

## Organize Non-Union Mines!

# Industrial Murder in West Virginia

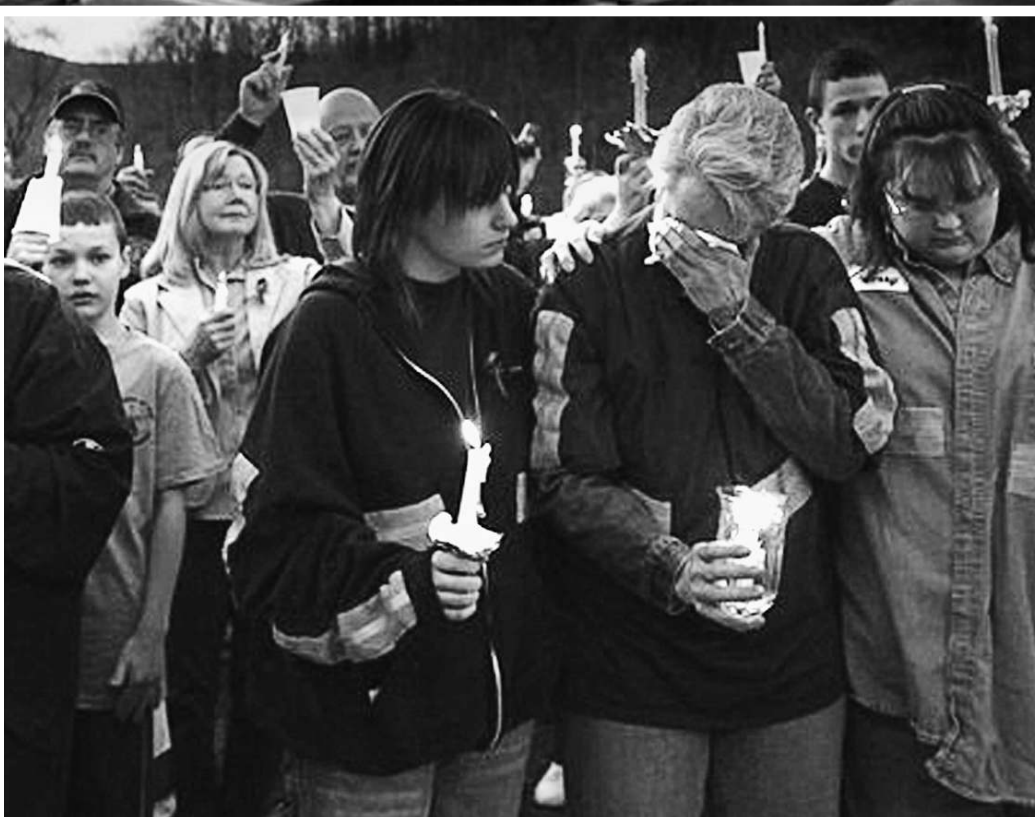


AP

It was a devastating blast, collapsing walls, twisting iron rail tracks like pretzels and, in the words of one of the survivors, engulfing miners as if they were “right in the middle of a tornado.” All told, the lives of 29 miners, ages 20 to 61, were claimed on April 5 at the Upper Big Branch coal mine in Raleigh County, West Virginia, the largest death toll in a single U.S. mine disaster in 40 years. This massive explosion, likely caused by a lethal combination of ignited methane gas and coal dust, was outright industrial murder by the Massey Energy coal bosses with the complicity of the state and federal governments. Conditions in the mine were so unsafe that one victim, Carl Acord, who had worked in the mines for 34 years, told his family he was worried about going to work that Monday. Another victim, Josh Napper, whose shift was sent home from work on the Friday before the explosion because of ventilation problems, wrote a goodbye letter to his fiancée, daughter and mother that weekend in the expectation that he wouldn’t live long working in that deathtrap.

For distraught family and friends, grief mixed with revulsion for Massey CEO Don Blankenship. When he and other company officials showed up outside the mine in the early morning hours after the explosion, the crowd hurled invectives—and a chair. Blankenship was sent scurrying into a quick exit under police escort. In a bid to defuse outrage, Governor Joe Manchin later called for all underground mines in West Virginia to halt production on April 16 to “evaluate safety practices.”

What should have happened is a national work stoppage by the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) in memory of the non-union Upper Big Branch miners and as a statement of the union’s intent to launch an aggressive



Getty

**Top: Entrance of Massey Energy’s Upper Big Branch coal mine following April 5 disaster, which killed 29 miners. Above: Candlelight vigil on April 10 for workers killed in methane gas explosion.**

campaign to organize the unorganized mines across the country. But such a course of action would require some elementary impulse for class struggle, as opposed to the craven appeals of the UMWA bureaucracy to the bosses’ government. Had the UMWA tops unchained the union’s power in any one of a number of strikes against Massey over the past 20 or more years, this disaster might have been prevented.

The deaths of the Upper Big Branch miners are a warning to workers everywhere that the forging of a class-struggle labor movement is a matter of life and death—not just in the mines but in meat-packing, public transport and throughout industry. To the capitalist bosses, the lives of workers are expendable in the service of the bottom line. The only way to establish and enforce safe working conditions is through mobilizing labor’s power. The pro-capitalist union bureaucracy sacrifices the interests, and the very lives, of workers on the altar of class collaboration, hamstringing labor’s power through

its reliance on capitalist politicians and government agencies. The union tops’ class collaboration is exemplified by their overwhelming fealty to the Democratic Party of Barack Obama, of which they are an integral part.

No less than the Republicans, the Democrats are a party of and for the capitalist class—the difference being that while Republicans make no bones about oppressing working people, the Democrats do the same while proclaiming themselves “friends of labor.” Whereas George Bush tapped company executives to head the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA), Obama appointed Joe Main, a former safety official for the UMWA, to the post. UMWA head Cecil Roberts enthused, “The workers have one of their own running this agency right now.” But what difference did that make to the miners at Upper Big Branch?

The capitalist rulers are waging an unrelenting war on the right of workers, the poor, immigrants and black people to live any kind of decent life. In the face of

a global economic recession, itself the product of the irrational capitalist profit system, the capitalists who have looted the economy rake in hundreds of billions in government bailout money while the working class and the poor are driven into deeper deprivation, homelessness and misery. Accepting the capitalist profit system and acting as enforcers of class peace, the labor bureaucracy has overseen the precipitous decline of the UMWA and other unions. Meanwhile, the capitalist rulers are using the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression to further attack the unions—already at their weakest point since the 1920s—and to push through deeper cuts in wages, benefits and pensions.

The fight to mobilize the unions in struggle against the employers must be based on the elementary understanding that the interests of labor and capital are irreconcilably counterposed. Labor must be mobilized independently of the bosses, their parties and their government. The capitalist government, from the local and state to the federal level, is nothing other than the executive committee of the capitalist class as a whole.

What is necessary is a political struggle to replace the union misleaders with a leadership dedicated to the political independence of the working class and the fight for a society in which those who labor rule. As we wrote after an earlier mine disaster that killed twelve workers at the Sago mine in West Virginia in 2006 (“West Virginia Mine Disaster: Capitalist Murder,” WV No. 862, 20 January 2006):

“Only when the working class rips the means of production out of the hands of the corrupt, obscenely rich capitalist class and establishes a planned socialist economy can the health and safety of every person be ensured. That requires the forging of a multiracial workers party, leading all the exploited and oppressed in the struggle for socialist revolution.”

### No Reliance on the Feds!

West Virginia was once UMWA country. Just 30 years ago, 95 percent of West Virginia miners were unionized, compared to under 25 percent today. It is no mystery

*continued on page 10*



# U.S. Atrocities in Iraq and Afghanistan: Imperialist S.O.P.

The recently released video showing a U.S. Apache helicopter firing on Iraqi civilians in 2007 vividly exposes what is standard operating procedure for the imperialist occupiers in Iraq and also in Afghanistan. WikiLeaks, which released the video last month, said it had got the footage from whistle-blowers in the military.

After getting permission from their commanders, the helicopter pilots opened fire on the unarmed crowd in Baghdad, killing most of them. One of the pilots gloated, “look at those dead bastards,”

to which the other replied, “nice.” As a wounded Reuters cameraman crawled away from the carnage, a van of civilians pulled up to aid him. The pilots then asked for and received clearance to strafe this van, killing the cameraman and others in the van and wounding two children in the front seat. When U.S. ground troops arrived on the scene and reported the wounded children, one pilot told the other, “Well, it’s their fault for bringing their kids into a battle.” Twelve people were killed that day,



WikiLeaks

**U.S. helicopter crew member brags, “Right through the windshield! Ha ha!” in leaked video showing slaughter of civilians in Baghdad in 2007.**

including two Reuters employees.

When asked about the video, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates defended the pilots’ actions, excusing it as a result of “the fog of war,” adding, “we’ve investigated it very thoroughly.” Indeed, this video is but the tip of a very grisly iceberg. The very nature of imperialist occupations and counterinsurgency operations means that everyone in the occupied country is “the enemy.”

U.S. forces have always employed the mass slaughter of civilians in their imperialist wars and occupations. The mass roundups and detention in torture centers like Abu Ghraib and Bagram are also part of the “democratic” imperialists’ store of “counterinsurgency” techniques. This is the case under either party of capitalism—Democratic or Republican—as is plain for all to see in the case of Obama’s “surge” in Afghanistan, as well as the lethal drone attacks in Pakistan. ***For the immediate, unconditional withdrawal of all U.S. and allied forces from Afghanistan and Iraq! Hands off Pakistan and Iran!***

In Iraq, the U.S. has pulverized what was once one of the more advanced countries of the Near East. By some estimates, more than 1.2 million people have been killed in Iraq since the 2003 U.S. invasion, this on top of some 1.5 million killed in the decade before through UN starvation sanctions. Meanwhile, the occupation of Afghanistan, which has been escalated by the Obama administration, involves daily atrocities by U.S./NATO forces against that country’s population.

In February, U.S. Special Forces troops killed two pregnant women and a teenage girl in eastern Afghanistan in a raid in which two Afghan government officials were also killed. An initial attempt by the U.S. military to cover up that story, claiming the women were killed by knife wounds administered earlier, unraveled after Jerome Starkey of the London *Times* exposed what happened. As Starkey reported in the London *Times* (13 March): “In a statement after the raid titled ‘Joint force operating in Gardez makes gruesome discovery’, Nato claimed that the force had found the women’s bodies ‘tied up, gagged and killed’ in a room.” Later, the U.S.-led military command in Kabul admitted that its forces had, in fact, killed the women and all the others. A later article by Starkey (5 April) reported: “US special forces soldiers dug bullets out of their victims’ bodies in the bloody aftermath of a botched night raid, then washed the wounds with alcohol before lying to their superiors about what happened, Afghan investigators have told *The Times*.” The family had some 25 guests and musicians on the night of the attack to celebrate the naming of a newborn child.

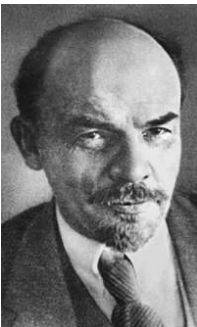
While the U.S. has carried out massive atrocities against the peoples of Afghanistan and Iraq, it has also met substantial resistance. We recognize that the Sunni or Shi’ite communalists in Iraq or the Islamicist fanatics of the Taliban in Afghanistan who are currently engaged in combat with the U.S. occupiers and their lackeys are murderous enemies of genuine national or social liberation.



TROTSKY

### The Liberating Goals of Communism

*In 1991-92, the Soviet Union, weakened by decades of Stalinist bureaucratic misrule, was destroyed by capitalist counterrevolution—a world-historic defeat for the proletariat. In the name of building “socialism in one country,” J. V. Stalin and his heirs in the Kremlin had trampled the liberating goals of Marxism in the mud. The 1938 founding document of the then-Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party explained that an egalitarian, stateless and harmonious society can be achieved only through international proletarian revolution.*



LENIN

With the provision of material abundance through planned socialist production, and the great educational and cultural advances thereby made possible, the socially useless and parasitic classes, as well as the remnants of capitalist ideology, will be eliminated. The entire population will be transformed into a community of free producers owning and controlling the total productive wealth and resources of society, and freely and consciously working out their own destiny. The need for the coercion and repression of socially alien classes will disappear with the disappearance of these classes, and together with them, of all classes. With it will vanish the need for a state machinery—even for the workers’ state. The state as an institution for the domination, repression, and coercion of men will be replaced by a purely technical administration for the handling of the general business of society. The noblest objective of the human race—communism, the classless socialist society—inaugurating a new era for all of mankind, will be realized.

The working class can build a complete socialist society only on the basis of a world division of labor and resources, and world cooperation. The revolutionary party in this country does not aim merely to lead the working class of the United States in revolution, but to unite with the workers of all other countries in the international revolution and the establishment of world socialism. Modern forces of production have compelled capitalism itself to transcend national boundaries; and the conflict between the world economy of capitalism and the outlived, constricting national political boundaries is a major source of the disastrous evils which confront the modern world. Capitalist imperialism cannot, however, achieve a harmonious society. World socialism is the only solution for the conflicts and disorders of the modern world, as well as for the major conflicts within a single nation. A socialist society will rationally and scientifically utilize the natural resources and productive machinery of the earth in the interests of the people of the earth, and will solve the conflict between the efficient development of productive forces and the artificial restrictions of national boundaries. It will grant the rights of free cultural self-determination to all nations. In these ways, world socialism will remove the causes of international wars, which under capitalism now seriously threaten to send mankind back into barbarism or complete destruction.

—“Declaration of Principles” (1938), reprinted in *The Founding of the Socialist Workers Party* (1982)

## WORKERS VANGUARD

**Marxist Working-Class Biweekly of the Spartacist League of the U.S.**

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The Spartacist League is the U.S. Section of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist).

*Workers Vanguard* (ISSN 0276-0746) published biweekly, except skipping three alternate issues in June, July and August (beginning with omitting the second issue in June) and skipping the last issue in December, by the Spartacist Publishing Co., 299 Broadway, Suite 318, New York, NY 10007. Telephone: (212) 732-7862 (Editorial), (212) 732-7861 (Business). Address all correspondence to: Box 1377 GPO, New York, NY 10116. E-mail address: [vanguard@tiac.net](mailto:vanguard@tiac.net). Domestic subscriptions: \$10.00/22 issues. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Workers Vanguard*, Box 1377 GPO, New York, NY 10116.

*Opinions expressed in signed articles or letters do not necessarily express the editorial viewpoint.*

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

**No. 957**

**23 April 2010**

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NUMBER 61 ENGLISH EDITION SPRING 2009

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**Spartacist** (English edition)  
**No. 61, Spring 2009**  
**\$1.50** (64 pages)  
*Spartacist* is sent to all WV subscribers.  
**Order from/pay to:**  
Spartacist Publishing Co.  
Box 1377 GPO  
New York, NY 10116

The following article is reprinted from *Workers Hammer* No. 210 (Spring 2010), newspaper of the Spartacist League/Britain, section of the International Communist League. The Militant tendency is the forerunner of Peter Taaffe's Socialist Party in Britain, affiliated with Socialist Alternative in the U.S., and the late Ted Grant's Socialist Appeal, whose U.S. supporters are the Workers International League.

## WORKERS HAMMER

The Fifth Conference of the International Communist League (ICL) in 2007 adopted the position of opposition in principle to Marxists running for executive office in the capitalist state. Such offices include president, mayor, provincial or state governor as well as cabinet member in Britain. As we noted:

“Communist deputies can, as *oppositionists*, serve in the U.S. Congress, parliaments and other legislative bodies as revolutionary tribunes of the working class. But assuming executive office or gaining control of a bourgeois legislature or municipal council, either independently or in coalition, requires taking responsibility for the administration of the machinery of the capitalist state. The ICL had previously held that communists could run for executive offices, provided that we declare in advance that we don't intend to assume such offices. But in re-examining this question, we concluded that standing for election to executive positions carries the implication that one is ready to accept such responsibility, no matter what disclaimer one makes in advance. For self-proclaimed Marxists to engage in such activity only lends legitimacy to prevailing and reformist conceptions of the state.”

—“Down With Executive Offices of the Capitalist State! Marxist Principles and Electoral Tactics,” *Spartacist* [English edition] No. 61, Spring 2009

When Marxists run candidates and seek election to bourgeois parliaments it is in order to use them as a platform for furthering the goal of proletarian socialist revolution. In the face of the betrayal of the Social Democratic leaders in Germany at the outset of World War I, Karl Liebknecht used his position in parliament to urge the German proletariat to wage revolutionary class struggle against the German bourgeoisie. As Liebknecht put it in his famous rallying cry: “the main enemy is at home.” The Bolshevik Party carried out revolutionary agitation and propaganda work, even in the reactionary tsarist Duma.

Assuming executive office, however, means becoming responsible for administering the capitalist system of oppression and exploitation of the working class. The London mayor is the boss of the city's Tube [subway] workers, for example, which means carrying out attacks on their wages and conditions. As an example of why communists don't run for or take executive office, this article will look at the experience of Liverpool City Council from 1983-87, when the deeply Labourite Militant tendency, forerunner of today's Socialist Party and Socialist Appeal, gained control of the council and administered the bourgeois state at the municipal level.

### The Communist International and the Struggle Against Reformism

Our opposition to executive offices flows from the Marxist understanding that the state is not neutral but an organ of class rule. At its core the state consists of armed bodies of men and instruments of coercion—the police, the army, prison officers, the courts, etc.—committed to the defence of the prevailing property forms. In every struggle of the working class the attitude that one takes towards the state is critical. The fundamental counterposition is between the reformist strategy of taking hold of and administering

# British Reformists in Action

# When Militant Ran Liverpool



Tony Mulhearn (far left) and Derek Hatton (center), members of Militant group who ran Liverpool City Council in 1980s, with Liverpool Labour Group leader John Hamilton. Book by Peter Taaffe and Mulhearn eulogizes this sordid chapter.

the bourgeois state apparatus and the revolutionaries' insistence on the need to smash the existing state and replace it with organs of proletarian rule.

Opposition to executive office is a corollary of Lenin's *The State and Revolution* and *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, written in 1917 and 1918 respectively. In effect, these are founding documents of Lenin's struggle to forge a new, revolutionary international following the collapse of the Second (Socialist) International into social chauvinism at the outbreak of WWI in August 1914. With their support for their “own” bourgeoisies many of the official Socialist leaders passed over definitively to the defence of the capitalist order against the working class. In rescuing the revolutionary heritage of Marxism from the reformist betrayers of the proletariat, Lenin had to reassert the fundamental lesson that Marx and Engels drew from the experience of the Paris Commune of 1871, which was, as Marx wrote in *The Civil War in France*, that: “the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes.” The experience of the Commune enabled Marx and Engels to codify the revolutionary tasks of the proletariat vis-à-vis the bourgeois state.

The question of ministerialism—the participation of Socialists in bourgeois governments—had been the subject of a

major dispute in the Marxist movement as early as 1899, over what became known as Millerandism. The French Socialist leader Alexandre Millerand joined the government of René Waldeck-Rousseau in order to help defuse the deep social crisis that had been raging over the Dreyfus affair. The anti-Semitic witch hunt of this Jewish military officer had polarised the country. Millerand's entry into the government as minister of commerce was a betrayal which divided French Socialists.

Rosa Luxemburg, the Polish-Jewish revolutionary who played a central role in the struggle against this reformist rot and against ministerialism, wrote: “The entry of a socialist into a bourgeois government is not, as it is thought, a partial conquest of the bourgeois state by the socialists, but a partial conquest of the socialist party by the bourgeois state” (“The Dreyfus Affair and the Millerand Case,” 1899). But the Second International compromised on the key question of socialists entering bourgeois governments. A resolution cooked up by Karl Kautsky proclaimed:

“The entry of an individual socialist into a bourgeois ministry cannot be regarded as the normal beginning of the conquest of political power but can be only a temporary and exceptional makeshift in a predicament.

“Whether in a given case such a predicament exists is a question of tactics and not of principle. Here the Congress shouldn't decide. But in any case this

dangerous experiment can be advantageous only if it is approved by a united party organization and the socialist minister is and remains the mandate-bearer of his party.”

—*Internationaler Sozialisten-Kongress zu Paris 1900* [International Socialist Congress in Paris 1900] (Berlin: Expedition der Buchhandlung Vorwärts, 1900) (our translation)

The ICL stands on the resolutions of the first four Congresses of the Communist International (CI), which began the task of clearing out the Augean stables of Social Democratic betrayal and mainly did a good job of reaffirming Marxism on the question of the state. However, we think that the task was not fully completed and we are not uncritical of the CI during this period. In fact our position that communists should not run for executive office is an extension of our criticism of the entry of the German Communist Party (KPD) in October 1923 into the regional governments of Saxony and Thuringia, which were led by so-called “left” Social Democrats. This was a move which helped derail a revolutionary situation (see “A Trotskyist Critique of Germany 1923 and the Comintern,” *Spartacist* [English edition] No. 56, Spring 2001).

At its Fourth Congress in 1922, the CI incorrectly applied the term “workers government” to the *bourgeois* governments of Saxony and Thuringia. We understand “workers government” as a popular designation for the dictatorship of the proletariat that follows the smashing of the bourgeois state. In Germany in 1923 the capitalist state was still intact and KPD participation in these governments reinforced prevailing parliamentary prejudices and acted as an obstacle to revolution.

### Comintern Ambiguity on Municipalism

An example of unfinished business of the CI on the capitalist state was seen in the “Theses on the Communist Parties and Parliamentarism” at the Second Congress of the Comintern in 1920. The theses make clear that:

“The proletariat's task is to break up the bourgeoisie's state machine and to destroy it, and with it parliamentary institutions, whether republican or constitutional-monarchist.”

—*Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress, 1920* (Pathfinder, 1991)

Thesis 5 unambiguously states what the reformist left often denies, namely that municipal councils are a component of the bourgeois state apparatus which must be smashed by workers revolution:

“It is no different with the bourgeoisie's institutions of local government. To counterpose them to the organs of the state is theoretically incorrect. They are in reality organizations similar to the mechanism of the bourgeois state, which must be destroyed by the revolutionary proletariat and replaced by local soviets of workers' deputies.”

However another thesis, number 13, which was added as an amendment, contradicts this understanding. It reads:

“Should Communists hold a majority in institutions of local government, they must (a) organize revolutionary opposition against the central bourgeois government; (b) do everything possible to serve the poorer sectors of the population (economic measures, creating or attempting to create an armed workers' militia, and so forth); (c) at every opportunity point out how the bourgeois state blocks truly major changes; (d) on this basis develop vigorous revolutionary propaganda, never fearing conflict with the state; (e) under certain conditions, replace municipal governments with local workers' councils. In other words, all of the Communists' activity in local government must be a part of the general work of undermining the capitalist system.”

While trying to draw a line against municipalism, this point is ambiguous enough that it leaves the door open for opportunism.

*continued on page 4*

# Down With Executive Offices of the Capitalist State!

# Liverpool...

(continued from page 3)

For us revolutionaries, it is important to acknowledge the weakness of the early revolutionary CI on municipalism. But unlike the CI, the Militant tendency which ran Liverpool Council had long been a hardened reformist organisation.

## The Myth of “Municipal Socialism”

A classic example of opportunist “municipal socialism” is the experience of Poplar Council in the years immediately following WWI. The term “Poplarism” is based on the “Councillors’ Revolt” against the central government, which is upheld to this day by reformists of every stripe as an exemplary “socialist” struggle. In the book *Liverpool: A City that Dared to Fight* by Peter Taaffe and Tony Mulhearn (Fortress Books, January 1988), Poplar is cited several times as an inspiration for Militant when it ran Liverpool.

In 1919 the Labour council of Poplar in East London, led by Mayor George Lansbury, began a struggle with the central government, which at that time was a coalition of the Liberals and Tories. Seeking to force richer London boroughs and the central government to assist with poor relief, the Poplar councillors refused to collect rates [taxes] other than those for the immediate benefit of the impoverished people of Poplar. As the post-WWI economy nosedived, unemployment levels were high, including among London’s dockers. George Lansbury was a left-Labourite—the Tony Benn of his day—in addition to being a Christian Socialist and a pacifist. Among the Labour councillors elected in Poplar were two Communists, Lansbury’s son Edgar and his wife Minnie.

The Poplar Labour councillors acted with considerable courage and were imprisoned for their stubborn campaign on behalf of the poor. However, fundamentally Poplarism revealed the futility of “municipal socialism” to provide any solution to the devastation wrought by the capitalist system of exploitation of the working class. That required workers revolution to rip the means of production out of the hands of the capitalists and a collectivised planned economy in at least a number of advanced capitalist countries. All the Poplar councillors could do was to try to pressure the central authorities to provide money. Noreen Branson recounts in her book *Poplarism, 1919-1925* that councillors hung out a placard when the King and Queen visited the borough stating: “Poplar Borough Council expects this day the King will do his duty by calling upon His Majesty’s Government to find work or full maintenance for the unemployed of the nation.”

In contrast to the later example of the Militant in Liverpool, which did not oppose British troops in Northern Ireland and was mired in the imperialists’ campaign against the Soviet Union, Poplar Council did pass resolutions calling for the withdrawal of British troops from Ireland, as well as opposing British imperialist intervention against the Soviet Union. Poplar councillors were among those who, in 1920, stopped the ship the

**Left: Bolshevik Duma fraction exiled to Siberia for opposing World War I, 1915. Right: Karl Liebknecht was imprisoned by German authorities for opposing imperialist war.**



VEB Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften

*Jolly George* from being loaded with munitions bound for Pilsudski’s nationalist forces in Poland for use against the Soviet army. The action by London dockers against the *Jolly George* was part of the Hands Off Russia campaign which had been established for working-class action in defence of the fledgling Soviet state against imperialist intervention. (See “‘Hands Off Russia!’ British Labour and the Wars of Intervention 1918-21,” *Spartacist Britain* No. 36, October 1981.)

## Militant’s Record in Liverpool

Militant held executive office in Liverpool in the context where Margaret Thatcher’s Tory government was waging a savage war against the working class

was founded in 1964. While falsely purporting to be Trotskyist, they were in fact an organic part of the Labour Party. Contrary to their claim to be winning workers in the Labour Party to Marxism through their “deep entry,” it was Militant who took on the political line of the reformist Labour Party, a classic case of the mask becoming the face. Militant’s entire political perspective was to bring in “socialism” through gaining a majority in Westminster [Parliament]. The “What We Stand For” box in their newspaper *Militant* shows what this organisation was about. In the 27 May 1983 issue they demand:

“Nationalisation of the top 200 monopolies, including the banks and insurance companies which control 80-85 per cent



Robin Thompson

**Limits of municipalism: Left-Labourite Poplar borough councillors in London’s East End fought for minimal raise in welfare payments for poor and unemployed, 1921.**

and oppressed minorities. The coal miners were the main target but Thatcher took aim against the whole working class and had a particular disdain for former strongholds of the industrial proletariat such as Liverpool, Manchester and South Yorkshire, as well as Scotland and Wales. The Thatcher government cut the Rate Support Grant (central government funding) to cities like Liverpool, which was devastated by unemployment with the decline of shipbuilding and the docks. Militant had taken office on the basis of a programme of public spending. They refused to increase the rates (local taxes) and put pressure on the government to make up the budget deficit. This is the substance of Militant’s much vaunted struggle in Liverpool.

The Militant tendency, led by Ted Grant,

of the economy. This should be done through an Enabling Bill, with compensation based only on proven need.”

This is parliamentary cretinism—the notion that socialism will come not through workers revolution but via the “mother of all parliaments.” Militant infamously upheld the line that cops and prison guards—the armed fist of the capitalist state—are “workers in uniform.” This reformist programme is upheld by the Socialist Party today. In August 2007, when thousands of prison officers staged a strike over pay, most of the reformist left gave gushing support to the strike. The Socialist Party went further, inviting Prison Officers’ Association (POA) leader Brian Caton to address its “Socialism 2007” event. Grotesquely, Caton is today a member of the Socialist Party.

Characteristically, the Taaffe/Mulhearn book extols the 1919 police strike and the “union” of police and prison officers, which it says “was founded in August 1918 to fight for the interests of ‘workers in uniform’.” Having described only pages before the savage police assaults against striking railway workers on St. George’s Plateau in August 1911, Taaffe/Mulhearn declare:

“Many workers in Liverpool had indicated that they would come to the side of the police, which showed their sound proletarian instinct. This was despite many vivid memories of the beatings and shooting they had suffered at the hands of the police in 1911.”

In 1921 these cops carried out a brutal assault on unemployed workers occupying the Walker Art Gallery in which, as Taaffe/Mulhearn describe it, “workers’ blood ran down the steps of the gallery.” This confirms the nature of the police as

described by Trotsky in an article about Weimar Germany:

“The fact that the police was originally recruited in large numbers from among Social Democratic workers is absolutely meaningless. Consciousness is determined by environment even in this instance. The worker who becomes a policeman in the service of the capitalist state, is a bourgeois cop, not a worker.”

—“What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat,” January 1932 (*The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*)

## Labourism and Cold War

Prior to 1983 Liverpool Council was run by the Liberals and Tories, often in coalition. The desperate economic situation however produced a shift and a political vacuum into which Labour, dominated by Militant, was able to move. When Militant assumed office in Liverpool the anti-Soviet Cold War campaign of the imperialists was at its peak over the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan in 1979 and the rise of Polish Solidarność in the early 1980s. The Trotskyist Spartacist League stood forthrightly for the military defence of the Soviet Union, a bureaucratically degenerated workers state, and the deformed workers states of Eastern Europe against imperialism and internal capitalist counterrevolution, while fighting for proletarian political revolution to oust the Stalinist bureaucracies, whose policies of conciliating imperialism undermined that defence. Today, we uphold the same programme in respect of the remaining deformed workers states—China, Cuba, North Korea and Vietnam. Militant howled along with Thatcher and Reagan in their anti-Communist crusade against the Soviet Union. On 14 October 1982 Militant tendency goons attempted to exclude the Spartacist League from a demonstration in Liverpool against youth unemployment. Incensed by our opposition to counterrevolutionary Solidarność in Poland, after announcing that our banner “had no place on the march” they attempted to tear it down.

At the time the Militant tendency was being witchhunted by the Labour leadership. Under the impact of Reagan and Thatcher’s Cold War drive against the Soviet Union the Labour Party was rent by a bitter struggle between the pro-NATO, pro-CIA right wing, led by Denis Healey, and the Little England reformists around Tony Benn, whose opposition to the siting of American missiles in Britain threatened to make Labour unfit for government in the eyes of the British bourgeoisie. We defended the Militant tendency against Labour’s inquisitors, while noting:

“Just as Healey is proving Labour’s loyalty to the bourgeoisie by witchhunting Militant, so Militant tries by witchhunting the SL to prove its loyalty to anti-Soviet Labourism and its determination to get Labour into Parliament (with or without ‘socialist policies’) above all else.”

—“Witchhunted Witchhunt,” *Spartacist Britain* No. 45, November 1982

Like Benn, Militant truly believed that the Labour Party was a “broad church” which should function as a “party of the whole class.” We sought to exacerbate this split in the Labour Party by driving out the pro-CIA Healey wing, to place Benn in a position where his reformist politics could be exposed as a central obstacle to building a revolutionary party.



Workers Hammer

**Spartacist banners at 14 October 1982 demonstration in Liverpool against youth unemployment drove Militant bureaucrats into frenzy.**

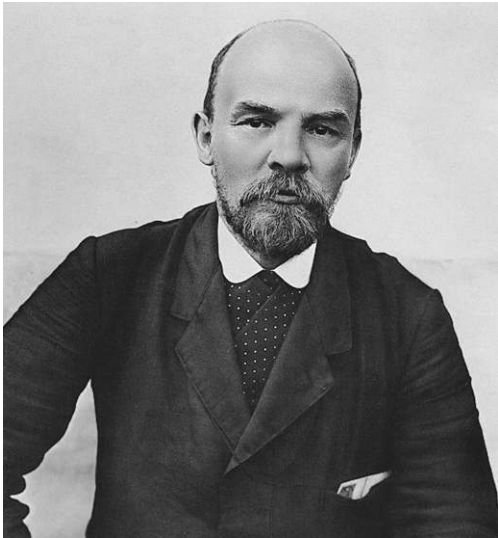
Among our slogans that enraged Militant were “Kick out CIA/NATO-lover Healey!” and “Labour can betray without the CIA connection!” More than a decade later, following the defeat of the miners and counterrevolution in the Soviet Union, Tony Blair began the project of seeking to transform the Labour Party from a “bourgeois workers party”—having a mass working-class base, but saddled with a pro-capitalist leadership and programme—into an outright bourgeois party, by severing all links to the trade-union movement. This process is unfinished but Labour is now moribund as a reformist party of the working class.

### Militant and the Miners Strike

Peter Taaffe, today’s Socialist Party leader who was a leader of the Militant tendency with the late Ted Grant, equates Militant’s stewardship of Liverpool Council with the heroic year-long miners strike of 1984-85. The first paragraph of the preface to Taaffe and Mulhearn’s book says:

“Since 1979 the conditions and rights of working people appear to have been crushed by the Thatcher juggernaut. In reality, the working class has put up ferocious opposition to the Tory government. This reached its height in the titanic year-long miners’ strike of 1984-5 and in the stand of the Liverpool City Council between 1983-7.”

Ludicrously placing the most significant class struggle in Britain since the 1926 General Strike on the same plane as Militant’s pleading with Thatcher for more



B.D. Vigilev

**Bolshevik leader V.I. Lenin’s 1917 *The State and Revolution* explains Marxist understanding of state as instrument of class rule.**

money for Liverpool shows Taaffe’s miserable parliamentary cretinism. Although the book is 500 pages long there are only a few passing references to the miners strike. Thatcher deployed the full weight of the capitalist state—thousands of riot cops, MI5 spies, court sequestrators, etc.—against the NUM [National Union of Mineworkers], which was dubbed the “enemy within.” As Taaffe/Mulhearn acknowledge: “the miners’ strike had to be ‘seen off’ and this was not to take place until March 1985.” Thus, in July 1984, four months into the miners strike, Thatcher’s minister Patrick Jenkin made a deal with the Militant-led council whereby the Tory government in Westminster would give Liverpool Council £30 million in exchange for a rates rise of 17 per cent. In his book *Inside Left: The Story So Far*, published in 1988, former Militant deputy council leader Derek Hatton recounts being told by Tory MP [Member of Parliament] Teddy Taylor that “we had to tell Patrick to give you the money. At this stage we want [miners union leader Arthur] Scargill. He’s our priority. But we’ll come for you later.”

We called for spreading the miners strike to other strategic industries, particularly the railways and the docks, which would have shut down the country. This would have immediately raised the question of state power, of which class shall rule. Taaffe/Mulhearn say that: “Like other councils, Liverpool City Council was heavily involved in support for the miners” and cite the facilities provided by the council “for collecting cash to buy food which was delivered to the mining areas by the lorry-load.” But Militant’s perspective was above all to get a Labour

**November 1984: Mass picket of miners and transport workers. TUC/Labour leadership spiked joint class struggle, leaving miners to fight alone against massive state repression.**

Stefano Cagnoni/Report



government elected. The Labour Party at that time was led by Neil Kinnock, who was despised by militant miners, especially for his denunciations of the strikers as “violent” while they were under massive police assault. Kinnock infuriated the miners not least with his call for a ballot, which became the rallying cry of all those who sought to defeat the strike, including Thatcher and the TUC [Trades Union Congress] misleaders, and was echoed by much of the so-called “far left.” Not surprisingly, in their book, Taaffe and Mulhearn repeat this strike-breaking call, stating:

“Yet as Militant has consistently pointed out, one of the fundamental weaknesses of the miners’ strike was the failure of the leadership to hold a ballot which

son Bond, a Militant supporter from London, was appointed as Principal Race Relations Advisor to the Liverpool Council. Taaffe/Mulhearn claim:

“Two entirely different philosophies, reflecting diametrically opposed class forces, clashed on the issue of his appointment as Principal Race Relations Officer to the Liverpool City Council. On the one side stood the class conscious approach of the labour movement. On the other side stood the race relations industry, feeling threatened to the very marrow of their being by the appointment of just one Marxist to such a potentially important position.”

Militant’s so-called “class conscious approach” was nothing other than Labourite chauvinist indifference to special oppression. In *Inside Left* Derek Hatton states that Militant’s position “has always been that while accepting there is discrimination, the problems of the black community are part of the overall struggle. It is a class problem, and a Socialist problem, and must be solved within that wide framework.” He continues, “To do otherwise is to alienate many white working-class people from identifying with the struggle.”

Hatton’s fear of “alienating white working-class people” is an expression of Militant’s pandering to backward consciousness, including racism. Their indifference to racial oppression is of a piece with their refusal to call for British troops out of Northern Ireland and their refusal to defend the Catholic population against national oppression at the hands of the British imperialists and the Orange state. This crass Labourite social chauvinism is exemplified by an article in the 6 January 1984 *Militant* titled “Northern Ireland: Labour Must Combat Sectarianism.” Militant says, “the Labour Party in Britain can and must play a significant part in helping Northern Irish workers come together in common struggle for socialist change.” This is the same pro-imperialist Labour Party which led the cheering in Parliament at the execution of James Connolly; which sent British troops into Northern Ireland in 1969 and which introduced the first draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act in 1974. Of course Militant’s leaders are past masters at disguising their Labourite opportunism in the language of pseudo-Marxism, claiming that they’re fighting for “working-class unity.”

Once the Thatcher government had defeated the miners—who were betrayed by the misleaders of the working class—Thatcher turned her attention to Liverpool. The city councillors were made personally liable for the refusal to set a rate. A total of 47 councillors were surcharged [charged a penalty], while the council tried to raise money from the Swiss banks. But in the meantime, with the money running out in a matter of weeks, Militant famously issued redundancy [layoff] notices to the council workers. As described by Taaffe/Mulhearn:

“The Labour group decided on the ‘tactic’ of issuing 90-day redundancy notices to the 30,000 strong workforce to gain that period as a breathing space in order to build the campaign. It was absurd to suggest, as the press and to their shame the national trade-union leaders subsequently did, that 30,000 workers were to be sacked.”

They conclude, however, that “the issuing of ‘redundancy notices’ turned out to be a major tactical error.” Derek Hatton, in *Inside Left*, unwittingly captures the mis-

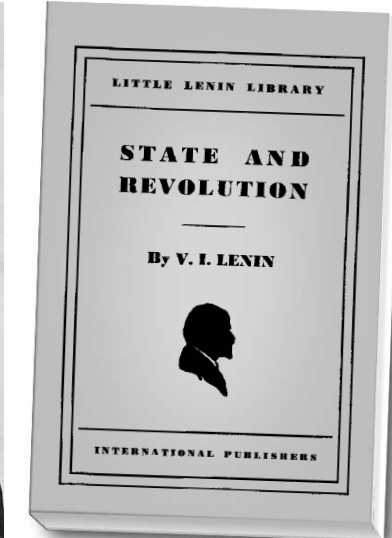
erable spectacle of self-proclaimed “Marxists” administering capitalism against the workers:

“We argued, that by issuing redundancy notices we could also hammer home the sharp reality of our arguments: that unless more money was available to Liverpool from the central funds then jobs really were on the line. There was never ever any intention to implement a single one of those 31,000 redundancy notices.”

Not surprisingly, Militant’s redundancy “tactic” was bitterly opposed by the unions. Hatton bleats: “Now we were their employers, and they fought us bitterly every inch of the way. We had told them that the redundancy notices were only a tactical ploy, but they sold the idea to their members as though it was for real. ‘Should we let our employers sack us—or should we stand and fight them now?’ was the line they took.” That is the end result of running the local state in the first place, which means becoming the bosses.

The Labour councillors were surcharged and banned from office by the courts. Militant were rewarded for their decades of loyalty to the Labour Party by being expelled by the Neil Kinnock leadership. The response of Militant to the witch hunt is explained in an appendix to the Taaffe/Mulhearn book: “When faced with expulsion proceedings in 1982, *Militant’s* Editorial Board decided to challenge the NEC’s [National Executive Committee] unconstitutional and undemocratic move in the courts.” Use of the bourgeois courts against political opponents in the trade unions or the workers movement is a breach of the principle of proletarian independence and an attack on the labour movement’s strength. Inviting the class enemy to intervene in the internal affairs of the labour movement is to promote illusions in bourgeois democracy by portraying the state as “neutral” between classes. That is the very essence of Militant’s Labourite reformism.

What was the result of Militant’s proud record in Liverpool? They boast that the Labour vote in 1987 was higher in Liverpool than the national average and much higher than it had been in 1983. In other words, if only that swing had been reflected nationally we would have had...a Kinnock-led Labour government! That’s what you get with “socialists” holding executive office and administering the capitalist state. In its own way it’s a powerful argument for why you need a workers revolution. ■



### Militant/Socialist Party: Labourite Social Chauvinism

As a city, Liverpool was built on the slave trade. The City Hall from which Militant conducted their business is decorated with stone representations of slavery; city streets are named after those who got very rich in the trafficking of black human flesh, including numerous mayors of the city such as Foster Cunliffe, Joseph Bird and George Campbell.

In 1981, rampant police brutality against minority youth sparked riots in Toxteth [in Liverpool]. As we wrote in *Workers Hammer* No. 109 (September 1989):

“Unemployment in the heavily black Toxteth area can reach up to 80 per cent. In some areas, according to another report in the *Independent* (15 October 1988) unemployment among black youth is as high as 90 per cent. ‘Nowhere else in Britain are blacks so exposed to threats, taunts, and abuse if they leave an area of the city’ (*Guardian*, 19 July).”

A Marxist revolutionary should strive to be, in Lenin’s words, “not a trade union secretary but a tribune of the people.” In other words, we fight against all manifestations of oppression in capitalist society and seek to lead the multiethnic working class in a struggle against racism in all its forms, against women’s oppression, against the oppression of homosexuals, etc. The Militant tendency is a far cry from a “tribune of the people.”

A furious row developed when Samp-



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# The Cold War and the Civil Rights Movement

We print below the second and final part of a Black History Month Forum given in New York City on February 20 by Workers Vanguard Editorial Board member Paul Cone. Part One appeared in WV No. 956 (9 April).

The Democratic Party's dominance in national politics was based on the New Deal coalition of Northern liberals and Southern segregationists. Throughout the Great Depression and World War II, Franklin D. Roosevelt refused to endorse anti-lynching legislation and the desegregation of the armed forces. Many of his New Deal programs—including Social Security—largely excluded the bulk of the black population in the South. Maintaining this New Deal coalition was a paramount concern for the Democratic Party establishment, up to and including John F. Kennedy in the early 1960s.

## PART TWO

But in 1948, President Harry S. Truman adopted a mild civil rights platform at that year's Democratic Party Convention. Truman was motivated by the Democrats' Cold War foreign relations concerns, as well as the need to prevent a hemorrhaging of liberal votes to Henry Wallace's Progressive Party in that year's presidential election. Wallace, who had been Roosevelt's vice president from 1941-45 and then Secretary of Commerce, ran for president on the bourgeois Progressive Party ticket on a platform that called for peaceful negotiations with the

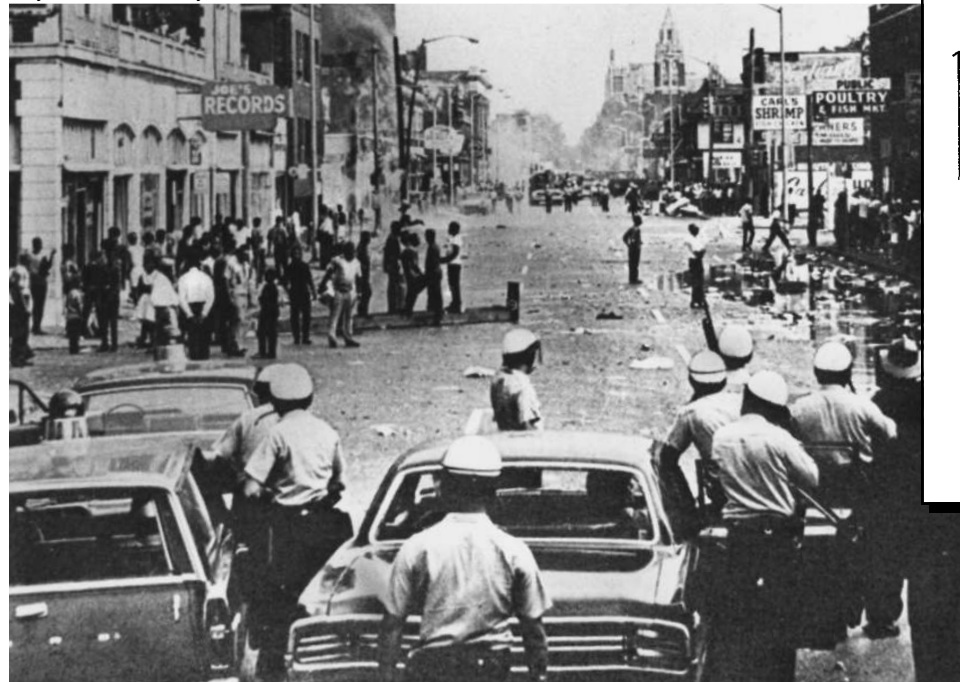


Civil rights protesters attacked by cops in Birmingham, Alabama, May 1963. AP

president. (The Democrats had been the racist South's historic party well before Abraham Lincoln, a Republican, won the 1860 presidential election on a platform opposing the extension of slavery.) With the help of the black vote in Northern urban centers, Truman squeaked out an upset victory. For the most part, the Southern Dixiecrats remained a core part of the Democratic Party until the mid 1960s.

Defending the strategy of "realignment," UAW president Walter Reuther declared, "We felt that instead of trying to create a third party—a labor party... that we ought to bring about a realignment and get the liberal forces in one party and the conservatives in another" (quoted in David Brody, *Workers in Industrial America: Essays in the Twentieth Century Struggle*). *Labor Action*, published by Max Shachtman—who had split

Wayne State University



Soviet Union, repeal of Jim Crow laws and legal guarantees of civil rights. Wallace was supported by the Stalinist Communist Party (CP).

Hubert Humphrey's speech at the 1948 Democratic Convention marked his national emergence as a liberal icon. He went on to become one of Washington's most virulent anti-Communist witchhunters. Humphrey sponsored the 1954 Communist Control Act outlawing the CP and proposed to amend the 1950 McCarran Act to set up concentration camps for "subversives" in the U.S.

When Truman won the Democratic presidential nomination, a significant number of Southerners fled the Democrats to form the States Rights Party and nominated South Carolina governor Strom Thurmond for

While Thurmond was trying to lead the South out of the Democratic Party, the social democrats, liberal labor tops and the CP adopted the strategy of "realignment"—i.e., driving the Dixiecrats from the party and pressuring the Democrats to fight for black rights. The social democrats were also actively trying to drive the reds out of the unions. Some of these social democrats, such as Bayard Rustin, A. Philip Randolph and, later, Michael Harrington, would be long-time advisers to Martin Luther King.



Muhammad Speaks

**Cops invade Detroit ghetto during 1967 upheaval. Cartoon captures cringing pacifism of Martin Luther King, who supported suppression of 1960s ghetto explosions.**

with Trotskyism on the eve of the Second World War because he refused to defend the Soviet Union against imperialism—declared in 1956: "The indicated strategy for labor in the coming Democratic Convention is: oust the South from the Democratic party through an all-out struggle for civil rights." This article was written by left Shachtmanite Hal Draper, whose Independent Socialist Clubs, founded in 1964, were the precursor to the International Socialist Organization (ISO).

Years later, responding to the Black

Power advocates in late 1966, Rustin stated, "The winning of the right of Negroes to vote in the South insures the eventual transformation of the Democratic Party.... The Negro vote will eliminate the Dixiecrats from the party and from Congress...." Rustin called for "a liberal-labor-civil rights coalition which would work to make the Democratic party truly responsive to the aspirations of the poor" (*Commentary*, September 1966). Meanwhile, the CP's Claude Lightfoot argued, "ousting the Dixiecrats from the halls of Congress" will "lay the basis for building a broad and pro-democratic and anti-monopoly coalition" (*Turning Point in Freedom Road: The Fight to End Jim Crow Now* [1962]).

The program of building "unity" with progressive capitalists in an "anti-monopoly" coalition and both working within and pushing from outside to make the Democrats fight remain the hallmark of American reformism.

In the early years of the civil rights movement in the 1950s, the then-Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party (SWP) insisted on the need for an independent labor party in the fight for black and workers rights. American Trotskyist leader Richard S. Fraser argued against "realignment" reformism: "The differences within the leadership of the Southern Democratic Party are tactical ones of how best to protect white supremacy." Fraser recognized the revolutionary implications of the fight for black freedom:

"It is the Negro movement which at the present moment holds the key to the whole picture. If the Negroes should succeed in breaking away from the Democratic Party, large sections of the industrial working class in decisive sections of the country would be impelled to do likewise. The result would be the disintegration of the Democratic Party in its strategic Northern centers and its replacement by independent labor political action."

—"Why Support for the Democrats by Reuther and the CP Helps Preserve White Supremacy," *Militant*, 24 September 1956

Ultimately, the Democratic Party *did* get "realigned." But not in the way the social democrats foresaw. Passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act by the Johnson administration would lead to a massive flight of Southern whites to the Republicans—the realization of the Southern strategy first devised by Barry Goldwater in the 1964 presidential election and implemented successfully by Richard Nixon in the 1968 election. The Democrats have won barely any Southern states in national elections since. And as the Democrats spent the next 32 years pandering to that white racist vote, the reformists only deepened their commitment to "fighting the right" through the Democratic Party.

## Post-World War II Struggles

The United States emerged from World War II as the pre-eminent imperialist power. Its European capitalist rivals were in tatters, and several of them were discredited and reviled by large sectors of the working masses for their identification with the fascists. Colonial empires were dissolving. Independence movements in turn were inspiring black activists in this country, as would the revolutionary overturns of capitalism in countries like China and Cuba.

Wartime employment and organization into CIO unions

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

provided tremendous advances for black people. At the same time, black veterans returned to a wave of lynchings and race terror North and South. These black workers would form the core of the early civil rights movement—for example, the NAACP grew ninefold between 1940 and 1946.

In posturing as the shining defender of “freedom” and “democracy,” Washington had a distinct handicap. Despite the devastation and the loss of 27 million people during the war, the Soviet bureaucratically degenerated workers state emerged with tremendous international prestige—a military power that had liberated Europe from Nazi Germany, and a rising industrial power as well. The Soviets provided support for national liberation movements in Africa. The U.S. was widely detested as an ally of the British, French and other European colonial powers. The postwar Marshall Plan to rebuild West Europe as a bulwark against the Soviets also played a key role in preserving the colonial empires of U.S. allies—for a time. When the French African colony of Guinea voted for independence in 1958, the U.S. supported France’s retaliations and refused to recognize Sékou Touré’s government. In 1960, the U.S. opposed a United Nations resolution condemning Portugal for forced labor and brutality in its African colonies, and another censuring South Africa for its apartheid policies.

Following the 1960 Sharpeville massacre in South Africa, in which 69 black activists were killed for protesting the hated apartheid pass laws, President Eisenhower waxed on about his concerns for the white South Africans and what he called their “difficult social and political problem.” The Congo won its independence from Belgium that same year and within months Eisenhower resolved to remove its nationalist prime minister Patrice Lumumba, authorizing the CIA to try to eliminate him. Lumumba was executed in early 1961, with U.S., Belgian and UN complicity. During the Kennedy administration the CIA worked closely with South African security forces, in 1962 tipping them off to African National Congress leader Nelson Mandela’s whereabouts, which led to his arrest and 27-year imprisonment.

But the biggest public relations problem for the U.S. rulers was the horrific treatment of black people within their own borders. This was well known to workers, students, guerrilla leaders and government officials from Bombay to Lagos. Even U.S. imperialism’s closest allies recognized the dilemma. In 1947, at the height of the Greek Civil War, with the U.S. pouring military aid to the brutal right-wing forces, Helen Vlachos, writer for the conservative Greek newspaper *Kathimerini*, traveled to the American South. She related how, after her trip, she could better understand “the bitter answer of a small Negro boy who, when asked by his teacher what punishment he would impose upon Adolf Hitler, said, ‘I would paint his face black and send him to America immediately’” (Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights* [2000]).

The opening verbal shot of the Cold War was British prime minister Winston Churchill’s famous 1946 Fulton, Missouri, speech. I say “verbal shot” because the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were the first real shots. Over 200,000 Japanese people were sent to a fiery death

out of racist spite and with the purpose of intimidating the Soviet Union. Churchill, speaking at the segregated Westminster College in Truman’s home state of Missouri, declared that “an iron curtain has descended across the continent.” Churchill stated, “We must never cease to proclaim in fearless tones the great principles of freedom and the rights of man which are the joint inheritance of the English-speaking world and which through Magna Carta, the Bill of Rights, the Habeas Corpus, trial by jury, and the English common law find their most famous expression in the American Declaration of Independence.” Needless to say, none of these applied to black people in the South. The NAACP, the leading civil rights organization of the day, blasted Churchill’s speech: “It would virtually insure continuation of imperialism.... Great Britain’s policies toward colonial peoples which have been continued by the present labor government can cause only shudders of apprehension as far as Churchill’s proposal of an Anglo-American coalition is concerned” (quoted in Ger-

“non-aligned states” that his presence gave “living proof to the fact that there is no truth in the Communist charge that the Negro is oppressed in America” (quoted in Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*). Ultimately, Powell’s “reward” for this service was to be stripped of his Congressional seat in the 1960s. Wilson Record’s 1951 book, *Race and Radicalism, The Negro and the Communist Party in Conflict*, was used by the U.S. in Asia and Africa. Promoting Record’s anti-Communist work, Voice of America broadcasts proclaimed, “This is the real American Negro as he is described by the distinguished Negro sociologist Wilson Record.” Wilson Record was a white man, from Texas.

A number of civil rights leaders joined in the State Department’s efforts. A. Philip Randolph declared his support of the Fair Employment Practices Commission in 1948. He said: “The most powerful political propaganda weapon Russian Communism now holds in its hands is discrimination against Negroes” (quoted in Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight*

dying world capitalism. The strengthening of capitalism in turn would mean the strengthening of all its institutions, including the institution of Jim Crow which Negroes are fighting to end.”

## The Cold War Attacks on Labor

The year 1946 saw the largest strike wave in U.S. history, followed by an anti-Communist purge of the unions. Key in this purge was Walter Reuther of the United Auto Workers (UAW). At the same time, the imperialists, led by the Democratic Truman administration, launched the Cold War against the Soviet Union.

As early as 1947, Truman put in place a loyalty board to screen all government employees and the purge of left-wing militants from the CIO began. That same year Congress enacted the strikebreaking Taft-Hartley Act. In addition to outlawing such labor weapons as secondary strikes, it barred Communists from union office. The anti-Communist witchhunt was launched to regiment the “home front,” to break the back of the militancy of the industrial unions that had been organized in the 1930s.

Some 25,000 union members, many of them key leaders of the CIO organizing drives, were purged from the labor movement, in some cases leading to the destruction of whole unions. Shachtman’s Independent Socialist League supported the expulsions of the CP-led unions from the CIO. The anti-red purge installed a venal, pro-imperialist union leadership that abetted the bosses in fostering racial divisions and would preside over the decimation of the unions in coming decades.

In the South, the red purge drove from the unions a militant generation of working-class fighters for black rights. Ironically, this took place against the backdrop of “Operation Dixie,” the CIO campaign to organize the South. As the experience of the 1930s had shown, this would require combining the fight for unionization with the struggle against Jim Crow. This was anathema to the CIO tops, whose Democratic Party loyalties ruled out any effort that would affront the Dixiecrats.

The anti-Communist purge targeted just about anyone seen as fighting for black rights. This in turn also levied a heavy toll on the unions. Among the questions asked of Dorothy Bailey, a black U.S. Employment Service employee, to “prove” supposed Communist sympathies, was: “Did you ever write a letter to the Red Cross about the segregation of blood?” (quoted in Biondi, *To Stand and Fight*). She was fired from her job. Black workers were asked, “Have you ever had dinner with a mixed group? Have you ever danced with a white girl?” White workers were asked if they ever entertained blacks in their home. Witnesses before the witch-hunting commissions were asked, “Have you had any conversations that would lead you to believe [the accused] is rather advanced in his thinking on racial matters?” (Philip S. Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker, 1619-1973* [1974]).

Under the 1950 Port Security Act (a precursor to the Maritime Security Act adopted a few years back as part of the “war on terrorism”), 50-70 percent of sailors and longshoremen dismissed were black or foreign-born. Purgings of black postal workers by the loyalty board were upheld by the Supreme Court.

In Birmingham, Alabama, the South’s one truly industrial center and accordingly a center of black—and white—proletarian power, there is a long history of investigations into the connections between blacks and reds. By the end of 1956, Virginia, Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina and Mississippi had adopted laws and launched investigations to harass the NAACP, while Alabama, Louisiana and Texas banned the organization’s activities outright.

In 1948, the U.S. Justice Department indicted leaders and members of the CP under the thought-crime Smith Act. The SWP defended the CP, which had earlier hailed the Smith Act prosecutions of Trotskyists in the early 1940s for their revolutionary opposition to World War II. Even while under attack during the Cold

*continued on page 8*



**June 1958: Black leaders lobby White House following suspension of school integration in Little Rock, Arkansas. From left: Martin Luther King, White House administrator E. Frederic Morrow, President Dwight Eisenhower, A. Philip Randolph, Attorney General William Rogers and NAACP leader Roy Wilkins.**

ald Horne, *Black and Red* [1986]). The NAACP would soon sing a different tune.

The State Department’s international propaganda efforts had a sort of Joseph Goebbels quality. On one hand, the government prevented black critics from traveling abroad. Most prominent among them was the actor Paul Robeson, a supporter of the CP, whose passport was seized. The State Department also prevented unfavorable books from being stocked in its libraries overseas. At the same time, the United States Information Agency distributed pamphlets abroad, such as *The Negro in American Life*, that depicted ever-increasing harmony in race relations. This pamphlet boasted of how equality was slowly “nurtured” as compared to post-Civil War Reconstruction’s “authoritarian measures” that had sought to impose equality for the newly freed black slaves in the South.

The State Department sponsored tours of black public figures to back up the lies. Whenever called upon, NAACP executive secretary Walter White would fly overseas to sing the praises of U.S. race relations. Jazz great Dizzy Gillespie toured Africa for the State Department, as basketball star Bill Russell did in 1959. New York Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, who had earlier been elected with CP support, told the 1955 Bandung Conference of

[2003]). Speaking at the 50th anniversary of the NAACP’s founding, Walter Reuther warned that segregation “can be American democracy’s achilles heel in Asia and Africa where the great millions of the human family lives” (quoted in Horne, *Black and Red*). In 1958, after a federal court judge ordered a moratorium on school desegregation for a couple of years, Martin Luther King, Randolph, the NAACP’s Roy Wilkins and others joined in a letter of protest to Eisenhower, declaring, “In our world-wide struggle to strengthen the free world against the spread of totalitarianism, we are sabotaged by the totalitarian practices forced upon millions of our Negro citizens” (quoted in Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*).

In 1949, when Randolph declared blacks would and should fight in a war against the Soviet Union, the SWP’s *Militant* (26 December 1949) powerfully answered:

“By this answer he gives a go-ahead signal to the very same ruling class that is responsible for the oppression and segregation of the Negro people at home—for a war that will be a projection on the international field of the same reactionary policies that they are pursuing in the United States.... Not only the Soviet masses but American workers and Negroes have a stake in preserving this system, for its destruction in a war by U.S. imperialism would mean a new lease on life for



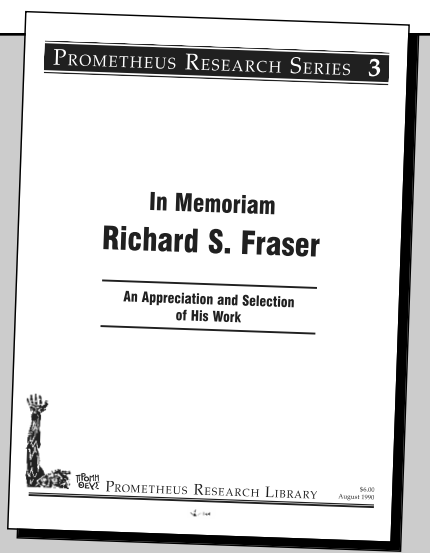
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Civil Rights...

(continued from page 7)

War, the Stalinists did their best to poison any united action against the witchhunters. Robeson spit on the SWP’s campaign for the “legless veteran” James Kutcher. Kutcher, who had lost both his legs in World War II, was fired in 1948 from his government clerk’s job in Newark, New Jersey, because of his SWP membership.

By the late 1940s, in stark contrast to their statement following Churchill’s speech, the NAACP had dropped even any verbal opposition to colonialism. They had ousted W.E.B. DuBois, one of the organization’s founders, following his support to the Henry Wallace presidential candidacy in the 1948 elections. For the next two decades NAACP head Roy Wilkins and lead counsel Thurgood Marshall, who went on to become the first black justice on the U.S. Supreme Court, shared information about alleged Communists with the FBI. The Harlem Branch of the NAACP had a special “Committee on Subversion.”

Toadying to the forces of racist reaction did little to immunize liberal civil rights leaders from the witchhunters. Ultimately, it only emboldened them. Redbaiting was a common thread throughout the course of the civil rights movement. Despite his pacifism and pro-Democratic Party politics, King was subjected to vicious and degrading FBI surveillance, wiretapping and interference in his personal life. The wiretaps on his phone, as well as on Bayard Rustin’s, were authorized by Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy.

The International Context

There is a lot of anecdotal material on the international effects of various events in the civil rights period and how these events caused a great deal of embarrassment for the U.S. imperialist rulers. I want to give just a few examples surrounding some of the landmark events of that time.

The international effects of the civil rights movement were made clear in the Justice Department’s intervention into a series of civil rights cases, including the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954, which outlawed segregation in public schools. In the *Brown* case, the government submitted a “friend of the court” brief that quoted Secretary of State Dean Acheson at length: “The United States is under constant attack in the foreign press...because of various practices of discrimination against minority groups in this country.” Acheson continued, “As might be expected, Soviet spokesmen regularly exploit this situation in propaganda against the United States, both within the United Nations and through radio broadcasts and the press, which reaches all corners of the world.” One young activist of South Africa’s African National Congress offered, “I think Amer-

ica has lost African friendship. As far as I am concerned, I will henceforth look East where race discrimination is so taboo that it is made a crime by the state” (quoted in Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line*).

Over the next few years, black students’ attempts to attend all-white schools were met with a vicious racist backlash that again reverberated across the world—most famously in the fall of 1957. When nine black students went to enroll in Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, they were met with lynch mob opposition led by the Capital Citizens’ Council. The day before school opened, Democratic Party governor Orval Faubus called in

the initiative and the lid of repression is clamped on tightly, the social equilibrium is not upset by a lynching or other terrorist actions.” Fraser presciently added, “When the Negroes take the initiative it is a ‘race riot’ and the public security is threatened and an excellent reason is given to the government to intervene” (“Contribution to the Discussion on the Slogan ‘Send Federal Troops to Mississippi,’” reprinted in “In Memoriam—Richard S. Fraser: An Appreciation and Selection of His Work,” *Prometheus Research Series* No. 3, August 1990).

This was proven to be the case. Eisenhower’s troops were sent to put down an upheaval of the Little Rock black popula-



Vice President Richard Nixon’s car attacked by angry protesters in Venezuela, May 1958.

250 National Guardsmen, guns in hand, to keep the black students out. As soldiers blocked the school entrance, a racist mob screamed at 15-year-old Elizabeth Eckford, “Lynch her! Lynch her!” After days of protests, Eisenhower sent in the 101st Airborne Division.

As myth has it, this was to “protect” the black students. The call for federal troops to the South was a defining issue throughout the course of the civil rights movement. We are opposed to such calls on the armed forces of the capitalist state. In an early expression of the SWP’s loss of its bearings under the pressure of the Cold War, in October 1955 the party called on the government to send troops to Mississippi to defend blacks. Inside the SWP, Richard S. Fraser objected to the slogan, writing in a March 1956 document, “If we advocate that the Federal Government send them there, we will bear political responsibility for the consummation of the demand.” He noted, “The most probable condition under which the Federal Government will send troops to the South will be that the Negroes hold the initiative in the struggle. As long as the white supremacists have

tion when it fought to disperse the racist mob and defend the students. The troops restored “law and order,” preventing the total rout of the retreating racists. In a pattern that would be repeated in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963 and Watts, California, in 1965, King praised the troops for enforcing “nonviolence” among the black population. He sent a telegram to Eisenhower “to express my sincere support for the stand you have taken to restore law and order in Little Rock, Arkansas.” He added, “your action has been of great benefit to our nation and to the Christian traditions of fair play and brotherhood” (*The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., Volume IV: Symbol of the Movement, January 1957-December 1958* [2000]). Eisenhower had earlier conveyed his notion of brotherhood to Supreme Court justice Earl Warren, telling of his empathy for the segregationists: “These are not bad people. All they are concerned about is to see that their sweet little girls are not required to sit alongside some big overgrown Negroes” (quoted in Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*).

Little Rock reverberated worldwide. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles complained, “this situation was ruining our foreign policy.” Jazz legend Louis Armstrong canceled a propaganda trip to the Soviet Union planned by the State Department. He explained: “The way that they are treating my people in the South, the government can go to hell.” When then-vice president Richard Nixon visited Venezuela in 1958 his limousine was stoned by an angry crowd who chanted, “Little Rock! Little Rock!” Dignitaries from Third World countries wooed by Washington were themselves often denied the use of public facilities and subjected to the same racist humiliation as American blacks were on a daily basis. John Kennedy’s secretary of state, Dean Rusk, described one such incident:

“Early in the Kennedy years a black delegate to the United Nations landed in Miami on his way to New York. When the passengers disembarked for lunch, the white passengers were taken to the airport restaurant; the black delegate received a folding canvas stool in a corner of the hangar and a sandwich wrapped with wax paper. He then flew on to New York, where our delegation asked for his vote on human rights issues.” —quoted in Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*

Having been elected in 1960 with no particular political commitment to civil rights legislation, the administrations of Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson ushered in the 1964 Civil Rights Act. This won John Kennedy and his younger brother, Robert, reputations as champions of black rights. In fact, Kennedy’s primary concerns were prosecuting the Cold War against the USSR and keeping the Democratic Party coalition of Northern liberals and Southern Dixiecrats together. Just a few years after Robert Kennedy signed wiretap orders on King’s phone, Johnson’s attorney general Ramsey Clark would escalate the war against the Black Panthers and other “black extremists.” In 1992, Clark went on to found the International Action Center, among whose leading spokesmen are members of the Workers World Party (WWP).

In Birmingham in 1963, the world watched police official Bull Connor and his stormtroopers: police dogs were set loose upon black protesters, while firehoses set at pressures sufficient to strip off tree bark hurled children up against walls. In response, the black masses fought back with sticks, rocks, knives and bottles against the racists in the streets. It was at that moment—and not before—that Kennedy sent troops to bases outside the city and announced he had taken steps to federalize the Alabama National Guard.

In the wake of black self-defense efforts against Klan and cop terror in Birmingham, Kennedy made vague suggestions of civil rights legislation. The 1963 March on Washington was an attempt to channel the mass struggle for black rights into pressure politics for the passing of such a civil rights bill and to cement ties with the Democratic Party. But when Kennedy called the civil rights movements’ “representative leaders” into the Oval Office, they quickly changed their minds about seeking to pressure Kennedy, who they saw was dragging his feet. The destination of the march was changed from the White House to the Lincoln Memorial. The march leaders deleted a “statement to the president” and a call to confront Congress from the march handbook. Participation was denied to “subversive” groups and speeches were censored.

Malcolm X rightly condemned the march as a “farce.” Overseas it generated substantial goodwill for the administration. But this didn’t last very long. The following month the Klan bombed the 6th Avenue Baptist Church in Birmingham, killing four young black girls. When an embassy official invited a Cameroon government representative to a screening of a film on the March on Washington, he was asked, “Don’t you have a film of the church dynamiting, too?”

The following year, in 1964, months after Kennedy’s assassination, his successor Lyndon Johnson pushed through the Civil Rights Act, formally eliminating segregation in schools and public accommodations. In early 1965, Johnson ordered the first bombing attacks on Vietnam, sparking the initial antiwar protests and again revealing the brutal face of U.S.

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imperialism around the world. Days after enactment of the Voting Rights Act in 1965, Watts erupted after the arrest of a black motorist, as did ghettos across the country over the next three years, an expression of the frustrated expectations generated by civil rights agitation. These upheavals marked the beginning of the end of the civil rights period.

The End of the Civil Rights Era

After the ghetto upheavals in Harlem and Watts, when it was clear the explosions were part of a pattern and not isolated events, it also became clear that King’s “turn the other cheek” ethos had no relevance to the embittered urban black masses. In 1966, Stokely Carmichael, newly elected as chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), raised the demand for “Black Power.” This call electrified young radicals from the Jim Crow South to the ghet-

a revolutionary solution to the oppression of black people. Despite their militancy and personal courage, the Panthers’ program was one of black nationalism—disdainful of the only force for revolutionary change, the multiracial working class. Their isolation left them especially prey for the brutal COINTELPRO vendetta. Within a few short years, the Panthers of Newton and Seale would run for office for the petty-bourgeois Peace and Freedom Party and then the Democratic Party.

The Myth of MLK’s Radicalism

This brings me back to why understanding historical context is so important. The unique circumstances—both domestically and internationally—that set the stage for the civil rights movement’s struggle for legal equality have long been removed. The desperate conditions of black people today, in the context of the deteriorating conditions of the

oppressed.... Dr. King’s fight is still before us, as is his inspiration” (January 2004).

Nobody has pushed this more tirelessly than the WWP and the ISO. King’s picture is plastered all over the WWP Web site and posters for their “Bail Out the People” campaign. *Workers World* cites the “transformative” last year of King’s life, during which it claims he “had come around to the understanding that merely altering the appearance of the capitalist system would in a short time amount to little more than a cruel betrayal of the fierce urgency to change the system.” They add: “This contradiction pushed King toward...an anti-capitalist struggle” (*Workers World* online, 3 September 2008).

The ISO’s Brian Jones chimes in that “in that last year of his life,” King “campaign- ed for radical, social-democratic reforms that are *still* far beyond what the Democratic Party is prepared to accept” (*Socialist Worker* online, 19 January 2009).

speech at Riverside Church, King chastised Johnson for suppressing Vietnam’s “only noncommunist revolutionary political force, the unified Buddhist Church” (“Beyond Vietnam,” 4 April 1967). He issued the timeworn appeal for “reordering our priorities, so that the pursuit of peace will take precedence over the pursuit of war,” this being “our greatest defense against Communism” (Martin Luther King Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* [1967]).

The ISO’s Jones lavishes praise on King’s 1967 book, *Where Do We Go from Here?* In that book the “anti-capitalist” King urged America’s rulers to “seek to remove those conditions of poverty, insecurity and injustice which are the fertile soil in which the seed of Communism grows and develops.” King bemoaned the “sad fact” that “comfort” and “complacency” have “driven many to feel that only Marxism has the revolutionary spirit.”

That the ISO & Co. seek to boost King’s credentials by portraying him as a “democratic socialist”—which he wasn’t—certainly tells a lot about *them*. The whole purpose of social democracy is to tie the working class to its “own” rulers, to inculcate among the workers the inviolability of the capitalist state, to contain radicalization and prevent revolutionary upsurge in times of social crisis. Social democracy is a key prop of capitalist rule—a lesson paid for in the blood of workers and imperialism’s colonial slaves around the world.

Today, the Soviet Union no longer exists, and its destruction has been accompanied by a retrogression in consciousness, albeit unevenly, to the point where politically advanced workers no longer identify their struggles with the goals of socialism. King got his wish.

But things change. The American bourgeoisie’s class war on the working masses has been so one-sided for years that young militants today tend to see only the painful and pathetic reality of the racist ideology that pervades all sectors of society in “normal” times. But when powerful social struggles erupt, these attitudes are rapidly swept aside by the developing consciousness of shared class interest. This has been borne out time and time again in U.S. history. Socialist revolution is the only means for delivering the exploited and oppressed from the capitalist bondage that took the place of the chains of slavery. And in that struggle, black workers will play a vanguard role as the section of the proletariat with the least to lose and the most to gain from a fundamental reshaping of the existing social order.

Our study of the civil rights period is critical to exposing those who have stood and continue to stand as props to the capitalist system, obstacles to the development of revolutionary consciousness. So, I will conclude by again citing the programmatic statement of the Spartacist League/U.S.:

“The proletariat is the only revolutionary class in modern society. Only the revolutionary conquest of power by the multiracial working class, emancipating the proletariat from the system of wage slavery, can end imperialist barbarity and achieve the long-betrayed promise of black freedom. We seek to build the Leninist vanguard party which is the necessary instrument for infusing the working class with this understanding, transforming it from a class *in itself*—simply defined by its relationship to the means of production—to a class *for itself*, fully conscious of its historic task to seize state power and reorganize society.”■



Social-democratic advisers to Martin Luther King. Bayard Rustin (far left) seen here with Max Shachtman. Right: Michael Harrington.



tos of the North. We noted at the time that the Black Power slogan “represents the repudiation of tokenism, liberal tutelage, reliance on the federal government, and the non-violent philosophy of moral suasion. In this sense, therefore, black power is class power, and should be supported by all socialist forces” (“Black Power—Class Power,” reprinted in *Marxist Bulletin* No. 5 [Revised], “What Strategy for Black Liberation? Trotskyism vs. Black Nationalism” [September 1978]). We also warned that “‘Black Power’ must be clearly defined in *class*, not racial terms, for otherwise the ‘black power’ movement may become the black wing of the Democratic Party in the South” (“Black and Red—Class Struggle Road to Negro Freedom,” *Spartacist* supplement, May-June 1967).

Unfortunately, this prognosis was proven to be the case. And not simply in the South. Beginning with Carl Stokes in Cleveland in 1967, black mayors came to be installed in Northern cities to contain the seething discontent of the ghetto masses. Over the years, a layer of black elected officials rose to prominence by cynically selling themselves as agents of “change” from within the system. In Chicago, Harold Washington, elected in 1983 as the city’s first black mayor, slashed jobs and services and oversaw Chicago’s murderous police department. In 1985, Philadelphia mayor Wilson Goode oversaw the FBI/cop bombing of the MOVE commune, killing eleven people, five of them children. In 1989, David Dinkins, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America led by Michael Harrington, became the first black mayor of New York City. He promised to tame the largely black city workers unions with his pledge to Wall Street: “They’ll take it from me.”

In the 1960s and ’70s, while co-opting a layer of civil rights activists, the capitalist rulers also waged a war of police terror against black radicals, particularly targeting the Black Panther Party. The Panthers originated at just about the same time the SNCC militants were embracing Black Power. In Oakland, California, a group of young black militants led by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale appeared on the scene, dressed in black leather jackets and berets and lawfully carrying rifles. Within the space of one short year, the Panthers would win the allegiance of thousands.

The Panthers represented the best of a generation of young militants who sought

entire working class, underline that any serious fight for black rights must take as its starting point the need to uproot the capitalist order. Today, black workers remain a strategic part of the working class.

For a number of years, we have seen groups raising the call for a “new civil rights movement.” One that immediately comes to mind is the By Any Means Necessary (BAMN) group initiated by the fake-Trotskyist Revolutionary Workers League in California in 1995. On the one hand, the call is just plain stupid—you cannot suck a movement out of your thumb. Politically, it is an appeal to revive the same type of liberal pressure politics that cut off the revolutionary potential of militant black activists in the 1960s in service of the Democratic Party. But in this, BAMN is not alone.

The same political perspective is seen in the reformist left’s adulation of King. About a year ago, while poring through some left-liberal and self-proclaimed socialist papers and Web sites, I was struck (maybe naively) at how often King was cited as the authority for whatever cause the liberals and reformists were promoting. The invocation of King is a naked appeal to the not-so-progressive wing of the bourgeoisie: Dear Congressman, this cause (whatever it is) is so wholesome that even King would support us—you should too.

A United for Peace and Justice “Action Alert” (19 January 2009) on the U.S. Labor Against the War Web site declared: “We honor King’s legacy by continuing to work for a new foreign policy which recognizes that there are no military solutions in Gaza or Iraq and Afghanistan.” *Socialist Action* declared, “Dr. King... spoke on behalf of all the exploited and

Normally a little slicker, the centrist Internationalist Group (IG) got on the bandwagon in their *Internationalist* (May 2008) report on the 1 May 2008 ILWU longshore workers’ port shutdown against the occupation of Iraq. The IG wrote without any comment, “The crowd was most animated when actor Danny Glover read from Martin Luther King’s speech against the Vietnam War calling for a ‘radical revolution in values’ and restructuring of the U.S. economy.”

The May Day action, a powerful demonstration of the kind of working-class action that is needed against the imperialist occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, was politically undermined by the ILWU bureaucracy. The bureaucrats disappeared the occupation of Afghanistan, widely supported by the Democrats, and channeled the anger of the ranks against the Iraq war and their desire to defend their union into “national unity” patriotism and support for Obama. (See “ILWU Shuts West Coast Ports on May Day,” *WW* No. 914, 9 May 2008.) The acclaim given King by Glover and the ILWU tops exemplified the politics of the event.

King was explicitly clear that in the era of Black Power with angry black youths and workers groping for a revolutionary solution to their oppression, he had been compelled to oppose the Vietnam War because of growing criticism of his hypocritical appeals for “nonviolence.” In response to the fake socialists who concoct an “anti-imperialist” King, I’ll let King speak for himself: “I knew that I could never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without having first spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today—my own government.” In a

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Miners...

(continued from page 1)

why the Appalachian mines today increasingly resemble ticking time bombs. Hard-fought, and often bloody, class battles won union safety committeemen the right to shut down unsafe mines. But workers in non-union mines have no organization to defend them and so risk losing their jobs merely for speaking out against dangerous conditions. Of the 48 mines that the Feds have deemed most dangerous, 44 are non-union. Without aggressive organizing, the union will keep losing ground, leaving more non-union miners at the mercy of the mine owners.

A major factor in the sharp decline of the mining workforce over the past three decades is the expansion of surface strip mining, which is more efficient, cheaper and requires fewer workers than deep underground mining. And as the bosses close down union mines, they open new, non-union operations, often in Wyoming, Utah, Colorado and other areas far from Appalachia. Nonetheless, coal miners still have tremendous potential social power. Coal provides half the electricity in the U.S. and is an export. This power, though, is kept in check by the pro-capitalist



Ellis/Charleston Gazette  
**Massey CEO Don Blankenship denounced mine safety rules at anti-union rally that he organized on Labor Day last year.**

UMWA leadership. In an April 15 statement lauding “Obama’s demands for improved mine safety,” UMWA head Roberts subordinates the union to the bosses’ government, offering: “The UMWA stands ready to do all we can to assist [Labor] Secretary Solis and Assistant Secretary Main in their effort to keep our miners safe.”

In the aftermath of the Sago, West Virginia, mine disaster four years ago, capitalist Democratic Party politicians pledged to overhaul safety procedures and demand greater accountability from the mine owners. A flurry of “investigations” and Congressional hearings followed, and the Miner Act of 2006 was passed.

Now the Democrats, including Governor Manchin and President Obama, are again wringing their hands over mine safety while preparing another whitewash and cover-up response. The truth of the



WV Photo  
**Left: Militant coal miners during 1976-79 Stearns, Kentucky, strike. A central demand of the strike was an elected union safety committee with power to pull workers out of dangerous areas. Right: Miners in Appalachia, Virginia, burn copies of proposed contract during 1977-78 strike that defied Taft-Hartley slave-labor law.**

matter is that government officials knowingly give the coal barons free rein to run the mines as deathtraps. Despite the many documented dangers at Upper Big Branch, federal inspectors just went about business as usual, issuing citations and fines knowing full well that mine operator Performance Coal, a subsidiary of Massey Energy, would continue to flagrantly violate safety standards. The simple truth is that government outfits like MSHA do not exist to protect workers. While occasionally giving the employers a slap on the wrist, they serve to breed faith in the agencies of the ruling class as a substitute for union struggle.

Safety Held Hostage to Profits

Massey Energy, the nation’s fourth-largest coal company, made \$104 million profit in 2009, in no small part by eliminating 700 jobs and slashing wages and benefits. At the same time, the company has ramped up production of high-quality metallurgical coal, used for steel production, in its Appalachian mines. Prices for this kind of coal have been climbing, driven by high demand from steelmakers in China and India. With the output at Upper Big Branch *tripling* in 2009, miners reported working 18-hour shifts, with no recourse for refusal short of leaving the job.

Compounding this dangerous speedup, the coal seams at the mine are naturally “gassy,” with up to 2 million cubic feet of methane released into the mine every 24 hours. Ventilation is essential to prevent the buildup of methane and coal dust. But in the name of nonstop production Massey executives brazenly violated safety rules. The mine racked up more than 1,300 safety violations from government inspectors since 2005, a rate several times the national average. Of 129 federal violations this year, 32 were related to dust, ventilation or combustible materials. In January, the mine was cited for having a ventilation fan that ran in *reverse* for three weeks, blowing dirty air *into* a mine tunnel. Accumulation of explosive methane

gas was so pronounced that the mine had to be evacuated several times in recent months.

As the man calling the shots at Massey, Blankenship acts every bit like a feudal aristocrat lording it over his serfs, a reflection of the barbaric values of the U.S. ruling class, which drips with the blood of working people and the oppressed everywhere. For years, he has openly campaigned against mine safety regulations, including through court suits, and defied them with impunity. In an internal company memo that became public in 2006, Blankenship instructed mine superintendents to place coal production ahead of safety, complaining, “We seem not to understand that coal pays the bills.”



Getty  
**April 7: Massey miners pause during attempt to rescue four workers who were later found dead.**

When miners are killed on the job, as 49 have been at Massey-owned properties since 2000, it is written off as a “statistically insignificant” cost of doing business. Blankenship reportedly had a special phone installed at Upper Big Branch so that he could call managers to protest whenever production slowed. One longtime Massey miner told ABC News (8 April) that working for Massey was “like living under a hammer. It’s all about the bottom line, we all know that.”

Blankenship earned his stripes at Massey as a vicious union-buster. In the case of Upper Big Branch, he flew in by helicopter to personally shower workers with empty promises if they voted out the UMWA when Massey acquired the mine in 1993—and to threaten them with closing it down if they did not. After the first vote ended in a tie, Blankenship brought miners to concerts and handed out gifts to successfully sway the second vote in his favor. Then almost overnight, production was jacked up, shifts were increased to 12 hours and bonuses cut. Over time, the union supporters were driven out of the mine.

To this day, Blankenship has continued his crusade against the UMWA. Last September, he held an anti-union “Friends of America” rally and concert to counter the union-organized Labor Day rally. Literally dressing himself in the red-white-

and-blue of racist U.S. imperialism, Blankenship railed against mining safety regulations. That the labor bureaucracy peddles the same flag-waving chauvinism is a prime example of how it subordinates the interests of its membership to those of the capitalist employers.

While Massey and its CEO are particularly vicious, they are not aberrations. The other big U.S. mining companies in Appalachia all have abysmal safety records. By the same token, the coal barons are an important component of the capitalist class as a whole. The bourgeoisie, a tiny minority that owns the mines, factories and other means of production, derives its wealth from the exploitation of labor and is backed by all the institutions of the

state. In the aftermath of the explosion at Upper Big Branch, the market and stock analysts remained bullish on Massey, judging the mass death of workers as a small bump in the road to greater profits.

Democrats, Republicans: Class Enemies of Workers

Ever since the disaster, bourgeois liberals and the trade-union misleaders have pointed the finger at the Bush administration for its accommodation of the coal operators. While Bush did his level best to help line the pockets of his corporate cronies, his model for MSHA was the Democratic Clinton White House’s “New OSHA” (Occupational Safety and Health Administration), defined by its “partnership” with business based on “voluntary compliance.” Elected with the support of Illinois coal interests, Obama has to date continued the same collusion with the industry magnates as his predecessor.

Soon after Obama appointed him to head MSHA, Main backed off an initiative announced by the administration in May that would have lowered the legal limit on coal dust levels in underground mines. Federal and state standards for controlling coal dust in underground mines date back nearly a century, and are not adequate to prevent explosions in modern, highly mechanized operations,

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# Continental...

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ground workers, from cleaners and baggage handlers to aircraft mechanics, are employees of largely non-union “third-party” subcontractors, and many domestic routes are now flown by regional affiliates, where workers typically earn far less. At the outset of the organizing campaign, there were 15,000 fleet service workers at Continental. After the union won certification, Continental announced plans to outsource 150 ramp jobs at seven stations serviced by its regional partners. The increasing use of subcontractors poses a broader task for the airline unions: organizing the unorganized throughout the industry, whether at the carriers or subcontractors, and winning equal pay for equal work, no matter the employer. But rather than fighting to organize the workers at the “third party” outfits, the union bureaucrats denounce these workers as “scabs.”

At a 2008 national summit on outsourcing, jointly sponsored by the Teamsters and the “Business Travel Coalition,” union leaders representing airline mechanics urged government officials to strengthen “war on terror” security measures at third-party repair stations. A taste of what this would mean in practice was shown by the government’s 2005 anti-immigrant raid on the non-union TIMCO maintenance facility in Greensboro, North Carolina, during which 27 mechanics were arrested and later deported. As well, the bureaucrats pushed increased U.S. government inspections and protectionist legislation directed at the overseas shops. It is in the vital interest of the labor movement to fight for full citizenship rights for all immigrants.

Few industries are as conducive to coordinating joint struggle as air trans-

port. But in his speeches to Continental workers, Hoffa promoted “save American jobs” chauvinism in support of a Congressional moratorium on foreign outsourcing. Whether by blaming mechanics abroad for jobs lost or railing against Mexican truckers, Hoffa & Co. poison the perspective of international labor solidarity. With the European flag carriers gunning for their unions, strikes have recently broken out in Britain, Germany and Italy. In March, the Teamsters and TWU made headlines for meeting with an official of the union representing British Airways flight attendants, shortly before they went on strike. But no labor action was taken in the U.S. to back up the strikers; the Teamsters did not mobilize its ground workers to refuse to work the arriving scab aircraft.

Despite the hard times, there are indications that airline workers are ready to test the waters. Those who remain at the major carriers are still heavily unionized and many are eager to restore what was lost over the last decade. At American Airlines, where nine union contracts are in mediation, the flight attendants and fleet service workers filed with the NMB for a release from talks, the first step in a long process to a potential strike under the RLA. As is typically the case, the request was denied. Other carriers, among them Continental, United, US Airways and Southwest, have also stalled for years on reaching agreements with their unions. What is necessary is for the unions to fight together in a common front against the bosses and their government.

Airline unions embody a strategic concentration of integrated union power in the “open shop” South, where a massive organizing drive is key for labor to regain its strength. In fact, with the victory at Houston-based Continental, the next major arena for organizing at the airlines is Atlanta-based Delta on the heels of its



**PATCO air traffic controllers union leaders hauled off in chains during 1981 strike.**

merger with Northwest. A large number of the non-union subcontractors in the industry are also headquartered in the South, where “right to work” laws have historically been enforced by racist terror. To organize the South will require a labor leadership that actively champions black rights and fights in the interests of all the oppressed.

The way forward is the forging of a class-struggle leadership committed to mobilizing union power independently of and in opposition to the capitalist politicians and government boards. It was just such a leadership, composed of Trotskyists and their sympathizers, that helped build the Teamsters into a powerful

union. In 1934, these militants set out to organize every truck driver and warehouse worker industry-wide in Minneapolis. First to win union recognition and then a contract, the city’s proletariat and its allies were mobilized in mass strike action involving pitched battles with scabs, cops and the National Guard. In assessing the strikes, James P. Cannon, a founder and leader of American Trotskyism, noted:

“The modern labor movement must be politically directed because it is confronted by the government at every turn. Our people were prepared for that since they were political people, inspired by political conceptions....  
“They prepared everything from the point of view of class war. They knew that power, not diplomacy, would decide the issue. Bluffs don’t work in fundamental things, only in incidental ones. In such things as the conflict of class interests one must be prepared to fight.”  
—*The History of American Trotskyism* (1944)

The airline industry under capitalism is a paradigm of irrationality. The current air traffic control system is based on World War II-era radar technology. Many pilots are paid poverty-level wages, with some even living off food stamps. Critical maintenance inspections are routinely put off by the bosses, courting death and disaster. The contradiction between the inherently international character of the industry and how it is operated by nationally-based rival carriers is a crystal-line example of the generalized anarchy of capitalist production for profit. To end this capitalist chaos requires a collectivized economy with centralized planning, which will come about only through socialist revolution. What’s needed is to build a workers party that, standing at the head of the exploited and oppressed, fights for the expropriation of the capitalist class and the establishment of a workers government.■

according to government research that regulators have never acted upon. Exposure to coal dust also is the cause of coal workers’ pneumoconiosis, known as black lung disease. One sure sign of the waning power of the UMWA is the resurgence of this slow killer, which has felled more than 10,000 miners in the past decade, increasingly including younger miners.

In its 32-year history, MSHA is not known to have ever shut down an unsafe mine. Under Main, MSHA still allows mines to operate despite hundreds of safety violations and ample warnings of imminent catastrophe—as evidenced by its treatment of the Upper Big Branch mine. On the heels of the disaster, Obama has pledged more inspectors, stronger federal laws and more persistent investigations. These measures are a smoke-screen for further sacrificing the health and lives of workers to the corporate bottom line.

## For a Class-Struggle Leadership of the Unions!

Coal miners were among the first sections of the American working class to organize into unions. Moreover, the UMWA was among the first major unions to be racially integrated, beginning in the late 19th century, with blacks serving as local officers, not just rank-and-file members. Time and again, miners displayed great courage and sacrifice in bloody class battles, such as Matewan and Harlan

County. It was the struggle to organize the miners in Harlan County in the 1930s that gave rise to what became the American labor movement’s anthem, “Which Side Are You On?”

Yet time and again, the miners’ combativity came up against the pro-capitalist policies pushed by UMWA leaders. Former UMWA president and current AFL-CIO head Richard Trumka exemplifies this class collaboration. Trumka got his start in the UMWA bureaucracy as a lawyer on the staff of Arnold Miller, who invited the government’s Labor Department to intervene in the union against his bureaucratic rival in a 1972 election. In contrast to much of the left, we told the truth: “Labor Department Wins Mine Workers’ Election” (WV No. 17, March 1973). Our warning was borne out as Miller, in cahoots with the government, sought to stifle union struggle. Government out of the unions!

Miller repeatedly tried to shove sellout contracts down workers’ throats. The 110-day coal strike of 1977-78, in which miners defied a Taft-Hartley back-to-work order issued by Democrat Jimmy Carter, was carried out *in defiance* of Miller. The UMWA ranks shut down non-union mines while scab coal was dumped on the highways, coal barges were burned on the rivers and railroad bridges on coal spurs were blown up. The strike, joined by 80,000 miners, shut down half of U.S. coal production. But they were ultimately forced back to work by the union misleaders. The hated Miller was forced to resign in 1979. Posturing as a militant, Trumka returned to become head of the UMWA in 1982 after coal miners rebelled against a sellout contract brokered by Miller’s successor.

In 1984, Massey, at the instigation of Blankenship, who then ran the Rawls mine, refused to participate in negotiations for the national coal agreement, insisting that each mine have a separate contract. Trumka broke with the union’s tradition of national strike action, instead calling “selective,” isolated strikes and relying on support from “friend of labor”

Democratic politicians. Backed up by the state police and the Reagan administration, Massey pulled out all the stops, hiring a private paramilitary army, including mercenaries fresh from killing workers and peasants abroad in Central America and elsewhere for U.S. imperialism. The company’s strikebreaking arsenal included attack dogs and M-16s, armored personnel carriers, helicopters and an armored locomotive. After 15 bitter months, the UMWA misleaders signed a sellout contract that gave Massey’s mines separate contracts. By 1988, Massey had closed down or sold most of its union mines, usually reopening them as non-union operations. Today, all of Massey’s mines are non-union.

During the 1989-90 Pittston strike, a strategic coal preparation plant was occupied, and 50,000 additional miners walked out in solidarity with the more than 1,500 striking Pittston miners. But Trumka and Cecil Roberts herded them all back to work. Rather than extending the strike or making any effort to stop scab coal, the UMWA tops pushed “civil disobedience” stunts and “Corporate Campaign” lobbying. Trumka again signed a secret sellout deal that allowed Pittston to buy out of the health care fund.

The bankruptcy of the UMWA misleaders is shown by their refusal to mobilize the union in defense of its own militants. When the Feds arrested five Kentucky miners in 1987 in connection with the Massey strike, framing them up on charges stemming from the shooting death of a scab, *Trumka refused to allow the union to defend these class-war prisoners.* They were convicted and sentenced to 35 to 45 years in prison. While three of the miners were finally released, Donnie Thornsberry, who was UMWA Local 2496 president, remains in prison. Labor must demand: Free Donnie Thornsberry! Nor did the union tops do anything to defend Jerry Dale Lowe, a safety committeeman from Logan County, West Virginia, who was framed up for the shooting death of a scab contractor during a bitter strike and spent

eleven years in federal prison. Actively involved in Lowe’s defense was the Partisan Defense Committee, a class-struggle, non-sectarian legal and social defense organization associated with the Spartacist League.

The profit-hungry capitalists exhibit a depraved indifference to the lives of those they exploit. Across the country, an estimated 177 workers on average die *every day* from work-related causes—13 of those as a result of workplace accidents, the equivalent of an Upper Big Branch disaster every two days—and many more are injured. Only when the working class rips industry from the hands of the capitalists and establishes a planned socialist economy will safety govern working conditions. This task, in turn, requires forging a revolutionary workers party that will unite the struggle of the multiracial working class with the cause of the downtrodden masses in the ghettos and barrios and of those oppressed by U.S. imperialism. *Remember the Upper Big Branch miners! Organize the unorganized!■*

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# WORKERS VANGUARD

## Union Organizing Victory at Continental Airlines

Labor scored a victory on February 12, when it was announced that the nearly 8,000 Continental Airlines fleet service workers had voted to join the Teamsters, capping a 13-year organizing campaign that involved two other unions and five previous representation elections. These workers, mainly ramp and cargo agents who perform difficult, physically demanding labor for as little as \$10 per hour, had been one of the largest non-union work groups in the airline industry. After almost a decade of mass layoffs, wage and benefit cuts and onerous work-rule changes, they again braved the company's wrath to vote for the union, this time with success.

But the election victory is only a first step. Winning a contract is far from automatic. Over the years, in order to head off the unionization of the fleet service workers, the company did everything from issuing empty promises and holding mandatory anti-union workplace meetings to cultivating a network of spies and finks and selectively disciplining union activists. The same tactics will continue to be used against union supporters in order to intimidate the workforce and stonewall on contract negotiations. It is crucial for the Teamsters—and the other unions at Continental—to defend the new members.

This defense must go hand in hand with the fight against racist discrimination. At Continental, where fleet service workers are heavily black and Latino in many stations, it was not uncommon for anonymous propaganda retailing vicious slanders against the union and its supporters, at times laced with racist appeals, to be circulated throughout the workplace. Just before voting began in January, workers had to protest flyers smearing organizers as “pimps.” Meanwhile, hangman's nooses recently turned up in the operations area of Newark airport, a union stronghold. The lynch rope embodies a program of white supremacy and violence against black people. The union must combat such provocations if it is to consolidate itself.

The success at Continental, however fragile, stands out against the wave of setbacks labor has suffered for many years, which has been made all the worse by the current sharp economic downturn. It is a testament to the determination and sacrifice of hundreds of volunteer organ-



Continental fleet workers celebrate Teamsters organizing victory, February 12.

izers, who struggled together for years against lies and intimidation by the company. In addition to wanting to improve their lot, many were spurred on by chronic abuse from management and derision toward their “unskilled” labor, others by blatant favoritism on the job. By all accounts, the decisive factor in this election was the organizers' efforts in traveling throughout the Continental system to unite workers at outlying stations behind the union.

Even as Continental was turning the screws on its fleet service workers, the carrier was able to keep them from organizing for so long in no small part because of the leadership of the unions—whether the Teamsters, the International Association of Machinists (IAM) or the Transport Workers Union (TWU)—steered clear of anything smacking of class struggle. One missed opportunity occurred in 2005, when the IAM-represented flight attendants at Continental voted to reject concessions, putting in jeopardy the company's goal of wresting major givebacks from all its union workers. At the time, the Machinists were attempting to organize the fleet service workers, but there was no move to link the two causes. Instead, the IAM tops foisted a new concessionary deal on the flight attendants while allowing the organizing campaign to flounder.

Divisions along craft lines and between

workers at different carriers, regional affiliates and “third party” subcontractors sap the strength of the many unions in the airline industry. Mergers, such as that of Delta and Northwest and the possible Continental-United combination, have given the bosses another opening to pit workers against each other in order to impose layoffs and cutbacks. Nonetheless, workers in the industry have enormous potential power, as air transport of both passengers and cargo is vital to a modern industrial economy. What is needed is a single industry-wide union that encompasses everyone from baggage handlers to pilots.

The disastrous consequences of this atomization were laid bare in the Aircraft Mechanics Fraternal Association (AMFA) strike at Northwest Airlines in 2005. Not only did the leaders of the other unions refuse to shut down Northwest in solidarity with the AMFA union, but IAM officials criminally engaged in open strike-breaking under the pretext that the AMFA craft union had carried out raiding operations against the IAM. The strike went down to a bitter defeat, and *all* airline workers are now worse off.

It should hardly be news to union “leaders” that when unions scab on each other, labor loses. This was seen clearly when the PATCO air traffic controllers union was smashed in 1981 by Republican president Ronald Reagan, implementing plans drawn up by the Democratic Carter administration. Responsibility for the defeat lay squarely with the leaders of the IAM, Teamsters and other unions who refused to honor the picket lines and shut down the airports. The smashing of PATCO laid the groundwork for a quarter-century of givebacks and union-busting from which labor has yet to recover.

### For a Class-Struggle Leadership of the Unions!

At Continental, the Teamsters also represent the mechanics, whose contract became amendable on the first day of 2009, shortly before the union kicked off its bid to organize the fleet service workers. During this time, the union tops sought to bring out both work groups together only for a few rallies outside Continental's hubs in Houston, Newark and Cleveland. In speeches at these rallies, Team-

sters president James Hoffa praised the virtues of supposed “allies” in the capitalist Democratic Party, outlining a legalistic response to the company's anti-union dirty tricks. It is the reliance on the political agents and institutions of the class enemy—the calling card of the pro-capitalist labor bureaucracy as a whole—that has hastened the decline in union power.

An earlier TWU organizing rally for the Continental fleet service workers in Newark featured one local Democratic Party politician after another seeking votes in the 2008 elections. The union tops spent a whopping *\$450 million* of union members' dues money on the 2008 bourgeois elections. Upon coming to power, Barack Obama, a Wall Street Democrat, imposed harsh austerity measures on unions, beginning with the United Auto Workers. In 1978, Jimmy Carter pushed through the deregulation of the airline industry, which opened a new round in the carriers' war on labor. Democrat Bill Clinton would later invoke the Railway Labor Act (RLA) 14 times to ban potential rail and airline strikes. Labor must break with the Democratic Party!

During the campaign at Continental, the Teamsters and 30 other unions began lobbying for a rule change proposed by the Obama appointees on the National Mediation Board (NMB) that would bring the union certification procedures for rail and airline workers in line with those in other industries. To win union recognition by NMB precedent today, the majority of an entire work group has to favor unionization, with absent ballots automatically counted as “no” votes; the change would make it a majority of those voting. We would support such a change, as companies like Continental and Delta pad their employee rosters to rig the vote.

But the union tops' declaration that this would “level the playing field” is a lie. The reality is that the NMB, whatever its composition, is a capitalist government agency set up to impose “class peace” and bind the unions to the bourgeois order. Under government boards like the RLA, the deck will always be stacked in favor of the bosses. If the certification rules change, so will their anti-union tactics. The unions were built through hard class struggle in defiance of labor laws and, no less today, that is what is decisive. By accepting the framework of the RLA, the union bureaucrats are reduced to tinkering with the bosses' rules in a losing game.

Saddled with a leadership wedded to the rule of capital, airline workers have taken it on the chin for years. Amid the wave of airline bankruptcies that followed the 11 September 2001 attacks, the bosses wrung billions in wage and benefit concessions from the unions and drastically chopped their employment levels. Continental first pioneered this form of union-busting back in 1983, when then-honcho Frank Lorenzo filed for Chapter 11 in order to tear up union contracts, shed jobs and slash pay. The bloodletting has continued to this day, as the airline bosses cite “low cost” competition, fuel prices and now the faltering economy to make the workers pay for the vicissitudes of capitalism.

Meanwhile, increasing numbers of

*continued on page 11*



October 2009: Continental workers at Newark airport rally behind Teamsters banner.