the cities (including teachers, journalists, some small businessmen) movements developed against many of the ugly results of monopoly capitalism — against the Spanish-American War and the fight for public health and sanitation.

Vivid works of literature were produced that exposed the viciousness of the capitalists. Often these forces made common cause with the workers in fighting the oppression of the monopolists, as in the battles for universal public education and against child labor, the barbaric practice that sacrificed the education, health and very youth of children for the fortunes of the capitalists.

Many times these movements were preyed upon by demagogic politicians who tried to pass themselves off as pals of the "little man" like George Wallace does today. These reactionaries promoted schemes to "break up the monopolies" as the cure-all medicine for farmers and the small owners generally.

No doubt William Vanderbilt, a multi-millionaire railroad owner and financier, had these tin-horn politicians in mind when he said in a public interview, "When I want to buy a politician I always find the anti-monopolist the most purchasable. They don't

come so high." William Jennings Bryan was the best known and most influential of these politicians who tried to use their golden tongues to steer this movement, which came to be known as the populist movement, down dead end roads.

The struggles of the farmers, small owners, and others of the middle classes shook the country. But while these struggles hit hard blows at the monopolists they could not stop the built-in process of capitalism of developing large-scale production owned by monopolies and creating great numbers of propertyless workers — wage-slaves with no alternative under this system but to sell their ability to labor to the owners of capital.

Reform schemes were powerless in the face of the profit drive of capitalists. The small producers were more and more being eliminated by large-scale production and therefore did not represent a higher form of organizing production. So they could not see, on their own, the way out of the oppression and misery that capitalism was causing.

It was the struggle of the working class — those who produce in common the great bulk of society's wealth and receive in return hardly enough for survival — that contained within it the seeds of revolution and a new society. And it contained the potential for uniting many allies from other classes and strata

against the common enemy.

The closing of the frontier and the growth of the monopolies went a long way in dispelling the capitalist promoted idea that hard work alone can bring success. If that were true how could it be that the workers can barely make ends meet, while a few investment coupon clippers wallow in wealth?

While few workers had any illusions of becoming wealthy capitalists, the idea had flourished in the young country that hard work and a little luck might bring, if not a fortune, at least a decent life and a chance to "be your own boss." As long as there was a frontier and a rapid growth of competitive capitalism there was a certain basis for believing this, although it was always more illusion than reality. And still today the capitalists constantly try to sidetrack the dreams of workers for a better life with lies like "you can make it if you try" — under this system.

But through their own experience and in the course of repeated struggles against the capitalists, especially as revolutionaries played a role in these fights, more workers saw themselves as a social class with common interests opposite those of the bosses, and realized that their own hopes for a better life could only come through the struggle of the whole class of workers.

War, Crisis and Revolution

Capitalism's growth into imperialism represented the beginning of its decline and fall. In each of the capitalist countries it had created its own gravediggers, the modern working class, driven by the system of exploitation into greater and greater struggles. And the capitalists extended their regime of plunder throughout the world — with no corner of the globe too remote for their exploitation. Imperialism meant the competition between individual capitalists was replaced by the conflict between giant monopolies and trusts, within each country and between countries themselves.

The capitalist system had been born out of historical necessity — of the need for society to emerge from the backwardness of previous social systems. It swept aside previous outmoded systems of oppression, feudalism in Europe and chattel slavery and colonialism in the United States, but it replaced them with a system of exploitation that created fortunes of blood-soaked wealth undreamed of by Egyptian pharaohs and medieval lords. It extended its chains of oppression and the numbers of people shackled to them far beyond the wildest ambitions of Julius Caesar and Genghis Khan.

Capitalism had, in its highest, imperialist stage, become the very obstacle to further progress in the world. While in its youth it had given rise to wars that

liberated society from old exploiting systems (like the American Revolution and the Civil War), in the decrepitness of its old age the wars it bred were imperialist, predatory conflicts which caused great suffering to the masses of people and were aimed only at increasing its regime of plunder and exploitation.

Even in its period of most rapid growth, ever more violent fits of economic crisis testified to its decay. Where once rapid growth had been punctuated by periodic crisis, in its imperialist stage growth and development were only temporary and partial, while crisis and decay became the rule, not the exception. Capitalism had become imperialism, it had entered the era of its decline and fall, of world war and revolution.

World War I

In 1914 the monopoly capitalists plunged the world into the First World War. The war was no accident of fate, its seeds lay in the capitalist system itself. With the world and its resources having been divided by a handful of "Great Powers," the imperialists were forced to turn on each other to increase their realms of plunder. Some imperialist powers like Germany had gotten a slow start in the race for colonies and areas for exploitation — most of which had already been grabbed by Britain and France.

Yet the relentless necessity of capitalism forced Germany and Austria-Hungary to find areas for investment of capital while these same laws forced the more established imperialists like Britain and France to fight in order to hang onto and even expand their empires. The appetite of each of the imperialist powers set them on a collision course which exploded in August 1914.

Millions of workers from each of the capitalist countries were put into uniform, issued weapons and told to shoot down their brother workers in the name of "defending the fatherland" and rallying around the flag. But the "fatherland" for which the workers were supposed to shed their blood was nothing but the regime of profit of the monopolists.

For a while, the capitalists of the U.S. stayed out of this first imperialist world war, finding it more profitable to sell war material to England and France (and some to the other side) and provide them with financial backing. But as the war dragged on the U.S. imperialists saw the possibility of grabbing a chunk of the world for themselves and the necessity of protecting their billion dollar loans to the British-French alliance.

Under the flimsy pretext of "making the world safe for democracy" and fighting a "war to end wars" the capitalists sent hundreds of thousands of American workers to Europe to join in the mutual slaughter.

And in this war for "democracy" they found themselves fighting on the same side as the Russian Tsar and the "democratic" British imperialists who were fighting to maintain their fabled Empire which they boasted the sun never set on.

Twenty million soldiers and civilians were murdered by the capitalists in their bloody struggle for world domination. In the course of this slaughter, workers in the U.S. and the other warring powers waged a heroic struggle against the war. Soldiers at the front fraternized with the "enemy" workers-in-uniform they were supposed to gun down. And in the midst of this holocaust the working class of Russia, led by V.I. Lenin and the Bolshevik Party, waged a successful revolution, dumping first the Tsar and then the capitalists, and established the first state in which the working class seized, and held, political power.

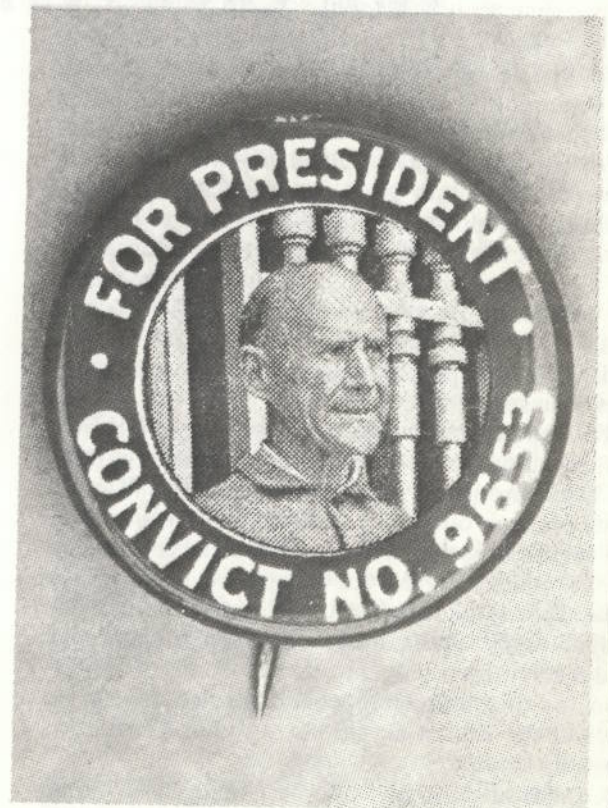
The Russian Revolution was like a giant earthquake which sent tremors throughout the whole world. After the end of the First World War there was a revolutionary upsurge of workers throughout Europe and in the United States. Workers in the U.S. came to the defense of the revolutionary workers of Russia, going so far as to refuse to handle shipments of weapons that the U.S. was sending from Seattle to Russia as part of an effort by the capitalist countries to strangle the Russian revolution.

Opposition to World War 1

Right, a campaign button for Eugene Debs, revolutionary working class leader who ran for president in 1920. At the time Debs was in jail as a result of his opposition to World War One. He received a million votes.

During World War One the capitalists went all-out to derail and suppress the struggle of the working class, by making appeals for national unity, branding opponents of the war as enemy agents and launching a full scale assault on working class organizations like the Industrial Workers of the World and many members of the Socialist Party who resisted the war.

Despite all this, millions of workers refused to sacrifice their struggle to the cause of the war between rival imperialist bandits and the overall class struggle of workers continued, including the fight against the imperialist war itself.



The success of the Russian Revolution shattered forever the myth that imperialism was all powerful and could never be overthrown. It proved that it was possible for the workers to become masters of society. Revolutionary-minded workers throughout the world looked to the newly founded Soviet Union as the land of the future and fought with renewed energy against the system that condemned the workers to a life of wage-slavery and had just plunged the world into a criminal mass slaughter of immense proportions.

In the United States, revolutionary workers formed the basis of the Communist Party, USA, at its founding in 1919. For several decades the CP led big advances in the struggle of the workers in this country against the capitalists and fought for the rule of the working class.

The severe crisis that shook the entire capitalist world after World War I subsided and capitalist profits again began to grow. The U.S. monopolists had emerged from the war in a powerful position. Once much of the stocks and bonds of the U.S. had been owned by European capitalists, but World War I reversed this situation and Europe was deeply in debt to Wall Street.

With their profits on the rise and with a certain temporary stability to the capitalist system, the bosses crowed once again that their system was here to stay. Henry Ford's mass production assembly lines were put forward as the "solution" to the problems and struggles of the workers. "Ford has beaten Marx," they said. Crisis and war, according to the capitalists, were a thing of the past.

Yet behind this rosy picture the capitalists were painting, the conflicts and contradictions of the capitalist system were building up. Their assembly lines chained the workers to murderous and intensified exploitation. A short ten years after the close of World War I, world capitalism was torn by a crisis as devastating in its own way as the imperialist war had been — the Great Depression.

Beginning in 1929 the whole of the capitalist world and its colonies were plunged into a crisis of immense proportions. Millions and millions were thrown out of work. In an effort to keep prices from falling, ruined farmers were forced by the brutal laws of capitalism to destroy the very food workers needed to survive. Whole factories were converted into scrap.

In the period of capitalism's growth periodic crises had been overcome and each had been followed by a new boom in capitalist production and exploitation. But the Great Depression broke out under conditions of capitalism's stagnation and decay.

High Tide of Struggle

Because of this, the Great Depression dragged on and on, and led to incredible suffering and misery for the working people. But more importantly, the Depression, which hit every capitalist country, led to an immense upsurge of struggle in this country and

around the world, as workers refused to be ground down into the dirt. Despite endless "share the burden" plans, "aid to the capitalists will bring you jobs" schemes, New Deals and a thousand other theories of the day saying "hold on, recovery is just around the corner," workers were forced to struggle. And struggle they did.

A tremendous movement of the unemployed developed, with leadership from the Communist Party, in which millions fought for jobs and unemployment compensation and declared to the capitalists their intention not to be sacrificed after producing billions in wealth for the exploiters. This struggle reached such mammoth proportions that over a million people demonstrated in a single day in early 1930.

The struggle for jobs or income, which won unemployment compensation, public works projects, and other gains, was not the only battlefield on which the working class took up its fight. In the middle and late '30s a tremendous movement developed to win unions in the basic industries of the country, which up until then had beaten back repeated attempts of the workers to win industry-wide unions.

In order to carry out this battle the workers had to break with the leadership of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), who held that workers could not be organized along industrial lines but only craft by craft and who looked down with scorn on the assembly line workers they considered "riff-raff."

The Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) was formed as a vehicle for organizing the workers in the basic industries of the country — auto, steel, electrical, rubber and others. And in this fight the Communist Party also played a leading role. In a series of hard fought and bloody battles the workers won victory after victory.

The back of the auto giants was broken in the famous Flint sitdown strike in which thousands of workers occupied three General Motors plants in Flint, Michigan, and held out for 44 days before the company was forced to give in. While the men held the plants, tens of thousands of workers came to their defense rallying outside the plants and beating back police attempts to drive the strikers out or starve them into submission. On the heels of the auto victory, steel, rubber and other industries were unionized.

And the hard years of the '30s saw battles on many other fronts as well. Millions of workers rallied to the defense of the working people of Spain who were in the midst of a bitter war with the fascist forces led by Franco. Thousands of American workers, organized by the Communist Party and others, went to fight side by side with their Spanish brothers and sisters.

Workers also took up important fights against the oppression of Black people in the South and other battles against oppression throughout society. "Free the Scottsboro Boys!" (nine young Blacks in the South, falsely accused of raping two white women and sentenced to death) became a battle cry of the working class, and the struggle eventually won them

Class Struggle in the Great Depression



In the depression years of the 1930s as the capitalists tried to drive the workers into the dirt they were confronted by a tremendous upsurge in the struggle. In the course of bitter battle many victories were won, including unemployment insurance, industrial unions in rubber, steel, auto and other industries and social security. In these struggles the Communist Party, USA played an important role and revolution and socialism became sharp questions for millions of workers.

Above, wives and families bring food and encouragement to Flint sitdown strikers.

Below, hundreds of thousands of workers celebrated International Workers Day, May Day, in cities across the country during the '30s.



their freedom.

In the course of the suffering caused by the capitalist crisis and the tremendous struggle the working class was waging against the capitalists the question of revolution and socialism, a society under the rule of the working class, became a sharp one on the minds of millions of workers. The Great Depression made it clearer than ever that the capitalist system had no future, could offer nothing other than deprivation and hardship, oppression, destruction and degradation for the masses.

For while the struggle of the 1930s won great improvements for the workers — unemployment insurance, social security, industrial unions and other gains, it did not and could not change the nature of capitalism as a vicious system of exploitation, unable to provide a decent life for the workers. The greatest fruit of the struggle of the '30s was the increased consciousness and determination of the workers to battle the capitalists and, in the minds of growing numbers, an understanding of the need to overthrow them once and for all.

While the capitalist system was embroiled in crisis and rocked by huge battles of the working class in this country and throughout the world, the conditions were building that were to throw the people of the world into another world war on an even more horrendous and destructive scale than the first. Despite the history book lies that Franklin Roosevelt's "pump priming" policies got the country out of the Depression, it was, in fact, only the outbreak of the Second World War, and its outcome, that gave the imperialists of this country a new, temporary, lease on life.

World War I had resulted in a new division of the world into colonies and "spheres of influence." The losers had been stripped of their colonies and forced to pay war reparations. But this division of the world into spheres of exploitation could not last forever. Always, under capitalism, one country stagnates while another power spurts ahead. And this process, which goes on constantly, inevitably leads to war between these rival imperialists to force a new division of the world. And this is exactly what led to the outbreak of the Second World War.

England and France together controlled the bulk of the world's colonies and had managed to hang on to them after emerging victorious from World War I. Other imperialist powers, especially Germany, Italy and Japan, were lean and hungry, lacking a "fair share" of the right to plunder and exploit other countries and working people. The crisis of the '30s hit all of the imperialist powers, but Germany, Italy and Japan were expanding at a faster rate than their rivals. This expansion was at the expense of the workers in those countries, who were driven mercilessly and whose revolutionary struggle had been brutally suppressed. As surely as two trains headed in the opposite direction on the same track, the need of the more rapidly expanding powers to seize new areas

for exploitation and the need of the others to hang on to what they had put these blocs of imperialists on a collision course. It was this rivalry among the international pirates that led to the outbreak of World War 2, not just the personal wishes of this or that imperialist butcher.

The Second World War, like the previous one, began as a fight among thieves for greater exploitation and as such the workers had no interest in backing either side. But the world had changed as a result of the emergence of the Soviet Union as a state ruled by the working class, which millions of workers looked to as the path of the future. So when Hitler sent the great bulk of the German armies into the Soviet Union, the character of the Second World War changed. It became a battle to defend the future, and millions of workers in the U.S. and other countries picked up guns and joined in the fight against the fascist powers who were concentrating on smashing what was then the world's only socialist state.

In the course of the war workers in many countries took advantage of the split between the imperialist powers, and the fact that one bloc was allied with the USSR, to fight for leadership in the battle against the fascist powers and to advance their own struggle for socialism. On the heels of the Second World War the working class seized power in a dozen countries of Europe and Asia and began building socialist societies.

Of all the major imperialist powers that had fought it out in World War 2, only the U.S. came out of it in a stronger position. Germany, Japan and Italy were completely defeated and under military occupation. The main imperialist allies of the U.S., England and France, came out of the conflict greatly weakened, in hock to the U.S., and in no position to hang onto their far-flung empires. The U.S. ruling class sat as the undisputed chieftain of the entire capitalist world. The U.S. ruling class proclaimed that "the 20th century is the American century."

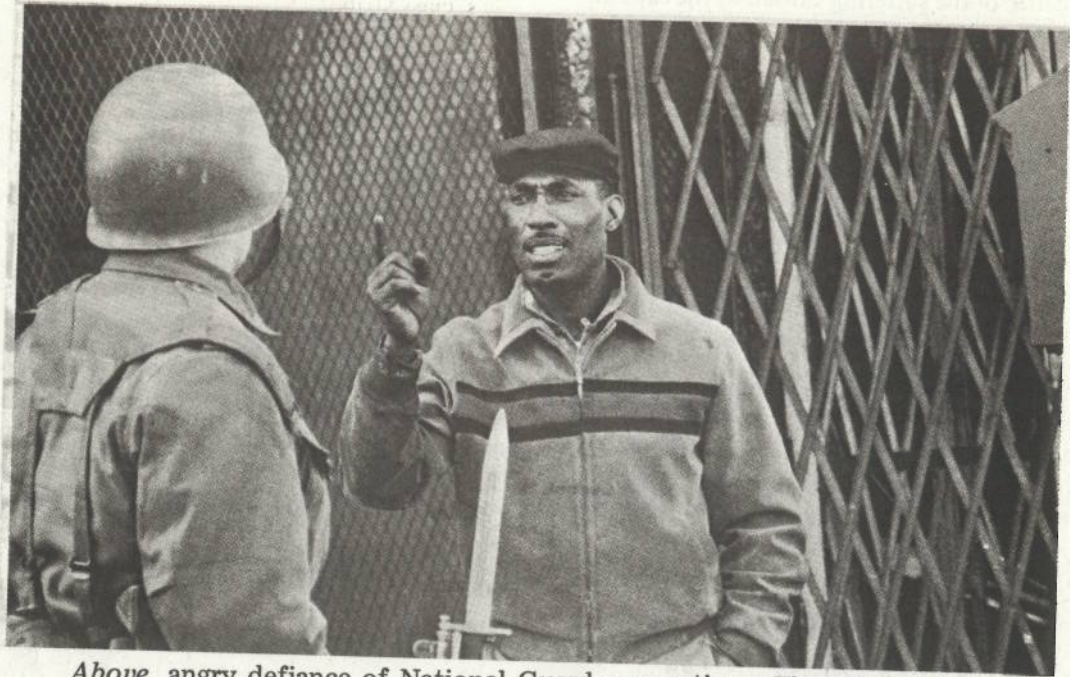
"The American Century"

Their gloating grew more boastful still when, in the mid 1950s, the working class suffered a great setback when class traitors seized control of the party and government in the Soviet Union and a few other socialist countries after Stalin's death. Socialism was wrecked and capitalism was restored.

The U.S. capitalists delighted in this reversal, and especially in pointing to the Soviet Union as a "lesson" that you can't change things. Their line was, "See, things there are like here — only worse. A few are on top and the masses slave away." In all this, of course, they slandered and distorted the many victories and advances elsewhere, as the working class built real socialism in China and other countries.

The U.S. imperialists dreamed of a long reign over the world. A crucial part of their plan to preside over an "American Century" was their hope of crushing and derailing the struggle of the U.S. working class

Black Liberation Struggle



Above, angry defiance of National Guard occupation. Throughout the 1950s and '60s a mighty storm of the Black people's struggle swept the country, winning many victories and helping to rekindle the revolutionary spirit among the whole working class.

which had grown to tremendous proportions in the 1930s. The ruling class launched a sharp attack on the working class through anti-labor laws like Taft-Hartley, and all-out efforts to defeat strikes.

In particular they made use of the traitors who had entrenched themselves at the top of the unions to drive militants and especially communists out of the trade unions, to shackle the struggle, and to promote the fairy tale that the workers had a stake in their own exploiters' efforts to establish and maintain world domination.

By the 1950s this "American Century" was in full swing. The bosses promised the workers prosperity and an end to crisis. And, for a while, it did seem to many workers that things were getting better in this country, especially compared with the bitter years of the 1930s. Many workers were able to buy their own home (mortgaged though it was), wages rose a bit and some new branches of industry developed.

Of course even this period of "prosperity" meant continued exploitation for the workers. Unemployment rates of 4% and 5% were considered "normal." Whole sections of the working class (especially among Blacks and other minorities) remained largely outside whatever little real improvements in living standards did occur. And it seemed to most people that at least their children would have it better than they did — a hope that is being shattered today as millions of young people enter a job market where even trained workers with years of experience can't find work, when drug addiction and gangs are on the

increase and when education is one of the first things being sacrificed in the name of balancing budgets and restoring profits.

Today, the years of "prosperity," shallow as they really were for the working class, are gone in Capitalist USA. These are the "good old days" that the capitalists hark back to by flooding the television and movie screens with shows idealizing life in the '50s and early '60s. But the real prosperity of the post-World War 2 period was for the capitalists, who made money hand over fist as never before. The very years of "prosperity" and the conditions that it created have laid the basis of the crisis that is shaking the country today and which can only deepen tomorrow.

The capitalists had another thing to crow about in the '50s, the desertion of the Communist Party to the side of the capitalists. The CP had led the workers in fierce struggle against the exploiters but, beginning in the late 1930s, increasingly lost sight of the goal of revolution. The CP was hit hard by the ruling class' anti-communist offensive of the 1950s but the response to these attacks was mostly to apologize for its ideas, further setting the stage for complete betrayal. By the mid 1950s the bulk of the leadership of the CP had completely caved in to the capitalists and abandoned the revolutionary struggle of the working class.

All of these things — the open attacks on the unions, the use of the traitors at the top of the unions, the betrayal of the old Communist Party, and the few concessions the ruling class was able to make in the

face of the struggle of the workers — combined to cause an overall setback for the workers' struggle in this country.

But even so, oppression and exploitation did not stop, and neither did struggle against it. Even in the midst of this heyday of U.S. imperialism a mighty storm was gathering in the Black people's struggle, which erupted in the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955. This struggle was aimed, at first, at Jim Crow, the laws and practices that had been used in the South to keep Blacks segregated and chained to the sharecropping system. It began as the civil rights movement, a struggle for democratic rights, for Black people had even been denied many of the few rights that most of the working people had won through years of struggle.

This movement was closely tied with the fact that the sharecropping system was breaking down in the South as the capitalists' profit drive led them to mechanize farming and bring wage labor in a big way into agriculture. This forced millions of Black people to the cities in all parts of the country, where they became, in their great majority, part of the U.S. working class.

The fierce struggle of the Black people, and the millions of others who supported it, won many important victories, including the desegregation of public facilities and the right to vote, and knocked down some barriers to employment. But its most impor-

tant accomplishment was the revival of revolutionary struggle in the country at a time when the workers' class struggle was at a low point. For as the Jim Crow laws were swept aside and some democratic rights were won, the struggle of Black people came squarely up against the U.S. ruling class and the capitalist system.

Despite the fine words of the ruling class politicians, their system could never bring about equality. To an extent Blacks did win jobs in industry through struggle, but discrimination was still present, along with the vicious exploitation suffered in common with workers of all nationalities in the U.S. In the middle and late '60s the Black people's struggle reached a high point, even going over into armed confrontations with the capitalists' army and cops, and raised the question of revolution once again in the minds of millions.

The myth of the "American Century" came tumbling down with the fierce struggle of the Black people, the licking the U.S. ruling class was taking at the hands of the people of Vietnam and the tremendous opposition to that war here. Not only were undeveloped nations rising against U.S. imperialism, but there was a growing challenge to the U.S. by rival capitalist bandits in other countries. A new wave of struggle was rising among the workers, and crisis racked the economy. The chickens had come home to roost.

And Now It's the Turn Of the Working Class

From the first men driven by poverty to sign contracts of indentured servitude, from the resistance of Indians to attempted extermination, from the holds of the first slave ships whose cargos were men, women and children captured in the relentless drive for profit and turned into the personal property of the rich, from the workers who toiled in the first factories and built the canals and railroads, the history of this country has been one of constant struggle between oppressor and oppressed.

The development of the country has been dictated by the laws of capitalism; it has led, relentlessly, to the society of 1976, where a modern working class of millions, the *proletariat*, stands opposite a small class of thieving exploiters. The American Revolution cleared the way for the growth of capitalism, for the ever increasing division of society into two opposite and opposing camps, "and now it is the turn of the proletariat to overthrow the capitalist system and build a completely new type of society." (from the *Programme of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA*)

Of course the Bicentennial Minutes, the politi-

cians' speeches, the patriotic editorial appeals, all present a different story — a never-never land of harmony and steady progress, where all men are created equal and the industrious rise to the top off their own hard work, where a government "of, by and for the people" represents rich and poor alike. But millions are increasingly seeing that this Mary Poppins story is bankrupt.

For two hundred years generations of working people have transformed the face of the country. Industries where thousands work in common churn out more goods in a few minutes than isolated individual craftsmen could ever have hoped to accomplish in a lifetime. Where once a journey of a few hundred miles was a major undertaking, today our labor has made it possible to send men to the moon.

But for the working class, the men and women who have created the great wealth we see all around us, the very products of our labor, such as factories, railroads, and machinery, are capital in the hands of the employers, chaining the workers to a lifetime of wage-slavery. Most of us live from one paycheck to the next and even the small gains we have won

through fierce struggle are the constant targets of the capitalists, who seek to increase their profit at our expense. For millions this year's Bicentennial of capitalism comes amidst great suffering and hardship.

The two hundredth anniversary of the system we live under cannot help but raise the question of the future of that system. But for answers the capitalists can offer nothing but nonsense and confusion, for in reality they can only offer more exploitation, more suffering — in short, more of the same.

All of the capitalists' "planning" and schemes amount to desperate efforts to keep their system afloat from one year to the next and all of them are based on increasing the robbery of the masses of people. But, in the words of the *Programme of the RCP, USA*, "Nothing can save capitalism in the long run, because it has long since become a barrier to progress and long since prepared the conditions for its own destruction."

At the heart of capitalist society is the conflict, the contradiction, between the working class, which produces the bulk of society's wealth by the collective efforts of millions working cooperatively, and the capitalist class which robs the working class by its private appropriation of the products of the workers' labor. The system of private ownership stands as an obstacle, a chain around the very *forces of production* (the workers' ability to produce and the machinery, factories, etc., necessary for production) that capitalism has called into being.

Why is it that millions can lack an adequate diet while land is unused and food lies rotting? Why can't the hundreds of thousands of unemployed construction workers build new housing for the many who need it? Why does the introduction of machinery that could eliminate much backbreaking work result in more misery for the workers? Why hasn't there been more progress in wiping out cancer and other diseases while a large chunk of the scientists of the country are employed devising new weapons of destruction? Why do young people face a bleak and dreary future when there is a whole world to be transformed?

There is only one answer to all these questions: *because of the criminal rule of the capitalists*. Capitalism, which subjugates all of society to the production of profit for a few, has made decay and stagnation a permanent feature of society — so much so that many capitalists predict a "normal" unemployment rate of 7% or 8% through the 1980s.

Crisis and War

Today the country is gripped by deepening crisis, and the opposite interests of the workers and capitalists are all the more stark. Crisis is such a built-in feature of the capitalist system that the ruling class presents it as if it was an unfortunate but natural part of human existence. But for the working class there is nothing "natural" at all about millions being thrown out of work while factories are lying idle and the very things the workers have produced — and need — pile

up and are locked in warehouses because the workers lack the cash necessary to purchase them.

Crisis compels the capitalists to do the only thing they know how — lay off millions and pile up the workload of millions more. They hold down wages, cut back on education and social services, deny unemployment benefits everywhere and in a thousand ways seek to increase their exploitation of the working class and try to dump the burden of the crisis on the masses of people.

But crisis also compels the working class to struggle, to resist every effort of the bosses to increase their profit robbery. From the eight hour day movement, to the unemployment struggles, in a million ways this has been the history of our class. The criminal absurdity of capitalist crisis reveals the bankruptcy of the capitalist system in all its glory and furthers the growing question on the minds of the workers: *is this the way it has to be?*

The unquenchable thirst of the capitalists for ever greater profits has already plunged the world into two global wars. In addition to these two conflicts, each of which sentenced tens of millions of people to their deaths, the monopolists have waged countless wars of enslavement and plunder against peoples of the underdeveloped countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, often in the name of spreading "civilization" and, in later times, in the name of "defending freedom and democracy."

The working class and the masses of people have no interest in these imperialist wars. They put us and our sons in uniforms and send us off to kill and be killed by the laboring people of other countries. The capitalists preach that these wars of plunder — like crisis, like their "sacred right" to accumulate fortunes — are part of the natural order of things. But these wars too, cause millions to question, must it be this way?

As the capitalists celebrate the Bicentennial of their rule they are once again preparing to go to war. The same basic conditions that gave rise to both previous world wars are operating today, and threaten to plunge the world into another, even more devastating, global conflagration. The new capitalist rulers of the Soviet Union have turned that country into an imperialist superpower rivaled only by the U.S. These imperialist overlords are driven by the same laws as our own ruling class. They, too, must seek new areas for investments and exploitation and in doing so come into headlong collision with the rulers of this country who just as desperately need to hang on to everything they have been able to rob over the decades — and, in the final analysis, to expand this robbery.

A day doesn't pass without new calls by various politicians and other ruling class spokesmen to toughen up against the Soviets, to increase war spending, to prepare for war.

When they do go to war they always wrap it in the flag and tell us it's everybody's patriotic duty to defend the profits and empire of the monopolies. Dur-

ing the Vietnam War they ran the line that it was in defence of freedom and democracy for the Vietnamese. But in the course of that war millions came to see that its basic purpose was protecting and increasing the wealth and resources in the pockets of the corporations, and their power around the world.

Now, with the crisis steadily deepening, the ruling class is combining its "defense of liberty" sales pitch with another more blunt and direct one: if you want a job, if you want a decent standard of living, you must be ready to go to war to protect the U.S. "national interest," by which they mean the profits and investments of the monopolies.

But workers have no common interest with their exploiters — not in this country, not in the Soviet Union, not anywhere in the capitalist world. Our interests lie with the working class of every country in the world, the *international proletariat*, who like us have no reason to wage war on fellow workers, and who together with us share the common task of waging revolution until capitalism and the evils that spring from it have been eliminated from the world once and for all. This war, the revolutionary war of the working class against the rule of capital, is the war we must prepare to fight.

Each time the capitalists have plunged the world into war it has weakened their system worldwide. On top of every other abuse, it further inflames the hatred of millions for their vicious rule, and has resulted in the working class making revolution in a number of countries and embarking on building socialism. The First World War led to the Russian revolution and World War 2 resulted in working class revolution in several countries including China. If the imperialist system survives in the world long enough to condemn the world's people to the horrors of a third world war it will give rise to a revolutionary upsurge all over the world and greatly hasten capitalism's doom.

Still, the capitalists preach the permanence of their system. They are using the Bicentennial to proclaim this from the rooftops. They tell us the principles of 1776 are "eternal," that they have created the best possible society, that they have provided "freedom and democracy" for the American people.

The real freedom on which their system rests, the freedom to exploit the labor of others, seems everlasting and sacred to them. What could be more "natural" than for them to own and control most everything while the workers do all the work? But there is nothing natural about wage-slavery — except that it is natural and inevitable that slaves will rebel against their masters.

Freedom and democracy mean one thing to the capitalists and quite another to the workers. The freedom the capitalists cherish is their freedom to exploit, the democracy they parade about, a mask covering their domination of the government.

From the beginning of history people have been fighting for freedom, but freedom has meant differ-

ent things in different times and for different classes. For the bulk of human history, up until modern times, freedom could only have a narrow and restricted meaning.

For colonial society the only freedoms possible at the time were certain limited freedoms concerning the right to settle land, some rights of free speech, religion and especially the right to acquire private property. For the great majority of people such freedoms could not mean that the people were free from the necessity of scratching out a bare existence from a hostile earth. Of course for the capitalists these freedoms mean quite a bit more — the freedom to rule over the rest of the population and to live lives of luxury off their labor.

While the Civil War wiped out the barbaric system of chattel slavery and replaced it with the system of "free labor," the great majority of the working people remained chained by the unwritten law of the capitalists' system — work for me or starve. But for the capitalists freedom meant the right to extend their exploitation further and further.

And today workers remain chained to the system of wage-slavery, paid just enough to keep on producing profit for the bosses and raise a new generation that, if the capitalists have their way, will suffer the same exploitation.

No, this is not the type of freedom that we want! And it is no longer the best that can be achieved.

Back to 1776?

The more the tide of history surges forward toward revolution, the more the ruling class and a host of apologizers for capitalism make desperate efforts to preserve the unpreservable, misdirect the growing anger of the people against them, and make futile attempts to drag things backward. They talk about "continuing the American Revolution" and "returning to the principles of the Founding Fathers."

But turning back the clock is an impossible and reactionary dream. The capitalists don't really want to return to 1776, when their profits were measured in thousands of dollars instead of billions and when all the money in the world couldn't buy most of the jet set luxuries the capitalists now enjoy.

What they want to preserve is the social system of 1776 which put them on top of society where they remain today. What they would like to turn back the clock on is the class struggle of the workers to the situation in 1776 when there was no modern working class in this country, when the science of revolution

Marxism-Leninism — had not yet been developed, and there was no force in society capable of toppling their rule. But the world has changed.

The capitalist class stands in the path of the working class achieving *its* freedom. The capitalists stand as the protectors and beneficiaries of the system of wage-slavery which has long ago outlived any shred of the brutal necessity that gave rise to it, and which today can only continue to snow forth decay, misery, oppression.

Their system chokes the very forces of production the working class has created, it swaggers from crisis to crisis. They embroil the working people of the world in imperialist wars. *They are no longer fit to rule.*

And today there is a class capable of waging revolution against the capitalists and their system — the working class. The whole history of its struggle and its position in society opposite the exploiters prepares it to seize power.

It is a class whose very existence is based on producing things in common through the coordinated labor of millions. It is a class with no interest in exploitation and oppression of any kind, capable of building a society where it is impossible for a few to ride on the backs of the many.

Whenever a class of people is reduced to a form of slavery they will resist, wherever a class of people stands as an obstacle to society's development they will be overthrown. This is a law of history.

Today in this country the workers are bound by the chains of wage-slavery, the blind laws of capitalism act on us like uncontrolled forces subjecting the people to crises, wars and untold suffering. But the working class will wage revolution, establish its own rule, struggle against the scars left on society by thousands of years of exploitation, and consciously and systematically use our labor and the machinery and tools our labor has produced as weapons for liberation and the final elimination of classes altogether — communist society.

Already one fourth of humanity has embarked on this road. They have overthrown the rule of the exploiters and have begun building the future. Even so, it is not an easy task that faces the international working class, it will take the struggle and labor of generations to reach our goal. There will be twists and turns in the road forward. The first workers' state, the Soviet Union, was ripped away from us temporarily, but our class has moved ahead and won power in several other countries. Despite whatever obstacles lie in our way, the tide of history is with the working class toward revolution, socialism and communism.

There is no question as to whether the working class of this country will fight back, will resist the capitalist exploiters, it happens every day. The real question is *how long* will we be forced to fight just to keep our heads above water, just to survive. And how soon will come the day when our struggle, our labor, our hopes and aspirations will be applied to turning the world upside down, and building a new society without exploitation, without war, a society when work itself, liberated from the pain and drudgery produced by capitalism, becomes the act of constructing a new world for the benefit of ourselves, our children and generations yet unborn.

The Movement We Need

We struggle every day against the countless abuses of capitalism, but our resistance to the capitalists' attacks, our fight to keep from being broken on the wheel of profits, cannot by itself eliminate the source of our oppression. For that, revolution is necessary. Our present struggle can and must develop into the conscious struggle of our class as a class for itself, in opposition to the capitalists and with the goal of eliminating them and their system once and for all.

And such a movement is developing. Within every strike, within every act of resistance lies the seeds of the revolutionary movement of our class. Many of the individual battles workers have taken up have grown in size and scope rallying thousands and tens of thousands of workers from all industries fighting as a class of people against not only the individual capitalist bloodsuckers but their whole rotten class. And increasingly workers have brought their strength, determination and vision into many of the most important battlefields in society.

The high and mighty will gather in Philadelphia July 4th this year to celebrate their rule and use the Bicentennial to try to throw sand in the eyes of the people, spreading their poisonous lies about "national unity" and the permanence of capitalism. But thousands of workers and others will be in the streets under the banner, "We've Carried the Rich for 200 Years — Lets Get Them Off Our Backs!" The demands of the demonstration, "Jobs or Income Now!" and "We Won't Fight Another Rich Man's War," are important demands of the whole working class, speaking to the needs and aspirations of millions and aimed squarely at the rulers of this country. The fight for jobs and against imperialist war are two of the most important battlefronts of our class, two open sores of the capitalist system which reveal its putrid and reactionary nature.

In all our battles, our class grows stronger, learns more about the enemy we face and how to defeat them.

We have carried the rich for two hundred years, and on July 4th the capitalists will proclaim their intention to maintain their rule over us forever. *But 200 years is long enough!* There will be no Tricentennial celebration. By then the people will celebrate a day far greater than July 4th, the day when the working class made *its* revolution!

"The movement of history, propelled forward by the class struggle, is irresistible. The advance of the proletariat, the greatest and most powerful class in history, to communism, to the elimination of class society, is inevitable."

*Programme of the Revolutionary Communist Party,
USA*



Back Cover: Statement by the Rich Off Our Backs — July 4th Coalition
(Initiated by Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Unemployed Workers
Organizing Committee, Revolutionary Communist Party, Revolutionary
Student Brigade)

Statement by the Rich Off Our Backs — July 4th Coalition:

We've Carried the Rich for 200 Years Let's Get Them Off Our Backs!

1976—Millions walking the streets looking for jobs and still more shoved out the door while plants close down. Those still at work, worked to death, chained to the bosses' machinery. Our cities falling apart. Our schools, hospitals, and firehouses shut down. Half finished construction sites standing next to burned out tenements and the drums of another war beating louder. All this amidst lies of recovery and the fireworks of celebration.

No! This is not what we worked so hard for. No, this is not the future we want for our children. One thousand outrages slap us in the face. No, we can't live like this. And we won't.

Our class, the working class, men and women of all nationalities — we build and we produce. But their class, the capitalist class, takes it all. They own what they have never built — the mills, mines and banks. Owning all, they take all we produce. And for us, only enough to keep us alive so we can slave for them some more.

They take our hard work and twist it. We work together. They steal, each as much for himself as he can, and try to keep us apart. Everything has a price for them. Their uncontrollable drive for profit makes this whole society run like it does. Crisis after crisis, war after war, injustice upon injustice. Ten generations of profits bled out of ten generations of our lives.

Our whole history proves this. We have fought for all that is worthwhile in this country. We are not animals but that's how they would have us live. No! Not in 1776, 1876, or 1976. Our history is filled with storms of resistance, battling back and standing tall. We are men and women. We will not be slaves. We are the backbone of the whole country, millions strong. They are a handful of murderers and slavedrivers, rotting even as they claw to grab more.

1976. These thieves call all of us to celebrate with them. National unity . . . all together and many happy returns. No! We shall not celebrate their rule. Despite all their sickening lies and broken-record hoopla, we have nothing in common with them. For them — 200 years of plunder. For us — 200 years of slavery and oppression. All they have they took from us. All we need we have wrenched from them through bitter battle. It is they and their never-satisfied thirst for profit that stand between us and our fight for a better life and brighter future for our children.

Fellow workers! Today as before our class battles every last abuse — on picketlines and shop floors, in neighborhoods and communities and everywhere throughout society. Our fight is a just fight, our demands are just demands. In building this struggle on July 4th in Philadelphia, we will proclaim especially our demand for "Jobs or Income Now!" and our determination that "We Won't Fight Another Rich Man's War!"

We have the strength to mobilize. We have the ability to unite all the battles, all the people, all the anger at the way we have to live. The future belongs to us. We are the only ones who can push things forward, and we are determined to break through.

Now is the time to pull it together. All our forces. All our battles. As we have always fought them we will fight them on the day they choose to celebrate their bloodsoaked rule. We will come together, thousands strong, to expose their crimes and build our movement, on that day and for the great battles ahead.

On to Philadelphia!

We've carried the rich for 200 years, let's get them off our backs!