

1917

"To face reality squarely; not to seek the line of least resistance; to call things by their right names; to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be; not to fear obstacles; to be true in little things as in big ones; to base one's program on the logic of the class struggle; to be bold when the hour of action arrives—these are the rules of the Fourth International."

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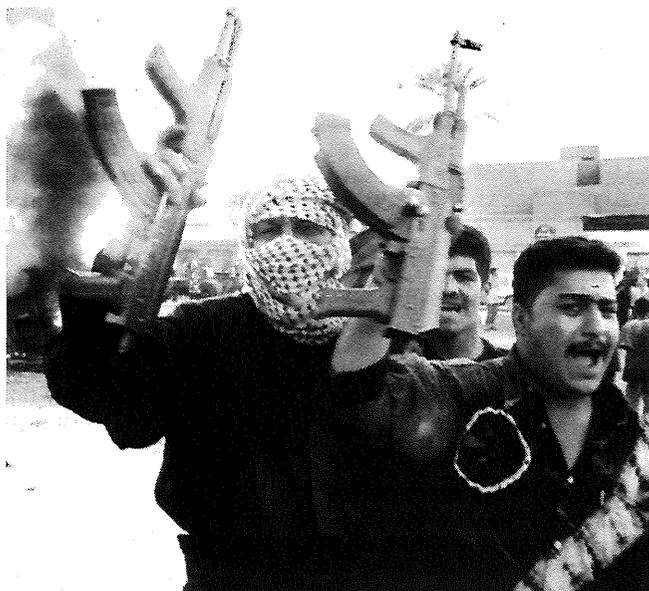
JOHN MAKEY—SUN

Imperialists Out of the Middle East!

Endgame in Iraq

A month before retiring as United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Annan observed: "The US is in a way trapped in Iraq, trapped in the sense that it cannot stay and it cannot leave" (BBC News, 21 November 2006). The conquest of Iraq was supposed to be the dramatic opening move in a bold strategy to secure permanent U.S. global supremacy.

Instead, it has considerably accelerated the decline of the American empire. The insertion of the U.S. military into the Middle East under the guise of combating terrorism and spreading "freedom" and "democracy" was designed to ensure that the lion's share of the profits from exploiting the region's strategically vital petroleum resources



AHMAD AL-HUBAYE—AFP

Shiite militiamen in Baghdad

would go to American corporations, while also providing Washington with powerful leverage over its rivals.

Victory in Iraq was to serve as an "Agincourt on the banks of the Euphrates," in the words of John Lewis Gaddis of Yale University (*Foreign Policy*, November/December 2002)—a display of overwhelming military power that would "shock and awe" friend and foe alike. The construction of a chain of military bases in Iraq was to provide "full spectrum dominance" and guarantee a string of "low-intensity democratic" American client regimes in the region. The remade Middle East was to be run from an enormous 104-acre embassy in Baghdad, which *USA Today* (19 April 2006) described as the only "major U.S. building project in Iraq [that] is on schedule and within budget." With a projected staff of 3,000 and its own power generation and water-treatment facilities, the embassy was designed to be America's largest diplomatic installation in the world. Despite growing talk of "drawing down" U.S. forces, both Democrats and Republicans remain committed to maintaining a sizable military presence in Iraq, although it is by no means certain that this will be feasible.

Sowing Dragon's Teeth

The rout of the Afghan Taliban in November 2001 produced visions of a "cakewalk" in Iraq, with a compliant and easily manipulated "democratic" regime replacing the brutal Baathist dictatorship of former U.S. client Saddam Hussein. While the American army captured Baghdad in less than a month, in four years it has been unable to put together a functional quisling government. Rather than attempting to co-opt key members of the old Baathist state apparatus, the U.S. occupation authorities decided to build a new one from scratch, leaving the core cadres of Saddam's regime, who have a popular base among Iraq's Sunni minority, to launch a sophisticated and remarkably resilient insurgency.

Lacking significant support from any sector of Iraqi society, the occupation authority sought to exercise control by manipulating sectarian divisions, a technique

employed by the British with considerably greater skill in the period between the two world wars. Having deposed the Sunni elite, which had ruled Iraq since its creation in the 1920s, the U.S. tilted toward the oppressed Kurds and Shiites. Though willing to take advantage of the opportunities created by the end of the Baathist dictatorship, no authoritative figures among either Kurds or Shiites have shown interest in acting simply as America's puppets.

The Kurdish leaders have maintained cordial relations with the occupation authorities in order to keep Turkey at bay as they consolidate and expand the quasi-independent statelet they have operated in northern Iraq since 1991. The Shiites, though not actively supporting the Sunni insurgents, have no loyalty to the foreign occupiers and look forward to their departure. Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, Iraq's senior Shiite cleric, wanted to avoid open conflict with the Americans, while using the elections they promised as a means of establishing the predominance of the Shiite majority. To this end, he managed to enlist all the major Shiite parties in a common electoral bloc, the United Iraqi Alliance.

In November 2004, the U.S. military attempted to "break the back" of the increasingly potent Sunni insurgency by laying waste to Fallujah, one of the chief centers of the revolt. U.S. forces destroyed most of the city and killed hundreds of civilians. This vicious assault only succeeded in further inflaming hatred of the U.S. throughout the Muslim world.

After the failure in Fallujah, the Pentagon sought to gain the upper hand through the use of ethnically- and religiously-based death squads modeled on those employed by the U.S. in El Salvador in the early 1980s:

"The interim government of Prime Minister [and former CIA asset] Ayad Allawi is said to be among the most forthright proponents of the Salvador option....

"[Maj. Gen. Muhammad Abdallah al-Shahwani, director of Iraq's national intelligence service] said that the U.S.

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1917

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Anarchist Organization and Vanguardism In Defense of Leninism

The question of what, if any, type of revolutionary organization is necessary has always been a thorny one for anarchists. The most hard-core "organizational" anarchist trend is "Platformism," which takes its name from the 1926 Platform advanced by Nestor Makhno, Peter Arshinov, Ida Mett and several others associated with the Paris-based émigré Russian anarchist paper *Dielo Truda*. In drawing the lessons of Bolshevik success and anarchist failure in the Russian Revolution, the authors of the Platform concluded that it was necessary to form a disciplined, programmatically homogenous anarchist organization. They proclaimed: "It is time for anarchism to leave the swamp of disorganisation...and to operate an organised collective practice" on the basis of "precise positions: theoretical, tactical and organisational."

In a January 2006 article, "Why an Anarchist Organization is Needed... But Not a 'Vanguard Party'," Wayne Price of the Northeastern Federation of Anarcho-Communists (NEFAC) addressed the long-standing accusation by Platformism's anarchist critics that it amounts to little more than closet Leninism. Price's article is, in part, a polemic against our 2002 pamphlet, "Platformism & Bolshevism," which he refers to as the "only extended work by Leninists on the subject."

The 1926 Platform advocated the creation of a "General Union of Anarchists" built on four organizational principles. In addition to the traditional anarchist preference for "federalism" over centralism, Makhno et al. favored "theoretical unity," "tactical unity" and "collective responsibility." Theoretical unity means that the anarchist organization should be based on a "homogeneous programme." This presented a direct challenge to the "synthesist" view that anarchist groupings should be all-inclusive formations embracing ultra-individualists, syndicalists and every other sort of self-professed anarchist. "Tactical unity" (aka the "collective method of action") requires members to coordinate their political activities and implement the democratically-arrived at decisions of the group. This overlaps somewhat with "collective responsibility," which stipulates that members have both the right to participate in the collective decision-making process and the duty to abide by the majority view once a decision is reached. The anarchist collective, as envisioned by the authors of the 1926 Platform, "requires each member to undertake fixed organisation duties, and demands execution of communal decisions."

The Platform's authors proposed an executive committee as part of the division of labor within the projected "General Union of Anarchists":

"With a view to the co-ordination of the activity of all the Union's adherent organisations, a special organ will be created: the executive committee of the Union. The committee will be in charge of the following functions: the execution of decisions taken by the Union with which it is entrusted; the theoretical and organisational orientation of the activity of isolated organisations consistent with the theoretical positions and the general



Nestor Makhno

tactical line of the Union; the monitoring of the general state of the movement; the maintenance of working and organisational links between all the organisations in the Union; and with other organisations."

The Platformists' contemporary anarchist critics charged that this was tantamount to Leninism:

"What has happened to federalism? They are only one step away from Bolshevism, a step that the authors of the Platform do not dare to take. The similarity between the Bolsheviks and the 'Platform anarchists' is frightening to the Russian comrades. It makes no difference whether the supreme organ of the anarchist party is called Executive Committee, or if we call it Confederal Secretariat."

—"Reply to the Platform (Synthesist)," April 1927, www.nefac.net

The venerable Italian militant Errico Malatesta, a well-known champion of "pro-organizational" anarchism, denounced the Platformists' idea of collective responsibility as "the absolute negation of any individual independence and freedom of initiative and action" ("A Project of Anarchist Organisation," October 1927). Anticipating this critique, the Platform had noted: "[Q]uite often, the federalist principle has been deformed in anarchist ranks: it has too often been understood as the right, above all, to manifest one's 'ego', without obligation to account for duties as regards the organisation." The Platformists dismissed those who took individual autonomy to extremes with the observation that a serious revolutionary organization can only function on the basis of majority rule:

"Almost always and almost everywhere, our movement's practical problems are resolved by majority vote. At the same time, the minority can cling to its own views, but does not obstruct the decision; generally, and of its own volition, it makes concessions. This is perfectly

understandable as there cannot be any other way of resolving problems for organizations that engage in practical activity. There is, anyway, no alternative if one really wants to act."

—Peter Arshinov, "Elements Old and New in Anarchism: A Reply to Maria Isidine," November-December 1928

In his article, Price concedes that majority rule inevitably requires an element of centralization:

"To be sure, an anarchist federation also has a degree of 'centralization,' that is, specific bodies and individuals are assigned specific tasks by the whole membership. These central groupings are elected and are recallable at any time, with a rotation of tasks among members. By definition, a federation balances centralization with decentralization, with—among anarchists—only as much centralization as is absolutely needed, and as much decentralization as is maximally possible."

—*Op. cit.*

Instead of simply renouncing "federalism," Platform anarchists have attempted to redefine it to include a "degree of centralization." This has led other anarchists to charge that Platformism is just one end of an authoritarian continuum that runs all the way to Leninism. Price attempts to distinguish Platformist "centralization" from Leninist on the grounds that:

"'Centralization' is not just coordination, unification, or cooperation. Centralization ('democratic' or otherwise) means that everything is run from a center. A minority is in charge."

—*Ibid.*

The question of who is "in charge" ultimately depends on what mechanisms exist to allow the membership to overturn decisions or select a new leadership. There is no logical reason why an organization cannot be both centralized and democratic. Nor must centralization mean that "everything is run from a center." To be effective, any organization (whether anarchist, Leninist, corporate or military) must strike a balance between centralized and local decision-making, and permit those on the ground the maximum amount of tactical flexibility in carrying out their assignments. There is also no reason why debate in a Leninist organization must automatically result in domination by authoritarian personalities and the atrophy of internal democracy, while the internal struggles of Platformists for "theoretical unity" can only proceed in an egalitarian, democratic fashion. Ultimately, the only guarantee against bureaucratism in any organization is the political consciousness of the membership.

Price attempts to skirt these issues by resorting to caricature:

"Among Leninists, the centralized party is justified philosophically. The party supposedly knows the Truth, knows 'scientific socialism.' The party is considered the embodiment of Proletarian Consciousness. Proletarian consciousness is not what the proletariat actually believes but what it should believe, what it must believe, which only the party knows for sure."

—*Ibid.*

The repulsive personality cults of Stalin, Mao and Kim Il Sung adorned brittle, autarchic dictatorial regimes that ruthlessly crushed any dissent. But the Bolshevik Party in

Lenin's time operated very differently. Even under conditions of civil war there were vigorous debates on a wide range of issues of economic and social policy, and at times the central leadership itself was sharply divided (as, for example, over the terms of the predatory "peace" treaty imposed by German imperialism at Brest-Litovsk, or later over trade-union policy).

The October Revolution was only possible because the Bolshevik leadership was flexible enough to radically revise long-held positions in the light of new developments. In April 1917, the party abandoned its entire strategic conception of the "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" and adopted a program originally associated with Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution, which Lenin had denounced for a dozen years. The party also dropped its long-standing agrarian policy in favor of the Social Revolutionaries' call for breaking up the large landed estates and distributing them to individual peasant families.

NEFAC's 'Platformist Pretensions'

The original Platformists placed a high priority on political homogeneity:

"[A] whole swathe of individuals claiming to be anarchists has nothing in common with anarchism. Gathering these people (on the basis of what?) into 'one family' and describing that gathering as 'anarchist organization' would not only be nonsense, it would be positively harmful. If that were to happen by some mischance, all prospects for anarchism's developing into a revolutionary social movement of toilers would be banished.

"It is not an indiscriminating mix, but rather a selection from the wholesome anarchist forces and the organization thereof into an anarchist-communist party that is vital to the movement; not a hotchpotch synthesis, but differentiation and exploration of the anarchist idea so as to bring them to a homogeneous movement program. That is the only way to rebuild and strengthen the movement in the laboring masses."

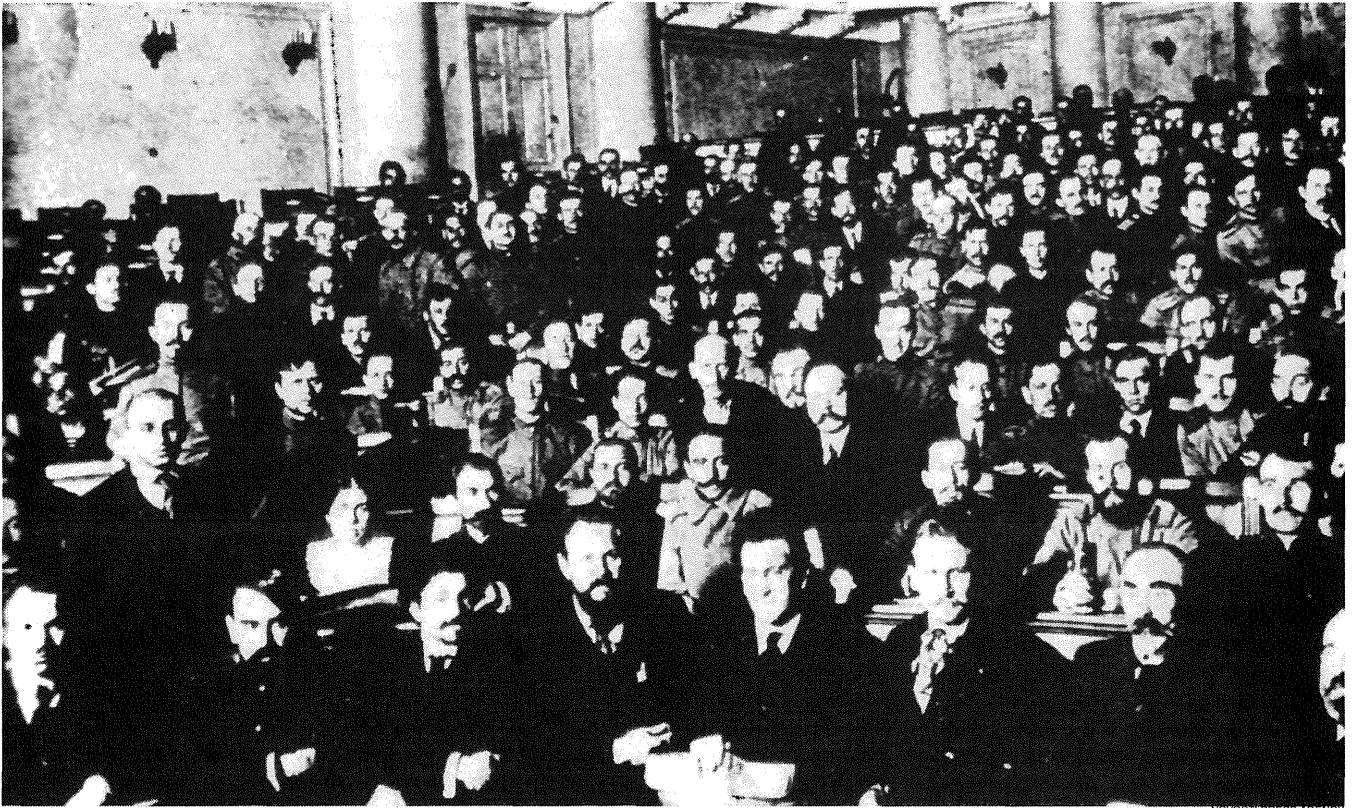
—"Reply to Anarchism's Confusionists," August 1927

NEFAC claims to stand in the Platformist tradition, but it rejects the idea of a "homogenous movement":

"Let's be clear, we do not believe that an organization is a movement in itself, and we do not pretend at all to represent [the] whole of the anarchist movement. While we have confidence in our ideas, we do not think we possess THE truth, and it is probable that we are wrong on this or that point. That [is] why we advocate revolutionary pluralism."

—"The Question of the Revolutionary Anarchist Organization: A NEFAC Position Paper," adopted 15 September 2002

The authors of the 1926 Platform, who asserted that anarchism "must gather its forces in one organisation" because "dispersion and scattering are ruinous," recognized that "revolutionary pluralism" is a prescription for inefficiency and duplication of effort. In the absence of significant political differences, a single larger group, with a more sophisticated division of labor, has considerable advantages over several smaller ones. The existence of different organizations with nearly identical politics, each claiming a desire to do mass organizing, while clinging to



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Delegates to the First All-Russian Congress of Soviets, Petrograd, June 1917

its own separate small-circle existence, would hardly be likely to inspire confidence among radicalizing workers.

Nicolas Phebus, one of NEFAC's founding members, candidly described other ways in which his group falls short of the model put forward by Makhno, Arshinov et al.:

"Despite our 'platformist' pretensions, in many ways we are much more a network than [sic] a federation, or even an organization like Love & Rage was with 'locals' and so on. Our grassroots nodes (i.e. collectives) are truly autonomous and are in constant contact with all other nodes without having to go through a central filter."

—"We Learn As We Walk: Looking Back on Five Years of NEFAC," *The Northeastern Anarchist*, No.10 (Spring/Summer 2005)

According to Phebus, NEFAC has:

"been unable to create central positions that are elected and controlled by the whole membership. There's no elected central structure in NEFAC; every task, even political tasks like producing the publications, are given with a vague mandate to various collectives."

—*Ibid.*

The absence of a "central structure" (i.e., a leadership body) has created predictable difficulties:

"We periodically have problems of collective responsibility at all levels. Since there's no one in charge of coordinating the whole federation, we still have problems following mandates (even if we're becoming increasingly better than when we first formed). Also, we collectively seem to have an aversion to budgeting. Of course we have a treasury and we are all supposed to pay regular dues, but the general functioning of the organization depends

on the good will and self-discipline of our membership. While good will is almost always there, self-discipline is sometimes lacking."

—*Ibid.*

Leadership, Vanguard & Revolutionary Minorities

In 1926, in response to anarchist militant Maria Isidine, the Platform's authors declared that it was their "duty to do all in our power to see that anarchism's ideological influence upon the march of revolution is maximized" ("Supplement to the Organizational Platform [Questions and Answers]," November 1926). At the same time they cautioned that the "theoretical driving force" provided by anarchist ideas "should not be confused with the political leadership of the statist parties which leads finally to State Power." Price explains this distinction as follows:

"With programmatic and tactical unity, members [of a Platformist group] would participate in broader, more heterogeneous, associations, such as labor unions, community organizations, antiwar groups, and—when they arise in a revolutionary period—workers' and community councils. Such anarchist organizations would not be 'parties,' because they would not aim at achieving power for themselves. They would seek to lead by ideas and by example, not by taking over and ruling the popular organizations, let alone by taking state power."

—*Op. cit.*

Mainstream anarchists have always been suspicious of the Platformists' desire to provide "leadership of ideas." In 1927 some synthesist critics observed:



R.T.H.P.L.

Massive anti-war protests shook Russia in spring 1917

"We declare that juxtaposing the words 'to lead' with the adverb 'ideologically' does not change the position of the Platform's authors significantly because they conceive the organization as a disciplined party."

—"Reply to the Platform (Synthesist)," April 1927

It is no secret that revolutionary ideas do not currently enjoy mass popularity in most industrialized countries, and NEFAC members are well aware of the political backwardness of the North American working class. Changing this will require the efforts of those who already understand the necessity of revolutionary social change, as Price explains:

"In general, over the long haul, people become radicalized heterogeneously. In conservative times, people become revolutionary by ones and twos. As things become more radicalized, by groups and clusters. Then, as things move into a period of radicalization, layers become revolutionary. Finally, in periods of upheaval, whole populations rise up. But many or most newly radicalized people have not thought out their goals or strategies. They tend to be full of energy but to be confused and uncertain until they can sort out their ideas through experience. It is easy in these periods for reformists to mislead them back to the old ways, or for authoritarian groups to set up new rulers....

"As groupings and layers of working people and others become radicalized, they have the chance to organize themselves to effectively spread their ideas among the rest of the (not-yet-radicalized) population. This

does not contradict the self-organization of the whole oppressed population. It is an integral part of that self-organization."

—*Op. cit.*

Price poses the problem in the following terms:

"The issue here is the relationship between the minority which has come to revolutionary conclusions, and the majority which, most of the time, is nonrevolutionary—except in revolutionary periods. (That the majority has become revolutionary is what, by definition, makes a period revolutionary!) Spontaneist and anti-organizational anarchists do not see this as an issue; they deny that it exists. To them, even talking about a revolutionary minority means being authoritarian. They live in a world of denial. It is only possible to counter dangers of authoritarianism if we admit that it may arise out of the split between a revolutionary minority and the majority."

—*Ibid.*

Like it or not, any attempt to organize a nucleus of committed activists capable of providing leadership ("ideological" or otherwise) for the masses of working people boils down to "vanguardism." Acknowledging this has always been difficult for Platformists. Price tries to finesse it by suggesting that those who provide a "leadership of ideas" are not really leaders at all. He then tries to clinch his argument with crude caricature:

"I do not wish to quibble about definitions of words, when it is the concepts which matter.... But 'vanguard'

has come to mean not only a group which has its own ideas, the revolutionary minority. It has come to mean those who think they have all the answers and therefore have the right to rule over others. This is what anarchists reject."

—*Ibid.*

Leninists don't claim to have "all the answers" nor to have a "right to rule over others." What we do assert is that only the ideas of Marxism can politically arm the proletariat to successfully wage the class war. Leninists aspire to provide a "leadership of ideas"—i.e., to have the Marxist program embraced by the advanced layers of the working class and the oppressed. The Bolsheviks' successful political struggle to win the support of a majority of the delegates to the workers' and soldiers' soviets in 1917 demonstrates how this can be achieved. Leninists also uphold the right of a revolutionary majority to impose its will on scabs, reactionaries and other backward elements.

Much of the practical activity of contemporary Platformists seems to involve participation in anti-racist, anti-war or anti-poverty coalitions within which they seek to encourage "self activity" and "non-authoritarian" practices. The politics put forward by these formations does not appear to be a concern to NEFAC, even when it involves the promotion of abject reformism (see our letter to NEFAC's Montreal collective on page 11). The important thing, according to Nicolas Phebus, is that:

"We do not see ourselves as 'colonizers' within social movements, but rather as fellow activists in search of the best strategies for our movements to win. This is how we approach our work as a political organization, and that's why we say we don't want leadership positions for ourselves but rather a 'leadership of ideas', which essentially means that we are going to fight democratically within these movements to develop influence for anarchist ideas."

—*Op. cit.*

Jeff Shantz, also of NEFAC, makes the same point:

"It is clearly a mistake to approach movements either as recruitment grounds (as more formal organizations often do) or as social clubs (as is more typical for informal groups). For us the key is to be involved in a principled way that prioritizes building working class strength in our communities, neighbourhoods and workplaces rather than building our specific organization."

—*Upping the Anti*, No.1, 2005

NEFAC takes a similar approach in the unions:

"Unlike left groups that have focused their energies on running opposition slates in union elections or forming opposition caucuses, NEFAC unionists work to develop rank-and-file organization and [militancy.] We take the position that regardless of the union leadership, until we build a militant and mobilized rank-and-file movement, across locals and workplaces, the real power of organized labour will remain unrealized."

—*Ibid.*

The power of labor can only be realized to the extent that revolutionary political consciousness develops within the advanced layers of the working class—something that does not occur as a byproduct of simple rank-and-file activism in the workplace. Whether or not to run candidates in this or that union election is a secondary, tactical

question which, depending on the concrete situation, may or may not advance the political struggle against the pernicious influence of the labor lieutenants of capital. It is not enough to fight the bosses or oppose a rotten contract pushed by the union brass—what is essential is to help the workers understand issues that go far beyond their immediate problems in the workplace. This means advancing a coherent revolutionary political alternative to "common sense" labor reformism, and fighting to root these ideas in the workers' organizations.

Price rejects Leon Trotsky's assertion in the *Transitional Program* that, in the final analysis, the crisis of humanity can be reduced to a crisis of working-class leadership:

"The disadvantage of this conception of leadership is that it lends itself to seeing the leadership as the all-important thing. The task becomes to replace the bad leaders with the good leaders, the bad parties with the good party: the party with the right ideas. Instead of focusing on arousing the people, encouraging their independence and self-reliance, the implication is that all they need is to put the right leadership in power. At its worst, the party becomes a substitute for the working class."

—*Op. cit.*

This poses the struggle for revolutionary "leadership" in a very one-sided fashion. Trade-union careerists fight for personal power and material privileges within the framework of capitalism, but the revolutionary "struggle for leadership" hinges on masses of ordinary working people developing the ability to recognize their own objective class interests and, on that basis, to distinguish friend from foe.

The Russian Revolution: A Specter Haunting Anarchism

The political awakening of the proletarian masses is marked by their increasing sophistication in assessing the pronouncements of reformists and the left-talking centrists, quacks and cranks who appear in times of heightened social struggle. This is precisely what occurred between February and October 1917 in Russia, as the working class moved steadily to the left and tens of thousands of the most revolutionary-minded and dedicated militants, including many former adherents of rival leftist formations, joined the Bolsheviks.

The October Revolution was the first—and so far the only—successful seizure of power by the working class. Unlike the deformed workers' states issuing from Soviet military occupation (Eastern Europe, North Korea) or insurrectionary peasant guerrilla armies (China, Vietnam, Yugoslavia and Cuba), the Russian workers' state was created by a highly-politicized and sophisticated urban proletariat, led by a revolutionary party that was committed to the socialist transformation of society.

The Platformists of 1926 recognized that key elements of the traditional anarchist doctrine had been tested and decisively refuted in the course of Russia's social revolution:

"It was during the Russian revolution of 1917 that the need for a general organisation was felt most deeply and most urgently. It was during this revolution that the libertarian movement showed the greatest degree of sectionalism and confusion. The absence of a general

organisation led many active anarchist militants into the ranks of the Bolsheviks."

—*Introduction to the 1926 Platform*

Anarchist militants went over to the Bolsheviks not only because of their superior organization, but also because they were serious about destroying the repressive apparatus of the capitalist state and replacing its role in the organization of production and civil administration with directly-elected workers' councils (or "soviets"). Comrade Price rejects the idea:

"...that the Russian revolution proves the need for a centralized, topdown, Bolshevik-type of vanguard party. Without that sort of party, it is said, there would not have been a socialist revolution. Therefore we need to build that kind of party today."

—*Op. cit.*

Yet, unlike most anarchists, Price neither denies the leading role the Bolsheviks played in the revolution nor the reality of the profound social transformation carried out under their leadership. Instead, he argues: "The Bolshevik Party made the Russian revolution when the party was most like an anarchist federation!" and cites the late Murray Bookchin's observation that:

"The Bolshevik Party...was an illegal organization during most of the years leading up to the revolution. The party was continually being shattered and reconstituted, with the result that until it took power it never really hardened into a fully centralized, bureaucratic, hierarchical machine. Moreover, it was riddled by factions...into the civil war."

—*Ibid.*

The Bolshevik Party under Lenin and Trotsky's leadership was "riddled by factions" precisely because a healthy democratic-centralist organization can only grapple with a complex and rapidly-changing social and political situation through vigorous internal discussion and debate. In his 1936 masterpiece, *The Revolution Betrayed*, Trotsky observed:

"The present doctrine that Bolshevism does not tolerate factions is a myth of the epoch of decline. In reality the history of Bolshevism is a history of the struggle of factions. And, indeed, how could a genuinely revolutionary organization, setting itself the task of overthrowing the world and uniting under its banner the most audacious iconoclasts, fighters and insurgents, live and develop without intellectual conflicts, without groupings and temporary factional formations?"

The transformation of a revolutionary organization in which the top leaders engaged in sharp political debates—even in the most critical periods—into "a fully centralized, bureaucratic, hierarchical machine" with an infallible leader and an intimidated and politically-atomized rank and file represented a qualitative degeneration.

Price also cites Alexander Rabinowitch's *Prelude to Revolution: The Petrograd Bolsheviks and the July 1917 Uprising*:

"that '...the near-monolithic unity and "iron discipline" of the Bolshevik Party in 1917 were largely myth....' (1991, pp. viii-ix). The party's Central Committee was unable to control the many regional and local organizations, and usually did not try to.... On the Central Committee there

were strong-willed militants who fought for their views, sometimes ignoring party discipline. Meanwhile the party had opened itself to tens of thousands of new worker members, who shook things up considerably. When Lenin returned to Russia, he relied on these new rank-and-file members to overrule the conservative policies of the Old Bolsheviks. Rabinowitch concluded that these 'decentralized and undisciplined' (p. ix) divisions caused some difficulties, but overall they were vitally useful. '... The Bolsheviks' organizational flexibility, their relative openness and responsiveness...were to be an important source of the party's strength and ability to take power' (1991, p. xi)."

—*Op. cit.*

The influx of newly-radicalized workers, whose adherence ultimately made the Bolsheviks hegemonic within the Russian working class, undoubtedly loosened things up internally. But the Bolshevik party became the natural destination for radicalizing workers largely because of its courageous, and initially extremely unpopular, opposition to Russian intervention in World War I, and its unequivocal opposition to the left-talking liberal-bourgeois Provisional Government. Lenin's reliance on "tens of thousands of new worker members" to overcome conservative resistance within the Bolshevik old guard is a model of how a revolutionary organization can correct mistakes and make abrupt changes in strategy through the mechanism of democratic internal political struggle.

The breakdown of communication between the center and local Bolshevik organizers was not a source of strength, because it tended to reduce the party's ability to concentrate its forces and thereby maximize its influence. But the same problem was faced by all of its competitors. Even in the most turbulent periods the party leadership retained the political confidence of its membership, and was therefore able to exert political control. This was particularly important during the July Days, when a premature confrontation with the Kerensky government could have resulted in bloody defeat.

The chief instance of "strong-willed militants" on the central committee choosing to "ignore party discipline" occurred when Grigory Zinoviev and Lev Kamenev, after failing to persuade a majority of the Bolshevik leadership that it was unwise to proceed with the overthrow of Kerensky, broke discipline and unsuccessfully sought to derail the entire project by leaking the plans to the press. Lenin wanted to expel the two "strikebreakers" for their betrayal, but no other member of the Central Committee supported his proposal. Isaac Deutscher observed: "It is quite impossible to square this and many similar episodes with the view that monolithic or totalitarian uniformity had reigned in the Bolshevik party ever since its inception" (*The Prophet Armed*).

While trying to paint Lenin's party at the time of the October Revolution as quasi-anarchist, Price treats the social order it established as a "state capitalist" totalitarian nightmare. The exigencies of fighting a civil war (and foreign intervention) in a country already exhausted by three years of imperialist war required the Bolsheviks to govern on the basis of military expediency, i.e., not in accordance with the norms of socialist democracy. As the civil war dragged on, living standards fell, and popular support for the Bolshevik regime shrank as its working-class base was



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Workers meeting at a Petrograd railway station to support Red Guards

decimated. This posed a dilemma for the fledgling revolutionary government, as we noted:

"[W]e do not criticize the Bolsheviks for pursuing victory over the Whites in the civil war, despite the fact that in large areas of the country they could no longer claim the support of the majority of the population, or even of the working class."

"Truth is always concrete and the necessary tactics for revolutionaries at any stage in the struggle must accord with the real possibilities that exist. In Russia in 1920 there were only two options—the victory of the Reds or the Whites. New elections to the Soviets would have produced a majority for parties that would have immediately taken steps to reintroduce capitalism. As Serge, and many other former anarchists, recognized, the maintenance of the rule of the Communist Party was the only alternative to the restoration of the Russian bourgeoisie."

—"Platformism & Bolshevism"

Price admits that free elections could well have "permitted the rise of a proto-fascism," but comes to a diametrically opposite conclusion:

"However, this approach did not lead to socialism, but to Stalinism, the counterrevolution through the party. Stalinism was almost as brutal a totalitarianism as was Nazism. According to the I.B.T. pamphlet, the Bolshevik party was no longer revolutionary by 1924, not that long after the 1917 revolution. Therefore, I conclude, it would

have been better for the Bolsheviks to have stuck to the revolutionary democracy of the original soviets, even if they were voted out of power. Nothing could have been worse than what happened."

—*Op. cit.*

Price may consider the outcome of the struggle between the Reds and Whites a matter of indifference, but most of the Russian Mensheviks, anarchists and other leftist opponents of the regime understood that for them it was literally a matter of life and death, which is why they ended up backing the Bolsheviks, despite their misgivings.

The idea that Russia could develop into a socialist (i.e., classless) society on its own was dismissed as an autarchic and unrealizable fantasy by the entire Bolshevik leadership in Lenin's time. Their whole strategy was based on viewing Russia as a staging area for proletarian revolution abroad, most importantly in Western Europe. The suspension of soviet democracy by the Bolsheviks, which was systematized and deepened by the Stalinist political counterrevolution, was initially seen as an extraordinary, short-term expedient to buy time. That is how it would have been remembered had there been successful revolutionary breakthroughs in the West.

There was nothing preordained about the triumph of the Stalinist oligarchy. The victory of the bureaucracy was, in the final analysis, a result of the defeat of the postwar revolutionary wave in Europe, and, in particular, the inability of the immature leadership of the German Communist Party to seize the opportunity presented by the crisis of



Leon Trotsky inspects Red Army troops, 1921

1923. An earlier and more decisive intervention by the Communist International might well have tipped the balance, and thereby changed the entire course of history.

Contemporary anarchists have a tendency to conflate the repressive measures undertaken by the Bolshevik regime in the early 1920s under Lenin and Trotsky with Stalin's bloody purges of the mid-1930s. Yet there is a qualitative difference between them, as Victor Serge, a former anarchist who personally witnessed the transformation, vividly described:

"In Russia the civil war and the encirclement created an atmosphere of mortal peril in which were dictated measures of public safety, sometimes terrible ones, but no less terrible for the party in power (*alone* in power because of the defection of certain dissidents) than for its adversaries in the ranks of the revolution. If the dictatorship of the proletariat refused the Mensheviks and the anarchists the right to sabotage, even with the best intentions, the defence of a commune threatened at every moment with the worst fate, it showed itself no less severe towards the deficiencies of the members, of the Communist party. It never refused the right of criticism to its dissidents, it never thought of refusing them the right to existence. It can, moreover, be asserted that if the Bolshevik party had declared at the beginning that it meant to build up a totalitarian régime excluding all freedom of opinion to the workers it would not have triumphed—the masses do not battle in order to go to prison; we know that, on the contrary, it announced the broadest labour democracy. On the morrow of the disarming of the anarchist Black Guards in Moscow (1918) the anarchist-syndicalist daily newspaper continued to appear; the anarchist-syndicalist publishing house of the *Voice of Labour* (*Golos Truda*) disappeared only in 1925 or 1926; at the same time, that is, after the victory of the bureaucratic reaction, there also disappeared the organ of the left-wing Social Revolutionaries, *The Banner of*

Labour (*Znamia Truda*). The anarchist paper *Pochin* (*The Beginning*) and *The Maximalist* succumbed a little earlier. The Menshevik party had a daily newspaper in Moscow in 1919, *Vperyod* (*Forward*). Its fractions maintained themselves in the soviets until 1923. The year 1927 must first be reached, at the moment when the bureaucracy consummates its victory in the party by the expulsion of the Trotskyists, before one can hear Tomsky and Bukharin proclaim with a single voice: 'Under the dictatorship of the proletariat, two, three or four parties may exist, but on the single condition that one of them is in power and the others in prison.'

"... [Leninists] cannot abandon the rigorous discipline of action without which no victory is possible, or the advantages of collective thought, any more than they can renounce imposing within the toiling class the will of the majority and, at certain turning points, the will of the vanguard upon that of the rearguard which is at once fearful, disabled, corrupted, and manoeuvred by the bourgeoisie. They also know that socialism cannot live and grow without living thought, that is, without freedom of opinion, divergences, criticism by the masses, active public opinion, contrast of ideas.... On these points Stalinism has done immense damage to the working-class world, which the proletariat of the West alone can remedy. In theory and practice, the prison-state has nothing in common with the measures of public safety of the commune-state in the period of the battles: it is the work of the triumphant bureaucrats who, in order to impose their usurpation, are forced to break with the essential principles of socialism and to refuse the workers any freedom at all."

—*Russia Twenty Years After*

1917 or 1936: A Choice Between Victory and Defeat

Many young militants who see that the capitalist state operates as a mechanism of oppression and inequality are sympathetic to anarchist proposals for the abolition of all "authority" and state power. But, as many Russian anarchists discovered in 1917, such notions are useless in situations where the question of social revolution is actually posed. The lesson was again driven home less than two decades later in Spain by the political capitulation of the anarcho-syndicalist Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT) and the Federación Anarquista Ibérica (FAI) in July 1936 after the working class successfully insurrected against a rightist military coup led by General Francisco Franco. Instead of seeking to push the struggle forward through expropriating the capitalists and creating organs of direct working-class power, as the Bolsheviks had done, the CNT/FAI leadership, which prided itself on its refusal to get involved in "politics," politically supported the "democratic" bourgeois government.

A prominent FAI leader, Diego Abad de Santillán, described how, immediately after the workers' uprising in Catalonia, President Luís Companys told the anarchist leaders:

"You are masters of the town and of Catalonia, because you defeated the Fascist soldiers on your own.... You have won and everything is in your power. If you do not

need me, if you do not want me as president, say so now, and I shall become just another soldier in the antifascist struggle. If, on the other hand, you believe me...then perhaps with my party comrades, my name, and my prestige, I can be of use to you...."

—cited in *The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain*,
Pierre Broué and Emile Témime

Santillán, who was subsequently elevated to the post of Minister of Economy, explained the CNT/FAI's leadership's capitulation as the logical consequence of its "apolitical" and "anti-authoritarian" ideology:

"We could have remained alone, imposed our absolute will, declared the Generalidad null and void, and imposed the true power of the people in its place, but we did not believe in dictatorship when it was being exercised against us, and we did not want it when we could exercise it ourselves only at the expense of others. The Generalidad would remain in force with President Companys at its head...."

—*Ibid.*

The left-anarchist "Friends of Durruti," who denounced

the capitulation of the CNT/FAI leadership, forthrightly asserted that "revolutions are totalitarian," and concluded that it is not enough to destroy the capitalists' state—it is also necessary to replace it with a revolutionary "junta" of workers' representatives. As we commented in our pamphlet, this amounted to advocating "the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' in everything but name." Comrade Price did not choose to comment on this.

Karl Marx's projection that under communism the "free development of each [will be] the condition for the free development of all" (The Communist Manifesto) requires organized, disciplined revolutionary struggle to break up the bourgeois machinery of social control and replace it with new, working-class institutions. The October Revolution in Russia, spearheaded by the Bolsheviks with the active support of anarchists, Left Social Revolutionaries and a variety of other leftists, is the only historical example of a successful overthrow of capitalist rule by the working class. Only those revolutionaries who embrace this experience and assimilate its lessons will be capable of winning new victories in the future. ■

Reformism, Pacifism & Anarcho-Opportunism

Letter to NEFAC

The following letter was sent to the Montreal branch of the Northeastern Federation of Anarcho-Communists.

5 September 2006

Comrades:

On 6 August thousands of people marched in Montreal under the slogan "Quebec stands up for justice and peace in Lebanon...NOW!" The demonstration also included calls for "respect of international conventions, international law and 'all' UN resolutions on the Middle East," as well as a demand "that the [Conservative] Harper government disassociate itself from the policies of the U.S. and work for justice and peace in the Middle East." The list of endorsers included Arab community groups, the Bloc Québécois, civil-rights organizations, trade-union federations, as well as Québec Solidaire and the anti-war Collectif Échec à la guerre to which the Montreal branch of the Fédération des communistes libertaires du Nord-Est (Northeastern Federation of Anarcho-Communists [NEFAC]) belongs.

The platform of the Collectif Échec à la guerre is characterized by bourgeois utopian calls for "a world of peace, based on international relations of justice, equity and solidarity," and the "reconversion of the Canadian military industry to civilian purposes." It also advocates the transformation of the United Nations:

"The *Échec à la guerre Collective* calls upon all nations of the world to firmly oppose the hijacking of the United Nations to benefit U.S. war plans or the marginalization of the UN through unilateral 'faits accomplis' that violate International Law and the very Charter of the UN. In this

respect, we call upon the Canadian government to work towards the reinforcement of the role of the UN General Assembly in order to face the new international situation and stop U.S. military hegemony."

How does any of this fit NEFAC's posture of revolutionary opposition to all imperialist state powers (including the Canadian one)? Social-democratic reformists may dream about imperialist powers "reconverting" their militaries into humanitarian agencies, but revolutionaries know that only victorious workers' revolutions around the globe will bring "world peace." As for the UN, it is essentially an imperialist tool, as has been repeatedly demonstrated since the Korean War of the early 1950s.

A genuinely revolutionary organization would never sign its name to the pacifist drivel espoused by the Collectif Échec à la guerre. NEFAC's willingness to participate reveals a profoundly opportunist tendency to cater to whatever is currently popular with its hoped-for audience. Any members of NEFAC who are at all serious about the goal of working-class revolution must decisively reject all social-democratic illusions about the bloody predatory system of world imperialism somehow being transformed into a mechanism for peace and social justice. Those who aspire to help the working class carry out a social revolution to uproot capitalist exploitation must begin by calling things by their right names.

Yours for Permanent Revolution,
Jordan Briggs,
for the International Bolshevik Tendency

Iraq...

continued from page 2

occupation has failed to crack the problem of broad support for the insurgency.... One military source involved in the Pentagon debate agrees that this is the crux of the problem, and he suggests that new offensive operations are needed that would create a fear of aiding the insurgency. 'The Sunni population is paying no price for the support it is giving to the terrorists,' he said. 'From their point of view, it is cost-free. We have to change that equation.'

—*Newsweek*, 8 January 2005

The use of Shiite and Kurdish militias to raise the "cost" to the Sunni civilian population did not blunt the insurgency, and instead fueled a cycle of communalist bloodletting that undermined any possibility of cobbling together a stable government with the legitimacy and coercive power necessary to control events:

"[I]t is worth recounting the US policies that sowed the dragon's teeth: dissolving the Iraqi army; allying with the sectarian Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq; bandying about the term 'Sunni triangle' to describe areas of strong anti-occupation sentiment; divvying up seats on the Iraqi Governing Council and interim ministries by sect and ethnicity; allowing ministries to become communal party fiefdoms; describing anti-occupation guerrillas as 'anti-Iraqi forces'; pushing a schedule of elections and constitution writing driven by US rather than Iraqi politics; and training clandestine 'counter-terrorism' units that are now government death squads. As US Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad put it in March, 'We have opened Pandora's box.'"

—*Middle East Report*, Summer 2006

The February 2006 bombing by persons unknown of the revered Shiite Askariya Mosque in Samarra produced a significant leap in sectarian killings that the U.S. military has been completely unable to tamp down. Initially, the victims were disproportionately Shiite. These murders were ascribed to fanatical Sunni "jihadists" motivated by a combination of sectarian animus and a desire to make Iraq ungovernable. But soon the Shiite militias, often operating through the puppet police, were among the main perpetrators of the escalating violence that is killing thousands every month. Toward the end of 2006, according to the United Nations, "citizens were fleeing the country at a pace of 100,000 each month," and "at least 1.6 million Iraqis have left since the war began in March 2003" (Associated Press, 23 November 2006).

Democracy & Imperialist Control

For the first few years of the occupation, U.S. military and political leaders periodically proclaimed that a decisive "watershed" had finally been reached and that the situation would soon improve. Yet every "milestone"—including the installation of a sham "sovereign government" under ex-Baathist thug Allawi in June 2004 and the fraudulent January 2005 election of an "interim government"—failed to make any appreciable difference in the lives of ordinary Iraqis, and, as a result, the political

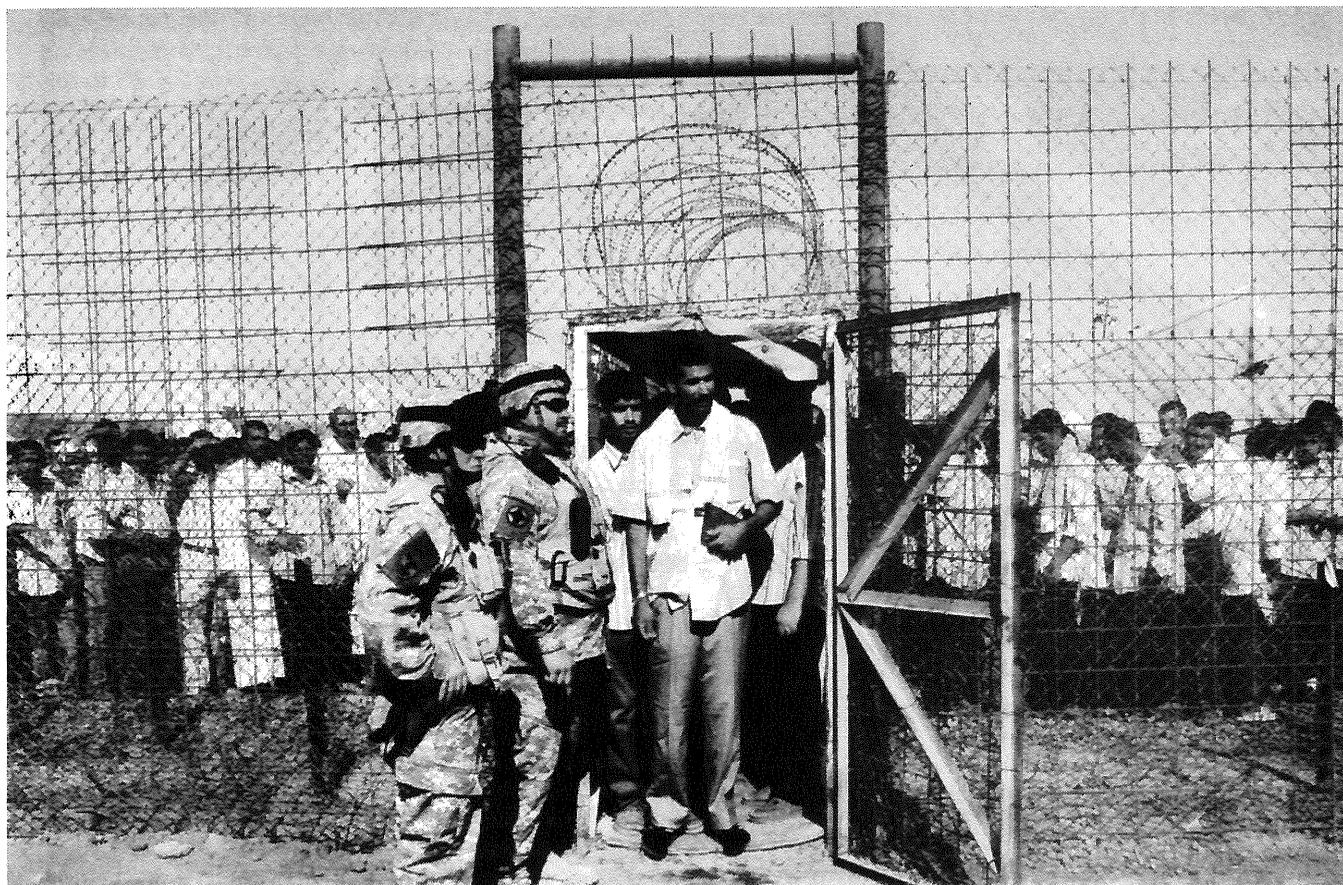
leverage of the occupation authorities and their lackeys has steadily declined. After months of torturous maneuvering, a "constitution" was accepted in a (rather dubious) October 2005 national vote. Two months later new national elections were conducted. The White House heralded both as important "turning points," but the attempt to disguise the recolonization of Iraq behind a "democratic" façade has fooled no one.

On paper, the December 2005 elections united representatives of Iraq's Kurds, Shiites and Sunnis in a "national unity government." The U.S. hoped that Sunni participation in the "political process" would result in splitting the base of the resistance. But the government headed by Shiite prime minister Nouri al-Maliki has never been more than a semantic fiction. It governs nothing and has failed to control the accelerating sectarian slaughter or impose even a semblance of order in the capital, much less make inroads on the insurgency.

Each component of Iraq's so-called government is intent on pursuing its own interests at the expense of its "partners." The Kurdistan Alliance only agreed to the October 2005 constitution after obtaining recognition of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Its chief concern is to secure control of the oil resources in the north. The Sunni and Shiite parliamentary blocs, which are prepared to countenance Kurdish "autonomy," at least for the moment, are flatly opposed to the KRG's ambition to extend its authority over oil-rich Kirkuk, a city with sizable Kurdish, Arab and Turkmen populations. To avoid an open split, the government has agreed to delay a decision on the disputed city until a referendum is held, perhaps in late 2007. Whether or not a vote eventually takes place, this bitter dispute seems likely to touch off armed conflict and a wave of bloody ethnic cleansing which could spill over into a major regional conflict, as Turkey has repeatedly threatened to intervene militarily to prevent a Kurdish takeover.

The U.S. favors "democracy" for its neo-colonies as a flexible and low-cost mechanism of imperial control through the manipulation of competing indigenous parties. The difficulty with implementing this model in Iraq arose with the reluctance of any wing of the Sunnis to get involved in the U.S.-initiated "political process." While some Sunni leaders participated in the negotiations for a new constitution, they were reluctant to endorse the resulting draft in the October 2005 referendum because they felt it opened the door for regional, rather than central, control of Iraq's petroleum resources, and their territory contains no significant known oil deposits. In last minute maneuvering, the U.S. pressured the Kurds and Shiites to agree that the new parliament would revisit the constitutional provisions governing the division of powers, including the question of control of oil resources. As a result, the Sunnis participated in the December 2005 national elections.

Once the elections were over, the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI—a party closely aligned with Iran and supported by the wealthier layers of Iraq's Shiites) declared that it was unwilling to make any substantial concessions to mollify the Sunnis. The *New York Times* (12 January 2006) described this as "a prescription for a national breakup and an endless civil war. It is also a provocative challenge to Washington, which helped broker the original promise of significant constitutional changes."



SCOTT NELSON—WPA/AGENTUR FOCUS

Some prisoners being released from infamous Abu Ghraib prison, June 2006

But it is not only the Sunnis who want centralized control of Iraq's oil. The Shiites are deeply split over this question. Supporters of Muqtada al-Sadr, who unlike the semi-collaborators of the SCIRI have opposed the occupation from the outset, are also in favor of central control. Sadr's Mahdi Army fought two major engagements with occupation forces in 2004, and his posture as an intransigent opponent of the Americans has made him the most influential political figure among the Shiites, even in the south, where the SCIRI is based. While framed in theological terms, Sadr's opposition to decentralization derives from the fact that his movement is rooted in the plebeian Shiite masses of Baghdad, an area without significant petroleum deposits. In September 2006, the Iraqi parliament opted to paper over the whole question by postponing a decision for 18 months, by which time everyone expects that the status quo will have been blown to bits.

In August 2006, relentless pressure from Shiite militias forced 1,000 British soldiers to abandon their base outside the city of Amara:

"According to Lt Col David La Bouchere, commander of the Queens Royal Hussars battle group, around 283 mortars were fired in from last March to August.

"The camp needed constant resupplying by around 160 trucks every couple of weeks. 'It was a very stupid situation, we needed six to seven companies of soldiers just to protect the base,' said Lt Col La Bouchere. 'The answer was to leave the base and depend on a more mobile force.' When the British left two months ago, officers

called it a tactical redeployment; the people of Amara called it a retreat."

—*Guardian* [London], 21 October 2006

As soon as the British were gone, a violent turf war erupted between the SCIRI's Badr Brigade and Sadr's Mahdi Army:

"In the capital, the two factions sit together as fellow members of the Shia Unity parliamentary bloc. But in Amara, they have been fighting pitched battles ever since the British Army ended its permanent presence in the city in August.

"Both factions have tried to stake political territory by introducing rafts of Taliban-style restrictions, including banning music at weddings, segregating schools, shutting internet cafes and stopping people watching Western satellite channels."

—*Telegraph.co.uk*, 12 November 2006

American influence in the Middle East is waning, and Washington's Arab allies are growing increasingly unsettled. Yet despite the steady deterioration of the situation, the U.S. commander in chief, seemingly oblivious to reality, has continued to talk of eventual "victory," and to insist that the fate of his Iraq venture would be "decided by future presidents."

Communist Conflict Spins Out of Control

The strategy of obtaining a reliable puppet through "manipulating the military balance of power among Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds in order to force them to come to a durable compromise," as Stephen Biddle recommended



DAN CHUNG—REUTERS

March 2003: Terrified family flees the U.S./UK assault

in *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 2006), presumes that “the underlying interests of all local parties would be far better served by a constitutional compromise than by an all-out war.” This may look plausible enough on paper, but with the situation on the ground spinning out of control, it would require bridling the Shiite militias, which have considerable influence in both the Interior Ministry and local police forces. It seems unlikely that the U.S. will want to take on the Shiites, particularly as the Sunni insurgency, whose fighters are blamed for many of the attacks on Shiite civilians, is still gaining ground.

By August 2006, as the American military was unsuccessfully attempting to suppress the upsurge of murderous sectarianism in Baghdad, a U.S. Defense Department official admitted that the “insurgency has gotten worse by almost all measures, with insurgent attacks at historically high levels,” and “has more public support and is demonstrably more capable in numbers of people active and in its ability to direct violence than at any point in time” (*New York Times*, 17 August 2006). Large areas of the country, particularly in Anbar province, which contains the cities of Haditha, Fallujah and Ramadi, have become virtual “no-go” areas for U.S. forces and their allies. The *Washington Post* (28 November 2006) reported that a classified military report by Peter Devlin, a Marine colonel, concluded: “The U.S. military is no longer able to defeat a bloody insurgency in western Iraq....”

For all the talk of pulling U.S. forces back from combat, it is clear that there is a bi-partisan consensus in the American ruling class in favor of attempting to maintain a permanent military presence in the region. The hope is that U.S. troops can be withdrawn from areas where resis-

tance is intense into bases outside the main urban centers, or perhaps outside Iraq altogether, but close enough to intervene as necessary. However, the inability of the U.S. military to suppress either the insurgents or the communalist militias suggests that this may turn out to be little more than defeat on the installment plan. With the partial exception of the Kurds, who have their own agenda, the U.S. has no militarily significant Iraqi allies—the Iraqi army and police will disintegrate as soon as the Americans begin to pull out. If 150,000 imperialist troops have spent four years in a futile attempt to contain an insurgency that seems to grow deadlier every month, it is hard to see how anyone could think that withdrawing into a few fortified bunkers in the hinterland, while permitting the insurgents to consolidate power in the towns and cities and to control the terrain through which the oil pipelines run, is likely to produce a better result.

The Pentagon hoped to substitute airpower for U.S. “boots on the ground” in Iraq, as it had attempted in Vietnam in the 1970s. In theory, close air support could enable even a mediocre army to prevail over highly-motivated, battle-hardened opponents. But Washington does not want to entrust Iraqi commanders, many of whom are loyal to the Sunni insurgency or Shiite militias, with the power to call in air strikes. One alternative is to embed U.S. “trainers” or “advisers” in every Iraqi unit, and give them the authority to select targets for destruction. But this risks having American officers “fragged” or taken hostage by members of the units to which they are attached.

The failure of the U.S. military to suppress the Sunni insurgency has turned the occupation into an unmitigated,

and very expensive, disaster. *Harvard Magazine* (May-June 2006) reported that a study by Nobel laureate Joseph E. Stiglitz and Harvard's Linda Bilmes estimated that the Iraq war "will eventually cost Americans in excess of \$2 trillion." In 2003, prior to the invasion, U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld projected a total cost of between \$50 and \$60 billion, while Paul Wolfowitz, his deputy, confidently asserted that Iraqi oil revenues would cover almost everything. The much touted "reconstruction" of Iraq proved lucrative for a handful of well-connected Bush/Cheney cronies, but failed to restore Iraq's electrical and water treatment facilities, as well as its schools, hospitals and other public services, to the levels that existed under Saddam.

A study of fatalities in Iraq conducted by a team from Baltimore's Johns Hopkins University, published in the October 2006 issue of the prestigious British medical journal *The Lancet*, estimated that a total of 655,000 "excess" deaths have occurred in Iraq since 2003. It estimated that 31 percent of violent deaths are directly attributable to "coalition" forces and that more than 45,000 Iraqis have been killed by coalition air strikes alone since the 2003 invasion.

The reckless massacre of non-combatants that has taken place throughout the "Sunni Triangle" is typical of situations when an occupation army, seeking to crush a popular resistance movement, comes to view the civilian population as indistinguishable from the active insurgents. In a handful of particularly well-documented cases which have been picked up by the media, charges have been leveled against U.S. soldiers, but, as in the case of the Abu Ghraib torture scandal, all responsibility is assigned to a few of the lower ranks.

Bourgeois Defeatism Rising

The openly defeatist mood in Britain, America's only significant ally in Iraq, was highlighted when General Richard Dannatt, chief of the British general staff, publicly stated that his troops should "get ourselves out [of Iraq] sometime soon because our presence exacerbates the security problems" (*Guardian* [London], 13 October 2006). Similar views have also been expressed, less directly, by an increasing number of U.S. military and political officials who have concluded that the war cannot be won. In November 2005 John Murtha, the senior Democrat on the House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee who has long served as the unofficial representative of the Pentagon's top brass, caused a sensation when he called for pulling out American troops by May 2006. This infuriated Bush, who responded a few days later in a 19 November speech in South Korea:

"The terrorists witnessed our response after the attacks of American—on American troops in Beirut in 1983, and Mogadishu in 1993. They concluded that America can be made to run again, only this time on a larger scale, with greater consequences. The terrorists are mistaken; America will never run."

"The terrorists regard Iraq as the central front in their war against humanity. And we must recognize Iraq as the central front in our war against the terrorists.

"...If they're not stopped, the terrorists will be able to advance their agenda to develop weapons of mass



Iraqis celebrate destruction of U.S. Army humvee

destruction, to destroy Israel, to intimidate Europe, and to break our will and blackmail our government into isolation. I'm going to make you this commitment: This is not going to happen on my watch."

—www.whitehouse.gov

Bush apparently fancies himself an instrument of god: "After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the former official said, he was told that Bush felt that 'God put me here' to deal with the war on terror. The President's belief was fortified by the Republican sweep in the 2002 congressional elections; Bush saw the victory as a purposeful message from God that 'he's the man,' the former official said. Publicly, Bush depicted his reelection as a referendum on the war; privately, he spoke of it as another manifestation of divine purpose."

—*The New Yorker*, 5 December 2005

If he saw the 2002 mid-term elections as an endorsement, one can only wonder how he interpreted the 2006 results. Residents of Baghdad's fortified "Green Zone" apparently sense that things are going very badly:

"Until as recently as last year, every ambitious state department intern and junior Foreign Office mandarin was keen to do at least a six-month stint there [in Baghdad's Green Zone]...Today, though, the brightest and the best have left, giving it the atmosphere of being a place wound down....

"Working there is becoming like an albatross around people's necks," said one insider. "The feeling is that it doesn't matter how many hours a day they do, it won't make any difference. And nobody wants to be around if they end up getting helicoptered out, Saigon-style."

—*Telegraph.co.uk*, 12 November 2006

Throughout 2006 the situation for the U.S. and its allies deteriorated considerably:

"In the fall of 2005, the generals running the Iraq war told the Senate Armed Services Committee that a gradual withdrawal of American troops from Iraq was imperative. "The American troop presence, Gen. John P. Abizaid and Gen. George W. Casey Jr. said at the time, was stoking the insurgency, fostering dependency among the Iraqi security forces and proving counterproductive for what General Abizaid has called 'The Long War' against Islamic radicalism.



CHRISTOPHER LANE—REUTERS

American forces in Iraq, October 2005

"This week, General Abizaid, chief of the United States Central Command, told the same committee that American forces may be all that is preventing full-scale civil war in Iraq, so a phased troop withdrawal would be a mistake.... The biggest danger now, they say, is that violence between Shiites and Sunnis could destroy Iraq's government and spill across the Middle East."

—*New York Times*, 18 November 2006

A bloody communalist civil war in Iraq could draw in Iran and Turkey as well as neighboring Sunni Arab regimes, and turn the entire region into an inferno. The U.S. bourgeoisie, acutely aware of the implications of failure in Iraq, is torn between a desire to extricate themselves ("cut and run") with as little damage as possible, and the wish to somehow find a formula to stabilize the situation.

The inability of the U.S. to control events on the ground is reflected in attempts by the "sovereign government" of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to display some independence from its master with denunciations of the occupiers' tendency to use "excessive force." In May 2006, Maliki proposed that "coalition" troops should withdraw from 16 of Iraq's 18 provinces by January 2007 (BBC News, 23 May 2006). In July 2006, after it was revealed that several months earlier U.S. soldiers in the town of Mahmudiyah had raped and murdered a 14-year-old girl and killed her parents and sister, the Iraqi parliament unanimously denounced this as a violation of "the honor of all Iraqis." Maliki suggested that those responsible should be tried under Iraqi law. The U.S. command rejected this out of hand as a violation of Order 17 passed in 2004 by the Coalition Provisional Authority under U.S. pro-consul Paul Bremmer granting foreign military personnel and contractors immunity from Iraqi courts.

A few weeks after condemning the hideous crime in Mahmudiyah, the Iraqi parliament unanimously characterized Israel's attack on Lebanon as "criminal aggression." Meanwhile, America's Jordanian, Egyptian and Saudi clients were denouncing Hezbollah for "adventurism."

When Maliki's chief ally, Muqtada al-Sadr, organized a demonstration of 100,000 in Baghdad to protest the Zionist assault, the *New York Times* (20 July 2006) observed:

"The resentment of the Iraqi government toward Israel calls into question one of the rationales among some conservatives for the American invasion of Iraq—that an American-backed democratic state here would inevitably become an ally of Israel and, by doing so, catalyze a change of attitude across the rest of the Arab world."

U.S. in Iraq: No Good Options

Juan Cole, the leading American expert on Iraqi Shiites, commented that the current U.S. impasse results from a failure to define "realistic and achievable" goals:

"Its original *political* goal of establishing a unified Iraq with a pro-US government that would let oil contracts on a favorable basis for Houston, would ally with Israel, and would form a springboard for further US pressure on Iran and Syria, is completely unrealistic. [U.S. Vice President] Cheney's inability to let go of those objectives is the biggest problem we have in Iraq."

—"Informed Consent" blog, 28 November 2006

On 24 October 2006, in a major editorial statement on the "Iraq Disaster," the *New York Times* commented that "all plans to avoid disaster involve the equivalent of a Hail Mary pass," i.e., a nearly hopeless long shot:

"No matter what President Bush says, the question is not whether America can win in Iraq. The only question is whether the United States can extricate itself without leaving behind an unending civil war that will spread more chaos and suffering throughout the Middle East, while spawning terrorism across the globe.

"The prospect of what happens after an American pullout haunts the debate on Iraq. The administration, for all its hints about new strategies and timetables, is obviously hoping to slog along for two more years and dump the problem on Mr. Bush's successor."

The editorial proposed:

"The president should also make it clear, once and for all, that the United States will not keep permanent bases in Iraq. The people in Iraq and across the Middle East need a strong sign that the troops are not there to further any American imperial agenda."

Of course, that is the only reason the U.S. military ever intervenes anywhere, and furthering an "American imperial agenda" is why there is a bi-partisan consensus on indefinitely maintaining U.S. bases in the region. The *Times* editorialists are merely suggesting that it is better to spin them as "temporary," rather than permanent, fixtures.

Ultimately, the U.S. ruling class has three broad, and unpalatable, options in Iraq. The first is to admit defeat and pull its troops out. This would be an immense historic setback for U.S. imperialism, at least comparable to Vietnam. U.S. withdrawal would be followed by a maelstrom of intercommunal violence, which could easily spill over into a broader conflict involving Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia and perhaps also Jordan and Egypt.

Even if a regional war could be averted, America's Middle East vassals would have to reach some sort of accommodation with Iran, the new regional power. Regimes closely identified with the U.S., particularly



JEWEL SAMAND—GETTY IMAGES/AFP

Iraqi youth takes a swing at disabled U.S. military tanker outside Baghdad

Jordan and Saudi Arabia, could easily implode. "Losing" Iraq would mark the definitive end of U.S. hegemony over the international system it established at the conclusion of World War Two. This is an outcome the U.S. ruling class is understandably reluctant to accept.

A second option for Washington is to make a deal with Tehran—to recognize its primacy in the Persian Gulf, while negotiating some sort of special status for the U.S. and its dependencies, and working out an arrangement for American oil majors to get some access to Iraq's petroleum resources. This would cement Iran's status as the champion of the Islamic world, reduce U.S. influence in the region and weaken the regimes most closely associated with it. A comprehensive deal with Iran would probably involve Tel Aviv—with terms that might include withdrawing from most of the Occupied Territories, dismantling the apartheid wall and recognizing a bifurcated Palestinian statelet with a great deal more sovereignty than proposed in either the 1993 Oslo Accords or the 2002 "Road Map."

A third broad alternative would be for the U.S. to demand that Tehran use its influence to stabilize Iraq on terms acceptable to Washington, or face military attack. Preparations for such an assault are well advanced, and the cover story about Iran's supposed quest for nuclear weapons has been widely publicized. Under Bush Jr., the U.S. repudiated an earlier (worthless) pledge never to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear powers, and has openly advertised its willingness to employ tactical nuclear weapons against underground bunkers, troop concentrations and similar targets. While giving no political support to the reactionary theocrats in Tehran, revolutionaries defend Iran against imperialist bullying, and uphold its right to possess effective means of self-defense, up to and including nuclear weapons.

Even prior to Hezbollah's demonstration in July and

August 2006 that bunkers designed by Iranian engineers can withstand the biggest and "smartest" conventional bombs in the U.S. arsenal, Seymour Hersh was reporting that the top echelon of the American officer corps was resisting White House pressure for an attack on Iran:

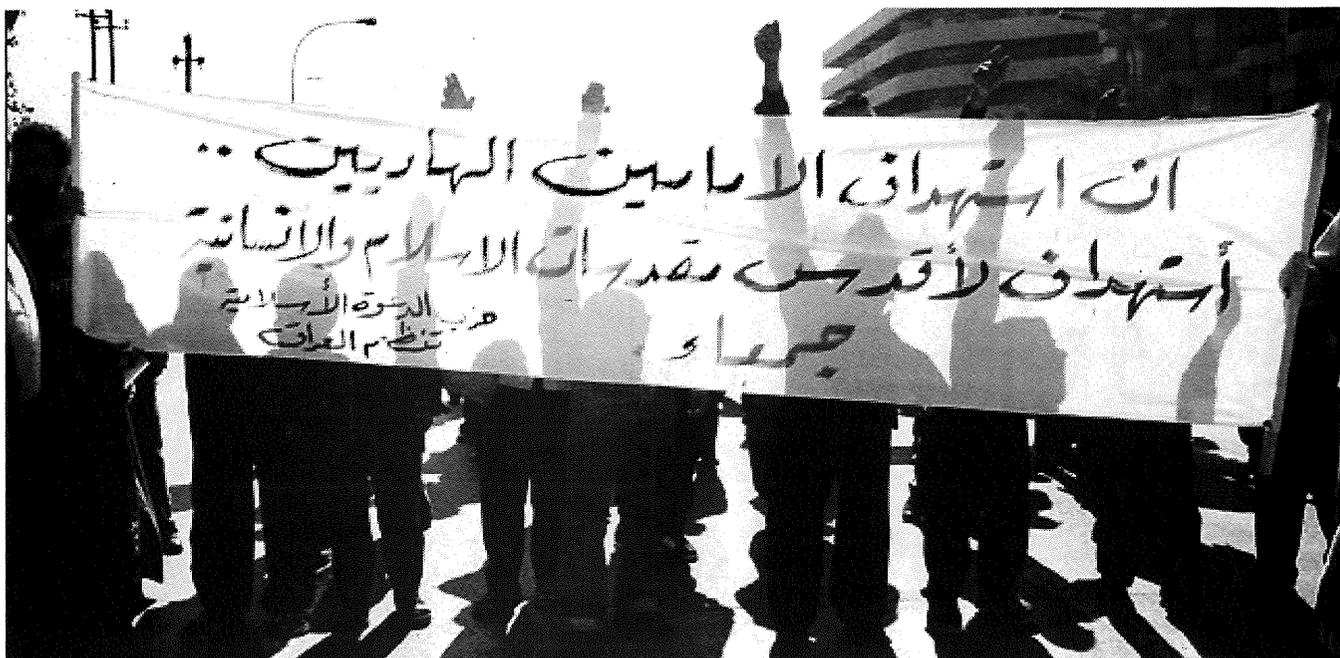
"Inside the Pentagon, senior commanders have increasingly challenged the President's plans, according to active-duty and retired officers and officials. The generals and admirals have told the Administration that the bombing campaign will probably not succeed in destroying Iran's nuclear program. They have also warned that an attack could lead to serious economic, political, and military consequences for the United States."

—*New Yorker*, 10 July 2006

The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff are concerned that Tehran might stiffen Iraq's Shiite militias with tens of thousands of Iranian fighters, and launch an all-out assault on the already overstretched "coalition" forces. An attack on Iran would further inflame the Middle East and could well touch off massive popular upheavals that would result in American clients being replaced by Islamist regimes.

Only Workers' Revolution Can Uproot Imperialism!

A decade and a half of imperialist sanctions and military aggression have transformed Iraq—once the most secular and economically advanced country in the Muslim world—into a madhouse of murderous sectarianism and reaction. Communalism and religious fanaticism are not permanent features of Iraqi society—they are the direct product of imperialist intervention in the Middle East. Marxists take no side in the vicious cycle of sectarian violence engulfing Iraq, nor in squabbles between the contending bourgeois factions. But revolutionaries militarily



MAX BECHERER—POLARIS

Iraqi Shiites protesting attack on Askariya Mosque, February 2006

support blows struck against imperialist occupation by neo-colonial forces regardless of their political character, from the 1983 truck-bombing of the American Marines and French paratroopers in Beirut; to the 1993 downing of a couple of U.S. Ranger Black Hawk helicopters in Mogadishu; to attacks on occupation forces in Iraq by Baathist or Islamic insurgents today.

The efforts of the many thousands of Iraqi fighters who have participated in the struggle to drive out the invaders have, in the short space of a few years, brought the world's most powerful military machine face to face with defeat. And that is a good thing, because imperialism is the biggest obstacle to the liberation of working people and the oppressed in every country, and the main bulwark of all forms of reaction. History will record America's misadventure in Iraq as a critical episode in the irreversible decline of what was, briefly, known as the "world's only superpower."

The looming U.S. defeat in Iraq and the resurgence of the Afghan Taliban, whose removal in 2001 was held up as the model for effortless "regime change" from the sky, has reminded the world that technological supremacy and sheer military might cannot always guarantee victory. The Israel Defense Forces learned a similar lesson from Hezbollah's guerrillas in southern Lebanon in 2006.

The revival of the "Vietnam syndrome" in the U.S. makes new military adventures less likely in the near future. Yet war—including neo-colonial "wars of choice"—are an inevitable and necessary feature of capitalism in the imperialist epoch. The fundamental factor that generated Washington's failing gamble in the Middle East—its declining economic standing vis-à-vis its chief rivals—has been exacerbated by its recent setbacks. Conversely, the position of the European and Japanese imperialists, who had no interest in seeing Iraq turned into an American oil colony, has improved. As U.S. influence wanes and its ability to get its way with its erstwhile allies shrinks, the stage is being set for future conflicts. Over 90 years ago, the great

Russian revolutionary Vladimir Lenin noted:

"inter-imperialist' or 'ultra-imperialist' alliances, no matter what form they may assume, whether of one imperialist coalition against another, or of a general alliance embracing *all* the imperialist powers, are *inevitably* nothing more than a 'truce' in periods between wars. Peaceful alliances prepare the ground for wars, and in their turn grow out of wars; the one conditions the other, producing alternating forms of peaceful and non-peaceful struggle on *one and the same* basis of imperialist connections and relations within world economics and world politics."

—V.I. Lenin, *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916)

The logic of capitalist competition finds expression on a global scale in inter-imperialist rivalry, which, taken to its ultimate conclusion, can only mean catastrophic war and nuclear holocaust. Capitalism is an irrational social system with intrinsic contradictions that cannot be resolved. It cannot be transformed into a system that serves the interests of humanity. It must be completely uprooted and replaced by a planned economy, organized on a global scale, which is guided by the principle of meeting human need rather than maximizing private profit. The working class in the advanced capitalist countries, not least the United States, has a vital role to play, alongside the workers and oppressed peoples of the neo-colonies, in the creation of an egalitarian socialist world order.

The international proletariat has both the social power and objective interest to wage a revolutionary struggle to free humanity from the nightmare of predatory imperialist rule. But to harness the massive dissatisfaction with the capitalist world order and direct it toward revolutionary objectives, the working class must be politically mobilized, and this can only be accomplished through the agency of a revolutionary organization. The International Bolshevik Tendency is committed to the struggle to forge such an instrument—a world party of socialist revolution. This is the most crucial task that confronts humanity today. ■

WASG & the 'Far Left'

The 'New' German Reformism



Gregor Gysi and Oskar Lafontaine, partners in Linkspartei

In June 2004, dissident members of Germany's governing Social Democratic Party (SPD) and a handful of trade-union officials launched the *Wahlalternative Arbeit und Soziale Gerechtigkeit* (WASG—Electoral Alternative for Labor and Social Justice). The WASG's founders sought to tap into the simmering discontent of German workers over the austerity policies implemented by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's SPD/Green coalition government. During the summer of 2004, tens of thousands of workers participated in a series of "Montags-Demos" ("Monday Demonstrations," named after the 1989 protests that took place during the twilight of the East German deformed workers' state [DDR]). The WASG appealed to those who opposed the SPD's rightward drift, but were not willing to support its reformist rival, the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS, the successor to the Socialist Unity Party [SED], which had been the instrument of Stalinist rule in the former DDR).

After recruiting several thousand new members, mostly trade unionists and unemployed workers, the fledgling WASG won a respectable 2.2 percent of votes cast in the May 2005 regional elections in North Rhine-Westphalia (a traditional social-democratic stronghold which includes the highly industrialized Ruhr area). The victory of the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in May prompted Schröder to call elections to the Bundestag (national parliament) for September 2005, a year ahead of schedule.

Schröder's electoral disaster in North Rhine-Westphalia led Oskar Lafontaine, a prominent SPD leader who had previously served as party chair and finance minister, to jump ship. Lafontaine joined the WASG and immediately

set out to broker an alliance with the PDS for the upcoming national election. At a special WASG congress in Kassel on 3 July 2005, a majority of delegates approved the idea of an electoral bloc with the PDS.

Lafontaine's adherence was a major coup for the WASG, but during the election campaign he embarrassed his new comrades in a June 2005 campaign speech in Chemnitz, when he attacked immigrants for putting Germans out of work: "[t]he state has a duty to prevent fathers with families, and women, from becoming unemployed because foreign workers have taken away their jobs at lower wages" (*Der Tagesspiegel* online, 18 June 2005).

For the PDS, the bloc with the much smaller WASG presented an opportunity for expanding its influence beyond its traditional base in eastern Germany. It re-branded itself the "Linkspartei.PDS" (Left Party/PDS) and agreed to include WASG members on its candidate list. In its election manifesto the Linkspartei came out strongly against further cuts to social programs, while discreetly sidestepping its record of implementing austerity measures when PDS/SPD coalitions governed in Berlin and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

In September 2005, the Linkspartei slate won 8.8 percent of the vote, which translated into 54 seats in the Bundestag (12 of which went to WASG members). At the WASG's party congress in Ludwigshafen on 29 April 2006, a majority of delegates approved the idea of fusing with the PDS. A month later Lafontaine and Klaus Ernst of the WASG co-signed a letter with Lothar Byski and Gregor Gysi of the PDS declaring:

"The time has come to bring together the divided forces of the left. The PDS has changed since its origins

in the SED. It has gained many new members and has become a democratic socialist party. This change is reflected in the new name: Linkspartei. The WASG was largely formed by disillusioned trade unionists, social democrats and members of social movements. In the 2005 Bundestag elections, over four million voters called on the Linkspartei and the WASG to found a new left-wing party."

—"Call for the Founding of a New Left," 2 June 2006

While the projected fusion into a unified Linkspartei, set for June 2007, has been greeted with enthusiasm by much of the German left, there is no reason for revolutionaries to be excited. The formerly Stalinist PDS is today overtly pro-capitalist, and the WASG never pretended to stand for more than 1970s-era social-democratic reformism.

German 'Far Left' & WASG

In certain circumstances it is necessary for revolutionaries to enter reformist organizations to help crystallize a Marxist wing and thereby lay the basis for the creation of an independent, revolutionary workers' party (see "The 'French Turn,'" 1917 No. 9, First Quarter 1991). In 1996, British supporters of the International Bolshevik Tendency (IBT) joined the Socialist Labour Party (SLP), launched by Arthur Scargill, the leader of the National Union of Mineworkers. Despite his Stalinist background and left-reformist politics, Scargill had a reputation within the British working class as a militant fighter, and a small, but significant, layer of working people were drawn to the SLP on this basis. The SLP openly proclaimed itself a socialist organization with a working-class orientation. It represented a left split from the Labour Party and many of its initial adherents were open to seriously reassessing the whole social-democratic tradition. In the SLP's formative

period there were serious discussions of socialist program and policy. When the Scargill leadership clamped down on internal dissent and launched a series of purges that transformed the SLP into a hardened reformist micro-sect, our comrades walked out (see "SLP: a Postmortem," 1917 No. 21, 1999).

Unlike the SLP, the WASG was, from its inception, an explicitly pro-capitalist organization:

"Other central democratic demands must be taken up (especially peace, ecology, women's rights, criticism of globalization, open access to education, criticism of official science, immigrants' rights). A lot of the groundwork has been laid through the 'Initiative for Political Change,' Memorandum-Gruppe, ATTAC, trade unions etc. There are differences in detail, and differences in emphasis, but there are sufficient things in common. These common positions of progressive social and political forces must be put forward in a popular form, in order to mobilize the masses. This does not mean a new explicitly left-socialist party."

—Founding Paper, 15 March 2004

While revolutionaries would not, in principle, exclude entry into such a formation, it made little sense when there was general agreement among the membership with the "Founding Paper's" assertion that: "Today, the issue is not 'Reform or Revolution' but social reformism or the further advance of neoliberal reaction."

The standard reformism of the WASG program includes a "law and order" plank:

"The WASG therefore stands for the democratization of the economy, the full participation of the population in all parts of society and the defense of democratic rights, and against the state running society in the interests of business and the wealthy. The state and police must provide more security from crime."

—Founding Program of the WASG

The left-liberal daily *Junge Welt* (28 August 2004) characterized the WASG as a group that:

"wants to give working people parliamentary representation again. Their activists consciously distance themselves from 'long-term' demands and stress the reformist nature of their project."

While the WASG leadership initially banned "left socialist" formations, it nonetheless provides a home for a variety of "revolutionary" organizations, from the Stalinist German Communist Party (DKP) to various ostensibly Trotskyist groups, including the International Socialist Left (ISL—affiliated with the United Secretariat) and the Sozialistische Alternative Voran (SAV—the German section of Peter Taaffe's Committee for a Workers' International [CWI]). Linksruck, the German section of the International Socialist Tendency (IST—headed by the British Socialist Workers Party) was particularly keen on the WASG's ultra-reformist politics, warning that it "would render itself superfluous if it adopted a socialist program because it would then exclude the majority of people it could otherwise win over" (*Argumente* No. 6, March 2005).

Supporters of the Gruppe Arbeitermacht (GAM—the German affiliate of Britain's Workers Power group), while sharing the opportunist appetites of their fellow "revolutionaries" in the WASG, have been considerably less

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Venezuela: Staat und Revolution

Latinoamerika weist weltweit die größten Einkommensunterschiede auf, mit weit über hundert Millionen Menschen, die abgehängt sind, von weniger als zwei Dollar am Tag zu verdienen, laut "World Development Indicators" (Wirtschaftsdatenbank der Weltbank) 2005. Die von internationalen Wirtschaftsorganisationen vorgeschriebenen Spar- und Privatisierungsprogramme haben in der Region physischen Hunger, Schrecken angeht. Tausende andere Entwicklungsländer sind ebenfalls um den Verkauf staatlicher Firmen bemüht, schrieb *Newsweek* (5. Juli 2005) und bemerkte: "Eines der reichsten Länder Lateinamerikas verliert 50 Prozent der gesamten Privatleistungsstärke in den Entwicklungsländern..."

Die Kampagne der internationalen Finanziers, den "kapitalistischen Sektor" zu privatisieren, wird von den Arbeitern und Gewerkschaften mit zunehmender Beharrlichkeit abgelehnt. Die Arbeiter der Region eine vereinigte Durchdringung von ausländischen

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constant in their affections. Initially the GAM was full of enthusiasm:

"The large and growing number of militants in the WASG reflects the process of the workers' movement separating itself from the SPD due to its policy under Schröder of attacking the working class and the masses. That's why Arbeitermacht is actively intervening in this process with the goal of constructing a new, revolutionary workers' party."

—GAM Infomail 173, 23 June 2004

However, by the time of the election in North Rhine-Westphalia, the GAM had walked out of the WASG declaring:

"The struggle against the general capitalist offensive and Steinbrück's [SPD] government cannot be carried out by voting for the PDS and the WASG. Therefore, in the North Rhine-Westphalia elections, we say: spoil your ballot! No vote for Red-Green [SPD-Green coalition]! No vote for WASG and PDS!"

—GAM Infomail 210, 14 May 2005

When the WASG's electoral results were better than anticipated, and Lafontaine signed on, the GAM changed its tune yet again and rejoined in time to participate in the September 2005 election campaign:

"The elections and the formation of the Linkspartei have generated growing interest and offer revolutionaries the opportunity to get 'nearer' to the masses. However correct our criticisms of the Linkspartei or parliamentarianism are, as mere criticism they are insufficient and purely passive! Communists must actively intervene in the process and fight openly for their positions."

—GAM Infomail 222, 19 August 2005

A year later, though still in the WASG, the comical confusionists of the GAM were back to denouncing their host:

"We warn all leftists that they are joining a party which clearly professes support for capitalism, despite the social reforms they want to make. In the name of 'specific obligations' they are turning themselves into auxiliary troops of capitalism, just as the SPD and PDS have been doing for many years."

—GAM Infomail 278, 27 September 2006

Contretemps in Berlin

The SAV has also been critical of the WASG leadership, particularly its plan to formalize the alliance with the PDS. The Taaffeites offered the following advice to the former Stalinists:

"If you do not find political partners and majorities, then—and this is what the Linkspartei.PDS in Berlin should do—you have to leave the government rather than accept and execute capitalist austerity. There was no mention of the option of applying pressure through extra-parliamentary protest to begin to reverse the balance of forces in favor of the working class and youth. This is precisely the task of an anti-capitalist and anti-neoliberal left party. In the view of the SAV, this would be the best way to build a strong and combative new formation. The potential is there."

—www.sozialismus.info, 24 February 2006

The SAV worries that the alliance with the PDS threat-

ens the WASG's anti-austerity credentials, particularly in Berlin and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, where voters have had a taste of the PDS in power. SAV supporters in Berlin (who exert considerable influence on the branch) played a major role in the Berlin WASG's decision to field its own slate in the September 2006 regional elections.

Christine Buchholz, a Linksruck supporter who is a member of the WASG's national leadership, was highly critical of this decision:

"Despite justified criticism of the 'Red-Red' [SPD-PDS] senate and the policies of the Berlin Linkspartei, we need a strong left in east and west to develop the social resistance that is needed. That is only possible through the Linkspartei. The support of workers and the unemployed will amount to nothing if a rival candidacy from the Berlin WASG puts this united left into question."

—*Junge Welt*, 16 May 2006

When the WASG tops sought to replace the rebellious Berlin leadership, the SAV ran to the capitalist courts, which endorsed the local leaders' right to run their own independent campaign. Lafontaine & Co. retaliated by cutting off funding for their Berlin branch.

The CWI leadership in London applauded the SAV's role in this squalid affair, and suggested that it opened up great opportunities for the German left:

"The continuing national media publicity given to the debate in the Berlin WASG is an indication of how a successful anti-cuts election campaign could play an important part in building a new all-German force that can both defend living standards and challenge capitalism."

—*The Socialist* [London], 27 April-3 May 2006

In fact, the SAV violated a fundamental principle of the workers' movement—the necessity of maintaining complete independence from the capitalist state—by inviting the bourgeois courts to intervene in the affairs of the WASG.

In its campaign, the Berlin WASG made clear that its intention was only to "pressure" the capitalist rulers: "Within the Berlin senate, we want to combine and strengthen parliamentary and extra-parliamentary pressure for social policies" (Berlin WASG Program, 22 April 2006).

The contemptible reformism of the Berlin WASG was most clearly expressed in its plans for reforming the capitalist police:

"The Berlin WASG therefore rejects further cuts in the Berlin police, the Berlin fire service and the disaster relief organization. In order to replace aging staff a new hiring system must be put in place. Police must be trained in non-violent conflict resolution and cultural awareness must be given even more weight. More young people with immigrant backgrounds must be recruited to the police service. A multicultural city needs a multicultural police force."

—*Ibid.*

Only a few months earlier, Berlin police violently evicted anarchist squatters of the Yorck 59 project. In Germany, as everywhere else, cops routinely harass immigrants and act as strikebreakers. Marxists are distinguished from social democrats like the SAV by the recognition that the "bodies of armed men" at the core of the bourgeois state exist to "serve and protect" the interests of the capitalist class. This is why the exploiters' state cannot be reformed—it must be



WASG-INFO.DE

June 2004: WASG protests cuts and privatization

smashed by workers' revolution.

The GAM made similar criticisms of the SAV and the independent Berlin WASG's campaign:

"despite all the protestations about social programs and workers' struggles, the strategic orientation is still one of rearranging the existing capitalist order in Berlin and Germany. This leads only to a strengthened (bourgeois) state. The consequences of such adjustments are most clearly seen in the Berlin WASG's call for additional recruits for the police in Berlin, the city with the highest density of police in the country."

—*Neue Internationale* 110, May 2006

Yet instead of drawing the obvious conclusion that there was no reason for revolutionaries to give any support to the advocates of "a strengthened bourgeois state," the GAM still called for workers to vote for the candidates of the Berlin WASG.

Linkspartei: 'Neither Attractive Nor Useful'

The SAV viewed the Berlin WASG's electoral campaign as a limited success, even though it failed to win any seats. But the WASG's national party congress in November 2006 reaffirmed the leadership's criticisms of the Berlin mutiny, and voted to step up the fusion process with the PDS.

The capitalist media enjoys pointing out the disparity between the "anti-cuts" rhetoric of the PDS and its record in office:

"On the national level they [PDS] agitate against Hartz IV [austerity program], but in local politics they are implementing the hated reforms. On the national level they rant against the privatization of public enterprises, while selling off housing in Berlin. They denounce welfare

cuts, but cut back on social services in Berlin. Many voters clearly did not understand that."

—*Berliner Morgenpost*, 18 September 2006

While well aware of the PDS record of betrayal, many leftists in the WASG appear to agree with Linksruck that somehow a PDS/WASG fusion will represent a "step toward the rebirth of a socialist workers' movement in Germany" (*Linksruck* No. 224, 15 November 2006).

At the November congress, two "left" critics were elected to the WASG's national leadership: Thies Gleiss, a co-thinker of the ISL, and SAV supporter Lucy Redler from the dissident Berlin branch. The SAV commented:

"Despite the welcome election of Berlin oppositionist Lucy Redler to the national leadership, the majority of this Party Congress in Westphalia has moved to the right since the [April 2006] Ludwigshafen WASG Congress. A decrease in dynamism and life at the base of the party is reflected at all levels. Nevertheless, the process of fusion between the WASG and the L.PDS remains a bone of contention."

—www.sozialismus.info, 20 November 2006

While this sounds like an explanation for abandoning ship, the SAV leadership seems reluctant to make a break, particularly after Redler's promotion, which may offer opportunities for more maneuvers. Sascha Stanicic of the SAV observed:

"The position of the SAV members who spoke at the congress was that there should be a number of minimum conditions to a merger, particularly opposition to joining any government with the SPD, which participates in social cuts and privatisations."

—*The Socialist* [London], 7 December 2006

Edith Bartelmus-Scholich, a prominent ISL supporter, also expressed reservations about the pending fusion with the PDS:

"Such a left party will appear neither attractive nor useful to most people, and only has relevance on the electoral level. Indirectly it therefore has a certain influence on public opinion, and for a limited period can gain modest electoral success as the lesser evil. Such a party does not represent progress, which could have happened if the WASG had been built successfully. It represents a step backward in nearly every respect."

—*Linke Zeitung*, 22 November 2006

The ISL talks vaguely about how nice it would be to see "a new political force throughout Germany to the left of the 'new left,'" but is careful to specify that "[t]his does not mean rushing into founding a new party" (*Ibid.*).

For its part, the GAM has declared that it intends to remain inside the WASG, at least until the fusion. The GAM leadership's zig-zag record means that nothing they say can be taken too seriously, but they have suggested that after a merger they may opt for the WASG's Netzwerk Linke Opposition (NLO—Left Opposition Network):

"The fight against the bureaucratic fusion of the WASG and the PDS must be used to build up the NLO in order to be able to function independently should the WASG be taken over by the PDS. In short, this fight must be part of forming a real new workers' party, one which is worthy of the name."

—GAM Infomail 287, 16 November 2006

"Building up" the social democrats of the NLO—who, if they do not end up inside the new Linkspartei, would constitute little more than a WASG rump with a very short half-life—hardly constitutes a step toward the creation of the "new, revolutionary workers' party" the GAM supposedly stands for. But such contradictions are par for the course with these rudderless confusionists.

What Way Forward?

The German comrades of the IBT, who have refused to wade into the WASG swamp, have been accused of "preaching from the sidelines" by some of the supposed Trotskyists who have taken up residence there. While we are prepared to energetically participate in any mass organization that represents a political step forward for the working class, the WASG is not such an organization, and never has been.

Working people need a genuinely socialist party to champion the interests of all the oppressed. Such a party would side militarily with the Iraqi and Afghan victims of imperialist aggression, rather than engaging in pacifist hand-wringing. It would advance a policy of militant class-struggle leadership in the trade unions, rather than endorsing the organized class collaboration of the "social partners." It would flatly oppose all funding for the capitalists' cops and military. It would stand for a socialist revolution to expropriate the expropriators and replace the bourgeois state with organs of direct working-class power.

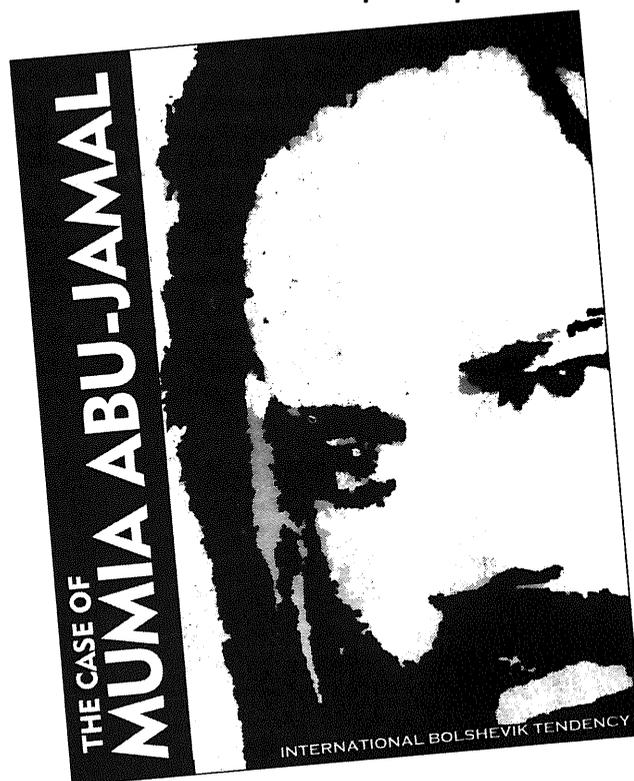
Leon Trotsky, the great Marxist whose name is sometimes invoked by the fake socialists of the GAM, ISL, Linksruck and SAV, observed:

"The tragic defeats suffered by the world proletariat over a long period of years doomed the official organizations to yet greater conservatism and simultaneously sent disillusioned petty bourgeois 'revolutionists' in pursuit of 'new ways.' As always during epochs of reaction and decay, quacks and charlatans appear on all sides, desirous of revising the whole course of revolutionary thought."

—*The Transitional Program*

The pseudo-revolutionaries who trumpet the WASG may imagine that they are engaged in clever tactical maneuvers to help build their groups—some may even (briefly) have entertained the notion that somehow they had found a shortcut to the creation of a mass socialist movement. In reality, by promoting the WASG, they have only helped legitimize another obstacle (albeit a small one) on the road to the self-emancipation of the working class. The "whole course of revolutionary thought," and a century of working-class experience, demonstrates that socialist revolution requires the leadership of a Leninist vanguard party. The construction of such a party must begin with a willingness to "speak the truth to the masses" and expose reformist dead-ends like the WASG, PDS and Linkspartei for what they are. ■

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SEP: Defeatist and Confusionist

The Class Nature of the Unions



22 August 2006: DFT strike rally

"The question of the relationships between the party, which represents the proletariat as it should be, and the trade unions, which represent the proletariat as it is, is the most fundamental question of revolutionary Marxism."

—Leon Trotsky, "Communism and Syndicalism,"
14 October 1929

In the early 1990s, the leadership of the Detroit-based Socialist Equality Party (SEP—the leading section of the "International Committee of the Fourth International" [IC]) decided that capitalist "globalization" had transformed trade unions from working-class organizations into simple agencies of the bourgeoisie. In August 2006, members of the Detroit Federation of Teachers (DFT) struck against wage cuts and roll-backs, in defiance of anti-strike laws and a back-to-work court order. The SEP's daily online publication (*World Socialist Web Site* [WSWS]) closely followed the events, interviewing striking teachers and reporting on union meetings and support rallies. However, in the WSWS coverage there was little evidence of the view that the DFT is irrelevant and obsolete, much less a tool of the bosses.

The SEP observed that the:

"biggest obstacle...to waging the type of struggle that can defeat the attacks of Superintendent Coleman, Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, Governor Jennifer Granholm and the corporate interests they represent is the leadership of the DFT and the rest of the trade union bureaucracy."

—WSWS, 9 September 2006

Accordingly, DFT militants were advised to wrest control of the strike from their official leaders:

"The first step is for teachers to take the running of the strike out of the hands of the union leadership, and campaign for the active participation of the broadest sections of workers and young people in the fight to defend public education. This includes mass picketing, sympathy strikes and solidarity rallies embracing the widest sections of workers."

—*Ibid.*

A militant, class-struggle union leadership would indeed take this approach, but how does this square with the SEP's claim that unions today are nothing more than instruments of the corporations?

SEP vs. Trotsky on Trade Unions

In January 1998, SEP/IC leader David North gave a lengthy speech in which he argued that trade unionism and socialism were fundamentally incompatible:

"Through much of its history, the socialist movement has ardently pursued the trade unions. Yet, despite much courting and wooing, this romance has been largely unsuccessful. Despite innumerable professions of affection and concern, the socialist suitors have been repeatedly kicked in the teeth and even stabbed in the back by the objects of their desire."

—"Marxism and the Trade Unions"

While not particularly elegantly formulated, North's meaning was clear enough. He went on to attack the traditional Marxist view that:

"trade unions are 'workers' organizations.' Thus, he who challenges the authority of the trade unions is, by definition, setting himself in opposition to the working class. The problem with this premise is that it reduces the trade unions to empty, ahistorical abstractions. That the trade unions have a large working class membership is undoubtedly true. But so do many other organizations, such as, in the United States, the Elks, the Masons, the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Catholic Church."

—*Ibid.*

North challenged his leftist opponents to:

"begin to offer a serious answer to the most elementary and obvious question: 'Why have the trade unions failed so miserably to defend the living standards of the working class, let alone raise them?' Not only in the United States, but all over the world, the last quarter-century has witnessed a precipitous decline in the social position of the working class. The trade unions have been incapable of defending the working class against the onslaught of capital. Inasmuch as this failure has been demonstrated over several decades on an international scale, one is led inescapably to search for its objective causes both in the socio-economic environment within which the trade unions now exist and, even more fundamentally, in the essential nature of the trade unions themselves."

—*Ibid.*

The leaders of the AFL-CIO are abjectly pro-imperialist advocates of class collaboration. Yet, despite their repeated capitulations, there remains a direct correlation between unionization and working-class living standards in the U.S. If unions were purely and simply instruments of the corporations, American capitalists would not spend over a billion dollars annually to oppose workers' organizing (see *Unionization and Deunionization*, John J. Lawler, 1990).

There is nothing inherently revolutionary about trade

unionism. Unions do not challenge the existence of wage slavery; they merely seek to obtain more favorable terms for the sale of labor power. The great Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky observed:

"As organizations expressive of the top layers of the proletariat, trade unions, as witnessed by all past historical experience, including the fresh experience of the anarcho-syndicalist unions in Spain, developed powerful tendencies toward compromise with the bourgeois-democratic regime. In periods of acute class struggle, the leading functionaries of the trade unions aim to become masters of the mass movement in order to render it harmless."

—*Transitional Program*

Yet Marxists are not indifferent to workers' struggles to unionize, or to any other attempt they make to better their lives:

"In the struggle for partial and transitional demands, the workers, now more than ever before, need mass organizations; principally, trade unions...."

"The Bolshevik-Leninist stands in the front-line trenches of all kinds of struggles, even when they involve only the most modest material interests or democratic rights of the working class. He takes active part in mass trade union[s] for the purpose of strengthening them and raising their spirit of militancy."

—*Ibid.*

By "strengthening" the unions, Trotsky meant striving "to renew the top leadership of the trade unions, boldly and resolutely in critical moments, advancing new militant leaders in place of routine functionaries and careerists...." North explicitly rejects this approach, sneering that it is "banal" and "subjective" to imagine that the fundamental problem with the unions is "the defeatist and treacherous policies of the AFL-CIO misleaders" (*Op. cit.*).

In 1998, the IC published a lengthy statement entitled, "Globalization and the International Working Class," which was, in part, a response the Spartacist League/U.S.'s (SL) description of the SEP's position on the unions as "defeatist and abstentionist." (For the SL's own recent, and symmetrically revisionist, departure on the trade-union question, see our 10 July 2006 letter, on page 29.)

The IC document proposed to draw "fundamental conclusions about the class nature and political role of the official unions," and asserted that:

"the decline of the unions cannot be simply, or even primarily, ascribed to the subjective qualities of the union leaders, but that the corrupt and reactionary character of the leaders must rather be understood, in the final analysis, as the subjective expression of more fundamental objective processes."

Revolutionaries distinguish between the unions—which are workers' organizations—and the parasitic bureaucrats who serve as the "labor lieutenants of capital." The material basis for the corruption of the labor tops, and their transformation into agents of imperialist influence within the workers' movement, has been recognized by Marxists since the collapse of the Second International in 1914. In 1933, Trotsky observed:

"Capitalism can continue to maintain itself only by lowering the standard of living of the working class. Under these conditions trade unions can either transform themselves

into revolutionary organisations or become lieutenants of capital in the intensified exploitation of the workers. The trade-union bureaucracy, which has satisfactorily solved its own social problem, took the second path. It turned all the accumulated authority of the trade unions against the socialist revolution and even against any attempts of the workers to resist the attacks of capital and reaction.

"From that point on, the most important task of the revolutionary party became the liberation of the workers from the reactionary influence of the trade-union bureaucracy...."

"As was said, the trade unions now play not a progressive but a reactionary role."

—"The ILP and the New International," 4 September 1933

Yet, despite this, he continued:

"Nevertheless, [the trade unions] still embrace millions of workers. One must not think that the workers are blind and do not see the change in the historic role of the trade unions. But what is to be done? The revolutionary road is seriously compromised in the eyes of the left wing of the workers by the zigzags and adventures of official communism. The workers say to themselves: The trade unions are bad, but without them it might be even worse. This is the psychology of one who is in a blind alley. Meanwhile, the trade-union bureaucracy persecutes the revolutionary workers ever more boldly, ever more impudently replacing internal democracy by the arbitrary action of a clique, in essence, transforming the trade unions into some sort of concentration camp for the workers during the decline of capitalism."

—*Ibid.*

The "class nature and political role" of the labor bureaucracy has not changed since Trotsky's time. Consequently, a key task for socialists remains "the liberation of the workers from the reactionary influence of the trade-union bureaucracy." The SEP/IC leaders disagree, but they put forward no serious alternative. If indeed the existing unions are no longer viable arenas for revolutionary activity, what do the Northites propose as an alternative? In "Globalization and the International Working Class," they offer only the following tentative speculation:

"Certainly, the working class requires organizations to prosecute the day-to-day defense of its economic and social interests. But trade unions are not the only possible form of organization geared to the defense of workers' immediate conditions. History has seen the emergence of more broad, democratic and militant types of organization, such as factory committees and workers councils, which transcend the limited realm of struggle over wages and hours and aspire to establish workers' control over the production process."

This passive "wait-and-see" approach to the crucial question of how working people can organize in their own defense is presented as a bold, revolutionary policy by the WSWs. But, as Trotsky pointed out, this sort of sterile "leftist" posturing has a logic that is ultimately anti-revolutionary:

"the thought easily arises: Is it not possible to bypass the trade unions? Is it not possible to replace them by some sort of fresh, uncorrupted organization, such as revolutionary trade unions, shop committees, soviets and the like? *The fundamental mistake of such attempts*

is that they reduce to organizational experiments the great political problem of how to free the masses from the influence of the trade-union bureaucracy. It is not enough to offer the masses a new address. It is necessary to seek out the masses where they are and to lead them.

"Impatient leftists sometimes say that it is absolutely impossible to win over the trade unions because the bureaucracy uses the organizations' internal regimes for preserving its own interests, resorting to the basest machinations, repressions and plain crookedness, in the spirit of the parliamentary oligarchy of the era of 'rotten boroughs.' Why then waste time and energy? This argument reduces itself in reality to giving up the actual struggle to win the masses, using the corrupt character of the trade-union bureaucracy as a pretext. This argument can be developed further: why not abandon revolutionary work altogether, considering the repressions and provocations on the part of the government bureaucracy? There exists no principled difference here, since the trade-union bureaucracy has definitely become a part of the capitalist apparatus, economic and governmental."

—"The ILP and the New International," emphasis added

The SEP claims that the class character of the trade unions has changed fundamentally since the 1960s and 1970s, when they "still retained a significant element of the shop floor militancy inherited from the past":

"the past two decades have witnessed a whole series of related quantitative changes—the level of union membership, the organizational and financial intertwining of union and management interests, the widening gap between the conditions of the workers and the privileges of the officials, the growing financial independence of the bureaucracy from the fate of the membership—which in their sum have produced a qualitative transformation."

—"Globalization and the International Working Class"

While extremely vague about when this "qualitative transformation" supposedly took place, the IC statement hints that it may have been connected to the sell-out of the militant Hormel meatpackers' strike in Minnesota twenty years ago:

"This betrayal exemplified not simply the subjective rottenness of the union leadership, but rather the objective transformation of the AFL-CIO into an instrument of the corporations and the capitalist state."

—*Ibid.*

One consequence of this "objective transformation," according to the IC, is that there is no longer any point in trying to expose the corrupt, pro-capitalist leadership:

"Even in the first decades following the Second World War, the major unions in Europe claimed some form of allegiance to socialism, and the AFL-CIO in the US remained, to some extent, a focus of the militant resistance of workers to the encroachments of big business. It was one thing, under these conditions, for the revolutionary party to employ as a central tactic the placing of demands on the union leadership, as a means of exposing the trade union bureaucracy before the workers. It is an entirely different matter today, after two decades during which the unions have essentially completed their degeneration, betraying the most elementary interests of the working class and transforming themselves into

outright corporatist extensions of the employers and the state."

—*Ibid.*

Aside from the skewed emphasis on the "centrality" of placing demands on the labor lieutenants of capital, the most notable aspect of the above passage is the escape hatch it contains—the unions, according to the IC, have essentially "completed their degeneration" into outright capitalist institutions. A more overt loophole appears a bit further on in the text: "There may be times and conditions, even in the present period, when it becomes necessary for the party to place demands on the trade unions." While described as merely a "provisional and limited tactic," it is clear that this is an attempt by the SEP/IC leaders to hedge their bets. Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel usually made sure to provide themselves a little wiggle room by including similar disclaimers in their revisionist paeans to the "New World Reality" or the "New Mass Vanguard."

The SEP leadership seems rather sensitive to the suggestion that:

"By rejecting the claim that the existing trade unions can be revived and turned into militant, indeed revolutionary, organizations of the working class, the IC is supposedly spreading defeatism among the workers."

—*Ibid.*

They indignantly reject the accusation of "abstentionism in relation to the struggles of workers in the unions":

"As any reader of *The International Workers Bulletin* in the US and the press of the IC sections around the world knows, our movement has never failed to intervene aggressively in the trade unions, defending the interests of the workers against the attacks of the employers and the treachery of the union bureaucracy."

—*Ibid.*

But if the unions are nothing more than "corporatist extensions of the employers," why should the ostensibly revolutionary SEP be involved in them at all? As far as we know, the SEP/IC has no supporters actively engaged in trade-union work anywhere, so their "aggressive interventions" are only of a literary character.

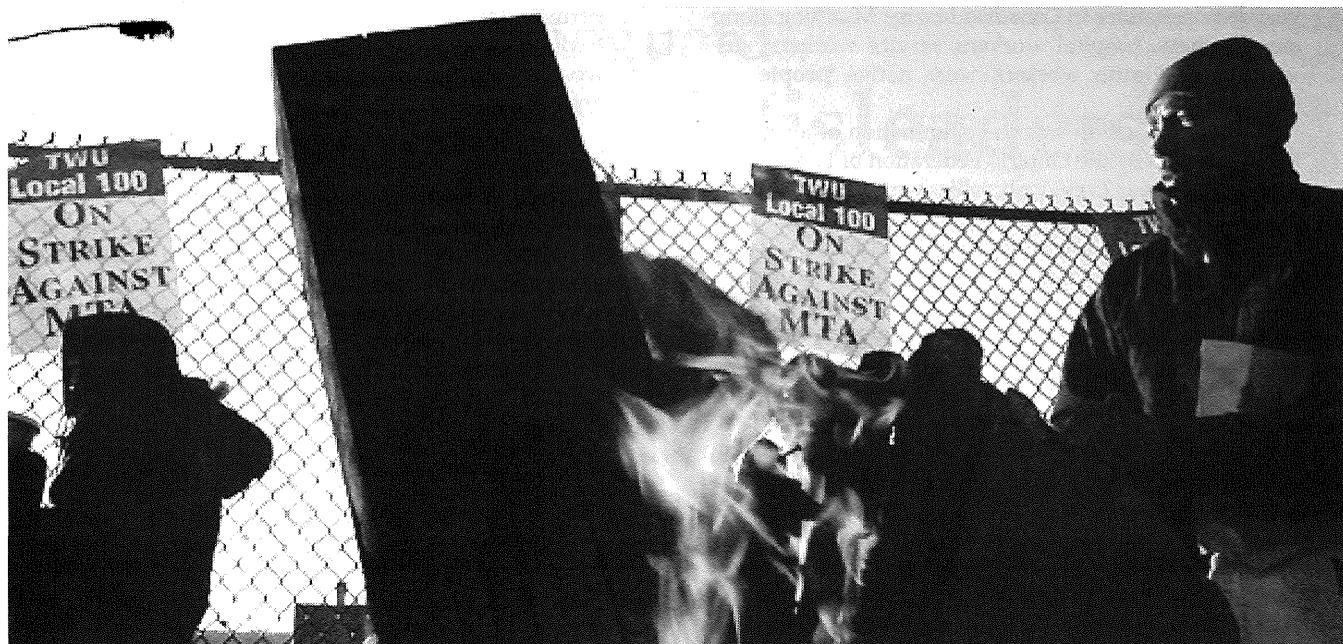
TWU, UPS & Ontario 'Days of Action'

While unions in North America today are much less combative than in the past, there have been serious struggles in recent years. The *WSWS* hailed the "illegal" transit strike that rocked New York City in December 2005 as "a new stage in the class struggle" of immense "international significance." In its 21 December 2005 statement, the SEP correctly observed: "The greatest obstacle to the victory of the transit workers comes from their own union leadership." Noting that "Local 100's parent union, the TWU International, has branded the walkout as illegal and unsanctioned," the SEP concluded:

"Nothing could more graphically demonstrate the way in which the official trade unions have been transformed into instruments for suppressing workers' struggles and blocking any challenge to American capitalism."

—*Ibid.*

The TWU leadership's attempts to derail the strike certainly demonstrated craven loyalty to the ruling class, but the actions of Local 100, which briefly panicked Wall



TYLER HICKS—THE NEW YORK TIMES

TWU Local 100 strikers, Queens, New York, December 2005

Street, illustrated the potential power of organized labor, and showed that rank-and-file militancy can, at least episodically, override the class collaboration of the official leadership. The *WSWS* concluded that the transit strike showed that workers need “a new leadership and a new political strategy to carry forward their struggle.” We agree. But instead of advancing the perspective of a political fight to oust the pro-capitalist bureaucrats and forge a new leadership in the unions on a class-struggle program, the *WSWS* connected victory in the TWU strike to “building the SEP”:

“If this strike is to be successful, transit workers must be guided by a perspective that rejects the social, economic and political assumptions of the financial oligarchy and its political parties. The unending demands for reductions in the living standards of workers clearly demonstrate that their interests are incompatible with the requirements of the capitalist profit system.

“We call on transit workers and all other sections of working people who agree with this perspective to contact the *World Socialist Web Site* and join us in building the Socialist Equality Party.”

—*Ibid.*

In August 1997, as the SEP was writing its obituary for the AFL-CIO, 185,000 Teamsters struck United Parcel Service (UPS—a company that handles 80 percent of the packages delivered in the U.S.). In its 25 August 1997 statement on the strike, the SEP noted: “the whole of corporate America has lined up behind UPS and backed the company’s intransigent position in the contract talks.” The statement suggested that this confrontation could herald “a new period of explosive class struggles in America,” and correctly observed:

“the UPS strike, uniting white, black, Hispanic, native-born and immigrant workers on picket lines from New York City to California, demonstrates that the basic division in American society is not race or ethnicity, but the social cleavage between those who must work for a living and those who profit from their labor.”

The UPS strike demonstrated that even in the United States, the most powerful imperialist country in the world, with the most politically-backward working class, the unions are still able to inflict pain on the bosses. The SEP condemned the Teamster bureaucrats’ “slavish support for the profit system and fanatical opposition to socialism,” and observed that “the present struggle at UPS, like every other struggle of workers today, is an attempt to recoup the losses which workers have suffered as a result of the trade union bureaucracy’s complicity.” True enough, but the UPS strike, like the more recent strikes of the TWU and DFT, also showed that even in the U.S., the unions still have the capacity to serve as vehicles of working-class struggle.

Two months after the UPS strike, in October 1997, tens of thousands of workers, responding to a call by the AFL-CIO’s Canadian affiliates, shut down the city of Windsor, Ontario, directly across the river from Detroit, to protest attacks by the right-wing provincial government. The Windsor shutdown was the ninth in a series of one-city “Days of Action” across Ontario organized by the labor tops (see “Resistance & Betrayal,” 1917 No. 19, 1997). The SEP ran a short report entitled “Anti-Tory protest paralyzes Windsor” in the 3-16 November 1997 edition of *The International Workers Bulletin* (*IWB*, the forerunner of the *WSWS*).

A year earlier they had provided more extensive coverage of the Toronto shutdown:

“On Friday tens of thousands of workers stayed home from work, paralyzing the city’s buses and subways, and forcing many area businesses, government offices, schools and factories to suspend operations. Some 300 sites across metropolitan Toronto were targeted for picketing, including the transit system, which carries about 2 million riders daily. Workers set up pickets at transit locations in defiance of a court-injunction, forcing the authorities to close down the system.

“The following day more than 150,000 anti-Tory protesters converged on the Ontario Legislature in one of the big-

gest demonstrations in Canadian history. Marching alongside teachers, hospital workers, service workers, steel workers and auto workers were native people and student youth.

"This two-day action was the culmination of a series of protests called by the Ontario Federation of Labor (OFL) over the past year. Previously rallies were held in London, Hamilton, Kitchener-Waterloo and Peterborough.

"The virtual shutdown of Canada's biggest city on October 25 and the massive turnout the following day revealed a rising tide of working class opposition to the policies of the Harris provincial government, as well as the federal administration in Ottawa. At the same time, the two-day protest exposed the political bankruptcy of the OFL and the union-based New Democratic Party (NDP), and the necessity for the Canadian working class to build a new political party and adopt a socialist perspective in order to successfully fight the attacks of big business and its political representatives."

—IWB, 11 November 1996

It is quite true that the blinkered, class-collaborationist labor tops are "politically bankrupt" and therefore unable to effectively beat back capitalist assaults, but the ability of the unions to shut down one city after another across Ontario hardly squares with the notion that they no longer have the capacity to resist attacks by the bosses. The strikes that paralyzed Ontario's cities, like those that shut down UPS, the New York subways and Detroit's schools, were not initiated by hypothetical "committees of action," "workers councils" or "factory committees." They were carried out by unions affiliated to the AFL-CIO.

Revolutionary Trade-Union Work: 'Struggle for Influence'

Revolutionaries have never insisted that class struggle can only proceed through pre-existing union structures. Indeed, Marxists have always sought:

"to create in all possible instances independent militant organizations corresponding more closely to the problems of mass struggle [in] bourgeois society; not stopping, if necessary, even in the face of a direct break with the conservative apparatus of the trade unions."

—Leon Trotsky, *Transitional Program*

But independent organs of mass struggle only arise in periods of sharply intensifying class struggle. In the U.S. and other imperialist countries today, a working-class upsurge would inevitably be reflected in the growth of militant sentiment within the existing unions. In a major text he was working on when he was assassinated in 1940, Trotsky argued that revolutionaries must "struggle to turn the trade unions into the organs of the broad exploited masses and not the organs of a labor aristocracy." He explicitly addressed those, like the SEP, who would write off the existing unions:

"in spite of the progressive degeneration of trade unions and their growing together with the imperialist state, the work within the trade unions not only does not lose any of its importance but remains as before and becomes in a certain sense even more important work than ever for every revolutionary party. The matter at issue is essentially the struggle for influence over the working class. Every organization, every party, every faction which

permits itself an ultimatic position in relation to the trade union, i.e., in essence turns its back upon the working class, merely because of displeasure with its organization, every such organization is destined to perish. And it must be said it deserves to perish."

—"Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay"

The WSWS neither "turned its back" on the DFT strike, nor did they treat the struggle between the teachers and the school board as a squabble between two "instruments of the corporations and the capitalist state." But this flies in the face of all their claims about the qualitative transformation of the unions—a contradiction that should cause some SEP members to wonder why, if the unions are "organically incapable of carrying out any serious struggle on behalf of the working class," the DFT strike ever occurred. Certainly anyone visiting teachers' picket lines who suggested breaking with the union would have been regarded as crazy and/or an agent of the employer. Yet that would be a logical corollary of the SEP's position.

Confronted with actual class struggles led by unions, the SEP's propaganda has at least tended to side with the workers and their organizations against the bosses. However, despite this, they have yet to repudiate the absurd policy of writing off the unions as agencies of working-class struggle. It would seem that, in the SEP/IC, the maintenance of the political prestige of the "uniquely correct" leadership takes precedence over everything else. ■

The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International

LEON TROTSKY

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Letter to Workers Vanguard On Criticism of Misleaders

The following letter was sent to Workers Vanguard, newspaper of the Spartacist League/U.S., with a postscript which does not appear below.

10 July 2006

To the editor:

The 9 June issue of *Workers Vanguard* (WV) contained an exchange with a reader from San Francisco regarding the Spartacist League's (SL) intervention in the three-day December 2005 New York City transit strike. The reader, "C.M.," writing a few days after Transit Workers Union Local 100 president Roger Toussaint pulled the plug on the "illegal" strike, asked why an SL leaflet distributed on the picket lines failed to mention the possibility that the bureaucrats might fold without a serious fight. C.M. observed:

"I'd say Toussaint and his cronies were forced to call a strike for fear that if they didn't they would be unable to control the ranks. Hell even the Democratic Party has to pose as a defender of the working stiff once in a while."

—WV No. 872, 9 June

WV responded by noting the leaflet's oblique references to Toussaint's record of suing the unions, while sucking up to cops and Democratic Party "friends of labor," and then frankly acknowledged that the SL leadership had chosen not to criticize him:

"Our posture was to close ranks in defense of the union and its leadership against the bosses and the capitalist state, which were screaming for the head of TWU Local 100 president Roger Toussaint, the leader of the strike. The leaflet did not directly attack Toussaint. Since we could not point to an alternative leadership of the strike, to do so would only have served to weaken the strike."

—*Ibid.*, emphasis added

This simple statement is nothing less than a repudiation of one of the most basic precepts of Trotskyism—the necessity "to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be." It was obviously necessary to defend the union leadership from the attacks of the bourgeois state and the corporate media, and any criticisms should have been clearly posed in the context of how to win the strike. But to suggest that it is illegitimate to raise disagreements until and unless a full-fledged "alternative leadership" stands poised to take over, is only one step removed from the Stalinist notion that anyone who dares criticize the leadership is "objectively counterrevolutionary." An alternative leadership with a class-struggle perspective can only be forged through exposing the limitations and contradictions of the reformist, pro-capitalist politics of the labor bureaucracy.

The narrow business unionism of the Toussaint leadership predisposed it to capitulate when slapped with a court order, without even attempting to resist or broaden the fight. It is of course highly unlikely that a leaflet from any leftist organization, even one with a few supporters among the strikers, would have decisively affected the outcome, but the duty of revolutionaries intervening in the class struggle is to try to outline a strategy for victory. In this case, the first step was clearly to remove control of

the strike from Toussaint and his circle, and place it in the hands of a democratically-elected strike committee.

Toussaint, like all union bureaucrats, is, in the final analysis, an agent of the bourgeoisie within the labor movement whose role is to preserve class peace by mediating between workers and bosses. Toussaint was pushed into launching a strike, as C.M. suggested, by pressure from his base in Local 100. For this he was vilified by the capitalists. Defending him, and the strike, from capitalist attacks did not preclude attempting to advise the strikers, many of whom may have had illusions in Toussaint, of the possibility that their leadership might capitulate. Alerting the more militant layers to this danger would not have weakened, but rather *strengthened* the strike and improved the chances of victory.

This same issue is posed by every major class battle. If criticism of reformists, bureaucrats and other misleaders during a struggle can only help the capitalists, what are we to make of Trotsky's polemics against the popular-front government during the Spanish Civil War? Did his criticism weaken the anti-Franco fight? During the Vietnam War, did the then-revolutionary SL's criticisms of Stalinist betrayals weaken the struggle to defeat U.S. imperialism?

After the German working class was crushed by the Nazis as a direct result of the lunatic doctrine of "social fascism," some charlatans criticized the Left Opposition for assigning the blame for the defeat to the policies of the Stalinists. Trotsky responded:

"Hypocrites will be found to say: the Opposition is criticizing a party which has fallen into the hands of the executioner. Blackguards will add: the Opposition is helping the executioner. By combining a specious sentimentalism with venomous falsehood, the Stalinists will endeavor to hide the Central Committee behind the apparatus, the apparatus behind the party, to eliminate the question of responsibility for the catastrophe, for the false strategy, for the disastrous regime, for the criminal leadership: that means helping the executioners of today and tomorrow."

—"The Tragedy of the German Proletariat,"

14 March 1933

The policy of suspending criticism of misleaders simply on the grounds that they hold positions of leadership is alien to the Marxist tradition. The first time the SL tops manifested this impulse was in 1981, when they instructed their ranks to parade under the banner of the Salvadoran popular front, a policy we identified as a significant departure from Trotskyism in our October 1982 founding declaration.

While the SL long ago ceased to be a genuinely Trotskyist organization, the rejection of political criticism for the duration of a particular struggle is unprecedented. I can only conclude that the cancer which destroyed the SL as a revolutionary organization and transformed most of what remains of its core cadre into burn-outs, cynics and demoralized hacks, is now being formally codified programmatically.

Yours for the Rebirth of the Fourth International,
Tom Riley
for the International Bolshevik Tendency

Mass Resistance & Reformist Treachery

The 'Anti-CPE' Movement in France



S. ORTOLA—20 MINUTES

8 March 2006: Student militants marching to the Arc de Triomphe

The following article was originally posted on www.bolshevik.org on 27 May 2006.

The recent struggle to spike the *Contrat première embauche* (CPE—First Job Contract for young workers) demonstrated the social power of the French working class as it resisted capitalist attempts to slash working and living standards. This fightback, which was ignited and driven forward by university and lycée (high school) students, was supported by a majority of the population. In March and early April, tens of thousands of workers staged 24-hour protest strikes, while three million demonstrators, mostly students and workers, marched in opposition to the government's plans.

Six months earlier, on 4 October 2005, a million people participated in a "day of action" called by the trade unions in part to protest Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin's introduction of the *Contrat nouvelles embauches* (CNE—New Jobs Contract) allowing small companies to fire workers without cause during a two-year "trial period." Having registered their objections, the union leadership dropped the issue, and went back to business as usual. By mid-January 280,000 new "precarious" contracts had been signed (*Le Monde*, 17 January).

During October and November 2005, thousands of

mainly black and Arab youths in France's suburban ghettos, chronic victims of massive unemployment and pervasive racism, exploded in anger after cops chased two innocent teenagers to their deaths. The government responded with heavy police repression. When things calmed down, Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy renewed efforts to tighten immigration controls as part of his attempt to woo the electoral base of the fascist National Front (*Le Monde*, 30 March). De Villepin, Sarkozy's main rival for the 2007 presidential nomination of the conservative Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) had announced plans for legislation to, among other things, exempt certain employers from tax and social contributions, legalize night work for 15 year-olds, lower the age for entering apprenticeships to 14 and introduce "parental responsibility" contracts aimed at cutting off family allowances for those whose children were charged with skipping school. But the most contentious part of de Villepin's "Equality of Opportunity" bill was the CPE for workers under the age of 26, a measure ostensibly aimed at reducing youth unemployment. In promoting the CPE, de Villepin let slip the suggestion that a "single contract" to ensure labor "flexibility" throughout the economy was under consideration. This was widely perceived as a threat to the wages and job security of all

working people.

When asked for his reaction to de Villepin's proposal, Bernard Thibault, general secretary of the General Confederation of Labor (CGT), immediately responded: "The method is inadmissible" (*Le Monde*, 18 January). The French union bureaucracy favors "concertation," a class-collaborationist model in which legislation is drafted only after the "social partners" (union leaders and bosses) have been consulted.

Students & Workers Fight Back

On 7 February, 400,000 protesters, mostly students, took to the streets demanding the "withdrawal of the CPE." This action was initiated by an "inter-union" meeting of National Students' Union of France (UNEF), National Lycée Students' Union (UNL), CGT, French Democratic Confederation of Labor (CFDT), French Confederation of Christian Workers (CFTC), Force Ouvrière (FO), United Syndical Federation (FSU) and National Union of Autonomous Trade Unions (UNSA). The various left organizations, including the Communist Party (PCF) and the Socialist Party (PS), supported the day of action. The FSU, comprised mostly of teachers' unions, even called on its members to walk off the job in solidarity.

The more militant elements in the so-called "anti-CPE" movement also wanted to defeat the entire "Equality of Opportunity" bill. Many protesters thought the campaign against the CPE could reignite the struggle against the CNE, and the more politically advanced elements understood the importance of including the defense of immigrants and ghetto youth as part of a general campaign against "précarité" (insecurity).

The success of the 7 February protest touched off a wave of student meetings and demonstrations. The UNEF leadership (which is close to the PS) instructed its branches on how to organize general assemblies (AGs) and curb the influence of leftists (*Le Monde*, 16 February). AGs are open to all students, and anyone who attends a meeting gets to vote on whatever is being discussed—whether to issue a leaflet, block access to the campus, occupy a building, etc. At the beginning of the anti-CPE movement, attendance at AGs on many campuses was limited, but as the struggle developed, participation grew steadily.

A national "week of action" was declared between 13 and 20 February. On 18 February representatives from student AGs from 30 universities, meeting in Rennes to "coordinate" the anti-CPE movement, called for student strikes and "blockages." This was the first of several national "coordinations," which at points began to operate as a parallel organizing body to the official students' unions. By 1 March, according to the UNEF, students at 13 universities were on strike.

A 7 March day of action called by the "inter-union" group drew an estimated one million participants (two-thirds of whom were workers) in over 160 cities across France. Two hundred thousand marched through Paris, 100,000 in Marseilles, 70,000 in Bordeaux, 50,000 in Toulouse and 30,000 in Rennes (*Le Monde*, 9 March). The CGT leadership, which refused to issue a national strike call for the day, did authorize its individual branches to decide for themselves whether to go out. FO, Union syndicale Solidaires (which includes the "SUD" unions representing postal workers and rail workers) and the FSU issued "inter-professional"

strike calls. Local public transportation was affected in Paris and other cities, and strikes occurred in many public-sector workplaces and in postal and telecommunications services (*Nouvel Observateur* [online], 7 March).

On 8 March, students occupied Sorbonne University in Paris for the first time since 1968. By 9 March, students were on strike at 38 universities, and unrest was spreading to an increasing number of lycées and polytechnical institutes. As momentum grew there was a widespread expectation that the government would take a step back, but de Villepin still attempted to ride it out.

'The Conflict Hardens'

On 11 March the vicious CRS riot cops attacked the students occupying the Sorbonne in one of the most publicized instances of police brutality against CPE opponents. De Villepin appeared on television the following night and arrogantly declared, "the law that has been voted will be applied" (*Le Monde*, 14 March). His remarks sparked renewed protests, especially among lycée students, tens of thousands of whom took to the streets on 14 March. Many shut down their schools, and others carried out "coup de poing" operations (e.g., occupying the local offices of the bosses' association, blocking train tracks, etc.). A 16 March student day of action drew an estimated half million participants with more than 100,000 in Paris.

As the "anti-CPE" movement spread from the big cities and their suburbs into small towns and remote areas, it slowly dawned on the French ruling class that the situation was potentially serious. The IFOP polling agency reported that "as the conflict hardens...the youth are radicalizing and are more open to far left formations" (*Le Monde*, 24 March). The government's obstinacy, while failing to blunt the protests, encouraged the fascists to crawl out of the woodwork. On 16 March, for instance, a couple of dozen rightist "youths armed with iron bars" stormed into Toulouse-I University to dislodge a student occupation (*Le Monde*, 17 March).

The next day, when a group of university presidents met with de Villepin, the head of Metz University, Richard Lioger, pleaded: "Mr. Prime Minister, we're on the verge of implosion. Do something" (*Le Monde*, 20 March). Interior Minister Sarkozy fretted: "There is a danger that this agitation of the lycée and university students will stir up the suburbs, which remain extremely tense" (*Le Monde*, 24 March). Laurence Parisot, head of the MEDEF (the main employers' federation) worried aloud that the conflict was threatening "the cohesion of the social fabric" (*Le Monde*, 27 March).

A third national day of action on Saturday 18 March drew 1.5 million protesters, many of them workers. Three hundred and fifty thousand marched in Paris, 130,000 in Marseilles and 50,000 in Toulouse (*Le Figaro*, 19 March). Once again the police response was aggressive: 167 people were arrested in Paris alone and one 39 year-old trade-union activist, Cyril Ferez, was beaten so savagely that he ended up in a coma for three weeks.

Following the 18 March demonstrations, the union tops "solemnly call[ed] upon the government and the president of the republic" to bring an end to the "social tensions." By 20 March, 67 universities and a quarter of France's 4,330 lycées were reportedly experiencing disruptions. In some



EMMANUEL FRADIN—REUTERS

Coup de poing: Protesters block train station, March 2006

places authorities resorted to “administrative closures” of campuses and lycées to undermine anti-CPE activity. There were several instances of “anti-blockage” groups composed of student supporters of the conservative UMP, backed by university administrators, attempting to mobilize apolitical students to reverse the blockages and strikes. Despite some successes, the reactionaries were unable to diffuse the mounting anger and frustration among working-class youth.

A 19 March statement issued by the national students’ “coordination” meeting in Dijon called for escalating the struggle:

“The national coordination calls for a general strike until the Equality of Opportunity law and the CNE have been withdrawn. It calls for the building and extending of the strikes and picket lines in the universities and lycées. It calls on the leadership of the union organizations to call for a general strike until the Equality of Opportunity law and the CNE have been withdrawn, and to build for it with the university and lycée students by calling for general assemblies in workplaces.”

The “coordination” proposed that the “inter-union” meeting on 20 March initiate a general strike for 23 March. Instead, the “inter-union” group endorsed a 23 March student day of action while calling for a 28 March “inter-professional day of action with work stoppages, strikes and demonstrations.”

A statement released by the “inter-union” group following their meeting expressed the hope that “the government must have the wisdom to get out of the impasse it has placed itself in.” Despite having declared the “withdrawal of the CPE” to be a precondition for any discussion, the union leaders sat down with the prime minister on 24 March. They hypocritically claimed that they met with de Villepin merely to reiterate their “demand that the CPE be withdrawn before engaging in any dialogue or negotiation.” Following the meeting, CGT general secretary Thibault warned:

“I didn’t sense that the prime minister was aware of the gravity of the situation...It is dangerous to play for the degradation of a social mobilization. It inspires youths who want to resort to other forms of contestation. The government is playing with fire.”

—*Le Journal du Dimanche*, 26 March

On 23 March, 450,000 protesters—mostly students—again took to the streets. They were joined by gas and electricity workers protesting the privatization of Gaz de France. Once again the police attacked the demonstrators, arresting several hundred. The capitalist media focused much of its coverage on denouncing “casseurs” (wreckers), a term applied mostly to black and Arab youth from the suburban ghettos who participated in confrontations with the cops. The popular press played up the relatively few instances where lumpenized suburban youths stole cameras and assaulted protesters. The denunciation of the “casseurs” was clearly aimed at weakening the movement by promoting racist hysteria—something the trade-union bureaucrats generally went along with. There was one ugly incident in which CGT marshals beat up a few youths from the suburbs and then turned them over to the cops (*Libération*, 29 March).

Three million people participated in the fourth national “day of action” on 28 March. Some 700,000 marched in Paris, 250,000 in Marseilles and demonstrations occurred in 250 other towns and cities. Public-sector employees were joined by steelworkers, autoworkers, communications and transport workers in walking off the job. None of the Parisian dailies appeared, and the Eiffel Tower was closed for most of the day. Again, the protests were violently attacked by the police and 800 were arrested (*Le Monde*, 30 March).

On 29 March the “inter-union” group once again appealed to the state authorities to grant a concession which they could use as an excuse to demobilize their ranks:

“It is urgent that the highest authorities of the state take stock of the situation and respond unambiguously to this demand [‘the withdrawal of the CPE and the opening of negotiations’]. To avoid the country sliding into a deep crisis, the government must resolve to do this. The inter-union group asks the president of the republic to use his constitutional prerogatives to have the CPE withdrawn.”

On 31 March, President Jacques Chirac appeared on national television to announce that the “Equality of Opportunity” bill would become law, but that he would ask that the CPE not be applied while the government opened negotiations with the unions. This clumsy maneuver, intended to help de Villepin save face while also providing the union leadership with an excuse to pull the plug on the struggle, only further enraged the young protesters, and the actions continued to spread. The national students’ coordination (including representatives from the lycées) met on 1 April in Lille and reiterated its call for a general strike, while leading elements of the Socialist Party began to talk about a “regime crisis” (*Le Monde*, 2-3 April).

The fifth national “day of action” on 4 April once again drew an estimated 3 million participants. This time there was less public-sector strike activity, though more private-sector workers participated. Many trade-union militants were growing impatient with the government’s stub-

bornness and their own leadership's temporizing. On 5 April Jean-Marie Le Pen, leader of the fascist National Front, denounced "Trotskyist agitators disguised as trade unionists" and accused Sarkozy of "tolerating anarchy" (*Le Monde*, 8 April). In fact more than 3,000 people were arrested during the anti-CPE struggle, as many as had been apprehended during the suburban rioting in October and November. Some of the anti-CPE protesters were sentenced to six months in jail after hasty, kangaroo court trials.

Union Leaders Pull the Plug

By early April events were coming to a head. The union bureaucrats, whose goal from the beginning had merely been to force the government to withdraw the CPE and enter into a new round of negotiations, were becoming worried about their ability to contain the struggle. While contacts between union leaders and the government had already been covertly renewed as early as 11 March (*Le Monde*, 12-13 March) the labor tops were concerned about the optics of openly negotiating prior to the "withdrawal of the CPE." However, their anxiety that events might escape their control ultimately proved decisive. After de Villepin met with the heads of the five labor "confederations" on 24 March, the whole 12-member "inter-union" group demanded a similar meeting, and once again "solemnly" reminded the government of "the gravity of the situation in which the country has been plunged."

Chirac's announcement of the promulgation and non-application of the CPE on 31 March effectively removed de Villepin from the dossier. Interior Minister Sarkozy immediately contacted the union leaders on 1 April to initiate negotiations. On 10 April, the government announced that the CPE would be replaced by new legislation. The labor bureaucrats hailed this as "an authentic success," despite the fact that the rest of the "Equality of Opportunity" law and the CNE remain intact. The national students' coordination advocated continuing the struggle and the union tops promised to support them. But while student militants, backed by workers in some cases, continued with "coup de poing" operations at train stations and postal sorting centers for a week or so, the "anti-CPE" movement quickly evaporated.

Fake Socialists Push Popular Frontism

For PS and PCF politicians the anti-CPE struggle was an opportunity to showcase policies and candidates for the 2007 elections. At the outset, PS leader François Hollande said: "Let's be realistic, the text is going to pass. The explanatory work we're engaged in will not end in the street but at the ballot box, in 2007" (*Le Monde*, 1 February). Despite the success of the first day of action on 7 February, Hollande insisted: "I don't know a better way to beat the right than by winning elections," a statement that PCF general secretary, Marie-George Buffet, solidarized with, observing: "No one thinks otherwise" (*Le Monde*, 10 February).

The PCF and PS leaderships, and their allies among the labor and student bureaucrats, officially supported the struggle, but their chief concern throughout was to bring the government to its senses before an explosion threatened the "unity of the nation." After Chirac attempted his 31 March promulgation/non-application maneuver, the



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Police attack student occupation in Sorbonne, 11 March 2006

PCF complained that the government was acting "not as though it wanted to resolve the crisis, but as though it were looking to send it spiraling out of control" (*L'Humanité*, 1 April).

Between 1997 and 2002 France was ruled by a government of "the left," i.e., a popular-front coalition of the reformist PS and PCF with a few small bourgeois formations (the Greens, Left Radical Party [PRG] and Citizens' Movement [MDC]). Like all popular fronts, the watchword was "unity," i.e., remaining within the limits of what the "progressive" wing of the bourgeoisie finds acceptable. The supposed need to maintain the coalition was used as an alibi by the PCF/PS leaders for implementing their pro-capitalist agenda.

The "anti-CPE" struggle unfolded as the PCF and PS were maneuvering to assemble another popular-front coalition for the 2007 elections. Among the potential bourgeois participants which endorsed the anti-CPE campaign were the Greens, PRG, Republican Left (GR), Republican Citizen Movement (MRC), Citizens' Alternative, Alternatifs, Movement for a Social Republican Alternative (MARS) and Regions and Peoples in Solidarity. The pseudo-Trotskyist Revolutionary Communist League (LCR) occupies a slot on the "far left" wing of this movement for a popular front. On 31 March, as events were reaching their height, the LCR and other opposition parties met in the National Assembly for a joint press conference. The communiqué issued at the end of the meeting begged the government to back down "in the interest of the country" and called "upon all citizens to take part in the day of action" on 4 April.

The LCR had refused to participate in an 8 February meeting of parties of the "left" on the grounds that it was a "trap" for workers set by those whose real interest lay in creating a new "Plural Left" government. Yet two days later the LCR announced it would be participating in the "comité Riposte" (Fightback Committee) set up at the meeting. The LCR then scandalized many leftists by endorsing the committee's servile "popular petition" requesting "Parliament to debate [the CPE] again."

As the anti-CPE struggle reached its zenith in late March, the remarks of the LCR's 2002 presidential candidate to a meeting in Paris seemed to slightly bemuse the PCF:

"For Olivier Besancenot, the situation is similar to 1968 or 1995. The LCR has at last said it is ready 'to discuss publicly' with all of the forces of the left the 'content of the alternative' to 'completely change politics,' but reiterated its refusal of any alliance with the 'former Plural Left'."

—*L'Humanité*, 30 March

Despite occasional bits of vestigial pseudo-revolutionary rhetoric, the LCR's popular-frontist orientation is well established. Its backhanded support to Chirac in the second round of the 2002 presidential election is proof positive that for these "revolutionary communists" the fundamental Marxist principle of working-class political independence from the bourgeoisie is entirely meaningless.

The Workers Party (PT—associated with ex-Trotskyist Pierre Lambert) cast the fight against the CPE as part of a struggle for "the reconquest of democracy." PT presidential candidate Daniel Gluckstein observed: "The government is simply obeying the orders of the IMF and the Maastricht-Amsterdam Treaty [i.e., the European Union] in instituting its 'First Job Contract'." He also complained that, "the European Union is only playing the tune of the International Monetary Fund (in other words, Washington's capitalists)" (*Informations Ouvrières*, 19-25 January). This echoes the national chauvinism of the union bureaucrats, who never tire of pushing the lie that the main enemy of French workers are American, rather than French, capitalists.

Defensive General Strike: Strategy for Victory

As the tempo of the mobilizations increased, the possibility of a defensive general strike was clearly posed. Instead of timid 24-hour inter-professional "days of action," a general strike to scrap the "Equality of Opportunity" bill and the CNE would have meant mobilizing the entire working class to shut down services, production and transportation. The youth who animated the struggle with their energy and enthusiasm would certainly have eagerly supported such an initiative.

The chief obstacle to launching a general strike was the opposition of the major reformist political parties and their counterparts in the trade-union bureaucracy. None of the larger "far left" groups seriously campaigned for a general strike. The ostensibly Trotskyist Lutte Ouvrière (LO) put little energy into the anti-CPE movement, and limited itself to calling for increasing the number and frequency of strikes. At no point did LO pose the necessity of meeting the capitalist offensive with a general strike. The PT at least mentioned the possibility of a general strike, but posed it simply as a bargaining chip—i.e., something the unions could threaten to initiate if the CPE was not withdrawn (see *Informations Ouvrières*, 9-15 March). The LCR, which threw all its resources into the campaign, routinely confused the issue of a serious general strike with the bureaucrats' 24-hour "inter-professional" strikes, which were never intended to do much more than blow off steam. The leftist leadership of Solidaires issued occasional pronouncements in favor of a general strike, but

happily joined the other labor tops in "solemn" appeals to the government to end the crisis.

Launching a viable general strike would have, at the very least, required overcoming the passive resistance of the bureaucracy. The union leadership would only have taken up the demand in order to maintain control over the rank and file, and would have inevitably sabotaged any serious struggle at the first opportunity. This is why it was necessary to call for "AGs" in every workplace to elect strike committees and delegates to local, regional and national assemblies to carry out an effective general strike. The creation of such bodies would not be enough to negate the political influence of the bureaucrats and pseudo-socialist PCF and PS, but they could have provided an arena for revolutionaries to expand their influence by putting forward the measures necessary to win, while exposing the defeatist, class-collaborationist policies of the reformists.

An effective general strike could well have brought down the government and triggered a new round of elections. But while there was immense opposition to the bourgeois assault on job security, there was never any serious prospect of an immediate revolutionary challenge to the rule of the bourgeoisie. New elections would likely have produced a "left" government—a popular-front coalition of the PS/PCF with the Greens, MRC and/or some other petty-bourgeois formations. The LCR, along with various other "revolutionary" groups, would certainly have offered their support, with or without "critical" fig leaves.

In 1974, the then-revolutionary Spartacist League/U.S. addressed a situation in which the combative British working class faced a generalized attack that required a generalized response, yet lacked any organization capable of approximating a class-struggle leadership. In such circumstances, the SL concluded:

"it would be the worst kind of scholastic passivity to argue that the workers must accept, without struggle, whatever the Tories do to them because their leaders might betray a general strike that could win."

— "Why We Call for a General Strike in Britain Now," *Workers Vanguard*, 1 March 1974, excerpted in 1917 No. 19

In recent years the degenerated SL and its satellites in the International Communist League (ICL, including the Ligue trotskyste de France [LTF]) have rejected this approach in favor of asserting that a general strike should only be attempted under the leadership of a hegemonic revolutionary party (for our critique of this idiocy see: "In Defense of Tactics," 1917 No. 20). The propaganda issued during the anti-CPE struggle by the LTF entirely ignored the question of the general strike, except in unfavorably comparing the situation in France today with that of 1968:

"In May '68, the students' actions sparked a three-week workers general strike, mobilizing millions of workers in the streets, but also importantly at first, in factory occupations. It was those strikes and factory occupations which shook up the ruling class not only here in France but across the world. But in the absence of a revolutionary party, the strikes were demobilized and betrayed, chiefly by the Stalinist Communist Party which, thanks to its influence within the working class, was ultimately able to save the skin of the French bourgeoisie.

"But today is not 1968. Now that the degenerated Soviet workers state was destroyed in 1991-1992, the capitalists around the world are stepping up their offensive to demolish workers' gains, including those achieved in the wake of May '68, with the CPE being just one attack in the generalized onslaught to increase the French capitalists' levels of profit as against their rivals. The counterrevolution in the former USSR has brought with it an enormous political demoralization of the workers, reinforced in France by the years of capitalist austerity governments headed by popular fronts (Mitterrand, Jospin), so that the working class currently does not see revolutionary socialism as a viable alternative to capitalism."

—*Workers Vanguard*, 31 March

The LTF's record in the recent struggle suggests that the leaders of the ICL are a great deal more demoralized than the French working class. By contrasting this year's confrontation to that of 1968, the LTF is clearly suggesting that a general strike would have failed. In November-December 1995 the ICL rejected the call for a general strike for similarly pessimistic reasons (see 1917 No. 18 for our analysis of that struggle).

The August 1991 triumph of counterrevolution in the Soviet Union was an enormous defeat for the international proletariat—but it hardly follows that the French working class has lost the capacity to beat back the bosses' attacks. The problem in 1968, in 1995 and today is that the misleaders of the workers' organizations, many of whom claim to be socialists and even "revolutionaries," pursue a policy of class collaboration. The task of Marxists is to combat their pro-capitalist influence in the working class through advancing a program of class struggle and putting forward tactics that will enable the unions to defeat the capitalist offensive and win new gains. A new, mass revolutionary workers' leadership for tomorrow can only be forged through class-struggle militants demonstrating the superiority of their ideas in the course of participating in the actual struggles of today.

The Groupe Bolchevik (GB—a tendency that traces its origins to Stéphane Just's break with the Lambert group in 1984) was properly critical of the blatant popular-frontism of most of the supposedly socialist organizations. The GB advocated escalating the struggle with a general strike and called for AGs in every workplace. In its propaganda the GB also linked the struggle against the CPE to the fight against racism and xenophobia, and to the defense of immigrants and minorities.

The GB criticized the treacherous role of the labor bureaucrats and the PCF/PS (as well as their LCR fellow travelers) but much of their propaganda focused on demands that the union leadership initiate measures it was completely opposed to—in particular, launching a general strike. For example, a 12 March GB leaflet was headlined: "Union leaders: refuse to negotiate the CPE! Call for a general strike until the Villepin law is abrogated!" In its 15 March leaflet, the GB advised the union leadership: "your responsibility is to call right now for a general strike!"

In principle there is nothing wrong with placing demands on the leaders of the workers' organizations in order to expose the contradiction between their militant rhetoric and their craven actions. Yet, in this situation, with the bureaucrats openly seeking to demobilize the protests, to focus on their "responsibility" to initiate a



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9 March 2006: General Assembly at Paris III university

general strike (something they would only have contemplated had they begun to lose control of their base) was more likely to create illusions than to dispel them. While a general strike could not be organized over the heads of the union leaders, it was necessary for revolutionaries to do more than exhort them to lead one. To take advantage of the contradictions between the union officialdom and their base, revolutionaries had to combine agitation for the creation of workplace AGs and strike committees with explanations of why the bureaucrats refused to undertake any serious preparations for a general strike.

Capitalist 'Precariousness' vs. Socialist Rationality

The debate over "flexibility" and "security" that framed the recent struggle in France reflects the fundamental antagonism between capital and labor. The struggle against the CPE demonstrated that tens of thousands of youths and working-class militants are willing to fight attempts by the bosses to erode living and working standards.

The job of the Marxist vanguard is to explain that under capitalism "precariousness" is the permanent condition of waged labor and that no reform can change this fact. The "anti-CPE" movement presented revolutionaries with the opportunity to pose practical solutions to the immediate problems of vital concern to the mass of youth and working people, while also linking their struggles to the necessity of a socialist revolution. As Karl Marx observed almost 140 years ago, the working class "has nothing to lose but its chains"—i.e., its historical interests can only be advanced through the overthrow of bourgeois rule and the creation of a rationally planned international economic order where production is geared to meeting human need rather than maximizing private profit. ■

For a Socialist Federation of the Middle East!

Zionist Terror in Lebanon



ADNAN HAJJ—REUTERS

Israeli bombs devastated Shiite quarter in Beirut

The following statement was published by the International Bolshevik Tendency on 30 July 2006.

Three weeks ago the Mediterranean seaport of Beirut bustled with commercial activity. Since then its main export has been North American and European refugees desperately seeking to escape the murderous Zionist aerial bombardments raining down upon the city. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF), which Prime Minister Ehud Olmert piously described as “the most moral army in the world” (*Jerusalem Post*, 11 June), has openly declared its willingness to roll Lebanon back 20 years—a reference to the devastation wreaked on the country in the course of its 15-year civil war.

In June 1982, in the midst of this communalist conflict, Ariel Sharon marched to Beirut at the head of an IDF invasion. “Operation Peace for Galilee” was initially advertised as a limited intervention intended solely to push PLO Katyusha rocket launchers back from the border, but was in fact aimed at crushing the secular nationalist Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and turning Lebanon into an Israeli protectorate.

Israeli forces killed at least 17,000 people, but failed to destroy the PLO. Their brutal occupation provided

the impetus for the creation of Hezbollah, “The Islamic Resistance of Lebanon,” an indigenous formation deeply rooted among the country’s sizeable Shiite minority. The IDF retained a strip of Southern Lebanon until 2000 when it was finally driven out after a lengthy war of attrition by Hezbollah guerrillas, who have the distinction of being the only Arab military formation to administer a clear-cut defeat to the Zionists. Israel’s racist ruling class, stinging from this humiliation, has thirsted for revenge ever since.

The current crisis has its immediate origins in the electoral victory last January of Hamas, a largely Islamist organization based among Palestinian Sunnis, which Israeli intelligence agencies had covertly supported in the late 1970s to undercut the influence of Yasir Arafat and his movement. In the recent parliamentary contest Hamas candidates benefited from widespread disaffection with the corrupt and discredited PLO government. Life was already unbearable for the million Palestinian residents of the tiny Bantustan known as the Gaza Strip. But when Hamas sought to form a government, Israel, with the support of its U.S. godfather, imposed severe economic sanctions, and withheld the \$50 million a month it collects in customs revenues in the Occupied Territories, with which

the Palestinian Authority pays the salaries of half its 140,000 employees.

Hamas declared a truce with Israel in February 2005 that lasted 16 months, but the IDF never abandoned its program of "targeted killings" of Palestinian resistance fighters, as well as many unfortunate bystanders. According to statistics collected by the Red Crescent, the Israeli military killed 73 Palestinians in Gaza in April and May alone. Hamas finally renounced its truce on 10 June after seven members of a Palestinian family holidaying on a Gaza beach were killed by an IDF artillery shell. Israel denied responsibility, but refused to permit an independent investigation.

A few weeks later, on 24 June, IDF forces entered Gaza and kidnapped two civilians, a doctor and his brother. Most of the Western media ignored this story, but the next day, when Palestinian militants responded by capturing Gilad Shalit, an Israeli corporal, in an audacious raid on an IDF post at Kerem Shalom, it was front-page news all over the world. The Israelis retaliated by cutting the pipeline that supplies Gaza with fuel, closing all crossings, and launching renewed aerial attacks and artillery bombardment. On 28 June Israeli planes destroyed Gaza's only electrical generating station. Jan Egeland, UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, said: "We are very worried about the situation in the Gaza Strip and, in particular, the shortages of power and water, the effect on sewage, and humanitarian access" (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 30 June). Such measures of "collective punishment" aimed at civilian populations are prohibited by the Geneva conventions, but the Zionists have been given a free pass to do as they please by their patron.

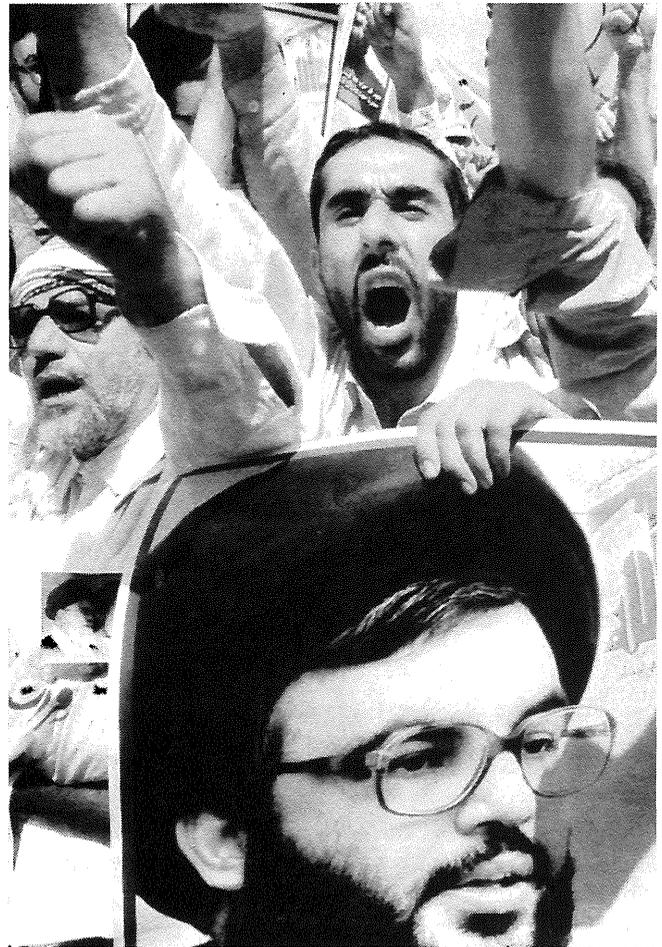
Hezbollah vs. IDF: David & Goliath Revisited

On 12 July, the eighteenth day of the siege of Gaza, Hezbollah fighters ambushed a patrol on the northern border of Israel, killing three IDF soldiers and capturing two. They then destroyed one of the IDF tanks sent in pursuit, along with its four-man crew. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah's proposal for an exchange of prisoners was rejected by the Israelis, who commenced the savage aerial bombardment of Shi'ite areas in Beirut and southern Lebanon, while also targeting much of the country's civilian infrastructure, including the Beirut airport, bridges and major highways, to effectively seal off the southern third of the country.

In Lebanon's May-June 2005 general election, Hezbollah candidates, along with those of Amal, their Islamist allies, took 29 of the 128 seats in Lebanon's parliament. While derided as little more than "terrorists" by the popular media in the imperialist countries, Hezbollah is deeply rooted within Lebanon's impoverished Shi'ite population:

"The outskirts of Beirut are known as the dahiya, Arabic for 'suburbs.' It has come to mean the poor, dense and sometimes dangerous maze of slums that is also Hezbollah-land. Its dirty alleys are crammed with concrete-block shanties....

"Hezbollah has become an enterprise in the dahiya, often outperforming the state. It runs a major hospital as well as schools, discount pharmacies, groceries and an orphanage. It runs a garbage service and a reconstruction program for homes damaged during Israel's invasion. It



ABEDIN TAHERKENAREH—EPA/DPA

Hezbollah resistance electrified Muslims around the world

supports families of the young men it sent off to their deaths. Altogether, it benefits an estimated 250,000 Lebanese and is the country's second-largest employer."

—*Washington Post*, 16 July

The IDF has combined its aerial attacks on Shi'ite areas in South Lebanon with warnings to civilians to flee their homes or face destruction. The imperialist media cites this as evidence of the humanitarianism of the Zionist butchers, rather than their proclivity for "ethnic cleansing." The Israeli government seems to have calculated that resentments generated by a massive influx of impoverished Shi'ite refugees into the Druze, Sunni and Christian areas would produce intensified hostility toward Hezbollah. But so far most of the anger has been directed at the IDF. Tel Aviv's hope that when the dust settled a compliant semi-puppet regime might emerge in Beirut prepared to absorb the overheads of suppressing the Shi'ite militias has been dashed. Israel's rulers have long entertained similar fantasies for their northern neighbor:

"In 1955, David Ben-Gurion proposed taking a 'Christian officer' and installing him as dictator. Moshe Sharet showed that this idea was based on complete ignorance of Lebanese affairs and torpedoed it. But 27 years later, Ariel Sharon tried to put it into effect nevertheless. Bashir Gemayel was indeed installed as president, only to be murdered soon afterwards. His brother, Amin, succeeded him and signed a peace agreement with Israel, but was



HASSAN AMMAR—AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE-GETTY IMAGES

Civilian victims of Israeli air strike in southern Lebanon

driven out of office. (The same brother is now publicly supporting the Israeli operation.)"

—Uri Avnery "The Real Aim," Gush Shalom, Znet, 17 July

Tanya Reinhart, a Tel Aviv academic, argues that this latest Israeli aggression in Lebanon has to be understood within the context of the continuing history of Zionist expansionism in the region:

"Lebanon's people know what every Israeli old enough to remember knows—that in the vision of Ben Gurion, Israel's founding leader, Israel's border should be 'natural', that is—the Jordan river in the East, and the Litani river of Lebanon in the north. In 1967, Israel gained control over the Jordan river, in the occupied Palestinian land, but all its attempts to establish the Litani border have failed so far.

"As I argued in *Israel/Palestine*, already when the Israeli army left Southern Lebanon in 2000, the plans to return were ready. But in Israel's military vision, in the next round, the land should be first 'cleaned' of its residents, as Israel did when it occupied the Syrian Golan Heights in 1967, and as it is doing now in southern Lebanon."

—"Israel's 'new Middle East'," *Counterpunch*, 26 July

In June 1967 Israel administered a humiliating defeat to the armies of Egypt, Syria and Jordan in only six days and seized the Golan Heights from Syria and the Sinai peninsula from Egypt, while also occupying the Gaza Strip and West Bank. But the IDF's inability to destroy Hezbollah in eighteen years of occupation and the conditions of the withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000 created something of a "Vietnam syndrome" in Israel. Getting bogged down once again in a Lebanese quagmire will not play well with either the public or the army. The IDF appears to be prepared to wage a long war of attrition on Gaza's largely defenseless civilian population, but desperately wanted to score a quick, decisive victory in Lebanon.

So far Hezbollah's fighters have managed to inflict

serious casualties on the invaders, thus demonstrating that despite their enormous advantages in both numbers and armaments, the Zionist supermen are not invincible. Hundreds of Hezbollah's primitive, short-range rockets have continued to land in Northern Israel with occasionally fatal results. The stubborn resistance mounted by the few thousand Hezbollah guerrilla fighters has electrified the Arab world (including Sunni and secular Arabs, as well as Shiites). While revolutionaries side militarily with Hezbollah and Hamas against the Zionist oppressors, we recognize that the growing prestige of such reactionary theocratic movements is an ominous sign for socialists, women, homosexuals, atheists and anyone else who does not wish to be governed by the strictures of pre-feudal Islamic reaction.

Lebanon 1983: Imperialists Driven Out

The master race ethos of the Israeli ruling class, which makes it averse to taking serious casualties, has complicated the IDF's offensive. A similar attitude hobbles their American patron and its imperial allies, all of whom agree on the desirability of sending in a force of foreign "peacekeepers" to aid the Israelis, while not being prepared to commit any of their own troops:

"France—which has called the idea of a force premature—and the United States are haunted by their last participation in a multinational force in Lebanon after the Israeli invasion in 1982, when they became belligerents in the Lebanese civil war and tangled fatally with Hezbollah.

"They withdrew in defeat after Hezbollah's suicide bombing of a Marine barracks in Beirut in October 1983, which killed 241 American service members and 58 French paratroopers."

—*New York Times*, 25 July

The 1983 blows that drove the colonial gendarmes out

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ISSAM KOBELSI—REUTERS

Hezbollah fighter in Beirut suburb, 17 July 2006

of Lebanon were welcomed by all genuine anti-imperialists, despite the fact that they were carried out by Islamic reactionaries. The impact of this defeat reverberates to this day within the ruling circles of imperialism. In an article entitled "The Rumsfeld Doctrine," Jacob Heilbrunn observed:

"the Bush administration's decision to launch a preemptive invasion [of Iraq in 2003] amounted to a wholesale repudiation of the so-called Powell doctrine.... This was not academic hairsplitting, but a fundamental rift in the Republican Party. Colin Powell's credo was a lineal descendant of the Weinberger doctrine, announced by his mentor, Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, in 1984 to justify bolting from Lebanon after the suicide bombing of a Marine barracks—a strategic humiliation that many Republican hawks view as the origin of America's current woes in the war on terror...."

—*New York Times Book Review*, 30 April

The once imperial presidency of George Bush Jr. has seen an unparalleled series of disasters, both at home and abroad. Today the vaunted American military is stretched thin by the occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan. In both countries initial proclamations of victory proved wildly optimistic, as the military position of the U.S., its auxiliaries and vassals has slowly but steadily deteriorated. The only thing that prevents Bush's support for the IDF's brutal assault on Lebanon from becoming yet another major political headache for him as the November mid-term elections loom, is the fact that his Democratic "opponents" are at least as willing to endorse the crimes of Zionism on the grounds that "Israel has a right to defend

itself."

U.S. sponsorship of the murderous Zionist rampage does come with a price, if not at home then abroad, where Israeli aggression is widely seen for exactly what it is. Of particularly acute concern to the Pentagon is the prospect that Iraqi Shiites may react to Zionist attacks on their Lebanese co-religionists with a renewed wave of attacks on the occupation forces of the U.S./UK axis. The tattered imperialist "coalition" already has enough trouble handling the resistance fighters from the minority Sunni population; if the majority Shiites were to insurrect it could make an already difficult situation impossible.

Hands Off Syria and Iran!

White House spinmeisters suggest that Hezbollah is little more than a proxy for Iran, and its current ally of convenience, Syria. But in fact the relationship is very similar to the one between Israel and the U.S., as Afshin Molavi observed:

"They both have common interests, the larger power provides financial and military assistance, and the two consult closely on regional matters. They occasionally bicker behind closed doors, but the political elite of the larger power is reluctant to criticize the smaller power publicly."

—Salon.com, 20 July

While Hezbollah gets substantial support from Iran—an estimated \$100 million annually—most of its funding is obtained from the Lebanese diaspora.



IBT supporter in Wellington, New Zealand, August 2006

The current conflict in Lebanon could be used as a pretext for Washington to move against Syria and Iran, both of which it has been threatening for several years. In recent months the Bush administration has launched a semi-hysterical propaganda campaign about the supposed “dangers” of Iran acquiring any sort of nuclear capacity. Revolutionaries militarily defend both Syria and Iran against imperialist bullying, while giving no political support to the hereditary Baathist dictatorship in Damascus or the theocratic ruling caste in Tehran. Military defense includes upholding their right to possess effective means of self-defense, up to and including nuclear weapons.

Forward to a Socialist Federation of the Middle East!

Under capitalism the more powerful bourgeois states have a predatory relationship with weaker ones—as the history of Zionism attests. But a continuation of the bloody religious, national and ethnic conflicts that have defined so much of the history of the Middle East over the past century can offer nothing but misery. Only through a series of successful proletarian revolutions, led by internationalist Leninist parties on the basis of the program of permanent revolution, can the conflicting claims of the various peoples of the region be resolved in a just and equitable manner.

Only a socialist federation of the Middle East can ensure that the region’s resources, including its vast oil fields, are no longer used to fuel super-profits for imperialist oil corporations and their local henchmen among the Zionist and Arab ruling elites. Establishing the rule of the workers and oppressed in the Middle East requires smashing the Israeli garrison state from within—something that can only be achieved by a revolutionary movement that defends the oppressed Palestinians while recognizing that the Jewish

working people, though poisoned with racist Zionism, have common class interests with Arab workers and the other oppressed peoples of the region.

The international workers’ movement has an important role to play in helping to develop the revolutionary class consciousness necessary for a historically progressive resolution of the bitter national, ethnic and religious conflicts of the Middle East. It can do so by actively opposing the imperialist occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, and defending Iran and Syria against imperialist attack. While revolutionaries side militarily with Hamas and Hezbollah in their resistance to the murderous aggression of the IDF in Gaza and Lebanon, we do not glorify them nor offer any political support to their theocratic project.

Class-conscious militants outside the Middle East could set a powerful example by fighting for their unions to refuse to handle Israeli goods while the IDF is raining death and destruction down on Gaza and Lebanon. Such an initiative would provide the oppressed masses of the region, who burn with anger at the brutalities of the imperialists and their allies, with a qualitatively different model for effective resistance to Zionist and imperialist oppression than the dead-end obscurantism pushed by the Islamists.

Amid the grim chaos and bestial Zionist terrorism, there are a few hopeful glimmers that the masses of the region may yet find a road forward and make the Middle East into a place in which Persians, Kurds, Arabs, Christians, Muslims, Jews and all the other ethnic and religious groups of the region can one day live together peaceably. On 16 July, according the *New York Times*, 2,000 Arabs and Jews joined together in a demonstration in Tel Aviv to protest Israel’s attacks on Lebanon. This is evidence that, even in the midst of Israel’s bloody expansionist drive, there are courageous individuals who are prepared to offer opposition to the brutal Zionist war machine.

At a moment in history like the present, many individuals, even many of those who identify with Marxism, can be gripped by despair at the possibility of revolutionary breakthroughs. But there is simply no other road forward for humanity. In 1916, when the organized mass murder of the First World War had already “become a boring monotonous daily business,” the great German communist Rosa Luxemburg pointed to the necessity for socialists to remember that only through overturning the global capitalist system will it be possible to put an end to exploitation, oppression and war:

“The modern working class must pay dearly for each development of its consciousness of its historic mission. The Golgotha-road of its class liberation is strewn with awful sacrifices. The June combatants [of 1848], the victims of the Commune, the martyrs of the Russian Revolution [of 1905]—an endless line of bloody shadows. But they have fallen on the field of honor, as Marx wrote of the heroes of the Commune, ‘to be enshrined forever in the great heart of the working class.’ Now millions of proletarians of all nations are falling on the field of shame, of fratricide, of self-destruction, the slave-song on their lips. And that, too, could not be spared us. We are truly like the Jews whom Moses led through the desert. But we are not lost, and we will be victorious if we have not forgotten how to learn.”

—*The Junius Pamphlet*

'Israel Lobby'...

continued from page 48

reality quickly" (*Ibid.*).

David Duke, a well-known fascist and rabid anti-Semite, boasted that Mearsheimer and Walt's article "validate[s] every major point I have been making since even before the [Iraq] war even started" (*New York Sun*, 20 March 2006). Duke raves about "Jewish supremacists who seek and support Jewish supremacy not only in the Mideast but in United States as well," but Mearsheimer and Walt, who do not subscribe to such vile nonsense, explicitly deny that the Israel lobby is any sort of conspiracy:

"In its basic operations, the Israel Lobby is no different from the farm lobby, steel or textile workers' unions, or other ethnic lobbies. There is nothing improper about American Jews and their Christian allies attempting to sway US policy: the Lobby's activities are not a conspiracy of the sort depicted in tracts like the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. For the most part, the individuals and groups that comprise it are only doing what other special interest groups do, but doing it very much better."

—*Op. cit.*

Washington's 'Israel Lobby'

The linchpin of the Israel lobby is the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), with 100,000 members and an annual budget of \$47 million (*New York Review of Books*, 8 June 2006). Other key elements are the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, the American Enterprise Institute and the Heritage Foundation. The Israel lobby's clout has been multiplied by the support of "Christian Zionist" bible-thumpers, who believe that Jewish control of the Holy Land will prepare the way for the "Rapture," the "second coming" of Christ and "Armageddon."

Mearsheimer and Walt begin by surveying the benefits that Tel Aviv gets from the current arrangement:

"Israel receives about \$3 billion in direct assistance each year, roughly one-fifth of the foreign aid budget, and worth about \$500 a year for every Israeli. This largesse is especially striking since Israel is now a wealthy industrial state with a per capita income roughly equal to that of South Korea or Spain.

"It is the only recipient that does not have to account for how the aid is spent, which makes it virtually impossible to prevent the money from being used for purposes the US opposes, such as building settlements on the West Bank."

—*Ibid.*

Israel's status as a "wealthy industrial state" is largely a consequence of its privileged relationship with the United States, which, in addition to direct aid, has included favorable trade deals, loan guarantees and other forms of indirect assistance. American support was vital to the development of the Israeli military industry:

"the US has provided Israel with nearly \$3 billion to develop weapons systems, and given it access to such top-drawer weaponry as Blackhawk helicopters and F-16



Bush and AIPAC president, Amy Friedkin, May 2004

jets. Finally, the US gives Israel access to intelligence it denies to its Nato allies and has turned a blind eye to Israel's acquisition of nuclear weapons."

—*Ibid.*

While fulminating about the supposed threat of phantom Iraqi and Iranian "weapons of mass destruction," the U.S. has consistently opposed attempts by Arab states to put Tel Aviv's nukes on the agenda of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). In the 1980s, the U.S. also ignored Israel's pivotal role in helping South Africa's apartheid rulers acquire nuclear weapons.

The relationship has not been entirely one-sided. U.S. subsidies to Israel are largely recycled back to American arms makers, and the Zionist military's aggression against the Palestinians and Arab states has provided the Pentagon with valuable battlefield weapons testing. Israel's hypertrophied arms budget has also pushed its Arab neighbors to increase their own military spending, thus expanding the market for U.S. weapons manufacturers:

"The arms industry contributes more than \$7 million each election cycle to Congressional campaigns, twice that of pro-Israel groups. In terms of lobbying budgets, the difference is even more profound: Northrop Grumman alone spends seven times as much money in its lobbying efforts annually than does AIPAC and Lockheed Martin outspends AIPAC by a factor of four. Similarly, the lobbying budget of AIPAC is dwarfed by those of General Electric, Raytheon, and Boeing and other corporations with substantial military contracts."

"This benefit to U.S. defense contractors is multiplied by the fact that every major arms transfer to Israel creates a new demand by Arab states—most paying in petrodollar cash—for additional American weapons to challenge Israel's increased military capacity. Indeed, Israel announced its acceptance of a proposed freeze on arms exports to the Middle East back in 1991, but the Bush and Clinton administrations, under pressure from the defense industry, effectively blocked it."

—Stephen Zunes, *Foreign Policy in Focus*, 16 May 2006



Funeral procession for child killed by Israeli military in Gaza

Israel has also provided a back door for dealing with various unsavory elements:

"during the 1980s, Israel served as a conduit for U.S. arms to governments and movements too unpopular in the United States to receive overt military assistance, including South Africa under the apartheid regime, Iran's Islamic Republic, Guatemala's rightist military juntas, and the Nicaraguan Contras. Israeli military advisers assisted the Contras, the Salvadoran junta, and other movements and governments backed by the United States."

—*Ibid.*

Israel may have been a strategic asset in countering Soviet influence in the Middle East during the Cold War, Mearsheimer and Walt suggest, but today the relationship has become a liability:

"The first Gulf War revealed the extent to which Israel was becoming a strategic burden. The US could not use Israeli bases without rupturing the anti-Iraq coalition, and had to divert resources (e.g. Patriot missile batteries) to prevent Tel Aviv doing anything that might harm the alliance against Saddam Hussein. History repeated itself in 2003: although Israel was eager for the US to attack Iraq, Bush could not ask it to help without triggering Arab opposition. So Israel stayed on the sidelines once again."

—*Op. cit.*

Noting that Tel Aviv has transferred "sensitive military technology" to American enemies, including China, they cite the U.S. General Accountability Office's observation that Israel "conducts the most aggressive espionage operations against the US of any ally."

But the chief concern of the two academics is Israel's supposed role in pushing the Bush administration to invade Iraq and its continuing pressure for attacking Iran and Syria:

"As for so-called rogue states in the Middle East, they are not a dire threat to vital US interests, except inasmuch as they are a threat to Israel. Even if these states acquire nuclear weapons—which is obviously undesirable—

neither America nor Israel could be blackmailed, because the blackmailer could not carry out the threat without suffering overwhelming retaliation....Israel's nuclear arsenal is one reason some of its neighbours want nuclear weapons, and threatening them with regime change merely increases that desire."

—*Ibid.*

Mearsheimer and Walt observe that Washington's longstanding indifference to Zionist ethnic cleansing inflames anti-American sentiment in the Muslim world, and thus "makes winning the war on terror more difficult." They also note that intransigence toward Iran and Syria "makes it almost impossible for Washington to enlist them in the struggle against al-Qaida and the Iraqi insurgency, where their help is badly needed."

American bellicosity toward Iran does not reflect pressure from the Israel lobby, but rather the fact that the Islamic Republic constitutes a significant obstacle to U.S. hegemony in the Persian Gulf. This, not Israel's regional designs, is why the Iranian "rogue state" remains a target for Washington.

'Realists' vs. Neo-Cons

The spectacular puncturing of neo-conservative fantasies about remaking the Middle East on the cheap has strengthened the hand of the "realists" within the American bourgeoisie, who think that the return on Washington's investment does not warrant the risk, and that it is time to rebalance the portfolio. The "realists" are perfectly willing to employ military force and brutal repression if necessary, but only where essential interests of the U.S. are at stake, and then only as a last resort. They prefer, wherever possible, to project a more benign image, co-opt opposition and seek "multilateral solutions" with imperial rivals. In their view, America's military dominance is most effective when used for political leverage.

In an earlier article, Walt sketched a "realist" framework for U.S. policy:

"[T]he United States should resume its traditional role as an 'offshore balancer.' This strategy assumes that only a few parts of the world are of strategic importance to the United States, such as Europe, industrialized Asia, and the Persian Gulf. Instead of controlling these areas directly, the United States would rely on local actors to maintain the regional balance of power. The United States would still stand ready to deploy its power against specific threats to its interests, but it would intervene only when absolutely necessary—when the local balance broke down and vital U.S. interests were clearly threatened by hostile forces. In short, while remaining engaged with its allies, the United States should keep its military presence as small as possible. Reducing the size of the U.S. footprint would diminish the likelihood that foreign terrorists—especially suicide bombers—would target the United States, because such responses are most often triggered by perceived foreign occupation.

"Being less directly involved on the ground would also bolster the United States' freedom of action. Washington would be able to play hard to get, making its support for others conditional on broad compliance with U.S. goals. Other states would be less likely to take U.S. protection for granted. By diminishing global concerns about U.S.

dominance, this approach would also make it easier for Washington to gain global backing on those rare occasions when it needed to use force. Playing hard to get would not win over a recalcitrant regime such as that in Pyongyang, but it would make it easier for the United States to attract broad assistance for its policies in even those cases."

—*Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2005

In Walt's view, a policy of rapprochement with the Baathists could have saved hundreds of billions of dollars, given U.S. energy corporations access to Iraqi oil and preserved Uncle Sam's image as the promoter of "freedom." This in turn would have increased America's capacity to put pressure on "recalcitrants" and promote social counterrevolution in North Korea (as well as Cuba, China and Vietnam).

The dispute over Mearsheimer and Walt's view of the Israel lobby reflects a struggle within the American ruling class over Middle East strategy. Zbigniew Brzezinski, the reactionary Cold Warrior credited with initiating the policy of training and equipping the *mujahedin* to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan (where Osama bin Laden got his start as a *jihadi*), solidarized with Mearsheimer and Walt, and acidly commented:

"It is probably not an accident that the most effective lobbies are also the ones that have been the most endowed. Whether that produces the best definition of the American national interest in the Middle East or elsewhere is open to question, and worthy of serious debate."

—*Foreign Policy*, July/August 2006

Dimitri Simes, writing in the realists' favorite journal, denounced the Israel lobby's attacks:

"Mearsheimer and Walt are serious people raising serious issues in a serious way. They—and by extension all Americans who want a rational discussion about U.S. foreign policy—deserve better than the virtual lynching to which they were subjected by some influential pundits.

"Predictably, the bulk of the character assassination directed at Mearsheimer and Walt has come from individuals who bear the lion's share of responsibility for our predicament in Iraq, yet who want to use name-calling as a way of precluding any honest examination of how it happened."

—*The National Interest*, Summer 2006

Contrary to those who would like to blame Zionist lobbying for the U.S. predicament in Iraq, Washington's foreign policy has always, in the end, been determined by the perceived interests of the American ruling class. The alliance with Israel, like the current colonial wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, were entered into with the expectation that they would yield a dividend for American capitalism. To access the halls of power in Washington, the Israel lobby understands that it must provide advice that is seen to be useful in advancing the objectives of U.S. imperialism. The Israeli tail does not wag the American dog.

Zionism & the British Empire

Zionism—an exclusivist ideology advocating the creation of a Jewish nation-state in the territories allegedly inhabited by the biblical Israelites—developed in Europe at the dawn of the imperialist epoch in the late nineteenth century. At first it was not particularly popular in Europe's

Jewish ghettos. Religious Jews viewed Zionism as a secular perversion which threatened the power and authority of the rabbinical hierarchy, while secular Jews tended to regard the Zionists' project as unachievable and/or undesirable. The Jewish workers and intellectuals who played such an important role in Europe's socialist movement recognized anti-Semitism as a "divide and rule" tool of the ruling classes. However, as socialists, the idea of a state where Jewish workers could be exploited by Jewish bosses was hardly a solution.

With little support in the Jewish community, the Zionists turned to their own imperialist bourgeoisies. Theodor Herzl, Zionism's principal ideologist, pitched the notion of a Jewish "homeland" in Palestine as a "portion of the rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilisation as opposed to barbarism," (*The Jewish State*, Theodor Herzl).

During World War I, the rulers of the British Empire came to view Zionism as a useful counterweight to pro-socialist sentiment in the Jewish working class. This was particularly important in Russia after the Czar was deposed in February 1917. The growing influence of hard-left socialists (particularly the Bolsheviks) who pledged to pull Russia out of the war alarmed the British Foreign Office, because this would mean the Germans could concentrate all their forces on the Western Front. The British ruling class was also concerned that a successful workers' revolution in Russia might spread rapidly across Europe due to the unpopularity of the seemingly endless, and pointless, inter-imperialist bloodbath.

On 2 November 1917, Britain's foreign secretary, Arthur Balfour, announced his support for establishing a Jewish "national home" in Palestine. While the "Balfour Declaration" came too late to have much effect on events in Russia, Britain's rulers continued to regard Zionism as valuable in undercutting communist influence among Europe's Jewish population. In 1920, Winston Churchill, at that time secretary of state for war and air, described "three main lines of political conception among the Jews": the "National" Jews, who identify first and foremost with their "own" country; the "International" Jews, or communists; and the Zionists:

"Zionism offers the third sphere to the political conceptions of the Jewish race. In violent contrast to international communism, it presents to the Jew a national idea of a commanding character. It has fallen to the British Government, as the result of the conquest of Palestine, to have the opportunity and the responsibility of securing for the Jewish race all over the world a home and a center of national life. The statesmanship and historic sense of Mr. Balfour were prompt to seize this opportunity....

"Of course, Palestine is far too small to accommodate more than a fraction of the Jewish race, nor do the majority of national Jews wish to go there. But if, as may well happen, there should be created in our lifetime by the banks of the Jordan a Jewish State under the protection of the British Crown, which might comprise three or four millions of Jews, an event would have occurred in the history of the world which would, from every point of view, be beneficial, and would be especially in harmony with the truest interests of the British Empire.

"Zionism has already become a factor in the political

convulsions of Russia, as a powerful competing influence in Bolshevik circles with the international communistic system. Nothing could be more significant than the fury with which Trotsky has attacked the Zionists generally, and Dr. Weissmann, in particular. The cruel penetration of his mind leaves him in no doubt that his schemes of a worldwide communist state under Jewish domination are directly thwarted and hindered by this new ideal, which directs the energies and the hopes of Jews in every land towards a simpler, a truer, and a far more attainable goal. The struggle which is now beginning between the Zionist and Bolshevik Jews is little less than a struggle for the soul of the Jewish people."

—*Illustrated Sunday Herald*, 8 February 1920
(reproduced in Lenni Brenner, *51 Documents: Zionist Collaboration with the Nazis*)

Churchill's casual anti-Semitic reference to the widespread paranoid rightist fantasy of a "Judeo-Communist conspiracy" did not diminish his enthusiasm for "Dr. Weissmann," whose ideals were so compatible with the preservation of the British Empire. Chaim Weizmann was a leading British Zionist who later became Israel's first president.

Britain had seized Palestine, and much of the rest of the Ottoman Empire after Turkey's defeat in World War I. In 1917, Weizmann proposed that "a Jewish Palestine would be a safeguard to England, in particular in respect to the Suez Canal" (*Trial and Error*, Chaim Weizmann). Prior to Turkey's entry into the war, Weizmann had already been thinking along these lines:

"My plans are based naturally on one cardinal assumption—viz. that the Allies will win and, as I sincerely wish and hope, win well...I have no doubt in my mind that Palestine will fall within the sphere of England. Palestine is a natural continuation of Egypt and the barrier separating the Suez Canal from...the Black Sea and any hostility which may come from that side...it will be the Asiatic Belgium, especially if it is developed by the Jews. We—given more or less good conditions—could easily move a million Jews into Palestine within the next fifty to sixty years, and England would have an effective barrier and we would have a country...."

—letter to Israel Zangwill, 10 October 1914 (quoted in *The Balfour Declaration*, Leonard Stein)

Israel as Client State

The dissolution of the British Empire following World War II allowed the U.S. to emerge as the dominant power in the Middle East. After unsuccessfully attempting to suppress a Zionist revolt in Palestine, Britain announced its intention to withdraw and turn the territory over to the United Nations. Some commentators regard U.S. support for the partition of Palestine as an early example of the success of the Israel lobby in steering American foreign policy:

"Truman's support for the creation of a Jewish state was due entirely to the US Jewish community, without whose influence Zionist achievements in Palestine would have been for naught. Long before any strategic argument was made, indeed, while a Jewish state was considered a strategic liability, long before Israel's fundamentalist Christian supporters of today were on the map, the nascent Israel lobby deployed its manifold resources with consummate skill and ruthlessness."

—Harry Clark, *CounterPunch*, 3-4 June 2006

In November 1947, the U.S. had voted in favor of partition in the United Nations General Assembly, but the State Department favored a policy of working to impose a "trusteeship" (i.e., direct imperialist control). In a January 1948 report, George Kennan (the influential State Department intellectual who had authored the doctrine of "containment" the previous year) argued that partition would alienate the Arab rulers who ensured American access to the region's oil, while emboldening, rather than mollifying, the Zionist insurgents. Kennan also worried that:

"The partition of Palestine might afford the USSR a pretext on the basis of 'self-determination of minorities' to encourage the partition of areas in Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Greece, with a view to setting up separate [Kurdish?] Azerbaijani, Armenian and Macedonian states enjoying the support of the USSR."

—reprinted in *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1948, Volume V, Part 2

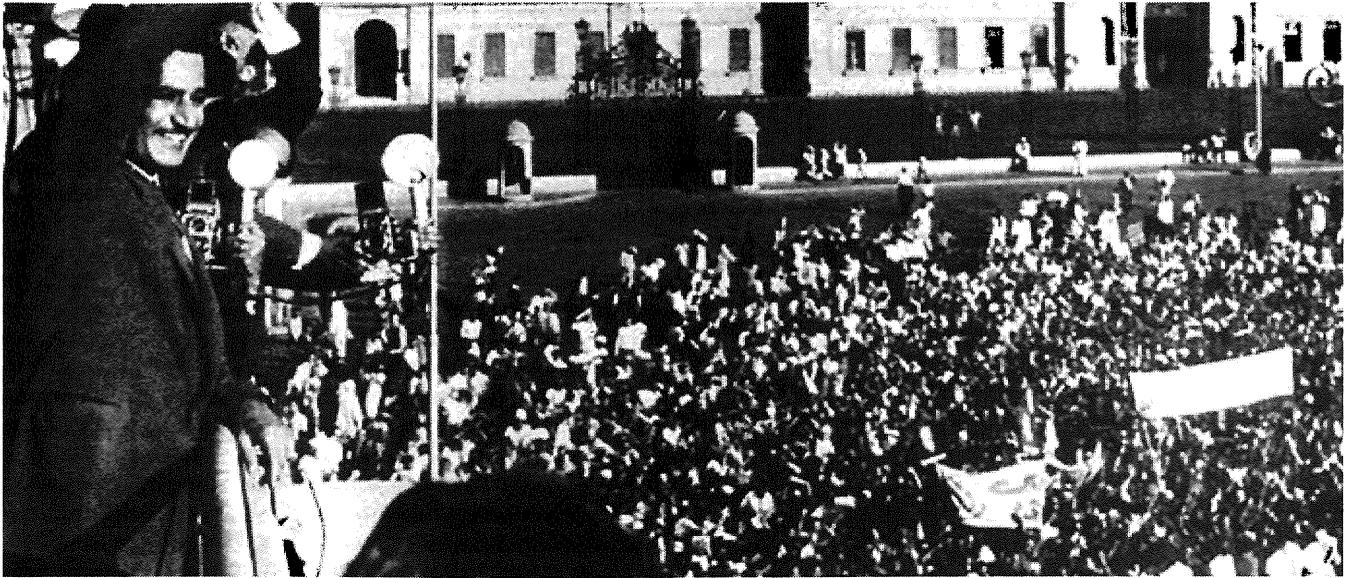
A "top secret" State Department memorandum dated 11 February 1948 proposed "altering our previous policy" to one of trusteeship:

"This course of action would encounter strong opposition from the Zionists. It would, however, probably have the support of the Arab States and of world opinion in general. Our prestige in the Middle East would immediately rise and we would regain in large measure our strategically important position in the area. Our national interests would thus be served and our national security strengthened...."

President Harry Truman, over the objections of the "nascent Israel lobby," decided to follow the State Department's advice, only to discover that neither the Arab Palestinians, who had long been promised self-government by their British overlords, nor the Zionist colonists were willing to accept UN trusteeship. On 12 May 1948, only a few days before the British finally withdrew, with the Zionist organizations preparing to proclaim the state of Israel, the U.S. finally dropped support for trusteeship. Two days later, Truman issued a statement recognizing the new Jewish state.

The consolidation of Soviet control in Eastern Europe, and the prospect of a Communist victory in China's civil war, made the U.S. reluctant to do anything that might push Israel into Moscow's orbit. In November 1948, as the Zionists and Arab neighboring states were finalizing the division of territory carved out of Palestine, Israel's foreign minister, Moshe Shertok, reminded Marshall that "many Israelis" wanted to "go along with the Russians."

At the same time, in the interest of good relations with its regional Arab clients, Washington kept some distance from the new Jewish state. In the 1950s, the Arab world was rocked by an explosion of nationalist and anti-colonialist sentiment. The leading figure in this ferment was Gamal Abdel Nasser, who had come to power in Egypt after King Farouk, a reviled British puppet, was toppled by a military coup. Nasser projected an image of a vehement anti-imperialist, but he had initially sought to reach a modus vivendi with the U.S. This proved impossible after Egypt recognized "Red China" in May 1956 and announced that it would be sending a high-level military mission to China. Washington retaliated by abruptly withdrawing its offer to help fund the construction of the Aswan High Dam—a gigantic project to manage the water resources of the Nile valley and provide electricity for Egypt's



26 July 1956: Nasser addresses crowd after Suez Canal nationalized

industrial development.

Backed into a corner, Nasser responded by nationalizing the Suez Canal (with compensation to its French and British owners). Britain and France countered by hatching a plot with Israel to oust Nasser and retake the canal. The first step was for Israeli troops to move into Egypt, using Nasser's support for Palestinian militants as a pretext. France and Britain were then to intervene, ostensibly to separate the belligerents and protect international shipping. On 29 October 1956, Israeli forces crossed into Egypt, and the next day, as planned, Britain and France issued an ultimatum, which Israel immediately accepted, but Egypt, as anticipated, rejected. On 31 October, British and French planes attacked Egyptian airfields, and a few days later began to invade. But before the British and French soldiers reached the canal, the U.S. intervened, arranged a UN ceasefire, and forced London and Paris to pull out.

Israeli historian Benny Morris observed that for the Zionists:

"It was an expansionist war, in so far as its architects, [prime minister David] Ben-Gurion and [chief of staff Moshe] Dayan, hoped it would lead to Israel's occupation and annexation of tracts of Egyptian territory in the Sinai Peninsula from Rafah or El Arish down to Sharm ash Sheikh."

—*Israel's Border Wars, 1949-1956*

The U.S. humiliated the British and French partly out of concern that their crude military aggression would strengthen Soviet influence among the Arab regimes, and partly because they had acted without first obtaining Washington's approval.

Members of the Israel lobby tend to regard U.S. actions in the Suez crisis as "appeasement." Former White House speechwriter David Frum recently wrote:

"After Suez, Arab nationalists redoubled their invective against the United States. The region turned increasingly radical, increasingly pro-Soviet, increasingly violent.... "Here's an alternative lesson to draw from Suez. What Westerners think of as goodwill, Middle Easterners often interpret as weakness. Westerners expect their concessions

and compromises to be met with concessions and compromises in return. Instead, Western moderation often intensifies Middle Eastern radicalism—as Eisenhower's goodwill intensified Nasser's radicalism, as Jimmy Carter's intensified the Ayatollah Khomeini's, as Ehud Barak's at Camp David intensified Yasser Arafat's. And (I'd argue) as George Bush's moderation toward Iran since 9/11 has intensified the Iranian regime's intransigence, extremism and violence."

—*National Post* [Toronto], 29 July 2006

The continued growth of left-nationalist and pro-socialist sentiment in the Arab countries after the Suez confrontation did produce a shift in U.S. policy. In 1958, when the ersatz Iraqi monarchy was overthrown by a left-nationalist officers' coup actively backed by mass working-class mobilizations led by the Moscow-loyal Iraqi Communist Party, U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower was sufficiently alarmed to dispatch 15,000 Marines to Beirut, where the government was facing rising domestic opposition. In the same year, a National Security Council report concluded that a "logical corollary" of the success of populist, anti-imperialist movements in the region would be for the U.S. "to support Israel as the only strong pro-Western power left in the Middle East" (quoted by Noam Chomsky, ZNet, 2 April 2002).

At this point, France was Israel's primary imperialist patron and military supplier:

"Almost immediately after Israel declared its independence on May 14, 1948, France embarked on what amounted to a policy of military and scientific cooperation with the new state.

"When, after 1956, France became the major arms supplier to the Israel Defense Forces, most commentators assumed that Israel was merely helping France recoup the influence it had lost in the Middle East after the Algerian revolt and the disastrous Suez adventure. Despite predictions that French support for Israel would cease when the Algerian war ended, cooperation with Israel persisted and broadened even while France gradually recovered its interests in the Arab world. It was only in

the aftermath of the Arab-Israel war of June 1967 that the special relationship that had endured for slightly more than a decade was ruptured brusquely and unilaterally by President Charles de Gaulle."

—*A Tacit Alliance: France and Israel from Suez to the Six Day War*, Sylvia K. Crosbie

De Gaulle's abrupt 1967 break with Israel, in favor of courting the Arab rulers, was offset by Washington's decision the same year to cement a long-term, strategic alliance with Tel Aviv, on the basis of the crushing victory scored by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) over the Soviet-backed forces of Syria, Jordan and Egypt, as Stephen Zunes of the University of San Francisco points out:

"Immediately following Israel's spectacular victory in the 1967 war, when it demonstrated its military superiority in the region, U.S. aid skyrocketed by 450%. Part of this increase, according to the *New York Times*, apparently was related to Israel's willingness to provide the United States with examples of new Soviet weapons captured during the war. Following the 1970-71 civil war in Jordan, when Israel exhibited its ability to deter Syrian intervention in support of the uprising against the pro-Western monarchy and thus curb revolutionary movements outside its borders, U.S. aid expanded still further. When Israel further proved its strength in successfully countering a surprisingly strong Arab military assault in October 1973, U.S. military aid burgeoned once again. These aid increases paralleled the British decision to withdraw its forces from areas east of the Suez Canal. Along with the shah of Iran, who also received massive arms and logistical cooperation as a key component of the Nixon Doctrine, Israel emerged as an important allied force in the wake of the British withdrawal."

—*Op. cit.*

On occasion, Washington has used its largesse to rein in Tel Aviv, as, for example, during the 1973 war:

"The Soviet Union organized a massive airlift of military supplies to Egypt and Syria. U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who was operating on his own because of [U.S. president] Nixon's preoccupation with his domestic political scandal, had originally withheld arms deliveries to Israel to force it to accept a cease-fire that would preserve some of Egypt's gains and facilitate peace talks that might break the diplomatic stalemate. But when [Egyptian president Anwar] Sadat rejected the U.S. cease-fire proposal in the hopes of seizing more Sinai territory, Kissinger released the U.S. weapons that had been withheld."

—*A World of Nations*, William R. Keylor

Kissinger's strategic calculation, based on American, rather than Israeli, interests, paid off handsomely when Sadat, responding favorably to the U.S. overture, abandoned Moscow and signed on as Washington's client. Since then, Egypt has received more U.S. foreign aid annually than any country except Israel.

Israel's value to the U.S. has undoubtedly declined with the end of the Cold War. Even so, Zunes observes, Israel still had its uses:

"Rather than being a liability, [because of Arab hostility] as Mearsheimer and Walt claim, the 1991 Gulf War once again proved Israel to be a strategic asset; Israeli developments in air-to-ground warfare were integrated

into allied bombing raids against Iraqi missile sites and other targets; Israeli-designed conformal fuel tanks for F-15 fighter-bombers greatly enhanced their range; Israeli-provided mine plows were utilized during the final assaults on Iraqi positions; Israeli mobile bridges were used by U.S. Marines; Israeli targeting systems and low-altitude warning devices were employed by U.S. helicopters; and Israel developed key components for the widely-used Tomahawk missiles. Israel is also the fifth-largest supplier of high-tech military hardware to the United States."

—*Op. cit.*

Israel did not contribute troops to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, but Israeli personnel instructed American commanders on the counterinsurgency and torture techniques used by the IDF in the Occupied Territories. Israel also trained pro-American Kurdish militias and supplied aerial surveillance devices, decoy drones and armored construction equipment for the occupation. The Israeli military seems to have been assigned a more significant role in Pentagon plans for attacking Iran. In its unsuccessful attempt to destroy Hezbollah in southern Lebanon in July and August 2006, the IDF tested new American bombing tactics and ordinance against fortifications that had been constructed with the assistance of Iranian engineers. The results provided the valuable, if disappointing, information that the Iranian installations had survived with little damage.

Although Washington's "special relationship" with Tel Aviv has always included a virtual *carte blanche* for Zionist brutality against Palestinian civilians, the disenfranchisement and on-going ethnic cleansing of the Arab population of historic Palestine, which is integral to the Zionist project, is of no particular benefit to the American ruling class. Indeed, Washington's support to Israel's apartheid practices has become an increasingly important political and diplomatic liability for the U.S., both in the Muslim world and beyond.

Mearsheimer and Walt consider the current arrangement to be more beneficial for Israel than the U.S.:

"It is not surprising that Israel and its American supporters want the US to deal with any and all threats to Israel's security. If their efforts to shape US policy succeed, Israel's enemies will be weakened or overthrown, Israel will get a free hand with the Palestinians, and the US will do most of the fighting, dying, rebuilding and paying. But even if the US fails to transform the Middle East and finds itself in conflict with an increasingly radicalised Arab and Islamic world, Israel will end up protected by the world's only superpower. This is not a perfect outcome from the Lobby's point of view, but it is obviously preferable to Washington distancing itself, or using its leverage to force Israel to make peace with the Palestinians."

—*Op. cit.*

The Israel lobby has failed on more than one occasion to persuade the American bourgeoisie that its interests and those of Tel Aviv coincided. In 1981, AIPAC pulled out all the stops to block the sale of AWACS (Airborne Warning and Control System) planes to Saudi Arabia, but the Reagan administration went ahead anyway. A decade later, Bush the elder ignored AIPAC and turned down Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's insistent requests for \$10 billion in loan guarantees, because Tel Aviv would not

promise that none of the money would be used to extend Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories. Even Bush Jr., whose administration is sometimes perceived to be in the pocket of "the Lobby," forced the Israelis to walk away from a deal they had signed to upgrade China's "Happy" surveillance aircraft.

'Israel Lobby' and Iraq

In accusing the perfidious Israel lobby of duping the U.S. into invading Iraq, Mearsheimer and Walt dismiss the idea that the American bourgeoisie might have been motivated by a desire to seize control of the oil wealth of the Middle East, disingenuously asserting that "there is hardly any direct evidence to support this claim." In fact, as Michelle Goldberg noted, a good deal of evidence:

"has been compiled by Paul Roberts, author of 'The End of Oil,' by analysts like James Paul of the Global Policy Forum, and by Kevin Phillips in 'American Theocracy.' Phillips quotes James Akins, former U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia, saying, 'what they [the Bush administration] have in mind is denationalization, and then parceling Iraqi oil out to American oil companies. The American oil companies are going to be the main beneficiaries of this war.' In his memoir 'The Right Man,' David Frum, the former Bush speechwriter and neocon par excellence, wrote that Bush's campaign to bring freedom to the Middle East would also 'bring new prosperity to us all, by securing the world's largest pool of oil.' After the conservative public interest group Judicial Watch filed a Freedom of Information Act request, a court ordered the Commerce Department to turn over documents from Cheney's Task Force; among them are Iraq oil maps and lists of foreign suitors for Iraqi oil-field contracts. And, of course, there's the fact that, as Baghdad burned immediately after the 2003 invasion, the only government building the Americans saw fit to protect was the oil ministry."

—Salon.com, 18 April 2006

In the early 1990s, at the behest of the U.S. Department of Defense, Zalmay Khalilzad (currently U.S. ambassador to Iraq) drew up a strategic review entitled "Defense Planning Guidance." Khalilzad's paper, written under the direction of Paul Wolfowitz, the under secretary of defense for policy, contained many of the themes that later appeared in the infamous 1998 "Project for a New American Century" document signed by Wolfowitz, Donald Rumsfeld, Richard Perle and other proponents of the invasion of Iraq. Khalilzad proposed that: "Our strategy must now refocus on precluding the emergence of any potential future global competitor" and advised, "In the Middle East and Southwest Asia, our overall objective is to remain the predominant outside power in the region and preserve U.S. and Western access to the region's oil" (*New York Times*, 8 March 1992).

When President Bill Clinton signed the "Iraq Liberation Act" in October 1998, he signaled the intention of the U.S. ruling class to "liberate" the oil resources of the Persian Gulf and create a permanent American military presence in the region. The rout of the Afghan Taliban in November 2001 reinforced illusions in the boundless superiority of America's high-tech military, and set the stage for the March 2003 attack on Iraq. But only two and a half years

later, in October 2005, Lt. General William Odom, former director of the National Security Agency, labeled the invasion of Iraq "the greatest strategic disaster in United States history" (*New York Times*, 16 October 2005). Today, as the U.S. ruling class desperately seeks a way out, assigning the blame for the debacle in Iraq to insidious special interests who took unfair advantage of the openness and generosity of America's political system provides some small consolation. Thus the notion of a well-oiled Israel lobby working at cross-purposes with America's "national interest" is gaining popularity as an explanation of how kindly Uncle Sam ended up wading into the Iraqi quagmire.

At bottom, the furor over the Israel lobby represents a struggle within the U.S. ruling class over America's entire Middle East strategy. Had Iraq turned out to be the "cakewalk" the neo-conservative think tanks predicted, it is unlikely that Mearsheimer and Walt's article would ever have been written. But today, many members of the U.S. ruling class are open to "recalibrating" American foreign policy and interested in exploring the idea that:

"Although the Lobby remains a powerful force, the adverse effects of its influence are increasingly difficult to hide. Powerful states can maintain flawed policies for quite some time, but reality cannot be ignored for ever. What is needed is a candid discussion of the Lobby's influence and a more open debate about US interests in this vital region."

—Op. cit.

Some of the liberals who subscribe to the myth of a beneficent giant led astray by a nefarious cabal of pro-Israel lobbyists like to imagine that somehow American military and economic power might one day be used to make the world a better place. But the real history of U.S. imperialism, from its debut with the rape of the Philippines in the 1890s to the carnage in Iraq today, is one of brutal oppression and mass murder in pursuit of profit. The devastation and misery that imperialist domination inflicts on the neo-colonial countries is not a result of adopting bad policy options, and cannot be corrected by well-meaning people committed to pursuing a different path. The ravages of imperialism in the Middle East and throughout the "underdeveloped" world are the necessary and inevitable result of global capitalist exploitation. A just and equitable economic order can only be constructed on the basis of turning the world upside down—through the wholesale expropriation of the corporate ruling elites and the creation of an internationally-planned, socialist economy in which the needs of the many take precedence over the enrichment of a few. ■

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On the 'Israel Lobby'

Imperialism, Zionism & the Middle East



Israeli artillery bombarding Lebanon

In early 2006, as the U.S. foreign policy establishment debated whether civil war in Iraq was underway or merely imminent, two prominent American academics, John Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago and Stephen Walt of Harvard, ignited a major controversy when their paper, "The Israel Lobby," was published in the *London Review of Books*. The authors asserted that most of Washington's current difficulties in the Middle East are rooted in its alliance with Tel Aviv:

"[T]he thrust of US policy in the region derives almost entirely from domestic politics, and especially the activities of the 'Israel Lobby'. Other special-interest groups have managed to skew foreign policy, but no lobby has managed to divert it as far from what the national interest would suggest, while simultaneously convincing Americans that US interests and those of the country—in this case, Israel—are essentially identical."

—*London Review of Books*, 23 March 2006

Mearsheimer and Walt were forced to turn to a British journal after the liberal *Atlantic Monthly*, which had origi-

nally commissioned the article, refused to run it, and no other major American publication was willing to pick it up. Serious criticism of Israel has long been *verboden* both on Capitol Hill and in the mainstream U.S. media. The Zionist lobby's furious response was typified by an op ed piece in the *Washington Post* (5 April 2006) entitled, "Yes, It's Anti-Semitic," by Eliot Cohen, a leading neo-conservative intellectual, who accused Mearsheimer and Walt of holding "obsessive and irrationally hostile beliefs about Jews."

Ha'aretz, Israel's leading newspaper, took an entirely different view, and commented that the article "does not deserve condemnation; rather, it should serve as a warning sign" (quoted in *New York Review of Books*, 8 June 2006). *Ha'aretz* expressed concern about a growing sentiment in the U.S. ruling class that Washington should reconsider its policy of blanket support of Tel Aviv: "the Israeli government must understand that the world will not wait forever for Israel to withdraw from the territories, and that the opinions expressed in the article could take root in American politics if Israel does not change the political

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