

The

May-June 2008

No. 27

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Internationalist



May Day 2008: Port Strike Against the War

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

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The Internationalist



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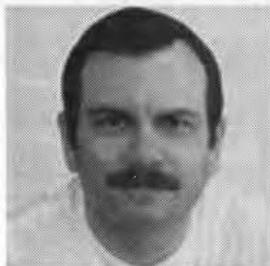


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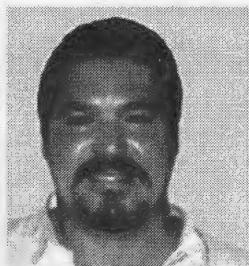
May-June 2008

For Revolutionary Defense of Cuba!

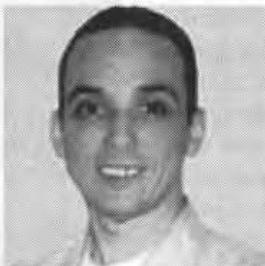
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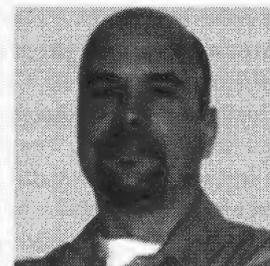
Fernando González



Ramón Labañino



Antonio Guerrero



Gerardo Hernández



René González

Heroic Fighters Against U.S. Imperialist Terror

**No to the Democrats – Imperialist War
Party from Bay of Pigs to Iraq**

Build a Revolutionary Workers Party!

On June 5, the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta upheld the convictions of the “Cuban Five.” The sentences of René González (15 years) and Gerardo Hernández (2 life sentences plus 15 years) were upheld. At the same time, the three-judge panel vacated the sentences of the other three. Ramón Labañino (life sentence plus 18 years), Fernando González (19 years) and Antonio Guerrero (life plus 10 years) are to be resentenced in a hearing to be held in Miami, which is notoriously infested by Cuban *gusanos* (“worms”), the counter-revolutionary scum who for decades have waged a dirty terrorist war against the Cuban people. The Five have committed no crime, but rather they heroically risked their lives to defend the Cuban Revolution against terror attacks launched from the U.S. *We demand that the Cuban Five be freed, now!*

For almost a decade the Cuban Five have been held in separate federal high security prisons in Florida, California, Colorado, Kentucky and Indiana. They were among ten Cuban immigrants arrested in September 1998 and accused of being part of a Cuban spy ring. At the time, prosecutors presented evidence that the five had infiltrated the *gusano* outfit *Hermanos al Rescate* (Brothers to the Rescue) and other ultra-rightist terror groups in Miami. Some were also accused of conspiracy to commit espionage. Since there was no evidence of secret U.S. military or intelligence information being obtained, or even sought, the prosecutors later threw in the additional charge of conspiracy to commit murder. Under draconian U.S. conspiracy laws no actual espionage or murder has to be proved, only a supposed agreement (even implicit) to commit such acts.

There is no question that the Five sought to obtain information about the activities of *gusano* terrorists in Miami, and

that they successfully infiltrated some of these murderous squads. The information they supplied to Havana was then passed on to the U.S. government. When Washington naturally did nothing about it (after all, the U.S. is the sponsor of these mercenaries), the Cubans gave the *New York Times* names and addresses of these assassins, and locations of their paramilitary training camps. The *Times*, which considers itself the quintessence of the “free but responsible” imperialist press, didn’t publish a word about this, just as it suppressed news of preparations for the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion. The Five also reportedly gathered information about U.S. military activities, but all of this was gleaned from publicly available sources.

The legal odyssey of the Cuban Five is a case history in capitalist injustice. The 2001 trial was held in Miami, home to 650,000 Cuban exiles. The right-wing press whipped up a hysteria against the government of Fidel Castro. The foreman of the jury openly expressed his hatred of the Cuban leader, and the jury declared the defendants guilty on all 26 counts without asking a single question. In August 2005, a three-judge panel of the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals unanimously threw out all the convictions and ordered a new trial on the grounds of the location and prejudicial publicity. But the U.S. government appealed the ruling to the full court, which in November 2005 reinstated the original convictions. The defense then appealed, leading to the latest ruling by another three-judge panel of this court.

Various human rights organizations have objected to the rigged trial and persecution of the Cuban Five. The United Nations Commission on Human Rights denounced the arbitrary detention of the prisoners, calling on the U.S. to rectify this abuse. Amnesty International has criticized the U.S.’ refusal to grant visas to the wives of René González and Gerardo Hernández so that they can visit their imprisoned husbands. Eighteen Nobel prize winners have written to the U.S. attorney general asking for release of the Five. All of this has predictably fallen on deaf ears, for the Yankee imperialists

are still desperate to crush the Cuban Revolution almost half a century after Castro's guerrillas toppled the corrupt U.S.-backed dictator Fulgencio Batista on 1 January 1959.

A number of the defenders of the Cuban Five seek to tiptoe around the issue of the *Hermanos al Rescate*, two of whose planes were shot down by Cuban Air Force pilots on 24 February 1996. They emphasize that there is no evidence that the Five "conspired" to have the *gusano* planes shot down, which is true. But as Trotskyists who defend Cuba against imperialism, we unequivocally *defend the shutdown of the Hermanos planes* as an act of self-defense. The planes violated Cuban airspace that day and had repeatedly done so in the previous weeks. A Cuban air force pilot who had infiltrated the *Hermanos* gang returned to Cuba to denounce their provocative activities at a press conference the day before the incident. The U.S. was well aware of these brazen provocations. An internal State Department memo warned that "one of these days the Cubans will shoot down one of these planes." On February 24, the pilots were told by Cuban air traffic control that they were entering prohibited airspace and putting themselves in danger. The *Hermanos* leader, Bay of Pigs veteran and "ex-"CIA agent José Basulto laughed (he survived), and they continued on.

The United States has waged a relentless war on Cuba, from the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion to the hundreds of plots to assassinate Fidel Castro to the decades-long economic embargo aimed at starving the island into submission. The *gusano* terrorist attacks could not take place without the knowledge, and in many cases outright approval of the U.S. government. These include the bombing of hotels and tourist spots in Havana, the murder of a Cuban diplomat on the streets of New York, the attempted bombing of the Cuban mission to the United Nations, and the shooting down of a Cubana Airlines plane in October 1976, killing all 73 people on board. The authors of that attack, Orlando Bosch and Luis Posada Carriles, who has admitted organizing terrorist bombings, walk freely around Miami, protected by the U.S., while the heroic Cuban Five have been jailed for almost a decade.

Bourgeois liberals may criticize a blatantly rigged trial, but they are not about to defend Cuba. After all, Democrat John F. Kennedy launched the Bay of Pigs invasion and it was the Democratic administration of Bill Clinton that arrested the Cuban Five. Recently, on May 23, the presumptive Democratic nominee Barack Obama gave a disgusting speech at a Cuban American National Foundation luncheon in which he vituperated against the "tyranny" of the Castro regime! This from a representative of U.S. imperialism which maintains its infamous torture center at the Guantánamo Naval Base stolen from Cuba. Those defenders of the Cuban Five who look to Democratic "elected officials" to aid them are searching in vain.

Likewise, Noam Chomsky and other liberal luminaries viciously denounced Cuba when in 2003 it jailed scores of Cubans who had been meeting with U.S. diplomats and receiving U.S. funds, and executed several hijackers of a ferry. The arrests and ferry hijacking took place in the immediate



Photojournalista

Protest outside federal building in New York against court decision on Cuban Five case, June 6.

aftermath of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, when the Bush regime was using its "shock and awe" strategy of massive bombing to create panic in Baghdad. No doubt it hoped to provoke a wave of "raft people" heading into the Caribbean from Cuba as well. Shamefully, various opportunist would-be socialists from the outright reformists of the International Socialist Organization to the centrist pseudo-Trotskyist Spartacist League joined the liberal hue and cry, at a crucial moment when it was the duty of all revolutionaries to stand at their posts in defense of Cuba.

The Internationalist Group and League for the Fourth International oppose the death penalty in Cuba as we do in the United States and throughout the world. We denounced the 1990 Stalinist show trial of General Arnaldo Ochoa, which was part of an effort to gain favor with the U.S. in the "war on drugs." But the execution of the ferry hijackers was an elementary matter of military defense against a counterrevolutionary act of war, to which it was necessary to give a firm response. Some of the initial appeals for the Cuban Five sought common ground with the U.S. against "terrorism." Yet the U.S. government is by far the greatest sponsor of state terrorism in the world, much of it directed against Cuba. Indeed, the Five were arrested shortly after the Cuban government handed information they had gathered about *gusano* terrorist activity to the U.S. Washington's predictable response was to arrest the messengers, not the terrorists.

We Trotskyists defend the Cuban bureaucratically deformed
continued on page 33

For an Arab-Hebrew Workers State in a Socialist Federation of the Near East!

Defend Gaza! Defeat U.S./Israel War on the Palestinian People!



Kevin Frayer/AP

Palestinians desperate to obtain supplies after being locked down by Israel stream through breach in the wall dividing town of Rafah between Gaza and Egypt, 23 January 2008.

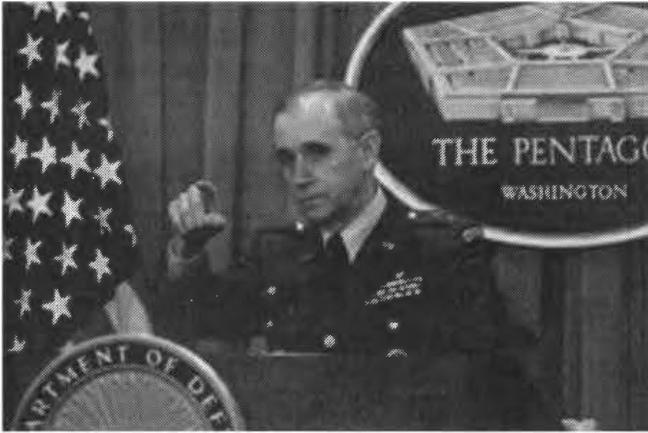
In late January, Israeli war minister Ehud Barak ordered a halt to all imports into the Gaza Strip. The border crossings were closed: no one and nothing would go in or out. The isolated enclave, with 1.4 million people crammed into 139 square miles, one of the densest population concentrations on the planet, was sealed off from the outside world. What amounts to the world's largest concentration camp, surrounded by concrete and steel walls topped with barbed wire, was put into lockdown. The Israeli action was a heinous war crime akin to the Nazis' confining of Polish Jews to the Warsaw Ghetto. But the Zionist war criminals are not acting on their own. The lockdown is part of a U.S.-Israeli plan to punish the Gaza population for electing the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas movement as their government. Hamas' crime, in the eyes of Washington and Jerusalem, is that it refuses to recognize Israel, the state that stole Palestinians' lands.

The Internationalist Group and League for the Fourth International call on class-conscious workers and all opponents

of imperialism and Zionism to mobilize to *defeat the joint U.S./Israeli war on the Palestinian people*. As proletarian revolutionaries we politically oppose Islamic fundamentalism, as well as the Christian fundamentalism fueling the U.S.' imperialist crusade in the Near East. We are against all theocratic states, whether it is the Islamic republic of Iran or the Jewish state of Israel, which is inherently discriminatory to Arab Muslims and Christians who are second-class citizens (or have no rights at all in the West Bank and Gaza). We demand the withdrawal of the Zionists (army and settlers) from all the territories occupied in the 1967 war, and recognition of the Palestinians' right of return to their ancestral homes in all of Israel. While recognizing the right of self-determination of both the Palestinian Arab and Hebrew-speaking population, we note that this cannot be equitably realized under capitalism and call for an *Arab-Hebrew workers republic as part of a socialist federation of the Near East*.

By January 20, as fuel supplies ran out, Gaza's only power

Department of Defense



Karim Ben Khelifa

Left: U.S. general Keith Dayton, real boss of of Palestinian "presidential guard." Right: General Dayton's man in Gaza, commander of the Fatah "Presidential Guard," Mohammed Dahlan.

station shut down, throwing the strip into darkness. Private generators supplying hospitals would run out of fuel as well. There was no water, for lack of electricity to run the pumps. Palestinians demonstrated with lighted candles to draw attention to their suffering. But such poignant appeals to humanity were lost on the Zionist rulers, whose whole strategy is to intensify the suffering of the Palestinian people, supposedly to force "militants" to stop launching rockets into southern Israel. Israeli spokesmen talk of the plight of residents in the southern town of Sderot, where the Qassam "rockets" regularly land in empty lots. A total of 12 Israelis have been killed by such attacks over the last six years, while many hundreds of Palestinians have been killed in "retaliation," often dozens at a time, when Israel bombs or shells refugee camps. This is fascist-style "collective punishment."

But on Wednesday (January 23) the Hamas-led elected Palestinian government responded, ordering a crane operator to pull down a section of the wall dividing the town of Rafah between Gaza and Egypt. Thousands of people rushed through the opening. Over the next several days, Egyptian soldiers and riot police would sporadically make show of strength, but then back off as an estimated 200,000 Gazans desperately stocked up on vital supplies for their families and businesses (gas canisters, fuel, cement, even cattle for slaughter). The imperialist media portrayed it all as a giant shopping spree and four-day holiday weekend. But it was only a brief respite, as the government of Egyptian Hosni Mubarak responded to Israeli and U.S. pressure to close the border again. Then they will return to their charade of engaging in a "peace process" with Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian nationalist Fatah movement.

The Zionist occupiers and the U.S. imperialists who stand behind them have treated all segments of the Palestinian population and all Palestinian political forces with disdain. Contrary to Israeli claims, they have never offered even a Palestinian mini-state, which in any case would be nothing more than a glorified "bantustan" for Palestinians, as the South African apartheid rulers called the phony "homelands" they set up for the black majority. The Zionists intend to keep the Palestinian population carved up into different settlement blocks, separated

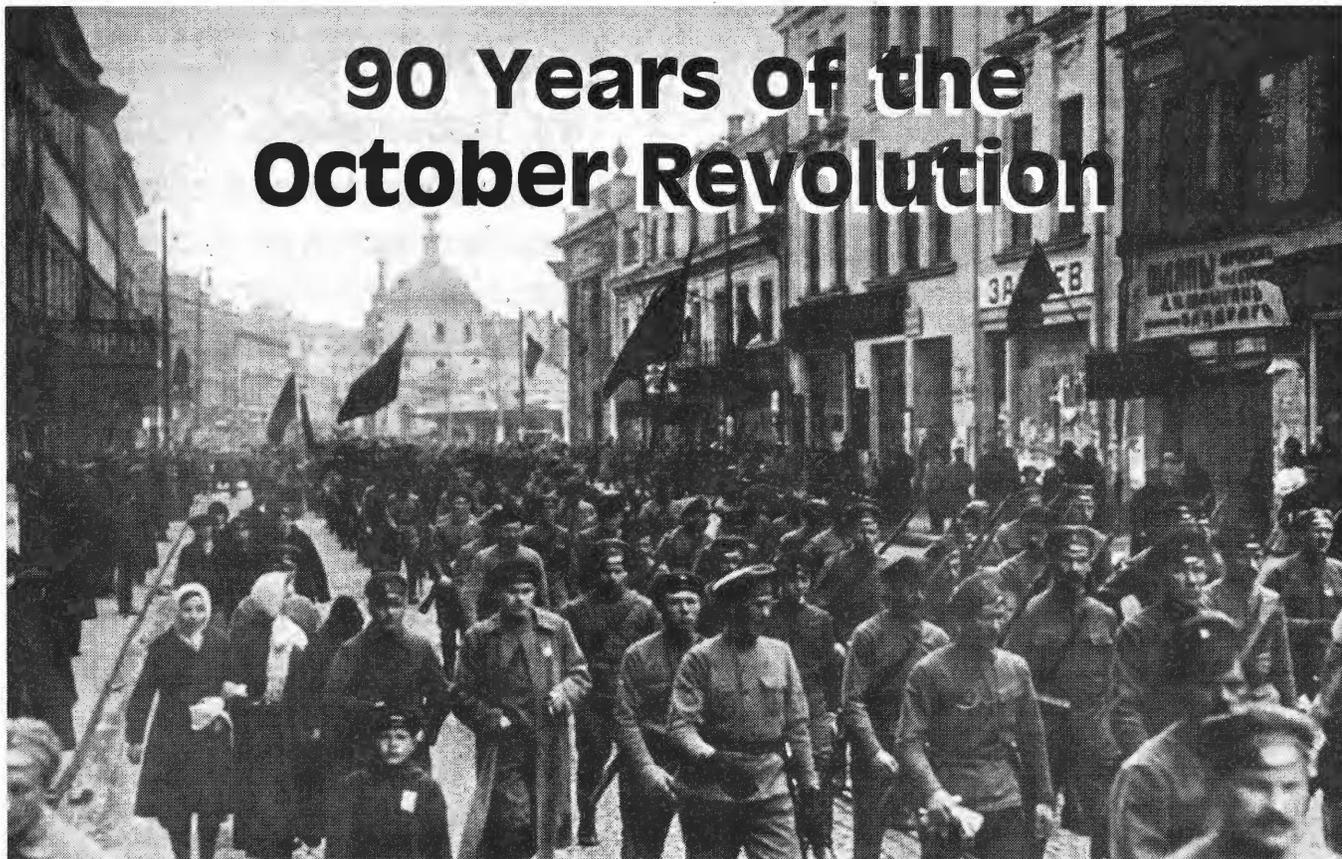
by highways open to Jews only, with any travel from one segment to another subject to Israeli control. Jerusalem, the Palestinian capital, would be entirely incorporated in Israel proper. This is the take-it-or-leave-it "deal" that U.S. president Bill Clinton and then Israeli premier Barak offered to Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat at Camp David in 2000. When Arafat turned down the poisoned chalice, Ariel Sharon staged a provocation at the Al Aksa mosque with the full complicity of Barak, which set off the second Palestinian *intifada* (uprising).

But since Hamas won the Palestinian legislative elections in January 2006, to the surprise of Israel and the United States, the Israeli Zionists and U.S. imperialists have changed tack and are now directly arming, training and commanding key Fatah forces to wage a war on Hamas. This plan was laid out in a U.S. intelligence agency document, "Action Plan for the Palestinian Presidency," that was published by the Jordanian weekly *Al Majd* on 30 April 2007. It was confirmed by a security plan for the West Bank and Gaza written by U.S. general Keith Dayton, in charge of the Pentagon mission "training" Palestinian forces, published by the Israeli daily *Haaretz* on 4 May. The two documents reflect the views of White House advisor Elliott Abrams, a prominent "neo-conservative" war hawk, and the key element is building up a presidential guard under by Abbas that is armed by Israel and trained by U.S. military forces. Commanded by Fatah security chief Mohammed Dahlan, it is actually controlled by General Dayton.

As the U.S./Israeli/Fatah forces were preparing to strike to bring down the Hamas government in Gaza last June, Hamas struck first and expelled Fatah militias from the area. This was portrayed in the Western media as a "Hamas coup d'état" and the subsequent fighting as a "squabble" between competing Palestinian nationalists. This ignores the fact that these key Fatah military forces have been fully integrated into the Zionist/imperialist war plans and are not merely aided by Washington and Jerusalem but are under direct U.S./Israeli control. (Not all Fatah sectors are in agreement with this, and some like the Al Aksa Martyrs Brigade are not under the control of Abbas.) Moreover, their attack is directed not only against Hamas

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90 Years of the October Revolution



Crack Bolshevik regiment marches on Smolny where Congress of Soviets was meeting under banners proclaiming "All Power to the Soviets! Long Live the Revolution!"

By Jan Norden

This is the 90th anniversary of the October Revolution of 1917. We commemorate this date – October 25 by the old Gregorian calendar, November 7 by the modern calendar – because it marks an event which was a turning point in world history, and indeed, the seminal event of the 20th century. The March 1917 overthrow of the tsarist autocracy, which ruled the vast Russian Empire, and the victory eight months later of the workers revolution led by the Bolshevik Party, put an end to World War I, the first global imperialist conflagration, and shook the old order from the imperial centers of Europe to the farthest reaches of their colonial "possessions." The revolution headed by V.I. Lenin and Leon Trotsky continued to be key to world events for the next three-quarters of a century, long after Joseph Stalin and his bureaucratic henchmen had seized power and betrayed the internationalist program of Red October.

Likewise, the counterrevolution that destroyed the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) along with the Soviet-bloc bureaucratically deformed workers states during the period 1989-92 represented a world-historic defeat for the proletariat of the entire planet. Yet contrary to the imperialist ideologues, communism is not dead, we have not entered a "new world order" of peace and prosperity, and we have not reached the "end of history" – far from it. Nor, as a host of self-proclaimed socialists declare, have we been thrown back

to the period before October; on the contrary, we must base ourselves on the program and achievements of Lenin and Trotsky. The revolution will rise again, and in order to lead it to victory, this time on world scale, a central task facing revolutionaries today is to draw the lessons both of the victory of 1917 and of the defeat that opened the post-Soviet period.

It is useful to begin with a quote from Karl Marx, in his pamphlet *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852). This was his essay on the defeat of the 1848 Revolution in France and subsequent proclamation of an empire by Napoleon Bonaparte's nephew in December 1851. At the beginning of his pamphlet, Marx wrote:

"Bourgeois revolutions, like those of the 18th century, storm more swiftly from success to success, their dramatic effects outdo each other, men and things seem set in sparkling diamonds, ecstasy is the order of the day – but they are short-lived, soon they have reached their zenith, and a long *Katzenjammer* [morning-after hangover] takes hold of society before it learns to assimilate the results of its storm-and-stress period soberly. On the other hand, proletarian revolutions, like those of the 19th century, constantly criticize themselves, constantly interrupt themselves in their own course, return to the apparently accomplished, in order to begin anew; they deride with cruel thoroughness the half-measures, weaknesses, and paltriness of their first attempts, seem to throw down their opponents only so the latter may draw new strength from the earth and rise before them again more gi-

gantic than ever, recoil constantly from the indefinite colossalness of their own goals – until a situation is created which makes all turning back impossible.”

Marx was distinguishing the proletarian revolution from the classic bourgeois revolutions, underscoring that setbacks and defeats are an inevitable part of the struggle by the exploited and oppressed to take power from their exploiters and oppressors. A key reason for this is that the bourgeois revolutions of the 18th century marked the taking of political power by a class that was *already* the dominant class economically. They were delivering the *coup de grace*, so to speak, to finish off a feudal order that was on the verge of collapse. The proletariat, on the other hand, can establish its economic dominance only *after* seizing political power and *then* instituting a socialized, planned economy. Hence, it will always be in a position of relative *economic* weakness beforehand. That is an important reason why forging a political leadership is far more decisive for the proletarian revolution than for the late bourgeois revolutions.

We look back to Red October of 1917, *Krasny Oktyabr* in Russian, because it represented the first successful workers revolution in history. It remains the only revolution carried out by the proletariat, whereas many subsequent revolutions (China, Vietnam, Cuba) were based on the peasantry. As James P. Cannon, the founder of American Trotskyism, said in a 1939 speech, “The Russian Bolsheviks on November 7, 1917, once and for all, took the question of the workers’ revolution out of the realm of abstraction and gave it flesh and blood reality” (Cannon, *The Struggle for a Proletarian Party*). Prior to 1917, the only other attempt by the working class to seize power was the Paris Commune of 1871, which was drowned in blood after barely two months. More than 30,000 Communards were killed in the fighting, and perhaps another 50,000 were executed later by the victorious counterrevolution.

If you think of the impact of the bourgeoisie’s triumphalist cries of the “death of communism” following the demise of the USSR, imagine the impact of tens of thousands dead in 1871. Yet despite the defeat in Paris, not even three and a half decades later you had the Russian Revolution of 1905, which served as a “dress rehearsal” for 1917. Fast forward to 1990, and as the Soviet Union is coming apart, Republican George Bush the Elder proclaims a U.S.-dominated “New World Order.” A few years later, Democrat Bill Clinton’s secretary of state Albright declares the United States to be the “sole superpower,” the supposedly “indispensable power.” Yet barely a decade and a half later, U.S. imperialism is sinking in the quicksands of the Near East while its economy is in crisis, teetering on the edge of a severe recession or new depression.

Why Did the October Revolution Take Place?

So let’s look at the lessons of Red October. In the first place, we should understand why it took place in Russia. Lenin emphasized that the rotting tsarist empire was the “weakest link” in the imperialist chain. It was weak, first, because the autocracy had become a parasitic outgrowth on an economy

Отъ Военно-Революціоннаго Комитета при Петроградскомъ Советѣ Рабочихъ и Солдатскихъ Депутатовъ.

Къ Гражданамъ Россіи.

Временное Правительство низложено. Государственная власть перешла въ руки органа Петроградскаго Совета Рабочихъ и Солдатскихъ Депутатовъ Военно-Революціоннаго Комитета, стоящаго во главѣ Петроградскаго пролетаріата и гарнизона.

Дѣло, за которое боролся народъ: немедленное предложение демократическаго мира, отмена помѣщичьей собственности на землю, рабочій контроль надъ производствомъ, создание Советскаго Правительства — это дѣло обезпечено.

ДА ЗДРАВСТВУЕТЪ РЕВОЛЮЦІЯ РАБОЧИХЪ, СОЛДАТЪ И КРЕСТЬЯНЪ!

Военно-Революціонный Комитетъ при Петроградскомъ Советѣ Рабочихъ и Солдатскихъ Депутатовъ.

25 октября 1917 г. 10 ч. утра.

Proclamation of Soviet power by the Military-Revolutionary Committee of the Petrograd Soviet on 25 October (7 November) 1917. Stalin wrote a year later, “All practical work in connection with the organization of the uprising was done under the immediate direction of Comrade Trotsky, the President of the Petrograd Soviet.” This passage was later deleted from his collected works.

that was increasingly capitalist. The feudal landed estates had already undergone a considerable transformation with the 1861 Emancipation Edict issued by Tsar Alexander II which formally ended serfdom in response to a series of peasant revolts. Of course, that didn’t mean the peasants escaped from poverty. On the contrary, they were thrown off the land and became vagrants, migrating to the cities. There were all the signs of a dying Old Regime. The court was rife with palace intrigues, with the Tsarina Alexandra (under the influence of the sinister Rasputin) embodying imperial arrogance much as Marie Antoinette did in France on the eve of the French Revolution of 1789. And so on.

But the Russian Empire wasn’t the only dying empire around. The Ottoman Empire was notoriously on its last legs, so much so that it was known as the “sick man of Europe.” World War I led to its demise, with the rise of a series of states in the Near East and the Balkans; its core become modern-day Turkey. The Austro-Hungarian Empire was decrepit, and collapsed in the imperialist world war as well, leaving two rump states, Austria and Hungary, as well as an independent Czechoslovakia, and pieces going to Poland, the Ukraine, Italy and Yugoslavia. So why was the Russian Empire the weakest link? Partly because of the tremendous advance of industrial production. Not only was the Ukraine the bread-

basket of Europe, exporting huge quantities of grain, but in the industrial centers there were everything from textile plants to giant munitions factories (such as the Putilov Works, the hotbed of revolution), with the most modern production techniques. And along with this you had the growth of an industrial working class.

Most importantly, it was in Russia that the Marxists had produced a revolutionary nucleus that was able to draw numerous lessons from the struggle that aided in achieving the subsequent revolutionary victory. In an essay on "The Russian Revolution and the American Negro Movement," Cannon observed that Lenin and Trotsky, and the Bolsheviks generally, were able to understand the struggle against black oppression, which is the key question of workers revolution in the United States, because the tsarist empire was a "prison house of peoples," of a host of oppressed nations, nationalities and pre-national peoples. It was impossible for the proletariat to lead a revolution in Russia without simultaneously championing the cause of these oppressed peoples. In the U.S., on the other hand, prior to the Russian Revolution, even the most left-wing socialists like Eugene Debs declared that "We have nothing special to offer the Negro," taking a "color blind" position that was blind to the oppression of blacks. Meanwhile, the right-wing socialists included open racists like Victor Berger.

Elsewhere in Europe, at this time, the most militant sectors of the working class were split between revolutionary syndicalists and left-wingers in the parliamentary Socialist parties. The Bolsheviks alone were able to overcome these divisions, partly because the tsarist Duma was a mockery of bourgeois parliamentarism, and because of its impotence didn't have the power of attraction that the West European legislative talk-shops had. In contrast, in the course of the 1905 Revolution the social democrats had participated in the *soviets*, or workers councils, leading up to a general strike and the verge of an armed insurrection, which the Bolsheviks were preparing to lead while the Mensheviks recoiled in horror at the prospect. These experiences enabled the Bolsheviks under Lenin and Trotsky to overcome many of the stumbling blocks which had bedeviled the West European workers movement. Finally, Russia was the weakest of the major combatants in World War I, and whereas in the rest of the major powers the social democrats either supported "their own" imperialist bourgeoisies or were paralyzed by impotent pacifism, the Bolsheviks stood for *defeat* of "their own" im-



Trotsky, Lenin and Kamenev at 1919 Bolshevik party congress.

perial masters and called to "transform the imperialist war into civil war," that is, to fight for social revolution.'

So these are some of the social factors that answer the question, Why Russia? But even more fundamental was the "subjective factor," the existence of a revolutionary leadership. This was organized in the Bolshevik Party, and embodied in the persons of Lenin, who had led the party for almost a decade and a half of tur-

bulent struggles, and Trotsky whose Mezhrayontsi (Interdistrict) group fused with the Bolsheviks in 1917. The Bolshevik Party differed from the European social-democratic parties in that it sought to be the party of the proletarian vanguard rather than a "party of the whole class" as advocated by Karl Kautsky. At decisive moments of war and revolution, the reformist pro-capitalist leadership of official Social Democracy held leftist elements in check, even resorting to murder to stave off revolution. In contrast, from the time of his 1902 pamphlet *What Is To Be Done?* Lenin fought to build a party of the revolutionary minority, a position he initially arrived at empirically and later theoretically generalized. This was decisive.

Even so, in 1917, the Bolshevik "Old Guard" including Lev Kamenev, Grigorii Zinoviev and Stalin stood in the way of proletarian revolution, first calling for "critical support" of the provisional government "insofar as" it "struggles against reaction," to which Lenin counterposed (in his *April Theses*) the call for "all power to the soviets" and opposition to the bourgeois government. Then, on the eve of October, Zinoviev and Kamenev opposed an insurrection (unless agreed to by the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries), while Stalin was nowhere to be seen (contrary to the later Stalinist mythology). Lenin and Trotsky, as head of the Petrograd Soviet and its Military-Revolutionary Committee, organized the uprising, and without them, the October Revolution would never have happened. This poses the question of the role of the individual in history. Unlike many bourgeois historians, Marxists do not think that history is made by a series of "great men," and unlike the Stalinists, we do not engage in hero worship or turn our leaders into icons. At the same time, conditioned by fundamental social forces, at key moments in the class struggle individuals can play a pivotal role. Here is what Trotsky wrote about October 1917, in his *Diary in Exile* (1934):

"Had I not been present in 1917 in Petersburg, the October Revolution would still have taken place – on the condition that Lenin was present and in command. If neither Lenin nor

I had been present in Petersburg, there would have been no October Revolution: the leadership of the Bolshevik Party would have prevented it from occurring – of this I have not the slightest doubt! If Lenin had not been in Petersburg, I doubt whether I could have managed to conquer the resistance of the Bolshevik leaders. The struggle with ‘Trotskyism’ (i.e., with the proletarian revolution) would have commenced in May, 1917, and the outcome of the revolution would have been in question. But I repeat, granted the presence of Lenin the October Revolution would have been victorious anyway.”

But Lenin and Trotsky were there, the October Revolution did take place and instituted a regime based on the soviets of workers and soldiers deputies. In addition to overcoming the opposition of the Bolshevik Old Guard, who clung to the idea that Russia would first have to go through a separate bourgeois revolution before the workers could take power, Lenin elaborated the question theoretically, in his book “The State and Revolution” dealing with “The Marxist Theory of the State and the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution.” Here he elaborated on Marx’s conclusion, based on the experience of the Paris Commune, that “the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes.” He spelled out how the dictatorship of the proletariat would be realized by a state based on workers councils (soviets), doing away with the parliamentary dens of corruption and pseudo-democracy of periodic elections controlled by money and replacing them through the “conversion of the representative institutions from talking shops into ‘working’ bodies,” of delegates recallable at any time by the bodies which appointed them. Today many would-be Marxists present soviets as purely democratic bodies, while leaving out their vital *class* content as organs of *workers* rule.

As Lenin stressed, such soviet rule was infinitely more democratic than the most democratic bourgeois state, which is a machine for imposing the class interests of the capitalists. The soviets were not an invention of some idealist thinker but grew out of the 1905 Revolution. And by themselves, they were no guarantee of revolutionary victory. Subsequently, anarchists, bourgeois liberals and White Guard reactionaries joined in praising the soviets while denouncing the communists. “Soviets without Communists” was the slogan of the Kronstadt uprising of 1921 which threatened the very survival of the revolution. Yet if the Bolsheviks had not won the leadership of the soviets, *there would have been no October Revolution*. The subsequent Stalinist bureaucratization gutted the soviets, *at the same time as it destroyed the Bolshevik Party that made the revolution*. Workers soviets under communist leadership, backed by the mass of the poor peasantry and oppressed peoples, were the key to Red October.

Aftermath of October

The Russian October Revolution led to attempts at workers revolution throughout Europe. One year later, almost to the day, on 9 November 1918, the German workers rose up and overthrew the Hohenzollern monarchy as the Russian workers toppled the Romanov dynasty. There followed upris-

ings in Bavaria, Austria, Hungary, Italy, Bulgaria, Latvia. The Bolshevik Revolution also sparked a series of revolts among the colonial slaves of Western imperialism. In Europe the social-democratic parties of the Second International, sliding into reformism, failed to champion the cause of the colonial peoples, while the right wing actively participated in colonialism. Even some of the centrists talked of a “socialist colonial policy,” as strange as that may sound today. Not surprisingly, most of these reformists and centrists subsequently supported “their own” bourgeois rulers in the imperialist world war. But when the colonial peoples saw that the Bolsheviks had taken power calling for support to colonial revolts, they responded with enthusiasm. There were uprisings in the Rif (Morocco) and Indonesia, a rapid and explosive development of the Communist Party in China, the beginnings of a CP in India and elsewhere.

Red October had a tremendous impact in every sphere of social life internationally. Much of modern art was deeply influenced by the Russian Constructivists. Modern architecture is almost entirely derived from the experiments in the early Soviet Union, notably the construction of workers clubs and housing, not only emphasizing clean lines and bold designs, but also including social innovations such as reading rooms, recreation and cultural centers. Bauhaus in Germany was a direct reflection of this ferment. The modern cinema was greatly influenced by Soviet filmmakers like Sergei Eisenstein, whose movie *October* (also known as *Ten Days That Shook the World*, the title of John Reed’s account of the 1917 workers insurrection) we showed to commemorate the 90th anniversary of the revolution. Poster art today is directly derived from the Bolsheviks’ propaganda posters. Even modern typography comes straight from the Soviet Union, where the victorious revolutionaries replaced the elaborate curly-cue letters of the traditional Cyrillic alphabet with modern sans-serif typefaces. Educational reform movements arose throughout West Europe and in the U.S., as well as in Latin America, seeking to drag schools out of their “classical” mold of education for an elite into the modern age of an industrial society which required an educated population. But in Russia these “reforms” were quickly translated into reality, and educational reformists such as John Dewey flocked to Soviet Russia to “see the future.”

Yet these great beginnings never really got past the experimental stage, because of the political counterrevolution that set in under Joseph Stalin and his heirs, who seized power in 1923-24. It was notable that the leaders of this *political* counterrevolution, the *troika* or Triumvirate of Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev, were the same ones who opposed workers revolution in 1917. The ascendant bureaucracy soon stopped building clubs for workers, for example, because they didn’t want workers to be able to congregate except under its control. The bureaucrats distrusted workers and intellectuals, both of whom had supported Trotsky against the Triumvirate. But more than a simple power struggle was involved. The revolution had occurred in an economically backward, predominantly peasant country, surrounded by more advanced capi-

talist nations. The Bolsheviks had faced more than a dozen foreign armies. West European imperialists and East European capitalist regimes along with the United States, Japan and China dispatched at least 150,000 troops in expeditionary forces to join with the counterrevolutionary White armies seeking to crush the Bolshevik "Reds." Following the failure of that intervention, with the Red victory in the 1918-21 Russian Civil War, the imperialists then sought to throw up a *cordon sanitaire* to quarantine the "Bolshevik bacillus." This included a diplomatic and economic blockade every bit as ferocious as the U.S. "embargo" that has besieged the tiny island of Cuba for almost half a century since the victory of the revolution there.

On top of this, the series of revolutions in Europe had all failed: the Spartakist Uprising in 1919 in Germany; the short-lived Bavarian and Hungarian Soviet Republics in the same year; 1920 in Italy when the workers in the north took over the factories; also in 1920 the failed Red Army invasion of Poland. Over and over, Germany was the focus of struggle: in 1920, the workers rose up to smash an attempted coup d'état by right-wing nationalists known as the Kapp putsch. In 1921, there was the fiasco of the botched "March Action," when the inexperienced Communist Party (whose leaders Luxemburg and Liebknecht had been murdered two years earlier) thought it could simply decree a revolution; in 1923, an elaborate plan for a nationwide German uprising went awry, primarily because of contradictory instructions from Moscow, reflecting the opposition of Stalin and his (by then) henchman Zinoviev to carrying out a revolution, while Trotsky did everything possible to push the revolution forward. On the ground in Germany, these conflicting lines led to paralysis and defeat.

Permanent Revolution vs. "Socialism in One Country"

So the combination of economic blockade, the aftereffects of a bloody civil war and the isolation resulting from the failure of the revolution to spread to the European imperialist heartland due to inexperienced leaderships of the young Communist Parties – all of this combined to feed into a growing conservative, nationalist backlash in the Soviet Union. This mood was embraced by the nascent bureaucracy which wanted above all stability so that it could enjoy its new privileges in peace. And it found a spokesman in Stalin, who together with the other members of the *troika* blocked Trotsky from becoming the central leader of the Bolsheviks upon Lenin's death in January 1924. When that alliance crumbled, Stalin allied with Nikolai Bukharin, another of the Bolshevik "Old Guard," to thwart Trotsky. The ideological cover for this anti-revolutionary alliance was opposition to Trotsky's perspective of *permanent revolution*, and of the October Revolution's program of international socialist revolution, in favor of the pipe dream of *socialism in one country*.

We cannot here go into these differences in great detail. Briefly, Trotsky held, based on an analysis of the Russian Revolution of 1905, that in the imperialist epoch, the bourgeoisies in

the economically backward capitalist and semi-feudal countries were too weak and too threatened by the spectre of an uprising by workers and peasants that they could not carry out the classic tasks of the bourgeois revolutions: democracy, national liberation and agrarian revolution. Instead, they regularly aligned themselves with the most reactionary forces. The peasantry, on the other hand, lacked the coherent interests and social/economic power of one of the fundamental classes – bourgeoisie or proletariat – and while deeply oppressed, it was not able to lead a revolution. Thus in order to achieve even these basic democratic tasks, it was necessary for the working class to take power, supported by the poor peasantry and other oppressed layers. Having done so, the proletariat would be obliged, if only to preserve the revolution, to undertake socialist tasks by expropriating the bourgeoisie and extending it internationally to the imperialist centers.

This was Trotsky's early, 1905 formulation of the *permanent revolution*, a concept that goes back to Marx's writings after the failure of the 1848 revolutions due to the betrayal of the German, French and Austrian bourgeoisies. And what Trotsky foresaw was what happened in Russia in 1917. That is, the October Revolution positively *confirmed* the perspective of permanent revolution. A decade later, in 1927, permanent revolution was confirmed in the negative in China when the failure of the working class to take power – due to the prohibition by Stalin and Bukharin imposed on the Chinese Communist Party – led to a bloody defeat at the hands of the nationalist general Chiang Kai-shek. Writing in 1929, Trotsky added one more, crucial, element, namely, that the working class must take power *led by its communist party*. This was something he had failed to emphasize or fully comprehend in the pre-1917 period, before he joined with Lenin in the course of the revolutionary upheaval, to carry out the program of *all power to the soviets* over the opposition of the Bolshevik "Old Guard."

We refer to Trotsky's *perspective* of permanent revolution, in order to emphasize that it is simultaneously a *theory and a program for action*. Quite a few pseudo-Trotskyists refer only to the theory, and don't see it as a key programmatic question. Many present it as an objective force that will impose itself whether or not the leadership calls for this program. This objectification then serves as a "theoretical" justification for politically supporting petty-bourgeois forces, such as Castroite guerrillas in Latin America and Maoist peasant armies in Asia, on the grounds that, like it or not, they would be obliged to expropriate the bourgeoisie, no matter what their formal programs call for. In reality, the class-collaborationist programs of the Castro and Mao Stalinists have led to defeat after defeat, at a horrendous cost of working-class militants' lives.

To block Trotsky, in 1924 Zinoviev and others penned rabid denunciations of permanent revolution, and in 1925 Bukharin and Stalin proclaimed the anti-Marxist dogma of "socialism in one country." Again, it is not possible to elaborate

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**Mobilize the Working Class to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal!
Abolish the Racist Death Penalty!**

Ruling Against Mumia Shows: No Justice for the Oppressed in the Capitalist Courts

**Federal Court Reaffirms
Frame-Up Conviction,
Orders Life Behind Bars or
Racist Legal Lynching**

The following article was issued as an Internationalist Group leaflet on March 28.

On March 27, a three-judge panel of the U.S. Third Circuit Court of Appeals in Philadelphia reaffirmed the frame-up conviction of Mumia Abu-Jamal, the former Black Panther Party spokesman and world-renowned radical journalist who has been locked up on Pennsylvania's death row for more than a quarter century. After previously rejecting Mumia's request to present evidence of his innocence, as well as a host of issues showing that he was railroaded by a racist court, the Court turned down Mumia's request for a new trial. It upheld the 2001 ruling by a federal district judge that ordered a new hearing on the sentence, but limited the "choice" to the living hell of life imprisonment without parole ... or execution.

This ruling demonstrates once again that there is no justice in the capitalist courts. Convicted in the 1981 shooting of Philadelphia police officer Daniel Faulkner, Mumia Abu-Jamal is innocent. He did not commit the crime of which he was accused. He was declared guilty and sentenced to die because of his revolutionary politics and because for years he had been a thorn in the side of the racist rulers of the misnamed "city of brotherly love." Around the world, millions have come out in defense of Jamal. His eloquent writings exposing the crimes of imperialism have circled the globe, translated into numerous languages. Mumia is the symbol of the international struggle against the racist death penalty, inherited from the sys-

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Mumia Abu-Jamal. Below: IG contingent and members of CUNY faculty/staff union PSC at April 19 Philadelphia march for Mumia.



Internationalist photo

Brazilian Teachers Strike Again for Freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal

The following article is adapted from *Vanguarda Operária* No. 10, May-June 2007, published by our comrades of the Brazilian section of the League for the Fourth International.

For a second time, the teachers union of the Brazilian state of Rio de Janeiro, SEPE-RJ, set an important example in calling a strike this past May 7 in defense of public education and demanding “freedom for Mumia Abu-Jama.” Known as “the voice of the voiceless,” the former Black Panther and world-renowned journalist has been imprisoned on Pennsylvania’s death row for the last 26 years, more than a quarter century, for a crime of which he is entirely innocent.

The SEPE has fought for Mumia’s freedom since 1999, when at the initiative of the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil (LQB) and its affiliated Class Struggle Committee (CLC) the teachers union called the first-ever labor action for Mumia. During a two-hour work stoppage, events were held at schools around the state to publicize Mumia’s case and denounce the racist death penalty. The next day, dock workers in the United States shut down all West Coast ports for ten hours demanding freedom for Jamal.



This time not a single voice among Rio teachers objected when spokesmen for the CLC raised the proposal to include the demand for freedom for Mumia in the May 7 strike. In the face of the worsening legal situation for Jamal, whose appeal for a new trial was recently rejected by the U.S. Third Circuit Court of Appeals, the SEPE voted to again stop work, calling on other unions to join it in demanding freedom for Jamal. A notice placed on the union’s web site stated:

“The latest of these judicial farces, like those that preceded it, shows that the exploited and oppressed can have no confidence in the racist injustice system. We call on the movement to include in its struggles, strikes and marches and various forms of mobilization the demand for the immediate freedom of Mumia Abu-Jamal!”

The same appeal was included in motions passed by the Intersindical union federation at its meeting on April 12-13, and by the national meeting of women of the Conlutas union federation on April 20-21.

The SEPE faced enormous difficulties in massively mobilizing Rio teachers for the strike, due to successive attacks by the state government of the PMDB (Party of the Bra-



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

zilian Democratic Movement, a bourgeois party) and the PT (Workers Party) and their satellites. Now the SEPE struck a second time on behalf of Mumia, who has said that one of his heroes is Zumbi, the leader of the escaped slaves of Palmares, who was killed fighting the Portuguese colonial army on 20 November 1695. Every year the anniversary of his death is commemorated in Brazil as a day of black awareness.

A special issue of the union newspaper on Mumia was put out for the strike recounting the facts of his case and the SEPE's 1999 work stoppage for his freedom. More than 20 chapters of the teachers union took papers to distribute and to inform their ranks of the strike. Particularly active were the locals in the steel city of Volta Redonda (where the LQB/CLC originated); Valencia, which gave full support; and São Gonçalo, a working-class suburb of Rio across the Bay. The issue contained a poem by Marília Machado, a supporter of the LQB/CLC, titled "Prelude for Jamal" (see opposite).

In the discussion in the SEPE state assembly on the motion, representatives of the CLC emphasized that the strike by the educational workers of the SEPE/RJ, most of whom are women, was taking place amid generalized unrest. Not only was the union fighting back against attacks on teachers launched by the "militarized popular front" government of Brazilian president Lula (leader of the PT) and state governor Sérgio Cabral (of the PMDB), along with their junior partner, the fascistic mayor of the city of Rio de Janeiro, César Maia.

It was also a response to the epidemic of dengue fever which has beset the poor and black population of the city of Rio this summer as never before, claiming children among its victims. This came on top of the massacre of 70 people, mostly young black men, during raids on the *favelas* (slums) in connection with the Pan-American Games held in the city last year. The CLC denounced that police operation, which served as a training grounds for the paramilitary National Security Force (FSN), which has been practicing in the hills of Rio to invade and kill in Haiti.

The Brazilian military commands the multinational "United Nations" force that is policing the black republic in the Caribbean as mercenaries for U.S. imperialism, which has its hands full in Iraq and Afghanistan. The LQB/CLC has called to mobilize workers action to drive the Brazilian military out of Haiti, and out of the Rio slums.

The CLC has always stressed that the fight to free Jamal cannot be separated from other demands of the working class, and of working women in the educational sector in particular. In their articles, the LQB and CLC point out that the liberation of the black population can only come about through socialist revolution. They emphasize that it is necessary to build a revolutionary workers party as a "tribune of the people," as Lenin put it, which takes up all the demands of the exploited and oppressed.

The CLC's call since 1999 to mobilize the working class to free Jamal, which was embraced by the SEPE-RJ, the largest union of working women in the state of Rio de Janeiro, which has twice stopped work on behalf of the imprisoned black leader in the United States, marks an unprecedented and historic step in the workers struggles in Brazil. ■

Prelude for Jamal

By Marília Machado

You are the struggle of all of us:
Of those who have gone before
and those yet to come.
The essence of freedom,
reaching for liberation.

You are those who live in Brazil
or in any other nation.
The pain of whoever is a slave
in a world of so many masters,
of the victims of so many horrors
in the countryside, city and slums.

You are one of those who write history
with strength and conviction
A hero without fantasy
who doesn't serve to alienate,
the voice which refuses to be silent
in the face of so much oppression,
a desire for justice,
a cry from the heart.

You are a scream in the throat
of every black person who cries,
of every human marked
by cruel tortures.
You are peace, and sometimes war.
You are **Mumia Abu Jamal**.

Marília Machado has two volumes of published poetry and workers as a teacher in São Gonçalo. In 1997 she was named Muse of Poetry of the city of Rio de Janeiro.

No Justice...

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tem of chattel slavery on which American capitalism was built.

This latest ruling, like all those that preceded it, shows that the exploited and oppressed must have no faith in the racist injustice system. *We call on the workers movement to mobilize its power to free Mumia now!*

Mumia's original 1982 trial and 1995 appeal hearing were such grotesque racist shams that many liberals and reformists saw them as aberrations, placing their hopes in a new trial. In both cases, the proceedings were presided over by the notorious "hanging judge" Albert Sabo, a lifetime member of the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP), who sentenced more defendants to death than any other sitting judge in the United States. Sabo was a certifiable racist who frequently made clear his disdain toward the defense and vowed in the hearing of a court employee that he would "help 'em fry the n——r." He refused to admit evidence of state manipulation of eyewitnesses into changing their testimony to implicate Jamal, suppressed evidence of the shooter fleeing the scene, allowed the use of a fabricated "confession" cooked up months later by the prosecution, and ordered the jailing of defense attorney Rachel Wolkenstein for objecting to his bla-

tantly prejudicial rulings.

Yet it is not just one racist judge. The judicial system has repeatedly upheld the rigged trial and conviction of Jamal. State and federal courts have refused to admit the testimony of the man, Arnold Beverly, who confessed to carrying out the murder for which Mumia was convicted. The persecution of this champion of the oppressed is the result of a tight-knit ruling class determined to uphold the cops who enforce *their* "law and order." This is illustrated by the fact that the Philly district attorney who oversaw the prosecution of Jamal, Ed Rendell, is now governor of Pennsylvania (and has vowed to quickly sign a death warrant if the sentence is reinstated), while his wife sits on the federal court hearing Mumia's appeal.

Although Jamal's persecution began under police chief and later Republican mayor Frank Rizzo, Rendell is a leading Democrat. Democratic president Bill Clinton authored the 1996 Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act, which has hamstrung appeals by Mumia and others challenging the barbaric system of legal lynching. And while Hillary Clinton is a big FOP backer, her Democratic rival Barack Obama supports "the ultimate punishment" in particularly "heinous" cases, and sure as hell isn't going to come out for Mumia, a former Black Panther who the cops are set on executing.

Philadelphia District Attorney Lynne Abraham applauded yesterday's federal court decision. While the local bourgeois press highlighted "Life term or new penalty hearing ordered for Mumia Abu-Jamal" (*Philadelphia Inquirer*, 28 March), Pam Africa of the MOVE organization rightly denounced the ruling as "a divisive, deceptive plot to fool people into thinking they had done something fair by Mumia." An *Inquirer* article posted yesterday afternoon quoted Jeff Mackler of the Mobilization to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal saying "Today's decision is a travesty of justice," adding: "He said he had been hoping that the Third Circuit would order an entirely new trial based on the claim about racial discrimination in jury selection." A vain hope indeed.

In fact, last year Mackler authored an article, "New Trial and Freedom for Mumia?" (*Socialist Action*, June 2007), displaying the dangerous delusions purveyed by bourgeois liberals and reformist would-be socialists:

"It is difficult to imagine that the systematic race and class bias that permeate America's criminal 'justice' system could be set aside and that the nation's most famed and innocent death row inmate and political prisoner of 25 years, Mumia Abu-Jamal, could win a new trial and freedom.

"But that is precisely what appeared to be unfolding on May 17 in the packed Ceremonial Courtroom of the Federal Courthouse in Philadelphia...."

After assuring readers that the judges on the panel "had carefully read the voluminous briefs submitted by both sides and thoroughly researched the history of the constitutional issues involved," the *Socialist Action* article opined:

"Indeed, a number of the Third Circuit's previous decisions on several critical issues that directly pertain to Mumia's most telling arguments have marked this court as among the few remaining 'liberal' juridical institutions in the country."

The evidence of racist jury rigging in the Philadelphia

courts is extremely powerful, including a "training video" for new prosecutors on how to exclude blacks jurors. Yet the Third Circuit judicial panel dismissed the whole issue because Mumia's lawyer failed to raise it at the 1982 trial and because there was no evidence of how many blacks were in the jury pool, even though in previous cases the same court had held that there were no such requirements.

The fact that Jamal's conviction was upheld by this "liberal" court should dispel the idea that somehow the capitalist judicial system, and particularly the federal courts, can produce justice for the oppressed. This illusion permeated the liberal civil rights movement of the 1960s, leading it to look to the Democratic Kennedy and Johnson administrations for salvation. Yet it was under LBJ that the full-scale persecution of the Black Panthers began, carried out by his attorney general, Ramsey Clark, now a darling of the reformist left. Revolutionary Marxists educated in the school of Lenin and Trotsky, in contrast, understand that the bourgeois state in all of its facets is a machine for enforcing the rule of capital over oppressed racial minorities, immigrants, poor and working people.

In fact, the railroading of Mumia Abu-Jamal is one more in a long string of frame-up trials including those of San Francisco labor leaders Tom Mooney and Warren Billings and hundreds of revolutionary syndicalists of the IWW in World War I; of anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti in the 1920s "red scare"; of the nine Scottsboro youths in Alabama who symbolized Jim Crow "justice"; of the Trotskyist leaders and Minneapolis Teamsters during World War II; of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg during the McCarthyite witchhunting at the height of the anti-Soviet Cold War. And it is part of the campaign of state murder against black radicals symbolized by the 38 Panthers gunned down by the police and hundreds who were jailed under the FBI's notorious COINTELPRO program of disruption and provocation.

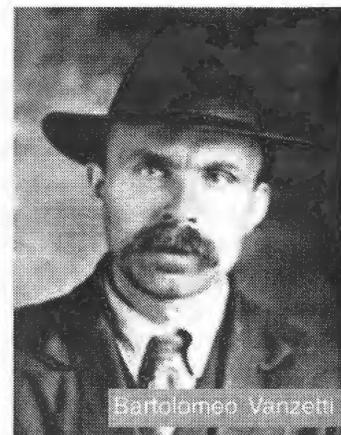
The Internationalist Group and the League for the Fourth International, of which the IG is the U.S. section, have fought since our inception to dispel illusions in the capitalist courts and instead mobilize the power of the workers movement to free Mumia Abu-Jamal. We seek to organize a revolutionary workers party against both capitalist parties of racist legal lynching and imperialist war. The LFI's Brazilian section, the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil, sparked the first work stoppage for Jamal's freedom, called throughout the state of Rio de Janeiro on 23 April 1999, which was carried out in conjunction with a shutdown of West Coast U.S. ports the next day by the powerful International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU). Currently, the ILWU has announced that it will stop work at all 27 West Coast ports on May 1 to protest the war in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Mass mobilization, including by several unions, was key in stopping the scheduled execution of Jamal in 1995. Today Mumia's life is again in danger. It is urgent that all defenders of democratic rights, opponents of the racist death penalty and fighters for black freedom come out now in strength to denounce this new court attack and demand *Freedom Now for Mumia Abu-Jamal!* ■



80th Anniversary
of Their Execution

The
International
Struggle to



Save Sacco and Vanzetti



Editions La Découverte

Demonstration in Paris, 7 August 1927. Communist-led CGTU labor federation called for protest strikes against impending execution.

The following article is based on the presentations by comrade Mark Lazarus in forums held by the Internationalist Group in July 2007 in New York City and Boston.

Eighty years ago – in the night of 22 to 23 August 1927 – Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were electrocuted by the bourgeois state at the ghoulis hour of midnight for a crime that they did not commit – a robbery in Braintree/Massachusetts on 15 April 1920. They were railroaded by Judge Webster Thayer and Governor Alvin Fuller. In point of fact, their only crime was they were immigrant workers and anarchist revolutionaries. That is why they were framed up and executed. Generations of people, millions upon millions, have remembered them as victims of U.S. capitalist *injustice*. This was a case,

which, like the Haymarket anarchists in Chicago of 1886, like the Scottsboro Boys in the '30s, or the Rosenbergs in the '50s, and like the case of Mumia Abu-Jamal today, crystallized social struggle against bourgeois repression for a generation.

The 80th anniversary of their legal lynching, however, passed with as little public fuss as possible. The reactionaries spewed their venom, while the bulk of the “responsible” bourgeois press treated the subject as ancient history, however deplorable. The publication of *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Men, the Murders and the Judgment of Mankind*, by one Bruce Watson, the latest review of the case, was hailed in the big business press for its agnosticism on the question of Sacco and Vanzetti’s innocence, precisely to avoid the question of the role of the

**Mobilize Working-Class Power to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal,
Abolish the Racist Death Penalty!**

bourgeois state in killing them.

Sacco and Vanzetti met their fate with the same courage and dignity with which they had faced their persecutors since their arrest. They went to their deaths protesting their innocence with great eloquence, remarks which are often quoted. But in their own way, they understood the class issues involved, and these views are less well-known. Vanzetti put the case in a nutshell in an unpublished letter to one of his supporters from 22 May 1927:

“Now on hope: You are hoping and they are hoping – we are hoping very little. As a matter of fact we have never hoped in Courts and Judges. We have hoped only, and we are still hoping only on what the comrades and the people will compel the State to give us. Because our case is grave, the solidarity so vast and great, the accused so weak and wretched, and our defensive proofs so strong and evident: people have always hoped that we will have won. The people hoped in a victory and they always got a defeat. Now we are in the hands of a gubernatorial discretion. A bad beast, believe me. Our case proved one thing positively: that that handful of men invested of power by the stupidity of the people and who call themselves public servants care a fig for the people’s wishes and pay no attention to the people’s claims. You ask: for what is man, when hope is death? I answer: A death man – I mean so physically. You understand that there are several things deriving either directly or indirectly from our case of which I am glad, proud, and comforted.”

The “solidarity so vast and great” evoked by Vanzetti – which took concrete form in massive strikes and demonstrations by the world working class – is precisely what “our” ruling class wants to make sure is forgotten

U.S. authorities quite appreciated the suppression of protest by the fascist dictatorship in Sacco and Vanzetti’s homeland. The American consul in Genoa wrote in 1927:

“[the] lack of incidents in Genoa is due not to indifference but to the strictness of the discipline enforced by the fascist government. If it had not been for the very careful measures taken by the authorities no one doubts but that the public here would have expressed its mind in no uncertain manner. It is to be hoped that this discipline will continue until the people have forgotten the case.”

Not if we can help it.

Bourgeois Consensus Shifts to the Right

As the anniversary approached, right-wing smears against Sacco and Vanzetti began to multiply. On 24 December 2005 the *Los Angeles Times* published a so-called “scoop”: a letter from the novelist Upton Sinclair from 1929, in which Sinclair described his meeting with Fred Moore, who had been Sacco and Vanzetti’s lawyer until 1924. According to the *Times*, Moore had told Sinclair the two men were guilty, but that Sinclair, who went on to write a novel about the case (*Boston*) supposedly deliberately suppressed this revelation.



Demonstration for Sacco and Vanzetti in Boston, 1925.

The Upton Sinclair story has in fact been known since 1975. And what did this letter actually say? What Sinclair said about Moore was, “I knew that he had parted from the defense committee after the bitterest quarrels. [...] Moore admitted to me that the men themselves had never admitted their guilt to him, and I began to wonder whether his present attitude and conclusions might not be the result of his brooding on his wrongs.” In short, Sinclair considered and rejected Moore’s allegations. There was no cover-up; instead eight decades later the *Los Angeles Times* suppressed Sinclair’s real views.

This cock-and-bull story then percolated through right-wing blogs and onto the pages of the reactionary *National Review*, one of whose literary goons wrote (6 January 2007): “In recent years, the lies and mythmaking have become perhaps even more egregious. ... Mumia Abu Jamal is guilty, but don’t say that in a faculty lounge. Stanley Tookie Williams was guilty.”¹ The Reaganite California assemblyman Chuck DeVore on his website attacked “the heirs to this shameful legacy with their banners and bumper stickers trying to break our resolve in the face of evil,” in order to criminalize by association any and all critics of the war in Iraq, as well as defenders of Mumia or opponents of the death penalty.

The case against Sacco and Vanzetti for the past few decades has been largely based on this kind of worthless *hearsay*. But far more noteworthy is that the liberals, who were in effect being baited here as lying stooges for criminals, barely responded. Why? Because there is a bi-partisan political consensus in favor of the racist death penalty as well as in favor of imperialist war, in favor of so-called “anti-terrorist” police state measures. In the face of this relentless, remorseless conservative drive to re-lynch Sacco and Vanzetti (reprised by the *Wall Street Journal*, 18 August 2007), “liberal” academia has simply collapsed on the question of their innocence.

The *New York Times* (15 August 2007) – and most bourgeois dailies followed suit – simply asserted, “the trial itself was not simply, or even primarily, the crucifixion of two radicals.” Even if the judge was, as the *Times* admits, a “hide-

¹ Stanley “Tookie” Wilson was executed in December 2005 after California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger refused to pardon him, notably because Wilson called for freeing Mumia Abu-Jamal.

bound reactionary,” the condemnation was due to “bad police work and seething ethnic prejudice” – as if there was no connection between the criminalization of immigrants and the criminalization of the left...

But even if liberals had been previously prepared to admit the innocence of Sacco and Vanzetti, their chief concern has always been to pretend that this case was an unfortunate exception, and not one more episode of capitalist injustice in the class war. The *Times* writes that the “judicial system, forming a perfect circle, simply ratified its own errors.” While this mouthpiece of the ruling class naturally doesn’t draw the conclusion, this is a fair description of the class nature of bourgeois justice, rather than simple “errors.”

To the extent that the previous liberal-radical consensus was based on a vision of Sacco and Vanzetti as mere “philosophical anarchists” (particularly Vanzetti, who has been painted as some kind of Saint Francis of Assisi who talked to birds and flowers), it stood on shaky foundations. The historian Paul Avrich pointed out some time ago in his *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Anarchist Background*. (1991) that the pair were in fact supporters of the circle around the anarchist communist Luigi Galleani, who were quite open about advocating violence in retaliation against the crimes of the ruling class and who may well have participated in such “direct action.”

Although irrelevant to the question of their never-proven participation in the Braintree robbery, this “revelation” offered a splendid occasion for many erstwhile defenders of Sacco and Vanzetti to jump ship. Thus *The Nation* (27 August 2007) declared that “their trial was highly unfair and their expedition an intolerable act of barbarism”, but that Sacco and Vanzetti were nonetheless “tainted” by their association with the Galleanists.

Watson, for his part, may respond to leftist critics by claiming that he has compiled a mass of facts indicating the innocence of Sacco and Vanzetti. But he can’t and won’t come out and openly say so. He is equally capable of turning around and hinting that Sacco, at least, may have been guilty. For Watson, “the true hero of this whole book” is William Thompson, the conservative lawyer who replaced Moore and who “played it by the book”, preaching slavish reliance on the bourgeois legal system, as he, Watson explained in an interview with the radio program “Democracy Now” on August 23 [2007].

The “Red Scare”

Sacco and Vanzetti were victims of the so-called Red Scare. That’s a fact. But what was it? In the schoolbooks, the “Red Scare” is presented as a curious piece of social history – an unfortunate, inexplicable outbreak of mass hysteria – then we pass on to the Jazz Age, flappers and Prohibition. That isn’t the real story.

The “Red Scare” was a direct continuation of the repression carried out during the First World War, which was orchestrated by that great “progressive” Democratic president Woodrow Wilson, who was, by the way, a vicious segregationist. The U.S. ruling class was well aware that broad sections of the population – the Irish, the Germans, but above all

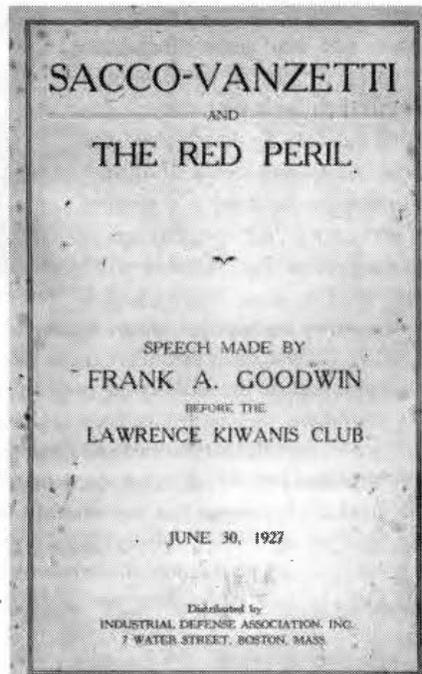
the socialists and the Industrial Workers of the World, the IWW – were opposed to war. Pretext after pretext for the war had to be manufactured to drag the country into war. And its opponents had to be terrorized.

The Espionage and Sedition Acts penalized any attempt to discourage recruitment to the armed forces or “utter, write, print or publish disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive language against the government, constitution, flag or uniform of the United States”: a forerunner of the Patriot Act. More than 1,500 prosecutions took place under the Sedition Act, resulting in more than 1,000 convictions – including that of Eugene Debs for his Canton, Ohio speech against the war. Of those sent to prison, 30 died there.

Thus, more than 1,000 striking copper miners (an IWW strike) in Bisbee/Arizona were rounded up by armed vigilantes in July 1917 and dumped in the desert². In August IWW organizer Frank Little was lynched in Butte, Montana. The government efforts were not designed to check this vigilantism, as defenders of Wilson will claim. This is a lie. The Federal Mediation Commission created by Wilson whitewashed the deportations in Bisbee. The government worked hand-in-hand with the American Protective League, a KKK-style group set up by a Chicago businessman – a national network of 250,000 snitches of the sort that the Bush administration is still trying to create. The Federal government itself organized raids on IWW offices in 48 cities, arrested the leaders, tried them and sent them to jail.

And it didn’t stop after the war. The government added another auxiliary force – the American Legion. The Army – which had occupied mines and lumber mills in the Pacific Northwest (where the IWW was particularly active) during the war – broke strikes again and again.

There was huge labor upsurge after the war – including (and this is almost universally unappreciated) – the black working class in the South. So we have the Army attacking streetcar workers in Chattanooga, dockworkers in New Orleans. But a major intervention was the 1919 steel strike, where



² See “Bisbee, Arizona Deportation of 1917: ‘Reds’ and Immigrants,” in *The Internationalist* No. 2 (April-May 1997).



During World War I, U.S. rulers jailed thousands of labor radicals for opposing imperialist slaughter. Above, left: 1917 deportation of IWW-led miners in Bisbee, Arizona. Following end of the war, fearing labor unrest the government unleashed repression against “reds.” Above, right: 1919 cartoon from *Chicago Tribune*.

General Leonard Wood smashed picketing and raided strike support organizations. Wood was former Military Governor of Cuba and the perpetrator of the infamous 1906 Jolo Massacre in which more than 600 Filipinos were slaughtered in cold blood. So you see the chickens come home to roost – this butcher was applying what he learned in the colonies. We can well imagine what the sadistic military murderers and torturers of Abu Ghraib and Haditha will unleash.

In the post World War I context we have the aptly named “War Plans White” worked out by Military Intelligence (which was, of course, up to it neck in domestic spying). This projected nothing less than civil war in the United States. We have a Colonel Dunn writing in July 1920, “Suppose the whole industrial area from Pittsburgh to the Mississippi River suddenly flares up with outlaw strikes, and you have that mass on your hands; with radical uprisings, labor and everything stewed up in flame in that section.” What’s the line up in this civil war? On the one side the Rotary Club and the DAR (Daughters of the American Revolution) – the usual suspects – on the other the Socialists, the radical syndicalist IWW, some AFL (American Federation of Labor) craft unions – and *all* blacks as well as (this is the point) entire immigrant groups such as Italians, Hungarians and Poles who were, according to Military Intelligence, “racial groups” which were “susceptible to hostile leadership against Anglo-Saxon institutions.”

So when they started rounding up reds, the targets of choice were the immigrants. In fact, at the time the majority of the revolutionary left was composed of non-citizens. In October 1918, Congress passed a new law aimed at resident aliens, the Anarchist Act. For the first time mere membership in an anarchist organization or possession of anarchist literature for the purpose of propaganda became grounds for eviction from the country, no matter how long an immigrant had lived in America. In November 1919, 250 were deported to Russia; in January 1920, in the infamous Palmer raids, perhaps as many as 10,000 were arrested (there were no warrants). The pretext was various alleged bomb plots and sev-

eral actual bombings, which may or may not have been carried out by the Galleanists, or by government agents provocateurs; the fact is none of them were ever arrested or tried for these bombings. Most of the left at the time believed that the bombings were the work of provocateurs.

These acts may have provided useful pretext for the feds, but this repression was a necessity for the ruling class in any case. The liberal critique is conditional; they argued that committed revolutionaries represented such a tiny proportion of the U.S. population that these dragnets were a case of “excessive force.” But following this line of argument, repression would have been “justified” if the revolutionary left had been stronger, i.e., the liberal critique shares the same class basis as the conservative apology for repression.

The fact of the matter is that if the 50,000 communists in the USA had formed a cohesive, functional vanguard party and intervened in these post-war class struggles (with a record 4 million strikers in 1919), they would have had an influence out of all proportion to their numbers. So from its standpoint, the ruling class was fully justified in crushing this in the egg and driving the reds underground. So this is the background to the arrest of Sacco and Vanzetti.

The Massachusetts Frame-Up

Here are the facts of the two crimes for which Sacco and Vanzetti were executed: on 24 December 1919, four men, one of them with a shotgun, unsuccessfully attempted to rob the payroll of the LQ White Shoe Company in Bridgewater, Massachusetts. On 15 April 1920, two men shot down the payroll guards Frederick Parmenter and Alessandro Bardelli in broad daylight on the street in Braintree, Mass., robbed the Slater & Morrill Shoe Company of almost \$17,000 and were picked up by a car, a Buick.

After flailing around, the local police became interested in Mario Boda, also a Galleanist, because he had an old Buick. Because of their association with Boda, and another anarchist Coacci, Sacco and Vanzetti were arrested on a streetcar in

Brockton on May 5 (Boda was never indicted for anything). Sacco and Vanzetti had pistols. They denied knowing Boda and Coacci. They were questioned about their politics and denied being anarchists. So they lied to the police. It is important to stress that Sacco and Vanzetti were interrogated by the police about their political views, rather than the Braintree robbery, so that their answers in no wise constitute "consciousness of guilt." They simply wanted to avoid being deported as anarchists.

This is the bedrock of the prosecution case – "consciousness of guilt." Why would leftist immigrants lie to the police? Well, during the Palmer raids, 500 arrestees were led in chains through the streets of Boston and dumped in an unheated immigration building on Deere Island without food or sufficient sanitation for more than a day. Some were subsequently deported. Why were they armed? This was a period in which more than one IWW member had been lynched, in which May Day demonstrations including in Boston had been viciously attacked.

Time is lacking to go into their previously political history. They had been active participants in various strikes. It should be noted however, that they were never IWW members; the Galleanists disapproved of any form of trade union organization on principle.

On 8 March 1920, two Italian anarchists, Roberto Elia and Andrea Salsedo, were kidnapped by the Justice Department, without a warrant and held in an illegal prison. They worked in a print shop at which a leaflet which had been found at the scene at one of the bombings was printed. There is eyewitness evidence that they were tortured. On 3 May 1920, Salsedo plunged to his death from the building where he was held – an alleged suicide. Or was he pushed? Sacco and Vanzetti were well aware of these events.

Vanzetti was charged with the Bridgewater robbery and quickly convicted, even though he had an alibi. The identification witnesses were clearly coached; their stories changed between when they were interviewed by Pinkerton agents investigating the robbery and what they said on the stand (this only came out in 1926). But it was necessary to rapidly convict Vanzetti to set up the next trial.

As to the second trial, which began in June 1921: the Braintree robbery took place in the afternoon; there were thus dozens and dozens of witnesses. Of these, the prosecution presented eleven persons. One of them, according to three of his co-workers, was in fact hiding under a table during the crime. Another retracted, reaffirmed and again retracted her testimony three times. The one prosecution witness who identified Vanzetti had him driving the car. **But Vanzetti did not how to drive.** Interestingly, at least one witness who did not identify them lost his job at the shoe factory (and one member of the jury was later hired by the company). Etc., etc.

Both men had alibis. Sacco had gone to Boston to apply for a passport that day. But the alibis were in the main from Italians, and delivered via interpreter, and so were simply dismissed. The government's case was so weak that the resulting convictions could only have been due to manipulation the jury by both judge and prosecution on political grounds.

But what about the so-called "hard evidence"? In 1921,

there was no scientific basis for matching a bullet to a precise gun. The prosecution's claim that a bullet extracted from the body of the payroll guard Berardelli (known as "bullet 3") matched the gun that Sacco was carrying was in fact pure bluff.

The bullet question only became decisive later, in the "re-lynching" of Sacco and Vanzetti, in which one Francis Russell was the driving force. Claiming that his investigation had reversed his initial views as to their innocence, Russell authored *Tragedy in Dedham* in 1962, a book that is pack of lies. Russell became a fixture at the *National Review*, pushing the line that Sacco was guilty, but Vanzetti was innocent, yet both supposedly received a fair trial! This is called having your cake and eating it too... As a matter of fact, Russell is on record (*Modern Age*, summer 1966) as saying that it was all right to execute Vanzetti as an "accessory after the fact." But in 1961 he had new ballistics tests carried out which confirmed that "bullet 3" indeed came from Sacco's gun. This is now gospel for the reactionaries.

This put-up job was convincingly refuted by William Young and David E. Kaiser in *Postmortem: New Evidence in the Case of Sacco and Vanzetti*. (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1985). According to almost all witnesses there was only one gunman, who killed both Parmenter and Berardelli. After initially wounding Berardelli, he finished him off at close range with two shots. So how could these bullets come from two different guns?

The answer, of course, is that **they did not. Bullet 3 was substituted later by the police and/or prosecution.** This is the bottom line. This is what the whitewash commission appointed in 1927 by Governor Fuller denied, this is what Russell denied, this is what the liberals can't deal with. Was the bourgeois state prepared to frame up these two anarchists by any means necessary? Yes or no? We say yes, it was prepared to and did frame Sacco and Vanzetti, and moreover, this is the **normal** functioning of the bourgeois "justice" system which serves to protect capitalist class rule.

In terms of manipulation or suppression of evidence, there are the fingerprints on the getaway car, which was found abandoned nearby, which were mentioned in the press, and then never again referred to *anywhere*. There is Vanzetti's handgun, which the prosecution claimed had been taken off the dead Berardelli. Police investigations showed that the registration number was *not* the same as the weapon purchased by Berardelli. This was suppressed until 1977, when the documents were released.

Today, when it is an established fact that many people on death row are demonstrably innocent, so-called forensic evidence has become last line of defense for the defenders of the racist death penalty. But consider this:

" (...) in July 1994, (...) *U.S. Today* and the Gannett News Service published a survey. Believing that the claim that the bloody glove found on O. J. Simpson's estate had been planted was far-fetched, the newspaper trawled legal and media databases for comparative cases. They found 85 instances since 1974 in which prosecutors had knowingly or unknowingly used tainted evidence that had convicted the



Nicola Sacco (right) and Bartolomeo Vanzetti (center) taken to court in 1927.

innocent or freed the guilty. In the same period, 48 people sentenced to death were freed after convictions were found to be based on fabricated evidence or because exonerating or exculpatory evidence was withheld.”

—John F. Kelley and Phillip K. Wearne, *Tainting Evidence: Inside the Scandals at the FBI Crime Lab* (Free Press, 1998)

So millions of people believed O.J. Simpson was framed in 1994/1995, because they *knew* L.A. cops were out to get him and that detective Mark Fuhrmann was a racist fully capable of planting evidence.

This is the question posed in the Sacco and Vanzetti trial 1921, as it was in the Mumia case: how far will the bourgeois state go in planting evidence? The parallels are indeed striking: the open racism of Judge Sabo in the Mumia trial and Judge Thayer’s off-the-cuff remarks about “anarchist bastards,” the manipulation of jury selection, the coaching and even black-mailing of witnesses. The same for the manipulation and suppression of ballistic evidence.

But a further parallel is that of the 1925 confession by Celestino Medeiros, that not Sacco and Vanzetti but rather

he, Medeiros, in conjunction with the Providence-based Morelli gang, had committed the robbery. This has an astounding similarity to the affidavit of Arnold Beverly from 1999, obtained by Mumia’s lawyer Rachel Wolkenstein, which described how he, and not Mumia Abu-Jamal had shot policeman Daniel Faulkner in 1981.

Just as the Medeiros confession was dismissed out of hand by the Lowell commission, and by Governor Fuller, etc., the Beverly confession is being ridiculed today by a broad political spectrum, including quite a few erstwhile so-called “defenders” of Mumia. Why? *Because they are afraid to confront the frame-up and the cover-up head on.* What exactly is so preposterous in the idea that Faulkner was killed because of a conspiracy to cover up police corruption and brutality after the federal investigation of the Philadelphia police, and the 1998-99 Los Angeles “Rampart scandal” as well? Need it be added that the bourgeois state had as a little interest in finding out who really committed the Braintree robbery then as the Fraternal Order of Police and all the rest of them have in who really killed Daniel Faulkner now? Let it be noted here, that the Medeiros confession, like the Beverly confession, provides the best explanation for

the facts of the case.

The origins of the Sacco and Vanzetti case lie, not in the Braintree robbery, but rather in a case brought before Thayer in April 1920 with the same set of district attorneys as later, involving a Lithuanian named Sergis Zakoff. Zakoff was a communist, who was indicted under a new “criminal anarchy” law for advocating the overthrow of the government. The jury acquitted him on the grounds that he had committed no actual deeds, merely expressed an opinion. Thayer was furious and savagely rebuked the jurors.

We can only speculate as to whether Webster Thayer, or District Attorney Katzmann, in their own minds, really made no distinction between Italians, anarchists and common criminals. What *is* known is that D.A.’s office was in communication with the Justice Department (which they later lied about) and knew that Sacco and Vanzetti were suspected Galleanists. But the only thing they could concretely accuse them of was the Braintree robbery.

Before the trial, Katzmann offered a “deal” to the defense team, to exclude “politics” from the argumentation. This was a

trap, since it meant that the prosecution arguments about “consciousness of guilt” would remain unchallenged. What instead happened is that the accused were labeled anarchists and draft-dodgers. And just as it was alleged that Mumia’s previous membership in the Black Panther Party showed that he had shot Faulkner, Sacco and Vanzetti’s jury got the message.

The Mooney Case – Another Anti-Labor Frame-Up

The Sacco and Vanzetti case should be compared to the other major defense case of the early twenties, that of Tom Mooney. This case has been almost totally disappeared, since it provides a flagrant example of how leftists have been framed up by the bourgeois state. Today, Tom Mooney is not very well known, but when *Time* magazine took a survey in Europe in 1935 the four best-known American were: FDR, Henry Ford, Charles Lindbergh ... and Tom Mooney. Mooney was a socialist and IWW member who became an organizer for the California Federation of Labor with anarchist leanings.

On 22 July 1916, the employers in San Francisco called a so-called “preparedness march”, i.e. a patriotic parade to whip up pro-war sentiment. In the midst of this, a bomb exploded, killing 10 people. The SF Chamber of Commerce immediately offered a reward of \$5,000, and then \$17,000, for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the bombers – a “sweepstake for perjurers” as the *New York Times* called it.

Perjurers were duly found. Mooney and his associate Warren Billings, who were a thorn in the side of the SF capitalists because of their campaign to organize streetcar workers, were fingered as the supposed perpetrators. Prosecution witnesses alleged Billings planted the bomb at 1:50 pm and met with Mooney a few minutes later. At Mooney’s trial, which was held in January 1917, the defense, however, submitted a photo showing Mooney on the roof of a building a mile away; a clock in the photo showed that the time was 1:58! Nonetheless, Billings got a life sentence and Mooney was sentenced to hang.

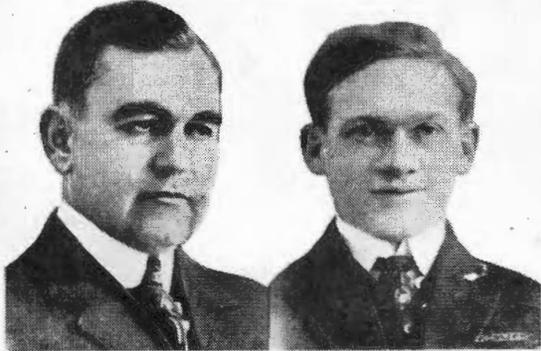
The differences with Sacco and Vanzetti were that Mooney was better known, and the frame-up quite gross. On the other hand, he was accused of a bombing which killed 10 people. So at first the trade union bureaucrats (and the Socialist party) wanted to have nothing to do with him. The International Workers Defense League (IWDL), which took up his cause, was essentially a small group of anarchists at the beginning.

However, the frame-up unraveled rather quickly; the perjurers were exposed. And help arrived from abroad – in the shape of the Bolsheviks who organized a demonstration in front of the US embassy in Petrograd in May 1917 shouting “Muni, Muni”. The Governor of California began to get letters from Woodrow Wilson urging him to postpone the execution or even commute it. Why? We have seen that Wilson had organized the most massive and brutal attack on the U.S. left to date. But he was concerned about the effects that the creation of an American labor martyr would have on workers throughout Europe at that crucial moment when governments were toppling and the old order was trembling.

In the U.S., meanwhile, it became increasingly clear that while Wilson had found collaboration with the AFL trade-

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JUSTICE =RAPED= IN CALIFORNIA



TOM MOONEY.
Sentenced to be hanged at San Quentin Prison, Cal., although proven to be the innocent victim of the Quinn perjury plot.

WARREN A. BILLINGS.
Now in Federal Penitentiary for life on the perjury of the same witness, Eddie Smith the prostitute, and John McDonald a drug fiend.

Story of So-Called Bomb Trials in San Francisco

EIGHTH EDITION of "The Frame-Up System" series by Robert Minor, revised and enlarged to 45 pages, with 54 illustrations. The former title fails to convey all the facts contained in this pamphlet, therefore the change of title.

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(Copyright applied for by Tom Mooney.)

union bureaucrats useful for keeping the workers in line during the war, at the end of the war the bulk of the capitalist class had decided to dispense with their services. This was the so-called “American plan,” which meant a full-scale union-busting drive. So there was a growing sentiment that after Mooney, after the IWW, the mainstream trade-union movement would be the next target. Support for Mooney’s freedom began to grow, mass demonstrations were held in Chicago and New York, and calls for labor action on behalf were becoming concrete. So to head this off, in November 1918, California Governor Stephens commuted Mooney’s sentence to life imprisonment, but refused to pardon him. Stephens was no doubt well aware that a motion to organize a referendum on a general strike for Mooney and Billings had just failed by one vote in the SF Labor Council.

Nonetheless, the IWDL initiated a National Labor Congress on the Mooney case, which was held in January 1919 in Chicago. Attendance was restricted to accredited delegates of “official unions” (AFL, Amalgamated Clothing Workers and the Railroad Brotherhoods) and 1,200 delegates attended. The Congress was split between “radicals” and “moderates” The “moderates” won the day, although the Congress went on record demanding the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Soviet Russia and freedom for “all political and industrial prisoners.” The postponement gave the AFL bureaucrats the time they needed to throttle the movement.



International Labor Defense rally for Mooney and Billings.

But the Seattle representatives had been among the radical faction at the congress, so that when the Seattle shipyard workers walked out in February, a major reason why this broadened out into a general strike embracing the entire city was because of the previous agitation around a general strike for Mooney. Even later, 40,000 coal miners in the Belleville sub-district of the Illinois United Mineworkers actually did go out on strike for Mooney on 4 July 1919, for which the bosses fined them.

So that when the International Labor Defense in particular argued for workers action to free Sacco and Vanzetti, they knew it could happen, even if the political situation was less favorable than in the early '20s. Furthermore, the idea that the U.S. government was not going to let itself be influenced by what goes on overseas is also false.

The Mooney case had an epilogue: in May 1933 he finally got a new trial. What happened? A farce. The D.A. moved a verdict of not guilty, the judge refused to admit any new evidence, and Mooney was acquitted of murder of one of the bombing victims. He was then returned to San Quentin because the conviction for the other murder charges had not been judged. He was finally pardoned in 1939, his health broken and died 3 year later. Billings had his sentence commuted, but was not pardoned until 1961! Keep this in mind when you hear people talking about a "new trial" for Mumia.

The Fight to Save Sacco and Vanzetti

It is often claimed that Sacco and Vanzetti's lawyer Fred Moore was too flamboyant, too political (he had been the lawyer in a number of IWW cases) – as if Judge Thayer needed anything to set him off! But together with the former IWW organizer Carlo Tresca, Moore ensured that the Sacco-Vanzetti case received some trade-union support already in 1921, as well as international publicity.

One of the high points in this first wave of international mobilization (in addition to South America) were the meetings and mass demonstrations organized in France by the Commu-

nist Party and the left trade-union federation the CGTU in a united front with the Union Anarchiste. When they marched on the U.S. embassy in Paris on 23 October 1921 it was protected by 10,000 police and 18,000 soldiers.

This should be stressed, because it has even been alleged by some anarchists that the Communists only jumped on the Sacco and Vanzetti bandwagon at the end in 1927 (see Ronald Creagh, "Sacco et Vanzetti ou les passions militantes," *Le Monde Libertaire*, 18 December 1997). Absolutely untrue. The first declaration calling to free Sacco and Vanzetti by the International Executive Committee of the Communist International is from November 1921.

By 1923, Moore felt that the Boston defense committee was too narrow; at the same time Sacco had turned violently against him. Moore (who as we have seen went sour) was replaced by William Thompson. Thompson was a sincere defender of Sacco and Vanzetti, but one who was politically con-

servative and wanted a strictly legalistic defense. Together with his assistant Herbert Ehrmann he compiled a mass of new evidence to back up their appeals, which they had to submit to Thayer, who was in effect sitting in judgment on himself. They actually believed this would have some effect.

It must be said that they spent a lot of effort following up the Medeiros confession – unlike Mumia's lawyers Weinglass and Williams, who suppressed the Beverley affidavit. Thompson even understood that Bullet 3 had been substituted. But Thompson and Ehrmann remained bound by bourgeois legality, and the Boston committee was essentially opposed to mass mobilizations.

To a large extent, the mobilization around the case followed behind the legal steps – no doubt far too closely. 1923 and 1924 were taken up with appeals based on the recantation of prosecution witnesses. Thayer rejected all these on 1 October 1924. Next, an appeal was submitted based on the Medeiros confession in spring 1926. The Massachusetts Supreme Court upheld the conviction in May, Thayer rejected the appeal in October 1926. Both Communist and anarchist activity was mainly propagandistic during this period.

The Communist effort was hampered by sluggishness in setting up class-struggle defense organizations. At the end of 1922, the Communist International had called for the creation of an international defense organization, which became the MOPR or International Red Aid. Individual national sections came into existence only with some delay, in part because most of the international was heavily involved in intervening into the pre-revolutionary situation in Germany in 1923. The German Red Aid was not founded until 1924, while the CP there was under attack. In the U.S. the two communist parties struggled to unite, and the united party itself faced repression (its August 1922 convention in Bridgeman, Michigan was raided by the feds). The International Labor Defense (ILD) was not founded until 1925.

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Historic ILWU Dock Workers' Action Points the Way May Day Strike Against the War Shuts Down U.S. West Coast Ports

Internationalist photo



Harbor cranes idle and boomed up. Port of Oakland during May 1 West Coast longshore port shutdown demanding an end to war in Afghanistan and Iraq and withdrawal of all U.S. troops from the Near East.

"We did it, we shut down the Coast," union speakers told the cheering crowd kicking off a rally at Justin Herman Plaza in San Francisco after a march from the hall of International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) Local 10 along the Embarcadero. All 29 West Coast ports were closed May 1 as a result of the action by the ILWU ranks to demand a stop to the war and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, and the immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from the Middle East. Longshoreman Jack Heyman, a member of the Local 10 executive board, recalled a local radio announcer who used to say, "if you don't like the news, then go out and make your own." "Today we've not only made news, we've made history," Heyman told the crowd of dock workers and supporters. They had indeed. On the fifth anniversary of President George Bush's ill-fated "mission accomplished" speech, workers used their industrial power against the war.

The ILWU's historic May Day walkout is the first time ever that an American union has struck against a U.S. war. Everywhere on the docks, the giant container cranes had their booms raised, showing they were not working, as if saluting the longshore workers' action. It was a dramatic show of strength that the ruling class can't ignore or dismiss. The union ranks defied the rulings of an arbitrator, who twice ordered them to go to work. They overcame the capitulations of the ILWU leadership, which didn't want

the work stoppage in the first place, tried to water it down and cowered before the threats of legal action while waving the flag. The employers' Pacific Maritime Association (PMA) declared the May 1 port shutdown an "illegal strike." But after all the huffing and puffing from the bosses' mouthpieces, the dock workers pointed the way to defeating the imperialist war by mobilizing working-class power.

In the end, it was more than a work stoppage. The dock workers' *May Day strike against the war* was a first step, a show of what it will take to bring down the warmongers in Washington. Their "symbolic" action was felt all the way to Iraq, where dock workers in two ports stopped work in solidarity with the ILWU. A May Day message from the General Union of Port Workers in Iraq to the "brothers and sisters of the ILWU" stated:

"The courageous decision you made to carry out a strike on May Day to protest against the war and occupation of Iraq advances our struggle against occupation to bring a better future for us and for the rest of the world as well.... We in Iraq are looking up to you and support you until the victory over the US administration's barbarism is achieved."

The sight of Iraqi and American workers joining hands in common action is a powerful show of what could come. These are not empty words on paper. Iraqi and American dock workers have just shown the world: *this is what proletarian inter-*

Break with the Democrats – For a Class-Struggle Workers Party!



All quiet on the docks. One of several ships berthed at port of Oakland during May Day port shutdown.

national solidarity looks like. Having demonstrated this, we must now generalize it and deepen it.

Importantly, the dock workers' May Day action was not restricted to narrow "labor" issues. The attractive poster for the longshore union action produced by the Inkworks Press Collective for the Port Workers May Day Organizing Committee linked the struggle to "Defend Worker Rights! Defend Immigrant Rights!" At the ILWU rally in Justin Herman Plaza, speakers called on demonstrators to attend immigrant rights marches later in the day, while speakers from the union addressed immigrants' rallies on both sides of the Bay. The port shutdown was not simply a West Coast event. Postal workers in San Francisco, New York City and Greensboro, North Carolina held moments of silence. The Vermont and South

Day in Rome, Italy, stickers were distributed by a group of American antiwar activists with the message: "We ♥ ILWU." And above all, there were the powerful messages and courageous work stoppages by dock workers in Iraq.

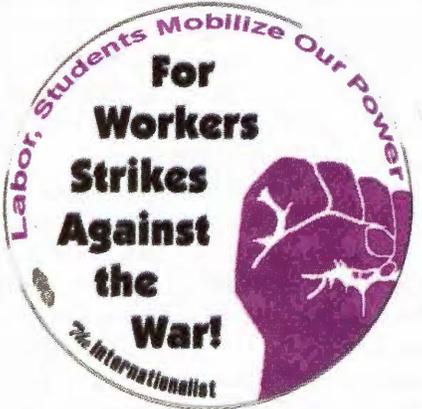
The Internationalist Group and League for the Fourth International have fought for years for transportation workers to "hot cargo" war materiel and for workers strikes against the war. We encouraged and publicized the ILWU union's decision to act as soon as it was announced, so that it wouldn't be buried by bureaucratic inaction or outright sabotage. The West Coast longshore workers' action dramatically demonstrated that workers action against imperialist war is possible, and we are proud to have contributed to bringing this about. *West Coast dock workers decided to "stop work to stop the war." Now unions everywhere should be mobilized to follow the ILWU's lead in fighting use labor's muscle to defeat the bosses' war.*

This requires not only industrial action but a *political offensive against the Democrats and Republicans, the partner parties of American imperialism.* The bourgeois and petty-bourgeois "alternatives," such as the Greens and Peace and Freedom that sprout in the lush flora and fauna of California politics, only serve to restrict opposition to the confines of bourgeois electoral politics. *A revolutionary workers party* would seek to mobilize the working class *independent of and against all the capitalist parties*, advancing class-struggle actions such as the ILWU's antiwar port shutdown, and leading them toward a struggle for working-class power. Against the star-spangled rhetoric of the "peace is patriotic" crowd, such a party would fight for *international socialist revolution.*

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Truckers lined up outside SF-BN rail yards at Oakland refused to cross picket line, solidarizing with antiwar protesters.

“No Peace, No Work” May Day

The decision to make May 1 a “No Peace, No Work Holiday” was taken at the February 8 conclusion of the ILWU’s Longshore Coast Caucus, the highest decision-making body of the waterfront division, made up of delegates elected by the rank and file. The motion for union action against the war, authored by Heyman of Local 10, was passed overwhelmingly, by a vote of 97 to 3. Key to the lop-sided vote was the support of Vietnam veterans, some of them politically conservative, who said that the war had to be stopped, whatever it took. There was a lot of anger at the Democrats, who won control of both Houses of Congress in the November 2006 mid-term elections on the strength of an antiwar vote. But once in control of the purse-strings, the Democrats kept on voting hundreds of billions of dollars for the Pentagon war effort.

In the run-up to May Day, the maritime employers tried to use the threat of legal action to intimidate the dock work workers. In late March, they got an arbitrator to rule that the action could not be a regular monthly “stop work” meeting. On April 8, the union leadership withdrew its request for time off, but plans for the work stoppage continued. The PMA requested an injunction, but a judge threw it out. On the eve of the action, the maritime bosses tried again: “A day earlier, an independent arbitrator sided with waterfront terminal operators and other employers who suspected a job action was in the works, and ruled that halting work would be a contract violation. The ILWU was not dissuaded” wrote the *San Francisco Chronicle* (2 May).

A day before, Steve Getzug, a spokesman for the West Coast shippers declared, “We’re anticipating that May 1 is a regular work day.” The terminal operators’ anticipation was wrong. “The directive [to report to work as usual], however, was apparently ignored by the union’s rank and file,” reported the *Long Beach Press-Telegram*. Up and down the Coast, the workers were no-shows. “Port in San Diego shut down as

dock workers go on one-day strike to protest the war in Iraq,” read a Reuters dispatch. “There were locked gates and few trucks at the Port of Seattle on Thursday despite an arbitrator’s order telling dockworkers not to take the day off for May Day protests,” broadcast KIRO-TV. Fox-TV in Los Angeles showed images of idle ports from Tacoma to L.A. In article titled, “Dockworkers take May Day off, idling all West Coast ports,” the *Los Angeles Times* (2 May) quoted a history professor saying: “This union looks at itself as the vanguard of the working class on the West Coast.”

The media reported that the day shift stop-work action by the 25,000 ILWU dock workers was solid everywhere. More than 10,000 containers a day and other cargo would normally be handled by 6,000 longshoremen. “There’s no work happening so that means there’s no cargo being unloaded and certainly being loaded either,” lamented Getzug of the PMA. During the 2002 lockout by the maritime bosses, it was estimated that economic losses around the country were a billion dollars a day. At the Los Angeles-Long Beach ports, “America’s trade gateway to Asia,” handling 40 percent of all imports coming into the U.S., the *Long Beach Press-Telegram* (2 May) reported that “operations at most shipping hubs were at a standstill most of the day.” A spokesman for the Southern California Maritime Exchange said 18 ships were scheduled to arrive May 1, and another 12 were already berthed. Holding a ship idle in port for a day costs around \$100,000.

In the San Francisco Bay Area, all 34 cranes in the port of Oakland were shut down, most of them with their booms up. Port authorities tried to minimize the impact, saying there was only one ship in port, but we observed at least four berthed at the docks and from the Bay Bridge you could spot several others in the harbor. Stevedoring Services of America (SSA) tried to run a skeleton crew, evidently to show it wasn’t affected by the union action. But ILWU members rushed to the terminal early in the morning and shut down the scab operation before it started.

ILWU Strikes for Peace

By Mumia Abu-Jamal

It should surprise no one that the mighty ILWU (International Longshore and Warehouse Union) is in the forefront of this eight-hour dock shutdown for peace. The ILWU's proud and illustrious history is one of supporting people's movements for life, freedom and workers' solidarity, and also immigration rights, worldwide.

They remember the stirring words of Eugene Debs, who said, almost a century ago, "It is the master class that declares war, it is the subject class that fights the battles." For these words and his antiwar sentiments, Debs was cast into prison. That the ILWU is echoing his words today is proof of their power and truth, 100 years later.

It also proves how little we have moved, from the dawn of the 20th century to the dawn of the 21st, for war is still a tool of imperial power, to fuel corporate wealth and glo-

bal domination. Who can deny that this is a war for oil? Who can deny that this is an illegal occupation, more concerned with what's under the earth than for the millions living in dread upon it.

For Iraq may not have been a barrel of laughs before the invasion and occupation, but is surely hell now. And Congress, like Nero amidst the fires of Rome, does little more than twiddle its thumbs. It's labor power that makes the wheels go round, and this powerful demonstration of the denial of labor, for May Day, for peace and an end to occupation in Iraq, is workers' solidarity made real.

Kudos to the ILWU. For labor power, peace and anti-imperialism, I thank you.

Ona Move. Long live John Africa. From Death Row, this is Mumia Abu-Jamal.

Bay Area Direct Action Against the War set up picket lines with some 60 protesters at the two entrances to the Santa Fe-Burlington Northern rail yards. At 7th Street, a couple dozen members of United Transportation Union Local 239 didn't cross, some deciding to show up late for work while others left for the day. At the entrance off Middle Harbor Road, truckers lined up, many refusing to cross the line. Most were Latino independent "owner"-operators, who get barely \$80 a box, hardly enough to cover the skyrocketing cost of fuel. They were uniformly supportive of the picketers. A Teamster driver told *The Internationalist*, "All power to them, they're really doing it. Somebody needs to stop the war." He recalled the struggle by janitors at Century City in Los Angeles a decade and a half ago, which eventually led to their unionization.

At the Local 10 union hall across the Bay in San Francisco, members were gathering for the march along the Embarcadero. The turnout exceeded all expectations. The ILWU contingent included many who had never demonstrated before. As a couple hundred union members filed out of the hall, there were a thousand people waiting for them in the street. The march stepped off with the Local 10 Drill Team in the lead doing their precision routines. A band struck up Solidarity Forever. There were banners from the Oakland Education Association (OEA), UTU Local 1741 and other unions. Anarchist, syndicalist and socialist groups participated. There were students who walked out from S.F. State University. It was very S.F.: in front of the ILWU's May Day 2008 banner marched a group of unionized dancers (SEIU Local 790) from the Lusty Lady strip club in North Beach with signs proclaiming "Exotic Dancers Solidarity with ILWU."

The rally was held in Justin Herman Plaza, near where two longshoremen were killed by cops on "Bloody Thursday," 5 July 1934, setting off the San Francisco general strike. The crowd was most animated when actor Danny Glover read

from Martin Luther King's speech against the Vietnam War calling for a "radical revolution in values" and restructuring of the U.S. economy. A powerful message was played from Mumia Abu-Jamal, on death row in Pennsylvania for over a quarter century, who saluted the ILWU action (see accompanying box). Jamal cited the words an earlier class-war prisoner, Socialist leader Eugene V. Debs: "It is the master class that declares war, it is the subject class that fights the battles."

Class Struggle vs. Popular Front

If the port shutdown and march showed the power of the S.F. labor movement, the rally showed many of its weaknesses. While disappointment with the Democrats fueled the vote for the antiwar stop-work action, the unions are still chained to the capitalist parties, particularly through the labor bureaucracy. Among the speakers were former Democratic Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney, now running for the Green Party nomination for president, who praised the longshore workers for "drawing a line in the sand" while appealing to "my former colleagues" in Congress to stop the "Bush-Pelosi war"; by Cindy Sheehan, the antiwar activist whose soldier son was killed in Iraq, who is running for Congress in S.F. as an independent against Democratic House speaker Nancy Pelosi; and by an aide to Democratic Congresswoman Barbara Lee, hailed for casting the lone vote against the declaration of war on Afghanistan (although two weeks later she voted for the war budget).

A number of union speakers made "butter not guns" appeals, linking budget cuts in education and social services to the war. Yet a real fight against the war on Iraq and Afghanistan is not about budget cuts. It's about U.S. torture and state terrorism, about colonial occupation and U.S. imperialist domination of the world. Fighting against attacks on education and other social services, or demanding health care for all, is certainly in order, as part of a broader class struggle.

But to pose opposition to the war as if it is a matter of spending priorities is saying that the speakers only want to change policies, or at most “reform” the economy. It is an appeal to the Democrats to shape up and oppose Bush, which is what the popular-front antiwar movement is all about. Taken together with calls to “support the troops by bringing them home safely,” this amounts to a loyalty oath, when what’s needed is sharp class struggle to *defeat* the U.S. imperialist war and *bring down the capitalist system* that produces war after war.

The “social-patriotic” appeal was explicit in a letter read to the crowd from ILWU president Bob McEllrath saying that “Longshore workers are standing-down on the job and standing up for America. We’re supporting the troops and telling politicians in Washington that it’s time to end the war in Iraq.” Saying, “Big foreign corporations that control global shipping aren’t loyal or accountable to any country,” McEllrath declared: “But longshore workers are different. We’re loyal to America, and we won’t stand by while our country, our troops, and our economy are destroyed by a war that’s bankrupting us to the tune of 3 trillion dollars.” This has been the tune of the ILWU bureaucrats from the outset, wrapping themselves in the Stars and Stripes in order to make the port shutdown as inoffensive as possible to U.S. rulers. This only undercuts the impact of the longshore workers’ action, *which is why the union tops make these appeals*, to denature and defang the strike they never wanted.

ILWU Local 34 president Richard Cavalli told the crowd that “this war is not going to end because of the politicians we put in office two Novembers ago, who have failed miserably.” It is certainly true that the Democrats are not going to stop the war, since they are now the *main war party* fueling the Pentagon in Washington. But they have hardly “failed” – they are *doing* their class duty, as representatives of U.S. imperialism. **Alone** among the speakers, Jack Heyman of Local 10, called for “a working-class party, a workers party to fight for the interests of workers.” It’s no accident that he not only wrote the resolution calling for the “No Peace, No Work Holiday,” but also originated the call for the ILWU’s previous shutdown of West Coast ports, demanding freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal. Heyman said there and in a subsequent interview with the “Democracy Now” program on Pacifica Radio, that “what this action was, was raising the level of struggle from protest to resistance.” That is a pretty accurate description, and it raises the challenge ahead: *to go from resistance to a struggle for power*, to drive out the warmongers, the racist oppressors and exploiters and put the working class in power, here and internationally.

It has been obvious from the outset that there has been a split between the union ranks and the leadership over the port shutdown. We noted in our first (March 1) article on the action, “The ILWU leadership could get cold feet, since this motion was passed because of overwhelming support from the delegates despite attempts to stop it or, failing that, to water it down or limit the action” (see “ILWU to Shut Down West Coast Ports to Protest War”, reprinted in the special issue of *The Internationalist* [19 April]). We noted how the bureaucrats reduced the walk-

out from 24 hours to eight hours. And we warned how the ILWU tops would try to distort the action with star-spangled rhetoric, even though there isn’t a word of social-patriotism in the Longshore Caucus resolution and not one speaker at the Caucus appealed to support the troops. We have also pointed out how the opportunist left for years has dismissed the fight for workers strikes against the war as an ultraleft pipedream [see “Why We fight for Workers Strikes Against the War (and the Opportunists Don’t)” in the same issue]. Now that there has actually been a workers strike against the war, no thanks to these fakers, they will deny that what’s needed is to broaden and deepen these workers actions into a fight for workers revolution.

No Substitute for a Revolutionary Party

The success of the strike against the war in the U.S. was due centrally to the determination of the most militant sectors of the ILWU membership to take a stand. They refused to back down in the face the shilly-shallying by their leadership before the threats of the PMA bosses. The overwhelming sentiment against the war in the union ranks held the union bureaucrats in check so that instead of calling off the action, as they dearly wanted to do, they tried to duck threats of legal action by making the strike formally a matter of individual “conscience.” But this fooled no one. In various interviews, the PMA spokesman complained: “We are severely disappointed that the union leadership failed to keep its end of the bargain.” “It’s of more concern to us because it signals something that is more sinister.” “Is this a voluntary war protest or a strike aimed at leveraging labor negotiation? We’re not sure.... We’re concerned. We thought these kinds of old tricks were a thing of the past.” The reality is that this was an organized workers’ action from top to bottom in which the union as a whole stood firm. That’s why it was successful, and why the message it sends is powerful: for workers action to stop the war.

The Internationalist Group contributed significantly to the success of this first-ever strike by American workers against U.S. imperialist war by insistently propagandizing for such class-struggle action over the last decade; by intervening directly among Bay Area dock workers for industrial action against the war (fighting for “hot-cargoing” of war materiel, particularly during the 2002 PMA lockout, fighting for antiwar strikes at a December 2002 Bay Area labor conference, and building the October 2007 Labor Conference to Stop the War called by Local 10); and by encouraging practical steps to arrive at this goal, which required several years of preparation. With the initiative of the IG, our general calls and particular suggestions, we sought to mobilize the power of organized labor, which alone could turn this class-struggle program into reality. And on May Day 2008, the workers of the ILWU did just that: they made the first step toward a workers offensive to bring the war of colonial occupation in Iraq and Afghanistan to a grinding halt. In doing so they also struck a blow against the assault on democratic rights and the bosses’ war on immigrants, oppressed racial minorities and working people “at home.”



Oakland's largest cinema posted a message in solidarity with the ILWU's port shutdown against the war.

Now it is necessary to go beyond this vital beginning to generalize the struggle for working-class action to *defeat* the imperialist war abroad and on the home front. This requires the building of a *class-struggle opposition within the unions and mass organizations of the working class* (including non-unionized immigrant workers) to oust the pro-capitalist misleaders who have sold out one labor gain after another. They are incapable of withstanding the capitalist offensive because they support the capitalist system, particularly through their support to the Democratic Party (and even, in some cases, the Republicans). Today, with their policies of class conciliation and collaboration, these "labor statesmen" are presiding over the relentless destruction of the labor movement itself. Meanwhile, "community leaders" tie immigrants to their exploiters through foundation grants and government-financed "non-governmental organizations" (NGOs). Such misleaders can never revive the workers movement or achieve full rights for immigrants.

Above all, as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels emphasized in the *Communist Manifesto*, "every class struggle is a political struggle." Engels wrote in his 1883 introduction to the *Manifesto* that Marx's core concept was that in the history of class struggles, "a stage has been reached where the exploited and oppressed class – the proletariat – cannot attain its emancipation from the sway of the exploiting and ruling class – the bourgeoisie – without, at the same time, and once and for all, emancipating society at large from all exploitation, oppression, class distinction, and class struggles." Thus in order to win against the exploiters, the working class must break with narrow trade-unionism and become the champion of all the oppressed. It must lead the

struggle against imperialist war, it must fight for full citizenship rights for all immigrants and mobilize its power to stop the raids and deportations. A class-conscious workers movement must fight for black liberation and oppose each and every instance of police brutality; it must stand for the liberation of women from double, and often triple, oppression.

To carry out these tasks will take a real revolution in workers' consciousness, which can only come about through the intervention of a party of the proletarian vanguard which, as Lenin defined its tasks, must act as a "tribune of the people" rather than a trade-union secretary. We seek to build the nucleus of such a revolutionary workers party through revolutionary workers propaganda, through education of future cadres, and through ac-

tive intervention in the class struggle. This struggle is far from easy, and has seen many setbacks, from the bloody defeat of the Paris Commune, to Stalin's victory over Trotsky and over Lenin's program of international socialist revolution, to the counterrevolution that destroyed the Stalinized Soviet Union and the bureaucratically deformed workers states of East Europe. Yet the class struggle does not let up, and after every setback the working class must take stock, analyze its mistakes and rearm politically. When we have successes, such as this first workers strike against the war in U.S. history, we must warn of the limited and temporary nature of such partial victories and prepare for new battles ahead.

Today "anti-party" sentiment has become fashionable among petty-bourgeois leftists. Yet the West Coast dock workers' antiwar port shutdown did not fall from the sky. The ranks' militancy was there, but for years it has been stymied by the bureaucracy, the "labor lieutenants of capital," in Daniel De Leon's famous phrase. Someone fought for workers strikes against the war, while others did not. Not only opportunist pseudo-socialists but also many syndicalists and anarchists originally dismissed reports of the port shutdown. As Trotsky wrote in his pamphlet *Lessons of October* (1924), summarizing the experience of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the failure of repeated revolutionary attempts in Germany from 1918 to 1923: "Without a party, apart from a party, over the head of a party, or with a substitute for a party, the proletarian revolution cannot conquer. That is the principal lesson of the past decade." That lesson is no less valid today, as we in the League for the Fourth International seek to reforge the world party of socialist revolution. ■

Iraqi Dock Workers, Unions Salute ILWU May Day Antiwar Port Shutdown

The May 1 strike by the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) against the U.S. war on, and colonial occupation of, Iraq and Afghanistan was fervently greeted by Iraqi trade unions. The General Union of Port Workers in Iraq, affiliated to the General Federation of Workers Councils and Unions in Iraq (GFWCUI), sent a message of solidarity and itself called a one-hour May Day work stoppage on the docks at the ports of Umm Qasr and Khor Alzubair (see below). In addition, a solidarity motion was sent by a number of Iraqi unionists, many of them affiliated with the GFWCUI (also printed below).

While a number of labor bodies endorsed the ILWU action, the Iraqi port workers' stoppage was one of the few concrete labor actions against the war/occupation – and taking place literally under the guns of the U.S. occupation forces. The recent offensive by troops of the Iraqi puppet “government” against the southern Iraqi city of Basra had as a particular target the dock workers union. An article, “Iraqi Troops May Move to Reclaim Basra’s Port,” in the *New York Times* (13 March), published just prior to the attack, listed as a central objective “to seize control of this city’s decrepit but vital port from politically connected militias known more for corruption and inciting terrorism than for their skill in moving freight.” In particular, the article singled out for attack “a militia-controlled union that will load and unload ships only eight hours a day – rather than the 24 hours a day typical of modern ports – and a general air of seediness.”

Horrors! A union that will only load and unload ships eight hours a day – what a crime! This must be what the military and their media mouthpieces call “corruption” and “terrorism,” not to mention the “general air of seediness.” It should be noted that dock operations at the port at Umm Qasr have been contracted out to Stevedoring Services of America (SSA), the same labor-hating outfit that handles a lot of the war cargo shipped from California ports, and which was picketed by unionists and antiwar protesters last May (see “Longshore Workers Honor Picket Line, Shut Down War Cargo Shipper in Oakland,” in *The Internationalist* No. 26, July 2007). Another objective of the recent U.S./“Iraqi” army



Kevin Frayer/AP

Iraqi dock workers under the gun of U.S. occupation forces. Above: “Iraqi” navy patrols Basra harbor.

offensive is to go after the Southern Oil Company Union, headquartered in Basra, which stands in the way of the imperialists’ plans to hand over Iraqi oil to “multinational” companies like Exxon, BP and Shell.

In order to disguise the fact that the recent military offensive was specially targeted against labor, the *New York Times* article claims that “Shiite militias controlled by ... Fadhila,” a split-off from the Shiite movement led by Moktada al-Sadr, are “widely considered to be in control of the dock workers’ union.” The message from the port workers union to the ILWU gives the lie to this fabrication, notably rejecting “the sectarian gangs who are the product of the occupation, [and] have been trying to transfer their conflicts into our ranks.” In fact, the GFWCUI federation to which the port workers and Southern Oil Company workers are affiliated is linked to the Workers Communist Party of Iraq (WCPI), which has taken a position equally opposed to both the imperialist occupiers and the Islamist militias.

The stance of the WCPI and GFWCUI places them well to the left of the General Federation of Iraqi Workers (GFIW), led by the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP), which was for years part of U.S.-sponsored Iraqi exile coalitions and joined the puppet “governing council” set up by the U.S. after the 2003 invasion. While the affiliates of the ICP’s GFIW are outright “yellow (scab) unions,” the policy of the GFWCUI and WCPI (and the Iraq Freedom Congress, a popular front they sup-

port) has meant that they do *not* support military resistance against the colonial occupation forces, nor did they call for resisting the U.S.-led invasion. This leaves the field open to Islamic fundamentalist and Iraqi nationalist forces to lead resistance. While rejecting any political collaboration with Baathists and Islamists, class-conscious workers in Iraq would seek to undermine the occupation with industrial and, where possible, proletarian military action.

Particularly in view of the Iraqi port workers' courageous action in solidarity with the ILWU, American labor has a special obligation to defend the Iraqi dock union against union-busting by the U.S. military, its war-profiteering contractors and the quisling Iraqi government. Action against SSA and other war cargo shippers on the West Coast docks can stop them cold in Umm Qasr. Further information about the recent military action in southern Iraq is provided in a video, "The Attack on Basra Is an Attack on Labor," available on the Internet (<http://youtube.com/watch?v=W2vtOsGEy-I>).

May Day Message From Iraqi Docks Union

From: The General Union of Port Workers in Iraq

To: The International Longshore and Warehouse Union in the United States

Dear Brothers and Sisters of ILWU in California:

The courageous decision you made to carry out a strike on May Day to protest against the war and occupation of Iraq advances our struggle against occupation to bring a better future for us and for the rest of the world as well.

We are certain that a better world will only be created by the workers and what you are doing is an example and proof of what we say. The labor movement is the only element in the society that is able to change the political equations for the benefit of mankind. We in Iraq are looking up to you and support you until the victory over the US administration's barbarism is achieved.

Over the past five years, the sectarian gangs who are the product of the occupation, have been trying to transfer their conflicts into our ranks. Targeting workers, including their residential and shopping areas, indiscriminately using all sorts of explosive devices, mortar shells, and random shooting, were part of a bigger scheme that was aiming to tear up the society but they miserably failed to achieve their hellish goal. We are struggling today to defeat both the occupation and sectarian militias' agenda.

The pro-occupation government has been attempting to intervene into the workers affairs by imposing a single government-certified labor union. Furthermore it has been promoting privatization and an oil and gas law to use the occupation against the interests of the workers.

We the port workers view that our interests are inseparable from the interests of workers in Iraq and the world; therefore we are determined to continue our struggle to improve the living conditions of the workers and overpower all plots of the occupation, its economic and political projects.

Let us hold hands for the victory of our struggle.

Long live the port workers in California!

Long live May Day!

Long live International solidarity!

The General Union of Port Workers in Iraq An Affiliate Union with General Federation of Workers Councils and Unions in Iraq (GFWCUI)

May Day 2008 Statement from the Iraqi Labour Movement

To the Workers and All Peace Loving People of the World
April 29th, 2008

On this day of international labour solidarity we call on our fellow trade unionists and all those worldwide who have stood against war and occupation to increase support for our struggle for freedom from occupation - both the military and economic.

We call upon the governments, corporations and institutions behind the ongoing occupation of Iraq to respond to our demands for real democracy, true sovereignty and self-determination free of all foreign interference.

Five years of invasion, war and occupation have brought nothing but death, destruction, misery and suffering to our people. In the name of our "liberation," the invaders have destroyed our nation's infrastructure, bombed our neighbourhoods, broken into our homes, traumatized our children, assaulted and arrested many of our family members and neighbours, permitted the looting of our national treasures, and turned nearly twenty percent of our people into refugees.

The invaders helped to foment and then exploit sectarian divisions and terror attacks where there had been none. Our union offices have been raided. Union property has been seized and destroyed. Our bank accounts have been frozen. Our leaders have been beaten, arrested, abducted and assassinated. Our rights as workers have been routinely violated.

The Ba'athist legislation of 1987, which banned trade unions in the public sector and public enterprises (80% of all workers), is still in effect, enforced by Paul Bremer's post-invasion Occupation Authority and then by all subsequent Iraqi administrations. This is an attack on our rights and basic precepts of a democratic society, and is a grim reminder of the shadow of dictatorship still stalking our country.

Despite the horrific conditions in our country, we continue to organise and protest against the occupation, against workplaces abuses, and for better treatment and safer conditions.

Despite the sectarian plots around us, we believe in unity and solidarity and a common aim of public service, equality, and freedom to organise without external intrusions and coercion.

Our legitimacy comes from our members. Our principles of organisation are based on transparent and internationally recognised International Labour Organisation standards.

We call upon our allies and all the world's peace-loving peoples to help us to end the nightmare of occupation and restore our sovereignty and national independence so that we can chart our own course to the future.

1) We demand an immediate withdrawal of all foreign troops from our country, and utterly reject the agreement being negotiated with the USA for long-term bases and a military presence. The continued occupation fuels the violence in Iraq rather than alleviating it. Iraq must be returned to full sovereignty.

2) We demand the passage of a labour law promised by our Constitution, which adheres to ILO principles and on which Iraqi trade unionists have been fully consulted, to protect the rights of workers to organize, bargain and strike, independent of state control and interference.

3) We demand an end to meddling in our sovereign economic affairs by the International Monetary Fund, USA and UK. We demand withdrawal of all economic conditionalities attached to the IMF's agreements with Iraq, removal of US and UK economic "advisers" from the corridors of Iraqi government, and a recognition by those bodies that no major economic decisions concerning our services and resources can be made while foreign troops occupy the country.

4) We demand that the US government and others immediately cease lobbying for the oil law, which would fracture the country and hand control over our oil to multinational companies like Exxon, BP and Shell. We demand that all oil companies be prevented from entering into any long-term agreement concerning oil while Iraq remains occupied. We demand that the Iraqi government tear up the current draft of the oil law, and begin to develop a legitimate oil policy based on full and genuine consultation with the Iraqi people. Only after all occupation forces are gone should a long term plan for the development of our oil resources be adopted.

We seek your support and solidarity to help us end the military and economic occupation of our country. We ask for your solidarity for our right to organise and strike in defence of our interests as workers and of our public services and resources. Our public services are the legacy of generations before us and the inheritance of all future generations and must not be privatised.

We thank you for standing by us. We too stand with you in your own struggles for real democracy which we know you also struggle for, and against privatisation, exploitation and daily disempowerment in your workplaces and lives.

We commend those of you who have organised strikes and demonstrations to end the occupation in solidarity with us and we hope these actions will continue.

We look forward to the day when we have a world based on co-operation and solidarity. We look forward to a world free from war, sectarianism, competition and exploitation.

Endorsed by: (signers as of 4/29/08)

Hassan Juma'a Awad, President, Iraqi Federation of Oil Unions (IFOU)

Faleh Abood Umara, Deputy, Central Council, Iraqi Federation of Oil Unions (IFOU)

Falah Alwan, President, Federation of Workers Councils and Unions in Iraq (FWCUI)

Subhi Albadri, President, General Federation of Workers

Councils and Unions in Iraq (GFWCUI)

Nathim Rathi, President, Iraqi Port Workers Trade Union

Samir Almuawi, President, Engineering Professionals Trade Union

Ghzi Mushatat, President, Mechanic and Print Shop Trade Union

Waleed Alamiri, President, Electricity Trade Union

Ilham Talabani, President, Banking Services Trade Union

Abdullah Ubaid, President, Railway Trade Union
Ammar Ali, President, Transportation Trade Union

Abdalzahra Abdilhassan, President, Service Employees Trade Union

Sundus Sabeeh, President, Barber Shop Workers Trade Union

Kareem Lefta Sindan, President, Lumber and Construction Trade Union, General Federation of Iraqi Workers (GFIW)

Sabah Almusawi, President, Wasit Independent Trade Union

Shakir Hameed, President, Lumber And Construction Trade Union (GFWCUI)

Awad Ahmed, President, Teachers Federation of Salahideen

Alaa Ghazi Mushatat, President, Agricultural And Food Substance Industries

Adnan Rathi Shakir, President, Water Resources Trade Union

Nahrawan Yas, President, Woman Affairs Bureau

Sabah Alyasiri, President (GFWCUI) Babil

Ali Tah, President (GFWCUI) Najaf

Ali Abbas, President (GFWCUI) Basra

Muhi Abdalhussien, President (GFWCUI), Wasit

Ali Hashim Abdilhussien, President (GFWCUI) Kerbala

Ali Hussien, President (GFWCUI) Anbar

Mustafa Ameen, Arab Workers Bureau, President (GFWCUI)

Thameer Mzeail, Health Services, Union Committee

Khadija Saeed Abdullah, Teachers Federation, Member

Asmahan, Khudair, Woman Affairs, Textile Trade Unions

Adil Aljabiri, Oil Workers Trade Union Executive Bureau Member

Muhi Abdalhussien, Nadia Flaih, Service Employees Trade Unions

Rawneq Mohammed, Member, Media and Print Shop Trade Union

Abdlakareem Abdalsada, Vice President (GFWCUI)

Saeed Nima, Vice President (GFWCUI)

Sabri Abdalkareem, Member, (GFWCUI) Babil

Amjad Aljawhary, Representative of GFWCUI in North America

Defend Gaza...

continued from page 6

but against the Gaza population as a whole. Under these circumstances, the duty of all proletarian revolutionaries is to defend Gaza and the elected Palestinian government controlled by Hamas, and fight for the defeat of the joint U.S./Israeli/Fatah war, while continuing to politically oppose the Islamic fundamentalists.

While defending the Palestinian people, we call for Palestinian Arab and Hebrew-speaking working people to join together in fighting against their respective Zionist, Arab nationalist and Islamic fundamentalist rulers. After more than four decades of Israeli occupation, Israel and the Occupied Territories are in fact one country. The entire economy of Gaza and the West Bank is fully enmeshed into the Israeli economy. Any effort to divide up scarce resources (such as water) under capitalism will lead to sharp disputes in which the more powerful – i.e., the Zionists – will inevitably prevail. At the same time, while the presence of the Hebrew-speaking population in Palestine is the result of a crime against the Palestinian people driven off their lands (as well as the outgrowth of an imperialist crime against the Jewish people – the Nazi Holocaust, and the subsequent refusal of Western “democracies” to receive Jewish refugees), several million are nevertheless settled in what is now Israel. Any attempt to drive Jews out would also be a terrible crime, the kind of genocidal “ethnic cleansing” perpetrated by the Nazis and the Zionists.

Therefore, while recognizing the right to Palestinian self-determination and to a Palestinian state, as well as the right to existence (and thus of national self-determination) of the Hebrew population, we Trotskyists call for a joint Arab-Hebrew Palestinian workers state, as part of a socialist federation of the Near East. Clearly our call is today that of a tiny minority, but as the dead end of Zionism, Palestinian nationalism and Islamic fundamentalism is made increasingly clear, many on both sides of the national divide are recognizing there can only be a harmonious resolution of competing claims in the framework of a single state. Our key point is that such a state is impossible without a revolution through the joint efforts of Palestinian Arab and Hebrew-speaking working people. It will be necessary for Israelis themselves to deal with the Zionist butchers who have terrorized the Palestinian population, while Palestinians must throw off the hold of Islamicists who relegate women to the status of chattel, of domestic slaves.

To achieve this, it is necessary to build a common Trotskyist party in all of Palestine, as part of a struggle to reforge the Fourth International of Leon Trotsky. In the United States, it is necessary to build a revolutionary workers party in struggle both against the Republicans and the Democrats. Today, not only Hillary Clinton is in the pocket of the Zionist supporters, but so is Barack Obama, and the victory of either in the U.S. presidential elections au-

gurs ill for the Palestinian people. The struggle to bring justice to the millions of Palestinians who have languished under the iron heel of Zionist occupation, and who have fought back heroically against overwhelming odds, can only be part of a broader struggle to defeat the U.S. imperialist occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Many on the left blame the “Jewish lobby” for Washington’s aggression in the Near East, but they confuse who is the horse and who is the rider in this alliance. The Zionists have always sought to peddle their services to the dominant imperialist power in the region, beginning with the Balfour Declaration in 1917: first the British, now the U.S. But while Israel acts as a gendarme for U.S. imperialism, it is the *American imperialists* who hold the whip hand and who have launched the present “war on terror” which is really a war for U.S. world domination. Thus in defending the Palestinian people, revolutionaries in the U.S. must fight to not to “change U.S. foreign policy” but to *defeat the imperialist war in the Near East and the capitalist war on working people, oppressed minorities and immigrants in the U.S.* ■

Cuban Five...

continued from page 4

workers state against imperialism – first and foremost the U.S. imperialists, but also against their Spanish, British and Canadian counterparts – while fighting for a workers political revolution to oust the bureaucracy and defend the gains of the Cuban Revolution against the danger of counterrevolution from within and without. It is no secret that important elements of the Cuban bureaucracy would like to negotiate a deal with Washington. Yet the U.S. imperialists have made it quite clear that they are not the least interested in “peaceful coexistence” with a Cuban workers state, and any restoration of capitalism on the island will be a bloody affair. With the retirement of Fidel Castro and the substitution of his brother Raúl at the helm, the imperialists will seek to intensify pressure on the besieged island.

Key to a revolutionary defense of the Cuban Five is the fight to extend the revolution internationally. It is necessary to break with all the capitalist parties of war and counterrevolution; to forge Leninist-Trotskyist vanguard parties of the working class in the U.S., Cuba and throughout the world; and to mobilize the workers movement, oppressed racial minorities and all opponents of imperialism *in the United States* in defense of Cuba. The Cuban Five understand the link between the struggle for their freedom and that of other class-war prisoners in the U.S., including Mumia Abu-Jamal and Leonard Peltier. We demand that the Cuban Five be immediately released and returned to Cuba where they will be rightly greeted as heroes. We demand that Posada Carriles and Bosch be extradited to Cuba to stand trial before a jury of the relatives of their victims. We demand freedom now for Mumia Abu-Jamal and Leonard Peltier! And we demand that the Guantánamo naval base be returned to Cuba and the inmates of this infamous imperialist torture center be set free! ■

“Workers Vanguard” Brings Up the Rear

The Opportunist Left and the Port Strike Against the War:

The Sound of One Hand Clapping



Internationalist photo

Longshore union shut down all 29 West Coast ports on May 1 in first-ever workers action against U.S. imperialist war. ILWU drill team led off May Day labor march in San Francisco.

On May 1, ports up and down the Pacific Coast were shut down by the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) to demand an end to “this bloody war and occupation for imperial domination.” For the tame American labor movement, dominated by pro-capitalist “business unionism,” this is a first. Not only in recent times, it is the first time ever that an American union has taken industrial action against a U.S. war. News of the ILWU’s strike against the war has reverberated among labor militants internationally, while many antiwar activists hailed it. It can be a vital first step toward *defeating* the imperialist war abroad and the bosses’ war on immigrants, oppressed racial minorities, poor and working people “at home,” not by begging the bourgeois politicians but by mobilizing the power of the workers and their allies.

When we first reported at the beginning of March that the ILWU Coast Caucus had voted to undertake this historic action to demand an end to the war and occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from the entire Near East, many were incredulous. Who was the Internationalist Group, and weren’t they making this up? But then the ILWU posted an official announcement confirming the Caucus’ action and a two-month tug-of-war between the workers and the bosses began. Predictably, the labor bureaucracy tried to maneuver between these two forces, trying to play down its importance, pitching it as a patriotic “support the troops” act, declaring it an individual action by the members. But faced with rank-and-file support, the union tops couldn’t call it off. So on May 1, West Coast ports stood still.



While the peace movement beseeched Democrat-controlled Congress to pull out of Iraq, Internationalist Group called for workers strikes against the war and to break with the capitalist parties.

While the maritime employers threatened legal action and trade papers denounce reds under the beds (see “All Out on May Day,” *The Internationalist* special issue, 19 April), most of the left aside from the Internationalist Group was notably silent on the most significant *working-class action in the U.S. against the war* in memory. The number of articles on the ILWU’s bold stand appearing in the publications of the organized “revolutionary” left in the month leading up to the strike can be counted on the fingers of one hand. And those who deigned to notice it were at best lukewarm. Over at libcom.org, a few anarchists greeted the initial announcement with sneers. The ILWU had the contractual right to take a day off for a seminar anyway, said one pundit, this wasn’t really a strike. So how come the bosses pulled every legal lever to have it stopped? You have to wonder if they would really have minded if the longshore and warehouse workers had bowed down to the bosses’ arbitrator.

On the social-democratic left, Socialist Alternative (affiliated to Peter Taaffe’s Committee for a Workers International) reported in its newspaper, “Strike Against the War – Dockworkers to Shut Down Ports May 1” (*Justice*, March-April 2008). But Socialist Alternative had another axe to grind:

“It’s very understandable that many feel a certain ‘protest fatigue,’ as mass antiwar demonstrations have brought what seems like very limited results. ... However, mass antiwar dem-

onstrations still serve a crucial role in expressing public opposition to the war, radicalizing many of those who attend, and translating passive opposition into active protest. But these demonstrations need to be combined with bolder, more powerful tactics if an effective antiwar movement is to be built.”

So they want overcome “protest fatigue” by spicing up the “antiwar movement” with some bolder moves. Yet politically, they still want to chain it to bourgeois politicians. The rest of the issue is full of articles arguing for support for Ralph Nader, whom they also supported in the 2000 and 2004 elections. Claiming that this bourgeois populist represented a “left challenge for the White House,” as Socialist Alternative does, is pulling the wool over the eyes of its readers. Nader is an immigrant-bashing populist who went out of his way to curry favor (and rake in dollars) from the rightist Reform Party, dissident Republicans and the fascistic Pat Buchanan.

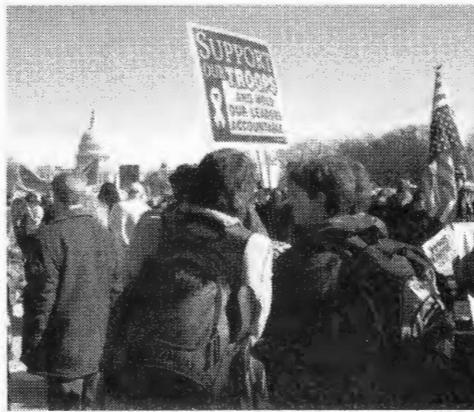
Another group of past Nader backers, the International Socialist Organization (ISO), took note of the dock workers’ port shutdown in passing and published a day-after account on its Internet site. The thrust of the ISO’s reportage was to treat the ILWU’s action as one more antiwar event, noting the support from would-be Green Party presidential candidate and former Democratic Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney and Cindy Sheehan, running against Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. Yet for the ISO, with its gaze fixed on bourgeois electoral politics and its patented method of taking positions one step to the left of the liberals, labor action is a sideshow. Despairing that “this will be a very tough year for independent, left-wing candidates” like Nader and McKinney, the ISO sees “opportunities for the left, but of a different kind,” namely by sidling up to the Democratic front-runner Barack Obama: “Anyone committed to fighting for change today should see how Obama’s campaign has raised hopes and expectations,” it writes, adding that “those hopes will be important in the struggles of the future – after the election and before it, too” (quotes from *Socialist Worker*, 25 January, 7 March and 15 February).

Various denizens of the San Francisco reformist swamp had little or nothing to say about the ILWU’s unprecedented port shutdown. Nat Weinstein’s *Socialist Viewpoint* (March-April 2008) ran a routine piece simply reprinting union resolutions, while Alan Benjamin’s *Socialist Organizer* couldn’t be bothered to even mention it: S.O.’s presence at the S.F. rally was solely to build support for McKinney. Jeff Mackler’s *Socialist Action* (affiliated with the United Secretariat, formerly led by the late Ernest Mandel), from which Weinstein and Benjamin split a while back, likewise hasn’t seen fit to comment on the antiwar strike. *Socialist Action* is focused on brokering an “Open U.S. National Antiwar Conference,” to be held in Cleveland this summer. This is likewise the current focus of the *Socialist Appeal* group (affiliated with Alan Woods’ International Marxist Tendency), which also said nothing about the ILWU action, nor did it merit a mention in the IMT’s report of May Day events internationally.

When it comes down to it, the reformist social democrats of various denominations (*Socialist Alternative*, *Socialist Worker*,



January 2007: Peace march calls on Congress to end the war. Below, left: Democrat Rev. Jesse Jackson, Republican Salt Lake City mayor Rocky Anderson, and Jane Fonda at the head of the march. Below, right: patriotic appeals to "Support Our Troops." They're not *our* troops.



Socialist Viewpoint, Socialist Organizer and Socialist Action) could care less about the ILWU's dramatic action. (Dock workers shut down the Coast to stop the war? Ho, hum.) Their aim is to revive, rebuild or resuscitate the exhausted "antiwar movement." At most, they might throw in "workers" as one more "sector" in their miniature "popular fronts" chaining opponents of the war to one or another bourgeois politician. This is precisely the program of the various antiwar "coalitions," whose entire strategy is, has been *and must be* to pressure the Democrats. Whether they have some Democrat on their speakers' platform or not, and mostly they do, the purpose of the endless and dwindling peace parades of the various competing antiwar groups is to "get Congress to act." Otherwise they have no point at all. And militant labor action gets in the way.

When the Democrats won control of both the Senate and House in the 2006 mid-term elections, largely on the basis of an antiwar vote, these opportunist leftists thought their time had come. United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ), and International ANSWER and the Troops Out Now Coalition held competing demonstrations in Washington, the first (January 27 [2007]) circling Congress and the second (March 17) marching to the Pentagon. The more "militant" pop-fronters staged some guer-

rilla theater in order to take some arrests, but it was still entirely in the framework of bourgeois pressure politics: it's lobbying in the streets. Yet once in control of the purse-strings, the Democrats kept on funding the war. Moreover, Congressional Democrats have been spearheading the drive to take the "war on terror" to the docks, in the form of the Transport Worker Identification Card (TWIC), which would produce a racial purge on the waterfront.

In contrast, the Internationalist Group proclaimed: "For Workers Strikes Against the War! Don't Beg Congress!" (*The Internationalist* special issue, 27 January 2007). As we laid out in our article, "Why We fight for Workers Strikes Against the War (and the Opportunists Don't)," in *The Internationalist* Special Supplement (October 2007), the reformist left is wedded to a program of chaining the working class and antiwar activists to the Democrats, who are now the *main war party* in Washington. It is the votes of Obama and Clinton that keep the warmongers in the White House and the Pentagon in business. The imperialist Congress is not about

to stop the imperialist war, and no peace parades, however large, are going to change that. This has already been demonstrated, as millions marched against the invasion and occupation of Iraq, which continues to this day. The capitalist ruling classes will take action only when they are forced to, by defeats on the battlefield and the prospect of sinking deeper into the quicksands of the Near East, or by working-class action in the imperialist homelands. And organizing that *class war*, not impotent peace crawls, is the task of revolutionaries in the U.S., Europe, Japan and elsewhere.

West Coast longshore workers called to "stop work to stop the war." This is an important beginning, but as we have said before, in the fight to put an end to imperialist war, "strikes are not enough." The bloody slaughter in the Near East will not be halted by one huge general strike, the *grand soir* (big night) that anarchists and syndicalists imagined, in which the whole capitalist edifice comes tumbling down because the workers stop working. It will take much more than that. The importance of this first antiwar strike is that it indicates the road to be followed, of mobilizing the power of the proletariat. It was the Russian October Revolution of 1917 that signaled the end of World War I and the German No-

ember Revolution of 1918 that brought it to a close. But because German workers lacked a revolutionary leadership forged in years of struggle like the Russian Bolsheviks of Lenin and Trotsky, and because capitalist rule was not overthrown, within months German imperialism, under social-democratic management, was back in the war business.

The reason the resolution for a "No Peace No Work Holiday" passed the Longshore Caucus is that, even as the union tops are still in the pocket of the Democratic Party, many in the union ranks sense the *bankruptcy of banking on the Democrats*. The ILWU voted to stop work because the delegates felt that workers have to take action on their own, that they can't trust the politicians. That places many a militant dock worker to the left of the opportunist left. But seeing the need for *independent* action by the working class against the bosses and the bosses' government is only the beginning of class consciousness. It is necessary to cohere that in the struggle to build a *revolutionary workers party* that can bring down the imperialist system which produces endless war, poverty and racism. History shows that only *international socialist revolution* will put an end to imperialist war.

On Charlatans, Imposters and Mountebanks

That will take a struggle to break the working class from the stranglehold of capitalism's "labor lieutenants." This is where the political double-talk from some opportunists who strike a more "critical" pose is particularly pernicious, as they *equate the ranks with the union misleaders*. David North's "World Socialist Web Site," at the end of an article on the longshore work stoppage remarked that at the rally "organizers and union officials promoted the very policy of channeling popular antiwar sentiment behind the Democratic Party that has led all efforts to end the war into a blind alley." WSWS goes on: "The contradiction between the official demand of the walkout – the immediate withdrawal of US troops from Iraq – and the ILWU's political perspective is expressed in the union's endorsement of Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama." But the ILWU does not have a uniform political policy, and the Northite claim that it does has far-reaching consequences.

Since our first article on the May Day port shutdown, *The Internationalist* has stressed the contradiction between the union delegates' action and the union leadership's pro-capitalist political perspective. The WSWS fails to note that the motion voted at the ILWU's Coast Caucus condemned the Democrats' complicity in the imperialist war as a central reason for the stop-work action. It was the *union tops*, headed up by ILWU president Bob McEllrath, who did not initiate this strike but couldn't simply disappear the decision taken at the Caucus, who tried to put a "social-patriotic" spin on the whole thing and bind the dock workers to the Democrats. Rather than resolving the contradiction by fighting in the unions to oust the labor fakers, WSWS declares trade unions everywhere to be mere capitalist tools. This sabotages workers' struggles. The Northites call on auto workers to reject union organizers of the United Auto Workers, as do the auto bosses. And it turns out that the maximum

leader of the WSWS, who also claims to head the "International Committee of the Fourth International," is simultaneously CEO of Grand River Printing & Imaging – a non-union printing company, which according to its website makes a cool \$25 million a year.

Same tune, slightly different lyrics from the centrists of the Spartacist League. The SL doesn't label the unions bourgeois, as the WSWS does, but it repeatedly uses the leadership's betrayals as an excuse not to fight for workers action. For weeks after the ILWU call for a stop-work action against the war was announced, we kept asking SLers if they supported it, to which they lamely replied "we don't have an article," and tried to change the subject: What about the presence of one Bill Logan at the October 20 Labor Conference to Stop the War called by ILWU Local 10? What's that got to do with it, a Marxist (or for that matter, any sane person) would respond. The next subterfuge was to say that it was only a "stop-work" meeting authorized by the contract, so no big deal.

Finally, *Workers Vanguard* (No. 912, 11 April) came out with a brief mention, buried in the back of an article on Iraq: "Now the ILWU longshore union is calling for an eight-hour work stoppage on May 1 in opposition to the war. We are all in favor of a work stoppage to demand that all U.S. troops get out of Iraq. But this action is being built by the ILWU International bureaucracy through social-patriotic appeals to 'express support for the troops by bringing them home safely,' and comes together with the ILWU's endorsement of Barack Obama."

Then, on the eve of the walkout, buried at the end of a speech about Mumia Abu-Jamal, there is a second two-liner: "Likewise, a work stoppage on May 1st, the international workers holiday, could be a powerful blow against the bloody imperialist occupation of Iraq. But the ILWU international leadership has wrapped the call for this stop-work action in 'support our troops' jingoism" (WV No. 913, 25 April).

Thousands of longshore workers are set to shut down every port on the Pacific Coast against the war. Where do you stand? "Yes, but," says the Spartacist League: *yes*, a work stoppage "could" be a blow against the imperialist occupation, *but* the leadership has wrapped it in jingoism. Conclusion? For the SL, this was an excuse to do nothing. When you get down to brass tacks, it didn't lift a finger to fight for the first-ever industrial action by a major U.S. union against the imperialist war. WV says it is "all in favor" of such a work stoppage? Nonsense. The SL supporter in the union didn't say a word in favor of the stop-work action in three separate union meetings, and only got up in the last meeting to say that the position of the ILWU International in opposing a union march in San Francisco on May Day meant that it was all over.

Ever vigilant to "pull [its] hands out of the boiling water" of the class struggle, as spokesmen for the SL's International Communist League (ICL) said in justifying their flight from a sharp battle against the police in Brazil in 1996¹, here they

¹ See our bulletin *From a Drift Toward Abstentionism to Desertion from the Class Struggle* (July 1996) and "The ICL Leaders' Cover Story: Smokescreen for a Betrayal," in *The Internationalist* No. 1, January-February 1997

don't even bother to take their hands out of their pockets.

After the event, *Workers Vanguard* (No. 914, 9 May) comes out with a back-page article, "ILWU Shuts West Coast Ports on May Day," which has a downright schizophrenic quality to it. The front of the article says, "We salute the more than 27,000 longshoremen, both registered men and casuals, who withheld their labor. The ILWU port shutdown points the way to the kind of working-class action that needs to be mobilized against the bloody U.S. imperialist occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan." It continues, "But the ILWU leadership politically undermined this action by channeling the ranks' anger at the Iraqi occupation and desire to defend their union into pro-Democratic Party 'national unity' patriotism." That's certainly what the ILWU tops *sought* to do, as we showed. The entire last half of the article, however, consists of attacking Jack Heyman, the Local 10 longshoreman who authored the resolution for the "No Peace, No Work Holiday," and the Internationalist Group that supposedly "downplayed the pro-capitalist politics of the May Day protest organizers and uncritically enthuses over left-talking bureaucrat Jack Heyman." What a travesty, particularly coming from the left-talking centrists of the SL who did *nothing whatsoever* to fight for a strike against the war!

As James P. Cannon, the founder of American Trotskyism, used to say about the opportunists he had to deal with, you need to get out your hip boots and a shovel to remove the piles of filth the *anti-Trotskyists* pile up. In the first place, in our March 1 article announcing the stop-work action against the war, we warned: "The ILWU leadership could get cold feet, since this motion was passed because of overwhelming support from the delegates despite attempts to stop it or, fail-

ing that, to water it down or limit the action." Later on in the same article, we wrote:

"The efforts to undercut the motion continue, as is to be expected from a leadership which, like the rest of the pro-capitalist labor bureaucracy, seeks 'labor peace' with the bosses. In his letter to [AFL-CIO president John] Sweeney, ILWU International president [McEllrath] tried to present the action as an effort to 'express support for the troops by bringing them home safely,' although the motion voted by the delegates says nothing of the sort. Playing the 'support our troops' game is an effort to swear loyalty to the broader aims of U.S. imperialism. It aids the warmongers, when what's needed is independent working-class action against the system that produces endless imperialist war. Yet despite the efforts to water it down and distort it, the May 1 action voted for by the ILWU delegates is a call to use labor's muscle to put an end to the war."

So we denounced the pro-capitalist politics of the bureaucracy from the outset, *almost six weeks* before *Workers Rearguard* said a word about McEllrath's "support our troops" line, or for that matter wrote anything at all about the projected port shutdown against the war.

According to the *WV* smear job, "the IG ... obscures the fact that the trade-union bureaucracy criminally subordinated the May Day work action to pro-Democratic Party pressure politics." We hardly obscured the fact that this is what the ILWU tops *tried to do*. In addition to the quote above, and the ILWU Caucus resolution attacking the Democrats for funding the war, in our second article (19 April), we wrote that what was required was working-class action independent of the bosses, **and** "What that takes is a fundamental break from the Democratic Party and the pro-capitalist politics that infuse the labor bureaucracy." But *WV* is saying something else: if "the May Day work action" itself had been decisively *subordinated* to the Democratic Party, then it was not a working-class action but bourgeois pressure politics, so says the SL.

Shutting down all 29 West Coast ports to demand an end to the war funded by the Democrats and immediate withdrawal of the troops that the Democrats plan to leave in the area is a pro-Democratic Party action?! Since when? And in that case, how does the ILWU port shutdown "point the way to the kind of working-class action" needed against the war (as *WV* states a few paragraphs earlier) if it's just one more tactic to pressure the Democrats. The schizoid character of the article would be positively clinical if it weren't political. The SL is a *centrist* organization which says one thing when trying to gain favor with the ILWU ranks, who are justly proud of their historic action, and something quite different when going after opponents to its left. It zigs and zags depending on the pressures it is subjected to by the bourgeoisie. And above all, its sometimes revolutionary-sounding words do not match its often opportunist deeds.

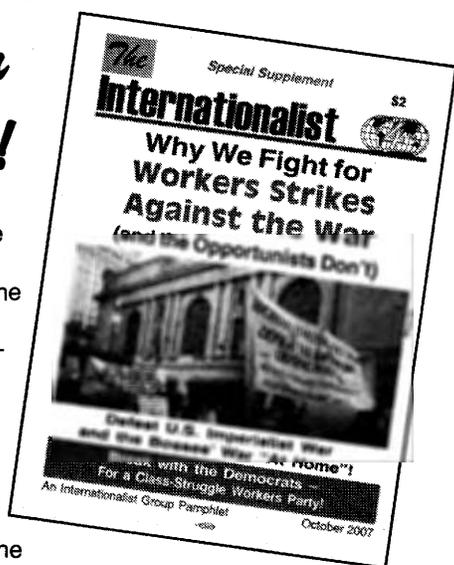
WV takes us to task for allegedly not polemicizing against the ILWU's support for Obama, although our first article was written before the ILWU *leadership's* endorsement was announced. This is a pink herring if ever there was one. The first article repeatedly attacks the Democrats, and in our sec-

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ond article, we noted: “The ILWU leaders’ endorsement of Obama hurts rather than helps the struggle against imperialist war and undercuts the May 1 work stoppage.” (“How delicately put,” WV sneers at our statement, yet 18 paragraphs earlier it wrote that “the ILWU leadership undermined this action” with its pro-Democratic Party politics.) And while the SL only attacks the union tops’ support for the Democratic front-runner, we also criticized Green Party presidential hopeful Cynthia McKinney, saying that she was a essentially a homeless Democrat. McKinney, who spoke at the rally, has much more support among the organizers of the port shutdown than Democrat Obama, who wants to keep tens of thousands of U.S. troops in the Near East and Iraq. But WV barely mentions her.

Where we have sought to combat the political illusions among the most militant sectors of the union and overcome the obstacles to a powerful workers action, the SL wants to use the leaders’ Democratic Party politics as an excuse to wash its hands of the whole thing. Even the bosses’ press noted that the motion was passed by the rank and file delegates over resistance from the leaders. While the bureaucrats endorsed Obama, the Longshore Caucus delegates loudly denounced the Democrats in the discussion. There is not a social-patriotic word or an ounce of support to the Democrats in the ILWU resolution. But rather than fighting against the bureaucrats, the SL used their attempts to distort and defang the port shutdown, *in order to downplay the fact that one of the most militant unions in the United States is for the first time ever using its industrial power to fight against imperialist war.*

Why? Because for years now the SL – like the other opportunists – has maintained that workers action against the war is not going to happen. Now that it has, they must try to minimize it. In part this is motivated by petty concerns for their own prestige. More particularly, it is because they rightly identify the slogan of “Workers Strikes Against the War” with the Internationalist Group. But most fundamentally, the reason is programmatic: any real fight for workers action against the war goes against the political line and outlook they have adopted over the past decade. These days it is often hard to distinguish between WV and the other left-opportunist papers over the issue of the war: they all call for “Out Now!” Back in the days when the SL stood for revolutionary Trotskyism, it used to criticize this slogan as an appeal to defeatist sectors of the bourgeoisie who want to cut their losses on the battlefield. The SL claims it is distinguished



Conlutas

Our comrades of the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil won endorsements of the ILWU port shutdown by Conlutas and Intersindical labor federations and Sepe teachers union in Rio de Janeiro.

by calling for “Class Struggle at Home,” which could mean just about anything. But one thing it clearly does *not* mean, coming from the SL, is organizing to shut down the West Coast docks to demand immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from the Near East.

The SL and its supporters in the unions didn’t lift a finger to fight for workers action against the war – not in the ILWU or anywhere else – while IG supporters worked overtime to build actions in support of the West Coast longshore work stoppage (see the report on solidarity actions at the City University of New York). Our comrades of the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil obtained endorsements for the ILWU action from the Sepe teachers union in the state of Rio de Janeiro, and from the Intersindical and Conlutas union federations. As the union march stepped off on May Day in San Francisco, ILWUers chanted “Ready to fight? Damn right!” The SL, if it were honest, would reply, “No way!” But honesty is not a virtue of imposters.

WV seeks to use the fact that ILWU dispatchers sent a few longshoremen to the Concord Naval Weapons Station to beat the IG over the head. That only shows exactly what we have argued all along, that the union tops were trying to undercut the action. While the SL long ago abandoned any real fight for the hot-cargoing of military cargo, we reprinted Jack Heyman’s April 17 leaflet that clearly warned against any attempt to move any kind of cargo:

“No work should be done in any port on the Coast Thursday May 1st, nothing moves. If any port works, it undercuts the whole purpose of our action and shows a divided ILWU to PMA. We had a democratic vote to stop work and mobilize

Spartacist League Also Hailed Democrat Barbara Lee

Hero from Oakland

Lone standout on war resolution

By Monica Moorehead

The first of the 2007 House votes was the resolution to stop the war in Iraq. It passed 217-210. The lone Democrat to vote against the war was Barbara Lee.

Over the past three years, Lee has developed a reputation of going against the grain of public opinion. She has generally opposed warlike actions.

In 2007, she was one of five congresswomen who voted against the Iraq War. In 2006, she was the only member of the Democratic opposition to the U.S. military budget.

Lee, who is African American, said: "I don't think that we should take any action that will cause any more loss of life. Violence begins to take hold and we don't want that to happen. That's the people."

She represents the heavily Democratic District Congressional District. She said:

In her Oakland and Berkeley, Calif.,

Lee is a member of the Democratic Party for the Bay Area.

Lee's political career began in 1996. She

was elected to the Oakland City Council.

She served on the Council for two years.

She then served on the Berkeley City

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Rep. Barbara Lee voted against the war resolution.

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repression against immigrants, blacks and all its perceived opponents. To her credit, black Oakland Congresswoman Barbara Lee, a protégé of former liberal Congressman Ron Dellums, registered the sole vote against the resolution giving Bush a blank check for war. For his part, Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan, calling America "the greatest nation on this earth."

-from Workers World, 29 September 2001

-from Workers Vanguard, 28 September 2001

The Latter-Day Spartacist League: Left Centrists Lurching to the Right

for a 'No Peace No Work Holiday,' remember? No work means no work, period."

Did the SL and its supporters try to do anything to stop the dispatching to Concord? Hardly. At least the organizers of the port shutdown were out on the Oakland docks that morning stopping an attempted scab operation at Stevedoring Services of America. And the fact remains that shipping was shut down up and down the West Coast on May 1 against the U.S. war.

In its usual "gotcha" politics, the WV article absurdly claims that "the IG conveniently omits any mention of taking a side with Afghanistan or Iraq against the U.S." This is ludicrous! In "All Out on May Day!" (*Internationalist* special issue, 19 April), we "conveniently" wrote:

"In order to defeat the imperialist war abroad and the bosses' war 'at home,' class-conscious workers must oppose all the capitalist parties and politicians, and build a class-struggle workers party. Revolutionaries fight to drive the U.S. out of Iraq and Afghanistan - which will be anything but orderly, as the U.S.' exit from Vietnam showed - by workers action. We would like to see the 'diplomats' (spies) and 'contractors' (mercenaries) clambering onto the roof of the U.S. embassy desperately trying to helicopter out of the 'Green Zone' in Baghdad. A defeat there would put a damper on U.S. imperial adventures around the world, and would aid the struggle of working people, immigrants and oppressed minorities in the United States itself."

And in the article "May Day Strike Against the War Shuts Down All U.S. West Coast Ports" (3 May), we again declared: "Now it is necessary to go beyond this vital beginning to generalize the struggle for working-class action to defeat the imperialist war abroad and on the home front." The idea that calling to drive the U.S. out of Iraq isn't "taking a side with Afghanistan and Iraq against the U.S." is laughable. But WV's aim is to cover up the fact that the SL of today has abandoned the call to defeat U.S. imperialism in this war, pumping out one bogus justification after another for this betrayal of basic Leninist politics (see below), whereas the IG says it loud and clear.

There is a whole history behind the Spartacist League's flimflam on workers action against the war. Back in 1998, when the Clinton administration attacked Iraq, the SL dropped its longstanding call for workers strikes against the war, ridiculing the IG for raising this and claiming it had no "resonance" among the workers (see "SL Rejects Calls for Labor Strikes Against Imperialist War Moves," *The Internationalist* No. 5, April-May 1998). When last May the Oakland Education Association put up a union picket outside the docks calling not to handle war cargo and ILWU longshoremen honored the picket, WV dismissed it with a wave of the hand, saying "it's not clear that any war materiel was stopped that day." Questioned by IG supporters over whether they call for workers strikes against the war today, SLers have said flat-out, "No." Why not? Because there supposedly is "no instrumentality," no one to carry this out.

Coming off of the May 2007 picket of war shippers on the Oakland docks, ILWU Locals 10 and 34 called a Labor Conference to Stop the War, held in the Local 10 hall in San Francisco last October 20. The meeting drew some 150 labor and left activists from California and around the country. Out of it came a resolution: "Therefore be it resolved that this conference calls for participants to go back to their unions committed to the urgent task of organizing actions, including strikes where possible, at the workplace against the war, recognizing that only an independent mobilization of labor can stop these wars and withdraw the troops immediately." The SL dismissed the conference as a "talk shop," but the members of the ILWU actually carried out the motion, called the May Day work stoppage, and shut down the entire West Coast in an industrial action against the war - something no other union in the U.S. has done. That doesn't amount to an empty talk shop in our book.

As an aside, one of WV's arguments in trying to write off

the conference was that the head of the San Francisco Labor Council, Tim Paulson, got up there to hail Democrat Barbara Lee, and that at a subsequent antiwar march, a labor contingent chanted "Barbara Lee speaks for me." This takes a lot ofchutzpah coming from the Spartacist League. In the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, *WV* (Nos. 765 and 767, 28 September and 26 October 2001) itself repeatedly and uncritically hailed Lee, saying that she was the only Representative to vote against "giving Bush a blank check for war." The SL echoed the entire Bay Area popular front (and the ILWU leadership) in praising the Democratic Congresswoman. So after 9/11, *Barbara Lee spoke for thee, SL*, as well as for the WWP, CP, ISO, etc. While opportunists of every stripe all applauded the bourgeois politician, we pointed out that, although Lee voted against the declaration of war on Afghanistan, she voted for the \$40 billion "emergency" war credits bill that literally contained a *blank check* (an unspecified appropriation) for the CIA! (See our article, "SL/ICL Flinches on Afghanistan War," in *The Internationalist* No. 12, Fall 2001)

"No resonance," "no instrumentality," Bill Logan, Barbara Lee – the SL has had one excuse after another for why it doesn't fight for workers action against imperialist war. Now that thousands of longshore workers from San Diego to Seattle have actually struck against the war, you might think that this demand would hum for them. Nope. These people are in serious need of a resonator – and a refresher course on the SL's own history. Challenged by the IG right outside the Local 10 hall on the day of the port shutdown over their renunciation of the long-standing Spartacist call for workers strikes against the war, two members of the SL Central Committee insisted that the SL didn't raise this demand until very late in the Vietnam War, when workers were beginning to go into action. One cited the date 1970. Wrong. We urged them and their office-bound comrades to go back and read the bound volumes of *Spartacist* where they will find a 21 October 1967 leaflet, "From Protest to Power," with a subhead "For Anti-War Strike Actions." We can assure them that workers strikes against the war were not busting out all over at the time. The then-revolutionary SL did not make its demands dependent on the present consciousness of the workers, whereas the centrist SL of today uses this as an excuse to renounce key elements of its former program.

Thus in the midst of the post-9/11 war hysteria the SL's paper *Workers Vanguard* (No. 767, 26 October 2001) accused the Internationalist Group of "Playing the Counterfeit Card of Anti-Americanism" because we continued to uphold the revolutionary defeatist program of Lenin and Trotsky (see "ICL Refuses to Call for Defeat of U.S. Imperialism, 'Anti-American' Baites the IG," *The Internationalist* No. 12, Fall 2001). After this shameful flinch before U.S. imperialism, and ominous smear against the IG, the next fall, as the Bush administration was gearing up to invade Iraq, the Spartacist League suddenly dropped its decades-long call for "*hot-cargoing*" war materiel. With the West Coast docks already shut down because of a PMA lockout, when stopping the flow

SL "Anti-American" Baites the IG

as in Puerto Rico and Mexico... pushed out to flatter petty-bourgeois nationalist forces.

Playing the Counterfeit Card of Anti-Americanism

In its 27 September statement, the IG writes of the Spartacist League: "Thus the SL put out a statement dated September 27 with the innocuous title, 'The Workers' Struggle Against the September 11 Terrorist Attack.' While..."

...and jingoism... is manipulating.

But the IG's purpose is otherwise; it is playing to a different audience, one of "Third World" nationalists for whom the "only good American is a dead American." One can search their two statements in vain for anything of substance... with how the fake left...

—from *Workers Vanguard* No. 767, 26 October 2001

While "anti-American" baiting the Internationalist Group, the SL uncritically quoted Democratic Party politician hailing the Statue of Liberty and the "sacred" Constitution that consecrated slavery.

many black Americans. Reflecting such apprehensions, Chicago-area Congressman Jesse Jackson Jr. pointed out: "The terrorists didn't attack the Statue of Liberty, the Constitution or the Bill of Rights or the Declaration of Independence. They attacked the symbols of our economic and military power in the world. It's the supporters of this bill who are really attacking American liberties that are contained in our most sacred historical documents."

—from *Workers Vanguard* No. 768, 9 November 2001

of war materiel was directly posed (and more possible than ever), the SL decided it was too dangerous to call for this because of the threat of repression in the form of an injunction under the Taft-Hartley Act (see "SL: Hard to Starboard," *The Internationalist* No. 15, January-February 2003).

While the Internationalist Group called to "Strike Against Taft-Hartley! Hot-Cargo War Materiel!" and raised these demands on the Oakland docks, the Spartacist League dumped them. In response, we recalled some SL history:



Labor rally in defense of the ILWU, 5 October 2002. Thousands cheered calls to shut down the Bay Bridge but SL didn't call for strike against Taft-Hartley injunction alleging the "political context" wasn't right.

"Back in 1971, when a national longshore walkout was ended when President Richard Nixon issued a Taft-Hartley injunction, *WV* denounced ILWU leader Harry Bridges for 'whip[ping] the men back to work under the excuse of the Taft-Hartley injunction' and urged 'defiance of Taft-Hartley.' A five-point program for longshore prominently highlighted the demands: 'For labor strikes against the war: Halt the flow of all war goods' (*Workers Vanguard* No. 3, November 1971). That was then, this is now, we can already hear the SL say."

Stung by our attack, the SL replied, "OK, we'll say it: That was then, this is now. What agitational slogans are raised are not divorced from political context and social reality" (*WV* No. 797, 14 February 2003). The article went on: "in this country where the working class has little even elemental class consciousness, the call for political strikes is only a few steps short of calling for a proletarian insurrection." The political context and social reality in 2002 was that Bay Area workers were incensed over the government's Taft-Hartley threats against the ILWU. At a labor rally of thousands there were calls for strike action to shut down the Bay Bridge. What stood in the way was the sellout labor bureaucracy, and the now-centrist Spartacist League didn't say boo. The same *WV* article justified refusing to call for a vote against the sellout contract with the pseudo-"leftist" argument that the ILWU leadership was so rotten that what could one do?

But it's not the first time the ex-Trotskyist SL has adopted such a shameful position. Over the years the West Coast dock union has undertaken a number of praiseworthy labor actions, some of which are cited in the ILWU resolution, including refusing to load bombs bound for the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile in 1978 and blocking military cargo to the Salvadoran military junta in 1981. In April 1999 the ILWU shut down the

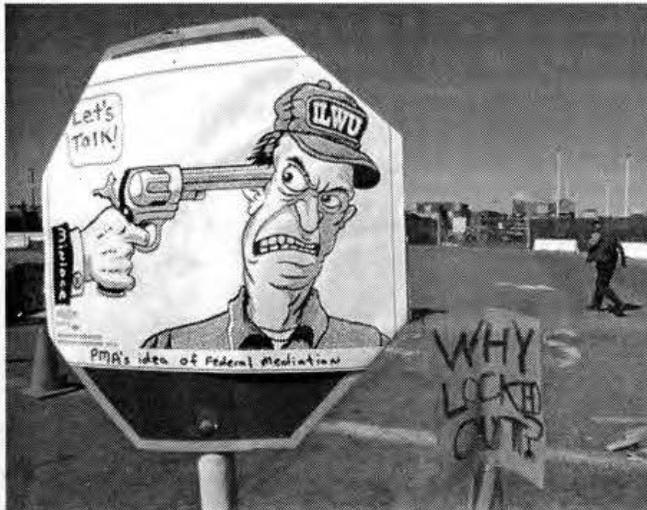
entire Pacific Coast demanding freedom for the foremost class-war prisoner in the U.S., Mumia Abu-Jamal, the former Black Panther and world-renowned journalist who has sat on Pennsylvania's death row for the last quarter century, sentenced to die for a murder of which he is entirely innocent. This action was taken in conjunction with the teachers union in the state of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, who the day earlier held a work stoppage demanding Mumia be freed.

The response of the Spartacist League? Well, they had several responses. Before the ILWU action, *WV* claimed it was just a "two-hour" union meeting; afterwards it said it was nothing but "regular monthly union meetings," and denounced those, like the IG, who "tout[ed] these as 'work stoppages'." Two years later, *WV* (25 May 2001) did an about-face and declared that, "The April 1999 stopwork by the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) did point to the sort of powerful labor action needed to strike a giant blow against the capitalist frame-up system." It took this supposed "vanguard" quite a while to figure that out. The SL's response was an example of what it later characterized as "stodgy demoralized sectarianism" ("A Hard Look at Recent Party Work and Current Tasks" (*WV* No. 841, 4 February 2005). And it's no less stodgy or demoralized today.

Meanwhile, *WV* has remained silent to this day about the simultaneous April 1999 work stoppage by the Rio de Janeiro teachers, as well as the subsequent actions of the Rio state CUT labor federation, bank workers, teachers and postal workers in raising the demand for Mumia's freedom. Why the silence? Because our comrades of the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil sparked these actions (see "SL Zigzags on Port Shutdown for Mumia's Freedom," *The Internationalist* No. 10, June 2001). The Rio teachers union Sepe just did it again, striking on May 7 for two demands, defense of public education and freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal, again at the initiative of the LQB, and published a four-page issue of its newspaper dedicated to Mumia. Wait and see if *WV* recognizes this, but don't hold your breath.

The Spartacist League first raised Jamal's case to public awareness and for years played a major role in his legal defense. It also rightly opposed calls by the reformists who focus protests on the demand for a new trial, implying faith in the capitalist "justice" system. The calls by the Partisan Defense Committee (PDC) on trade-union leaders to come out for Mumia's freedom are also praiseworthy. We have praised this work and defended the SL against smears and exclusion attempts by the "new trial" reformists/liberals, as well as endorsing and speaking at PDC Mumia demonstrations (as has Jack Heyman). But while the SL/PDC calls in the abstract to "Mobilize Labor's Power - For Mass Protest!" when it comes

Paul Sakuma/AP



In October 2002 PMA lockout, with docks already shut down, SL dropped call to “hot cargo” (refuse to handle) war cargo.

to actually mobilizing the ranks to use their power in strike action, it has done precious little, if anything at all.

So we will re-raise a question we have posed to the SL many times over the years:

- When and where in the last decade have union supporters of the SL or ICL so much as put forward a motion to stop work for Mumia’s freedom? So far no one has ever given an example, and SL union supporters in New York have confirmed that they have *not* raised such calls in their unions?

- And since the SL says it is “all in favor” of a work stoppage against imperialist war, let us ask: When and where in the last decade have union supporters of the SL or ICL put forward a motion to stop work against imperialist war?

Words and Deeds

One of the characteristics of centrists is the gulf between what they say and do: revolutionary in words, reformist in deeds. Very occasionally, buried deep in an interminable speech by some SLer, you may find a statement that, of course, they are for the defeat of U.S. imperialism. (Incidentally, the same is true of the ISO, WWP, PSL, SWP and other reformists.) They may whisper it, *sotto voce*, stage left, but they do not raise the banner of the fundamental Leninist and Trotskyist position that revolutionaries must fight for the *defeat of “their own” bourgeoisie in an imperialist war*. Nor do they fight for workers strikes against the war. If some workers do it, like the British train drivers, Italian railroad workers and Japanese dock workers in 2003, or on a far larger scale, if the ILWU shuts down the entire U.S. West Coast against the war, then well and good, the SL/ICL will mutter some faint words of praise after the fact. Thanks for nothing.

This brings up an important aspect of the sterile abstract propagandism and abstentionism into which the Spartacist League has sunk as its leaders and much of the membership became demoralized in the aftermath of the world-historic defeat represented by the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union and the East European bureaucratically deformed

workers states. It’s not just that the SL hasn’t fought for workers strikes against the war, they actually end up aiding the bureaucrats. Their arguments were clearly laid out in response to a letter by Jack Heyman to *Workers Vanguard* (see WV No. 873, 7 July 2006). Heyman pointed to WV’s earlier justification for not raising a word of criticism of New York transit union leader Roger Toussaint in a leaflet on the 2005 transit strike. “The [SL] leaflet did not directly attack Toussaint,” wrote WV, adding: “Since we could not point to an alternative leadership of the strike, to do so would only have served to weaken the strike.” What a capitulation!

In response to Heyman’s letter, the WV editors go on at length as to why “we do not currently urge our supporters in the unions to launch oppositional caucuses.”

“Today we are faced with a different conjuncture than in the ’60s and ’70s. Decades of capitalist attacks, combined with the effects of deindustrialization in the U.S., have greatly set back the unions. The counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union in 1991-92 has served to throw back proletarian consciousness generally, albeit unevenly. Under these conditions, for two or three supporters lacking a solid programmatic base of support to form a caucus would serve to unnecessarily set them up for victimization and/or lead to their accommodation to the labor tops, likely through a bloc with trade-union careerists.”

So let’s add this up. According to the Spartacist League, the workers’ consciousness has sunk to such an abysmal level (from what?) that to build opposition caucuses would set up SL supporters for victimization or lure them into selling out. Therefore, *the SL doesn’t wage an oppositional struggle against the bureaucracy inside the unions*. And since they couldn’t point to an alternative leadership (in a union where they have several supporters, who are not engaged in oppositional struggle), *the SL doesn’t criticize the union leadership from the outside either during a hard-fought strike which the leadership criminally sold out. This self-serving argument justifies tacitly siding with the pro-capitalist union bureaucracy*. Having capitulated to the ILWU bureaucracy during the 2002 longshore lockout (as detailed above), and then justified this capitulation “theoretically,” they extended the rationale and the “theory” to cover their capitulatory line on the TWU and unions in genera

The latter-day SL/ICL’s line is, and has been for the last dozen years, that in the post-Soviet period any oppositional activity and/or serious labor struggle will be either adventurist or opportunist. This is the excuse to abandon in practice their former class-struggle program in the unions. In 1997 the ICL fled from the struggle to remove police from the unions in Brazil on the grounds that it posed “unacceptable risks to the vanguard” (meaning itself). In 1998 it abandoned the call for workers strikes against the war, because it supposedly lacks “resonance” among the workers. In 2001 it dropped the call for the defeat of “its own” imperialist bourgeoisie in the war over Afghanistan, and later Iraq on the grounds that it is just “rrrevolutionary phrasemongering.” In 2002, it dumped the call to “hot-cargo” war materiel because of the threat of a Taft-Hartley injunction.

continued on page 46

NYC May Day in Solidarity with the ILWU

The following article is based on a report by a PSC delegate and supporter of the Internationalist Group.

The May 1 West Coast port shutdown against the war by the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) had an impact in New York City. The dock workers' defiant action demanding immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from the Near East was an inspiration to workers, students and all opponents of imperialist war – as well as an example to emulate.

May Day events in solidarity with the ILWU action were held on eleven campuses of the City University of New York (CUNY) by chapters of the Professional Staff Congress (PSC), the union representing CUNY faculty and staff. These included rallies and teach-ins at Hunter College, Hostos Community College and Bronx Community College, a speak-out against military recruiters at Queens College, a march into Manhattan from NY City Tech, and tabling at several other units of the largest urban public university in the United States.

At Hunter College, preparations had been underway for weeks, with beautiful posters, signs and more than 1,500 leaflets distributed by faculty and students as well as immigrant-rights activists and cab drivers who came to help out. The Hunter student newspaper, *The Envoy*, ran an extensive article, "PSC Supports Dock Workers' Strike on May Day to End War," quoting history professor Sándor John, who noted that the working class has "a power that can shut down the whole country," which is "much stronger than 10,000 marches or rallies."

John pointed out that the PSC's support for the dock workers' historic action against the war on Iraq and Afghanistan is "very strongly connected to building a strong union and our ability to fight for anything." Film professor Tami Gold, a noted documentary filmmaker and incoming chair of the Hunter PSC chapter, pointed out that faculty pay at CUNY had fallen by 27 to 51 percent in recent years as salaries failed to keep up with inflation. The PSC has been working without a contract since last September, while adjuncts continue to get poverty-level pay.



CUNY students and faculty show support for ILWU port strike against the war.

David Pavlosky



David Pavlosky

The Hunter rally drew support from labor and immigrant groups that sought a concrete way to express solidarity with the longshore workers' port shutdown. In addition to the New York Taxi Workers Alliance (a largely immigrant group that carried out an important strike last fall), the event was endorsed by NYC Labor Against the War, UFTers Against the War, New Immigrant Community Empowerment and others.

Organizers at Hunter had to contend with vindictive campus administrators who told police to deny a sound permit for the outdoor rally/teach-in. They even sent cops to prevent use of a bullhorn. Police barricades deterred some from joining in, although scores crowded into the plaza to hear and participate. Altogether about 120 people attended. Students responded with vigor to joining with the power of labor on the international workers day, particularly this May Day as the first labor strike against war in U.S. history was being carried out.

"Workers strikes against the war!" the crowd chanted. Several reports were relayed during the three-hour event from the West Coast dock workers' port shutdown and march in San Francisco. Outgoing Hunter PSC chapter chair Mike Perna read a lyrical description of the different West Coast ports that had been closed by union action. PSC vice president Marcia Newfeld read a letter from Iraqi dock workers announcing their shutdown of two ports in solidarity with the ILWU action and against colonial occupation.

Participants got a history lesson on the 1934 San Francisco general strike that established the ILWU, about the police murder of three unionists in their attempt to break the longshore strike, on the union hiring hall that has enabled the West Coast dock union to stand strong against racism, xenophobia and McCarthyite witchhunting against "reds on the docks." The ILWU's refusal to load ships for the Chilean dictatorship, the Salvadoran junta and South African apartheid butchers was cited.

The history of May Day was recalled going back to the judicial frame-up and execution of the Haymarket martyrs, in an attempt to break the 1886 strike by tens of thousands of immigrant and U.S.-born workers fighting for the eight-hour day. This was linked to recent events, particularly the acquittal of the NYPD killer cops who gunned down Sean Bell in a hail of 50 bullets on his wedding day in Queens.

There were faculty speakers from the Anthropology, English, History, Media Studies, Philosophy, Sociology, Romance Languages, Urban Planning, Women's Studies and other departments at Hunter. Speakers told of the role students played in the 1968 Columbia University revolt and in the May-June '68 worker/student revolt in

France on the 40th anniversary of those events. A professor from Brooklyn College gave some history of the Iraq war, and drew lessons from the workers' revolt against World War I in Germany.

Carl Lindskoog, an organizer of the Adjunct Project, received loud applause when he said we don't oppose this war because it "costs too much" to kill Iraqis and Afghans, but because it is a war of conquest, pillage and plunder. He gave a rousing appeal to learn from the dock workers not to be intimidated by anti-labor legislation like New York's Taylor Law, which bans strikes by public employees. "The dock workers shut it down, and we need to do that, too," he said to chants of "Shut it down, shut it down."

A representative of the New York Metro Area Postal Union told of the solidarity with the ILWU antiwar port shutdown by postal unions here and in other cities. A speaker from the Welfare Rights Initiative linked organizing among welfare recipients to the struggle for women's rights, to defend public education and against the war.

A central theme was the fight for immigrants' rights, particularly as immigrants mobilized around the country on May Day. Antonio, a rank-and-file member of the Taxi Workers Alliance and supporter of the Internationalist Group, told the Hunter rally: "The attack on immigrants also means attacks on workers born here. Look at what they're doing with driver's licenses and the push for a national ID card. As an immigrant worker, I link the struggle for full citizenship rights for all immigrants to the fight for labor rights and to the fight to defeat imperialist war. I link it to the fight against the oppression of black people in this country, which is key to the class struggle. We see it in the Sean Bell case, and in the fight to free Mumia Abu-Jamal," the radical black journalist and former Black Panther on Pennsylvania's death row.

There was controversy as well. One professor said speak-



Internationalist contingent in immigrants' rights rally at Union Square, May 1.

ers were too hard on the Democratic Party, while another urged rally participants not to engaged in “sectarian radical approaches.” The rally chairman responded with examples of how both Republicans and Democrats had used the anti-labor Taft-Hartley and Taylor laws against labor, speaking of the 2005 NYC transit strike, about Democratic president Bill Clinton’s ending of “welfare as we know it,” as well as his attacks on the right of habeas corpus, of the votes for the war budget of candidates Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama. A philosophy adjunct professor spoke about how imperialism works.

A speaker from the Internationalist Group talked of how the “official antiwar movement” had been powerless to stop the war, since marches and protests “don’t stop the tanks from rolling, or war materiel from being shipped.” “Wars are not started or stopped by public demand,” he said, “despite the strategy of endlessly pressuring Democrats and Republicans who already know – and don’t care – that the public hates the war. Instead what’s needed is to mobilize real power, that of the working class.”

A speaker from the Campus Antiwar Network talked about the effects of the war on CUNY, and the activities of her group on different campuses. This led to a discussion about the protests that halted the “anti-immigrant war purge” that CUNY launched in the fall of 2001, about the struggle that spiked a “Homeland Security” certificate program at BMCC, and the campaign by the Revolutionary Reconstruction Club at Bronx Community College that managed to successively drive Air Force, Navy and Army recruiters off campus by mobilizing student and worker protest. There were chants of “Military recruiters out of CUNY!”

Mid-way through the Hunter rally, protesters were joined by a group that had come from the solidarity rally at Hostos Community College in the Bronx. There, the speaker from the Hostos Internationalist Club spoke of the USA PATRIOT Act, of the police murder of Sean Bell, and of the “*migra* persecution of hundreds of thousands of immigrant workers and their families, carrying out raids in their homes and workplaces with semi-automatic weapons, sniffing dogs, helicopters and an arsenal that would make Rambo blush.” The speaker noted that the wave of anti-immigrant laws began under Clinton, calling to break with the Democrats and form a revolutionary workers party.

At the end of the event, a contingent from the Hunter rally proceed to Union Square where immigrants’ rights demonstrators were gathering for a march of 1,000-plus protesters to the Federal Building in Lower Manhattan. Among the speakers was Victor Toro, the Chilean leftist émigré who is facing deportation. The Internationalist Group and CUNY Internationalist Clubs carried banners calling in Spanish and English for full citizenship rights for all immigrants, and to smash the racist Minuteman vigilantes. The contingent chanted “¡Arriba, abajo, la *migra* pa’l carajo!” “1-2-3-4, for workers strikes against the war,” “50 shots equals murder” and “We are all Sean Bell, NYPD go to hell.” And finally, “Asian, Latin, black and white, Workers of the world, unite!”

With the mobilization of immigrant workers and the

powerful action of the West Coast longshore workers, May Day is being reclaimed for the U.S. working class. Now we must carry out the promise of international class struggle for which it stands. ■

The Left on the Port Strike...

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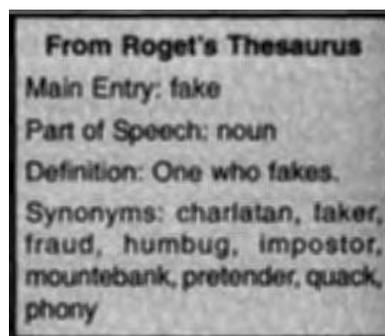
And in 2008 the SL sat out the first workers strike against a U.S. imperialist war in the history of the United States, on the grounds that the bureaucracy would inevitably sell it out. Thus it helped out the ILWU tops who never wanted the port shut-down in the first place and did all they could to wriggle out of it. In practice, this means that these rightward-moving left centrists act, if not as capital’s labor lieutenants, then as small-time “labor corporals.”

Bottom line: The Internationalist Group fights for workers’ strikes against the war. The Spartacist League doesn’t. Everyone who compares the two groups’ press over the past ten years can verify this for themselves. Not only that, but the SL has repeatedly attacked us for upholding this position, which they used to hold before they turned their backs on Trotskyism (i.e., genuine Marxism).

While West Coast longshore workers rightly believe they did a very good thing by shutting down 29 ports against the war on May Day, the Spartacist League perceives that the action was very bad for it. The SL never called for it, never thought it would happen, did nothing to make it happen – and now the hapless writers at the misnamed *Workers Vanguard* have the thankless task of trying to cover the SL’s tracks. Thus they hurl smears and distortions, and throw cold water on the action.

People are often puzzled by the SL’s focus on us. If the Internationalist Group is as irrelevant as it says, why devote so much space to us? Many think it is an obsession, which it is. In attacking the IG the present-day SL is trying to exorcize its own revolutionary past. But it is also political. In this case, they denounce the Internationalist Group and League for the Fourth International precisely because of our role in pushing for the first strike against a U.S. war in the history of the American labor movement.

There is only one thing to be said to all these prattlers about Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, class struggle, proletariat or socialist revolution – those that deep-sixed the ILWU strike, those who contented themselves with a “gee-whiz, isn’t that nice” squib from the sidelines, those who denounce social patriotism in the abstract, but never, ever, either advocate or organize class struggle action against imperialist war – Roget had your number. ■



Why We Fight for Workers Strikes Against the War (and the Opportunists Don't)

Break with the Democrats –
For a Class-Struggle Workers Party!



Sue Kellogg

Internationalist Group contingent at 18 March 2006 antiwar march in New York. Banner in Spanish reads: "Full Citizenship for All Immigrants! Forge a Revolutionary Workers Party."

We reprint below the lead article from the October 2007 special supplement to The Internationalist.

The U.S.' imperialist war against, and colonial occupation of, Iraq and Afghanistan is at a dead end. Despite the vaunted "surge" of U.S. forces in Iraq last spring, bringing troop levels to the highest since the 2003 invasion, attacks by insurgents have not diminished one bit, while the number of Iraqi civilian casualties has increased significantly. In Afghanistan, Taliban forces control large areas in the south. "Public opinion" in the U.S., that measure of the impact of the bourgeois media, has long since turned decisively against the war. In the mid-term elections last November, the Democrats won control of both houses of Congress mainly due to the perception that they would "do something" to end the war. Prominent Republican Senators have deserted President George Bush. Staff officers at the Combined Arms Center debate where the U.S. went wrong on Iraq; colonels accuse their superiors of a "failure of generalship" for not standing

up to Bush and his war secretary Donald Rumsfeld. Bourgeois defeatism is rampant, and yet ... the war keeps going on. No end in sight. No "light at the end of the tunnel." No exit.

Early this year, we published a tabloid special issue of *The Internationalist* (27 January) headlined: "Don't Beg Congress! Defeat U.S. War on Iraq!" and calling "For Workers Strikes Against the War!" Yet the entire activity of the antiwar movement has consisted precisely of seeking to pressure the Democratic Party into opposing the war on Iraq. The slogans "Bring the (or "Our") Troops Home," and "Money for Jobs (Books, Health Care, etc.) Not War," are geared to appeal to Congress to oppose the war on budgetary or other grounds acceptable to capitalist politicians. Forget it. The Democrats voted for war powers resolutions on Afghanistan and Iraq, and have voted over and over for the military budget, sometimes adding billions to the request from the Republican administration. Leading Democratic candidates Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama and

John Edwards all have promised to keep U.S. troops in Iraq or in the region to defend "U.S. interests." But we seek to *defeat the imperialist war* and the war on working people, immigrants, minorities and civil liberties "at home" *through militant workers action.*

Last month, the administration issued its interim "national assessment" of the situation in Iraq. Having previously replaced its proclamation of "victory" and "mission accomplished" with a "way forward," the White House now added the sucker bait of "gradual reductions" in U.S. forces starting next spring. In fact, independently of domestic opposition to the war, the Pentagon will have to start cutting back units on the battlefield. But at the same time, when Bush's Iraq commander General David Petraeus testified before Congress, Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi summed up his testimony saying it sounded like "a 10-year, at least, commitment to an open-ended presence and war" (*New York Times*, 12 September). A couple of days later in a televised speech to the nation, Bush announced that "success will require U.S. political, economic, and security engagement that extends beyond my presidency," and that Iraq must have "an enduring relationship with America." Actually, Bush has said several times that he wants a "Korea model," in other words a U.S. presence in Iraq lasting at least half a century.

Various Democratic Party politicians, starry-eyed liberals and even gullible leftists have argued that given the level of opposition to the Iraq war at all levels of American society, the U.S. will eventually have to get out. But Bush, the "chicken hawk" who hid out in the Air National Guard to avoid duty in Vietnam, now denounces the U.S. withdrawal from Indochina. This government, which took power in what amounted to a judicial coup d'état, is not about to walk away from its Iraq "debacle." Instead, Bush wants to escalate, by gearing up for war on Iran. As demented as this may be, with U.S. forces already stretched to the breaking point, military casualties in many units approaching levels where they become inoperable, top Pentagon officials report that they have been ordered to prepare battle plans for bombing hundreds of Iranian sites, including with "tactical" nuclear weapons.

Bush just spelled out what this means by threatening a nuclear "World War III" against Iran. Even though the former top U.S. Near East commander General John Abizaid stated recently that "there are ways to live with a nuclear Iran," Bush has declared that he would never "tolerate" this. Those who are "interested in avoiding World War III," he said at a news conference, had better join in "preventing them [the Iranians] from having the knowledge necessary to make a nuclear weapon" (*New York Times*, 18 October). Why? Because if Tehran does develop atomic weapons it would at least



Infophoto

Italian trade unionists of the CGIL federation and antiwar activists stop NATO war train outside Vicenza, in February 2002.

cause the U.S. to hesitate before attacking it, as North Korea has shown. If the U.S. does attack Iran, in addition to throwing the entire Near East into turmoil it would put Washington on a collision course with Russia. While White House officials brandish the argument that a nuclear-armed Iran might attack Israel, the well-known fact is that Israel has hundreds of nuclear weapons and is ready to use them, while no one claims that Iran has or is close to achieving nuclear weapons capability.

Even under the bogus Non-Proliferation Treaty, Iran has the perfect right to develop nuclear power (as it says it is doing). And in any case, we defend Iran and its right to nuclear or any other kind of weapons to defend itself against the nuclear-armed imperialists in partnership with the Zionist madmen. From the outset, even before the Iraq invasion, we have warned that the U.S. war pointed to a world conflagration: "Pentagon's 'First Strike' Strategy: Careening Toward World War III" we wrote in a headline in *The Internationalist* No. 14 (September-October 2002). The real aim of U.S. imperialism was not simply to topple Saddam Hussein, under whatever pretext, but to cement U.S. hegemony as the global "superpower." Washington wants the oil not for domestic consumption (the U.S. imports very little from the Near East), but in order to control oil supplies to its imperialist rivals in Europe and Japan. Thus the Near East wars, from Afghanistan and Iraq to Israel/Palestine, could serve as a precursor to World War III, as the 1908-13 Balkan Wars heralded the first imperialist world war and the wars in Spain and Ethiopia led to World War II.

The Internationalist Group and League for the Fourth International call not just for U.S. withdrawal, which would just lead to the next war as it has repeatedly over the last century, but to drive the imperialist occupiers out of Iraq and Afghanistan and to *defeat* U.S. imperialism's wars through international socialist revolution. No "antiwar movement" ever stopped an imperialist war, as we have insisted. The only successful

struggle against imperialist war was by the Bolsheviks in the 1917 October Revolution, which pulled Russia out of World War I. Class-conscious workers must stand with the victims of imperialist attack, defending Iraq and Afghanistan during the invasions and taking the side of those resisting the colonial occupation forces, even as we politically oppose all the Islamic fundamentalist and Arab or Iraqi bourgeois nationalists. We seek to mobilize the power of the workers movement in sharp class struggle, including workers strikes against the war and “hot carguing” war material. And we call to break with the Democratic Party of war and racism, to build a revolutionary workers party.



German workers strike against imperialist world war, January 1918.

Antiwar Movement Flounders

Leading up to the Iraq war, millions marched in Western capitals and other large cities to protest the impending invasion. In New York City, half a million people were in the streets on 15 February 2003. Even a year later, hundreds of thousands marched against the war. But today, after hundreds of thousands of Iraqis have been killed (and several thousand U.S. soldiers are dead and many more gravely injured), the antiwar movement is at loose ends. The September 2007 marches in Washington, D.C. were far smaller than previous peace parades, and the upcoming regional actions come after Congress has already voted the latest “emergency” war budget. Why? An obvious reason is that the various peace “coalitions” are each doing their own thing, so that this fall there have been national marches on September 15 and 29, and others scheduled for October 27. But more basically, the competing coalitions are based on appealing to ruling-class politicians, the Democratic Party in particular, and the fact that after all is said and done the Democrats continue to back the war has produced widespread demoralization among antiwar demonstrators.

For the past five years, various opportunist socialist groups have busily built and rebuilt the “anti-war movement,” consisting of occasional peace marches to demand that the imperialist government end the war. The reformist organizations that lead the major peace groups are pretending that it’s ever onward and upward. The Workers World Party (WWP), which directs the Troops Out Now Coalition (TONC), effused over the latest, very modestly sized and very ordinary peace parades, as “Anti-War Marches of a New Type” (*Workers World*, 11 October). Their former comrades in the Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL), who now lead International ANSWER, exult: “we are waking to a new morning of action, resistance and militant struggle.... Sept. 15 in Washington, D.C. will be remembered as historically relevant if it emerges as a step toward an even

greater development” (*Liberation*, 11 October).

While WWP and PSL are heirs of the Stalinoid current led by the late Sam Marcy and occasionally put on radical airs (while parading Democratic speakers on their platforms), the arch-reformist Internationalist Socialist Organization (ISO) is an utterly social-democratic outfit. Yet the ISO, which leads the Campus Antiwar Network (CAN), has preferred to tail along after the larger coalitions. Lately, it has adopted a critical posture, asking: “Why is the antiwar movement so weak?” (*Socialist Worker*, 12 October). After blaming “the general political period,” it complains of ANSWER’s “top-down methods” and avers that the United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ) “makes the movement hostage to the politicians.” Surprise, surprise. The UFPJ, a condominium of the Committees of Correspondence for Socialism (CoC) and the Communist Party USA (CPUSA), from which the CoC split in the mid-1980s, are past masters at tying the working class and whatever movement they are currently building to the Democratic Party. It’s called the popular front.

The ISO goes so far as to say that “‘Out now’ is an appropriate slogan for an antiwar protest, but this message can easily become diluted in the context of today’s do-nothing ‘antiwar’ Democrats” (*Socialist Worker*, 19 October). Yet the ISO has repeatedly raised the call for “Out now” in antiwar marches and meetings with Democratic Party politicians. Moreover, at recent demonstrations ISO activists chanted; “Stop the funding, stop the war, What the hell is Congress for?” Internationalist Group marchers responded that Congress was for imperialist war!

The ISO says that “the key” to overcoming the “weakness” of the antiwar movement is “building a strong grassroots movement, independent of both the Democrats and Republicans, with the power to force the politicians of both parties to abandon their support for the war.” So while supposedly remaining “independent” of the leading capitalist parties (and running the

capitalist red-white-and-blue Green candidate Ralph Nader for president), its whole aim is to build a "grassroots movement" that could somehow convince the capitalist politicians to oppose their imperialist war! This is pure reformist illusion. The U.S. bourgeoisie was *driven out of Vietnam* by the Vietnamese and it will not abandon the strategic Near East unless forced to do so by catastrophic losses on the battlefield and the mobilization of the power of the working class internationally.

The fact is that all of these groups, despite claiming the legacy of the Marxism, have abandoned the core of its revolutionary logic. Imperialist war is not the policy of one administration or party that can be changed by pressure campaigns, but the bloody expression of the rivalries among the "great powers" to decide who shall lord it over the colonial and semi-colonial slaves. In this imperialist war, which is a war to enslave Iraq and Afghanistan and maintain U.S. imperialism's domination of the planet, the question for the workers is not how to end the war and achieve "peace" between Washington and whatever oppressed nation it is attacking, but how to *defeat* the imperialist warmongers once and for all through a socialist revolution.

The Struggle for Workers Strikes Against the War

Since well before the launching of the Iraq invasion, the Internationalist Group and League for the Fourth International have been calling for working-class action against the war. We called for this in 1998 and 1999 when Democrat Bill Clinton bombed Iraq and attacked Yugoslavia, and again in 2001 when Bush invaded Afghanistan. In the run-up to the Iraq war, we agitated for workers to refuse to handle military goods, as well as for strike action against the impending war. We raised these demands with West Coast longshore workers in the United States when they were locked out by the employers. In February 2003, the LFI organized a worker/immigrant demonstration on the docks in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. We also highlighted in our press when train drivers in Scotland refused to move a munitions train bound for the Persian Gulf in January 2003, and when Italian railroad workers joined with peace demonstrators trying to block the rails as NATO jeeps and tanks were being transported to the ports to be shipped to Kuwait.

These incidents showed that workers action against imperialist war is possible. But they are a small example of what has occurred in the past. During World War I, German workers repeatedly engaged in strike action against the imperialist slaughter. When revolutionary socialist (and later Communist) leader Karl Liebknecht was being tried (and was then sent to prison) for daring to vote against the war budget and agitate against the war, in June 1916 some 55,000 tool and die makers in the big Berlin factories suddenly shut down their machines. The news spread through the plants like wildfire, "The machine workers are striking for Liebknecht." And this was a first: the German working class had never engaged in a political mass strike before. The majority Social Democrats (SPD) supported the war and did everything possible to sabotage such working-class protest action. But militant union activists carefully prepared the strikes in the underground, and later formed the Revolutionary Shop Stewards (Revolutionäre Obleute) which orga-

nized the later strike actions.

A second wave of strikes occurred in April 1917, under the influence of the Russian February Revolution and touched off by a cut in bread rations. In Leipzig, more than 10,000 workers struck and raised a series of political demands, including for a peace without annexations, the abolition of war-time censorship, lifting of the state of siege, an end to labor conscription, freeing political prisoners, and universal suffrage (the right to vote) at all levels. In Berlin, striking workers called for German workers to take up the example of their Russian comrades. By now an Independent Social-Democratic Party (USPD) had split from the pro-war SPD and adopted a pacifist program. But while many in the Independent ranks looked to Russia, the USPD leaders feared a revolution. They and the metal workers union leaders called off the strikes after one day. Even so, more than 50,000 workers continued the strike and denounced their leaders' betrayal.

A third wave of strikes took place in January 1918, this time influenced by the victorious Bolsheviks' offer to negotiate peace at Brest-Litovsk. This time the numbers had grown enormously, with 400,000 striking in Berlin on the first day, and then swelling to half a million. There was civil war in the air. A leader of the Spartakusbund and future German Communist Leo Jogiches commented, "Like a revolutionary breeze, a certain readiness, but no one knew what to do." The German Spartakists "emphasized that the leadership in the struggles should be placed in the hands of elected workers' councils, and that the revolutionaries should win over the soldiers" (Pierre Broué, *The German Revolution, 1917-1923* [Brill, 2005]). Once again, the SPD and USPD leaders managed to undercut the strikes. Some 50,000 workers were drafted into the military as punishment. Nevertheless, within a few months, sailors rose up in the Baltic port of Kiel and the German Revolution of November 1918 began. Yet it ended in a defeat with the bloody repression of the Spartakist uprising of January 1919, and the assassination of Communist leaders Liebknecht, Luxemburg and Jogiches on the orders of the SPD government.

The German workers' strikes prepared the way for revolution and imperial Germany's capitulation in the war. Yet the recounting of this history underscores that by themselves, strikes are not enough. The lack of a seasoned revolutionary leadership meant that at every turn the reformist SPD and centrist USPD misleaders were able to divert the struggle. Today, the reformist leaders of the class-collaborationist antiwar coalitions (WWP, PSL, ISO, CoC, CPUSA) may give lip service to labor as one more "constituency" as they build their "popular front" with the bourgeois "dove" politicians. Others, centrists, such as the Spartacist League, once called for workers strikes against the war and "hot cargoing" military cargo, but then dropped these demands like hot potatoes as soon as they were posed concretely over Iraq. They claim that such actions are either (a) nothing but a big political demonstration, or (b) tantamount to revolution, and in any case such calls don't find "resonance" in the working class. Maybe they need a resonator. German work-

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ILWU to Shut Down West Coast Ports May 1 to Protest War



ILWU dock workers in San Francisco antiwar march, March 2004. It's not just "Bush's war" but bipartisan imperialist war.

MARCH 1 – *In a major step for the U.S. labor movement, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) has announced that it will shut down West Coast ports on May 1, to demand an immediate end to the war and occupation in Iraq and Afghanistan and the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the Middle East.* In a February 22 letter to AFL-CIO president John Sweeney, ILWU International president Robert McEllrath reported that at a recent coast-wide union meeting, “One of the resolutions adopted by caucus delegates called on longshore workers to stop work during the day shift on May 1, 2008 to express their opposition to the war in Iraq.”

This is the first time in decades that an American union has decided to undertake industrial action against a U.S. war. It is doubly important that this mobilization of labor’s power is to take place on May Day, the international workers day, which is not honored in the U.S. Moreover, the resolution voted by the ILWU delegates opposes not only the hugely unpopular war in Iraq, but also the war and occupation of Afghanistan (which Democratic candidates Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama and Republican John McCain all want to expand). The motion to shut down the ports also demands the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the entire region, including the oil sheikdoms of the strategically important Persian/Arab Gulf.

The Internationalist Group has fought from the moment U.S. troops invaded Afghanistan in September 2002 for

American unions to *strike against the war*. Despite the fact that millions have marched in the streets of Europe and the United States against the war in Iraq, the war goes on. Neither of the twin war parties of U.S. imperialism – Democrats and Republicans – and none of the capitalist candidates will stop this horrendous slaughter that has already killed hundreds of thousands of Iraqis. The only way to stop the Pentagon killing machine is by mobilizing the power of a greater force – that of the international working class.

The action announced by the powerful West Coast dock workers union, to stop work to stop the war, should be taken up by unions and labor organizations throughout the United States and internationally. The ILWU should be commended for courageously taking the first step, and it is up to working people everywhere to back them up. Wherever support is strong enough, on May 1 there should be mass walkouts, sick-outs, labor marches, plant-gate meetings, lunch-time rallies, teach-ins. And the purpose of such actions should be not to beg the bourgeois politicians whose hands are covered with blood, having voted for every war budget for six and a half years, but a show of strength of the working people who make this country run, and who can shut it down!

Now is the time for bold class action. Opposition to the war is even greater in the U.S. working class than in the population as a whole, more than two-thirds of which wants to stop the war but is stymied by the capitalist political sys-

tem. In his letter to Sweeney, the ILWU president asked “if other AFL-CIO affiliates are planning to participate in similar events.” Labor militants should make sure the answer to that question is a resounding “yes!”

There should be no illusions that this will be easy. No doubt the Pacific Maritime Association (PMA) bosses will try to get the courts to rule the stop-work action illegal. The ILWU leadership could get cold feet, since this motion was passed because of overwhelming support from the delegates despite attempts to stop it or, failing that, to water it down or limit the action. And the U.S. government could try to ban it on the grounds of “national security,” just as Bush & Co. slapped a Taft-Hartley injunction on the docks during contract negotiations in the fall of 2002, saying that any work stoppage was a threat to the “war effort,” and threatened to occupy the ports with troops!

The answer to every attempt to sabotage or undercut this first labor action against this war, and against Washington’s broader “war on terror” which is intended to terrorize the world into submission must be to redouble efforts to bring out workers’ power independent of the capitalist parties and politicians. If the ILWU work stoppage is successful, it will only be a small, but very important, beginning that must be generalized and deepened. *It will take industrial-strength labor action to defeat the imperialist war abroad and the bosses’ war on immigrants, oppressed minorities, poor and working people “at home.”*

ILWU in the Forefront of Labor Action Against the War

Workers strike action against imperialist war isn’t new – it just hasn’t happened here for a long, long time. During World War I there were huge mass strikes in Germany against the battlefield carnage, culminating in the downfall of the kaiser in November 1918. A year earlier in Russia, working-class opposition to the war led to the overthrow of the tsar and the October Revolution led by Lenin and Trotsky’s Bolsheviks. The Internationalist Group and League for the Fourth International call today for transport workers to “hot cargo” (refuse to handle) war shipments. In the early 1920s, Communist-led French dock workers did exactly that, boycotting ships carrying war materiel to suppress a colonial rebellion in the Rif region of Morocco, as they also did during France’s war in Indochina in the 1950s.

In the U.S., the ILWU struck in 1948 amid Cold War hysteria and in defiance of the “slave labor” Taft-Hartley Act to defend its union hiring hall against the bosses and government screaming about “reds” in the union leadership. In 1953, at the height of McCarthyite witch-hunting, the ILWU called a four-day general strike in Hawaii of sugar, pineapple and dock workers over the jailing of seven union members for being communists. During the Vietnam War,



Jeff Paterson/Courage to Resist

Dock workers at Port of Oakland honored antiwar picket line, refusing arbitrator’s order work ships during two shifts.

socialist historian Isaac Deutscher said that he would trade all the peace marches for a single dock strike. The ILWU was the first U.S. union to oppose the Vietnam war, but during the war and especially during the 1971 strike union leader Harry Bridges refused to stop the movement of military cargo. (Ship owners made use of this by falsely labeling cargo as “military” to evade picket lines and undermine the strike.) This betrayal went hand in hand with a “mechanization and modernization” contract that slashed union jobs.

As the U.S.-led imperialist invasion of Iraq was looming, in January 2003 train drivers in Scotland refused to move a freight train carrying munitions to a NATO military base. The next month, Italian railroad unionists and antiwar activists blocked NATO war trains by occupying the rails. In the United States, ILWU dock workers were a target of “anti-terrorist” government repression, as police fired supposedly “less than lethal” munitions point blank at an antiwar protest on the Oakland, California docks, injuring six longshore workers and arresting 25 people (who eventually won their legal case against the police). And every year since the war started, the San Francisco/Oakland ILWU Local 10 has voted for motions for labor action against the war. Usually they were voted down at caucuses and conventions of the ILWU, but not this time.

Last May, Local 10 longshoremen and Local 34 ships clerks refused to cross picket lines set up by the Oakland Teachers Association and antiwar activists, defying arbitrators’ orders by refusing to work ships of the notorious anti-union outfit, Stevedoring Services of America (see “Oakland Dock Workers Honor Picket, Shut Down War Cargo Shipper,” *The Internationalist* No. 26, July 2007). In the after-

FOR WORKERS' ACTION TO STOP THE WAR

The following resolution, originally introduced by International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 10, San Francisco Bay Area, was amended and approved overwhelmingly after debate at the Longshore-Warehouse Coast Caucus on February 8.

WHEREAS: On May 1, 2003, at the ILWU Convention in San Francisco resolutions were passed calling for an end to the war and occupation in Iraq; and

WHEREAS: ILWU took the lead among labor unions in opposing this bloody war and occupation for imperial domination; and

WHEREAS: Many unions and the overwhelming majority of the American people now oppose this bipartisan and unjustifiable war in Iraq and Afghanistan but the two major political parties, Democrats and Republicans continue to fund the war; and

WHEREAS: Millions worldwide have marched and demonstrated against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan but have been unable to stop the wars; and

WHEREAS: ILWU's historic dock actions,

1) like the refusal of Local 10 longshoremen to load bombs for the military dictatorship in Chile in 1978 and military cargo to the Salvadoran military dictatorship in 1981 and

2) the honoring of the teachers' union antiwar picket May 19, 2007 against SSA in the port of Oakland stand as a limited but shining example of how to oppose these wars; and

WHEREAS: The spread of war in the Middle East is threatened with U. S. air strikes in Iran or possible military intervention in Syria or the destabilized Pakistan;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That it is time to take labor's protest to a more powerful level of struggle by calling on unions and working people in the U. S. and internationally to mobilize for a "No Peace No Work Holiday" May 1, 2008 for 8 hours to demand an immediate end to the war and occupation in Iraq and Afghanistan and the withdrawal of U. S. troops from the Middle East; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED:

That a clarion call from the ILWU be sent with an urgent appeal for unity of action to the AFL-CIO, the Change to Win Coalition and all of the international labor organizations to which we are affiliated to bring an end to this bloody war once and for all.

Submitted by:
ILWU Local 10

math of that action, the union issued a call for a Labor Conference to Stop the War that would "plan workplace rallies, labor mobilizations in the streets and strike action against the war." The Call to Action stated:

"ILWU Local 10 has repeatedly warned that the so-called 'war on terror' is really a war on working people and democratic rights. Around the country, hundreds of unions and labor councils have passed motions condemning the war, but that has not stopped the war. We need to use labor's muscle to stop the war by mobilizing union power in the streets, at the plant gates and on the docks to force the immediate and total withdrawal of all U.S. troops from Afghanistan and Iraq."

As the conference date approached, the union was the target of several police attacks, including a vicious cop assault on two black dock workers from San Francisco working in the port of Sacramento. Some 250 demonstrators from every ILWU local in Northern California rallied in their defense outside the courthouse. Their trial, to be set at a March 18 hearing, will encounter even larger demonstrations.

The Internationalist Group and its union supporters helped build and attended the October 20 conference, along with some 150 labor and socialist activists from the Bay Area, elsewhere in California and across the country. At the meeting, a particular focus was resistance to the Transportation Workers Identification Card (TWIC), which threatens minority workers and the union hiring hall, and which the Democratic Party in particular has been pushing in order to carry out a purge of dock workers in the name of the "war on terror." Not long after that conference, a federal judge or-

dered Local 10 elections canceled and replaced by a Labor Department-run vote, on the eve of 2008 contract bargaining. Federal agents even invaded the union hall to enforce their order. This action is a threat to the independence of all unions.

This set the stage for the recent longshore-warehouse caucus, which voted on a motion for a 24-hour "No Peace, No Work Holiday" against the war. The resolution was introduced in Local 10 by Jack Heyman, who also presented the motion for the 24 April 1999 coast-wide port shutdown demanding freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal, the former Black Panther and renowned radical journalist who has been on Pennsylvania's death row for the last quarter century. Although the union tops maneuvered to prevent Heyman from being elected as a delegate to the Coast Caucus, the motion passed in Local 10. At the Caucus, the delegate from Local 34 referred to the October Labor Conference to Stop the War as the origin of the motion.

At the close of the Caucus on February 8, there was a vigorous debate on the resolution. The union tops tried to stop it, to no avail. They kept asking, "are you sure you want to do this action." The delegates overwhelmingly said "yes." Even conservative trade unionists, including veterans of the Vietnam War, were getting up saying the government is lying to us, we've had it with this war, we've got to put a stop to it now. So instead the bureaucrats tried to gut the motion, which was cut down from 24 hours to 8, and changed into a "stop-work" meeting (covered by a contract clause) instead

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For Workers Strikes Against the War! Full Citizenship Rights for All Immigrants!

All Out on May Day!

On May 1, all 29 ports on the U.S. West Coast are to be shut down by the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) in protest against the U.S. war on Afghanistan and Iraq. *This is a historic event of international significance: labor action against imperialist war by a major American union.*

The strategically placed port workers in the ILWU can bring commerce with Asia to a grinding halt, and they're about to demonstrate it. The maritime employers are already screaming, and you can bet it's got the attention of the warmongers in Washington. All labor should take up the challenge this poses: *For workers strikes against the war! Hit 'em where they feel it.*

Meanwhile, immigrants' rights groups are once again mobilizing on May Day. We say: everyone here should have equal rights; otherwise the bosses and reactionaries play one group off against another. *Full citizenship rights for all immigrants! Mobilize labor action to stop the ICE raids!* And on April 30 and May 1, the independent truckers who move cargo to and from the docks may play an important role in a shutdown, particularly in Los Angeles (where immigrant truckers closed the port on May Day 2006) and possibly some East Coast ports.

The imperialist war on Afghanistan and Iraq is also a war on immigrants, minorities, working people and democratic rights "at home." As a longshore picketer declared in 2002, the "War on Terror is a War on Us." We need to *defeat* this attack here and abroad, in opposition to *both* the capitalist war parties. The "antiwar movement," whose aim has always been to pressure the Democrats, is at a dead end. But a battle is brewing. *Workers, immigrants, opponents of imperialist war: All out on May Day!*

The Bay Area ILWU local was the first American union to condemn the war. In April 2003, as invading U.S. troops reached Baghdad, six longshoremen were injured and a union official was arrested as police fired on hundreds of antiwar protesters in the port of Oakland. Now, while Democrats in Congress keep voting for the war budget, while *all* the presidential candidates



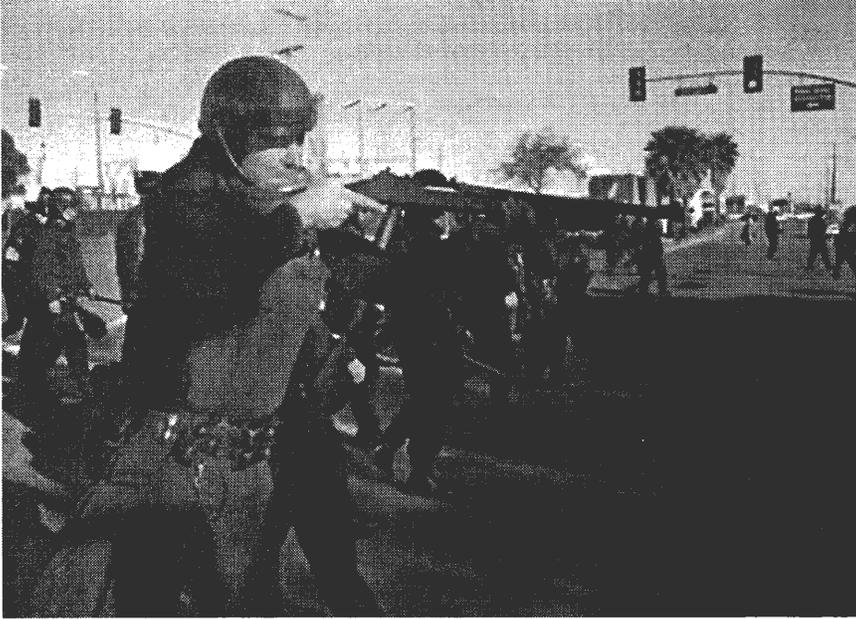
ILWU members demonstrate outside union headquarters in July 2002 over their contract. Now longshore workers are set to shut down all 29 West Coast ports in protest over the war.

of the twin parties of American capital vow to keep U.S. troops in Iraq *indefinitely* and to *expand* NATO occupation forces in Afghanistan, *dock workers have decided to shut down the entire Pacific Coast in the most powerful single action in decades aimed at stopping a U.S. war.*

When we broke the story last month, many rubbed their eyes in disbelief. Yes, it's for real. In a notice posted on the ILWU website and printed in the union newspaper, *The Dispatcher* (April 2008), the union announced: "Longshore Caucus calls for Iraq war protest at ports on May 1." The resolution by the union's elected delegates called for this unprecedented labor action to "demand an immediate end to the war and occupation in Iraq and Afghanistan and the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the Middle East" (see ILWU motion, page xx).

The longshore delegates said they were issuing a "clarion call" with an "urgent appeal for unity of action" to all of labor "to bring an end to this bloody war once and for all." Now it's

Tim Wimborne/Reuters



Cop fires shotgun at antiwar protesters and longshoremen at port of Oakland, 7 April 2003. Six longshoremen were injured by the “less-than-lethal” ammo, and 25 arrested. The army of police was dispatched by the city’s Democratic mayor, former governor Jerry Brown, after consultation with California state terrorism office.

to stop the port shutdown means that a *class struggle* is already being waged over this issue.

The PMA’s move is no idle threat: the feds issued an injunction during the 2002 bargaining, saying that any stoppage was a threat to the war effort. They could do it again. If that happens, the dock workers should defy the labor-hating government, and all labor must use its muscle to back them up! Can it be done? Yes, and the ruling class knows it. An article by Matt Smith in the on-line business publication *Miller-McCune* (9 April) expressed amazement that, “Would you believe...blue-collar dock workers” could “bring down the economy.” Smith explained:

“The ILWU, which represents 25,000 dockworkers at 29 Pacific coast ports, is simultaneously the most politically radical, materially comfortable and economically significant group of U.S. workers....

“The union’s industrial might has its roots in a 1930s San Francisco general strike that created one of the most politically radical, democratically run and impenetrably unified American labor syndicates....

“The union and shippers are already butting heads over ILWU plans to shut down all West Coast ports May 1 in protest against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The idea was to exploit a work rule allowing the union to request a day off for a local shop meeting, by requesting simultaneous days off at every port. The shippers refused. And now the ILWU is poised to conduct the equivalent of a one-day walkout.”

In response to the threats, the author quoted a union spokesman saying nobody was intimidated:

“‘For us, folks aren’t going to be working on May 1. Everybody here’s clear about that,’ said ILWU Communications Director Craig Merrilees.”

The maritime employers are particularly worried because bargaining is underway on the union contract. The article quoted a Berkeley economist saying that a dock strike could produce “a chain reaction that’s really rather a nightmare.... This affects the whole economy very broadly and very quickly.”

Earlier, another business publication, the *CalTrade Report* (14 March) tried some old-style red-baiting in a front-page article with a subhead declaring: “US West Coast action called to protest ‘imperialist’ war in Iraq, Afghanistan” The article declared: “A number of organizations including The Internationalist Group-League for the Fourth International, a New York-based Marxist activist group, have voiced their support for the ILWU action.

“According to a story on the front page of the organization’s website –

www.internationalist.org, ‘This is the first time in decades that an American union has decided to undertake industrial action against a US war.’ “The action, it continues, ‘should be taken up by unions and labor organizations through-

out the United States and internationally...and the purpose of such actions should be not to beg the bourgeois politicians whose hands are covered with blood, having voted for every war budget for six and a half years, but a show of strength of the working people who make this country run, and who can shut it down!’”

The smear tactics went nowhere. Despite the hyperventilation in the trade papers, the union has stood its ground.

Break with the Democrats – Build a Class-Struggle Workers Party!

But the battle over the antiwar port shutdown is far from over, including inside the ILWU. As we reported earlier, the union’s International leadership initially tried to divert the call for an antiwar work stoppage, as it has done before and just as it buried Local 10’s call to stop work and march for immigrant rights last May 1. Having failed to “deep-six” the resolution, the union tops are now trying to present it in a “social-patriotic” light. Writing to AFL-CIO president John Sweeney, ILWU president Robert Ellrath said the action was called to “express support for the troops by bringing them home safely.” This phrase was highlighted in the official union announcement. Meanwhile, the union Executive Board has endorsed Democrat Barack Obama for president.

In fact, the resolution passed by the Longshore Caucus has none of these social-patriotic appeals, and it explicitly attacks the “bipartisan and unjustifiable war in Iraq and Afghanistan” which “Democrats and Republicans continue to fund.” Wrapping themselves in the American flag, the bureaucrats are playing the game of the warmongers in Washington. All the talk of “supporting the troops” coming out of



On May Day 2006, immigrant *troqueros* shut down port of Los Angeles in national strike by immigrants showing their key role in U.S. economy. Seeking to overcome tensions between independent truckers and unionized dock workers, port shutdown organizers called to defend immigrants' rights.

the “antiwar movement” is a loyalty oath: they’re saying they oppose the (losing) war in Iraq, but they still salute the flag of U.S. imperialism. Similarly, slogans calling for “jobs not war,” “books not bombs,” etc., pose opposition to the war as a question of *priorities*. Yet if there was no U.S. war in Afghanistan and Iraq, and Colombia and the Philippines, and if there were no U.S. troops in the more than 700 U.S. bases in 130 countries around the world, the U.S. capitalist rulers *still* would not provide jobs or books or healthcare.

It’s not about foreign *policies* or budget *priorities*, it’s about the imperialist *system* that produces one war after another as the U.S. seeks to nail down its current position as the “sole superpower” in the post-Soviet world. The whole “war on terror” is a war for U.S. world domination. It’s the lead-up to a new world war in which the “enemy” is not a Saddam Hussein or some other tin-pot dictator but the U.S.’ imperialist “allies” and rivals. The Democrats are 110 percent for that war – they just think, as Obama said, that Iraq is “the wrong war.” And their “right” war “against terror” – to terrorize the world into submission – hits longshore workers directly, through the Transport Workers Identification Card. The TWIC is being pushed in particular by the Democrats, and its introduction will bring a racial purge on the docks.

Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton remarked a few weeks ago, in response to claims by President George Bush and Republican candidate John McCain that withdrawal from Iraq would be a defeat: “Well, let’s be clear, withdrawal is not defeat. Defeat is keeping troops in Iraq for 100 years. Defeat is straining our alliances and losing our standing in the world. Defeat is draining our resources and diverting attention from our key interests” (*Boston Globe*, 18 March). Clinton wants to withdraw (some of the) U.S. troops, precisely in order to *avoid a defeat for U.S. imperialism*. For his part, Barack Obama has said that he would leave residual troops in Iraq

among other things to “fight terrorism,” that he wants to up U.S. troop levels in Afghanistan, and that the U.S. should launch missile strikes on targets in Iran and Pakistan. The ILWU leaders’ endorsement of Obama hurts rather than helps the struggle against imperialist war and undercuts the May 1 work stoppage.

The capitalist parties also include the Greens, who ran immigrant-basher Ralph Nader for president in 2000. In 2004 they were on the ballot only in “safe” states so as not to hurt the chances of Democrat John Kerry. The likely Green presidential candidate this time around is Cynthia McKinney. McKinney for 12 years was a Democratic Congresswoman from Georgia, joining the Green Party only after she lost in a primary election due to a Republican crossover vote. She has de-

nounced the U.S.’ criminal response to Hurricane Katrina, in which 100,000 overwhelmingly poor and black people were left to die in the flood. She was one of three members of the House of Representatives to vote for a 2005 resolution for immediate withdrawal from Iraq, and she has recently endorsed the ILWU call for a work stoppage against the war. But she emphasized that she was for an “orderly withdrawal,” that she wants to “support the troops by bringing them home,” and her politics are vintage Democratic liberalism. Explaining her switch to the Greens, she said: “I had a place to go when the Democratic Party left me.” Exactly. The red, white and blue Greens are nothing but a home for homeless Democrats.

In order to *defeat* the imperialist war abroad and the bosses’ war “at home,” class-conscious workers must oppose *all* the capitalist parties and politicians, and *build a class-struggle workers party*. Revolutionaries fight to *drive the U.S. out of Iraq and Afghanistan* – which will be anything but orderly, as the U.S.’ exit from Vietnam showed – by workers action. We would like to see the “diplomats” (spies) and “contractors” (mercenaries) clambering onto the roof of the U.S. embassy desperately trying to helicopter out of the “Green Zone” in Baghdad. A defeat there would put a damper on U.S. imperial adventures around the world, and would aid the struggle of working people, immigrants and oppressed minorities in the United States itself. The drawn-out U.S. defeat in Vietnam set the climate in which women made many gains including the right to abortion, and the racist death penalty was (temporarily) suspended. U.S. rulers gave in on these issues because they were afraid the entire country could blow.

Fighting for workers’ action against the war and against all the capitalist war parties is a key way to break the political stranglehold of the captains of industry and their labor lieutenants. The ILWU port shutdown can and should be a catalyst for such action. ■

Why We Fight...

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ers had no tradition of mass political strikes either, until they held the first walkout.

As we struggle for workers strikes against the war in the U.S., we must wage a political battle to break from the Democratic Party (and all capitalist parties) and undertake the forging of a class-struggle workers party. Such a party must be built by combating the illusions spread by the popular-front antiwar movement in the possibility of pressuring the Democrats to end the war. Those who seek to build a revolutionary workers party must also confront head-on the chauvinist calls to “support our troops,” and call openly for the *defeat* of “our own” imperialist rulers. Such a party must be founded on an internationalist program defending the Afghan and Iraqi peoples under the guns of U.S. imperialism, as well as the Palestinians rising up against Israeli Zionist colonial rule.

Today there is growing frustration among those who would put an end to the seemingly never-ending slaughter in Iraq and Afghanistan. Their frustration is a direct result of the subordination of the “antiwar movement” to the Democrats and the realization that they, like the Republicans, are a war party. This realization can lead to demoralization, as it has in recent months, or it can lead to radicalization. The task of building revolutionary leadership on a *class* program is key. ■

ILWU to Shut Down...

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of a straight-out shutdown, thinking that this would lessen opposition from the employers. In the end there was a voice vote and only three delegates out of 100 voted against.

The efforts to undercut the motion continue, as is to be expected from a leadership which, like the rest of the pro-capitalist labor bureaucracy, seeks “labor peace” with the bosses. In his letter to Sweeney, ILWU International president tried to present the action as an effort to “express support for the troops by bringing them home safely,” although the motion voted by the delegates says nothing of the sort. Playing the “support our troops” game is an effort to swear loyalty to the broader aims of U.S. imperialism. It aids the warmongers, when what’s needed is independent working-class action against the system that produces endless imperialist war. Yet despite the efforts to water it down and distort it, the May 1 action voted for by the ILWU delegates is a call to use labor’s muscle to put an end to the war.

Mobilize Labor’s Power to Defeat the Bosses’ War!

For the West Coast dock workers union to shut down the ports against the war means a big step forward in the class struggle. The Internationalist Group has uniquely fought for workers strikes against the war, when all the popular-front “peace” coalitions dismissed this and even some shame-faced ex-Trotskyists refused to call for it, saying it had “no

resonance” among the workers (see our October 2007 Special Supplement to *The Internationalist*, “Why We Fight For Workers Strikes Against the War [and the Opportunists Don’t]”). With signs, banners and propaganda we have sought to drive home the central lesson that it is necessary to defeat the imperialist war abroad and the bosses’ war “at home” by mobilizing the power of the workers movement independent of and against the capitalist parties.

That means fighting the war mobilization down the line. First and foremost, this means actively joining the struggle for immigrant rights as the government turns undocumented working people into “the enemy within.” Class-conscious workers should demand *full citizenship rights for all immigrants*. Last year, San Francisco Local 10 voted to stop work and join marches for immigrant rights on May 1, but this was opposed by the employers PMA and sabotaged at the last minute by the union tops. Shamefully, Local 13 in Los Angeles, a majority Mexican American port, made no protest when police attacked immigrant rights protesters that same day. Today, as the ICE immigration police stage Gestapo-style raids across the country, organized labor should take the lead in organizing rapid response networks to come into the streets to *block the raids*. Despite the campaign by the capitalist media and politicians to whip up anti-immigrant hysteria, there is widespread disgust among American working people toward the jackbooted storm troopers who are terrorizing immigrant communities.

At the same time, the unions should use the power to put a halt to the attacks on civil liberties which are part of the home front of the imperialist war. Driver’s licenses with biometric data, TWIC identification cards with “background checks,” warrantless spying and phone tapping, setting up special military tribunals for “trials” in which defendants are denied the right of habeas corpus, to know the “evidence” or even the charges against them – all these are part of a drive that is in high gear pushing the United States toward a full-fledged police state. There have been scores, perhaps hundreds of resolutions by unions and city, county and state labor bodies against the U.S.A. PATRIOT Act, showing that labor activists are well aware of the danger. But just as is the case with the countless union antiwar resolutions, there has been no labor action. It is commonplace in the labor movement to bemoan the lack of real action when Reagan broke the 1981 PATCO air traffic controllers’ strike, paving the way for massive union-busting, takeaways and racist attacks all down the line. Let’s not let the labor bureaucrats bury the vital struggles of today.

Now is the time to turn words into deeds, to speak to the capitalist rulers in the only language they understand. The imperialist war parties must be defeated by a class mobilization of the working people at the head of all the oppressed. The ILWU motion to stop work on May Day to put a stop to the war can provide working people everywhere with the opening to turn from impotent protest to a struggle for power. For that the key is to build a class-struggle workers party fighting for a workers government, for socialist revolution here and around the world, that will put an end once and for all to the system of endless war, poverty and racism. ■

Defend the Puerto Rican Teachers Federation!

A Case of Labor Colonialism:

AFL-CIO and Change to Win vs. the FMPR

7 FEBRUARY 2008 – As the Puerto Rican Teachers Federation (FMPR – Federación de Maestros de Puerto Rico) prepares to strike against a virulently anti-labor governor, Aníbal Acevedo Vilá of the Popular Democratic Party (PPD), braving draconian no-strike legislation (Law 45), unions affiliated with the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) and the Change to Win (CTW) federation are outrageously lining up with the bosses. This will come as no surprise to those who know something of the sordid history of the American labor bureaucracy in the U.S.’ Caribbean island colony, and as accomplices of imperialist machinations throughout Latin America (and the rest of the world). What the labor fakers are preparing is a major betrayal of Puerto Rican workers. A crucial test is shaping up in which all of labor will have to take a stand. *Which side are you on?*

On January 1, Dennis Rivera, vice president of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the main component of CTW, and Aida Díaz, head of the “Association of Teachers of Puerto Rico” (AMPR), announced that they had begun “a process of affiliation to obtain a triumph in the union elections of the Department of Education” (AP, 1 January). At first glance this would appear to be an old-fashioned raid on the FMPR. But it’s worse than that. The SEIU/CTW and AMPR are working hand-in-glove with Education Secretary Rafael Aragunde, who for more than two years dragged his heels refusing to negotiate with the Teachers Federation leaders, and then last month got the Public Sector Labor Relations Commission to decertify the FMPR. As the New York Spanish-language daily *El Diario-La Prensa* (3 February) reported:

“The battle takes place in anticipation of a major teachers strike that threatens to paralyze the public school system and in which Change to Win is positioned as a strategic ally of the island’s autonomous government, which wants to push the Teachers Federation out.”



Carlos Quiñes/LaborNet

Hundreds of members of the Puerto Rican Teachers Federation (FMPR) protest in June 2005 outside “hearings” called by American Federation of Teachers as AFT prepared to bring in the colonial courts.

As for the AMPR: this is not a workers organization at all but a “professional” outfit that includes supervisors and even Aragunde’s spokesman who delivers his strikebreaking threats. Since it is not registered as a labor group, the Association has set up a phantom “teachers union” whose first act will be to *scab*. Its members will “attempt to work in the classroom” in the event of a teachers strike, said a spokesman, while pretending to “avoid confrontations” (*Primera Hora*, 4 February). Every experienced trade-unionist knows what that means: they are preparing to provoke violence on the picket lines. But while Education Secretary Aragunde calls on retired teachers to give classes during a strike and the governor prepares to use the Shock Force (Fuerza de Choque) of the Puerto Rican Police and even the National Guard against the FMPR to keep schools open, spokesmen for the retired teachers vowed they would not act as strikebreakers.

For its part, the AFL-CIO, through its affiliate, the Puerto Rican Workers Federation (FT), joined with the SEIU affiliates on the island – the SPT (Puerto Rican Workers Union) and UGT (General Workers Union) – to denounce the Teachers Federation’s call for a strike. While claiming to support



Faces of ignominy: sellout bureaucrats José Rodríguez Báez of the FT (left), Fernando Juarbe (UAW) and Roberto Pagán (SPT-SEIU 1996) while they were denouncing the upcoming strike of the FMPR, January 18. Also putting the knife in the teachers' backs were the SPU, UFCW, SEIU 1199 and CWA.

the right to strike in the abstract, at a press conference shortly after the decertification of the teachers union, FT leader José Rodríguez Báez announced that “we are against their call for a strike.” Rodríguez Báez argued that Law 45 had allowed 100,000 government employees to enjoy the benefits of collective bargaining (*Vocero de Puerto Rico*, 19 January). But when Governor Acevedo Vilá *locked out* 95,000 government workers for two weeks in May 2006, they were paralyzed by this same law. Although they have many initials, each of the U.S.-affiliated labor “federations” has fewer members than the FMPR, the largest union in Puerto Rico. *And now they are preparing to stab the teachers in the back in a crucial class battle.*

Supporters of the Internationalist Group in New York area teachers unions – the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), representing public school employees, and the Professional Staff Congress (PSC), representing City University of New York faculty – have called on them to undertake concrete actions in defense of the Puerto Rican Teachers Federation. We urge class-conscious trade-unionists throughout the United States to take up this struggle for concrete labor solidarity with the FMPR against the shameful anti-strike actions of the AFL-CIO and CTW tops in league with the union-busting government. If this class collaboration escalates to outright *scabbing* in the course of a strike, not only should any scabs receive the time-honored treatment they deserve for crossing picket lines – the battle lines of the class struggle – but the *scabherders* in labor officialdom should be vociferously denounced wherever they go.

AFT/AFL-CIO/CTW: A History of Betrayal of Puerto Rican Workers

The treacherous action by the “Change to Win” bureaucrats is one more proof that they are not one bit more militant

than the pie cards of the AFL-CIO. Ever since the labor tops knifed the PATCO air controllers’ strike in 1981, they have presided over a steady decline in the number of unionized workers to barely 12 percent of the workforce today. At the time of the 2005 split, SEIU president Andy Stern claimed he was building a “new and stronger labor organization.” But while using publicity-grabbing tactics in the “Justice for Janitors” campaign, the core of “Stern’s efforts to modernize the way unions work,” as *Fortune* magazine (10 October 2006) noted, is to “cooperate” with management. “Business and labor have to work together on health care,” he announced, and formed an “alliance” with the union-bashers at Wal-Mart, whose employees still overwhelmingly lack health insurance. As for former 1199 leader/now SEIU veeep Denis Rivera, his brand of labor opportunism is summed up in his political alliance with NY Republican governor George Pataki.

The AFL-CIO’s collaboration with the bosses and their government is notorious in Puerto Rico. At the time of the hard-fought 1998 telephone workers’ strike that escalated into a two-day island-wide general strike, the FT leader declared that it was pointless to strike against privatization of the phone company (see “Puerto Rican General Strike: Forge a Revolutionary Workers Party!” *The Internationalist* No. 6, November-December 1998). In 2003, FT chief Rodríguez Báez reaped an avalanche of protest when he wrote a private letter to then-governor Sila Calderón denouncing “some ‘labor leaders’” who proposed that a \$150 monthly raise be extended to all government employees (*Bandera Roja*, 18 June 2003).

But the prime example of U.S. labor officialdom’s backstabbing collaboration with the colonial government of Puerto Rico against its employees concerns the FMPR itself. Since shortly after it was founded in 1966 the Puerto Rican Teachers Federation was affiliated to the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), which for decades has been run by the New York UFT. But in recent years there was growing discontent on the island over the high-handed actions of the AFT brass, and the precious few benefits received by teachers for \$2.8 million annually in dues money paid to the AFT in Washington. This came to a head in 2003 when the FMPR health insurance plan collapsed due to the pilfering of \$43 million under the administration of the AFT’s man in San Juan, Félix Rodríguez. In May of that year, Rodríguez was voted out as FMPR president and replaced by Rafael Feliciano and his CODEMI (Commitment, Democracy, Militancy) caucus. CODEMI campaigned on a program for disaffiliation from the AFT, and in September 2004 an FMPR assembly voted by over 60% (793 to 393) to separate from the U.S. union.

The AFT tops reacted with an escalating effort to take over the FMPR and depose its elected leadership. First, they claimed the vote was illegal, even though their own supporters were on the committee that counted the votes and signed off on the results. Then, at its July 2004 convention, the AFT pushed through a series of amendments to its constitution concerning putting locals in receivership. It was clear to all that this was aimed at the FMPR. They then proceeded to collect signatures from the members to justify placing the

Puerto Rican federation under an AFT-appointed administrator. But although they were required to present 11,000 signatures (30 percent of the membership), they only came up with 650, many of whom were school employees but not union members. In June 2005, the AFT held hearings in San Juan to “investigate” the FMPR leadership which were picketed by hundreds of teachers. And on July 6, at precisely 4 p.m., the AFT executive council announced that it had appointed an administrator for the FMPR.

While claiming it had discovered “financial irregularities” in the Puerto Rican Federation (“Administratorship in Puerto Rico,” *American Teacher*, September 2005), it didn’t mention that the administrator it named, Félix Rodríguez, had been at the helm when the \$43 million mysteriously disappeared from the health fund. The AFT tops also neglected to mention that two minutes before their decision to impose an administrator, at 3:58 p.m., they had gone to federal court to get it to order the ouster of FMPR leader Rafael Feliciano (Luis Angel Torres, “The Hour of the Furnaces,” *Bandera Roja*, 29 July 2005). So behind the “pantomime” at the AFT exec board, they were actually running to the colonial courts to try to enforce their coup d’état against the elected leadership of the Teachers Federation. (They tried earlier with a Puerto Rican court, but with no luck.) The next day in Washington, FMPR members picketed the AFT headquarters with signs denouncing the AFT “dues suckers” (*chupacuotas*). Feliciano denounced the AFT’s idea of union democracy as “little less than medieval” and said, “Its imposition of an administratorship has as much substance as the wind” (Educational Intelligence Agency, 18 July 2005).

In the upshot, the federal judge dismissed the AFT suit on the grounds that the Puerto Rican teachers are not covered by U.S. federal labor laws (notably the Taft-Hartley Act). The FMPR fought back by holding a referendum of its membership on 18 August 2005 on the question of disaffiliation from the AFT: 19,421 voted to disaffiliate (76 percent), while 5,882 favored keeping the affiliation, with 82 percent of the membership voting. There is no doubt where Puerto Rican teachers stood in exercising their rights.

It is a fundamental betrayal of workers democracy to appeal to the capitalist courts to intervene in the affairs of the workers movement. Class-conscious workers oppose all judicial intervention in union affairs. All the more so in the



Thousands at assembly of the Federación de Maestros de Puerto Rico voted to authorize a strike, 11 November 2007. On the basis of this democratic vote, the government decertified the FMPR. All Puerto Rican labor should unite to smash Law 45!

case of a colony such as Puerto Rico, where the courts, like the police and National Guard, are the organs of direct imperialist domination. The AFT tops’ action was a vile case of trade-union colonialism which any self-respecting unionist or opponent of colonial rule must denounce.

We Trotskyists defended Jimmy Hoffa against the government’s vendetta against him. We knew, as did any informed person, that the reason Democrat Bobby Kennedy went after the Teamster leader with a vengeance was not because the U.S. government favored union democracy but because they feared the possibility of a powerful nationwide truckers strike. In fact, the investigations of the Teamsters began shortly after the first national Master Freight Agreement was signed. We also denounced the *betrayal* by supposed leftists in Teamsters for Democracy (TDU), backed by social democrats of the International Socialists and Solidarity, who ran to Richard Nixon’s Labor Department to supposedly bring “democracy” to the truckers union. After TDU candidate Ron Carey was elected in government-run union elections in 1991, he was barred from reelection in 1997 over misuse of union funds. The Teamster welfare funds that the government placed under “professional” management by financial “experts” lost massive amounts in the 2000-01 stock market crash, while the regional funds that the feds didn’t manage to seize are in good financial shape (due to investments in Las Vegas!).

In the case of Puerto Rico, appealing to the federal courts is to bring in the colonial masters who for more than a century, ever since 1898, have used Puerto Rico as a military base for U.S. domination of the Caribbean. It is appealing to the government that trampled on the rights of *tens of thousands* of Puerto Ricans with its spying, particularly against those who fought for independence. The police files (the *carpetas*) became known in the 1980s, causing a public outcry. After Bronx Democratic Representative José Serrano questioned the FBI director at a House Appropriations sub-

committee meeting in 2001, it was admitted that there were *1.8 million pages* in the files, copies of which are now being housed at the Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College in New York. They document every movement of Puerto Rican independence leader Pedro Albizu Campos as he was dying in federal prison, and including voluminous reports gathered under the infamous COINTELPRO spying and disruption program on “student demonstrations and workers’ strikes” in the island (*New York Times*, 28 November 2003).

The “AFL-CIA” in Latin America

This is the colonial governmental apparatus that the American Federation of Teachers appealed to in order to oust the leadership of the Puerto Rican teachers union. Later, to justify their betrayal, AFT leaders have resorted to vintage red-baiting tactics, arguing that the present FMPR leadership has a political agenda, that they favor Puerto Rican independence and are socialists. Feliciano and others in the Federation leadership and the CODEMI caucus are supporters of the Movimiento Socialista de Trabajadores (MST – Socialist Workers Movement). So what? But the fact that the AFT resorts to such repulsive Cold War tactics is no accident. For decades under Albert Shanker and his heirs in Social Democrats U.S.A. (SDUSA), the AFT ran CIA-funded anti-Communist union-busting operations all over Latin America under the cover of the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD). This is documented in the pamphlet by George Schmidt, *The American Federation of Teachers and the CIA* (1978). Shanker et al. also funneled U.S. dollars to the pseudo-union Solidarność in Poland that in the guise of promoting “free trade unions” acted as a spearhead of capitalist counterrevolution in the Soviet bloc.

These days “The Company’s” money is sent via conduits such as the National Endowment for Democracy, run by the same SDUSA crowd that used to run the AIFLD. At the AFL-CIO, the International Department has been replaced by the “Solidarity Center,” whose Latin American operations use Puerto Rican union flunkies and sinister Cuban *gusano* Bay of Pigs veterans (like the former CIA agent who just punched former Puerto Rican governor Pedro Roselló in the eye for criticizing the Iraq war!). And now they’re up to their old imperialist “dirty tricks” again. *El Diario-La Prensa* (14 January) reports that it has documented proof of the identity of “a paid propagandist of the government of Puerto Rico [who] has participated in at least one of the attempts by U.S. labor federations to retake control of the Teachers Federation,” at the time of the AFT takeover bid, and who “is directly linked to Governor Aníbal Acevedo Vilá.” Meanwhile, Wilda Rodríguez, a former press secretary for 1199 chief Dennis Rivera, is writing columns in *El Nuevo Día* (24 January) talking about strikers “provoking clashes” in the context of a “concerted civil action against the strike.” Just who is provoking here?

A century ago, the American socialist Daniel De Leon coined the telling phrase describing union bureaucrats as the “labor lieutenants of the capitalist class.” This accurately describes the action of the entire layer of union officialdom whose

job, in a broad sense, is to control the ranks in the interests of maintaining capitalism. The AFL-CIO, AFT and SEIU/Change to Win international go beyond that to act as direct agents of imperialist repression. AFL-CIO union operatives helped prepare the bloody Pinochet coup against Salvador Allende’s Unidad Popular government in Chile in 1973, for instance, by organizing “strikes” by truck owners. More recently, these labor operatives have been active in Hugo Chávez’ Venezuela in the course of a counterrevolutionary 2002 coup disguised as a “strike” when it was actually a bosses’ lockout. Now we see them at work again in the Caribbean, which Washington considers an “American lake,” just as they treat all of Latin America as the U.S.’ “back yard.”

Independence for Puerto Rico and All Colonies! For International Socialist Revolution!

But these open agents of imperialism are the battering ram for the broader pro-capitalist labor bureaucracy. While government agents should simply be chucked out of workers organizations, in the U.S. class-conscious unionists must struggle within the AFL-CIO and Change to Win federations and other unions to drive out the labor fakers who chain workers to the capitalist parties, particularly to the Democrats – but not exclusively, as the example of Dennis Rivera shows. Many leftists who criticize “AFL-CIA” dirty work in Latin America turn around and support pro-Democratic Party liberal bureaucrats in the U.S., and even sue unions in the bosses’ courts (in the case of the Teamsters, Mine Workers, Transport Workers and other unions). Thus they use the same tactics as the AFT tops against the FMPR. Because they do not recognize the *class line* separating the proletariat from the bourgeoisie, they are inexorably led into “popular fronts” with the supposedly more “progressive” capitalist parties (such as Allende’s UP in Chile).

Ninety years ago, in the midst of the First World War, V.I. Lenin explained the fact that most of the social democrats ended up supporting “their own” bourgeoisie in the imperialist slaughter by pointing to the role of the “labor aristocracy.” This social layer is bribed with crumbs from the imperialist table – the plush offices, overseas jaunts, high salaries, etc. – to chain the workers to their class enemies. Today, he wrote, “every imperialist ‘Great’ Power can and does bribe smaller strata (than in England in 1848–68) of the ‘labor aristocracy.’ Formerly a ‘bourgeois labor party,’ to use [Friedrich] Engels’s remarkably profound expression, could arise only in one country, because it alone enjoyed a monopoly.... Now a ‘bourgeois labor party’ is inevitable and typical in all imperialist countries.” The Bolshevik leader continued: “The important thing is that, economically, the desertion of a stratum of the labor aristocracy to the bourgeoisie has matured and become an accomplished fact; and this economic fact, this shift in class relations, will find political form, in one shape or another, without any particular ‘difficulty’” (“Imperialism and the Split in Socialism,” October 1916).

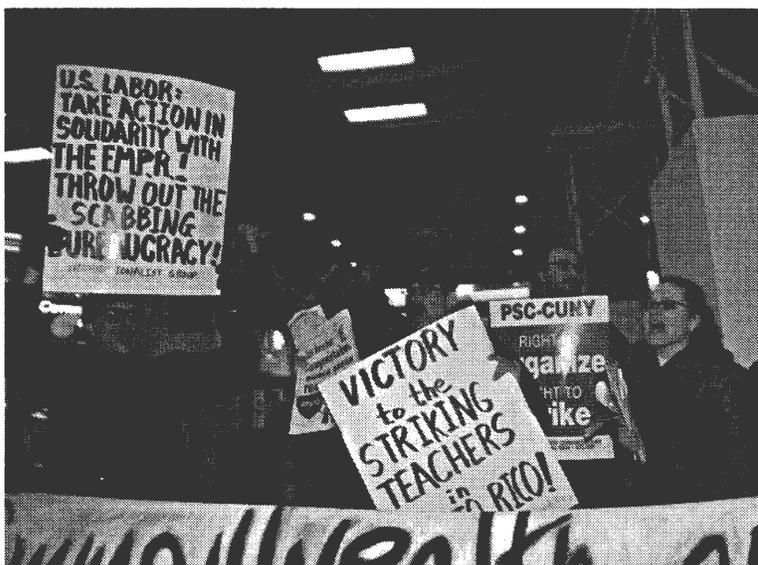
Lenin’s conclusion was that it was necessary to oust this social layer that holds the workers organizations in bondage to the bourgeoisie. But that required a political struggle not

NYC Teachers Union Votes Solidarity with Puerto Rican Strikers

On March 5, the Delegate Assembly of New York City's United Federation of Teachers (UFT) declared its solidarity with the striking teachers in Puerto Rico. Close to 1,000 delegates voted for a motion calling to "support the Puerto Rican teachers in their struggle to be treated with dignity." The UFT is the largest union in NYC, representing some 92,000 teachers and paraprofessionals educating more than 1 million students, as well as being the largest affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT).

Winning this support took a considerable struggle as the Puerto Rican Teachers Federation (FMPR) disaffiliated from the AFT in 2004 complaining of the high-handed attitude of the American union, whose representatives were implicated in the financial collapse of its health and welfare fund. Nevertheless, under pressure from the ranks, UFT president Randi Weingarten introduced Normahiram Rodríguez-Pérez, a member of the UFT and former union delegate of the FMPR who told the delegates how the Puerto Rican union walked out in defiance of a law outlawing strikes by public sector workers. She noted that the women strikers were displaying great courage and setting an example in this week honoring working women.

A week earlier, another affiliate of the AFT in NYC, the Professional Staff Congress (PSC), also approved a mo-



CMI Puerto Rico

March 5 protest in New York in solidarity with FMPR strike.

tion of solidarity with the Puerto Rican teachers. The PSC Delegate Assembly, representing 20,000 faculty and staff at the City University of New York (CUNY), condemned the Puerto Rican government's attacks on labor rights and called for overturning the decertification of the union. Supporters of the Internationalist Group were active in their unions in obtaining these declarations of solidarity.

only against the open "social chauvinists" who supported "their own" imperialist rulers in war (as the AFT, AFL-CIO, CTW have long done), but also against "social pacifists" who want at most to change the war *policy* without challenging the imperialist system. While social pacifists like Karl Kautsky talked of "peace," the Bolsheviks fought to "turn the imperialist war into civil war" by mobilizing the workers in class struggle against imperialism. Today, as multiple "peace" coalitions with nearly identical political platforms squabble with each other over organizational questions, competing to get some Democratic politician on their platforms, the Internationalist Group uniquely fights for workers strikes against the war, for labor to refuse to transport war materiel, and to *defeat the imperialist war* abroad and the *bosses' war on labor, oppressed minorities and immigrants* "at home." We struggle in the unions to replace the sellout labor bureaucracy with a class-struggle leadership, to break with the Democrats and *forge a revolutionary workers party*.

The IG and the League for the Fourth International, of which it is the U.S. section, have long fought for independence for Puerto Rico, and for a voluntary socialist federation of the Caribbean. As the early Communist International insisted, it is the elementary duty of revolutionaries in the imperialist countries to unconditionally support freedom for all colonies (see "ICL Renounces Fight for Puerto Rican Independence," *The Internationalist* No. 6, November-December 1998). At the same time, we fight politically against illu-

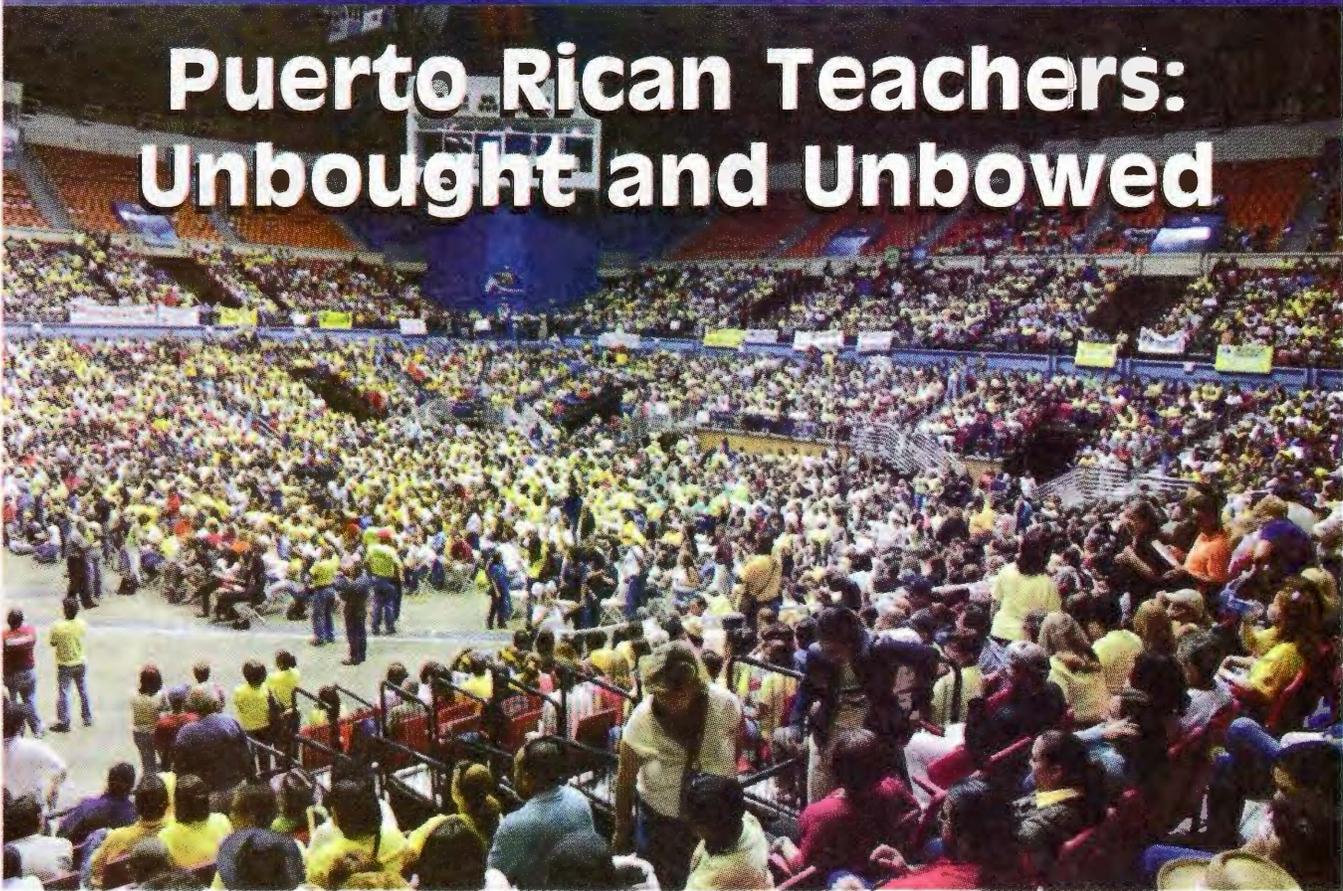
sions in bourgeois nationalists, such as the Puerto Rican Independence Party (PIP), or the host of petty-bourgeois nationalists who seek only an independent (capitalist) *patria* ("fatherland"). From the time of the Communist Manifesto on, it is axiomatic that in waging an *internationalist* struggle against capitalism and imperialism, *the workers have no fatherland*. As Leon Trotsky underlined in his theory and program of *permanent revolution*, in the imperialist epoch, national liberation is not possible without breaking the chains of imperialism, through international socialist revolution.

Whether or not unions in the colonies should remain part of unions in the United States is a tactical question that must be answered by revolutionaries in the colonial countries. Certainly when they are subjected to looting and *diktats* smacking of colonial/imperialist arrogance, Puerto Rican unionists are fully justified in breaking organizational affiliations with such unions. Yet being part of unions organizing workers throughout the U.S. can enhance the ability to intervene directly in the imperialist heartland. The fact is that the largest single concentration of Puerto Ricans is in metropolitan New York, the center of international finance capital. In either case, proletarian internationalists seek the closest collaboration of the workers in the colonies, semi-colonial countries and inside the imperialist monster. That is a key reason why *it is crucial to give the fullest support to Puerto Rican teachers today* as they struggle against their colonial rulers and the "labor lieutenants" of imperialism. ■

**Strike Challenged Slave Labor Law,
Despite Setbacks They're Still Ready to Fight**

Puerto Rican Teachers: Unbought and Unbowed

CMI Puerto Rico



Combative FMPR union assembly on March 5 of more than 10,000 voted to return to work.

The two-week strike by Puerto Rican teachers was a historic event, in open defiance of Law 45, a ruthless piece of anti-union legislation that outlaws strikes, work stoppages or even voting for such labor action. From the beginning of the walkout on February 20 to the decision to return to the classrooms, approved by a giant assembly on March 5 with some 10,000 union members participating, the action by the Federation of Puerto Rican Teachers (FMPR) threw the island into turmoil. The FMPR, representing some 42,000 educators, dared to break the prohibition decreed by the colonial capitalist rulers. In doing so, they blazed the way for all Puerto Rican workers.

There were pickets at hundreds of the 1,500 schools, classrooms were emptied: up to three-quarters of the students didn't attend school. There were dramatic scenes of women teachers with shields confronting the Fuerza de Choque (Shock Force) of the Puerto Rican Police. There were scores of picket-line arrests. These fighters decidedly did *not* act as victims, but rather as protagonists in the fight for justice. Those in

charge of the Puerto Rican educational system can no longer delude themselves that they have a submissive workforce.

The strikers confronted an unholy alliance of enemies which extended from a governor under investigation for corruption and his arrogant secretary of education to the "dues-sucking" union leaders of the SEIU (the U.S. Service Employees International Union) who shamefully took the side of the employer. While the teachers were forced to declare a "recess" of the strike — that is, to call it off — it was because the bosses' intimidation tactics were having an effect on part of the membership, and because the FMPR found itself alone, without the active support of the rest of the workers movement.

The government canceled the Federation's legal certification as bargaining agent for the teachers. The Department of Education refused to sign a contract or any agreement. Even so, due to the pressure of the looming strike, the D.E. decreed a pay increase of \$100 monthly, and a raise in the paltry base salary to \$1,750 a month; it formally renounced any effort to privatize public education through charter

Forge a Revolutionary Internationalist Workers Party!

schools; it committed itself to maintaining established terms of employment and working conditions; and it refrained from taking measures against the strikers for violating Law 45.

The Federation was able to retreat in an orderly way, “with their heads held high and with no reprisals,” as the union publication *Páginas Sindicales* (April 2008) put it. In the face of the decertification of the union, the assembly on March 5 collected more than 7,000 signatures to deduct dues for the FMPR as a fraternal association

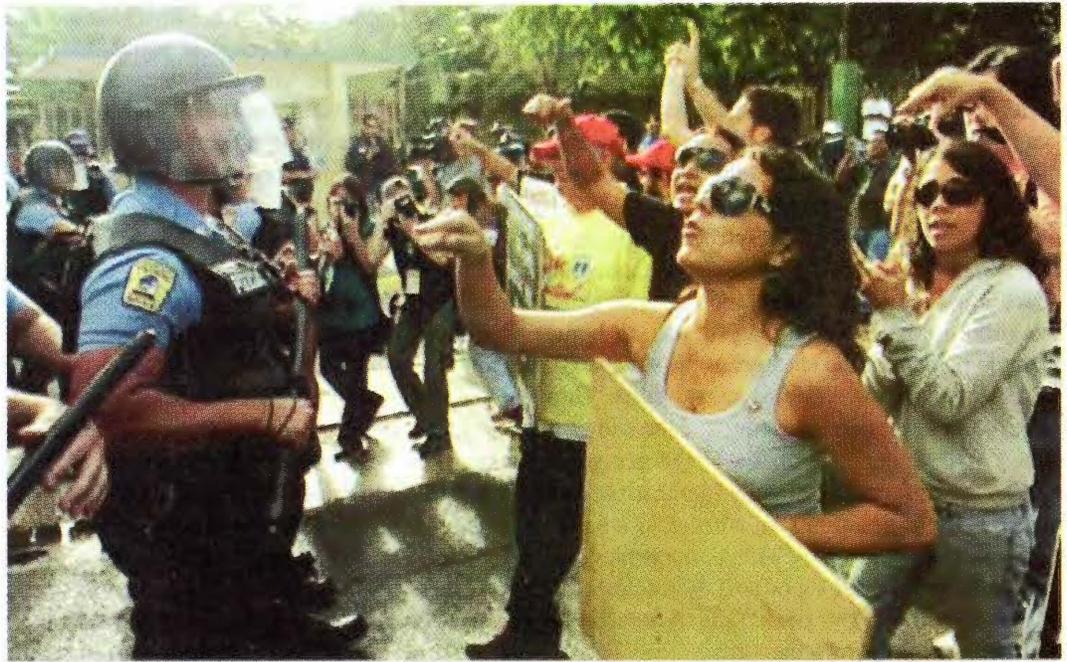
(*hermandad bonafides*). The teachers are going through a difficult period, but the Federation did not renounce the right to go on strike, and the militancy of the union is unbroken.

The educators of the FMPR gave a lesson to the entire workers movement of Puerto Rico and the United States. The heroic strikers deserve our admiration and the labor misleaders who stabbed them in the back should be despised by every trade-unionist with an ounce of dignity. Above all, it is necessary to rearm the FMPR and all Puerto Rican unions for all-out class struggle. Those who hold that the teachers’ strike should never have occurred think that you have to submit to the whip, that all resistance is hopeless. Many are cutting deals behind the backs of the workers in order to feather their nests. But those who fight to defeat the forces that would bury public education will seek to turn this strike experience into a school for class-struggle labor education. As Karl Marx wrote of the unions in his pamphlet, *Value, Price and Profit* (1865):

“They fail generally from limiting themselves to a guerilla war against the effects of the existing system, instead of simultaneously trying to change it, instead of using their organized forces as a lever for the final emancipation of the working class, that is to say, the ultimate abolition of the wages system.”

Balance Sheet of a Hard-Fought Strike

The Internationalist Group and League for the Fourth International actively supported the Puerto Rican teachers strike: denouncing the “labor colonialism” of U.S. union tops; publishing articles on the Internet and in leaflets; putting out a 12-page strike special, in English and Spanish, hundreds of copies of which were sold by our team that traveled to the island; helping to organize solidarity demonstrations in New York; helping to get important motions of solidarity from New York City unions; and obtaining statements of labor solidarity from the Bay Area to Mexico and Brazil. We also raised key issues to win this important battle, as well as criticisms



Carlos Giusti/Primera Hora

Strikers confront Shock Force riot cops outside the Miguel Such school in Río Piedras.

of the strategy pursued by the union leadership. Now it is time to draw up a balance sheet in order to prepare for the coming battles.

From the moment that seven thousand union members voted in a delegated assembly last November to authorize a strike, the Teachers Federation has been the target of an assault by the government of Aníbal Acevedo Vilá, of the Popular Democratic Party (PPD); by its Department of Education and its high-handed chief Rafael Aragunde; by a bourgeois press rabidly hostile to the FMPR; by a handful of union misleaders on the make who have been bribed with the dues money assured to them under Law 45, so long as there is no fight for the interests of the members; by some ex-leaders of the Federation who have sold out; and by the would-be king of the “dues-sucking” bureaucrats, Dennis Rivera, head of the health workers sector of the SEIU.

We have reported in a separate article on the shameful campaign against the FMPR by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), which went to the federal courts in 2004 in a vain attempt to stop the disaffiliation of the Puerto Rican union, or, failing that, to seize its assets (see “A Case of Labor Colonialism: AFL-CIO and Change to Win vs. the FMPR,” on page 59). We also worked with FMPR members and supporters to overcome this, and together were successful in getting through motions of solidarity from the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) and Professional Staff Congress (PSC) in New York, despite resistance stemming from the fact that both are part of the AFT (which is more like a subsidiary of the UFT). Others worked to reach unionists in Local 1199 and other SEIU affiliates. This showed that real labor solidarity between U.S. and Puerto Rican unionists is possible, despite the pro-imperialist politics of the union tops.

But the fundamental battle was taking place on the ground in Puerto Rico. The strikers showed great courage and determi-

nation. The shock troops of Pedro Toledo's Puerto Rican Police dragged off women teachers by the hair. Campuses of the University of Puerto Rico carried out a one-day stoppage, although far too late in the strike, while leftist students and faculty unionists played an active role on the picket line. But as the strike dragged on with no end in sight, the number of teachers actively participating began to drop sharply.

A balance sheet of the strike in the union's *Páginas Sindicales* (April 2008) by the FMPR's secretary of union education, Luis Angel Torres, reported that active support for the strike (either by picketing or staying home) was down from 60 percent of the teachers at the start to 50 percent after seven days and was dropping to one-third, "showing that the strike process was deteriorating and the end of the strike was near." With under half of the workforce participating, the strike was unsustainable, and a return to work was unavoidable. The only question was whether it would be ragged or with a show of force, which the union achieved, showing that it had the determined support of thousands of teachers, even in difficult straits. But these figures reveal real weaknesses and errors in preparing the struggle.

Although the union had said that there were hundreds of strike committees in schools around the island, in many cases these were too weak to sustain a hard-fought struggle. It is certainly relevant, as Torres noted, that "the lack of strike experience had its effect on a majority of the picket lines, since strikebreakers were permitted to enter freely, without resistance by the strikers." But that also shows that there was insufficient preparation by the union leadership. If "the majority of the membership prepared for a short-lived strike," that means that the FMPR leaders either expected the same, or did not ensure that the ranks understood what was involved in real terms. Since it was a struggle just to call the strike in the first place, such deficiencies may be understandable, but they can be fatal – and in this case they were.

The colonial government lined up its labor finks, made some concessions, organized scabberding, and brought out the police in force. The bosses were prepared for a knock-down, drag-out battle and the union ranks were not, at least not sufficiently. And though the teachers fought valiantly, that inadequate preparation is the fault of the leadership. Of course, defeatists, scabs and other scum will seize on this to argue that the teachers should not have struck. Those voices of despair are echoing the bosses' propaganda. But serious labor militants – and teachers who want to get out of poverty and teach in well-maintained and equipped schools, where students can learn instead of being warehoused in run-down, rat-infested barracks – will understand that it is necessary to learn from the mistakes in order to really sock it to the bosses in the next round.

The fact that the return to work was not a debilitating defeat, that teachers were able to go back without reprisals, with their fighting spirit unbroken, that they were able to force some concessions with the threat of a strike – all this shows that the struggle was worth it. Yet it is a mistake to try to present the outcome of the strike as a victory, as some FMPR supporters have done, or to talk of "agreements" achieved by

the strike, as the FMPR leadership has done, when in reality the outcome was a *setback*. These weren't agreements, but rather unilateral decrees by the employer – under pressure from the combative union. And the FMPR was decertified, leaving the teachers without union representation. It is necessary to combat a mood of disappointment, but prettifying the result doesn't help – it doesn't fool anyone, and it doesn't prepare the membership to do better.

Beyond the evaluation by the FMPR leaders, there are several issues they did not raise. Working-class parents were not really organized to actively participate in the strike. A "Broad Front to Support the FMPR" was announced at the last minute, but this was simply a vehicle for bourgeois politicians and various labor and community leaders to declare their sympathy and portray the teachers' action as a "strike of the people" rather than a vehicle to mobilize working-class and poor neighborhoods in support of teachers in the local schools. We called to "turn the strike committees into enormous community centers of the working people." Hold strike education on the picket lines. Having large numbers of students and parents in the street in front of the schools would have solidified support, enormously disrupted traffic and public life, and made it extremely difficult to bring in scabs. But it would have taken months of preparation.

But a key issue FMPR leaders have not emphasized is the fact that the Federation stood alone against the onslaught of the government and virtually the entire bourgeoisie. To be sure, they mention the "enthusiastic cooperation" with the state from "dues-sucking unions," "*independentista* sectors allied with the *populares*" (the PPD), and ex-leaders of the FMPR. But they don't mention the criminal lack of mobilization by their friends in the historically militant unions, in particular the UTIER electrical workers and secondarily the UIA water workers. With teachers being clubbed by the Fuerza de Choque riot police, there should have been mass labor marches blocking the streets of the capital. They could have thrown the switch to plunge governmental offices into darkness (and shut down the air conditioners and computers). In our 14 February *Internationalist* article, "Puerto Rico: All Out to Defend the Teachers' Struggle!" we wrote: "In a hard strike, a fighting 'triple alliance' of the FMPR, UTIER and UIA could be key to winning."

It didn't happen, even though leaders of the UTIER are members of the same Movimiento Socialista de los Trabajadores (MST – Socialist Workers Movement) as are FMPR leader Rafael Feliciano and others in the CODEMI (Commitment, Democracy, Militancy) caucus that leads the teachers union. Their own comrades abandoned them. And a common struggle against the government was eminently possible. On February 15, a week before the teachers struck, representatives of the electrical authority arrogantly walked out of negotiations with the UTIER. On February 17, the UIA demonstrated over the refusal of the Water and Sewage Authority to carry out the contract. The union president even threatened to call a strike vote. Moreover, neither the UTIER and UIA are covered under Law 45, so that even legally it was far easier for them to strike. But they didn't. Why?

Class-Struggle Unions Require a Revolutionary Leadership

Many, if not most, union struggles that go down to defeat these days are sold out by the union leadership. This is particularly true in the period since the late 1970s as the bourgeoisie launched a full-scale assault on the unions and the Soviet Union, leading to the counterrevolutionary destruction of the USSR and the bureaucratically deformed workers states of East Europe. Since then, many erstwhile socialists have given up the ghost, and many labor leaders actively go along with the destruction of hard-fought union gains, at most trying to slow down the process when they aren't actually seeking to profit off of privatization deals. It happens so often that denouncing union tops for selling out almost becomes routine.

In this case, the Puerto Rican teachers strike was *not* sold out, yet it ended in a setback. The union leadership organized mass picket lines in a number of locations, not the token or toothless "informational" pickets so common today; it held out until the strike was no longer sustainable; it didn't abandon its key demands; it didn't accept a rotten deal; it didn't agree to disciplinary actions, or renounce the right to strike – and yet the bosses won this round. How did this come about? And how can it be avoided next time around?

In the first place, the teachers union leaders, while they broke the no-strike Law 45, continued to play by the bosses' rules. In deciding on union representation, they go through the procedures of capitalist labor legislation, whose purpose is to enforce ultimate government control of the unions. Whether or not to participate in such rigged votes (in which management blatantly tries to intimidate the workers with threats of firings and discrimination) is a tactical issue, but a class-struggle union leadership would know that to win it must enforce its right to represent the workers in action. Also, rather than forthrightly calling to rip up Law 45, the FMPR leaders sought only to reform it. Yet class-struggle unionists *oppose all capitalist legislation regulating unions* (as opposed to workplace safety laws and the like), and *reject all court intervention into the affairs of the workers movement*.

Secondly, the FMPR leadership did not wage a *political* struggle against the government, the colonial rulers and the capitalist class. While opposing the PPD government and the PNP (New Progressive Party) opposition, it allied closely with the Puerto Rican Independence Party (PIP), a secondary capitalist party linked to the social-democratic Second International. The PIP claims to be for independence, although it is actually for a negotiated "association" with Yankee imperialism, including leaving the numerous U.S. military bases on the island. It often adopts a more "militant" stance: thus its leaders got themselves arrested during protests over the Navy bombing range on Vieques Island (as did Dennis Rivera). But the PIP also did not call for repeal of the no-strike Law 45, only for its modification. Although it poses as a "friend of labor," as a bourgeois party it wants to keep the unions under the thumb of the capitalist state.

A communist union leadership would have fought during the strike to lay the basis for a revolutionary workers party.

The MST regularly comes under heavy red-baiting attack in the Puerto Rican press, as FMPR leader Feliciano noted in an April 4 talk at Hunter College in New York. His point was that he didn't have to constantly identify himself as a socialist since the media does it for him, and thus everyone knows. But he treated this as an essentially a private matter: some union members are *populares*, others are *penepés*, still others are *pipiolos* and he is a *socialista*. Yet while a union represents the entire membership, a class-struggle union leadership cannot be politically neutral.

This is notably the case on the vital issue of Puerto Rican independence. The MST calls for independence of the Caribbean island nation, which has been under the U.S. boot since 1898. Puerto Rico was until recently the oldest and largest colony remaining in the world (it has since been replaced by Iraq and Afghanistan, which have essentially become U.S. colonies). However, faced with the neighboring poverty-stricken countries such as Haiti and the Dominican Republic, a large majority of Puerto Ricans have voted for either statehood or maintaining the present colonial status disguised as a "commonwealth," as it is vaguely called in English, or "free associated state," as it is deceptively termed in Spanish.

The MST has on various occasions called for "unity" of the "independentista movement." Yet the pro-independence MINH (National Hostosiano Independence Movement), successor to the petty-bourgeois nationalist socialists of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party (PSP), opposed the strike before it was called, and viciously denounced the FMPR leadership after it was over, accusing the union leadership of "monumental errors" and calling the union's demand that the Department of Education sit down to negotiate "laughable" (Carlos Gallisá, in a commentary in *Claridad*, 20 March). This was no accident, because as *bourgeois* nationalists the MINH yearn to be the owners of "their own" *patria* (fatherland).

It shouldn't be surprising therefore, that the spokesman for Education Secretary Aragunde is a member of the strike-breaking management Association of Puerto Rican Teachers and a supporter of the MINH. Nor should it come as a surprise that former PSPer Dennis Rivera has maintained ties with these nationalists who buzz like flies around the PPD administration of Governor Acevedo Vilá. In contrast, as proletarian internationalists, the Internationalist Group and League for the Fourth International stand for the unconditional independence of Puerto Rico and fight for a voluntary socialist federation of the Caribbean, in order to put an end to the national oppression of the Puerto Rican people and to expose the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalists. Thus Trotskyists oppose political unity with *independentistas* such as the PIP and MINH as class collaboration.

This leads to a third key point, that the Movimiento Socialista de los Trabajadores is not a Leninist vanguard party of the working class but rather a loose social-democratic formation. Since it angers MSTers when we say this, let us explain. First, we are not referring to the latter-day social democrats like Tony Blair's "New Labour" in Britain who implement "neo-liberal" privatization policies, but a more classi-

cal type. In its statement, "What Is the MST and What Does It Fight For" (*Bandera Roja*, 21 April 2003), the MST openly proclaims its "Socialist-Democratic perspective." It explicitly rejects a Leninist party governed by democratic centralism. This concept has been deformed by the Stalinists, who imposed a *bureaucratic* centralism on the party ranks, in order to enforce its policies of class collaboration. But any tendency that seriously intends to wage sharp class battles requires a disciplined party to lead them.

The MST writes that the "crisis of Marxism" has manifested itself particularly on the question of party organization and has "highlighted the contradictions of the so-called Leninist theory of organization with the autonomous and free development of the workers struggles." Where Leninist democratic centralism holds that after internal discussion, a minority must carry out the decision of the majority, the MST writes that "once a decision is taken, the majority...must be the main ones responsible for putting it into practice; the minority (those who voted against) must have the option of complying with it or not." This is pure social democracy, a party in which every current can do what it wishes – at least until pressures grow so intense that the party bureaucracy ends up throwing out the revolutionaries, or worse.

So what about the "autonomous and free development of the workers struggles"? We have just seen what this means in practice. The FMPR teachers union led by MSTer Rafael Feliciano goes on strike against a no-strike law, facing the full weight of state repression, and the UTIER electrical workers led by MSTer Ricardo Santos sits on its hands, even though intervention by the electrical workers could have decisively altered the outcome of the strike. Each labor group goes its own way, because "the organization should not require anyone, under the threat of disciplinary measures, to obey a decision which would injure principles of conscience." If so, on what basis can the union require that its members not scab on a strike?

This also concerns the crucial question of class consciousness. In his balance sheet, Luis Angel Torres writes that a main reason the strike did not win a contract was "the state of class consciousness of the educational workers." This is certainly a key factor, and it is also certain that "the teachers strike was a massive pedagogical experience." Yet as Lenin insisted in *What Is To Be Done?* it is the revolutionary party that must bring socialist consciousness to the working masses, for otherwise they cannot go beyond the trade-union consciousness that grows out of their day-to-day existence and struggles. Blaming the ranks for the lack of clear class consciousness, is ducking the responsibility of the leadership.

So the teachers union did not sell out, yet it still suffered a loss. That is related to a more general issue, namely the fate of labor struggles and unions in the present era. This question was addressed by Leon Trotsky in an essay he was working on when he was murdered by a Stalinist assassin in August 1940. In the unfinished but extremely rich manuscript he left, published under the title "Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay," the co-leader of the Russian October Revolution wrote:

"In other words, the trade unions in the present epoch cannot

simply be the organs of democracy as they were in the epoch of free capitalism and they cannot any longer remain politically neutral, that is, limit themselves to serving the daily needs of the working class. They cannot any longer be anarchistic, i.e. ignore the decisive influence of the state on the life of peoples and classes. They can no longer be reformist, because the objective conditions leave no room for any serious and lasting reforms. The trade unions of our time can either serve as secondary instruments of imperialist capitalism for the subordination and disciplining of workers and for obstructing the revolution, or, on the contrary, the trade unions can become the instruments of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat."

Trotsky comes back to this point over and over, treating it from various angles. Thus he writes:

"As a matter of fact, the independence of trade unions in the class sense, in their relations to the bourgeois state can, in the present conditions, be assured only by a completely revolutionary leadership, that is, the leadership of the Fourth International. This leadership, naturally, must and can be rational and assure the unions the maximum of democracy conceivable under the present concrete conditions. But without the political leadership of the Fourth International the independence of the trade unions is impossible."

Many ostensibly Trotskyist outfits treat this as pious wishes, then turn around and make political blocs with all sorts of reformist out-bureaucrats that guarantee that once in office they will act like their predecessors. But Trotsky was making a fundamental point. In this period where union gains are being chewed up left and right, as the standard of living of the working class is systematically driven down, "the objective conditions leave no room for any serious and lasting reforms." In fighting to defend its very existence, the proletariat cannot succeed using the old methods of reformist labor struggle. This was just shown in Puerto Rico, where the teachers fought with all their hearts, they weren't sold out, but they couldn't prevail because they were only prepared for a traditional (reformist) labor struggle while the bosses were waging class war.

This is the second major labor battle in Puerto Rico in recent years, the first being the general strike of 1998. For our analysis of that strike, which was sold out with a handshake between a union leader and top cop Toledo on the road to the San Juan airport as the mass picket was called off, see our "Balance Sheet of the General Strike: Puerto Rican Workers Mobilize, Union Tops Cave In," in *The Internationalist* No. 6, November-December 2006. We encourage revolutionary-minded militants in Puerto Rico to study Trotsky's essay on the unions. The Internationalist Group and League for the Fourth International uphold the need to build a revolutionary workers party based on the principles and program of Lenin and Trotsky in order to provide the leadership the class struggle requires in this epoch. In quiet times, this may seem like preaching in the wilderness, but in every hard class battle, it is dramatically confirmed.

The urgent need to build the Leninist-Trotskyist world party of socialist revolution, a reformed Fourth International, is the central lesson of the Puerto Rican teachers strike. ■

Sacco and Vanzetti...

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By 1926, the total membership of the ILD was 20,000 individual members and 75,000 collective members (affiliated organizations) and was thus many times that of the CP (about 15,000 members). Its National Committee included a wide spectrum of political beliefs and affiliation within the framework of working-class defense. The CP did not hide its role in founding the ILD and its members who played prominent roles in the ILD such as National Secretary James Cannon, who went on to become the founder of American Trotskyism, did not disguise their membership. It was not a “communist front”, but rather a class-struggle defense organization in accordance with the communist program. As Cannon later recalled:

“There were [initially] 106 class war prisoners in the United States – scores of IWW members railroaded in California, Kansas, Utah, and other states under the criminal syndicalist laws. We located a couple of obscure anarchists in prison in Rhode Island; a group of AFL coal miners in West Virginia; two labor organizers in Thomaston, Maine – besides the more prominent and better known prisoners... They were not criminals at all, but strike leaders, organizers, agitators, dissenters – our kind of people. Not one of these 106 prisoners was a member of the Communist Party! But the ILD defended and helped them all.”

– James P. Cannon, *The First Ten Years of American Communism*. (Lyle Stuart, 1960)

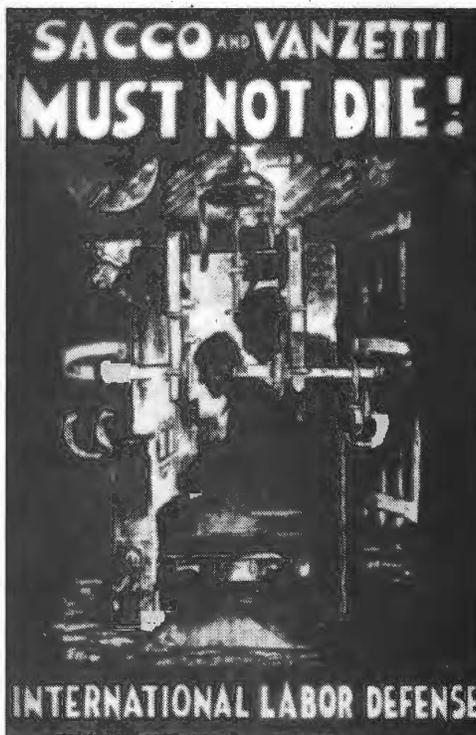
It is necessary to underline this character of the ILD in view of the scurrilous allegations, repeated by the Watson book, as well as the 2006 documentary film by Peter Miller, that the Communists had no interest in saving Sacco and Vanzetti, and preferred dead martyrs. History records that in January 1928 Calogero Greco and Donato Carillo, two Gallianists, were acquitted of the death of two Italian fascists in New York City



Carlo Tresca addresses 1927 rally of the ILD to free Sacco and Vanzetti.



Under James P. Cannon (above), who in 1928 was expelled from the Communist Party for Trotskyism, the ILD led fight to free Sacco and Vanzetti.



after a defense campaign supported in large part by the ILD.

But the ILD did sharply criticize the legalism of the Boston committee, as well as Socialist Party efforts in the same vein. In 1926 it proposed to Sacco and Vanzetti that the ILD take over the case and bring in the renowned lawyer Clarence Darrow. After some hesitation, Sacco and Vanzetti decided to remain loyal to the Boston committee.

The outlook of the International Labor Defense as Cannon summed it up in January 1927 (he repeated this

again and again, and these writings are reprinted in his *Notebook of an Agitator*):

“One policy is the policy of the class struggle. It puts the center of gravity in the protest movement of the workers of America and the world. It puts all faith in the power of the masses and no faith whatever in the justice of the courts. While favoring all possible legal proceedings, it calls for agitation, publicity, demonstrations – organized protest on a national and international scale. It calls for unity and solidarity of all workers on this burning issue, regardless of conflicting views on other questions. This is what has prevented the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti so far. Its goal is nothing less than their triumphant vindication and liberation.

“The other policy is the policy of ‘respectability,’ of the ‘soft pedal’ and of ridiculous illusions about ‘justice’ from the courts of the enemy. It relies mainly on legal proceedings. It seeks to blur the issue of the class struggle. It shrinks from the ‘vulgar and noisy’ demonstrations of the militant workers and throws the mud of slander on them. It tries to represent the martyrdom of Sacco and Vanzetti as an ‘unfortunate’ error which can be rectified by the ‘right’ people proceeding in the ‘right’ way. The objective of this policy is a whitewash of the courts of Massachusetts and ‘clemency’ for Sacco and Vanzetti in the form of a commutation to life imprisonment for a crime of which the world knows they are innocent.”

The Communist and anarchists around the world continued to publicize the case. The French anarchists re-founded a Sacco-Vanzetti committee in 1924, and then another in 1926. The international movement only really resumed in 1926. In June 1926 a meeting of 15,000 was held in NY in Madison Square Garden. In June, however, in what was obviously an attack coordinated at the highest level, police all round the country banned meetings and broke up demonstrations. The International Red Aid conducted a worldwide campaign of mass meetings in fall of 1926.

As the state of Massachusetts continued to rubber stamp rejections of the appeals, the campaign moved into high gear in the spring of 1927. On 26 May 1927, tens of thousands of factory workers in Rochester, New York walked out several hours before closing time in a protest strike.

By this time, the movement around the world had attracted quite a bit of support from various intellectuals and other celebrities – Albert Einstein and H.G. Wells, for example, which has led to the massive international working class support for Sacco and Vanzetti being ignored. Despite much useful information, a recent article by Lisa McGirr in the *Journal of American History* (March 2007) – “The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti: A Global History” – describes the protests in defense of Sacco and Vanzetti as a “popular front”. This is quite mistaken.

In Marxist terms, a popular front is an alliance of working class organizations, including ostensible socialists and communists, with openly bourgeois forces, and thus on the latter’s terms. This can take the form of coalition governments, but even here in the USA we have mini-popular fronts around the war question, with demands tailored to be accept-

able to the Democrats, rather than calling for the defeat of the imperialists and workers action against the war.

In 1926 and 1927 there were those, such as Green, the president of the AFL, and various social democrats or bourgeois representatives in Europe who called for a “new trial”, or for commuting their sentence to life imprisonment (even the Pope got into the act) which represented a genuine form of popular frontism.

The Communist International, to be sure, was no longer the international of Lenin and Trotsky, but had rather undergone centrist degeneration. The Stalinist bureaucracy had already consolidated its hold as of 1923, preaching the dogma of “socialism in one country” and pursuing a class-collaborationist bloc with the Kuomintang in China. But on the Sacco and Vanzetti issue, the Comintern maintained a line of calling for liberating Sacco and Vanzetti though class-struggle means.

The social democrats around the world made various declarations, and sent various telegrams, but consistently refused any proposals for joint *action* from the Communists. Significantly, the anarchist committee in France preferred unity with the socialists – who were incapable of even turning out their own members for a demonstration – rather than with the Communists, who stood foursquare for workers strikes to free Sacco and Vanzetti.

Feeling the pressure, Massachusetts governor Fuller appointed the Lowell commission to review the case (this is what the German social democracy had politely requested). Lowell, the President of Harvard, was a first-class swine, anti-Semitic, anti-black, anti-homosexual, who of course whitewashed Thayer. Fuller himself intervened, interviewing various witnesses. In particular he even offered Medeiros a pardon if he would retract his confession! (He did not.) It is important to stress that the Boston committee was quite opposed to any demonstrations during this phony “review”.

With the execution set for August 10, strikes were called in the United States, in Germany for August 9 and in France for August 8. Given the total opposition of the AFL and the European social democracy, these remained limited to various communist strongholds.

In New York City, it is estimated that as many as 500,000 workers went out – primarily in the garment sector – despite a barrage of hostile declarations by the trade union bureaucracy. As Rose Baron, the Secretary of the ILD-backed Sacco-Vanzetti Emergency Committee, pointed out in regard to the opposition of the AFL tops, “This is the first time in the history of the American labor movement that a mass strike of such proportions as this was called without the aid of a properly organized strike machinery” (*New York Times*, 9 August 1927).

Other strong points in the USA included the Colorado coalminers, called out by the IWW, but also Cuban cigar workers in Ybor City, Florida as well as silk workers in Paterson, New Jersey. It was announced that the Federal government was going to institute a crackdown on immigrants and deport all radicals. Chicago was subjected to a reign of police terror in which all meetings were broken up, as were the Pennsylvania coal fields, so that what actions did take place were truly heroic defiance.



Teachers and students in Rio de Janeiro stopped classes on 23 April 1999 to hold protest meetings demanding "Freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal." Work stoppage was ordered by the Rio state teachers union SEPE at the initiative of the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil.

In the face of these events, Fuller postponed the execution until August 23. Again, desperate attempts were made to organize new strikes, as well as demonstrations. Again, they were sabotaged by the labor bureaucrats, although there were general strikes in Argentina, Uruguay and in various Mexican cities. But the movement just did not have sufficient strength to force the bourgeoisie to relinquish its death grip.

Sacco and Vanzetti thus met their fate at midnight. The following day, there was an explosion of working class rage in Paris in which police attacks met with determined resistance, and even the building of barricades. Demonstrations involving clashes with the police also broke out in many cities in France, particularly in the ports of Le Havre, Dunkirk, Cherbourg and St. Nazaire, as well as in other cities throughout the world. Demonstrations throughout Germany were banned by various provincial governments, including ones with "socialist" police chiefs, as in Saxony. In Hamburg, the governing coalition, which included the SPD, was responsible for police attacks on protests on August 24 in which one worker was killed, and temporarily banned the local Communist daily afterwards. When Sacco and Vanzetti were laid to rest in Boston on August 28, there was a final act to this drama, as police viciously attacked the funeral march.

Sacco and Vanzetti did not seek "martyrdom" as some philistines would have it, but they did believe that they would not have died in vain if their supporters understood that they were victims of the ruling class. As Shachtman, the editor of the ILD's newspaper, the *Labor Defender*, pointed out in his pamphlet *Sacco and Vanzetti: Labor's Martyrs*, (which the Internationalist Group has now reprinted), their case was a prime example of just how far the bourgeoisie was prepared to go. And it left its mark. Without the Sacco and Vanzetti campaign, the ILD would not have been able to organize the massive outpour-

ing of support around the world which contributed to saving the lives of the Scottsboro boys in the Thirties.

For Workers Action to Free Mumia!

The movement to save Sacco and Vanzetti remains a guide to action for the present. When Pennsylvania governor Ridge issued a warrant for Mumia's execution in June 1995, there was an outpouring of opposition from labor organizations around the world. In South Africa, where the death penalty was a mainstay of the hated regime of apartheid slavery, virtually all the major unions joined the clamor to save Jamal. In Italy and France, national labor federations took up his cause. Journalists unions around the world came out for their fellow writer. This was a token of the kind of protest by workers and the oppressed that will be necessary to free Mumia, but it is only a token. These words still have to be turned into action, into mass struggle in the streets.

Within the limits of our modest forces, the sections of the League for the Fourth International are guided by the strategy laid out by the ILD and International Red Aid. On 23 April 1999, the union representing 150,000 teachers in the Brazilian state of Rio de Janeiro called on its members to stop work and hold protest meetings in schools throughout the state to demand freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal. Following upon a resolution passed in January by the congress of Brazil's National Confederation of Educational Workers (CNTE) demanding Jamal's immediate freedom, the Rio state teachers union (SEPE) sought to implement this by calling a political work stoppage to free this courageous and eloquent fighter for the oppressed. The motions in the national and state teachers unions were introduced by the Class Struggle Caucus, affiliated with the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil. This laid the basis for further actions:

- On 10 November 1999, the CUT labor federation in Rio de Janeiro raised the call for freeing Mumia as one of the demands of a daylong work stoppage by unions throughout the state.

- 22 November 1999: a labor-centered demonstration in Rio on the "Day of Black Consciousness" made freedom

for Jamal one of its central demands.

- 25 November 1999: a one-day strike by bank workers in the state of Rio de Janeiro included the demand “Liberdade para Mumia Abu-Jamal!”

- 7 December 1999: the Rio teachers union (SEPE) struck for half a day, including freedom for Mumia as one of its central demands.

This had direct consequences in the United States. On 24 April 1999 longshore workers of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) shut down the docks all along the U.S. West Coast for ten hours demanding freedom for Mumia. This action was carried out explicitly in conjunction with the Rio de Janeiro teachers’ work stoppage.

But the vast majority of the so-called far left – a veritable “who’s who” from Socialist Action to the Revolutionary Communist Party – has taken a different course, and adopted the line of calling for a “new trial” to conciliate the liberals. This was a conciliation of people who might admit that Mumia hadn’t gotten a fair trial, but in fact believed him to be guilty. It was a capitulation to the Democrats who are in full accord with the death penalty and the Homeland Security police state measures and the anti-immigrant repression which are the domestic counterpart of imperialist war. So that over the last few years, there has been an outpouring of scurrilous attacks on and backstabbing against Mumia not only from the Fraternal Order of Police, but from so-called “progressives” as well including his erstwhile lawyers.

The battle over the guilt or innocence of Mumia Abu-Jamal, like Sacco and Vanzetti, isn’t really about digging up more forensic evidence or whatnot. The *fact* of their *innocence* has long been proven. Rather, this dispute reflects differing political outlooks, coming down to the issue of confidence in the bourgeois state.

This is undoubtedly why these same groups had nothing to say about the 80th anniversary of the death of Sacco and Vanzetti. A notable exception to this silence on the far left, on the other hand, was the Spartacist League, which finally produced a longish two-part series on Sacco and Vanzetti in its paper *Workers Vanguard* from 31 August to 14 September. Since the Spartacist League, and the Partisan Defense Committee which shares its views, are for freeing Mumia in opposition to those calling for a new trial for Mumia and claim to stand in the tradition of the ILD, there is indeed a lot of talk about mobilization of the working class. *Workers Vanguard* could hardly avoid mentioning the workers’ strikes which were after all the axis of the ILD’s campaign, but the punch line – *the call for strike action today* – just never arrives.

The SL and the PDC, are impregnated with the defeatist



Above: ILWU dock workers marched in San Francisco on 24 April 1999 chanting, “An injury to one is an injury to all, Free Mumia Abu-Jamal!” Below: ILWU stopped work that day, shutting down West Coast ports demanding freedom for Mumia.



proposition that working-class political strikes are impossible in this period. The Spartacist League thus vehemently denied that 1999 ILWU port shut-down was any kind of strike at all. Although it retrospectively reversed this slur four years later, to date it has still not made not *one single mention* of *any* of the trade-union actions in Brazil! And it is not about to advocate anything of the kind itself. So its history lesson is quite toothless in the end.

We cannot expect that the next judicial decision will do our work for us. It could just as well reinstate the death penalty, or leave Mumia to rot in jail like Tom Mooney. What is crucial is to mobilize the tremendous power of the *international working class* in battle against the capitalists and their state power. Mass demonstrations and the mobilization of labor’s *power* are crucial in the fight to save class-war prisoners. But because the capitalist system cannot survive without a massive repressive apparatus – the cops, courts, secret police and armed forces that constitute the core of the bourgeois state – it will take a socialist revolution to sweep away the death penalty and the whole system of racist injustice forever. That is the task to which we in the LFI are dedicated here. ■

Aftermath

The execution of Sacco and Vanzetti immediately provoked a spontaneous and massive eruption of working-class rage throughout the world, from Tokyo to Sydney and Mexico City to London. Even in placid Switzerland, the U.S. embassy, as well as hotels and travel agencies, were attacked and the bourgeoisie mobilized not only the police but also the army on 23 August 1927.

Despite a ban by the police prefect, demonstrations took place in districts throughout Paris during the night of the 22nd to the 23rd. Demonstrators stopped charges by mounted police by strewing the streets with ball bearings. The skirmishes with the police, which even led to the building of barricades, was branded a "Communist plot," but was in fact workers self-defense against assaults on men, women and children. "The Socialist Youth held its own," reported the anarchist paper *Le Libertaire* concerning the initial clashes (Ronald Creagh, *Sacco et Vanzetti* [Paris, 1984]).

Similar outbreaks took place in most French cities, but especially in the ports of St. Nazaire, Dunkirk, Cherbourg (where barricades also went up) and Le Havre. Afterwards, the French bourgeoisie launched a drive to deport Italian communists and anarchists to Mussolini's jails.

Protests in Germany on August 23 also included strikes in the industrial Ruhr region, as well as in Solingen-Remscheid, in addition to massive demonstrations in Berlin. In Chemnitz, in Saxony, construction workers and factory workers walked out. In one city after another, public demonstrations were banned. After police attacks in Leipzig led to the death of one protester, the Social Democratic (SPD) police chief banned any communist demonstrations. The SPD police chief of Dresden followed suit.

In Hamburg, a demonstration called by the Communist Party (KPD) on the 24th was also attacked. One worker was killed and four severely wounded



German anarchists agitate to "Let Sacco and Vanzetti Go!"

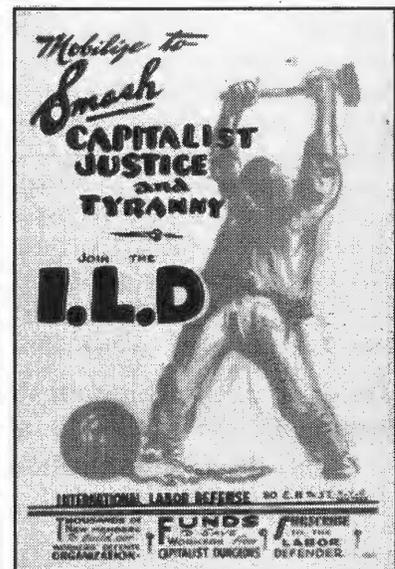
when police fired into the crowd. The ruling Hamburg coalition, which included the Social Democrats, then proceeded to ban the local Communist newspaper. "They fear the truth, so martial law reigns in Hamburg," declared the KPD (Johann Zelt, *Proletarischer Internationalismus im Kampfum Sacco und Vanzetti* [East Berlin, 1958])

These workers actions were forerunners of the sharp class battles of the '30s. But they lacked the genuinely Bolshevik-Leninist leadership that was indispensable for united working-class action to smash the looming fascist threat. ■

Order Now!

Pamphlet on the struggle to free Sacco and Vanzetti, published by the International Labor Defense in 1927 and reissued by the Internationalist Group.

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90 Years...

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here on this fundamental question. Briefly, as early as 1845, in the *German Ideology*, Marx declared that "Communism is only possible as the act of the dominant peoples 'all at once' and simultaneously, which presupposes the universal development of productive forces and the world intercourse bound up with communism." Otherwise, he wrote, "each extension of intercourse [i.e., trade] would abolish local communism," by undermining the isolated workers state with the power of the world market. As Trotsky emphasized, the revolution could break out in a single country, even an economically backward country, but for it to open the door to socialism the revolution must spread to the most advanced capitalist powers. Since a communist or even socialist, *classless* society can only be built on the basis of generalized prosperity not poverty, Trotsky analyzed in his work, *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936), seeking to maintain an isolated workers state would require an enormous expansion of police powers to decide who got scarce resources. This is what occurred in the Stalinized Soviet Union, which he termed a *bureaucratically degenerated workers state*. The subsequent East European regimes that arose following the victory of the Soviet Red Army over Hitler Germany (as well as the Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese and Cuban regimes), modeled on the Stalinist USSR, were *bureaucratically deformed workers states* from birth.

Under Stalin and the Stalinists, the program of building what they called "socialism" only in the Soviet Union soon was translated into actively opposing revolution elsewhere. After the Stalinists and social democrats let Hitler took power unimpeded in 1933, their panicked response was to launch the *popular front*. Instead of a *workers united front* against the fascists, as Trotsky advocated in Germany, the popular front was a class-collaborationist coalition with sections of the bourgeoisie. But the supposed "anti-fascist" (or "anti-imperialist" or "antiwar") bourgeoisie quickly drops its "democratic" and "progressive" pretenses the minute it sees capitalist class rule threatened. This invariably leads to defeat (often bloody) for the working people, as in the victory of Franco in the Spanish Civil War of 1936-39, the triumph of Marshal Pétain in France in 1940, or in the post-World War II period, in the Suharto coup in Indonesia in 1965 and the Pinochet coup in Chile in 1973. Following this logic, Stalin dissolved the Communist International in 1943, as a sop to his imperialist allies in the Second World War.

Defense of the Degenerated/Deformed Workers States and Political Revolution to Oust the Bureaucratic Betrayers

Now as Trotsky did, we as Trotskyists defended the Soviet degenerated workers state, as well as the subsequent deformed workers states, against imperialism and internal counterrevolution. Here it is important to distinguish between the class character of a state and its government. By virtue of the

expropriation of the bourgeoisie, the USSR was a proletarian regime, eventually basing itself (from the early 1930s on) on a planned economy as opposed to the profit-driven capitalist economy. This economic underpinning could open the way to eventually achieving socialism, even though the political regime of bureaucratic Stalinist rule stood in the way and would have to be swept away by a proletarian political revolution. Trotsky stressed that, although the Stalinist bureaucracy rested on the economic foundations of proletarian rule, and thus was sometimes constrained to defend those foundations, in its bureaucratic manner, the political program of this parasitic layer led it to seek "peaceful coexistence" with imperialism which, since such coexistence is *impossible*, would ultimately threaten the very foundations of workers power. This helped prepare the way for the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union and East Europe, and today the same threat of imperialist-sponsored counterrevolution hangs over the remaining deformed workers states of China, North Korea, Vietnam and Cuba.

To help workers in the capitalist countries understand the dialectical concept of a bureaucratically degenerated workers state, Trotsky made a comparison between the Soviet Union under Stalin and a bureaucratically led trade union. Workers must defend the union against the capitalist state, which represents the class enemy, at the same time as they seek to get rid of the sellout misleaders who by their sweetheart deals with the bosses are constantly threatening the existence of the very workers organization they lead. On course, during the anti-Soviet Cold War various reformist social democrats refused to defend the USSR under imperialist attack. By the same token many of them refused to defend bureaucratic-led labor unions against the capitalist state, and often brought in the government and the courts to "clean up" the unions. Class-conscious unionists, on the other hand, insisted that labor must clean its own house.

This was a big issue in the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT), the truck drivers union in the U.S. Beginning in the 1950s, the government went after the IBT leadership on all sorts of corruption charges, reaching a crescendo under the Democratic Kennedy administration in the early '60s. But what was really behind the feds' vendetta was fear that the Teamsters could tie up freight transportation with a national strike. Their special target was Jimmy Hoffa, who negotiated the first national master freight agreement in 1964, leading to a considerable rise in truckers' wages. Hoffa once remarked that everything he knew about organizing over-the-road truckers he learned from the Trotskyists who in the 1930s led the Minneapolis Teamsters (and who were jailed during World War II for their opposition to the imperialist war). In the 1970s, a social-democratic outfit was formed called Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) which in the '80s went to the Labor Department (under Republican Ronald Reagan) to file a suit against the IBT, which was then used to install a "reform" leadership beholden to the government. The result was a sharp decline in truckers' wages and the ravaging of the pension system.

Same thing with the Soviet Union. The people who claimed that the USSR was “state capitalist” like the anti-Trotskyist renegade Tony Cliff eventually ended up on the barricades with Boris Yeltsin, George Bush the Elder’s “man in Moscow,” in August 1991. These same social democrats, like the International Socialist Organization (ISO) in the U.S., also backed the TDU and others who dragged the unions into the bosses’ courts. So the Cliffites hailed the triumph of counter-revolutionary forces in the USSR proclaiming a “New Russian Revolution.” In Latin America, the followers of Nahuel Moreno, many of whom have now openly embraced “state capitalism,” headlined “Revolution Overthrows Stalinist Dictatorship” and “Great Revolutionary Victory in the USSR.” Well, Russian workers have had to pay the price, through massive impoverishment. The life expectancy for Russian men has fallen sharply as a result, to 59 years, and women have been largely driven out of social labor, denied the right to abortion, and thrown into poverty.

Today, even the Cliffites are forced to admit that the demise of the Soviet Union, which according to them was just a shift from one kind of capitalism to another, is widely seen as a bitter defeat for socialism around the world. It’s interesting to see the gyrations they go through to justify their betrayal with this anti-Marxist, self-contradictory line. An ideologue of the ISO, Anthony Arrove, wrote an article on “The Fall of Stalinism: Ten Years On” (*International Socialist Review*, Winter 2000) where he starts out saying that the Stalinist regimes were overthrown in East Germany, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania and the USSR, and declaring “This was a tremendous victory for genuine socialism.” “But,” he adds immediately, “almost universally the opposite conclusion was drawn.” Why so? “For the right, this was obviously a fact to be celebrated,” Arrove writes. Why is that so obvious if it was a “victory for genuine socialism”? Then he goes through various Stalinist-influenced leftists who claim the Soviet bloc states were socialist. While dishonestly claiming that Tony Cliff was “developing the ideas of Leon Trotsky” in declaring in 1948 that the USSR was “bureaucratic state capitalism,” Arrove never mentions that Trotsky called the Soviet Union a bureaucratically degenerated workers state, that Trotsky defended the USSR against imperialism, and that Trotsky fought a faction fight against Max Shachtman over precisely this question.

While claiming that the new ruling classes in East Europe were just the old bureaucrats, he mentions that Lech Walesa of Polish Solidarność headed a new ruling class that imposed market competition and harsh austerity measures, known as “shock therapy,” which eliminated the jobs of many of Walesa’s former supporters in the Gdansk docks. He doesn’t mention that the ISO vociferously supported Walesa’s anti-communist, pro-capitalist, Polish-nationalist, clerical-reactionary movement. So what happened, according to the “state capitalists”? “What happened was actually a step sideways,” he writes. “It was not a transition from socialism to capitalism, but a restructuring of capitalism, similar in fact to the kind of restructuring the International Monetary Fund and

the World Bank have overseen in Bolivia, Brazil and other countries.” He goes on: “Like everywhere else that capitalism has been restructured, this process has had a devastating impact on the working class.” So when capitalism is “restructured” in Bolivia, Brazil and elsewhere, does the ISO consider that to be a “tremendous victory for genuine socialism”?

Of course, the economy under the Stalinists was bureaucratically planned. The plan called for producing 50 pounds of nails? Ok, they produce one 50-pound nail, as the joke goes. The bureaucrats were fully capable of producing horrendous catastrophes. They drained the water of the Aral Sea in Soviet Central Asia for irrigation of cotton fields, so that today it is reduced to the size of a lake with water so salty that hardly anything can live in it. But this was a conscious decision, and had there been democratic organs of workers rule in charge of the planning, a different decision could have been made. In the case of capitalism, vast disasters such as the more than 200,000 people who were killed in the Asian tsunami of January 2005 or the 100,000 overwhelmingly black and poor people abandoned in New Orleans in Hurricane Katrina that September are the result of the inexorable workings of a system based on maximizing profit. The result of the next tsunami or hurricane, even if there is no Bush in the White House, will be no different.

Let’s consider an example of what a planned economy can do. In 1989-90, we went to East Germany at the time the Berlin Wall opened up. Our organization at that time, the International Communist League (ICL), whose political continuity is the League for the Fourth International (LFI), fought capitalist reunification of Germany tooth and nail, while calling for a political revolution to oust the tottering Stalinist leaders of the DDR deformed workers state. We recruited a number of women comrades. And they took us around their apartments, showing us the rooms for their children, which were guaranteed by law. According to DDR law, children up to a certain age had the right to a room with another child, while teenagers had a right to their own room. On top of this, women had a right to free abortion on demand, which we fight for here. There were low-cost communal restaurants, which were not bad; there was free day care, although it was not 24-hours, as we demand, and mothers had to rush home to pick up kids before the closing hour of 6 p.m. Over 90 percent of women had a job, compared to half that percentage in West Germany. While generally excluded from top positions, women played a more prominent role in social life. This was partly due to the fact that East Germany had a tremendous labor shortage from 1945 on. Still, women in East Germany were better off than in West Germany.

The point is that no capitalist country, no matter how advanced its social welfare policies, no Sweden or Norway, has ever or *could ever* make such achievements a *right*. The capitalist market economy would not permit it. Every so often, some social democrat comes up with the idea of writing full employment or decent housing or no layoffs into the constitution. Such calls are fundamentally a lie, because there is no way a capitalist country can guar-

antee such conditions, whether it's written in a constitution or not. Perhaps for a short period in the wealthiest imperialist country, something approaching full employment could exist, but that will be eliminated with the next recession or depression.

Trotskyism vs. Cold War Social Democracy

So Trotskyists defended the Soviet bloc degenerated and deformed workers states against imperialism and internal counterrevolution, just as the LFI defends China, North Korea, Vietnam and Cuba today, while calling for political revolution to oust the Stalinist misleaders. This meant, for example, defending Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in the 1980s, during the period we called Cold War II. The U.S. financed, armed and trained Islamic fundamentalist *mujahedin*, including one Osama Bin Laden, to wage "holy war" against the Soviet Army and the weak Afghan reform regime it was propping up. So while the social democrats and "Eurocommunists" joined the imperialists in denouncing a "Soviet invasion," we *hailed* the Red Army intervention as a progressive action that could open the way to extending the gains of the October Revolution to Afghanistan as they had been to Soviet Central Asia. The Soviet-backed Afghan government, for example, extended education to girls while the U.S.-backed "holy warriors" shot teachers. But the Kremlin didn't want this intervention, which it saw forced on it by the CIA's intrigues, and eventually Gorbachev pulled Soviet troops out in 1989. At that point we offered to send an international brigade to fight on the side of the Kabul regime against the U.S.-backed *mujahedin*.

We defended the Soviet Union in Poland by opposing the Polish nationalist Solidarnosc. While the reformist left was joining demonstrations together with monarchists, fascists and social-democratic Cold Warriors proclaiming "Solidarity with Solidarity," the Trotskyists – which at that time

were organized in the international Spartacist tendency – proclaimed "Stop Solidarnosc Counterrevolution." We pointed out that Lech Walesa's Solidarnosc was union-buster Ronald Reagan's favorite "union," that it was financed by millions of CIA dollars funneled through the Vatican Bank and West German social democracy, that it was an anti-Soviet Polish nationalist organization and not a workers union, in which a large part of the membership consisted of prosperous landowning peasants (*kulaks*), and that Solidarnosc, after consultation with leading capitalist spokesmen, was in fact calling for counterrevolution in Poland. So, in 1989, Lech Walesa is elected president, Solidarnosc is in power, and a counterrevolution takes place. Immediately, women are denied the right to abortion.

So, as alluded to, we fought bitterly against counterrevolution, in East Germany and then in the Soviet Union. Then in the International Communist League, we did things no Trotskyists had ever done before. We put out a daily newsheet in East Germany. We ran candidates in the DDR elections. We recruited workers from various plants, including turbine manufacturers like Bergmann-Borsig, and the giant chemical plant at Leuna, the largest in Europe. We issued a call for a massive mobilization against fascist desecration of Soviet workers tombs in Treptow Park in East Berlin, and after the Stalinists joined the united front, a quarter million people, 250,000, overwhelmingly workers, showed up to oppose fascism. This was a threat to the imperialists, who then put their push for capitalist annexation of the DDR into overdrive. The Stalinist leaders saw the spectre of civil war and took flight. So in the space of three months West Germany flooded the country with D-marks and swallowed the DDR into the Fourth Reich of German imperialism.

But although this was a tremendous defeat, we didn't stop there. We continued to work in Eastern Germany, attracting hundreds of Soviet officers and soldiers stationed in

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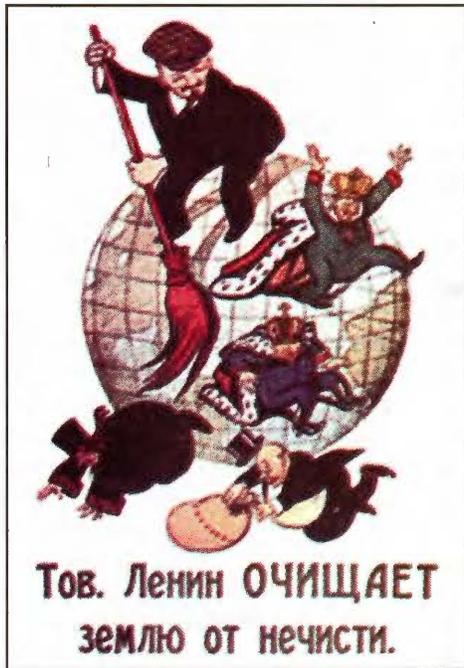
the country to forums on Trotsky's fight against Stalinism. And we worked in the Soviet Union itself against counterrevolution. One of our comrades, Martha Phillips, was murdered there, a martyr in the struggle for Trotskyism. When Yeltsin seized power in a counter-coup in August 1991, we called on Soviet workers to rise up against Yeltsin-Bush counterrevolution. But the rump Stalinists of the "Emergency Committee" ordered workers to stay on the job or at home and not to come into the streets. For

they too were looking for a deal with imperialism, as the Stalinists always yearn for. They simply wanted to preserve the USSR, even if capitalism was restored, whereas Yeltsin planned to abolish the Union, and did so six months later.

For working-class revolutionaries today, Red October, is more than just a slogan or an image or a historical reference point. It marks the tasks begun in 1917, which still face us 90 years later. In a forum on the 70th anniversary of the Revolution, in November 1987 at the Leon Trotsky Museum in Coyoacán, Mexico, where the co-leader of the October Revolution and founder of the Red Army was assassinated by a Stalinist agent in August 1940, we noted that "the spectre of Trotsky haunts Gorbachev's Russia." While Gorbachev even rehabilitated Bukharin, the father of "socialism in one country" and leader of the Right Opposition, he continued to repeat Stalinist lies about Trotsky, the leader of the Left Opposition. Why? Because the Thermidorean Stalinist bureaucracy feared above all the threat of genuine Bolshevism and its program of world socialist revolution. We cited Leopold Trepper, a heroic Soviet spy and head of the Red Orchestra intelligence group that did invaluable work against the Nazis in occupied Europe. When Trepper was jailed by Stalin after World War II, he wrote:

"Who protested? The Trotskyites can lay claim to this honor ... they fought Stalinism to the death, and they were the only ones who did...."

"Today, the Trotskyites have a right to accuse those who once howled along with the wolves. Let them not forget, however, that they had the enormous advantage over us of having a coherent political system capable of replacing Stalinism. They had something to cling to in the midst of their profound distress at seeing the revolution betrayed. They did not 'con-



Early Soviet posters: "Comrade Lenin sweeps the world clear of filth" while Trotsky slays the dragon of counterrevolution.



fess,' for they knew that their confession would serve neither the party nor socialism."

Today, most of the international groupings that once claimed to be Trotskyist are assiduously trying to cut their ties to that tradition. The United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USec), once led by Ernest Mandel, wants to unite with the International Socialist Tendency of followers of the late Tony Cliff. The French section of the USec, the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR) writes a whole article on the 90th anniversary of the October Revolution without even mentioning Trotsky. This is no accident, as they are preparing to dissolve the LCR into a "broader" party that doesn't even pretend to be Trotskyist. For them the question of the class nature of China, Cuba, North Korea, etc. or the historical Soviet Union, does not pose a problem because neither the Mandelites or Cliffites defended them at the crucial hour. They joined the social democrats and "Eurocommunists" in "howling with the (imperialist) wolves," they hailed Yeltsin on the barricades, they are coresponsible for the triumph of capitalist counterrevolution. Likewise the followers of Peter Taaffe in the Committee for a Workers International, the acolytes of the late Ted Grant and Alan Woods who now hail Hugo Chávez in Venezuela and call themselves the International Marxist Tendency, or the followers of Pierre Lambert's Parti des Travailleurs in France who form the International Entente of Working People – they all renounce building a specifically Trotskyist international party.

In fact, they all look to alien class forces for they have lost confidence, if they ever had it, in the revolutionary capacity of the proletariat. Likewise, those who looked to Stalin and led revolutions in China, Cuba, Vietnam and elsewhere have produced regimes that were nationalist rather than in-

ternationalist in their program, and rest fundamentally on a militarized peasantry – a petty-bourgeois force – rather than the working class. Such revolutions could not lead to socialism without a subsequent political revolution, and instead produced bureaucratic regimes that rely on police power to keep the working class in check. Yet those regimes remain fragile because of the contradiction between their actual practice and their formal identification with the October Revolution and their claim (however feeble) to represent workers rule. In contrast to a class, which is rooted in its position in system of production, the bureaucracy is a contradictory petty-bourgeois layer and a parasitic growth on the workers state. When events come to a crisis level there, too, it will be incumbent on authentic Trotskyists to do their utmost to bring the program of Lenin and Trotsky to the workers and youth of those states as it was in the USSR and DDR almost two decades ago.

The fact that various opportunists may claim some vestigial connection to Trotskyism does not alter the rightist character of their centrist or outright reformist politics, often siding with counterrevolution in a “democratic” disguise. The International Communist League, which over several decades represented authentic Trotskyism, argues that the fall of the Soviet Union led to a qualitative regression in proletarian consciousness, whereas the reality is more contradictory. It used this one-sided characterization to justify withdrawing into passive propagandism (while expelling the revolutionaries who went on to form the League for the Fourth International). It responded to a defeat by internalizing a defeatist outlook, and like all revisionists it blames the working class when in fact the leadership is key. Over the last decade, the ICL has embarked on a zigzag course, characteristic of left centrism, marked by capitulation to bourgeois forces at each test. Over China it claimed that the Stalinist bureaucracy was leading the counterrevolution, as if it were some kind of new exploiting class, then retreating from this “third camp” position. Notably, over the U.S. war on Afghanistan and Iraq, the ICL *dropped* its long-standing call for the defeat of “its own” imperialist rulers while outrageously accusing the LFI of pandering to “anti-Americanism” for upholding this fundamental Leninist position.

For Stalinists, the demise of Soviet Union and East European Soviet-bloc deformed workers states spelled the failure of their whole worldview – which doesn’t stop a few rump Stalinists from running around hailing Stalin, that “great organizer of defeats,” as Trotsky called him. So it’s not surprising that quite a few ex-Stalinists, like the academic Eric Hobsbawm, end up buying into the bourgeoisie’s “death of communism” propaganda, just like their forebears pushed the “god that failed” anti-Communism during the first Cold War. For social democrats, the devastation wrought by the collapse of the USSR is no more problematic than the destruction of “welfare state” social programs in the West – they explain this away by saying it is what is required by capitalism, *which they support*. For Trotskyists, the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union – which we fought against, while

the Stalinists capitulated – was predicted long ago, and inevitable unless socialist revolution was extended internationally. Trotsky’s reaffirmation of Marx and Engels’ dictum about the impossibility of an isolated socialism is key to building a new revolutionary vanguard party, which must be Trotskyist or it will not be.

Defeats are inevitable in the struggle for workers rule. What is key is drawing the right lessons from the defeats. This is the point that was underlined by Rosa Luxemburg in her last article, titled “Order Reigns in Berlin,” which she wrote in January 1919, shortly before she was assassinated by the Freikorps precursors of Hitler’s fascists, on orders of the social-democratic government of Friedrich Ebert, Philipp Scheidemann and Gustav Noske. Rosa saw the looming defeat with counterrevolution in the ascendance, but sought to prepare the way for victory:

“Out of this contradiction between the increasingly sharply posed tasks and the insufficient preconditions for resolving them in the early stages of the revolutionary process comes the fact that individual battles of the revolution end in formal *defeat*. But revolution is the only form of ‘war’ – and this is its particular law – in which the ultimate victory can be prepared only by a series of ‘defeats.’

“What does the entire history of socialism and of all modern revolutions show us? The first flaring up of class struggle in Europe, the revolt of the silk weavers in Lyon in 1831, ended with a heavy defeat; the Chartist movement in Britain ended in defeat; the uprising of the Parisian proletariat in the June days of 1848 ended with a crushing defeat; and the Paris Commune ended with a terrible defeat. The whole road of socialism – so far as revolutionary struggles are concerned – is paved with nothing but thunderous defeats.

“Yet, at the same time, history marches inexorably, step by step, toward final victory! Where would we be today without those ‘defeats,’ from which we draw historical experience, understanding, power and idealism?”

As Marx and Luxemburg underscored, the proletarian revolution advances through a series of defeats, even tremendous defeats, only to come back again, *provided* that the proletarian revolutionaries draw the correct lessons from these class battles.

To give birth to new October Revolutions, it is necessary to take up the Bolshevik program of 1917, that is, Trotsky’s program of permanent revolution along with his analysis of Stalinism and of an imperialist system sinking further into decay, embodied in the Transitional Program, the founding program of the Fourth International. Contrary to pseudo- and ex-Trotskyist centrists and reformists, we reaffirm that the central thesis of that program, that the historical crisis of humanity is reduced to the crisis of revolutionary proletarian leadership, retains its full validity today. From Mexico to Iraq to the United States, we must build a world party of socialist revolution. This is the program of the League for the Fourth International, of which the Internationalist Group is the U.S. section. As Lenin exclaimed to the Petrograd Soviet of Workers and Soldiers Deputies 90 years ago, “*Long live the world socialist revolution!*” ■

Fight for Power to Workers and Peasants Councils!

Trotskyism vs. Constituent Assembly Mania

Over the last several years, calls for the establishment of a *constituent assembly* have been increasingly heard in various countries of Latin America. Most recently around the mass strike and quasi-uprising in Oaxaca, Mexico during May-November 2006, demands were raised by the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO) and a host of left groups for a constituent assembly, a “revolutionary constituent assembly,” a “democratic and popular national constituent assembly,” etc. Although a constituent assembly elected by universal suffrage is no more than a bourgeois-democratic demand, it has been put forward by revolutionary communists in fighting against a variety of pre-capitalist and colonial regimes or bonapartist dictatorships. It was one of the key planks of V.I.

Lenin’s Bolsheviks in tsarist Russia, in the 1905 Revolution for example, until it was superseded as the central demand by “all power to the soviets” in the course of 1917. Trotsky raised the call for a national assembly in China under the warlords, while emphasizing that it would only be part of a program for the taking of power by workers and peasants councils (soviets). But the current deluge of calls for a constituent assembly in ostensibly bourgeois-democratic regimes is counterposed to Bolshevism. It replaces the program of proletarian revolution with that of (capitalist) “democracy,” a hallmark of social democrats everywhere.

In its various formulations, the slogan harks back to the 18th century French Revolution when the Third Estate (representing the rising bourgeois and petty-bourgeois forces) formed a National Constituent Assembly in June 1789 to sweep away the remains of the Old Regime (*ancien régime*), of an absolutist monarchy atop a decaying feudal social order. Their initial aim was to establish a constitutional monarchy to put an end to the chaotic conditions which impeded the growth of a national market, with power to be shared between the king and the assembly. But revolutionary events



Petrograd Soviet in 1917. For the Bolsheviks, the call for constituent assembly was a tactical demand against anti-democratic regimes not an all-purpose slogan for all times. Trotskyists fight for the program of the October Revolution, power to workers and peasants councils (soviets).

soon outstripped the plans of the bourgeois “moderates.” By 1792 the National Assembly had been replaced by the National Convention led by the Jacobins under Robespierre. With the further development of capitalism, the working class came to the fore. By the time of the June Days of the 1848 Revolution in France, the National Assembly became the focal point of bourgeois reaction against the proletarian uprising. In Germany and Austria as well, bourgeois constituent assemblies in Berlin, Vienna and Frankfurt in 1848 made their peace with the forces of reaction out of fear of workers revolution.

Generically, a constituent assembly is not simply a parliament but a body which would set up (constitute) a state structure, for example, by issuing a constitution. In France, the second, third and fourth republics were all established by constituent assemblies. In Latin America today, demands for such an assembly are typically accompanied by calls to “refund” the country. It can be a key demand in a country where whole sections of the population have been excluded from exercising democratic rights (for example, in Ecuador the large Indian population was effectively disenfranchised until 1978 by requirements that voters be literate in Spanish). It is also appropriate



Supporters of Evo Morales march to defend the Constituent Assembly, December 15. To defeat right-wing reaction what is needed is revolutionary class mobilization, fighting for a workers, peasants and Indian government.

where a feudal or semi-feudal social structure prevents the vast mass of the rural population from any participation, with landless peasants tied to the landed estates through debt peonage, such as in Mexico prior to the 1910-17 Mexican Revolution. In such cases demands for a “national convention” or constituent assembly to resolve the land question through agrarian revolution, eliminate clerical domination of education and carry out other democratic tasks can be powerful levers to rouse the masses to revolutionary action. The same could be true in the struggle to bring down military dictatorships, as held sway in much of Latin America in the 1970s.

But to raise the call for a constituent assembly in Ecuador or Mexico today, where the formal structures of bourgeois democracy, however stunted, exist and semi-feudal *latifundia* have long-since been replaced by capitalist agriculture, would be to call to “refound” the country on a *bourgeois* basis when what is called for is *socialist* revolution. In Bolivia, the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) of Evo Morales campaigned for a constituent assembly, in order to foster the illusion that it was calling for fundamental change while not touching the *capitalist* foundations of the country. This demand was then repeated by various left groups that tailed after the MAS, in an effort to pressure Morales to the left and pick up support among his plebeian followers. In the 2003 and 2005 worker-peasant uprisings that brought the country to the brink of insurrection, we noted that what was called for was not a bourgeois-democratic constituent assembly (or even a left-sounding “people’s assembly”) but the formation of workers and peasants councils (soviets) to serve as the basis for a revolutionary worker/peasant/indigenous government. We also noted that while Bolivia was the continental champion in the number of coups d’état, it also led in the number of constituent assemblies or congresses (at least 19

by our count)¹. So Morales was elected in December 2005, and thereupon called the constituent assembly he had long promised. What was the result? Right-wing racists have hijacked the assembly to push their reactionary demands for regional autonomy from the Indian-dominated highlands (*altiplano*).

So while in certain contexts it is appropriate for communists to call for a constituent assembly, this demand is by no means inherently revolutionary-democratic. On occasion, it can even serve as a cover for “democratic” counterrevolution. Our tendency, the League for the Fourth International (LFI), and the International Communist League/international Spartacist tendency (ICL/iSt) from which we origi-

nated, has had some experience with this issue. In an article, “Why a Revolutionary Constituent Assembly” (*Workers Vanguard* No. 221, 15 December 1978) we noted that when in Chile the Pinochet dictatorship staged a plebiscite and the Christian Democrats (DC) were talking of replacing the dictator with a reformed military junta, we denounced the rigged vote, calling for a revolutionary constituent assembly and to smash the junta through workers revolution. Our article, by the Organización Trotskista Revolucionaria of Chile, explained:

“Counterposed to reformist adaptations to the bourgeoisie’s program, as Trotskyists we raise the demand for a constituent assembly with full powers, directly and secretly elected by universal suffrage. A genuine constituent assembly by definition could only be convoked under conditions of full democratic liberties, permitting the participation of all the parties of the working class. Thus it requires as a precondition the revolutionary overthrow of the junta, something which the DC and the reformists, despite their lengthy list of democratic demands, fail to mention.

“For Leninists democratic demands are a subordinate part of the workers’ *class* program. As Trotsky wrote of the role of democratic demands in fascist-ruled countries: ‘But the formulas of democracy (freedom of the press, the right to unionize, etc.) mean for us only incidental or episodic slogans in the independent movement of the proletariat and not a democratic noose fastened to the neck of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie’s agents (Spain)’ (Transitional Program). In countries with a bourgeois-democratic tradition and a politically advanced working class, such as Chile, the demand for a

¹ In 1825, 1826, 1831, 1834, 1839, 1843, 1851, 1861, 1868, 1871, 1878, 1880, 1899, 1920, 1938, 1945, 1947, 1961, 1967. See Luis Antezana E., *Práctica y teoría de la Asamblea Constituyente* (2003).

constituent assembly is not a fundamental part of the proletarian program. Thus following the junta takeover, the iST did not raise this slogan. We raise it tactically at present against the bourgeoisie's efforts, aided by their agents in the workers movement, to make a pact with sectors of the military. Our purpose is to expose the bourgeoisie's fear of revolutionary democracy."

—"Condemn Pinochet Plebiscite!" *Workers Vanguard* No. 190, 21 January 1978

In contrast, on other occasions the call for a constituent assembly has been raised in order to head off the spectre of workers revolution. This was the case in Portugal in the summer of 1975. Following the fall of the dictatorship of Marcelo Caetano in April 1974, at a time when right-wing reaction was gathering around the sinister General António Spínola, we initially called for immediate elections to a constituent assembly, as well as for the formation of workers councils. But a year later, as we pointed out in our 1978 article, "Why a Revolutionary Constituent Assembly?" "workers commissions, popular assemblies and various other localized, embryonic forms of dual power were springing up everywhere around the country." At that point, while the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) was allied with leftist officers of the bourgeois Armed Forces Movement (MFA), with Spínola sidelined, counterrevolutionary forces cohered around the Socialist Party (PS) of Mário Soares, which with bourgeois backing won the April 1975 elections to a constituent assembly.

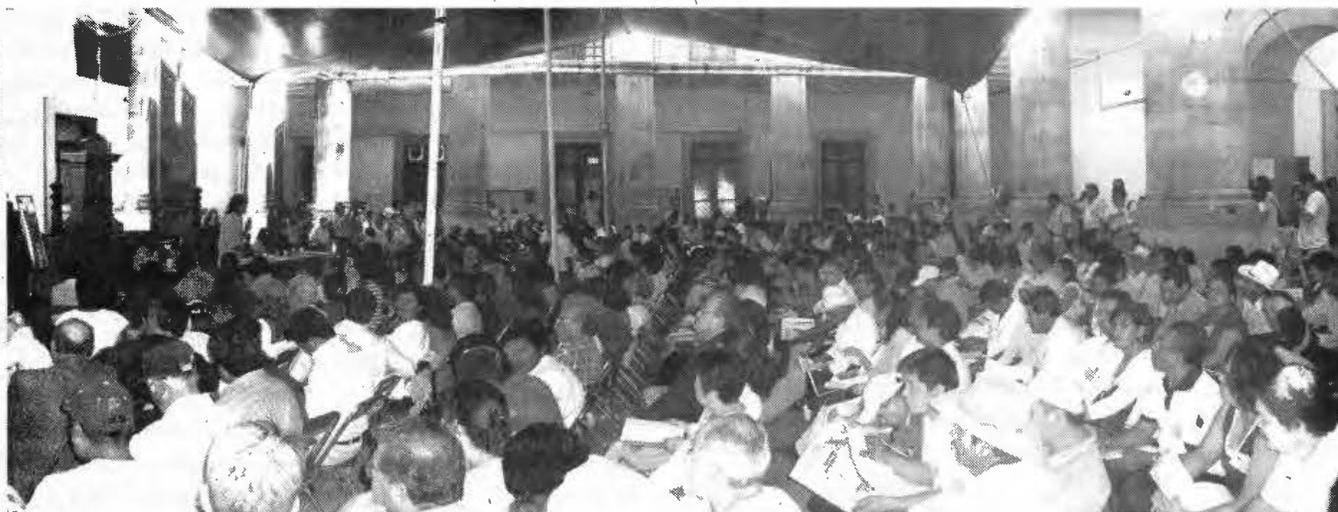
What policy should revolutionary Marxists take? The largest ostensibly Trotskyist organization at the time, the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USec), was split down the middle. The majority, followers of Ernest Mandel, hailed the "revolutionary officers" of the MFA, just as today many would-be radicals hail the bourgeois populist colonel Hugo Chávez in Venezuela. The minority, led by the U.S. Socialist Workers Party of Jack Barnes and Argentine pseudo-Trotskyist Nahuel Moreno, sided with the Socialists (heavily financed by the CIA via the German Social Democrats' Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung) in the name of defending the "sovereignty" of the constituent assembly. So as "socialist"-led mobs were burning PCP offices, the USec was on both sides of the barricades! In contrast, authentic Trotskyists supported neither of the contending bourgeois coalitions, and called instead for the formation of workers soviets in Portugal counterposed to the rightist-dominated constituent assembly (see our two-part article, "Soviets and the Struggle for Workers Power in Portugal," *Workers Vanguard* Nos. 83 and 87, 24 October and 28 November 1975).

Returning to the current situation, in September-November of 2006, articles appeared in radical media around the world acclaiming a "Oaxaca Commune," most of them uncritical enthusiasm, others adding a "left" twist by calling on this commune to seize power, expropriate the bourgeoisie, etc. How it was supposed to do this in the most impoverished, peasant-dominated state of Mexico was not explained. Our comrades of the Grupo Internacionalista in Mexico actively intervened in Oaxaca over the space of many months,

but at the same time pointed out that while a number of unions were part of the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca, the APPO was not based on the working class or peasantry and thus was not an embryonic *workers and peasants government* – which is what the Paris Commune of 1871 or the Russian Soviets of 1917 were (see "A Oaxaca Commune?" in *The Internationalist* No. 25, January-February 2007). In fact, several top leaders of the APPO were supporters of the Party of the bourgeois-nationalist Democratic Revolution (PRD). The GI and LFI called for a *national strike* against repression and to *break with the popular front* around the PRD and its leader, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, and form a revolutionary workers party.

Following the bloody repression of 25 November 2006, the "far left's" facile talk of a Oaxaca Commune has gone up in smoke, so today various radicals are focusing their calls on the demand for a constituent assembly. By far the largest left group in Oaxaca is the Communist Party of Mexico (Marxist-Leninist), which writes that in order to achieve a "revolutionary democratic outcome," the left must focus on "the discussion of a new constitution," "achieving a common platform" and "placing in the strategy of the mass movement the building of a National Democratic and Popular Constituent Assembly" (*Vanguardia Proletaria*, 5 March 2007). It's not surprising that the PCM (m-l) should raise this call, for it is entirely in line with its reformist Stalinist program of a "two-stage revolution" and the popular front, and indeed, in the same issue an article praises Stalin's policies as "a classic of Marxism-Leninism." But the latter-day Stalinists are not the only ones to defend this bourgeois-democratic line. Another champion of the constituent assembly anywhere and everywhere is the Liga de Trabajadores por el Socialismo (LTS – Workers League for Socialism), part of the Trotskyist Faction (FT).

In its balance sheet, "Crisis of the Regime and the Lessons of the Oaxaca Commune" (31 December 2006), the LTS writes that the APPO should have fought for "a provisional government that should call a Revolutionary Constituent Assembly." More specifically, APPO should have "transformed itself into a genuine organ of direct democracy of the exploited and oppressed, which would raise a workers and people's program," in order to "reorganize the state in the interests of the big majorities of the exploited and oppressed" and that a "government of the APPO and other working-class and popular organizations" as "an expression of the Commune" would "institute a genuine Revolutionary Constituent Assembly" in which the "working people, peasants and Indians, along with the whole of the people, could discuss how to reorganize society." Just about everything here is contrary to Marxism. In the first place it is necessary not to "reorganize the state" but to smash the capitalist state and replace it with a workers state. Secondly, a genuine soviet is not simply an example of direct democracy of the poor, but a class organ of *workers* power. The LTS/FT systematically glosses over the working-class character of the program Trotskyists fight for, replacing it with mushy rhetoric about "democracy" and the "people" who sit around discussing what kind of society they want.



Member of the Grupo Internacionalista/México (with microphone, left) addressing forum on democracy called by the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO), Mexico, in August 2006. He said that talk of democracy for the poor and working people under capitalism is an illusion. What was needed at height of struggle was to form workers and peasants councils (soviets) to fight for workers revolution, not a (bourgeois) democratic constituent assembly within capitalist framework.

The “democratist” rhetoric of this current is no accident, for it comes straight from the FT’s progenitor, Nahuel Moreno. The FT gets offended when we call them neo-Morenoite, as they claim to have broken with Moreno some years after his death in 1986. (See their “Polemic with the LIT and the Theoretical Legacy of Nahuel Moreno,” *Estrategia Internacional* No. 3, December 1993-January 1994.) But while objecting to various of Moreno’s most blatantly opportunist formulations, such as his call for a “democratic revolution,” the FT keeps his methodological framework and many of his slogans. Thus the leading section of the FT, the Argentine PTS (Workers Party for Socialism) wrote following the December 2001 *cacerolazos* (pots and pans demonstrations) against the succession of bourgeois presidents:

“The slogan, ‘Get rid of them all!’ expresses the lack of legitimacy and the popular hatred against the regime of political representation.... But it still has not advanced to identifying this regime, in its social content, with capitalist rule. It is in the sense of extending a bridge between the ‘democratic’ consciousness of the masses and the need for revolution and workers power that Marxists raise the slogan of a Revolutionary Constituent Assembly.”

—“The Constituent Assembly and Workers Power, a Debate on the Left,” *La Verdad Obrera*, 18 July 2002

Of course, Trotsky himself presented the 1938 Transitional Program “to help the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find the bridge between the present demands and the socialist program of the revolution.” But what the PTS/FT does here is quite different, for the slogan of a constituent assembly, whether you label it revolutionary or not, does not by itself go beyond the limits of capitalism. In economically backward capitalist, semi-feudal or colonial countries, such an assembly could be the vehicle for mass struggles for agrarian revolution, national independence and basic democratic rights. But both before and after December 2001, Argentina

was an independent, fully capitalist country which doesn’t even have a real peasantry but rather agricultural workers. To pretend that there is a “democratic revolution” to be accomplished in Argentina is to capitulate to and adopt the democratic illusions of the masses, not to lead them to socialist revolution. And that is exactly what Moreno did in making the call for a constituent assembly a centerpiece of his program, from Portugal (where he borrowed it from the U.S. SWP) to Argentina to the whole of Latin America.

The cornerstone of Trotskyism is given in the first sentence of the Transitional Program: “The world political situation as a whole is chiefly characterized by a historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat.” The purpose and *raison d’être* (reason for being) of the Fourth International, of which this was the founding document, was to provide that independent revolutionary vanguard to lead the struggles of the workers and oppressed to international socialist revolution. Moreno, however, rejected Trotsky’s view. In a 1980 document titled *Actualización del Programa de Transición* (Bringing the Transitional Program Up to Date), he argued that “despite the defects of the subject (i.e., that in some revolutions the proletariat was not the main protagonist) and of the subjective factor (the crisis of revolutionary leadership, the weakness of the Trotskyists), the world socialist revolution achieved important victories, expropriating the national and foreign exploiters in a number of countries, even though the leadership of the mass movement was still in the hands of the opportunist and counterrevolutionary apparatuses and leaderships.”

According to Moreno, an independent Trotskyist leadership was not necessary to carry out what he called “February revolutions,” as opposed to October Revolutions. He then “updated” Trotsky’s program by postulating a whole stage of February Revolutions. In Thesis 26 of his article, Moreno wrote:

“Our parties must recognize the existence of a pre-February

revolutionary situation in order to come up with democratic slogans suitable for the existence of petty-bourgeois leaderships who control the mass movement and the need to establish unity of action as soon as possible in order to carry out a February revolution. We must understand that it is necessary to do so and not try to leap over this stage, but rather to draw all the necessary strategic and tactical conclusions."

So Moreno the pseudo-Trotskyist is calling for putting forward democratic slogans appropriate for the *petty-bourgeois leaderships*, not a program for the revolutionaries. And what might those slogans be? In Thesis 27, he emphasizes "the general democratic character of the contemporary February Revolutions." Moreno goes on: "Hence the enormous importance acquired by the slogan for a Constituent Assembly or similar variants in almost all the countries in the world." He refers to the constituent assembly as "the highest expression of democratic struggle," saying that "we call for a *constituent assembly* while saying, 'we are the biggest democrats'," etc. He talks of "developing workers and people's power," whatever that means, saying that ultimately the objective is for the working class and its allies to take power. But the bottom line is that he is here putting forward a *democratic* program for petty-bourgeois (or even bourgeois) misleaders.

Moreno's 1980 "updating" of the Transitional Program was part of a whole evolution in his political conceptions. Prior to that point, the Argentine pseudo-Trotskyist had distinguished himself primarily by his facility as a political quick-change artist, so much so that we referred to Nahuel Moreno as the Cantinflas of the Marxist movement, after his Mexican namesake, the comedian Mario Moreno. The Argentine Moreno was constantly trying to pass himself off as the left wing of whatever movement was in vogue at the time. After posing as a left-wing Peronist in Argentina, in the early 1960s he put on the olive green fatigues of Castro/Guevara guerrillism. For a while in the mid-'60s, he enthused over the Maoist Red Guards in China. When some of his associates took him at his word and actually began to form a guerrilla front in Argentina in the late '60s, with disastrous results, Moreno quickly backpedaled and put on the suit-and-tie of a respectable social democrat, joining up with the remnants of the Argentine Socialist Party. In 1975-76 he was backing CIA-financed social democracy in Portugal. By the late '70s, he was back to guerrillism, this time as a socialist Sandinista. We documented this history in the *Moreno Truth Kit* (1980) first published by the international Spartacist tendency and now available from the League for the Fourth International.

Back in Argentina, Moreno defended the bloody military dictatorship under General Videla against boycotts sparked by his European USec comrades, even as the junta was arresting and murdering Morenoite cadres. But by the early 1980s, the junta was on its last legs, mortally wounded by its ill-fated military adventure in the Falkland/Malvinas Islands (which the Morenoites loudly hailed), and Moreno sided with the bourgeois Radical opposition led by Raúl Alfonsín, which took office after winning elections in 1983. Moreno proclaimed this *A Triumphant Democratic Revolution* in a book which bore that title, and thereupon invented a whole theory of "democratic

revolutions." The programmatic linchpin of this anti-Marxist dogma was his call, anywhere and everywhere, for a constituent assembly. This was Moreno's final "contribution" to the annals of pseudo-Trotskyism. Genuine Trotskyists, in contrast, as we have repeatedly insisted, fight for international *socialist* revolution, led by authentic Leninist communist parties and based on worker and peasant councils, i.e., soviets.

But even before his infatuation with "February revolutions" (which came around the time Ronald Reagan was calling for a "democratic revolution" in Latin America), Nahuel Moreno was highlighting the call for constituent assemblies in the semi-colonial "Third World." Thus in the mid-1970s, his publishing house (Editorial Pluma) put out a collection of Trotsky's writings on *La segunda revolución china* covering the period from 1919 to 1938, which prominently featured the Bolshevik revolutionary's call for a constituent assembly around 1930, following the defeat of the second Chinese Revolution in 1927. However, this 220-page book left out *all* of the many articles by Trotsky calling for the formation of *soviets* in China, which was the focus of his calls for action by the Chinese Communist Party at the height of the revolutionary upheaval of 1925-27. Moreno's skewed selection of documents was a deliberate distortion of Trotsky's policies in semi-colonial countries. To this day, Spanish readers of Trotsky have never seen his repeated calls for workers revolution in China based on worker, peasant and soldiers soviets and only know the Morenoite bowdlerization.

Note also that Moreno called for constituent assemblies not just in the "Third World" but rather "in almost all the countries of the world." Including the imperialist "democracies"? How about in the United States? Indeed, the short-lived Morenoite organization in the U.S. called at one point in the early 1980s for a constituent assembly. At the same time, they attacked our comrades with claw hammers – pro-capitalist "democratist" politics and anti-communist thuggery go hand in hand.

In Bolivia, where the question of a constituent assembly has been a hot issue due to Evo Morales' calls for one, a leading spokesman for the section of the Moreno-derived FT, Eduardo Molina, published an article at the outset of the 2003 upheaval calling for a "Revolutionary Constituent Assembly" (*Lucha Obrera* No. 11, 24 February 2003). In a section titled "Trotskyism and the Constituent Assembly," Molina wrote:

"Leon Trotsky raised the demand for a National Assembly as a great banner to unify the masses following the Second Chinese Revolution, he put forward the slogan of a Revolutionary Constituent Cortes at the outset of the Spanish Revolution, in the early 1930s; and he demanded a national assembly, together with a program of radical-democratic slogans against the regime of the French Republic in his Program of Action for France in 1934."

This has been a standard Morenoite argument for years, as they rewrite Trotsky in the spirit of bourgeois democracy. It has been more recently taken up by the French Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR), the section of the United Secretariat, as it becomes ever-deeper incrustated in bourgeois *parliamentarism*. (The leaders of the long-since reformist LCR

V. I. Lenin, "Theses on the Constituent Assembly" (Excerpts)

(December 1917)

1. The demand for the convocation of a Constituent Assembly was a perfectly legitimate part of the programme of revolutionary Social-Democracy, because in a bourgeois republic the Constituent Assembly represents the highest form of democracy and because, in setting up a Pre-parliament, the imperialist republic headed by Kerensky was preparing to rig the elections and violate democracy in a number of ways.

2. While demanding the convocation of a Constituent Assembly, revolutionary Social-Democracy has ever since the beginning of the Revolution of 1917 repeatedly emphasised that a republic of Soviets is a higher form of democracy than the usual bourgeois republic with a Constituent Assembly.

3. For the transition from the bourgeois to the socialist system, for the dictatorship of the proletariat, the Republic of Soviets (of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies) is not only a higher type of democratic institution (as compared with the usual bourgeois republic crowned by a Constituent Assembly), but is the only form capable of securing the most painless transition to socialism....

14. ... The course of events and the development of the class struggle in the revolution have resulted in the slogan

"All Power to the Constituent Assembly"—which disregards the gains of the workers' and peasants' revolution, which disregards Soviet power, which disregards the decisions of the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, of the Second All-Russia Congress of Peasants' Deputies, etc.—becoming in fact the slogan of the Cadets and the Kaledinites and of their helpers....

16. The result of all the above-mentioned circumstances taken together is that the Constituent Assembly, summoned on the basis of the election lists of the parties existing prior to the proletarian-peasant revolution under the rule of the bourgeoisie, must inevitably clash with the will and interests of the working and exploited classes which on October 25 began the socialist revolution against the bourgeoisie. Naturally, the interests of this revolution stand higher than the formal rights of the Constituent Assembly....

17. Every direct or indirect attempt to consider the question of the Constituent Assembly from a formal, legal point of view, within the framework of ordinary bourgeois democracy and disregarding the class struggle and civil war, would be a betrayal of the proletariat's cause, and the adoption of the bourgeois standpoint....

have been trying for years to get rid of the "C" and the "R" in their name, but they keep running up against reluctance in the ranks.) LCR theoretician Francisco Sabado is now toying with calls for a constituent assembly in France, citing the 1934 program as justification ("Quelques éléments clés de la stratégie révolutionnaire dans les pays capitalistes avancés", *Cahiers Communistes* No. 179, March 2006).

Once again, this is a distortion of Trotsky's revolutionary politics. In China, as we have pointed out, Trotsky put the call for a constituent assembly in the forefront of his agitation following the *defeat* of the Second Chinese Revolution, where it was directed against the rule of warlords and the dictatorship of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek; at the high point of the battle, his central call was for the formation of *soviets*. The Spanish Revolution in 1931 was developing in struggle against the monarchy and the military dictatorship of General Primo de Rivera, which had ruled the country with an iron hand since 1923. Trotsky's call intersected pent-up demands for democratic election and proclamation of a republic, for agrarian revolution, the separation of church and state and confiscation of church properties. Thus the demand of a revolutionary constituent assembly or Cortes was the generalization of a whole series of democratic demands which were the portal to the socialist revolution. Of course, Trotsky combined this with propaganda for the formation of soviets. And by the time of the Spanish Civil War of 1936-39, the demand for a constituent assembly was no longer appropriate under the Republic.

The situation in France in the mid-1930s was very different, and Trotsky did *not* call for a constituent assembly there, contrary to Morenoite mythology. So what did his June 1934 "Program for Action in France" advocate? At the time,

right-wing reactionaries and fascists were pushing the country toward an authoritarian "strong state" regime, reflecting a general trend throughout Europe symbolized by Hitler's seizure of power the year before and the February 1934 defeat of an uprising of the Vienna workers by the clerical-fascist Dolfuss regime in Austria. Trotsky's central slogan in the face of this bonapartist threat was *not* for a bourgeois-democratic constituent assembly, as the Morenoites suggest, but rather "Down with the Bourgeois 'Authoritarian State'! For Workers and Peasants Power!" As part of the fight for a "workers and peasants commune," Trotsky vowed to defend bourgeois democracy against fascist and royalist attacks. In that context, he called for abolition of various anti-democratic aspects of the French Third Republic, including the Senate, elected by limited suffrage, and the presidency, a focal point for militaristic and reactionary forces, and proposed a "single assembly" that would "combine legislative and executive powers." We raised these points in our recent article, "France Turns Hard to the Right" (*The Internationalist* No. 26, June-July 2007). But this is quite distinct from calling for a constituent assembly in a country that already has a bourgeois-democratic regime, however tattered and threadbare.

In laying out his program of *permanent revolution* in the economically backward capitalist countries, Trotsky emphasized: "The central task of the colonial and semi-colonial countries is the *agrarian revolution*, i.e., liquidation of feudal heritages, and *national independence*, i.e., the overthrow of the imperialist yoke." He emphasized that revolutionaries cannot merely "reject the democratic program; it is imperative that in the struggle the masses outgrow it. The slogan for a National (or Constituent) Assembly preserves its full force

for such countries as China or India. This slogan must be indissolubly tied up with the problem of national liberation and agrarian reform." Hence the slogan is not appropriate in an imperialist country, or where those tasks have already gone beyond the bourgeois-democratic level. In Mexico or Bolivia or Ecuador today, no democratic demand can break the stranglehold of imperialism or of capitalist agribusiness – this can only be accomplished by workers revolution.

To pretend that a "democratic revolution" is posed in Latin America or Europe today is to play into the hands of bourgeois reaction, just as Moreno did in adopting the Reaganite rhetoric in the 1980s, which was then turned against the Soviet Union. It's not surprising that many of the pseudo-Trotskyists joined in the anti-Soviet chorus over Afghanistan and Poland at the beginning of the 1980s and stood with the counterrevolutionary Boris Yeltsin in 1991, as the Morenoites and the United Secretariat did. And it is equally logical that in taking up the call for a constituent assembly in France today, LCR/USec "theorist" François Sabado should hark back to Rosa Luxemburg's criticism of the Bolsheviks who had dispersed the Constituent Assembly in Russia in January 1918 as a focal point for opposition to Soviet rule. In her unfinished manuscript, *On the Russian Revolution*, Luxemburg criticized Trotsky's defense of this revolutionary measure (in his 1918 pamphlet *From October to Brest-Litovsk*) and wanted a new Constituent Assembly to be elected alongside the Soviets, in the name of "democracy." This is exactly what occurred a few months later following the German Revolution of November 1918, when the National Constituent Assembly became the base for the governing Social Democrats in smashing the Congress of Workers and Soldiers Councils while murdering Luxemburg and her fellow communist leader Karl Liebknecht². We stand instead with Lenin, whose December 1917 "Theses on the Constituent Assembly" are excerpted on the opposite page.

What was posed in Oaxaca in June-November 2006, in Bolivia in June 2005 and September-October 2003, and in Argentina in December 2001 was not to call for bourgeois-democratic resolution of the crisis, synthesized in the slogan of a constituent assembly, but to explain to the masses (and the left) that none of the objectives of the struggle could be achieved without the formation of organs of working-class power, backed by the urban and rural poor, hand-in-hand with the fight to build authentic Trotskyist parties and a reformed Fourth International to lead the struggle for *international socialist revolution*. ■

² It should be noted that Luxemburg never published *On the Russian Revolution*, nor is it clear that she intended to do so; it remained an unfinished manuscript. It was first issued as a pamphlet in 1922 by Paul Levi (in an incomplete and inaccurate version) after he had split from the Communist Party and returned to Social Democracy, and has been used ever since as a banner by all manner of anti-communists. Moreover, when the issue of a national assembly and/or workers councils was posed in Germany in November-December 1918, Rosa the revolutionary came down squarely for a government of workers councils against the bourgeois "democracy" of the National Assembly.

Buying of the Presidency...

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Look at the realities. Well over 100,000 Iraqis – maybe 600,000 according to one estimate – have been killed in five years of bloody U.S. war and occupation. The toll among the imperialist occupation forces (U.S. and allied military plus mercenary security "contractors") in Iraq is over 5,300 since the 2003 invasion, with last year the deadliest yet, plus well over 30,000 severely wounded. In Afghanistan, the U.S./NATO occupiers have been losing ground to the Taliban Islamic fundamentalists, while American planes regularly massacre civilians with their "surgical" bombing. Yet the horrendous U.S. slaughter in the Middle East just about disappeared from the debates, and nightly TV. In the first six months of 2008, there were less than 200 minutes of news from Iraq on the three major networks, about 5 percent of the total time and one-sixth the coverage in 2007 (*New York Times*, 23 June).

On the home front, some two million foreclosures are predicted for 2008 as a credit crunch and stock market plunge turns into a deep recession. Banks slashed lending no matter how much the Federal Reserve lowers interest rates and how many billions it pumps into the U.S. economy. The dollar is dropping like lead, while the cost of oil and of basic foods is skyrocketing. At well over \$4 a gallon, gasoline costs double the price at the pump last year. Working people are being ground down by rising costs, while unemployment is escalating. Yet *none* of the candidates will do a damn thing about millions of people losing their homes and jobs. *All* their health care plans are based on soaking working people to fill the pockets of the insurance companies. And on economics, Barack Obama, the admirer of Ronald Reagan, was the most right-wing of all the Democrats.

Meanwhile, black-uniformed Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) police have been carrying out Gestapo-like raids across the U.S., rounding up undocumented workers, brutally separating children from their parents. According to one study last year, at least 13,000 children have seen one or both parents deported in the last two years (*New York Times*, 17 November), and the raids have escalated sharply since then. Naturally, none of the leading candidates opposed this rising tide of reaction, while several seek to lead it. In the Republican primaries, certified police state reactionaries like Rudolph Giuliani and Milt Romney tried to make up for lack of born-again credentials by clashing in a CNN/YouTube debate over who was "soft" on "illegal" immigrants. The former NYC mayor told an interviewer that he would have had 400,000 undocumented New Yorkers deported.

While the Republican rightists were whipping up an anti-immigrant frenzy, the liberal Democrats are not much better. When she was a partner with husband Bill in the White House in the 1990s, Hillary Clinton went after undocumented immigrants with a vengeance pushing through the 1996 "Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act" and militarizing the border. Barack Obama? He wrote in his campaign autobiography, *The Audacity of Hope*, that he feels

“patriotic resentment” when “I see Mexican flags waved at proimmigration demonstrations.” He, too, supports the 700-mile border fence. And when the specter of lynching reared its head in Jena, Louisiana, Barack Obama deliberately *didn't* march. His response was that “Outrage over an injustice isn't a matter of black and white. It's a matter of right and wrong.” Yet lynching is all about white racism and black oppression, and you can't duck or “transcend” that fundamental issue.

Obama “Re-Branding” U.S. Imperialism

So obsessed are the capitalist media and politicians with the two-ring presidential campaign circus that President George W. Bush has been virtually forgotten. After years of denouncing “Bush's war,” the ABB (Anybody But Bush) liberals have dropped the issue of Iraq. First, because U.S. casualty figures have reportedly been falling. But second, and more important, because with the Democrats in control of both House and Senate, they now hold the purse strings on the war. Despite getting elected in November '06 by voters fed up with the war, the Democratic Congressional leaders' grandstand plays of holding up the Pentagon budget have come to naught and exactly nothing has changed on the ground. The House just pushed through a bill for \$162 billion to fund the war through the end of Bush's presidency.

Hillary Clinton was widely hated in the antiwar movement because of her October 2002 vote for the “Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution.” Everyone understood that another Clinton in the White House would mean an indefinite continuation of U.S. war and occupation in the Near East. What is not so well understood is that the same is true of an Obama presidency. In a speech last September, Barack Obama laid out his policy: pull out some combat brigades “immediately” (i.e., in 2009, when they will have to be rotated out anyway), but leave an thousands of U.S. troops “in country” for “humanitarian” missions, to “protect U.S. diplomats” and go after Al Qaeda. Obama was introduced at the speech by his chief foreign policy guru, Cold War hawk Zbigniew Brzezinski.

Obama's main claim to be antiwar is that he didn't vote for the 2002 declaration of war. Of course, he wasn't in the Senate at the time, but in a 2 October 2002 speech in Chicago, he made his rationale: “I am not opposed to all wars. I'm opposed to dumb wars.” In an article in the house organ of the U.S. foreign policy establishment, he spelled out his positions: “To renew American leadership in the world, we must first bring the Iraq war to a responsible end... Iraq was a diversion from the fight against the terrorists who struck us on 9/11” (*Foreign Affairs*, July-August 2007). Now that he is the *de facto* Democratic nominee, Obama is vowing to *escalate* the “war on terror,” which is really a war to terrorize the world into submission.

In the U.S. Senate, Obama repeatedly voted billions to pay for the Iraq war. With the advice of Brzezinski, the architect of the 1980s U.S. proxy war against the USSR in Afghanistan, in his *Foreign Affairs* article Barack Obama looks back to U.S. imperialism's anti-Soviet crusade as a model: “To defeat al Qaeda, I will build a twenty-first-century military and twenty-first-century partnerships as strong as the anticommunist alli-

ance that won the Cold War.” When he talks of using force unilaterally, he is specifically talking about military strikes inside Pakistan (“If we have actionable intelligence about high-value terrorist targets and President Musharraf will not act, we will” [1 August 2007]). In that same speech, titled “The War We Need to Win,” he made clear that “I was a strong supporter of the war in Afghanistan” from the beginning, and he called for *increasing* the number of U.S. troops there. The first plank of his war strategy, he summed up, is “getting out of Iraq and on to the right battlefield in Afghanistan and Pakistan.”

Barack Obama is no antiwar candidate. He is pushing for a “smart war” in Afghanistan instead of the “dumb war” in Iraq. In reality, sending American troops into nuclear-armed Pakistan could be an even more colossal miscalculation by Washington that would backfire big time. But this is what the second war party of U.S. imperialism has been pushing for, and Obama can be valuable to them to build support for their next military adventure. The endorsement by Obama by Ted Kennedy and others of the Kennedy clan was a tip-off. Recall that John F. Kennedy's candidacy for president in 1960 was touted as a breath of fresh air after McCarthyism. So Kennedy gets elected and what happens? First there was the failed Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba, and soon he sent U.S. military “advisors” to Indochina, leading to more than two million Vietnamese deaths and 50,000 U.S. dead.

Ruling-class politicians, pundits and powers that be see in Obama a figure that can play the same role. Andrew Sullivan writing in *The Atlantic* (January-February 2008) argued that the “generally minor policy choices” between the candidates and parties couldn't explain the “hyperventilation” of the debate. After all, he says, no one is actually going to withdraw from Iraq and everyone is for keeping U.S. forces in Afghanistan, threatening Iran and supporting Israel. All their health care plans are similar. Even on abortion the differences are not so great. So why all the heat? Sullivan is suggesting that with all the talk of “transcending” divisions, of “bringing America together,” Obama can “bridge the partisan gulf” in the “culture war” that has bedeviled U.S. bourgeois politics since the 1960s. At the same time, he argues that Barack Hussein Obama, a “brown-skinned man whose father was an African, who grew up in Indonesia and Hawaii, who attended a majority-Muslim school as a boy” can undercut Islamic hostility to the U.S.:

“What does he offer? First and foremost: his face. Think of it as the most effective potential re-branding of the United States since Reagan. Such a re-branding is not trivial – it's central to an effective war strategy.... If you wanted the crudest but most effective weapon against the demonization of America that fuels Islamist ideology, Obama's face gets close.”

It is this crude appeal to “rebrand” the U.S. internationally that has won significant bourgeois support for Obama. His backers are the same forces that were floating a possible candidacy of New York's billionaire mayor Michael Bloomberg as a kind of Democratic/Republican “fusion” candidate. It is their money that launched Obama's campaign with a fundraiser a year ago hosted by Hollywood mogul David Geffen and his movie studio

partners Steven Spielberg and Jeff Katzenberg. During the primaries, Obama far out-fundraised Clinton and now he is beating McCain by \$47 million to \$22 million. Obama brags about the small donations he receives over the Internet. But Obama received nearly \$10 million in contributions from finance, insurance and real estate. Goldman Sachs is his top donor ("Subprime Obama," *Nation*, 11 February).

Obama's conservative economic policies and pro-"smart war" stance are part of his appeal to this influential layer of the bourgeoisie. His advisors include "free-market" economists who served in the Clinton Administration. In addition to Brzezinski, Jimmy Carter's former national security advisor, his foreign policy advisors include Anthony Lake, Bill Clinton's former national security advisor, Richard Clarke, former counterterrorism "czar" under Clinton and Bush, a bevy of retired generals, and one Dennis Ross, Clinton's Near East envoy and link to the Zionist lobby. Again, this is no accident. Obama has made clear that he is a hard-line supporter of Israel. Last year he spoke at the convention of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). The liberal Israeli Zionist paper *Haaretz* reported that, "At least rhetorically, Obama passed any test anyone might have wanted him to pass. So, he is pro-Israel. Period" (quoted in Ali Abunimah, "How Barack Obama Learned to Love Israel," *Electronic Intifada*, 4 March 2007).

For Black Liberation Through Socialist Revolution

Disgust over the endless war in Iraq and concern over the economy are so intense that this election is the Democrats' to lose. But they've pulled it off before, and one can't underestimate the racism of U.S. bourgeois politics. So far Obama has weathered the mudslinging, mainly by condemning his former pastor Rev. Jeremiah White for saying things about the crimes of U.S. imperialism that are not to be uttered in "acceptable" political discourse. But the basic line of the Democratic nominee is to pretend that it is possible to "transcend" racial divisions by ignoring racism. Thus in his March 18 Philadelphia speech on race, he went out of his way to show "understanding" for white racists "when they are told to bus their children to a school across town" and "when they're told that their fears about crime in urban neighborhoods are somehow prejudiced."

In the South Carolina primaries, Obama supporters chanted, "race doesn't matter." But it does: in capitalist America, every major social and political issue is about race, and always has been. The struggle against black oppression goes back to slavery, and fanning racial fears and prejudices continues to be the main way the ruling class keeps its exploited and oppressed wage slaves divided. Legal equality does not begin to deal with the racial oppression that is part of the bedrock of U.S. society, as the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement showed. Half a century after *Brown vs. Board of Education* eliminated formal segregation, American schools are more racially segregated than ever. And they're still trying to exclude black voters.

The liberal integrationism of Martin Luther King failed because it did not address the social and economic roots of the

oppression of black people, who for centuries have been segregated at the bottom of U.S. society. As revolutionary integrationists, we insist that the only road to black liberation is through socialist revolution. While many black and white youth see the Obama candidacy as a sign of hope, we say straight-out that if elected he will act on behalf of the capitalist oppressors to squelch black struggle and to suppress opposition to imperialist war.

In the current election, some left groups are trying to sidle up to Obama by soft-pedaling their opposition to this imperialist warmonger. Others are supporting the Green Party candidate Cynthia McKinney, the former Congresswoman from Georgia who was twice defeated by racist gerrymandering and a campaign by the Zionist lobby because of her support for Palestinians. McKinney, too, is a capitalist politician, a "homeless Democrat" who frankly says that she didn't leave the Democratic Party but instead it left her.

The war on Iraq and Afghanistan and U.S. imperialist attacks around the world will not be ended by any capitalist party or politician. While the "peace movement" vainly tries to pressure the Democratic Congress, we have emphasized the need to mobilize the working class in struggle to defeat the imperialist war abroad and the capitalist war on immigrants, poor, black and working people "at home." To wage this class struggle we seek to forge the nucleus of a revolutionary workers party, as part of the struggle for a reformed Fourth International, the world party of socialist revolution. ■

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Republicrat Obama vs. War Hawk McCain

The Buying of the Presidency 2008 U.S. Imperialism Seeks New Face on System of War and Racism



João Silva/NYT



M. Spencer Green/AP



Matthew Roe/U.S. Army

U.S. troops assault Sadr City, Iraq, April 2008. Top right: Democrat Barack Obama flanked by some of seven generals and admirals who have endorsed him. Bottom right: Republican John McCain during his April Fool's Day 2007 stroll in the Baghdad market.

For the last six months, it would seem that the entire United States – and much of the world – has been mesmerized by the charade being enacted on the stage of U.S. bourgeois politics.

The main drama was in the Democratic Party, where Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton slugged it out. The fact that a black man and a woman were the leading contenders in one of the major parties of U.S. capitalism certainly marked a shift in American politics. Yet both represented the interests of the imperialist would-be masters of the world against working people, women and oppressed minorities.

On the Republican side, the field was narrowed to professional POW John McCain or the immigrant-bashing Bible Belt bigot Mike Huckabee. And now the primary season is over and we have the presumptive nominees: Obama vs. McCain.

The candidacy of Barack Obama has been causing waves,

particularly among college students and black youth generally, but also among antiwar liberals fed up with the Clinton “New Democrats.” Obama claims to “transcend race,” but the centuries-old oppression of black people can only be overcome by *smashing* the racist capitalist system. And the fact that Obama’s appeal for “color blind” politics has raked in big bucks from Wall Street, Hollywood and Silicon Valley points to the key fact about his campaign.

In the 2008 elections, U.S. imperialism wants to put on a new face. The more far-sighted rulers of this “sole superpower” want to change the image of “America,” to replace that of the torture photos of Abu Ghraib. That’s why for the first time a black candidate has a very well-financed election machine and a real shot at the presidency. Barack Obama has been drafted as the better war candidate.

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**Break with All the Capitalist Parties and Politicians –
Build a Revolutionary Workers Party!**