

## Break with the Democrats—For a Workers Party!

# U.S. Capitalism in Decay



1930



2009

Left: Unemployed gather outside of Cleveland City Hall to apply for jobs. Right: Job fair in Louisville, Kentucky. Periodic capitalist crises mean immiseration for working people.

AP photos

# America Needs Workers Revolution

*We print below, edited for publication, a September 12 forum given in Chicago by Spartacist League Central Committee member Ed Clarkson.*

Let's start with the obvious: things are bad. Official unemployment is about 15 million. Nine million people are working part-time. Another several million or more have thrown in the towel; they're not reflected in the unemployment statistics because they don't look for work anymore, and probably haven't since the dot-com crisis. We see people losing their homes and dreams of retirement smashed.

News was just released that only 60 percent of the people attending college ever complete their four-year degree. People drop out, I assume, because they don't have the scratch. And generally those who are applying for college are downsizing to the community colleges, which are kind of like trade schools. Typically you go through community college, get a skill and go look for a job. But there are no jobs, and you go back to community college and get another skill, and so on. Everybody knows that phenomenon. The reason being education doesn't produce jobs; capitalist economic investment produces jobs. Also, with the continuing loss of jobs, you have a continuing loss of health care.

Last November about 56 percent of the voting-age populace turned out, many hoping to end the seeming *Nightmare on Elm Street* of the Cheney-Bush years. Democratic voters all had considerable illusions in Barack Obama, the first black man elected to the presidency. Now, it's not his 100th day, it's his 200th day or so.

It's not that nothing has happened since he took office; it's unfortunately worse than that. Two of the major actions of his administration are, first, giving a lot of bread to the banks, which has the population outraged. And the other, with the able assistance of United Auto Workers head Gettelfinger, is bringing what was at one time the most powerful union in the United States to its knees. That auto bail-out deal was orchestrated from the White House. All the promises that he made as a candidate, or half promises, that plants wouldn't close—the plants closed. Jobs vanished—they're not even spoken about anymore with any seriousness.

Mortgage relief is not forthcoming at all. People are still losing their homes; they're going to continue to lose their homes. Roundups of immigrants have in fact escalated greatly compared with the

Bush years. The occupation of Iraq continues, the "timetable" for partial withdrawal being essentially the one that George Bush proposed, no different, and who knows what the timetable means in any case. Anybody who thinks that there will actually be a departure in 2010 better think about it again. There's the escalation of war in Afghanistan, which most Americans today are not very happy with. And then there is the torture apparatus of U.S. imperialism: the government won't brag about it anymore, just tuck it back in a corner. Unlike Cheney, they won't cheer every time somebody screams in a prison—that's unseemly.

### Wealth Care

Look at the current health care "reform." There are now approaching 50 million people in this country without any

health care at all. There is some impulse on the part of the bourgeoisie to cover a larger percentage of the population, because it's bad press to have so many people without health care. Of even greater concern for the bourgeoisie, health care in America is not cost-effective. Remembering that this is the most savage and backward of the major imperialist powers, and always has been, health care "reform" is gone about in a particularly American way. The "evil" cited is that people are "consuming" too much health care. Just like they consumed too many homes, when banks gave them the loans, and they ran up too much debt just trying to get by because their incomes were really shrinking.

So the evil consumer is behind everything. What's happened, they found out, is that a significant percentage of credit card debt was for health costs. People don't "consume" health care: "Oh, doc, I'm looking for a bypass, and what are you charging for liver transplants today?" What happens is that you go into a doctor's office because you don't feel well, he tells you what you need, your insurance either approves it or doesn't, and the hospital provides it or doesn't. There is no consumerism here. Everything is out of your hands.

So what are they putting together in Washington now? Obama has already made deals with the insurance companies, with the doctors, with the hospitals, that certain areas won't be touched, so they are all now supporters of health care "reform." All these people who have made mammoth profits are now all of a sudden behind this because they may get some tens of millions more people able to "consume." On the other hand, ordinary people get nervous when they hear that there will be all these great cost savings, because the fox is now running the

*continued on page 6*



Baran/MPR

September 11: Minneapolis cops arrested seven supporters of Rosemary Williams, who had been resisting eviction from her foreclosed home.



# Drop All Charges Against Elliot Madison and Michael Wallschlaeger!

The first day of the G20 summit last month saw the use of a “sound cannon” that emitted a directed high-decibel ear-splitting noise with terrifying effect. This weapon is used widely by U.S. occupation forces in Iraq and Afghanistan for “crowd control.” And now, it is being deployed by U.S. police departments for use against protesters. Knowing that other law enforcement agencies were watching this new weapon being demonstrated, the Pittsburgh police chief boasted, “It served its purpose well.” With the business district locked down, up to a thousand jail cells freed up for use and protesters placed well outside the G20 security perimeter, the cops opened fire with tear gas, stun grenades and rifle-fired bean bags on assembled youth with no march permits. What followed was a violent cat-and-mouse chase of a marauding police army in pursuit of a few hundred fleeing youth.

“If you have 5,000 police officers and

a quarter-million dollars in fancy equipment, you have to do something with it,” explained Witold Walczak, legal director of the Pennsylvania American Civil Liberties Union. “Might as well go after some amateur ham radio operators in a motel room.” The amateur ham radio operators in question here are Elliot Madison and Michael Wallschlaeger, New York anarchists arrested on September 24 after a police raid on their motel room in Pittsburgh. The police found the two sitting in front of computers, wearing headphones, perusing maps and listening to scanners for the purpose of tweeting anti-G20 protesters using the Internet social-networking site Twitter.

Twitter, in cooperation with cops, shut down the anarchists’ account, posting a notice that it “has been suspended due to strange activity.” This “strange activity,” according to the Pennsylvania criminal complaint, consisted of the two “directing

others, specifically protesters of the G-20 summit, in order to avoid apprehension after a lawful order to disperse.” A typical tweet would have been: “Report received that police are ‘nabbing’ anyone that looks like a protester/Black Bloc. Stay alert watch your friends!” There can be no doubt that many demonstrators on this first day of G20 protests were saved from police injury and arrest by Madison and Wallschlaeger’s warnings. For this, the Pennsylvania prosecutors are now charging Madison and Wallschlaeger with “hindering prosecution, criminal use of communication facility and possessing criminal instruments.”

On October 1 Madison’s Queens, New York, home—an anarchist collective house known as Tortuga—was raided in search of “evidence” of violation of “federal rioting laws.” FBI and New York City police searched the home for **16 hours**, from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m., handcuffing several residents for hours. Madison, a social worker, had his confidential client list seized by federal agents. Other seized “evidence” included Curious George plush toys, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* DVDs, artwork, correspondence with political prisoners, birth certificates, passports, videos, tax records, photographs, banners, posters, flags and a needlepoint of Lenin!

Although no federal charges have been filed yet, Madison and his wife, Elena, are now under investigation on trumped-up charges of violating an interstate rioting law. Passed in 1968, that law is known as the “H. Rap Brown law” because it was intended to target black militants and leftist activists. As the Madisons’ attorney pointed out, this law has been rarely used since the case of the Chicago Seven, who were arrested during the 1968 Democratic National Convention protests in Chicago.

Under the Obama administration, the “war on terror”—exemplified abroad by



Democracy Now!

the continuing slaughter in Iraq and Afghanistan and the U.S. air strikes in Pakistan—continues to have a domestic reflection of furious repression of all kinds of dissent, including on an expanded electronic battlefield. While the U.S. government applauds the use of Twitter, Facebook and other social-networking sites by protesters in countries like Iran, such protesters in the U.S. are met with criminal charges.

In the case of the Madisons and Wallschlaeger, they are being gone after for distributing *publicly available information*. Their case is reminiscent of that of Sherman Austin, a black L.A. anarchist who was convicted in 2003 under a 1997 “anti-terrorism” law for hosting an anarchist Web site on which publicly available information was posted (see “Free Sherman Austin Now!” WV No. 809, 12 September 2003).

It is in the interest of the working class and all opponents of government repression to fight back against the capitalists’ assault on democratic rights, such as the encroachment on Internet use. **Drop all charges against Elliot Madison and Michael Wallschlaeger now! ■**



TROTSKY

## In Defense of Dialectical Materialism

*This year marks the centennial anniversary of the publication of Materialism and Empirio-criticism, written by Bolshevik leader V.I. Lenin in 1908 during the period of victorious reaction following the defeat of the 1905 Russian Revolution. This work is a powerful repudiation of bourgeois philosophical idealism—embraced at the time even by some Bolshevik leaders—which in the end always amounts to a defense of reaction and the status quo. In the excerpt below, Lenin provides a concise exposition of the Marxist materialist outlook.*

Yesterday we did not know that coal tar contains alizarin. Today we have learned that it does. The question is, did coal tar contain alizarin yesterday?

Of course it did. To doubt it would be to make a mockery of modern science.

And if that is so, three important epistemological conclusions follow:

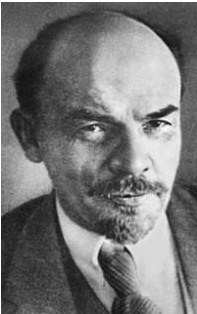
1) Things exist independently of our consciousness, independently of our sensations, outside of us, for it is beyond doubt that alizarin existed in coal tar yesterday and it is equally beyond doubt that yesterday we knew nothing of the existence of this alizarin and received no sensations from it.

2) There is definitely no difference in principle between the phenomenon and the thing-in-itself, and there cannot be any such difference. The only difference is between what is known and what is not yet known....

3) In the theory of knowledge, as in every other sphere of science, we must think dialectically, that is, we must not regard our knowledge as ready-made and unalterable, but must determine how *knowledge* emerges from *ignorance*, how incomplete, inexact knowledge becomes more complete and more exact.

Once we accept the point of view that human knowledge develops from ignorance, we shall find millions of examples of it just as simple as the discovery of alizarin in coal tar, millions of observations not only in the history of science and technology but in the everyday life of each and every one of us that illustrate the transformation of “things-in-themselves” into “things-for-us,” the appearance of “phenomena” when our sense-organs experience an impact from external objects, the disappearance of “phenomena” when some obstacle prevents the action upon our sense-organs of an object which we know to exist. The sole and unavoidable deduction to be made from this—a deduction which all of us make in everyday practice and which materialism deliberately places at the foundation of its epistemology—is that outside us, and independently of us, there exist objects, things, bodies and that our perceptions are images of the external world.

—V. I. Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-criticism* (1909)



LENIN

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The closing date for news in this issue is October 20.

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23 October 2009

We reprint below a leaflet issued by the Bay Area Spartacist League on October 14 and distributed at the October 17 Antiwar Coalition's rally.

Socialist Action leader Jeff Mackler has been caught red-handed at a game he has long been playing in his self-described role as “a national antiwar leader for the past 45 years.” That is, his service as a running dog for the trade-union bureaucracy and, behind it, the often-preferred party of imperialist war in the U.S., the Democrats. An article by quirky rad-lib journalist Alexander Cockburn (*CounterPunch*, 4-6 September) exposes Mackler, in his capacity as a leader of the October 17 Antiwar Coalition, as the moving force in canceling an antiwar picket against Democratic Party House Speaker Nancy Pelosi at a \$100-a-plate breakfast in a ritzy hotel in San Francisco on Labor Day weekend.

Cockburn recounts Mackler's apoplexy when he learned that this protest, which the October 17 Coalition had voted to endorse, was taking place at an event hosted by the San Francisco Labor Council. In an e-mail to his fellow coalition leaders, Mackler raved: “No one knew that we voted to hold a demonstration at the Labor Council breakfast!” (Evidently they had been hoodwinked by Steve Zeltzer, a perennial gadfly in the Bay Area liberal-reformist swamp, who put forward the motion.) Declaring that a “time bomb was ticking,” Mackler argued that this was a “grave mistake that needed immediate correction” or else the coalition would lose “the ability to ask in good faith for Labor Council support” for their October 17 antiwar protest in San Francisco.

According to Mackler, his umbrage at not being informed that Pelosi was being hosted by the trade-union tops was shared by others in the coalition, including the Revolutionary Communist Party's World Can't Wait front group, Workers World's International Action Center and United for Peace and Justice. But the day was saved for these antiwar reformists, not to mention Pelosi and her labor statesmen hosts. Labor Council chief Tim Paulson wrote: “Our partners in the anti-war movement have been calling me to say they are condemning this protest as irresponsible and divisive.” Paulson particularly pointed to the Party for Socialism and Liberation's ANSWER coalition as well as U.S. Labor Against the War. Having more of an inside track into the whole affair is Socialist Organizer, which has endorsed the October 17 demonstration and whose leader Alan Benjamin serves on the executive committee of the Labor Council.

In response to Cockburn, a lengthy article in *Socialist Action* (October 2009) is headlined: “Red-baiting against Socialist Action & the antiwar movement—Mackler replies to Cockburn's smears.” Far from red-baiting, Cockburn's article in fact makes the opposite charge, i.e., that Mackler and his fellow “antiwar” leaders have about as much to do with revolutionary politics as HMOs have to do with health care (or, as Cockburn puts it, these recent antics only demonstrate that Mackler is “longer of tooth, but no closer to socialism”). Indeed, here in the very small petri dish of the October 17 Coalition, we see the role the reformist left plays in the syphilitic chain that has shackled the working class—the one force in this society with the social power

# Antiwar Reformists, Labor Bureaucrats and the Democratic Party



## The Syphilitic Chain

Credits (left to right): Socialist Action, Alameda Report, AP

Left to right: Socialist Action's Jeff Mackler, Tim Paulson of the San Francisco Labor Council and Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

and historic interest to wage a genuine struggle against the barbaric wars and occupations of U.S. imperialism—to the capitalist class enemy. The reformists serve the labor bureaucrats who in turn serve to subordinate the unions to the parties of imperialist war, particularly the Democrats.

down the West Coast, *was* a powerful demonstration of the kind of working-class action that is needed against the imperialist occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan. But it was politically undermined by the ILWU bureaucracy. Seeing the opportunity to make a statement of the union's strength in the midst of the 2008

Heyman, who authored the motion calling for the port shutdown. Heyman in turn decries our statement that the protest was “against the occupation of Iraq (but not Afghanistan, the preferred war of the Democrats)” as an outrageous falsehood. In fact, the length of the efforts to deep-six any mention of Afghanistan, not to mention Pelosi, was confirmed by antiwar activist Cindy Sheehan, who was a featured speaker at the SF May Day rally held in conjunction with the port shutdown. Sheehan, who at the time was running as an independent against Pelosi, told *Workers Vanguard* that Clarence Thomas, who was then an ILWU Local 10 Exec Board member (and Heyman's co-emcee at the rally), “really shocked me and said that I couldn't say anything bad about Nancy Pelosi or talk about Afghanistan; I was supposed to stay focused only on Iraq”!

This attempted censorship wasn't perpetrated by the ILWU International tops but by one of the “progressives” of the Local 10 bureaucracy. Indeed, the very purpose of double-talkers like Thomas and Heyman is to give a “militant” gloss to the class-collaborationist treachery of the ILWU bureaucracy, of which they are an integral part. Here the IG covered for Heyman who covered for the ILWU International, whose “loyal to America” patriotism on May Day was designed to boost the Democratic Party, which, now in power, is intensifying U.S. imperialism's assault on the peoples of Afghanistan, expanding it to Pakistan and waving its sabers against Iran.

### A Long and Sordid History

Breathing a sigh of relief that the October 17 Coalition had managed to remove its “good name” from the protest against Pelosi, Mackler sanctimoniously intoned that labor support was particularly critical “in these days of terrible encroachments on the lives, health and stability of working people, not to mention the masses who are daily slaughtered in the course of the U.S. wars that we so strongly oppose.” Cockburn aptly replied: “Opposition to the war and the slaughter of the masses apparently stops and flees at the hideous possibility of causing embarrassment to the San Francisco Labor Council.” But then again, Cockburn himself knows a thing or two about fleeing from opposition to war. In the lead-up

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### Voltaire on the Syphilitic Chain

Pangloss replied thus: “My dear Candide! You remember Paquette, the pretty lady's maid to our august Baroness; well, in her arms I tasted the delights of paradise, which in turn provoked the torments of hell by which you see me devoured; she was herself infected, and may now be dead. Paquette received this present from a very learned Franciscan, who could trace it back to its source: for he had been given it by an old countess, who in turn had it from a cavalry captain, who was indebted for it to a marquise, who caught it from a page-boy, who contracted it from a Jesuit, who, while a novice, had inherited it in a direct line from one of the shipmates of Christopher Columbus. As for me, I will pass it on to no one, for I am dying of it.”

“Oh Pangloss!” cried Candide, “what a strange genealogy is this! Surely the devil is its source?”—“Not in the least,” replied that great man. “It is an indispensable feature of the best of all possible worlds, a necessary ingredient: for if Columbus, on an island off the Americas, had not contracted this disease—which poisons the source of all procreation, and often even prevents procreation, contrary though this be to nature's great plan—we would have neither chocolate nor cochineal....”

—from *Candide* (1759)

Others do the same under the cover of more “revolutionary” rhetoric. Take the Internationalist Group (IG), for example. They promote the May Day 2008 antiwar port shutdown by the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) as opposed to the opportunists' “program of chaining the working class and antiwar activists to the Democrats.” The May Day action, which shut down ports up and

contract negotiations, the ILWU tops simultaneously channeled the anger of the ranks against the Iraq war and desire to defend their union into “national unity” patriotism and support for Obama for Commander-in-Chief of U.S. imperialism.

The IG claims this was all the doing of the ILWU International tops as opposed to their man in the bureaucracy, left-talking ILWU Local 10 Exec Board member Jack



WV Photo

Clarence Thomas (far left) and Jack Heyman at 2008 San Francisco May Day rally. Cindy Sheehan (right), shown speaking at the rally, recounted to WV that Thomas, then an ILWU Exec Board member, told her that she “couldn't say anything bad about Nancy Pelosi or talk about Afghanistan.”

Cameron/Oakland Tribune





# The Decline of New Orleans

We print below, slightly edited for publication, an 8 August document by Joe Vetter, a founding member of the Spartacist League/U.S. and the organizer of the SL's former New Orleans branch. For many years, from our Atlanta branch, he directed our work in the South.

## By Joe Vetter

A great crime was committed against the black and working population of this country by the predictable depopulation of New Orleans around Hurricane Katrina. But while Katrina represented an opportunity for the bourgeoisie, it did not represent the turning point for the population. The turning point for the city occurred in the early 1970s, as is detailed below.

The Port of New Orleans was primarily an outlet for cotton. The Cotton Exchange closed in 1964. This marked a shift by city planners to tourism. In the late 1960s Bourbon Street, Royal Street and the area around Jackson Square in the French Quarter were closed to vehicle traffic. Decatur Street, which had previously been a home to very rough seamen's bars, was "cleaned up." The Jax brewery, which was located across the street from Jackson Square, was closed and converted into an upscale tourist shopping center. Plans were laid for building the Louisiana Superdome, and Poydras Street, which was anchored by the Superdome at one end, was widened—driving out the drunks, low-life bars, and boxing gyms. This made room for some swank hotels and One Shell Square, which was the second-largest Shell Oil tower in the U.S.

Meanwhile, an attempt to keep the port alive as a transport center was being made with the completion of MRGO (Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet), then called the Ships Channel. For over a century, the port had been plagued by its location—about 100 miles upriver from the Gulf of Mexico. Additionally, the water along this distance was somewhat shallow, with shifting sandbar bottoms. Probably from at least the Civil War on, there existed a union of a few dozen men called the River Pilots whose job was to join ships at the mouth of the river and guide them safely to New Orleans or further north. These were highly skilled jobs that paid extremely well, and you had to be grandfathered into the union. The Ships Channel was supposed to shorten the route to New Orleans and avoid the need for the River Pilots. It also provided a quick outlet for the first stage of the NASA "moon rocket" from the Michoud Assembly Facility to get to the Gulf and on to Florida. Prior to Katrina, the facility was

being used to install the heat tiles that keep falling off of the space shuttle. The Ships Channel was the route taken by the waters that flooded the Ninth Ward and New Orleans East.

Plans were made to open a large container facility at France Road at the corner of the Ships Channel and the Industrial Canal in the Lower Ninth Ward. The Industrial Canal cuts the Ninth Ward into its upper and lower parts. The question for the shipping bosses was how to deal with the labor question for the port. New Orleans at that time also had large rail yards and a number of scattered trucking facilities. There were two unions contending for organization of the facility, the Teamsters and the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA).

If memory serves correctly, the Teamsters were loyal to the Reutherites, and I believe they had connections to the Car-

*Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* [2008]).

In the 1950s and 1960s, being a black longshoreman meant that you were somebody. Everyone made good money, and every political and social event in the black community took place at the union hall. And the union led the labor movement. In 1968, when the black longshore locals downed tools to commemorate the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., white longshore workers also downed tools saying, "We don't work without our black brothers." Black longshore workers generally favored maintaining racially separate locals because they believed that without them they would be giving up their power. The work environment was integrated even during the harder aspects of Jim Crow segregation. I happened to see an MGM travelogue on New Orleans made about 1950. It opens with scenes of

power. This set the stage for the disconnection of the main body of the black population from all except the most marginalized sections of the working class. After one particularly terrible murder, a local resident was interviewed on TV and she made the obvious point: "Somebody around here has got to give these young people something to do." I believe that the bulk of the black proletariat in New Orleans is now changing sheets in tourist hotels. I recall having an argument with a comrade, well before Katrina, over the fact that poverty in New Orleans was more comparable to the Caribbean than the South Bronx.

Longshore power is very attenuated; it was once the center of labor and black power in New Orleans. In the late 1980s, we distributed the longshore supplement at a number of East Coast ports [see "Let's Win This One!" reprinted in *WV* No. 413, 10 October 1986]. We received a good reception at every port that we went to but New Orleans. There it was difficult to give the supplement away to longshoremen. One told me, "I don't need that, I'm just going in here to punch the clock." The longshore workforce is aging and its power has diminished. There was a report of a surge in cargo in 1997, but the question is whether this reinvigorated the ILA or went to the France Road facility, or whether it went 30 miles upriver to be unloaded (where it would be considered part of the Port of New Orleans).

Most of the statistics quoted in *Workers Vanguard* regarding the size of the port undoubtedly included the France Road facility and areas upriver from New Orleans that are worked by New Orleans longshoremen. The France Road facility, I believe, remains closed since Katrina. Also, *WV* No. 868 (14 April 2006) states that in terms of tonnage, the Port of New Orleans is the fifth-largest in the world. The Port Authority states that it is the twelfth-largest port in the U.S.

Beginning in the mid 1980s and continuing to 1996, I made essentially annual trips to New Orleans to visit family and vacation (not the same thing). It is easy to see most of the Port of New Orleans by going about one-half block behind Café du Monde (a major tourist attraction) and looking. The top of the crescent of the Mississippi at New Orleans is just about at this point. In all of the years that I visited, the only thing that moved on the port was the water on the river and the ferry that plods across the river to the west bank of New Orleans.

I believe that fitting into this picture is the fact that beginning in the early 1970s there was massive white flight from New Orleans to the suburbs. Housing and social life had been very mildly integrated at least from during the 1950s. A black mayor was elected, and the largely black transit workers won a

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UPI

**New Orleans: International Longshoremen's Association member during 1968 strike.**

los Marcello Mafia family. This was in opposition to the Baton Rouge Teamsters, who ran some militant strikes but were led by one of the main people to testify against Hoffa before Congress. The port bosses wanted to (and eventually did) sign a sweetheart contract with the New Orleans Teamsters to organize the container facility.

The history of New Orleans labor centers on the port. Longshoremen were organized into about five locals, both along race lines and along skill lines: general cargo (black, with a smaller white local), banana handlers (black, I believe, and dangerous because of tarantulas), grain handlers (mainly black and dangerous because of the possibility of falling into the grain and smothering) and clerks and checkers (white only). The multiple locals became one in the 1980s.

The International Longshoremen's Association organized the port in the late 1930s after a bitter battle with the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU). This battle included Catholic church cells organized by Catholic Action that came down on the side of the ILA (see F. Ray Marshall, *Labor in the South* [1967]). John L. Lewis, president of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), had decreed that the ILA organize everything east of the Mississippi and the ILWU organize everything west of the Mississippi. New Orleans straddles the river. I was told that in the 1930s the Communist Party's (CP) largest chapter was in Birmingham, but its second-largest chapter was in New Orleans. An ex-CP organizer told me once that they would regularly sell the *Worker* on the levees. There had been arguments in the CP in the late 1920s about an orientation to black dock workers in New Orleans versus sharecroppers in Alabama (see Glenda Gilmore,

the port and longshoremen working. It showed longshoremen, both black and white, loading cotton and emphasized the role of the port. Almost no mention is made of the food, culture and music. Another scene of longshoremen working at the time can be found in the Richard Widmark film *Panic in the Streets* (1950). There are also scenes of seamen bidding for jobs in what I believe was the old National Maritime Union hall.

In order to allow the sweetheart contract to be signed with the Teamsters over the France Road container facility, the port bosses had to give up something to the dock workers. Containerization was seen by the ILA as representing a massive loss of work, particularly in general cargo. What was accepted was the idea of "royalty payments." This meant that longshoremen would be paid for just signing in for work (without actually working). In other words, they sold their jobs and

Louisiana Photograph Collection



**Trading floor of New Orleans Cotton Exchange, 1924. The exchange was closed in 1964.**

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## Jim Crow “Justice” for Victim of Racist Attack *Drop the Charges Against Jason Vassell!*

Early in the morning of 3 February 2008, Jason Vassell, then a student at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, was thrust into every black man’s nightmare. Two drunken bigots approached his dorm room window shouting racist slurs and sexual innuendo about two (white) female friends inside. When Vassell refused to go outside to confront them, they broke through his window. Then, when he left to get help, they entered his dormitory lobby and attacked him, breaking his nose and giving him a concussion.

### Amherst, Mass.

Managing to fend them off with his pocketknife, he fled behind a locked door. Later that day when he went to press charges, Vassell was arrested within one minute of setting foot inside the police station—for the “crime” of defending himself.

Outrageously, Vassell faces two felony counts of assault, with a potential sentence of 30 years! Both of the racist thugs who attacked him had extensive criminal records for similar incidents, yet one was sentenced only to probation, while the other wasn’t charged at all. The District Attorney’s continuing persecution of Jason Vassell recalls the infamous 1857 Dred Scott decision in which the Supreme Court held that blacks “had no rights which the white man was bound to respect.” Vassell’s lawyers are pursuing a civil rights case, fighting to get the charges dropped on the basis that he has



Wilson/Boston Globe

**UMass Amherst, February 3: March in support of Jason Vassell (inset).**

been selectively prosecuted because of his race. Students and community members have rallied to Vassell’s defense, organizing protests and showing up to his hearings. *Drop the charges against Jason Vassell!*

To add insult to injury, the university sided with the racist police and presented

Vassell with an ultimatum: withdraw, or face expulsion. *Let Jason Vassell return to his studies!* The persecution of Jason Vassell shows that even at supposedly “progressive” campuses in “progressive” states, racist violence, repression and injustice against black people are inherent in capitalist America. Under capital-

ism, the universities are run to benefit the bosses and reinforce the norms of racist, capitalist society. *Abolish the administration! For student/teacher/worker control of the universities!*

American capitalism was founded on black chattel slavery and black people today constitute an oppressed race-color caste, segregated at the bottom of society. But black people are not just victims of racist capitalism. Black workers are integrated at the point of production and compose a key section of the proletariat. The only way to achieve full equality and integration is through the fight to overturn the entire rotten capitalist edifice. Class-conscious black workers, armed with a revolutionary program, will play a central role in building the workers party necessary to sweep away the capitalist system of exploitation and racial oppression.

\* \* \*

Send protest letters demanding the dropping of charges against Jason Vassell to: Elizabeth Scheibel, Northwestern District Attorney, One Gleason Plaza, Northampton, MA 01060 and to Martha Coakley, Massachusetts Attorney General, One Ashburton Place, Boston, MA 02108. The Partisan Defense Committee, a class-struggle, non-sectarian legal and social defense organization associated with the Spartacist League, has contributed to Jason Vassell’s legal defense and encourages others to do so. Checks should be made out to his mother, Esmie James, and mailed to Justice for Jason, P.O. Box 197, Amherst, MA 01004. ■



Stern/Republican

## LRP State Department Socialists *Embrace New Bedfellow*

On August 18 the vicarious Third World nationalists in the League for the Revolutionary Party (LRP) sponsored a forum by a former member of our organization, Israeli pseudo-Marxist Yossi Schwartz, under the title “All Israel Is Occupied Territory! The Crisis of Zionism and the Prospects for Revolution in the Middle East: For a Palestinian Workers’ State from the River to the Sea! For a Socialist Federation of the Middle East!” We went to investigate these self-styled socialists’ new lash-up, the latest in a long series for both parties.

The LRP’s previous international affiliates include a Ukrainian section made up of con men who posed as members of (according to the LRP) “at least ten far left organizations internationally, and probably far more”—including the Bolshevik Tendency (BT), the Internationalist Group and the Committee for a Workers’ International, represented in the U.S. by Socialist Alternative. When the fraud came out, the LRP had to admit that their Ukrainian section “has in fact never existed as a genuine organization. Its ‘members’ and ‘leaders,’ some of whom we had met more than once, were part of the overall scam” (“LRP/COFI Statement on the Ukrainian ‘RWO,’” undated). As we noted, all these organizations had been

### From the Big Bang to Hot Air

“more than happy to perpetrate their con on the left public by trumpeting their fraudulent Ukrainian sections” for as long as they could (“Chickens Come Home to Roost in Kiev,” WV No. 808, 29 August 2003).

Today, as the Internationalist Socialist League (Israel/Occupied Palestine), Yossi Schwartz is arguing the LRP’s line on everything from the Palestinian question to “statified capitalism.” (“Statified capitalism” is the LRP’s contribution to the state capitalist “theory” used by renegades from Marxism to justify siding with the U.S. imperialists against the former Soviet Union.) But Schwartz has been known to argue for almost anything, including mental telepathy. As a comrade from the Spartacus Youth Club pointed out at the forum, “Yossi is known for changing his political positions and his

groups about as often as he changes his socks. Where he will be next is anybody’s guess—probably even for Yossi himself. Too bad telepathy can’t tell him that.”

The SYC comrade explained, “As he left our organization 15 years ago, Yossi was denouncing us as ‘Stalinophobic’ for refusing to support the ex-Stalinist, anti-Semitic and fascist-infested ‘red-brown coalition’ in the [former] Soviet Union as some form of defender against capitalist counterrevolution. After quitting, he then joined a number of groups that cheered the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union, and turned around and denounced us as being Stalinophilic.” In response, Schwartz heatedly denied ever having called for an “orientation” to the “red-brown coalition.” But this was one of the positions that formed the basis of his faction in our organization, together with ret-

respectively saluting Khomeini’s mullahs as the “ally” of the workers in Iran in 1979 and bizarrely opposing the Big Bang theory of the origin of the universe (see “The Rad Shift,” *Spartacist Canada* No. 102, March/April 1995). Yossi’s course was fully documented by our Canadian comrades in two *Internal Discussion Bulletins* that contain some 400 pages of factional debate (“Debates with the Leninist-Trotskyist Faction” Nos. 12 and 13, May and June 1994), available upon request.

### Schwartz Drives Self into Sea?

More recently, Schwartz had hooked up with the late Ted Grant’s International Marxist Tendency (Socialist Appeal is their affiliate in the U.S.). At the forum, Schwartz explained that he and a co-thinker split because the Grantites refused to “militarily” support Islamic fundamentalist Hamas against petty-bourgeois nationalist Fatah during Hamas’s 2007 takeover of Gaza, internecine bloodletting in which Marxists had no side. A comrade from the Spartacist League responded:

“You said it took the Grantites to tell you that you couldn’t support Hamas ‘militarily’ for you to figure out that they were opportunist. That blew me away. Decades in the [British] Labour Party

*continued on page 9*



# Capitalism...

(continued from page 1)

chicken coop. They suspect what’s going to happen—and there is a basis for this suspicion—is that the people that have health care are going to get less. The government will cut Medicare and Medicaid, cut the “gilded” insurance policies. They’re talking about taxing the “excess” benefits of a two-worker family with kids. So people pretty much were for health care reform going into it, but they are now very suspicious that who is going to pay is the working class, that working people are going to have to pay for people who are not working. In this country, such suspicions always intersect anti-black racism. This shows the invaluable service that the race/caste oppression of black people in this country plays in helping the bourgeoisie to divide working people along racial lines.

Having said that, it needs to be understood that all health care is rationed in capitalist society, both government health systems and private insurance. As Marxists, we don’t call for a “better” reformist plan, like national health insurance. It would be nice if that were in place, but that’s not our solution. We are for free, quality health care for all. If there were a



May 5: Villagers sifting through rubble of houses destroyed by U.S./NATO air strikes in Farah Province, Afghanistan, that killed dozens.

bosses’ state that defends it must be overthrown by a socialist revolution led by the working class. There is no other answer to the matter. Our model for that is the Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917.

For the reformist left, support to a capitalist politician as president especially reflects their illusions. But is it possible, assuming he even wanted to, for anyone

uses in dividing the working class and in maintaining the U.S. as the only major country that lacks even a reformist workers party. In other words, workers in this country simply do not generally consider themselves to be part of a working class.

Obama is a member of the new black middle class. By “new” I mean there is now a small layer of blacks in executive



Left: Franklin D. Roosevelt signing Social Security Act of 1935. Right: WPA workers in New York in 1930s. Social and economic concessions from bourgeoisie were won by hard class struggle.



socialist revolution tonight, tomorrow all health care would be free. *All* health care—abortions, everything. That’s how easy it is to reform health care. The hard part is having the socialist revolution.

## American Capitalism and the Obama Presidency

The Spartacist League, U.S. section of the International Communist League, opposed Barack Obama when he ran for president. We oppose all *bourgeois* candidates. Moreover, in the case of executive offices—the administrators of the capitalist order, the governors, the mayors, the top cops and the president—we oppose the offices as such. In the past on several occasions we have run for mayor, for example, which is an executive office, expressly stating that we would not take that office if elected. We have since reconsidered the matter, because the very fact of running for executive office carries with it, no matter what you say, the implication that reform is possible within that context. So we no longer run for executive office (see “Down With Executive Offices of the Capitalist State! Marxist Principles and Electoral Tactics,” *Spartacist* [English-language edition] No. 61, Spring 2009).

People voted for Obama hoping that something good would happen after the Bush years. Our opponents on the left, although most of them did not openly call for a vote to Obama, said maybe this guy will open things up for people, somehow. And of course everybody who read their papers knew what that meant.

The reason that we didn’t vote for Obama is not because we liked or disliked the man; that had nothing to do with it. It’s because as communists we understand that the capitalist order is the source and perpetuator of human misery and that the system of private property and the

in that office to reform the capitalist system? Georgi Plekhanov, speaking about the nature of human progress, said in his *The Role of the Individual in History*:

“At the present time we must regard the development of productive forces as the final and most general cause of the historical progress of mankind, and it is these productive forces that determine the consecutive changes in the social relations of men. Parallel with this *general* cause, there are *particular* causes, *i.e., the historical situation* in which the development of the productive forces of a given nation proceeds and which, in the last analysis, is itself created by the development of these forces among other nations, *i.e., the same general cause.*”

The historical situation that we happen to live in has been called by Leon Trotsky the “epoch of imperialist decay” and the “death agony of capitalism.” Capitalism was always accompanied by misery, but it did have its era of progress. In this country that era reached its high point in the Civil War with the victory of the North and the smashing of the slave system of labor, which was in fact a social revolution. With the beginning of the 20th century, the major industrial powers began, in their quest to expand their basis of profits and their rule, to conflict with each other in the process of dividing up the planet. The U.S. entered the imperialist order on the world stage in 1898 against the decaying Spanish empire in the Philippines, Cuba, etc. (the Spanish-American War), while simultaneously re-enthraling black people at home through the legal apparatus of Jim Crow segregation in the South. Of course the legal apparatus of Jim Crow is now gone, but it is reflected in every meaningful social statistic: health, life span, jobs. Although it’s not particularly the subject of this talk, the oppression of blacks is a fundamental feature of American capitalism that the bourgeoisie

offices, in corporate firms, high up in the educational apparatus, in addition to sports and popular entertainment figures. And that’s the stratum that Obama comes from. He gives Booker T. Washington-like lectures to black men to get themselves together and start to behave “responsibly,” and then he sits down to have a brewski with a cop to explain why cops should be “sensitive” when dealing with black intellectuals like Henry Louis Gates Jr. And of course the cop is now the hero of all the U.S. police forces, which praise his lack of sensitivity, because after all these are the repressive forces that are responsible for controlling this capitalist society for the bourgeois rulers. While doing all this, Obama is also the guy putting the hammer to a key segment of

the old black working class, the auto workers, further turning Detroit into a wasteland. This is the domestic face of Obama’s role as Commander-in-Chief of U.S. imperialism.

Let’s look further at the epoch of imperialist decay. To be sure, in the epoch of decay, there are periods of rot and devastation, but there also occurs regrowth. When this “Great Recession” ends, as it someday will, hiring will begin again. Will it be as good? No. The jobs haven’t been as good for a long time. You lose your job, the second job is worse, the third job is worse than that. And will there be as many jobs? Probably not. But there will be an uptick in hiring at some point. So what the epoch of imperialist decay means is not something like *The Picture of Dorian Gray* or *Night of the Living Dead*, but rather that, in aggregate, there is more pain than gain for humanity from the capitalist social system. But social systems don’t just dissipate and go away. Unlike biological organisms, social organisms have to be put to death, primarily through war and revolution. For example, the most powerful and wealthiest of the imperialist powers, the U.S., arrived at its apogee in the aftermath of World War II, which took place in the epoch of imperialist decay.

What has been the price of that ascendancy? Well, there are the almost 100 million dead from two world wars, the devastation of Europe and much of Asia, the savagery at Hiroshima and Nagasaki where essentially a defenseless people were incinerated by atomic weaponry. Since its ascendancy in the aftermath of the war, the United States has been involved in wars or military actions virtually every year. At least another ten million bodies have been added to the graveyards created by the First and Second World Wars, of course in the service of the spread of “democracy,” which is really a gussied-up form of the “white man’s burden.”

History after the world wars gives ample testimony to the fact that the working class had no side in these wars between the major capitalist powers, not even in the so-called “heroic war against fascism.” There was only one side that was appropriate to defend in the Second World War: the Soviet bureaucratically degenerated workers state. Decades later, however, in an historic defeat, the Soviet Union fell to capitalist counterrevolution in 1991-92. The situation today shows an actual historical regression. A false view of Marxism is that it holds that societies always march forward. No, unfortunately great defeats are possible. What we see in Russia and East Europe now is the impact of the inferior, reactionary capitalist social system destroying a social system that, despite the Stalinist bureaucracy’s misrule, had in it the roots of social progress—*i.e., the overthrow of capitalist rule and the institution of the beginnings of working-class forms of production.* We fought against the capitalist counterrevolutions in East Europe and the USSR in 1989-92 and today we defend the remain-

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**For Socialist Revolution in the Bastion of World Imperialism!**

SEE PAGE 2

**Organizational Rules and Guidelines of the Spartacist League/U.S.**

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**Opponents of the Revolutionary Internationalist Workers Movement**

SEE PAGE 37

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ing countries like China, Vietnam, North Korea and Cuba where capitalism has been overthrown. At the same time, we fight for proletarian political revolutions to oust the Stalinist bureaucracies. Worldwide, the greatest impact of the fall of the Soviet Union has been on the consciousness of especially the advanced elements of the working class, who no longer tend to see socialism, even in its reformist variant, as something to be fought for. That is a tremendous setback.

### Recession, Depression and Roosevelt's "New Deal"

I happened to grow up in the heyday of American imperialism. Unfortunately, I now lose my rights as a geezer to tell people "I had it harder than you did." It's simply not true. And so in the last three or four decades of considerable economic decline, we see the erosion of living standards of ordinary people, with occasional huge gouges (for example, the "end of welfare," orchestrated by Bill Clinton); the ratcheting up of attacks on rights (the "war on drugs," the "war against terror"); a goodly percentage of the black population now finds its "housing" in prisons. In general, things look pretty grim for people.

But one might ask, "With all this rot, why are we better off today than we were in the Great Depression?"—which we are, it must be frankly said. Let me go back for a minute to where we started. The presidency since Lincoln has generally been a succession of nonentities. What did Calvin Coolidge do, what did Chester Alan Arthur do, what did Grover Cleveland do, what did Woodrow Wilson do? Nobody did anything, because they operated within the confines of the system, and the office has never been used, nor will it ever be used, to challenge those confines. There's one putative exception: Franklin D. Roosevelt. FDR was known as some combination of Lenin and Satan by the right wing, and as the guy, for the liberals, who really proved that capitalism can be decent. Both because of the similarities between the Great Depression and now, and because of the sainthood of FDR, it's useful to examine this question. I hope to refute it.

There are two major differences in the world now from the time of the Great Depression: first, the 1917 October Revolution was then a beacon for the working class, and, second, the United States was a *growing* industrial country at that time, the strongest in the world. That no longer pertains. Those are important qualifiers.

Let's compare and contrast Obama and FDR a little bit. There are some similarities: the primary act of both was to stabilize the banks, although they did this by different mechanisms. Roosevelt essentially just closed the bad banks. Obama showered money on the bad banks. The net result was the same: the banks sat on money, they did nothing with it. Why? Because the important thing for capitalists is the ability to realize a profit, and that money will not move until then. It doesn't matter how much money Obama prints. Now the other thing that was similar is that the bigger banks ate the smaller ones, the more stable ate the weaker. That happened both times.

During Roosevelt's "First New Deal," he formed the NRA, the National Industrial Recovery Act, which mainly promoted worker-management "cooperation," if you can imagine that, creating very few jobs. The same with the Tennessee Valley Authority and what became the Civilian Conservation Corps—a minuscule number of jobs were created. What the NRA mostly did is set the basis for the formation of company unions. This did not enchant the working class a great deal, so workers for the most part walked away from them, because a company union is not much good when you want to fight the company.

Now let's look at what's called the "Second New Deal"—that's in 1935. The Works Progress Administration hired more people, still a small percentage of those unemployed, but a couple million people. Social Security was initiated, and

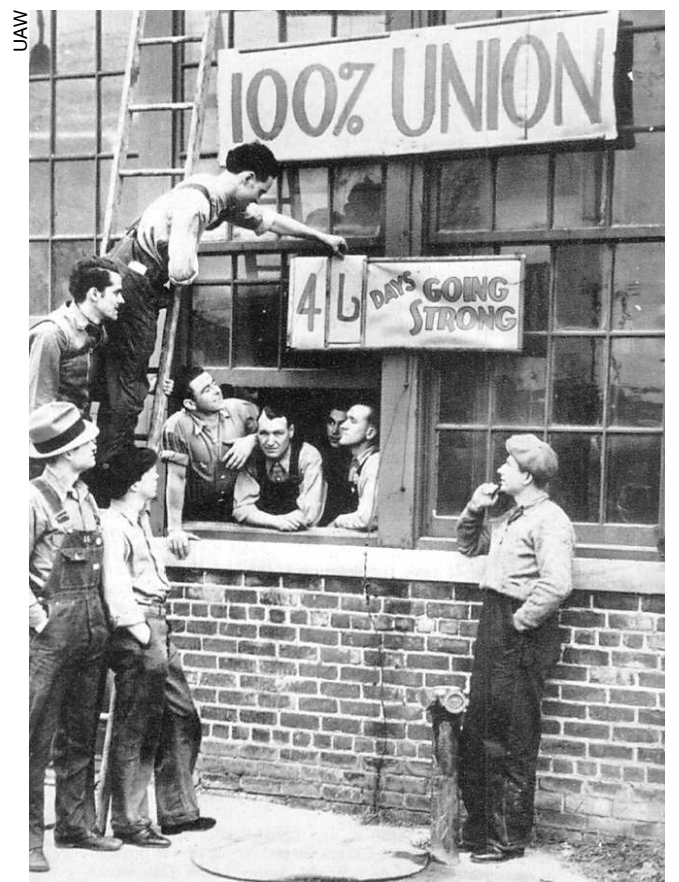
from Social Security came unemployment relief, ADC (welfare), etc. And then to supplant the NRA, which had been declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1935, there was something called the National Labor Relations Act, also known as the Wagner Act, which was passed later in 1935. This was supposedly to allow the workers to organize—if they behaved well and legally under the system of capitalism.

So one should ask the question: does this reflect the fact that the FDR administration—the executive committee of the capitalist rulers—developed a heart? No, it developed the pretense of a heart, and there's a difference. What really extracted these social concessions from the bourgeoisie were the giant strikes of 1934 in Toledo, on the West Coast in long-shore and the Minneapolis trucking strike. Militants began at that time to organize the unemployed as a section of the labor movement. Just to show you FDR's great ambivalence about even the small reforms he initiated, he raised the number of people employed by the government in the Works Progress Administration in 1935, then cut it drastically in 1937 because he thought there was an upturn, and that ushered in another recession. The Great Depression was actually constructed of two recessions—in 1929-33 and 1937-38.

Now, as for the powers of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), the employers ignored the NLRB because they thought that it too would be overturned by the Supreme Court. The workers tended to ignore it too, which was a good thing. In other words, what followed was a strike wave. Let me give you a sense of its proportions. In 1934, there were 1,800 strikes; in 1935, there were 2,000; in 1936, 2,100 strikes; in 1937, during the beginning of the second recession, there were 4,700; in 1938, 2,700; in 1939, 2,600 strikes. Nobody was trotting down to the offices of the NLRB and asking "please." They were out there kicking ass on the streets, and some dying in the process.

The great Flint sit-down strike occurred

**UAW workers occupied GM plants during 1936-37 Flint sit-down strike.**



in 1936-37. Anybody remember the NLRB intervening into that? No, it did not. It might have attempted to, but it had no impact as such. Incidentally, the strike wave beginning in 1935 resulted in a doubling of the trade union movement in five years. So it was quite substantial. These workers were betrayed, however, by the reformists, especially the Stalinist Communist Party, in the service of their ties with the Democrats, and in the service of going into the war on the side of Roosevelt.

There is much talk today about Keynesianism. FDR was not a Keynesian. He was a balanced-budget kind of guy. Government expenditures went up some during the Great Depression, accompanied by tax increases. In other words, the government was going to pay its way, unlike with Obama where you just run the printing press and see what happens. For

Keynesianism, the answer is supposedly to put money into consumers' hands. You do deficit spending. It wasn't until 1939 that the government started on a course toward significant deficit spending, and the reason for that did not have to do with the economy, it had to do with building weapons. Capitalist governments do need Keynesianism for war, unless they have a very fat treasury and unless they are going to show up on the battlefield without any guns, without any planes, without any tanks. So Keynesianism in fact played no role, has never played any role, in that kind of situation as occurred in the Great Depression. Of course what solved the Depression, as we all know, was World War II: automatic improvement to joblessness, since half the working population was sent off to kill and die on the battlefield.

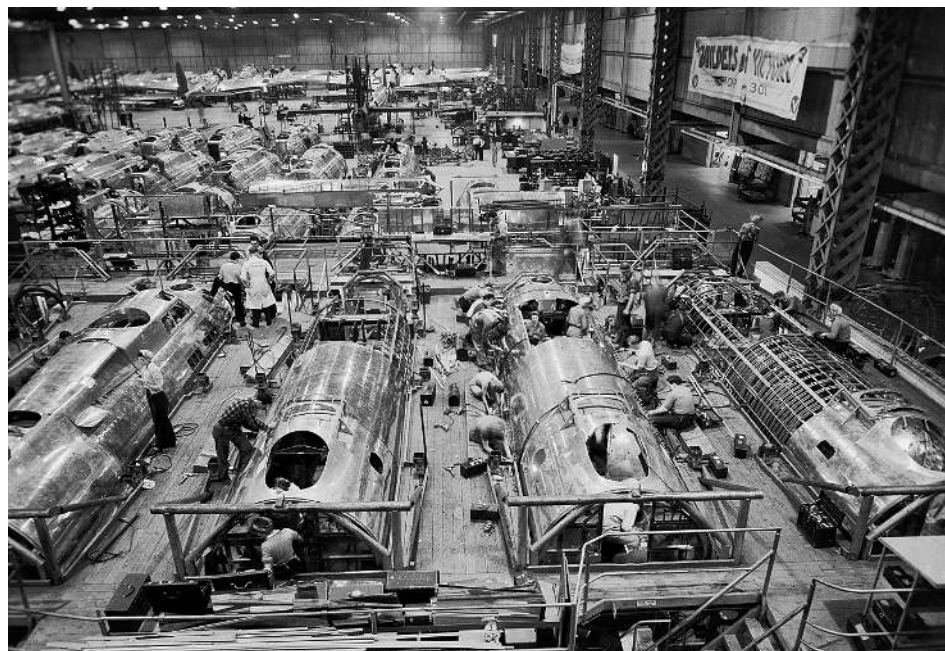
Having said that, Obama has done nothing like even the stinting sort of things that FDR did, except to pay off the banks. Moreover, as far as I can tell, there's no talk of doing anything. But Obama doesn't have the spur of class struggle, like FDR did. On the other hand, we know the limits within which the capitalist system operates.

Going into the Second World War, wages were frozen and the right to strike was taken away, with the complete complicity of the trade-union bureaucracy in support of the government's war plan. People worked throughout the course of the war at Depression-level wages, leading to the giant strike wave at the end of the war in 1946. Obama's policy, insofar as he seems to have one, seems more like right-wing economist Milton Friedman's. It's essentially monetarist, you keep the Federal Reserve interest rate very low, at zero percent. Japan brought its federal bank rate to zero percent starting in the mid 1990s. It didn't stimulate the economy, because, again, capitalism depends on generating profits. If profits aren't available, it's very slow. If there are a lot of profits available, it runs very fast and creates the basis for the next crisis.

Today, money going to the consumer is not apparent, as consumer spending continues to fall because people are losing jobs. Those that have money expect to lose their jobs, so they are not going to give it up quite as easily. Or they expect to lose their health care, or they expect to lose their homes—and their fears have reason.

So, are we materially better off today than we were in the Depression? I would say so, but why? Because Social Security exists, because unemployment insurance exists, because food stamps exist—all those things that were the by-products of the social struggles of the 1930s now exist. They didn't exist until later in the Great Depression, and barely then. You

*continued on page 8*



Office of War Information

**Above: World War II bomber factory. Below: February 1945 firebombing of Dresden by U.S. and Britain slaughtered tens of thousands of German civilians. War production, not New Deal, pulled U.S. out of Great Depression.**



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New Orleans...
(continued from page 4)

non-company union for the first time since 1927. Also, the American Federation of Teachers won a contract. Jefferson Parish (adjacent to New Orleans) attempted to seal off black New Orleans by building a wall at the entrance to the parish. Jefferson Parish is the same suburb that elected David Duke to the state legislature.

At about the same time, the public housing projects became points of sharp contention between the utterly corrupt police force and the black population. The Black Panthers were rooted out in 1970, but resistance to the cops continued. I knew a fireman whose area covered the Desire Projects (maybe the largest public housing project in the U.S.). To go into this area, a fire truck required four cop cars as escort and would still take sniper fire. To get into the projects to meet with the Panthers, the two of us who went in had to be escorted by Panthers. That the bourgeoisie was not going to repopulate the projects after Katrina was not a surprise.



30 August 2005: Desperate families waded through floodwaters on Canal Street the day after Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans.

The first two articles in WV on Katrina were good pieces of propaganda against a racist atrocity. But later pieces, written seven months or so after the hurricane, began to push a line of a proletarian

power center in New Orleans. Such power does exist in other Gulf and South Atlantic ports. I believe that it was the forum that was given by Barry James that appeared in Black History that finally

Capitalism...
(continued from page 7)

can speculate that maybe the more rabid sections of the bourgeoisie could just abolish these, but that’s not quite a political reality. If they did that, the Codgers for a Democratic Society would be rolling the guillotines down Pennsylvania Avenue. You’re not just going to take everything that people have away from them in one fell swoop. But codgers, unfortunately, are not an adequate social force.

For Workers Revolution

I’ve tried to argue that the myth about FDR is just that, a myth. Key events that occurred in the course of his administration were, in an important way, a loss for humanity. The United States’ victory in World War II, its domination of the world, is a loss for humanity, a tremendous blow. And in particular, those things that seem to be benefits, he had nothing directly to do with, except to respond in an effort to buy off and placate the class struggle that was seriously ignited at that time.

What I’ve tried to show is that reforms are the by-product of social struggle, that those reforms are eroded and endangered constantly by the trade-union bureaucracy, which, in its allegiance to capitalism, is willing to make important concessions. In the case of the once very powerful auto workers union, it’s not dead yet, but it has a moribund quality. The trade-union bureaucracy, the labor lieutenants of capital, operates to contain and/or, sometimes simultaneously, betray the class struggle. In this country that is politically expressed through its ties with the Democratic Party, of which it is a significant component. I think at any given Democratic presidential convention, 25-30 percent of the delegates are trade unionists. The Democratic Party is not a workers party,

it’s a bourgeois party. But it must be recognized that there is substantial integration of the tops of the trade-union movement into that party, to the detriment of the unions.

I have also tried to demonstrate that the only way forward for humanity is the smashing of capitalism through working-class social revolution. It might be mentioned, in terms of health care, for example, that only those countries that overthrew capitalist rule—Cuba, the Soviet Union and much of East Europe—provided free health care. It wasn’t highly elegant, but it was available to everybody. (Although in Cuba they do fairly sophisticated things, and they did fairly sophisticated things in the Soviet Union, too.) And because it was available to everybody, you just got people to the doctor and treated them.

Some people ask, what’s going to happen under socialism? Well, of course, some problems are more complex than others, like restocking the industrial base of this economy, which would require some thought and planning. But I promise that, in an American workers state, the housing problem, like the health care crisis, would be quickly over. Is there any question that there are houses out there that people can live in, empty office buildings, etc.? And it’s possible in the short term to provide everybody with a job by just shrinking the number of hours you work. That’s what the Transitional Program, written by Trotsky in 1938, suggests: a manner in which revolutionaries can raise demands, unattainable in their entirety under capitalism, thus leading to the understanding that what is necessary is a revolutionary solution. There is the demand for a sliding scale of wages and hours; for the nationalization of the banks without compensation; the nationalization of important firms, again without compensation; the formation of workers defense

guards. Let me read from the Transitional Program:

“The orientation of the masses is determined first by the objective conditions of decaying capitalism and second by the treacherous politics of the old workers’ organizations. Of these factors, the first of course is the decisive one: the laws of history are stronger than the bureaucratic apparatus.”

So why don’t we just go up and ask Barack Obama to nationalize the banks

socially organized production is, on the other hand, anarchically appropriated by the ruling class. There are those that labor and those that own the products of that labor. This system is inherently volatile, but not predictably so. If you ask me, “When is the class struggle going to be?”, I have to say, “I don’t know.” Nor is there a recipe to engender the class struggle that we Marxists know will occur. But the very conditions that kicked down the work-



Transport Workers Union members rally in New York City against MTA attempts to extract more concessions, October 14.

without compensation? Well, you’d probably be arrested for drug abuse, with some reason to think it true. So let me quote from Trotsky on how one uses this kind of program: “The difference between these demands and the muddleheaded reformist slogan of ‘nationalization’ lies in the following: (1) we reject indemnification; (2) we warn the masses against demagogues of the People’s Front”—in today’s parlance, that means reformists—“who, giving lip service to nationalization, remain in reality agents of capital; (3) we call on the masses to rely only upon their own revolutionary strength; (4) we link up the question of expropriation with that of seizure of power by the workers and farmers.” (Small farmers were a significant element in American society then, which they no longer are.)

What our reformists often do is make one demand that seems possible to them, like the call for nationalization. The problem is, in that context, it is begging. Who are you asking? Do you really think that America’s imperialist rulers are really going to grant these kinds of reforms? Well of course the reformists do, because they think that this system can be reformed.

There is class struggle in the world, incidentally, but not much in the United States, and there hasn’t been much for decades now. But, as Friedrich Engels pointed out, the capitalist order is a system that socially organizes production, on the one hand, but the product of that

ing class, the same conditions that demoralize workers and set them one against the other in a fight to survive—that is, the capitalist mode of production—these same conditions also propel the working class toward unity in battle against its exploiters. As long as capitalism exists, it will generate the conditions that spawn class struggle.

So what should people do today? Well, what we need is the kind of social overturn that I’ve talked about. But it cannot be effected without the forging of a revolutionary Trotskyist party. And it will be necessary for class-conscious workers to drive the trade-union bureaucratic betrayers out of their positions of power in the unions. So what must be done today is to begin to accrue those that have committed to forming a revolutionary workers party. Our reformist opponents have no such commitment. We are unique on the left for that commitment. Because of that, the reformists consider us kind of obnoxious, because we point out that they are opponents of socialist revolution and we show the many ways in which they betray and sell out the struggles of the working class and peddle illusions in capitalism. So, we are looking for people who would aspire to some day carry this little booklet, the Transitional Program, into their plants and factories and to play a role in mobilizing the working class in its historic task of overturning this very savage capitalist order.■

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**SPARTACIST**

NUMBER 61 ENGLISH EDITION SPRING 2009

**Down With Executive Offices of the Capitalist State!**

**Marxist Principles and Electoral Tactics**

Against Apologists for the Treachery of the POUM, Then and Now

**Trotskyism vs. Popular Frontism in the Spanish Civil War**

**Women and Revolution**

**Women Workers and the Contradictions of China Today**

Defend China Against Imperialism, Counterrevolution! For Workers Political Revolution!

G  rard Le M  teil, 1959  2007.....3



## LRP...

(continued from page 5)

didn't do it for you. Support to Hugo Chávez didn't do it for you. Them bragging that they stood on the barricades of Boris Yeltsin in 1991 didn't do it for you, which I think, actually, speaks a lot to where you're coming from."

As does the slogan "all Israel is occupied territory."

For Schwartz and the LRP—people who hate the existing workers states (Cuba, China, North Korea and Vietnam)—calling for a Palestinian "workers state" and a socialist federation of the Middle East is just a way to dress up Palestinian nationalism. Their answer to the conflicting national claims of the Palestinian and Hebrew-speaking peoples is to reverse the terms of oppression, for a single Palestinian "workers" state where the Hebrew-speaking nation would be denied the democratic right to national self-determination. The SYC speaker at their forum pointed out, "It's not the class line, but 'good and progressive' peoples against 'bad, reactionary' ones that determines their line."

In his presentation, Schwartz had thundered that Marx, Lenin and Trotsky stood for self-determination only for oppressed nations, not oppressor nations. Actually, Lenin's aim wasn't to pit nation against nation but to take the national question off the agenda in order to bring the class question to the fore. The SYC speaker at the forum exposed this shameless fabrication:

"Lenin was for the rights of all nations—and if you don't believe me, here's Lenin. This is from 'The Right of Nations to Self-Determination': 'However, we cannot move towards that goal [uniting the workers of all nations] unless we combat all nationalism and uphold the equality of the various nations'."

The LRP responded to our arguments with an outrageous smear, insisting that it was not possible to be for the national rights of both peoples, so we must be in favor of "apartheid or ethnic cleansing" for one or the other. For an organization that claims the Hebrew-speaking nation



doesn't have the right to exist, this takes some chutzpah!

As Marxists, we defend the Palestinian people against the brutal Zionist occupation, which has reduced one of the most cosmopolitan populations in the region to dire poverty and desperation. But the Palestinian and Hebrew-speaking peoples are geographically interpenetrated—both lay claim to the same sliver of land so that, under capitalism, the exercise of national self-determination by one can come only at the expense of the other. The equitable resolution of not only the Palestinian national question, but all of the myriad, conflicting national claims in the region requires the revolutionary overturn of the Zionist state and the existing Arab states in the region, and the establishment of a socialist federation of the Near East.

What is desperately needed is a *class* axis of struggle, not pandering to Arab nationalism, which, like all nationalism, is based on the false unity of the downtrodden and exploited with their "own" exploiters and would-be exploiters. As the SYC comrade proceeded to explain, "The only way to smash the Zionist citadel is from the inside out. And that



Grotesque caption by LRP "Jim Crow socialists": their only complaint about KKK emblem is its position on the flagpole (left). Moscow, August 1991: Confederate flag flown by counter-revolutionaries on Yeltsin's barricades (above). International Marxist Tendency, LRP sided with capitalist counterrevolution in Soviet degenerated workers state.

requires Hebrew-Arab workers struggle within Israel itself."

### Anti-Communism Abroad, Class Collaboration at Home

In the United States, a country founded on the bedrock of black oppression, the LRP's "horse race of peoples" led them into the arms of the racist American ruling class. As a comrade from the Labor Black League for Social Defense noted at the August 18 forum, during the Boston busing crisis in the mid 1970s:

"these 'separate but equal' socialists solidarized with white racists in opposition to busing. The LRP claimed that integration 'means the *subordination* of blacks to the dominant whites' [*Torch*, December 1974]. The LRP stands in opposition to integration and their opposition to busing was a capitulation to both the racists and the black nationalists who despaired of the possibility of integrated struggle uniting black and white workers."

When this rotten position was exposed at the forum the assembled LRPers could do nothing but grumble and cynically ask why we didn't also bring up the picture of the Confederate flag they ran in their paper. Our comrades obliged, holding up the photo from the Winter 1976-77 issue of *Socialist Voice*, which did not have a word of protest against the banner of the Southern slavocracy, but objected only to it being flown below the U.S. flag!

The speaker from the Labor Black League also quoted the LRP's article, "Obama and Racist America." That article poses the question, "Could a Black President Be Bad for Blacks?" and then answers, "It will no doubt be accepted as obvious by most people that the election of Barack Obama as this country's first Black President would mark an historic

victory against racism. In one sense, it would" (*Proletarian Revolution*, Spring 2008). The comrade from the Labor Black League responded, "The election of Obama will do nothing, nothing to change the nature of black oppression in racist, capitalist America."

At the forum, Schwartz openly embraced the LRP's virulent anti-Sovietism, denouncing our defense of the Soviet forces in Afghanistan in the 1980s against the CIA-funded, imperialist-backed *mujahedin*. These must have been welcome words to the smarmy Bolshevik Tendency and their recent "split," Samuel Trachtenberg's one-man "Revolutionary Regroupment," who lauded the presentation while politely suggesting that the Hebrew-speaking people might have the right to exist. The LBL speaker had their number, noting the BT "departed our organization in the '80s because they couldn't stand our unflinching military defense of the USSR during Reagan's Cold War."

As the representative of the Spartacist League stated:

"Yes, we said 'Hail the Red Army in Afghanistan!' We proudly stand on that tradition. That was the only force that was bringing social progress to the Afghan peoples. It meant defense of the southern flank of the Soviet Union against imperialist provocation. And those who opposed that stood on the side of the imperialists. Don't get up here and lecture about the side of the imperialists and the side of the oppressed states. Those who opposed the Soviet intervention stood on the side of the imperialists."

That's where the LRP and Schwartz found one another. We can only conclude, they deserve each other—but who knows if this marriage of convenience will last. ■



Palestinian woman cooks on open fire outside her shack in Gaza, November 2008. Israel's years-long blockade has reduced population to desperation.

## CORRECTIONS

March 3, 2009

Dear *Young Spartacus*,

I noticed an error in Seymour's talk on the black question (WV930) ["Revolutionary Marxists and the Fight for Black Freedom" (13 February)], when he says that "King led a march for 'open housing' into the white Chicago suburb of Cicero." In fact King cancelled the march to appease [Chicago mayor] Daley; it was others like SNCC and CORE who went ahead with it.

Is a correction already in the works? A useful book on this question is *Confronting the Color Line: The Broken Promise of the Civil Rights Movement in Chicago* by Anderson and Pickering.

What Seymour said is actually a

widely held myth, and correcting it would be an opportunity to illustrate how the Democratic Party smothers the fight for black freedom.

Keith

\* \* \*

In "SDS Old & New: From Tepid Liberalism to Radicalism and Back Again" (WV No. 927, 2 January), referring to Trotsky's "For Grynspan: Against Fascist Pogrom Gangs and Stalinist Scoundrels" (February 1939) we described Herschel Grynspan as "a German youth who had assassinated a Nazi." As a reader pointed out, Grynspan was born in Germany to Jewish parents who had immigrated from Poland.

We thank our readers for these corrections.



## Spartacus Youth Club Events

### TORONTO

Wednesday, October 28, 6 p.m.  
**The Russian Revolution: How the Working Class Took Power**

University of Toronto  
Sidney Smith Hall  
Room 1074  
100 St. George Street

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

### VANCOUVER

Thursday, October 29, 6:30 p.m.  
**The Capitalist State: Reform vs. Revolution**

University of British Columbia  
SUB Room 42V

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

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

### BAY AREA

Thursday, November 5, 6:30 p.m.

**The Civil Rights Movement: How Liberals and Reformists Derailed the Struggle for Integration**

San Francisco State University  
Cesar Chavez Student Center  
Rosa Parks E

Information and readings: (510) 839-0851  
sycbayarea@sbcglobal.net

### LOS ANGELES

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

Wednesday, October 28, 6 p.m.  
UCLA, Haines Hall A78

Sunday, November 1, 12 Noon  
3806 Beverly Blvd., Room 215, L.A.  
Information and readings: (213) 380-8239  
slsycla@sbcglobal.net

### NEW YORK CITY

Thursday, October 29, 7:30 p.m.

**State and Revolution**

Hunter College, West Building, Rm. 411  
Information and readings: (212) 267-1025  
nysl@tiac.net

# Syphilitic Chain...

(continued from page 3)

to the 1991 imperialist onslaught against Iraq, Cockburn wagged his finger at those leftists calling for “U.S. Out of the Persian Gulf!” Instead, he argued for “the conversion of the forces confronting Iraq in the region into a genuinely multilateral force—with diminished U.S. presence—under a genuine U.N. command” (*Nation*, 8 October 1990).

At the time, Cockburn and Mackler’s Socialist Action stood together in endorsing an antiwar coalition that promoted UN sanctions against Iraq, which were the prelude to the 1991 war and which continued after it, costing the lives of over one million Iraqis. So Cockburn has something of the Israelis when it played a leading role in the 1980s pro-Democratic Party coalitions protesting U.S. intervention in Central America and in opposition to apartheid South Africa.

In his lengthy reply to Cockburn, Mackler indulges in much pompous wind-baggery about what it takes to “build a united-front-type, democratic, and effective antiwar movement.” With this as his alibi, he essentially pleads guilty to all charges. Mackler concedes that Socialist Action’s opposition to the inclusion of a “demand on Palestine” at the time of the Israeli occupation of Lebanon and the first Palestinian *intifada* was indeed motivated by concern that “labor would walk,” i.e., that it would offend the labor bureaucrats who toe the line of the rabid pro-Zionism of the Democratic Party. Now, he pontificates that if the October 17 Antiwar Coalition had “pressed forward” with the protest against Pelosi “we would have also risked the formal support of the S.F. Labor Council” (which subsequently was secured). Opining that “labor’s political break with the class enemy is not on the agenda today,” Mackler declares that it is “eminently more reasonable to approach the organized labor movement

patiently and with due care.” This is all a long way of saying that selling out to the trade-union bureaucracy and the Democratic Party is what “building the movement” is all about. And Mackler is a practiced hand.

Mackler contests Cockburn’s charge that Socialist Action tried to bully a woman of Lebanese descent to prevent her from raising the defense of the Palestinians at a 1980s coalition meeting in a packed union hall. We don’t know about that. But we can testify that thuggery has long been wielded by Mackler and much of the reformist left to silence any opponents of their grotesque class collaborationism. During the Vietnam War, when he was a member of the ex-Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party (SWP), Mackler was a leader of the National Peace Action Coalition (NPAC). While the best of the youth radicalized by the struggle against the Vietnam War stood for the military victory of the National Liberation Front/Democratic Republic of Vietnam, NPAC was busy sealing an alliance with the defeatist wing of the American bourgeoisie, which sought to cut U.S. imperialism’s losses in its dirty, losing war in Indochina. This alliance was sealed with the blood of leftists. At a July 1971 NPAC conference, SWP goons viciously attacked members of the Spartacist League and Progressive Labor-SDS who protested against Democratic Party Senator Vance Hartke, a keynote speaker at that conference (where he appeared side by side with “progressive” labor bureaucrat Victor Reuther).

After emerging from the SWP in the early 1980s, one of Socialist Action’s first political acts was to serve as goons for the SF labor bureaucrats at a solidarity rally with the 1983 Greyhound strike. After listening to over an hour of empty speeches by the bureaucrats, a couple of thousand militant workers took to the streets and headed to the Greyhound terminal, where they stopped scab buses from running. At a rally a week later, when militant workers again defied the sellout bureaucrats and set up picket lines at the terminal, they were met with a line of bureaucrats and “socialist” goons, including Mackler.

At its debut public meeting in the Bay Area, Mackler boasted of Socialist Action’s role in organizing a “workers defense guard” so that “the crazies wouldn’t run the demonstration,” specifically pointing to the “spectacle of a tiny sect of 20 people leading the chants to workers of



Stone/SF Examiner  
**Nat Weinstein, a former Socialist Action leader, at 1981 rally for counter-revolutionary Polish Solidarność.**

2,000.” It was left to none other than Steve Zeltzer—today Mackler’s nemesis for putting forward the nefarious motion calling for a protest against Pelosi—to point to supporters of the Spartacist League in the audience. Mackler congratulated him for identifying the “culprits.”

We happily plead guilty to having played a role in militant labor action when workers picked up our chants of “Picket lines mean don’t cross!” as they surged toward the Greyhound terminal. Out of such struggles we seek to arm the working class with a conscious understanding of its social power and historic interest to wage a political confrontation with the capitalist class enemy. Mackler’s role as a goon against class struggle was, at the time, matched in Socialist Action’s avid promotion of the CIA-bankrolled “union” in Poland, Solidarność, whose aim was the counterrevolutionary overthrow of the gains of the Polish deformed workers state.

As for Steve Zeltzer, as coincidence would have it he now promotes the so-called “Transport Workers Solidarity Committee,” which has little to do with militant labor action and everything to do with providing a platform for Heyman and other labor fakers to posture as “militants.” But when the rubber hits the road to the Democratic Party, long paved by the labor bureaucracy, it’s a different

the “war on drugs,” whose real targets are combative workers and left organizations—in the face of the devastating effects of the international economic crisis. According to the bosses, we should “all” tighten our belts. Indeed, the nature of capitalism dictates that the workers and peasants around the world must pay the price of the economic crises. It is necessary to destroy this system and replace it through socialist revolution and its international extension (especially to the U.S.), with an internationally collectivized and planned economy centered on the pursuit of satisfying the needs of the population.

The government plans to use workers from the Federal Electricity Commission (CFE), organized by the SUTERM union [a corporatist union which organizes electrical workers nationally], to operate LFC. For decades, SUTERM’s venal corporatist bureaucracy has acted in cahoots with the bourgeois government and has adapted to the exploitative “productivity” ideal that the bosses want to impose on what was until yesterday the LFC. **SUTERM workers: Don’t be scabs for Calderón—don’t replace SME workers!**

To fight effectively against this attack, it is necessary to combat the widespread illusions in the bourgeois populism of AMLO [former presidential candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador], the PRD, and its appendage, the PT [Labor Party], all representatives of the class enemy who today pose as “allies” of the SME. The proletariat has unique class interests and enormous social power based on its role in the productive process; this means it is

story. While Heyman’s original motion calling for the May Day port shutdown called for “an immediate end to the war and occupation in Iraq and Afghanistan and the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the Middle East,” these demands never saw the light of day. Instead, Heyman not only provided left cover for the red-white-and-blue patriotism of the ILWU International but also himself chimed in with his own appeal that “we want the troops home.”

This social-patriotic call has long been a central rallying cry of the so-called “antiwar movement.” But while the sons and daughters of the working class are used as cannon fodder for the military adventures of U.S. imperialism, these aren’t our troops. They are the armed forces for the bloody wars and occupations of U.S. imperialism abroad and the violent suppression of the working class, blacks, immigrants and all of the oppressed “at home.” The side of the working class and all genuine opponents of U.S. imperialism is in defense of the peoples of Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan *against* the occupiers and their allies and *for* class struggle against the capitalist rulers at home.

Mackler proclaims that the purpose of the October 17 Antiwar Coalition is to build “a massive and successful challenge to the ongoing and expanding U.S. imperialist wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan....” In fact, the opposite is true. Far from fighting war, their kowtowing to the labor bureaucracy and the Democratic Party actually promotes war, because it cements the ties that bind the working class to the continued rule of U.S. imperialism.

The only program to end war is the revolutionary struggle to get rid of this decaying system. Imperialist war is the necessary outgrowth of the drive between competing capitalist powers to increase their profits through capturing foreign markets and raw materials around the globe. Our purpose is to build a workers party to give a conscious class-struggle leadership to struggles against U.S. imperialism and its bloody depredations against the peoples of the world and the working class and oppressed at home. Grounded in a program of revolutionary internationalism, such a party will fight not only for the immediate interests of the working class but also for its liberation, and the emancipation of all of humanity, from capitalist class rule, by bringing to power the socialist rule of the multiracial proletariat. ■

# Mexico...

(continued from page 12)

liquidation of the state-run Central Light and Power Company (LFC), throwing its more than 40,000 workers into the streets (with more than 20,000 retirees left in uncertainty). Last night, thousands of Federal Police and military personnel occupied the company’s installations as a preventive measure against the powerful Mexican Union of Electrical Workers (SME). The government is attempting to destroy the SME, one of the oldest unions with the most combative reputation in

the country. Previously, the government had refused to recognize the elected union leadership by denying it the anti-worker “*toma de nota*” [procedure by which the government validates the election of new union officials] and had frozen the union’s assets. ***Bourgeois state: Hands off workers organizations!***

Justified in the name of increasing productivity and against “operational and financial inefficiency,” this attack will mean the elimination of labor gains obtained through decades of struggle by SME workers, and it will deal harsh blows to the already impoverished population in the center of the country through the eventual elimination of subsidies to the vital service of electric energy. The disappearance of LFC is a step toward privatizing the electric industry through the elimination of the main obstacle, the SME. Privatization would open the road to unbridled exploitation and would mean even greater subordination of the Mexican economy to imperialism. ***This new onslaught by the bosses is a savage attack against the workers movement and against all the poor. Defend the SME! Mobilize the social power of the working class—for labor strikes in solidarity with the SME! Down with the privatization of the energy sector!***

In going after a nerve center of the workers movement, this attack furthermore has the purpose of demoralizing and atomizing the working class as a whole. The victory of this onslaught would embolden the bourgeoisie in its reinforcement, already under way, of the repressive state apparatus—under the guise of

called upon to play the leading role in championing the aspirations of all the poor and oppressed through its own emancipation and the establishment of a workers and peasants government. The working class does not lack the will to fight; but as long as it remains dominated by the politics of bourgeois nationalist populism, it will be derailed towards illusions in the democratic reform of capitalism. The purpose of AMLO and his PRD is to perpetuate this system of exploitation and oppression.

We reject the petty-bourgeois prejudices according to which defense of unions depends on the politics of their leadership—like those who refused to defend the pro-PRI [Institutional Revolutionary Party] miners union against the attacks of the PAN. Genuine Trotskyists defend all workers organizations against the state. As we wrote in March 2006 in defense of the miners union [reprinted in WV No. 869, 28 April 2006]:

“Class-struggle defense of the unions requires a fight for their complete and unconditional independence from the bourgeoisie and its state—the prerequisite to achieving trade-union democracy and to transforming the unions into organs of struggle for the interests of the great exploited masses. This means breaking with all illusions in the bosses’ parties—PRI, PRD, PAN. This means a fight to build a revolutionary workers party to smash the profit-driven, murderous system of capitalism and replace it with the rule of the working class through international socialist revolution. That is the purpose of the Grupo Espartaquista de México, section of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist).” ■

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**Karl Marx tenía razón**  
**Crisis económica capitalista:**  
**Los patrones obligan**  
**a los obreros a pagar**

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(continued from page 12)

and barred from participating in Spain's "democratic" elections.

The European Court of Human Rights recently granted its official support to these police-state measures, characterizing them as a “vital social need,” which is “necessary in a democracy” (*El País*, 1 July). It could not be clearer that capitalist democracy is nothing but a convenient parliamentary fig leaf for the dictatorship of the capitalist class over the workers and oppressed. “Human rights” means the right of the capitalist class to exploit the working class and send its cops against those they deem dangerous for their rule. Against the crackdown by the Spanish and French capitalist states, the workers movement must oppose the banning of nationalist organizations and struggle for the right of self-determination for the Basque people. This is the only antidote to the chauvinist poison dividing the working class between Basques and non-Basques, a split the Spanish bourgeoisie needs in order to continue to impose its system of capitalist oppression.

Following the recent arrests, the Spanish top cop, the social democrat Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba, came to Paris on August 26 to meet Brice Hortefeux, the new French minister of police, to celebrate the collaboration between the police forces of the two countries. This collaboration was sealed in blood in the 1980s, under the social-democratic governments of François Mitterrand in France and Felipe González in Spain, with the setting up of the GAL [Grupos Antiterroristas de Liberación, Anti-Terrorist Liberation Groups] death squads. At least 27 alleged Basque nationalists were murdered by the GAL. Since then, this collaboration has continued to flourish, including a decade ago under the government of the Socialists Lionel Jospin and Jean-Luc Mélenchon and the Communist Marie-George Buffet. Today the repression targets not only Basque nationalists but also undocumented workers from Africa who risked their lives to reach Spain and the rest of Europe. Measures are increasingly being adopted to deport immigrant workers, including those who have become legal residents. We demand, in Spain as well as in France: *Full citizenship rights for all immigrants! Down with the deportations!*

At the August 26 police summit, Rubalcaba particularly insisted that the persecution of the ETA is the “most important problem in Spain at this time” (see the video of his press conference at [www.interieur.gouv.fr](http://www.interieur.gouv.fr)). This is taking place as the economic crisis devastates Spain even more than most other European countries. Officially, there are nearly four million unemployed in Spain, one fifth of the labor force. Rubalcaba’s declaration is an example of how the Spanish bourgeoisie uses repression against the Basque people to scapegoat the Basques for the capitalist crisis and prevent any proletarian mobilization against the massive layoffs and the evictions of many

heavily indebted families from their homes. It is a classic example of the divide-and-rule policies of the bourgeoisie. In Spain, as well as on the other side of the Pyrenees [mountains dividing Spain from France], it is necessary, in order to achieve the revolutionary unity of the proletariat, that the labor movement mobilize in defense of the Basque people and defend its *right to self-determination, including the right to independence from Spain and/or France*. However, the reformist left in Spain, which is totally dedicated to the defense of the interests of its own capitalist ruling class, is now openly or implicitly on the side of its own bourgeoisie

both sides of the Pyrenees. As Marxist-Leninists, we are opposed to the petty-bourgeois strategy of individual terrorism in the fight against capitalist oppression. Our starting point is the historical interests of the proletariat, which under capitalism, because of its relationship to the means of production, is the only class having the social power to overthrow the capitalist system. Nevertheless, when the oppressed act against the bourgeoisie and its state, we defend them against capitalist repression.

The labor movement must defend the Basque nationalists against repression, while opposing their ideology. With its



and the social-democratic government against the Basque nationalists.

When the ETA criminally plants bombs in restaurants and other tourist spots, it potentially targets everybody. (Tourism is a cornerstone of the country's economy and provides a significant portion of jobs.) On 30 December 2006, at the Madrid airport, two young immigrants from Ecuador were killed during an attack for which the ETA claimed responsibility. By unleashing violence between peoples, the ETA fuels the nationalist fears and hatreds on all sides and helps the Spanish reformists unite the non-Basque working class behind the Spanish bourgeoisie. The Basque nationalists simply want a separate Basque national state, free from the Spanish and French oppressors—a *bourgeois state* that defends the specific interests of the Basque bourgeoisie abroad—and in the Basque region itself, against the workers, whether Basque or of non-Basque origin.

The kidnapping and execution of cops, bourgeois politicians and capitalist bosses are not crimes against the working class, but are futile actions flowing from the nationalist perspective of the ETA. They are counterposed to the strategy of mobilizing the oppressed masses (in particular, the Spanish and Catalan masses) and to the perspective of socialist revolution on

crackdown in the Basque country, the bourgeoisie aims to divide the entire multi-ethnic workers movement. In a region where polarization along nationalist lines can mobilize tens of thousands of people in demonstrations either for or against Basque national rights, the struggle by the proletarian vanguard must include an active fight against national oppression. Without this crucial element, the historical power of nationalist ideology, the tremendous weight of brutal national oppression and the social-chauvinism of the French and Spanish left combine to push Basque workers into the arms of the Basque nationalists, who are currently the main force in the unions in the region (see our article on the Basque question in *Le Bolchévique* No. 146, Summer 1998).

The French reformist left considers, first of all, that the Basque question is an exclusively Spanish problem. The left thereby implicitly defends the unity and indivisibility of the French capitalist republic—despite the fact that, in the European Union elections a few months ago, some 10,000 votes went to the nationalist

slates in the Pyrénées-Atlantiques [the region that includes the French Basque country]. Lutte Ouvrière (LO) equates the terror carried out by the social democratic-led capitalist government in Spain with attacks by the ETA: “The policy of the ETA, which in fact considers all Spaniards, including workers, as enemies, is obviously criminal. But they are not the only ones sowing confusion within the Spanish working class. The Spanish left, whose sole ambition is to form a government to manage the interests of the bourgeoisie and which continues to align itself with a right wing still strongly influenced by Francoism, leads to the same consequences” (*Lutte de Classe*, April 2007). The reformists of LO are well known for capitulating to the “antiterrorist” campaigns of the bourgeoisie, particularly in their refusal to oppose Vigipirate, the racist police mobilization in French train stations and airports.

As for the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (New Anti-Capitalist Party, NPA) of Olivier Besancenot and Alain Krivine, to our knowledge it has yet to take a position on the Basque question. Its previous incarnation, the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR), published an article in *Rouge* (1 February 2007) stating: “The other Basque left groups must convince the abertzale [nationalist] left that the ETA must lay down its arms, not because the Spanish state demands it as a condition for resuming talks, but because this is indispensable to building a democratic alliance for national self-determination, which is the only thing that will allow a transformation of today’s majority sentiment of the Basque society into a mobilization of the citizenry.” In fact, even though they occasionally demand freedom for some Basque activists, they want to disarm the Basque activists in the name of capitalist “democracy,” which is the oppressor of the Basques. Thirty-six years ago, Krivine’s Spanish comrades liquidated their organization in the Basque region into a branch of Basque nationalism, which originated in the political orbit of the ETA. Today, they capitulate directly to the post-Francoist Spanish capitalist state.

The workers struggles of the 1930s and 1970s in Spain showed that the solution to the national question in Spain is inextricably linked to the struggle for workers power throughout the peninsula. We fight to build a Leninist proletarian vanguard party which would defend the right of self-determination of the Basques, on both sides of the Pyrenees. Only such a party will be able to unite Basques and Catalans with the workers throughout Spain and, beyond the Pyrenees, France in a common struggle for workers revolution, which in Spain will sweep away the legacy of Francoism by overthrowing the Spanish bourgeoisie, including its Basque and Catalan components, and establishing a workers government. *Down with the witch-hunt against the Basque nationalists! For Trotskyist parties in Spain and France, part of a reformed Fourth International!* ■

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# WORKERS VANGUARD

## Mexico: Federal Police Occupy Power Plants

# Defend SME Electrical Workers Union!



Reuters photos

**Left: Federal police and military occupy LFC power plant in Mexico City, October 11, in government drive to destroy SME union. Right: Hundreds of thousands protest in Mexico City against closure of plant, October 15.**

OCTOBER 19—Hundreds of thousands marched in Mexico City on October 15 in defense of the SME electrical workers union, all of whose members were left jobless on October 10 when the government dissolved the state-owned company where they had worked. In addition to the numerous contingents of electrical workers in what was one of the largest mobilizations in the union's history, there were contingents from many other unionized workforces, including miners and metal workers, flight attendants and pilots, transit and health care workers, and the UNT union federation.

## Statement of the Grupo Espartaquista de México

The electrical workers were also joined by large student contingents from the main national public university, UNAM, and affiliated high schools, as well as peasant and social organizations and thousands of others. Opposing the privatization of the electric energy industry, protesters demanded that the government decree be reversed and that the workers be given their jobs back. At the rear of the march was a contingent led by

López Obrador (known as AMLO) and his followers, including from the bourgeois-populist Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), who, due to the massive attendance, were able to get to the Zócalo (central square) only after the rally had ended.

It is vital for the multiracial U.S. working class to stand in solidarity with their class brothers and sisters in Mexico. We reprint below an October 11 statement

by the Grupo Espartaquista de México, section of the International Communist League, titled "Liquidation of LFC—Brutal Privatizing Attack: Defend the SME! Mobilize the Power of the Working Class! Federal Police Out of LFC! Break with AMLO and the PRD! Forge a Workers Party!"

\* \* \*

The PAN [National Action Party] federal government of Felipe Calderón has launched the most brutal anti-worker attack of recent decades through the

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## For the Right of Self-Determination for the Basque People!

# Free ETA Basque Nationalists Now!

## France, Spain

We print below an article translated from *Le Bolchévik* No. 189 (September 2009), newspaper of the *Ligue Trotskyste de France*, section of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist).

### LE BOLCHEVIK

PARIS, September 2—On August 19, Alberto Machain Beraza, Beraza Aitzol Etxaburu and Andoni Sarasola were arrested in Savoie [France] during a joint raid by French and Spanish cops. All three are suspected of belonging to the Basque pro-independence group Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (Basque Homeland and Freedom, ETA) and of having provided it with weapons and explosives. Currently, 172 people are imprisoned in France as part of the crackdown on the Basque nationalist movement (*Le Figaro*, 1 Sep-

tember). The French government boasts of having, so far this year, handed over 15 other Basque nationalists to the Spanish police under [Prime Minister] José Luis Zapatero's social-democratic government; they join the hundreds of political prisoners who are today rotting in Spanish jails. According to the Basque nationalist newspaper *Gara* (25 March 2008), in February 2008 there were 739 Basque nationalist prisoners in France and Spain, out of a population of some two million Basques [in both countries]. Such a high number has not been seen since 1969, during the dark years of Franco's Spain. **We demand: Free all the Basque nationalist activists now! Drop the charges against them!**

These arrests take place only a few weeks after several bomb attacks, notably against barracks of the Spanish Guardia Civil in which two guards were killed; there were also attacks against the headquarters of the Socialist Party in Durango and tourist spots in Majorca, in which nobody was hurt. These attacks show that, contrary to claims by the French and Spanish cops, the ETA, which has been in



AP

**Arrasate, Basque region, Spain: Riot police confront protesters supporting ETA prisoners, September 25.**

existence for 50 years, is far from having been dismantled. The nationalist movement is fighting increasingly harsh national oppression. The political organization Batasuna, which is considered the

ETA's political arm, has been banned throughout Europe, and any organization suspected of being related to it, or simply not hostile to it, is regularly banned

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