

For Permanent Revolution Across North Africa!



Getty

Tunisia: Dictator Flees, Protests Continue

Tunis, January 20: Protesters confront riot police outside governing party headquarters, demand resignation of ministers linked to ousted strongman Ben Ali.

The following article was written by our comrades of the Ligue Trotskyiste de France, section of the International Communist League.

After 23 years in power, Tunisian dictator Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali ignominiously fled the country on January 14. His exit to Saudi Arabia followed several weeks of protests, initially from layers of youth demanding jobs and to be treated with some dignity by the state. Starting in the town of Sidi Bouzid in Central Tunisia, the protests rapidly spread to the whole of the country, encompassing broad layers of Tunisian society, including the working class, and were met with brutal police repression. Even official sources state that over 100 people have been killed in the course of the five weeks of social struggle, the great majority shot down by police fire.

In the hours following Ben Ali's flight, Mohamed Ghannouchi, Ben Ali's prime minister for over eleven years, declared himself president. Faced with further protests, which are increasingly being met with police repression, most of Ben Ali's loyal servants have been fired from their ministerial positions in the latest attempt to put a lid on the protests while keeping in place the core of the governing apparatus. For now, Ghannouchi is once again prime minister. The Tunisian teachers union held a two-day strike over January 24-25, and other strikes including in public transport have been taking place to drive out the detested Ben Ali bosses,

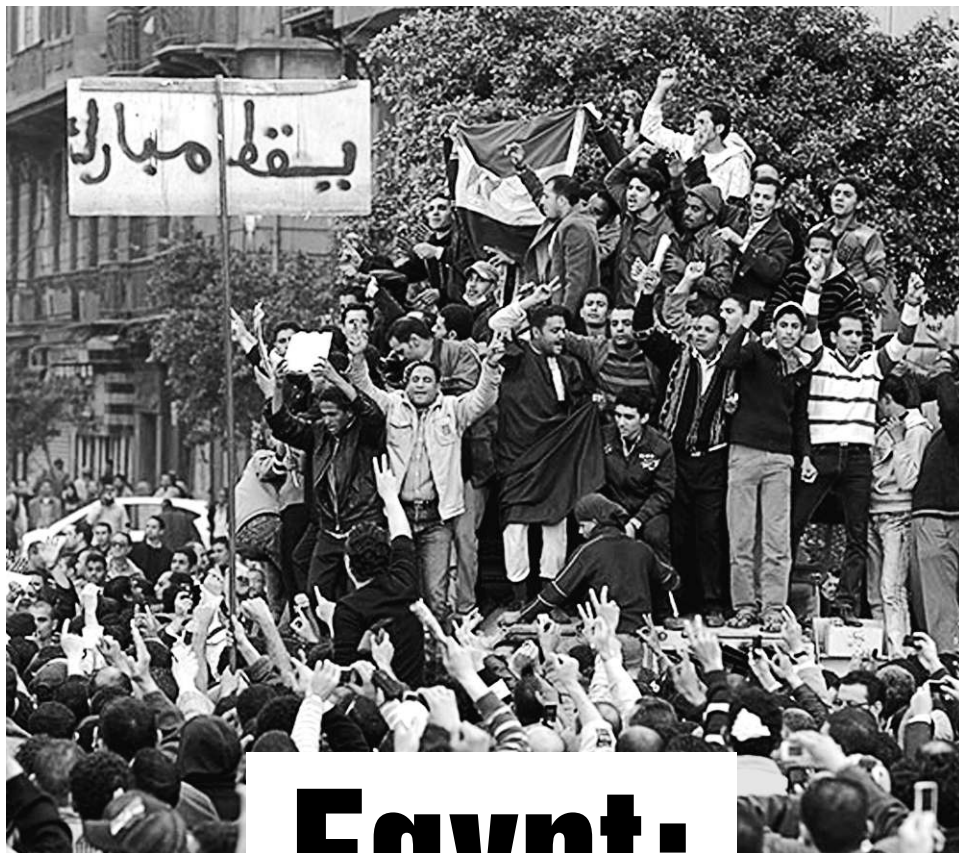
who in recent years have imposed ever more draconian working conditions. Pictures of workers chasing out the president of the country's largest insurance firm, Star, which is partly owned by a French group, have made the rounds of the Web.

Fed up with unemployment, rising food prices, the widespread corruption of Ben Ali and his family and cronies, as well as police-state repression, Tunisians have heroically braved Ben Ali's cops and thugs to fight for the most elementary democratic rights. Under Ben Ali, who since 1987 has been re-elected in grotesquely fraudulent elections, political opponents were generally co-opted or smashed. Now the bourgeoisie and its imperialist sponsors are regretting that their deposed despot left no ground for an opposition with "clean hands" to jump into the saddle, thus prolonging instability in Tunisia and beyond.

The masses' democratic aspirations continue to be a powerful spark for struggle. What is vital is for the proletariat, the one class with the social power and historic interest to overthrow the capitalist system, to emerge out of these struggles as the leader of the country's unemployed youth, urban poor, peasants, women and other oppressed sectors aspiring to emancipation.

The tumultuous events in Tunisia provide an extraordinary opening for popularizing the Marxist program of socialist revolution, which alone can address the masses' demands. The upheaval has

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AP

Egypt: Mass Upheaval Challenges Dictatorship

January 29: Protesters atop a military vehicle in Cairo next to sign reading: "Down With Mubarak."

FEBRUARY 1—As we go to press, the bonapartist capitalist regime of Hosni Mubarak—a strategically important client state of U.S. imperialism—is tottering in the face of an unprecedented wave of mass protests. In Cairo's Tahrir Square and throughout the country, protesters chant: "The people demand the fall of the regime." Mubarak's appointment last week of a new set of ministers, naming longtime cronies and former military commanders as vice president and prime minister, only further inflamed opposition to his dictatorship.

Well over a million rallied in Tahrir Square today, while hundreds of thousands demonstrated in Alexandria, Suez and other cities in a nationwide stay-away strike. Tonight, Mubarak announced his "concession": he will not seek re-election this fall(!). In response, crowds in Tahrir Square angrily chanted, "We won't leave!"

One United Nations official estimates that as many as 300 have been killed and over 3,000 injured since protests broke out on January 25. Nevertheless, within days the massive demonstrations overwhelmed police lines in a number of cities. Countless police stations, as well as the Cairo headquarters of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP), were reduced to burned-out rubble. The widely reviled police withdrew from the scene, although they have since been redeployed. The

shaken government then mobilized the military—the core of Egypt's bonapartist state apparatus—to try to control the streets. The army has officially declared that it will not fire on protesters. But make no mistake: there remains the dire threat that whatever happens to Mubarak, Egypt's bourgeois rulers will demand fierce military repression to restore and maintain capitalist "order."

The upheaval has drawn in virtually every layer of the society—unemployed youth, university students, workers, shopkeepers, professionals. Overwhelmingly, their demands are for Mubarak to go and for democratic elections and other reforms. The situation has also created an open-

ing for the reactionary Muslim Brotherhood, which initially abstained from the protests but called for its followers to join them on Friday, January 28. With the ports, banks and other businesses closed, the economy has ground to a halt, while prices for scarce food supplies are soaring. As for the filthy rich at the top, they're either hunkered down in their gated mansions or flying off to Dubai.

There is no question that the U.S. and other imperialist powers have been shaken by the dramatic events in Egypt, the most populous Arab country with the largest working-class concentration in North Africa

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**Down With
U.S. Aid to
Egypt, Israel!**



For Revolutionary Workers Parties!

The Arizona Shooting and Obama's "Socialist" Choirboys

Most Americans saw the recent shooting in Arizona for what it was—a senseless act of violence perpetrated by a deranged, delusional individual. This was not the case for the liberal wing of the Democratic Party and its Sunday socialist chorus, who used the event to counterattack the Republicans, who had just drubbed the Democrats in November's Congressional elections, for hate

and violence mongering. For the most part, the comments from chastened surviving Democratic officeholders were muted or anodyne appeals to get along and work nicely together. This was in the spirit of the opening of the new House of Representatives, when the Democrats read, along with the exultant Republican victors, sections of the expurgated Constitution, the nasty parts about slavery

having been deleted from that holy text.

Obama's speech at a memorial in Tucson, accurately described by many as a political rally, set the agenda, albeit with a tactful caution. He called for "talking with each other in a way that heals, not a way that wounds" and pled that "only a more civil and honest public discourse can help us face up to our challenges as a nation." This pious sermonizing was ludicrously hailed by Garry Wills in the *New York Review of Books* (13 January) as the modern-day equivalent of Abraham Lincoln's greatest speeches exhorting slavery, overlooking in his raptures for Obama—CEO of racist U.S. imperialism—that Lincoln led a bloody and just civil war to crush the slaveowners' rebellion.

The *Nation* (13 January), organ of the Democratic Party left wing, intoned: "There is an opportunity now to show a different America. That doesn't mean only rejecting gunsight ads or turning away from threatening campaign rhetoric; it means leaders from President Obama on down clearly articulating a social compact, which is the only real route to safety for politicians and citizens alike." A half step to the left, the ersatz socialists of the International Socialist Organization (ISO) and Workers World Party (WWP) groove on the call to "fight the right," particularly the Tea Party and other elements of the right wing of the Republican Party.

A reality check is warranted. The ongoing depression, the latest and by far the most massive of three economic crises in the past three decades, has further ravaged jobs and pensions while hacking to pieces the scant social services available in the U.S. that used to provide working and poor people with some basis for a livable future. Driven by the need to accumulate profits that is the *raison d'être* of their system, America's capitalist rulers, the perpetrators of this disaster, still walk the streets or, more accurately, drive them in limos.

Such recovery as has occurred is for the very rich only. Not only have these not sacrificed, but their gargantuan share of the nation's wealth remains unscathed. Indeed, the share of income going to the top 1 percent in this country has grown exponentially. From 1980 to 2005, more than four-fifths of the total increase went to this layer. And while working people continue to lose their jobs, pensions and homes in the "Great Recession," American businesses have in the same period raked in profits at an annual rate greater than at any time in the past 60 years.

The bourgeois parties, Democrat and

Republican, who vie to administer the capitalist order are currently driven by the purpose of shielding the banking and industrial magnates from the consequences of the havoc wreaked by their rotting system. It is in the service of this purpose that Obama and the Democrats have acted to continue and escalate the attacks on democratic rights won in past struggles, rights that provide the oppressed and exploited masses with some defense against injustice as well as some ability to mobilize to redress the assaults on their ability to survive.

They hope that the population foregoes its guns (i.e., the right to self-defense) and accepts increasing constraints on what they say or print. Thus the government has recently gone after protesters of a war that almost all despise (see article, page 12) and those that expose the machinations and lies of U.S. imperialism, such as Julian Assange and Army Private Bradley Manning, who is accused of leaking classified documents and is currently in solitary confinement in Quantico, Virginia. These are deemed to be, at best, legally culpable for giving comfort to America's enemies or, at worst, traitors who deserve incarceration.

Although now somewhat embarrassed by its cheerleading for Obama when he ran for the post of Commander-in-Chief of U.S. imperialism, the reformist left remains committed to the Sisyphean task of pressuring the president to the left. The ISO and WWP will occasionally condemn the evils of capitalism, without any reference to the need for a working-class socialist overturn of its decaying social order.

Thus, the ISO's *Socialist Worker* (18 January) wrote: "Those who want to right the injustices of this society should protest the bigoted attacks of the right wing. But we can't accept the calls by Obama to 'transcend our differences.' ... On the contrary, we welcome the conflict between left and right—in the form of struggle for a better society, and the louder the better." Similar drivel can also be found in the pages of *Workers World* (12 January): "While this resurgence of reaction is pushed mostly by Republicans, it also feeds on the weakness of the Democratic leaders, who have compromised and retreated on every issue, from health care to Social Security to workers' rights." In short, things will get better if the weak-kneed Democrats are forced to man up.

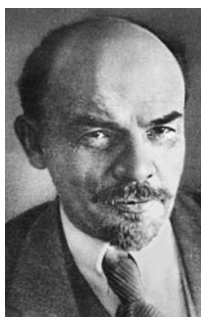
But of course the Democrats have done such, for their *class interest*. Among the impediments to "national unity" are pub-



TROTSKY

Tunisia, Egypt and Permanent Revolution

Mass protests in Tunisia have sparked upheavals in Egypt and beyond against the brutal imperialist-backed capitalist regimes and for basic democratic rights, jobs and other necessities of life. As Leon Trotsky stressed in "What Is the Permanent Revolution? Basic Postulates," in countries of belated capitalist development, these aspirations can be realized only through the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, necessarily linked to the fight for



LENIN

socialist revolution in the imperialist centers. This was the perspective of Lenin and Trotsky's Bolshevik Party, which led the proletariat to victory in the Russian October Revolution of 1917.

With regard to countries with a belated bourgeois development, especially the colonial and semi-colonial countries, the theory of the permanent revolution signifies that the complete and genuine solution of their tasks of achieving *democracy and national emancipation* is conceivable only through the dictatorship of the proletariat as the leader of the subjugated nation, above all of its peasant masses....

Without an alliance of the proletariat with the peasantry the tasks of the democratic revolution cannot be solved, nor even seriously posed. But the alliance of these two classes can be realized in no other way than through an irreconcilable struggle against the influence of the national-liberal bourgeoisie.

No matter what the first episodic stages of the revolution may be in the individual countries, the realization of the revolutionary alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry is conceivable only under the political leadership of the proletarian vanguard, organized in the Communist Party. This in turn means that the victory of the democratic revolution is conceivable only through the dictatorship of the proletariat which bases itself upon the alliance with the peasantry and solves first of all the tasks of the democratic revolution....

The dictatorship of the proletariat which has risen to power as the leader of the democratic revolution is inevitably and very quickly confronted with tasks, the fulfilment of which is bound up with deep inroads into the rights of bourgeois property. The democratic revolution grows over directly into the socialist revolution and thereby becomes a *permanent* revolution.

The conquest of power by the proletariat does not complete the revolution, but only opens it. Socialist construction is conceivable only on the foundation of the class struggle, on a national and international scale. This struggle, under the conditions of an overwhelming predominance of capitalist relationships on the world arena, must inevitably lead to explosions, that is, internally to civil wars and externally to revolutionary wars. Therein lies the permanent character of the socialist revolution as such, regardless of whether it is a backward country that is involved, which only yesterday accomplished its democratic revolution, or an old capitalist country which already has behind it a long epoch of democracy and parliamentarism.

The completion of the socialist revolution within national limits is unthinkable. One of the basic reasons for the crisis in bourgeois society is the fact that the productive forces created by it can no longer be reconciled with the framework of the national state. From this follow, on the one hand, imperialist wars, on the other, the utopia of a bourgeois United States of Europe. The socialist revolution begins on the national arena, it unfolds on the international arena, and is completed on the world arena. Thus, the socialist revolution becomes a permanent revolution in a newer and broader sense of the word; it attains completion only in the final victory of the new society on our entire planet.

—Leon Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution* (1930)

WORKERS VANGUARD



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Spartacus Youth Club Events

CHICAGO

Thursday, Feb. 10, 6 p.m.
The Russian Revolution of 1917: How the Working Class Took Power

University of Illinois at Chicago
African-American Cultural Center
Addams Hall, 830 S. Halsted St.
Library Room 200
Information and readings: (312) 563-0441
chicagosyc@sbcglobal.net

NEW YORK CITY

Thursday, Feb. 10, 7:30 p.m.
Meet the Marxists at City College New York
NAC Rotunda
(Take #1 train to 137th St.-City College)
Information and readings: (212) 267-1025
nysl@tiac.net

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

TORONTO

Wednesday, Feb. 16, 7 p.m.
Marxism and the National Question: Defend the Palestinians! For a Socialist Federation of the Near East!

OISE (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education), 252 Bloor Street West
Room 2279
Information and readings: (416) 593-4138
spartacan@on.aibn.com

VANCOUVER

Thursday, Feb. 24, 6:30 p.m.
Defend China Against Imperialism and Counterrevolution! For Workers Political Revolution to Oust the Ruling Stalinist Bureaucracy!

UBC SUB, Room 42V
Information and readings: (604) 687-0353
trotskyist_vancouver@shawcable.com

South Korea

Socialist Workers League Members Sentenced for Political Activity

JANUARY 25—Eight supporters of the Socialist Workers League of Korea (SWLK) face serious prison sentences for the “crime” of supporting workers struggles and advocating socialist revolution. Charged in early December under the notorious National Security Law, they are due to be sentenced on January 27.

The National Security Law, enacted in 1948, has long been used to repress leftist and labor struggles in South Korea. Its sweeping provisions include a ban on forming or sympathizing with “anti-state” groups as well as the death penalty for activities in support of North Korea. Since right-wing president Lee Myung-bak came to power in 2008, his government has repeatedly tried to railroad SWLK activists to prison. It has also ramped up its suppression of labor struggles, including smashing a strike by workers at Ssangyong Motor Company in 2009.

These repressive moves come in the context of stepped-up U.S./South Korean provocations against North Korea and China, including last month’s joint military exercises in the Yellow Sea near the North Korean coast. Like a number of other South Korean left groups, the SWLK falsely characterizes North Korea and China as “state capitalist,” a characterization repeated by their spokesman Oh Sei-chull in his address to the court in December. In reality, these are bureaucratically deformed *workers states*, products of the revolutionary upheavals in Asia that followed the Second World

Free All Class-War Prisoners!

War. The International Communist League stands for the unconditional military defense of China and North Korea against imperialism and counterrevolution, including supporting their possession of nuclear weapons to deter imperialist attack. At the same time, we oppose the privileged Stalinist bureaucracies in Beijing and Pyongyang, whose futile quest for “peaceful coexistence” with imperialism undermines defense of the revolutionary gains.

It is necessary to forge a Leninist-Trotskyist party based on proletarian internationalism to lead a struggle for the revolutionary reunification of Korea: for socialist revolution against the brutally repressive capitalist regime in the South and for workers political revolution to oust the Stalinist bureaucrats in the North. Linked to the fight for workers political revolution in China, this struggle must ultimately extend to the victory of proletarian rule in the imperialist heartlands of Japan and the U.S.

The persecution of the SWLK militants purely for their political beliefs gives the lie to the “democratic” pretensions of South Korean capitalism. Leftist and labor militants internationally must come to the defense of these activists. We print below a January 22 protest letter to the South Korean Embassy in Washington,

D.C., by the Partisan Defense Committee, a legal and social defense organization associated with the Spartacist League, U.S. section of the ICL.

* * *

The Partisan Defense Committee demands that the charges against members of the Socialist Workers League of Korea (SWLK) be dropped and that they immediately be released. For their defense of several strikes and their participation in demonstrations these members face five to seven years in prison for “anti-state” activities.

Oh Sei-chull, Yang Hyo-seok, Yang Joon-seok, Choi Young-ik, Park Joon-seon, Jeong Won-hyun, Oh Min-gyu and Nam-goon Won were convicted under the draconian National Security Law. This law was enacted in 1948 to suppress any support for North Korea and has been used to criminalize all political opposition to successive reactionary South Korean regimes. This is no less true of the Lee Myung-bak government which has imprisoned striking workers, launched a campaign against migrant workers and cracked down on demonstrations his administration deems to be illegal, the definition of which has expanded greatly under his administration. The prosecution of these activists is part of the contin-



Reuters
Riot cop assaults striking worker at Ssangyong Motors factory in Pyeongtaek, August 2009.

ued crackdown on those who, in the face of the brutal South Korean government, stand up for basic democratic rights and is a continuation of the brutal repression against the working class and its allies.

We demand: Free the SWLK 8! Drop the charges! ■

lic sector unions that, as yet, have not sacrificed their pensions and health care or succumbed to the tsunami of wage-slashing that has accompanied the depression, obviously in violation of the spirit of “shared sacrifice.” With President Obama leading the attack on the unionization of teachers and such seniority rights as their existing unions have maintained, others, including not a few Democratic Party politicians, are thinking that maybe the right to collective bargaining for public sector workers has to go, let alone the right to strike to the extent it exists. In substance, this agenda differs little from that of the Republicans save for its emphasis on gun control and the Democrats’ flimsy pretensions to protect the common man from the ravages of the system of capitalist exploitation.

Most Americans are justly angered and enraged by their circumstances. That this redounded to the electoral victory of the Republicans, who largely banked on the support of the petty-bourgeois bigots and racists who are the core elements of the Tea Party, is hardly surprising given the absence of significant social/class struggle. This absence is, to no small extent, a product of the groveling sellout of unionized workers by the trade-union tops who constitute a power base within the Democratic Party.

But it needs to be noted that it wasn’t the Tea Party types who created the current catastrophe or who bailed out the bankers or who led the attacks on jobs, wages and pensions. Nor are they leading the attacks against democratic rights—in fact, they fancy themselves victims of these assaults. It is the objective of these yahoos—for the most part older and generally loudmouthed, self-satisfied white males—to protect “their” entitlements (Social Security and Medicare) while ensuring that no tax money is spent on programs for immigrants, black people, the poor and unemployed, women in need of abortions—i.e., on Medicaid, food stamps,

scholarships and all other “handouts” for those they consider “undeserving.”

The Tea Party is reactionary, to be sure, but not a fascist movement. Sarah Palin, who recently invoked the anti-Semitic charge of “blood libel,” lacks the intellectual energy necessary to even try to read the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* or *Mein Kampf*. Nevertheless, it is critically necessary to mobilize to stop the attacks on such social benefits as remain. (Even the thoughtful bourgeois politician might want to pause before putting to torch the last vestiges of the public mental health system.) Those attacks, which have been in process for decades, will not cease if Rush Limbaugh and Glenn Beck are barred from accessing the public media.

In fact, attacks on free speech have always been and will be ultimately directed not at those who advocate injustice and oppression, but rather at those who protest and oppose these ongoing and integral components of capitalist class rule.

It is no accident that the ISO and WWP, whose rhetoric is emblematic of the entire reformist “left,” add fuel to the absurd notion that the capitalist system based on exploitation and oppression can be forced to throttle right-wing reaction. Yesterday they led protests against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan with the demand that the imperialists’ guns be traded in for the butter of social programs at home. Today they hype the notion that there is a better society to be had if the rulers could be

forced to lop off their right arms.

The current devastation is the product of the anarchy *inherent to the capitalist system*. Anger and rage are necessary ingredients of the class and other social struggles that are desperately needed to begin the fight to overturn that system. It is the multiracial working class that possesses the social power required to accomplish that end through socialist revolution. But in this country that power is held back by the chains binding the working class to the Democratic Party, chains that must be shattered through the building of a revolutionary proletarian party based on the understanding that the workers share no common cause with their imperialist masters. ■

Spartacist League



Black History Month Forums

150 Years Since the Civil War

Finish the Civil War! For Black Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!

NEW YORK CITY

Saturday
February 19, 4 p.m.
322 W. 48th Street
1st Floor
(between 8th & 9th Aves.—
Take A, C or E to 42nd St.)
For info: (212) 267-1025
nysl@tiac.net

LOS ANGELES

Saturday
February 26, 4 p.m.
Mount Hollywood
Congregational Church
4607 Prospect Ave.
(near Vermont-Sunset Red Line Station)
For info: (213) 380-8239
slsycla@sbcglobal.net

BAY AREA

Saturday
March 5, 2 p.m.
Methodist Church
303 Hudson St., Oakland
(5 blocks from Rockridge BART,
enter on Manila)
For info: (510) 839-0851
slbayarea@sbcglobal.net

A Marxist Analysis of the Mexican Revolution of 1910

The following is a slightly edited translation of an article that first appeared in *Espartaco* No. 12 (Spring-Summer 1999), publication of our comrades of the Grupo Espartaquista de México. In 1999 Mexico's ruling bourgeois party was the Partido Revolucionario Institucional, whose seven-decade reign would be broken the following year with the election of Vicente Fox of the right-wing Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party—PAN), since succeeded by the PAN's Felipe Calderón.

ESPARTACO

The Mexican Revolution of 1910 was a long and bloody process that lasted almost a decade, during which more than two million people—almost 10 percent of the population—lost their lives. The gigantic peasant insurrection against the dictator Porfirio Díaz and its bloody suppression by the bourgeois reaction of

PART ONE

Venustiano Carranza and Alvaro Obregón are events that had a profound impact on the country and have delineated the features of the Mexican bourgeois regime to the present day. For decades, the Mexican bourgeoisie has benefited from using the symbolism of the Revolution of 1910 to legitimize its capitalist order of exploitation and oppression, promoting a pervasive nationalism that continues to be the main ideological basis for the political subordination of the working masses in the city and the countryside.

The 1988 split in the ranks of the governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party—PRI), which later led to the formation of the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Party of the Democratic Revolution—PRD) of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, reinforced the old nationalist symbols that had been successfully used for more than 70 years by the decaying PRI to derail and repress class struggle. Subordinated to this nationalism, the reformist left, which feeds illusions in the bourgeois PRD, tries to convince the workers that only “Yankee imperialism” or the current PRI president are their enemies, and not the entire Mexican bourgeoisie as a class. Thus, the bourgeoisie, the PRD and their pseudo-leftist followers try to prevent the workers, youth and poor peasants from struggling against capitalist exploitation, and the working class from turning toward a common internationalist struggle together with the powerful working classes of other countries, especially in North America.

The nationalism encouraged by the bourgeoisie, which seeks to tie the exploited to their exploiters, intoxicates the masses with the lie that there is a “progressive and patriotic” sector of businessmen, politicians and the armed forces that can unite with the exploited and save the country from bankruptcy. The nationalist left, within and outside of the PRD, also helps to encourage *class collaboration* through the illusion that it is possible to solve burning democratic and social questions within the framework of capitalism. Nevertheless, this confidence in “progressive” sectors of the bourgeoisie and in the possibility of pressuring and reforming the capitalist state is a fatal illusion and a dead end for the working class and the oppressed in the struggle for



General Eufemio Zapata (center, with sword), brother of Emiliano, with general staff in December 1914, when rebel forces entered Mexico City.

their emancipation from capitalism.

The counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union in 1991-92 had a tremendous impact in the semicolonial countries of the so-called Third World, which have become even more subordinated to the imperialists and their bloodsucking financial institutions. In growing competition with its rivals in Europe and Japan, North American imperialism continues through its NAFTA pillage to transform all Latin America into its backyard and its supplier of raw materials and semi-slave labor for its manufacturing plants. The generalized discontent over the effects of NAFTA has been shown in increasing social turbulence in Mexico, weakening the control of the PRI and helping to feed the growth of new bourgeois oppositions like the PAN and the PRD.

The hegemony of bourgeois nationalism in the organizations of the workers movement, in the corporatist unions as well as the “independent” ones, is the main reason why there has been no authentic proletarian challenge to the capitalist order. Thus, while most of the unions are still captives under the iron control of the PRI bureaucracy and its enforcers, the leadership of the “independent” and dissident union movement (from the UNT [National Union of Workers] and STU-NAM [National University workers] to the SME [electrical workers] and the CNTE [teachers]) feeds illusions in the bourgeois politicians of the PRD or even in “democratic” sectors of the PRI. Nor is it uncommon for meetings of these unions and student marches to end with the singing of the national anthem, which is the anthem of the bourgeoisie. In this sense, the 1994 EZLN Zapatista rebellion, which arose in protest against the annihilation of indigenous villages by the imperialist rape of NAFTA, also reinforced the old nationalist ideology. The petty-bourgeois leadership of the EZLN, subordinate to the PRD, asks [then PRI president] Ernesto Zedillo to “lead by obeying” and demands that the national anthem be sung and the flag honored at all the unions and assemblies they visit. This is the same flag that is carried by the Mexican Army that murders indigenous people and that was saluted by [former PRI president] Díaz Ordaz after he ordered

the massacre of hundreds of students in Tlatelolco [in Mexico City] in 1968!

In intransigent opposition to bourgeois nationalism and its pseudo-left apologists, which block the development of conscious, decisive class struggle by the working class, the Grupo Espartaquista de México seeks to bring the program of communism to the vanguard of the workers and youth who want to struggle



Dictator Porfirio Díaz was overthrown in Mexican Revolution.

against the exploitation and oppression of capital. The GEM is dedicated to forging an internationalist Leninist-Trotskyist party to lead the proletariat to power. We struggle together with our comrades of the Spartacist League/U.S. and the Trotskyist League/Ligue Trotskyste of Canada, seeking to mobilize the powerful, multiracial North American proletariat against the imperialists and the Mexican bourgeoisie and in defense of all immigrants and the oppressed. As part of the International Communist League, we struggle to reforge the Fourth International, world party of socialist revolution.

The Permanent Revolution

With its nationalist, paternalistic ideology, the Mexican bourgeoisie justifies the

social backwardness, rural poverty and illiteracy of millions of workers and peasants, blaming the victims themselves for the ravages of their exploitation. To redirect the dissatisfaction of the masses, the bourgeoisie also incites rotten xenophobic hatred, anti-Semitism, anti-indigenous racism, *machismo* and homophobia, relying on the willing help of the church. For their part, the bourgeoisie's arrogant North American imperialist masters portray Mexicans as a weak and lethargic people, using all types of disgusting racist stereotypes, unleashing the terror of groups like the Ku Klux Klan and border vigilantes as well as the racist death penalty. Against all this garbage, the communist program explains that the backwardness and grinding poverty in the semicolonial world are not the result of some “cultural” cause but instead come from powerful historical factors in the development of capitalism.

We communists base our struggle for workers revolution on the program of *permanent revolution* developed by Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky. In Trotsky's perspective, because of the combined and uneven development of the world economy, the bourgeoisies in backward countries are strongly linked to imperialist interests, thus preventing them from carrying out the fundamental tasks of bourgeois revolution—democracy, agrarian revolution and national emancipation. In the face of peasant rebellion and a combative working class, each and every one of these goals would directly threaten the political and economic control of the capitalist class. The democratic tasks of the bourgeois revolution, then, can be resolved only by an alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry. Marxism maintains that there can only be one dominant class in each state. Because the proletariat is the only consistently revolutionary class, as the *Communist Manifesto* declares, this alliance must take the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat, supported by the peasants.

Trotsky was unequivocal that the peasantry cannot play an independent political role. In carrying out the democratic tasks of the revolution, the proletarian state must inevitably make “despotic incursions into the rights of bourgeois property.” Thus the revolution passes directly to socialist tasks, without stopping at any arbitrary “stages,” or, as Lenin put it, without the existence of a “Chinese Wall” between the bourgeois and proletarian phases. The advent of a genuinely socialist society (that is, without classes) can only be achieved on an international scale, requiring the overthrow of capitalism in at least several advanced countries.

That is why we communists base ourselves on the central role of the proletariat and fight for the working class to arise as the leader of the oppressed masses in the cities and the countryside in order to overthrow the bourgeois order. But for the working class to be able to free itself from the exploitation of capital, it is necessary for it to sweep away the ideology of the bourgeoisie and draw its own lessons from the historical event that exploded in Mexico at the dawn of the 20th century. Without a materialist understanding of its own history, the working class, and with it all those oppressed under capitalism, would be condemned to suffer new bloody defeats at the hands of the bourgeoisie. The fundamental task of the Leninist-Trotskyist vanguard, as we intervene to change history, is to take this understanding and the revolutionary program to the working class, fighting to

raise its consciousness to the level required by its historic tasks.

The Absolutist Spanish State and the Colonization of America

There was a time when the bourgeoisie played a revolutionary role against the old feudal order and the obscurantism of the Middle Ages. The classic bourgeois-democratic revolutions that broke out in Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries had concrete results: the liberation of the peasantry, national independence and unification, the elimination of feudal constraints on markets and industry, etc. Marxism came to this generalization after analyzing the results of several bourgeois revolutions, such as the English Revolution of Cromwell in the mid 17th century, and especially the Great French Revolution of 1789, which is the archetype of the classic bourgeois revolution.

Marxism also pointed out that after this radical period the bourgeoisie stopped being revolutionary. The reactionary course of the bourgeoisie was clearly shown in the revolutions of 1848 in Europe and especially in France, where the bourgeoisie bared its counterrevolutionary teeth when it brutally smashed the proletariat. After that, one sees the European bourgeoisie repudiating its original political ideals, ceding power to the forces of reaction—all because of its fear of the working class.

Spain and Portugal are a special case, because they lagged behind the bourgeois development experienced in several other European countries during those centuries. Spain was the first great unified, absolutist monarchical state to arise in Europe after the Reconquest in 1492, marked by the taking of Granada and the expulsion of the Moors from Spain. The victory over the Arabs consolidated the power of the Spanish monarchy as well as the Catholic church, which played a central logistical role in the struggle against the Moors. The Spanish church was the pillar of the Inquisition, which was a reaction against modernization and the Protestant Reformation of Calvin and Luther. Torquemada’s Inquisition also proceeded with brutal terror against the Jews. (This is one of the origins of the anti-Semitism that is deeply rooted in Latin America and in the nationalist and centrist left of today.)

The monarchy unified the church and the army under its banner, and, with the conquest of the Americas, the Inquisition and colonization went hand in hand. Thus, the Spanish state experienced a brief flowering from 1500 to 1550, above all because of the vast plunder wrenched from the American colonies. But this plunder failed to strengthen commercial capital, which was now ascendant in the rest of Europe. The Spanish mercantile class used it for the consumption of luxury goods, and the Spanish monarchy used it to purchase aristocratic titles and vast landed estates. A popular saying from that time captures something of this



Miguel Hidalgo (left) initiated 1810 insurrection that led to independence from Spain. Benito Juárez (right) led second Mexican revolution (1858-61).



Library of Congress Graphics

social reality: “Grandfather, a merchant; father, a nobleman; son, a beggar.” The Spanish monarchy did everything in its power to keep the nascent Spanish bourgeoisie and feudal lords weak and in debt to the throne. Everything passed through the monarchy, which tried to interfere with and control all aspects of economic, political and cultural life.

For the Spanish Crown, the new colonies in the Americas did not represent commercial or settlement expansion but rather tribute-paying protectorates, new sources of royal income that were not much different from the various Spanish provinces. After the brief flowering it experienced through consolidating as a national state, Spain began a downward spiral toward stagnation and decadence. In a short time, the main function of the monarchical state became that of a simple mediator, extracting tribute from the colonies to purchase articles produced in other locations by the manufacturing capital of Britain, France, Holland, Belgium and Germany. The Spanish conquerors in the Americas soon became collecting agencies for the throne in Madrid, replacing the ancient Mexicas as collectors of tribute. But this extraction of tribute did not last long, owing to a catastrophic decline of the indigenous population in Mexico, which fell from some 16 million to about a million—in only two generations!

The annihilation of the indigenous population, the result of the brutal exploitation of the *encomienda* [peonage] system, famine and disease, was accompanied by a great influx of Spanish immigrants. With the impossibility of continuing to extract more tribute, other sources of exploitation appeared. Slowly, the development of a more diversified economy was achieved, one centered on mining, the textile industry and agriculture (dyes, sugar, and coffee, etc.) for the domestic market and for commercial export.

Thus, during the colonial period that lasted three centuries (1519 to 1821), we cannot speak of a capitalist Mexico in the

Marxist sense of the term (contrary to the assertions of some pseudo-Marxist authors like André Gunder Frank and Nahuel Moreno, for whom the conquest and colonization of America was fully capitalist). What was implanted in the New World was a mixture of tributary, parasitic despotism with decadent feudal elements and an embryonic mercantile capitalism. All this was woven together and organized by the Spanish Crown in the world market of mercantilist capitalism. (This mixture of several elements is not exclusive to colonial Mexico.)

Colonial domination by a backward Spain stifled Mexico and Latin America at a decisive stage of capitalist development. That was why Mexico could not reproduce the pattern of booming commercial and industrial capitalist development that appeared in the most advanced areas of Europe, something that was also achieved by the English colonists in North America, for example. The fact that some elements of mercantile capitalism can be perceived in the Spanish colonies in that era does not mean that those societies were already organized on the basis of capital. For Karl Marx, capitalism was essentially a *mode of production*, not a network of overseas commerce (something that had already existed since the time of the Phoenicians).

The War of Independence of 1810

By the end of the 17th century, Mexico was nevertheless the richest of the Spanish colonies, responsible for more than 60 percent of the precious metals sent to Spain from the Americas, especially silver. Over time, the Mexican political economy developed beyond mining, unlike in the rest of Latin America. For example, during the colonial period the income of the wealthy *criollo* [Creole: Mexican-born of Spanish descent] land-owning *hacendados* was several times greater than that of their alter egos in Peru. By the middle of the 17th century, Mexico City rivaled Spanish cities in size and wealth. The name given to colonial

Mexico, “New Spain,” was not an accident.

As Mexico’s economy developed, creole landowners and artisans and the middle and lower hierarchies of the church and the army clashed against the Spanish viceregal power that mediated and blocked their access to international commerce and political power. Many *hacendados* complained about a law that prohibited indigenous Mexicans from putting themselves more than five pesos in debt. This regulation blocked the transformation of indigenous Mexicans into debt peons—i.e., semi-slave laborers who would toil on large agricultural estates where production was completely for export. This type of Spanish protectionism was consciously maintained as a counterweight to the development of a creole bourgeoisie in Mexico. The Creoles began to demand the right to export agricultural goods as well as free importation of manufactured products and other prerogatives.

This contradiction was the material basis for the War of Independence that broke out in September 1810. This first Mexican revolution (1810-1821) was an attempt to resolve the conflicts between the nascent creole bourgeoisie and the stifling government of the parasitic Spanish monarchy. In his *Historia del Capitalismo en Mexico (History of Capitalism in Mexico)*, historian Enrique Semo points out:

“The despotic-tributary system did not cease to exist by itself. A revolution was needed to help it exit the historical stage, and this is a fact forgotten by those who argue that the revolution for independence contributed little or nothing to the development of the Mexican nation. The rule of the Crown and its viceregal bureaucracy constituted not only a system of external dependence but also an internal form of rule. The task of the turbulent years of 1810-1821 was to destroy it, and this was, to a large extent, achieved. The Spanish official who controlled down to the last detail a society divided into conflicting corporations, who intervened between the owners of the means of production and the laborers, who extracted riches from the colony to enjoy them in the metropolis, who opposed any local enterprise that went against his own or the Crown’s interests had to go, and with him went all vestiges of the *encomienda*, the *repartimiento* [system of forced labor], the tribute, and so on. His place was taken by the *hacendado*, the main beneficiary of the revolution for independence, the natural representative of large private property and local particularism who—in conflict with the church—had to make his interests prevail over those of other social classes. “The revolution of 1810-1821 did not mark the victory of bourgeois trends over feudal modes, but rather the removal of all vestiges of tributary despotism with its bureaucratic centralism, and the victory of large semifeudal landed property with its parochially oriented *caciquismo* [*cacique* means local boss].”

As in all the Spanish colonies in the Americas, the push to declare independence in Mexico was accelerated by the fear on the part of the creole propertied classes and the church of the Napoleonic invasion of Spain in 1808. At the same time, news of the French Revolution arrived in Mexico very early. Its language may be found

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Culver



University of Michigan

Left: Army of Hernán Cortés butchers Mexicas, as Spain conquers territory. Right: Spain reaped riches by brutally exploiting indigenous population.

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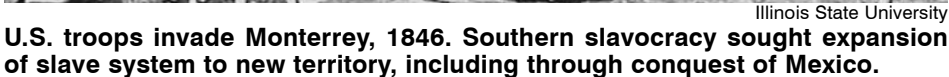
But separation from Spain did not come until 1821, when Agustín de Iturbide, who was assigned to smash the rebellion, went over to the side of independence, among other reasons because of his appetite to anoint himself as emperor of Mexico. His slogan was “Independence, unity and religion!” By “unity” he meant unity with the Spanish monarchy—temporarily overthrown by the episodic revolution of 1820 in Spain, which tried to institute the radical democratic constitution of 1812 that called, among other things, for the separation of church and state. By “religion,” he meant defense of the privileges of the Catholic church, the largest landowner and also the largest moneylender in Mexico. Thus, independence from Spain ultimately had a distinctive smell of counterrevolution.

The next 40 years of Mexican history were full of revolt and internal struggle. There were constant clashes between the regional liberal elites, tending to appropriate indigenous lands (which were often controlled directly or indirectly by the church), and a weak conservative center based on the church, the army and the state administration. Between 1821 and 1861, there were 56 presidents in Mexico! It was during this time that Mexico suffered the first intervention by the United States, ordered by President James K. Polk in 1846—an event that presaged the current U.S. colonialist domination and rape of Mexico.

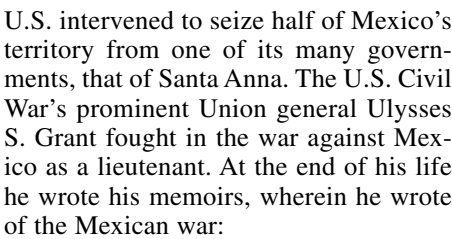
From a demographic point of view, at the beginning of the 19th century Mexico and the U.S. were almost the same—each had about six million inhabitants. (The population of Mexico was actually a bit larger.) But the characteristics of the economic systems in both countries were very different. The political economy of the United States was a transplant of the developed commercial capitalist system in Britain, whereas that of Mexico, as we have seen, issued out of Spain's backwardness and tributary despotism. U.S. capitalism was very dynamic, exactly the opposite of the Mexican economy. Thus, the northern border of Mexico was strongly attracted to the economic orbit of

church's great landed estates and also abolished many of the collective properties of the indigenous peoples. Juarism established secular education and some social services. The Reform aimed for the bourgeoisie to be able to acquire property on a capitalist basis. From the Vatican, Pope Pius IX angrily railed against Juárez and declared "null and void" the laws of the Mexican government, excommunicating Juárez himself.

Under the pretext of the Mexican debt and with the cry of "Religion and Privileges!", France and Britain intervened militarily in Mexico in 1863, seeking to impose the monarchy of Maximilian of Habsburg. This new rapacious intervention was possible because of the prox-



Adapted from map by U.S. Army Center of Military History



“Generally the officers of the army were indifferent whether the annexation was consummated or not; but not so all of them. For myself, I was bitterly opposed to the measure, and to this day regard the war which resulted as one of the most unjust ever waged by a stronger against a weaker nation. It was an instance of a republic following the bad example of European monarchies, in not considering justice in their desire to acquire additional territory.”

The war with the U.S., and the constant interference of the European powers, sharpened the conflicts that had dragged on since Independence. In this context, the War of the Reform (1858-61) broke out, undertaken by President Benito Juárez in the name of radical bourgeois ideology and influenced by the principles of the French Revolution. This second Mexican revolution differed from its predecessor because it had more of the features of a movement of the dominant and semi-dominant classes fighting against one another, without the plebeian mobilization that took place during Independence. Juárez established the separation of church and state, forced the sale of the

imity of the U.S. Civil War. France and Britain would not have intervened in Mexico if the U.S. had not been in the middle of a civil war. The North, which had already recognized the Juárez government, preferred to remain "neutral" for fear that France and Britain might recognize the Confederate slave power in the South. Juárez declared war against the invaders, and although at one point he was pushed into the north of Mexico, he finally won the war in 1867. Maximilian was captured and executed.

Juárez became a national hero. His conservative opponents, including the church, were discredited in the eyes of the masses because of their collaboration with the invaders. Nevertheless, in spite of the prestige Juárez gained, the climate of instability not only continued but was aggravated by the war's bloodletting and a boycott by reactionary forces. Thus, in 1876, General Porfirio Díaz, at the head of a liberal alliance, abruptly took power, installing a military dictatorship that would last more than 30 years. The coup was planned in close collaboration with U.S. interests. Díaz's peculiar motto was "Little politics and much administration." And to restore "order" in turbulent Mexico, Díaz threw out the Jacobin ideology of Juárez and achieved an understanding with the church, instituting the so-called "peace of the tomb": immediate military repression of any peasant or popular rebellion, jail and exile—including the massive exile of entire populations such as the indigenous Yaqui and Mayo of

Sonora—to the death camps in Yucatán or Valle Nacional in Oaxaca.

The new Porfirian cabinet tried to shape a Mexican bourgeoisie that might enrich itself by riding on the coattails of the imperialists. To guarantee that the imperialist corporations and the weak Mexican bourgeoisie would benefit from the exploitation of natural resources, the Díaz regime promoted the construction of a vast system of railroads. Díaz tried to do a balancing act between the United States, Britain, France and Germany, setting them against each other in distributing investment concessions. The result was that toward the end of his rule, more than one-fourth of Mexican land was the property of foreigners, as well as 90 per cent of industrial capital.

It was the age of the ascendancy of modern imperialism, and the imperialist powers were deeply involved in the Mexican economy. U.S. capitalists were particularly concentrated in mining, railroads and the great cattle *haciendas* in the north. Yucatán was basically a satellite plantation of the International Harvester Company. The British were involved in the petroleum industry in particular, while the Germans tried to dominate the banking system. For their part, the French had large investments in textiles and amassed large amounts of Mexican government debt in the form of bonds. But with the world financial crisis at the beginning of the 20th century, marked by a precipitous fall in the prices of raw materials, the Mexican economy, sustained by the export of those materials, suffered a tremendous blow, and the Díaz dictatorship became extremely isolated and discredited.

In 1910 Mexico was an overwhelmingly agrarian country, characterized by a marked particularism and regional parochialism, where the majority of peasants had no land. This development was a direct consequence of imperialist investments and the rapid expansion of the railroads during the Porfiriato, which, by opening up the interior of the country, unleashed an explosion of land speculation and growth of agricultural production for export.

The Mexican Revolution of 1910 began as a classic Mexican uprising by five northern governors. Representing the bourgeoisie in that region, which was most closely linked to the U.S. economy, they felt threatened by the decrepit central government of Díaz. With his extensive network of favoritism and cronyism, the dictator had become an obstacle for the bourgeoisie and the object of popular hatred. At the end of Díaz's long reign, the country was shaken by a profound financial crisis, worsened by corruption, gigantic government debt and a fiscal policy that was intolerable for the population. In the years immediately preceding the revolution, a wave of combative strikes (Cananea, Río Blanco, etc.) and peasant restlessness swept the country.

Francisco I. Madero, the most representative figure in this stage of the revolution against Díaz, came from one of the richest families in the country, one which wanted to compete with companies from the United States. But Madero's timid campaign to bar the president from running for re-election soon opened the door to a series of peasant revolts that swept like wildfire through the country, as unrest could no longer be contained by the dictator. Díaz soon capitulated to Madero and the northern revolutionary wave, which was powerfully reinforced by massive popular protests in Mexico City. In the elections that followed the fall of Díaz, Madero emerged victorious and anointed himself president. Like a good bourgeois politician, Madero left the military apparatus of the old regime intact, and the essence of his program was a colorless liberalism. Certainly, Madero had no intention of altering social relations in the countryside, nor did he grant any concessions whatever to the working class.

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Tunisia...

(continued from page 1)

been marked by an outpouring of all social classes other than the upper echelons of the Tunisian bourgeoisie, a good many of them cronies of Ben Ali. Tunisian flags have been everywhere. This reflects a nationalist consciousness that is also expressed in widespread illusions in the army, whose chief reportedly refused to fire on civilian demonstrators and is rumored to have orchestrated the ouster of Ben Ali. Such illusions are a deadly danger to the working people and the oppressed.

Amid the political vacuum created by Ben Ali’s departure and the jostling for political influence by various forces in the country, what is needed is a Marxist working-class vanguard putting forward the program of permanent revolution: the seizure of power by the working class, fighting to extend its revolutionary victory to the centers of world imperialism—the only way to break the fetters of political despotism and economic and social backwardness.

For a Workers and Peasants Government!

In Tunisia, as in other countries of belated capitalist development, historic gains—such as political democracy and national emancipation—associated with the great bourgeois revolutions of the 17th and 18th century in Britain and France cannot be realized so long as bourgeois rule remains. Tunisia is a neo-colonial country whose bourgeoisie is tied by a million strings to world imperialism, particularly France, the former colonial ruler, which benefits from the deep oppression of Tunisia’s masses and served as the main prop for the Ben Ali regime.

French foreign minister Michele Alliot-Marie even offered to send security forces to help crush the uprising. (A cargo plane full of tear gas canisters was stopped from heading to Tunisia only after news came out that Ben Ali had left the country.) Over a thousand French companies are active in Tunisia, owning the bulk of the financial sector and employing over 100,000 people. U.S. imperialism was also key in propping up the Ben Ali regime. One of the documents recently released by WikiLeaks quotes a July 2009 cable by the U.S. ambassador to Tunisia: “The United States needs help in this region to promote our values and policies. Tunisia is one place where, in time, we might find it.”

The subordination of Tunisia to imperialism serves to ensure the brutal exploitation and oppression of its people. Authentic national and social liberation requires mobilizing the proletariat in a frontal attack against the imperialists *and* the domestic bourgeoisie, which is the deadly enemy of Tunisia’s workers and oppressed. Indeed, amid continuing protests, there is a real danger of the military carrying out a coup to stabilize the bourgeois order. Addressing protesters on January 24, General Rachid Ammar, the army chief of staff, ominously stressed that “the national army is the guarantor of the revolution” (*Le Monde*, 26 January). For its part, the right-wing *Le Figaro* (18 January), a French government mouthpiece, openly and threateningly mooted a military coup as the next stage to save bourgeois order and imperialist domination in Tunisia: “Except for accepting this government of national unity [with Ben Ali cronies] to organize upcoming democratic elections, the Tunisians have no plan B to re-establish civilian peace, except resorting to the military to occupy power.”

In Tunisia today, even a small Marxist propaganda group putting forward a series of transitional demands that link the democratic aspirations of the masses to the struggle for proletarian power could have a great impact on unfolding events. This would lay the basis for the building of a revolutionary party that

can lead the proletariat in the fight for a workers and peasants government that expropriates the bourgeoisie. Such a party must be forged not only against Ben Ali’s cronies but also against all manner of bourgeois “reformers” as well as the reactionary Islamic fundamentalists.

A proletarian victory in Tunisia would have an electrifying impact throughout North Africa and the Near East and would serve as a bridge to socialist revolution in the advanced capitalist countries, especially France, where some 700,000 Tunisians reside. Summarizing his theory of permanent revolution, Bolshevik leader Leon Trotsky underlined in *The Permanent Revolution* (1930):

“With regard to countries with a belated bourgeois development, especially the colonial and semi-colonial countries, the theory of the permanent revolution signifies that the complete and genuine solution of their tasks of achieving *democracy and national emancipation* is conceivable only through the dictatorship of the proletariat as the leader of the subjugated nation, above all of its peasant masses....

“The dictatorship of the proletariat which has risen to power as the leader of the democratic revolution is inevitably and very quickly confronted with tasks, the fulfillment of which is bound up with deep inroads into the rights of bourgeois property. The democratic revolution grows over directly into the socialist revolution and thereby becomes a *permanent* revolution....

“In a country where the proletariat has power in its hands as the result of the democratic revolution, the subsequent



January 14: Protester outside Interior Ministry in Tunis calls for ouster of Ben Ali.

fate of the dictatorship and socialism depends in the last analysis not only and not so much upon the national productive forces as upon the development of the international socialist revolution.”

The Bankruptcy of Tunisian Nationalism

Tunisia has long been touted by its rulers, including by the late Habib Bourguiba, the country’s first president after it received independence from France in 1956, as well as by the imperialists and international bourgeois press as an exception in North Africa for its development, high level of education and supposed equal opportunities for women. However, the case of Mohamed Bouazizi, whose self-immolation sparked the revolt that led to the toppling of Ben Ali, encapsulates the grim reality of life in Tunisia today.

After becoming the main provider for his family at the age of ten, selling fresh produce at the local market, he gave up on his plans to study and left high school at 19 without graduating in order to support his family and give his younger siblings the chance to stay in school. Those who knew Bouazizi spoke of years of abuse and harassment by local police who would confiscate his wares and fine him, ostensibly for not having a permit to sell. On December 17, the police took his scales, tossed aside his cart and beat him. Less than an hour later, after local officials refused to hear his complaint, he set himself alight. Outraged by the events, the



January 17: Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi, crony of departed Ben Ali, at his office amid continual government shake-ups.

city of Sidi Bouzid erupted in protests. Mohamed Bouazizi died on January 4.

Untold numbers of Tunisians and other North Africans, mainly youth, have died in venturing the dangerous boat trip to reach Italy and the rest of Europe to look for work—only to then be subjected to backbreaking exploitation and racist oppression, living under constant danger of deportation. And even that route has become increasingly closed as the European imperialists clamp down on immigration. According to Sami Aouadi, a leader of the Tunisian UGTT trade-union federation, there are today at least 200,000 people with a college degree who are unemployed in Tunisia—that is, 27 percent of all the unemployed in a country numbering about ten million people.

The Tunisian economy is based on agriculture and related processing industries, some oil extraction, phosphate mining in the Gafsa area, tourism and some industry. Textiles, with its heavily female workforce, makes up nearly half of the manufacturing sector. Manufacturing, including French-owned spare parts factories for the auto and aeronautical industries, constitutes about one-fifth of Tunisia’s GDP. There is also an increasingly important service industry with a number of foreign companies, particularly French telecommunications operators, having outsourced call centers to Tunisia. Tunisian workers earn one-eighth of West European wages.

While Tunisia is hardly a heavily industrialized country, it does have a significant trade-union movement, with the UGTT claiming to represent some 600,000 blue-collar workers. The UGTT has a unique history in North Africa of not being completely subservient to the bourgeois-nationalist ruling government. It has engaged in both class struggle and deep class collaboration with the nationalists in power. Ben Ali seemed to have finally brought the UGTT to heel after many years of repression, and in recent years the top leaders of the union federation were also members of the leadership of Ben Ali’s Democratic-Constitutional Rally (RCD) party. The UGTT tops called for a vote to Ben Ali in 1999, 2004 and again in 2009, at a time when the population was sarcastically changing the “Ben Ali 2009” campaign posters to “Ben Ali 2080” and “Ben Ali 2500.”

On December 28, the UGTT demanded the release of those imprisoned following

the protests in Sidi Bouzid and elsewhere. However, it insisted that its demands were made “with the aim of contributing to devising constructive solutions in order to appease the situation in that area and contain its fallout.” Under pressure from its ranks, and as protests swelled, it made statements increasingly hostile to the government and finally allowed its regional chapters to call for local general strikes on January 14, the very day that Ben Ali fled.

The UGTT leadership then jumped into the “new” government, the key posts of which, including the police, remained manned by Ben Ali associates. Again, it was only under the pressure of mass protests against the sham “transitional government” that the UGTT ministers resigned from their posts, saying they were still willing to participate in the capitalist government provided that prime minister Ghannouchi was the only Ben Ali crony in it. As Jilani Hammami, a UGTT leader, delicately put it, the trade-union federation “was subjected to heated debates, counterposing the leadership, with its links to the regime, to the federal and regional chapters, which supported the popular uprising.” More recently, the UGTT has endorsed the reshuffled “interim government” in a (so far futile) attempt to quell protests.

The 2008 Gafsa Revolt: a Precursor

The contradictory role played by the trade unions, as well as the divisions between the base and the tops of these unions, was also seen in the 2008 revolt in Gafsa. This revolt was a precursor to the current social upheaval and had previously been the most significant protest Tunisia had seen since the Bread Revolt in 1984, which erupted after Bourguiba instituted an IMF-dictated 100 percent hike in the price of bread.

A phosphate mining area, the Gafsa region has been hit particularly hard by mass unemployment. Over the past three decades, the government-controlled CPG (Company of Gafsa Phosphates), the region’s main employer, has reduced its payroll from 14,000 workers to little more than 5,000. A popular upheaval broke out in January 2008 when the mining company produced a list of people to be hired that favored individuals loyal to the government and to the UGTT regional lead-

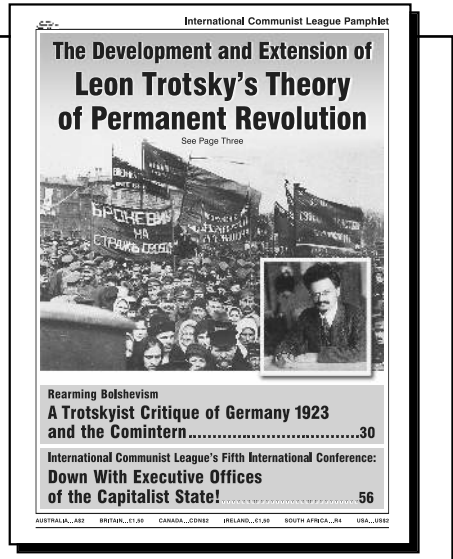
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International Communist League pamphlet comprising three articles from ICL press: “The Development and Extension of Leon Trotsky’s Theory of Permanent Revolution,” “A Trotskyist Critique of Germany 1923 and the Comintern” and “Down With Executive Offices of the Capitalist State!” These articles together constitute an introduction to the historically founded principles and program of Trotskyism (i.e., genuine Marxism).

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Tunisia's French overlords, then and now: (left) Socialist president François Mitterrand with Habib Bourguiba, 1983; (right) current president Nicolas Sarkozy with Ben Ali, before latter fled to Saudi Arabia.



Tunisia...

(continued from page 7)

ers. Since the company had a policy of not replacing its retirees, this was its first hiring opportunity in six years; hopes were thus particularly high.

For months, workers, women and unemployed youth in the mining region protested. Their banners declared, “Work, Freedom and National Dignity,” “We Want Jobs, No to Promises and Illusions” and “No to Corruption and Opportunism.” In June 2008, the government cracked down. Two people were killed, in addition to one the month before, while dozens were injured and many more were imprisoned. In November 2009, most prisoners were released under a presidential pardon by an increasingly unstable Ben Ali regime, but with the sentences remaining in place and the individuals subject to regular police controls. However, Fahem Boukadous, a journalist who covered the Gafsa revolt, was sentenced last year to four years in prison and released only on January 19. The workers movement in Tunisia and internationally must demand: **Freedom now for all the heroic fighters of the Gafsa upheaval and all other victims of bonapartist repression!**

Local UGTT activists played a key role in the Gafsa struggle, particularly in the town of Redeyef. However, the central and regional leadership denounced the protests and even suspended one of the trade unionists leading the protests—Adnane Hajji, a teacher who was subsequently sentenced to more than ten years in jail. While on paper the UGTT is opposed to temporary jobs, local UGTT honcho Amara Abbassi, a member of the RCD central committee and of parliament, set up a company of labor brokers to supply the mines with temporary workers. He also set up other labor broker companies to supply maintenance workers, enriching himself and his family on the backs of the superexploited workers. As part of the struggle to forge a Marxist workers party in Tunisia, it is vital to fight to replace the reformist leadership of the UGTT with a class-struggle leadership dedicated to the independence of the trade unions from the bourgeoisie and its state.

For a Revolutionary Constituent Assembly!

In fighting for working-class power, it would be impossible for a Marxist party in Tunisia merely to reject the bourgeois-democratic program. Rather, as Trotsky put it in the 1938 Transitional Program, the founding document of the Fourth International, “it is imperative that in the struggle the masses outgrow it.” The Tunisian working masses are today saddled with a “transitional government” headed by a Ben Ali crony with elections suspended for six months, aiming for the emerging bourgeois regime to consolidate its power.

Thus, against the maneuverings of Tunisia’s bourgeois rulers and their UGTT lackeys, we raise the call for immediate elections to convoke a **revolutionary constituent assembly**, which could give free expression to the will of the population after decades of silence under the heel of Bourguiba and Ben Ali. This basic democratic demand will not be realized

through parliamentary bargaining but only through a victorious popular insurrection.

Our call for a revolutionary constituent assembly is counterposed to calls for a constituent assembly raised by the reformists, who in fact envision parliamentary bargaining with the bourgeois authorities with the (illusory) aim of securing a democratic form of bourgeois rule. The Workers Communist Party of Tunisia (PCOT), a group with a Stalinist background that played a militant role in the Gafsa uprising, stands out for having straightforwardly denounced the governmental combinations formed after Ben Ali fled. Its spokesman Hamma Hammami told *l’Humanité* (17 January), newspaper of the French Communist Party, that the purpose of the provisional government was “to abort the democratic and popular movement,” insisting: “We don’t demand anything impossible, only the institution of a transitional government to form a constituent assembly in order to elaborate a constitution guaranteeing fundamental civil rights, freedom of expression, of association and of the press.” Speaking plainly, PCOT simply wants, including through its call for a constituent assembly, a **capitalist government** but without those who have a history of collaboration with Ben Ali.

We raise the call for a revolutionary constituent assembly as a bridge between the current, legitimate democratic aspirations of the masses and the need for the dictatorship of the proletariat, which would be based on soviets (workers councils)—i.e., proletarian democracy, a higher form of democracy than a bourgeois-democratic constituent assem-

blage. Only they are capable of bringing the democratic revolution to a conclusion and likewise opening an era of socialist revolution.”

The Working Class Needs Its Own Organs of Power

In periods of acute class struggle, the trade unions, which typically organize the top layers of the proletariat, become too narrow to draw in the broad layers of masses in revolt, including unorganized workers. At the same time, the unions’ bureaucratic misleaders strive to keep on top of the situation in order to derail the struggle. A Marxist party in Tunisia today would put forward a perspective of building organizations that embrace the whole fighting mass: strike committees, factory committees and, finally, soviets.

As Trotsky emphasized, soviets can only arise at the time when the mass movement enters into an openly revolutionary stage. Soviets originally arose amid the 1905 Russian Revolution as workers strike committees. When the soviets arose again during the course of the 1917 Russian Revolution, they embraced not only the workers but also soldiers and the peasantry, becoming organs of dual power. Under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party, the working class took power in Russia, with the soviets emerging as the organs of working-class rule.

Following Ben Ali’s departure, local militias sprang up to defend neighborhoods against the rampages of cops and thugs allied with Ben Ali. What is necessary is for the working class to take the lead. This means organizing factory committees, organs of dual power at the point

centered bodies that vie with the bourgeoisie for control of the country—run up against the very nature of the capitalist order:

“These new organs and centers, however, will soon begin to feel their lack of cohesion and their insufficiency. Not one of the transitional demands can be fully met under the conditions of preserving the bourgeois regime. At the same time, the deepening of the social crisis will increase not only the sufferings of the masses but also their impatience, persistence, and pressure. Ever new layers of the oppressed will raise their heads and come forward with their demands. Millions of toilworn ‘little men,’ to whom the reformist leaders never gave a thought, will begin to pound insistently on the doors of the workers’ organizations. The unemployed will join the movement. The agricultural workers, the ruined and semiruin farmers, the oppressed of the cities, the women workers, housewives, proletarianized layers of the intelligentsia—all of these will seek unity and leadership.

“How are the different demands and forms of struggle to be harmonized, even if only within the limits of one city? History has already answered this question: through soviets.”

Stalinist “Two-Stage Revolution” Means Betrayal

Faced with decades of class-collaborationist betrayal by the Stalinist Communist Party (now called Ettajdid, meaning “Renewal”) and other reformist parties, Tunisia’s working and oppressed masses today do not identify their struggles with the fight for socialism. After decades of brutal dictatorship, there are deepgoing illusions in bourgeois democracy and nationalism.

Tunisian left groups have shown that they have learned nothing from their past betrayals, when many of them supported General Ben Ali’s 1987 ascent to power as he deposed the then “president for life” Habib Bourguiba. We wrote at the time: “The Tunisian so-called left is giving the benefit of the doubt, if not their support, to the new Bonaparte, General Ben Ali, hoping for the liberalization of the regime” (*Le Bolchévique* No. 79, January 1988). Today, these left groups continue to bow before the ruling apparatus. Ettajdid leader Ahmed Ibrahim greeted Ben Ali’s conciliatory speech on the day before his flight, declaring, “It is a good start to turn the page of authoritarianism” (*Le Monde*, 15 January). Ettajdid went so far as to participate in the government that was formed after the dictator’s ousting.

Historically, Stalinists in the Third World advocated “two-stage revolution,” with a first, democratic stage to be carried out in alliance with a mythical “progressive” and “democratic” wing of the bourgeoisie, which would then be followed in an indeterminate future by a second stage of socialist revolution. Time and again, these pipe dreams have ended with drowning the workers in blood; the second stage never comes. Once the capitalists have stabilized their power with the help of the Stalinists, they unleash a massacre of the Communists and working-class militants, as they did, for example, with the Iraqi revolution of 1958 (see “Near East, 1950s: Permanent Revolution vs. Bourgeois Nationalism,” *WV* Nos. 740 and 741, 25 August and 8 September 2000).

Today, however, groups like PCOT do not even go beyond mentioning the first



January 15 Paris rally in solidarity with Tunisian upheaval.

bly. As Trotsky underlined in the Transitional Program, “Democratic slogans, transitional demands, and the problems of the socialist revolution are not divided into separate historical epochs in this struggle, but stem directly from one another.” He added:

“At a certain stage in the mobilization of the masses under the slogans of revolutionary democracy, soviets can and should arise. Their historical role in each given period, particularly their relation to the national assembly, will be determined by the political level of the proletariat, the bond between them and the peasantry, and the character of the proletarian party policies. Sooner or later, the soviets should overthrow bourgeois

of production, and from there setting up workers militias, drawing in the urban poor and unemployed, for self-defense against the state’s thugs. The workplace committees must, among their elementary demands, fight for jobs for the unemployed and an end to the intimidation and harassment of women workers, fighting for equal wages and benefits for women. Marxists must also fight for the workers to take charge of food distribution and control food prices in the face of shortages and black market corruption. In the Transitional Program, Trotsky underlined how the tasks and demands of such organs of dual power—i.e., proletarian-

stage of achieving “democracy”—i.e., reformed bourgeois rule. Most recently, PCOT has joined a class-collaborationist bloc called the “January 14 Front”—named after the day Ben Ali left the country—with a number of small bourgeois formations, including Nasserist and Ba’athist nationalists. The Front’s program is thoroughly bourgeois, including the demand for “a new policy of security based on respect for human rights and the superiority of the law.”

Far from instilling the basic Marxist understanding that the military is part of the capitalist state, PCOT contributes to illusions in the army. In a statement dated January 15, PCOT wrote: “The armed forces, which consists in the main of the sons and daughters of the people, are required to provide safety for the people and the motherland and respect people’s aspirations toward freedom, social justice and national dignity.”

If the officer corps did oust Ben Ali, it was because they realized he was a losing proposition for Tunisian capitalism. In fact, the army was involved in the bloody repression of the Gafsa upheaval in 2008 and it will play a similar role in the future, all the more so as illusions still continue to run deep in its supposed role as the “defender of the people.” On January 20, the army fired live rounds into the air, scattering protesters who had converged on the headquarters of the RCD in Tunis. The military, cops, judges and prison guards constitute the core of the capitalist state, an organ of class oppression to maintain bourgeois rule through violence. As the workers fight for their own state power, they will have to smash the bourgeois state apparatus, including by splitting the army along class lines—the conscripts versus the bourgeois officer corps.

Even at their most radical, the left groups in Tunisia at best demand a “democratic republic.” They have abandoned any pretense of fighting for socialist revolution, reflecting the dramatic retrogression in consciousness that followed the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet degenerated workers state in 1991-92, a catastrophic defeat for the international working class.

Islamic Fundamentalism and the Fight for Women’s Liberation

The political bankruptcy of Tunisia’s left groups could give an opening to the Islamic fundamentalists. This is a deadly threat to the working class and particularly to women. The Islamic fundamentalists played no visible role in the ousting of Ben Ali, unlike the many women who participated. Most demonstrators have vehemently stressed that they are not for Islamic rule. The mosques were indeed tightly controlled by the regime and supported Ben Ali.

The bourgeoisie internationally, especially in France, had for years supported the bloody Ben Ali regime as a rampart in

the “war on terror” and as a vanguard in the fight for “secularism.” In the wake of the 11 September 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, the U.S. and other imperialists went on to launch or participate in wars of depredation in Afghanistan and Iraq and to increase repression domestically, particularly against minorities with Muslim backgrounds. In France, the former popular-front government of Socialist Party prime minister Lionel Jospin, which included the Communist Party, reinforced the Vigipirate plan of police/army patrols of public transport, which has remained on “red alert” levels since 2005. The Jospin government also passed the “Daily Security Law” that strengthened police powers, which were further increased when Nicolas Sarkozy was interior minister and again now that he is president.

While the imperialists have used the “war on terror” to prop up “secular” lead-

do not wear the veil, abortion has been liberalized, contraception is available and polygamy is banned; “repudiation” (where a man can divorce his wife simply by uttering the phrase, “I divorce you”) was replaced by civil divorce. These rights were mostly obtained under President Bourguiba in the early years after independence and in good part because Tunisia had a workers movement that was relatively independent of the state. However, as we wrote more than 20 years ago in *Le Bolchévique* No. 79, after Ben Ali seized power, Tunisia’s Code of Personal Status is profoundly inspired by Islamic law, forcing women to be subordinate to their fathers and husbands:

“Unmarried women remain under the authority of their father who must ‘provide for them until marriage.’ The husband must pay a dowry ‘of a substantial amount’ for his future wife, before the marriage is ‘consummated.’... After marriage, women must obey their husbands.



Amnesty International

Workers struggle in Gafsa mining region in 2008 was precursor to current upheaval.

ers like Ben Ali in Tunisia and Mubarak in Egypt, in reality the imperialists long fostered the growth of Islamic fundamentalism as a bulwark against Communism and even left bourgeois nationalism. This is no less true of the Arab rulers, who brutally repress the fundamentalists with one hand while promoting them with the other. In a 1994 interview, Ben Ali himself stated that “to some extent fundamentalism was of our own making, and was at one time encouraged in order to combat the threat of communism. Such groups were fostered in the universities and elsewhere at that time in order to offset the communists and to strike a balance” (quoted in *Political Islam: Essays from Middle East Report*, edited by Joel Beinin and Joe Stork [1997]).

Tunisian society is relatively secular compared with other countries in North Africa and the Near East. Many women

Sexual inequality in inheritance has been maintained: a woman inherits half the share of a man. The Tunisian Code of Personal Status, its constitution and legislation were designed as an awkward, fragile and reversible compromise between Islamic law and bourgeois ‘modernity.’”

After 23 years of Ben Ali’s rule, very little has changed in this respect, except that obeying your husband is no longer an obligation enshrined in law. However, importantly, the proportion of women in the workforce has increased to nearly 30 percent from just 5.5 percent in the mid 1960s, underlining their increasing role as a vital component of the proletariat.

Fundamentally, women’s oppression is rooted in the institution of the family and in class society. It can be eradicated only after a revolutionary workers state has collectivized the economy and laid the material basis for replacing the family through the socialization of child rearing and education (see “The Russian Revolution and the Emancipation of Women,” *Spartacist* [English-language edition] No. 59, Spring 2006). The reforms gained under Bourguiba and Ben Ali—that is about as far as it can go for women under capitalism in such a neocolonial country. The fight for women’s emancipation will play a vital role in the struggle for socialist revolution in Tunisia.

French Imperialism’s Loyal Social Democrats

In response to the Tunisian upheaval, the social-democratic left in France has sowed illusions in French imperialism. Of course, they all criticized the French foreign minister’s offer to send security forces to help prop up Ben Ali. At bottom, these social democrats have been furious that the Sarkozy government’s grotesque support to the Ben Ali regime is going to weaken the position of French imperialism in a post-Ben Ali Tunisia. This is felt in particular with regard to French imperialism’s U.S. rivals, who had been privately critical of the Ben Ali regime and reportedly gave the green light to General

Ammar to order Ben Ali to leave the country. With U.S. imperialism hypocritically offering to help organize “free elections” in Tunisia, French Socialist Party honcho Jean-Marc Ayrault lamented that the French government took “positions that disqualify France in the eyes of the world and Tunisians.”

So now the social-democratic left is calling on the same Sarkozy government to be a force for good in Tunisia. The Left Party of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who from 2000 to 2002 was a minister in Jospin’s bourgeois government, distributed a statement in Paris on January 13, the day before Ben Ali’s flight, demanding that “the government of M. Sarkozy as well as the European Union use the many forms of pressure available to them to force Ben Ali to listen to the popular demands and engage without delay in the deep democratic reforms that are essential in the country.” Similarly, the Communist Party demanded that Sarkozy and other EU leaders “condemn the repression and take political, economic and financial sanctions against the Ben Ali regime” (*L’Humanité*, 14 January). This was printed on the very day that the French government was getting a plane-load of tear gas ready for Tunisia! This should be no surprise: The social democrats and Stalinists have steadfastly defended French imperialist interests, from the war against Algerian independence waged by the Socialist Guy Mollet government, with the Communist Party’s support, in the 1950s to the defense of present-day French interests in Africa.

The New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) of Olivier Besancenot has been slightly more sophisticated in its attempts to pressure the government. While calling on France to give up its “little neocolonial arrangements” in its former colonies of Tunisia and Algeria, the NPA, in a Paris leaflet distributed on January 13, condemned the “French government’s quasi silence” on the Tunisian uprising as “intolerable.” At home the NPA works to subordinate the working class to the bourgeoisie through class collaboration; similarly in regard to Tunisia it uncritically promotes the “January 14 Front” that includes PCOT and a number of small bourgeois parties.

For Permanent Revolution!

The impact of the Tunisian uprising has already reverberated across North Africa and the Near East (see accompanying article on Egypt). Amid the international economic crisis, the masses in countries like Egypt have been reeling from major increases in basic food and fuel prices, fostered by runaway speculation by international capitalist financiers (see “Imperialism Starves World’s Poor,” *WV* Nos. 919 and 920, 29 August and 12 September 2008, on the previous speculation-fed food crisis). Egypt is exploding. In Algeria, protests have spread throughout the country against the government of the ailing Abdelaziz Bouteflika, a figurehead for the military, which has dominated Algeria since independence.

A workers revolution in Tunisia would have tremendous impact throughout North Africa and the Near East. Workers uprisings could sweep away all these rotting regimes and begin to address the fundamental demands of the masses for jobs, freedom and justice. Imperialist France, the neocolonial overlord of the whole Maghreb region of North Africa, would be profoundly shaken, especially given the strategic position in the French proletariat of millions of workers of North African origin. What is essential is the forging of revolutionary workers parties like the Bolshevik Party that led the working class of Russia to power in the 1917 October Revolution—parties committed to the program of permanent revolution, addressing the burning needs of the masses and unalterably leading them to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat. This is the program of the International Communist League. *For a socialist federation of North Africa!* ■

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Egypt...

(continued from page 1)

and the Near East. The arrogant imperialists, who act as though nothing can stand in the way of their rampages around the world, are now faced with threats to the survival of crucial client regimes. The Obama administration desperately seeks to quell the upheavals in North Africa and prevent their further spread. Jordan and Yemen, an outpost in Washington’s “war on terror,” have already seen mass anti-government demonstrations (dominated by Islamic opposition movements). Today, Jordan’s King Abdullah fired his cabinet. Meanwhile, student demonstrations have begun in Sudan. What is particularly remarkable about the mass protests in Tunisia and Egypt is that in a region long dominated by religious and ethnic strife, they have centered on secular-democratic demands, spurred by increasingly intolerable conditions of life.

The immediate spark for the upsurge in Egypt was the mass protest movement that overthrew the Ben Ali dictatorship in Tunisia. But there was ample social tinder ready to be ignited. With nearly half the



Mubarak welcomes U.S. imperialist chief Obama to Cairo, June 2009. Tear gas used against protesters is “Made in U.S.A.” as Washington provides bonapartist regime with \$1.3 billion annually in military aid.



Reuters photos

patrons into crisis mode. Every year, Washington pumps \$1.3 billion in military aid into the regime, the second-largest recipient of U.S. aid after Israel. Egypt has been a linchpin of U.S. imperialist interests in the Near East, especially since 1979 when it became the first Arab country to sign a peace agreement with Israel. The Egyptian regime has long served

now talking about an “orderly transition.” Meanwhile, it’s finalizing “plans to evacuate thousands of US nationals to ‘safe havens’ in Turkey, Greece and Cyprus” (*Financial Times*, 31 January). A much-touted “transitional” figure is Mohamed ElBaradei, a bourgeois liberal who helped work out the 1978 Camp David Accords that normalized relations between Egypt and Israel and later headed the International Atomic Energy Agency, where he helped ensure that Saddam Hussein’s Iraq was disarmed in the face of U.S. war preparations.

Working Class Must Take the Lead

What is urgently posed in Egypt today is that the powerful proletariat—the only class with the social power to overturn the brutal and decrepit capitalist order—emerge as the leader of all the oppressed masses. The current upsurge comes amid a years-long strike wave that historian Joel Beinin described as “the largest social movement Egypt has witnessed in more than half a century” (*The Struggle for Worker Rights in Egypt*, February 2010). His study tallied an average of 194 strikes and sit-ins per year from 2004 through 2008, nearly four times the rate of the previous three years.

The spike in factory occupations, strikes and demonstrations started in 2004 when the government stepped up the pace of privatization of state enterprises. The spearhead of this movement has been the workers at Mahalla al-Kobra textile mills, the country’s largest industrial complex with some 40,000 workers. In April 2008, as people groaned under soaring food prices, a planned strike was headed off by a massive show of police force. This touched off two days of rioting in which three people died by police fire. After the government granted the workers a bonus, a close adviser to Mubarak haughtily and fatuously told the *Washington Post* (27 September 2009): “Once you give more money to those people, it’s over.”

Mahalla al-Kobra workers walked out on the very first day of the current protests, directly opposing the regime for the first time since the start of the strike wave. Workers in Suez, a port city and oil refining center, have also been out from the beginning. Police there showed no mercy in trying to smash the protests. In an op-ed piece in the *New York Times* (31 January), Mansoura Ez-Eldin cites a message from a friend describing Suez as a war zone: “Its streets were burned and destroyed, dead bodies were strewn everywhere.” But the city’s working-class residents fought back.

The often exemplary militancy of Egyptian workers has repeatedly run up against the treachery of the regime’s bought-and-paid-for officials of the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF), who are integrated into the capitalist state apparatus. At the 1957 founding of the federation that would become the ETUF, its entire leadership was appointed by the regime of bourgeois-nationalist strongman Gamal Abdel Nasser. For over two decades, the president of the ETUF usually doubled as Minister of Labor. Today, virtually every member of the ETUF executive committee is a member of the ruling NDP; ETUF president Hussein Megawer

was head of the NDP parliamentary bloc and currently chairs the parliamentary Committee on Manpower. Last week, he instructed union officials to head off any labor demonstrations. As police were shooting protesters down on January 25, the ETUF issued a statement congratulating the Interior Ministry in celebration of “Police Day”!

In the course of the recent strike wave, Egyptian workers have acted in defiance of the regime’s “labor lieutenants.” Because strikes must by law be approved by the ETUF leadership, every one that took place was illegal. Often the workers elected strike committees to provide leadership, commonly raising the demand for independent unions. This points to the potential for broad organs of working-class struggle to emerge out of the current political turmoil, such as factory committees and workers defense guards as well as neighborhood committees to oversee the distribution of food and to organize self-defense against the police thugs and their criminal accomplices. All this underscores the need to fight for the independence of the working class from the capitalist state and all bourgeois political forces.

For a Leninist Vanguard Party!

As in Tunisia, what is necessary in Egypt is the forging of a revolutionary party that can lead the fight for a workers and peasants government. Such a party would be, in the words of Bolshevik leader V. I. Lenin, a “tribune of the people,” fighting against the oppression of peasants, women, youth, homosexuals and ethnic and religious minorities.

A Leninist vanguard party would champion women’s emancipation in Egypt, where “honor killings” and female genital mutilation are common practices, especially in the rural areas where some 60 percent of the population lives. It would also actively defend the rights of



Nasser Nouri

December 2006: Strike by more than 20,000 textile workers in Ghazl el-Mahalla, part of wave of labor struggle in Egypt in recent years.

Egyptian population scraping by on \$2 a day or less, the last few years have seen a wave of militant strike activity. Unemployment was massive even before the outbreak of the international financial crisis. Rural areas, especially in southern Egypt and the northern Nile Delta, are marked by excruciating poverty, with landless peasants at the mercy of ruthless landlords. Corruption among the ruling elite is notorious. Expressions of discontent are regularly met with brutal police beatings, torture and imprisonment.

The unraveling of the Mubarak dictatorship has thrown its U.S. imperialist

as an accomplice to the Zionist state in oppressing the Palestinian people, currently by policing the southern border of the Gaza Strip. Down with U.S. aid to Egypt, Israel! Defend the Palestinian people!

Having declared the Mubarak regime “stable” at the onset of the protests, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was compelled to shift her approach as the upheaval spread, intoning about “the universal rights of the Egyptian people.” Demonstrators were hardly assuaged, with many holding up tear gas canisters with “Made in the U.S.A.” labels for reporters. Washington is

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WV Photo

NYC protest against Mubarak regime, January 29.

Mexico...

(continued from page 6)

When Díaz left Veracruz to go into exile, he was heard to say in reference to Madero: “I hope he can tame the tiger he let out of the cage.” The tiger he was referring to was the immense peasant uprising. The intra-bourgeois conflict between Madero and Díaz had indeed opened the tiger’s cage. The agrarian question—the land hunger of millions of peasants—was revealed as the most burning and explosive question of the revolution. Madero’s unfulfilled promises quickly provoked conflicts with the forces of Emiliano Zapata, who controlled the state of Morelos. Meanwhile, various strikes broke out in industry.

By the end of 1912, the Madero regime, in power for a little more than a year, was already in deep crisis, trapped between popular discontent and reactionary forces, both domestic and imperialist, that were determined to re-establish “order.” In February 1913, in a coup plotted from the U.S. Embassy, Madero was overthrown and shot by General Victoriano Huerta. Huerta’s coup unleashed popular anger and energized the peasant forces of Francisco Villa in the north and the guerrillas of Emiliano Zapata in the south. Partly because of Huerta’s connections to Britain, the Americans later began to support the Constitutionalist forces of Venustiano Carranza and Villa, which had taken up arms against the new dictatorship.

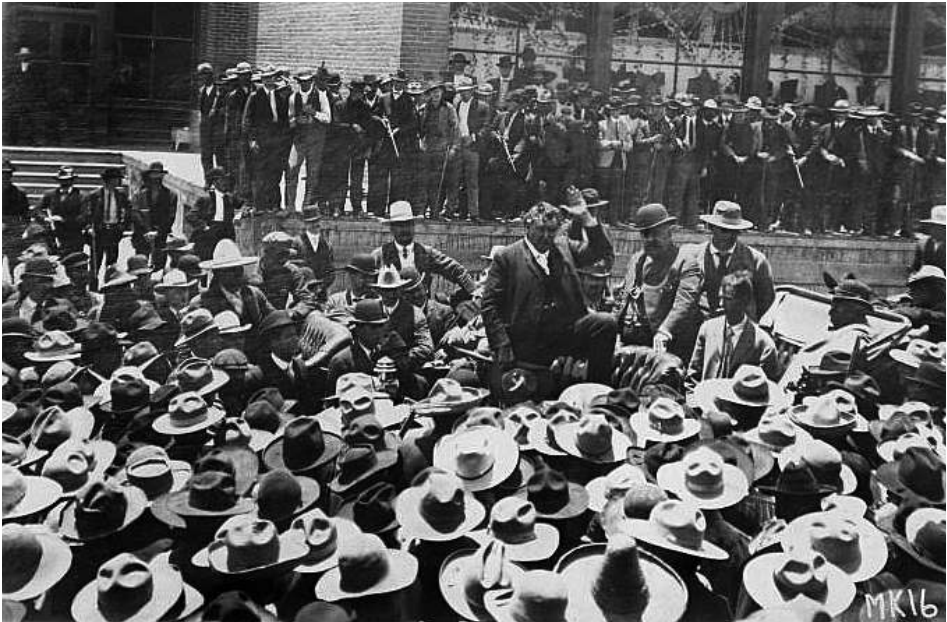
The Taking of Mexico City and Bourgeois Reaction

With the fall of the Huerta dictatorship in July 1914, the victorious anti-Huerta forces immediately fell apart. The more conservative bourgeois wing of Venustiano Carranza and Alvaro Obregón, representing the northern bourgeois elites and the radical petty bourgeoisie, was more adept than Villa. In a military race, Obregón’s forces occupied Mexico City on 15 August 1914, although not for long. With the definitive split between Villa and Zapata on one side and Carranza and Obregón on the other, after the Convention of Aguascalientes in November 1914, a new and acute phase of the Mexican Revolution began.

Lacking sufficient supplies to hold on to Mexico City, the Carrancistas withdrew to Veracruz. The victorious peasant armies

of Zapata and Villa took the capital in December 1914. Veracruz had been occupied by the U.S. since 21 April 1913. In an agreement Carranza made with the occupiers, he obtained a large reserve of arms and provisions as the U.S. forces evacuated the city. It is significant that when the U.S. took Veracruz for the first time, Carranza made an impassioned nationalist speech and criticized them harshly for the occupation (although it was designed to

insufficient as a national political program and a means for Villa and Zapata to hold on to power in the urban centers. It was a movement based on the peasantry, and as such, was limited by that ideology. Along the same lines, it is notable that during this conflict, which lasted almost a decade, none of the warring factions created a political formation—a party—with any consistency. The Mexican Revolution was led mainly by spontaneously



June 1906: Cananea copper miners mass in front of mine owner during historic strike that helped set stage for the struggle against Porfirio Díaz dictatorship.

benefit him), while Villa remained silent, not wanting the enmity of the U.S., which supplied him with arms.

In this regard, it is interesting to analyze the occupation of the capital by Villa’s and Zapata’s peasant armies, as well as their withdrawal. The regional, petty-bourgeois peasant perspective of Villa and Zapata meant that these radical leaders did not know what to do when, upon taking the capital, they had state power within reach. This is despite the fact that they had arms and the overwhelming sympathy of the population, which welcomed them with great jubilation (including many workers who months later would be joining Carranza’s “red battalions” to put down the rebellion). The limited demands for more democracy and land distribution in the villages, like the Plan of Ayala, were

arising peasant leaders or by regional military leaders. Trotsky explained the political inability of the Russian peasantry, as a class, to lead a revolution, a characteristic that can be extended to the Mexican peasantry:

“The peasantry is dispersed over the surface of an enormous country whose key junctions are the cities. The peasantry itself is incapable of even formulating its own interests inasmuch as in each district these appear differently. The economic link between the provinces is created by the market and the railways, but both the market and the railways are in the hands of the cities. In seeking to tear itself away from the restrictions of the village and to generalize its own interests, the peasantry inescapably falls into political dependence upon the city. Finally, the peasantry is heterogeneous in its social relations as well: the kulak [rich peasant] stratum naturally seeks to swing it to an alliance with the urban

bourgeoisie while the nether strata of the village pull to the side of the urban workers. Under these conditions the peasantry as such is completely incapable of conquering power.”
—“Three Conceptions of the Russian Revolution,” 1939

An anecdotal but illustrative example of this inability of the peasantry to assume power in its own name happened during a meeting of the Villa-Zapata Convention in Mexico City. A large group of poor women was demonstrating against famine in front of this assembly, and the only answer the Convention could come up with was to pass the hat to collect a bit of money for them! In other words, Villa and Zapata did not have, nor could they have on their own, the program to use these latent forces for a victorious revolutionary—that is to say, proletarian and socialist—solution. When Villa and Zapata occupied the capital, they certainly did not touch the church, which was a bastion of the most reactionary elements of the ruling class in Mexico and an enemy of the poor peasantry. The upper ranks of the Catholic hierarchy in the capital certainly were a different animal from those humble village priests who were won to Zapatismo. This was one more nail in the coffin of the peasant rebellion.

The bourgeois wing of Carranza, conscious of the political weakness of the peasant armies, was able to reorganize and pursued the forces of the Zapatista Convention until finally defeating them. Obregón effectively avoided the capital in order to confront Villa, who had the principal mobile forces of the Convention, in decisive battles in the north and in El Bajío [lowlands of central Mexico]. By the end of 1915, Villa’s powerful División del Norte had been dismantled. On 10 April 1919, Zapata was ambushed and slaughtered.

In July 1923, bourgeois reaction caught up to Villa, who had retired to private life and become a well-to-do *hacendado* in Chihuahua. He was still a symbol for the peasantry. When he supported the local bourgeois Adolfo de la Huerta against Obregón’s group, Villa was massacred and his body decapitated. (It was a very different story on the other side of the world, when in October 1917 the gigantic Russian “peasant bear,” hungry for land and justice, found a revolutionary leadership in a young and resolute working class and the Bolshevik Party of Lenin and Trotsky.)

[TO BE CONTINUED]

the Coptic Christian minority, which suffers discrimination and violent persecution at the hands of the state, abetted by pogromist incitement by Islamic fundamentalists. In December, when Copts protested against the government’s refusal to allow them to set up a church in Cairo, two were shot dead by riot police. This gave a green light to the bombing of an Alexandria church on New Year’s Eve that killed 23 people. Joint protests by Copts and Muslims against the bombing were attacked by riot cops.

A key task for revolutionary Marxists is to combat the widespread nationalist ideology that is evident among the protesters waving Egyptian flags and embracing the army as the supposed friend of the exploited and the oppressed. Many rank-and-file soldiers of the conscript army have fraternized with demonstrators, even allowing them to paint anti-Mubarak graffiti on their tanks. But it is the military brass—subsidized and trained by the U.S. imperialists—that is calling the shots.

Illusions in the army run deep in Egypt, where military officers led by Nasser overthrew the despised British-backed monarchy in 1952. While Nasser, with the support of the Stalinist Communist Party, would lay claim to leadership of a mythical “Arab socialism,” he aimed from the beginning to crush the combative working class. One month after coming to power, Nasser seized on a textile workers strike in Kafr Al-Dawwar near Alexandria to deliver a dramatic blow to the workers movement. Two strike leaders were hanged on the factory grounds, the Communists were banned

and strikes were outlawed. Subsequently, Nasser turned on his Communist supporters with a vengeance, rounding up almost every known leftist in the country.

Even as their comrades were beaten to death or left to die for lack of medical aid, the Stalinists maintained their political support to this bonapartist ruler, officially liquidating into his Arab Socialist Union in 1965. Stalinist parties throughout the Near East and North Africa sacrificed their proletarian bases on the altar of bourgeois nationalism, betraying historic opportunities for socialist revolution. This opened the door to reactionary Islamic fundamentalists like Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood—a deadly enemy of women, Copts, secularists and leftists—to posture as the only firm opponents of the unbearable status quo. While suffering severe repression, the Muslim Brotherhood has also been tolerated, and at times promoted, by successive Egyptian regimes. Mubarak has often silenced his opponents by claiming that if not for him, the Brotherhood would rule Egypt.

The Muslim Brotherhood plays little role in the workers movement but is heavily entrenched in the lumpenproletariat of the impoverished slums and among professionals and other petty-bourgeois layers. Many protesters today say that they would oppose the Brotherhood coming to power. Nevertheless, its emergence in the protests points to the threat that it could win a hearing among the desperate masses. The need to politically combat the forces of Islamic reaction was highlighted by the events in Iran in 1978-79, when the Shi’ite clergy under Ayatollah Khomeini

succeeded in subordinating to its reactionary agenda a powerful wave of opposition to the hated Shah that included the organizations of the working class.

After having been supported by virtually every left group in Iran, Khomeini unleashed a murderous wave of terror against worker militants, leftists, Kurds, unveiled women and homosexuals. Uniquely on the left, the international Spartacist tendency, predecessor to the International Communist League, declared: Down with the Shah! Don’t bow to Khomeini! For workers revolution in Iran! In regard to Egypt today, we say: Down with Mubarak! No to ElBaradei and the Muslim Brotherhood! Workers to power!

It is vitally important for leftists and proletarian militants to study the example of the Bolshevik Party, which provided the necessary leadership for the working class in Russia in 1917. As soviets (workers councils) re-emerged with the fall of the tsar in the February Revolution, Lenin’s Bolsheviks raised the call “All power to the Soviets,” opposing any political support to the bourgeois Provisional Government. Amid rapidly growing opposition to the slaughter of working-class and peasant soldiers in the interimperialist World War I, soviets spread to the peasantry, which was in open rebellion against the landlords, and into the military as well. Under the influence of the organized working class, the soldiers councils served to set the worker and peasant ranks of the military against the bourgeois officer corps. Following the Bolshevik-led October Revolution, the soviets of workers, peasants and soldiers

deputies became the organs of the new proletarian state power.

As elaborated in the accompanying article on Tunisia, revolutionary Marxists, based on Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution, must put forward transitional demands linking the masses’ democratic aspirations to the struggle for proletarian power and for its international extension. Out of the ferment in Egypt, the International Communist League seeks to cohere the nucleus of a Leninist-Trotskyist party, the indispensable instrument for the victory of proletarian revolution. ■

Stalinist Class Collaboration: A Legacy of Revolutions Betrayed

Near East, 1950s

Permanent Revolution vs. Bourgeois Nationalism

Part One

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More Subpoenas Against Midwest Leftists

FBI Infiltration Exposed

CHICAGO—In a further escalation of its war on civil liberties, in December the Obama administration issued federal grand jury subpoenas to nine leftists and Palestine solidarity activists in Chicago. The subpoenas follow raids last September 24 in Illinois and Minnesota in which scores of FBI agents descended on the homes of 14 activists, including well-known trade unionists, antiwar organizers and several supporters of the Freedom Road Socialist Organization (FRSO), which publishes *Fight Back!* newspaper. The Feds seized cell phones and passports and carted away vanloads of boxes filled with personal papers, address books and computer disks.

With its vendetta against these leftists, the Obama administration has one-upped the Bush regime in its war on civil liberties. Investigated for providing “material support to terrorism” on the basis of purported links to the secular-nationalist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the guerrillas of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the leftists’ “crime” in the eyes of the U.S. rulers is their siding with victims of the Zionist butchers and Colombian death squads. Those who manage to avoid bogus charges of “support to terrorism” may still face years of imprisonment on charges of “criminal contempt” for the honorable act of refusing to name names before the grand jury inquisitors.

This witchhunt is a stark confirmation of how the shredding of civil liberties in the name of the “war on terror,” while at first mainly targeting Arab and Muslim immigrants, is ultimately aimed at the left and the entire labor movement. As the Spartacist League warned in a statement issued one day after the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, both the Democrats and Republicans would seize on the event to reinforce capitalist class rule. As we wrote in “The World Trade Center Attack” (WV No. 764, 14 September 2001):

“It’s an opportunity for the exploiters to peddle ‘one nation indivisible’ patriotism to try to direct the burgeoning anger at the bottom of this society away from themselves and toward an indefinable foreign ‘enemy,’ as well as immigrants in the U.S., and to reinforce their arsenal of domestic state repression against all the working people.”

It is vitally necessary for the left, the labor movement and fighters for black and immigrant rights to defend those caught up in the government witchhunt. The Spartacist League and Partisan Defense Committee have participated in protests on the Midwest leftists’ behalf, demanding that all the subpoenas be withdrawn, that no charges be filed and that materials seized by the Feds be returned. The vendetta against these leftists, a blatant attack on the rights of speech and association, is intended to intimidate into silence anyone who would protest government policies at home and wars and depredations abroad.

At a January 12 press conference in Minneapolis, FRSO supporters exposed how this whole “investigation” stems from police surveillance and disruption of protests against the 2008 Republican National Convention (RNC). The Feds have now admitted that one government agent, using the name Karen Sullivan, infiltrated the Minneapolis Anti-

War Committee (AWC) and later joined FRSO. “Sullivan” pushed herself into the forefront of local activism. She joined a vanload who traveled to the annual protest at the School of the Americas at Fort Benning, Georgia, where the U.S. military trains its Latin American counterparts in murder and torture, and gave a workshop on the counterinsurgency

prosecute the exercise of First Amendment rights of speech and association as support to terrorism. In *Holder v. Humanitarian Law Project*, the court ruled that to advise the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam or the Kurdistan Workers Party on how to appeal to the United Nations in regard to their struggles against the genocidal wars waged by the Sri Lankan and

protecting their communities against racist nightriders, Central American peasants fighting back against the landlords’ army and hired killers.”

America’s rulers have a long history of harassing and criminalizing leftist dissent—from the legal lynching of the Haymarket Martyrs for organizing for the eight-hour day, to the Palmer Raids that led to the deportation of thousands of foreign-born radicals after World War I, and the Smith Act prosecution of leaders of the then-Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party on the eve of World War II. The postwar purges that drove the Stalinists and other leftists out of the unions, coming on the heels of the largest strike wave in U.S. history, were the domestic reflection of the Cold War against the Soviet Union. In the 1960s, those who protested against U.S. imperialism’s dirty war against the Vietnamese workers and peasants were painted as traitors, while the government unleashed its secret police against fighters for black rights at home, assassinating 38 Black Panther Party members and railroading hundreds more to prison.

Ominously, one of the Chicago activists subpoenaed in December is Maureen Murphy, managing editor of the online publication *Electronic Intifada*, who had helped spearhead the defense of those targeted in the September raids. As a January 24 protest letter to Attorney General Eric Holder by the PDC stated: “The clear implication is that anyone who defends the civil liberties of those smeared as ‘terrorists’ will themselves in turn be targeted as ‘terrorists’.”

Ultimately, what the racist capitalist rulers can get away with will be determined by the level of class and social



January 25: Chicago protest against witchhunt of antiwar activists is addressed by Joe Iosbaker, one of those targeted by FBI.

“Plan Colombia” at last year’s U.S. Social Forum in Detroit. This agent also insinuated herself into a three-person AWC Palestinian solidarity delegation to the Occupied Territories in 2009, which was stopped by Israeli immigration agents as soon as it arrived in Tel Aviv, presumably based on information “Sullivan” supplied.

“Sullivan” was only one of a host of undercover agents and informants who swarmed over the RNC protests. Many were paid thousands of dollars to spy on, disrupt and set up organizers for arrest. “The Policing of Political Speech,” a report issued by the National Lawyers Guild last September, exposed the central role of these agents in the prosecution of the RNC 8. These protest organizers were initially charged with “terrorism” based on acts of civil disobedience and disruption by a few anarchist youth—trivial acts that used to be vindictively charged as “disorderly conduct.”

Liberals and the reformist left, including the FRSO, promoted the illusion that Obama’s election would mark a sharp turn from the regime of George W. Bush. But as we pointed out at the time, Obama’s promises to clean up the worst “excesses” of the Bush gang were driven by his commitment to wage the “war on terror” more effectively. From the indefinite detention of “enemy combatants” at Guantánamo to National Security Agency domestic wiretapping, Obama has embraced every one of the repressive tools handed him by Bush (and Bush’s predecessor, Bill Clinton).

Last June, the U.S. Supreme Court handed the Justice Department the authority, which it had long sought, to

Turkish governments would constitute “material support” to terrorism. We wrote in response that “by the Court’s light, any activity that is considered as giving legitimacy to ‘terrorists’—from giving money to Muslim charities to interviewing a guerrilla fighter for the press—would be deemed ‘material support’” (“Supreme Court Decision Shreds First Amendment Rights,” WV No. 961, 2 July 2010). Just three months later, the FBI launched its raids.

As reported by *Fight Back!*, “it seems that the investigation of U.S. Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald is focused on small donations to the day-care and women’s center projects of the Union of Palestinian Women’s Committees.” Promoting education, day care and other relief for Palestinian refugee women and political prisoners, this group has had ties to the PFLP, which is designated as “terrorist” by the U.S. government.

For the blood-drenched U.S. imperialists, the designation of “foreign terrorist organization” is elastic and constantly shifting. It has included such organizations as Nelson Mandela’s African National Congress during the reign of apartheid in South Africa. The Islamic reactionaries of Al Qaeda top the U.S. hit list today, but in the 1980s their forebears were hailed—and bankrolled—by the U.S. as “freedom fighters” against the Soviet Union. In “Why Reagan Needs ‘Terrorism,’” (WV No. 347, 3 February 1984) we wrote: “For the bourgeoisie, ‘terrorism’ is violence associated with causes of which they disapprove, the use of force outside their own monopoly of violence: strikers defending their picket lines, black people

Agent Exposed



Committee to Stop FBI Repression
“Karen Sullivan,” FBI plant

struggle. As Marxists, we understand that there will be no justice served until the imperialist exploiters, war criminals and witchhunters are swept from power through a socialist revolution that overturns capitalist class rule and establishes a workers government.

* * *

Funds are urgently needed for the legal defense of the subpoenaed Midwest activists. Donations can be sent to Committee to Stop FBI Repression, PO Box 14183, Minneapolis, MN 55414. Letters of protest can be sent to U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder, U.S. Department of Justice, 950 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20530-0001. ■