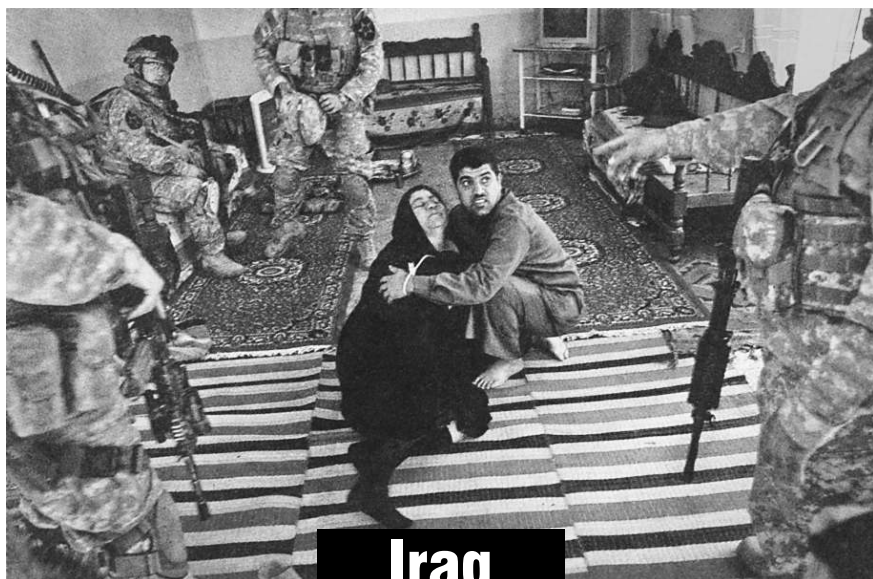


Bourgeois Elections and the Imperial Presidency



AFP

Iraq

Hicks/NY Times

New Orleans

Left: U.S. troops terrorize Iraqi family in its home in Baghdad, February 2007. Right: Masses of poor people, mainly black, abandoned in wake of Hurricane Katrina, September 2005.

Fight for a Revolutionary Workers Party!

NOVEMBER 4—As we go to press, the winner of the 2008 presidential election has not been announced, though it appears that the nasty, brutish and seemingly endless campaign season is finally coming to an end. Whether the victor is John McCain and his “pit bull” Sarah Palin or Barack Obama and Joe Biden, the Iraq occupation will continue, the Afghanistan occupation will intensify, the U.S. imperialists will continue to threaten the world and the economy will proceed with its downward spiral.

As Marxists, we are opposed on principle to giving any political support to any capitalist politician, as underlined in the October 25 Bay Area forum that we print below, edited for publication, by Spartacist League speaker Diana Coleman. As she explains, working people need their own party “to lead the exploited and oppressed in their struggles to the revolutionary overturn of the racist capitalist order.”

* * *

Taking my cue from *Workers Vanguard* No. 921 (26 September), I am going to start with a quote from Bertolt Brecht. This is from a poem called “Those Who Take the Meat from the Table,” written in the 1930s in the midst of the Great Depression:

Those who take the meat from the table
Teach contentment.
Those for whom the taxes are destined
Demand sacrifice.
Those who eat their fill speak to the hungry
Of wonderful times to come.
Those who lead the country into the abyss
Call ruling too difficult
For ordinary men.

We say that those who labor must rule.
As the expanding financial crisis highlights the destructive irrationality of capi-

talism, it could scarcely be clearer that working people need a party that fights for their class interests, a workers party committed to sweeping away the capitalist system. We stand for the political independence of the working class from the capitalist class enemy. We are opposed to giving political support to any capitalist politician—Democrat, Republican, Green or “Independent.” Not Obama, not McCain, not Cynthia McKinney. A vote for a bourgeois candidate is a vote of confidence in the reformability of capitalism and a vote against the need for socialist revolution. We say that black liberation and the liberation of all working people will only come through socialist revolution.

Americans are currently engaged in that once every four years elephant and donkey show, the election to the imperial presidency. V. I. Lenin, leader of the Russian Revolution, commented in his 1917 work, *The State and Revolution*, that the essence of capitalist democracy is “that the oppressed are allowed once every few years to decide which particular representatives of the oppressing class shall represent and repress them in parliament!” He also said that in a democratic republic “‘wealth exercises its power indirectly, but all the more surely,’ first, by means of the ‘direct corruption of officials’ (America); secondly, by means of an ‘alliance of the government and the Stock Exchange’ (France and America).” We certainly see that these days.

This presidential election differs from previous ones in two regards. There is a black candidate who actually has a chance

of winning, which is a new thing in this deeply racist country. And a significant portion of the electorate is actually excited by the event for the first time in a long time. There are, of course, many blacks and a portion of youth who are animated by the prospect of electing a black man as president; and then there are most others who are animated by a chance to replace one of the most venal, stupid and sadistic presidencies by something they hope will be better.

Generally in most presidential election years the turnout runs between 35 and 55 percent of those qualified to vote. It’s hard to care a great deal about who oppresses you. You hope they will be nice, but, you know. The excitement around the Obama campaign has been compared to John F. Kennedy’s campaign in 1960 where about 60 percent of the people were not only registered to vote but actually voted. So one

suspects the turnout will be somewhat larger in this election than in most others.


It is interesting to look at the question of presidential popularity. Among the biggest vote-getters in history have been Herbert Hoover, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard Nixon. Herbert Hoover was greeted by the Great Depression during his term, after which he couldn’t run for dog-catcher. Franklin Delano Roosevelt died in office; that had nothing to do with anything except biology. LBJ was elected in 1964;

near the end of his term he found himself in front of the TV cameras promising people he would never run again. People were very delighted by this announcement because in the course of the Vietnam War he had come to be hated. And then there was Richard Nixon who was elected in 1968 and then again in 1972. After this mammoth victory, he left office to avoid going to jail. This was another offshoot, indirectly, of the Vietnam War. The Spartacist League had a popular headline that said “Impeachment Is Not Enough” (WV No. 43, 26 April 1974) and we called for Nixon to be extradited to North Vietnam to be tried by a jury of his victims.

My point is that the consciousness people have at any given point in time is responsive to the anarchy and destructive violence of this imperialist order. There

continued on page 9

Obama/McCain/McKinney— Class Enemies of Workers, Oppressed



We Are the Party of the Russian Revolution...4



For Free Abortion on Demand!

Drop the Charges Against Dr. George Tiller!



AP

For over 30 years, Dr. George Tiller has defended women's right to abortion. His clinic and its staff members have been the target of "pro-life" terrorists; he survived an assassination attempt in 1993. Dr. Tiller's Wichita Women's Health Care Services is one of the few remaining clinics that provide "late-term" abortion services. In Kansas, this very arbitrary calculus of "late-term" is set at 22 weeks. Courageously refusing to buckle under to intimidation and terror, Dr. Tiller now faces up to **19 years in prison**, \$47,500 in fines and loss of his medical license for misdemeanor charges stemming from the Kansas law, which requires a second "independent" physician to concur on "late-term" abortions. ***This is an outrage and it must be fought!***

The point of such legal restrictions is to hack away at and ultimately overturn the legal right of women to abortion. The labor movement and all defenders of women's rights have a stake in championing the defense of Dr. Tiller. The Partisan Defense Committee—a non-sectarian, class-struggle legal and social defense organization associated with the Spartacist League—wrote in a 14 July 2007 protest letter to the attorney general of Kansas: "The state's persecution of George Tiller is part of an all-out assault on abor-

tion rights which anti-woman bigots have sought to overturn for the last three decades through both legislative and judicial means while unleashing 'god squads' to terrorize patients and clinic staff and murder doctors. Stop the witchhunt against George Tiller! Drop the charges!"

Tiller's lawyers have been fighting the constitutionality of the Kansas law and have fought against sinister snooping expeditions to get at patient records. During this current round of attacks, Tiller faced two vigilante-like "citizen-initiated" grand juries seeking thousands of medical records. His Wichita clinic has been vandalized and flooded. In September his attorneys filed for dismissal of the latest charges, documenting nearly 500 examples of legal misconduct in the course of the state's frenzied campaign against him. The Kansas attorney general's tactics included an absurd and lying pretext for the inquisition—the claim that the state needed to scour patient records of minors to determine if they were victims of "child rape." Plans were drawn up for armed raids to seize patient records and employee files. A hearing is scheduled for November 17.

The Kansas law being thrown at Tiller is just one of the many such measures passed following the 1973 Supreme Court

Roe v. Wade decision that legalized abortion. Dr. Tiller's case is a case study in the terror tactics used by anti-abortion bigots for decades. In 1986, Tiller's clinic was bombed. In the summer of 1991, hordes of Operation Rescue fanatics descended on Wichita for six weeks, blockading his clinic. In 1993, Tiller was shot in both arms by a member of the "Army of God," a fascistic anti-abortion group that spawned the killer of New York State abortion doctor Barnett Slepian, shot in his home in 1998.

As a result of such unrelenting terror and legal machinations, 87 percent of U.S. counties have no abortion clinics. This year another barrage of anti-abortion measures is on the state ballots. South Dakota has resurrected a ballot measure, which previously failed, for a virtually complete ban on abortion. Colorado has a proposal redefining the term "person" to include a fertilized human egg. The federal courts sustained a similar law this year in South Dakota that forces a doctor to inform women that abortions "terminate the life of a whole, separate, unique living human being." California has on the ballot in this election a proposition requiring parental notification for women under age 18, the third such proposition since 2005.

The myriad laws that serve to demean and torture women also particularly target the young, working class and poor, who already have limited access to decent health care, childcare, affordable housing or even enough food to feed their families. While we communists defend legal

abortion tooth and nail, our demand is for ***free abortion on demand as part of free quality health care for all!*** No return to the days of backstreet butchery! Money and connections will continue to buy the best medical care for the wealthy, including abortions. Such is not the case for the working class and poor. "Choice" is clearly not simply a legal question, contrary to the line of bourgeois feminists, many of them movers within the Democratic Party.

The reactionary demagoguery of the Republicans is longstanding and obvious enough. But the fact is that there has been little "choice" for poor women since Democrat Jimmy Carter (who now has become an international "human rights" icon) signed into law in 1977 the Hyde Amendment eliminating Medicaid coverage for abortions. During Democrat Clinton's eight years in office, welfare for mothers was axed, safe access to abortion was effectively gutted across much of the country, as the number of abortion providers plummeted 14 percent between 1992 and 1996, and a huge number of restrictive laws were passed.

In the recent election cycle, Democrats have barely paid lip service to even the formal right to abortion. In July, Barack Obama made clear his opposition to mental health exceptions for "late-term" abortion bans with the reactionary statement that a woman's rationale for an abortion cannot be "just a matter of feeling blue" (*Washington Post*, 6 July). Meanwhile,

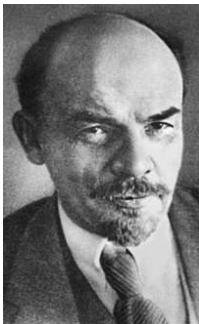
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TROTSKY

Against Illusions in Bourgeois Democracy

V.I. Lenin, leader of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution that brought the proletariat of Russia to power, explained that bourgeois democracy serves as a mask for the bloody dictatorship of the capitalist class. Writing in 1918 in The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky (a continuation of his 1917 work, The State and Revolution), Lenin polemicized against apologists for "democratic" bourgeois rule such as Karl Kautsky, a German Social Democrat and



LENIN

an opponent of the October Revolution and soviet rule (i.e., workers democracy).

Bourgeois democracy, although a great historical advance in comparison with medievalism, always remains, and under capitalism is bound to remain, restricted, truncated, false and hypocritical, a paradise for the rich and a snare and deception for the exploited, for the poor. It is this truth, which forms a most essential part of Marx's teaching, that Kautsky the "Marxist" has failed to understand. On this—the fundamental issue—Kautsky offers "delights" for the bourgeoisie instead of a scientific criticism of those conditions which make every bourgeois democracy a democracy for the rich....

The learned Mr. Kautsky has "forgotten"—accidentally forgotten, probably—a "trifle," namely, that the ruling party in a bourgeois democracy extends the protection of the minority only to another *bourgeois* party, while the proletariat, on all *serious, profound and fundamental* issues, gets martial law or pogroms, instead of the "protection of the minority." ***The more highly developed a democracy is, the more imminent are pogroms or civil war in connection with any profound political divergence which is dangerous to the bourgeoisie.***

—V.I. Lenin, *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky* (1918)

WORKERS VANGUARD

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No. 924

7 November 2008

Spartacists at Bay Area demonstration in defense of *Roe v. Wade*, January 21.



Letter

On John Dewey

24 October 2008

Dear Comrades:

In "Elections 2008: Economic Crisis and Imperialist War" (WV No. 923, 24 October), we should not have described John Dewey simply as a "20th-century American philosopher." During his time, Dewey distinguished himself as one of the defenders of Trotsky against the Stalinist usurpers during the 1930s Moscow purge trials. But Dewey was a pragmatist who denied the existence of laws of social development.

Dewey was a conscious opponent of Marxism and dialectical materialism, writing in "Means and Ends" in 1938, among other things: "Orthodox Marxism shares with orthodox religionism and with

traditional idealism the belief that human ends are interwoven into the very texture and structure of existence—a conception inherited presumably from its Hegelian origin" (reprinted in *Their Morals and Ours* [Pathfinder, 1973]).

Writing in response to Dewey's attack on Marxism, Trotsky wrote to one of his secretaries at the time: "I completely agree with your idea about the necessity of giving a Marxist criticism of Dewey's philosophy and I believe it is your direct duty to do this job" (16 August 1940).

It is our direct duty to defend Marxism in opposition to all forms of philosophical idealism, which is a bridge to reconciliation with one's own bourgeoisie.

Comradely,
Don Alexander

WORKERS VANGUARD

British Trotskyists Say: Down With Chauvinist Language Policy at London Campus!

The following article is reprinted from Workers Hammer No. 204 (Autumn 2008), newspaper of the Spartacist League/Britain.

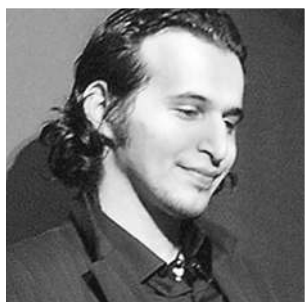
WORKERS HAMMER

The British state's racist "war on terror" is the domestic face of the bloody colonial occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan and an excuse to further curtail civil liberties and introduce yet more draconian "anti-terror" laws. In June, Gordon Brown's Labour government narrowly pushed through a vote extending to 42 days the time that "terror suspects" can be interned and interrogated without charge. Labour's "war on terror" targets Muslims in the first instance but is also aimed at regimenting the whole population and repressing social struggle. The deadly reality of the "anti-terror" crusade was brutally demonstrated by the police killing of Brazilian electrician Jean Charles de Menezes on a Tube train in London in July 2005, and the near-killing of postal worker Mohammed Abdul Kahar during a June 2006 raid by hundreds of cops in Forest Gate, London. We say: **Down with Labour's racist "war on terror"!**

"Anti-Terror" Witchhunts on Campus

Government "guidelines" for "tackling violent extremism" on university campuses place students and workers squarely in the crosshairs of police repression. Exactly what this means was seen in frightening reality on 14 May when Hicham Yezza—an employee of the University of Nottingham, president and co-founder of the Arabic Society and editor of a political magazine—and Rizwaan Sabir, a post-graduate student at the university, were arrested and detained after Sabir downloaded and sent to Yezza a document entitled "The Al Qaeda Training Manual" that he was using as part of a PhD proposal. The document is freely available from the U.S. Department of Justice website as well as for sale on Amazon! Both Sabir and Yezza were held and interrogated for six days before being released without charge. Yezza was then re-arrested for unspecified "visa irregularities," threatened with deportation to Algeria and held at numerous immigration detention centres for a month before being released on bail to await further proceedings. Yezza powerfully described the harrowing effects of his treatment in an 18 August *Guardian* article entitled "Britain's Terror Laws Have Left Me and My Family Shattered." **No deportation of Hicham Yezza! Full citizenship rights for all immigrants!**

Yezza and Sabir are just two of a number of victims of the anti-Muslim witch hunt who are either students or workers on campus. In August 2004, Babar



University of Nottingham students and workers march in protest against threatened deportation of campus worker Hicham Yezza (inset).

Ahmad, then an IT technician working at Imperial College London was arrested under the Extradition Act 2003 and accused of running a website supporting "terrorism" in Chechnya and Afghanistan. He awaits a European court decision which could be followed by his immediate extradition to the U.S. The previous year, in December 2003 Ahmad was savagely beaten by police, arrested and detained for six days and then released. Also facing extradition in connection with the same alleged "conspiracy" is Syed Talha Ahsan, a former student at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London who was arrested in July 2006. It is an outrage that under the conditions of the Extradition Act 2003 between the U.S. and Britain, no *prima facie* evidence is required for any "terror suspect" to be extradited, only that the U.S. government provide documentation of the appearance of guilt. **Hands off Babar Ahmad and Syed Talha Ahsan!**

Revolutionaries Fight "English Only" Gag at SOAS

It is in the vital interests of students, lecturers and campus workers to oppose the "war on terror" on campuses. At SOAS this means fighting to overturn the chauvinist campaign that has been waged for two years by the SOAS Student Union, targeting clubs and societies who publish materials in languages other than English. At the September 2006 Freshers Fair there was an unsuccessful attempt by student union bureaucrats—spearheaded by former vice president and prominent Socialist Workers Party (SWP) spokesman Clare Solomon—to impose an "English-only" rule on student societies, with the outrageous and ludicrous demand that "All publicity must be in English."

The Spartacus Youth Group was targeted by Solomon for refusing to abide by this witch-hunting "rule," which the student bureaucracy ludicrously sought to pass off as part of its "Equal Opportunities Policy." We vehemently opposed this attempt at anti-communist censorship at the time and have campaigned against the policy ever since, noting that it is aimed primarily at Muslims and will be used to target anyone who opposes British imperialism. SYG members have intervened into campus events and held regular sales of our literature (including in Arabic, Chinese, Turkish, Tagalog and other languages) and fought to overturn this threat to all students. A motion drafted by the SYG, submitted to a 2007

SOAS Union General Meeting read:

"That this 'English-only' rule has nothing to do with 'equal opportunities' and everything to do with enforcing the so-called 'war on terror' on campus. All students and staff should be allowed to read and distribute material in *any* language *regardless of whether it is translated*. The 'war on terror' is a classic 'divide and rule' ploy, stigmatizing Muslims as an excuse for a sweeping reduction in the legal rights of the entire population and a racist, imperialist 'war' of military adventures abroad. The 'war on terror' targets immigrants, minorities and ultimately the working class."

It speaks volumes to the SWP's claim to be a defender of the oppressed Muslim population that while the SYG campaigned to expose and defeat the "war on terror" witch hunt at SOAS, Clare Solomon et al. actually *helped to enforce it!* Faced with the determined opposition of the SYG comrades, Solomon took a step back before eventually *abstaining* on our

motion, thus aiding those who want the policy to remain.

It is clear that the student union intends to continue to enforce its chauvinist policy in the new academic year, albeit in a slightly modified form. An 11 August e-mail to the SYG from Ben Sellers, current Vice President for Sports and Societies states, "any materials you have in foreign languages must have a direct english [sic] translation available." We will continue to oppose the "war on terror" witch hunt for what it is and demand: **Down with the chauvinist compulsory English policy for student societies at SOAS!**

Reform vs. Revolution

It is scandalous that the student union bureaucracy, including the so-called "socialists" of the SWP, colludes with the university administration and the forces of state repression to enforce a policy that augments the "war on terror" and aids government attempts to brand Muslim students and leftists alike as "violent extremists." In the case of the SWP this flows from its reformist worldview and programme, which has always amounted to pressuring the capitalist state, especially when administered by a Labour government, to act in the interest of working people. But the capitalist state cannot be reformed to serve workers and the oppressed, and those who administer it must inevitably implement the attacks and state repression of the capitalist class. In its own small way, at the level of campus politics, the SWP proves the reactionary bankruptcy of reformism. The programme of the revolutionary Marxist SYG stands in complete counterposition to this reformist claptrap: we seek to win youth and students to the understanding that racism, war, poverty and oppression are inherent to the capitalist system and cannot be eliminated short of socialist revolution to overthrow capitalism here in Britain and internationally and replace it with a society where those who make the wealth—the working class—rule.

Our model is the 1917 October Revolution where the Bolshevik Party of Lenin and Trotsky led the working class to power and ripped Russia from the rule of tsars, priests and capitalists. If you want to see an end to poverty, starvation, imperialist war and racism, only a revolutionary party with a record of standing on a genuinely Marxist programme is capable of providing the way forward—join us! ■

23rd Annual Partisan Defense Committee Holiday Appeal Benefit for Class-War Prisoners

**Free Mumia Abu-Jamal!
Free the Class-War Prisoners!
Abolish the Racist Death Penalty!**

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(2 blocks west of MLK,
just north of Ashby
at Ashby BART)
For more information:
(510) 839-0852



Los Angeles

**Saturday, December 13
1 to 4 p.m.**
Immanuel
Presbyterian Church
3300 Wilshire Blvd.
(at Berendo St., 2 blocks west of
Vermont/Wilshire Red Line Sta.)
For more information:
(213) 380-8897

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4 to 8 p.m.**
Nuyorican Poets Cafe
236 East 3rd Street
between Aves. B and C
(take F train to Second Avenue,
or #6 train to Bleecker St.)
For more information:
(212) 406-4252

Chicago

**Sunday, December 14
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(at Monroe)
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(312) 563-0442

Toronto

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sabre rattle against Russia**

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We Are the Party of the Russian Revolution

We print below, edited for publication, a presentation by comrade Victor Gibbons given in Los Angeles on 10 November 2007 in commemoration of the 90th anniversary of the Russian Revolution.

The vast political gulf that separates the International Communist League from the rest of the left can be summed up in one declaration: ***"We are the party of the Russian Revolution."*** We salute the 90th anni-

PART ONE

versary of the Bolshevik Revolution in the same spirit as the red proletariat of Petrograd celebrated its first anniversary—as “the greatest event in the history of the world.” And it remains the most important event in the history of human civilization: the path that the workers and toiling masses must follow, if we are to escape the death agony of capitalism and embark on the transition to communist society.

The founder and historic leader of American Trotskyism, James P. Cannon, stated in his 1939 “Speech on the Russian Question”:

“The Russian Bolsheviks on November 7, 1917, once and for all, took the question of the workers’ revolution out of the realm of abstraction and gave it flesh and blood reality....

“The October revolution put socialism on the order of the day throughout the world. It revived and shaped and developed the revolutionary labor movement of the world out of the bloody chaos of the war. The Russian revolution showed in practice, by example, how the workers’ revolution is to be made. It revealed in life the role of the party. It showed in life what kind of a party the workers must have.”

For a more extended discussion of the 1917 Revolution, I recommend that you read a series of four educationals on Leon Trotsky’s *The History of the Russian Revolution* (1932) in WV Nos. 874, 875, 877 and 879 (4 August, 1 September, 29 September and 27 October 2006).

During the course of the Russian Revolution, the multinational proletariat, drawing behind it the peasantry and the oppressed nationalities, forged its own new organs of class power, the soviets. With the smashing of the old capitalist state, these organs, under Bolshevik leadership, formed the basis of the new work-

ers state. The vanguard of the workers understood that they were not just taking power in Russia; they were opening the first chapter of the *world socialist revolution*. They inspired workers uprisings throughout Europe and inspired rebellions by imperialism’s colonial slaves.

The tremors of October 1917 extended all the way around the globe to right here in the richest bastion of imperialism. In 1919, the Bolsheviks launched the Communist International (CI). Under Bolshevik leaders V.I. Lenin and Leon Trotsky, the CI and the Soviet state became the most powerful revolutionary force ever yet assembled by the world proletariat.

The October Revolution forged a Red Army that emerged victorious from four years of civil war as well as invasion by the armies of 14 capitalist powers in league with their local capitalist henchmen. The Soviet government expropriated the capitalists and repudiated outright the tsar’s massive debt to foreign bankers. It proclaimed the right of working people to jobs, health care, housing and education, as the first steps to building a socialist society.

It gave land to the peasants and self-determination to the many oppressed nations of the tsar’s prison house of peoples. It tore down the whole edifice

of Russian patriarchal medievalism. The early Soviet government not only separated church and state, it put all available resources toward universal secular education and science. It eliminated all laws discriminating against national and ethnic minorities, women and homosexuals. Soviet Russia not only gave the vote to women at a time when the Western imperialists were beating them bloody for demanding such a thing; the Bolsheviks put women in the front ranks of proletarian rule as factory managers, state commissars and army commanders.

The Soviet workers state proved the superiority of nationalized property and planned economy over capitalist private property and anarchy in production. Out of the historical poverty left by tsarist Russia, the wreckage left by imperialist invasions, the continuing economic and military encirclement by imperialism, and in spite of Stalinist mismanagement and parasitism, the Soviet Union achieved unrivaled modernization and growth. At the same time as the capitalist world had fallen into the abyss of the 1930s Great Depression, the Soviet planned economy brought tens of millions of Soviet workers and peasants out of Russia’s medieval villages and turned them into educated modern proletarians,

scientists, directors of industry and commanders of the mechanized Red Army.

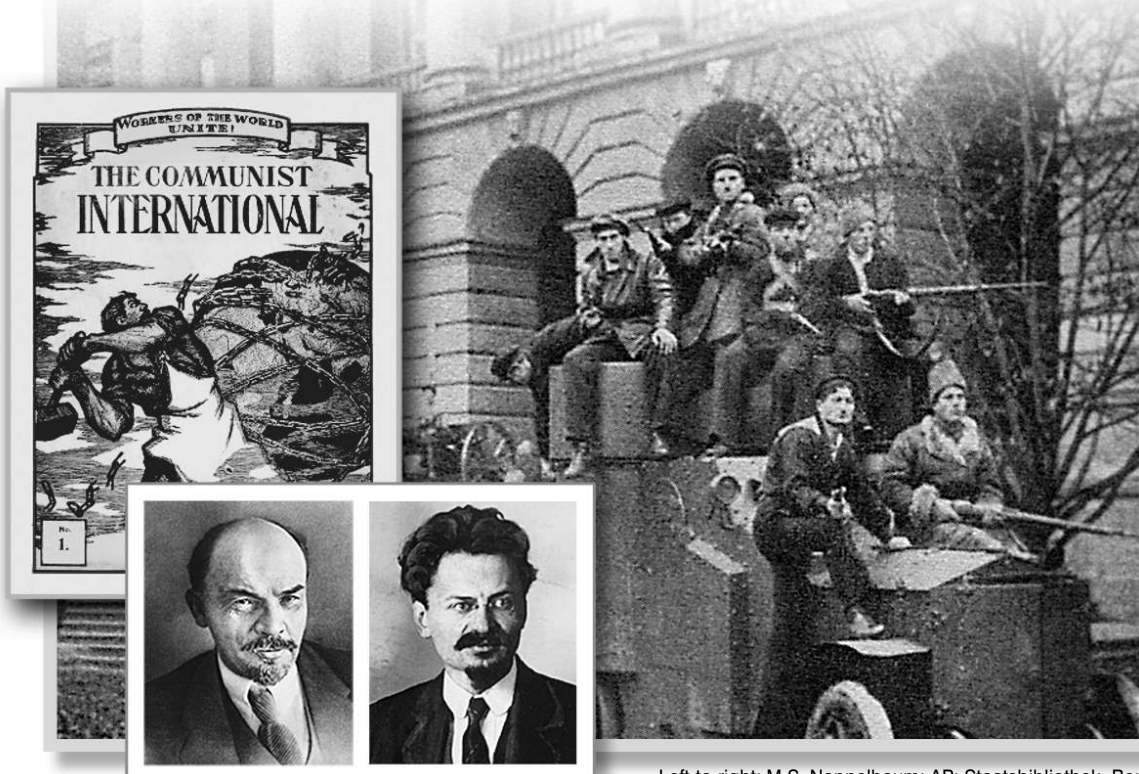
The Soviet Union was the industrial and military powerhouse that made possible, and protected, the overturns of capitalist rule from Cuba to East Europe to China to Vietnam and North Korea. Had it not been for the USSR, the imperialists would have attacked North Korea, China and Vietnam with nuclear weapons during the Korean and Vietnam wars.

The destruction of the Soviet Union and the restoration of capitalism there in 1991-92 and in East Europe transformed the political landscape of the planet and threw proletarian consciousness back to a point in which workers today by and large no longer associate their struggles with the goal of socialism. Capitalist counterrevolution triggered an unparalleled economic collapse throughout the former Soviet Union, with skyrocketing rates of poverty and disease combined with a

catastrophic decline in the average life-span. Internationally, with the absence of the Soviet Union as a counterweight to their ambitions, the imperialists feel they have a free hand to project their military might, from Serbia to Iraq and Afghanistan.

The bourgeoisie has always wanted to wipe the October Revolution from historical memory by burying it under a mountain of lies. They often call it a conspiracy or putsch, but the 1917 October Revolution was no putsch and no accident. It was *needed* because the socially organized productive forces of the planet were tearing at bourgeois private property forms, and at the bourgeois nation-states as well. These had become shackles on social progress. The first imperialist world war of 1914-18 marked the descent of the capitalist system into a barbaric destruction of society’s productive forces, culture and humanity itself. World War I signaled that, to free the planet’s productive forces from the death grip of capitalist imperialism, proletarian revolution, in the historical sense, had to be on the order of the day. The October Revolution *happened* because it was organized and led by a party that was able to instill in the proletariat this understanding of its historic mission.

Capitalist imperialism is still caught in



Left to right: M.S. Nappelbaum; AP; Staatsbibliothek, Berlin

Armed guard outside Smolny Institute during the October Days. Lenin and Trotsky (inset) led 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and founded Communist International under banner of world socialist revolution.



Left: Mass burial of Russian soldiers during WWI. Right: Communist leader Karl Liebknecht addressing January 1919 Berlin demonstration of workers and soldiers during 1918-19 German Revolution.



its fatal contradictions; it still creates a proletariat with the social power to overthrow the bourgeoisie, and it still compels the workers to fight for their survival. Our duty is to make sure that there will be a party like Lenin's in the right place at the right time. So this talk is not just about what happened in 1917 in Russia, it is also about the fight of the ICL to *make new Octobers*.

War and Revolution

The immediate backdrop to the outbreak of revolution in Russia in February 1917 was World War I. This war had a profound impact on Lenin's thinking. It had triggered the collapse of the Second "Socialist" International. Beginning on 4 August 1914, the vast majority of its affiliated parties lined up behind their bourgeoisies' war mobilizations. The Bolsheviks turned out to be among the few that sought to act on the International's prior resolutions to use war to hasten workers revolution.

The collapse of the old International led Lenin to generalize his split with the Mensheviks in Russia. That split went back to the 1903 fight over the definition of party membership; the differences broadened shortly thereafter as the Bolsheviks rejected the Mensheviks' promotion of the liberal bourgeoisie as the purported leadership of an overthrow of the tsar. The split had become definitive by 1912.

Lenin concluded from World War I that opportunism in the workers movement was not a vestigial or localized phenomenon that could be overcome within a common party. He concluded that the Second International had been destroyed and that a new revolutionary international must be built through a complete split with not only the outright jingoists, but also the centrists who covered for them by using fake-Marxist arguments. The archetype of such centrists at the time was the German Social Democrat Karl Kautsky.

Lenin held that the war had demonstrated that capitalism was in its final stage of decay and that proletarian socialist revolution offered the only way out of a continuing descent into barbarism. He maintained that the path to proletarian revolution was the transformation of the imperialist war into a revolutionary civil war and that the condition for this was that socialists must stand for the defeat, above all, of their own bourgeois state in the war. Lenin's policies brilliantly anticipated the revolutionary sweep of events to come and pointed to the program needed to meet them.

It was in the Russian capital of Petrograd on International Women's Day, 23 February 1917 (by the old Julian calendar) when the social tensions exacerbated by World War I burst. A strike of mostly women textile workers demanded bread and war rations. There were over 1,000 casualties as ever more workers joined the street fighting and launched a general strike on the 25th. This was the start of the February Revolution. Throughout Russia, police and state officials were sent packing, and on February 27 the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies was formed. The election of soviets in the factories and in the army reflected the workers' experience in the 1905 Revolution. (You can read a presentation on the 1905 Russian Revolution in WV No. 872, 9 June 2006.)

Let's take a moment to define "soviets." These were working-class organs, councils of deputies elected from workplaces and army units. The workers elected their deputies, could actively control them and, whenever need be, recall them. The soviets were organs of struggle, insurgency and proletarian administration.

But the paradox of the February Revolution was that while the autocracy had been overthrown by the workers, many of them schooled over the years by the Bolsheviks, the official government that emerged was *bourgeois*. Even as street fighting was raging in Petrograd, a self-appointed Provisional Committee of

bourgeois-monarchist politicians met in the Tauride Palace on the night of February 27, behind the back of the popular revolution. They declared a Provisional Government aimed at erecting a constitutional monarchy.

And while the Bolsheviks and the workers were still in the streets battling the tsar's gendarmes, a cabal rushed to the other wing of the Tauride Palace and appointed themselves the heads of the Petrograd and All-Russian soviets. These were the leaders of the Mensheviks and the Socialist-Revolutionary Party (SRs). While the SRs were largely based on the peasantry, the Mensheviks represented urban petty-bourgeois layers and the more conservative and privileged workers. The program of the Mensheviks and SRs was that the bourgeoisie should lead and rule, and they desperately appealed to the bourgeois Provisional Government to take control.

The February Revolution thus resulted in a situation of *dual power*. That is, alongside the Provisional Government of the *bourgeoisie*, there stood the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, based on the working class and answering to it. This situation could not last. One class or the other would have to rule.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks

The Bolsheviks' internal life was an arena of constant debates. And in the course of 1917, a struggle recurred between Lenin and a conservative wing centered around Bolshevik leaders Lev Kamenev, Gregory Zinoviev and Joseph Stalin. And as we will see, the latter three would come together again after the October Revolution.

Lenin waged a key fight with them when he returned to Petrograd on April 3. While still trapped in Swiss exile, he had been reading with increasing alarm in the party paper, *Pravda*, of Kamenev and Stalin's "conditional" support to the Provisional Government. They dropped Lenin's revolutionary defeatism on the war and embraced a variety of Menshevik defensism, under the cover of pressuring the Provisional Government to negotiate an end to the war. They moved to merge the Bolsheviks with the Mensheviks. They were steering the party towards the Menshevik mirage of a parliamentary pressure group on the government of Prince Lvov!

When he finally arrived at the Finland Station in Petrograd, Lenin climbed atop an armored car to address the cheering crowds that had brought down the tsar. Lenin hailed them and, to the shock of the official pro-war Soviet welcoming committee, gave an internationalist salute to the German revolutionary Marxist leader Karl Liebknecht who was in a prison cell for opposing German militarism and its fake-socialist supporters: "The hour is not far when, at the summons of our comrade Karl Liebknecht, the people will turn their weapons against their capitalist

exploiters.... Long live the world-wide socialist revolution!"

This was the opening shot of Lenin's fight to rearm the party. He was adamant on the principle of no support to the capitalist Provisional Government and its imperialist war. It was a *split issue*. He was a minority of one, but he knew his program corresponded to the needs of the proletariat and peasantry. Lenin's program for proletarian seizure of power was already taking shape in the masses' own struggles. "Turn the imperialist war into a civil war!" would be concretized on Bolshevik banners that read "All Power to the Soviets!" and "Down With the War!" What made it possible for Lenin to turn the party wheel toward the proletarian seizure of power was that by



Boni and Liveright

Workers at Petrograd's Putilov metal works, a bastion of soviet power during 1917 October Revolution. Banner at left proclaims: "Long Live the Third International!"

the end of April he rallied decisive support from the proletarian provinces and industrial districts of the capital.

Whenever you hear us Spartacists being called "splitters" or you hear sermons about "unity, unity," just remember: Lenin could not have led a workers revolution alongside supporters of the bourgeois government and imperialist war.

State and Revolution

One of Lenin's great achievements during 1917 was his revival and defense of the teachings of Karl Marx and his lifelong comrade, Friedrich Engels, on the state. In July, as he was hiding from a government death squad, Lenin devoted what he thought might be his last days to completing a pamphlet, *The State and Revolution*. He wrote that the bourgeoisie uses lies to hide its dictatorship, but that Marxists must state the truth: states are not neutral arbiters above classes.

Engels defined the core of the state as

armed bodies of men, the prisons and police who hold a monopoly of violence over society. These instruments were forged in wars and revolutions for the social domination of particular classes. These social classes are defined by their *property rights in relation to society's means of production*. Thus *all states are instruments for the domination of a particular class's property forms in the means of production*. In modern society, there are only *two fundamental classes*: the bourgeoisie, which owns the means of production; and the proletariat, defined as those who own only their labor power. The capitalists require private property in the means of production, the workers need socialized ownership of them. The interests of the capitalists and workers are

thus absolutely counterposed and cannot be served by one and the same state.

Lenin also explained that it is impossible to make the institutions of the bourgeoisie's class dictatorship serve the proletariat: "Marx's idea is that the working class must *break up, smash* the 'ready-made state machinery,' and not confine itself merely to laying hold of it." The proletariat had to build up its own organs of state power out of such things as factory committees, unions, red guards, workers militias, soldiers committees and revolutionary soviets, *independent of, and in active struggle against, the old bourgeois state*. These were built in 1917 and, after the workers' revolutionary seizure of power, became the basis of a new kind of state: the dictatorship of the proletariat. This was a fundamentally different power from all previous states in that its purpose was ultimately not perpetuation of class domination, but the transition to classless, therefore, stateless, socialist society.

The Bolsheviks' Fight Against Class Collaboration

The first Provisional Government was brought down in a political firestorm over its pledge to continue the hated imperialist war. A new cabinet was formed on May 5, and this time the SR and Menshevik Soviet leaders took ministerial posts in the capitalist government. Trotsky later called this Russian coalition government "the greatest historical example of the Popular Front." The popular front was the name that the Stalinists would use, starting in the 1930s, to designate their coalition government betrayals. It also goes by other names: Union of the Left, Unidad Popular, Tripartite Alliance.

Such class collaboration is not a tactic, but the greatest betrayal. Any political bloc that a workers party enters into with capitalist parties, whether in government or in opposition, is a pledge by the traitorous working-class leaders that they will not violate the bourgeois order. It means that the workers party will take

continued on page 6



VAAP

July 1917 demonstration in Petrograd. Banners read: "Down With the Capitalist Ministers! All Power to the Soviets of Workers, Soldiers and Peasants Deputies!" and "Long Live Socialism!"

Russian Revolution...

(continued from page 5)

political responsibility for policing the bourgeois social order.

Lenin and Trotsky devised a slogan in response to the coalition government: “Down With the Ten Capitalist Ministers!” This meant: break the coalition with the capitalists; the workers and soldiers Soviets should take all the power! The refusal of the Mensheviks and SRs to do this exposed them before the mass of workers, soldiers and peasants of Russia who still followed them.

In June, the coalition government launched a new war offensive. This impelled the Petrograd proletariat and sailors of the neighboring Kronstadt naval base to embark on a three-day armed demonstration in July to demand the Soviet leaders end the hated war and take power. The Bolsheviks strove to prevent a premature showdown but, unable to hold back the mobilization, took their place at its head to provide leadership.

Capitalist Petrograd’s reaction was to

ing the Provisional Government, but this was strictly *military* defense. The Bolsheviks gave absolutely no *political* support to the Provisional Government. On the contrary, while the workers and soldiers mobilized against the counterrevolutionary threat, the Bolsheviks exposed the traitors—the Mensheviks and SRs—in the Provisional Government, who were in constant communication with Kornilov.

A crucial corner had been turned by the beginning of September. The masses were convinced through their Bolshevik-led struggle against Kornilov that the old Soviet misleaders were kaput and that only the Bolsheviks would take decisive action to end the war and stop capitalist sabotage of the economy. The General Staff of the army was no longer capable of mobilizing military units against revolutionary Petrograd. The countryside was aflame as returning peasant soldiers seized the landlords’ fields and torched palatial estates. On September 4, Trotsky was released from prison, and by the 23rd he was elected Chairman of the Petrograd Soviet. The Bolsheviks finally had solid majorities in the Moscow and Petrograd Soviets. Trotsky declared, “Long live the direct and open struggle for a revolutionary power



VAAP

August 1917: Armed workers marching to head off counterrevolutionary attack by army Commander-in-Chief Kornilov against Soviets in Petrograd.

quarters in the Smolny Institute became a beehive of working-class organization.

On October 18, Kamenev and Zinoviev publicly blew the whistle on the insurrection in the press. Lenin called them strike-breakers and demanded their expulsion. As Trotsky explained in his 1924 work, *Lessons of October*, sharp turns such as the leap to insurrection footing provoke conservative tendencies latent in the party into opposition. Trotsky defined the essence of Bolshevism as “such a training, such a tempering and such an organization of the proletarian vanguard as enables the latter to seize power, arms in hand” and the social-democratic (Menshevik) tendency as “the acceptance of a reformist opposition activity within the framework of bourgeois society and an adaptation to its legality—i.e. the actual training of the masses to become imbued with the inviolability of the bourgeois state.”

As we’ve seen, the soviets by themselves do not settle the question of power. They can serve different programs and leaderships. As Trotsky wrote, “Without a party, apart from a party, over the head of a party, or with a substitute for a party, the proletarian revolution cannot conquer.”

The insurrection took place on the eve of the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets on October 25th. Lenin reappeared in public and read out declarations on peace, land and the rights of the toilers. The Bolsheviks’ proclamations were punctuated by the steady boom of red naval artillery directed against the government holdouts in the Winter Palace. Lenin declared: “The Russian started the revolution, and the German will carry it through to the end.” He also said: “A new phase has opened up not just in Russia, but throughout the entire world.”

Isolation of the Revolution and Stalinist Degeneration

The masses of workers in war-ravaged Europe looked to the example of Soviet Russia. However, the social-democratic leaders of the mass reformist workers parties sought to preserve the capitalist order and strangle the October Revolution. Hamstrung by this treachery, insurgent workers in Europe failed in their efforts to take and hold power in Finland (1918), Germany (1918-19), Hungary (1919) and Italy (1919-20), where revolutionary struggles went down to defeat. What was lacking were programmatically grounded and battle-tested revolutionary parties like the Bolshevik Party, capable of leading the workers in victory over the social-democratic and nationalist defenders of capitalist rule.

Within Soviet Russia, the Red Army eventually repulsed all the imperialist-sponsored troops and domestic White Guards, but the country emerged exhausted and drained from the Civil War. There was a vast gulf between the Bolsheviks’ communist goals and the prevailing material scarcity and want. Not only was industry in ruins, the vibrant proletariat that had accomplished October had practically ceased to exist. Vast parts of Moscow and

Petrograd were like dark, frozen ghost towns. Instead of an influx of material resources from a Soviet Europe to help rebuild Russia’s devastated infrastructure, Soviet Russia was swept by famine that reached the point of cannibalism in the countryside.

Because of the material and cultural poverty inherited from tsarism, the Bolsheviks early on had to utilize those remaining former functionaries, technical specialists and military officers who, often for careerist reasons, offered their services to the new regime. Lenin warned at the March 1922 Eleventh Party Congress that “‘Four thousand seven hundred responsible communists’ in Moscow administer the state machine. ‘Who is leading whom? I doubt very much whether you can say that the communists are in the lead’” (quoted in Trotsky’s *The Revolution Betrayed*, 1936). A nascent conservative and bureaucratized layer had developed—using its position to secure privileges amidst general scarcity—that became a transmission belt for alien class interests and conservative political moods into the Bolshevik Party itself.

These were the conditions in which the revolutionary core of the Bolshevik Party was outflanked by the growing conservative wing, centered on the party apparatus headed by Stalin. After Lenin was struck down by a stroke in May 1922, Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev formed a secret “troika” (or triumvirate) to stop Trotsky from succeeding him as central leader of the party. Their bloc against Trotsky became a center around which opponents of the party’s Leninist wing would act to usurp political power. Stalin emerged as the protector and spokesman for the conservative, bureaucratic layer in the party and state apparatuses.

Doing away with Great Russian chauvinist despotism, the Bolsheviks in power offered full democratic rights to all ethnicities in what had been, in Lenin’s words, the tsarist “prison house of peoples.” In order to liberate the myriad peoples at different levels of national consolidation, a variety of soviet republics were established, from Union Republics for fully formed nations to Autonomous Oblasts (provinces) for various nationalities. In areas of heavy interpenetration of peoples, such as the Caucasus, the resulting complicated checkerboard of autonomous regions set an internationalist framework for intercourse among the peoples.

It was precisely over the national question in the Caucasus that the first decisive political fight against the developing Stalinist bureaucracy was waged by Lenin. After Stalin attempted to deny the Georgian, Azerbaijani and Armenian republics their sovereign status and force them into a Transcaucasian federation, Lenin broke with him in late 1922. Lenin resolved to consummate a bloc with Trotsky, preparing to, in the words of one of his secretaries, drop a “bomb” on Stalin at the upcoming Twelfth Party Congress, held in April 1923. However, Lenin was debilitated by another stroke shortly before the



Harlingue-Viollet

Adult literacy class in the Soviet Union, early 1920s. Bolshevik Revolution opened the road to unprecedented social progress.

bring in reactionary troops from the front and launch a reign of terror. But when even this failed to stop the Bolsheviks, the bourgeoisie in August resolved on a military coup by the Commander-in-Chief of the army, General Lavr Kornilov, to crush the Soviets altogether. The conciliationist Soviet tops were paralyzed, but the masses rallied around the Bolshevik-organized united-front action that stopped Kornilov in his tracks.

Kornilov was gearing up to sweep away the Provisional Government along with the Soviets as a whole. In mobilizing to stop Kornilov, the Bolsheviks were defend-

throughout the country!” Lenin hammered home: Get on with it, take power!

The Party, the Soviets and the Conquest of Power

The Bolshevik Central Committee met on October 10 and 16 to finalize the insurrection. At both meetings Zinoviev and Kamenev were opposed to insurrection, while the Lenin and Trotsky wing carried the majority in support of it. Everywhere, factory Red Guards were drilling, workers at the arms factories funneled weapons directly to the workers militias, and the Petrograd Soviet and Bolshevik head-

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Congress opened, ending his active participation in the affairs of the Soviet party and state. With Lenin ill, Trotsky's primary concern was to avoid a split within the leadership. Thus, he accepted a deal in which his resolutions on key issues, including the national question, were adopted by the Congress while Stalin kept his post as General Secretary (see "A Critical Balance Sheet: Trotsky and the Russian Left Opposition," *Spartacist* No. 56, Spring 2001).

The final straw was the defeat of the October 1923 revolution in Germany. It stopped the postwar revolutionary wave, allowing the global bourgeois order to stabilize. This was hugely demoralizing for Soviet workers. They had strained every nerve preparing for common revolutionary struggle alongside a Bolshevik Germany. Instead, they now faced, for the first time, the prospect of national isolation for the foreseeable future.

The delay of international revolution is what enabled the ascendancy of a conservative bureaucracy in Soviet Russia, which step-by-step strangled the remnants of the Bolshevik Party's revolutionary core. Trotskyism (i.e., genuine Marxism) is the continuation of Leninism. Stalinism did *not* flow from Leninism; it was a conservative reaction against it.

A qualitative turning point occurred at the Bolshevik Thirteenth Party Confer-

edly interrupted by hecklers. Vrachev fired back in protest: "Comrades, it may be that we have only a few hours left of full democracy, so let us use it!" He was right. From that point on, the people who ruled the USSR, the way the USSR was ruled and the purposes for which it was ruled all changed.

It took some time for the bureaucracy to consolidate its rule. The Stalin clique had to carry out bloody purges throughout the 1930s. (As an aside, one of the things that the ICL did in the USSR was to seek out surviving veterans of the Trotskyist Opposition. We found Ivan Vrachev and interviewed him.)

In defending its privileges, the Stalinist bureaucracy necessarily soon acquired political self-consciousness in opposition to the Bolshevik Party's Marxist program. The change of *purpose* of the USSR's leadership was encapsulated in December 1924 when Stalin trampled on October's banner of world revolution by propagating the false dogma of economic autarky and isolationism known as "socialism in one country." As a theory it was absurd. A workers state cannot ignore the capitalist-dominated international economy. In order to achieve a classless, socialist society, what is required are socialist revolutions to expropriate the bourgeoisies and establish planned, collectivized economies. But Stalin's nationalist formula



Basil Blackwell, Inc.

Trotskyist Left Oppositionists exiled to Siberia by Stalin demonstrate on anniversary of October Revolution, 1928. Center banner reads: "Long Live the Dictatorship of the Proletariat!"

both in the Soviet Union and—insofar as they were able—in the Communist International, to preserve and extend the gains of the Russian Revolution. Trotsky's 1928 "Critique of the Draft Program of the Communist International" proved that the fight in the Russian party was a fight not only for a revival of the Soviet proletariat and against the bureaucratic deformation of the Soviet Union, but also to preserve the theoretical and programmatic heritage of Bolshevism, the revolutionary Marxism of the imperialist epoch. Trotsky's *The Third International After Lenin*, containing his 1928 "Critique," stands as the founding statement of international Trotskyism.

In 1933, Hitler came to power in Germany without a single shot being fired. The Stalinists, who were then in an ultra-left phase that they termed the "Third Period," referred to the Social Democrats as "social fascists" and refused to call for a united front with this mass reformist working-class party against Hitler's drive to power. In the face of this historic defeat—and the fact that no opposition was voiced nor a balance sheet drawn within the Stalinized Comintern—Trotsky called for forging a new, Fourth International.

The Communist International under Stalin, after the catastrophic ultra-left line, zigzagged to the right and, at the Seventh (and last) Comintern Congress in 1935, consolidated around a policy of forming class-collaborationist coalitions that they termed "popular fronts." At the time, the Stalinists sought to justify this treacherous policy by arguing that they were uniting with supposedly "democratic" bourgeois parties "against fascism."

It was through tying the workers politically to their class enemy that the 1936 French general strike was betrayed by the French Socialist and Communist parties. From the Spanish Revolution of 1936-38 to Chile in 1970-73, the popular front has served to undermine any independent bid for proletarian power, paralyze its struggles and set it up for defeat, often bloody. Like Lenin and Trotsky, we are opposed in principle to any coalition with capitalist parties, whether in government or in opposition, and we are against voting for

the workers parties that are part of a popular-front coalition.

In the aftermath of the Stalinist betrayal in Germany, followed by the Comintern's codification of the reformist popular-front line, Trotsky and his comrades founded the Fourth International in 1938. The 1938 Transitional Program of the Fourth International characterized the Soviet Union under Stalin as follows:

"The USSR thus embodies terrific contradictions. But it still remains a *degenerated workers' state*. Such is the social diagnosis. The political prognosis has an alternative character: either the bureaucracy, becoming ever more the organ of the world bourgeoisie in the workers' state, will overthrow the new forms of property and plunge the country back into capitalism; or the working class will crush the bureaucracy and open the way to socialism."

Trotsky's program pointed to how these contradictions could be resolved: the Fourth International fought for unconditional military defense of the degenerated workers state from imperialism and counterrevolution. This was based on the understanding that the Stalinist bureaucracy's usurpation of power was a *political*, rather than social, counterrevolution because it did not overthrow the proletarian property forms created by October. As Lenin had taught, the state—a repressive apparatus of armed bodies at its core—defends the property relations of the ruling class: a bourgeois state defends capitalist private property relations, a workers state defends collectivized property relations. The Soviet Union, with the political rule of the parasitic and repressive Stalinist bureaucracy, had become a bureaucratically degenerated workers state.

The Trotskyists called for proletarian political revolution. Such a revolution, based on defense of collectivized property forms, is not a *social* revolution or a counterrevolution, which overturns existing property relations and puts a different class in power. Rather it is a *political* revolution to oust the bureaucracy, restoring workers soviet democracy and a Trotskyist internationalist leadership such as the one that led the October Revolution.

[TO BE CONTINUED]



YIVO Institute

Trotsky with graduates of a Red Army commander school, 1924. Working men and women of all ethnicities were trained to be leaders of Soviet industrial and military power. Inset: 1920 "Red Banner of Labor" medal inscribed in Belarusian, Yiddish and Polish.

ence in January 1924. In the discussions leading up to that conference, Trotsky and the emerging opposition to bureaucratism and Stalin's Great Russian national chauvinist policies received unexpectedly broad party support. The apparatus panicked and demonstratively slammed shut the doors to the last party forum where Lenin and Trotsky's revolutionary core might have been able to overcome their opponents. The elections for delegates to this conference were systematically rigged by the Troika to allow only three supporters of Trotsky to attend. The nascent bureaucracy had shaken its fist in the face of the Opposition: you are out!

One of the three Oppositionist delegates seated at the Conference was Ivan Vrachev. As he denounced Stalin's undermining of Lenin's party from the floor of the Thirteenth Conference, he was repeat-

crystallized a mood of conservatism, a retreat into a false hope of stability for which Soviet society ached after years of war, revolution and privation.

As the Kremlin bureaucracy became more conscious of its position, this revisionism of internationalist principle became a rationale for political betrayal. Increasingly, Communist parties abroad were transformed into Soviet foreign-policy bargaining chips in a bid for illusory "peaceful coexistence" with imperialism. Over the coming decades, one opportunity after another for socialist revolution in the capitalist countries was strangled.

The Left Opposition that emerged from the crucible of the anti-bureaucratic struggle in the Soviet party was unquestionably the continuity of Leninism, the real heirs to the 1917 Russian Revolution. Trotsky's Left Opposition fought,

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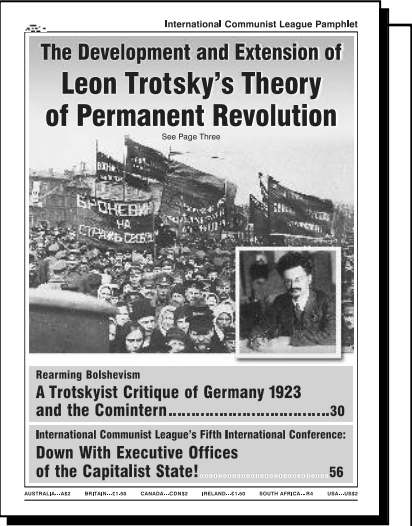
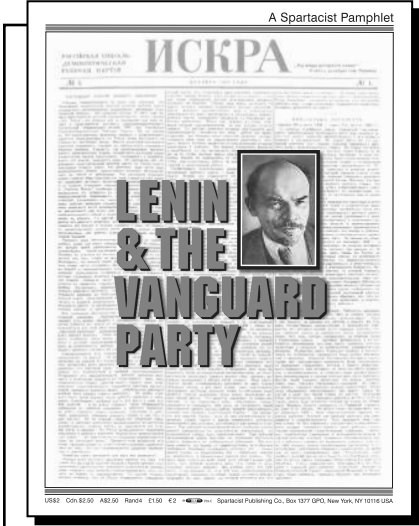
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“Students for a Free Tibet”: Campus Counterrevolutionaries

We reprint below an article from the Young Spartacus pages of Spartacist Canada No. 158 (Fall 2008), publication of the Trotskyist League/Ligue Trotskyste of Canada.

SPARTACIST CANADA

A group called Students for a Free Tibet (SFT) staged a spate of tiny, well-publicized demonstrations around the Beijing Olympics. For whom and for what did they protest?

The short answer: for one of U.S. imperialism’s oldest anti-Communist crusades. Funded by Washington, the drive for a “Free Tibet” amounts to a political lever for the restoration of capitalism to China, including Tibet. Its victory would pose the subjugation of the world’s most populous country to the same imperialist robbers that now run roughshod over the globe. As fighters for social progress and the genuine emancipation of all oppressed peoples—as *Trotskyists*—the Spartacus Youth Clubs oppose the reactionary “Free Tibet” campaign. We stand for the unconditional military defense of China against imperialism and domestic counterrevolution because it is a workers state, albeit bureaucratically deformed, born of a revolution against capitalism.

The 1949 Chinese Revolution liberated the country from imperialism as well as the domestic capitalists and warlords. That laid the basis for enormous advances for the people of Tibet. Secular education, running water and electrical facilities were eventually erected on the ashes of Tibet’s Lamaist theocracy, which was based on forced peasant labour and punishment by floggings, mutilations and amputations. The average life span of Tibetans, which had been 35 years in 1950, rose to 67 in 2001. Infant mortality, an astounding 43 percent in 1950, dramatically decreased to 0.661 percent in 2000.

SFT’s website includes a statement by a Tibet “support group” in Spain which claims that “over 1 million Tibetan’s [sic] were murdered or died at the hands of Chinese officials.” The shamelessness of this Big Lie is exposed by no less than a former director of the “Free Tibet Campaign” in London. He noted in a *New York Times* (22 March) op-ed article that “after scouring the archives in Dharamsala” he found “that there was no evidence” to support the claim raised by his and other “Free Tibet” groups that 1.2 million Tibetans have been killed since the People’s

Liberation Army entered Tibet in 1950. Then, the population of ethnic Tibetans was only some 2.8 million. Now, in the People’s Republic of China, ethnic Tibetans number at least 5 million, and over 90 percent of them speak Tibetan. *Beware of Students for a Free Tibet’s lying, anti-Communist campaigns against China!*

SFT executive director Lhadon Tethong as well as other prominent “Free Tibet” organizers such as Freya Putt, Kate Woznow and Sam Price all hail from British Columbia. Everything about their cause—from its movie-star spokesmen to its patronizing glorification of Tibetan feudalism—reeks of the self-righteous hypocrisy of Vancouver yuppies, whose affluent lifestyle fads stand in stark contrast to the real face of the city: the AIDS, poverty, drug addiction and all-sided social devastation that ravage Native people and others on the Downtown Eastside.

A feature in the August 23 *Globe and Mail* contrasted what it called Beijing’s “Totalitarian” Olympics to the plans for the Vancouver games in 2010, which the article claims will be done “ethically,” “the Canadian way.” The brazen hypocrisy of the claims to moral superiority made by this country’s rulers is exposed by the diverging fates of Tibetans in China and Natives in Canada. The Chinese Revolution brought the people of Tibet technology, education and the opportunity for advancement. In Canada, the colonial conquerors descended on the Native population bringing disease and campaigns of extermination. Today, the rulers of this advanced imperialist country offer Native people nothing but marginalization, degradation and hollow apologies for some of their predecessors’ crimes. That’s “the Canadian way.”

“Free Tibet” Means Imperialist Enslavement

Earlier this year, SFT touted the formation of a “Tibetan People’s Uprising Movement” based in Dharamsala, India. “In the spirit of the 1959 Uprising,” this outfit vows to “remove all obstacles to the unconditional return of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to Tibet and his rightful place as leader of the Tibetan people.” What happened in 1959? A rebellion inspired, armed and financed by the CIA originated among ethnic Tibetans in China’s Sichuan province and culminated in a monk/aristocrat-led uprising in Lhasa. This effort—preordained to fail—was cynically launched by the U.S. simply to harass China. Against the imperialist hue and cry over “poor little Tibet,” Trotskyists stood forthrightly for the defense of China.

The uprising was smashed, the Dalai Lama fled to India and the Communist Party of China under Mao Zedong quickly abolished his administration—the “Tibet Local Government”—which had been formed in 1951. Only then did Mao move to abolish the *ulag* (forced peasant labour), slavery and the myriad of mandatory taxes paid to the aristocracy and monasteries. Previously, the monasteries simply appropriated children to replenish the monk population while villages were forced to hand over children for state functions in Lhasa, with boys thus “donated” taken by the monks as consorts. The land, livestock and tools of the aristocrats who fled into exile were distributed to the peasants, as were the land and chattel of the monasteries which had participated in the uprising. For its part, the CIA continued throughout the 1960s to train armed Tibetan counterrevolutionaries. Ten years ago, the Dalai Lama’s administration admitted to having received

\$1.7 million a year from the CIA (*New York Times*, 20 October 1998).

On this year’s anniversary of the 1959 rebellion, rioters led by monks, often at the head of teenaged gangs, rampaged in Lhasa’s old Tibetan quarter, burning and destroying shops run by ethnic Chinese and killing at least 13 people. This reactionary rampage was lauded by SFT Campaigns Director Kate Woznow as “the largest protests in Tibet in 50 years” in an article for the website of Vancouver’s “lifestyle and entertainment weekly,” the *Georgia Straight* (15 March). Yet even the anti-Communist mouthpiece of British

Reactionary “Free Tibet” protester attacks young wheelchair-bound woman bearing Olympic torch in Paris, April 7.



finance capital, the *Economist*, which had a reporter in Lhasa at the time, described the scene as “an orgy of anti-Chinese rioting” (see “Counterrevolutionary Riots in Tibet,” *SC* No. 157, Summer 2008).

The CIA Connection

The Tibetan People’s Uprising Movement, to whom Woznow refers her readers, is backed by “Free Tibet” outfits that openly receive funding from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). Established under the Reagan administration, the NED is well-known as a money-laundering conduit for the CIA. Among those it funds is the International Tibet Support Network, whose “Olympics Co-ordinator,” the aforementioned Freya Putt, oversaw the provocations in Beijing this summer. SFT was founded in 1994 by another NED-financed outfit, the International Campaign for Tibet. SFT has received financial support from something called the Isdell Foundation, which is linked to a multi-billion dollar financial services company, Aristeia Capital, LLC.

He who pays the piper, calls the tune. SFT and the various “Free Tibet” outfits with which it associates are organically linked to the imperialist ruling class of the United States. Their activities intertwine with the funding and the purposes of the NED—and thus the CIA—at a day-to-day level.

Especially since the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet degenerated workers state in 1991-92, China has been in the cross hairs of the imperialists. The strongest of the remaining bureaucratically deformed workers states (Cuba, North Korea and Vietnam are the others), China is now surrounded by a whole system of U.S. military bases. To whip up anti-Communist hysteria, George Bush, Stephen Harper and the other imperialist war criminals lecture the Beijing regime on “human rights” at every opportunity.

The SYCs call to defend China against counterrevolution. At the same time, we politically oppose China’s ruling nation-

alist, Stalinist bureaucracy, whose ideology of “socialism in one country” means accommodating imperialism on a global scale. The Chinese proletariat must combat nationalism, Han chauvinism (Han comprise over 92 percent of China’s population) and all forms of discrimination against Tibetans, Muslim Uighurs and other ethnic and national minorities. A workers political revolution—based on defending and extending the gains of the 1949 Revolution—is necessary to sweep away the bureaucracy and replace it with the rule of workers and peasant councils committed to the struggle for communism worldwide.

For North American Socialist Revolution!

Canadian social democrats portray this country as a feel-good, peacekeeping counterweight to U.S. imperialism. In fact, Canadian imperialism, a junior partner to the U.S., has its own long, sordid history of violence and oppression at home and abroad. And the social-democratic NDP [New Democratic Party], in sync with its imperialist masters, has always promoted

anti-Communism and counterrevolution. They were quick to join the anti-China furor around the Tibet riots, issuing a March 14 statement that expressed “deep concern and alarm at the crackdown by the government of China.” A month later, leading NDP politicians were among the “Parliamentary Friends of Tibet” who made a pilgrimage to Ann Arbor, Michigan, to pay homage to “His Holiness” the Dalai Lama.

The handful of West Coast youth who are today SFT’s central leaders graduated from the ranks of campus activism to high-publicity careers as willing tools of U.S. imperialism. To the extent that they seek an “au naturel” Tibet where tranquil and simple humans live in “organic” relationships unspoiled by “civilization,” they are simply arrogant, petty-bourgeois reactionaries who uphold a society only decades ago so ravaged by sickness that an estimated **90 percent** of the population suffered from venereal disease; a society in which women were shared with their husbands’ male relatives if poor or added to the stables of wives of the rich; a society where life was brutal, harsh and short and where the masses were offered not the least hope for amelioration or any kind of change. And such a society, or one very much like it, necessarily under imperialist domination, would re-emerge if the Lama/aristocrat exiles returned to power in an “independent” Tibet.

The fate of the Tibetan people is inextricably bound up with the struggle for proletarian political revolution in China and socialist revolution in the capitalist countries, not least imperialist Japan and the Indian subcontinent. On this side of the Pacific, our perspective is for workers revolution to sweep away the rulers of U.S. and Canadian imperialism. The Spartacus Youth Clubs seek to win students and youth to the side of the working class, whose interests lie in the emancipation of all peoples from all forms of oppression and social backwardness. *Join us in the fight for a communist future!* ■



Tibetan herdsman whose foot was chopped off. Lamaist theocracy was based on forced peasant labor and punishment by mutilation.

Elections...

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is no such thing as an enduring state of bliss in terms of people’s confidence in their society. It is very much the product of what is happening to them at any point in time. Today, everybody is worried about the economy. There is plenty to worry about.

For Class Struggle Against U.S. Capitalist Rulers!

Our starting point is the understanding that capitalist society is divided between two fundamental classes: the capitalist class and the working class. The bourgeoisie owns the means of production—the factories, mines and transportation systems of modern industrial capitalism; the proletariat, in order to survive, is forced to sell its labor power to the capitalists, and through its labor generates the surplus value that the capitalists reap as profit. The interests of these two classes are irreconcilably counterposed.

With its hands directly on the means of production, the working class has the social power and objective interest to overthrow capitalism. Only then can the material basis be laid for ending exploitation, imperialist war, racial and other forms of oppression, all of which are endemic to the capitalist system. But for the working class to become fully conscious of its historic task to overthrow the capitalist order requires revolutionary leadership.

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels taught in the *Communist Manifesto* that “the executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.” The state is in its essence special bodies of armed men—police, military, prisons, courts—who maintain the rule of a few capitalist overlords over the many workers and oppressed. The state cannot be taken over and run in the interests of the working class. It must be smashed through socialist revolution.

The U.S. is today the Dorian Gray of imperialism. It’s old and hoary. For a century, it has been the most powerful and wealthy imperialist power in the world. It is, of course, occasionally prettified and cosmetically altered by those candidates that run for public office. This is exactly Barack Obama’s role: he offers a facelift for U.S. imperialism. American capitalism has never claimed to provide all people with jobs or health care or decent retirement or education or the ability to live if you don’t happen to be employed. There isn’t even a scrap of paper to indicate that women might have equal rights with men. The American capitalist system maintained Jim Crow segregation, administered by the Democrats in the South, until a little over 40 years ago. The 2005 man-made racist atrocity in the Gulf Coast in the face of Hurricane Katrina shows the American rulers’ very real and continuing impulse toward genocide of black people.



A Hooverville in Seattle, 1934. These shantytowns, sarcastically named after Herbert Hoover, U.S. president at beginning of Great Depression, sprang up throughout America.

U.S. imperialism entered onto the world stage with the 1898 Spanish-American War, which was manufactured by newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst and an obliging president. Its supposed drive to liberate people from Spanish domination was in fact the crushing of the indigenous Cuban independence struggle and the slaughtering of up to half a million Filipinos. The United States participated in the imperialist bloodbaths of World War I and World War II, coming out of each better off than it went in—as opposed to its imperialist rivals. It ended the Second World War with the atomic incineration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki—cities of no military importance—in an already defeated Japan. It was a racist massacre used to send a message to the Soviet Union that you better watch out—we’re pretty powerful. Fortunately, the Soviet Union soon procured nuclear weapons.

Since the end of WWII, the U.S. has been involved in over 50 military interventions, adding an additional ten million dead to the previous body counts. Some six million were slaughtered in U.S. imperialism’s counterrevolutionary wars in Korea and Vietnam alone. Today, we have the ongoing occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan. There is the bipartisan saber rattling against capitalist Russia. Both parties continue to threaten Iran over its nuclear energy program, and there are threats against North Korea. The U.S. has increased its incursions into Pakistan, the kind of thing that Obama has called for. Obama’s cautious and uneven opposition to the Iraq war and occupation is directed at restoring U.S. imperialism’s ability—weakened by the Bush administration’s disastrous policies in Iraq—to project its military and diplomatic power globally, not least against the Chinese deformed workers state, the largest and most powerful of the remaining states where capitalist rule was overthrown.

Then there’s the current economic meltdown. Raising the spectre of the Great Depression, bourgeois economists and

media pundits have insisted that the Wall Street bailout was the price that everyone had to pay to restore stability. Obama and McCain certainly have agreement on the bailout—money out of the taxpayers’ paychecks and into the coffers of Wall Street. But the bailout sure hasn’t done much for the economy; the stock market continues to plunge or is at best erratic, credit remains tight and the economy is contracting. Mortgage foreclosures are sweeping the country at a rate not seen since the Great Depression. The wholesale destruction of pension programs now means that many are also seeing the retirement monies that they invested in the stock market and other accounts go up in smoke. There was this cartoon in the *New York Times* (5 October) of “The Scream” by Edvard Munch. It shows the agonized little figure on the bridge screaming—only in this case he’s holding his 401(k).

For Black Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!

When I was 18 years old, I might have considered voting for Democrat Lyndon Johnson in 1964. He was supposed to be a peace candidate and certainly the “lesser evil.” His official slogan was “All the Way with LBJ.” The right wing of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) had the slogan, “Part of the Way with LBJ,” one of the funnier “critical support” slogans for the Democrats. But you couldn’t vote at 18 at that time. This was changed during the Vietnam War. “You’re old enough to kill, but not for votin’” was a line from the song “The Eve of Destruction,” which I will not sing for you.

In 1965 I went to Mississippi for one

of the Freedom Summers with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). We were supposed to be registering blacks to vote—Democrat, of course. I, like many others by this time, preferred direct action and fighting to integrate lunch counters, although I was for the right to vote. I saw how Mississippi was controlled by the Dixiecrats and plantation owners like Senator James Eastland, how the Mississippi delegation to the 1964 Democratic convention had been all white despite SNCC’s vast voter registration drive. I came back saying that hell would freeze over before I’d vote for the Democrats.

Both the Democrats and Republicans are capitalist parties. In a “state of the union” speech 32 years ago, America’s great essayist and novelist Gore Vidal aptly noted, “We have only one political party in the United States, the Property Party, with two right wings, Republican and Democrat.” For all his hoopla about “change,” Obama is in fact a mainstream capitalist politician, linked to the Illinois Democratic machine, who has put himself forward as the best candidate to run U.S. imperialism and keep working people, blacks, immigrants and all the oppressed down. He supports the death penalty, a legacy of slavery, the lynch rope made legal. We oppose the death penalty as a matter of principle—for the guilty as well as the innocent. Obama voted to expand the border fence and further militarize the border with Mexico. In South Africa, immigrants face being eaten by lions as they come across the border from Mozambique. Here in the U.S., a more advanced country, they face dying by starvation, being burned alive by giant forest fires, or dismembered riding the rails in Mexico. People should read *Enrique’s Journey* by Sonia Nazario to get a sense of what desperate immigrants endure. We say: Full citizenship rights for all immigrants!

The way forward is to break the political chains that bind workers, blacks, immigrants and the oppressed to their class enemy, particularly through support to the Democratic Party. The pro-capitalist trade-union tops have done their best to paralyze class struggle by promoting Democratic Party lesser-evilism. Part and parcel of building a revolutionary working-class party in this country will be waging a political struggle against the trade-union bureaucracy, to forge a new leadership of labor so that the trade unions can realize their ability to play a leading role in the struggle against

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Tiller...

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the Democrats have fielded 12 openly anti-abortion Congressional candidates. The reformists who seek to “pressure” this other capitalist party of war and racism have little to offer but wistful whining. The International Socialist Organization wrote: “If the top Democratic contenders aren’t saying anything much this year about protecting abortion rights, it’s because liberal pro-choice organizations haven’t really asked them to” (*Socialist Worker* online, February 8).

In fact, the concession made by the Supreme Court decision to legalize abortion was not a result of pathetically “asking” politicians to do the right thing. It was the result of social struggle on the streets, linked to a radicalization in U.S. society—the struggle for black liberation and against U.S. imperialism’s losing, dirty war against the Vietnamese people. And such concessions are in turn reversible in a period of its decline. That reversal began with the onset of the Cold War II campaign against the Soviet Union in the late 1970s under Democrat Carter, and the rollback of these gains has been ongoing: from affirmative action, welfare and women’s rights to union rights and the overall living standards of the working class. These attacks were intensified following the counterrevolutionary

destruction of the Soviet Union.

The enforced ignorance about safe sex and birth control, led in no small part by religious and anti-abortion bigots, has meant many unwanted pregnancies for young girls. It has also furthered the spread of AIDS. Black teens account for almost 70 percent of new AIDS cases, although they represent only 16 percent of American teenagers. Meanwhile, gay rights have also been further under attack in many parts of the country, as witnessed by Proposition 8 in California banning gay marriage. We defend the rights of gays to marry (and divorce) and to get every benefit of society possible.

It will not be through the voting booth or appeals to the courts, but through the massive mobilization of women, black people, immigrants and all the oppressed under the leadership of the working class and its revolutionary party that the doors to clinics will stay open and decent health care and education will be made available for all. The liberation of women requires nothing less than a socialist revolution which will uproot the private property system and create a socialized planned economy. Only then will the material basis be laid to replace the institution of the family—the main source of women’s oppression under capitalism—with socialized childcare and housework, and bringing women full equality in all areas of social and political life. For women’s liberation through socialist revolution!■

Spartacus Youth Club Events

BAY AREA

Saturday, November 22, 4 p.m.
**Financial Crisis:
Bankruptcy of Capitalism**
1634 Telegraph Avenue, 3rd floor
Oakland
(near 17th and Broadway, 1 block from
19th Street BART, ring buzzer on left)
Information and readings: (510) 839-0851
or e-mail: sycbayarea@sbcglobal.net

CHICAGO

Tuesday, November 11, 7 p.m.
**The Capitalist State:
An Instrument of Organized Terror**
University of Chicago
1116 E. 59th St.
Harper Memorial Library, Room 130
Information and readings: (312) 563-0441
or e-mail: chicagospartacist@sbcglobal.net

**Visit the ICL Web Site:
www.icl-fi.org**

LOS ANGELES

Thursday, November 13, 6 p.m.
The State and Revolution
152 Kerckhoff Hall, UCLA
Information and readings: (213) 380-8239
or e-mail: slsycla@sbcglobal.net

TORONTO

Wednesday, November 19, 6:30 p.m.
**The Russian Revolution:
How the Working Class Took Power**
University of Toronto
Sidney Smith Building, Room 1080
100 St. George Street
Information and readings: (416) 593-4138
or e-mail: spartcan@on.aibn.com

VANCOUVER

Wednesday, November 19, 6 p.m.
Independence for Quebec!
UBC Student Union Building, Rm. 211
Information and readings: (604) 687-0353
or e-mail: trotskyst_vancouver@shawcable.com

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exploitation and oppression. Our conception of a revolutionary workers party is not an electoralist vehicle but an instrument to lead the exploited and oppressed in their struggles to the revolutionary overturn of the racist capitalist order.

For his part, Obama wishes to become the overseer of the whole plantation and, as we have said, is well qualified to be the chief executive of U.S. imperialism. This is not a compliment. We typically wind up calling for imperialist presidents to be tried by their victims. And be assured that Barack Obama will have victims if elected. Obama's own position is that the civil rights movement brought America "90 percent of the way" toward racial equality. His statement that "the ineptitude was colorblind" in the wake of Hurricane Katrina is a disgusting lie. It wasn't ineptitude and it wasn't colorblind!

The reality is that the condition of black Americans is no better, and in some cases worse, than at the time of the civil rights movement, with two exceptions. There has been a recovery of the right to vote, at least partially. And there has also come into existence a black middle class of some weight. In terms of what the black population faces—ghettos, cop terror, lack of jobs, social benefits and education—things are as bad as ever or worse. There were more black students when I went to UC Berkeley 40 years ago than there are now. And of course there is the fact that since the civil rights movement, the U.S. has filled the prisons with black people. The race-caste oppression of black people will not be ended by America's rulers. It is an invaluable tool for them to keep working people divided to put a brake on class and social struggle. It is precisely the absence of class and social struggle that allows Obama to run as a black candidate promoting the lie that racist oppression is 90 percent dead.

The only way forward is to link the struggle for black freedom and equality to the fight for socialist revolution. Due to their special oppression and the fact that they are among the most conscious and experienced in struggle, black workers are slated to play an exceptional role in the coming American socialist revolution. Our struggle for black liberation is based on the program of revolutionary integrationism. While opposing every manifestation of racist oppression, fighting in particular to mobilize the social power of the multiracial labor movement, we underline that full equality for the black masses requires that the working class rip the economy out of the hands of the capitalist rulers and reorganize it on a collectivized, socialist basis. Only then will it be possible to eliminate the material roots of black oppression through the integration of black people into an egalitarian socialist society based on a planned, collectivized economy with jobs and quality housing, health care and education for all.

American "Democracy" and Black Disenfranchisement

In this election, as in all previous, we see much praise of democracy and the right to vote as a vehicle for change. The trappings of American democracy and the illusions they reinforce serve a crucial function for the capitalist rulers in blocking the development of workers' class consciousness. We tenaciously defend the right to vote. But we emphasize that fundamental change will not come through voting. All the gains working people and black people have made came through their seizing them, by mass struggles on the battlefields, in the factories and on the streets, from the racist rulers.

Do you want to know how many popular votes George Washington won by? You can't find out. Nor can you find out about Thomas Jefferson or John Adams, because there was no recorded nationwide popular vote until 1824. Throughout the 19th and the early 20th centuries, some 13 to 19 percent of the population voted. Capitalist democracy is democracy for the capitalist rulers, it is the

dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.

The struggle to expand the vote has been the product of large social movements and part of the struggle for freedom and against exploitation and oppression. The Civil War, the second American revolution, gave the franchise to black men, who then had it taken away several decades later by Jim Crow legislation in the South. The young Soviet workers republic was among the first countries to accord women the right to vote, which was the direct cause of women getting the right to vote in other countries, including the U.S.

The civil rights movement regained the right to vote for black people. But even that has been partial. Andrew Hacker has an interesting article in the *New York Review of Books* (25 September) called "Obama: The Price of Being Black." In it he explains how in certain states you need a driver's license or other official ID to vote; blacks are less likely to have cars and driver's licenses. The *New York Times* (5 October) had an editorial called "Foreclosures and the Right to Vote," which states: "It has been a long time since there

Bolshevik Revolution—the word became flesh. We stood for the unconditional military defense of the Soviet degenerated workers state against imperialism and capitalist counterrevolution—just as we do today for the remaining deformed workers states of China, North Korea, Vietnam and Cuba. At the same time, we fight for workers political revolution to oust the Stalinist bureaucracies and replace them with regimes based on workers democracy and revolutionary internationalism. In 1991-92, as our political opponents on the left acted as cheerleaders for Yeltsin's counterrevolution, we fought to the end in defense of the homeland of the October Revolution. We fight for new October Revolutions.

Reformists, Greens and Obamania

What about the Green Party and Green presidential nominee Cynthia McKinney? The Greens are a small capitalist party. They are quite clear in their program that they are for small-time capitalism. One feels like reminding them that small-time

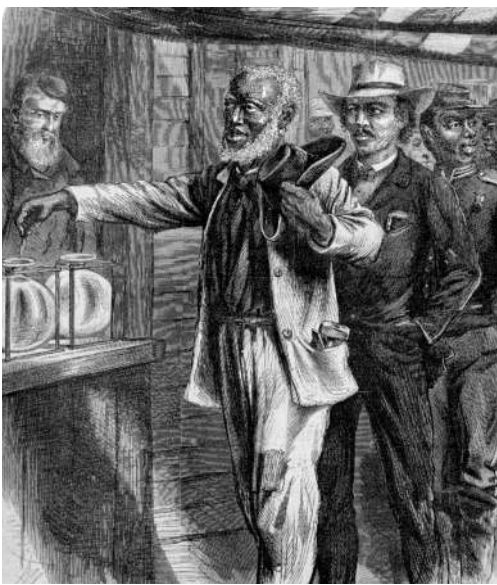
much of the left, by Obamania. While not coming out openly in support of Barack Obama, they have been gushing about his message of "hope."

In their monthly theoretical journal, *International Socialist Review* (March-April 2008), they write that "just breaking the stifling conservative orthodoxy of the last generation would make liberalism a more viable ideological alternative for millions who want to see real social change." That's the ISO summed up: trying to resurrect Democratic Party liberalism. Having supported Ralph Nader and the capitalist Greens in the past, the ISO wrote this year: "While Nader may be the candidate who deserves our votes in November, we at *Socialist Worker* believe it would be a poor use of scarce resources for those who want to build a stronger left to concentrate their energies working on Nader's candidacy" (*Socialist Worker*, 7 March). They have since flirted with supporting McKinney, but are not putting much into that campaign; they're too busy cozying up to the Democrats. They enthused over Obama's March 18



Library of Congress

Left: Heroic black Massachusetts 54th Regiment charging Fort Wagner in South Carolina during the Civil War, July 1863. Black troops were key to Union victory that smashed chattel slavery. Right: Southern blacks voting in 1867 during Reconstruction.



Harper's Weekly

were property requirements for voting. Election officials must not impose them now, by disenfranchising people because they have lost, or are losing, their homes"—i.e., blacks, Latinos and working-class poor.

But it is mass black incarceration that has had the most impact. If you have been in prison, then in most states (Florida is the most notorious) you lose the right to vote, sometimes for life. We're for the decriminalization of all drugs and say that the "war on drugs" is a war on black people. Some 13 percent of black men have been disenfranchised through incarceration. We demand the restoration of all citizenship rights to all prisoners and ex-felons.

For New October Revolutions!

Against all reformist illusions and delusions in the reformability of the capitalist system, we point to the 1917 Russian Revolution as our model. It was the single most liberating event in human history. The capitalist owners and the landlords were expropriated, and land was given to the peasants. The right of self-determination was declared for the nations and peoples of the former tsarist prison house of peoples. In the course of the 1917 Revolution, the soviets, popular organs of insurrection and working-class power, were formed. Representatives from these soviets constituted the working-class government that emerged from the October Revolution under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party. It is interesting to note that even after the political degeneration of the Soviet Union, which began in 1923-24 under the nationalist Stalinist bureaucracy, the Soviet economy grew during the Great Depression. This is because it was not a society run for profit but by collectivized social planning, albeit bureaucratically.

Marx's statement in the *Communist Manifesto* that the working class is the only social force capable of overturning capitalism and proceeding to build a socialist order was realized by the

capitalism becomes big-time capitalism. McKinney is not well known. On the campuses students came up to us when they saw our signs against McKinney as a bourgeois politician, telling us that we had misspelled McCain's name! McKinney is one of many homeless Democratic politicians who use the Green Party as a vehicle to try to pressure the Democrats to the left. McKinney's role is to herd radical youth, workers, blacks and others fed up with the Democrats back into the Democratic camp.

For all her claims to stand "independent" of the Democrats, McKinney, herself a longtime Democrat, issued a statement of congratulations to Obama, after Hillary Clinton conceded the primary race, that was clear enough: "Coming from Barack Obama, the word 'change' did not appear as just another empty campaign slogan. It galvanized millions of people—mostly young people—to register to vote and to get active in the political system." After laying out a series of liberal demands, certainly more left-sounding than most Democratic politicians, McKinney explicated the central task of her campaign: "I encourage the Democratic Party and its new presumptive nominee, Senator Obama, to embrace these important suggestions for policy initiatives." McKinney and the Greens not only act as shills for the Democrats, but more broadly steer the disgruntled into the illusory quest for reform through electoralism—as though the right politician will change all.

In this the Democrats and Greens are served by the reformist left which, especially since the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union, has ever more defined its political activity as within the bounds of bourgeois democracy. The anti-Communist International Socialist Organization (ISO) has acted as an appendage of bourgeois democracy from its inception, when it made common cause with the imperialists in their drive for capitalist counterrevolution in the Soviet Union. Currently the ISO has been seized, as has

"More Perfect Union" speech where he denounced Reverend Jeremiah Wright: "Obama proceeded to do what no 'electable' presidential candidate has ever done—speak explicitly about the reality of racism in America" (*Socialist Worker*, 28 March). No! Obama's talked about race in order to dismiss race. Regarding Obama, they grotesquely wrote: "U.S. politics are at a potential turning point, in which a nation founded upon slavery, with racism ingrained in its very foundation, could finally begin to correct its hideous past" (*Socialist Worker* online, 5 June).

The misnamed Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) has denounced Obama as being on the same side as Bush and McCain, but don't let their posturing fool you. The RCP, through its World Can't Wait coalition, has worked tirelessly to mobilize liberals to "Drive out the Bush regime!" And replace it with what? The Democrats! During the 2004 elections, they told their readers and members to "vote for Kerry if you feel you really have

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to” (*Revolutionary Worker*, 29 August 2004). The RCP’s appeal to bourgeois-liberal politicians comes across in the World Can’t Wait’s call for protests at the Democratic National Convention in Denver. The call (printed in *Revolution*, 3 August) does *not* demand that the U.S. get out of Afghanistan, Obama’s preferred theatre of imperialist carnage. It obscenely exhorts people to take responsibility for the actions of “your government.” This is not our government and imperialism is not a policy that can be pressured to change through protest.

Workers World Party (WWP) explicitly supports capitalist Green candidate Cynthia McKinney. The Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL), which split from WWP, are themselves running as Greens and in California under the petty-bourgeois Peace and Freedom Party. But in case this crossing of the class line was not clear enough, the PSL wrote in an article hailing McKinney’s and Cindy Sheehan’s candidacies that they have “the potential to build a stronger base for the people’s progressive movement in the coming period” (23 August statement, www.pslweb.org). My parents were in the Communist Party, and I heard a lot about “progressive” movements growing up. That always means reforming capitalism. In fact the only people I have met who support McKinney are leftists who remain committed to electoralism. Frankly it’s a sham because they know all their supporters are going to go for Obama anyway.

Socialist Action, in arguing against voting for the Democrats or Republicans, nevertheless shows where they are really coming from: “Elections pose the question as to which class will rule society.” And later on: “Again, elections in essence pose the issue of power, of which class shall rule, the minority capitalists or the majority of workers and their allies among the oppressed” (*Socialist Action*, August 2008). This is anti-Marxist and anti-Leninist. Elections do not pose the question of state power; the working class has to seize state power through socialist revolution, as the Russian Revolution showed.

Down With Executive Offices of the Capitalist State!

The fundamental line between reform and revolution is one’s attitude toward the bourgeois state. The reformist attitude is that one can administer it in the interests of workers; Marxists understand that the capitalist state apparatus must be smashed through proletarian revolution and replaced with organs of working-class power. It was in this framework that we took up the question of running candidates for executive office during the Fifth International Conference of

Monument at Truc Bach Lake in Hanoi commemorates shooting down of war criminal John McCain’s military aircraft in 1967 by Vietnamese fighters (right). Antiwar protest in Washington, D.C., January 1973. Spartacists fought for victory of Vietnamese workers and peasants.



Linda Merz



WV Photo

the International Communist League (of which the Spartacist League is the U.S. section) in early 2007. By executive office we mean the mayor, the governor, the president. Unlike the U.S. Congress, parliaments and other legislative bodies, where communist deputies can, as *oppositionists*, serve as revolutionary tribunes of the working class, assuming executive office requires taking responsibility for the administration of the machinery of the capitalist state. As Marxists, we do not stand for executive office. To stand for election to executive positions carries the implication that one is ready to accept such responsibility, no matter what disclaimer one makes in advance. For self-proclaimed Marxists to engage in such activity only lends legitimacy to prevailing and reformist conceptions of the state.

The distinctions between executive and legislative offices are clearer when you see them in action. When I was visiting South Africa recently, I spoke to a young man who was in the youth group of the South African Communist Party (SACP) about the fact that a leader of the SACP, which is in the bourgeois-nationalist Tripartite Alliance and helps run capitalism for the Randlords, is the Minister of Safety and Security and called out the army and cops against black strikers last year. The young man looked pained and

said: “Well, that’s his job description.” Well, if elected, Obama’s job description will be to run U.S. imperialism.

We stand on the first four Congresses of the Third or Communist International (Comintern), the revolutionary international built by the Bolsheviks in the immediate aftermath of the Russian Revolution. But we are not totally uncritical. The Second Congress of the Comintern produced “Theses on the Communist Parties and Parliamentaryism” that contained contradictory language on the appropriateness of Communists running municipal councils. Thesis 5 noted correctly that “the bourgeoisie’s institutions of local government...are in reality organizations similar to the mechanism of the bourgeois state, which must be destroyed by the revolutionary proletariat and replaced by local soviets of workers’ deputies.” But Thesis 13 states that Communists who “hold a majority in institutions of local government” should “organize revolutionary opposition against the central bourgeois government.” Administering local councils has historically been used as a mechanism by which the bourgeoisie has co-opted reformist parties into the capitalist order. In “Down With Executive Offices of the Capitalist State!” (reprinted in the April 2008 ICL pamphlet, *The Development and Extension of Leon Trot-*

sky’s Theory of Permanent Revolution), we stated:

“In adopting the position against running for executive office, we are recognizing and codifying what should be seen as a corollary to Lenin’s *The State and Revolution* and *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, which are really the founding documents of the Third International. This understanding was attenuated by the time of the Second Congress of the CI, which failed to draw a distinction between parliamentary and executive office in pursuing electoral activity. Thus we are continuing to complete the theoretical and programmatic work of the first four Congresses of the CI. It is easy enough to pledge that you won’t take executive office when the chance of winning is remote. But the question is: what happens when you win?... If we cannot arrive at a correct answer of how to deal with executive offices we will inevitably bend in the direction of reformism when the issue is posed.”

In the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution, Trotsky made a point that the world is rotten-ripe for socialist revolution. By that he meant all the objective conditions existed for proletarian revolution. What was needed, as Trotsky and other revolutionaries underlined, was revolutionary leadership, the subjective factor. The question of forging a leadership capable of leading the proletariat to power is one of the main lessons of the Russian Revolution. The revolution was victorious because of the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky’s Bolsheviks. The forging of a revolutionary party to lead the proletariat to fulfill its historic mission as destroyers of the bourgeois order remains the main crisis today. One thing we have to acknowledge is that with the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union, this crisis has been deepened, with even advanced sections of the working class no longer viewing their struggles as part of a fight for socialism. Marxism must once again win the allegiance of the proletariat.

The need for class struggle is critically urgent in this country, where workers do not even perceive themselves as a class opposed to the capitalists. Struggles will occur. The capitalist order of exploitation and oppression will summon class awakenings. But that doesn’t mean there is nothing to do now—you know, go home and “call me when the socialist revolution is on.” We must not passively await the stirring of the masses. We must assemble the cadres to forge a revolutionary working-class party so that when the proletariat awakens, the cadres are assembled to lead the struggle to overturn the bloody American imperialist order. The task of the ICL is to organize, train and steel the proletarian vanguard parties, sections of a reformed Fourth International, necessary for the seizure of state power and the establishment of workers rule around the globe.■

U.S. War Criminals...

(continued from page 12)

Under the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq, age-old ethnic and religious antagonisms—which were stoked by the imperialists’ divide-and-rule carve-up of the Near East and exacerbated by decades of bourgeois-nationalist rule—have erupted in an all-sided orgy of bloodletting. We call for the military defense of Iraqi and Afghan forces insofar as they aim their blows against the imperialist occupiers and their lackeys. At the same time, we stand in intransigent political opposition to the Islamic fundamentalists and nationalists who have also engaged in communalist slaughter.

The vaunted “surge” has merely resulted in a decline in U.S. casualties. Meanwhile, the various Sunni and Shi’ite forces continue to bomb their rivals’ mosques, neighborhoods and marketplaces throughout Iraq. In Mosul, tensions between Kurds and the Shi’ite-led central government for control of the city have reached a boiling point. One consequence of the sectarian violence is shown in the fate of the Iraqi Christians, whose num-

bers were cut in half over the last five years through forced expulsions and murder. Christians have lived in the area for nearly two millennia, surviving countless invasions and occupations only to have their existence threatened by the Christian fundamentalist regime in Washington.

It was the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union, a world-historic defeat for the international proletariat, that emboldened U.S. imperialism to wield its military might far and wide, especially in the strategically important and oil-rich Near East. The Soviet Union was the homeland of the October Revolution of 1917, the world’s first and, to date, only victorious workers revolution. While the reformist “socialists” joined in cheering the demise of the USSR, we Trotskyists fought to the end in defense of the Soviet workers state and its collectivized property forms. With the U.S. imperialists today intent on overturning the gains of the 1949 Chinese Revolution that resulted in the smashing of capitalist rule, the international proletariat must stand for the unconditional military defense of China and the other deformed workers states against imperialism and counterrevolution. We call for workers political revolution in these states to oust the Stalinist bureaucratic misrulers and replace them

with regimes based on workers democracy and revolutionary internationalism.

Imperialist war abroad goes hand in hand with increasing immiseration, repression and racist oppression at home. What is necessary is class-struggle opposition to U.S. imperialism by the multiracial proletariat in this country. The primary obstacle to this course is the pro-capitalist labor bureaucracy, which subor-

dinates the proletariat to its capitalist class enemy, particularly by promoting Democratic Party “lesser evilism.” The fight for revolutionary leadership is key. Our purpose is to forge the multiracial workers party that will lead the proletariat in sweeping away the bloody capitalist system that breeds war and put the wealth of this country into the hands of the workers who create it.■

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U.S. Strikes Pakistan, Syria



Left: U.S. air strike on Pakistani border post killed eleven soldiers, June 10. Right: Syrian villagers carrying coffins of relatives killed in October 26 U.S. military attack on Sukkariyah village, on the Syria-Iraq border.

U.S. War Criminals: Hands Off the World!

In the past weeks, U.S. imperialist forces have attacked sites in Pakistan and Syria, threatening to spread the carnage of the bloody occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq into these neighboring countries. On October 26, the U.S. military staged an attack on the Syrian village of Sukkariyah, with soldiers emerging from helicopters to gun down eight people, including four children. Meanwhile, the U.S. is now routinely launching Predator drone missile strikes into Pakistan's western tribal regions. Two recent attacks last Friday claimed an additional 27 lives.

The offensive into the Pakistani tribal region bordering Afghanistan includes at least one ground raid. On September 3, helicopter-borne U.S. commandos carried out an assault in Pakistan, killing some 20 people. In line with secret orders issued by President Bush in July authorizing such raids, this attack took place without prior approval from the U.S.'s nominal ally in Islamabad. With these orders, Bush is following the course recommended by Barack Obama, who since the beginning of his campaign has expressed a willingness to make military incursions into Pakistan in pursuit of "terrorists."

These U.S. military incursions have touched off a firestorm of protest, including a rally of thousands in Damascus. While the new Pakistani regime has previously acquiesced to the airstrikes, including by allowing the CIA to fly the drones from a secret military base within its borders, popular outrage at the September 3 assault prompted the Islamabad regime to threaten to cut off the supply routes of its imperialist patron in the event of any future ground raids. Recently, in response to the raging discontent, the Pakistani government issued statements protesting the bombings in the tribal regions.

Many Pakistanis trace the origins of the uprising in the Bajaur tribal area to a U.S. missile strike on an Islamic seminary there in November 2006. Under heavy pressure from the U.S., the Pakistani military is now waging a brutal offensive in Bajaur to suppress the uprising, forcing

Out of Iraq, Afghanistan!

some 300,000 people to flee the area. The disintegration of Pakistan, a highly fragile and nuclear-armed country, could well ignite the kind of communalist slaughter that has attended the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq. The resulting death and destruction from a conflagration on the Asian subcontinent would eclipse that of the brutal occupation of Iraq.

In advance of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the White House announced what came to be known as the "Bush doctrine" of unilateral "pre-emptive" war against any perceived adversary. The 2002 "Nuclear Posture Review" listed seven countries, including the deformed workers states of China and North Korea, for nuclear first strike. Last week, Defense Secretary Robert Gates expanded the "Bush doctrine," arrogating to the U.S. the "right" to nuke any "enemy" country it wants at any time. With its A-bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the Second World War, the U.S. demonstrated its willingness to inflict such destruction in the service of its appetites to control the world. Nevertheless it is no accident that this policy has been reasserted at this time. The burgeoning economic crisis in the U.S. and its militarily weakened state make U.S. imperialism an even greater danger to the world's working and oppressed peoples.

This will not change, whoever wins the U.S. elections. John McCain is promising an Iraq-style "surge" in Afghanistan while Obama is pledging at least 10,000 more troops. Both support further U.S. military action inside Pakistan. Meanwhile, U.S. troops will remain in Iraq, whether at current levels or as a "residual force" deemed necessary by Obama and described by his advisers as totaling up to 50,000 troops. As for Iran, Obama has joined McCain in issuing threats over its nuclear program, declaring that "we must never take the

military option off the table."

Obama, who was seen by many as the "antiwar" candidate, has surrounded himself with the likes of Zbigniew Brzezinski and Madeleine Albright. As a part of the Carter administration, Brzezinski was godfather to the reactionary Afghan *mujahedin* cutthroats financed by the CIA against the Soviet Army, which intervened in Afghanistan in late 1979 in defense of the USSR's southern flank and on the side of elementary human progress. Albright was Clinton's Secretary of State, who extolled the UN starvation blockade of Iraq and was a key player in the U.S./NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999.

In Berlin this summer, Obama gave a speech designed to reinvigorate "Western allies" behind U.S. imperialist aims abroad, denouncing "the Soviet shadow [that] had swept across Eastern Europe" after World War II, while leaving unmentioned the fact that the Red Army had defeated the scourge of Nazi terror in Europe. In the aftermath of the destruction of the Soviet Union, Obama's anti-Communism today serves a real purpose in targeting the deformed workers states of Cuba, North Korea, Vietnam and especially China, the largest and most powerful of the countries where capitalist rule has been overthrown.

The only way to put an end to imperialist war is to tear up the whole capitalist system by its roots through workers revolution and to establish a socialist society. As revolutionary Marxists in the belly of the imperialist beast, the Spartacist League/U.S., section of the International Communist League, demands the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all U.S. forces from Iraq, Afghanistan, the Near East and Central Asia. ***U.S. hands off the world!***

In the lead-up to and during the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, we stressed that it was in the class interest of

the international proletariat to defend those countries against imperialist attack without extending any political support to the Taliban cutthroats or Saddam

Hussein's bloody capitalist regime. Every victory for the imperialists in their military adventures encourages more predatory wars; every setback serves to assist the struggles of working people and the oppressed.

The U.S. imperialists have repeatedly engaged in saber rattling against Iran, as they seek to stamp out any regime that does not bow to their dictates. Iran in particular has been singled out for its uranium enrichment program. In support of the perspective of effectively disarming Iran, the reformist International Socialist Organization and its Campus Antiwar Network and the Revolutionary Communist Party (through its World Can't Wait outfit) signed a petition begging the war criminals Bush and Cheney not to "aggressively" attack Iran, while advising the imperialist chiefs to "lead the way to peace"! The petition argues that "the most effective way to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons would be to closely monitor its nuclear energy program" (see "ISO, RCP to Bush: Disarm Iran, 'Lead the Way to Peace,'" WV No. 870, 12 May 2006).

The reformists operate within the framework of the capitalist system, a system that *can't* be made to serve the interests of working people and the oppressed, much less inaugurate world peace. Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism, is nothing other than the competition among the industrial powers for profits and spheres of influence, which ignites wars of conquest and gives rise to neocolonial pillage. We say that Iran needs nuclear weapons and adequate delivery systems to defend itself and to deter an imperialist attack. In the event of military attack against it by the U.S. imperialists or Israel acting as a proxy for the U.S., we would call for military defense of Iran while giving no political support to its theocratic regime.

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