

U.S. Hands Off the World! Imperialists Put Off Strike on Syria, For Now

Many throughout the world—from various European heads of state to the average Joe/Jill on the streets of the U.S.—breathed a sigh of relief when Barack Obama announced that he was tabling his plans to bomb Syria while exploring Russian President Vladimir Putin’s proposal to place the Assad regime’s stockpile of chemical weapons under “international control.” Soon after, Obama’s media toadies were fuming over the trenchant and apt delineation of U.S. bellicosity in Putin’s op-ed piece in the *New York Times* (11 September). Pointing out that a U.S. strike against Syria would “result in more innocent victims and escalation,” the capitalist autocrat wrote: “Millions around the world increasingly see America not as a model of democracy but as relying solely on brute force, cobbling coalitions together under the slogan ‘you’re either with us or against us’.” He then piously put forward, “We must stop using the language of force and return to the path of civilized diplomatic and political settlement.”

It is a measure of the intense opposition to a U.S. attack on Syria that Putin has been mentioned, at times without tongue in cheek, for the Nobel Peace Prize given to war criminals who, however briefly, resort to diplomatic wheeling and dealing. Meanwhile, calls on Obama to forfeit his prize have been on the increase. Putin’s posture as the epitome of moderation and reason is consummate hypocrisy from the strongman of capitalist Russia who led the carnage against Chechen fighters for independence over a decade ago, among other bloody deeds.

The current chaos and bloodletting in the Near East, which in the context of the Syrian civil war threaten to erupt into a regional Sunni-versus-Shi’ite communal war, have been fed by more than two decades of wars and machinations by U.S. imperialism in the service of its appetites to maintain and augment its dominance there. U.S. depredations have decimated the populations of Iraq and Afghanistan and are ongoing both in Afghanistan and with drone strikes throughout the region. Although the talks between Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov seem to have removed the prospect of an attack on Syria in the near future, Obama has maintained his “right” to act unilaterally if he is not pleased with the outcome of the chemical weapons deal.

The Assad regime lauds Putin for obtaining an agreement it describes as a victory. The Syrian rebels, on the other hand, had

hoped that the campaign against the purported use of chemical weapons would provide the basis for imperialist bombardment on their behalf and have bitterly denounced the agreement. Marxists do not support either side in the Syrian civil war, which pits two reactionary forces against each other: the butcher Assad regime and a gaggle of rebel forces, ranging from hardcore Islamists to some secular types,

Workers must also oppose the imperialist starvation sanctions that are in place against both Syria and Iran.

The Assad regime, which amassed chemical weapons as a counterweight to the nuclear-armed Zionist state of Israel, has indicated willingness to accept the terms of the Russia-U.S. deal, including the presence of United Nations chemical weapons inspectors. It is to be remembered that in



Reuters
Barack Obama with Russian president Vladimir Putin during G20 summit in St. Petersburg, Russia, September 5.

and militarily. As aptly put by John Pilger in the London *Guardian* (10 September): “John Kerry’s farce and Barack Obama’s pirouettes are temporary. Russia’s peace deal over chemical weapons will, in time, be treated with the contempt that all militarists reserve for diplomacy.”

In Syria as well as Iran, Russia has strategic interests in the production and delivery of fossil fuels throughout the region. Moreover, Russia has enough military might, largely in the form of its nuclear arsenal, to command the respect of the U.S. To emphasize its opposition to Obama’s threatened bombing, Russia dispatched two warships to the Mediterranean Sea in August and recently sent two more to the area, including a “carrier killer” missile cruiser. The CIA has in recent weeks initiated light arms and munitions shipments to Syrian rebels, who are likely to receive more such aid in spite of the deal.

In the countries of the European Union (EU), many of which remain mired in recession, the widespread unpopularity of the U.S.-led war/occupation of Iraq provided the main basis for large-scale opposition to the proposed attack on Syria. British Conservative prime minister David Cameron’s failure to deliver parliamentary support for an attack left François Hollande, Socialist Party prime minister of France (Syria’s former colonial overlord), as the only EU leader to back the U.S. Russian resistance to the U.S. bombing plans stiffened the resolve of the European imperialist chiefs, whose countries have their own interests in the region. When the assassin Putin provided Edward Snowden with temporary asylum, thus seizing the tattered mantle of “human rights” respectability from the assassin Obama, those heads of state were further pleased. All of these run their own nations’ spy apparatuses (normally in collaboration with the NSA and CIA or, in Britain’s case, in lockstep). But many of them resent the mammoth scope of the surveillance they are subjected to by the U.S. spymasters.

The rapidity with which the U.S./Russian understanding was reached indicates that Obama had little taste to go it alone. His September 10 speech indicating a willingness to try the path of diplomacy was for the most part a paean to American imperialism as the seven-decade-long “anchor of global security”—in other words, the world’s sheriff. Through multiple enforcements (read, continuous wars), America has

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AFP
Above: Aftermath of reported air strikes by Syrian air force in Idlib Province, September 5. Below: Imperialist-backed rebels execute seven Syrian army soldiers, Spring 2012.



New York Times video

which are mainly armed by Persian Gulf states and have themselves reportedly used chemical weapons. However, it would be the duty of the proletariat, especially U.S. workers in the belly of the beast, to stand for the defense of Syria against any military attack by the rapacious imperialists.

the lead-up to the second U.S. war against Iraq, the UN and its inspectors acted as the imperialists’ facilitators, a role the UN has played since its founding after World War II. As the world’s dominant capitalist power, the U.S. will persist in its efforts to control the Near East politically

Rulers Fuel Deadly Witchhunt

State-Branded “Sex Offenders”: Pariahs for Life...4



Greek Left, Immigrants in Fascists’ Crosshairs

ATHENS—In a small but important victory for the left and all opponents of the fascist Golden Dawn, the Secretary General of the Workers Revolutionary Party (EEK), Savvas Michael Matsas, and the former rector of the National Technical University of Athens, Konstantinos Moutzouris, were acquitted on September 4 of all charges that resulted from a lawsuit by Golden Dawn. Michael was targeted because he is a leftist and Jewish. He was falsely accused of defamation against Golden Dawn because the May 2009 issue of the EEK’s journal, *New Perspective*, characterized them as a Nazi organization that incites racist attacks against immigrants. He was also charged with “disturbance of the civil peace” and “incitement of violent assaults and conflict.” Moutzouris was accused of allowing the independent news portal Indymedia to use university servers.

Following several anti-fascist demonstrations in early 2009 in defense of immigrants, Golden Dawn filed a lawsuit against numerous parties and individuals, such as the Communist Party of Greece

(KKE), Syriza and the left coalition Antarsya, as well as immigrant organizations. In total, they named 80 people. Three years later, police conducted interrogations and Moutzouris and Michael were singled out for prosecution. This transparent political witchhunt gained international attention, including an article in the London *Guardian* (1 September) by Maria Margaritis. After a two-day trial during which the prosecution’s two main witnesses from Golden Dawn did not even appear, Michael and Moutzouris were acquitted of all charges.

In an August 27 statement demanding that the charges against Michael and Moutzouris be dropped, the Trotskyist Group of Greece explained:

“This case has also fueled a climate in which a vile online anti-Semitic campaign has been whipped up against Savvas Michael with calls to ‘hit the Jewish vermin’ and describing him as ‘an instrument of the World Jewish Conspiracy to foment civil war among Greeks to impose a Judeo-Bolshevik regime in Greece’ (‘Resolution of Solidarity’ at www.change.org/petitions). The savage attacks by the Greek capitalists and by

the imperialist EU [European Union] against Greek working people over the past five years have led to many protests and struggles by the working class and the left. At the same time attacks on the left are increasing while nationalism, anti-immigrant racism and hostility to anything not considered ‘pure Greek’ are on the rise. It is in this context that Savvas Michael and Konstantinos Moutzouris are facing charges.”

Indeed, while the acquittal of Michael and Moutzouris was a victory, on September 12 supporters of the KKE poster in a working-class district near the port of Piraeus were brutally attacked by 50 men with crowbars and bats. Reporting on a KKE protest, the *Guardian* (13 September) Web site described the assault as “a violent attack on Communist party members by black-shirted supporters of the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party which left nine people in hospital with serious injuries” (“Greeks Protest Against Golden Dawn Attack on Communists”). The incident took place in Perama, where the KKE has a historic base among shipyard workers. According to the KKE newspaper *Rizospastis* (14 September), one of the victims sent to the hospital by this potentially deadly attack was the president of the Union of Metalworkers of Piraeus.

This attack underscores the TGG’s warning: “While Golden Dawn currently aim their attacks primarily against immigrants, gays and leftists, their ultimate purpose is to crush the organizations of the working class in order to save the capitalists, as Mussolini’s forces did in Italy in the 1920s and Hitler’s in Germany in the 1930s” (“Capitalists Bleed Greek Working Class,” WV No. 1013, 23 November 2012). The Greek bourgeoisie has a long history of resorting to right-wing terror to smash the workers movement. The current attacks pose the urgent need to mobilize contingents of workers, based on the trade unions, to sweep the fascists off the streets.

It is a condemnation of the existing workers’ leadership that the power of organized labor has so far not been brought

to bear in this struggle, even as the fascists have gained strength in the climate of mass unemployment and grinding austerity. Last year, after a Golden Dawn thug attacked a female KKE parliamentary deputy on live television, then-KKE general secretary Aleka Papatrifa ruled out mobilizations to stop Golden Dawn’s attacks, fatuously declaring that they would be defeated by “the weapon of the vote” (kke.gr, 7 June 2012). No! What is necessary to beat back the fascist menace are mass, proletarian united-front mobilizations against the fascists, drawing in all their intended victims.

Violent attacks, along with prosecutions of workers and leftists, are nothing other than attempts to intimidate anti-fascists into silence and passivity. Another chilling witchhunt is being carried out against hospital workers on the island of Samos who are facing investigation for refusing to collect blood from Golden Dawn donors who insisted it be for “Greeks only.” An August 29 press release by the Panhellenic Federation of Public Hospital Workers defending the Samos workers states: “The state has the obligation to provide as a social benefit FREE and EQUAL healthcare to the residents of the country independently of nationality and race.” It is telling that in June the government chose Adonis Georgiadis, a former leader of the fascist-infested LAOS party, as Health Minister to oversee the destruction of what remains of Greece’s public health system and its workforce.

Capitalism gives birth to the scourge of fascism, so the struggle to do away with forces like Golden Dawn must be linked to the fight for the overthrow of capitalist rule in Greece and internationally. The EU’s austerity attacks, led centrally by German imperialism, have helped fuel not only massive protest but also a resurgence of chauvinist nationalism among Greeks. In opposition to the nationalist politics promoted by the Greek left, we understand that the fight for international socialist revolution and a Socialist United States of Europe is key to leading the Greek working class out of its desperate situation. For this it is necessary to build a revolutionary workers party—a party like Lenin and Trotsky’s Bolsheviks—which champions the interests of all the exploited and the oppressed as part of the fight for a workers government. The TGG, sympathizing section of the International Communist League, seeks to build such a party. ■



TROTSKY

Fascism and Capitalist Crisis

Feeding off of the grinding capitalist economic crisis in Greece, the fascist Golden Dawn has launched a series of attacks on immigrants, left organizations and trade unionists. The dire threat that fascism poses for the working class and the oppressed was explained by Leon Trotsky in 1932 as part of his call for proletarian united-front mobilizations to stop the Nazis in their tracks—a program that retains full validity and urgency today in Greece and elsewhere.

For the monopolistic bourgeoisie, the parliamentary and fascist regimes represent only different vehicles of dominion; it has recourse to one or the other, depending upon the historical conditions....

At the moment that the “normal” police and military resources of the bourgeois dictatorship, together with their parliamentary screens, no longer suffice to hold society in a state of equilibrium—the turn of the fascist regime arrives. Through the fascist agency, capitalism sets in motion the masses of the crazed petty bourgeoisie, and bands of the declassed and demoralized lumpenproletariat; all the countless human beings whom finance capital itself has brought to desperation and frenzy. From fascism the bourgeoisie demands a thorough job; once it has resorted to methods of civil war, it insists on having peace for a period of years. And the fascist agency, by utilizing the petty bourgeoisie as a battering ram, by overwhelming all obstacles in its path, does a thorough job. After fascism is victorious, finance capital gathers into its hands, as in a vise of steel, directly and immediately, all the organs and institutions of sovereignty, the executive, administrative, and educational powers of the state: the entire state apparatus together with the army, the municipalities, the universities, the schools, the press, the trade unions, and the cooperatives. When a state turns fascist, it doesn’t only mean that the forms and methods of government are changed in accordance with the patterns set by Mussolini—the changes in this sphere ultimately play a minor role—but it means, primarily and above all, that the workers’ organizations are annihilated; that the proletariat is reduced to an amorphous state; and that a system of administration is created which penetrates deeply into the masses and which serves to frustrate the independent crystallization of the proletariat. Therein precisely is the gist of fascism.

—Leon Trotsky, “What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat” (27 January 1932), printed in *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany* (Pathfinder, 1971)



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The Spartacist League is the U.S. section of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist).
Workers Vanguard (ISSN 0276-0746) published biweekly, except skipping three alternate issues in June, July and August (beginning with omitting the second issue in June) and skipping the last issue in December, by the Spartacist Publishing Co., 299 Broadway, Suite 318, New York, NY 10007. Telephone: (212) 732-7862 (Editorial), (212) 732-7861 (Business). Address all correspondence to: Box 1377 GPO, New York, NY 10116. E-mail address: vanguard@tiac.net. Domestic subscriptions: \$10.00/22 issues. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Workers Vanguard*, Box 1377 GPO, New York, NY 10116.
Opinions expressed in signed articles or letters do not necessarily express the editorial viewpoint.
The closing date for news in this issue is September 17.

No. 1030

20 September 2013

Brooklyn Hospital Crisis

Union Jobs, Services for Poor Under the Ax

For a snapshot of the irrationality and anarchy of the capitalist system one need look no further than to the current crisis plaguing hospitals in the New York City borough of Brooklyn. With a string of hospitals facing bankruptcy and their owners threatening to shut them down, medical services are under severe attack. Today, at least four Brooklyn hospitals—a quarter of the borough's total—are threatened with closure. That could eliminate more than 2,000 hospital beds and greatly reduce access to emergency rooms. This wholesale slashing of health care services would overwhelmingly hit working people and especially black people, Latinos and other minorities. Thousands of union jobs are under threat.

Starving ghetto hospitals of public funds and forcing closures is as New York as stop-and-frisk. In the past seven years, fully 18 hospitals in New York State have shut down, including 12 in New York City. With the economic crisis that was touched off in 2008 and the recent cutbacks in Medicaid payments, more Brooklyn hospitals are facing bankruptcy. Those hospitals, whose patients include a high proportion of the poor and elderly, are especially vulnerable to cuts in Medicaid and Medicare reimbursement rates. One million Brooklynites, almost 40 percent of the borough's population, are registered in the state Medicaid program. Additionally, as is true throughout the New York metropolitan area, those with commercial insurance are increasingly seeking medical care in Manhattan.

The Brooklyn hospital crisis is ground zero in a mounting wave of hospital closings and mergers nationally. This has been intensified by the impending implementation of President Obama's Affordable Care Act (ACA), which comes with drastic cuts in the rates of Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement that hospitals will receive. The Act explicitly maintains the bar against undocumented immigrants receiving Medicaid. The ACA will also hit unionized workers in a number of ways, including by taxing so-called "Cadillac" health plans. We opposed the ACA from the start, pointing out that it was a "reform" Wall Street could believe in. While fighting tooth and nail against hospital closures and cutbacks, the health care unions should take the lead in the struggle for free, quality health care for everyone, including all immigrants. Such a fight would speak to the felt needs of millions and help revitalize the labor movement.

Bipartisan War on Health Care

Despite their misleading designation as "nonprofit" institutions, privately owned hospitals in New York State are, no less than their "for profit" counterparts else-



Demonstrators march across Brooklyn Bridge to protest threatened closure of Long Island College Hospital, July 24.

where, subject to the laws of the capitalist market. If they cannot generate enough revenue to cover their expenses—that is, if they are not profitable—they will ultimately go under. And failing hospitals are not likely to see the kind of generous subsidies that Washington handed out to the banks and auto companies. In the eyes of the bourgeoisie, government expenditure on health care for the sick and elderly is an overhead expense that ultimately lowers the overall profit rate.

Democratic New York governor Andrew Cuomo has made it clear he will balance the budget on the backs of the workers and there will be no bailouts. Cuomo is intent on slashing \$500 million in Medicaid funding, which would overwhelmingly hit the most needy and vulnerable, and on imposing massive cutbacks in personal care and other services for the disabled. He is also cracking down on "preventable" hospital admissions for drug-addicted and mentally ill patients.

Cuomo's plan was based on the recommendations of the governor's Medicaid Redesign Team (MRT), which specifically called for the elimination of 1,235 beds from Brooklyn hospitals. The MRT included George Gresham, president of the health care union 1199 SEIU, and was co-chaired by his predecessor as union head, Dennis Rivera. For years, the 1199 leadership traded on its "progressive" image as a defender of liberal social causes. All the while, the 1199 bureaucrats served to tie their working-class base to the capitalist Democratic Party, including by themselves serving as key party officials and operatives. Indeed, Rivera served as Obama's point man in preparing the ground for the ACA by helping to forge a coalition of insurance and drug companies, along with the American Medical Association and the American Hospital Association and their lobbyists, that determined the bill's contours.

Local 1199 SEIU and the New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA) along with smaller unions have rallied, lobbied, prayed, chanted and sent petitions to the state government in Albany in opposition to hospital closures. The union tops have also relied heavily on legal action in the courts to put speed bumps in the way of

the closures. There have been many small demonstrations against the threatened Brooklyn closings, which the 1199 and NYSNA leaderships have used to promote Democratic candidate Bill de Blasio as the next mayor.

De Blasio has made the Brooklyn hospitals a key part of his mayoral campaign. He was arrested outside the offices of the SUNY University Hospital and appeared at many demonstrations, while also fil-

ing countless legal papers. In his capacity as New York City Public Advocate, he called for setting up a "super-authority" with "extraordinary powers" to oversee Brooklyn hospital restructuring—a body that would contain the same city and state officials who are overseeing and approving the closures right now. De Blasio holds Montefiore Hospital in the Bronx as a model for providing hospital services in a high Medicaid area. Montefiore has been buying up smaller hospitals and other facilities and in the process *laying off workers*.

By promoting de Blasio's candidacy, the 1199 bureaucrats promote the lie that the interests of workers and the poor are represented by those capitalist politicians who strike a pose as friends of labor. No less than the Republicans, the Democrats are a party of the capitalist class, as illustrated by the fact that Cuomo's attacks on health care largely echo the program laid out by his Republican predecessor, George Pataki. We say *no vote to de Blasio* or any other Democratic Party politician. The working class needs its own party: a workers party that fights for a workers government, which would

expropriate the productive wealth of the capitalist class—including the health care industry—and build and develop a planned economy in which production is geared toward social need, not profit.

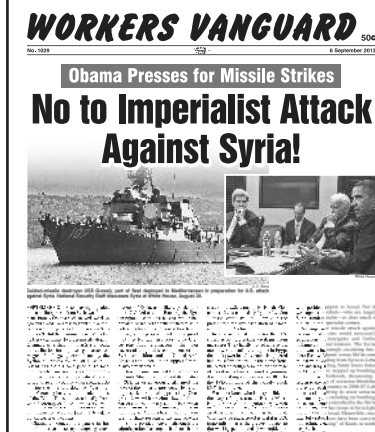
For a Class-Struggle Fight Against Hospital Closings

The next Brooklyn hospital on the chopping block is Interfaith Medical Center, *continued on page 7*

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CORRECTION

In the article "Greek Workers Battle Austerity, State Repression" (WV No. 1017, 8 February), we polemicized against the Greek Socialist Workers Party (SEK) for an article called "Patriotism and Internationalism" that appeared in their press (*Workers Solidarity*, 9 January). This was in fact a letter that the SEK published without comment.

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Rulers Fuel Deadly Witchhunt State-Branded “Sex Offenders”: Pariahs for Life



Reuters

Convicted “sex offender” forced to live in camp under bridge in Miami, February 2008.

Over the past several decades, the sex police in this country have swept up some one million people. They are thrown in prison, publicly humiliated and endangered by Internet “sex offender” registries, tracked by GPS ankle shackles, hounded out of their communities, driven to live under bridges and in the woods. They are turned into total social outcasts, modern-day lepers.

Even as gay marriage—and (openly) gay Boy Scouts—find wider acceptance, the capitalist rulers’ effort to legislate sex and “morality” is a seemingly endless project. Its latest expression is the frenzy whipped up against an alleged rash of incorrigible “sexual predators,” especially those supposedly targeting children over the Internet (i.e., fantasyland) and via pornography (again, pure fantasy). There is no such epidemic, although there do seem to be an awful lot of undercover cops lurking in chat rooms. Untold thousands have been victimized just for viewing porn or trying to communicate with others, not to mention engaging in consensual sex with minors—none of which would be crimes in a rational society.

As with the hysteria in the 1980s and ’90s over supposed satanic child-molestation rings in daycare centers, the Internet predator is a government- and media-manufactured myth. Bolstering and manipulating fear and backward social attitudes, its underlying purpose is to legitimize and strengthen the powers of the capitalist state. While Democratic and Republican politicians prate about “protecting our children,” the U.S. imperialists bomb children across the globe even as millions go hungry in this country, where the infant mortality rate ranks 51st in the world.

Some of the more pernicious legal innovations, designed to further government control, are the federal laws signed by Democratic president Bill Clinton in the mid 1990s that require online registration and community notification of the whereabouts of released sex offenders. A further statute requires state law enforcement authorities to transmit their data and fingerprints to the FBI for a national database. There also is “civil commitment,” which is used to keep prisoners institu-

tionalized after their sentences are served. With these laws, people convicted of sex crimes are plunged into a Kafkaesque labyrinth of presumed guilt, social ostracism, preemptive punishment, fear and violence—usually for life.

For Charles Parker of Jonesville, South Carolina, and his wife, his registration as a sex offender was a death sentence. In July, Jeremy Moody plucked Parker’s name off the registration list that located the Parker home on a map, walked in and shot and stabbed the couple. “I’m not here to rob you, I’m here to kill you because you’re a child molester,” said Moody, who has the word “skinhead” tattooed across his neck. (Parker had not been convicted of child molestation.) Moody later admitted that he was preparing to kill another person off the registry.

Case Study: The Friedmans

Recently back in the news was the case of Arnold Friedman and his teenage son Jesse, which was documented in the chilling, Oscar-nominated 2003 film *Capturing the Friedmans*. The film shows how the two Long Island men, victims of police misconduct, community hysteria and judicial bias, were coerced into falsely confessing to dozens of counts of child abuse that supposedly occurred in Arnold’s computer classes, where Jesse assisted him. A teen-

age friend of Jesse’s, Ross Goldstein, was also convicted and served 13 months in jail after he was coerced to confess and make false accusations against Jesse.

The charges in this witchhunt ranged from the outlandish to the impossible. As Jesse Friedman pointed out, one ten-year-old boy who attended class once a week alleged that he was forced to have anal or oral sex 30 times in a ten-week period and—after re-enrolling—was raped 41 times in class the next year. One charge described group molestation exercises, including “Leap Frog,” in which Arnold and Jesse supposedly sodomized an entire class of naked boys by leaping from one to the next. Despite tales of physical violence, verbal abuse and forced sex in front of the whole class, not one bit of evidence was mustered—no bruises or bloody clothes. No parents voiced a murmur of suspicion until the cops arrived at their doorstep to interview their kids.

The only indisputable fact is that in 1987 customs agents intercepted a packet containing child pornography addressed to Arnold Friedman, leading to a police raid on the Friedman home in the affluent Great Neck suburb of New York. There, police seized perhaps 20 kiddie porn magazines from around the house and a list of children who attended Arnold’s classes.

In possessing pornography, Arnold

Friedman committed no crime! Pictures, fantasy sex, entertainment: porn hurts no one. How many of us could avoid prison if we stood to be jailed for our “deviant thoughts”? As opposed to some feminists and the Maoists of the Revolutionary Communist Party who want to clamp down on porn on the specious grounds that it causes violence against women, we recognize that anti-porn laws hurt everyone by legitimizing censorship and unleashing state interference in private lives. We oppose anti-porn laws and all laws against “crimes without victims,” such as prostitution, drugs, gambling. The government should keep its eyes, ears and nose out of the bedroom and out of people’s private lives!

In accord with the twisted logic promoted in this society that Arnold Friedman, viewer of pornography, must therefore also have been a child molester, he was sentenced to 10-30 years and died in jail in 1995, an apparent suicide. Jesse got six to 18 years behind bars. He was released in 2001 after 13 years, only to face a life sentence of legal and societal persecution.

Even before the trial began, authorities promoted the view that every one of Arnold’s students should be considered a victim. Hundreds of hysterical parents massed in community meetings demanding advice on how to counsel their children. They were told to seek therapy. Many supposed victims in such cases have testified years later to the vast harm done to them and their families by the state’s coercing them to invent stories and by the subsequent “therapy” premised on these fairy tales.

This year, the same prosecutor’s office that convicted the Friedmans reviewed the case in response to a searing critique by the U.S. Second Circuit Court of Appeals in 2010. The court wrote: “The record here suggests ‘a reasonable likelihood’ that Jesse Friedman was wrongfully convicted.” For the prosecutor’s review, Ross Goldstein (known as Kenneth Doe in the legal papers) spoke up for the first time in 23 years. In a nine-page statement to the district attorney, he stated: “None of the events allegedly described by or attributed



to Kenneth Doe ever took place.” Goldstein joined numerous former students who now affirm that absolutely nothing happened in the classes and that police intimidated them into providing false statements. Nonetheless (and not surprisingly), the result of the self-examination was that the prosecutor’s office acquitted itself of any procedural wrongdoing.

Childhood Sexuality and the State

The Friedman case, an ongoing tragedy for an entire family, highlights several important political issues. The Spartacist League’s approach, derived from our Marxist worldview, puts us at odds with bourgeois moralism and often also with many self-styled socialist groups. Human sexuality is broad-gauged, but its practice is conditioned by the particular society. U.S. bourgeois society, with its fanatical religious component, pours a good deal of energy into restraining sexual appetites in the name of social order. With its cops, judges and prisons, the state’s intervention into private sexual relations is aimed at imposing the morality professed by the bourgeoisie, and it often transforms a harmless or even positive experience into a nightmare. The bourgeois state is not a neutral arbiter or protector of the whole citizenry; it exists to assure the maintenance of capitalist rule.

A premise of many anti-sex laws is that children are asexual beings. Absurdly, adolescents and teenagers with raging hormones are considered children. In fact, sexuality is part of the makeup of humans from infancy. As extensively covered in “Unholy Alliance of Feminists and Christian Right—Satan, the State and Anti-Sex Hysteria” (*Women and Revolution* No. 45, Winter-Spring 1996), children are inquisitive little animals who engage in sexual and other types of experimentation and observation on their way into adulthood. As among other primate species, sex among humans has a large learning component. Today, in much of the country ready access to contraception and sex education is routinely denied, leaving youth vulnerable to unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. If they try to act on what they see on TV and the Internet, they’re in trouble.

Statutory rape laws vary widely from state to state, but they all criminalize activity deemed sexual by the court simply on the grounds that a minor (someone below the “age of consent”) was involved, regardless of whether or not whatever happened was consensual. The law willfully conflates consensual sex with violent sexual assault and rape. *Anyone* convicted of having sex, or of something considered sexual contact, with a minor is automatically labeled a violent offender. The designation “predatory” can be given when a court decides that a relationship had been established or promoted for the primary purpose of “victimization.”

The only guideline for any sexual relationship should be that of effective consent—that is, mutual understanding by the parties involved—regardless of age, gender or sexual preference. Granted, making the most basic determinations, e.g., whether anything really happened and whether it was consensual, can sometimes be tricky. And there are certainly plenty of cases of violent abuse and rape for which victims might seek legal recourse. At the same time, as Irish playwright Brendan Behan once commented in a different context, “I have never seen a situation so dismal that a policeman couldn’t make it worse.” Furthermore, disentangling issues of human sexuality from the web of social prejudice is almost impossible in this class- and race-divided society. Freed of the cruelty and cold indifference arising from the profit drive, a socialist society would strive for a scientific approach to these knotty questions.

Lock ‘Em Up...

The anti-sex laws have created a huge mass of potential targets, fueling dragnets with huge cash outlays for undercover work and encouraging frame-up trials using sketchy psychiatric constructs and

“expert witnesses.” As a result, ever more victims have been shoveled into the maw of the U.S. prison system, already the largest in the world. The toll of the war on sexual “deviants” has added to the earlier “war on crime” and ongoing “war on drugs”—code words for racist legal persecution that quadrupled the prison population to some 2.2 million people today, nearly half of them black.

From the 1970s to now, the number of people locked up as sex offenders has mushroomed. *Sex Panic and the Punitive State* (University of California Press, 2011) by Roger N. Lancaster provides a useful survey, describing the development of such panics and delineating just how vast the archipelago of victims of state sex persecution is. Lancaster wrote: “Nation-



Left: L.A. detective hauls away computer allegedly containing child pornography, April 24. Right: Parolee arrested in Wilmington, California, for possessing porn, August 2012.

ally, reports of child sex abuse leaped from 6,000 in 1976 to 113,000 in 1985 and 350,000 in 1988—a fifty-eight-fold increase in twelve years.” Pointing to an irrational dread of “the lurking stranger,” he noted in a *New York Times* (20 August 2011) article titled “Sex Offenders: The Last Pariahs”: “A child’s risk of being killed by a sexual predator who is a stranger is comparable to the chance of being struck by lightning.” Lancaster also made the point that “most perpetrators of sexual abuse are family members, close relatives, or friends or acquaintances of the victim’s family.”

The anti-sex witchhunts have been used to trash basic tenets that Americans are taught to believe are inherent to a democracy, similar to how the “war on terror” has eviscerated a range of constitutional rights. As seen in the Friedman case, privacy is the first to go, then presumption of innocence as the accused are demonized. The convicted are then marked for the rest of their lives. Nearly 750,000 people are currently on the Web registry mandated by the Clinton-era “Megan’s Law,” which was enacted after seven-year-old Megan Kanka was brutally murdered in a sexual assault in 1994.

Upon release from prison, Jesse Friedman—who did not do anything to begin with—was categorized as a “level III violent sexual predator,” that is, deemed to pose a high risk of repeat offense and a threat to public safety. As such, he was driven out of his home three times. He wrote on his Web site regarding residency restrictions that prohibit proximity to children: “If you look at a map you will discover that means almost everywhere. In some states and cities I would be banned from any place ‘where children are known to congregate’ that includes libraries, museums, aquariums, beaches, and even public sporting events.” “Megan’s Law,” he wrote, “is social exile.”

Thousands of others have similarly been made into pariahs. In Southampton, a summer playground for New York City socialites and Wall Street sharks, some 40 men convicted of various sex offenses are forced to live in two trailers located away from population centers. Only one trailer has a shower—“offenders” in the other trailer have to take a bus there to bathe a couple times a week.

Lost Memory of Skin (HarperCollins, 2011), a starkly realistic novel by Russell Banks, explores the horrifying world of the new outcasts. The hero is a shy and naive young man referred to as “the Kid”

whose faithful companion and only friend is his iguana Iggy. The Kid goes to meet “brandi18,” whom he met on the Internet, only to find Brandi’s father and five cops at her house. After he is arrested and convicted he finds himself homeless and living under a bridge with other “sex offenders,” scrounging for food in dumpsters. Even this tiny, dirty, half-hidden space is raided by cops at the behest of headline-seeking politicians, with tragic results. These bridge men are relentlessly forced to keep recharging their ankle monitors:

“It takes half an hour to fully charge his monitor battery and during that half hour the Kid feels intimately connected to the millions of other convicted sex offenders young and old and in-between...all of whom at this moment have plugged their electronic shackles into outlets and are

sitting in the bedrooms, living rooms, and basements of houses and apartments and mobile homes, in garages, homeless shelters, public parks, in airports and train stations, in waiting rooms, offices, and the back rooms of fast-food restaurants and under causeways and overpasses—as if they were all trembling leaves on the branches large and small of a vast electrical tree that casts its shadow across the entire country.”

...And Throw Away the Key

Making a mockery of the notion of “serving your time” and the pretense of rehabilitation are the various state and federal “civil commitment” laws passed since 1990. For example, the 2006 “Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act” provides for indefinite detention of *any* federal prisoner—even those never convicted of a sex crime—who has completed his sentence but is considered mentally “abnormal” and likely to commit a sex offense in the future.

In an article in *The Atlantic* (20 May 2010) titled “When the Feds Decide Who’s Sexually Dangerous,” Wendy Kaminer stated: “People who trust the federal bureaucracy and believe officials will use this power accurately, fairly, and in good faith may feel protected by it; others should worry about a government authorized to detain its citizens indefinitely, without jury trials, based on speculations about their future dangerousness.” Speak to the prisoners in Guantánamo about that.

Under some state laws, those tagged for civil commitment may be entitled to a hearing in front of a judge but not a trial with the possibility of mounting a defense. Most people do not undergo “treatment,” and hardly anyone ever gets out even if they do. There is even a case of a 102-year-old Wisconsin man who could not undergo his treatment due to memory lapses and poor hearing!

As of 2007, 2,700 men were being held in civil-commitment centers. To escape the clutches of the penal/“therapeutic” institutions in which they are entombed, some prisoners even request castration, as the article “The Science of Sex Abuse” by Rachel Aviv (*The New Yorker*, 14 January) relates. The first person detained under the Adam Walsh Act, Graydon Comstock, challenged the legislation in a 2010 Supreme Court case. Aviv observed: “By the time the case was heard, four years after Comstock’s criminal sentence had expired, Comstock was sixty-seven and was suffering from heart disease, diabetes, and incontinence. He had twice requested

to be castrated, thinking that the operation would help his case, but he was told that it wasn’t medically justified.” In recent years, the Supreme Court has consistently upheld civil-commitment statutes.

Aviv’s powerful examination of the horrors of civil commitment revolves around the real-life story of a lonely soldier named John, who befriends “Indy-Girl” in a chat room. Yes, an undercover cop. The soldier, enticed to a sweet-sounding outdoor picnic, was promptly grabbed by the Military Investigations Unit and the FBI. John was sentenced to 53 months in federal prison for possessing child pornography and “using the Internet to persuade a minor to have sex.” But then his troubles really began.

After getting out on probation, John slipped up and looked at some more



underage porn—and was promptly sentenced to two more years in prison. Still incarcerated when Congress passed the Adam Walsh Act, John was transferred to a medical prison in Massachusetts and, without a legal hearing, determined to be “high risk.” Four years passed. In 2011, his civil-commitment hearing began. A year later, the judge ruled that John was too dangerous to release and condemned him to indefinite “therapeutic confinement” in the federal prison system. He remains in this living limbo, where daily “therapy” encourages inmates to spin ever more fantastic stories to win approval from the psychiatrists, stories that only further incriminate them. Living in a tent under a highway seems a preferable fate.

New Witches, New Witchhunters

In the U.S., with its deeply puritanical streak and insidious racism, the combination of sex and race has long been used as a means of social control. The myth of the black male predator stalking white women and children was conjured up in the service of keeping the black population terrorized as lynch law reigned in the Jim Crow South. Anti-sex laws have frequently been wielded to try to put black men behind bars, including famous ones like boxer Jack Johnson in 1912 and Michael Jackson in 1994 and again ten years later.

Anti-sex crusades were one of the weapons for rolling back the gains of the civil rights struggles and to dampen the wider social turmoil of the 1960s and early ’70s, especially that arising from opposition to the Vietnam War. Coming to office in 1977, the Democratic Party administration of Jimmy Carter kicked off an onslaught of domestic social reaction while bringing “born again” religious fundamentalism into the White House. Under the watchword of “human rights,” he also launched U.S. imperialism’s Cold War II aimed at the destruction of the Soviet Union.

The next decade saw one of the most peculiar, terrifying witchhunts in American history: the hysteria over “satanic abuse” in daycare centers, in which hundreds of men, women and children had their lives ruined. Extending into the early ’90s, this panic peaked at the height of Reagan reaction, which among other things sought to drive women back into the home. Funds for welfare and other social programs like preschool and daycare centers for working mothers were

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Pariahs...

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slashed, causing enormous hardship and injury to women and children. The “satanic abuse” panic provided cover for this *actual* abuse by the government.

In the longest trial in U.S. history, lasting from 1986 to 1990, the McMartin preschool case saw child witnesses recount stories of animal sacrifice, orgies, secret underground passages, mutilation of corpses and other fantastical tales. The case started in 1983, and the following year a grand jury handed down 354 counts involving as many as 369 alleged victims, with cops warning of an enormous criminal conspiracy. More than 70 people were wrongfully convicted. Meanwhile, dozens more “satanic” cases swept the country, from Kern County, California, to Fells Acres in Massachusetts and Little Rascals daycare in North Carolina. No evidence was ever found in these cases. The accused were completely innocent, as we (unlike virtually every other group on the left) pointed out *at the time* in defending the daycare workers. The Friedmans were arrested in the midst of this witchhunt.

Bourgeois feminists and liberals helped this insanity gain traction. They promote themselves as protectors of women and children, but their remedy is to appeal to the state for more or stronger laws and more vigilance by police. A more extreme version of the same politics was Susan Brownmiller’s 1975 *Against Our Will*, which famously contended that rape or threat of rape is the main way in which *all* men control *all* women. Her proposal: more female cops.

In the 1970s and ’80s, the burgeoning God squads, led by the likes of Catholic fundamentalist Patrick Buchanan and Moral Majority head Jerry Falwell, campaigned against abortion and declared AIDS to be God’s punishment of gays. As right-wing bigots besieged abortion clinics, the feminists took aim at pornography and imaginary satanic abuse. In pushing this anti-sex agenda, the “progressives” forged a temporary alliance with the evangelicals.

The state was more than happy to oblige. In 1974, Democrat Walter Mondale sponsored the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, which mandated that therapists, teachers and social workers report indications of abuse to the police. Thus, hundreds of thousands of social workers and educators are supposed to act as adjuncts of the repressive machinery of the capitalist state. Reagan’s attorney general Edwin Meese launched a major anti-porn campaign in the 1980s, with a lot of help from liberal allies. With the Internet, things have only gotten worse. In the last 15 years, federal sentences for possession of child porn have increased in length by over 500 percent and can carry a maximum term of life in prison, the typ-

ical sentence for first-degree murder. Among the most prominent feminists pushing reactionary anti-porn campaigns was *Ms.* magazine founder Gloria Steinem, who began her career as a witting informer for the CIA. The despicable Steinem also jumped on the satanic ritual/repressed memory bandwagon with a vengeance. In the mid ’80s she gave financial support to a dig organized by McMartin preschool parents searching for (nonexistent) tunnels and dungeons that coerced children had testified about. In 1993, *Ms.* headlined: “Cult Ritual Abuse Exists—Believe It!” In 1995, Steinem narrated the HBO documentary *The Search for Deadly Memories*. Apocryphal “recovered memories” of

Hysterical Liberals Join S.F. Anti-Gay Witchhunt

Defend NAMBLA!

SAN FRANCISCO—A calculated and vicious campaign by a local TV station and the SFPD has whipped up a

WORKERS VANGUARD
7 February 1992

with each other,” has been maliciously

there, Defense of NAMBLA against persecution is the elementary duty not just of socialists but of all who defend democracy.

TV launched an “investigative” operation culminating January crew barging into a regular NAMBLA meeting held, as it turned out, two years, in the Putnam Hill public library. The station broadcast

SL defense of NAMBLA against state repression is part of our fight against reactionary “age of consent” laws. Right: 1978 gay rights demonstration, New York City.

abuse played a pernicious role in numerous cases. These “repressed memories,” as quack social workers called them, were the secular liberal version of religious hysteria. Being tough-minded materialists, we didn’t buy it. As we pointed out in “Satan, the State and Anti-Sex Hysteria,” techniques that supposedly reveal repressed traumas have been shown to be excellent at inducing false memories, especially in susceptible young children. Sometimes, so-called memories are implanted by cops in the course of interrogation, as in the Friedman case. Actual traumas do traumatize people, and so people tend to remember them.

Sex, Marriage and the Family

How is it that an expanding tolerance (except among hard-core bigots and religious zealots) for gay marriage today can coexist with an unrelenting anti-sex witch-hunt? Because marriage, a legal contract, is one of the main social props of the bourgeois state. In a presentation this May, David Thorstad, cofounder in 1978 of the North American Man/Boy Love Association (NAMBLA), noted of the demise of the radical gay liberation movement:

“The earlier challenge to heterosupremacy, with a view to liberating the repressed sexuality of everyone, has been replaced by a conservative, conventional focus on winning acceptance by that heterosupremacist, capitalist society. This is most obviously reflected in the quest for marriage and open participation in oppressive institutions such as the military, as

well as in appeals to strengthen the state’s repressive forces through so-called hate-crimes laws.”

So, in the quest for bourgeois respectability, gay pride marches welcome contingents of gay cops, whose job includes busting “sex offenders.” Meanwhile, march organizers ban the likes of NAMBLA, which calls for the decriminalization of consensual relationships between adult men and minors.

Unlike the feminist and gay establishments and, disgustingly, most of the “socialist” left, we have always defended NAMBLA and its members against state repression and victimization by employers. This is more than just a “free speech”



WV Photo

issue. Many a young boy, tortured and confused by his own feelings and the conflicting and repressive strictures of this society, would find it reassuring to talk things over or experiment with a more experienced person, as generations before them have done. But these days, engaging in cross-generational intimacy of any sort is playing with fire.

In an article titled “Youth, Sexuality and the Left,” Sherry Wolf of the International Socialist Organization (ISO) brandished her pitchfork at Thorstad for being “the most vocal long-time defender of pederasty on the left” (socialistworker.org, 2 March 2010). Upholding the reactionary premise of age-of-consent laws, she quoted from her book *Sexuality and Socialism: History, Politics and Theory of LGBT Liberation*: “It is incompatible for genuine consent devoid of the inequality of power to be given by a child to a man of 30.” Wolf’s article continued: “Adults and children do not approach each other as emotional, physical, social or economic equals in our society. Children and young teens do not have the maturity, experience or power to make truly free decisions about their relationships with adults. Without those, there can be no genuine consent.”

Never mind that most relationships between adults would not meet this standard for consent. As for Wolf’s professing that “teens mature at different ages,” just who is to determine the proper age for sexual activity for a species that for some

99 percent of its existence has been into it well before hitting today’s putative “age of consent”? Under the vicious capitalist status quo, the default is the state. For communists, it is ABC to oppose government intervention into people’s private lives and to defend any group that is persecuted for advocating more freedom in sexual relations. This is an expression of the ideal of the Leninist vanguard as a tribune of the people. The ISO & Co. march to different drummers, accommodating to bourgeois values and the witchhunt against those with sexual proclivities deemed *verboten*.

In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884), Friedrich Engels traced the simultaneous rise of the family and the state as means of consolidating and carrying on the power of the possessing class as it emerged from primitive human society. The monogamy of the wife was required to ensure paternity for the inheritance of property. Today, the family is still the main source of the oppression of women. For children, the family is meant to instill submission and respect for authority, often engendering frustration and violence. As we wrote in “Satan, the State and Anti-Sex Hysteria”: “The sexual proclivities of a group-living mammalian species such as our own are patently ill-suited to the rigid heterosexual monogamy which forms the ideological foundation of the institution of the family, reinforced by organized religion.”

Much of the terrible damage that is inflicted on youth and women occurs within the bosom of the family. But in this capitalist society, the family is most often all you’ve got. Society provides scant alternative services for nurturing children or caring for the ill or aged.

Anti-sex bigotry and vicious state repression will persist as long as private property and production for profit hold sway. The capitalist state cannot be reformed to serve the interests of the exploited and the oppressed. It must be swept aside and a workers state based on expropriation of the means of production must arise on its wreckage. To eradicate women’s and gay oppression requires building a socialist society in which the functions of the family are collectivized—communal childcare and kitchens, free quality health care, and so on—freeing women from the burden of child rearing and household slavery. As to what such a rational society will hold regarding sexual relationships and social relations in general, Marxists share the broad vision expressed by the late (and very much missed) Gore Vidal, who wrote in “Pink Triangle and Yellow Star” (*The Nation*, 14 November 1981):

“Whatever social arrangements human society may come up with in the future, it will have to be acknowledged that those children who are needed should be rather more thoughtfully brought up than they are today and that those adults who do not care to be fathers or mothers should be let off the hook.”■

Mexico City...

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Union of Education Workers (SNTE).

The context for this crackdown is Peña Nieto’s “Pact for Mexico,” which was endorsed by the bourgeois populist PRD and the right-wing National Action Party (see WV No. 1019, 8 March). The Pact is a declaration of war against unions and the poor. Among its primary targets are the powerful oil workers union, which is directly threatened by the efforts of the Mexican bourgeoisie and its imperialist masters to privatize the state-owned PEMEX oil company, and the SNTE, the largest union in Latin America, of which the CNTE is a dissident faction. While the Movement for National Regeneration (Morena) led by former PRD presidential candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador has protested the recent repression, it joined in the anti-labor campaign by criticizing the education “reform” as too soft on the union.

The authorities claim that not one teacher was arrested in the sweep—only

“infiltrators.” In past weeks they have launched a vicious media campaign against those supporting the teachers—from student youth to members of the defunct Mexican Union of Electricians—declaring them “vandals” or “masked anarchists.” Groups of students, teachers and workers from the National School of Anthropology and History, joined by students from UNAM (the National Autonomous University of Mexico), have called a strike. As our comrades in the Grupo Espartaquista de México stated in a leaflet issued the day after the assault on the teachers’ encampment:

“We call on the workers movement to mobilize against this new attack. *An injury to one is an injury to all! Free all those arrested immediately!* The need to defend the teachers against repression goes beyond solidarity. The teachers have mobilized essentially on their own *for months* against the education reform—a reform that is aimed not only at the SNTE and the union gains of the teachers but also against public education itself. It is in the interest of the entire working class to mobilize against the education reform and the attack on the SNTE and CNTE, a new chapter in a long anti-union offensive.”■

SPARTACIST LEAGUE/U.S.

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National Office: Box 1377 GPO, New York, NY 10116, (212) 732-7860

Chicago.....Box 6441, Main PO, Chicago, IL 60680, (312) 563-0441
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Syria...

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made the world a better place, a force for good especially devoted to keeping children safe, blah blah. To those few hawks who complained about limiting an attack on Syria to a pinprick strike, Obama was more than reassuring. He declared, “Let me make something clear: The United States military doesn’t do pinpricks.”

Indeed not. The drones that shatter villages in Afghanistan and elsewhere are neither childproof nor pinpricks. The atomic incineration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki did not spare the wee ones. The napalm conflagrations employed in the Korean War deprived the inhabitants of villages and towns of the air necessary to survive irrespective of age. The chemical defoliants rained on the population of Vietnam (six pounds of defoliant per head) produced what Vietnamese doctors call a cycle of fetal deformities. The U.S. blockade of medicines to Iraq during the Clinton era was similarly unkind to the kids. The number of those massacred abroad by the U.S. imperialists in pursuit of their class interests since World War II approaches the ten-million mark. The bloodsoaked American rulers will be disarmed only when the U.S. proletariat sweeps them from power through socialist revolution.

Absent international support, Obama’s eschewal of an immediate armed attack on Syria signifies some recognition that such a venture is opposed by the war-weary majority of the American people, many of whom voted for him in 2008 as

the “peace” candidate. Predictably, the racist yahoo Tea Party types are against any proposal from a man they dementedly portray as an alien hybrid of Hitler, Stalin and Idi Amin. Most Americans have other concerns, like surviving the impact of the “Great Recession.”

In this context, the majority of Congress, many of whom will stand for election next year, were undecided or opposed to endorsing Obama’s “limited” attack on Syria. Although the president is not greatly favored by the populace at the moment, Congress is very widely and vigorously despised, inspiring the following headline in *The Onion* (5 September): “Poll: Majority of Americans Approve of Sending Congress to Syria.” From their own standpoint, many among the U.S. capitalist rulers share the appreciation that this Congress (whose job is, after all, to serve their class interests) can accomplish nothing and are ill-disposed to getting bogged down in another Near East quagmire. This is especially the case in Syria, where the strength of the rebel forces resides in Islamic fundamentalists who are devoted to the extinction of the Great Satan (America). And Putin gave Obama a way out of his mess.

In his speech, the president intoned: “I know Americans want all of us in Washington, especially me, to concentrate on...putting people back to work, educating our kids, growing our middle class.” The reality is that the percentage of the population employed is the same as it was at the depths of the recent recession and that Obama has continued the attacks on education initiated by his predecessor under the banner of “reform.”



WV Photo

August 29 NYC protest against threatened attack on Syria.

Those massively deprived of their homes by the recession remain, for the most part, dispossessed, while many others are added to that list due to the rapacious bankers. Meanwhile, those at the very top have not only recovered their losses from the financial crisis but have seen their wealth reach an all-time high. Many of the president’s liberal supporters laud “Obamacare” as the crowning achievement of his reign. Not so trade unionists who fear that his recent one-year reprieve to employers to provide health care under the plan will allow the bosses more time to dump the health care they are obliged to provide under existing union contracts.

To these blows to working and poor

people should be added the veneer Obama provided to racists with his proclamation upon being elected five years ago that racism had been 90 percent eliminated in this country. The recent Supreme Court ruling threatening voting rights, at base, challenges the legitimacy of the North’s victory over the slaveholding South in the Civil War. The ruling appealed to the perception that racism is pretty much a yesterday thing. This fiction was exposed as such, for the umpteenth time, by the killing of Trayvon Martin, so that a president known for his reticence in addressing racism felt obliged to acknowledge that black people face “a history that doesn’t go away.”

Nevertheless, in the absence of a workers party that champions the interests of the exploited and the oppressed, most workers and black people continue to look to the Democrats and Obama to provide some redress for their plight. Simultaneously, the rulers of the decaying capitalist order are intent on further grinding the working people and the poor, and every successful extension of U.S. military might across the globe strengthens them in that effort. The only social force capable of reversing these assaults is the working class mobilized in struggle against the dictates of bourgeois rule. It is the historic task of the international proletariat to put an end to capitalist imperialism and create a worldwide planned economy. But that requires the leadership of revolutionary workers parties, which we in the International Communist League seek to build as sections of a reformed Trotskyist Fourth International. ■

Hospitals...

(continued from page 3)

which is located between the mainly black and Caribbean neighborhoods of Crown Heights and Bedford-Stuyvesant. Recent merger attempts with Brooklyn Hospital fell through, leading Interfaith straight to bankruptcy court. The shutdown of services has started, and the doors are due to be padlocked by the end of the year, with the loss of around 1,500 jobs. The closing will create a health care desert in Bed-Stuy, which has been officially recognized as “medically underserved” for years. The surrounding community has high rates of HIV, diabetes and psychiatric illness, which are endemic in impoverished neighborhoods.

Another hospital on the brink is Long Island College Hospital (LICH). Located in the upscale Cobble Hill area, it is the community hospital serving Red Hook, site of Brooklyn’s largest public housing project. The city authorities’ contempt for the project’s residents was all too clear in the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy, when they were left for two weeks before the Housing Authority bothered to check to see if they were still alive. This callousness continues. As state authorities approved the closure plan for LICH in July, management nearly emptied the hospital of patients. For over

two months, ambulances were diverted to other hospitals, while security guards kept desperate patients from entering the hospital. While management continues to insist on closing down the hospital, LICH has so far been kept open by temporary restraining orders and other legal actions. On September 12, a state judge ruled that Albany’s regulations on hospital closings were “unconstitutionally vague,” erecting a further obstacle to the closing of LICH and possibly other hospitals.

Still LICH is confronted with the same fate that befell St. Vincent’s in Manhattan, which was closed in 2010 and sold for condos, leaving the Lower West Side without a single hospital. There are views of the Statue of Liberty from some of the windows in the LICH building, which is valued at up to \$1 billion. State authorities took over running the hospital two years ago in a fiasco that was slammed by a federal judge. It was clear that the state government took on the hospital in order to sell the property as valuable real estate to offset financial problems at SUNY University Hospital, the other state-run Brooklyn hospital, where more than 200 union jobs are on the line.

When Mayor Michael Bloomberg finally deigned to comment on the hospital crisis, he intoned: “The reality is you can’t have a hospital on every corner.” In other words, the poor can just drop dead. In Bloomberg’s well-heeled Upper East Side neighborhood, you can’t jog ten feet without running into a world-class hospital or the office of one of the gazillions of psychiatrists and plastic surgeons in the area. A Medicaid recipient from Bed-Stuy trying to get into one these facilities would more likely get an arrest than a referral.

The members of 1199, the largest union in the city, hail from every corner of the planet and include a significant number of black Americans. As with health care workers generally, these union members represent a living link with impoverished minorities and immigrants who by themselves have precious little social power to combat their oppression. The fact that the current attacks on Brooklyn hospitals would strike a severe blow at the borough’s black and Latino residents underlines the need for the labor movement to champion the cause of all the oppressed.

Such health care benefits as the working class has won have been the product of class struggle. The dearth of strikes over the past decades has helped pave the

way for the exploiters to butcher health care, pensions and other union gains with impunity. And they have gotten away with it thanks to the acquiescence of the labor bureaucracy, which shares the bosses’ concern for maintaining the profitability of American capitalism.

The union tops tell these workers to butter up the priests, pastors and politicians to achieve gains. The health care unions are not just another type of community group with a special interest in the welfare of the hospitals and residents—they represent the workers who make the hospitals and clinics run. The unions urgently need to fight in defense of every job and to organize the non-union health care workers. Linking up with other sections of the labor movement, these unions can fight not only on behalf of their members but for the black and Latino poor, the

uninsured and underinsured. We need a fighting labor movement with a leadership that understands that capitalism must be replaced with workers rule.

It is through breaking the political chains binding workers and the oppressed to the Democratic Party that a workers party will be forged to lead the fight for free, quality health care, education, housing and jobs for all. The working people need socialized medicine, where doctors will be servants of the people, hospitals will be havens to heal the sick, and research on vaccinations, new medical techniques and improved drugs will be internationally coordinated and used for the benefit of all. This all points to the need for a socialist revolution to break the power of the capitalist cultures and lay the basis for eradicating all exploitation and oppression. ■

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The State and Revolution
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Rosa Parks D
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Lecture Center B2, 803 S. Morgan St.
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20 SEPTEMBER 2013

7

South Africa COSATU Labor Federation in Turmoil

We reprint below excerpts of an article from Spartacist South Africa No. 9 (Winter 2013), newspaper of the South African section of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist). Subsequent to its publication, COSATU general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi was suspended from his post on August 14 on the grounds of having sex with another employee of the union federation at its Johannesburg headquarters. In September, Vavi's supporters in the leadership of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) challenged this suspension in the Johannesburg High Court, and Vavi himself has joined this legal challenge. As the article below explains, Marxists do not support either faction of the bureaucracy in the current struggle within COSATU. We also oppose, as a matter of principle, using the bourgeois courts to resolve disputes in the unions and other workers organizations.

SPARTACIST SOUTH AFRICA

The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) is faced with the worst crisis since its inception about three decades ago. At the centre of the tensions is the attempt by supporters of [South African president] Jacob Zuma to purge Zwelinzima Vavi. This has pitted various top bureaucrats from different affiliates, as well as within some affiliates, against each other in pro- and anti-Vavi factions. The two biggest COSATU affiliates, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and NUMSA, are on opposing sides. The NUM leaders are anti-Vavi, while NUMSA is leading those defending him. In some of the affiliates like the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU), top bureaucrats are divided between those supporting and those against Vavi. The base of the unions is generally more supportive of Vavi than most of their leaders.

Supporters of Vavi think he is being victimised for being a vocal critic of the government, while his opponents complain about his “oppositionist” stance. In fact, all wings of the bureaucracy prop up the bourgeois government via the ANC/SACP [South African Communist Party]/COSATU Tripartite Alliance—a nationalist popular front chaining the workers to the capitalist exploiters. In the lead-up to the 27 May meeting of COSATU's National Executive Committee (NEC), top African National Congress (ANC) honchos intervened to prevent what looked like a split in the making. The ANC bourgeois nationalists heavily rely on COSATU to deliver the working class as voting cows and would not tolerate any COSATU split on the eve of the 2014 general elections.

Nationalist Popular Front Unravelling

The current squabbles among the top Tripartite Alliance bureaucrats are only symptoms of the deepening class contradictions in society. Among the oppressed majority, the anger against the ravages of the post-1994 neo-apartheid capitalist system is reaching an explosive level, leading to differences among the Alliance tops over the best way to respond. That 560 protests in Gauteng Province



From left: COSATU general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi, South African president Jacob Zuma and COSATU president Sdumo Dlamini at labor federation's September 2012 National Congress.

Forge a Leninist-Trotskyist Party to Fight for a Black-Centered Workers Government!

[which includes Johannesburg and Pretoria] alone were recorded between 1 April and 10 May is but one example of how deep the impatience of the poor masses has become.

The Tripartite Alliance is a South African variant of the popular front, a coalition of reformist-led workers organisations (the Stalinist-derived SACP as well as the COSATU union federation) with bourgeois parties (the ANC) for the purpose of administering capitalist rule. The popular front is commonly employed by the bourgeoisie to deal with a restive and militant working class by co-opting the pro-capitalist leaders of the workers

organisations into the government coalition, giving them the task of implementing and defending capitalist attacks on their members. The popular front is a betrayal of the proletariat. Such coalitions never serve to transform the capitalist government into serving the interests of the workers—as the reformist misleaders claim—but rather have always meant increased attacks on the workers, paving the way for open reaction.

The Zuma regime has reacted to opposition and anger from the base of society by using more repressive measures. At the same time, last year's wave of wildcat strikes and the dramatic collapse of the

NUM in the platinum belt, in particular, have led influential sections of the bourgeoisie to seriously question the ability of the COSATU bureaucracy to keep the workers under control. The decision by the Chamber of Mines to terminate the “special arrangement” whereby it pays the salaries of top union officials, mainly from the NUM, is one indicator of this.

The response by COSATU bureaucrats like Vavi and [NUMSA leader Irvin] Jim has been more hypocritical rhetoric about the need to overcome the “social distance” between the union leadership and membership, and other posturing to demonstrate their “independence.” There have also been growing tensions between the COSATU and SACP tops, with Irvin Jim in particular criticising SACP general secretary Blade Nzimande for accepting a ministerial post in Zuma's government and calling on him to return to fulltime work for the SACP. The SACP has basically told COSATU to mind its own business. There are even speculations that Nzimande and Gwede Mantashe (ANC secretary general and former SACP chairman) are behind the attempts to kick Vavi out of COSATU.

There is no question about the reactionary pro-capitalist politics of the pro-Zuma faction in the COSATU bureaucracy, but Vavi and his supporters share the same class-collaborationist programme. The posture of “independence” by Vavi, Jim and Co. is nothing but a hypocritical sham. The pro-capitalist demagogue Nzimande (one of Zuma's biggest fans and loudest apologists) for once said something truthful when he countered their criticisms by saying: “Those who say they do so [attack the ANC] because they are independent are wrong. *There is no independence in the alliance*” (*Mail & Guardian* online, 17 May, our emphasis). This is precisely the point about how the Tripartite Alliance nationalist popular front serves the rule of the capitalist exploiters!

Spartacist/South Africa, section of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist), does not support either faction of the COSATU bureaucracy, both of which are fundamentally committed to upholding the nationalist popular front. While the two wings of the pro-capitalist bureaucracy trade accusations and counter-accusations of corruption, we contend that the greatest corruption perpetrated by both factions is the *political crime* of selling out the independent interests of the proletariat to the racist capitalist rulers through the bourgeois Tripartite Alliance. We are for breaking the Tripartite Alliance *along class lines*. This means setting the working-class base of COSATU and the SACP against the pro-capitalist tops and fighting for the *class independence* of the proletariat—organisational independence from and opposition to all wings of the bourgeoisie, bourgeois parties and the capitalist state.

The growing immiseration of the black majority along with the coloured [mixed-race, partly Malay-derived] and Indian toilers on the one hand, and the increased repression by the Tripartite Alliance government on the other, mean that there is a real possibility of an acute crisis developing soon. Explosive class struggle has the potential to blow the ANC/



Marikana, August 16: Miners mark one-year anniversary of police massacre of 34 strikers.

SACP/COSATU Alliance and the whole country apart. But the outcome of such a crisis will depend crucially on whether a revolutionary vanguard party of the working class can emerge—a party steeled in struggle and based on an internationalist programme of working-class rule to replace decaying capitalist imperialism.

The forging of a Leninist-Trotskyist vanguard party is also crucial for the fight to replace the pro-capitalist misleaders of the trade unions (not only those affiliated to COSATU) with a class-struggle leadership. The urgent tasks facing the workers in their immediate struggles cannot be solved on the basis of a “shop floor” perspective, but require a revolutionary framework to struggle against the whole system of neo-apartheid capitalism. As Bolshevik leader Leon Trotsky explained in his work “Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay” (1940): “In the epoch of imperialist decay the trade unions can be really independent only to the extent that they are conscious of being, in addition, the organs of proletarian revolution.”

Vavi’s Betrayals in the “New South Africa”

Now that he is under attack from the pro-Zuma bureaucrats in COSATU, Zwelinzima Vavi is trying to portray himself as a champion of working-class interests against the capitalists and the government. Nothing could be further from the truth. As the longest serving head of COSATU [since 1999], Vavi has been centrally responsible for keeping the most powerful unions in the country under the thumb of the capitalist government, assisting his comrades in the government as they carried out vicious neo-liberal attacks against the working class. These include the implementation of IMF- and World Bank-dictated structural adjustment programmes demanding reduced government spending and cost-recovery. These measures saw mainly black, coloured and poor Indian townships being targeted for cutting off of basic services like water and electricity. Through privatisation, more than a million jobs were lost and many hospitals and clinics serving the poor were closed down. An estimated 330,000 people died between 2000 and 2005 as a result of the Mbeki government’s “AIDS denialism” and the failure to provide life-prolonging antiretroviral drugs.

Despite all these crimes against the poor by this capitalist government, Vavi continued his unwavering support. His modus operandi has always been selective left rhetoric against some government policies, sometimes leading to one or two protests or work stay-aways, designed to blow off steam and deflect pressure from the base of the unions. When election time came, Vavi would, without fail, not only call for the workers to give political support to their class enemies, but vigorously campaign for the electoral victory of his capitalist allies. Slogans like “COSATU—the workers’ voice. ANC—the workers’ choice” are the hallmarks of his misleadership of COSATU.

Under Vavi, COSATU has also continued to provide foot soldiers to carry out anti-working-class attacks as ministers in the capitalist government. Contrary to the tired lie that promoting COSATU bureaucrats to leading positions in the government and ANC will help make them “pro-working class,” many of these turncoats have gained reputations as the most hostile and pronounced enemies of the working class and the poor.

At the same time, Vavi has proven himself time and again to be a trustworthy strikebreaker on behalf of the bourgeoisie and his friends in government. To mention just a few recent examples, in 2010 Vavi sold out the public workers strike after initially falsely promising to call solidarity strikes by more strategic mining, industrial and commercial workers [see “South Africa: Capitalist Government Shaken by Public Workers Strike,” WV No. 964, 10 September 2010]. Early last year he strangled a strike by SADTU members in the Eastern Cape and unsuccessfully tried to break a number of the



September 9: National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa members march in Cape Town during nationwide strike by gas station attendants.

2012 wildcat strikes in the mines.

When the government committed one of the most gruesome massacres against organised labour in Marikana last August, Vavi closed ranks with other Alliance tops against the workers who were killed for fighting against slave working conditions, many of whom remained NUM members. In fact, Vavi thanked Zuma for showing strong leadership, and several months later joined the rest of the COSATU bureaucracy in backing Zuma against Kgalema Motlanthe in the elections for president at the ANC’s Mangaung conference in December 2012. We of Spartacist/South Africa opposed any support to either faction of this party of the class enemy, just as in 2007 we opposed both sides when Zuma faced off against then-ANC president Thabo Mbeki.

NUMSA Leadership: Talk Left, Walk Right

The picture of class-collaborationist betrayals is fundamentally no different if you look at Vavi’s most outspoken supporters, Irvin Jim and the NUMSA leadership. The NUMSA leaders have become known as

politics. Thus the very same NUMSA CC statement applauded the response by “Comrade Jacob Zuma” to the massacre! Just like Vavi and the rest of the COSATU tops, Jim and the other NUMSA leaders are wholly committed to the alliance with the bourgeois-nationalist ANC and the Tripartite Alliance government. They too have a long history of betrayals of workers’ struggles in the “new South Africa.”

This history goes back to even before the 1994 elections that brought the ANC-led Tripartite Alliance to power. When a militant sit-down strike by workers at the Mercedes-Benz plant in East London threatened to create problems for the Alliance tops’ pursuit of negotiations with the apartheid rulers in 1990, they moved in to reassure the white minority regime that they would police the black proletariat. It was NUMSA leader Moses Mayekiso who, along with SACP leader Joe Slovo, went to East London to strangle the strike.

Following the 1994 elections, the ANC-led government of Nelson Mandela set as a top priority creating an investor-friendly environment as part of establishing its credentials as dependable overseers in the

closely with the bureaucracy of the German metalworkers union IG Metall, who were well-versed at selling treacherous “social partnership” deals to increase profits for the German imperialists.

The NUMSA leaders were ruthless in their suppression of oppositionists within the union who sought to challenge their sell-out deals. One such opposition group emerged in the late 1990s among some shop stewards and workers in the VWSA Uitenhage plant, initially calling itself a “Concerned Group” and later “Indlu ye ngwevu” [the House of Senators]. These were mainly older workers who had participated in the militant struggles against apartheid of the 1980s and correctly saw the new “social partnership” as undermining the hard-won gains of class struggle.

The NUMSA bureaucracy’s purge of these union militants—using suspensions, expulsions and even the bourgeois courts—was completed during the dismissal in February 2000 of almost 1,400 workers following a wildcat strike at VWSA in Uitenhage. Treacherously, the SACP and COSATU leaders took the side of the VWSA management in supporting these dismissals. Just two days before the mass dismissals, a leaflet was issued by the provincial leadership of NUMSA advertising a strikebreaking meeting addressed by the general secretary of COSATU, one Zwelinzima Vavi: “Vavi will urge all NUMSA members to go back to work and distance themselves from agent provocateurs [sic] bent on disturbing production at the plant.” The contact person listed on this leaflet? One Irvin Jim, who was then provincial leader of NUMSA in the Eastern Cape.

COSATU Tops Ride the “Gravy Train”

The material basis for these betrayals is provided by the perks and privileges which the COSATU bureaucrats have gained under neo-apartheid, resulting in a standard of living and outlook which puts them much closer to the bosses than to their working-class base.

After 1994, the leaders of COSATU and its affiliate unions set up union investment companies behind the backs of their members. While they sought to



Left: Striking Mercedes-Benz auto workers in East London, 1990, were sold out through intervention of top Communist Party leaders. Right: Wildcat strike at Port Elizabeth VW plant, January 2000. NUMSA bureaucrats mobilized to break strike.



the most left-talking among COSATU affiliates. For example, after the Marikana massacre the NUMSA Central Committee was one of the only leading bodies in COSATU to issue a clear-cut denunciation of the police. Their press statement of 2 September 2012 even noted, quite correctly, that with the Marikana massacre, “the police have violently reminded us once again what Marx and Lenin taught us about the state: that it is always an organ of class rule and class oppression and that bourgeois democracy is nothing but the best political shell behind which the bourgeoisie hides its dictatorship.”

But the NUMSA bureaucrats’ occasional use of revolutionary rhetoric only serves to give a “Marxist-Leninist” veneer to their pursuit of class-collaborationist

eyes of the Randlords and their imperialist senior partners.

The NUMSA leadership played a leading role in advancing these class-collaborationist schemes. This included a number of watershed agreements between the NUMSA bureaucracy and Volkswagen South Africa (VWSA) in the mid-late 1990s, whose net effect was binding the union in taking responsibility for the profitability of the bosses’ enterprise. This included increased labour “flexibility” through the hated casualisation schemes that are currently dominated by the use of bloodsucking labour brokers. Other deals included agreeing to speed-ups on the production line, cuts in December holiday leave and other concessions. In all this, the NUMSA leaders worked

justify this as a measure to supposedly break the stranglehold of white capital on the economy and to extend participation in the economic activities of the country to the “previously” disadvantaged communities, the facts prove that only the union tops have benefitted. Many of them leave union posts as multimillionaires, and some former union leaders like Cyril Ramaphosa have become part of the handful of black capitalists in the still predominantly white capitalist ruling class. The union bureaucrats’ investment companies are frequently involved in the most scandalous low-wage companies and sometimes in projects which the union tops are at the same time cynically mobilising COSATU members to protest

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South Africa...

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against. Meanwhile, workers do not even get strike funds to help sustain themselves during the usually bitter struggles against the bosses.

The *Daily Maverick* recently exposed one of the most scandalous cases of the union tops receiving pay-offs from the bosses. That paper uncovered how NUM leaders, from local shop stewards through top regional and national leaders, have literally been on the payrolls of mining capitalists, getting paid high salaries by the bosses they are supposed to protect their members from. The response by NUM spokesman Lesiba Seshoka was effectively to say that this kind of class treason is the norm in COSATU.

Vavi tries to profile himself as an anti-corruption fighter. This has clearly angered his opponents in the COSATU bureaucracy, especially when he raises a stink about their dirty dealings or those of Zuma. But this corruption is inherent to the workings of the class-collaborationist Tripartite Alliance (and to capitalism in general), which is based on the workers’ misleaders delivering “stability” to the capitalist exploiters and which Vavi has been so central to maintaining.

Moreover, Vavi’s cries against inequality are simply empty hypocrisy. In 2009 Vavi doubled his salary from R250,000 [\$25,000] to R500,000 a year, a salary that dwarfs those of the COSATU membership (and of COSATU’s administrators and researchers). Vavi also gets compensated as a director in different bourgeois institutions including the Industrial Development Corporation. This state-owned entity is tasked with providing money to new industrial capitalists. He has also not differed from his opponents in using political connections to open up business deals for family members.

Lessons of the Anti-Apartheid Struggle

The SACP and COSATU led millions of workers who struggled militantly against apartheid, and many of them wanted to replace it with socialism. But the leadership opposed proletarian revolution and instead promoted an alliance with the petty-bourgeois nationalist ANC with the aim of a so-called democratic (i.e., capitalist), “non-racist, non-sexist” South Africa. In this way, the militancy of the working class was steered in the direction of the treacherous negotiated settlement with the apartheid butchers.

All this was not a “mistake” on the part of the SACP leaders, but flowed from the SACP’s Menshevik-Stalinist programme of “two-stage revolution.” This is the programme of supporting the “progressive” bourgeoisie in the first stage, which supposedly will later evolve into the second stage of socialism in the indefinite future. Experience of the two-stage “theory” in reality has always shown that in the first stage, Communists mobilise the working class to help the bourgeois nationalists come to power, and in the second stage,



Afrapix

Mineworkers union’s 1987 congress was held under slogan, “Socialism Means Freedom!” Masses’ socialist aspirations were betrayed by reformist leadership’s program to install ANC in power as black front men for white capitalist rulers.

the nationalists butcher the working class. Another crucial lesson from the anti-apartheid struggle is that black workers cannot defend or further their interests simply through trade-union struggle, however militant. This can be seen most clearly in the fate of the so-called “workerists,” who were at one time a dominant force in the leadership of the black trade-union movement that emerged in the 1970s. The “workerist” tendency, represented by the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU), was generally distrustful of the ANC, believing it would ride roughshod over the working class once in power as other post-independence nationalist regimes in Africa had done. But their answer to this fear (which proved quite correct) was to limit the tasks of the trade unions to shop-floor issues and try to “ignore” politics, leaving the struggle for national liberation of the black masses from apartheid to the leadership of the ANC.

The “workerists” had *no programme or perspective* for leading the struggle against national oppression, something which would have meant challenging the ANC and other nationalist organisations politically. But when the township revolt of the 1980s broke out, the FOSATU unions could not stand passively outside the mass upheaval against apartheid, so the result was that they participated in the struggle by accepting the dominant ANC leadership. COSATU was formed in 1985 from the merger of the NUM, FOSATU and pro-ANC unions. The COSATU unions soon emerged as the main organisations of mass, militant black struggle, for example mobilising 340,000 mineworkers at the height of the 1987 gold strike. However, the growing social and political power of COSATU was paralleled by its increasing subordination to the ANC.

Irvin Jim and some other supporters of Vavi have been branded “worker-ists” by some of their opponents within the COSATU bureaucracy. But this is an invention of the Zuma loyalists in COSATU, who want to silence *any criticism* of the ANC and government. Jim and the current NUMSA leaders are quite clear and open in their political support for the ANC, including endorsing Zuma’s second term and recently declaring their willingness to support the ANC in the 2014 elections.

The leaders of the Association for Mining and Construction Union (AMCU) have made a big show of declaring themselves to be “non-political.” But despite their refusal to formally endorse any political parties, the AMCU leaders do have politics and these politics are class-collaborationist. AMCU is affiliated to the National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU). NACTU is politically aligned

to the Pan Africanist Congress and Black Consciousness Movement, which are fundamentally no different from the ANC in their bourgeois-nationalist politics. Meanwhile, AMCU president Joseph Mathunjwa has on many instances expressed his dislike of “illegal and unprocedural” strikes. He recently clashed with the workers committees at Anglo American Platinum and other mines in the Rustenburg area, denouncing their strike actions and working to send the mineworkers back to the shafts.

Before and after the wildcat strikes last year, there has been a massive wave of resignations from the NUM across the platinum belt, with most of those mineworkers joining AMCU, which is now the majority union at the big platinum mines. Revolutionaries generally favour organising all workers of an industry in one union to maximise their strength, but we do not condemn all splits within the trade-union movement out of hand; these need to be judged on a case-by-case basis. It is the NUM tops’ betrayals that are fundamentally responsible for undermining workers’ unity in the mining industry, and if the majority of workers want to join AMCU it is their right. But as the class collaboration of Mathunjwa and other AMCU leaders underline, new unions are not in and of themselves enough to resist the bosses’ attacks. What’s needed is a *political* fight for a class-struggle leadership to replace the pro-capitalist sell-outs both within COSATU and in other federations like NACTU. This is a crucial part of the struggle to build a revolutionary party that champions the interests of all the exploited and oppressed.

For a Black-Centered Workers Government!

During last year’s wildcat strike wave, we called for and supported the formation of joint strike committees based on elected local mine committees [see “Miners Struggle Shakes Neo-Apartheid Capitalist Order,” WV No. 1011, 26 October 2012]. Such committees would organise and unify the miners’ struggles irrespective of union affiliation. They would fight to ensure equal pay for equal work, striving to drive out the parasitic labour brokers. They would coordinate workers defence guards to stop scabs and organise defence against cop thugs, as well as promoting demands in the interests of the surrounding poor black communities and mobilising to defend immigrants against the police and mob attacks. Elected strike committees would more democratically reflect the will of the workers than existing union bodies, and they would embrace broader sections of the working masses. An effective strike committee would, in periods of prolonged and intense struggle, take over many of the functions of running society like coordinating provisioning of food and medical care. This would provide an invaluable experience for the workers and instill the consciousness of their own ability to organise society on the basis of proletarian state power.

But this depends on a *revolutionary leadership* emerging, one which is firmly rooted in the working class and has a clear programme to fight for a black-centred workers government to end neo-apartheid capitalist slavery. At the height of the anti-apartheid struggle there was a development of spontaneous working-class organisations much broader than the offi-

cial trade unions. These covered many factories and plants in a particular locality and involved the unemployed, community organisations and the youth. The task of these area committees was to coordinate and promote solidarity of workers’ struggles within a particular local and between different locals, and they included other worker formations outside of COSATU, like NACTU.

But while these area committees had great potential because of the working masses they encompassed and the struggles they coordinated, the leadership was committed to maintaining capitalism and the alliance with the ANC. No criticism of the participating organisations was tolerated. In this way, the political hegemony of the ANC was protected and the black proletariat was used to haul the ideological cart of nationalism. We are for *workers democracy* within the working-class organisations. This includes open debate and criticism of political programmes, which are required for the workers to hold their leaders accountable and learn to reject reformist dead-ends.

One such dead-end can be found in the reformist politics pushed by the Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM), whose activity around the workers committees in the Rustenburg area was highly publicised in the media. The DSM used the prominence it gained during the wildcat strikes to launch a new “mass workers party,” the Workers and Socialist Party (WASP), on the basis of a reformist, trade-union economist programme. In fact, up until 1996 the DSM’s predecessors were buried inside a mass *bourgeois* party, the ANC, and *opposed* the call for a workers party. For example, in 1994 the current leader of the Committee for a Workers’ International to which the DSM is affiliated, Peter Taaffe, said: “The slogan of a workers party was an incorrect slogan in the period prior to the elections in South Africa. We wanted the biggest possible ANC majority.” Their deep-seated reformism is further confirmed by their grotesque position that cops are “workers in uniform.” Even the brutal murder of the Marikana workers has not convinced these reformists about the suicidal nature of this position.

The national oppression of the non-white majority is too deep, multifaceted and structural to ever be addressed through trade-union struggle alone or any other reformist solution. The proletariat must place itself at the head of the struggle for the national liberation of the black African people as well as the coloureds and Indians, a struggle culminating in a black-centred workers government. The success of a socialist revolution in South Africa requires its international extension. What we wrote in “South Africa Powder Keg” (*Black History and the Class Struggle* No. 12, February 1995) retains its force today:

“For the moment South Africa is a weakened link in the chain of the world capitalist system binding the neocolonies of the Third World to the imperialist states of North America, West Europe and Japan. It is necessary to mobilize the forces of the proletariat to *break* that chain at its weakest links, and then fight like hell to take the battle to the imperialist centers, seeking allies against the vicious enemy of all the oppressed—international capital.”

That requires a revolutionary international vanguard party, which is what we are fighting to build. ■

A Spartacist Pamphlet\$1

Black History and the Class Struggle

No. 23

South Africa: Marikana Massacre

The True Face of Neo-Apartheid Capitalism

Masses of an angry platinum miners by police in Marikana on 16 August 2012. (South Africa) and the workers. (Right) Left: More than 3,000 miners arrested in protest at Marikana on September 5.

Break with the Bourgeois Tripartite Alliance! Forge a Leninist Party!

No.23, Feb. 2013 \$1 (32 pages)

Black History is sent to WV subscribers.

Make checks payable/mail to: Spartacist Pub. Co., Box 1377 GPO New York, NY 10116

Spartacist South Africa

Newspaper of the South African section of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist)

Issue No. 9 (32 pages) US\$1 R2

Subscription (4 issues) US\$4 R10

Make checks payable/mail to: Spartacist Publishing Co. Box 1377 GPO, New York, NY 10116

In South Africa: Spartacist, P.O. Box 61574 Marshalltown, Johannesburg 2107 South Africa

SPARTACIST SOUTH AFRICA

Issue No. 9

Miners 2013

Mineworkers Strikes Shake Neo-Apartheid

Fight for a Black-Centered Workers Government!

Contents from this issue: Perspectives on the 100th anniversary of the Russian Revolution, 1917-2017, 1; Marikana: A bloody massacre of striking workers in Marikana, 16 August 2012, 2; Perspectives on imperialism: On the African continent, 3; Workers Revolution Will Overthrow Marikana Massacre, 4; Labour Unions and the Class Struggle, 5; Down With the Tripartite Alliance, 6; Neo-Apartheid Rule: Terror, 16; Break With the Bourgeois Tripartite Alliance, 22; 32

ILWU...

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“The working class has the power not only to defeat the effort to destroy the unions, but to end the system of exploitation altogether. The principal thing lacking for the quick development of this power is the mistaken point of view illustrated by the program of the New York central body.”

—“Who Can Save the Unions?”
7 May 1921, reprinted in *James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism* (Prometheus Research Library, 1992)

Labor: Stop the Backstabbing!

Today, the few private-sector unions left standing are often at each other’s throats to preserve their jurisdictions. McEllrath cites one of the more notorious examples, pointing to the strikebreaking role played by the Operating Engineers union during the ILWU’s 2011-12 fight against an all-out union-busting offensive by the EGT grain consortium in Longview, Washington. Trumka stood by these scabs, ordering the Oregon AFL-CIO to rescind a motion condemning the Operating Engineers. More recently, members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) have been crossing ILWU picket lines at United Grain. An ILWU motion condemning this scabbing did not even make it to the floor for discussion at the July convention of the Washington state AFL-CIO.

Taking on this backstabbing in his president’s report in the July/August issue of the ILWU newspaper, the *Dispatcher*, McEllrath writes that the “ILWU sees the honoring of picket lines as a fundamental principle that can’t be compromised.” It is hard to imagine any other top union leader in this country even recalling this principle, much less being able to choke it out. But as the great Irish writer and wit Oscar Wilde famously put it: “Hypocrisy is the homage vice pays to virtue.”

For decades, the ILWU tops have invoked the struggles that forged the union to convince the ranks that the ILWU remains the last remaining bastion of labor militancy. The union’s founder, Harry Bridges, is eulogized as the epitome of fighting unionism. All this is belied, of course, by the actual history and practice of the ILWU leadership. The last coastwide ILWU strike was in 1971, more than 40 years ago. That strike was largely forced on Bridges by a membership seething over the massive loss of jobs under the 1960 Mechanization and Modernization (M&M) Agreement he negotiated and rammed down their throats.

Today, the ILWU bureaucracy’s answer to the PMA’s drive to increasingly mechanize operations on the docks is to claim jurisdiction over maintenance and other mechanical service jobs, a number of which are currently done by other unions. In Portland, for example, the ILWU filed a joint lawsuit with the PMA bosses to claim the equivalent of two jobs servicing refrigerated containers that have been worked by the IBEW for over 30 years. As a result, the ILWU has incurred the animosity of the IBEW, a union well versed in the dog-eat-dog world of jurisdiction.

The ILWU is an increasingly isolated outpost of organized labor at the ports, surrounded by tens of thousands of unorganized workers, from the port truckers to workers at intermodal rail facilities and the vast inland warehouse empires. Little to nothing has been done to organize these workers. In disaffiliating from the AFL-CIO, McEllrath pointed a finger at the Trumka bureaucracy’s “immigration reform policies,” in particular its support to a bill that “favors workers with higher education and profitability to corporations, as opposed to the undocumented workers such as janitors and farm workers who would greatly benefit from the protections granted by legalization.”

Many such workers are among the thousands of overwhelmingly immigrant port truckers. Yet far from championing citizenship rights for these workers or even a “pathway to citizenship,” the ILWU has,

at best, turned a blind eye to their plight. At worst, as recounted by many of the drivers who recently walked off the job in protest against the grueling conditions they face at the Oakland port, they are treated with chauvinist contempt by many ILWU members. The solidarity of the truckers will be critical in the upcoming ILWU contract battle with the PMA, as the ILWU leadership no doubt recognizes on some level. Unlike in 2008, when the Bay Area Local 10 tops told longshoremen that the truckers’ picket lines were not “bona fide,” this time they called to honor the pickets, at least at the Stevedoring Services of America terminal.

In his *Dispatcher* column, McEllrath demands an end to the “ugliness of racial bigotry.” In particular, he pointed to reports of longshoremen on the picket lines at grain terminals in the Pacific Northwest hurling racial epithets at scabs and Gettier security guards. There is no question that these strikebreakers serve the class enemy. But it has nothing to do with the color of their skin. They are hirelings of companies that, in the tried-and-true practice of this country’s capitalist rulers, play the race card to further their aims. If the ILWU actually used its muscle, mobilizing its supporters to build picket lines that no scab would dare to cross, it would be in a position to turn the tables on the bosses. But not only has there been no such struggle, the ILWU in Portland and elsewhere embraces the regular port security guards as fellow union members. It is hard to fight an enemy that is welcomed into your own house!

McEllrath recounts that Bridges “made racial integration and anti-discrimination a cornerstone” of the union’s organizing strategy. Indeed, he did in the Bay Area, but in the name of “local autonomy” he left discrimination mostly unchallenged in the Pacific Northwest as well as at the San Pedro docks in Los Angeles. Thus, racial fault lines were built into the union from the beginning. Today, the deadly poison of racism is a threat to the very existence of the ILWU, with the potential to detonate divisions between the still overwhelmingly white Pacific Northwest, the largely black membership in the Bay Area and the majority Latino L.A./Long Beach local.

Racial and ethnic chauvinism has been further fueled by the “loyal to America” patriotism of the ILWU International lead-



Underwood



San Francisco, 1939: ILWU leader Harry Bridges, seated at center, at deportation hearing.

ment to gut the unions in this country. If the unions are not only to survive but to become actual battalions of working-class struggle, they must champion the cause of black freedom and full citizenship rights for immigrants as part of a class-struggle fight to bring the masses of unorganized workers into the unions. As is particularly demonstrated in longshore, where work is dependent on world trade, the workers’ fight is international. Labor must repudiate the red-white-and-blue patriotism of its misleaders, who have shackled the unions to the interests and profitability of U.S. imperialism. The kind of leadership that labor needs is one that inscribes on its banners Marx and Engels’ call in the *Communist Manifesto*: “The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Working men of all countries unite!”

Build a Class-Struggle Workers Party!

The present crisis is not the first faced by a weakened American labor movement. Throughout the 1920s, the AFL union leadership did little to organize the millions of workers who did the back-breaking work in the mills and on the assembly lines. In the four years after the October 1929 stock market crash, unemployment skyrocketed to over 12 million, so that virtually any worker could easily

movement, including the social democrats and the CP, crippled it through their political support to Democratic Party president Franklin D. Roosevelt. Harry Bridges was among this number. During World War II, he imposed a no-strike pledge and other measures that served to increase the exploitation of ILWU members in order to advance the war aims of predatory U.S. imperialism.

In 1949-50, eleven unions associated with the CP, including the ILWU, were expelled from the CIO as part of the Cold War red purges. Driving out the key leaders and fighters for industrial unionism, the purges consolidated the labor bureaucracy that has presided over the steady erosion of union power to the point where today less than 7 percent of manufacturing and other industrial workers are organized. Aptly described over a century ago by early American socialist Daniel De Leon as the “labor lieutenants of the capitalist class,” the union officialdom, then and today, shares the exploiters’ belief in the inviolability of the profit system. This belief is concretized by their prostration before, and integration into, the capitalist Democratic Party.

The Obama administration is far from a disinterested observer of the upcoming contract struggle between the ILWU and the PMA. The union has enormous social power. With the offshoring of much manufacturing and the just-in-time delivery system, a strike would quickly paralyze whole sectors of the U.S. economy. It is precisely because longshoremen have their hands on the choke points of international commerce that there has been an offensive against their unions around the world. That Obama will stand with the PMA shipping bosses is as obvious as the flotilla of armed Coast Guard ships and helicopters his administration mobilized during the ILWU’s Longview battle to ensure that the first shipment of scab grain out of the EGT terminal met no interference. Today, Coast Guard ships again patrol the Columbia River to ensure the passage of grain worked by scabs in Vancouver and Portland. Meanwhile, with the PMA aiming to gut medical benefits, Obama’s health care “reform” will further roll back these hard-won gains by levying taxes on so-called “Cadillac” union health care programs.

The ILWU is in a tough spot. But there is no immediate hope if the union continues to surrender its power. Nor does splitting from the AFL-CIO open the way for the union to struggle. The road forward lies in the fight to forge a new, class-struggle leadership of the unions that will wage the battles out of which a revolutionary internationalist workers party can be built. Such a party will lead the “final conflict” to get rid of a system in which profits are reaped through the brutal exploitation of labor. When those who labor rule, the means of production will be taken out of the hands of the rapacious capitalist owners and made the collective property of society. The tremendous wealth of this country will then be used to provide for the many as opposed to profiting the few. ■

ILWU members march in San Francisco demonstration against Vietnam War, circa 1968.

ership. In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks, the ILWU bureaucracy lined up behind the “war on terror” on the docks, pointing a finger at port truckers as a potential “security threat.” Now the ILWU tops present the fight against the union-busting grain companies as one in defense of the “American grain industry” against Japanese and other foreign competitors. To this end, McEllrath & Co. uphold the concessionary deal they made with the U.S.-based TEMCO grain company, amid contentious negotiations with the Pacific Northwest Grain Handlers Association, as supposed evidence of TEMCO’s commitment to the well-being of its workers.

The lie that workers and their exploiters have common interests disarms labor in the face of the virtually unchallenged offensive by the bosses and their govern-

be replaced. The working class was confronted not just by joblessness but homelessness and starvation. By 1933, AFL membership was less than half of what it had been in 1920. But the next year, city-wide strikes in Minneapolis, San Francisco and Toledo—led by Trotskyists, the Stalinist Communist Party (CP) and left-wing socialists respectively—set the stage for an outpouring of working-class militancy and laid the basis for the formation of the mass CIO industrial unions.

The gigantic class battles of the 1930s carried the American trade-union movement to unprecedented heights and advanced class consciousness in the working class. The most advanced elements were receptive to the idea of forming a workers party in opposition to the capitalist parties, Democratic as well as Republican. But the very leaders of the new industrial

WORKERS VANGUARD

As 2014 Contract Battle Looms

ILWU Splits from AFL-CIO

On the eve of the recent AFL-CIO convention, the 42,000-member International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) split from the federation. In his August 29 letter of disaffiliation, ILWU International president Robert McEllrath pointed to increasing attacks on the longshore union by other AFL-CIO unions, ranging from the filing of unfair labor practice lawsuits to outright scabbing. These charges are all too true and then some. But the ILWU leadership's hands are hardly clean in the sordid game of jurisdictional warfare that pits union against union in a scramble to defend their turf. McEllrath complains of the "compromising" policies of the AFL-CIO in "going along to get along" with the Obama administration. But the ILWU bureaucrats are equally culpable in subordinating the unions to the political fortunes of the Democratic Party, even if they have been disappointed with the hoped-for payoff for such treachery.

Today, the very existence of the ILWU in grain handling in the Pacific Northwest is on the line. Its members have been locked out for months by United Grain in Vancouver, Washington, and by Columbia Grain in Portland, Oregon. Scabs, protected by the latter-day Pinkertons of J.R. Gettier & Associates, are doing jobs held by the union for decades. Alongside the grain conglomerates' drive to break the ILWU stand the shipping company bosses of the Pacific Maritime Association (PMA), who are preparing for war with the union when its coastwide contract expires in July 2014.

Splitting from the AFL-CIO in the lead-up to this battle, the ILWU stands to be further isolated and risks making an even more open enemy of the AFL-CIO bureaucracy, led by Richard Trumka. It is already reported that the ILWU will not be granted "solidarity charters," which were awarded to the affiliates of the Change to Win coalition when they broke from the AFL-CIO in 2005. Instead, the ILWU is to be expelled from all regional and city labor councils. Despite the formation last year of a "Maritime Labor Alliance" composed of

the ILWU, the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA)—which organizes East and Gulf Coast ports—and four other unions, the ILWU can hardly bank on solidarity from the leaders of the ILA. At the AFL-CIO convention, the ILA announced it would stay in the AFL-CIO. Its president, Harold Daggett, was rewarded with a seat as a vice president of the federation, even as he gave more lip service to standing behind the ILWU.

In his letter to the AFL-CIO, McEllrath recounts the ILWU's "long and proud

power as a class to shut down production through mass, militant picket lines, sit-down strikes and solidarity actions. They didn't bow before the capitalist anti-labor laws but fought it out in opposition to the bosses and their cops, courts and security goons. Against the poisonous racial and ethnic hatreds so ably wielded by America's rulers to divide and conquer the workers, the organizing drives in auto, steel, meatpacking and other industries brought thousands of black workers into the new industrial unions.

to join as *individuals* through its "Working America" organization. It also will open its doors to the community-based workers' centers that have sprung up around the country. These new members will provide more money and bodies for the bureaucrats' "get out the vote" and lobbying efforts. The name of the game has become building coalitions with student labor activists and other "community" groups in order to beg the capitalist rulers to throw a few more crumbs labor's way.

This scheme is a striking example of what *not* to do to build the unions. But it is a natural step for the labor misleaders, who have long refused to wage the class battles required to organize the mass of unorganized workers. For years, the AFL-CIO tops have argued that their hands are tied in waging any such struggle by myriad anti-union agencies and laws, from the National Labor Relations Board to the Taft-Hartley Act. The truth is that labor has never won anything of value playing by the bosses' rules. The unions themselves were once outlawed as criminal conspiracies.

The attempt to turn the AFL-CIO into a labor-centered version of MoveOn.org is premised on and can only serve to reinforce the supposed obsolescence of organizing drives that bring to bear the unique social power of the working class to withhold its labor and cut off the flow of profits. It also further undermines any understanding of the workers as a distinct class, dissolving them into the mass of "the people." As early American Communist and, later, Trotskyist leader James P. Cannon observed of a plan by a New York central labor council to bring various perceived "friends of labor" into its ranks over 90 years ago:

"Civic bodies, church forums, 'non-labor organizations'—the elements who go to make up such groupings are poor props for the unions to seek to lean upon. They may 'feel' for organized labor, but the organized workers never feel it in the shape of substantial support in their fight...."

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Locked-out longshore workers picket outside Port of Vancouver, February 27.

history of militant independence," from its roots in the Industrial Workers of the World, early pioneers of industrial unionism, to its role in the formative years of the CIO. But the CIO was born out of the militant class battles of the 1930s to *organize* the millions of workers in U.S. industry who were disdained by the craft-based AFL, which was led by sworn enemies of socialism and often outright racists. In these battles, workers mobilized their

Such is not even the remotest perspective of the pro-capitalist labor tops today, from the Trumka bureaucracy to the ILWU leadership.

The Fall of the "House of Labor"

At its convention, the AFL-CIO outlined what is described as a "strategic shift" away from collective workplace organizing. The federation proposes to replenish its diminishing ranks by allowing workers

Brutal Crackdown on Teachers Struggle

Mexico City

On September 13, thousands of federal police backed up by anti-riot tanks and Black Hawk helicopters brutally cleared an encampment of teachers in the Zócalo, Mexico City's central plaza. Members of the National Coordination of Education Workers (CNTE) and their supporters had for four months maintained the encampment—which grew to tens of thousands in August—in protest against Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) president Enrique Peña Nieto's education "reform." The new law threatens tenure and imposes

performance evaluations—a means of scapegoating teachers for the dismal school system—while eliminating union control over hiring.

Knowing they faced imminent attack, the teachers had already decided to take down their camp and make an orderly retreat. This did not stop the riot cops, unleashed by federal authorities and the Mexico City government of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), from attacking atomized groups of teachers and others. At least 32 protesters were arrested and many more injured. News broadcasts showed cops attacking a contingent that included leaders of the Oaxaca and Mexico City locals of the National

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Cops bust up teachers' encampment in Mexico City, September 13.