

Imperialists' Hands Off Syria!



AFP

Left: Syrian National Council members with Hillary Clinton at "Friends of Syria" conference in Tunis, February 24. Right: Syrian despot Bashar al-Assad with military officials in Damascus last October.



AP

For the past year and a half, the Syrian population has been crushed between two reactionary forces that have ravaged the country in a devastating civil war. Faced with an insurgency dominated by forces centrally from the majority Sunni Muslim population and backed by sundry imperialist and regional powers, the murderous Ba'ath Party regime of Bashar al-Assad has sought to stamp out the rebellion through the massive use of firepower, including against residential areas. Insurgents have likewise carried out grue-

some massacres of civilians. Key Syrian opposition leaders have appealed for imperialist military intervention, echoing the Libyan "rebels" who became willing tools for the NATO bombing campaign last year. While the imperialists are currently focusing on providing material and logistical support to the anti-Assad forces, the Obama White House has declared that military options are not "off the table."

Revolutionary Marxists support neither side in this civil war, in which a victory of one combatant or the other would do

nothing to further the cause of the working class and the oppressed. However, workers internationally *do* have a side in opposing military intervention by the imperialists. In the event of imperialist attack, we would stand for the defense of Syria while maintaining proletarian political opposition to Assad's bloodsoaked rule.

The civil war grew out of a series of demonstrations in the provincial city of Dara'a in Syria's southern Sunni region in March 2011 as "Arab Spring" protests

were sweeping North Africa and the Near East. The demonstrations spread beyond Dara'a, and the Assad regime murderously unleashed troops and tanks on civilians. Increasing numbers of soldiers defected, forming the core of an array of anti-government militias. Key commanders of this so-called Free Syrian Army (FSA) were for years part of the Assad regime's repressive machinery.

Presenting itself as the main political leadership of the opposition is the Syrian *continued on page 3*

Marikana Miners Win, Strike Wave Spreads

South Africa

SEPTEMBER 24—A six-week wildcat strike ended in victory for rock drillers and other platinum miners at the Lonmin complex in Marikana, who went back to work four days ago with wage hikes ranging from 11 to 22 percent. As we reported last issue, the August 16 police massacre of 34 strikers—an event that brought to mind the vicious repression of the old white-supremacist apartheid regime—did nothing to quell the determination and fighting spirit of the miners. In fact, their militancy inspired tens of thousands of other platinum miners to launch their own strikes in defiance of the capitalist government led by the African National Congress (ANC). Now their wage victory has emboldened gold and chrome miners to strike, demanding a similar pay rise and even more.

Workers are battling not only the mine bosses and the government but also the misleaders of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and the COSATU trade-union federation, in which the South African Communist Party (SACP)

is politically dominant. The leaders of the SACP and COSATU, which along with the ANC make up the ruling Tripartite Alliance, were some of the loudest voices howling against the "violence" of the Marikana workers. And now they're condemning the wage settlement precisely because it is inspiring more struggle! With 15,000 miners on strike at Gold Fields in Driefontein, south of Johannesburg, demanding a 12,500 rand (\$1,500) monthly wage, COSATU leader Zwelinzima Vavi rushed out of his organization's national congress last week to lecture them that the strike was "illegal" and they should get back to work. The miners defied him and vowed to continue the strike until their demands were met.

In a country that produces 75 percent of the world's platinum—a crucial component in auto production—and is also a leading producer of gold and chrome, the strikes have caused a major crisis for the capitalist ruling class and its Tripartite Alliance political police. ANC president Jacob Zuma announced last week that he was deploying the army to back up the police in the "maintenance of law and order in the Marikana Area...and other areas around the country" until the end of January. It is also reported that the government has issued an arrest warrant for Julius Malema—a wealthy expelled ANC Youth League leader whose populist demagoguery has gained a hearing among many miners—on corruption charges.



AFP

September 18: Marikana miners celebrate victory over Lonmin Platinum bosses.

Prior to the Lonmin settlement, police backed by 1,000 soldiers invaded the Nkaneng squatter camp, where many of the miners live in shacks without electricity, running water or basic sanitation. A running battle ensued as strikers fought

side by side with other residents to repel the state's attempt to disarm them. Thirteen people were reported arrested, and strike leaders were forced underground. Those killed by state forces in the last *continued on page 9*



On Critical Support to KKE

11 July 2012 13 July 2012

Refreshing to read real Trotskyists take on the parliamentary idiots of SYRIZA and the fake-Trotskyist “Euro-communists” of Greece! [See WV No. 1005, 6 July.] Puts the ICL way out ahead of the competition. Good work, Vanguard!

Forward to the Socialist United States of Europe!

Bill in Atlanta

Comrades,

I read your Greek comrades’ statement and it seemed reasonable, except saying vote for the “candidates” of the KKE in the Greek election leaves open the possibility of voting for the candidates running for executive offices of the Greek capitalist state, which seems in violation of your expressed opposition to doing that.



TROTSKY

The Bolshevik Revolution vs. the State Church

Shortly after the Bolshevik-led October Revolution, the Soviet government stripped the Russian Orthodox church of its state sanction and vast property holdings. An initial step toward rooting out religious reaction and promoting atheism, the decree printed below was part of a thoroughgoing effort to remake a society steeped in rural backwardness and the heritage of tsarist oppression. Such steps were later undermined by the Stalinist bureaucratic caste that, beginning in 1923-24, usurped political power and threw out the Bolsheviks’ revolutionary-internationalist program. In 1943, the same year the Communist International was officially liquidated, Stalin’s regime gave state recognition to the Orthodox church as part of its promotion of Russian nationalism in the war against Nazi Germany.

1. The Church is separated from the state.
2. Within the confines of the Republic it shall be prohibited to issue any local by-laws or regulations restricting or limiting freedom of conscience, or establishing privileges or preferential rights of any kind based on the religious creed of citizens.
3. Every citizen may profess any religious belief, or profess no belief at all. All restrictions of rights, involved by professing one or another religious belief, or by professing no belief at all, are cancelled and void.

NOTE: All reference to the professing or non-professing of religious creeds by citizens shall be expunged from all official documents.

4. State or other public functions binding in law shall not be accompanied by the performance of religious rites or ceremonies.
5. Free performance of religious rites is permissible as long as it does not disturb public order, or interfere with the rights of the citizens of the Soviet Republic. The local authorities shall be entitled in such cases to adopt all necessary measures for maintenance of public order and safety.
6. Nobody is entitled to refuse to perform his duties as a citizen on the basis of his religious belief. Exceptions to this rule, on the condition that one civic duty be replaced by another, may be granted in each individual case by the verdict of the People’s Court.
7. The official taking or administering of religious oaths is cancelled. In necessary cases merely a solemn promise is given.
8. Births, marriages, and deaths are to be registered and solemnized solely by civic (secular) authorities: marriage and birth registration offices.
9. The School is separated from the Church. Instruction in any religious creed or belief shall be prohibited in all state, public, and also private educational establishments in which general instruction is given. Citizens may give or receive religious instruction in a private way.
10. All church and religious associations are subject to the ordinary legislation concerning private associations and unions. They shall not enjoy special privileges, nor receive any subsidies from the state or from local autonomous or self-governing institutions.
11. Compulsory collection of impostes and taxes in favour of church and religious associations, also measures of compulsion or punishment adopted by such associations in respect to their members, shall not be permitted.
12. No church or religious associations have the right to own property. They do not possess the rights of juridical persons.
13. The property of all church and religious associations existing in Russia is pronounced the property of the People. Buildings and objects especially used for the purposes of worship shall be let, free of charge, to the respective religious associations, by resolution of the local, or central state authorities.

—“Decree on the Freedom of Conscience, and of Church and Religious Societies,” 20 January 1918, printed in Mervyn Matthews, ed., *Soviet Government: A Selection of Official Documents on Internal Policies* (Taplinger Publishing, 1974)

WORKERS VANGUARD

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The closing date for news in this issue is September 25.

No. 1009

28 September 2012

Furthermore, this was pointed out to me by an Australian supporter of yours who first saw it before I did, and I suggested earlier today he might wish to write you on this issue as I’d missed his point.

Were your Greek comrades by leaving which KKE candidates they were suggesting voting for open suggesting voting for candidates running for exec. offices part of that or not?

Comradely, A.G.

WV replies: As our article “Marxist Principles and Electoral Tactics” (*Spartacist* [English-language edition] No. 61, Spring 2009) noted: “In arguing against running for executive office, the ICL does not preclude giving critical support to other workers organizations in appropriate instances where they draw a crude class line.” When we give critical support to another workers organization, it does not mean that we agree with its political program, including its intention to administer the capitalist state. Much the opposite. The purpose of this tactic is to demonstrate that despite the claims of such parties to represent the interests of the workers, in practice they betray them.

As Marxists, we seek to instill in the working class the understanding that the existing state apparatus cannot be administered in the interests of the workers but rather must be smashed through the proletarian conquest of power. We refuse to run for executive office, even if we declare in advance that we don’t intend to assume such office, because doing so would deepen prevailing illusions that the capitalist state can be reformed. But as

Darwin and Marx: Correcting the Record

New York City 15 September 2012

To the editor:

I enjoyed reading Parts One and Two of “A Marxist Critique of the ‘New Atheists’” and look forward to the conclusion. Part One mentions Richard Dawkins’ reputation as “Darwin’s Rottweiler” for defending the teaching of evolution in public schools. Seven years ago, we saluted Dawkins in “The Evolution Wars: Religious Reaction and Racist Oppression—Hail Charles Darwin!” (WV No. 854, 16 September 2005) for combating the forces for creationism. Therefore, now would be a good time to make a small correction to our 2005 article, which wrongly states that Karl Marx offered to dedicate the second volume of *Capital* to Darwin.

Our source for this mistake is Stephen Jay Gould from the first edition of his *Ever Since Darwin*. Gould later corrected this error (without acknowledging the change). Unwittingly, we relied on Gould’s earlier version when we noted that “Darwin’s discovery of the continual motion and interaction between organisms and their environment was embraced enthusiastically by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. According to Gould, Marx offered to dedicate the second volume of *Capital* to Darwin (who declined as he had not read it).” However, as Gould stated in the revised *Ever Since Darwin*, “A common bit of folklore—that Marx offered to dedicate volume 2 of *Das Kapital* to Darwin (and that Darwin refused)—turns out to be false. But Marx and Darwin did correspond, and Marx held Darwin in very high regard.”

Gould expounded with greater detail in an interesting essay, “The Darwinian Gentleman at Marx’s Funeral: Resolving Evolution’s Oddest Coupling,” on “the mythology [that] centers upon a notorious, if understandable, scholarly error [by Isaiah Berlin] that once suggested

the *Spartacist* article argues, if we were to hold others to the same standards, we “could never extend critical support to a mass reformist party, because on winning an election it will inevitably seek to form the government, i.e., administer capitalism. Indeed, this argument is an essential polemical aspect of our critical support.”

When applicable, the tactic of critical support is a tool for forging a workers party of the Bolshevik type, allowing even a small revolutionary nucleus to gain a hearing among the most advanced elements who presently look to one or another reformist party. The call by the Trotskyist Group of Greece for a vote to the Stalinist Greek Communist Party (KKE) in the June election is a case in point. The central issue posed in the election was the devastating austerity dictated by the European Union (EU) and International Monetary Fund and imposed by the Greek bourgeoisie. The KKE stood out on the left for its opposition to the EU and its refusal to enter any coalition with bourgeois parties, despite enormous pressure to join a “unity of the left” coalition with Syriza.

A massive vote for the KKE would have delivered a slap in the face to the imperialists and their Greek lackeys and given a boost to the defensive struggles of workers across Europe. At the same time, we pointed out that the KKE panders to Greek nationalism, which is the chief ideological obstacle to building a revolutionary workers party in Greece, and that its populism, expressed as “the people” against “the monopolies,” disappears the unique social power of the working class to wage the necessary fight against capital. ■

far more affinity between Marx and Darwin.” In his 1939 biography of Marx, Berlin inferred that Marx offered to dedicate volume two of *Capital*.

Here is the relevant passage of Gould’s essay:

“This tale of Marx’s proffered dedication then gained credence when a second letter, ostensibly from Darwin to Marx, but addressed only to ‘Dear Sir,’ turned up among Marx’s papers in the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam. This letter, written on October 13, 1880, does politely decline a suggested dedication: ‘I Shd. Prefer the Part or Volume not be dedicated to me (though I thank you for the intended honor) as it implies to a certain extent my approval of the general publication, about which I know nothing....’

“To shorten a long story, two scholars, working independently and simultaneously in the mid-1970s, discovered the almost comical basis of the error.... Marx’s daughter Eleanor became the common-law wife of the British socialist Edward Aveling. The couple safeguarded Marx’s papers for several years, and the 1880 letter, evidently sent by Darwin to Aveling himself, must have strayed into the Marxian collection.

“Aveling belonged to a group of radical atheists. He sought Darwin’s official approval, and status as dedicatee, for a volume he had edited on Darwin’s work and his (that is Aveling’s, not necessarily Darwin’s) view of its broader social meaning (published in 1881 as *The Student’s Darwin*, volume two in the International Library of Science and Freethought).... Darwin ended his letter to Aveling (not to Marx, who did not treat religion as a primary subject in *Das Kapital*) by writing: ‘It appears to me (whether rightly or wrongly) that direct arguments against christianity and theism produce hardly any effect on the public; and freedom of thought is best promoted by the gradual illumination of men’s minds which follows from the advance of science. It has, therefore, been always my object to avoid writing on religion, and I have confined myself to science.’”

Comradely, Richard G.

Our dear sympathizer Judith Szathmari-Lécuyer died June 12 from cancer, after fighting bravely to the end against the disease. Our thoughts are with her family, especially her husband, Jean Lécuyer.

Judith was born in Hungary. Her family fled to the United States in 1956, when she was 12, at the time of the Soviet intervention to crush a proletarian political revolution in Hungary. Judith still remembered clearly a Soviet Army soldier who was crying because he did not want to shoot at his Hungarian class brothers. This experience allowed her to have a deep understanding of what a political revolution means, and it played an important role in her later evolution toward Trotskyism.

She spent her teenage years in Washington, D.C., and California. She was won to Trotskyism in the early 1970s at the University of California at Davis and was active in several branches of our American section. Notably, she was one of the comrades who went to Detroit, the center of the U.S. auto industry at the time, when we were building a local branch there to orient to the city's militant black working class.

Later, she moved to New York, where she played an important role in establishing our international center, at a time when our American comrades were fighting to break out of national isolation and extend internationally. She contributed to our efforts to transform from an unstable sub-propaganda group into the international propaganda group that became the international Spartacist tendency and subsequently the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist).

Judith went to France in 1977, our French section having been founded in 1975. Thus, she was one of the comrades who helped re-implant Trotskyism in France, in direct continuity with James P. Cannon's American Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and our comrades of the Spartacist League/U.S., who maintained the Trotskyist heritage against the SWP's Pabloite degeneration in the early 1960s.

Judith met Jean in 1975 at a summer camp held in Austria by our international tendency, and they were a couple for 37 years, until her death. She played a crucial role in checking the translation of Hungarian letters and documents written by Michel Varga, which allowed us to arrive at our conclusions at an international commission of inquiry held concerning this individual in the mid 1970s. For sev-

Judith Szathmari-Lécuyer



1944–2012

eral years, Judith was in charge of circulation of the Ligue Trotskyste de France newspaper, *Le Bolchévik*, and she was also on its production team.

Jean and Judith went to Mexico in 1989, under very difficult conditions. They played an important role in laying the groundwork for the development of our ICL section in that country. In 1990, the Grupo

Espartaquista de México fused with subjectively Trotskyist cadres who had broken with followers of Argentine adventurer Nahuel Moreno over the question of the Morenoites' support to the capitalist reunification of Germany. This strengthening of the GEM made possible the publication of our Mexican newspaper, *Espartaco*.

Comrades remember Judith's great patience in recruiting people to the party and in pedagogically explaining our program to younger comrades. They remember her English classes that enabled comrades to read the party's international newspapers and documents. They remember her advice on books to read, especially novels on the black question in the U.S., and her recommendations to visit various museums.

Judith left the party in the 1990s but remained close to us and loyal to our program. She continued to work for the party, especially looking for photographs for the newspaper—work to which she continued to devote her time and energy even while fighting the devastating disease. One of her last tasks was the translation into English of a university thesis about Greek Trotskyism during World War II. She continued to learn about everything she could, attending lectures after she retired from her job. She regularly went to the movies in Paris and always had something to say about the latest films. Having become a real Parisian by adoption, she knew the city's every nook and cranny, all the cinemas and museums, and she always knew about the latest exhibitions.

Judith was close to her family, who she watched over even though they were dispersed in several countries. She kept ties with some members of her family who remained in Hungary, and she was very concerned in recent years by the rise of reaction there. She was also greatly appreciated by her colleagues at work, especially by her younger colleagues, many of whom came to her memorial service.

All the comrades throughout our International who knew her and who were fortunate enough to work with her admired her strength, talent, charm, intelligence and sense of humor—Judith loved to laugh.

We will not forget her, and to honor her we continue the struggle for the rebirth of the Fourth International, the party of revolution, to which she gave her time and energy.

—Translated from *Le Bolchévik* No. 201, September 2012

Syria...

(continued from page 1)

National Council (SNC), a coalition of exiles and opposition groups. A number of the principal spokesmen for this lash-up have longstanding ties to U.S. State Department and national security officials, as detailed by the London *Guardian* (12 July) article, "The Syrian Opposition: Who's Doing the Talking?"

The SNC today is dominated by the reactionary Muslim Brotherhood, which controls the largest number of seats in the Council as well as the committee that distributes money and other aid to anti-Assad forces in Syria. Furthermore, Sunni jihadist groups from other Muslim countries have increasingly joined the armed rebellion. These developments have complicated matters for the U.S. rulers, who are conscious that those who just killed their ambassador to Libya were fundamentalists financed and armed by Washington last year to help overthrow Muammar el-Qaddafi.

Syria is a patchwork of ethnic, national and sectarian groupings, where the regime dominated by the Alawite minority holds sway over the Sunni majority, Kurds, Christians, Druze and others, posing the danger of the conflict degenerating into communal warfare. This situation is the legacy of the divide-and-rule policies of the colonial powers, which carved up the Near East following World War I (see article on page 4).

Although the Obama administration is wary of directly intervening militarily into the conflict, it has allocated some \$25 million to the Syrian "rebels" in accordance with a secret order signed by the

president earlier this year. All the while, Washington has maintained the pretense of not supplying "lethal weapons." U.S. intelligence agents, working with their counterparts from Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, are "drawing on their experience in Libya" to help direct support to the anti-Assad forces (*Wall Street Journal*, 13 June). They work out of a secret "nerve center" set up in Adana, a Turkish city near the Syrian border, which is also home to Incirlik, the U.S. air base. According to the *New York Times* (21 June), arms are funneled into Syria "by way of a shadowy network of intermediaries including Syria's Muslim Brotherhood."

The imperialists have imposed on Syria a broad range of economic sanctions, with the Obama administration ratcheting up U.S. measures last month. Syria has been particularly hard hit by an oil embargo imposed a year ago by the European Union (EU). Until then, oil exports, almost all of which went to EU member states, were the mainstay of the Syrian economy, which has severely contracted under the embargo. The main casualties have been rural and urban laborers, especially the poor and most vulnerable, who face rampant inflation, massive layoffs and shortages of gasoline and other refined oil products as well as staple foods. Attempts to implement United Nations Security Council sanctions have been thwarted by opposition from Russia, which is also supplying the Assad regime with intelligence and arms, and China.

Behind Washington's drive to effect "regime change" in Damascus is the determination of America's imperialist rulers to perpetuate and extend their world dominance. Syria has historically occupied a pivotal position in the oil-rich

Near East. The country exerts key influence in Lebanon, particularly through its support to the Shi'ite fundamentalist Hezbollah, and serves as the most significant Arab ally of Iran. Tehran's influence in the region was given a major boost by the U.S. invasion of Saddam Hussein's Iraq in 2003 and the installation of a predominantly Shi'ite regime in Baghdad. For years, the U.S. rulers have been hostile toward Iran, as have been the Sunni monarchs in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, who have been major suppliers of arms to anti-Assad forces, especially to the Sunni jihadists. What the U.S. ended up getting through its murderous occupation of Iraq was an Iran-friendly regime.

French imperialism, now under Socialist Party president François Hollande, has been beating the drums for an "international coalition" to impose a "no-fly zone" over part of Syria. However, the White House has resisted any such move, even as the chorus of influential figures in Washington calling for U.S. military intervention now extends beyond right-wing Republicans like John McCain to include the likes of William Perry and Madeleine Albright. The latter two served, respectively, as secretary of defense and secretary of state under Democratic president Bill Clinton in the mid-late 1990s as the U.S. rained bombs on Iraq and the former Yugoslavia.

Just as the *New York Times* retailed Washington's lies about Hussein's "weapons of mass destruction" in the run-up to the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, so today the bourgeois press prints any fabrication put out by the Syrian opposition. Thus, the press worldwide reported that the Syrian military had perpetrated the August 25 massacre of at least 245 men, women and

children in Daraya, near Damascus. Yet an on-site investigation by veteran journalist Robert Fisk pointed to the killing of civilians by insurgents (*Independent*, 29 August). A local resident told Fisk: "One of the dead was a postman—they included him because he was a government worker."

It was a U.S.-financed group of Iraqi exiles, Ahmed Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress, that generated the bogus reports of Hussein's WMDs. This summer, it was the U.S.-backed Syrian opposition that put out patently spurious reports claiming that Assad was moving chemical weapons out of storage facilities and preparing to use them. When Obama last month warned of "enormous consequences," the Syrian government countered that it would only use chemical weapons "in case of external aggression."

Uniquely among the principal minorities in Syria, the Kurds as a people constitute a nation that extends into Turkey, Iran and Iraq. But their struggle against national oppression has been betrayed time and again by competing nationalist leaders who act as lackeys of the imperialists or of one local bourgeois regime

continued on page 4

CORRECTION

In our articles "Hail Charles Darwin!" (WV No. 854, 16 September 2005) and "A Marxist Critique of the 'New Atheists'" Part One (WV No. 1007, 31 August) we incorrectly cited J.D. Bernal's 1954 four-volume work as *Science and History*. The correct title is *Science in History*.

Syrian Civil War: Legacy of Imperialist Divide-and-Rule

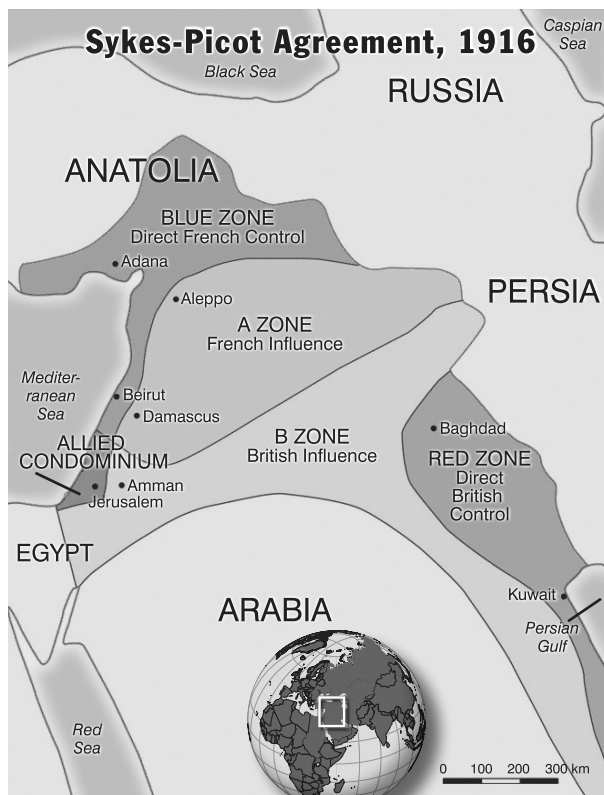
The following report, which has been edited for publication in WV, was submitted by an International Communist League comrade in July to inform party discussion.

Before World War I was even over, the British and French imperialists, with the assent of tsarist Russia, divided up the spoils of their impending victory over the Ottoman Empire, which was allied with Germany, in the secret Sykes-Picot treaty of 1916. The publication of that document by the Bolshevik workers state in late 1917 exposed the imperialists' machinations and had an electrifying effect across the Near East. Strikes and demonstrations swept Egypt in 1919, and in Mesopotamia (today's Iraq) the masses stood up to the more than 130,000 British troops deployed to occupy the territory.

Until it was dismembered in the carve-up of the Near East, the vast region known for centuries as Bilad al-Sham (the lands of Damascus), or "greater Syria," included Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine. Although it was almost never a politically united entity, its inhabitants saw it as a whole homogeneous culture with close economic ties. Against the wish of its inhabitants, who vehemently opposed the Sykes-Picot treaty and demanded a united Syria-Palestine, France took Syria and Lebanon and Britain occupied Jordan and Palestine.

In 1920, seeking to fashion a pro-Western enclave in the Levant, France created the entity that it called *Grand Liban* (Greater Lebanon) by annexing Muslim regions of Syria to Mount Lebanon. To divide and rule, the French combined the Muslims, among whom nascent Arab nationalism was growing, with the Christian Maronite majority, among whom they nourished a myth of non-Arab heritage and who would look to France for protection. On the eve of World War II, in a desperate attempt to persuade Turkey to join the Allies against Germany, France detached the northwestern province of Alexandretta from Syria and handed it over to Turkey. (Turkey kept Alexandretta, renamed it Hatay, but sided with Germany anyway.)

Over the centuries, the inaccessible valleys high above sea level and the rugged terrain on the eastern Mediterranean coast of Syria and Lebanon have provided a physically protected refuge for diverse religious and ethnic minorities who fled persecution at the hands of both Christian and Muslim rulers. The Alawites and the Ismailis, who both have Shi'a origin, found in Syria a refuge from the wrath of successive Sunni rulers. Christian Armenians flocked to Syria when the Seljuk Turks of Anatolia conquered their country in the eleventh century. Centuries later, more waves of them poured in, fleeing the 1915-18 genocidal terror of the Young Turks. The Druze, a tenth-century offshoot of Shi'ism, fled persecution by the Fatimid



caliphate in Egypt. Palestinians fleeing massacres by the Crusaders after the conquest of Jerusalem in 1099 settled on the slopes of Mount Qassioun. The Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholics settled in the region following successive splits of the Christian church. After the handover of Alexandretta to Turkey in 1939, more Kurds and Armenians fled south to Syria.

The majority of inhabitants of Syria are Arabic-speaking Sunnis (about 60 percent). The other major religious minorities are the Alawites (12 percent), Christians, with more than seven denominations (14 percent), Druze (3 percent) and Ismailis (1.5 percent). The principal ethnic minorities are Kurds (9 percent), Armenians (4 percent), Turcomans and Circassians. While the Kurds, Turcomans and Circassians are almost exclusively Muslim, the Armenians are Christian. Alawites, Druze and Ismailis as well as the Greek Orthodox are Arabic-speaking.

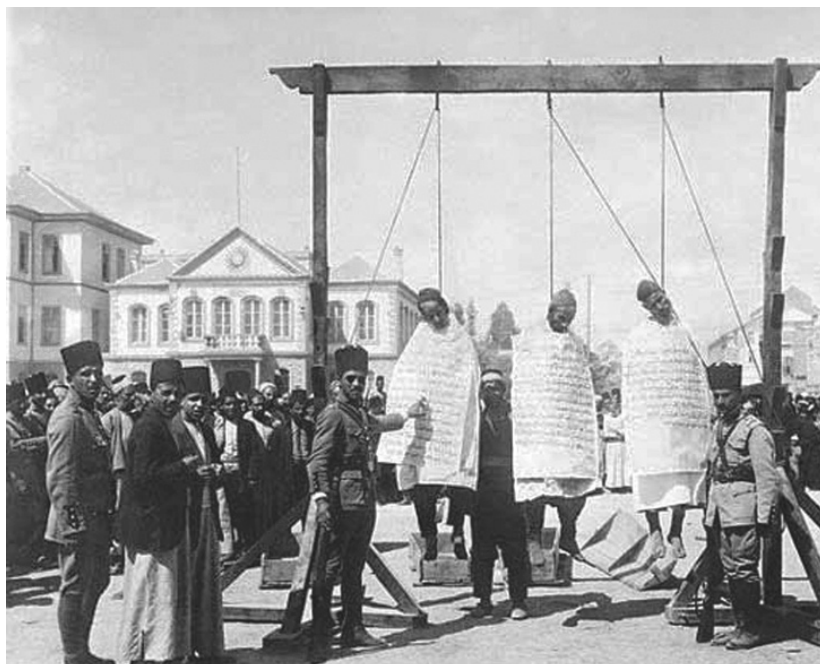
Roots of Alawite Ascendancy

The bloodletting that marked much of the history of Syria (and Lebanon) is a legacy of Ottoman rule and late French domination and the interpenetration of the myriad religious and ethnic communities coupled with imperialist intervention, combining to retard capitalist development and prevent the consolidation of a modern state. What is currently taking place in Syria is in great measure a continuation of mutual hatreds (some dating back centuries) that were manifested in the countless bloody coups and counter-coups, ethnic and religious conflicts that were a feature of Syrian history since it gained independence in 1946.

In April 1964, Sunni fundamentalists

to wage economic struggles, politically it is subordinated to Islamist and other bourgeois forces.

For the proletariat to emerge as a contender for power, it is necessary to undertake the forging of vanguard workers parties that oppose the imperialists and all domestic bourgeois forces—from the military bonapartists and liberal political figures to reactionary political Islam. There will be no end to ethnic and national oppression, no emancipation of women, no end to the exploitation of working people short of a thoroughgoing proletarian revolution that opens the road to the establishment of a socialist federation of the Near East, as part of the struggle for world proletarian revolution. ■



Syrian History

Secret Sykes-Picot treaty of 1916 carved out chunks of former Ottoman Empire for British, French imperialists. Damascus, 1925: Corpses of Resistance militants executed by French Mandate authorities in drive to quell Great Syrian Revolt.

staged an uprising in the city of Hama, a stronghold of Sunni conservatives, ransacking wine shops, beating up members of the nationalist Ba'ath party and killing and mutilating an Ismaili guard. The government responded with brutal force, killing up to one hundred. In 1979, more than 30 Alawite officer cadets were murdered in a massacre led by a Sunni officer at the Aleppo Artillery School. More murders of Alawites occurred in the city of Latakia. The government immediately responded with a countrywide campaign against the Muslim Brotherhood.

The violence continued throughout the early 1980s. The Muslim Brotherhood attempted to assassinate Hafez al-Assad, father of current president Bashar, in 1980. Assad responded by murdering in cold blood some 500 Muslim Brotherhood members imprisoned in a Palmyra jail. The sectarian confrontation between the Sunni fundamentalists and the Alawite-dominated regime reached its climax in February 1982 with the bloodiest showdown in modern Syrian history. The regime leveled the city of Hama, killing an estimated 10,000 to 20,000 Sunnis.

The sectarian confrontation continues. While Western bourgeois media publicize the regime's repression, atrocities perpetrated by Sunni fundamentalists receive scant, if any, coverage. The massacre in Houla in May, for example, which the media reported to be carried out by the Assad regime's militia, was, according to one German newspaper, carried out by Islamist forces. No one can predict the outcome of the conflict, but the fate of religious and ethnic minorities has already been decided by the Islamic fundamentalists as they chant: *Al-Alawi ala taboot, wa al-Masihi ala Beirut* (the Alawi in the coffin, and the Christian to Beirut).

The Alawis (or Alawites) are members of a schismatic offshoot from mainstream "Twelver Shi'ism." Like the Druze and Ismailis, they are a remnant of the Shi'a upsurge that swept the Islamic world around the ninth century. The name Alawi (i.e., a follower of Ali) is of recent coinage, dating from the French conquest after World War I. Before that they were known as Nusayriya, after the founding leader Muhammad ibn Nusayr. The Alawites share with other Shi'a the belief that Ali, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, was his rightful heir but was robbed of his inheritance by the first three caliphs (rulers). In addition, they see Ali as infused with "divine essence."

For this and other esoteric beliefs they

were denounced by Sunnis as infidels deserving death. The 14th-century Syrian jurist Ibn Taymiyyah, a champion of Sunni orthodoxy, condemned them as more dangerous than Christians. Urging Muslims to wage holy war against them, he declared that their blood and wealth were permissible for the taking; they were apostates who had to be punished, even exterminated, wherever they were found. To this day, this pronouncement provides ammunition for their adversaries.

In the upland settlements of the wild mountains, Alawites, neglected by the Ottoman rulers, lived in destitution. They were denied education, jobs and services of any sort. Over many centuries, generations of impoverished Alawites were driven by hunger down to the central Syrian plains around Homs and Hama to work as serfs and sharecroppers for wealthy Sunni landlords. After the French occupation, the Alawites, to the chagrin of the majority Sunnis, were awarded privileges as they, along with other "reliable minorities" with limited nationalist ambitions, were recruited to the *Troupes Spéciales du Levant*, which the French used to ruthlessly suppress Sunni nationalists. By the time of independence, the Alawites were dominant in the military. In 1955, no less than 65 percent of noncommissioned officers were Alawites, an advantage that enabled them to wrest control of the Ba'ath party and government.

The Ba'ath Party

The Arab Socialist Ba'ath (Rebirth or Renaissance) party was founded in Syria during the rising tide of Arab nationalism and anti-colonial struggle in the 1940s by two Damascus schoolteachers, Michel Aflaq, a Greek Orthodox Christian, and Salah al-Din al-Bitar, a Sunni Muslim. The party advocated independence from foreign rule, secularism and pan-Arabism. It raised the utopian slogan "One Arab nation with an eternal mission," which was intended to address the centuries-old burden of humiliation suffered under the rule of the Ottomans as well as the colonial powers.

The Ba'ath party steadily established a base among the rural poor, urban petty-bourgeois intellectuals, religious Arab minorities and within the army. Ba'ath secular ideology appealed especially to Arab religious minorities, who hoped that the Ba'ath would free them from their minority status and that Sunni domination of Syrian political life would be broken. Sunni Arab nationalists have traditionally assigned a central role to Sunni Islam

Syria...

(continued from page 3)

or another. To achieve Kurdish self-determination requires the proletarian revolutionary overthrow of the four capitalist states and the formation of a Socialist Republic of United Kurdistan.

During the popular uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt last year, we pointed to the working class, whose strikes played a major role in bringing down both despotic regimes, as the potential gravedigger of the bourgeois order. We underlined the urgent need for the proletariat to act as the leader of all the oppressed masses. However, while the proletariat continues

A Marxist Critique of the “New Atheists”

This part concludes the article. Parts One and Two appeared in WV Nos. 1007 and 1008 (31 August and 14 September 2012).

The “new atheists” vehemently oppose the position of some left-liberal intellectuals, such as Noam Chomsky, that there was a causal connection between Al Qaeda’s terrorist attack on the U.S. in 2001 and Washington’s policies in the Arab/Islamic

PART THREE

world. In “What’s New About The New Atheism?”, Victor Stenger asserts: “Some commentators have tried to explain this tragic event in terms of social causes, such as the perceived American oppression of Muslim nations.” The term “perceived” implies that U.S. imperialism is guiltless in the oppression of the peoples of the Arab/Islamic world. More generally, none of the main “new atheist” works make reference to, much less condemn, the atrocities committed by the American state, e.g., the A-bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in World War II, the razing of Korean cities and villages in the 1950s, the carpet bombing of Vietnam in the 1960s and early ’70s, the lethal economic warfare against Iraq in the 1990s.

A major theme of both Sam Harris’ *The End of Faith* and Christopher Hitchens’ *God Is Not Great* is the antagonistic relationship between Islamic fundamentalism and the West. Yet in neither book is there a discussion of European colonial rule over Islamic societies between the 17th and mid 20th centuries. Nor do they take up U.S. dominance and policies in the Near East during the Cold War era between the late 1940s and the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991-92. Harris and Hitchens go from excoriating the Koran, written (supposedly) by Muhammad in the 7th century, to fulminating against present-day anti-Western jihadism as if the intervening 14 centuries have no relevance whatsoever. Basically, the “new atheists” view Osama bin Laden and his cothinkers just as the fundamentalists present themselves, that is, as faithful followers of Muhammad carrying out the authentic message of the Koran in today’s world.

Almost all countries where Islam is the dominant religion, from North Africa to Southeast Asia, were subjected to colonial rule by West European states. In some cases (such as what are now Indonesia and Bangladesh), colonial rule lasted for centuries; in other cases (Iraq, Syria), for a few decades. In all cases, the European imperialists utilized Islamic clerics and the native ruling elite to reinforce their domination and exploitation of the mass of toilers. At the same time, they exploited and aggravated all manner of ethnic (tribal), national and religious divisions, for example between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs in British India. The state of Pakistan was deliberately created as an Islamic political entity in 1947 when the British partitioned the Indian subcontinent, over which they were no longer able to maintain colonial rule. The Partition resulted in horrific intercommunal slaughter, with an estimated one million dead.

The official ideology of French imperialism demonstrates that a lack of religious motivation is entirely compatible with imperialist subjugation and murderous repression on a mass scale. Because England had a state church, British colonialism had an official Christian sanction. By contrast, French colonial rule was carried out in the name of a secular, democratic republic claiming adherence to the liberal principles of the 1789 “Declara-

tion of the Rights of Man and Citizen.”

Many of the military officers and civilian administrators who governed France’s colonies in Africa, the Levant and Southeast Asia were nonbelievers, and some were strongly anticlerical. The French ruling class, represented by both Catholics and anticlerical secularists, tortured and killed millions of Arabs, black Africans and Vietnamese in seeking to maintain its wealth and power. The fact that the French colonial army was that of a secular republic did not make it in the least a force for progress and enlightenment.

Contrary to both the “new atheists” and

chy, the mainstay of fundamentalism in the Sunni Arab world. Bin Laden’s outfit—the forerunner of Al Qaeda—was originally funded and armed by the CIA to combat Soviet forces in Afghanistan in the 1980s. Last year the U.S. and its West European allies conducted an air war against the Libyan regime of Muammar Qaddafi in support of tribally based insurgents, including a substantial jihadist component. In Egypt, political power following the ouster of Hosni Mubarak has for the most part been exercised by the military, which has long been heavily financed by the U.S. The military has

tionism, including the barbaric treatment of women, among the downtrodden masses. The American state is the main external political and military enforcer of a social system from which the jihadist groups derive and on which they depend for their very existence.

Imperialism, Fundamentalism and Anti-Communism

By the late 1940s, the United States had become the dominant imperialist power in the Near East. But that dominance was challenged by the Soviet Union, supported by Communist parties that in some countries (e.g., Iraq and Iran) had attained a mass base of support, centrally in the working class. Despite their Stalinist leaderships and opportunist (class-collaborationist) policies, these parties embraced hundreds of thousands of politically advanced workers as well as leftist intellectuals who aspired to an egalitarian socialist society in which women would be liberated from the hideously oppressive conditions sanctioned by Islamic traditionalism. Almost all of the indigenous forces representing atheistic materialism and rational humanism were concentrated in and around the Communist movement.

In its Cold War against the Soviet Union and international Communism, U.S. imperialism utilized the forces of religious reaction in the Near East and elsewhere in the semicolonial world. This strategy was spelled out in 1950 by John Foster Dulles, soon to become Secretary of State: “The religions of the East are deeply rooted and have many precious values. Their spiritual beliefs cannot be reconciled with Communist atheism and materialism. That creates a common bond between us, and our task is to find it and develop it” (quoted in Paul Baran, *The Political Economy of Growth* [1957]). The policy outlined by Dulles would be put into effect with important historical consequences to this day.

In Iran in 1953, the CIA organized a coup that overthrew the bourgeois-nationalist regime of Mohammad Mossadeq and replaced it with the autocracy of the Shah. The imperialists’ main target was not Mossadeq but the Communist Tudeh (Masses) party, which they saw as posing an imminent threat of “red revolution.” A major social force actively involved in the CIA-orchestrated coup was the Shi’ite Muslim hierarchy led by Ayatollah Kashani, a predecessor of the Ayatollah Khomeini. In Indonesia in 1965, Washington encouraged a military coup in which the Communist Party—then the largest in the world not holding state power—was physically exterminated. Over a million workers, peasants, leftists and ethnic Chinese were killed, many of them by mobs led by Islamic clerics.

The purging of Communism in the Near East in the early Cold War period was not just the work of U.S. imperialism and indigenous reactionary forces backed by Washington. Just as important, if not more so, were Arab bourgeois-nationalist regimes that were supported by the Stalinist misleaders in the name of “anti-imperialism.” In the late 1950s, the Egyptian regime of Gamal Abdel Nasser—then viewed as the personification of Arab nationalism—crushed the Communist Party, imprisoning, torturing and killing its leaders. In the same period, the once powerful Iraqi Communist Party was broken by the murderous repression of successive bourgeois-nationalist regimes, the predecessors of Saddam Hussein (see “Near East, 1950s: Perma-



Above: Afghans in Nangarhar province burn U.S. flag at protest against anti-Islam film, September 14. Below: U.S. president Eisenhower met with Muslim Brotherhood and other Muslim delegates at White House in 1953 seeking anti-Communist Cold War alliance.



Chomsky as well as some leftist groups like the British Socialist Workers Party, there is *no basic conflict* between Western imperialism and Islamic fundamentalism. Notwithstanding both its recent bloody wars and occupations against the Muslim peoples of Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. imperialists, as well as their British junior partners, will support fundamentalist regimes and movements when they perceive it in their interest to do so. And, notwithstanding repeated outbursts of angry protest against Western governments (most recently over an Islamophobic film made in the U.S.), the Islamists are, in turn, just as opportunist in their relations with the Western imperialist powers.

For decades, Washington has supported and protected the Saudi monar-

at times collaborated with the Muslim Brotherhood—the main Islamist organization, which now holds the presidency—against Westernizing liberals. The generals would not have pursued such a policy without at least the tacit approval of the White House. In Afghanistan, the U.S. is negotiating with the Taliban to effect a “political settlement” that would allow a drawdown of military forces in a war that increasing sections of the U.S. ruling class recognize is unwinnable.

At a more fundamental level, the domination of capitalist imperialism has arrested the socio-economic and cultural development of North Africa, the Near East and South Asia. Pervasive poverty and social degradation form the material conditions that perpetuate Islamic tradi-

ment Revolution vs. Bourgeois Nationalism,” WV Nos. 740 and 741, 25 August and 8 September 2000). The betrayals and ultimate destruction of the once-powerful Communist movement was an important historical factor underlying the present conditions in the Near East: the pervasiveness of Islamic traditionalism in society and the political strength of Islamist parties and movements.

In *The New Atheism*, Stenger argues that a large fraction of the population in the world today no longer believes in religion. He points in particular to China: “I have seen estimates that there are as many as a billion nonbelieving Chinese alone.” Stenger may well overstate the extent of irreligiosity among the Chinese populace. Given the closed political conditions in China, it’s not possible to gauge the extent to which traditional beliefs and practices, such as ancestor worship, remain current, especially among the peasantry. Additionally, in recent years there has been a proliferation of “underground” Christian churches, which act as a conduit to and from anti-Communist movements in the U.S. and elsewhere. Nonetheless, it is incontestable that not only organized religion but personal religious attitudes and practices are much less important in China than in the Near East or South Asia.

Stenger makes no effort at a historical-materialist explanation of this difference and, indeed, is incapable of doing so. The difference lies in the fact that in 1949 China experienced a *social revolution* that liberated the country from capitalist-imperialist domination. That revolution and the workers state it created were bureaucratically deformed from the beginning by the Stalinist leadership of Mao Zedong’s Chinese



Beard



Dietz Verlag Berlin

Karl Marx (left) and Friedrich Engels (right).

leader of Al Qaeda, denounced “democracy” (Western-type parliamentary government) as a sacrilege:

“In Islam, legislation comes from God; in a democracy, this capacity is given to the people. Therefore, this is a new religion, based on making the people into gods and giving them God’s rights and attributes. This is tantamount to associating idols with God and falling into unbelief...”

“In democracy, the people legislate through the majority of deputies in parliament. “These deputies are men and women, Christians, communists and secularists.”

— Gilles Kepel and Jean-Pierre Milelli, eds., *Al Qaeda in Its Own Words* (2008)

The jihadists’ belief that the U.S. rulers aim to transform the Near East and

and Friedmans, the aim of the imperialists is *not* to create secular democracies in the Near East or elsewhere in the Third World. The shell of “democracy” by which the capitalists disguise their class dictatorship over the workers they exploit is reserved for the wealthier capitalist states. In plundering the neocolonial countries, imperialism perpetuates the backward social, economic and cultural conditions that sustain religion. At the same time, the penetration of these countries by imperialist capital creates elements of a modern infrastructure and a proletariat—the potential gravedigger of bourgeois rule.

In the 1848 *Communist Manifesto*, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels devoted a brief section to “feudal socialism,” a current of Christian intellectuals tied to the old aristocracies. These Christians denounced modern bourgeois society—its materialistic values and glorification of individual competitiveness—from a reactionary ideological outlook expressed in an idealized version of medieval European society. By analogy, one can describe Al Qaeda and the other jihadist groups as “feudal anti-imperialists,” opposing Western domination of the Arab/Islamic world in the name of an idealized version of medieval Islamic society and polity.

Resurrecting “Feudal Socialism”

“Nothing is easier than to give Christian asceticism a Socialist tinge.”
— *Communist Manifesto*

A present-day version of “feudal socialism” has been propagated by Terry Eagleton, who, moreover, claims to be a Marxist. A professor of English literature in Britain, Eagleton published a polemical book against the “new atheists,” *Reason, Faith, and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate* (2009), in which he derisively refers to Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens as “Ditchkins.” This work is a defense of religion, in particular a leftist current in the Roman Catholic church (mainly in Latin

America) called “liberation theology.” Eagleton condemns modern capitalist society as a spiritual wasteland given over to hedonistic individualism and the satisfaction of creature comforts on the cheap: “The advanced capitalist system is inherently atheistic. It is godless in its actual material practices, and in the values and beliefs implicit in them, whatever some of its apologists might piously aver.... A society of packaged fulfillment, administered desire, managerialized politics, and consumerist economics is unlikely to cut to the kind of depth where theological questions can even be properly raised.”

This book came out at the very moment that the capitalist world plunged into the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression of the 1930s. In Britain, working people and the poor have been subjected to savage government-imposed austerity carried out in the interests of the financial moguls of the City of London. One would like to see Eagleton go into a working-class pub in London or the Midlands and spout off about the evils of “packaged fulfillment” and “consumer economics.” Barring divine intervention on his behalf, he would encounter a pretty ugly response.

While having a special fondness for Catholic “liberation theology,” Eagleton also has a good word for the moral rectitude and old-fashioned values of Christian fundamentalists: “In the teeth of what it decries as a hedonistic, relativistic culture, Christian fundamentalism seeks to reinstate order, chastity, thrift, hard work, self-discipline, and responsibility, all values that a godless consumerism threatens to rout.” Identifying “true” Christianity with sympathy for the poor and downtrodden, Eagleton willfully disregards “the wealthy are god’s chosen people” ethos of today’s Christian fundamentalism in the one country where its adherents wield real political influence: the United States. American evangelical Protestants have added two commandments to the ten handed down to Moses by Jehovah on Mount Sinai: “Thou shalt not tax the rich” and “Thou shalt not feed and give succor to the poor.”

For Eagleton, the socialist movement, like Christianity, is animated by altruism (love of one’s fellow man), not the material interests of the working class:

“For the liberal humanist legacy to which Ditchkins is indebted, love can really be understood only in personal terms. It is not an item in his political lexicon, and would sound merely embarrassing were it to turn up there.... The concept of political love, one imagines, would make little sense to Ditchkins. Yet something like this is the ethical basis for socialism.”

Yes, organizations claiming to be socialist have attracted idealistic intellectuals, some from very privileged social backgrounds, motivated by sympathy for the exploited and oppressed masses. However, the socialist movement has always been based on politically advanced workers, whose purpose is to qualitatively raise the material conditions (living standards) of their class and all those on the bottom,

continued on page 8



Bettmann

Jakarta, October 1965: Chinese student being victimized during roundup of Communists. More than a million Communists, workers, peasants and ethnic Chinese were massacred by Indonesian military, Islamic fundamentalists in 1965-66.

Communist Party. Nonetheless, over the past six decades China has undergone a level of progressive socio-economic development and cultural advancement that has *eroded the material grounds* for religious belief among the populace. This is despite reactionary values fostered by the Stalinist regime, from its inculcation of Chinese nationalism to its sanctioning of “official” Protestant and Catholic churches—a policy that the early Soviet workers state would have considered an abomination (see “The Bolshevik Revolution vs. the State Church” on page 2).

Understanding Jihadism

Why after having received U.S. aid in the war against “godless Communism” did a significant current of fundamentalists, self-described as jihadists, turn violently against the West and especially the United States in the post-Soviet period? With the demise of the Soviet Union, fear of Communism among Islamic traditionalists was replaced by fear of “Westernization.” Islamists took the “democratic” ideological posturing of U.S. imperialism—now the self-proclaimed “world’s only superpower”—at face value. In the early 1990s, the Egyptian Islamist Ayman al-Zawahiri, who would become a central

other traditionally Islamic countries along the socio-cultural and political lines of present-day North America and West Europe is a *delusion*. There is, to be sure, a broad and influential section of bourgeois intellectuals, ranging from pro-Democratic Party liberals to right-wing Republicans, who think the U.S. government should do just that. Liberals like *New York Times* columnists Thomas Friedman and Nicholas Kristof have agitated for the U.S. government to actively promote “democracy” and “human rights” throughout the world, especially in the Near East. Feminists in academia and the media have also weighed in, pointing to the barbaric treatment of women, especially in Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan under the Taliban. On the right, so-called neo-cons like William Kristol and Robert Kagan contended that Islamic fundamentalism had become a serious threat to America’s global interests.

The anti-Western jihadism of Osama bin Laden is the converse of the U.S. “human rights” imperialism expounded by the likes of Friedman, who supported the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003 in the name of creating a “secular democratic society” in the Arab/Islamic world. Contrary to both the bin Ladens

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Atheists...

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fighting for an egalitarian society. For Marxists, the ultimate goal is a society based on *material superabundance*, a necessary condition to fully realize the creative capacities of all its members. Consequently, underlying communism is a level of labor productivity far greater than in today’s advanced capitalist economies.

As Marx explained in *Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy* (1857-58), the development of a collectivized economy would see the “free development of individualities” and hence “in general the reduction of the necessary labour of society to a minimum, to which then corresponds the artistic, scientific, etc., development of individuals, made possible by the time thus set free and the means produced for all of them.”

In Defense of Marxism

The “new atheists” are hostile to Marxism. At the same time, they feel compelled to answer their theistic antagonists who raise the mass murder carried out by the regime of J.V. Stalin in the Soviet Union in the 1930s. That regime claimed atheistic materialism as an important component of its formal ideology. Dawkins and his cothinkers contend that the crimes of Stalin were not motivated by atheism as such but rather by a religious-like belief in Marxist doctrine. Dawkins links Stalin and Hitler, a lying amalgam often made by bourgeois ideologues (see “*Black Book: Anti-Communist Big Lie*,” WV No. 692, 5 June 1998). He wrote in *The God Delusion*:

“Stalin was an atheist and Hitler probably wasn’t; but even if he was, the bottom line of the Stalin/Hitler debating point is very simple. Individual atheists may do evil things but they don’t do evil things in the name of atheism. Stalin and Hitler did extremely evil things, in the name of, respectively, dogmatic and doctrinaire Marxism, and an insane and unscientific eugenics theory tinged with sub-Wagnerian ravings.”

In *The End of Faith*, Harris similarly argues, “Consider the millions of people who were killed by Stalin and Mao: although these tyrants paid lip service to rationality, communism was little more than a political religion. At the heart of its apparatus of repression and terror lurked a rigid ideology, to which generations of men and women were sacrificed.” Like almost all bourgeois intellectuals, the “new atheists” identify Stalinism with Marxism and Stalin’s Russia with the historical embodiment of Marxist doctrine.

V.I. Lenin, Leon Trotsky and the other leaders of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution understood that socialism could be achieved only on an international scale. They viewed the October Revolution in Russia as sparking a wave of proletarian socialist revolutions in Central and West Europe, ultimately extending to North America. However, under the conditions of imperialist encirclement and economic backwardness, in the 1920s the Soviet workers state underwent a bureaucratic degeneration, as analyzed by Trotsky in *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936). The rule



Reuters

Moscow, 1995: Russian president Boris Yeltsin with Orthodox Patriarch Alexy II (on his right) and other church figures at Kremlin three years after capitalist counterrevolution.

of a parasitic bureaucratic caste was consolidated by Stalin’s murderous regime and expressed ideologically in the *anti*-Marxist doctrine of building “socialism in one country.”

As Trotsky explained in the 1938 Transitional Program, the founding document of the Fourth International:

“The Soviet Union emerged from the October Revolution as a workers’ state. State ownership of the means of production, a necessary prerequisite to socialist development, opened up the possibility of rapid growth of the productive forces. But the apparatus of the workers’ state underwent a complete degeneration at the same time: it was transformed from a weapon of the working class into a weapon of bureaucratic violence against the working class and more and more a weapon for the sabotage of the country’s economy. The bureaucratization of a backward and isolated workers’ state and the transformation of the bureaucracy into an all-powerful privileged caste constitute the most convincing refutation—not only theoretically but this time practically—of the theory of socialism in one country. “The USSR thus embodies terrific contradictions. But it still remains a *degenerated workers’ state*. Such is the social diagnosis. The political prognosis has an alternative character: either the bureaucracy, becoming ever more the organ of the world bourgeoisie in the workers’ state, will overthrow the new forms of property and plunge the country back to capitalism; or the working class will crush the bureaucracy and open the way to socialism.”

In 1991-92, the negative of the two basic historical alternatives projected by Trotsky—capitalist counterrevolution—came to pass.

The “new atheists” not only falsely identify Marxism with Stalinism but also falsify Marxism as such. Daniel Dennett is particularly vulgar and contemptuous in his caricature of Marxism in *Breaking the Spell*:

“Remember Marxism? It used to be a sour sort of fun to tease Marxists about the contradictions in some of their pet ideas. The revolution of the proletariat was inevitable, good Marxists believed, but if so, why were they so eager to enlist us in their cause? If it was going to happen anyway, it was going to happen with or without our help. But of course the inevitability that Marxists believe in is one that depends on the growth of the movement and all its political action. There were Marxists working very hard

to bring about the revolution, and it was comforting to them to believe that their success was guaranteed in the long run.”

As a matter of fact, the beginning of the first section of Marx’s most famous and widely read work, the *Communist Manifesto*, clearly states that while the class struggle is inevitable, the outcome is not: “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. “Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.”

Half a century later, the revolutionary Marxist Rosa Luxemburg posed the historical alternatives facing mankind as “socialism or barbarism.” With the development and deployment of nuclear weapons, the profit-driven capitalist-imperialist system threatens to destroy civilization and even exterminate the human race.

It is common for bourgeois-liberal intel-

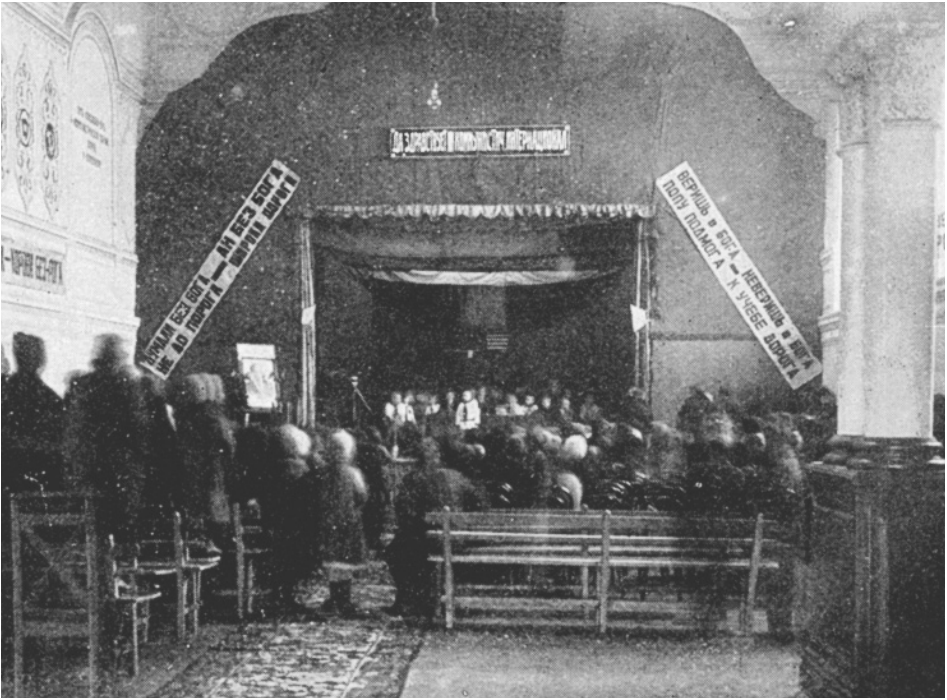
lectuals, especially those who describe themselves as secular humanists, to argue that Marxism is a form of teleological idealism derived from the philosophy of Hegel. Attributed to Marx is the idea that the historical development of society will necessarily culminate in communism. Marxism is presented and condemned as a kind of secularized religion in which the promise of a future otherworldly heaven is replaced by the promise of a future earthly heaven.

In one of Marx’s first writings, he explicitly argued against a Hegelian-type teleological concept of history. *The Holy Family*, written in 1844 as Marx’s first collaborative work with Engels, states:

“*Hegel’s* conception of history presupposes an *Abstract* or *Absolute Spirit* which develops in such a way that mankind is a mere *mass* that bears the Spirit with a varying degree of consciousness or unconsciousness. Within *empirical*, exoteric history, therefore, Hegel makes a speculative, esoteric history, develop. The history of mankind becomes the history of the *Abstract Spirit* of mankind, hence a *spirit far removed* from the real man....

“*History* does *nothing*, it ‘possesses *no* immense wealth,’ it ‘wages *no* battles.’ It is *man*, real, living man who does all that, who possesses and fights; ‘history’ is not, as it were, a person apart, using man as a means to achieve *its own* aims; history is *nothing but* the activity of man pursuing his aims.” (emphasis in original)

In the political realm, the bourgeois-rationalist “new atheists” offer at best a species of liberal reformism, preferring advice to the rulers of a capitalist order that, at home and abroad, inculcates the reactionary, anti-scientific religious beliefs against which Dawkins et al. rail. Marxists, in contrast, strive to change the political consciousness of the working class in order to effect a revolutionary change in social conditions—i.e., the overthrow of that capitalist order—leading to the erosion and final elimination of all backwardness and superstition. In Marx’s own words: “Philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it.” ■



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Former Orthodox chapel transformed into atheist club after 1917 Russian Revolution. Banner on right reads: “Believing in God, You Help the Popes—Not Believing in God, You Are on the Road to Learning.”

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South Africa

September 15: Thousands of miners march near Lesotho's border town in support of a 10-day strike by police.

ANC/SACP/COSATU: The leaders of South Africa's ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC), the South African Communist Party (SACP), and the South African Congress of Trade Unions (COSATU) have announced that they will support the 10-day strike by police. The strike is being called by the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUM) and the National Union of Transport Workers (NUTW). The strike is being called in support of the 10-day strike by police. The strike is being called in support of the 10-day strike by police.

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COSATU Congress: Bureaucrats Burn Literature Supporting Striking Mineworkers

The following letter by our comrades in South Africa was sent to the Congress of South African Trade Unions on September 25.

On 20 September, supporters of Spartacist/South Africa, section of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist), went to sell our literature at the 11th national congress of COSATU. An important aim of ours was to intersect delegates to the congress who are outraged at the brutal massacre of striking mineworkers by police in Marikana on 16 August, and who feel a sense of solidarity with the wildcat strikes in Marikana and elsewhere.

We distributed our statement of 23 August denouncing the massacre, as well as the latest issue (14 September) of *Workers Vanguard*, published by the American section of the ICL, with the front-page headline: “ANC/SACP/COSATU Tops: Front Men for Mining Bosses—Striking Miners Defiant After Massacre.” Our placards emphasised the need for labour solidarity with these strikes, something our comrades have campaigned for internationally, demanding: “Drop All the Charges! Victory to the Striking Mineworkers!” Another placard underlined the Marxist understanding—bloodily confirmed by the Marikana massacre—that the cops are not workers but the hired guns of the bourgeoisie, calling for “Cops and Security Guards Out of the Unions!” A third placard pointed to the need for working-class independence from bourgeois-nationalism and a revolutionary perspective against neo-apartheid capitalism: “Break With the Bourgeois Tripartite Alliance! For a Black-Centred Workers Government!”

While quite a number of delegates were interested in checking out our political slogans and literature laying out our broader programme for new October Revolutions and the genuine communism of Lenin and Trotsky, some others were not very happy

to see us. The latter certainly included members of POPCRU, the cop “union” affiliated to COSATU, and some top bureaucrats from the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) who had notoriously denounced the Marikana strikers and called for state repression against them both before and after the 16 August massacre. After our comrades had been at the congress venue for about an hour, a group of bureaucrats—unable to answer our criticisms with political arguments—decided to use their fists to silence our support to the striking rock drillers and opposition to the neo-apartheid massacre. An organised group of 10-15 bureaucratic thugs moved in on our comrades, roughed them up, overturned our literature table and set fire to our newspapers and placards. A number of delegates who witnessed the attack voiced their protest against this thuggish method of silencing political opponents, but the bureaucrats were not listening to anybody.

While immediately directed at our comrades, the point of this attack was to deliver a threat against anyone who would fight within COSATU for working-class solidarity with the wildcat mineworkers’ strikes or take a stand against the pro-capitalist bureaucrats’ stranglehold over the unions. The Lonmin mineworkers waged a six-week long, determined struggle against the mine owners, defying bloody repression by the capitalist government while being stabbed in the back by the NUM/COSATU tops. And *they won an important victory*: on 18 September, Lonmin agreed to substantial wage increases for rock drill operators and other workers. The COSATU bureaucrats fear that other sections of the working class, inspired by this, will take the road of class struggle, thereby upsetting the cosy relationship of the bureaucrats with the capitalists and their government. That’s why the Alliance tops are now denouncing the Lon-

min bosses for “caving in” to the wildcat strike. According to the *Mail & Guardian* online (19 September), on the day of the settlement, COSATU general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi complained via Twitter: “Cosatu and NUM will have to act fast or this deal can collapse the [sic] every bargaining system in place...it can communicate [sic] the message workers can lead themselves and get what they want.”

The Marikana massacre and its aftermath are exposing the truly gruesome, viciously racist nature of neo-apartheid capitalism for all to see. Some 78 workers were injured and at least 34 killed, many of them hunted down and shot in what amounted to a killing spree by the cops. Marikana shows that the blood of black workers is just as cheap today, in the “new” South Africa, as it was under apartheid rule. And it shows what we have repeatedly emphasised from 1994 on: the *leaders* of the bourgeois ANC/SACP/COSATU Tripartite Alliance are the enforcers of neo-apartheid capitalist misery for the majority black masses, defending the rule of the (overwhelmingly white) mine bosses, Randlords, and their imperialist senior partners.

This is clearly shown by the role played by the NUM misleaders. They have defended the cops and repeatedly demanded repression against the strike leaders and particularly the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU), which many workers have been joining out of disgust with the NUM bureaucracy’s betrayals. Immediately after the massacre, NUM general secretary Frans Baleni said in a radio interview: “The police were patient, but these people were extremely armed with dangerous weapons.”

At COSATU’s national congress, Baleni was joined by Alliance tops like SACP general secretary (and minister of higher education) Blade Nzimande in denouncing

the mineworkers and crying out for more state repression. In a speech to the congress on 17 September, Nzimande railed against “lumpen-patriarchal networks” supposedly duping and intimidating the mineworkers, and declared brazenly: “The SACP fully supports government’s crack-down on the illegal carrying of weapons, on intimidation and on incitement to violence. The ring-leaders must be dealt with and separated from the mass of misled strikers (many of whom are not actually employees of Lonmin or even workers).”

The SACP and COSATU leaders have a problem: after more than 18 years of the Tripartite Alliance in power, anger at continued neo-apartheid oppression is erupting at the base of society, including among many SACP and COSATU members, who are fed up with their leadership’s repeated betrayals of working-class struggles in the name of the bourgeois Alliance. The Marikana massacre has become a focal point for that anger.

According to online reports by the bourgeois papers *Mail & Guardian* and *Daily Maverick*, the bureaucrats who burned our literature then marched into the congress hall singing pro-Zuma songs, which led to a shouting match between pro- and anti-Zuma delegates. We oppose *all factions* of the bourgeois ANC and fight to win working-class militants to breaking from the Tripartite Alliance *along class lines*. For years, the workers’ interests have been sold out in the name of the bourgeois Alliance and support for this or that bourgeois politician—before [the ANC conference in] Polokwane 2007 it was Zuma vs. Mbeki; now, before Mangaung 2012, it is Zuma vs. Motlanthe/Malema. This is just a squabble over which representative of the class enemy to back, and we reject the whole swindle: The interests of the working class are *irreconcilably counterposed* to those of the bourgeoisie. To get rid of neo-apartheid capitalist misery, the workers need a leadership which is independent of and opposed to all wings of the bourgeoisie and their repressive state. We remain steadfast in our fight to build the revolutionary internationalist vanguard party needed to achieve this. ■

South Africa...

(continued from page 1)

week include an Anglo Platinum striker who was run over by an armored police vehicle and an ANC councilor killed by police firing on a shantytown near Marikana.

When the superexploited, mainly black working class fought courageously against the apartheid regime in the 1980s, its struggles won widespread sympathy and support from workers around the world, not least black American workers who saw in apartheid the mirror image of their own oppression. Today the South African proletariat’s fight against the same capitalist exploiters demands active solidarity by miners and other trade unionists internationally. *Drop all charges against arrested strikers! Free all those behind bars! Military out of the mining areas!*

The South African ruling class and its financial senior partners in London and New York dread the prospect that the mechanisms put in place to control black labor—arbitration courts, nationally negotiated contracts, etc.—are breaking down. After the strike wave hit AngloGold Ashanti, the world’s third-largest bullion producer, the *Financial Times* (21 September) noted that gold companies had wrongly assumed they would be spared because they “use collective bargaining” and because the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU), which led many of the striking platinum miners, has “a much weaker presence in gold mining, where the NUM dominates.” The article continued: “But the unrest has shown workers becoming increasingly frustrated with their union representatives and taking unilateral action that exacerbates tensions and complicates negotiations.” NUM spokesman Lesiba Seshoka is quoted moaning that the “contagious” wage demands “will undermine collective bargaining and that’s



Reuters

Workers blockade road in attempt to shut down Anglo American Platinum mine in North West Province, September 12.

going to be chaos.” Fearing just that, the mining bosses called the NUM leadership into an emergency meeting at the Chamber of Mines on September 21.

South Africa reveals in the rawest form some basic truths about the capitalist profit system. It took *class war* for the Marikana miners to win a pay hike that barely begins to redress the miserable wage structure inherited from apartheid. That settlement excludes the 9,000 even more miserably paid workers—nearly one-fourth of the mine’s workforce—supplied by bloodsucking labor brokers (contractors), whose role in the economy has grown since the days of apartheid. A crucial lesson that the August 16 massacre should burn into workers’ consciousness is the role of the bourgeois state as an organ for the violent suppression of the exploited and the oppressed in the service of capital-

ist rule and profits. The fact that “Communists” like SACP national secretary Blade Nzimande have ministerial positions does not change the nature of that state one bit.

The mine strikes demonstrate the enormous social power of the proletariat. But the South African proletariat cannot realize its revolutionary potential when it is tied to its exploiters through the ANC and its bourgeois-nationalist ideology. While the ANC gained enormous authority among the oppressed masses in the struggle against apartheid, its commitment to private property meant that it could not deliver on the promise of liberation.

After 18 years of neo-apartheid, South Africa is marked by the continuing desperate poverty of the non-white majority and mass unemployment. Angry protests by township dwellers demanding housing and basic services are so commonplace

that the roadblocks are reported as routine traffic news. And now the ANC is marking its 100th anniversary with the slaughter of striking black workers! Meanwhile, the ANC’s labor lieutenants have furiously tried to squelch any solidarity with the Marikana miners. Bureaucrats at the COSATU congress mobilized a goon squad to attack and set fire to a Spartacist/South Africa literature table, angered by placards denouncing the August 16 massacre and calling to break workers from the Tripartite Alliance (see letter to COSATU on this page).

Uniquely on the South African left, our South African comrades have always refused on principle to give the least political support to the Tripartite Alliance, a nationalist popular front. As the SSA wrote in a leaflet protesting the Marikana massacre (reprinted in WV No. 1007, 31 August): “Trade-union militants from COSATU and SACP members who genuinely want to fight for communism must be broken from the pro-capitalist programme of these organisations and won to a policy based on the independence of the working class from *all* bourgeois-nationalist forces.” Those forces include Julius Malema, a bourgeois politician whose racist demagoguery obscures the *class* divide in society. Breaking workers from the Tripartite Alliance is crucial to the task of forging a revolutionary workers party based on the perspective of permanent revolution, which was captured in the conclusion of the SSA statement on Lonmin:

“The national oppression endured by the black majority, imperialist domination, and many-layered oppression and backwardness characteristic of capitalism in South Africa can only be overcome through workers revolution, extending internationally. We need a *black-centred workers government*, part of a *socialist federation of Southern Africa*, which fights like hell to link up with workers revolution in the imperialist centres and create an international socialist planned economy.” ■

Leon Trotsky on “The Future of Man”

We reprint below the concluding remarks of exiled Bolshevik leader Leon Trotsky’s 1932 speech on the Russian Revolution, titled “In Defence of October,” delivered in Copenhagen, Denmark. This excerpt was published in the July-August 1947 issue of Fourth International, theoretical journal of the then-Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party.

* * *

Between nature and the State stands economic life. Technical science liberated man from the tyranny of the old elements—earth, water, fire and air—only to subject him to its own tyranny. Man ceased to be a slave to nature, to become a slave to the machine, and still worse, a slave to supply and demand. The present world crisis testifies in especially tragic fashion how man, who dives to the bottom of the ocean, who rises up to the stratosphere, who converses on invisible waves with the Antipodes, how this proud and dar-

ing ruler of nature remains a slave to the blind forces of his own economy. The historical task of our epoch consists in replacing the uncontrolled play of the market by reasonable planning, in disciplining the forces of production, compelling them to work together in harmony and obediently serve the needs of mankind. Only on this new social basis will man be able to stretch his weary limbs and—every man and every woman, not only a selected few—become a citizen with full power in the realm of thought.

But this is not yet the end of the road. No, it is only the beginning. Man calls himself the crown of creation. He has a right to that claim. But who has asserted that present-day man is the last and highest representative of the species *Homo-sapiens*? No, physically as well as spiritually he is very far from perfection, prematurely born biologically, with feeble thought and has not produced any new organic equilibrium.

It is true that humanity has more than once brought forth giants of thought and action, who tower over their contemporaries like summits in a chain of mountains. The human race has a right to be proud of its Aristotle, Shakespeare, Darwin, Beethoven, Goethe, Marx, Edison, and Lenin. But why are they so rare? Above all, because almost without exception, they came out of the upper and middle classes. Apart from rare exceptions, the sparks of genius in the suppressed depths of the people are choked before they can burst into flame. But also because the processes of creating, developing and educating a human being have been and remain essentially a matter of chance, not illuminated by theory and practice, not subjected to consciousness and will.

Anthropology, biology, physiology and psychology have accumulated mountains of material to raise up before mankind in their full scope the tasks of perfecting and developing body and spirit. Psycho-analysis, with the

inspired hand of Sigmund Freud, has lifted the cover of the well which is poetically called the “soul.” And what has been revealed? Our conscious thought is only a small part of the work of the dark psychic forces. Learned divers descend to the bottom of the ocean and there take photographs of mysterious fishes. Human thought, descending to the bottom of its own psychic sources, must shed light on the most mysterious driving forces of the soul and subject them to reason and to will.

Once he has done with the anarchic forces of his own society man will set to work on himself, in the pestle and the retort of the chemist. For the first time mankind will regard itself as raw material, or at best as a physical and psychic semi-finished product. Socialism will mean a leap from the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom in this sense also, that the man of today, with all his contradictions and lack of harmony, will open the road for a new and happier race.

FBI Raids...

(continued from page 12)

by pugetsoundanarchists.org and saynothing.info notes, “The purpose of this Grand Jury seems to be an investigation of what occurred in downtown Seattle on May Day 2012.” At that march, police claim that 75 “Black Bloc” anarchists allegedly damaged branches of Wells Fargo, Bank of America, HSBC and Homestreet banks, a Nike store and the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. Cops assaulted protesters and arrested at least eight activists. The next day, Seattle police chief John Diaz stated, “I am convinced there are a lot of people who will be spending some quality time in prison for what they did yesterday.” It was announced the same day that a task force was formed to review footage from the protest.

One of the Seattle PD’s first victims was Cody Ingram, who was arrested and charged with destruction of government property. Ingram spent a month in jail before pleading guilty to a misdemeanor and being sentenced to time served. At his hearing, an FBI special agent accused him of saying that the “government needs to be replaced.” (Last we knew, that was still a democratic right.) Activist Robert Ditrani was pressured to plead guilty on charges of disorderly conduct after allegedly spitting on a cop.

The May Day protest in Seattle was organized as part of a nationwide “general

strike” initiated by the last holdouts of the populist Occupy movement, who issued flyers and posters calling for “no work, no school, no shopping, no banking, no chores.” In fact, this “general strike” was simply a protest that in no way shut down production. Notwithstanding the movement’s insistence on having no demands at all, the program embodied in the Occupy protests that began one year ago is simple liberal reform that is very much in line with the Democratic Party. Occupy’s slogan “We are the 99 percent” denies the fundamental class division in society between the capitalists and the proletariat.

While exposing its tepid reformism, we have defended and do defend Occupy against all attacks by the capitalist state. Similarly, while the political bankruptcy of anarchism has been evident particularly since the Russian Revolution of 1917, it is the duty of all opponents of capitalist state repression to come to their defense now.

Since the beginning of the Occupy movement, the protesters have been hit with vicious state repression. Brutal crack-downs swept cities across the U.S. last November, and Democratic Party mayors carried out most of them. So-called “progressive” Democrat Jean Quan, mayor of Oakland, admitted to participating in a conference call with officials from 18 cities nationwide to discuss how to disperse the encampments last year. The state continues to persecute the few remaining Occupy activists, as evidenced by the Northwest raids and the arrests of 185

protesters in New York on September 17 during the anniversary of Occupy Wall Street. **Drop all the charges!**

The FBI raids, the grand jury subpoenas and the arrests of political activists are of a piece with the vicious attacks on civil liberties that have been carried out under both Democratic and Republican administrations. The government’s prohibition of “material support to terrorism” originated with the 1996 Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act under Clinton and was expanded by Bush’s “war on terror” Patriot Act following the September 11 attacks.

For his part, Obama renewed the Patriot Act and added to this arsenal of repression the indefinite military detention of U.S. civilians and legalized political assassination of citizens abroad (see “Obama Ramps Up ‘War on Terror’ at Home,” WV No. 993, 6 January). A 21 June 2010 Supreme Court ruling expanded the definition of “material support to terrorism” to include engaging in political advocacy of groups deemed enemies of the state.

The state began its “war on terror” by targeting Muslims, but the laws crafted to justify state terror are increasingly used against anyone advocating ideas contrary to the status quo (see “More Subpoenas Against Midwest Leftists: FBI Infiltration Exposed,” WV No. 973, 4 February 2011). Dissenters are deemed “enemies of the state” or “terrorists”—i.e., people with no rights the state is bound to respect and to whom the government can do anything.

The ultimate target of “anti-terror” and other measures of repression is the multiracial working class, which has the social power and objective historic interest to overthrow the capitalist order. The Spartacist League and its youth auxiliary, the Spartacus Youth Clubs, aim to build the vanguard workers party necessary to establish working-class rule and put the system of racism, poverty and war out of business once and for all.

Defend the Northwest grand jury resisters! Free the imprisoned Occupy protesters! Down with police and FBI raids! ■

Spartacus Youth Club Events

LOS ANGELES

Wednesday, October 10, 6:30 p.m.
Introduction to Revolutionary Marxism
UCLA, Bunche Hall, Room 2173
For more information: (213) 380-8239
slsycla@sbcglobal.net

NEW YORK CITY

Tuesday, October 2, 7 p.m.
What is Communism?
The Communist Manifesto:
A Guide to Action
CCNY, NAC Room 1/211
138th St. and Amsterdam Ave.
Information and readings: (212) 267-1025
nysl@tiac.net

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

TORONTO

Wednesday, October 10, 6:30 p.m.
Down With the Imperialist EU!
For a Socialist
United States of Europe!
U of T, Sidney Smith Hall, Room 2104
100 St. George Street
Information and readings: (416) 593-4138
spartcan@on.aibn.com

VANCOUVER

Thursday, October 11, 6 p.m.
Harper’s Creeping Police State:
“War on Crime”
Targets Minorities, Activists,
Labour... Everyone
UBC, Irving Barber Learning Centre
Room 157
Information and readings: (604) 687-0353
trotskyist_vancouver@shawcable.com

Spartacist League/SYC Forums

Elections 2012:

Wall Street Democrats vs. Wall Street Republicans

We Need an All New Ruling Class—the Workers!

NEW YORK

Saturday
September 29, 4 p.m.

322 W. 48th St., 1st Fl., Manhattan
(Between 8th and 9th Avenues;
take A, C or E train to 42nd St.)

For info: (212) 267-1025 • nysl@tiac.net

LOS ANGELES

Saturday
October 13, 3 p.m.

Metropolitan Community Church
4953 Franklin Avenue
(four blocks west of Vermont)

For info: (213) 380-8239 • slsycla@sbcglobal.net

Trotskyist League of Canada Forums

Lessons of the Struggles in Quebec

- **Students: Ally with the Working Class!**
- **For Revolutionary Leadership!**

TORONTO

Saturday, September 29, 7 p.m.
OISE, Room to be announced
252 Bloor Street West
(at St. George subway)
For info: (416) 593-4138
spartcan@on.aibn.com

VANCOUVER

Wednesday, October 3, 6:30 p.m.
Creekside Community Centre
1 Athletes Way
Multipurpose Room 1
For info: (604) 687-0353
trotskyist_vancouver@shawcable.com

Death Penalty...

(continued from page 12)

these prisoners is Kevin Cooper, a black man framed up for the killing of a white family in 1983. In 2004, only hours before he was to be strapped to the death chamber gurney, Cooper was granted a stay of execution. Despite overwhelming evidence of his innocence and a more than 100-page opinion by Judge William Fletcher of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeal arguing that the “State of California may be about to execute an innocent man,” in 2009 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against Cooper’s appeal of his sentence.

Cooper argues that the SAFE Act’s repeal of all avenues of appeal for those now sentenced to death is “a step backwards in our ability to challenge our convictions,” condemning them to life behind bars in prisons “worse than death row.” It is a profoundly searing indictment of this country’s judicial system that some prisoners prefer a death sentence on the grounds that this provides some means to prove their innocence and avoids the worse day-to-day violence and torture in the maximum-security prison chambers. The accused and convicted should get the best representation possible and the benefit of all legal redress. Nonetheless, as Cooper’s case itself demonstrates, death penalty appeals provide little more than a facade of “due process.”

In California, the death sentence carries one automatic appeal to the state Supreme Court. According to a 2011 report by senior U.S. Appeals court judge Arthur L. Alarcón and Professor Paula M. Mitchell of the Loyola Law School Los Angeles, the average wait between the original conviction and a decision by the California Supreme Court is ten years, and the death sentence has been upheld in more than 90 percent of the cases. In state *habeas* petitions, inmates wait eight to ten years simply for appointment of counsel. Since 1978, new evidentiary hearings have been granted in just **31 of the 689 appeals filed**. Only after all state appeals have been exhausted can death row prisoners file *habeas* petitions with the federal courts. Of the 970 people condemned to death in California since 1978, only 54 have obtained new trials from such appeals; 32 other death row prisoners died awaiting a decision.

A major obstacle in this Kafkaesque maze of appeals is finding a lawyer with the qualifications and resources to take on a *habeas* petition. As San Quentin death row prisoner Darrell Lomax wrote: “There are over 300 people on death row in California who have been here for over 10 years, myself included, who have not yet received appointment of counsel. I have been waiting over 15 years to clear my name” (*Socialist Worker*, 12 April).

We profoundly sympathize with Cooper and other death house inmates who oppose the SAFE Act. Confined to cages within cages, behind layer after layer of stone walls, iron gates and beset by sadistic screws, the measure appears to deprive them of the sole possibility of relief, no matter how remote, in the racist capitalist courts. They don’t see the possibility of working-class and other social struggle outside the prison walls that might change their fate. And little wonder, as there has been precious little struggle, thanks above all to the endless betrayals by the trade-union misleaders.

But the executed have no appeals. Any fight for their freedom is forever silenced by death. As another prisoner on San Quentin’s death row, Donald Ray Young, wrote: “We said ‘I am Troy Davis.’ Many of us said that we were Stanley Tookie Williams. Cameron Todd Dillingham was another innocent person on death row; the Texas criminal justice system executed him in our name. If we had abolished capital punishment, all three of these men would still be alive, able to prove their innocence to the world. No one enjoys a prison sentence of life without the possibility of parole (LWOP), but it definitely keeps Mumia Abu-Jamal speaking truth to power” (*San Francisco Bayview*, 5 June).

Does any fighter for Mumia’s freedom

think that he would be better off staying on death row because he might have a chance to appeal his frame-up conviction—repeatedly upheld by court after court—before the U.S. Supreme Court? Now off death row, for the first time in more than 30 years, Mumia is able to embrace his wife, family and other visitors, and has access to sunlight and exercise. But we found no “justice” in the Philadelphia D.A.’s decision last December to stop seeking a death sentence. As the Partisan Defense Committee wrote: “While it is welcome that Mumia will no longer be under the threat of state execution, it is an abomination that this innocent man, who has already spent 30 years entombed, is condemned to a living death in prison.... Trade unionists, opponents of the racist death penalty and fighters for black rights must continue the fight to *free Mumia*” (see WV No. 993, 6 January).

Our fight for Mumia and to abolish the racist death penalty is rooted in the program of the class struggle, looking to mobilize the social power of the workers both in the U.S. and internationally. This faces many obstacles, not least the pro-capitalist labor bureaucrats who overwhelmingly refuse to call their members into action to defend their economic interests, much less in defense of a black political prisoner.

The Warden, the D.A. and “Law and Order” Liberals

In 1972, the California Supreme Court struck down the death penalty as a violation of the state’s constitution. Later that year, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the death penalty was “wanton” and “freakish,” leading to a moratorium on its application.



Getty
Protest outside San Quentin moments before December 2005 execution of Tookie Williams (inset).

Those decisions reflected the tumultuous social struggles of the time, from the civil rights movement of the 1950s-60s to the mass protests against U.S. imperialism’s dirty war against the Vietnamese workers and peasants. The struggles on the streets and campuses reached into the prisons and even among U.S. troops in Vietnam, intersecting growing discontent in sections of the working class. After these struggles had subsided or were co-opted or smashed, the U.S. Supreme Court reinstated the death penalty in 1976.

Today, opposition among sections of the bourgeoisie to the death penalty and prison overcrowding is at bottom driven by considerations of expediency, as seen in arguments that the current system of mass incarceration and death costs too much money and is “broken.” On the other side are those who believe that only the most monstrous measures of repression can keep the working class and oppressed cowed in the face of intensifying exploitation and mounting misery.

The main spokesman for the SAFE Act is Jeanne Woodford, a former San Quentin warden who oversaw four executions and was appointed Director of the Department of Corrections under Republican governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. Another prominent supporter is former L.A. County District Attorney Gil Garcetti, a Democrat who was a key actor in the 27-year campaign of frame-up, cover-up and imprisonment of renowned Black Panther Geronimo ji Jaga (Pratt). Now, Garcetti ghoulishly complains that California’s death pen-



WV Photo
Protest outside Philadelphia court hearing for Mumia Abu-Jamal, November 2010.

alty is “totally ineffective” because “most inmates are going to die of natural causes, not executions” (AP, 24 April).

Other endorsers include the two right-wing Republicans, Don Heller and Ron Briggs, who authored the 1978 California proposition called the “Death Penalty Act,” which expanded the categories and circumstances of crimes punishable by death or life without parole. For them, the state’s kill rate hasn’t been high enough. Briggs wrote in a *Los Angeles Times* (12 February) op-ed piece: “Never did we envision a multibillion-dollar industry that packs murderers onto death row for decades of extremely expensive incarceration. We thought we would empty death row, not triple its population.”

Joining this chorus are the liberal anti-

death penalty advocates of the American Civil Liberties Union, whose Northern California chapter wrote:

“The facts prove that life in prison without the possibility of parole (LWOP) is swift, severe, and certain punishment. The reality is that people sentenced to LWOP have been condemned to die in prison and that’s what happens: They die in prison of natural causes, just like the majority of people sentenced to death. The differences: Sentencing people to death by execution is three times more expensive than sentencing them to die in prison.”
—“The Hidden Death Tax,”
www.aclunc.org

Given the notorious overcrowding and denial of medical care that forced California prisons into federal court receivership, death by disease, aging and (not mentioned) suicide would clearly be a “bargain” by the calculus of these law-and-order liberals! Similarly, the “big savings” of \$100-plus million a year that might be accrued from overturning the death penalty is a drop in the bucket compared to the **\$8.9 billion** the state government spends to maintain its prison hellholes. But such doesn’t feature in the account books of those promoting life without parole as a thrifty alternative to death.

In its article “A Closer Look at SAFE California” (*Socialist Worker*, 24 May), the International Socialist Organization (ISO) points to the case of Stanley Tookie Williams, who was legally lynched at San Quentin in 2005 with the executioners digging into his arms for 20 minutes to inject their cocktail of death. Accepting the sick bourgeois lie that the prisons are

meant for “rehabilitation,” the ISO points to Williams’ work behind bars for gang prevention as having “illustrated how people can change, undermining the claim that the death penalty is reserved for those beyond redemption”! They continue by complaining that “SAFE Act proponents unfortunately have chosen a strategy that negates this potential, instead highlighting life without the possibility of parole.” To promote the notion of “redemption” in prison is to buy into the entire notion of crime and punishment, a barbaric relic of ancient religious codes asserting that one can be “saved” through repentance.

An article titled “Sophie’s Choice 2012: Death Penalty vs. LWOP” by Chris Kinder, a leading spokesman for the Labor Action Committee to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal (LACMAJ), laments: “There’s nothing in the initiative about racism in the system, or why black death-row convicts outnumber whites way out of proportion to population.... Nor does it address why cops routinely get away with murdering people of color in this [sic] streets, or why cops and courts systematically frame up who they want to get without regard to the truth.” While Kinder ends by declaring that “the system itself needs to be overturned,” only someone with an abiding belief in the inherent justice of this system would expect that the cabal of former jailers and prosecutors who authored the SAFE Act would ever address the racial and class bias that is at the core of capitalist justice in this country.

For years, such touching faith in the capitalist state led the reformist left to demand a new trial for Mumia Abu-Jamal from the very courts that framed him up and sentenced him to death for his outspoken defiance of their racist injustice system. The reformists’ purpose was to “broaden the movement” by appealing to law-and-order liberals like the ACLU and others who promote “life” in prison without the possibility of parole.

As revolutionary Marxists, we do not seek to advise the bourgeoisie on the more “humane” or “just” administration of its increasingly decrepit and depraved rule. Whether it is the death penalty, life in prison without parole or imprisonment in general, we oppose the entire machinery of violence that is the capitalist state.

We will vote for Proposition 34. But we understand that ending the death penalty would not fundamentally change the violently racist and oppressive nature of capitalist class rule. It would not free the innocent, like Mumia, languishing in America’s dungeons or spare the victims of racist police executions on the streets. Nor would it alter the slower death of the growing ranks of the poor, jobless and homeless, or the agony of the sick who lack medical care. Our purpose is the fight to forge the nucleus of the revolutionary workers party that will lead the proletariat in overthrowing this system through socialist revolution. When those who labor rule, the death penalty will be abolished for good and the capitalists’ prisons smashed as initial steps in the emancipation of all the exploited and oppressed. ■

Just Out!

BC **Partisan Defense Committee**

CLASS-STRUGGLE DEFENSE NOTES

Number 37 50c ©2012 Summer 2012

Drive to Execute Mumia Halted

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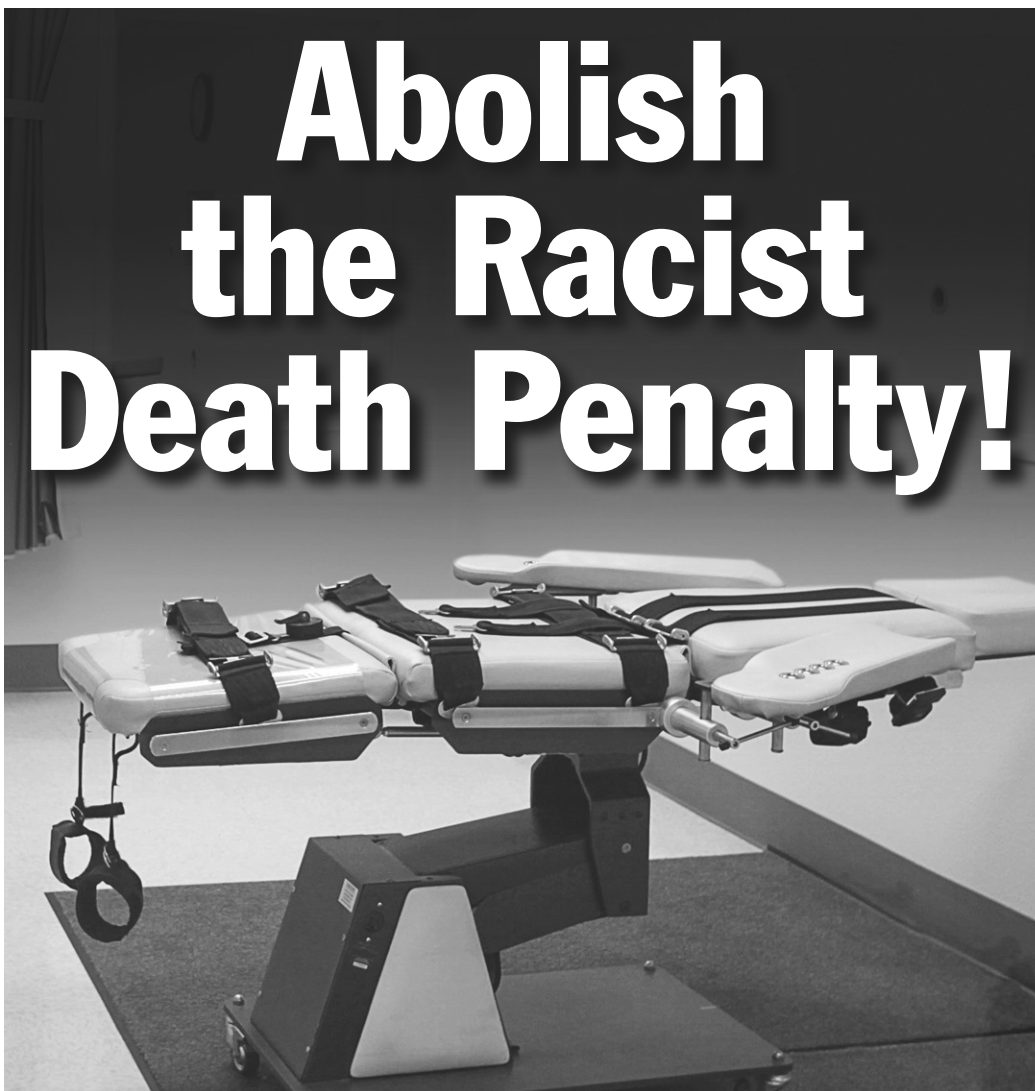
WORKERS VANGUARD

“Tough on Crime” Anti-Death Penalty Measure

Vote Yes on California Prop 34!

In a country that leads the world in the number of people behind bars, disproportionately black, the endurance of the death penalty is rooted in the foundation of American capitalism, which was built on the scarred backs of black slaves. Capital punishment is the supreme declaration of state authority and the monopoly of violence in the hands of this country’s racist capitalist rulers. The so-called “Golden State” of California leads the nation in death row inmates, with close to one-quarter of the more than 3,170 men and women condemned to die. Of the 729 death row prisoners, overwhelmingly concentrated at San Quentin, 14 have exhausted all appeals. The only thing standing between them and the death chamber are court-directed negotiations over which combination of deadly chemicals to inject in their veins to avoid the charge of “cruel and unusual punishment.”

Proposition 34 (the SAFE California Act), which is on the ballot in the November elections, calls to repeal the state’s death penalty and replace it with life without parole. As Marxists, we oppose the death penalty on principle—for the guilty as well as the innocent. We do not accord the state the right to determine who lives and who dies, and welcome any measure against the death penalty or curtailing the reach of the state’s killing machine. While the measure is couched as a means of making the system of capitalist repression more effective and efficient, including by redirecting money to police departments, what is primary for us in calling for a “yes” vote is that the SAFE Act is a referendum on state-sanctioned murder.



Death chamber at San Quentin.

The very name ascribed to this ballot initiative by its sponsors, the “Savings, Accountability and Full Enforcement for California Act,” expresses the cruel calculus of capitalist “justice,” weighing the costs of legal murder against the expense of relegating prisoners to a living death on what class-war political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal so aptly calls “life row.” Arguing that “California’s death penalty is an empty promise,” the act appeals for a more efficient and effective punishment. Whip-

ping up the spectre of depraved criminals on the loose, the SAFE Act declares: “Killers and rapists walk our streets free and threaten our safety, while we spend hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars on a select few who are already behind bars forever on death row.... By replacing the death penalty with life in prison without the possibility of parole, we would save the state \$1 billion in five years without releasing a single prisoner.” One hundred million dollars of these “savings” is pledged

to the cops, courts and prosecutors.

Yet despite all of these sops to the forces of “law and order,” the California District Attorneys Association, the State Sheriffs’ Association and a number of other police agencies are literally screaming murder. Their “Vote No on Prop 34” Web site promotes speeding up the state’s killing machine. It proposes streamlining the appeals process to get rid of “delay tactics” and instituting a one-drug protocol of death, pointing to Ohio, where 14 death row prisoners have been killed by this method since 2009. Declaring that life without parole “will cost taxpayers more in healthcare costs” for aging inmates, these opponents of the SAFE Act argue that savings can be made by no longer housing death row prisoners in single cells. Reveling in barbarism, their “Mend It, Don’t End It” statement concludes with the bloodthirsty complaint that “cop killers, baby killers and serial killers who rightfully received the death penalty do not deserve the benefits they have at San Quentin.”

In our opposition to the death penalty, we are equally committed to the abolition of life without parole, the prisons and all the barbaric institutions of the capitalist state. Our purpose is to arm the working class with the understanding that the cops, courts, prisons and military make up the apparatus for the violent repression of the working class and the oppressed in defense of the power and profits of the capitalist rulers. It will take nothing short of proletarian socialist revolution to sweep this state away.

Voices from Death Row

Some of the condemned men on San Quentin’s death row have also raised their opposition to the SAFE Act. They have spoken out against being entombed for life in prison with their appeals cut off and forced to be unpaid slave laborers as restitution for their alleged crimes. Among

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FBI Raids Target Northwest Activists

Young Spartacus

At daybreak on July 25, FBI and Joint Terrorism Task Force agents armed with assault rifles raided the homes of three anarchists in Portland, Oregon. During this coordinated raid, Feds broke down doors and stormed in behind a volley of flash grenades while a helicopter circled overhead.

Dennison Williams was rousted out of bed while pleading for his life and then placed in a chair while handcuffed and half-naked. Over a dozen FBI agents ransacked his apartment and seized his cell-phone, laptop and eleven items of black clothing as “evidence.” He was slapped with a subpoena to appear before a federal grand jury in Seattle. At least four others were subpoenaed, including Leah-Lynn Plante of Portland and Matt Duran of Olympia. Duran has since been imprisoned for refusing to testify. ***Free Duran now!*** Stop the grand jury inquisition and

return all the belongings that were seized!

Revealing the real political motive behind the raids, the sealed search warrant shown to Williams stated that the FBI was to seize “anti-government or anarchist literature or material.” SWAT raids that targeted Occupy Seattle activists in Washington weeks earlier were also searching for “anarchist materials.” Williams’ warrant justified confiscating anarchist paraphernalia, supposedly used in the “Destruction of government property” and “Conspiracy to travel interstate with intent to riot.”

At an August 1 press conference held the day before the first hearing, Williams read aloud from a statement by Plante and himself, in which they courageously vowed not to testify before the grand jury. He said, “This grand jury is a tool of political repression. It is attempting to turn individuals against each other by coercing those subpoenaed to testify against their communities.”

On September 13, the court held Duran in contempt for refusing to testify and



KGW News

July 25 FBI raid on Portland home of activist Dennison Williams.

shipped him off to SeaTac federal prison in Seattle. According to a September 17 update on saynothing.info (a Web site run by supporters of the Northwest activists), Duran is being held in solitary confinement. Meanwhile, Plante was released and subpoenaed yet again. She and the other activists could face Duran’s fate if they continue to refuse to testify.

It is vitally necessary to defend these activists, who have been targeted for

their political views. If the capitalist state can raid the homes of these young leftists, rifles in hand, and drag them before a witchhunting grand jury—simply for supposedly reading Bakunin and having a penchant for wearing black—they can do it to anyone. ***An injury to one is an injury to all!***

An August 2012 “Grand Jury Resistance in the Pacific Northwest” statement signed

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