No to Capitalist Reunification!

East Germany: Build Workers Councils, Now!

DECEMBER 19—A political revolution is unfolding in the German Democratic Republic (DDR). The leadership of the ruling Stalinist party is in retreat. Plans are afoot to “dissolve” the Stasi, the hated secret police. Within the army, soldiers councils are beginning to form. Meanwhile, the West German financiers and industrialists are on a hard course toward capitalist reunification of Germany, with the Socialist Party (SPD) acting as their “left” lieutenants, and outright fascists increasingly active in the DDR as the shock troops of capitalist reaction.

An East German workers state stands under the democratic, internationalist rule of workers councils—soviets—could be the springboard for a united red Germany and a Socialist United States of Europe. Reunification of Germany on a capitalist basis under Helmut Kohl’s Fourth Reich means bloody counterrevolution, a resurgence of fascism and the danger of a third world war. The stakes are enormous—the choice posed is literally “socialism or barbarism.” But while the massive wave of protests has strongly reflected the weight of the working class in the heavily industrialized DDR and has evidenced a widespread sentiment to defend egalitarian pro-socialist values, the working people are not organized to express their class will in the political convulsions shaking society. We call on the workers of East Germany to form Workers Councils, now!

The Crisis of Gorbachev’s Russia

While Gorbachev is praised to the skies by the rulers of the capitalist West for his capitulations in the Cold War, the Soviet leader has become ever more unpopular in his own land. Gone are the bold, brash calls for “socialist renewal.” Gorbachev himself admits that Soviet working people blame perestroika (restructuring) for empty shops and soaring prices, while Soviet premier Nikolai Ryzhkov has to reassure the American press there is no danger of a military coup in Moscow.

Everyone knows that the Soviet Union cannot go on as it is. Working-class resentment over the effects of perestroika exploded last summer in miners strikes from Siberia to the Ukraine. Independent workers organizations are being formed. At the same time, Great Russian chauvinism and anti-Semitism are on the rise in Leningrad, Moscow and other Russian cities. In the Baltic republics, nationalist forces are ever more aggressive in demanding independence to join the capitalist “free world.” Communistist bloodletting between Azerbaijanis and Armenians has taken hundreds of lives, and the restless Georgians have launched pogroms against the northern Caucasus mountain people. And Ukrainian nationalists are stirring behind the revived Eastern Rite (Uniate) Catholic church.

After more than 60 years of Stalinist bureaucratic rule under the banner of “socialism in one country,” the Soviet Union has become a seething cauldron of popular and national discontent. Today, it is clearer than ever before that Trotsky was right. Either the Soviet working class sweeps away the parasitic bureaucracy through proletarian political revolution, opening the road to socialism on a world scale, or the gains of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution will be destroyed by bloody counterrevolution and the USSR dismembered by Western and Japanese imperialism.

Perestroika-Fuels Reactionary Nationalisms

Soviet workers have been wary, if not hostile, to Gorbachev’s market-oriented “reforms” from the outset. The mass base, so to speak, of the current Kremlin regime is the intelligentsia, the swollen numbers of urbanized, university-degreed, soft-job-possessing children of the workers and state bureaucrats, who were themselves largely ex-workers and peasants. Indeed, a key part of the program of perestroika is increasing the material privileges of the intelligentsia at the expense of workers and collective farmers.

Given the history of Russia, there is a somewhat larger percentage of Jews in the intelligentsia than in the population as a whole. For fearful workers, insecure managers, trapped collective farmers, embittered veterans of the Afghan war and many others of those who fear for the future of Russia, the Jews once again appear as a scapegoat. In Leningrad and elsewhere, posters have appeared denouncing the “yid-mason mafia” who “control the radio, television, newspapers and magazines.” The powerful Writers Union has become a cesspool of anti-Semitism with one of its leading officials, Anatoly Bulyov, declaring, “The Jews appear to be the only nationality that is interested in our ruin” (London Independent, 6 December). A century ago the German workers leader August Bebel called anti-Semitism “the socialism of fools.” And that is certainly its role in Gorbachev’s Russia today.

Mass demonstration outside parliament building in East Berlin, November 4. Workers political revolution is key to defending East Germany against West German bankers’ counterrevolutionary designs.

Only Workers Political Revolution Can Save the Soviet Union!

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For old-line CPers in the West, East Germany could always be relied on as a bastion of Stalinist order and stability; Hall even sports a wrist watch given him by (now deposed) DDR Stalinist boss Erich Honecker. How then to explain the mass exodus of DDR workers last summer? It is a “...current mass upheaval” (“attempted Mussolini coups”)?

But the CP has always meant popular-frontist solutions. Just after the Tienamen Square massacre and an ensuing “two-line struggle inside the CP—one member complained that he felt as though participants were being watched by “brain police.” And the 29 September People’s Daily World carried a letter by Michael Parenti which ripped into Hall: “It would seem there would be less of the “fras-tration” and “confusion” Gus Hall was talking about if the CP opened its pages to candid and critical discussion of the period’s great political crisis in existing socialist countries.”

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workers councils, now. Time is of the essence. Today once again, Germany is the key to Europe and the world. All over East Europe, as millions take to the streets demanding democratic reforms, governments resign and are replaced by unstable new coalitions as leaders scramble to keep pace with the spread of discontent and the demands for change. The whole Stalinist "system" is wracked with conflict and collapse, including in the USSR itself (see article, page one).

Stalinist rule is profoundly conflicted, unstable and brittle. The Stalinist system was constructed in the interests not of a Stalinist market, and on the other side the indigenous fascist elements, and not Trotskyism to win a revolutionary workers party, modeled on Lenin's and Trotsky's party which led the Bolshevik Revolution and ushered in the epoch of international communism, must be constructed in the DDR early on. Already, sinister capitalist forces, from the NATO imperialists externally to inner-Stalinist elements, are moving to take advantage of the DDR seeking the road to authentic proletariat leadership.

Fascist activity has been on the rise, as indigenous elements are augmented by neo-Nazis from the West. A Jewish cemetery in Weissenau in East Berlin was just defaced for the fourth time this year. Reactionary banners calling for capitalist reunification with the West and even for a reunification of the two "Germans" of Hitler's Third Reich have begun appearing with ominous regularity at points within the DDR and elsewhere. At the same time, thousands of other protesters are adamant in opposing a sellout of the DDR to the Deutsche Bank and Daimler Benz.

Trotskyst Press:
A Collective Organizer

The International Communist League, through its German section, the Trotzkistische Liga Deutschlands (TLD), is intervening into the present revolutionary situation in the DDR. The TLD has issued a public call for the formation of Spartakist Groups, to lay the basis for a new Leninist-egalitarian party. On December 7, the TLD launched Arbeiterpresse-Korrespondenz (Workers Press Correspondence), presently a daily newsletter, to supplement its bimonthly newspaper Spartakist, which is now appearing weekly. The first Arbeiterpresse-Korrespondenz front page headlined: "No Sellout of the DDR! Workers and Soldiers Councils, Now!" As we go to press, nine issues of Arbeiterpresse-Korrespondenz have appeared. Each issue includes the short programmatic statement "What the Spartakist want" (reprinted in this issue of WV), centering on the slogans of "Down with Stalinism!" and "No to Capitalist Restoration!"

In taking this step, we recognize, as Lenin said in What Is To Be Done?: "A newspaper is not only a collective propaganda and a collective agitator, it is also a collective organizer. In this respect it may be compared to the scaffolding erected round a building under construction; it marks the contours of the structure and facilitates communication between the builders, permitting them to distribute the work and to view the common results achieved by their organised labour." Arbeiterpresse-Korrespondenz strives to be the voice of the thousands of socialist militants in the DDR seeking the road to authentic communism, "to create a living connection between the SPARTAKIST Groups and the political direction and leadership in the unfolding political revolution." Thus far, the situation continues to be very open. But the polarizations shift and intensify week by week. Those who pre­vented the drawing of a massive blood line between the regime and the demon­strators in Leipzig on October 9 (when Honecker ordered troops to open fire) bought valuable time for the possibility of a working-class solution. Subse­quently, actions by indignant citizens aimed at keeping the Stasi political police from destroying files have gener­ally achieved their point. When, particu­larly in such a situation, mouthpieces of the big imperialist bourgeoisie like the New York Times start running headlines about "VIOLENCE" in East Germany, you might want to watch: "Violent right now smells of fascist provocation," warned the 8 December Arbeiterpresse-Korrespondenz: "Those who want a bloodbath in the DDR are doing the work of the imperialists, ranging from the CIA to the West German Office for the Defense of the Constitution."

Meanwhile, NATO General Secretary Manfred Wanner insists that the Soviet military alliance must be ready to inter­vene in countries experiencing "disor­der," while the American and British press seek to paint the DDR as being on the verge of anarchy. Arbeiterpresse-Korrespondenz (15 December) warns of "NATO Threat Against the DDR," adding: "What disturbs the imperialists is not 'disorder' but the building of a new proletarian order, a proletarian political revolution defending the collective property we want to defend.

As one way to express concretely the revolutionary internationalist spirit of Leninism, the Spartakist Groups are distributing solidarity statements (in German and in the appropriate lan­guages) to Polish, Cuban and Viet­namese immigrant workers (the text of the Vietnamese appears on page six). These working people have been sub­jected to official and social discrimi­nation in a DDR ruled by nationalist
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(continued from page 3) Stalinism. The statement to Polish work­ers declares: “Polish comrades, you have come to work in the DDR, but you have had to endure chauvinist abuse, low wages, miserable housing... You are working people trying to survive and the German working class does not want to see you迫害... When the workers of the world unite with socialist forces they see around them with the Polish working people...”

“A workers’ movement and Soviet soldiers stationed in the DDR as the bulwark against NATO imperialism, with “International Greetings to our Com­rades Soviet Soldiers and Officers”

For a New, Revolutionary, Communist Party!

At a December 16 conference the ruling Stalinist party of the DDR, the SDP, voted to add to its statutes “the platform of Democratic Socialism.” The SDP tops now say: “We need a real socialist party in this country anything to the natural German workers and people...”

A new Stalinist party will not “dissolve” itself just because the demoralized Stalinist bureaucratic has decided to “liquidate” the workers’ movement. It will never be better get organized, for their enemies are busy. If the mass sentiments for national unity of the German working people are not to be simply handed over to the outbreak capitalist restorationists (and to the SPD which presently has the allegiance of many of the Western German workers), it is not enough to defensively cling to the DDR and work for “socialism in half a country.”

The Stalinists dismiss any possibility of social revolution in the West and accept the hegemony of the SPD over the West German workers as an irrevers­ible fact. But, as Arprekor No. 2 (8 Decem­ber) wrote, “Nothing has done more to chain the West German working class to Social Democracy than the crimes of Stalinism, East and West. Today the SPD/SDP is the spearhead for capitalist counterrevolution.” As an immediate task, the TLD calls for mobilization of the organized power of the German working class in Social Democracy and for the workers to “seriously study the facts...”

A Leninist movement will fight against the state of the workers, without any illusions about the revisionist syndicalists, office workers and pensioners rep­resented in an advisory capacity... The development of the conditions is indispensable for proletarian political revolution. The key to victory in the DDR - not a capitalist reunification in a new Fourth Reich, but a red soviet Germany in a reunified capitalist Fourth Reich. The political class of the East German population must be centered on the formation of freely elected councils of workers and soldiers, including their allies-in other sections of the population. These soviets will not be like Gorba­chev’s pseudo-parliamentary Congress of People’s Deputies, many of whose deputies are elected on a territorial basis to rubber-stamp the new mass, but bodies com­posed of delegates who are elected from the factories, the barracks, the cooperatives and trade unions, the soviets, office workers and pensioners rep­resented in an advisory capacity... And at any time to immediate recall. That is the meaning of workers democ­racy; it is the democratic opposite of the Stalinist dictatorship of the proletariat, the “leading role” of the Communist Party in a government constitution.

As the conditions are indispensable for proletarian political revolution in the DDR - not a capitalist reunification in a new Reich, but a red soviet Germany in a Socialist United States of Europe!...
League (Fourth International) appears section of the International Communist have for decades been perverted and betrayed by Stalinism. We fight for the communist program and ideals of the Bolshevik Revolution which have for decades been perverted and betrayed by Stalinism.

From October 1917 on, capitalism has sought to crush the world-historical achievements of the Russian Revolution. The Stalinist bureaucracy grew out of and fed upon proletarian defeats, notably the ideals of the Bolshevik Revolution which Marx of workers soviets, to replace the corrupt workers states. Defend the historic gains of the working class achieved through the overthrow of capitalism—Defend the proletariat internationalists, we support all anti-imperialist struggles for Lenin and Trotsky, leaders of the Bolshevik Revolution and the Communist International.

We stand with those members and recent ex-members of the Stalinist SED, as well as numerous others who want to build a socialist world, who vow that the heirs of Hitler must not expropriate that which, by the workers' toil, has arisen out of the ruins.

The key is forging a Leninist-egalitarian party, regrouping all revolutionary internationalist forces in a German section of a reborn Fourth International. Let us begin build Spartakist Groups, to assimilate the lessons of past revolution struggles, to intervene with revolutionary propaganda, to forge a new KPD—a mass communist vanguard party that will lead the German workers in their struggles on the road to power. To learn from Lenin and Trotsky is to learn to win! —

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The consistent break with Stalinism therefore consists in a re-formation of the Soviet Union against imperialism and internal corruption.

Lenin and Trotsky, leaders of the Bolshevik Revolution and the Communist International.

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The consistent break with Stalinism therefore consists in a re-formation of the Soviet Union against imperialism and internal corruption.

Lenin and Trotsky, leaders of the Bolshevik Revolution and the Communist International.

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Internationalist Greetings to Our Vietnamese Comrades

The following statement of internationalist greetings is being distributed to Vietnamese workers in the DDR and was also printed in Aufkampf No. 6 (14 December).

- The 1917 Bolshevik Revolution welcomed revolutionary fighters of all lands as equals in the new Soviet republic. So too the German workers political revolution holds out to you, our class brothers, the hand of internationalist solidarity.

- Revolutionary workers of the DDR respect deeply the last contributions you and your countrymen have made in your victorious struggle against the vengeful imperialism’s drive to starve the country, suffering low wages, abuse, miserable housing. A new Germany ruled by the genuine workers soviets democracy.

- Secretariat of the International Secretariat of the International Communist League was directed to the special congress of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) held December 16-17 and was published in Aufkampf No. 9 (19 December).

- The 1917 Bolshevik Revolution was a world event. It was a historical fact which irreversibly changed the course of world history and the destiny of the working class of the most advanced capitalist countries. The Russian workers and peasants, joined by the toiling people of the Soviet republics, triumphantly chased the tsarist rulers from the throne by means of a profound and all-encompassing social revolution which definitively swept away the counterrevolution in Europe and the rest of the world.

- Trotskyists, Marxists, and the entire internationalist fraction of the SPD must carry forward this workers revolution in Germany—indeed we can point the way forward to a future of socialist abundance for all mankind.

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Down With Decomposing Stalinist National Autarky!

For an Effective Planned Economy Through Workers Democracy

The following statement on the East German economy by the International Secretariat of the International Communist League was directed to the special congress of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) held December 16-17 and was published in Aufkampf No. 9 (19 December).

17 December 1989

Comrades,

The economic situation of the DDR is above all harsh and deteriorating. There are no stable short-run solutions dependent on additional economic activity of the DDR participating in the politically highly manipulated “capitalist” world market. The only way to stop the slide to the East and interfering with the perestroika campaign of the Soviet Union, some stability can be obtained through stabilization, nominal rates of product and material, based on world market prices and of good quality and ample supply, so that the economic strengths that the DDR and the Soviet Union do possess can be added together. Forces in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia are seeking reduction to the status of Israel. The working people of the three aforementioned lands could be inspired through класс and the DDR against the political and economic pressures from the increasing impoverishment of the Israeli masses now that Israel is no longer a “front line state” in the war against Communism.

The “right to strike” of this summer’s Siderov: passes without shooting, mine explosions, Sidorov: pass calls for workers and soldiers councils—a vigorous offensive for a comparabletransformation of the collective farms. But there are no solutions short-run, political Party of workers who power in his State and Revolution. We believe that much of the membership of the SED, who only wanted socialism, must combine together with many of their previous victimized critics into a new party dedicated to the maintenance of an international planned economy and state monopoly of foreign trade, maintaining the subsidization of housing, health, education, basic foodstuffs and the like; resisting absurdities into the oligarchy of the West; tearing out Stalinism root and branch; and as proof of this, vigorously defend and defend their interests to the workers. In the DDR. After 40 years of Ulbricht and Honecker’s SED, that means a new party, e.g., a KPD as it was founded as a fusion of the revolutionary left.

All these aims must be combined with a vigorous offensive for a comparable proletarian political revolution in the Soviet Union so that a far larger combined economy in transition from capitalism to socialism may defend itself against the fascist workers councils, and must be highly reversible through further debate and immediate recall of workers delegates who have lost the confidence of their representatives.

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Gorbachev’s Russia... (continued from page 1)

When the nationalist Russian fascist Pam­ yat (Memory) first raised its head two and a half years ago, we called on Soviet workers to smash the dangerous organization in the egg. Since then Pamyat has grown and other Russian chauvinist out­ fits have also been spawned. Most recently, when liberal poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko was quoted saying the Russian state owed a Pamyat demogogue Jew-baited the author of “Babi Yar”: “You’d better be off to the synagogue” (Opozytsia, 2 December). This October the Popular Front of the Russian Federation was formed, with two flags flying. The so-called Unified Front of Russian Workers is being actively built by old-line Stalinist politicians and party apparatchiks, especially trade-union functionaries. Its program combines populist economic demands—suppressing petty capitalist enterprise and free pricing—with Slavophobe bigotry and attacks on Western-oriented intellectuals.

Class-conscious workers and international intellectuals must smash the Pamyat fascists in the streets and root out manifestations of Russian chauvinism and anti-Semitism. Only by driving the nationalists and anti-Semites away from the Russian frontier will the dominant Russian nationality will patri­ otic Soviet workers gain the moral and political authority to counter the other reactionary nationalisms which now threaten to rip apart the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

The violent outbursts among the Turkic-speaking peoples of Soviet Central Asia are directly tied to economic discontent and deprivation. Kazakh and Uzbek youth have been driven into the cities looking for jobs by the monopolistic exploitation of the collective farms. But there are few jobs to be had, as new industrial investment has been stagnant in the USSR for over a decade. Adding to Uzbek grievances was the big drop in the state is willing to pay for cotton. Gorbachev’s perestroika, geared to make economies in government, necessarily favors the advanced regions of European Russia over the more backward Turkic- speaking republics. Equality among the diverse peoples of the Soviet Union is possible only in a planned, socialized economy under the democratic control of the workers and collective farmers.

Competition for economic resources also underlies the fratricidal bloodletting in the Caucasus between the Armenians and Azerbajians, originally triggered by the Armenian party’s campaign against the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave. According to Valery Sidorov: “At present not a day nor night passes without shooting, mine explosions, acts of arson, cars set on fire, hostages being taken and roads and railways cut of by blockades” (Daily Challenge (New York), 29 February).

How can Gorbachev possibly get out of this situation? An internationalist
recognized the danger of capitalist restoration clearer than in the Baltic republics. Nationalists in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia believe they will prosper under the aegis of Western capitalism. Meanwhile, these self-styled "democrats" enacted legislation restricting the citizenship rights of Russian-speaking residents and in some cases even insisted that shoppers show their internal passports (indicating nationality) before they are allowed to purchase scarce goods. Gorbatchev has recently attempted to appease the pro-capitalist nationalists by granting these republics almost total economic autonomy. But the Baltic nationalists are not satisfied by greater advantages within the Soviet Union. They want to join the Common Market of Nato Europe. "We want support, especially in Western Europe, for our independence next year," declared a spokesman for the Latvian People's Front in the Soviet Congress of People's Deputies (New York Times, 10 December).

It is common for the Western media to lump together the three Baltic republics. However, Lithuania is in critical respects different from its two northern neighbors. Lithuania has long historic ties to Poland and its population is traditionally Roman Catholic. Latvia and Estonia were conquered from the Swedes by Peter the Great in the early 18th century and, excepting the 1920s, have been part of the Russian polity ever since. The northern Baltic peoples are ethnically Finno-Ugric.

Since Gorbatchev seems intent on giving away the store to the imperialists, it is reasonable to ask whether Yeltsin will let Lithuania go while holding on to Latvia and Estonia. Eighty percent of the Lithuanian republic consists of ethnic Lithuanians. The several hundred thousand Russians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Jews, ethnic Siberians, etc., now living there would be forced to emigrate somewhere in the USSR. But in Latvia and Estonia, roughly half the population consists of other Soviet peoples. And that half is heavily proletarian. These Russian-speaking workers have organized themselves in the "Internationalist Movement" to combat Baltic nationalism and defend their democratic rights. Thus the stage is set for a full-scale civil war, which would very much accord with the bloodlust of the imperialists, and with their dreams of reconquering all the deformed workers states for capitalist plunder.

On the scale of the USSR, the three Baltic republics are Lilliputian. At the time of Stalin's annexation of the Baltic states in 1940, Trotsky argued that while the region had some strategic military value, the Red Army occupation would do more harm than good in the long run. However, an eruption of anti-Communist nationalism in the Ukraine—with its enormous military, industrial and agricultural resources—would threaten the very existence of the Soviet Union. The eastern Ukraine, with its large Russian-speaking proletariat, is well integrated into the USSR. Significantly, the recently formed independent miners organization in the Donbass rejected an invitation to join the Ukrainian Popular Front precisely because of the front's nationalist program. However, the western Ukraine was annexed by Poland after the Russian Civil War. This region became a hotbed for reactionary Ukrainians, many of whom initially welcomed Hitler's Wehrmacht as liberators.

Today, the Ukrainian Popular Front, unlike its Baltic counterparts, remains aancement limited to the intelligentsia. A more potent vehicle for resistant Ukrainian nationalism is the Eastern Rite Catholic church, which Gorbatchev legalized early this month. (Stalin banned it in 1946.) As Marxists, inheritors of the tradition of Enlightenment humanism, we stand for freedom to practice religion as well as freedom to conduct anti-religious propaganda. However, the Ukrainian Uniate church, like the Roman Catholic church in Poland, can serve as an organizing center for anti-Communist nationalism linked to Western imperialism. Indeed, Pope John Paul Wooley of Cracow has proclaimed himself the new godfather of Ukrainian Uniates.

For Lenin's Internationalism!

In a 7 December speech, Cuban leader Fidel Castro said maybe some of the East European states will have to re-examine their policies. The Cubans work- ing people have relatively fresh memories of the brutality they suffered before the revolution, and the U.S. imperialist colossus only 90 miles away is a continuing and palpable reminder of the danger of bloody counterrevolution. But this seemingly militant statement by Castro in fact expresses a defeatism reminiscent of the German Communists. "After Hitler, us," in the early 1930s. The workers of East Europe must be mobilized to oppose any attempt at capitalist restoration before it triumphs; in this, we Trotskyists will fight alongside them. The corruption of the Stalinist bureaucracy righteously affronts the egalitarian values of the working people in the deformed/degenerated workers states.
PART TWO OF TWO

AIDS victims are black. Blacks have twice the infant mortality, twice the unemployment rate, one-tenth the average household wealth. Every statistic underlines the same basic point: life for black people in this country is miserable, and getting more so.

Poverty among American blacks is so massive and so evident that even right-wing spokesmen and ideologues do not deny it. Rather they try to blame the victim for the crime. Blacks are poor, so the argument goes, because they’re habituated to the “culture of poverty.” Black children don’t make it in this supposedly bountiful capitalist society, these people claim, because they are not encouraged to study at school or compete for economic success, because they lack positive role models, and so on.

All these arguments have one common theme: the capitalist system is held blameless. For example, Reagantite State Department “theoretician” Francis Fukuyama, whose highly publicized article, “The End of History?” (National Interest, Summer 1989), proclaimed the triumph of “the American way of life” everywhere and forever, maintains that “black poverty in the United States is not the inherent product of economic liberalism, but is rather the ‘legacy of slavery and racism’ which persisted long after the formal abolition of slavery.” And black liberal superstar Jesse Jackson echoes the same theme, preaching moral uplift—“down with dope, up with hope”—to the nighmarch conditions of ghetto life.

In reality, the ghetto poor are the victims of capitalist decay. But black people in the United States are not powerless before their oppressors and exploiters. As a strategic component of the American working class, blacks can liberate themselves by destroying this brutal, exploitative and racist system. It will take a third American revolution to complete the task of black emancipation begun by the Civil War, a socialist revolution to sweep away the Wall Street bloodsuckers and liberate the productive resources of America to create a genuinely egalitarian and bountiful society.

Black Poverty: Family Structure or Capitalist Decay?

There is a widespread notion that government money for the poor increased greatly from Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society programs in the mid-1960s until the cutbacks under Reagan. This fiction is perpetuated because it serves the political interests of both liberal Democrats and right-wing Republicans. Liberals can blame the appalling misery of black people on Reaganomics. Rightists can argue that ghettos youth would rather live off the “welfare state” than go out and get a job. In reality, real welfare benefits per family, including food stamps, have been falling ever since 1972. By 1985 real benefits under Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) had been cut by one-third from the level of the early 1970s. But the welfare rolls have continued to soar. Half of all black families with children are now headed by single women, and two-thirds of these live below the poverty line. Since the notorious 1965 Moynihan report black poverty has been blamed on the matriarchal black family: the “feminization of poverty” has now become a sociological cliché. But the rising number of single mothers on welfare is the effect not the cause of black impoverishment.

In 1950 only 18 percent of black families were headed by single women, and a large number of these were elderly widows. During the ’50s the overwhelming majority of black children were raised in two-parent families. Moreover, in this period many black women, like their white counterparts, were full-time housewives supported on the husband’s income. As Marxists, we certainly do not hold up the traditional patriarchal family as our model for the future. Rather, we are pointing out that the enormous growth of desperate poor black families headed by single women is a recent product of American capitalist decay.

The massive deindustrialization, union-busting and wage-slashing over the past 15 years has made it impossible for millions of young black men to raise a family. Almost 40 percent of black men in their early 20s are unemployed. In New York City it is harder for a black high school graduate to get a job than it is for a white high school dropout. The black sociologist William Julius Wilson calculated what he calls “the shrinking male marriageable pool” for young black women (The Truly Disadvantaged [1987]). (Wilson recognizes that intermarriage in this poisonsly racist culture is so rare as to be of little economic import.) In 1960 there were almost 70 employed black men in their early 20s for every 100 black women in the same age group; by 1982 there were less than 50. And these figures do not take into account the sharp decline in real wages available to young black men who are employed. Thirty years ago, it was normal for a black teenager getting out of high school in Detroit or Chicago’s South Side to go into an auto
Capitalist state wages war on the homeless: cops invade New York’s Tompkins Square Park last July.

contradictions of the Civil Rights Movement

Opinion polls show most whites believe that since the civil rights movement blacks are no longer subject to oppression and discrimination. After all, Martin Luther King’s birthday is a national holiday. Most of the largest U.S. cities now have black mayors. Yet by every standard, economic conditions for the mass of black people are worse than before the civil rights movement. Why?

Before World War II the majority of blacks lived in the rural South as a deeply exploited agricultural proletariat. In the early ’40s millions were drawn into the Northern cities to work in the shipyards, munitions factories and other booming war industries. Until the early ’60s the U.S. economy was expanding enough to employ most blacks who migrated to the cities. During this period the black industrial proletariat formed the core of Northern black communities and also in many cases of the local trade unions, especially in the Midwest. However, by the mid-1960s American capitalism had ceased growing fast enough to absorb the children of these black workers into industry; year after year, the seniority lists in the auto plants remained unchanged.

Then the momentous struggle for black equality, which is now called the civil rights movement, erupted at a time when the undergirding economic position of blacks in American society was weakening, particularly in the North.

It is standard fare for Democratic and Republican politicians to claim that the civil rights movement was needed to glorify the militancy of the ’60s. In the first part of this article we quoted former Panther leader Donald Cox, who summed up the grim statistics that make America today a nightmare for most black people. But, too, contrasts the degrada­tion and misery of the ’80s with the high-water mark of black struggle in the ’60s.

“In the 50’s & 60’s, with the push for civil rights, evolving into national liberation struggle, it was felt that there was something to be gained. And during that epoch of heroic resistance to injustice, blacks scored more impressive, unprecedented gains than at any time since the emancipation proclamations of the 1600s.”—Black America Database (1989)

But these “unprecedented gains” were primarily legal and tokenistic, improving the social condition of a relative handful of black petty bourgeoisie while the gheto masses continued to live in desperation.

The civil rights movement originated as a mass struggle against institutionalized Jim Crow segregation in the South. The main goals of the freedom marches, freedom rides, sit-ins and boycotts were equal access to public facilities, school integration and voting rights. That is, the movement of King and the early SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) aimed to achieve the same bourgeois-democratic rights in the South as existed in the North.

However, the civil rights movement by its very nature—a movement of liberal democratic reform—could not confront the underlying oppression and exploitation of blacks as a “last, fired” color-caste at the bottom of American capitalist society. The social conditions comprising the black masses in ghettos—with their mean streets, lousy schools, rat-infested housing and rampant police terror—could not be solved by a new civil rights act. Thus all attempts to extend the civil rights movement to the North failed. At the same time, the Southern movement splintered and disintegrated when the struggle against Jim Crow laws appeared to have been won. The contrast between the hopes raised by the civil rights movement and the continuing, indeed worsening, poverty and oppression led to a series of spontaneous rebellions in the Northern ghettos in the mid-1960s.

In 1967 the Spartacist League, which had been deeply involved in the struggle for black equality, wrote: “The militancy of the Negro people and the tempo of their struggle is enormous in the 1950s and early 60s, but the achievements have been minimal—limited entirely to token advancement of democratic rights. In fact, the fundamental conditions of life for the vast majority of black people, particularly in the key areas of employment, wages, housing and education, have worsened. The Civil Rights movement, geared to the aspirations of the small Negro middle class, though professing to speak for all Negroes, has been stopped dead in its tracks in dealing with these fundamental needs, and in fact has functioned partly as a brake on the unorganized and leaderless pressures from below.”—Young Black and Red, Spartacist No. 10 (May-June 1967)

Young blacks militantes that the rebellious ghetto masses were in war on poverty” money were murdered, jailed and terrorized through the FBI’s COINTELPRO.

But for the black petty bourgeoisie, the civil rights movement did open up new opportunities. During the ’60s the proportion of blacks in white-collar occupations—mainly in the government bureaucracy—doubled from 13 to 26 percent. Today, a majority of black professionals are government employees. Black yuppies were able to escape from the ghettos to these more secure and previously all-white suburbs. Thus the post civil-rights era has seen a widening social and economic polarization within the black population. In the mid-’60s the top 20 percent of black families—“the talented tenth,” to paraphrase W.E.B. Du Bois—earned 8.5 times that of the bottom 20 percent. By 1980, the “talented tenth” were earning 11 times more than their poor inner-city brothers and sisters.

The rise of black yuppies has gone hand in hand with the rise of black Democratic big-city mayors. In 1967 Richard Hatcher of Gary, Indiana became the first black man to head a major city government in this country since Reconstruction.

In the spring of 1988 the National Conference of Black Mayors hosted 300 members including the chief city officials of Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, Atlanta, Detroit and Los Angeles. These BSOs serve as the vanguard for their white capitalist slave masters. It is the black Democratic mayors who have administered the welfare policies that were designed by the Reagan White House: suppressing resistance with a combination of political demagogy and savage police terror. Remember the 1985 firebombing of the MOVE commune in Philadelphia that killed 11 people—seven of them children—including the chairman Marion Barry, who became the first Democratic mayor of that city.

Those, like many Black Panthers, who could not simply buy off their despair. And during that epoch of heroic resistance to injustice, blacks scored more impressive, unprecedented gains than at any time since the emancipation proclamations of the 1600s.—Black America Database (1989)

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NY Transit Militants Say:

“No to Drug Testing!”

The "war on drugs" is hitting the labor movement with a vengeance. Beginning December 21, drug testing will be imposed on four million transportation workers. And the first one to test will be the transit workers who will test for even trace amounts of alcohol—and expect to test 20 to 40 percent of the workforce in "flunk." In New York City the Transit Authority (TA) is instituting "random" testing of 40,000 transit workers. And in a parading shot at New York labor, racist pig and defeated mayor Ed Koch announced that he will test 140,000 city workers, from bridge painters to park rangers.

NYC working people will soon be hit with another fare hike (above the dollar they already have to shell out) to ride in the decrepit, dangerous subways. Track "accidents" have already killed another five transit workers this year. And the "war on drugs" is the TA's way to hang workers for the decaying infrastructure and deadly working conditions. Other unions, from the Teamsters to AFSCME to postal unions, all get a legal challenge to drug testing, but the Transit Workers Union (TWU) Local 100 bureaucracy, led by President Sonny Hall, is running point for the TA in implementing the "war on drugs".

Class-struggle militants in Local 100, members of the Committee for a Fighting TWU, are mobilizing against the attempt to scapegoat transit workers and discipline the unions. We print below excerpts from a 17 November leaflet by the Committee.

James Byrne was the fifth brother to die on the system this year. Byrne and his partner were working on the J Line and were never told trains were running both ways on the outbound track. He was killed as he desperately tried to scramble out of the way. This was no "accident"—trains on the tracks is TA policy. When our union brothers Mel-sinker and Davis were killed on the tracks at Astor Place last spring, the first thing the TA did was force the shamed train operator to pass in the dixie cup. He tested clean, so the TA hanged the dead man instead. When five track workers were critically burned in two explosions caused by the TA's policy of leaving the juice on while track work is under way—you can bet their bodily liquids were tested for evidence of "substance abuse."

"The TA always finds a "means" for the "accidents" that kill and maim workers and passengers on this 80-year-old rattler railroad run by union-busting and thieves. Now Sonny Hall, who acts more and more like a 'beake [TA company cop] every day, has agreed to shake out the last drops of piss of every TWU brother and sister as he submits us to "random" drug screening.

The rotten secret deal to test half of us each year was signed September 12 and ratified by the Local 100 executive board in October. The deal says one positive test and you're off the job with no pay. And it contains a provision that gags the union from even opposing drug testing. Hall calls this a "victory." It's a victory for the bosses, the hypocritical labor-hating drug-runners in the White House and the "friend-of-labor" Democrats, who are out front pushing this witch hunt! By leaps and bounds the Bush Administration on drug testing, Sonny and his cronies are leading the attack against us. Without us to run the subs and buses, the city doesn't move. We shouldn't have to pass on demand for anybody! What this union needs is a fighting class-struggle leadership, not pro-strike finks who run to Albany to beg and do the TA's dirty work! A leadership that will fight for a workers party, independent of the Democratic and Republican parties of capital.

Drug testing is a union-busting weapon in the arsenal of the hypocritical "war on drugs" pushed by the Democrats and directed by "Poppy" Bush. At home it helps them regiment the population. Abroad they want us to use the drug issue to make the U.S. "cops of the world." Reagan's favorite drug-runner and North walked, but the man who really ran the Iran-Contra drugs-for-arms scheme has moved upstairs to the Oval Office. Directors/Hell on Wheels [reformist drift] of the "war on drugs" is a massive weapon they come up with to use against the bosses' sinister drug crime and street violence that ravage inner city neighborhoods: decriminalizes drugs and remove the super-profit incentive to the pushers, drug-runners and cops. Instead, the racist rulers unleash their "TNT" rate squads on the ghettos and barrio and terrorize and kill. One "drug-bust" on Edgecombe Avenue ended with the "suspect" the cops were chasing thrown from the roof to his death. Meanwhile every capitalist politician, from Bush to David Dinkins, calls for more cops.

Mass urine screens can have a staggering 10 percent or more false positive rate, and a positive reading can be trig­gered by everything from poppy seed buns to marijuana to perspiration. We print below excerpts from urine screens that confirm which drug or food caused the initial positive are very expensive and often not done.

It's none of the government's or the TA's business what transit workers or anybody else does in private. They should butt out!

We could strike a real blow in defense of labor and the right to pri­vacy by stopping the bosses' sim­mer plans to drug-test every­body. What labor needs is a inter­national conference with transit workers link with other transport workers to "drug-test labor in a real class-struggle fight." The government plan needed for that kind of fight isn't going to come from company cop Sonny Hall. And it's not going to come from New­Directions/Hell on Wheels [reformist drift] of the "war on drugs." It's nothing to fight drug testing because, like Hall, they're in the hip pocket of the Democratic bureaucracy.

Let's start by tearing up Hall's drug-testing agreement with the TA!"
movements of the '60s to liberate black people which politically conditioned the present climate of despair in which black liberation has reached epidemic proportions.

Black Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!

Radical journalist Ellen Willis has compared the current "war on drugs" to the McCarthyite anti-Communist hysteria of the early 1950s, used as a justifica­tion for stepped-up police repression at home and military adventures abroad. Here it is important to recall that it was the eruption of black struggle in the '30s that shattered the stifling political climate of the Cold War red scare. America's posture as leader of the "free world" was brutally exposed as peaceful demonstrators were set upon by police dogs, tear gas and clubs for de­manding the right to vote and use public facilities. A new generation of young radicals—black and white—was forged in the freedom rides, lunch counter sit-ins and voter registration drives.

Yet the radical interventionist period did not link the fight for black equality and freedom to the working-class struggle against capitalist exploitation. Yet the young civil rights militants were reacting against the Meaney/Reuther-led AFL-CIO unions which were, if anything, more committed to the racist status quo than were many liberal Democratic and even Republican politicians. George Meany—a product of the lily-white building trades—was a rabid red hatter whose visceral social values were indistinguishable from FBI boss J. Edgar Hoover. The liberal face of the union bureaucracy, marginal groups outside the mainstream of American society— Appalachian dirt farmers, black ghetto lumpen, Chicano agricultural laborers. The celebrated book on poverty of the early '60s was The Other America by JFK social-democrat Michael Harrington. The very title reflected a vast gulf separating the poor from the mass of American workers.

During the late '60s white New Leftists and black nationalists—many of them veterans of the civil rights movement—tended to set the black ghetto poor against the organized labor movement (e.g., in the 1968 New York City teachers strike). At the same time, the Meaney/Reuther labor bureaucracy made common cause with Richard Nixon, George Wallace and J. Edgar Hoover in their campaign to extirpate black radicals. The net result was the crushing of all militant struggle for black rights and the weakening and political isolation of the trade-union movement. Thus were set the political preconditions for the past decade of union-busting, giveback contracts, two-tier wage systems, mass homelessness and savage cutbacks in every social program for the poor. If the past thirty years has proven anything, it is that the fate of the American working class and the ghetto poor are integrally linked economically and politically.

While many industrial unions have been gutted during the past two decades, black workers remain important in such basic services as hospital care, urban transit and longshore. These black proletarians can serve as a bridge between the ghetto poor and the organized labor movement. Conditions are now ripe—indeed overdue—for a massive social struggle that is more than three times greater than the total figure for 1988. And strikes are increasingly popular among the population at large. Pittsburgh coal miners in Virginia regularly draw caravans of union supporters from as far away as Detroit. In New York City this summer, unionists demonstrated in the thousands in support of striking phone and hospital workers.

The potential for broad class struggle was demonstrated particularly at the outset of the Eastern Airlines strike. Eastern boss Frank Lorenzo is a notorious corporate raider who a few years back smashed all unions at Continental Airlines. As he slashed and hacked at the Eastern unions, the Machinists—predominantly white skilled workers—walked out last February. The strike was effective due to solid support from the pilots, the most elite section of the labor aristocracy, many of them former mili­tary officers. Strike rallies showed an enormous reservoir of popular support extending far beyond airline workers or even unionized labor. Like the pediatrician Henry Ford in the 1930s, Frank Lorenzo has come to personify everything brutal and inhuman about American capitalism in the '80s, from the murder of strikers on the picket line to the cutbacks in school lunchs for poor black children.

While the Eastern strike itself was both solid and popular, the airline work­ers could not win within these narrow confines. For the driving force behind Lorenzo's airline empire was the lifeblood of his campaign. But the aspirations of these workers can never be realized so long as the major political forces in this racist capitalist system.

The pro-capitalist labor bureaucracies and "wing of labor" Democratic politicians stand as the main obstacles to uniting the working class and poor in the struggle against Wall Street bloodeaters like Lorenzo and Donald Trump.

What is needed is a multiracial revolu­tionary movement of millions, one that includes all the exploited and oppressed against the capitalist bosses and their state. In a sense, the Spartacist-Militant League has pointed the way to uniting organized labor and the ghetto poor in common struggle. Against the general climate of reaction during the Reagan years, labor/black mobilizations of as many as 100,000 people came out on fight Klan/Nazi/skinhead incursions into major cities like Detroit, Washington, Chicago, Philadelphia and Atlanta. As we wrote after a labor/black mobilization forced the Klan and skinheads to cancel a scheduled rally at Philadelphia's Inde­pendence Mall in November 1988: "The SL, although a relatively small communist organization, provided the leadership and our revolutionary program explicated the demands of millions who came out to stop the Klan. In each case, these demonstrations were built against the Democratic Party mayors and the so-called leftists who talked after them. In each case, it was black and red together, getting a taste of the social power that the fight for black revol­ution will unleash...." The integrated union marshals who stood shoulder to shoulder in defense against the KKK, represent the spirit of the workers party which must be built in the wake of the Reagan years to lead the fight for a workers revolution.

For workers party—Forward to a workers America!