

## Egypt Coup: Blood-Soaked Military Ousts Reactionary Morsi

JULY 8—Five days after ousting the reactionary government of Mohamed Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood, the Egyptian military has gunned down more than 50 Morsi supporters outside a Republican Guard officers club in Cairo, where the Islamist leader is believed to be held. With this massacre, the military

has sent a message: what they're doing to Brotherhood supporters today they are prepared to do tomorrow to anyone standing in the way of order.

The July 3 coup took place after days of massive protests around the country demanding the resignation of Morsi, whose year in power was marked by

the continuing collapse of the economy, mounting shortages of fuel and other necessities and heavy-handed attempts to reinforce Islamic legal and social strictures. News of the coup and Morsi's arrest was cheered by hundreds of thousands who had gathered in Cairo's Tahrir Square. Military helicopters and jet fight-

ers flew overhead, driving home the generals' message that they are the "defenders of the nation" and the ultimate arbiters of who will rule. In nightly clashes between pro- and anti-Morsi forces, scores died on both sides. Now, after today's bloodbath, the Muslim Brotherhood has called to

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**See Page 4**

**Egypt: For Women's Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!**

## Turkey: Mass Protests Shake Islamist Regime



AFP



Reuters

**Left: Protesters in Ankara demanding resignation of Islamist Erdogan government carry poster of Kemal Atatürk, founder of modern Turkish state, June 16. Right: Riot police fire water cannon to clear demonstrators from Istanbul's Taksim Square, June 22.**

Turkey continues to be roiled by protests that began at the end of May directed against the government of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP). The protests, which have taken place in a number of cities, were triggered by brutal attempts by the police to enforce plans for a building project in Gezi Park near Taksim Square in central Istanbul. The government's hardline response has for now succeeded in tamping down the scope of the demonstrations. Some 8,000 people have been injured, 60 of them seriously, with eleven blinded by tear gas canisters fired at them. Four demonstrators have been killed, while unknown numbers of people have been arrested or have disappeared.

Turkish society is polarized. Erdogan retains a base of support, particularly among the bourgeoisie in the country's Anatolian heartland and among the rural masses. Those who have protested are

concentrated among younger elements in the better-educated middle classes in the larger cities who deeply resent Erdogan's Islamist regime. Some workers in Turkey's politically divided trade-union movement have participated, as have members of the oppressed Kurdish national minority.

After coming to power in 2002, Erdogan and the AKP proceeded to implement their reactionary religious program. Turkey today has over 85,000 mosques, one for every 900 citizens—compared to one hospital for every 60,000 citizens, with more imams (prayer leaders) than doctors or teachers. In his first term, Erdogan tried unsuccessfully to pass a law criminalizing adultery, with three years in jail for straying from the marriage bed. Koran study classes were introduced in primary schools.

More recently, restrictions on the sale and advertisement of alcohol were imposed. After Turkish Airlines attempted to force female flight attendants to wear new uniforms featuring ankle-length dresses and tried to ban red lipstick and nail polish, protests forced the company to back down. In his crusade against abortion (and Caesarean sections as well!), Erdogan lectured Turkish women to have at least three children. He has also frequently denounced gay rights. Last May, kissing was banned in the subway of the capital city, Ankara, targeting couples acting against "moral rules."

An important part of the backdrop to the current protests was the agreement the government reached in March with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which

for three decades has been waging a military struggle in predominantly Kurdish southeastern Turkey against the central government. Over 40,000 Kurds have been butchered by the army in their courageous effort to assert Kurdish national rights. The agreement is supposed to provide "autonomy" for the Kurdish people, including greater cultural and language rights, as well as freedom for PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan and other imprisoned activists. While keeping its weapons, the PKK declared a cease-fire, with many of its fighters withdrawing to the Kurdish enclave in northern Iraq. PKK military leaders have complained of the one-sided "peace process" in which the Kurds make concessions while new Turkish army posts

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**Break with Islamic Reaction, Turkish Nationalism—  
For Workers Revolution!  
For a Socialist Republic of United Kurdistan!**



# PDC Partisan Defense Committee

## CLASS-STRUGGLE DEFENSE NOTES

The PDC is a class-struggle, non-sectarian legal and social defense organization which champions cases and causes in the interest of the whole of the working people. This purpose is in accordance with the political views of the Spartacist League.

## Protest Prison Harassment of Mumia Abu-Jamal!

*Mumia Abu-Jamal, a former Black Panther, renowned journalist and supporter of the Philadelphia MOVE organization, is America's foremost class-war prisoner. Mumia was railroaded to death row in 1982 on false charges of killing a police officer. In December 2011, the death sentence was removed, but Mumia still remains sentenced to life in prison without parole. The following is a July 6 letter from the Partisan Defense Committee to John E. Wetzel of the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections.*

We write to protest recent administrative measures taken against political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal. Prison officials suspended Mr. Jamal's access to telephone communication for two weeks as punishment for a phone interview with Philadelphia attorney Michael Coard, on his WURD program, "Radio Courtroom."

In 1998, the Third Circuit Court of Appeals found that Mr. Abu-Jamal had a First Amendment right to make radio commentaries as well as written ones. The

court enjoined attempts by the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections to interfere with or otherwise punish Mr. Abu-Jamal for exercise of this right, one it held protected by the First and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution, see *Abu-Jamal v. Price* 154 F3d 122 (3rd Circ. 1998). The court also ruled that the punitive actions in violation of his free speech rights caused Mr. Abu-Jamal irreparable harm.

We also protest the refusal of prison officials to permit contact visitation between Mr. Abu-Jamal and his son Jamal Hart. Mr. Abu-Jamal spent almost 30 years in the isolation of death row based on a sentence that in late 2011 was finally adjudged illegal. The Department's current actions violate not only his First Amendment rights to speech, but in isolating him from his family recall the illegal deprivations he suffered on death row for three decades.

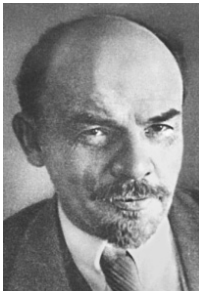
We urge you to reinstate Mr. Abu-Jamal's telephone access, desist from any further interference with his free speech rights, and permit contact visitation with his son. ■



TROTSKY

### U.S. Capitalism: Racist Divide-and-Rule

*Writing during the outbreak of the 1950s civil rights struggles, George Breitman, a leader of the then-revolutionary Socialist Workers Party, explained that the bourgeoisie's strangling of Reconstruction in the years following the Civil War signified that anti-black racism would endure as a fundamental feature of American capitalism. Today, the deepening immiseration of the black masses and the rollback of many gains*



LENIN

*of the civil rights movement underscore that genuine equality for black people will be achieved only through a socialist revolution carried out by the multiracial proletariat.*

The striking thing about the Reconstruction period which followed the abolition of slavery was the speed with which old ideas and customs began to change and break up. In the course of a few short years millions of whites began to recover from the racist poisons to which they had been subjected from their birth, to regard Negroes as equals and to work together with them amicably, under the protection of the federal government, in the solution of joint problems. The obliteration of anti-Negro prejudice was started in the social revolution that we know by the name of Reconstruction, and it would have been completed if Reconstruction had been permitted to develop further.

But Reconstruction was halted and then strangled—by the capitalists, acting now in alliance with the former slaveholders. No exploiting class lightly discards weapons that can help maintain its rule, and anti-Negro prejudice had already demonstrated its potency as a force to divide, disrupt and disorient oppressed classes in an exploitative society. After some vacillation and internal struggle that lasted through most of Reconstruction, the capitalist class decided it could make use of anti-Negro prejudice for its own purposes. The capitalists adopted it, nursed it, fed it, gave it new clothing, and infused it with a vigor and an influence it had never commanded before. Anti-Negro prejudice today operates in a different social setting and therefore in a somewhat different form than a century ago, but it was retained after slavery for essentially the same reason that it was introduced under the slave system that developed from the sixteenth century on—for its convenience as an instrument of exploitation; and for that same reason it will not be abandoned by the ruling class of any exploitative society in this country.

—George Breitman, "When Anti-Negro Prejudice Began,"  
*Fourth International* (Spring 1954)

## WORKERS VANGUARD

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## Guantánamo: Fear and Hunger

By Mumia Abu-Jamal

*We print below a column by class-war prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal transcribed from a June 6 prisonradio.org recording.*

The word "Guantánamo" has become a watchword for the world. It is a temple of state terror, of imperial fear and American hypocrisy.

Since 2002, it has been transformed from a U.S. naval base on Cuban soil—against the wishes of the Cuban government, it must be said—to a global torture center and an interrogation chamber. Opened under Bush/Cheney and maintained under Obama, it has been a detention center designed for perpetual detention to hundreds of men and boys. An international outcry forced the government to release over 500 men back to half a dozen countries.

Today 166 men remain languishing there with dozens on a hunger strike, an act of desperation after a decade in Guantánamo without charges. Eighty-six men have been cleared for release but remain in chains years later. President Barack

\* \* \*

**WV Update:** Adding insult to extreme injury, the Obama administration refused a request by four Guantánamo inmates on hunger strike that force-feeding be stopped during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which began on July 8. Some 45 men out of the 106 currently on hunger strike are being force-fed, a procedure that the United Nations and other bodies officially recognize as torture but that the U.S. government cynically describes as "humane, high-quality medical care to preserve life and health" (quoted in "Guantánamo Authorities 'Planning Ramadan Force-Feeding Factory,'" *London Guardian*, 5 July).

The authorities claim that Ramadan will be respected while holding out the option to force-feed in the daytime if "any unforeseen emergency or operational issues" arise. Even so, as a legal filing by the inmates' attorneys notes, "fasting detainees, who may not take water during the daylight hours of Ramadan, will be spending up to four more nighttime hours without access to water as well as being under physical restraint, putting them at substantial risk of dehydration and sleep deprivation." Free the detainees now! U.S. out of Guantánamo!

## Sadistic Feds Deny Lynne Stewart Release

### Free Her Now!

The Director of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, Charles E. Samuels Jr., has denied compassionate release for 73-year-old leftist lawyer Lynne Stewart, whose health is rapidly deteriorating due to Stage IV breast cancer that has spread to her lungs, lymph nodes and shoulders. With a long history of defending radicals, black militants and the poor, Stewart was convicted in 2005 in a "war on terror" show trial, along with her interpreter, Mohamed Yousry, and her paralegal, Ahmed Abdel Sattar, for her vigorous defense of a blind Egyptian cleric imprisoned for an alleged plot to blow up New York City landmarks in the 1990s. Originally sentenced to 28 months in prison, Stewart was resentenced in 2010 to ten years at the instigation of the Obama administration. We noted at the time that this was effectively a death sentence, which the Feds are clearly determined to carry out.

Samuels, appointed head of America's vast dungeon system by Attorney General Eric Holder in 2011, has spat on the demands of over 20,000 people who have signed a petition for Stewart's release, ignoring as well the recommendations of the warden of the Federal Medical Center Carswell in Texas, where Stewart languishes. Stewart is too weak to receive medical treatment to arrest the cancer, and her white blood cell count has dropped to dangerous levels. Her husband, Ralph Poynter, has fought valiantly for her release and return to her family in New York City. In a statement following the Feds' decision—an act of calculated

cruelty—Poynter declared, "We shall not stand by idly while the Federal Bureau of Prisons murders Lynne Stewart."

An April report by the Department of Justice's inspector general advised greater use of "compassionate release" for terminally ill federal prisoners—those with 18 months' or less life expectancy—in order to "save taxpayer money and reduce overcrowding" (*New York Times*, 1 May). But the capitalist state always has special rules for those who put a thorn in its side. One sick measure of this policy is that when Stewart asked to get her own medical records—a simple matter of photocopying—she was told to appeal in six months through the Freedom of Information Act! We have long fought for freedom for Lynne Stewart, a recipient in the Partisan Defense Committee's Class-War Prisoner Stipend Program, and continue to urge our readers to sign the petition posted on [lynnewestewart.org](http://lynnewestewart.org). **Free Lynne Stewart now! ■**

### PDC Annual Fundraiser BBQ

#### BAY AREA

Sunday, July 21, 1 to 5 p.m.

**Crab Cove Regional Park**  
1252 McKay Ave., Alameda  
Crolls Garden Picnic Area

(2nd BBQ area from Visitors Center)

Public transport: AC Transit 51A (from East Bay) or O (from SF) bus lines to Webster and Santa Clara, walk to park.  
Information: (510) 839-0852

**Support the work of the PDC!**  
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WORKERS VANGUARD

# Asylum Now for Edward Snowden!

JULY 8—Five weeks after the London *Guardian* printed accounts of the massive collection of phone records and Internet spying by the National Security Agency (NSA), former agency contractor Edward Snowden, who provided the documentation, by all accounts remains holed up in the transit section of a Moscow airport. Stung by Snowden's revelations, the U.S. imperialists are seeking their pound of flesh. The State Department weeks ago revoked Snowden's passport to prevent his travel as Washington fights to return him to the U.S., where he would face decades in prison on charges of espionage, theft and conversion of government property. Venezuela, Nicaragua and Bolivia to their credit have offered him political asylum. In tearing yet another veil off the U.S. spying machine, Snowden performed a great service to workers and the oppressed, in the U.S. and internationally, who are the ultimate target of the capitalist rulers' apparatus of state repression.

Early speculation that Ecuador would offer asylum to Snowden was dashed when President Rafael Correa backtracked, stating on June 27 that such a request could only be considered if Snowden were on

Ecuadorian territory. This came after Vice President Joe Biden worked the phones to put pressure on leaders of Snowden's possible destination countries. The arm-twisting culminated last week in a chilling act of imperial arrogance against the president of impoverished Bolivia, Evo Morales. After Morales announced in Moscow that he would consider giving asylum to Snowden, Spain, Portugal, Italy and France, clearly acting at the behest of the U.S., closed their airspace on July 2 to block Morales' plane on the return trip to La Paz, claiming they had information that Snowden was on board. Diverted from their planned route, which had been agreed to in advance, pilots in fear of running out of fuel were forced to land in Vienna, where the plane was kept for 14 hours before being allowed to depart.

Bolivia's ambassador to the United Nations rightly denounced this as an act of aggression. The country's vice president, Álvaro García Linera, bluntly stated that Morales was "kidnapped by imperialism." Bolivia formally filed a complaint with the United Nations on July 3, one day after Ban Ki-moon, the secretary general of this tool of imperialism, denounced

Snowden for "misuse" of access to information. Outrage over the incident resonated across Latin America. Argentina's president, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, denounced the "vestiges of colonialism," adding, "We believe this constitutes not only the humiliation of a sister nation but of all South America." The bourgeois populist regimes of Venezuela, Ecuador and Uruguay also protested, while newspapers and political commentators recalled centuries of U.S. interventions, invasions and occupations.

While the European "democracies" initially preened as champions of the privacy rights being trampled in the U.S., it did not take long before Germany was revealed to be working on massively increasing its capacity to intercept communications and that France is engaged in the same kind of mass data collection as the NSA. These same governments huffed and puffed late last month when it was revealed that the NSA had bugged their diplomatic offices in Washington, the UN and Brussels. In a rare moment of candor, Obama dismissed spying among friends as commonplace, saying, "That's how intelligence services operate." Behind the imperialists' diplo-

matic skullduggery—conducted at times with and at times against one another—is their drive to exploit the world's workers and oppressed in accord with their distinct interests.

Edward Snowden is a courageous young man who is paying a steep price for making public some of the secret workings of the capitalist state. Others who have shed light on the government's domestic spying include retired Bay Area AT&T worker Mark Klein, who came forward seven years ago to reveal how the NSA had tapped into AT&T's fiber-optic cables in order to access much of the country's Internet data flow. Like the court-martial of Bradley Manning for his revelations of U.S. imperialist barbarity, the government's attempt to seize and lock away Edward Snowden goes hand in hand with the enormous extension of police powers and evisceration of civil liberties in the name of the "war on terror." Obama & Co. are after their hides as a marker of what lies in store for anyone contemplating blowing the whistle on the crimes of this planet's most dangerous imperialist power. We demand: Hands off Edward Snowden! ■

## Letter

# Porn, NAMBLA and Bourgeois Moralism

17 April 2013

The "Young Spartacist" (3-22-13) article defends pornography... it raises questions about your method.

Who produces pornography? Capitalist companies. Who sells it? Capitalist companies. They exploit sex workers just as other capitalists do. Most pornography is mechanical, with almost no humanity. Everything in this society, especially human beings, are a commodity under capitalism. But you seem now to have become advocates of capitalist libertarianism.

Of course, pornography appeals to the deep alienation in modern capitalist society between human beings.

But laws against pornography will not end that alienation. Only the destruction of capitalism and the formation of a socialist society will end pornography as we know it. But you don't say that...

Marxists need to defend sexuality but not its commercialization. Neither do we have to defend NAMBLA, the North American Man/Boy Love Association. Again NAMBLA reflects the alienation of some individuals who gain power over youth through their pocket books rather than "love." Sexuality again is turned into a financial transaction. Children cannot be expected to give "effective consent" which your writer requires from children.

Capitalism is haunted by mental illness and treatment is only available to the rich. Laws which ban one manifestation of capitalism will not work!

Earl Gilman

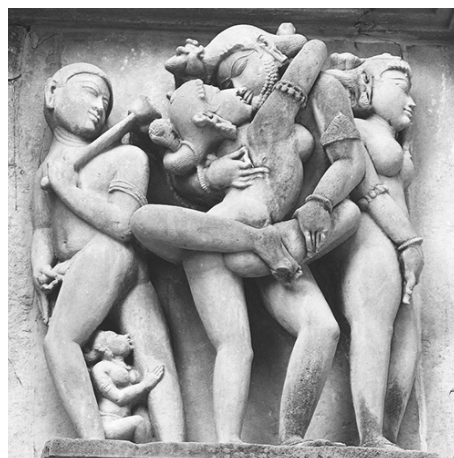
[All ellipses are the author's.—ed.]

### WV replies:

Earl Gilman's objections to our article "Church of Avakian Decrees: No Nudes Is Good Nudes" (*Young Spartacus* pages, WV No. 1020, 22 March), a polemic against the Maoist Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP), puts him in very unsavory company. And hardly for the first time: having been associated with an assortment of pseudo-Trotskyist currents over

the decades, Gilman was aptly described in WV many years ago as "a walking culture medium for every deviation known to Marxism" (in "BT Provocation Fizzles," WV No. 417, 5 December 1986).

In addition to enlightening us as to his opinion of the artistic qualities of "most pornography," Gilman belabors the obvi-



Henry Flower

**Ancient Indian temple art: porn of a precapitalist age.**

ous—pornography is produced and distributed by capitalist companies. And so it is, along with the food we eat, the clothes we wear, the computer on which he composed his letter, etc. What does this prove? Merely that, like all commodities, porn has a use value. People buy it because they like it. Product of capitalism? Porn has been around for millennia. If, as Gilman puts it, "socialist society will end pornography as we know it," surely it would only be to improve its quality.

Our attitude was concisely stated in the *amici curiae* brief filed by the Spartacist League and Partisan Defense Committee in the Supreme Court in 1988 against state use of RICO conspiracy laws to shut down publishers and distributors of allegedly "obscene" material (*Fort Wayne Books, Inc. vs. State of Indiana, et al.*). As the brief stated: "People have the right to read or look at whatever they want, to write, paint or film it too, and to engage in whatever sexual practices (or none at all) they choose, so long as they're consensual. The point is neither to proscribe, nor prescribe, what kind of sex people 'should' have." The arguments in our brief did not fall from the sky but were based on cited works of classic Marxism and the Enlightenment as well as scholars and

writers from Harold Laski to Gore Vidal.

Our line should be simple enough to grasp for any self-described Marxist: Government out of the bedroom! But Gilman joins forces with purveyors of the truly twisted "morality" of the capitalist rulers and their state. Gilman's smear of NAMBLA gives the game away. NAMBLA is an organization that supports the sexual rights of youth, including those in relationships with older men, and opposes laws that punish consensual relationships, such as reactionary "age of consent" laws. For this it has been the target of a vicious, decades-long witchhunt by the capitalist state and media. Gilman's cheering on the crusade against NAMBLA is lamentably common for pseudo-socialists and establishment gay rights groups, serving as a measure of their proximity to bourgeois "family values" hypocrisy and their great distance from the class line, let alone from the remotest concept of real human freedom.

Sounding like the Victorian judges who imprisoned Oscar Wilde not only for homosexuality but also for "corrupting the morals of youth," Gilman rants about NAMBLA supporters' alleged "power over youth through their pocket books" and echoes the bigotry of the RCP in slandering NAMBLA as "child molesters." To bolster

his refusal to defend NAMBLA, Gilman asserts that "children cannot be expected to give 'effective consent,'" period. Millions of sexually active teenagers can tell you differently, not to mention thousands of years' worth of anthropological evidence, including literature, paintings, sculpture. "Age of consent" laws are aimed not at "protecting our children" but at imposing abstinence on and promoting guilt in youth who wish to have sex—and at locking up adults who "deviate" from the sexual "norms" that the ruling class tries to foist on the masses while they themselves, more often than not, honor those norms in the breach.

The Victorians put under lock and key all the artwork portraying sex, paganism and naked bodies that Britain had looted from ancient civilizations in the lands they conquered for their Empire. They also locked up Oscar Wilde. Gilman's position draws from this well. Perhaps he thinks that the three topless women who carried an ANSWER Coalition banner in the "Free Bradley Manning" contingent at the recent gay pride parade in San Francisco were exploiting themselves. At any rate, his anti-porn nonsense and anti-NAMBLA screed play into the hands of a contemporary, very real anti-sex witchhunt by the capitalist state. ■

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## NOTICE

**Workers Vanguard skips  
alternate issues in  
June, July and August.  
Our next issue  
will be dated August 9.**



# Egypt: For Women's Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!

The image flashed around the world in December 2011: a young woman, her clothing ripped off to bare her blue bra, being dragged through Cairo's Tahrir Square by military thugs who beat and kicked her. It presented a stark symbol of the degradation of women in Egypt, whose oppression has long been codified in law and enforced as well through customs such as seclusion.

The mass upheaval against the U.S.-backed regime of Hosni Mubarak, whose rule rested heavily on the military, repeatedly thrust the miserable status of women into the spotlight. Driven by poverty and an immense desire to throw off dictatorial rule and the many-sided oppression endemic to Egyptian capitalist society, women were among millions of demonstrators from virtually all social classes who braved police bullets and took to the streets in the January 2011 mass protests. Their presence, which challenged the traditional, stifling patriarchal order, was answered by intense measures of suppression carried out by the military, police and Islamist mobs. The protests succeeded in driving out the hated Mubarak. But the political forces at their head—from bourgeois liberals and nationalists to (belatedly) the Muslim Brotherhood—offered only another face of capitalist class dictatorship over the workers, the poor, women and all the oppressed.

In March 2011, a month after Mubarak's overthrow, thugs mobilized around slogans such as “the people want to bring down women” and “the Koran is our ruler” attacked an International Women's Day demonstration in Cairo, telling those assembled, “This is against Islam” and “Go home, go wash clothes.” Women arrested at a protest the next day were forced by the military to undergo “virginity tests” in an act of calculated humiliation.

Mubarak was quickly replaced by the direct rule of the military, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF). But in the June 2012 presidential elections, the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohamed Morsi defeated the SCAF's handpicked candidate, Ahmed Shafiq. In exchange for protecting the lucrative economic prerogatives of the high command, Morsi secured the resignation of top SCAF leaders in an attempt to firm up his position as president. Now the military has swept him from power, reasserting direct rule to try to enforce social peace.

## The Lash of Political Islam

Women would immediately feel the lash of political Islam in power. Last year, in an ominous sign of what the Islamists had in store, hardline Salafists and other Islamists introduced bills in parliament to eliminate the law (honored in the breach) against the horrendous practice of female genital mutilation, to rescind the limited right of women to divorce and to lower the age of marriage for girls to 14. The government television station also began featuring women announcers in headscarves, overturning a decades-long secular dress code. Despite large protests in November and December, Morsi pushed through a new constitution reinforcing Islam as the official religion and subordinating the

## Part One The Legacy of Colonial Subjugation

minimal rights formally granted women to *sharia* (Islamic law). Islamist clerics have been regularly going on television to demand the veiling of women and the banning of alcohol, to be enforced by religious police. Meanwhile, sexual assaults, particularly against protesters, continue with impunity, with clerics lashing out at

ing people have certainly not escaped the effects of the world capitalist economic crisis, which has led to brutal attacks on workers' living standards internationally.

As he tightened the grip of Islamic reaction, Morsi signaled his intent to restore “stability” in order to foster a climate conducive to capitalist profit-making. “Since

What happens in Egypt, which with more than 90 million people is the most populous Arab state, reverberates throughout the Near East. In a region made up of artificial entities carved by the imperialist powers from the carcass of the Ottoman Empire, Egypt is the only country that has maintained a distinct historic identity through the millennia. It is the social, political and cultural center of the Arab world, generating its defining ideologies. Pan-Arab nationalism was put to the test in Egypt under Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser. The Muslim Brotherhood, the first mass movement committed to the creation of an Islamic state and the grandfather of Islamist movements from North Africa to Southeast Asia, was also born in Egypt.

Developments in Egypt will have far-reaching consequences throughout the rest of the Muslim world. But under capitalist class domination, the only alternative for the working class and the oppressed who chafed under the rule of the Islamists is the bleak prospect of a return to bonapartist military rule. Revolutionary Marxism offers a different perspective, based on the potential of the working class to be the gravediggers of capitalist rule. The Egyptian proletariat has a long history of militant struggle. The years leading up to the ouster of Mubarak saw a strike wave that Beinín described as “the largest social movement Egypt has witnessed in more than half a century” (“The Struggle for Worker Rights in Egypt,” solidaritycenter.org, February 2010). But those strikes were confined to sectional economic demands, and the working class remains *politically* atomized and subordinated to bourgeois political forces.

As we have stressed from the outset of the “Arab Spring,” what is necessary is for the working class in Tunisia, Egypt and elsewhere to emerge under its own banner as the champion of all the exploited and oppressed in struggle against all bourgeois forces—imperialists, secular nationalists, political Islamists. This requires the leadership of proletarian vanguard parties equipped with a program that can lead the daily struggles of the toilers toward the overturn of the capitalist order as part of the fight for world socialist revolution.

## Colonial Subjugation...

The fact that age-old practices hideously oppressive to women can exist side-by-side with elements of modern industry and infrastructure is above all the product of Egypt's belated capitalist development and its legacy of imperialist subjugation.

Well before the capitalist epoch, Egypt, with its strategic position on the Mediterranean astride the commercial routes between Asia and Europe, had been a magnet for the colonial ambitions of world powers. For over 2,000 years, until Nasser came to power in 1952, the country did not see a native ruler. Conquerors who occupied the country over the centuries include Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, the Arabs, the Ottomans and others. In 1798, Napoleon invaded Egypt, only to be driven out three years later by an Ottoman/British alliance.

Muhammad Ali, commander-in-chief of Albanian forces in the Ottoman army,



Cairo: Women march in protest against police violence, 20 December 2011 (above), three days after infamous brutalization of female protester in Tahrir Square (below).



women heading toward Tahrir Square as “devils...going there to get raped.”

These harsh facts should be enough to expose the political bankruptcy of those reformist “socialists” in Egypt and around the world who portrayed the anti-Mubarak upheaval as a revolution. As in Tunisia and elsewhere, what took place in Egypt during the “Arab Spring” was no revolution. The repressive forces of the capitalist state—centrally the military and the police—have remained intact. The already desperate material conditions of life for the overwhelming majority of the population have in fact worsened over the last year as food prices and unemployment continue to climb. While the last two years of social turmoil have been a big factor in Egypt's economic dislocation, the work-

Mursi assumed office,” wrote Near East historian Joel Beinín, “physical and legal attacks on trade union activists have increased. Hundreds of workers have been fired for trade union activities and thugs have beaten many others” (*Middle East Report and Information Project*, 18 January). In tandem with state repression, the Islamists sought to bring unions under their control by maneuvering their own members into the leadership, including in many of the unions that had corporatist ties to the state under Mubarak. Presaging yet more attacks on working people and the poor, the government, which already receives more than \$1 billion in U.S. aid annually, appealed for a \$4.8 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund based on a program of austerity.

became governor in 1805. In 1807, he crushed a British attempt to occupy Egypt. The dynasty he founded would rule Egypt until 1952. While he paid homage to the Sultan in Constantinople, the Ottoman capital, Muhammad Ali was effectively a sovereign ruler. In the first decades of the 19th century, he attempted to modernize the country, aiming to establish the basis of a modern economy, including by promoting the intensive cultivation of cotton as a cash crop for export. He brought most of the land under state control and expanded agricultural production by constructing dams and irrigation canals.

To protect the country’s nascent industries, Muhammad Ali’s regime instituted a state monopoly on trade and placed an embargo on imported materials, in particular lower-cost British textiles. He also modernized and expanded the health services and instituted the first secular public schools, which admitted both men and women and included specialized schools to train doctors, engineers and veterinarians. In 1822, Egypt’s first printing house was opened, publishing books in Arabic, Turkish and Persian.

The regime established a modern army numbering well over 100,000 men, a naval force and a merchant marine. By the 1830s, Muhammad Ali ruled over a stretch of land that reached as far as Syria in the north, Sudan in the south and parts of the Arabian Peninsula in the east. Such was Egypt’s development that Karl Marx described it in the 30 July 1853 *New York*



National Media Museum  
**Public execution of Egyptian by British colonial overlords, Alexandria, 1882.**

*Daily Tribune* as the “only vital element” in the Ottoman Empire. While the reforms turned Egypt into a strong and viable state, they were brought about through high taxation, *corvée* (forced) labor and the brutal oppression of workers, artisans and *fellahin* (peasants) as well as of the subjugated peoples of Syria, Arabia and the Sudan.

Britain’s capitalist rulers were incensed by Muhammad Ali’s aggressive industrial policies. They feared the emergence of a powerful state that would threaten their interests in the region, potentially cutting their overland routes to India and other Asian colonies, closing the eastern Mediterranean market to British goods and depriving Lancashire textile mills of prized, long-staple Egyptian cotton. In 1840, British and Austrian forces, in alliance with the Ottomans, landed in Syria and defeated the Egyptian army, which was within a few days’ march of Constantinople. At Alexandria, under the muzzles of the British navy, Muhammad Ali was forced to sign an agreement returning Syria and Arabia to Ottoman rule, radically reducing the size of his army and navy, paying a large tribute to the Sultan, disbanding monopolies and lifting embargoes. As Marx observed in the *Tribune* (25 July 1853), the European powers reduced to impotence the only man who might have “replaced a ‘dressed up turban’ by a real head.” Egypt’s brief experiment in industrialization came to a



faroukmisr.net  
**Painting (circa 1830-48) of Muhammad Ali, who built army and naval forces as part of attempt to modernize Egypt.**

halt, the country reduced to supplying raw materials for European industry.

...And Its Legacy

The colonial powers continued their economic devastation of Egypt under Muhammad Ali’s successors. In acceding to French plans to build the Suez Canal, Egypt’s rulers were forced to seek out enormous foreign loans, negotiated on terms highly favorable to the European banks. The British and French governments would hold majority interest in the canal while Egypt supplied *corvée* labor and went into debt to build it. Over 100,000 Egyptians died in the canal’s construction.

For a brief period during the American Civil War, Egypt had benefited from the boom in cotton prices caused by the blockade of Southern U.S. ports. To speed up export, the government embarked on huge infrastructure projects, building roads, bridges and lighthouses and deepening harbors. But the boom rapidly came to a halt, and the regime was forced to borrow beyond its means to finance these projects. When the Suez Canal opened in 1869, the government was unable to pay even the interest on the loans. Indebtedness compelled Egypt’s rulers to sell the country’s share in the canal to Britain, ceding total control over it to European powers.

With Egypt rapidly sliding into bankruptcy, Britain and France took joint control of its finances and public works. Resentment of foreign domination, state repression and crippling taxation fueled a revolt led by Ahmad Urabi, a native army colonel, under the slogan “Egypt for the Egyptians.” Britain invaded in 1882, defeating the nationalist uprising and occupying the country for seven decades. Not only did the British rulers arrest capitalist development—by World War I, cotton accounted for 90 percent of Egypt’s exports—but they also bolstered the most reactionary and repressive aspects of semi-feudal society. Her Majesty’s Government found its best friends in the corrupt palace, the old Turkish-Circassian ruling circles and the banks and moneylenders, all of whom profited from the exploitation of the peasants, who were subjected to *corvée* and taxed to bare subsistence to pay off monstrous government debts.

Before the British occupation, education for both boys and girls was provided at government expense. The colonial administration instituted tuition, including for primary education, and sharply restricted education for girls. Evelyn Baring, Lord Cromer, who ruled Egypt on behalf of Britain for a quarter century, warned: “Egypt being essentially an agricultural country, agriculture must of necessity be its first care. Any education, technical or general, which tended to leave the fields untilled, or to lessen the fitness or disposition of the people for agricultural employment, would be a national evil” (quoted in John T. Chalcraft, *The Striking Cabbies of Cairo* [2004]).

The British rulers justified their colonial occupations with the racist claim of bringing civilization to the “inferior races” and liberating women from backwardness. So whom did these “champi-

ons” of women send to administer their colonies? In Britain, Cromer and George Curzon, former Viceroy and Governor General of India, were fervent opponents of giving women the vote. Cromer presided over the merger of separate men’s and women’s anti-suffragist leagues into the National League for Opposing Woman Suffrage in 1910; Curzon succeeded him as president.

Imperialism and Social Backwardness

The development of capitalism in Europe had required the destruction of the political and economic chains of the old feudal order. In 1789 in France, in the classic example of a bourgeois-democratic revolution, the rising bourgeoisie mobilized the peasantry and urban lower classes to bring itself to political power under the banner of the universal rights of man. In place of an economy based on localized production and dominated by the landed aristocracy and the church, the new bourgeois ruling class consolidated a nation-state, separated church and state and established a parliamentary system, a national code of laws and a national currency.

However, with the emergence of imperialism toward the end of the 19th century, a handful of the most powerful capitalist powers acted to suppress indigenous development in colonial and semicolonial countries. The weak, despotic bourgeoisies in countries such as Egypt were incapable of achieving the democratic tasks associated with the bourgeois revolutions in Europe. In fear of the working class, they could not break from their imperialist masters and achieve national independence. To maintain their power, they relied on the refuse of the past—e.g., precapitalist subjugation of the peasantry; domination by the mosques—together with brutal police and military repression.

Today Egypt teems with enormous contradictions rooted in its arrested development. On the streets of Cairo, among Mercedes and BMWs zigzag strings of donkey-drawn carriages. A tiny, wealthy elite holds sway over a resentful popula-

tion mired in dire poverty. Millions are unemployed and some 40 percent of the population lives in degrading squalor. Landless peasants roam the Nile Valley searching for work. Many find “homes” in cemeteries; the more fortunate shelter in the tin-and-cardboard slums that ring major cities, providing a fertile recruitment ground for Islamic fundamentalists.

The wretched peasantry, constituting one-third of the population, lives in conditions not much advanced from those of Pharaonic Egypt. The majority are tenants, migrant rural laborers and small-holders who, on average, own less than one acre. Men work in the fields while women remain largely confined to domestic and maternal duties in the home, with occasional forays to the well and the marketplace. Women’s oppression is nowhere more entrenched than in the backward agrarian areas, especially in Upper Egypt. As one young government bureaucrat put it, “Many fellahin here don’t let their daughters leave the house to go to school and the like because they fear that their girls will gain a sense of freedom, which is always dangerous.... If they learn to read, they will read the wrong kinds of books, not the Koran” (quoted in Richard Adams, *Development and Social Change in Rural Egypt* [1986]).

The intertwining of religion with every aspect of society means that Coptic Christians, some 10 percent of the population, remain subject to Islamist terror and state persecution, which in turn reinforce the hold of the church over that community. In October 2011, protesters rallying against the burning of Coptic churches in Cairo were attacked by uniformed military forces and Islamist mobs. In collusion with the army and riot police, armed thugs roamed the streets seeking out Christians, including women and children, killing 27 and maiming hundreds.

Egypt presents a powerful argument for Leon Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution, which was starkly confirmed by the October Revolution of 1917 in Russia. Neither the state-sponsored industrial development under Nasser in the 1950s and ’60s nor the “open door” to privatization and investment of his successors Sadat and Mubarak could break the chains of imperialist domination or resolve the contradictions posed by Egypt’s combined and uneven development. As Trotsky explained in *The Permanent Revolution* (1930), for countries of belated capitalist development, “the complete and genuine solution of their tasks of achieving democracy and national emancipation is conceivable only through the dictatorship of the proletariat as the leader of the subjugated nation, above all of its peasant masses.”

The Egyptian proletariat in power would expropriate the bourgeoisie and landlords, seizing the property holdings of the mosques, and break the chains of imperialist subjugation on the road to establishing a collectivized, planned economy in which production is based on social need rather than driven by profit. Proletarian revolution in Egypt would resonate

*continued on page 6*



Reuters  
**Shantytown in eastern Cairo, 2008.**

# Egypt, Women...

(continued from page 5)

throughout the world, not least in North Africa and the Near East as well as among the millions of North African workers in France and Turkish and Kurdish workers in Germany. Such workers could play a crucial role in linking the fight for socialist revolution in the neocolonial world to the struggles of workers in the imperialist centers to get rid of their own exploiters. Short of the overturn of capitalist rule in the advanced industrial countries, any development toward socialism in the more backward countries would be arrested and ultimately reversed under the pressures of world imperialism.

## “To Reach Womanhood Is to Enter a Prison”

In Egypt, the oppression of women is wrapped in ancient barbaric customs, the legacy of belated economic development reinforced by imperialist domination. Patriarchy in the family is fortified by religious ideology, both Coptic Christian and Muslim; daily life for women is drudgery and humiliation. In her novel *The Open Door*, Latifa al-Zayyat, a leftist jailed by Anwar Sadat in 1981, tells the story of Layla, a young woman who reaches adulthood during the Nasser era: “She grew to the realization that to reach womanhood was to enter a prison where the confines of one’s life were clearly and decisively fixed.”

The torment of females begins at childhood. Girls aged seven or younger are sub-



EPA

Rice planting in Nile Delta, 2008. Poverty, primitive conditions dominate Egyptian countryside.

cal complications throughout their adult lives. Though illegal since 1997, FGM is rampant across all classes in Egypt, and equally so among Muslims and Christians. According to the United Nations, 96 percent of women between the ages of 15 and 49 have undergone the practice.

A few decades ago, before the rise in Islamist influence, many urban women went around bareheaded and wore knee-length skirts and open-necked blouses. Today more than 80 percent of women don the headscarf. It is not uncommon to see women wearing billowing black robes and *niqab* veils that suffocate women as they cover the entire body and leave only narrow slits for the eyes.

can only deepen their isolation from secular currents, increasing the hold of religious reaction and family domination” (“Turkey: Women and the Permanent Revolution,” WV No. 916, 6 June 2008).

“Honor killings” of women and girls for eloping or having sex outside marriage are widespread in Egypt, among both Muslims and Christians, and socially acceptable, especially in the rural areas. Perpetrators seldom get more than a slap on the wrist, since the law allows judges to reduce sentences for men who kill women in “crimes of passion.” Accurate statistics are impossible to find, as most of these murders are either hushed up or reported as suicides.

By every index—wages, poverty, education, employment—women are at the bottom. Fully 60 percent are illiterate. Egyptian law, which has its basis in *sharia*, codifies the subordination of women to their male relatives. According to Islamic law, a woman’s share of inheritance is half that of her brother. Laws based on *sharia* ban abortion (with very few exceptions), prohibit Muslim women from marrying non-Muslims, bar conversion to other religions and outlaw declarations of atheism. Until recently, children of women married to non-Egyptian men were denied citizenship. A man can still divorce his wife simply by saying “I divorce you,” but for a woman to get a divorce she has to overcome numerous hurdles. A law passed in 2000 allowed women to sue for divorce on condition that they forfeit all their legal and financial rights. For Coptic Christians, it is all but impossible to get a divorce because their church proscribes it. Meanwhile, polygamy is legal.

The smothering effect of women’s oppression goes well beyond their own enforced seclusion. There is no law criminalizing homosexuality, because the pretense is that homosexual behavior is unthinkable. Nonetheless, for transgressing sexual norms, gay men are a target of state torture and persecution as well as vigilante violence. In May 2001, 52 men were arrested in a raid on a boat party in Cairo. Charged with “habitual debauchery,” “obscene behavior” and “deriding religion,” they were tried in a secret military court, and 21 of them were sentenced to three years’ hard labor (see WV No. 801, 11 April 2003). In 2007, two HIV-positive gay men were arrested, subjected to insults and beatings and detained for months. In 2008, four HIV-positive men were sentenced to three years in prison after being convicted of the “habitual practice of debauchery.”

In his seminal work *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884), Friedrich Engels traced the roots of the family—the main source of women’s oppression—and of the state to the first division of society into classes. The invention of agriculture had provided a social surplus beyond what was required for basic subsistence. A ruling class developed based on private appropriation of that surplus as human society moved away from the primitive egalitarianism of the Stone Age. In order to transmit property from one generation to the next, the pater- nity of the heirs had to be assured, requir-

ing women’s sexual monogamy. Thus society places a premium on virginity and marital fidelity—for women. Raising new generations of toilers, the family, together with the church/mosque, instills obedience to authority among youth slated for wage slavery or to be cannon fodder in the armed forces. It also plays a major role in inculcating religious backwardness.

The imperialist and neocolonial worlds are both marked by the oppression of women. As with Islam and other religions, Christianity and Judaism have their own grisly traditions of anti-woman brutality that continue to this day. However, there is an enormous gulf between the status of women in advanced industrialized societies and in the imperialist-dominated societies of the Third World, an outcome of different paths of development. In Egypt, the veil, seclusion, the bride price, FGM, the concept of “family honor” and all the attendant mechanisms of social control over women have been carried forward from pre-capitalist society to the modern day.

These “customs” are not exclusively or even primarily Islamic. (FGM, which is widespread throughout much of Africa, is believed to have originated with animist tribes.) Rather, they are an outgrowth of primitive modes of production based on clans that hold and work the land in common. Inheritance, ownership and access to water and other necessities are determined through the family. Thus the virginity and marriageability of a daughter is a material asset to a patriarch. These barbarous customs can only be completely eliminated through the qualitative development of the productive forces in a socialist world, which will rip out the entrenched economic and social backwardness that is reinforced by imperialist domination. A workers and peasants government in Egypt would seize the property of the landlords and give land to poor peasants as initial steps toward collectivizing and industrializing agriculture.

It will require the overthrow of the capitalist system, which is based on private property in the means of production, and its replacement by a world planned economy under workers rule to build the foundations of a socialist society in which the institution of the family is replaced with collective childcare and socialized housework. Only then will women be freed from the confines of the home to participate fully and equally in political, social and economic life.

## Workers Must Come to the Fore

In the last two years, as the Islamists worked toward consolidating their hold on political power, ostensible socialists shoved aside the question of women’s oppression. Particularly notable on this account are the Revolutionary Socialists (RS), the Egyptian affiliate of the International Socialist Tendency founded by the late Tony Cliff, who unabashedly tail after the Islamists. Indeed, the RS formally endorsed Morsi in the 2012 elections—an act of treachery that the Cliff-



vasi.net

Moscow, 1918: Women trained for military service in fledgling Soviet workers state.

jected to the hideous practice of female genital mutilation (FGM), a savagery that involves the cutting of the clitoris, aimed at curbing the sexuality of women and maintaining their chastity. This gross crime not only deprives women of their organs of sexual pleasure but also subjects them to intense pain during urination, menstruation, sexual intercourse and childbirth and causes them multiple medi-

Contrary to Islamist claims, the veil is not an exercise in religious freedom or a sign of modesty and submission to a deity. Nor is it simply a reactionary symbol of religious affiliation like the Christian cross or Jewish yarmulke. The veil—a glaring manifestation of the social program of the Islamists—is the physical expression of the submission of women to men, the permanent, imposed affirmation of their inferior status. It represents the extension outside the home of the seclusion imposed on women by Islamic law and enforced by fundamentalist intimidation and social pressure. Young women reluctantly heed the advice of their families to “wear the veil and stay alive.”

As Marxists, we reject the liberal/nationalist notion of “cultural relativism,” which prettifies the veil and other manifestations of the hideous oppression of women in the Third World as quaint cultural attributes. At the same time, we oppose state bans on the veil, which strengthen the bourgeoisie’s repressive powers—a threat to minorities, workers and leftist organizations. In the imperialist West, such bans are an expression of anti-Muslim bigotry and serve only to drive women deeper into a cultural ghetto. Nor are such bans supportable in Islamic countries. When Turkey’s Islamist government announced plans to scrap a longstanding ban on the headscarf in colleges, we noted that this would encourage fundamentalist mobs to try to force women to don the veil. Nonetheless, as we pointed out, “barring religious women from education and universities because they refuse to remove their headscarves

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# Egypt Coup...

(continued from page 1)

extend its protests into a national uprising. As Marxists, we are just as adamantly opposed to the coup as we are to government by the Islamists. Many of the bourgeois-nationalist and liberal-reformist organizations that helped kick off the anti-Morsi protests whitewash the coup, which the military warned of well ahead of time, by claiming that the masses in the street are determining events. The opportunist Revolutionary Socialists, who a year ago called for a vote to Morsi, now chime in with talk of a “second revolution.” The masses that rose up two years ago against the hated bonapartist regime of Hosni Mubarak sought a fundamental change to their conditions of poverty, brutal oppression and absence of democratic rights. Mubarak was ousted. But what the working people and the oppressed got was not a revolution but a new political face on the same system of capitalist oppression—first under the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), then the elected Morsi presidency and now back to direct military rule. As we wrote following the 2011 ouster of the Mubarak regime:

“We Marxists reject this bankrupt reformist framework, which posits that the only two ‘choices’ for the working class in Egypt are to capitulate either to the ‘secular,’ military-backed bourgeois nationalist regime or to political Islam. In fact, these are *alternative ways* of propping up capitalist class rule, the system that ensures vast wealth for its rulers and dire poverty for the urban and rural masses. We look instead to the revolutionary mobilization of Egypt’s proletariat, standing at the head of all the oppressed, in a fight for socialist revolution, which alone can

**July 8: Bodies of Muslim Brotherhood supporters slaughtered by army outside Republican Guard officers club in Cairo five days after coup.**



Reuters

address the fundamental problems facing the masses.”  
—“Pandering to Reactionary Muslim Brotherhood”  
(WV No. 974, 18 February 2011)

The same armed forces that have been cheered in Tahrir Square rounded up thousands of protesters in 2011, subjecting many to electric shock and other brutal tortures. Tahrir Square’s “Street of the Eyes of Freedom” got its moniker after security forces, in a cruel and calculated attack, fired directly into the faces of protesters rallying against SCAF rule. During the Maspero massacre of 9 October 2011, armored military vehicles, in concert with the police and Islamists, mowed down dozens of Coptic Christians protesting the burning of homes and churches. Women protesters detained by the army were subjected to humiliating “virginity tests.” Now large numbers of women

demonstrators are again being gang-raped and otherwise assaulted under the eyes of the security forces.

Not surprisingly, during the coup U.S. officials were on the phone constantly with their Egyptian counterparts. The Egyptian military is dependent on the \$1.3 billion in aid that it receives annually from Washington. General Abdul Fattah el-Sisi, the central figure in the coup (and Morsi’s Defense Minister), was trained at the U.S. Army War College and has close relations with American military tops. Washington also made clear to Morsi that his time was up. Using a common reference to the U.S., a Morsi aide texted to an associate shortly before the coup, “Mother just told us that we will stop playing in one hour.”

The military—the backbone of all of Egypt’s bourgeois regimes, along with the police—has stepped in to put a stop to social turmoil in order to halt the economic collapse, which has affected all but the wealthiest layers of Egyptian society. Government debt has increased by \$10 billion in the last two years and the country’s foreign currency reserves are rapidly being exhausted. The vital tourist industry has all but collapsed since the initial protests in 2011. The value of the Egyptian pound has plummeted over the past year, while food prices have skyrocketed. Youth unemployment is almost 80 percent.

In the eyes of the capitalists, the only policy to address such a crisis is by taking it out of the hides of working people. While breaking strikes, Morsi’s government began to introduce vicious austerity measures against the poor to fulfill the conditions of an IMF loan. The working class can expect nothing less from the SCAF, which has a long, bloody record of repressing labor struggle and political dissent. To this end, the generals are turning once again to veterans of the Mubarak

regime. Adli Mansour, a former crony of Mubarak, was named to replace Morsi. Other Mubarak appointees from the so-called “Deep State” have also stepped to the fore to resume governing.

A key task for revolutionary Marxists is combating the widespread nationalist ideology that is evident among the protesters waving Egyptian flags and embracing the army, and even police, as their allies. Anti-Morsi crowds chanted, “The people and the police are one hand” while battling Brotherhood supporters last week. Even the *New York Times* (6 July) called it “a curious sight since the police had been widely detested for killing protesters during the anti-Mubarak uprising.” Particularly among the petty bourgeoisie, there is a sentiment to get cops back on the street in the service of “law and order.”

Illusions in the army run particularly deep in Egypt, where officers led by Gamal Abdel Nasser overthrew the British-backed monarchy in 1952. Nasser’s pretensions to “Arab socialism” notwithstanding, his regime tortured, killed and disappeared hundreds of opponents, including workers and Communists. He was also adept at co-opting Communists and others who pledged allegiance.

During the “Arab Spring” uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011, we pointed to the working class, whose strikes played a major role in bringing down both despotic regimes, as the potential gravedigger of the bourgeois order. We underlined the urgent need for the proletariat to act as the defender of all the oppressed layers of society, including women, Copts and impoverished peasants. The working class continues to wage economic struggles, as in April when a national train drivers strike paralyzed Egypt’s train service for days. However, politically the proletariat remains subordinated to bourgeois forces.

There will be no end to the exploitation of working people, no emancipation of women or liberation of the peasant masses, short of a proletarian revolution that sweeps away the bourgeois state, expropriates the capitalists as a class and proceeds to establish a collectivized economy. There is no nationally limited road to the emancipation of the workers and the oppressed. The powerful Egyptian proletariat can be a leading force in the struggle for a socialist federation of the Near East, part of the fight for proletarian revolution internationally, crucially including the imperialist centers. To bring this perspective to the working class requires the construction of a Leninist vanguard party, which will be forged in political combat against the reformists, liberals and others who seek to subordinate the working class to the imperialists, nationalists and forces of Islamic reaction. ■



**October 2011: Mourners in Cairo carry coffins of Coptic Christians slain in Maspero massacre by security forces and the army.**

ites have since tried to bury—based on the argument that the Muslim Brotherhood has “contradictions” that socialists can exploit (see “Cliffites Disappear Their Support to Egypt’s Morsi,” WV No. 1017, 8 February). The RS even bragged about “reaching out to and earning the respect of the most revolutionary wing of the Salafist movement” (jadaliyya.com, 11 May 2012).

It is grotesque that self-declared Marxists would ever support religious fundamentalists, who want to turn the clock back on human progress by some 14 centuries. The RS has insisted that because the Islamists were repressed under Mubarak (who also at times encouraged them), they were allies in the struggle against dictatorship. This is a deadly fallacy: the Islamists—Muslim Brother and Salafist alike—have a long history of murderous violence against trade unionists, Communists, women, Coptic Christians and Jews, not to mention the RS’s own members.

Women’s liberation requires socialist revolution. By the same token, there will be no revolution except under the leadership of a party that writes on its banner the demand for the emancipation of women. A revolutionary workers party must take up elementary democratic demands such as legal equality for women, equal rights for homosexuals and

the separation of religion and state, which Egyptian capitalism has been unable to grant. In order to draw women into the workforce and every other aspect of social life, it is necessary to fight for an end to forced seclusion and the establishment of literacy programs, free 24-hour childcare and free abortion on demand, linked to the struggle for jobs for all.

The Egyptian woman may be hideously oppressed, but she is also a vital part of the class that will lay the basis for her liberation. Women have played a leading role in strikes over the last decade, especially in the textile industry, where they make up 35 percent of the workforce. One of the biggest of the strikes, at the historically combative Mahalla textile plant, was launched in December 2006 by women who walked out as the men continued working. Protesting outside the plant, they started chanting, “Where are the men? Here are the women!”

In 1924, seven years after the Bolshevik Revolution, Leon Trotsky observed in a speech to the Communist University for Toilers of the East in Moscow:

“Even today we can still observe in the East the rule of Islam, of the old prejudices, beliefs and customs but these will more and more turn to dust and ashes.... This, moreover, means that the Eastern woman who is the most paralysed in life, in her habits and in creativity, the slave of the slaves, that she, hav-

ing at the demand of the new economic relations taken off her cloak will at once feel herself lacking any sort of religious buttress; she will have a passionate thirst to gain new ideas, a new consciousness which will permit her to appreciate her new position in society. And there will be no better communist in the East, no better fighter for the ideas of the revolution and for the ideas of communism

than the awakened woman worker.”  
—*Perspectives and Tasks in the East*, New Park Publications (London), 1973  
[reprinted in “Communism and Women of the East,” *Spartacist* (English-language edition) No. 60, Autumn 2007]

[TO BE CONTINUED]

**February 2011: Textile workers in Mansoura in Nile Delta industrial zone demand better conditions.**



AFP



cuted, locked up and massacred for years by patriotic Turkish flag-wavers simply for calling themselves Kurds. Further, the TKP claims that “Kurdish politics” must “become a strong constituent of a united, patriotic, and enlightened working people’s movement.” And what if, contrary to the TKP’s Turkish patriotism, the Kurds choose to set up their own state? Such an option is not admitted by the TKP. Nor are these wretched politics new: the TKP has given support to the virulently anti-Kurdish CHP as an alternative to other bourgeois parties.

Marxists strongly oppose the petty-bourgeois nationalist program of the PKK. While the PKK has indeed waged a heroic military struggle against the far better equipped Turkish army, it rejects the need for proletarian revolution and writes off the Turkish working class. Thus, the PKK can only maneuver with various factions of the Turkish bourgeoisie as well as launch futile appeals to the European and American imperialists to intervene on its behalf.

Adapting its demands to what it hopes will be acceptable to the Turkish bourgeoisie, the PKK today does not call for independence for the Kurds. Instead it calls for autonomy, expecting to get more language and cultural rights as a part of the Turkish state. But regional autonomy under capitalism means that decisive power remains in the hands of the national state. Even if such an agreement were to be reached, it will be the Turkish bourgeois state and its army that will be in the driver’s seat and will ultimately determine exactly what rights Kurds do and do not get. This will never lead to national liberation for the Kurds.

It is only through revolutionary proletarian internationalist struggle—forging unity among the Kurdish, Turkish, Arab and Iranian working masses—that victory is possible. We call for a Socialist Republic of United Kurdistan, part of a socialist federation of the Near East. This is a concrete expression of the Trotskyist program of permanent revolution. In countries of belated capitalist development, the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolutions achieved long ago in the West cannot be solved within a capitalist framework. The crucial need to modernize these areas, carry out agrarian revolution, resolve the national oppression of the Kurds and other minorities and achieve elementary rights for women requires that the working class, supported by the peasantry, take power. In order to survive and flourish, socialist revolution in the backward countries must be extended to the advanced capitalist states of Europe, the U.S. and Japan, whose economic, technological and scientific technique is essential to raise the semicolonial world to the economic level of the West on the way to achieving a socialist society based on material abundance.

### Political Islam in Turkey

As the Turkish people became disappointed with “secular” nationalist governments, successive regimes played the religious card. In fact, the Kemalist generals gave direct encouragement to the Islamists. In the late 1960s and 1970s there were hundreds of thousands of leftists in Turkey. In response, the generals encouraged the growth of clerical reaction. After a military coup in 1971, the authorities did not arrest the then leader of the political Islamists, Necmettin Erbakan, unlike the leaders of leftist parties. Erbakan rose from obscurity, taking part in two coalition governments in the 1970s as deputy prime minister. Nevertheless, as documented by a Pew Research report released in April, just over a tenth of the country’s population supports making *sharia* the law of the land, compared to three-fourths of Muslims in Egypt.

After the 1980 military coup, the generals provided a further spur to Islamization, introducing such measures as compulsory religious instruction in state schools, training more imams and opening scores of religious academies. As Stephen Kinzer put it in his book *Crescent and Star* (2001), “The dour generals who seized power in September 1980 hoped to

use Islam as a counterweight to secular liberal and radical ideologies that were gaining strength in Turkey.” After deadlocked elections in 1995, Erbakan became prime minister in a coalition government. Once in office, he ostentatiously thumbed his nose at the generals, denounced the West and solidarized with the Iranian theocracy. Erbakan was forced to resign in 1997, and his Welfare Party was banned from politics. Although Erbakan was sentenced to prison, he was amnestied and served no time. But fellow Islamist Erdogan was convicted of subversion and jailed for four months.

Although they suffered a setback, the Islamists were not crushed. In 2002, Erdogan’s AKP was elected to office. Erdogan was careful to cultivate an image as a “moderate” Islamist and a “democrat.” He pushed Turkey’s application to join the European Union (EU) and enacted some minor reforms in Kurdistan, allowing use of Kurdish in private—but not state—schools and very limited Kurdish language radio broadcasts. This played well in the West and won high praise from various bourgeois pundits.

Meanwhile, Erdogan was going after his enemies among the Kemalist generals, recognizing that they were a threat to consolidating his authority. Using the courts and other institutions, he gradually purged the officer corps. Thus in Turkey the army is now subordinated to the Islamists. This is manifestly different from the situation in Egypt.



**February 24: German chancellor Angela Merkel at base in southeastern Turkey with NATO-deployed Patriot surface-to-air missile system.**

As Erdogan became more secure in his position, he increasingly geared up the repressive machinery of the state against anyone who appeared to be an opponent. By 2005, the AKP government had stepped up military repression in Kurdistan, leading the PKK to end its five-year cease-fire. Turkey also began bombing PKK camps in Iraq. Meanwhile, “anti-terror” laws have been used to persecute thousands of union activists, students, lawyers, journalists and university teachers.

Under Erdogan, one of the most infamous provisions in the Turkish constitution, Article 301, was “reformed” so that now it is a crime to insult the Turkish nation as opposed to insulting “Turkishness”—a distinction with absolutely no difference. In October 2005, Armenian-Turkish journalist Hrant Dink was given a six-month suspended sentence under Article 301 for writing about the 1915 massacre of Armenians. Dink was assassinated by a Turkish nationalist for whom Article 301 was a passport to murder. Several dozen members of the teachers union Egitim Sen, which has an honorable record of defending the right to education in one’s own language, were detained for months on bogus charges under anti-terrorism legislation and still face charges.

Erdogan has embarked on a massive building program, often with the theme of celebrating Ottoman times. An example is the shopping mall complex designed to supplant Gezi Park, with an artillery barracks of that period and a mosque. Developers have targeted poorer inner-city neighborhoods, driving Kurds, Roma (Gypsies) and others to slums beyond the city limits.

The Islamist regime has also stepped



**Karsan automotive factory in western Turkey builds buses in partnership with Italian company, 2011. Turkish proletariat, with significant Kurdish component, must be broken from bourgeois nationalism, religious reaction.**

up provocations against the Alevi minority. Composing up to 25 percent of the population, the Alevis are an unorthodox offshoot of Shi’ite Islam who are seen as advocates of secularism and are disproportionately represented on the left. Alevi men and women worship together; women are not covered. Alevis do not fast during Ramadan and do not normally pray in mosques or accept the Koran as a source of jurisprudence. The government is naming a third bridge being built over the

southern rim, demonstrate that talk of the “growing together” of Europe has nothing to do with raising poorer countries to the level of richer nations but rather enables increased capitalist exploitation.

While many Kurds have expressed illusions that the EU would defend minority rights, the fact is that EU states have viciously persecuted immigrants and ethnic minorities, such as the Basques in Spain and France and the Catholics in Northern Ireland. Moreover, both the U.S. and the EU have banned the PKK as a “terrorist organization.” The ICL demands freedom for Öcalan and opposes the banning of the PKK. We have also called for defense of Turkish Guevarists, such as the Revolutionary People’s Liberation Party-Front (DHKP-C), and other leftists persecuted as part of the “anti-terrorism” witchhunt.

It is highly questionable whether the racist and bigoted European rulers would ever grant EU membership to a large, overwhelmingly Muslim country like Turkey, whose citizens would have the right to travel and work in EU states. In any event, the EU continues to put up new obstacles to Turkey’s entry. With the AKP’s goal of EU entry stalled, Erdogan’s “neo-Ottomanism” has put particular stress on developing influence where the Sultanate once held sway or where Turkic languages are spoken, an area stretching from Bosnia in the Balkans to the Near East and Central Asia. While Europe remains Turkey’s largest trade partner, from 2002 to 2010 trade with the Gulf states increased fivefold and with Egypt sevenfold. Receiving foreign capital investment from the Persian Gulf states, Turkey’s construction companies as well as food and textile concerns have in turn invested in the rest of the Near East.

Erdogan’s Turkey has lined up with the Sunni Arab states and the Western imperialists in a bloc whose principal target is Shi’ite Iran. Thus the AKP government

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# BART Strike...

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union ranks had voted overwhelmingly to authorize strike action. A united strike with the BART workers would not even have meant doing anything “illegal,” the trade-union bureaucracy’s longstanding alibi for not fighting. It required nothing more than adherence to what was once a labor principle—No Contract, No Work! But the leadership of ATU Local 192, which organizes workers at AC Transit, not only kept their members on the job but gave BART bosses a helping hand by agreeing to work extra buses to take people across the Bay! BART management was counting on such assistance to undermine the strike.

There were plenty of bus drivers enraged by this dirty deal, who knew all too well that their heads are also on the chopping block. All it would have taken to shut it down was BART workers setting up picket lines at the AC Transit bus barns and other central bus terminals. But for the union tops, this would be against the rules, i.e., the strikebreaking laws of the bosses’ government. Pickets of BART drivers and station agents were dispatched to stations where scab shuttles had been organized by management—not to shut them down but to impotently appeal to riders.

Picket lines are not some kind of “moral witness” or public relations ploy. They are battle lines in the class struggle between the workers and the capitalists who derive their profits from the exploitation of labor. Their success is predicated on the consciousness and organization of the workers mobilized against their class enemy. If the BART strike had been fought on such terms, it could have ignited some real labor solidarity by other unionized transit systems, from regional buses, trains and ferries to S.F. Muni transit workers, whose current contract was imposed on them by an arbitrator after they had defiantly voted down three other sellouts. To wage such a struggle calls for a leadership that will take on the capitalists and their political parties, not bow before them and call off the fight.

## The Allies and the Enemies of Labor

Throughout the strike, the bosses’ hired media pens and newscasters orchestrated a union-hating outcry against “greedy” BART workers, weeping crocodile tears for the plight of the “hard-working” public. The bureaucrats in turn stoked fears that the strike was igniting public outrage. But the “public” is not an undifferentiated mass. Sure, the well-heeled professionals employed in San Francisco’s financial district and commercial and high-tech industries let loose with a barrage of class hatred and barely concealed racist contempt for the highly integrated BART workforce. But on the other side of the “public” are workers and poor people who have lost their jobs, homes and meager social ben-



July 3: ATU picketers at BART stop in El Cerrito.

efits in the economic disaster created by the speculative binges of the Wall Street bankers and corporate magnates. Among those suffering under the same budget-cutting ax as the BART workers, there was some real sympathy with the unions.

As V.I. Lenin, whose Bolshevik Party led the Russian working class to power in the 1917 October Revolution, wrote in “Economic and Political Strikes” (May 1912): “Whereas the liberals (and the liquidators) tell the workers: ‘You are strong when you have the sympathy of “society”,’ the Marxist tells the workers something different, namely: ‘You have the sympathy of “society” when you are strong.’” Here were unions with the social power to deal a blow against the greed of the obscenely wealthy capitalists on behalf of all labor. A hard-fought class battle, including demands addressed to the needs of the poor, black people, immigrants and others—like free mass transit and free, quality health care for all—could have won plenty of allies

among the many who have been thrown under the bus by the bosses.

But the trade-union bureaucrats look for “friends” in the camp of the class enemy, including the cops who serve as the armed enforcers of capitalist rule. The BART police who shot down Oscar Grant, a young, unarmed black man, in cold blood on New Year’s Day in 2009, are embraced as “union brothers.” And their job is not just terrorizing and gunning down minority youth and others on the trains but policing the workforce for management. In the current negotiations, BART management is demanding that its cops be deployed to investigate workers for even the most minor workplace infractions, including tracking them down at their homes. BART cops are the thugs who would have been cracking heads on the picket lines had there been any violation of the bosses’ strikebreaking laws. *Police, prison guards and security guards have no place in the workers movement—they are*

January 2009: Protest against shooting death by BART cop of Oscar Grant in Oakland.



# Turkey...

(continued from page 9)

sides with the Syrian rebels against the bonapartist regime of Bashar al-Assad, an Iranian ally. A conduit for arms to the rebels, Turkey successfully pushed for stationing NATO Patriot missiles on its soil. However, Erdogan’s war course is deeply unpopular in Turkey, with widespread fears that the country may become militarily involved. As Marxists, we say that both sides in the communally based Syrian civil war are deeply reactionary enemies of the working class. But in the event that the U.S. and/or European powers launch a military attack on Syria, working people internationally must stand with Syria against the imperialist forces.

Turkey has substantial relations with the Kurdistan Regional Government in northern Iraq, where Turkish firms have the vast bulk of construction contracts. Iraqi Kurdistan is now a semi-autonomous enclave whose protected status is largely due to the support it has gotten from U.S.

imperialism. Oil is about to flow from newly exploited fields in Iraqi Kurdistan via pipeline to Turkey, angering Iraq’s majority Shi’ite government, which complains that it is not getting a fair share of the revenues. Meanwhile, many of the PKK’s fighters have migrated to Iraqi Kurdistan. Should fighting break out again between Turkey and the PKK, the pro-American Iraqi Kurdish leaders could well hunt down PKK militants, as they have done in the past.

There is a long history of mutual backstabbing among rival Kurdish nationalist groups pursuing advantages with the imperialists or one or another regional capitalist state. We stressed during the U.S. occupation of Iraq that “any fight for Kurdish independence that does not take as its starting point opposition to the occupation and to the nationalist parties that serve it will necessarily be subordinated to the occupation” (“The U.S. Occupation and the Kurdish Question,” WV No. 871, 26 May 2006). The article continued:

“As part of the multinational proletariat of the Near East, Kurdish workers can

play a leading role in bringing down the rotten structure set up to serve the imperialist overlords. Kurdish and Turkish workers in Europe, especially in Germany, can serve as a living bridge linking the Kurdish struggle for independence to the fight for socialist revolution

in the Near East and the advanced capitalist countries of West Europe.”

This struggle requires the leadership of internationalist workers parties forged in opposition to all bourgeois forces and all forms of religious reaction. ■

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# Supreme Court...

(continued from page 12)

action—also a gain, however minimal, of the civil rights movement. The case was kicked back to a lower court for consideration under a new standard that will make it even harder for universities to consider race in admissions. The ongoing racist purge of higher education and skyrocketing tuition costs cry out for a fight for free, quality, racially integrated education for everyone, through the university level.

These judicial feats turning back the clock have been very easy to carry out. Why? Time and again, the capitalist Democratic Party politicians who pass for leaders of the black masses have diverted justified anger back into electoral politics, as have the bureaucrats atop the trade unions. The resulting low ebb in social and class struggle has put wind in the sails of the decades-long effort to roll back the gains of the civil rights movement, not to mention the ongoing war on labor that has hit black workers, most recently in the public-sector unions, especially hard. Historically comprising a reserve army of labor to be maintained, albeit minimally, for the American bourgeoisie, today the black ghetto poor are increasingly considered to be an expendable population.

It is crucial to defend voting rights and every other gain for black people, other minorities and the working class. Depriving the oppressed of basic democratic rights is a declaration that it is open season on them. At the same time, a serious defense of those rights would involve mobilizing not votes for “lesser evil” representatives of the class enemy but rather mass struggles against the racist capitalist rulers. Such a fight for the rights of the oppressed would prove a powerful leaven to the class struggle of the working class as a whole.

## Racial Oppression—Bedrock of U.S. Capitalism

Following the defeat of the South in the Civil War, the former slaves were liberated—codified in the Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery—and extended such basic rights as the right to vote and hold office. This period of Radical Reconstruction was the most democratic in American history, with black rights enforced in the South at rifle-point by the interracial Union Army. Among the measures adopted were the Fourteenth Amendment—which conferred citizenship on “all persons born or naturalized in the United States,” an important protection for immigrants as well—and the Fifteenth Amendment.

Ultimately, though, the Northern bourgeoisie in pursuit of its class interests went on to betray Reconstruction, making common cause with Southern landholders to ensure the maintenance of private property in the means of production. This turn was exemplified by the Compromise of 1877, after which Union troops were ordered back to their barracks, opening the road for Jim Crow to ride in on the Klansman’s horse. The black population, although not returned to slavery, was solidified as a specially oppressed race-color caste.

With the mass migration of blacks from the South to the industrial cities of the North—initially around the time of World War I—the bourgeoisie increasingly fostered anti-black racism, making the color bar a dividing line that has served to obscure the fundamental *class* divide in society. To this day, racist poison plays a central role in blocking the development of class consciousness in the American proletariat. As a result, the U.S. is the only industrial country where the workers have not had their own independent political party, even a reformist one. The legacy of black chattel slavery is behind much in the U.S. political system that is anti-democratic, e.g., the Senate, which is designed to favor less populous rural and Southern regions by granting each state equal representation.

Although the courageous struggles of

**October 2009:  
50,000 crowd  
Detroit’s  
Cobo Center  
for 5,000  
applications for  
federal aid to  
help pay rent  
and utilities.**



Mears/Detroit News

the civil rights foot soldiers were instrumental in ending Jim Crow, the bourgeoisie had its own reasons for acquiescing. The system of legal segregation in the South had become outdated with the mechanization of agriculture and the growth of a black proletariat in the region. It was also a blemish on the U.S. image abroad. In countering American bourgeois propaganda that praised the virtues of “democracy,” the Soviet Union made hay of scenes of police dogs mauling and truncheons pummeling black men, women and children in the South. As Louis Menand related in the *New Yorker* (8 July): “American Presidents were trying to run a Cold War. They could live with Jim Crow when it was an invisible regional peculiarity, but once conditions were broadcast around the world they experienced an urgent need to make the problem go away.”

The strategy of Martin Luther King and other liberal civil rights leaders was to appeal to the “conscience” of the capitalist rulers, pinning their hopes on the beneficence of their courts and the Democratic Party in Washington. The ruling class was willing to make concessions in the sphere of democratic rights. But it would not and could not redress the abject material conditions besetting the black masses. The civil rights movement met its defeat when it came North, where it confronted the conditions of black impoverishment and oppression woven into the fabric of American capitalism: rat-infested slums, crumbling schools, mass unemployment and rampant cop terror.

The great Marxist revolutionary Leon Trotsky, co-leader with V.I. Lenin of the 1917 Russian Revolution that brought the proletariat to power, described this dynamic in his 1922 report “The Position of the Republic and the Tasks of Young Workers”:

“The bourgeoisie makes concessions to the working class: universal suffrage, social and factory legislation, national insurance, the shortening of the working day. The bourgeoisie makes a retreat step by step; where necessary it grants a reform; when possible it puts on the pressure again and then makes a retreat. Why? It is manoeuvring; the ruling class is fighting for its rule, for the exploitation of the other class. Of course the reformists suppose that bit by bit they will remake the bourgeois system into a socialist one. And we reply to this: rubbish!—while power is in the hands of the bourgeoisie they will measure out each reform but they know up to what point they can grant a reform. And just for this purpose they have the power in their hands.”

What the bourgeoisie grants it also can take away. As the chipping away at the gains of the civil rights movement shows, reforms under capitalism are eminently reversible. The same is true for gay rights, now widely considered on firmer footing after another five-to-four Supreme Court ruling last month that declared unconstitutional a key provision of the anti-gay federal Defense of Marriage Act signed into law by Bill Clinton in 1996. That decision came amid increasing support among the bourgeoisie and more widely in society for extending to same-sex couples the institution of marriage—one of the means by which the ruling class exerts social control.

The only way to win social equality is to put an end to the capitalist system of exploitation. With black people historically a vital part of the American economy while at the same time in the

mass forcibly segregated at its bottom, we advance the program of revolutionary integrationism. Fighting against all forms of discrimination and segregation, we understand that the liberation of black people can be achieved only through integration into an egalitarian socialist society. This perspective is counterposed to both liberal integrationism, which holds that black equality can be achieved within the confines of American capitalism, and black nationalism, which despairs of the possibility of overcoming racial divisions through united class struggle.

## Liberalism and the American Nightmare

Adding a heavy dollop of cynicism to its reactionary ruling, the Supreme Court directed Congress to come up with a new, improved method of pre-clearance, well aware that lawmakers are unlikely to agree to any standard. But if you believe the NAACP and other liberal types, it is time to appeal to the “better angels” among the Congressional Republicans. Democratic Party mouthpiece Al Sharpton—one of the organizers of the August 24 “National Action to Realize the Dream” events commemorating the 50th anniversary of the 1963 March on Washington—has pledged to “mobilize nationwide to put the pressure on Congress to come up with stricter voter protection laws.”

The predictable reaction of top officials of the unions, many of which have endorsed the August 24 events, is to similarly preach faith in the politicians who look after the interests of racist American capitalism. In his statement on the Voting Rights Act decision, AFL-CIO head Richard Trumka declared: “We call on Congress with leadership from President Obama to live up to



AP photos

**Above: Black youth in Selma, Alabama, protest at courthouse demanding voting rights, February 1965. Below: Liberal civil rights leader Martin Luther King and others meet with Democratic president John F. Kennedy following March on Washington, August 1963.**



# WORKERS VANGUARD

## Gutting the Voting Rights Act

“Our country has changed,” wrote Supreme Court Chief Justice Roberts in the majority decision striking down the section of the 1965 Voting Rights Act that gives it teeth. In a five-to-four ruling, the Court effectively found its “pre-clearance” provision, i.e., prior approval from the Justice Department to fiddle with voting rules, too onerous for those states subject to it.

The gutting of the Voting Rights Act, which in its own words was meant to “enforce the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution,” is nothing but a punch in the face to black people. Part of the legal consolidation of the democratic gains that black people won, gun in hand, in the Civil War, the Fifteenth Amendment granted the right to vote regardless of “race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” But following the defeat of Reconstruction, it became a dead letter in the states of the old Confederacy, which employed poll taxes, literacy tests and other dirty tricks—backed up by the lynch-rope terror of the Ku Klux Klan and local police (often intertwined)—to keep black people from casting their ballots. It took a mass movement, and no small sacrifice of lives, to crush Jim Crow segregation in the South and wrest reforms such as the Voting Rights Act from the ruling class.

Signaling how little racist capitalist America has changed, the states that had fallen under federal oversight celebrated the Supreme Court decision by immediately gearing up their machinery of voter suppression. Texas, Alabama, Mississippi, South Carolina and Virginia rushed to implement new voter ID laws that will redound against not just black people but many others at the bottom of society—Latinos, the poor, the elderly. In Arizona, where authorities have gone to great lengths to one-up the Obama administration’s anti-immigrant crackdown, state attorney general Tom Horne railed that the Voting Rights Act “humiliates Arizona by making it say ‘Mother may I’ to the federal government every time it wants to change some remarkably minor laws.” Meanwhile, North Carolina and other states are moving to drastically

## Supreme Court Spits on Black Rights



Washington Post

Voting rights decision by Supreme Court gives green light to states’ efforts to suppress minority votes. Below: NAACP student chapters demonstrate in Raleigh, N.C., against voter ID legislation, April 24.



AP

cut early voting and eliminate same-day registration.

The Court’s ruling should come as no surprise. Chief Justice Roberts is but one

of those on the Court who were schooled in the legal doctrine of “strict constructionism,” which in plain English means rolling back rights that black people and

others have gained through struggle. Roberts has been devoted to this pursuit since his days as a Justice Department lawyer under Ronald Reagan. Commenting on Roberts’ and Samuel J. Alito’s confirmation hearings, we observed: “Theirs is not a mere ‘judicial philosophy’ but the expression in the legal/judicial realm of the call that the ‘South will rise again’” (WV No. 864, 17 February 2006). For Senate Democrats at the time, the reactionary views of these Bush nominees were not an issue. Despite Democrats’ rancor over the Voting Rights Act decision, Barack Obama and his party have done their part to downplay the enduring character of racial oppression, not least through Obama’s much-lauded comment in 2008 that the civil rights movement took black people “90 percent of the way” to full equality.

The reality is that by every measure—employment, income, housing, education—the yawning gap between white and black America persists to this day. Nearly 50 years after the passage of the Voting Rights Act, black people are still blown away on the streets of this country simply for their appearance, as was 17-year-old Trayvon Martin last year. Today his vigilante killer is on trial, but only because nationwide protest prompted his arrest. Across the country, the police routinely stop, frisk, beat and jail black youth, although not to the satisfaction of NYC mayor Michael Bloomberg, who recently lamented that “we disproportionately stop whites too much and minorities too little.” Mass incarceration has left some 13 percent of black men with felony convictions. If ever released, most of them continue to be stripped of basic rights, including the franchise.

The “end of racism” nonsense plays into the hands of right-wing reactionaries as they go about instilling their view that oppressed minorities deserve nothing, ever. Take Justice Antonin Scalia sneering in February that pre-clearance is the “perpetuation of a racial entitlement.” Cut of the same cloth was the Supreme Court’s recent seven-to-one ruling that puts another nail in the coffin of affirmative

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## Democrats Call the Shots Union Tops Call Off BART Strike

Four days into a strike that shut down the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) system, the fifth-largest public rail transportation system in the country, the leaders of Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 1555 and Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 1021 ordered their 2,400 members back to work. The union ranks had voted by close to 100 percent to authorize strike action against BART management’s drive to gouge more out of their wages and health and pension benefits. But they were not even consulted, much less allowed to vote, on calling off their strike. Instead, they were unilaterally

told to pull down their picket lines and get back on the job. Nothing had been gained, as it was announced that the massive giveback contract foisted on the unions in 2009 was to be extended for another month.

Who was really calling the shots here was California’s Democratic Party governor Jerry Brown. His Labor Secretary, Marty Morgenstern, issued the “recommendation” for ending the strike. Thanking the union tops for their compliance, Morgenstern opined, “It’s not easy to come back off a strike without a contract.” No kidding! Once again, labor’s fight has been sacrificed on the

altar of the bureaucrats’ fealty to the Democratic Party, promoting as “friends of labor” politicians who no less than the Republicans are the servants of the capitalist exploiters. Union after union has gone down to defeat in the service of this shell game. The once-powerful industrial unions now represent less than 7 percent of workers in the private sector. This has cleared the way for a massive union-busting assault against public workers, who like BART workers are lyingly portrayed as living high on the hog at the taxpayers’ expense.

With BART management talking about imposing a contract on the striking work-

ers, an SEIU 1021 leader argued: “BART wants to keep us out on strike and break us by turning the public against us.” But rather than stepping up the fight by appealing for the active solidarity of other trade unionists as well as the working people and poor who had good reason to sympathize with the strike, the bureaucrats beat a cowardly retreat.

The potential for bringing out other workers was there for the asking. The contract for some 1,500 overwhelmingly black East Bay bus drivers and mechanics at AC Transit expired the same day as the BART unions’ contract, and the

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