

Obamacare Puts Squeeze on Working People



Patterson/NY Times



Corbis

Left: Family members in Mississippi numbering among the millions of uninsured not poor enough for Medicaid, but too poor for Obamacare subsidies. Right: Administration officials and insurance company executives with Obama at White House, November 15.

For Socialized Medicine— Quality Health Care for All!

News coverage of the botched rollout of President Obama's Affordable Care Act (ACA) initially focused on the government's virtually unusable Web site. But the headlines soon shifted to a bigger story: insurance companies canceling millions of families' policies. So far, some 4.8 million people who do not get coverage through their employers have received cancellation notices because their plans do not conform to the ACA. Many are being forced to accept policies that impose much higher premiums and out-of-pocket medical costs for inferior coverage.

Obama repeatedly promised: "If you like your health plan, you will be able to keep your health plan." In fact, the administration knew from the start that this was false. Though it was practically unreported in the press, the administration estimated as far back as June 2010 that up to two-thirds of privately purchased insurance policies would get canceled when the ACA was introduced. On November 7, Obama apologized to those losing their coverage despite "assurances they got from me." He insisted that the problem would impact only "about 5 percent of the population who are in what's called the individual market."

That new promise by the president is just as false as the previous one. A major component of Obamacare is the drive to scale back employer-paid health plans, which provide health insurance for 156 million people—more than half of the population. By the administration's own estimate, as many as 80 percent of small-employer plans and 64 percent of large-employer plans could be canceled as a result of the Affordable Care Act (*Federal Register*, 17 June 2010).

When working people got a measure of

decent health coverage through employer-paid plans, it was the fruit of hard class struggle by this country's industrial unions. The years-long attack on those plans is reflected in the increasing medical costs that workers are obliged to pay. Since the financial crisis began six years ago, average family premiums have grown by over 25 percent. The efforts to water down employer-funded health plans are of a piece with the drive initiated under the Ronald Reagan presidency to replace defined-benefit pension plans with 401(k) accounts, to which the bosses make only minimal contributions.

In our previous article on Obamacare ("U.S. Rulers Intensify War on Workers, Poor," WV No. 1031, 4 October), we laid out several ways that the ACA further undermines company health plans. One key provision is the tax on so-called "Cadillac" plans, which actually comprise up to three-quarters of all employer-paid plans. An economist who helped draft the ACA called the tax "one of the most significant provisions" of the law (*New York Times*, 27 May). Companies—as well as local and state government agencies—are putting unions under intense pressure to accept whittled-down health benefits before the tax goes into effect in 2018.

The Obama administration has trumpeted the fact that, with the expansion of Medicaid, millions of currently uninsured poor people will have access to health insurance under the ACA. As is traditional in racist capitalist America, even that improvement is being denied to many black people and others on the bottom. Since the Supreme Court gave the green light, a total of 26 states—including every state of the former Confederacy except Arkansas—have rejected the expansion

of Medicaid, which was supposed to help finance the extension of coverage to the poorest layers of society. Those states are home to more than two-thirds of the poor blacks and single mothers nationwide who lack insurance. A Mississippi doctor pointed to the legacy of segregation: "If you look at the history of Mississippi, politicians have used race to oppose minimum wage, Head Start, all these social programs. It's a tactic that appeals to people who would rather suffer themselves than see a black person benefit" (*New York Times*, 2 October).

The low-cost insurance plans obtainable under the ACA require such high out-of-pocket payments in the form of copayments and deductibles that many of those covered will still not be able to afford doctor's examinations or medical tests. In reality, these so-called "bronze" plans offer little more than catastrophic care insurance: If you run up major hospital bills, you will be much less likely to lose everything in bankruptcy than is now the case. In opposing the ACA from the outset, we noted that "Obama invokes the plight of the uninsured, with promises of a level of care not much above a pledge to pick up the dead bodies" ("For Socialized Medicine!" WV No. 943, 25 September 2009). With the population mandated to purchase coverage, the insurance companies expect to collect an additional annual bonanza of \$60 billion.

Access to health care should be an elementary right for everyone, not just those who can pay for the highly advanced care that can be found in the U.S. The allocation of skilled personnel, medical facilities, equipment and medicines entails a cost to society. That cost should be borne not by individuals out of pocket but by

the government. At the point of delivery of health care, the service should be free of charge. The U.S. government throws plenty of money—collected through taxes—at its police, prisons, army and other repressive state institutions to protect capitalist profits and rule. But it will take fierce class struggle for workers to win even a modicum of the quality health care everyone needs. This requires fighting the class-collaborationist outlook of the trade-union bureaucrats, who have acceded to countless givebacks in the service of capitalist profitability. The labor traitors went all out to help ensure passage of the ACA, whatever their current misgivings about the "reform."

Under the capitalist system, fully satisfying basic human necessities—including good education, decent housing and stable, well-paid jobs—inevitably runs up against the drive by corporations to generate profits. For the capitalist bosses of the U.S. insurance giants and pharmaceutical companies, health care is essentially a commodity trade in human lives. These parasites should be expropriated, a task that points straight to the need to overturn the capitalist order through socialist revolution. To achieve this goal requires forging a workers party that champions the cause of all the exploited and oppressed.

Socialism and Health Care

That the U.S. is the only major industrialized country in the world without a national health care program is, in large part, testimony to how successfully America's rulers have wielded anti-black racism and anti-immigrant nativism to divide and weaken the working class and its struggles. Those divisions have been a

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General Giap and the Vietnamese Victory Against Imperialism...4

Workers Vanguard Subscription Drive

New Readers for Revolutionary Press

The Spartacist League and Spartacus Youth Clubs concluded our annual subscription drive on October 9. This year's campaign was modestly successful, exceeding our quota with 2,325.5 points. The total represented 1,035 subscriptions to *Workers Vanguard*, 81 to *Espartaco* (newspaper of the International Communist League's Mexican section) and 95 to the press of ICL sections in other countries. Unlike past years, the quota did not include an "at large" category, which had mainly consisted of WV subs sold by our comrades in Canada during their sub drive. Comrades reported that widening social inequality, the NSA spying revelations and recent racist atrocities were prominent factors in motivating new subscribers to our revolutionary Marxist press.

Comrades from the four SL/U.S. locals visited campuses and worksites far beyond their home turf, with some working alongside the Trotskyist League of Canada in Montreal. Helping kick off the sub drive, a sizable team of comrades traveled to Washington, D.C., for the August rally marking the 50th anniversary of the "March on Washington." Anger over George Zimmerman's acquittal for the racist killing of Trayvon Martin was still running hot, swelling the attendance. But the rally was expressly designed by Al Sharpton and other Democratic Party liberals to appeal to the Obama administration and its top cop Eric Holder for redress. Our banner calling, "Break with the Democrats! For a Workers Party!" had a polarizing effect, outraging some but



WV Photo

Spartacist League/Spartacus Youth Club banner at August 24 commemoration of 1963 March on Washington.

attracting others to our literature offering a program for black liberation through socialist revolution.

As we have done for many years, we visited Mid-Atlantic, Southern, Gulf and West Coast ports, where the ILA and ILWU longshore unions are increasingly under siege from the shipping companies and terminal operators. Our Chicago local was encouraged by its results in Michigan. In addition to sales at the large state universities in Lansing and Ann Arbor, comrades did well in Detroit, a city that the auto barons and bankers have turned into a monument to capitalist decay. At Ford's River Rouge plant in Dearborn, where pensions, union protections and wages have all been on the chopping block, one worker held up our newspaper and announced: "I'm not a communist, but there's a lot of truth in this! Communists are pro-union all the way, and that's good enough for me!"

Locals reported that the SYC's "Meet the Marxists" presentations, a regular feature of our sub drives, sparked lively debate on everything from the shell game of capitalist electoral politics to petty-bourgeois environmentalism. Many student subscribers, overburdened with debt and facing scarce job prospects, said that socialism was attractive because to them it meant affordable education and health care.

In New York City, the SYC joined protests against the return of the U.S. military's ROTC program to City College after 40 years, as well as against the City University's appointment of war criminal David Petraeus as a visiting professor. In Durham, North Carolina, a Spartacist speaker addressing a pro-

test against the threatened U.S. imperialist bombing of Syria pointed out that the reformist Workers World Party and other self-described socialists had hailed Obama's 2008 election and that the Democrats are the capitalists' preferred party of war. As Workers World supporters lamely insisted that Obama's ascension to Commander-in-Chief *was* a victory against racism and imperialism, several protesters were intrigued by our polemics and subscribed to *WV*.

WV is known for tackling the hard issues, such as defending China and North Korea's nuclear weapons capacity as a deterrent to imperialist attack. One particularly controversial article featured in the sub drive was "State-Branded 'Sex Offenders': Pariahs for Life" (WV No. 1030, 20 September).

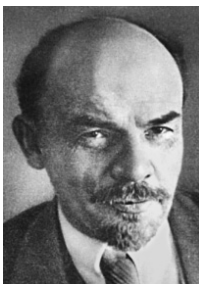
Our Marxist press promotes an international perspective grounded in the history of the workers movement. The current issue of our theoretical journal *Spartacist*, which is included with all WV subscriptions, focuses on upholding the lessons of the Bolshevik-led October Revolution of 1917 against the attacks of social-democratic renegades from Marxism. While class and social struggle continue to be at a low ebb in the U.S., the very workings of the capitalist profit system generate enormous discontent. Swimming against the stream of bourgeois ideology is necessary to win those who want to fight against the depravities of capitalist imperialism to a revolutionary program. We welcome our new and returning readers. And we congratulate comrade Alan in the Bay Area for winning the national sub drive. ■



TROTSKY

Medicine in U.S. Capitalist Society

Writing in the mid 20th century, James P. Cannon, founder of American Trotskyism, pointed to the contradiction besetting doctors in the capitalist U.S. between the delivery of medicine as a social service and its rendering into a commodity for profit. As he observed elsewhere in the same article: "Socialism will be good medicine for the doctors who just want to be doctors."



LENIN

Medicine as a science is progressive and revolutionary, constantly sharpening its theoretical tools, bold and thoroughgoing in its increasingly successful search for new techniques. Medical science is benign, by its very nature social-minded, humane and out-giving, committed to the most ennobling ideal—the service of others. Who can be more deserving of the grateful acclaim of the people than those who heal the sick and make human life more livable? The doctors—as doctors—belong to the Order of the Friends of Man.

But the way things are, the doctor, who shouldn't have to bother with anything but his profession, must also be a businessman who has to make a living, charge all the traffic will bear and try to get rich in competition with others. This side of the picture is not so attractive. Medicine as a business, self-centeredly working for its own pocket, is no better than any other business. In some respects it is even worse, for the unnatural mixing up of a profession designed for service with the business of making money entails a special corruption of its own, which merits nobody's veneration.

Commercialized medicine leads to discrimination against those who need medical service most in favor of those who can pay best....

The Oath of Hippocrates obligates the doctor to visit the sick wherever they may be and to serve anyone whatever, on the sole condition that he needs medical care.

That ideal of the legendary founder of the medical profession must govern its future too. But that can be fully realized only when the practice of medicine as a social service—its justification and its glory—is completely separated from sordid business considerations and shabby politics—its degradation and disgrace.

That will require a change and reorganization of our social system, as revolutionary as any changes that have been made in the practice of medicine.

—James P. Cannon, "The Doctor's Dilemma," *Militant*, June 1952, reprinted in *Notebook of an Agitator* (1958)

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Reinstate Fired School Bus Union Leaders!

Boston

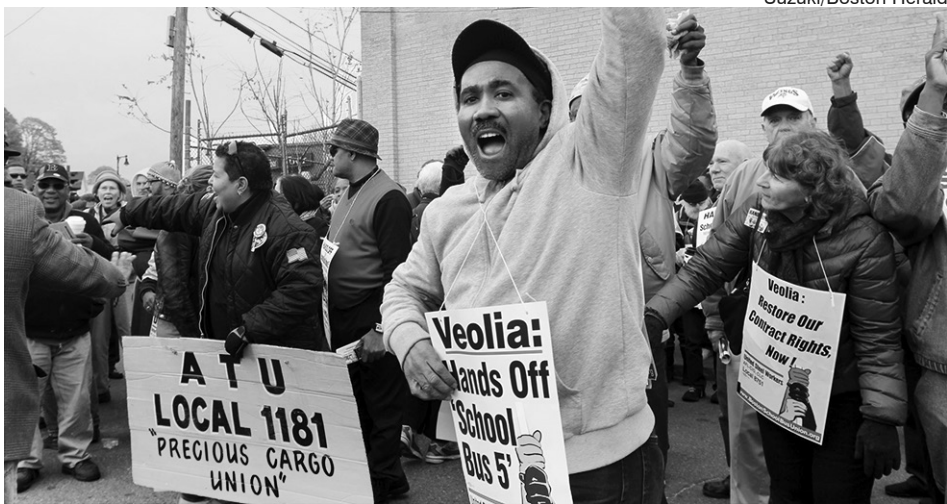
Boston school bus drivers, organized in United Steel Workers (USW) Local 8751, are fighting a vendetta against union leaders for a brief job action last month provoked by labor-hating Veolia Transportation (see “Boston Job Action: No Reprisals Against School Bus Drivers!” WV No. 1033, 1 November). Since it took over management of the buses in June, the company had trampled on the union contract, threatening safety, shortchanging drivers on their paychecks and effectively forcing them to reapply for their jobs. When on October 8 drivers refused to roll out the buses unless management agreed to a meeting with the union, the bosses locked out the workforce for the day, bringing in police to help clear the yards. Veolia sought to make special examples of the “School Bus Union 5.” Grievance committee chairman Stevan Kirschbaum, vice president Steve Gillis, recording secretary Andre Francois, stewards Garry Murchison and Richard Lynch were suspended. Except for Lynch, all were later fired.

Large numbers of the heavily Haitian and Cape Verdean drivers and their supporters mobilized for protests outside the disciplinary hearing for the School Bus Union 5 at the end of October. In response to the subsequent firings of the Local 8751 officials, some of whom have long been supported by the reformist Workers World Party (WWP), a day of solidarity was held on November 9. Hundreds of people, including trade unionists from other cities, rallied at the Freeport bus yard and marched to company headquarters, chanting “Union! Union!” Management, though, has thus far proved intransigent. Not one of



Fred Floreal

Above: Garry Murchison, Stevan Kirschbaum, Andre Francois, Steven Gillis and Richard Lynch, the “School Bus Union 5.” Below: November 9 union solidarity rally outside Veolia Transportation in Boston demands drivers be reinstated.



Suzuki/Boston Herald

the demands presented by the union right after the work stoppage, which the company deemed illegal, has been met. To help beat back this open union-busting, all of labor must stand behind the drivers. Reinstate Kirschbaum, Gillis, Francois and Murchison! An injury to one is an injury to all!

Although the USW regional office renounced the job action at the time, providing ammunition for Veolia, the union’s top leadership has since stepped up to the

plate to underwrite the defense effort. The San Francisco Labor Council and Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 1181 in New York City are among the union bodies that have issued solidarity statements, helping counter the redbaiting and union-bashing emanating from all quarters of the Boston elite. Such statements need to be turned into whatever actions are necessary to defeat the attack on Local 8751 by Veolia, an international outfit holding over 200 transportation contracts

with cities, transit authorities and airports across North America. Wherever it sets up, this company’s first order of business is to attempt to bring the unions to heel. Impressed by its anti-union record, other employers have paid top dollar for its services, such as Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART), which hired Veolia’s Thomas Hock to squeeze its unions in contract negotiations earlier this year.

The attacks on the poorly paid school bus drivers are the latest in the nationwide anti-labor barrage. In NYC, school bus drivers and matrons in ATU Local 1181 carried out a month-long strike earlier this year after Mayor Michael Bloomberg sought to strip them of job protections, only to see 100 of the strikers fired upon returning to work. On the West Coast, BART union members went on strike twice in recent months in an attempt to fend off major concessions. Everywhere, workers are under pressure to keep surrendering hard-won gains of the past, even as the capitalist exploiters pocket ever greater profits.

A major barrier to reversing this course is labor officialdom’s embrace of capitalist Democratic Party politicians. Unions nationwide contributed millions to help elect “friend of labor” Martin J. Walsh, the next mayor of Boston. But the reaction of this former head of the city’s Building and Construction Trades Council to the October 8 job action was barely distinguishable from that of current Democratic mayor Thomas Menino. Not mincing words, Walsh declared: “This is illegal, the actions taken by the drivers. I don’t condone it in any shape, manner, or form.” According to the *Boston Globe* (8 October), Walsh “has continuously insisted that he would be able to oversee tough negotiations with unions despite their heavy contributions to his

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Letters

On Anti-Sex Witchhunts

28 September 2013

Dear Comrades,

I have just come across your excellent article in *Workers’ Vanguard* [“Britain: Teacher Jailed in Anti-Sex Witchhunt,” WV No. 1028, 9 August] reprinted from *Workers’ Hammer* on the jailing of Jeremy Forrest, and I just want to send my applause and congratulations to your organization for being the only left group I know of nowadays that stands up for teenage and ‘childhood’ sexuality and also unconditionally speaks up for Julian Assange.

I have spent my life as a Reichian therapist fighting for people to free themselves sexually, and admire tremendously pioneers such as Wilhelm Reich and Alfred Kinsey who risked everything to try and bring some sense and honesty into the open about what everyone intrinsically knows: that from a very early age we all experience sexual curiosity and desires.

I left England in 1974 and don’t know what the hell happened to turn the clock back so radically on all the development towards sexual freedom that was going on in the 60s and 70s, and I have been totally shocked at just how deeply the cancer of the new sexual puritanism has re-entrenched itself.

So it is with the utmost relief that I read your article and many others on similar issues such as ‘Obama’s Reactionary Crusade Against Teen Birth Control’ in *Workers’ Vanguard* of 31 May.

I admire the way you stick your neck out and take such a strong stand in these oppressive times.

I can’t join you *in toto* as although

brought up in a communist family, I removed myself from Western society many decades ago and live as a ‘bourgeois peasant’ running up a small commune and working the land on an organic farm in the Colombian Andes ...and using alternative medicine, which I see for some strange reason you are violently opposed to!

However, this doesn’t stop me appreciating enormously your radical stance on so many issues.

Wishing you well,
Jenny J.

WV replies:

We appreciate Jenny’s letter. For those interested in reading about our opposition to alternative medicine, please see “On Quacks and Their Defenders,” WV No. 962, 30 July 2010.

* * *

5 October 2013

Dear Spartacist League,

Thanks for your excellent article on the new pariahs of the American police state: sex offenders [“State-Branded ‘Sex Offenders’: Pariahs for Life,” WV No. 1030, 20 September]. It is to your credit that among all left groups, you have been consistently superior in your coverage of the antisex witch hunt and sex panic that has branded so many with the scarlet letter for life. No other group comes close to your incisive and comprehensive coverage. Virtually all left groups instead run after the ruling class’s phony “equality” campaigns (gay marriage, militarism, hate crimes laws...) that have served not only to co-opt gay

liberation, but also contributed to the demise of the radical sexual freedom movement altogether. Too many who consider themselves radicals embrace the liberal “equality” mantra and, insofar as they even believe in sexual liberation, relegate it to the Wobbly pie in the sky by and by when you die.

The same criticism could be made of most “lgbt” groups, who, to their shame, have not made a peep to protest the government’s inhuman mistreatment of those it brands as “sex offenders,” some of them teenagers.

Kudos! Your work is appreciated.
David Thorstad

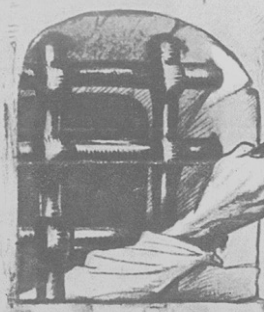
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Left: General Vo Nguyen Giap (back left) with Ho Chi Minh (second from right) in 1950 during military campaign against French imperialists. Right: Vietnamese forces in May 1954 en route to Dien Bien Phu, site of decisive defeat for French military.

General Giap and the Vietnamese Victory Against Imperialism

On October 12-13, hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese gathered all over the country to pay their respects to General Vo Nguyen Giap in two days of national mourning. Giap, who died on October 4 at the age of 102, was the chief architect of the defeat in Vietnam of two world powers: first France, which had colonized Vietnam in the mid 19th century, and then the U.S. The wars in Vietnam, which lasted 30 years (1946-75) and cost some three million lives, were part of the imperialist crusade to “roll back Communism,” aimed at restoring capitalist rule in the Soviet Union and drowning in blood struggles for national liberation and social revolution by workers and peasants elsewhere.

A former history teacher and journalist, Giap was the top military commander of the Vietnamese army that decisively defeated the French at the battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954. The victory of the Vietminh (Vietnam Independence League, a bloc led by Ho Chi Minh’s Communists that included some bourgeois nationalists) resulted in the division of the country between a bureaucratically deformed workers state in the North and a capitalist regime in the South under U.S. imperialist domination. Dien Bien Phu gave tremendous encouragement to independence struggles in France’s remaining colonies, in particular helping spark Algeria’s national liberation struggle, which broke out later that year.

The U.S. would go to meet a stunning defeat at the hands of the North Vietnamese Army and the South Vietnamese National Liberation Front (NLF, or Viet Cong). The brutal, seemingly endless war would produce an explosive situation in the U.S., the heartland of world imperialism, and radicalize a whole generation of youth throughout the world. The spectacle of the massive American military machine losing to the workers and peasants of a poor Third World country inspired other oppressed peoples to fight for their own liberation. However, numerous attempts to replicate the peasant-based Chinese, Vietnamese and Cuban guerrilla movements failed, at the cost of the lives of many would-be revolutionaries.

The overthrow of capitalist rule in Vietnam was a historic victory for the international working class, whose duty is to defend such conquests tooth and nail against imperialism and domestic counterrevolution. This is despite the rule of a

Stalinist regime that from the beginning has politically suppressed the working class and opposed the fight for workers revolution elsewhere. In contrast, the proletarian October Revolution of 1917 in Russia, under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party, established the rule of workers and peasants councils (soviets), and two years later the Communist (Third) International was launched in Moscow to promote the fight for world socialist revolution.

Giap was North Vietnam’s defense minister in 1975, when Saigon fell to the North Vietnamese Army and NLF, leading to the reunification of North and South Vietnam. For years, U.S. imperialism’s defeat in Vietnam constrained the American rulers in pursuing their bloody designs around the world. For his outstanding role in the liberation of Vietnam, we Trotskyists honor Vo Nguyen Giap, whose military genius and dedication will be remembered in history.

Stalinism and the Fight Against Imperialism

Vo Nguyen Giap joined Ho Chi Minh’s Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) in the early 1930s. Building the Vietminh’s

military forces from scratch and later leading North Vietnam’s conventional armed forces, he was praised as an outstanding military strategist, even by many of his enemies. Most famous for Dien Bien Phu, Giap was involved in many other key battles and was credited with creating the “Ho Chi Minh Trail,” the crucial supply line for the NLF fighters in the South. He also organized the 1979 invasion of Cambodia, which toppled the demented Pol Pot regime. While details about Giap’s early life are sketchy, it is clear that he paid a devastating personal price for his leadership of anti-imperialist struggle, with close relatives, including his wife, killed at the hands of the French.

Even while noting that Giap is often classed among the great military leaders of the 20th century, the *New York Times* (4 October) obituary harped on his supposed “profligate disregard for the lives of his soldiers,” quoting war criminal General William C. Westmoreland’s statement that “any American commander who took the same vast losses as General Giap would not have lasted three weeks.” This is the sneering of the losers in Vietnam, the same imperialists who were willing to inflict any amount of

death, destruction and suffering on those fighting for national and social liberation. General Giap waged revolutionary warfare: the workers and peasants who fought under his command were prepared for sacrifice to free themselves from the colonial yoke and the local landlords, oppressors and exploiters. “In the final analysis, victory in any war is determined by the willingness of the masses to shed blood on the battlefield,” Giap once wrote.

In the starkest contrast, the heavily working-class American conscript troops were fighting a war on behalf of their own exploiters and oppressors. Especially as it became clear that the U.S. was losing, they increasingly opposed their own officers and government. When Muhammad Ali made his famous declaration, “No Vietcong ever called me n---r,” he expressed the sentiments of growing numbers of soldiers, particularly black GIs who were aware that the “freedom” they were supposed to be fighting for in Vietnam was denied them at home.

But Giap’s role was contradictory. The program of the ICP and its successors reflected the perversion of Marxism by the Stalinist bureaucratic caste that politically dominated the Soviet workers state beginning in 1923-24. In the vain hope of softening the imperialists’ class hatred of the USSR, the bureaucratic regime abandoned the Bolshevik program of world revolution and adopted the dogma of “socialism in one country.” The Communist International was increasingly transformed into an instrument of the bureaucracy’s search for “peaceful coexistence” with imperialism.

In 1935, the popular front—the codification of the Stalinist policy of seeking alliances with “progressive” bourgeois forces—became the systematic practice of the Third International, leading to the betrayal of revolutionary opportunities throughout the world. As World War II loomed and the USSR faced the deadly menace of Nazi Germany, this policy meant selling the “democratic” credentials of one set of capitalist exploiters and imperialist oppressors (except for the brief period of what is known as the Stalin-Hitler pact). In the name of anti-fascism, Communist parties in countries militarily allied with the USSR became loyal supporters of the capitalist governments, backing their war aims against rival imperialists, opposing strikes and other struggles at home and opposing independence for their “own”



Da Nang, South Vietnam: U.S. marines haul NLF prisoners by neck harnesses, 1965.

colonies. In Vietnam at the time, this meant that the Communist Party did *not* challenge France’s colonial stranglehold.

In WWII, Trotskyists called for working-class opposition to all the imperialist combatants, continuing to pursue the class struggle at home while fighting for unconditional military defense of the Soviet Union. In several colonial and semicolonial countries where the Communist parties repudiated the fight for national liberation, Trotskyists as a result gained significant influence in the proletariat. One such country was Vietnam, and this would put the Trotskyists in the crosshairs of not only the imperialists but the Stalinists as well.

Dien Bien Phu and the Geneva Accords

Toward the end of WWII, the Kremlin bureaucracy made a series of agreements with its U.S., British and other wartime imperialist allies, including over control of their colonies and semicolonies. Vietnam, which had been under Japanese occupation, was divided between North and South at the 16th parallel, the North awarded to Chiang Kai-shek’s China and the South to Britain (and subsequently France). However, the Vietminh took over the North when Japan withdrew, and Ho Chi Minh proclaimed the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). He then accepted the reintroduction of French troops in the North in the framework of limited independence within the “French Union.” But once the French army came back in force, it turned on Ho Chi Minh’s government. In November 1946, the

to find so many guns capable of producing an artillery assault of such power,” wrote one of the survivors. What was intended as a display of colonial might turned into a bloody trap for the French. Wading in the mud and muck, hammered relentlessly by artillery, they lost 4,000 men by some estimates. After 55 days of fighting, crushed and humiliated, the French surrendered to the Vietnamese, ending nearly a century of France’s domination of Indochina.

With the Western imperialists seeking a compromise, a conference took place in Geneva that year attended by the Soviet Union, the U.S., France, Britain and China, where capitalist rule had been smashed in 1949. Going into the conference, Communists controlled most of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. But when they left the conference, which redivided Vietnam at the 17th parallel, they controlled only North Vietnam. A U.S. official wrote: “Ironically the agreement written at Geneva benefited all parties except the winners.... Ho Chi Minh somehow was persuaded—apparently by a joint Sino-Soviet effort—to settle for half the country on the grounds that the other half would be his as soon as elections were held.” Since 80 percent of the population in South Vietnam was thought to be in favor of independence, the imperialists saw to it that those elections never took place. But in the North, the capitalists were expropriated and a collectivized economy was introduced, although the working class was denied political power.

The Geneva conference was one of several times that the Vietminh, and later the DRV/NLF, gave away imminent vic-



Spartacist League at 1973 anti-Vietnam War protest in Washington, D.C.

French shelled Haiphong harbor, killing at least 6,000 Vietnamese.

The attack at Haiphong was met with a broad counteroffensive by the Vietminh, touching off a protracted war of liberation. At the end of 1953, the French military command decided to fortify Dien Bien Phu, a small village near the border with Laos. The intent was to create a secure base from which to harry Giap’s Vietminh in the northwest mountains. The French built a formidable entrenched camp and brought in 16,000 troops, among them the Foreign Legion, its elite expeditionary corps. The surrounding forests and mountains were assumed to be impassable for the enemy’s heavy artillery, which would in any case be vulnerable to air attack.

The Vietminh could access Dien Bien Phu only through a narrow, steep 55-mile-long mule path interrupted by scores of mountain streams. In a few months, they built dozens of bridges despite constant attack by French artillery as well as heavy rain and flooding. Thousands of sampans and countless convoys of mules and bicycles using rivers, streams, roads and trails moved 4.5 million tons of materiel. Artillery was moved up the steep path in sections, then reassembled.

By January 1954, 55,000 Vietminh troops were positioned in the hills overlooking the garrison, and on March 13 General Giap launched the attack with a massive artillery barrage. “We were all surprised...how the Viets have been able

tory at the bargaining table at the behest of Stalin and his successors as well as Mao Zedong’s Chinese Stalinists. But while the North Vietnamese settled for “socialism” in half a country, the relentless persecution of their comrades in the South did not stop, particularly under the Ngo Dinh Diem regime. In 1956, the Stalinists began giving real support to the resistance struggle in South Vietnam.

While it was pretty easy for the Moscow and Beijing bureaucrats to sell out someone else’s revolution, for the Hanoi Stalinists total sellout would have meant cutting their own throats. The Stalinists’ political perspective was an alliance with the native capitalists, but this class was too weak to present a real possibility for power-sharing. Under attack by imperialism and with their own bourgeoisie rebuffing all offers of a coalition, they were forced to rely on the workers and peasants, sometimes acquiescing to revolutionary measures. Thus, the Vietnamese war posed a social revolution from the beginning, with the workers and peasants on one side and the domestic bourgeoisie and the imperialists on the other.

U.S. Sent Packing

After the French departure, the U.S. took over the campaign to crush the Vietnamese Revolution. When the resistance struggle by the NLF picked up once

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RULERS INVADE CAMBODIA, MASSACRE U.S. STUDENTS:

Blood and Nixon

The Nixon administration's criminal adventurist imperialist aggression into Cambodia and the new brutal bombings of North Vietnam are a final outrage in America's war against the just struggle of Vietnamese working people for the liberation of their country. The slaughter at Kent State University in Ohio is a declaration of war upon students as the most outspoken dissenters against American foreign policy. This outrage shows that the Administration will treat those who oppose its imperialist aggression with the same callous brutality as it has shown the Vietnamese.

of the university strikes--demands for the freeing of all political prisoners, an end to war research and ROTC on campus, and an end to political intimidation along with the demand for the immediate unconditional withdrawal of all U.S. troops and "advisers" from Southeast Asia, the working class, because of its economic power, can lead the struggle for an effective anti-war struggle. On the other hand, the workers can lead the struggle for an effective anti-war struggle. The unprecedented national unity and militancy themselves under way is extremely important. The Administration, but it is

1970 Spartacist Leaflet

The Nixon administration’s criminal adventurist imperialist aggression into Cambodia and the new brutal bombings of North Vietnam are a final outrage in America’s war against the just struggle of the Vietnamese working people for the liberation of their country. The slaughter at Kent State University in Ohio is a declaration of war upon students as the most outspoken dissenters against American foreign policy. This outrage shows that when provoked, the Administration will treat those at home who would oppose its imperialist aggression with the same callous brutality as it has shown the Vietnamese. The reality of the violence of American capitalism abroad and in the ghettos at home has been harshly and dramatically brought home to all students.

This violence does not come from the evil or mistaken notions of a few politicians, as the liberals would have us believe—rather it is a violence politically motivated, directed against political dissent—it is the violence of capitalism which feels its power is threatened. For many students have begun to realize that the war in Vietnam is no “mistake” in U.S. foreign policy but is part of the need of American capitalism, as the backbone of world imperialism, to prevent social revolutions throughout the world.

The Working Class Must Lead the Struggle!

The Spartacist League has long insisted on the need for labor strikes against the war. We have raised the demand for a general anti-war strike of workers and students, and have struggled to see this demand adopted within the labor and radical student movements. It is crucial now for the masses of students to seek to link up their strike with workers, and it is crucial now for rank and file militants to raise the anti-war strike demand in their unions!

The reason for this should be clear. American capitalism’s life blood is the profits made by exploiting the labor of the working class. This was sharply dramatized in the recent brief postal strike which severely threatened the economy’s stability and forced Nixon to resort to troops to demoralize the strikers and intimidate popular support. Economic power lies in the hands of industrial, transportation and communications workers. And in the final analysis economic power is political power.

The student movement, isolated from the working class, will either shatter into frustrated, demoralized and adventurist fragments and, like the [Black] Panthers, face savage repression by a government which feels it can attack them with impunity. The deepening political radicalization of students can be clearly seen in the cogent demands raised in many of the university strikes—demands for the freeing of all political prisoners, an end to war research and ROTC on campus, and an end to political intimidation, along with the demand for the immediate unconditional withdrawal of all U.S. troops and “advisers” from Southeast Asia.

Only the working class, because of its economic power, can lead an effective anti-war struggle. Only the class-conscious workers can lead the struggle to defeat capitalism. The unprecedented national

student strike now under way is extremely important. The students’ unity and militancy themselves pose a threat to the Administration, but it is its potential for sparking the working class into revolutionary motion (as happened in France in May 1968) which is its greatest importance.

Workers whose job conditions and falling real wages force them continually into conflict with the bosses must see as essential to their own interests the fight to end the bosses’ imperialist war and to break from the bosses’ warmonger political parties to form a party of labor. These struggles—like struggles for militant economic demands—will necessitate the replacement of the treacherous union bureaucracies which seek at every turn to tie the workers to the status quo (like “labor statesman” George Meany [head of the AFL-CIO], who completely endorses Nixon’s war policy, and his more devious, left-talking counterparts like [United Automobile Workers leader Walter] Reuther) by rank and file workers’ control. A working class which joins the political combativeness of the radical student protesters with their own tremendous militancy is the only force which can decisively defeat the imperialists.

Sino-Soviet Sellout

Faced with the U.S. invasion of Cambodia, the Soviet Union and China satisfied themselves with a few threats to increase their half-hearted military aid to the NLF [National Liberation Front] forces. Where, we ask, is the massive military support to repel the vicious imperialist aggressor in Indochina? Why instead have the Russians sent enormous military aid to the corrupt incompetent capitalist government of Egypt? The Maoist rush to hail Sihanouk, [Cambodia’s] former “neutralist” liberal prince, betrays the anxiety to avoid the urgent demands of the Indochinese situation and return to petty border quarrels and “national priorities.” The North Vietnamese government’s cowardly and vague threats about postponing negotiations in Paris also show their hypocrisy as Communist “internationalists.” In face of the invasion into Cambodia and renewed bombings of the North, what possible excuse could be found for remaining in Paris to negotiate?

All the Stalinist leaderships have once again demonstrated that their primary concerns are with their own narrow needs in consolidating their own power. The Stalinist dictum of “socialism in one country” is seeing another tragic enactment. The gains of the anti-capitalist revolutions of Russia, China, etc. can be safeguarded not by diplomatic maneuvering and deals but only by the victory of the Indochinese Revolution and the destruction of capitalism in the advanced industrial nations—the U.S., Western Europe, Japan—whose economic and military capacities hold the key to world socialism and world peace. By their denial of a truly proletarian internationalist perspective, the Stalinist bureaucracies show themselves as a best friend to the bloody Nixon administration.

ALL INDOCHINA
MUST GO COMMUNIST!
FOR A LABOR-STUDENT GENERAL STRIKE AGAINST THE WAR!

Giap...

(continued from page 5)

again, President John F. Kennedy turned to covert operations, sending special ops forces (50,000 “advisers”) to South Vietnam. The CIA initiated the Phoenix program of infiltration, torture and assassination.

In February 1965, hoping to force North Vietnam to restrain the NLF, the Lyndon B. Johnson administration launched a full-scale war. Washington unleashed a massive bombing campaign over North Vietnam that lasted three years while massively increasing the number of U.S. troops in the South. At the height of the war, the U.S. had half a million combat troops in Vietnam and another 300,000 in the surrounding region. Over the war’s course, the U.S. dropped more bomb tonnage than the combined total of all combatants in World War II. All told, the U.S. killed at least two million Vietnamese, maiming and wounding millions more and devastating most of the countryside.

To break the will of the American government to continue fighting, on 31 January 1968 the North Vietnamese and the NLF launched the Tet Offensive, a coordinated series of fierce attacks by some 80,000 men and women on more than 100 cities and towns in South Vietnam. Though U.S. and South Vietnamese puppet forces managed to hold off the attacks, Tet demonstrated the determination of the DRV/NLF fighters and further sapped the morale of their foes.

As it sank in that Vietnam had become a losing war, the U.S. sought negotiations. Peace accords were signed in 1973 in Paris, ending direct U.S. involvement in the war but keeping South Vietnam under imperialist bondage. The formal program of the Stalinists continued to be for a Southern coalition government with bourgeois forces. But unlike the situation resulting from the 1954 sellout, large numbers of DRV/NLF troops remained in the South, and the civil war went on for two more years. Finally, in early 1975 the government of North Vietnam carried out the “Great Spring Offensive” to liberate the South. Giap oversaw the final push on Saigon, and on April 30 DRV and NLF tanks rolled triumphantly into the South Vietnamese capital. Leaders of the defeated puppet regime and the South Vietnamese bourgeoisie fled by every available means; helicopters airlifted the last Americans out of the country.

Stalinism and Trotskyism in Vietnam

As noted above, agreements between the Allied imperialists and the Kremlin bureaucracy at the end of WWII dictated that South Vietnam would be returned to the French. But reimposition of Western colonial rule was resisted by the Trotskyists, who had acquired a mass working-class base, as well as by various nationalists. When the British and the French reoccupied Saigon in September

1945, an insurrection broke out. As people’s committees sprang up, particularly around Saigon, the peasants in the countryside rose up, burning the villas of large landowners. The Trotskyists called for the people’s committees to take power, for arming the people and for nationalization of industry under workers’ control. (For more, see the 1976 Spartacist pamphlet *Stalinism and Trotskyism in Vietnam*.)

This program was a threat to the Stalinists’ aim of accommodation with the bourgeoisie. As Nguyen Van Tao, the Vietminh’s interior minister for the South at the time, declared: “Whoever encourages the peasants to take over the landed properties will be severely and pitilessly punished.... We have not yet carried out a



Nguyen Khanh Hoi, Quatrième Internationale (inset)

Trotskyists led 1945 Saigon workers insurrection, sparked by return of colonial forces. Stalinists welcomed “democratic” imperialists, assassinated Trotskyist leaders, such as Ta Thu Thau (inset).

communist revolution, which would bring a solution to the agrarian problem. This government is only a democratic government, and therefore it cannot undertake this task.”

The best-known Trotskyist leader, Ta Thu Thau, was arrested on the orders of the Vietminh. Tried three times by people’s committees, he was acquitted each time. Finally, he was shot on the orders of southern Stalinist leader Tran Van Giau. As the French reinvaded the South in October 1945, the Stalinists stood by, concentrating their fire on the Trotskyists, whose leaders were all killed. Shortly thereafter, the Vietminh were forced out of Saigon by the Allies. Once Ho Chi Minh had physically liquidated the Trotskyist leadership with the aid of Giap, then the North’s interior minister, he capitulated to the Allies in the North.

In this conflict the French Communist Party, which had several ministerial posts in the capitalist government in Paris, illustrated the lengths to which the Stalinists would go in attempting to ingratiate themselves with the bourgeoisie. While Ho Chi Minh was dissolving the Indochinese Communist Party and agreeing to permit French troops into the North, his French comrades were busy explaining why the right of national self-determination did *not* apply to Vietnam and voting war credits to finance the French expeditionary force! On 20 December 1946, a month after the French bombed Haiphong, Communist deputies in the French Assembly voted to send congratulations to the Expeditionary Corps and its lead executioner, General Leclerc.

The Vietnamese Communists were caught between their program of seeking to share power with the bourgeoisie—in accordance with the Stalinist schema of “two-stage revolution”—and the needs of their own survival, which ultimately meant a struggle to the end *against* the imperialists and the national bourgeoisie. As Leon Trotsky explained in developing the theory of permanent revolution, in the imperialist epoch the weak bourgeoisies of economically backward countries, closely intertwined with imperialism and mortally afraid of the worker and peas-

ant masses, are incapable of carrying out the democratic tasks of national liberation and agrarian revolution. Those tasks can be achieved only through smashing bourgeois rule and establishing a proletarian dictatorship supported by the poor peasantry.

Despite their official program, the Vietnamese Stalinists, like Mao’s forces in China, were compelled to take power in their own name and, either immediately or in the short term, break rotted-out bourgeois rule. The fact that those petty-bourgeois guerrilla movements could carry out social revolutions was conditioned by highly exceptional historic circumstances, including the extreme weakness of the domestic bourgeoisie, the absence of the

working class as a contender for power and the counterweight to imperialism provided by the Soviet Union. Against ostensible Trotskyists and other leftists who saw these guerrilla movements as a substitute for mobilizing the proletariat in revolutionary struggle, the Spartacist League has always insisted that the most that these forces could achieve, under extraordinarily favorable conditions, was the creation of deformed workers states.

As we wrote in hailing U.S. imperialism’s defeat in Indochina (“Capitalist Class Rule Smashed in Vietnam, Cambodia!” WV No. 68, 9 May 1975): “Because their rule is based on the political expropriation of the working class, these petty-bourgeois bureaucratic castes are incapable of mobilizing the proletarian masses for an international revolutionary assault on the bastions of world capitalism, since it would simultaneously mean their own demise.” The nationalist Stalinist regimes from Havana to Hanoi and Beijing must be overthrown by workers political revolutions led by Trotskyist parties in order to open the road to socialist development.

America: The War Comes Home

Throughout the U.S. war in Vietnam and the mass antiwar protests, the Spartacist League called for unconditional defense of North Vietnam and for military victory to the NLF in the South while giving no political support to the Stalinist leadership. Our slogan “Victory to the Vietnamese Revolution!” expressed our understanding of the class nature of the war. While our slogans were attractive to many young people in this period of leftward motion, we had to swim against the stream, combating the false ideologies popular among the more radical activists, particularly Maoism and the adulation of Ho Chi Minh. We opposed antiwar rallies being made into platforms for bourgeois politicians, stressing that imperialist war is inherent in the capitalist system and can be fought effectively only on the basis of a revolutionary socialist program.

In early propaganda, we criticized the bureaucratic regimes in the USSR and China for their inadequate military aid to the Vietnamese and demanded:

“Soviet nuclear shield must cover China, North Vietnam!” We denounced the Sino-Soviet split—a falling-out driven by the competing national interests of the two regimes—and called for Communist unity against imperialism. In response to the U.S. invasion of Cambodia in 1970, the SL raised the call, “All Indochina Must Go Communist!”

The U.S. Army was seething with discontent, while those back home were becoming increasingly alienated from the war, its Cold War rationale and economic costs, as well as from the lying government. Although the AFL-CIO labor bureaucracy headed by George Meany remained a bastion of support for the government until the end, the war was mostly unpopular among workers, and all the more so as it became widely perceived as an endless quagmire. Students were becoming radicalized as the Democratic Johnson administration escalated the military engagement. Many activists were breaking away from the official antiwar leadership of liberal pacifists and such reformist leftists as the Communist Party (CP) and Socialist Workers Party (SWP), who did donkey work for Democratic Party “doves” preaching about the need for negotiations and saving America’s image.

The Vietnam antiwar movement arose on the heels of the mass, plebeian civil rights struggles that had punctured the smug political climate of 1950s anti-Communism. By the late 1960s, the antiwar protests coincided with an upturn in strikes as well as explosions of anger in the urban ghettos over police brutality, segregation and poverty. Despite the students’ petty-bourgeois elitism and the best efforts of the racist AFL-CIO Cold Warriors, soldiers and young workers were open to radical arguments.


A Spartacist leaflet widely distributed at one of the massive marches on Washington (“From Protest to Power,” 21 October 1967) noted that “the anti-war movement can force Johnson to withdraw U.S. troops only if he is more afraid of it than of the victory of the Vietnamese Revolution. No demonstration, however effective and militant, can do this. Only a movement capable of taking state power can. The anti-war movement has no future except as a force for building a party of revolutionary change.” The leaflet called on militants to break out of the student milieu and orient to the proletariat. This would mean ceasing to build support for strikebreaking “antiwar” capitalist politicians and sellout black leaders like Martin Luther King, who backed the suppression of ghetto upheavals.

The Spartacist League opposed draft resistance and college student deferments, an example of class privilege that also had the effect of keeping antiwar students from impacting the views of working-class draftees. We called for mobilizing a one-day general strike against the war and for a labor party built through linking discontent over the war to the rising labor militancy and the explosiveness of the ghettos, charting a course for fighting against the entire capitalist system. The SL gained a hearing for these views and recruited substantially from the antiwar movement and New Left. But the official, pro-Democratic Party leaders (with the assistance of the CP and SWP) kept most of those who hated the war within the framework of social-patriotic, pro-imperialist politics.

A more far-sighted wing of the establishment was becoming defeatist from their own class standpoint: they had ceased to believe the U.S. could win in Vietnam and were increasingly alarmed at the war’s social consequences. They especially feared that the Army was being destroyed as an effective fighting force, rife with drug addiction and with rank-and-file soldiers often more hostile to their officers than to the “enemy.” Opening the road to bourgeois defeatism over Vietnam were the events in Indonesia in 1965, when the “progressive” Sukarno regime was toppled by a reactionary coup instigated by the CIA. The coup ushered in the massacre of over a million Commu-

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STALINISM AND TROTSKYISM IN VIETNAM



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Obamacare...

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major roadblock to the development of elementary class consciousness—that is, the understanding that the multiracial proletariat has distinct class interests that require political expression in its own party. In Europe, the rise of mass workers parties beginning in the late 19th century went side by side with the introduction of national health care.

Europe’s first compulsory social health insurance program was introduced in Germany by Chancellor Otto von Bismarck. A major concern of the “Iron Chancellor” and his advisers was to avoid any repeat in Germany of the 1871 Paris Commune, when the French workers briefly seized power during the Franco-Prussian War. In 1883, shortly after passing the Anti-Socialism Laws to squash the German Social Democratic Party, Bismarck introduced the Health Insurance Act. Bismarck declared that government policy “cannot be expressed simply by the repression of Social Democratic excesses, but that this must be accompanied by the positive enhancement of the workers” (Vicente Navarro, “Why Some Countries Have National Health Insurance, Others Have National Health Services, and the U.S. Has Neither,” *Social Science and Medicine*, 1989).

Insurance plans soon spread to Austria (1888), Hungary (1891), Luxembourg (1901), Norway (1909) and Serbia (1910) after social-democratic parties had been established in most of those countries. In Russia, where the tsarist regime had survived workers revolution in 1905, state insurance was introduced in 1912 during a period of explosive strike battles and spreading influence of the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. The outbreak of World War I split the workers movement between the social-democratic parties that supported the war effort of their own capitalist ruling classes and revolutionary elements and organizations, prominently including the Bolsheviks, that opposed all sides in this interimperialist conflict.

In October 1917, the Bolsheviks led the working class in seizing state power. As reported in John Reed’s *Ten Days That Shook the World* (1919), one of the Soviet government’s early decrees, issued months before the expropriation of capitalist industry, declared:

“The Workers’ and Peasants’ Government, relying upon the support of the Soviets of Workers’, Soldiers’ and Peasants’ Deputies, announces to the working-class of Russia and to the town and village poor, that it will immediately prepare laws on Social Insurance based on the formulas proposed by the Labour organisations: “1. Insurance for all wage-workers without exception, as well as for all urban and rural poor. “2. Insurance to cover all categories of loss of working capacity, such as illness,

infirmities, old age, childbirth, widowhood, orphanage, and unemployment. “3. All the costs of insurance to be charged to employers. “4. Compensation of at least full wages in all loss of working capacity and unemployment. “5. Complete workers’ self-government of all Insurance institutions.”

The subsequent development of a collectivized, planned economy assured access to health care for all. This gain remained despite the degeneration of the October Revolution under the rule of the Stalin-

tion. But the legal obligation for the state to provide universal health care, free to everyone at the point of delivery, was one of the most significant gains ever won by working people from British capitalism. Attempts by the British bourgeoisie to roll back that gain by privatizing health care repeatedly ran up against massive popular opposition. It was the Labour government of Tony Blair, using plans hatched in the 1980s under Conservative prime minister Margaret Thatcher, that succeeded in introducing the first significant measures

doctors in the American Medical Association (AMA) defending their incomes and social status. Lacking their own class party, workers were led by the likes of American Federation of Labor president Samuel Gompers, who denounced compulsory health insurance. This stalwart of U.S. capitalism (who also opposed legislation for the eight-hour day, the minimum wage and unemployment insurance) hypocritically intoned that government-paid health care would stand in the way of the workers struggling “for their own emancipation through their own efforts”!

In the 1930s, the issue of state-sponsored health insurance arose again in response to the working-class upsurge that led to the creation of the mass, integrated industrial unions of the CIO. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt sought to head off class struggle and the deepening leftist political radicalization by proposing a New Deal of palliative reforms. The racist Dixiecrats, who controlled the Democratic Party in the South and had a stranglehold in Congress, imposed a veto on any government intrusion in the health care system because they feared that it could ultimately threaten Jim Crow segregation of Southern hospitals and other health care services. The Dixiecrats did not block FDR’s social security program, though they insisted that the mostly black agricultural and domestic workforce be excluded from its benefits. However, national health insurance did not survive the final draft of the 1935 Social Security Act.

The sharp class battles in the 1930s created an opening to form an independent workers party in the U.S. But that potential was stymied by the Communist Party and social democrats who used their influence in the CIO unions to help channel the workers’ upsurge into support for FDR’s Democratic Party. The working class has paid for this class-collaborationist alliance ever since.

Following World War II, a massive strike wave broke out. When the United Mine Workers (UMW) walked off the job in 1946 demanding employer-funded health care benefits, Democratic president Harry Truman seized the mines and ordered striking miners back to work. They refused. The nationwide strike ended when Truman agreed to endorse the miners’ demand for lifetime health benefits. In 1947, Congress passed the slave-labor Taft-Hartley law, which specifically forbade company-funded welfare plans directly controlled by the unions. When the miners struck again in 1950 in defiance of government threats, they won an unprecedented cradle-to-grave union-controlled health plan. Miners paid a big price for their victory: UMW head John L. Lewis made a deal with the coal bosses not to protest the loss of thousands of jobs to mechanization. Nevertheless, the miners opened

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Los Angeles, April 16: Union rally of thousands, including public health workers, demands higher wages and statewide Medicaid expansion.

ist bureaucracy. Workers in the Soviet Union had guaranteed health care, housing and jobs up until the workers state was destroyed through capitalist counterrevolution in 1991-92. The value of the collectivized economy can be seen today in the Cuban deformed workers state, where despite an imperialist embargo and limited resources, health care outshines in many respects what is generally available in the U.S.

Nationalized health systems introduced in capitalist West Europe following World War II were themselves a response to the appeal the Soviet Union held for militant workers. The USSR, and by extension the mass Communist parties in capitalist Europe, gained enormous authority for having borne the brunt of the fighting to defeat the Nazi armies. As a wave of working-class militancy swept the continent, the capitalist rulers were willing to surrender a portion of their profits and grant social benefits in order to contain the powerful workers movements and prevent them from going further in a revolutionary direction.

In Britain, the Labour Party government under Clement Attlee instituted the National Health Service (NHS) in 1948. Even at its best, the NHS did not provide adequate care for the needs of the popula-

opening the NHS to the penetration of private capital and the generation of corporate profits. That set the stage for the substantial shift of medical care toward the private sector under current Conservative prime minister David Cameron (see “Britain: Nationalized Health Care Under Attack,” WV No. 1023, 3 May).

Class, Race and American Medicine

In the U.S., the campaign in the early 20th century for government-organized health insurance was spearheaded by the bourgeois Progressives. The high point of the Progressive Era was the presidential election of 1912, when the Progressives bolted from the Republican Party and nominated former president Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt supported government health insurance on the basis that no country could lord it over other nations if its people were in poor health, i.e., the rank and file of the armed forces had to be in shape to project U.S. military might around the world.

Nevertheless, the campaign for state insurance was defeated by an alliance of capitalists seeking to lower wages and benefits, insurance companies reaping cash from insecurity and fear, pharmaceutical companies hungering for profits and

nists, workers, peasants and ethnic Chinese. With the world’s largest non-ruling Communist Party utterly destroyed, elements in the U.S. ruling class could more easily talk about cutting their losses in Vietnam.

Vietnam Was a Victory!

For years, many self-described socialists and ex-radicals nostalgic for the massive demonstrations of the Vietnam War era have peddled the myth that the antiwar movement ended the war. But it was the heroism and tenacity of the Vietnamese on the battlefield that broke the imperialists’ will and drove them out of the country.

Today Vietnam, a country still scarred by pitiless bombing and devastating defoliation, continues to be squeezed by the far more powerful economies of the imperialists and by their massive military might. The diplomatic rapprochement of the Vietnamese Stalinists with the U.S. over the past decade reflects the country’s isolation following the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union, the continuing pressures of poverty and the nationalist antipathy pitting the Bei-

jing and Hanoi bureaucracies against each other (see “Stirring Up the South China Sea—U.S. Imperialism Tightens Military Vise on China,” WV No. 1005, 6 July 2012). The Stalinist regime has also spurred widening social inequality stemming from its version of “market socialism.”

It remains the duty of revolutionaries in the belly of the imperialist beast to unconditionally defend Vietnam and the other remaining deformed workers states—China, Cuba, North Korea and Laos—against imperialist and domestic counterrevolutionary forces. The struggle for workers political revolutions to sweep away the Stalinist regimes in those countries is inseparable from the fight to mobilize the proletariat to overthrow capitalist rule in North America, Japan and West Europe—the prerequisite for building a world socialist society of material abundance. This requires the construction of Leninist-Trotskyist revolutionary parties.

When the U.S. launched air attacks against North Vietnam on 7 February 1965, we sent a telegram to Ho Chi Minh, stating: “Spartacist in fullest solidarity with

defense of your country against attack by United States imperialism. Heroic struggle of Vietnamese working people furthers the American revolution.” When the workers of this country take power from the murderous rulers of decaying capital-

ism, they will surely tear down the monuments to the imperialist war criminals (and Confederate generals) and erect in their place memorials to Vo Nguyen Giap and others who fought to rid this planet of exploitation and oppression. ■

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life is associated with the Roma.

The expressed concern of the Greek state for the welfare of Maria is breathtaking hypocrisy. In September, a prosecutor in Greece called to reopen an investigation into the disappearance of *over 500* Albanian Roma children who had been in the state's "care." The government rounded up these children in the years prior to the 2004 Athens Olympics in the guise of a campaign to protect children begging on the streets. The children disappeared and their whereabouts remain unknown. As for Maria, she has been wrenched from the family that raised her and is reportedly to be deported to Bulgaria, not to live with her biological parents but to be put in foster care.

One factor currently driving the hysteria against the Roma is related to the expansion of the imperialist European Union (EU). When Romania and Bulgaria, which both have significant Roma minorities, joined the EU in 2007, their citizens were restricted from working in several EU countries, including Britain, France and Germany. Restrictions on the right to work and the persecution and deportations of Roma show the true face of the European imperialist “democracies.” On 1 January 2014, these restrictions will be lifted, putting an end to this formal discrimination in employment. However, even when Roma have the legal right to work, they will continue to face acute obstacles to getting work.

We in the International Communist League have always been implacably opposed to the EU, an imperialist trade bloc within which the major European imperialists cooperate to further the exploitation and immiseration of the work-



Paris, October 17: High school students protest deportations of Dibrani and Khatchik Kachatryan, a 19-year-old student of Armenian descent (inset).

ing class, including its immigrant component. Within the EU, Germany, France and Britain dominate the poorer member states. The “second tier” includes East European countries used as a source of cheap labor and markets by the EU powers.

In Britain, there is a furor over the supposed influx of Bulgarian and Romanian immigrants to descend on the country next year. During the summer, a Roma camp near London was cleared out and nearly all the residents were deported to Romania. Former Labour Party home secretary David Blunkett chided the current government for not being harsh enough on immigrant Roma, stating in a radio interview earlier this month: "We have got to change the behavior and the culture of the incoming community, the Roma community, because there's going

to be an explosion otherwise.” Such incitement gives legitimacy to fascist and state-backed terror.

In France, the government of Socialist Party president François Hollande (which includes Green Party housing minister Cécile Duflot) evicted over 10,000 Roma in the first six months of this year alone. Despite attempts to sound less racist, the reformist Communist Party's mayor of Saint Ouen, near Paris, wrote to Interior Minister Manuel Valls at the end of October demanding that Roma be expelled from a camp in her jurisdiction. Fueled by the government's anti-immigrant crackdown, fascist gangs have been assaulting veiled women and in June skinheads murdered leftist anti-fascist activist Clément Méric. Meanwhile, electoral support to the fascist National Front is growing.

As our comrades of the Ligue Trotskyste de France explained in “SP-Green Government’s Racist Campaigns Swell Fascists’ Sails” (*Le Bolchévik* No. 205, September 2013): “Racist terror is inherent in the capitalist system, whether it is fascist terror or the ordinary terror of the bourgeois state, whether it is Sarkozy’s rightist government terror or Valls-Duflot’s ‘left’ version, whether it targets Roma, veiled women or minority youth more generally. To do away with racist oppression once and for all, it is necessary to destroy its causes, which are found in the basic mechanisms of the system of capitalist exploitation.”

We print below a translation of an October 29 leaflet issued by our comrades in France protesting racist deportations and demanding full citizenship rights for all immigrants.

* * *

In the presidential election last year, we called for people not to vote for Hollande. Among other things, we pointed to his vowing to wage an “implacable” struggle against undocumented immigrants and to put the Roma in “encampments of our own choosing” to stop them from moving around “over and over” (*Le Monde*, 15 February 2012). His chief cop minister, Valls, was only following through on these campaign promises when on October 9 he sent the cops onto a school bus looking for Leonarda Dibrani and had her deported for good to Kosovo. She speaks neither Albanian nor Serbian—but she does speak French! Leonarda courageously denounced Hollande’s proposal to let her back into France...without her family.

The lesson Valls draws from this incident is that the processing of asylum requests must be accelerated, for the explicit purpose of being able to deport

(continued from page 7)

the way for the United Auto Workers and other unions to win health benefits, helping lay the basis for the employer-funded health plans that today are under attack.

While the bourgeoisie's ongoing class battle with the miners was playing out, Truman's platform for the 1948 presidential election included a proposal for national health insurance. Truman's electoral promises soon foundered in the sweeping tide of anti-Communist witchhunting, as the AMA mounted what was at the time the most expensive lobbying effort in American history to stop this "creeping socialism." Congressional Republicans denounced "socialized medicine" as a communist-inspired assault on personal freedoms, sounding a theme that has been taken up by today's Tea Party yahoos as they fulminate against Obamacare.

Wall Street Bullish on Obamacare

The neo-Confederates of the Tea Party are part of a long tradition of right-wing demagogues railing against “big government.” That is coded language for a call to ax social programs portrayed as a “redistribution” of income from hard-working folks to “undeserving” blacks and immigrants. Ironically, as the media increasingly reports on—and Republicans seize upon—examples of families overwhelmed by increased insurance costs, liberal backers of Obama’s health plan are putting forward their own version of the redistribution theme. For example, columnist John Harwood argued in the *New York Times* (23 November) that “the redistribution of wealth has always been a central feature of the law” because some must pay higher insurance costs so that coverage can be extended to those with pre-existing medical conditions and others who suffered discrimination at the hands of the insurance companies.

Some working people have bought in to that reasoning, which feeds on the populist notion that “we’re all in this

together.” In our recent subscription drive, comrades encountered unionized black workers in the South who were willing to take a hit on their health care costs—to pay their “fair share”—if it meant that their impoverished relatives might see an improvement in their conditions. In those Southern Republican-controlled states, this sentiment is reinforced by a sense of racial solidarity with the president, particularly as the ACA comes under attack from overt racists. In reality, the fundamental problem in medical care is the obscenely rich owners of the insurance, pharmaceutical and other health care corporations who prey upon the working people and poor.

Almost 20 percent of the entire economic output of the U.S. goes to pay for health care, about twice the level of spending in most industrialized countries. Yet that enormous expenditure does not come close to resulting in a corresponding level of health and welfare of the population. A study by the Institute of Medicine in January compared the health of the U.S. population to that in other economically advanced countries. Americans fared worse in a broad range of categories, including infant mortality, heart disease, chronic lung disease, HIV/AIDS infection, obesity and diabetes. Not surprisingly, life expectancy in the U.S. is lower than in all other advanced industrial countries, and that gap continues to grow.

Like all businesses, for-profit health care companies exist to generate the maximum possible return on their owners' investments. In that regard, those corporations have been spectacularly successful. They are raking in such fabulous profits that the S&P stock index for the health care sector is up 38 percent this year, more than for any other sector of the economy. Big investors are definitely bullish on Obamacare.

A valuable window into the parasitic dealings of this industry was provided by investigative journalist Steven Brill in a *Time* (20 February) cover story. Brill noted: “When medical care becomes a matter of life and death, the money demanded by the health care ecosystem

reaches a wholly different order of magnitude, churning out reams of bills to people who can't focus on them, let alone pay them." He documented cases of hospitals charging patients two and a half times the purchase price of an implantable device, \$77 for a box of gauze pads and \$1,200 per hour for nursing services. As for the pharmaceutical industry, Michael Moore's 2007 documentary movie *Sicko* showed a woman in Cuba paying a nickel for the same inhaler that in the U.S. cost \$120.

Make no mistake: When the capitalist rulers speak of cutting health care costs, they are not referring to the elimination of such obscene examples of the heartless exploitation of working people's suffering. In the interest of swelling profits, the bourgeoisie means to further slash the medical care that is provided to the working population. As the *New York Times* (27 May) put it, companies that are cutting health benefits "are right in line with the administration's plan: To encourage employers to move away from plans that insulate workers from the cost of care and often lead to excessive procedures and tests."

That same logic is fueling the drive to cap Medicaid spending by turning millions of recipients over to private “managed-care organizations.” Those outfits are typically paid a fixed sum for providing (grossly inadequate) care. Since 2000, the number of Medicaid enrollees covered by managed care has increased from 19 million to 30 million and now accounts for some 40 percent of beneficiaries.

Growing popular anger at the Wall Street and health insurance robber barons has helped fuel the rise of a number of liberal Democratic Party politicians, such as New York City mayor-elect Bill de Blasio and Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren. Playing the populist card, they reinforce the illusion that the system can be made to work for the little guy. Of course, when the Republican Party revels in union-bashing as well as racist, anti-woman, anti-immigrant reaction, it is easy for a Democrat to appear as the

lesser evil. This is despite the fact that “illegal” immigrants and their families are excluded from the ACA, which also will not put a dollar toward abortion services. And that many poorer people who find themselves shelling out more for health care are seeing their food stamp benefits cut by bipartisan agreement.

Populist nostrums help obscure the fundamental *class* divide between the capitalists—the coterie of families who own the banks and means of production, such as the factories and mines—and the working class, whose labor is the source of the capitalists' profits. As such, the working class is the only force with the potential power and historic interest to sweep away the capitalist system. The interest of the capitalist class in the health of the population comes down to maintaining a workforce fit enough to be exploited and to fight in their imperialist wars. To put the immense wealth generated by the labor of working people at the service of human need will require the expropriation of the bourgeoisie through workers revolution and the establishment of a workers state as part of a socialist world. ■

The image shows the front cover of a book. At the top, a black banner contains the title 'Programmatic Statement of the Spartacist League/U.S.' in white, bold, sans-serif font. Below the banner is a small graphic of a hammer and sickle. The main title 'For a Workers Party That Fights for a Workers Government!' is in a bold, black, sans-serif font. Below this, the subtitle 'For Socialist Revolution in the Bastion of World Imperialism!' is in a larger, bold, black, sans-serif font. A horizontal line separates the subtitle from the text 'SEE PAGE 2'. Below this, the text 'Organizational Rules and Guidelines of the Spartacist League/U.S.' is in a bold, black, sans-serif font. Another horizontal line follows, with 'SEE PAGE 30' below it. The text 'Opponents of the Revolutionary Internationalist Workers Movement' is in a bold, black, sans-serif font, with 'SEE PAGE 37' below it. At the bottom left, the price '\$2' is in a large, bold, black, sans-serif font. To its right, the date 'November 2000' is in a smaller, black, sans-serif font. Further right is a small logo of a hammer and sickle, followed by the publisher's name 'Spartacist Publishing Co., Box 1377 GPO, New York, NY 10116' in a black, sans-serif font. The entire cover is framed by a thick black border.

Grangemouth...

(continued from page 12)

any taint of association with the unions, Unite’s strategy of “reclaiming” Labour, which was never more than a reformist party loyal to bourgeois rule, is something of an exercise in feeding the hand that bites you. Nevertheless, it was correct and necessary for the union to defend Deans against management, which went after him on the grounds that he was conducting political work on the company’s time. In fact, political work is a normal part of a shop steward’s job.

In September, union members in Grangemouth voted for strike action in defense of Deans by a resounding 81 percent. The union called a two-day strike to begin on 20 October. But on 15 October, Ineos shut down the entire Grangemouth site, effectively locking out all 1,370 permanent workers as well as some 2,000 temporary contract workers who were already being laid off. What was needed from the outset was a strategy aimed at mobilising the social power of workers throughout the oil industry, in Scotland and elsewhere. Faced with a declaration of war on the union, a leadership worth its salt would have sought to choke off the supply of fuel to petrol stations by appealing for class solidarity from the oil tanker drivers. These members of Unite waged a strike in February that defeated an attack on their pensions by BP, showing that it is possible to fight the bosses and win.

Far from appealing to workers outside the Grangemouth complex, union leaders threatened with the shutdown offered to call off the strike. This betrayal further emboldened Ratcliffe, who issued an ultimatum to the workforce: sign an agreement slashing jobs, pensions and pay, or be sacked. Once again, union members voted to fight, rejecting Ratcliffe’s blackmail by a two-thirds majority. On 23 October, Ineos announced the permanent closure of the petrochemical facility, with the loss of 800 jobs, supposedly because it was in “financial distress.” The Unite leadership surrendered completely. Unite general secretary Len McCluskey and Scottish regional secretary Pat Rafferty agreed to swallow the “survival plan” that union members had rejected a few days before. The plant was reopened on Ratcliffe’s terms, which include a three-year pay freeze, a no-strike agreement, an end to the final-salary pension plan and no more full-time union representatives on site.

Rather than call this defeat by its right name, the bureaucrats spun the story as if they had won a victory by “saving jobs.” Rafferty said: “Relief will ring right round the Grangemouth community, and across Scotland today. Hundreds of jobs that would have been lost can now be saved and £300 [\$480] million will be invested into the plant” (Unite Web site, 25 October). McCluskey declared: “I went to Scotland last week to save those 800 jobs and keep a vital national asset open in the face of a real threat of closure,”



Unite senior shop steward Stephen Deans in September. After witchhunt by Labour Party leadership, he was hounded out of job by Ineos management.

admitting that the deal with Ineos is not that different from “the difficult discussions my union and others have had with many employers during the current banking slump” (*Guardian*, 30 October).

For the pro-capitalist union bureaucracy, “saving jobs” means the workers must make sacrifices to maintain the company’s profitability. Over the decades, such class collaboration has led to one sellout after another. Take the much celebrated 1971 work-in at the financially troubled Upper Clyde shipyard—led by Communist Party-affiliated union officials and supported by Labour “left” Tony Benn—which saw workers complete orders rather than take industrial action. Today, only two shipyards remain on the Clyde, with the loss of 1,800 more jobs looming between the Scottish yards and England’s centuries-old Portsmouth facility. Shipyard workers, who mainly work on strategically important Ministry of Defence contracts, have the industrial muscle to fight these threats. To wield that power requires a class-struggle programme, not the class collaboration that has proven utterly ineffective in preventing the capitalist production system from chewing up workers and throwing them on the scrapheap according to the whims of the world market and the relentless pursuit of profit.

The attacks on Unite have continued unabated since Grangemouth reopened, with the *Sunday Times* and *Daily Mail* adding fuel to the fire. The dirty anti-union smear campaign is all to the benefit of Prime Minister David Cameron’s Tories, as Unite provides substantial funds to the Labour Party. Meanwhile, Stephen Deans has been hounded out of his job and is not seeking re-election to his position in the Labour Party.

The attack on Unite is part of an assault on all workers, in Britain and internationally, to make them pay for the global capitalist crisis. There is no simple trade-union solution to the ills of the capitalist system. But if the unions are to become effective in fighting for their own interests—and those of the unorganised working class, temporary/agency workers and the unemployed—what is needed is a new leadership that bases itself on a programme of class struggle against

the capitalist order, as opposed to class collaboration. This task is linked to the forging of a revolutionary workers party to fight for a workers government that would organise production for social need, not for profit.

Reformists Hark Back to “Old Labour”

The Grangemouth betrayal shows that the “socialist” left lacks any alternative to the bankrupt politics of the trade-union leadership. Both the Socialist Party of England and Wales, which advocated a vote for McCluskey as Unite leader, and the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) bemoaned the fact that he didn’t fight. For these groups, the way to “save jobs” is to appeal to capitalist governments to nationalise ailing enterprises, a call raised by McCluskey himself at Grangemouth. The SWP looked to pressure Cameron’s government in Westminster, saying that “a real campaign to nationalise Grangemouth would have been very hard for the weak and divided Tories to ignore” (*Socialist Worker*, 5 November). Showing a preference for the Scottish National Party (SNP), which runs the Scottish parliament, the Socialist Party Scotland wrote: “Decisive action by Unite, including the occupation of an appropriate part of the site, would gain mass support and apply huge political pressure on the Scottish government to carry through the nationalisation of the plant” (quoted in “Trade Unions Must Learn Lessons from Grangemouth Setback,” socialistpartyscotland.org.uk, 25 October). Never mind that the SNP was working in collusion with the Ineos bosses!

Plant occupations flout the property rights of the bosses, and in so doing point the road forward in the struggle for working-class power. But for the reformists this tactic is a means to bring pressure toward nationalising industry under capitalism. In the same framework, Socialist Party Scotland raises the demand for Ineos to open the books to inspection by the trade unions. Gaining access to the *real* books can be useful to exposing the truth behind the company’s propaganda. Unite appointed accountants to study the company’s published finances in order to challenge Ratcliffe’s claims that the Grangemouth plant would have to close because it was losing £10 million a month. However, in the absence of class struggle, such exposure had little effect on Ratcliffe. By calling off the strike, the union tops were in no position to call the company’s bluff—once the union leadership folded, the bosses did not have to show their hand.

One thing is certain: the Ineos bosses hyped up fears about job losses to turn the screw on the union and to grind more out of the workers, while milking taxpayers to underwrite millions in loans that will make Grangemouth a more lucrative source of profits for City of London investors. Moreover, if Grangemouth had been taken over by a capitalist government—whether in Edinburgh or in London—as the reformists demand, pensions, wages and bonuses would have been slashed as much as they were under the Ineos “survival plan.” In contrast to reformist “socialists” who put forward nationalisation schemes to rescue failing capital-

ist enterprises, Bolshevik leader Leon Trotsky declared:

“We can say to the miner, you wish nationalization. Yes, it is our slogan. It is only the question of conditions. If the national property is too burdened with debts against former owners, your conditions can become worse than now. To base the whole proceedings upon a free agreement between the owners and the state signifies ruin of the workers. Now you must organize your own government in the state and expropriate them.”
—“For a Workers’ and Farmers’ Government,” July 1938, printed in *The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution* (Pathfinder, 1977)

Marxists advocate the nationalisation without compensation of certain strategic industries, such as that related to North Sea oil and gas, including the refineries. This perspective has nothing in common with the social-democratic call for nationalisations to bail out bankrupt industries. Bourgeois nationalisations can do nothing to fundamentally counteract the ravages of the boom-bust cycle of the capitalist system that periodically puts entire sections of industry out of business with devastating consequences for the working class. Under a planned economy administered by a workers government, collectivised industry would play a profoundly liberating role. The rational allocation of resources within the framework of an international division of labour would unleash the productive forces, strengthening the working class.

Labour Betrayals Boost Scots Nationalists

For the Socialist Party Scotland, Grangemouth shows yet again that “today Labour does not support workers in struggle and that Unite should come out clearly in favour of a new mass workers’ party, public ownership and a real political alternative to the austerity agenda” (25 October). The illusion that old Labour supported workers in past struggles is central to the Socialist Party’s core programmatic commitment to recreating an old Labour-type party, i.e., a party based on the trade-union bureaucracy and the myth of public ownership under a bourgeois government. This myth was enshrined in Clause IV of the Labour Party’s constitution, which nominally committed the party to “common ownership of the means of production” and codified the notion that socialism could be achieved through legislation in parliament. It thereby was a rejection of the need to smash the capitalist state (the class dictatorship of the bourgeoisie) and establish a workers state, the dictatorship of the proletariat. The adoption of Clause IV in 1918 was an attempt to deflect the radicalising impact on the working class of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution.

Labour was founded as a bourgeois workers party—while saddled with a pro-capitalist leadership, its membership consisted primarily of the trade unions. In 1994, shortly after counterrevolution in the Soviet Union, Tony Blair announced the abolition of Clause IV, signaling his intention to transform Labour into an outright capitalist party. The process stalled due to Labour’s dependence on trade-union funding, but as we observed

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in 2008: “New Labour today is moribund as a reformist party of the working class” (*Workers Hammer* No. 204, Autumn 2008). As a follow-up to the witchhunt of Deans and the local party in Falkirk, Miliband has picked up where Blair left off, calling a special conference next spring to end the system whereby union members are registered en masse as members of the Labour Party.

For the Labourite left, the high tide of old Labour and Clause IV was the nationalisation of coal, steel and other industries by the Clement Attlee government elected in 1945. In the context of Britain’s dramatic decline from its once-dominant role in the world economy, these giant capitalist bailouts were designed to help British capitalism to compete in the world market. In that sense, the post-WWII nationalisations under old Labour were no more socialist than the bailout of the banks carried out in 2008 under the then-New Labour government (or, for that matter, by the Bush/Obama regimes in the United States).

Social-democratic support for nationalisation of failing industries goes hand-in-hand with protectionism and national chauvinism, which is poison to working-class consciousness. A grotesque example is the 2009 construction workers’ strikes at Lindsey oil refinery in Lincolnshire demanding “British jobs for British workers,” in which the Socialist Party of England and Wales played a prominent role. We vehemently opposed this reactionary campaign, which was not intended to secure more jobs or defend existing jobs, but to give preference to British over foreign workers in the allocation of existing jobs. In rejecting such divide-and-rule ploys that



Edinburgh: Scottish nationalist demonstration on September 21 calling for a “yes” vote in 2014 independence referendum.

of dismissal against the shop steward Stephen Deans.” While such declarations of paper solidarity do not carry great weight in and of themselves, they point to the possibility of mobilising the unions in concrete acts of class solidarity.

SNP Hails Grangemouth as Scotland’s Future

Reformist leftists in Scotland (and in England), who previously tailed Labour, are now in thrall to the bourgeois-nationalist Scottish National Party. The SNP, which controls the Scottish parliament in Edinburgh, is campaigning for a “yes” vote in next year’s referendum on

class, which has nothing but contempt for the former industrial areas of northern England as well as Scotland and Wales. We uphold the right of self-determination for Scotland and Wales, which means the right to form independent states.

As such, we defend the democratic right of the Scots to choose whichever option they want in the independence referendum, but we do not advocate either a “yes” or a “no” vote and are indifferent to the outcome. Our programme is for a voluntary federation of workers republics in the British Isles. Within such a federation, we do not predetermine what Scotland’s status will be—an independent workers republic, an autonomous region or any other status of their choice compatible with working-class rule.

The right of self-determination also implies the right *not* to separate. This course can be preferable for semi-assimilated nations like Scotland and Wales, both of which lack decisive differences in either language or religion with England. When the Spartacist League/Britain was founded a year before the era of Margaret Thatcher began, we declared: “We are for the *right* of self-determination, but call on the Scottish people to exercise that right by choosing to stay in the same state as the other peoples of Britain” (*Spartacist Britain* No. 1, April 1978). Over the course of the intervening decades, our press has stated many times that the pervasive English chauvinism of the British bourgeoisie could well drive the Scots toward separation. This was clearly seen during the Thatcher years, when the hated Poll Tax was imposed first on Scotland, in 1989. The destruction of manufacturing industry has had particularly devastating consequences in Scotland, whose proletariat was often in the vanguard of the British trade unions.

One affront after another—from the treachery of Labourite union leaders that sealed the defeat of the year-long 1984-85 miners strike by the Thatcher government, to New Labour’s subsequent adoption of Thatcherite policies—has increasingly driven the working class in Scotland to electorally support the Scottish nationalists, although not necessarily the call for independence. The SNP’s popularity with former Labour supporters has more to do with policies that the Scottish parliament has introduced, including free prescriptions, free personal care for the elderly, no university tuition fees and a freeze on the council [municipal services] tax. By contrast, Labour promises not to reverse the Tory cuts in public spending if elected.

Central to the SNP’s case for independence is the claim: “It’s Scotland’s oil.” From the time it came on stream in the late 1970s, North Sea oil was also claimed by the British capitalist rulers to be the solution to the country’s profound economic decline. The Thatcher regime shut down most of the coal mines—largely as a political move to destroy the militant miners union—and promoted North Sea oil and gas as the country’s main source of energy. Even at its most productive,

when revenues poured into London, North Sea oil did not fundamentally improve British capitalism’s position relative to that of its rivals. And now North Sea oil has passed its peak. The cost of exploration and extraction is growing, and the oil giants are shifting their investments to more lucrative areas of the world. With oil profits set to decline even further, the British ruling class increasingly views Scotland as an economic drain, a phenomenon reflected in the frequent ranting in the English chauvinist press about subsidies to Scotland.

Trillions of dollars are invested worldwide in infrastructure related to oil and gas production and refining. At the same time, the price of oil can be wildly unstable. In the naked pursuit of profit, the big oil companies are always striving to ratchet up the rate of exploitation of the working class. The industry is also notoriously unsafe—from the industrial murder of 167 workers on the North Sea’s Piper Alpha platform in 1988 to the numerous fatalities in crashes of helicopters ferrying workers to and from the rigs.

The Grangemouth plant produces much of Scotland’s refined petroleum and chemical exports, but like the rest of Europe it is struggling to cope with falling consumer demand for petrol and stiffer competition, with shale gas production slashing the price of American chemical products. Britain increasingly imports its diesel, even as it exports much of the petrol it produces. Meanwhile, the government is expanding its nuclear energy capacity and has plans for shale gas. Britain’s aging refineries are also facing competition from modern ones in the Near East, India and China. As a result, the Coryton refinery in Essex closed last year, with Milford Haven refinery in Wales reportedly now under threat of closure.

One of the lessons to draw from Grangemouth is the need for an industrial union of all oil workers. As we wrote in “Oil Workers—Shut Down Production Now!” (*Workers Hammer* No. 116, September 1990) during a series of strikes and occupations of North Sea oil rigs: “A hard strike would lay the basis for forging one solid union of all onshore and offshore oil workers. Production workers, as well as maintenance and catering workers, must be mobilised in struggle: a Piper Alpha-type inferno does not distinguish between contract workers and others.” In the wider context of war moves by the U.S. and British imperialist powers against oil-rich Iraq, the article concluded:

“Thatcher has particularly targeted the working people of Scotland, with her devastation of the Upper Clyde, the coalfields and now Ravenscraig [steel plant]. Those who are lucky have got jobs doing hard, demanding and dangerous work offshore. And whether Labour or Tories administer capitalism the companies will extract extortionate profits from the sweat, blood and corpses of oil workers. That wealth should benefit not a handful of bankers, capitalists, colonels and sheikhs but the working people of the world, who will lay claim to it through proletarian revolution and the establishment of an international socialist order.” ■



February 2013: British Petroleum tanker drivers in Grangemouth organized by Unite waged successful three-day strike over pensions and pay.

pit workers of different countries against each other, we called for the unions to defend the rights of immigrant workers and organise the unorganised. We wrote: “Consistent opposition to these reactionary strikes requires a revolutionary internationalist programme and a perspective of mobilising the multiethnic working class in Britain in a struggle for the revolutionary overthrow of the racist capitalist system” (*Workers Hammer* No. 206, Spring 2009 [reprinted in WV No. 937, 22 May 2009]).

North of the border, the Socialist Party Scotland shamelessly panders to Scottish nationalism. The demands they raised during the Grangemouth showdown were entirely limited in scope to Scotland, mainly to Grangemouth itself, with no attempt made to appeal to workers at oil refineries in England and Wales. At least on paper, oil unions in other European countries had defended the union rep at Grangemouth. Leif Sande, president of the trade union Industri Energi in Norway representing 60,000 oil, gas and related industry workers, wrote a letter demanding that Ineos Britain put “an end to the intrusive and accusatory investigations and threats

independence. The “vote no” campaign is led by Labour—for decades the main party in Scotland—which argues for Scotland to remain in the “United Kingdom,” but with more autonomy.

SNP leader and Scotland’s first minister Alex Salmond, who helped broker the anti-union deal at Grangemouth, crowed when it reopened that the plant has a “bright future.” Some future. Grangemouth—one of Scotland’s few remaining industrial complexes, where the trade union has now been crippled and workers cowed into submission—indeed prefigures the kind of future the working class can expect in capitalist Scotland, independent or otherwise. The SNP’s vision of “independence” does not include a break with the British monarchy or the sterling currency.

We revolutionaries oppose the reactionary entity known as the “United Kingdom,” which is centred on the monarchy, the House of Lords and the established (Protestant) churches and incorporates the Orange statelet in Northern Ireland. The Westminster parliament reflects the favoured status granted to finance capital, the City of London and the Home Counties of southeast England by the ruling

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WORKERS VANGUARD



AFP photos

European Gypsies Under Siege

French Government Crackdown on Roma, Immigrants

In recent months, there has been a dramatic increase in vicious attacks against Roma (Gypsies) across Europe, where the 10 to 12 million Roma make up the largest and one of the most oppressed minority populations. Hounded by ingrained racism, Roma are routinely excluded from employment and housing and made to live in conditions with little or no sanitation. In the context of the ongoing economic crisis, the European capitalist governments are offering up the Roma as scapegoats for worsening conditions and rising unemployment—taking aim at an

Left: Children cast out on the street after French police shut down Roma camp outside Lyon, August 2012. Fifteen-year-old Leonarda Dibrani, shown with her family in Kosovo on October 19 after their deportation from France.

easy target, a marginalized and defenseless people persecuted for centuries. The capitalists' chauvinist media has whipped up a storm recalling medieval lies about Roma stealing children, now repackaged under the rubric of "human trafficking."

In mid October, cops raided a Roma camp in central Greece on a drug sweep and snatched up a 4-year-old girl with fair hair and blue eyes, arresting her parents.

The girl, Maria, doesn't fit the stereotype of the Roma, so the media christened her the "Blonde Angel" and splashed her photo around the world. It turns out that her biological mother is a Bulgarian Roma who had been living in Greece. Forced to return to Bulgaria, the mother had arranged for Maria to be brought up by a different Roma family in Greece.

But these mundane facts of a childcare

arrangement common in every culture did not prevail against the chauvinist hysteria that spread like wildfire across Europe. Within days, two pale-skinned Roma children in Ireland were abducted from their parents by state authorities and subjected to DNA tests to "prove" they were who their parents said they were. For the Irish capitalist state, anti-Roma racism is part and parcel of its longstanding oppression of Irish Travellers, a distinct ethnic group with their own language and culture whose historically itinerant way of

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Grangemouth: Labour Party Paved Way for Attack Union Bashing at Scottish Oil Refinery

The following article was written by our comrades of the Spartacist League/Britain.

On 25 October, the leaders of Britain's biggest trade union, Unite, signed a deal amounting to a humiliating defeat for workers at Scotland's only oil refinery, in Grangemouth. Formerly owned by British Petroleum (BP), the vast industrial complex on the Firth of Forth near Falkirk powers a major pipeline from the North Sea and supplies fuel to pumps throughout Scotland, Northern Ireland and parts of northern England. Since the takeover of the facility by the Ineos corporation in 2006, boss Jim Ratcliffe has been determined to break the union. His previous assault on the pension plan was defeated by a successful two-day strike in 2008, which shut down the pipeline that carries 30 percent of Britain's oil.

The stage for the recent anti-union attack was set by the Labour Party leader-

ship, which instigated a vicious witchhunt against Stephen Deans, a senior shop steward who worked for 25 years at Grangemouth. Bowing to Tory [Conservative Party] allegations that Unite was rigging the selection of a candidate in the Falkirk district, Labour leader Ed Miliband called in the police to investigate the local party branch, of which Deans was chairman at the time. Not a shred of evidence was found, by either the cops or the Labour Party's own investigation. But the dirty deed was done. The oil bosses continued with disciplinary proceedings against Deans, threatening him with the sack [firing].

The accusations against Deans stem from the union's role in recruiting around 150 union members into the Labour Party and backing its preferred parliamentary candidate. This strategy is politically misguided, to put it mildly. Given the intense hostility of the Labour Party elite toward

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Press Association

October 20: Locked-out Unite union workers protest outside oil refinery in Grangemouth, Scotland.