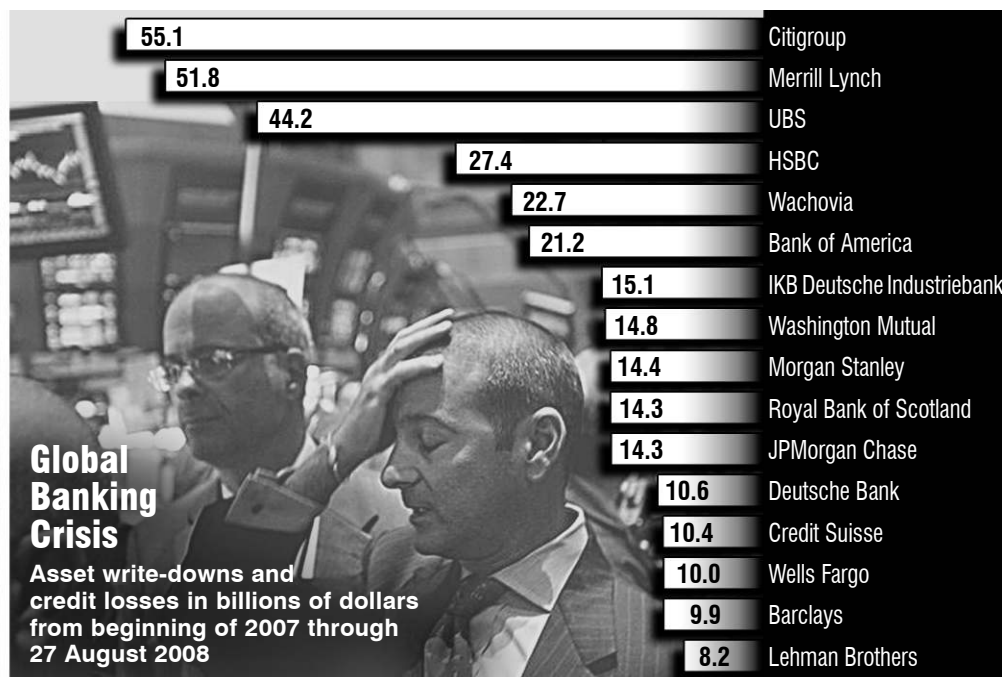




AFP

As foreclosures mount, desperate homeowners line up for credit counseling in Washington, D.C., this July (left).



WV Graphic, Chart Source: Bloomberg, Photo: Getty

# Wall Street Nightmare Stalks Working People

**Break with the Democrats, Republicans—  
For a Revolutionary Workers Party!  
For a Socialist Planned Economy!**

*“Robbing a bank’s no crime compared to owning one!”*

—Bertolt Brecht, Happy End

SEPTEMBER 22—The mushrooming economic crisis that exploded on Wall Street this month, triggered by the collapse of the housing price bubble last year, reduced some of the country’s, indeed the world’s, most powerful financial institutions to twisted wreckage. On September 7, the Bush administration nationalized the two home finance giants, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac—which hold or guarantee half of all U.S. residential mortgages—pledging a bailout of up to \$200 billion. One week later, Lehman Brothers, an investment bank with assets greater than the gross domestic product of Argentina, abruptly filed for bankruptcy. Meanwhile, Wall Street colossus Merrill Lynch (“We’re bullish on America”) averted collapse by selling itself at a fire-sale price to Bank of America. Fearing a worldwide financial panic, the Federal Reserve (the U.S. central bank) arranged an \$85 billion bailout for the American International Group (A.I.G.), one of the world’s biggest insurance companies, with the government taking over an 80 percent share of the firm’s ownership.

For years, Wall Street fat cats raked in multimillion-dollar salaries and bonuses as they gambled their banks’ money on

various speculative schemes, most recently on the U.S. housing market. Now that the housing bubble has burst, it is not enough that millions are in danger of losing their homes; working people are now forced to watch as their tax dollars are spent on bailouts to replenish the coffers of those responsible for their ruin. Both presidential candidates, Democrat Barack Obama and Republican John McCain, have only minor objections to the bailout plans. Now the Bush administration is proposing an even vaster bailout—the largest in U.S. history—in which the government would buy banks’ troubled mortgage-related assets to the tune of up to \$700 billion! *New York Times* business columnist Joe Nocera likened the proposal to a Hail Mary pass in football, remarking that “most of the time they fail.” Many working people are rightly furious that more than a half-trillion dollars were found to bail out Wall Street while millions are without jobs and health care and face the threat of losing their homes.

With the economy already sliding into recession, the financial meltdown threatens a much deeper economic crisis. Credit

markets internationally froze up quickly last week as fearful bankers hesitated to lend—even to each other—and investors shifted their money into the safest havens, like U.S. Treasury bills and gold. Even money market funds, which have long been regarded as just as secure as T-bills, are in trouble. After the oldest such fund, the Reserve Primary Fund, redeemed its investors’ deposits by paying only 97 cents on the dollar, the government rushed to commit up to \$50 billion to stanch a wave of withdrawals from money market funds that resembled a classic bank run.

The choking off of credit means that businesses will slash investment plans while consumer spending—which accounts for two-thirds of the country’s economic activity—will take yet another hit. At the same time, the living standards of working people are being driven down by a sharp increase in the inflation rate, especially for food, gasoline and utilities. The *Wall Street Journal* (18 September) titled a front-page article: “Worst Crisis Since ’30s, With No End Yet in Sight.”

It could scarcely be clearer that work-

ing people need a party that fights for their class interests, a workers party committed to sweeping away the capitalist system through socialist revolution. We stand for the political independence of the working class from the capitalist class enemy. We are opposed to any political support to any capitalist politician—Democrat, Republican, Green or “Independent.” A vote for any bourgeois candidate is a vote of confidence in the reformability of capitalism and a vote against the need for socialist revolution.

The burgeoning financial crisis highlights the destructive irrationality of the capitalist system. Since last August, when nearly the entire spectrum of credit markets first seized up, the U.S. and other central banks have provided hundreds of billions of dollars in short-term loans to large banks—in addition to pledging hundreds of billions more in bailouts. Yet the highest pinnacles of finance capital continue to totter as major financial institutions such as Washington Mutual, the country’s largest savings and loan, scramble to stave off bankruptcy.

*continued on page 8*

## Boston: 1970s Fight for School Integration

**As Racist Mobs Rampaged,  
Liberals and Reformists Knifed Busing... 4**



# Why Trotskyists Said “Stop Solidarność Counterrevolution!”

Editor, Workers Vanguard:

“A trade union led by reactionary fakers organizes a strike against the admission of Negro workers into a certain branch of industry. Shall we support such a shameful strike?” (Leon Trotsky, In Defense of Marxism, page 30.)

“No self-resp[ec]ting trade unionist, no supporter of the workers movement, and certainly no communist crosses picket lines, ever.” (Workers Vanguard, 15 March 1996, page 3)

As a means of putting forth political ideas, leftists frequently find it necessary to sloganize; to reduce their concept to a few brief words, suitable for chanting or putting on a picket sign. This always involves a trade-off; what you gain in brevity and simplicity often involves a loss of precision and accuracy.

This is especially the case with one of the Spartacist League’s favorite slogans, “Picket Lines Mean Don’t Cross.” This formalistic formulation is a boiled-down expression of working-class unity, of solidarity, and it [is] appropriate 95 times out of 100. But in the other five cases, the formal answer can be a wrong answer.

Within the range of worker/employer conflict it is usually appropriate. But every picket line has a political aspect. Some may involve jurisdictional issues, in which case it is necessary to examine the situation carefully to determine which side best serves the interest of the working class as a whole.

Some picket lines are not union lines at all, but are openly political. Reactionar-



Corbis

Lech Walesa addresses Solidarność meeting in 1980 in front of symbols of clerical-national reaction.

ies and racists sometimes set up picket lines, and a formal position that no picket line should ever be crossed can put leftists in the position of supporting right-wing positions.

But nevertheless, the original concept is basically correct. What it implies is class solidarity. It means we make a presumption of solidarity with the picketers. We do not ask them, “Are your demands just and appropriate?” Instead we say, “If you are ready and willing to fight the bosses, we will help in whatever way we can, first of all by supporting your picket line.”

All of this, of course, is merely the carrying out in practice of the old marxist principle that the working class is the only truly revolutionary class in modern times. Revolutionaries try to work within working class organizations, such as unions, to win the worker-members to a revolutionary point of view. Most of the time, most members and almost all union leaders are not very revolutionary.

In such cases, leftists have often abandoned the main-stream unions and tried to set up alternative, revolutionary unions. This “dual-union” policy has often been tried in the past. It invariably leads to the isolation of the revolutionary forces and a weakening of the union movement as a whole. For good reasons, this policy is explicitly rejected in the Transitional Program.

This means that the attitude of revolutionaries towards trade unions is completely different from their attitude towards political parties. The revolutionary content of a union lies in the fact that it is a mass organization of workers. Whatever its current policies, it is an organization of the revolutionary class, and revolutionaries must be a part of it, must support it, must become the best builders of it, in spite of the current conservative or reactionary nature of its policies and leadership.

The revolutionary content of a political party, on the other hand, lies in its program. To support a political organization which does not have a revolutionary program only serves to confuse and disorient the workers among its membership. It may be better to split off and establish a smaller organization that can put forth a clearer, more revolutionary program.

The key aim for revolutionaries in a political organization is clarity. The key aim in a class organization, such as a union, is unity. In a class organization, revolutionaries try to work from the inside, trying to win the workers by argument and example to a revolutionary point of view.

It is in this area that the Spartacist League made the biggest political error of its history. In 1981 it called for the smashing of the Polish union, Solidarity. The Spartacist League was opposed to Solidarity from the very beginning. By doing so, it won for itself a place as a footnote in future histories of the Trotskyist movement as the first advocate of union-smashing Trotskyism.

There were actually two Polish Solidaritys. The original Solidarity was a union, organized and led by workers. Its main bases were the factories, mines, railroads, shipyards and other workplaces. Intellectuals, students and farmers played a supporting but subordinate role. It included, at its peak, over 90% of the Polish working class.

It faced an almost impossible political situation: how to improve the condition of Polish working people without provoking a Soviet invasion, as had happened in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968. This would have been hard enough to work out in an open society with full freedom of speech, press and assembly. Under a Stalinist regime, the brief, 18-month life-span of Solidarity was not enough to develop a workable solution.

Certainly the role of Trotskyists in such a situation was to work within Solidarity, argue for their ideas, present their program for a development leading towards the eventual political revolution against the Stalinist regime and the conversion of the “deformed” workers’ state into a real one. This after all, was the Trotskyist objective for all of the East European countries at that time.

After the Stalinist government cracked down in the summer of 1981, Lech Walesa and his friends in the church took over the Solidarnosc name and formed a reformist political party.

Marion Syrek  
Founding member,  
the Spartacist League

## WV replies:

Marion Syrek, who departed our organization in 1968, seeks to falsely conflate, in true “third camp” fashion, the necessary suppression of counterrevolutionary Solidarność in military defense of the Polish *deformed workers state* with trade-union questions within *capitalist* countries. Regarding the latter: in the event of picket lines of a racist or otherwise reactionary character, we seek to convince workers who are under the sway of reactionary ideology to act otherwise; failing that, we seek to mobilize the most class-conscious elements of the working class to *take down* reactionary picket lines. As to the dangers of “dual unionism”: as someone clearly conversant with our published material, Syrek should know that we are not advocates of “dual unionism” (i.e., the formation of “red unions” as against the existing bureaucratically led trade unions). Rather we seek to build, through political struggle, a revolutionary opposition to the corrupt, anti-Communist, pro-capitalist union bureaucracy within the current mass organizations of the working class. At the same time, we do not make a fetish of the existing union structures. For revolutionaries, this question is tactical, dependent upon the level of proletarian struggle and consciousness.

The real crux of Syrek’s letter is an apology for those who stood with counter-revolutionary Solidarność against its suppression in Poland in 1981. Syrek claims

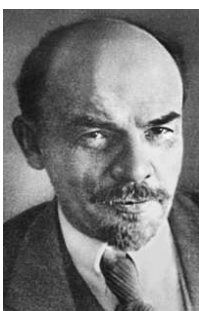
*continued on page 7*



TROTSKY

## Proletarian Road to Black Freedom

*Writing in the decade after the civil rights movement, we noted how black and working people have been chained to the bourgeois order through the agency of the Democratic Party. What is necessary is a fight to forge a revolutionary, multiracial workers party that leads the struggle against capitalist exploitation and racial oppression, which in the end can be eradicated only with the overthrow of the American capitalist order through socialist revolution.*



LENIN

Since Roosevelt’s New Deal and the mass migrations of blacks into the cities, insofar as black people have not been excluded from the American political process they have been tied to the Democratic Party. In large part due to opportunist betrayal by the American Communist Party, Roosevelt was able to transform the Democrats into a rejuvenated “people’s party” embracing Stalinists at one end and Dixiecrats at the other. Even after decades of Democratic administrations have brought nothing but bloody imperialist wars and token amelioration of racial discrimination combined with real deterioration of black living standards, black people still vote Democratic. Their resistance to the assault upon the limited gains of the civil rights movement is channeled into the dead end of liberal Democratic Party politics by black Democrats like Coleman Young and Ron Dellums who cohabit in the same party with George Wallace and “ethnic purity” Carter....

Unlike chattel slavery, wage slavery has placed in the hands of black workers the objective conditions for successful revolt. But this revolt will be successful only if it takes as its target the system of class exploitation, the common enemy of black and white workers. The struggle to win black activists to a proletarian perspective is intimately linked to the fight for a new, multiracial class-struggle leadership of organized labor which can transform the trade unions into a key weapon in the battle against racial oppression. Such a leadership must break the grip of the Democratic Party upon both organized labor and the black masses through the fight for working-class political independence. As black workers, the most combative element within the U.S. working class, are won to the cause and party of proletarian revolution, they will be in the front ranks of this class-struggle leadership. And it will be these black proletarian fighters who will write the finest pages of “black history”—the struggle to smash racist, imperialist America and open the road to real freedom for all mankind.

—Preface, *Marxist Bulletin* No. 5 (Revised), “What Strategy for Black Liberation? Trotskyism vs. Black Nationalism” (September 1978)

## WORKERS VANGUARD

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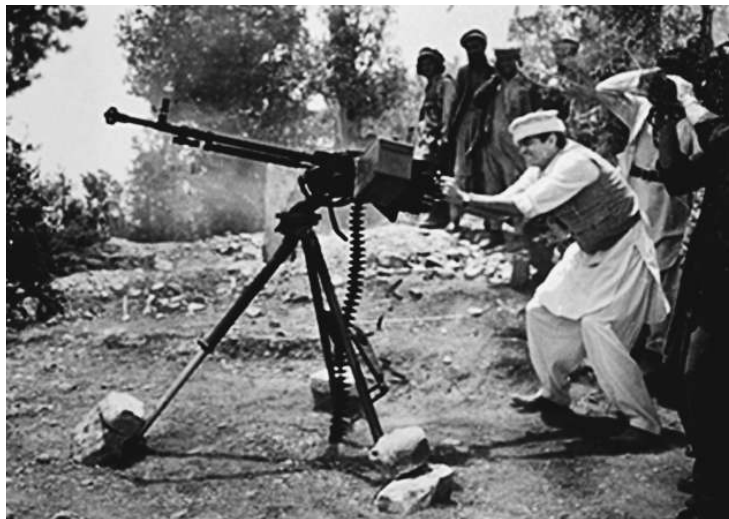
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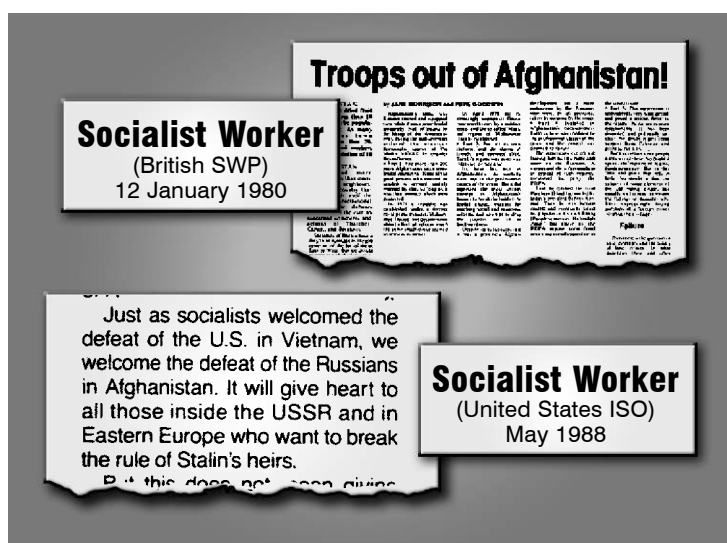
# We Said “Hail Red Army in Afghanistan!”

## Charlie Wilson’s War



60 Minutes

## Was the ISO’s War



Top: Democratic Texas Congressman Charlie Wilson in Afghan garb with *mujahedin* cutthroats in Afghanistan, 1988. Above: Cliffites of British SWP and U.S. ISO embraced anti-Soviet crusade in Afghanistan, “welcomed” withdrawal of Red Army.

After spending decades in bed with the most vile anti-Communist and woman-hating forces around the world—from Islamic fundamentalists in Afghanistan and Iran to clerical reactionary Polish Solidarność and Tibetan monks—the International Socialist Organization (ISO) has suddenly decided it was time for a morning-after pill. A September 9 Web posting by the ISO is promoting a petition by faculty at the University of Texas objecting “to the establishment of a chair in Pakistan studies named for former Texas congressman and misguided cold warrior Charlie Wilson.” Democratic Congressman Wilson played a key role in winning billions in CIA funding and high-tech weaponry for the Afghan *mujahedin* fighting the Soviet Red Army in the 1980s. For its part, the ISO would have preferred a less “misguided” Cold Warrior.

Earlier this year, in a column by Joe Allen (*Socialist Worker*, 25 January), the ISO disparaged the movie *Charlie Wilson’s War*, which, the ISO complains, paid “a fawning homage to America’s ‘clandestine services,’” who were “recruiting largely reactionary Islamic forces to the mujahedeen.” Allen’s article, “Charlie Wilson’s Not-So-Good War,” declares that “Hollywood’s liberals portray the Afghanistan war as a great triumph in the struggle for freedom, when it should be seen as another savage war for empire in which the people of Afghanistan continue to be the prime targets.” Reading these articles, one wouldn’t know that the *ISO was for the Afghan mujahedin long before they were against them*.

Well before the Soviet intervention into Afghanistan in December 1979, Washington started funneling arms to the *mujahedin* from the moment the Soviet-allied People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) came to power in April 1978 in what was essentially a left-wing military coup with popular support among intellectuals and government workers. The PDPA embarked on a program of reforms that included canceling peasant debts, carrying out land redistribution, prohibiting forced marriages and lowering the bride price to a nominal sum. They made schooling compulsory for girls and launched literacy programs for women, building 600 schools in just over a year. These measures threatened the mullahs’ stranglehold on social and economic life and immediately provoked a murderous backlash. The earliest bloody confrontations were over women’s literacy, as PDPA cadres and women literacy workers were driven from villages and killed.

The PDPA could not quell the *mujahedin* insurgency, which was heavily backed by the U.S., Pakistan and Iran (where the Islamic theocracy under Ayatollah Khomeini had come to power in early 1979). After ignoring repeated requests for military aid, including troops, the Soviet Union, fearing the PDPA regime was about to collapse, finally sent in 100,000 soldiers to combat the Islamic reactionaries. The imperialists seized on the Red Army intervention to launch a renewed Cold War drive. As the CIA undertook its biggest covert operation ever, Afghanistan became the front line of the imperialists’ relentless drive to destroy the Soviet Union. The threat of a CIA-backed Islamic takeover on the USSR’s southern flank posed point-blank unconditional military defense of the Soviet degenerated workers state. As we wrote at the time:

“A victory for the Islamic-feudalist insurgency in Afghanistan will not only mean a hostile, imperialist-allied state on the USSR’s southern border. It will

mean the extermination of the Afghan left and the reimposition of feudal barbarism—the veil, the bride price. Moreover, the Soviet military occupation raises the possibility of a social revolution in this wretchedly backward country, a possibility which did *not* exist before.”

—*Spartacist* (English-language edition) No. 29, Summer 1980

We unambiguously declared, “Hail Red Army! Extend the gains of the October Revolution to Afghan peoples!” For their part, the ISO howled with the imperialist wolves when the Soviets entered Afghanistan, and popped champagne corks when the Red Army was withdrawn nine years later. Since Charlie Wilson’s war was the ISO’s war, we are left wondering, “What’s their beef?” The exposures of CIA waterboarding, extraordinary rendition and secret prison black sites may make being on the same side as the CIA torturers a bit awkward. Or perhaps lauding the virtues of the veterans of the war against the Red Army isn’t the kick it was before the September 11 attacks. Or it just could be that the ISO—historically allied with the international tendency led by the late Tony Cliff—is irritated that no credit is being given to their role in drumming up support for the CIA-backed cutthroats at the height of Cold War II. Maybe a “Tony Cliff chair” is what they are after.

Screaming “Troops Out of Afghanistan” was not enough for the ISO’s then-parent group, the British Socialist Workers Party (SWP). SWP leader Paul Foot succeeded in provoking an anti-Soviet frenzy on the floor of Parliament, by right-wing Tories and Labour Party “lefts” alike, through incendiary “exposés” in his *Daily Mirror* column of the possibility

that British meat—“*our* beef”—exported to the Soviet Union might be sent to Soviet soldiers serving in Afghanistan.

Today, the ISO calls *Charlie Wilson’s War* “thoroughly reactionary.” There is, for example, the scene where wealthy right-wing socialite Joanne Herring, played by Julia Roberts, tells Wilson, played by Tom Hanks, “I want you to deliver such a crushing defeat to the Soviets that Communism crumbles.” But such was exactly the position of the ISO. When Soviet forces pulled out of Afghanistan in 1988-89, in a futile attempt by the Kremlin Stalinist bureaucracy to appease the imperialists, the ISO gloated: “We welcomed the defeat of the Russians in Afghanistan. It will give heart to all those inside the USSR and in Eastern Europe who want to break the rule of Stalin’s heirs” (*Socialist Worker*, May 1988). Three years later, the British SWP exulted: “Communism has collapsed.... It is a fact that should have every socialist rejoicing” (*Socialist Worker* [Britain], 31 August 1991). The ISO could have scripted the lines for crazed anti-Communist Zbigniew Brzezinski, national security adviser under Democrat Jimmy Carter and today a foreign policy adviser to Barack Obama, when he ranted: “What was more important in the world view of history? The Taliban or the fall of the Soviet Empire? A few stirred-up Muslims or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the Cold War?”

*Charlie Wilson’s War* is a thoroughly reactionary movie. The film peddles anti-Soviet lies discredited long ago, such as that Red Army troops planted toys containing bombs on roadsides in order to maim Afghan children. Nowhere does the

film even hint that long before the Red Army intervention, the U.S. was funneling aid to the mullahs who rose up against the Afghan government’s modest reforms for the brutally enslaved women. Ronald Reagan’s “freedom fighters,” with whom the ISO sided, were exemplified by one Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the largest recipient of American aid, who had a penchant for throwing acid at the faces of unveiled women. Though the *mujahedin* fought to maintain women in *pardah* (seclusion), forced them to wear the suffocating head-to-toe *burka* and deprived them of education and medical care, the film ludicrously shows unveiled women mixing freely with men in refugee camps.

Meanwhile, Jonathan Neale of the ISO’s erstwhile comrades of the British SWP (they split in 2001) has suddenly discovered, doubtless after much research, that “feminism is now very weak in Afghanistan!” The cause? “In the 1980s Afghan feminist women supported the Russians and their violent occupation” (*Socialist Worker* [Britain], 19 January). The “lesson for today,” Neale lectures, is “if the left allies with the invader, the eventual resistance will hate the left.” In blaming the present condition of Afghan women on the Soviet Union and those women who fought alongside the Red Army, the SWP sounds much like the Southern “redeemers” after the U.S. Civil War who condemned former slaves for joining with the Union Army as it marched through the South.

The Soviet military intervention into Afghanistan was one of the few genuinely progressive acts carried out by the Soviet Stalinist bureaucracy, opening the vista of social liberation to the downtrodden Afghan peoples. It underlined the Trotskyist understanding that despite its degeneration under a Stalinist bureaucratic caste, the Soviet Union remained a workers state embodying the historic gains of the October Revolution of 1917, centrally a planned economy and collectivized property. A Red Army victory posed the extension of the social gains of the October Revolution to Afghanistan through a prolonged occupation and the country’s integration into the Soviet system. The Red Army troops, many of them recruits from Soviet Central Asia, who fought against the CIA-backed *mujahedin* genuinely believed they were fulfilling their internationalist duty. And so they were!

This military intervention in defense of the Soviet degenerated workers state not only opened up the possibility of tremendous gains for the hideously oppressed Afghan peoples but offered the prospect of reanimating the Bolshevik program of proletarian revolutionary internationalism in the Soviet Union. As we stressed at the time, a genuinely internationalist perspective toward Afghanistan required a proletarian political revolution to oust the Stalinist bureaucracy and return the Soviet Union to the road of Lenin and Trotsky.

By the mid 1980s the Red Army had the *mujahedin* on the run. But as we warned from the outset, the Kremlin bureaucracy cut a deal with the imperialists and pulled out. When in 1988-89 Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev withdrew Soviet forces from Afghanistan, we denounced this as a crime against both the Afghan and Soviet peoples. We stressed to Soviet workers and soldiers that it was far better to defeat counter-revolution in Afghanistan than to confront it in Leningrad. Events have bitterly and amply verified our warning that the Soviet pullout from Afghanistan would mean a bloodbath for women and leftists. And the Stalinist bureaucracy’s treachery

*continued on page 11*



# Young Spartacus



## Boston: 1970s Fight for School Integration As Racist Mobs Rampaged, Liberals and Reformists Knifed Busing

We print below, edited for publication, a class on Boston busing given by comrade Irene Gardner to youth comrades doing work in our center over the summer. Today, 30 years after busing was defeated in Boston, the school system is more segregated than before the civil rights movement, and impoverished inner-city schools serve as holding pens for mostly black and Latino youth, barely providing even the pretense of education. This makes all the more clear the need to mobilize the social power of the multi-racial working class to fight for free, quality, integrated education for all, as part of the struggle for socialist revolution to end the system of wage slavery as a whole. Our fight in the 1970s for labor/black defense of bused schoolchildren, of busing and of integration pointed the way forward for this struggle. For more on the fight for black freedom, see *Marxist Bulletin* No. 5 (Revised), “What Strategy for Black Liberation? Trotskyism vs. Black Nationalism” (September 1978).

\* \* \*

One of the readings for this class was the article “Reactionaries Oppose Boston School Busing” from *Young Spartacus* in May-June of 1974, before the Boston busing plan was implemented. At that time we didn’t anticipate the virulent racist frenzy and violence that was going to take place that fall, but we did take a clear stand in defense of busing from the beginning. We supported busing as a minimal application of the basic democratic right of black people to equality in education, a minimal step toward integration, although busing alone could not solve either the problem of quality education or of racial integration. We sought to mobilize the working class to defend desegregation through school busing as a means of breaking down sharp racial divisions and strengthening the basis for united class struggle.

In 1954 in the landmark court case *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court struck down the “separate but equal” doctrine of racial segregation that had been the formal law of the land since the 1890s. However, the later *Brown* decision of 1955 called for desegregation with



Young Spartacus (top), Forman/Boston Herald American

**October 1974: Boston rally to support school integration. Spartacist banner calls for defense of Columbia Point housing project against race terror (top). Racist anti-busing mob in Boston attacks black lawyer Ted Landsmark, 1976.**

“all deliberate speed,” which meant at a snail’s pace. It took nearly ten years for a desegregation plan to be enacted in Boston after the 1965 Massachusetts Racial Imbalance Act was passed, because the issue was tossed like a hot potato from the State Department of Education to the federal courts to the racist Boston School Committee. Every conceivable legal and political obstacle was thrown in its path.

Boston was a quintessential Democratic Party stronghold. Busing was killed in Boston, foreshadowing its defeat nationwide, by an alliance of racist mobs in the streets of Boston along with liberals in Congress who made sure that nobody was bused out to the relatively privileged schools of suburban Boston. There was a landmark case in Detroit where the court ruled specifically not to allow busing to the suburbs, and that was used as a precedent. Busing of black students was purposefully limited to neighborhoods like South Boston, known as Southie, one of the poorest white areas outside of Appalachia, with the aim of pitting poor and working-class whites against blacks. Demagogic politicians inflamed racist sentiments in these white ethnic enclaves under the watchwords of “neighborhood schools” and “stop forced busing.”

Just a couple examples of Boston Democrats: you know the Kennedys. The racist Boston City Council president Louise Day Hicks, who made herself famous by throwing herself in front of the buses carrying black students, ended up with a seat in Congress. State Representative Ray Flynn was a co-founder of ROAR—that stood for “Restore Our Alienated Rights.” This was the reactionary umbrella group that organized racist mobs throughout the city. He became the “liberal” mayor of Boston and, later, Clinton’s ambassador to the Vatican.

When the Boston busing plan began to be implemented in the fall of 1974, the desegregation order was immediately met with a white boycott of South Boston High School. This rapidly escalated into citywide racist mobilizations and lynch mob terror. It exploded the minute the buses started to roll. You had racial slurs and rocks being hurled at the buses carrying black schoolchildren. You had frenzied mobs roaming the streets intimidating and assaulting blacks. The NAACP office was firebombed. A predominantly black housing project called Columbia Point was assaulted by night-riding vigilantes. And then you had this group called the South Boston Marshals, which was

basically a racist paramilitary grouping that patrolled the area against “outside agitation.” This meant blacks as well as the anti-racist militants throughout the city.

The book *Common Ground* by J. Anthony Lukas gives a good flavor of what happened in that period. At the time, a lot of our comrades were living in Dorchester, which is in the southern section of Boston. There’s a whole chapter in *Common Ground* about the neighborhood and even the street I lived on. Black families were getting firebombed. A number of us had to move very quickly out of Dorchester because the local grocery store turned into an anti-busing recruiting center. Very quickly, the city had polarized. We had a number of black comrades visiting the city to help with our intervention, and they couldn’t come to some of our homes. This was the kind of polarization that was going on—the pitched battles over school integration.

### The Fight to Implement Busing

This raged on from 1974 to 1976. We fought to defend school busing and called on the integrated labor movement—including the teachers, the bus drivers, the meatpackers unions—to organize labor/black defense of the bused black schoolchildren. By the way, the black members of the meatpackers union had a union hall on the edge of South Boston. When they were coming out of union meetings their car windows were getting smashed. But the meatpackers union leadership did nothing to help in organizing labor/black defense. In a lot of cases, the trade-union leaderships didn’t want their membership to have anything to do with labor/black defense. They played a very craven role. In some cases they even came out against busing.

Against the narrow limits set by the federal judges, we called to extend busing to the suburbs so poor kids, black and white, could have a shot at a better education. We advocated transitional demands: jobs for all; low-rent, integrated, quality public housing; and quality education for all. In this racist society, it will take a socialist revolution to secure quality education, housing and jobs for all black, Latino and working-class youth,

just as only after the revolutionary Civil War smashed the slave system was the way opened for public education in this country. We called Boston a “referendum on racism.” The attempt to stop busing, whether by constitutional amendment, court action or mob attacks on school buses, was the opening salvo in a dangerous, right-wing campaign to strip black people of modest gains made through the civil rights movement’s previous two decades of struggle for democratic rights.

We issued a united-front call for a broad mobilization around the slogan, “Stop the Racist Attacks Against Black School Children.” This call is printed in the Spartacus Youth League pamphlet *The Fight to Implement Busing*. We called on labor, black and socialist organizations to use their influence and resources to build a massive rally against racist anti-busing terror. Despite a huge amount of work—we got out thousands of leaflets all over the city, we went to labor groups and other organizations—we did not have the social weight to effect a principled united front with the black liberal establishment or the left groups or unions at the time. The integrated union movement in Boston was very weak, and the black liberals, backed up by the Workers World Party and the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), soon jumped in to call for reliance on the state and bringing in federal troops who supposedly would defend black schoolchildren.

I want to talk a bit about why the labor movement in Boston was so weak—it has to do with the history of Boston. Before and during the Civil War, Boston was the heart of the anti-slavery abolitionist movement. Following the huge influx of Irish and Italian immigrants around the turn of the century, Boston’s blue-blooded Brahmins placed ethnic white ward heelers, people like “Honey Fitz” Fitzgerald—that was John F. Kennedy’s grandfather—in charge of the city administration. There was a lot of patronage. The city’s ruling class retarded industrial development and suppressed attempts to organize trade unions in Boston. The Association of Catholic Trade Unionists was an organization formed to counteract the role of communists in the unions. It was organized in the 1930s, and it was very prominent in Boston and New York.

By the time of the CIO organizing drives in the 1930s, there was predominantly only light industry in Boston. In the 1800s the rich Boston merchants had refused to allow heavy industry into Boston proper. They wanted to maintain the “serenity” of the city. After the decline of textiles and shoemaking, major industry was restricted to outlying areas: General Electric in Lynn, General Motors in Framingham, General Dynamics in Quincy. (We had supporters working in auto in Framingham for a while.) The city basically was not touched by the CIO organizing drives of the 1930s.

The CIO industrial unions were being built around the country, in mining and especially in large industries like steel and auto. Many of the organizers were members of the Communist Party or Trot-

skyists. The industrial unionism pushed by the Reds meant organizing both skilled and unskilled workers in the same union. That’s how a lot of blacks got organized into the unions—they were locked out of the skilled trades traditionally organized by the AFL. It was very significant that this did not happen in Boston. Unlike Detroit and the Midwest generally, there also was no mass migration of black people from the South into Boston.

The black liberal petty bourgeoisie had a long history in Boston. In 1850 Boston had significant numbers of black artisans, attracted by the abolitionist sentiment and religious liberalism of the “Boston Brahmins.” A lot of blacks settled there to open up small businesses. Over the decades, the black petty bourgeoisie grew with the conscious help of the white liberal establishment. In the ’70s, black businesses were bankrolled by the banking/insurance giants. White, liberal bourgeois establishments helped to create black liberal political coalitions that were dependent on City Hall handouts, Ford Foundation grants, etc. There was relative quiescence in places like Roxbury, in the black community in Boston. In fact, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King and Louis Farrakhan all lived in Boston at various times, but they weren’t prominent when they lived there. Over time the black nationalists were unable to make any serious inroads in Boston, although there were some small black nationalist groups like De Mau Mau.

## Not Federal Troops, but Labor/Black Defense!

When we fought for labor/black defense of busing in Boston, we pointed to



WV Photo

**Chicago area UAW Local 6 members at meeting to organize union defense of black unionist, April 1975.**

an example that occurred in Chicago at that time. Members of the United Auto Workers Local 6 in Chicago organized a Civil Rights Defense Committee of the union to protect the house of a black union member, C. B. Dennis (see “Black Family Firebombed in Chicago—UAW Local Sets Up Labor/Black Defense Guard,” WV No. 67, 25 April 1975). Dennis had recently moved into a white neighborhood and his house was being attacked by racists. As a result of a motion put forward in the union by the Labor Struggle Caucus, a caucus we supported based on a class-struggle program, the union voted to have a union defense guard around-



Young Spartacus

**Reformists of Socialist Workers Party youth group pushed illusions in federal troops to defend black children, Boston, 1974 (top). Detroit, 1967: U.S. troops suppress ghetto rebellion. Forty-three people were killed, over 7,000 arrested.**



UPI

the-clock to protect his house and his family from the racists. When they heard about the UAW-organized labor defense, the racists didn’t mess with him anymore. Other groups, reformists like the SWP, called labor/black defense pie in the sky. Well, we showed them a picture of the C. B. Dennis defense guard.

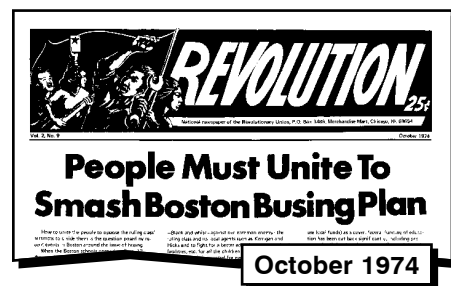
The SWP initially opposed busing. They put forward the slogan of “community control.” This was in keeping with their tailing of black nationalist politicians since the mid 1960s—the call for “black

called for federal troops to put down black Roxbury, which is what federal troops do.

In Boston the labor movement was weak, but there *was* a labor movement and there was a possibility of mobilizing labor/black defense. By pushing forward the call for federal troops to Boston, the SWP shared responsibility for making sure that labor/black defense didn’t happen. They shared responsibility for the fact that busing was defeated. Who killed busing? It was the liberals in Congress who played the major role, but the left shared responsibility.

## Jim Crow “Socialists”

Perhaps the most grotesque position on the left was taken by the Maoist Revolutionary Union (RU), soon to become the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP), who we aptly called “Jim Crow ‘Socialists’.” They openly sided with the racists who were fighting street battles against the oppressed black masses. It was pretty incredible when they came out with their October 1974 newspaper with the huge, front-page headline, “People Must Unite to Smash Boston Busing Plan.” I heard a story at the time that one of the main New Left bookstores in

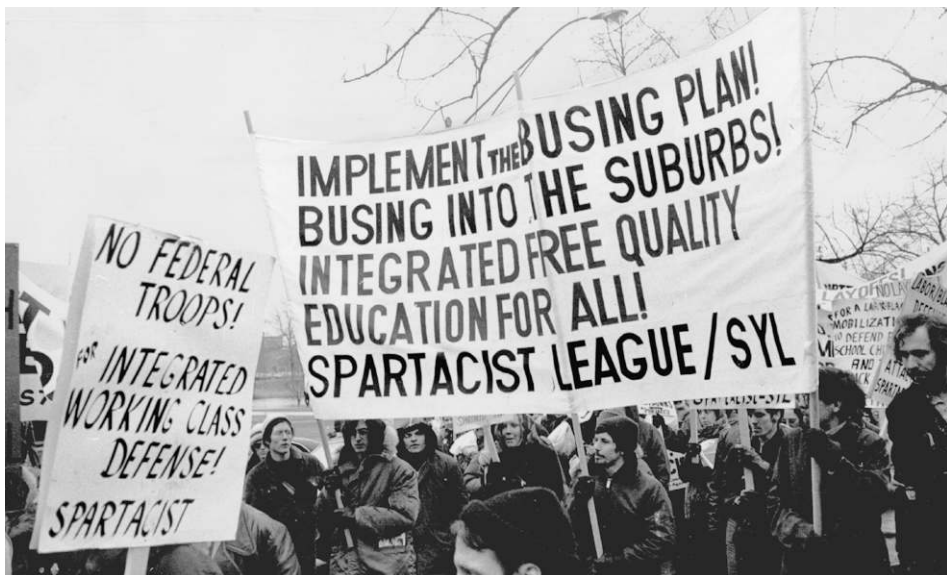


**Predecessor of Revolutionary Communist Party sided with racist backlash against school integration.**

Cambridge, which catered to all sorts of Maoists, actually refused to carry that issue because of the headline. The RU’s position was the most despicable capitulation to white racism.

That article tried at length to explain the motivations of the anti-busing school boycotters. It denounced as “liberal” all talk of “backward, racist whites.” It denounced as “reactionary” the “absurd line that the ‘only issue’ in the white boycott in South Boston is racism.” It even denounced raising the question of racism as “defeatist and divisive.” They opposed busing as an “issue which heightens the contradictions of people of different nationalities,” in favor of “community control” of the schools. But the perfect example of “community control” is what the racists like Louise Day Hicks were fighting for: it was the “right” of whites to keep blacks out of their schools and neighborhoods.

Just as incredibly, a year later the RU/ continued on page 6



WV Photo

**Spartacist contingent at National March and Rally Against Racism, Boston, December 1974.**



## Busing...

(continued from page 5)

RCP described the Klan-led anti-busing riots in Kentucky: “When school opened in Louisville under a new court-imposed busing plan, the spontaneous fight back was tremendous” (*Revolution*, October 1975). The RCP refused to defend basic democratic rights such as busing for black children or the Equal Rights Amendment for women, which simply called for equality for women under the law. They blocked with the reactionary demagogue Anita Bryant in Florida to oust gays from teaching school. They tailed the most reactionary sectors of the petty bourgeoisie and backward workers. This is the same RCP, a leader-cult around Bob Avakian, that today initiates groups including the World Can’t Wait to tail the liberals.

At the time that the busing plan was implemented in Boston, the RU’s youth group, the Revolutionary Student Brigade (RSB), was quite active at Boston University, where I was a student. They would try their hardest to keep us out of meetings, and to shut us up when we tried to intervene. But they couldn’t escape the issue of busing. I was in a class of Howard Zinn’s with something like 300 students in one of these really large audi-

was neither the outgrowth of mass struggle nor of any particular benefit to the Black masses. Ordered by the federal government with the excuse of a lawsuit by the NAACP, the busing plan aimed to accomplish exactly what it did accomplish—the intensification of national divisions among the people.”

They do waffle a little bit in that article, recognizing that they were too often siding with the racists against the fight for black equality. They explain that they set out to find “a middle ground,” and claim that busing in Boston wasn’t really the issue. But busing in Boston was not something there was a middle ground on—the racists in Boston were mobilized around the question of busing. And the RCP says very firmly in that article that busing cannot be supported! There was only one busing plan that they would support—in Chicago, Marquette Park. That’s where busing was “limited and voluntary”! Now we all know what voluntary busing means—voluntary busing doesn’t happen. It’s an open invitation for organized harassment and racial violence against the children whose families volunteer. “Voluntary busing” is what a lot of the racists were calling for.

The RCP describes in the article how they tried to go to anti-busing meetings and convince them about the divisions in



**Demonstration in Birmingham, Alabama, 1963, part of civil rights movement against Jim Crow segregation.**

were daily attacking black people on the streets! The League for the Revolutionary Party, then the Revolutionary Socialist League, was not really active in Boston. But we know from our work here in New York and other places that they’re still pushing this anti-busing line. They’re a splinter from the family tree of the International Socialists. They scurrilously stated that busing was a “vicious ruling class attack on blacks and cannot be supported” (*Socialist Voice*, Spring 1977).

Progressive Labor (PL) resorted to a lot of moralistic, “put your body on the line” bravado to give a militant cover to a reformist program. They did an ultra-adventurist May Day march through South Boston where they called for “death to the racists.” They followed up with a “Freedom Summer” campaign confined to a reformist petition campaign. That zigzag between mindless militancy and tepid liberalism is pretty typical of PL.

Any time there’s a major event going on in the world, it puts a lot of pressure on a small Leninist vanguard. So I want to go over some of the political internal struggle going on in the party at the time. In 1974 Bob Pearlman was the party organizer; I was the new youth organizer. We had thrown our forces in Boston into pushing a united-front call to defend busing. Counterposed to the do-nothing liberals, we advocated labor/black defense and extending busing to the wealthy suburbs, and opposed the call for federal troops to Boston. We stood out as the group that was pushing the way forward in the face of the racist assault. But the liberals and the bourgeois politicians and their lackeys in the Workers World Party and the SWP were working overtime to try to channel all the frustration into these calls for federal troops and for state intervention.

There was a black Democrat, Bill Owens, in Boston who was pushing for a December 14 “National March and Rally Against Racism.” The organizational initiative and impetus came from Workers World and the SWP. Early on, the populist demagogue Owens eyed the planned anti-racism demonstration, coming at a time when the busing crisis continued to be in the spotlight of national attention, as a vehicle for emerging as a self-styled militant black bourgeois politician. Workers World was enthralled with Owens’ militant image, cheap rhetoric and willingness to “unite” with them, i.e., use them. The SWP was obviously in the market for such a bourgeois politician to head up their sought-after new, liberal “civil rights movement.”

What Owens wanted with this demonstration was to organize his own committee where he would control everything: he would control the propaganda, he would control the march route, he wouldn’t allow any speakers other than the speakers he hand-picked. We could not endorse this demonstration, since Owens and his hangers-on had ensured that the only relationship any left organization could have with Owens’ committee was one of political liquidation. Owens had made it clear that the demo would be firmly tied to Democratic Party politics, not a rallying

point for action by black people and their allies in the labor movement to turn back the racist offensive. Bob Pearlman wanted to endorse the demonstration, but Pearlman’s position was defeated in the local. We did not endorse the demo, instead we intervened with an impressive contingent, raising our class-struggle demands.

Part and parcel of Pearlman’s accommodation to Owens’ “Emergency Committee” was his attempt to do phony “mass work” all over the city. Pearlman wanted us to cut back on all the interventions we were doing in conferences on the campuses and at demonstrations, in order to do more mass leafleting “in the community.” Our small propaganda group could not substitute for the fact that the Boston trade-union movement was weak and highly craft-oriented, and that the trade-union bureaucratic leadership either opposed busing or did nothing in response to our call.

We had a very clarifying political fight before Pearlman’s resignation. But, leaving the party, he used the SWP—or the SWP used him, rather—to put out a scurrilous article about SL “abstention” in Boston, etc. We responded in a two-part article, “Alibis of a Social Democrat” (WV No. 168, 29 July 1977 and No. 170, 26 August 1977). Pearlman didn’t last long in the SWP.

The party perspective at the time was to intervene as a propaganda group with our Trotskyist program and win people over in counterposition to our reformist opponents. Our goal was to become the nucleus of a vanguard party that could intervene as a communist pole in major arenas of political struggle: the trade unions, the campuses, the black and women’s movements and internationally. The struggle over busing opened people up to our revolutionary politics, and our position for black liberation, the touchstone of the American revolution, was key to recruiting. We were debating people from the black student milieu at Harvard around the February First Movement, the fallout from the Pan-Africanists.

We had an East Coast Educational Conference in December 1974. Part of the conference was a forum titled, “The Leninist Party in Motion: Program and Conjunction” by Central Committee member James Robertson. As reported in *Young Spartacus*:

“Turning to the SL/SYL’s campaign in Boston for a labor-black defense, the speaker noted the exacerbation of racial tensions in the U.S. arising from the deterioration of the living conditions of the working class and oppressed and the intensification of job competition. The core of the SL/SYL’s perspective in Boston and other cities like Detroit where the possibility of race riots is very real is to seek to deflect race riots into sharp manifestations of struggle against the capitalist class. The SL/SYL has an objective importance today, comrade Robertson noted, and we are under pressure to dissipate ourselves in our struggle to provide leadership in situations where our tasks are enormous.”

—“East Coast Educational a Success,” *Young Spartacus* No. 28, January 1975

Although we could not turn the tide in Boston, our intervention there was a crucial test for our party, and important in winning many new recruits. ■



**May 1983, Norfolk, Virginia: Longshoremens at 10,000-strong march in defense of school busing. Labor movement must champion black rights.**

toriums. Howard Zinn was someone who had been involved in the civil rights movement. He challenged anybody in the room who opposed busing to explain their position. So these two RSBers had to get up in front of the room. And the Spartacus Youth League and the RSB had a debate on busing and our program in front of two or three hundred students. There was a lot of debate going on constantly in Boston about busing.

In June 1979, the RCP ran an article with so-called “self-criticism” on their position on busing (“Busing and the Fight Against National Oppression and for Revolution,” *Revolution*). It’s a lot of Mao-speak. They say they “committed serious errors” around Boston busing in 1974. But really, they did not change their line on busing. They wrote: “The plan itself

the working class! I mean, these are the ROAR people. You know how the RCP always says the people united will never be defeated? The racists in the anti-busing movement actually came out with the slogan, ROAR united will never be defeated.

### Reformists and Renegades

The International Socialists, the predecessor to the International Socialist Organization, also capitulated to the racist anti-busing backlash, though not as flagrantly as the RCP. They sought to carve out a non-existent “third camp” with the line that “socialists oppose both the ‘pro’-busing and the ‘anti’-busing forces, both of whom use racism to further their own ends” (*Workers’ Power*, 10 November 1972). This grotesque argument amnestied the lynch mobs who

## Spartacus Youth Club Events

### LOS ANGELES

Thursday, October 9, 6:30 p.m.

#### Meet the Marxists

152 Kerckhoff Hall, UCLA

For more information: (213) 380-8239 or e-mail: slsycla@sbcglobal.net

### NEW YORK CITY

Saturday, September 27, 5 p.m.

#### The Russian Revolution: How the Working Class Took Power

299 Broadway, Suite 318

(1-1/2 blocks north of Chambers St.)

Information and readings: (212) 267-1025 or e-mail: nysl@tiac.net

### TORONTO

Wednesday, October 8, 6:30 p.m.

#### The Capitalist State: Reform vs. Revolution

U of T, Sidney Smith Building Room 1080, 100 St. George Street

Information and readings: (416) 593-4138 or e-mail: spartacan@on.aibn.com

### VANCOUVER

Wednesday, October 8, 6 p.m.

#### Imperialism and War

University of British Columbia Student Union Building, Room 211

Information and readings: (604) 687-0353 trotskyist\_vancouver@shawcable.com

Visit the ICL Web Site: [www.icl-fi.org](http://www.icl-fi.org)

Solidarność...

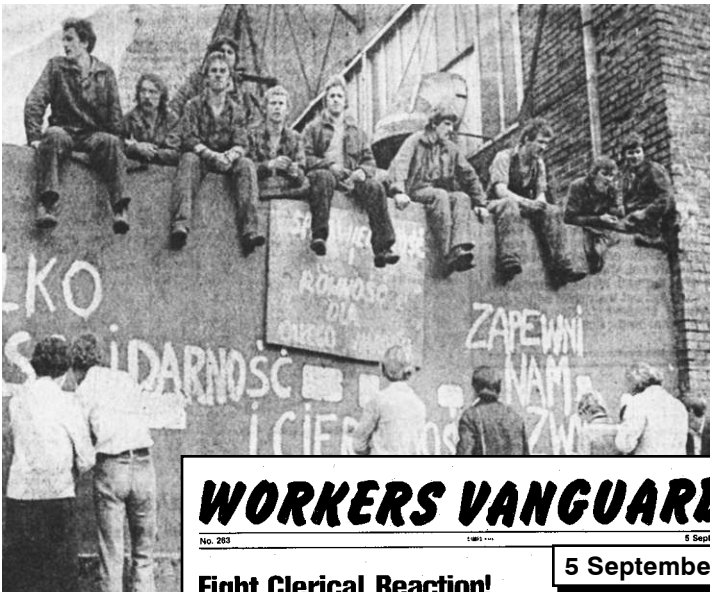
(continued from page 2)

that our support to the suppression of Solidarność is “the biggest political error” of our history.

Our Trotskyist position of unconditional military defense of those states where capitalism has been overthrown has been a major dividing line between ourselves and the fake left for decades. Our fight against counterrevolutionary Solidarność as well as the evolution of our position and our work has been documented extensively (see: Solidarność: Polish Company Union for CIA and Bankers, Spartacist pamphlet, 1981). We wrote in the introduction to that pamphlet:

“The Polish Stalinist bureaucracy, having already mortgaged Poland to the German bankers in the futile hope of buying off its own working class, now seems paralyzed by Solidarność” bid to sell the country to the imperialists outright. There has emerged in Poland no socialist opposition worthy of the name. And internationally the fake-lefts see in this mortal danger to socialized property in Poland a chance to earn their stars and stripes as a left cover for the social democrats and the pro-capitalist ‘labor statesmen’ who long ago enlisted as junior partners in imperialism’s war drive against the Soviet Union.”

Syrek refers to “two Polish Solidarities,” the first including “at its peak, over 90% of the Polish working class.” Beginning in 1980 we recognized in the Polish upheavals both an opening for revolutionary agitation and an awesome potential for reactionary mobilization based on the powerful Catholic church, the large peasant “free market” and the “dissident” movement which looked to the capitalist West to “democratize” East Europe. We



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WORKERS VANGUARD 25c

No. 293 5 September 1980

Fight Clerical Reaction!  
For Proletarian Political Revolution!

Polish Workers Move

Everyone predicted it was coming. A strike, involving working class, peasants, students, teachers, doctors, etc., etc., etc.

Practically, the entire had a sacred effect. Other workers were not demanding more. In early August there were no more strikes.

1980: Striking workers in Gdansk shipyard shook Polish Stalinist regime but knelt before Catholic church. Spartacists fought against capitalist counterrevolution and called for workers political revolution.

poured cash into Walesa’s operation. Solidarność also called for “free elections,” by which it meant capitalist restoration under the guise of parliamentary “democracy.” We raised demands for the strict separation of church and state, for the collectivization of Polish agriculture, for the cancellation of Poland’s crippling debt to the imperialist bankers, for the military defense of the USSR against imperialism, for political revolution against the Stalinist bureaucracy and for a democratically elected workers government based on soviets to carry out socialist economic planning.

Syrek, glibly opining about Trotskyist “work” within Solidarność, omits the

suppression because of its mass proletarian base. When that necessary crack-down came only hours before Solidarność’s own counterrevolutionary grab for power, we wrote in “Solidarność Counterrevolution Checked: Power Bid Spiked” (WV No. 295, 18 December 1981):

“The Polish Stalinists managed to pull off an effective coup d’état in their own country. Contrary to every instinct and appetite of the ruling bureaucracy, constantly seeking accommodation with imperialism, they were forced to take measures defending historic gains of the proletariat. For it must be recognized that Lech Walesa’s Solidarność was moving to overthrow not merely the corrupt and discredited Stalinist regime, but social gains inherited from the Bolshevik Revolution—centrally a collectivized planned economy—which were bureaucratically extended to Poland after the Red Army liberated the country from Nazi occupation. That is why this Polish ‘free trade union’ is supported by the forces of imperialist reaction.”

It was certainly not to our liking to see workers follow a counterrevolutionary course. It was the bankrupt policies of the Stalinist misrulers that drove these workers from the historically socialist-minded proletariat of Poland into the arms of capitalist reaction. Nonetheless, when the program for the emancipation of the working class is in flat contradiction with a section of the working class, our loyalties must reside with the program, which is decisive. Not so for Syrek. In fact, in 1993 *Workers Vanguard* published a letter by Syrek in which he posited that those states in East Europe where capitalism had been overthrown were “simply new forms of bourgeois states.” As we replied at the time:

“Similarly, the missing ingredient in Syrek’s ‘analysis’ of Eastern Europe is the intervention of the Red Army, whose military victory over Hitler’s Nazis and their East European puppet regimes caused the former rulers to flee, leaving behind a power vacuum that was filled by the Soviet Army. Under the pressure of imperialist Cold War I, the Stalinists

established deformed workers states in these countries as a ‘buffer zone,’ through cold social revolutions that were imposed from the top down.”

—“On Counterrevolution in East Europe,” WV No. 578, 18 June 1993

This was no abstract debate then, nor is it now. Syrek writes of “an open society with full freedom of speech, press and assembly” as opposed to a “Stalinist regime”—echoing those who extol “democratic” imperialism. The renegade Kautsky would have been proud.

The subsequent course of events in Poland further demolishes Syrek’s apology for “poor little Solidarność.” As our comrades in the Spartacist Group of Poland wrote:

“After the destruction of the Polish deformed workers state in 1989-90, Solidarność had served its purpose as the spearhead for capitalist counterrevolution. Its peasant sector and many intellectuals decamped and founded their own bourgeois parties. Thus, Solidarność (and its offshoots like Solidarność 80 and Sierpień 80) became more akin to a trade union in social composition. During the first tenure of the SLD [Democratic Left Alliance]-led government in post-counterrevolution Poland we observed that the ‘official Solidarność union now poses as a champion of working-class interests while revving up its anti-Communist demagoguery and making overtures to openly fascist forces’.”

—“Spartacist Group of Poland Refounded,” WV No. 892, 11 May 2007

Such are the bitter fruits of capitalist counterrevolution throughout the former Soviet Union and East Europe, an outcome against which we fought to the end. As we explained in “All the Pope’s Dissidents” (WV No. 263, 5 September 1980): “Authentic Trotskyism stands not for the bogus ‘unity of all anti-Stalinist forces’—including disciples of Wojtyła [Pope John Paul II] and Brzezinski [Carter’s National Security Advisor]—but for a class-conscious communist opposition to the parasitic bureaucracy.” ■



WV Photo

September 1981: Spartacists demonstrate in front of Solidarność office at teachers union headquarters in New York, exposing Solidarność as company union for CIA, Vatican and Wall Street.

pointed out after the August 1980 Gdansk Agreement was signed that the union movement would either become a vehicle for clerical-nationalist reaction or would have to oppose it in the name of socialist principle. *There was no “third way.”*

By September 1981, we recognized that “Solidarity is no longer a trade union, but has come to include large sections of the intelligentsia, petty bureaucrats, priests, etc.... Much of Solidarity’s efforts were directed toward forcing the government to legally recognize the organization of peasant smallholders, Rural Solidarity, a potent social force for capitalist restoration” (see “Stop Solidarity’s Counterrevolution!” WV No. 289, 25 September 1981). We oriented toward creating a left opposition from among *both* Solidarność and Communist Party militants who sought a genuine “socialist renewal.” As we pointed out: “A revolutionary vanguard in Poland would seek to *split* Solidarity, winning the mass of the workers away from the anti-Soviet nationalist leadership around Walesa.”

But Solidarność consolidated around a clear counterrevolutionary program, including the call for “free trade unions,” a war cry of Cold War AFL-CIO anti-Communists and their CIA cohorts who

fact that not only was the “AFL-CIA” officialdom backing the consolidation of Solidarność around a counterrevolutionary program, but also that this Polish “free trade union” was supported by the forces of imperialist reaction from Wall Street to the Vatican. Ronald Reagan declared the Polish crisis represented “the beginning of the end of Communism.” The notoriously anti-Communist social democrat Albert Shanker and the *Wall Street Journal* were as one in attacking any leftists (i.e., us) who exposed Solidarność as a company union for the CIA and bankers. Meanwhile, such was the renegacy of the fake-Trotskyist “left” that Nat Weinstein’s Socialist Action made the Solidarność logo the template for its newspaper’s masthead. Indeed, Marion Syrek was listed as a staff member of *Socialist Action* since its first issue in December 1983 until at least November 1985.

Reading Syrek’s letter, one would never know that the bulk of the fake left, in overt reformist or more slimy centrist fashion, sided with counterrevolution in the former Soviet Union and East European deformed workers states. This included the likes of British Workers Power which, while conceding the counterrevolutionary nature of Solidarność, nonetheless opposed its

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(continued from page 1)

## Financial Crises and the Anarchy of Capitalist Production

The deterioration in the condition of the working class is directly related to the

**IAM machinists  
on picket line at  
Boeing plant in  
Everett, Washington.  
Some 27,000 IAM  
Boeing workers  
have been on strike  
since September 6.**



“This confusion and stagnation paralyses the function of money as a medium of payment, whose development is geared to the development of capital and is based

The current crisis was conditioned by a broad transformation of the U.S. financial industry since the late 1980s that was exemplified by the repeal, under the Clinton administration, of the Glass-Steagall Act, a Depression-era law that sought to limit speculation by commercial banks. A component of that transformation was the



Margaret Bourke-White

“In the simple model of yesteryear, a bank would essentially borrow money from its depositors and lend it to households or businesses that needed loans. For every dollar it lent out, however, the bank was required to set aside some of its own money in reserve to cover losses it might

suffer if some loans were not repaid. “But all that went out with deregulation and the rise of financial engineering.... “Financial engineering has encouraged debt to be piled on debt, making the system more susceptible to a meltdown if credit suddenly becomes more expensive or unavailable. And that’s precisely what’s been developing over the past several weeks.”


## Government Bails Out Wall Street: “Socialism for the Rich”

A prime example of the capitalist scam of privatizing profits while socializing debts is Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. Fannie was set up as a government agency in the late 1930s and Freddie in 1970 to promote home ownership by increasing the pool of mortgage money. The former was privatized by Democratic president Lyndon Johnson in 1968 to help pay for the Vietnam War; the latter was created as a private corporation. Until the collapse of the housing-price bubble last year, the two financial giants

## ***WORKERS VANGUARD***

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No. 910      14 March 2008

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the "Global Economy"  
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**Imperialist Rivalries Heat Up..... 3**  
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mortgage giants’ bonds were held abroad, mainly by Asian central banks and funds. If Washington allowed them to default on these debts, Asian governments and financiers could respond by dumping their U.S. Treasury bonds.

The main political champions of Fannie and Freddie have been Congressional Democrats, while the Bush regime took a jaundiced view of them. Liberal Democrat Barney Frank, chairman of the House Financial Services Committee, has staunchly defended the right of the government-sponsored enterprises to make a profit for their shareholders while urging them to divert some of that profit to finance housing for low-income families. This is a liberal version of trickle-down economics.

A week after the government bailout/takeover of Fannie/Freddie, Lehman Brothers declared bankruptcy. One of the most venerable institutions on the Street—it originated in the 1850s as a cotton exchange in Alabama—Lehman survived the Great Depression and several subsequent financial crises. But not this time. When mortgage-backed securities began their downward slide last summer, Lehman head Richard Fuld judged this to be a short-term blip in the market. He not only refused to sell off part of the firm’s securities portfolio, he even bought more. A fatal mistake. When Lehman announced a few weeks ago the biggest quarterly loss in its 158-year history, the already sharp decline in the price of its shares turned into a death spiral.

Fuld desperately tried to find a buyer for the firm, to no avail. As a last resort, he turned to a government bailout à la Bear Stearns, but this time the Treasury and Federal Reserve said no. The semi-official explanation is that Lehman’s demise had been anticipated for months by other major financial players who had presumably adjusted their policies to that eventuality. In effect, Paulson and Federal Reserve chief Ben Bernanke gambled that Lehman’s bankruptcy would not unduly roil financial markets. They lost that gamble big time. The next day, panic seized stock markets throughout the world, motivated in large measure by fear that A.I.G. would be the next to go.

A.I.G. is the central player in the estimated **\$60 trillion** global market for credit default swaps. This is a form of insurance that investors buy to cover losses suffered by defaults on the securities they have purchased. (But the companies that issue such insurance do not have to keep reserves to cover the possibility of a payout!) If A.I.G. went bankrupt or failed to meet its insurance claims, financiers around the world would have to devalue the hundreds of billions of dollars in their security portfolios. Furthermore, banks, suddenly deprived of default insurance on their loans, would be forced by government regulations to immediately raise large sums of additional capital. While the effective government takeover of A.I.G. did little to lessen the panicky conditions on Wall Street and in financial centers from London to Tokyo, Bush’s proposed mega-bailout of U.S. banks holding mortgage-backed securities has halted the downslide, for the moment. A day before the government bailout of A.I.G., the head of a money management firm warned: “Its collapse would be as close to an extinction-level event as the financial markets have seen since the Great Depression” (*New York Times*, 16 September).

**The Liberal Nostrum of Financial Regulation**

An interesting piece in a South African bourgeois newspaper, *The Star* (10 September), blamed the current financial crisis on the ideological triumphalism of the American ruling class following the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union in 1991-92:

“In the absence of the restraining influence that an alternative system’s presence offered, however feebly, US-style capitalism moved into extreme mode.... For market players much of the past 18 years has been rather like a drunk being encouraged to drink his way out of a hangover.



Spartacist League banner at May 2001 rally in San Francisco for class-war prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal.

Instead of acting as a restraining influence, the regulators seemed intent on accommodating each new session of binge drinking.”

This piece contains both an important component of truth and a fundamental falsehood. It is true that American bourgeois triumphalism over “the death of communism” was an important factor contributing to the deregulation of financial markets in the post-Soviet period. Here we should emphasize that the main steps of that program were carried out by the Democratic administration of Bill Clinton and spearheaded by his Treasury secretary, Robert Rubin, a Wall Street heavyweight who is now a top man at Citigroup. But it is a liberal illusion that a financial crisis of the current magnitude could have been prevented if only the old financial regulations had been maintained and strengthened. What we are now seeing is a consequence of the fundamental workings of the capitalist system, not an accidental occurrence caused by excessive financial deregulation.

Within just the last two decades, major financial crises have occurred throughout the capitalist world every few years. In 1990-91, a frenzied stock market and real estate boom in Japan collapsed, leading to more than a decade of economic stagnation in the world’s second biggest capitalist economy. In the late 1990s, a sudden outflow of speculative money capital wreaked havoc in the capitalist economies of East and Southeast Asia, from South Korea to Thailand to Indonesia. A few years ago the dot-com stock market boom in the U.S. went bust, ushering in a recession.

The need to restore and strengthen government regulation of financial markets is now the order of the day in Washington. In reality, at the core of the crisis are the big banks (which, despite the scrapping of Glass-Steagall, are still regulated) rather than the effectively unregulated hedge funds and similar financial operators. However, the government authorities pretty much let the banks do whatever they wanted as long as they were making money. But now they are regulating with a vengeance, this time to minimize the banks’ losses.

Thus, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) has just banned the short selling of almost 800 financial stocks in an effort to prevent speculators from further depressing their prices. When a financial operator sells short, he typically borrows corporate stocks or other securities from a broker and sells them at the current price while agreeing to buy them back later (at an expectedly lower price) and return them to the broker. The difference is pocketed as profit. The intent and effect of the SEC ban on short selling is to strengthen the financial condition of the large banks at the expense of, for example, hedge funds, for whom the practice is their very life’s blood. One irate hedge fund manager exclaimed that the government is “turning a football game into badminton” (*New York Times*, 20 September).

The utter disarray of the captains of finance, central bankers and government officials charged with overseeing the economy has demonstrated the fallaciousness of monetarism, the dominant economic doctrine of the bourgeois right since the ascendancy of Ronald Reagan and Britain’s Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s. The ideologues of monetarism confidently maintained that economic crises could be minimized, if not eliminated, by adjusting the amount of money in the banking system along with interest rates. Today, that notion stands exposed as a myth.

Republican McCain has indulged in impassioned, pseudo-populist rhetoric usually associated with the left-liberal wing of the Democratic Party, ranting against “the greed and corruption that some engaged in on Wall Street” (*New York Times*, 16 September). Needless to say, Democrat Obama has blamed the current crisis on the Republicans’ “economic philosophy” that the market is always right. He should talk! One of his main economic advisers is Robert Rubin who as Clinton’s Treasury secretary was centrally responsible for scrapping key regulations governing banking practices that were established during the 1930s. The reality is, as the *Wall Street Journal*

(17 September) clearly stated: “Despite the rhetoric, both candidates are looking at generally similar solutions.” That is, “solutions” to protect the interests of the capitalist class at the expense of working people.

**Toward a Class-Struggle Labor Movement**

That the highly despised Bush administration, backed up by the Democrats, has a free hand to unabashedly write billion-dollar checks to Washington’s cronies on Wall Street speaks to the low level of class struggle in this country. The increasing disappearance of good jobs and their replacement by McJobs, the slashing of pensions and health care benefits, the enormous weakening of the unions—all this and more takes place with the acquiescence of the pro-capitalist trade-union bureaucracy. Instead of mobilizing in struggle, they tie working people and the oppressed to the capitalist system, especially through support to the Democratic Party, the other party of American capitalism, racism and war. Every election year, millions upon millions of dollars of union members’ dues are wasted on backing one capitalist politician or another as a “friend” of labor, as is happening this election year with the unions’ support to Obama.

This bureaucracy, which parasitically sits atop the unions, is on the one hand susceptible to the demands of its working-class base. At times, it is pressured both by labor’s ranks and by the provocations of the bosses into strikes and other labor action. On the other hand, they have often thrown in the towel or signed egregious give-back contracts. But unions will not get anywhere playing by the bosses’ rules.

It is necessary to forge a new leadership of the unions based on the understanding that there are two decisive classes in capitalist society, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, whose interests are irreconcilably opposed. A class-struggle leadership of the unions would fight for a series of transitional demands, which start from the current consciousness of wide layers of the working class and their daily struggles against the capitalists and lead to the program of proletarian revolution. The fight to mobilize labor in struggle for its class interests must include the fight

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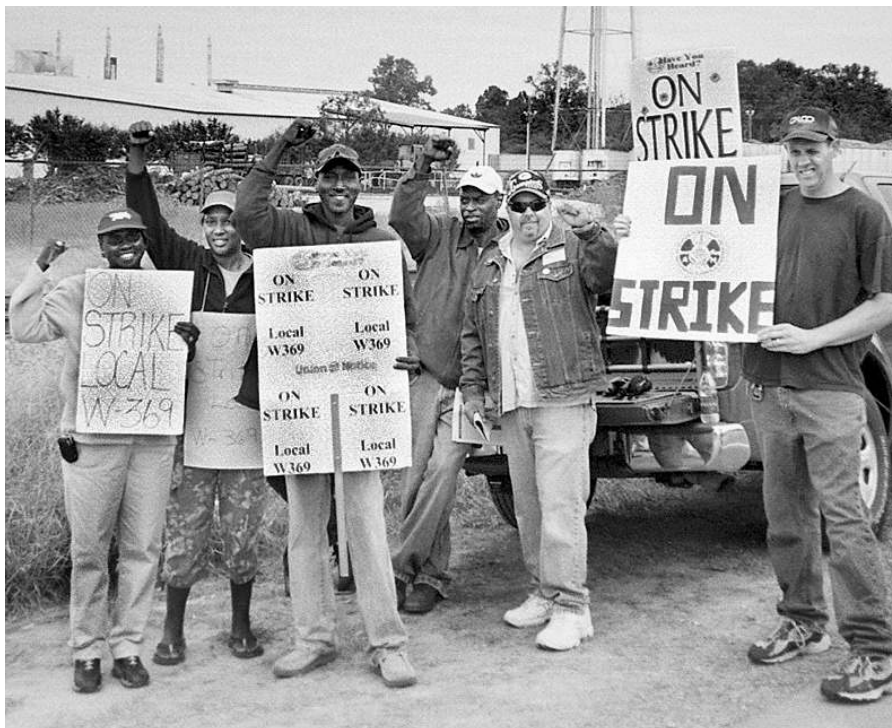
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# Victory to the Moncure Plywood Workers Strike!

## North Carolina

SEPTEMBER 21—Facing down a new plant management that has a history of busting unions, the 114 members of the International Association of Machinists (IAM) Local Lodge W369 are on strike at Moncure Plywood in Chatham County, North Carolina. Spirits are high among the striking workers, who walked off the job on July 20 after bosses tried to impose mandatory 60-hour workweeks and other anti-union measures in contract negotiations. *Workers Vanguard* salesmen visited the picket lines during a trip to the area for our annual subscription drive. One black striker told WV that this struggle was about rights, not money, adding: “Even the slaves got a day off.” Already long hours at the plant are made worse by the dangerous working conditions, including the lack of ventilation, missing saw guards and accumulation of combustible dust.

While production at the plant is reportedly down, it remains open. According to an IAM W369 representa-



WV Photo

tive, management has recruited scabs, including from among Latino immigrants, and lured some 40 former members of the union back to work. In a

plant that was 60 percent black and 30 percent Latino before the strike, bosses have stated that they will not hire any more black workers. With immigrant

workers under siege in North Carolina and elsewhere in the South, including through government workplace raids, management views these workers as vulnerable and easily intimidated into opposing the union. Meanwhile, a noose was provocatively hung near the pickets. This demonstrates that championing black rights and fighting for full citizenship rights for all immigrants are key to mobilizing labor's power in struggle against capitalist exploitation.

For weeks, deputy sheriffs harassed the striking workers. The role of the cops is to defend the bosses' profits and rule. The same forces of the capitalist state, historically backed up by Klan terror, uphold the “right to work” laws that have kept North Carolina open shop and largely non-union. Instead of launching a campaign to organize the unorganized, the pro-capitalist officials of the AFL-CIO and Change to Win trade-union federations preach reliance on their “friends” in the capitalist Democratic Party. Electing Democrats, who are representatives of the class enemy, is an obstacle to the way forward: hard class struggle. ***Victory to the Moncure Plywood workers strike!***

## Wall Street...

(continued from page 9)

against all forms of discrimination and for full citizenship rights for immigrants; for a shorter workweek with no loss in pay in order to fight unemployment; against the bosses' union-busting “two tier” contracts; for union defense guards against the scabherders; for mass picketing and plant occupations to win strikes instead of bowing to the bosses' laws.

To forge such a leadership requires a **political** fight within the labor movement to sweep away all wings of the pro-capitalist labor bureaucracy. This is integrally linked to the fight for a workers party—like Lenin and Trotsky's Bolshevik Party—to provide revolutionary leadership to the struggles of the workers in the fight for socialist revolution and the building of a workers state where those who labor rule.

### Expropriate the Exploiters! For a Workers Government!

The reformists of the International Socialist Organization (ISO) provide a classic social-democratic take on the financial crisis (*Socialist Worker*, 19 September):

“Now that they have bailed out the mortgage giants Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, shouldn't U.S. taxpayers have a say in the

companies' operations? Why shouldn't the public owners of these companies insist on a moratorium on foreclosures on the loans owned or guaranteed by Fannie and Freddie....

“Now that the federal government has gotten into the insurance business with the takeover of the largest insurance company in the world, is there any justification for anyone in the U.S. going without health care coverage, much less 45 million people?

“And when the objection comes that the U.S. government will have to cut spending to pay for the Wall Street rescues, there should be no question about where the money should come from. The federal government could get the whole sum for the AIG takeover from the Pentagon budget and still leave the U.S. military with more money—many times over—than any other country in the world.”

Such a statement—including the ISO's backhanded support to a (scaled-down) imperialist military force—could have been issued by such European “socialist” parties as the French Socialist Party or the Left Party in Germany. The ISO protests that its demands are not put forward by “either of the mainstream parties” because that “would strain at the boundaries of the profit system.” But their statement is intended to reinforce the reformist myth that one can smoothly make the transformation to “more butter, less guns” by taking over management of the bourgeois state.

As Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels taught long ago, the courts, cops, prisons and armed forces are core components of the capitalist state—a machinery of organized violence to protect the rule and profits of the exploiting class. An old socialist noted some years back, on behalf of the working people, that everything the bourgeoisie doesn't have nailed down we are going to steal, and what is nailed down we are going to nationalize. Another, Sidney Hook, before he became a raving right-winger, used to worry whether expropriation should be with or without compensation. Hell, the Emancipation Proclamation was a gigantic expropriation without compensation: by freeing black people from chattel slavery most of the capital of the rulers of the Confederacy was taken away from its owners.

It's a political question at bottom. You can solve a lot of problems with “domestic cash transfers”—make life livable for workers, blacks, Latinos, jobless, homeless, welfare mothers, drug users, etc. And we communists intend to do so. But

you have to first smash the power of the bourgeoisie. For that you need to build a workers party, one that doesn't “respect” the property values of the bourgeoisie, a party that says to the exploited and oppressed: we want more, we want all of it, it ought to be ours, ***so take it.*** And when we have the wealth of this country, we will begin to build a planned socialist economy on an international scale. Then we can right some historical wrongs and crimes and pay off some debts left over by our rulers, like some tens of billions of dollars to the Vietnamese and others whose countries have been maimed under the passing treads of American tanks. As for “compensation” to the people who have driven the United States to ruin, we can offer to those who don't get in our way that they will live to see their grandchildren prosper in a truly humane society.

***We need a workers party to grab the vanishing wealth of America before the bourgeoisie squanders it all. Fight, don't starve—for class struggle against the U.S. capitalist rulers! ■***

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Soviet military intervention in 1979 opened the road to emancipation of Afghan women. Before Soviet withdrawal, over half of students at Kabul University were women (left). Today, in U.S.-“liberated” Afghanistan women are segregated, humiliated, degraded (right).



Steve McCurry

## ISO’s War...

(continued from page 3)

in Afghanistan was the direct precursor to the 1991-92 capitalist counterrevolution in the Soviet Union, destroying the homeland of the October Revolution.

As the Soviets pulled out of Afghanistan, we extended an offer to the beleaguered PDPA regime to organize international brigades to “fight to the death” against the *mujahedin* cutthroats. This offer was refused, but the Partisan Defense Committee—a class-struggle, non-sectarian legal and social defense organization associated with the Spartacist League—took up the PDPA’s appeal to organize an international aid campaign for the besieged city of Jalalabad, raising some \$44,000. For the next three years, the Kabul government forces, especially the women’s militias, fought valiantly, but were finally overrun by the U.S.-backed fundamentalists. A few years later, the Taliban, born and bred under the patronage of Pakistan’s ISI secret police and supported by the U.S., emerged as the strongest of the *mujahedin* factions in the internecine feuding that broke out after

the fall of the PDPA regime, coming to power in Afghanistan in 1996.

The ISO greeted the Taliban’s rise to power by grotesquely declaring, “Tragically, the Taliban has no answer to the terrible crisis of the country”! The Cliffites have always displayed a certain penchant for Islamic fundamentalism. As the Shi’ite mullahs fought for power in Iran in 1979, we put forward a program for proletarian revolution, declaring: “Down With the Shah! Down With the Mullahs! Workers Must Lead Iranian Revolution!” In contrast, the ISO ran laudatory articles on the mullahs’ “mass movement” with headlines like, “The Form—Religious, the Spirit—Revolution!” In 1994, the Cliffites published a pamphlet by SWP “theoretician” Chris Harman titled, *The Prophet and the Proletariat*, complete with a green cover and Arabic-looking lettering, while the British SWP declared, “*Islamists have now replaced socialists and the left in terms of being in the frontline against the state in many countries*” (*Socialist Worker* [Britain], 20 August 1994).

The Cliffites’ genuflection before religious reaction is not a bizarre aberration. They have historically sided with any and all counterrevolutionary forces

against the Soviet Union, no matter how reactionary. In this, they stand completely in line with U.S. imperialism, which, notwithstanding its current reactionary crusade against Islamic fundamentalism, fostered the growth of Islamic reaction for decades as a bulwark against “godless” Communism and even secular nationalism. In 1950, John Foster Dulles, who was later Secretary of State during the Eisenhower presidency, wrote: “The religions of the East are deeply rooted and have many precious values. Their spiritual beliefs cannot be reconciled with Communist atheism and materialism. That creates a common bond between us, and our task is to find it and develop it.”

Just as it was obligatory to fight for the unconditional military defense of the Soviet Union and East European deformed workers states, so it is the elementary duty of workers around the world to defend the remaining deformed workers states of China, Cuba, Vietnam and North Korea. Today, the ISO continues to fight Charlie Wilson’s war. In “Tyrannies That Ruled in the Name of Socialism” (*Socialist Worker*, 28 August), Paul D’Amato reasserts the ISO’s “Where We Stand” call for capitalist counterrevolution: “China and

Cuba, like the former Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc, have nothing to do with socialism. They are state capitalist regimes.” The ISO sides with the forces of “democratic” imperialism and capitalist counterrevolution, reprinting in *Socialist Worker* online (27 August) a piece by Dave Zirin, a regular contributor to that paper, that chides the bourgeois media for insufficient China-bashing during the Olympics and condemning them for supposedly not asking “why the State Department last April took China off its list of nations that commit human rights violations.”

As Bolshevik leader Leon Trotsky taught, you can’t win new gains without defending those already won. The capitalist counterrevolution welcomed by the imperialists and their social-democratic lackeys like the ISO was a world-historic defeat for the international proletariat, creating a “one superpower” world where the U.S. imperialists feel they can run roughshod over the world. It paved the way for the brutal wars against Iraq and Afghanistan, where women continue to be enslaved. *U.S. out of Iraq and Afghanistan! Defeat U.S. imperialism through workers revolution! For new October Revolutions!* ■

## Katrina...

(continued from page 12)

northward to Houston. This must be linked to a fight to unionize the increasing numbers of unorganized workers. In the “right to work” South, where the racist legacy of slavery and Jim Crow segregation has always served to head off labor struggle, the struggle for unionization must center on the fight for black rights as well as the rights of immigrant workers. Full citizenship rights for all immigrants! Organize the unorganized!

Such a perspective requires a political fight against the pro-capitalist labor tops who chain working people and the oppressed to the capitalist class enemy, especially through support to the Democratic Party. To unleash the social power of this country’s multiracial proletariat, there needs to be a fight to replace the labor bureaucracy with a leadership committed to mobilizing labor’s power independently of the capitalist state and politicians and in the interests of all the exploited and oppressed.

Contrast the havoc wreaked along the Gulf Coast and Texas with the Cuban bureaucratically deformed workers state, where capitalist rule was overthrown in 1960-61. By the time Gustav and Ike had swept through Cuba, the government had evacuated over 2.5 million people, or over 21 percent of the entire island’s population. No one was killed during Gustav, though four people died during Ike. (In the U.S., total deaths from both storms were over 100 people.) In Cuba, despite its relative poverty, intensified by over four decades of U.S. imperialist economic embargo, the government routinely moves large numbers of people to safe areas of the island during major hurricanes. The government provides early, accurate scientific forecasting, educates and mobilizes the population, and holds detailed post-disaster assessments. Every year there are dress rehearsals, and each

community has arrangements in place for shelters, transport, additional food and medical backup. Some 3,000 health professionals make up a mobile disaster response team that has provided aid not only internally but also to disaster survivors internationally.

Cuba has suffered catastrophic property and crop damage this year, requiring massive rehabilitation. The Cuban government had asked the U.S. government to consider lifting its 46-year-old trade embargo for at least six months to allow it to buy materials for reconstruction, but Washington has refused to change its policy on the embargo, imposed on Cuba since 1962 under the Democratic Kennedy administration. The Bush administration offered time-limited aid as long as it bypassed the government, and Democrat Barack Obama agreed, stating: “Make no mistake—the embargo must remain.” We call for an end to U.S. imperialism’s embargo against Cuba, a blatant act of war. Defend the Cuban Revolution!

In Haiti, four storms in three weeks killed over 300 people. Haiti languishes in ruin. It has been a victim of the U.S. and other capitalist powers since winning independence in the 1791-1804 Haitian Revolution. The Bush administration in 2000 slashed foreign aid, even blocking previously approved loans from the Inter-American Development Bank for improvements in education, roads, health care and the water supply, plunging what was already the poorest country in the Western hemisphere and one of the most malnourished populations in the world into even greater poverty. Now after this summer’s storms, cemetery workers trudge through the coastal town of Gonaïves fetching the bloated corpses emerging from the muck daily.

Speaking about Katrina back in 2005, Obama declared that “the ineptitude was color-blind.” Despite differences over particular tactics, the Republicans and Democrats are united in defending the capitalist system. Obama could only get away

with his lying pronouncement in a period of relatively low social and working-class struggle. The fight for black freedom is a strategic task for a proletarian revolution in the U.S. A class-conscious labor movement under revolutionary leadership must and will take up the fight for black liberation as an inseparable part of the struggle for the emancipation of workers from capitalist exploitation. We fight for a third American revolution, a socialist revolution, to complete the unfinished tasks of the Civil War.

Across the U.S., systematic deindustrialization and lack of investment have resulted in a rotting infrastructure: bridges collapse in the Midwest, power grids fail and levees burst all along the Mississippi and its swollen tributaries. The bold engineering that characterized an earlier, ascendant American capitalism is long gone and is utterly unimaginable for the decaying shells of urban centers today

alongside stretches of empty, crumbling factories. The country’s capitalist rulers have looted basic industry, and their drive for ever-greater profits means depraved indifference to the lives of those they exploit.

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. The Spartacist League is dedicated to building a Leninist vanguard party that will lead the working class to sweep away this cruel economic system and replace it with working-class rule. As we wrote in a statement on the New Orleans racist atrocity (reprinted in *WV* No. 854, 16 September 2005): “This anarchic, irrational profit-driven system cannot even provide for the safety and welfare of the population—the system must go.” ■

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# WORKERS VANGUARD

## Three Years After Katrina Racist Atrocity New Orleans Still in Ruins

The abandonment of masses of overwhelmingly black and poor people in the Gulf Coast by America's capitalist rulers in the face of Hurricane Katrina three years ago is a crime that must be seared into the memory of working people. The people left to die, the many others who to this day cannot return to their city, were not victims of a "natural disaster" but of a capitalist economic system that upholds profit over human life. This reality of American capitalism was brought home once again shortly before Hurricane Gustav hit the Gulf Coast and Ike swept through southern Texas. On August 13, a judge threw out murder and attempted murder charges against seven New Orleans cops who in 2005 shot down desperate New Orleans residents trying to cross a bridge to food and safety, killing two people.

As Hurricane Gustav approached a still gutted and devastated New Orleans, people too dispossessed, elderly and sick to flee the threat were treated again to a combination of capitalist brutality and racist contempt. Since the beleaguered residents understandably had little trust in a government that left them to die three years ago, the evacuations were made "mandatory" and accompanied by dusk-to-dawn curfews with threats of arrest on sight. Just as in 2005, when Hurricane Katrina pounded the Gulf Coast, racist hysteria was whipped up as all types of law enforcement, in roughly a one-to-one ratio with residents, occupied the streets of New Orleans cluttered with roadblocks and Humvees. This included National Guard troops who have not been demobilized since 2005. Black Democratic mayor Ray Nagin ranted, "Anybody who is caught looting in the city of New Orleans will go directly to Angola," one of America's most notorious prisons. "God bless you if you're there," he warned. Meanwhile, in New York City, the capitalist rulers' "preparedness" included opening the New York Mercantile Exchange early to allow extra time for Gulf oil speculators to position themselves to profiteer.

Many of New Orleans' evacuated poor residents were holed up in abandoned warehouses, getting a "sickening reminder of Katrina," as a *New York Times* editorial (21 September) put it. The editorial noted: "Evacuees said they had had no idea where they were going; bus drivers would not tell them. When they arrived, there were not enough portable toilets, and no



AP

**Above: In wake of Hurricane Katrina, capitalist rulers abandoned masses of black and poor people in New Orleans Convention Center. Below: Desperate people line up for food in front of Superdome in New Orleans three days after Hurricane Gustav.**



AFP

showers. For five days there was no way to bathe, except with bottled water in filthy outdoor toilets. Privacy in the vast open space—1,000 people to a warehouse, shoulder-to-shoulder on cots—was nonexistent. The mood among evacuees was grim, surrounded as they were by police officers and the National Guard, with no visitors or reporters allowed."

After Gustav passed, residents had to fight to be allowed to return, defying a

government that treated them as if the storm were another opportunity to purge more of New Orleans' black population. Now the returnees struggle alongside Texas victims of Hurricane Ike for food stamps, tarps and tents.

The oil magnates and the rest of the capitalist rulers and their bureaucrats breathed a huge, collective sigh of relief that Gustav fizzled. They knew they had lucked out. The levees on the West Bank area of New Orleans where this year's storm hit had not been tested by Katrina. Old, shoddily built levees, neglected for decades, still leak, and much of the repair work has been done hurriedly and remains incomplete. In April, a local news station reported that two years ago a resident had found newspaper stuffed in an expansion joint of a St. Bernard flood wall that has yet to be repaired. There are 325 miles of repairs that need to be made; the Army Corps of Engineers projects are only 20 percent complete, not expected to be finished until 2011. There are unfinished flood walls along the Harvey Canal south of the city. Gaps in walls have been filled in with earth and sand.

As he toured other parts of the Gulf Coast hit by Gustav, George Bush didn't dare set foot in New Orleans, while McCain, owner of (at least) seven homes, modulated the partying down at the

Republican National Convention. More recently, in the wake of Ike, Bush has been buzzing around Texas urging individual donors to avoid "disaster fatigue," while the government bails out Wall Street parasites. But cutbacks and neglect of infrastructure and social services are Democratic as well as Republican policy. Over two decades of neglect of the flood control system around New Orleans prior to Katrina included the eight years of the Clinton administration, during which the federal government ran a budget surplus for several years.

Since 2005, 57 percent of New Orleans' black population has not been able to return, and the number of homeless has doubled. In May, Mayor Nagin declared that the homeless of New Orleans should be given "one way" tickets out of town. Affordable rental housing has been wiped out, the public housing that existed has been bulldozed, bus service cut by 80 percent, public health facilities closed—many of the basic necessities that supported the population are being phased out. Some 75,000 trailers poisoned with the toxic chemical formaldehyde were issued to Katrina evacuees, and the government has yet to come up with any disaster plan for housing future storm victims. Today, nearly 7,000 families live in FEMA trailers in metropolitan New Orleans, and those who have been evicted have nowhere to go.

City ordinances banning "multifamily dwellings" and moratoriums on "mixed income" developments are aimed at keeping blacks and Latinos out. Confederate flags, KKK crosses on lawns, house burnings, cops and Jim Crow "zoning" laws all greet families trying to resettle. After the firing of all public school teachers and staff, more than half of the schools have been privatized, in effect destroying the public education system, which was already one of the most decrepit in the country. "Nonprofit" organizations, foundations and businesses have been recreating the city as a playground for wealthy white tourists. Referring to the many schemes laid out for the battered city, New Orleans poet Kalamu Ya Salaam said, "It wasn't a blank slate, it was a cemetery. People were killed, and they're building on top of their bones."

Tens of thousands of immigrants have come to the Gulf Coast area since 2005. Many were too afraid of arrest to board buses to escape the recent storms. The Red Cross announced that they would be "impartial" to government raids of shelters—i.e., they would not oppose anti-immigrant raids by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (I.C.E.). Others fled on their own because of the police buildup and nightly curfews.

For all workers who struggle to survive in the Gulf region, prevailing wage laws have been thrown out the window and pay is poverty scale. These workers should be a force for revitalization of the Gulf Coast. There must be a struggle for union jobs at union wage scales for all, with health care, housing and all other necessities. What is needed at minimum is a massive program of federally funded public works to rebuild New Orleans and the rest of the devastated Gulf Coast, stretching now to inundated Galveston, Texas, and

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AP

**People waiting in line to get gas in Houston after Hurricane Ike, September 14.**