



Imperialism Unmasked by Iraq Debacle

The profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilization lies unveiled before our eyes, turning from its home, where it assumes respectable forms, to the colonies, where it goes naked.

— Karl Marx, 1853

The U.S. occupation of Iraq has been knocked into a crisis from which it has no satisfactory way out. The sensational revelations in May about the Abu Ghraib torture atrocities came on top of the linked Sunni and Shi'ite uprisings in April that the U.S. military, despite its widespread slaughter of both civilians and insurgents, has still not been able to suppress. And all parties await the next explosion that they know is coming. The multi-sided debacle threatens not only to undermine the Bush administration but to deliver an enormous and lasting defeat to the American imperialist ruling class as a whole.

These recent events have greatly strengthened the already overwhelming rejection of the occupation by the Iraqi population. And they have led to a significant swing against the war by public opinion in the U.S. The ruling class itself is seriously alarmed by the fallout from "Torturegate." This was shown, for example, by the numerous calls in the press and in Congress for Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and other top officials to resign – and even by public doubts over the war voiced by neo-conservative former warhawks. It is also apparent that top officers in the military and CIA are telling journalists of their contempt for the Rumsfeld-Wolfowitz crew that runs the Defense Department and the occupation. These bourgeois rats cannot desert their ship of state; when it begins to founder they go for each other's throats.

The capitalists' fears are fully justified. The U.S. empire now faces an insoluble dilemma in Iraq. It cannot withdraw without



Iraqi protest outside Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad. Torture scandal symbolized U.S. rape of Iraq.

seriously endangering its hegemonic position as the world's top imperialist power and its dominance over the Middle East. On the other hand, it cannot stay in Iraq without greatly escalating its bloody attempts to suppress the masses, thereby abandoning the invasion's vital goals of pacification and stabilization.

The crisis for the ruling class reaches beyond Iraq. The patriotic unity born of September 11, 2001 has been cracked; the democratic mask that U.S. imperialism hides behind has been ripped off. The invasion of Iraq turned from the U.S. ruling class's greatest triumph since the fall of the Soviet Union into its worst night-

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COFI/LRP Report

COFI GERMANY

On April 3 the major unions summoned their members to a day of protest in Cologne, Stuttgart and Berlin. About 600,000 were mobilized nation-wide, with COFI participating in Cologne and Berlin. In contrast to the militancy of the November 1, 2003 demonstration in Berlin, which took place against the wishes of the union bureaucrats, the April 3 event was noticeably more sedate, though many workers eagerly took our leaflet calling for an indeterminate general strike. (See the German-language section of our website.) In Berlin, Michael Sommer, head of one of Germany's strongest unions (the DGB), vowed that if the governing Social-Democratic Party (SPD) didn't change its course of attacks on the living standards of the working class, then "we'll be back." Beyond this frightening threat to demonstrate peacefully again some day, Sommer didn't tread. However, the sheer number of people out on the streets did give a few in the SPD and Greens cause for concern, with calls for a review of the reform program in a couple of years!

By May Day, the union leaders were talking a bit more left about potential strike and other measures. Some in the SPD's left-wing called for a new (reformist) worker's party. (See "No To New Reformist Parties!" in PR 63 or on our website for our analysis.) But the overwhelming majority of union bosses have made no sign of breaking with their SPD chums. Although they have come down hard on the left-wingers inside the SPD, facing a great loss of membership and votes, Chancellor Schroeder & Co. have been publicly announcing a potential revision of their reform plans.

This bluff may for a time give some room for maneuver to the union bosses, who didn't have much of substance to say to the approximately 25,000 people who showed up to the annual May Day rally in Berlin. This was as usual more of a big picnic outing than a serious day of protest. Our comrade joined the march leading up to the rally; most of the 7500 people there were less enthusiastic about our general strike call than in the past period.

While the union bureaucrats were attempting to lull the workers to sleep, the bourgeoisie and right-wing elements tried to steal May Day for themselves. The leading players of European capital chose the traditional day of working-class struggle as the day for the official widening of the European Union. There were huge,

state-sponsored celebrations as European imperialism swallowed up ten East European states in an attempt to enhance their opportunities to exploit the East European working class. They also aimed to beat out their imperialist rival, the U.S., for labor and commodity markets, and to build a political-military cushion of new NATO members against the prospect of future threats from Russia.

Meanwhile, about 2000 neo-Nazis from all over Germany met in East Berlin in order to march through immigrant and leftist neighborhoods. They were met by about 3000 leftists who forced them to circle back, only allowing the Nazis to taint four kilometers of Berlin with their racist presence. Of course, the police were out in force in order to protect the "democratic rights" of the Nazis. In the ensuing attack on the leftists, about 75 people were taken into custody. Although the Nazis didn't manage to get very far, they did end up splitting the left forces, with about 3000 showing up for a "Revolutionary" May Day march in a different part of town. During this militant if uneventful march, many youth enthusiastically took our leaflets on the general strike and Iraq.

At an Arbeitermacht (Workers Power) educational on Trotskyism in early May, we defended our theory of statified capitalism, Stalinism, and the need for the re-creation of the Fourth International rather than the building of a Fifth. On the last weekend in May, a Berlin comrade attended the national educational conference of the CWI's German group, Sozialistische Alternative (SAV). Arguing for our conception of revolutionary work in the unions (see our pamphlet "Communist Work in the Unions" and our article in PR 63), he unanswerably critiqued the reformist rank and filism that was being overwhelmingly offered as the only way to radicalize the unions.

CWI's Ukraine Scandal

PR readers will know that we and other left groups swindled in Ukraine by CWI operatives have been demanding that the CWI leadership come clean on the matter. Although they have expelled their former Ukrainian leaders, they gave a slap on the wrist to Ilya Budraitskis, their crooked Russian leader (see PR 69 and website statements). At the SAV conference, our literature table displayed a placard addressed to the SAV ranks, many of whom had never
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How to Reach Us

COFI Central Office & LRP New York (new address)
P.O. Box 1936, Murray Hill Station, New York, NY 10156
(212) 330-9017
e-mail: lrpcofi@earthlink.net; website: www.lrp-cofi.org

LRP Chicago
Box 204, 1924 W. Montrose, Chicago, IL 60613
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COFI Australia
League Press, P.O. Box 148, Fairfield, Vic. 3078

COFI Germany
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53111, Bonn
e-mail: KOVİ.BRD@t-online.de
website: www.lrp-cofi.org/KOVİ_BRD

Proletarian Revolution

Published by the Socialist Voice Publishing Co. for the League for the Revolutionary Party (Communist Organization for the Fourth International). ISSN: 0894-0754.

Editorial Board: Walter Daum, Sy Landy, editors; Dave Franklin, Evelyn Kaye, Matthew Richardson.

Production: Jim Morgan

Subscriptions: \$7.00 for 8 issues; \$15.00 overseas airmail, supporting subscriptions and institutions. Striking, unemployed and workfare workers may subscribe for \$1.00.

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P.O. Box 1936, Murray Hill Station
New York, NY 10156, USA.

Walter Daum vs. John Kerry

LRP Revolutionary in Face-to-Face Confrontation with Democratic Presidential Candidate over Iraq

For over a year now, the U.S. has prosecuted a bi-partisan and bloody colonialist campaign in Iraq. Democratic Party Presidential candidate John Kerry supported the U.S. invasion of Iraq, and has long argued for sending more troops to crush the anti-imperialist resistance. Criminally, the U.S. left has for the most part rallied to the “Anybody But Bush” banner and remained silent about Kerry’s viciously imperialist commitments.

This deafening silence was finally broken during one of Kerry’s campaign meetings at City College in New York City on April 14. There, in a face-to-face argument, League for the Revolutionary Party supporter Walter Daum attacked Kerry’s bloody imperialist policy in a confrontation that received widespread national and international media coverage. For example, CNN’s headline was “Kerry debates anti-war activist in New York.”

As the *New York Times* wrote the next day, “Mr. Kerry ... found himself defending the president’s stay-the-course approach in Iraq, insofar as both officials have made stability in Iraq a precondition for withdrawing American troops. In a town-hall-style meeting attended by more than 400 people, with Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton and Representative Charles B. Rangel beside him, Mr. Kerry came under attack from the left when a retired professor of mathematics, Walter Daum, questioned him on Iraq.”

After being called on to ask a question of Kerry, comrade Daum began by making clear that the popular armed resistance by Iraqis to the U.S. forces occupying their country is justified. He went on to tell Kerry:

You have said, “Stay the course.” George Bush calls the people there “thugs;” you call them “extremists.” But they hated Saddam Hussein, and they now hate us. They wanted Saddam Hussein out. Now they want the United States out. And you say, “Stay the course.” What the United States is doing is bombing hospitals, bombing mosques, sniping at civilians, killing hundreds of civilians, wounding thousands of civilians. And you say, “Stay the course.” Is that the criminal course that you want to stay?

This is an imperialist country that’s fighting an imperialist war. You say “stay the course” of this imperialist war, and you say you have a stark difference from George Bush. People hate George Bush. By the end of your presidency people will hate you for the same thing. You may fool some of the Americans that you are different from George Bush on this war, but you’re not fooling most of the world, and



Thurman E. Sanabria

you’re not going to fool Iraqis.

In response, Kerry began by covering his support for continuing the Bush White House’s policy of occupying Iraq by saying, unbelievably, that he shared a desire to see American forces get out of Iraq. Not letting him get away with this lie, comrade Daum interrupted Kerry, insisting “No you don’t! You say ‘stay the course!’” Then Kerry argued that the U.S. couldn’t pull out of Iraq because of the danger of civil war; the country had to be “stabilized.” Daum broke in again to point out what the world press has reported, that Iraq’s Sunnis and Shi’ites are united against the occupation. Arrogantly, Kerry ended the “debate” by charging that Daum wasn’t listening. But in fact the damage was done – the liberal/left conspiracy of silence over Kerry’s imperialist program was broken.

ELECTORALISM VERSUS MASS STRUGGLE

The capitalist media, of course, could only understand comrade Daum’s confrontation with Kerry in electoralist terms. MSNBC went so far as to question the significance for Kerry’s campaign of what they called “the Daum vote” (“White House Derby: Whip Hand from Outside,” April 15) – potential Democratic voters who won’t support Kerry because of his basic agreement with Bush’s occupation of Iraq.

On the contrary, revolutionaries understand, in spite of the efforts of liberals to make it appear otherwise, that the Democratic Party is a capitalist, imperialist party not fundamentally different from the Republicans. We never support it; working-class independence from the capitalists is for us a matter of principle. Rather, revolutionaries look to the mass struggles of the working class and oppressed, from the anti-U.S. uprising in Iraq to future mass struggles at home, which have the potential to not

just set back the imperialists' attacks but ultimately to overthrow the entire capitalist system through socialist revolutions.

The bourgeois media isn't solely to blame for creating the idea that people who call themselves socialists might support Kerry. As we have noted, most of what passes itself for the left in this country has embraced the perspective that anyone, even Kerry, would be better than Bush, and have covered up his pro-war, pro-colonial occupation positions. Even some supposedly revolutionary socialists have made their contributions to creating this situation.

BUILDING THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

The LRP will continue to seek to unite with all others in building united actions against U.S. imperialism's crimes and all the capitalists' attacks. However our small but important success in challenging Kerry shows that the real revolutionary alternative to the imperialists will be built by sharp and principled struggle, not opportunist maneuvers. On our website and in our magazine *Proletarian Revolution*, the LRP has consistently argued that the Iraq war was not just the choice of President Bush and his "neo-conservative" advisers. It was rooted in the drives of world imperialism to keep the oppressed masses of the world subject to super-exploitation. Hence it was supported by both big capitalist parties in the U.S., the Democrats as well as the Republicans. Based on our Marxist understanding of the Iraqi events, we have fought for the demand that U.S. imperialism must be forced out of Iraq now and for military defense of the resistance in Iraq against the occupation.

Similarly, the LRP has also consistently supported the Palestinian resistance against Israel. We have come to confer-



The "Anybody but Bush" crowd. The anti-war coalition *United for Peace & Justice*, headed by Leslie Cagan (center), focuses its attacks on the pro-war liar Bush as opposed to the pro-war liar Kerry.

ences and demonstrations with the slogans "Self-Determination for Palestine: All Israel Is "Occupied Territory!" and "Smash Zionism through Workers Revolution! For a Socialist Federation of the Middle East!"

If you too want to enlist in the revolutionary class war for a Marxist alternative to the bloody, racist imperialists, then come and work with a fighting organization that is not afraid of taking on the supposedly "progressive" defenders of capitalism. Check out the LRP. ●

Widespread Media Coverage of Our Confrontation with John Kerry

A sample of the thousands of notices that appeared in newspapers and on the Web.

"During a town hall meeting at City College, Kerry was confronted by Walter Daum, a retired mathematics teacher at the college, who said the United States should withdraw immediately, angrily accusing Kerry of backing an imperialist war and of having the same policy as the president."

– *Washington Post*

"'People hate George Bush, but by the end of your presidency people may hate you for the same thing,' said Walter Daum ... to a smattering of applause. 'You may fool some of the Americans who think that you are different from George Bush on this war, but you're not fooling most of the world and you're not going to fool Iraqis.'"

– *New York Newsday*



ISO Fibs: “We Protested Kerry Too”

The statement below was issued by the LRP on April 19, 2004.

When John Kerry made a campaign stop at the City College of New York (CCNY) on April 14, LRPer Walter Daum made the national news for his face-to-face confrontation with the Democratic Party candidate over Iraq. The International Socialist Organization (ISO), like the LRP, has supporters at CCNY, and now they want to share the notoriety.

So after several people had posted congratulations for Walter’s intervention on CCNY and City University e-mail bulletin boards, Shaun Harkin of the ISO wrote back, saying: “Members of the CCNY International Socialist Organization and the CCNY Campus Antiwar Network also protested Kerry’s visit to CCNY. Our members handed out flyers to people intending to attend Kerry’s speech and they also unfurled a banner inside the hall when Kerry was speaking saying: ‘Kerry Take A Stand: Bring the Troops Home Now!’ The banner was visible on NY1 and CNN.”

Sadly, Shaun is not telling the truth. The ISO did not protest against candidate Kerry. Instead, willfully ignoring Kerry’s repeated support for the invasion of Iraq and for sending more troops to crush the Iraqi anti-occupation struggle, the ISO joined with others and hopelessly appealed to Kerry to back withdrawing the troops.

Here are the facts: In the lead-up to the Kerry meeting, the LRP appealed to the ISO, SLAM and other anti-war activists to join us in a united protest against Kerry. But the ISO chose not to. Instead they handed out a flyer to people going into the meeting which featured a number of softball “Questions for Sen. Kerry.” On Iraq, these included, “Why are you calling for more troops to be sent to Iraq instead of bringing the troops home and giving Iraqis back control over their own country?” “Do you support prolonging the occupation because you think Iraqis are not capable of governing their own country?” and “Why do you think the U.S. is occupying Iraq and why do you think we should stay there?” And inside the meeting, they held up their banner.

Some protest! First, the ISO encouraged people to question Kerry instead of calling on them to denounce Kerry as an imperialist hack. The only conclusion that could be drawn from the ISO’s flyer is that while Kerry may have some incorrect positions, he is at least someone you can have a discussion with. After all, can you imagine the ISO asking such questions of George W. Bush? Of course not. The ISO gave Kerry kid-glove treatment.

In contrast to this mild-mannered approach to Kerry, and in the absence of the united protest we wanted, LRPers outside the meeting presented the hard truth, not “questions.” We hawked our magazine, *Proletarian Revolution*, with its headline, “Democrats No Answer to Bush,” and loudly called out our slogans: “A vote for Kerry is a vote for war and occupation,” and “Democrats and Republicans – two parties of imperialist war and occupation.”

Second, it was good that ISO supporters and other members of the Campus AntiWar Network smuggled a banner into the meeting, but its message was in the same spirit as their question sheet. While Walter Daum was blasting Kerry for his blatant pro-occupation position, labeling it imperialist and criminal, they unfurled their slogan: “Kerry Take A Stand: Troops Out Now.” As if Kerry hadn’t already taken a clear stand, both in favor of the war and for sending more troops to Iraq!

This banner actually implied that if Kerry would take the stand they called for, the ISO would support him. We don’t think the ISO as an organization is yet ready to endorse a Democrat, but they are ready to accommodate their slogans to those who



ISO’s so-called “protest” at CCNY.

endorse “Anybody but Bush.” This is not how genuine revolutionaries fight imperialist criminals who support massacres in Iraq and Palestine.

What’s behind the ISO’s soft-pedaling on Kerry and Shaun’s little fib?

The ISO’s opportunist leaders adapt their politics to the prevailing moods among radical college students in order to win the maximum number of new recruits – even if those recruits don’t fully understand or really agree with the ISO’s views. Thus during the 2000 presidential election they supported Ralph Nader because he was popular among their target audience, in spite of his pro-capitalist, nationalist and racist views. This year the ISO has decided that their best hope for recruitment is to appeal to left-liberal students who have illusions in the Democrats and Kerry. Thus they welcome new members who will vote for Kerry instead of honestly trying to convince them of their mistaken views up front. To attract such recruits, the ISO styles its public campaigning and *Socialist Worker* newspaper headlines in a consciously anti-Republican fashion – “Bush’s Iron Fist” (April 14, sold outside the City College meeting), “Bush’s War Lies” (March 26), “Bush’s This”, “Bush’s That,” etc. – downplaying the bi-partisan nature of the U.S.’s bloody colonialist oppression. The fact that the Democrats are competing with the Republicans over who wants to be toughest in Iraq is conveniently buried in other articles.

It was hard enough for the ISO to appear revolutionary in 2000 when they endorsed Nader, who supported the war on Afghanistan and didn’t want immigrants to get jobs other than cleaning toilets. (For specifics, see our pamphlet *The Nader Hoax*.) It’s even more difficult when they’re softballing the Democrats this time around. So when a genuine revolutionary group (which the ISO likes to belittle as sectarian), after publicly appealing for a united protest, goes it alone against Kerry and gets widespread media attention and praise from activists for exposing him, it’s time for damage control ... and Shaun’s little fib.

We who want to fight U.S. imperialism might well hoist a banner of our own: “ISO Take a Stand: Out Kerry Now!” It’s time to stop all the “Bush’s This” and “Bush’s That” headlines that peddle illusions in Kerry. Tell the world – out loud – that the Republicans and Democrats are both parties of murderous imperialism. Anything less only weakens the struggle. ●

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Wal-Mart Vanguard of Capitalism

by Dave Franklin

The recent struggle of supermarket workers in southern California – where members of United Food and Commercial Workers suffered substantial and cruel concessions in a contract with major grocery chains in the area – highlighted the enormous and growing role of the Wal-Mart company in the class struggle. To be sure, both the grocery bosses and union leaders exaggerated the Wal-Mart factor as an excuse to pile on the givebacks. But through its looming threat as a non-union, low-wage grocer (which, although the nation's largest, is only one tentacle of its massive operation), Wal-Mart did serve as an unseen participant in the bargaining and general struggle, a battering ram against the workers even in an area where it does not have immediate prospects of dominating. In many other arenas, its role is more direct if sometimes not obvious.

The Wal-Mart issue is huge; in part because Wal-Mart itself is huge. It has annual revenue of about \$230 billion. It is the largest company in the world, and the largest employer in the U.S. and Mexico. It has 3500 stores in this country alone. Every week, 138 million shoppers visit Wal-Mart. And it only plans to get bigger wherever it can.

But just as important as its size is *how* it got to obtain such stature. Wal-Mart has become a giant by mastering not simply the techniques of capitalist exploitation in general, but the more specific mechanisms that capitalists have developed in the past several decades to keep their system afloat. It has become an operation as widely admired by fellow capitalists as it is despised by militant and revolutionary-minded workers.

No question about it: in order to fundamentally alter the course of the American – and increasingly the international – class struggle, Wal-Mart has to be confronted head-on. And it can be. Its vast, oppressed and potentially rebellious workforce can be mobilized to turn a capitalist bastion into a spearhead of the proletarian struggle. As we will discuss in the continuation of this article, unions are already planning a campaign to organize Wal-Mart. But a successful struggle will involve a strategy and fight that goes far beyond the pitiful excuses for “organizing” that the current labor leadership of reformist bureaucrats offers to protect their own privileged but withering positions. What is ultimately needed, for Wal-Mart and all workers, is a revolutionary proletarian leadership dedicated to overthrowing the system of which Wal-Mart is such a forceful and vile sponsor.

CRISIS AND CAPITALIST ATTACK

Wal-Mart opened its first store in 1962 in Bentonville, Arkansas; it secured its status as a mega-enterprise only in recent years. That is, the brainchild of Sam Walton came of age *after* the post-World War II economic boom. It is worth examining the outline of the class struggle in this time in order to understand how Wal-Mart became the monster it is today.

The post-war boom ended in the 1970's, and with it a period of substantial improvement in working class life in this country. The boom was based on the depression, world war and massive defeats of the working class in previous years. The combination of economic growth with a combative working class resulted in substantial wage increases for large sections of the working class.



Ad on UFCW's Canadian website mocking Wal-Mart's smiley-face commercials. UFCW bureaucrats, infamous for selling out recent California supermarket strike, can hardly provide a militant inspiration for Wal-Mart workers.

Further, the boom produced the remarkable growth of the middle class to which significant portions of the working class, mainly white, could realistically aspire.

But when stagnation succeeded the boom, the capitalist bosses were obliged to press an offensive against the working class that has yet to run its course; only through increasing the rate of exploitation could capitalism hold off full-scale depression. The capitalist class has been able to deploy traditional economic weapons, such as mass layoffs, lockouts, speed-up, etc., to carry out its drive. But such blunt instruments have had their cruel effectiveness enhanced by developments like automation and work reorganization through the “team” concept.

A strategy that has particular relevance to Wal-Mart (and which was itself made possible through automation) has been the outsourcing of production to areas of cheaper and cheaper labor in the world. Automation allows production facilities to be sent abroad while the major decision-making centers remain at home. Changes in product design and quantities produced, for example, can be sent by computer from headquarters to production centers in a fraction of the time and costs of previous methods. At the same time, the concentration of capital into larger firms and fewer hands was expanded. This has given the participating capitalists more leverage and resources to use against workers.

The bosses have called on the services of the capitalist state to assist them, and – no surprise – the political powers obliged.

From bail-outs of capitalist firms (Chrysler in the late '70's, the Savings and Loan debacle a decade later) to open strike-breaking (Ronald Reagan's destruction of the air traffic controllers union – PATCO), the bourgeois government has come squarely down on the side of the bosses and used the powers at its disposal to repress working-class resistance. While the Republicans have been more open in their loyalty to capitalist profit and control, the Democrats have played a similar role. Through Democratic and Republican administrations alike, the prosecution of the class struggle has been stepped up. The National Labor Relations Board, set up to channel workers' struggles through orderly legal processes, has become increasingly an open tool of bosses to deny basic rights to employees.

During the Bush II administration, in the wake of the recession that began shortly beforehand and under the impact of September 11, these attacks hit a new tempo. They have affected the working class as a whole but have particularly hit oppressed minority workers. Millions of jobs have been lost during this period, including in the jobless "recovery" supposedly under way.

UNION BUREAUCRATS STIFLE STRUGGLE

During this long period of capitalist offensive, the trade union bureaucracy, the leadership of the only mass organizations of the working class, made no attempt to organize a serious class defense and fought against those who have done so. Even during the post-war boom, the bureaucracy was busy serving the capitalists; they surrendered workers' shop-floor power and agreed to productivity drives – in exchange for wage increases and their own enrichment. With the shift to crisis, the union misleaders completely accepted the bosses' dictum that the workers pay for the crisis.

The bosses extracted concession after concession, with the labor bureaucrats mustering their energy to suppress rank and file anger (sometimes openly, as in the Hormel strike of the mid-'80's – see our account in *PR* 26) and to steer the attacks so as to favor themselves first, then the more skilled and higher seniority workers (disproportionately white), and finally current union members. Under this order, new hires would be the worst hit with concessions, as manifested in the rapid growth of two-tier contracts. The bureaucrats watched PATCO go down the tubes – uttering hardly a whimper, much less leading support strikes; they called a mass rally only months later. Their preferred method of "struggle" has been to call on the capitalist state, in particular Democratic Party politicians, even though the bosses' politicians joined the anti-labor offensive.

This approach has only whetted the bosses' appetites for cut-backs, speed-up, outsourcing, etc. These attacks, along with economic contraction, fueled a savage wave of layoffs in basic manufacturing, including airlines, auto and textiles. Bosses have successfully targeted health-care benefits as a particular area for cuts. Work-rule changes that entail speed-up continue. And the union bureaucracy has continued to play along. The United Auto Workers, for example, made huge concessions to the auto bosses, particularly in parts plants, in its latest contracts, while the United Steelworkers have allowed massive pillaging of retirees' health and pension benefits. Billions of dollars worth of concessions were made by airline unions – which have already overseen a decline in real wages for two decades in the most heavily unionized sector of private industry. At United Parcel Service, the site of one of the rare victorious union struggles during this entire period in 1997, the company has been able to reverse gains and is trying an end run through Congress to attack pensions. One of the strongest local unions, Transport Workers Local 100 in New York, saw the supposedly militant Roger Toussaint leadership ram a



75,000 home health aides were organized by SEIU in Los Angeles, one of the few bright spots in recent organizing.

contract down the ranks' throats in 2002 that paves the way for mass layoffs among previously-protected bus and subway workers. The list, sadly, could go on.

All this has left the "labor movement" in shambles. This is most apparent in the private sector. By the end of last year, only 8.2 percent of workers in the private sector were organized in the country; only 15 percent of manufacturing workers are unionized. A smattering of successful organizing has hardly compensated for the bleeding of jobs in the heavily unionized industries – or simply the bleeding of union jobs in others. (The latter is most striking in trucking, where a militant union history – including the organizing of drivers by revolutionary Trotskyists in the 1930's – seems a faded memory amidst a current union membership of just 18 percent of the sector's labor force.)

There have been a few victories during this time. These included the UPS strike and one at Yale University in 2003. Large and successful organizing drives were made among hotel workers in Las Vegas by the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees (HERE) and health-care workers in Los Angeles by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). The struggles at UPS, Yale and in Las Vegas exemplified lessons that are particularly critical in the harsh bargaining climate of recent years: victories against hardened bosses occur not because of clever negotiating tactics but because the union ranks respond positively to preparation, resolve to undertake militant action and make clear they will wage a determined battle. (The organizing drive in Los Angeles is not so much an exception as a success built on special circumstances of a new health-care authority that did not actively fight unionization.) The UPS victory had the added advantage of being supported by most of the American working class. These are conditions that need to be kept in mind when preparing to fight Wal-Mart.

THE RISE OF WAL-MART

Behind Wal-Mart's folksy image is an organization that was intensely regimented and conservative from its inception, free of union contracts or virtually any form of welfare for its employees. In general, of course, this would give any company competitive advantages and a greater ability to exploit employees. At other times such conditions would have made it a tempting target for labor strife and organization. But in the years of capitalist offen-

sive and labor retreat, the company was given a clear field to refine and develop some of the sharpest weapons in the capitalist arsenal. Among them:

1) Low wages. The core of Wal-Mart's workforce – the sales “associates” at Wal-Mart stores – average \$8.23 an hour, well below the poverty level for a family of three. If depriving workers of adequate or any health coverage has become a favored technique at many companies, at Wal-Mart it is a particularly malicious specialty. Wal-Mart spends 30 percent less per employee on health care than its competitors. It makes new hires wait six months to sign up for a benefit plan – which excludes retirees and doesn't pay for basic needs like flu shots and child vaccinations (not to mention contraception). No wonder the presence of Wal-Mart was felt in the California grocery strike: the wage and benefit package for its grocery workers is \$9 to \$10 an hour less than that of the unionized workers in the California market.

Such a workforce will inevitably include many of the more oppressed layers of workers, including Blacks, Latinos and women. In recruiting from these layers, Wal-Mart pursues a strategy that condemns the great majority to a continued existence of misery in the proletariat's depths. (At the same time, the company has done little to alter the profile of its leadership as a white old boy's club – while 72 percent of hourly employees are women, 90 percent of top management and two-thirds of all management is male.)

Wal-Mart's low-wage policy reaches beyond its own employees. Wal-Mart insists that its suppliers consistently cut the costs of their products. These suppliers in turn look to squeeze their own workforce as the primary way to meet Wal-Mart's conditions. It is a fitting example of how struggle among the capitalists themselves serves as a mechanism of carrying out the class struggle against the workers.

2) Virulent anti-unionism. No company freely invites unions into its workplace out of sheer good will. But Wal-Mart has built a well-deserved reputation as one of the most anti-union employers around. It blends its bottom-line abhorrence of unions with an ideological ferocity. Its militant commitment to preventing labor organization has risen with its maturity and its limited but mounting engagements with union organizing. It openly tramples on what labor rights exist, fires pro-union personnel at the drop of a hat and subjects employees to a barrage of anti-union propaganda.

3) Use of globalization. In the late 1980's, Wal-Mart projected a “Buy America” campaign as part of its conservative nationalist appeal. But company officials did not let that prevent them from concluding that if they were to be able to buy goods as cheaply as possible, they would have to go where labor could be bought for the most miserable wages. So Wal-Mart forcefully sought sweatshop vendors around the world. It has not been content to farm work out to countries like Haiti, where the weekly wage is less than the \$10.97 price of one of the 375 Pocohontas shirts a worker makes in that period. Increasingly, the most reliably cheap sellers are located in China, and that is where Wal-Mart increasingly turns. It now buys \$12 billion worth of goods from China per year, a staggering ten percent of China's U.S. sales.

4) Concentration of capital. Nobody in the retail industry comes close to Wal-Mart's market share. Of course, it took time for the company to obtain this dominant status; but once acquired it wielded its power ruthlessly, to workers, suppliers and competitors alike. This has been a self-reinforcing process. As the company and its resources grew, it amassed a huge capital arsenal to use against labor unrest. It acquired even greater leverage over suppliers, who now fear that keeping a contract with such a customer is a matter of survival. And it has been able to undercut competi-

tion with price wars to obtain ever greater market share.

One thing that does *not* generally describe Wal-Mart's operation is modernization of production. Wal-Mart has not achieved its savings through any massive innovation of the labor process through technology that creates great increases in labor efficiency. Wal-Mart stores are relatively labor-intensive, low-tech affairs, as characterize the retail industry. The company was late to catch on to e-commerce. It has mainly done a good job of making workers do more for less. And while some economists credit its squeeze on suppliers as a big factor in what productivity increases have occurred nationally in recent years, there have been piecemeal improvements in other enterprises – likewise largely through squeezing their workforces. This situation pretty much describes latter-day capitalism, which despite the hoopla about automation in production, has basically defended its profits system through attacks on the proletariat's working and living conditions.

WAL-MART'S CAPITALISM

Through such weapons, Wal-Mart has obtained a comfortable pricing cushion and parlayed it into a winning sales strategy. Company spokesmen like to prattle about the “ten-foot attitude” (smiling at customers from ten feet away) and other hokum as key reasons for their commercial success. But that is not what draws customers. Even less of an attraction is the level of safety and comfort of their stores: over 25,000 customers were injured by unsecured merchandise in Wal-Mart stores in the mid-90's alone.

The real reason people shop at Wal-Mart, the one the bosses really advertise, is the relatively cheap line of prices on basic merchandise. This is particularly meaningful for a customer base that is largely working-class and hard-pressed to make ends meet. It is ironic that Wal-Mart is a mighty contributor to those tough conditions, and bitterly ironic that one of the chief anti-worker companies in the country also has a popular following within the working

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class. But it is a reality that can't be ignored.

On this basis – a high level of exploitation, a high sales volume coupled with an aggressive expansion strategy – Wal-Mart has become the giant it is in a relatively short time. From stores dotting small towns and rural areas, it spread to suburban strip malls and has been conducting forays into urban areas. In the process, it has succeeded in destroying many a Mom and Pop operation that stood in its way, and in other ways has bent the lives of communities to its will. It has spread across U.S. borders to become a major retailer internationally, with over a 1000 stores outside the country.

Along the way, it has added sophistication to its hard-nosed outlook. For much of its history, the company didn't really feel the need to enlist the support of national politicians for serving its specific company ends; it was content to make its money through the general process of protection and enhancement offered by the capitalist state. But more recently, in navigating its expansion and countering the increasing resistance to its operations, Wal-Mart has been buying influence in Washington with a vengeance. Its first lobbyist was hired only in 1998, but it now has the second largest Political Action Committee in Washington and was the highest corporate donor to federal parties and candidates (overwhelmingly Republican) in 2003 – with much of its funding coming from pressuring its own employees. Of course, there is a payoff: it has, for example, been able to sidestep a Sino-American agreement made in 1998 to limit foreign retailers in China to 30 stores; it has already negotiated for 35 stores, with more planned.

Even before the company's Washington activities on its own behalf, the Walton family had been using its growing capital fortune to push a more general right-wing social agenda. Its campaign to butcher the public education system has been prominent. Wal-Mart was a co-founder of the "voucher" scheme to rob funds from public schools; its experience with the voucher campaign allowed it to pick up valuable experience in finding elements within the Black community to front for its growing business efforts there.

So Wal-Mart's parochial executives have not been entirely naive in their methods of pushing into urban shopping. In their drive into California cities, they encountered suspicion from oppressed urban minorities and stiff opposition from threatened local businesses, community groups, unions and local politicians based on those interests. In response, Wal-Mart moved to buy off selected political leaders and snow residents with campaign hype. The results have been mixed. Wal-Mart has successfully entered some areas but was defeated in referendums in Oakland and, most recently, in Inglewood, where Wal-Mart enlisted the support of the town's Black mayor. Its high-pressure campaign included free meals and a forged letter of recommendation supposedly from local Black resident Annie Lee Martin urging support. The latter tactic sparked a huge backlash in the largely Black enclave. Its defeat in Inglewood was a stinging setback, but Wal-Mart has no plans to beat a strategic retreat.

That Wal-Mart is a capitalist leader does not mean it is loved by all sections of its own class. It is loathed by many suppliers, competitors, ruined petty bourgeois and political liberals. The "moral code" of the Walton family, which among other things demands that profanity be stripped from musical material sold in its stores (thus serving as an effective artistic censor), will appear quaint to secular bourgeois types who gorge themselves on every perceived vice their position affords them. But this hardly represents any fundamental opposition to company practice. In fact, many of its bourgeois detractors actually admire Wal-Mart's ways; they just wish they were not in the path of the juggernaut.

Wal-Mart's modus operandi is hardly a rogue capitalist

model. Fundamentally, it does what any capitalist enterprise would do in its position. Indeed, company apologists have some truth on their side when they point out that the retail industry has always been characterized by low-wage, dead-end jobs (though they conveniently leave out Wal-Mart's role in reinforcing this condition). Its formula of lowered prices through low-frill, low-wage operations has been successfully employed in other industries as well, including highly mechanized ones like the airlines. Using hegemonic power to run roughshod over workers and fellow capitalists alike is something all capitalists aspire to do; it has been done often enough by enterprises in this epoch of monopoly. And its maximization of profits by minimizing labor and other costs has always been a rule of capitalist production.

Indeed, even the limited exceptions to the Wal-Mart model within its industry prove the rule. A case in point is Costco Wholesale Corp. Costco hardly surrounds its workers with riches; but it does provide distinctly higher wages while keeping the ratio between blue-collar and executive pay at much lower levels than Wal-Mart and other corporations. It contends that paying the workers a little more results in better work, less store theft and, in the end, more profits. But capitalist finance does not agree. Costco's stock is devalued relative to Wal-Mart specifically because of its alleged concern for employees. As one financial analyst explained: "From the perspective of investors, Costco's benefits are overly generous. ... Public companies need to care for shareholders first." (*Wall Street Journal*, March 26.)

Wal-Mart still stands out for its venality. It is bad enough that the wife and four children of Sam Walton occupy positions 6 through 10 in the *Forbes* magazine billionaire rankings – while the bulk of the people who work for their company are obliged to scrape for public assistance. A committee in the California legislature determined that a typical Wal-Mart store of 200 employees would cost the state over \$400,000 in taxes to pay for the subsidized medical care and free school lunches that poverty-stricken employee families are entitled to. Wal-Mart sets a new standard of repulsiveness when the same company that works overtime to trash the social wage simultaneously forces its own employees onto the dole.

It is inevitable that militant and revolutionary-minded workers hold specific capitalists up for special hatred. There is extra pleasure in defeating and punishing them for their crimes against working and oppressed people. The symbolic value of such individuals and their enterprise is itself a material force.

But the symbolism points to the capitalist system itself. The rottenness of such capitalists reflects the decay of the system itself. Whatever the idiosyncracies of its owners, they serve mainly to put Wal-Mart ahead of the curve in capitalistic practices; they are pioneers in the increasingly ruthless prosecution of the class struggle. In this regard, Wal-Mart is not a fringe element but stands in the capitalist vanguard. It is essential to understand that taking on Wal-Mart means taking on the forces of the system itself. ●

[to be continued]

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Dominican Crisis Demands Revolutionary Solution

by Eric Nacar

The devastating floods on the island of Hispaniola highlighted the hardship of existence in both Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Over three thousand have already died and over fifteen thousand are reported homeless. But the bulk of suffering on the island is not a natural disaster but a man-made one. This article focuses on the political scene in the Dominican Republic, where on May 17 the press celebrated the victory of Leonel Fernández of the Dominican Liberation Party (PLD) in the presidential election.

Fernández had been in office before and did nothing to improve the lot of the masses. This time he has vowed to implement “tight fiscal policies,” meaning further attacks on most peoples’ standard of living. There is nothing to celebrate in Fernández’s triumph, any more than there was with his predecessor, Hipólito Mejía of the Dominican Revolutionary Party (PRD). And a look back also shows that the disaster of the Dominican economic crisis, like the even greater sufferings of its neighbor Haiti, has been largely “made in the U.S.A.”

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The U.S. first occupied the Dominican Republic from 1916 to 1924. In 1930 a military coup initiated the thirty-one year dictatorship of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo, who had been part of the new military apparatus put together and trained by the U.S. marines during the occupation.

Trujillo’s greatest atrocity (among many) was the racist, genocidal massacre of tens of thousands of Haitians. Trujillo hoped to displace Dominican workers’ and peasants’ frustrations onto these super-exploited immigrants. Almost all Dominicans have some African ancestry. Haitians, however, are on average darker in skin color. Many have fled over the border to escape devastating poverty and social decomposition in Haiti. But in the Dominican Republic they face vicious racist discrimination and hatred. Like immigrants everywhere, they fulfill a key role as super low wage labor for the capitalists, while getting the blame for the unemployment caused by capitalism itself.

“Anti-Haitianismo” is a key part of Dominican capitalist rule for other reasons; it forms part of the broader racist ideology of the “white” ruling-class elite. After all, the Dominican capitalists also rule over masses categorized as racially mixed and black. Racism divides Dominicans from each other as well as Haitian immigrants, keeping the whole working class and poor down.

Trujillo was assassinated after 31 years. The long-standing opposition, the PRD, then led by Dr. Juan Bosch, won the election in 1962. Romanticized by much of the left, the PRD even under Bosch was never more than a radical-talking bourgeois party with a social-democratic program. A coup against him in 1963 imposed a new military dictatorship with U.S. backing. But in April 1965, the working class rose up against the junta. In this “Guerra de Abril” (April War), the junta fell. And again the U.S. marines invaded to suppress the uprising.

The imperialists and Dominican capitalists imposed their own version of a “constitutional” government, but the veneer was thin indeed. Trujillo’s long-time top aide and partner-in-crime, Joaquín

Balaguer, won rigged presidential elections in 1966, building the Partido Reformista which later became the conservative Partido Reformista Social-Cristiano (PRSC). The PRD accepted the new regime; its left wing, led by Bosch, later split to form the Dominican Liberation Party (PLD), the party of Leonel Fernández today.

The 1966 farce established modern Dominican “democracy.” Bourgeois parties alternate in power through “free” elections, resting on large, very repressive police and armed forces which often operate outside constitutional limits. The PRSC’s base was in the military and in the capitalist and petty bourgeois classes, while the PRD had significant trade union support. The PLD built a base among middle-class elements.

“FREE MARKET” POVERTY

In the mid-1980’s, following the international trend imposed by imperialism, the Dominican bourgeoisie adopted so-called “free market” privatizing policies. Falling world sugar prices had created a crisis. By 1985 the Republic was one of the poorest countries in the Americas. A new economic strategy was launched, based on tourism and assembly plants. To attract investments, mainly from the U.S., they set up “Zonas Francas” (Free Trade Zones) in Santo Domingo and other ports. There foreign investors could set up factories to process half-finished garments and other products. The investors pay no taxes or tariffs and can hire workers at minimal wages. Private security guards and the Dominican police strongly discourage unionization and work stoppages in the zones.

In 1996 Fernández, a lawyer and academic who had grown up in New York City, won the presidency for the first time. (New York is the city with the world’s second-largest Dominican population after Santo Domingo; there are 8.8 million Dominicans in the Republic, an additional one million in the U.S. mainland and a good number in Puerto Rico and elsewhere.) Fernández won the elections on the second round, by means of an historic deal that gained him the support of the openly reactionary Balaguer and the PRSC. In office, Fernández abandoned all the party’s socialist



Police violence against workers is “routine” during Dominican strikes. Fighting organizations must organize self-defense of the masses.

rhetoric and carried out massive privatizations, particularly of the electric generating industry.

At first many Dominican middle-class people and even workers welcomed the privatization. The state-owned utility had been notoriously inefficient and subject to frequent blackouts. The new private owners provided more reliable service for a while, and the government used the proceeds of the sale to improve municipal services and fund education. But the apparent gains were short-lived: you can only sell off the same government property once. By the end of Fernández's term in 2000, the money was gone.

Strikes and protests against unemployment, price hikes and electricity blackouts had begun as early as 1997. The unequal effects of the "boom" were painfully clear. The total of social spending under Fernández was 7 percent of the country's GDP, about half of the Latin American average. In any case, election rules kept Fernández from running again in 2000, when the PRD candidate, Hipólito Mejía, won. After September 11, 2001, however, the bottom dropped out: tourism dried up, exports and foreign investment dropped and multiple debt repayments were due. Inflation skyrocketed, fuel became scarce and electric blackouts became longer and more frequent than in the worst days of state ownership. Working-class struggle again went into gear, this time against Mejía.

LEAD-UP TO GENERAL STRIKES

From late 2001 to the fall of 2003, the Dominican peso lost at least half its value relative to the U.S. dollar. Fuel shortages and lack of investment and maintenance made electric blackouts more frequent, longer and more extensive. The price of gasoline and diesel fuel doubled, so that taxi drivers couldn't afford to work. Food prices at least doubled. University tuition costs increased, forcing thousands of students to drop out of college. Unemployment increased dramatically. To make things worse, the IMF tightened the screws, forcing the government to raise sales taxes and increase inflation even more. All in all the miseries of capitalism worsened under Mejía.

The last straw was the failure in April 2003 of Banco Internacional (Baninter), the second largest commercial bank in the country, apparently because of massive fraud. Contrary to Dominican law, Mejía bailed Baninter out to the tune of \$2.2 billion, or about two-thirds of the government's entire annual budget and 15 percent of the gross domestic product. Bailout expenditures reached about 20 percent of the GDP with the failure of two more banks.

Meanwhile, the government cut budgets and raised prices on everything workers need. So it was no surprise that on July 1, 2003, angry workers and others marched in Santo Domingo in protest. They were led by Ramon Almánzar, President of the New Alternative Party and Ramon Pérez Figueroo, General Secretary of the National Center of Unified Transport Workers (CNTU). The powerful CNTU was one of the few established unions to play an important role in the general strikes, since the bulk of the unions opposed the strike and collaborated with Mejía against it.

The demonstrators were protesting a new agreement with the IMF. The National Police attacked and broke up the march with a tear-gas attack and arrested 40 demonstrators. Shortly afterwards, President Mejía sent thousands of police and soldiers to raid the homes of working-class, student and other activists, allegedly to look for illegal weapons. These raids resulted in hundreds more arrests.

ORGANIZING THE GENERAL STRIKE

Only months later was a general strike called. Leaders of

many of the left parties played important roles, but the most prominent leaders were Almánzar and Pérez Figueroo of the CNTU transport union. The government's July raids had not deterred the workers and other oppressed from wanting to move forward with their struggle. There was a long list of demands, including: reduce the cost of the family market basket; reduce fuel prices; stop the blackouts: 100 percent wage increase; reduce transport fares and charges; renationalization of privatized energy enterprises; stop agreements with the IMF; no more increases in the foreign debt; no to the free trade agreement with the U.S.

Certainly these demands and others were vital. But in our view the question of the imperialist debt had to be taken up more strongly. Even to begin to meet other economic and social demands, never mind to build a livable economy, it is not enough to simply demand the end of debt increases. Any payment at all only starves the workers – literally. The demand that the Dominican government repudiate the debt completely is necessary. Dominican workers, with those across the Caribbean and Latin America, are all in the same boat and would certainly approve and identify with such a struggle.

THE TWO STRIKES

The first strike, on April 7, 2003, lasted 24 hours as planned, and it effectively paralyzed the country. Organizers claimed 95 to 97 percent compliance. Most reports indicated it was the most solidly backed working-class action in years. Every city was shut down.

The government responded with massive repression. Six workers were shot dead and over 100 wounded. There were several hundred arrested, including Almánzar. The net result was that the government did not back down – as could have been expected, because of the limited one-day strike. Rather than extending the struggle beyond the one day, another general strike, this time for 48 hours, was decided on for late January 2004.

The second general strike, on January 28 and 29, had an additional demand: the resignation of Mejía and his entire government. For their own electoral reasons, the PLD and PRSC declared that they supported it. Even the Consejo Superior de la Empresa Privada (COSEP – High Council of Private Enterprise, a major business organization) stated its support.

Yet this strike had slightly less participation than the first one. Organizers estimated compliance at 90 percent. The Zonas Francas workers almost all observed the strike, but their bosses in anticipation had made them work the previous Saturday and Sunday. Hospitals and clinics were shut down. Many shopkeepers opened up the first day, but few customers or workers appeared. The shops shut before noon, and the owners didn't bother opening the next day. There was almost no passenger or freight transport. Participation was down somewhat in Santo Domingo but rose in Santiago de los Caballeros, a traditional center of worker militancy, San Pedro de Macorís, another major city, and other large towns.

The same government repression prevailed. The strikers this time had better-organized self-defense. In poor neighborhoods in the north of Santo Domingo, and elsewhere, columns of workers, some wearing hoods, held off cops and soldiers with rocks and home-made bombs. Seven strikers died from police bullets. One cop also died of gunshot wounds. Again over 100 strikers were wounded and hundreds more were arrested. Again the cops arrested Almánzar as well as Pérez Figueroo and some leaders of left parties, holding most of them briefly.

Many strikers wanted to stay out until they won their demands, but again the leaders sent them back to work on schedule, citing government repression as the reason. Yet as before, the

government didn't give an inch; it had to wait it out for only two days, after all.

In February another 48-hour strike was announced for March 16 and 17, with the same demands. But in fact there was no third general strike. And it is clear that a third "general strike," conducted in the same way as the last two, could not have achieved different results.

THE LEFT'S FAILURES

In the events of 2003-2004 so far, strikers showed their resolve and militancy and started organizing effective self-defense. However, from what we have seen, no left party advocated a necessary plan for workers' mass armed self-defense, demanded that strike leaders organize defense, or even discussed the need for it in their propaganda. That lack alone guaranteed defeat. This in a country where huge numbers of guns are floating around, on the one hand, and the cops are a constant threat, on the other!

The left also failed to arm the workers politically. Above all what was the purpose of the "general strike" calls? Under certain circumstances, a one-or two-day protest strike can be an effective step. This was not the case here. In order to shift the balance of forces, the struggle needed to escalate greatly. But the workers' leaders never fought for this.

A general strike can be a vital means of achieving working-class unity by using the power of the working class to shut down the economy and win actual gains. Any serious general strike, beyond a one-or two-day protest exercise, also has a dramatic effect on workers' political consciousness; workers themselves begin to organize their own struggle and in fact their own way of running society. Assemblies and workers' councils inevitably crop up to make the decisions of the struggle. These in turn become forums where left parties can argue for their proposals and views and try to convince their fellow workers. New leaders and in fact an authentic revolutionary party for the working class can develop in struggle.

As Trotsky often commented, any serious general strike poses the question of state power. Regardless of what is immediately achieved, in a general strike the working class begins to create its own institutions and becomes aware that the only real choices are the continuation of capitalist state power or revolution for the establishment of workers' state power.

For these reasons, the LRP advocates the general strike weapon as the best tactic for fighting against capitalist attacks in many circumstances in today's world. But this also means consistently explaining that only workers' revolution, the overthrow of the capitalist state and its replacement by a revolutionary workers' state, can win and hold the workers' demands. No Dominican left organizations that we know of did this essential Leninist propaganda work.

LEFTISTS' STAGISM

Workers who are happy to follow the left parties in mass strikes and overwhelmingly elect them to union positions have never given them over 10 percent of the vote in presidential elections. Disconnected from the (so far) limited experience of class independence they have exercised in struggle, the workers have usually voted for the PRD or, more recently, the PLD. What accounts for this? The reason is the program and practice of the "communist" parties themselves.

From what we have seen, all of them believe that the Dominican revolution must take place in two stages. The first, anti-imperialist stage, requires the united participation of almost all classes, including many capitalists. Foreign, mostly U.S.,

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imperialism has held the latter back from developing as a national bourgeoisie based on an evenly developed economy. Only after first liberating the dependent capitalist economy from U.S. imperialism and its most overt Dominican lackeys can the working class then confront the national bourgeoisie; only then, the theory says, is it time to advocate workers' socialist revolution. Until then, all Dominican poor and exploited, from workers and peasants through the middle class and up to small and even pretty big capitalists, must maintain a strategic alliance. Under such a theory, the stage where workers get to fight for themselves, for socialist revolution, never actually comes. Such a perspective puts forward no reason of principle to not vote for the lesser evil bourgeois candidate – even where left parties are running campaigns alongside them.

The biggest Stalinist group of the 1970's, the Dominican Popular Movement (MPD), held this middle-class populist ideology. Under the pressure of mass workers' struggles, it fragmented at the end of the 70's. The various splinters almost all called themselves "workers" or "communist" parties but maintained the populist program. The workers have seen many of these left parties take this ideology to its logical conclusion – electoral coalitions or outright mergers with bourgeois parties.

As of now the Dominican workers have not seen an authentic revolutionary alternative. A good number of working-class people voted for Fernández, hoping against hope for the return of slightly better times while really knowing on another level that he is far from a hero. They simply saw no other alternative.

"Lesser evilism," of course, suits the imperialists and native capitalists just fine. It means that the exploited and super-exploited basically accept their miserable existence. The rulers are happy that the working class doesn't yet see the possibility of a whole new socialist society, where every single human being would be guaranteed a decent life — and all forms of racism, national chauvinism and other mistreatment could be eradicated. The rulers do know that once large numbers of workers understand that our class has the power to bring about socialism, imperialism is doomed.

REVOLUTIONARY ALTERNATIVE

Authentic Trotskyists reject the two-stage theory, which historically became a cover for Stalinist betrayals of workers' revolutions in favor of alliances with supposedly progressive sectors of the bourgeoisie. Trotsky came to understand that in the imperialist epoch all sectors of the national bourgeoisie, including the

rulers of oppressed nations, have class interests completely tied to capitalist property and therefore hostile to the needs of the working class. Trotsky's strategy of permanent revolution calls for the independent struggle of the working class in alliance with the peasantry and all the oppressed.

The theory of permanent revolution also countered the Stalinist myth that socialism could be built in one country alone. Socialism requires a higher level of production and resources than can be achieved under capitalism. It requires the building of a cooperative economy internationally, which is possible only with the overthrow of capitalism in a number of countries and a socialist federation of the resulting workers' states. Revolutionary internationalism, not nationalism, is central to the strategy for achieving socialism. As a step in this direction, Trotskyists emphasize the re-creation of the Fourth International based on an authentic revolutionary program for workers' unity and revolution across the globe.

Some phony socialists falsely claim that permanent revolution means simultaneous revolutions in various nations — as if

such a thing could be decreed. Nevertheless, today's highly "globalized" environment allows instant communications and forces many workers and oppressed around the world to face the same imperialist enemy, the same basic conditions of life, and even the same multinational companies. Our theory and program recognize that a revolution in one country could easily inspire and spread to another. Indeed, the spreading of revolution is an essential part of the strategy.

This necessity for working-class unity and international revolution stands in contrast to the enmity against Haitians that has been purposefully and continually propagated by the Dominican ruling class. An authentic revolutionary party would make the fight against anti-Haitianismo central to working-class struggle in the Dominican Republic.

All this requires the building of a new working class leadership, a truly revolutionary workers' party. The Dominican working class has shown in practice, both recently and historically, that it is ready for such a party. The most politically conscious workers have to start building it. ●

Gay Marriage Faces Bipartisan Opposition

by Guy Lindsay

This May, gay people won a significant victory against legal discrimination. Massachusetts became the first state in the country to sanction same-sex marriages, after the state Supreme Judicial Court in February reaffirmed its decision last fall recognizing their legality, and the U.S. Supreme Court declined to issue an emergency order stopping them. Hundreds of gay and lesbian couples rushed to get married, and thousands of supporters went onto the streets in Massachusetts and across the nation to celebrate. Their joy starkly contrasted with the disgruntled faces of right-wing anti-gay protesters.

The fight for gay marriage rights is an important struggle against injustice and oppression, even though marriage itself is a bourgeois institution that so often corrupts human feeling under the weight of economic pressure. By being forbidden from marrying, same-sex couples are denied innumerable rights, including: coverage from their partners' health insurance; hospital visitation and legal rights; custody, adoption and immigration rights; greater protection for children; and tax, social security and inheritance benefits. Further, denying same-sex couples the right to marry is a key means of formalizing and encouraging the oppression of all gays and lesbians, and thus strengthens the forces of bigotry against all oppressed people. As a result, the struggle to win same-sex marriage rights can inspire broader liberation struggles, not just of gays and lesbians, but of women, people of color and all the oppressed.

BIPARTISAN OPPOSITION TO GAY RIGHTS

Not surprisingly, gays and lesbians around the country recognized that the court's decision was a watershed moment in their struggle against oppression. But so did important sections of the U.S. ruling class and its two main political parties.

The Republican response was predictable. President Bush seized the opportunity to galvanize the GOP's activist supporters on the religious right. He threatened to initiate an amendment to the U.S. constitution which would flatly ban same-sex marriage. This would be a historical precedent: the first amendment to exclude a group of people from rights others enjoy. And the

Republican Governor of Massachusetts, Mitt Romney, dipped into the cesspool of bourgeois legality and found an old law originally enacted to block interracial marriages and used it to demand the end of marriages performed for out-of-state gay couples.

The Democratic Party response was also predictable. The majority of Democrats and their most important leaders came out against same-sex marriage rights. Meanwhile a liberal minority of the Democratic Party hoped to maintain gay and liberal voters' support by saying they'd favor same-sex marriage rights, although they will not break from the Democratic Party which dooms those efforts.

So in Massachusetts, the overwhelmingly Democratic state legislature proposed a state constitutional amendment, executable through a referendum in 2006, that would ban same-sex marriages but permit "civil unions." And Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry made clear that nothing better could be hoped for from the Democrats at the federal level. He came out against gay marriage, stating "I have the same position Vice President Cheney has." In fact, Cheney favors the proposal for a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriages; Kerry does not. Instead, he was referring to the fact that while he opposes same-sex marriage rights he does support same-sex couples having the right to "civil union," as do Cheney and Bush.

Indeed same-sex "civil unions" is the preferred solution of both Democrats and Republicans who want to defend the sexist, bourgeois idea of the family; they deny gay people the right to marry while making a small concession so as not to seem openly bigoted. But as with racist segregation, so too with "civil unions" — enforced separation always means inequality under capitalism. "Civil unions" would maintain legal discrimination against gay people: married couples enjoy some 1400 legal rights compared to just 350 for same-sex couples in the proposed civil unions. Most importantly, "civil unions" would further formalize gay people's second-class status and encourage greater discrimination and oppression. It is thus crucial that the gay and lesbian movement not settle for this discriminatory second-class status and carry on the fight for full and equal rights.



Protest at Cook County clerk's office (Chicago) on May 27 demanding marriage licenses for same-sex couples.

Further, the struggle to defend the right of same-sex couples to marry in Massachusetts and to extend those rights nationwide will have to overcome the legacy of the Clinton administration's eight years of betrayals and outright attacks on gays and lesbians. In 1992, gays and lesbians were organizing around an equally basic democratic right – the right to serve in the U.S. military. Then-candidate Clinton pledged that he would overturn the military ban on gays. Once elected, Clinton immediately betrayed this promise with his infamous “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy, basically requiring gays and lesbians to stay in the closet. That was a betrayal. On top of that, Clinton’s “Defense of Marriage Act” (1996) was an outright attack on women, gays and lesbians. Among other things, this reactionary legislation defined marriage as a strictly heterosexual union and thus stands as a barrier to same-sex couples winning the right to marry and receive the same federal benefits that straight couples enjoy.

MASS STRUGGLE NEEDED

The struggle for gay marriage rights gained momentum following the victory in Massachusetts. Gays, lesbians and their supporters held demonstrations across the country celebrating the Massachusetts victory and demanding the same in their states, in some cases pushing politicians and judges to start issuing same-sex marriage licenses. For example, on February 12, San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom ordered the county clerk to begin issuing marriage licenses in defiance of state Proposition 22 which states, “Only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California.” San Francisco authorities married over 3500 gay and lesbian couples in two weeks, before Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger ordered Attorney General Bill Lockyer to “terminate” gay marriage ceremonies. Moves to marry gay and lesbians couples in other states, including New York, were similarly blocked by mayors and governors.

It will take a massive struggle to simply defend the

Massachusetts victory, let alone spread it across the country. The recent events have sparked the beginnings of a revival of gay and lesbian struggle after an ebb of many years. The massive and radical gay and lesbian liberation movement of the 1960's and 70's, as well as the later wave of AIDS activism and protest, was derailed by pro-Democratic Party electoralism, along with the other mass struggles.

But the gay and lesbian struggle is still burdened by a privileged middle-class and bourgeois leadership committed to the strategy of supporting the Democrats. It thus places its emphasis on lobbying and compromise rather than protest, and when protests do take place it works to keep them from threatening the Democrats' power and the system they serve. Groups like the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force have jumped on the “Anybody But Bush” bandwagon, in spite of

Kerry's right-wing program. Already in Massachusetts, the leaders of MassEquality, the alliance of gay and lesbian lobbying groups, connived with Democratic legislators to try to pass the “no to marriage, yes to civil unions” sell-out “compromise.”

The reformist electoral strategy of the main gay and lesbian and other civil rights leaderships means cowering before the limits imposed by the ruling class and its political parties. This cringing and wheedling undercuts mass action, the real source of all the gains. And it opens the way for the counterattacks in the future. Such an attempt to take back gains wrested from the system is inevitable because anti-gay bigotry is vital to the preservation of capitalism itself.

Campaigning for the Democrats means undercutting the battle for gay marriage rights. The momentum gained by recent events will be quickly dissipated if the pro-bourgeois gay and lesbian groups remain at the head of the struggle.

RULING-CLASS CONTRADICTION

The most pro-bourgeois elements in the movement argue for the right to gay marriage, not just in terms of equal rights and benefits but also in favor of the nuclear family and monogamy, to show the purported lack of a threat by gays. They share that view with a section of the capitalist class.

There has always been an aristocratic liberal wing of the American ruling class. Lacking the “noble” pedigree of sectors of its European counterpart classes, it has nevertheless tried to achieve a certain aura of noblesse oblige and cultured sophistication. Sometimes more far-seeing than its cruder classmates, it often stood for reform and modernity. Once rooted within the New England, mainly Massachusetts, Protestant bourgeoisie, it has spread geographically and religiously in modern times.

At times, various liberal sections of the bourgeoisie have been forced to make important concessions to the working class and oppressed groups, out of fear of immediate or potential



Getting their marriage license in Worcester, Massachusetts.

revolts. At other times, the more paternalistic patrician elements sought to dispense sops to the “deserving poor” precisely because they didn’t seem to present a real threat. For example, in the late 1800’s, these elements adopted the American Indians as the object of their charitable social impulse. They avoided the fighting working class and the dangerous Southern Blacks in favor of a group they deemed peripheral and no threat to bourgeois society.

Their counterparts today exhibit a “sophisticated” acceptance of gay rights. They regard the religious right and the opponents of abortion and womens' rights as dinosaurs. It was not entirely by accident that the recent decision on same-sex marriage came from the high court in Massachusetts, given this tradition there. Further, it has picked up support in the “establishment” bourgeois press and the upper tier of the academic and foundation world. And it was no accident that the same-sex marriage acts and efforts came from judicial and governmental institutions and not from attempts to build struggles at the base. Bourgeois types can easily afford to favor such rights as long as mass struggles by the oppressed don't threaten them.

MASS ACTION

Today, the relative absence of mass movements as a result of the work of the misleaders of past struggles has meant the acceptance of the Democratic Party and the electoral and legalistic path as the vehicle for change. The Black struggle, the Latino struggle, the women's struggle and the class struggle have all seemingly been domesticated. So too the gay struggle. Besides, the liberal bourgeoisie sees gay people as inherently a far less powerful danger than the other forces. The seeming absence of any threat was an important factor in moving the judges into action together with the support of the patrician wing of the bourgeoisie.

But even these legal and legislative decisions were caused by and reflect the clash of real struggles and the interplay of classes and other power groups as they confront – or fail to confront – each other within society. Certainly that is true of the current fight over gay marriage.

The seeming absence of a threat of mass action doesn't mean that it was no factor in the recent decisions. After all, without the fighting eruption onto the streets by large numbers of gay fighters in the 60's and 70's, there would be no impulse for the courts to even have thought about the question now. Certainly, the history of the ghetto revolts and the women's struggles reveals that only mass action and the threat it constitutes can win and solidify real gains beyond formal acceptance. The ruling class makes conces-

sions only when it fears losing a lot more. In this way reforms are essentially the result of mass action and the implicit or explicit threat of revolution.

Even though the recent court decisions did not come in response to an explosion of the struggle by gays and lesbians, it could spark one if there is a genuine refusal to accept the self-defeating compromises now being pushed.

The struggles of the past and the consequent transformation of social attitudes has gone deep into the fabric of American capitalism, despite the reactionary rollback of past gains that has been true for many years now. Its not just the patrician liberals who are careful about taking the masses on. Even some of the right-wing's most prominent leaders talk of gay civil unions, which would have been anathema years ago. Similarly, even reactionaries decorate their administrations with a few faces of Black people and women. And for all the reactionary anti-labor measures, the bourgeoisie out of fear still will not move to crush the unions. Despite the successful domestication of the misleaders of the working class and the oppressed, the past struggles have not been obliterated. They can be built upon. The underlying anger of the working class and the oppressed is still with us, even if frustrated and temporarily coated in cynicism.

And despite the liberal bourgeoisie's assumptions, the potential threat of a gay struggle, given the objective links it has to other struggles, is far higher than they understand. Politicians of right and left also recognize that there are a great number of middle-class and working-class people, straight and gay, who support the idea of equality for all and would be offended by overt discriminatory acts. Bush's position combining opposition to same-sex marriage with nominal support to gay civil unions shows that important sections of the conservative bourgeoisie sense the implicit threat of a gay struggle far better than the liberals.

LINKS TO CAPITALISM AND WOMEN'S OPPRESSION

The oppression of gays and lesbians is rooted in the capitalist system itself, and stems from the system's need to oppress women through the family and other institutions.

Capitalism is based on the exploitation of workers through wage-labor. The working-class family is a basic unit of the capitalist system, an integral part of the reproduction of labor power. As a necessary component of the wage form of exploitation, capitalism imposed a particular sexual division of labor. Women are obliged to fulfill the wife/mother role to insure the system a steady supply of labor power. (See “Women And The Family: The Ties That Bind” in *Proletarian Revolution*, No. 34.)

As well, capitalism requires the existence of a “reserve army of labor” of unemployed proletarians to keep wages down and force workers to accept the bosses' terms. Women are chiefly part of what Marx called the “floating” section of this reserve: they must still give priority to child-care and family and are therefore more often willing to accept part-time jobs and lower wages. It is not just the woman's place in reproduction and nurture but her overall position that militates for a traditionalizing role.

Of course, the contradiction within the system that pushes women out of the home and into the workforce serves to undermine the traditional women's role and is now undermining the bourgeois family. Gay families also serve to threaten that already faltering conservatizing role and therefore add great weight to the ongoing subversion of the conservatizing family.

Given capitalism's need to oppress women, the conservatizing role of the family, as with church and school, is by no means peripheral to bourgeois stability. Focusing on family values lets the ruling class off the hook by “privatizing” and individualizing the greater poverty and instability that capitalism imposes on the

working class; survival becomes a problem for each individual family, not a class issue.

While gays and lesbians are especially oppressed under capitalism, they are not necessarily consigned by race or gender to the working class or to its most exploited layers. But major gains by gay freedom struggles could strike powerful blows against the gender-based oppression of women and the family; and this would have a ripple effect throughout other layers of the working class and the oppressed masses.

GAY LIBERATION THROUGH WORKERS' SOCIALIST REVOLUTION!

We have to recognize that a victory in this current fight will, in immediate and direct terms, primarily benefit upper- and middle-class gays in sophisticated urban localities. This points to the class divisions in the so-called gay "community." While bourgeois gays foster the illusion of the possibility of equality under capitalism, many working-class gays and lesbians (particularly outside the biggest cities and their relatively "gay-friendly" areas) still fear the consequences of being out. In fact, most working-class gays and lesbians still live in the closet. For them it is not just a moral question; it is a life or death decision. Under these conditions, as long as the current struggle focuses overwhelmingly on same-sex marriage rights, it will seem to many to be a struggle for the dreams of the more privileged gay people that will have little effect on the lives of the masses of working-class and poor gays, especially those of color.

For the current fight to really begin the revival of a mass gay and lesbian struggle, it will have to begin committing itself to an uncompromising struggle against all forms of oppression. The force that can confront the conservative, bourgeois, pro-Democratic leaders of the gay movement are working-class gays and lesbians, particularly those of color as well as youth. With less chance to avoid the worst forms of anti-gay bigotry, they feel more urgently the need to fight for complete liberation from oppression, as well as the need for the struggle to fight around broader social issues like racism and exploitation.

Massive, angry, threatening protests can force the politicians to make more concessions to the demands of gays and lesbians. But as we have explained, the oppression of gays and lesbians is necessary to the survival of capitalism and if left unchallenged will continue to get worse, not better. Getting rid of anti-gay bigotry and oppression once and for all will take overthrowing the



Anti-gay bigots, Pershing Square, Los Angeles

capitalist system that feeds it. That is why we raise the slogan: "Gay and Lesbian Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!"

Revolutionary communists believe that the working class has the power in the course of struggle to overcome its backward political consciousness and overthrow capitalism. Today the working class is mired in all sorts of reactionary ideas, including virulent homophobia. But history proves that as workers unite in struggle and develop a sense of their own power and distinct interests they are able to shed the old, backward ideas, including homophobia. A powerful, militant, radical gay and lesbian movement

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will play a decisive role in this. And the working class must begin shedding its homophobia and other forms of backward consciousness if it is to triumph over capitalism. Gay liberation is impossible apart from socialist revolution, but socialist revolution is just as inconceivable apart of the struggle of gays and all oppressed people for their liberation.

The rise of the gay liberation movement in the 1960's at the same time as the growing Black liberation movement, women's movement and working-class struggle showed the potential for broad mass struggle. But just as those struggles were led into the graveyard of support for the Democratic Party, so too there is the

danger that the beginnings of struggle today will also be led to similar defeat. Essential to avoiding this fate is the building of an alternative, revolutionary communist party leadership. Revolutionaries seek to prove themselves the most loyal and effective champions of mass struggle. In the current gay and lesbian struggles, as in others, we fight for the most effective means of struggle to win the movement's immediate demands. In doing so we also work to win an audience among gays and lesbians for our revolutionary communist views, and thus advance the process of building the revolutionary party leadership so needed to win all the struggles of the oppressed. ●

LRP/COFI

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heard of the Ukrainian scandal: "Ask your leaders: 1) What was actually going on in the Ukraine? 2) Why is the criminal Ilya Budraitsis still a CWI member?"

Once the SAV leaders at the event got wind of our pointed questions, one of them, backed by a posse of SAV members, indignantly demanded that we remove the placard – he wouldn't allow his "comrade" to be called a criminal. Being enormously outnumbered, we agreed under protest to cross out the word "criminal." We hereby publicly protest this infringement on our right to democratic expression within the international working-class movement and demand, once again, to know why Budraitsis, who has dragged the name of Trotskyism through the mud in the land of the October Revolution, should not be driven out of the workers' movement.

NEW YORK LRP

The March 20 anti-war demonstration was quite large, somewhere between 50,000 and 100,000 people, and was as much anti-Bush as anti-war. Two particular factors surprised us: the large number of Kucinich banners and placards, after the Democratic Party primary campaign had ended, and the small number of ANSWER signs as compared with those of United for Peace & Justice. The Kucinich supporters doubtfully represented a way of supporting the Democrats without actually endorsing the pro-war Kerry. The latter reflects UFPJ's bigger soft-on-the-

Democrats base.

The LRP sent a sizable contingent with placards including the following slogans: "U.S. out of Iraq now! No U.N. occupation!" "End the occupations of Iraq & Palestine! All Israel is occupied territory!", "Oppose Bush, Kerry, Nader and all capitalist politicians! Build the revolutionary party of the working class!", "U.S. out of Iraq now! No U.N. occupation!" and "Bush/Kerry = War, Occupation and Oppression." Even with the strong pro-Democratic Party presence we were able to sell roughly 100 copies of *Proletarian Revolution*.

Palestine Demonstrations

The oppression of Palestine was protested several times during the last few months. During the Al Awda conference on the weekend of April 16, word came of the murder of Hamas leader Abd-al-Aziz al-Rantisi (see p. 23). The conference decided to hold a demonstration close to the Israeli mission to the United Nations on April 18. The LRP delegation was one of the strongest at this spirited demonstration of roughly 100 people. Our slogans included "Down with Israeli Massacre of Palestinians," "Stop Bush-Kerry-Sharon Terror!", "All Israel Is Occupied Territory" and "End Imperialist War through Class War."

On May 17 the LRP joined a demonstration calling for the end of the occupations of Iraq and Palestine in Times Square. The turnout was about 400. Popular chants were "Palestine must be free, from the river to the sea" and "Long live the Intifada."

Every year there is a Zionist festival in New York called the "Salute to Israel Parade". And every year there is a counter-demonstration called by Al-Awda and Jews Against the

Fight Police Terror!

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- Why capitalism is driven to deepen exploitation and racist oppression.
- Why revolution is necessary to achieve a society free of exploitation and oppression.
- Why the chief barriers to effective struggle are the Democratic Party politicians and the union bureaucrats.
- Why a revolutionary party must be built by the workers and poor if we are to stop being sold out.

From the Struggle against Police Brutality to the Struggle against the System That Oppresses Us All

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LRP table at New York protest against U.S. occupation of Iraq, March 20, 2004

Occupation. This year (on May 23) the counter-demonstration was much smaller than in the recent past. We participated as part of our commitment to self-determination for Palestinians. (See p. 23.)

Local 1199

On March 27, LRPers joined a rally of over 1000 1199SEIU hospital workers in Newburgh, NY in support of the demands of newly unionized workers at St. Luke's Cornwall Hospital. A strike is currently posed for early summer. Also, as we go to press, 23,000 1199 home health aides in the New York City area have launched a three-day strike for wage increases. LRPers are joining in their protest activities.

These struggles and others to come have been hampered by a major contract re-opener that 1199 President Dennis Rivera recently negotiated for 117,000 hospital and nursing home workers in New York City. It included a significant giveback and destroyed the growing potential for a major strike of the union's most powerful sectors. Check out our leaflet against the deal at <http://www.lrp-cofi.org/statements/1199.html> or write for a copy.

At City College, the LRP continued our forum series with discussions on "Police Brutality: the Struggle Isn't Over" on March 25 and "Rattling the Empire's Chains: Iraq's Intifada" on April 29.

Another in the series of meetings calling for a "Socialist Alliance" of left groups on the British or Australian model was held on June 6. This effort is a tiny attempt along the lines of building new reformist parties in the wake of the political collapse of the Social Democratic and Stalinist parties, particularly in Europe.

The panel and especially some of the discussion showed the cynicism of much of the middle-class left about the ability of the working class to make revolutions. Our speakers from the floor first pointed to Bolivia and other Latin American countries: workers have made frequent uprisings, but because no revolutionary leadership exists these potential revolutions fail. The LRPers added that new reformist parties pose the same danger to working-class consciousness as old ones. They foster illusions that socialism can be brought about by electoral means and thereby create new barriers to the development of revolutionary consciousness.

On April 24 there was a demonstration in Philadelphia to demand freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal. In what was projected to be a "major spring mobilization for Abu-Jamal," a maximum of

120 people attended. Mumia's case retains its critical importance at a time of increasing political repression.

CHICAGO LRP

The March 20 demonstration confirmed our analysis in "Anti-War Leaders Divert Struggle," *PR* 69. Despite the coalition's "radical" pretensions, it managed to turn the event into a Democratic Party rally. Jesse Jackson was allowed to speak three times; his message was "Remember in November." In response, the LRP says remember in November that the invasion of Iraq was launched with the overwhelming support of Democrats, and that John Kerry wants to send thousands more soldiers to expand this bloody colonialist war.

The leftist forces who had so vehemently opposed the LRP's right to speak (see *PR* 70) made a tortured effort to cover their capitulations. The gold medal for political striptease goes to the speaker from Workers' World (ANSWER), who coyly

warned that "if you want to end war, you may have to go beyond the Democrats and try something new." Our political line stood in sharp contrast to the leadership's Democratic Party orientation. Our magazine headline ("Democrats No Answer To Bush") turned heads and sparked discussions. We particularly noted that the ISO would not raise their voices to make a single criticism of Kerry or the Democrats as imperialist occupiers of Iraq.

Chicago LRP has re-established its presence at Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU) by setting up literature tables, intervening in speakouts and holding discussions with activists around the Socialist Club and other groups. Many student activists, even those sympathetic to socialism, seem to have been suckered onto the "Anybody but Bush" bandwagon. But among the student body, particularly students of color and immigrants, we continue to meet radical youth attracted by our open hostility to all capitalist parties. ●



LRPers at demonstration at Israeli Mission in New York to protest murder of Hamas leader Abd-al-Aziz al-Rantisi.

Imperialism

continued from page 1

mare. American imperialism has suffered a catastrophic loss of moral authority, and is now far more vulnerable to future mass struggles, not only abroad but even at home.

However, unless the world scene dramatically changes, the immediate shock to imperialism will prove to be damaging but not fatal. The masses in Iraq and the Middle East are clearly outraged but have not poured explosively into the streets. The workers and poor in the region are searching for a way forward, but they do not see a real alternative, a leadership that can really challenge the imperialists and the horrible conditions the masses now face. From our point of view, that leadership must be revolutionary – dedicated not only to the defeat of imperialism but to the destruction of the capitalist regimes throughout the Middle East and beyond. There is absolutely nothing else that will end exploitation and the grip of mass poverty, bloody repression and tyrannical rule.

ABU GHRAIB: AS AMERICAN AS APPLE PIE

Even before the April uprisings, the occupation was already in disarray. The intensifying anger of the Iraqi masses and their growing demands for democracy and social reconstruction were wreaking havoc with the U.S. goal of imposing a new government of pawns. (See our detailed coverage in *PR* 69 and 70.)

Then came what the socially blind U.S. authorities see as the mother of all public relations failures: the torture photos that wiped out the last pretenses to credibility the U.S. could claim for having ousted Saddam Hussein in the name of freedom. Most if not all of the victims were not even terrorism suspects; those still alive were later released without charges. Their deliberate, systematic degradation was horrifyingly symbolic: it nakedly exposed the reality of the U.S. rape of Iraq.

Almost as outrageous as the tortures themselves have been the arrogant and self-serving assertions by President Bush and others that such behavior is “un-American.” In fact, anyone with eyes open knows the exact opposite is true. This country was built on the slaughter of the Indians and the enslavement of Africans. U.S. history has included rampaging racist lynch mobs and armed attacks on striking workers. It is still shot through with rampant, racist prison torture and police violence at home, along with vicious imperialist acts abroad. Abu Ghraib is no aberration: it is as American as apple pie.

There is one sense, however, in which the Iraq tortures *were* un-American. Since its rise as an imperialist power, the U.S. has often assigned such responsibilities to subordinate thug regimes – like Saddam’s not so long ago – and their less-inhibited death squads. Now that the U.S. is again directly running colonies, it got caught doing its own dirty work.

It has become abundantly clear that responsibility for the criminal torture policy reaches to the highest levels of the Pentagon and the White House. We read in the respectable bourgeois press that torture was official CIA policy (as had been well documented worldwide long before) – allegedly only under “approved” conditions. We learn that Rumsfeld and his military chief, General Richard Myers, had set up a secret program which “encouraged physical coercion and sexual humiliation of Iraqi prisoners in an effort to generate more intelligence about the growing insurgency in Iraq.” (*The New Yorker*, May 24.) We know that White House counsel Alberto Gonzales had helpfully ruled that the Geneva Conventions’ limits on interrogating prisoners were “obsolete.” We see that Attorney General John



Iraqi resistance fighter. U.S. assault on civilians united vast majority of country behind resistance uprisings.

Ashcroft was a co-conspirator, and there have been reports for years that in the U.S. itself, immigrant detainees were subject to physical and sexual torture similar to what took place in Baghdad.

Specifically, the U.S.’s Iraqi prisons were following the models established in Afghanistan and Guantánamo, where U.S. authorities have repeatedly declared that prisoners have no rights. Unable to win the “hearts and minds” of the Iraqi masses by lying promises of honest government, security, jobs and vital services, the scum in Washington could maintain their grip only through terror. (It was only after the Iraqi resistance heated up that Rumsfeld realized he needed to bring in his torture experts from Guantánamo to tighten the screws in Abu Ghraib.)

In sum, the world now knows that the sadistic soldiers in Baghdad were following their superiors’ lead, if not direct instructions. But responsibility extends beyond even the most directly involved U.S. officials. The whole U.S. ruling class is guilty of these monstrous crimes. For in the end, torture and bloody repression are dictated by imperialist necessity. Colonial rule requires extreme violence; in the oppressed countries, imperialism cannot dole out sufficient sopps to the masses, so it must use the most inhuman forms of intimidation.

EXCUSES FOR WAR COLLAPSING

The reaction in the U.S. has been so strong because *all* the Bush administration’s concocted justifications for the invasion have been exposed as frauds. More than that, the *real* reasons for the war, which come under the heading of imperialist conquest, have also collapsed.

Consider the ever-changing excuses. Saddam’s “weapons of mass destruction” couldn’t be found, even though the U.S. has had the run of the country for over a year. There were no links between Saddam and Al Qaeda, but the hated U.S. occupation has

created hundreds of willing terrorists. Saddam's regime of torture and mass murder has been replaced by an occupation of torture and mass murder.

The promise that the occupation of Iraq would produce "democracy" has been violated by the occupiers themselves from the start. The U.S.'s proconsul, Paul Bremer, hasn't dared to allow free elections and can't find believable puppets to hand pseudo-sovereignty to. The Pentagon's formerly favorite Iraqi "patriot," Ahmed Chalabi, has now been condemned as the source of the false WMD stories and even as a spy for Iran. As we write, Bremer's new choice for prime minister, Iyad Allawi, turns out to be a long-term CIA agent – just the man to convince the world that the new "fully sovereign" Iraqi regime will be independent of U.S. control.

Finally, the administration's insistence that the Iraq war could be waged without broad international backing is in tatters. Bush has had to swallow his defiance of the United Nations in late 2003 and call desperately on U.N. officials to cobble together an Iraqi "government" by July. But even with the U.N.'s collaboration, Bush still can't get any allies to join his dwindling coalition of the no-longer-willing. Governments know that with tens of millions in their countries hostile to the war, sending troops into an inferno is political suicide.

MISSION NOT ACCOMPLISHED

Of course, the U.S. mission in Iraq was never really meant to create democracy and freedom. Its purpose was to dramatically advance the ruling class's economic, military and political strength against its imperialist friends (rivals) as well as the world's rebellious masses.

As we have detailed in recent issues of *Proletarian Revolution*, the U.S. knew that it would have to increasingly move against its rivals' interests in order to reinforce its own dominance; that is why it humbled the U.N. Aiming to tighten its grip on world oil supplies, the U.S. sought to control one of the world's richest reserves. And it needed to threaten the masses of the world, especially in the Middle East, after it was dealt a black eye in the September 11 terrorist attacks. It decided to unleash a terrifying display of "shock and awe" and establish a huge military presence in the center of the region. It further aimed to create a regional model of political reforms and a "pluralist" government – nominally elected, reflective of divided population sectors, but pro-U.S. and able to stave off dangerous Islamist movements on one side as well as the potentially explosive working class in the "Arab street."

The invasion of Iraq was an effort to answer these pressing needs of the U.S. ruling class; it was not just a plot by a right-wing cabal in the administration, as some profess. There was grumbling over the lies and evasions that justified the war and the blunders that plagued the occupation, but it nevertheless received strong majority support from both Republican and Democratic politicians and the ruling class they serve.

Now Washington is most concerned to limit the damage of its Iraq adventure. Iraq's oil production, intended to give the U.S. a chokehold over its competitors' lifeblood and the revenues to pay for the war and occupation, has still not approached normal levels. The occupation has not only not paid for itself, as the Pentagon once promised, but it costs at least \$4 billion a month and is devouring funds for vital capitalist domestic programs.

The vaunted conquest of Iraq by Rumsfeld's "lean" invasion force has also failed: the U.S. military presence was supposed to have been greatly reduced by now, but it is over 130,000 and rising. And as a consequence of the rising death rate, growing demoralization and extended tours of duty (including for National Guard and Reserve troops), military enlistment is at a 30-year low.

The neo-conservatives' scheme to spread a pseudo-democratic Pax Americana across the Middle East has been dashed. A hilariously understated *New York Times* headline on May 13 summed it up: "U.S. to Present Revised Program for Democracy in Mideast; Skepticism is Widespread."

Most important, the goal of teaching the world's masses the lesson that imperialist might is not to be challenged is in shreds. The Iraqi masses are uncowed and unbowed; it is Washington and its puppets who are reeling and squabbling among themselves.

THE APRIL RESISTANCE AND AFTER

When first confronted with armed opposition to its occupation, the occupiers could dismiss the insurgents as die-hard Saddam supporters and foreign terrorists. But in April the U.S. was confronted by an armed uprising from both the Sunnis (who had been favored by Saddam's dictatorship) and the Shi'ites (the majority in Iraq, who Saddam had brutally oppressed).

First, American mercenaries were ambushed in the predominantly Sunni city of Fallujah. Thrilled to have their oppression at the hands of the U.S. military interrupted by a defeat for the occupiers, hundreds of residents gathered at the scene to celebrate. The mercenaries' bodies were dragged from their vehicle and hung from lampposts and a bridge – a particular humiliation for the White House, given its efforts to hide from view the stream of soldiers returning to the U.S. in coffins.

The next day, a demonstration by thousands of Shi'ites protesting the closing of anti-U.S. cleric Muqtada al-Sadr's newspaper and the arrest of one of his lieutenants was met with a deadly counter-attack by the military. The U.S. announced its intent to capture or kill Sadr, who responded with calls for further protest that sparked an explosion of struggle. Thousands of Shi'ites rioted across the country, and Sadr's militia launched attacks on U.S. and allied forces. They seized several police stations in Baghdad, briefly drove occupation forces out of a number of smaller cities across southern Iraq and took control of the Shi'ites' most important shrine in Najaf.

The U.S.'s first response was a massive counter-offensive. The military laid siege to Fallujah, killing hundreds of civilians in a bloody exercise in collective punishment. Najaf was surrounded by thousands of troops in preparation for an invasion. But it soon became clear to the U.S. that to go much further would trigger a greater uprising. The U.S. has since been forced into a series of humiliating retreats and ceaseless ceasefires.

Thus the U.S. managed to unite the entire Arab population against it. As the *Wall Street Journal* reported, "Residents in many Baghdad neighborhoods signed up to host displaced families from Fallujah and banners and signs are posted at every corner declaring that Sunni and Shi'ite forces are now unified." (April 12.)

U.S. officers had no choice but to negotiate with the guerrillas in Fallujah and then withdraw their troops. Adding insult to injury, the only force the U.S. could find to police the city was a new Iraqi battalion headed by first one, then another, former general of Saddam's Republican Guard and counting in its ranks many of the guerrillas who had fought the U.S. during the siege. So much for Bremer's dispersal of Saddam's army, another supposed gain of the occupation. But the "solution" that saved some face for the U.S. in its conflict with the Sunni minority could not work in the southern strongholds of the majority Shi'ites.

In the South, after promising to destroy Sadr, the U.S. undertook a halting but ongoing offensive. The masses' growing opposition to the occupation had forced the collaborationist Shi'ite parties to increasingly confront the Americans. So the U.S. has sought to divide the Shi'ite leaders. Bremer offered posts and spoils to Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani and two other Shi'ite reli-

gious forces, the Iranian-backed Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) and al-Dawa, in return for their help in demanding that Sadr end his uprising and disband his militia. They called on both warring sides to withdraw from the area of the mosques and shrines in Najaf and other “holy cities.” Even though Sadr’s militia is widely hated for its fundamentalist thuggery, the betrayal of his anti-occupation fighters by Sistani and other collaborators has reduced the latter’s popular influence.

As a result, there is no Shi’ite force that the U.S. can rely on along the lines of its Fallujah battalion led by former Saddam officers. There is no alternative for the imperialists but to maintain foreign “coalition” troops in the region to keep the restive Shi’ite masses in their place. Washington has turned to the idea of using tribal militia as a base for its new “Iraqi” army, but that will simply mean relying on a decentralized, totally unreliable and divided army.

QUANDARY OVER A QUAGMIRE

There is now no way the U.S. can win in Iraq. To overcome the resistance from armed Sunnis and Shi’ites, it would have to smash its way into cities and further the slaughter of civilian populations. When it started doing so in early April, it had to pull back in the face of troop losses and horrified world opinion. Even if it succeeded militarily for a moment, it would leave a sullen population ready to explode and retaliate at the first opportunity.

Why can’t the U.S. just set an early date for pulling out, as some propose? It is not just that the ruling class, especially favored sections of it, would lose considerable profits by abandoning ship. To leave Iraq without keeping military bases and real, if indirect, political control would be an impossibly embarrassing and dangerous retreat; it would demonstrate that even the mighty U.S. cannot suppress the masses of a mid-sized country. It would also undermine the U.S.’s ability to militarily suppress local pawns who keep getting out of hand. And those reasons are what make the other imperialists cede world leadership to it.

That is why both George W. Bush and John Kerry both insist it is necessary to “stay the course.” Otherwise, Iraq would indeed become a model for the Middle East, but not the one the imperialists conceived. A U.S. withdrawal, proving once again that imperialism can be beaten, would encourage anti-imperialist struggles in the Middle East and the world over. Imperialism and its compradors would find themselves at bay on many fronts.

In this light, the presidential campaign is a rescue operation for the imperial crisis. The ruling class will prefer the candidate who can best salvage something from a disaster that is already the greatest since the combination of the Watergate scandal that brought down the Nixon presidency and the imperialist defeat in the Vietnam war 30 years ago. Today’s debacle could even surpass the earlier one in its consequences, since the economic sops that could buy some breathing room then are no longer available.

The U.S. can at best try to save face by maintaining something like the status quo. It needs a puppet Iraqi government, compliant Shi’ite clerics cooperating in suppressing radicals like al-Sadr, controlled elections down the road, continued repression of trade unions and the withdrawal of most American forces to the dozen



Baghdad Shi’ites denounce U.S. occupation.

or more military bases they are building across the country. But even if some such set-up could be patched together, the U.S. forces in Iraq will end up in a prison of their own making. They will have been far too exposed. They will have to yield much of the control of Iraq’s oil revenues to a U.N. body if not an Iraqi one.

No matter what military success the U.S. achieves against the Sadrists, its offensive will only encourage the reactionary but anti-American Islamist elements. It will end up with a restive and highly divided protectorate. Under such conditions, the Kurds, Sunnis and Shi’ites led by rotten and warring clerical and secular power-mongers will be at each other’s throats. The imperialists will have to search for a new strongman pawn like the old Saddam, and pray that he too won’t get out of hand. In any case, the humbling of the U.S. will have taught the masses the lesson that resistance can succeed. Therein lies the hope for Iraq, the Middle East and the world.

The Iraqi masses were brutally oppressed by Saddam, bombed and starved by imperialism and are now burdened by reactionary religious and political leaders. So far they have remained largely in the background of the struggle, angry but trying to survive under the dreadful conditions of the occupation and not yet finding the genuinely anti-imperialist – anti-capitalist – leadership they need. Nevertheless, their opposition to the U.S. has been the key to the guerrillas’ success. Their unity against the occupation has exposed the bloody face behind the imperialist mask of democracy and freedom, thereby weakening the dominant oppressors on the world scene.

The Iraqi working class, historically both militant and socialist, has not found its own voice. When it does, in conjunction with the masses throughout the region, the U.S. imperialists will be driven out of Iraq in the manner they so gloriously deserve. Proletarian socialist revolution is the solution. ●

Letters Welcome!

We invite readers of *Proletarian Revolution* to send letters to the magazine. Names will be withheld on request. Write us at P.O. Box 1936, Murray Hill Station, New York, NY 10156, USA.

Israel's New Assaults on Palestine

With the full support of George W. Bush and his echo, John Kerry, the Israeli government of the butcher Ariel Sharon is laying the basis for yet another episode in the ongoing attempt to devastate the Palestinians as a people. They are trying not only to put a gravestone on the current intifada but also to erase the concept of and potential for Palestinian self-determination. Whether they will succeed temporarily in their first aim remains to be seen. In the second, they are doomed to failure.

On a political and military plane, the Israeli strategy has three components: "unilateral disengagement" from the Gaza Strip, the building of a wall through Palestinian lands in the West Bank and an added offensive against the Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel.

The latest Israeli attack, under the nauseatingly innocuous name of "Operation Rainbow," consists of wholesale destruction and massacre in the refugee camp of Rafah. House demolitions, missiles and sniper fire murdered anywhere from 40 to 60 Palestinians, and left thousands more homeless. It is the

largest such atrocity since the invasion of Jenin two years ago. (See PR 64.)

GAZA: WORLD'S LARGEST CONCENTRATION CAMP

Sharon's "disengagement" plan would transform the Gaza Strip into the world's largest concentration camp. The plan removes the 7000 Jewish settlers (and the soldiers who protect them), who currently occupy one quarter of one of the world's most densely populated territories at the expense of 1.3 million Palestinians. Israel would retain control over all of the Strip's land borders, all air rights and the adjacent sea, and forbid the reconstruction of the airport and seaport in Gaza. Israel would have the right to re-invade at any point. Israeli corporations would retain the exclusive right to exploit 4000 Palestinian workers in the Erez Industrial Zone under the eye of Israeli troops. The withdrawal would not be completed until the end of 2005, until which time the settlers and soldiers would retain free rein to bulldoze Palestinian homes. In exchange for such generosity, Israel insists that Gaza will no longer be considered "occupied territory."

The plan, favored by the bulk of the Zionist bourgeoisie and by Israeli public opinion at large, was nevertheless seen by the majority of Likud's 200,000 members as an unacceptable concession to "terror." The desire to rid themselves of responsibility for Gaza while retaining effective control has long been mainstream for the Israeli ruling class, pioneered by supposed "doves" of the Labor Party like Yitzhak Rabin and Ehud Barak. The setback to Sharon's plan that the Likud ranks delivered will not blunt the Zionist maneuver for long. The slaughter in Rafah seems intended to send a message, both to the Likud ranks and to the Palestinian masses, that if Israel leaves, it does so from a position of strength, not weakness.

But what Rabin and Barak tried and failed to accomplish through the Oslo agreement and subsequent negotiations was to force a section of the Palestinian bourgeoisie, led by Yasir Arafat and the PLO, to serve as useful intermediaries. In the course of the present intifada, the PLO-controlled Palestinian Authority (PA) established by these negotiations was exposed as being neither effective collaborators with Israel nor defenders of the aspirations of the Palestinian masses. It could not openly turn against the uprising without losing its last shred of credibility; yet its sole purpose was to use that credibility in order to suppress the uprising.

With the resulting vacuum of leadership, the power of the clerical reactionaries of Hamas grew, especially in Gaza, where they became a dominant force within the intifada leadership. They not only led thoroughly defensible forms of resistance (mass demonstrations, both unarmed and armed, and commando, bomb and mortar attacks on Israeli soldiers and settlers), but also organized so-called "martyrdom operations" – suicide bombings on Israeli civilians.



Palestinians demonstrating in Rafah. A few minutes after this photo was taken, the Israelis fired tank shells and helicopter missiles at these unarmed demonstrators. (Photographer: Johannes Abeling, The Electronic Intifada)

This tactic encouraged Arab masses to wait passively for martyr-saviors and also drove many Israeli workers deeper into Sharon's arms in a futile quest for "security."

HAMAS ASSASSINATIONS

The greatest danger for the Israeli state coming from a non-negotiated withdrawal from Gaza was that it would be seen by the Palestinians as a partial victory for the intifada. It was, in fact, seen this way by the overwhelming majority of Palestinians in Gaza, eager to be at least in part rid of the settlers and soldiers. Sharon has a grasp of the relationship between his state's maneuvers and the mass struggles. Therefore, he uses U.S.-made Apache helicopter gunships and tanks to try to bloodily suppress such ideas.

Assassination has long been a key feature of Israeli strategy. But until recently, Israel had generally refrained from killing political leaders above a certain rank, out of fear of creating martyrs. Most targets were either leaders of the military wings of their organizations or lower-ranked political leaders.

That changed early in the morning of March 22, with the murder of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the quadriplegic spiritual leader of Hamas, as he left his mosque in the center of Gaza City. His successor as Hamas's political leader in Gaza, Dr. Abd-al-Aziz al-Rantisi, was then assassinated, again by a helicopter-fired missile.

These killings are a blow to Hamas. Sensibly, the identity of Dr. Rantisi's successor has been kept a secret; the loss of two widely-known charismatic leaders will not be easily replaced. More fundamentally, the killings sent a chilling message from Israel to the Palestinian people: "If you dare to rise up against your oppression, we will not hesitate to murder you."

A great danger to the Palestinians stems from the pro-capitalist nature of Hamas's conduct of the struggle. While nominally standing for the liberation of all Palestine, it wants to deter any revolutionary transformation of Palestinian society. Therefore its leadership is driven to attain at least a piece of whatever state power the Palestinian bourgeoisie is able to win. Since the projected withdrawal from Gaza did not come about as a result of negotiations with "the Zionist entity," Hamas has promised to join PA institutions to administer the area. If this goes through, it is only a matter of time before Hamas representatives, shoulder to shoulder with their ex-PLO counterparts, are negotiating with "the entity" over matters like conditions of Palestinians at the Erez plants and the distribution of dwindling permits to enter Israel for work.

THE SHARON-BARAK-BUSH-CLINTON-KERRY PLAN

The Israeli "peace-seeking" and "disengagement" plan is a recipe for continued oppression of the Palestinians. His plan in hand, Sharon met with President Bush on April 14, just three days before Dr. Rantisi's assassination, and received a letter confirming U.S. support for the key strategic aims of Zionist expansionism: the annexation of large settlement blocs in the West Bank, and the rejection of the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and lands in the "Jewish state." Not to be outdone, Kerry hastened to endorse the Sharon plan and the assassination of Rantisi by proclaiming himself "not 99 percent, but 100 percent" behind Israel.

The PA leadership responded with one voice to this Bush-Sharon agreement as if the sky had fallen. Yet, as Ali Abunimah of *The Electronic Intifada* pointed out, "Sharon's position indicates a significant shift towards Israel's traditional Labor-led 'peace camp,' while Bush simply rephrased formulas already used by former president Bill Clinton." ("Why all the fuss about the Bush-Sharon meeting?", April 14.) Preparing such annexations

and maintaining the sacrosanct "Jewish character" of the Israeli state at the expense of the refugees was always the purpose of the so-called "peace process," as coverage in *PR* has repeatedly demonstrated.

So why the fuss? Because the PA leadership lives and dies by negotiations. What Bush and Sharon now made clear was that the whole charade of "final status talks" was exactly that. The Palestinians could expect nothing more than an unviable, overpopulated, minuscule Bantustan from the "two state" solution.

ISRAEL'S COMING END

Sharon may be able, by taking Israeli settlers and soldiers out of the line of fire, to dampen the intifada. Certainly, his apartheid wall, which further imprisons the West Bank Palestinians, may also thwart the mass uprising for now. But his aim, expressed with such cocky assurance, of finishing off the Palestinian struggle against national oppression is unachievable.

The full scope of Israel's vicious injustices do not stop at the borders of the West Bank and Gaza Strip; they go to the very heart of its existence as an exclusively Jewish state. This was hinted at obliquely in a sentence of Bush's letter to Sharon which has been little remarked upon, but whose devastating significance is clear both to Zionists and their more clear-sighted opponents: "We also understand that ... Israel believes it is important to bring new opportunities to the Negev and the Galilee."

These two regions within Israel's 1948 boundaries have the highest percentages of Palestinian Arabs, fourth-class citizens, often referred to by the misleading name "Israeli Arabs." They form the lowest economic strata in Israel. Tens of thousands live in "unrecognized villages," which have no paved roads, electricity, sewage or water systems, and are subject to being razed by planning agencies with no warning. From the foundation of the state of Israel, "economic development" in these regions has meant "Judaization" – the expropriation of Arab lands to make way for new Jewish settlers.

The ongoing harassment of Israel's Arab citizens serves the purpose of pushing "voluntary" self-exile. This helps carry out the Zionist aim of achieving a Jewish majority in as much of Palestine as possible. Now, the U.S. has given a green light, not only to the further imprisonment of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, but also the escalating Zionist attack on Israel's nominal citizens on the basis of nationality and religion.

The establishment of an exclusive Jewish state at the center of the Arab world demanded, from the beginning, mass expulsion. Today, Israeli historians not only admit to the huge ethnic cleansing required by their state's foundation, but wonder if it should have gone further. A colonial-settler state founded upon such blatant theft could only survive, in this epoch, as a heavily subsidized imperialist outpost. For the 1.2 million Palestinians living today within Israel's 1948 borders, and for the 5 million refugees descended from those expelled, it remains the case that *all* Israel is occupied territory. Israel's oppression does not stop at the borders of the West Bank and Gaza Strip; neither will the struggle against it. This is the fatal flaw of all of Bush and Sharon's plans.

With the embarrassing crisis faced by the U.S. in Iraq, a dramatic escalation in the hostility and potential confidence of the masses of the Middle East is now occurring under the surface of events. That confidence, if coupled to the growth of class consciousness, will undermine the clerical as well as the secular nationalists who now mislead the struggle against U.S. and Israeli imperialism. When Arab workers place themselves at the head of the struggle in Palestine, it will be as part of the rising tide of revolution which will sweep the entire region. ●

Kerry's Domestic Program Attacks Workers

by Jeff Covington

Working people have been hit hard by four years of recession, jobless recovery and government attacks on social benefits. Bush blatantly seeks to maintain this course. But John Kerry's economic program amounts to a continuation of the same attack. On domestic issues, Kerry talks out of both sides of his mouth, making loud rhetorical promises to workers while quietly promising the capitalists that he will enforce austerity and deepen exploitation.

Kerry is pushing a program of "fiscal responsibility" at a time when unemployment, indebtedness, lack of health care and fear of depression haunt the working class. His campaign promises on jobs, health care, education, minimum wage and union organizing are empty sound bites, since he has pointedly vowed to violate his own programs in order to achieve a balanced federal budget.

As the *Wall Street Journal* observed on February 17:

Kerry is using populist corporate-bashing rhetoric to woo the party's liberal base, even as a campaign adviser privately sends the reassuring message that the senator is really "pro-business" and will be "more nuanced going forward."

Kerry's populism peaked during the primary campaign, when he was competing with Howard Dean and Dennis Kucinich. As the *Journal* indicated, he has since changed his tune, now that he is appealing to the ruling class as a whole on one level, and middle-of-the-road voters on another. All along, Kerry has been surrounded by Clintonite advisors who, despite their former boss's populist rhetoric, openly stand for Wall Street's interests. No wonder that in the Senate Kerry has been one of the largest recipients of corporate campaign donations.

KERRY'S REAL ECONOMIC PROGRAM

Kerry made a big splash with his announcement of a balanced budget plan April 7, prompting the *New York Times* to proclaim him "John Kerry, Fiscal Conservative." Whereas the Democrats used to be attacked by conservatives for "tax and spend" programs that offered sops in response to working-class struggles, now the Democrats seize the mantra of "balanced budgets." This is a legacy of the Clinton administration, which represented the burial of liberalism in all but rhetoric in the Democratic Party. At a time when the federal government is running record deficits, balancing the budget means slashing programs needed by workers and the poor; it has become a ruling-class code word for austerity.

In Kerry's speech at Georgetown University in Washington, he proclaimed that he's fully prepared to drop planks of his own program if they come into conflict with a balanced budget. That says plainly that his promises to workers are worthless. It's *this* promise – one made to the capitalists – that he means to keep.



Workers demand "Where are the jobs?" with illusions that Kerry can help them, but his domestic program offers no hope.

Kerry's promises may be flippable and floppable, but the man is unflappable: the very next week he was on a campus tour touting his proposal of a free college education for all youth who complete a public service program – the same proposal he made a point of saying he had withdrawn in his balanced budget speech.

Kerry also promises to spend \$900 billion on health care and education, financed solely through reversing Bush's tax cuts to people with \$200,000 or more annual incomes. In the light, however,

of his genuine pledge to "stay the course" in Iraq, the enormous and mounting costs of the occupation are sure to drain whatever resources are supposedly targeted for domestic benefits. Devastating cuts in housing, education and healthcare are already imposing major suffering on working-class and poor people. Kerry's program means that more are on the way. Hardest hit will be Black and Latino working-class communities, which notoriously have the lowest levels of public services.

THE "JOB CREATION" SHELL GAME

Kerry criticizes Bush over the "jobless recovery", but both candidates are playing games over the issue. The Bush campaign points to the falling unemployment rate. Even though Kerry and the Democrats have no truthful program to combat joblessness, their reply that the actual number of jobs in the U.S. economy is not increasing is accurate. That claim is backed by the neo-conservative *New York Post's* business columnist John Crudele, who pointed out that the Labor Department's job-creation figures are the result of statistical finagling. As Crudele commented, "Take away all 270,000 make-believe jobs and, well, you have the sort of pessimism that the political pollsters are seeing."

Moreover, all bourgeois statistics distort the real economic situation. The unemployment rate is always grossly understated, as it only counts those who are actively looking for work and overlooks those who have given up trying to find a job. Also, the total number of jobs lost or gained ignores how poorly the jobs pay – a major problem, given the growth of low-wage, part-time and temporary jobs with no health-care or other benefits.

Kerry proposes to create 10 million new jobs in the four years of his first term. But as soon as you get past the sound bite, the populist appeal disappears: the mechanism he proposes is nothing more than cutting the overall corporate tax rate. Under Reagan this was known as "trickle-down economics," and Kerry's plan is indeed a trickle. In this election it's all the Democrats are willing to do. It is a massive concession to the capitalists whose mouths water at Bush's tax giveaways, a promise that a Kerry Administration will not eliminate their windfalls.

PROTECTIONIST RHETORIC NO ANSWER

Kerry dresses his program up with a dose of protectionist rhetoric: he will make up for the revenue lost in corporate tax cuts

by ending tax breaks for companies with operations and employees overseas. On March 26 he told a UAW rally in Michigan, "We're going to end the subsidies for companies that send jobs overseas and reject the American worker."

This takes a lot of gall from John Kerry, who has supported every free trade agreement from NAFTA to GATT to the WTO. For mainstream Democrats as well as Republicans, "free trade" as well as "keeping jobs at home" are empty slogans. In this world dominated by monopolies and imperialist nations and their grab for superprofits, the U.S. signs "free trade" deals with weaker countries, forcing them to yield huge concessions while demanding protection for its own large industries. The imperialists export whatever jobs can profitably be done by cheaper labor.

Kerry and the union bureaucrats are misleading workers: protectionism is no solution to the decline of jobs, which they blame on "outsourcing" overseas. The main reason now for the jobs loss is increasing productivity – not so much through investment in newer technology and automation, but through speed-up.

There is a downward spiral. Jobs went overseas in search of low wages. That caused more U.S. workers to fear layoffs and unemployment, and many swallowed wage cuts, harsh conditions, losses of benefits and longer hours. Outsourcing to U.S.-based industries with such cheap labor then reduced wages and jobs in unionized industries even more than before. Now, devastating speed-up drives conditions even further down. Protectionist attacks on workers overseas aren't the answer – the suppression of struggle by the union bureaucrats is the real problem.

A *New York Times* editorial (April 8) gingerly touched on the underlying issue when it stated that the lack of jobs has a lot to do with "impressive gains in productivity growth." This is the way bourgeois economics expresses the fact that the capitalists are intensifying their exploitation of workers, getting more labor out of fewer workers in less time and for less pay, so that they don't have to hire as many workers. As billionaire investor Warren Buffet – now also a Kerry adviser – recently commented, "If class warfare is being waged in America, my class is clearly winning."

Indeed, because of the reduction in vacations, holidays and work breaks, in a 20-year period the average of numbers of hours worked in the U.S. has increased by over 10 percent. The chief reason for this retreat is the union officials' refusal to lead all-out fights against the bosses, relying instead on voting for the bosses' second party, the Democrats.

THE ROLE OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY

What's behind Kerry's anti-worker program? *Proletarian Revolution* has often explained how the Democratic Party functions as the graveyard of mass movements in the U.S. This role is inherent to the Democrats as a party of the capitalist class that rests on an electoral base of workers and oppressed people. In times when mass struggle threatens to explode, Democratic politicians wear their populist hats and pretend to voice the con-

cerns of the masses. They co-opt movement leaders who peddle the lie that election campaigns, not militant mass actions, are the way to achieve people's needs. As we explained in *PR 70*:

The Democratic Party claims to be the "party of the people." But in reality it is a major party of the capitalist class, beholden to Wall Street and imperialist interests as well as to lesser sections of the capitalists. It rests on an electoral base that includes large sections of the working class, including both trade unionists and those in oppressed groups. ... Given that the Democrats' working-class base has interests which are fundamentally opposed to those of the ruling class, the bourgeoisie normally prefers to have the government run by the Republicans ... So Democratic politicians have to constantly prove their allegiance to big business, even when they are nominally taking positions in opposition.

That accounts for much of Kerry's notorious flip-flopping. As a liberal Democrat, he has two audiences: the working class whose votes he seeks, and the ruling class whose endorsement he requires. Some Republicans also make populist appeals, but this sort of double-talk is an occupational necessity for Democratic politicians. They typically first water down the demands they pretend to stand for and then betray them outright. Thus they set the stage for new attacks: union bosses and Black and Latino leaders are much less willing to fight Democrats than Republicans.

The conditions of this election make Kerry's exceptional political slipperiness an asset. Despite four years of George W. Bush's presidency, a severe recession and job losses, the fact is that mass struggles of workers and oppressed people have not exploded; nor do they appear to be on the immediate horizon. That is because union bureaucrats have managed to keep a lid on strikes and workers' struggles, and Black leaders have derailed the potentially explosive movement against police brutality – trading in on the September 11 attacks and the wave of patriotic sentiment as well as the fear of stepped-up government repression. The bureaucrats' betrayal of the California supermarket strike is one example. (For details, see *PR 70*.) The self-transformation of Al Sharpton's image, from "outspoken militant against cop brutality" to "respectable" presidential candidate ignoring cop brutality, is another. Both vividly illustrate the suppressed state of workers and Black struggles today.

Under these conditions, the ruling class doesn't seek a message that might actually connect with still angry and frustrated working people. At the current low level of struggle, that would only risk stirring up trouble rather than containing it. The masses don't need to feel confidence in the Democrats; what they need is a healthy dose of fear that another four years of Bush and the Republicans will be even worse. In the early stages of the campaign, several major unions endorsed Dean because of his populist and anti-war rhetoric. When Dean's campaign collapsed, those unions had to switch to Kerry, despite the emptiness of his promises. "Anybody but Bush" really means "Anything but Struggle."

KERRY IGNORES STRUGGLES OF OPPRESSED

Because of the threat of the Republican far-right, Black voters normally support the Democratic Party in overwhelming numbers. In this light, it is significant that Kerry's website, full of hundreds of policy statements, manages to avoid mentioning Black people, even "African Americans." While he has policy sections on gays and lesbians and Native Americans, the only reference to Blacks is carefully and indirectly placed under the heading of "Civil Rights," where a generic anti-discrimination statement sounds like the legal wording on a job application. There are also short statements in defense of affirmative action

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and against racial profiling. This tokenism suggests that unlike Clinton, Kerry is unwilling to even blow hot air about standing up against attacks on Black people.

Black Democrats helped pave the way for Kerry's silence on racial oppression. The NAACP took care to "suspend" its boycott of South Carolina, which flies the Confederate flag, for the duration of the Democratic primary campaign there. Jesse Jackson reinforced the point with a shameful editorial on the eve of the South Carolina primary, endorsing the view that Black people care about "kitchen-table" issues, not issues like the racist flag. (*Chicago Sun-Times*, Jan. 27.) That's exactly the attitude Kerry and the Democrats are taking: lots of photo-ops talking to Black people about jobs; not a word on racism. Of course, Black workers, like all workers, are concerned about jobs and other bread-and-butter issues. But racism is rampant in this society; it affects the job market especially. To dodge this issue is to betray Black people even in bourgeois terms.

Eventually Kerry will have to demagogically escalate his appeal to Black and Latino voters, since he is not doing well in the polls despite Bush's loss of voter support. The point is that he is waiting as long as he can to do so, in order to avoid stirring up constituencies so feared by the ruling class.

WHY THE LIBERALS LIKE KERRY

Even if his programs on the economy and the war are indistinguishable from Republican conservatism, Kerry attracts many liberal and even leftist voters because the two parties are supposedly poles apart on civil liberties and other social issues. One big problem with this argument is the USA Patriot Act, John Ashcroft's super-repressive legislation that was backed by most House Democrats and all but one Democrat in the Senate. (The one was not John Kerry.) Kerry says "it's time to end the era of John Ashcroft," but he has not denounced Ashcroft's witch-hunt of immigrants nor called for freeing the thousands of detainees caught in "homeland security" round-ups.

Like many Democratic Senators, Kerry voted to empower Antonin Scalia and other reactionary judges who endanger civil and social rights. Kerry backed Clinton's welfare "reform," which wiped millions of people off the welfare rolls and pushed them into the sub-minimum wage "workfare" programs. A former Massachusetts prosecutor, Kerry also helped pass Clinton's crime bill in 1994, which expanded the death penalty and funded 100,000 more cops.

Kerry favors the right to abortion. But in his drive to appeal



Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, whose appointment John Kerry voted for. Scalia is a prominent reactionary, leading the effort to roll back the abortion rights won in Roe v. Wade

to Republican-leaning voters, he stuck his foot in his mouth May 19 when he told a reporter he would consider appointing judges who disagree with his position. After an uproar by abortion-rights supporters, he issued a "clarification," pledging not to appoint anyone to the Supreme Court who would undo *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 decision that declared abortion legal. But he left open the possibility of placing anti-abortion judges on lower courts. Whereas the Republican right wants abortion abolished, the Democrats for years presided over the gradual chipping away of practical access to abortion. That is typical of the way the Democrats pave the way for the Republicans to accelerate the attacks. Kerry's gaffe fits right into this tradition.

To those who say the issues of federal judges, abortion rights and civil liberties are the decisive reasons for backing Kerry, we say they are engaging in a rotten trade-off. They are in effect telling working-class people who see that the war and the economy are life and death issues that the "social" questions are more important. Underneath, the question is class, not the pluses and minuses of campaign promises. The ruling class will break all its promises – as Kerry has already indicated – to maintain profits and international hegemony. If the capitalist attack on the workers and oppressed at home and abroad is further validated by the election of any bourgeois candidate, past economic gains will be further undermined, civil liberties further surrendered and racial and gender gains further gutted. Bushism without Bush and his perpetual sneer is no answer.

Working-class people – especially oppressed layers, immigrants and women – need civil liberties, abortion rights and freedom from repression even more than the middle-class Democrats who say these issues are decisive in the election. For their own class reasons, the latter overlook that workers cannot afford to downplay the economic programs – the economic *attacks* – advocated by all the bourgeois politicians. The strategy of voting for a lesser evil is bankrupt, especially when the disastrous effects on the working class are so apparent.

FOR MASS ACTION, NOT POPULISM

For workers and oppressed people, the answer to John Kerry's conservative program is not some more-liberal Democrat or better-sounding populist promises. The alternative is to fight for militant mass actions that threaten the system rather than rely on it. That means serious, mass strikes that can actually win, rather than strikes that accept the bosses' ground rules and inevitably give in to their demands for major concessions like two-tier wage and benefit scales. (For a summary of the bureaucrats' record, see the article on Wal-Mart on page 7.)

It means massive protests against police brutality and racist attacks. It means fighting to unite all workers and the oppressed in the most powerful, threatening form of mass action of all: the general strike.

The call for mass strikes and mass action is not simply a program for more or better activism. It means an all-out political struggle which will inevitably confront state power, the enforcer of ruling class interests. To achieve such a struggle means a fight against the labor bureaucrats and Black and Latino leaders who hold back mass action and preach reliance on Democratic politicians.

The re-emergence of mass struggles of workers, Black and Latino people, immigrants and all the oppressed will no doubt bring forth populist demagogues of various types. Populism means championing "the people" against "the rich" or "the corporations," as opposed to fighting for the working class against the capitalist system. It is a leftist capitalist attempt to submerge the question of class and thus preserve this miserable system.

The populist demagogues will come out of the woodwork to try to lead the bandwagons they just jumped on. Some will be new or re-born “movement leaders,” some will be Democratic politicians, and others will wave a third-party banner. All will attempt to lead struggles back to the Democratic Party graveyard. But re-invigorating the Democratic Party is no reason to fight for strikes and mass actions. Mass struggles are battles to win absolutely necessary demands and to defend against the constant attacks on living standards. That means looking beyond the limits of capitalism towards a society run by and for working-class people.

THE SOCIALIST SOLUTION

If mass movements are to truly succeed and achieve their goals, they must create a leadership not beholden in any way to the preservation of racist capitalism. That can only be a working-class, socialist, revolutionary leadership, dedicated to getting rid of the capitalist system once and for all.

The world’s forces of production long ago reached the point where there is capacity to produce more than enough for all. The obstacle to achieving that goal is the ownership of the means of production by the ruling class in society, the tiny class of capitalists. Private property in the major means of production is inconsistent with human needs. For example, the capitalists only produce what they can make a profit from, and thus hold back production far short of its potential and of what’s needed, thus condemning the great majority of people on the planet to poverty.

As the economic crisis heats up even more, capitalism will not hesitate to inflict the same misery on the American working class.

There is an alternative. The greatest force of production of all is the working class itself, whose labor makes society run. The working class also has the power to take collective control of the means of production and run society itself, producing for human need and not for profit, and creating a society without any classes at all. Under workers’ rule, for example, the productivity advances that now threaten workers’ livelihoods would simply mean fewer working hours and more useful goods for all. That is the socialist solution. It is the only way out of the crisis of capitalist society, and it is achievable. But it will require a historic earth-shaking struggle to overthrow the capitalist system worldwide, through socialist revolutions in every country. Now that counterrevolutionary Stalinism and social democracy have been undermined, the middle-class populism and class collaborationism they fought for has been severely weakened. The day of authentic communism is dawning once again.

Revolutionaries who see the need to get rid of capitalism must work today to build the revolutionary socialist working-class party that can lead these approaching struggles to victory. Bourgeois electoral campaigns, whether for Kerry or any other Democrat or populist, are not only no answer to the crisis workers face – they actively put obstacles in the way of workers and youth looking for answers. An essential part of the struggle for socialism is to wage a political fight against these campaigns and their supporters at every opportunity. ●

No to Nader Too

The independent and Reform Party candidate Ralph Nader is gaining significant support in the polls, largely because he calls for a U.S. withdrawal from Iraq. But he offers no genuine alternative for working people. Nader’s is a left bourgeois campaign that stands firmly against working-class interests. As he said when he ran for president in 2000, his aim is to “save American corporate capitalism from itself.”

Nader’s “solution” in Iraq amounts to backhanded support for imperialism. It is aimed at separating the “mainstream Iraqis” from the anti-occupation “insurgents,” despite the fact that over 80 percent of Iraqis want the imperialists out. That is, he supports the occupation, even if he prefers it to continue under the false cover of a U.N. flag.

This scheme reflects Nader’s announced purpose in running: to force John Kerry to the left so that the Democrat can pick up votes from those who (rightly) abhor the programs and candidates of the two dominant parties. In May he met with Kerry, whom he labeled “very presidential,” to organize a “second front” against Bush. Nader wants Kerry to defend “traditional Democratic values,” hiding the fact that

the Democratic Party serves only capitalist values. Support for Nader is a backhanded way, however illogical, of trying to get Kerry to disguise his imperialist reality.

Nader accepted the right-wing Reform Party’s ballot line while claiming that he disagrees with its racist policy on immigration – specifically, its opposition to any government assistance for “illegal” immigrants. But he agrees that “we have to control our borders,” the same position he held during his 2000 campaign. He spelled out his view to say that immigrant workers would be allowed entry only for “a short period of time,” high-tech workers would be barred, with immigrants being allowed in only to perform work “that Americans don’t want to do.” (See *PR* 62.) Nader’s policy is only a softer version of the pro-imperialist nationalism he shares with the Pat Buchanan supporters in the Reform Party.

On the far left, the Socialist Alternative group (affiliated to the class-collaborationist and morally corrupt CWI organization – see *PR* 70) “strongly supports” Nader, as it did in 2000. SA absurdly claims that Nader’s bourgeois, pro-imperialist campaign “will be the best way in the

2004 elections to forward the interests of workers, young people, women, people of color, LGBT people, the environment, and the anti-war movement.” When Nader hooked up with the racist Reform Party, SA leaders sent him an open letter asking him to reject the Reform ballot line. Just as Nader begs Kerry to disguise his true views, SA begs Nader to disguise his.

The International Socialist Organization, which backed Nader enthusiastically in 2000, has been divided over supporting Nader. In a May 28 editorial, *Socialist Worker* announced that the ISO is withholding support “at this time,” supposedly because it has qualms over his ties to Kerry and the Reform Party. The ISO forgets that Nader’s strategy of pushing the Democrats to the left was the same in 2000, as was his racist line on immigration. Crossing the class line to support Nader then was no more principled than it is today. The real difference is that this year the “Anybody but Bush” sentiment is now strong among the ISO’s middle-class liberal campus audience; supporting Nader would alienate the pro-Kerry liberals it tails. With the pretend-Bolshevik ISO, opportunism is always the rule. ●

Kerry vs. Bush: Who Will Rule for Imperialism?

Electoral observers have repeatedly pointed out that John Kerry and George W. Bush have much the same international policy. For example, *Foreign Policy* magazine, a leading establishment journal, titled its May-June editorial “Meet George W. Kerry.” It argues that, whoever is elected, U.S. international affairs will be driven by a mutually accepted understanding of national interests. That is, for the ruling class the only real issue is which candidate can best defend the needs of the globally dominant imperialist power: maintaining U.S. hegemony over the lesser imperialist powers, control over regional pawn regimes and suppressing the exploited working classes of the world.

Such close agreement over foreign policy may seem paradoxical, especially at a time when the present administration’s conduct of a major war is in total shambles. But that is precisely the reason: as we show in our lead article on the debacle in Iraq, no serious bourgeois candidate can propose that the U.S. leave Iraq. Indeed, despite murmuring from within the Democratic Party for Kerry to take at least a minimal anti-war stance, the candidate has even avoided scoring points against Bush over the expanding prison-torture scandal. Kerry is wary of undermining Bush because, on this issue, the bourgeoisie is of one mind. Its goal is to avoid an ignominious U.S. retreat in Iraq.

For similar reasons, Kerry and Bush also have parallel positions on other leading international conflicts. On Palestine, Kerry supports Bush’s active support of Ariel Sharon’s escalation of apartheid, assassination and mass murder. He backs Bush’s continuing disaster in Afghanistan. He endorses the administration’s plans to “return Latin America to American leadership” by subverting the elected government of Venezuela (despite, ironically, Hugo Chávez’s support for Kerry’s candidacy). And he has joined Bush in blaming the Haitian crisis on ousted president Aristide, thus moving closer to open support for the U.S.’s conquest and occupation of that country as well.

THE IRAQ QUAGMIRE

The fundamental agreement within the U.S. bourgeoisie on Iraq is not new, as *Proletarian Revolution* has pointed out for over a year. The U.S.’s second savage Iraq war was backed by the leaders of both major parties in the U.S., and the great majority of Democrats in Congress. Today, Kerry still echoes Bush, claiming that “the United States of America is going to be resolute and tough and make certain that we accomplish our mission” in Iraq.

The Iraqi uprisings in April brought out Kerry’s solidarity with Bush in defense of imperialism’s right to massacre whomever it chooses in defense of its rule. Denouncing the simultaneous Sunni and Shi’ite resistance struggles to drive out the hated occupiers, Kerry said in the April 13 *Washington Post*:

The extremists attacking our forces should know they will not succeed in dividing America, or in sapping American resolve, or in forcing the premature withdrawal of U.S. troops.

We note that the League for the Revolutionary Party played a small but significant role in bringing the fact of Kerry’s agreement with Bush to public attention – see p. 3.

Kerry’s sole distinction from Bush over Iraq is his claim that “It may take a new president to be able to change the atmosphere

in order to be able to accomplish what we need to” – that is, to bring in the U.N. and other imperialist forces to share the U.S.’s burden. Kerry’s complaint is that the administration’s arrogance cost the U.S. the participation of major allies in the Iraq war. He is telling the ruling class that he would be a better imperialist.

Kerry may be right, but Bush is of necessity taking a similar tack. The U.S. has been forced by events to seek United Nations cover for the continuing war. Even if Kerry is elected, he will face the same impossible task: implementing the occupation of a country whose great majority wants all conquerors out. Adding the U.N. into the formula means that little will change: the hated sanctions that starved hundreds of thousands of Iraqis between the two U.S.-Iraq wars were enforced by the U.N. The U.S. will remain waist-deep in a bloody colonial war. And that war permits imperialism no face-saving way out.

THE KERRY TEAM

A further indication of Kerry’s commitment to an aggressively imperialist policy is the list of his foreign policy advisors; all are establishment warhawks. His likely candidates for Secretary of State include Clinton diplomat Richard Holbrooke and Senator Joseph Biden, who both endorsed Bush’s unilateral attack on Iraq. The militarist Republican Senator John McCain is also mentioned for either State or Defense.

Another top foreign policy mentor is Rand Beers, who had previously been appointed by Condoleezza Rice to serve Bush as a special assistant and as Senior Director for Combating Terrorism. Beers was notoriously a defender of the U.S.’s deadly crop-fumigation program in Colombia and has justified U.S. support for Colombia’s right-wing government by claiming that Al-Qaeda was training rebels there. In the *Boston Globe* (April 26), Beers accurately explained how he has been able to serve both Republican and Democratic presidents:

Much of American foreign policy is bipartisan. The goals are not always in question; it’s the style, it’s the way in which we’re approaching it.

Also close to Kerry is Clinton’s U.N. Ambassador and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, notorious for justifying the estimated half-million deaths of Iraqi children caused by the U.S./U.N. sanctions. She said in 1996, “I think this is a very hard choice, but the price – we think is worth it.”

After returning from Vietnam in 1971, the young John Kerry denounced that war for its atrocities. Today he apologizes for his youthful “anger” and shuts up about the current atrocities. The Bushites mock Kerry for his “flip-flops”; his supporters salute him for his “growth.” He has indeed grown – to understand that wartime atrocities are an imperialist necessity.

LIBERALS’ LAMENT

No one should be surprised at Kerry’s imperialist stance, but its flagrancy troubles some left liberal commentators who have been pushing the “Anybody but Bush” line. Robert Scheer in the *Los Angeles Times* warned that Kerry will end up losing like Al Gore if he tries to squeeze in just to the left of Bush. Jonathan Schell in *The Nation* mourned that the Democrats have become “an anti-war party that dares not speak its name.” Ruth Conniff in

The Progressive worried that Kerry “seems to lack the courage of his [supposedly anti-war] convictions.” Howard Zinn, also in *The Progressive*, pleaded: “We do not need another war President. We need a peace President.” James Ridgeway in the *Village Voice* implored the Democrats to nominate “someone – anyone – else.”

In lamenting Kerry’s stance, these queasy bourgeois leftists hide the class nature of capitalist society, the class interests behind this war and, most insistently, the class basis of the Democratic Party. Some are less concerned about Kerry’s too-blatant embrace of imperialism than the fear that his pro-war stance may cost the election. “The movement must persist, independent of Kerry and keeping him or making him honest, yet not opposing him,” Schell idiotically asserted. The leftish liberal leaders will inevitably call for votes to Kerry, despicably demanding the choice of one mass murderer over another in the name of “peace.”

Liberalism had its glory days during the post-World War II boom, when the U.S.’s economic domination allowed sections of the working class (and a growing middle class) to win significant gains. As American politics moved inexorably to the right after the boom ended around 1970, liberal Democrats began to look more and more like Republicans and were able to promise less and less. Likewise, the always-fraudulent Democratic claim to offer a more peaceful and humane foreign policy became transparent: imperialism required more loot from abroad as well as from home. That even left liberals today endorse Kerry is a naked statement of utter bankruptcy. No wonder that leftish vestiges of the old liberalism try to reinvent themselves as “populists” and bleat impotently about having no other choice than Kerry.

THE SEARCH FOR A “NEW WORLD ORDER”

There is a history to today’s bipartisan interventionist policy. As *Proletarian Revolution* has explained over the years, the fall of

the weaker Stalinist states in 1989-91 destabilized the imperialist balance of power and forced the U.S. to seek a new mode of domination. The Stalinist Soviet Union had played a key role in propping up the system, keeping a leash on mass struggles in its own sphere and parts of the “third world.” When the Cold War ended, the U.S. remained the world’s sole military superpower. But the disappearance of an enemy power loosened the bonds that held together the Western bloc under Washington’s domination. A “New World Order” to keep the masses down and lesser states in check has been the U.S. aim ever since.

The slogan was launched by Bush I, but his attempt ran aground. The fall of Stalinism had encouraged a few nationalist demagogues, leaders who had previously tried to exercise the little leverage afforded them by the U.S.-Soviet conflict, to seek to fill local power vacuums in their own national interests. Bush and Colin Powell taught them the first lesson by quickly ousting Panama’s Manuel Noriega in 1990, at a great cost in Panamanian lives. Then came Saddam Hussein. The U.S. expelled his forces from Kuwait in 1991 and encouraged the Shi’ites and Kurds to rebel. But then Papa Bush thought better of the potential destabilization of the Middle East and allowed Saddam to crush his internal enemies and stay in power.

Clinton at first continued Bush I’s floundering. He pulled the U.S. out of Somalia after military setbacks. He continued the starvation sanctions against Iraq without solving that festering and life-draining crisis. Then Yugoslavia flew apart because its bourgeois leaders whipped up nationalist hatred in the face of an economic crisis induced by imperialist pressures. Clinton first tried to bolster controllable local strongmen – Serbia’s Milosevic and Croatia’s Tudjman – as Washington had done with Saddam and Noriega. But Milosevic went over the line in combating the drive for independence in Kosovo; and this time Clinton took the opportunity to show the world who was boss. (See *PR* 59.) Milosevic, like Hussein, was taught the lesson that without a heavy Soviet imperial counterweight, U.S. imperialism believes it can take over militarily wherever it pleases.

Thus Clinton opened the road to U.S. unilateralism by waging war against Serbia in 1999 without U.N. approval. Bush II only extended the developing American policy further with his contemptuous treatment of the U.N. and “old Europe” in going to war against Iraq again in 2003. But even though some bourgeois reactionaries, liberals and Bush I stalwarts were nervous about Bush II’s methods, this aggression by a conservative Republican “cabal” also had its bipartisan precedent. In 1998 Clinton signed into law the Iraq Liberation Act, which declares: “The policy of the United States [is] to support efforts to remove the regime headed by Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq and to promote the emergence of a democratic government to replace that regime.” Even Bush’s lie about saving Iraq for democracy was stolen from the Democrats.

Bush II’s bold attempt to establish a new U.S. world hegemony in the wake of September 11 was widely hailed by bourgeois spokesmen in this country, some of whom even proudly polished up the old term “imperialism” that had been kept in use only by leftists. But that was last year. This year the U.S. ruling class is itself being taught a lesson: oppressed peoples do not take their neo-colonization lightly and can fight back.

John Kerry hopes to continue this brutal imperialist tradition. In his campaign book, *In a Call to Service*, Kerry calls for reviving “the tough-minded strategy of international engagement and leadership forged by Wilson and Roosevelt in the two world wars and championed by Truman and Kennedy in the cold war.” For the record, that tradition includes the dropping of two atomic bombs on civilian targets, the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba, the

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF STALINISM

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– Al Richardson, *Revolutionary History*

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Freedom Bridge over Danube April 1999. Clinton's war on Serbia in 1999 was part of U.S. imperialism's drive to discipline local strongmen.

Korean War and the Vietnam War, just for starters. In the same spirit, Kerry says he has no plans to lower the \$400 billion military budget and calls for an additional 40,000 active-duty U.S. troops to bolster the numbers currently overstretched in Afghanistan, Iraq and everywhere else.

Earlier in the campaign, Kerry talked as if he had the answer to the problem of a New World Order. He would take advantage of the gains of Bush's policy: proving the fighting strength of the U.S. military, and gaining economic opportunities for U.S. capitalists. But unlike Bush he would admit and correct mistakes: a larger military is needed, since the Iraq occupation was underplanned and understaffed; imperialist allies would be cultivated, not insulted; and through the U.N. world opinion would be placated. It sounded like an ideal imperialist solution – until the Iraqi rebellion punctured Kerry's balloon as well as Bush's.

ECONOMIC CRISIS OF IMPERIALISM

To understand the underlying reasons for the U.S.'s bipartisan policy of international aggression, we have to start a half-century back. The relative boom years after the Second World War – built on the worldwide defeat of the working classes at the hands of fascism, Stalinism, the Great Depression and the inter-imperialist war – ended by the late 1960's when profit rates began a long decline and working-class explosions took on massive dimensions in countries as diverse as China, France, Mexico and Czechoslovakia. As well, Western Europe and Japan had regained competitive imperialist status. In the normal order of capitalism, the resulting crisis of overproduction would have led to a new great depression. But fearing the power of working-class explosion, the imperialists used state power to puff up faltering economies through a massive expansion of fictitious capital – and a renewed but at first very careful assault on the working class. (See our pamphlet, *The Specter of Economic Collapse* for further analysis.)

The growing crisis hit most deeply in several of the poorest countries. But its most spectacular effect, in the late 1980's, was to undermine the Stalinist ruling classes, whose statified version of capitalism had prevented rapid modernization and the efficient exploitation of workers. (See our book, *The Life and Death of Stalinism*.) In Eastern Europe and the USSR, large sections of the ruling classes ditched the Stalinist parties and joined up with new entrepreneurs to form a new hybrid capitalist class, ruling in partnership with or subordinate to Western imperialism. (In China the Stalinists held on to state power in order to best implement

overtly capitalist market practices in their own as well as imperialist interests.) This reform of statified capitalism toward the traditional private-property system – a devolution that had long ago been foreseen in articles in this magazine – brought new horrors to workers in the former Stalinist bloc, as their rulers subjected their economies to higher levels of looting and exploitation.

Western capitalism thought it had won a new lease on life, but in fact the crisis of Stalinism reflected and foreshadowed its own growing crisis. Looting the ex-Stalinist bloc and squeezing heavier debt payments out of superexploited workers and peasants in Africa, Asia and Latin America temporarily is boosting imperialist profits but has not rescued capitalism from its long-term decay. The boom of the 1990's in the U.S. was based largely on fictitious evaluation of stock market prices. The 2000 collapse and the corporate scandals involving giant companies like Enron and WorldCom revealed that such fictions were no solution. A new depression is still inevitable. On the eve of the Iraq war in 2003, the bitter dispute between the U.S. versus France, Germany and Russia demonstrated the increasingly desperate scramble for profits that now drives all capitalist formations: state, corporate and national.

The U.S.'s second Iraq war was a necessary but desperate attempt to shore up American imperial hegemony. Accordingly, the imperialist debacle in Iraq has embarrassed and endangered the leadership of the U.S. superpower. To be forced out of Iraq by mass opposition and resistance would ignite mass revolts everywhere. Hence the U.S. ruling class's harrowing fear of withdrawal from Iraq. Kerry and Bush have no choice but to run as committed imperialists in order to reassure their class. The choice of direction for imperialism has narrowed.

CHOOSING BETWEEN IMPERIALISTS

Beneath the quagmire in Iraq is the fact that for all their might and their willingness to inflict terror, the imperialists fear the rising tide of mass hostility abroad. As rebellious struggle grows, class consciousness is beginning to recover. With the death of Stalinism and social democracy and the populist class collaborationist politics they lent their strength to, the basis for the resurgence of authentic communist class consciousness is now being sparked in the semi-colonial and neo-colonial world. Given the ever-growing economic centralization of imperialism around the world ("globalization") the U.S. economy and class struggle can no longer remain isolated from the crises and eruptions abroad. Soon all the imperialist countries will be embroiled in external and internal struggles. The U.S. working class too will inevitably face a crisis of enormous proportions and a decisive life choice.

Those on the left who swear by "Anybody but Bush" and campaign for Kerry are adding their weight, however minimal, to legitimizing the U.S. imperialist war drive. They are also spreading the illusion that Kerry or any Democrat could run as an anti-war candidate and in that capacity serve as chief executive of the U.S. ruling class. That lie is more insidious than any of "Bush's lies" that served to justify the U.S. war on Iraq. For it is aimed at making even the more radical sections of the U.S. working class complicit in their rulers' imperialism. It is a blow not just against working-class interests but against class consciousness, the only hope in the U.S. for overthrowing its imperialist rulers.

At this moment, there are "pro-populist socialists" who align with the left liberals to take up where dying Stalinism and declining social democracy left off by trying to prevent the re-growth of class consciousness. In the U.S. and across the world, the alternative to an election designed to reinforce imperialism is to re-create the workers' own international revolutionary party. ●

No Choice in 2004 Election

Bush, Kerry Demand War, Austerity



The presidential contest between Bush and Kerry is a cruel farce. The beleaguered masses across the world face the spectacle of two pompous bloody-handed multi-millionaires competing to decide their fate. It appears that Americans are uniquely privileged because they alone get to choose between them. But even that choice is a lie. American workers, especially Blacks, Latinos and immigrants, are also the targets of U.S. imperialism.

Their occasional rhetoric aside, no candidate in this election offers anything close to what working people need and want. That is because this society, its pseudo-democratic elections included, in no way serves the working class. It is a capitalist society, run by and for the capitalist ruling class. Millions of American workers want an end to the bloody war against the people of Iraq. They want jobs for all at human wages, affordable and decent health care, real skills training, good housing and a solid education for their kids. But the vote will get them none of this.

The facts are plain. The two major presidential candidates agree almost 100 percent on imperialist war abroad and attacks on the workers and oppressed at home. They both insist on “staying the course” in Iraq – that is, on extending the disaster for the Iraqi population and prolonging the unwanted stay of the occupying forces. (See our article on page 29.) Both candidates envisage a U.S. and world economy that defends the interests of Wall Street above all and therefore requires austerity for the vast majority, at home as well as abroad. (See page 25.)

So what is the point of the vote? *By means of the presidential campaign, the ruling class is demanding popular ratification of its imperialist, anti-human course.* To support Bush or Kerry is to endorse that course: to continue and expand the murderous and torturous U.S. regime in Iraq, and to sacrifice all hopes of economic and social gains at home to the insatiable needs of war and profit.

Moreover, as our front-page article explains, U.S. imperialism is facing a catastrophe in Iraq. The central thrust of the Kerry campaign is that he alone can rescue the ruling class from the disaster that George W. Bush & Co. have led it to. To campaign for Kerry, as many anti-war and working-class activists will do, with the “practical” aim of getting rid of the hated Bush administration,

means seeking to rescue U.S. imperialism from its self-imposed debacle. It means mobilizing the U.S. population for the sacrifices required to maintain the “white man’s burden” of colonial regimes in Iraq, Haiti and elsewhere. It means accommodating to policies that will lead to both cuts in social spending at home and increases in U.S. military manpower abroad.

What then is to be done? The problems American working people face will not be solved by elections, by the capitalists or within the capitalist system. The only alternative is socialist revolution; the way to get there is mass action, the living class struggle. No gains, no liberties, have ever been won by any course other than mass struggle that at least threatens the system. If there are few successful mass struggles in this country at the moment, the reality is that the miseries of capitalism will force working people to struggle. The point then is to work for the inevitable struggles to be able to win.

What is necessary now – the most practical and realistic thing that can be done – is to see that when the struggles break out again, they are not again sold down the river by leftist liberal leaders who support or adapt to the Democratic Party. That is, it is necessary to build the nucleus of a revolutionary workers’ party. Revolutionaries today must recruit, train and educate our fellow working-class militants, who have no interest in defending capitalist imperialism, in order to fight to win leadership of the future struggles. Revolutionaries must use elections as Lenin did, to convince working people of the need for the vanguard party and socialist revolution.

That task cannot be postponed because it is allegedly necessary to put off disaster by electing yet another “lesser” evil, an enemy who defends this system of worsening horrors. Those who advocate that path invariably caution against mass struggles; unrest may damage their candidates’ chances of winning middle-of-the-road support. Thus they betray the only course that offers a genuine solution, and they offer a future that will bring slaughter and misery to countless human beings. A vote in this election for *any* bourgeois candidate is a vote to validate mass murder and imperialism! Lending any effort to an imperialist campaign is not just a diversion from but a barrier to the liberation of our species. ●