

After Newtown Massacre

Bourgeois Hypocrisy and Gun Control Schemes

Coming on the heels of the July 2012 killing of 12 moviegoers in Aurora, Colorado, the slaughter at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, by a deranged individual last month has predictably led to renewed calls for a further clampdown on gun ownership in the U.S. With President Obama intoning that there “can’t be an excuse for inaction,” the *New York Times* (19 December) called to restore and strengthen the ban on assault weapons that expired in 2004. On January 3, the first day of the new Congress, ten gun control bills were introduced. The measures would ban possession or transfer of high-capacity ammunition magazines and mandate a national database of those prohibited from buying firearms as well as background checks on firearms transactions at gun shows, among other things.

Just as reactionary “law and order” forces point to particularly heinous murders in pushing for greater application of the barbaric, racist death penalty, so do bourgeois liberals jump on killing sprees like those at Virginia Tech and now Newtown to urge ever-tighter restrictions or outright bans on gun ownership. The result in all these cases is that the population’s basic rights are trampled on and the capitalist state further consolidates and expands its murderous repressive powers.

Only sociopaths would deny the horror that took place in Newtown. But what is at stake now is a renewed drive by the capitalist state to enforce a monopoly of violence in its hands by further eviscerating the right to bear arms, which is codified in the Second Amendment to the Constitution. Marxists oppose gun control laws and uphold the right to armed self-defense, a necessity for the working class, black people, other minorities and the populace as a whole.

A *New York Times* (17 December) editorial titled “Reason to Hope After the Newtown Rampage” offered up the population as more than willing to voluntarily surrender its rights, proclaiming: “Americans are ready to shoulder burdens—as we did after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks by accepting increased security when we travel and military actions we might previously have avoided.” That’s what they say. President Obama continued his drive to “increase security” on January 3 by signing the latest National Defense Authorization Act—the annual military appropriations bill—which allows the indefinite detention of U.S. citizens.

The right to bear arms was born of the American Revolution and its predecessor in England the previous century. Throughout the bourgeois revolutions in Europe and North America from the 17th through the mid 19th centuries, the principle of arming the people, includ-



Getty

At December 16 memorial service for victims of Newtown massacre, Obama seizes opportunity to declare that there is no “excuse for inaction” on gun control.

ing the concept of the people’s militia, was seen as constituting a vital defense against tyranny. But as we noted in “The Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution” (see page 8): “With the appearance of the proletariat as an independent actor on the scene, ‘the armed people’ became archaic as the population was polarized along class lines.”

Despotic regimes prefer to rule over defenseless subjects; an armed people can fight back. For black people, armed self-defense and other basic rights were won with the Civil War that smashed slavery—and soon thereafter came under attack. In the struggle to build and defend unions, from the West Virginia and Kentucky coalfields to the nation’s docks and trucking hubs, workers armed themselves against strikebreaking scabs and the police, military and private security outfits. Following World War II and the Korean War, black vets, arms in hand,

formed the foot soldiers for the early struggles against Jim Crow segregation in the South.

The people who decide who will be given the privilege to exercise the right to bear arms happen to be the greatest mass murderers the world has seen—the U.S. capitalist class. Even as Obama declared in Newtown that “these tragedies must end,” his military and spy apparatus was preparing the next round of drone attacks in Pakistan and Yemen. In a commentary titled “Beyond Newtown,” class-war prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal observed: “Across America, cities from coast to coast and in the Midwest experience small, silent, almost invisible massacres where dozens of parents lose their children; wives lose their husbands; and some husbands lose their wives. I speak of the plague of police violence against blacks in New York, in Chicago, in Oakland and beyond.”

For some time, class and other social

struggle in this country has been in a trough. Nevertheless, there is enormous social discontent that prepares the ground for renewed struggle. Americans have guns and want to keep them. This is a sociological fact of life, and will be a useful fact when the mass of the population feels immediately and overtly threatened by a tyrannical government. For revolutionary Marxists, what is crucial is that the working class emerge as the champion of all those under the heel of the capitalist rulers.

The Capitalist State: Bearing Arms Against the People

Sheer hypocrisy has always marked calls for gun control emanating from the bourgeoisie. The now-deceased head of the Sulzberger clan, which owns the *New York Times* and is among the leading exponents of gun control for the masses, was known for keeping a gun in his desk to deal with potential hostile intruders. NYC mayor Michael Bloomberg certainly has no reason to fear state seizure of weapons: he has an around-the-clock personal police detail at his disposal.

Much fun has been made of recent pronouncements by the rather ossified National Rifle Association (NRA), particularly the speech by its president in which he raised the reactionary call to place armed security guards in all schools. Pupils in some one-third of the country’s public schools are already subject to searches and harassment by armed security guards and even cops, particularly in the ghettos and barrios. We would note that the NRA is currently providing the useful service of training teachers in

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AP



Corbis

Gun control means trigger-happy cops have monopoly on arms. Left: Police search vehicles for guns at funeral in black South Side Chicago, December 4. Right: Los Angeles mayor Antonio Villaraigosa with cops at press conference for gun buyback program, December 27.



**Civil War, Not Compromise,
Smashed Slavery**

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San Francisco Cop Vendetta Against Protesters

Defend the ACAC 19! Drop All Charges Now!

OAKLAND—One of the defense cases highlighted at last month’s benefit for the annual Partisan Defense Committee Holiday Appeal for class-war prisoners was that of the ACAC 19. These 19 protesters were arrested on October 6 when San Francisco cops brutally attacked a march of nearly 200, part of a series of “Anti-Colonial, Anti-Capitalist” (ACAC) events. The march was called to protest the racist treatment of native peoples, the military’s Fleet Week and the war in Afghanistan. Videos show dozens of cops suddenly charging the march before it got more than a few blocks, beating demonstrators to the pavement and inflicting injuries that included a broken nose, deep facial cuts requiring stitches and multiple bruises. Initially hit with felony charges, the ACAC 19 now face vindictive prosecution for a range of trumped-up misdemeanor charges. ***Drop all the charges now!***

One of the organizers of the October 6 demonstration singled out for special attention by the cops is Robbie Donohoe, a member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 6 in San Francisco. Speaking at the Oakland Holiday Appeal, brother Donohoe graphically described the police assault:

“I turned and looked and I saw a baton hit my wife across the back, and I saw her back arch. And I was compelled—instead of trying to get to safety, I ran

over and sort of flanked her with my body, and on the way there faced a line of batons coming down on me. And they eventually knocked us both over and continued to beat us both with batons as I lay on top of her. They kicked me off of her. Three officers were on my back. One of them pulled my head to the side so that I could see her lying next to me as another officer was punching her in the back of the head.”

On November 13, the SF district attorney subpoenaed Twitter account information of two protesters, ominously claiming “a conspiracy or agreement to stage a riot.” In a December 22 protest letter to the D.A., the PDC declared: “Occurring in the context of a nationwide increase in government surveillance and repression of leftist and labor activists, the District Attorney’s demand that Twitter turn over protesters’ account records is a direct threat to the right to political dissent, including the elementary rights of free speech and assembly.” ***Stop SFPD surveillance and harassment of the ACAC 19!***

The Obama administration has systematically escalated the attacks on democratic rights unleashed by his Republican predecessor under the so-called “war on terror.” As the Spartacist League and PDC have always warned, although its initial targets were Arabs and Muslims, the “war on terror” has put in place an arsenal of repressive measures that would



Steve Rhodes

Cops descend on “Anti-Colonial, Anti-Capitalist” protesters in San Francisco, October 6.

also be used against leftists, trade unionists and working people. Such attacks have become increasingly frequent and widespread.

In the Midwest, 23 leftists and trade unionists subpoenaed by a witchhunting federal grand jury in Chicago following 2010 FBI raids on their homes are still under investigation for supposed “material support to terrorism.” The “NATO 5,” arrested last year on trumped-up “terror plot” charges around the protests against NATO war criminals in Chicago, remain in jail and face up to 40 years if convicted. Four Occupy Cleveland supporters were sentenced in November to prison terms ranging from six to eleven and a half years for a “plot” concocted by an FBI informant. Three Portland activists are locked away in prison, possibly until 2014, for courageously refusing to testify before a federal grand jury in Seattle investigating a May Day demonstration last year.

Documents obtained last month by the Partnership for Civil Justice Fund reveal that the FBI, in coordination with the New York Stock Exchange, began tracking activists involved with planning

Occupy Wall Street a month before the occupation of Zuccotti Park in Manhattan. In cities across the country, the Feds along with local and state police monitored the Occupy movement as a potential terrorist threat.

Immediately after the arrests of the ACAC 19, the police and capitalist media launched a smear campaign, painting the demonstrators as “members of a criminal street gang, Black Blok.” An SFPD spokesman circulated the baseless claim that the ACAC demonstrators were the same “anarchist group” that had “vandalized” the Mission District police station in a protest against the shooting of a young Latino man by plainclothes gang squad cops weeks earlier. Gang squad cops were among those who attacked the ACAC march, and arrestees were stripped and inspected for “gang tattoos.” This gang squad is the same unit that uses the “gang affiliation” label as carte blanche to terrorize black and Latino youth in San Francisco, including gunning them down in the streets.

Clearly intending to provoke further retaliation against the ACAC 19, the police

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TROTSKY

For the Communism of Lenin, Liebknecht and Luxemburg!

Upholding communist tradition, this month we honor Bolshevik leader V.I. Lenin, who died in January 1924, and Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, founding leaders of the German Communist Party who were assassinated in January 1919. The military reactionaries who murdered Liebknecht and Luxemburg were acting under the auspices of the government led by the Social Democratic

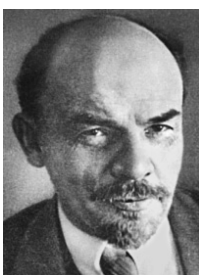
Party, which had already definitively betrayed the proletariat by supporting German imperialism in World War I. We publish below excerpts from Luxemburg’s tribute to the Russian Revolution and its Bolshevik leadership.

Only a party which knows how to lead, that is, to advance things, wins support in stormy times. The determination with which, at the decisive moment, Lenin and his comrades offered the only solution which could advance things (“all power in the hands of the proletariat and peasantry”), transformed them almost overnight from a persecuted, slandered, outlawed minority whose leader had to hide like Marat in cellars, into the absolute master of the situation.

Moreover, the Bolsheviks immediately set as the aim of this seizure of power a complete, far-reaching revolutionary program: not the safeguarding of bourgeois democracy, but a dictatorship of the proletariat for the purpose of realizing socialism. Thereby they won for themselves the imperishable historic distinction of having for the first time proclaimed the final aim of socialism as the direct program of practical politics.

Whatever a party could offer of courage, revolutionary far-sightedness and consistency in an historic hour, Lenin, Trotsky and the other comrades have given in good measure. All the revolutionary honor and capacity which western Social-Democracy lacked was represented by the Bolsheviks. Their October uprising was not only the actual salvation of the Russian Revolution; it was also the salvation of the honor of international socialism.

—Rosa Luxemburg, “The Russian Revolution” (September 1918)



LENIN

WORKERS VANGUARD

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On Marx, Maximilian and Mexico

The following letter was addressed to Jacob Zorn regarding an article based on his forum presentation, “Mexican-American War: Prelude to American Civil War” (WV Nos. 933 and 934, 27 March and 10 April 2009), which is reprinted in the most recent issue of Black History and the Class Struggle (July 2012).

10 August 2012

I followed closely your Mexican-American War article in “Black History and the Class Struggle, No. 22.” I did so because I am a Texan and a former newspaper correspondent in Mexico. I was anxious to know what SL had to say: the group does impressive historical research.

For years I have argued that the Texas revolution was a pro-slavery uprising, and also that U.S. imperialism dates to the Mexican war. Your article convinced me that maybe the U.S. wasn’t ready for imperialism at the time.

However, I have long believed that Marx sided with Maximilian’s invasion of Mexico, writing words to the effect

that it would “drag Mexico into the modern world.” I read that many years ago in a Mexican publication. But you didn’t mention that.

I thought it important since Maximilian’s invasion postdates 1854, the date you cite as that of Marx’s last defense of the Mexican War. So I looked in my “Collected Works” set—and found nothing of the kind.

Either I was misled about Marx’s view of Maximilian or you overlooked something. Can you tell me which it was? If I’m in error, I don’t want to continue.

If you are familiar with any sources on Marx/Maximilian/Juarez, I’d also like to know.

Yours,
D.R.

WV replies:

Everything we have read by Karl Marx and/or Friedrich Engels opposes the French incursion into Mexico, which set up the

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WORKERS VANGUARD

Playing by the Bosses' Laws—A Losing Game

Heading into the last week of December, the nearly 15,000 members of the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) on the East Coast were poised to wage their first Maine-to-Texas strike in 35 years. On the West Coast, some 3,000 members of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) in the Pacific Northwest locals voted down by a resounding 93.8 percent the "last, best and final" contract offer by grain export companies. Amid the union-busting devastation that has reduced industrial unions in this country to a mere shadow of their former strength, the two longshore unions are among the few remaining bastions of the power of organized labor.

A battle that brought both unions out on strike could have galvanized workers across the U.S. against the wholesale war on their jobs, wages, working conditions and very means of survival. But this potential has for now, once again, been squandered by the labor misleaders' allegiance to the Democratic Party and prostration before the anti-labor laws and strike-breaking forces of the bosses and their government.

Two days before the December 30 strike deadline for the ILA, a federal mediator announced that the union tops and the employers' United States Maritime Alliance (USMX) had agreed to extend the contract until January 28 (since extended to February 6). On the West Coast, the ILWU International submitted to the grain companies' ultimatum that longshoremen work under the terms of the contract that they had just overwhelmingly rejected or be replaced by scab labor. While announcing that they would be "reviewing" the companies' latest dictates, the ILWU bureaucrats lamented that the bosses "have not bargained in good faith."

ILWU Coast Committeeman and co-chair of its grain negotiating team, Leal Sundet, had earlier described the union's counteroffer as one that "equalizes the playing field on all points that matter." Sundet went on to complain in protectionist terms that "foreign-based grain merchants intend to risk the U.S. export market to try to break the union." Far from putting U.S. grain exports at risk, increasing the rate of exploitation of labor (and hence profits) by trying to break the back of the ILWU is in the interests of all the conglomerates—only some of them foreign-based—that control the international grain trade. The grain goliaths who own the Northwest terminals are now literally making a killing, using drought conditions to drive up grain prices, threatening even greater starvation for peoples around the globe.

On the East Coast, the ILA leadership has similarly sung a patriotic tune, tying the workers' interests to those of American capitalism. This is the second time they have pulled the plug on possible strike action. The original contract deadline was September 30, which coincided then with the expiration of the ILWU's master grain agreement in the Pacific Northwest. Only two weeks earlier, the two unions had announced the formation of a Maritime Labor Alliance together with four other smaller unions with the purported purpose of having each other's backs. But higher loyalties prevailed, and in the words of ILA president Harold Daggett, he extended the contract "for the good of our Country and Our President." Indeed, and it wasn't different this time around.

Giant retailers like Walmart and others were breathing down Obama's neck, demanding that he invoke the Taft-Hartley slave labor law to stop the ILA from striking. But the president was saved the trouble by his allies in the labor bureauc-

Longshore Unions Under the Gun



Portland, Oregon, October 22: Ship at grain terminal operated by one of the companies forcing longshoremen to work under terms of contract that ILWU membership overwhelmingly rejected.

racy lest his intervention damage their lie that the Democrats, who no less than the Republicans represent the capitalists' interests, are the "friends of labor." As reported in the *Wall Street Journal* online (28 December): "The contract extension is a relief for the White House, now negotiating with Congress about 2013 income tax rates and federal spending and borrowing limits. A ports strike could have loaded new worries on an already fragile economic recovery." That is, the profits of the shipping companies and retail giants were rescued while the working class and poor face being pushed off the "fiscal cliff" into further misery and destitution.

The Bosses' Rule Book

The federal mediator heralded the agreement "in principle" between the ILA and USMX over container royalties. Beginning in the 1960s, the ILA leadership accepted a deal in which jobs were sacrificed in exchange for royalty payments based on container cargo tonnage. Having decimated the workforce (which went from 35,000 in the 1960s to 3,500 today at the Port of New York and New Jersey alone), the shipping outfits are out to ultimately eliminate this compensation. Yet to be resolved are USMX's demands for sweeping changes in work rules and manning scales.

On the West Coast, the contract being imposed by the grain exporters is a frontal assault on union work rules and safety conditions, gains which were won over decades in the struggles and at the cost of the very lives of longshoremen in

this dangerous industry. As part of this package, the bosses are also aiming to undermine the union hiring hall—the key gain of the 1934 West Coast longshore strike that forged the union—by allowing the companies to approve which ILWU members can be dispatched to work in their terminals. These conditions are modeled on the deal made with the Export Grain Terminal (EGT) consortium in Longview, Washington, last year.

Longshore workers and their allies fought a bitter battle with EGT, whose aim was to drive the ILWU out of its new, high-tech terminal in Longview and replace it with scab labor. They didn't succeed in this. But as we wrote in "Grain Export Bosses Gunning for ILWU" (WV No. 1010, 12 October 2012): "In preserving jobs it has held for over 80 years in Longview and its coastwide organization, the ILWU lived to fight another day. But fight it must, or the EGT contract will become the standard for the ILWU's bulk grain handling work in the region." But rather than preparing the ranks and their allies for battle, to date the only "forces" the ILWU International has called out are the union's lawyers.

Playing an elaborate game of legal machinations, they are trying to wield to the union's advantage the very anti-labor laws and agencies, like the NLRB, which came down with strikebreaking injunctions and lawsuits against the union in Longview. The union membership has overwhelmingly been left in the dark and is understandably fearful of what potentially lies in wait. Meanwhile, the grain

bosses were mobilizing their forces for all-out war against the ILWU.

An advance team of professional strikebreakers from the Delaware-based J.R. Gettier and Associates has been on the scene for months. As the deadline for the union vote on the contract drew near, hotel rooms in the area were filled with scabs. On the Willamette River, three tugboats manned by strikebreakers and protected by armed guards were moored near the Portland ILWU Local 8 union hall. Their purpose was to ensure that grain ships were taken in and out of the docks. Behind them, the big guns of the capitalist state were mobilized by the Obama administration, with the Coast Guard deployed to create "safety buffer zones" to prevent the union from stopping ships carrying scab grain. While the ILA was not facing anywhere near such a strikebreaking armada, according to the industry mouthpiece, the *Journal of Commerce* (28 December), USMX had been discussing countering a strike, which the union had announced would cover only commercial container shipping, with a lock-out of all ILA members including auto and breakbulk work as well.

Better to Fight on Your Feet Than Die on Your Knees

There is no question of the stakes faced by the longshore unions, particularly now the ILWU. But one thing is for sure: playing by the bosses' laws is a losing game. The whole reason these laws exist is to outlaw labor from mobilizing its social power based on its collective strength to stop the flow of goods and shut down production. But this truth is obfuscated by the bureaucrats. Instead, they have whipped up fear that if the union goes on strike, the law would permit the companies to permanently hire the scabs. By these lights, it is better to accept a company lockout that supposedly precludes such a union-busting outcome.

It's not the bosses' laws, but the relative strength and determination of the opposing forces that decide who wins and who loses in any strike, as in any conflict. By working the rejected contract terms, the ILWU is creating "facts on the ground" that will be harder to reverse.

As we wrote some 30 years ago in the wake of the union-busting juggernaut that was launched with the 1981 destruction of the PATCO air traffic controllers union:

"The future of the unions is on the line. And while the capitalists are grabbing every gun in their closet, the union bureaucracy is handcuffing the workers with the bosses' laws.... No decisive gain

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Above: ILWUers and supporters mass on tracks in Vancouver, Washington to stop train bound for EGT terminal at Port of Longview, 7 September 2011. Right: Striking clerical workers at Port of Long Beach, November 28.

Murray/LA Daily News



Civil War, Not Compromise, Smashed Slavery

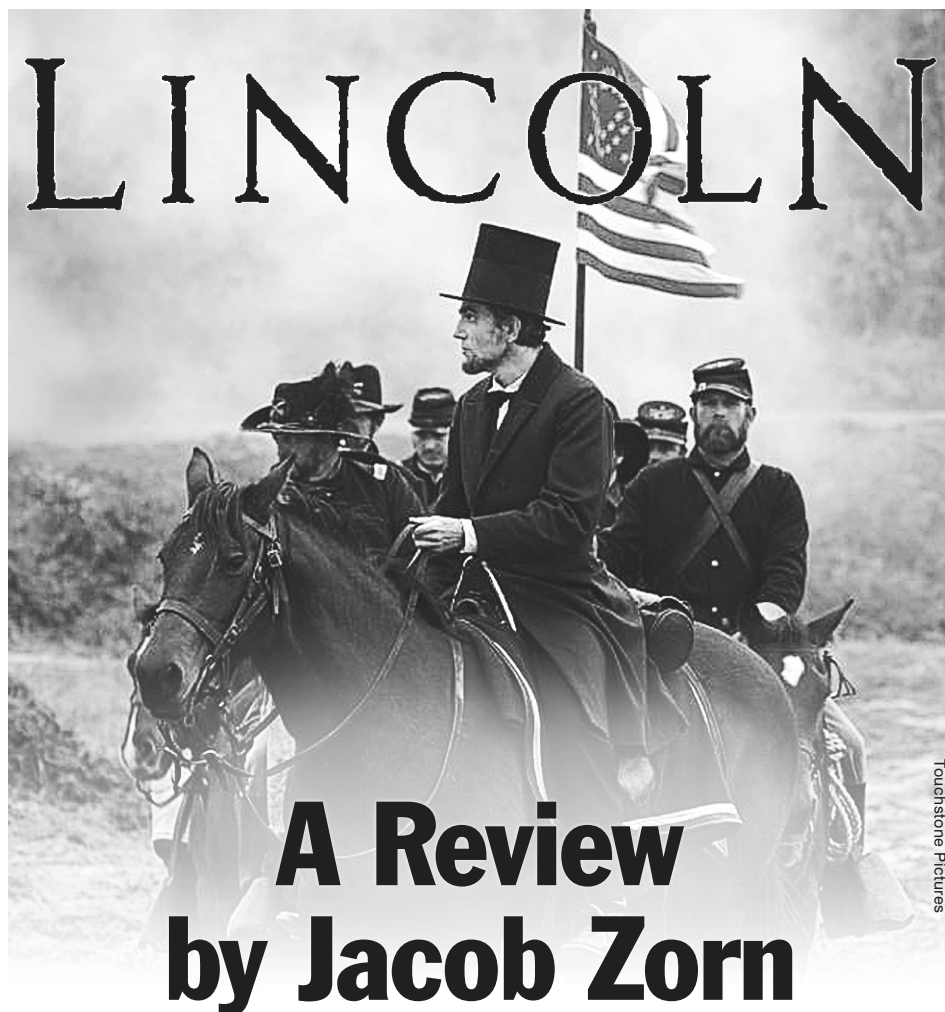
Lincoln—Steven Spielberg’s new movie based on a screenplay by Tony Kushner—begins with a battle scene that highlights the bravery of black soldiers, some 200,000 of whom fought in the Civil War. Two of them are seen talking to President Lincoln and criticizing the Union Army’s racist policies, paying blacks less than whites and preventing them from advancing to officers. One of the soldiers wonders whether blacks will have the vote in a hundred years. This sequence hints at the crucial role played by black soldiers in the armed struggle that broke the slave power in the South, but the film then entirely switches gears.

The movie’s plot reduces the abolition of slavery to so many parliamentary maneuvers by the wise and clever Lincoln to get the House of Representatives in early 1865 to pass the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which abolished slavery. In the process, it distorts the significance of the Amendment and the role of the abolitionists, who were the main force, then and for decades before, pushing for an end to slavery.

To its credit, *Lincoln* is forthright that the Civil War was about slavery and does depict Lincoln, with all his contradictions and strengths, as devoted to not just winning the war but smashing the Southern slavocracy. The movie is based in part on a chapter in Doris Kearns Goodwin’s *Team of Rivals, The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* (2005). While other historians—particularly James McPherson, who wrote the classic *Battle Cry of Freedom* (1988), and Eric Foner—present a deeper understanding of the social and political forces at work in the Civil War, Goodwin’s book underscores Lincoln’s political genius and canny leadership in leading the North to victory.

The opening scene is done in a manner to wrongly suggest that racial oppression is a relic of the past long since overcome. The not-too-thinly-disguised goal of the movie is to laud President Obama and to underline how he, supposedly like Lincoln, should seek “bipartisan” compromises with adversaries. By extension, his left critics are expected to give the president a break. When interviewed on NPR, Kushner gushed about what a great president Barack Obama is and what a “blessing” it was to see “the Obama years through a Lincoln lens.” Kushner then rhapsodized about the virtues of compromise and horse trading. This message was not lost on most of the bourgeois commentary on the film—as shown in the *L.A. Times* (28 November 2012) headline: “Gov. Jerry Brown Could Learn a Lesson From ‘Lincoln.’”

Lincoln is not without entertainment value, with its excellent acting by Daniel



Day-Lewis (as Lincoln) and Tommy Lee Jones (as Pennsylvania Republican Congressman and abolitionist Thaddeus Stevens). If the only problem of the movie was simply the narrow focus of its plot, it could be partly alleviated by watching it in conjunction with the superb movie *Glory*. An inspiring portrayal of the black soldiers in the Massachusetts 54th regiment, *Glory* gives a sense of what was required for Union victory in a way that *Lincoln* does not.

But the main weakness of *Lincoln* is that in trying to show the Lincoln years through the Obama lens the movie distorts history. Barack Obama is Commander-in-Chief of a capitalist system long into its imperialist epoch of decay. The Civil War was the last great progressive act of the American bourgeoisie. To further the consolidation of industrial capitalism, when the exploitation of free labor represented an historical advance, the North was compelled to destroy the system of chattel slavery in the South. Today racist U.S. imperialism continues to carry out what has been more than a century of pillage and war across the globe, brutally exploiting labor at home and abroad while qualitatively arresting wider social and economic development. The American capitalist rulers are the main enemy of the world’s working people and oppressed.

It will serve some good if *Lincoln* piques interest in the Civil War among its viewers. But it must be understood that the movie obscures the fact that only a social revolution could have uprooted slavery, smashing everything that stood in its way. By the same token, it will take a socialist revolution by the proletariat and its allies to eradicate capitalist wage slavery.

The Thirteenth Amendment

The Thirteenth Amendment, which had its origins in a petition campaign by anti-slavery women suffragettes in early 1864, states: “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.” The Thirteenth Amendment codified the end of slavery. Lincoln’s insistence that his generals fight to crush the opposing Confederate armies, and not his search for “bipartisanship,” paved the

way for the passage of the Amendment.

In July 1862, as slaves were fleeing Southern plantations and seeking freedom behind Union Army lines, Congress authorized the “confiscation”—i.e., emancipation—of Confederates’ slaves. In January 1863, Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which he had drafted the previous September. It declared that slaves in Confederate-controlled areas “shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free.” With the Proclamation, the war openly became a social revolution to emancipate an oppressed class, the chattel slaves, and destroy an oppressor class, the slave masters. The Emancipation Proclamation also sanctioned the recruitment of black soldiers, such as those Lincoln visited in the first scene of the movie.

The revolutionary aspect of the war was resisted by many Northerners, especially those in the Democratic Party, which was the party that ran the slave South. These Northern Democrats—the so-called “Copperheads”—were antiwar and opposed abolition. In the movie, their main spokesman is Democratic Congressman Fernando Wood, a former mayor of New York City. The clash of the two parties came to a head in the election of 1864, when the Democrats ran General George B. McClellan—whom Lincoln had fired as the commanding general of the Union Army because he refused to fight to win the war. Meanwhile, with Ulysses S. Grant in charge, the tide of the war had begun to decisively turn, and the Union Army was on an offensive through the South.

In the election, the Democrats’ slogan was “The Constitution As It Is and the Union As It Was.” In other words, end the war and keep slavery. McClellan was decisively defeated, winning only New Jersey and the border states Delaware and Kentucky. Lincoln’s victory signaled support for continuing the war until the slavocracy was defeated, with the Republicans gaining enough seats in Congress to guarantee passage of the Thirteenth Amendment.

From Lincoln’s perspective, the question was not whether slavery would be abolished, but whether the Amendment would be passed by the outgoing Congress in early 1865 or the incoming Congress later that spring. This consideration was not trivial. Rather than wait for the new Republican-dominated Congress to be convened, Lincoln wanted it to pass

with some Democratic support. To do so would be a show of national support for abolition and would undercut the Copperheads, making it impossible to conclude peace on any basis except abolition.

The movie shows in detail how Lincoln—mainly acting through his secretary of state, William H. Seward—manipulated, cajoled, flattered and bribed various Democrats to support the Amendment. In the end, he obtained enough support from “lame duck” Democratic Congressmen to get it passed. Rather than the culmination of the Civil War, the drama in Congress represented a sideshow—albeit an important one—to the abolition of slavery. Eric Foner stressed in a letter to the *New York Times* (26 November 2012) about the movie: “Even as the House debated, [Union general] Sherman’s army was marching into South Carolina, and slaves were sacking plantation homes and seizing land. Slavery died on the ground, not just in the White House and the House of Representatives.”

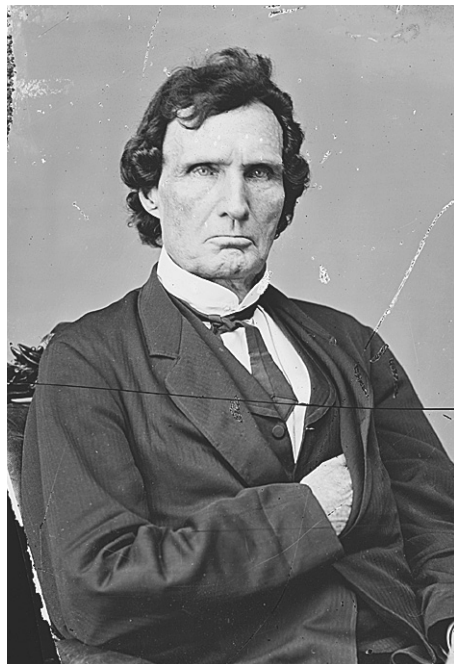
The viewer would not know from the movie that to become law, amendments must be ratified by three-fourths of the states. When this happened in December 1865, it was because the North had militarily defeated the Confederacy. Among the states that ratified the Thirteenth Amendment were several in the South. James McPherson captured the real lesson of its adoption when he wrote: “Without the Civil War there would have been no confiscation act, no Emancipation Proclamation, no Thirteenth Amendment (not to mention the Fourteenth and the Fifteenth), certainly no self-emancipation, and almost certainly no end of slavery for several more decades at least” (*Drawn with the Sword*, 1997).

The Abolitionists and Radical Republicans

Radical abolitionism, the first interracial political movement in the United States, had pointed out decades before the Civil War that the slave system could not be reformed but had to be destroyed. At the time, mainstream politicians either essentially ignored slavery (the Whig Party) or supported it (the Democratic Party). For their bravery, the abolitionists were attacked, denounced and belittled.

The more farsighted elements of the capitalist class in the North eventually coalesced into the Republican Party. At the time of the 1860 presidential election, the Republican Party was not an abolitionist party, and Lincoln, its candidate, wanted only to limit slavery from expanding into the West. But both the slavocracy and Republicans understood that if slavery were prevented from expanding, it could not survive, in large part because its agricultural methods demanded ever more virgin soil. Lincoln’s victory prompted the Southern states to secede, provoking the Civil War. From its outset, the abolitionists understood that slavery was the central issue. Former slave and abolitionist leader Frederick Douglass insisted that it was futile to “separate the freedom of the slave from the victory of the government.” He declared: “War for the destruction of liberty must be met with war for the destruction of slavery.”

This was underlined by Karl Marx, who from London agitated among British workers in support of the North. In “The Civil War in the United States” (October 1861), Marx stressed: “The present struggle between the South and North is, therefore, nothing but a struggle between two social systems, the system of slavery and the system of free labour. The struggle has broken out because the two systems can no longer live peacefully side by side on the North American continent. It can only be ended by the victory of



Library of Congress

Radical abolitionist Thaddeus Stevens

one system or the other.” Criticizing Lincoln’s early wavering on emancipation, Marx declared, “Events themselves drive to the promulgation of the decisive slogan—*emancipation of the slaves*.”

In the early stages of the war, Lincoln was fearful of the reaction of the four pro-Union slave border states as well as the Copperheads. The abolitionists and Radicals pushed Lincoln to grasp the need to smash slavery in order to win the war. Thaddeus Stevens declared: “It is plain that nothing approaching the present policy will subdue the rebels.”

In our article “Honor Abraham Lincoln!” (WV No. 938, 5 June 2009), which elaborates on the evolution of his views on race over the course of the Civil War, we stated:

“The American Civil War was a bourgeois revolution, and Lincoln was both bourgeois and revolutionary at the same time—with all the contradictions this implies.... Borrowing from today’s terminology, one could argue that Lincoln began as a reformist, believing that the reactionary social system in the South could be pressured into change and that the institution of slavery would eventually wither on the vine. But he underwent a radical shift when bloody experience in the crucible of war—combined with the mass flight of the slaves to the Union lines—taught him that the nation could be preserved only by means of social revolution.”

It is hard to say to whom the movie does more injustice, Lincoln or the abolitionists. Lincoln is turned into some Obama-style centrist, and the abolitionists into well-meaning people who couldn’t get the job done. Kushner in his interview with NPR condemned “impatience on the part of very good, very progressive people” as one of the main obstacles Obama faces today. In other words, like Obama, Lincoln’s virtue was that he knew that the way to get what is important is to give as well as take.

One of the most egregious aspects of the film is the lack of even a mention of Frederick Douglass, a powerful advocate for abolition and black rights. It was Douglass who not only urged Lincoln to recruit black troops, but advocated that they be treated fairly and paid the same as whites. Douglass had met and argued



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Soldiers of the 107th U.S. Colored Troops at Fort Corcoran, near Washington, D.C. Black soldiers were key to Union victory in the Civil War.

with Lincoln on a number of occasions, including at the reception after his second inaugural address, as Goodwin relates in the chapter of her book on the Thirteenth Amendment.

The one abolitionist who factors prominently in the movie is Thaddeus Stevens. Stevens has long been vilified, like many Radicals, as a vindictive fanatic who was likely mad. By portraying Stevens sympathetically, the movie hopefully will spur people to learn more about him and the other radical abolitionists.

Yet the film deals with Stevens one-sidedly. At one point in the movie, during a private conversation, Lincoln lectured Stevens that if matters had been left to the Radicals, emancipation would have failed: “But if I’d listened to you, I’d’ve declared every slave free the minute the first shell struck Fort Sumter; then the border states would’ve gone over to the Confederacy, the war would’ve been lost and the Union along with it, and instead of abolishing slavery, as we hope to do, in two weeks, we’d be watching helpless as infants as it spread from the American South into South America.”

There is a grain of truth to this since Lincoln the politician was mindful of

public opinion and tried not to put himself too far ahead of it. But it leaves out how instrumental abolitionists like Stevens were in the fight against slavery. As Stevens’ biographer put it, “Thaddeus Stevens in the House and Charles Sumner in the Senate led the struggle against widespread apathy and fear, pushing through Congress the limited emancipation measures that prepared the nation for general emancipation and the Thirteenth Amendment” (Fawn M. Brodie, *Thaddeus Stevens: Scourge of the South*, 1959).

A telling example of how the movie tries to fit the abolition of slavery into the mold of compromise and bipartisanism is the dramatic tension over what Stevens would say in the House debate over the Thirteenth Amendment. Stevens was known for his saber-sharp sarcasm. In the movie, Ohio Congressman James Ashley—who sponsored the Amendment—begs Stevens to “compromise” in his advocacy of racial equality, “or you risk it all.” The movie then shows Stevens arguing with Fernando Wood on January 27, i.e., shortly before the final vote. In response to Wood’s badgering, Stevens states that he did not believe everybody was equal, but only should be

treated equally before the law.

The drama of the scene is false, concocted in order to bolster the movie’s message of political conciliation. In fact, it was over three weeks before the voting when Stevens said that he advocated only “equality before the laws,” and he did so in response to Ohio Representative Samuel Cox, a Democrat who ended up voting for the Amendment. In any case, Stevens’ supposed “compromise”—civil rights for black people—was not only far ahead of most other politicians but also ahead of the actual Thirteenth Amendment.

Reconstruction

Several times in the movie, Lincoln declares that he was focused only on the task at hand—winning the war and abolishing slavery. He tells Stevens that he refuses to discuss Reconstruction after the war: “We shall oppose one another in the course of time. Now we’re working together.” Fair enough: one cannot fault a movie about Lincoln for not delving into what happened after the president’s assassination. But the movie’s refusal to even touch on what happened after the war serves a purpose. To do so would expose the folly of moderation and compromise with the pro-slavery forces.

After Vice President Andrew Johnson, a Democrat from the mountains of Tennessee, assumed the presidency following Lincoln’s death, remnants of the defeated Confederacy made it clear that, while their military defeat had forced them to accept the end of slavery, they had no intention of accepting black people as genuinely free. Southern states sent former Confederates to Congress and passed “black codes” that all but re-enslaved blacks. Meanwhile, Johnson carried out a policy of conciliating the South and was openly disdainful of black people.

Combating Johnson’s equivocal Reconstruction policy, Stevens and other Radical Republicans carried out what became known as Radical Reconstruction. Refusing to allow the Southern representatives to sit in Congress, they passed laws—overriding Johnson’s repeated vetoes—that protected the rights of former slaves,

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“Emancipation Proclaimed”

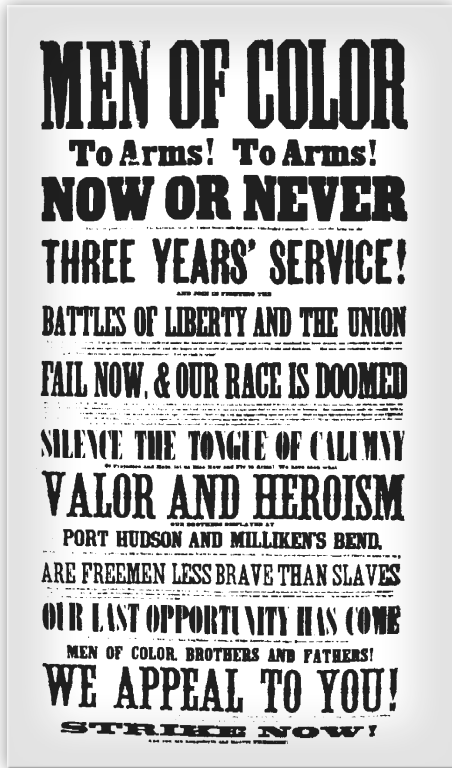
By Frederick Douglass,
October 1862

In celebration of the 150th anniversary of the 1 January 1863 issuance of Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation, we reprint below an October 1862 article by Frederick Douglass from *Douglass’ Monthly*, published in Rochester, New York. The article hails Lincoln’s preliminary announcement of the proclamation on September 22.

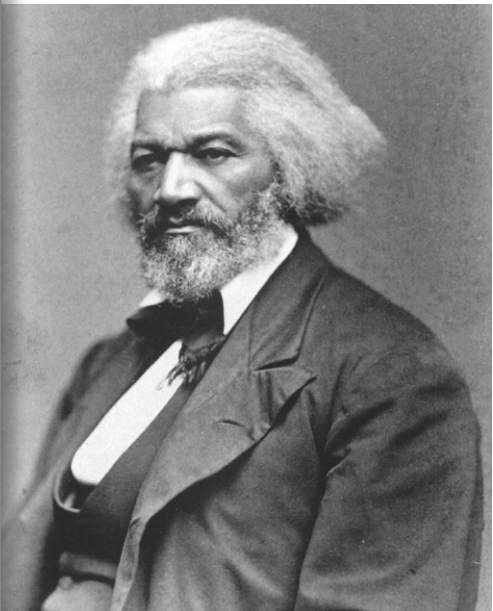
Douglass, who escaped from slavery in Maryland in 1838, was an electrifying agitator and outstanding political leader. Breaking with the “moral suasion” line of abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, by the early 1850s Douglass argued that slavery could not be ended short of armed struggle. With the onset of the Civil War, he along with other militant abolitionists and Radical Republicans, such as Wendell Phillips and Thaddeus Stevens, sought to convince Republican moderates to agree to an emancipation proclamation and the arming of black soldiers to smash the Confederate slavocracy. Following the Emancipation Proclamation, Douglass actively recruited black troops to the Union Army. He continued to fight for black equality after the war and the formal abolition of slavery in 1865.

* * *

Common sense, the necessities of the war, to say nothing of the dictation of justice and humanity have at last prevailed. We shout for joy that we live to record this righteous decree. *Abraham Lincoln*, President of the United States, Commander-in-Chief of the army and



navy, in his own peculiar, cautious, forbearing and hesitating way, slow, but we hope sure, has, while the loyal heart was near breaking with despair, proclaimed and declared: “*That on the First of Janu-*



Frederick Douglass House

Leading black abolitionist Frederick Douglass campaigned for black enlistment in the Union Army.

ary, in the Year of Our Lord One Thousand, Eight Hundred and Sixty-three, All Persons Held as Slaves Within Any State or Any Designated Part of a State, The People Whereof Shall Then be in Rebel-

lion Against the United States, Shall be Thenceforward and Forever Free.” “Free forever” oh! long enslaved millions, whose cries have so vexed the air and sky, suffer on a few more days in sorrow, the hour of your deliverance draws nigh! Oh! Ye millions of free and loyal men who have earnestly sought to free your bleeding country from the dreadful ravages of revolution and anarchy, lift up now your voices with joy and thanksgiving for with freedom to the slave will come peace and safety to your country. President Lincoln has embraced in this proclamation the law of Congress passed more than six months ago, prohibiting the employment of any part of the army and naval forces of the United States, to return fugitive slaves to their masters, commanded all officers of the army and navy to respect and obey its provisions. He has still further declared his intention to urge upon the Legislature of all the slave States not in rebellion the immediate or gradual abolishment of slavery. But read the proclamation for it is the most important of any to which the President of the United States has ever signed his name.

Opinions will widely differ as to the practical effect of this measure upon the war. All that class at the North who have not lost their affection for slavery will regard the measure as the very worst that could be devised, and as likely to lead to endless mischief. All their plans for the future have been projected with a view to a reconstruction of the

continued on page 6

Emancipation Proclaimed...

(continued from page 5)

American Government upon the basis of compromise between slaveholding and non-slaveholding States. The thought of a country unified in sentiments, objects and ideas, has not entered into their political calculations, and hence this newly declared policy of the Government, which contemplates one glorious homogeneous people, doing away at a blow with the whole class of compromisers and corrupters, will meet their stern opposition. Will that opposition prevail? Will it lead the President to reconsider and retract? Not a word of it. Abraham Lincoln may be slow, Abraham Lincoln may desire peace even at the price of leaving our terrible national sore untouched, to fester on for generations, but Abraham Lincoln is not the man to reconsider, retract and contradict words and purposes solemnly proclaimed over his official signature.

The careful, and we think, the slothful deliberation which he has observed in reaching this obvious policy, is a guarantee against retraction. But even if the temper and spirit of the President himself were other than what they are, events greater than the President, events which have slowly wrung this proclamation from him may be relied on to carry him forward in the same direction. To look back now would only load him with heavier evils, while diminishing his ability, for overcoming those with which he now has to contend. To recall his proclamation would only increase rebel pride, rebel sense of power and would be hailed as a direct admission of weakness on the part of the Federal Government, while it would cause heaviness of heart and depression of national enthusiasm all over the loyal North and West. No, Abraham Lincoln will take no step backward. His word has gone out over the country and the world, giving joy and gladness to the friends of freedom and progress wherever those words are read, and he will stand by them, and carry them out to the letter. If he has taught us to confide in nothing else, he has taught us to confide in his word. The want of Constitutional power, the want of military power, the tendency of the measure to intensify Southern hate, and to exasperate the rebels, the tendency to drive from him all that class of Democrats at the North, whose loyalty has been conditioned on his restoring the union as it was, slavery and all, have all been considered, and he has taken his ground notwithstanding. The President doubtless saw, as we see, that it is not more absurd to talk about restoring the union, without hurting slavery, than restoring the union without hurting the rebels. As to exasperating the South, there can be no more in the cup than the cup will hold, and that was full already. The whole situation having been carefully scanned, before Mr. Lincoln could be made to budge an inch, he will now stand his ground. Border State influence, and the influence of half-loyal men, have been exerted and have done their worst. The end of these two influences is implied in this procla-

mation. Hereafter, the inspiration as well as the men and the money for carrying on the war will come from the North, and not from half-loyal border States.

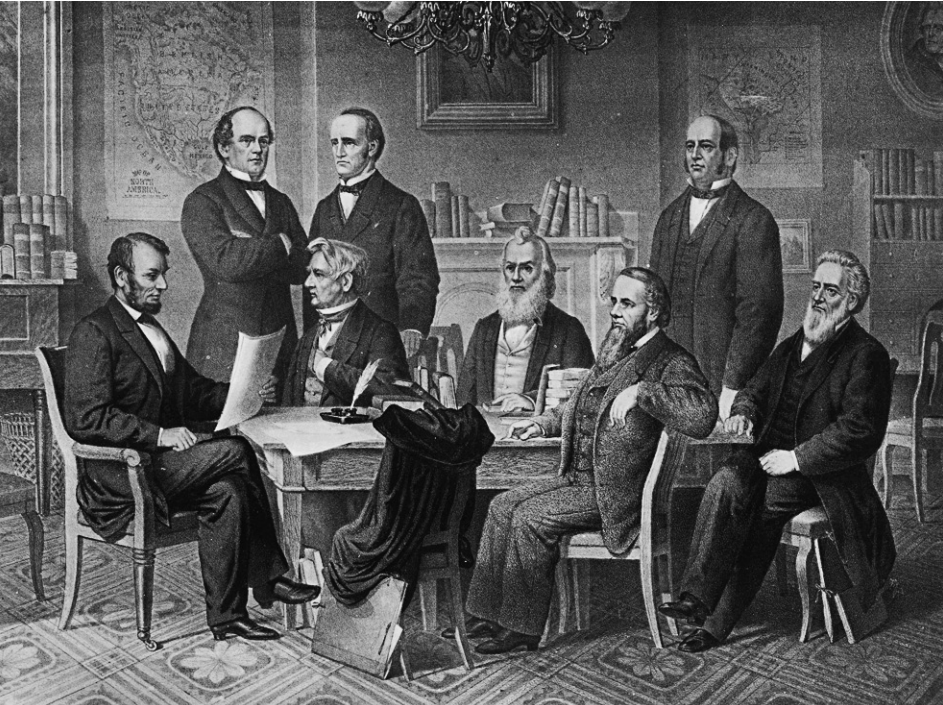
The effect of this paper upon the disposition of Europe will be great and increasing. It changes the character of the war in European eyes and gives it an important principle as an object, instead of national pride and interest. It recognizes and declares the real nature of the contest, and places the North on the side of justice and civilization, and the rebels on the side of robbery and barbarism. It will disarm all purpose on the part of European Government to intervene in favor of the rebels and thus cast off at a blow one source of rebel power. All through the war thus far, the rebel ambassadors in foreign countries

seen enough to convince them that there can be no end to this war that does not end slavery. At any rate, we may hope that for every pro-slavery man that shall start from the ranks of our loyal army, there will be two anti-slavery men to fill up the vacancy, and in this war one truly devoted to the cause of Emancipation is worth two of the opposite sort.

Whether slavery will be abolished in the manner now proposed by President Lincoln, depends of course upon two conditions, the first specified and the second implied. The first is that the slave States shall be in rebellion on and after the first day of January 1863 and the second is we must have the ability to put down that rebellion. About the first there can be very little doubt. The South

will put an end to general fighting for the winter. When the leaves fall we shall hear again of bad roads, winter quarters and spring campaigns. The South which has thus far withstood our arms will not fall at once before our pens. All fears for the abolition of slavery arising from this apprehension may be dismissed. Whoever, therefore, lives to see the first day of next January, should Abraham Lincoln be then alive and President of the United States, may confidently look in the morning papers for the final proclamation, granting freedom, and freedom forever, to all slaves within the rebel States. On the next point nothing need be said. We have full power to put down the rebellion. Unless one man is more than a match for four, unless the South breeds braver and better men than the North, unless slavery is more precious than liberty, unless a just cause kindles a feeblter enthusiasm than a wicked and villainous one, the men of the loyal States will put down this rebellion and slavery, and all the sooner will they put down that rebellion by coupling slavery with that object. Tenderness towards slavery has been the loyal weakness during the war. Fighting the slaveholders with one hand and holding the slaves with the other, has been fairly tried and has failed. We have now inaugurated a wiser and better policy, a policy which is better for the loyal cause than an hundred thousand armed men. The Star Spangled Banner is now the harbinger of Liberty and the millions in bondage, inured to hardships, accustomed to toil, ready to suffer, ready to fight, to dare and to die, will rally under that banner wherever they see it gloriously unfolded to the breeze. Now let the Government go forward in its mission of Liberty as the only condition of peace and union, by weeding out the army and navy of all such officers as the late Col. Miles, whose sympathies are now known to have been with the rebels. Let only the men who assent heartily to the wisdom and the justice of the anti-slavery policy of the Government be lifted into command; let the black man have an arm as well as a heart in this war, and the tide of battle which has thus far only waved backward and forward, will steadily set in our favor. The rebellion suppressed, slavery abolished, and America will, higher than ever, sit as a queen among the nations of the earth.

Now for the work. During the interval between now and next January, let every friend of the long enslaved bondman do his utmost in swelling the tide of anti-slavery sentiment, by writing, speaking, money and example. Let our aim be to make the North a unit in favor of the President's policy, and see to it that our voices and votes, shall forever extinguish that latent and malignant sentiment at the North, which has from the first cheered on the rebels in their atrocious crimes against the union, and has systematically sought to paralyze the national arm in striking down the slaveholding rebellion. We are ready for this service or any other, in this, we trust the last struggle with the monster slavery. ■



Library of Congress
President Abraham Lincoln presents the Emancipation Proclamation to his cabinet.

have been able to silence all expression of sympathy with the North as to slavery. With much more than a show of truth, they said that the Federal Government, no more than the Confederate Government, contemplated the abolition of slavery.

But will not this measure be frowned upon by our officers and men in the field? We have heard of many thousands who have resolved that they will throw up their commissions and lay down their arms, just so soon as they are required to carry on a war against slavery. Making all allowances for exaggeration there are doubtless far too many of this sort in the loyal army. Putting this kind of loyalty and patriotism to the test, will be one of the best collateral effects of the measure. Any man who leaves the field on such a ground will be an argument in favor of the proclamation, and will prove that his heart has been more with slavery than with his country. Let the army be cleansed from all such pro-slavery vermin, and its health and strength will be greatly improved. But there can be no reason to fear the loss of many officers or men by resignation or desertion. We have no doubt that the measure was brought to the attention of most of our leading Generals, and blind as some of them have seemed to be in the earlier part of the war, most of them have

is thoroughly in earnest and confident. It has staked everything upon the rebellion. Its experience thus far in the field has rather increased its hopes of final success than diminished them. Its armies now hold us at bay at all points, and the war is confined to the border States slave and free. If Richmond were in our hands and Virginia at our mercy, the vast regions beyond would still remain to be subdued. But the rebels confront us on the Potomac, the Ohio, and the Mississippi. Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, and Virginia are in debate on the battlefields and their people are divided by the line which separates treason from loyalty. In short we are yet, after eighteen months of war, confined to the outer margin of the rebellion. We have scarcely more than touched the surface of the terrible evil. It has been raising large quantities of food during the past summer. While the masters have been fighting abroad, the slaves have been busy working at home to supply them with the means of continuing the struggle. They will not down at the bidding of this Proclamation, but may be safely relied upon till January and long after January. A month or two

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Lincoln...

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extended the life of the Freedmen’s Bureau and politically disenfranchised the former slaveowners. The Union Army was stationed in the South to enforce these laws. Meanwhile, black people were asserting their basic rights by voting, standing for office and building schools. Radical Reconstruction was the most democratic period in American history, bringing advances for poor whites, such as public education, as well.

Among the Radicals in Congress, Stevens pushed to extend Reconstruction the furthest. He advocated black suffrage, disenfranchising former Confederates and, most radical of all, seizing the former slaveholders’ plantations and redistributing them to the freedmen. In the movie, Stevens articulates this vision, telling Lincoln: “We’ll build up a land down there of free men and free women and free children and freedom.” Since Johnson tried to subvert Reconstruction at every step, Stevens helped spearhead the drive to impeach him, which failed by one vote in Spring 1868.

One of Stevens’ last acts was to campaign for the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment. That Amendment extended the rights of citizenship to everybody born in the United States, regardless of race. While *Lincoln* implies that it was with the Thirteenth Amendment that Stevens compromised, it was in fact over the Fourteenth. He had pushed to give black



Harper's Weekly

1868 election rally of freed black slaves in South during Reconstruction, most democratic period in U.S. history.

men the right to vote, but the Amendment instead reduced the number of representatives for states that denied blacks the right to vote. Stevens told Congress that he was going to vote for it “because I live among men and not among angels.” Only in 1870, with the Fifteenth Amendment, did black men gain the right to vote.

As we wrote in our 1966 document “Black and Red—Class Struggle Road to Negro Freedom” (reprinted in *Marxist Bulletin* No. 9, “Basic Documents of the Spartacist League”): “Capitalist and slave alike stood to gain from the suppression

of the planter aristocracy but beyond that had no further common interests.” In other words, even though a section of the bourgeoisie pushed to deepen Reconstruction, as a whole the ruling class had no such interest.

For Reconstruction to have succeeded would have required what Stevens advocated: breaking up the large landed estates and actually giving blacks “40 acres and a mule.” But the promise of black freedom was betrayed when the Northern capitalists formed an alliance with the remnants of the slavocracy in order to exploit South-

Mexico...

(continued from page 2)

rule of Habsburg “Emperor” Maximilian from 1864 until 1867. Indeed, in a November 1861 New York *Daily Tribune* article, Marx denounced the impending invasion of French as well as British and Spanish troops as “one of the most monstrous enterprises ever chronicled in the annals of international history” (“The Intervention in Mexico,” *Collected Works*, Vol. 19).

From 1858-61, Liberals and Conservatives fought a bloody civil war in Mexico, the “War of the Reform.” It was touched off when Conservatives resisted efforts by the government to limit the power of the reactionary Catholic church, including by decreeing the separation of church and state and seizing church property. When the forces of radical Liberal president Benito Juárez emerged victorious yet bankrupt, his government declared a two-year moratorium on paying the country’s foreign debt. This enraged the British, French and Spanish governments (led by Queen Victoria, Emperor Napoleon III and Queen Isabella II, respectively), who reacted by signing the Convention of London in October 1861. With this pact, they pledged to occupy the customs house at the port of Veracruz in order to collect their debts.

In his *Daily Tribune* article, Marx predicted that “the joint intervention, with no other avowed end save the rescue of Mexico from anarchy, will produce just the opposite effect, weaken the Con-

stitutional Government, strengthen the priestly party by a supply of French and Spanish bayonets, rekindle the embers of civil war, and, instead of extinguishing, *restore* anarchy to its full bloom.” By January 1862, thousands of British, French and Spanish troops had landed in Veracruz. While the British and Spanish soon withdrew, the French continued their invasion, forcing the retreat of Juárez’s government to the north of the country. Attempting to establish a monarchy in Mexico, the French—with the backing of propertied anti-Juárez Mexican forces—crowned the Austrian Habsburg Maximilian I in 1864.

By 1867, Juárez’s forces had defeated Maximilian, in part with the aid of the United States. The U.S. had recently emerged from victory over the slavocracy in the Civil War—the last great, progressive act of the American bourgeoisie (and the prelude to the emergence of the U.S. over the next few decades as an imperialist power). In a footnote in Volume I of *Capital*, Marx noted that in Mexico, as in several other countries, “slavery is hidden under the form of *peonage*.... Juarez abolished *peonage*. The so-called Emperor Maximilian re-established it by a decree, which, in the House of Representatives at Washington, was aptly denounced as a decree for the re-introduction of slavery into Mexico.”

D.R. seems to be confusing the attitude Marx and Engels adopted toward this incursion with their earlier support to the U.S. war against Mexico (1846-48). Marx and Engels at that time believed—wrongly—that the U.S. invasion would further the development of a modern capitalist Mexico. Thus Engels wrote in 1848 that they “rejoiced” at the U.S. conquest of Mexico, perceiving “an advance when a country which has hitherto been exclusively wrapped up in its own affairs, perpetually rent with civil wars, and completely hindered in its development, a country whose best prospect had been to become industrially subject to Britain—when such a country is forcibly drawn into the historical process” (“The Movements of 1847,” *Collected Works*, Vol. 6).

Far from promoting capitalist development and social progress, the U.S. invasion of Mexico in the 1840s was in the main driven by the Southern slaveholders’ need to extend the territory over which they held sway. The stage was set for the war when Texas declared independence in 1836, which D.R. aptly describes as a

pro-slavery uprising. As Ulysses S. Grant wrote about the U.S. Civil War in his *Memoirs*: “The Southern rebellion was largely the outgrowth of the Mexican war. Nations, like individuals, are punished for their transgressions. We got our punishment in the most sanguinary and expensive war of modern times.”

Comrade Zorn noted in his forum that industrial capitalism, which was in the process of development, was “then a progressive force, and Marx and Engels believed that one of its most progressive features was creating a nation with a unified working class.” While they condemned the monumental crimes committed by Western powers against the peoples of Asia, Africa and the Americas, they initially supported colonial penetration of such backward regions as a vehicle for promoting economic and social modernization. History would subsequently show that even though the advanced countries introduced certain elements of modern industrial technology into their colonies and semicolonies, e.g., railroads, the overall effect was to arrest the social and economic development of those areas.

Marx and Engels would soon develop a very different attitude toward colonialism, expressed, for example, in their defense of the Sepoy rebellion in British-occupied India in 1857-58. Particularly important in prompting the change in their views on the oppression of weak, backward

ern resources and the freedmen. Particularly following the Paris Commune of 1871, when the proletariat seized power for two months in the city, the American bourgeoisie saw expropriation and redistribution of private property in the land as a potential threat to themselves.

After the election of 1876, the last federal troops were recalled from the South as part of a compromise between the Republicans and the Democrats. Black freedmen and poor white sharecroppers didn’t have the social weight to defend their gains. With the racist Democrats returned to power in the South, they steadily stripped away the rights that black people had won. By the end of the century, the Southern states had disenfranchised black people and instituted formal Jim Crow segregation. The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments would be dead letters until the civil rights movement of the 1950s and ’60s.

The defeat of Reconstruction was a betrayal of the promise of black equality. To this day, the Civil War remains unfinished business, with black people making up an oppressed race-color caste. They form an integral part of American society but at the same time are overwhelmingly segregated at its bottom. Although the Democrats are no longer the pro-slavery party they once were, they are no less foes of black liberation today, administering along with the Republicans the capitalist system in its death agony. The tasks of the Civil War can be finished only by smashing American capitalism through socialist revolution. ■

states by stronger, more advanced ones was the major role that Britain’s hold on Ireland played in retarding the political consciousness of the English proletariat.

Having first championed the assimilation of the Irish into British society, in the late 1860s Marx and Engels came out for Ireland’s independence. In an April 1870 letter that Marx wrote to two American followers, S. Meyer and A. Vogt, he noted that “the ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who lowers his standard of life. In relation to the Irish worker he regards himself as a member of the *ruling* nation and consequently he becomes a tool of the English aristocrats and capitalists *against Ireland*.” Marx continued: “*This antagonism is the secret of the impotence of the English working class*, despite its organization. It is the secret by which the capitalist class maintains its power.” He concluded that “the sole means” of hastening the social revolution in England was “to make Ireland independent.” Revolutionary Marxists carry forward this perspective by championing the national liberation of peoples subjugated by the advanced capitalist (imperialist) powers.

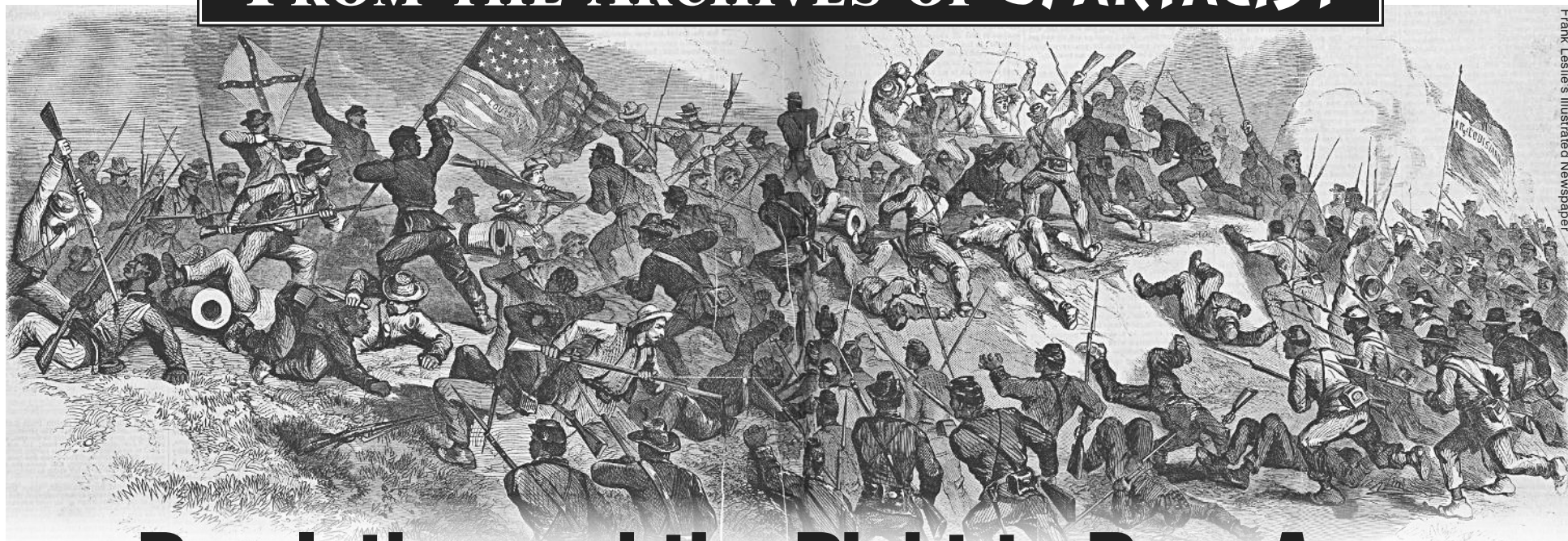
Certainly there was no mistaking as social progress the French intervention installing Maximilian, whose family tree included Emperor Charles V, in whose name Hernán Cortés had conquered Mexico for the Habsburgs in the 16th century. ■

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Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper

Revolution and the Right to Bear Arms

The Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

Spartacist No. 43-44, Summer 1989 (Excerpts)

Port Hudson, Louisiana, 27 May 1863: First major battle of the U.S. Civil War in which black Union troops took part.

It's really not news that guns were invented to kill people. And in this class-divided society, it has more than occasionally been necessary for "law-abiding" citizens to defend themselves with violence, even against the so-called legally constituted authorities. Are memories really so short? Recall the bloody Ludlow, Colorado massacre of 1914 in which 21 men, women and children, families of striking miners, were killed by the machine gun fire of the state militia, who were really Rockefeller's hired guns. But the workers were armed by the United Mine Workers, and to the bosses' horror for ten days some 1,000 strikers fought back bullet for bullet.

Recall as well the 1937 Memorial Day Massacre at Republic Steel in South Chicago. On May 30 of that year, in the midst of a national strike against the "little" steel companies (i.e., all the companies except the giant United States Steel Corporation), 1,500 protesters, mostly strikers and their families, marched in a holiday mood toward the Republic Mill. They were met by a solid line of 200 cops and a sudden volley of tear gas shells. As the marchers broke and ran, the cops charged with blazing guns and swinging clubs. Ten workers were shot dead, and another 40 were wounded—all of them shot in the back. An additional 101 protesters, including an eight-year-old child, were injured by clubs. In this case the strikers had been politically disarmed by their union mis-

leaders with the line that the cops, sent to keep order by the Democratic "friends" of labor, should be "welcomed."

We also remember the 1979 Greensboro Massacre, in which five leftist civil rights workers and labor organizers were gunned down in cold blood by a Klan/Nazi group. An FBI informer led the fascists to the murder site, and an agent of the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms showed them how to use and transport the semiautomatic weapons. Or in the Philadelphia of black mayor Wilson Goode, where the cops in 1985 raked the MOVE commune with 10,000 rounds in 90 minutes, using fully automatic M-16s and M-60 machine guns, and incinerated eleven black people, including five children, in a fire ignited by C-4 plastic explosive provided by the FBI. But of course none of the "concerned" anti-gun lobbyists are advocating taking away guns from the *cops*.

White middle-class liberals preach total pacifism from the relative safety of their condos and suburban ranch houses—they don't expect the cops to come bursting

into *their* homes. But the ruling class does not believe in pacifism and has carefully armed *its* state to the teeth. The whole issue of gun control revolves around the question: do you trust *this state* to have a monopoly of arms? And the answer is refracted through the deepening class and racial polarization of this society. The core of the state, after all, is "special bodies of armed men," as Lenin explained in his 1917 pamphlet *The State and Revolution*, commenting on the writings of Marx and Engels. And this is *not our state*, but the capitalists'; they assert the state's monopoly of armed force in order to maintain their class rule.

To Disarm the People

The whole history of gun control is the story of the ruling class trying to *disarm* the population, particularly in periods of social struggle. The ban on automatic weapons is usually linked to gangsters like Al Capone, but it never stopped them from getting their hands on Thompson submachine guns, just as the mob today has its Uzis. More to the point, the 1934 ban on automatic weapons came in the Great Depression when the spectre of working-class revolution haunted Washington (in fact, that year saw three citywide general strikes led by ostensible communists). The federal gun control act of 1968 came at the peak of black ghetto upheavals. And the perennial push to ban the cheap handguns known as "Saturday Night Specials" is just an attempt to make guns more expensive and hence less accessible to the poorer classes.

* * *

In Europe and America it was the struggle against absolutist, reactionary tyrannies which produced the revolutionary principle of the "right to keep and bear arms." One of the first acts of the French Revolution was to seize weapons and ammunition from the arsenals. And every subsequent revolutionary upsurge has been accompanied by similar actions. The right to bear arms was codified by the Second Amendment to the U.S. Con-

stitution. What's going on today is a calculated *counterrevolutionary* attack by a decaying ruling class on these constitutional guarantees.

The Second Amendment's Revolutionary History

The clear intent of the Second Amendment (ratified in 1791), as expressed in its language, was not sport or hobby but a people's militia:

"A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed."

The constitutional right is not about hunting or target practice; the American colonial revolutionaries wanted the whole people armed, centering on military arms—in today's terms something like the AK-47—in order to be able to *kill British soldiers*, and to forestall the threat of any standing army, which they rightly regarded as the bane of liberty and the basis of tyranny. Indeed, what triggered the American Revolution were attempts by the British army, in particular General Thomas Gage, to force colonialists to surrender their arms. As noted in a recent article by Stephen P. Halbrook:

"The Revolutionary War was sparked when militiamen exercising at Lexington refused to give up their arms. The widely published American account of April 19, 1775, began with the order shouted by a British officer:

"Disperse you Rebels—Damn you, throw down your Arms and disperse!"

—American Rifleman,
March 1989

There is a continuum between the English Civil War, the American Revolution and the American Civil War. The question of the standing army and the king's attempts to raise taxes to finance it against the opposition of Parliament and the emergent bourgeoisie was central to the outbreak of the English bourgeois revolution. Oliver Cromwell beheaded the king in 1649 and the revolution gave birth to democratic principles, codified decades later in the English Bill of Rights of 1689 when the revolution was already ebbing and after a renewed drive to absolutist reaction under James II. As a guarantee against the Catholic/royalist threat, the English Bill of Rights listed "true, ancient and indubitable rights," including:

"6. That the raising or keeping a standing Army within the Kingdom in Time of Peace, unless it be with Consent of Parliament, is against Law.



Survey Associates, Inc.

After 1914 massacre in Ludlow, Colorado, United Mine Workers organized armed fightback against state militia.

Gun Control...

(continued from page 1)

some states in the use of firearms.

The liberal press, echoed by the reformists of the International Socialist Organization (ISO), lament that this is a violent society—an observation akin to recognizing that bald men lack hair. From Marine barracks where “Kill ‘em all and let God sort ‘em out” is the watchword to church pulpits where abortion providers are deemed worthy of death, an undeniable truth is that violence “is as American as cherry pie,” as 1960s black militant H. Rap Brown put it.

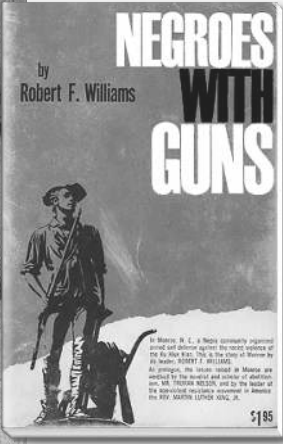
Mass murder is a repeated phenomenon in the U.S.—and it is regularly carried out by the state. In 1921, police in Tulsa bombed the segregated black community, killing 75 people. In Philadelphia in May 1985, black Democratic mayor Wilson Goode, in concert with the FBI, ordered the bombing of the predominantly black back-to-nature MOVE commune, killing eleven people, five of them children. An entire black neighborhood was burned down. In 1993, after a 51-day siege, Bill Clinton’s Justice Department ordered an attack on the integrated Branch Davidian religious sect near Waco, Texas, killing over 80 men, women and children.

The homicidal individuals who have perpetrated mass shootings in recent years have been typically armed with semiautomatic weapons, including the AR-15, one of the most popular rifles in the country, which was used by the Newtown killer. So the gun control lobby is screaming about the need to crack down on “assault weapons.” A task force led by Vice President Biden, an author of the expired ban on such weapons, is due to come up with a proposal to renew it and to put forward other restrictions. Helping feed the liberal frenzy is the ISO, declaring in “How Does This Happen?” (socialistworker.org, 17 December): “Socialists believe guns are a symptom, rather than a cause of violence—but no one should ignore what this symptom tells us about a sick society where people can purchase thousands of rounds of ammunition off the Internet, including the kind of high-volume clips apparently used at Sandy Hook, whose only possible purpose is to ‘hunt’ human beings.” The ISO’s starting point is trust in the capitalist state.

The hand-wringing over AR-15s and the like is common coin for liberals in the U.S. and elsewhere who routinely point to Japan, Britain and other advanced capitalist countries where gun control is the norm. (By way of exception, in Switzer-



John Herman Williams
Robert F. Williams (center), shown with other members of Monroe, North Carolina, NAACP in 1957. His 1962 book recounts organizing self-defense against KKK terror.



land, which trails only the U.S., Yemen and Serbia in guns per capita, only 40 people were killed by firearms in 2010.) Whereas in U.S. cities the cops round up black and Latino youth on the pretext of drug and/or gun possession, in Britain the cops sweep up black and Asian youth for drugs and/or knives. In both cases, the cops brutalize and kill with impunity.

Pathological violence takes place irrespective of whether guns are readily available. The same day as the rampage in Newtown, a deranged man in China, where the ruling Stalinist bureaucracy maintains strict gun control, invaded an elementary school, stabbing 22 children and a school guard. In all cases, the bottom line is that working people must have the means to defend themselves and others.

Black Rights and Gun Rights

Although nearly half of American households possess at least one gun, those standing up for Second Amendment rights are perceived as the racist, anti-immigrant, right-wing fringe. Yes, there are gun-loving reactionary lunatics who believe that the U.S. is facing an invasion by Mexico or perhaps by black United Nations helicopters. But the basic truth of the matter is something that used to be common wisdom among labor and black militants: if guns are outlawed, only cops, criminals and Klansmen will have them.

The particular violence that is woven into the fabric of American capitalist society stems mainly from the special

oppression of black people, the legacy of chattel slavery. And any serious reading of the history and social reality of this country makes clear the utter necessity of black self-defense. As race-terror swept the Jim Crow South in the late 19th century, anti-lynching crusader Ida B. Wells wrote:

“The only times an Afro-American who was assaulted got away has been when he had a gun and used it in self-defense. “The lesson this teaches and which every Afro American should ponder well, is that a Winchester rifle should have a place of honor in every black home, and it should be used for that protection which the law refuses to give.”

—quoted in Jacqueline J. Royster, ed., *Southern Horrors and Other Writings: The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892-1900* (1997)

This isn’t just a matter for the history books. In June 2011, seven white teenage thugs brutally beat and killed 49-year-old black auto worker James Craig Anderson in Jackson, Mississippi, while chanting, “White Power.” Had Anderson been armed, he might well be alive today.

Black self-defense has historically been met with frenzied state repression. The earliest 20th-century gun control laws were passed in states like South Carolina, Tennessee and Mississippi as a way to disarm blacks in the face of KKK terror. With the rise of the civil rights movement, gun control again became associated with ruling-class fears of black militancy. Robert F. Williams, the head

Irishmen uprising of 1798 was Ireland’s failed bourgeois revolution.

Despite these limitations on the concept of “universal rights,” the American War of Independence released a world-shaking democratic spirit, reflected in the military sphere by the arming of masses of civilians who could be trusted, out of ideological conviction, to fight for their government in loosely controlled guerrilla-type units. As was noted by Friedrich Engels, who was no mean soldier himself (being a heroic and able officer on the revolutionary side in 1848): “While the soldiers of European armies, held together by compulsion and severe treatment, could not be trusted to fight in extended order, in America they had to contend with a population which, untrained to the regular drill of line soldiers, were good shots and well acquainted with the rifle. The nature of the ground favored them; instead of attempting manoeuvres of which at first they were incapable, they unconsciously fell into skirmishing. Thus, the engagement of Lexington and Concord marks an epoch in the history of infantry.”

—“Infantry,” an article for *The New American Cyclopaedia* (1859)

Abolition of Slavery by Arming the Slaves

But the Americans’ so-called democracy accepted slavery, written into the Constitution itself. It was generally recognized that if the slaves got guns it would

of the NAACP in Monroe, North Carolina, was hounded out of the country for organizing a defense squad against racist attacks. In Louisiana and a few other Southern states, the Deacons for Defense and Justice were successful in using firearms to protect the civil rights movement from Klan attack. Among the Deacons’ standard weapons was the M-1 carbine, an “assault rifle” that they had learned to use in the Army.

An article by Jill Lepore in the *New Yorker* (23 April 2012) pointed out, “In the nineteen-sixties, gun ownership as a constitutional right was less the agenda of the N.R.A. than of black nationalists.” In 1965, the New York City Council passed a bill especially to prevent Malcolm X from carrying a carbine for his protection; he was assassinated shortly afterward. In 1967, the California legislature banned the carrying of a loaded gun after a demonstration by the Black Panthers, who were legally carrying guns, at the state capitol in Sacramento. The Panthers had been patrolling the streets of Oakland, where police terror was rampant. The state ban was followed by gun control laws nationwide, especially after the ghetto upheavals that broke out following Martin Luther King’s assassination in 1968.

Today black people, who are disproportionately the victims of gun violence, are those most in need of means to defend themselves. Yet in many urban centers, ghetto residents are increasingly likely to support calls by black Democrats like Congressman John Lewis and Al Sharpton for strict gun control. These calls give further fuel to the humiliating and often life-threatening stop-and-frisk programs carried out by the NYPD and cops in other cities across the country.

Violent crime in the ghettos and barrios is a direct outgrowth of the rampant unemployment and hopelessness created by the workings of the capitalist profit system. Impoverished youth thrown on capitalism’s scrap heap see little chance of a way out short of risking their lives in the military or perhaps grabbing a piece of the drug trade. Marxists call for the decriminalization of drugs, which would remove the basis of the superprofits that fuel the illegal drug trade and its attendant violence.

Above all, the situation cries out for a class-struggle fight for jobs and quality housing and education for all. That task demands the building of a revolutionary workers party that would fuse the anger in the ghettos and barrios with a revived labor movement and point the way toward overturning the racist capitalist system through socialist revolution. ■

mean the end of slavery, so they were denied this legal right through the device, juridically approved by the Supreme Court in the infamous Dred Scott case in 1857, of claiming that “the people” meant only “citizens,” and “citizens” did not include black slaves. Chief Justice Taney noted with horror that if blacks were citizens they would be entitled to a long list of rights, including the right “*to keep and carry arms wherever they went.*”

John Brown was among a small vanguard in the 1850s who saw that only force of arms would put an end to slavery, and he became a prophetic martyr for leading the famous raid on a federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry in 1859. Meanwhile, ex-slave and abolitionist Frederick Douglass, a close friend of Brown, openly defended a man’s “right of self-defense” when fugitive slaves were being hunted by agents of the slaveholders, even if this meant “shooting down his pursuers,” as occasionally happened. “Slavery is a system of brute force,” he said. “It must be met with its own weapons.”

Thus when the Civil War came, and the Northern bourgeoisie became so militarily desperate in 1862-63 to crush the slaveholders’ rebellion against the Union that Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation and agreed to the forming of black regiments, Douglass seized on this historic opportunity. “Men of Color, To Arms!”

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“7. That the Subjects which are Protestants, may have Arms for their Defence suitable to their Condition, and as are allowed by Law.”

—quoted in Stephen P. Halbrook, *That Every Man Be Armed* (1984)

This principle was reiterated in the 18th-century Blackstone’s Commentaries, still regarded as a definitive bourgeois statement on the English Common Law. The 1689 Scottish Claim of Right reiterated an identical point about the right to bear arms. In Scotland this assertion was underpinned by a widely accepted custom of bearing arms. This reflected among other things the recognition that the ability to mobilize forces of equipped and experienced fighters at short notice had often been the margin between independence and English invasion and conquest. In addition the Scottish Reformation had faced the challenge of attempts to impose French-backed Catholic absolutism.

Carrying forward the English tradition, the American revolutionaries expanded on this right, in light of their own experience in struggle against the British king, when they drew up the Constitution in 1787. In the state conventions which ratified it, a “militia” was understood to mean the armed people, not a “select” militia like the present-day National Guard (which can be federalized and keeps its arms stored in armories controlled by the government). The right to “keep and bear arms” was universally recognized

Second Amendment...

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was his slogan as he campaigned for black volunteers for such famous regiments as the 54th Massachusetts. And it wasn't only in the army that blacks fought—during the racist anti-draft riots in New York in 1863, according to one black newspaper of the time:

“The colored men who had manhood in them armed themselves, and threw out their pickets every day and night, determined to die defending their homes.... Most of the colored men in Brooklyn who remained in the city were armed daily for self-defense.”

—quoted in James M. McPherson, *The Negro's Civil War* (1965)

In the post-Civil War Reconstruction period, the central struggle in the South was between the newly emancipated blacks seeking to exercise political power and the remnants of the slaveholders' government seeking to put the former slaves back “in their place.” This struggle pivoted on black people's possession of arms. Hence the reactionary “black codes” passed in various Southern states tried to outlaw possession of firearms by blacks. An 1865 Florida statute, for instance, made it unlawful for “any Negro” to possess “firearms or ammunition of any kind,” the penalty for violation being the pillory and the whip. In response, the federal government's Freedmen's Bureau widely distributed circulars which read in part, “All men, without distinction of color, have the right to keep and bear



Valerio/Philadelphia Inquirer

Massacre of Philadelphia MOVE, May 1985: Cops opened up with automatic weapons, while firebombing the black commune, killing eleven, including five children.

arms to defend their homes, families or themselves.” But the question would be decided by military power: the racist white state militias, aided by the private Ku Klux Klan, were already disarming blacks, whose only defense was their own arms and/or the occupying Union Army. What was going on in the South was graphically described in one letter cited in Congressional hearings in 1871:

“Then the Ku Klux fired on them through the window one of the bullets striking a colored woman...and wounding her through the knee badly. The colored men then fired on the Ku Klux, and killed their leader or captain right there on the steps of the colored men's house....”

In this case, as in many others, the Klan leader turned out to be “a constable and deputy sheriff.”

While Congress adopted all sorts of paper measures protecting blacks, including the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution which guarantees “equal protection of the laws,” it betrayed the promise of black liberation in the Compromise of 1877, when Union troops were withdrawn from the South. Because they could not defend their rights by force of arms, black people were denied all their rights. It took a long and often bloody struggle for the civil rights movement 80 years later to restore some of the blacks'



Greensboro News & Record

Left: Victims of 3 November 1979 Greensboro Massacre, where five unarmed leftists were gunned down by KKK and Nazis. Right: Spartacist-initiated united front in Detroit stopped Klan from celebrating a week after Greensboro slayings.

rights won in the “Second American Revolution” which was the Civil War.

Disarming the Population

In the 19th century Karl Marx had expressed the hope that America would be one of the few countries where working people could take power more or less peacefully because the ruling class had virtually no standing army but relied on militias. Yet by the turn of the century the U.S. had entered the imperialist club and quickly developed a standing army. And over the years Second Amendment rights, supposedly inviolate, have been increasingly constricted by layer upon layer of laws which made gun-owning and armed self-defense more and more of a class privilege.

The most notorious example is New York State's Sullivan Law, which makes it illegal to carry a pistol for self-defense, unless you're one of a handful of well-connected people who can get a license to “carry” from the police department, people like real estate mogul Donald Trump and *New York Times* publisher Arthur O. Sulzberger (“Businessmen Opt to Pack a Gun,” *New York City Business*, 11 March 1985). The law was passed back in 1911 after a man who felt he had been unjustly fired from his city job as night watchman shot the mayor with a revolver. Hizzoner survived, but the incident was seized upon by “prominent” citizens such as John D. Rockefeller, Jr. (the same one responsible for the Ludlow massacre) to launch a campaign for gun control. And the *New York Times* led the pack.

* * *

The Turning Point: 1848

As the call for a people's militia was adopted by the rising proletarian movement, the bourgeoisie abandoned its own slogan that “every man be armed.” As noted by Friedrich Engels, the workers' demands for social equality contained “a threat to the existing order of society”:

“...the workers who put it forward were still armed; therefore, the disarming of the workers was the first commandment for the bourgeois, who were at the helm of the state. Hence, after every revolution won by the workers, a new struggle, ending with the defeat of the workers.

“This happened for the first time in 1848.”
—Engels' 1891 introduction to Marx's *The Civil War in France*

With the appearance of the proletariat as an independent actor on the scene, “the armed people” became archaic as the population was polarized along class lines. 1848 marked the beginning of the modern world in which we still live, and the class struggle between the bourgeoisie and proletariat remains historically unresolved to this day.

The defeat of the 1848 revolutions in Europe was followed by a bloodbath revealing the “insane cruelties” of which the bourgeoisie is capable, wrote Engels. “And yet 1848 was only child's play compared with the frenzy of the bourgeoisie in 1871,” when the workers of Paris rose up and formed the Commune. One of the Commune's key decisions came on 30 March 1871, when it



WV Photo

“abolished conscription and the standing army, and declared the sole armed force to be the National Guard, in which all citizens capable of bearing arms were to be enrolled.” When the Commune fell in May 1871 before the troops of the French government, behind whom stood the more substantial forces of the Prussian army, the disarming of the working class was followed by a massacre of defenseless men, women and children in which some 30,000 died.

Legislation against the possession of arms and for gun control precisely correlates with the social situation. Besides the seminal events of 1848 and 1871, the whole history of France since 1789 demonstrates the way in which the ruling class has resorted to firearms control in accord with the felt threats to its position. After the restoration of the monarchy in 1816, Louis XVIII sought to disarm the population by ordering all arms turned in. Louis Philippe in 1834 and Napoleon III in 1858 passed laws to restrict access to arms. A 1939 emergency decree of the Daladier government remains the basis for all subsequent French gun control laws, and new restrictions were imposed in 1958, 1960 and 1961, during the crisis surrounding the Algerian war for independence. However, the memory of the armed insurrection of the Communards remains alive in the French working class. And the Resistance during WW II, despite the Communist Party's nationalist, class-collaborationist role, did not exactly leave a pacifist anti-gun legacy.

* * *

The Bolshevik Revolution

It was an armed working class which made the Bolshevik Revolution, in accordance with Lenin's call:

“Following the path indicated by the experience of the Paris Commune of 1871 and the Russian Revolution of 1905, the proletariat must organise and arm *all* the poor, exploited sections of the population in order that they *themselves* should take the organs of state power directly into their own hands, in order that *they them-*



Soviet Writer

Red Guards in Petrograd, 1917. Banner reads: “Long Live the Universal Arming of the People and the Workers First of All.”

selves should constitute these organs of state power.”

—“Letters from Afar, Third Letter Concerning a Proletarian Militia” (March 1917)

The Soviet Red Guard workers militias fought the first battles of the ensuing civil war. Like all militias, the Red Guards were not much good at first, but in war one's strength is always relative to the enemy's, and the Whites suffered from low morale. Militiamen can become professional fighters if they survive long enough to gain experience. As the founder of the Red Army, Leon Trotsky, commented in December 1921, “In the initial stages we learnt manoeuvring from them [the Whites].” And the Soviets eventually triumphed over the combined strength of 14 imperialist/Allied expeditionary forces and the tsarist White Guards.

Though the Bolsheviks advocated a socialist militia “in connection with the abolition of classes,” they were forced by the fight against counterrevolution to build a standing army. Trotsky explained in the foreword to the fifth volume of his military writings (*How the Revolution Armed, 1921-23* [1981]) that the problem was rooted in the poverty and backwardness of Russia, wherein “the Red barracks constitutes an incomparably higher cultural setting than that to which the Red Army man is used at home.” But when Stalin usurped political power at the head of a conservative bureaucracy, he made the standing army into a fetish, going so far as to mimic the Western capitalist armies' ranks and privileges. Trotsky denounced this:

“No army...can be more democratic than the regime which nourishes it. The source of bureaucratism with its routine and swank is not the special needs of military affairs, but the political needs of the ruling stratum.”
—*The Revolution Betrayed* (1936)

Having restored the officer caste 18 years after its revolutionary abolition, Stalin then beheaded the Red Army on the eve of Hitler's invasion.

In the shadow of the oncoming world war, Trotsky's Fourth International insisted in its 1938 *Transitional Program*: “The only disarmament which can avert or end war is the disarmament of the bourgeoisie by the workers. But to disarm the bourgeoisie the workers must arm themselves.” Its program for revolutionary struggle against imperialism and war included the call for: “Substitution for the standing army of a *people's militia*, indissolubly linked up with factories, mines, farms, etc.” Its demands for military training and arming of workers and peasants under the control of workers' and peasants' committees were coupled with the demand for “complete independence of workers' organizations from military-police control.”...

Having guns is no magic talisman, but an unarmed population faces merciless slaughter at the hands of this vicious ruling class whose state is armed to the teeth. For as Karl Marx summed it up in *Capital* (1867), “Force is the midwife of every old society pregnant with the new.” ■

Michigan...

(continued from page 12)

capitalist parties is only one of approach. Take the smashing of the PATCO air traffic controllers union in 1981. It was conceived by the Democratic Carter administration and implemented by Ronald Reagan. Benefitting from union money and get-out-the-vote efforts, Democrats might stop just short of outright crushing the unions, at least as long as they remain under the watch of the docile “labor lieutenants of capital.” Turning back the ruling-class war against labor will require breaking labor’s political subservience to the Democrats and the capitalist order.

Detroit: Capitalist Devastation

Ever since their profit margins narrowed in the 1970s, mainly due to Japanese competition, the Big Three have carried out repeated waves of plant closures in the Rust Belt, moving a good deal of production to low-wage areas in the open shop South as well as other countries. Michigan’s urban landscape is a testament to this decay and immiseration, a direct result of the capitalist system of production for profit. Once the hub of the U.S. auto industry, Detroit is now a wasteland that lost one quarter of its population from 2000 to 2010.

As the last hired and first fired in racist capitalist America, black workers have been particularly hard-hit, a situation made worse by the financial meltdown in 2008. Over the next three years, black male joblessness in Detroit hovered at 50 percent. The jails were overflowing, and



Sheldon Dick

Workers occupy GM Fisher Body No. 1 plant in Flint, Michigan, during 1936-37 sit-down strike that won union recognition for UAW.

the housing market imploded.

To forestall bankruptcy, three years ago Mayor Bing hatched a plan to cut off city services, including road repairs, streetlights and garbage collection, to the 20 percent of Detroit that he deemed expendable. Now, with the city teetering on the brink of insolvency, the governor is angling to appoint an emergency manager (EM) for Detroit. Under the terms of another bill rammed through the legislature at the end of the year, the state can place municipalities and school districts into receivership. The EM appointee will have the power to void union contracts outright and liquidate city assets. The same legislative session also enacted a pair of vicious laws attacking women’s fundamental right to abortion.

If Detroit is put into receivership, a wide swath of the state’s population, including a majority of its black residents, will be subject to the diktats of unelected officials, as cities like Flint, Pontiac and Benton Harbor already operate under an EM. A taste of what the State of Michigan has in store can be gleaned from its takeover of Detroit Public Schools (DPS) in 2009. Out to bust the teachers union, the EM in 2011 sent a layoff notice to every teacher and other salaried DPS employee. Nearly one half of the city’s schools have closed down in the last five years.

In Michigan, as elsewhere, struggles by labor to revitalize the unions would find many allies among the ghetto and barrio poor by taking up the fight for jobs, quality housing, education, health care

and more. Even in devastated Detroit, black workers still form the backbone of the city’s proletariat and could serve to link the power of the working class to the simmering anger of the ghettos. Throughout the country, it is crucial for labor to actively defend the rights of immigrants, an increasingly important component of the working class. Any struggle to unionize the open shop South will directly pose the need for labor to combat anti-black racism and anti-immigrant bigotry.

The labor tops give a nod to the crucial need to replenish the ranks of labor by organizing the unorganized. In Michigan alone, since 1989 union membership has fallen by a third, from 26 to 17.5 percent of the workforce. But the bureaucrats confine their actions to what is deemed permissible by the capitalist state and its gamut of labor laws and regulatory bodies like the NLRB.

The class-collaborationist framework of the labor bureaucracy and its reformist tails has led to disaster for the working class. We Marxists put forward the revolutionary strategy offered by the Transitional Program, in which Leon Trotsky declared: “If capitalism is incapable of satisfying the demands inevitably arising from the calamities generated by itself, then let it perish.” The burning necessity is for a proletarian revolution to rip the productive wealth of society out of the hands of the greedy capitalist rulers and build a collectivized, planned economy where production is based on social need, not profit. The way forward lies in forging a multiracial revolutionary working-class party dedicated to the overthrow of the decaying capitalist system. ■

Longshore...

(continued from page 3)

of labor was ever won in a courtroom or by an act of Congress. Everything the workers movement has won of value has been achieved by mobilizing the ranks of labor in hard-fought struggle, on the picket lines, in plant occupations. What counts is power. The strength of the unions lies in their numbers, their militancy, their organization and discipline and their relation to the decisive means of production in modern capitalist society. The bosses are winning because the power of labor, its strength to decisively cripple the enemy, has not been brought to bear.”

—“Labor’s Gotta Play Hardball to Win!” WV No. 349, 2 March 1984

Although a taste of the union’s poten-

tial power was seen in late November when 450 ILWU office clerical workers went on strike at the L.A./Long Beach ports, it was a relative skirmish compared to what the ILWU is up against in the Pacific Northwest. Ten thousand ILWU longshoremen, clerks and walking bosses honored the clerical workers’ picket lines. Engaged under the “legal” sanction of an arbitrator, the action effectively shut down work at ten of the 14 terminals in the largest port complex in North America. After eight days, the strike was settled as both the Los Angeles mayor and the Federal Mediation Service intervened to force a settlement.

On November 20, some 2,000 ILWU longshoremen in the Port of Oakland defied an arbitrator’s ruling and honored picket lines set up by port maintenance

and clerical workers. Effectively shutting down the nation’s fifth largest port for one shift, the action was enough to force the port bosses back to the bargaining table. In the end, 500 workers organized by the Service Employees International Union and three other unions won a contract that defeated the port’s demands for major concessions in pensions and health care.

There is no question that the grain export bosses have a gun to the head of the ILWU. Behind them stand the West Coast container and cargo shipping bosses of the Pacific Maritime Association, whose contract with the ILWU is up in 2014. But there is no hope if the union surrenders its power in advance playing by a rule book written by the capitalist class enemy.

The outcome for either the ILA or the ILWU in their current contract battles has yet to be decided. The bottom line is that their continued existence as powerful industrial unions will take a fight against the bureaucracy’s class-collaborationist policies that have shackled the power of the workers to the interests of the capitalist exploiters. It is not easy to win in the face of the union-busting forces of the bosses and their state. But only through struggle can the tide be turned on the bosses’ one-sided class war and a new leadership of the unions emerge. Out of such battles a multiracial revolutionary workers party will be built capable of leading the fight against this entire system of capitalist wage slavery and establishing the class rule of those who labor. ■

ACAC 19...

(continued from page 2)

released pictures and names of the arrestees. Indeed, scurrilous flyers with mug shots of Donohoe and his wife together with their address were dumped from cars and posted around their neighborhood, denouncing them as “extremely dangerous people,” “members of the criminal street gang: Occupy Oakland” and “sworn anarchist revolutionaries.”

At the Holiday Appeal, UC Davis professor Joshua Clover—one of those facing prosecution for a March 29 campus sit-in (see “Defend the UC Davis ‘Banker’s Dozen’!” WV No. 1007, 31 August 2012)—spoke of a growing “black scare.” The bosses’ media and politicians have

repeatedly howled about supposed Black Bloc anarchists to set the stage for cop repression against leftist protesters.

Behind the attacks on the ACAC protests and Occupy around the country is the understanding by the capitalist ruling class that the smoldering discontent at the base of this racist, class-divided society sows the seeds for sharp class and other social struggles. The ultimate target of political repression aimed at criminalizing dissent is the multiracial proletariat, which, as the collective producers of wealth, represents the one force capable of successfully challenging the capitalist order. For struggle against capitalist rule to be successful, that social power must be mobilized under the leadership of a revolutionary party.

That Marxist perspective is rejected by “direct action” activists, who have sought to distinguish themselves from other forces in and around the Occupy movement by burning American flags and otherwise expressing their rage against the atrocities of the U.S. imperialist rulers at home and abroad. Such actions offer only an ineffectual sideshow, bringing activists into isolated conflict with the bloody fist of the bosses’ state. This state apparatus, centrally the cops, courts, prisons and armed forces, is at bottom an instrument of force that defends the class rule of the bourgeoisie.

All wings of the Occupy movement share the populist conception of the “99 percent,” which obscures the class division of society and has been easily sub-

sumed into the liberal wing of the capitalist Democratic Party. It will take a socialist revolution carried out by a class-conscious proletariat to put an end to the capitalist order and open the road to an egalitarian communist future.

* * *

The Support the ACAC 19 committee has called for letters, e-mails

and phone calls demanding the immediate dropping of all charges to be directed to San Francisco District Attorney George Gascón, Hall of Justice, 850 Bryant Street, Room 322, San Francisco, CA 94103; e-mail DistrictAttorney@sfgov.org; phone (415) 553-1751. Donations can be made at the committee’s Web site: supporttheacac19.wordpress.com. ■

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WORKERS VANGUARD

**Defend the Unions Through Class Struggle!
No Reliance on the Democrats!**

Michigan Passes Union Busting “Right to Work” Law

With over 10,000 trade unionists chanting “Solidarity forever!” in protest outside the State Capitol in Lansing on December 11, the Republican-controlled government enacted a law making Michigan a “right to work” state. As in Indiana, where a similar law went into effect a year ago, the bill’s backers cynically portrayed it as a job creation measure in a manufacturing region ravaged by decades of deindustrialization and now reeling under the weight of the economic downturn. This was the flimsiest cover for its clear purpose: to cripple the unions financially and sow division within the workforce by making dues payments optional.

Michigan, home to the United Auto Workers (UAW) and once a stronghold of multiracial union power, joins 23 other open shop states, concentrated in the South, the Great Plains and the Rocky Mountains, where average wages are considerably less than elsewhere in the country. This disparity represents a major profit bonanza for the bosses. Riding high, the union-busters are crowing: “If it can happen in Michigan, it can happen anywhere” (*Bloomberg News*, 13 December). The dominoes could very well continue to fall unless the “right to work” crusade is met with sharp class struggle by the unions.

The day before its passage, President Barack Obama, taking a cheap opportunity to posture as a “friend” of labor, intoned that the Michigan “right to work” bill meant the “right to work for less money.” He certainly knows of what he speaks. The bailout of U.S. automakers in 2009 that he orchestrated was all about making UAW members “work for less”—or not at all—so that the industry would again turn a profit. We opposed the bailout from the outset, warning that it “will be purchased through the further destruction of the jobs and livelihoods



Lansing, Michigan: Thousands of union members rally at State Capitol to protest “right to work” bill, December 11.

of working people” (“Bosses Declare War on UAW Workers,” *WV* No. 926, 5 December 2008). Indeed, plant closures and mass layoffs followed, clearing the way for the employment of new hires and temps at *half the pay* of senior workers when the companies again added jobs.

For UAW head Bob King, though, Obama “saved” the auto industry and its jobs with the bailout, turning a major blow against the union into a badge of honor for the White House. The union bureaucrats poured tens of millions into Obama’s reelection campaign and feted him on the floor of auto plants in Midwest battleground states, while reviling the Republican candidate Mitt Romney for declaring in 2008: “Let Detroit go bankrupt.” In fact, the bailout deal explicitly allowed the Treasury Department to revoke its loans to GM and Chrysler—i.e., throw the automakers into bankruptcy—in the event of an auto workers strike to resist the bloodletting. After relinquishing the tools of class struggle, the servile UAW tops sold the bailout deal to the membership by posing the choice: “voluntarily” concede or be thrown to the mercy of the bankruptcy courts.

These sellouts not only sacrificed their members on the altar of restoring the competitive edge and profitability of American capitalism but also opened the door to further attacks on labor as a whole. “Right to work” forces redoubled their efforts in places like Michigan, while state and municipal governments controlled by Democrats and Republicans alike took aim at public workers across the country. One such massive assault in Wisconsin two years ago galvanized protest by trade unionists from across the Midwest, who turned out in the tens of thousands week after week. But far from seizing the opportunity to unleash labor’s strike weapon, the union officialdom channeled the outpouring

of militancy into a toothless and *losing* bid to recall Republican governor Scott Walker in favor of a Democrat. This prostration before the “lesser evil” capitalist Democratic Party resulted in the gutting of the public employee unions.

Michigan’s union bureaucrats served up more of the same strategy of tying labor’s fortunes to capitalist electoral mechanisms. In a bid to prevent “another Wisconsin” amid a growing anti-labor chorus, they put a referendum on the November ballot to supposedly enshrine collective bargaining rights in the state constitution. In an abject display of the bureaucrats’ role as “labor statesmen,” they included a provision authorizing lawmakers to ban public employee strikes! Even with such reassurances, the ballot measure sparked an all-out propaganda counterattack and failed. The bosses then smelled blood. On December 4, Republican governor Rick Snyder announced that “right to work” was “on the agenda.” A week later, it was law.

Giving some left coloration to the labor bureaucracy’s electoral strategy, the reformists of the International Socialist Organization (ISO) dress up the Michigan ballot initiative as an “independent political action” (“What Went Wrong in Michigan?” *socialistworker.org*, 19 December 2012). The ISO claims it failed mainly due to the lack of sufficient activism, unlike the successful 2011 Ohio referendum on collective bargaining for public workers in that state. As we wrote in “Obama’s Re-election: The Shell Game of Lesser Evilism” (*WV* No. 1013, 23 November 2012):

“The rights of workers to organize, strike, picket and shut down production have never been codified in the Constitution. The reason is simple: they collide with the only actual guaranteed rights in this society, the property rights of the capitalist owners that are the foundation for the profits they extract through the exploitation of labor. Everything of value that

workers have won has been gained through hard-fought, often bloody, class battles *against* the employers and their state.”

The Class-Struggle Road

One such example is the very forging of the UAW. In the course of the 1936-37 Flint, Michigan, sit-down strike, workers occupied the GM Fisher Body No. 1 and No. 2 plants and shut production down tight for weeks. On 11 January 1937, strikers fought off an attempt by city cops in riot gear to retake the Fisher No. 2 plant in what became known as the Battle of Bull’s Run. The next month, sharp military maneuvers allowed a phalanx of workers to occupy Chevrolet Plant No. 4, precipitating a crisis for the company, which capitulated ten days later and recognized the union. Wives of the GM workers and other supporters, forming a Women’s Auxiliary, played a crucial role throughout these class battles.

The strike was part of a broader industrial union organizing drive sparked in part by three citywide general strikes in 1934—all led by reds—in Minneapolis, Toledo and San Francisco. As the unionization drive, which resulted in the founding of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) swept through industries in the late 1930s, the union shop took hold. But even then the leaders of the CIO, including its reformist Communist Party and social-democratic components, hitched the unions to the New Deal coalition of Democratic president Franklin Roosevelt, at a time when an advanced layer of the working class was receptive to the notion of an independent workers party.

Today’s labor bureaucrats barely pay lip service to the class-struggle methods that built the unions. Beholden to the capitalist profit system, the UAW’s King and his ilk offer up the unions as willing “partners” of the bosses, sapping labor’s fighting strength and demoralizing the union membership. A case in point is the chauvinist “America first” protectionism long peddled particularly by the UAW tops. Promoting the fortunes of U.S. auto companies against their foreign rivals poisons the well of international labor solidarity with workers toiling in auto plants around the world.

In the wake of the Michigan “right to work” defeat, the union misleaders have announced a campaign to replace Republican lawmakers with Democrats in 2014—i.e., preferring the blows to be struck by a gloved fist. In Detroit, Democratic mayor David Bing has imposed layoffs and wage cuts on teachers and city workers while slashing basic city services to the bone. Across the country, Democrats like California’s Jerry Brown, New York’s Andrew Cuomo and Chicago’s Rahm Emanuel have been out front in similar anti-labor attacks.

The difference between the two
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UAW president Bob King hosts Obama at a UAW conference in Washington, D.C., 28 February 2012.