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Sham Election Maintains Imperialist Rule

U.S. Out of Iraq!

Despite the orgy of self-congratulatory rhetoric by the U.S. government and media, as well as the hopes of millions of Iraqi voters, the election in Iraq on January 30th was based on a fraud. It will neither produce democracy nor create a government that even remotely represents the will of the Iraqi people. Moreover, the vote resolved none of the crises and conflicts that are tearing Iraq apart – above all, the imperialist occupation.

The U.S. line claims that the election was a historic step forward for the Middle East and proves that the U.S. troops are liberators, not occupiers. A *New York Times* editorial hailed the vote as “an open expression of popular will” and “a heartening advance by the Iraqi people.” Even the left wing of the U.S. media followed the party line:

The election might have been a blood-soaked fiasco, aborted by insurgent forces. It might have been a non-event, with sparse turnout and sullen voters. ... Instead, the election was a full-

throated, long suppressed cry by millions of oppressed and abused people against tyranny, torture, terrorism, penury, anarchy and war, and an ardent appeal for freedom, peace, order and ordinary life. (Jonathan Schell, *The Nation*, February 10.)

This is sheer Orwellian doublethink. Who are the “insurgents” fighting against? Who is responsible – right now – for the torture, penury, anarchy and war? Yes, many Iraqis held great expectations for this election, mainly that it would lead to the end of the U.S. occupation. But no country can determine its own destiny while occupied by a massive foreign force – the 150,000 mostly U.S. and British troops – that has killed citizens by the tens of thousands, destroyed cities and jailed and tortured hundreds of civilians.

Marxists understand that any real state rests on its monopoly of armed force: the army, police and courts that enforce the power of the ruling class. In Iraq today, the only such force is the U.S.-run occupation. State power is still in the hands of American imperialism, not the assortment of corrupt politicians and clerical demagogues who are being assembled to replace direct U.S. rule in the vague future. The new government will face more popular expectations than the previous puppets, but it too will have to work within the limits set by the U.S. authorities. And it will face continued armed resistance from the mostly Sunni-based guerrilla insurgency and the threat of renewed mass struggles and armed opposition by the Shi’ites.

HOPES VS. REALITY IN IRAQ

What in fact did the Iraqi people want? One aspect of American “democracy” that the U.S. has succeeded in introducing is the bargaining among politicians

continued on page 13



Imperialist tanks, devastated cities show who really rules Iraq.

Inside

COFI/LRP Report	2	Union Leaders Betray Hotel Strike	17
China's New Proletariat	3	Cosby's Campaign Against Black Workers	24

Bolivia: Revolution vs. Reaction 7

COFI/LRP Report

NEW YORK

As we go to press, Transport Workers Union Local 100 workers are on strike against the Liberty Lines bus company in Westchester County. *Revolutionary Transit Worker (RTW)* supporters and other New York City Transit members of Local 100 have marched on these lines, but Local 100 President Roger Toussaint has done nothing to mobilize the Local membership.

Toussaint called a general membership meeting last winter, supposedly to start planning for the struggle for a new contract for New York City subway and bus workers, due on December 15. At most 1500 members out of 35,000-plus attended, showing that he had done little if anything to mobilize the membership. Working with other union militants, *RTW*, which is supported by the League for the Revolutionary Party, tried to raise motions for mass demonstrations and strike action. (See *RTW* issue No. 20 on our website for details.) Toussaint, however, ruled all motions out of order and forbade discussion of any contract demands or tactics. Originally elected on the “progressive” left-supported New Directions slate in 2000, Toussaint continues to stifle democracy in the union. *RTW* 21 (available to readers on request) offers contract and strategy proposals.

At City College, the LRP has begun a formal discussion group which reads and discusses major *Proletarian Revolution* articles and books on working-class and revolutionary history. At the end of the fall term, LRP supporters were involved in organizing and leading a small demonstration to protest military recruiters on CCNY campus. We worked with other CCNY students and staff, and plan to continue this work when the recruiters for imperialist wars return to campus. This term we joined in a “picket-line protest” by the PSC, the faculty-staff union at the City University (CUNY), to protest an outrageous contract offer made by the CUNY administration.

LRPers from New York attended the anti-inaugural demonstration in Washington on January 20. The event was dispirited and much smaller than expected, a reflection of the anti-war leadership’s near-total capitulation to the pro-war Democratic Party campaign of John Kerry in 2004.

The LRP will join the March 19 anti-war rally in Harlem and Central Park on the second anniversary of the Iraq invasion. In preparation, we have attended meetings of both the International

Action Center (IAC) and United for Peace and Justice (UfPJ) coalitions. The IAC has temporarily rebaptized itself and its allies as the “Out Now Coalition,” while UfPJ continues the years-long sectarian hostility between the two groups by refusing to build what should be a united mass protest against the war. As usual, however, the rally will be built mainly by radical and “socialist” organizations but will feature pro-capitalist liberal politicians whose job is to keep the activists tied to the imperialist Democrats. The LRP contingent will actively protest this treacherous orientation.

The New York LRP holds regular meetings in the city on international, labor and other political topics, in addition to our monthly public forums at City College.

ANTI-WAR PROTESTERS ARRESTED

On March 9, the LRP worked with a number of campus groups (including the International Socialist Organization, the Progressive Labor Party and the Student Liberation Action Movement) to organize a demonstration against military recruiters at a CCNY “career fair.” This event was an opportunity to protest against the imperialist war in Iraq and to expose the recruiters’ lies to working-class youth and youth of color – trying to get them to go to Iraq and kill their working-class brothers and sisters. The real enemy is at home: the U.S. ruling class that brutalizes working people at home and abroad.

About 15 protestors entered the hall and began chants like “U.S. Out of Iraq!” and “Recruiters off Campus!” Within minutes, the protestors were surrounded by police – both CUNY “peace officers” and CCNY’s private security, one of whom initiated the violence by tackling and stomping on one of the protestors. Other protestors attempted to assist those being brutalized, and in a few minutes three of them, including supporters of the ISO, were under arrest on trumped-up charges of assault and obstruction. The LRP condemns these brutal police tactics and stands in solidarity with those arrested. We are helping to plan protests to resist this police terror on the CCNY campus.

CHICAGO

LRP supporters had hoped to provoke some discussion of the reasons for the dwindling anti-war movement at meetings to plan
continued on page 16

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Enter the Dragon: China's New Proletariat

This article was written by a reader of Proletarian Revolution in China. In detailing the superexploitation of China's peasant/proletariat, it confirms our analysis that "socialist" China has always been a country ruled by an oppressive statified capitalist class. (See our articles in PR 53 and 70.) China's recent drive to industrialize as described here further confirms an old Marxist precept: the capitalists are driven by the laws of their own system to create, expand and empower their own gravedigger, the proletariat.

There is a specter haunting China, the specter of the mingong – the migrant peasant worker. In only the last 15 years, hundreds of millions of peasants freed from the land have streamed into the major urban centers and transformed the landscape of the entire east coast. In the largest construction boom in recorded history, where cranes droop like flocks of perched storks in all directions across the skylines of Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou and dozens of new supercities, a queer specter, half-peasant and half-worker, ekes out an existence in the pre-fab nooks and crannies within the nether regions of the towering forest of skyscrapers and megamalls. It toils from dawn to dusk, does not speak the local languages yet moves mysteriously in the night. It is China's growing, young proletarian dragon. And let the capitalists be forewarned: when it learns to stand, it is going to shake the world.

In the current historical period, an incredible convergence of the interests of the world's crisis-ridden capitalist classes of the West and those of the Beijing Stalinists has led to an unprecedented exploitation of resources and human labor in China. Growth in China, with its expected double or triple-digit returns, is the current motor of the world economy. Much of the liquidity that abounded with the central banks' cutting of interest rates throughout the world has made its way to China, lately in particular to the Yangtze River Delta around Shanghai. The flood of foreign investment and colossal infrastructure spending has spurred growth rates of over 9 percent a year in China and given new life to the sluggish economies of the West.

This turn of events would have seemed unimaginable but 10 or 20 years ago. China was considered to be one of the most backward and inward-looking nations on the planet. But it was precisely because of its backwardness and decades of Stalinist autarky that it was to become the new key link in the imperialist chain: the Chinese Stalinists, with

the support of imperialist capital infusion, hoped to stave off a terminal crisis in their bankrupt economy with a capitalist growth bonanza, while the Western multinationals hoped to prop up their dwindling rates of profit with supercheap Chinese labor. A tacit deal was made and the Chinese "miracle" gave them a collective – yet temporary – sigh of relief. China's reality not only verifies the Trotskyist understanding of its economy as statified capitalism; it also demonstrates the impossibility of ever considering it to be a socialist or workers' state.

While a few million Chinese new rich flaunt BMW's and Louis Vuitton handbags in a form of conspicuous consumption unimaginable in the West, hundreds of millions of workers and peasants labor around the clock for the equivalent of U.S. \$2 a day. The yawning gap between the urban, eastern metropolises and the impoverished countryside, the dwelling place of some 800 million people, has stretched the limit. In the last few months alone, worker and peasant uprisings from Sichuan to Henan to Chongqing, not to mention strategic Guangdong province, have forced the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to issue special directives to its organizational committees far and wide to maintain the rule of the CCP. And above all, it is the mingong who is set to play a strategic role in the coming storm because of its size, social power and objective interests.

"ONE COUNTRY, TWO SYSTEMS": CHINA'S HUKOU CASTE SYSTEM 1958-80

It is impossible to develop an analysis of this new proletariat or lay out a program without an understanding of China's



Shift change at a shoe factory in Guangdong Province.

residence system. Known by its Chinese name, hukou, this “household registration” system was officially adopted in 1958 to stem the growing tide of peasant migration into the cities. Previous attempts at dissuasion formulated in a series of laws had failed, so “registration” was transferred to the Public Security Bureau.

All citizens were assigned a hukou according to their place of residence, and that hukou essentially tied them to a definite administrative region. Since distribution of basic necessities like food and clothing was strictly rationed through the (urban) work unit or agricultural collective, population mobility was extremely limited. Those possessing an urban hukou received a monthly salary and the social benefits of their work unit, including housing, education, medical care, etc., and a subsidized ration coupon system was adopted to offset the costs of industrialization.

The rural or “agricultural” hukou, on the other hand, simply served to confine its possessor to a life of back-breaking labor without enjoying the same benefits as the urban dwellers. Throughout the ebbs and flows in its evolution over the course of the last five decades, the hukou system has fundamentally served the purpose of perpetuating this two-tiered citizenship within Chinese society.

The codification of this urban-rural dualism left an indelible stamp on the achievements of the revolution and undercut the instinctive class solidarity which had been forged between the urban proletariat and the poor peasants. The famed “iron rice bowl” – the job and benefit guarantees for state workers – was a real, if transitory, gain of the revolution, but it was only meaningful as an urban phenomenon. In the twenty years spanning 1958 to 78 hukou state policy became increasingly restrictive and China’s rate of urbanization had even dropped.

This counter-urbanization was enforced not only through policing rural-to-urban migration, but also through periods of forced mass migration to the countryside. After a brief respite in the late 1950’s to allow for recruitment of workers during the industrialization period, the aftermath of the Great Leap Forward led the government to close down many state-owned enterprises to deal with the crisis and forcibly relocate 20 million workers back to the countryside. This only aggravated the unfolding catastrophe of the Great Famine, which remained predominantly a rural phenomenon.

During the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) millions of “intellectual youth” were relocated to remote farmlands to “receive education from the impoverished peasants.” The victims were not only Mao’s factional opponents (Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping and their tens of thousands of supporters) but also some millions of Red Guards who answered his messianic call after they had outlived their usefulness in helping to crush his opposition.

Contrary to the Maoist mythology surrounding these orchestrated campaigns and the blind support offered by the starry-eyed Western left at that time, these population transfers had nothing to do with “education” or “culture”, but were initiated to ease the growing burden weighing on the urban social infrastructure. In fact, towards the end of the Cultural Revolution the constitution was amended to abolish altogether the items referring to population mobility. In 1977, stricter new regulations ensured that rural hukou holders who married urban ones would have to continue to work in the rural area and, significantly, that any child born of mixed hukou marriage would be classified as “rural.”

Such blanket legislation was clearly aimed at the millions of “intellectual youth” who spent years toiling on peasant communes and wished to bring their (predominantly female) spouses and children back to the city. It also revealed the darker underbelly of the Stalinist cult of the family, which pandered to the patriarchal traditions of the countryside, considering women as “spilled water on the

ground.” If children in Stalinist China couldn’t inherit their father’s urban wealth, at least they could inherit their mother’s rural poverty!

Not until 1980 did the CCP loosen the hukou system in step with the growing reform and opening-up policy of Deng Xiaoping. And here too the hukou system was to serve Chinese – and indeed foreign – capitalism very well, as we shall see.

OPENING-UP AND HUKOU REFORM

After consolidating control of the CCP hierarchy in the aftermath of the disaster of the Cultural Revolution, the pragmatists around Deng Xiaoping launched a string of reforms in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s that aimed to create a more dynamic mixed economy. While much is made of the consequences of the creation of the Special Economic Zones, initially it was the reform in agriculture that generated the greatest growth.

The Peasant Commune system was broken up, and there was an allocation of land to individual households, codified in the Household Responsibility System. The prices of agricultural products were increased by 20 percent and a rural market was established for selling sideline products from private plots. Though grain procurement was still enforced, a quota system was established whereby any surplus could be sold on the private market.

Between 1978 and 1985 the rural market doubled and agriculture was completely de-collectivized. The townships and villages that had taken over administrative control operated in a quasi-private sphere and didn’t need government approval for hiring and firing. Because of the high cost of credit and the low cost of labor, these administrative units were forced to develop a more productive allocation of resources, eventually coalescing into the Township and Village Enterprises (TVE’s) that were to mushroom during the 1980’s.

The surplus labor freed from the breakup of the communes, overwhelmingly Han Chinese, was partially absorbed by the TVE’s, but naturally a great many peasants began migrating towards the smaller towns and even the cities. The government began to relax restrictions on non-farm activities within the villages and allowed farmers to engage in domestic trade and transport, adopting the slogan “leaving the land but not the village.” By encouraging this rural-to-rural migration they hoped to thwart the spontaneous drift to the cities. In 1984 the state authorities loosened the hukou restrictions and began to allow rural migrants to register in the small towns with the proviso that they had obtained a certificate of employment.

It is important to stress that even though this reform affected some tens of millions of rural migrants, the social infrastructure of the small towns could not be compared to that of the big cities. The urban-to-rural income disparity maintained an incredible ratio of 3 to 1 in the 1980’s. On top of this, their situation was still precarious and their access to the welfare infrastructure was limited. For example, they had to buy food on the more expensive open market, as they couldn’t use the local ration coupon system. Nonetheless, in comparative terms their lot improved with this reform, which served as a magnet for millions of peasants leaving their plots of land.

It wasn’t until 1997 that the Ministry of Public Security gave the migrants residing in small towns full legal status as urban hukou holders. The big cities kept the caste walls firmly intact; only in 1998 did they allow selective migration of some rural new rich who invested in city property or, in some cases, the rural spouses of urban returnees and their children – 20 years after the fact!

By 1995 the TVE’s had absorbed some 135 million rural workers and made up one-third of China’s industrial output. But

they had reached their peak. Whereas between 1984 and 1988 rural enterprises had created an average of 10.8 million jobs a year, by 1994 they could only create half of that average. As the TVE's began to lose steam the demand for low-wage workers was picking up in the booming metropolises on the eastern seaboard. By 1988 there were already 5 million "illegal" rural workers in the cities doing the so-called 3D jobs (dirty, demeaning and dangerous) that local urban workers shied away from. This occupational segregation between "native" urban workers and rural "outsiders" doing 3D jobs was to become a defining characteristic of the Chinese "miracle" and marks a striking parallel with the typical division of labor in the imperialist metropolises.

As in the capitalist West, this reserve army of labor not only did the 3D jobs but also served as ballast to hold down the upward pressure on urban wages and create a useful artificial division within the working class. With the massive layoffs from the state-owned enterprises which accelerated in the late 1990's, the growing army of "outsiders" became a favored target of those who feared losing their urban privileges in the ensuing economic dislocation. Naturally the Stalinist capitalists, like their western counterparts, exploited these fears to maintain the strict hukou regulations in force. In fact, in supercities like Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou and Wuhan, these restrictions have even been tightened in the last few years, bucking the trend of the smaller-scale cities, where there has been a loosening of hukou enforcement.

THE CAPITALIST BONANZA

Rural-to-urban migration patterns began to change with the initiation of the Special Economic Zones (SEZ's) in 1980. The cities of Shenzhen and Zhuhai (bordering Hong Kong and Macau respectively), as well as Shantou and Xiamen, first saw the trickle of foreign capital from ethnic Chinese in Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Within a few years these SEZ's were joined by a dozen port cities, stretching south from the Northeast along the coast of the Pacific Rim. While the southeastern Pearl River Delta (PRD) in Guangdong province remained the principal benefactor of foreign investment for many years, there has been a gradual shift towards the Yangtze River Delta (YRD).

First, many of the Taiwanese investors who ran labor-intensive sweatshops in the PRD relocated to the YRD after the Asian financial crisis in 1997 to climb the capitalist food chain. They set up a silicon valley just west of Shanghai, which came to replace the one formerly based in Taiwan, hoping to add value to their reduced labor costs. Shanghai is currently host to almost half the resident Taiwanese on the mainland, some 400,000 people, and is now to Taiwan what Shenzhen was to Hong Kong: a platform for a wholesale relocation of industry. The YRD has become the largest production base for electronic products in the world.

The YRD also grants easier access to China's growing domestic market. The Guangdong PRD region became hampered in this respect since it had mostly produced goods for export, while the YRD, developing later, developed a more harmonious infrastructure, with easier access to the interior. Recently business executives and party officials in the PRD region have been promoting a Pan-PRD project to counter the spectacular rise of the YRD, called "9+2" (nine southern and central provinces plus Hong Kong and Macau), but it remains to be seen whether the PRD can challenge the YRD's hold on the internal market.

Another reason is political. The southeastern region, bordering the former colonies of Hong Kong and Macau, was always considered to be most prone to outside, Western influence, with closer links to the Chinese diaspora. Though this was definitely

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– Al Richardson, *Revolutionary History*

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an asset for economic development, it was considered a political liability that would have to be checked. Shanghai did not share these liabilities and had been tightly integrated into Beijing's political dominion.

A final but not unimportant reason is that an increasingly high level of proletarian concentration began to threaten the "economic miracle" in the PRD, and the capitalists started to set up shop elsewhere to dilute the strength of worker unrest. Thus over the years, the flow of rural-to-urban migration gradually increased and radiated upwards along the eastern seaboard to follow the bulging capital infusion. More than 100 million migrant workers now work in multi-national corporations and the associated urban clusters from the PRD to the YRD to the Bohai Rim around Tianjin and Beijing in the North.

These corporations can take many forms, including joint ventures and wholly-owned foreign enterprises; some are Chinese contractors or subcontractors who act as a front for Taiwanese capital. Originally investment followed a stricter geopolitical pattern, and it was suspected that Hong Kong, Taiwanese and Korean capital would carve out separate spheres of influence in the PRD, across the Taiwan Strait and the Northeast. But now the trends are quite diffuse, especially with the entry of Japanese and then European and American capital.

Though global foreign direct investment (FDI) had contracted from U.S. \$1,388 billion to 560 billion from 2000 to 2003, in China in the same period the FDI had increased from 40 billion to 53 billion, and in 2004 shot up to 60 billion, a 50 percent increase in 3 years! If we take one example, that of General Motors, we can see the trend clearly. While General Motors is currently suffering a 50-year low in sales in the U.S. market, their Chinese market has come to represent a whopping 25 percent of their global profits (up from 7 percent only a few years ago), and they have committed a further 3 billion to expansion in China. The influx of foreign capital has been so pronounced, and growth rates so high, that the Chinese government last year introduced various measures to cool down the economy and prevent the much-feared "hard landing."

CASTE WALLS IN THE “FORBIDDEN CITIES”

Unlike in countries like Mexico, where new “special economic zones” became the permanent residence of migrating waves of workers, in China under hukou law the migrants did not have the right to reside in the cities. Starting in Shenzhen in the early 80’s, the local municipal governments issued temporary one-year residence permits and provided temporary lodging in dormitories flanking the factories and construction sites. The employers would be responsible for documenting the workers and would pay the associated fees to the government. In practice this meant that many migrants went unregistered and became part of a circulating “black (undocumented) hukou” population living in constant fear of the police.

This dormitory labor regime precluded family migration since other family members couldn’t live in the dormitories and most certainly couldn’t afford to rent apartments available on the limited free market. The hukou caste system also meant that, as “rural” residents, they did not have access to any elementary health care nor to education for their children. Nor could “non-residents” register marriages or births. Despite some experiments with a medical system mandated by the local governments of Shenzhen, Zhuhai and Dongguan, it was found that only 150 workers in a toy factory of 1000 were registered with it. The gap in the cost of living between the countryside and the big city also limited their mobility and purchasing power even when they did have time to venture outside the dormitory.

The conditions in these dormitories have been well documented by Pun Ngai, a professor at the University of Science and Technology in Hong Kong, who herself spent six months working in one of the factories in Shenzhen. Writing about China Wonder Garments, a Hong Kong-owned company situated in the middle of the global subcontracting chain in Shenzhen, she explains:

The dormitory building of three stories was just adjacent to the production building, which required only two minutes walk to the shop floor, thus easily facilitating a just-in-time labor system for just-in-time production. Each dormitory room housed 12-16 workers and was very crowded, lacking ventilation, adequate lighting, and absolutely no private or individual space. No kitchen, toilet or bathroom was provided in each room, and thus the workers in each floor had to share common toilets and bathrooms at the end of the corridor. ... The dormitory building was built to accommodate 500 workers only, but in China Wonder, it always had more than 600 workers.

The dormitory regime also cloaks a whole web of social oppression that keeps the machines humming to the tune of capitalism’s frenzied production cycles. Those lucky enough to get a

job in the big city are generally recruited through an informal familial network that extends back to the native village. Each new recruit is under incredible social pressure within the dormitory to uphold the reputation of the work ethic of their extended family, and each “family” carves out a niche to peddle influence for the right to enlist others in the chain of migration.

Over time the dormitory system develops a self-regulating familial labor discipline linked to the fortune of the native village. Here the patriarchal traditions of the countryside project their authority within the sealed caste walls of the dormitory with the blessing of the employers. The predominantly female workers in the textile industry are to spend the best years of their youth as prisoners of the machine before reaching the “marrying age” of 25, when they will return to the countryside.

Though their wages are calculated monthly, the majority of the migrant workers are paid in a lump sum at the end of the year, and a good chunk of their paltry wages is in fact brought back to the village every year during the one holiday to which they are entitled, the Chinese lunar New Year. This returning migrant income represents at least half of the total rural income, which has come to reinforce the village’s dependency on migrant income and thus on the lifeblood of the chain of migration. Delayed and/or non-payment of wages, a phenomenon which affects 25 percent of migrants, is the one issue which the local governments and the Chinese ACFTU union federation try to address – to head off an explosion of unrest.

“WE HAVE BEEN NOUGHT, WE SHALL BE ALL”

And so, the logic of international capitalism’s race to the bottom has led it to the vast untapped reservoir of cheap labor opened up by the Chinese Stalinists. Despite their hypocritical pronouncements over “human rights” abuses, they have seized upon the most inhumane institution set up by the CCP, the hukou caste system, and turned it into a prop for a rate of exploitation unparalleled since the dawn of capitalism. Indeed, a key feature of early capitalism in its rawest form is being replicated on a gigantic scale: the costs of the reproduction of labor, those of education and social welfare, are borne entirely by the rural communities from which this new proletariat has emerged. Sometimes even the costs of labor aren’t being paid.

Linked by social position to the urban proletariat and by blood to the poor peasantry, the mingong is a bastard creation of capitalism in its death agony, a modern wretched of the earth that suffers unimaginable superexploitation in the interests of a handful of Chinese and international capitalist parasites. But that is precisely why it is the stuff of nightmares for its rulers. Long ago Marx wrote that the modern proletariat under capitalism is fundamentally an object for exploitation. But when it becomes conscious of its historic destiny, when it becomes a subject in history, it is transformed from a class in itself into a class for itself. Thus begins a struggle for power.

The mingong’s struggle for democratic and civil rights cannot be waged in the name of that same Western capitalist “democracy” which enslaves it. The struggle for the democratic and civil rights of the mingong intersects with the struggle for their liberation as a class and is inseparable from the class struggle of the Chinese proletariat as a whole. The very entry of the mingong into the arena of class struggle will galvanize the “native” proletariat and find a ready echo within the impoverished masses of the countryside, already seething with unrest. Indeed, particularly in this era of globalization, and given the size and strategic weight of the Chinese proletariat, the approaching theater of class struggle in China bears a world-historic significance. The wretched of the earth, the Chinese proletarian dragon, will now take the stage.●

Further Reading...

- “China’s Capitalist Revolutions” (*Proletarian Revolution* No. 53) (\$1.00)
- “Imperialism’s China Card” (*Proletarian Revolution* No. 70) (\$1.00)
- *The Life and Death of Stalinism*, by Walter Daum. Marxist analysis of the Stalinist system of stratified capitalism. (\$15.00)

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Bolivia: Revolutionary Prospects and Reactionary Threats

by Evelyn Kaye

The struggle in Bolivia has been confronted with an ominous political threat orchestrated by President Carlos Mesa. Only a year and a half ago, the Bolivian masses made history when they overthrew Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, the hated neo-liberal president. In October 2003 the upheaval centered in the Western highlands (*altiplano*) around La Paz, the political capital of the country. It focused on the demand for nationalization of the natural gas reserves. Workers and peasants also saw their uprising as a fight against oppression in a majority indigenous country with a long and horrific history of racism.

The concerted action of indigenous peoples, mainly Aymara and Quechua, stopped the selling off of Bolivia's gas reserves at that time. But misleaders of the workers and peasants cut a deal which ensured a stabilizing transfer of power from Sanchez de Lozada to his vice-president, Carlos Mesa. That betrayal stalled the revolutionary momentum of the struggle. (See "Bolivia's Unfinished Revolution," in *Proletarian Revolution* No. 69.) It left the fate of Bolivia's gas resources up to Congress and laid the foundation for the current crisis.

MESA'S THREATS

As we go to press, the Bolivian political scene is shifting rapidly. Frustrated at Congress' stalling over the passage of a new hydrocarbons law, on March 5 Mesa threatened to resign. On March 8, the bulk of parties turned up in a Congressional session to go through the charade of rejecting his resignation; they also accepted a National Accord (*Acuerdo Ante La Nación*) which he demanded as a condition of his remaining in power. Mesa demanded the approval of a new hydrocarbons law to his liking, laws for a constituent assembly, elections for departmental governors and a referendum on departmental autonomy. He also called for a demonstration on March 10 to rally support against the mass protests and road blockades that he claims have created "chaos" in the country.

Mesa's tactical threat to resign seems to have caught all sectors of the popular movements off guard. However, the mass movements taken as a whole have actually been in retreat for quite a while. In particular, the cohesive unity that was developing dissipated after Mesa was allowed to come to power. Again, the misleaders of the workers and peasants were responsible for the overall lack of united actions that facilitated Mesa's maneuver.

THE SANTA CRUZ OPPOSITION

The biggest recent indication that the Mesa government was planning a big attack on the masses was its handling of reactionary demands generated out of the Eastern lowland department of Santa Cruz. Santa Cruz has long been the bastion of reaction and racism in the country. The civic committee has been demanding "autonomy" for Santa Cruz, demanding a continuation of the existing economy with no infringement on imperialist profit-making in general – and multinational control over the hydrocarbon resources in particular. Santa Cruz accounts for much of the nation's industry, over half of the country's oil wells and about a third of overall economic output. Neighboring Tarija has much of the gas.



Rural teachers' contingent in recent march in Cochabamba. President Mesa threatened to resign in the face of relentless protests against neoliberal attacks.

The economic motives of Santa Cruz business groups and politicians are intertwined with a blatant racist hostility to all indigenous groupings and to the demands of workers and peasants. The ethnic makeup of the densely populated highlands is largely indigenous, while the lowlands have a much larger mestizo population. Highland economic activity is focused on domestic markets and a multitude of smaller operations, including light industry, whereas the lowlands are largely export-oriented (including a significant export of illegal coca paste and cocaine).

But it is not only Bolivia's natural gas reserves that have been up for grabs. Long-standing demands for indigenous rights, often expressing themselves through calls for territorial autonomy, have been countered by the very different and deceptive "autonomy" demands of the Santa Cruz elite. For this Eastern sector of the ruling class, their "autonomy" demand is simply a cover for the defense of the foreign imperialist superexploitation of Bolivia – which provides the financial lifeblood of these Bolivian comprador capitalists.

AFTERMATH OF THE 1952 REVOLUTION

Economic power in Bolivia moved to the East decades ago with the depletion of the tin mines in the West. The focus shifted to the extraction of oil, abundant in the East; more recently, natural gas reserves were discovered. As well, the East developed successful agricultural export operations, especially in soy beans. Western exports still center around minerals – zinc, silver, tin and others.

The political roots of this deep inequality can be found in the aborted Bolivian Revolution of 1952, where a popular front government led by the bourgeois radical party Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR) was installed on the backs of the revolutionary-minded tin miners and other workers as well as the peasants. Once solidified in power, the MNR turned on the masses. (See our pamphlet *Bolivia: The Revolution the "Fourth International" Betrayed* for a fuller discussion.)

A fundamental aspect of the program was that only unproductive lands were to be expropriated, the so-called “latifundia.” That generally meant that the least arable lands in the West were handed over to the peasantry – and in piecemeal fashion at that. Real economic development efforts in the countryside were concentrated on the sparsely populated but fertile lowlands of the East. This split agrarian policy reflected the interests of U.S. imperialism, which funded much of the development. Thus MNR policies laid the basis for the highly polarized development of the East: thriving white and mestizo owners of big agricultural enterprises and businesses, with indigenous rural labor and small farmers hanging on to the bottom.

FROM MINING TO HYDROCARBONS

There was a loosely parallel situation with the nationalization of the tin mines by the MNR in 1952. It took over the mines of the top three companies, which were compensated (as were the rural landowners in the land reform program). Then the MNR regime depleted the funds of the state mining sector in favor of the oil sector in the East.

No doubt a big factor in the development of Eastern politics and business was the lack of powerful workers’ and peasants’ unions to interfere with the process. On this historical basis, the East developed as the most blatantly racist, anti-worker and anti-peasant region, in the context of the fact that the Bolivian ruling class as a whole rests on an entrenched racist hierarchy. Simply put, if you are darker-skinned, your life is most likely to be miserable.

Despite the blatant deficiencies of bourgeois nationalization, the 1952 revolution was forced to concede major gains to the working class: guaranteed jobs and living standards in the mining sector in particular. The gains were eroded over time and then overturned in 1985 with the closing of most of the mines, huge layoffs and the full-fledged introduction of a drastic neoliberal program by an MNR government.

When highly valuable natural gas reserves were discovered in recent years, the masses saw the need to fight against yet another bourgeois assault-and-plunder operation like those which have characterized so much of Bolivia’s history. Thus in October 2003 they mounted a thunderous strike against decades of super-exploitation and oppression. But given the betrayal of the mass uprising and subsequent events throughout 2004, the Santa Cruz sector of the ruling class was able to move decisively to the forefront by the late fall. This in turn made it easier for Mesa to start posing as the voice of reason, as if he were opposing impossible demands from both sides. In reality, his pretense was pretty thin. Despite the regional conflicts within the ruling class, all sections are united on the need for continued imperialist domination of Bolivia and the maintenance of a white and mestizo ruling class lording over the indigenous masses and workers, East and West.

The Santa Cruz autonomy campaign, however, was known for its denunciation of Mesa. (The Santa Cruz ruling class announced on March 7 that it “accepted” his resignation.) This prompted a response among some of the more moderate peasant organizations that Mesa was the lesser evil and that the current



political center of the capitalist state required defense. The workers’ and peasants’ pole, exerting its strength in the Western Andean and Central Valley departments, has lacked a bold leadership and program to counter either Santa Cruz or Mesa.

MESA AND MORALES: DANGEROUS GAMES

Evo Morales is internationally well known as a coca growers’ leader and presidential contender who was key to Mesa’s accession to the presidency. He has continued to play a central role. According to the October 2003 deal, the question of gas resources was to be solved by a binding referendum. When President Mesa revealed last May that the gas referendum would not even pose nationalization as an option, the movement revived. But Morales, who heads the bourgeois reformist party Movement Toward Socialism (MAS), backed Mesa and his fraudulent referendum. Morales’ main opponents were the Bolivian Workers’ Central (COB), led by Jaime Solares, and the affiliated peasants’ union, the United Peasant Workers Union Central (CSUTCB), led by Felipe Quispe. These forces called for a boycott and mass action, while Morales and MAS supported the referendum. The unions’ boycott flopped and the referendum passed.

This, however, obligated Mesa to bring a concrete proposal to Congress. A section of the masses had been taken in by the idea that the referendum would mean nationalization. But when he revealed his actual proposal in early September, they exploded again. The plan clearly allowed foreign companies to continue to exploit the nation’s gas resources.

At that point Morales swung into opposition, trying to head the movement against Mesa’s proposal while restraining it. Demonstrations were much larger after Morales joined in, showing that MAS had influence not only among the rural population and coca growers but also among workers, union and non-union. Morales came out with a more left-wing version of Mesa’s bill,

Letters Welcome!

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which also ruled out nationalization but upped the ante in terms of royalties and posed the possibility of renegotiated contracts. Morales touted his proposal as a form of nationalization, and it gained him support.

By this point the movement that had been united in October 2003 in its drive to halt the sale of gas was confused and divided. This was not the accomplishment of Morales alone; it occurred in the absence of a definitive program for nationalization by the more left-wing union leaders whom the masses had looked to as well.

Any bill that would actually challenge the status quo is opposed by all wings of Bolivian capitalism. The U.S., the World Bank and foreign investors all oppose the masses' demands. Brazil, under the Workers Party of "Lula" da Silva, has played a big role in backing Mesa — and defending the ample investments of its state oil company, Petrobras, in Bolivia. Nestor Kirchner of Argentina also stepped up. And even the supposed "revolutionary," Hugo Chávez of Venezuela, is also backing Mesa.

Sections of the masses had a wait-and-see attitude toward the hydrocarbons law that was being debated and torn apart in Congress for a long time. There was mounting pressure to "close the deal" for the sake of stability and investments. And this meant there had to be a way to stifle the mass movements. So Mesa threatened to resign. This was a necessary attempt to mobilize his middle-class following, frustrated by the prolonged protests with no solution in sight, as well as to divide the workers and peasants' movements. It was also meant to deal a significant blow to Morales' stature. Despite correctly denouncing Mesa's threats against the mass movements as racist, Morales' MAS voted along with the bulk of the traditional parties against accepting Mesa's resignation. (Quispe's party, the Movimiento Indígena Pachacuti, voted to accept the resignation. Both MAS and MIP walked out of the subsequent negotiations over the National Accord.)

CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY

There is also the matter of the long-promised constituent assembly. Much of the indigenous population has hoped that such an assembly, rewriting the constitution, would deliver on their claims of territorial rights and self-rule. They have expected some kind of power-sharing formula that would mean a real say for them in organizing their immediate localities and in how Bolivia as a whole is governed. But the condition of Bolivian capitalism, as is now abundantly clear, allows only two possibilities. Either the constituent assembly will be continually put off, or it will be called with the aim of creating another controlled pseudo-democratic fraud like the "referendum" on gas. It seems probable that Mesa's scheme, at the very least, is to get his hydrocarbons bill passed and give the elites of Santa Cruz and other regions what they want in terms of "autonomy" — before convening an assembly to supposedly grant more indigenous rights to the oppressed.

Since Mesa came into power, the COB and CSUTCB have supported protest politics while sometimes waxing rhetorical about a grand "alternative" constituent assembly. Yet there is no obvious power at this point to call such an alternative that would command the masses' attention. For example, El Alto, the proletarianized Aymara city near La Paz which has been the center of struggle, has remained the most steadfast and radical in its activity. Yet it has not produced an identifiable leadership for the overall struggle.

Up until early March, when Mesa really showed his true face as anything but a democrat, the masses' focus seemed to be on demanding that Mesa call a constituent assembly. For authentic revolutionaries, participation in bourgeois efforts like



Abel Mamani, president of the Federation of Neighborhood Councils of El Alto, was struck during protest over privatization of the water supply on March 3. A few minutes later police gassed the demonstrators. Mass self-defense is an urgent need in the raging conflict in Bolivia.

parliamentary and constituent assembly elections are not ruled out, as long as these platforms are used to denounce the process itself and to expose and oppose all pro-capitalist programs. Revolutionary participation is purely tactical, based on the motion of the masses and the need to intervene in forums that command their political attention. The masses' political focus is obviously in flux. One thing for sure is that the steadfast advocacy of indigenous rights will be critical in building unity against Mesa at this point.

THE SANTA CRUZ "STRIKES"

Given the nature of the conjuncture, chiefly characterized by the absence of a definitive leadership for the masses, it is no wonder that the forces of reaction based in the East used the opening created by the weakness of the mass movements to flex their political muscle. Their grand opportunity arrived on December 31. As a result of IMF/World Bank demands, prices were raised on gas, kerosene and diesel fuel. Mass mobilizations responded in all major cities. El Alto began an indefinite general strike on February 11, led by the Federation of Neighborhood Juntas that was key in 2003. The strike also featured a local demand to kick out a French water supply company, Aguas de Illimani. Mesa gave in on that — temporarily. But while El Alto was celebrating this victory, the pro-business civic committee in Santa Cruz had accomplished a two-day business-led "general strike" on January 12 and 13 which was the biggest of all the mobilizations, even larger than a similar "strike" in November.

The pro-business mobilization was opposed to the price hikes on the surface, but its real aim was the enforcement of Santa Cruz's reactionary demand for autonomy. The "strike" was followed up by escalating mobilizations and then a concrete victory. Mesa, under pressure, promised that direct elections for departmental governors (prefects) would take place in June. (Previously they had been appointed by La Paz.) A binding referendum on autonomy would also take place. Mesa then re-organized his cabinet in order to give Eastern business interests more voice. Mesa's readiness to capitulate to Santa Cruz was clear.



Rodrigo de Rato (left), Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund, shook hands with grinning President Carlos Mesa (right) during February visit. Debt repudiation is the revolutionary measure which can spark an internationalist fight against imperialism across the continent.

Santa Cruz has vehemently opposed a constituent assembly, since “autonomy” demands for Santa Cruz inevitably would conflict with the autonomy demands of the indigenous populations. They use the ultimate threat of secession if they don’t get what they want.

THREATS TO WORKERS AND PEASANTS

The leadership of the Santa Cruz civic committee is closely linked to the Santa Cruz Chamber of Commerce (CAINCO). Its long list of member businesses includes gas companies with contracts in the region, such as Petrobras (Brazil), Repso-YPF (Spain) and Enron, all of which have representatives on CAINCO’s board. Reportedly CAINCO has also provided support for the activities of Nación Camba, an extreme right group that advocates regional separation and claims 40,000 mainly white and mestizo members from Santa Cruz and the neighboring Tarija department. The group’s youth section is already known for violent attacks on indigenous marches.

Disturbingly, workers seem to have supported the November and January business-led “strikes” for autonomy. Workers and employees in the hydrocarbon and banking sectors, both vital to the Eastern economy, are among the highest paid in the country. There is a tendency within the labor aristocracy in all countries to identify with the racist pro-imperialist aims of their bosses; Bolivia is no exception. But we have found little discussion in the Bolivian and Latin American left over what political strategy could be used to win over at least portions of the Eastern urban and industrial workers. There were blockades and even shut-downs of pipelines by agricultural workers and peasants against the oil and gas companies. However, the indigenous populations in the East don’t have the clout that the Aymaras and Quechuas have exerted in the West.

A strategy must be forged to build a worker-indigenous alliance on a national basis at this point. This is the only way to defeat the Santa Cruz agenda and to defeat Mesa, who not only capitulates to Santa Cruz but has become the most immediate

danger to the masses across Bolivia. The fact that workers in the East as well as the West were recently mobilized against gas hikes imposed by the IMF is just one indication that there *is* a class basis for unity – despite the bosses’ efforts to cultivate a fake cross-class unity based on racism and regional chauvinism. Unity *in action* must be achieved without political concessions. Working-class leadership of a united front of workers and peasants from all regions is essential for building a powerful defense.

REVOLUTIONARY PROGRAM

Revolutionaries must begin by focusing on those already politically conscious workers from all regions who can be won most immediately to the central task of building a Leninist party. In forging such a party, clarity of basic program is essential.

Imperialism has not allowed the development of a genuinely centralized economy in Bolivia, and this remains an essential need of the masses of all regions. A workers’ state would nationalize the hydrocarbon, mining, banking and other vital sectors without giving the compradors or the imperialists any compensation. It would likewise carry out a thoroughgoing land reform. It would establish a nationally centralized monopoly over foreign trade. It would repudiate the huge debt owed to the imperialists – debt repayment alone is now 30 percent of the entire national budget. These measures would lay the basis for a genuine industrialization program in Bolivia. Only through such measures can a guaranteed decent living standard for all be created; it would include free health, education and welfare services. The socialist plan would feature a full public works program that means not only guaranteed jobs for all but – for the first time – water, electricity, heat, sanitation and transport for all of Bolivia.

When advanced workers are armed with a socialist program, outlined in broad strokes above, they have the basis for tactical approaches to fellow workers in motion when the time is ripe. Obviously the bulk of workers can not be convinced instantaneously of the full program for socialist revolution and the workers’ state. In these situations, Trotskyists use a system of transitional demands. For example, demands like “nationalization of key industries without compensation” and “workers’ control of industry” can be very effective in articulating objective goals that workers can identify with. Workers already see the advantages of nationalization and can certainly see the immediate advantage of not compensating the imperialist bloodsuckers who most of them despise. We argue openly for socialist revolution and advocate nationalization of the hydrocarbons and other major industries under a workers’ state as the only solution.

In Bolivia, where MAS and even left-talking union leaders

Literatura del LRP en español

Tenemos disponibles nuestros artículos sobre Bolivia y Argentina en español. También tenemos otros documentos y folletos. Si desea añadirse a nuestra lista de correspondencia por favor escribanos y notifíquenos si desea algún documento o artículo en particular o si desea recibir todos nuestros documentos en español.

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have spread great confusion about what the nationalization of gas means, clear propaganda explaining the revolutionary significance of the demand, including the need for a workers' state, is essential. By the same token, raising a fight over compensation and over the right of the workers and oppressed to at least oversee any nationalization that would take place under a capitalist state can be tactically vital. Through the joint struggle for such transitional demands, revolutionaries have the opportunity to demonstrate revolutionary truths in practice. A centralized revolutionary party to represent the socialist working-class alternative is desperately needed.

DISORIENTATION OF THE MOVEMENTS

In the existing mass movements, the demand for local decentralized power and autonomy have co-existed with fervent demands for the nationalization of gas and an industrialization program – which are correctly understood as key demands on the central state power. While bourgeois forces exploit these contradictions and use them to confuse the masses, a revolutionary policy must “say what is” and call things by their right names.

Despite the need for a centralized state, no authentic communist can be indifferent to the yearning of oppressed indigenous groups for autonomy in the face of the present state power. A proletarian strategy must deal with and resolve the apparent contradiction in a truthful way.

For revolutionary internationalists, the opposition to world imperialism and the need for the self-determination of Bolivia in particular dictate a centralist program. But this program has to be proved in practice, especially to indigenous peoples who have suffered five hundred years under colonialism and imperialism. For this reason Leninists advance the democratic rights of oppressed groups. In Bolivia, the struggles have demonstrated that secession is not appropriate for any of the distinct indigenous populations that want autonomy. But the same Leninist spirit that has been historically used to support the right of secession for oppressed nations must still be invoked when addressing the demand for self-rule embodied in their calls for autonomy.

Revolutionaries therefore must energetically defend the right to autonomy for indigenous peoples. From the Aymaras in the Western highlands to the Guarani and many other minority populations in the Eastern lowlands, important sections currently see no hope for an equitable Bolivian nation and therefore want some form of self-rule in their historical land areas.

As with the right of national self-determination and secession, our recognition of the right of oppressed groups to choose autonomy means total hostility to demands for autonomy by any section of the oppressors. Nor does it mean that we must advocate autonomy as the best way forward for the oppressed in specific situations. It simply means that we defend the right of the oppressed to make this choice. Revolutionaries fight side by side with the oppressed in their struggles, while pointing out that centralization under a workers' state is the only real solution.

Abstract advocacy of regional autonomy is a dangerous strategy in Bolivia at this time, as the events in Santa Cruz have already abundantly proved. Revolutionaries must defend the right of oppressed indigenous populations to pursue *their* specific struggles for autonomy, while warning against calls for regional autonomy of *all* departments.

REVOLUTIONARY POLICY

Socialist revolution is necessary to overthrow Bolivian comprador capitalism and its ties to imperialism. The development of a socialist revolution requires the building of an internationalist

Further Reading...

- *Bolivia: the Revolution the “Fourth International” Betrayed* (articles from 1952 by an internal opposition group in the Fourth International)
- “Argentina: Crisis and Revolutionary Program” (*Proletarian Revolution* No. 64)
- “Bolivia’s Unfinished Revolution” (*Proletarian Revolution* No. 69)
- “U.S. Hands Off Venezuela!” (*Proletarian Revolution* No. 70)
- “Brazil: Workers Party Betrays Workers” (*Proletarian Revolution* No. 70)

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Trotskyist party. Its goal is a workers' state, led by a workers' and peasants' government, pledged to uproot anti-indigenous racism in Bolivian society.

The workers' ability to carry out such a program depends not only on the strongest possible alliance with the peasantry and indigenous populations but also on the international spread of the fight. In particular, the demand for debt repudiation is key to internationalist strategy; it has been acutely lacking in the Bolivian situation. Repudiation of Bolivia's debts is designed to win tremendous support from the masses everywhere, who are suffering under the same debt burden. It could spark a chain reaction across Latin America.

The masses' fight for nationalization is opposed not only by the local capitalists and the imperialists, but also by such neighboring “left” regimes as Lula's Brazil and Kirchner's Argentina. Mesa can not solve the underlying problems or even hold back the movements for long by himself. These neighboring regimes are also the most likely forces to intervene and front for U.S. imperialism in coming confrontations. This danger can only be stopped by fostering solidarity with the masses of all the neighboring countries, including raising the need to support indigenous struggles on an international level. Combatting the age-old reactionary anti-Chilean chauvinism is an acute necessity.

This article can only sketch in some basic perspectives. Despite the current obstacles, the masses are not defeated nor do they see themselves as decisively defeated. And the escalated attacks are also forcing a new wave of resistance. Therefore a new upsurge on the level of the October 2003 uprising, initially beginning defensively, can be expected. Given the dangers now being mounted, it is imperative that revolutionaries fight for the arming of the workers and peasants. Every opportunity to place demands on the current misleaders of the masses to defend the current struggles must be seized. Reformist and centrist union leaders and above all Morales must be ceaselessly exposed until they can be replaced. Campaigns for united fronts and solidarity actions in the struggles today are vital.

Today, even a small number of revolutionary cadres, armed with a genuine Marxist program, can be key to building the vanguard Bolshevik party for the upcoming upheavals in Bolivia. The LRP and COFI strive to play a role in the re-creation of the revolutionary Fourth International in an effort to support this development.●

March 8, 2005

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Iraq

continued from page 1

and clerics claiming to represent ethnic and religious sectors for shares of the governmental spoils. The U.S. and its pawns deliberately fanned the fires of religious sectoralism to divide the working class. Iraqi workers, with a long tradition of militant, secular organization and struggle have been sidelined for the moment. The main nominally working-class party, the Communist Party, has openly collaborated with the occupation governments and thereby lost any chance of mobilizing the anti-occupation masses.

Likewise, the main secular Shi'ite Arab politicians, Ahmad Chalabi and Iyad Allawi, are both long-term servants of imperialism. So the Shi'ite and Sunni religious parties, which have vacillated over the occupation, have gained predominant influence, along with the Kurdish secular bourgeois forces, which supported the invasion from the start.

Iraq's Shi'ites make up the majority of the population but have always been oppressed by successive colonial and neo-colonial dictatorships. They turned out to vote in force, not to validate the occupation but for opposite reasons: they want the U.S. out, and they want their vital services restored. Many were tricked by their political and religious leaders into thinking that electing a Shi'ite-dominated government would open the way for the departure of U.S. troops.

The Kurds voted in even greater percentages, in the belief that they would gain a chance for true self-determination and independence. Exit polls showed that was the overwhelming desire of the masses. But that too is an empty dream: the U.S. will not permit an independent Kurdistan whose very existence would inspire Kurdish revolts in Turkey, Syria and Iran. Many Shi'ites and Kurds remember their betrayal by the U.S. after the 1991 Gulf War, when Washington left the brutal dictator Saddam Hussein in power to smash their uprisings. And they know the U.S. looks on in silence when Turkish forces slaughter Kurds just across the border with Iraq.

The political ruling class of Iraq, under Saddam and before, was largely composed of Sunni Arabs, who make up about a quarter of the population. Sunnis have been especially targeted by the U.S. military and have carried out the bulk of the armed resistance. Most Sunni organizations boycotted the election in



Relatives of Iraqi prisoners protest overcrowding and abuses at U.S.-run Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad. Pre-election sweeps by occupation forces rounded up thousands of civilians.



One U.S. agent greets another: John Negroponte, U.S. ambassador (in fact, pro-consul) in Iraq for part of 2004-5; Iyad Allawi, CIA agent and U.S.-appointed prime minister of Iraq.

response to the U.S.'s laying waste the city of Fallujah last fall, so they won very few seats. The victorious Shi'ite and Kurdish politicians will nevertheless have to deal with Sunni leaders in hopes of cobbling together a government that can pretend to represent Iraq.

As the masses begin to realize that the government they voted for will not achieve their hopes, the appearance of legitimacy will vanish. The claims that the election was a crushing blow to the insurgency or a step towards stability, sovereignty, or democracy, will be exposed. The U.S. and its collaborators will be left with a "Mission Accomplished, Part II" – one more premature announcement of an illusory imperial triumph.

As we write, the U.S. is making ever-noisier threats against Iran to pressure its Islamist government from building nuclear weapons – and to create another "democracy" that disguises a restored imperial control. However, the growing resistance in Iraq has tied down the bulk of the Pentagon's armies, and the election will not stabilize Iraq so as to allow the imperialists now to even contemplate using their own military force to invade Iran. Thus the election has solved none of the problems faced by the Iraqi people, nor has it freed the imperialist invaders to militarily attack other targets.

WHY THE ELECTION?

Right after the invasion, the U.S. set up a military dictatorship under General Jay Garner, with the intention of installing the Pentagon's favorite opportunist and crook, Chalabi, as strongman and thereby undercut the religious and Iran-backed Shi'ites. When this scheme failed, the U.S. appointed a new proconsul, L. Paul Bremer, who created a puppet Governing Council based on newly returning exiles. Bremer issued edicts that opened the Iraqi economy and its oil resources to U.S. plunder. He too made the U.S.'s real intentions obvious despite its democratic claptrap. He announced plans for a national assembly which involved regional caucuses composed of hand-picked collaborators.

Grand Ayatollah Al-Sistani, the main Shi'ite religious leader, had cautiously collaborated with the U.S. occupation while nominally opposing it. Now he saw a chance to assert Shi'ite domination. He issued *fatwas* – religious edicts – demanding quick popular votes for both the transitional and permanent government. When the U.S. refused, he brought hundreds of thousands



Women and girls try to get water from Baghdad well. Lack of water, electricity, medical care after two years of occupation shows U.S. goal in Iraq is exploitation, not democracy.

of Shi'ites out to protest, and finally the U.S. had to consent. So even the sham election was the result of popular demand, not any American concern for democracy.

In June 2004, Bremer appointed a new "sovereign" government, a ploy to give the appearance of progress and aid Bush's reelection campaign. Bremer appointed a government led by Allawi, a long-term CIA agent, who went some way toward reintegrating elements of Saddam's Ba'ath party into the government. He also played a key role in fronting for the U.S. suppression of the rebellion last summer led by the radical Shi'ite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr. (See *PR* 71.) But despite Allawi's deserved reputation for brutality, he has been unable to rule over much of Iraq other than the U.S.-fortified "Green Zone" in central Baghdad.

The plans for the elections were decided by the U.S. and its agents: only nationwide lists, no local candidacies, were allowed; all lists had to be approved by the U.S., and any party calling for support to the armed resistance was barred. The vote was delayed until after the U.S. presidential election, so that nothing could embarrass Bush. The delay gave the U.S. time to further terrorize Iraq, as it did by pulverizing the Sunni resistance centers of Fallujah and Samarra, adding to the already brutal record of the U.S. occupation.

The prospect of an election under such circumstances led a number of prominent Sunni groups, including the Association of Muslim Scholars (AMS), to call for postponement. A sector of the U.S. ruling class, notably the *New York Times* publishers, also called for postponement, arguing that a Sunni boycott could invalidate the entire election. But the Bush administration realized that any postponement would be considered a victory for the insurgents. It enforced its decision with a renewed wave of violence and intimidation culminating just before the elections.

ELECTION RESULTS

Initial figures for the election turnout were absurdly high, with Fox News initially projecting that 90 percent of eligible voters had cast ballots. These figures were revised to around 73 percent, a number thrown around by many mainstream sources for days. This accomplished the goal of framing the election as an historic success. After the votes were counted weeks later, the officially claimed count turned out to be a little over 8 million votes, or 58 percent of eligible voters. This percentage is based on the figure of 14 million eligible voters, and some have estimated that the true number is as many as 18 million, which would bring

the turnout down to around 45 percent, assuming the vote count is true at all.

The further illegitimacy of this inherently illegitimate election was demonstrated by the Sunni boycott. In the city of Ramadi, about 300 votes were cast; in Samarra, a city of 200,000 people, 1400 voted; while in decimated Fallujah, there were 500 votes out of an estimated 140,000 Iraqis. In Mosul, the country's third largest city, 50,000 voted out of an estimated 500,000 eligible voters. In many Sunni areas, including some Sunni sections of Mosul and Baghdad, hundreds of polling places did not even open. Overall, the Sunni turnout is estimated at 10 percent.

The major winner was the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), a primarily Shi'ite, mostly religious alliance set up with the backing of Sistani. The alliance included prominent Shi'ite groups like the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) backed by Iran, the Dawa party, and Chalabi and his supporters. The UIA based its campaign on Sistani's authority, and its platform initially called for a timetable for U.S. to withdraw, an Iraq based on Islamic law, jobs for all, and use of oil profits for Iraqis.

The Kurdish alliance, based on the two major Kurdish bourgeois parties, ran on a platform of Kurdish autonomy in a federal state. The Kurdish leaders called for Kurdish self-rule and retention of their own armed forces and control of the oil-rich region of Kirkuk.

Prime Minister Allawi ran on his own slate. Other contestants included the secular People's Union based around the Communist Party (ICP), and Islamist supporters of Sadr. Sadr played it three ways: he tried to distance himself from the elections by saying that he wouldn't run and wouldn't vote; at the same time, he made sure that known supporters were on the UIA list as well as on an independent list. He is reported to have a base of perhaps 7 percent of the parliamentary seats. His faction, based on impoverished urban workers and unemployed, wants the Americans out



Bush and the reactionary New York Post arrogantly assume that he can run a fair election in Iraq with U.S. troops and the CIA embedded in the society and running the country.

immediately and maintains contact with the Sunni AMS.

NO GAIN FOR IRAQIS

The mad scramble of opportunist politicians for a piece of the action is now in high gear. The bargaining is especially heavy because of the rule that the new government requires approval of two-thirds of the elected assembly – a formula the U.S. imposed to give itself room to control who gets the top posts. The U.S.'s first choice was Allawi, even though they could live with most of the other leading candidates. Allawi was the only one able to campaign on TV, taken from place to place in U.S. helicopters to make speeches across the country. His slate's poor showing reflects mass opposition to the occupation, even among the Shi'ites.

After the UIA won a majority of parliamentary seats, the leaders of its various factions began an open squabble over the prime ministership and other posts. Ibrahim al-Jafaari, the Dawa Party leader became the UIA's designee for prime minister; he now says that a U.S. withdrawal has to be postponed lest it lead to a bloodbath. But the two-thirds rule means that Jafaari needs support from either the Kurds or Allawi's bloc, so the maneuvering continues. With his U.S. support, Allawi still hopes to peel off layers of the UIA coalition to win the top job.

Whatever bloc ends up running the new government, the Iraqi masses lose. The Iraqi leaders will still be barred from interfering with the imperialist plunder of Iraq's economy and oil resources. Secular Iraqis, women especially, will likely be subject to some form of Islamist repression under a cleric-dominated regime. This has already been happening in localities governed by Sunni or Shi'ite religious parties, with the U.S. and British overlords looking the other way.

And the U.S. is not about to leave, whatever Iraqi politicians have promised. Bush's remark in his State of the Union address in January – "We will not set an artificial timetable for leaving Iraq" – made clear that the U.S. will not withdraw any significant forces until Iraq has a compliant government that can guarantee U.S. interests, economically and militarily. And even then, the U.S. intends to keep military bases in the key oil fields indefinitely.

ECONOMIC DISASTER

A major problem for the government is the masses' demand for the rebuilding of Iraq's infrastructure and the resumption of regular services like water, electricity and medical care. The occupation, both under direct U.S. rule and Iraqi "sovereignty," has been unable to restore services to anything resembling a normal level for an overwhelming majority of Iraqis. Most water supplies are tainted, and much of Iraq has electricity for only a few hours a day. Iraqis hated Saddam, but they see that the restoration of services under the occupation has been much slower than under Saddam after the 1991 war. According to one report,

Iraqi officials expressed frustration with the latest cutbacks, saying fewer water, sewer and electricity projects could further alienate Iraqis and bolster the insurgency. Already, one top Iraqi official said she had to cut back on plans to deliver clean water to resi-

dents of the often-restive cities of Falluja and Mosul. "I'm amazed at how a program meant for reconstruction that could have provided more services and could have effected stabilization could be cut so drastically," said interim Iraqi Public Works Minister Nasreen Mustapha Berwari. (Los Angeles Times, Feb. 21.)

The occupation is primarily out to benefit U.S. imperialism. Its smashing of Saddam was a warning to other pawns around the world not to get out of hand, as he did with his Kuwait invasion in 1990. The establishment of a pseudo-democracy was designed to be a model for substituting a more stable form of government in openly tyrannical countries like Saudi Arabia, where the masses are restive.

The U.S. also saw the opportunity to tighten its chokehold on oil supplies vital to European and Japanese imperialists. As well, it has hired expensive U.S. contractors to handle reconstruction, adding to the already huge unemployment rate in Iraq. The U.S. allocated billions for the reconstruction, but every day brings another story about the mismanagement and disappearance of money and the reallocation of funds from rebuilding to "security," a code word for military operations against the Iraqi people. On top of this, much of the U.S. assistance is in the form of loans, with Iraq expected to pay them back with oil revenues. Thus the Iraqi people are forced by the U.S. to pay for their own oppression.

The lack of jobs and the economic disaster have been the primary reason for many people joining the Iraqi military. The U.S. desperately hopes that a sufficiently potent armed force can be built to defend the Iraqi government, thereby allowing the U.S. to reduce its troop commitments before American public opinion is fully fed up with the occupation. The creation of a serious Iraqi armed force in any reasonable time, under the current regime, is extraordinarily dubious, since when the shooting starts, the recruits melt away.

Rather than teaching the world the beauties of pseudo-democracy, what the American invasion will prove is that in the less developed and highly exploited areas of the world, dictatorial rule is a necessity if imperialism is to maintain its grip. Even the semblance of democracy is not possible in Iraq and similar countries for more than a moment in time, if imperialist domination is



Kurdish militia training in northern Iraq. Kurds' democratic demand for self-determination is anathema to imperialist U.S. rulers.

allowed to remain.

In Iraq, keeping the Kurds docile, placating both the Shi'ites and the Sunnis and above all keeping the inherently powerful oil workers and other toilers in check is simply impossible without either the U.S.'s direct occupation or a U.S.-backed strongman regime. Direct occupation over time is far too costly politically, militarily and economically, so the U.S. will have to fall back on relying on a new Saddam. And such a regime can only dominate if it promotes a nationalist ideology designed to trick the masses into thinking that it is really anti-imperialist. That in turn spells more trouble for imperialism.

WORKING CLASS POWER: THE ONLY SOLUTION.

Leon Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution teaches us that democratic aspirations of the masses can only be fulfilled in the course of the socialist revolution and its spread around the world. Only the working class of Iraq can lead the way out of the nightmare the masses face. The working class has no interest in maintaining capitalist exploitation and imperialist domination. Ending capitalist rule in Iraq and the building of a workers' state committed to socialism is the only way forward.

The invasion and occupation have thrown the Iraqi working class into temporary disarray, shutting down major industries and creating mass unemployment. Saddam banned the right to strike, and Bremer maintained this anti-democratic prohibition. And, so far, the resistance has been dominated by bourgeois religious and secular forces, some engaging in terrorist attacks, behind-the-scenes collaborationist maneuvers and anti-working-class attacks.

Yet there are growing reports of working-class struggle. The Southern Oil Company Union (SOCU) successfully struck against the miserable wage schedule instituted by Bremer. Hassan Juma'a Awad, a leader of SOCU, wrote the following in an article published during a recent visit to Britain:

The occupation has deliberately fomented a sectarian division of Sunni and Shia. We never knew this sort of division before. Our families intermarried, we lived and worked together. And today we are resisting this brutal occupation together, from Falluja to Najaf to Sadr City. The resistance to the occupation forces is a God-given right of Iraqis, and we, as a union, see ourselves as a necessary part of this resistance – although we will fight using our industrial power, our collective strength as a union, and as a part of civil society which needs to grow in order to defeat both still-powerful Saddamist elites and the foreign occupation of our country. (*The Guardian*, Feb. 18.)

Revolutionaries in Iraq must participate in these struggles to help their fellow workers learn their class interests in the course of the struggle. As Awad indicates, they cannot ignore the struggle against imperialism. The bourgeois demagogues can be undermined by revolutionaries fighting as the most consistent champions of anti-imperialism. In that struggle they must also stand up against religious and nationalist attacks on democratic freedoms. Revolutionaries will fight for the defeat of the imperialist forces in every clash, together with Iraqi forces of all political colors. But at all times we seek to raise the class consciousness of our fellow workers so as to mobilize and arm the working class independently.

Neither the U.S. military nor the bourgeois politicians can alter the systemic exploitation and oppression that drives the Iraqi masses into conflict with imperialism and the capitalist system it rests on. These factors will inevitably drive the Iraqi working class into the leading role in the struggle. The urgent task today for revolutionary Iraqi workers is to begin to build the revolutionary party of the working class to lead the struggle to victory.●

March 7, 2005

COFI/LRP report

continued from page 2

Chicago's demonstration against the occupation of Iraq on March 19, but these meetings attracted only the usual suspects going through the usual motions. Despite the facilitators' efforts to stifle any discussion, we managed to protest the coalition's inevitable decision to adopt the patriotic political line exemplified by the slogan, "Bring the troops home."

In PR 72 we reported on the successful strike by the Chicago City College Teachers Union (CCCTU). As noted, other college teachers belonging to AFSCME 3506 (and therefore not represented by the CCCTU) had bravely participated in the strike. In the aftermath, the City Colleges retaliated by firing and then openly blacklisting over 130 non-CCCTU teachers. Shamefully, neither the CCCTU nor AFSCME has organized work stoppages or other actions to beat back this vendetta. Supporters of the LRP continue to participate in small actions organized by the fired teachers themselves.

This winter the Chicago LRP participated in conferences on Colombia and Palestine as well as public meetings hosted by left organizations. The Chicago LRP continues its regular literature sales at Northeastern Illinois University.

GERMANY

The Communist Organization for the Fourth International (COFI) has ended its political relations with Anton Holberg, formerly a member of our fraternal German affiliate, KOVI-BRD.

In December 2004 we informed him that positions he had taken in discussions with the COFI Center were incompatible with membership in COFI. He resigned from the organization because he stated that he was pessimistic about revolutionary leadership in the coming period in Germany. We immediately accepted his resignation, but because of the far more fundamental differences that had arisen during the discussions, notably:

1. His agreement with racist statements made this past summer by the American TV celebrity Bill Cosby, who notoriously asserted that Black working-class Americans bear responsibility for the conditions of oppression they now live under.

2. His claim that the Roma ("gypsy") people who have immigrated to Germany from Eastern Europe are parasites on the German working class and were likewise responsible for the racist treatment they now face.

During his membership in COFI, Holberg made lasting contributions to COFI's understanding of the international class struggle. We particularly value his past polemical attacks on anti-communist political demoralization in the German far-left milieu, including its expression in the form of "anti-national" and "anti-German" ideology. His exposure of the anti-working-class nature of this pro-imperialist and pro-Zionist political trend remains useful to the development of a revolutionary working-class leadership in Germany. His own capitulation into chauvinism is a symptom of the demoralization he once fought. We therefore regard it as a negation of his best political work.

As a result of this political break, e-mail for KOVI-BRD should be addressed to kovi_brd@yahoo.de.●

“Progressive” Union Leaders Betray Hotel Strike

by Dave Franklin

At a time when a big labor victory is sorely needed by the working class, the reformist labor leaders have refused to seize a particularly good opportunity – the expiration of union contracts affecting hotel workers, members of UNITE HERE, in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C.

The capitalist offensive against the working class, over a quarter of a century old in the U.S., continues to accelerate. Wages and benefits are falling, and real unemployment remains rampant. The proposed slash in Social Security is the latest and most brazen attack on the social wage in this country. Union membership has fallen to only 7.9 percent of workers in the private sector (the lowest proportion since 1901), while the Bush Administration and state governments are mounting a frontal assault on public employee unionization.

In some respects, workers in the hotel sector of the economy seem to have fared better. UNITE HERE has made significant organizing gains in recent years, including the recruitment of 30,000 members in Las Vegas in the '90's. In San Francisco, the union has been able to increase its sizeable membership 15 percent since 1996.

But having a union contract has hardly been a guarantee of good times. Hotel workers have been subjected to speed-up and remain a low-wage sector of the work force. In a city like San Francisco with a high cost of living, the \$9 to \$15 an hour that workers earn leave them in a constant struggle to sustain themselves and their families.

And so the hotel struggle that commenced this past fall was a real test of the union's capacity to defend its membership. While it is still ongoing, it is clear that misleadership has already led to major setbacks and disunity. A victory will certainly require far more than what labor bureaucrats have been willing to offer.

BACKGROUND TO THE STRUGGLE

The hotel bosses wanted to impose severe cuts on their workforce. A focus for this offensive was the expiring contracts this past year in San Francisco, Los Angeles and Washington, D.C. The bosses were looking in particular to make slashes in health-care benefits, including charging workers a \$275 co-payment for medical benefits. This idea naturally went against the needs of the workforce, hard-pressed and drawn largely from the ranks of oppressed people, particularly Asian and Latino immigrants.

Workers were certainly hostile to management, and the bosses also bumped up against the particular bargaining strategy of the UNITE HERE leadership. The union was demanding two-year contracts in the three cities, so that their next contracts would



Rally in San Francisco's Union Square on October 12. Ranks' anger and potential power was squandered by bureaucrats' passive and divisive strategy.

expire at the same time as contracts in other areas like New York and Chicago. They had argued to the ranks that this demand was strategic, and workers in the three cities were led to expect a joint strike in 2004 to win that common expiration date. The talking point was to use this gain as a building block for an even more powerful national strike two years from now.

An important aspect of the offensive on unions has been to roll back various contractual means by which unions exerted bargaining leverage and extracted concessions in the past. While the UNITE HERE leadership did not pose it right now, the common expiration date would have also opened up the possibility of going for a master contract in the hotel industry, along the lines that powerful unions like the Teamsters had accomplished in the past. In any case, a strike in several cities at once would threaten the profits of the industry far more heavily than isolated strikes alone.

The demand for a common expiration date was vehemently opposed by large chains like Hyatt, Hilton and Marriott – the hotels that would be the most affected by facing the union over a swath of major centers. Organized through the San Francisco Multi-Employer Group (SFMEG) and similar bodies in the other cities, the hotel bosses refused to give an inch on the matter.

So by the end of the summer it appeared that a dramatic struggle was shaping up. Bargaining in San Francisco and Washington, where contracts expired in September, was going nowhere, and the contract in Los Angeles had already expired. The ranks were ready for a scrap. They had voted for strike authorization by overwhelming numbers in all three cities.

PARTIAL STRIKE IN SAN FRANCISCO

A strike did occur at the beginning of October – but only in San Francisco, and only with 4000 hotel workers from four hotels. Thus the workers' expectations of a solid strike in three cities were dashed from the beginning. On top of this, the union ordered the ranks in San Francisco back to work after two weeks. The fact is that this union leadership, considered one of the more "progressive" unions in the country, didn't even do the basics of calling out all its members who were ready to strike.

Revolutionaries have a totally different idea of what a strike should look like. Mobilizing the full power of the ranks would have meant calling out the workers in all three cities and building picket lines that scabs couldn't cross; it would have also meant a fight in the labor movement to turn the hotel workers' fight into a cause of the whole working class. In this way decent contracts could not only have been achieved for one sector, but a huge push would have been made in getting the whole of labor off its knees and fighting again.

Given the nature of the union heads, such a full scale mobilization – with solid picketlines and citywide campaigns – certainly would have required at minimum that fighters within the union build an effective opposition, raising these demands and raising the spirit of fellow workers to see what is really possible. In our view such a fight would have shown the total inadequacy of all stripes of reformist, pro-capitalist leadership – and therefore the necessity for revolutionary leadership.

Left to their own devices, even the "progressive" union leaders of UNITE HERE never dare to go beyond controlled strikes and orchestrated demonstrations. But why they didn't do the kind of broader strike that they claimed to favor, even in their own limited style, is still a mystery. Clearly the California supermarket strike had already demonstrated the limits of a selective strike. (See our article in *PR 70*.) Before the strike, one union organizer had stated: "we don't want the same thing to happen to us that grocery workers faced in L.A." But in important ways that *was* exactly what happened! An emboldened management ran a hard line, and the result was a strung-out, atomized struggle with

varied results and prospects.

In San Francisco, where a partial strike at least had occurred, the SFMEG responded by imposing a lockout of workers at all of its 14 hotels and promptly brought in scabs. In pressing their attack, the bosses showed a unity of class purpose that trumped their competitive urges. The union ranks showed spirit at the picket lines around the hotels and in demonstrations. But workers surely had been given the message that their strike was to be a limited one, with minimal strike benefits and with minimal support from the so-called labor movement. (The union had also called for a boycott of the hotels, itself normally a feeble method of struggle.)

BUREAUCRATS RELY ON DEMOCRATS

Nonetheless, the strike/lockout did make a dent in business, with cancelled reservations and complaints of poor service, and it created a political noise in the city. Democratic Mayor Gavin Newsom felt obliged to wade into the struggle. He pleaded with hotel management to end the lockout; when rebuffed, he kept city business out of the hotels and took the more unusual step of removing police from patrolling the picket lines. But Newsom did not do so out of "pro-worker" or "pro-strike" sentiments. He came to office as a well-known toady of the city's moneyed interests and never ceased steering businesses from *outside* the city to the hotels through the Convention Bureau. He was interested only in tamping down the fight, getting the city back to normal and scoring some cheap political points with a working class that was rightly suspicious of him. The union officials assisted, virtually proclaiming him a hero of the struggle. Union bureaucrats are always eager to tout capitalist politicians, particularly Democrats, as deserving the ranks' support – as an alternative to mass struggle. Newsom gave them just enough crumbs to make the praise appear plausible.

While Newsom's actions were an irritant, business conditions were more troublesome; the effect of a strike on occupancy during the upcoming holiday season, traditionally a busy time for hotels, was a particular concern. So management wanted to ease off temporarily. The union leaders cooperated, failing to use an obvious opening to hit the hotels where it would hurt. A two-month "cooling off" period was declared in late November. During that period, UNITE HERE leaders signaled their willingness to throw out the demand for a two-year contract in return for a few sops with a three- or four-year pact. This capitulation only convinced management to press harder, so they offered a new proposal that also meant attacks on wages and healthcare.

The union leaders were left with nothing to sell to the ranks. So the cooling off period came and went without an agreement and with management upping its threats. Local 2 President Mike Casey announced that the union was not planning to resume the strike. As we go to press, a boycott of the big-chain hotels has been revived and only a low-level resistance is being implemented.



Local 2 Rally on August 3: Union members had voted overwhelming support for authorizing militant strike action.

Wal-Mart versus Unions

In *Proletarian Revolution* 71 and 73 we discussed the growing hostility among Wal-Mart workers to the company's exploitation. Recent events have born this analysis out.

In February, Wal-Mart announced that it would close its store in Jonquière, Quebec, where workers had successfully unionized and were fighting for the first contract with the company in North America. The company claimed it was taking the action because of the store's low profit margins. But only the most naive believe that there was any major reason other than thwarting the unionization effort, regardless of the effect it had on the workers and families or the small sacrifice to the company itself.

In the same month, the company successfully turned back an attempt to unionize the tire-and-lube department of a company store in Loveland, Colorado. A majority of workers in the shop in November had supported the vote for a

union. Wal-Mart responded by bringing the resources of the largest company in the world against the nine workers who had supported the union effort. The company fired one union supporter (two moved away), inserted six workers screened for their company loyalty into the shop, and subjected workers to daily harangues and anti-union videos from specially trained personnel flown in from the company's Arkansas headquarters. After this intimidation campaign, only one of the original union supporters, Joshua Noble – at considerable personal risk given his dependence on the company health plan – voted for unionization. But other employees who had switched votes made clear they did so out of raw intimidation and fear, not hostility to the idea of a union.

Wal-Mart claims company workers don't want unions, but these incidents indicate just how scared company bosses are of workers organizing. The store closing in Quebec is a rather obvious example,

while the fact that an election took place in the isolated conditions of a small Colorado town demonstrates the underlying resentments of the workers.

But this indicates just the opposite of an easy fight to organize Wal-Mart. The bosses are once again demonstrating their violent commitment to keeping workers from having their own mass organizations. The union bureaucrats' favored notions of passive, isolated store-by-store campaigns will meet utter failure. Only a mass, radical struggle, including mobilizing the unions as a whole, could force the company to cede any meaningful union rights.

The broad and radical social movement necessary for winning even limited gains shows that, under today's capitalist system, any serious defense of the working class must lead workers to think about a society run by the working class, not the capitalists – a revolutionary socialist society.

TALK, NO ACTION, IN LOS ANGELES

In the meantime, Los Angeles workers had to plod on with an expired contract and a management intent on grabbing serious concessions. In January, management declared an impasse in bargaining and began to impose unilateral cuts in wages and benefits. The move was so provocative that even the NLRB declared it illegal. But management still has no intent to throw the union any bones, and has been making noises about a lockout. The union leaders have been forced into a position, like in San Francisco, of trying to cook up some resistance to the bosses' unrelenting stance. They started a boycott, engineered rallies, and are talking about preparing for a lockout or even (heaven forbid!) a strike. It should be noted that the two California locals, rather than coordinating strike activity, have adopted opposite approaches: San Francisco struck and now talks of not striking; L.A. refused to go out in October but now offers weak strike talk.

Otherwise, UNITE HERE's main "achievement" with the L.A. hotels has been to negotiate a two-year pact with independent and smaller hotel chains. But a common expiration date in this case doesn't have quite the impact as with the bigger chains and can't be expected to be a trendsetter. Worse, in order to get it the union agreed to microscopic wage increases and to what amounts to healthcare cuts (by subsidizing rising health care costs from a trust fund reserve).

In Washington, events played out somewhat differently. With bargaining going nowhere through the end of last year, the union leaders began making threats of a strike during the second coronation of George W. Bush. But instead of taking action at that opportune moment, the union capitulated on the two-year contract demand. A deal with moderate wage increases and maintenance of the healthcare package was hammered out and overwhelmingly approved by a rank and file that must have been discouraged and wary because of the disjointed nature of the struggle.

NEW "PARTNERSHIP" DISSOLVES

At the moment, this is where things stand in the hotel workers' struggle. But a bit more has been going on "at the top," which bears on the situation. When we discussed the labor scene in *PR* 73 (see *Labor Confronts Wal-Mart*) we noted that UNITE HERE had joined in the "New Unity Partnership" (NUP), a bureaucratic bloc that was raising some sharp criticisms of the organizing efforts of the AFL-CIO. In addition to UNITE HERE led by John Wilhelm and Bruce Raynor, the NUP included President Andrew Stern of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), as well as the Laborers International Union of North America (LIUNA) and the Carpenters Union. The NUP proposed that a greater premium be put on organizing, and that financial and organizational structures be re-aligned within the AFL-CIO. They favored the consolidation of unions along established industrial lines and larger merged unions.

We noted that while being more aggressive in union organizing than the bulk of the union bureaucracy, the NUP approach differed little in fundamentals. As we stated:

The essential point is that the NUP leaders are unwilling to pursue a level of militancy and mobilization of the ranks that is even significantly distinguished from the daily sellouts of the labor bureaucracy at large. No wonder they have conveniently based their platform on the question of organizing narrowly posed, as if defending current members against the bosses' attacks and organizing new workers are not organically connected. Yet without a change in strategy, plans to restructure and devote more funds to union organizing will by themselves bear little fruit in achieving even their own limited goals.

The NUP is now history, having dissolved in early January. While it is not clear what the exact internal dynamics were, NUP was an odd collection of union heads from the start. Within the spectrum of "respectable" capitalistic politics, the SEIU and



Locked out hotel workers demonstrate in San Francisco.

UNITE HERE leaders are considered progressive, while the LIUNA and Carpenter leaders are of a more conservative bent. The fact that they organize a base of poorly paid workers, drawn largely from the ranks of oppressed minorities, is no doubt part of what has forced UNITE HERE and SEIU to adopt more progressive positions. (And on important issues like immigrant rights, they certainly have registered more favorably than the old craft unions generally do.) But in essence the SEIU and UNITE HERE leaders represent a wing of the bureaucracy that places a premium on organizational technique and cleverness – conceived, initiated and enforced by smart and trained people on the top. And that was what the bloc with LIUNA and the Carpenters was about – not a fundamental change in the conduct of struggle but the accretion of more funds and resources at the top.

In this regard, one factor in the breakup was that SEIU's Stern had made threats to bolt from the AFL-CIO – a move that was apparently considered too disruptive and was not well received by other NUP leaders. A big factor was that the Teamsters Union, a significant force in labor, presented a proposal to the AFL-CIO Executive Council in December similar to what NUP had stood for: it would reward individual unions' organizing efforts with financial rebates and urged voluntary mergers of unions. The proposal was viewed favorably by NUP leaders, including Stern. When the proposal was voted on at a more recent meeting of the AFL-CIO leaders, it was defeated but had picked up added support from the United Auto Workers and the United Food and Commercial Workers.

The end of NUP as such confirms our analysis of the lack of difference over fundamentals between it and other sections of the labor bureaucracy. The conduct of the UNITE HERE leadership in the hotel struggle also shows that a big union merger in itself hardly substitutes for a fighting strategy and a real show of class power. In fact, according to all reports the crisis facing hotel workers and the actual ongoing struggle wasn't even on the NUP agenda!

Altogether, the entire labor bureaucracy, which derives its power from being brokers of labor power, is far more frightened

of a militant mobilization of the rank and file that could get out of hand than of the threats and attacks of the bosses themselves. And that is why there is so much more that keeps them together than divides them at this point.

HOTEL STRIKE AND THE FUTURE

We would expect that the protracted and unsuccessful lockout period, on top of the lack of a forthright strike preparation by union leaders, had a chilling effect on the ranks' spirit. On the other hand, the bosses themselves are allowing the bureaucrats so little maneuvering room that the necessity for some sort of a fight could still be building.

In any case, many workers would agree that the time for a real strategy of struggle is overdue. In this situation, accepting give-backs, particularly in health care, must be rejected. Hefty wage increases and maintenance of existing health benefits are fighting demands, and the demand for a two-year contract should be revived. Preparation for, at minimum, a joint strike of L.A. and San Francisco workers, is on the order of the day. Workers who see the need for a drastic change in the conduct of the strike, should

fight for such policies as well as the active support of the entire spectrum of organized labor. This means not only financial aid but mass, militant picket lines to keep scabs out.

The possibilities for a militant and successful struggle in the hotel industry exist. Despite the massive problems with the way the strike/lockout was being led in the fall, the hotel bosses did reveal vulnerabilities. A victory would be a real shot in the arm for unionized workers and the working class in general. Given the painfully long lull in the labor "movement," it is inevitable that workers will reach the boiling point. One cannot predict whether a real fightback can take place in the California labor scene right now or whether an eruption will first occur elsewhere. Such matters are beyond the control of small groups.

However, what we as revolutionaries must do is to help build a new leadership that *can* play a larger role in the future in advancing such struggles when they do occur. The working class desperately needs a leadership that believes in the power of our own class and is not afraid to mobilize workers for our class's own interests. An authentic revolutionary party will do just that; it will be dedicated to overthrowing capitalism and creating a new epoch of prosperity and justice. ●

Further Reading...

- "Lessons of California Supermarket Strike" (*Proletarian Revolution* No. 70)
- "Wal-Mart: Vanguard of Capitalism" (*Proletarian Revolution* No. 71)
- "Labor Confronts Wal-Mart" (*Proletarian Revolution* No. 73)

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Cosby

continued from page 24

We have to turn the mirror around. Because for me it is almost analgesic to talk about what the white man is doing against us, and it keeps a person frozen in their seat. It keeps you frozen in your hole that you are sitting in to point up and say, 'That's the reason why I am here.' We need to stop this.

Translation: Racism isn't why poor Blacks are stuck at the bottom; it's now their own fault. Conclusion: a struggle against racism is irrelevant.

COSBY'S ATTACK ON BLACK WORKERS

Cosby attributes anti-social conduct like unwillingness to work, criminality, drug and alcohol addiction and hostility to education to the poor in general. Much of this conduct is prevalent among the lumpen proletarians – the dregs of society, the hoodlums, rapists, drug pushers, pimps and other parasites – of all races. But it is a sick lie to paint the majority of less well-paid Black working-class people with the same brush.

Given racism and its forced inequality, Black people still constitute a disproportionate share of the people who are unemployed, many of whom have had their benefits slashed by Clinton's "reform" measures and other cutbacks accelerated by Bush. No unprejudiced person can deny that this is the result of the history and ongoing reality of racism. The broad anti-working-class cutbacks in income and social benefits, combined with the anti-Black backlash, have taken their toll.

Despite the pressures of joblessness, the overwhelming majority of able-bodied people on welfare or unemployment insurance wanted to work rather than to stay on the dole. The notion that the unemployed Black people are responsible for their own plight excuses these cutbacks while obstructing a desperately needed serious fight against layoffs and for jobs. There are more white people getting such assistance than Black people, yet the white racists and Cosby's of this world characteristically single out the Black recipients and lump all poor Blacks together.

There is a connection, but it is not what Cosby assumes. Capitalism requires unemployment so it can use competition

among workers to lower wages and conditions. In the U.S. and around the world, it uses racism to intensify this competition. Historically, after slavery American Black people served as an enforced reservoir of "free" but ill-paid labor, used to undercut all wage levels and to undermine strikes by all workers. U.S. capitalism grew rich by dividing and conquering the working class through racial oppression. Even though banned by law, the segregated racial caste system is still operative.

Today, past gains won by working-class struggles are being taken away. Wages are being forced down, and many workers are forced to compete even more for the minimum-wage, hardest and dirtiest jobs. In the U.S., the primary target continues to be the Black workers.

Racially-dictated unemployment, when it becomes long-term and chronic, serves as a spawning ground for lumpen-proletarians. Their predatory conduct mirrors the rapaciousness of the capitalism that bred them. Racism segregates poverty-stricken Black workers, employed and unemployed, and forces them to live side by side with their predators, the lumpen elements. This miserable social situation is created by racist capitalism itself, not by personal choice.

COSBY'S ATTACK ON BLACK YOUTH

The anti-youth aspect of Cosby's attack is virulent. He dwells on their lack of education and blames them and their parents. Never mind the decrepit and underfunded schools. Youth are characteristically rebellious, and given the huge barriers they face in the United States, Black youth are often particularly angry. Many plunge into escapist dreams of achieving celebrity, instead of the effort necessary to achieve the (highly improbable) long-term rewards that genteel society pretends are realistic. The rich – like Cosby – deliberately ignore the life and aspirations of youth in the ghettos. Very few Black people will be allowed to rise to the top and live the "American Dream."

On top of that, the schools are disciplining agencies, meting out more penalties and threats in an already threatening world. Much of what they teach is obedience and propaganda for the system. Many white kids play the game because they see reasonable job rewards for regurgitating the lessons. Not so for huge numbers of Black youth (and increasing numbers of whites as

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well), who are doomed to unemployment, marginal work or life in the army as cannon fodder. No wonder that more Black (and Latino) youth tend to be rebellious, suspicious and alienated from the start.

THE ATTITUDE OF REVOLUTIONISTS

Proletarian revolutionists do not patronize working-class youth. When we see anti-social or criminal conduct by people who are racially or nationally oppressed, we readily acknowledge the fact and point out its dangers, just as we do with the rest of the working class. But we blame anti-social criminals for their rotten acts. We don't smear the innocent by lumping them together with the guilty. We also point to the true cause – racist capitalism. Only a racist or a fool fails to note the deeper social causes. Cosby is no fool.

Cosby and his ilk are our enemies. They are part of the problem, not the solution. Today, the massive attack on the working class is picking up steam. Both Republicans and Democrats, representing the ruling class, are intent on wiping out all the gains made by workers during the explosive labor struggles of the 1930's and the Black revolt of the 1960's-70's. Cosby's crusade meshes with the rollback by denying this reality and calling for individualist solutions, not a mass fightback. The once powerful militancy in defense of their rights demonstrated by Black workers has already been stifled for years, with the help of Black middle-class politicians and trade union misleaders.

In the course of finding its way to revolutionary consciousness, the working class goes through many forms of rebellion, some productive and some self-defeating. As Marxists we know that consciousness of the truth does not come through supernatural revelations, intellectual saviors or elitist lectures and attacks. The trial and error of experience, together with the leadership of those workers who already understand revolutionary reality, is key. In fighting against the sometimes mistaken paths taken by workers, revolutionists always identify with the spirit of revolt. That spirit needs to be revived if the entwined struggle against racism and capitalism is to be resurgent. In contrast, Cosby is embarrassed by and seeks to crush the healthy aspects of the day-to-day struggle for survival in the ghetto – the rebellious spirit.

One of the most vicious weapons used historically, and still today, in the racist attack on Black people is "mind rape." The per-

vasive myth of Black inferiority has not only been used to inflame white racists but has often been imposed on Black consciousness itself. In class society, many subjugated people often, for a time, accept the self-denigrating images forced upon them by their oppressors. The revolts against segregation and oppression in the 1960's and 70's not only attacked racist institutions and laws – they were the means through which many Black people cast off this self-defeating mythology. Thus "Black Pride" became a symbol of the anti-racist struggle.

It is no accident that since the mass Black struggle has been diminished over the years, self-contempt has risen among the youth. And Cosby criminally tells them that they are right!

Moreover, social explosions and mass movements, from the Paris Commune to the Montgomery Bus Boycott, show that the best way for the oppressed and exploited to get rid of petty thievery and other anti-social conduct is through mass revolts against the social order. From this angle, Cosby's complaint denounces the only real solution to the problems he says he is concerned about.

WHY IS COSBY NOW SO POPULAR?

Current data shows that criminal conduct among Black youth has seriously receded in recent years. So why is Cosby's attack now so openly popular in Black middle- and upper-class circles?

As a result of the Black revolt of the 1960's and 70's, a sizable Black middle class has arisen. Because of their class position, many of them have come to share the disdain for the Black masses held by their white equivalents. But despite these common class attitudes, the Black upper strata have not been allowed to achieve Martin Luther King, Jr.'s dream of real equality. And even for them, "integration" is severely limited and tenuous. Over the years, many embarrassed middle-class Black people have tried to distance themselves from the Black poor, in order to achieve acceptance by their white counterparts.

The bitter phrase heard so often about the Black middle class is that "they have forgotten where they came from." It isn't entirely true, but not because many haven't tried. The unyielding fact is that capitalist America remains thoroughly racist even though it now tries to hide it. The upper strata of Black people are still identified by whites as linked by color to the mass of poor Black people, and for all their displays of wealth and education, they have not been allowed to escape that fact. They are linked not with the real working people of the ghetto, with all their pluses

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and minuses, but with the all-pervasive racist stereotypes.

The Black upper strata have tried a variety of approaches to fulfil their social ambitions. They enthused over Jesse Jackson's political campaigns, which were designed to gain acceptance of Black people as "just another ethnic group" within the mainstream: "African-Americans" – just like Irish Americans, Italian Americans, etc. Their most saluted "role models" are people like Colin Powell, Condoleeza Rice and Barack Obama, who happen to be completely untinged by any contact with struggles against Black oppression. Many even momentarily embraced Farrakhan and his "Million Man March," which called for Black "atonement" (no less!) for their alleged past misdeeds as a people. Since many feel that their role models have been totally incapable of changing the outlook of the youth, they temporarily bought into the false idea that Farrakhan could get them to clean up their act.

With the appearance of Black faces in important positions, the middle class has had some hope for further success. Their open acceptance of Cosby's attack shows an added degree of class confidence. But many also see the threat on the horizon. As the economic situation declines and joblessness expands, the prospects worsen and the potential for a greater growth of even more rebellious conduct by young Black workers looms on the horizon. As well, the gains made by much of the Black middle class are tied to government support, especially in areas like heavy industry and the public sector where contraction is most likely. Cutbacks and rollbacks loom like swords poised above their heads. An economic plunge could reduce their living standards to working-class levels, uncomfortably close to the image of the Black masses.

COSBY GETS HIS HISTORY BACKWARDS

Cosby's key claim, that Black workers are betraying the gains made by the civil rights movement, is a monstrous untruth. He assumes that those gains were won by the middle-class religious and political leaders. In fact, the civil rights leadership hit an impasse in the late 1960's. Martin Luther King, the NAACP and the other leaders were fruitlessly begging the liberal Democrats to cede more gains. They warned that if they didn't, the growing ghetto revolts would explode in size and power. None of them had the power to restrain the Black workers who led the uprisings.

This revolt scared Washington into making massive conces-



Martin Luther King, Jr., addressing New York City officials in 1964. It was the Black masses' struggles, not deals with Democrats, that won civil rights gains.

Further Reading...

- *Marxism, Interracialism and the Black Struggle*, by Sy Landy. Black liberation through class struggle. (\$3.00)
- *The Democratic Party: Graveyard of Black Struggles* (articles from *Proletarian Revolution*) (\$2.00)
- "Lessons from Cincinnati: Rebellion against Police Terror" (*Proletarian Revolution* No. 63) (\$1.00)

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sions in jobs and income to Black America. The government and private bourgeois foundations moved rapidly to create a leadership which would have clout among the Black masses but would be dependent on the ruling-class institutions for its stake in society. Blacks were given positions in government and the corporations to back up the illusion that real upward mobility for the masses was possible. The expanded middle class owes its very existence to the struggle of the Black workers and unemployed who rose up in ghetto rebellions, and to the Black-led industrial strikes in the same years.

Cosby says to the Black masses, "We won it for you." In reality, they won it for him.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE

As the decay of capitalism deepens, the situation for Black America can only worsen. The history of liberation struggles reveals two facts. The huge gains were won by the working class through mass action. The primary beneficiaries have been the upper and middle strata, who misled the struggles. It is time that the Black working class took charge of its own destiny and provided the leadership for the struggles that will inevitably explode once again.

The ghetto revolts and the strikes of the 60's and 70's showed the enormous power of Black workers. Even with all the industrial erosion in the U.S., Black workers are still central to the workforce in the decisive industries and in major cities. The early 1970's also showed – for the first time – that white workers would follow the lead of militant Black workers in significant strikes, even in the South. In the coming days when the class struggle erupts again, Black workers will take the lead again.

And they won't be alone. Black workers have natural allies, not enemies, in the growing Latino and immigrant sectors of the working class. It is now inescapable that the only way that Black and Latino workers can keep their jobs, given racial and ethnic discrimination, is by championing a program of guaranteed jobs for all people who want to work.

Further struggles demanding the end of the attack on Black workers and youth will prove that racism is inherent in capitalism; the only way that democratic rights, equality and economic security can be achieved is through socialist revolution. Cosby's tirade, and its support among the Black elite, shows once again that the fight against racism will have to be led by the Black working class and youth. An end to racism is only possible through the conquest of power by the united, interracial working class, and the building of socialism, led by its own re-created revolutionary party. Given their history of struggle, there is no doubt that young Black and Latino workers will be represented in the revolutionary vanguard far in excess of their proportion in society. ●

Cosby's Campaign Against Black Workers

Bill Cosby, the wealthy liberal Black comedian, has become the point man for a vicious attack on what he calls the Black "lower economic people." It began at a NAACP gala in Washington D.C. on May 17, 2004, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Brown vs. Board of Education decision against segregation in public schools. Cosby's speech contemptuously denounced working-class Black parents and youth as responsible for social ills like unemployment that blight the Black community.

His tirade hit its low point when he gave a cover for racist police murders:

These are people going around stealing Coca-Cola. People getting shot in the back of the head over a piece of pound cake and then we run out and we are outraged, "The cops shouldn't have shot him." What the hell was he doing with the pound cake in his hand?

Unlike the justified mass outrage that he mocks, Cosby is outraged at the thought of protests over cops killing kids who supposedly commit petty thievery. Thus he makes light of hundreds of brutal slayings – like that of Amadou Diallo, who was shot 41 times in New York in 1999 for having *his own* wallet in his hand.

This scandalous harangue was only the beginning. In the same speech he spewed out a litany of racist and anti-working-class claims. He has since carried his campaign across the nation, and support for his campaign isn't coming only from the far right.

Cosby received accolades in the white and Black bourgeois media for his "courage," for "telling it like it is." The Democratic Party warmly welcomed his support. He has been feted by Black colleges and churches. He is supported not only by Black businessmen and reactionary nationalists like Louis Farrakhan, but also by liberal integrationists like Jesse Jackson and Kweisi Mfume, and artists like Spike Lee. Even the "militant" Al Sharpton registered as ambivalent. Outrage has been disgustingly little, even on the left.

COSBY'S DIATRIBE

Here are more gems from Cosby's Washington speech:

The lower economic and lower middle economic people are not holding their end in this deal. ... And these people are not parenting. They're buying things for the kid – \$500 sneakers – for what? They won't buy or spend \$250 on "Hooked on Phonics." ... Brown v. Board of Education – these people who marched and were hit in the face with rocks and punched in the face to get an education and we got these knuckleheads walking around who don't want to learn English.

That is, poor Black people are wasting the opportunities that the civil rights struggle gave them, says Cosby. Parents in the "lower economic" order spoil and fail to control their "knucklehead" children who do not bother to learn standard English.

It didn't stop there. On July 1 in Chicago, at Jesse Jackson's Operation Push conference, he enlarged on his attacks on poor Black workers. He deliberately stereotyped all impoverished



Cosby attacks the Black "lower economic people."

Blacks as violent, uneducated and unmotivated:

You've got to stop beating up your women because you can't find a job, because you didn't want to get an education and now you're [earning] minimum wage.

He said he didn't care about airing "dirty laundry" in front of white people. About Black youth, he sneered,

Let me tell you something, your dirty laundry gets out of school at 2:30 every day, it's cursing and calling each other n—. ... "They think they're hip. They can't read; they can't write. They're laughing and giggling, and they're going nowhere.

Cosby added that Blacks shouldn't blame whites for their problems today:

continued on page 21