

Obama Takes Aim at Medicare, Union Health Plans For Socialized Medicine! Expropriate the Health Care Industry!

It would be hard to find a more blatant expression of the capitalist profit system than the plans afoot to “reform” the catastrophe of health care in America. The commodity trade here is in human lives and the life-sucking health insurance giants and drug companies are the ones who will continue to be laughing all the way to the bank. In his September 9 speech to Congress, Obama packaged his health care “reform” plan as a means to provide coverage for the nearly 50 million uninsured Americans. He also claimed his plan would protect those with insurance from being subjected to the tender mercies of the HMOs, which deploy an army of administrators to “insure” that you get the least coverage possible, if they don’t just cut off your benefits entirely—particularly if you have a life-threatening illness.

The Democrats’ posture as “friends” of working people makes them effective political representatives for enforcing the rule of a system that is based on exploitation and oppression. Restoring the profitability and competitive edge of U.S. imperialism, where health care costs are the highest and the health of the majority of the population the worst in the advanced industrialized countries, is the real name of the “health care reform” game. As characterized by Wendell Potter, a former CIGNA insurance executive who is now an industry whistle blower, what’s being put forward today might as well be called “The Insurance Industry Profit Protection and Enhancement Act.”

With the official unemployment rate crowding 10 percent—and double that when the underemployed and those who have stopped looking for work are added in—the number of those with no health insurance increases day by day. Obama invokes the plight of the uninsured, with promises of a level of care not much above a pledge to pick up the dead bodies, in order to massively *cut health care costs*. Some \$600 billion in savings is to come from reducing government spending on Medicare and Medicaid. Also being eyed for the ax by the health reform executioners are the now non-taxable employer-paid health programs won through the hard-fought union battles of the past. What are described as “gold-plated insurance” policies are not those of Wall Street CEOs, who have ready access to the best medical care money can buy, but the coverage available to many union members and their families. The current proposal by Demo-



Todd Bigelow

Above: Patients in crowded waiting room at a Los Angeles health center. Below: Patients at fairgrounds in Virginia being treated by volunteer dentists and support staff of Remote Area Medical, an organization that originally provided health services to underdeveloped countries.



AFP

cratic Senator Max Baucus is that the government levy taxes on these plans in the name of funding...health care!

The bitter reality of what is being palmed off as insuring the rights of all Americans to medical care was captured by liberal *New York Times* columnist Bob

Herbert (18 August), heretofore among the more vapid enthusiasts for Obama as “change we can believe in”:

“Insurance companies are delighted with the way ‘reform’ is unfolding. Think of it: The government is planning to require most uninsured Americans to buy health coverage. Millions of young and healthy

individuals will be herded into the industry’s welcoming arms. This is the population the insurers drool over.

“This additional business—a gold mine—will more than offset the cost of important new regulations that, among other things, will prevent insurers from denying coverage to applicants with pre-existing conditions or imposing lifetime limits on benefits. Poor people will either be funneled into Medicaid, which will have its eligibility ceiling raised, or will receive a government subsidy to help with the purchase of private insurance.

“If the oldest and sickest are on Medicare, and the poorest are on Medicaid, and the young and the healthy are required to purchase private insurance without the option of a competing government-run plan—well, that’s reform the insurance companies can believe in.”

The liberals, trade-union bureaucrats and reformist left plead for Obama not to abandon his promise of a “public option,” i.e., a minimal government-funded program to compete with the insurance magnates, or maximally to institute a “single-payer” system as exists in Canada and much of Europe. All of this is predicated on the belief that the capitalist state, the very purpose of which is to defend the profits and rule of the bourgeoisie, can be made to serve the interests of those the capitalist rulers exploit and oppress.

The national health care programs that exist in other industrialized countries were instituted to placate combative working classes. While representing real gains, these programs have been consistently whittled away according to both the budgetary considerations of the capitalist rulers and the overhead they deem necessary to rein in working-class struggle. Under capitalism medical care is rationed to all but the few who can afford to buy it. This does not change when the bosses’ state becomes the administrator.

“Big Government”: A Racist Rallying Cry

Free, quality medical care for all should be an elementary right. But achieving that will require a genuine socialist assault by the multiracial working class to rip the “health” industry out of the hands of the profit-gorged insurance giants and drug

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For Free, Quality Health Care, Including for All Immigrants! For Free Abortion on Demand!



On Sports, Steroids and Race

11 August 2009

Editors,

Last Saturday (8 August) I intently listened to a press conference in which David “Big Papi” Ortiz and the Major League Players Association General Counsel Michael Weiner spoke to the issue of steroid use in baseball and the continuing victimization of Major League ball players by the Commissioner’s office, the U.S. Government and the media. Ortiz flatly stated he did not use any banned substances but rather bought vitamins and supplements across the counter.

To many of us following the turmoil surrounding the issue of the use of banned substances by Major League ball players this appearance of Ortiz, a well liked and respected player (except, of course, in New York), publicly fighting back against scurrilous and career damaging attacks with his union representative at his side was a positive event. For the last 4 or 5 years not a week goes by when some hack politician or corporate media flak has not attacked the baseball accomplishments and integrity of some Major League

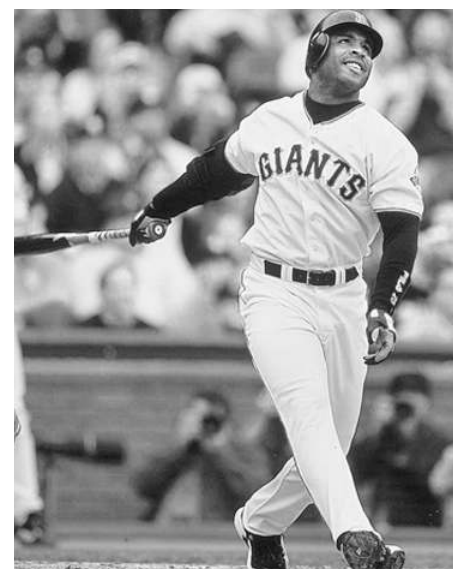
ball player. Obviously the bourgeoisie is attempting to intimidate the youth of this country by demonizing steroid use and attacking the Players Association.

I, for one, could care less what a baseball player does with his body. I don’t hear any puffed-up politician or corporate media hack bemoaning the fact that Hollywood has plastic surgeons on speed dial to perform a breast implant, butt enhancement, hair implant, face lift or whatever some star thinks it will take to get him or her in front of the camera. We all know of one Governor who “enhanced” his way to stardom and I don’t hear many complaints from the horse racing industry about all the drugs and supplements given to jockeys and horses to keep the weight down or the speed up.

Most of us have no doubts that a lot of the bad publicity and attacks are racially motivated as the persecution of Barry Bonds makes clear. Personality aside Bonds was the most feared batter of his era and has now been effectively blackballed from baseball before he could reach 3,000 hits, faces Federal charges and has had his name and career disparaged by every

two-bit journalist in the country. The man has won seven MVP’s, hit 762 home runs and intimidated opposing managers so much he was intentionally walked with the bases loaded more than once. Fact is that the baseball and sports establishment does not like to admit that Henry Aaron and Barry Bonds, Black players, both broke the most hallowed record in American sports. The game of baseball is entertainment not life or death and management will promote whatever it takes to put butts in the seats and money in the till. (Just ask U.S. Senator Jim “Buckles” Bunning who in his Major League pitching days was known to groove the baseball with the help of his uniform belt buckle to give him an edge on the mound.)

I could say a lot more on this issue because baseball is dear to my heart and has been since the 50’s when Mantle, Berra and Whitey Ford were playing on the transistor radio stashed under my elementary classroom desk. The bourgeoisie has corrupted everything they touch with the climate of greed they promote and now want to act as if they are crusading protectors of the youth of the country



Sports Illustrated

Barry Bonds

when we know that some of them rank right up there with the most slimy banker or derivatives trader. Just sending this along to you in the hopes it might elicit an article on the subject.

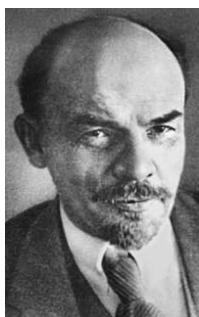
Yours in struggle
For Pete Rose and Barry Bonds
in the Hall of Fame
A Revolutionary Socialist
and Baseball Fan



TROTSKY

Trotskyists and the Second World War

Bourgeois scribblers and reformist swindlers falsely assert that the Second World War, which began in September 1939, was a battle for “democracy against fascism.” In fact, World War II was driven by the same underlying economic impulse as the First World War: the struggle among the imperialist powers to seize new arenas of exploitation around the planet and to defend their existing ones. Against the tide of reactionary patriotism, Trotskyists carried out their inter-



LENIN

nationalist duty to rally the proletariat in its own class interests: standing for the unconditional military defense of the Soviet Union, a workers state despite its Stalinist degeneration, and opposing all the imperialist combatants in that carnage—a position for which U.S. Trotskyists were imprisoned in 1941. We print below excerpts from a resolution adopted by the Eleventh Convention of the American Trotskyist movement in November 1944 that was originally printed in Fourth International, published by the then-revolutionary Socialist Workers Party.

When the United States entered the second World War, Roosevelt, chief spokesman of American capitalism proclaimed that this war was a crusade for democracy, for the “Four Freedoms,” for the destruction of fascism and totalitarianism. The labor bureaucrats, recruiting sergeants for the war machine, volunteered their services to sell the war as a conflict between “free labor” and “slave labor.”

After three years of America’s participation in the war, the demagogic slogans under which the people were dragooned into the slaughter have been stripped bare. Democracy and freedom are among the first casualties of the war. The slogans of “national unity” and “equality of sacrifice” are a snare. The pledges to take the profits out of war to prevent a new crop of wartime millionaires, are proved a monstrous hoax.

The capitalist government logically began its reactionary campaign by striking its first blows at the class-conscious vanguard of the American working class. On the very day war was declared, December 8, 1941, sentence was passed on the leaders of the Socialist Workers Party. They were convicted under the anti-labor Smith “Gag” Act for their uncompromising and outspoken opposition to the war program and because of their firm adherence to the principles of revolutionary Socialism. The conviction and imprisonment of the 18 was accompanied by a whole series of measures designed to throttle the unions and paralyze labor’s resistance to the onslaught of Big Business.

The right to strike, basic to the freedom of the labor movement, has been virtually outlawed. Workers have been frozen to their jobs at frozen wages while the cost of living continues to rise. A “modified” version of forced labor has been imposed by executive decree. An increasing weight of taxes is being saddled on those least able to pay while corporation profits soar to the highest levels in history.

The war immediately strengthened the most reactionary groups and institutions. The surge of reaction, especially the persecution of minorities and the spread of race-hatred, is a wartime continuation of tendencies inherent in capitalist decay. Brutal discrimination and humiliating segregation of the Negro people in the armed forces as well as in civilian life reduce the slogans of “democracy and freedom” to a hideous mockery for 13-million American citizens. The wave of anti-Semitism unleashed by capitalist reaction has already risen to alarming proportions. Jim Crowism and anti-Semitism march hand in hand with the assault against the organizations of the working class. This is the reality behind the demagogic facade of the “Four Freedoms.”

Prior to America’s entry into the war, this reactionary trend was analyzed and forecast in the Manifesto of the Fourth International on *The Imperialist War and the Proletarian Revolution* which stated:

“Seeking to gain the advantages of a totalitarian regime, the imperialist democracies launch their own defense with a redoubled drive against the working class and the persecution of revolutionary organizations. The war danger and now the war itself is utilized by them first and foremost to crush internal enemies. The bourgeoisie invariably and unswervingly follows the rule: ‘The main enemy is in one’s own country.’”

—“The U.S. and the Second World War,” *Fourth International* (January 1945)

White House Sacks Mumia Supporter

White House “green jobs” advisor Van Jones was unceremoniously dumped by the Obama administration on Labor Day weekend, nominally over his signing a 9/11 conspiracy-theory petition in 2004 calling for an investigation of the Bush administration. Jones’s resignation had been preceded by a weeks-long campaign by Fox News attack dog Glenn Beck that escalated after ColorOfChange.org, a group Jones helped launch in 2005, organized an advertising boycott campaign of Beck’s show to protest his calling Obama a “racist.” The ravings of Beck and the right-wing blogosphere claimed (falsely) that Jones is some kind of closet black radical or even a “Marxist.”

In 1994 Van Jones, one year out of Yale Law School, helped form the now-defunct San Francisco Bay Area group STORM (Standing Together to Organize a Revolutionary Movement). Despite its radical pretensions, STORM’s liberal activism was neither “Marxist” nor “communist.” In the following decade, Jones moved on to become a “green jobs” anti-poverty advocate who embraced the capitalist market. He wrote a 2008 best-selling book, *The Green Collar Economy*, and subsequently took a post with the Obama government. The right-wing drumbeat over his long-ago left posturing and the more recent 9/11 petition was an embarrassment to the Democratic White House. But Van Jones became an

intractable liability when, as the *Washington Post* (6 September) noted, “his advocacy on behalf of death-row inmate Mumia Abu-Jamal...threatened to develop into a fresh point of controversy.”

Mumia is an innocent man who has been imprisoned on death row for nearly three decades. A former Black Panther Party spokesman and supporter of the Philadelphia MOVE organization, he was framed up and convicted of the 1981 killing of Police Officer Daniel Faulkner. Since then, one court after another has refused to even consider the massive amount of evidence proving Mumia’s innocence, including the confession of Arnold Beverly that he, not Mumia, shot Faulkner (see Partisan Defense Committee Fact Sheet *Big Lies in the Service of Legal Lynching*).

As Marxists, we don’t care whether or not Obama has Van Jones in his administration. And it’s hardly surprising that Obama would dump anyone even remotely associated with Mumia, a man the American ruling class wants to see entombed for life or dead. Yet reformist groups like Workers World Party (WWP), which hailed Obama’s election as “a triumph for the Black masses and all the oppressed” (*Workers World*, 20 November 2008), appeal to the White House for “justice” for Mumia. A September 9 e-mail by a leading member of the

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WORKERS VANGUARD



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25 September 2009

Canada: Reformists and the Quebec National Question

The following article originally appeared in the Young Spartacus pages of Spartacist Canada No. 162 (Fall 2009), newspaper of the Trotskyist League/Ligue Trotskyste, Canadian section of the International Communist League.

Last December's Quebec elections gave a first parliamentary seat to Québec Solidaire (QS), a petty-bourgeois nationalist formation posturing as a "left" alternative to the bourgeois-nationalist Parti Québécois [PQ]. QS leader Amir Khadir's victory in Mon-

SPARTACIST CANADA

tréal's Mercier riding [electoral district] was feted by most of the reformist left, which in Quebec is largely buried within QS. Not even laying claim to working-class credentials (much less socialist ones), QS employs rhetoric about "social justice" to attract PQ supporters dissatisfied with the big-business policies of that party, keeping them firmly in the grip of bourgeois nationalism.

We Trotskyists call for Quebec independence in order to remove the roadblock of national antagonisms that divides the workers of English Canada and Quebec, poisoning prospects for united class struggle against capitalism. We agree with Bolshevik leader V.I. Lenin that "a proletariat that tolerates the slightest coercion of other nations by its 'own' nation cannot be a socialist proletariat" (*Socialism and War*, July-August 1915). First and foremost, we fight against the Maple Leaf chauvinism that dominates in the English Canadian working class. At the same time, calling for independence helps combat nationalism in Quebec by giving Marxists a hearing to win Québécois workers away from their nationalist misleaders.

In contrast, the reformist left groups adapt everywhere to their "own" bourgeois exploiters. In Quebec, the pseudo-socialists who support QS—Gauche Socialiste, Parti Communiste du Québec, etc.—betray the interests of the working class by proping up this would-be "left" instrument of the Quebec capitalists. These groups endorse Québécois nationalism outright as some kind of "progressive" force. For example, they support Quebec's restrictive language laws, which among other things force children of immigrants to attend the French-language school sys-

Trotskyists Say: Independence for Quebec!

tem in order to "preserve the culture."

In English Canada, the same reformist groups back the social-democratic NDP [New Democratic Party], a party that due to its fealty to the Canadian capitalist rulers has always been hostile to Quebec's national rights. The NDP joined the forces of "Canadian unity" in the 1980 and 1995 Quebec sovereignty referendums and endorsed Ottawa's anti-democratic Clarity Act, which legally entrenches the denial of Quebec's right to self-determination. Back in 1972, then-NDP leader David

Levy said, "We are not going to give up the right to self-determination." Spouting rhetoric about the need to "unite and fight," they intone condescendingly that "an independent capitalist republic" of Quebec "would only isolate the workers of Quebec further from the workers on the rest of the continent, and leave them more vulnerable" (marxist.ca, 1 November 2005). Such specious arguments in defence of "Canadian unity" could easily emanate from the English Canadian union tops (the Canadian Labour Congress also has a paper line for Quebec's right to self-determination).



Chauvinist 1995 "Canadian unity" rally in Montreal. IMT's Fightback, Bolshevik Tendency ape Canadian rulers by opposing independence as "divisive."

Lewis applauded the jailing of union leaders during the semi-insurrectionary Quebec general strike, which saw workers take over and run whole towns.

Many left groups in English Canada at least try to mask their reformism by opposing the NDP's "national unity" chauvinism over Quebec. But the "Fightback" group, affiliated with Alan Woods' International Marxist Tendency (IMT), is an exception. While claiming to defend Quebec's right to self-determination, they oppose Quebec independence as "divi-

sive." Whatever the conjunctural sentiments, the Québécois have long asserted their national distinctness; they have compacted a distinct political economy with a francophone bourgeoisie that oppresses its "own" working class, one that also integrates new immigrants. The 1995 Quebec sovereignty referendum only lost (by less than one percent) due to military and economic intimidation and outright fraud by the "federalist camp" run by the government in Ottawa. "United Canada" has long been a poisonous, artificial construct

that exacerbates the divisions between English- and French-speaking workers, divisions that are further fuelled by the labour misleaders in both nations who rally the workers behind their "own" capitalists. Quebec independence would not, of course, put an end to capitalist exploitation. But it would remove a major obstacle to making the working class conscious of the need for struggle against their own exploiters.

Fightback's purpose has nothing to do with furthering the class struggle, and everything to do with channelling workers' struggles onto reformist shoals. In English Canada, their main activity is to call for the pro-capitalist NDP to take office "on a socialist program." In Britain, the IMT's parent group has long been buried in the ruling New Labour Party. In all cases, they look to the capitalist state as the instrument to bring about socialism. This flies in the face of the Marxist understanding of the bourgeois state as an organized instrument for the suppression of the working class. As Lenin explained, the workers cannot lay hold of the existing state apparatus and wield it for their own purposes, but must smash it and replace it with their own working-class state, the dictatorship of the proletariat. This perspective was vindicated when the Bolsheviks led the Russian workers to power through socialist revolution in October 1917, and it is what we fight for today.

A Quebec NDP?

Fightback was among the many groups who greeted Amir Khadir's parliamentary victory with wild enthusiasm. At a QS congress in June, the spokesman for their Quebec affiliate around the newspaper *La Riposte* gushed that "the IMT considers the election of the first QS MNA [Member of the National Assembly of Quebec] as the biggest political event in Quebec since the Common Front general strike of 1972"! After this shameless (and historically demented) piece of flattery, *La Riposte* received formal status as a "collective" within QS.

In joining QS, Fightback (like Gauche Socialiste et al.) crossed the class line into an organization that stands outside the workers movement. This is hardly news nowadays when most of the left internationally, having hailed the counter-revolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, has accommodated itself to the "death of communism" rhetoric of the imperialist ruling classes. The IMT is long practiced in overt class collaborationism: their affiliate in Pakistan is buried inside an outright bourgeois party, the Pakistan Peoples Party, while in Venezuela they enthuse over the bourgeois populist Hugo Chávez, a former military commander whose capitalist government they paint in "revolutionary" colours.

In an April 2007 web posting, Fightback wrote: "Solidaire cannot just be a party of the petit-bourgeois academic Montréal left with less than 6,000 members—it must become a mass party of the Québec working class, based on the unions, that fights on the streets, on the picket lines, and in elections." In other words, they want QS to become an NDP à la québécoise. This is made explicit in another Fightback statement, which calls

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Spartacus Youth Club Events

BAY AREA

Thursday, October 22, 6:30 p.m.

60th Anniversary of the 1949 Chinese Revolution and the Contradictions of China Today

Defend the Chinese Deformed Workers State Against Imperialism! For Workers Political Revolution to Oust the Beijing Bureaucrats!

San Francisco State University
Cesar Chavez Student Center
Rosa Parks E
Information and readings: (510) 839-0851
sycbayarea@sbcglobal.net

NEW YORK CITY

Thursday, September 24, 7:30 p.m.

Meet the Marxists

Hunter College, West Building, Rm. 411
For more information: (212) 267-1025
nysl@tiac.net

TORONTO

Wednesday, September 30, 6 p.m.

Capitalist Economic Crisis: Karl Marx Was Right

University of Toronto
Sidney Smith Hall, Room 2119
100 St. George Street
Information and readings: (416) 593-4138
spartacan@on.aibn.com

LOS ANGELES

Wednesday, October 7, 6 p.m.

Meet the Marxists

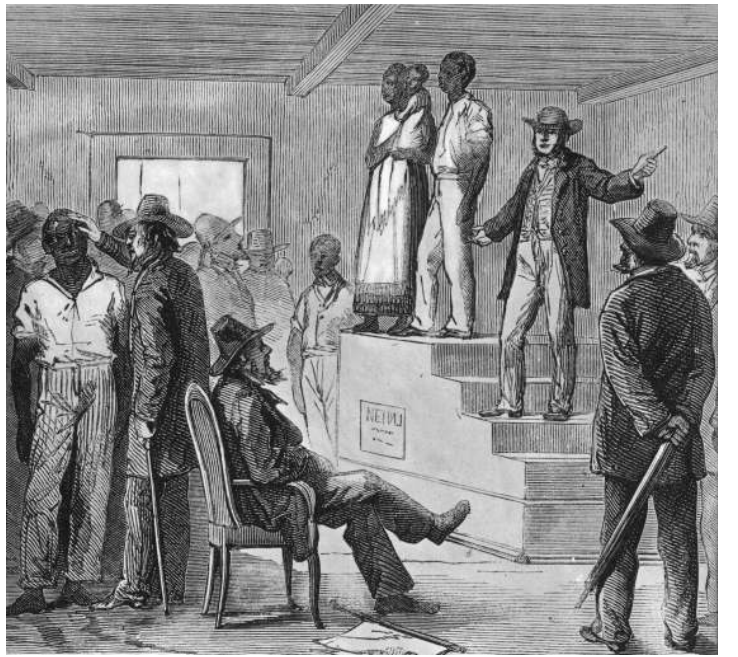
UCLA, Haines Hall A78
For more information: (213) 380-8239
slsycla@sbcglobal.net

VANCOUVER

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

Financial Crisis: Bankruptcy of Capitalism

University of British Columbia
SUB Room 42V
Information and readings: (604) 687-0353
trotskyist_vancouver@shawcable.com



Left: Battle of Lexington on 19 April 1775 marked beginning of American Revolution. Right: Slave auction in Richmond, Virginia, 1856.

SLAVERY AND THE ORIGINS OF AMERICAN CAPITALISM

We print below, in slightly edited form, Part Two of a presentation by Jacob Zorn to a Spartacist League educational in New York on 30 March 2008. Part One of this talk, published in WV No. 942 (11 September), focused on the centrality of black chattel slavery to the early development of capitalism.

PART TWO

I want to talk about the American Revolution, which we don't write about all that much. I think there are two essential pitfalls in dealing with the American Revolution. One was shown most fully by Earl Browder, the head of the Communist Party (CP) during its popular-front phase in the mid 1930s. In *What Is Communism?*—the same book in which he tried to show that "Communism is the Americanism of the twentieth century"—Browder argued that the American Revolution of 1776 was essentially the model of the popular front. (There's a novel by Howard Fast called *Citizen Tom Paine*, written during World War II, where he also makes this argument, that Tom Paine came up with the idea of a popular front against British colonialism.) The second pitfall is to pretend that the American Revolution isn't really important at all.

There's a WV article that was part of the readings, called "Why We Don't Celebrate July 4" [WV No. 116, 2 July 1976], which is very useful. But just because we don't celebrate the Fourth of July doesn't mean that we think the revolution was unimportant. The revolution was, so far as it went, both important and progressive—the main thing is that it didn't go all that far. The American Revolution

was a bourgeois revolution in the sense that it laid the basis for the development of American capitalism, but keep in mind that Britain in 1776 was not a feudal society—the English Civil War had happened more than 100 years earlier. Socially, the revolution was an alliance between the planter elites of the Southern colonies, which obviously were based on slavery, and the merchants of the Northern colonies because both of them wanted to break away from the constraints of British mercantilism. Thus, the revolution spurred not only the development of American capitalism, but also the development of the slave system in the South. The revolution itself cemented the alliance between capitalism and slavery, an alliance that would later—to borrow a phrase from the *Communist Manifesto*—have to be burst asunder. But one of the interesting points about the American Revolution is that this relationship was almost not burst asunder. The revolution did not solve the question of which of these two systems would dominate; and in that sense, the Civil War really was the Second American Revolution. This is another part of the answer to comrade Foster's question: Why did there need to be a Civil War? I think the American Revolution kind of set it up, in that sense.

I want to talk about the political significance of the revolution, however. Many of the ideals of the revolution, which drew upon the Parliamentary side of the English Civil War, are, in and of themselves, important. The right to bear arms, the separation of church and state, representative democracy, republicanism and colonial independence are good things. It's worth reading *Common Sense* by Thomas Paine. Some of these ideas were quite radical for the time—and I would just remind comrades that in Britain there is still both a crown and an established church. Plus, the founding fathers were by and large secular. I don't think that if George Washington had said that God had told him to fight England that people would have taken him seriously. That's another point that our article on the Fourth of July makes—that even by bourgeois standards, the leaders of the American Revolution stand several heads and shoulders above the current leaders.

The Nature of the American Revolution

The American Revolution, however, was not a social revolution, unlike either the French or the Haitian revolutions that immediately followed it. The question of the revolution was not whether the goal of the colonies was to be capitalist, or

to make money, but for whom the colonies would be making money. It is important to keep in mind that of all the British colonies in America, the West Indies—the so-called "sugar colonies"—were much more important than the mainland North American colonies. The Northern colonies, as Eric Williams describes, essentially existed to provide food and other supplies to the Caribbean colonies. They preferred importing food, even at very high prices, from North America to wasting land that could otherwise be used for sugar. And in an earlier book, *The Negro in the Caribbean* (1942), Williams described how even then, most of the fish eaten in the Caribbean was imported from elsewhere, even though obviously the Caribbean is made up of islands. And the West Indian planters were a powerful section of the British ruling class, including many representatives in Parliament. So Parliament was not going to do anything that would harm the interests of these planters.

Under British mercantilism, there were basically two ways that the North American colonies were important to Britain. Under the Navigation Act of 1651, and later the Molasses Act of 1733, they were supposed to trade only with other British colonies. For the North, these acts were largely dead letters; they traded with whomever they wanted to trade. Northern merchants regularly bought molasses from French colonies, which tended to be more productive and sold cheaper, and they sold rum and other products—made directly or indirectly from slave labor—to non-British colonies. The planters in the South were expected to sell tobacco only to the British, but they found ways to get around this. The other important role of the North American colonies was to pay taxes. And tobacco was taxed at this time, in much of the 18th century, not by its value (i.e., by the price), but by how much was actually grown, so that as the planters' profits declined, their taxes often still increased. So, in much of the 18th century, even though the sugar colonies were much more profitable, they paid much less in taxes than did Virginia. And Virginia, in fact, paid more taxes to the royal treasury than any other colony. Nonetheless, for most of this period, the British government had a policy that was called salutary—or benign—neglect, allowing the colonies to ignore much of the mercantile laws while the colonies ran themselves.

This all changed at the end of the Seven Years (or the French and Indian) War, in 1763, which, in America at least, was fought in part over control of the Caribbean and French Canada. It was

very complicated, and in some ways perhaps the first world war, drawing in every European power. But two trends merged at the end of this war. Britain ended the war with immense holdings in North America, with a large empire, and the newly crowned George III wanted to reassert a vigorous role for the British Crown. But the British were broke after the war and looked to America as a way of paying for this. As the *Encyclopedia Britannica* puts it, the British "felt that the colonies were ungrateful children, ready to profit from the security our arms had gained for them, but unwilling to pay the price."

So Parliament and George III, in a rather ham-handed way, passed a series of laws regarding the colonies (if you remember ninth grade, you probably went through them). But the bottom line is that these laws convinced both the American planters in the South and the merchants in the North that as long as they continued to remain a part of the British system, they would not be able to develop in the way that they wanted. And slavery was central to all of this, both because the main product that was being sent from Virginia—tobacco—was made with slave labor, but also because sugar and other things that were being traded in the North were an integral part of the Triangle Trade between Europe, the American colonies and Africa.

Slavery and the American Revolution

There is a great article that deals with the American Revolution in WV No. 764, called "The Haitian Revolution and the American Slavocracy." Many comrades don't remember it because it was published on September 14, 2001, but it explains how the American Revolution did not involve a social revolutionary component that was equivalent, for example, to the *sans-culottes* in France. It did not fundamentally change the class structure of the United States. But in order to mobilize the mass of the white populace—small farmers, artisans, shopkeepers—to risk their lives and livelihoods against Britain, the wealthy colonial elites had to tell them that all men, having been created equal, were entitled to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

One of the key ways they were able to do this was through the institution of slavery, and the American rulers could give political rights to whites because the central labor force in the American South was slaves, who were excluded from all this. This is one of the reasons that there was no regime of plebeian terror

WORKERS VANGUARD

Marxism and the "Spirit of '76"

Why We Don't Celebrate July 4

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in the American Revolution as there was in France; there was no Robespierre or, as in the English Civil War, Cromwell. Famously, in writing the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson, himself a slaveholder (he owned about 200 slaves), had put in some mild anti-slavery language, blaming George III for supporting the slave trade. This was taken out at the insistence of the slaveholders. That is to say, slavery couldn't be touched.

From the revolution until the Constitution was adopted, the law of the land was what is called the Articles of Confederation. They allowed each state to regulate its own affairs, including whether to have slavery or not—this is the concept which later is called “states’ rights.” Earl Browder, in the same piece I referenced earlier, wrote that the Constitution was a “*counter-revolution* engineered by Alexander Hamilton.” (Given that this was about the same time that Browder was defending the Stalinist Moscow Trials in the USSR, his idea of a political counter-revolution might be somewhat suspect.) The CP fundamentally preferred the side of Jefferson—their school here in New York City, for example, was called the Jefferson School of Social Science. Jefferson liked to talk of individual liberties, and in some ways he is one of the more eloquent spokesmen for the American Revolution. But the system that was set up was really a cover, to a large degree, for slavery. Jefferson’s traditional enemy is considered to be Alexander Hamilton, and there are a lot of bad things about Alexander Hamilton, I suppose—he was willing to sacrifice political liberty upon the altar of bourgeois development, and he feared the people having too much power. But one of the key things was that he opposed slavery. If any of the founding fathers were vindicated by the Civil War, I think it was really Alexander Hamilton, who was in favor of a strong central government to develop capitalism, was opposed to slavery, and who also proposed arming blacks in the American Revolution, something that, again, the slaveholders opposed. Part of this is probably his own background, because he came from the British Caribbean and was intimately familiar with slavery.

Although the Constitution did represent a move away from the more egalitarian goals, or at least the rhetoric, of the revolution, it was carried out largely by

the same men who made the revolution—as our piece in 1976 put it, they died of old age. It was not really a political counterrevolution in the same way that you can talk about Thermidor in the French Revolution, because there was not really a Robespierre in the American Revolution. The closest you would have, I guess, would be Daniel Shays, who in late 1786 in western Massachusetts rebelled against high taxes. It was fundamentally a different type of revolution.

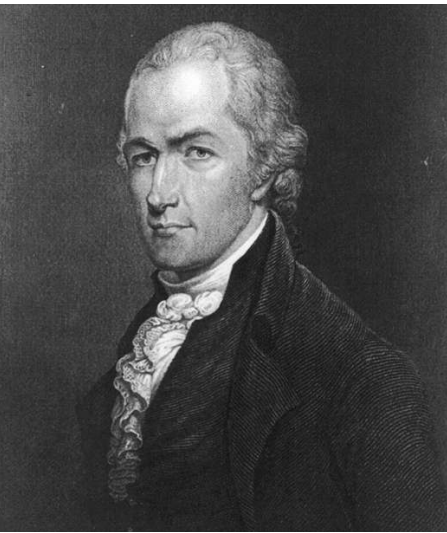
The Constitution of 1787 was pushed by Alexander Hamilton in order to create a centralized government that would have the power to help create a unified, capitalist country. It was not very democratic, even if we exclude the question of slavery. In this context, I recommend section three in the July 2003 *amici curiae* (friends of the court) brief by the Partisan Defense Committee on Jose Padilla, which is called, “It Took a Civil War to Establish the Rights and Privileges of United States Citizenship.” It makes the point that federalism—the so-called separation of powers, including between the states and the national government—really allowed slavery to exist until the Civil War. There-

fore, the Constitution of 1787 codified the coexistence of two battling social systems, with the South given extra power.

I’m sure comrades have listened to, or at least read, Barack Obama’s recent “A More Perfect Union” speech, where he argues that:

“The answer to the slavery question was already embedded within our Constitution—a Constitution that had at its very core the ideal of equal citizenship under the law; a Constitution that promised its people liberty, and justice, and a union that could be and should be perfected over time.”

Well, no, the Constitution actually made resolving this question short of a Civil War largely impossible. Also—it’s interesting—when he lists all the bad things about the Constitution, he leaves out the most important part, which is the three-fifths compromise, which not only said that blacks are 60 percent human beings, but essentially gave the slave South control of the federal government. As Frederick Douglass put it in an article titled “The Constitution and Slavery” (1849): “Under it, the slave system has enjoyed a large and domineering representation in Congress, which has given laws to the



Library of Congress

Alexander Hamilton

whole Union in regard to slavery, ever since the formation of the government.” Out of the three-fifths clause we also have the amazing contraption of the electoral college, which basically was designed to, and did, give the South the presidency, by giving more power to states that owned slaves. Some nine out of the first 15 presidents were Southerners, most from Virginia. So slavery was not, as Obama put it—and it’s not just Obama, it’s a common liberal myth—a “stain” on early American politics and society, but an essential thread woven throughout the development of American capitalism. It’s a fundamental aspect, not extraneous or peripheral.

The Bill of Rights was adopted in 1791 in order to get the states to support the adoption of the Constitution, and this is what the Padilla brief calls the “Second Constitution.” And these recognized important rights, but they still did not define any sense of national citizenship, something that would not come until the Civil War. In fact, one of the reasons that the framers didn’t put these rights in the original Constitution is that they didn’t want to start off saying that “all men are equal” again. That is to say, they didn’t want to have anything that could be seen as challenging slavery. Of course, a point that is made in the Padilla brief and that we have often made since the “war on terror” began is that rights are not just granted by a piece of paper but also reflect what type of social struggle is going on in society.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

Mumia Supporter...

(continued from page 2)

moribund Bay Area group, Labor Action Committee to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal, dropped even a pretense to “labor action.” Bemoaning the right-wing backlash, the e-mail explained that “a few current Mumia supporters” had thought that Van Jones could be prodded to “set Obama straight on Mumia’s case” and “whisper something a bit more positive in Obama’s ear.” This is the same Obama who in 2008, while professing ignorance over Mumia’s case, nonetheless assured right-wing radio broadcaster Michael Smer-

conish, “In my mind, if somebody killed a police officer, they deserve the death penalty or life in prison.”

For years, the liberals and reformists have peddled illusions in the capitalist courts, calling for a “new,” “fair” trial for Mumia from the very courts that knowingly convicted this innocent man. Today, with judicial appeals all but exhausted, they seek to place Mumia’s fate in the hands of Obama and his Attorney General Eric Holder. The International Concerned Family and Friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal (ICFFMAJ), the International Action Center, initiated by WWP, and the Free Mumia Abu-Jamal Coalition (NYC) are all now petitioning Holder “to immediately commence a civil rights investigation to examine the many examples of

egregious and racist prosecutorial and judicial misconduct.” Obama’s answer was to ax Van Jones.

While advocating that every legal avenue be pursued on Mumia’s behalf, we have warned against illusions in capitalist “justice.” Our fight to free Mumia and abolish the racist death penalty is rooted in the revolutionary perspective of winning the working class to the understanding that the bourgeois state is not some “neutral” agency that serves society as a whole but rather exists to defend the rule and profits of the capitalist class against the exploited and oppressed.

This perspective stands in sharp counterposition to the illusions peddled by the liberals and reformists. Outside the NAACP convention in July, where Obama

and Holder were keynote speakers, the Free Mumia Abu-Jamal Coalition (NYC) held a banner pleading: “Obama & Holder We Need You Now! Free Mumia.” As we wrote in “Mumia Is an Innocent Man! Free Him Now!” (WV 941, 28 August):

“Who are they appealing to? Obama is the Commander-in-Chief of U.S. imperialism—the most bloody and rapacious imperialist power on the face of the planet—and the overseer of the slaughter of countless peoples in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan. His attorney general is the warden-in-chief of the prison dungeons holding political prisoners such as Mumia and over two million people, disproportionately blacks and Latinos. It would be hard to find a more savage indictment of the reformists’ fundamental belief in the ‘democracy’ of capitalist class rule.” ■

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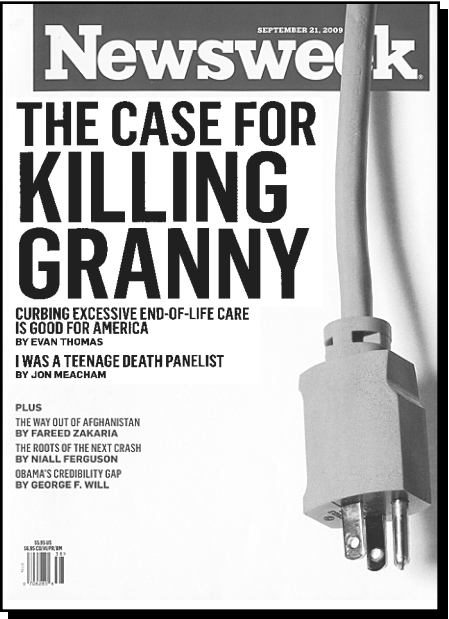
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Socialized Medicine...

(continued from page 1)

companies. Only with the destruction of this entire capitalist system of exploitation, which measures human life in dollars, can the wealth generated by those who labor be committed to providing the highest level of medical care for all and eradicating the poverty and hunger that condemn countless millions to a life of misery, disease and early death.

Despite its Stalinist bureaucratic degeneration, the Soviet workers state, with its planned economy, was able to provide all with a job, housing, health care and education. An examination of the tragedy that has befallen the peoples of the former Soviet Union since capitalist counterrevolution in 1991-92 speaks volumes about the “magic of the marketplace.” In capitalist Russia today, millions are starving, more than 40 percent of the population lives in poverty, infant mor-



September 21 Newsweek cover story expresses ghoulish reality of capitalist “health” industry: Don’t waste money on old people.

tality has skyrocketed and life expectancy has plummeted. It is equally telling that Cuba, once a backward neocolony of the U.S., has since the overthrow of capitalist/imperialist rule provided health care to all at a level comparable to that available in the U.S., despite the poverty of the island, enforced by the U.S. embargo and further exacerbated by the 1991-92 counterrevolution in the USSR.

There is plenty of justified fear and apprehension, especially among unionized workers and the elderly, over the current health care “reform” schemes. But the howls of the racist yahoos, bible-thumpers, militiamen and other reactionaries mobilized by the Republican right wing and their media shock jocks that Obama’s plan is a prescription for a veritable “communist” takeover of America are genuine lunacy. At the same time, such lunacy is a very real reflection of the anti-black racism, anti-immigrant nativism and sexual bigotry that have long been wielded by the American bourgeoisie to preserve its class rule.

Obama is branded by the color of his skin, but he is also the top cop of American capitalism, responsible for enforcing a system built on the forcible subjugation of the majority of the black population at the bottom of society. Jimmy Carter—who in the 1970s openly proclaimed the virtues of “ethnic purity”—decided as racist South Carolina Congressman Joe Wilson’s “you lie” outburst during Obama’s speech to Congress. Carter’s remarks are an expression of the appreciation by the more rational wing of the U.S. bourgeoisie of the necessity to uphold the credentials of America’s first black president to effectively oversee their plantation, and extract further sacrifices from the working class, blacks, immigrants and the poor.

That the U.S. is the only major indus-

trialized country on the face of the planet without a national health care program is, in large part, testament to how the race/caste oppression of black people has been used by America’s rulers to divide and weaken the working class, furthering the exploitation of labor and the destitution of all the oppressed. In this country, cries against “big government” have long been synonymous with axing social programs such as health care and welfare by painting these as a drain on the tax dollars of “hard-working folks” to benefit the ghetto poor. Black people are always disproportionately hit by unemployment, poverty and lack of health care.

But what was first visited on the most vulnerable—single welfare mothers, desperate immigrants, people with AIDS—is now increasingly the reality for the working class as a whole. Thus, the fight for decent health care must link the fight for black equality with the struggle to end all injustice and exploitation. For full citizenship rights for all immigrants! For free abortion on demand and democratic rights for gays!

The lurid stories of government “death panels” that would order a shot of morphine to end granny’s life are particularly demented in a country where pain-relieving opiates are parceled out in ever diminishing doses for the sick and dying. The same religious fanatics who terrorize abortion clinics and assassinate abortion doctors in the name of “life” are a moving force to ensure that you die in agony in the name of God, with campaigns against the right of those whose bodies are ravaged by incurable diseases to end their misery through assisted suicide. A sector of the Catholic hierarchy, which has been in the forefront in fighting against the right of the dying not to suffer, has been condemning the evils of health care reform as an assault on the “unborn” and on that most sacred right of all for the capitalist rulers of this society, private property.

Nevertheless it needs be recognized that the powers that be have little interest in continuing to fund “excessive” medical care for those reaching the end of their lives. One can be assured that the Brooke Astors of the world will be immune to such cost savings. At the same time, the ruling class plans to raise the retirement age to assure that Social Security is not too burdened by excessive longevity. Simply put, for the ruling class, Americans are living too long.

Obama has made clear that his plan would not provide for “illegal” immigrants and their families and that “no fed-



Nashville, Tennessee: Racist yahoos, bible-thumpers and other reactionaries at April 15 “Tax Day Tea Party.”

eral dollars will be used to fund abortions.” This would be in line with the reactionary Hyde Amendment, signed into law by Carter in 1977, eliminating abortion coverage from Medicaid. Meanwhile, the situation for immigrants, who labor at the most dangerous and debilitating jobs, continues to worsen. In fact, since Obama took office, Homeland Security raids and deportations of immigrants have exceeded those carried out two years ago in a similar period under Bush.

The Labor Lieutenants of the Capitalist Class

Such health care benefits as the multi-racial working class has won have been the product of militant class struggle against the exploiters. The dearth of strikes over the past decades helped pave the way for the bosses to butcher health care, pensions and other union gains with impunity. They have overwhelmingly gotten away with it thanks to the acquiescence of the union misleaders, who share the bosses’ concern of maintaining the profitability of American capitalism.

Obama’s election was celebrated as the arrival of the moment when things would be finally turned around in favor of the unions that had contributed \$450 million to elect a Democrat to the White House. In fact, in his short time in office Obama has proved far more effective in gutting the unions than his Republican predecessor. Obama’s appeals for “sacrifice” to salvage American capitalism from the most severe economic crisis since the Great Depression were readily saluted by United Auto Workers (UAW) leader, Ron

Gettelfinger. In the assault on the UAW orchestrated by the White House to foot the bill for bailing out the auto bosses, Gettelfinger accepted worthless GM and Chrysler stock to fund over half the union’s retiree health care trust. That is, he robbed medical care from aging workers whose years of backbreaking labor on the production lines were a serious and chronic detriment to their health, while those still working continue to see their health benefits massacred.

But perhaps the most flagrant expression of the trade-union bureaucracy’s commitment to maintaining the profitability of American capitalism at the expense of the very lives of union members is the role played by Service Employees International Union (SEIU) leader Dennis Rivera. Describing him as Obama’s “point man” on health reform, a *New York Times* (27 August) article reported that “Washington insiders are impressed and surprised that it was a union leader—Mr. Rivera—who forged a coalition including giant drug makers, the health insurers, the American Hospital Association and the American Medical Association that helped secure their pledges to cut hundreds of billions of dollars in costs.” In bed with the Obama administration and the health industry, the trade-union bureaucrats betray the genuine concerns of their members and leave the field of protest open to the crazed, racist right wing.

Leading accomplices in a “health care reform” package that will mean the massive leveling down of medical care for union members and their families, the SEIU tops also readily acknowledge that these deadly cuts will cost the jobs of hospital workers. For his part, newly installed AFL-CIO chief Richard Trumka is “drawing a line in the sand” against Democrats who oppose the now all but dead “public option,” according to the *Huffington Post* (18 August). Even in the unlikely event that a public option is included, it would be little more than a prescription for a health care ghetto for the most destitute, leaving the HMO and drug company moneybags with the whip hand.

For the Socialist Reconstruction of America!

The situation cries out for a revival of labor struggle to defend and extend the health, pension and other benefits won through the class battles of the past. But that means getting rid of the labor traitors, who long ago junked the very class-struggle means through which the unions were forged. The road forward lies in building a new leadership of the unions, which will lead the vitally necessary battles against America’s bourgeois masters. Such a leadership would lead the fight for free health care for all and for expropriating the health insurance and drug companies without compensation.

An article in the *Left Business Observer* (25 August) cited a founder of Physicians for a National Health Program who noted that CEOs who might privately support a single-payer health program are “reluctant to embrace it publicly for fear of encouraging would-be expropriators.” The fear as he put it is: “If you



Left: Esmin Green, a black 49-year-old woman, was ignored for hours as she lay dying on waiting room floor of Kings County Hospital Center in Brooklyn, June 2008. Below: Health care workers and patients protest in Los Angeles against proposed cuts to California health system, May 22.



can take away someone else's business—the insurance companies' business—you can take away mine." And that is precisely what is needed—the expropriation of capitalist expropriators who have looted the wealth of this country which was created by labor. For that, we need a revolutionary workers party, one which doesn't respect the property "values" of the bourgeoisie but instead leads a revolutionary assault on and overturns through socialist revolution this decaying system. Only through the establishment of a workers government and a planned econ-

omy can the tremendous wealth, resources and medical technology of this society be put to providing for the many, not for the profits of the few.

We reprint below an article originally published in *Women and Revolution* (No. 39, Summer 1991), journal of the Women's Commission of the Spartacist League/U.S. Titled "Wealth Care USA," the article traces the history of medicine for profit in the U.S. and its roots in the class exploitation, racist reaction and sexual bigotry that are the foundation stones of American capitalism.

Women and Revolution



The Debate Over "Socialized Medicine" Wealth Care USA

In 1948 that conservative bastion of wealth and prestige, the American Medical Association (AMA), smelled Armageddon in the air when Democrat Harry S. Truman won the presidential election. To the horror of organized medicine, prominent in Truman's platform was a proposal for national health insurance. Outraged by this dire threat to doctors' income and position, the AMA mounted what was at the time the most expensive lobbying effort in American history, running ads, publishing articles in the bourgeois press and sponsoring public meetings to stop this "creeping socialism." One pamphlet demanded in a typical flight of reactionary hyperbole, "Would socialized medicine lead to socialization of other phases of American life?... Lenin thought so. He declared, 'Socialized medicine is the keystone to the arch of the Socialist State.'" (According to Paul Starr, in *The Social Transformation of American Medicine*, the Library of Congress could not locate this quotation in Lenin's writings.)

Harry S. Truman, the imperialist Commander-in-Chief who dropped the atom bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the American Cold Warrior who presided over the Korean War, was undoubtedly mighty indignant at being tagged a Communist for a proposal to ensure that "our people would continue to get medical and hospital services just as they do now"—that is, subject to all the class, race and sex biases of this bigoted society. But in 1948 the AMA's intransigent opposition to any organized health plan perceived as a threat to "fee for service" private practice was already legendary. Since 1920 the AMA had denounced all such plans as the insidious doom of quality health care and had in 1938 attempted to destroy the Washington-based Group Health Association, a nonprofit cooperative providing health care to employees of the Federal Home Loan Bank. For this last the federal government had even moved to prosecute the AMA under the Sherman Anti-Trust Act, but the AMA remained intransigent.

Truman's electoral promises soon foundered in the sweeping tide of anti-Communist McCarthyite witchhunting. Health insurance was "socialism" straight out of the Soviet constitution, according to Republican Robert Taft, who walked out of Senate hearings on Truman's bill. In 1948 even simple public health measures like fluoridated water were "Communist plots" to the McCarthyites.

Yahoo fears to the contrary, such plans had existed for decades in Europe *without* threatening the capitalist status quo. Rather, European politicians knew that welfare plans could help defuse class struggle, win votes and cement an alliance with the pro-capitalist "leaders" of the workers movement. Truman, like Roosevelt before him, was a member of that liberal wing of the bourgeoisie that seeks to soften a bit of the jagged edges of exploitation in order to better reap profits and make war.

Access to health care should be a simple democratic right, a necessity just like education, a place to live, a job. Like every other basic right worth having, decent health care must be *fought for* in hard class struggle. It was no accident of history that Truman made his proposal amid a bitter series of strikes by the United Mine Workers (UMW) for union-controlled health benefits, part of a massive postwar strike wave that swept millions of workers out of the factories and onto the picket lines. Working in the country's most dangerous trade, miners had been incapacitated by hideous rates of illness, crippled and killed by black lung disease. Notoriously corrupt company doctors had systematically whitewashed the severity of illness and injury. In 1946 Truman seized the mines when miners struck for a health and pension fund; in 1947 Congress passed the union-busting, slave-labor Taft-Hartley law, which specifically forbade union-controlled, company-funded welfare plans. But the miners struck again and again, defying government threats, until they won an unprecedented "cradle to grave" union-controlled health plan. While McCarthyite reaction killed Truman's insurance proposal, the miners' historic victory opened the way for other unionized workers to win health benefits. But the miners paid a big price for their victory: UMW head John L. Lewis made a deal with the coal bosses not to protest

the loss of thousands of mining jobs to mechanization.

Medicine for Profit in Capitalist America

Today the U.S. crisis in health care is so bad that liberal social critics point out with alarm that the United States and apartheid South Africa are the only two industrialized countries in the world without a national health system of some kind. In America the grotesque inequities in medical care are a symbol of the injustice, inequality and indignity of this society. If you have money, you can get the best health care in the world, right on the cutting edge of the most advanced medical technology; that's why Saudi princes come to New York for medical attention. But if the bucks aren't there, and you don't have really good private insurance, you can suffer lifelong debilitation from treatable diseases like asthma or you can die when treatment could have saved your life.

Health "care" in America means black children in Harlem die of measles and malnutrition, and workers suffer one of the highest rates of on-the-job accidents and industrial disease in the world. Hos-

sal of Fortune), comatose for years and not expected to recover, gets a weekly coiffure and manicure in her hospital bed while space-age machines keep her breathing.

Our rulers know they're sitting on a bomb waiting to go off: for years now health care has been a major issue in strike after strike. Workers and their families are suffering and dying because they're denied care that touches on the most fundamental and the most intimate parts of life—sickness, birth and death. The health care disaster is having a widening impact on *all* sections of American society, except for the very rich. Even well-paid people, once relatively secure in a network of employer-provided health insurance, private physicians and well-run private hospitals, are threatened as companies cut benefits, doctors and hospitals raise rates, unemployment results in loss of health insurance.

The current health crisis has its more immediate historic roots in the economic crisis of U.S. capitalism signaled by the 1971 devaluation of the dollar, followed shortly by the U.S.'s humiliating defeat at the hands of the Vietnamese Revolution. Since then the American ruling class has

Robotic system for micro eye surgery. America has among the best medical technology in the world—if you can pay for it.



pitals specializing in the wallet biopsy just throw poor patients out; the paltry Medicaid fee doesn't pay enough. "Until DeTar [Hospital] pays my malpractice insurance, I will pick and choose those patients that I want to treat," declared Michael Burditt, MD, when he rejected a seriously ill, pregnant Hispanic woman who had come to the emergency room; she ended up giving birth in an ambulance without a doctor's attention! But the millionairess Sunny von Bülow (whose story is told in the blood-chilling *Rever-*

sought to counter its decline by squeezing the population harder to restore profitability; domestically it's meant rampant union-busting and budget-cutting. Under Democrat Jimmy Carter the miners' historic "cradle to grave" health system was destroyed when the coal bosses and the government undermined union control in the bitter months-long Great Coal Strike of 1978. And Ronald Reagan opened a decade of union-busting attacks when he fired the PATCO air controllers for daring to strike against the federal government. That defeat signaled a broad capitalist assault on hard-won union benefit programs.

The bankrupt American empire thinks it can solve its economic crisis through military adventures like the bloody imperialist war in the Persian Gulf. While spending billions to bomb Iraq back to a pre-industrial age, our rulers decide this country can't afford health, education, housing, jobs for American workers and the poor. With the decline in American industry, they don't need a healthy, literate working class. But even on their own terms, where dollars count more than human lives, the bourgeoisie has a real problem: the anarchic medical system is out of control and costing too much money, so much so that even conservative holdouts like the National Association of Manufacturers are beginning to call for expansion of some government programs to cover the poor. Meanwhile, the U.S. government has announced plans to ration Medicare expenses, inevitably depriving the elderly of access to expensive new procedures.

Capitalist America: Class, Race, Sex Bigotry

Why does the United States have no national health system? Why is public health so feeble and preventive medicine nearly nonexistent? The answer is deeply rooted in this country's history. In the United States public health began late and remained weak. Until the Civil War

continued on page 8



Militant coal miners in 1948 thumbed their noses at slave-labor Taft-Hartley Act (left). Washington, D.C., 1981: 10,000 protest President Reagan's cutbacks in benefits for miners with black lung disease (below).



Socialized Medicine...

(continued from page 7)

destroyed the slaveholding system, the capitalist class, impeded by the slavocracy in its attempts to institute a federal road system and to create a national bank and a protective tariff for industry, was certainly not going to forge a national board of health. Post-Civil War efforts foundered on “states’ rights,” intransigent capitalist opposition to cleaning up working conditions and slum tenements, and “social Darwinist” blame-the-victim bigotry.

Further, the power of the American capitalist class; the race, ethnic and sex divisions in the working class; the vastness of the country with the accompanying regional divisions; the absence of explicit, formal class barriers as in Europe with its aristocratic vestiges—all of these factors have served to vitiate the development of class consciousness in American workers. The same powerful class and social forces stymied the emergence of a mass workers party in this country. In Europe, the development of such a party, like Britain’s Labour Party or the German Social Democracy, went side by side with the institution of national health care.

From 1912 to 1920 a debate raged in the U.S. in reform-minded and medical circles over federal and state proposals for government-organized health insurance. While the American Medical Association was prominent in defeating these proposals, it was only one factor in a complex web incorporating hospitals, insurance companies, the giant pharmaceutical corporations and government officials. The web was spun from the deep-seated class and race divisions in this country. Capitalists seeking to lower wages and benefits, commercial insurance companies reaping cash from insecurity and fear, pharmaceutical companies hungering for profits: in the absence of a powerful, class-conscious labor movement able to fight for basic social needs, which could at least have provided a social counterweight to the moneygrubbing in the health industry, these forces soon established an iron grip over health care in the United States. They used every weapon in the bourgeois arsenal of social reaction: anti-woman bigotry, religious and ethnic hatred, class bias, race prejudice, national chauvinism.

Race-hate, woman-hating, religious bigotry—that was America in the early years of the 20th century. The post-Civil War South, where Jim Crow had crushed the freed slaves into poverty, illness and ignorance, was virtually an impoverished agricultural colony of Northern capital. In 1915 the KKK was reborn in the lynching of Leo Frank, a Jewish businessman framed up for the murder of a white woman. In the brutal Northern industrial slums, thousands of mothers and infants died at birth each year. Working conditions were appalling: in 1914, 35,000 workers died in on-the-job accidents; 700,000 suffered injuries like severed fingers and crushed limbs. In 1911, 147 young women, mostly Jewish and Italian immigrants, died horribly in the Triangle Shirtwaist fire in New York City; dozens leaped to their deaths because the bosses had them locked in.

Bosses bitterly fought any regulation of safety conditions and the paltry workmen’s compensation plans which had just become law in some states; many of these plans were declared null and void by the courts.

The American robber barons only counted the dollars flowing in as their “divide and conquer” assault on the working people raked in Wall Street profits. By pitting workers against each other, by bringing in desperate blacks as scabs to break strikes, by fomenting chauvinist hatred of the millions of non-English-speaking immigrants on the job, the bosses had succeeded in crippling the workers movement. In the 1910s, less than 6 percent of American workers were members of the American Federation of Labor (AFL). The Gompersite labor lieutenants of the capitalist class organized their job-trusting unions *against* blacks, women, immigrants, feed-

wages—these plans represented a significant reform within the confines of the capitalist system and were won as a concession to the combativeness of the European workers movement. In 1883, shortly after passing the Anti-Socialism Laws to squash the German Social Democratic Party, Bismarck instituted the first national sickness program:

“Chancellor Otto von Bismarck created the German system of social insurance as a dike to hold back the rising tide of socialism. As he told a visiting British observer, he wanted ‘to bribe the working classes, or, if you like, to win them over to regard the State as a social institution existing for their sake and interested in their welfare’.”

—Ronald L. Numbers, *Almost Persuaded: American Physicians and Compulsory Health Insurance, 1912-1920*

Insurance plans soon spread to Austria (1888), Hungary (1891), Luxembourg (1901), Norway (1909), Serbia (1910)



National Museum of American History

Medical students conduct a dissection at the Woman’s Medical College of Pennsylvania, around 1890. As the medical profession gained prestige, women, Jews, immigrants and blacks were driven out.

ing into antagonisms consciously fostered by the capitalists.

While the American Socialist Party endorsed health insurance in 1904, it was increasingly a party of middle-class, white “reformers,” alienated from more militant sections of the working class, many of whom were non-English-speaking immigrants. And the militant, class-struggle Industrial Workers of the World renounced “politics” on principle. Their mass base among migrant workers in the West, where they were crushed by the bosses and their government, lacked the potential clout of the industrialized workers in the Eastern cities.

History of the Health Insurance Debate

While working people lived and labored in brutal squalor, medicine was making miracles. When in the last decades of the 19th century Louis Pasteur and Robert Koch began to identify the pathogens responsible for many killer diseases, they began a bacteriological revolution which soon enormously increased medicine’s effectiveness. The discovery of anesthesia and asepsis opened up enormous potential both for the relief of human suffering and for profit in hospital surgery. The demand for doctors’ services and hospital beds—and the expense of medical treatment—soared.

By 1914 many European countries had passed some form of national health insurance. Far from comprehensive and certainly not free—only a fraction of the population was covered and workers had to pay some part of the cost out of their

and even backward tsarist Russia (1912). More influential in the United States was the British National Insurance Act, put forward in 1911 by Liberal Party chancellor of the exchequer David Lloyd George, later British imperialist war leader. Consciously seeking to diminish class conflict by integrating the working class into a welfare system and to win workers’ votes to the Liberal Party, Lloyd George summed up his hopes for health insurance with the comment, “You can not maintain an A-1 empire with a C-3 population” (quoted in Paul Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine*). When the British Medical Association threatened a boycott, the government succeeded in buying the doctors off with promises of physician control of local health committees and guaranteed remuneration.

Social reformers in the U.S. expected health insurance to sweep the U.S. as it had Europe. It was in tune with the spirit of Progressivism popular in liberal bourgeois circles before World War I. Seeking to “clean up” the worst abuses of capitalist exploitation (but blind to the hideous oppression of black sharecroppers in the Jim Crow South), Progressives argued for woman suffrage and for legislation to protect child and female labor. And they certainly realized that the illnesses of the poor were communicable to the rich; disease was rampant in the fetid working-class slums of the big cities, where tuberculosis, the “captain of death,” spread in dusty sweatshops and filthy tenements without sunlight or fresh air. In motivating health insurance the American Association for Labor Legislation (AALL) emphasized that sickness was the leading immediate cause of “charity cases”; thus social relief enabling a sick person to keep his job would “reduce illness itself, lengthen life, abate poverty, improve working power, raise the wage level, and diminish the causes of industrial discontent.” But despite such appeals to capitalism’s “best interests,” by 1920 health insurance was a dead issue.

Enter the Doctors

In 1847 a small group of physicians had founded the American Medical Association primarily as a means to combat “sectarians,” that is, nontradi-

tional physicians such as homeopaths, who were seen as a threat to the wealth and social position of the medical profession. (The AMA even denounced the Surgeon General of the U.S. for cooperating with a homeopathic physician to save the life of Secretary of State William Seward, when he was shot the night of Lincoln’s assassination!) As a classic petty-bourgeois professional layer primarily engaged in private practice, doctors have no strategic social power in capitalist society. Their economic motive is simple: to charge as exorbitant a fee as they can squeeze out of patients. Their social outlook is to avoid what has befallen teachers: proletarianization, the worst fear of a petty-bourgeois professional. In the key years 1890 to 1920—culminating in the victory of the bourgeois right wing—the AMA consolidated as a conservative force championing “fee for service” and opposed to any “third party” intervention in the “doctor-patient relationship.”

Organized medicine boosted its prestige by becoming rich, white, WASP, native-born and male. Through “reform” of medical education, the AMA succeeded in cutting the number of medical schools from 131 to 95 in 1915 and reducing overall admissions to eliminate a “surplus” of doctors. Only two black medical schools, Howard and Meharry, remained out of an earlier seven. Deliberate policies of discrimination kept immigrants, Jews, blacks and women out of medical schools. By 1920 blacks and foreign-born doctors were almost completely unrepresented on hospital staffs. Ethnic, race and religious discrimination against both doctors and patients was a leading factor in the establishment of religious and ethnic hospitals like Mount Sinai in New York City.

Both North and South, hospitals were strictly segregated against blacks. The AMA itself was almost lily-white. While blacks could join on a national level, most doctors were members through a local medical association. Black doctors in the South were effectively barred; in 1895 blacks had established their own organization, the National Medical Association (NMA), which, reflecting the desperate needs of black patients, had a longstanding position in support of national health insurance. In 1950 the AMA finally moved to put token pressure on Southern locals to admit black doctors. But as Edward H. Beardsley wrote in *A History of Neglect: Health Care for Blacks and Mill Workers in the Twentieth-Century South*, “there was feeling among some blacks that the AMA was only hoping to strike a deal with the NMA over national health insurance. Earlier, AMA leaders had approached their black counterparts with a vague offer of recognizing black medical societies as AMA affiliates if the NMA would join against Truman’s ‘socialized medicine’ scheme.”

Public Health in America: Stillborn

As Harvard medical historian Paul Starr documents, doctors viewed public health as a threat and defended a “vigilantly guarded border” between private medical practice and public health’s shrinking mandate. “Doctors fought against public treatment of the sick, requirements for reporting cases of tuberculosis and venereal disease, and attempts by public health authorities to establish health centers to coordinate preventive and curative medical services.” Crying “parasitism” and “abuse,” doctors were instrumental in banishing urban dispensaries, “medical soup kitchens” where the poor could be treated for free. Similarly, in April 1902 over 1,000 doctors and druggists denounced New York City’s internationally renowned Department of Health for “unfair competition” and “municipal socialism” because it sold its overstock of diphtheria antitoxin at cost. The department was forced to stop all sale of the antitoxin for this hideous disease, one of the 19th century’s biggest killers of children.

Thus, by 1912 when the Progressivist American Association for Labor Legisla-



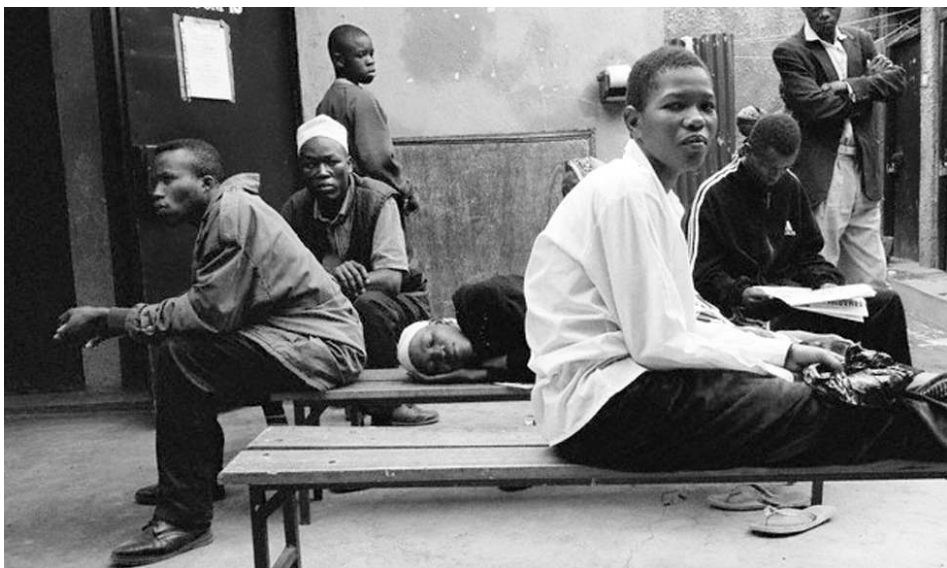
Bettmann

In the Triangle Shirtwaist fire of 1911, 147 workers, mostly young immigrant women, died in a garment industry sweatshop because the bosses had locked them in.

“During this period nothing seems to have played a greater role in molding opinion than money. In the early days of the debate, when poorly paid American physicians believed that they, like their British brethren, might benefit financially from compulsory health insurance, it seemed like an attractive idea.... [But] the incomes of physicians were increasing without insurance. The average income of taxed physicians in Wisconsin, for example, rose 41 percent between 1916 and 1919. Wartime inflation was responsible for much of this, but an unprecedented decline in the total number of physicians undoubtedly had some effect.”

The AALL program's inclusion of death benefits directly threatened the life insurance giants, who proved its most bitter opponents. The chief spokesman for the insurance industry was Frederick L. Hoffman, Prudential actuary and vice president, who churned out pages of propaganda smearing compulsory health insurance as unnecessary, fraudulent and un-American. The insurance industry also financed the opposition of the Christian Science faith healers.

Faced with such powerful enemies, compulsory insurance needed powerful friends. But while some state union federations supported it, AFL head Samuel Gompers denounced it. When in 1916 Socialist Party Congressman Meyer London introduced a bill for compulsory health insurance into the House of Representatives, Gompers was the only witness to testify against it. In a hypocritical diatribe against government paternalism, Gompers claimed that compulsory insurance would stand in the way of the workers' attempts "to strive and struggle for their own emancipation through their own



Corbis
Impoverished AIDS patients await treatment in Nairobi, Kenya. AIDS epidemic in Africa is exacerbated by ravages of imperialism.

The final blow to the Progressives' reform plan was the entry of the United States into World War I in 1917. True, when hundreds of thousands of young Americans failed their army physicals, health reformers used military necessity to bolster their arguments for health insurance. But this appeal to chauvinism was swamped in imperialist war hysteria targeting radicals, antiwar militants, women's rights activists, socialists, unionists—any challenge to the U.S. war drive. Chauvinist reaction killed dead any chances for health care reform, while health insurance opponents reveled in its German connection. (In his 1918 address, the AMA's president called on AMA members to turn in German doctors to the cops.) The powerful witch-hunting Creel Committee on Public Information commissioned a series of articles by Frederick Hoffman "exposing" German sickness insurance as a "fraud."

The California League for the Conservation of Public Health (an Orwellian name indeed) propagandized in a pamphlet entitled "What Is Compulsory Social Health Insurance?": "It is a dangerous device, invented in Germany, announced by the German Emperor from the throne the same year he started plotting and preparing to conquer the world." A front

The 1917 Russian Revolution, greeted by the working-class masses as a beacon of hope amid imperialist slaughter and exploitation, gave the enemies of health insurance yet another inflammatory theme which only intensified in the postwar upsurge of anti-communist reaction. In 1919 a prominent New York physician-lawyer, John O'Reilly, screamed that health insurance advocates were "Paid Professional Philanthropists, and busy-body Social Workers...Supporters, Defenders, Associates of the Forces of unrest known as the I.W.W. and Bolsheviks; the disciples of Lenin and Trotsky whose Gospel is the Destruction of those things worth while for which men and women have given their lives." Others attacked insurance advocates using nasty anti-Semitic slurs and claims of "sexual license" and "religious hatred." Thus organized medicine played its small but dirty part to whip up the bloody crack-down on labor struggle after the war. Capitalist reaction spawned the union-busting, the anti-communist Palmer Raids, the mass deportations of foreign-born workers and the vicious race riots of the postwar years.

While the rise of the militant CIO in the 1930s paved the way for the establishment of union benefit plans like the UMW's, American medicine for profit, born in capitalist reaction, remains locked in to anarchic, limitless greed. When AIDS hit the U.S. in the 1980s, the response of the ruling class and the medical establishment was to be predicted: criminal neglect, outright gloating over a disease that targeted homosexuals as well as increasing numbers of drug users and the poor. Medicine has become not only

Today, about 34 million Americans have no health insurance at all—and that's not counting the tens of millions who have pitifully inadequate coverage like Medicare and Medicaid. Medicaid fees are so low that many doctors simply turn patients away—for a visit to a doctor in New York Medicaid paid \$11 in 1989! For years death rates and infant mortality rates for black people have been worsening as poverty lashes them with malnutrition, wretched housing, lack of medical care. Ghettos are devastated by epidemics of diseases supposedly conquered by modern medicine: tuberculosis once again spreading; measles, easily prevented by vaccine, rampant because vaccinations for common childhood diseases, once free, now cost several hundred dollars. In contrast to every other industrialized country on the globe, in the United States sexually transmitted diseases are increasing; syphilis, once almost eradicated, now the cause of thousands of babies born with a terrible, crippling congenital condition; gonorrhea, now spreading in drug-resistant forms.

Conditions on the job have deteriorated too as the bankrupt American empire has intensified the exploitation of labor. Some 4,000 coal miners die every year from black lung disease, and 10,000 of the 160,000 miners on the job show evidence of the disease already. In February 1989 the so-called "Labor" Department of the U.S. government discovered widespread and massive cheating by mining companies in testing mine air for coal dust, the cause of the illness. After stalling for months while miners continue to get sick, the government finally announced fines

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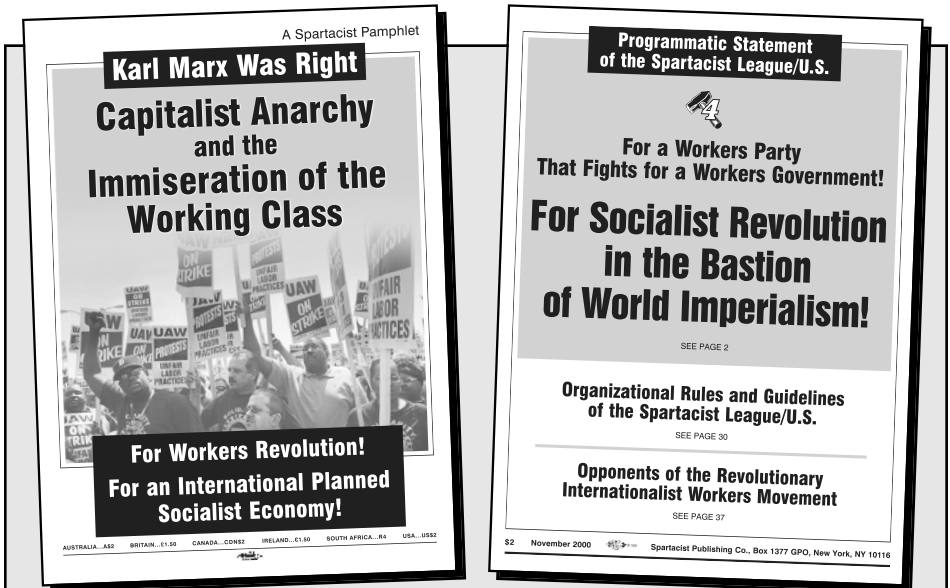
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Socialized Medicine...

(continued from page 9)

as low as \$1,000 per violation, a meaningless slap on the wrist!

The health care “system” in the U.S. shows again and again that the capitalists don’t want to let human life get in the way of their profits. Understandably outraged, ACT UP activists, through militant stunts like blockading Wall Street and protesting at Catholic masses, try to pressure government into putting more money into AIDS care and AIDS research. But only intransigent class struggle has won even the little piece of the “miracle of modern medicine” that workers and the poor now have. And as the miners’ long years of struggle show, even those gains can be reversed by renewed capitalist attack.

Medicine for profit is too locked in for the American capitalists to implement a universal government-provided health system like the one in Canada or Britain. But even if it were possible, it’s no

answer either. In Britain, nobody who can afford a private physician’s fees ever goes to National Health, and the already inadequate care is fast disappearing as the government slashes services. While the Canadian system provides better general health care to the population as a whole, many people can’t get access to expensive procedures requiring high-tech medical equipment because there isn’t enough money in the tight budget.

The struggle for decent health care exposes the gaping holes in all the pathetic patchwork reform schemes advocated by liberal social workers, social democrats and officials of the twin capitalist parties. The treacherous U.S. labor bureaucrats, the grandsons of Samuel Gompers, today pass motions calling for a national health system and argue about it at their fancy poolside confabs in Bal Harbour. But such schemes are just band-aids for cancer, more halfway measures guaranteed to ration medical care by class, race and sex. The AFL-CIO executive board couldn’t even pass a motion to support women’s right to abortion, let alone fight for equal rights for blacks, women and gays. The working class must

oust the trade-union bureaucrats, the labor lieutenants of the Democratic Party—the party of Harry Truman and Jimmy Carter—and build a revolutionary, class-struggle workers party which will take up all the struggles of the exploited and oppressed, and fight for a workers government.

Free, Quality Health Care for All in a Socialist World!

The crisis of medical care cries out for a socialist revolution which will lay the basis for a society which will end all exploitation and social oppression. Health means much more than shots and pills and surgical knives: it is a decent place to live; plenty of good food to eat; knowledge of human biology; air clean of pollution; safe, decent working conditions; the principles of public health rigorously applied. Medicine can’t save lives ruined by poverty and malnutrition. Right now a deadly epidemic of cholera is spreading rapidly throughout South America, the first since 1895. Its genesis is quite simply the collapse of the sewage system. Groaning under millions of dollars of debt to imperialist banks,

Third World countries can’t maintain even a basic social infrastructure.

In this complex industrial society, it will take *worldwide* planning based on scientific knowledge to establish both public health and the best care for the individual. The AIDS pandemic only underlines the urgency of this truth. What we need is *free, quality health care for all*—*communist* medicine, where the wealth of resources on our planet go to the service of the people, not to production for profits.

When we have thrown out the vicious capitalist system which sells human life for dollars, we will be able to build a new socialist society where human life, human worth and human dignity count. Doctors will be servants of the people; hospitals will be havens to heal the sick; research on vaccinations, new medical techniques and improved drugs will be internationally coordinated and to the benefit of all. When the workers of the world are in charge of this planet, the only limits of human health will be scientific—and these will be constantly enlarged by thoughtful, energetic research.■

Iraq...

(continued from page 12)

and murder of gays are the work of the reactionary zealots who prowl the streets of Iraq, such crimes are incited and prepared by a vicious crusade demonizing homosexuality as “disgusting,” a “disaster” and “delinquent behavior.” In 2005, top Shi’ite cleric Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani issued a religious decree to punish and murder gay men and lesbians “in the worst, most severe way of killing.” Moqtada al-Sadr ordered that the “depravity” of homosexuality be eradicated. News media have bemoaned the “feminization” of Iraqi men, “endangered manhood” and “spread of the third sex.”

Gays in Iraq are not the only victims under the imperialist occupation. Women, who at least in the cities enjoyed a relative degree of freedom under Saddam’s regime, are driven off the streets, forced into the veil, beaten, raped, beheaded, stabbed, burned and stoned to death in the barbaric practice of “honor killing,” now intensifying throughout Iraq. Their “crimes” include taking off the veil or falling in love with men outside their tribes. In Iraqi Kurdistan, touted by the capitalist media as a secular region, 17-year-old Du’a Khalil Aswad was stoned to death by a mob in the town of Bashiqa in 2007, with 2,000 men watching. She fell in love with a man outside her tribe.

Homosexuality and Arab Culture

In the Near East, the persecution of gays is not confined to Iraq. In March, a 44-year-old gay man was shot to death in Yemen, one of several gay men killed since 2008. Last year, Ahmet Yildiz, a gay physics student, was gunned down in Istanbul. In Iran, homosexual men and teenagers are frequently hanged. Iraqi gay men who sought refuge in Syria have been forced back across the border into the hands of their executioners. Last month, in the “democratic oasis” of Zionist Israel, a semi-theocratic state, a gunman sprayed a gay club with bullets in Tel Aviv, killing two people and wounding more than ten. As we wrote in “Protest Anti-Gay Persecution in Egypt!” (WV No. 801, 11 April 2003), following a vicious roundup of Egyptian homosexuals:

“Across the Islamic crescent, from Morocco to Malaysia, homosexuality is a crime under Sharia (Islamic law), punishable by death in Pakistan, Iran, Yemen, Sudan, Saudi Arabia and ‘liberated’ Afghanistan, among others. It is a measure of the pervasiveness of anti-gay bigotry in these societies that there is no word in Arabic, Urdu or Farsi for homosexual that is not demeaning or derogatory.”

The Near East has witnessed far more tolerant times in regard to homosexuality. During the golden days of Arab culture and learning in the centuries fol-

lowing the founding of Islam, one of the greatest poets of classical Arabic literature, Abu Nuwas (ca. 755–ca. 815) or “father of curls”—so named because he wore his long hair to his shoulders—was openly gay and a court poet. He was famous for his erotic lyrics on male love and wine, a theme that was picked up by the best poets of Persia and Arabia, such as Omar al-Khayyam, Hafiz and countless others. The collection, *A Thousand and One Nights*, originally included an erotic tale titled “Abu Nuwas and the Three Youths,” which was removed from the 1930 English-language edition. A major boulevard in Baghdad is named after Abu Nuwas; now the reactionaries are planning to change its name.

Even in the 20th century, as Arab culture became increasingly insular and intolerant, there continued to be a current of toleration of homosexuality among major Arab intellectuals. The novels of Egyptian author Naguib Mahfouz, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1988, often portrayed homosexual characters as human beings no different than others. Likewise, such portrayals were also common in the films of the late Egyptian director Youssef Chahine. In his classic 1978 film, *Alexandria...Why?* Chahine depicts a young Egyptian aristocrat who during the Second World War sought out a foreign officer to kill in an act of “patriotism.” But when a young British soldier is delivered to him, they end up falling in love with each other. More recently, the 2002 novel, *The Yacoubian Building*, by Alaa Al Aswany and the 2006 film version have both been a subject of controversy in the Near East due to their positive portrayals of homosexual characters.

Marxists and Homosexual Rights

Whether in the benighted East or in the West, persecution and bigotry against gays are not simply a question of backward ideology; they flow directly from a core element of class society: the institution of the family. The family, with its entrenched patriarchy, is the main source of the oppression of women, youth and homosexuals in class society. It embodies societal gender roles that are then reinforced by religious moral codes. The institution of the family is key to capitalist society, which is built upon private property and domination of the ruling class over the workers and the oppressed. The family provides the mechanism through which private property is passed down to the next generation. Alongside organized religion, it acts as a conservatizing force, regimenting the population, teaching respect to authority and instilling a morality that proscribes anything perceived as a threat to the sanctity of the family.

We are virtually alone on the American left in our defense of gays in predomi-



drawing by Khalil Gibran

Abu Nuwas (ca. 755–ca. 815), shown here in drawing by Lebanese poet Gibran Khalil Gibran, was one of the greatest poets of classical Arabic literature and openly gay.

nantly Muslim countries. Historically, Marxists have been strong defenders of homosexual rights. In a series of articles in 1895, Eduard Bernstein, a leader of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), condemned the trial of the great 19th-century writer Oscar Wilde, who was condemned to two years in prison by a British court for homosexuality. August Bebel, cofounder of the SPD, considered same-sex love as natural and aesthetically as noble as “normal” relations. Addressing the Reichstag (parliament) in 1898, he called for the repeal of the German criminal code against male same-sex acts.

But it was the Bolsheviks who gave flesh and blood to the Marxist understanding of the woman question and homosexual rights. At a time when the European capitalists were prosecuting homosexuals, the revolutionary Bolshevik regime that took power after the 1917 Russian Revolution laid the basis for the first time for real equality for women and eliminated all laws against homosexuality. As Dr. Grigori Batkis, the director of the Moscow Institute of Social Hygiene, wrote:

“Concerning homosexuality, sodomy, and various other forms of sexual gratification, which are set down in European legislation as offenses against public morality—Soviet legislation treats these exactly the same as so-called ‘natural’ intercourse. All forms of sexual intercourse are private matters. Only when there’s use of force or duress, as in general when there’s an injury or encroachment upon the rights of another person, is there a question of criminal prosecution.”

— quoted in John Lauritsen and David Thorstad, *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement (1864-1935)* (1974)

While many of these emancipatory principles were later reversed as the Stalinist bureaucracy sought to entrench itself in the USSR—in part by reinforcing the family and traditional social val-

ues—they inform our Marxist approach. For us the guiding principle for sexual relations is that of *effective consent*, meaning mutual agreement and understanding, as opposed to coercion. As long as those who take part agree to do so at the time, no one, least of all the state, has the right to tell them they can’t do it. We oppose reactionary “age of consent” laws and have been the subject of slanderous attacks for our defense of NAMBLA (North American Man/Boy Love Association) in the U.S.

Under capitalist rule, gays in Iraq will never realize the rights that their counterparts have gained in advanced bourgeois societies. At the same time, such democratic gains in the West are not only partial, but also reversible. Bible bigots, “family values” crusaders and other reactionaries serve to ensure that homosexuals in the U.S. and other Western countries continue to face violence, persecution and abrogation of their rights.

In terms of Iraq—a country forcibly cobbled together by British imperialism and populated by historically hostile ethnic and religious groups that are themselves further riven by clan and tribal rivalries—there is no basis for stable bourgeois-democratic rule. With their enormous social contradictions, Iraq and the Near East more generally present a powerful argument for Leon Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution, which found living confirmation in the Bolshevik Revolution. Trotsky’s theory holds that in those countries where capitalism emerged belatedly, the tasks historically associated with the bourgeois-democratic revolutions of the 17th and 18th centuries can be carried out only under the class rule of the proletariat. Liberation from the imperialist yoke, which exacerbates backwardness and reaction, and the equitable resolution of the democratic rights of all peoples of Iraq and the region more broadly can be achieved only through the overthrow of capitalist rule in the region and the establishment of a socialist federation of the Near East.

While proletarian rule will do much to end the oppression of women and homosexuals, routing the reactionaries, the final eradication of oppression cannot be realized before the family is replaced in a communist society. To finally arrive at classless communism requires the destruction of capitalist imperialism as a world system and the establishment of a world socialist division of labor, leading to a tremendous leap in the productive forces that can provide material plenty for all. Our task is to build revolutionary workers parties of the Bolshevik type that will act as tribunes of the people, defenders of all the oppressed, leading the fight for world socialist revolution, laying the material basis for the eradication of the oppression of women and gays.■

Canada...

(continued from page 3)

on QS and the NDP to “unite together on a program demanding full employment, free education, better health care and an end to the war in Afghanistan” (marxist.ca, 10 October 2008).

In the past, all manner of small social-democratic groupings in Quebec have tried to cohere a mass reformist party based on the Québécois working class—and all have failed. With the national question weighing so heavily on all aspects of political life, the Quebec bourgeoisie has not felt the need for a social-democratic formation to mislead the workers. Supported by the union tops, the bourgeois *souverainiste* PQ, and later the Bloc Québécois, have done that job very well for decades (with the petty-bourgeois QS now available to lend a hand as well). Fightback’s particular twist is to call for “unity” with the chauvinist NDP, a party whose hostility to Quebec’s national rights has made it a virtual non-factor among Québécois workers.

More fundamentally, what distinguishes us Trotskyists from frauds like Fightback is that *we fight to build a revolutionary workers party, not a reformist one*. If a social-democratic formation rooted in the working class did emerge in Quebec, Marxists would have to work out policies and tactics to win workers from its pro-capitalist, social-democratic politics and leadership, much as we do with the NDP in English Canada today. But our purpose is to build a Leninist vanguard party that fights for the overthrow of the capitalist state and the establishment of a workers state; Fightback’s is the bankrupt perspective of reforming the existing state through the election of a “socialist” government in the bourgeois parliament. That is the crux of our differences, and it informs our diametrically different approaches to the Quebec national question.

IMT Struggles Against “Separatism” and Slanders Lenin

In cozying up to the nationalist QS, Fightback/*La Riposte* wax on shamelessly about how they supposedly “fight against national oppression” and “defend all the democratic rights of the Québécois—including the right to self-determination, if the Québécois democratically decide on this question” (“Quebec: Whose sovereignty is it anyway?”, marxist.com, 10 June). They add that “the movement for national liberation must be led by the working class” and fault “the bourgeois and petty bourgeois of Quebec” for being “incapable of completing the tasks of the democratic revo-

lution.” This pseudo-Marxist verbiage is written for the unwary. For one thing, far from being a semicolonial country of belated capitalist development (presumably in need of a “democratic revolution”), Quebec is part of the imperialist Canadian state, albeit nationally oppressed within it. More fundamentally, what Fightback is trying to do here is disguise its *opposition* to Quebec independence.

In English Canada, flag-waving jingoism is the habitual reflex of the NDP and labour tops, who deflect workers’ justified anger at the capitalists’ attacks on jobs and working conditions into chauvinist and protectionist campaigns against “foreigners.” The forced retention of Quebec within Canada is part of the bedrock of such Canadian “national” consciousness.

Fightback itself pushes Canadian nationalism of the purest water. During the recent B.C. [British Columbia] provincial election, their leading Vancouver spokesman, Mike Palecek, chided the governing B.C. Liberals and the NDP tops for not being protectionist enough, while simultaneously embracing the rulers’ anti-Communist campaign against China. Palecek complained that premier Gordon Campbell allows “lumber companies to shut down mills and send raw logs to China where they are milled in sweatshops, while thousands of workers are laid off here” and that the NDP platform “instead of *banning* raw log exports,” “calls for *restricting* them” (marxist.ca, 8 May). This protectionist garbage is the logic of their embrace of pro-capitalist Canadian social democracy.

Fightback’s opposition to Quebec independence allows them to swim in the stream of the Anglo-chauvinist NDP, but



Boudjikian/Chronicle

Public workers on strike in Kirkland, Quebec, June.

it is also scripture from much higher authority. In 2000, the IMT founder-leader, the late Ted Grant, and his successor Alan Woods jointly penned a lengthy thesis on “Marxism and the National Question” in which they revise Leninism on the national question and explicitly take up the mantle against “Quebec separatism.” Bastardizing Lenin, they write: “The slogan of the right of self-determination, far from implying support for separation, was [for Lenin] *an integral part of the struggle against separation*”! In case any of their Quebec comrades might like to squirm away from this, Grant and Woods add immediately:

“Let us take a modern example. The French-speaking population of Quebec feel nationally oppressed by Canada. The Quebecois nationalists are pressing for separation. A Marxist would say to the Quebecois: yes, you have the right to self-determination. We will defend that right. But we consider that separation will be to the detriment of the Quebecois and all the people of Canada. If there is a referendum we will certainly agitate and vote against separation. We stand for a socialist Quebec in a socialist Canada with full respect for national right [sic] as the only solution to our problems. This was approximately Lenin’s position on the national question.”

—marxist.com, 25 February 2000

Of course there *was* a referendum on Quebec independence some five years before this statement. Notoriously, those who did “agitate” “against separation” were the entirety of the Anglo-chauvinist Canadian ruling class, backed by most of the Quebec bourgeoisie, and of course Fightback’s beloved NDP. Calling for a

No vote in 1995 was a straight capitulation to the Canadian capitalist class. (Fightback did not exist at the time; however a position for a No vote was taken by the grossly misnamed Bolshevik Tendency, who share Fightback’s “concerns” for the “isolation” that would befall the Québécois workers should they be foolish enough to break from the Canadian state. See our polemic, “Bolshevik Tendency: Still in the Camp of Anglo Chauvinism,” SC No. 120, Spring 1999.)

Moreover, Grant/Woods’ claim that Lenin was for a “struggle against separation” is a slander and a lie. Basing himself on the lessons of the class struggle, Lenin addressed instances of national oppression *concretely*, seeking to further the fight for proletarian unity and socialist revolution. Defending the right to self-determination did not necessarily mean calling for independence, but it by no means excluded calls to exercise that right when circumstances warranted. In his seminal 1914 article “The Right of Nations to Self-Determination,” Lenin cited the case of Norway’s secession from Sweden:

“The dissolution of the ties imposed upon Norway by the monarchs of Europe and the Swedish aristocracy strengthened the ties between the Norwegian and Swedish workers. The Swedish workers have proved that in spite of *all* the vicissitudes of bourgeois policy...they will be able to preserve and defend the complete equality and class solidarity of the workers of both nations in the struggle against both the Swedish and Norwegian bourgeoisie.”

Later in the same article, Lenin pointed to Marx’s support to Irish independence from Britain:

“...it is in the direct and absolute interest of the English working class to get rid of their present connection with Ireland.... The English working class will *never accomplish anything* until it has got rid of Ireland.... The English reaction in England had its roots...in the subjugation of Ireland.”

—Letter to Engels, 10 December 1869

This Marxist approach to the national question has direct applicability for proletarian revolutionists in Canada, where national animosities have long served to cripple working-class consciousness and struggle. Capitulating to Anglo chauvinism, hailing the petty-bourgeois QS, falsifying Lenin—the Fightback opportunists are certainly versatile. But there is one thing that they cannot do, and that is to provide revolutionary leadership to the working class. The Trotskyist League/Ligue Trotskyiste and the Spartacus Youth Clubs seek to expose such charlatans as part of our fight to forge a genuine Leninist vanguard party that will lead the struggle for North American socialist revolution. ■

Trotskyist League/Spartacus Youth Club Forums

Iran in Turmoil

Imperialists Hands Off!
For a Leninist-Trotskyist Party in Iran to Fight for Workers Revolution!

TORONTO

(416) 593-4138
spartacan@on.aibn.com

Saturday, October 3, 7 p.m.

OISE (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education)
252 Bloor Street West, Room 5150
(at St. George subway)

Women’s Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!

U.S./Canadian Imperialism: Enemy of Workers’ Rights Internationally

VANCOUVER

(604) 687-0353
trotskyist_vancouver@shawcable.com

Saturday, October 3, 2 p.m.

Roundhouse Community Centre, Board Room
181 Roundhouse Mews
(at Yaletown-Roundhouse Sky Train Station)

Spartacist Forums

U.S. Imperialism: Enemy of Women’s Rights Internationally—For Women’s Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!

- Honor George Tiller! For Free Abortion on Demand!
- For Free, Quality Health Care!
- Break with the Democrats—Forge a Workers Party!

BAY AREA

Saturday, October 10, 3 p.m.

The Women’s Building
3543 18th Street, San Francisco
(near 16th St./Mission BART)
(510) 839-0851
slbayarea@sbcglobal.net

LOS ANGELES

Saturday, October 10, 2 p.m.

Immanuel Presbyterian Church
3300 Wilshire Blvd.
(2 blocks west of Vermont/
Wilshire Red Line Station)
(213) 380-8239
slsyla@sbcglobal.net

CHICAGO

Saturday, October 3, 5 p.m.

University of Chicago
Bartlett Hall, Bartlett Lounge
5640 S. University Ave.
(312) 563-0441
chicagospartacist@sbcglobal.net

NEW YORK CITY

Saturday, October 10, 3 p.m.

CWA Local 1180 Hall
6 Harrison Street, Manhattan
(1 train to Franklin, west on Franklin
to Hudson, 1 block south to Harrison)
(212) 267-1025
nysl@tiac.net

WORKERS VANGUARD

Hundreds of Iraqi Gays Slaughtered Under Imperialist Occupation



Left: U.S. troops patrol central Baghdad, February. Right: Murdered gays on streets of Iraq.

AP photos

Across Iraq, gay men and boys are being murdered with impunity in a systematic campaign that started following the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and has been intensifying in the last few months. Death squads abduct their victims from the streets, break into their homes or entrap them in Internet gay chat rooms. They are brutalized and interrogated to extract the names of other potential victims before being murdered. The mutilated bodies are dumped in the garbage or hung as warnings in the street, their genitals cut off and the word “puppy,” a derogatory term for homosexual, daubed on their chests. The murderers mete out grotesque and sadistic torture to their victims, sealing their anuses with glue and force-feeding them laxatives, leaving them to an agonizing death. Men are targeted for not looking “manly” enough, wearing their hair too long or their jeans too tight. Malicious neighborhood gossip

All U.S. Troops Out Now!

could bring about a death sentence.

How many have been killed might never be known as many murders go unreported given the entrenched stigma and sense of shame associated with homosexuality. UN officials put the number in the hundreds; the London-based Iraqi group, LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) reported that a total of 680 people have been murdered since 2004, seven of them women. According to the London *Observer* (13 September), more than 130 have been murdered since the beginning of the year.

The campaign has been largely blamed on Shi’ite militias. However, according to human rights groups, police and security

forces and other religious and ethnic vigilante gangs are involved in the murders, from Shi’ites in the south to Sunnis in Baghdad to the Kurds in the north. Boys as young as 14 are shot and killed by the police for being gay.

It is the imperialist occupation that has unleashed the reactionary forces wreaking death and terror on gay men and fueled the ethnic and religious antagonisms engulfing Iraq in an orgy of bloodletting. By some estimates, more than 1.2 million people have been killed in Iraq since the U.S. invasion. And many of those carrying out such slaughter, including against homosexuals, are forces tied to the Iraqi government

puppets put into power by the U.S.

It is a measure of the ferocity of the terror meted out to gay men today that they are nostalgic for the life they had under the brutal regime of Saddam Hussein, the bloody oppressor of workers, leftists, Shi’ites and Kurds. As one gay man told *Newsweek* (26 August 2008), “Those were the most beautiful days of our lives,” adding, “The fall [of Saddam] was the worst thing to happen.” While suppressing all perceived political enemies, Saddam’s regime did not criminalize homosexuality. Through suppression, he stayed the hands of the clerical reactionaries. In the lead-up to the 2003 invasion, we called for the military defense of Iraq against imperialist attack, without giving the capitalist regime of Saddam Hussein a scintilla of political support. **All U.S. troops out of Iraq now!**

While the crimes of abduction, torture
continued on page 10

No to Gun Control!

Freedom for Plaxico Burress!

On September 22, football star Plaxico Burress was sentenced to two years in prison. Last month, Burress had pleaded guilty to “attempted weapons possession,” a lesser charge than the prosecution’s original indictment on trumped-up gun possession and related charges that could have landed Burress in prison for 15 years. Confronted by a storm of ridicule in the bourgeois press and a district attorney who vowed to make an example of him, Burress felt compelled to cop a plea.

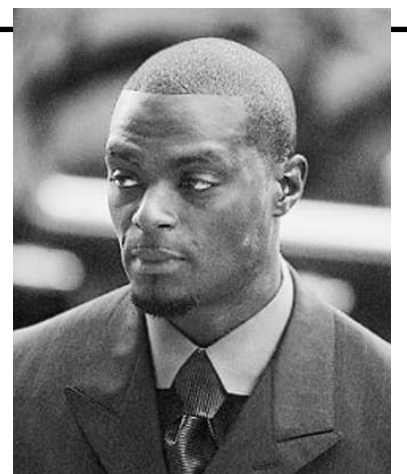
On the Saturday after Thanksgiving last year, Burress decided to go to some clubs in Manhattan with a couple of his New York Giants teammates. As Burress explained, he carried his gun with him that night because earlier that week teammate Steve Smith had been robbed at gunpoint in the same area where Burress was going. Later that evening, as he was climbing the stairs in the Latin Quarter

nightclub, the gun fell from the waistband of his pants. He tried to stop it from falling to the floor; it accidentally discharged, wounding him slightly in the thigh.

This might have been only the stuff of tabloid journalism, had not New York’s billionaire mayor, Michael Bloomberg, intervened. Upon learning that Burress’ gun, though legally purchased in Florida, was not registered in the state of New York, Bloomberg railed that anything short of the state minimum for unregistered gun possession, i.e., three and one-half years in jail, would be “a sham, a mockery of the law.” When Bloomberg also demanded criminal charges be filed against New York-Presbyterian Hospital for not reporting Burress’ wound to the cops, the hospital suspended Dr. Josyann Abisaab who treated Burress in the emergency room.

This is an outrageous assault on the constitutional right to bear arms. As Marxists, we stand for the right of armed self-defense and oppose gun control schemes which are nothing but ruling class attempts to disarm the population. The earliest 20th-century gun control laws were passed in states like South Carolina, Tennessee and Mississippi as a way to disarm blacks in the face of KKK terror. In 1965, the New York City Council passed a bill especially to keep black militant Malcolm X from carrying a carbine for protection.

The importance of this critical right was brought home to New Yorkers on August 13, when 72-year-old Harlem businessman Charles Augusto Jr. needed his shotgun to defend himself and two employees from four would-be robbers. Two of the intruders were wounded and two died from injuries in their attempted heist. Nearby residents were generally sympa-



Hagen/NY Daily News

thetic to Augusto, who was described as a “good dude” who “helps out the neighborhood.” A bystander at the shooting said, “I hope that the gun was licensed and that he was in his rights” (*New York Times* online, 13 August).

Plaxico Burress, a hero of Super Bowl XLII in February 2008, will now lose two years of his life for something that was not the least bit criminal. Like other prominent black and minority athletes, he is the target of efforts to disrupt or destroy his career for a “crime” without a victim. At the age of 32, this likely means the end of his football career and livelihood. Freedom for Plaxico Burress! ■