

## California Power Meltdown

AP

### Capitalists Wreck Energy Supply, Loot Everyone

On two days in mid-January, Silicon Valley millionaires and janitors alike were left in the dark as rolling blackouts struck big swathes of Northern California. The cause was not an earthquake, storm or mechanical failure of the state's aging infrastructure. Rather, the ongoing electric power crisis in California, which has the sixth-largest economy *in the world*, has been brought about by the anarchic organization of society's productive resources in the interest of capitalist profits.

Electric bills have been jacked up 9 to 15 percent so far and are sure to rise far higher; in some cities, like Riverside, monthly bills have tripled or quadrupled. At the same time, natural gas prices have skyrocketed, driving many working-class families who use it for heat and cooking to desperation. The hike in gas prices has also driven the wholesale price of electricity higher still, as the fuel is used by about half the state's power plants. And it's not just California. In the Midwest, families that rely on propane for heating fuel face living in freezing homes because "filling the tank for a month can cost more than the rent or the mortgage payment" (*New York Times*, 4 February).

While oil, gas and electricity interests are raking it in, other capitalists, especially in the California epicenter of the high-tech boom, are starting to lose serious money. Last month's power cuts cost the state's economy \$1.7 billion in one week alone. Intel CEO Craig Barrett declared there was "not a chance" his company would now expand in Silicon Valley anytime soon. As "stage three alerts," triggered when electricity demand is dangerously close to the available supply, extend into their fifth straight week, this debacle is certain to deepen the economic downturn already beginning in the country as a whole.

Currently the two largest state utilities, Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) and Southern California Edison, teeter on the edge of bankruptcy. They blame a deregulation scheme that requires them to buy at any price on the wholesale market while selling at a retail price set when deregulation went into effect in 1996. At the time, the utilities bet that they would make a killing from the then much lower



Stewart/SF Chronicle

**Outages and outrage: Cops attack protesters outside PG&E utility headquarters in San Francisco, January 10.**



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wholesale rates. This is exactly what they did for two years, siphoning off some \$10 billion to parent corporations that made record profits, paying lavish stock dividends and investing elsewhere. Then wholesale prices soared. Last June, the state experienced the largest planned blackout since World War II. Now the utilities are screaming for the retail rate cap to be abolished.

Declaring deregulation a "colossal and dangerous failure," California's Democratic governor, Gray Davis, wants the federal government to set a wholesale electricity price cap. Meanwhile, he's moving to bail out the utilities—at a cost of at least \$10 billion—by guaranteeing their debts and having the state government broker long-term contracts at lower wholesale prices (but still substantially above current retail rates).

Even fellow "new Democrat" Clinton resisted Davis' pleas for a wholesale rate cap. The Bush White House is not only ideologically opposed to the idea, but some of George W.'s best friends and biggest financial backers are the heads of Texas-based power companies like Enron and Reliant which are currently tripling or quadrupling their profits from the California fiasco. And this is not to mention the Bush family's longstanding personal ties to the Oil Patch. Everyone in the chambers and corridors of power knows electricity bills will soar. And this is bad news for everyone from the middle class to workers and the poor—as well as for

the sectors of the American capitalist class whose ability to compete on the world market will be hamstrung.

Liberal consumer advocates are pushing straight-out re-regulation, arguing that the mission of the utilities should be the "public interest," selling electricity at a "fair price" for a "fair profit." The reformist left, appealing to the Democrats, is pushing for state and local governments to take over power plants and/or the transmission lines. The Green Party hypocritically denounces the blackouts as a ruse by utilities to force up retail prices, but many environmentalists

would welcome big price increases as a way to reduce demand. To the petty-bourgeois eco-movement, the blackouts are a good thing in principle, since they see the problem as not too little power but too much consumption. Green leader Medea Benjamin belittled Davis' pleas for everyone to "conserve" energy only for not being serious enough (*Daily Californian*, 8 February).

The government exists to defend not the "public interest" but the interests of the capitalist class as a whole—first and foremost protecting their riches from the exploited and oppressed with the armed might of its police and military. The truth is that this crisis is rooted in the basic workings of the capitalist system, "regulated" or not. The deregulation of the power and gas industries in California, launched in 1996 and 1998 respectively, was meant to be a showcase for "the magic of the marketplace." Instead it is providing a stark demonstration of the bankruptcy of this whole capitalist system, based on enriching the wealthy few who own the generating plants, factories, refineries, mines and banks on the backs of those who labor. It is a dead weight around the neck of the population, an obstacle to fulfilling the most basic daily needs of life.

The only way forward lies through a workers revolution that will create a workers government, seize the productive forces from the capitalist owners—from L.A. and San Francisco to Houston and Wall Street—and forge a socialist planned economy. This alone can create a genuinely egalitarian society, based not on scarcity and a regression in technology

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## WOMEN AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION



SEE PAGE FIVE



# Revolutionary Leadership and the Fight Against Klan Terror

Dear Young Spartacus,

I am writing this letter to comment on the January 20, 2001 Partisan Defense Committee Labor/Black Mobilization against the KKK in Gary, Indiana. The event was the first mobilization of its type in which I have been involved. It gave me insight into the power of labor and the need for a party of and for the

## Young Spartacus

interests of the proletariat that will fight for a communist future.

Karl Marx wrote in *The Communist Manifesto*: “All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.” And as five friends from Richmond, Virginia piled into a rented car, heading northwest through fog and rain, mountains and snow, for fourteen hours one way, we were to learn lessons in Marxism that we would never be able to understand through reading alone. We were to see



January 20  
PDC-initiated  
anti-Klan rally  
in Gary,  
Indiana.

Marxism in concrete terms: in the streets of Gary, a company town, shadowed by the state but in the midst of the power of labor. We were “compelled to face with sober senses the real conditions.”

During our trip, we were unaware of the developments taking place in the

days prior to the Mobilization. The KKK and the PDC had been denied permits to demonstrate. The PDC had been stonewalled through legal avenues, namely the courts, in their determination to make their actions legal. But there was also the understanding that the working class should not put its reliance in the bourgeois courts. The KKK, on the other hand, filed a lawsuit with the ACLU, whose legal position was that the Klan’s First Amendment Rights were being violated. But the Klan, as blacks are all too familiar, are racist terrorists. As the PDC’s Mobilization leaflet “All Out to Stop the KKK” succinctly stated: “the Klan ‘speaks’ with the lynch rope. The fascists’ ‘words’ are fired out of the barrel of a gun.”

We had driven from Richmond, a town where museums are dedicated to the Confederate soldiers and battles. Monument Avenue, which runs through the heart of the Fan neighborhood, is lined with enormous statues hailing the racist likes of Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson. These monuments are indicative of who still runs Richmond, and the South, a hundred and thirty-six years after the Confederacy was defeated by the Union Army.

We discussed the events at Greensboro in 1979 and in New York City on October 23, 1999 but perhaps we were not truly aware of what lay ahead as our car rambled through Gary toward Chicago, the wind outside cutting to the bone, and the extent of industrialization in the area we realized through miles of factories along I-65 and I-90.

## The French Revolution and the Proletariat

*The radical sector of the bourgeoisie that carried out the Great French Revolution of 1789-94 proclaimed the ideals of “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.” Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels embraced the egalitarian heritage of the French Revolution. But they explained that the formal equality championed by the bourgeoisie against the aristocracy did not and could not satisfy the demand of the emerging proletariat for*

*social equality, which could only be realized through the overthrow of the capitalist system of exploitation and the creation of a classless communist society.*

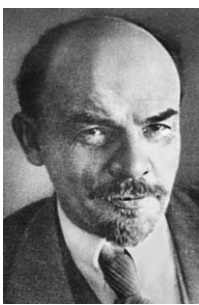
The demand for liberation from feudal fetters and the establishment of equality of rights by the abolition of feudal inequalities was bound soon to assume wider dimensions from the moment when the economic advance of society first placed it on the order of the day....

From the moment when, like a butterfly from the chrysalis, the bourgeoisie arose out of the burghers of the feudal period, when this “estate” of the Middle Ages developed into a class of modern society, it was always and inevitably accompanied by its shadow, the proletariat. And in the same way the bourgeois demand for equality was accompanied by the proletarian demand for equality. From the moment when the bourgeois demand for the abolition of class *privileges* was put forward, alongside of it appeared the proletarian demand for the abolition of the *classes themselves*—at first in religious form, basing itself on primitive Christianity, and later drawing support from the bourgeois equalitarian theories themselves. The proletarians took the bourgeoisie at their word: equality must not be merely apparent, must not apply merely to the sphere of the state, but must also be real, must be extended to the social and economic sphere. And especially since the time when the French bourgeoisie, from the Great Revolution on, brought bourgeois equality to the forefront, the French proletariat has answered it blow for blow with the demand for social and economic equality, and equality has become the battle-cry particularly of the French proletariat.

—Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Dühring* (1878)



TROTSKY



LENIN

## WORKERS VANGUARD

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## Black History Month Forums

The Defeat of Reconstruction and the Great Rail Strike of 1877:

The Shaping of Racist American Capitalism

Saturday, February 24, 3 p.m.

Harvard University, Science Center Hall E

BOSTON

For more information: (617) 666-9453

The Fight for Black Liberation:  
Key to the American Socialist Revolution

Saturday, February 17, 5 p.m.

University of Chicago, Third Floor Theatre, Ida Noyes  
1212 E. 59th Street (at Woodlawn)

CHICAGO

For more information: (312) 454-4930

Forums will include reports from successful labor/black mobilization to stop the KKK in Gary, Indiana on January 20!

# Mexico City: Student Activists Occupy UNAM Campus

## Drop All Charges!

MEXICO CITY—On February 6, the students of Mexico City's National Autonomous University (UNAM) commemorated the one-year anniversary of the brutal police suppression of the ten-month-long strike in defense of the right to free, public education, in which nearly a thousand student activists were imprisoned and the campus facilities were occupied by the Federal Preventive Police. Students' assemblies from several UNAM schools decided to carry out a 24-hour occupation beginning on the night of February 5, and two massive demonstrations the next day. Both demonstrations were held in defiance of recent threats by the PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution) city government to outlaw and attack any protest that might block traffic. During the stoppage, the university workers union (STUNAM) refused to work in the occupied facilities. The following is an eyewitness account from a comrade of the Juventud Espartaquista (JE), youth group of the International Communist League's Mexican section, the Grupo Espartaquista de México (GEM), who was present at the Political Sciences school when the students defeated an intended provocation by 35 strikebreakers.

\* \* \*

There were about 100 activists, half of whom were women, staying overnight to guard the school of Political Sciences. Due to rumors about some hired thugs (*porros*) hiding in the local administration building and keeping in mind a previous attack at the School of Engineering where an activist ended up in the hospital, the activists' meeting decided around



Mexico City, February 6: Student march marked one-year anniversary of government crackdown on 10-month-long strike at UNAM.

1:00 a.m. to go all together and check the facilities. It turned out that there were 35 thugs, including campus functionaries and teachers, whose explicit purpose was to break the occupation. When we entered the room where the *porros* were gathered, several of them began to arm themselves with pipes, looking for a physical confrontation. Given our numerical superiority, we proceeded to surround them and take them out to the square. We took their pipes away. Many students were shocked to see some of their teachers playing the role of vicious strikebreaking thugs. When we finally managed to get them all together and seated at the center of the square, the students began to demand that the *porros* take off their pants and shoes (with the exception of the three women among them), chanting "Mexé! Mexé!" This was a reference to the famous episode just two weeks after the government crackdown on the UNAM strike in Mexico City, when the population of the village around the El Mexé teachers school

prevented a police squad from capturing the striking students, tying up the cops and forcing them to strip in the central square. As some of the student activists were taking the shoes away from their "prisoners," they shouted, "Now you know how our indigenous brothers feel!" One of the thugs grotesquely whined, "These are Maoist methods!" Coming from a right-wing strikebreaker, this was hardly an insult. As he refused until the end to take his pants off, the students took them off forcibly. Some of us thought it would be a beautiful irony to make these thugs vote as to whom they wanted to donate their pants and shoes: to the earthquake victims of El Salvador or India or to the indigenous Zapatista villages under military siege.

There were a lot of different groups and tendencies among the students, reflecting acute political differences, but it took the joint action of all of us to put the strikebreakers under control. Later on, the students took a vote and decided to

give them their clothes back. When the media finally showed up in response to our call, a student read a statement explaining what had occurred and the strikebreakers were released, after being gently escorted a few blocks away from any other occupied campus building. This successful defensive action may have helped persuade the strikebreaking thugs at other schools against carrying out similar attempts as they had threatened. Now many of the student activists are facing charges in the university tribunal amid a witchhunt by the vengeful university authorities and the bourgeois media. It is urgently necessary to mobilize the power of the workers to defend the student activists! **Drop all the charges!**

The JE intervened in this defensive action, counterposing our proletarian revolutionary views to those of other groups within the student movement. We sharply exposed the arrogant program of "student vanguardism" that rejects the centrality of the working class and fosters the illusion that students can, by themselves, solve the contradictions of the whole society by turning the campus into an isolated "territory of justice" within capitalism. This program is advanced by organizations like the left-wing student group "En Lucha," and is doomed to capitulate to the ruling class, seeking to reform capitalism rather than destroy it and replace it with an egalitarian socialist society where those who labor rule. Grotesquely, some of En Lucha's top leaders have denounced the victory of the students over this strikebreaking provocation as a "mistake" (*La Jornada*, 9 February), objectively embracing the witchhunt launched by the university authorities. The JE, a training ground for future communist cadre, fights to win over radicalized youth to struggle at the side of the workers to achieve proletarian class dictatorship through socialist revolution. Join us! ■

## PL and UC Berkeley Coalition

# Six Degrees of the Democratic Party

On January 24, a new movement was launched at UC Berkeley with a forum called by the fledgling Progressive Student Alliance (PSA), which unites unfiliated political students with the racist, capitalist Democratic Party and its associated single-issue auxiliaries in the ACLU, CalPIRG, Queer Resource Center, the Cal Human Rights Campaign and even the Cal Vegetarians. But far from a cynical ploy launched by the Democrats to lure disillusioned students back into the fold, the real blame lies with the fake socialists of Solidarity and the International Socialist Organization (ISO), without whose organizational savvy and flyer foot-soldiering the PSA could well dissolve into a hazy mist of liberal good intentions, and without whose left cover the PSA's nature as a prop to capitalist rule would be immediately apparent to the most naive student.

But special distinction must be given to Progressive Labor (PL) who, though no longer members, provided the red eggshell which protected the PSA while it was still in its embryonic form as Students for Nader (SFN). In our article

"Progressive Labor Crawls for Nader" (WV No. 746, 17 November 2000), we detailed PL's entry into SFN and its craven kowtowing before campus liberals. PL's press attacked Nader as a bourgeois candidate, but when faced with the unpopularity of "fighting for communism" among liberal students, PL found that "We made our first mistake at the very first meeting by openly attacking Nader.... We were written off as 'outsiders'" (*Challenge*, 15 November 2000). Where revolutionaries seek to win young people to the need for the revolutionary overthrow of racist U.S. imperialism, PL illustrated its own opportunism in preferring to "develop friendships," "build close ties," and "find the points of unity."

From there, it was only a short step to fawning messages to the SFN e-mail list, with PL members cooing "I think it's going to take a revolution, and some in Students for Nader disagree. But I think we are overall on the same side.... I'm glad I joined." Even when faced with an SFN member's support of Republican John McCain as an advocate of campaign finance reform, PL members were

careful not to step on those "friendships," replying cordially that "What unifies us is our desire for a drastic change in the way the system operates. Personally, having John McCain in the coalition I feel would jeopardize that heinously." No kidding.

While PL provided the shiniest possible red veneer to the same old liberal crap, the Spartacus Youth Club explained that Nader's campaign aimed to refurbish the image of the capitalist electoral system, and therefore to channel those discontented with this society toward the Democratic Party. The role of capitalist third party movements in the U.S. has been to divert anger among the masses away from social protest and back into the dead end of bourgeois electoral politics. In seeking to prettify a system which has black oppression at its core, Nader had little support from blacks, and even less to offer them. But instead of exposing Nader's intentional indifference to racism, PL sought to provide him with some progressive credentials. In the same 15 November *Challenge* article titled "Nader Student Group Won to Anti-

Racist Stand," PL wrote: "Once we felt more comfortable in the group, we 'upped the ante' at the weekly meeting. We pointed out that the group was predominantly white, and that we should try to change this.... We proposed a prison labor forum highlighting racism which could attract more minority students."

At that prison labor forum a Spartacist supporter intervened to point out that the

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### Spartacus Youth Forum

**Down With NAFTA "Free Trade" Rape of Mexico!**

**For Workers Revolution in Mexico!**

**Mexican Army Out of Chiapas! Beware of Peace Talks Fraud!**

**Wednesday, February 21, 7 p.m.**

UCLA Ackerman 3508

For more information: (213) 380-8239

**LOS ANGELES**



Our comrade Susan Adams died at home on the morning of February 6 after a two-year struggle with cancer. In her 30 years as a communist cadre, Susan served on many of the battle fronts of our international party. There is hardly a section of the International Communist League or an area of our work which did not benefit directly from her political counsel and from her exceptional talents as a teacher and trainer of a new generation of proletarian leaders. She continued to carry out vital work as a member of the leading committees of the Spartacist League/U.S. and the ICL until her death. We salute her memory and share in the pain and loss of her longtime companion and comrade, François, her family and her many comrades and friends around the world.

Like thousands of youth, Susan was propelled into political activism in the mid-1960s by the civil rights movement, the growing opposition to the Vietnam War and the near-revolutionary upheaval in France in May 1968. She vehemently rejected the mysticism and hypocritical moralism of her Catholic background and struggled against the internalized oppression that it caused. While at the University of California in San Diego, she joined Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and was drawn to the pro-working-class wing led by the left-Stalinist Progressive Labor Party. Susan was won to Trotskyism as she began working with the SL-led Revolutionary Marxist Caucus of SDS in 1970 after moving to the State University of New York in Stony Brook. Having moved back to California, she became a member of the Spartacist League in December 1971. Within months, she was elected organizer of our rapidly growing Bay Area local committee, helping to integrate new recruits from a variety of political tendencies.

When we moved to set up a branch in the “Motor City,” Detroit, in early 1973, Susan was chosen to lead it. She proudly described this center of the black industrial working class as the Vyborg of the American proletariat, in reference to the militant proletarian stronghold of Bolshevism in Petrograd on the eve of the Russian Revolution. She was aggressive in ensuring that our Trotskyist propaganda penetrated the combative proletariat in the auto plants, often taking a direct hand in writing, mimeographing and distributing our first leaflets. Susan saw to it that the local carried out a program of intensive Marxist internal education and that the industrial comrades, who were working 50 hours or more on swing shift on the assembly lines, got their share of polemical combat doing campus work.

After little more than a year in Detroit, Susan moved to New York to be the central leader of our national youth organization, the Spartacus Youth League. As always, she took on this task with energy and political determination, frequently touring the locals, initiating or directing local and national SYL campaigns, overseeing the publication of a high-level monthly press, *Young Spartacus*, with an emphasis on Marxist education and polemics.

In 1976, as the Spartacist tendency began to gain small footholds in Europe, Susan took on another crucial area of party work, this time for our International Secretariat. Stationed mainly in Paris, she became the central leader of our work in Europe, and Paris became one of three main political centers of our International. Until 1992, Susan was the principal leader of the Ligue Trotskyiste de France. She was centrally involved in the debates and discussions undertaken in the LTF and the International to hammer out our strategy and tactics in this international center of ostensible Trotskyism, particularly in response to the resurgence of the popular front in the form of the “Union of the Left” in the late 1970s and early ’80s. Determined to implant the Cannonist understanding of party building and Bolshevik norms of functioning which were largely alien to European cadre, she worked closely with often inexperienced leaderships in the European sections, getting them to seize on opportunities for building the party, to carry through regroupments with leftward-moving elements of opponent organizations and to combat the incessant pressures of French parochialism, British Labourism, resurgent German nationalism and so on.

# Susan Adams



Spartacist



## 1948-2001

In July 1994, helping to redirect the work of the ICL in a genuinely new and difficult period signaled by capitalist counterrevolution in the Soviet Union, Susan wrote a letter to the International Secretariat:

“The main task of the I.S. is the production of the appropriate, necessary and urgent literary propaganda, quadrilingually and in part pentalingually, i.e., also in Russian, mainly in the *Spartacists*.... Publishing propaganda presumably gives political direction; it creates the scaffolding inside which the sections construct their work, in the spirit that Lenin developed in *What Is To Be Done?*”

When the incipient proletarian political revolution erupted in East Germany in the fall of 1989, Susan of course threw herself into guiding and pushing forward our Trotskyist intervention, playing a major role in building the united-front mobilization we initiated to protest the fascist desecration of a Soviet war memorial, which drew 250,000 people to East Berlin’s Treptow Park on 3 January 1990.

In 1992, when the LTF leadership itself succumbed to the same pressures Susan had seen so clearly and fought so well elsewhere, there was a sharp political fight at an ICL conference. Susan sought to assimilate the political lessons of the fight and only a few months later accepted the difficult assignment of heading up our small ICL station in Moscow, taking up the work of our comrade Martha Phillips who had been murdered at her post there earlier that year. Working in a situation where there was little room for mistakes, our Moscow group

fought to reimplant Bolshevism in the face of the devastation of capitalist counterrevolution and of the retrograde Stalinist-derived chauvinists of the “red-brown” coalition.

Although foreign languages did not come easily, Susan embarked on learning Russian with the same discipline and resolution that she had applied to studying French. The combination of limited party resources and the overwhelmingly negative objective situation in the former Soviet Union ultimately forced us to abandon an organized presence in Moscow. To her last days, Susan would speak fondly of her “Moscow boys,” as she called the young members from various countries, among them recent recruits from the former DDR, who had volunteered for this arduous and dangerous assignment and who received their shaping as Leninist cadre under Susan’s tutelage.

After nearly 20 years of overseas assignments, Susan returned to the U.S. to work in the central party administration, directing her energies particularly on working with a new layer of youth recruits in New York and nationally. Seeking to capitalize on our very successful anti-Klan mobilization in October 1999, Susan addressed the New York Spartacist branch, of which she was political chairman:

“This demonstration really does put into context the last decade, when there wasn’t very much going on. In the last couple of years, there have been many struggles in the party. We have sought to grind off the rust in the party and prepare ourselves for exactly the kind of situation that I think our party responded to very well this month. And now the question is the follow-up. In short, the whole point here is: this is what we live for, this is what we prepare for, and now we’re in it and we must take advantage of it in the maximum political way.”

During this period she also devoted much of her waning energy to preparing her public presentation on “Women and the French Revolution” and expanding it for publication. Even while homebound in her last few days, she was involved in helping select graphics for the layout. Several of her other projects remain to be completed, including an index for the first bound volume of French-language *Spartacist*.

Susan’s beauty and graciousness struck all who met her. She solicited and listened intently to the opinions of the newest youth member no less than those of the most senior party cadre, arguing with them openly when she disagreed. Her intellectual curiosity was intense and many of us fondly remember sharing a book-shopping expedition, a novel, a Shostakovich symphony, an art exhibit or a play with Susan in whatever city of the world we found ourselves. Her critical-mindedness, integrity and revolutionary determination serve as an inspiration to us all as we go forward to realize the task to which she dedicated her life, the reforging of a Trotskyist Fourth International and the achievement of communism worldwide.

### Memorial Meetings

Memorial meetings are planned in several cities—Berlin: February 24, for information call: (030) 4 43 94 00; Paris: March 3, for information call: 01 42 08 01 49; New York: March 3, for information call: (212) 267-1025.



Spartakist

East Berlin, 14 January 1990: Susan (at left) with Spartakist contingent at demonstration honoring Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg during incipient political revolution.

# WOMEN AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION



Bulloz

**October 1789: Parisian women armed with pikes, the “people’s weapon,” march on the royal palace at Versailles to protest counterrevolutionary outrages and demand bread.**

*Throughout her years as a communist, our comrade Susan Adams had an intense commitment to the study of history and culture, which she put to particular use as a member of the Editorial Board of Women and Revolution while that journal existed. We publish below an edited version of a presentation she gave at a Spartacist League forum to celebrate International Women’s Day in New York City last year.*

International Women’s Day originated in March 1908, with a demonstration here in Manhattan by women needle trades workers. They marched to oppose child labor and in favor of the eight-hour day and women’s suffrage. March 8 became an international day celebrating the struggle for women’s rights. And then on International Women’s Day in 1917, right in the middle of World War I, 90,000 textile workers, many of them women, went on strike in Petrograd (St. Petersburg), the capital of the Russian tsarist empire. They rose up from the very bottom rungs of society, and it was these most oppressed and downtrodden of the proletariat who opened the sluice gates of the revolutionary struggle leading to the October Revolution, where Marx’s ideas first took on flesh and blood.

The Soviet state was the dictatorship of the proletariat. It immediately enacted laws making marriage and divorce simple civil procedures, abolishing the category of illegitimacy and all discrimination against homosexuals. It took steps toward replacing women’s household drudgery by setting up cafeterias, laundries and childcare centers to allow women to enter productive employment. Under the conditions of extreme poverty and backwardness, those measures could be carried out only on a very limited scale. But they undermined the institution of the family and represented the first steps toward the liberation of women. The collectivized planned economy laid the basis for enormous economic and social progress. Fully integrated into the economy as wage earners, women achieved a degree of economic independence that became so much a matter of course that it was barely noticed by the third generation after the revolution. We fought for unconditional military defense of the Soviet Union against imperialist attack and internal counterrevolution up until the very last barricade.

The great October Russian Revolution has now been undone and its gains destroyed. Surrounded and pounded by the imperialists for seven decades, the

Soviet Union was destroyed by capitalist counterrevolution in 1991-92. The responsibility for that lies primarily with the Stalinist bureaucracy which usurped political power from the working class in 1923-24 and betrayed the revolutionary purpose of Lenin and Trotsky’s Bolshevik Party and the revolutionary Communist International that they founded. Not the least of the Stalinists’ crimes was the glorification of the family and the reversal of many gains for women. We called for a proletarian political revolution to oust the Stalinist bureaucracy and return to the road of Lenin and Trotsky.

In celebrating International Women’s Day, we reaffirm that the struggle for women’s rights is inextricably linked to revolution and we honor the women fighters through the centuries whose courage and consciousness has often put them in the vanguard of struggles to advance the cause of the oppressed. The Russian Revolution was a proletarian socialist revolution; it overthrew the rule of the capitalists and landlords and placed the working class in power. The Great French Revolution of 1789-94 was a bourgeois revolution, the most thorough and deepgoing of the bourgeois revolutions of the 17th and 18th centuries.

The French Revolution overthrew the rule of the monarchy, the nobility and the landed aristocracy and placed the bourgeoisie in power. It swept Europe with its liberating ideas and its revolutionary reorganization of society. It transformed the population from subjects of the crown to citizens with formal equality. Jews

were freed from the ghettos and declared citizens with full rights; slavery was first abolished on the territory of the French nation. It inspired the first successful slave revolt in the colonies, the uprising led by Toussaint L’Ouverture in what became Haiti. And, within the limitations of bourgeois rule, it achieved gains for women that were unparalleled until the time of the Bolshevik Revolution.

Today’s capitalist ruling class is unsurpassed in bloody terrorism against working people around the world in defense of its profits and property. As hard as it is to imagine, the ancestors of this bourgeoisie played a historically progressive role then, sweeping away the backwardness, irrationality and inefficiency of the previous feudal system. The leaders of the French Revolution, who represented the most radical sector of the French bourgeoisie, spoke with—and for the most part believed—the words of the Enlightenment, justifying its fight to destroy the nobility as a class and take political power itself as the advent of “liberty, equality and fraternity” for all. They could not, and the majority of them did not intend to, emancipate the lower classes. Nevertheless, something changed in the world.

Particularly since “death of communism” propaganda has filled the bourgeois press and media following the destruction of the Soviet Union, there’s been a real attempt to demonize not just the Russian Revolution but any revolution, the French Revolution in particular. The push for retrograde social

policies has been historically justified with a virtual flood of books and articles attacking the humanist values of the Enlightenment philosophy which laid the ideological basis for the French Revolution. Today, while the bourgeoisie in its decay disowns the rationalist and democratic values it once espoused, we Trotskyists stand out not only as the party of the Russian Revolution but the champions of the liberating goals of the French Revolution.

Bolshevik leader V.I. Lenin identified with the Jacobins, the radical wing of the French revolutionary bourgeoisie, whose most prominent leaders were Maximilien Robespierre, Jean-Paul Marat and Louis-Antoine de Saint-Just. Lenin wrote that the “essence of Jacobinism” was “the transfer of power to the revolutionary, oppressed class” and that Jacobinism was “one of the highest *peaks* in the emancipation struggle of an oppressed class.” You can better understand why Lenin was inspired by the Jacobins from the following words by Saint-Just: “Those who make a revolution with half-measures are only digging their own grave.”

## Women’s Oppression and Class Society

In the early 19th century, a French socialist named Charles Fourier carefully studied the French Revolution. He wrote biting, witty and humorous criticism of existing social relations, including working out a whole scheme—kind of nutty but fun and food for thought—for perpetually satisfying sexual relations. Needless to say, he thought sexual monogamy was a curse worse than death. In a famous statement quoted by Karl Marx in his 1845 book *The Holy Family*, Fourier said: “The change in a historical epoch can always be determined by women’s progress towards freedom, because here, in the relation of woman to man, of the weak to the strong, the victory of human nature over brutality is most evident. The degree of emancipation of woman is the natural measure of general emancipation.”

And that quite profound observation guides us today in our understanding of society.

Women’s oppression is rooted in the institution of the family and has been a feature of all class societies. At one point before recorded history, it didn’t much matter who the father of a child was, since children were largely cared for communally. But then inventions such as agriculture made it possible to produce more than the producers could actually consume. This ability to produce

*continued on page 6*



VAAP

**March 1917: Petrograd women march with banner reading, “As long as women are slaves there can’t be freedom. Long live women’s equality!” Earlier protest on International Women’s Day marked start of Russian Revolution.**



# French Revolution...

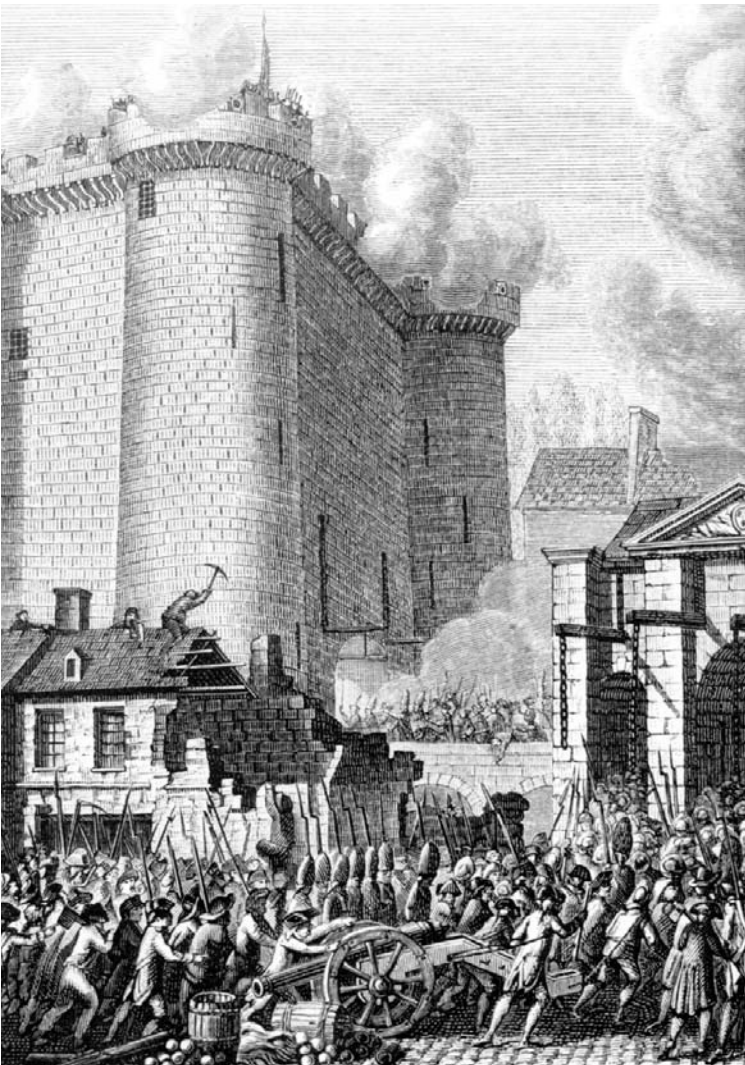
(continued from page 5)

a surplus meant that a leisure class could live off the labor of others and accumulate property. It became important to know who the father of a child was so that he could pass on his property to his own children. Monogamy appeared, making the man dominant and the woman subservient, enslaved.

The family is a key social unit for the maintenance of capitalism. For the capitalists, the family provides the basis for passing on accumulated wealth. And where there is no property to pass on, the family serves to rear the next generation of workers for the capitalists and to inculcate conservative social values. It is the family—and the necessity to control sexual access to the woman to ensure that the man knows who his real heir is—which generates the morality codified in and reinforced by religion. It is the family which throughout a woman’s life gives definition to her oppressed state: as daughter, as wife, as mother.

We Marxists fight to rip the means of production out of the hands of the capitalists in order to put them at the service of the needs of the working people that create the wealth. Only then can household drudgery be replaced with socialized childcare, restaurants, laundries and so on. The program of communism is for a classless society in which the family is transcended by superior sexual and social relations which will be free of moral or economic coercion. Our slogan is: “For women’s liberation through socialist revolution!”

Marx said that revolution is the locomotive of history. In the Great French Revolution, the women of Paris were often the engineers in that locomotive. I’m going to be talking about the role of thousands of women leaders, military commanders, propagandists and organizers whose role at key junctures of the French Revolution was quite simply



14 July 1789: Depiction of storming of Bastille by Parisian working people Right: Parisian *sans-culottes*.



Bulloz



Bulloz

nist today, at least as far as I have been able to put together her history, was Olympe de Gouges. In her pamphlet, *The Declaration of the Rights of Woman and Female Citizen*, written in the fall of 1791, she implicitly called for the vote for women, for a women’s assembly and for equal rights with men. She also dedicated her pamphlet to the despised queen Marie Antoinette! De Gouges was not an aristocrat but a butcher’s daughter from outside Paris, yet she remained a royalist throughout most of the revolution and was guillotined in November 1793.

Some of the recent analysis by feminist historians feeds right into today’s reac-

orders, a most ferocious woman.” The *Mère Duchesne* newspaper wrote in September 1792:

“In the past, when we wanted to speak, our mouths were shut while we were told very politely, ‘You reason like a woman’; almost like a goddamn beast. Oh! Damn! Everything is very different now; we have indeed grown since the Revolution.”

## “The Columns of French Liberty”

Now I want to go into some detail about the French Revolution itself. A revolution is a monumental military and social battle between *classes*. The dominant class in any society controls the state—the police, courts, army—which protects its class interests. In modern society there are two fundamental classes: the big capitalists who own the means of production (the mines, factories, etc.) and the workers who own absolutely nothing except their personal effects and are compelled to sell their labor power to the capitalists. At the time of the French Revolution, there were essentially four classes. The king and the nobility who owned nearly all of the land, the rising bourgeoisie, the peasants (who constituted over 80 percent of the population) and the urban *sans-culottes*. The latter consisted of artisans, who worked either at home or in very small workshops, shopkeepers, day laborers, the poor and unemployed. Those who did manual labor wore loose trousers and were *sans*—without—the tight silk leggings worn by aristocrats and those imitating them.

A revolution happens when the ruling class can no longer rule as before, and the

masses are no longer willing to be ruled in the same way. We’re talking about a political crisis in which the rulers falter and which tears the people from the habitual conditions under which they labor and vegetate, awakening even the most backward elements, compelling the people to take stock of themselves and look around. That political crisis was provoked in France by the 1776 American Revolution.

France had taken the side of the American colonies against its perpetual enemy England and so had emerged on the side of the victors, but totally broke. In May 1789, King Louis XVI convened an *Estates General*—a meeting of representatives of the nobility, the clergy and the non-noble property owners and lawyers (the so-called Third Estate)—at Versailles, where his palace was located, about 12 miles from Paris. He hoped to convince some of them to pay more taxes. But they refused, while every village throughout the country wrote up its grievances to be presented at Versailles. The meeting of the three estates transformed itself into a National Assembly.

It was clear that the king was gathering troops to disperse the National Assembly. The negotiations out at Versailles might have gone on forever, except the Parisian masses took things into their own capable hands and organized to arm themselves, seizing 60,000 muskets from armor-

ies like the Invalides and the Bastille prison fortress around the city on 14 July 1789. You know of this event as the storming of the Bastille. The freeing of the handful of prisoners was incidental; it was the arms that were the goal. The Paris garrisons had been deeply influenced by revolutionary propaganda following a massacre of rioters in the working-class quarters of Faubourg Saint-Antoine some months earlier. In June, the troops paraded through the streets to shouts of “Long live the Third Estate! We are the soldiers of the nation!”

The king backed down, but the monarchy still had its army and its throne. The bourgeoisie and the aristocracy, mutually hostile classes, were relying on essentially incompatible government institutions, the National Assembly and the royal throne. One or the other would have to go. Either the king (and his many royal cousins and relations by marriage ruling other countries of Europe) would crush the National Assembly or the king would meet up with what came to be known as “Madame la Guillotine.”

The weeks following the July 14 events were known as the “Great Fear,” the fear that the aristocrats were coming to take the land back and were organizing brigands and robbers and bands of pirates and so forth. So the peasants armed to protect themselves. Then it turned out to be a rumor, but there they were, armed and ready, and being practical sorts, they turned on the landlords’ manor houses and made use of the arms that they’d gotten.

The people’s representatives, who were deliberating out at Versailles, took note of the insurrection and on August 4 passed laws eliminating feudal privileges, which



Contemporary print shows May 1791 decree giving civil rights to free black men and Declaration of Rights of Man. Reason is seen holding a level to symbolize equality of black and white.

decisive. Groups like the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women literally shaped history. Count Mirabeau, one of the major actors in the beginning of the revolution, was an extremely sleazy guy, firmly in favor of a constitutional monarchy, occasionally in the pay of the king. But even he said: “Without women, there is no revolution.”

Most histories of the French Revolution concentrate their chief attention on the upper levels of society and the top layers of the plebeian masses. In recent years, a number of French and American women historians have done very interesting and important research into the dusty archives of the revolution in Paris—police reports, newspaper articles. Some of these historians are feminists; that is, they see the fundamental division in society as that between the sexes.

At the time of the revolution, a movement focused specifically on women’s rights was in the minority. One person who was what you would call a femi-

nist today, at least as far as I have been able to put together her history, was Olympe de Gouges. In her pamphlet, *The Declaration of the Rights of Woman and Female Citizen*, written in the fall of 1791, she implicitly called for the vote for women, for a women’s assembly and for equal rights with men. She also dedicated her pamphlet to the despised queen Marie Antoinette! De Gouges was not an aristocrat but a butcher’s daughter from outside Paris, yet she remained a royalist throughout most of the revolution and was guillotined in November 1793.

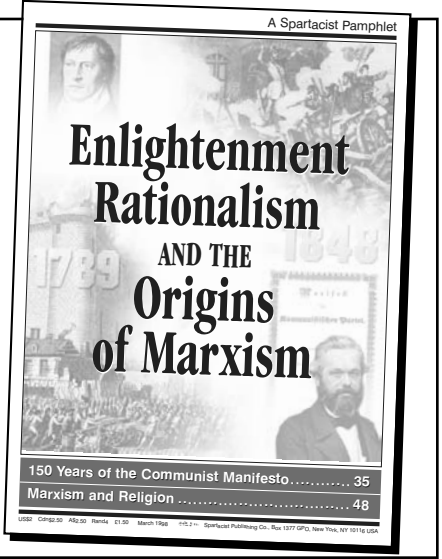
Some of the recent analysis by feminist historians feeds right into today’s reac-

This pamphlet reprints presentations given by SL Central Committee member Joseph Seymour on the origins of Marxism in the French Enlightenment and in left Hegelianism. Also included are “150 Years of the Communist Manifesto” and “Marxism and Religion.”

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had been the original issue all summer. The problem was that you had to buy your way out of your feudal duties and pay 25 times your feudal taxes in order to free yourself from them. Most peasants simply ignored that and had been seizing the land all over the country since July 14. They also would burn down the lord's manor house, where the records and the deeds were kept. You know, straightforward and practical.

The next major event is crucial to our understanding of the women's role. It was October and the people of Paris were starving again. October is usually a cold and wet month in Paris. It was indeed raining at 8 a.m. on the morning of 5 October 1789. Thousands of women—even- tually some 8,000—had already gathered in front of City Hall. They knew where to find the arms because it was they who had helped store them here after July 14.

The king had allowed the symbol of the revolution—the red-white-and-blue cock- ade (rosette)—to be trampled underfoot by some foreign troops brought in to protect him and his Austrian queen, Marie Antoinette. The women intended to stop this anti-revolutionary activity and they wanted bread. Huge stores of fine white flour waited at Versailles. They began to walk there. They couldn't get anyone to come with them, but later in the afternoon about 20,000 troops of the National Guard—which had been formed by the bourgeoisie—forced the very reluctant General Lafayette, whom you might know as a hero of the Ameri- can Revolution, to lead them there. One of the women was Pauline Léon, a choc- olate maker, who was later to lead the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women. That day she was armed with a pike, which was known as the people's weapon, because it was so easy to make. You could pull something off the top of a railing and attach it to a good hefty stick. It was said that “the pikes of the people are the columns of French liberty.”

This was no protest march—it was a sea of muskets and pikes. The women were determined not to come back with- out the king and his family. There were still plenty of illusions in the king, but they wanted him under their watchful eye, in Paris. At one point the crowd apparently invaded the palace and was wandering through Marie Antoinette's chambers and some things were getting broken and stepped on and stomped and so forth. One very respectable woman in a velvet hat and cloak turned around and said very haughtily, “Don't do that, we're here to make a point, not to break things.” And a woman from the artisan class turned around and said, “My hus- band was drawn and quartered for steal- ing a piece of meat.” Finally the women demanded that the royal family get into their carriage. Lafayette's troops led the way and the women marched in front car- rying on their pikes loaves of fresh, very white bread—the kind reserved for the upper classes—and the heads of two of the king's bodyguards.

**The Revolutionary Jacobin Dictatorship**

While pretending to be happy with the situation, the king was secretly corre- sponding with the other royal heads of state and nobles began to emigrate en masse, establishing counterrevolutionary centers outside the country. In June 1791, the king and queen disguised themselves and tried to escape, intending to return with the backing of the Austrian army. But an observant revolutionary recog- nized them in the town of Varennes, and they were brought back to Paris. This destroyed the people's remaining illu- sions in the monarchy and triggered an upsurge in revolutionary agitation. But the bourgeoisie, fearing things could get out of hand, sought to maintain the mon- archy and clamp down on the mass tur- moil. A month after the king's arrest, a petition to abolish the monarchy was being circulated among the crowd on the broad expanse of the Champs de Mars. The National Guard fired on the crowd and many were killed. Commanded by the aristocrat Lafayette, the National



Musée Carnavalet

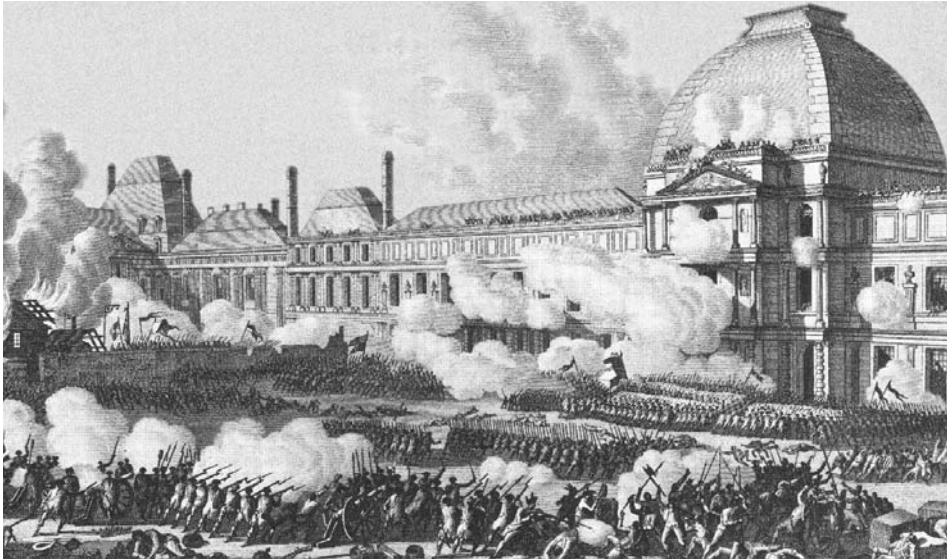
**A women's political society meets during the French Revolution.**

Guard had been organized as a force not only against the king but also against the threat that the bourgeoisie had already seen coming from the Parisian working people.

The Champs de Mars massacre marked a split within the bourgeois revolution- ary forces. The two main factions that emerged—the Girondins and the Jaco- bins—represented the same social class, but they were deeply politically divided. The Prussian monarchy and the rest of royal Europe were mobilizing militarily and in April 1792 revolutionary France went to war. The Girondins sought a “negotiated solution” with the reactionary feudal armies combined with concessions to the nobility and the clergy. The Jaco-

his troops moved to drive them out of a strip of land near Valmy in eastern France. But not a man flinched as the French general waved his hat in the air on the point of his sword, shouting “Long live the nation!” The *sans-culottes* fired straight and repeatedly at the enemy. With a torrential rainstorm some hours later, the armies fell back. The German writer Goethe was present at Valmy, and as he looked out over the battlefield that night he said, “This day and this place open a new era in the history of the world.”

He could not have been more prescient. On that day, the Assembly gave way to the Convention, which was elected by universal male suffrage and convoked expressly to give the nation a constitution



Mansell Collection

**10 August 1792 *journée*: Assault on Tuileries Palace, king's residence, marked overthrow of monarchy.**

bins were ready to make temporary con- cessions to the hungry urban masses in order to thoroughly vanquish feudal reac- tion. You could say that the Girondins were the reformist wing and the Jacobins the revolutionary wing of the bourgeoisie.

In June 1792, thousands of armed marchers, including numerous women armed with sabers, paraded through the Assembly in the first of what became known as *journées*, or days of action. One official observed at the time, “The throne was still standing, but the peo- ple were seated on it, took the measure of it.” The monarchy was finally over- thrown by a second *journée* on 10 Au- gust 1792, when the masses invaded the king's residence at the Tuileries Palace in Paris and imprisoned the royal family.

The war was not going well. Most of the former officers, aristocrats, had emigrated. A government representative appealed for recruits by invoking “the heartbreaking thought that, after all the efforts that have already been made, we might be forced to return to the misery of our former slavery.” While the best of the revolutionaries volunteered for the front, they were untrained and assumed to be undisciplined. Most of the new recruits were tradespeople, artisans and journe- men, not the sons of the bourgeoisie as before. The road to Paris seemed open to the Prussian royal armies.

The king of Prussia expected the French troops to scatter in disarray when

the “maximum”) demanded by the *sans- culottes* and destroyed the resistance of the feudal order through a reign of revolu- tionary terror carried out by the Com- mittee of Public Safety.

A month after the foreign troops were driven from France in mid-1794, on July 27 (9 Thermidor in the revolutionary calendar), the conservative wing of the bourgeoisie took the reins of power. The next day Robespierre followed the Giron- dins to the guillotine. The Thermidorians thought they could do without the alli- ance with the lower classes. That calcu- lation was proved false, and they were themselves replaced in 1799 in the coup of the 18th Brumaire (November 9) by Napoleon Bonaparte, who subsequently declared himself emperor. But the Jaco- bin dictatorship had irreversibly consoli- dated the central achievement of the French Revolution, the rooting out of feu- dal relations in the countryside.

**Marriage, Divorce and Inheritance**

As materialists, we understand, as Marx put it, that “Law can never be higher than the economic structure and the cultural development of society conditioned by that structure.” The rising capitalist class was firmly committed to the preservation of private property, as indeed it had to be. It was precisely this which staked out the limits of the revolu- tionary social changes that could be car- ried out, although the most radical years of the French Revolution went very far indeed.

The family was temporarily under- mined in order to serve the needs of the revolution against its enemies, the feudal nobility and Catholic church. This is one demonstration of the fact that so- cial institutions which seem to be immut- able, to be “natural” and “eternal,” are in fact nothing more than the codifica- tion of social relations dictated by the particular economic system that is in place. After the bourgeoisie consoli- dated its power as the new ruling class, it re-established the constraints of the fami- ly. But nothing would ever be the same again. The contradictory reality of the French Revolution—the breathtaking leap in securing individual rights and the strict limits imposed on those rights by the fact that this was a bourgeois and not a socialist revolution—was captured by Karl Marx in *The German Ideology*:

“The existence of the family is made necessary by its connection with the mode of production, which exists inde- pendently of the will of bourgeois soci- ety. That it was impossible to do without it was demonstrated in the most striking way during the French Revolution, when for a moment the family was as good as legally abolished.”

The feminists who want to dismiss the bourgeois revolution as anti-woman end up echoing those who justify *suttee* (widow-burning) in India and the imposi- tion of the *chador* in Iran and Afghanistan as “cultural differences.” Where the bour- geois revolution did not triumph, the status of women is qualitatively inferior. It is enough to contrast the condition of women today in West Europe with Af- ghanistan, groaning under the rule of the Islamic fundamentalist Taliban.

I'll give you a very small example of what it meant to have a society in which

*continued on page 8*

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# French Revolution...

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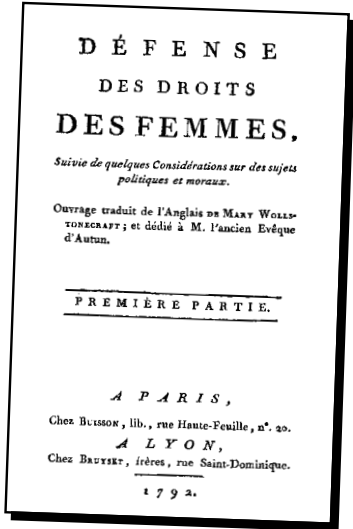
a rising, vigorous, productive class—the bourgeoisie—was held in check by outmoded institutions. France was a Catholic country. In 1572, tens of thousands of French Protestants were killed in the St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre, and more fled the country. The 1598 Edict of Nantes assured them the free exercise of their religious beliefs, but this was revoked in 1685. Some of the richest merchants were Protestant, but marriages performed by their own pastors were not officially recognized. At the death of a spouse, you would have distant Catholic relatives claiming the inheritance, because legally there was no spouse and the children were illegitimate. Both Protestants and Jews accepted divorce. In 1769, according to James Traer in his *Marriage and the Family in Eighteenth-Century France* (1980), a respected author advocated permitting divorce on the grounds that “the Protestant nations of northern Europe were enjoying both population growth and prosperity while the Catholic states of southern Europe were suffering from declining population and poverty.” But the conservatives always managed to get the law postponed.

Under the Old Regime, women had the right to exactly nothing. The monarchy



John Opie

English radical democrat Mary Wollstonecraft with 1792 French translation of her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.



at the court of Louis XIV some decades before the revolution that the aristocracy frowned on marital fidelity as being in bad taste, and a German visitor noted, “I know of not a single case of mutual affection and loyalty.” I introduce this to make the point that marriage for the upper classes was all about property. Many of the *sans-culottes* did not marry at all. But in the Paris of the French Revolution, women were still largely dependent on men for economic reasons (whether or not they were legally married).

Much debate and several pieces of draft legislation on marriage and divorce had already been considered by the National Assembly before September 1792. All proposed to make marriage a simple

tended to legitimize “free unions.” For example, soldiers’ common-law wives could receive government pensions.

Divorce had not been high on the list of grievances before the revolution, but as the pamphlets flowered, so did the notion that divorce was a necessary right in society. Probably rarely in history had a simple law so delighted the female population. When a certain citizen Bellepaume came to the town hall intending to oppose the divorce demanded by his wife, he found that she had organized “a considerable number of citizens of both sexes, but chiefly women” who pursued him in the corridors, abused him and tore his clothes. In the first year after the divorce law was passed, women initiated over 70



Planeta

consistently sought to reinforce, supplement and extend the father’s control over the marriage of his children. Women found guilty of adultery were sentenced to public whipping or imprisonment. Women were also put into convents for life for adultery. Marriage was indissoluble—a life sentence. If you were a man, you couldn’t marry until you were 30 without your parents’ permission. If your family had property, your father could get the king to issue a *lettre de cachet*, something like an unlimited arrest warrant, and you could be locked up indefinitely. If you married a minor (under the age of 25 for women) without permission, the penalty was death for rape notwithstanding the woman’s consent. By the way, actors and actresses couldn’t marry either, because their profession was viewed by the church as immoral.

The aristocracy was hardly committed to the sanctity of marriage. It was said



Bibliothèque Nationale Estampes  
Enlightenment philosopher Condorcet, a proponent of women’s rights.



AP

**Afghanistan: Women in Kabul under Soviet military presence (left). 1989 Soviet withdrawal meant regression to feudalist backwardness under Taliban fundamentalists.**

civil affair. However, what stood in the way of this was the Catholic church. Those clergy who refused to swear an oath of loyalty were threatened with deportation. But the Pope forbade it, and a lot did refuse. Though some were deists or free thinkers, the bourgeois deputies in the Assembly had no intention of suppressing religion; they nearly all agreed that some kind of religion was necessary to keep the people pacified. But now they had a big problem on their hands as the village priests became organizers for counterrevolution.

The local priests not only carried out marriage ceremonies, baptisms and funerals, but also recorded them. If these records were in the hands of hostile forces, how could you count the population? You wouldn’t even know if you had enough draftees for the army. When in June 1792 the Minister of Justice wrote that the civil war launched by the aristocracy and the church in the Vendée region in southwest France had completely disrupted the keeping of records, one delegate rose to propose that the marriage ceremony be abolished with the cry, “Freedom or death!” So in some ways, the progressive marriage and divorce laws enacted in September the same day as the victory at Valmy were war measures.

The age of adulthood was lowered to 21 and marriage without parental consent was legalized. This was followed by a June 1793 decree that proclaimed the right of illegitimate children to inherit from both their mothers and their fathers. At a stroke, the institution of the family lost one of its main functions as the framework for the transfer of property from one generation to the next. While inheritance rights didn’t mean much to those without property, the new laws also

percent of all divorces. One woman wrote to the Convention:

“The female citizen Govot, a free woman, solemnly comes to give homage to this sacred law of divorce. Yesterday, groaning under the control of a despotic husband, *liberty* was only an empty word for her. Today, returned to the dignity of an independent woman, she idolizes this beneficial law that breaks ill-matched ties and returns hearts to themselves, to nature, and finally to divine liberty. I offer my country six francs for the expense of war. I add my marriage ring, which was until today the symbol of my slavery.”

## The Society of Revolutionary Republican Women

The question of women’s status in society had been a subject of debate throughout the Enlightenment. The Encyclopedia, published just before the revolution and intended as a compendium of all knowledge, contained four contributions under the category “Women”: one in favor of equality, one ambiguous and two against. Even in a very radical work like Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), woman’s role as subordinate to man inside the family was not seriously called into question. Wollstonecraft was part of a circle of British radical-democratic revolutionaries who supported the French Revolution against English monarchical reaction, even participating in the French government.

Most of the Enlightenment thinkers and writers concentrated on education for women, and that was about it. Now, this is undeniably a very important question, and it refuted the prevalent idea that women were inferior to men and their brains worked in an inferior way. Only about a third of French women at the time were literate. You’d find them

during the revolutionary years at the corner café with their glass of red wine, reading or listening to someone else read Robespierre’s latest speech. The hunger for knowledge was totally linked to the desire to change society. Before 1777, France had no daily newspaper. Two years later, there were 35 papers and periodicals and by 1789 there were 169. Thousands of political pamphlets rolled off the printing presses.

One of the novels based on the new research published in the last few years has the Enlightenment philosopher Condorcet, who wrote very eloquently about women’s rights, and his lovely young wife enjoying long mornings reading a bit of Voltaire or the equivalent of the Sunday *New York Times* in bed with their café au lait, making love, and then getting up in the afternoon to walk in the garden and do their very serious intellectual work. Not a bad life, right? But it wasn’t available to most people, of course. Condorcet ended by opposing the execution of Louis XVI, ostensibly on the grounds of opposition to the death penalty.

The working women of Paris who were a motor force in the revolution lived very different lives. Perhaps 45,000 women in Paris, some 20 percent, were wage earners; a similar percentage of women in cities like Lyon and Rouen worked. Because of the war, women were able to break into traditionally male professions and they were also employed at sewing, as domestic servants. Some were proprietors of shops. Wives, legal or otherwise, of soldiers at the front were given subsidies. The Paris municipal government and the political clubs set up spinning workshops that at a certain point employed several thousand women, though the wages were miserable. They were centralized by the government office responsible for producing clothes for the troops.

It was from among these women of the *sans-culottes* that the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women was formed in the spring of 1793. One of the leaders of the society was the chocolate maker Pauline Léon, whom we last saw with her pike on the October 1789 march to Versailles. Another was the actress Claire Lacombe, who always followed her signature with “A Free Woman.” A third was Anne Félicité Colombe, who owned a print shop. Typography was generally a man’s job, so she was already exceptional for this. In 1791, she had been one of the four women arrested when the National Guard shot down demonstrators at the Champs de Mars calling for the overthrow of the monarchy. Colombe printed the revolutionary newspapers of Jean-Paul Marat, *L’Ami du Peuple* (The Friend of the People) and *L’Orateur du Peuple* (The Orator of the People). She was dragged into a libel suit, which she eventually won, and distributed the 20,000-*livre* settlement to the poor in her neighborhood.

While women did not win the right to vote for delegates to the Convention, especially after the establishment of the Jacobin dictatorship in 1793 they played a full role in the Parisian sectional assemblies, intervening, presenting positions, voting and being elected as delegates. They refused to be “servile women, domestic animals,” as one put it in May 1793. Interestingly, the one widespread demand for formal equality was for the right to bear arms. In March 1792, Pauline Léon had led a delegation to present a petition to the Assembly declaring:

“You cannot refuse us and society cannot remove from us this right which nature gives us, unless it is alleged that the Declaration of Rights is not applicable to women and that they must allow their throats to be slit, like sheep, without having the right to defend themselves.”

The women demanded the right to arm themselves with pikes, pistols, sabers and rifles, and to assemble for maneuvers on the Champs de Mars. After much debate, the Assembly moved to put the petition in the minutes with honorable mention. Dozens of women actually went to the front when the war began, a few as officers.

The Society of Revolutionary Republi-



can Women solidly backed the Jacobins as the revolutionary government and politically supported the extreme left Enragés around Jacques Roux, who spoke for the popular masses. Just after the Revolutionary Republican Women was founded, they mobilized the support of the masses in the streets for the Jacobins, whose battle to oust the Girondins was then coming to a head. As the split deepened, there were many more women than men in the street gatherings, according to police reports. The Revolutionary Republican Women dressed in military clothes and carried sabers. One account has them waging a military battle in the Convention to get back the seats which had been taken from them by supporters of the right-wing Gironde.

Reversal of Gains Under Thermidor

In October 1793, the society became one of the first organizations to be banned by the Jacobin government. Those feminist historians I mentioned earlier claim that this proves that the French Revolution was essentially hostile to women. That’s wrong. The society was banned not because it was composed of women, but because it was one of the most radical expressions of the *sans-culottes*.

Here’s what happened. The Enragés and the Revolutionary Republican Women fought for strict price controls, especially on food, and an upper limit on the size of personal fortunes. In October, the Revolutionary Republican Women launched a campaign to force all women to wear the revolutionary cockade. They brought their campaign to Les Halles, the central marketplace in Paris. The market women were of course hostile to the price maximum on food that had just been imposed by the Jacobin government as a concession to the *sans-culottes*. The question of the cockade was just the pretext for the major-league brawl that ensued between the market women and the women revolutionaries. This fight represented an early split in the Jacobins’ base, and the Jacobins sided with the market women, banning the Revolutionary Republicans.

The peasants wanted maximum food prices, the artisan-proletariat in the cities wanted minimum ones, pointing to the spectre of a civil war which the *sans-culottes* could not win. The Jacobins could have tried to strike a deal, but ultimately they could not satisfy the conflicting demands of the urban poor and the peasantry. When revolutionary Russia in the early 1920s was confronted with the “scissors crisis,” as the price of scarce manufactured goods rose and the price of agricultural products fell and the peasants threatened to withhold their produce, Bolshevik leader Leon Trotsky proposed a course of planned industrialization to make more manufactured goods available to the peasants and maintain their support for the proletarian dictatorship.



1919 Soviet monument to Jacobin leader Jean-Paul Marat. 1917 postcard with Russian translation of French Revolution slogan: “Liberty! Equality! Fraternity!”

Trotsky’s proposal was rejected at the time (only to be implemented at forced-march pace a few years later by Stalin). But such an option was objectively unrealizable in the capitalist economic system of pre-industrial France.

By the fall of 1793, the Jacobins and revolutionary France were gasping for air. Mandatory conscription had provoked mass uprisings in the Vendée; there had been treachery at the front; the armies of the European monarchies had re-invaded France; and Girondin provinces were seceding; Marat, the “friend of the people,” had been assassinated by the

Women played a vanguard role in the last uprising of the French Revolution in the spring of 1795, after Thermidor. The rallying cry was “Bread and the Constitution of 1793!”

The modern feminist historians believe that the role of women who rose up from the “cellars and catacombs” has been largely obscured because of prevailing patriarchal attitudes in society. Or they seek to show that women acted only on “women’s issues,” mainly food shortages. While there’s some truth in both these observations, they fundamentally miss the point. The mass of active women

Napoleon’s defeat, Paris was occupied by Russian troops for a period of time. A number of young officers spent a lot of time in the cafés talking to people about what had been going on, and went back to St. Petersburg and led the Decembrist Uprising against the tsarist autocracy in 1825. They fought, among other things, for women’s equality.

The very first communist ideas came out of the analysis developed by some of the radical Jacobins while in prison after the defeat of the Jacobin dictatorship. Revolutionaries like Gracchus Babeuf, who organized the Conspiracy of Equals, and Philippe Buonarroti came to believe that private property itself was the cause of oppression. They provided a living link to Marx and Engels, who issued the *Communist Manifesto* as the next revolutionary wave swept Europe in 1848, declaring: “The bourgeois family will vanish as a matter of course when its complement vanishes, and both will vanish with the vanishing of capital.” In France, a program was advanced for women’s emancipation that called for replacing domestic slavery with socially organized and financed services. I found this 1848 program reprinted in an early 1920s women’s journal published by the French Communist Party, *L’Ouvrière* (The Woman Worker).

In the Paris Commune in 1871, women once again played an extremely important role. Marx described the Commune as the first realization of the dictatorship of the proletariat, though it lasted less than three months. The women of the Paris Commune were called the “incendiaries” by the reactionary press, and a correspondent for the London *Times* wrote, “If the French Nation were composed of nothing but women, what a terrible nation it would be.” But Marx hailed them: “The women of Paris joyfully give up their lives on the barricades and execution grounds” (quoted in Edith Thomas, *The Women Incendiaries* [1967]). When the French capitalist rulers finally defeated the Commune after heroic resistance, they slaughtered at least 30,000 people in one week, and many thousands more were sent to penal colonies.

Today, bourgeois France is an imperialist power, where the July 14 storming of the Bastille is celebrated as a chauvinist glorification of the “grandeur of France”—much like July 4 here—while French colonial atrocities are carried out to the music of the once-revolutionary hymn, the *Marseillaise*.

We Trotskyists know that it will take world socialist revolution to do away with the institutions which are the root cause of women’s oppression. In our fight to reforge Leon Trotsky’s Fourth International, world party of socialist revolution, to lead new October Revolutions around the planet, we are guided by the words of the Fourth International’s founding document, the 1938 Transitional Program: “The sections of the Fourth International should seek bases of support among the most exploited layers of the working class, consequently among the women workers. Here they will find inexhaustible stores of devotion, selflessness, and readiness to sacrifice.” Join us! ■



The Woman Worker, newspaper published by the French Communist Party in the early 1920s.

royalist Charlotte Corday. Against this backdrop, the Revolutionary Republican Women, in their revolutionary zeal against the market women, threatened to get in the way of prompt and regular deliveries of food to the city from the countryside, without which the Jacobins would have lost the allegiance of the urban masses.

Many of the revolutionary women continued to be active as individuals. Even after being arrested by the Jacobin government, Claire Lacombe stayed loyal to Robespierre. She never renounced her support, and after Robespierre’s execution she always refused to point out that she had been arrested by his revolutionary government because she hated the idea of becoming a hero of the Thermidorians.

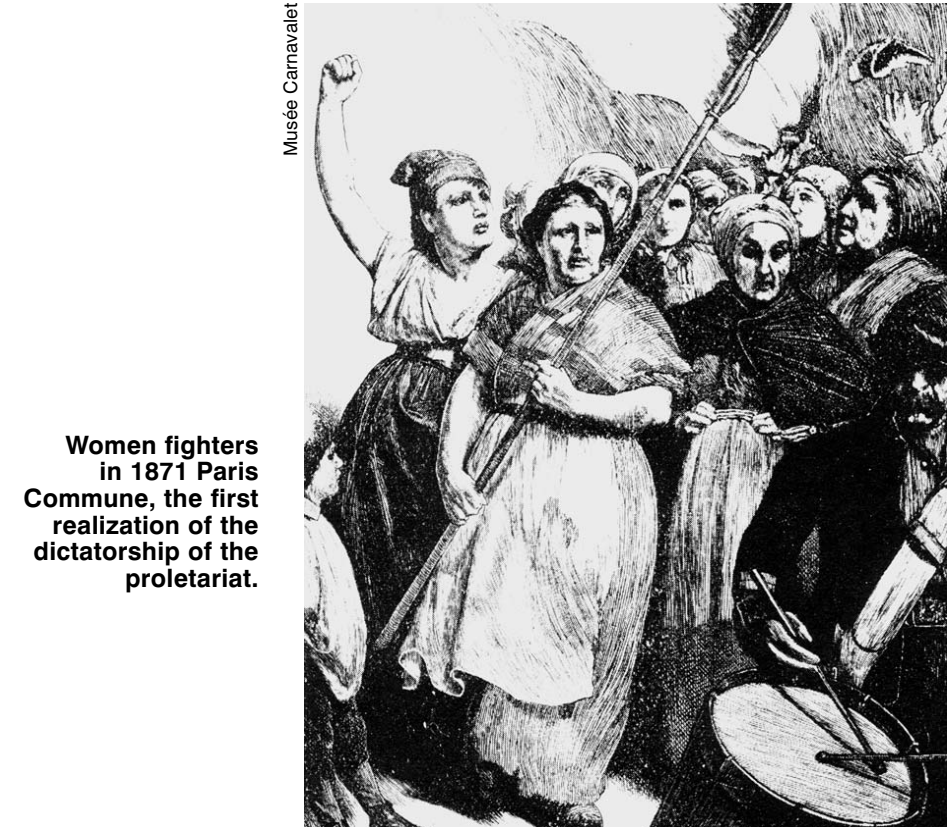
in the French Revolution did not fight and organize as women but as *revolutionaries*. And, as the October 1789 march that brought the king back from Versailles showed, it wasn’t simply the question of bread that motivated them.

Thermidor marked the end of the radical phase of the revolution, and women were among the first to feel this. This was especially true for divorced women, who would have trouble finding work and maintaining themselves under the conservative Thermidorians. Divorce became identified with the “ruin of society” and the “torrent of corruption that invaded the cities and especially Paris” during the Terror and the months that followed it. Proof of a legitimate marriage became a requirement for soldiers’ wives seeking to receive aid. After May 1795, the Convention banned women from “attending political assemblies,” urging them to withdraw to their homes and ordering “the arrest of those who would gather together in groups of more than five.”

The Napoleonic Code saw a further reversal of the gains of women. It’s reported that the only part of the deliberations on the Napoleonic Code that Bonaparte sat in on was the Family Code enacted in 1804. The Family Code again made women minors from the standpoint of the law, mandating that they had to have the approval of their husbands for all contracts and so forth. In 1816, a year after Napoleon was overthrown and the monarchy restored, divorce was abolished.

For Women’s Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!

I want to briefly trace the revolutionary continuity extending from the French Revolution through the 19th century. The French Revolution, refracted through Napoleon’s armies, brought the first notions of women’s equality to hideously backward tsarist Russia. Following



Women fighters in 1871 Paris Commune, the first realization of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

# California...

(continued from page 1)

but on constantly expanding production of the things people need.

## The Capitalist Myth of the Free Market

Deregulation of the privately owned monopolies that ran gas and electric production and distribution for half a century on the basis of government-guaranteed profits was launched nationally in 1992 by the U.S. Energy Policy Act. In California, it was promoted as a step toward cleaner, more efficient and cheaper power for all. According to the deregulation evangelists, once the dead hand of the giant utilities was lifted—by “unbundling” their generating, transmission and retailing operations—investors would flock to build new, efficient power plants and compete to provide power at the lowest price in a new marketplace called the California Power Exchange. But, as a 5 February article on the *Fortune* Web site put it, “Instead of offering the output of their plants to the Power Exchange at a little more than the cost of generating it, they offered to sell power only at sky-high prices, or not at all. In other words, instead of thinking like a regulated utility, the private power generators were thinking like—surprise!—sellers looking for the best price.”

This organ of finance capital understands that the aim of capitalists is to maximize profits, not efficiency. The workers who collectively create the wealth of society are paid far less than the value their labor creates. That difference, after overhead expenses and upkeep on machinery is subtracted, is what the capitalists pocket as the return on their investments. Under capitalism, investment cannot be planned for the good of society as a whole because ownership of capital is divided up among many capitalists, each of whom tries to maximize the return on his investment relative to all the others, naturally investing where that return is highest. Such transfer of capital does not abate until increased production and competition drive down the rate of profit to the point where it is no longer adequate. At that point, capital flees, many firms go belly up and factories are shut down.

The result is the anarchic veering between boom and bust which is the hallmark of a capitalist economy. Those capitalists who have more financial resources gobble up their smaller competitors, giving rise to the domination of production by a handful of big operations that have the clout to manipulate the market, alternately colluding with each other and trying to cut each other’s throat. This monopoly capitalism further retards development of the productive forces, as

private ownership of industry increasingly comes into conflict with the centralized, collective process of production which the capitalists themselves brought into being. Thus, to further social and economic progress it is necessary for the capitalists’ rule over society to be smashed by the collective producers, the working class, through a workers revolution.

## The Populist Myth of the “Public Interest”

That truth is precisely what the reformist left, clinging to the hope of influencing the capitalist state, is devoted to obscuring from the working class. In *Socialist Worker* (19 January), the International Socialist Organization (ISO)

lauds calls by Medea Benjamin and fellow Green Matt Gonzalez of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors for public ownership of the utilities. In its 2 February issue, *Socialist Worker* itself demands: “The state of California should take over the entire production, distribution and servicing of the electrical system and run it as a public utility.” Then, according to these social democrats, “well-paying union jobs could be guaranteed” and “electricity could be guaranteed to the poor, the sick and the elderly, regardless of their ability to pay.”

According to radical journalist David Bacon, writing in the Northern California Committees of Correspondence *Newsletter* (February-March 2001), “Electricity can be efficiently provided by the public sector, where the pursuit of profit doesn’t override national decision-making.” Likewise Socialist Alternative, whose faith in the beneficent powers of the local Democratic Party politicians apparently knows no bounds, issued a 22 January leaflet in the name of its Potemkin village Progressive Left coalition which demanded: “The City should take immediate control of the production and distribution of energy in our City and County. We OWN the energy sources and we should recover control of them.” “We” own? Flagrantly denying the class divide in this capitalist

society, these sewer socialists seem to think that all it takes is a stiff municipal ordinance to make the capitalist bosses sit up and take notice and command those electrons to flow.

Contrary to the liberal consumer activists and fake lefts, neither regulation nor public ownership of utilities ever had anything to do with the interests of the population, but rather served the interests *of the capitalists as a whole*. Electric power is the heart and blood of the interdependent industrial infrastructure. In the early years of the 20th century, it became clear how unviable it was for many companies to run competing electrical networks. But early attempts by city and state governments to regulate utilities were quickly bypassed by giant

holding companies, which bought up local utilities, sucked huge profits from them and then put the money into high-risk ventures.

It was only when a number of these collapsed as the Great Depression hit that the system of regulated utilities was set up. The aim was not primarily to forge a more rational economic policy. Rather, these “New Deal” Democratic Party measures were largely a byproduct of attempts by the ruling class—including public works projects as a sop to the masses of unemployed workers—to forestall the threat of revolution as an upsurge in class struggle loomed. Rural electrification came even as an entire class of poor small farmers was uprooted in epic migrations. Meanwhile, the capitalists were effectively subsidized with cheap hydroelectric power.

This worked well—for the capitalists—as long as the stockholders of giant utilities were guaranteed a good, stable return on their investment. For decades, the utilities were regarded as rock-solid investments. But they were shaken when fuel costs spiked in the “oil shocks” of 1973-74 and 1979, as the big oil companies connived to drive up profits and the ensuing economic downturns reduced demand. In 1974, utility stocks lost 38 percent of their value in less than six months. With cities like Los Angeles choking on air pollution, leading to increasingly restrictive air quality requirements, building more coal-fired generators was not a profitable option. Nuclear reactors cost a lot more after the meltdown at the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant in 1979, though this did not stop PG&E from building its Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant directly on top of an earthquake fault!

With an acceptable rate of profit no longer guaranteed, utilities lost interest in further capital investment. In California, electric generating capacity *decreased* by 1.7 percent from 1990 to 1999, while overall demand jumped by more than 11 percent. Moves to increase the rate of profit through layoffs and wage cuts ran into resistance from their unionized workforces. Utilities saw deregulation as an opportunity to break their capital out of state limitations and seek higher profits elsewhere. Independent, unregulated companies now account for more than 20 percent of domestic electricity generation and the percentage is rising fast. Adding to the anarchy of the situation is America’s federal system of government. While California shares an electric grid with a dozen other western states, each state has its own regulatory system.

As reflected in the *New York Times* (23 January), sections of the bourgeoisie are worried that the California crisis “could expose other parts of the country to significant market disruptions.”

Both the unregulated outfits and the utilities were up to their necks in writing the California deregulation law (along with Goldman Sachs and Credit Suisse). The utilities’ perceived stake in it was based on a fundamental misreading of the (inherently unpredictable) future market. Coming just after a recession in which retail prices were already high by national standards and demand was low, there was a regional surplus of generating capacity. The retail rate freeze was written into the law not to protect consumers but to lock in a rate substantially above then current and projected wholesale prices until March 2002. For the same reason the utilities hoped to benefit from the law’s requirement that they buy power from the unregulated short-term “spot” exchange—which has now become what one state power official called a “Turkish bazaar”—betting the price would if anything be bid down.

Finally, the law’s requirement that the utilities sell off their plants was intended to work to the advantage of both the utilities and the big unregulated players. Instead of many independent firms entering the industry, five big concerns snapped up most of the plants, sometimes paying twice market value. They could now sell that power to the unregulated wholesale market. PG&E and Edison split the remaining distribution business off into subsidiaries, took the proceeds and bought dozens of power plants elsewhere run by other subsidiaries. For example, the non-union operations of PG&E’s U.S. Generating Co. and Edison’s Mission Energy outside of California now sell unregulated power at the same astronomical prices the Texans get.

It does not take a conspiracy to manipulate the market. The monopolies influence the market by their very existence, which is not to say there hasn’t been endless scheming, no doubt much more than we will ever know. One example has come to light in an antitrust suit against gas companies operating in Southern California reported in the *Los Angeles Times* (4 February).

According to the suit, in September 1996 executives of El Paso Natural Gas Co., Southern California Gas and San Diego Gas & Electric met in a Phoenix hotel to divide up business and squelch the construction of a new gas pipeline which would have brought gas into California from Canada’s vast reserves. It is the lack of adequate pipeline capacity which has now driven the price of natural gas through the roof compared to other states. Similar machinations undoubtedly happen every day on the wholesale electricity market. As the London *Economist* (23 December 2000) reported, “Kaiser Aluminum in Washington state has laid off 400 workers, after concluding that the profit it would make from using electricity to smelt aluminium would be far outweighed by the profit it could make reselling the power.” Those workers had just come back from a 20-month strike and lockout.

## The Need for a Revolutionary Workers Party

The most verbally left-wing version of the reformist “public ownership” cry has come from the idiosyncratically reformist Socialist Workers Party (SWP). The *Militant*’s 22 January editorial calls on the labor movement to demand “government expropriation of the power and energy companies.” It then explains that these nationalized monopolies must be “run as public utilities for the benefit of the majority rather than the interests of a handful of super-wealthy capitalists, bankers and bondholders.” This boils down to the long-familiar type of utility run, in the *Militant*’s words, by “public, elected boards, independent of the government,” albeit with a tacked-on call for “workers exerting control of job conditions and production.”

Mike Peters/Dayton Daily News



## SPARTACIST LEAGUE/U.S. Local Directory and Public Offices

**National Office:** Box 1377 GPO, New York, NY 10116 • (212) 732-7860  
**Web site:** www.icl-fi.org • **E-mail address:** vanguard@tiac.net

### Boston

Box 390840, Central Sta.  
Cambridge, MA 02139  
(617) 666-9453

### Chicago

Box 6441, Main PO  
Chicago, IL 60680  
(312) 454-4930

### Public Office:

Tues. 5-9 p.m.  
and Sat. 12-3 p.m.  
328 S. Jefferson St.  
Suite 904

### Los Angeles

Box 29574, Los Feliz Sta.  
Los Angeles, CA 90029  
(213) 380-8239

### Public Office:

Sat. 2-5 p.m.  
3806 Beverly Blvd., Room 215

### New York

Box 3381, Church St. Sta.  
New York, NY 10008  
(212) 267-1025

### Public Office:

Tues. 6:30-8:30 p.m.  
and Sat. 1-5 p.m.  
299 Broadway, Suite 318

### Oakland

Box 29497  
Oakland, CA 94604  
(510) 839-0851

### Public Office:

Sat. 1-5 p.m.  
1634 Telegraph, 3rd Floor

### San Francisco

Box 77494  
San Francisco, CA 94107  
(415) 395-9520

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Tues. 6-8 p.m.  
564 Market St., Suite 718

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Berkeley...

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“anti-prison labor” movement, in positing that the increase in incarceration is due to corporations’ lust for cheap labor, is a liberal facade to reform capitalism. Prisons are an integral part of the bourgeois state, which exists precisely to defend capitalism against workers and the oppressed by means of organized violence. PL helps to obscure this by appealing simply to opposition to “corporate greed” as a basis for organizing. And PL brands prison labor as “fascist,” whereas in fact the exploitation of prisoners is part of the normal functioning of bourgeois democracy. Unable to apply a class analysis of society, PL dismisses diverse organizations as “fascist” so they will have something to unite with liberals *against*.

In the U.S., the segregation of black people at the bottom of society is a cornerstone of capitalist exploitation and oppression. But while PL talks a lot about “fighting racism,” they treat it as a mere idea, divorced from material reality. Thus, they claim that simply by proposing a forum on prison labor, they “turned any racist tone at the meeting into its opposite” (*Challenge*, 15 November 2000). Meanwhile, PL’s opportunism means that they will not challenge the current consciousness of the working class, leading them to abandon the actual defense of black rights—witness PL’s refusal to defend affirmative action against the drive to eliminate minority students from the universities. This failure to challenge existing consciousness also explains why PL refuses to fight against anti-gay repression and tolerates members who think gays are sick.

Clearly, PL’s program has never been about revolutionary politics, instead swinging between sectarian withdrawal

and opportunist toadying, alternately denouncing or capitulating to existing consciousness, but never trying to change it. A shift in class consciousness can only be achieved through direct and clarifying political struggle. For this reason we went to the recent PSA meeting, called “Progressive Community Forum,” where we devoted our speaking time to combatting illusions that left-leaning students have in the Democratic Party, and exposing the roles of the ISO and Solidarity in providing left cover. The SYC seeks to win students to the side of the working class, understanding that the working class must throw off its current pro-Democratic Party leadership and build a workers party to take state power as part of the fight for social justice and against racial and sexual oppression.

Maybe the PSA’s lust for unity overwhelmed their senses, or maybe their political compass had been distorted by their truly weird experience with PL, but they e-mailed us soon after asking if, as we attended the forum, we wished to be listed as members of the PSA. The resounding “no” of our reply is reprinted, slightly edited, below. We received a response from a PSA member, who denied that the coalition is politically dominated by the Democrats and said that their main goal is “communication.” But there can be no neutral political alliance. The pro-Democratic Party politics of the PSA are not only transparent, but the logical extension of its origins as backers of Nader’s candidacy.

\* \* \*

The Spartacus Youth Club does not want to be listed as part of the PSA. When we went to the first meeting of your lash-up last semester, it was to convince students of the need for socialist revolution and to make sure that unknowing students were not sucked into support for the thoroughly bourgeois Nader candidacy by the presence of some groups that

claimed to be “socialist.” We made it clear that Nader’s only purpose was to refurbish the tarnished image of the capitalist electoral system; in his own words Nader wanted to pull the Democrats in the “right direction.” The “progressive” coalition served exactly the function we warned it would: the PSA is now centered around the Cal chapter of the Democrats, partner party of U.S. imperialism responsible for mass slaughter from Iraq to Serbia and gutting “welfare as we know it.”

By the time of the initial introductions last week, it was clear that even on the reformist terms of the fake left, this “unity” with the capitalist party of war and racism can be in no way “progressive”—the International “Socialist” Organization listed its work in Students for Justice in Palestine and against the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas; the Democratic Party backs the murderous Zionist regime and enacted NAFTA, the FTAA’s predecessor, as part of its program for the free-trade rape of Mexico. The ISO’s “Campaign to End the Death Penalty” in fact is a campaign for a temporary moratorium, which would only serve to give the capitalists breathing room to rehabilitate it; besides which, as Nader supporters were so fond of pointing out, Al Gore and Bill Clinton are no less ardent supporters of the death penalty than Bush is, and Clinton himself was behind the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act which speeds up death row lynchings. Solidarity talks about “trade-union democracy” by which they mean bringing the capitalist state into the unions, doing yeoman’s work for the Democratic Party, which consistently intervenes to derail strikes and smash unions—as Jesse Jackson did against the pending transit strike in Los Angeles last semester, or as Willie Brown and progressive sweetheart Tom Ammiano did in ramming through the anti-worker “Rescue MUNI” plan last year.

The main obstacle to a socialist revolution in this country is the illusions that workers have in the Democratic Party. We of the Spartacus Youth Club seek to mobilize workers independently of the capitalist class, and in direct opposition to it. A perfect example of this is our successful labor/black mobilization in Gary, Indiana on January 20, which stopped the KKK. That mobilization, which found a deep resonance in the working class of nearby Chicago as well as the Gary steel mills, achieved victory only by the sharpest political struggle against Gary’s Democratic administration, which threatened mass arrests of any anti-Klan protesters. The ACLU, another player in the PSA, did its own part for capitalism by lawyering for the Klan, reducing the struggle for self-defense against racist terror to simply questions of “free speech” and “ideas.” The ISO, whose national headquarters are only 40 miles away, could not even bring itself to give a paper endorsement, much less mobilize for the anti-Klan mobilization. Instead, along with the rest of the fake left they threw their resources into the anti-inauguration rallies, solidarizing with disheartened Democrats.

Because the liberalism of the PSA’s former incarnation in Students for Nader embodied no break from capitalist politics, it was relatively easy for your alliance to wake up the day after the elections and discover that from your own petty-bourgeois standpoint the Republicans can “spoil a system that’s already spoiled.” Now you’re right back in bed with the “progressive” wing of the ruling class, the Democrats, to “fight the right.” The presence of ostensible “socialist” organizations in the PSA only serves to fool any students who are looking for a real answer to the ills of today’s society. We in the SYC have no wish to provide further left cover by lending the weight of actual revolutionary politics to such an anti-revolutionary endeavor. ■

Just such an operation—minus the workers’ participation in their own exploitation—is the quasi-independent Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (DWP), which has become the model of the reformist left. To be sure, the DWP has kept rates down and made money, since it owns enough capacity to supply its local customers and sells the excess at wholesale prices. But like all such utilities, the DWP serves only the capitalist class, which entrusts it with keeping overhead costs down in the interest of higher profits.

This was starkly demonstrated in 1993 when DWP demands for cutbacks sparked a militant nine-day strike by 10,000 unionized employees (see *WV* No. 583, 10 September 1993). This largely successful strike, in the face of a torrent of opposition from union-busting Mayor Riordan on down, was almost immediately followed by a drumbeat of demands for 2,000 layoffs to “prepare for deregulation.” In 1998, as deregulation was rolled out, union tops signed on to a deal to cut one out of every five jobs. PG&E similarly prepared for deregulation by cutting thousands of jobs, leaving maintenance decimated and workers furious. Then in 1994 PG&E executives cut a sweetheart deal with the heads of IBEW Local 1245 for labor peace in exchange

for nixing 800 additional job cuts. Edison chose instead to hardline it against its unionized workers.

Even from the standpoint of major sectors of the bourgeoisie, some form of regulation or public ownership of utilities and other essential services would serve their interests better. The recent deregulation mania, like the massive privatizations of formerly nationalized industries in West Europe, is in part ideologically driven. The American capitalist state exists primarily to suppress the enemies of Wall Street, internally and externally. In the post-Soviet “one superpower” world, the U.S. rulers see no big external threat, while the working class, saddled with a brittle but treacherous labor bureaucracy, has been relatively quiescent. In an excess of ideological zeal extolling the virtues of the market, the capitalists have lopped off some of the things—such as regulated utilities—they actually need the government for. In Britain, the privatization of the railway system, which has led to widespread inefficiency and a series of deadly collisions, has generated such a huge backlash that the major bourgeois daily, the London *Independent* (4 December 2000) carried an article headlined, “The Capitalist Case for Renationalising the Railways.”

The “energy crisis” has generated

intense and widespread popular hostility to “deregulation” and to the monopolies which control electric power and fuel supplies. The demand for the government to expropriate these monopolies nationwide—not just the bankrupt shells of the California utilities but also the power plants, transmission lines, natural gas stocks and pipelines, etc.—would find broad and even enthusiastic support among working people in California and throughout the country. But this would obviously not be carried out by George W. Bush, Gray Davis or any other capitalist politician, Democrat or Republican. The “energy crisis” is a powerful argument for a workers party that would fight for expropriation of the energy industry as part of a broader struggle to overthrow the entire system of capitalist exploitation, establishing a workers government and a planned socialist economy.

It is not rocket science to project increased need for power, build the needed capacity, plan the corresponding increase in fuel production and distribution, etc. But it is absolutely impossible to do so when independent gangs of robber barons decide what gets done based on maximizing their own profits. Among other things, it will *never* be profitable for capitalists to invest in technology to clean up generator pollution. But for a planned economy in which social need and not profit is the determining factor, this would not be a problem.

When the working class seized power in backward Russia in 1917, it created a workers state based on the rule of soviets, workers councils. Addressing the situation of the workers state’s isolation from the proletariat of industrialized Europe where the capitalists still reigned, Bolshevik leader V.I. Lenin raised the slogan, “Communism equals Soviet power plus electrification.” The tremendous capacity of economic planning enabled the Soviet Union to industrialize a vast peasant country in decades, despite all the distortions imposed by the Stalinist bureaucracy which usurped political power in 1924. How much vaster will be

the power of the industrial powerhouse of North America, once the workers take it in their hands.

The pathetic quality of the reformist schemes for regulation or nationalization was captured by Leon Trotsky in the 1938 Transitional Program:

“Liberal capitalism, based upon competition and free trade, has completely receded into the past. Its successor, monopolistic capitalism, not only does not mitigate the anarchy of the market but on the contrary imparts to it a particularly convulsive character.... The Social Democrats prepare to drain the ocean of anarchy with spoonfuls of bureaucratic ‘planning.’ Engineers and professors write articles about ‘technocracy.’ In their cowardly experiments in ‘regulation,’ democratic governments run head-on into the invincible sabotage of big capital.”

That this statement written 63 years ago rings so true underlines just how rotten-ripe for socialist revolution the world is. The fundamental needs of society require a planned economy, as the current debacle so painfully illustrates. The only force which can bring it into being is the multiracial working class, and for this purpose it needs a revolutionary workers party forged in political struggle against all those who cling to the decaying capitalist order. ■

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## “New Directions” TWU Tops Scramble to Avert Strike

# NYC: Defeat Union-Busting Against Bus Workers!

Over 4,000 bus drivers and maintenance workers at seven privately owned bus companies in the New York City area are gearing up for a possible strike in the face of a union-busting offensive by management and the Giuliani administration. The city has hatched plans to shred union contracts at the publicly subsidized private lines by shifting route franchises at year's end to the lowest bidders, meaning the worst anti-union wage-gougers. Negotiations over a new contract broke down late last month as the companies offered no more than a 2.5 percent raise to these workers, whose wages and benefits are already considerably worse than those of bus workers at New York City Transit (NYCT).

A strike of the private lines could have a significant impact on this center of international finance. It would also reinvigorate the public transit unions in the wake of the union-busting assault on the eve of a threatened walkout in December 1999. The private lines drivers get hundreds of thousands of people from Queens and other areas to work every day. Most are members of Transport Workers Union (TWU) Local 100, whose 36,000 members also include NYCT bus and subway workers. The rest are in Locals 1179 and 1181 of the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU), which also represents some city bus workers.

Unlike the NYCT, the private lines are not covered by the state Taylor Law, which outlaws strikes by public employees. But the city is already threatening to break a strike by mobilizing hundreds of the non-union “dollar vans” which supplement scheduled services in heavily immigrant areas in Queens and Brooklyn and by re-routing up to six buses from each of 18 public transport depots. TWU members told *Workers Vanguard* that at least one subway division meeting in January passed a motion insisting that the union officially announce that no member will do the work of strikers.

It is crucial that TWU and ATU members in public transit mobilize to stop any scabbing against their union brothers and sisters. An injury to one is an injury to all! Moreover, NYCT workers are themselves under attack. Immediately after union elections in December, NYCT head Larry Reuter announced that 237 token booth clerk jobs would be axed, foremen and supervisors were given a provocative “strike contingency plan,” and the transit bosses began massively underfunding the union's Health Benefits Trust.

Posturing as a militant alternative to the discredited “old guard” around outgoing president Willie James, Roger Toussaint was elected president and his New Directions (ND) wing of the bureaucracy captured the other two top spots, five of seven VP positions and a clear majority on the executive board. Tabloids like the *Daily News* and *Newsday* have painted Toussaint as another Mike Quill, the Local 100 leader who defiantly ripped up anti-strike injunctions to lead the 1966

transit strike. But during the elections Toussaint and other ND candidates stressed that they had *opposed* a strike in '99 and were not “strike-happy.”

The new ND leadership is now straining every muscle to prevent a strike against the private lines. Contracts at six of the companies expired on New Year's Day (the seventh ends on February 28) and workers at four companies voted unanimously in December to authorize a strike. But the union tops have kept workers on the job. “I'm not looking forward to a confrontation in that area,” Toussaint

the thumb of the capitalist state. “Such appeals to the agencies of the capitalist class enemy are proof enough why ND, despite its occasional ‘militant’ posture and talk of ‘democracy,’ offers no alternative to James and Melendez,” we warned in our article “Sellouts, Traitors, Finks: No Choice in TWU Local 100 Elections” (WV No. 746, 17 November 2000).

ND is braintrustered by the sinister Association for Union Democracy (AUD), which specializes in bringing the unions under state control (see “Lawyers for Government Union-Busting,” WV No.

city comptroller Alan Hevesi.

Now the TWU leadership has called a mass meeting of private lines workers on February 13 to discuss “Unity in Our Fight Back to Win a Just Contract!” But with Democratic City Council Speaker and mayoral hopeful Peter Vallone as a keynote speaker, it is clear that Toussaint & Co. are talking about unity with the class enemy, not unity of the ranks in struggle against the bosses. ND's program is to police the ranks and smother class struggle while working to get another Democrat into City Hall and another installed in Albany.

It is this program of class collaboration that has shackled labor's power, encouraging management attacks and undermining the union in the face of schemes by the bosses to keep transit workers divided: between skilled and unskilled workers, between different job categories and divisions on the subways, between NYCT and MaBSTOA public bus lines workers, between public and private bus lines, between TWU and ATU members. What's needed is *one industrial union* of all NYC transit workers, *one expiration date* for all contracts and *full parity in wages and benefits* at the highest levels!

The “dollar vans,” largely driven by low-paid Caribbean immigrants, fulfill a real transportation need in minority neighborhoods, especially following public transit cuts in the 1990s. Instead of allowing the racist bosses to pit non-union van drivers against unionized bus workers, the unions should immediately launch a drive to organize them. To succeed, such an organizing drive must wage a fight against racist and anti-immigrant bigotry and demand full citizenship rights for all immigrants. A struggle spearheaded by the unions for *free, quality mass transit* would win wide support among the city's poor and working people.

The numerous self-proclaimed socialist groups that support the pro-court, pro-Democratic Party ND demonstrate their hostility to a class-struggle perspective. *Socialist Action* (January 2001) and the International Socialist Organization's *Socialist Worker* (5 January) both effusively hailed ND's election. Progressive Labor lauded ND as a “reform caucus with a mass following” whose election could be one of the “early signs of a new upsurge in the labor movement” (*Challenge*, 3 January). In a November 15 leaflet, a TWU supporter of the League for the Revolutionary Party criticized ND for being “not very militant” and even mentioned its anti-union suits, but called for support nonetheless, proclaiming: “Put New Directions to the Test.”

What is posed is the fight to forge a class-struggle union leadership against all wings of the pro-capitalist bureaucracy. This is integrally linked to the fight for *class independence*, breaking with the Democratic Party and building a workers party committed to ripping transport and industry away from the capitalists under a workers government. ■



Hart/NY Times

TWU private lines workers confront cops during 1992 strike.

told the civil service newspaper, the *Chief-Leader* (2 February), which reports that he is “trying to dispel any notion of a job action.” It's about time union members reasserted the old TWU slogan: No contract, no work!

The *TWU Express* (31 December 2000) vows that “our members will not scab in the event of a strike.” But the TWU and ATU tops have posted flyers on private bus lines promising that “any actions we may take to protect ourselves and to achieve a fair contract will adhere strictly to the law.” This means bowing to strike-breaking injunctions under the Taylor Law, which would certainly be wielded against transit workers who refuse to scab. When Giuliani and Democratic state attorney general Eliot Spitzer used the Taylor Law to criminalize not only a strike but even use of the word “strike” in December 1999, New Directions *joined* with the James bureaucracy in enforcing the court injunctions, instructing transit workers at an ND protest march at the time to abide by them.

As we wrote then, ND's capitulation to the court injunctions was no surprise. From its inception, ND's stock in trade has been to use the courts as a club against its rivals within the union bureaucracy, serving to further shackle the power of the union and place it under

738, 30 June 2000). ND lawyer Arthur Schwartz, a longtime AUD operative, has now literally ensconced himself in the TWU union hall. On February 1, the AUD sponsored a public meeting to celebrate its clients' victory, featuring AUD executive director Carl Biers as well as Toussaint and other Local 100 officials. The speakers cynically refrained from talking about their “struggles” in the chambers of the bosses' “justice” system—until a Spartacist League supporter spoke from the floor to expose ND/AUD's sordid history of anti-union lawsuits.

ND's reliance on the bosses' courts goes hand in hand with its support to the capitalist Democratic Party. In his interview with the *Chief-Leader*, Toussaint said, “We intend to use this year to go as far as possible in establishing Local 100's political machine,” pointing as a model to Local 1199 hospital workers under Dennis Rivera. Rivera is a leading figure in, and former state co-chairman of, the racist, anti-labor Democratic Party, which mobilized alongside Giuliani in December 1999 to smash a potential transit strike. That is the “political machine” ND is trying to build. A Martin Luther King Day event at Local 100 headquarters featured a parade of prominent Democrats, including Senator Charles Schumer, former mayor David Dinkins and