

Report from New Orleans

Seven Months After Katrina: Racist Atrocity Continues

A Workers Vanguard reporter recently spent a week in New Orleans. This article is based on his reports and interviews.

Seven months after Hurricane Katrina, when multiple levee breaks flooded 80 percent of New Orleans, vast swaths of the city are still in darkness and as many as 300,000 people remain dis-

placed. Aside from the veneer of the French Quarter and the well-heeled affectation of the Garden District, New Orleans feels like a Third World country, as black longshoremen and Avondale shipyard workers told *Workers Vanguard*. The U.S. rulers—the true looters and

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WV Photo

April 4: Demonstrators push past security guards to reclaim their homes at St. Bernard public housing project.

France: Workers, Students Beat Back Government Attack

APRIL 10—After more than two months of mass protests, campus occupations and widespread strikes, French president Jacques Chirac announced today that the government will scrap the First Employment Contract (CPE), which he had signed into law on March 31. The CPE stipulated that workers under 26 years of age be subject to a two-year probationary period during which they could be fired without cause, threatening job security and hard-won union gains for all workers, especially minorities.

The scrapping of the CPE is a victory. The government is coming out extremely weakened, and this may open the road to more class struggle against the capitalists' attacks in France. Many students want to continue the struggle until the whole racist "Equal Opportunities Act," of which the CPE was a component, is scrapped, as well as a similar law applicable to workers of any age in companies with a workforce of fewer than 20.

But the union bureaucrats are happy to let the struggle stop here and have planned no further strikes to support the students' demands, which virtually assures that the bulk of the law will be implemented. Even without the CPE, two-thirds of youth have insecure work contracts one year after they leave school, and the present "wel-



Reuters

April 4: Mass demonstration in Paris, part of latest nationwide day of protest by students and workers against "First Employment Contract" law.

No to a New Popular Front! For a Socialist United States of Europe!

fare state" in France means that on average you don't get into the stable employment market until you reach the age of 28.

The leadership of the opposition Socialist Party (PS) and Communist Party (PCF), which is tailed by Alain Krivine's Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR), is seeking to use the crisis of the rightist government of Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin in order to put together a new popular front—a class-collaborationist

alliance with capitalist parties—in view of next year's presidential and legislative elections. In contrast, our comrades of the Ligue Trotskyiste de France, section of the International Communist League, have intervened with a proletarian, revolutionary and internationalist program pointing to the need to fight for socialist revolution.

We reprint below the edited translation of an April 5 presentation given in Paris

by Herminio Sanchez, editor of the LTF's newspaper, *Le Bolchévique*.

* * *

Yesterday's mobilization against the CPE was a huge success. The trade unions announced that there were again some three million demonstrators. [Interior Minister Nicolas] Sarkozy and the rest of the government are maneuvering to sidetrack the movement through parliamentary tricks in an attempt to save what can still be saved of the CPE. The union bureaucrats appear ready to play this game. It is nonetheless possible that the anti-CPE mobilization will signal the end of the CPE, as well as of de Villepin and Chirac and maybe even Sarkozy.

During two months of anti-CPE struggles, the campuses have been blockaded and the revolt extended into the *banlieues* [suburban ghettos], but the government's reaction has been to send in the CRS riot police. When the working class entered the scene, it changed the entire situation. This showed the power of the working class. It is this class that makes profits flow into the pockets of the capitalists; it is also the one capable of stopping this flow and blocking the whole economy.

There is a constant class struggle, a conflict between the two fundamental social classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. We of course support all of the workers' economic struggles aimed at improving their conditions. At the same time, the constant struggle of workers under capitalism can at best only marginally improve workers' conditions. We

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For the Right of Independence for Puerto Rico!

Down With FBI Repression Against Puerto Rican Militants!

The U.S. government is stepping up its campaign of repression and terror against the Puerto Rican guerrilla nationalist group Ejército Popular Boricua, known as Los Macheteros. On February 10, heavily armed units of the FBI raided homes and offices of six independence activists who it claimed were associated with Los Macheteros. As Homeland Security helicopters hovered overhead, the FBI arrived in caravans, terrorizing whole neighborhoods. The Feds carted off computers,

mailing lists and personal property, and abused the activists' family members. As protesters and news media gathered outside the apartment of Liliana Laboy, a sociologist and trade-union activist, FBI thugs knocked people to the ground and pepper-sprayed reporters' faces, causing several reporters to be hospitalized.

In claiming that the raids were "aimed at preventing a potential domestic terrorist attack," the FBI invoked the U.S. rulers' "war on terror"—an all-purpose

rationale for imperialist war and occupation abroad and repression at home against immigrants, black people, labor and opponents of imperialist depredation. In fact, the raids were aimed at terrorizing all who support independence for Puerto Rico, the principal remaining colony of the U.S., or defend Puerto Rico's working people. On 20 October 2004, the FBI raided the headquarters of the Independent Authentic Union of water workers, which was on strike in defense of health care benefits. Two weeks earlier, the FBI had accused the union of planning to "sabotage" Puerto Rico's water supply.

Now the FBI has arrested Antonio Camacho Negrón, a 60-year-old veteran Machetero who was seized on March 28 after the opening day of a conference for decolonization that he had organized at the University of Puerto Rico. Camacho Negrón is an old comrade of Filiberto Ojeda Ríos, the 72-year-old independence fighter and cofounder of Los Macheteros who was assassinated by FBI agents last year in his rural Puerto Rico home (see "Protest FBI Killing of Filiberto Ojeda Ríos!" WV No. 856, 14 October 2005).

Los Macheteros has carried out attacks against the U.S. imperialist government apparatus, such as a 1981 bombing that destroyed nine airplanes at the Puerto Rican Air National Guard base, at a time when Puerto Rico was a staging ground for counterrevolutionary operations in Central America. We stood in defense of Los Macheteros in 1985, when the group was the target of an earlier FBI "anti-terrorist" dragnet (see "Free the Macheteros!" WV No. 388, 4 October 1985). Like Ojeda Ríos, Camacho Negrón was convicted in connection with a 1983 robbery of a Wells Fargo depot in Hartford,

Connecticut, which was carried out to help fund pro-independence activities. In 1989, Camacho Negrón was sentenced to 15 years in prison. He has been rearrested three times for refusing to accept parole conditions that restrict his political activity and associations.

The FBI's brutal crackdown has sparked angry protests and aroused nationalist sentiment throughout Puerto Rico. On February 26, some 8,000 students, trade unionists, independence activists and others marched in San Juan behind a banner reading, "Respect Puerto Rico—FBI Get Out!" Protesters also demonstrated against the FBI outside the World Baseball Classic games recently held in San Juan. With outrage mounting over the repression, the Puerto Rican Department of Justice has sued the FBI in U.S. federal court on the grounds that the FBI has refused to release any documents to Puerto Rican authorities investigating the killing of Ojeda Ríos and the attack on the reporters or to name the agents involved. In fact, the assassination of Ojeda Ríos was carried out with the help of Puerto Rican cops, who closed off the roads as the FBI launched its assault.

Even many Puerto Ricans who oppose independence and advocate statehood for the island rightly see that the FBI's repression against independence activists is a calculated blow to Puerto Rican national pride. The people of Puerto Rico have deeply contradictory feelings in regard to the island's status. On the one hand, the outrage over the recent attacks as well as the massive protests that forced the Navy to stop its bombing exercises in Vieques in 2003 show that the Puerto Rican people have a strong

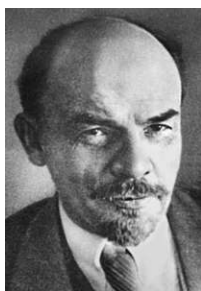
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TROTSKY

The Industrial Proletariat and the Fight for Socialism

In his seminal work developing the theory of permanent revolution out of a Marxist examination of tsarist Russia, Leon Trotsky argued that capitalist development had created an industrial proletariat with the historic interest and social power to overturn the capitalist system through socialist revolution. Trotsky's perspective was verified in practice by the Bolshevik-led October Revolution of 1917.



LENIN

In order to realize socialism it is necessary that among the antagonistic classes of capitalist society there should be a social force which is interested, by virtue of its objective position, in the realization of socialism, and which is powerful enough to be able to overcome hostile interests and resistances in order to realize it.

One of the fundamental services rendered by scientific socialism consists in that it theoretically discovered such a social force in the proletariat, and showed that this class, inevitably growing along with capitalism, can find its salvation only in socialism, that the entire position of the proletariat drives it towards socialism and that the doctrine of socialism cannot but become in the long run the ideology of the proletariat....

The importance of the proletariat depends entirely on the role it plays in large-scale production. The bourgeoisie relies, in its struggle for political domination, upon its economic power. Before it manages to secure political power, it concentrates the country's means of production in its own hands. This is what determines its specific weight in society. The proletariat, however, in spite of all co-operative phantasmagoria, will be deprived of the means of production right up to the actual socialist revolution. Its social power comes from the fact that the means of production which are in the hands of the bourgeoisie can be set in motion only by the proletariat. From the point of view of the bourgeoisie, the proletariat is also one of the means of production, constituting, in conjunction with the others, a single unified mechanism. The proletariat, however, is the only non-automatic part of this mechanism, and in spite of all efforts it cannot be reduced to the condition of an automaton. This position gives the proletariat the power to hold up at will, partially or wholly, the proper functioning of the economy of society, through partial or general strikes. From this it is clear that the importance of a proletariat—given identical numbers—increases in proportion to the amount of productive forces which it sets in motion. That is to say, a proletarian in a large factory is, all other things being equal, a greater social magnitude than a handicraft worker, and an urban worker a greater magnitude than a country worker. In other words, the political role of the proletariat is the more important in proportion as large-scale production dominates small production, industry dominates agriculture and the town dominates the country....

All this leads us to the conclusion that economic evolution—the growth of industry, the growth of large enterprises, the growth of the towns, and the growth of the proletariat in general and the industrial proletariat in particular—has already prepared the arena not only for the *struggle* of the proletariat for political power but for the *conquest* of this power.

—Leon Trotsky, *Results and Prospects* (1906); Pathfinder Press (1969)

Labor: Protest Jail Sentence for TWU President Roger Toussaint!

NEW YORK CITY, April 11—State Supreme Court judge Theodore T. Jones yesterday sentenced Transport Workers Union (TWU) Local 100 president Roger Toussaint to ten days in jail, starting within 30 days. Toussaint was charged with refusing to obey a court injunction and order TWU members back to work when they struck for three days in December, defying the state Taylor Law that bans public employee strikes. Jones also levied fines against Toussaint and two other Local 100 officials. Transit workers have already given up six days' pay under Taylor Law guidelines.

The jail sentence is retribution for a strike that crippled the financial capital of American capitalism and drew widespread support from working people and minorities, in New York City and elsewhere. It is also a clear threat to all city and state labor. The court may also fine Local 100 \$3 million and eliminate its dues checkoff system and is as well threatening financial penalties against Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) locals 726 and 1056, which joined the TWU on strike. The *New York Times* (11 April) reports that Jones "acknowledged yesterday that the financial penalties could put the union out of business." The threat against the dues checkoff system underlines that union members should fight to

replace this system, by which the bosses control dues collection through paycheck deductions, with collection by elected union officers.

The court ruling highlights what we noted in "NYC Transit Strike: Union Power vs. Class Collaboration" (WV No. 861, 6 January; available as a special supplement): "The role of the courts and government officials during the strike starkly demonstrated that the 'democratic' trappings of the capitalist state are but a facade for the dictatorship of the exploiting class." The entire labor movement must rise to the occasion and mobilize in defense of the TWU and its officials against government union-busting. Following the strike, the Partisan Defense Committee issued a call to the labor movement urging solidarity with TWU Local 100 and ATU locals 726 and 1056. Our appeal generated letters and statements from unions in the U.S. and internationally protesting the threat of legal reprisals.

Defense of those victimized for using labor's strike weapon should be the starting point for united action by city and state unions to smash the Taylor Law. It will take hard class struggle, not looking to phony "friends of labor" in the capitalist Democratic Party, to defend the unions and uphold their right to strike. ■

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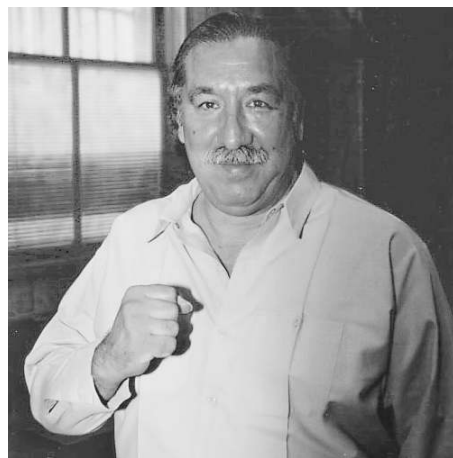
Opinions expressed in signed articles or letters do not necessarily express the editorial viewpoint.

The closing date for news in this issue is 11 April.

No. 868

14 April 2006

Court Suppresses Evidence of Frame-Up



Ben Corbett

Locked Up for Thirty Years Free Leonard Peltier!

Thirty years ago, on 6 February 1976, American Indian Movement (AIM) leader Leonard Peltier was seized by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in western Canada. Peltier had fled there after a massive U.S. government attack the previous June—by FBI and Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) agents, SWAT cops and white vigilantes—on South Dakota's Pine Ridge reservation during which two FBI agents were killed. After Canadian authorities held Peltier for ten months in solitary confinement in Oakalla Prison, he was extradited to the U.S. on the basis of fabricated FBI testimony. In 1977, Peltier, a member of the Anishinabe and Lakota Nations, was convicted and sentenced to two consecutive life sentences on frame-up murder charges stemming from the shooting of the two FBI agents.

While Peltier had sought refuge in Canada, two others charged in the agents' killings were acquitted in a federal court in Iowa. Jurors stated that they did not believe the government witnesses and that it seemed "pretty much a clear-cut case of self-defense" against the FBI invasion. In Peltier's trial the prosecution concealed ballistics tests showing that his gun could not have been used in the shooting, while the trial judge ruled out any chance of another acquittal on self-

defense grounds by barring any evidence of government terror against the Pine Ridge activists. At a 1985 appeal hearing, a government attorney admitted, "We can't prove who shot those agents."

AIM had been in the Feds' gun sights because of its efforts to fight the enforced poverty of Native Americans and the continued theft of their lands by the government and energy companies, which were intent on grabbing rich uranium deposits under Sioux land in South Dakota. The Leonard Peltier Defense Committee stated in 2004: "Virtually every known AIM leader in the United States was incarcerated in either state or federal prisons since (or even before) the organization's formal emergence in 1968, some repeatedly." Between 1973 and 1976, thugs of the Guardians of the Oglala Nation (GOON), armed and trained by the hated BIA and FBI, carried out more than 300 attacks in and around Pine Ridge, killing at least 69 people.

As we wrote during the fight against Peltier's threatened deportation, "The U.S. case against Peltier is political persecution, part of a broader attempt by the FBI to smash AIM through piling up criminal charges against its leaders, just as was done against the Black

Panthers" (WV No. 112, 4 June 1976). AIM and Peltier were targeted by the FBI's deadly Counter-Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) of disruption, frame-up and murder of the left, black militants and others. Under COINTELPRO, 38 Black Panthers were killed by the FBI and local cops. Panther leader Geronimo ji Jaga (Pratt) spent 27 years in prison for a crime the FBI knew he could not have committed before finally winning release in 1997. Mumia Abu-Jamal—also an innocent man—remains on Pennsylvania's death row today.

In November 2003, a federal appeals court ruled, "Much of the government's behavior at the Pine Ridge Reservation and in its prosecution of Mr. Peltier is to be condemned. The government withheld evidence. It intimidated witnesses. These facts are not disputed." But the court still refused to open the prison doors for Peltier. Last year, U.S. District Court judge William Skretny turned down Peltier's request for documents suppressed by the government, even while acknowledging that he could have been acquitted had the government not improperly withheld them. Peltier attorney Michael Kuzma stated that the evidence withheld by the government

amounts to a staggering 142,579 pages!

On February 24, Skretny again ruled that the FBI can keep part of its records secret in the name of "national security." Peltier noted in a message to the March 18 protests against the Iraq occupation, "Our government uses the words 'national security' and fighting the war on transnational terrorism as a smoke screen to cover up further crimes and misconduct by the FBI." Also this February, defense attorney Barry Bachrach argued in St. Louis federal court that the federal government had no jurisdiction in Peltier's case, since the shootings occurred on a reservation.

Millions of people have signed petitions for Peltier over the years, including by 1986 some 17 million people in the former Soviet Union. His frame-up, like that of Geronimo ji Jaga and Mumia Abu-Jamal, demonstrates that there is no justice in the capitalist courts of America. While supporting all possible legal proceedings on behalf of the class-war prisoners, we place no faith whatever in the "justice" of the courts and rely solely on the power of mass protest centered on the integrated labor movement.

After Peltier's third appeal for a new trial was denied in 1993, thousands of prominent liberals, celebrities and others—ranging from Willie Nelson to Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Mother Teresa—called for a presidential pardon. In a recent column titled "Free Leonard Peltier!" (5 February), Mumia Abu-Jamal wrote: "Many Peltier supporters put their trust in a politician named Bill Clinton, who told them that when he got elected he 'wouldn't forget' about the popular Native American leader. Their trust (like that of so many others) was betrayed once Clinton gained his office, and the FBI protested. In the waning days of his presidency, he issued pardons to folks like Marc Rich, and other wealthy campaign contributors. Leonard Peltier was left in his chains!"

Peltier is one of 16 class-war prisoners to whom the Partisan Defense Committee sends monthly stipends. For more information on his case, or to contribute to Peltier's legal defense, write to: Leonard Peltier Defense Committee, 2626 North Mesa #132, El Paso, TX 79902. *Free Leonard Peltier and all class-war prisoners!* ■

From Death Row, This Is Mumia Abu-Jamal

Ongoing War Against Workers: The TWU Strike



It only lasted for three days, but it lasted long enough to betray the scuffles and scars of war.

It was a spark for the eternal war between labor and capital. It was a war between those who work and those who hire.

When the New York Transport Workers Union (TWU) went out on strike, their action sent shock waves across the nation and rattled the rulers. Immediately, like a slave driver who claims he was "betrayed" by "his" "people," New York's mega-billionaire mayor, Michael Bloomberg, unleashed an ugly verbal missile at those who demanded a fair contract under which to work.

In the minds and mouths of the Bloombergers, TWU strikers were: "Thugs!"

The corporate press joined the slander, with one well-known fishwrapper blaring, with a banner headline: "JAIL 'EM!"

Them's fightin' words. And they reflect, with a richness and clarity rarely revealed, the true nature of this war: a class war.

Local 100 of the TWU is a predominantly Black, Latino and immigrant union, and the ugly war of words, spun by the masters of the nation's media machines, were as raw as they were racist.

When an unruly mob of cops converged on City Hall, to lambaste the city's first Black mayor (David

Dinkins) as a "washroom attendant," and sprinkled other racist references to local Black leaders, one needed to search far and wide to find references to the behavior of the cops as "thuggish."

The city and the MTA (Metropolitan Transportation Authority) used the Taylor Law, which disallows such strikes, to demand that local courts return crippling fines against any striker.

But some leading TWU members pointed to the history of the early civil rights movement, specifically the experience of the late Rosa Parks, who broke unjust laws to spark a mass movement. Can the Taylor Law be just when it leaves workers at the mercy of management, when it forces them to accept substandard contracts, when it virtually requires ruinous givebacks?

While the corporate press channeled the negativity of their bosses, strikers reported that average, working-class and poor folks supported their efforts, for many understood that this was a stand which would strengthen workers generally, and beat back the hands of greed that has been choking unions all across the country.

As for the Taylor Law, why would anyone even try to pass such a law, which clearly disadvantages labor? The very fact of its existence proves the political betrayal by politicians who supported, lobbied and voted for it.

The Taylor Law is a weapon of the rulers, and a whipping for the workers. It strips them of their only real instrument of social power—the ability to refuse their labor. Since when is that a crime?

Well, to the rich, it is! Karl Marx said that the law "is but the will of one class made into a law for all."

It is a machine, just like it made segregation legal, and criminalized Black freedom and dignity. The same law demanded that Blacks take the back of the bus. The same law outlaws the right of those who labor to withhold their labor, to better their condition, and those who follow them.

Such a law must itself be outlawed! But it won't be, if the people rely on the politicians to do it.

That law can be unmade only by the concerted actions of the people, by workers power, supported by others, in every area of work and life.

Even though a recent contract was approved by TWU leadership, the proposed pact was reportedly rejected by a majority of union members.

These front-line workers want to put an end to givebacks, and compromises, and labor bowing to capital, and their puppet politicians.

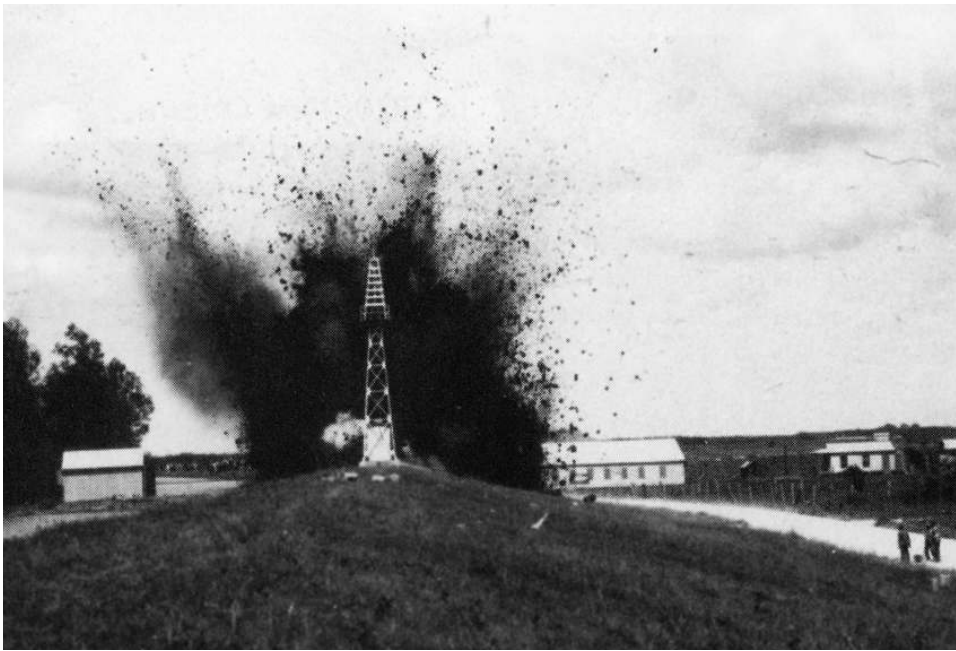
Labor wishes to fight for their class, and for their many and varied communities, who are supported by their efforts.

To make a change, Labor must fight for it!
1 March 2006

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Send urgently needed contributions for Jamal's legal defense, made payable to "National Lawyers Guild Foundation" and earmarked for "Mumia," to: Committee to Save Mumia Abu-Jamal, 130 Morningside Drive, Suite 6C, New York, NY 10027.

If you wish to correspond with Jamal, you can write to: Mumia Abu-Jamal, AM8335, SCI Greene, 175 Progress Drive, Waynesburg, PA 15370.



Library of Congress photos

Left: April 1927 dynamiting of levee 13 miles below New Orleans flooded thousands of residents out of their homes. Right: Denied shelter and aid, many black flood victims had to live on levees.

Black Oppression and the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927

Black people crying for help from rooftops; left to drown, starve or die of dehydration or from lack of medical care—the whole world saw the U.S. capitalist government’s murderous racist neglect in the social disaster that was Hurricane Katrina. Tens of thousands of people, most of them black, lost the little they had. The National Guard came not to provide relief but to criminalize the victims. At all levels, the government covered up the death toll and other evidence of its culpability.

And it had all happened before. John M. Barry’s *Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How It Changed America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997) tells the story of another historic natural disaster and the government’s cover-up, lies and neglect. Then as now, racist ruling-class callousness and violence sustained the U.S. capitalist order. The Great Mississippi Flood—actually a series of floods lasting several months—deluged 27,000 square miles in seven states. After months of torrential rain, levees burst from Illinois to Louisiana. An unknown number died—certainly in the thousands. Many were buried beneath tons of river mud or washed out into the Gulf of Mexico. Hundreds of thousands

lost their homes; more than 325,000 people, most of them black, lived in Red Cross camps for as long as four months.

The unique race and class nexus of the United States spawned the 1927 flood disaster. The Civil War—the second American Revolution—had broken the chains of chattel slavery. But with the defeat of Reconstruction, the most egalitarian period in American history, the old planter aristocracy regained power. The black freedmen were politically disenfranchised, and a social order based on debt servitude—sharecropping—was established. In the Deep South of the 1920s, the machine age had scarcely touched cotton production. Jim Crow segregation, buttressed by the terror of lynch law and the Ku Klux Klan nightriders, enforced sharecropping peonage under the wealthy Bourbon planters. The spirit of white supremacy infected the whole country. The degradation of Southern black labor served to drive down wages for all workers, while the poison of race-hate retarded the development of working-class consciousness North and South.

Control of the wild waters of the Mississippi is key to the Gulf ports of Louisiana and to commercial river traffic. The

river and its tributaries reach into more than 40 percent of the continental United States. As Barry documents in his book, the interests of the banks and planters determined “flood control” policies along the Mississippi. Barry also describes engineering decisions that led to the levee system, which only worsened the inevitable natural catastrophe.

The black people who built the hundreds of miles of levees were at first slaves, then mainly sharecroppers and convicts. The levee work camps were isolated, barbaric places where the pay was even less than for picking cotton and where white foremen could literally get away with murder. During a flood in 1912, a Mississippi engineer who ran out of sandbags ordered several hundred black convicts to lie down on top of a levee while the water splashed over them. The local press suppressed the story, but the *New York Times* reported this horror as “brilliant.”

Black Lives Sacrificed to Flood Control

In 1927 as the rivers spilled over, black work gangs were rounded up to toil in dangerous and ultimately pointless attempts to stay the water. In Mounds Landing, Mississippi, north of the main Delta town of Greenville, over 2,000 black men were forced at gunpoint to fill and throw sandbags onto the levee. On April 21, the levee was breached, releasing water with a force greater than Niagara Falls. Many in the work gangs who were reinforcing the levee were swept into the torrent. The official account, by a National Guard officer at the site, stated, “No lives were lost among the Guardsmen.”

Richard Wright’s powerful story, “Down by the Riverside,” captures the nightmare of the 1927 flood. The protagonist watches men wearily toiling on the levees and unloading boats while “behind them stood soldiers with rifles.” When the levee breaks, he sees “the long lines of men merged into one whirling black mass.” Wright’s story describes the desperation and powerlessness of a black flood victim trying to save his family in a hostile world where whites are far more ominous than the awful forces of nature.

The deluge swept away everything in its path. To prevent his tenants from fleeing the desolation, one planter locked them in barns and cotton gin houses. Black people who found shelter in public buildings were driven back into the waters at gunpoint. Thousands of flood victims fled to or were forcibly driven to the narrow crowns of the levees, bringing with

them nothing but their debts to the planters. The Percy family, the main planters in Greenville, prevented blacks from boarding barges brought to evacuate the homeless masses for fear of losing their cheap labor force. In the Greenville area alone, 5,000 black people were forced to take shelter in warehouses, stores and similar facilities, while up to 13,000 more lived on an eight-mile-long levee.

In New Orleans, with its crucial banks and port facilities, newspapers refused to print flood warnings even as the waters mounted for fear of touching off panic among investors. The state and city ruling-class elite ordered the dynamiting of the levee protecting St. Bernard and Plaquemines parishes to the south of the city to create the illusion that they were doing something to save the city and its port. Some 10,000 impoverished people—mainly trappers, fishermen and bootleggers—were displaced, and few ever got more than a few dollars of compensation.

The federal government didn’t contribute a dime of direct aid to the thousands of flood victims, despite a record budget surplus. The Red Cross established racially segregated camps in the flood zones. Black families lived in floorless tents in the mud without cots, chairs or utensils, eating inferior rationed food. Sometimes forced to work on the levees without pay, black men had to wear tags identifying that they were laborers in order to receive rations, and to show which plantation they “belonged to.” Women with no working husband did not get supplies unless they had a letter from a white man.

Policing the camps, the National Guard supervised the workers, whipping and beating the men. At least one black woman was gang-raped and killed by Guardsmen. Typhoid, measles, mumps, malaria and venereal diseases ran rampant among destitute tenant farmers and mill workers already weakened from illnesses endemic to poverty, such as tuberculosis and pellagra. The *Chicago Defender* (4 June 1927) even reported that “those who die are cut open, filled with sand then tossed into the Mississippi River.” Such horrors were stark proof that the poisonous legacy of chattel slavery still infected the land some 60 years after the Civil War.

1920s America: Klan-Infested, Anti-Labor

The 1920s in the United States was a period of untrammelled capitalist greed,

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Spartacus Youth Club Events

BAY AREA

Thursday, April 20, 5 p.m.

**Finish the Civil War!
For Black Liberation Through
Socialist Revolution!**

SF State University, Rosa Parks F
Information and readings: (510) 839-0851
or e-mail: sycbayarea@sbcglobal.net

BOSTON

Saturday, April 22, 3 p.m.

**The Russian Revolution and the
Emancipation of Women**

Boston University, College of Arts and
Sciences, Room 320
725 Commonwealth Ave.
(BU Central Stop on Green Line B)
Information and readings: (617) 666-9453
or e-mail: bostonsyc@yahoo.com

CHICAGO

Tuesday, April 18, 7 p.m.

**For Women’s Liberation Through
Socialist Revolution!**

University of Chicago, 106 Cobb Hall
5811 S. Ellis Avenue
Information and readings: (312) 563-0441
or e-mail: chicagospartacist@sbcglobal.net

LOS ANGELES

Saturday, April 29, 2 p.m.

**Defend China, Cuba, North Korea and
Vietnam Against Imperialist Attack
and Capitalist Counterrevolution!**

3806 Beverly Blvd., Room 215
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NEW YORK

Wednesday, April 19, 7:30 p.m.

**—Organizing Meeting—
Free Mumia Abu-Jamal Now!
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Video Showing: From Death Row,
This Is Mumia Abu-Jamal**

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**The Working Class, the
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Black Longshoreman on Katrina Disaster:

Our New Orleans reporter spoke with a black member of International Longshoremen's Association Local 3000, who along with a friend made his way back into the flooded city and rescued some 150 people in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Below are excerpts from his story.

We had to fight our way through checkpoints, stopped over at the Wal-Mart, bought a big generator, fought our way through the police barricades, military barricades. Working for the Port of New Orleans, I had my port pass, I had my work vest. I put a work vest on my friend to make it look official, with a generator on the back of the truck, to get in through the military, to sneak back into the city.

Me and about 35 other guys began to commandeer some boats. We started a convoy, rescuing people. I brought a bull-horn with me to call out names. There were men in the outer borders of New Orleans, but no one is inside of the city trying to help the people. Yes, you heard reports of people shooting at helicopters. The reason why was because they were passing over the poor, black people that they left stranded on rooftops, in attics, on streets. There was no police department with boats. There was no sheriff's department. There was no Wildlife and Fishery. They had nobody out there. There were no military out there in boats. It was common citizens who did the right thing. They commandeered some boats, went out there and started gallantly and frantically rescuing people.

We're going out there getting everybody we can. There was an elderly lady we went to rescue, 80-years plus, on a rooftop with five Wal-Mart bags in her hands. I said, Miss, we came to get you. I said, Come on, but you can't bring your bags. She said this is all I own. I turned away, looked away. She says if this means it's going to make room for someone else to sit, I don't need nothing. She threw

"We All Gave, but We Received Nothing"

them out into the water and they floated off. What do you do, man?

There was an old lady we went to rescue at Lafayette School. She was in a wheelchair, with no legs. The helicopter

on the neutral ground in water. I cried out to them: Man, give us a hand, help us out. Guys looked over at us and kept walking. At the time of a tragedy, there was segregation. Can you believe that? But yet this



Abandoned by racist rulers, some Hurricane Katrina survivors were rescued through heroic efforts of individuals.

can't pick her up, she's dead weight. We had to put her on the boat, bring the boat to a Shell gas station where the Coast Guard could pick her up. While we try to load someone else up, the boat tips over with the lady. She's under the water. We had to go under to retrieve her, to keep her from drowning. At least she survived. I mean, what do you do?

At that point racism is alive and well. There's three white guys walking along

is America. Where is that "We're one"? "All for one and one for all"? That didn't exist here. It was an experience you could never possibly imagine.

There was a group of guys that we got together—winos that had manned boats to *save* people. The people that you pass by, sitting on a street corner drinking wine, were the heroes. Those were the people that came out, that stood up. Common everyday citi-

zens. It wasn't a policeman, it wasn't a fireman, it was the people, your neighbor. People in the neighborhoods, the same neighborhoods that they're not letting repopulate.

But yet it's "Tourism, that's what supports the city." That's a lie. The Port of New Orleans is what carries the city. Yet we have to deal with "right to work"—non-union companies. Ask me, what did the PNO [Port of New Orleans] do for the men? Nothing. We didn't receive any financial aid. Ask me: What did the city do for the workers, the port workers? Nothing. We didn't receive anything to come back. We left our families. Some families are still out there. Some of these guys don't have places to live. But yet you tell me we are all for one.

The looting? The looting, it was going on. But it was the instinct of survival. If the helicopters are passing people over, not dropping common provisions, the instinct of survival is going to kick in on you. You're going to let a loaf of bread sit on the shelf, and you go hungry? Would you do it? We have to have a better plan. If not we shall perish as a people. The media portrayed poor, black, destitute people—we're "*refugees*." How in the hell can we be refugees in the country that we fought and died for? I earned my money and my keep by the sweat of my brow.

The port is as good as the people that work there. The port is nothing without the workers. The port cannot function without the workers, but the workers' families are elsewhere, they're homeless. What is the port doing for the family members? The guys work six days, seven days a week, five days a week, around the clock, some guys. But some guys only work four days a week because they have to go up there three days a week to try to secure their family. Some guys don't have a place to live. Some guys lost everything. We all gave, but we received nothing. ■

Katrina...

(continued from page 1)

criminals—express their contempt for the black and working-class residents, who infuse this storied city with its lifeblood, by throwing up massive obstacles to their return home.

On April 1, upwards of 5,000 people joined a New Orleans protest called by Jesse Jackson's Rainbow/PUSH Coalition for the "right to return, a protected vote, and reconstruction." They marched over the Mississippi River bridge where last September black people fleeing the floodwaters were stopped at gunpoint by racist Jefferson Parish and Gretna police authorities. The protesters demanded that

the thousands of still-displaced New Orleanians be able to vote (in satellite locations) in the April 22 municipal elections. White racist candidates have crawled out of the woodwork, sensing that their time has come to "take back" the city.

The black people of New Orleans rightly perceive an attack on their democratic right to vote. The poll tax and literacy tests of Jim Crow-era elections find their present-day equivalents in the abandonment and dispersal of the black population. The spectre of Florida in 2000, when Bush stole the presidency in part by disenfranchising black voters, was invoked at the protest. One marcher expressed the concerns of many: "They want to return. Some just don't have the means to do so. I pay taxes, I work, I

raised children, I'm not a criminal" (New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, 2 April).

The protest was meant to bolster Democratic Party candidates, with speakers including former black Democratic mayor and National Urban League president Marc Morial, Al Sharpton and Bill Cosby. NAACP signs sarcastically read: "Iraq Has Fairer Elections." Many wore T-shirts for black mayor Ray Nagin, who recently acceded to demands by the largely white community in the Algiers section that no FEMA trailer parks be placed near their sanctuary. Hailed from the podium was Mitch Landrieu, lieutenant governor of Louisiana and brother of U.S. Senator Mary Landrieu, a proponent of the mainly white charter schools that have mushroomed here as public education is abandoned.

While the callous indifference of the Bush gang is obvious to all, the pathetic state of the levees and the flood control system, which contributed to the Gulf Coast disaster, is a *bipartisan* responsibility. The more than two decades of neglect of this vital infrastructure included the eight years of the Democratic Clinton administration. The Democrats and Republicans both uphold the capitalist system in which the ruling class gorges on profits while workers' jobs and pensions disappear, necessary social programs are starved for funds, and ghetto residents are considered a "surplus" population. This same profit-driven system leads to imperialist depredations abroad, such as the murderous occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan. As we wrote shortly after

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Virtually all of New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward remains uninhabitable.

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Black History and the Class Struggle
No. 19

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Katrina...

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Hurricane Katrina in “New Orleans: Racist Atrocity” (WV No. 854, 16 September 2005; reprinted in *Black History and the Class Struggle* No. 19, March 2006):

“The situation cries out for a socialist planned economy, in which natural resources and the technological and productive forces of society would be marshaled *on behalf of human needs*, not profit. What is urgently required is to build a workers party that can lead a workers revolution to rip power from the hands of the capitalist class and its political agents, right-wing Republican and liberal Democrat alike.”

The Legacy of Slavery

The pristine condition of the Robert E. Lee monument in New Orleans stands in stark contrast to the devastation of the black communities. The legacy of slavery is inescapable here—it’s impossible to describe the city without reference to the Civil War and the defeat of Reconstruction. In capitalist America, built on a foundation of black oppression rooted in chattel slavery, the ruling class and its political front men, white and black, are determining how many black people can return to New Orleans.

The abandonment and belated evacuation of the majority of the black population last year was a racist atrocity. The *continuing* racist atrocity is the enforced dispersal of the population. The black population of New Orleans has been branded criminals, looters and lazy people who watch soap operas all day. There are new code words, like the call for a city with a “smaller footprint.” Hardcore racists are preening in the streets, shouting racist epithets at black workers from their cars. And in the continuing cop rampage against the black population, on April 4 a black woman was assaulted and pepper-sprayed by a group of mainly white cops after they stopped her car.

When Bush visited the Garden District’s wealthy enclave in January, he hyped the return of infrastructure. This was but the continuation of his depraved indifference to the disaster, as revealed in Congressional hearings and on videotape. There *is no infrastructure* across whole stretches of the city. Up to 120,000 homes remain as they were when the water receded. There are precious few FEMA trailers in Orleans Parish and fewer still with utility hookups. The public school

system is largely shut down, with the concomitant destruction of some 7,000 union jobs. Health care for the working poor is virtually nonexistent, with the utterly callous and gratuitous closing down of Charity Hospital and the layoff of its staff just one example. The U.S. postal system has only begun a modicum of mail delivery.

As hurricane season approaches, the levee system has not been restored. There is simply no commitment to build levees to withstand Category Five storms. Recently, the Army Corps of Engineers acknowledged a major design flaw in the construction of existing levees that could lead



Getty

September 2005: Cops arrest New Orleans flood survivor.

to their failure. No one trusts the government on this score, as this is the land of the drive-by levee inspection.

A high percentage of displaced blacks have no means to return and nothing to return to. The “Bring New Orleans Back” commission supported by Mayor Nagin requires neighborhoods to reach a critical population mass; otherwise former residents will be forced to sell their property. In this capitalist society, where property rights are supposedly sacred, black New Orleanians have no rights the government is bound to respect. This is surely heaven for the real estate speculators, to hell with the rest.

On April 4, 80 residents of the St. Bernard Housing Development project had had enough and marched back into their homes, pushing aside Housing Authority and city cops. Two months ago, a tall steel fence was put around the project, whose first floor units had been damaged by the flood. One long-term resident told

WV: “We want to come home. This is our home. They’re not going to pretend to us that they are concerned about us. HUD is not concerned about us. I think they want to tear it down and make it private sector. Whatever they want to do with it, it don’t include black poor people.”

Immigrants and Labor

In the lead-up to the April 1 protest, Jesse Jackson complained about immigrant workers rebuilding New Orleans: “Why must people here look at people coming in from out of the country to do the work? That is humiliating” (Associ-

ated Press, 30 January). However, this kind of rhetoric was toned down on April 1, as Democratic politicians were prominently featured in nationwide protests against a Republican bill that would further criminalize immigrants. While Democrats as well as Republicans are supporting various “guest worker” bills, we oppose this new form of indentured servitude (see “Full Citizenship Rights for All Immigrants!” WV No. 867, 31 March).

There is more than a little anti-immigrant chauvinism along the Gulf Coast. One bricklayers’ union official complained that “they” don’t join unions. On one level this is simply false, since immigrant workers have become key components of a number of union organizing drives and labor battles. It is the labor tops who have failed to aggressively undertake the unionization of foreign-born workers and to organize in the face of “right-to-work” laws in the South.

In our article following Hurricane

Katrina we outlined what the labor movement should fight for: “The masses of displaced people must be provided with jobs—*union jobs* at union wage scales, with health care, housing, clothing and all other necessities.... What is needed at the minimum is a massive program of federally funded public works to rebuild New Orleans and the rest of the devastated Gulf Coast.” Racism and anti-immigrant chauvinism undermine the unity in struggle necessary to fight for what’s needed against the capitalist rulers. The labor movement must defend immigrant workers, demanding full citizenship rights for all those who have made it to the U.S. At the same time, the immigrant-derived proletariat must grasp that anti-black racism remains the touchstone of social reaction in this country.

The Gulf Coast Latin American Association reports that 30,000 Latinos have moved into the area since the storm. For the most part, they live in tents or abandoned buildings or in the very buildings they are gutting. Many have left their families behind. They are brutally exploited and very vulnerable to disease, with little access to medical care. As part of Homeland Security’s “Operation Community Shield,” there are recurrent raids on immigrant workers. They are even pounced on when they emerge from the only mobile clinic in New Orleans that treats them.

Meanwhile, the Port of New Orleans has returned to almost 100 percent operating capacity. It’s just not an option for the capitalists to allow this port to be closed for any extended period. Even Gulf Coast oil production isn’t as significant as this port, which in terms of tonnage moved is the largest in the U.S. and the fifth-largest in the world. In a 1 September 2005 article on the Stratfor Web site titled “New Orleans: A Geopolitical Prize,” George Friedman noted that the New Orleans port complex is where “bulk commodities of agriculture go out to the world and the bulk commodities of industrialism come in.”

This gives port workers like longshoremen enormous potential social power. To unleash labor’s power, there must be a fight to replace the pro-capitalist labor bureaucracy with a leadership committed to the independence of the working class from the capitalist state and its political parties. We need a workers party to lead all the exploited and the oppressed in the struggle for a workers government. ■

Flood...

(continued from page 4)

when anti-black racism and anti-immigrant bigotry reigned and a weak, craft-based labor movement meant that few workers were organized into unions. Government repression was fueled in part by fear that the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution would inspire U.S. workers. Sacco and Vanzetti, immigrant anarchists framed up for bank robbery and murder in Massachusetts, were executed in August 1927 despite massive, worldwide protests. In the South, the KKK-infested Democratic Party ran the government. In the North, the Klan had hundreds of thousands of members from Portland, Maine to Portland, Oregon, running state and city governments.

In the midst of the 1927 floods, a wave of lynchings hit the South. In Little Rock, a black man was hung from a tree and riddled with bullets. His corpse was then tied to the back of a car, dragged through the town and burned. In Mississippi, two black men were burned at the stake.

But black people fought back after the murder of James Gooden in Greenville that July. A cop had ordered Gooden to join yet another work gang after he had worked all night. When he refused, the cop killed him. Blacks, seething with anger, stopped work on the levees. They began carrying firearms along with their shovels, hoes and knives. Like virtually

every white man since Reconstruction who had killed a black man in Mississippi, the cop was never indicted. The county prosecutor was the Exalted Cyclops of the Klan.

The scale of the Great Flood was such that it contributed to the breakdown of the Southern sharecropping plantation system, as those fleeing the ravaged Delta accelerated the “Great Migration” of Southern blacks to Northern industrial cities like Chicago. During World War II, black migration from the South was boosted yet again, as labor was needed for defense industries. The “Great Migration” changed the composition of the U.S. working class and the labor movement, particularly as black workers joined the new industrial unions in the 1930s and ’40s.

Over time, as industry increased in the South, poor agrarian whites as well as blacks were proletarianized, creating an identity of interest between them. Such changes in the South created the conditions for the re-emergence of the struggle for black freedom. The mass civil rights struggles of the 1950s and ’60s finally resulted in the clearing away of the legal framework of segregation in the South. But while Jim Crow was the most blatant form of institutionalized racism in this society, the root of black oppression remains in the structural workings of the U.S. capitalist profit system, as the 2005 Gulf Coast disaster so dramatically exposed.

The sharecropping system may be gone, but by every measure of social conditions—the huge prison population, unemployment, non-existent health care and prison-like schools—black people remain an oppressed race-color caste segregated at the bottom of U.S. society. At the same time, black workers continue to be integrated into strategic sec-

Puerto Rico...

(continued from page 2)

sense of nationhood. On the other hand, there is a fear that independence for Puerto Rico, which already has a per capita income 25 percent below that of the poorest U.S. state, would mean sinking to the level of poverty of its Caribbean neighbors. There is as well a desire to hold on to the ability to live and work on the U.S. mainland, where almost three million Puerto Ricans reside.

The Spartacist League/U.S. defends the right of self-determination for Puerto Rico and demands: FBI, CIA, U.S. military out of Puerto Rico! We support political freedom for advocates of independence to organize, and we demand the release of all imprisoned independence fighters. But our Marxist perspective is counterposed to the nationalist strategy of the Macheteros, which is premised on the unity of Puerto Ricans of all classes

tors of the industrial proletariat, which alone has the power to shatter this racist capitalist system. Won to a revolutionary program, black workers will be the living link fusing the anger of the dispossessed ghetto masses with the social power of the multiracial proletariat under the leadership of a Leninist vanguard party. ■

around the call for independence. The only road to ending imperialist domination is through socialist revolution—in Puerto Rico and on the mainland. This perspective necessarily entails political struggle to break the Puerto Rican proletariat from nationalist “unity” with the local bourgeoisie. In the U.S., it means mobilizing the proletariat in opposition to the imperialist rulers and their Democratic and Republican parties.

As we wrote in our article protesting the assassination of Filiberto Ojeda Ríos:

“We seek to unite Puerto Rican workers and the multiracial working class in the U.S. in common struggle against U.S. imperialism, from Central America to the Caribbean and the U.S. We fight to forge Trotskyist parties to lead the workers to power both on the mainland and in Puerto Rico. A victorious workers revolution in the U.S. would immediately free Puerto Rico and all other nations subjugated by U.S. imperialism and establish relations with them on the basis of their freedom to exercise their national self-determination.” ■

France...

(continued from page 1)

say that what is needed is a struggle of the working class to overthrow the entire capitalist system. Capitalism is based on the exploitation of the workers by the capitalists. It is impossible to make it work in the interests of the workers; it can't be reformed.

We have mobilized all our forces over the last several weeks in order to intervene into this struggle and have received many reinforcements from our international, as you can see in this room today. We intervened to outline a revolutionary perspective. We said in our March 29 leaflet:

“We warn against the betrayal being prepared by the union bureaucrats and reformists. In this struggle, their real aim is to win the 2007 elections by forming a new bourgeois alliance between the reformist workers parties (PS, PCF and maybe LCR) and small bourgeois parties such as the Chevènementistes, the Left Radicals and the Greens—a new popular front like [former PS prime minister Lionel] Jospin's ‘Plural Left,’ with a new look.”

This is the main danger now looming on the horizon. In France, the classic mechanism by which reformist workers parties subordinate the working class to the bourgeoisie is the popular front. This is how they strangled the possibility of workers revolution in June 1936. They present the popular front as an alliance of progressive forces to defeat the right wing. In reality, it is a parliamentary alliance with bourgeois parties, which is necessarily based on a bourgeois program of managing capitalism. The bourgeoisie and the workers have fundamentally counterposed and antagonistic interests. We struggle for a socialist revolution and fight to build a party of the Bolshevik type capable of leading the workers to victory.

This is what fundamentally differentiates us from all of our opponents such as the LCR or LO [Lutte Ouvrière], which on occasion claim to be revolutionary or Trotskyist. Their whole strategy is limited to trying to pressure the bourgeoisie into making a few concessions, which can be granted today but taken away tomorrow.

The CPE and the Trade-Union Bureaucracy

Listening carefully to the union bureaucrats' reaction to Chirac's recent speech, you may have noticed that their biggest regret regarding what he said about the CPE was that he rejected negotiations with them. They define themselves as “social partners,” i.e., partners of the bourgeoisie. In our last leaflet, we noted that [CGT union federation leader] Bernard Thibault signed a servile declaration of loyalty to Chirac last week, recalling that the CGT had called to vote for him four years ago (as did the SUD union federation, the PS, the PCF and the LCR).

The attitude of these bureaucrats re-

flects their ambition to manage capitalism, which can only be done on the backs of the workers and the oppressed. In our leaflet against the Bolkestein Directive [an anti-worker measure to “liberalize” internal markets that was adopted by the European Union parliament] reprinted in *Le Bolchévik* [No. 175, March 2006], we said:

“The trade-union bureaucrats rest on a relatively privileged layer of workers, in large part men of French or European descent. They benefit from a few crumbs thrown at them by the capitalists and, based on these privileges, spread the illusion that workers have common interests with their ‘own’ capitalists, and that they must therefore work in partnership to strengthen ‘their’ capitalism against its foreign competitors. In reality, capitalist society is everywhere based on the same fundamental antagonism between workers and capitalists: the capitalists exploit the workers to extract their profits. When the bureaucrats promote collaboration between the working class and the bourgeoisie, they work to maintain the capitalist system and are an obstacle to the struggle for liberation from wage slavery through workers revolution.”

The Struggle Against Unemployment

In this framework, social democrats such as the PS scarcely even promise reforms anymore, but simply present themselves as a lesser evil than the unbridled attacks of the right. They may promise to get rid of the CPE and other repressive measures, but when they run the capitalist government, they necessarily go after the working class—in collaboration with the union bureaucrats. The maximum program of the “far left” is to maintain the status quo. They propose to maintain the welfare state, in its current sorry state, and that's about it.

To sound a radical note, the LCR demands “banning layoffs.” With such a demand, which is also one of LO's favorites, they only spread the illusion that capitalism could function in the workers' interest. Layoffs are inherent to capitalism. The capitalists maintain a reserve army of unemployed workers to exert a downward pressure on wages and working conditions. The Jospin government talked about an “irreducible unemployment rate” of 8 percent, below which there would be labor shortages and demands for wage increases from the workers. Jospin introduced the five-year CDDs [fixed-length work contracts] as “youth jobs” and the Aubry Law on the 35-hour workweek that served to freeze wages as well as hiring through a massive increase in labor flexibility and thus productivity.

Supposedly, the CPE is aimed at combatting unemployment. In reality, what it means is not that the bosses can more easily hire, but that they can more easily fire. The goal of the CPE is to raise the workers' rate of exploitation by forcing them to accept worse working conditions for fear of losing their jobs. “Banning layoffs” solves nothing for the 4.5 million people registered today with the ANPE [employment bureau], not to men-



François Préneau

Above: Members of SUD union federation in Nantes demand revoking of youth jobs law, April 4. Below: Protesting students occupy Gare de Lyon train yard in Paris, March 30.



AP

tion those, notably women, who aren't even registered. In the face of the unemployment that today bedevils this society, affecting in particular women and youth, particularly those of the suburban ghettos, here's what Trotsky wrote in his 1938 Transitional Program:

“The *right to employment* is the only serious right left to the worker in a society based upon exploitation. This right today is being shorn from him at every step. Against unemployment, ‘structural’ as well as ‘conjunctural,’ the time is ripe to advance, along with the slogan of public works, the slogan of *a sliding scale of working hours*. Trade unions and other mass organizations should bind the workers and the unemployed together in the solidarity of mutual responsibility. On this basis all the work on hand would then be divided among all existing workers in accordance with how the extent of the working week is defined. The average wage of every worker remains the same as it was under the old working week. Wages, with a strictly guaranteed *minimum*, would follow the movement of prices. It is impossible to accept any other program for the present catastrophic period....

“If capitalism is incapable of satisfying the demands inevitably arising from the calamities generated by itself, then let it perish. ‘Realizability’ or ‘unrealizability’ is in the given instance a question of the relationship of forces, which can be decided only by the struggle. By means of this struggle, no matter what its immediate practical successes may be, the workers will best come to understand the necessity of liquidating capitalist slavery.”

This gives you the basic framework for our approach. The current strikes and demonstrations graphically demonstrated the power of the working class, even though the unions in France are the weakest in Europe, with a rate of union membership of only 5 percent among private-sector workers. Moreover, the unions are divided at each work site among several union organizations, all of which depend more on the good graces of the bosses and of the state for their financing than on their own membership. Subcontracting support services, such as cafeterias, cleaning or maintenance—where there is a higher proportion of women, immigrant workers or youth of North and Sub-Saharan African origin—is also a way for the bosses to weaken the trade unions. We fight for strong, *indus-*

trial unions that draw all the workers of a given industry into a single union. We fight to *organize the unorganized*. We fight for *full citizenship rights for all immigrants*.

The goal of the CPE is to create such a climate of fear of layoffs that young workers dare not join the unions, nor even seek out union delegates at work to defend them. Students and unions went into revolt against the CPE, which is indeed targeted at them. But for once, de Villepin told the truth when he said that the CPE is aimed first and foremost at the *banlieue* youth. There is an unemployment rate of up to 50 percent among youth in those projects. But this also means that more than 50 percent are employed, one-third of whom are in industrial jobs. Far from being just victims of racist oppression, *banlieue* youth are also workers and future workers. They are at the core of the only class with the power and the historic mission to overthrow capitalism, the working class. Over the last year, there have been a series of strikes, such as at the Citroën auto plant in Aulnay-sous-Bois, where youth of North African and Sub-Saharan African origins played a key role. The implementation of the CPE would particularly weaken this layer of youth. As we wrote in our 15 March supplement against the CPE [see WV No. 867, 31 March]:

“The CPE is all about undermining the integrity of the working class by reinforcing the divisions between young and old and between dark-skinned youth of non-European origin and those of European origin. It's an attempt to manipulate youth, especially those from the ghettos, against the trade unions themselves. To repel this attack, the workers movement must overcome the narrow limits of trade unionism and confront head-on the special oppression of immigrants and of French-born youth of North African and African origin. The workers movement must fight racist segregation in housing, education and hiring.”

The Anti-“Casseurs” Popular Front

Class collaboration by the union bureaucrats and reformists with the capitalists was reflected last week in their support to the government's racist campaign against the *banlieue* youth, who

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Reuters

Paris, March 28: Plainclothes cops beat youth at end of protest by student groups and trade unions.

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At the time of the November [*banlieue*] revolt, the left didn't defend these youth. This betrayal encouraged de Villepin to launch the CPE. At the time, the PS supported the state of emergency, the PCF called for re-establishing order and the LCR tailed the PCF. LO also signed an appeal to re-establish order, which it later called an "idiocy, but a minor one." It was minor for LO, but not for the hundreds of youth who received hard-time jail sentences.

The bureaucrats backed off from Sarkozy's most extreme measures, but at bottom they nonetheless consider that the cops can be allies of the workers against the "*casseurs*." More generally, they see the cops as "workers in uniform"; all unions, including the SUD, agree it's OK to organize cops. This form of class collaboration is within the unions themselves. We say: *Cops, security guards and prison guards out of the unions and the workers movement!*

In the midst of the revolt in the *banlieues* in early November, we demanded that the imprisoned youths be immediately released and that all charges against them be dropped. We are very well known for our opposition to Vigipirate, a racist scheme that includes the occupation of the transit system by cops and the military.

WORKERS VANGUARD 10c
 Published weekly from 1935 to 1967
 13 April 1966

**Down With Racist U.S. Imperialism!
 For Socialist Revolution on Both Sides of the Border!
 Full Citizenship Rights
 for All Immigrants!**

**Joint Declaration of the Spartacist League/U.S.
 and the Grupo Espartaquista de Mexico**

100 HR 4437

The reformists' position for amnesty for the arrested *banlieue* youth is likewise in contradiction to what they do on the ground. They systematically opposed, or prevented from coming to a vote, motions we put forward in student general assemblies at the Paris 8, Jussieu and Rouen campuses in late March that simply demanded freedom for all the youth, including the youth from the November ghetto revolt. In practice, the reformists did not even go as far as the platform adopted at the Student Coordination meeting in Toulouse, which on February 25 (before the anti-*"casseurs"* campaign) demanded an end to repression and amnesty for convicted youth. This referred to all youth arrested during the movement a year ago against the Fillon Law [instituting cutbacks in high school

A final note on this racist anti-“casseurs” campaign. LO is continuing it. Yesterday in Paris they distributed a special supplement, which is very rare for them, in order to denounce the “hooligans.” But the rest of the left, except to my knowledge the PS, has distanced itself from this campaign, starting with the Student Coordination which last weekend, as I heard, chanted, “We are all casseurs.” If you read the PCF’s *l’Humanité* today, you would have to be struck by the tone, which was totally anti-repression, denouncing the arbitrariness and the police violence, etc. One could almost ask oneself whether this is the same newspaper that one week ago was denouncing the cops for not being severe enough against the “real casseurs.”

Olympia/Action Press
“Fortress Europe”: Italian police seize refugee ship in Sicilian port of Catania.

really hot, and the next week they disappear all trace of their crimes. The only constant thing is their opportunism.

For all the strength of the mobilization against de Villepin over the question of the CPE, in the demonstrations we have run into implicit support to the same Chirac/de Villepin government over the question of Iran. We have encountered not a few hostile remarks against our placard stating that Iran needs nuclear weapons if it is to be able to defend itself against the imperialist threat. In reality, the nuclear blackmail comes from the imperialists. It is Chirac, not Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who has threatened to use nuclear weapons; it is French imperialism, not the regime of the Iranian mullahs, that has extensively used chemical weapons.

Many militants on the left are worried about the reactionary Iranian mullahs getting nuclear weapons, and they place their trust in French imperialism on this question. These militants are often members or supporters of organizations like the LCR, which in 1978-79 supported the “Iranian revolution” of Ayatollah Khomeini. At the time, they claimed this was an “anti-imperialist revolution,” and some leftists even called the veil a symbol of resistance to the pro-American regime of the Shah of Iran. We uniquely said at the time, “Down with the Shah! Don’t bow to Khomeini!” and fought for a workers revolution in Iran.

Possessing these armaments or having the capacity to produce them is not optional for these powers. They need them, and other types of weapons, to impose their interests on other peoples of the world, to assure the security of their foreign investments. If they disarmed, what country would honor its debts? Wouldn't their rivals immediately seize the opportunity to appropriate their share of the pillage of the "Third World" and more generally of the profits to be realized on the international market? What are termed "property rights"—whether in the form of loans, direct investments or trade agreements—are only pieces of paper if there is not an armed force to enforce them. Every Mafia loan shark knows that if he does not have at his command someone who can break the neck of his debtors, he will have a much lower rate of return.

For all these reasons, pacifists are merely petty bourgeois who lull themselves and breed illusions that an end to imperialist war can be achieved without workers revolution to overthrow the capitalist system. Having a maximum program of “peace,” “democracy” and “the Republic” comes down to supporting one’s own “democratic” imperialism. On the left, one often comes across opposition to French troops in the Ivory Coast. Of course we are for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all French troops from the Ivory Coast. But also, and this is a less popular position, we demand their withdrawal from the Balkans, where French soldiers are supposedly “peace-keepers,” and Afghanistan, where they are supposedly fighting the “war on terror.”

For a Socialist United States of Europe

To understand the current capitalist offensive and working-class resistance to the CPE and other government attacks, it is necessary to understand the historic conjuncture in which we are situated, fundamentally marked by the destruction

of the Soviet Union. The Cold War, which lasted more than 40 years between the Second World War and the counterrevolution in the USSR, created significant economic costs for the bourgeoisie. In the U.S., it led to a disproportionate military budget. In West Europe, the overhead was quite different. It consisted of social welfare programs considered necessary to win support, or at least passive acceptance, by the workers for the political and military mobilization against the USSR.

Immediately after the collapse of the USSR, the U.S. considerably and rather easily reduced its military budget. But for the bourgeoisies of West Europe, the drive to liquidate the welfare state was accompanied by working-class resistance and a series of defensive battles. Wage costs remain relatively high in West Europe; thus profits are relatively low, and the growth rates of the French and German economies for the last 15 years have remained markedly weaker than in the U.S. This has prevented the European imperialist powers from amassing the necessary surplus to close the military gap vis-à-vis U.S. imperialism. You have seen Chirac’s efforts in recent years to rearm: they have been very modest and have run up against a substantial budgetary deficit.

Despite the resentment of the French and German bourgeoisies toward Bush’s adventurist policy in Iraq, they are now collaborating more closely than they did three years ago with the U.S. and the British on the question of Iran. This has nothing to do with any supposed anti-nuclear-proliferation pacifism on the part of the French imperialist bourgeoisie that carried out over a hundred nuclear tests in [the South Pacific island] Mururoa.

The dismantling of the welfare state is an iron necessity for French imperialism, which is much weaker than the U.S. and even Germany. In the closing years of Chancellor Gerhard Schröder’s Social Democratic-led government, Germany succeeded in significantly reducing wages while lengthening the workday. Then Schröder campaigned against the economic “ultra-liberalism” of Christian Democrat Angela Merkel—to end up forming a coalition government with her. This government is based on a program that includes a German version of the CPE—except that the Social Democrats agreed that their CPE should target not only those under 26 but everyone.

The social crisis in France is deep-going. But throughout Europe there are very important class struggles going on. In Germany there have been public sector strikes for two months now, opposing among other things the return of the 40-hour week; a metal workers strike looms. In Britain on March 28, the day of the strike here, there were 1.5 million municipal public service workers on strike against the dismantling of their pensions.

Today in France the social democrats of the PS and the PCF are in the opposition, so they make fine speeches. But at bottom they collaborate with the European bourgeoisies, which are driving to destroy working-class gains. They recently opposed the Bolkestein Directive, but in fact the French social democrat Pascal Lamy, who had been previously named by Jospin as a European commissioner, had signed a version of the directive much worse than the one that was

adopted. The aim of the Bolkestein Directive is to pit French workers against East European workers. Following the destruction of the Polish and East European deformed workers states, these workers have been thrown on the unemployment heap. Now, they are being used by the bourgeoisie to do away with social gains in the West. Our slogan, *full citizenship rights for all immigrants*, is particularly important to undercut the chauvinist poison that serves to divide the working class.

The reformists call for a capitalist “social Europe.” We, on the other hand, oppose the European Union from a proletarian, internationalist and revolu-



French armored vehicle moves through Kosovo as part of imperialist occupation force, 2000.

tionary perspective. Only the taking of state power by the working class and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat in at least several advanced capitalist countries will allow the setting up of a rationally planned economy placing the productive capacity of Europe at the service of the peoples of the whole world. Only on this basis can one speak of the *socialist* united states of Europe.

Our Struggle to Defend the Workers States

There is a link between the CPE and the destruction of the USSR, which has encouraged the capitalists’ attempts to destroy the gains of the working class in West Europe. Likewise, the position of the left groups on the question of the CPE is not unrelated to the position that they had with respect to the Soviet Union. For example, the LCR backed President François Mitterrand (for whom they had voted) in order to support Solidarność’s capitalist-restorationist bid for power in Poland in December 1981. Just like Mitterrand, Lutte Ouvrière in 1989 supported the drive for the capitalist reunification of Germany.

The Soviet Union issued out of the Russian Revolution of October 1917, when the Russian workers took power in their own hands, destroying the bourgeois state and establishing a workers state. Capitalism is a system based on the nation-state because the bourgeoisie is a nationally based class. We fight for international socialist revolution—for the collectivization of the means of production and international planning of this collectivized economy.

The failure of the German Revolution in 1923 delayed the perspective of the extension of Soviet proletarian power to industrialized West Europe. The Soviet Union was then largely a backward agricultural country, with an industrial base that was highly concentrated in particular cities but also very limited. The failed German revolution left the USSR isolated, which was a crucial factor for the usurpation of political power by a parasitic bureaucracy. The Stalinist bureaucracy claimed that it was possible to build socialism in a single country. In practice, that meant strangling revolution elsewhere in the name of peaceful coexistence with imperialism.

In spite of the bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet Union, it remained a workers state. We Trotskyists fought to defend and extend the gains of the Rus-

sian Revolution. We were for the unconditional military defense of the USSR against imperialism and counterrevolution. We fought for workers political revolution to oust the Stalinist bureaucracy that undermined the workers state from within. We waged this fight to the end. In particular, when the Berlin Wall fell in November 1989, we threw all our forces into the fight for proletarian political revolution in East Germany against the collapsing Stalinist bureaucracy. We fought for a Red Germany of workers councils, that is, the revolutionary reunification of Germany on a socialist basis. We lost. Gorbachev gave up East Germany to German imperialism, and

less than two years later Yeltsin took power in Moscow and led the counter-revolution that destroyed the workers state and re-established a capitalist state. Once more we sought to mobilize the working class in defense of the workers state, to sweep away Yelstin’s and Bush Sr.’s barricades in August 1991.

The counterrevolution in the USSR marked a turning point in history. Our banner remains unstained. In contrast, in the name of the struggle for “democracy,” the LCR openly took the side of Yeltsin. At the time, they produced a national leaflet declaring “full solidarity with all those men and women who stood on the barricades, facing the threat of tanks.”

This is not merely a historical question. Today, in contrast to our pseudo-Trotskyist opponents, we stand for the unconditional military defense of the remaining deformed workers states—China, Cuba, Vietnam and North Korea—while fighting for workers political revolution to establish regimes based on workers democracy and revolutionary internationalism. A victory for capitalist counterrevolution in China would be a terrible defeat not only for the workers in China, but indeed in the entire world.

The Need for a Bolshevik Party

Today, parties and groups on the left claim to seek to lead struggles against attacks like the CPE, which are in fact indirect results of the counterrevolution. They have learned nothing from their betrayal regarding the USSR. In April 1940, Trotsky wrote in “Balance Sheet of the Finnish Events” (*In Defense of Marxism*): “It is the duty of revolutionists to defend every conquest of the working class even though it may be distorted by the pressure of hostile forces. Those who cannot defend old positions will never conquer new ones.”

Today we continue to be reproached for our defense of the USSR. In the protests against the CPE, many people tell us that they really like the headlines of our paper, but they dislike its name. They dislike it because they understand that the name “*Le Bolchévick*” lays claim to the Russian Revolution, and they have partly or wholly absorbed the lying campaign of the social democrats, the anarchists and the bourgeoisie about the “80 million dead” allegedly as a result of Bolshevism.

We said in our first leaflet on the CPE that this isn’t 1968. In saying that, we don’t mean that a social explosion is

impossible. On the contrary, the situation is favorable to class struggle because the government has been substantially weakened since the defeat of the referendum on the European Constitution. The bourgeoisie is divided and the working class has suffered so many attacks over the last three years that all the ingredients have come together for a deepgoing struggle.

The most important difference with respect to May ’68 concerns the political outlook of the working class. Forty years ago the great mass of workers supported the Stalinist PCF, and many advanced workers thought that socialism was something achievable. Even if there were problems in the USSR, its very existence proved that a system where the capitalists were expropriated could function, and moreover in the interests of the workers. Even a liberal at that time might have called himself a “Marxist-Leninist,” Bolshevik, etc.

In May ’68 the French bourgeoisie feared revolution. So it offered a compromise that the PCF seized upon, thus snuffing out the possibility of revolution. Today, apart from ourselves, hardly anyone thinks it is reasonable to want to overthrow the capitalist system. The bourgeoisie understands this well, and that is why it has so brutally (and stupidly) launched the current attacks. The stock exchange has even risen by 10 percent since the beginning of the year. Among workers there is political demoralization, which must be overcome to break the vicious circle of “left-” and right-wing capitalist governments and fight for socialist revolution to destroy the capitalist system.

We saw the power of the working class in the strikes yesterday, last week, and in October in Marseille, in the strikes by dockers, the seamen of the SNCM ferry line and the transit workers. The workers still have the social power to overturn the capitalist system. What they lack to take the struggle to the end is consciousness of their own strength and historic responsibility to be the grave-diggers of the capitalist order. They also lack the revolutionary leadership to lead them to the victory that the Russian workers had in October 1917. Our task is to build a party to win the majority of the working class to our revolutionary perspective. Our political opponents are an obstacle to this because, continually telling workers that all they can hope for is slowing down the pace of the attacks, they set up the proletariat for big defeats. The building of revolutionary parties—national sections of a reformed Fourth International—is the central task confronting us, a task we will accomplish. We call on you to make our battle yours and to join us! ■

CORRECTION

In “Mass Protests Shake France” (WV No. 867, 31 March), we wrote, referring to a 1998 government attack on minority youth and the current racist attacks, “Then as now, the LTF was unique on the French left” in coming to the defense of the arrested youth. But as the accompanying article explains, while other left groups initially refused to defend the youth arrested during last fall’s ghetto revolt, several have since raised the call for amnesty for those arrested.

Just Out!

LE BOLCHEVIK

4

LE BOLCHEVIK

4

LE BOLCHEVIK

4

LE BOLCHEVIK

4

A bas la loi raciste sur l'«égalité des chances» visant les jeunes des banlieues!

A bas le CPE!

PCF, LCR veulent canaliser les protestations vers l'élection d'un nouveau «front populaire» capitaliste

A bas la directive antisyndicale Bolkestein!

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Le Bolchévick

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Bolivia...

(continued from page 12)

perspective of spreading elsewhere in Latin America and, crucially, to the advanced capitalist countries, particularly the United States. But what has been missing since the inception of the protests in Bolivia has been participation by an organized proletariat. This in turn reflects not only the petty-bourgeois nationalist outlook of the protest leaders but the material devastation and atomization of the working class itself since the 1980s. Indeed, one of the bourgeoisie’s reasons for shutting down the state tin mines was to get rid of thousands of the miners, who had been some of the most class-conscious workers in Latin America.

The changed social composition of the recent protests has been noted by numerous individuals, including some who hail Bolivia’s “social movements.” Thus, in an article posted on the reformist Left Turn organization’s Web site, “El Alto: Epicenter of the New Bolivian Resistance” (19 January 2005), Jim Straub wrote:

“The IMF and World Bank’s economic ‘reforms’ wiped out entire sectors of the Bolivian economy—mining, manufacturing, and the public sector—that employed mass numbers of organized revolutionaries....

“Denied a livelihood in sectors like mining or public service, unemployed Bolivians gravitated to the few industries where there was any economic opportunity, the informal sector—which basically means the massive black market and street-level retail that dominates Latin America now—and coca growing....

“Whereas once armed miners and factory workers brought down governments, this past year it was indigenous associations of informal market workers and militant coca growers who forced corrupt President Sanchez Lozada to resign and flee the country.”

Permanent Revolution and Bolivia

In countries of combined and uneven development, the national bourgeoisie’s weakness and dependence on imperialism makes it incapable of achieving the gains realized by the French Revolution and other classic bourgeois revolutions, which laid the basis for economic modernization and the creation of an industrial society. As Trotsky wrote in *The Permanent Revolution* (1931):

“With regard to countries with a belated bourgeois development, especially the colonial and semi-colonial countries, the theory of the permanent revolution signifies that the complete and genuine solution of their tasks of achieving *democracy and national emancipation* is conceivable only through the dictatorship of the proletariat as the leader of the subjugated nation, above all of its peasant masses.”

In explaining the perspective of permanent revolution, Trotsky stressed that “the conquest of power by the proletariat does not complete the revolution, but only opens it. Socialist construction is conceivable only on the foundation of the class struggle, on a national and international scale.” The 1917 Russian Revolution broke imperialism at its “weakest link,” a backward, mainly peasant country. Generalizing from this experience, Trotsky insisted



Mercado/Reuters photos



June 2004: Soldier (above) closes gate at Caracoles tin mine occupied by unemployed miners demanding work at nearby mines. Woman carrying her goods outside mine.

that a socialist order, which would provide material abundance for all, could not be constructed within the confines of one state. Ultimately the capitalist system had to be destroyed at its strongest points, the advanced industrial states. The proletarians of the more backward countries had to be linked to its class brothers and sisters in the West through an international revolutionary party.

The struggle of the working masses in Bolivia has been a negative confirmation of the perspective of permanent revolution. In 1952, in 1970-71 and again in 1985 the proletariat, with the tin miners in the lead, engaged in powerful actions, up to and including outright insurrection. But these struggles were betrayed by the workers’ misleaders, who tied the proletariat to the class enemy by preaching the need to ally with a supposedly “anti-imperialist” bourgeoisie. The coalition governments (popular fronts) that the workers’ misleaders entered into with the bourgeois nationalists strengthened the forces of capitalist reaction, leading time and again to military coups and bonapartist rule.

While past struggles were defeated by the betrayals of the workers’ leadership, the material devastation of Bolivia—in particular the shutting down of the tin mines and much of industry—raises another issue. The proletarian instrumentality for overturning capitalism has been qualitatively diminished. If one looks at only the relationship of forces within Bolivia itself, this period does not augur well for the struggle against imperialism and its domestic bourgeois agents. As Trotsky stressed in *The Permanent Revolution*:

“Under the conditions of the imperialist epoch the national democratic revolution can be carried through to a victorious end only when the social and political relationships of the country are mature for putting the proletariat in power as the leader of the masses of the people. And if this is not yet the case? Then the struggle for national liberation will produce only very partial results, results directed entirely against the working masses.”

Militants radicalized by the depredations of imperialism and capitalism in Bolivia must grasp the necessity of linking the struggles of the Bolivian masses to those in adjoining countries such as Brazil, Chile and Argentina, where there are more viable concentrations of the proletariat, as well as to the struggles of the North American working class. This proletarian-internationalist perspective is sorely lacking among the pseudo-

Marxists who have enthused over the recent protests and their petty-bourgeois and bourgeois-nationalist leadership.

A case in point in the U.S. is the reformist International Socialist Organization (ISO), which cheered Mesa’s resignation with a *Socialist Worker* (17 June 2005) article, headlined “Victory in Bolivia!” that exclaimed: “Although the fight for nationalization of gas and oil is not yet resolved, the social movements have delivered a stunning blow to the Bolivian oligarchy and U.S. imperialism.”

Also fatuously enthusing over the 2005 upheaval is the Internationalist Group (IG), whose founding members found their way out of the International Communist League in the mid 1990s due to their irrepressible appetites to cheer for forces remote from the working class. The IG turned an accusing finger on us in their *Internationalist* (December 2005). They pontificate:

“For its part, the now centrist Spartacist tendency has reached a new low as its Mexican comrades now denounce us for calling for soviets in the May-June Bolivian events, claiming this is impossible since according to them there is ‘no working class in Bolivia today’ (never mind the thousands of factories in the city of El Alto alone). In other words, these fake-Trotskyists believe socialist revolution is impossible in Bolivia.”

Although the IG evokes “thousands of factories in the city of El Alto alone,” these are, for the most part, not “factories” in the usual meaning of the word

but small, often family-run and -owned textile shops and sweatshops. As Straub puts it, they are “people without regular work, union representation, or even the proverbial Boss to struggle against.” This is on top of the extensive unemployment in El Alto.

Writing in *CounterPunch* (14 October 2005), Raúl Zibechi notes:

“With regard to jobs, El Alto is characterized by self-employment. Seventy percent of the employed population works in family-run businesses (50%), or semi-business sectors (20%). These jobs are mostly in sales and the restaurant business (95% of the employed population), followed by construction and manufacturing.”

What often pass as “trade unions” are in fact groupings of artisans and the self-employed. A case in point is the Regional Workers Center (COR), which was a leading component of the El Alto protests. Noting the emergence in the 1970s of labor federations for merchants and artisans with “a strong territorial worker identity,” Zibechi wrote: “Thus emerged trade unions and organizations of artisans and vendors, bakers and butchers, who in 1988 created the COR, now joined by local bars, guesthouses, and municipal employees. These groups are mostly made up of small businesses owners and self-employed workers, a social sector that in other countries is not usually organized.”

Reading the IG’s breathless accounts of Bolivian events (gathered on its Web site under the grandiloquent title of “Bolivia: Class Battles in the Andes”), one would never know that anything had changed in the world over the past 20 years, whether in Bolivia or elsewhere. The IG denies the magnitude of the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union and the retrogression of proletarian consciousness worldwide accompanying this defeat. The purpose of this is to prettify existing reality in the hope of passing off as “revolutionary” the alien class forces they accommodate—whether it be burnt-out Stalinist sellouts from the DDR East German deformed workers state, trade-union opportunists in Brazil, or the like (see “Norden’s ‘Group’: Shamefaced Defectors from Trotskyism,” *International Bulletin* No. 38, June 1996, which can be ordered from the Spartacist Publishing Company).

The IG is a past master at denying reality. It can conjure up a fraternal section in Ukraine made up of total counterfeits (see “IG’s Potemkin Village Idiocy *Ad Absurdum*,” *WV* No. 828, 11 June 2004). The IG can conjure up a proletariat where it barely, if at all, exists, while it ignores powerful concentrations of the working class. Thus it’s notable that while the IG has written scads of articles on Bolivia (literally seven in the Summer 2005 issue of their press alone), it has mainly ignored East Asia—China, Japan and Korea—which has become an industrial heartland of the world.

The 1952 Revolution

In 1952 the Bolivian working class, led by tin miners organized in the FSTMB miners union, spearheaded a promising



August 2003: 12,000 Brazilian auto workers protested threatened job cuts at Volkswagen plant near São Paulo.



MNR

Left: Armed Bolivian miners, 1952. Workers revolution was derailed by popular front led by Víctor Paz Estenssoro. Right: Miners raise up Paz Estenssoro during visit to Catavi mine, 1959.



Reuters

opportunity for workers revolution. In April of that year an attempted coup sparked an insurrection in which armed workers defeated the army. A powerful labor federation, the Central Obrera Boliviana (COB), was formed and became the primary authority not only for organized labor but for much of the peasantry and urban petty bourgeoisie. As miners demanded workers control of the newly nationalized tin mines and peasants anticipated the promised land reform by seizing some large estates, COB top Juan Lechín joined the bourgeois government of Víctor Paz Estenssoro's Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNR). Thus Lechín and other "workers ministers" became the bourgeoisie's instrument to subordinate the aroused masses to the capitalist regime.

At the time, the POR (Revolutionary Workers Party), an ostensibly Trotskyist organization, enjoyed real influence in the COB executive. The POR was led by Guillermo Lora, who became known for his national Menshevism and contempt for anything outside the borders of Bolivia, boasting that "Bolivia is the richest experience of world Trotskyism." Lora demonstrated his disdain for the lessons of the Russian Revolution, not least the need for the political independence of the working class. The POR supported Lechín's entry into the bourgeois government, asserting that it "supports the left wing faction of the new cabinet," and called on Paz Estenssoro to "realize the hopes of the workers by organizing a cabinet composed exclusively of men of the left of his [bourgeois!] party." In counterposition, the Bolsheviks in 1917 refused any support to the bourgeois Kerensky government, exposed the reformist Menshevik and Social Revolutionary class traitors who joined the government, and led the working masses to shatter bourgeois rule through proletarian revolution (see "Revolution and Counterrevolution in Bolivia," *Spartacist* [English-

language edition] No. 40, Summer 1987).

The nationalization of the tin mines as well as a modest agrarian reform were among the concessions granted by the Bolivian bourgeoisie in 1952 as a means of staving off revolution. However, as subsequent events proved, such reforms are eminently reversible. Indeed, as the threat of social revolution receded, the capitalists began to move against the workers. The army was rebuilt with U.S. dollars and advisers, on the basis of a decree cosigned by Lechín. This army became notorious for its bloody massacres of the combative miners. By 1957 the MNR felt sufficiently secure to invite the U.S. to take over the Bolivian economy under the "Triangular Plan" of austerity and union-busting.

When the IG today gushes over the FSTMB miners' participation in protests, it is trying to dupe the uninformed reader into believing the FSTMB is still the spearhead of the militant proletariat. This is sheer chicanery. Between 1985 and 1987 the state tin mining company reduced its workforce from 30,000 to 7,000; subsequently the operations were privatized. The Library of Congress, in its country study on Bolivia, notes, "The restructuring of the nationalized mining sector, especially the mass layoffs, had decimated the FSTMB." The bulk of the people working in the industry today are in fact engaged, along with their families, in sifting through the remains of closed mines or straining minerals out of rivers, selling what they find on the black market or on the street. Their atomized position makes them more akin to petty-bourgeois prospectors rather than proletarians.

The COB, the historic union federation of 1952, has also changed radically. As Herbert S. Klein notes in *A Concise History of Bolivia* (2003): "The base of the radical left has been transformed with the decline of the old labor central, the COB, and the miner's FSTMB and the rise of new peasant organizations.... Soon the

CSUTCB [peasant confederation] held a major stake in the COB and would eventually take over its leadership and reorient its demands toward these new themes."

It is a logical consequence of the recent protests that Bolivia's new leader is a farmer. His crop, and that of his social base, is coca, which after the collapse of the tin market became a key export. In fact, the coca farmers "union" has supplanted the FSTMB as the strongest component of the COB!

U.S.-imposed drug eradication programs—carried out under both Democratic and Republican administrations—brought financial ruin to Bolivia's coca farmers. Morales seeks to cooperate with the U.S. in eradicating cocaine production while hoping that Washington will allow him to "depenalize" the coca leaf. Coca has many traditional uses. Many chew it to alleviate hunger pains—a powerful inducement in the second-poorest country of the Western Hemisphere. The Bush administration, however, is predictably hostile to anything having to do with coca. This puts Morales in a tight spot between his social base and the imperialists he is seeking to placate. As Marxists, we oppose the U.S. rulers' "war on drugs" and call for decriminalizing drug use.

For Socialist Revolution Throughout the Americas!

Numerous commentators have predicted that if Morales doesn't carry out his campaign pledges, he will fall as did the previous two presidents. This may be true. Then again, Bolivia has had almost 200 governments since gaining independence from Spain in 1825, and each has administered economic exploitation and misery. It points to the weakness of Bolivia's bourgeoisie that a president can be toppled largely through activities as simple as blocking its main roads. In the context of tremendous backwardness, Bolivia's instability recalls what Trotsky, addressing Spain's chronic turmoil, called "the chronic convulsions expressing the intractable disease of a nation thrown backward" ("The Revolution in Spain," 24 January 1931).

Confined to the borders of Bolivia and with the proletariat absent as an organized force, the social upheavals that grow out of the country's instability can only result in

some variant of capitalist rule. What is crucially necessary is to build an international revolutionary workers party that can link the struggles of Bolivia's impoverished masses—particularly of those proletarians that exist—to the powerful working class that exists in other Latin American countries, the U.S. and elsewhere. Such a party will be built in Latin America in sharp opposition to bourgeois nationalists and reformist politicians of all stripes.

It will also be built in opposition to the national chauvinism that has long characterized even "leftist" politics in Bolivia. Guillermo Lora's POR largely focused its opposition to the dictatorship of Hugo Banzer in the 1970s on accusations that the latter had sold out the "fatherland" to Chile and Peru. The POR also accused Banzer of betraying the "great national task" of regaining access to the sea—an implicit call for war to reverse Bolivia's defeat by Chile in the late 19th century. The last time landlocked Bolivia attempted to win a "road to the sea," the result was the bloody Chaco War of 1932-35, in which Bolivia battled Paraguay over the potentially oil-rich Chaco region and access to the Paraguay River outlet to the Atlantic. With Standard Oil backing Bolivia and Shell Oil on Paraguay's side, the war ended in defeat for Bolivia and intensified Bolivian nationalism. How deep this nationalist sentiment runs was shown in the recent "gas wars" protests, when chauvinist denunciations of Chile for "stealing" Bolivia's natural gas were rampant.

The task of tearing South and Central America out of backwardness and subjugation to imperialism falls to the proletariat of the region. As Trotsky stressed in "Manifesto of the Fourth International on the Imperialist War and the Proletarian World Revolution" (May 1940):

"The slogan in the struggle against violence and intrigues of world imperialism and against the bloody work of native comprador cliques is therefore: the *Soviet United States of South and Central America*....

"Only under its own revolutionary direction is the proletariat of the colonies and the semicolonies capable of achieving invincible collaboration with the proletariat of the metropolitan centers, and with the world working class as a whole. Only this collaboration can lead the oppressed peoples to complete and final emancipation, through the overthrow of imperialism the world over." ■

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The election of Evo Morales as president of Bolivia in December was hailed by a range of liberal “anti-globalization” activists and social democrats internationally as a blow to U.S. imperialism, largely based on Morales’ pledge to nationalize oil and gas reserves. Heading the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS—Movement Toward Socialism), Morales won an outright majority of the vote in the biggest landslide victory since the end of military rule in 1982. Much of Morales’ support stemmed from the fact that he is an Aymara Indian, the son of a shepherd, in a country marked by deep anti-Indian racism. Reporting on Morales’ inauguration, the *New York Times* (22 January) commented that his election may represent “the hardest turn yet in South America’s persistent left-leaning tilt, with the potential for big reverberations far beyond the borders of this landlocked Andean nation.”

The Bush administration, which has chastised Morales for his base among Bolivia’s coca farmers, has responded cautiously to his election. The *Washington Post* (21 February) remarked in an article titled “U.S. Officials Soften Stance Toward Bolivia’s New Leftist President” that “for now, at least, the Bush administration is hoping that Evo Morales, who once threatened to become ‘America’s worst nightmare,’ is a man with whom it can do business.” The imperialists are also aware that Bolivia is a very poor country and that Morales has fewer resources at his disposal than Hugo Chávez in oil-rich Venezuela.

A bourgeois nationalist, Morales is committed to “Andean capitalism” and “free trade.” Immediately after his election, he traveled to Santa Cruz in eastern Bolivia, a center of the country’s business elite, where he expressed sympathy for their demand for autonomy from the impoverished western region. He also agreed to privatize El Mutún, one of the biggest iron mines in the world, and has sought to cement the bourgeoisie’s allegiance by appointing to his cabinet a veritable rogues’ gallery of shady businessmen and supporters of his “neoliberal” predecessors. Thus Morales handed the Ministry of Mines to one Walter Villarroel, who in a previous stint in the government played a pivotal role in dismantling the state-owned Bolivian Mining Corporation (COMIBOL) and privatizing mining operations. Just last month, workers at Lloyd Aereo Boliviano, the country’s main airline, who were on strike demanding that the company be nationalized, clashed with police after Morales ordered military and police forces to seize control of the country’s airports in order to break the strike.

In calling to “nationalize” Bolivia’s natural resources, Morales echoes a long-standing program in Latin America. The main demand of the protesters in Bolivia last year for nationalization of oil and gas is supportable as a measure of national self-defense by a semicolonial country against the imperialists, albeit hardly socialist in character. In regard to the expropriation of the oil industry by the bourgeois-nationalist Cárdenas regime in Mexico in 1938, revolutionary Marxist leader Leon Trotsky wrote:

“Semicolonial Mexico is fighting for its national independence, political and economic. This is the basic meaning of the Mexican revolution at *this* stage. The oil magnates are not rank-and-file capitalists, not ordinary bourgeoisie. Having seized the richest natural resources of a foreign country, standing on their billions and supported by the military and diplomatic forces of their metropolis, they strive to establish in the subjugated country a regime of imperialistic feudalism, subordinating to themselves legislation, jurisprudence, and administration....

Bolivia

Trotskyism vs. Bourgeois Nationalism

“The expropriation of oil is neither socialism nor communism. But it is a highly progressive measure of national self-defense.”

—“Mexico and British Imperialism,” 5 June 1938

Bolivia is itself no stranger to nationalizations, including in the petroleum industry. The military government of David Toro (1936-37) nationalized Stan-

dard Oil Company of Bolivia without compensation, setting up a state oil company. This company took over Gulf Oil Company of Bolivia in 1969. Only in 1996 were significant portions of the oil and natural gas operations privatized. Today the Brazilian company Petrobras controls some 51 percent of Bolivia’s extensive natural gas reserves and 95 per-

cent of its refining capacity. However, most of the natural gas reserves are not being exploited. The Association of Organizations of Ecological Producers of Bolivia noted in a 2005 report that “Bolivia has eight sectors that generate more employment than gas” and that “the entire petroleum sector gives work to some 600 people, most of them foreigners.”

Morales’ call for “nationalizations” today most likely connotes merely increased taxation. He told the social-democratic *In These Times* (January 2006): “We want to tax the transnationals in a fair way, and redistribute the money to the small- and medium-size enterprises.” In the December presidential election, not only Morales but every candidate raised some form of the call to nationalize the natural gas industry. A savvy politician, Morales sought to sound more militant than his competitors, while simultaneously seeking not to irrevocably alienate either the Bolivian bourgeoisie or the imperialists.

The Bolivian “Revolution” of 2005

The immediate precursor to Morales’ election was a series of popular upheavals last May through June. Demonstrators protested against “neoliberalism”: the widespread privatizations of state-owned facilities and IMF-dictated austerity measures. Made possible by the defeat of a 1985 general strike, those measures resulted in the privatization of Bolivian mines and other natural resources, as well as telecommunications and transport. Laid-off miners and peasants were forced to eke out a living in small family businesses or other forms of self-employment. Many of these moved to El Alto, originally a suburb of the capital city of La Paz, but now an independent entity comprising some 800,000 people.

The 2005 upheaval was the latest in a series of desperate struggles by Bolivia’s impoverished masses. In 2000, large plebeian protests broke out in Bolivia’s third-largest city, Cochabamba, after the Hugo Banzer government acceded to World Bank demands and sold off the city’s water system to Bechtel and other corporations from imperialist countries, leading to water-rate increases of at least 200 percent. This “water war” led to Bechtel abandoning its stake and subsequently suing Bolivia for lost revenue in U.S. courts. Another revolt broke out in September 2003 upon the announcement that recently discovered natural gas reserves would be piped through Chile, a historic target of Bolivian nationalism since Chile’s victory in the 1879-83 “War of the Pacific,” which resulted in Bolivia losing its coastline. The 2003 “gas war” came to an end with the installation of Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada’s vice president, Carlos Mesa, as president—a move that Morales was instrumental in bringing about.

The May-June 2005 protests and strikes erupted in El Alto after Congress passed a hydrocarbon bill proposed by Mesa that would favor the imperialists. Protesters raised numerous demands, including to nationalize gas and other resources, to oppose the autonomy of the wealthier Santa Cruz province, and to put Sánchez de Lozada on trial for killing protesters in the “gas war.” Mesa resigned on June 6, and elections were called for December.

The El Alto protests reflected the determination of the downtrodden masses to resist imperialist exploitation. However, to smash the chains of imperialist oppression requires a proletarian revolution led by a programmatically sufficient, i.e., a Leninist-Trotskyist, party to smash capitalist rule and establish a workers state. Such a revolution must have the

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Friedman-Rudovsky/NY Times

Bolivian president Evo Morales (above) campaigned on pledge to nationalize oil and gas reserves. Below: Mainly Indian residents of El Alto march to La Paz during wave of mass protests, June 2005.

AP

