

Venezuela: U.S. Imperialism Fuels Right-Wing Protests



Reuters photos

Left: Anti-government protesters confront National Guard in Caracas, March 17. Right: Poster of late Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez is set on fire, March 12.

For almost eight weeks, students and middle-class demonstrators demanding the *salida* (exit) of Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro have set up barricades in affluent neighborhoods in Caracas and other Venezuelan cities. While deriding the country's oppressed masses and raving against purported Cuban infiltration of the government, protesters have also attempted to tap very real popular grievances—shortages of necessities like cooking oil, flour and toilet paper, rising inflation and high crime rates. The government has called out the National Guard against protesters, but by several reports the protesters themselves are responsible for many of the almost 40 deaths. There have also been rumors of a coup attempt, leading to the arrest of three air force generals on March 24.

The U.S. imperialists, who back the right-wing opposition, and their media mouthpieces have raised a great hue and cry over Venezuelan government repression. On March 4, the House of Representatives passed a resolution condemning the Maduro government by a vote of 393-1. Last month, Secretary of State John Kerry threatened sanctions against Venezuela and denounced Maduro for waging a “terror campaign against his own people.” (Actually, the U.S. secretary of state is the real expert in waging terror campaigns against civilian populations.) Florida *gusano* Congressmen are foaming at the mouth over the possibility of ousting Maduro and stopping the 100,000 barrels of oil that Venezuela ships to Cuba daily, partly in exchange for the services of 30,000 medics and other Cuban personnel.

Leading figures in the protest include neoliberal opposition politicians Maria Corina Machado, who was recently stripped of her parliamentary immunity, and the now imprisoned Leopoldo López. Machado, a congresswoman from a wealthy district who is known as the “Venezuelan Iron Lady” for her conservative views, was honored at the White House in 2005 by George W. Bush for

her attempts to undermine the regime of Maduro's predecessor, Hugo Chávez. The group she cofounded, Súmate, has taken money from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a notorious CIA front. López, a graduate of Harvard Kennedy School of Government, has the blessing of Inter-American Dialogue, a think tank funded by ExxonMobil, Chevron and the

undermine the Venezuelan government through U.S. AID's “humanitarian” programs and NED grants to train political activists and provide “democracy assistance.” Toppling the regime was the goal of the failed U.S.-backed coup in April 2002, the capitalist lockouts designed to cripple the oil industry in the winter of 2002-03 and the campaign to recall

and other industries. Cisneros's backing of the 2002 failed coup against Chávez earned his TV station, along with three others, the nickname the “four horsemen of the apocalypse.”

In deeply polarized Venezuelan society, poor and working people overwhelmingly remain tied to *chavismo*, the left-wing nationalist populism associated with strongman Chávez and adopted by Maduro, who came to prominence on Chávez's coat-tails. Chávez consolidated popular support by denouncing U.S. imperialism's military interventions around the world and bucking its policies in Latin America. He used the wealth generated by selling oil to fund social welfare programs like food subsidies, improving pensions and health care (the latter with Cuban assistance).

In Chávez's first 12 years in office, the population's caloric intake increased 50 percent and the poverty rate fell from over 50 percent to less than 30 percent. He made it harder to fire workers, mandated pensions for domestic workers and repeatedly raised the minimum wage. Unlike the traditional political elite who flaunt their European roots while oozing contempt for the poor, Chávez boasted of his *zambo* (mixed African and indigenous) heritage. When Maduro—Chávez's vice president and hand-picked successor—was narrowly elected president after Chávez's death a year ago, he promised to continue the “Bolivarian Revolution” begun by Chávez in 1999.

Though in the crosshairs of U.S. imperialism and hated by the layer of the Venezuelan bourgeoisie most closely tied to the imperialists, Maduro, like Chávez before him, heads a capitalist government. Chávez himself repeatedly emphasized that his regime did not pose a risk to private property. While Marxists support the establishment of social welfare programs for the poor and defend nationalizations in dependent countries, these measures do not in any way alter the capitalist character of a society, no matter the amount of “socialist” packaging that's given to them.

In fact, *chavista* nationalist populism helps deflect social struggle and ideologically binds the impoverished masses and the working class to capitalist rule. The nationalizations of land and private companies—carried out in large part through

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Break with Chavismo! For a Revolutionary Workers Party!

U.S. Agency for International Development (AID), which is another CIA conduit. A member of Venezuela's oligarchy, he is a wealthy descendent of the 19th-century Latin American nationalist Simón Bolívar.

Since Chávez was first elected in 1998, the U.S. imperialists have sought to install someone more to their liking in Caracas. Hundreds of millions of dollars in U.S. funds have been poured into attempts to

Chávez in 2004. After Maduro was elected president by a narrow margin last April, Washington's local agents claimed fraud and attempted to reverse the results in favor of their candidate.

Many of Venezuela's capitalists made their profits as front men for imperialist interests. Gustavo Cisneros is one. The Cisneros family amassed immense wealth as the Venezuelan distributors of Pepsi, later branching into media



Reuters

Maria Corina Machado, protest leader and founder of U.S. State Department-backed NGO Súmate, with Condoleezza Rice in Florida, 2005.



“Letter to the Workers and Peasants of the Ukraine”

By V.I. Lenin, December 1919

The proletarian revolution of October 1917 in Russia was the defining event of the 20th century. In taking state power, the multinational proletariat of Russia not only liberated itself from capitalist exploitation but also led the peasantry, national minorities and all the oppressed in ending feudal tyranny and imperialist bondage. What made it possible for the Bolsheviks to unite the toiling masses of the former tsarist empire in common struggle was their internationalist program, which declared full and equal national rights for all peoples, including the right of national independence.

Ukraine, which had been partitioned between the Russian tsarist and Austro-Hungarian Habsburg empires, was an important front in the civil war that followed the October Revolution. In the course of the civil war, successive short-lived Ukrainian bourgeois-nationalist regimes, deeply hostile to proletarian rule, allied with the White Guards and various imperialists—notably France and Germany—in an attempt to crush the revolutionary proletariat. (For more on Ukraine in this period, see “Soviet Power and the Liberation of Ukraine,” WV No. 1042, 21 March.)

After the November 1918 German surrender ending World War I, the Red Army was able to wrest Kiev from German control. But in the summer of 1919, Anton Denikin, commander of the southern White forces, went on an offensive and recaptured Kiev and Kharkov with the help of the Ukrainian nationalist forces of Simon Petlyura. In the conquered territories, Denikin’s troops, as well as Petlyura’s, carried out mass executions and plunder, murdering tens of thousands of Jews in pogroms. When Bolshevik leader V.I. Lenin addressed the workers and peasants of Ukraine in the letter printed below, the Red Army had stopped Denikin’s advance at Orel, 220 miles south of Moscow, and was pushing back into Ukraine, liberating the cities of Kharkov and Kiev.

It would take a couple more years to put

down other counterrevolutionary forces so that the Ukrainian Bolsheviks could consolidate proletarian power in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. Thus, Ukraine achieved self-determination for the first time, not through the good graces of the capitalist powers, but as a result of the defeat of imperialist-backed counter-revolutionary armies. In 1922, Ukraine

Kharkov and are advancing victoriously on Rostov. The Ukraine is seething with revolt against Denikin. All forces must he rallied for the final rout of Denikin’s army, which has been trying to restore the power of the landowners and capitalists. We must destroy Denikin to safeguard ourselves against even the slightest possibility of a new incursion.



Ukraine, 1919: Funeral for victims of anti-Bolshevik, anti-Jewish nationalist Petlyura. Among the Bolshevik leaders on the platform are Pyatakov, Rakovsky and Antonov-Ovseenko.

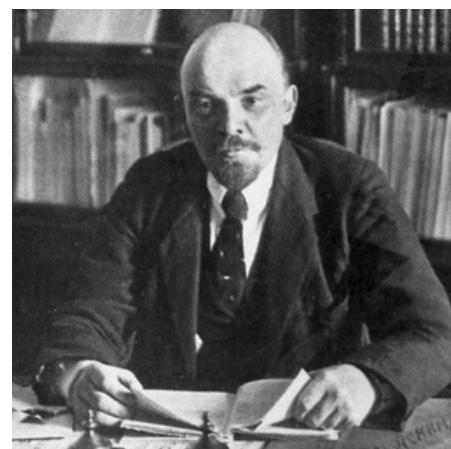
became a founding member of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

* * *

Comrades, four months ago, towards the end of August 1919, I had occasion to address a letter to the workers and peasants in connection with the victory over Kolchak.

I am now having this letter reprinted in full for the workers and peasants of the Ukraine in connection with the victories over Denikin.

Red troops have taken Kiev, Poltava and



P.A. Otsup

V.I. Lenin

the tasks of Soviet power and induce them to defend it more staunchly.

In Great Russia the system of landed estates has been completely abolished. The same must be done in the Ukraine, and the Soviet power of the Ukrainian workers and peasants must effect the complete abolition of the landed estates and the complete liberation of the Ukrainian workers and peasants from all oppression by the landowners, and from the landowners themselves.

But apart from this task, and a number of others which confronted and still confront both the Great-Russian and the Ukrainian working masses, Soviet power in the Ukraine has its own special tasks. One of these special tasks deserves the greatest attention at the present moment. It is the national question, or, in other words, the question of whether the Ukraine is to be a separate and independent Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic bound in alliance (federation) with the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic, or whether the Ukraine is to amalgamate with Russia to form a single Soviet republic. All Bolsheviks and all politically-conscious workers and peasants must give careful thought to this question.

The independence of the Ukraine has been recognised both by the All-Russia Central Executive Committee of the R.S.F.S.R. (Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic) and by the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks). It is therefore self-evident and generally recognised that only the Ukrainian workers and peasants themselves can and will decide at their All-Ukraine Congress of Soviets whether the Ukraine shall amalgamate with Russia, or whether she shall remain a separate and independent republic, and, in the latter case, what federal ties shall be established

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Letter

On Stalinists and 1934 Strikes

[undated]

Dear comrades:

I appreciated the excellent article on the port truckers in the WV 1038, “For a class struggle fight to organize port truckers.” Equally important was the drawing of

parallels with the general strike of 1934 led by Local 574, and the Trotskyists of the Communist League of America. But what was left out was the role of the Communist Party which played a counter-revolutionary role at every turn.

The taxi drivers voted to go on strike and to join the Local 574. They won the strike, the CP which did not participate in the strike, attacked the settlement. As a “Trotskyite sellout” to the Citizen’s Alliance (this was the period of the CP’s left turn, which was a move away from what was previously a policy of reconciliation with the trade union bureaucracy and capitalist politicians.) The CP was isolated in Minnesota, and for not taking an active role in the class struggle, so they tried to muscle their way into the union by denouncing Carl Skoglund and the Dunne brothers as “traitors and agents of the bosses.” They demanded that members of a paper union (the Trade Union Unity League) be made members of the strike committee. When this was rejected they put out more flyers calling the strike leaders “undemocratic.” The CP’s members were almost physically attacked by members of 574.

As a result of this action the CP was losing support in Minnesota. On the day of Bloody Friday (July 19th) the CP tried to convince Harry Deboer [DeBoer] to seize the Court House, as opposed to

stopping scab trucks. Deboer turned down this offer because he realized he would have been shot by the cops, since the workers were unarmed. The CP was also losing the little support they had among the unemployed in the Unemployed Councils that they had organized as a place to register picket credentials in Local 574.

Of course, this was turned down by 574, and the CP was told to go to the MCCW (Minnesota Central Council of Workers). The CP also attempted to force themselves on the ERA—Emergency Relief Administration’s Strike Committee. They were turned down as a result of a lack of credentials.

By now the Stalinists were completely isolated. They wrote and published articles in the Daily Worker and their magazine, the Communist, and a pamphlet called “The Permanent Counter-Revolution—Role of the Trotskyites in the Minnesota Strike.” For this the CP members were given a belt in the jaw—and rightly so!

The CP and Stalinism have destroyed many idealistic and serious youth and

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Crimea Is Russian

Self-Determination and Russian Intervention: Strengthening Our Position

A letter we received from a sympathizer of the International Communist League points out a significant flaw in our principled support to self-determination of Crimea and the intervention by Russia that allowed the referendum enabling that right to take place. In agreement with the line taken in “Ukraine Coup: Spearheaded by Fascists, Backed by U.S./EU Imperialists—Crimea Is Russian” (WV No. 1041, 7 March 2014), our sympathizer, Jonah, wrote in his March 14 letter that “as the Crimea is predominantly Russian and the majority favors unification with Russia, Marxists are bound to support that democratic demand for self-determination, while taking note of the fate of non-Russian minorities in the equation.” The problem, he wrote, is the article’s statement that support to Russian intervention was principled “so long as Russia were to implement special rights for the Crimean Tatar minority, who are plenty oppressed under Ukrainian rule.”

The article in WV No. 1041 further declared that “if Russian forces use the takeover of the Crimea to deepen the oppression of the Tatars, it would then be unprincipled to support the Russian intervention.” Jonah wrote: “That sentence and the provision on ‘special rights for the Crimean Tatar minority’ comes off as placing the self-determination for the Crimean Russians as being *conditional* on how well the Crimean Tatars are treated by Russia if and when the Crimea votes to become part of Russia. If that’s a criteria for self-determination then I don’t see how self-determination can be supported *anywhere*” (emphasis in original). He observed, “If the difference is the presence of Russian troops in the Crimea, then I don’t see how or why that would change matters. Even if the Crimea had managed to successfully secede peacefully from Ukraine (without needing Russian intervention) then Russian troops would still enter the Crimea when it became part of Russia proper.”

Jonah is correct in pointing out this problem, and we thank him for his letter, which is too long to print in its entirety. The condition we placed on support to Russian intervention, and hence to the exercise of self-determination by the Crimean majority, bent to the pressure of the imperialist propaganda barrage directed against Russia and its bourgeois strongman, Vladimir Putin. The U.S. and European Union imperialists and their media hacks, having backed the fascist-infested coup that overturned the Yanukovich regime in Ukraine, raised a hue and cry about a non-existent Russian “invasion” of Crimea—in fact Russian troops from the Black Sea Fleet based in Sevastopol were already there. They also condemned its “annexation” of Crimea, even comparing this to Nazi Germany’s *Anschluss* of Austria.

As we wrote in WV No. 1041: “Contrary to how it is often presented in the West-

ern media, the Russian intervention into Crimea is not an intervention into a ‘foreign country,’ notwithstanding Crimea’s formal status as part of Ukraine.” Crimea was first incorporated into Russia in the late 18th century, when it was wrested from the Ottoman Empire. Our article

is championing the rights of the Muslim Tatars and other ethnic and national minorities. In supporting Russian intervention in Crimea, we have not given the least amount of political support to Putin’s Russian-chauvinist capitalist regime. It is the duty of Marxists to oppose all forms



ITAR-TASS

Russian navy prepares Ukrainian submarine for towing to Russian Black Sea Fleet base in Sevastopol, Crimea, March 22. Much of Ukrainian military in Crimea switched allegiance as peninsula rejoined Russia.

noted: “It was only in 1954 that Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev ceded Crimea to the Ukrainian Soviet Republic. Later, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, this took on significance, as the fate of the area was the subject of heated disputes between the now bourgeois states of Russia and Ukraine.” Putin’s intervention was essentially defensive, aiming among other things to protect the Black Sea Fleet.

Jonah wrote that the fears of the Tatar minority “do not invalidate the democratic right of the Russian Crimean majority to seek unity with Russia, any more than the fears of aboriginal people in Quebec invalidate the Quebecois majority’s right to independence.” (On the oppression of the Tatars, including their mass expulsion from Crimea by Stalin’s bureaucratic regime, see WV No. 1041.) Revolutionary Marxists seek to mobilize the working class in defense of oppressed minorities as part of the struggle against the capitalist class enemy. Thus, while advocating independence for Quebec, our Canadian comrades of the Trotskyist League/Ligue Trotskyste are intransigent fighters for the rights of Native peoples and other minorities, whether under English Canadian or French Québécois capitalist rule. This includes defending the right of Native peoples with a land base to decide their own future, including the possibility of secession.

In Russia, a crucial task for Marxists

of nationalism and Great Power chauvinism. Upholding the right of nations to self-determination, as V.I. Lenin explained in the article reprinted on page 2 of this issue, is a crucial means of combating nationalist prejudices and breaking down the barri-

Brussels, March 26: President Barack Obama delivers imperialist tirade about Russian “invasion” to NATO allies.



AP

ers to uniting workers of different countries and nations in the fight for socialist revolution.

Crimea: Not a Case of Interpenetrated Peoples

In “Ukraine Turmoil: Capitalist Powers in Tug of War” (WV No. 1038, 24 January), we quoted an ICL resolution, first printed in January 1995, stating that the breakup of the Soviet Union follow-

ing capitalist counterrevolution revealed a “considerable interpenetration of peoples and of economic production units which were inherited from and geared to a (bureaucratically) centralized planned economy.” The quoted resolution continued: “Thus in a number of regions (particularly eastern Ukraine, Crimea, northern Kazakhstan) a democratic resolution of the national question cannot be achieved except through a socialist federation or federations of workers states transcending national boundaries.” The resolution was part of our attempt to grapple with a historically unprecedented event: the counterrevolution that destroyed the degenerated Soviet workers state and unleashed an orgy of nationalist bloodletting throughout much of its former territory.

In fact, the use of the term “interpenetrated peoples” in regard to Crimea does not reflect reality, and it was not repeated in our last two issues. The resolution was superseded in April 1995, when the ICL called for a plebiscite so that the people of Crimea and Chechnya could decide their fate, a tacit recognition that self-determination for those areas could be achieved democratically short of the overthrow of capitalist rule. Jonah put the question, “If that situation of interpenetration still exists in the Crimea with the Russian, Ukrainian and Tatar populations, then why did WV come out with ‘Crimea is Russian’?”

When we speak of interpenetrated peoples, we are not talking about any mixture of nationalities and ethnicities within a single state, which is the norm in the world. Rather, we are addressing situations where two (or more) peoples claim the same territory, e.g., Israel/Palestine and Northern Ireland, and the programmatic implications for Leninists. While many reformist leftists divide the world into supposedly progressive and reactionary peoples, with democratic rights accorded only to the former, we uphold the right to self-determination for *all* nations, as Lenin did. In cases of interpenetrated peoples, as the ICL’s International Declaration of Principles states, “the democratic right of national self-determination cannot be achieved for one people without violating the national rights of the other. Hence these conflicts cannot be equitably resolved within a capitalist framework. The precondition for a democratic solution is to sweep away all the bourgeoisies of

the region” (*Spartacist* [English-language edition] No. 54, Spring 1998).

Crimea is fully 97 percent Russian speaking, with even the ethnic Ukrainian minority heavily Russified. This is in contrast to the Caucasus, which is populated by many peoples speaking different languages. Nor is it like Northern Ireland, with its deeply split but roughly numerically equal Protestant and Catholic populations. The recent referendum in Crimea and its aftermath have underlined that the region is not a case of geographically interpenetrated peoples but one centrally defined by its Russian history and ethnic makeup. Just under 97 percent of voters favored reunification with Russia, although many Tatars boycotted the referendum. Furthermore, Russia’s reabsorption of Crimea was accomplished with virtually no bloodshed or any real resistance. The bulk of Ukrainian troops and officers in Crimea simply went over to the Russians.

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CORRECTIONS

In “U.S./Japanese Imperialists: Hands Off China!” (WV No. 1036, 13 December 2013), we incorrectly referred to “battleships” being shifted to the Far East as part of President Obama’s “pivot toward Asia.” We should have used the generic term “warships.” The U.S. Navy no longer has any battleships commissioned (nor does any other navy worldwide).

In “U.S., Japanese Provocations in East China Sea” (WV No. 1041, 7 March), we wrote that “the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force constitutes the world’s second-largest navy.”

That is incorrect judged by metrics commonly used to compare the size of navies (number of warships, aggregate tonnage).

The article “Reformists Salivate Over Sawant’s Seattle Election” (WV No. 1042, 21 March) incorrectly characterized socialism as a system in which “workers have become the new ruling class” and “control the economy and the state.” That in fact describes the dictatorship of the proletariat, a transition period between the revolutionary seizure of power by the workers and the establishment of socialism. Under socialism (the first phase of communism), classes will have ceased to exist and the state will be in the process of withering away.

Letter...

(continued from page 2)

revolutionary workers. Having to apologize for every twist and turn of Uncle Joe Stalin, and wrapping themselves in the American flag during the Second World War, and denouncing striking miners and leftists who were supporting the miners' strike as "social fascists," and "German agents," etc.

It's no wonder that the CP was so hated by radical youth and workers. It was only the Trotskyists of the CLA/Socialist Workers Party that could lead and organize the masses in the Minneapolis general strike. And it is only Trotskyism that has the program to lead the masses now.

FOR FULL CITIZENSHIP RIGHTS
FOR ALL IMMIGRANTS NOW!

Fraternally,
Karl R.

WV replies:

Our article "For a Class Struggle Fight to Organize Port Truckers!" (WV No.

1038, 24 January) highlighted both the 1934 Trotskyist-led Minneapolis Teamsters strikes and the 1934 Stalinist-led West Coast maritime strike as examples of class-struggle union organizing that provide crucial lessons for today. The interested reader can find more on Minneapolis in other of our writings, such as the article "Lessons of the 1934 Minneapolis Teamsters Strikes" (WV No. 940, 31 July 2009).

Karl R. gives some details of the despicable role played by the Stalinists in the Minneapolis strikes, which deeply discredited the CP among militant workers there. But the Trotskyists in the forefront of those Teamsters organizing battles, while politically exposing the Stalinists, did not treat them as counterrevolutionaries. For example, after striking workers gave "a crack in the jaw" to the distributors of a CP leaflet slandering the union leadership, Local 574's strike newspaper, *The Organizer* (7 August 1934), declared this response wrong, explaining: "They are not stool pigeons—at least not con-

scious ones; they are just a little bit nutty and what they need is a friendly boot in the posterior. Maybe the shock will bring them to their senses."

The Stalinists at the time were near the end of their 1928-34 "Third Period" phase of bombast and adventurism in which proletarian revolution was fatuously declared to be imminent, more or less worldwide. The Stalinists in the U.S. denounced the established AFL trade unions as "social fascist" and abandoned them in the late '20s to form marginal "revolutionary" unions. As a result, the CP was largely isolated from the strike waves that erupted in 1933 and '34.

The significant exception was in San Francisco. District CP leader Sam Darcy was then no longer wedded to the CP's Third Period "dual union" policy and in mid 1933 CP longshoremen followed the mass of Bay Area dock workers and joined the AFL-affiliated International Longshoremen's Association (ILA). Harry Bridges and other CP supporters in the ILA, who *at that time* advocated

class-struggle tactics and did not bow to the Democratic Roosevelt administration, went on to lead the 1934 West Coast maritime strike that forged a powerful longshore union and won a great deal of political authority for the CP.

The fact that the Stalinists in San Francisco were in a position to lead that strike and fight it out class against class was conjunctural. In 1935, the CP abandoned its Third Period policies for the openly class-collaborationist politics of the "People's Front" adopted by the Communist International after Hitler came to power in Germany. Under this banner, the Stalinists sought to consummate a bloc with the bourgeois-democratic imperialists, which in the U.S. meant support to Roosevelt and his "New Deal." The Stalinists' lasting political crime in this country was to help channel the working-class radicalization of the mid to late 1930s into support for the Democratic Party as a supposed "progressive" wing of capitalism. Labor's support to the capitalist Democrats is a shackle on working-class struggle to this day. ■

Crimea...

(continued from page 3)

Faced with a *fait accompli*, Barack Obama, with the assistance of his imperialist allies, has mustered some sanctions, low grade for now, against various Russian figures while also showing some force through increased air patrols in the Baltic states and a heightened military presence in Poland. This has been accompanied by an outpouring of bellicose statements replete with hypocrisy and double-speak. Addressing his European Union and NATO allies in Brussels on March 26, Obama condemned "the invasion of Crimea" and "Russia's annexation" while admitting that Russia is not about to be dislodged from Crimea through military force. Obama passed off the U.S. occupation of Iraq, which destroyed an entire society and racked up hundreds of thousands more victims of American imperialism's worldwide depredations, as leaving a "fully sovereign Iraqi state." And after all, he said, it wasn't about grabbing resources "for our own gain."

This can be believed about as readily as Obama's "shocked, shocked" denial that "America is somehow conspiring with fascists inside of Ukraine." Washington has assiduously backed the Svoboda party—the more "moderate" face of Ukrainian fascism—throughout the turmoil that culminated in the coup against Yanukovich, as a result of which several fascists won high government offices, including deputy prime minister, prosecutor general and minister of defense. There is nothing new in Washington's collaboration with such scum. After the Soviet Red Army drove out the Nazi invaders and their local hitmen in World War II, the U.S. enrolled and bankrolled Svoboda's forebears—the fascist gangs led by Stepan Bandera, infamous for massacres



Tatar-language poster, 1921, depicts militant Soviet women workers reaching out to Muslim women of the East.

of Jews and Poles—as soldiers in the Cold War against Communism.

"Leftists" Echo Imperialist Propaganda

Most of the reformist left in the U.S. has willingly served as tribunes in the imperialists' verbal blitzkrieg over Russian intervention in Crimea. In WV No. 1041, we noted that the International Socialist Organization (ISO) retailed bourgeois propaganda by prettifying the mass protests in Kiev, replete with fascists, as a fight for "democracy," describing the protests as "action from below." Now over Crimea, the ISO asserts that it stands in a "third camp"—encapsulated in the slogan, "Neither Washington nor Moscow"—as it did when the Soviet workers state existed. In reality, the "third camp" was always the camp of imperialism, as the ISO proved time and again by backing counterrevolutionary forces arrayed against the USSR in the name of "democracy."

Having reveled in the destruction of the Soviet workers state in 1991-92, the ISO continues to direct its fire to the east as U.S. imperialism ramps up the pressure against capitalist Russia. While objecting to what it calls "the imperialist conflict being fought out in Ukraine," the ISO shows its real animus by shamelessly echoing the Western propaganda mills: "Russian imperialism has made its move to retain political and economic domination over the country with its takeover of Crimea—this should be unconditionally condemned by all revolutionaries claiming to be anti-imperialists" ("Ukraine and the National Question," socialistworker.org, 11 March).

The Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), for its part, has given abstract recognition to the national rights of Crimea's majority population only to say that it really doesn't matter because the need of the hour is the call raised by its Russian group on March 2: "Russian Imperialism—Out of

Crimea!" The CWI is the same outfit whose leading section in Britain capitulated to its imperialist rulers by refusing for decades to call for British troops out of Northern Ireland, where they along with local police and Protestant paramilitaries brutally oppressed the Catholic minority.

As we observed in "U.S./EU Imperialist Frenzy as Crimea Rejoins Russia" (WV No. 1042, 21 March), the CWI's stance was "little more than a left-sounding cover for the U.S./EU position that a vote for self-determination in Crimea is invalid because the U.S./EU imperialists say it is invalid." On March 4, the CWI elaborated its position, declaring: "What is happening now will not lead to genuine self-determination; it will only mean that Crimea becomes a Russian protectorate, like South Ossetia, or, even worse, an occupied region with a dictatorial ruler, like Chechnya's Kadyrov" ("Russian Troops Take Up Positions Throughout Crimea," socialistworld.net).



Russian armored vehicles on way to South Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali in Georgia, 2008. Marxists were revolutionary-defeatist in Russia-Georgia war.

SPARTACIST PAMPHLET \$2

Stalinism—Gravedigger of the Revolution

How the Soviet Workers State Was Strangled

Homeless tent city in Moscow's Red Square

For Socialist Revolution to Sweep Away Yeltsin Counterrevolution!

August 1993

Spartacist Publishing Co., Box 1377 GPO, New York, NY 10116

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Archives...

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between that republic and Russia.

How should this question be decided insofar as concerns the interests of the working people and the promotion of their fight for the complete emancipation of labour from the yoke of capital?

In the first place, the interests of labour demand the fullest confidence and the closest alliance among the working people of different countries and nations. The supporters of the landowners and capitalists, of the bourgeoisie, strive to disunite the workers, to intensify national discord and enmity, in order to weaken the workers and strengthen the power of capital.

Capital is an international force. To vanquish it, an international workers' alliance, an international workers' brotherhood, is needed.

We are opposed to national enmity and discord, to national exclusiveness. We are internationalists. We stand for the close union and the complete amalgamation of the workers and peasants of all nations in a single world Soviet republic.

Secondly, the working people must not forget that capitalism has divided nations into a small number of oppressor, Great-Power (imperialist), sovereign and privileged nations and an overwhelming majority of oppressed, dependent and semi-dependent, non-sovereign nations. The arch-criminal and arch-reactionary war of 1914-18 still further accentuated this division and as a result aggravated rancour and hatred. For centuries the indignation and distrust of the non-sovereign and dependent nations towards the dominant and oppressor nations have been accumulating, of nations such as the Ukrainian towards nations such as the Great-Russian.

We want a *voluntary* union of nations—a union which precludes any coercion of one nation by another—a union founded on complete confidence, on a clear recognition of brotherly unity, on absolutely voluntary consent. Such a union cannot be effected at one stroke; we have to work towards it with the greatest patience and circumspection, so as not to spoil matters and not to arouse distrust, and so that the distrust inherited from centuries of landowner and capitalist oppression, centuries of private property and the enmity caused by its divisions and redivisions may have a chance to wear off.

We must, therefore, strive persistently for the unity of nations and ruthlessly suppress everything that tends to divide them, and in doing so we must be very cautious and patient, and make concessions to the survivals of national distrust. We must be adamant and uncompromising towards everything that affects the fundamental interests of labour in its fight for emancipation from the yoke of capital. The question of the demarcation of frontiers now, for the time being—for we are striving towards the complete abolition of frontiers—is a minor one, it is not fundamental or important. In this matter we can afford to wait, and must wait, because the national distrust among the broad mass of peasants and small owners is often extremely tenacious, and haste might only intensify it, in other words, jeopardise the cause of complete and ultimate unity.

The experience of the workers' and peasants' revolution in Russia, the revolution of October-November 1917, and of the two years of victorious struggle against the onslaught of international and Russian capitalists, has made it crystal-clear that the capitalists have succeeded for a time in playing upon the national distrust of the Great Russians felt by Polish, Latvian, Estonian and Finnish peasants and small owners, that they have succeeded for a time in sowing dissension between them and us on the basis of this distrust. Experience has shown that this distrust wears off and disappears only very slowly, and that the more caution and patience displayed by the Great Russians, who have for so long been an oppressor nation, the more certainly this distrust will pass. It is by recognising the independence of the Polish, Latvian, Lithuanian, Estonian and Finnish states

that we are slowly but steadily winning the confidence of the labouring masses of the neighbouring small states, who were more backward and more deceived and downtrodden by the capitalists. It is the surest way of wresting them from the influence of "their" national capitalists, and leading them to full confidence, to the future united international Soviet republic.

As long as the Ukraine is not completely liberated from Denikin, her government, until the All-Ukraine Congress of Soviets meets, is the All-Ukraine Revolutionary Committee. Besides the Ukrainian Bolshevik Communists, there are Ukrainian *Borotba* Communists working on this Revolutionary Committee as members of the government. One of the things distinguishing the Borotbists from the Bolsheviks is that they insist upon the unconditional independence of the Ukraine. The Bolsheviks will not make *this* a subject of difference and disunity, they do not regard *this* as an obstacle to concerted proletarian effort. There must be unity in the struggle against the yoke of capital and for the dictatorship of the proletariat, and there should be no parting of the ways among Communists on the question of national frontiers, or whether there should be a federal or some other tie between the states. Among the Bolsheviks there are advocates of complete independence for the Ukraine, advocates of a more or less close federal tie, and advocates of the complete amalgamation of the Ukraine with Russia.

There must be no differences over these questions. They will be decided by the All-Ukraine Congress of Soviets.

If a Great-Russian Communist insists upon the amalgamation of the Ukraine with Russia, Ukrainians might easily suspect him of advocating this policy not from the motive of uniting the proletarians in the fight against capital, but because



Ukmap
Red workers' demonstration in Kharkov, 1917. Center banner reads: "All Power to the Soviets of Workers, Peasants and Soldiers Deputies! Down With the Counterrevolutionary State Duma and State Council!"

against the revolutionary workers. We saw this in the case of Kerensky's rule in Russia in the February-October period of 1917, and we have seen it and are seeing it in all other countries.

Mutual distrust between the Great-Russian and Ukrainian Communists can, therefore, arise very easily. How is this distrust to be combated? How is it to be overcome and mutual confidence established?

The best way to achieve this is by working together to uphold the dictatorship of the proletariat and Soviet power in the fight against the landowners and capitalists of all countries and against their attempts to restore their domination. This common fight will clearly show in practice that whatever the decision in regard to state independence or frontiers may be, there must

our midst of Great-Russian nationalism, for such manifestations, which are a betrayal of communism in general, cause the gravest harm by dividing us from our Ukrainian comrades and thus playing into the hands of Denikin and his regime.

Consequently, we Great-Russian Communists must make concessions when there are differences with the Ukrainian Bolshevik Communists and Borotbists and these differences concern the state independence of the Ukraine, the forms of her alliance with Russia, and the national question in general. But all of us, Great-Russian Communists, Ukrainian Communists, and Communists of any other nation, must be unyielding and irreconcilable in the underlying and fundamental questions which are the same for all nations, in questions of the proletarian struggle, of the proletarian dictatorship; we must not tolerate compromise with the bourgeoisie or any division of the forces which are protecting us against Denikin.

Denikin must be vanquished and destroyed, and such incursions as his not allowed to recur. That is to the fundamental interest of both the Great-Russian and the Ukrainian workers and peasants. The fight will be a long and hard one, for the capitalists of the whole world are helping Denikin and will help all other Denikins.

In this long and hard fight we Great-Russian and Ukrainian workers must maintain the closest alliance, for separately we shall most definitely be unable to cope with the task. Whatever the boundaries of the Ukraine and Russia may be, whatever may be the forms of their mutual state relationships, that is not so important; that is a matter in which concessions can and should be made, in which one thing, or another, or a third may be tried—the cause of the workers and peasants, of the victory over capitalism, will not perish because of that.

But if we fail to maintain the closest alliance, an alliance against Denikin, an alliance against the capitalists and kulaks of our countries and of all countries, the cause of labour will most certainly perish for many years to come in the sense that the capitalists *will be able* to crush and strangle both the Soviet Ukraine and Soviet Russia.

And what the bourgeoisie of all countries, and all manner of petty-bourgeois parties—i.e., "compromising" parties which permit alliance with the bourgeoisie against the workers—try most of all to accomplish is to disunite the workers of different nationalities, to evoke distrust, and to disrupt a close international alliance and international brotherhood of the workers. Whenever the bourgeoisie succeeds in this the cause of the workers is lost. The Communists of Russia and the Ukraine must therefore by patient, persistent, stubborn and concerted effort foil the nationalist machinations of the bourgeoisie and vanquish nationalist prejudices of every kind, and set the working people of the world an example of a really solid alliance of the workers and peasants of different nations in the fight for Soviet power, for the overthrow of the yoke of the landowners and capitalists, and for a world federal Soviet republic.■



Novosti
Above: Soviet troops enter Ukrainian city of Odessa in 1919 during Civil War. Inset: 1920 recruitment poster from Kiev enjoins workers and peasants to enlist in Red Cavalry that fought General Denikin and other White counterrevolutionaries.

of the prejudices of the old Great-Russian nationalism, of imperialism. Such mistrust is natural, and to a certain degree inevitable and legitimate, because the Great Russians, under the yoke of the landowners and capitalists, had for centuries imbibed the shameful and disgusting prejudices of Great-Russian chauvinism.

If a Ukrainian Communist insists upon the unconditional state independence of the Ukraine, he lays himself open to the suspicion that he is supporting this policy not because of the temporary interests of the Ukrainian workers and peasants in their struggle against the yoke of capital, but on account of the petty-bourgeois national prejudices of the small owner. Experience has provided hundreds of instances of the petty-bourgeois "socialists" of various countries—all the various Polish, Latvian and Lithuanian pseudo-socialists, Georgian Mensheviks, Socialist-Revolutionaries and the like—assuming the guise of supporters of the proletariat for the sole purpose of deceitfully promoting a policy of compromise with "their" national bourgeoisie

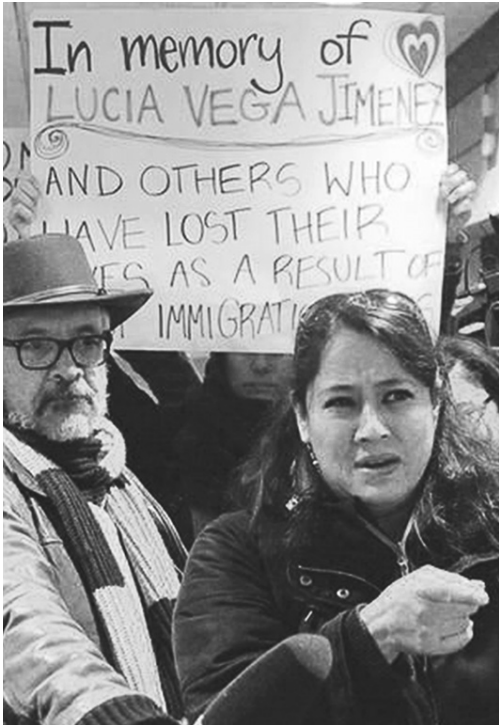
be a close military and economic alliance between the Great-Russian and Ukrainian workers, for otherwise the capitalists of the "Entente," in other words, the alliance of the richest capitalist countries—Britain, France, America, Japan and Italy—will crush and strangle us separately. Our fight against Kolchak and Denikin, whom these capitalists supplied with money and arms, is a clear illustration of this danger.

He who undermines the unity and closest alliance between the Great-Russian and Ukrainian workers and peasants is helping the Kolchaks, the Denikins, the capitalist bandits of all countries.

Consequently, we Great-Russian Communists must repress with the utmost severity the slightest manifestation in

Labor Must Fight for Immigrant Rights!

Canadian Government Escalates War on Refugees



David P. Ball photos

Vancouver: Spring 2013 march against racism (left); sign at February 5 rally commemorates refugee who died in custody (right).

The following article originally appeared in Spartacist Canada No. 180 (Spring 2014), newspaper of our comrades of the Trotskyist League/Ligue Trotskyiste.

SPARTACIST CANADA

Nothing so belies the capitalist rulers’ carefully nurtured myth of Canadian benevolence as their brutal treatment of refugees. This has always been so, but under [Prime Minister Stephen] Harper’s Conservatives it has gotten much, much worse. Instead of receiving asylum, ever larger numbers of refugees are condemned to automatic, mandatory and indefinite detention, often in maximum-security prisons, followed by deportation to the hell they fled. The Tories’ lying cant about “fraudsters” and “bogus” asylum seekers is meant to fuel racist xenophobia so as to deflect working-class anger away from the capitalist exploiters, who are destroying the livelihoods and lives of millions, and onto vulnerable migrants fleeing destitution and repression.

Since September 2013, some 200 migrants and asylum seekers subjected to indefinite detention have been protesting against their intolerable condi-

tions and demanding their release from a maximum-security prison in Lindsay, Ontario. Some have been incarcerated for as long as seven years. One hunger striker, not a refugee, has lived in Canada for 43 years. Another has cancer and fears dying in jail. For carrying out hunger strikes and boycotts of their detention hearings, they have faced reprisals including deportations, lock-up in segregation and denial of access to legal counsel.

This war on refugees is killing people. For an unpaid bus fare, hotel worker Lucía Vega Jiménez was handed over to immigration cops in Vancouver on December 1. Slated for deportation to Mexico, she attempted suicide in the bathroom of the airport detention centre and died a few days later, still in custody. A Roma [Gypsy] refugee, Jan Szamko, was refused proper medical care and died in a Toronto jail in 2009. As Ottawa has cut off vast numbers of refugee applicants from access to health care, such atrocities will only grow in number.

Since the Tories came into office in 2006, the web of laws aimed at refugees, immigrants and also citizens has grown massively. In the service of erecting a reactionary “fortress Canada,” the Tories have made it much harder to get in, and much easier to get deported. A proposed new law, Bill C-24, would allow the government to unilaterally strip citizenship from dual citizens. The harshest measures, however, are reserved for refugees.

The “Protecting Canada’s Immigration System Act” (Bill C-31), which became law in December 2012, was aptly dubbed the “Refugee Exclusion Act” by refugee advocates. For many years, the government has been imprisoning refugees and other migrants: since 2004, in excess of 100,000. But the law now allows for *mandatory* arrest and detention of so-called “irregular arrivals,” defined as anyone arriving in groups of two or more. Modelled on the brutally racist Australian system, where mandatory detention of refugees has been the norm since 1992, the new law has seen even more moved into the prison system. Meanwhile, deportations have soared to 15,000 per year.

If you are designated “irregular,” you have two weeks to prove your identity—while in prison! If you fail, you will be automatically detained for another six or

even 12 months. Imprisonment can be extended indefinitely. Challenged last year by a reporter with the fact that among those being held behind razor wire in detention jails are 289 children, then-immigration minister Jason Kenney sneered, “They are not jails,” describing the Toronto detention centre as a “three-star hotel with a fence around it.” We Marxists of the Trotskyist League demand asylum for refugees and an immediate end to detentions. The trade unions must be mobilized to champion the rights of the foreign-born. *Full citizenship rights for all those who have made it here!*

Tamil and Roma Refugees in Tory Crosshairs

The Tories’ pretext for automatically detaining refugees en masse came in 2010, when 490 desperate Tamil men, women and children were intercepted on the *Sun Sea*, a rusting freighter off the coast of B.C. [British Columbia]. After the Sri Lankan army’s 2009 bloodbath destroyed the remnants of the Tamil mini-

state in the north and east of the island, some 300,000 Tamils were interned in prison camps and interrogation centres. Disappearances, abductions, arrests, torture and rape by the police and military continue to be widely reported, as do deaths in custody and extrajudicial killings. Thousands fled the country, hoping to join the large Tamil diaspora here and elsewhere. We said then, and repeat today, “Asylum now for Tamil refugees!” We uphold the right to self-determination for the oppressed Tamil people, and we stood for the military defense of the Tamil Tiger insurgents, while giving these bourgeois nationalists no political support.

Amid the Tories’ furor against “human smugglers,” the *Sun Sea* refugees were thrown into prisons on B.C.’s Lower Mainland. Families were ripped apart as women and children were jailed apart from fathers and brothers. Having already proscribed the Tamil Tigers as “terrorists,” the Harper government went on an all-out witchhunt against these refugees. Tamils deported back to Lanka from Canada face arrest, imprisonment and torture.

For huge numbers of refugees, the need to escape means casting one’s fate to the high seas in rickety, overcrowded vessels like the *Sun Sea*. The route from Indonesia to Australia’s Christmas Island continues to claim the lives of asylum seekers in large numbers. Hundreds of Syrian, Somali and Ethiopian refugees have drowned off Italy’s coast. Contrary to the bourgeoisie’s ignorant, racist hysteria about “people smuggling” and “queue jumping,” people are driven to pay vast sums for passage to countries as inhospitable as Australia or Canada because these countries have made it almost impossible to get there any other way. The walls against refugees are so impenetrable that only the luckiest few ever get through.

Among the unluckiest of asylum seekers must be counted the Roma people, against whom Canada has conducted an especially vicious crusade. A provision in the 2012 anti-refugee law, designed in part to deter Roma, includes Hungary on a list of 27 supposedly “safe countries” to which asylum seekers may be rapidly deported after a hearing before a politically appointed refugee board. There is no right to appeal.

For the Roma, one of Europe’s oldest and most harshly oppressed minorities, Hungary is anything but safe. Intense nationalist reaction has spawned violent prejudice against Roma and Jews emanating from both the ruling Fidesz and the fascist Jobbik party. Life in Hungary means murderous fascist violence and systematic discrimination and poverty. Roma people throughout Europe are regularly subject to police repression and fascist pogroms, and have been expelled en masse from many European Union countries.

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NEW YORK CITY—Around 250 UPS drivers in Teamsters Local 804 walked off the job in Maspeth, Queens, on February 26 to protest the firing of longtime union activist Jairo Reyes—until they were pressed by union officials to go back to work a few hours later. On March 3, company executives broke away from official discussions with the union over potential discipline for the walk-out and hit these drivers with “working terminations,” which means they can be fired at any time. UPS also banned Teamsters business agent Liam Russertt, a leader of the job action, from all company facilities.

“Big Brown” management nationwide is notorious for vicious anti-union persecution of workers, petty disciplinary write-ups and enforcing a backbreaking pace of work. The Maspeth UPS bosses terminated Reyes, who had been on the job for 24 years, on fabricated “dishonesty” charges of punching in early without permission. In reality, he was sent packing for filing a grievance against the company, which had violated seniority rules in fixing route start times. His firing was the straw that broke the camel’s back for union members who have to put up with the company’s “culture of harassment,” not only the drivers but also the part-time inside workers who joined the protest after finishing their shifts.

Now the company has turned up the heat on the workforce. According to Russertt, “it only helps the company’s fear mongering with me not being on the job to talk to the guys.” If UPS goes ahead and fires the 250 for their elementary act of union solidarity, all Local 804 must be prepared to mobilize in action until every worker has his job back and disciplinary records are wiped clean. And it is incumbent upon the rest of New York City labor to back them up. **Reinstate Jairo Reyes! Lift the ban against Liam Russertt! No reprisals against the drivers!**

The brief exercise of union power by the Maspeth workers stands in sharp contrast to the path later charted by the Local 804 leadership. Video of the February 26 job action posted on the Internet documents the palpable anger of the workers who wanted to fight. Indeed, a phone call from local president Tim Sylvester urging everyone to go to his truck was not heeded. Workers started their routes only after the secretary-treasurer was dispatched to the facility.

Since then, union officials have built a campaign around getting capitalist Democratic Party politicians to pressure the company to “respect” their workers. On March 21, Sylvester called a press conference and rally outside the Maspeth garage, attended by about 100 workers. NYC Public Advocate Letitia James, City Council majority leader Jimmy Van Bramer and other “friend of labor” Democrats blew a lot of hot air in speeches meant to play to working-class constituents.

The Working Families Party (WFP), whose purpose is to shill for the Demo-

No Reprisals Against Queens UPS Workers!



250 Face Firing Over Walkout

CBS 2



WV Photo

Top: Hundreds of Teamsters Local 804 members at UPS walked off job in Queens to protest firing of co-worker, February 26. Below: UPS workers and supporters protest against threatened company retaliation, Queens, March 21.

cratic Party swindlers, helped the union bureaucrats organize this campaign. WFP is coauthor with MoveOn.org of one of several online petitions that have garnered 100,000 signatures in support of the victimized Teamsters with the toothless message: “Tell UPS: Firing 250 workers for protesting is wrong!” The union’s own petition demands that all UPS workers “be treated with dignity, respect and fairness.” But UPS, like other capitalist enterprises, respects nothing but the profits it squeezes out of its workforce.

It is not wrong in itself to seek allies among friendly UPS customers in the community who know and depend on the drivers. But as is normally the case, union officials are substituting a consumer campaign for mobilizing solid labor action and solidarity, a losing strategy. Allies with real potential social power are to be

found among the city unions, all currently working under expired contracts because their leaders have pinned all their hopes on the largesse of new Democratic mayor Bill de Blasio, who has made clear that he will not give without taking.

The working class can hit the capitalists where it matters, in their profits. Workers make the wheels of industry turn—or not, as when the Maspeth UPS drivers withdrew their labor on February 26. The 1997 national UPS strike reduced commerce to a crawl and wrung concessions from management, notably the promise of 10,000 full-time driver positions for part-time loaders. That struggle united black, white and Latino, part-time and full-time, younger and older workers, cutting across the divisions that weaken the working class. (See “Unchain Labor’s Power!”, WV No. 673, 5 September 1997.)

But UPS reneged on its promise, and the Teamsters bureaucracy has taken it lying down, squandering the potential power of the union.

On that score, there’s little difference between “old guard” business unionists typified by current International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) president James Hoffa Jr. and “reformers” who lionize his predecessor Ron Carey for the 1997 strike, such as the current Local 804 leadership. In the Teamsters, reform has become synonymous with inviting the capitalist government into the union to “clean up” corruption as against mobilizing the union ranks to clean house themselves. The main culprit is the Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), which in the late 1980s filed lawsuits that first opened the union’s door to the government and then delivered the blueprint for reorganizing the Teamsters to the Justice Department. The Feds have been running union elections, installing regulators and putting locals in receivership ever since.

The aim of the government in interfering in the affairs of the unions is not to ensure “democracy” but to cripple them. The career of Ron Carey is an object lesson. Having sued the union himself in the bosses’ courts, he won the 1991 election for IBT president with TDU support. Six years later, on the heels of the wildly popular UPS strike, the Feds turned on their eager accomplice in a renewed anti-union vendetta. Under the pretext of “political contribution violations,” Carey was barred from running for office again. Similarly, far from rooting out corruption, the earlier government war against Jimmy Hoffa was intended to crush his campaign for a Master Freight Agreement, a single national trucking contract.

Over the years, fake leftists like the International Socialist Organization and FightBack!news, which is associated with the Chicago-based Freedom Road Socialist Organization, have been effusive in their praise of Carey and the TDU. Such groups are incapable of telling the simple truth to the working class: The capitalist state, with its cops, courts and prisons, is the repressive apparatus that protects the profits and rule of the ruling class *against* the workers and oppressed. Instead, they peddle the lie that the government and the state power it represents are neutral and can be pressured into serving the interests of the workers.

By their appeals to the bosses’ state, union-suing “reformers” and their ostensibly socialist supporters undermine the very purpose of unions—to defend workers from the bosses. Both wings of the union bureaucracy stand for class collaboration in one form or another, especially the subordination of labor to the political fortunes of the Democratic Party. What workers need is a leadership that sets the unions on the path of class struggle against the exploiters. The watchword must be the *total* independence of the unions from the capitalists, their political parties and their state. ■

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Venezuela...

(continued from page 1)

government buyouts—represent a means by which countries under imperialist domination can achieve a degree of economic independence. But far from placing the productive wealth of society in the hands of working people, these nationalizations have helped Chávez’s cronies in the so-called *boliburguesía* (Bolivarian bourgeoisie) line their pockets.

U.S. policy in Latin America has left a centuries-long bloody trail of military interventions, American-installed dictators and death squads. It is in the interests of working people in the U.S., as well as in Venezuela, to oppose a U.S.-backed coup or other imperialist intervention in the country. At the same time, political support to *chavismo* and the Maduro regime only subordinates the Venezuelan working class to its capitalist exploiters. For this reason, during the 2004 referendum to recall Chávez, we argued for abstention rather than a no vote. As we wrote in “U.S. Imperialism’s Referendum Ploy Fails—Populist Capitalist Ruler Chávez Prevails” (WV No. 831, 3 September 2004):

“The immediate perspective that is urgently posed is not only to oppose U.S. imperialist incursions into Venezuela and elsewhere, but to fight to shatter the support of the workers movement to either Chávez or the opposition, and to forge a revolutionary internationalist workers party to lead the working class to power. This requires an intransigent fight against nationalism in Venezuela, which obscures class divisions in the country. Only the victorious struggle for working-class rule, i.e., socialist revolution throughout the Americas, will ensure land to the landless and enable the oil workers and other proletarians to enjoy the wealth created by their labor.”

Nationalist Populism: Dead End for Working People

Like Lázaro Cárdenas who ruled Mexico in the 1930s or Argentina’s Juan Perón in the 1940s and ’50s, Chávez, a former colonel who had attempted an unsuccessful military coup in 1992, was what Marxists call a bonapartist ruler. The term applies to a strongman, typically a (former) military leader like the original Napoleon Bonaparte, heading a regime that in a period of crisis elevates itself to a position of “leader of the nation.” As revolutionary Marxist Leon Trotsky explained when writing about the Cárdenas regime which expropriated the petroleum and energy industries:

“In the industrially backward countries foreign capital plays a decisive role. Hence the relative weakness of the *national* bourgeoisie in relation to the *national* proletariat. This creates special conditions of state power. The government veers between foreign and domestic capital, between the weak national bourgeoisie and the relatively powerful proletariat. This gives the government a Bonapartist character of a distinctive character. It raises itself, so to speak, above classes. Actually, it can govern either by making itself the instrument of foreign capitalism and holding the proletariat in the chains of a police dictatorship, or by maneuvering with the proletariat and even going so far as to make concessions to it, thus gaining the possibility of a certain freedom toward the foreign capitalists.”

—“Nationalized Industry and Workers’ Management” (1939)

Populist reform and neoliberal austerity are two faces of capitalist class rule in dependent countries, that is, alternate policy prescriptions available to the national bourgeoisie, as demonstrated in Venezuela itself. In 1976, President Carlos Andrés Pérez nationalized the oil industry with compensation. Buoyed by increasing oil prices, he invested heavily in social programs, expanding government employment and improving education and health care. But when Pérez was elected president again in 1989, the oil market had crashed, so he implemented massive austerity at the behest of the International Monetary Fund.

Chávez’s principal concern upon coming to power in 1998 was to solve the problem of the country’s faltering oil profits, the lifeblood of the Venezuelan bourgeoisie. He moved immediately to



Left: Cuban doctors train Venezuelan medical students at maternity hospital outside Caracas, 2011. Right: Reactionary mob sets fire to Cuban flag during anti-government protest, March 7.



Reuters photos

discipline the oil workers union and to otherwise increase the efficiency of the state-owned oil industry, while pressing the OPEC oil cartel to jack up prices. It was for such efforts, and in the interest of political stability, that Chávez was initially *supported* by much of the ruling class. This included not least his former comrades in the military high command, who were instrumental in restoring him to power after the short-lived 2002 coup.

Chávez was lucky: the price of oil rose from \$10.87 per barrel in 1998 to \$96.13 in 2013. However, the price of oil is notoriously unstable and the United States, the largest recipient of Venezuela’s oil, has cut its imports. The social welfare programs introduced by Chávez cannot be sustained in the long term under capitalism. With declining productivity dragging down its economy, Venezuela has managed to keep afloat in no small part due to billions of dollars in loans from the Chinese deformed workers state in exchange for oil.

Most of the Venezuelan capitalist class enriched itself by siphoning off the oil

lators and sold for higher prices. Hoarding is reported to be widespread. The traditional “market solution,” i.e., relaxation of price and currency controls and government subsidies introduced by Chávez, would no doubt spur private capitalists to produce and sell more products. Just as in Colombia and other Latin American countries, such measures would be good for the balance sheets of the capitalists, but disastrous for everybody else.

In Venezuela today, the poor are not starving, but shortages of basic products have made conditions more miserable. So long as the productive wealth of society is in private hands, production will be guided by what increases capitalist profits. The masses will remain subject to exploitation and oppression, and economic development will be subordinated to the dictates of the imperialist-dominated world market. There can be no permanent amelioration of the plight of the urban and rural poor without the smashing of the capitalist state and the overthrow of the capitalist social order. The perspective of the International Communist League is



Reuters

San Cristóbal, February 27: Food shortages have led to long lines outside supermarkets.

wealth of the country. Chávez’s use of this revenue for social reforms angered elements of the bourgeoisie who had long seen this money as their personal slush fund. When Chávez implemented price and currency controls and nationalizations, the divide deepened. Some one million wealthy and middle-class Venezuelans have left the country from the time Chávez came to power. Many have sent their money abroad—including to Miami, the snake pit of anti-Communist Cuban exiles. In response, the government instituted more price and currency controls, which made it more difficult for private companies to get capital, hardening opposition to the government. As a result, many capitalist manufacturers, such as in the auto industry, have closed up shop, increasing Venezuela’s dependency on imported goods.

To boost profits, many private stores have refused to sell products at the official government rates, insisting on higher prices. Government-subsidized staples are illegally exported to Colombia by specu-

lators and sold for higher prices. Hoarding is reported to be widespread. The traditional “market solution,” i.e., relaxation of price and currency controls and government subsidies introduced by Chávez, would no doubt spur private capitalists to produce and sell more products. Just as in Colombia and other Latin American countries, such measures would be good for the balance sheets of the capitalists, but disastrous for everybody else.

Left Apologists for Chavismo

Most self-described socialist organizations flocked to support Hugo Chávez’s “Bolivarian Revolution” and continue to act as the leftist marketing department for Maduro. Alan Woods, who leads the International Marxist Tendency (IMT), is prominent among these types, boasting of being a “Trotskyist” adviser to first Chávez and now Maduro. The March 5 article “Carry Out the Legacy of Hugo Chávez!” (marxist.com) by Woods lauds the toiling masses for having “saved the Revolution and pushed it forward” and beseeches them to buckle down against the “reformists” and “bureaucrats” in the Caracas government.

In the declaration “Hugo Chávez Is

Dead: The Fight for Socialism Lives!” (6 March 2013) issued prior to the election of Maduro last year, the IMT elaborated: “Hugo Chávez died before completing the great task he had set before himself: the carrying out of the socialist revolution in Venezuela. It is now up to the workers and peasants—the real motor force of the Bolivarian Revolution—to carry this task out to the end.” They go on to implore: “We must ensure that the next government will carry out a socialist policy.”

The IMT would have the working masses serve as foot soldiers to bolster the position of Maduro, thereby helping to prop up capitalist rule. The glorification of a former army colonel and his acolyte, who have been at the helm of the repressive Venezuelan capitalist state for the last 16 years, disarms the workers and binds them to a wing of Venezuela’s ruling class. The only reliable defense against capitalist immiseration, whether imposed by the rightist opposition or by the Maduro government, is the independent struggle of the working class. And the fight for socialism can advance only if the proletariat struggles under its *own* banner. Socialism will result not from the “Bolivarian Revolution” that does nothing to challenge capitalist property but from workers revolution that sweeps away the bourgeois state apparatus and expropriates capitalist property.

The IMT sees in the “Bolivarian Revolution” a repeat of the Cuban Revolution. As IMT spokesman Jorge Martin put it, the “dynamic of action and reaction of the Venezuelan revolution reminds us in a very powerful way of the first years of the Cuban revolution” (marxist.com, 1 March 2005). Such a comparison, though, has no basis in reality.

When Castro’s forces marched into Havana on 1 January 1959 culminating several years of guerrilla war, the bourgeois army and the rest of the capitalist state apparatus that had propped up the U.S.-backed Batista dictatorship collapsed in disarray. Initially, the heterogeneous petty-bourgeois rebels were committed to no more than a program of radical-democratic reforms, but under the pressure of U.S. imperialism would begin a series of nationalizations. By the time Castro declared Cuba “socialist” in 1961, the Cuban bourgeoisie and the U.S. imperialists and their CIA and Mafia henchmen had all fled and capitalist property had been expropriated. Quite unlike Venezuela, where the bourgeoisie is fully intact as a class, what was established in Cuba in 1960-61 was a deformed workers state: a society in which private property is collectivized, but a parasitic bureaucratic caste, not the workers, holds political power.

The fact that a petty-bourgeois guerrilla movement could overthrow capitalist rule was due to historically exceptional circumstances—the absence of the working class as a contender for power in its own right, hostile imperialist encirclement and the flight of the national bourgeoisie, and a lifeline thrown by the Soviet Union. The Cuban workers state itself was modeled on the Soviet Union after its bureaucratic degeneration at the hands of the Stalin-

Refugees...

(continued from page 6)

This has not stopped Tory politicians from smearing Roma refugees as “bogus.” Last year, Canada sponsored massive billboards in the Hungarian city of Miskolc (a former industrial centre afflicted by poverty and mass unemployment since Hungary’s capitalist counterrevolution in 1989), warning would-be migrants against seeking asylum in Canada.

For the last year, Hungarian Roma have been slated for “fast track” deportation. Classrooms in neighbourhoods like Toronto’s Parkdale, where hundreds of Roma children attended school (many for the first time), were emptied. As students and teachers mourned the sudden removal of friends and classmates, a government news release boasted of reducing the number of Roma asylum seekers by 98 percent.

“Free Market” Misery, Locked-Down Borders

The torments inflicted on people who thought they’d made it to safety in Canada are the product of decades of policies enacted by both Liberal and Conservative governments. While the Canadian bourgeoisie likes to cultivate an image of “tolerance” and “inclusion,” it was only in 1967 that demand for new sources of labour mandated an end to the longstanding, deeply racist colour bar on immigration. Legal niceties like citizenship and other democratic rights have never been a barrier to the rulers. During World War II, they interned some 23,000 Japanese Canadians, robbing them of their property. After the war, thousands were deported to war-ravaged Japan, where many had never lived.

The capitalist class has always wielded immigration policy as a weapon to divide workers and drive down labour costs. The flow of people into the country is regulated to serve but one principle: the need to increase profits. Today’s ever tighter laws against immigrants and refugees are another link in the new chains being forged for working people by capitalist governments from North America to West Europe and beyond. Such countries lord it over the masses of the neocolonial world under the global system of imperialism.

Bolshevik leader V.I. Lenin identified imperialism as “a world system of colonial oppression and financial strangulation of the overwhelming majority of the population of the world by a handful of ‘advanced’ countries” (*Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, 1916). The counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union, the world’s first workers state, in 1991-92 removed the chief obstacle to unbridled imperialist pillage across the planet and laid a basis for intensified interimperialist rivalries.

In Asia, Africa and Latin America, this imperialist system of subjugation drives untold millions into terrible poverty. As

the screws are tightened, local ruling classes promote religious fundamentalism or spawn national and ethnic conflicts which typically culminate in state repression, pogromist violence or both. Whether by economic strangulation or violent social convulsion, whole communities find themselves forced to flee their homes as a matter of survival.

For a Class-Struggle Fight to Defend Refugees!

The same capitalist class that is destroying our unions and shredding our pensions and every other social benefit won through struggle is waging this racist war on refugees. It is in the direct interest of the multiracial working class to bring its enormous potential power to bear in defense of asylum seekers and other migrants.

Filipino health care workers, Portuguese and Latino construction workers, Sikh truckers: immigrant workers, including the undocumented, form a strategic core of the proletariat. This underscores that any effective fight against the capitalists’ attacks must go hand in hand with a struggle against the anti-immigrant racism which the bosses use to divide the working class along racial and ethnic lines. Fighting for the rights of immigrants and refugees is an elementary act of self-defense for the working class.

Stoking antagonisms among working people so as to divide and poison their struggles is a cornerstone of the profit system. The bosses’ agents in this are the pro-capitalist union misleaders and the social democrats of the New Democratic Party [NDP], who push the lie that Canadian workers have a common national interest with Canadian capitalists.

This is what explains the aid and comfort the NDP has given to the Tory war on refugees. The party’s platitudes about refugee rights ring pretty hollow against the fact that the NDP backed the Tories’ 2010 “Balanced Refugee Reform Act.” This law greatly sped up deportations of failed asylum seekers from supposedly safe “designated countries” and limited their appeals. Prominent NDP MP [Member of Parliament] Olivia Chow bragged about helping the Tories to “fast-track” the law. Other New Democrats have joined the outcry against “human smuggling,” and Chow herself demanded more money for immigration cops. When the even harsher Bill C-31 was introduced, the NDP’s immigration critic Don Davies praised Tory minister Kenney for seeking a “fast and fair determination process.” As to refugees who don’t make the cut, his message was, “deport them out of Canada swiftly.”

This is the NDP in opposition, proving its bona fides to the ruling class. When in power provincially, the NDP has more than once shown its suitability to rule on behalf of capitalism, carrying out attacks on the foreign-born while going after the workers. In Ontario in the early 1990s, an NDP government presided over a regime of harsh capitalist austerity, including



AP
Above: Roma villagers in eastern Hungary flee homes in fear of fascist vigilante “patrols.” Inset: Canadian government billboard in Hungary warns against seeking asylum in Canada.

moving to cancel medical coverage for refugees and foreign students. In B.C. in 1999, the ruling New Democrats whipped up a racist backlash against several boatloads of Chinese migrants.

Many unions have spoken out against the government’s anti-refugee campaign. The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) made the record with a letter protesting Harper’s anti-immigrant Bill C-31 in March 2012. However, the nationalist protectionism pushed by the union misleaders serves to fuel nativist reaction that scapegoats not only workers abroad, but foreign-born workers here at home.

Two years ago, Steelworkers union leaders in B.C. unleashed an ugly, China-bashing campaign against temporary Chinese workers hired to work at a northern B.C. coal mine. In support of this drive, a CLC news release began, “CLC wants work permits rescinded for offshore miners,” a call for the Chinese workers to be barred or expelled from Canada.

The Tories have vastly expanded the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, whereby immigrant workers are brought into the country as a pool of superexploited cheap labour. Their temporary status makes them especially vulnerable to abuse, as any assertion of their rights can mean not only the loss of employment but also deportation. A class-struggle labour leadership would counter these repressive measures with a fight to *unionize* these workers, demanding equal pay for equal work. It would combat all forms of anti-immigrant racism, demanding an end to the abusive Temporary Foreign Worker Program and full citizenship rights for all (see “Union Tops’ Ugly Campaign Against Foreign Workers in B.C.,” *SC* No. 175, Winter 2012/2013).

From the early history of the workers movement in Canada, militant immigrant

workers led the way in combatting the racial, religious and ethnic divisions fostered by the rulers to poison and defeat class struggle. For the Communist Party of the 1920s—whose base was among Ukrainian, Finnish and Jewish immigrant workers—this meant direct political struggles with reactionary bureaucrats leading the established unions. Then as now, relatively privileged and conservative layers within the workers movement acted as the crucial transmission belt for anti-immigrant chauvinism among the workers.

The NDP social democrats and their reformist camp followers seek to con working people with the lie that with the help of petitions, lobbying and the occasional demonstration, the capitalist state can be pressured to adopt a fair or “non-racist” immigration policy. But the barbarities of capitalist imperialism cannot be remedied without a proletarian socialist revolution that takes power out of the hands of this ruling class. We communists seek to win politically advanced workers and youth to the understanding that the workers have a common interest not with their employers, but with their class brothers and sisters in Asia, the Americas, Africa and Europe.

It will be through a series of victorious socialist revolutions around the globe that the working class in power will be able to put an end to the needless suffering which the daily workings of the profit system generate across the planet. Decaying capitalism spells only poverty, racism and war—let it perish! For our part, we emphatically echo the call of the *Communist Manifesto*, penned over 150 years ago by the young revolutionaries Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. “Working men of all countries unite!” affirmed the *Manifesto*: “The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.”■

ist usurpers beginning in 1923-24. As we did with the Soviet degenerated workers state before its destruction, we call for the unconditional military defense of Cuba and for workers political revolution to oust the ruling bureaucratic caste.

The Castro bureaucracy in Cuba embraces the Stalinist dogma of “socialism in one country.” Thus, it denies the need for proletarian revolution internationally, not only elsewhere in Latin America but particularly in the advanced capitalist world. Further damaging the defense of Cuba, the bureaucracy has cozied up to and provided “revolutionary” cover for all kinds of anti-working-class capitalist regimes. Meanwhile, various “market reform” measures introduced in response to Cuba’s severe post-Soviet economic problems have brought widening inequality (see “Cuba: Economic Crisis and ‘Market Reforms,’” *WV* No. 986, 16 September 2011).

In those countries like Venezuela where capitalism emerged belatedly, the bourgeoisies are too weak, too fearful of the proletariat and too dependent on the world

market—dominated by the U.S., Europe and Japan—to break the chains of imperialist subjugation and resolve mass poverty and other burning social problems. The only way forward is, as Trotsky stated in *The Permanent Revolution* (1930), the fight for “the dictatorship of the proletariat as the leader of the subjugated nation, above all of its peasant masses.” The dic-

tatorship of the proletariat would place on the order of the day not only democratic but also socialist tasks, such as collectivizing the economy, giving a mighty impulse to international socialist revolution. Only the victory of the proletariat in the advanced capitalist world would ensure against bourgeois restoration and secure the possibility of bringing socialist

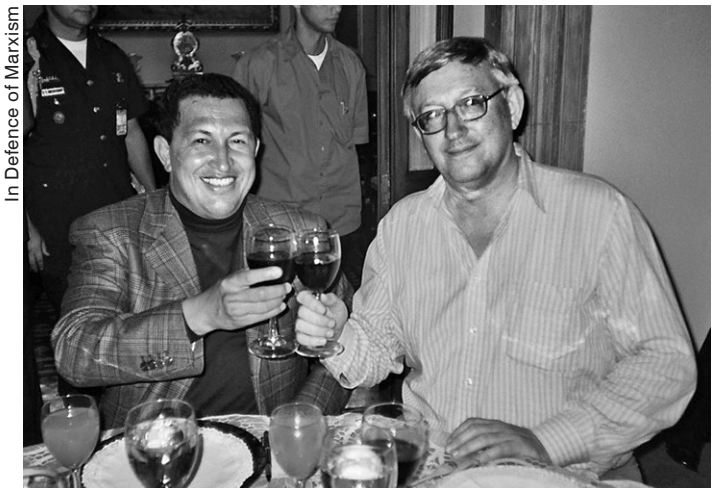
construction to its conclusion.

It is the task of Marxists to break illusions in bourgeois populists like Chávez in order to forge revolutionary parties of the working class. As we wrote in “Venezuela: Populist Nationalism vs. Proletarian Revolution” (*WV* No. 860, 9 December 2005):

“History will reserve a harsh verdict for those ‘leftists’ who promote one or another left-talking capitalist *caudillo*. The way forward for the downtrodden throughout the Americas does not lie through painting nationalist strongmen as revolutionaries and populist forays as revolutions. It lies instead in constructing national sections of a reformed Fourth International in the spirit of uncompromising revolutionary hostility to any and all kinds of capitalist rule.”

South of the Río Bravo, such parties will have to be built in political struggle against widespread illusions in populism and nationalism. In the U.S., a revolutionary workers party will be built in the struggle to break the proletariat from the capitalist Democratic Party and to mobilize it in solidarity with all those oppressed and exploited by U.S. imperialism around the world.■

International Marxist Tendency’s Alan Woods (right), “Trotskyist” adviser to Chávez (left) and Maduro.



In Defence of Marxism

Vancouver...

(continued from page 12)

would-be scabs aware that strikebreaking would be dangerous to their health. Vindictively, police and security forces were mobilized to continually film the strikers. The PMV also threatened to terminate the permits of striking UTA truckers, which would bar them from future work at the port. On March 19, the British Columbia Liberal government, egged on by the Conservative rulers in Ottawa, announced that it would enact legislation to break the strike by Unifor workers.

Strikers responded to these moves with defiance. As Unifor’s B.C. Area Director Gavin McGarrigle said, “What I’m hearing from some of the members on the picket line is they’re considering going to jail” (Canadian Press, 20 March). Earlier, Unifor and UTA members had both overwhelmingly rejected a settlement proposed by a government mediator. Now, rather than leave the UTA alone on the picket lines, an angry and militant Unifor membership pushed the union leaders to take an uncharacteristically defiant stand. After flying into B.C., Unifor national president Jerry Dias announced that the union would refuse to obey back-to-work legislation and demanded an immediate reopening of negotiations.

Though it represents only a minority of the port truckers, Unifor is part of the largest private-sector union in Canada, with a \$135 million strike fund. When the union declared that it would defy the strike-breaking law, the government blinked, abandoning its hardline “no negotiations” posture. Half a day later, both Unifor and the UTA had a deal that saw the government make numerous concessions.

Labour’s Got to Play Hardball to Win!

These events hold important lessons for the whole labour movement, which has seen one defeat after the other thanks to the cap-in-hand begging to the bosses that most union bureaucrats call “bargaining.” Indeed, five years ago the leaders of the Canadian Auto Workers, one of the unions that merged to found Unifor last summer, surrendered to the auto bosses’ demands for wage and benefit cuts of \$19 an hour.

In contrast, the determination and unity of the UTA and Unifor truckers temporarily put some steel in the backbone of their leaders and forced the government and port authority to withdraw the strike-breaking bill, the punitive lawsuit and the revoking of permits. The settlement also includes improved wages and trip rates as well as payments for wait times. However, it states that the PMV will only rescind permit suspensions “where no criminal charges have been laid against any driver or operator by the police.” While no one has yet been charged for activities on the picket lines, this measure could open the



Kristian Secher/The Tye

Unity in struggle of unionized Unifor workers and the non-union United Truckers Association on display during recent strike.

door to reprisals. In the event of any retaliation, all labour must stand in defense of the strikers.

Port truckers have immense potential social power. They are a vital part of the waterfront workforce and a key link in the worldwide cargo chain. Yet large numbers remain ensnared by the “owner-operator” system that downloads all the risks and costs of trucking onto individual truckers. This system also impacts negatively on the political outlook and consciousness of many truckers by giving rise to an entrepreneurial mentality. Do they identify with the workers, or do they aspire to become a boss? The idea that by owning your own truck you can get ahead and maybe even start your own business is a myth that does not stand up against the harsh reality.

Some 150 cutthroat trucking companies operate at the Vancouver port, fueling the pernicious practice of undercutting that has seen some drivers forced to work for even less than the already-low standard rates. An additional burden is that port truckers must meet the costs of expensive emission controls in the name of keeping the port “green.”

In 2005, the port truckers, then largely owner-operators, struck for 47 days. In the aftermath, the port authority imposed a moratorium on new owner-operator permits. The result is that today a slight majority of truckers, 54 percent, are employees rather than owner-operators. Going into this year’s strike, drivers had not seen a wage or rate increase for *eight years*; many were making less than they did in 2006. Average pay was just \$15.69 an hour, much less than the \$23 made by other B.C. truckers, with employees getting slightly more than owner-operators. More than half are paid by the trip rather than by the hour and work eleven-hour days under gruelling conditions. Cutbacks inside the port have contributed to longer wait times—up to six hours—which were hitherto unpaid. Less than a third of the

workers get health and pension benefits. As one trucker told our comrades on the picket line, “We were slaves in India and we are slaves in Canada.”

Like the truckers that work U.S. coastal ports, Vancouver port truckers remain largely non-union. Recent years have seen repeated protests and strikes by port truckers in cities up and down the East and Gulf Coasts as well as the West Coast, from Los Angeles to Seattle, but the Vancouver strike was by far the most sustained. In the course of this struggle, many of the divisions between unionized Unifor workers and the non-union UTA fell away as strikers stood shoulder to shoulder on the picket lines, their banners intermingled. But organizing all the port truckers into a common union—part of organizing all port workers—remains a vital task.

As they return to work, many port truckers are already wondering how the gains won in the new deal will be enforced. Indeed, truckers at a mass UTA meeting on March 27 heard that some 60 men had been fired by trucking companies who claimed no work was available. Most have since been rehired. But this underlines the workforce’s vulnerability to the whims of the bosses. Instead of the parasitic, profit-gouging trucking companies deciding who gets to work, port truckers need to be fully unionized with their own union hiring hall and a strong seniority system to undercut favouritism and reprisals.

Overturning the whole owner-operator system that enslaves drivers to the trucking companies will take hard class struggle by all unions on the waterfront. Coupled with a fight for all drivers to get full union-scale wages and benefits, the entire owner-operator scam could be shattered. Port truckers would come to view joining the ranks of organized labour as wage workers as a far better alternative to their present destitution.

For United Struggle by All Port Workers!

The truckers fought hard and managed to shut down a good part of PMV’s operations, but they stood alone as the rest of the labour movement did little to support this vital class battle. What was posed was a struggle to shut down all the terminals, from Burrard Inlet to the Fraser River, bringing Canada’s only major West Coast port to a standstill. Such a class-struggle perspective requires confronting and defying the bosses’ laws. Tactics like secondary boycotts, hot-cargoing and sympathy strikes are what built the unions in the first place. Today, however, they are more and more alien to a pro-capitalist labour leadership that is mired in legalism and loyalty to the social-democratic New Democratic Party (NDP).

It took three weeks for the slick bureaucrats who lead the B.C. Federation of Labour to even call a rally in support of the truckers. Some 1,500 hospital workers, teachers and others joined the protest in downtown Vancouver on March 21. But the union movement should have been putting its muscle to work on the picket lines, helping to ensure that nothing moved in the port.

Criminally, leaders of the International

Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) did the opposite. Chained to the job by the legalistic union tops, longshoremen continued to load and unload ships. The ILWU brass did not express even pro forma solidarity with the port truckers. Some of the South Asian UTA truckers have also reported being harassed and bullied by members of the ILWU, and examples of racist conduct were mentioned to our supporters on the picket lines. This is poisonous and can only weaken the position of all port workers in the face of the profit-hungry bosses.

Longshoremen should recall that many decades ago they were in a situation not so different from that of the truckers today, treated as “contract labour,” forced to line up for the morning “shape up” in which they were hired by corrupt gang bosses based on favouritism and kickbacks. Their strikes were broken and their unions wrecked. The solidarity of truckers at the San Francisco port was crucial to the eventual victory of the 1934 strike that laid the basis for the founding of the ILWU as a powerful industrial union. The workers movement will either advance as one or be thrown back separately.

Immigrant Workers: Key to Class Struggle

The truckers’ action sparked widespread sympathy among the large Punjabi community in the Vancouver area. Sikh temples fed strikers while local Punjabi radio stations gave the strike extensive coverage. On March 21, strikers and supporters flooded a Skytrain transit station in the heavily South Asian suburb of Surrey during the morning rush hour to galvanize support.

The strike showed how crucial immigrant and other minority workers are to the class struggle, but it also underscored their vulnerability. At least one boss threatened a trucker with deportation if he backed the strike. This drives home that it is in the direct interest of the labour movement to defend *all* workers, regardless of status, while fighting for full citizenship rights for all immigrants.

When supporters of the Trotskyist League visited the picket lines, strikers snapped up copies of *Workers Vanguard* with the article “For a Class-Struggle Fight to Organize Port Truckers!” (No. 1038, 24 January). On March 24 at Deltaport, a group of some 50 truckers applauded a TL representative as he declared our solidarity and saluted the strikers’ determination. Speaking in Punjabi, he explained that we are a Marxist organization and “look to workers as the social power to overthrow this capitalist state.” He continued, “Whether it is the NDP, Liberals or Conservatives, they have always tried to break picket lines and force workers back to work.” Indeed, every time it has run the B.C. provincial government, the NDP has upheld capitalist rule, including through breaking workers strikes, from pulp, rail and other workers in 1975 to school support workers in 2000.

The labour movement is under sustained attack at every level as unions, jobs, pensions and every other benefit are shredded. The response of the union bureaucrats has overwhelmingly been marked by cowardice, defeatism and a paralyzing acceptance of the bosses’ laws and rules. The outcome of the Vancouver port truckers’ struggle gives a taste of what would be possible if workers social power was unleashed around a consistent class-struggle program.

For the workers to prevail against the exploiters, they must be armed with the understanding that labour and capital have no common interests. This perspective requires a political fight against the pro-capitalist union misleaders and their NDP political partners. The working people need their own multiracial workers party, which would be in the forefront of the struggles against union-busting and act as a beacon for workers and the oppressed everywhere. Only in this way can the workers go forward to their own class rule, ripping the means of production from the exploiters through socialist revolution and placing them in the hands of those whose labour makes this society run. ■

SPARTACIST LEAGUE/U.S. Local Directory and Public Offices

Web site: www.icl-fi.org • E-mail address: vanguard@tiac.net

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

Chicago.....	Box 6441, Main PO, Chicago, IL 60680, (312) 563-0441 chicagospartacist@sbcglobal.net Public Office: 1st Sat. of every month, 2-5 p.m., and by appointment, 222 S. Morgan (Buzzer 23)
Los Angeles	Box 29574, Los Feliz Sta., Los Angeles, CA 90029, (213) 380-8239 slsycla@sbcglobal.net Public Office: Sat. 2-5 p.m., 3806 Beverly Blvd., Room 215
New York	Box 3381, Church St. Sta., New York, NY 10008, (212) 267-1025 nysl@tiac.net Public Office: 1st Sat. of every month, 1-4 p.m., and by appointment, 299 Broadway, Suite 318, Manhattan
Oakland.....	Box 29497, Oakland, CA 94604, (510) 839-0851 slbayarea@fastmail.net Public Office: Sat. 1-4 p.m., 1904 Franklin (Buzzer #407)

TROTSKYIST LEAGUE OF CANADA/LIGUE TROTSKYSTE DU CANADA

Montréal.....	CP 83 Succ. Place-d’Armes, Montréal QC H2Y 3E9, (514) 728-7578 trotskyiste.montreal@gmail.com
Toronto	Box 7198, Station A, Toronto, ON M5W 1X8, (416) 593-4138 spartcan@on.aibn.com
Vancouver.....	Box 2717, Main P.O., Vancouver, BC V6B 3X2, (604) 687-0353 trotskyist_vancouver@shawcable.com

Harlem...

(continued from page 12)

indicating that a dangerous leak had fueled the explosion. Natural gas trapped below the street can move horizontally, finding its way into nearby buildings. National Transportation Safety Board investigators later found a leak at the eight-inch gas main, which had sections of both cast-iron and plastic pipe. One natural gas safety expert noted: “If I lived near an 1887 small-diameter cast iron main, I’m living next to a ticking time bomb.” Indeed, just a week after the Harlem explosion, a leak was discovered from a crack in a 108-year-old cast-iron main in the Bronx, forcing the evacuation of two apartment buildings.

New York City still has about 3,000 miles of cast-iron pipe delivering gas. Con Ed reported an astonishing 105,000 gas leaks in the city between January 2009 and the beginning of last month, 12,000 of which were due to corroded pipes, in company filings with the federal Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration. And New York is just the tip of the iceberg. There are more than 1.2 million miles of gas-main pipes in the U.S. Last year, the number of reported gas leaks averaged about one for every eight miles of pipe. Widespread gas-line defects such as faulty welding were highlighted by the September 2010 pipeline explosion in the San Francisco suburb of San Bruno that killed eight people and destroyed 38 homes.

A potential contributing factor to the fatal East Harlem gas leak reportedly was an earlier water-main break that undermined the soil, creating a sinkhole in front of the two buildings. The water main was installed in 1897, and the typical NYC water main is almost 70 years old. There have been nearly 400 water-main breaks annually since 1998.

The widely despised Con Ed—the city’s main energy trust and the oldest company on the NY Stock Exchange—has allowed its infrastructure to crumble. The money that should have been spent on maintaining and replacing pipes has instead gone toward boosting profits for the company’s private investors. Now the utility is under a modicum of pressure to replace its decrepit piping and service equipment, which it plans to do at a snail’s pace. Since issuing a 2010 “long-range plan,” Con Ed has replaced old gas pipe throughout NYC at a rate of 65 miles per year, which would take over 35 years to complete.

When it weighed in, the New York state Public Service Commission (PSC) pounded the table...and ordered Con Ed to make it 70 miles of replacement pipe per year, shaving a few years off the project. Contrary to the myth that government utility regulators like the PSC protect the “public interest,” the actual mission of such bodies is to help the utility companies achieve a satisfactory return on investment. That’s why a truly accelerated infrastructure upgrade program coming from the PSC is a pipe dream. In the meantime, the number of people who will die or be severely injured as a result of widespread gas leaks in the city is just another integer in the cost-benefit analysis, that is, the death calculus of capitalism.

Capitalist Rulers Let Infrastructure Rot

When American capitalism was in its ascendancy, the bourgeoisie allocated funds for major public infrastructure projects out of its own self-interest, such as providing efficient transportation for its goods and workforce. No longer. Since the 1970s, countless factories have rusted into the ground after the capitalist owners threw workers on the scrap heap and moved production elsewhere in a bid to boost flagging profit margins. Alongside the ravaging of the country’s productive forces, the capitalist rulers have scuttled maintenance of roads, bridges, transit systems, airports, power grids, dams and water supplies—the very things needed for society to function. Meanwhile, the life expectancy of the systems built in earlier

times is either running out or well past. New York City graphically highlights the state of infrastructure nationwide as well as the anarchic irrationality of the capitalist system. While the bourgeois media in the U.S. gets preachy about corruption or negligence when buildings or bridges topple in Third World countries, it is a different story when closer to home. Here in the financial capital of U.S. imperialism, 47 bridges have been found structurally deficient, old buildings collapse, construction cranes fall, underground steam pipes and electrical transformers explode and trains derail. Not to mention the flood-prone subways, where over one-third of signals have exceeded their “useful life.”

Our article “Capitalists Starve Infrastructure: Working People Die” (WV No. 897, 31 August 2007) recounted a similar list of disasters, including the explosion of an 83-year-old Con Ed steam pipe in Midtown Manhattan at the height of the evening rush hour and the sudden collapse of a Minneapolis bridge that killed 13. We noted: “For nearly four decades the government has slashed infrastructure spending so much that the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) 2005 report card gives an overall grade of ‘D’ (poor) to the country’s infrastructure as a whole.” Eight years later, the ASCE gives an overall grade of “D+” and estimates that it would cost \$3.6 trillion to bring infrastructure up to par.



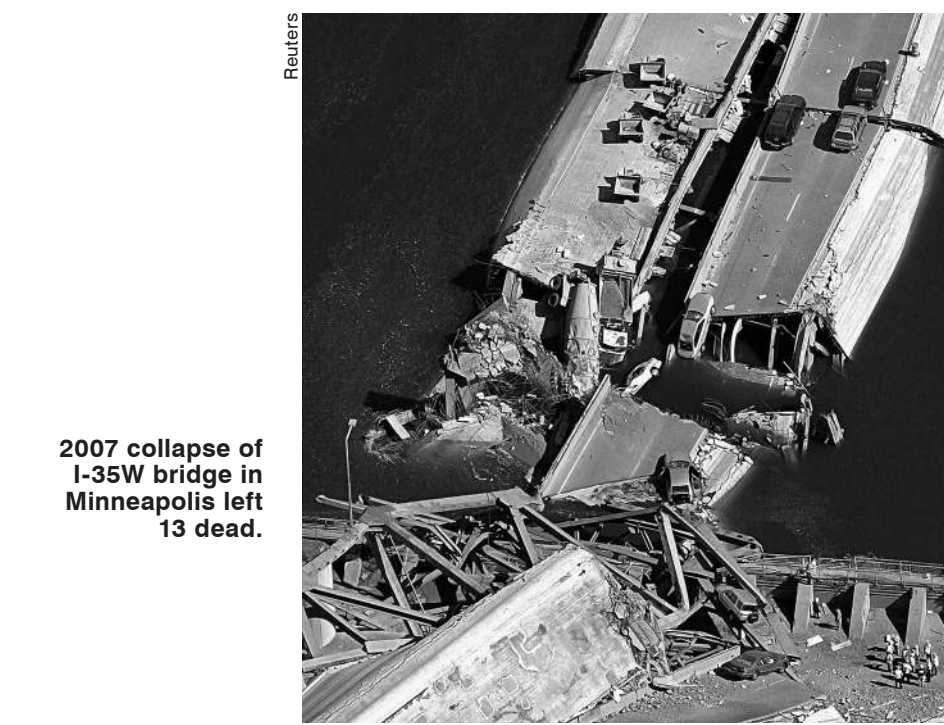
New York City: Locked out Con Ed union members rally with transit workers outside company headquarters, July 2012.

In recent years, President Barack Obama has given lip service to repairing the nation’s aging infrastructure, at times promising money and jobs that have never materialized. When his latest proposal to fund highway and other improvements met resistance in Congress, Obama scolded Republicans who “just don’t want to pay.” But neither does the president, whose best offer is a drop in the bucket of what is actually needed. The fact is that Obama and other Democratic Party politicians, no less than the Republicans, represent the capitalist ruling class that has no interest in pouring money into the overhaul of decrepit infrastructure, because it doesn’t immediately benefit the bottom line.

For a Planned Socialist Economy!

Since the late 1990s, staffing at gas utilities nationwide has been cut by 20 percent while consumer demand has increased by 20 percent, leading to longer hours for utility workers, more service interruptions and slower response times during system outages. As of last year, Con Ed’s unionized workforce, represented mainly by Utility Workers Union of America (UWUA) Local 1-2, was at its lowest level in a decade. Management has not only undermanned the operation but also ruthlessly squeezed Local 1-2 members to work more for less, culminating in a lockout in 2012. With the city suffocating under a deadly heat wave at the time, Con Ed was more than willing to imperil the lives and health of the poor, sick, elderly and young in order to ratchet up the exploitation of UWUA workers.

When Superstorm Sandy inundated NYC and the surrounding area a few months later, Local 1-2 members were on the frontlines putting in long hours to



2007 collapse of I-35W bridge in Minneapolis left 13 dead.

restore electricity, not least in the poor and working-class neighborhoods that the city administration all but abandoned. Afterward, the union issued an “Assessment of Restoration Efforts” (February 2013) that detailed the damage done by Con Ed’s “run it until it breaks” mentality whereby “ongoing maintenance has been replaced by emergency repairs, which are conducted only when equipment fails.” The utility was inviting catastrophe, and it still is, by

ble” path to a “progressive agenda” means givebacks in return for long-delayed raises or back pay, however insufficient. Less staff, longer hours and the slashing of health benefits are an inherently unsafe combination for utility, transit and all the other workers pushed to the breaking point as they maintain the decaying infrastructure of New York City.

It is high time to replace the union bureaucracy with a leadership committed to mobilizing labor’s power independent of the state agencies and politicians of the class enemy. A fighting labor movement would enforce safety standards and shut down structures and facilities that endanger people, as well as insist on a massive program of public works. It would engage in struggle to organize the unorganized and for jobs for all through a shorter workweek at full union wages. Such battles must be directed toward ending the rule of the capitalist class that in its twilight has put a death grip on society.

It is not difficult to develop a rational plan to install and maintain modern pipelines in the city or to provide gas-leak detectors for every building to avoid man-made disasters like the East Harlem blast. But this won’t happen any time soon, if at all, since the capitalists and their political parties and government decide what gets done based on what maximizes profits. In 1977, after a citywide blackout brought about by inadequacies in Con Ed’s electrical infrastructure, we called for workers to expropriate Con Ed without compensation (see “Get Con Ed, Not the Ghettos,” WV No. 167, 22 July 1977). This demand was linked to the struggle to forge a revolutionary workers party that fights for a workers government.

The fatal explosion in East Harlem lays bare yet again the grim reality of capitalist America. The fundamental needs of society will keep going unmet as long as the capitalist order remains intact. The only way out of this impasse is for the proletariat to seize the productive wealth in society from the greedy and irresponsible bourgeois rulers and begin building a collectivized, planned economy based on social need, not profit. ■

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WORKERS VANGUARD

For a Class-Struggle Fight to Organize All Port Workers!

Port Truckers Strike Beats Back Bosses' Attacks

Vancouver, B.C.

The following article was written by our comrades of the Trotskyist League/Ligue Trotskyiste, Canadian section of the International Communist League.

After a bitter month-long strike, some 1,600 Vancouver, British Columbia, port truckers returned to work on March 27 with a settlement that includes significant gains. The strike began on February 26 when more than 1,200 mostly non-union drivers, members of the United Truckers Association (UTA), walked off the job demanding higher pay rates and shorter wait times at the port. On March 10, they were joined by about 400 unionized truckers in Unifor-Vancouver Container Truckers' Association.

The strike, waged by a workforce that is mainly Punjabi, became one of the most prolonged waterfront labour battles seen on the North American West Coast in years. Facing down attacks by the port

authority, the trucking companies and the federal and provincial governments, these heavily immigrant drivers stood firm, powerfully demonstrating that even a fairly small number of workers can have a huge impact when they act collectively.

Vancouver is the largest export port in North America. As grain and forest products began to pile up in containers outside the port, the Port Metro Vancouver (PMV) bosses went after the UTA with a vindictive lawsuit, claiming that the strike was costing up to \$885 [US \$800] million a week and causing untold harm, including "to Canada itself." Braying about "violence," the PMV got an injunction prohibiting pickets on port property only days into the strike. Nevertheless, the determined strikers succeeded in choking off the movement of cargo. Truckers protested and picketed outside the terminals every day, while making

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Spartacist Canada

March 24: UTA/Unifor port truckers picket at Deltaport. Month-long strike stood down government strikebreaking, won gains.

U.S. Infrastructure: Ticking Time Bomb East Harlem Gas Explosion

The five-story buildings at 1644 and 1646 Park Avenue in East Harlem were reduced to a three-story heap of brick and twisted steel after a horrific explosion, triggered by a gas leak, on March 12. The blast sent tremors across this heavily Latino and black neighborhood. All told, eight people died from smoke inhalation, severe burns or the crushing impact of the rubble, and over 60 were injured. A young woman who lived nearby described the scene: "We saw people flying out of the windows. Those are my neighbors."

Consolidated Edison CEO John McAvoy immediately tried to evade culpability by grotesquely chiding the people of Harlem for not doing enough to report the gas leak earlier. In his words, a call alerting Con Ed to the problem nearly 20 minutes before the explosion "was a low priority" because more residents had not phoned. Also absolving the utility giant was New York City mayor and liberal darling Bill de Blasio, who offered that the explosion was "a tragedy of the worst kind because there was no indication in time to save people." But outraged Harlem residents were not buying it: Con Ed is notorious for gambling with people's lives, and the smell of gas is nothing new in the area.

In fact, one 1646 Park Avenue resident gave the lie to Con Ed's attempts to blame the victims. By his account, since last fall several tenants had called to



Reuters

March 12: Two buildings in East Harlem collapse after Con Ed gas explosion, killing eight and injuring 60.

report the smell of gas. Around Christmas, the Fire Department stopped by the building to investigate. In the days leading up to the blast, "the gas smell was overwhelming.... It was hard to get from the front door to the apartment, that's how bad the smell was. We had to

open up windows to air it out." The night before the explosion, his niece dialed 311 to again report the problem but could not get anybody on the line.

The simple truth is that East Harlem residents needlessly died due to the callous and criminal neglect of infrastructure

on the part of the capitalists and their politicians, which is symptomatic of the country as a whole. Aware of the potential for disaster, Con Ed and the city rulers have made working people and the poor into proverbial canaries in the coal mine. But unlike the birds that miners always heeded, reports coming out of neighborhoods like East Harlem are all too often downplayed by officials. And although the technology to detect hazardous gas buildup is available, nobody in the lineup of City Hall, the utility company and landlords is about to foot the bill to put such detectors in every building. In a capitalist society, safety takes a backseat to profits. Witness the thousands of workers across the U.S. who lose their lives doing their jobs each year.

Much of the infrastructure of New York City dates back over a century. Poorer, mainly Latino and black neighborhoods like East Harlem are especially neglected and vulnerable. The cast-iron gas main serving the two collapsed buildings was laid in 1887. Old cast-iron pipe is a common source of gas leaks, especially in East Coast cities, and is not typically installed because it is brittle and susceptible to corrosion. Since the 1960s, the choice materials for natural gas delivery have been coated steel and polyethylene piping.

Soil tests at the blast site found gas concentration levels as high as 20 percent,

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