

Reformists Beg Imperialist Warmakers for Peace

Obama's Bloody Afghanistan Offensive



Reuters



AP

Left: U.S., Afghan soldiers during attack on Marja, February 17. Right: Victims of Obama's Afghan offensive in Helmand Province hospital.

Having announced late last year that he was ratcheting up the number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan to nearly 100,000, President Barack Obama last month launched the largest military operation since the U.S. and NATO forces invaded that country in 2001. On February 13, thousands of troops attacked rural Marja in Taliban-controlled southern Afghanistan. This was the first stage of a wider military offensive aimed at seizing control of Kandahar, the country's second-largest city.

Washington offered cynical promises that the civilian population would be spared during this offensive. But bloody atrocities directed against civilians are inherent in all imperialist occupations because the occupiers view every local resident as a potential insurgent. Indeed, on the second day of the assault in Marja, U.S. troops fired missiles into a family's home, killing 12 people, half of them children. On February 21, in the deadliest single U.S./NATO attack on civilians in six months, three minibuses were blown away in an air strike, killing 27.

Parallel with Obama's surge in Afghanistan, the White House is expanding the CIA's program of using unmanned drone aircraft to launch missile attacks against Taliban fighters in Pakistan, where the government, under U.S. pressure, has launched offensives against Taliban forces in the northwest region bordering Afghanistan. Already, in the first year of Obama's administration, the U.S. carried out more drone strikes in Pakistan than in the previous three years under Bush. More than

U.S. Out of Afghanistan, Iraq! Hands Off Pakistan, Iran!

700 Pakistanis were killed in these attacks last year alone. Meanwhile, the Pentagon reportedly plans to reinforce the more than 100 U.S. special operations forces currently in Pakistan.

The U.S. military is also stepping up operations in the strategically important Horn of Africa and Gulf of Aden region. Along with escalating drone strikes against suspected Al Qaeda fighters in Yemen, in December Obama approved a series of operations by U.S. commandos together with Yemeni troops that have killed scores of people. In Somalia, the U.S. is reportedly providing training, funds and logistical support for a planned offensive by what passes as the local government, backed up by African Union "peacekeepers," against clan-based Islamic fundamentalist militias that control much of the country.

The Obama administration has also expanded Bush's efforts to force Tehran to rein in its nuclear program. Iran, which claims that it does not aim to develop nuclear weapons, is now subject to a

barrage of UN and U.S. sanctions. We oppose these sanctions, which are acts of war. In Saudi Arabia last month, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton lectured Iran's rulers that they "do not have a right" to "pursue nuclear weapons." In fact, given the threats by the U.S. imperialists as well as their Israeli clients, it would be perfectly reasonable for Iran to pursue acquisition of nuclear weapons and adequate delivery systems to deter military attack.

Wars of conquest and occupation are integral to the capitalist-imperialist system, as is demonstrated by the entire history of U.S. imperialism from the Philippines at the dawn of the 20th century to Iraq and Afghanistan today. At home, the capitalist rulers who have looted the economy rake in hundreds of billions in government bailout money while the working class and poor are driven into deeper deprivation, homelessness and misery. The unemployment rate for black workers in Michigan is projected to soon surpass 25 percent—the rate of total unemployment in the depths of the 1930s Great Depres-

sion. The only way out of this system predicated on exploitation, racist oppression and war is socialist revolution: the seizure of power by the proletariat and the building of a workers state that will expropriate capitalist property and institute a planned economy based on production for social need.

In the face of the 2001 and 2003 invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the Spartacist League stood for the military defense of those countries against imperialist attack without giving any political support to the reactionary Taliban cutthroats or the bloody capitalist dictatorship of Saddam Hussein. We raised the call for class struggle at home against the U.S. capitalist rulers. We underlined that every victory for the imperialists in their military adventures encourages more predatory wars while every setback serves to assist the struggles of working people and the oppressed the world over. Today we continue to call for the immediate withdrawal of all imperialist troops and bases from Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asia.

In contrast, for years the reformist left built an "antiwar movement" premised on the illusion that the blood-soaked capitalist rulers could be pressured to make peace and serve human needs, exemplified by timeworn demands for money for schools/jobs/health care, not war. As intended, the

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effect of rallying against “Bush’s war” was to promote the electoral fortunes of the Democratic Party—the other party of U.S. imperialism. As the Democrats retook Congress in 2006 and especially as Obama’s presidential campaign took off, the protests withered. Upon Obama’s election as president, the International Socialist Organization (ISO) held a victory party and Workers World Party (WWP) declared its “joy”: Mission accomplished.

Obama’s election has, also as intended, given a facelift to U.S. imperialism. But with U.S.-led forces sinking deeper into the Afghan quagmire, Obama’s attempt to persuade Washington’s NATO allies to commit additional troops is largely falling flat. While Germany agreed to up its troop levels, France balked at the request. And the Dutch coalition government fell when its Labor Party component refused Washington’s request to extend that country’s military presence in Afghanistan for another year. The *New York Times* (25 Feb-

ruary) editorialized: “We fear the Dutch decision could provide cover for wavering politicians elsewhere—Germany, for example, or Canada, which is now scheduled to pull out its troops at the end of 2011.”

At home, with most of the population opposing Obama’s war in Afghanistan and reeling from the effects of the Great Recession, the liberal-reformist left is beset by dread that Republicans are about to regain control of Congress and, even, the White House two years later. The liberal *Nation* (12 February) spelled it out most clearly: “As for the surge in Afghanistan and the endless war that goes with it, by election time 2010 it’s an even bet that it will have further undermined any hopes of a late-inning Democratic Party revival.”

The ISO chimes in, more in sorrow than in anger: “Having given the Democrats a huge opportunity to move the country away from the right-wing Republican dominance of the Bush-Cheney years, voters are now not sure they want to return the Democrats to power in the 2010 elections” (“How the Democrats Blew It,” *Socialist Worker*, 29 January). For his part, WWP leader Larry Holmes bemoans Obama’s

“thankless job—and some people consider it a setup—of presiding over this political period” (*Workers World*, 18 February).

The reformists’ current task is to reenergize a “movement”—any movement—to put some wind back in the Democrats’ sails. Thus the message on offer from the annual March “antiwar” exercise staged by the ANSWER coalition, an outfit founded by WWP and now controlled by the Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL): Obama, the Wall Street Democrat, must start listening to his “progressive” supporters, too. After all, according to a 13 December 2009 posting by the PSL on its Web site, Obama is in the middle of a delicate “balancing act between the interests of imperialism, on one hand, and the growing opposition around the world against imperialism on the other.”

Baldly expressing the disappointment felt by the President’s reformist fan club, the ISO wrote in “The Year of Frustrated Hopes”: “Obama had the opportunity to change the direction of U.S. politics and society—and the popularity to accomplish it” (*Socialist Worker*, 29 January). Here is a crystal-clear example of what Bolshevik leader V.I. Lenin described in “Marxism and Reformism” (September 1913): “Reformism actually means abandoning Marxism and replacing it by bourgeois ‘social policy’.” As exemplified by Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal coalition in the 1930s, the pro-capitalist labor

bureaucracy and reformist left have long sought to influence “bourgeois policy” by means of pressuring the Democratic Party, deceptively offered as the friend of labor, blacks and the poor.

In the midst of the popular euphoria over Obama’s inauguration, we reaffirmed the need to fight to break the political chains binding the proletariat and the oppressed to the capitalists. As we wrote in “Barack Obama Takes Helm of Racist U.S. Imperialism” (WV No. 929, 30 January 2009):

“There is no ‘common ground’ between imperialist president Barack Obama, representative of the capitalist system, which is based on the exploitation of labor, and the working class, including its growing immigrant sector and its strategic black component. Labor desperately needs a fighting leadership to unleash the power of the multiracial working class in struggle for workers’ economic interests and for black rights, to organize the unorganized, to demand full citizenship rights for immigrants, and to oppose U.S. imperialism....

“We fight for a workers party with a revolutionary internationalist program aimed at the liberation of the proletariat and all the oppressed. As opposed to the Obama-enthralled reformist opponents, our revolutionary continuity extends from the Bolsheviks of Lenin and Trotsky, who led the 1917 October Revolution. Our watchwords are those of these revolutionary antecedents: for a proletarian, revolutionary and internationalist party to lead the struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat and all the oppressed masses. For new October Revolutions!” ■



Socialism and Women’s Liberation

In *Woman and Socialism*, the first full-length Marxist study of women’s oppression, early German Marxist leader August Bebel stressed that the struggle for women’s emancipation is strategic to the fight for socialism. Women’s oppression is rooted in the institution of the family, a core element of class society that arose with the advent of private property, as Friedrich Engels would further develop in his work *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*

TROTSKY

(1884). As Bebel outlined, complete social equality can be realized only with the abolition of classes in a world socialist society.

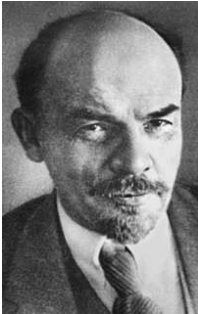
For thousands of years human society has passed thru all phases of development, only to return to its starting point: communistic property and complete liberty and fraternity; but no longer only for the members of the gens, *but for all human beings*. That is what the great progress consists of. What bourgeois society has striven for in vain, in what it failed and was bound to fail,—to establish liberty, equality and fraternity for all,—will be realized by Socialism. Bourgeois society could merely advance the theory, but here, as in many other things, practice was contrary to the theories. Socialism will unite theory and practice.

But as mankind returns to the starting point of its development, it will do so on an infinitely higher level of civilization. If primitive society had common ownership in the gens and the clan, it was but in a coarse form and an undeveloped stage. The course of development that man has since undergone, has reduced common property to small and insignificant remnants, has shattered the gens and has finally atomized society; but in its various phases it has also greatly heightened the productive forces of society and the extensiveness of its demands; it has transformed the gentes and the tribes into nations, and has thereby again created a condition that is in glaring contradiction to the requirements of society. It is the task of the future to remove this contradiction by re-establishing the common ownership of property and the means of production on the broadest basis.

Society takes back what it has at one time possessed and has itself created, but it enables all to live in accordance with the newly created conditions of life on *the highest level of civilization*. In other words, *it grants to all what under more primitive conditions has been the privilege of single individuals or classes*. Now *woman*, too, is restored to the active position maintained by her in primitive society; only she no longer is mistress, but man’s equal....

The complete emancipation of woman, and her establishment of equal rights with man is one of the aims of our cultured development, whose realization no power on earth can prevent. But it can be accomplished only by means of a transformation that will abolish the rule of man over man, including the rule of the capitalist over the laborer. Then only can humanity attain its fullest development. The “golden age” of which men have been dreaming, and for which they have been yearning for thousands of years, will come at last. *Class rule will forever be at an end, and with it the rule of man over woman*.

—August Bebel, *Woman and Socialism* (1879)



LENIN

Letter Feds’ Detroit “Terror” Kill

17 February 2010

Dear Workers Vanguard,

The so-called War on Terror took a sinister turn in the Detroit area on October 28, 2009 with the execution style killing of Imam Luqman Ameen Abdullah, leader of the Masjid Al-Haqq mosque, by agents of the FBI.

According to the FBI, a federal complaint was filed identifying Imam Abdullah as “a highly placed leader of a nationwide radical fundamentalist Sunni group”. The affidavit continues “Abdullah and his followers have trained regularly in the use of firearms, and continue to train in martial arts and sword fighting”. Nowhere in the complaint was the word terrorist, nor did the FBI seek any terrorism charges.

The mosque served the heavily Arab-American community along the Detroit/Dearborn border. Countering the FBI complaint, Dawud Walid, executive director of The Council on American-Islamic Relations-Michigan said: “the congregation he led was poor. He fed very hungry people in the neighborhood who were Christian. He helped and assisted a lot of troubled youth. People would come to him who were hungry and he would let them sleep in the mosque. He would let them in from the elements. They have no

linkage to terrorism nationally or internationally. What in the world does Islam have to do with these charges?” (Detroit News, 29 October 2009).

The War on Terror only serves as a pretense for the capitalist rulers to attack and intimidate the “unwanted population at home” and apparently just being of Muslim faith is enough to trigger a murderous assault.

While working in a warehouse and trucking firm the mosque uses for various services and storage, Imam Abdullah and several of his followers were surrounded by FBI agents and local police from the Joint Terrorism Task Force. According to various accounts, the Imam and his followers were ordered out of the warehouse. Four men were allowed to surrender, but the task force unleashed a dog to charge the Imam who shot at it to defend himself. Under the pretext that the Imam shot at the federal agents (the dog was considered the FBI agent) the remaining agents opened fire. The autopsy, which was held up for months because the Dearborn Police feared it would incite the community, showed the Imam was shot 21 times. Even worse, these FBI sharpshooters managed to strike the Imam only

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No. 954

12 March 2010

Defend ILWU Borax Miners!

LOS ANGELES, March 8—On January 31, the Rio Tinto Group mining giant locked out the unionized workforce at the world's second-largest borax mine, located in the Mojave Desert town of Boron, California, after five months of contentious contract negotiations. The nearly 600 miners are organized in Local 30 of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU). In the face of outright union-busting by the world's third-largest mining company, the ILWU International has offered up words of solidarity but not the urgent labor action necessary to force Rio Tinto to back down.

With a declining global market share in borax, the company is carrying out a plan worked out months ago to eviscerate the union. Its final contract offer prior to the lockout would abolish the closed shop, allowing Rio Tinto to hire non-union labor; junk seniority rights in promotion, transfer, scheduling and lay-offs; and limit the union to four shop stewards who could perform their duties only on their own time. Coupled with a no-strike pledge, the proposal was a calculated provocation that would strip away every reason to have a union while slashing benefits and introducing onerous work rule changes, such as mandatory overtime. When the union membership rejected this offer, the company locked them out and bused in scabs. On March 5, after the ILWU filed charges against the company with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), the Rio Tinto bosses withdrew a few of their demands while keeping the ILWUers locked out.

The Rio Tinto Group is a multinational conglomerate that grew out of two com-



Getty

Busload of scabs leaving Rio Tinto borax mine, February 2.

from Australia and Canada to Southern Africa have waged their own labor battles against Rio Tinto in recent years, while union miners from Turkey and maritime unionists from Australia have sent delegations to Boron to show their support. Dock workers are strategically placed to stop Rio Tinto's union-busting in its tracks since it is through their hands that borax is shipped around the globe. ILWU locals, rail and other unions in the U.S. and internationally must mobilize to "hot-cargo" (refuse to handle) scab borax! *Not America-first chauvinism but international working-class solidarity!*

A generation ago, the bosses pulled out all the stops to break the union in

Spartacist League on a February 24 rally in Boron for the locked-out workers that was organized by the AFL-CIO.

Reporter's Notebook

Though only about two hours from L.A., when you go to Boron—a company town of 2,000 people—you feel transported back 50 or 100 years in time and dropped in the middle of the movies *Salt of the Earth* or *Harlan County U.S.A.* In fact, the solidarity we witnessed was both inspiring and frustrating. Inspiring in that it showed the potential for multiracial class struggle; frustrating in that the whole event was an exercise in blowing off steam and *dissipating* militancy.

Departing from Dodger Stadium in L.A., the cars in the caravan to Boron were festooned with American flags and signs supporting the Borax miners and their families. The ILWU tops' reaction to the lockout has emphasized assisting the workers' families. However, the need of the hour is to mobilize union power in defense of the ILWU and its Local 30 members. As we got within 30 miles of Boron, groups of workers and their families had gathered on many of the freeway overpasses. They were waving American flags and also holding signs. One prominent sign was: "Welcome L.A. Labor."

As the caravan pulled into the union hall, the road was lined with miners and their families welcoming the caravan and thanking everyone for coming. The caravan included four big-rigs full of food from L.A. unions. There also were about 15 or 20 workers from the Bay Area ILWU, including the union drill team. The whole gathering was about 800 to 1,000 people. The spread of unions that were represented was very wide. It included many ILWU members from L.A./Long Beach Local 13 and other locals and over a dozen other unions, from the Teamsters (quite prominent, one of the big-rigs was theirs) to the United Food and Commercial Workers, SEIU service workers and California Nurses Association.

While the borax workers are mostly white, the workers who came up to support them were very integrated. Many of the Local 13 members, as well as other L.A. unionists, were Latino and most of the Bay Area ILWUers were black. There also were a few Asians from various L.A. unions.

To say that borax workers were ecstatic to see all these people is not an overstatement. But all of this energy was not put to any good use. After a brief bathroom break, everyone was urged to get back into their cars and drive around the town and up to the gate of the mine. The caravan was impressive; it had about 225 cars and most cars had several people in them. In the little town of Boron, many people came out to wave at the caravan. The cop presence was very laid-back. The cars went up to the mine gate, which was

closed and guarded by a small number of cops and security guards. Clearly they were not expecting any trouble. People just honked their horns, yelled and turned around to go back to the union hall for food, the live band and brief speeches. Everything was very organized, but not to shut down the mine.

In front of the Local 30 hall was an outdoor rally with a loud sound system, food tables and the bureaucrats. People milled around for over two hours. We distributed *Workers Vanguard* and did not notice any other left presence at all—no salesmen, no one we knew from any left group. Interestingly, we met several women who had worked in the mine. It was physically difficult because the wind was blowing grit into everything.

A number of workers expressed frustration with the fact that they are not stopping the scabs. I was told that about 300 scabs are currently working 12-hour shifts and being housed in nearby motels. There has been picketing at the gate when the scabs go in—some yelling and screaming with no real attempt to stop them. It was clear that I wasn't the only person to whom it had occurred that all these union workers assembled in a tiny company town in the Mojave Desert could really stop the scabs if they wanted to do so. Workers would mention "replacement workers," but as soon as I said "scab," they would, too.

I was also told several times by miners that if they acted too much as though they are on strike, they would lose their unemployment benefits (or rather their hoped-for benefits, as some people said they hadn't gotten them yet). Everyone confirmed that they "aren't eligible" for strike benefits from the ILWU International because they aren't on strike. When I expressed outrage at this, people looked surprised, but they certainly didn't disagree. When I asked if borax was being shipped from the L.A./Long Beach ports, I got different responses. One guy thought it wasn't. Another thought it was and, if so, it showed the sad state of the American labor movement. When I brought up the Democrats, workers expressed both illusions and disappointment in Obama.

Maria Elena Durazo, head of the L.A. County Federation of the AFL-CIO, spoke to the rally on behalf of L.A. labor. She denounced Rio Tinto as a British company and said they couldn't treat American workers this way, the U.S. was not a colony, there had been an American Revolution. She said she was bringing the borax workers' American flags that they could wave proudly. It gave you a sense of how much the trade-union bureaucracy was pushing all the flag-waving, chauvinism, etc.—especially outrageous considering how much international support there has been for the Boron miners, from Turkey to Australia. After talking about the children in Boron as her family, she concluded by leading the crowd in chanting "*Sí, se puede*" (Yes, we can), which everyone chanted with enthusiasm.

While the solidarity was impressive, without stopping the flow of borax from Southern California ports and internationally, these workers are in deep trouble. ■



WV Photo

Boron, CA: Labor rally in solidarity with locked-out borax miners, February 24 (above). Delegation of Turkish miners outside union hall in early December.



Dispatcher

panies, one British, the other Australian. Focusing on this fact, the ILWU bureaucracy has pushed national chauvinism, putting out leaflets complaining that a "powerful foreign-owned company" is "attacking American workers" and taking away "cherished Constitutional rights." Whatever their flag, capitalists seek to drive up profit margins by attacking unions everywhere—the ILWU itself was born through bloody battles against the red-white-and-blue shipping and stevedoring companies. And we recall that the ILWU's founder Harry Bridges, venerated by the ILWU tops, was himself born in Australia and was repeatedly threatened with deportation by the U.S. government.

Based on the lie that workers have common interests with their "own" bourgeoisie, the ILWU tops' flag-waving chauvinism poisons the potential for international labor solidarity. Workers

Boron. In a bitter, 132-day strike in 1974, police clashed with striking workers in the streets, and the company set up a makeshift runway to fly in scabs. We wrote at the time in WV No. 62 (14 February 1975) that the strike went down to defeat "because ILWU leaders allowed borax to be shipped (some by ILWU longshoremen!) and refused to organize anything but token outside support." Throughout the U.S., union power has been sapped under a leadership that preaches class collaboration and reliance on the capitalist Democratic Party and state agencies like the NLRB. Democratic president Barack Obama has more than proven his merit to Wall Street. Workers need their own party, independent of all the parties of capital, which will fight to expropriate the capitalists by establishing a workers government.

We print below a report from the L.A.

A Spartacist Pamphlet

Karl Marx Was Right

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and the
Immiseration of the Working Class

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Young Spartacus

In Defense of Dialectical Materialism

We print below a class given by Spartacist League Central Committee member Don Alexander to the New York Spartacus Youth Club in June 2009. It has been edited for publication.

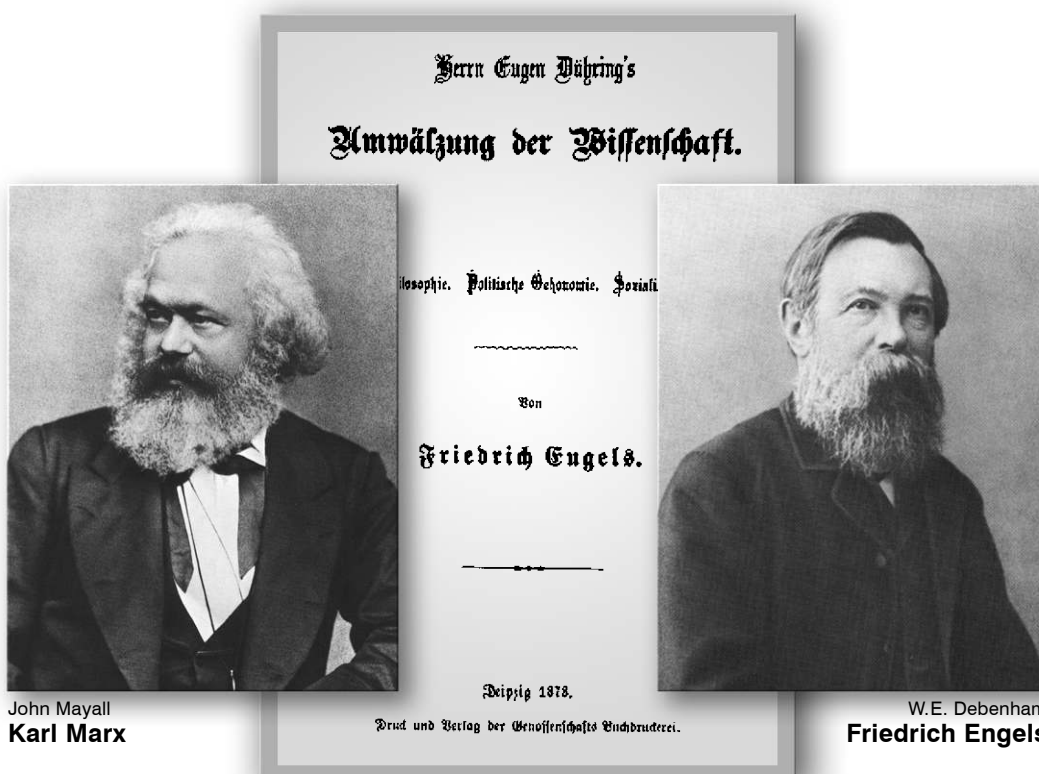
This class is just to get our feet wet, to begin to absorb the history of Marxism—it wasn't born in a vacuum. The purpose of the class is to uphold dialectical and historical materialism against all forms of subjective idealism.

Now, I'll make some basic assertions, just so we're all on the same page, as they say. Idealism proceeds from the premise that the material world is dependent on the spiritual. It asserts that the spirit, our mind and our ideas can and do exist in separation from matter. The most extreme form of this assertion is subjective idealism. Subjective idealism asserts that matter does not exist at all, but is pure illusion. Idealism asserts that there exists a realm of the mysterious and unknowable that's above or behind what can be ascertained and known by perception, experience and science. Science is thrown out the window.

Materialism, in direct contradiction, states that the world is, by its very nature, composed of matter, and that everything that exists comes into being on the basis of material causes. Everything arises and develops in accordance with the laws of motion of matter. Materialism teaches that matter is objective reality, existing outside of and independent of ideas, and that, far from the mental existing in separation from the material, ideas, including spiritual ones, are a product of material processes. Materialism also teaches that the world and its laws are knowable and that, while much in the material world might not be known, there is no unknowable sphere that lies outside of the material world.

Our social consciousness reflects and is determined by our social being. I want to start with that because it's not a commonplace, particularly in a period of great religiosity. That's why the quote from the German Marxist Franz Mehring in the current *Workers Vanguard* is so timely [see "Franz Mehring: *On Historical Materialism*," WV No. 938, 5 June 2009]. Mehring proceeds from the understanding that material economic conditions are primary in shaping any given society. In his pamphlet *On Historical Materialism* (1893), he also remarks that "the human mind is not the father of the mode of production, but the mode of production is the mother of the human mind." I think this is a really good quote because it says what is.

Our discussions do not take place in a vacuum. Nothing exists in isolation, either in nature or in society. Contradiction, the unity and struggle of mutually opposed forces and tendencies, is inherent within things. Change and movement operate on the basis of contradictions. Contradictions constitute the foundation of movement. In *Anti-Dühring* [Herr Eugen Dühring's *Revolution in Science* (1877-78)], Engels suc-



Anti-Dühring (1877-78), written by Engels in collaboration with Marx, dissected Dühring's idealist philosophical outlook, put forward materialist conception of history.

cinctly remarked, "*Motion is the mode of existence of matter.* Never anywhere has there been matter without motion, nor can there be." So in other words, comrades, there is no supreme being, there is no god setting in motion the eternal universe. I don't have to tell people here that.

Climbing Out of Obscurantism

The dialectical materialist conception is that all processes of nature and society are in a constant and uninterrupted process of change and development, of eternal becoming. Marx referred to this as "a scandal and abomination to bourgeoisdom and its doctrinaire professors, because it includes in its comprehension and affirmative recognition of the existing state of things, at the same time also, the recognition of the negation of that state, of its inevitable breaking up" ("Afterword to the Second German Edition," *Capital*, Vol. I [1873]). It's not the case that Marx is saying that all previous philosophical inquiries were rubbish. He just makes the point that the materiality of the world is demonstrated by the long and laborious development of the natural sciences.

The ancient materialists anticipated modern materialism, asserting the priority of nature over consciousness and

ideas. The mechanical materialists of the 17th and 18th centuries directed their fire against the medieval theologians, and they maintained that material particles in the universe are constantly bombarding each other somewhat at random. They basically viewed human beings as machines. This was materialist, but it was also mechanical. Human consciousness includes one's sensations and ideas as active factors in molding one's environment to procure the means of subsistence. (The actual conditions and methods through which this occurs vary, of course, throughout the course of history.)

You're familiar with René Descartes, the early 17th-century rationalist who believed that there are certain indubitable, self-evident propositions, for instance, the famous one, *cogito ergo sum*—"I think, therefore I am." He figured out that you couldn't doubt your existence if you didn't exist. So, that almost exhausts my Latin.

Another profound statement of subjective idealism was from Bishop George Berkeley, who remarked—it was in the 18th century—*esse is percipi*—"to be is to be perceived." So if you didn't see a man slipping on a piece of ice in Central Park during a day in the winter, or if you weren't present when somebody turned off the light to go to sleep, then it didn't

happen. Now, I'm going to let Berkeley speak for himself, because unlike most of the professional philosophers defending idealism, he rarely beat around the bush. In his *Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710) he alleged that:

"All the choir of heaven and the furniture of the earth, in a word all those bodies which compose the mighty frame of the world, have not any subsistence without a mind... that consequently so long as they are not actually perceived by me, or do not exist in my mind or that of any other created spirit, they must either have no existence at all, or else subsist in the mind of some Eternal Spirit."

As you can see, we have been climbing our way out of obscurantism and idealist flights of fancy for a long time.

The Dialectical Method

The 1939-40 factional struggle within the then-Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party (SWP) is documented in Trotsky's *In Defense of Marxism*. Trotsky wrote powerfully against the cliquist, anti-Soviet opposition of Max Shachtman, James Burnham and Martin Abern. He characterized them as a petty-bourgeois opposition. They maintained that dialectical materialism didn't have anything to do with working out a concrete political position. I want to read you the opening to "A Petty-Bourgeois Opposition in the Socialist Workers Party":

"It is necessary to call things by their right names. Now that the positions of both factions in the struggle have become determined with complete clearness, it must be said that the minority of the National Committee is leading a typical petty-bourgeois tendency. Like any petty-bourgeois group inside the socialist movement, the present opposition is characterized by the following features: a disdainful attitude toward theory and an inclination toward eclecticism; disrespect for the tradition of their own organization; anxiety for personal 'independence' at the expense of anxiety for objective truth; nervousness instead of consistency; readiness to jump from one position to another; lack of understanding of revolutionary centralism and hostility toward it; and finally, inclination to substitute clique ties and personal relationships for party discipline. Not all the members of the opposition of course manifest these features with identical strength. Nevertheless, as always in a variegated bloc the tinge is given by those who are most distant from Marxism and proletarian policy. A prolonged and serious struggle is obviously before us."

Following Engels, Trotsky pointed out that, just as Darwin revealed the laws of development of living species of organic matter, so Marx revealed the laws of development of human history. (Darwin was not a conscious dialectician.) The economic forces of production play an indispensable role: they are the ultimate determining factor in social and economic life. The relationships between human beings producing their means of material survival determine the actual relations of production. See—you have to be able to eat and have clothing and shelter, to cooperate in some form or fashion, in order to be able to wrest a living from



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Index Books

Georgi Plekhanov's *The Materialist Conception of History* (1897), Antonio Labriola's *Essays on the Materialistic Conception of History* (1896) and Peter Fryer's "Lenin as Philosopher" (1957) provide further explanation of dialectical materialism.

nature. Upon this rests the entire superstructure of society—the art and the politics and religion and the philosophy and the morality.

This doesn't rule out, of course, the effects of the superstructure upon the economic base. The father of Russian Marxism, Georgi Plekhanov, had the highest praise for Antonio Labriola, the Italian Marxist, a great materialist thinker. But in *The Materialist Conception of History* (1897), Plekhanov pointed out that one of the weaknesses of Labriola was his tendency to isolate racial factors, explaining the development of human societies in terms of their norms of beauty and their rituals, etc. It's not that these things shouldn't be studied. Plekhanov gives the example of why women among the Ishavs in the Caucasus cut off their braids on the death of a brother, but not on the death of their husbands—what does this mean? Well, this stuff is interesting, but ultimately you have to look at how people procure their means of subsistence. That's what's dominant.

Comrades, the dialectical method is not merely a question of development in the abstract. There's a bourgeois-liberal doctrine of development, of gradualness, that ignores the fact that there are leaps in nature and society, that one form of matter transforms into another through a sudden change. The dialectical method posits that everything in nature and society can only be understood in its fundamental connections with everything else and in its constant movement from simpler forms to higher forms, from quantity into quality.

Trotsky gave many examples about formal logic and its use and its limita-



L. Y. Leonidov

Trotsky and Lenin, Moscow, 1920.

tions in this superb book, *In Defense of Marxism*. You know:

“The Aristotelian logic of the simple syllogism starts from the proposition that ‘A’ is equal to ‘A.’ This postulate is accepted as an axiom for a multitude of practical human actions and elementary generalizations. But in reality ‘A’ is not equal to ‘A.’ This is easy to prove if we observe these two letters under a lens—they are quite different from each other. But, one can object, the question is not of the size or the form of the letters, since they are only symbols for equal quantities, for instance, a pound of sugar. The objection is beside the point; in reality a pound of sugar is never equal to a pound of sugar—a more delicate scale always discloses a difference. Again one can object: but a pound of sugar is equal to itself. Neither is this true—all bodies change uninterruptedly in size, weight, color, etc....

“Every worker knows that it is impossible to make two completely equal objects. In the elaboration of bearing-brass into cone bearings, a certain deviation is allowed for the cones which should not, however, go beyond certain limits (this is called tolerance). By observing the norms of tolerance, the cones are considered as being equal. (‘A’ is equal to ‘A.’) When the tolerance is exceeded the quantity goes over into quality; in other words, the cone bearings become inferior or completely worthless.”

Engels on Nature and Dialectics

Nature is the proof of dialectics, and it must be said for modern science that it has furnished this proof with very rich materials increasing daily, and thus has shown that, in the last resort, nature works dialectically and not metaphysically; that she does not move in the eternal oneness of a perpetually recurring circle, but goes through a real historical evolution. In this connection Darwin must be named before all others. He dealt the metaphysical conception of nature the heaviest blow by his proof that all organic beings, plants, animals and

man himself, are the products of a process of evolution going on through millions of years. But the naturalists who have learned to think dialectically are few and far between, and this conflict of the results of discovery with preconceived modes of thinking explains the endless confusion now reigning in theoretical natural science, the despair of teachers as well as learners, of authors and readers alike.

—Friedrich Engels,
*Socialism: Utopian
and Scientific* (1880)

Trotsky succinctly describes dialectical thought as the following:

“Dialectical thinking is related to vulgar thinking in the same way that a motion picture is related to a still photograph. The motion picture does not outlaw the still photograph but combines a series of them according to the laws of motion.... “We call our dialectic, materialist, since its roots are neither in heaven nor in the depths of our ‘free will,’ but in objective reality, in nature.”

Successive Approximations

The German philosopher Georg Hegel was an absolute idealist who was very critically assimilated by Marxists, Lenin especially, and many others. He viewed history as the unfolding of the absolute idea. However, he also recognized that everything that exists changes uninterruptedly; everything comes into being and then passes out of existence. Marx and Engels stood his dialectical idealism, as they said, right side up and extracted its rational kernel from its mystical shell. In the aftermath of the defeat of the 1905 Revolution in Russia, Lenin had to fight for dialectical materialism against those known as the “god seekers” of his party, the Lunacharskys and the Bogdanovs. He forcefully defended the materialist dialectic against its detractors.

The article “Lenin as Philosopher” (*Labour Review*, September-October 1957) by Peter Fryer is just incredibly good, and I'll get back to that. The Healyites, pseudo-Trotskyist political bandits who in 1959 formed the British Socialist Labour League, threw away a very valuable cadre. With characteristic modesty, Fryer wanted to know why we had such praise of him in the issue of *Spartacist* with our article “Healyism Implodes” (*Spartacist* [English-language edition] No. 36-37, Winter 1985-86). He didn't think what he wrote was such a big deal, but he was certainly happy about the truthful account we gave of life in the Healyite jungle. That organization abused dialectics very regularly in the service of opportunist politics. As we explained in “Healyism Implodes,” they resolved the contradiction between a formally correct program and a corrupt internal “regime”:

“by sharp programmatic departures from Trotskyism: principally, their embrace of the Maoist ‘Cultural Revolution,’ which was at bottom nothing but an unusually degrading and violent falling out between sections of the Chinese Stalinist bureaucracy; and their line on the 1967 Arab-Israeli ‘Six Day War’ when, in the name of fighting Zionist racism and expansionism, they embraced a totally classless concept of an ‘Arab Revolution’ consisting of the despotic nationalist regimes which have cravenly colluded with imperialism and Zionism to dismember the Palestinian nation.”

Now, in “Lenin as Philosopher,” Peter Fryer writes about E.P. Thompson, who was a preeminent British Marxoid historian. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) is still worth the read—I learned a lot from that. But Thompson claims—and Fryer refutes him—that Marxism is a form of economic reductionism that negates the subjective factor, or what he calls the human agency. In other words, Marxism ignores, allegedly, the role of human conscious-

ness as an active factor. Thompson accuses Lenin of viewing consciousness as nothing but a passive mirror reflection of social reality. That is just exactly the opposite of the truth.



Historia Photo, Bad Sachsa

Georg Hegel

Fryer uses two really wonderful quotes from Lenin—these come from Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks* (1914)—which sum up dialectical knowledge as “an endless process of the deepening of men's knowledge of things, phenomena, processes, etc., proceeding from appearance to essence and from essence less profound to essence more profound.” And, “When human intelligence grapples with a particular thing, draws from it an image (= a concept), that is *not* a simple, direct, dead act, it is not a reflection in a mirror, but a complex, twofold, zigzag act.”

Scientific Investigation of History

The International Communist League intervened in the unfolding political revolution in East Germany in 1989-90 based upon a program for proletarian political

revolution in the East and socialist revolution in the West [see “For the Communism of Lenin and Trotsky!” *Spartacist* (English-language edition) No. 47-48, Winter 1992-93]. We didn't win, but we fought, and that's key. Afterwards, we had extensive discussion to try to grasp the various aspects of what had happened in that very complex, rapidly developing incipient revolution. Jan Norden, who in 1996 would defect from our organization to co-found the Internationalist Group (IG), belittled and denied the ICL's role as the conscious revolutionary vanguard. He repeatedly claimed, “the key element was missing, revolutionary leadership.” The polemical reply, that “we were the revolutionary leadership” in Germany, has a core of truth but is still insufficient. Science proceeds through successive approximations.

What happened was not simply determined by what we did, although what we did was very important. To say otherwise ignores the actual balance of forces and is radically false, both politically and theoretically. While imprisoned under Mussolini, the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci wrote in *The Modern Prince* about the formation of what he called a “collective will,” that is, a compact group struggling for power. As Gramsci put it:

“The active politician is a creator, an awakener, but he neither creates from nothing nor moves in the turbid void of his own desires and dreams. He bases himself on effective reality, but what is this effective reality? Is it something static and immobile or is it not rather a relationship of forces in continuous movement and change of equilibrium? To apply the will to the creation of a new balance of the really existing and operating forces, basing oneself on that particular force which one considers progressive, giving it the means to triumph, is still to move within the sphere of effective reality, but in order to dominate and overcome it (or contribute to this).”

Here's what Fryer says: sometimes there are unforeseen consequences of what one struggles for. He says that:

“The materialist recognition of the objectivity of being and its laws is, not yet freedom, but the requisite for all real freedom. “It is of course perfectly true that men act with conscious aims and intentions. But no attempt to explain human history in terms of the conscious aims and intentions, wills and desires of men will advance our understanding very far. Man's aims clash, and something happens which no one had intended, desired or foreseen. Therefore any scientific understanding of social development has to start from ‘the inner general laws’ which ultimately govern both the development of human society and the aims and intentions, ideas and theories, in people's heads.”

So men's aims clash. There were also forces that were active in East Germany *continued on page 6*



Spartakist photos

German Trotskyist speaker at ICL-initiated rally of 250,000 against fascist desecration of Soviet war memorial in Treptow Park, East Germany, January 1990. ICL banner reads: “Down With NATO! Defend the Soviet Union!”



Dialectical Materialism...

(continued from page 5)

in 1989-90 that tried to stop this process of incipient political revolution cold. One was Gorbachev's Stalinist bureaucracy. After the January 3 demonstration against the fascist desecration of a memorial to Soviet soldiers at East Berlin's Treptow Park, the German imperialists launched a furious anti-communist campaign. Then we saw the Stalinists driving full steam with the anti-Soviet, pro-capitalist West German Social Democratic Party—which we called the Trojan horse of capitalist counterrevolution—for capitalist reunification. [See “Workers Soviets Must Rule in All Germany!” WV No. 948, 4 December 2009.]

Marxism is a scientific investigation of history that places the acts of individuals in their concrete historical context. So comrade Bert Mason's article in the current *Workers Vanguard* was a fine contribution on the role of Lincoln in the American Civil War [“Honor Abraham Lincoln!” WV No. 938, 5 June 2009]. “Lenin as Philosopher” is superb; it's a masterful analysis of dialectical contradictions. I especially appreciated that Fryer put his analysis in the context of World War I, when Lenin was studying Hegel and grappling with the betrayal by the German Social Democrats who had deserted to the side of their own bourgeoisie during the first imperialist world war. How did such a formidable workers party, with vast influence in the German proletariat, come to that state of opportunist degeneration? What was the process of economic and political and social development that led to their social-patriotic capitulation?

Well, that's what Lenin dealt with in his *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916). He examined all the



Wide World

pragmatism as the “curse of American thought” and insisted that an unpostponable task of the SWP—this was in 1939-40—was to educate its cadres in the philosophy of dialectical materialism.

Against Philosophical Idealism

This talk wouldn't be complete without a short exposition on the manifestations of the various forms of subjective idealism. Lenin argued that, ultimately, idealism is clericalism. In popular terms, it's sort of like “thinking makes it so.” You have probably heard the vulgar version of it: if a tree crashes in the forest and I wasn't present, then it didn't crash. That, ultimately, logically, leads to what is called solipsism—that the only things that are real are one's own subjective impressions and thoughts and sensations.

Many years ago, through a rather laborious process, I studied some of the idealists, who are important to understand. Immanuel Kant, the German idealist, was very interesting, but difficult to read in



WV Photo

Cuban militiaman guards oil refinery expropriated from U.S. in 1960. Above: Spartacists at demonstration in defense of Cuba, New York City, September 1994.

the Socialist Workers Party,” Trotsky referred to a conversation he had with a certain British political economist who echoed the liberal economist John Maynard Keynes. Keynes was a proponent of “priming the pump,” and deficit spending to stimulate demand, and government investment in order to arrest the endemic financial and economic crises of capitalism—some of the stuff that Obama and his administration are tinkering with. On the basis of his discussion with this political economist, with his praise for Keynes and his hatred of Marx, Trotsky concluded that he was an opponent of materialist dialectics in his general outlook. Trotsky says:

“If it is possible to place a given person's general type of thought on the basis of his relation to concrete practical problems, it is also possible to predict approximately, knowing his general type of thought, how a given individual will approach one or another practical question. That is the incomparable educational value of the dialectical method of thought.”

Marxism: A Guide to Action

We have applied this dialectical materialist methodology to many questions. You can look at “Cuba and Marxist Theory” (*Marxist Bulletin* No. 8) where we applied our dialectic, materialist methodology in assessing the formation of a bureaucratically deformed workers state in Cuba. A petty-bourgeois-led, guerrillaist movement led to the destruction of capitalism in Cuba without the leadership of a Trotskyist party. Developing that understanding required the application of a dialectical materialist methodology. It was part of the preservation and extension of our fundamental Marxist program.

This is the same thing as with the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA)—you have to appreciate the role of actual contradictions. The EFCA was a referendum on unionization, with the National Association of Manufacturers and other bosses' organizations waging a major campaign against it while the AFL-CIO and Change to Win union federations campaigned for its passage. While warning the workers against any reliance on any government-prescribed mechanisms of class collaboration, we would support the EFCA in its original form because the card-check provision would make it somewhat easier to organize unions. We drew the class line without hiding our criticism of the role of the defeatist, class-collaborationist union bureaucrats. We examined the concretes of the EFCA with its living contradictions, not on the basis of speculation, but on the basis of scientific investigation of history. Our investigation included what the Socialist Workers Party, the Trotskyists of the time, wrote about the 1935 Wagner Act, which contributed to more comrades doing research on the history of the Marxist movement. [See “Why Marxists Support the EFCA,” WV No. 929, 30 January 2009.]

Dialectics is not a master key for all questions; you have to make a concrete, scientific analysis. I want to end with a

quote from “Lenin as Philosopher,” which I think is really apropos of what we're talking about:

“Men's power to change their world progressively crystallizes out and perfects the scientific element in their concepts; their relative helplessness on the other hand gives rise to the tendency of abstract ideas to fly away from reality and weave themselves into marvelous, internally consistent systems of myth and illusion, from which the real world and real relationships of men to nature and men to men are then deduced.”

A comrade asked why do we need to read anything by this Gramsci guy? Wasn't Gramsci anti-Trotsky, and so on. Definitely on the Trotsky-Stalin question, Gramsci went not for Trotsky but for Stalin. So that was his contradiction. But he had some very penetrating observations about consciousness, the relationship between the subjective and the objective, and how an objective, concrete analysis of the relationship of forces in the national and international context is critical to deciding how to apply one's program. It's very helpful.

It's a terrible waste to dismiss somebody like that. Just like dismissing Plekhanov, whose renegacy is well known. Following the defeat of the 1905 Revolution, Plekhanov denounced the December Moscow insurrection as an adventure, and in 1917 he opposed the seizure of power by the Bolshevik-led workers. Importantly, however, he never joined hands with those Mensheviks and others who tried to mobilize against the revolution. In the course of the Civil War following the 1917 Revolution, Lenin concluded that there's no way that you could be a genuine communist without understanding Hegel's logic, Plekhanov's philosophical works, and Marx's *Capital*.

That's a challenge to us to rise to a higher theoretical level, because that's the only way to prepare ourselves for the tasks of the struggle for a communist future. It's a laborious, worthwhile, life-long process. ■



Staatsbibliothek, Berlin

Social Democratic president Friedrich Ebert reviewing German troops following WWI.

phases of the development of an opportunist layer within the working class. Without this, one couldn't understand how quantity turned into quality. Mutually opposed, contradictory tendencies are inherent in all phenomena of nature and society. Lenin explained how the unity and conflict of oppositions, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in this case, worked themselves out. Lenin assiduously studied Hegel, and we have to, too.

I wrote a short note about an article in *Workers Vanguard* that was uncritical of the American philosopher John Dewey, that quoted Dewey approvingly without criticizing him philosophically (“On John Dewey,” WV No. 924, 7 November 2008). The same Dewey who had a role in fighting the frame-up of Trotsky by the Stalinist epigones was an opponent of Marxism and of the October Revolution. Dewey was a pragmatist, not any kind of dialectical materialist. Trotsky scathingly denounced pragmatism as a mixture of rationalism and empiricism—empiricism means one's own sense impressions are the ultimate source of knowledge. It doesn't mean that empiricists completely say that there's no independently existing objective world out there. Trotsky denounced

many ways. His key work, *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), sought to reconcile idealism and materialism. Kant didn't deny the existence of “things in themselves,” just our ability to know them. He formulated this along the following lines: how are *a priori* synthetic judgments possible? How do we arrive at truth independent of human experience and scientific experimentation? Essentially, what he argues for are the propositions of what is known as common sense, which is really unsystematized and pre-scientific. Kant also studied astronomy, which made him very interesting. But he tried to reconcile materialism and idealism.

In *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* (1886), Engels had to deal with such thinkers. Of course, he made his way through Ludwig Feuerbach, who rightly criticized Hegel for his absolute idealism. Marx, in his “Theses on Feuerbach” (1845), characterized Feuerbach's materialism as contemplative, noting that for Feuerbach, “things, reality, sensuousness, are conceived only in the form of the *object, or of contemplation*, but not as *sensuous human activity, practice*, not subjectively.”

In “A Petty-Bourgeois Opposition in

A Spartacist Pamphlet

Enlightenment Rationalism AND THE Origins of Marxism

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Teens, Sexting and Morality Police



Photo Illustration: Ayesha Walker/Youth Radio

Across the U.S., a howl of outraged moralism has arisen against a new, terrifying danger springing from every DSL connection, every Wi-Fi linkup, transmitted by invisible radio waves from GSM tower to GSM tower. This horrifying plague? Young people showing one another their naughty bits.

For “sexting,” sending or receiving sexy photos of each other via cell phones and computers, teenagers across the country have been hauled off to jail and charged with creation, possession and distribution of child pornography. According to a 2009 survey by MTV and the Associated Press, three in every ten people between the ages of 14 and 24 have been involved in sexting. But in capitalist America, religious backwardness and “family values” moralism make sexual experiences as scarring and guilt-ridden as possible while draining as much enjoyment from them as can be. We say: Consensual sexual expression is no crime!

It’s no surprise that youth want to play digital doctor. Whenever humans have developed a new medium of communication, they have inevitably taken advantage of it to broadcast their physical assets, and doubly so for teenagers with their hormones all atwitter. However, the current uproar over sexting, driven by the bourgeois media, feminists and moral majority think tanks such as the pro-abstinence National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, poses a very real danger—especially, but not only, to the teenagers they say they want to “protect.”

Consider Hope Witsell, a 13-year-old in Florida. She sent a photograph of her breasts to a boy she liked, which was subsequently circulated among other students at her school. For this “crime” she was suspended from school, grounded and banned from the Internet and her cell phone. After another “incident” she was sent to a Christian counselor. For trying to attract a boy, she was virtually branded with a scarlet letter—picked on, mocked

and isolated from school, her friends and the outside world. Soon after the next school year started, she committed suicide. Her death can be laid squarely at the feet of the bourgeoisie’s anti-sex bigots.

At age 18, Phillip Alpert was arrested in Florida for distributing child pornography because he forwarded a picture of his naked girlfriend to her friends and family after a fight with her. Stigmatized under the bourgeoisie’s vicious anti-sex crusade, he will be forced to register as a sex offender until he is 43 years old. Alpert



MSNBC

Hope Witsell

can’t live with his father because his father lives too close to a high school—the same one Alpert attended. Alpert has been kicked out of college and, as a convicted felon, has not been able to find a job. He is afraid to e-mail his lawyer because Alpert’s probation officer can send him to jail for e-mail that is not work- or school-related. In an invitation to vigilante terror, Alpert’s age, hair color, eye color and home address have been posted on the public sex offender registry on the Internet, and, as he describes, “I’ve actually had a lot of neighbors come to my door...to check if it was safe for their kids to play around outside, with me here” (*MTV News*, 11 February). *Hands off Phillip Alpert!*

The “family values” hypocrites are intent on stamping out all behavior that threatens the bourgeois conception of marriage as one man on one woman, for life. Fear, guilt and repression are loaded on the very young for even having sexual thoughts. The cops, courts and prisons have been mobilized—the FBI’s Uniform Crime Reporting Program classifies “sex offenses” as “Offenses against chastity, common decency, morals, and the like”! This all flows from the capitalist class’s dependence on the institution of the family—the main source of the oppression of women and youth. For workers, its purpose is to inculcate social conservatism and to raise the next generation; for the rich, it is the vehicle for passing wealth on to their children.

The sexting witchhunt is an old-fashioned moral panic in the service of social *reaction*, reminiscent of the early 20th-century hysteria over automobiles leading to “necking” and “heavy petting.” Flirting, fighting, arguing, screwing, spreading horrid rumors, making both regrettable and reasonable decisions—these are all part of growing up. What’s going on is not a new “hypersexualized” culture, as right-wing and feminist commentators alike have claimed. Nor is it the case that youth today are growing up “too fast.” To the contrary, sociologists widely recognize that modern society has forced youth into an artificially prolonged adolescence. Now beset by financial crisis, capitalist society has little to offer those youth who are not scions of bourgeois families—decent education, jobs and an independent future appear further and further out of reach for most, leaving youth more dependent on their families.

Cases like Witsell’s and Alpert’s have sparked a national debate over what is an “appropriate” penalty for sexting, with the result that over ten states have passed or are considering legislation specifically tar-

getting the practice. But the real criminals here are those forces of capitalist reaction ruining the lives of youth for doing something that youth do naturally. Marxists oppose the prosecution of sexting just as we oppose all laws against “crimes without victims,” such as prostitution, drug use or pornography, including “child pornography,” which, like all pornography, is simply words and images designed for pleasure. We oppose reactionary “age of consent” laws and all laws that criminalize consensual sexual activity. Our guiding principle in sexual matters is simply that of mutual effective consent—that is, mutual agreement and understanding. We say: *Government out of the bedroom!*

Under capitalism, human relations, including sexuality, will *always* be twisted and distorted. The family must be replaced as part of the transition to a classless, communist society. But to even begin to do this, the working class must first smash the capitalist state—whose genuine inhuman perversity was shown in the torture and humiliation of prisoners at Abu Ghraib, Bagram prison and Guantánamo Bay—along with *all* of its reactionary laws, and establish a workers state. As we wrote in “Coming of Age in the U.S.A.—Sex, Fear and Religious Reaction” (*WV* No. 877, 29 September 2006):

“Technology and modern medicine enable humanity to increasingly control the forces of nature and use them to the advantage of human beings. Abortion and birth control give women greater control over their own reproduction, and there are simple measures that greatly reduce the risk of STDs. While these advances allow sex to be a safe and enjoyable act for both men and women, it is only with the destruction of capitalism that humanity will be able to fully avail itself of these advances and be freed from state repression and religious bigotry. And only then will youth be able to do what they please sexually, with whom they please, free of state and parental control.” ■

Detroit...

(continued from page 2)

3 times in the chest, the majority of bullets entered the upper thighs and groin. The mortally wounded Imam was then handcuffed, while the dog was airlifted to a veterinarian hospital.

Not content with the murderous onslaught and subsequent arrest of numerous mosque members (the majority of whom have since been released on personal bond), the FBI went after Imam Abdullah’s son who at last report was fighting extradition from Canada.

The source of the FBI information centered on three undercover informants whom local Muslims said had enticed the Imam and his followers to fence a few stolen items to earn needed cash. “A bunch of petty thieves” is how Imam Abdullah El-Amin of the Muslim Center of Detroit described the informants.

I opened this letter saying the War on Terror took a sinister turn here in Detroit and here’s why.

Detroit was the venue for the first federal terrorism trial after 911. The accused were Moroccan immigrants, two of whom were acquitted and two were convicted.

At the time, United States Attorney General John Ashcroft boasted that a terrorist sleeper cell was broken up. As it turned out, the prosecuting attorney had concealed exculpatory evidence, and all convictions were vacated. The lead prosecutor, who celebrated the frame-up conviction with a big cigar on the front page of the daily paper, is now under federal criminal investigation for his handling of the case.

Similarly, in 2006, the FBI made a big deal of three Palestinian-American kids who bought about 80 cell phones on sale from Walmart with an intent to make a few thousand dollars for themselves reselling them to college students. All terrorist charges were dropped.

The FBI no longer wants to be embarrassed by their inability to frame up innocent civilians based solely on racial profiling. The killing of Imam Abdullah represents an ominous turn away from judicial prosecution to outright lethal force in order to intimidate anyone who doesn’t fit the “American Way”.

I want to thank Workers Vanguard and the Spartacist League for letting this atrocity be publicized.

With warmest greetings,
Matt P.

Spartacus Youth Club Class Series

BAY AREA

Thursday, March 18, 6:30 p.m.
The Emancipation of Women Through Socialist Revolution
San Francisco State University
Cesar Chavez Student Center
Rosa Parks D
Information and readings: (510) 839-0851
sycbayarea@sbcglobal.net

CHICAGO

Wednesday, March 17, 5:30 p.m.
Women’s Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!
University of Illinois at Chicago
Prairie Room, Student Center East
750 S. Halsted Street
(Exit Halsted Street at UIC-Halsted stop on CTA Blue Line)
Information and readings: (312) 563-0441
chicagosyc@sbcglobal.net

LOS ANGELES

Sunday, March 14, 12 noon
The Fight for a Leninist Vanguard Party
3806 Beverly Blvd., Room 215
Information and readings: (213) 380-8239
slsycla@sbcglobal.net

NEW YORK CITY

Wednesday, March 17, 7:30 p.m.
Defend China Against Imperialism, Counterrevolution!
Hunter College
West Building, Room 509C
(No. 6 train to 68th St.-Hunter College)
Information and readings: (212) 267-1025
nysl@tiac.net

TORONTO

Wednesday, March 24, 6 p.m.
The Struggle for a Leninist Vanguard Party
University of Toronto
Sidney Smith Hall, Room 1080
100 St. George Street
Information and readings: (416) 593-4138
spartacan@on.aibn.com

VANCOUVER

Thursday, March 25, 6:30 p.m.
The Vanguard Party and the Fight for Socialist Revolution
University of British Columbia,
Student Union Building, Room 224
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Women's Oppression in Racist Capitalist America For Free Abortion on Demand!

While bourgeois feminists may celebrate it, March 8—International Women's Day (IWD)—is a *workers'* celebration. It originated in 1908 among female needle trades workers in Manhattan's Lower East Side who marched for the eight-hour day, for an end to child labor and for equal voting rights for women. By far the most important celebration of IWD took place in Petrograd on 8 March 1917 (February 23 in the old Julian calendar), when women textile workers led a strike of more than 90,000 workers. This signaled the end of tsarist rule and the beginning of the Russian Revolution, which culminated in the proletarian seizure of power on November 7 led by the Bolshevik Party.

In recognition of IWD, we print below a presentation, abridged and edited for publication, by Erica Jones in New York City on 10 October 2009. The talk was part of a series of public forums under the title "U.S. Imperialism: Enemy of Women's Rights Internationally—For Women's Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!" that were also held in Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles. The forums saluted Dr. George Tiller, the courageous abortion provider who, at age 67, was murdered in his church last May for his services to women at the clinic he headed in Wichita, Kansas. For decades, Dr. Tiller withstood all the threats and provocations spewed out by reactionaries dedicated to forcing women to bear children against their will. He was specially targeted by the anti-abortion terrorists as one of a very small number of doctors performing late-term abortions.

Dr. Tiller's murderer, Scott Roeder, obscenely sought to turn his crime into an endorsement of assassinating doctors in the name of saving "babies" during his trial in January. But on January 29, the jury took only 37 minutes to find Roeder guilty of murder. His sentencing is scheduled to take place on April 1.

Dr. Tiller's surviving family decided to close the clinic, so at least in this way the killer achieved his aim of denying more women the still formally legal right to abortion. But in the wake of Tiller's murder, his longtime colleague Dr. Leroy Carhart began performing late-term abortions at his clinic in suburban Omaha, Nebraska. Fully aware that this places him in the crosshairs of such anti-woman reactionaries as Operation Rescue founder Randall Terry, who denounced Roeder's trial as a "scam," Dr. Carhart hired two of Tiller's former staff members and began training his own clinic staff in the practice of late-term abortions because "there is a need, and I feel deeply about it." We

have the deepest admiration for Drs. Tiller and Carhart and their staff, who put their lives on the line to defend women's rights.

* * *

We are here today to honor the memory of Dr. George Tiller. On May 31, Dr. Tiller, one of only three doctors still providing late-term abortions in the United States, was shot and killed at the church he attended. A right-wing anti-abortion

lation and regulatory complaints; and protested relentlessly. Some sent death threats. One bombed his clinic. Another tried to kill him in 1993, firing five shots and wounding him in both arms.

Between 1993 and 1998, anti-abortion terrorists murdered *seven people* for providing abortions: three doctors, two clinic workers, an escort and a clinic security guard. Doctors trained in and practicing abortion are becoming extinct. There is justifiable fear that they and their fami-

women. It is also partly due to the great difficulty of getting an abortion in the U.S., even compared with other industrialized countries.

"Democratic" Imperialists: Enemies of Women's Rights

In the epoch of imperialist decay, the period we live in, where the capitalist economic system has long outgrown its progressive character and acts as an obstacle to humanity's future, millions of women in many sections of the world lead short, brutalized lives of pain and toil. Female children's genital organs are mutilated; women are bought and sold like cattle in the form of the bride price and dowries; women are killed with impunity in the name of "honor." Approximately 25 percent of the world population lives in countries with highly restrictive abortion laws, mostly in Latin America, Africa and Asia. In some countries, such as Chile, women still go to prison for having illegal abortions.

In countries like Afghanistan, women are prohibited access to simple contraception, like condoms, let alone abortion. This is a country where girls are assaulted for going to school and female politicians are shot or threatened with beheading for daring to work outside the home. In Iraq, the U.S. imperialist occupation has meant the *resurgence* of religious reaction in a country that was formerly known in the Near East for its secularism.

No matter how much they hypocritically yell about "freedom," the U.S. ruling class is the bloodiest ruling class in history and is the main enemy of the workers, women and the oppressed in the U.S. and worldwide, insofar as it is still the strongest capitalist power in the world today. Our starting point is proletarian class opposition to the U.S. capitalist rulers and to the imperialist system as a whole. We call for all U.S. troops out of Iraq and Afghanistan now! Hands off Pakistan! Hands off Iran!

The closest women ever came to the possibility of social liberation in Afghanistan was the situation that opened 30 years ago with the Soviet military intervention. The age-old enslavement of women had begun to break down starting in 1978 under the regime of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, backed by the then-Soviet Union. Women were becoming doctors and lawyers, casting off the stifling head-to-toe *burqa* and walking the streets of Kabul, unaccompanied, in modern dress. But in one of the biggest covert CIA operations in history, the U.S., in a proxy war against the Soviet Union, backed an Islamic insurgency that violently opposed the regime's attempt to reduce the traditional bride price and introduce education for girls and adult women.

This was probably the first shooting war in modern history that was specifically ignited by the question of women's liberation. We hailed the Soviet Army's intervention in Afghanistan in 1979 against the Islamic reactionaries, and we centered our propaganda on what the defeat would mean for the masses of the Afghan peoples, particularly women. And we highlighted the threat posed to the Soviet Union, the degenerated workers state which we unconditionally militarily defended.

The Soviet intervention was unambiguously progressive, underlining our Trotskyist understanding that despite its degeneration under a Stalinist bureaucratic caste, the Soviet Union had remained a

International Women's Day



IWD in Petrograd, 1917: Demonstration led by women textile workers touched off February Revolution.

For Women's Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!

bigot has been arrested. Tiller had been a main target of the "pro-life" god squad for decades. In 1991, tens of thousands of Operation Rescue fanatics blockaded his clinic for six weeks. They campaigned—successfully—to have him prosecuted; boycotted his suppliers; tailed him with hidden cameras; branded him "Tiller the baby killer"; hit him with lawsuits, legis-

lies, friends, co-workers will be subjected to harassment, violence and death.

Before I joined the Spartacist League, I attended a forum on the woman question a few months after the murder of abortion doctor Barnett Slepian in Buffalo in 1998. Our comrade Carla, who gave the presentation, quoted the French utopian socialist Charles Fourier, who said that you could gauge what level a society had attained by the position and status of women within that society. She then asked the audience, "So, looking around, where do women stand in 1999?"

Well, it's ten years later and women still stand in the same place in this miserable capitalist society. Doctors can still get prosecuted and even murdered for providing women with abortions. One in five American children lives in poverty, the highest rate in the industrialized West, and nearly eleven million have no health insurance. Hundreds of thousands are in foster care, and even before the financial crisis hit, 1.5 million were homeless. The infant mortality rate in the inner cities of Washington, D.C., New Haven, East St. Louis and Chicago rivals that of Malaysia. This deplorable fact is largely attributable to the lack of health care available to poor



Washington, D.C., January 1992: SL joined 2,000 others in defending abortion clinics against Operation Rescue bigots.

workers state embodying historic gains of the October Revolution of 1917, centrally collectivized property and the planned economy. A Red Army victory in Afghanistan would have posed the extension of the social gains of the October Revolution through a prolonged presence leading to Afghanistan’s integration into the Soviet system, which would have brought tremendous gains to the hideously oppressed Afghan peoples. The Soviet intervention also offered the prospect of reanimating the program of revolutionary internationalism in the Soviet Union, spurring the struggle for political revolution to oust the Stalinist bureaucracy. The Soviets’ withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1988-89, a futile attempt to conciliate imperialism, was a betrayal of Afghan women that also paved the way for the restoration of capitalism in the USSR itself.

The reformist International Socialist Organization (ISO), in an article titled “Should the Left Call for Taliban Victory?” [SocialistWorker.org, 18 August 2009] says: “We should condemn unreservedly the oppression of women and the general social conservatism of the pre-2001 Taliban regime, as well, of course, as their efforts to cut deals with regional and global superpowers against the interests of the vast majority of Afghans.” These fake socialists express concern over the state of women in Afghanistan now. Too bad that wasn’t the case 30 years ago when it really mattered. The coming to power of anti-woman fundamentalist reactionaries in Afghanistan was actually cheered on by a number of left groups, like the ISO. In the current period, they helped build the “movement” to elect Obama, who ran on a promise to beef up the military occupation there. After his election and the ISO’s victory party to celebrate it, Obama, true to his promise, has committed to sending more troops to Afghanistan than Bush to carry out the bloody occupation.

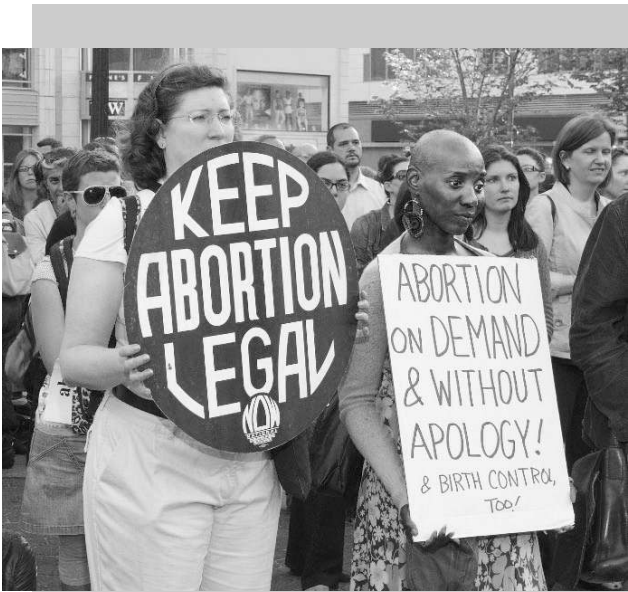
The Family: Key Institution of Women’s Oppression

The question of women’s oppression is one of the oldest social issues. In his 1884 book, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, Friedrich Engels lays out the historical roots of women’s oppression by means of the family in the rise and consolidation of private property and the state. He writes that “the overthrow of mother-right was the world historical defeat of the female sex. The man took command in the home also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude, she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children.”

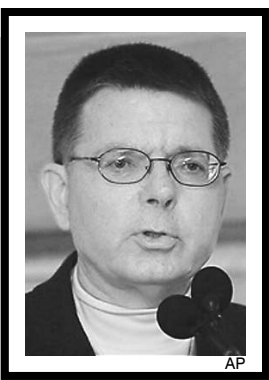
The development of productive techniques—especially the development of agriculture—led for the first time to the existence of a social surplus that made possible a leisured ruling class. The division of society into antagonistic classes brought also the need for a state to protect the ruling class. The class division of society led to the monogamous family and patrilineal descent. The biological fact of childbearing and child rearing became tied to the social oppression of women. As a means of consolidating wealth in the hands of a tiny minority, the patriarchal family decreed monogamy for women as a way to ensure that inheritance of property went to the proper descendants.

The institution of the family reinforces, as Engels put it, “the supremacy of the man over the woman, and the individual family as the economic unit of society.” The family is a key institution for the oppression of women and youth. For the proletariat, which has no property to leave to the next generation, the family serves to produce future generations of workers for capitalist exploitation and to provide for the care of the young and the old and other social services the capitalists don’t want to pay for. The family also indoctrinates young people in the ideologies pushed by the bourgeoisie, instilling social conservatism.

Women’s liberation requires a socialist revolution to end capitalist rule and lay the material basis for the replacement of



Above: June 2009 NYC vigil for Dr. George Tiller (top right). Bottom right: Dr. Barnett Slepian, murdered by anti-abortion terrorist in 1998.



the family, opening the door not only to legal equality but to social equality. The family in its economic and social functions can’t simply be done away with. It must be replaced by the socialization of housework and other tasks that now fall upon it. To do so means a comprehensive network of free, well-equipped, 24-hour childcare centers; free, top-quality medical care including abortion, no matter what term in pregnancy; socialization of such services as laundry and the preparation of meals; free access to all educational institutions. But achieving this, placing society’s resources truly in the service of working people, requires the overthrow of the capitalist private property system and the creation of a socialized economy under a revolutionary workers government, the dictatorship of the proletariat, which replaces the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.

Oppression of women affects all classes, but the fight for women’s liberation is inseparably linked to the struggles of the working class and the freeing of all working people from capitalist exploitation. The oppression of women is a question of *special oppression* internationally because you cannot fight for socialist revolution anywhere on this earth without championing the emancipation of women.

The Bolsheviks and Women’s Emancipation

It is our task to build an internationalist, vanguard working-class party that will lead the working class to seize the means of production—a party like the Bolshevik Party that led the 1917 Russian Revolution. The revolution was sparked by mass demonstrations in February 1917 by what Trotsky called the most oppressed and downtrodden part of the proletariat, largely women textile workers, demanding bread. In October, Lenin’s and Trotsky’s Bolshevik Party led the *socialist* revolution. The proletarian regime removed from the books all legal references to “illegitimate” children, made marriage and divorce simple civil acts and got rid of all laws against consensual sex, including homosexuality. In its insistence on individual

rights and gender equality, the Bolsheviks’ Family Code constituted nothing less than the most progressive family legislation the world had ever seen.

In 1920, women were provided the right to free abortion on demand. The clearing out of reactionary laws was coupled with attempts to afford mothers all the material resources possible. To the extent they could, the Bolsheviks set up communal kitchens and laundries and childcare centers. And they did this under conditions of immense poverty and devastation resulting from World War I and also from the Civil War, in which domestic counterrevolutionaries were aided by numerous capitalist countries that invaded the workers state. But the Bolsheviks recognized that without qualitative economic development, the liberation of women was a utopian fantasy. Leon Trotsky explained that from the beginning, the Bolsheviks recognized that the actual liberation of women was unrealizable on a basis of “generalized want.”

Lenin’s Bolsheviks broke the capitalist system at its weakest link, and they understood that unless the proletarian revolution was extended to the major capitalist powers, most immediately Germany, an isolated dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia could not long survive. They initiated the Third (Communist) International to extend the revolution. But the pressure of imperialist encirclement, the devastation of the Russian working class in the Civil War and the isolation of the workers state, particularly after the defeat of a revolutionary opportunity in Germany in 1923, enabled a bureaucratic layer headed by Stalin to usurp power in a political counterrevolution in 1923-24.

While resting on and deriving its privileges from the socialized property forms of the workers state, the Stalinist bureaucracy was not irrevocably committed to their defense. Stalin’s “theory” of “socialism in one country,” expressing the nationally limited interests of the Kremlin bureaucracy, increasingly turned the Communist International from an instrument of the world revolution into a new obstacle to revolution. The overall impact on women

of the bureaucracy’s usurpation of political power from the proletariat was decidedly negative. In June 1936, the Soviet Central Executive Committee issued a decree outlawing abortion. The new law offered incentives to childbearing by providing stipends for new mothers, large bonuses for women with many children and longer maternity leaves. It made divorce harder to get and stiffened the penalties for not paying alimony or child support. The bureaucracy declared the oppressive institution of the family a “socialist” unit.

The Stalinist bureaucracy opposed the fight for international revolution and so degraded the great ideals of communism with bureaucratic distortions and lies that, in the end in 1991-92, the working class did not fight against the revolution’s final undoing and the restoration of capitalist rule under Boris Yeltsin. We defended the Soviet degenerated workers state, the DDR (East Germany) and the East European deformed workers states unconditionally against military attacks by imperialism and against internal counterrevolution while at the same time fighting for proletarian political revolution. Today we defend the remaining deformed workers states: China, Cuba, North Korea and Vietnam.

The restoration of capitalism in East Europe and the Soviet Union was a direct blow to women, in every country. I came across an article on the Huffington Post Web site that told a story about a woman who was seeking an abortion in Poland, where it is now severely restricted. She had a condition in which pregnancy would likely cause blindness; as a result of being denied the abortion, she nearly went blind. The author, Vanessa Gera, writes: “Abortions were easily available under communism but with the transformation to democracy the once-marginalized Catholic church regained significant influence. Today Poland allows the termination of a pregnancy until the 12th week but only if the mother’s life is in danger, the fetus is irreparably damaged or the pregnancy is the result of rape or incest.” This is a good example of what capitalist counterrevolution has meant in the former Eastern bloc and what “democracy” under capitalism means.

Democrats Attack Abortion Rights

Abortion is a politically explosive issue everywhere because it raises the spectre of women’s equality. This simple and safe medical procedure provides women with some control over reproduction. For this reason it is viewed as a threat to the institution of the family. For a good part of the last 40 years, the anti-abortion crusade has been on the cutting edge of all-sided social reaction, wielded by institutionalized religion backed by the repressive power of the state under both the Democratic and Republican parties.

The emergence of the religious right in the late 1970s as an increasingly powerful and accepted force shaping social policy reflected the overall political and economic interests of U.S. imperialism at the time. Coming to office in 1977, the Democratic Carter administration kicked off an onslaught of domestic social reaction coupled with the renewal of U.S.

continued on page 10



Soviet tanks in Afghanistan, Afghan women in 1980. Red Army intervention opened prospect of social emancipation for women.



Abortion...

(continued from page 9)

imperialism’s Cold War drive aimed at the destruction of the Soviet Union. The American ruling class needed to overcome widespread fear and loathing of the government following the explosive years of the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, the rise of the New Left and finally the Watergate break-in that forced the resignation of Republican president Richard (“I am not a crook”) Nixon in 1974.

For the bourgeoisie, the social turmoil and defiance of authority were deeply disturbing, and the potential for an alliance of black militants and radicalized students with an increasingly restive labor movement was dangerous. Thus once the ruling class had cut its losses in Vietnam, where U.S. imperialism was defeated by the heroic workers and peasants, and sealed up that source of social instability, a major bourgeois ideological assault was launched to overcome the “Vietnam syndrome” and to instill an unquestioning acceptance of capitalism, God and family, including once again the desirability of dying for one’s country.

Abortion rights were among the gains made when the rulers felt they had to grant some concessions to the restless population. But like all such gains under capitalism, they were eminently reversible. The Hyde Amendment, enacted into law under Jimmy Carter, eliminated federal funding of abortion coverage under Medicaid, essentially depriving poor women of access to abortion. During Bill Clinton’s eight years in office, safe access to abortion was effectively gutted across much of the country. The number of abortion providers plummeted 14 percent between 1992 and 1996, and a huge number of laws were passed chipping away at abortion rights, including parental consent regulations targeting teenagers.

“Crisis pregnancy centers”—fake clinics set up to subject pregnant women to anti-abortion propaganda and otherwise pressure them to carry the fetus to term—now outnumber actual abortion clinics. There are as many as 4,000 of these anti-abortion centers, which have received \$60 million in federal abstinence and marriage-promotion funds. Meanwhile, 87 percent of U.S. counties have *no* abortion clinic.

As for Obama, while he claimed he was outraged by Dr. Tiller’s murder, as the Commander-in-Chief of U.S. imperialism he is the class enemy of working and oppressed women around the world. He explicitly disavowed defending the rights of women as well as immigrants in his health care proposal, proclaiming that “the reforms I’m proposing would not apply to those who are here illegally” and that “under our plan, no federal dollars will be used to fund abortion, and federal conscience laws will remain in place.” Earlier, Obama had pledged to uphold “the tradition in this town, historically, of not financing abortions as part of government-funded health care.” The “tradition” Obama is referring to is the Hyde Amendment.

Formal legality alone will not help poor, minority and working-class women

get abortions if there’s no doctors around to perform them and no clinics left to perform them in, and if they don’t have the money to pay for them. We have always fought for free abortion on demand as a necessary component of free, quality health care for all.

Today, millions of poor women are denied access to abortion under Medicaid programs. Only four states—New York, Hawaii, Maryland, Washington—provide state funding to allow Medicaid insurance to pay for abortions. Thirteen other states, including California and Illinois, make Medicaid recipients seeking abortions get a court order—they have to plead before the bourgeois justices to be allowed to not have a child. In 32 other states, funding for abortion is restricted to a woman whose life is in danger, is a victim of rape or is carrying a child of incest. Women living in these states are either forced to

of the two-parent black household” and lectured that to reduce poverty we have to “encourage teenage girls to finish high school and avoid having children out of wedlock.” This program for “change” is nothing more than labeling women who have children out of wedlock as deviants who breach the rule that women should remain monogamous, abstinent until marriage. The ruling class does not care about children or teenagers—look at the urban schools, where children are trained to walk through metal detectors, subjected to security guards, in sick preparation for populating the U.S. prisons.

The bourgeoisie has all kinds of mouth-pieces. In 2006, Democrats Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton kicked off a three-day event in Dallas to mobilize the black vote. They said abortion has been used too much to block discussion of issues like voting rights and affirmative action, i.e.,

to exclude unmarried mothers from government assistance. Adoption, an option widely accessible to white mothers, was virtually unheard of for black unwed mothers: no one wanted to adopt a black baby. Solinger discussed the case of one black woman in Illinois who was arrested and charged with desertion when she tried to give her child up.

Black Women and the American Nightmare

It wasn’t until the 1940s that public money became available to unwed mothers and their children through the Aid to Dependent Children program. As many potential recipients were black, a campaign was launched against the black unmarried mother. White racist policy makers pointed to high rates of black “illegitimate” pregnancy, harked back to slavery’s racist myths about blacks’ uncontrollable sexuality and promiscuous childbearing and located the source of these alleged behaviors in biologically determined inferiority. This was later supported by the racist book *The Bell Curve* by Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein, which claims that social disparities stem from the higher fertility rates of genetically less intelligent groups, including black people. Such views reflect the origins of American capitalism, built on the backs of black chattel slaves.

The Clinton administration carried out a relentless campaign against poor and black women that went virtually unopposed by feminists and union “leaders.” In 1996, as part of his campaign to “end welfare as we know it,” Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, which slashed benefits to the poorest people. The rulers play the race card to better “divide and rule.” Our perspective is to fight against the threat posed by slave-labor “workfare” by calling for jobs for all at union wages. We fight for the unions to organize the unorganized. This is the program to cut across the divisions between employed and unemployed, skilled and unskilled, and unionized and unorganized workers.

Today the fastest growing concentration of black women occurs not in the workforce but in the prisons. Much of this rise can no doubt be attributed to the “war on drugs.” Recently I read an interesting book on black women and contraception called *Killing the Black Body*, by Dorothy Roberts. In it she points out:

“Many Americans believe not only that Black mothers are likely to corrupt their children, but that Black children are predisposed to corruption. This trend is epitomized by the panic over ‘crack babies,’ Black infants irreparably damaged by the mothers’ use of crack during pregnancy.... Newspaper stories warned of a horde of Black children about to descend on inner-city kindergartens in need of high-cost special services. But the brain damage crack babies sustained was supposed to cut even deeper: lacking an innate social conscience, crack babies were destined to grow up to be criminals.”

Similarly, the Spartacist League argued 20 years ago that the “crack baby” hype was a bogus, racist campaign. Now even the *New York Times* admits as much.

In 1989, officials in Charleston, S.C., initiated a policy of arresting pregnant women whose prenatal tests revealed they were smoking crack. A team of police officers tracked down expectant mothers and raided maternity wards to haul away patients in handcuffs and leg irons hours after giving birth. Women remained shackled to their beds during the entire delivery. Shackling incarcerated women to their beds while in labor is still a practice in many states. Once the baby is born, the woman is allowed to bond in shackles.

We consider drug use, prostitution and gambling as “crimes without victims” and call for their decriminalization. The capitalist state’s criminalization of these activities has nothing to do with the welfare of society and everything to do with repressing the population. Drug use or addiction, depending on the circumstances, may be a health concern, but it should not be a crime.

Being black, poor and with little or no access to quality health care and contraception is a deadly combination for many.



Ryan/NY Times

Above: Evicted renter with her belongings on Milwaukee street. Right: Demonstrators carry banner outside White House on World AIDS Day, December 2009. Blacks account for majority of new HIV infections among women.



EPA

bear a child, forced to have an illegal abortion or forced to do whatever it takes to try to come up with the cash to travel across the state line to pay for an abortion, if it’s not too late in the term.

For all their lip service about “the right to choose,” the Democrats have repeatedly slashed access to abortion for working women and the poor. Obama calls for a “dialogue” with the anti-woman bigots; Hillary Clinton wants abortions to be “rare.” The Democrats pose as friends of labor and the oppressed, while the Republicans openly flaunt their anti-union, racist, anti-gay, anti-woman, anti-immigrant program. Both parties carry out fundamentally the same policies, while the Democrats lie about it more.

Black Women and Abortion Rights

In his 2006 book, *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama talked about “the collapse

electing the next black Democrat. When the Hyde Amendment was passed, Jackson wrote an open letter congratulating Congress.

After years of having no position, in early 2004 the NAACP officially declared it was in favor of abortion rights, a stance it quietly rescinded months later after significant backlash, which included loss of conservative donors. Now the NAACP won’t officially take a stand one way or the other, despite efforts spearheaded by Alveda King, Martin Luther King Jr.’s niece, to get them to adopt an anti-abortion resolution. Alveda King outrageously argues that abortion is tantamount to genocide of the black race. Her blog has a link to a Web site, blackgenocide.org, dedicated to throwing black women back to a time prior to the legalization of abortion, when unwed women were subjected to all kinds of hell for getting pregnant.

Wake Up Little Susie, a book by Rickie Solinger, gives you a picture of what life was like for single pregnant black and white women prior to *Roe v. Wade*. She notes that in the late 1950s and early ’60s, “in every section of the country, state legislators either passed or tried to pass laws mandating substantial fines and prosecution, incarceration, and sterilization of women who ‘persisted’ in having children without being married.” She noted that some of those victimized were women who had gotten abortions. From 1945 to 1973 at least 1.5 million unwed mothers in the U.S. carried their fetus to term and gave the baby up for adoption, many finishing pregnancies secretly in maternity homes.

An unmarried black pregnant woman looking for help prior to *Roe* had even less options. In the 1950s, most maternity homes excluded blacks; state laws sought

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WORKERS VANGUARD

Black women represent 66 percent of new AIDS cases among women in the U.S. HIV infection is the leading cause of death among black women aged 25 to 34. In NYC there is a government program called HASA (the HIV/AIDS Services Administration), which helps provide housing for poor people living with AIDS. However, in order to qualify they must have AIDS—that is, their T-cell count has to have dropped below 200. So, in order to qualify, poor people living with HIV have been known to stop taking their antiretroviral medications, allowing their T-cells to drop just to get a roof over their head.

The fight against sexual, racial and all oppression is part of our fight for world socialist revolution. In the U.S., the call for black liberation through socialist revolution encapsulates our fight for a third American revolution, a workers revolution. The realization of the age-long dream of black freedom—that is, the complete smashing of the color bar—can occur only through the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. In America, black working women suffer triple oppression: as women, as members of a race-color caste and as workers. The program for the emancipation of the black working woman is that program which enables the working class to forge a revolutionary internationalist party to lead the struggle to smash capitalist-imperialist rule.

Free, Quality Health Care for All!

In racist America, where jobs are getting harder and harder to come by, the forcible segregation of the black population at the bottom of society is wielded by the capitalist rulers as an effective club in holding back working-class struggle. Once serving as what Karl Marx called a reserve army of labor to be brought in during economic booms, under decaying capitalism blacks in the ghettos are now deemed to be a surplus population, an unprofitable mass not worth maintaining even at the most meager subsistence level. We fight for jobs for all, for a shorter workweek with no loss in pay, for national public work programs at union wages and unlimited unemployment benefits. We fight against all discrimination against minorities, women and gays and call for full citizenship rights for all immigrants.

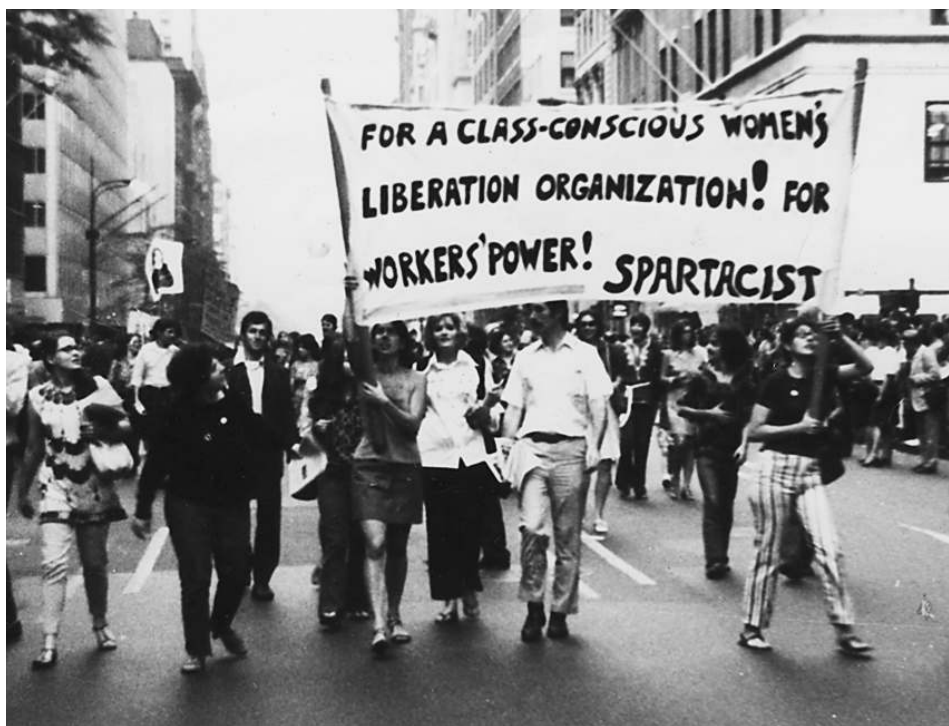
The racist American rulers arrogantly presume that they can get away with starving the poor, killing the sick and aged and further impoverishing all of labor without provoking any social protest. But they cannot eliminate the class struggle, born of the irreconcilable conflict of interest between labor and capital. Scenes of gutted dwellings, devastated communities and ruined families are being multiplied across the country at a rate not seen since the Great Depression of the 1930s. People cannot stand having no future for themselves or their kids, or feeling oppressed like slaves, with poverty, disease, no retirement benefits, no health care.

The strategy of the trade-union bureaucracy is to build an “alliance” with business, for example, over the question of health care reforms. The *New York Times* had an article about Dennis Rivera, an SEIU bureaucrat heading up their health care campaign. He is in alliance with Wal-Mart management and hospital administrators—the same ones who particularly here in New York cut the pay and pensions of the members of his own hospital union. Organizing Wal-Mart workers would do a lot for the *entire* working class; crawls for the Democrats in D.C. will do nothing. The labor movement has been

deceived and betrayed by the labor traitors, who sacrifice workers on the altar of the capitalist private property system.

The Democrats’ posture as “friends” of working people makes them effective political representatives for enforcing the rule of a system based on exploitation and oppression. Restoring the profitability and competitive edge of U.S. imperialism, where health care costs are the highest and the health of the majority of the population the worst in the advanced industrialized countries, is the real name of Obama’s “health care reform” game. We fight for free, quality health care for all!

As Marx and Engels wrote in the *Communist Manifesto*, “Not only has the bourgeoisie forged the weapons that bring death to itself; it has also called into existence the men who are to wield those weapons—the modern working class—the proletarians.” The current situation cries out for a revival of labor struggle to stop the attacks on health and pension benefits. Virtually every strike in the past two decades has been over defense of such benefits. The labor movement would find many allies if it were to take up the fight for socialized medicine—the expropriation of the parasitic health care and



Women and Revolution
August 1970: Spartacist contingent at first major “women’s liberation movement” march, New York City.

drug companies, which are an immediate threat to the well-being of almost everyone in this country. But the fight for such demands directly poses the need for a political fight to oust the present sellout union tops and replace them with a class-struggle leadership.

Reformists Tail Capitalist Politicians

In NYC, when the news first broke of Dr. Tiller’s murder we looked for protests to participate in. But what pose as pro-abortion groups basically did nothing in response to his murder, mainly candle-light vigils. A doctor who performed third-trimester abortions was not a very popular cause among the pro-Democratic Party “pro-choice” organizations. Groups like N.O.W. and NARAL looked to the election of Obama as the key to defeating the anti-abortion bigots. You can barely get these groups to say “abortion” anymore, and forget about free abortion on demand.

As for the reformists, the Workers World Party (WWP) bemoans “the FBI’s lackadaisical approach to the arrest of anti-abortion terrorists” and writes, “Why

haven’t there been serious, probing undercover investigations that could actually prevent these terrorist acts before they happen?” (workers.org, 11 June 2009). Perhaps it has something to do with the fact that the capitalist state is a weapon of class oppression, whose purpose is to suppress the working class when it tries to defend itself. By pushing illusions in the neutrality of the capitalist state, WWP participates in all known ways in politically disarming the fight for women’s liberation and the liberation of all the oppressed.

The International Socialist Organization’s answer to everything is to build “the movement,” that is, cross-class coalitions. They complain: Bush got elected for a second term because the movement wasn’t strong enough, the war on Iraq continues because the movement did not come together, clinics and abortion doctors are defenseless against right-wing attack because the pro-choice movement has retreated. Well, the real purpose of the ISO’s “movement” was to get Obama elected, making it a movement that guarantees that nothing really changes. An article called “Defending Abortion Rights” by Sharon Smith in the ISO’s *Internation*

tional Socialist Review (July-August 2009) notes that “entrusting politicians to defend legal abortion has proven a disaster for the pro-choice movement.” This is pretty rich coming from the ISO, which consistently runs campaigns to pressure and build platforms for capitalist politicians.

I was in Buffalo in the late 1990s when Dr. Slepian was killed and thousands turned out in protest. A sniper shot him through his kitchen window. WWP built a coalition to organize a protest of the murder. Their model of “stopping anti-woman and racist violence together” is building platforms for capitalist politicians such as Democrats and Greens. This particular coalition included local N.O.W. chapters campaigning for Chuck Schumer for Senator and for other Democrats.

At one point, one of the WWP organizers told me they were having difficulty appealing to the black community. I pointed out that for one thing, there was nothing addressing black people in their call or leaflet for the protest. She explained how the coalition was not in favor of “singling out racism” around this issue. But the killing of Dr. Slepian was a particular blow to the thousands of black and poor women with Medicaid seeking abortions in Buffalo, as he was the only abortion provider who accepted it. His clinic, situated in a predominantly poor black neighborhood, was frequented by white right-wing bigots with video cameras to intimidate the women and staff going in.

Not Feminism but Socialist Revolution Will Liberate Women

Despite the triple oppression that black women face in racist, sexist capitalist America, they have never been attracted in

significant numbers to the “women’s liberation movement.” This in itself is not surprising: the petty-bourgeois feminism that dominates the “movement” has very little to offer working women—black or white—and has had as little success in recruiting poor white women as poor black ones. Communists vigorously fight for equal rights for women even under capitalism. But the promise of equal rights under capitalism means no more for working women than the “right” to be equally exploited instead of superexploited, to be merely a wage slave instead of “the slave of the slave.”

Feminism is a worldview counterposed to revolutionary Marxism. Feminists analyze society as gender-based rather than class-based. It is an anti-egalitarian ideology of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois women who support the capitalist system and seek their own power and privilege within it. American feminism has a particularly reactionary history, as many of its founders embraced white supremacy. Early feminists such as Susan B. Anthony opposed the 15th Amendment passed after the Civil War because it provided black freedmen the right to vote rather than white women.

Feminism views anti-woman ideology as just bad thinking and puts forward that what’s needed is to spread correct ideas and then maybe people will catch on and stop being bigots. Like black nationalism, feminism is a variant of sectoralism, which means that each oppressed group must organize separately. We oppose sectoralism, which denies the possibility of consciousness transcending an individual’s own experience of oppression. We fight to unite the vanguard of all oppressed social layers behind the proletariat in the struggle for socialism. A gross example of the cross-class unity pushed by feminists is the notion that you’re in sisterhood with Hillary Clinton, Madeleine Albright and Condoleezza Rice. Bourgeois feminism also perpetuates the false belief that things are getting better for women: Hillary had a shot at the presidency, look at all the Congresswomen, etc.

The truth is that this irrational, boom-bust capitalist profit system is obsolete and must be swept away through socialist revolution. The entry of women into the proletariat opens the way to liberation: their position at the point of production gives them the social power, along with their male co-workers, to smash the capitalist system and lay the basis for women’s emancipation through the abolition of class exploitation and the replacement of the institution of the family. As revolutionary Marxists—Trotskyists—we struggle to educate and organize the working class to fight in its own interests and those of all the oppressed, which is the only way it can break its chains.

We fight for the rebirth of the Fourth International, which stands for the emancipation of labor and the oppressed worldwide: Those who labor must rule! The struggle for the expropriation of the parasitic capitalist class is a life-and-death question. Join the fight to build a revolutionary international workers party, a Trotskyist party. For women’s liberation through socialist revolution! ■

Women and Revolution

Journal of the Women’s Commission
of the Spartacist League/U.S.

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Labor: Fight Union Busting Attack on Rhode Island Teachers!

Central Falls, Rhode Island's poorest city, has become the center of a national war against the teachers unions. When the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers refused Central Falls High School superintendent Frances Gallo's demand that teachers work longer hours and attend training sessions after school without getting paid at union rates, the local school board voted on February 23 to fire all 93 teachers and staff. Outside the board meeting, teachers from around the state turned out by the busload to rally in support of the Central Falls faculty. In a supposed "compromise" currently under discussion, the union has already agreed to longer school days and "more rigorous evaluations and training" (*Washington Post*, 4 March). But even with this agreement, not all the teachers would be rehired.

Speaking in D.C. on March 1, President Barack Obama made a point of endorsing the mass firing, while his Education Secretary, Arne Duncan, "applauded" the school district for "showing courage and doing the right thing for kids." Obama's speech elicited outrage from the teachers unions on up to the top level of the AFL-CIO, which had mobilized union members and spent hundreds of millions in union funds to elect Obama CEO of American capitalism. As a mid-level Houston Federation of Teachers official put it: "We worked hard for this man, we talked to our neighbors and our fellow teachers about why we should support him, and we're having to dig the knife out of our back" (*New York Times*, 7 March).

The firings highlight that Obama's "school reform" program means outright union-busting. In order to get some of the \$3.5 billion the government is laying out for "School Turnaround Grants," "failing" schools can choose one of four methods: school closure; takeover by a charter operator; "transformation," which requires a longer school day and other changes; or "turnaround," which means firing the entire staff and rehiring no more than half. One teacher put it succinctly to the *Providence Journal* (24 February): "I think the real goal is to bust the unions."

Central Falls has more children living in poverty than anywhere else in Rhode Island, which has the second-highest unemployment rate in the nation, after Michigan. Of the more than 1,000 students at Central Falls High, 65 percent are Latino, and for many of them English is a second language. The largely Latino population has been subjected to immigration raids and a statewide campaign against undocumented workers. In 2008, some students stopped coming to class because their families had gone into hiding. The area's textile industry has long been dying out. But Central Falls is home to the Wyatt Detention Facility, a private jail that held hundreds of immigrants—including residents of Central Falls—awaiting deportation. A Wyatt detainee, Hiu Lui Ng, a Chinese-born computer engineer, died of untreated cancer and a broken spine in 2008 after months of being denied medical treatment despite excruciating pain.

On the heels of the firings in Central Falls, the *New York Times* (7 March) reported that Boston school officials are forcing staff members at six "under-

performing" schools to reapply for their jobs. Dismissing an entire school faculty casts a mold for broader attacks on public workers, who for the first time make up the majority of union members in the U.S., largely due to the erosion of industry and the acquiescence of the pro-capitalist labor tops to the proliferation of non-union shops. Democratic and Republican state governments are using the worst economic crisis since

health care and every other social service."

As Marxists, we defend secular universal public education as a democratic right. Against the class privilege and race bias that infuse education in this country, we fight for free, quality, integrated education, at all levels. We call to nationalize the private universities and for a state-paid living stipend so working people and the poor can attend. We demand the expansion of remedial programs, which are especially



Ertl/NY Times



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February 23: Rhode Island teachers rally in support of Central Falls High School faculty. Left: President Obama defends mass firing of Central Falls teachers at U.S. Chamber of Commerce, March 1.

the Great Depression to attack unions and push through layoffs and cuts in wages, benefits and pensions. Some 60,000 teachers were laid off last year alone.

Having driven public education into the ground, America's racist capitalist rulers blame overworked and underpaid teachers and their unions for the dismal state of schools. The fact is that for decades, public schools in major urban centers and dying industrial towns like Central Falls have been starved of funding by a ruling class that sees no need to educate those whose prospects are prison, the military or maybe a minimum-wage job. As we wrote in "Education U.S.A.—Separate and Unequal" (WV No. 544, 7 February 1992): "The problem for these youth is not in the classroom—it is race and class oppression which deprives them of jobs, housing,

important for students from the decrepit, overcrowded, segregated inner-city schools that are little more than holding cells.

It was no accident that Obama chose Duncan to run point in the drive against public schools and the teachers unions. In January, Duncan declared that Hurricane Katrina was "the best thing that happened to the education system in New Orleans," where all public school teachers and staff were fired and where millions in federal funds went to private charter schools. Duncan was in charge of the Chicago school system from 2001 to 2008, with devastating effect. By his own account, some 60 schools were closed during his reign, primarily in black and minority neighborhoods, while the number of charter and military schools mushroomed. The Chicago public school system boasts of its *five* military high schools and of a Junior ROTC program that is the largest in the country.

A centerpiece of the bourgeoisie's privatization schemes are charter schools, which are cynically promoted as a solution to the dismal state of education in the ghettos and barrios. In fact, charter schools constitute an attack on public education by siphoning off public funds to privately operated schools. The *New York Times* (7 March), which calls Harlem the "epicenter for charter schools," notes that more than a third of all first-grade students in one Harlem district are in charter schools. The result is that already impoverished public schools are even more starved of funds. Proponents of charters prey on the desperation of parents in the ghettos and barrios to find decent education for their children. But studies show that such schools have actually *increased* racial segregation, *increased* the gap between the education available to inner-city youth and that available to suburban youth. They have also gone a long way in undermining the separation of church and state by allowing religious outfits to run schools with public funds.

It is in the vital interest of all public workers unions, and of workers more broadly, to mobilize in defense of the fired teachers. Against the rulers' attempts to pit parents against teachers in the name of "school reform," the teachers unions would win wide support from working people and the poor by leading a fight for quality public education for everyone. But to carry out such a struggle requires fighting against the labor bureaucracy's class-collaborationist program of reliance on their Democratic Party "friends" in government.

The day after the mass firing at Central Falls High, American Federation of Teachers head Randi Weingarten could not even bring herself to condemn the school board's action, instead calling it a "failed approach" to school reform. Her primary concern, as she later put it, was "whether Washington, the states and local districts will be partners that help us do our job" (*New York Times*, 7 March). Her successor as president of the New York City teachers union, Michael Mulgrew, promised that the process of removing a teacher could be accelerated after schools chancellor Joel Klein complained that firing "incompetent" teachers was taking too much time (*New York Times*, 23 February).

The disappointment expressed by the labor officialdom over the course taken by the Obama administration is a faint echo of the bitter anger in the working class, which has been clobbered with massive unemployment, home foreclosures and continued attacks on health care and other benefits. Time and again, the union misleaders have sacrificed the interests of workers on the altar of class collaboration with the bosses and their politicians. What is needed is a class-struggle leadership of the unions—one based on the understanding that the interests of working people and the oppressed cannot be reconciled with those of the capitalist rulers. It will take a workers government to rebuild this society—including by providing decent jobs, education and medical care for everyone. To get there we need a workers party dedicated to the overthrow of this decaying capitalist order through socialist revolution. ■