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Internationalist



World Capitalism Plunges From the Wall Street Crisis



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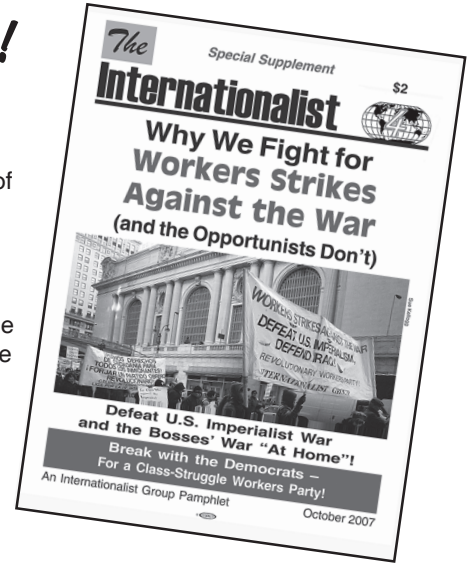
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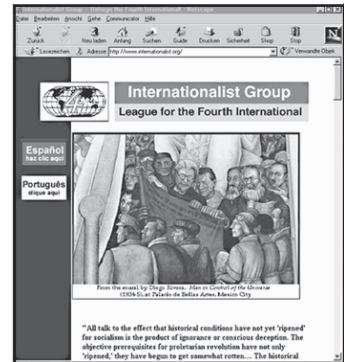
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New Commander-in-Chief, Same Bloody System of Oppression

Obama Presidency: U.S. Imperialism Tries a Makeover



Saul Loeb/AFP

President Obama, Vice President Biden with war secretary Gates and Joint Chiefs of Staff at the Pentagon, January 28. *Wall Street Journal* considered new war cabinet "not bad."

On January 20, the baton was formally passed from George W. Bush to Barack Hussein Obama as leader of the United States, the most powerful imperial power in the history of the world, presently mired in losing imperialist wars and the deepest economic crisis in three-quarters of a century. The fact that, for the first time ever, a black person had been elected president was celebrated by well over a million people who thronged to the inaugural in Washington, D.C. and tens of millions more who watched it on television around the U.S. and the world. For the African American Obama to take office in the highest elected position in this country reflected a considerable social change in this country founded on chattel slavery, where Jim Crow segregation continued into the 1960s – and where in the 21st century blacks and Latinos have still been prevented from voting. But this has

not changed the system of imperialist capitalism one iota: with Obama at the helm, the U.S. is bombing Iraq and Afghanistan to hell, marauding in Pakistan, supplying the weaponry for Israeli slaughter in Gaza, throwing millions out of work in the U.S. while enslaving workers with starvation wages around the planet.

The Internationalist Group did not call for a vote for Obama, the candidate of the Democratic Party, one of the twin parties of racist American capitalism, nor do we celebrate his presidency. Instead, we called for a revolutionary workers party and warned of the illusions that have been awakened (with help from the opportunist left) that the election of the first African American president would represent "change we can believe in," as Obama's campaign propaganda trumpeted. Our stand was and is guaranteed to be un-

**Break with the Democrats
Forge a Revolutionary Workers Party!**

popular, for now. Coming after eight years of the Bush regime, a government born of a judicial coup d'état which was hated around the world and widely despised even in the United States, many identified their hopes with Obama. After a bitter election campaign in which Democrat Hillary Clinton and then Republican John McCain and his running mate, the ultra-rightist Sarah Palin, resorted to bigoted appeals, many young people, black and white, older veterans of the Civil Rights movement, white liberals and Latino and Asian immigrants hailed Obama's victory as a blow against racism. But Obama in office will preside over a racist system.

Inauguration Day was a huge orchestrated feel-good celebration of "inclusion" and "diversity." TV cameras focused on signs saying "We have overcome" and "Yes, we did." The *Amsterdam News* (17 January), New York's premier black newspaper, ran a big front-page photo of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the headline, "The Dream Realized," referring to King's famous "I have a dream" speech at the 1963 civil rights March on Washington. (Ironically, the article below it headlined, "Cop arrested over shooting of unarmed black man.") A poll reported that 69 percent of the population thought King's dream of racial harmony had been realized. The *New York Times* (21 January) proclaimed "a day of celebration that climaxed a once-inconceivable journey for the man and his country." It also noted that when the now-ex president Bush took off from the Capitol in a helicopter many in the crowd gave a farewell Bronx cheer "along with some one-fingered salutes." CNN's Wolf Blitzer took a break from spewing out a steady diet of Zionist war propaganda for Israel's invasion of Gaza to quote from a Jamaican woman who said "America can give itself a couple of pats on the back" for electing a black president.

At his inauguration, Obama proclaimed a "new era of responsibility," hailing "loyalty and patriotism" and "spirit of service" embodied in the soldiers who "patrol far-off deserts" (Iraq and Afghanistan) and fought in places like Khe Sanh (Vietnam). He referred to the economic crisis wracking the U.S., blaming it on the greed of some and "our collective failure to make hard choices" – as if the implosion of the banking system after years of unbridled speculation was also the fault of working people whose wages fell steadily while the Wall Street moguls and captains of industry wallowed in obscene wealth. One commentator dared to break the reverential praise to ask of Obama's speech, "why did it come out so much sounding like Ronald Reagan?" In fact, Obama has often praised Reagan for fostering "entrepreneurship" after "all the excesses of the 1960s and 1970s" during which "government had grown and grown." Far from representing "change," Obama is firmly in the mold of Bill Clinton's "New Democrats," who appeal to the left in primary elections, run to the center in the general election and govern from the right.

Internationally, rulers, media and manufactured popular opinion uniformly greeted the new American president with enthusiasm. In Mexico, even "progressive" intellectuals, generally skeptical of U.S. intentions and actions, were caught up in "Obamamania." *La Jornada* (20 January) editorialized



Mahmud Hams/AP

Israeli war crime: Zionist invaders deliberately targeted Gaza civilian population. Right: Palestinian man in anguish over his two sons and nephew killed by Israeli tank shell on January 5.

that "Obama's path leads us to believe that he will arrive at the White House with signs of human and social sensibility, of respect for other countries," unlike his predecessor. Columnists opined that "one must give Barack Obama the benefit of the doubt." But other Spanish and Latin American writers noted "The Emperor's Old Clothes" (Carlo Frabetti) and "Imperial Leopardism" (Atilio Borón), from Tomasi di Lampedusa's novel *The Leopard* (Il gattopardo) about 19th century Sicily, where "something must change so that everything can stay the same." The Washington inaugural was watched with special attention in Gaza where many hoped for a statement from Obama with even the slightest criticism of the criminal Israeli bombardment and occupation. Instead, the new president declared that "Israel's security is paramount" – a virtual endorsement of the massacre of over 1,300 Palestinians, the Zionists' greeting to their new patron.

Continuity the Ruling Class Can Count On

While many liberals and reformist leftists deluded themselves into believing that Obama would provide a break from the policies of the past, the Democratic candidate was careful to commit himself to very little – and now he is ripping up his few campaign promises one after another. The shift be-



Palestinians in Gaza cafe watch inaugural in Washington. Many hoped for Obama criticism of Israel's murderous bombing/invasion. But after weeks of complicit silence the new U.S. president declared Israeli "security" is "paramount" – the same policy as Bush.

gan with his cabinet appointments, starting with Rahm Emmanuel, who volunteered to work on an Israeli army base during the 1991 Persian Gulf war and whose father was a member of the right-wing Zionist terrorist Irgun. The new administration is chock full of recycled officials from the Democratic administration of Bill Clinton, starting with his primary rival Hillary Clinton as Secretary of State. To this was added a prominent holdover from the Bush regime, Robert Gates, as war secretary. Gates, a long-time senior CIA official, was up to his neck in the Iran-Contra scandal and the war on Sandinista Nicaragua in the 1980s. Alongside these war hawks, Obama's national security advisor is General James Jones, the former Supreme Commander of Allied Forces Europe, who up to December 15 was a director of the Boeing aircraft and Chevron oil corporations. "Military-industrial complex" anyone?

On the campaign trail and since, Obama occasionally indulged in some populist rhetoric, but it's just for show. If his national security team is loaded with Pentagon brass, his economic team is top heavy with Wall Street execs and members of the academic-financial axis. Ben Bernanke stays on as chairman of the Federal Reserve Bank, and Timothy Geithner as Treasury Secretary will keep on servicing the big banks as he did for Bush as president of the New York Fed, and for Clinton as a deputy Treasury secretary. His bosses then were former Goldman Sachs CEO Robert Rubin and Larry Summers (a devotee of conservative economist Milton Friedman) who is now head of Obama's Council of Economic Advisors. Rubin and Summers ditched restrictions that kept commercial banks out of investment banking and deregulated derivatives, setting the stage for the orgy of speculation that

triggered the current crisis. As candidate, Obama joined McCain in endorsing the \$725 billion bank bailout, and as he was about to take office he ordered Congress to fork over the second half of this huge money pot, or else.

No wonder a *Wall Street Journal* (28 November 2008) editorial praised "Obama's War Cabinet" as "not bad." In the same issue of the bankers' daily, George W. Bush's former Rasputin, Karl Rove, called Obama's economic team "reassuring" and "thanksgiving cheer" for businessmen. A few weeks later (9 January) the conservative *Journal's* Washington commentator Gerald Seib wrote: "Rarely has a president – to say nothing of a Democratic president – been thrown into the arms of the business community on his way in the door as has Barack Obama." Ever since the election, the president-elect went on an offensive to court Republicans. He consulted often with his opponent John McCain, and even had a private dinner with a gaggle of right-wing pundits, one of whom (William Kristol) wrote a column summing up Obama's "no-dramatic-change-in-policy-in-the-White-House" line as "continuity we can believe in" (*New York Times*, 12 January). Two weeks later, Kristol published his last column for the *Times*, proclaiming Obama's inauguration "the end of a conservative era."

Liberals are not so sanguine. A writer for the Internet magazine *Salon* (17 January), David Sirota, headlined "Obama Sells Out to Wall Street," adding: "The president-elect's support of the bank bailout is payback to his wealthy Wall Street supporters." He noted that the Democrat was "a politician who raised more Wall Street dough than any other," and "whose inauguration festivities are being underwritten by the very bankers who are benefiting from the bailout largesse." Payback, certainly, but Obama can hardly be accused of "selling out" to the money

men. Not only is he the standard bearer of a party that has been a pillar of U.S. capitalism since the 1830s, his campaign was financed from the outset by big bucks from high finance, as well as from well-heeled Hollywood moguls and Silicon Valley venture capital. Only a quarter of the record-breaking \$745 million his presidential campaign raised came from small donors (*New York Times*, 6 January). The first black president is a vivid demonstration of how American "democracy" is *government over the working people by the capitalist politicians and for the bourgeoisie*.

Not only have the Democratic president's personnel picks and economic policies pleased conservatives, so have his other moves. Notably, Obama stopped talking about withdrawing U.S. combat forces from Iraq in 16 months and now refers to being "on a glide path to reduce our forces in Iraq." At a mid-December meeting in Chicago with Obama's national security team, a plan was presented, drawn up by Bush's generals Petraeus and Odierno, that called only for withdrawing about 5 percent of U.S. forces (7,000-8,000 troops) over six months while many units remaining in Iraq would be "remissioned" from combat troops to "trainers" and "enablers." Even after the "withdrawal" some time in the future, plans are for *close to 50,000 U.S. troops to remain in Iraq indefinitely* according to Gen. Odierno (*New York Times*, 29 January). Tens of thousands more will be stationed just over the border in Kuwait and other Gulf states, not to mention the 30,000-plus mercenaries and over 100,000 other "contractors" paid for by the U.S..

Obama has sought to piece off his liberal/"progressive" supporters with symbolic gestures like executive orders to close the Guantánamo torture prison (a year from now), and limiting interrogation techniques to those in the Army Field Manual 2-22.3 (which doesn't include "waterboarding"). But this only applies to prisoners captured in "armed conflicts" (not "counterterrorism" operations) and does not include special techniques too secret to be made public. Meanwhile, "extraordinary renditions" of prisoners to torture regimes will continue and even increase, as the U.S. tries to offload many of the 245 prisoners presently at Guantánamo. It is unclear what will happen to the over 600 prisoners crammed into even more gruesome facilities at the U.S. airbase at Bagram in Afghanistan, at least two of whom have been tortured to death. And Obama has no intention of prosecuting the hundreds of U.S. officers and military personnel implicated in the torture as well as their civilian bosses in the Pentagon and White House, or the Justice Department lawyers and top



Reuters

Obama escalates forces in Afghanistan by almost 50 percent. Shades of the SS: U.S. troops in Helmand province fly death's head flag.

officials who authorized these war crimes.

The essential *continuity* of Obama's presidency with that of Bush was demonstrated in concrete action during his first week in office.

- In Afghanistan, on January 23, three days after the

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inaugural, U.S. Special Forces staged a raid in Laghman province, gunning down 16 villagers, including two women and three children. After angry protests of hundreds in the provincial capital, even the American satrap installed as Afghan “president,” Hamid Karzai, demanded a stop to such raids, to no avail.

- Across the border in Pakistan, on the same night as the Afghan raid, missiles launched from remotely controlled U.S. aircraft known as Predators killed at least 15 people in the region of Waziristan. Such attacks were authorized by secret orders signed by President Bush last July, and his successor is continuing this policy – a clear act of aggression which the Pakistani government has repeatedly denounced.

- And in Iraq, on January 25, U.S. Special Operations troops shot and killed a couple in their home near Kirkuk, carrying out this murder in front of their 8-year-old daughter.

Since then, Obama has announced that he is ordering 17,000 more troops to Afghanistan, an *escalation of almost 50 percent* of U.S. forces in the country. And the future “withdrawal” of “combat troops” from Iraq has been stretched from 16 to 19 months, with almost no reductions in 2009, while the number of “residual forces” to be stationed there indefinitely keeps growing.

In short, Barack (“Bomb ‘em”) Obama, who early on posed as an opponent of the Iraq war, has quickly become a *certified war criminal*. But have you seen any protests asking the popular black president – as they did of Bush, Nixon and LBJ – “how many kids did you kill today”? The “antiwar movement” *called off* protests for the duration of the election campaign in order to elect Obama, and it’s still covering for him. Because that is the role of this popular front – to chain protests against imperialist slaughter to the Democrats, who are historically and today the *main war party of American capitalism*. Obama never was an antiwar candidate, he only opposed “dumb” wars like Iraq that were doomed to failure.

But there’s dumb ... and dumber. Bush’s invasion and occupation of Iraq has drained U.S. military and economic strength in a quest for world domination. Obama’s vow to escalate the war in Afghanistan, spread over a far larger, mountainous territory, and at the same time to attack Pakistan, with eight times the population and the only Islamic country with nuclear weapons to boot, could set off a chain reaction that would send the entire region up in flames. ***Any genuine opponent of imperialism must break with both capitalist parties and build a workers party on the program of international socialist revolution.***



Strikers at Chrysler’s Warren Stamping Plant, October 2007. UAW leaders are pushing contract concessions under government plan to rescue auto companies which will eliminate 50,000 auto workers’ jobs. Bailout also includes no-strike provision.

Labor’s Honeymoon with Obama

While black, Latino and young voters went most heavily for Obama (95 percent, 67 percent and 66 percent respectively), one of the key sectors supporting him was organized labor. Despite racist appeals to “Joe Six-Pack,” particularly in key battleground states like Pennsylvania and Ohio, exit polls reported that 59 percent of union members voted for Obama. Particularly after the 2000 and 2004 elections, when the Republicans’ “ground operation” outdid the Democrats’, and eight years of relentless anti-worker action by the Bush regime, labor went all-out to elect Democrats this year. Unions were major financial contributors to Democratic candidates, pouring almost half a billion dollars into their campaign war chests, and providing millions of man and woman hours in phone banks, campaigning door-to-door and other volunteer activities. Contingents from both the AFL-CIO and Change to Win labor federations marched in the Inaugural Parade. “Happy days are here again for the labor movement in the United States,” wrote the *Christian Science Monitor* (2 February) summing up the views of labor officialdom.

The union tops are banking heavily that Obama will provide concrete support to labor. They were ecstatic when the new president invited labor leaders to a ceremony signing three executive orders that undid Bush administration policies favoring employers. Vice-president Joe Biden greeted them with the words, “Welcome back to the White House.” Obama declared, “I do not view the labor movement as part of the problem, to me it’s part of the solution.” This welcome and verbal endorsement alone was enough to ensure years of support from the bureau-

crats, who above all seek to sell their services to the ruling class in return for some “clout” with the government. They were full of praise over Obama’s selection of Democratic Rep. Hilda Solis as his new Labor Secretary. And they applauded his signing of the Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Restoration Act overturning a time limit on suits against discrimination imposed by the Supreme Court. As they dream of a “new New Deal” under Obama, many would like to revive a slogan from the 1930s, “The president wants you to join a union.”

In fact, the incoming administration let it be known last month that it wanted the AFL-CIO and Change to Win to merge into a single national labor federation. The leaders of the 12 largest unions in the U.S. dutifully met in Washington to call for reuniting the labor movement: “The union presidents issued their joint call after the transition team for President-elect Barack Obama signaled that it would prefer dealing with a united movement, rather than a fractured one that often had two competing voices” (*New York Times*, 8 January). The meeting was arranged by former Democratic Congressman David Bonior. We did not support either side in the 2005 split among the labor tops, nor do we expect anything positive from them reuniting at the behest of the capitalist government. Rather, what we’re liable to get is more protectionist measures, like the “Buy American” provision for structural steel and iron in infrastructure projects under the economic stimulus act. Instead of international workers solidarity, United Steelworkers (USW) president Leo Gerard vituperated against imports from China. “It’s time for economic patriots to stand up in our country,” said Gerard, who is Canadian.

United Auto Workers (UAW) leaders have been pushing Obama for the auto “bailout,” under which huge sums – currently \$39 billion and climbing – are to be funneled to General Motors and Chrysler to keep these two American industrial giants afloat. Yet these billions are to be given to the employers, not the workers, and will involve huge “givebacks” by the unions. The companies are demanding that they be allowed to substitute their (presently near worthless) stock for billions of dollars they are obligated to pay to health care trusts the finance health and retirement benefits of UAW members. Already UAW president Ron Gettelfinger has agreed to give up the “job bank” which supplemented unemployment benefits for laid-off auto workers. The bosses also want the union to agree to lower labor costs to the level of foreign-owned auto plants in the U.S. (Gettelfinger already agreed in 2007 to cut wages for new hires to \$14.50 an hour, half the level of current employees). Some 50,000 auto workers’ jobs are to be eliminated under this “rescue” plan, which also turned out to have an unpublicized *no-strike clause*. But what do the UAW bureaucrats care, they have no intention of striking to defend their members.

The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) led by Andrew Stern has been a long-time supporter of Obama in Illinois, and endorsed him for president in early February 2008, long before the AFL-CIO, many of whose affiliates initially supported Hillary Clinton. Stern brags that the union spent \$82 million electing Democrats in 2008. The SEIU’s

preference for Obama is not accidental, since Stern’s calling card is “partnership” between unions, employers and the government. The SEIU chief posed as a “reformer” and has put resources into union organizing campaigns while the hidebound AFL-CIO chiefs prefer to spend their time hobnobbing with Democratic politicians on Capitol Hill. But Stern has also formed alliances with such virulent labor haters as Wal-Mart (over health care) and the colonial government of Puerto Rico (against the militant FMPR teachers union). Stern runs the SEIU as his personal fiefdom, and has gone to the capitalist state to oust dissidents in the union, recently against California health care workers. He is also a virulent defender of the present bankrupt economic system, saying “I totally believe that America should be focused on capitalism and competition” (CNN, 31 January).

Above all, labor officialdom is pinning its hopes on Congress passing and Obama signing into law the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA). Under this bill (H.R. 800), unions would be recognized on the basis of a “card check” if at least 50 percent of the employees in a company or location sign cards affiliating to a union as their representative. The union tops hope that this would turn around decades of declining membership. They figure a card check would make organizing a lot easier since they wouldn’t have to go through a stacked union “election” under the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). At present, employers brazenly intimidate employees, threatening to close the workplace, barring union organizers from the plant and firing union sympathizers with abandon. The NLRB, deeply hostile to unions, seldom reinstates workers in their jobs, and it routinely takes years for cases to be decided. But while a card check may aid union organizing, the EFCA still asserts the government’s right to certify union representation. Or not. In addition, it includes a provision for *compulsory arbitration* of an initial two-year contract if the employer and union cannot reach an agreement.

Liberals and reformist leftists who pursue the illusion of making the capitalist system more “worker-friendly,” are universally in favor of the EFCA. How effective it would be in increasing union membership in the face of an employer class that has made union-busting into a \$4 billion industry is another matter. Canada has a card check law and only 17 percent of the private sector workforce is unionized (as opposed to 7.5 percent in the U.S.). But we have a more fundamental difference. *Marxists oppose all interference by the capitalist government in union affairs*, and warn that the EFCA can be used to hamstring militant action by labor. We’re for getting rid of all obstacles to unionization, such as the requirement for stacked NLRB elections. We participate in union mobilizations in opposition to the employer offensive against the “card check” bill. But rather than calling to support the EFCA, we fight for full freedom of workers to organize and for total independence of the unions from state control. As Leon Trotsky wrote in his 1940 essay, “Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay”: “The primary slogan for this struggle is: *complete and unconditional independence of the trade unions in relation to the capitalist state.*” ■

The “Obama Socialists”

In different ways, most of the left in the United States fell into line behind the candidacy of Barack Obama. That required some interesting political contortions, since every one of them knew perfectly well what Obama was about: that he was not an antiwar candidate, no leftist by any stretch of the imagination but a “center-right” bourgeois politician in the Clinton mould, who was and is an admirer of Ronald Reagan. Perhaps the most shameless were the ex-New Leftists from Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), including Tom Hayden, Todd Gitlin, Mike Klonsky, Carl Davidson, Bernadine Dohrn and the now notorious Bill Ayres. Hayden and Gitlin were on the right wing of SDS back when it called to go “part of the way with LBJ” (Lyndon B. Johnson) in the 1964 elections; Klonsky and Davidson led the little-red-book-waving Maoist “Revolutionary Youth Movement II,” while Dohrn and Ayres were leaders of the idiot adventurist, anti-working-class Weatherman faction. Having gone through a transmogrification from ’60s radicals to 21st century mainstream Democrats, their mantra is that Obama “needs a transformational movement to be a transformational president,” as Hayden put it (“Dreams of Obama,” *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, 20 August 2008).

Unlike some of the New Leftovers, the garden variety liberals around *The Nation* and the Democratic (Party) Socialists of America (DSA), along with their closely associated Progressive Democrats of America, haven’t really changed in decades. A bunch of these “progressive” luminaries issued an “Open Letter to Barack Obama” (*Nation*, 18 August 2008), including Barbara Ehrenreich, Katha Pollitt, Marcus Raskin, Norman Solomon, Gore Vidal. They “recognize that compromise is necessary in any democracy” and “understand that the pressures brought to bear” on him are “intense,” but worry about “troubling signs that you are moving away from the core commitments ... toward a more cautious and centrist stance.” So they want to hold Obama to various stands he has taken, including “withdrawal from Iraq on a fixed timetable,” “a response to the current economic crisis that reduces the gap between the rich and the rest of us,” “universal healthcare,” etc. (Nothing about Afghanistan, of course.) If he doesn’t come through, they will wring their hands in lament.

The ultra-reformist Communist Party U.S.A. of course supported Barack Obama, as they did John Kerry, Al Gore, Bill Clinton and almost every Democratic presidential candidate since it embraced the program of the “popular front” and came out for Franklin Delano Roosevelt in the 1936 election. (The exception was its brief fling with the “Progressive Party” of FDR’s former vice president Henry Wallace in 1948 and ’52.) No surprise there. Along with John McCain and the entire ruling class, the CPUSA declared the election of Obama “historic.” It added that this “people’s victory” spelled “the dawn of a new era,” comparing Obama to “another tall, lanky, transformative figure from Illinois: Abraham Lincoln” and arguing that “it was a transformative election representing the end of extreme rightwing Republican rule and the beginning of a new demo-



cratic upsurge which could move our country in a progressive direction.” “The best thing the coalition that won this victory can do,” editorialized the *People’s Weekly World* (8 November 2008), “is to stick together and help the new administration carry through on its promises.”

Among the professional opportunists of the not so “far left,” the name of the game was to identify as closely as possible with the masses who voted for Obama while coyly avoiding a direct call to elect him. The important *social change* registered in the election of a black president in this deeply racist country is labeled “historic” and “transformational” in order to attract some of his supporters by flattering them rather than telling the fundamental truth: that Barack Obama is the leader of the Democratic Party; that he will rule in the interests of capital that he is the new commander of U.S. imperialism, who presides over a system of racism, war and poverty for the millions; that it will take a *socialist revolution* to change that system; and that is why we must build a *revolutionary workers party* to lead that struggle, which won’t be decided in bourgeois elections and on TV but in the streets, in the factories, in the barrios and ghettos, and internationally.

Various reformist groups take a different tack. Thus *Workers World* (13 November 2008) proclaimed, “Millions in streets seal Obama victory.” The article began: “It was truly a great day in Harlem.” After paragraphs of celebratory verbiage, only after the second jump of the article does the reader find out that “The Democratic Party is a party of the capitalist imperialist system, and Obama is now its main spokesperson.” Even so, “Such an outpouring of the masses, particularly oppressed people of color, warrants the full solidarity of the movement.” This is par for the course for the Workers World Party (WWP), followers of the late Sam Marcy, which in the 1980s was plugging black Democrat Jesse Jackson for president. A November 15 WWP conference in NYC originally billed as “Capitalism Must Go!” was retitled “The New Situation in the U.S. and the World” in the light of “the historic election” of black Democrat Obama as president. The WWP’s particular shtick is to call on the capitalist government to “Bail Out People, Not the Banks!”



Their fellow Marcyites of the Party of Socialism and Liberation (PSL), which split from the WWP in 2004, ran their own candidates, but not as a hard opposition to the bourgeois parties. On the contrary, they declared “Our campaign has absolutely no quarrel” with those campaigning for “a Black president – regardless of his politics” (see “Socialists in Bourgeois Electionland,” page 24 of this issue). Following the election of Obama (“an occasion of historic significance”) they wrote: “What is needed is a clear program focused on what the new administration should do to meet the needs of the working people; to fulfill the expectations its campaign has created” (*Liberation*, 21 November 2008) The PSL then lists a series of points – declare a housing emergency, no layoffs, extend unemployment benefits, health care for all, pass the EFCA, end the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan – none of which challenge capitalist rule, and concludes: “It will be the failure of the new administration to carry through this program that will expose it before the eyes of the people as another agent of the capitalist system.” This is the method common to many reformists: rather than opposing Obama outright, they present a list of pious wishes and proposals for action by the capitalist government, calculating that if it doesn’t fulfill them, people will become radicalized. More likely they will become demoralized liberals.

A gaggle of pseudo-Trotskyist social democrats (Socialist Alternative, Socialist Organizer) present variants of this program, but without doubt the past master in this brand of opportunism is the Internationalist Socialist Organization (ISO), which has developed acting as a pressure group on Democratic Party liberalism into a patented methodology. Here’s the formula: to come up with the ISO line on any particular issue, start with the liberal position, then (a) take one or two steps to the left; or alternatively, (b) take the same position, repeat the same slogans, but add some “socialist” rhetoric; or, best of all, (c) formulate a leading question: Will Obama bring change? Is Afghanistan the “good war”? Should we invade Iraq? (We kid you not – the last two were titles of forums by the ISO-led Campus Antiwar Network.) Thus the pre-election issue (September-October 2008) of the ISO’s *Internationalist Socialist Review* featured a sympathetic photo of

Obama with the headline, “Politics of change, or Politics as usual” (see the inside pages for any critical remarks).

The ISO web site was filled with gushing coverage of Obama’s victory. A column on “Election Day in Harlem” by Brian Jones reported on an election party, “I felt like a tiny ship, tossed back and forth on a frothy sea of human emotion and pride in the historic election of the first African American president of the U.S. Raw joy was dominant, but there was also relief, pride, shock and wonder.” He concluded: “Huge numbers of people are energized by the fact that, yes, we can elect a Black president. What we get from this president depends mostly on what happens to this energy, and less on the president himself.” Well, actually, no. A *Socialist Worker* (7 November 2008) editorial on “The New Shape of American Politics” takes the same tack, asking:

“What economic policies will Obama pursue as the worst financial crisis since the 1930s drives the world deep into recession? Will the man who made his mark as an opponent of the Iraq war make good on his promise to pull out U.S. troops? Will there be the kind of fundamental change that his supporters so clearly want?...

“Will Obama call a halt to this colossal rip-off and fashion an economic program that puts the interests of working people in its center? ... Will there be an economic stimulus program that creates secure, long-term jobs?”

Will the ISO say that Obama is a capitalist politician who *must* act to defend the ruling class of U.S. imperialism? Don’t hold your breath waiting. Instead, *SW* editorializes:

continued on page 51



“Yes, we can elect a black president,” crows the ISO, donning the mask of militant Obamaism. See inside pages for any mealy mouthed criticisms.

What "Post-Racial" America?

Barack Obama vs. Black Liberation

The election of Barack Obama as president of the United States was widely hailed as the culmination of the Civil Rights movement. On election night in Harlem, New York's first (and so far only) black mayor, David Dinkins, declared, "We're all drinking out of the same fountain now," as if segregation were a thing of the past. But racist discrimination and oppression are woven into the fabric of American capitalism. Black equality is a dream that is far from being realized while schools around the country are as racially segregated as ever – and in New York City, more so. Racist police brutality is ever-present: witness the New Year's cop execution of Oscar Grant in a rapid transit station in Oakland, California before scores of witnesses. Obama's campaign was based on the illusion that the United States had moved "beyond race." In his inaugural address, he never mentioned race, integration, civil rights, Abraham Lincoln or Martin Luther King. The day before, January 19, was MLK Day, a holiday that was bitterly opposed by racists. Yet the president-elect ostentatiously did nothing that recalled the struggle for civil rights, instead highlighting "service" and support for the military.

Although Washington, D.C. has had a black majority for decades (part of the reason it has no votes in Congress), the center of power stretching from Capitol Hill to the White House and State Department is the preserve of white politicians and their retinues. On January 20, however, hundreds of thousands of black people flooded into the area, joining with whites in celebrating Obama's swearing-in as president. Veterans of the Civil Rights movement and black teenagers shared a feeling of pride and accomplishment. Many felt the last color bar had been broken. Older Washingtonians recalled the separate drinking fountains and lavatories, the "whites only" swimming pools, the segregated schools – and now there's a black president in the White House. Along with all the Obama kitsch, there were ubiquitous photos of the First Family to be hung in homes around the country. But what was jarring was how the ruling class used the occasion to claim that this proves that racism in the United States has been overcome. Don't believe it. It goes far deeper than legal discrimination – *racial oppression is inscribed in the DNA of American capitalism*. It will take a revolution to do away with this scourge.



Lydia Bullock/Flickr

Ruling class used flag-waving inaugural for new imperialist chief Obama to claim that racism has been overcome in U.S. But racial oppression is in DNA of American capitalism.



Pablo Martínez Monsiváis/AP

Barack Obama, the new commander in chief of U.S. imperialism.

For Black Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!

Internationalist photo

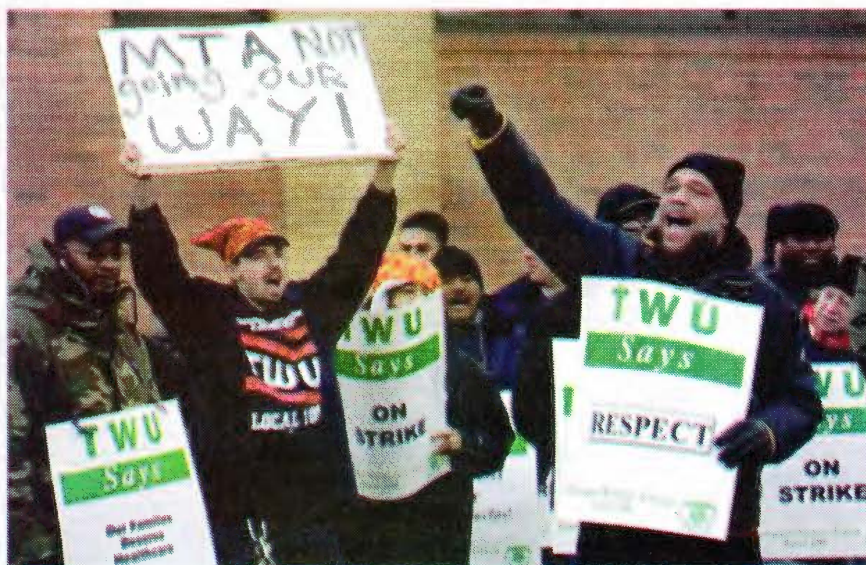


Internationalist Group joined hundreds in April 2008 protesting against court verdict letting killer cops who gunned down Sean Bell go free. Yellow sign lists some of many victims of racist police terror in New York City. Angry demonstrators chanted, “We are all Sean Bell, NYPD go to hell.” Obama lectured youth, “we are a nation of laws, so we respect the verdict that came down.” With that mentality there never would have been a Civil Rights Movement.

The election of Barack Obama was proclaimed “historic” and even “transformative” by virtually the entire American political spectrum, suggesting that it would fundamentally alter the shape of U.S. politics. Liberals and conservatives, as well as self-proclaimed socialists and outright reactionaries sang from the same hymnal. The *Wall Street Journal* (5 November 2008) headlined: “Obama Sweeps to Historic Victory; Nation Elects Its First African-American President Amid Record Turnout.” John McCain, the defeated Republican, chimed in: “This is a historic election, and I recognize the significance it has for African-Americans and for the special pride that must be theirs tonight,” he said, adding that “we have come a long way from the injustices that once stained our nation’s reputation.” There were only scattered boos from unreconstructed racists in the crowd. The same tone of self-congratulation marked the inauguration. Yet the injustices are not only a matter of past history. The white racist vote was strong as ever in its redoubts, and there were a number of racist threats and attacks during and after the election, which were largely hushed up by the media.

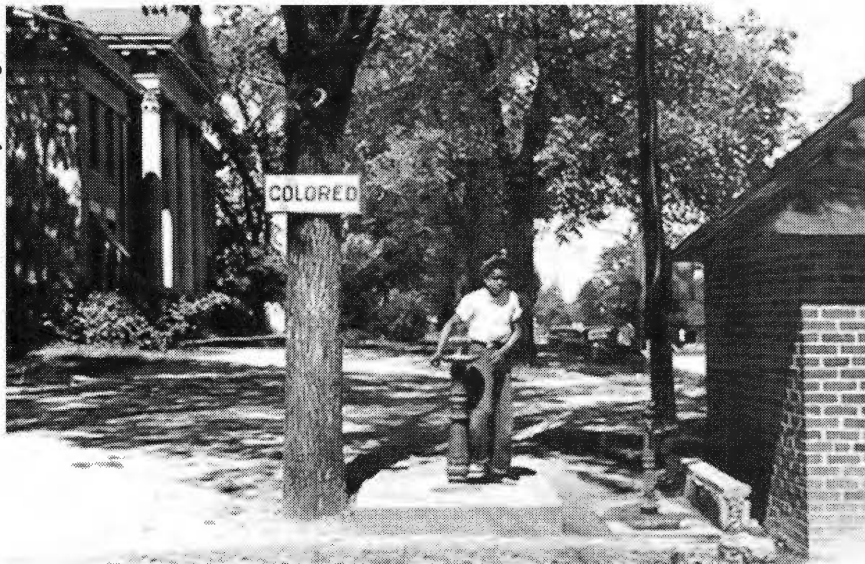
There were blatant appeals to racism both in the primary and general elections. Hillary Clinton’s appeal for votes on the grounds that “Senator Obama’s support among working, hard-working Americans, white Americans, is weakening,” was unmistakable. At rallies of the Republican McCain/Palin ticket, Obama was called Arab, Muslim, traitor, terrorist, friend of terrorists, not a real American or more generally, “not one of us.” In the coded language of racism, when speakers labeled him “elitist,” they were saying “uppity.” In the weeks before the presidential vote, many blacks worried that their votes would not be counted. Ultimately, Obama got a higher percentage of white votes nationally than either of the previous two Democratic candidates (John Kerry and Al Gore), but the Democrats have not won a majority among whites since Lyndon Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act in 1965. The Republicans picked up the Dixiecrats with Nixon’s “Southern strategy.” And while Obama took North Carolina and Virginia, the Bible Belt, that hard core of Southern white racism, went *more* heavily Republican than in 2004. In Mississippi and Alabama, 88 percent of whites voted Republican.

Then there were the racist attacks and threats. The one case that was widely reported was that of two young Nazi skinheads in Tennessee who were arrested by federal agents a week before the election. They had plans for a killing spree to single out black school children, “killing 88 people and beheading 14 African-Americans” before assassinating Obama, according to the feds’ affidavit. Following the election, authorities said Obama received more threats than any other president-elect. The Southern Poverty Law Center reported “hundreds” of racist incidents. There were graffiti at North Carolina State University calling to “shoot that ... in the head,” elementary students on a school bus in Idaho chanting “assassinate Obama,” swastikas, racial slurs and “Go back to Africa” spray-painted on sidewalks, houses and cars in the Los Angeles area, crosses burned in yards of Obama support-



Jason DeCrow/AP

Black workers power: Blacks are an integral and strategic part of the multiethnic working class. Transit workers struck in December 2005, tying up New York City, center of international finance capital.



Segregated drinking fountain outside county courthouse, Halifax, North Carolina, 1938.

ers in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. In Maine a general store held an “Osama Obama Shotgun Pool” where customers could bet a dollar on the date he would be killed, saying “stabbing, shooting, roadside bombs, they all count,” and adding: “Let’s hope someone wins” (AP dispatch, 16 November 2008).

These incidents didn’t just take place in Southern backwaters or rural areas where “white power” fascists prowl. In the town of Mastic on Long Island, New York, two dozen cars were sprayed with messages against the president-elect, including “Kill Obama.” On the day before the election, Ku Klux Klan literature was distributed in neighborhoods in Islip, L.I. And in nearby Patchogue, three days after the election, Marcelo Lucero, an Ecuadorian immigrant, was murdered by a lynch mob. Moreover, on Staten Island in New York City, on election night a racist gang went cruising through a black neighborhood, using a pipe and police baton to beat a black man, send a black teenager to a hospital, threaten a Hispanic man and a group of blacks celebrating Obama’s victory, and ram a white man with their car thinking he was black. This was silenced in the major media until two months later, when the police made arrests in the case. The brutal fact is that virulent racism is present all over the United States. The issue is: what will it take to put an end to it?

Black struggle in the 1950s and early ‘60s focused on demands for legal rights, and then led to upheavals in the northern ghettos where the black poor were just as oppressed as they were before the Civil Rights movement. Racist police brutality was rampant, black struggles for school integration and open housing were met with mob violence. In Chicago, where outright fascists mounted violent attacks on a 1966 march led by Martin Luther King against segregation in Cicero, it was axiomatic that “urban renewal means Negro removal.” Today, “school reform,” designed by leading Chicago corporations and administered by Obama’s education sec-

retary Arne Duncan, goes hand-in-hand with “gentrification” as whites move into formerly black neighborhoods. In New York, police murder African immigrant Amadou Diallo in a hail of 41 shots in 1999; in 2006, a young black man, Sean Bell, is cut down by 50 NYPD bullets. In both cases, the killer cops walk. Now Obama tells blacks they must “respect” the verdict of the racist, capitalist court. Is this “change we can believe in”? Hardly. A “post-racial” America? No way.

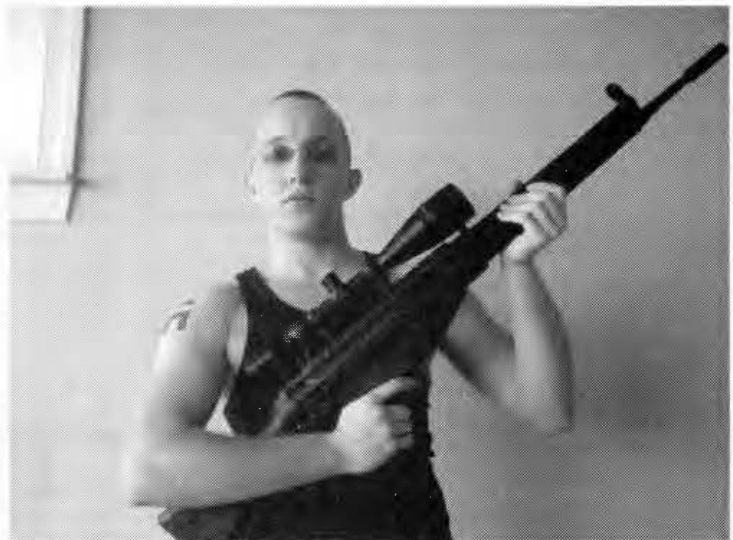
Obama’s “Color-Blind” Campaign Conciliates Racists

The message of Obama and the Democratic Party political operatives who shaped his election campaign was to ignore wherever possible and downplay the issue of race, and above all to stay away from any mention of *struggle* against racism. Hillary

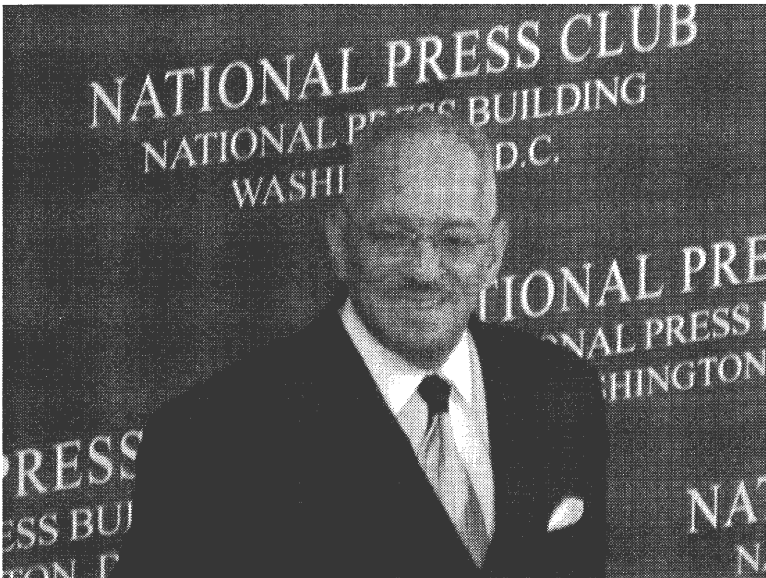
Clinton and the Republicans latched onto statements by Obama’s pastor, Rev. Jeremiah Wright, whose cardinal sin was to say that the U.S. itself practiced and supported terrorism. In a sermon after the 11 September 2001 attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, Wright told his congregation:

“We bombed Hiroshima, we bombed Nagasaki, and we nuked far more than the thousands in New York and the Pentagon, and we never batted an eye.... We have supported state terrorism against the Palestinians and black South Africans, and now we are indignant because the stuff we have done overseas is now brought right back to our own front yards. America’s chickens are coming home to roost.”

What Rev. Wright said is the plain truth, and his “chickens coming home to roost” is exactly what Malcolm X said about the John F. Kennedy assassination. (Not long after, Malcolm himself was assassinated.) But under fire from the



Nazi skinhead arrested in Tennessee last October in plot to assassinate Barack Obama and kill black school children.



Obama repudiated Rev. Jeremiah Wright for telling it like it is. Speaking here at National Press Club, 28 April 2008.

racists, Barack Obama denounced his former pastor, calling his remarks “divisive,” in a March 18 speech in Philadelphia on the issue of race that was widely hailed in the bourgeois media. Obama’s appeal for “reconciliation over rancor,” as one commentator put it, in fact conciliated the racists.

The Democratic candidate said that Rev. Wright’s statements “expressed a profoundly distorted view of this country – a view that sees white racism as endemic, and that elevates what is wrong with America above all that we know is right with America; a view that sees the conflicts in the Middle East as rooted primarily in the actions of stalwart allies like Israel, instead of emanating from the perverse and hateful ideologies of radical Islam.” Obama’s statement here was nothing less than a loyalty oath to U.S. imperialism and support for its wars to terrorize the world into submission. He also showed “understanding” for the racist fears of whites “when they are told to bus their children to a school across town; when they hear that an African American is getting an advantage in landing a good job or a spot in a good college because of an injustice that they themselves never committed; when they’re told that their fears about crime in urban neighborhoods are somehow prejudiced....” But white opposition to school integration through busing, to affirmative action in response to centuries of exclusion, and white hysteria over “urban crime” are in fact *expressions of deep-rooted prejudice that must be rooted out.*

The fact that Obama would not touch issues of racial oppression with a ten-foot pole did not go unnoticed by blacks or whites. It goes so far that he is reticent to even pronounce Martin Luther King’s name on a national stage (some hoped for a mention in the inaugural address, but were disappointed). Clearly, he and his political advisors have made a decision to stay away from any hint of black struggle in order to raise the “comfort level” with white voters. Obama explains this by saying he “stands on the shoulders” of those who marched for civil rights, whom he and others have taken to calling the

“Moses generation,” that stood up to the Pharaoh and led their people out of bondage. Now, they say, the torch has passed to the “Joshua generation” who will lead their people into the promised land. Having supposedly arrived there, blacks are being told to be patient. Popular radio and TV talk-show host Michael Baisden has been telling his listeners to rein in their wish lists. Allison Samuels wrote in *Newsweek* (2 February):

“Now that President Obama is a reality, we have to confront a whole new kind of calculus.... Obama faces two international wars and the deepest economic crisis since the Great Depression, with job losses that soar by the week. With desperation, Americans of all races and backgrounds are counting on him to solve their problems. Depending on our expectations, African-Americans may be in for a stinging reality check.

“Though Obama never promised us anything specific, we just assumed that because he’s African-American, he will put our interests near the top of his agenda.... We all understand that Obama can’t change the world in the first day—or even the first 100. We can be patient.”

Yet patience will not bring freedom any closer, not for black people nor any other sector of the oppressed. Frederick Douglas’ saying still holds true today, “Power concedes nothing without demand. It never has and it never will.” Gains won through struggle can also be taken back so long as social, economic and political power remains in the hands of capital. Moreover, the democratic rights won by the Civil Rights movement never addressed the situation of black people in the Northern ghettos, whose oppression is rooted not in legal discrimination but in the capitalist economy, where they have historically been “last hired and first fired,” where housing discrimination was through “red-lining” by real estate interests, where school segregation was based on residence not legal prohibitions. “Racial profiling” and racist police brutality against blacks has not changed a bit even though over the last three decades there have been black mayors of just about every large city in the U.S. and there are tens of thousands of black and Latino cops. It is the *system* that produces black oppression, not the personnel.

Beginning in the late 1960s, there has been a considerable increase in the number of black elected officials: from under 1,500 in 1970, it grew to over 9,500 in 2006, with 40 members of Congress. But installing black officials won’t change the racist nature of American capitalism, any more than having Colin Powell as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff or Powell and then Condoleezza Rice as secretary of state under Bush made the U.S. any less imperialist. As Mumia Abu-Jamal, the former Black Panther and renowned radical journalist on Pennsylvania’s death row for the last quarter century, noted (“The Perils of Black Political Power,” 16 August 2008), when black Democrat Carl Stokes was elected mayor of Cleveland in 1967, one of his first acts was to hire black general Benjamin O. Davis, just back from Vietnam, as director of public safety. Davis ordered 30,000 dum-dum (hollow point) bullets and cracked down on the Black Panther

Party. Mumia's conclusion: "Black faces in high places does not freedom make."

In fact, black mayors have often been brought in just when the rulers decided to impose anti-working class austerity measures on the poor, black and working-class population. When David Dinkins was running for NYC mayor in the fall of 1989, he told his big money backers, "it may well be that I'll have to tell some of my friends they cannot have all the things they want. But they'll take it from me." A year later he ordered \$1 billion in cutbacks in city services and threatened up to 15,000 layoffs. Today a big factor contributing to Obama's victory was the economic and financial crisis. Many workers (even "Rednecks for Obama") voted for the Democrat because they figured he would better defend their pocketbook. The crisis especially affects black workers, whose official unemployment rate is almost double that of whites (12.6 percent compared to 6.9 percent in January). In particular, some 20,000 black auto workers have lost their jobs since the beginning of the crisis, a 14 percent fall in black employment in the industry, more than three times the overall decline for manufacturing workers (*New York Times*, 30 December 2008). And Obama is the one who will tell them they'll just have to take it.

Ruling Class Substitutes "Diversity" for Equality

In a country built on the myth that "any child can grow up to be president," Barack Obama's election is seen as an example of individual achievement. He is being promoted as a role model for black youth, to encourage teenagers that it's "cool" to study hard – you can still shoot hoops. There is even an academic study purporting to show an "Obama effect" among black students taking standardized tests, with scores going up after his nomination and election victory. But for all his personal qualities, the future president did not go from Hawaii's most exclusive college preparatory school to Occidental College, Columbia University and Harvard Law School on the basis of diligence and intelligence alone. Nor are decisions about who gets access to the elite private educational institutions of U.S. capitalism made by some lowly admissions officer sitting in a cubicle looking over test scores. Although political competition sometimes results in a real dud at the helm of the imperialist ship of state, the more farsighted sections of the ruling class take care in selecting and grooming their future leaders.

The commanders-in-chief of U.S. imperialism are also supplied with a governing apparatus. True, Richard Nixon convincingly pretended to be a madman, Ronald Reagan notoriously fell asleep during cabinet meetings and George W. Bush seemed unable to utter a sentence without mangling the language. Yet their administrations carried out their reactionary programs fairly efficiently. The failed military adventures, torture, scandals (Watergate, Iran-contra, "WMD")



New York City

NYC Mayor David Dinkins ("they'll take it from me"), left, with Gen. Colin Powell at Yankee Stadium, 15 April 1991, shortly after Persian Gulf War.

and economic disaster were not due to *incompetence* but the result of *policy* and the capitalist *system*. So after eight years of Bush, the American ruling class was ready to turn to the Democrats, who pride themselves on being the "responsible" administrators of U.S. imperialism, as opposed to the Republican "cowboys." After Obama grabbed attention with his speech at the 2004 Democratic convention, some key Democratic money men placed their bets on him in the fall of 2007 and Wall Street firms financed a well-oiled campaign machine. Once elected, the president was provided with a "team" to run the government which – surprise! – turns out to be the same as the previous Clinton administrations, plus some holdovers from the Bush regime.

Having a black president does not represent black power, or even "empowerment," in Jesse Jackson's ambiguous phrase. Obama in the White House, built by slave labor, will not overcome the legacy of slavery and bring about the "promise" of racial equality. Instead, in the 1970s, in response to the unrest in the northern ghettos, the ruling class embarked on a conscious policy of diverting black anger by promoting a privileged layer of black petty-bourgeois, and recruiting particular individuals from this pool into the bourgeoisie itself. By 2001, you had a number of black CEOs at the head of Fortune 500 companies (Stanley O'Neal at Merrill Lynch, Richard Parsons at Time Warner, Franklin Raines at Fannie Mae, Kenneth Chenault at American Express). But having a more diverse selection of capitalist "decision makers," also including a few women, in no way indicates a move toward social equality. The opposite is the case: relative incomes of black families have *fallen* over the last three decades, from 64 percent of whites' in 1974 to only 58 percent in 2004. The gap in wealth is considerably wider. "Diversity" is being promoted as an *alternative* to equality, *which capitalism cannot provide*.

Developments since the end of the Civil Rights movement have made certain changes in the condition of black America. Sections of the black middle class have moved out of the ghettos and into the suburbs. There are more opportunities and often higher incomes for black university graduates. There was a surge of black home ownership in the late 1990s. Yet the workings of capitalism constantly reproduce black inequality, as we are now seeing. Unemployment in inner city neighborhoods remains at Depression levels. The numbers of black men in college have been sharply falling, foreclosures disproportionately affect middle-class black families, while layoffs are hitting black industrial workers particularly hard. *Black people in capitalist America are still today a race-color caste segregated at the bottom of U.S. capitalist society.*

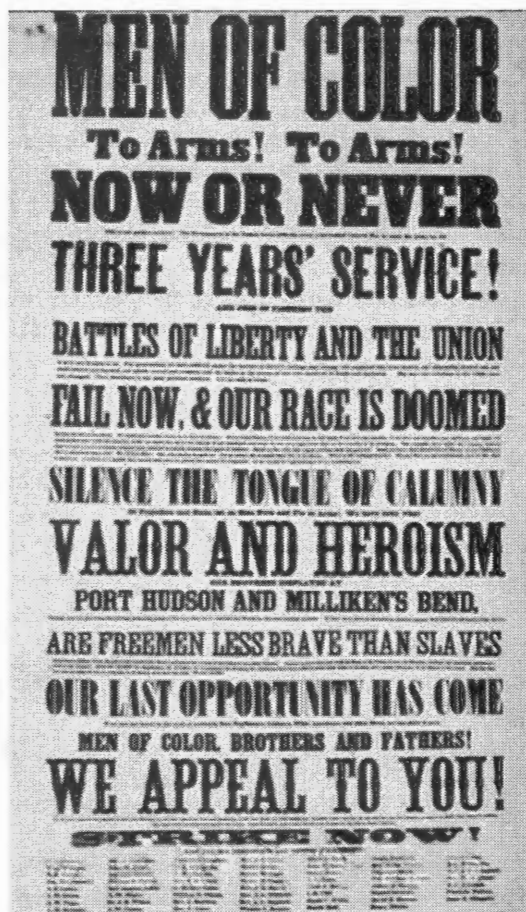
At the same time black workers are an integral and strategic part of a multiethnic proletariat. While the rulers conspire to keep black and white divided, the experience of class struggle can unite black workers with their white, Latino and Asian brothers and sisters, immigrant and U.S.-born, against their common capitalist enemy. And although legal equality is a bourgeois-democratic demand – a watchword of the French Revolution of 1789, which proclaimed “freedom, equality, fraternity” – *genuine freedom and actual social, economic and political equality for blacks in America, whose oppression has always been central to the preservation of the capitalist order, can only come about through a socialist revolution.*

Lessons of the Second American Revolution

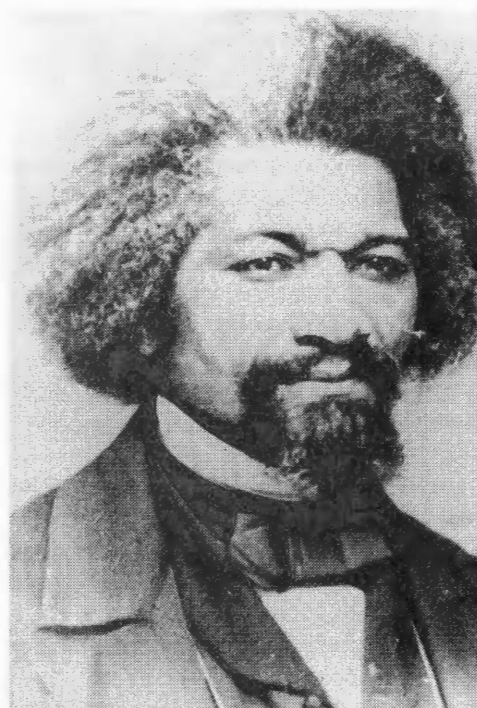
To understand why this is so, one need only consider the outcome and legacy of the first two American revolutions. The first, the War for Independence from Great Britain, was solely a political revolution to throw off colonial rule. Although the Declaration of Independence had ringing proclamations of democratic ideals, such as “all men are created equal,” the practice was far different. The Constitution was based on compromise between Southern planters and Northern merchants, manufacturers and bankers in order to preserve the interests of capitalist property and ward off the threat of social revolution. Voting was limited to men of property and human bondage was enshrined by counting three-fifths of the slave population in calculating representation in Congress. The Atlantic slave trade was legally permitted for 20 years (and continued unabated right up to the Civil War). But while plantation agriculture flourished (the number of slaves increased from 700,000 to 4 million) and the slaveholders dominated national politics, slavery increasingly divided the country. The Haitian Revolution inspired slave revolts – notably those led by Gabriel Prosser (1800), Denmark Vesey (1822) and Nat Turner (1831). The 1845 annexation of Texas and 1848 war on Mexico were fueled by a drive to extend the number of slave states, and Abolitionist agitation and border wars led to political polarization.

In 1858, Abraham Lincoln declared, “I believe this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free.” The future Republican president made clear his intention was not to abolish slavery, only to limit its extension. However, immediately after Lincoln’s 1860 election the South began preparing secession. When fighting broke out, some Northern and British capitalists treated it as simply a war over tariffs. But the Southern planters were determined to defend the fount of their wealth, and the Confederate Constitution explicitly endorsed slavery. After the April 1861 attack on Fort Sumter, South Carolina ended efforts at compromise, Frederick Douglass, the former slave and great Abolitionist, observed:

“The American people and the Government in Washington may refuse to recognize it for a time, but the ‘inexorable logic of events’ will force it



Recruiting poster calling on blacks to join the Union Army in the Civil War. Appeal was signed by Frederick Douglass.



Frederick Douglass

upon them in the end: that the war now being waged in this land is a war for and against slavery; and that it can never be effectively put down till one or the other of these vital forces is completely destroyed."

—*Douglass' Monthly*, May 1861, cited in James M. McPherson, *The Negro's Civil War* (1965)

Across the sea in London, Karl Marx arrived at the same conclusion. In November 1861, the founder of modern communism wrote:

"The present struggle between the South and North is, therefore, nothing but a struggle between two social systems, the system of slavery and the system of free labour. The struggle has broken out because the two systems can no longer live peacefully side by side on the North American continent. It can only be ended by the victory of one system or the other."


Today some self-proclaimed Marxists who refuse to understand that the struggle against black oppression is key to workers revolution in the U.S. say they wouldn't take sides in the Civil War, dismissing it as a squabble between two sets of bosses (see box, page 21). Not surprisingly, using the same rationale they also refuse to defend Iraq and Afghanistan against U.S. imperialist attack. Yet a century and a half ago, Marx, Douglass and hundreds of thousands of free blacks and slaves could see further. Black men rushed to enlist in the Union Army, understanding that its victory by the force of their arms was the only guarantee of emancipation from the bonds of servitude.

The destruction of slavery in the Civil War, in which some 180,000 black men fought in the Union Army and 40,000 died, constituted the Second American Revolution. It ushered in the only really democratic chapter of American history: Reconstruction. It brought legal freedom for 4 million slaves, decreed in the Emancipation Proclamation and codified in the 13th Amendment to the Constitution. It extended citizenship to all born in the United States — except Native Americans and women! — in the 14th Amendment, and outlawed discrimination in voting rights on the basis of race or color in the 15th Amendment. Despite resistance, not only from the defeated Southern planters but also from "moderate" capitalist politicians from the victorious North and border states (including Lincoln's successor Andrew Johnson), Reconstruction governments in the militarily occupied South for the first time brought black men to political office. Over 600 blacks served as state legislators, as well as 15 U.S. Representatives and two black Senators. Prior to the Civil War education for slaves was a crime, during Reconstruction networks of public schools for blacks arose across the South, although segregated.

Conditions were laid for a deeper social transformation: the first halting steps toward racial equality were made and workers began building labor unions in the fight for the eight-hour day. But from the beginning this was undercut and ultimately reversed by the failure to provide the freedmen and women with economic conditions that would enable them to exercise their formal democratic rights. The former slaves did not receive "40 acres and a mule" General William Sherman promised in his famous Field Order No. 15 to the

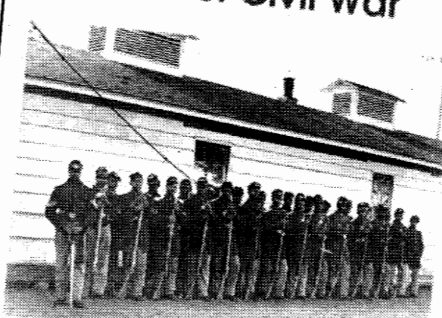
tens of thousands of black refugees who joined his army as it marched across Georgia to Savannah. President Andrew Johnson revoked Sherman's order and ordered confiscated lands returned to their former owners. Lacking capital and land, blacks found themselves forced by economic necessity back onto the plantation to which they were bound by the sharecropping system. From chattel slaves they had become landless peasants and tenant farmers. Almost immediately, the remnants of the Confederate Army began terrorizing blacks through the hooded nightriders of the Ku Klux Klan, seeking to intimidate the former slaves from exercising their newly won and tenuous rights.

But meanwhile, black workers had begun to organize. In 1865, there were an estimated 100,000 black mechanics in the South. In 1867 there was a wave of strikes, including on the levee in Mobile, Alabama and on the docks in Charleston, South Carolina where the Longshoremen's Protective Union Association won higher wages. William Sylvius, head of the National Labor Union founded in 1866, reported from the former Confederacy that he was convinced that "a vigorous campaign will unite the whole laboring population of the South, white and black, upon our platform," and "we will have a power in this part of the country that will shake Wall Street out of its boots." However, although a plan to organize black workers was approved, many local unions in the North refused to admit black members. In 1870 a National Colored Labor Union was formed that affiliated with the NLU. The latter issued a call for a labor party, saying that "inasmuch as both the present political parties are dominated by the non-producing classes, the highest interest of our colored fellow-



Internationalist Group
League for the Fourth International

Marx on Slavery and the U.S. Civil War



4th U.S. Colored Regiment at Fort Lincoln, at end of the Civil War (1865)

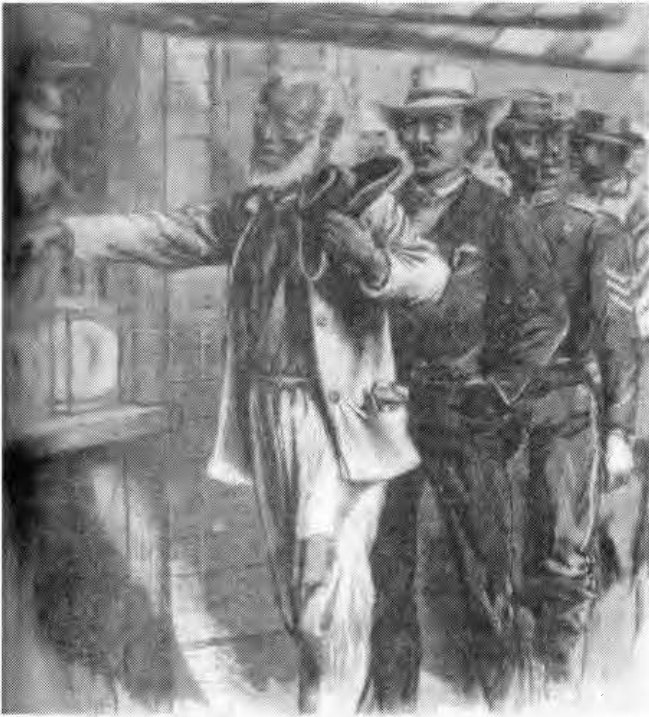
Internationalist Group Class Readings
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Sketch by A. R. Waud



"The First Vote," from cover of *Harper's Weekly*, 16 November 1867.

citizens is with the workingmen, who, like themselves, are slaves of capital and the politicians."

These first steps toward working-class racial unity soon halted. The National Labor Union ignored calls for a campaign to gain full legal equality for blacks, engaged in chauvinist agitation against Chinese laborers, and was soon swallowed up in a populist crusade (the greenback movement) against the return to the gold standard. The NCLU, in turn, became effectively an appendage of the Republican Party and ignored struggles of black workers, such as the Baltimore Longshoremen's Association strike in 1871. Then in September 1873 the failure of a leading New York banking house touched off the first Great Depression, throwing millions out of work. Unions were decimated. In the South, reaction was on the march, as pressure built to put an end to Reconstruction. This was accomplished in the infamous Compromise of 1877, following the contested election of 1876. Republican Rutherford Hayes was awarded the White House in exchange for the withdrawal to their barracks of the remaining federal troops in the former Confederate states. White supremacy was reestablished and over the next decades "Jim Crow" segregation was instituted, more rigid even than under slavery.

Once the initial shock of the 1873 panic wore off, workers' struggles picked up again. A bitter 1875 strike over wage reductions in the northeastern Pennsylvania coalfields was crushed and the miners' union destroyed. The mine owners with their Coal and Iron Police and Pinkerton labor spies spread terror by arresting, hanging and assassinating labor militants accused of being members of a secret "terrorist" society, the Molly Maguires. Yet only two years later, the Great Railroad Strike of 1877 broke out in West Virginia, spread-

ing to Maryland and Pennsylvania, and on to Illinois. The bosses' press blamed "the hands of men dominated by the devilish spirit of Communism." This strike, too, was broken by a series of massacres as federal troops and militias shot down 40 strike supporters in Pittsburgh and scores more elsewhere (see "1876," in *The Internationalist* No. 9, January-February 2001). But the outcome could have been very different. The destruction of Black Reconstruction in the South emboldened the federal government in sending soldiers to slaughter Northern strikers. Indeed, Thomas Scott of the Pennsylvania Railroad, one of the original robber barons, engineered the Compromise of 1877. Hayes dispatching troops to massacre strikers was the payback.

It was perhaps too early for a workers revolution: even in the midst of a Depression, American capitalism was in its phase of expansion. But the development of the class struggle could have been very different had the former slaves had the economic wherewithal to fight back against the plantocracy and their KKK terror squads, and if black and white workers had been able to forge real bonds of class unity. The potential for this was indicated as poor blacks and whites joined in the Populist movement in the 1880s. But the racist rulers responded with lynching and disenfranchising blacks through poll taxes, literacy tests and other subterfuges. The workers movement would have been tremendously strengthened if not divided by race and poisoned with racism. Black people could have been spared 90 years of hideous segregation, denial of basic democratic rights and outright terror. Because the de-



The Great Railroad Strike of 1877: National Guard troops shoot down strikers in Baltimore. Engraving from cover of *Harper's Weekly*, 11 August 1877.

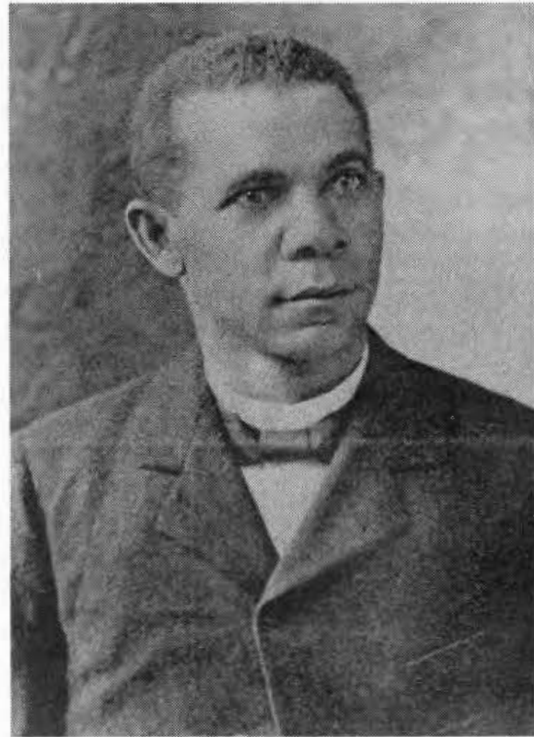
struction of slavery was not accompanied by the social and economic emancipation of the slaves, the democratic rights won in the bloodiest war in American history were largely reversed. The legacy of the *defeat* of the struggle for full equality and freedom following the Civil War meant that the "American dream" was a *nightmare* for blacks.

Accommodation, Separatism or Revolutionary Integrationism

The post-Civil War Reconstruction of the South marked the high point of the struggle for black freedom in the United States. It was also the limit to what can be achieved without going beyond democratic rights to attack the underlying economic structure of black oppression. The smashing of Reconstruction, the suppression of the black vote and the imposition of rigid race segregation, consecrated by the Compromise of 1877 between the different factions of the capitalist ruling class, North and South, ushered in a lengthy period of defeat. The Civil Rights struggles of the 1950s and '60s were largely to regain rights that had been written into the U.S. Constitution but were denied in reality. And even those gains are at risk. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 has been brazenly undermined by intimidating blacks from voting and simply annulling black votes. In Duval County, Florida alone, 26,000 votes from the black communities around Jacksonville were thrown out on "irregularities" in the 2000 election.

The reestablishment of white supremacy after 1877 produced a change in black leadership. Rather than Frederick Douglass in the forefront of the Abolitionist movement, Booker T. Washington became the spokesman for an accommodationist policy that accepted Jim Crow. In his 1895 "Atlanta Compromise" speech, Washington declared, "In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress." This speech laid the basis for accepting the 1896 Supreme Court decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* that established the "separate but equal" doctrine justifying segregation in public facilities. Washington's program was self-help ("it is at the bottom of life we must begin, and not at the top") while pledging to be loyal, responsible citizens ("in our humble way, we shall stand by you with a devotion that no foreigner can approach"). Soothing Southern aristocrats and Northern investors, he called for "interlacing our industrial, commercial, civil, and religious life with yours in a way that shall make the interests of both races one." Waxing poetic, he said, "The laws of changeless justice bind Oppressor with oppressed ... We march to fate abreast."

Barack Obama today is no successor to Martin Luther King, Jr. While occasionally paying lip-service to the leader of the liberal Civil Rights movement, Obama's position is that the time for fighting for black rights is past. Or as his adviser Valerie Jarrett put it, "You do not need to have demonstrations in front of the White House" about how "there is a disparate impact in the African-American community around issues such as health care and education. He's got that." With his talk of personal responsibility and self-help, Obama is sounding the same themes as Booker T. Washington. In his Philadelphia speech on race,



Booker T. Washington, president of the Tuskegee Institute.

Obama declares that "working together we can move beyond some of our old racial wounds," and while "continuing to insist on a full measure of justice," this also "means taking full responsibility for own lives." Obama embraced "this quintessentially American – and yes, conservative – notion of self-help." Where Washington said not to "permit our grievances to overshadow our opportunities," Obama criticized the "mistake" of his former pastor Rev. Wright in his "offending sermons about America – to simplify and stereotype and amplify the negative."

Obviously, the situations are different – for all his warm and financially rewarding relations with Northern capitalists like Andrew Carnegie, Booker T. Washington would never have been elected to any office, much less the presidency – but the themes are similar. Rather than Washington's image of the oppressed and oppressor harmoniously marching forward to face fate – or in the Obama version "working together we can move beyond some of our old racial wounds" – we prefer the words from Byron with which W.E.B. DuBois began his 1903 essay, "On Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others": "Hereditary bondsmen! Know ye not, Who would be free themselves must strike the blow?"

Since the abolition of slavery, there have been sharply different programs in the struggle for black freedom. In periods of defeat, the views of compromisers like Booker T. Washington gain force, along with separatists like Marcus Garvey who despair of any positive resolution in the U.S. Whether preaching submission or escape, both seek accommodation with the capitalist rulers. This is also true of currents such as the Nation of Islam under Elijah Mohammed and Louis Farrakhan. In periods of advancing social struggle, on the other hand, the fight

for integration predominates. Those struggles have generally been led by bourgeois liberals such as the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), CORE (Congress for Racial Equality) in its early years, or King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). When the liberal integrationists reached a dead end following the passage of the '60s Civil Rights laws, many young black radicals turned toward the advocates of "black power" who rejected King's turn-the-other-cheek pacifism. But the Black Panthers and other radical nationalists were destroyed by the combination of racist state repression and internal discord.

Historically, most of the left in the U.S. has supported the liberal integrationists, particularly since the mid-1930s when the Stalinists embraced the "popular front," joining social-democratic reformists in tailing after liberal Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt. Sometimes these leftists hold up the picture of Malcolm X as an icon, as they do with the image of Che Guevara, to give a radical allure. But politically they are solidly in the Martin Luther King camp, and today either openly or with a fig leaf of independence they want to profit from Obama's popularity. As opposed to conservative accommodation and liberal integrationism, we Trotskyists fight for

a program of *revolutionary integrationism*. We stress that the fight for black freedom and equality in capitalist America can only succeed by overturning the economic foundations of black oppression. We recognize the radical impulse of many black nationalists who were breaking from the liberal preachers, but emphasize that the oppressed black poor and working people can only achieve power through common struggle together with their class sisters and brothers of all races. We stand for *black liberation through socialist revolution*.

A Revolutionary Workers Party as a Tribune of the People

Today black liberals and reformists support Barack Obama, in line with their overall popular-front politics (many supported Democrat John Kerry as well). After an initial complaint about Obama being a no-show at a "Covenant for Black America" conference, *Cornell West* (honorary chairman of Democratic Socialists of America) signed up. *Manning Marable* (DSA, former co-chairperson of Committees of Correspondence, chairman of Movement for a Democratic Society, Inc.) likewise. The cultural nationalist and Democratic Party politician *Charles Barron* enlisted early on, saying Obama would not only break

Challenge Hailed Racist Anti-Draft Riots of 1863

PLP: "Communists" Who Accuse Marx of Selling Out on U.S. Civil War

In the Progressive Labor Party (PLP) newspaper *Challenge* (4 June 2008), an article on "Civil War's Hidden History: Women Workers Battled Gov't, Bosses" favorably reviewed the book by *A People's History of the Civil War* (2005) by Georgia historian David Williams. The review praised "the anti-war sentiments of the general population" and particularly the "inspiring story" of women who participated in 1863 anti-draft riots in New York. Yet these riots were *racist pogroms* against the black population, burning their homes and killing at least a dozen blacks.

This grotesque portrayal of lynch mobs as heroic working-class fighters evidently caused some unease inside the PLP, as the promised second part of the review never appeared. Instead there were several letters pro and con. A couple (by "Red Historian" and "Anti-racist Red") described the anti-draft riots as the racist gang violence that they were. But another (by "Red Teacher") explicitly linked the Civil War to PL's position on the U.S. invasion of Iraq: "Workers were convinced to fight an intra-capitalist war, then, just as they are convinced to fight in the U.S. imperialist war in Iraq today." *PL refused to defend Iraq* (a semi-colonial country) *against the U.S. invasion* on the specious argument that it was just a squabble between bosses.

And the Civil War was just an "intra-capitalist" dispute?! The black troops who flocked to the Union army in this bloody battle that abolished slavery didn't think so. This "debate" in the PLP is hardly academic, nor is it a momentary slip. Almost three decades ago, *Progressive Labor* magazine (Fall 1979) published a lengthy article on "John Brown's Raid -

Guns Against Slavery," which dismissed Lincoln as nothing but "a racist through and through." It attacked the "mistakes" of "German Marxists who had come to the U.S. in 1848 and participated in the war under Lincoln's leadership (e.g., General Wedemeyer)" and of "**Marx himself**, who wrote several letters to Lincoln offering friendly advice, rather than attacking Lincoln for the class enemy of the workers that he was."

This all reflects an *idealist* perversion of Marxism. These self-proclaimed "communists" don't have a clue when it comes to a materialist understanding of history. These are the people who argued that "Marxist communism in 800 A.D." "would have been the best way to run the world if it could have been done" (*PL Magazine*, Summer 1982)! Perhaps they will blame the collapse of Mayan civilisation on a lack of scientific communist consciousness.

To be consistent, PL should attack Karl Marx as well for his statement in the 1848 *Communist Manifesto* that the communists "fight with the bourgeoisie whenever it acts in a revolutionary way, against the absolute monarchy, the feudal squirearchy," while maintaining the workers' political and organizational independence. After the defeat of the 1848 revolutions, Marx concluded that it is "our task to make the revolution permanent until all the more or less propertied classes have been driven from their ruling positions, until the proletariat has conquered state power..." *Permanent revolution* is key in the imperialist epoch of capitalist decay, when the bourgeoisie cannot play a revolutionary role.

Genuine communists stood with the Union army in the U.S. Civil War, the Second American Revolution. ■



Banner of the Rio de Janeiro teachers union, SEPE-RJ, demanding freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal against the racist death penalty.

the white, male monopoly on the presidency but would be best placed to “put forth a black agenda,” which he has hardly done. Another right-wing nationalist, Prof. *Leonard Jeffries*, who made headlines in 1990 with his crackpot “ice people”/“sun people” racial theories and anti-Semitism (blaming Jews for the slave trade), bizarrely claimed that the election of Obama marked “the moment that the capitalist system collapsed.” “No matter what Obama does in office,” he added, “Mumia Abu-Jamal ... even if he goes to his reward he’s got to celebrate the fact that he was here” at Obama’s election.

It is characteristic of the range of those who supported Barack Obama that it went from supporters of Mumia to right-wing Philadelphia talk radio hack Michael Smerconish, who has for years been in the forefront of the cop vendetta to execute former Black Panther Jamal for a crime he didn’t commit. Smerconish, who was a master of ceremonies for Bush in 2004 and has endorsed the U.S.’ use of “waterboarding” and other forms of torture, hosted Obama on his show and came out for the Democratic candidate last October. Now he will try to cash in on that support, hoping at least for Obama’s acquiescence in the face of the legal lynch mob. Those who looked to the election of a black president to save Mumia could be cruelly awakened from their illusions. The Internationalist Group and the League for the Fourth International (LFI) fight to mobilize the working class to free Mumia Abu-Jamal. Our comrades of the Brazilian section of the LFI initiated the first strike action for Mumia’s, a statewide work stoppage by teachers in Rio de Janeiro, in April 1999, in conjunction with the U.S. longshore union, ILWU, which closed the West Coast ports for ten hours demanding his freedom.

While many liberals and reformists have been caught up in what’s being called “Obamania,” some left-wing black intellectuals and political activists have not fallen prey to the all-round cheering for Democrat Obama. Interestingly, former Communist Party vice-presidential candidate Angela Davis said in an interview with the London *Guardian* (8 November 2008)

shortly after the election, “when the inclusion of black people into the machine of oppression is designed to make that machine work more efficiently, then it does not represent progress at all.” Davis added that Obama “is being consumed as the embodiment of colour blindness. It’s the notion that we have moved beyond racism by not taking race into account.” Glen Ford of the Black Agenda Report was even sharper. In a December 14 Harlem debate with Obama supporters Barron, Jeffries, Viola Plummer (December 12 Movement) and Malik Shabazz (New Black Panther Party), Ford declared forthrightly:

“What we wound up with is a president-elect whose Cabinet to-date is mostly a Clinton Cabinet – and worse.

“Obama’s military portfolio is in the hands of a Reagan/Bush-1/Bush-2 war criminal, Robert Gates, whose crimes go back to Iran Contra and the mining of Nicaragua’s harbors.

“Obama’s economic mechanisms will be in the hands of the very same robber baron bankers that set the stage for catastrophic meltdown through their actions under both Bill Clinton and George Bush....

“Barack Obama has chosen of his own free will to put his face at the head of an administration whose most powerful portfolios – War and the Economy – are manned by the worst thieves and warmongers available.”

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—*Black Agenda Report*, 17 December 2008

While voicing criticisms of the Democratic candidate, the “lesser-evil” logic of American bourgeois politics is so ingrained that very few left groups, socialists and black activists would flatly call for *no vote for Obama*, as the Internationalist Group did. Using a sliding scale of who is the more “progressive,” they either wash their hands of the whole matter, or end up supporting to one degree or another the new commander-in-chief of U.S. imperialism. Today their candidate is laying waste to Afghanistan and Iraq, launching missiles in Pakistan, bailing out Wall Street banks, opposing caps to the multi-million-dollar salaries of all but a tiny number of bankers, bailing out the auto companies by slashing auto workers’ jobs and imposing a no-strike clause to boot. Genuine communists and fighters for black liberation instead take a *class* stand in political opposition to *all* bourgeois politicians and parties. Rather than beseeching the representative of capital to be a “friend of the people,” we seek to form a *revolutionary workers party* that champions the cause of, and seeks to mobilize, all those exploited and oppressed by capital.

At the turn of the last century, American socialists were at best oblivious to the oppression of blacks. Their “color-blind” policy was summed up in the expression of Eugene V. Debs, that “we have nothing special to offer the Negro.... The Socialist Party is the party of the whole working class, regardless of color.” Other socialists such as Victor Berger were open racists. It was the Communists, basing themselves on the experience of the Russian October Revolution, who insisted that blacks were doubly exploited second-class citizens, and that a program of special demands was needed to address black oppression. The early Communist International paid particular attention to this issue, with reports on the “Negro question” from John Reed, Otto Huiswoud (J. Billings) and Claude McKay at the Second and Third Congresses of the Comintern (see the Internationalist pamphlet, *The Communist International and Black Liberation*). Leon Trotsky asked McKay to elaborate, which he did in a report on *Blacks in America*. American Trotskyist leader James P. Cannon later wrote:

“Everything new on the Negro question came from Moscow – after the Russian Revolution began to thunder its demand throughout the world for freedom and equality for all national minorities, all subject peoples and all races – for all the despised and rejected of the earth.”

It was the Communists’ worldwide campaign for the “Scottsboro Boys” that saved them from the hangman’s noose in the early 1930s. But Stalin, having ditched Lenin and Trotsky’s program of world social revolution, ordered the Communist Party in the U.S. to ally with liberal Democrat FDR, whose New Deal program rested on the support of Southern Dixiecrats in Congress. The CP sought to put the lid on black struggle, and thousands of black Communists drifted away in disillusionment. The Trotskyists continued to fight for black rights, and during WWII their leaders were jailed for opposing the imperialist war. In the late 1950s, as the Civil Rights movement was getting under way, Cannon wrote: “There has been a big change in the outlook and demands of the Negroes’ movement since the days of Booker T. Wash-

ington, but no fundamental change in their social condition.” He added: “An honest workers party of the new generation will recognize this revolutionary potential of the Negro struggle, and call for a fighting alliance of the Negro people and the labor movement in a common revolutionary struggle against the present social system” (James P. Cannon, *The Russian Revolution and the American Negro Movement* [1959], available as an Internationalist pamphlet).

We continue to fight against segregation of schools even as many liberals have abandoned the fight for school integration through busing. Today that means opposing schemes for “school choice” and selective elite schools and programs, favored by Obama and conservatives like McCain, which only increase race and class segregation. But where the liberals appealed to the capitalist state, in the form of federal troops and courts, we look to the working class, such as the black longshoremen in Norfolk, Virginia who mobilized to defend busing in the late 1970s. When the cops who murdered Sean Bell in New York went free last year, Obama told black youth to respect the verdict of the (bourgeois) courts. In protests against the recent police execution of Oscar Grant in Oakland, California, some have called on Obama’s Justice Department to open an investigation, to no avail. In contrast, we warn against illusions in the capitalist government and call to bring the working class into the streets against it.

The Trotskyists fight for basic democratic demands, such as an *end to the denial of voting rights for former prisoners*, which amounts to permanent disenfranchisement of a whole section of the black population. We demand *cops out of the schools* and an end to the brutalization of students by the uniformed enforcers of racist, capitalist “law and order.” We demand an *end to “racial profiling”* and random “*stop and frisk*” orders by police who last year searched more than 500,000 people, 82 percent of them black and Latino, without cause. We oppose the ruling-class drive to a police state and criminalization of black youth. At the same time, black people are among the hardest-hit by the capitalist crisis, and therefore will be in the forefront of class struggle against the effects of that crisis. We demand an *immediate moratorium on all foreclosures* and call for the workers movement to mobilize to *block evictions* as it did during the 1930s. And as hundreds of thousands of black workers are fired we call for *plant occupations* and broader *strike action against layoffs*, to impose a *shorter workweek with no loss in pay*.

But such demands are not magical words on paper. They must be taken up by militant black, white, Latino and Asian workers, by immigrants, women and youth, united in class struggle. That struggle will inevitably go up against the government of Democrat Obama. And that struggle urgently requires the leadership of a revolutionary workers party that is not afraid to tell the truth, a party that acts, as Lenin expressed it, as a *tribune of the people*, the champion of all the oppressed, that will achieve genuine equality for blacks and all the oppressed by *the only means possible* – sweeping away bankrupt, racist American capitalism through international socialist revolution. ■

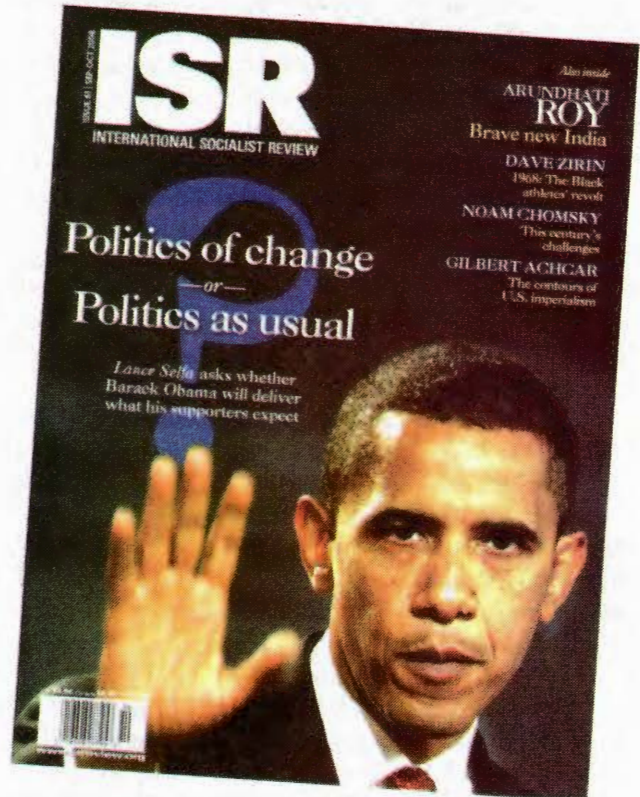
No to Capitalist “Third Parties” – For a Revolutionary Workers Party

Socialists in Bourgeois Electionland

4 NOVEMBER 2008 – Marxists have long exposed the charade of bourgeois elections. “To decide once every few years which member of the ruling class is to repress and crush the people through parliament – this is the real essence of bourgeois parliamentarism, not only in parliamentary-constitutional monarchies, but also in the most democratic republics,” wrote Bolshevik leader V.I. Lenin in his 1917 work *The State and Revolution*, laying out the theoretical framework for the Russian October Revolution only a few months later. The division of powers between parliamentary talk-shops and all-powerful executives only creates the illusion of “democracy,” or government by the people (*demos* in Greek), while in fact it is capital that rules. Communists seek instead to build a state like the 1870-71 Paris Commune, which was, as Karl Marx described it, “a working, not a parliamentary, body, executive and legislative at the same time,” whose members were recallable at any time. This was the model for the *soviets* (councils), on which the Russian Revolution was based until political power was usurped by a conservative bureaucracy with Stalin at the helm.

Under normal conditions there is enormous cynicism in the U.S. population about elections, so that in recent years barely half the potential voters bother to vote (55 percent in 2004, 50 percent in 2000). Since the winners usually have around half the vote in the divided electorate, this means that barely over one-quarter of the adult population can elect a president. This gives considerable clout to well-organized minorities, like right-wing evangelical Christians who organize political machines out of their churches. But this is only if the real rulers, the owners of capital, permit it. They may negate the popular vote, as in 2000, when the Republican party nullified hundreds of thousands of votes, then got the conservative U.S. Supreme Court to “elect” George W. Bush president by a vote of 5 to 4. Otherwise, the outcome is heavily influenced if not determined by the power of money (see our article, “The Buying of the Presidency 2008: U.S. Imperialism Seeks New Face on System of War and Racism,” *The Internationalist* No. 27, May-June 2008). In the current election, Barack Obama raised over \$660 million dollars, more than all the candidates combined in the 2004 elections.

This year in contrast to most, enormous expectations have been aroused by the candidacy of Barack Obama, who is leading in the opinion polls and is the first African American to be the candidate of one of the two major capitalist parties, Democrats or Republicans. Many youths, blacks, opponents of the Iraq war, unionists and millions fed up with the deeply unpopular Bush regime have deposited in Obama their hopes for “change,” however they define it. Many will see in the election of Obama a breaking of a color bar that has excluded



Internationalist Socialist Organization (ISO) magazine looks like Obama election propaganda.

blacks from the highest elected office. As we have repeatedly stated, these hopes are in fact illusory, for Obama is very much a bourgeois politician, who will wage imperialist war and rescue Wall Street banks while governing against the interests of poor and working people. But such massive illusions place tremendous pressure on socialists to capitulate to the popular bourgeois candidate. Reflecting these pressures, in 2008 most of the left is trying in different ways to navigate in the slipstream of the Obama campaign, at a time when it is more vital than ever for revolutionaries to *swim against the stream* and *oppose all the capitalist candidates and parties*.

Anti-Communist Immigrant Basher Nader and His Socialist Hangers-On

“Obamamania” has not blinded everyone to the reality of the Democratic Party, however. In New York City, many unions are urging their members to vote for Obama on the line of the “Working Families Party,” which is not a workers party at all but simply a vehicle to vote Democratic while holding your nose. On the other hand, some liberals and reformists have been attracted to “third party” or “independent” bourgeois candidates. First up is the perennial populist Ralph Nader, who is running



Right-wing “Reform Party” presidential candidates, fascist Patrick Buchanan (2000) and populist immigrant-basher Ralph Nader (2004) on “Meet the Press.”

for president once again, this time without party backing (the Greens dumped him in 2004 after being embarrassed over siphoning votes away from Al Gore in 2000, leading many Democrats to blame them for the election of Bush).

This millionaire lawyer is no socialist for sure, as he would be the first to insist. Nader has taken advantage of the popular outrage at the bailout of the biggest Wall Street firms to promote a program for tinkering with the stock market. He is not *against* the bank bailout, but only wants to attach a few conditions. His miracle cure is a small tax on stock transactions, the so-called “Tobin tax,” named after the Yale University economist who devised it. This would dampen speculation and finance a variety of public works projects and social programs, according to Nader. Nader staged an October 15 rally in New York City against the payout to Wall Street on under the slogan “Socialism Saves Capitalism” – as if the rescue of the biggest capitalist banks and investment firms had anything to do with an economy planned to meet the needs of working people.

Public Enemy No. 1 in Nader’s populist-nationalist demonology is the “communist dictatorship” in China. Nader fulminates at the danger of imported Chinese apple juice: “Apple juice from China is pouring into the United States. Is there anything left that cannot be imported into what was once the greatest food exporter the world has ever seen?” (*Counterpunch*, 10 July 2007). China has long been a bugbear for Nader. Recently he has been accusing China of committing “genocide” in Tibet, a favorite cause of Democrats like House of Representatives speaker Nancy Pelosi. Nader hails Tibetan “spiritual leader” Tenzin Gyatso, the Dalai Lama, for his “noble attempt to resist the attempt to wipe out Tibetan culture.” The would-be “God King” Gyatso is a CIA “asset” whose feudalist lieutenants staged a failed revolt in 1959 with the aid and instigation of the American spy agency. Earlier this year, Tibetan nationalists tried to take advantage of the Beijing Olympic to stage another revolt, but it too failed ignominiously.

What’s going on here is that U.S. imperialism is trying

to use the banner of “free Tibet” in order to build international repudiation of the Chinese deformed workers state, a propaganda campaign using Hollywood movie stars and liberal Democrats to prepare “public opinion” for war. The Beijing regime has certainly engaged in Han Chinese chauvinist policies toward Tibetans, as it has to other national minorities. But it isn’t even remotely like genocide, or even the massive slaughter the U.S. carried out in Korea (2 million killed), Vietnam (3 million dead) and now Iraq (600,000+ killed and counting). After it defeated the 1959 revolt and Gyatso fled to Indian exile, the Chinese Stalinists revised their policy of coexistence with the Tibetan monarchy, and abolished the feudal peonage of the Tibetan peasants. Today, unlike under the rule of the Lamas, Tibetans have schools, health care facilities and are no longer born to be slaves of the idle monk class. Victory for the “Free Tibet” crusaders would be as apocalyptic as the victory of the U.S. sponsored “holy warriors” was in Afghanistan in 1989, and would set the stage for counterrevolution throughout China.

Nader is also notorious for teaming up with Hitler apologist Patrick Buchanan to bash “illegal immigrants.” Nader’s campaign platform (www.votenader.org/issues/immigration/) blames “illegal” immigration for “driving down wages” and the “expansion of poverty.” Nader calls for more “enforcement” which he claims is “nearly non-existent.” In 2004, he railed against “amnesty,” writing: “We have to control our immigration and our borders. We have to limit the number of people who come into this country illegally” (see our article, “Capitalist Nader’s “Socialist” Foot Soldiers,” *Revolution* No. 2, October 2004). Although Nader claims to be for enforcement against corporations as opposed to individual immigrants, such law-and-order measures always lead to mass firings, Gestapo-style immigration police raids and deportations. As opposed to Nader’s xenophobic fear mongering, revolutionaries demand *full citizenship rights for all immigrants*.

Socialists should *protest* against this enemy of the international working class, yet Nader has the support of Socialist Alternative (SAIt), U.S. supporters of the Committee for a Workers International (CWI), who call Nader’s anti-China, immigrant-bashing campaign an “insurgent campaign for President as an independent to challenge the corporate stranglehold over U.S. society” (“Break with the Two Parties of War and Big Business: Vote Nader!” *Justice* September-October 2008). Still, it must be conceded that Nader is a natural choice for the CWI, which supports cop “unions” and hailed the CIA-inspired anti-Chinese riots in Tibet last March, grotesquely comparing the monastery-organized mobs that burned ethnic Han Chinese homes and shops to the Palestinian *intifada* (“Tibet Erupts!” 28 March). When supposed leftists and union bureaucrats clamor for Congress to impose sanctions on Chinese imports and protections for “American” jobs, they are pledging their loyalty to the imperialist drive to throw China back to its pre-1949 status as an impoverished semicolon.



Cynthia McKinney, presidential candidate of the red-white-and-blue Green Party.

McKinney and Her Socialist Backers Pressure Obama

The Green Party presidential campaign of Cynthia McKinney, a former Democratic Congresswoman from Georgia, is also attracting support on the left, and among left liberals. McKinney has the endorsement of the Workers World Party (WWP); of the San Francisco-based Socialist Organizer (S.O.) group, supporters of the international current of the late Pierre Lambert; and of the Workers International League (WIL), supporters of the International Marxist Tendency led by Allan Woods, who seeks to be a tutor on (pseudo-)Trotskyism for bourgeois nationalist colonel Hugo Chávez in Venezuela.

McKinney calls for freedom for death row radical political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal and denounces the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. In 2001, however, this latter-day “peace candidate” did her duty as a Democratic Representative of the war-making capitalist class and voted for the Congressional authorization of the war on Afghanistan. Today, McKinney calls for an “orderly withdrawal” from Iraq, calling in a June 11 press release for a federal “Department of Peace” charged with “overseeing the orderly withdrawal of U.S. troops from the more than 100 countries around the world where they are stationed” and for “slashing [i.e., not eliminating] the budget for the Pentagon.” In contrast, the Internationalist Group calls for “Not One Person, Not One Cent for the Imperialist War Machine!” (*Internationalist* No. 26, July 2007) and in an article for the 2008 May Day West Coast longshore workers strike against the war, we wrote:

“In order to *defeat* the imperialist war abroad and the bosses’ war ‘at home,’ class-conscious workers must oppose *all* the capitalist parties and politicians, and *build a class-struggle workers party*. Revolutionaries fight to *drive the U.S. out of Iraq and Afghanistan* – which will be anything but orderly, as the U.S.’ exit from Vietnam showed – by workers action. We would like to see the “diplomats” (spies) and “contractors” (mercenaries) clambering onto the roof of the U.S. embassy desperately trying to helicopter out of the “Green

Zone” in Baghdad. A defeat there would put a damper on U.S. imperial adventures around the world, and would aid the struggle of working people, immigrants and oppressed minorities in the United States itself.”

–“All Out on May Day,” *The Internationalist* special issue, 27 April 2008

When McKinney switched to the Greens, she remarked: “I had a place to go when the Democratic Party left me.” As we commented in the above article: “Exactly. The red, white and blue Greens are nothing but a home for homeless Democrats.” Now the time may not be right yet for her to go home again, but she is using her campaign to pressure Obama. In her June 11 press McKinney effusively congratulated Obama clinching the Democratic Party nomination for commander-in-chief of U.S. imperialism, while drawing his attention to her issues:

“Coming from Barack Obama, the word ‘change’ did not appear as just another empty campaign slogan. It galvanized millions of people.... Sen. Obama called for healing the wounds inflicted on working people and the poor in our country after eight years of a corrupt and criminal Bush-Cheney Administration.... Across a broad swath of the people of this country, and from those who are impacted by U.S. foreign policy, there is a real expectation, a real desire, for change.... While congratulating Sen. Obama for a feat well done, I would also like to bring home the very real need for change and a few of the issues that must be addressed for the change needed in this country to be real....”

WWP, ISO: Holding Obama “Accountable”

Thus the McKinney campaign is a perfect vehicle for the pseudo-socialist opportunists who are seeking to ride the coattails of a popular bourgeois war candidate, Obama, while maintaining a fig-leaf of formal “independence.” Her liberal politics are in line with Workers World’s history of opportunist support for bourgeois candidates whose brief affairs with “independence” lead their unfortunate supporters straight back into the death trap of the Democratic Party. WWP campaigned for Democrat Jesse Jackson and supported McKinney when she ran as a Democrat for Congress. Today *Workers World* (6 November 2008) counsels Obama supporters, “As president, Obama will not be able to effect change without the cooperation of the people and without demands on him for accountability.” So there is WWP’s real politics – “cooperation” plus “accountability” – which add up to a backhanded virtual endorsement of Obama.

Perhaps the most blatant in playing this cynical game is the International Socialist Organization (ISO). These past masters in opportunism have a front-page cover on the current issue of their magazine *International Socialist Review* (September-October 2008) with a big, flattering photo of Barack Obama and the headline, “Politics of change or Politics as usual.” The uninitiated reader would get the impression that the ISO is supporting Obama, which is what exactly they are supposed to think. Turning to the inside, the first paragraphs of the article by Lance Selfa keep up the impression, talking about the hundreds of thousands who came out in Berlin to hear the senator, quoting people saying “Our president is Barack Obama,” talking about his “historic” can-

didacy. Only when you get well into the article do the critical remarks appear. It's a con game, sucker bait to lure in Obama supporters rather than confronting their illusions up front. And then at the end of the article it appeals to the authority of Martin Luther King to push the "accountability" line. It quotes Obama responding to a question from CNN about King:

"Well, I don't think Dr. King would endorse any of us. I think what he would call upon the American people to do is to hold us accountable.... I believe change does not happen from the top down. It happens from the bottom up. Dr. King understood that.... Arguing, mobilizing, agitating and ultimately forcing elected officials to be accountable – I think that's the key."

The article concludes: "For candidate Obama, these may have been just good debating points. But for the rest of us, acting on the spirit of these words will be crucial in the next period...." So there you have it, despite its talk of "socialism" and whatever its pretensions of "independence," *the ISO takes its marching orders from Obama.*

The WWP and ISO posture of "holding Obama accountable" is simple bourgeois pressure politics. Indeed, it is the same as the policy of a bevy of bourgeois "progressives" and social democrats who signed an "Open Letter to Barack Obama" that appeared in *The Nation* (18 August). The signers include such liberal luminaries, writers and academics as Phil Donahue, Barbara Ehrenreich, Eric Foner, Tom Hayden, Walter Mosley, Frances Piven, Gore Vidal, Howard Zinn and *Nation* editor/publisher Katrina vanden Heuvel. Taking up Obama's campaign slogan, "Change We Can Believe In," the signers wax enthusiastic about the enthusiasm his candidacy has awakened, call on him to "listen to the voices of the people who can lift you to the presidency and beyond," and list a series of issues on which they beseech him not to "retreat." These include "withdrawal from Iraq on a fixed timetable" (not "immediate"? what a surprise!), "a response to the current economic crisis that reduces the gap between the rich and the rest of us" (i.e., not the gap between rich and poor, a nice touch, since a number of the signers are pretty well-off), an end to torture and abuse of civil liberties, an immigration system with a "path to citizenship" (i.e., not full citizenship rights now), and so on. The "progressives" then offer:

"If you win in November, we will work to support your stands when we agree with you and to challenge them when we don't. We look forward to an ongoing and constructive dialogue with you when you are elected President."

The fondest hope of the WWP and ISO is to be part of that "constructive dialogue."

PSL: Working Class Mobilization, or a Click of the Computer Mouse

The task of Marxists in bourgeois elections is to combat the illusions that working people hold in capitalist "democracy." When working people still believe the lie that their votes count for anything but an endorsement of the capitalist rulers, a revolutionary party might run candidates to expose the bankruptcy of the capitalist system and its "democratic" façade. Revolutionaries can also offer critical support to candidates representing centrist or reformist working-class par-

ties or organizations, *if* such candidacies run independently of all capitalist parties and represent a sharp break with the bourgeoisie on fundamental issues. Critical support does not imply approval of their politics, and the Marxists would point to the contradiction with their overall opportunist politics. As Marxists we always draw a *class line*, to mobilize the exploited and oppressed against the exploiters and oppressors. In the 2008 elections, however, we find no candidates warranting such support. Just voting for any ostensibly socialist candidate with a run-of-the mill reformist platform does nothing to advance the class struggle.

The Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL), a split from WWP, is running Gloria La Riva for president and Eugene Puryear for vice president. The PSL controls the ANSWER anti-war group, which organizes popular-front "peace" marches tying leftists to bourgeois politicians like Jesse Jackson and Dennis Kucinich under the slogan "Fund People's Needs, Not Militarism & Bank Bailouts!" There is no qualitative difference between the PSL's endless variations on the "jobs not war, bring the troops home now" theme and the utopian prescriptions of the Green Party or Ralph Nader platforms: this is a bourgeois and not a socialist program. In a rehash of classic social-democratic minimum and maximum programs, PSL spokesmen talk "socialism" in a general sense (when they are not wearing their ANSWER hats and posing as simple "peace and justice" folks), but their program on the issues consists of calls for shaking up the budget, "prosecuting" bankers for malfeasance, providing health care through "publicly owned entities," "elimination of the racist criminal 'justice' system," etc.

One has to ask, who exactly is supposed to carry out such demands? Trotskyists propose a *transitional program* of *class mobilization*: workers strikes against the war, labor-centered defense against police brutality and immigration raids, workers' control of industries in response to threats of layoffs and capitalist economic sabotage. What is the PSL's response to the economic crisis? Look behind the sloganeering about "socialism" in the abstract, what the PSL actually proposes (at votenobailout.org) to workers is that they send an email to Congress asking the representatives of the bankers to do right by the working people. Before that they had votenowar.org, votetoeimpeach.org and similar gimmicks. They all worked equally well, in fostering democratic illusions. (For more on this question see, "Exchange on Transitional Demands," on page 42 of this issue).

While the PSL doesn't come as close as their former comrades in WWP to outright endorsing Obama, the La Riva/Puryear campaign manifesto states "For many Black people especially, the prospect of simply having a Black president – regardless of his politics – is enough to arouse excitement. This is perfectly justifiable. The fact that there have been so few Black elected officials in this country is a testament to the country's deeply-rooted racism. Our campaign has absolutely no quarrel with those who have devoted their time to righting this historic wrong." Yet the election of Barack Obama will *not* right the historic and present-day wrongs that make the United States home to some of the most ugly



Police mass in immigrant area of Washington, D.C. on second day of protests against cop killing of Latino, 6 May 1991. "Socialist" Party candidate Brian Moore at the time was spokesperson for businessmen's vigilante group clamoring for more arrests.

and violent racism on Earth. Like black Democratic mayors before him, an Obama presidency will preside over a *system* of racist mass imprisonment, legal lynching and imperialist war, which he has fulsomely supported throughout his political career. This is what *revolutionary* socialists would say to those who believe that "simply having a Black president – regardless of his politics" will bring longed-for "change."

A "Socialist" Who Called for Racist Police Repression

Among the campaigns of various minor parties claiming to be socialist, the one that is on the most state ballots is the Socialist Party U.S.A. (SPUSA), which is running Brian Moore and Stewart Alexander for president and vice-president. In his campaign biography, Moore cites his role as an "advocate for small businesses and community's civil rights in wake of riots; Wash. DC, 1991-92". It turns out that this "socialist" presidential candidate was *the spokesperson for a businessmen's "law and order" vigilante group!*

In May 1991, the heavily Latin American-immigrant neighborhood of Mount Pleasant in Washington, D.C. was shaken by crowds protesting a wanton police shooting of a Hispanic man celebrating the Mexican holiday of Cinco de Mayo. Thousands of youth held off the police for hours, torching more than a dozen police cars, in the course of which some local shops were damaged. The blame for these desperate outbursts of rage rests squarely on the racist capitalist police force that even some in the bourgeois media recognized as the cause of the youths' anger.

At the time we Trotskyists called for all charges to be dropped against the arrested protesters. The response of "Socialist" Brian Moore, who had run for D.C. mayor, was quite

* See www.votebrianmoore.com/background.htm

different: he was the spokesman for a merchant's association clamoring for more arrests! According to the *Washington Post* (12 July 1991):

"A group of merchants, dissatisfied by official efforts to arrest looters and vandals from the Mount Pleasant disturbances, has begun soliciting videotapes and photographs of the violence in order to pick out suspects and turn their names over to police...."

"Aided in part by advertisements with the headline, 'Wanted: Photos/Videos of Riots,' which were placed in two neighborhood newspapers, the merchants have obtained several dozen photos and four videotapes of the unrest, said Brian Moore, the campaign's coordinator and an independent candidate for D.C. mayor last year. "Moore and others supporting the merchants' 'Accountability Project' said that identifying and prosecuting those who burned buses and cars, broke windows and stole merchandise could help the District avoid a repetition of the disturbances in Mount Pleasant, Adams-Morgan and Columbia Heights on May 5 and 6.

"You can't solve social injustices with other social injustices, and too many times people in the community are allowed to get away with murder,' said Moore, who neither lives nor works in the Mount Pleasant area but said he got involved because his Southwest neighborhood – or any other – might be next.

"He said many merchants believe the police have failed to pursue aggressively those involved in the May disturbances, much as they complained bitterly then that some officers had stood by and watched looting and vandalism occur. About 230 people were arrested during the disturbances, many of them for violating curfews imposed by Mayor Sharon Pratt Dixon.

"There were a large number of participants,' Moore said, but the community has no indication from the police that many of those involved have been arrested."

As a candidate for DC city council, Moore called for a 9 p.m. curfew for youth and for warrants to be issued against violators' parents!

We have to assume that the SPUSA is aware of these facts. That the Socialist Party USA would list this *crime against the people*, without comment, as a qualification for their candidate means that these "socialists" take the side of the enemies of the workers and oppressed, and their candidate should be roundly denounced.

SWP and SEP: An Odd Reformist Sect and Some "Socialist" Scabs

Among the other groups running candidates, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) is presenting Róger Calero and Alyson Kennedy for president and vice president this year, along with several local candidates. The SWP, which almost half a century ago (up to the early 1960s) was the revolutionary voice of Trotskyism in the United States, has degenerated over the decades into a weird, reformist sect that insists that

Russia and the eastern part of Germany are still “workers states” and seeks to be the representatives of the Stalinist Cuban bureaucracy in the United States (on which count it has a good deal of competition). When the SWP had a significant following in the 1960s and ’70s, it was as the right-wing of the Vietnam anti-war movement that in order to court Democratic “doves” and labor bureaucrats for its “single-issue” (“Out Now”) popular front excluded thousands of youth who solidarized with the NLF from its “peace parades” (in addition to sometimes violently expelling communists from its confabs). When the U.S. did pull the troops out, the movement built by the SWP, which had sought nothing else, soon collapsed, U.S. imperialism rearmed and the SWP fell apart, expelling thousands of members in a series of bureaucratic purges and ossifying as an irrelevant sect.

Today, in response to the economic crisis, “Calero and Kennedy demand that the federal government launch a public works program to build schools, hospitals, and affordable housing and to rebuild deteriorating infrastructure” (*The Militant*, 10 November). Responding to the Great Depression, Leon Trotsky called for “a broad and bold organization of public works” in the Transitional Program. But in the very next sentence he emphasizes that such a program can only have “a progressive significance for society” as part of a national plan *under workers control*: “The working out of even the most elementary economic plan – from the point of view of the exploited, not the exploiters – is impossible without workers’ control...” Without this crucial element the SWP platform is nothing more than liberal wish lists dressed up as “socialism.”

Last and very much least among the “socialist” contenders for the presidency is the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), which emerges from its cyberspace haunt at the World Socialist Web Site every election year to run candidates. A fair number of leftists follow news on the WSWS site without knowing much about the politics of the SEP led by David North. This is not surprising since in large part the articles rewrite the bourgeois press with only the most rudimentary “class-angling.” This year the SEP is not on any ballot but is calling for a write-in vote. In its election statement it presents social-democratic nostrums such as calling for “the transformation of the giant banks and corporations into democratically controlled utilities,” “vastly expanded resources for social programs, jobs, health care, housing and education,” “repeal of all anti-democratic legislation,” and the like, always clad in bourgeois-democratic garb, plus a ritual reference that capitalism “must be overthrown.”

But the SEP is not its ostensible reformist “socialist” program. More significantly, North & Co. use the sellouts of the labor bureaucracy to write off the unions entirely as supposedly no longer workers organizations in any sense. When workers are given the chance to vote for union representation, the SEP *campaigns for an anti-union vote*, thereby joining with the bosses (see our article, “SEP/WSWS: Scab ‘Socialists’” [22 December 2007, available on-line at www.internationalist.org]). And that is no accident, for David North is the same person as David Green, who is the CEO of a non-union (i.e., *scab*) print

shop, Grand River Printing & Imaging, near Detroit which according to its website rakes in \$25 million a year. These *scab socialists*, whose long and sordid political history includes supporting a New York City police “strike” in 1971 and supplying photographs of Iraqi communists to the murderous, U.S.-supported regime of Saddam Hussein a few years later, shouldn’t get a single worker’s vote.

“The Emancipation of the Working Class Must Be the Act of the Workers Themselves”

Under capitalism, elections are a mechanism of bourgeois class dictatorship. Every step of the process, from the grooming of the politician caste, to the primaries, to the general election is rigged to give absolute advantage to the owners of capital. The bourgeois media machine generates “public opinion.” Even when it gets past the elaborate requirements to register a candidate, requiring thousands of signatures, no workers party, much less a revolutionary party, could possibly come up with the oodles of dollars needed to buy television time. When the year-long electoral circus reaches its grand finale with November’s ritual act of “democracy,” the voters (those not entirely disenfranchised by the racist “justice” system and immigration laws) are left to choose among representatives of the ruling capitalist class. And the real decisions are seldom decided by elections, or even Congressional votes.

A perfect example was the recent bailout. Both Obama and McCain endorsed the rescue of the banks, which has already cost hundreds of billions of dollars more than the entire cost of the Iraq war: no choice there. When Congress responded to the popular uproar against the bailout and voted it down, the bankers (through President Bush and the Democratic Congressional leadership) simply told the Congressmen to go back and vote again, this time the “right” way. Then when it was all over, it turned out that the Wall Street banker who runs the Treasury Department had decided to use the hundreds of billions of dollars in an entirely different manner, and on no account to aid struggling homeowners facing eviction. This is how bourgeois “democracy” works. The capitalist state rests not on popular sovereignty but on police departments, prison cells and military power. It is the institution through which the capitalists exercise their class rule over the workers and oppressed.

Today as several “third party” and “socialist” candidates seek the votes of those rightly disgusted with the twin parties of imperialist war and racist, anti-labor attacks, none of these campaigns represents a significant section of the working class moving toward class independence. The alternative candidates offer, at best, a utopian wish list for the capitalist government, not a program to fight for a workers government. The task of the workers revolutionary vanguard is not to organize the biggest “protest vote” for a bourgeois or reformist petty-bourgeois candidate. We seek to intervene in the elections spectacle to bring revolutionary communist consciousness to the working class. For as Marx and Engels insisted, “the emancipation of the working class must be the act of the workers themselves.” ■

Mobilize Working-Class Struggle to Free Troy Now! Abolish the Racist Death Penalty! Free Mumia Abu-Jamal!

Troy Davis Must Not Die!

Troy Davis is currently awaiting the decision of a three-judge panel of the federal circuit court in Atlanta on his appeal for a new hearing. The following leaflet was issued by the Internationalist Group for an international day of protest.

27 OCTOBER 2008 – On October 24, the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals granted a last-minute stay of execution for Troy Anthony Davis. He had been scheduled to be murdered by the state of Georgia three days later. Now the deadline has been pushed back at most to November 18 so his lawyers could file a *habeas corpus* appeal, but it could come well before then. Davis, a 40-year-old black man, was convicted of the murder of a Savannah police officer in 1989. His conviction in a 1991 trial rested solely on the testimony of witnesses. No weapon was ever found, and there is no physical evidence linking Troy to the killing. Since the trial, seven of the nine eyewitnesses have recanted their testimony, several saying they were coerced by the police into fingering Davis. Three witnesses have said that another man admitted to killing the policeman.

That wouldn't even get Troy Davis a hearing, much less set aside the guilty verdict, under the 1996 Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act. Signed into law by Democratic President Bill Clinton, AEDPA puts impossible limits on the admissibility of exculpatory evidence. Under this act, courts are instructed to ignore proof of innocence if it wasn't presented in a "proper" and "timely" fashion. This is only part of an elaborate legal framework dating back to the time of slavery under which innocent people are routinely executed, particularly if they are poor and black. There can be no faith in the racist U.S. "justice" system.

The liberal "human rights" group Amnesty International has mounted an international campaign calling for letters to be sent to the Georgia Board of Pardons, pointing to "overwhelming doubts of Davis' guilt." Over the years, a host of prominent figures have called to stop the execution of Troy Davis,



Troy Davis

including the Pope Benedict, former U.S. president and Georgia governor Jimmy Carter, Georgia Congressman John Lewis, South African bishop Desmond Tutu, singer Harry Belafonte and musician Ravi Shankar, as well as the Council of Europe and the European Parliament – all to no avail.

The threatened execution of Troy Davis is a legal lynching. The Internationalist Group calls on working people and the oppressed to ***mobilize to stop the execution, to free Troy Davis and abolish the barbaric death penalty!***

The statements by the witnesses who later recanted their trial testimony expose the everyday functioning of the capitalist state's legal system.

- Dorothy Ferrell was on parole and staying in a hotel across the street from the scene of the shooting. Now she testifies: "I was scared that if I didn't do what the police wanted me to do, then they would try to lock me up again.... From the way the officer was talking, he gave me the impression that I should say that Troy Davis was the one who shot the officer.... I told the detective that Troy Davis was the shooter, even though the truth was that I didn't see who shot the officer.... I had four children at that time, and I was taking care of them myself. I couldn't go back to jail."

- Darrell Collins was only 16 when more than a dozen police officers converged on his home. "I told them that ... I didn't see Troy do nothing. They got real mad when I said this and started getting in my face. They were telling me that I was an accessory to murder and that I would pay like Troy was gonna pay if I didn't tell them what they wanted to hear. They told me ... I would be lucky if I ever got out, especially because a police officer got killed. ... After a couple of hours of the detectives yelling at me and threatening me, I finally broke down and told them what they wanted to hear. ... I am not proud for lying at Troy's trial, but the police had me so messed up that I felt that's all I could do or else I would go to jail."

- Antoine Williams was coerced by police into signing a state-

There Is No Justice in the Capitalist Courts



IG at protest outside Madison Square Garden in New York, 23 October 2008.

ment that he could not read, implicating a gunman who he did not see: "I couldn't really tell what was going on because I had the darkest shades of tint you could possibly have on my windows of my car. As soon as I heard the shot and saw the officer go down, I ducked down under the dash of my car. ... Later that night, some cops ... asked me to describe the shooter and what he looked like. ... I kept telling them that I didn't know.... After the officers talked to me, they gave me a statement and told me to sign it. I signed it. I did not read it because I cannot read.... I have no idea what the person who shot the officer looks like."

The state of Georgia has refused to hear this evidence because it is itching to kill Troy Davis, and the courts have backed it up. On March 17, the Georgia Supreme Court denied Davis a new trial. His execution was scheduled for September 23, and the state court and Parole Board refused to move the date, even when the U.S. Supreme Court scheduled a hearing for September 29. But eventually the high court in Washington refused to reconsider Davis' case.

As international protests gather in a last-ditch attempt to save him, Davis's prosecutor, Spencer Lawton, has taken to the airwaves and the editorial pages to grease the skids for this legal lynching. He sneers at the recantations of the prosecution witnesses, who expose themselves to charges of perjury by coming forward, calling their sworn affidavits "coerced" (by whom?). D.A. Lawton's defense of the state-sponsored lynching hanging over Troy Davis's head drips with the bigoted rage of the professional frame-up artist. With the sworn recantations, the case against Davis stands on nothing but the naked will of the racist ruling class to "finish the job."

Troy Davis needs all the defenders he can get, but the bour-

geois figures who have called to stay the execution are concerned first and foremost with sanitizing racist capitalist rule. Amnesty International petitions the Georgia parole board: "Your power to grant clemency exists to prevent such an irreversible error and preserve public faith in the state's justice system." Jimmy Carter ran for president in 1976 supporting the reintroduction of the death penalty. Even on the left, those who call for "justice for Troy Davis" and looked to the Supreme Court as Troy's "last hope" build dangerous illusions in the racist justice system. The demand must be for *freedom* for Troy Davis, for *there is no justice in the capitalist courts!*

The relentless drive for the assassination of Troy Davis is only the latest case in the machinery of state murder, where those accused of killing a police officer are framed and railroaded with a vengeance despite their innocence. On October 6, the U.S. Supreme Court turned down an appeal of Mumia Abu-Jamal, the renowned journalist and former Black Panther spokesman who has been on Pennsylvania's death row for more than a quarter century, falsely accused of killing a Philadelphia cop. The fact that witnesses lied on the stand in a rigged trial before a judge who was a lifetime member of the Fraternal Order of Police was of no concern to the high court. Now another appeal is being prepared over the blatant exclusion of black jurors in Mumia's "trial." Meanwhile, just as the execution of Davis was rescheduled, the Philly D.A.'s office called on the U.S. Supreme Court to reinstate the death sentence against Jamal.

While supporting efforts to use whatever legal venues are open to him, we call not for a "new trial" in the bourgeois courts, as the liberals and reformists vainly do, but to *mobilize the power of the working class in action to free Mumia Abu-Jamal*. In Brazil our comrades of the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil have twice sparked work stoppages by teachers in the state of Rio de Janeiro demanding Mumia's freedom, the latest on May 7 of this year.

Troy Davis is innocent, but Troy Davis is black and this is capitalist America, where black oppression is "enshrined" in the system of racist repression. Over 40 percent of the people on this country's death row are black. The death penalty is a direct legacy of slavery, and a symbol of how the unfinished Civil War left black people, North and South, branded and condemned as a specially oppressed color caste at the bottom rung of those whose toil enriches the exploiters.

The one force more powerful than the determination of America's "justice" system to kill an innocent black man is the international working class. In Georgia, Willie Seymore, president of Local 1414 of the International Longshoremen's Association spoke to a meeting of more than 300 people at Savannah State University on October 13 protesting the scheduled execution of Troy Davis. From San Francisco, California, the president of International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 10, Melvin MacKay, sent a letter to the Georgia Board of Pardons, noting that "the death penalty, a leftover from the days of slavery, is used with a strong racial bias," and calling to stop the execution of Davis.

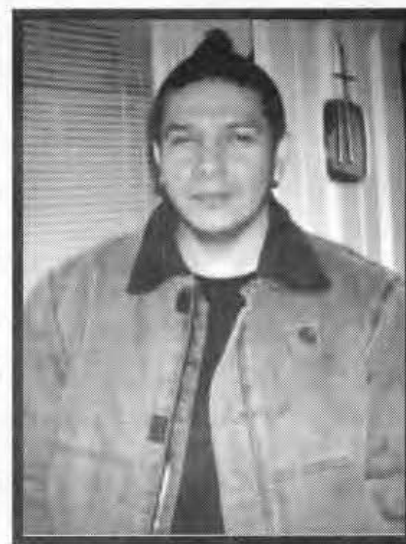
But much more is needed: the *power* of the working class

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Mobilize Workers Action to Defend Immigrant Workers!

Lynch Mob Murder on Long Island

Internationalist photo



Daily News

Hundreds turned out for vigil for Marcelo Lucero (right) in Patchogue, Long Island, November 11.

11 NOVEMBER 2008 – Just before midnight Saturday, November 8, an Ecuadorian immigrant worker, 37-year-old Marcelo Lucero was brutally beaten and then stabbed to death by a lynch mob of drunken teenagers in Patchogue, Long Island. This is not an isolated incident but part of a pattern of racist violence against immigrants on the island, and in Suffolk County in particular where the county executive has made immigrant-bashing his election trademark and police regularly harass Latino residents. It is the latest of a number of deadly anti-immigrant attacks, including another lynch mob murder in Shenandoah, Pennsylvania last July. It took place as the federal government is intensifying the deportation raids by its Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) cops across the country. And it came only days after the election of Barack Obama, the first black president in the history of the United States. *The racists are in a frenzy. It is up to the workers movement and all defenders of immigrant and minority rights to stop them in their tracks.*

The vile crime in Long Island was committed by a racist gang who had started several brawls with immigrant students in the local high school, and who would get liquored up to go out “beaner jumping” – to beat up Latinos they encountered on the street. The night of the murder, the racists were driving around town looking to “f—k up some Mexicans,” according to one of them. First they encountered a Colombian waiter, 55-year-old Hector Sierra, punching and chasing him until he started banging on a door so loudly screaming for help that the thugs left. A few minutes later they found Marcelo Lucero and a friend near the Long Island Railroad station, surrounded them and

started beating. The friend managed to get away and called the police. Marcelo did not. He was stabbed in the chest with a knife by the gang’s ringleader, Jeffrey Conroy, a white supremacist who has a swastika tattooed on his thigh. Conroy was at the center of the series of racist brawls that caused the Patchogue-Medford High School to be locked down.

This is a clear-cut case of a racist mob led by a Nazi: they were identified by Lucero’s friend and police quickly located and arrested the group. The murder weapon was found and Conroy admits the stabbing. Yet the fascist killer has only been charged with first degree manslaughter as a hate crime and first degree gang assault in what was clearly a case of *murder*. Moreover, the racist thugs’ attacks on Latino immigrants were widely known and tolerated by the community and police. This is no accident, as Suffolk County is where in the town of Farmingville in 2001 two Mexican day laborers were nearly beaten to death and in 2003 a Mexican family’s house was burned down. A local nativist anti-immigrant group calling itself Sagem Quality of Life has invited outside racist groups to spew their hate propaganda on Long Island. And Suffolk County executive Steve Levy has launched sting operations against contractors who hire immigrant day laborers, while trying to get the police to arrest undocumented workers on immigration charges.

While in this rare case the murderers were quickly caught and Levy issued a pro forma condemnation, police and local authorities from Long Island, New York to San Diego, California are at the forefront of the racist attacks. In Arizona, the sheriff of Maricopa County (which includes Phoenix), Joseph Arpaio, has set up private posses including members of the fas-

Full Citizenship Rights for All Immigrants!

cist Minuteman squad to hunt down “illegal” immigrants. In turn, these racist immigrant catchers, reminiscent of the slave catchers who tracked down escaped blacks in the pre-Civil War era, take their cue from the hated *migra*. The notorious ICE immigration police carry out their dawn raids on factories and immigrant neighborhoods with armies of black-uniformed riot cops reminiscent of the Gestapo who rounded up Jews and Communists in Nazi Germany. Fascist murderer Conroy and his cohorts did not act alone. They were egged on by the bourgeois politicians and police who have made immigrants the “enemy within” in their “global war on terror.”

Appealing to the authorities will not stop the wave of racist attacks, for the courts, cops and capitalist politicians are masterminding the criminal war on immigrant workers, documented and undocumented alike. To combat the racist attacks it is necessary to organize mass mobilization led by the multiracial, integrated workers movement, which has the power to stop the raids and to teach the racists a lesson they will never forget. On May 1, 2006 more than a million immigrants stopped work and went into the streets to demand their rights. But since then, demonstrations for immigrants’ rights have been far smaller. Why? The huge 2006 marches were fueled by fear of a bill, HR 4437, calling for mass deportations, and by hope in immigration reform, particularly from the Democrats. But a bipartisan “reform” bill (which would have legalized indentured servitude) coauthored by liberal Democrat Ted Kennedy and conservative Republican John McCain died in conference after being passed by the Senate. In the recent election campaign, both McCain and Democratic candidate Barack Obama called for enforcing laws calling for deportation of undocumented immigrants.

Currently a number of bourgeois immigration reform groups are calling to lobby Congress starting the day after Obama’s inauguration. They are fostering the illusion that the African American Democratic president will somehow provide immigrants with a “path to citizenship.” The *New York Times* (11 November) editorializes about how “Republican politicians decided a few years ago to exploit immigration as a wedge issue,” yet they neglect to mention that Stephen Levy who wants to turn Suffolk County into a hell for immigrants is a *Democrat*. While George Bush and his Republican administration have justly earned the hatred of millions of Latino voters and immigrants who are denied the right to vote, the fact is that both of the partner parties of American capitalism are in a frenzy to “control U.S. borders” as they carry out their “preventive war” from Afghanistan and Iraq to the Philippines and Colombia whose aim is to get the world to bow down to the dictates from Washington.

The Internationalist Group, section of the League for the Fourth International, calls to break from the Democrats, Republicans and all capitalist parties and begin the construction of a revolutionary workers party, which as in the French Revolution of 1789, the Paris Commune of 1871 and the Russian October Revolution of 1917 will establish full citizenship rights for all immigrants, by overthrowing the capitalist slave drivers who seek to prolong their exploitation by

setting one group of workers against another.

We print below the remarks by a spokesman for the Internationalist Group at the October 12 immigrants rights march in Queens, New York:

“There are more than 15 million undocumented workers in this country. They do not receive unemployment insurance, they do not receive welfare, they do not receive health benefits. They are here because the capitalist economy requires their labor. And now that the U.S. economy has entered into a financial crisis, there will be increased demands that they be expelled from this country, that there be mass deportations.

“And we are here to say that these deportations must not happen and that we need to mobilize the power of the working class to stop them. The rulers in Washington will not stop these raids. If Obama is elected on November 4 it will not stop the raids. If McCain is elected on November 4 it will not stop the raids. They are capitalist politicians. They are imperialist politicians. They are waging a war, an imperialist war, in the Near East, and they want an enemy within.

“In the Second World War, the enemy within was the Japanese, and they locked them up in concentration camps. In this war, the enemy within is immigrants. They started with the Arab immigrants. They arrested thousands of immigrants from South Asia, because maybe they looked like Arabs. Now they are arresting and throwing into concentration camps again tens of thousands of immigrants from all over the world. And those immigrants are here because they were forced here by the economic crisis that was brought upon them by imperialism.

“In Mexico, millions of peasants have been thrown out of work in Oaxaca, in Michoacán, in Guerrero. They were growing corn, but they can’t sell their corn because the cheap corn from the United States undercuts them in the market. So what happens: they get driven off of their land, and they get driven to the north. And today many of those peasants who have been forced out of their lands by cheap corn from Iowa are now working in the meatpacking plants in Iowa where they are subject to brutal conditions of exploitation.

“We say it’s necessary to mobilize the working class in action to stop the raids. We say that everybody who is here has a right to stay here with the same rights as everybody else. That is why we demand *full citizenship rights for everyone, for all immigrants* here in the United States.

“And we say as well that it is necessary to stop this war by the action of the working class in this country. On May Day, May 1st of this year, the dockworkers on the West Coast, the port workers, shut down every port on the West Coast for one day in a strike against the war – against the war in Iraq, and against the war in Afghanistan, and demanding that U.S. troops be withdrawn from throughout the Near East. That is a small example of the kind of power that we need to use. And we can use that, we can stop this war. If they try raids here in New York City it is entirely possible that the working class here can stop those raids by going into the streets and blocking them: not by begging Congress, but by insisting that we demand the rights of citizenship.” ■

Bring Down the Bourgeoisie Through Workers Revolution!

World Capitalism Plunges

The global economic crisis continues to deepen, month after month. With the financial crisis that exploded in September 2008, the international credit system effectively froze, making it virtually impossible for even the largest firms with the best ratings to obtain new loans. In what amounts to a slow-motion stock market crash, values on financial exchanges worldwide have been cut in half from their 2007 highs. Since then, the plunge has moved from the realm of what Karl Marx called “fictitious capital” to the real economy. In the past five months, there has been a sharp drop in industrial production, investments, exports, consumer spending, construction and just about every other major indicator of economic activity in virtually every country of the capitalist world. This marks a big difference from all other recent economic crises, where countries could recover by exporting to other markets (notably the United States) or pouring money into new speculative bubbles. Not this time.

Although attention has been focused on the financial crisis – and on the Wall Street bankers, hedge fund operators insurance company execs who have made out like bandits – the economic downturn began almost a year earlier. In the U.S, this is already be the longest recession since World War II, and it’s not ending any time soon. Housing prices fell by 20 percent last year in major markets and 10 percent of all mortgages are in arrears or default; 19 million houses and apartments are standing empty around the country, while homelessness increases. More than 4.4 million jobs have been lost so far, 650,000 in each of the last three months. While the official unemployment rate is at 8.1 percent, the actual rate is considerably higher (the government fudges the statistics by not counting those who have given up looking for work). The broader unemployment count is now 14.8 percent of the workforce, and it’s heading a lot higher. Consumer spending has gone through the floor, especially for big ticket items like automobiles (down 41 percent in February).

One economist quipped that not so long ago people were buying cars, big screen TVs and refrigerators like they were groceries; now they are buying groceries like they are cars. Just as in the 1930s farmers dumped “surplus” milk while people went hungry, today sales of dairy products have dropped so far that there is an “oversupply” of cows so farmers are selling off (and killing off) their herds! Another sign of the times: General Electric, which was considered the gold standard of blue chip stocks because it paid a dividend straight through the 1930s, announced at the end of February it was cutting its dividend by two-thirds. One anguished retiree wrote



Casey Kelbaugh for The New York Times

Hundreds of job seekers lined up in Manhattan, February 24.

in response: “We are retired. My husband is 90 1/2 and is not to proud to eat the food I will have to now get us dumpster diving. We needed that dividend for food.”

Recession or Depression? Suddenly the rulers are beginning to mention the dreaded “D-word.” Bourgeois economists have described recent recessions as “V-shaped,” with a sharp decline followed by sharp upturns. They at first said the current crisis looked like a “U-shaped” recession, lasting longer at the bottom before turning up. Now quite a few are saying that this crisis will be “L-shaped”: plunging straight down, and staying there. The CEO of Microsoft, Steve Ballmer, said in announcing 5,000 layoffs, the first significant cuts ever for the computer giant: “Our model is not for a quick rebound. Our model is things go down, and then they reset. The economy shrinks” (*New York Times*, 23 January). Or as John Silvia, chief economist at Wachovia Bank, put it (*New York Times*, 7 March):

“These jobs aren’t coming back.... A lot of production either isn’t going to happen at all, or it’s going to happen somewhere other than the United States. There are going to be fewer stores, fewer factories, fewer financial services operations. Firms are making strategic decisions that they don’t want to be in their businesses.”

What is to be done? In short, the recession is rapidly becoming a depression, although the capitalist rulers don’t want to say so because they fear that would set off an even worse panic. Generally, “mainstream” economists say a depression (which they used to claim was no longer possible) is just a worse recession. But there is a significant difference. The series of recessions every 5-7 years that one can find at any point in the history of capitalism is an expression of the cyclical nature of the production for profit system. However, when production

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From Wall Street Crisis to International Socialist Revolution

2 OCTOBER 2008 – Over the last 15 years, there have been financial crises in a number of countries around the world: the collapse of the banking system in *Mexico* in 1994-95; the collapse of the currency of *Thailand* in 1997, touching off a wave of devaluations and stock market crises in all of Southeast Asia; the ruble crisis in *Russia* in 1998, due to a fall in the price of oil; the devaluation of the real in *Brazil* in 1999, which unleashed a flight of short-term investments; the economic crisis of *Argentina* from 2000 to 2002, which resulted in the fall of a succession of presidents; the implosion of the *information technology bubble* in the United States in 2000-01 with the bankruptcy of many Internet-based “dot-com” companies and a nosedive of share prices on the New York Stock Exchange; and now, from 2007 on, the *credit crisis* in the U.S. and around the world that began with *subprime mortgages*.

Yet this is not only a financial crisis: the entire capitalist system is at risk. It has already set off a wave of sharp falls in stock market prices worldwide. The rulers of the United States, who brag that they are the only and “indispensable” superpower, say that if not resolved, the present crisis could have “catastrophic” consequences. The kings of Wall Street, the center of international finance capital, who have dubbed themselves “masters of the universe,” say the same. The stock market panic can end up in a full-fledged *crash*, as in 1929, and meanwhile the lack of credit is threatening to produce a new *Great Depression*. Even though they have already pumped more than \$500 billion into U.S. banks, the credit system is still frozen. The economists and politicians who in the past acted as prophets of the religion of free markets are now nationalizing one financial institution after another. And the crisis continues.

In Latin America, there is a widespread sentiment of *Schadenfreude*, of satisfaction in seeing the difficulties of the arrogant Yankee imperialists who used to try to discipline their subjects with the whip of “neo-liberalism,” the doctrine that calls for the elimination of all state interference in the economy. What a surprise! At the moment of truth, Washington and Wall Street don’t want to drink their own bitter medicine. Some “center-left” analysts like the Brazilian Emil Sader ask, “Is Neo-Liberalism Over?” (*La Jornada*, 29 September). (Sader’s conclusion is that the model has run out of gas, but it hasn’t ended.) Among “far left” groups analyses are proliferating that foretell a total if not terminal “capitalist collapse.”



Reuters

Frenzy on New York Mercantile Exchange, March 2008.

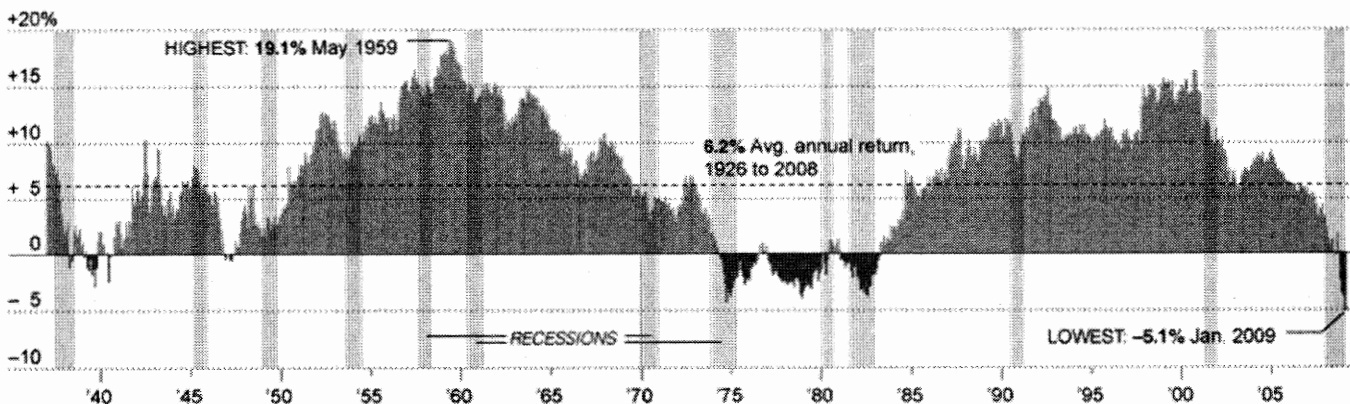
But neither the “moderate” nor the supposedly “far” left put forward a program for revolutionary action.

In the United States, the ruling class was shaken by the unexpected failure of its bank bailout plan in the House of Representatives on September 29. Congressmen received an avalanche of phone calls, letters and e-mails against it, running at a rate of 200 to 400 to 1 opposed to shelling out astronomical

**Break with the Democrats and All the Bosses' Parties!
Build a Revolutionary Workers Party!**

Worst Decade Yet

Annual total return of Standard & Poor's 500-stock index, adjusted for inflation, over 10-year periods ending on date shown.



Graph: New York Times

Figures are based on the total return of the S.&P. 500, with dividends reinvested, adjusted for the change in the Consumer Price Index. Figures are not reduced for either transaction costs or taxes, and thus overstate what the average investor would be likely to receive. Figures assume the C.P.I. will be unchanged for January.

Sources: Standard & Poor's, Bloomberg, Bureau of Labor Statistics via Haver Analytics

The ten-year period from February 1999 to February 2009 saw the worst decline in the stock market in history, worse even (when adjusted for inflation) than the decade after the 1929 stock market crash, losing 50 percent of their value. This is what Karl Marx called "fictitious capital."

payoffs to the financiers who produced the crisis with their boundless "greed." The same day as the vote in Congress, the New York Stock Exchange suffered its biggest fall since 1987. In one day more than a trillion dollars of what Karl Marx called "fictitious capital" were wiped out. Terrified investors are putting their money in U.S. Treasury bonds at an interest rate of practically 0, while overnight dollar deposit loans among banks, the most secure in the commercial market, went up to 7 percent *per day*, the highest figure in history.

Meanwhile, in the real economy, hundreds of thousands of families are losing their homes because of mortgage defaults. Companies cannot obtain funds to finance investments or even to carry out their day-to-day operations. Workers' wages and even middle-class incomes have been hard-hit by the rise in prices of food and fuel. Real inflation is over 14 percent annually, according to the methods used to calculate the rate in 1980, before the government decided to falsify the figures by eliminating the cost of gasoline and food! The real unemployment rate is also already in double digits (over 10 percent) when you include the categories of "discouraged workers" who are not actively looking for work, and others who the government has simply eliminated from the workforce altogether because there are no jobs for them. Both are not counted in the government's phony official jobless statistics. For the U.S. working class, whose wages have steadily fallen since the 1970s, the crisis is not new but has been going on for years.

In Latin America, the effects of the Great Depression of the 1930s in Europe and North America were partially offset by the relative isolation of their national economies, which made possible a certain process of industrialization by "import substitution." Today the effect of the capitalist crisis is immediate. The panic on the New York Stock Exchange has spread and intensified on the stock markets of Mexico, São Paulo and Buenos Aires. The crisis in Detroit due to falling

automobile sales has led to layoffs in the *maquiladoras* (free trade zone plants) in the north of Mexico, which produce exclusively for the U.S. market. If in recent years the mounting demand for raw materials has produced a boom in oil and mineral producing countries, now a crash is looming as a result of the plummeting prices and falling exports. In the era of "globalization" there will be no safe harbor from the devastation of a world capitalist crisis.

It's not a matter of choosing one "model" or another of capitalist economy: it is the system itself that is in crisis. "Neoliberalism" spread in the 1980s due to the exhaustion of the Keynesian policies which sought to regulate crises through government spending – policies which in the 1970s led to the phenomenon of "*stagflation*," when inflation surged while the economy stagnated. This was intensified due to the decision of the U.S. government, under the Democrats as well as the Republicans, to finance the Vietnam War with a policy of "guns and butter" (i.e., budgeting increased spending for the military and for social programs). How did they do it? By printing greenbacks. Similarly, today the war on Iraq and Afghanistan is being financed entirely by borrowed money: the trillion-dollar (so far) bill will come due later. And if in 1971, Washington's answer to the economic crisis was to declare that the U.S. currency was no longer backed by gold, today the dollar's value and its function as the world's reserve currency is based exclusively on confidence in the stability of the American economy. Once that confidence has gone up in smoke...

But the dire straits in which the masters of the U.S. economy find themselves will not by itself lead to a positive outcome for the international working class. In the 1960s and '70s as well, the American empire was bogged down in a losing colonial war, along with great social unrest in Latin America, and a large-scale capitalist economic crisis. But

nowhere was capitalism overthrown in the region after the Cuban Revolution. Why? The absence of victorious proletarian revolutions in the Western Hemisphere is entirely due to the lack of a *revolutionary internationalist* leadership. The Latin American left was dominated by the line of Castro- and Mao-style guerrilla struggle, both variants of Stalinism, based on the *nationalist* and anti-Marxist policy of building “socialism in one country.” The failure of these struggles, based not on the proletariat but on the petty-bourgeois peasantry, led to the destruction of an entire generation of leftist would-be revolutionaries.

Today, the theories of an imminent final collapse of capitalism have gained new currency. Quite awhile ago, Lenin underscored the falseness of such concepts. In his report on the international situation to the Second Congress of the Communist International (1920), he insisted:

“[For the bourgeoisie] there is no such thing as an absolutely hopeless situation. The bourgeoisie are behaving like barefaced plunderers who have lost their heads; they are committing folly after folly, thus aggravating the situation and hastening their doom. All that is true. But nobody can ‘prove’ that it is absolutely impossible for them to pacify a minority of the exploited with some petty concessions, and suppress some movement or uprising of some section of the oppressed and exploited. To try to ‘prove’ in advance that there is ‘absolutely’ no way out of the situation would be sheer pedantry, or playing with concepts and catchwords.... The revolutionary parties must now ‘prove’ in practice that they have sufficient understanding and organization, contact with the exploited masses, and determination and skill to utilize this crisis for a successful, a victorious revolution.”

At the end of the 1920s, when Stalin revived the theory of a final crisis of capitalism, Trotsky responded: “Will the bourgeoisie be able to secure for itself a new epoch of capitalist growth and power? Merely to deny such a possibility, counting on the ‘hopeless position’ in which capitalism finds itself would be mere revolutionary verbiage.” (*The Third International After Lenin* [1928]).

Some social democrats also adopted the theory of an automatic collapse of capitalism, basing themselves on a book by the Polish economist Henryk Grossman, *The Law of Accumulation and Breakdown of the Capitalist System*, published shortly before the 1929 stock market crash. What characterizes the “theory of collapse” (*Zusammenbruchstheorie*) is that it is deeply *objectivist* and passive, whether in its Stalinist or social-democratic versions, or any of the variants put forward by groups claiming to be Trotskyist, such as the “International Committee of the Fourth International” of the late British pseudo-Trotskyist Gerry Healy in the 1970s. If it was true that the capitalist system was about to fall on its own, it would negate the urgent need to organize a revolutionary vanguard to win the leadership of the working class.

It should be noted that various Latin American groups who today call themselves Trotskyists – including both the Trotskyist Faction led by the Argentine Partido de Trabajadores por el Socialismo (PTS – Party of Workers for Socialism) and the Coordinating Committee for Refounding the Fourth In-

ternational led by the Argentine Partido Obrero (PO – Workers Party) – produce endless analyses of the economic crisis without putting forward a class-struggle program leading to revolution. They proclaim the crisis and that’s the end of it.

Another tendency, the International Workers League led by the Brazilian Partido Socialista dos Trabalhadores Unificado (PSTU – United Socialist Workers Party), the direct descendants of the late Nahuel Moreno, present “A Workers Program to Combat the Crisis” (*Opinião Socialista*, 25 September), but this program is limited to the capitalist framework. Instead of Trotsky’s call in the Transitional Program for an *agrarian revolution* they want a “radical agrarian reform” carried out by action of the (capitalist) state. They seek “state ownership of the financial system,” which in Latin America could be a *pro-capitalist* measure to save insolvent banks, as was the case in Mexico with the nationalization of the banks by President José López Portillo in 1982. And if they call for a “wage trigger” or COLA (cost-of-living allowance), namely an “automatic wage increase taking account of inflation,” they do not link this to the struggle to sweep away the capitalist state and install a workers and peasants government to expropriate the bourgeoisie and extend the revolution internationally.

The League for the Fourth International insists, along with the great Russian revolutionaries Lenin and Trotsky, that the capitalist system will not definitively collapse by itself. Despite its many crises, as deep as they may be, capitalism will not disappear due to its own internal dynamic. The working class has to give it a shove to get rid of this system of exploitation and poverty in order to be able to erect on its remains an egalitarian society in which production is for human needs rather than for the exploiters’ profits. We reprint on the next page the leaflet of the Internationalist Group distributed at Wall Street protests, calling for working-class mobilization against the bank bailout and for a program of transitional demands pointing to the only solution in favor of the exploited and oppressed, international socialist revolution. ■

Troy Davis...

continued from page 31

must be brought to bear. Yet the labor tops and civil rights groups leaders are mobilizing their members and resources to vote for Democrat Barack Obama, who *defends* the racist death penalty and tells those who protest against the racist injustice system that they must “respect” the verdict of the courts (as in the case of Sean Bell who was murdered in a hail of 50 bullets from New York City cops who were all acquitted).

Class struggle against the legal lynchers is our last and best hope, and it is not too late to mobilize it. As the execution of Troy Davis looms, the Internationalist Group and League for the Fourth International urgently call on organized labor to mobilize working-class action across the country and internationally to demand freedom for Troy Davis and all class-war prisoners, and to smash the racist death penalty! ■

Expropriate the Banks Under a Workers Government!

No to the Bailout of the Capitalist Speculators!

25 SEPTEMBER 2008 – In the last two weeks, the financial crisis that has been heating up since early 2007 reached the boiling point. Credit markets virtually stopped functioning. A full-blown panic has swept through stock markets worldwide. The capitalist economy is in the throes of a recession that could turn into a Depression lasting for years. Unemployment lines are swelling as almost 800,000 jobs have been eliminated in the last ten months. Foreclosures have thrown more than a million households out of their homes in the space of a year. The incomes of working people are falling sharply. And meanwhile the U.S. imperialists are waging a war without end, pillaging countries from Iraq and Afghanistan to the Philippines and Latin America, demanding that the world bow to their diktat.

In these dire economic straits, the Wall Street speculators who set off this crisis are demanding that the government rescue them with a bailout priced at \$700 billion. The actual costs will be far higher, possibly a trillion dollars or more. The bankers are holding the economy hostage. The Bush regime holds a figurative gun to the head of Congress, threatening that if it doesn't come up with the ransom there will be a financial meltdown and the entire world economy will grind to a halt. Their doomsday scenario has added credibility as the capitalist financial system has practically frozen up. Yet there is no indication that this huge bribe will restart the credit markets any more than the hundreds of billions of dollars already injected into the banking system by the Fed have.

The Republican administration has been treading a fine line. On the one hand they want to pretend that all is needed is minor "corrections" to a basically healthy economy. On the other hand, they threaten that if their program isn't passed there will be financial Armageddon. In the aftermath of the Lehman Brothers bankruptcy, Republican presidential candidate John McCain said "the fundamentals of our economy are strong." Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson declared, "the long-term economic fundamentals of the United States are sound." As one economics pundit declared, "There is a rule of thumb that when the government proclaims the fundamentals are good, you should sell" (*New York Times*, 16 September). And if they declare that the "long-term" fundamentals are A-OK, that means big trouble in the short-term and you should sell *now*. Which is what investors did, sending the Dow Jones and NASDAQ indexes plummeting.

The government wants to frighten the general population and browbeat Congress into approving its giant boondoggle by bandying about the specter of a new Depression.



Federal Reserve Bank of New York

Gold reserves in the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. Since 1971, the American dollar is no longer backed by gold but only by confidence in the U.S. How long will that last?

Their line is vote for the Wall Street bailout this week, or else. It has many people scared stiff because on Main Street the economic crisis is already here, and has been for months. But voting a giveaway of hundreds of billions to the banks isn't going to stop anyone from being evicted from their homes or get any jobs for the jobless.

Meanwhile, the Democrats are pushing hardest for the Bush bailout of the banks. It is not for nothing that New York Democrat Chuck Schumer is known as "the senator from Wall Street," and that vice-presidential Democratic candidate Joe Biden of Delaware was dubbed "the senator from MBNA," the giant credit



Illusion and reality, unemployment line 1937.

card company that was sold to Bank of America a couple of years ago. Likewise, today it is the Democratic majority in Congress that keeps funding the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama blames “greed and irresponsibility” for the crisis on Wall Street (capitalism without greed?) and says there must be no “blank check to Washington” to resolve it. Democratic Senate majority leader Harry Reid repeats that Congress must not grant President Bush a “blank check” with the \$700 billion bailout. He says the Democrats will “do what is necessary,” but they want some conditions. They are asking for an “oversight board” to supervise the operation, plus allowing bankruptcy judges to impose new loan terms in foreclosure proceedings, getting a stake in the banks in exchange for taking bad debts off their hands, and putting some limits on salaries of executives whose firms get handouts from the U.S. Treasury.

Marching in step, the New York City Central Labor Council called an “emergency mobilization press conference” in Manhattan’s financial district on September 25, under the slogan “No Blank Check for Wall Street.” The CLC’s seven-point program is a rehash of the Congressional Democrats’ conditions, including “aggressive public oversight” of the bailout, “stop the CEO party train,” use “financial and legal tools to stop home foreclosures,” “repeal the Bush tax cuts,” etc. AFL-CIO chief John Sweeney got in on the act with a letter to the U.S. Senate saying that any bailout plan must “address the disastrous weaknesses in our financial regulatory system.”

Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson opposes any conditions, saying this could “limit market participation” – i.e., the banks would prefer to keep the worthless loans on their books and refuse to resume lending. But in very short order, they will come to a deal. Any conditions attached will be toothless, just sugar coating to make the bitter pill more palatable. The “independent” board proposed by Democrat Barney Frank to oversee the

bailout is to consist of the heads of the Federal Reserve Board, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation and the Securities and Exchange Commission plus two “outside” financial “experts” appointed by Democratic and Republican Congressional leaders. Regardless of what hat they are wearing, this commission will consist of Wall Street bankers. The “regulators” will regulate themselves. Some “independence”!

Moreover, the cause is not “lax regulation,” as the Democrats pretend. The crisis has hit the commercial banks as well, which are the most heavily regulated sector of the U.S. economy. The problem is not “free market fundamentalism” or “neo-liberalism” but *capitalism*. And even if Congress were able to legislate some or all of the Democrats’ riders, *the bailout is still a mammoth payoff to the capitalist speculators*. Many people understand this, if only instinctively. At the September 25 financial district labor demo,

workers in hard hats were chanting “No bailout for Wall Street,” which was definitely not the program of the AFL-CIO chiefs.

While the fat cats, Democrats and bureaucrats are all going for the Bush bailout to prop up U.S. capitalism, revolutionary Marxists oppose this trillion-dollar giveaway to the Wall Street speculators. No matter what “reforms” are tacked onto it, this giant bribe to finance capital is a crime against the working class, which is already suffering from rising unemployment and falling incomes. Instead of subsidizing the banks, we call for the expropriation of the financiers and the whole of the banking system the only way possible: through a workers revolution.

The Diktat of Finance Capital

The bailout lays bare the workings of capitalist “democracy,” right in the middle of the election campaign. It makes clear that whichever candidate wins, it is Wall Street that is calling the shots. The bank rescue plan would make the Treasury Secretary into a dictator, with \$700 billion to throw around at his sole discretion. The administration’s brief (2 ½ page) proposal is a blueprint for the naked dictatorship of finance capital undisguised by the usual trappings of Congressional votes. According to the original wording, “Decisions by the secretary pursuant to the authority of this act are non-reviewable and committed to agency discretion, and may not be reviewed by any court of law or any administrative agency.”

Appointing the Treasury Secretary in charge of “regulating” the banks is putting the fox in the chicken coop. When Henry Paulson told Congress that “all we care about” is “the American taxpayer,” it provoked snickers in the audience. That has about as much credibility as the banks’ automated announcements that “your call is important to us” as you wait on line endlessly to talk to a real person. Paulson is the former

head of Goldman Sachs, the one independent investment bank left standing. Another Goldman Sachs alumnus is White House spokesman Josh Bolton. And it's not just the Republicans. The leading contributor to the presidential campaign of Democrat Barack Obama is . . . Goldman Sachs. And the Secretary of the Treasury under the Democratic administration of Bill Clinton was Robert Rubin, the former chairman of Goldman Sachs, who is currently head of Citigroup and one of Obama's main economic advisors. Some "democracy"!

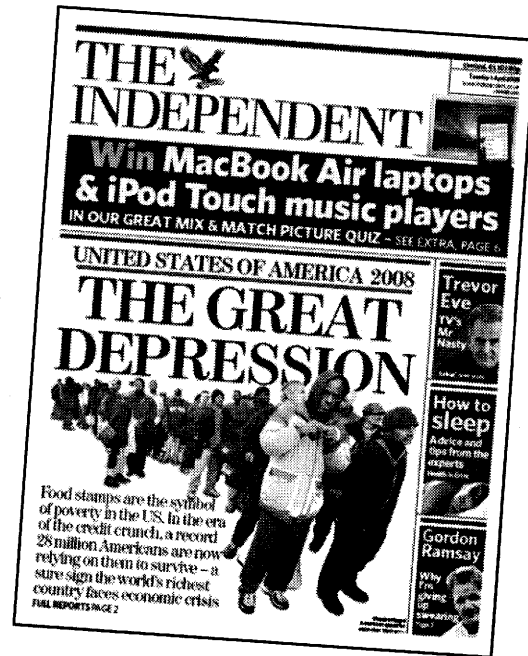
The scope of this giveaway to the capitalist bankers is enormous. The \$700 billion price tag is equal to the entire cost of the Iraq war. It comes on top of \$565 billion already budgeted or handed out to Wall Street this year (\$200 billion Federal Reserve loan program in exchange for mortgage-backed securities; \$30 billion to JPMorgan for the takeover of Bear Stearns; \$200 billion for the federal takeover of the Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac mortgage guarantors; \$85 billion for the takeover of the AIG insurance giant; \$50 billion to shore up money market funds) plus unlimited borrowing rights for top investment banks from the Fed's "discount window." But all that didn't get the banks to start lending, and there is nothing to indicate the infusion of another trillion or so dollars will work either.

In return for taking over "toxic" mortgage-based securities, the future of all sorts of social programs will be mortgaged. The enormous cost of the bank bailout will be used to nix spending for education, health care and other needs. Meanwhile, the ballooning federal debt is set to exceed \$1 trillion this year and the bailout plan includes increasing the limit for the accumulated national debt to over \$11 trillion dollars. This has already sent jitters through the international "financial community." On Monday, the U.S. dollar suffered the biggest drop against the euro since 2001. Investors are worried that with Washington pumping so many billions into the economy, it will stoke inflation and reduce the value of their dollar holdings.

For years, the United States economy has been fueled by enormous subsidies from the East Asian state banks which have bought up Treasury bills to cover the federal government's budget deficits and the U.S.' over \$600 billion yearly international trade deficits. If the financial crisis sets off a stock market crash and a run on the commercial banks, it would be accompanied by a stampede on the American dollar, which since 1971 is sustained only by the confidence of the world's central bankers who see holding greenbacks as a haven of stability. Once that confidence is gone, the whole house of cards could come tumbling down. The "meltdown" of the financial system could set off a "nuclear winter" in the global capitalist economy.

"Do You Still Believe in Capitalism?"

The mushrooming financial crisis has raised fundamental questions. The *New York Times* (20 September) recently published an article advising readers on what to do with "Your Money," where it wrote that in order to minimize risk, "Before you do anything with your portfolio, ask yourself this: Do you still believe in capitalism?" The *Times* editorialized that the



bank crisis was due to "unfettered capitalism." But what is their alternative? Like the Democratic Party politicians and union leaders, what they want is essentially "fettered capitalism." But "regulating" the markets hasn't stopped the boom-bust cycle of capitalism before, and it won't do so now.

Free-market ideologues like to quote the Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter on the "creative destruction" un-leash-ed by capitalism on outmoded economic structures. But today, as the wages and living standards of the working people are being steadily eroded, as social programs are drastically slashed, there is nothing creative about the destruction unleashed by the would-be masters of the universe. This is capitalism in decay, in its imperialist epoch of wars and revolutions. The only thing changed by "globalization" is to speed up the spread of economic crises internationally.

There is a lot of loose talk today about "socialism for the rich," particularly among right-wing Republicans (but also among some gullible leftists) objecting to the bailout. Among the financial wizards about to be laid off at Lehman Brothers there was gallows humor about the "People's Republic of Wall Street." But what is being proposed as a solution to the crisis in the center of world high finance has nothing to do with socialism. It is closer to the kind of corporatist regimentation of capitalism associated with Mussolini's Italy.

And it goes hand-in-hand with the escalating elimination of democratic rights. The rulers are ramming through the bank bailout with the same sort of scare tactics they used to enact the U.S.A. PATRIOT Act in the wake of the 11 September 2001 attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. The result was a wholesale attack on immigrants, leading to the present Gestapo-like raids by the ICE immigration police, as well as warrantless government surveillance of millions of citizens that throws supposed Constitutional guarantees out the window. The latest "security plan" for New York, the "Lower Manhattan Security Initiative," calls for a

“ring of steel” around Wall Street, with mobile teams of heavily armed police and TV cameras at all street and subway entrances to the financial district so that they can scan the faces of everyone who enters the citadel of high finance. So demonstrate on Wall Street while you still can!

This is not the first time that the ruling class has resorted to corporatist measures to shore up the tottering mainstays of U.S. capitalism. In the 1930s, Democrat Franklin Delano Roosevelt set up a number of quasi-government bodies in conjunction with corporate leaders under the aegis of the National Recovery Administration. According to liberal mythology, it was FDR’s Keynesian deficit financing, bank regulation and NRA corporatism that pulled the U.S. out of the Great Depression. But the reality is very different. The first post-1929 depression was followed by a second sharp downturn in the late 1930s, and it was only World War II that finally reduced the massive unemployment set the industrial economy running at full steam.

Today as well, the roiling financial crisis that has hit stock markets and banks around the world points ultimately to a new imperialist war. The war on Afghanistan and Iraq likewise sets the basis for a world conflagration. The U.S.’ aim in the Near East is not to grab Iraq’s oil for its own use, but to control the production and distribution of this vital commodity in order to dominate their imperialist allies and rivals in Europe and Japan. Washington wants its hand on the oil spigot, and its “allies” are becoming restive. Speaking at the United Nations, French president Nicholas Sarkozy described the present U.S.-dominated financial system as “insane.” Ultimately, the war in the Near East, the financial crisis on Wall Street, the assault on democratic rights and the attack on the jobs and living standards of working people are all part of the same *class war* by the U.S. imperialist rulers pointing to a thermonuclear World War III.

Not a Bank Bailout but Socialist Revolution

It has become a commonplace in the last week to call this the biggest economic crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Some bourgeois economists are calling it the financial crisis of the century. In any case, it is far from over. Than Wall Street panic is only a step away from turning into a full-scale stock market crash, which would reverberate throughout the world. The banks are sitting on trillions of dollars which they are refusing to lend because they don’t know how exposed the other banks are to bad loans and they don’t know how much of their own mortgage-backed securities, credit default swaps and various derivatives are at risk. And as of last June the Standard & Poor’s 500 corporations (excluding the banks) have at least \$650 billion in cash on hand (*Financial Times*, 24 August). Yet they are asking working people to foot the bill for rescuing the banks through their taxes.

In the late 1930s, the Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky put forward a Transitional Program to “help the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find the bridge between present demands and the socialist program of the revolution. This bridge should include a system of transitional demands,

stemming from today’s conditions and from today’s consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat.” In the present crisis, class-conscious workers should fight for workers commissions to *open the books of the financial corporations* to see what the stock market speculators and bankers have been up to. In the face of escalating unemployment and inflation, they should fight for a *sliding scale of wages and hours*, to share the available work among all hands and to raise workers’ pay so that it isn’t ravaged by inflation. There should be a *massive program of public works under union control*.

In New York City, instead of trying to prettify the bank bailout, the unions should be preparing to strike against the multi-million dollar cuts that billionaire mayor Bloomberg has announced. This requires a fighting alliance with the black and Latino population in the ghettos and barrios, with immigrants, unorganized workers and students in the vast City University system. Such a *class struggle* would win support even from sections of the hard-pressed middle class. Labor has the power, as the 2005 New York transit strike demonstrated, to bring the city to a crawl. But to use that power requires a genuine “emergency mobilization” to *rip up the anti-labor, no-strike Taylor Law*.

Various opportunist left-wing groups have seized upon the bailout issue to push their schemes to answer the financial crisis within the framework of capitalism. The Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL), for instance, has set up a new website, voteno bailout.org, where it declares: “instead of taking our tax dollars and giving it [sic] to the already rich and powerful, these funds should be used to provide ... decent-paying jobs, affordable housing, health care and a good education for our children.... Click here to send your letter to Congress.” This is the latest version of the “jobs not war,” “education not occupation,” ploy that all the reformists push. But the present financial crisis shows precisely that it is not a question of budget priorities. Even if there were no war or financial crisis, the ruling class is not going to pay for decent jobs, health care or education for the working people.

Curiously, the International Socialist Organization (ISO) editorializes that “now that the U.S. government has carried out several quasi-nationalizations” like Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, “why shouldn’t the public owner of these companies insist on a moratorium on foreclosures” (*Socialist Worker*, 19 September).

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP), for its part, “propose[s] that the major banks and financial institutions be nationalized and turned into public utilities, operated under the democratic control of the working population.” And how is this to be accomplished? The SEP opposes unions and does not call for the mobilization of the organized workers movement. Instead it calls to support its candidates in the elections. Click to send a letter to Congress, convince “publically owned” (capitalist) corporations to stop foreclosures, pull a lever to vote for some pseudo-socialist: these nostrums peddle the illusion that something can be done about the financial

crisis within the framework of bourgeois democracy (of which there is precious little these days).

Instead, it is necessary to mobilize the power of the workers in sharp class struggle. That underscores the burning need to break with the Democrats and all the capitalist parties (including such pressure groups as the Greens and the "Working Families Party," which is nothing but the Democratic Party

in disguise). To do so requires throwing out the pro-capitalist bureaucrats who tie labor to the Democrats and who today are trying to prop up the Wall Street banks, with conditions. What is urgently needed is a struggle to forge a revolutionary workers party with the program to bring down the rotting capitalist edifice and open the road to genuine socialism through international workers revolution. ■

Exchange on Transitional Demands

We print below an exchange of correspondence with Mitchel Cohen of the Brooklyn Green Party.

September 26, 2008

To *The Internationalist*:

Hi,

I agree with the article you handed out at the Wall St. demo Thursday, "No to the Bailout of the Capitalist Speculators" (above). It contained some good information and was short on rhetoric – always a good sign.

However, the end was, for me, problematic, and I want to discuss this with you in a non-polemical way.

I don't particularly like "calls" for others to do something. Exhortations for workers to arise, or for some force "to forge a revolutionary workers party," or for "the mobilization of the organized workers movement," or whatever, just expose one's own impotence. Much better to write, "Here's what we are *doing* to achieve workers' revolution" or to "forge a revolutionary party" or to "mobilize the organized workers".

In addition, you criticize several groups: the PSL, ISO, SEP, and, secondarily, the Greens and the Working Families Party. But except for the WFP, which is a front group for the Democrats, the grounds for your criticisms of the others make no sense. On the one hand, you uphold Trotsky's Transitional Program (and clearly define it), and on the other you criticize the other groups for issuing what are basically transitional demands. To criticize the PSL by saying that "even if there were no war or financial crisis, the ruling class is not going to pay for decent jobs, healthcare or education for the working people" may be correct, but that's exactly the purpose of such a statement — it's a transitional demand as you've (and Trotsky) defined it. Same with the other organizations.

So what actually comes across is a rather petty-sounding and not very theory-based attempt to distinguish your own group from the others, for no good reason.

Now, I'm not saying that there aren't good reasons. I'm just saying that you can't uphold the Transitional Program as strategy on the one hand and then criticize other groups for employing it.

Mitchel Cohen

Brooklyn Greens / Green Party

The Internationalist replies: Thank you for your response to the leaflet we distributed at the September 25 Wall Street protest against the bank bailout. You raise an important question about transitional demands.

In our leaflet, we noted that one left group, the Party for

Socialism and Liberation (PSL) "has set up a new website, votenobailout.org, where it declares: 'instead of taking our tax dollars and giving it to the already rich and powerful, these funds should be used to provide ... decent-paying jobs, affordable housing, health care and a good education for our children.... Click here to send your letter to Congress'."

As we noted, this is a continuation of the PSL's "jobs not war," "education not occupation" line which they share with a whole host of groups in the "antiwar movement." The point we were making is that present financial crisis demonstrates that the issue here is not budget priorities – spend either on this (war) or on that (jobs, education, healthcare, etc.) – but rather a class question. Even though the ruling class is spending hundreds of billions of for their predatory imperialist war in the Iraq and elsewhere in the Near East, suddenly they can come up with a cool trillion dollars in an attempt to bribe Wall Street banks into lending the hoard of cash they are sitting on. Whether their ploy works is another matter.

You find our argument "petty-sounding" and "not very theory-based," because you see the PSL's slogan as a "transitional demand" such as Leon Trotsky defined it. Yet Trotsky's Transitional Program was a program for action by the workers movement to lead from the present demands of the laboring masses to show the path, or constitute a bridge, as he put it, to the fight for workers revolution. It was not a program to pressure the bourgeois state into altering its spending priorities.

When the PSL, or Workers World, or the International Socialist Organization, or the rest of the opportunist left put forward calls like "jobs not war," this is not an attempt to mobilize or prepare the working-class for independent action but an appeal to sections of the bourgeoisie to oppose the current war without opposing the imperialist system which produces those wars. This was what it meant when the German Social Democrats in the late 1930s called for "butter not guns" in response to Hitler's war preparations.

The SPD didn't want to say that it was necessary to defeat German imperialism, to smash the Nazi regime, because they were appealing to the wing of the German bourgeoisie (including sectors of the military) that was worried that with his doctrine of preventive war Hitler might have gone too far. The purpose of today's reformists in raising "money for jobs not war" and similar demands is the same. Just listen to Democrat Obama repeating the same argument in the September 26 presidential candidates' debate with Republican McCain.

The result of this line has been to drive the mass opposition to the Iraq war into the ground by pushing it into the

arms of the Democrats, who have no intention of ending the war. They just want to shift the main theater of operations to Afghanistan and Pakistan.

But are such calls “transitional demands”? Not at all. They are bourgeois pressure politics. You argue that their purpose is to expose that the bourgeoisie isn’t going to do that. But once that is established, how do such demands lead the masses to understand the need to mobilize independently to fight for power? In fact, because they don’t provide a program of class struggle, they tend to produce apathy. If antiwar forces want jobs for education/healthcare/jobs, and two-thirds of the population is against the war, and it doesn’t affect the direction of the government, most people just give up.

The question is, who are we calling on to act? When we demand a sliding scale of wages and hours, for example, Trotskyists don’t tell the masses to send an e-mail to their bourgeois Congressman or woman. Instead we urge the workers to go into the streets and take over the factories like the Italian workers did in 1969 when they won the demand for a *scala mobile* to protect their wages against the ravages of inflation. When we call for workers defense guards, we don’t ask the bourgeois government to carry this out, even under a left-talking nationalist like Hugo Chávez. We advocate that the workers organize independently of and against the state as the German workers did in the early 1920s before they were crushed due to the criminal misleadership of Stalin & Co.

To be sure, certain demands could be construed as being directed at the state. But even then what we are advocating is that the workers mobilize to carry them out. What about the call for expropriation of certain sectors of capitalists, for example? In the Transitional Program, Trotsky sharply distinguishes the revolutionary call for expropriation from the reformist call for nationalization. On the question of state takeover of the banks, he writes: “However, the state-ization of the banks will produce these favorable results only if the state power itself passes completely from the hands of the exploiters into the hands of the toilers.”

When Trotskyists call for expropriation of a particular section of industry, we don’t do so by telling workers to send letters to their Congressional representative or the president, we do so in the manner of the Mexican workers who in 1937-38 struck the oil fields, organizing workers militias to occupy the facilities and challenging the Cárdenas government to expropriate them.

Similarly on the demand for massive programs of public workers under union control. This is not a call for Congress to up its spending on pork barrel projects, with a pro forma reference to the unions tacked on. Trotsky argues that the demand for public works cannot have a progressive content unless it is linked to the fight for workers control. We would fight for this in the way the Minneapolis Trotskyists did in the late 1930s when they organized the WPA workers as a section of Teamsters Local 574, which they led, demanding a six-hour day, union-scale pay, union working conditions, reopening closed plants under workers councils, and striking against layoffs in 1939.

These are some concrete examples to illustrate the gen-

eral point that Trotsky makes, in his March 1938 discussions with Max Shachtman on transitional demands. “What is the sense of the transitional program?” Trotsky asks. “We can call it a program of action, but for us, for our strategic conception, it is a transitional program – it is a help to the masses in overcoming their inherited ideas, methods, and forms” to go from their present demands “to the slogan for the creation of a workers’ soviet.” To urge people to click their computer mouse to send a letter to their Congressperson is a caricature of a transitional demand. It does not lead workers in the direction of forming soviets, but in the opposite direction, of relying on the bourgeois state.

You find exhortations on the workers to arise or to “forge a revolutionary workers party” only “expose one’s own impotence” and prefer writing about “here’s what we are *doing*.” It’s certainly good to write about what you are actually doing, and not just empty exhortations. But in order to do something, it is first necessary to call on the working class to act. For example, we have written about the May 1 West Coast port strike against the war, the first strike ever by American workers against a U.S. war. We have sought to explain in detail how this was accomplished, pointing to the strengths and weaknesses of the ILWU dock workers’ action.

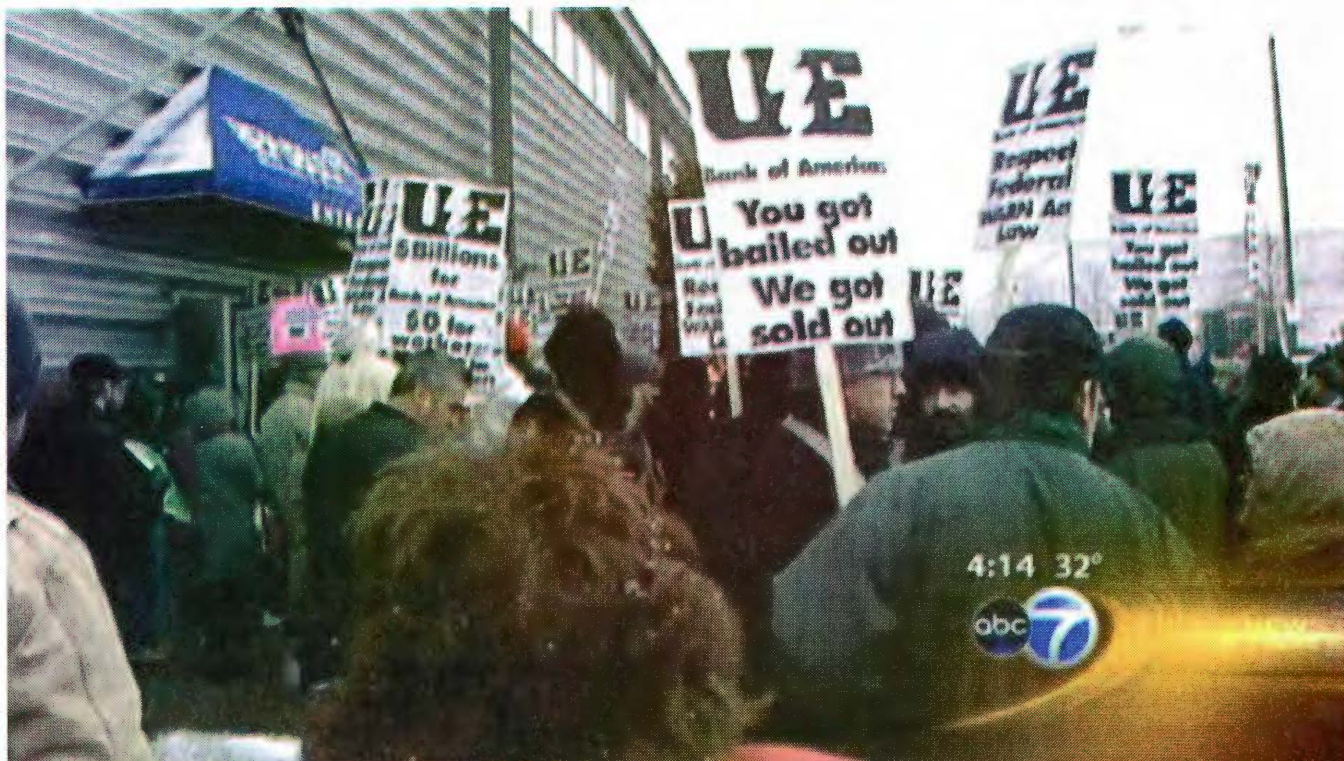
But we have been fighting for this for years. Since 1998, we have not only called for workers strikes against the U.S. wars on Iraq, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Iraq again, we also agitated among the West Coast dock workers for this and for “hot cargoing” war materiel. We helped build a labor conference to stop the war sponsored by ILWU Local 10 in the San Francisco Bay Area, and played an active role in helping prepare this action in every way we could. You might have found our calls “For workers strikes against the war” in 1998, 1999, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007, year in and year out, to be repetitive exhortations. Yet these were not abstract empty calls, and eventually they contributed towards a major development in the class struggle in the U.S.

Not that this makes the slightest impact on the opportunist left. Their attitude, by and large, has been, “Oh, the dock workers shut down the West Coast over the war, how nice. Now let’s move on to the real stuff, like our next anti-war conference.” The reason for this disdain and disinterest on the part of the reformists is that they are not at all interested in an independent mobilization of the workers against the war and against the capitalist war parties, but instead they want to tie all protests against the war to the Democrats and their bankrupt “strategy” of pressuring the bourgeois state.

We call to forge a revolutionary workers party because breaking the chains that bind the U.S. working class to the Democratic Party is decisive in order to advance the class struggle. But revolutionaries also have an obligation to make clear what the alternative is: not another capitalist party like the Greens, or even a reformist chauvinist outfit like the stillborn U.S. Labor Party. On the Green Party, our article on “Capitalist Nader’s ‘Socialist’ Foot Soldiers,” in *Revolution* No. 2 (October 2004), published by the Internationalist Clubs at the City University of New York, is a good starting point. ■

Unionized Immigrant Workers Win \$1.7 Million in Back Pay

Chicago Plant Occupation Electrifies Labor



Supporters of United Electrical Workers (UE) sit-in rally outside Republic plant in Chicago, December 6.

Against Mass Layoffs: *Workers, Seize the Plants – Take to the Streets!*

15 DECEMBER 2008 – On Friday morning, December 5, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that U.S. employers slashed 533,000 jobs in November. Taken together with the BLS' revised figures for jobs eliminated in September and October, that's 1.2 million workers thrown onto the street in three months as the credit crisis turns into a full-fledged economic collapse. Curiously, the stock market rose, on the grounds that things were so bad that the government would have to act.

At almost the same hour as the jobs report was released in Washington, the Republic Windows and Doors plant in Chicago was scheduled to close its doors. The owners had abruptly announced three days earlier that they were shutting down, and didn't even show up for negotiations with the union, the United Electrical Workers (UE), the day before. But the furious 240 workers refused to take it lying down. They fought back, and showed the way to others.

At 10:30 a.m., the largely immigrant and black workers

took over Republic and occupied the plant, vowing to hold fast until they won the vacation pay and 60 days severance pay owed them under the Federal Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification (WARN) Act. And they did. On the sixth day of the occupation, J.P. Morgan and the Bank of America, two of the biggest banks in the United States, forked over \$1.75 million to pay for Republic's legal obligations.

The news of the occupation Friday spread like wildfire through the labor movement. TV reporters and crews broadcast the news of the spectacular action around the Chicago area. By the evening, trade unionists and other supporters were showing up at the plant, located in the Goose Island industrial area of North Chicago, bringing coffee, donuts and solidarity. The next day, news reports reverberated among labor and left activists nationally, and internationally.

From plant floors to corporate boardrooms and broadcast studios, people had their eyes glued on the small plant in Chicago to see what happened. Everyone was well aware that this

could be a harbinger of things to come as mass layoffs spread. If 200-plus workers could sit down and win, what would that mean for auto, where the United Auto Workers (UAW) is facing the shutdown of dozens of plants and tens of thousands of firings? Could the Republic sit-in spark a wave of labor struggle using militant tactics seldom seen since the '30s?

The sense of expectation was heightened by the shift in political climate with the election of Democrat Barack Obama to the White House on a platform of "change" from the despised regime of George Bush. "I have a lot of hope that next year, with a new president, he'll make good decisions and invest money in industry so I can get another job as soon as possible," one of the Republic workers, Apolinar Cabrena, told the media (AFP, 6 December). In reality, unemployment is going to get worse, a lot worse, under Obama as the capitalist crisis deepens.

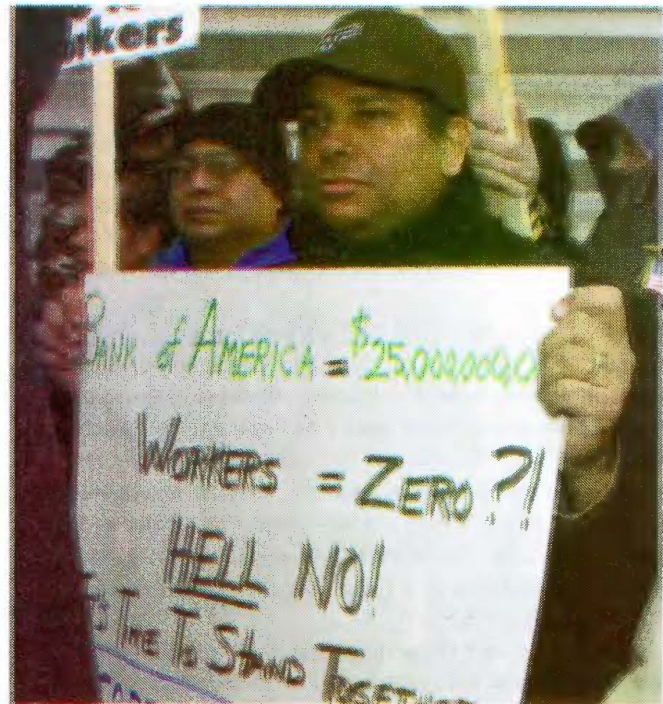
Another, even more fundamental factor, was the sense among the workers that they had nothing to lose. With millions looking for work, the chances of finding another job soon were slim. Unemployment insurance isn't enough to live on and make payments on home mortgages, car payments, credit card bills and medical expenses. Plus it runs out after a period of months. Republic workers remarked that they could soon lose their homes as well as their jobs.

In fact, with Obama still in Chicago before moving into the White House next month, the pressure on the Democratic president-elect to side with the workers was enormous. The giant Bank of America, which received \$25 billion in federal bailout funds supposedly intended to encourage lending to businesses, had refused to roll over the credit line to the employer, who claimed he couldn't pay the back wages. The BoA was seen as the Grinch Who Stole Xmas.

Meanwhile, people showed up at the plant with donations of food for the workers, a truckload of toys for their children. Celebrities like Jesse Jackson showed up to compare the workers to civil rights hero Rosa Parks and Cesar Chavez. Illinois' wheeler-dealer governor Rod Blagojevich made the scene to announce that he was ordering state agencies to stop business with Bank of America. (The next morning he was arrested in his home by federal agents on corruption charges.)

Beyond the expressions of sympathy and grandstanding by the politicians, there were demonstrations of solidarity. The UE held a rally of over 1,000 in downtown Chicago on December 10, while Bank of America offices were picketed nationwide in support of the Republic workers. Internationally, messages of solidarity came from labor federations from Japan to Venezuela and France, declaring, "Your fight is our fight as millions of workers around the world are suffering from the economic crisis that affects more and more people every day."

Negotiations dragged on as the bankers claimed it wasn't up to them to pay the workers and company management claimed they didn't have the cash. But a little digging by reporters revealed that the owners of Republic Windows and Doors last month set up another company, Echo Windows and Doors, which in turn bought a plant in Iowa. Their intent was clearly to save on wages by shifting production to the



Chris Geovanis/Chicago Indymedia

non-union facility. They were already shipping machinery out in the dead of night and on weekends.

Republic CEO Rich Gillman turns out to be a first-class villain who makes Gordon Gekko in the film *Wall Street* look like a do-gooder. Not only were they taking away the livelihoods of 240 workers and refusing to pay what they legally owed them, they didn't declare bankruptcy at Republic until *after* the plant closure, so workers' claims would come *after* other creditors. And while pleading poverty, Gillman demanded that any new bank loan also cover the lease of his BMW 350xi and Mercedes S500 luxury cars and pay eight weeks of his \$225,000 salary!

They Dared to Struggle, and Won

The sit-in at Republic Windows and Doors didn't just happen spontaneously. A few weeks earlier, as they kept a late-night lookout to see where machinery from the plant was being sent, Mark Meinster, a UE organizer, raised the possibility with Armando Robles, president of Local 1110 at the plant. By Friday, when company officials announced that they were not only shuttering the plant but had already cut off employees' health insurance and were refusing to pay the last week's work, the angry workers voted unanimously to occupy the factory.

The United Electrical Workers became the representative of Republic workers in 2004 after they voted to decertify the Central States Joint Board, an outfit long run by Laborers Union leader John Sarpico, who was notorious for sweetheart deals with the bosses, sweetheart loans from banks and close ties to the Chicago and Illinois Democratic political machine. The UE is relatively more democratic and feisty than the norm for American "business unionism," and last spring organized a picket at the plant and presented a petition to management listing demands.

The occupation itself had modest goals, to force the company and the banks who financed it to pay money that was legally owed the workers. UE officials also raised the possibility of finding another company to restart the plant and there was talk of running it under an ESOP (Employee Stock Ownership Plan), as Avis Rent-a-Car or United Airlines were for a time. The “worker ownership” of such arrangements is a fiction, making the workers responsible for their own exploitation while management continues to run the company, fire employees, etc.

Various leftists talked of “workers control,” citing the example of occupied plants like the Bruckman textile and Zanon ceramics plants in Argentina. Workers in those plants fought tenaciously to save their jobs in the face of unscrupulous bosses much like those at Republic Windows and Doors. But far from being workers control – which is dual power at the factory level, in which workers contest for power with the capitalists – these are essentially cooperatives, which with limited resources compete from a weak competitive position on the capitalist market.

The real power the workers at Republic had was they were safeguarding the facilities, finished products and equipment in the plant – or holding them “hostage,” as the bosses saw it – that were worth far more than the \$1.75 million owed them. After all, these were their tools and the products of their labor. If the banks had refused to settle, and no way was found to save their jobs, the workers could have demanded that the proceeds from any sale of assets be paid to them.

The intrepid band of Republic workers were facing off not just against a real stinker of a boss but against major corporations. BoA is the closest thing to a nationwide bank in the United States, and it turns out (which had not been previously publicized), that 40 percent of the windows plant was owned by the JPMorgan Chase investment bank, whose Midwest chairman is William Daley, brother of Chicago’s Democratic mayor Richard M. Daley. The building belongs to the Wrigley chewing gum corporation, bought out last fall by the Mars candy conglomerate.

In the end, Bank of America caved under the mountain of bad publicity, shelling out \$1.35 million while JPMorgan threw in another \$400,000. The workers discussed the proposal and voted unanimously to accept it, pouring out the factory doors to proclaim to the waiting media, “We did it!” While some leftists proclaimed it as a “resounding victory” (*Socialist Worker*, 11 December), the fact is that Republic workers are still out of a job, with no prospect of getting work. But it was definitely, as a UE official said, “a victory for workers everywhere.”

Fight Layoffs with Militant Labor Action

What does the Chicago workers courageous plant occupation mean for working people around the country? For one thing, Republic was an inspiring example of solidarity of Latino and black workers, putting the lie to the bosses’ propaganda (repeated by some fake leftists) that immigrant workers are too cowed to be militant. Here the mainly immigrant

workers set an example of audacious action for all labor in the U.S. Also on December 11, Latino immigrant and black workers at the giant Smithfield hog processing plant in Tar Heel, North Carolina voted for the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) after a bitter 14-year fight, overcoming management efforts to set different ethnic groups against each other (see box).

These are signs of a shifting political climate, but despite the fervent hopes for “change” by many who voted for Barack Obama, the example of Republic workers will not simply multiply. As the capitalist crisis deepens, hard class battles are coming, in which the Democratic president will back the bosses. This time, as a small group of workers won national sympathy, Obama could make a grand gesture and declare that the workers were “absolutely right” in demanding what was legally owed to them. But while he is the first black president in the history of the United States, a country founded on slavery and marked by racism throughout its history, *Obama represents not the mass of black poor and working people but the interests of capital.*

If other workers react to mass layoffs and plant closures by following the example of the Republic workers in Chicago, *and they should*, they will be met next time by a massive wall of repression and slander. Auto workers, for whom losing their job means they will likely never set foot in an auto plant again, will be portrayed as greedy and “privileged.” The pink slips from the companies will be backed up by an act of Congress ordering “restructuring” of the industry.

Moreover, the labor fakers who sit atop the United Auto Workers (UAW) are actively helping the Big Three (GM, Ford and Chrysler) and the incoming Democratic administration by agreeing in advance to rip up past gains and drive wages and benefits down by at least \$10 an hour. The only question is when, in 2009 or 2010. Already new hires receive only \$14.50 an hour and sharply limited benefits as a result of past givebacks.

While the UE is better than most American unions in various respects, it still plays by the bosses’ rules, working within the legal framework set by the ruling class to hamstring labor action. In order to win battles on a large scale, workers must rip off that straitjacket and act according to their own rules. The stranglehold of the present misleaders of labor must be broken and replaced by a leadership with the program and determination to do what it takes to defeat the bosses.

The Republic plant occupation harked back to the 1937 General Motors sit-down strike in Flint, Michigan. The tactic had been used a year earlier by rubber workers in Akron, Ohio, and then by steel workers. But it was the occupation of Fisher Body and Chevrolet plants in Flint that laid the basis for the UAW and unionizing the mass production industries in the CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations) unions. Flint was a pitched battle against police and National Guard, and without the leadership of communists and socialists it never would have won.

Other militant tactics soon appeared: “flying pickets” (truckloads of strikers to stop scabs or spread the action);



Auto strikers guard window entrance to GM's Fisher Body Plant #3 during 1937 sit-down strike.

“hot-cargoing” (union workers refusing to handle scab goods); “solidarity strikes” (shutting down production in support of another union). Many of these were pioneered by supporters of the Bolshevik revolutionary Leon Trotsky in the Minneapolis Teamsters, who in 1934 led a truckers strike that shut down the city. Other citywide general strikes took place the same year in Toledo, Ohio (auto parts) and San Francisco (longshore). All were led by “reds.”

But in the “red purge” that drove militant leaders out of the unions after World War II, Congress passed the infamous Taft-Hartley “slave labor” law that outlawed these militant labor tactics. Today while the sellout AFL-CIO and “Change to Win” bureaucrats pin their hopes on passing the Employee Free Choice Act to unionize workers through a simple “card check,” we insist that strong unions can only be built by workers action independent of the government, on the picket lines and in the plants.

Jesse Jackson talks of a “non-violent wake up call to America” and the need for a “bigger movement to resist economic violence.” If unions not only take over factories to protest layoffs and wage cuts, but also prepare to defend them against the forces of state repression as they did for 44 days at Flint in 1937 – including with a Women’s Emergency Brigade led by the Trotskyist Genora Johnson on the front lines against the cops and company goons – this talk of “non-violence” will be turned against the workers. The struggle for *workers defense guards*, as for plant occupations against layoffs and wage cuts, will require *class-struggle leadership*.

Such struggles can’t be waged on a plant-by-plant basis. Plants facing shutdown are in a weak position to start with, since the bosses are already losing money on them. It is also necessary to unite the factories with the masses of unemployed in the black ghettos and Latino barrios in a common class

struggle led by the most powerful sectors of the workers movement. In a real battle, strike action shutting down the Chicago commodities markets, the transit authority, steel and other industries would be key. Teachers unions with their ties to the poor and working-class neighborhoods, and others can play important auxiliary roles. And again, this will not be accomplished by business-as-usual “business unionism.”

The Internationalist Group emphasizes that any serious struggle against the scourge of unemployment in this developing depression will have to oust the pro-capitalist bureaucrats and break from the Democrats. The ruling class is worried that after decades of socking it to labor, destroying unions and ripping up workers’ gains, it could be facing some serious unrest. “We’re going to have riots,” warned a Southern Senator in opposing the auto bailout. But for the unrest and resistance to roll back the bosses’ union-busting offensive

and achieve victory, we need to forge a *revolutionary workers party*.

Ultimately, as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels wrote 160 years ago in the *Communist Manifesto*, “every class struggle is a political struggle.” And the fight to abolish unemployment cannot be achieved under capitalism. Many liberals and reformists today talk of a “new New Deal,” as if the mounting job losses, wage cuts, evictions, homelessness and poverty could be resolved by a repeat of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s public works, social insurance and corporate regulation programs. But FDR’s programs didn’t end the Depression, World War II did.

While it was touched off by a housing bubble, credit crisis and stock market panic, underlying the present economic collapse is a classic crisis of overproduction reflecting the capitalists’ falling rate of profit. Trotskyists put forward a transitional program of demands – including for a *shorter workweek with no loss in pay*, to divide up the available work among all takers; for workers commissions to open the books of the giant corporations; for massive public works under union control – as part of an overall program leading to *socialist revolution*, in the U.S. and worldwide.

The closure of Republic Windows and Doors is a vivid illustration of the irrationality of capitalism. People need quality windows and doors, particularly in the dead of a Midwest winter. Yet windows and doors will no longer be produced at Republic, because it isn’t “profitable” for Bank of America, JPMorgan Chase and the cockroach capitalist Gillman. Meanwhile, millions are being evicted from their homes even though the mortgage defaults have shaken the pillars of international finance capital. Now more than ever – *workers to power*, to lay the basis for an internationally planned, collectivized economy producing for human needs rather than profit. ■

After 15-Year Struggle at World's Largest Hog Processing Plant Smithfield Workers Win Union Vote

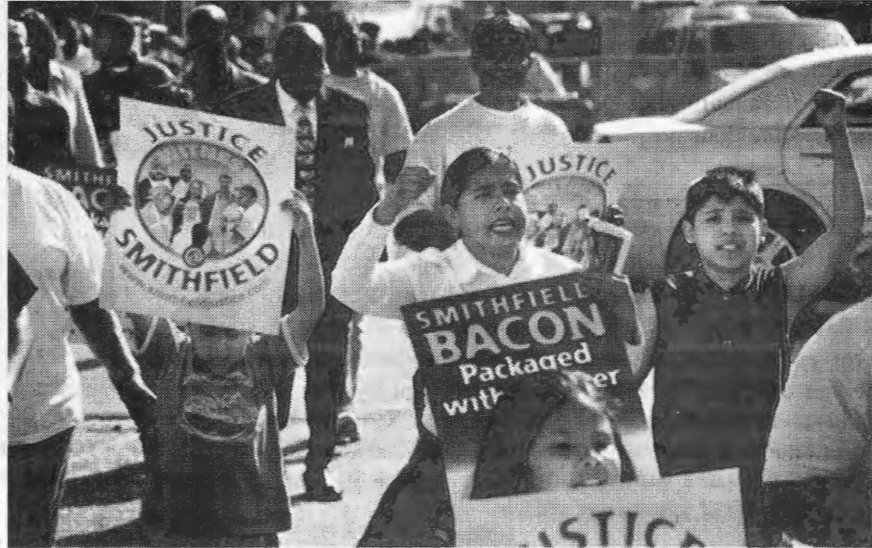
Workers at the Tar Heel, North Carolina hog processing plant owned by Smithfield Foods voted on 10-11 December to be represented by the United Food and Commercial Workers union (UFCW). The vote was a significant breakthrough in a struggle that was waged for over 15 years against fierce company opposition in the least-unionized state in the country. It is doubly important in the meatpacking industry, where raids by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) police have been used against unions from the Atlantic Seaboard to the kosher Agriprocessors plant in Iowa last year.

Taking place as workers occupied the Republic Windows and Doors factory in Chicago, a militant labor tactic not seen in the U.S. in decades (see article, page xx), the vote at largest pork processing facility in the world raised hopes of a turnaround after years of union defeats. In a December 17 article labor journalist David Bacon reported that the "stunning reversal" of earlier vote setbacks "set off celebrations in house trailers and ramshackle homes in Tarheel, Red Springs, Santa Paul's, and all the tiny working class towns spread from Fayetteville down to the South Carolina border."

But even as the 5,000 workers at this mammoth hog plant celebrated the holiday gift that they won for each other, the labor movement must prepare for battle. Workers at the Tar Heel plant have yet to win a first contract, which may take some doing. Just as it did to thwart two earlier union elections, Smithfield is capable of firing worker militants, assaulting union supporters and calling on the forces of capitalist "law and order" – from the local sheriff to the ICE immigration cops – to crush the workers.

Union bureaucrats and much of the left look expectantly to Democratic president Barack Obama and pin their hopes on the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA) with its card-check provisions (see page 9). But only hard class struggle that tackles head-on the racism of the employers and their government can break the "right to work" regime of the states of the former Confederacy. Smithfield sought to set white, black, Latino immigrant and Native American workers against each other, segregating job classifications and even holding separate union-bashing meetings for each group.

During the union election in 1994, which the UFCW lost, Smithfield fired union supporters, who only won their jobs back 12 years later (with \$1.1 million in back wages). In 1997, the sheriff's department mobilized at the call of the bosses against another union election. Bacon wrote:



Unity of black, white and Latin immigrant workers key. Smithfield workers at 15 January 2007 Martin Luther King Day March in Fayetteville.

"Police in riot gear lined the walkway into the slaughterhouse, and workers had to file past them to cast their ballots. At the end of the vote count union activist Ray Shawn was beaten up inside the plant."

Smithfield had their director of security deputized by the county sheriff, set up its own private police with arrest powers, and built a jail for "uppity" workers on plant property. The UFCW lost the election again under the guns of the capitalist police. But the union and the workers who supported it didn't give up.

The union campaign heated up again in 2003 at the initiative of cleaning workers employed by QSI, Inc., who waged a wildcat strike against the contractor's safety violations and policy of layoffs to avoid promised raises for seniority. The company police force threatened the cleaning workers with deportation. QSI fired one of the strike leaders, Julio Vargas, and the UFCW hired him as an organizer. Thousands of Smithfield workers marched in the historic May Day 2006 protests against anti-immigrant laws. At the time, most of the plant's workers were Spanish-speaking immigrants.

A few months later, Smithfield retaliated again, this time in league with the federal government. On 30 October 2006, the company threatened hundreds of immigrant workers with Social Security "no match" warnings. Two weeks later, over 30 suspected "illegal" workers were arrested. But black, white and Latino workers stood together, and three days later more than 1,000 walked out in protest, shutting down the production line. They won an extension on the company's demands for paperwork and a reversal of the anti-immigrant firings (see "Labor Revolt in North Carolina," in *The Internationalist* No. 25, January-February 2007, for the story of this remarkable struggle).

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Why Marxists Oppose All Government Intervention in the Unions

One group that falsely lays claim to the heritage of Trotskyism, the Spartacist League (SL), recently published an article, "Why Marxists Support the EFCA" (*Workers Vanguard*, 30 January). Without saying so directly, this "corrects" the SL's previous position against the "card check" bill (see *WV*, 8 December 2006). It also revisits an article in *Workers Vanguard* (8 October 1976), back when it stood on the program of revolutionary Marxism. That article noted that in 1935 when Congress passed the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), "Trotskyists opposed the Wagner Act as a threat to labor's ability to strike." According to today's "post-Trotskyist" *WV*, "In fact, as far as we know, the Trotskyists neither explicitly supported nor opposed the Wagner Act." This is so much horse manure.

In the first place, the 1976 *Workers Vanguard* article extensively quoted from the Trotskyists' *New Militant* (6 July 1935), which wrote:

"Under this bill a National Labor Relations Board [NLRB] is to be set up to 'enforce' collective bargaining, etc. Thus the way is paved for eventual greater control of government over the unions.... [T]he basic concern of these government agencies is never that of enforcing the rights of the workers, but that of maintaining 'industrial peace,' in other words, preventing strikes or if they break out somehow, 'settling' them, getting the workers back to work as quickly as possible.

"Thus these government boards become in effect strike-breaking agencies even under the best conditions. The workers will not get salvation from the Wagner bill. They must now as ever fight the entire system for which it stands. They will get nothing except that which they can take by their organized strength and militancy."

The 1976 *WV* article also pointed out that in 1935, the "even the Communist Party came out against the Wagner Act." It quoted the CP's *Daily Worker* (6 July 1935) saying:

"The Wagner Bill does NOT guarantee (except in words) the right to organize.... On the contrary, the bill sets up compulsory arbitration machinery that can be used to prevent and break strikes and to tie labor hand and foot."

And if the editors of *WV* had bothered to check, they would have found another article in the *New Militant* (4 May 1935), titled "The Meaning of the Wagner Bill - A Noose for Labor."

While opposing the Wagner bill, the Trotskyists did say that its passage could give the impression "that unionization will get government support and so to stimulate organizing campaigns and strikes." In that case "militants will take advantage of the situation" so that workers can "learn the true nature and function of all capitalist governments." Genuine Marxists (i.e., Trotskyists) oppose any mechanisms of government control of labor, whether by card check or NLRB-supervised "elections." A real union organizing drive would rest on mobilizing the workers' strength in action, including possible strike action. Given the balance of forces and the

NEW MILITANT

Capitol News Letter

The Meaning of the Wagner Bill — A Noose for Labor

By JACK ELDER

WASHINGTON, D. C.—The Senate Committee on Education and Labor has just concluded its prolonged series of hearings on S. 1958: Wagner bill to "outlaw" company unions. No doubt the Committee will report the measure out favorably; but that should hardly be a cause for rejoicing among the rank and file of the labor movement.

* * *

First, the bill as written is an invitation to the A. F. of L. to entangle itself more thoroughly than ever before in the complex arbitral machinery for which Section 7a is responsible. The A. F. of L. has plunged into the present

Trade Commission throughout its history has been a notorious paralytic, incapable of getting its orders enforced by the courts. There is no reason to suppose that the National Labor Relations Board would be anything more than a like paralytic, except where hamstringing of labor is concerned.

* * *

Those who get enthusiastic about the Labor Relations Bill forget that, in the last analysis, all the orders of the Board would be "enforceable and reviewable" by the federal courts. The courts, not the board, would finally decide whether or not an employer was forcing company unions on his hired hands.

Trotskyists in the 1930s didn't oppose the Wagner Act, says SL? See for yourself. Article from the *New Militant* (4 May 1935).

need for unions to function in the capitalist legal framework, it may be necessary to make use of or participate in such procedures. But the tactical issue of how to deal with mechanisms for government certification once they are law is very different from calling for passing a law that slightly modifies but maintains those mechanisms.

The latter-day Spartacist League now says that while supporting the EFCA, it opposes the compulsory arbitration provisions, which provide for an initial two-year contract imposed by the government if the union and employer cannot agree. However, in order to pretend that this is not such a big deal, the SL claims that "there are no legal prohibitions in the EFCA to prevent strike action during this four-month period" of negotiations leading up to the binding arbitration. This ignores legal precedent that will surely be used against the workers. The Supreme Court has ruled (in *Gateway Coal Co. v. UMW*, 414 US 368 [1974]) "that the arbitration clause created an implied no-strike clause," and thus a strike was not legally protected and could be ruled an unfair labor practice. And even if the union could legally strike, under the EFCA the outcome would still be subject to arbitration!

The SL's argument is just eyewash to hide the fact that it is supporting a bill to modify, but still retain, a key element of state control of the unions under the NLRA. Since one can assume that in hard-fought cases the employers will not agree to a contract, in practice this means that, while pretending to oppose binding arbitration, these pseudo-Trotskyists favor a

system that will result in two years of government-dictated contracts.

It is telling that while the latest *WV* article quotes from Trotsky's 1940 essay on "Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay," it doesn't mention the demand that he considered key, for "*complete and unconditional independence of the trade unions in relation to the capitalist state.*" This is no academic matter. The most militant major labor struggle under U.S. jurisdiction in recent years, the strike by the Puerto Rican Teachers Federation (FMPR) in February-March of last year, was precisely against the colonial government's Law 45, which bans strikes by public employees. The SEIU then sought to oust the FMPR using the union certification procedures of that law similar to those of the NLRA (see "Puerto Rican Teachers: Unbought and Unbowed," *The Internationalist* No. 27, May-June 2008). The militant teachers union was decertified, but the ranks were able to defeat the government-back SEIU affiliate in the subsequent election because they were prepared to *defy* this anti-labor law.

If the "card check" bill is passed (and the new administration has not been pushing this), it may make union organizing somewhat easier. However, many companies unionized under this procedure in recent years have been offered sweetheart deals by the unions in exchange, particularly by the SEIU. It is also possible that the election of Barack Obama with his vague talk of "change" could encourage some labor activists to struggle. This played a role in the recent Republic Windows and Doors plant occupation in Chicago (see "Chicago Plant Occupation Electrifies Labor," *The Internationalist* supplement, 15 December 2008). But any effort to wage serious labor struggle in key sectors – such as the auto plants slated to be closed and the undermining of the health and pension fund being demanded of the UAW – will require a leadership built on a program of hard class struggle that is prepared to *oppose the Obama government down the line*. And that means ousting the present sellout labor bureaucracy whose entire policy is to chain the unions to the bourgeois Democratic Party and the capitalist state. ■

Smithfield Workers...

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Still, the arrests and deportations continued. Some 1,500 immigrant workers fled the plant out of fear of deportation. By this year the racial composition of the plant had changed from a majority immigrant workforce to majority black. In January 2007, Smithfield workers demanded a holiday for Martin Luther King Day. The company refused, and threatened more firings, but 400 workers took the day off anyway to join the celebration. The anti-racist workers' unity symbolized by the Martin Luther King Day walkout was a key to winning the union vote in the face of company intimidation.

Now Smithfield workers will face off against the bosses to improve wage, safety and benefit conditions. Even though 26 other Smithfield facilities are organized by the UFCW, which has won some wage gains in recent contracts, victory is by no means assured. The workers' determination and militancy in this epic labor struggle has served them well. But they are endangered by the labor bureaucracy's servility to the capitalist order and its parties. Thus while the union has called conferences and instituted a court suit against the ICE raids, it has not used its industrial power to shut down the plants to stop this blatant union busting by the Department of Homeland Security.

The bureaucracy chains the workers to their exploiters, particularly to the Democratic Party of North Carolina governor Mike Easley, who supports the racist death penalty while over half of the state's 162 death row inmates are black. Many labor and would-be socialist reformists (such as the International Socialist Organization and Workers World Party) spread hopes that the new Democratic president Obama will legislate a new "New Deal."

But along with his support for the EFCA, Obama (another death penalty supporter) will seek to revive companies by driving down wage costs (as he is doing in the auto "bail-out") while continuing the occupation of Iraq and expanding the war in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The New Deal itself was a plan to regiment labor for capitalist profits and imperialist war, and was facilitated by the Communist Party, which subordinated its sharecroppers and integrated workers organizations to the campaign for the Democratic Party of Franklin D. Roosevelt ... and the Klu Klux Klan.

After World War II, the CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations) campaign to organize the South, "Operation Dixie," was defeated because of the union tops' anti-communism (they purged any organizer or steward labeled a "red," including many who had played a key role in earlier organizing drives in the Carolinas and Virginia) and their failure to fight white racism. Thus the CIO abandoned the integrated workforce of the tobacco industry, and concentrated on the overwhelmingly white textile mills, where they lost to the racists.

Workers at Smithfield in North Carolina showed the world that it's possible to fight back and win against ruthless anti-union repression from the bosses and their state. Key to a lasting victory in the "open shop" South is building a lead-

US\$2

Articles from Lenin and Trotsky, from *The Internationalist*, and a series from the 1970s on Communist and Trotskyist work in the trade unions.

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Internationalist Group
League for the Fourth International

Trotskyism and Trade-Union Struggle



Strike of the Market during 1928 Minneapolis Teachers strike led by Trotskyists.
Police directed attack on strike and banned vigilance.

Internationalist Group Class Readings
December 2005

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ership that mobilizes the workers movement to fight against all forms capitalist oppression. This means fighting for full citizenship rights for all immigrants, and for labor mobilizations to abolish the racist death penalty, and breaking from the Democratic party and all the capitalist parties, to build a class-struggle workers party. ■

“Obama Socialists” ...

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“Given the multiple crises that beset the U.S., change is coming – but what kind, and in whose interest, depends on whether and how working people get organized to fight for it.”

Not a hint of the Marxist analysis of the state as the instrument of capitalist rule. For the ISO, it’s all about pressure.

The latest issue of the *ISR* (January-February 2009) features Obama’s campaign slogan, “Yes we can! ¡Sí se puede!” On the inside, Obama’s program is described as ... “limited” (!). The article notes that he got ruling-class support in order to “restore the profitability of the system and to overcome the disaster that was the Bush administration....” Then it adds: “However, to what extent these changes will primarily reflect the interests of Wall Street and to what extent they answer to the needs of ordinary people will depend on the level of struggle from below.” Politically, this is pure and simple bourgeois liberalism. To spread such deadly illusions goes directly against the most elementary interests of the working people.

What did Marx and Engels have to say on this? Here is what they wrote in the *Communist Manifesto*: “The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.” The ISO says, that’s nice, old fellas, but “yes we can” make it “answer to the needs of ordinary people” (sic) if only there is enough “pressure from below.”

For these social democrats, as for all liberals and reformists, the government is neutral, rather than being the executive committee of the ruling class. In antiwar marches in 2007 and ’08, after the Democrats won a majority in both houses of Congress, ISOers chanted, “Stop the funding, stop the war, What the hell is Congress for?” (Supporters of the Internationalist Group responded, “Congress is for imperialist war.”) Following Lenin and Trotsky, we characterize the present epoch as the imperialist era. The ISO has a different take: “What next for struggle in the Obama era?” (5 November 2008) they write, or “Antiwar organizing in the Obama era” (19 December), and “What’s in store in the Obama era?” (20 January). And like the *Nation* liberals who want to hold Obama “accountable” by holding him to *his* stated program, the ISO follows Obama’s agenda. Thus it writes:

“The left in the 1930s used the slogan ‘the president wants you to join a union’ to capitalize and amplify its position. Today, we should use President-elect Obama’s words in a similar way.”

Actually, that argument was popularized in the 1930s by John L. Lewis of the United Mine Workers, who viciously repressed “reds” in the UMW (and ended up a Republican).

The masses learn through struggle, say ISOers. Yes, but

only if the revolutionaries speak the truth plainly. And the plain truth is that it is necessary to draw a *class line* between the exploited and oppressed, on one side, and their exploiters and oppressors, on the other. Barack Obama is on the other side of that line.

In the recent election, some “progressives” sought refuge in the Greens, a minor capitalist party, which ran former Democratic Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney for president. McKinney has taken some gutsy stands, calling for freedom for Mumia and traveling on a boat carrying medical supplies to Gaza in the middle of the Israeli bombing attack. But she remains a bourgeois politician and the whole purpose of her campaign was to pressure Obama to move slightly to the left. Thus in a TV interview after the Gaza-bound ship was rammed by an Israeli patrol boat, McKinney pleaded with President-elect Obama to “say something, please, about the humanitarian crisis that is being experienced by the people [of Gaza] right now.” Yet Obama’s refusal to condemn the massacre and his statement in an interview with Al-Arabiya TV that “Israel’s security is paramount” makes it clear where he stands – on the side of the Zionist butchers.

For the last year, liberals and reformists of all persuasions have salivated at the prospect of a new layer of young activists for social causes coming out of the Obama campaign. But contrary to the delusions of a Tom Hayden of “an explosion of rising expectations for social movements – here and around the world – that President Obama will be compelled to meet in 2009,” the operation that elected Obama was not a “movement” for “social change from below.” Rather, it was a capitalist-financed, top-down electoral machine similar to the NGOs (non-governmental organizations) orchestrated by U.S. imperialism to undercut inconvenient governments from Venezuela to East Europe and the countries of the former Soviet Union. In any case, rather than a classless “movement” to pressure Obama, what’s urgently needed today is a *revolutionary workers party* to mobilize the exploited and oppressed *against* the attacks of the bourgeois rulers.

As in the 1930s, there is no “solution” to the economic crisis, imperialist wars and racist oppression without sweeping away the capitalist system that generates these plagues whether a Democrat or Republican president sits in the White House or controls Congress. As V.I. Lenin wrote in April 1917, when the mass of the workers had not yet broken from the bourgeoisie, “it is necessary most thoroughly, persistently, patiently to explain to them ... that without the overthrow of capital it is impossible to conclude the war with a really democratic, non-oppressive peace.” Now is a time to “patiently explain” to the masses, to swim against the stream. Let the opportunists chase after fleeting popularity, genuine Marxists follow the watchword of Trotsky’s Transitional Program: “To face reality squarely; not to seek the line of least resistance; to call things by their right names; to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be; not to fear obstacles; to be true in little things as in big ones; to base one’s program on the logic of the class struggle; to be bold when the hour for action arrives – these are the rules of the Fourth International.” ■

Class Struggle Education Workers Formed

The Internationalist Group salutes the establishment of the recently formed Class Struggle Education Workers, which has issued the following introduction and program.

Class Struggle Education Workers was formed in September 2008 by activists in two New York City education unions: the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), representing public primary and secondary educational personnel, and the Professional Staff Congress (PSC), which represents faculty and staff at the City University of New York. We also seek to involve campus and school administrative staff and maintenance workers who are in the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) as well as other unionized and non-unionized workers. Those initiating the group played leading roles in fights against merit pay and in defense of "excessed" teachers in the NYC schools, in opposition to the "two-tier" labor system at CUNY, in defense of immigrant students and in solidarity with striking teachers in Mexico and Puerto Rico. The felt need was for a grouping to help provide a clear orientation and leadership in the struggle to defend and transform public education in the interests of working people and the oppressed. This intersects almost every crucial social and political issue of the day and ultimately means bringing down the rule of capital. As this requires a thorough-going break from the entire framework of "business unionism" and the outlook of the union bureaucracy, general calls for more militancy and union democracy alone only lead to a dead end. Instead, the Class Struggle Education Workers is based on a class-struggle program, presented below.

Class Struggle Education Workers Program

We have formed Class Struggle Education Workers (CSEW) as part of a broader fight for a revitalization and transformation of the labor movement into an instrument for the emancipation of the working class and the oppressed rather than, as it is at present, an instrument for the disciplining of labor in the interests of capital. The subservience of organized labor goes beyond the PSC, UFT and AFSCME, and we look forward to a class-struggle tendency encompassing militants in a number of unions. We support the basic positions expressed in the Internationalist pamphlets *Stop CUNY's Anti-Immigrant War Purge* and *Marxism and the Battle Over Education*. We stand for:

1) Free public education from kindergarten through graduate school. Abolish corporate-dominated Boards of Trustees and mayoral control of the schools: students, teachers and workers (together with parents at primary and secondary schools) should democratically control schools and universities.

2) Stop education privatization and making the City University of New York into "Wal-Mart U"! For militant action against deepening inequality at CUNY and throughout the school system. Abolish the two-tier academic labor system that pays adjunct and other contingent education workers

poverty wages. Job security, parity and full health coverage for adjuncts and all "part-timers," including graduate students: equal pay for equal work. Unite against the drive to gut public higher education and turn it into a "platform" for making profits.

3) Defend and transform public education in the interests of working people and the oppressed. Oppose capitalist corporatization. Cancel all student debt. Living stipend and free housing for students. No to "charter schools" as an opening wedge to privatization. Down with "merit pay" in any form. In UFT: Full-time positions for all teachers "excessed" or "reorganized" out of their jobs (ATRs). Defend tenure, restore seniority, abolish "rubber rooms" that penalize teachers subject to unjust accusations.

4) Oppose resegregation of schools: separate is not equal. Stop discrimination and racist attacks against black, Latino, Asian and immigrant students. Fight budget cuts, tuition hikes, exclusionary tests and all anti-working-class, anti-minority measures. Restore open admissions, no tuition. Down with the anti-education "No Child Left Behind" act. Stop anti-immigrant "war purges" (like the one CUNY launched in 2001) against undocumented students and workers. Full citizenship rights for all immigrants.

5) Mobilize the power of labor together with minorities, immigrants and students in an all-out fight to smash the Taylor Law. Keep bosses' courts out of the unions. Police and military recruiters out of the schools. No cops, prison or security guards in the unions. For a single union of all university workers. Oust the sellout bureaucrats, for a class-struggle leadership.

6) Parental leave for all. Free childcare on campus, available round the clock for students and employees. Full reproductive rights, including free abortion on demand and full availability of contraceptives; no to reactionary campaigns against sex education.

7) Defend the rights of labor, minorities, immigrants, women, gays and lesbians. Make PSC defense of Mumia real – mobilize workers' power for his freedom. Solidarity with teachers and all workers in Mexico, Puerto Rico and elsewhere.

8) End union support to capitalist politicians (Democrats, Republicans, Greens, et al.). For workers' strikes against the war – Defeat U.S. imperialism. Oppose U.S. war threats against Iran, Cuba, China, North Korea. For a class-struggle workers party to fight for a workers government.

– Original version presented 24 August 2008; this updated version incorporates the changes made at the founding meeting of the CSEW, 26 September 2008.

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The UFT Must Say Loud and Clear:

NO LAYOFFS, NO GIVEBACKS!

By UFTers in Class Struggle Education Workers

10 FEBRUARY 2008 – On January 28, NYC Schools Chancellor Joel Klein testified before the New York State legislature saying that the slashing of \$1.4 billion in funds for city schools could lead to the layoff of 15,000 teachers and “school-based personnel” – i.e., not the suits at Tweed. Some layoffs could even begin this school year, he insinuated. While complaining about the \$700 million cut in Governor David Paterson’s budget he has said nothing against the \$500 million cut in city funds ordered by his boss, Mayor Bloomberg. Two days later, the mayor presented his “doomsday” budget, threatening that if money isn’t forthcoming from Albany, the Department of Education would fire 14,000 educators, plus dropping another 1,400 positions as teachers retire or leave, along with laying off 8,000 other city employees.

Bloomberg and Klein are well aware that there would be hell to pay if they ordered layoffs on this scale, focusing on teachers. No doubt some of the bluster is scare tactics to get the attention of the governor and state legislature. According to all reports, \$1.6 billion of the federal “stimulus” bill is earmarked for New York City schools. But city rulers are intent on using the “opportunity” of the economic crisis to go after the municipal unions, first and foremost the United Federation of Teachers. In presenting his NYC budget, the mayor called for city workers to pay 10 percent of health care premiums, and to require that new employees work longer and retire at a later age to be eligible for city pensions. The union cannot duck or sidestep this threat. **The UFT must insist that there be no layoffs and no givebacks, period.**

Using the announced budget cuts as an excuse, Klein is also trying to get out from under state mandates to use funds to relieve overcrowding in the jammed city schools and to make up for decades of deliberate neglect of schools in impoverished communities of color. He asked the legislature to give the DOE more “flexibility” to spend money for “core instructional services” (meaning that he could ignore requirements that state funds be used to reduce class size) and to let it “make school cuts more even” (so he could rip up stipulations that schools in impoverished districts be given extra resources). The chancellor also called for the elimination of the Board of Ed Retirement System. The Bloomberg/Klein wish list is part of the ongoing ruling-class assault on teachers and public education generally.

The Democratic governor and “independent” (ex-Democrat, ex-Republican) billionaire mayor have thrown down the gauntlet. UFT president Randi Weingarten rightly responded that every layoff of a teacher is cutting services to children. What she did not do was say straight-out that the threatened cutbacks and layoffs must be fought tooth and nail, and call on parents and working people generally to join the fight to defeat this attack on their children’s education. As usual

Weingarten tried to sidestep the fight and pare down the cutbacks. At the December UFT Delegate Assembly she made a PowerPoint presentation repeatedly saying that “I cannot tell you that we can mitigate all of these cuts.” Delegates got the message: they should go back to the membership and prepare them to take a hit. This is dead wrong.

In her press conference responding to Bloomberg’s threat of 15,000 layoffs, the UFT president said, “We know times are tough and that everyone needs to share in making sacrifices, but this is shockingly disproportionate and unfair.” *No, everyone doesn’t need to “share the sacrifice.”* The Wall Street bankers still gave themselves nearly \$20 billion in bonuses, even after sinking the capitalist financial system in a sea of speculation and debt. Millions of workers, on the other hand, whose wages have relentlessly fallen for more than three decades, are losing their jobs and their homes. The union should say unambiguously: **working people didn’t make this crisis, and we won’t pay for it.**

But the UFT tops won’t say this, because they are beholden to the Democratic Party and American capitalism, of which it is a mainstay. Randi Weingarten and the UFT leadership endorsed Paterson when he ran for lieutenant governor together with the ignominiously departed Elliot Spitzer. Weingarten supported Bloomberg’s bid for mayoral control of the schools, and in fact came out for that back in May 2001, under the rabid labor-hating mayor Giuliani! Last year, as the new president of American Federation of Teachers as well as the UFT, she backed Barack Obama for president.

We have noted the gimportant social shift represented by the election of a black president in this country founded on slavery, although American schools are as segregated today as they were half a century ago. But unlike virtually every sector of the education “community” – from school chancellors to union leaders and union opposition groups – as well as the vast majority of the left, Class Struggle Education Workers did not support Democrat Obama for president. Instead, we warned against illusions in this capitalist politician who stood for more war in Iraq and Afghanistan and for the program of corporate education “reform.”

Currently, Weingarten and Bloomberg are looking to the \$100 billion in money for education in Obama’s stimulus bill



No to Mayoral Dictatorship Over the Schools!

This year the state law that established mayoral control of New York City schools is up for renewal. Bloomberg has launched an expensive PR campaign to continue his personal dictatorship, which allows him to ride roughshod over the objections of teachers and parents. The UFT has just come out with a report on school governance which would only slightly modify the present system, reducing the number of mayoral appointees on an educational policy council from eight to five. The mayor would still have control, the chancellor would serve at his whim. Teachers, students, parents and staff would have no say at all.

The Independent Community of Educators (ICE) has presented a minority report, which the bureaucracy's Unity Caucus has tried to suppress, calling for more "checks and balances." A central board would name the chancellor, with three mayoral appointees and one union appointee. Class Struggle Education Workers stands instead for a system in which policy is set and all school leadership and central administrators are named by councils of democratically elected delegates of teachers, students, parents and workers at the school, district and citywide level. Such delegates and councils would be subject to recall at any time. For teacher-student-parent-worker control of the schools!

in order to pressure Paterson to bail out New York City schools. But as the UFT bureaucracy pulls out the stops to get the "economic recovery" bill through Congress, they don't mention that the House version contains \$200 million for a "Teacher Incentive Fund" for "merit pay" schemes, \$25 million for charter schools and \$250 million for state data systems. According to House Education Committee chairman George Miller, these items were inserted at the request of the Obama administration and are likely to be in the final bill.

So in Albany it is Democratic governor Paterson who is calling for cutting \$700 million from the NYC schools budget. In Washington, it is Democratic president Obama and the Democratic Congress who are pushing "performance pay" and charter schools. As usual, the teachers unions leaders argue "it could have been worse." Going down this path they have already given up or whittled down quite a number of union gains, and are preparing to do so again. Last November 16, shortly after Obama's election, Randi Weingarten declared at the National Press Club in Washington that "as a

pledge of shared responsibility," with the exception of vouchers, "no issue should be off the table." And in the looming battle over D.C. schools, according to the *Washington Post* (1 February) the AFT president said she is willing to "modify tenure" to allow removal of "underperforming" teachers in "humane, fast and fair ways."

It is a total myth that poor teachers are responsible for poor education in run-down inner city schools. It is the deliberate, massive, *racist* underfunding of urban education by capitalist rulers who are deeply hostile to public education, seeking wherever possible to privatize it and elsewhere to bend it to the needs of corporations. They seek to create a two-tier system in which high quality education is available only to a select minority, and to bust the unions which stand as an obstacle in their path. This program is shared by both the Republican and Democratic parties, and rather than fight it head-on, the labor bureaucracies at most try to slow down the erosion of gains won through labor struggle. In seeking

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What Will It Take to Defeat the War?

Not Another Popular-Front "Peace Movement," Mobilize the Working Class to Fight for Power!

**Break with All the Capitalist Parties –
For a Revolutionary Workers Party!
For Workers Strikes Against the War
Defeat U.S. Imperialism –
Defend the Iraqi and Afghan Peoples**

On 30 June 2008, a conference was held in Cleveland, Ohio called by veterans of the 1970s Vietnam "antiwar movement" who sought to form an umbrella coalition including the various peace groups active today. The Internationalist Group attended the meeting, while making clear that we are not part of this or any other popular-front lash-up. We distributed the leaflet reprinted below, which stressed that the different coalitions all were dedicated to tailing after and pressuring the Democratic Party. Yet the Democrats have been a party of imperialist war for more than a century.

This was graphically proven once again by the election of Democrat Barack Obama as president. After making a pitch against the Iraq war early on in the primary season, the new president has now ordered a doubling of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, attacked Pakistan and issued plans for a phony "withdrawal" from Iraq that would leave 50,000 U.S. troops there indefinitely (roughly the same number that are still in Korea more than half a century after the 1950-53 Korean War. So much for the antiwar groups talk of "Bush's war": Iraq and Afghanistan are bipartisan imperialist wars.

We have written on numerous occasions about how the antiwar coalitions are in fact subordinated to the Democrats. But in Cleveland you could observe the process live. The conference steering committee, particularly but not only Socialist Action, fought tooth and nail to prevent the body from calling for withdrawal from Afghanistan, to exclude any mention of Palestine and Israel, to keep out refer-

ences to threats against Iran, and to oppose having a national antiwar mobilization before spring 2009. The excuse was they couldn't "bring [their] allies in the labor movement on board." What they meant was that their "strategy" was based on "mobilizing" sectors of the Democratic Party, who wouldn't muck up Obama's election chances.

Eventually a majority at the conference added references to Afghanistan, Palestine and Iran, but the sticking point came over not calling national antiwar marches in the fall. They finally settled on having "regional" actions in early October, and another round in December, all of which fizzled. Various groups (including the League for the Revolutionary Party, Socialist Appeal, Freedom Socialist Party and some local coalitions) which claim to be to the left of the major pro-Democratic antiwar coalitions pushed to include various supposedly more militant planks. But the amendments did nothing to change the fundamental character of the National Assembly, with the end result that there is now one more popular-front obstacle to a class-struggle fight against imperialist war.

With Obama now in office, the same charades are being repeated. United for Peace and Justice, the largest and most blatantly pro-Democratic Party coalition, sought to duck the Afghan war (now called "Afpak" by Washington insiders) in its April 4 march, although it finally had to include a pro-forma mention. But by not calling for immediate withdrawal, by holding the march in New York, not Washington, and by headlining it "Yes, we can..." (end the war, build a new



Internationalist photo

ILWU contingent marches in San Francisco, 1 May 2008, during historic West Coast port strike against the war.

economy, etc.), they make crystal clear that there is a pro-Democratic Party event. Workers World Party and its Bail Out the People group is likewise holding a Wall Street rally a day earlier (April 3), while its Troops Out Now group and International ANSWER (led by the WWP split-off, Party for Socialism and Liberation), is having a March 21 event in Washington. But, mind you, they will march on the Pentagon, not the White House. Wouldn't want to demonstrate against Obama, would they? So the pop-front beat goes on, as does the imperialist war they pretend to oppose.

30 JUNE 2008 – A “National Assembly” has called an “Open National Antiwar Conference” in Cleveland to found a new antiwar organization, in addition to the various already existing coalitions. Its promoters, chiefly Socialist Action (SA) and several other self-described socialist groups, expect hundreds of activists to attend the conference and deal with the debilitating problems facing the antiwar movement as the U.S. terror war on the world is well into its seventh year. Many antiwar activists were disturbed when massive protests were held all over the globe on the fifth anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq – everywhere except this country. “The absence of a massive united mobilization during this period in the United States,” says the call for the Cleveland conference, “should be a great concern to us all.”

The conference organizers say that the main reason that protests were called off, that protests have dwindled in size, and that earlier antiwar marches, which were the largest in the history of the U.S., have failed to have any effect on the course of the war, is organizational: squabbles between narrow “sectarian” formations supposedly stood in the way of united, “democratic” decision-making. Wrong. The problem is *political*. The reason that there were no big antiwar actions last March was because the main “coalitions” didn't want to embarrass the Democratic Party at the height of the primary season.

The January 2008 issue of *Socialist Action* newspaper carried an exposé (“U.S. Antiwar Movement Falters: An Insider's View”) of the machinations of the leaders of United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ) to prevent a national antiwar mobilization last March, saying they sought to “focus on currying favor with the Democrats.” True enough, as far as it goes. Yet now, through the “National Assembly” it has initiated, SA is prepared to do the same thing for which it criticized the UFPJ. Why is there is no mention of Afghanistan in the conference call? Simple: because the Democrats are all for the war on Afghanistan. Any why does the action proposal by the coordinating committee call for a national protest only in Spring 2009? Because they don't want to get in the way of Democrat Barack Obama's election bid. Yet Obama is for escalating the war in Afghanistan and says he is prepared to bomb inside Pakistan and attack Iran!

So because the conference organizers, with all their talk of being “independent,” are bound by their bourgeois political loyalties, they are set to repeat the policies of the present “antiwar movement” leaders, which will produce the same impotent failures as previous protests. Albert Einstein is said

to have defined insanity as doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. If 20 or so “mass mobilizations” since 2001 appealing to Congress to stop the war have had no effect, how is a new national organization dedicated to “peaceful, legal” mass mobilizations of the same sort going to stop the war machine? Answer: it won't.

Behind the seeming insanity is a program. “Though this be madness, yet there is a method in't.” This new effort at an “inclusive,” “independent,” “democratic” antiwar formation is actually organizing a coalition of class collaboration that is “inclusive” of the Democrats and other capitalist parties. Look at the list of endorsers: it includes the “Progressive Democrats of America” (a group set up by the Democratic Socialists of America), the Duluth Democratic Farmer-Labor Party, various representatives of the capitalist Green party, etc. But even if the bourgeois parties and politicians weren't directly present, these coalitions are inevitably and invariably aimed at pressuring the capitalist rulers.

Such *popular fronts* serve to chain the exploited and oppressed to a wing of their exploiters and oppressors – i.e., the supposedly “democratic” or “anti-fascist,” “anti-imperialist” or “antiwar” capitalists. And from Spain and France in the 1930s to Chile and Portugal in the 1970s, they always prepare the road to defeat by heading off revolutionary struggle. The vaunted “independence” of the various coalitions is a fig leaf to cover up the fact that they are actually aiding the parties of war and racism. Yet the fundamental point is that to stop imperialist war it will take international workers revolution to bring down the capitalist system that generates endless wars.

Otherwise, the perspective is for one imperialist war after another, and one impotent antiwar movement after another. Look at the list, just since World War II: Korea (1950-53, with U.S. troops still there); Vietnam (1954 to 1975); Afghanistan (1980-1989); Cuba Bay of Pigs (1961, followed by decades of economic blockade); Central America (1980-1989), Iraq, Gulf War (1990-91), Yugoslavia/Bosnia (1995), Yugoslavia/Kosovo (1999), Afghanistan again (2001 to date), Iraq again (2003 to date), not to mention countless coups, “peacekeeping” operations and other U.S. imperialist interventions in Africa, Asia and Latin America. And the drum beat of war goes on.

Ultimately, it points toward a new World War III against the present imperialist “allies” and rivals of the U.S. The next step may be an Israeli attack on Iran, backed up by Washington. We say: Iran, a semi-colonial country, has the right to nuclear or any other weapons it needs to fend off imperialist attack. Defend Iran against Israeli/U.S. attack!

The Trotskyists of the Internationalist Group, U.S. section of the League for the Fourth International, put forward a program against imperialist war that is sharply counterposed to the bourgeois politics of *all* the factions of the antiwar movement. Rather than peace parades that appeal to Congress to moderate the war policy (“Troops out,” “Bring the troops home,” etc.), we seek to mobilize the international working class at the head of all the exploited and oppressed to *defeat* the imperialists in this war, unleashing workers

power through strikes against the war and refusal to transport war cargo, on the road to world socialist revolution to overturn the capitalist system. This was the program of the Bolsheviks, who brought World War I to an end by turning the imperialist war into a civil war, toppling the capitalist order in Russia in the 1917 October Revolution and unleashing a wave of revolutionary agitation internationally.

“Ridiculous!” “Ultra-left!” exclaim the self-proclaimed socialists, even would-be “Trotskyists” who back this latest antiwar coalition. These same people insisted that our call for *workers strikes against the war* was utopian “pie in the sky.” But the IG fought for and played an important role in building the first-ever strike against a U.S. war by an American union. This past May 1 [2008], the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) shut down every port on the West Coast against the war in Iraq and Afghanistan (see our extensive coverage of this historic action in *The Internationalist*, No. 27). While various reformist pseudo-socialists now want to praise the ILWU, trying to include it as one more sector of their antiwar popular fronts, we insisted from the beginning that strikes against the war must be directed against the imperialist parties of war and racism, leading to the building of a revolutionary workers party.

“Mass Action” for the Democrats, or Workers Strikes Against the War

The fundamental difference between powerless peace parades and mobilizing workers power is not on the plane of tactics or organizational structure. The difference is in the class content of the program against imperialist war. The Trotskyists wrote in the 1930s as the local wars were spreading (China, Ethiopia, Spain) leading up the second imperialist world war:

“The most common mistake made in the attempted struggle against war comes from the belief that this exists somehow ‘independent’ of the class struggle in general, that a broad union of all sorts of persons from every social class and group can be formed around the issue of fighting war, since – so the reasoning goes – these persons may be all equally opposed to war whatever their differences on other points. In this way, war is lifted from its social base, considered apart from its causes and conditions, as if it were a mystic abstraction instead of a concrete historical institution. Acting on this belief, attempts are made to build up all kinds of permanent Peace Societies, Antiwar Organizations, Leagues Against War, etc.

“This kind of attitude is about as effective as it for doctors to treat the high fever in acute appendicitis by putting the patient in an ice-box. The only way actually get rid of the high fever is to remove the cause of the fever – that is, to take out the diseased appendix. The thing is true for war: the only way to get rid of war is to remove the cause of war.”

–*War and the Workers* (1936)

This war to enslave the people of Iraq and Afghanistan is also, like every imperialist war, a war against the “enemy within.” From the U.S.A. PATRIOT act to the overturning of *Brown vs. Board of Education* (the ruling that led to formal

desegregation of the schools), to the military quarantine and counterinsurgency operation against the poor black population of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, and the Gestapo-style roundups and deportations of hundreds of thousands of immigrants, this war has targeted blacks, immigrants and labor on the “home front.” What is called for is a powerful workers struggle for the *defeat* of this war, which would unite and mobilize the oppressed masses in the colonies and in the heart of the imperialist beast.

The National Assembly calls to “bring the troops home now!” Despite what the opportunists claim, this is not the same as defeating U.S. imperialist war, “objectively” or otherwise. Hillary Clinton made the point explicitly: “Senator McCain and President Bush claim withdrawal is defeat... Well, let’s be clear, withdrawal is not defeat. Defeat is keeping troops in Iraq for 100 years. Defeat is straining our alliances and losing our standing in the world. Defeat is draining our resources and diverting attention from our key interests” (*Boston Globe* 18 March 2008). Barack Obama wants to disengage from what he calls the “dumb war” in Iraq, albeit slowly and partially, leaving thousands of troops in the area, in order to wage what he thinks are “smart” wars against Afghanistan and Iran!

“Troops out” is an appeal addressed to the growing sector of the imperialist bourgeoisie that sees the Iraq adventure as a failure and wants to *rescue U.S. imperialism for future wars*. “Support the troops by bringing them home”? This is a red-white-and-blue *loyalty oath* to U.S. imperialism. Bring the troops home to do what? Patrol the Mexican border, as Republicans and Democrats (and the fascist Minutemen) suggest? After Hurricane Katrina, the elite 101st Airborne division and Blackwater mercenaries were brought home, with orders from Louisiana’s Democratic governor to *shoot to kill* the stranded survivors!

The “theory” of “mass action” that the conference promoters expound endlessly is a banality that explains nothing and conceals everything. It will take “mass action” to stop the war, like it would take “motion” to travel to Alaska. But motion in what direction, in what sort of vehicle? Who’s in the driver’s seat, and who’s stuffed in the trunk? *Mass action of what class, with what program?* The conference proposes “The independent and united mobilization of the antiwar majority in massive peaceful demonstrations.... Mass actions aimed at visibly and powerfully demonstrating the will of the majority....” But imperialist wars are not made by majorities, and they are certainly not ended by popular demand. The capitalists produce constant war to grab markets for labor and industry away from their imperialist rivals.

Imperialist war can only be defeated with *class war*. Talk of “majorities” peacefully persuading the (ruling-class) “minority” to withdraw from Iraq by “demonstrating” that the majority is a majority, is a *deception* that serves the ruling class by promoting illusions in bourgeois “democracy.” So what if the capitalists and war supporters are a minority? It hasn’t stopped them before. This minority rules through the capitalist state apparatus: it has the police, the prisons, the courts and the armed forces at its disposal, as well as the

capitalist media as a platform for “opinion makers.” This minority makes war to keep its heel on the necks of oppressed and exploited millions. Nothing but *smashing the capitalist system* will put an end to imperialist war. The “Progressive Democrats,” Greens and the *phony socialists* are opponents of workers revolution. Unity with them means endless war.

Two, Three, Many Peace Parades, or a Revolutionary Workers Party?

A little history may be in order here. Most of the key organizers of the Cleveland conference are alumni of the Vietnam peace movement. Part of the motivation for this conference comes from a generation of ex-members of the ex-Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party (SWP) who dream of reliving the halcyon days of their youth as leaders of the SWP’s Vietnam-era National Peace Action Coalition (NPAC). They claim it was the antiwar movement that stopped the Vietnam War. This is a willful rewriting of history, unless we are to believe that the National Liberation Front and North Vietnamese army were some sort of Quakers. The U.S. imperialists and their allies were defeated militarily by the Vietnamese workers and peasants, *two years after* the official antiwar movement packed up and went home. The peace movement was satisfied with the withdrawal of most of “our boys” while mass-murder bombing and a proxy civil war escalated. Trotskyist revolutionaries, on the other hand, said that “our boys” were the Viet Cong, and hailed the U.S. defeat in Vietnam, proclaiming “All Indochina Must Go Communist!”

Moreover, NPAC along with the Communist Party-dominated People’s Coalition for Peace and Justice (PCPJ) were the *right wing* of the seething mass movement of potentially revolutionary discontent that exploded out of the black ghettos onto college campuses and into sectors of the working class. Just like today’s Cleveland assembly that rolls out the red carpet to the “progressive” Democrats, NPAC had Democratic senator Vance Hartke on its governing board, even while the SWP piously intoned that its pop front was “independent” of the Democrats. When leftists intervened in a 1971 NPAC conference to protest the presence of the capitalist politician and CIA bagman Victor Reuther, SWP/NPAC goons viciously attacked them, throwing one oppositionist through a glass door to defend their coalition’s bourgeois “respectability.”

At NPAC peace parades – which would vanish during even-numbered (i.e., election) years, just like the barely-moving “movement” today – more than once the SWP set up daisy chains of marshals chanting “peaceful, legal!” to try to divert and exclude demonstrators carrying NLF flags. In his chronicle of the Vietnam antiwar movement, SWPer Fred Halstead admits that as soon as U.S. troops were withdrawn, “Virtually all the local antiwar coalitions also folded up” (*Out Now!* [1978]). Halstead also records that “No mass socialist movement emerged from the antiwar activity... Once the war in Vietnam was over, the organized movement against it ceased to exist. This was inevitable.” Inevitable, since the SWP’s subordination to Democratic “doves” made these reformists hardened opponents of revolutionary politics, or of

any political line to the left of the “single issue” dictated by the need to keep their capitalist “allies.”

The experience of NPAC should give pause to those radicals who would seek to be the “left wing” of the Cleveland popular front. Any real struggle against imperialist war is necessarily a *class struggle* and can only be waged in and through the mass organizations of the working class. We do not present our revolutionary program as an “action proposal” to this body, since to do so would only prettify what is a popular front of class collaboration. It is necessary instead to break the “alliance” that chains the workers to their war-making exploiters in the name of “peace.” Those who genuinely seek to put an end to imperialist war must *break decisively with all the capitalist parties*, the Green Party of longtime Democratic Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney included, and *break with the popular front* embodied in the “National Assembly” and all the other “antiwar” and “peace” coalitions. Every last one of them is beholden to the Democrats, the only difference is the UFPI is up front about it, while the rest (ANSWER, TONC, CAN, World Can’t Wait, etc.) try to disguise it.

The National Assembly in Cleveland has been founded with the participation of sectors of the Democratic War Party. It exists to promote “peaceful” mass demonstrations that never have stopped an imperialist war, and never will. It stabs the suffering people of Afghanistan in the back, ignores the war against blacks and immigrant workers, and has nothing to say about the looming war on Iran, all for the sake of unity with “broad progressive forces,” i.e. the capitalist Democratic Party. And if the tame peace-crawls proposed by this condominium of fake socialists and bourgeois politicians end up playing an ancillary role in the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq, *this will only set the stage for the next imperialist war* – which will also have its “mass action” antiwar movement, as will the next war, and the next until the whole system is brought down through socialist revolution.

Pacifism, especially in the “socialist” inflection with which SA and the other opportunists preach it, diverts anger against the war into powerless “mass” lobbying in the streets. There is only one program to stop the imperialist war, and that is the program of revolutionary Marxism, i.e., Trotskyism. Every day that bourgeois coalitions for “peace” overshadow and crowd out class struggle against imperialist war will be another day of unimpeded imperialist slaughter and barbarism. The period in which the class traitors lead the “movement” nowhere must come to an end. As the founder and longtime leader of American Trotskyism wrote during the Korean War:

“The class struggle of the workers, merging with the colonial revolutions in a common struggle against imperialism, is the only genuine fight against war. The Stalinists who preach otherwise are liars and deceivers. The workers and colonial peoples will have peace when they have the power and use their power to take it and make it for themselves. That is the road of Lenin. There is no other road to peace.”

—James P. Cannon, *The Road to Peace* (1951)

Break with the bourgeoisie! Build a revolutionary workers party! ■

What the entire gamut of liberals and reformists is seeking is for Obama to launch a "New Deal" like that of Roosevelt in the 1930s. Following

the November election, this was all the rage in the bourgeois media. The *New York Times* (8 November 2008) ran a piece on Obama's stimulus package titled, "75 Years Later, a Nation Hopes for Another F.D.R." Liberal economist Paul Krugman wrote on his blog the same day, "Everybody's talking new New Deal these days." Before the election, *Nation* editor Katrina vanden Heuvel and Eric Schlosser wrote an article for the *Wall Street Journal* (27 September 2008) calling for exactly that: "What we really need is a new New Deal: a systematic approach to the financial and economic problems of the United States. Firstly, we need relief for ordinary Americans." More recently, the *Monthly Review* (February 2009), a non-denominational organ of Stalinist reformism, ran an article by John Bellamy Foster and Robert McChesney, "A New New Deal under Obama?" saying, "The possibility of a new New Deal is to be welcomed by all of those on the left, as promising some relief to a hard-pressed working population."

The social-democratic reformists of the International Socialist Organization are singing from the same hymnal. In an article, "Who Made the New Deal?" in *Socialist Worker* (19 November 2008), SW editor Lance Selfa "recounts the history of an era that is still remembered for the important changes that benefited the working majority." That is, of course, how the liberals remember it, and obscures the fact that FDR's purpose was quite different. So Selfa adds: "The New Deal was, first and foremost, a program to save a U.S. economy in crisis." But it's not just "the economy" in generic terms, as Daniel Gross wrote in piece on "The New 'New Deal'" (*Newsweek*, 25 March 2008), "In the 1930s Franklin Delano Roosevelt saved American capitalism from its own self-inflicted wounds." And FDR himself wrote, "I am the best friend the profit system ever had." The ISO tries to get around this by saying: "That American workers made gains was the result of huge struggles that gave a radical content to that program." Yet the content of the New Deal was hardly radical, and the workers' struggles were often waged in the face of efforts by the Roosevelt administration to call them off.

The New Deal was a program to save capitalism. It didn't even end the Depression – it took World War II to do that. To the extent the New Deal offered anything to the working class, it was in an effort to keep it under control and stave off the spectre of "red revolution." It was the leaders of the conservative AFL unions who preached reliance on Roosevelt, not "the left," and certainly not the revolutionaries. The issue came to a head in a series of strikes in 1934, in Toledo (auto parts), San Francisco (maritime), Minneapolis (truckers) and a national textile walkout. Trotskyist leader James P. Cannon wrote, "Now,

Not a "New New Deal," But a Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution

as in the labor upsurge of last year, the attitude of the workers toward the NRA [National Recovery Administration] occupies a central place." Compared

to the walkouts of 1933, there "has been a heavy shift in emphasis from faith in the NRA to reliance on their own strength." Workers dubbed the NRA the "National Run Around." But leadership was key. Only in Minneapolis, where the Trotskyists led the strikes, was there a clear-cut victory. Cannon compared the outcome there with the other strikes:

"In most of the other strikes the leaders blunted the edge of the fight - where they could not head it off altogether, as in the case of the auto workers - and preached reliance on the NRA, on General Johnson, or the president. In Minneapolis the leaders taught the workers to fight for their rights and fought with them."¹

—James P. Cannon, "Minneapolis and Its Meaning," *New Internationalist*, July 1934

The key question, in the 1930s and today, is revolutionary leadership. Now as then, the opportunists look to the capitalist government, taking their cue from presidents Roosevelt and Obama. Thus the leadership of the largest "antiwar coalition," United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ), essentially called off national antiwar mobilizations for the duration of the elec-

¹ In the Toledo Auto-Lite strike, the AFL leadership accepted the findings of an FDR-appointed federal mediation board, which included recognition of a company union, but the ranks rose up against it. In San Francisco, the AFL tops managed to seize control from the militant maritime workers, led by the Stalinist CP, and sold out a general strike. In the national textile strike, which marked the peak of the strike wave, even as victory was in their grasp the workers were stabbed in the back by the AFL tops who, fearing that the power of the mass struggle could unseat them, accepted a mediation board "settlement" pushed by Roosevelt that gave the strikers nothing. Of the textile strike, Cannon wrote:

"This was the greatest strike in American labor history in point of numbers, and the equal of any in militancy. Called into being by the pressure of the rank and file at the convention against the resistance of the leadership, it was frankly aimed at the NRA and the whole devilish circle of governmental machination, trickery and fraud. The workers, the majority of them new to the trade union movement, fought like lions, only to see the fruits of their struggle snatched from their hands, leaving them bewildered, demoralized, and defeated - they knew not how....

"The mainspring of the new left wing can only be a revolutionary Marxian party. Its creation is our foremost task."

—James P. Cannon, "The Strike Wave and the Left Wing," *New Internationalist*, September-October 1934

General Hugh Johnson was a top official of the NRA who saw Mussolini's fascist Italy as a model.



Striking truck drivers run off Citizens' Army and police during Minneapolis Teamsters strike, 21 May 1934.

tion campaign, in order not to embarrass the Democratic Party candidate. Subsequently it has resisted calling for immediate withdrawal from Afghanistan (although reluctantly ceding on this) or directly confronting the Obama administration. So it will call a demonstration on April 4 in New York City, not Washington, on the slogan "Yes We Can ... End the War." Sound familiar? Yet the UFPJ is just more up-front in its opportunism. The fact is that all the reformists have sought to build a class-collaborationist "antiwar movement" geared to what is acceptable to Democrats. Now that the Democratic Party, with their aid, controls the executive and both houses of Congress, the bankruptcy of this policy is starkly revealed: the war in Iraq goes on, and in Afghanistan and Pakistan it is escalating under Obama, while the U.S. backs the Israeli slaughter of Palestinians in Gaza.

In contrast, the Internationalist Group, section of the League for the Fourth International, calls for *defense of the Afghan, Iraqi and Palestinian peoples* and the *defeat of U.S. imperialism and Zionism*, for *workers strikes against the war*, for transportation unions to *hot cargo war materiel*, for mobilizing the power of the international proletariat rather than appealing to the capitalist Democrats. The first-ever workers strike in the United States against a U.S. imperialist war, the walkout last May 1 by the International Longshore and Warehouse Union that shut down all 27 ports on the West Coast, was a step in this direction. The union ranks, fed up with the Democrats' failure to stop the war, carried out this action over repeated attempts by the union leadership to sabotage and distort it. The IG fought for and helped build and publicize this action.

Currently, labor officialdom and the reformist left are concentrating on building support for the Employee Free Choice Act, since Obama and the Democrats have endorsed this. Meanwhile, the new administration is shoving a "stimulus" bill down the throat of auto workers which will eliminate their right to strike, slash billions of dollars of company contributions to their health and pension funds, close at least

15 additional auto plants and lay off 50,000 auto workers, just from the Detroit 3, while giving \$39 billion to their bosses. The UAW leadership is going along with this devastating plan. What should the response of labor militants be? In a December 17 statement, the CPUSA calls to "get behind President-Elect Barack Obama's economic stimulus and public works jobs program," and suggests "public ownership of the domestic auto industry." How? Simple. "The United States government could buy all the common shares of stock in General Motors." This takeover could even be temporary, these "communists" suggest. The ISO likewise calls, in a November 10 article, for "nationalization" of auto, while urging that "the Obama government should insist on a moratorium on layoffs and guarantees of job security."

Such calls build dangerous illusions. The Obama administration is committed to slashing auto jobs wholesale in order to make the industry "competitive." If it does go for a temporary de facto nationalization, it would only be to hold onto a key industry for "national security," and

auto companies would still be subject to the dictates of the capitalist market. Instead of calls on the capitalist government to save the workers, in the face of the threat of a wholesale shutdown of productive capacity, with auto plants across the country laying idle, class-struggle unionists should call for workers action to *occupy the plants*, not only those threatened with closing but of the entire chains, and *impose workers control*. Audacious? Certainly. Impossible? Certainly not, as demonstrated by the recent occupation of Republic Windows and Doors in Chicago and the enthusiastic response it received from workers around the country. Militant workers should raise demands for *30 hours work for 40 hours pay*, form *workers committees to open the books of the auto companies*, demand full *socialized medicine* (not just "single payer" health insurance) as well as a *massive program of public works* at union-scale wages and under union control.

Under those conditions, demands for expropriation of the bankrupt auto manufacturers (not compensated nationalization), whose discredited management has run the industry into the ground, would have a very different content. They would point directly to the need for a socialist planned economy, which would produce to fill human needs rather than for profit, and to the only way to achieve this: through workers revolution. As Leon Trotsky wrote in the founding program of the Fourth International, written in the depths of the last Great Depression, with special attention to the struggles of American workers:

"It is necessary to help the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find the bridge between present demand and the socialist program of the revolution. This bridge should include a system of transitional demands, stemming from today's conditions and from today's consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat."

—*The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International* (The Transitional Program)

World Capitalism...

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remains stuck at severely depressed levels for years this is not cyclical but the result of a crisis of the capitalist system itself. In the 1930s, economist John Maynard Keynes analyzed that the economy was caught in a "liquidity trap," so that governments had to inject large amounts of money to get production going again. It is now admitted even by bourgeois economists that this was insufficient and only World War II put an end to the Great Depression of the '30s.

The recipe of the monetarist "free market" economists for dealing with an economic downturn was to lower interest rates. Federal Reserve chairman Ben Bernanke tried that, driving down interest rates to near zero percent, but the banks wouldn't lend. Bush's Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson then tried giving away vast amounts of dollars to the bankers (the \$750 billion "bailout"), but they just put the money in their reserves (or gave themselves bonuses). Even free money wouldn't restart the stalled economic engine. Now Obama is trying the standard Keynesian answer, to pump cash into the economy through public works in the \$825 billion "stimulus" bill. But that will only have a limited impact as well, and unemployment will keep soaring. It won't work because it assumes that the basic problem of the economy is *underconsumption*: give the people more money, they will buy more, companies will produce more, banks will lend more, etc. But the problem that set off the crisis isn't that people weren't consuming – on the contrary, egged on by the banks and credit card companies, American consumers were busy spending money they didn't have, sinking into debt.

The underlying issue behind both the waves of financial speculation and now the sharp drop in the real economy is the *overproduction of capital*, and therefore of goods, and the associated *falling rate of profit*. The rate of real capital formation in the advanced capitalist countries has been extremely low since the late 1980s because investors figure they can't get a sufficient rate of return on their capital investing in production. So instead they "invest" it in stock market speculation, information technology or housing bubbles, and when those burst they just sit on the cash. Building highways or "green" energy projects won't change that, the "multiplier effect" of deficit spending will be minimal. Under capitalism, the only way the rate of profit can be restored is through the *destruction of capital*, by massive bankruptcies producing millions of unemployed, or by *imperialist war* laying waste to productive capacity. Or, as happened in the 1930s and '40s, by both. After the bloodbath is over and a "reasonable" profit rate restored, the production cycle will resume ... at a cost of untold mass misery.

The present global capitalist economic crisis is not cyclical or even structural but systemic. Neither monetarists nor Keynesians can solve it. But as Lenin and Trotsky insisted, capitalism will not collapse of its own accord. The capitalist answer to a crisis of overproduction is *barbarism*: the imperialist war mongers will try to shoot their way out of the mess

the capitalists have created. The only way to defend the very existence of the proletariat today is by mobilizing our class power to demand what we need. A series of *transitional demands* should be raised pointing to the need bring down the bourgeoisie and institute workers rule (see "Exchange on Transitional Demands," on page 42). That centrally requires breaking the stranglehold of the capitalist parties and building a workers party that fights for international socialist revolution, which can lay the basis for a planned economy producing to fulfill human needs rather than profit. ■

No Layoffs, No Givebacks...

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to have "a seat at the table," they *feed the union-busters' lies and pave the way for the gutting and ultimate destruction of their own unions.*

To resist this offensive, the UFT should seek a fighting alliance of labor including municipal workers unions and the powerhouse of NYC labor, Transport Workers Union Local 100. It must be prepared to use labor's most powerful weapon, the strike, which means confronting the state Taylor Law which outlaws this fundamental right for government workers. This would require a mobilization of all city labor. In its 2005 strike, the TWU demonstrated that it had the power to tie up the city, the center of international finance capital. That fight was over the precise issue that Mayor Bloomberg is now posing for all city workers: forcing workers to pay for health care and attacking pension rights. But the transit workers were undercut by their own leadership, which never wanted the walkout, and by backstabbing from Randi Weingarten, who refused to publicly support the strike and instead told TWU leader it would be disastrous to continue.

Facing the threat of mass firings, the United Federation of Teachers should declare that it will not tolerate *any* layoffs, that it will not consent to givebacks of health care and pensions that are some of the few benefits for overworked and underpaid educators. It should defend tenure to the hilt, pointing this does not mean the right to a job for life but only that after three to five years in the system, teachers cannot be fired without cause. Those who want to do away with tenure want precisely to establish a management dictatorship in the schools in which they can throw out any teacher they don't want, for whatever reason. In Washington and New York it is likely that the unions will be offered a "deal": weaken tenure (i.e., the already tenuous job security) in exchange for limiting layoffs. The unions' answer must be a resounding *NO!*

As in every class struggle, this is fundamentally a political fight. So long as the unions are chained to the Democratic Party of Obama and Paterson, you will see your job protections, health care, pensions and other union gains steadily whittled away until there is virtually nothing left. Already many younger teachers see the UFT as nothing but a health insurance provider, and now that is threatened. To win we need to throw off the pro-capitalist bureaucracy, break the stranglehold of the bosses' parties and build a class-struggle workers party. ■

The Imperialist “War Against Drugs” and the Class War on Poor and Working People

Militarization and Hunger in Mexico

Army and Federal Police – Get Out of the Barrios!

—translated from a supplement to *El Internacionalista* (March 2009)

From the very first moment of his six-year mandate, Mexican president Felipe Calderón has focused on militarizing the country. Within days of taking office at the beginning of December 2006, he announced “Joint Operation Michoacán,” sending more than 6,500 troops to the central Mexican state in order to seal the coasts and highways as part of an “integral strategy” in this “battle” of the “war on drugs.” In January 2007, another 3,300 soldiers and federal police were dispatched to Tijuana. Future operations were announced for the states of Guerrero, Nuevo León, Sinaloa and Tamaulipas. And to symbolize his role as “supreme commander,” the gray bureaucrat Calderón kicked off 2007 by donning an olive green jacket and a military cap with five stars to accompany his defense minister, four-star general Galván, in reviewing the troops in the field. Two years later, the Mexican government is clearly not winning this battle. It’s reported that 7,000 people have been killed in drug-related violence since the beginning of 2008, more than a thousand this January alone. This has Calderón’s patrons in Washington worried.

The militarization offensive was designed to gain the favor of the American government, concretized in the so-called “Mérida Initiative” agreed to by Calderón in talks with U.S. president George Bush in his March 2007 visit to the capital of Yucatán. Its aim, according to the Bush administration, was to “combat the threats of drug trafficking, transnational crime, and terrorism in the Western Hemisphere.” For this purpose, the U.S. Treasury has budgeted \$1.6 billion dollars, more than 80 percent of it for Mexico. But lately U.S. rulers are concerned about how much “bang” they are getting for their “buck.” Last November, a perspectives document of the Pentagon, *Joint Forces Operating Environment 2008*, focusing on coming crises, declared ominously: “In terms of worst-case scenarios for the Joint Force and indeed the world, two large and important states bear consideration for a rapid and sudden collapse: Pakistan and Mexico.” Mexico about to collapse? A “failed state”? What do the Yankee imperialists have in mind? Send in the Marines, as they have done so often in the past? Already the Department of Homeland Security says it has 50 agents in Mexico. They and all other U.S. agents should be thrown out!

Since the new administration of Democrat Barack Obama



Federal Police arrive in Ciudad Juárez, March 2.

René Soto

took office in January, there has been a crescendo of hysteria in Washington over security in Mexico. Recently, Dennis Blair, the new U.S. director of national intelligence, charged in a Congressional committee hearing that the Mexican government does not control part of its territory. A top official of the Department of Homeland Security testified about an “Operations Plan on Violence on the Southwestern Border.” The governors of Arizona and Texas called for sending the National Guard to the border. U.S. vice president Joe Biden suggested that Mexico should follow the example of Colombia, where hundreds of U.S. troops and “contractors” (mercenaries) have infested the country. And in a visit to Mexico, the head of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen, was even more explicit, saying the Pentagon was “ready to aid Mexico with its war on drug trafficking with counterinsurgency tactics like those employed in Iraq and Afghanistan” (*La Jornada*, 12 March). Coming next: legions of “advisors” and “contractors.”

In response to this pressure from the north, the government has launched a “war” in Ciudad Juárez. Following a February 10 shootout between units of the army and a squad of hit men of the Sinaloa Cartel of Joaquín (El Chapo) Guzmán (who just made the Forbes list of the richest men in the world), Calderón ordered 5,000 troops and 2,000 Federal Police to the border city. In mid-March, he dispatched another contingent so that there are now 10,000 federal agents in the city. They patrol in convoys of armored cars, brandishing assault rifles, their faces covered with ski masks. There is a virtual curfew: after 10 p.m. pedestrians disappear from the streets. At the University of Chihuahua, evening classes end at 8.

Similar scenes are repeated in cities all along the U.S. border. In Tijuana a 30-minute car trip turns into an hour or more as vehicles are stopped three and four times at military checkpoints every few hundred meters. Periodically there are pitched battles: on February 17, police in Reynosa were met with fragmentation grenades and RPGs (rocket-propelled grenades) smuggled in from the U.S.

This program of massive militarization has not intimidated the drug cartels, but it has had the desired effect of getting the military heavily involved in police operations. From the outset, a main purpose of Calderón's offensive has been to armor-plate a weakened regime against social unrest. This is made all the more urgent by the rampant economic crisis: hundreds of thousands of workers have lost their jobs in recent months (336,000 in January alone, according to official statistics). As for the *maquiladora* (free trade zone) plants producing for the U.S., just in Ciudad Juárez, 45,000 are out of work due to "technical" shutdowns. For decades, Mexican governments maintained control through the all-encompassing mechanisms of a corporatist regime, which "integrated" every sector of society in the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). Since the PRI lost the presidency in 2000 after seven decades in power, the right-wing governments of the National Action Party (PAN) have tried to maintain elements of the corporatist "unions" to keep the working class in check. But its ultimate recourse is greater use of the military, bringing Mexico closer to militarized pseudo-democracies like Colombia.

The "Colombianization" of Mexico is well underway. This is not only taking place in the northern states: in Michoacán, Guanajuato, Colima and Guerrero in the center, as well as Yucatán and Quintana Roo in the south, the military is out in force. And of course in Chiapas, surrounding the Zapatista peasants, and Oaxaca, still seething with unrest led by the militant teachers union and indigenous organizations. At the doors of Mexico City, the PAN mayor of Tlalnepantla has the army patrolling the streets. And in the Federal District, the PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution) government of former police chief Marcelo Ebrard (who contracted Giuliani Associates to advise him on implementing "Zero Tolerance" police methods) now wants to imitate Tony Blair's England by installing 9,000 video cameras, bought from Telmex (owned by Carlos Slim, now only the third richest man in the world) and the French company Thales for US\$460 million. So there you have the PRD government of the capital: ice-skating rinks, free Viagra for older men, and Big Brother watching your every move. And this is supposed to be an "opposition" to Calderón?!



Mexican president Felipe Calderón reviews the troops, January 2007.

All three of Mexico's major bourgeois parties – "left" (PRD), right (PAN) and "center" (PRI) – are pushing the militarization offensive. In fact, the PRD governor of Michoacán in 2006, Lázaro Cárdenas Batel, invited Calderón to send in the army, and his successor, Leonel Godoy, also PRD, is a big ally of the president. Ultra-rightists such as Guillermo Velasco Arzac of the fascist El Yunque have tried to whip up popular hysteria with monster rallies "against crime," such as last August in Mexico City. Meanwhile, the national chairman of the PAN is calling to "Guanajuatize" the country, referring to the state of Guanajuato which his party has run for two decades. Last July, a scandal erupted when videotapes surfaced of police in León, Guanajuato being trained in torture techniques (with an instructor who "looks American"): shoving recruits' faces in their own vomit, pouring soda into their nostrils

(the *tehuacanazo*). Then this past January, a Guanajuato peasant was tortured to death. The response was to retire the state police chief ... and replace him with another official who has also been accused of torture!

In a typical reactionary declaration, the PAN mayor of the city of Guanajuato blamed drug gangs on working moms: "The gang-bangers are the result of mothers who go to work"! From 2000 on, over 130 women have been jailed in Oaxaca for having an abortion, and even though terminating pregnancy due to rape is permitted, the state's public hospitals have not performed a single abortion in such cases. Instead of militarization being the spearhead for a campaign of all-round reaction, as has occurred in Guanajuato and as Calderón would like to do to all Mexico, Marxists take the opposite tack. The Grupo Internacionalista is for the right to *free abortion on demand* for all women. We also call for the *elimination of all laws banning or regulating the use or commerce of drugs*. The state has no business telling people what to do with their own bodies. And drugs becoming legal will instantly eliminate the economic basis for the existence of the traffickers' cartels, just as the elimination of Prohibition in the United States in the 1930s put the whisky bootleggers and rum runners out of business.

The so-called "war on drugs" is everywhere a screen for the class war on poor and working people. Like the "war on terror," it is a war on us. This is a straightforward matter of democratic rights. But when a modest proposal for the legalization of some products like marijuana was raised in the Mexico City legislature, Ebrard and the PRD fraction went ballistic. As bourgeois politicians, they defend bourgeois morality. So, too, do the pseudo-socialists of Militante, which claims to be a Marxist tendency inside the *capitalist* PRD.

Some “Marxists,” who call to elect bourgeois politicians like Andrés Manuel López Obrador or ex-police chief Ebrard. In their newspaper *Militante* (February 2009), they call to “create self-defense groups, in every town or barrio affected by criminal action, and at the same time to act in an organized way against the centers of drug distribution, forming local vigilance committees to dismantle them”! This is a call for vigilantism, for lynch mobs, to enforce the laws of the ruling class against working people. *Militante* should be vilified for this disgusting support for the oppressors!

Real *workers self-defense groups* are indeed required, built on a *class* basis, to defend the plebeian barrios against the depredations of the police and army. Recently there have been a number of protests in different areas of the north against abuses by the military. The best publicized cases were in Monterrey this past February, where protesters closed streets and avenues for six days in a row protesting abuses by the Mexican army. The police and press denounce them as nothing but “narco-blockades,” just as they have created the bogeyman of “narcoguerrillas” in Colombia (see our article “Narcogobierno colombiano perpetra siniestra masacre en Ecuador” [March 2008].) They refer to the protesters as “*tapados*” because their faces are covered with T-shirts or bandannas, as if this weren’t common to all protests against the police (just look at the photos of Oaxaca in 2006). And where residents of impoverished neighborhoods have swarmed onto the tracks to break open freight cars to get sacks of corn being imported from the U.S., for example in Celaya, Guanajuato, they claim this is “organized crime” rather than the actions of poor people suffering hunger (see *Proceso*, 1 March).

There may indeed be connections between traffickers and protesters in some places. And these are not leftist-led demonstrations, so they may well be organized through connections with the local networks that typically dominate particular *colonias*. But that does not invalidate their complaints (which are almost never reported). An article in *Reforma* (21 January 2008) reports on a protest of 200 people in front of a military barracks in Nuevo Laredo complaining about soldiers attacking a dance hall and a discotheque the night before, beating people and pushing them to the floor. There have also been documented massacres by the military in the supposed “war on drug trafficking.” There was the case of an attack on the Esparza Galaviz family in Leyva, Sinaloa at a military checkpoint in June 2007: the soldiers killed five, including three young children. A year later, there was a second mass killing, in the town of Santiago de los Caballeros, also in Sinaloa, where the driver and three other passengers in a vehicle were murdered. In neither case were any of the victims armed (documented in a March 2009 dossier on military abuses by the Center for Human Rights Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez).

Human rights groups, like the Centro Pro, many of which are strongly anti-communist, have provided mountains of evidence of systematic torture and arbitrary killings by the police and army. They point out that the use of the military for internal policing is against the Mexican constitution, as are the abuses they commit. But their appeals to bourgeois constitutional pre-

cepts fall on deaf ears, and explain nothing, because at bottom this is a class issue. Mexico in recent years has experienced mounting social tensions as a result of a quarter century of massive privatization, destruction of social services, peasants being forced off their lands and other manifestations of an offensive by the bourgeoisie against the workers and oppressed. After the decaying PRI apparatus lost its national domination in 2000, the PAN government of Vicente Fox increasingly resorted to heavy repression, as we analyzed in a series of articles (“Fox Drops the Mask,” March 2001; “Repression in Foxilandia,” May 2005; “Break Calderón’s ‘Firm Hand’ With Workers Struggle,” December 2006, and others).

This came to a head at the end of Fox’s six-year period, when workers, teachers and peasants mobilized to throw back murderous police and army attacks in Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán (April 2006), Atenco, in Mexico State (May 2006) and Oaxaca (June-November 2006). The massiveness and militancy of the struggles frightened the Mexican bourgeoisie (and their imperialist backers), which finally managed to clamp down on the “contagion” by an army-police occupation of the state of Oaxaca at the end of the year. On taking office in December 2006, Calderón announced that he would “use some of the same methods” as in the Oaxaca crackdown, but would direct them against “organized crime” and drug-trafficking. He hoped to build up the repressive apparatus of the state and use it for domestic policing without provoking mass discontent, as Fox had. But he ended up shooting himself in the foot, as the number of drug-related killings has skyrocketed. And there are now increasing protests against police-military abuse.

We Trotskyists of the Grupo Internacionalista have joined our efforts with those sectors of the working class and peasantry who have resisted the bourgeois onslaught, from Oaxaca to the miners in Cananea, who have been on strike for more than a year. We fight to break the straitjacket of the “corporatist” labor organizations which masquerade as unions while in fact subjugating the workers to government control. We seek to build genuine workers unions as organs of class struggle, politically independent of the government and all the bourgeois parties. In the face of massive militarization, we call for working-class mobilization to join with residents of the barrios suffering under the military boot, to demand that the army and federal police get out. If they continue to terrorize the slum districts, the next step will be the formation of police death squads, as has occurred in Brazil and elsewhere, all in the name of the “war against drug trafficking.”

Key to fighting this class war is the formation of a revolutionary workers party, based on the Trotskyist program of *permanent revolution*, to lead the powerful Mexican proletariat at the head of the peasants and urban poor to sweep away the rotting capitalist regime, which promises nothing but more unemployment, hunger and police terror to the masses. It is necessary to extend the revolution throughout the hemisphere, particularly to the imperialist colossus to the north where tens of millions of Mexican worker immigrants form a human bridge to make possible a genuinely *international socialist revolution*. ■

Initiative for Haitian-Dominican Solidarity Against Deportations

New York Protest Against Persecution of Haitian Workers in the Dominican Republic



Internationalist photo

Protesters march in front of the Dominican consulate in Times Square, New York City, August 7, protesting the mass expulsions and persecution of Haitians in the Dominican Republic.

On August 7 [2008], an emergency picket was held in New York City against the threat of mass deportations of Haitian workers from the Dominican Republic. More than 75 people participated in the demonstration, which was organized by a united-front Initiative for Haitian-Dominican Solidarity Against Deportations. This was the first time in recent years that groups representing immigrants from both sides of the Caribbean island of Hispaniola (or Quisqueya, as it was called by the indigenous Taíno people) have joined together in protest against the racist treatment of Haitians in the Dominican Republic. That point was not lost on the Dominican government. The protest was given prominent coverage in the Santo Domingo daily *Diario Libre* and in *El Nuevo Diario* of San Juan (Puerto Rico), highlighting the presence of Pulitzer Prize-winning author Junot Díaz at the protest.

For decades, the Dominican ruling class has extracted superprofits from the near-slave labor of Haitian workers. Laborers are rounded up in Haiti, trucked into the Dominican sugar estates to perform the backbreaking work of cutting sugar cane, paid starvation wages and kept locked up in *bateys* (shantytowns

on the edge of the fields). Then after viciously exploiting them, the Dominican bosses call in the military to dump them back across the border. Periodically right-wing Dominican politicians whip up anti-Haitian hysteria to stage racist pogroms against the long-established Haitian community. At present this includes up to one million Haitian immigrants and Dominicans of Haitian descent, constituting about 15 percent of the entire population of the Dominican Republic.

The 1937 massacre of Haitians and dark-skinned Dominicans by the U.S.-installed dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo is internationally infamous. Not so well known is the fact that this “ethnic cleansing” was sanctioned by the United States government, and even by its puppet regime in Haiti. The current president of the Dominican Republic, Leonel Fernández, who grew up in New York City, was elected to his first term in 1996 in a campaign that used vicious racist prejudice against his main opponent, José Francisco Peña Gómez, because of the latter’s Haitian ancestry. In 2005, during Fernández’ second term, politicians in the ruling coalition instigated a climate of racist hysteria in which dozens of Haitians were slaughtered, hacked to



In January 2006, the Dominican military rounded anyone who “looked Haitian,” dumping thousands across the border.

death by machetes or burned alive after being doused with gasoline. Many others were rounded up and deported.

An estimated 60,000 Haitians and scores of Dominicans of Haitian descent were expelled from the Dominican Republic in 2005. Since that time, monthly pickets have been held outside the Dominican Consulate in New York City, initiated by the group Grassroots Haiti. The Internationalist Group has regularly participated in these protests, which, although small, have been covered in the Dominican press and thus help to keep the pressure on. But when the Dominican director of immigration was quoted in the press this June 31 saying that Haitian immigration had become “unbearable,” that recent immigrants should “return to Haiti” and that Fernández should make this a priority in his third term, which began August 16, we decided to approach Dominican and Haitian organizations to hold an emergency protest in early August.

The response was positive, and weekly planning meetings were held during July. It was established that this would be a united-front action, around four demands: Stop the expulsions of Haitians from the Dominican Republic; defend Haitians in the Dominican Republic against violence and persecution; down with the anti-Haitian Dominican immigration law; and defend the right to vote – down with attempts to disenfranchise Dominicans of Haitian origin! There was also agreement that both in the U.S. and the Dominican Republic, everyone should have equal rights. Beyond that, each participating organization was free to present its own program. A leaflet for the picket was issued in English, Spanish and Kreyol; a fact sheet detailing the persecution of Haitians in the Dominican Republic was prepared; a press release was sent out, and a letter written to Dominican president Fernández to be presented to the consulate.

As a result of this work, more than a dozen Dominican and Haitian organizations and personalities joined in calling for the picket. The main groups involved in preparing the protest were

Grassroots Haiti, Fuerza de la Revolución (Dominican Republic), the Internationalist Group and the League for the Revolutionary Party. Father Luis Barrios of Iglesia San Romero and Pastors for Peace endorsed while Sonia Pierre, leader of the Movement of Dominican-Haitian Women, sent a message of support. Articles appeared in the New York Spanish-language daily *El Diario-La Prensa*, as well as interviews and spots on Haitian community radio and TV. On the day of the protest, NY 1 Noticias broadcast a story on the press conference prior to meeting with the Dominican vice-consul to deliver the letter to President Fernández.

The picket was well-attended and spirited, with chanting and speeches lasting for a full two hours, from 5 to 7 p.m. Demonstrators chanted, “Dominican government, hands off Haitian workers,” “Stop the racist deportations,” “Haitian and Dominican workers unite,” “*Haitianos y dominicanos, unidos en la lucha*,” “*La lucha obrera no tiene frontera*” and “Dominican repression, made in U.S.A.” In addition

to the picketers, quite a number of passers-by stopped to listen to the speakers from the groups participating. Several noted that in New York City, where up to a million Dominican and Haitian residents feel the weight of anti-immigrant repression, it is possible to overcome the nationalist animosity fanned by reactionary bourgeois politicians. The IG emphasized the importance of struggle for socialist revolution on both sides of the island of Quisqueya, and extending to the U.S. as well.

Excerpts from some of the speeches at the August 7 picket of the Dominican consulate:

Jan Norden (Internationalist Group): It’s significant that today, for the first time in some time, we have a united protest by Haitian, Dominican and North American organizations. This is a united front, there are many different viewpoints here. We are united in saying that people who are here in the United States should have equal rights with everyone else, and also in the Dominican Republic.

People should understand that the repression in the Dominican Republic is *made in U.S.A.* The repression against the Haitian population in Haiti is a direct result of the “war on terror” against Afghanistan, against Iraq, against the working people of Colombia, throughout Latin America. The system of slave labor that is functioning in the Dominican Republic was set up by the United States when it occupied both Haiti and the Dominican Republic in the early part of the 20th century. The armies of both Haiti and the Dominican Republic were set up by the United States. In the massacre of 1937, almost 40,000 Haitians were murdered by the dictator Rafael Trujillo, a former officer in the U.S. colonial army. And today, 40 trainers of the Southern Command of the U.S. Army are in the Dominican Republic where they are training the Dominican army in repression on the border, preparing for mass expulsions.

We need to mobilize the power of the working class, not only in defense of the Haitian workers in the Dominican Republic but also against our own bourgeoisie, our own ruling



Santo Domingo during the April 1965 uprising against the U.S. invasion. "Yankees get out!"

class and against the war that they are waging in the Near East and everywhere. This past May 1st, the dock workers shut down every port on the West Coast against the war. This is the first time in the history of the United States that there has been a political strike against a U.S. war. We need to generalize that, and also to give it political consciousness, because the union bureaucracy that first tried to stop this strike, then tried to wrap it in the Stars and Stripes.

In 1965 there was a U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic. This came when the U.S. was mounting its blockade against Cuba. At that time, we fought, as we fight today, to defend the Cuban Revolution against counterrevolution, from within and without, and to extend it. When the United States invaded Santo Domingo, they did so in order to strike at Cuba. The United States government gave as the excuse to invade Santo Domingo – like under McCarthyism – that “we have a list of 58 communists in the Dominican Republic who are involved in the revolt.” At the university that I was attending then, when someone mentioned this point, that there were supposedly 58 communists, we chanted, “58 communists is not enough!”

We need revolutionary struggle, for international socialist revolution, because it’s not going to be made in the Dominican Republic alone, it’s not going to be made in Haiti alone – if there’s going to be a revolution in the Caribbean, it’s going to be on both sides of that border. And we need to extend that revolution to the heartland, to the belly of the imperialist beast, which is right here, in the United States.

Father Barrios: A journalist was asking me, “you’re not Dominican, you’re not Haitian, what the hell are you doing here?” People, this is about human rights. This is our responsibility. We have a responsibility to build a better society, a better world. There is a name to describe what is going on in the Dominican Republic against the Haitian community. It’s not just against Haitians, it’s also against Dominicans of Haitian

descent. The name is racism, the name is xenophobia. So let’s start calling things by their right name. We’re not going anywhere until we see peace with justice for all these people.

Mario Pierre (Grassroots Haiti): In the Dominican Republic today, Haitian workers are being used as slaves. There is slave labor going on right on the border of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. For years, Haitian workers were being contracted to go to the Dominican Republic to cut sugar cane. As the Dominican economy expanded, Haitian workers were used in different sectors in the Dominican economy, such as construction, agriculture, domestic work and various other sectors. Haitian workers today are no longer being contracted, but they are being recruited in Haiti to fill the labor pools in the Dominican Republic. When the Haitian workers get there, they cannot leave. They cannot get out of the *bateys* in the Dominican Republic, if they do, they will get killed.

However, because the bourgeoisie in the Dominican Republic is exploiting them, they’re making all the profits, they’re not giving them any benefits. A lot of people today are blaming Haitian workers. After they exploit them to their very last drop of blood, they just pick them up and deport them to Haiti. That is an injustice, and we are here to protest against this injustice.

Abram Negrete (Internationalist Group): The deportations of Haitian workers from the Dominican Republic are intimately connected with the racist deportations from the United States of Dominican workers, of Haitian workers, of African workers, of Asian workers, of Mexican workers. When we say “*la lucha obrera no tiene frontera*,” when we say “the workers’ struggle has no border,” it means that we fight against these racist deportations here in the United States, in the Dominican Republic and everywhere, because we fight for full citizenship rights for all immigrants.

Two semesters ago I had the privilege of teaching a class on Dominican heritage, where we talked about how the division of the island of Hispaniola between the Dominican Republic and Haiti was the product of two interrelated things, of empire, and of slavery. We learned about how slavery was overthrown through a social revolution, the Haitian Revolution led by Toussaint Louverture, which was the only way to destroy slavery – a revolution of the slaves against the slave owners. That is what we need today, a revolution of the working class, a revolution of the slaves of capital, in the Dominican Republic, in Haiti, in the United States and throughout the world.

The Dominican workers have a proud and glorious history of struggle against imperialist intervention. We will never forget the heroic fight of the Dominican workers, who drove back the filthy American Marine intervention [in 1965] under the Democrat Lyndon Johnson, the murderer of Vietnam; who drove them back, only to be sold out by the reformist and Stalinist leadership. We need to unite the tradition of revolutionary struggle of the Haitian proletariat, of the Dominican proletariat, and the international working class for an international proletarian revolution. ■

Batay Ouvriye and the ACILS

For the last two decades, Jean-Bertrand Aristide has had the support of most of the poorest sectors of the Haitian population. This was true even after the former Liberation Theology priest was reinstalled as president and front man for Washington by U.S. occupation troops in 1994, and after he was removed from the presidential palace as U.S. troops again invaded Haiti ten years later. Internationally, most sectors of the left have for years been followers of Aristide and his populist Lavalas (Avalanche) movement. This is in keeping with the politics of the *popular front*, which ties the working class and oppressed to supposedly “progressive” sectors of the ruling class (like Aristide) in order to head off revolution.

One group not in the Aristide camp is Batay Ouvriye (B.O. – Workers Struggle), a labor grouping with leftist origins which has been active unionizing workers in the north and in free trade zones in the Haitian capital and along the Dominican border. In 2005, a controversy erupted when a pro-Aristide publicist revealed that B.O. had received money from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) via the “American Center for International Labor Solidarity” (ACILS) of the U.S. labor federation AFL-CIO. Initially it was reported that B.O. received a \$3,500 grant to support fired workers, but it was later listed as the recipient of \$99,965 from the NED. This is a very bad business.

The NED was set up as a conduit for U.S. government funds after revelations of CIA covert financing of various organizations caused scandals in the late 1960s and ’70s. The ACILS, or Solidarity Center, is the continuation of the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD), which was notorious for participation in U.S.-engineered coups in Guyana, Chile, El Salvador and elsewhere. As we wrote in 2006, these “labor” fronts for Yankee imperialism “finance death and destruction of the workers movement”:

“There should be no illusions about where this money comes from and what it represents.... Like the AIFLD, the ACILS is a front for, and is directly controlled by U.S. intelligence agencies. In the period before the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union, the ‘AFL-CIA’ used to fund only right-wing and social-democratic anti-Communists. Today, via the NED, they bankroll a host of “non-governmental organizations” [NGOs] and a wide range of opponents of governments the U.S. opposes. No doubt the NED is interested in Batay Ouvriye for its opposition to Aristide and Lavalas, just as the ACILS finances right-wing ‘labor’ outfits like FOS and CATH.

“This money is poison. It is CIA money. The fact that it is sent via the AFL-CIO ‘Solidarity Center’ makes no difference. This is what intelligence agencies call a ‘cut-out,’ designed to disguise the origin of the funds.”

—“Kick the U.N. Out of Haiti!” *The Internationalist* No. 23 (April-May 2006)

While noting that those raising the charges against Batay Ouvriye are only envious that they weren’t receiving the U.S. dollars (as they did when Aristide was financed by Washing-

ton), we insisted: “accepting funding from U.S. imperialism is a betrayal of the interests of Haiti’s working masses.”

We had strongly raised these criticisms at a January 2006 forum in New York by a leader of Batay Ouvriye. The B.O. spokesman defended accepting Solidarity Center funds, and said they would take any amount of money from any source as long as there were no strings attached. Grassroots Haiti, which sponsored the forum, took an equivocal stance in a 20 February 2006 statement, saying there was a “range of opinions” within the group, with some supporting B.O.’s justification while “others are concerned that the funding lends weight to arguments raised by Batay Ouvriye’s detractors and has the potential to isolate the organization from other progressive forces internationally.” That’s putting it mildly.

The dispute over these funds has continued to percolate internationally. Last year there was a series of exchanges between Batay Ouvriye and the League for the Revolutionary Party (LRP) in the U.S. In answer to the LRP’s mild criticism that accepting funds from such imperialist institutions was a “serious misjudgment” and its polite urging to “consider repudiating your prior decision,” B.O. sent a letter (2 July 2008) filled with nationalist invective, saying it considered the matter “a case closed,” while at the same time reporting that it had been recently contacted again by the ACILS (which B.O. said “has at times had a verified bearing on struggles,” unlike others).

The July 2 letter said that it would “refuse to continue [receiving] Solidarity Center funds,” although “adopting this position on the basis of the international working class doesn’t convince us that this is best for the Haitian working class, in its extreme needs and abandon.” So due to the uproar over the issue it reluctantly decided to stop the funding. Despite B.O.’s protestations that “WE WON’T INTERVENE AGAIN!” on the subject, it subsequently put out two additional statements. The first, “One Last Note on the Solidarity Center” (October 2008), stated repeatedly: “We have said it, and we say it again: Batay Ouvriye does not have any relationship with the Solidarity Center. There is no financial relationship. There are no relations whatsoever.”

B.O. now talks about the treacherous role of the ACILS in continuing the work of the AIFLD, about its current role in Venezuela and in Haiti, where it “has spread its influence into the rotten and corrupt central labor federations.” It insists that it always criticized the role of the Solidarity Center in the “global imperialist agenda.” But how could anyone take any such criticism seriously when B.O. was also receiving funds from the U.S. government via these labor lieutenants of imperialism? Moreover, it still complains of being short-changed by the ACILS:

“From a total of \$440,000 they got from the NED in our name, we only received \$90,000 while they kept \$350,000! On top of that, they simply refused to give us the remaining \$6,000 that had been granted to us....”

And B.O. still refuses to “simply state that our previous prac-

tics were wrong,” arguing that “the situation was more complex than that.”

Then, following its “final note” in October, Batay Ouvriye sent a new response to the LRP (making a total of at least seven statements on this subject so far)¹. While adding a footnote apologizing for the tone of its previous reply, it declares that, “We think that principles are very important, but that they should not be made into dogma.” It does say that “we underestimated the negative impact of our practices with the Solidarity Center,” but insists that “we still hold that we are justified in accepting funds from any source as long as we can maintain our autonomy and our ability to struggle against our enemies.”

The LRP, for its part, while criticizing taking money from imperialist agencies that intervene “against the interests of the working class,” does not pose this as a question of principle. Similarly in the U.S., it occasionally criticizes but does not categorically reject suing the unions in the capitalist courts – that is, using the bourgeois state against the workers movement. Blind to the class line on such basic questions as the nature of the Soviet Union², it shows the same willful blindness on other issues. And while today the LRP says it is for “defending neo-colonial capitalist rulers like Aristide from imperialist attack,” as in the 2004 U.S.-French takeover of Haiti, it neglected to call for this at the time, instead noting that the Haitian masses “didn’t rally to Aristide in any numbers.” They also would have had some difficulty defending the government, even while vowing “no political support,” since Aristide and his supporters put up no resistance and only sought to get the U.S. to defend him.

In contrast to this, and to Batay Ouvriye’s line of building “autonomy” within the “general movement of struggle” against Aristide that led up to the U.S.-sponsored coup d’état in 2004, the Trotskyists of the Internationalist Group and the League for the Fourth International called to *mobilize the working class and poor on a class basis*, independent of Aristide and Lavalas as well as the right-wing coup-plotting opposition, *against the imperialist occupation of Haiti*, whether directly by U.S. and French troops, or now indirectly through Brazilian, Argentine, Chilean and other neo-colonial troops acting as mercenaries in U.N. blue helmets.

While B.O., for now, reluctantly renounces funding from the Solidarity Center, it doesn’t absolutely refuse. Could this change under Obama? As we wrote, the old saying “he who pays the piper sets the tune” is still valid. Even without Batay Ouvriye changing its policies, the ACILS evidently figured they could do business. B.O. has from the start been very gingerly in its formal opposition to the MINUSTAH (U.N. occupation troops and police). This has not been a central focus of its work in Haiti, where it seeks to “advance the struggles of the masses, and ... these struggles will force the occupation forces to unmask themselves and will push them out,” as it writes in its November 2008 letter, contrasting this with “anti-occupation campaigns inside the occupying countries themselves.”

¹ Statements and letters dated 11 November 2005; 9 January 2006; 10 March 2006; March 2007; 2 July 2008; October 2008; and 21 November 2008.

Moreover, as a Batay Ouvriye spokesman explained at a 2007 World Bank conference, B.O. used its ties to the “Solidarity Center” to put pressure on the World Bank’s International Finance Corporation to get the Dominican Grupo M (which had a \$20 million IFC loan) to rescind the firings of workers and withdraw announced plans to close the Ouanaminthe free trade zone plant which had been organized by a union associated with B.O. In short, along with the money, B.O. was hoping to use the “AFL-CIA’s” influence as a cog in the machinery of U.S. domination to aid its union work. But eventually the imperialist labor operatives tried to cash in on their investment, making life even more uncomfortable for B.O.

We want to be clear: we do not consider Batay Ouvriye imperialist agents, as the pro-Aristide forces (who received far more U.S. dollars) claim. Its militants have suffered repression at the hands of the Aristide regime and the remnants of the U.S.-trained Haitian army. However, taking Yankee imperialist funds from the NED/ACILS has seriously compromised B.O. This is much more than a miscalculation, “misjudgment” or serious mistake. Its insistence that “we knew who we were dealing with” just makes it all the worse. This act was a betrayal of the Haitian workers. Yes, workers organizations in poor countries subjugated by imperialism face excruciating difficulties in financing their activities, for which they require collaboration of their supporters in the richer capitalist countries. But taking money from class enemy makes them beholden to the oppressors.

We have consistently fought to the extent of our capabilities to defend the Haitian workers and oppressed. The IG has regularly participated in pickets of the Dominican consulate in New York protesting the persecution of Haitian workers in the Dominican Republic (see article on page 65 of this issue). The Brazilian section of the LFI has repeatedly fought to mobilize union action to force the withdrawal of Brazilian troops from Haiti. We have always opposed giving political support to Aristide and called for working-class opposition to imperialist subversion in the first black republic in the world. We see the Haitian Revolution of 1791-1804, led by Toussaint L’Ouverture, the first successful slave rebellion in history, as part of our own revolutionary heritage. Haiti inspired slave revolts in the U.S. and throughout Latin America.

The importance of Haiti to the world socialist revolution is also why we insist again, as we wrote in 2006, “Bottom line: being on the payroll of U.S. imperialism is incompatible with fighting against imperialism.” ■

² Posing as partisans of the Fourth International, the LRP holds that the Soviet Union under Stalin and his successors was “statified capitalism,” rejecting Trotsky’s characterization of it as a bureaucratically degenerated workers state. Thus the LRP, like its progenitor Max Shachtman, *opposes* defending the Soviet Union in World War II, while authentic Trotskyists fought with the USSR against imperialism (including in concrete acts, sailing on the deadly Murmansk run to deliver war supplies), while seeking to oust the parasitic Stalinist ruling layer that desperately sought “peaceful coexistence” with one imperialist power after another.

Canadian Federal Elections: No Choice for the Working Class

Forge a Revolutionary Workers Party!

In the Canadian federal elections last fall, prime minister Harper's Conservatives picked up 19 seats but were still well short of a majority. With the watchword "anyone but Harper," the reformist left for the most part supported the New Democrats, which in deeds opposes Quebec's right to self-determination and supports imperialist occupation of Afghanistan; or the Bloc Québécois, which is pro-"free market" and pro-war. In varying degrees, these socialists hoped for/expected a Liberal-New Democratic coalition to bring down Harper. But when Harper put it to Parliament in January, Liberals supported his budget bill. So a minority Conservative cabinet continues to govern while Liberals, social democrats and opportunist leftists wring their hands. The following leaflet was issued in French and English by the League for the Fourth International, and distributed at a demo in Montréal.

9 OCTOBER 2008 – On October 14, voters throughout Canada will be summoned to the polls to elect a new bourgeois government. Feeling the wind in its sails at the end of the summer, the Conservative Party (CPC) cabinet of Stephen Harper moved quickly to call elections, catching unprepared their rivals in the "opposition" parties: the Liberal Party of Canada (LPC), the New Democratic Party (NPD), the Bloc Québécois (BQ) and the Green Party. In order to bring this off, Harper did not hesitate to violate his own law instituting elections at a fixed date. It's hardly surprising coming from a capitalist politician.

Since opinion polls indicated that there is a very good chance a majority Conservative (Tory) government will take office after October 14, that was all it took to unleash an intense campaign to "keep out the Conservatives" and "stop the right." The reformist left – including, among others, the union federations (FTQ, CSN, CSQ), various popular groups, feminist organizations and social-democrats from around the country – mobilized to denounce the rightist policies of the Conservative Party and to drive it out of power, calling for a "strategic vote." Their watchword is "Stop Harper."

There is no doubt that Stephen Harper's Conservative Party is profoundly reactionary, lined up with the policies of the U.S. Republicans and infested with religious fundamentalists. For example, it is seeking to "progressively" recriminalize the right to abortion with its Bill C-484; it raised the minimum age for sexual consent from 14 to 16, and it has significantly increased the number of Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan. On the other hand, one shouldn't forget that the Liberal Party has been the pillar for the rule of the capitalist class in Canada since Confederation in 1867, having

been in office the longest.

The Liberals, under the leadership of Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin, waged an all-sided offensive against the social gains of the working class during the 1990s, drastically slashing unemployment insurance, public housing and federal transfer payments to the provinces for health and education. In doing so, they paved the way for the creeping privatization of the Canadian healthcare system and for a substantial increase in tuition and fees for post-secondary education. The Liberals also stole the surplus from the unemployment insurance fund in order to eliminate the federal deficit, supported the 1999 Kosovo war against Serbia, sent troops to Afghanistan to participate in the war and colonial occupation of that country, and played an active role in the coup d'état against Haitian president Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 2004.

Moreover, the Liberal Party of Canada is known for its hard line against the national rights of Québec, and above all against any struggle for national independence. The LPC went so far as to threaten a potential independent Québec with partition, and its current leader, Stéphane Dion, was himself the author of the Referendum "Clarity Act" to bash Québec's legitimate right to self-determination. And that isn't even taking into account that throughout Stephen Harper's minority government, from January 2006 to September 2008, the Liberals on the federal level have regularly supported their Tory "opponents" during votes in the House of Commons.

The fact that the LPC now seeks to present itself as a so-called "progressive" alternative to the Tories is utterly scandalous and revolting. During the September 28 demonstration in Montréal defending the right to abortion, Liberal Members of Parliament (MPs) were present even though 27 of their colleagues supported Bill C-484, the "Unborn Victims of Crime Act," and their leader Dion was conspicuously absent on the day of the vote! The struggle in favour of *the right to free abortion on demand*, even though it is an elementary bourgeois-democratic right, is a fight against all bourgeois politicians, even the most "progressive."

The other parties in what is commonly designated the "parliamentary opposition" are hardly any better. The right-wing social-democratic New Democratic Party, Anglo-chauvinist to the core, is marred by the unenviable balance sheet of NPD provincial governments in Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and British Columbia, where they have actively participated in dismantling social programs, thereby opening the door to governments of the right. The NDP is also well-known for its chauvinist opposition to Québec national rights. It effectively supported the "Clarity Act" and favours a strong Canadian state, even though for the past several years it has come out for "asymmetrical" federalism that would grant more powers to the Québec

government in order to go vote-hunting in Québec.

The NDP also supported Canadian intervention in Afghanistan up until its September 2006 congress in Quebec City, where it came out for withdrawing Canadian troops in favour of a "peacekeeping" force under the aegis of the United Nations! On September 22, NDP chief Jack Layton called for a coalition of the NDP and LPC in order to drive the Conservatives from office and to govern Canada (in defence of the interests of the imperialist Canadian bourgeoisie). There has already been a Liberal/New Democratic government, during the reign of Pierre Elliott Trudeau, from 1972 to 1974. And in the 2005 budget vote, New Democratic MPs prevented the fall of the corrupt Liberal minority cabinet of Paul Martin.

For its part, the bourgeois-nationalist Bloc Québécois, the twin brother on the federal level of the provincial Parti Québécois (PQ), is going all out to keep its plurality in Quebec, dropping talk of independence in order to present itself as the "best defender of Quebec's interests" in Ottawa. It's worth noting that by more or less openly abandoning the "sovereignty" option, the PQ has had to adjust its aim in order to avoid disappearing altogether in short order. The BQ also supports the occupation of Afghanistan by the Canadian Army, while throwing in some "humanitarian" concerns. In contrast to these bourgeois nationalists, who yearn to be imperialist masters, proletarian internationalists struggle for the *defeat* of the U.S., NATO and Canadian troops in Afghanistan, and to *drive out* the Canadian police "advisors" (mostly from Québec) from Haiti.

As for the Green Party of Canada – which now is now represented in the Canadian parliament thanks to the crossing over of a former Liberal MP from British Columbia, Brian Wilson – its campaign pitch seeks, among other things, to win over conservative voters and is centred on the need for economic competitiveness. Its program includes a pledge to reduce the public debt and a promise to reduce taxes, even for the most affluent. The Greens are also in favour of introducing a tax on carbon emissions, as are the Liberals, which would have the effect of penalizing working people who have to use their cars to get to work.

As we have already mentioned, the reformist left is actively mobilizing for a "strategic vote," a telegraphic formula denoting voting for the NDP, in some cases for the Liberals, and for the Bloc Québécois in Québec. The Internet site "Presse-toi à gauche" (Keep Left), which is close to the Gauche Socialiste (Socialist Left – followers of the late Ernest Mandel) as well as to the Québec Solidaire coalition, tends toward the NDP, viewing the BQ as too close to the PQ and not "left" enough. For its part, the Communist Party of Québec (PCQ), led by the ex-Maoist André Parizeau, is calling to keep out the Conservatives and Liberals by voting either for the BQ or the NDP. Meanwhile, the PCQ shows a clear tilt toward the BQ in the name of the struggle for independence of Québec, even though the Bloc is presenting itself less and less as a pro-"sovereignty" party. The PCQ, as usual, counterposes nationalist interests to those of the working class, trying to present the BQ as a "progressive" party due to its support for a federal "anti-scab" law and

its verbal opposition to cuts in unemployment insurance.

The Québec Solidaire party, which brings together all these reformists, is also calling to keep out the Conservatives without issuing a specific call for a vote, which surely means voting for the NDP or the BQ. This "strategic vote" is nothing but unvarnished parliamentary cretinism. In English Canada, just about all left organizations call for a vote for the NDP, including the International Socialists (followers of the late Tony Cliff), the Mandelites of Socialist Action and Fightback (followers of the late Ted Grant). The latter two call on the NDP leadership to adopt a "socialist" program and after a fashion try to push that party to the "left." As if the election of an NDP government on a "radical" platform would somehow lead to bringing in socialism! In its election statement, Fightback makes no mention of the Quebec national question, nor that of the indigenous peoples, reflecting its total indifference toward questions of special oppression.

There are also some "communist" organizations participating in these elections. These are the two main Stalinist groups in Canada, the formerly pro-Soviet Communist Party of Canada (PCC) and the one-time Maoist and pro-Albanian Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist). Both are putting forward completely reformist and electoralist programs. The PCC calls to keep out the right by electing a group of progressive MPs – i.e., the Greens, the New Democrats, and of course, some "Communists"! And of course, it even goes so far as to favour the election of a minority liberal government!! All its election propaganda is centred on denouncing the Tories, while mouthing at most a few words about the Liberals being no alternative.

The PCC opposes Quebec independence in the name of defending Canadian sovereignty – i.e., reinforcing Canadian imperialism – at the expense of the working class and the various minority peoples nationally, while internationally reinforcing the position of the Canadian bourgeoisie on world markets. In the last referendum of Quebec sovereignty, it openly favoured maintaining Canadian unity, in order not to weaken poor Canada supposedly threatened by the United States! Its election platform is based on intransigent Canadian nationalism even though Canada is a fully sovereign imperialist country that is firmly controlled by its "national" bourgeoisie.

The infernal logic of the "strategic vote" was shown with striking clarity in 1968 when the CPP called to "keep out the right" in the federal elections, with the result being that the Liberal government of Pierre Elliott Trudeau took office and placed Quebec under martial law during the crisis of October 1970. The Communist Party of Canada has never renounced its policy of allying with imaginary nationalist and "progressive" sectors of the Canadian bourgeoisie to form an "anti-monopoly" coalition. As for the PCC-ML, it issued calls for "democratic renewal," for electing an "antiwar" government (without specifying who would make up such a government), for the adoption of a new and modern Constitution, for the education of "worker politicians," etc. These two so-called communist parties have joined the "Anybody But Harper"

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Organize Workers Self-Defense Guards! For Workers Control of Production!

Leftist Union Leaders Assassinated in Venezuela

1 DECEMBER 2008 – On the afternoon of November 27, some 400 workers at the Alpina milk plant in the Venezuelan state of Aragua occupied their plant demanding full payment of money owed them by the Colombian-owned company. At first, the bosses tried to get the workers to abandon their leaders in the UNT (National Workers Union). When that failed, state police swarmed onto the grounds, brutally beating the workers and seriously injuring four. But the union alerted workers in the industrial area, and according to a report by UNT state leader Luis Hernández, “within minutes, the plant was surrounded by workers of the Unión Nacional de Trabajadores. Thanks to this act of solidarity, it was possible to retake the plant, and the workers reoccupied it.”

Yet a few hours later, as they were heading home, Hernández and two other UNT leaders who had led the Alpina workers’ struggle that day, Richard Gallardo and Carlos Requena, were gunned down at a shopping center in the nearby town of Cagua by an assassin on a motorbike. The three were also cadres of the Unidad Socialista de Izquierda (USI, Left Socialist Unity), which has opposed the bourgeois populist government of Hugo Chávez and its attempts to impose state domination of labor. Whatever sinister force ordered the assassination, the blow was aimed at one of the most combative sectors of the Venezuelan workers movement. Despite Chávez’ socialist rhetoric, this is the reality of the Bolivarian “revolution” in Venezuela today: leftist unionists are murdered while the forces of bourgeois state repression back up the bosses.

For the last year, Venezuela has been stuck in a stand-off between the leftist nationalist Chávez regime and the right-wing pro-imperialist opposition. In the November 23 regional elections, a pro-government “patriotic coalition” won back about 1.5 million votes Chávez lost in the constitutional referendum last year, while the opposition vote was lower this year. Yet the right elected several key governors and mayors, including the mayor of metropolitan Caracas. Significantly, the PSUV lost Petare, a working-class suburb of the capital which was long a *chavista* stronghold, as former Chávez supporters stayed home massively. In recent years, the government financed extensive social programs with superprofits from the high price of oil. But as oil prices plummet, Venezuela’s bourgeois “petrosocialism” is running into trouble. Still, Chávez has relaunched a drive for a constitu-



El Siglo (Maracay)

Venezuelan workers shut down highways across state of Aragua, December 2 to protest murder of leftist labor leaders.

tional amendment to allow him to be reelected.

Internationally, U.S. imperialism has kept the heat on the Venezuelan regime, reviled in Washington because of Chávez’ support for Cuba. This pressure will probably be more intense under Obama than under the widely hated Bush administration, as many in Latin America have illusions in a “kinder, gentler” Yankee imperialism, just as they had in John F. Kennedy. But then came JFK’s Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba while “Alliance for Progress” counterinsurgency programs killed hundreds of leftist insurgents. Earlier this year, the U.S. announced the revival of the Fourth Fleet (which hasn’t existed since 1950) to patrol the Caribbean. (During the 2002 coup, U.S. Navy ships stood offshore to aid the plotters.) Chávez effectively countered by inviting the Russian Navy to hold joint maneuvers this past week, to Washington’s great consternation. Trotskyists defend nationalist Venezuela and the Cuban deformed workers state against imperialism.

This standoff cannot last indefinitely. Either Chávez will submit to “the empire,” or it will come to a showdown in which the alternative will ultimately be between workers revolution or bloody counterrevolution. Whether the murder of three leftist union leaders is part of a rightist plan for destabi-



Richard Gallardo (left) and Luis Hernández, leaders of UNT union federation in Aragua and candidates of the Left Socialist Unity in recent elections, were gunned down November 27.

lization or another government attack on workers, it indicates that the day of reckoning is approaching sooner rather than later. The key question then will be, as it already is today, that of proletarian revolutionary leadership,

Sharp Class Struggle in Aragua

The three slain socialist leaders had admirable records as fighters for the working class. Richard Gallardo, a textile worker in the city of Maracay, led workers when they rose up against the April 2002 coup that sought to overthrow Chávez, and again seven months later when the bosses decreed a counterrevolutionary lockout masquerading as a "strike." Gallardo was named national coordinator of the UNT when it was founded in 2003, breaking from the CTV (Confederation of Venezuelan Workers) whose leaders gave a "labor" cover to the 2002 coups. He also joined in forming a series of socialist organizations (PST-La Chispa, Partido Revolución y Socialismo and the USI), the latter two linked to the wing of the UNT led by Orlando Chirino. He was a USI candidate for state assembly deputy in regional elections held three days earlier.

Luis Hernández was a worker at the Pepsi-Cola plant in Aragua, who in 2003 led a week-long occupation of the plant when the company announced a mass layoff. He was president of the state UNT, and was the USI candidate for mayor of the municipality of Zamora in the November 23 elections. Carlos Requena, the youngest of the three (they were all under 40), had been active on a national level fighting for workers health issues. They gave their all to the workers struggle, and their deaths must not be in vain.

The vile assassination of Hernández, Gallardo and Requena led to an explosion of anger throughout the state of Aragua. The next day, November 28, hundreds of workers took to the streets, blocking traffic with burning tires and marching. At the burial of Luis Hernández the following day, the population of his home town, Villa de Cura, spilled into the streets in "scenes of pain, confusion, rage and impotence," wrote the local paper *El Clarín* (30 November). Then on December 2, workers from

more than 200 unions in Aragua made a dramatic show of strength, occupying the turnpike to the capital, Caracas, and highways throughout the state, shutting down all traffic (except ambulances and a funeral) for ten hours or more, demanding that the killers must pay for their crime.

The question on everyone's lips was "who did it?" One obvious possibility is professional hit-men (*sicarios*) contracted by Alpina, the multinational company which has used paramilitary assassins to kill union leaders at its plants in Colombia (where over 2,500 trade unionists have been murdered by the government and paramilitaries since 1986). Pro-Chávez media such as Radio YKVE Mundial suggested that the killer could be linked to the Aragua state police, under the control of the governor, Didalco Bolívar, a former Chávez ally who went over to the right-wing opposition last year in the dispute over the package of constitutional amendments that was narrowly defeated in a referendum last December 2. The League for the Fourth International called for casting a blank ballot in that vote (see "Venezuela: Impose Workers Control on the Road to Socialist Revolution," *The Internationalist* supplement December 2007).

But unionists in Aragua pointed their finger at Chávez' own supporters, who felt threatened by political opposition on the left. The Maracay daily *Siglo* (29 November) reported, "Union leaders heading up the protests attribute Hernández' death to followers of newly elected mayor Aldo Lovera, who...recently made death threats against him [Hernández]." Lovera is a member of the PSUV (United Socialist Party of Venezuela), Chávez' bourgeois state party. Hernández had challenged Lovera's election, demanding a recount, and it was this that led to the threats. In the December 2 protests, workers in Villa de Cura declared that they would not lift their blockade until Lovera resigned as mayor of the municipality of Zamora.

Various international appeals were issued by labor, left and human rights groups and protests held at Venezuelan embassies over the murder of the three socialist workers leaders. Calls have been made for "exemplary punishment" of the killers and those behind them. However, these appeals have uniformly called on the Chávez regime to investigate: "We call on the government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the regional government of Aragua to immediately open an investigation into the whereabouts of the material and intellectual assassins in this horrendous crime," states a joint appeal by a number of Argentine leftist groups (IS, PTS, PO, MST, MAS, FOS, IT, CS, UST, OS).

Exposing the failure of the legal authorities do their job is one thing, but to call on the *chavista* national and state governments to conduct an investigation when the main suspect (the mayor of Zamora) is a member of Chávez' PSUV is inviting a cover-up! This appeal reflects the *political* support of most of the left internationally for the Venezuelan bourgeois nationalist leader. The lesson of this crime should instead be the need for working-class independence. What's clearly posed is the need

for *union self-defense groups* and a *workers militia* independent of control by Chávez' bourgeois government or any of its sectors, as outlined in Trotsky's Transitional Program. Yet to our knowledge none of the international appeals by various ostensible Trotskyist groups raised this elementary call.

The assassination of Richard Gallardo, Luis Hernández and Carlos Requena was no isolated incident. Orlando Chirino, the coordinator of the UNT and leader of the USI, told the press, "In Aragua, seven members of our labor organization have been murdered in the last two years" (*La Clase*, 28 November). In Valencia, capital of the state of Carabobo next door, workers at the FUNDIMECA plant have been attacked by *sicarios*, with the complicity of the police and judges. Yet it is the workers who are facing judicial persecution, while the gunmen go free. In Villa de Cura, a Communist Party leader, Luis Delgado Díaz, was killed in his home in September 2007. And the day before Gallardo was killed, he had warned, "*compañeros*, we must take care, they're coming for us, we have to organize defense teams" (*La Clase*, 30 November).

In Venezuela, at least, the need for workers self-defense has become self-evident. Chirino of the UNT, USI and the CCURA (the United Autonomous Revolutionary Class Current) union tendency called vaguely to raise funds for "our own security plans." The leader of the pro-Chávez wing of the split UNT, Marea Socialista (MS – Socialist Tide), Stalin Pérez, was more explicit, issuing a call to "immediately begin organizing our workers and people's self-defense" (*Aporrea*, 28 November). But in both cases this is an isolated demand rather instead of being part of a broader working-class offensive to impose *workers control of production* and move toward establishing organs of dual power – *workers committees* in the plants and area-wide *workers councils* independent of government control.

When Chávez formed his bourgeois state party, the PSUV, last year he tried to strong-arm the left and labor movement into joining it in order to gain control over the working class which has eluded him in a decade in power. The UNT divided, as Pérez and Marea Socialista joined the bureaucratic ruling apparatus while Chirino and CCURA refused. Yet both are reformists whose politics come down to simple trade unionism. While CCURA and USI defend workers against government officials, and although Chávez accuses them of spreading "poison" among the workers for refusing to submit to the discipline of the PSUV, Chirino's UNT has *not* led struggles to take over the plants, except during the 2002 emergency.

Today, the response to the assassination of three top UNT leaders should be massive strikes and plant occupations throughout the state and elsewhere in Venezuela. UNT leaders had already drawn up a plan for which factories to take in May 2007. Alpina workers should take over the plant and open the books to find out what management has been up to. Aragua is where the workers of Sanitarios Maracay have waged a tenacious struggle for the last two years, seizing the plant which makes bathroom fixtures when the owner abandoned it, and then seeking to run it under workers management. But the plant has been unable to obtain raw materials while white collar employ-

ees sabotaged the struggle, the state police under Didalco Bolívar (then a Chávez ally) savagely repressed them, and the Minister of Labor refused their entreaties.

The Venezuelan Left Between Hammer and Anvil

The fundamental struggle in Venezuela is for revolutionary leadership. An authentically Leninist-Trotskyist vanguard party of the working class is urgently needed to lead resistance to attacks by the different factions of the bourgeois nationalist government while mobilizing against the constant threat of Yankee imperialist aggression and internal reaction led by domestic counterrevolutionaries.

However, the several groups in Venezuela who identify with Trotskyism have been all over the map on the key question of the Chávez government. Following the defeat of the constitutional referendum of 2 December 2007, UNT coordinator and USI leader Orlando Chirino went from calling for a blank ballot (abstention), a correct policy, to claiming that the victory of the right-wing "no" campaign constituted a "triumph of the workers and the people" (*Aporrea*, 7 December 2007). Chirino has even appeared on the same platform as CTV leaders and spoken under the auspices of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, the German social-democratic outfit (named after the chancellor who approved the assassination of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht in 1919) that channeled CIA money to Portugal.

On the other hand, Chirino's former comrade Stalin Pérez of the Marea Socialista² collective joined Chávez' PSUV in May 2007 and since then has been busily maneuvering among the factions of the "Bolivarian bourgeoisie," the *boliburguesía* as it is called in Caracas. To justify joining this capitalist party, MS spokesmen hark back to the early career of Argentine pseudo-Trotskyist Nahuel Moreno in Buenos Aires in the 1950s ("Remembering Nahuel Moreno," *Marea Socialista* No. 2, 2007). Both the MS and USI can find supporting material in the career of this political quick change artist. Critiquing Trotsky's program of permanent revolution, Moreno called for a "democratic revolution," while showing a strong predilection for nationalist strongmen, from Juan Perón in Argentina to Khomeini in Iran.

Another group, the Corriente Marxista Revolucionaria (CMR – Revolutionary Marxist Tendency), has gained a certain notoriety as the leader of its international grouping. Alan Woods, has sought to act as Chávez' tutor in Trotskyism. Woods presents a parody of Trotsky's program as if the Russian Bolshevik leader were an advisor to bourgeois nationalist regimes. The CMR joined Chávez' PSUV, just as the affiliates of Woods' International Marxist Tendency³ have long been part of Bhutto's

¹ Chirino's Unidad Socialista de Izquierda is affiliated with the UIT-CI (International Workers Unity), one of the products of the splintering of the international current led by Nahuel Moreno following the latter's death in 1987.

² MS has fraternal ties to the Argentine MST (Movimiento Socialista de los Trabajadores), another spin-off of the implosion of Argentine Morenoism.

PPP (Pakistan People's Party) and López Obrador's PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution) in Mexico. Charlatans who see no contradiction between calling themselves Marxist and joining a bourgeois party will never lead a workers revolution.

A case in point is the CMR's championing of the workers who seized the factory at Sanitarios Maracay in November 2006. While Woods & Co. were making nice with Chávez in private audiences at Miraflores Palace, the workers in Maracay were facing brutal repression by the *chavista* police in Aragua. When the UNT broke with Chávez by refusing to join his state party, the Sanitarios Maracay workers sided with Chirinos' UNT. Richard Gallardo, one of the three murdered union leaders, led a statewide strike in defense of Sanitarios Maracay in May 2007. Showing its colors, the CMR denounced Chirinos and the UNT, to which the Sanitarios union belongs, of "sectarian" errors for opposing "Comandante Chávez." ("Algunas verdades sobre la heroica lucha de los trabajadores de Sanitarios Maracay," 22 August 2007).

The CMR has called for nationalizing Sanitarios Maracay under workers control. But where Chávez has been forced to nationalize plants because of the workers struggle, such as the steel factory SIDOR, formerly owned by the Argentine-Italian conglomerate Techint, which the government finally seized last April, it has been precisely in order clamp down on workers' militancy. Through his twists and turns, Chávez has made it clear that his concept of "21st Century Socialism" does *not* involve expropriating or even breaking politically with the bourgeoisie. Following his defeat in the December 2007 constitutional referendum, the Venezuelan president reshuffled his cabinet, amnestied many of those who plotted the 2002 coup d'état and condemned left-wing "extremism," declaring:

"We have to seek alliances with the middle class...even with the bourgeoisie. We can't propose theses which have failed the world over, such as eliminating private property. That is not our thesis. [We can't let ourselves be] deceived by the voices of extremism, of theses which have gone out of style, which you won't find anywhere in the world, like the elimination of private property.... No, no, no! That is not our thesis. We have to look beyond that, to alliances to strengthen the new historical bloc as (Antonio) Gramsci called it."

—Aporrea, 4 January 2008.

Chávez also cited as revolutionary authorities V.I. Lenin, Fidel Castro, Daniel Ortega ... and Aleksandr Lukachenko, the strongman who presided over the restoration of capitalism in Bielorrussia and counseled the Venezuelan president on the need to impart to the bourgeoisie "love for their nation, for their fatherland," so that they will invest in their country!

The Struggle for Revolutionary Leadership

Those who tell the combative workers of Aragua to go along with Chávez are condemning them to continued capitalist exploitation. The alternative, however, is not social-democratic trade-unionism, limited to defensive struggles over

wages and hours, but a revolutionary offensive. Nor is it sufficient to call, as does another self-proclaimed Trotskyist in Venezuela, the Liga de Trabajadores por el Socialismo (LTS – Socialist Workers League⁴, for a generic "independent" or even "revolutionary workers party." In a country where every left tendency and even the capitalist state party calls itself "revolutionary" and "socialist," it is clear that the only party that can *lead* the way forward to workers revolution is one based on the Bolshevik program of Lenin and Trotsky for international socialist revolution.

If the Venezuelan left continues on its present path, split between those who politically support Chávez and those who don't go beyond a narrow defense of union gains, they risk ending up in the quandary of the Chilean left at the fall of the Unidad Popular (UP) government of Salvador Allende. At the time, in addition to the Communist and Socialist Parties that were part of Allende's popular-front coalition with sectors of the bourgeoisie, there was a small left-wing group, the Unión Socialista Popular (USOPO) which split from the SP in opposition to the formation of the UP. The USOPO had strong positions in two key copper mines (Chuquicamata and El Teniente), much as the UNT is rooted in Venezuelan industries.

While the USOPO did not support Allende's bourgeois government, again like the UNT it did not seek to organize a workers upsurge against it, even as the movement setting up *cordones industriales* (embryonic workers councils in the industrial belts around Santiago and Valparaiso) was spreading in 1972. By 1973, as the end was nearing, Allende attacked the copper workers as "privileged" for justifiably defending union gains such as a cost-of-living escalator to protect against the ravages of inflation. Trotskyists supported the El Teniente and Chuquicamata strike at the outset, but as the battle went on Christian Democratic forces seized control of the strike and allied with far-right and openly fascist sectors against the UP. In the end, demoralization of the workers meant that there was no sustained working-class resistance to the 1973 coup.

So long as would-be revolutionaries in Venezuela are either dragged along in Chávez' wake or limit themselves to reflexive measures of defense, they will be unable to defeat the continuing reactionary drive to tie down and ultimately overthrow the nationalist government and replace it with unconditional puppets of imperialism. The League for the Fourth International seeks to forge the nucleus of a Leninist vanguard party on the Trotskyist program of permanent revolution – in particular, championing the cause of peasants who have been denied land by Chávez' minimal "agrarian reform," and fighting for international extension of the revolution throughout the hemisphere and into the heartland of U.S. imperialism. This is key to resolving the fundamental dilemma in Venezuela today, where a militant working class is paralyzed by the lack of a proletarian revolutionary leadership. ■

³ The IMT is the current incarnation of the Militant tendency historically led by Ted Grant in Britain, which was characterized by its decades-long "entry" into the social-democratic Labour Party.

⁴ Part of the Trotskyist Faction, the international grouping led by the PTS (Socialist Workers Party) of Argentina, which originally comes out of the Morenoite current as well, although it adopts a more critical attitude toward its progenitor.

Venezuela: Impose Workers Control on the Road to Socialist Revolution

The following article was published on the eve of the 2 December 2007 constitutional referendum in Venezuela under a call to “Cast a Blank Ballot ... and Prepare for Class War.” In the balloting, the package of 69 amendments proposed by the Chávez government narrowly lost by 51 percent to 49 percent. The loss was due not to increased support for the right-wing opposition, which called for a “no” vote, but rather by a sharp drop of 3 million votes, mostly from impoverished neighborhoods in and around the capital, Caracas, which had long been bastions of support for the populist president.

The defeat stunned the regime, which had won eleven previous elections and referendums by large margins since coming to power in 1998. In response, Chávez reshuffled his cabinet while denouncing “extremism” and rejecting calls to “eliminate private property.” Instead, he appealed for “alliances even with the bourgeoisie.” The next months saw increased attacks on sectors of the working class organized in left-led unions, leading up to the murder of three socialist trade unionists in November 2008 (see article, page 72). While ordering the “nationalizations” of some enterprises (in reality, buying them at inflated prices), he has accused workers of “sabotage” for making wage demands and refused to recognize negotiated labor contracts.

At the same time, Chávez took advantage of skyrocketing oil prices to dramatically increase spending in the various social programs of the Bolivarian government, providing for free medical care, subsidized food, education and loans to small businesses in slum districts. While complaining of rampant bureaucratism, many of the urban and rural poor received tangible benefits. So when Chávez again pushed for a constitutional amendment to eliminate term limits, which would allow him to



Fernando Llano/AP

Mass mobilization in Venezuelan capital of Caracas to close campaign for “yes” vote for packet of constitutional changes drew half a million participants.

run for president again when his mandate expires in 2012, this time the measure passed by a wide margin.

Revolutionary Marxists defend Venezuela against the threats and attacks by U.S. imperialism and domestic reactionaries who are remote-controlled from Washington. At the same time, we reject Chávez’ pretense of building “21st Century socialism” (in alliance with the bourgeoisie!) and call for complete independence of the workers movement from the capitalist government. As Venezuela is stuck at a crossroads, veering from left to right, it is urgently necessary to build the nucleus of a Leninist-Trotskyist workers party to lead the struggle for *international socialist revolution*.

On December 2 [2007], Venezuelans will go to the polls to vote on a proposal to reform 69 articles of the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic, adopted in 1999. President Hugo Chávez Frías has presented this platter of amendments in order to “deepen the Bolivarian Revolution.” While taking opposite

**Smash Counterrevolution with Workers Mobilization!
No Political Support to the Bourgeois Populist Chávez –
Build a Revolutionary Workers Party!**



Workers and supporters of Sanitarios Maracay marched in Caracas in December 2006 calling for workers control.

positions on the referendum, both Chávez supporters (who are voting “*si*,” or yes) and rightist reactionaries (who are voting “*no*”) portray the measures as opening the door to socialism in Venezuela. This, however, is in no way the case.

The various changes aim at strengthening presidential power and instituting a series of social reforms characteristic of a social-democratic “welfare state” in Europe or a bourgeois populist regime in Latin America. Nothing in the 69 articles goes beyond the limits of capitalism. They do not expropriate capitalist property and in fact, for the first time they give constitutional protection to private ownership of the means of production. The fact that the right wing portrays these mild reforms as “socialist” just shows what dyed-in-the-wool counterrevolutionaries they are.

Proletarian revolutionaries who fight for a genuine socialist revolution, that is for the Venezuelan workers to take power with the support of the poor peasants and impoverished urban masses, cannot vote for these constitutional amendments. Although several of the social reforms are positive, the overall effect would be to grant unlimited powers to the president and the *bourgeois* state apparatus, particularly the army, which will inevitably be used against the workers. At the same time, communists must be in the front lines of those prepared to fight to the finish against the counterrevolutionaries who have coalesced around the call for a “no”

vote and who are trying to provoke a crisis by causing artificial food shortages and blaming price controls.

Consequently, the League for the Fourth International urges class-conscious Venezuelan workers to *cast a blank ballot* (*votar nulo*) or abstain on the constitutional referendum, while *joining in mobilizations to block any attempt by rightist reaction backed by U.S. imperialism to stage a coup d'état* or seize territory during or following the voting. With the surfacing of alleged CIA documents for an “Operation Pincer” calling to do just that, documents which however dubious they may appear to be have not been disavowed by Washington, and in view of the reactionaries’ unrelenting coup attempts in the past, this possibility is not at all abstract.

The U.S. government is currently keeping a low profile, having seen its crude attempts to intervene in Venezuela blow up in its face, notably in the botched April 2002 coup. That time around Washington hailed the *golpistas* (coup plotters) only to see Chávez brought back to power less than two days later by key army units with mass popular support. But just because the Bush regime is keeping its spokesmen muzzled doesn’t mean it isn’t up to something. Most importantly, on Venezuela, unlike Iraq, the Republican White House has the fulsome support of the Democrats in Congress, who label Chávez a “dictator” and opponent of “democracy,” despite his electoral landslide victories while the current U.S. president took office in a judicial coup.

Speaking to the closing rally of the campaign for “yes” vote on the constitutional reforms, a huge mobilization which filled the center of Caracas with hundreds of thousands of poor and working people, Chávez warned that if Washington tries anything, oil shipments to the U.S. should be immediately cut off. Good. In fact, Chávez’ continued supply of oil to the United States, while it has brought Venezuela a windfall of billions of petrodollars as oil prices approach \$100 a barrel, has also kept the Pentagon war machine going in Iraq. In the case of a new coup attempt by Washington’s men in Caracas, there should be worldwide protests against the imperialist power grab.

In Venezuela, workers committees, which exist in embryonic or developed form in many plants and workplaces, should be on the alert around the clock in the coming hours. If the constitutional amendments are approved, even with smaller margins (as several opinion surveys indicate) than Chávez’ past overwhelming victories at the polls, or if they are narrowly defeated or the outcome is in doubt, there could be a showdown in the streets with the rightist reactionaries who are armed and dangerous. While civilian militias have been formed as an auxiliary to the armed forces, *the army still controls the guns*. In the face of a rightist putsch, revolutionaries must demand *and secure* the necessary weapons for *armed worker and peasant militias independent of state control*, and proceed to impose *workers control* throughout the country.

Above all, it is necessary to *forge a revolutionary workers party*, a party that gives no political support to the bourgeois populist Bonaparte Chávez while militarily defending

the Venezuelan regime against imperialist-sponsored counterrevolution. Against the PSUV (United Socialist Party of Venezuela), which despite its name is a bourgeois state party, what's required is a party of intransigent opposition to all capitalist regimes, fighting for a workers and peasants government based on workers councils (soviets), and based on the Trotskyist program of permanent revolution. It must be infused with the proletarian internationalism of Lenin and Trotsky rather than the Latin American bourgeois nationalism of Chávez, who looks back to the Liberator Simón Bolívar

The Packet of Constitutional Reforms: Petrodollar Populism and Military "Socialism"

The panoply of constitutional reforms certainly reflect a shift in the political face of the Bolivarian Revolution, which has gone through several incarnations according to the latest influences on its leader (and the current price of oil). After being associated early on with ex-Communist Party guerrilla leader Douglas Bravo, in the mid-1990s Chávez was advised by one Norberto Ceresole, an ultra-rightist Argentine nationalist and ideologue of the *carapintada* movement of fascistic military officers left over from the Videla dictatorship. Reacting to the hostility of U.S. imperialism, Chávez in power has moved in fits and starts to the left, but always within the capitalist framework and always leaving actual power in the hands of the army.

Today Chávez is a close ally of Fidel Castro's Cuba, a bureaucratically deformed workers state, and even expresses admiration for the Russian Revolutionary Leon Trotsky, but his actual policies are far more timid. While talking of "21st century socialism" he has made clear his desire to work with capitalists. In fact, ex-Colonel Chávez has carried out very few nationalizations, far less than General Lázaro Cárdenas in Mexico in the 1930s or General Juan Perón in Argentina in the '50s. As *Time* magazine (1 May 2007) noted of his latest move to take control of heavy oil installations:

"But the truth – one that both Chavez and his archfoe, the Bush Administration, would prefer you not know – is that when it comes to oil nationalization, Hugo is hardly the most radical of his global peers. In fact, even after today's petrotheatrics, Chavez is just catching up with the rest of the pack.."

The nationalization of Venezuela's oil industry was carried out in 1976 by Carlos Andrés Pérez of the pro-imperialist Acción Democrática (AD), a bourgeois party affiliated with the social-democratic Second International.

The packet of constitutional reforms includes a reference to the "Venezuelan Socialist State" (Article 16) and even a "Socialist Economy." However, the latter is defined only as prohibiting "monopolies and latifundios" (large landed estates), and includes a whole range of property forms including "direct" and "indirect social property," "communal property," "collective property," "mixed property" and ... "private property" (Article 115). Thus capitalist ownership of the means of production now has constitutional status, including the guarantee that

any expropriation will be by judicial sentence and with "timely payment of fair compensation." Some "socialism"!

A number of the reforms which have drawn the ire of Venezuela's rightists and their imperialist godfathers in Washington could have been implemented by any social democrat. Much has been made of the reference to a "six-hour workday," but less of the fact that this is part of a "36-hour workweek" (Article 90), an hour more than the 35-hour workweek implemented under the popular-front French government of Socialist Lionel Jospin and maintained by subsequent conservative cabinets. Social security coverage would be extended to informal vendors, taxi drivers, housewives and others presently excluded (Article 87) – a significant reform, particularly as barely 40 percent of the population is presently covered.

Yet how much security this actually affords depends on the vagaries of the capitalist market. If the price of oil were to fall back to \$9 a barrel, as it was when Chávez came to power, you can say goodbye to all this. Imperialist pundits rail against the "irresponsible" economic policies of the Venezuelan president, often accompanied by premature announcements that "That Chávez Thing Is Over" (*Newsweek*, 29 May 2006). Even the most rabid, such as the *New York Times* (29 November 2007) Paris-based columnist Roger Cohen, are forced to admit that "Certainly, the oil money Chávez has plowed into poor neighborhoods ... has reduced poverty. The United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America said last year that the extreme poverty rate had fallen to 9.9 percent from 15.9 percent." But that doesn't stop Cohen from frothing about the policies of the Venezuelan leader as "disastrous" and "grotesque."

What really has the imperialist rulers and their kept media riled up is the constitutional amendments' political provisos, particularly elimination of term limits on the presidency and provisions for emergency rule. Cohen sneeringly calls it a "grab for socialist-emperor status" by a "barracks-bred buffoon," claiming it would "prod Venezuela from an oppressive rule comparable to Mexico's under its once impregnable Institutional Revolutionary Party toward the dictatorial absolutism of Cuba." This is pretty rich coming from a proponent of American-style bourgeois "democracy" which "elects" its presidents through a contest of who can amass more millions from capitalist donors, or can get the Supreme Court to annul the popular vote; which monitors its citizens' phone calls without judicial warrants, arrests thousands of immigrants and holds them incommunicado for months and even years; and engages in torture on a mass scale as well as slaughtering hundreds of thousands (Iraq) or millions (Korea and Vietnam) of civilians.

If Hugo Chávez did to even one political prisoner what the U.S. imperialist rulers routinely do to thousands, there would be a deafening hue and cry from the laptop liberal pundits. A more balanced judgment comes from a Washington economist, Mark Weisbrot, who wrote: "Perhaps it is because I am from Chicago, and had only one mayor from the time I was born until I graduated college, that I am unable to see this as the making of a dictatorship. Not to mention that



Workers of occupied Sanitarios Maracay plant march in Caracas, 14 December 2006, demanding nationalization under workers control. Four months later, police and National Guard attacked workers' caravan.

if Hillary Clinton is elected next year, we will have Bushes and Clintons as heads of state for a full consecutive 24 years, and possibly 28" (*New Statesman*, 21 November). Brazilian president Lula, hardly a radical, asked why no one complained of Margaret Thatcher ruling Britain for so many years.

As for emergency rule, the reforms allow for the president to suspend certain constitutional guarantees in a national emergency, including the right to information and due process, but not including prohibitions on torture, holding prisoners incommunicado or forcible disappearances. Nobody in the bourgeois media has bothered to mention that the U.S. routinely violates the last three prohibitions and is *presently* being governed under a state of national emergency as part of the post-9/11 "war on terrorism" (not to mention such draconian laws as the U.S.A. PATRIOT Act). And while Chávez would be required to present his emergency measures to the National Assembly within eight days, George W. Bush last May signed into law a National Security and Homeland Security Presidential Directive (NSPD-51 and HSPD-20) which supersedes the National Emergency Act by allowing the president to assume dictatorial powers over all federal, state, local, territorial and tribal governments, as well as private sector organizations in a national emergency without any form of Congressional approval or oversight. And no one voiced on that.

In Venezuela, ex-leftist Teodoro Petkoff's labeled the amendments a "constitutional coup," while General Baduel declared, "I categorize it as a coup d'état." Others have said it would make Chávez a "dictator-for-life." Yet the fact that Baduel called on military officials to "assess carefully" the changes that the government proposed "in a hasty manner and through fraudulent procedures" amounted to a scarcely veiled call for a

real coup d'état by the military.

As for term limits, this is a pseudo-democratic measure that in fact limits the right of the population to vote for whomever it wishes; the only reason it even appears democratic is the recognition that under the fake democracy of capitalism, incumbents have enormous power to get themselves re-elected. The fact that the limits are removed only for the head of state, however, points to a shift toward a presidential regime in which a strong executive with reinforced powers is increasingly independent of any parliamentary control.

The emergency measures are another matter. In conditions of imperialist aggression and counterrevolutionary attack, we defend particular repressive measures directed against bourgeois reaction, whether undertaken by Chávez' "Bolivarian" regime

against coup-plotting media, by the Nicaraguan Sandinistas against U.S.-financed contra mouthpieces or by Abraham Lincoln against pro-Confederate newspapers (see "Venezuela: Battle Over the Media," *The Internationalist* No. 26, July 2007). But for a capitalist government to arm itself with such emergency measures in advance is an invitation to use them not only against coup plotters but also against militant workers' struggles. Communists oppose such laws giving capitalist rulers carte blanche to eliminate democratic rights, whether in imperialist or semi-colonial countries.

Some of the political reforms are positive, including outlawing discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, sex or sexual orientation, religious creed or social condition (Article 21), recognizing Afro-Venezuelans as a community along with indigenous peoples (Article 100) and lowering the voting age to 16 (Article 64). Others, such as proclaiming the right to adequate, comfortable housing with basic services (Article 82) and the right to a job and duty to work (Article 87), are pious wishes that cannot be guaranteed under capitalism, no matter what the Constitution says on paper. The provisions about revoking mandates of elected officials (Article 72), while an advance over the institutional bonapartism of U.S.-style bourgeois "representative democracy," are far from the "participatory democracy" they claim to represent. A recall election half-way through an elected term is a minimal control, which can easily be sidestepped by a determined executive, but far less than even a parliamentary regime.

Under the rubric of "people's power" (Article 136), the reforms refer to the constitution of "councils of working people," but only as organs of municipal self-government along with councils of peasants, students, artisans, sports,

youth, women, fishermen and others. The reforms provide for setting up a "Communal City" as part of a "new geometry of power," but such "communes" and "communal self-government" entities would be set up and its authorities named by the "National Executive Power" (Article 16). So in the guise of "*poder popular*," this actually establishes local bodies totally controlled by the presidency.

And finally, in Article 236, there is a long list of powers of the presidency, including creating or eliminating provinces, federal districts, cities, regions and districts, as well as naming or removing their authorities; naming vice presidents; declaring states of exception and suspending or restricting constitutional guarantees; issuing enabling acts and decrees; dissolving the National Assembly, and "anything else indicated by the Constitution or by law," subject only to ratification by the vice presidents (named by the president).

This is a program for a bonapartist "strong state" regime. The inclusion of plebiscites to episodically approve the actions of the executive is a traditional mechanism of providing a veneer of popular legitimation for such dictatorial regimes going back to Louis Napoléon Second Empire and Napoléon Bonaparte's First Empire in France. It is light years away from the *workers democracy* based on *soviets* (workers and peasants councils), in which all representatives are subject to immediate recall at any moment by the councils whose decisions they carry out.

This is what gave the Russian soviets tremendous flexibility as organs of revolutionary struggle, enabling the Bolsheviks to become the majority and oust the previous Menshevik and Social-Revolutionary leaders of the bourgeois Provisional Government. It then provided the framework for establishing a workers state, the dictatorship of the proletariat, in which the fiction of "representative democracy" (in which electors are herded to the polls to vote every few years in the illusion that they are picking the rulers) was replaced by working bodies directly involving the working masses.

In contrast, the amended Venezuelan Constitution sets up a top-down regime in which virtually everything is decided by an all-powerful president, ratified by his appointed underlings and periodically acclaimed by the populace. If Venezuela were a workers state, it might provide the forms for a bureaucratic regime such as Castro's Cuba, as charged by Venezuelan right-wingers. But *Venezuela remains a capitalist state* in which all of this only serves as window-dressing for a state power resting on the guns of the bourgeois army. For socialists to approve such measures would be to renounce the program of proletarian revolution.

Bourgeois Bonapartism or Workers Revolution

Currently, the reactionaries are parading the figure of General Raúl Baduel, a "*chavista* of the first hour" going back to 1982, who was Venezuela's defense minister from 2004 until retiring earlier this year and who played a key role in saving Chávez during the 2002 coup attempt. While some *chavistas* try to minimize this, claiming for example that

Baduel and his fellow officers moved against the coup plotters only after the masses came into the streets in defense of the deposed president (not true, it was the other way around), the fact is that his defection represents a serious fracturing of the Bolivarian political establishment at the top. Other generals on active duty are rumored to be ready to break with Chávez. The "social-democratic" PODEMOS (Por la Democracia Social) party, another former pillar of support for Chávez which refused to join the PSUV, has also called for a "No" vote on the referendum.

In fact, while Chávez has broad support among poor and working people, from the beginning his political apparatus has been heavily populated with bourgeois politicians and military officers. The Movement for the Fifth Republic (MVR), his main political vehicle until the formation of the "socialist" PSUV, was shot through with corrupt careerists. Such elements were so notorious that they are popularly known as the *boliburguesía*, often described with adjective "hummera" to indicate their predilection of these nouveau riche *chavistas* for buying high-priced Hummer SUVs. Chávez has also promoted a "socialist" businessmen's association, *Empresarios por Venezuela* (Empreven), who are prepared to work with the regime, for a price. Again, no surprise. Mexico under the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) had a similar layer of private capitalists who profited handsomely from the heavily stratified capitalist economy.

We have noted in the past (see "Venezuela: Workers to Power," *The Internationalist* No. 22, September-October 2005) that Chávez heads a "bourgeois nationalist government of a 'bonapartist' character, with its base in the armed forces, but with characteristics peculiar to semi-colonial countries." It is not simply a military/police dictatorship such as Chile under Pinochet or Argentina under the junta (1976-83). As Trotsky noted in elaborating his perspective of permanent revolution, in countries of belated capitalist development, a weak national bourgeoisie is sometimes obliged to maneuver between imperialism and the proletariat. Writing of the Mexican government of Lázaro Cárdenas, he noted that such a regime has a "bonapartist character *sui generis*" (of a distinctive or unique sort).

While seeming to raise itself above classes, in reality such a regime serves the bourgeoisie by making concessions to the imperialists or to the working class (such as Cárdenas' nationalization of the railroads and oil industry, or Chávez' experiments in "co-management"). "Revolutionary" rhetoric does not change the class character of such governments, and in fact many "Third World" capitalist regimes describe themselves as "socialist" based on the fact that they have large state-owned sectors of the economy. Yet this is simply a means of accumulating capital which will eventually be parceled out to a nascent "national" bourgeoisie when it becomes strong enough, such as occurred in Mexico over the last couple decades.

Facile comparisons with Cuba ignore the basic fact that while Castro took power at the head of a *petty-bourgeois guerrilla band*, following the disintegration of the dictator Fulgencio Batista's army, Chávez' base is the *bourgeois armed*

Rodrigo Abal/AP



Outdoor market in Caracas. Capitalists are trying to create food shortages to protest price controls. Workers should seize control of agricultural/food manufacturing and marketing system and impose workers control.

forces. These are the same repressive forces that massacred thousands of poor Caracas residents in the 1989 *caracazo* upheaval, and slaughtered leftist insurgents in the 1960s. There are many more Baduels ensconced at the command level of the officer corps, biding their time waiting for a propitious moment to seize power. And while Chávez may slough off pro-capitalist elements the way East European Stalinists got rid of bourgeois ministers one by one through “salami tactics” after World War II, there is no Red Army occupying Venezuela to serve as ultimate arbiter and power base for erecting a deformed workers state.

Many self-proclaimed socialists give political support to Chávez and his “Bolivarian Revolution” in Venezuela on the basis of its extensive social programs, despite the fact that the various “missions” are basically “welfare state” (*asistencialista*) measures that do not put into question the capitalist economic foundations of the regime. Although the Venezuelan leader has his frictions with particular imperialists, particularly George W. Bush in the U.S. whom he has vividly compared to the devil, he has in no way broken with the *imperialist system*. The unprecedented high prices for Venezuela’s main export, oil, may enable Chávez to pay off rather than repudiate the foreign debt, and U.S. energy dependence on Venezuela may restrict the options of the imperialist rulers. But it will take a revolutionary working-class-led uprising to expropriate the bourgeoisie, by a workers and peasants government that then extends the revolution throughout the hemisphere and into the heart of imperialism.

Various leftists who abuse the good name and revolutionary heritage of Trotsky to cover over their opportunist maneuvers are tailing after Chávez. Among them are the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USec), followers of the late Ernest Mandel, and particularly its French section, the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR) which says of the constitutional changes that it “can only applaud and support such a reform” (*Rouge*, 20 September). By far

the most uncritical of the pseudo-Trotskyist *chavistas* is the International Marxist Tendency (IMT) of the late Ted Grant and its current leader, Alan Woods, who fancies himself a Trotskyist guru to Chávez. The small Venezuelan group associated with the Grantite “Militant” tendency, the Corriente Marxista Revolucionaria (CMR), describes itself as “part of the Bolivarian movement and the PSUV,” and calls for a massive “yes” vote on the referendum. No surprise there, for the IMT “Marxists” are part of bourgeois parties from Mexico (the PRD) to Pakistan (Bhutto’s PPP).

Another current which sometimes pretends to follow

Trotsky (but opposes his actual policies on just about everything) are the followers of the late Tony Cliff, who characterized the Stalinized Soviet Union as “state capitalist” and refused to defend the USSR against imperialism whereas Trotsky defended the Soviet Union as a bureaucratically degenerated workers state. The British mother section of the International Socialist Tendency (IST) has been critical of Chávez “bureaucratic state machine that continues to sustain capitalist social relations,” while other sections of this loose social-democratic federation enthusiastically embrace Chávez’ PSUV. The estranged American Cliffites, the International Socialist Organization (ISO) recently published an extensive front-page article on “What’s Really Happening in Venezuela” (*Socialist Worker*, 30 November 2007) in which they manage to take no position on the constitutional referendum while trying to sound sympathetic to the Chávez regime.

What’s behind this confusion from a current that usually uncritically hails “Third World” nationalist *caudillos* is that the people they have been tailing after in Venezuela are split on what line to take on the reforms. Part of the leadership of the Unión Nacional de Trabajadores (UNT – National Workers Union) headed by Stalin Pérez is calling for a “Yes” vote, while another sector led by Orlando Chirino, until now allied with Pérez in the C-CURA (Current for Revolutionary Class Unity and Autonomy) caucus, is calling for abstention and casting a blank ballot (*voto nulo*). This follows an earlier dispute in C-CURA and its allied Partido Revolución y Socialismo (PRS) over whether to enter the PSUV, with Pérez opting for entry and Chirino opposed. The UNT/C-CURA/PRS managed to establish itself as the leading organized representatives of the Venezuelan workers, defeating the CTV (Confederation of Venezuelan Workers) allied with the bourgeois right-wing opposition, and outflanking the unconditional *chavistas*. But it has been bedeviled from the

beginning by the riddle of how to oppose Chávez' attacks on the workers while not breaking from the popularity he enjoys among Venezuela's impoverished masses.

The answer is: it can't be done, you have to choose. To be sure, politically opposing the leader of the Bolivarian "revolution" while defending the regime militarily against counterrevolution and imperialism is a difficult task in today's polarized situation, where the division between *chavistas* and *anti-chavistas* is drawn in blood. Taking an independent stance would undoubtedly not be understood today by many workers mesmerized by the nationalist *caudillo*. But for Marxists, what's fundamental is the class division separating all currents of the bourgeoisie, on the one hand, from the working class allied with poor peasants and other oppressed sectors on the other. Only by insisting on a *class line*, whatever the cost in temporary popularity, can communists prepare the working people for the revolutionary struggles ahead.

For Chávez will, without any doubt, clamp down on any act of working-class independence from his regime. He accused UNT leaders of being "poisoned" and sharply denounced any trade-union autonomy from the PSUV, even quoting Rosa Luxemburg against them! (Of course, in her 1906 work on *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions*, Luxemburg was responding to reformist trade-unionists who wanted to take their distance from the social-democratic *workers party*, whereas Chávez is opposing independence by leftist trade-unionists from the control of a *bourgeois party* that is the bureaucratic political apparatus of the capitalist state.) But more than that, the officials of the "socialist" regime have cracked down on leftist-led struggles by Venezuelan workers.

A case in point is the treatment dished out to the government workers union by the Labor Ministry. According to an account in the newspaper of the British Socialist Workers Party:

"The elected representatives of Fentrased, the public employees' trade union with some 1.5 million members, went to the Ministry of Labour in mid-August to renegotiate the collective contract for their members. The minister, Ramón Rivero, is a member of the Bolivarian Trade Union Federation and an ex-Trotskyist. He refused to meet with the delegation and locked them inside a room in the ministry. No food or drink was provided; the delegates' families passed them through the windows. After six days they were driven out by hired thugs."

—*Socialist Review*, October 2007

It should be noted that the leader of FENTRASEP, Ramón Arias, belongs to that wing of the UNT and C-CURA which opposed Chirino and entered the PSUV (while calling for purging corrupt bureaucrats and employers from the party). Another example is what happened to the workers at Sanitarios Maracay, manufacturers of toilets, who have occupied their plant for the last year. When the workers were traveling by bus to Caracas on April 24 [2007] to demand expropriation of the company under workers control, they were stopped on the highway by the Aragua state police and National Guard who fired on the workers with buckshot, wounding 14 and arresting 21. These workers were organized in the FRETCO (Revolutionary Front

of Workers in Occupied Factories) linked to the Grant/Woods Militant tendency which has been the loudest cheerleaders for Chávez on the international left.

So here we have two cases of anti-union repression by the military-based "socialist" regime directed against *supporters* of the regime. One can imagine how Chávez & Co. would react to a militant struggle led by leftist workers politically *opposed* to their bonapartist government.

Today, the active threat in Venezuela comes from the capitalist ultra-right wing allied with U.S. imperialism, which has never let up in its drive to overthrow the nationalist government that dared to flout the diktats from Washington. The Internationalist Group and League for the Fourth International have repeatedly called to defend Venezuela against imperialist aggression and internal counterrevolutionary forces who would drown the workers in blood. In 2002-03 bosses' lockout we called for workers to seize the shuttered plants and impose workers control, to organize workers militias, and to form workers to organize supplies of necessary goods and revolutionary resistance to the pro-imperialist coup.

Today, it is urgent to put a halt to the bosses' sabotage, in particular their attempts to create artificial food shortages, by seizing control of the entire agricultural/food manufacturing and marketing chain and imposing workers control. Such energetic action by the workers movement would certainly be opposed by sectors of the "Bolivarian bourgeoisie" in power. Hence it must be linked to a whole program of transitional measures leading to the seizure of power by the working class. This was the purpose of the 1938 Transitional Program, the founding program of the Fourth International, which Trotsky intended to "help the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find the bridge between present demand and the socialist program of the revolution. This bridge should include a system of transitional demands, stemming from today's conditions and from today's consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat."

This was also the method of Lenin in his September 1917 pamphlet on *The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat It*. Here the Bolshevik leader was responding to the disruption of production and distribution of grain as well as coal and other vital raw materials by rail stoppages and hoarding that were causing dire food shortages and a looming famine, thereby threatening the revolution. In his pamphlet, Lenin called for revolutionary action by the workers, through the soviets, rather than begging the capitalist government, which was in league with the hoarders and disrupters. His program included workers control, nationalization of the banks, and fighting for all power to the soviets. He wrote:

"In point of fact, the whole question of control boils down to who controls whom, i.e., which class is in control and which is being controlled. In our country, in Republican Russia ... it is the landowners and capitalists who are still recognised to be, and still are, the controllers. The inevitable result is the capital-

ist robbery that arouses universal indignation among the people, and the economic chaos that is being artificially kept up by the capitalists. We must resolutely and irrevocably ... pass to control over the landowners and capitalists by the workers and peasants. And this is what our Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks fear worse than the plague."

What was put forward as a program in September was then carried out in the October Revolution of 1917.

Today, while vigilantly mobilizing the workers and impoverished masses against the capitalist saboteurs, *including those incrustated in the "Bolivarian" state apparatus*, it is necessary above all to build an authentically Leninist-Trotskyist

revolutionary workers party. It must be based on the Trotskyist program of permanent revolution, understanding that in the present imperialist epoch, even achieving basic democratic tasks including agrarian revolution, national liberation and democracy for the exploited and oppressed requires that the working class take power, backed by the peasantry and urban poor, to sweep away the capitalist state, establish a workers and peasants government to expropriate the bourgeoisie and spread the revolution internationally.

The choice is revolution or counterrevolution – and no amount of constitutional fiddling will resolve it. The question is power, *kto/kogo*, as Lenin put it: who controls whom? ■

Morenoites Once More in the Camp of "DemocraCIA" PSTU "Fellow Travelers" of Reactionary Coup Plotters in Venezuela

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The overwhelming majority of the socialist left in Latin America has constantly tailed after the government and the person of Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez. This was true not only during the pro-imperialist coup of April 2002 and the bosses' lockout disguised as a "general strike," organized by the same coup-plotters, which lasted from December 2002 to the end of January 2003. At those times it was the duty of every defender of the workers movement and of every anti-imperialist fighter to take sides at the military level against the ultra-rightist putsch attempt. The bulk of the left also supported Chávez in 2000, when he was implementing a "neo-liberal" economic policy and sought to impose supervision by the (capitalist) state over the unions, a measure which was opposed by the League for the Fourth International. The opportunist left also lined up as unconditional supporters of *chavismo* on the recall referendum of 2004 and in the presidential elections of 2006, and on just about every other occasion.

The support of various tendencies that proclaim themselves communist – and even Trotskyist – to a bourgeois bonapartist regime can be explained by the overall orientation of such opportunist organizations, which regularly tail after every bourgeois or petty-bourgeois nationalist movement, with no regard to their class content. Recently, however, there has been a split among the pseudo-socialist fans of *chavismo*. The Brazilian Partido Socialista dos Trabalhadores Unificado (PSTU – United Socialist Workers Party), the leading component of the Workers International League (LIT) came out in favor of voting "no" in the Venezuelan constitutional referendum of 2 December 2007. Six months earlier, they opposed the non-renewal of the broadcast license of RCTV, one of the main players in the frustrated coup d'état of 2002. Both the PSTU and the LIT are followers of the late Argentine pseudo-Trotskyist caudillo Nahuel Moreno. For years, they have justified their rejection of the

Trotskyist theory and program of permanent revolution by raising the banner of the "democratic revolution." This line pushes them into the arms of bourgeois sectors, including the most reactionary, and even into those of Yankee imperialism.

That is what happened with the latest about-face of the PSTU and the LIT over Venezuela. Accustomed to trailing and even advising left (bourgeois) nationalist leaders, such as Evo Morales in Bolivia and even the rightist colonel Lúcio Gutiérrez in Ecuador (since overthrown), the PSTU supported Chávez in the recall referendum of 2004 and in the presidential election of 2006. However, in recent months as imperialism and the coup-plotting right wing in Venezuela have changed their tactics in challenging the government of the "Bolivarian Revolution," the PSTU switched horses from Chávez to the bourgeois reactionaries. In the referendum of December 2 (2007), they called to vote against the packet of constitutional amendments proposed by Chavez and the government majority in the National Assembly. The Morenoites took up the slogan of the Stone Age right wing calling to "vote 'no'." They even regurgitate the propaganda themes of the counterrevolutionary reactionaries against "totalitarianism." Thus they argue:

"According to its content, a 'yes' vote amounted to a reactionary vote, because it supported a 'totalitarian' project, even when disguised by red flags and references to 'socialism.' A 'no' vote, again on the basis of its content, was a progressive vote, since it represented the rejection of this project by important sectors of the mass movement and its dissatisfaction with the social and economic policies of the Chávez government."

–*Opinião Socialista*, 14 December 2007

In practice, the PSTU policy is to justify the actions organized by the most reactionary sectors on the Venezuelan scene. Thus it insists that, "contrary to the claims of the *chavistas*, the student demonstrations were not 'right-wing' but democratic" (*Opinião Socialista*, 6 December 2007). These latter-day Morenoites repeat the refrain of the *New York Times* (1 Decem-

ber 2007), in an editorial titled "Saying 'No' to Chavez," which praises the "thousands of university students [who] have taken to the streets to protest, facing down armed Chávezista thugs." So the PSTU "says 'no' to Chávez in consonance with this authoritative imperialist mouthpiece. The student demonstrations were recruited above all from the elite universities, and were as rightist as the coup movements of 2002-04. The only difference is that the discredited leaders of yesteryear are this time hiding behind the new faces of previously unknown "student leaders."¹

In reality, the "student" mobilizations were sponsored by U.S. intelligence agencies. This is demonstrated by the financing of various student groups opposed to the Chávez regime by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), an outfit that was created after the revelations in the 1970s of secret funding by the CIA of various so-called "civil society" organizations. The *Washington Post* (2 December 2007) reported: "U.S. documents, obtained through a freedom of information request filed by a researcher for the National Security Archive at George Washington University, show that \$216,000 was provided from 2003 through this year to unnamed student groups at several universities for 'conflict resolution,' 'democracy promotion' and other programs." Eva Golinger has published a list of several contracts (see "Washington Finances Student Groups and Leaders in Venezuela," *Aporrea*, 13 June 2007). This goes hand in hand with the actions of U.S. imperialism in recent years backing "democratic" fake revolutions from Yugoslavia to Ukraine.

The "vote 'no'" campaign was so right-wing that the PSTU found it necessary to argue that "even if the whole or the majority of its leaders were rightists or reactionaries, this doesn't change the progressive character of the movement." However, even with this fairy tale of an imaginary "progressive" movement led by reactionary rights, and in spite of its calls for the formation of a "third camp of the workers and the masses," the PSTU cannot hide the fact "the Venezuelan right together with imperialism called to vote 'no.' Thus, they also won in the referendum." Attempting to justify the unjustifiable, these Morenoites argue that "at times the revolutionaries coincide, on a very limited fact, with their irreconcilable enemy, imperialism." As an example of this thesis, they cite the case of the train that transported Lenin across Germany to Petrograd in March 1917! Thus the Morenoites *accept* the imperialist lies about this.

The reality is that Lenin and the Bolsheviks *did not agree* with the German general staff even on this "limited objective," as the PSTU claims. On the contrary, the Bolsheviks used the existing contradictions between the imperialists. Not one of the

¹ Yon Goicoechea, the main visible leader of the student movement in the referendum campaign, later was awarded the "2008 Milton Friedman Prize for Advancing Liberty," which includes a US\$500,000 award, which he was presented with at a dinner at New York's ritzy Waldorf-Astoria Hotel. Goicoechea is a law student at the elite Andrés Bello Catholic University. Milton Friedman was the right-wing economist who was the guru for the "free market" economics known as "neo-liberalism," which in addition to destroying public services around the globe sparked the current meltdown of the world capitalist economy.

objectives of the Bolsheviks coincided with those of the Kaiser, just as there was no agreement between the "democratic" imperialists and Trotsky and other revolutionary leaders that they allowed to reach Petrograd via Helsinki. The German military tried to use Lenin for their aims, just as the Bolsheviks sought to use the imperialists. History already issued its verdict on who won. In contrast, the Morenoites are repeating the thesis of "agreement" with imperialism that they have borrowed from Stalinism in the period of the popular front, when the Communist parties supported the foreign policy and voted for the war budgets shoulder to shoulder with the "democratic" bourgeoisie. In this instance, the PSTU is doing so together with the coup-plotting bourgeoisie and the CIA.

One of the PSTU's arguments to justify its "no" vote in the constitutional referendum, as well as to justify its opposition to the cancellation of the broadcast license of RCTV in May [2007], is that there is no longer a danger of a coup d'état. It's true that the imperialists tried to get rid of Chávez with a coup in 2002, they say, but after that flopped, "they abandoned the coup-plotting line and went over to another policy: counting on wearing him down in the long run in order to overthrow him by electoral means" (declaration of the LIT, "On the Closing of RCTV in Venezuela," 19 June 2007). Now they cite an article by a journalist for the Buenos Aires newspaper *Clarín* (4 December 2007), referring to "the strategy of non-confrontation that the State Department is pursuing" currently. The conclusion of the PSTU is that "U.S. policy is not to push for a coup" (*Opinião Socialista*, 10 December 2007). This confidence in the conversion of Yankee imperialism to peaceful means of "regime change" in Venezuela demonstrates, what in Venezuela would be hair-raising voluntary blindness. If for the moment the CIA and its allies have gone for mobilizing innocent-looking young people (the gilded youth of Caracas), that doesn't mean they aren't hatching another putsch in the shadows.

The PSTU waxes "indignant" because a left-wing academic like James Petras called it "counterrevolutionary," and *Causa Operária* (Workers Cause, an ostensibly Trotskyist party in Brazil, aligned with the Argentine Partido Obrero [Workers Party] of Jorge Altamirano) called it an "agent of U.S. imperialism" (*Causa Operária*, 6 December). Well, they aren't agents of the CIA: the Morenoites of the PSTU are offering their services to the Venezuelan domestic bourgeoisie and to imperialism free of charge. The PSTU also lacks the political weight in Venezuela to really influence the course of events. But even though this kind of pernicious cop-baiting is utterly unacceptable, and even if the practical effect of the PSTU's reactionary stands is nil, this doesn't exonerate them for making common cause, by "coincidence," with the worst elements of the counterrevolutionary putschist bourgeoisie. It's worth recalling that while they now slam Petras for resorting to Stalinist methods and being an unconditional *chavista*, this didn't bother the PSTU in the least when for years Petras acted as a pro-Chávez ambassador for it in leftist academic circles. Now that the PSTU/LIT has carried out one of the periodic flip-flops which are the trademark of Morenoism, it shouldn't be surprising that their previous fellow travelers turn on them in a particularly crude fashion.

It's worth pointing out that the Morenoites' new line is not all that new. The Brazilian disciples learned it well at the feet of their master. Back in 1975-77, Moreno and his tendency took sides for the Portuguese Socialist Party of Mário Soares, fulminating against Stalinism and praising "democracy" to the skies, at a time when the PSP was being financed with millions of D-marks by the CIA (via the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung of the German SPD) while mobs of Soares supporters were torching offices of the Portuguese CP. It should be highlighted as well that the PSTU's policy in Venezuela goes hand in hand with its reformist policies in Brazil, where its campaigns to "moralize" politics have led it to line up with the most retrograde sectors of the bourgeoisie, for example in the scandal over the so-called *mensalão* (monthly payoffs to buy the loyalty of former "opposition" Congressmen), calling on the Congress of the corrupt to investigate the Lula government for corruption.

More recently, the PSTU-led Union of Workers of the Judicial System of Pará together with a "union" of cops, the armed fist of the bourgeois state, asked the Brazilian Supreme Court to regulate the right to strike for public employees. At the Morenoites' invitation, as was to be expected the bourgeois court decided against government workers, subjecting the right to strike to so many conditions that it amounted to denying it. What unites these various positions of the PSTU on democratic rights is the total absence of *class* criteria.

We Trotskyists of the League for the Fourth International criticized various of the measures included in Chávez' packet of constitutional reforms as representing a program for establishing a "strong state" of a bonapartist sort (see "Venezuela: Impose Workers Control on the Road to Socialist Revolution," on page 76 of this issue). While it guaranteed private property, it included clauses facilitating nationalizations, as well as a series of social measures with the aim of winning workers' support. In this way, it represented a measure typical of the kind of nationalist governments that Trotsky defined as "bonapartist *sui generis*" (of a unique kind) which tend to arise in semi-colonial countries. Lacking a strong bourgeoisie, these capitalist regimes (like that of Lázaro Cárdenas in Mexico in the late 1930s), are obliged to maneuver between imperialism and the proletariat, offering concessions first to one and then to the other.

On the other hand, accusing Chávez of carrying out a "totalitarian project" is to adopt the vocabulary of U.S. imperialism, which considers communism identical with fascism, and labels any restrictions of the "free market" an attack on "democracy." With all its references to "democratic" mobilizations against Chávez and a "third camp of the workers and the masses," in reality the PSTU ends up in the second camp of bourgeois reaction and imperialist democraCIA.

In the dispute over the constitutional reform, it was necessary to reject Chávez' measures to strengthen the bonapartism of the capitalist state, at the same time as resolutely opposing the reactionary bourgeoisie. Therefore, we called on Venezuelan workers to "*cast a blank ballot (votar nulo)* or abstain in the constitutional referendum." Far from being a call to remain passive, we urged class-conscious workers to "join in mobilizations to block any attempt by rightist reaction backed by U.S.

imperialism to stage a coup d'état or seize territory during or following the voting." In the face of the economic sabotage by the bourgeois reactionaries, creating shortages of good and other basic necessities, we called for "seizing control of the entire agricultural/food manufacturing and marketing chain and imposing workers control." And since the danger of a putsch had not disappeared, we called for the formation of "*armed worker and peasant militias independent of state control.*" In all this, we emphasized, the key is to "build an authentically Leninist-Trotskyist *revolutionary workers party*," based on the Trotskyist program of permanent revolution and guided by proletarian internationalism rather than the "Bolivarian" nationalism of Chávez. ■

Canadian Elections...

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movement, with a few particular nuances, which advocates a popular front diametrically opposed to the interests of working men and women.

For our part, the Leninist-Trotskyists of the League for the Fourth International do not support, even critically, any of the parties that are presenting candidates in this election. Not one of them in any way draws a class line clearly opposed to the interests of the bourgeoisie. That is why we say there is no choice for the working class in this election. Even the parties claiming to be "communist" only seek to rearrange the capitalist system so as to render it more "human" and "liveable" for working people and the oppressed. The real solution lies in building a *revolutionary workers party* which seeks to rally the most combative sectors of the working class at the head of all the oppressed, in the struggle to overthrow capitalism in the framework of a *North American federation of workers republics* leading to a socialist society.

The LFI is committed to this fundamental task, and to carry this out we seek to achieve the broadest possible unity of the working class in Québec and English Canada. That is why we advocate independence for Québec with the aim of putting an end, once and for all, to the historical national oppression of the Quebec nation, and also to remove this issue from the agenda. It is only in this way that it will be possible to demonstrate to the workers of the two nations that their real enemy is their respective capitalist class and not the working class of the "other" nation.

We also defend the right of indigenous peoples to freely decide their destiny, as they have been heavily oppressed and plundered by the imperialist Canadian and Québec bourgeoisie. We support the struggle for the recognition of their ancestral rights that are threatened both by the English Canadian chauvinists and Québec nationalists. The LFI calls for full citizenship rights for all immigrants, documented or without documents, and for the end of all measures of intimidation, harassment and discrimination against them. We say that only *international socialist revolution* can definitely put an end to all forms of national and linguistic oppression as well as national antagonisms in Canada and elsewhere. ■

DR. ERWIN ROY JOHN, a leading neuroscientist and founder of the Brain Research Laboratories at New York University's School of Medicine, died on February 28. The son of an Austrian father and Hungarian mother interned in the U.S. as "enemy aliens" during

World War One, he grew up on relief (as welfare was called at the time) during the Depression, joining the Young Communist League at the age of 13. After getting a job at the Republic aircraft factory on Long Island, he was a volunteer organizer for the United Auto Workers-Congress of Industrial Organizations. The victory of Francisco Franco's rightist forces in Spain affected him deeply, as the older brothers of some of his closest friends had gone to fight in the Spanish Civil War.

Volunteering for combat in WWII, he was an infantryman in the Battle of the Bulge, where many of his friends died, as well as the invasion of Germany. During the occupation of Germany, he was brought up on charges for allowing Polish former slave laborers to take rags from a factory, and for talking back to the officer who said he was there to "defend property." After the war, he found out that 27 members of his mother's family had died in Auschwitz, but never discovered what had become of his father's relatives.

Working briefly as a machinist at the Atomic Energy Commission, Roy rejected that institution and decided to use his GI Bill benefits to get a degree in science, while driving a cab at night. At the University of Chicago he organized a student political party to fight McCarthyism. This led to repeated visits from the FBI, which sought to intimate him and his then wife, a concentration camp survivor who, like him, was well-known for her active opposition to the Cold War witch hunt and Chicago's version of Jim Crow segregation.

After studying physics, Roy decided to study the workings of the human brain. Focused on the study of consciousness, his scientific work challenged the "localizationist" orthodoxy of the day, which claimed that memories are located in specific neurons. A confirmed atheist, he clashed with the Oxford-educated neuroscience pioneer Sir John Eccles, whose relentless advocacy of this viewpoint led him to champion the Catholic Church (as, supposedly, only a divine being could direct the firing of so many disparate memory-holding cells).

Despite decades of blacklisting, documented in thick files gained through the Freedom of Information Act, Roy became internationally renowned as the pioneer of the theory that memory is distributed throughout the entire brain. As a memorial statement noted, he was "committed to translating his

E. Roy John 1924-2009

discoveries in basic neuroscience into clinical practice," notably with regard to coma and brain trauma, developing a brain-imaging technique called Neurometrics. His work led to over 25 patents in medical technology, together with others much further afield (most

recently, in 2008, for a "self-deploying automatic inflatable fire escape"!). A passionate opponent of racism and bigotry, in one of his collaborative studies with researchers in Cuba, Mexico, Barbados, Sweden, Korea and elsewhere, he conclusively demonstrated that the development of the human brain could be described in universal equations that shredded the last vestiges of the pseudo-science of "race."¹ A black steelworker who is a leading member of the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil wrote that he would always remember how Roy's work showed conclusively and for all time that "a black man's brain is the same as that of a white man."

Yet Roy refused to write a popular article on this for non-scientists, arguing that to do so would dignify the "theories" of the notorious Arthur Jensen and other racialsists.

John family



Dr. Roy John (right) with Fidel Castro, mid-1980s.

After moving to Rochester, New York, Roy dropped away from the CP milieu in the early 1960s, but became an outspoken defender of the Cuban Revolution, giving a public speech in defense of the embattled island during the 1962 Missile Crisis – and eventually becoming known as "the father of Cuban neuroscience." He worked closely with the Centro Nacional de Investigaciones

Científicas (National Center for Scientific Research), helping make neuroscience an integral part of the island's world-renowned advances in health care. In a message sent after his death, Cuban National Assembly President Ricardo Alarcón (whom Roy befriended when he was Cuba's ambassador to the United Nations), wrote: "We will never forget his generous contribution to the development of Cuban scientific institutions." After the New York offices of the U.S.-Cuba Health Exchange Roy founded were blown up by right-wing Cuban exiles, he and his family had to guard their house with shotguns when it too was threatened by the counterrevolutionaries.

During the U.S. war against Vietnam, Roy organized the Committee of Professionals Against the War, and would speak with great admiration for the National Liberation Front (Vietcong) fighters he met at the 1968 Cultural Congress of Havana, who could disassemble a whole printing press in less

¹ See "Developmental Equations Reflect Brain Dysfunction," *Science* 210 (1980).

than a minute when U.S. bombers were sighted on the horizon.

After the 1973 Pinochet coup in Chile, Roy worked to bring to the U.S. a number of leftists who had been imprisoned or persecuted. He was attracted to the international campaigns that the Spartacist tendency organized in defense of MIR (Revolutionary Left Movement) leaders Bautista van Schouwen and Alejandro Romero, as well as Trotskyist miners' leader Mario Muñoz. In the 1980s, he gave contributions to Salvadoran insurgents, enthusiastically supported labor/black mobilizations against the Klan, and started a long and deeply-felt commitment to winning the freedom of radical black journalist Mumia Abu-Jamal, the former Black Panther who has spent more than a quarter century on death row for a crime he did not commit.

Roy John was a friend of the Internationalist Group/League for the Fourth International from its inception, expressing particular enthusiasm for our work in Latin America, notably that of the LFI's Brazilian and Mexican sections. Formed by the Depression decade and the events of those years like the Spanish Civil War, by WWII and the fight against McCarthyism, he never turned his back on the radical ideals of his youth and never lost hope in a future revolution of the workers and the dispossessed. Although he read Trotsky and came to admire his struggle against Stalinism, Roy was not a Trotskyist. But he kept a poster of Lenin on the wall of his lab (where he continued to work almost up to the day of his death), proudly answering "yes" when visitors asked, "Does that mean you're a communist?"

Like many others around the world, we will miss him. ■

Zionist Mass Murder...

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It was Israel that broke the truce on the evening of November 5, when it entered Gaza and attacked Hamas fighters. That attack occurred just as U.S. polls were closing and was intended in part as a message to the Democratic president-elect Barack Obama. Although the most right-wing Zionist militarist hawks in Israel and the U.S. were uncomfortable with Obama, he has made utterly clear that he fully supports Israel's more than 40-year occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, while justifying Israel's terror attacks on the Palestinian people.

While Israeli and U.S. spokesmen and their kept media routinely label Hamas "terrorist," the actions of this conservative Islamist movement can't even come close to the routine terror bombings and indiscriminate attacks on the Palestinian people by the Zionists and their imperialist patrons. Meanwhile, U.S. colonial occupation forces kill hundreds of Iraqis and Afghans monthly. Israel's siege of Gaza is an attempt to terrorize and starve the Palestinian population into submission akin to the Nazis' "collective punishment" in occupied Europe.

The Internationalist Group and League for the Fourth International condemn the Israeli mass murder in Gaza and call for action by the international working class in defense of Gaza and the Palestinian people, including efforts to break the siege. Impotent consumer boycotts of Israeli goods or Israeli academics do not target the Zionist rulers or their imperialist backers, whereas a refusal by transport workers to un-

load Israeli ships or planes is the kind of *class* action that could send a powerful message to the racist rulers.

Last May 1, dock workers in the U.S. shut down all 27 West Coast ports to stop the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, while demanding immediate withdrawal U.S. troops from the entire Middle East. If such actions were repeated, particularly in Europe, it could strike a powerful blow in defense of the besieged Palestinian masses.

As we pointed out in a previous article ("Defend Gaza! Defeat U.S./Israel War on the Palestinian People!" *The Internationalist* No. 27, May-June 2008), in addition to supplying the Israeli war machine with advanced weaponry, the Pentagon now effectively controls the military forces of Fatah, headed by Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas. In the West Bank, Fatah paramilitary forces, armed and advised by the U.S., suppress opponents of the Zionist occupation. While giving no political support to the Islamist Hamas, or to various Palestinian nationalist groups, we call to defeat the joint Israeli/U.S./Fatah war.

The first task today must be to defend the Palestinian people against the Israeli occupier and oppressor. Recognizing the Palestinian right to self-determination and to a Palestinian state, proletarian internationalists also recognize the right to existence and national self-determination of the Hebrew-speaking population while opposing a religion-based ethnically exclusive regime such as Zionist Israel – a state founded on the basis of stealing the Palestinians' lands and expelling the people – which is inherently oppressive to the non-Jewish population and Arabs in particular.

The Trotskyists of the League for the Fourth International stand for an Arab-Hebrew workers state in a socialist federation of the Near East. As we wrote in our previous article:

"Clearly our call is today that of a tiny minority, but as the dead end of Zionism, Palestinian nationalism and Islamic fundamentalism is made increasingly clear, many on both sides of the national divide are recognizing there can only be a harmonious resolution of competing claims in the framework of a single state. Our key point is that such a state is impossible without a revolution through the joint efforts of Palestinian Arab and Hebrew-speaking working people. It will be necessary for Israelis themselves to deal with the Zionist butchers who have terrorized the Palestinian population, while Palestinians must throw off the hold of Islamicists who relegate women to the status of chattel, of domestic slaves.

"To achieve this, it is necessary to build a common Trotskyist party in all of Palestine, as part of a struggle to reforge the Fourth International of Leon Trotsky. In the United States, it is necessary to build a revolutionary workers party in struggle both against the Republicans and the Democrats. Today, not only Hillary Clinton is in the pocket of the Zionist supporters, but so is Barack Obama, and the victory of either in the U.S. presidential elections augurs ill for the Palestinian people. The struggle to bring justice to the millions of Palestinians who have languished under the iron heel of Zionist occupation, and who have fought back heroically against overwhelming odds, can only be part of a broader struggle to defeat the U.S. imperialist occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan." ■

For International Working-Class Action Against the Israeli Militarists, U.S. Imperialism and Its Arab Pawns!

Zionist Mass Murder

Break the Siege, Defend Gaza!

**Bush and Obama Back
Zionist Butchers –
Drive U.S. Imperialism
Out of Iraq,
Afghanistan and the
Near East!**

**For an Internationalist
Workers Party!**

31 DECEMBER 2008 – Just before noon local time on Saturday, December 27, Israeli warplanes launched a massive bomb attack on the densely populated Gaza Strip. More than 270 Palestinians were killed as wave after wave of U.S.-supplied F-16 fighter jets and Apache helicopters dropped more than 100 bombs. Another 15 were killed by renewed air strikes on Sunday as Israeli infantry and tanks massed on the border for a possible ground invasion reoccupying the area where 1.5 million people are jammed into 140 square miles, barely twice the size of Washington, D.C.

The attack on Gaza sparked demonstrations in West Bank cities including several thousand in Nazareth, while hundreds of Jewish and Arab leftists marched in Tel Aviv to protest the Israeli assault. Police attacked the demo and arrested a number of protesters.

The Israeli military said they were targeting Hamas installations, and the bombs hit numerous government offices in Gaza City and the southern town of Rafah. The Islamic fundamentalist movement Hamas won Palestinian elections in January 2006 and has ruled Gaza as its elected government for the last year and a half. Many of the dead were police officers, although



Yasser Saymeh/AFP

A victim of a strike on the Buriej refugee camp in Gaza.

numerous civilians were killed, including a number of children, as schools had just let out for lunch. *The Zionists' attack on downtown areas was deliberate mass murder.*

The Israeli slaughter was carried out with the full knowledge and a green light from its imperialist patrons in Washington, as well as U.S. client regimes such as Egypt. The White House issued a statement blaming Hamas for breaking the truce with rocket attacks. The few dozen Qassem rockets launched from Gaza were in retaliation for earlier Israeli attacks and have not killed a single person, while injuring only a handful. Meanwhile, Israel has completely sealed off Gaza for over a week, not allowing in food, fuel or even medical supplies.

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**Defend the Palestinian People – For an Arab/Hebrew
Workers State in a Socialist Federation of the Near East**