

As Bosses' Parties Squabble U.S. Rulers Intensify War on Workers, Poor

OCTOBER 1—With many government operations shutting down, it will be the workers, the poor and the oppressed who will be hit the hardest. Propelled by the Republican House majority's determination to choke off money for Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act (ACA), the shutdown is resulting in the furlough of some 800,000 federal workers and threatens massive delays in Medicare and Social Security applications. And in just two weeks' time, Congress faces the deadline to raise the federal debt limit, without which the government will default, stoking fears of a major economic tailspin.

Budget brinksmanship has been recycled over and over again. Most notable was the government shutdown of 1995-96 led by Republican Congressional leader Newt Gingrich. This redounded against the Republicans, helping propel Democratic president Bill Clinton to re-election the following year in the midst of an economic upturn. Polls show that the Republicans will again bear the blame as government functions grind to a halt. This has led Republican mouthpieces and strategists like the *Wall Street Journal* and Karl Rove to denounce the Tea Party types who spearheaded the shutdown for forfeiting any chance to recapture the White House and Senate in the near future.

More to the point, a major section of the capitalist ruling class is fed up that the government, which is their executive committee, is at an impasse. Some 250 groups representing major industry signed on to a letter saying that a shutdown risked disrupting the economy, i.e., their profits. Tomorrow, Obama is scheduled to meet with the CEOs of the country's biggest banks at the White House as the debt ceiling deadline looms.

The Republican representatives of the capitalist class are stoked by their opposition to "Obamacare," which they claim is unpopular with a broad swath of the population—and it certainly is. With its mandate requiring the uninsured to buy health insurance, the biggest beneficiaries of the ACA will be the profit-gouging health insurance giants as well as pharmaceutical companies. But that's certainly not the Republicans' beef. Wild-eyed declarations by their more unhinged elements that Obamacare amounts to "socialism" are merely an expression of opposition to any social program, from welfare to food stamps, perceived as providing gov-



Sharrett/NY Times

Above: People arrived at Dyersburg, Tennessee, county fairgrounds before sunrise to wait for monthly food distribution, August 16. Below: Fast-food workers at August 29 Los Angeles protest demand living wage.



Bloomberg

ernment assistance to the working poor and unemployed. In racist America, the myth that social programs are a drain on the income of hard-working people has long been wielded by the rulers to direct popular anger away from them and toward black people and other minorities. Today's far-right wackos are all the more incensed at the inexcusable sin of having a black man in the White House who isn't the butler.

The Democratic Party representatives of the capitalist class in turn paint the Republicans as coldhearted scrooges who relish starving the poor and stomping on labor, black people and immigrants—and they certainly are. Before it was squashed by the Senate, the House passed a farm bill last month that would have cut \$40 billion for food stamps over the next ten years, removing millions from a program that has grown during the years of recession to include nearly one-sixth of the country's population. Up against those who would literally take the scraps off your table, all the Democrats have to do to appear as a lesser evil is breathe. If they need to do more to bolster that image, they can call on liberal populists like Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren and

NYC mayoral candidate Bill de Blasio.

While U.S. imperialism's Commander-in-Chief took a major political and diplomatic hit by backing down from the projected attack on Syria, he's been all too successful in attacking the working people at home. Along with attacks on public employees and other unionized workers, Obama has repeatedly made clear his willingness to negotiate a "grand bargain" of massive austerity through slashing billions from Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security. When the ACA was passed in 2010, Democrats and Republicans agreed to cut some \$700 billion from Medicare spending over the next decade. Those "savings" were supposed to finance Obama's health care reform. Then came the "sequester" cuts when the

two parties failed to reach a budget deal earlier this year. This kicked in a 5 percent cut in federal spending across the board, which both parties had agreed to beforehand. As a result, federal unemployment benefits have been cut by over 10 percent, while social programs like Head Start and Meals on Wheels are being depleted. Budget cuts will cost an estimated 900,000 jobs next year.

Affordable Care Act: Three-Card Monte

The government shutdown coincides with the beginning of enrollment for the health insurance exchanges at the center of the ACA. It's doubtful that even those who drew up the law can make their way through its maze of terms and conditions. But some things are very clear. For many, especially those who choose the lower cost "Bronze" plans, the deductibles and copays are so prohibitive that coverage will be in name only. Twenty-one state governments concentrated in the former Confederacy have opted out of Medicaid expansion, forcing many of the working poor to purchase policies, often without any government subsidies. Undocumented immigrants are proscribed from receiving any of the ACA's benefits. To cap it off, Obama issued an executive order reaffirming the Hyde Amendment, which denies the use of federal funds to pay for abortions.

As for those who will begin to receive employer-financed health insurance, don't expect this to come without a hefty hidden price tag. This was highlighted by a study last year of the Massachusetts health care system introduced in 2006 under Republican governor Mitt Romney, which served as a model for the ACA. The study by the Boston-based National Bureau of Economic Research found that employers who were mandated to provide health insurance passed on essentially the entire cost to their workers in the form of wage cuts.

Embedded in Obama's health care scheme is a multisided assault on gains wrested by the working class from the exploiters. First of all, the ACA imposes a tax, starting in 2018, on so-called "Cadillac" employer-paid health plans. (Actually, the tax will hit up to three-quarters of all employer-paid plans.) Unionized workers

continued on page 4

Women and Revolution



South African Government Promotes Reactionary Tribal Leaders....6



L.A. Transit Bosses Threaten Workers for Body Art

In the latest in a series of attacks against its heavily unionized workforce, the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) announced on its Web site: “All Metro employees must cover up (or remove) *visibly exposed* body-art modifications at all times in the workplace, or while representing Metro in an official capacity.” Workers have told WV salesmen that the company’s action goes further. All employees have been told that they must fill out a form locating and describing every tattoo or piercing not covered by underwear, which will then be kept in their personal files—and

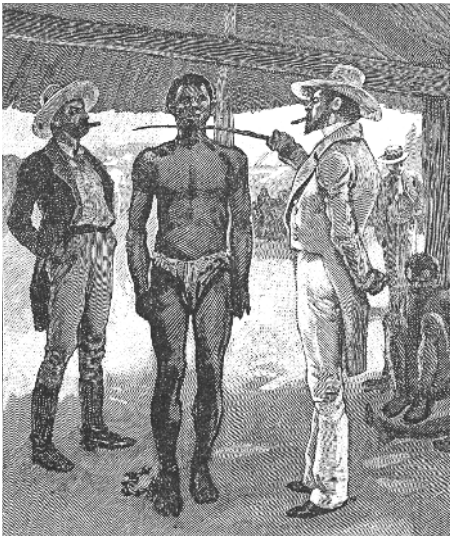
who knows where else. The company will monitor the workforce to ensure that any new markings are covered up. Like similar measures being implemented by employers across the country, this is an attempt to further regiment workers and exclude from future employment all those who do not fit a prescribed conservative mold. Metro is acting like Southern slave-traders who put chattel on auction, standing naked to have their bodies inspected

by prospective buyers. The attack by the transit bosses is a threat to the unions and especially to younger workers—among whom tattoos and piercings are common—and minorities, extending well beyond an invasion of privacy. “Tattoos indicating gang membership,” a designation left to the whim of the cops, are a common pretext for inclusion in the CalGang database, which has *over 200,000* entries. The database currently includes 10 percent of all black Angelenos between 20 and 24 years old. For 30 years, the L.A. cops have waged a “war on gangs,” a local expression of the national “war on drugs” used to justify the criminalization and overwhelmingly disproportionate imprisonment of blacks and Latinos. And those who get ensnared in the criminal “justice” system are for all intents and purposes branded for life.

Background checks have kept black and Latino men who have been victimized by the racist cops and courts, especially through the “war on drugs,” out of the Metro workforce. Drug testing is conducted to harass and abuse workers. Body-art registration is a similar club in the hands of the bosses. Further, the Youth Justice Coalition has detailed that the state has shared data from CalGang with potential employers and even landlords. Who’s to say information doesn’t flow both ways?

Workers are angry that the leaders of the unions at Metro have not taken a strong stance against this assault. According to them, SMART—the new union issuing out of the merger of the bus

and train drivers’ United Transportation Union with the Sheet Metal Workers—is taking legal action against the company. The Amalgamated Transit Union, which represents mechanics and maintenance workers, has voiced its support for this action. In the meantime, the bureaucrats of all the Metro unions are telling their members to give the information the company wants when asked for it! Such slavish groveling before the bosses is the norm for these pro-capitalist labor



Mariners’ Museum, Newport News
Depiction of 19th-century slave trade. L.A. transit bosses threaten to bodily inspect workers in crackdown on tattoos and piercings.

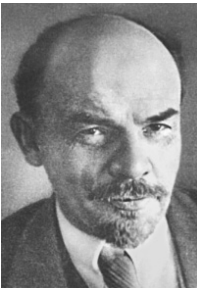
bureaucrats. A union leadership worth its salt would direct workers not to comply and then defend the membership against any company reprisals. To fight company discrimination, what’s really needed is union control of hiring. ■



TROTSKY

75th Anniversary of Founding of Fourth International

We print below excerpts from the *Fourth International’s* founding document, commonly known as the *Transitional Program*, adopted in September 1938 near Paris. Written by revolutionary leader Leon Trotsky during the Great Depression, the document continues to serve as a guide for Marxist intervention into class and social struggle, providing a bridge from the masses’ immediate needs to the overthrow of the decaying capitalist system.



LENIN

Classical Social Democracy, functioning in an epoch of progressive capitalism, divided its program into two parts independent of each other: the *minimum program*, which limited itself to reforms within the framework of bourgeois society, and the *maximum program*, which promised substitution of socialism for capitalism in the indefinite future. Between the minimum and the maximum program, no bridge existed....

The Fourth International does not discard the program of the old “minimal” demands to the degree to which these have preserved at least part of their vital forcefulness. Indefatigably, it defends the democratic rights and social conquests of the workers. But it carries on this day-to-day work within the framework of the correct actual, that is, revolutionary, perspective. Insofar as the old partial, “minimal” demands of the masses clash with the destructive and degrading tendencies of decadent capitalism—and this occurs at each step—the Fourth International advances a system of *transitional demands*, the essence of which is contained in the fact that ever more openly and decisively they will be directed against the very foundations of the bourgeois regime. The old “minimal program” is superseded by the *transitional program*, the task of which lies in systematic mobilization of the masses for the proletarian revolution....

Under the menace of its own disintegration, the proletariat cannot permit the transformation of an increasing section of the workers into chronically unemployed paupers, living off the crumbs of a disintegrating society. *The right to employment* is the only serious right left to the worker in a society based upon exploitation. This right today is being shorn from him at every step. Against unemployment, “structural” as well as “conjunctural,” the time is ripe to advance, along with the slogan of public works, the slogan of *a sliding scale of working hours*. Trade unions and other mass organizations should bind the workers and the unemployed together in the solidarity of mutual responsibility. On this basis all the work on hand would then be divided among all existing workers in accordance with how the extent of the working week is defined. The average wage of every worker remains the same as it was under the old working week. Wages, with a strictly guaranteed *minimum*, would follow the movement of prices. It is impossible to accept any other program for the present catastrophic period.

Property owners and their lawyers will prove the “unrealizability” of these demands. Smaller, especially ruined capitalists in addition will refer to their account ledgers. The workers categorically denounce such conclusions and references. The question is not one of a “normal” collision between opposing material interests. The question is one of guarding the proletariat from decay, demoralization, and ruin. The question is one of life or death of the only creative and progressive class, and by that token of the future of mankind. If capitalism is incapable of satisfying the demands inevitably arising from the calamities generated by itself, then let it perish. “Realizability” or “unrealizability” is in the given instance a question of the relationship of forces, which can be decided only by the struggle. By means of this struggle, no matter what its immediate practical successes may be, the workers will best come to understand the necessity of liquidating capitalist slavery.

—Leon Trotsky, “The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International” (1938)

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4 October 2013

With the Islamists Sometimes,
With Bourgeois Rule Always

How Egyptian Cliffites Covered for Military Coup



Left: Opponents of ousted Islamist president Mohamed Morsi flock around armored personnel carriers near Cairo's Tahrir Square on July 5, two days after military coup. Right: Victims of army massacre of Muslim Brotherhood supporters in Cairo suburb of Nasr City, July 8.

In a televised statement on July 3 announcing that the Egyptian Armed Forces had seized power, General Abdul Fattah el-Sisi stated that the military had been “called by the Egyptian people” to suspend the constitution and remove Islamist president Mohamed Morsi from office. In the ensuing two months, supporters of Morsi’s reactionary Muslim Brotherhood who have demanded his reinstatement have been brutally suppressed by the military regime, with some 1,000 killed according to the *New York Times* (23 September). Both state forces and Islamist mobs have rampaged through Coptic Christian areas, expelling families and burning homes, churches and shops.

Military repression is also targeting trade unionists, leftist political activists and journalists. Haitham Mohamedain, a noted labor lawyer and spokesman for the Revolutionary Socialists (RS), the Egyptian affiliate of the late Tony Cliff’s International Socialist Tendency, was arrested on September 5. Although he has been released, he remains under investigation for “leading and joining a secret organization called the Revolutionary Socialists” and “attempting to change the form of government by terrorist means.” These Orwellian charges represent an attempt to criminalize any opposition to the military dictatorship. The workers movement internationally must demand: *Hands off Haitham Mohamedain and the Revolutionary Socialists!*

Since the January 2011 upheaval that forced the removal of the despised strongman Hosni Mubarak, events in Egypt have been glowingly depicted as a revolution by all varieties of self-described socialists, especially the RS. The July 3 coup demonstrated the obvious: there has been no revolution. The masses that rose up in January-February 2011 sought a fundamental change to their conditions of poverty, brutal oppression and absence of democratic rights. But the dominant political forces in the anti-Mubarak upsurge and in subsequent protests have represented different variants of capitalist rule, from Nasserite nationalists and bourgeois liberals to the reactionary Muslim Brotherhood.

From Mubarak’s last days in office through Morsi’s presidency and today’s

military regime, the army, police and judiciary have remained intact (with a few changes at the top), enforcing capitalist dictates against workers and peasants and brutal repression against women and Copts. General Sisi himself was the director of military intelligence under Mubarak and head of the armed forces under Morsi. As Hugh Roberts explains in depth in “The Revolution That Wasn’t” (*London Review of Books*, 12 September), the army, the source of political power in Egypt since 1952, had been marginalized by Mubarak but not displaced. “The events of January and February 2011 that brought it back to centre stage were not a revolution.”

In an August 14 statement against military repression, the RS, which a year earlier had hailed Morsi’s election, denounced “liberals and leftists” who acted “to whitewash the military and the counter-revolution. These people have blood on their hands.” Indeed. And the reformist RS and its cothinkers in the U.S. International Socialist Organization (ISO) and the British Socialist Workers Party are prime examples. Shortly after the coup, RS spokesman Sameh Naguib wrote in the British *Socialist Worker* (5 July): “What has happened in Egypt is the height of democracy, a revolution of millions to directly topple the ruler. As for the military displacement of Mursi, this was nothing but a foregone conclusion, once the military institution saw that the masses had already settled the issue in the streets and squares of Egypt.”

Tamarod and the Military: One Hand

As the *Wall Street Journal* (19 July) reported in a corrected version of an earlier article, in the months before the coup, military leaders told senior aides to Amr Moussa, Hamdeen Sabahy and Mohammed ElBaradei, leaders of the bourgeois National Salvation Front (NSF), that the military would oust Morsi if they could put enough protesters in the streets. The vehicle for this move turned out to be an organization called Tamarod (Rebellion), which was launched in April to initiate a petition demanding new presidential elections. Tamarod claimed the petition obtained 22 million signatures—millions more than the number of votes Morsi

received in the 2012 election—and thus gave a popular mandate for his removal. In addition to the NSF and Coptic billionaire Naguib Sawiris, who helped finance the campaign, supporters of Tamarod included former officials from Mubarak’s National Democratic Party...and the RS.

Bourgeois forces were propelled to embrace Tamarod by Morsi’s failure to quell social struggle and shore up the collapsing economy, as well as by competition for the spoils of office. While the RS vaguely warned of the involvement of remnants of the Mubarak regime and bourgeois liberals, it nevertheless enthused over the petition campaign and especially the mass demonstrations on June 30. In an article carried in the U.S. *Socialist Worker* (27 June), Sameh Naguib raved: “The Tamarod (Rebellion) campaign has emerged after a period of retreat in the revolutionary movement to ignite the fuse of that movement on a national level heretofore unseen.” He continued, “As for the revolutionaries, the goal of their participation in the Rebellion campaign and in the battles that will begin on June 30 is to reclaim the revolution” from the Islamists.

What soon became glaringly clear is that the protest movement, organized around the single demand for Morsi to leave office, served as the avenue for the military to reclaim direct power from the Islamists. Masses of people poured into the protests, galvanized by soaring inflation, unemployment, police repression, religious reaction and myriad other dire conditions that characterized life under Morsi’s gov-

ernment. (They were also spurred on by sudden mysterious shortages of food and fuel—commodities that the military plays a key role in distributing.) But from the outset, the Tamarod campaign was premised on replacing one set of capitalist oppressors with another. At Tahrir Square, military planes flew overhead, showering demonstrators with Egyptian flags and bottled water.

In the U.S., Socialist Action’s Jeff Mackler shamelessly claimed after the coup that “the revolutionaries who correctly supported, built, and participated in the June 30 mobilizations can hardly be held accountable for the results” (*CounterPunch*, 19 July). As if the protest organizers’ intentions weren’t clear! As Tamarod activist Mohamed Khamis told the London *Observer* (6 July), “The army did not take over power. They were merely a partner in the democratic change we were seeking.” For their part, the RS opportunists, week after week, delicately refrained from describing the early July events as a coup even as they condemned military repression.

Morsi’s Apostates

Since the outbreak of mass protests in early 2011, we have stressed the crucial need for Egypt’s powerful working class to emerge as an independent political force at the head of all the downtrodden and oppressed—from women and Copts to urban slum dwellers and the rural poor. Waves of bitter, militant strikes by textile workers and others shook Egyptian society in the years leading up to Mubarak’s ouster, and have continued since then. But the proletariat remains politically atomized and under the sway of bourgeois nationalism and religious forces. As we wrote when Mubarak was toppled:

“Elementary democratic rights such as legal equality for women and the complete separation of religion and state; agrarian revolution to give land to the peasants; ending joblessness and grinding poverty: the basic aspirations of the masses cannot be met without the overthrow of the bonapartist capitalist order. The indispensable instrument for the working class to take the lead is a proletarian revolutionary party, which can be built only through relentless struggle against all bourgeois forces, from the military to the Brotherhood and the liberals who falsely claim to support the struggles of the masses.”

—“Egypt: Military Takeover Props Up Capitalist Rule,” WV No. 974 (18 February 2011)

The entire political activity of the RS has been in opposition to this revolutionary perspective. Most of the reformist left internationally has preferred to tail various Nasserists and liberals, while the U.S. Workers World Party in the period following the July coup has praised the Muslim Brotherhood as “the germ of bourgeois democracy” (workersworld.org, 19 August). The RS and its British and American cothinkers have the dubious distinction of having supported *all* these class enemies of the workers and the poor.

Tony Cliff’s international tendency has a sordid history of support to Islamic reaction, from celebrating the Ayatollah Khomeini’s rise to power in Iran in 1979 to promoting the CIA-backed Afghan *mujahedin*’s holy war against the Soviet Union in the 1980s. In 1994, the Cliffite journal *International Socialism* published an extensive article “The Prophet and the Proletariat” by Chris Harman that provided

continued on page 11

**June 2012:
Following his
inauguration,
then president
Morsi receives
military’s highest
honor from Field
Marshal General
Hussein Tantawi,
leader of military
regime after
ouster of dictator
Hosni Mubarak.**



Defend Anti-Petraeus Protesters!

New York City

On September 17, the cops brutally attacked a demonstration at the City University of New York (CUNY) against the appointment of war criminal David Petraeus as visiting professor. Six black and Latino protesters were arrested, detained overnight, and slapped with a range of trumped-up charges including “riot.” The delegate assembly of the Professional Staff Congress, a union representing CUNY faculty and staff, passed a September 19 resolution denouncing the cop repression and calling for the charges against the protesters to be dropped. Students, faculty and campus workers must defend the CUNY 6, and all those who oppose the crimes of U.S. imperialism, against bourgeois state repression. **Drop all charges against the CUNY 6!**

The demonstration, called by the Ad Hoc Committee Against the Militarization of CUNY, was held outside a fund-raiser attended by the former CIA director General Petraeus at CUNY’s Macaulay Honors College. Videos filmed on the scene show an NYPD supervisor grabbing a protester and slamming him into a parked car as two other officers pile on top and other cops swarm the street, chasing protesters. Another video shows police holding down and repeatedly kidney punching another protester.

The media has gone on a violence-baiting smear campaign against the CUNY protesters and in defense of this war criminal. In an ominous statement released on September 20, CUNY’s interim chancellor William P. Kelly issued a thinly veiled endorsement of the police repression and an implicit threat against the protesters, vowing



Jefferson Siegel
Four of the arrested CUNY 6 protesters with attorney (right) in Manhattan Criminal Court, September 18.

to put a stop to so-called “obstruction” and “harassment” of Petraeus. **CUNY: Hands off faculty and student protesters! No reprisals!**

Outrageously, the press and CUNY administration have invoked the notion that Petraeus’s right to free speech as a professor has been violated. But this is not a question of “academic freedom” for some bourgeois ideologue. We want students, teachers and workers to drive Petraeus off campus through protest and exposure—**not for his political views, but for his deeds** in overseeing torture and mass murder in Iraq, Afghanistan, Latin America and elsewhere. We are also in favor of protests aimed at shutting down the Reserve Officers Training Corps (see “ROTC Off Campus!” WV No. 1029, 6 September).

While the Spartacus Youth Club defends these protesters, we also maintain our criticisms of the politics of the Ad Hoc Committee, as expressed in

our press and at the multiple CUNY protests in which we have participated. This group, led by the fake-Trotskyist Internationalist Group (IG) and the Maoist Revolutionary Student Coordinating Committee (RSCC), is an opportunist bloc that does not mention—let alone oppose—the current ruling party of imperialist war, namely the Democrats, in any of its published statements. While the RSCC claims to be anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist, it offers no opposition to the Democratic Party anywhere in its Points of Unity, Platform or published articles. The IG is only too happy to ditch its paper opposition to the Democrats for the sake of joint statements of unity with liberals and reformists.

For Marxists, the starting point for a program to defeat U.S. imperialism is opposition to the capitalist ruling class and its parties. As a speaker for the SYC stated in his speech during the Ad Hoc

Committee’s September 3 protest, “The Democrats are simply the other party of racism and war. We say break with the Democrats! No support to Obama. We need a workers party that fights for socialist revolution!”

The next court hearing is scheduled for October 17 at the New York Criminal Court, 100 Centre Street, time to be announced. Protest letters can be sent to Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus R. Vance Jr., One Hogan Place, New York, NY 10013. We reprint below the SYC’s September 21 protest letter to the Manhattan D.A. We note that the last name of one of the arrested protesters, Rafael Peña, was misspelled in the court record and thus also in our protest letter.

* * *

The New York Spartacus Youth Club (SYC) denounces the police assault on those protesting ex-CIA head General David Petraeus outside CUNY Macaulay Honors College on September 17th. Six protesters, Jose Disla, Denise Ford, Rafael Pena, Luis Henriquez, Agustin Castro and Angelica Hernandez, were arrested. We demand that all charges be dropped immediately!

During the protest, the NYPD viciously punched and slammed protesters to the pavement. One was held down by officers and repeatedly pummeled.

The context for this police attack was several recent protests against Petraeus teaching at Macaulay Honors College and against the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) returning to CUNY campuses. For voicing their opposition, the six protesters face trumped up charges, including riot in the second degree, obstruction of governmental administration and resisting arrest, among others. The SYC stands in solidarity with the CUNY 6. We demand that all charges be dropped!

War on Workers...

(continued from page 1)

with decent health coverage—a key gain of labor battles of the past that has been under attack for years—now face the threat of massive cutbacks of those plans by bosses screaming even louder that they can’t afford the costs. Secondly, when the health care law comes fully into effect in January 2015, firms with 50 or more full-time employees will be required to offer “affordable” health insurance or pay a fine. So many of these companies are simply slashing work hours to under 30 per week.

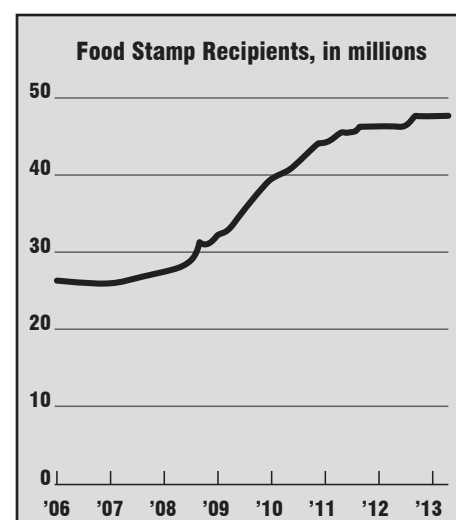
Thirdly, the law threatens health plans sponsored by more than one employer, which are typically negotiated by unions in industries dominated by small businesses, such as construction, retail and restaurants. A major reason that workers in these industries are attracted to unions is the existence of such health plans—800,000 of the 1.3 million members of the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) are covered in this way. Under the ACA, low-income workers covered by plans on the new health insurance exchanges will be eligible for federal subsidies. However, unionized workers covered by multi-employer plans will not qualify for subsidies. That whets employers’ appetite to drop coverage when existing collective bargaining agreements expire and put

their workers on the exchanges. And by caving in to such attacks, the labor misleaders further undermine the unions.

In July, the leaders of the Teamsters, the UFCW and UNITE HERE, which organizes hotel and restaurant workers, sent a letter to the leaders of the Congressional Democrats, Senator Harry Reid and Representative Nancy Pelosi, protesting that the ACA will “shatter not only our hard-earned health benefits, but destroy the foundation of the 40 hour work week.” When a resolution calling for repeal of the ACA in its current form looked set to pass at the AFL-CIO convention on September 11, the White House strong-armed the labor bureaucrats into passing a watered-down resolution that simply called for changes to the law. Two days later, Obama called AFL-CIO president Richard Trumka and other union tops to the White House and told them that any idea of protecting multi-employer health plans was dead in the water.

In their letter to Reid and Pelosi, the union officials recalled their endless efforts and financial contributions to help elect Democratic politicians as well as their enthusiastic support to Obama’s health care law when it was initially proposed. What is needed is some actual labor struggle—including strike action—to fight the companies that are trying to steal workers’ benefits.

Working people and everyone else need **free, quality health care**—a demand that runs straight up against the profit-gouging corporations that are at the core of the U.S. health care system. The unions would find plenty of allies if they waged some



Center on Budget and Policy Priorities/Source: USDA

Capitalist economic crisis has left one-sixth of U.S. population reliant on food stamps.

hard class struggle for health care, for black and immigrant rights and access to free abortion and contraception. But such battles pose the need to replace the labor sellouts, who peddle the lie that the workers have interests in common with their exploiters, with a leadership committed to mobilizing workers power in opposition to the class enemy. What’s needed is to build a workers party that calls to expropriate the health care industries as part of the fight to overturn the capitalist order through socialist revolution.

Whom the Gods Would Destroy They First Make Mad

The liberal *New York Times* economics maven Paul Krugman speaks for a good



Coates/Detroit News

September 2012: Workers at Detroit waste water treatment plant walk off job to protest job slashing.

Katrina Racist Nightmare Lives On

Danziger Bridge Killer Cops Get New Trial

On September 17, a federal court granted a new trial to five New Orleans Police Department (NOPD) officers incarcerated for their role in one of the most notorious killings by cops in recent memory: the shootings at Danziger Bridge in September 2005, a few days after Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans. The ruling by U.S. District Judge Kurt Engelhardt, who presided over the original 2011 trial, opens a pathway for the convicted killers and a key accomplice in the subsequent cover-up to walk out of prison while awaiting another trial—if federal prosecutors decide to pursue a new trial at all. The five are serving terms ranging from six to 65 years. Coming just two months after the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the coldblooded killing of Trayvon Martin, the federal court decision is another reminder of just how cheap black life is in this racist capitalist society.

The incident at Danziger Bridge is emblematic of the nightmare for New Orleans' black and poor population that unfolded in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. As city officials ranted against mythical black looters and rapists, cops and white vigilantes were given the green light to go on a killing spree. Black Democratic mayor Ray Nagin directed the NOPD's second-in-command to "stop search and rescue and bring our force back to controlling the streets." The *Times-Picayune* (12 December 2009) reported that "in the week after Katrina, New Orleans police killed and wounded as many people as they do in a typical year." Among them were two killed and four wounded at Danziger Bridge.

At 9 a.m. on 4 September 2005, a truckload of officers raced to the bridge

in response to a police call that falsely reported people shooting at cops near the Industrial Canal. Jumping from their vehicle, the cops opened fire, including with AK-47s, on clusters of unarmed people crossing the bridge in a desperate search for food and water. Ronald Madison, a 40-year-old severely disabled man, was killed by a blast in the back of the head from a shotgun fired at close range by Robert Faulcon, the only black cop among the crew. Madison's brother Lance was then arrested on frame-up charges of shooting at the cops. Seventeen-year-old James Brissette was also killed, and four members of a family accompanying him were gravely injured. At the trial, several officers taking the stand as part of plea bargains testified to the ensuing cover-up, which included fabricated witnesses, a planted gun and falsified reports.

Engelhardt's ruling did not contest these facts but rather cited prosecutorial misconduct. Specifically, he contended that anonymous postings (some disparaging the police) on the Web site NOLA.com by individuals associated with the prosecution had created a "prejudicial, poisonous atmosphere" requiring a new trial. As a *Washington Post* (21 September) editorial noted, "By that logic, overturning the convictions might also be justified by the TV show 'Treme' which...depicts the New Orleans police as corrupt, brutal and violent." The fact is that *the whole world* saw the venality and brutality of the thugs in blue in daily news broadcasts at the time.

What happened at Danziger Bridge was an especially depraved expression of the murderous racist violence meted out daily by police in upholding the American capitalist order. Three days before



Brandon/Times-Picayune

Days after Hurricane Katrina, cops arrest Lance Madison at Danziger Bridge, where they shot six people, killing two including Madison's brother.

Engelhardt's decision, police in Charlotte, North Carolina, gunned down Jonathan Ferrell, a 24-year-old former Florida A&M football player. Ferrell had recently moved to the city to join his fiancée and was working two jobs and preparing to go back to school. When his car ran off the road in the early morning, he crawled out of the back window and sought help at the first house he found. A woman who opened the door shut it quickly and called the police. Moments after they arrived, Ferrell lay dead, hit by ten bullets. The next day, Randall Kerrick was arraigned on voluntary manslaughter charges, the first time in 30 years that a Charlotte cop was charged for an on-duty shooting. In the rare instances of such cases going to trial, the courts almost always let cops off on the grounds that they were just "doing their job."

Hurricane Katrina provided dramatic evidence of a ruling class that could not care less whether the impoverished black masses live or die. Many people recall with horror the images of thousands of desperate survivors begging for help from rooftops and bodies floating by on floodwaters. Dying victims, packed into the sweltering Superdome, lacked food, water and medicine. Another measure of the rulers' racist contempt and class arrogance is that there is still no final casualty count for the hurricane. Officially, the death toll

directly attributable to the storm is around 1,800 for Louisiana and Mississippi, with a majority of the victims black. However, hundreds are still missing, with many bodies unclaimed or unidentified.

In the first six months of 2006, there were over 2,300 more deaths than usual in the New Orleans area, in part due to a skyrocketing suicide rate. Meanwhile, the capitalist class sought to whiten the city's face, taking advantage of the catastrophe to raze public housing, shut down schools, especially in black areas, and bust city unions. In 2007, the Director of the New Orleans Health Department reported that there were 75 percent fewer hospital beds and 70 percent fewer doctors in black areas of the city, which had already suffered from grossly inadequate health care before the storm.

Hurricane Katrina was a natural disaster. But the social disaster that followed was man-made, a product of the racial oppression that is built into the American capitalist system. First enslaved, then forcibly segregated, marginalized and imprisoned by the hundreds of thousands, the black population remains an oppressed race-color caste. But they are not powerless. As an integral component of the proletariat, doubly oppressed black workers will be at the forefront of the socialist revolution that will sweep away murderous racist capitalism and its police enforcers. ■

section of the U.S. ruling class when he derides the Republican Party today as "the crazy party." But there is a reason for the seeming madness.

In 1991-92, the U.S. and other imperialist powers achieved a decades-long strategic goal with the destruction of the Soviet Union—the world's first workers state—through capitalist counterrevolution. The anti-Soviet campaign imposed a certain disciplined class unity between the Democrats and Republicans, whatever their particular policy differences. In the post-Soviet world, the U.S. bourgeoisie emerged as the unchallenged dominant power. But even as the U.S. achieved unrivaled military supremacy, its domestic industrial base has continued to corrode. To some in the haughty ruling class, the decline of the country's economic might is bereft of any explanation—besides being contrary to "God's will." This section of the bourgeoisie found expression in the presidency of George W. Bush.

The capitalist rulers achieved a degree of national unity with their "war on terror" following the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Later that unity was frayed as U.S. imperialism remained mired in the occupations of Afghanistan and especially Iraq. While slaughtering hundreds of thousands of those countries' peoples, the U.S. rulers found themselves in a quagmire under the leadership of an increasingly discredited and deeply unpopular

president. It was the task of the Obama presidency to extricate the U.S. from those occupations and focus on other world targets (like China) while continuing and extending the Bush administration's attacks on democratic rights and living standards at home. But as the recent events around Syria show, extricating the U.S. from its Near East morass is not easy.

For five years the Obama administration has presided over increasing immiseration and cuts in social programs benefiting the poor, attacks on labor and women. When the big banks and auto companies faced crippling losses as a result of the 2008 financial crisis, they were showered with government subsidies to the tune of hundreds of billions of dollars. The 2009 contracts that the United Auto Workers bureaucracy helped force down the throats of workers at General Motors, Ford and Chrysler threw thousands of them on the scrap heap and slashed wages for new hires in half, opening the floodgates for further attacks on unions throughout the country. Today, the largely black and impoverished population of Detroit—the city ruined by the Big Three automakers and Wall Street banks—gets peanuts from Washington.

Nearly 47 million people—fully 15 percent of the U.S. population—are today living in poverty. The unemployment rate, which stands at 7.3 percent, has fallen incrementally in recent months, due almost entirely to workers taking part-

time or poverty-level jobs or simply giving up on looking for work. Meanwhile, corporate profits last year, as a share of the economy, were the highest since World War II.

What Krugman and other liberals portray as the madness of the Tea Party Republicans is merely an extreme expression of the unbridled greed and arrogance of the capitalist ruling class. When Congress and the White House were wran-

gling over the debt ceiling two years ago, we wrote in "We Need an All-New Ruling Class—The Workers!" (WV No. 985, 2 September 2011): "Just as the decadent, crazed and corrupt court of the tsars was swept away by the Russian Revolution, we Marxists are determined to build the revolutionary internationalist party that can lead the workers in overthrowing the decaying rule of American capitalism." ■

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Traditional Courts Bill: Dire Threat to Women

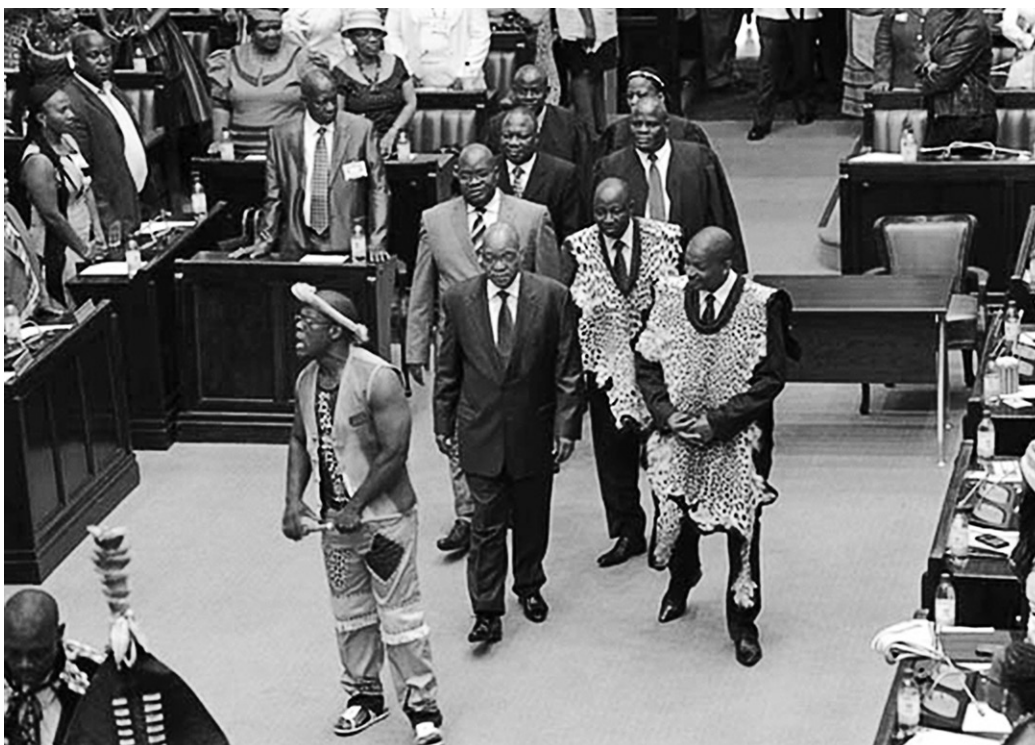
South African Government Promotes Reactionary Tribal Leaders

The following article originally appeared in Spartacist South Africa No. 9 (Winter 2013), newspaper of the South African section of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist).

In December 2011, the government introduced a new Traditional Courts Bill. The bill would give traditional leaders, headed by tribal chiefs, unchallenged legal power over 17 million rural black inhabitants, who are balkanised according to tribal background along the same lines promoted under apartheid. Chiefs would get increased powers to make laws, decide cases and hand down punishment—including evictions and forced unpaid labour—often with no possibility for appeal.

The biggest losers under this bill are black women, the “slaves of the slaves,” who already suffer from grinding poverty and triple oppression. Backward traditional practices oppressive to women are widespread—from *lobola* [bride price], forced polygamy and *ukuthwala* (marriage by capture) to virginity testing, all of which are reinforced by the traditional leaders. Women are commonly denied the right to represent themselves in the traditional courts, and forced to be represented by their husbands or other male family members.

After the bourgeois parliament discussed the Traditional Courts Bill in late



South African president Jacob Zuma accompanies tribal chiefs at National House of Traditional Leaders, November 2012.

petty-bourgeois and bourgeois nationalists are incapable of ensuring real and lasting rights for women. Throughout its 101-year history, the programme and policies of the ANC have been guided by the basic aim of fostering a black capitalist layer which could participate in exploiting “its own people”—a task which they did not want to leave solely to the white and foreign capitalists. The interpenetration of the ANC leadership with the chiefs and other traditional leaders has been a key part of this programme, and a clear indicator that this party represents the class enemy of the liberation of workers, women, and the oppressed black majority in general.

Just look at Mandla Mandela, a grandson of Nelson Mandela and ANC member of parliament. As chief of the Mvezo traditional council in the Eastern Cape, he has become notorious for using this position to enrich his family and suppress criticism or challenges, all the while pro-

moting the most hideous backwardness to shore up his despotic reign. For example, in 2010 he officially defended the barbaric “culture” of kidnapping women (particularly young girls) known as *ukuthwala*, telling a parliamentary committee on rural development and land reform, “for a girl to be taken as a wife through *ukuthwala*—the process has nothing to do with age—When you are going to discuss culture do not even try to bring in white notions as such an approach will turn things upside down.” In 2011, three of Mandla Mandela’s “subjects” in Mvezo took him to court after he ordered their eviction from their ancestral gravesite to make way for capitalist developers to build a hotel and stadium.

Bourgeois-nationalist ideology has always relegated women to being “baby-makers” and servants of men. The capitalists and their lackeys are the enemies of women’s liberation. As revolutionary

Marxists, atheists and fighters for women’s liberation, we fiercely oppose the Traditional Courts Bill. We seek to link the fight against this reactionary bill to the necessary broader struggle against the whole system of capitalist exploitation. The struggle for women’s liberation is inseparable from the struggle for socialist revolution, and both require a fight to break the working class from the influence of bourgeois nationalism as part of forging a Leninist party to act as a tribune of the people. The working class as a whole has a vital interest in stopping this reactionary bill, which will also be used to further clamp down on any struggle against the neo-apartheid capitalist order.

Tribal Chiefs: Tools of Racist Capitalist Oppression

Life in the former bantustans is hell for the black masses, especially women, and the traditional leaders play a central role enforcing this misery and keeping the population in check. Research conducted by the Rural Women’s Movement has

uncovered cases in rural villages of KwaZulu-Natal where parents are forced to pay R1,000 [\$100] or a cow to the tribal chief as a fine for their daughter falling pregnant out of wedlock; where traditional leaders deprive families of the “right” to bury loved ones because of such unpaid fines; and where many other instances of despotic abuse run rampant, including imposition of endless arbitrary “taxes” to fund traditional leaders’ parasitic lifestyles.

One of the most brutally oppressive, backward practices perpetrated against women in the name of tradition is female genital mutilation (FGM), also known as female circumcision. It is often found alongside male circumcision in societies where cultures attempt to make sharp gender/sexual distinctions as children reach puberty, and it continues to be practiced in rural parts of South Africa, although the government does not acknowledge its existence. FGM is a heinous crime against women, which must be categorically and unconditionally opposed. In contrast, male circumcision, when performed under safe medical conditions, is a procedure that is vastly less deforming. Yet every year in South Africa, scores of young boys die as a result of botched circumcisions at traditional initiation schools. This highlights the tribal leaders’ bitter hostility to Western medical advances and the cheapness of black life. This year in May, over 20 boys died in just one week in Mpumalanga province. The ANC’s provincial minister for “health,” Matshego Dlamini, grotesquely justified this, explaining her refusal to intervene by saying, “This is a tradition; as a woman I cannot go; if they are dead or not, it is a tradition”!

The chieftaincy is a bastion of reaction, a remnant of pre-capitalist society which survived through widespread collaboration with the former colonial and apartheid rulers. Throughout Southern



Women carrying roofing thatch in KwaZulu-Natal, 2006. Enshrining power of tribal chiefs further reinforces social oppression and backwardness.

SPARTACIST SOUTH AFRICA

2012, misinformation reports were spread by the ANC [African National Congress] and the government saying that the bill had been withdrawn. This method is commonly used to defuse anger against particularly unpopular new laws (similar tricks were tried with the Protection of State Information Bill, which has now been passed). The fact is that the Traditional Courts Bill is now being reviewed by the provincial governments and pushing it through is still very much on the agenda of the ANC/SACP/COSATU [ANC/South African Communist Party/Congress of South African Trade Unions] Tripartite Alliance government.

The bill is part of the increased state repression which has been deployed in response to mounting social unrest. In order to administer the neo-apartheid capitalist system, the leaders of the Alliance are compelled to reach for the same weapons that were previously used by their own apartheid butchers. The government led by President Jacob Zuma, in particular, has relied on stoking poisonous tribal sentiments and anti-immigrant chauvinism, while sharpening the most repressive tools of the state—massacres of strikers, police brutality, de facto states of emergency, etc. The strengthening of the chiefs, tribal divisions, and traditional backwardness is part of the package of neo-apartheid rule.

The bill also underlines the lesson that national liberation struggles led by

Africa, the chiefs fight tooth and nail to deny women abortion and other basic democratic rights. There is a large overlap between the chieftaincy and the ruling ANC. This helps the chiefs increase their power and wealth, while the chiefs in turn are an important part of repressing the rural black population and delivering them as voting cattle to the ANC.

Defending the Traditional Courts Bill during a speech to the National House of Traditional Leaders in November 2012, Zuma lashed out at black intellectuals who have been critical of the bill: “Some Africans who become too clever take a position (where) they become the most eloquent in criticising themselves about their own traditions and everything.” Zuma, whose government just a few months earlier had carried out the massacre of 34 striking black mineworkers in defence of the profits of London-based Lonmin Platinum, demagogically intoned, “Let us solve African problems the African way, not the white man’s way.” In fact, the Traditional Courts Bill stands very much in the tradition of the white rulers—from British imperialists in the colonial period, to the Afrikaner nationalists during apartheid—who seized upon and reinforced the most retrogressive aspects of tribal and traditional culture as a means of propping up their rule and amassing profits from the blood and sweat of the black masses.

A prime example is the Native Administration Act of 1927, which created civil, divorce, appeal and high courts under



August 2012: A day after police massacred striking miners at Marikana, women from surrounding shantytowns protested outside Lonmin platinum mine.

control of the tribal headmen and chiefs, reinforcing and imposing tribal divisions on the black population. That act codified the minority status assigned to women by traditional customs, declaring: “A Black woman...who is a partner in a customary union and who is living with her husband, shall be deemed to be a minor and her husband shall be deemed to be her guardian.” This was part of a notorious series of laws enacted by the British rulers as they went about entrenching the migrant labour system—the Masters and Servants Act, the Natives’ Land Acts beginning in 1913, the Urban Areas Act, and various Pass Laws and Poll Taxes, all of which served to dispossess blacks of their land and create a pool of cheap black labour with no rights.

After coming to power in the 1948 elections, the National Party government would fine-tune this racist system and take it to new extremes under apartheid. As noted in “‘One Chief, One Vote’: The Revival of Traditional Authorities in Post-Apartheid South Africa” (*African Affairs*, 1997): “The African reserves in the countryside played a crucial role in the government’s efforts to establish tighter control over African labour.... In the African villages, the administration of the pass book and the running of the labour bureaux, where permits had to be annually renewed, were the responsibility of the chief.”

The heart of apartheid was the migratory labour system, the reduction of South African blacks to dispossessed foreigners within their own country and the reduc-



June 2012: Tribal court in session in village of Manhlaneni.

tion of the surrounding black states to labour colonies for South Africa’s mines, factories and farms. Thousands of workers, maimed for life while toiling for the white ruling class, were dumped back on the bantustans. The full brunt of this system was borne by the women relegated to the unspeakably destitute “homelands.”

The migrant labour system and the superexploitation of mainly black labour remain at the foundation of the capitalist system in the “new South Africa,” but now with the ANC-led Tripartite Alliance government acting as the black overseers for the still predominantly white capitalist rulers. This fact, and the role of the tra-

who have made it out of the desolation of the rural areas. This is no accident—it flows from their treacherous class-collaborationist politics, which chain the working class to the bourgeois-nationalist ANC via the Tripartite Alliance. A fight against the migrant labour system is going to take a political struggle against the class-collaborationist trade union tops.

Eradicating the migrant labour system is also intimately connected to the land question, a burning issue at the centre of the dispossession of the non-white majority. A century after the Natives’ Land Act of 1913, the white minority still owns more than 70 percent of urban and arable rural land. We are for the expropriation of the large, white-owned farms and for their transformation into collective and state farms under workers rule. Much of the remaining land in the rural areas is now under the control of the tribal chiefs as a result of the Communal Land Rights Act of 2004, which gave them control over the land of their subjects. A black-centred workers government would put an end to the privileges and power of these rural despots.

At the ANC’s founding in 1912 (initially as the South African Native National Congress), a considerable number of the delegates were tribal chiefs, leading to the creation of an “Upper House” to accommodate traditional leaders who joined the organisation. Along with the intellectuals, lawyers and other representatives of the black petty-bourgeoisie who formed the ANC, the chiefs’ main concern was begging the British colonial rulers to grant them a privileged position as black aristocracy within the system of white capitalist rule. For example, at the 1912 founding, one of the five basic aims outlined for the organisation was to “promote understanding between chiefs, and loyalty to the British crown and all lawful authorities and to promote understanding between white and black South Africans”!

The ANC would later adopt a more populist stance aimed at attracting mass support, exemplified by the 1955 Freedom Charter, a bourgeois-populist programme. This was in large part a result of the white rulers’ refusal to grant even the most minimal concessions, instead increasing repression of any independent black political activity, including banning the ANC and other black-nationalist organisations by the early 1960s. At the same time, the apartheid rulers sought to co-opt the tribal chiefs and use them to police

the black population through the hated bantustan system. For the most part, the chiefs were willing collaborators, a fact which led to significant hostility toward the chiefs among the base of the ANC-led Congress movement and other wings of the anti-apartheid movement.

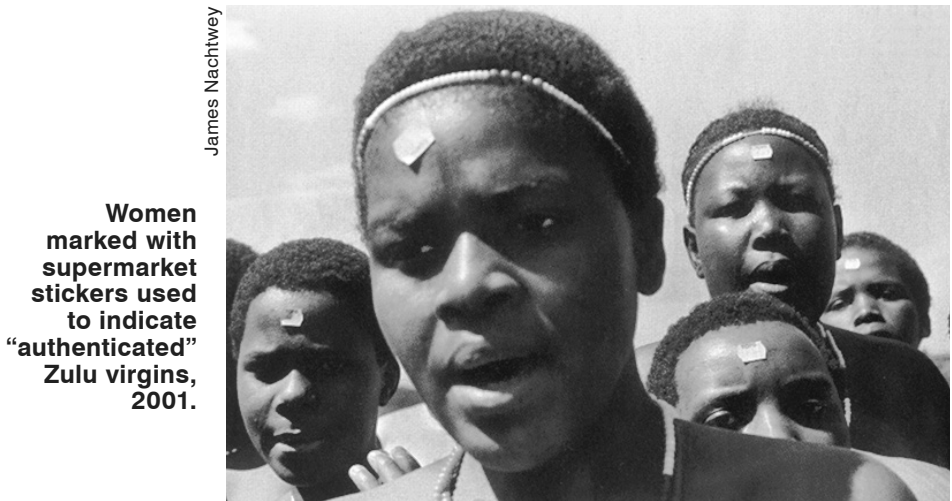
Some of the sharpest expressions of this hostility occurred during the 1980s, at the same time as massive strikes by the black trade unions and township revolts rocked the country. But the ANC leaders’ calls to “make the country ungovernable” were never intended to launch a struggle to overthrow the hated apartheid rulers; rather, the nationalist leaders were cynically exploiting the militancy of the masses in a bid to *pressure* the white rulers into a negotiated settlement. At the same time, they sought to mend ties with the traditional leaders who had collaborated with the National Party government, trying to give them “liberation” credentials by creating a mythology about the tribal chiefs’ resistance to apartheid. In 1987, the ANC launched CONTRALESA (Congress of Traditional Leaders) as an organisation of “progressive” tribal chiefs, hailing this as “the chiefs coming back to the people.” Since coming to power in 1994 following the deal with the white rulers, the Tripartite Alliance government has been in charge of maintaining the same profit system as before. They have inherited the structures that existed during apartheid.

Women’s Oppression, Tradition and the Family

As part of administering neo-apartheid capitalist misery, the ANC and other Alliance leaders also romanticise tribal societies, including conciliating and promoting *izangoma* (witchdoctors) and other quacks who are euphemistically referred to as “traditional healers.” The disastrous state of the public health care system—with public hospitals chronically overcrowded, understaffed and decrepit, if you can even make it to one—means that traditional healers are the only “health care” many ever see. Some women go to them for abortions because legal abortions in hospitals are not accessible. We stand for women’s right to free, safe abortions on demand. We defend science and science-based medicine against “traditional medicine” *muti* and other so-called “alternative medicine,” opposing government subsidies or other promotion of traditional healers.

The disastrous effects of the bourgeois nationalists’ promotion of traditional backwardness were shown horrifically by the “AIDS denialist” policy of the Thabo Mbeki government (a policy in which Zuma, Mbeki’s deputy until 2005, as well as the leaders of the SACP and COSATU, were complicit for years before later distancing themselves). A Harvard School of Public Health study showed that some 330,000 South Africans died of AIDS between 2000 and 2005 because a timely antiretroviral (ARV) treatment programme was not implemented. The meagre aid which the profit-driven imperialist system rationed out to Southern Africa was further obstructed, as Mbeki and other ANC leaders rejected medical science and actively blocked the implementation of an ARV programme, instead promoting traditional healers and other merchants of death pushing herbal and “natural” cures. Because

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Women marked with supermarket stickers used to indicate “authenticated” Zulu virgins, 2001.

South Africa...

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HIV/AIDS is a sexually-transmitted disease, its spread has always been fueled by the subordinate position of women. We always opposed the deadly “denialist” quackery, and we continue to demand free ARVs for all who need them as part of the struggle for free, quality health care for all.

Besides their role in furthering ignorance, promoting anti-scientific prejudices and superstition, the traditional healers are part of the repressive political structure that runs from the community *sangoma* [traditional healer] straight up to the House of Traditional Leaders, which is part of the bourgeois state. A primary function of that repressive structure is to enforce the subordination of women to men. This is done through promoting and legitimising anti-woman, patriarchal practices. Along with *lobola* and *ukuthwala*, this includes virginity testing and initiation ceremonies like *uMemolo*, where young women are taught subservience to men and how to be the bearers of traditional culture to the next generation.

These backward traditional practices are remnants from an agricultural and slave culture. They are a big factor in legitimising and promoting violence against women, including some of the highest recorded rape statistics in the world. It is the most vulnerable women who suffer most under these practices. For example, the thugs who practice *ukuthwala* usually kidnap women who are orphans or come from poor families. As always in class society, the traditions and culture which are upheld most vehemently are those which are acceptable and beneficial to the wealthy.

Strengthening the traditional courts means strengthening this repression of women. In many systems of customary law, African women fall under the guardianship of their fathers or, after marriage, their husbands. They have no contractual capacity without consent of their guardian and are not allowed to appear in court without the assistance of their guardian. They are excluded from political processes of the tribe and are sometimes precluded from obtaining land rights. Traditionally women are not included in *lobola* negotiations; sexual consent and other sexual rights belong to family members rather than the women themselves.

A common misconception is that women’s subordination to men, like the patriarchal family of today, have always existed. Another misconception, particularly prevalent among feminists and others who oppose women’s oppression from a bourgeois-liberal framework, is that the source of women’s oppression is simply backward patriarchal ideas (mainly those of men). On the other hand, nationalists in particular apologise for forced polygamy, *lobola* and other anti-woman practices, romanticising them as uniquely African ways of showing “respect” between families. Another justification for these things argues that since women are often accorded prominent positions in traditional African practices, they can’t be oppressive to women.

As Marxists we understand that women’s oppression is material and that the view of women as inferior to men is a reflection of that material reality. Engels explained that women’s oppression is rooted in the development of private

property and the division of society into classes, both of which are tied to the development of the family. Early human societies lived in a form of “primitive communism.” This meant humans hunted and gathered the bare minimum in order to survive, and shared this equally. The division of labour between men and women was based on the biological reality of childcare—i.e. women were responsible for bearing and nursing of the young—and implied no subordinate social status for women. The division of

as an ideological brake on social consciousness. In this way the institution of the family ensures the maintenance of class rule for the capitalists. It is the main source of women’s oppression, an economic and social unit which is a mainstay of social reaction along with organised religion. It is also at the root of discrimination, legal persecution and other oppression of homosexuals. Despite liberal laws on paper, anti-gay bigotry is virulent in South Africa, with regular reports of murderous attacks against gays



Laurie Bloomfield

Durban, 1959: Apartheid police attack women in Cato Manor protesting crackdown on home beer brewing.

labour between the sexes was equal, both worked to produce the necessities of life. The functions of the household were a communal and collective responsibility.

This primitive social equality was overthrown when advances like the development of agriculture enabled humans to produce more than the bare minimum needed to survive. This social surplus became the property of a minority, which were men, creating the first class divisions in society. This led to the development of the institution of the family as a means of passing ownership of property from one generation to the next. It also gave rise to the state, an organisation of dominance used by one class to suppress another.

The patriarchal family decreed monogamy for women so that men could ensure that their offspring inherited their property. This put an end to the communal family. Therefore family functions, raising children and household labour, became private and lost their public character. Women, confined to the individual home, became isolated from social production, which became a male sphere. As Engels wrote in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884): “The overthrow of mother-right was the *world historical defeat of the female sex*. The man took command in the home also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude; she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children.”

So what is the role of the monogamous family for people who have no property to pass down? The family under capitalism also serves to rear the next generation to work on the land, in the factories and mines, and to serve as cannon fodder in the bourgeois army. It serves to train youth to obey authority, inculcates religious backwardness and generally acts

and lesbians, particularly in the townships and rural areas.

Unlike the feminists, who view women’s liberation as a task of women only, we understand that the fight for women’s equality must be taken up as a necessary part of the struggle to liberate the working class as a whole. This includes fighting to integrate women into social production. The trade unions must fight for free, 24-hour childcare to be available for all; for the extension of maternity leave rights for working women; for free access to birth control and free, safe abortions on demand; and for other demands to give women greater access to decent jobs and financial independence.

Fighting for these demands requires a political struggle to replace the current pro-capitalist trade union leaders—who, in the case of the COSATU leaders, directly subordinate the working class to the capitalists via the Tripartite Alliance nationalist popular front—with a class-struggle leadership. Struggling against the pro-capitalist union misleaders is a crucial part of the necessary fight to forge a revolutionary vanguard party. We want to open the way for women to play an active and leading role in the work-

ing class, which uniquely has the social power and objective interest to overthrow the capitalist system.

Especially in countries of belated capitalist development like South Africa, the fight for women’s liberation can be a powerful motor force for socialist revolution. South Africa never experienced a bourgeois-democratic revolution. Instead, capitalist oppression was imposed by the imperialist colonisers on top of pre-capitalist societies, leaving in place and reinforcing all the accumulated backwardness of those societies, particularly brutal oppression of women. We oppose the “cultural relativism” of nationalists and others who justify barbaric, anti-woman practices like female genital mutilation and marriage-by-capture in the name of tradition, and we seek to put an end to such practices. There is nothing uniquely African about such practices—for example, *lobola* is a version of the bride price, something which has been practiced in societies in Asia and Europe at different periods, and still is today in countries like Afghanistan.

We fight for women’s emancipation through socialist revolution. We seek to get rid of the institution of the family, which is the source of women’s oppression. The functions of the family—childcare, housework, etc.—can’t simply be abolished; they must be replaced by social institutions. In a socialist society, the workers state would seek to provide free, 24/7 childcare which is easily accessible at home and in the workplace; communal kitchens and laundry facilities; and other measures which would free women from household slavery and allow them to participate socially at every level. This is only possible on the basis of a socialist, planned economy, where production is freed from capitalist anarchy and irrationality and organised and run according to human need rather than profit.

“Two-Stage Revolution”: Betrayal of Women, Socialism

The SACP claims to oppose the Traditional Courts Bill. Last year, delegates at the party’s 13th national congress voted to reject it outright, just a few months after the SACP Central Committee issued a mealy-mouthed statement calling for “more discussion” on the bill and arguing, “Aspects of the Traditional Courts system that are progressive should be retained, but aspects that are in conflict with the non-sexist, democratic and nation-building goals of the NDR should be rejected.” Not surprisingly, though, none of this has caused any noticeable disturbance in the SACP leaders’ harmonious relationship with the capitalist government that is pursuing this reactionary bill—a government which they are a prominent part of. To take one example, Yunus Car-

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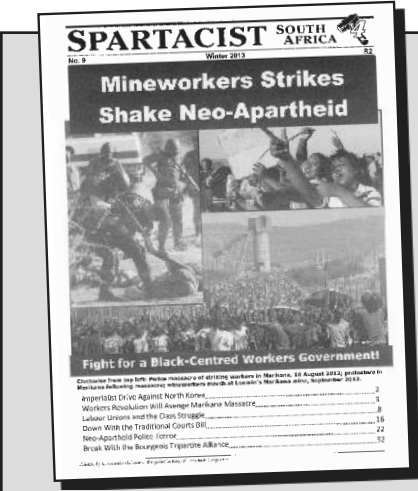
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Spartacist South Africa

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Gideon Mendel



AP

Left: Patients waiting for treatment at Soweto’s Baragwanath Hospital, 2006. Right: Traditional healer advertises on outskirts of Cape Town, 2009. Quack remedies flourish due to wretched state of medical care for black masses.

rim, a member of the SACP’s Politburo, is deputy minister of the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs—the very government ministry responsible for the bill!

The SACP leaders have a long history of betraying working-class interests in the name of the Menshevik/Stalinist schema of “two-stage revolution”—known in South Africa as the “National Democratic Revolution” (NDR). According to this schema, which serves as an ideological justification for their historic alliance and interpenetration with the ANC, conditions are not currently ripe for socialism. Therefore, first must come a political bloc with “progressive” bourgeois nationalists. Then, in some far-off and unspecified future, this will evolve into socialism. Throughout history, the “second stage” has in reality always been the bourgeois nationalists slaughtering workers and communists.

In 1964, historic SACP leader Govan Mbeki wrote the following fine words denouncing the traditional leaders: “If the Africans have had chiefs, it was because all human societies have had them at one stage or another. But when a people have developed to a stage which discards chieftainship, when their social development contradicts the need for such an institution, then to force it on them is not liberation but enslavement” (*The Peasants’ Revolt*). However, in the name of the class-collaborationist alliance with the “progressive” ANC nationalists, the SACP leaders went along with every grotesque conciliation of the chiefs, and today they are among the most craven apologists for the government of the Traditional Courts Bill.

In order to go forward in its struggles,

the working class must break with the Tripartite Alliance and with the reformist politics of class collaboration packaged as the National Democratic Revolution. In opposing the “two-stage revolution” schema, Spartacist/South Africa, section of the International Communist League, stands for the programme and perspective of permanent revolution developed by Bolshevik leader Leon Trotsky. This posits that in countries of belated capitalist development, the outstanding democratic tasks historically associated with the bourgeois revolutions can only be carried out through the assumption of power by the working class, and that the working class, once in power, must fight to extend the revolution to the advanced capitalist countries to ensure the successful building of socialism.

South Africa is a particularly striking case of the applicability of Trotsky’s permanent revolution, a unique society where European colonisation created a strong overlap between race and class through the brutal suppression and superexploitation of the black majority. To stress the intimate link between socialist revolution and national liberation for the black majority, and to combat the dominance of nationalist ideology, we raise the call for a **black-centred workers government** as a concretisation of permanent revolution. A black-centred workers government would unite the different tribal and language-based groups, and would include an active role and full democratic rights for the coloured [mixed-race, partly Malay-derived] and Indian minorities, as well as for those whites who accept a government based centrally on the black workers.

The measures needed to dismantle the

racist migrant labour system and to free women from domestic slavery underline the vital need for an internationalist perspective: Development of the rural areas, programmes to provide housing and childcare to all, etc.—all these things will depend for their ultimate success on linking up with an international planned socialist economy, meaning the extension of socialist revolution to the advanced capitalist (imperialist) countries of North America, West Europe and Japan. In fighting for that goal, we seek to build a Leninist revolutionary vanguard party of the working class that would champion the cause of the vast unemployed urban masses, the landless, immigrants, women, agricultural labourers and all of those oppressed under neo-apartheid capitalism.

For New October Revolutions!

Black women played a heroic role in the struggle against apartheid, but because that struggle was politically dominated by bourgeois nationalism, their hopes of liberation were unfulfilled. For a positive model in the fight for women’s liberation, we look to the Bolsheviks of Lenin and Trotsky. The Bolshevik-led October Revolution of 1917 was a dramatic confirmation of Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution. The revolutionary government in the young workers state fought to carry out the Marxist programme for women’s liberation. They immediately removed all impediments to legal equality, giving women the right to vote, breaking the hold of the church over marriage and divorce, and making these simple matters of civil registration. The Bolsheviks legalised abortion, set up literacy schools for young girls, outlawed discrimination against homosexuals, and abolished the concept of illegitimacy of children born out of wedlock.

But as Lenin explained, such legal changes are only the first step to the liberation of women. The second and more challenging step is laying the material foundations needed to actually replace the social functions of the family and liberate women from household drudgery. The Bolsheviks struggled, despite scarce resources, to provide large-scale socialised domestic services as a first step (see “The Russian Revolution and the Emancipation of Women,” *Spartacist* [English edition] No. 59, Spring 2006, for a more extensive look at what the Bolsheviks did). But Russia was a backward capitalist country, and after the revolution the young workers state was economically devastated, isolated and surrounded by hostile imperialist powers. Lenin and Trotsky understood that the key to building socialism in Russia was the international extension of workers revolution to the more advanced capitalist countries, particularly to Germany.

This revolutionary internationalist outlook was later trampled on by a conservative, nationally-narrow bureaucratic caste represented by Stalin, which came to power in a **political counterrevolution** and pursued the anti-Marxist, utopian programme of “socialism in one country.” Despite the subsequent bureaucratic degeneration and Stalinist misrule, the

gains made by the Soviet workers state were tremendous, not least for women. Trotskyists defended the Soviet Union against imperialism and capitalist counterrevolution, and fought for proletarian political revolution to oust the bureaucracy and return the workers state to the road of Lenin and Trotsky. This is our perspective toward the remaining deformed workers states today—China, Cuba, Laos, North Korea and Vietnam.

One of the places where the Russian Revolution had a profound impact on the conditions of women was Soviet Central Asia. At the time of the October Revolution, this region was even more backward than Russia, still in a pre-capitalist mode of production and marked by the hideous oppression of women under customary Islamic law. The Bolsheviks undertook systematic work among these women, seeking to win them as allies and demonstrate the liberating potential of the communist programme to the peoples of the East. This was captured by Trotsky in a speech given in April 1924, celebrating the third anniversary of the founding of the Communist University for Toilers of the East in Moscow:

“The sense, strength and the essence of Bolshevism lies in that it addresses itself not to the labour bosses but to the mob, the underdogs, the millions and to the most oppressed of the oppressed.... And this, moreover, means that the Eastern woman who is the most paralysed in life, in her habits and in creativity, the slave of slaves, that she, having at the demand of the new economic relations taken off her cloak will at once feel herself lacking any sort of religious buttress; she will have a passionate thirst to gain new ideas, a new consciousness which will permit her to appreciate her new position in society. And there will be no better communist in the East, no better fighter for the ideas of the revolution and for the ideas of communism than the awakened woman worker (applause).” (“Communism and Women of the East,” reprinted in *Spartacist* [English edition] No. 60, Autumn 2007)

We fight, in this spirit, to build the revolutionary internationalist party needed to win new Octobers here and around the world. ■

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Bangladesh...

(continued from page 12)

Dhaka University. Thousands of young people gathered, demanding that the government take tougher action against the fundamentalists. Among the demands raised were a ban on Jamaat, an end to funding of religious schools and hospitals and a boycott of the banks run by Islamic organisations. In defiance of the Islamists, women mingled with men while students, young people and secular writers and artists joined in. The protests grew in size and continued over many days, eventually growing to two hundred thousand, the largest that Bangladesh has seen for decades. The Bangladesh flag was prominent in the protests, showing widespread illusions in “secular” Bangladeshi nationalism as the solution to fundamentalism.

The “atheist bloggers” who were identified with these protests have been targeted for murderous violence by the Islamists: on 14 January, 29-year-old blogger Asif Mohiuddin, who had been hounded by Islamic reactionaries, was stabbed and seriously injured. A month later, the well-known “atheist blogger,” Ahmed Rajib Haider, who had been threatened by pro-Jamaat activists, was found dead with his throat slit. When the tribunal passed down the life sentence for Quader Mollah, the Shahbagh protesters thought it was too lenient and demanded the death penalty. They fear that the people who are being convicted will walk free if the BNP wins the election, which is due within a year. There are also well-founded fears that Hasina could cut a deal with the Islamic fundamentalists, whom she has repeatedly conciliated in the past.

In 2006, Hasina signed an electoral pact with Khelafat Majlish in which she agreed that, if elected with the help of these fundamentalists, the Awami League would enact a blasphemy law and give legal backing to *fatwas*. The charge of blasphemy has increasingly been used by fundamentalists in Pakistan, and in Egypt when President Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood was in office, to inflict murderous violence on impoverished Christians of both countries. Even without a blasphemy law, Hasina’s government had no qualms about arresting several bloggers and shutting down Web sites for supposedly offending religious sentiment. In April the government announced it would not adopt the anti-blasphemy laws as written. However, in response to their demand for state-sanctioned *Sharia* law (Islamic religious law), Hasina pledged that: “Our country will be run in keeping with the spirit of the Medina Charter...of our beloved Prophet Mohammad” (*The Hindu*, 15 April).

Hasina’s grotesque promise to implement a *seventh century* Islamic charter did nothing to mollify the Islamists. In protest at not getting their full programme adopted, the BNP called for a two-day general strike on 5-6 May. Hefazat and Jamaat supporters unleashed a riot, setting much of Dhaka ablaze. An unknown number were killed in a crackdown before the government regained control. Among those attacked in the rampage by the Islamists was the Communist Party of Bangladesh, whose office was torched. Its members were lucky to escape with their lives.

Women Garment Workers Are Key

With the country engulfed in a crisis over the war crimes trials, the worst disas-

ter in the history of the garment industry shocked the country and the world. The Rana Plaza factory building collapse in April annihilated more than 1,100 mainly women garment workers. This act of industrial murder showed the real workings of the capitalist market in one of the poorest countries in the world. Some 5,000 factories in Bangladesh produce garments for major North American and European brands. The workers toiling in near-slavery in these deathtraps are paid the lowest wages in the world for that industry—as low as \$37 (£24) a month, far below subsistence, often working 15-hour shifts.

At the same time, the garment industry is a cornerstone of the country’s economy and the millions of workers in these factories have potential social power. To prevent such power from being unleashed, the local garment bosses, aided by the Awami League government, brutally sup-

documented an extremely high level of violence against women in Bangladesh. “Sulfuric acid—able to burn through skin, muscle and bone—is thrown on women for various reasons including ‘refusal of marriage offers, rejection of male advances, dowry disputes, domestic fights, property disputes, and even a delayed meal’” (quoted in “Bangladesh: Violence Against Women,” Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2004). In 2002 the government introduced special laws to stop acid attacks; in 2011 the state restricted the sale of certain kinds of acids in an effort to reduce the number of these gruesome attacks.

Women have most to gain from the overthrow of capitalism in Bangladesh and, as indeed in all of South Asia, they will be a motor force for socialist revolution. The fight for the most basic needs of women—for literacy, education, contraception, an end to forced marriage and a way out of



1971: Some of the millions of refugees who fled Pakistan’s repression of Bengali-speaking population.

press trade unions, to the point of targeting union activists with murderous violence (see WV No. 1023, 3 May). Nevertheless, a number of strikes have swept the industry in recent years. And when news of the Rana Plaza disaster spread, hundreds of thousands of these workers walked out of work and marched on the headquarters of the garment manufacturers’ association demanding “we want execution of the garment factory owners!”

The women who work in these factories are drawn from the villages, where illiteracy rates are high and the influence of religion and anti-woman prejudices are pervasive. For these women, a job in the garment industry opens up the possibility of escaping from the backwardness of village life. The ability of women to find employment in the cities breaks the taboo on mixing with men outside the home and enables women to become financially independent of their families. This fuels a backlash by the Islamists because it undermines the material basis for the traditional village and family hierarchy, within which women are blatantly traded as property. Dowry was prohibited by Bangladeshi law in 1980 but the legislation had little effect and the practice remains widespread. All aspects of personal and family law—regarding marriage, separation and divorce—are religion-based. Muslims are subjected to Islamic law, Christians to laws agreed by Christian churches and Hindus to Hindu codes. Numerous reports have

grinding poverty and oppression—requires a struggle to root out the very foundations of capitalist society. In 1994, when Jamaat launched a murderous anti-woman campaign against Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasrin, we wrote that “Nasrin’s case raises questions far beyond the important democratic issues of women’s rights, freedom of speech and the separation of religion and the state,” questions “that only a revolutionary socialist program can answer.” Our article emphasised that:

“In the Third World countries burdened by centuries-old ‘customs,’ even basic questions of democratic reform can be explosive, not least because women’s subordination in the family has decreed them as the ‘bearers’ of the traditional culture to the next generation. But to unleash the tremendous revolutionary potential of the fight for women’s emancipation requires the leadership of a genuinely communist workers party, armed with a broad new vision of a social order of equality and freedom. The fight for the basic needs of the vast mass of Bangladeshi women—an end to forced marriage and the seclusion of *purdah* and the veil; freedom from poverty and legal subjugation; the right to an education and decent health care, including abortion and contraception—is an attack on the foundations of the capitalist social order and poses nothing less than socialist revolution.”

—“Women and the Permanent Revolution in Bangladesh,” *Women and Revolution* No. 44, Winter 1994-Spring 1995

When the imams issued a *fatwa* (religious edict) against Nasrin and put a price

on her head, she was hounded out of Bangladesh in 1994 and has remained in exile, forbidden to return home, not only under the BNP government but also under the Awami League. Nasrin’s case is a litmus test of the “secularism” the Awami League (occasionally) espouses, as well as for the left. At the time, the Bangladeshi Left Democratic Front, a coalition of leftist parties tailing the Awami League, condemned Nasrin for making statements against the Koran. Similarly, under a West Bengal government led at the time by the Stalinists of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), she was forced to flee Kolkata. This was a cowardly capitulation to religious obscurantism and a gross betrayal of women on both sides of the Bengal border.

The CPI(M)’s commitment to upholding capitalist class rule in India was brutally clear in 2007 when its cadres joined police in an assault on peasants who were resisting a forced land expropriation in Nandigram, West Bengal. As our Canadian comrades wrote in an article:

“The Nandigram massacre had a precursor in a 1979 massacre of dalit (so-called ‘untouchable’) Hindu refugees from heavily Muslim Bangladesh. These refugees, some 30,000, had tried to settle on the small island of Marichjhapi in the inhospitable terrain of the Sundarbans, but the CPI(M) leaders declared their settlement ‘unauthorized.’ After a starvation blockade led to as many as 1,000 deaths, forcible removal began and hundreds were simply massacred. Settlers were tear-gassed, their huts razed, their fisheries and wells destroyed. As they were driven out of Marichjhapi, over 4,000 families perished.”

—*Spartacist Canada* No. 171, Winter 2011/2012 [reprinted in WV No. 993, 6 January 2012]

As opposed to Stalinists—such as the Communist Party of Bangladesh and its Indian counterparts—we Trotskyists fight for the perspective of permanent revolution: the overthrow of imperialist domination through workers revolution, uniting all of the oppressed, including women as well as the mass of toiling peasants, under the leadership of a Leninist party. Such a party will mobilise the social power of the proletariat in a struggle modelled on that of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 in Russia.

Religious Reaction— A Tool of the Imperialists

Particularly in the Indian subcontinent, the struggle for women’s liberation, as well as for working-class unity, means combating communalism. In Bangladesh communalism by Muslim bigots is directed against the oppressed Hindu minority, who make up approximately 10 per cent of the population, as well as against Buddhists and the Ahmadiyya Muslims. Communalism is not some inevitable condition of the region, but the legacy of rule by the British imperialists, who used religion to drive a wedge between India’s Hindus and Muslims, diverting their hatred of colonial rule into a communalist slaughter that accompanied the bloody partition of India in 1947. The creation of Pakistan was justified as supposedly providing a home for one “nation” of all Muslims, but this belies the reality. Capitalist rule in Pakistan is based on the domination of the Punjabi ruling class over Pashtuns, Baluchis and other oppressed nationalities.

Bangladesh owes its existence to the mutual hostility between India and Pakistan that resulted from partition. The former East Pakistan achieved independence only when India intervened militarily on the side of the Awami League. India’s intervention had nothing to do with the Bengalis’ legitimate struggle for self-determination, but was undertaken to weaken Pakistan. With the connivance of the Awami League, India took control of the fighting. As we wrote in an article published at the time, “the just struggle of the Bengalis was entirely subordinated and integrated into the interests of the predator India at the expense of the predator Pakistan” (WV No. 4, January 1972).

Bangladesh’s claim to secularism, which was written into the country’s first constitution, is a myth. Far from being secular, Bangladeshi nationalism is integrally linked to Muslim religious identity. For the Awami League, in independent Bangladesh “secularism” was defined in opposition to

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Pakistan and the religious fundamentalists such as Jamaat who had inflicted such brutality on the Bengali-speaking population. On the other hand, Bangladeshi nationalism accepted partition which forcibly divided the Bengali-speaking people along Hindu-Muslim lines. Mujib, the father of Bangladesh, had no hesitation in rebutting accusations that the Awami League was against religion: “The slanderous rumour is being circulated against us that we are not believers in Islam. In reply to this, our position is very clear. We are not believers in the label of Islam. We believe in the Islam of justice. Our Islam is the Islam of the holy and merciful Prophet” (quoted in *Religion, Identity & Politics—Essays on Bangladesh*, Rafiuddin Ahmed). Mujib’s rhetoric about secularism was useful when it came to harvesting votes from among Bangladesh’s Hindus. But he began to tone it down when he was forced to seek aid from Saudi Arabia when his country was stricken by devastating floods in 1974. Evidently the oil sheiks were not taken in by Mujib’s backpedalling: Saudi Arabia refused to recognise the state of Bangladesh until the day after his assassination in August 1975.

India’s claim to be a secular democracy is also false. The Indian state was founded on Hindu chauvinism and brutal oppression of minorities has been the norm, not only under the avowedly Hindu-supremacist BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) but under the Congress Party as well. Congress Party politicians orchestrated violent pogroms against Sikhs in Delhi in 1984. Decades of Congress rule paved the way for the BJP to ride to governmental power on the back of murderous anti-Muslim pogroms. India’s massive military repression against Kashmir, the country’s only majority Muslim state, gives the lie to New Delhi’s claim that it is a secular democracy. Moreover it

Right: Taslima Nasrin, who has long been under fire from Islamic reactionaries. Far right: February 2012 Calcutta protest against cancellation of launch of Nasrin’s Exile, one of a series of autobiographical works.



Sophie Baasoulis

reinforces the grip of fundamentalists such as Jamaat on Muslims in Pakistan as well as in Kashmir itself.

The resurgence of religious and social reaction seen today in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh is an international phenomenon. A key event was the war in Afghanistan waged by reactionary U.S., British- and Saudi-backed Islamic fundamentalists against Soviet military forces that were invited into that country in December 1979. The funding and arming of the anti-Communist Islamic *mujahedin* in Afghanistan in the 1980s in the service of the Cold War against the Soviet Union gave an enormous boost to Jamaat-e-Islami and many other Islamic insurgents. Capitalist counterrevolution in the Soviet Union in 1991-92 gave a tremendous boost to the forces of reaction around the world. It was in this context that Hindu chauvinist mobs destroyed the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya in 1992, followed by widespread pogroms against Muslims. In a mirror image of the BJP’s Hindu communalist terror, Muslim fundamentalists in Bangladesh unleashed their wrath against Taslima Nasrin and

against the oppressed Hindu minority.

In a recent posting on her blog *No Country for Women*, Nasrin expressed the hope that Shahbagh “will turn into a positive political movement for a true democracy and a secular state—a state which affirms a strict separation between religion and state, and maintains a uniform civil code, a set of secular laws that are not based on religion, but instead, on equality, and an education system that is secular, scientific, and enlightened” (“Secular Uprising in Bangladesh,” 3 March). Nasrin’s ideal of a democratic, secular Bangladesh cannot be realised simply through mobilisations against the fundamentalists. Eruptions of communalist violence, including against Hindus, take place with the complicity of the central government, particularly under the BNP. Furthermore, the oppressive conditions of women in society are deeply rooted in the structure of capitalist society in neocolonial Bangladesh.

As Marxists we know that pogroms and explosions of communalism have to be ruthlessly suppressed. But the capitalist rulers are incapable of defeating the forces



EPA

of political Islam. In the subcontinent, the relatively small but strategic proletariat of each country is the social force that can crush the communalists—by carrying out a socialist revolution. The working class of each country is divided by caste, religion and ethnicity. A revolutionary Marxist leadership must be forged in the fight for proletarian unity and class independence across national and religious lines. The class-conscious proletariat must take up the struggle for the emancipation of women and place itself at the head of all the oppressed, winning the rural masses to its side in a fight to overthrow the landlords and capitalists.

Proletarian socialist revolution—spread throughout South Asia and extended to the imperialist centres—can develop the productive forces on a vast scale. Eliminating scarcity will lay the material basis for freeing the masses from the yoke of religion, of caste, and for the liberation of women. What is necessary is the forging of Leninist-Trotskyist vanguard parties dedicated to the overthrow of capitalist rule in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. ■

Egypt...

(continued from page 3)

a “theoretical” rationale for tailing the Islamists, offering the watchword: “With the Islamists sometimes, with the state never.” Founded in this tradition in 1995, the RS courted the Muslim Brotherhood, investing these clerical reactionaries with “progressive” credentials. Notoriously, the RS formally endorsed Morsi in the second round of presidential elections last year.

The RS justified its grotesque support to Morsi by saying that his victory would be “a blow against the old regime” (*Socialist Worker* [Britain], 2 June 2012). It was workers and the oppressed who felt the blow. As the Morsi government cracked down on trade unionists, it also frontally

attacked women and Copts by strengthening Islamic legal strictures, supplemented by the extra-legal terror of Islamist mobs. With inflation raging and unemployment shooting up, the government, backed by the annual infusion of \$1.5 billion in U.S. aid, pounded the masses with IMF austerity measures. Attacking the working class was nothing new for the Islamists. Previous regimes had alternately repressed the Muslim Brothers and unleashed them to suppress trade unionists and leftists. Under Colonel Nasser’s nationalist rule, Muslim Brothers were given free rein to break strikes and slaughter Communists and others until 1954, when Nasser hanged six Brotherhood leaders and banned the organization.

Within months of Morsi’s election, strikes and large-scale protests were again

shaking the country, prompting the RS to switch banners with not a single word of explanation. By November, the RS had concluded that the Brotherhood and the remnants of the old regime “are two sides of the same coin, which is tyranny and enmity towards the people” (*Socialist Worker* [Britain], 24 November 2012). Had the Cliffites suddenly discovered the class line? Hardly. After returning from Egypt, Ahmed Shawki, a longtime ISO leader, proclaimed that “the forces united in the National Salvation Front represent, in many inchoate ways, the emergence of the second stage of the Egyptian revolution” (*Socialist Worker* [U.S.], 12 December 2012). The Front—basically a lash-up of bourgeois opponents of the Morsi government—would soon be courting the military in the lead-up to the coup.

In its August 14 statement, the RS ludicrously claimed that it “did not defend the regime of Mohamed Mursi and the Mus-

lim Brotherhood for a single day.” Such outright lies are the handmaidens of the deeper deception these opportunists practice by painting every change at the top of the bourgeois state as evidence of an ever-unfolding “revolution.” Banging on about the interests of the “Egyptian people,” the RS plays into the deeply held nationalist idea that Egyptians of all classes share a common interest. While rooted in a long history of foreign occupations, decades of British rule and the current ongoing domination by U.S. imperialism, this false perspective obscures the distinct class interests of the proletariat, especially its role as the potential leader of the oppressed masses against their common class enemy. To instill revolutionary consciousness in the working class requires forging a Leninist vanguard party in opposition to all bourgeois forces. The RS has shown time and again that it is an obstacle to this struggle. ■

Spartacus Youth Club Events

BAY AREA

Tuesday, October 8, 7 p.m.

The State and Revolution

The Marxist Analysis of the State and the Tasks of Workers Revolution

San Francisco State University
Cesar Chavez Student Center
Rosa Parks D

Information and readings:
(510) 839-0851 • sycbayarea@sbcglobal.net

NEW YORK CITY

Wednesday, October 16, 7 p.m.

Imperialism and the Class Struggle

**ROTC Off Campus!
U.S. Hands Off the World!**

CCNY, NAC, Room 1/209
138th St. and Amsterdam Ave.

Information and readings:
(212) 267-1025 • nysl@tiac.net

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

CHICAGO

Thursday, October 17, 6 p.m.

Enlightenment Rationalism and the Origins of Marxism

Location TBA
Information and readings:
(312) 563-0441
chicagosyc@sbcglobal.net

TORONTO

Wednesday, October 9, 6:30 p.m.

**For Free Abortion on Demand!
Women’s Liberation Requires Socialist Revolution**

University of Toronto, Room TBA
Information and readings:
(416) 593-4138
spartcan@on.aibn.com

VANCOUVER

Wednesday, October 16, 6:30 p.m.

**Canadian Capitalism and Racism
Immigrants, Minorities:
Key to Workers Struggle**

UBC, Irving Barber Learning Centre
Room 460
Information and readings:
(604) 687-0353
trotskyist_vancouver@shawcable.com

SPARTACIST LEAGUE/U.S.

Local Directory and Public Offices

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slsycla@sbcglobal.net
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nysl@tiac.net
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WORKERS VANGUARD

Islamist Upsurge Threatens Women, Workers and Minorities

Bangladesh in Turmoil



AP photos

Left: Protesters in Dhaka on February 28 celebrate sentencing of Islamist leader convicted of war crimes at time of independence from Pakistan. Right: Security vehicle by burning barricade in Dhaka, May 5, as government moved against Islamist forces.

SEPTEMBER 28—Bangladesh has been shaken in the recent past by mass mobilizations that highlight the profound contradictions that characterize the South Asian state, where over four-fifths of the population scrape by on less than \$2 per day. In the last week, as many as 200,000 mainly women garment workers and their supporters waged strikes and street protests demanding an increase in the abjectly miserable minimum wage from \$38 a month to \$100. The strikes, which also demanded maternity leave, forced the closure of hundreds of factories in the industrial suburban districts of the capital, Dhaka. The Awami League government of Sheikh Hasina responded with brute force, with police clubbing workers and firing tear gas and rubber bullets, injuring dozens.

Meanwhile, the religious reactionaries of Jamaat-e-Islami launched a two-day nationwide protest following a September 17 Supreme Court decision sentencing fundamentalist leader Abdul Quader Mollah to hanging. As explained below in the article reprinted from *Workers Hammer* No. 223 (Summer 2013), newspaper of the Spartacist League/Britain, the government has prosecuted a number of leading Islamists for atrocities committed at the time of Bangladesh's fight for independence from Pakistan in 1971. In response to the death sentence, Islamist mobs set off crude bombs and burned vehicles while schools and businesses were shut down, leaving Dhaka's commercial district all but deserted.

Social turmoil is likely to heat up further around general elections due to take place by late January 2014, as the bourgeois Awami League battles the rival Bangladesh Nationalist Party, with which Jamaat-e-Islami is aligned.

WORKERS HAMMER

For some months, Bangladesh has been in the throes of a general political crisis, with Islamic fundamentalists staging mass mobilisations against the government. In early May, Jamaat-e-Islami, the largest fundamentalist organisation in the country, mobilised its supporters to converge on the capital in what they called "Siege Dhaka." Hefazat-e-Islam, an outfit that was born in opposition to a proposal to give women equal rights to inherit, is

putting forward a 13-point programme. Among other things it calls for execution as the penalty for "insulting Islam," a ban on intermingling of men and women and an end to "shameless behaviour and dress." This reactionary upsurge is an ominous threat to the working class, the oppressed and above all to women.

Awami League had lost popular support. It was overthrown in a military coup in 1975 that assassinated its leader, Mujibur Rahman (Mujib), and killed 40 members of his family—all but two daughters, one of whom is Sheikh Hasina, the current party leader and prime minister. The military coup brought General Ziaur Rahman to

led the independence struggle. Following a landslide election victory for the Awami League, the long-delayed war crimes proceedings began in 2010. Foremost among those accused are leaders of Jamaat.

Last December, before any verdicts were announced, Jamaat organised a general strike in protest against the trials. On 5 February Abdul Quader Mollah, assistant general secretary of Jamaat, was convicted of complicity in rape and mass murder and sentenced to life in prison. On 28 February, Delwar Hossain Sayedee, vice president of Jamaat and a former Member of Parliament, was sentenced to death, as was Muhammad Kumar Zaman on 9 May. With each conviction, the Islamists orchestrated mob rampages against not only the government but also the oppressed Hindus. After Sayedee was sentenced to death, his supporters attacked Hindu villages, damaging more than 50 temples and destroying more than 1,500 houses in nearly 20 districts. Hindus were forced to flee with their families and continue to live in fear. Buddhist temples and statues were also damaged, notably near the southern city of Chittagong where the Islamists are strong.

The howling by the fundamentalists for the death penalty for "insulting Islam" is aimed at the pro-secular demonstrations that began on 5 February at Shahbagh, a major intersection in the capital near

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For a Socialist Federation of South Asia!

Jamaat supporters are enraged by the ongoing trials of its leaders, who are accused of atrocities that were committed against the Bangladeshi population at the time of independence from Pakistan in 1971. The revolt of the Bengali-speaking population led by the Awami League met ferocious repression by the Pakistani oppressor. Pakistan's military laid siege to Bengali areas and carried out a mass slaughter. Estimates of the numbers killed vary widely, but a commonly cited figure in Bangladesh is three million. Some ten million Hindus became refugees, many fleeing to India. The number of women raped by the Pakistani army and paramilitary units is estimated at tens of thousands.

The Pakistani side was supported by Jamaat-e-Islami, which actively opposed independence for Bangladesh. Its cadres participated in paramilitary units such as the Razakars (roughly, "collaborators") who colluded with the Pakistani troops in carrying out terrible crimes against the Bangladeshi population. Following independence, Jamaat and other organisations who had sided with Pakistan were widely hated in Bangladesh and were banned by the ruling Awami League. In 1973 the government decided to try collaborators for war crimes, but it later backtracked and declared an amnesty, releasing all suspects.

Over time, however, the political bankruptcy of the Awami League paved the way for the forces of political Islam to re-emerge as a force in the country. A key factor was the utter inability of the bourgeois nationalists to free the masses from extreme poverty. This was evident as early as 1974 by which time Bangladesh faced disastrous famine and floods. The venal and corrupt

power, who welcomed Jamaat back to Bangladesh. He also founded the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). The country was run for years by military dictatorship, followed since the 1990s by rotating Awami League- or BNP-led governments.

But since 1971 the perpetrators of atrocities continued to walk free in Bangladesh—and other countries, including Britain, which gave many of them a warm welcome—and the issue festered. To capitalise on popular anger over the issue, in the run-up to the 2008 elections Sheikh Hasina revived the proposal to try those accused of war crimes. This was a cynical manoeuvre by a corruption-ridden party to refurbish its credentials as the party that



Mehedi Hasan

September 23: Garment workers in Dhaka block road in demonstration demanding hike in rock-bottom minimum wage.