

Immigration “Reform” and Liberal Hypocrisy

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Obama's Deportation Machine

Any day now, the Obama administration will mark its success in carrying out two million deportations, far surpassing its predecessors in the White House. To be sure, there won't be balloons or parades to mark this milestone, no black-tie White House ball featuring J. Lo, Rosario Dawson and Carlos Santana to burnish Barack Obama's cred as a “friend” of Latinos. In its stead will be the trademark cultured duplicity that must make Obama's Harvard Law professors proud. This talent was on display at a March 13 meeting with Latino Congressmen in which Obama told of his “deep concern about the pain too many families feel from the separation that comes from our broken immigration system.” This was uttered as outrage over the deportations and Obama's unfulfilled promises to provide even minimal protection for undocumented immigrants won him the title of “deporter in chief” from Janet Murguía, president of the National Council of La Raza.

Three years ago, Obama offered the same share-your-pain blather in announcing that policy would be altered to focus on deporting those who committed “serious crimes.” In reality, of the 368,000 men, women and children deported last year, 152,000 had no criminal convictions. Among the third who qualified as felons were those convicted of such “serious” crimes as filing a false tax return or failing to appear in court as well as, of course, those caught up in the racist “war on drugs.” Under the 2005 Operation Streamline program adopted by the Republican Bush administration, attempts by deportees to re-enter the country to unite with their families are classified as felonies that can carry sentences of up to 20 years in federal prison. Such re-entry cases account for one-half of the growth in federal felony convictions since 1992.

Left: “Deporter in Chief” Obama at immigration reform event in San Francisco, November 25. Right: Undocumented Guatemalan immigrants at Arizona airport before deportation, June 2011.

Full Citizenship Rights for All Immigrants!

One consequence of the anti-immigrant crackdown under Obama has been the augmenting of the mass incarceration that he and Attorney General Eric Holder have time and again announced their intention to alleviate. Dramatically highlighting the immigrant prisoners' plight, hundreds of detainees at the Northwest Detention Center outside Tacoma, Washington, joined by detainees in Texas, have launched a series of hunger strikes protesting the deportations as well as their

wretched conditions, including being forced to work for \$1 per day. The Northwest Detention Center, operated by the private Geo Group company, is part of a nationwide network of prison facilities holding people marked for deportation.

As the London *Guardian* (10 April) reports, a Congressional directive known as the “bed mandate” requires that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (I.C.E.) keep 34,000 detainees per day in custody. But, the article continues, “tighter bor-

der controls and a shaky economy have reduced illegal border crossings to their lowest level in decades,” leaving I.C.E. and the Border Patrol struggling to meet their quota. While the number of those attempting to enter the U.S. from Mexico without papers has indeed declined over the past several years, there has lately been a marked increase in people from Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras attempting to cross, including many children.

As a result of the quota, enforcement sweeps have ensnared people such as Washington State hunger striker Ramon Mendoza Pascual, a 37-year-old from Mexico who entered the U.S. 20 years ago without legal papers. A construction worker with three children, all of them U.S. citizens, Mendoza was arrested last year for driving under the influence of alcohol, even though he was found in a parked vehicle. The charge against him was dropped. Nevertheless, he was marked for deportation based on a prior DUI conviction.

On March 13, the White House announced that Homeland Security secretary Jeh C. Johnson will lead a review of the administration's immigration enforcement policies to see if they can be done “more humanely within the confines of the law.” This pledge will have about the same effect as the Senate's show of moral outrage over CIA torture techniques. Under capitalism, immigration law is fundamentally driven by the economic needs of bourgeois rulers. As described in the International Communist League's “Declaration of Principles and Some Elements of Program” (*Spartacist* [English-language edition] No. 54, Spring 1998):

“Modern capitalism, i.e., imperialism, reaching into all areas of the planet, in the course of the class struggle and as economic need demands, brings into the proletariat at its bottom new sources of cheaper labor, principally immigrants from poorer and less-developed regions of the world—workers with few rights who are deemed more disposable in times of economic contraction. Thus capitalism in ongoing fashion creates

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Reuters

March 11: Immigrant rights supporters rally at Northwest Detention Center outside Tacoma, Washington, in solidarity with detainee hunger strikers.



As Union Tops Accept Penalties Fired Queens UPS Drivers Reinstated

NEW YORK CITY—On April 9, UPS rescinded its retaliatory firings of 250 Teamsters Local 804 drivers who walked off the job in Maspeth, Queens, in February to protest the dismissal of union activist Jairo Reyes. The company also reinstated Reyes, a victory for these drivers and all UPS workers. However, in the first clause of a settlement brokered by Teamsters International officials, it is specified that the union local must pay the company an incredible \$250,000 “as damages sustained by UPS” for the 90-minute work stoppage. In addition, Reyes will lose pay for the six weeks he was out of a job, and the 250 drivers are to serve ten-day unpaid suspensions, which will amount to \$2,500 in lost wages for each.

When UPS bosses fired Reyes on February 26 in retribution for a grievance he had filed, it was the last straw for the

drivers. Fed up with Big Brown’s harassment, abuse and daily contract violations, they staged a short walkout before starting their routes. The company, in turn, declared open season on the drivers, putting all 250 on “working termination” until their replacements could be trained, and later firing 19 workers outright. Typical of management’s divide-and-rule tactics, those fired were disproportionately black and Latino workers, who in general are the most victimized on the job and therefore file the most grievances. UPS also banned Teamsters business agent Liam Russertt from company property for leading the walkout (see “No Reprisals Against Queens UPS Workers!” *WV* No. 1043, 4 April).

Instead of mobilizing union action to stop the company’s vendetta, Local 804 officials initiated a publicity campaign

focused on begging the Democrats to lobby the company on the union’s behalf. Its centerpiece was an April 3 press conference on the steps of City Hall that gave Democrats like public advocate Letitia James a chance to shore up their “friend of labor” cred. James threatened to cut some of the perks that UPS is granted by City Hall if management did not treat its workers “with respect.” The company responded by firing another 16 workers the next day.

A balance sheet of the six-week labor dispute shows what can be won when the union makes use of even modest class-struggle methods. Reyes got his job back as a direct result of the black, Latino and white drivers’ elementary act of labor solidarity with their union brother. The job action, in which the drivers briefly withheld their labor, was also joined by part-time loaders, whom UPS pays a pittance and heaps with abuse. Reyes, who gave a spirited speech during the walkout, later paid tribute to the key role played by Russertt, telling *WV*: “If Liam hadn’t said, ‘Enough is enough,’ I’d still be fired.”

In contrast, the publicity campaign and hobnobbing with City Hall Democrats led straight to very costly penalties for the union. While Local 804 officials disputed the company’s statement that the walkout was illegal, they gave away the store even though the union contract sanctions work stoppages in the event that the company violates grievance procedures, as it did with Reyes. The union tops also willingly undermined future actions by conceding that “the union’s internal procedures for authorizing a strike were not properly followed.” Russertt remains banned from company property as a condition of the settlement.

After cutting this raw deal, which also stuck union members with disciplinary records, Local 804 president Tim Sylves-

ter told the press: “We’re looking forward to turning the corner and getting on a new road with UPS.” The “new road” means more labor peace, which will come at the cost of union members’ livelihoods. Covering for the labor bureaucrats, FightBack!news—which is associated with the Chicago-based Freedom Road Socialist Organization—published an April 9 online article on Local 804 that disappeared all the penalties.

In its coverage, the social-democratic *Labor Notes*, which feted Sylvester at its recent conference in Chicago, downplayed the suspensions and was silent on the damages. *Labor Notes* as well as FightBack!news backs the “reform” wing of the Teamsters bureaucracy aligned with the Teamsters for a Democratic Union. This outfit has for decades, in the name of furthering “democracy,” invited the bosses’ government to oversee union affairs, thereby gutting the power of the union.

One worker from a Manhattan UPS distribution center, angry that the company got away with so much, told *WV*: “We should have walked out—the whole district.” Exactly right on both counts. What determines the outcome in battles between labor and capital is the relationship of forces; workers can tip the balance of power in their favor by uniting and acting together to stop the flow of profits. The Maspeth walkout was an example of how workers can and will defend themselves against the relentless attacks of the bosses. But the Teamsters tops, beholden to the capitalist profit system, made union members pay a price for doing so. Labor requires an entirely new leadership, one based on the independence of the working class from the bosses’ state and political parties. Such a class-struggle leadership would strive to build a workers party that fights for a workers government. ■

Imperialism and Capitalist Decay

The utter devastation of Detroit, once the center of U.S. auto manufacturing, is a prime example of the workings of the capitalist profit system in its final, imperialist stage as analyzed by Bolshevik leader V.I. Lenin. Capitalism in its decay points directly to the need for the socialist expropriation of the bourgeoisie through workers revolution.

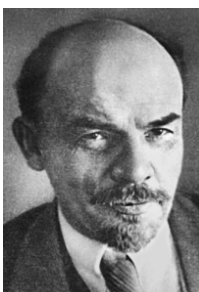
We have seen that in its economic essence imperialism is monopoly capitalism. This in itself determines its place in history,

for monopoly that grows out of the soil of free competition, and precisely out of free competition, is the transition from the capitalist system to a higher socioeconomic order....

Monopolies, oligarchy, the striving for domination and not for freedom, the exploitation of an increasing number of small or weak nations by a handful of the richest or most powerful nations—all these have given birth to those distinctive characteristics of imperialism which compel us to define it as parasitic or decaying capitalism. More and more prominently there emerges, as one of the tendencies of imperialism, the creation of the “rentier state,” the usurer state, in which the bourgeoisie to an ever-increasing degree lives on the proceeds of capital exports and by “clipping coupons.” It would be a mistake to believe that this tendency to decay precludes the rapid growth of capitalism. It does not. In the epoch of imperialism, certain branches of industry, certain strata of the bourgeoisie and certain countries betray, to a greater or lesser degree, now one and now another of these tendencies. On the whole, capitalism is growing far more rapidly than before; but this growth is not only becoming more and more uneven in general, its unevenness also manifests itself, in particular, in the decay of the countries which are richest in capital (Britain)....

When a big enterprise assumes gigantic proportions, and, on the basis of an exact computation of mass data, organises according to plan the supply of primary raw materials to the extent of two-thirds, or three-fourths, of all that is necessary for tens of millions of people; when the raw materials are transported in a systematic and organised manner to the most suitable places of production, sometimes situated hundreds or thousands of miles from each other; when a single centre directs all the consecutive stages of processing the material right up to the manufacture of numerous varieties of finished articles; when these products are distributed according to a single plan among tens and hundreds of millions of consumers (the marketing of oil in America and Germany by the American oil trust)—then it becomes evident that we have socialisation of production, and not mere “interlocking”; that private economic and private property relations constitute a shell which no longer fits its contents, a shell which must inevitably decay if its removal is artificially delayed, a shell which may remain in a state of decay for a fairly long period (if, at the worst, the cure of the opportunist abscess is protracted), but which will inevitably be removed.

—V.I. Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916)



LENIN



TROTSKY

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Letter

On Russian Intervention in Crimea

31 March 2014

Comrades,

As someone who has been politically conscious for almost forty years, I have been struck by how readily, liberals and much of the “left” have responded to recent events in the Ukraine. The vast majority have lined up behind the absurd premise that those in power in Kiev are “democrats” and that the Crimea somehow should be part of the Ukraine. I mean this isn’t exactly the USSR invading Finland (which Marxists, of course, defended). This should not be terribly controversial unless you happen to be a Ukrainian neo-fascist. For any Marxist, this should be a complete no-brainer. It is obvious that the “right of self-determination” is not being violated here, and possibly being served. I agree that it is critical how the Tatars are treated. It is also obvious that the ethnic Russians are at risk in the new order in the Ukraine. When I ask liberal friends, “explain to me again how Putin is worse than Obama,” they are usually at a loss, although a couple commented that Putin was a homophobe. The hypocrisy is really breathtaking. As for the fake Marxists that support the coup or oppose Crimea’s reunification with Russia, I guess I should not be surprised. The ongoing decline in political consciousness makes its mark everywhere. And some of the ostensible Trotskyist organizations have, in their previous anti-soviet zeal, supported fascists such as the “Forest Brothers” and of course such stalwart forces of progress as the Mujahideen in Afghanistan. Today it is Svoboda and the Right Sector. Real

fascists, replete with swastika-like symbols and vicious anti-semitism. What’s next, calling for a vote to the “populist” National Front in France? (Actually, we all know that would not happen because there is the Socialist Party to tail in France...). In any case, I deeply appreciate your coverage of the events as they unfold. It underscores the bankruptcy of the bourgeois press, even its relatively “enlightened” wing. Thank you.

CGs
David

CORRECTION

The article “Union Bashing at Scottish Oil Refinery” (*WV* No. 1035, 29 November 2013) stated: “We uphold the right of self-determination for Scotland and Wales, which means the right to form independent states. As such, we defend the democratic right of the Scots to choose whichever option they want in the independence referendum, but we do not advocate either a ‘yes’ or a ‘no’ vote and are indifferent to the outcome.” As our comrades of the Spartacist League/Britain, who wrote the article, explained in a correction, “The referendum does not pose an issue of principle and we are not taking a stand for or against independence. But we are not indifferent to the outcome, nor to the many questions it will surely pose” (*Workers Hammer* No. 226, Spring 2014).

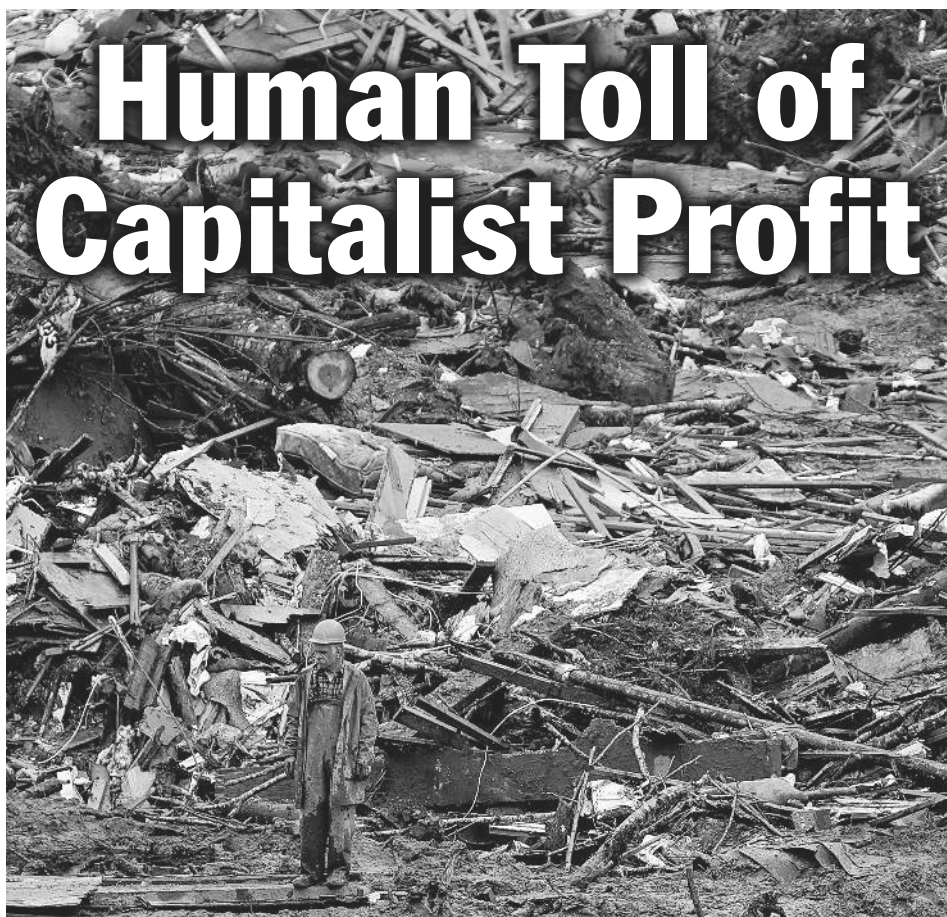
Dozens Killed in Washington State Mudslide

Heavy rainfall was the immediate trigger for the square-mile torrent of mud that buried part of Oso, Washington, on March 22, killing 36 people with eight still unaccounted for. But capitalist profiteering was the real culprit behind this horror.

Despite repeated mudslides dating back at least to 1949, state authorities allowed clear-cut logging to continue at the top of the unstable hill. Scientists repeatedly warned against the removal of the trees, which help anchor the soil in place as well as catch the rain and soak it up from the ground. The hill's soil, composed of loose sand and gravel atop a layer of clay, was well known to retain water and be prone to collapse. A 1999 report filed with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, one of several red flags raised by experts, warned of "the potential for a large catastrophic failure."

The dangers were so obvious that county officials at one point considered buying up the properties of residents in the area to prevent large-scale loss of life. Instead, it was decided to give real estate interests a free hand to build and sell homes at the base of the hill. Seven homes were constructed after a 2006 landslide on the same hill sent so much mud crashing into the Stillaguamish River that it cut a new channel, posing yet another threat to local residents. Daniel Miller, author of the 1999 report, recalled that instead of observing homes being vacated, he saw carpenters building new ones. "They didn't even stop pounding nails," Miller's colleague commented. "We were surprised."

Government officials made no system-



Reuters

March 27: Rescue worker at site of deadly mudslide in Oso, Washington, that killed at least 36.

atic effort to warn residents or potential homebuyers of the unsafe conditions. One resident who lost his house declared: "Were we informed of this danger? No, a very emphatic no." An information

campaign would surely have driven down property values in the area and cut into home builders' profits.

Insurance companies knew the risks. Their standard policies explicitly exclude

landslides from insurance coverage. The insurers do offer special policies providing some protection against landslides at exorbitant prices. But there's a catch: If you live in an area where landslides are a known danger, you probably cannot qualify for the coverage.

Of the 42 homes that were wiped out in last month's landslide, 30 were primary residences and almost all belonged to low-income families. Most of them are saddled with outstanding mortgages on their destroyed homes, as well as auto and other loans. Having lost everything that they own, these families are now confronted by bankers demanding full repayment of their debts.

A range of proven technologies exists to predict landslides in time to prevent the loss of life. Unstable hillsides almost always begin to slip before major slides occur, with the creepage usually starting slowly and then accelerating as the collapse approaches. A geologist told *The Seattle Times* (3 April) that by installing sensors on landslide-prone hills to monitor such movements of the soil, Switzerland has successfully evacuated residents of alpine valleys in advance of major slides. Such life-saving instruments were not installed on the hill above Oso and are rarely used elsewhere in the state, because they are considered too costly.

This deadly landslide was an unnatural disaster caused by capitalist indifference to human life. Such inhumanity, characteristic of a system based on the insatiable drive for profit, will continue until workers sweep the capitalists from power and establish their own government. ■

USAID's Cuba Twitter Plot #counterrevolution

On April 3 the Associated Press revealed that in 2010 the U.S. had launched a Twitter-style social networking service in Cuba with the intent of generating an army of users who could organize "smart mobs" to "renegotiate the balance of power between the state and society"—that is, overthrow the Cuban deformed workers state. The operation, eventually christened ZunZuneo (Cuban slang for a hummingbird's tweet), buried its U.S. origins under a variety of front companies in Central America and Barcelona that were funded out of a bank account in the Cayman Islands. Offering free text messages as bait, the enterprise by March 2011 had quickly acquired 40,000 subscribers—and was quickly unearthed and disrupted by Raúl Castro's government. By the middle of 2012, it had ceased to exist.

Predictably, ZunZuneo's revelation has generated much handwringing and sanctimonious hogwash in the halls of Congress and in the bourgeois media, especially as this scam was run under the auspices of the "humanitarian" U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Equally predictably, this "scandal" is now under review by a Senate subcommittee in order to allow both the Senators and USAID head Rajiv Shah to deny prior knowledge of the affair. During its brief period in operation, ZunZuneo's sole effect was to have augmented the coffers of the Cuban state-owned telecommunications company, to which it was obliged to pay tens of thousands of dollars in fees.

Since the Cuban Revolution, the U.S. imperialists have harbored revanchist counterrevolutionary ambitions toward an island that was long run as a subsidiary of the Mafia, the United Fruit Company and other American interests. Once Castro's forces ousted the U.S.-backed

Batista regime in 1959, the new government was confronted with a mounting effort from Washington to bring it to heel through economic pressure, especially after it began expropriating the holdings of major imperialist enterprises. This pressure led Castro to turn to the Soviet Union for crucial economic assistance. By 1961, Cuba was a bureaucratically deformed workers state modeled on the USSR after its degeneration under Stalin.

U.S. imperialism's efforts to overthrow the Cuban government have been unrelenting since the Bay of Pigs invasion in April 1961. USAID was established in November of the same year and has ever since worked hand in hand with the CIA. In 1962, the U.S. launched its ongoing embargo of Cuba. Over the years, the CIA has hatched innumerable plots to assassinate Fidel Castro. The most recent serious attempt was in Panama in 2000 when it planned to put 200 pounds of explosives under a podium where Fidel was due to speak, a venture easily discovered by his security team. Also during the Bill Clinton presidency, a hallucination-driven scheme—deploying a giant mollusk stuffed with explosives to fatally interdict Fidel while he was scuba diving—was scuttled when saner minds intervened.

USAID has recently attracted some scrutiny for funneling 75 percent of the aid earmarked for earthquake relief in Haiti to U.S.-based organizations, to the dismay of the destitute Haitian masses. It also currently has a hand in imperialist intrigues in Venezuela, Ukraine and Syria. Following the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union, USAID gestated its own Igor, the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI). This division issued the following mission statement: "To support U.S. foreign policy objectives by

helping local partners advance peace and democracy in priority countries in crisis. Seizing critical windows of opportunity, OTI works on the ground to provide fast, flexible, short-term assistance targeted at key political transition and stabilization needs." In other words: have gun, will travel.

As the Cuba Twitter scam was being devised, Obama's Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in a 2009 speech gave official blessing to this approach: "We are also supporting the development of new tools that enable citizens to exercise their rights of free expression by circumventing politically motivated censorship" (*Atlantic*, April 2014). The reality is that U.S. imperialism, with its various agencies, has as its sole purpose the maintenance and expansion of its world dominance, using the guise of human rights and democracy to befuddle the American people. USAID is no more humanitarian in its operations than are the forces that invaded Iraq and Afghanistan or those that today send U.S. drones on their missions of murder.

Just before it initiated the ZunZuneo plot, USAID dispatched a contractor, Alan Gross, to smuggle spy-grade computer and satellite communications gear into

Cuba. Gross was soon arrested. He is now pleading for release while complaining, with some justice, that ZunZuneo further imperiled him. To be sure, Gross's skill set seems to resemble that of the vacuum-cleaner salesman turned spy played by Alec Guinness in *Our Man in Havana*.

USAID denies any responsibility for the wellbeing of those who travel to Cuba under its auspices, so Gross's future, apparently, is his problem. Likewise for the Cuban dissidents whose names USAID sent on an unencrypted line to Cuba. In contrast, the 40,000 subscribers to ZunZuneo seem to have been guilty only of attempting to avoid the Castro regime's constraints on communications. Nonetheless, for being caught up in USAID's scheme, they may soon find themselves subjected to more intense attention from the Cuban government.

We stand for the unconditional military defense of the Cuban deformed workers state, which has good cause to subvert each and every attempt at intervention by U.S. imperialism. However, the regime's bureaucratic dominance poses a severe threat to the overturn of the capitalist order, i.e., to the very basis of its own rule. The Castro bureaucracy is wedded to the nationalist dogma of building "socialism in one country," a theory that set the stage for capitalist restoration in East Europe and the Soviet Union. It will require a proletarian political revolution on the island to begin on the road to a future of material abundance and personal freedom, which will come to fruition only if workers come to power internationally, not least in the U.S., the belly of the imperialist beast. ■

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Immigration...

(continued from page 1)

different strata among the workers, while simultaneously amalgamating the workers of many different lands.”

Many immigrants flee their homelands to escape grinding poverty and brutal repression resulting from imperialist plunder. We say that those who make it into this country are entitled to all the rights of anyone already here. Our demand is for full citizenship rights for all immigrants—from the right to vote to the right to a U.S. passport, as well as full access to medical care, bilingual education and what remains of the threadbare social “safety net.” No deportations! Free the detainees!

As Marxists, we do not seek to advise the bourgeoisie on an alternative immigration policy, which would mean accepting the constraints of a system based on exploitation and oppression. Our fight is to unite the working class, at the head of all the oppressed, in the struggle for a proletarian revolution to expropriate the bourgeoisie as a class and begin the socialist reconstruction of this society. In this effort, immigrant workers, who represent a living link to class and social struggles in their home countries, will be embraced as comrades.

The “Reform” Swindle

We would welcome any measure providing some actual relief from anti-immigrant oppression. But the various “reform” bills being hashed out in Congress offer no such amelioration, only a swindle. The centerpiece of these efforts is Senate Bill 744 (S. 744), Obama’s brainchild, which promises a “path to citizenship” that resembles a walkway through the eerie Black Forest of old fairy tales. Strewn with all but insurmountable legal and financial obstacles, the 13-year journey would offer the eleven million undocumented immigrants only a slim chance of a reprieve at the end of their ordeal.

With Obama boasting about his putting “more boots on the ground on the southern border than at any time in our history,” the bill mandates \$40 billion for another 20,000 Border Patrol agents and 700 more miles of fencing along that border, promising yet more detentions and prosecutions of those crossing illegally. The effect would be to again shift the perilous routes taken by desperately impoverished Mexicans and Central Americans in crossing over, leading to ever more deaths from drowning, dehydration and exhaustion as well as killings by the Border Patrol.

Apologists for Obama’s Democrats sell his adoption of a good part of the racist Tea Party yahoos’ border control program as a bargaining chip in the game of bipar-

tisan legislative “reform.” Last month, House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi filed a “discharge petition” to force a vote on S. 744, which passed the Senate last June but has been squelched by the House Republican leadership. With no chance of success, Pelosi’s gambit was intended to reinforce the false image of the Democrats as immigrant-friendly by highlighting the overt racist xenophobia of their Republican opponents. Such lesser-evil politics worked well for the Democrats in 2012 when Obama, who stomped on the Latino masses (and not only them) in his first administration, nevertheless won 71 percent of their votes.

Now, having already taken a hit with the botched rollout of Obamacare, the Democrats see a need to cynically appeal to the growing, and in some places potentially decisive, Latino vote. But as anger over deportations mounts, the press reports that many pro-Democratic Party Lati-

organizers have also demanded that the president extend more broadly the temporary reprieve from deportations given to “Dreamers,” undocumented immigrants who came to the U.S. before turning 16. To qualify, the Dreamers had to be either enrolled in school or serving in the military. In fact, in ramping up repression against immigrants, the current White House occupant is simply doing his job as the chief executive of capitalist America. Notably, Obama took office in the early stages of a deep recession, when the bourgeoisie’s need to bring in cheap labor had receded.

Calling on the president to defer some deportations, a *New York Times* (5 April) editorial titled “Yes He Can, on Immigration” essentially advised Obama to carry out elements of the stalled “reform” package by executive order. What many of the Dreamers have gotten is a taste of the American nightmare. For more than

vine. As noted recently by the *New York Times* in the article “California Farmers Short of Labor, and Patience” (29 March), many in this dyed-in-the-wool Republican constituency are considering dropping their financial support to the party due to the Republicans’ insistence on expelling the immigrant farm workforce and preventing more youthful immigrants from taking their place.

A report issued by the Partnership for a New American Economy and the Agriculture Coalition for Immigration Reform decries that labor shortages prevent U.S. farmers from increasing production, hampering their ability to compete on the world market. The report attributes a yearly loss of \$1.4 billion in farm income to lack of labor. Liberal talking heads ritually couch their support to legislation allowing immigrant farm workers to slave away here legally by claiming that these are jobs that nobody born in the U.S. will do. The reality is that this is skilled labor, which, while paid next to nothing, is not easily replaced.

While some unions, particularly in the service sector, have a large immigrant component, the pro-capitalist labor bureaucracy mainly sees foreign-born workers as a threat to remaining union jobs. Last spring, the labor tops and the Chamber of Commerce helped pave the way for the Senate bill by working out a program that pegs the number of visas to employment needs, up to a maximum of 200,000 annually. The heavily immigrant Service Employees International Union, the mainstay of the Change to Win trade-union federation, similarly calls for regulating work visas in line with “the needs of our economy.” AFL-CIO head Richard Trumka has also embraced the E-Verify program, a database of everyone legally permitted to work in the U.S. that has facilitated the mass firings of immigrants, including workers engaged in union organizing drives.

From the meatpacking plants and warehouses to construction and the fruit and vegetable farms, organizing foreign-born workers will be a crucial part of reviving the unions after decades of the capitalists’ one-sided war against labor. As we wrote 40 years ago in “Immigration and the Class Struggle” (WV No. 41, 29 March 1974):

“It is in the interests of the working class to back the fight of undocumented workers for their rights, because undocumented workers will otherwise continue to be used as a weapon against the rest of the working class. Those in desperate, illegal situations are more difficult to organize and must accept lower wages. Unfortunately, labor does not always see its real interests so clearly. It is led today by bureaucrats who not only accept, but actively enforce, the capitalist ‘rules of the game’ in which unemployment and high profits are automatically accepted as natural....

“In fact, as long as the labor movement *accepts* unemployment it will remain divided against itself. Instead of fighting for more jobs it will fight against those it sees as threatening the jobs it has. And the bosses will use this fight quite skillfully against the working class, breaking strikes and pushing down wages. The solution to the problems of *both* U.S.-born and immigrant workers lies in overthrowing the system which creates unemployment and perpetuates poverty.”

As with the fight against black oppression, which is embedded in American capitalism, the working class must actively combat the bosses’ efforts to pit the native-born against the foreign-born—a divide-and-rule tactic they have used since before the Civil War. The labor movement must fight every instance of wage and other discrimination against immigrants, oppose deportations and undertake concerted action to organize immigrant workers into the unions with full rights. Such struggles would go a long way toward promoting the understanding that the multiracial, multiethnic proletariat has distinct class interests—counterposed to those of the racist, chauvinist capitalist rulers—that must be politically expressed through their own class party, a revolutionary workers party that fights for workers power. ■



Spartacist contingent at Brooklyn protest against detention of Arab and Muslim immigrants, March 2002.

nos are planning to sit out the November Congressional elections. For their part, many in the Republican Party leadership express the need to further their electoral fortunes by spitting a bit less venom at immigrants. At the same time, Republican state governments have increasingly adopted anti-immigrant measures as well as “voter fraud” laws that would disproportionately strike at Latinos’ as well as black people’s voting rights.

A series of protests in dozens of cities across the country on April 5 highlighted the disillusionment among Latinos with Obama’s anti-immigrant policies. The protests had an all-in-the-family character focused on pressuring the president to live up to his promises. A central demand was the call on Obama to use his executive power to stop deportations. Some protest

40 percent of them, work permits did not lead to new jobs, and only 45 percent reported any pay increases. Many of these individuals lack a college degree or even a high school diploma. Even many of those with degrees were forced to work under the table because they lacked any job history. But Obama has made clear that even the tiny bit of redress given the Dreamers is off the table for others, saying that his “hands are tied” by his Republican Congressional adversaries.

Labor Must Champion Immigrant Rights

The central focus of current legislative proposals is on creating a large pool of completely vulnerable immigrants made to pay large sums of money for the privilege of working for a pittance with no job protection, no assured immigration status, no democratic rights and no right to any kind of welfare. While much of the ruling class wants to preserve the cheap and vulnerable immigrant labor pool, the better to depress wage levels for workers as a whole, the bourgeoisie’s more nativist wing rants that “American culture”—that is, white Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture—is being overrun by those from south of the border. In the first instance, they mean Mexico, which had one-half of its land, including Texas, stolen by the U.S. in the 19th century. Such raw bigotry allows Obama and the Democrats to dress themselves up as friends of immigrants.

With an eye toward sharpening U.S. corporations’ competitive edge in the world market, the ruling class broadly agrees on the need to vastly expand the number of visas for technical professions. Silicon Valley and engineering firms in particular are clamoring for skilled personnel they cannot recruit domestically due largely to the woeful state of U.S. science and math education. Meanwhile, agribusiness conglomerates are up in arms over the government’s failure to expand “guest worker” programs, thus cutting off a source of viciously exploited labor and leaving their fruits literally dying on the

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Retail Workers Need a Fighting Labor Movement

Canada: Victory to Locked-Out Ikea Workers!

The following article is reprinted from Spartacist Canada No. 180 (Spring 2014) published by our comrades of the Trotskyist League/Ligue Trotskyste.

Workers at the Ikea furniture store in the Vancouver suburb of Richmond have been on the picket line since May of last year, when the company locked them out and imposed a contract with a tiered wage system. Under Ikea's edicts, it could

SPARTACIST CANADA

take new employees more than 20 years to reach the full rate of pay. The workers beat back an earlier attempt to impose a tiered wage system through a three-week strike in 2007. This time around, they have shown their determination by voting down insulting contract offers four times.

The young, racially integrated workforce, including many women, is part of Teamsters Local 213, which also represents thousands of workers across B.C. [British Columbia] in manufacturing, warehousing, construction and freight. The workers' defiance of the employer for nearly a year is proof positive that the retail sector is no exception to the class struggle. "We refuse to accept the sweeping and humiliating deteriorations the company is trying to force us to accept," said one locked-out worker on a union delegation to Sweden, where Ikea was founded. "More than 300 of us refuse to surrender to Ikea's threats, despite the harsh economic conditions we've experienced during the lockout."

Some 35 workers bowed to management intimidation and crossed the picket lines to return to work. The union defended itself by expelling them all as scabs. Security guards menace picketers with continuous video surveillance, while the company has escalated its giveback demands. After a veteran worker, a cancer survivor, was cut off long-term disability, a manager told her she would get coverage restored if she crossed the picket line. She refused, vowing, "I couldn't do that to the people I work with." The union fought on her behalf and the company eventually backed down.

The 2007 strike was able to beat back Ikea's attacks because it shut down the store. But this time management and the ex-union scabs have kept it open on reduced hours. The union recently won an injunction to stop Ikea from bringing in other scabs. Though welcoming any such victories, a militant strike leadership would recognize the need to build strong picket lines, reinforced by other unions and their supporters among minorities and youth, in order to shut the store down tight. It is through the unleashing of social power, not reliance on the bosses' courts and labour boards, that the workers will find a way forward.

Capitalist War on the Unions

Working people today face an anti-labour "austerity" barrage from capitalist governments at every level. Social services from EI [unemployment insurance] to health care are on the chopping block. Most recently, Canada Post announced the end of home postal delivery and up to 8,000 job cuts. Billions have been ripped off from workers' pensions. The federal Tories [Conservative Party] have repeatedly broken strikes, just like their Liberal predecessors; now they want to ban them altogether in big parts of the public sector. A new Alberta law bans public-



"Ikea values" at work: Locked-out workers in Richmond, British Columbia, have been on picket lines for nearly a year.

sector unionists from even *talking* about the need for a strike, while unions that engage in "illegal" strikes face \$1 million a day in fines.

With nearly half a million manufacturing jobs axed since 2006, retail and other service jobs are the bosses' blueprint for reshaping the entire workforce. Many workers who still have jobs have been forced to take huge cuts in pay and benefits. The bosses' watchwords are: part time, on contract, low wages, no benefits, flexible schedules and above all no union. Nearly two-thirds of all jobs created since the provincial Liberals' 2011 "B.C. Jobs Plan" are seasonal or casual. Half of all workers in the Toronto and Hamilton area today have precarious jobs, with immigrants and other minorities bearing the brunt. Increasing numbers have to resort to food banks to survive.

The conditions of such "McJobs" are notorious. Day in and day out, front-line managers humiliate cashiers in front of customers. Then, in the privacy of their offices, they manipulate workers' schedules and hours, choking off the livelihoods and disrupting the lives of anyone who fails to curry their favour. Workers' confidence is gnawed at by anxiety from the unrelenting threat of layoffs, zero-hour workweeks and dismissals. Workers at Wal-Mart, McDonald's and other notoriously low-wage companies have staged protests for a paycheque you can live on and better working conditions. Some have risked all but certain firing by fighting to organize a union.

The Richmond Ikea workers already have a union, in itself a big step forward. It is one of only two unionized Ikea stores in North America (the other is in Montreal). But the hard truth is that retail workers atomized in thousands of separate stores do not have the social power on their own to put a wrench in the bosses' profit machine. Winning broader unionization as well as big gains in wages and benefits requires mobilizing the power of workers who are strategically positioned along the supply chain that provides the goods for the retail outlets.

The Ikea workers have received support from the B.C. Federation of Labour, the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) and others. The International Longshore and Warehouse Union, which

organizes workers at the Vancouver-area docks, joined an international day of solidarity with the locked-out Teamsters on December 17. While longshoremen rallied outside the store and at Deltaport and the Fraser Surrey Docks, other unionists demonstrated in Scandinavian countries and as far away as Australia and Japan.

But critically absent has been the kind of mobilization of labour's power that can hit Ikea where it hurts. Where Ikea and other corporate behemoths are particularly vulnerable is in their dependence on the steady movement of goods through the "just in time" global cargo chain, with its key choke points. The bosses could be brought to their knees if the union movement organized secondary boycotts, refusing to handle goods destined for the Richmond store.

The power of collective action by working people was shown at the end of February when more than a thousand truckers at Port Metro Vancouver went on strike over working conditions and low rates. Militant pickets by the United Truckers Association blocked operations at Canada's largest port, which handles nearly half a billion dollars in goods every

day. A few days later, the Vancouver Container Truckers Association (part of Unifor) voted to join them on strike. The port bosses quickly moved to get a strike-breaking injunction to stop picketing by the truckers, many of whom are of South Asian origin.

"Ikea Values" and Union Bureaucrats

Most of the key weapons in labour's arsenal—mass pickets, hot cargoing, secondary strikes—are "illegal" under the bosses' laws. Yet everything of value the workers movement has won has come through mobilizing labour's ranks in hard-fought struggles against the rulers and their whole body of anti-worker legislation.

The top union bureaucracy—a relatively privileged layer that long ago separated itself from its base, the union membership—constantly cites the capitalists' anti-labour laws to justify its failure to organize the kinds of struggles that can win. Through their support to the purported "national interests" of Canadian capitalism and their loyalty to the right-wing social democrats of the NDP [New Democratic Party], the labour misleaders tie the unions to the enemy class. B.C. NDP leader Adrian Dix and federal MP [Member of Parliament] Libby Davies may have shown up at a couple of rallies for the locked-out Richmond workers, but the New Democrats have their own long history of strikebreaking in B.C., including against school support workers in 2000 when the party ran the province.

Rather than mobilize militant labour action to win a union victory, the B.C. Fed tops are pushing a toothless consumer boycott of Ikea's Vancouver-area stores. For their part, leaders of the Teamsters organized a "global commission of inquiry" into the lockout together with the European-based ITF and UNI Global Union. Its report, released late last year, laments that Ikea has "lost track of its Swedish values" and that management in Richmond "has abandoned the stated values of the 'IKEA family'."

The patriarch of said family is one Ingvar Kamrad. In 1943, the same year he founded Ikea, Kamrad joined the Swedish Nazi party and served it as a functionary

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United Truckers Association/Unifor port truckers picket at Deltaport, near Vancouver, March 24. Month-long strike stood down government strikebreaking.

Communalism in India: Tool of Capitalist Rule

The following article is reprinted from Workers Hammer No. 226 (Spring 2014), newspaper of our comrades of the Spartacist League/Britain.

As the 30th anniversary of the storming of the Golden Temple in Amritsar approaches, official documents made public in Britain revealed that Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government aided the Indian military in planning the attack in the Sikh holy city. The documents that were declassified in January include a personal letter from Thatcher expressing support for Indira Gandhi's policy on the Punjab. Support for the 1984 atrocity against the Sikhs is hardly shocking, coming from the former colonial power that was directly responsible for the first Amritsar massacre. In 1919,

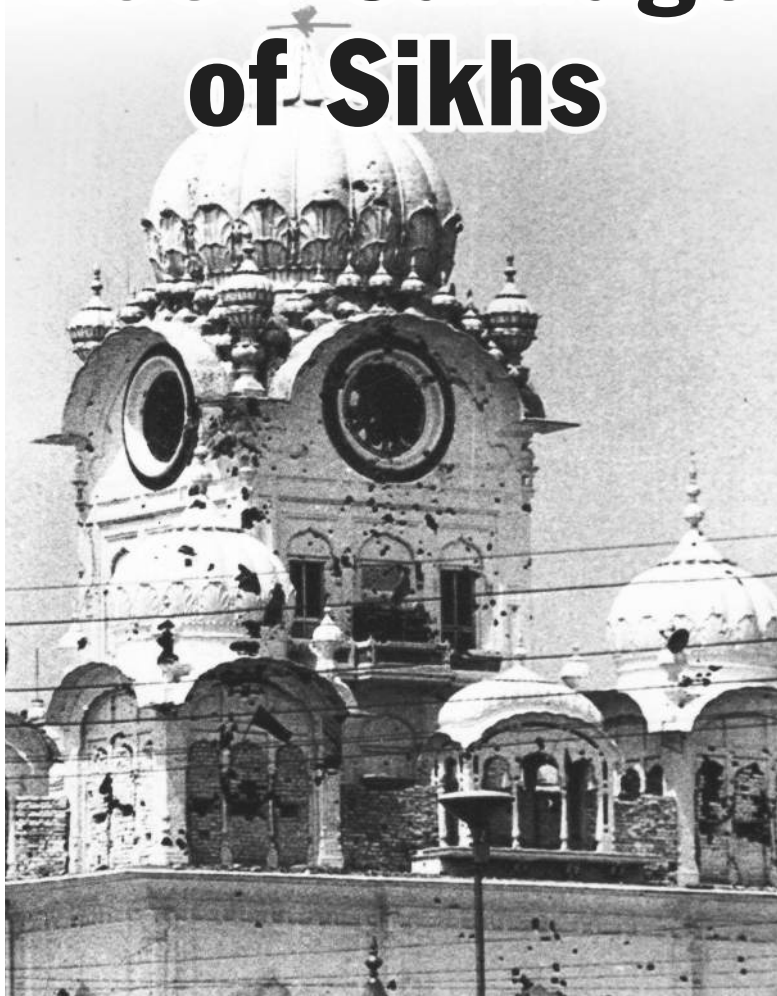
WORKERS HAMMER

under the command of General Reginald Dyer, troops gunned down and killed somewhere between 400 and 1,000 civilians who were gathered in a park. Many had come to celebrate a religious holiday; others came out in defiance of a British ban on political protests against colonial rule. Last year, Prime Minister David Cameron paid a high profile visit to Jallianwala Bagh, the scene of the 1919 Amritsar massacre. Cameron's hypocritical expression of "regret" was a cheap ploy to garner votes from among Britain's 500,000 Sikhs.

The 1984 assault on the Golden Temple ordered by Indira Gandhi's Congress government in Delhi was an atrocity against all Sikhs. Ostensibly intended to overpower armed Sikh fundamentalists, followers of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, who had taken up positions in the temple complex, the attack slaughtered as many as 2,000 people, many of them pilgrims, including women and children. The attack made a martyr out of Bhindranwale and dramatically boosted support for religious fundamentalism among Sikhs. In India and abroad, angry protests erupted, often led by reactionaries demanding Khalistan, a theocratic Sikh state. Some 4,000 Sikh soldiers deserted their regiments as the unrest spread to India's armed forces, over ten per cent of which were Sikh. Throughout Punjab and in cities such as Delhi, Sikhs were arrested and tortured by the thousands. At the time we wrote, "the vicious crackdown by the Hindu-chauvinist Gandhi regime was an attack on the entire Sikh community and a bloody lesson to all opponents of the regime. And the repercussions are likely to be immense, and even bloodier, as the reactionary legacy of British imperialist rule continues to wreak havoc upon the Indian masses" (*Spartacist Britain* No. 60, August 1984). That legacy was again played out in a communalist frenzy, directed overwhelmingly against the Sikhs, that recalled the horrors of Partition [that divided the subcontinent between majority-Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan in 1947].

By declaring war on the Sikhs, Mrs. Gandhi got more than she bargained for. On 31 October, she herself was assassinated by Sikh members of her bodyguard. For the next three days the capital city was engulfed in a wave of pogroms that culminated in a massacre of 3,000 Sikhs in Delhi alone. One particularly heinous atrocity took place in Trilokpuri, east Delhi, in a colony housing impoverished low-caste Sikhs. Over a 72-hour period, some 350 people were butchered in a single block. A team of journalists

1984 Carnage of Sikhs



AP (top), Demotix

Top: Dome of Golden Temple, Amritsar, badly damaged by army machine gun fire and shelling, 18 June 1984. Bottom: Sikh Alliance banner at Downing Street, London, January 2014.

who had been tipped off by a survivor made their way to Trilokpuri suspecting that, "even while the whole city was in the grip of mass killings, there was something exceptionally dreadful about the plight of Block 32." One of the journalists, Rahul Bedi, later testified that the street was "littered with limbs of human bodies, hairs and charred bodies" (*When a Tree Shook Delhi*, M. Mitta and H. Phoolka, 2007). Some 30 Sikh women from Trilokpuri were raped. Mass rapes are part of a gruesome pattern that was seen during Partition and almost always accompany communalist bloodletting. Again in 1991 in Kunan Poshpora, Kashmir, Indian Army troops gang-raped nearly 100 women in a single night.

In the three decades that have elapsed since 1984, the families of the victims have fought courageously for the legal system to punish those responsible. But *ten* official "enquiries" have whitewashed the crimes, while leading figures in the Congress party have built political careers

out of their involvement in inciting terror against the Sikh community. Among them are Jagdish Tytler, who served several times as a minister in the federal government, and leading politician Sajjan Kumar, who had charges filed against him, including for murder and rioting, but whose case has been bogged down in the courts. Rajiv Gandhi, who took over as Congress leader and prime minister after his mother's death, condoned the anti-Sikh terror in his infamous November 1984 statement that:

"Some riots took place in the country following the murder of Indiraji. We know the people were very angry and for a few days it seemed that India had been shaken. But, when a mighty tree falls, it is only natural that the earth around it does shake a little."

—*When a Tree Shook Delhi*

Congress romped to victory in elections in December 1984. Today, with India-wide elections imminent, the Hindu-supremacist BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) is expected to win and its candi-

date, Narendra Modi, is tipped to become prime minister. Among liberals and reformists, opposition to BJP communalism frequently takes the form of presenting Congress as a supposedly secular alternative. The BJP rose to prominence in Indian politics based on its association with the violent attacks on Muslims that followed the destruction of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya in 1992 by Hindu-chauvinist mobs. By the end of the 1990s the BJP led a coalition government of all India. Similarly, Narendra Modi, who was chief minister in Gujarat during the 2002 anti-Muslim pogroms, has built a political career on the back of this violence. The role played by Congress leaders in 1984, and the 30-year cover-up of their guilt, gives the lie to the notion that Congress is an alternative to BJP communalism.

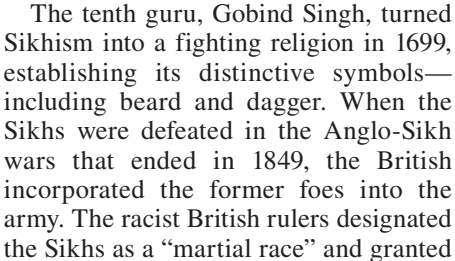
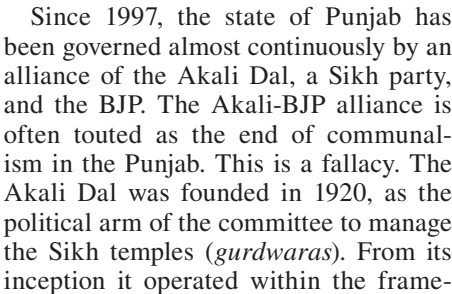
Marxists and the Sikh Question

In India as a whole, with a Hindu majority of over 80 per cent and a population of some 1.2 billion, the Sikhs are a tiny minority of about two per cent, concentrated in Indian Punjab. The Punjab was severely affected by the horrors of Partition, which were the culmination of systematic divide-and-rule machinations by the British imperialists. The violence was not only a consequence of, but "was a principal mechanism for creating the conditions for partition" (P. Brass, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 2003). In the main, the mass killing, raping, looting and forced population transfers on an enormous scale were carried out by organised paramilitary outfits. Hindus and Sikhs who lived in western Punjab were driven eastwards to India by outfits such as the National Guards of the Muslim League. Muslims were forced to flee in the opposite direction, often at the behest of Hindu communalist forces such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) or by Sikh militia. Calling for the formation of an Akali Fauj (Sikh army) on the steps of Lahore legislative building in March 1947, the principal Sikh leader at the time, Master Tara Singh, declared that Sikhs must be prepared to die for their cause.

In post-Partition India, the Sikh leadership has repeatedly shown its anti-Pakistan, anti-Muslim credentials. As a reward for loyalty in the 1965 war with Pakistan, the capitalist rulers in Delhi granted the Sikhs' demand for new state borders. In 1966, the state boundaries were re-drawn, creating the present Sikh-majority state of Indian Punjab and a new state of Haryana and enlarging Himachal Pradesh in the process. Sikhs are heavily represented in India's armed forces, which are a vital bulwark of the unity of the state. It was a Sikh general, Kuldeep Singh Brar, who led the 1984 attack on the Golden Temple (while the Khalistani forces inside the Temple were led by a former army officer, General Shabeg Singh). On the eve of the slaughter in Amritsar—which lies less than 20 miles from the Pakistan border—Brar rallied his troops by warning that "the enemy" had links to Pakistan.

The anti-Communist Khalistani forces certainly looked to Pakistan for support. During the 1980s, Pakistan's rulers, together with the U.S. and British imperialists, massively armed and funded the reactionary Islamic-fundamentalist *mujahedin* forces in Afghanistan in a "holy war" against the Soviet Union. As Trotskyists, from the beginning of the 1979 Soviet intervention we proclaimed: "Hail Red Army in Afghanistan! Extend the social gains of the October Revolution

The Indian reformist left generally denied the legitimacy of the Sikh struggle against national oppression. The Moscow-loyal Communist Party of India (CPI), which for years had been a servile creature of the Indira Gandhi regime, shamelessly supported the army's assault in Amritsar. The CPI general secretary at the time, C.R. Rao, declared: "We have always been for effective steps to put down extremist violence. These should, however, be combined with efforts for a political solution, which will go a long way in isolating the extremists" (*Overseas Hindustan Times*, 23 June 1984). As for the Communist Party of India (Marxist),



The caste prejudices of the Akali leaders were manifest in the 1930s, when Dr. B.R. Ambedkar proposed to lead India's 60 million *dalits* ("untouchables") into the Sikh religion. The Akali leadership rejected this and, according to author Kapur Singh, "they unanimously decided that Ambedkar and his followers untouchables must be dissuaded and stopped from becoming Sikhs for all time" (quoted in "Scheduled Castes in Sikh Community," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 28 June 2003). The Punjab's Green revolution of the 1960s and 1970s enriched the Jat farmers, while creating the need for unskilled farm labourers, with the result that many lower caste migrant workers flocked to the state from areas such as Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Today, *dalits* constitute some 30 per cent of the Punjab's population—the highest proportion in India—and more than 80 per cent of those *dalits* live in rural areas.

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Campaigns Against Tobacco, Soda and Junk Food

Mexico: “Health Fascism” Against the Poor

We print below an article translated from *Espartaco* No. 40 (February 2014), published by our comrades of the *Grupo Espartaquista de México*.

ESPARTACO

Imitating his U.S. imperialist overlords, ten years ago [Andrés Manuel] López Obrador, then [bourgeois-populist Party of the Democratic Revolution] PRD mayor of Mexico City, decreed the tyrannical anti-tobacco law that drove all smokers from offices, restaurants, bars and every public building. A few years later, Congress approved a similar law at the national level. At the same time, increasing taxes have caused the price of a pack of cigarettes to soar—in the case of Marlboros, Benson & Hedges and others, from 20 pesos in 2007 to 45 pesos in 2014. Nowadays, the age-old pleasure of smoking—or, at least, of smoking decent tobacco—is a luxury out of the daily reach of the working class and poor. What’s next? The total prohibition of tobacco use, according to the InterAmerican Heart Foundation (one of the main anti-tobacco groups in Mexico).

These anti-tobacco laws are part of a wider campaign aimed at regimenting the entire population. Behind this campaign is the “health fascist” ideology: the notion that the state, supported by a movement of “citizens” against “vice,” should decide what can be con-

sumed. The usual excuse for these laws is based on the supposed need to protect non-smokers from tobacco smoke’s harmful substances. The truth of the matter is that medical evidence regarding the effects of “secondhand smoke” is simply not conclusive. Various serious studies that have attempted to establish a health risk from secondhand smoke have had to come to the same conclusion: there is no significant statistical correlation. The idea of protecting the supposed “passive smoker” is simply ridiculous considering that Mexico City is one of the world’s most polluted cities, where tons of animal and human fecal matter float in the air every day. It’s true that tobacco smoke is an irritant—as is any other type of smoke. In any case, the obvious solution would be to provide adequate ventilation, but that wouldn’t be profitable, so it isn’t even an option.

Karl Marx, who scientifically explained the functioning of the ruthless capitalist system, wrote about English anti-liquor legislation: “The classical saints of Christianity mortified *their* body for the salvation of the souls of the masses; the modern, educated saints mortify *the bodies of the masses* for the salvation of their own souls.” The “beautiful people” and the government are now going after consumers of sodas, snacks, baked goods and other food that the Congressmen deem to have an excessively high caloric content. It was the PRD, again, that led the charge to impose a “special tax” on

these products, through which, “in addition to the benefit of tax collection,” they seek to combat obesity...and “psychosocial inadaptability”! If the class bias wasn’t sufficiently evident in the case of tobacco, it’s simply shameless in the case of soda and “junk” food. A study by the National Institute of Public Health from last year states the obvious as a reason to approve the new law: “Reduction in the consumption of soda due to an increase in its price would be greater in the poorest families and those living in extreme, high and medium-to-high poverty areas.” According to this institute, “These individuals would replace soda consumption with water or milk.” This assertion is completely arbitrary. This “study” doesn’t even take into account that milk is generally more expensive than soda, even with the new tax (not to mention lactose intolerance, which is much more common among indigenous peoples of the Americas than among those of European ancestry).

Almost a fifth of the population lacks access to basic foodstuffs. At least a million and a half children suffer from malnutrition. The state has been gradually dismantling health services, which are inadequate and insufficient to begin with. Workers routinely die because the ruling capitalist class doesn’t want to spend money on workplace safety—remember Pasta de Conchos [a mine explosion that killed 65 miners]. Workers and peasants die because they can only afford to live

in sheet metal and wood shacks built in areas with a high risk of natural disasters—remember Hurricane Manuel and Hurricane Ingrid. Behold the interest of the government in the health of the population! The above-mentioned study asserts that the multimillion-peso revenue to the state resulting from the new taxes would cover “around 30 percent of obesity expenses for the country.” It’s simply grotesque that the greedy bourgeoisie wants to exert moral pressure and put the financial burden of the capitalist system on the poor.

In the face of the starving Parisian masses’ demand for bread on the eve of the Great French Revolution, Queen Marie Antoinette suggested: “Let them eat cake.” But even this infamous Austrian didn’t think of demanding that the poor pay a “special tax” for it—and, even so, we should add that her insults cost her her head. These absurd taxes simply reflect a gratuitous cruelty, trying to make inaccessible for the majority some small pleasures of everyday life—like eating a snack cake, drinking an ice-cold coke, smoking a cigarette. Obesity is, needless to say, a health problem. But instead of these tyrannical stupidities, what is needed is free universal health care, access to a varied and plentiful diet, decent housing—and it would be nice if workers had sufficient free time in order to play a sport (or sit down to read a book or watch TV, if they so desired). But that requires the overthrow of the capitalist system; it requires an internationally collectivized and planned economy.

It’s no secret that smoking is bad for your health, and nobody has much faith in the nutritional value of Coca-Cola or Twinkies. But everyone has the right to choose their own poison. As far as we’re concerned, people should be able to read, eat, drink and smoke whatever they please, and enjoy whatever consensual activities they like, without having the police, courts, bosses and totalitarian snobs intruding in their business. ■

India...

(continued from page 7)

revolution is a key component of the programme for proletarian state power. The working class must win the support of the rural masses to its side by championing agrarian revolution to overthrow the landlords and capitalists.

At the same time, India has a significant industrial proletariat, which is the motor force of the Indian socialist revolution. Not far from Punjab lies the industrial centre of Gurgaon, including Maruti Suzuki, India’s largest car maker. Workers at this plant have carried out a series of powerful strikes, uniting workers across caste and religious divisions. In July 2012, the bosses made a frontal attack on the trade union in the plant. When a manager mysteriously died in a fire, some 147 workers were arrested, falsely accused of murder and put in jail, where they have languished ever since. This is an attack on *all* workers. The capitalist bosses who have gone to such lengths to stamp out

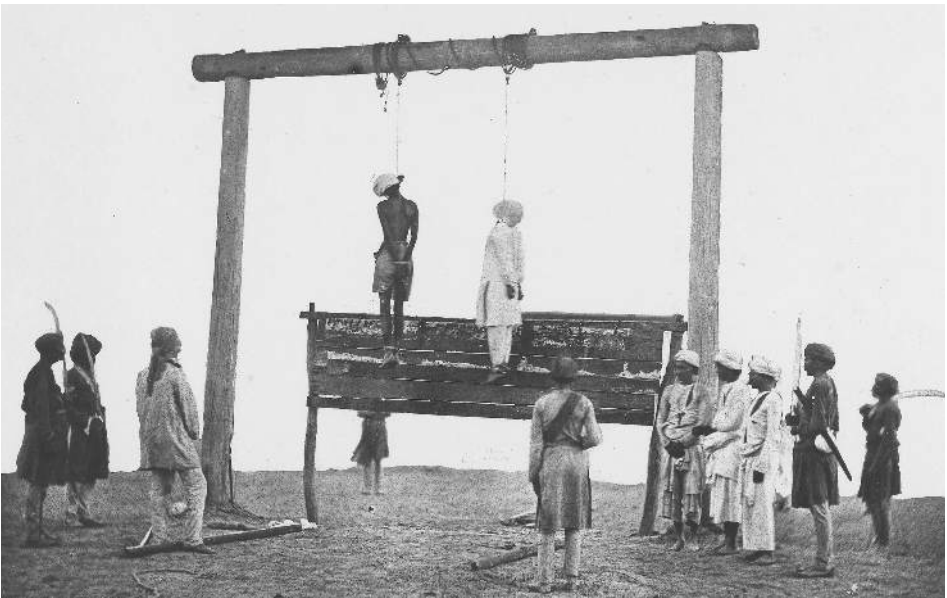
the union among these workers are well aware of the potential power of the working class.

The labour of the proletariat produces the profits that enrich the ruling class. But this potential power is hamstrung by the existing political leadership. What is essential is forging a new leadership of the working class that fights to turn the unions into organs of proletarian unity and class independence from the bosses and their state. This task is linked to the forging of a revolutionary vanguard party.

The communalism that repeatedly threatens to tear India apart is not some inevitable condition of the country, but a legacy of British colonial rule and a cornerstone of capitalist rule in the region. The carnage of Partition was not the only possible outcome of the independence struggle. But a democratic, secular *capitalist* India was not on the historic agenda. The militant upsurge against colonial rule at the end of World War II could have signalled the opening of great possibilities for a revolutionary party. Instead, there was the Stalinist CPI, whose support for British imperialism during WWII was a betrayal that had fateful consequences for the Indian independence struggle. As we noted:

“Britain had lost control. Posed pointblank was not only India’s political independence from two hundred and fifty years of the British jackboot; the *social* liberation of India’s toiling masses from millennia of indigenous caste, gender, communal and class oppression was also now suddenly within grasp. What was needed was a revolutionary vanguard party of India’s small but strategic and modern, urbanised industrial working class which could rally and draw behind it the millions of peasant poor and other oppressed, oust the British, and put the native capitalist-landlord alliance out of business, launching a direct offensive for both national and social liberation through capturing proletarian state power.”

Instead, the CPI’s perspective was to subordinate the interests of the proletariat to the bourgeois nationalists, particularly the Congress leaders, and to peddle illu-



Felice Beato

Two Indian soldiers (sepoys) hanged for participation in 1857 rebellion against British colonial rule.

sions in “Gandhiji.” As the above article pointed out:

“The Congress leaders feared the unleashing of the workers and peasants against the capitalists and landlords many times more than they desired to enforce the demand to ‘Quit India’ on the British imperialists; the Stalinists with their grovelling before Churchill had made themselves for a key period of time ‘the most universally detested political organisation in India’. The intervention of a revolutionary Trotskyist party with some real weight in the proletariat was at this juncture the decisive element in whether the question of India was solved along the October model or left after post-war ‘independence’ to the bloody partition designed by the British imperialists.”

—“The 1940s ‘Quit India’ Movement—Stalinist Alliance with Churchill Betrayed Indian Revolution,” *Workers Hammer* Nos. 131 and 132 (September/October and November/December 1992) [reprinted in *WV* No. 970, 3 December 2010]

We base ourselves on the programme of Lenin and Trotsky’s Bolsheviks in the

victorious October Revolution of 1917. In India during World War II, this programme was upheld by the Trotskyist forces of the Bolshevik-Leninist Party of India [BLPI], section of the Trotskyist Fourth International. But the small forces of the BLPI were insufficient to take advantage of the revolutionary crisis. As our article cited above continued:

“Yet by midnight of 14 August 1947, when Congress prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru rose to address ‘free’ India’s parliament of capitalists, landlords and princes, the spectacular upsurge had been derailed. Instead, a pro-imperialist alliance of the Congress bourgeoisie and the Muslim League landlords had successfully diverted the revolutionary momentum into British imperialism’s waiting trap, the nightmare of communalist Partition. India’s working masses had paid with their lives—and were now about to pay even more—for the absence of a revolutionary party to lead its millions in an independent struggle for workers power.”

The key task in India remains the forging of a Leninist-Trotskyist party. ■

WORKERS HAMMER
Fascist-infested, imperialist-backed Ukraine coup

Crimea is Russian

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Detroit...

(continued from page 12)

around Detroit and “throw in the blankets and corn.” With Detroit and several other Michigan cities in receivership and run by emergency managers, a wide swath of the state’s population, including a majority of its black residents, is subject to the diktats of unelected officials. Simply put, this is racist disenfranchisement.

The 1941 Strike: Solidifying the UAW

The completion of the Erie Canal in 1825 and the city’s relative proximity to the Mesabi iron range first spurred Detroit’s growth. The city produced rail-road cars, stoves and other manufactured goods. It became the Motor City with the advent of Ford’s Model T in the early 20th century.

Shortly after, the “Great Migration” began, setting the stage for the economic integration of black people into industrial capitalism. During the labor crisis created by World War I, over half a million black people left the Jim Crow South for the North. A good portion of black Detroit “had roots in Tennessee, Alabama, western Georgia or the Florida panhandle because the historic rail lines connected those places during the Migration years.... Detroit’s black population would skyrocket” (Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns*, 2010).

Detroit has long been a city of sharp contradictions. Prior to the Civil War, it was a station for the Underground Railroad and a meeting place of leading abolitionists. Yet in 1863, it also was the scene of a major anti-black riot. Detroit at the beginning of the Great Migration was “the most Southern” of Northern cities, but at least black people could sit where they wanted on the trolley. In the early 1920s, 40,000 Klansmen lived in the city, and a KKK mayor was almost elected. In 1925, a black doctor, Ossian Sweet, moved his family to a white neighborhood. Armed with guns, the Sweet family defended themselves against racist mobs, killing one attacker. After trials and imprisonment, the Sweets were ultimately acquitted.

The mass unionization of black workers into the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) some seven decades ago was key to preparing the ground for common struggle with white workers against the bosses. But black workers first had to be convinced of the new CIO unions’ commitment to racial equality after decades of Jim Crow discrimination on the part of the craft-based American Federation of Labor (AFL). Moreover, Henry Ford and his ilk initially hired black people as a counterforce to unionism. Their toe-hold in northern industry was due to the capitalists’ desire for insurance against strikes.

A seminal event was the 1941 Ford strike, which brought 10,000 black members into the UAW. Taking on the “great white father of Dearborn” and besieging Ford’s giant River Rouge plant, then employing 100,000 workers, the UAW



A few weeks after approval of sellout contract, UAW tops Bob King (left) and Ron Gettelfinger (second from left) embrace Ford executives, December 2007.

won recognition from the last of the Big Three automakers to be unionized. No longer did the black community bow down to the “king of the open shop.” The Rouge, known as Master Ford’s plantation, would become the home of UAW Local 600, a center of black union power. As the strike and its lead-up highlighted, breaking down racial barriers by fighting for black equality is essential to building strong industrial trade unions and advancing the struggles of the working class as a whole. In other words, labor and black struggles will either go forward together or fall back separately.

Years earlier, Henry Ford had bought off the small black middle class by pouring money into black churches. He also financed some services for a segregated slum known as Inkster. In return, his loyal black ministers screened job applicants for their anti-unionism. Ford’s racial “philanthropy” flowed from white supremacy. His paper, the *Dearborn Independent*, portrayed black people as beneficiaries of the “white man’s civilization” and warned against attempts by Jews to “Bolshevize the Negro.”

To do battle with Ford, the UAW hired several black organizers who had gained trade-union experience through the Communist Party (CP) and its National Negro Congress. Among its activities, the UAW’s Negro Sub-Organizing Department issued special editions of the Local 600 newsletter *Ford Facts*. Through such efforts, the UAW was able not only to neutralize anti-union sentiment but also to convince many black workers that it would defend their jobs—not by begging Ford but through collective action. When the organizing drive began, Ford countered by hiring black workers into his “Service Department” of anti-union thugs run by Harry Bennett.

The strike began on April 1 when Ford fired eight UAW committeemen. Practically the whole Rouge plant walked, though some black workers remained in the foundry and hundreds of others, recently hired to scab, slipped back in the next morning. At 6 a.m. on the second day, Bennett sent several hundred scabs and thugs out of the factory to attack the union pickets with steel bars and knives. At 9 a.m., another assault took place, but this time the picketers were prepared with baseball bats and sticks. The battle was brief and bloody; the union lines held.

There were few black workers on the picket line, and there were black scabs inside, making it possible to paint the confrontation as a racial conflict. Meanwhile, an ex-president of the UAW, working for the AFL, addressed 3,000 blacks in the ghetto to garner support for a back-to-work movement.

In response, the UAW appealed directly to black strikebreakers to leave the plant and urged black workers not to let themselves be used as scabs, pointing to the greater pay, job security and promotions from the seniority system that would be gained through unionization. The union reiterated that the UAW “permits no racial discrimination within its ranks.” The head of the NAACP youth

group, who also was a Ford foundry worker, ignored the neutrality of the adult branch and used a UAW sound truck to appeal in the name of the NAACP for the strikebreakers to leave the plant. Such efforts were a counterbalance to the black ministers and defused the back-to-work movement.

On April 11, Henry Ford agreed to a National Labor Relations Board-supervised election. In May, the UAW won, although many black workers voted for the company-backed AFL union. But



Richard S. Fraser (1913-1988) developed Trotskyist understanding of black oppression in the U.S. *Prometheus Research Series No. 3*, containing selection of his writings, is available for \$7 from Spartacist Publishing Co., Box 1377 GPO, New York, NY 10116.

black hostility to the UAW dissipated after the elections because black workers received the same wages as the rest of the workforce, and they saw a black UAW organizer prominent on the contract bargaining committee. The part played by black UAW organizers was important to securing not only the union allegiance of black workers but also white workers’ acceptance of their black counterparts.

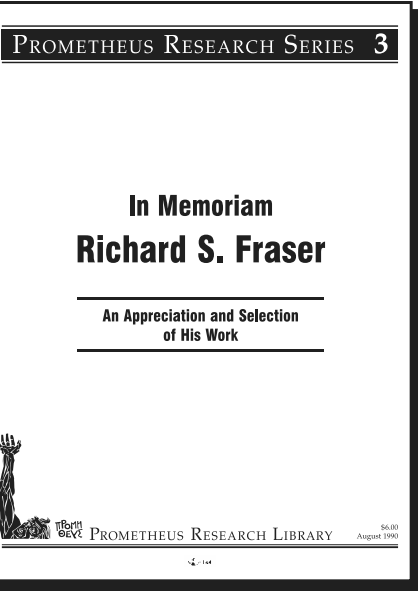
This victory for the UAW was partial—black workers were still segregated into the worst jobs, and auto companies would continue to play on the fears of white workers to keep the union divided. Henry Ford cut off money to Inkster and instituted an anti-black hiring policy at his plants. UAW president R.J. Thomas,

in turn, ignored the fight to upgrade black workers to better jobs and the racism that remained in his own ranks.

Anti-Black Riot of 1943

The U.S. entry into World War II in 1941 brought another mass migration of Southern blacks and whites to labor-hungry Detroit. The thousands of new white workers from the South had not gone through the strike experiences with black co-workers. Together with second-generation Poles, they were, as a rule, hostile to black rights. Meanwhile, Detroit suffered an acute housing shortage, which exploded in the bloody riots of 1943.

The prelude to the riots occurred in 1942 at the Sojourner Truth Housing Project, built to accommodate the influx of thousands of defense workers. The night before it opened, the Ku Klux Klan burned a cross at the project, which was located in a mainly white area north of Polish Hamtramck. Tenants moving in were attacked. A UAW presence with sound trucks and black Local 600 members helped prevent a racist riot. However, hundreds of black people were arrested (and only a handful of whites). Local 600 and the UAW International issued statements defending the black tenants but failed to follow up with further union action. Three months later, black families moved in with the support of government housing officials acting to get critical industry up and running for the war profiteers.



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Detroit...

(continued from page 9)

Klansmen “want to fight the union on this issue, we are ready and willing to take them on” (August Meier and Elliott Rudick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW*, 1979).

Two weeks later, the riot began. By the time it was over, 25 black people lay dead—most of them killed by the police. While not lifting a finger to stop the lynch mobs during the riots, UAW leaders trumpeted that none of the bloodshed had entered the plants! But the then-revolutionary Socialist Workers Party (SWP) fought for a mobilization of union militants to defend the black masses. The Trotskyist SWP’s *Militant* newspaper (3 July 1943) wrote:

“The labor leaders must do more than deplore these attacks...do more than order their members to stay off the streets and appeal for grand jury investigations. They must summon their membership to take determined and organized action against the instigators and organizers of these lynch mobs. The unions of Detroit could have repulsed this threat to their very existence as they repulsed General Motors in 1937 and 1941. Detroit would be far different today and the native fascists would be cowering in their holes, demoralized instead of triumphant, had the union leaders called out the veteran flying squadrons to defend the Negro people.”

With the country awash in patriotic war fervor, the SWP pointed out that “because of their no-strike pledge and slavish subservience to Roosevelt’s labor policies, the CIO and AFL leadership have completely failed to provide the workers with any program of resistance to the encroachments of the capitalists.... That is the reason why fascist demagogues and preachers of race hate and violence are able to receive a hearing from some workers” (*Militant*, 3 July 1943). The pro-capitalist labor bureaucracy’s support to imperialist wars abroad has as its corollary support to the wartime suppression of union struggle at home.

Postwar Anti-Communist Purges

The New Deal put labor in bed with its liberal class enemies in the North as well as the Dixiecrats, who terrorized black people and the unions in the South. It is a myth that Roosevelt’s New Deal pulled the U.S. out of the 1930s Great Depression. The economy did not return to its pre-1929 level until the interimperialist slaughter of World War II set the war industries running in high gear. As opposed to the CP, the SWP supported none of the imperialist combatants, whether “democratic” Allies or the Axis. At the same time, the Trotskyists continued to stand foursquare for the unconditional



Cold Warrior and UAW head Walter Reuther (second from right, front) with President Kennedy, Martin Luther King (far left) and others following 1963 March on Washington.

military defense of the Soviet Union.

The U.S. was the only imperialist power to emerge from the war with its industrial infrastructure intact. It also was the unchallenged military power of the capitalist world. The triumphant U.S. ruling class heralded the “American century.” When the largest strike wave in the country’s history broke out in 1946 amid postwar austerity, the bourgeoisie, rolling in profits, pieced off workers with wage increases and talk of the “American dream.”

At the same time, the victory of the Soviet Union over Nazi Germany and the Red Army’s liberation of much of Central and East Europe was a boon for the USSR. Communism had more prestige despite the anti-working-class crimes of Stalin’s bureaucratic rule. As the industrial-military powerhouse of the non-capitalist world, the Soviet Union was the main enemy of the bourgeoisie. The U.S. rulers turned on their erstwhile ally with a vengeance, launching a Cold War against the Soviet degenerated workers state. In its domestic reflection, the unions were purged of reds and other militants who had led the major organizing struggles of the 1930s.

Given its association with the Russian Revolution and its influential position in the CIO, the Communist Party became the chief target of the witchhunt. As a result of its all-out wartime support for the Allies, the CP had upheld a no-strike pledge and quashed struggles for black rights, betrayals that further isolated it from union militants. The success of the purges helped consolidate an anti-Communist union bureaucracy committed to U.S. imperialism and class peace. Anti-labor laws like the Taft-Hartley Act, which outlawed secondary boycotts and sympathy strikes and demanded “loyalty oaths” from union officials, were passed

at this time. The Cold War leaders of the AFL and CIO—George Meany and Walter Reuther, respectively—denounced such slave-labor legislation but complied with it.

Social democrats like the UAW’s Reuther were the spearhead of repression within the labor movement. He had tried to ban Communists from elected union office as early as 1941. In September 1948, Reuther moved to purge Coleman Young (later the mayor of Detroit) and other CP supporters from the Wayne County CIO. Local 600, where black

the International Affairs Director of the UAW, Reuther’s brother Victor spent CIA money to split Communist-led unions in postwar Europe.

Walter Reuther’s 1950 auto contract, touted as the “Treaty of Detroit,” gave union members a cost-of-living adjustment but tied wages to productivity. The UAW tops agreed with the slogan attributed to GM boss Charles Wilson that “what’s good for General Motors is good for the country.” To maintain labor peace in the late 1960s and early ’70s, Reuther and his lieutenants crushed revolts by radicalized black workers.

In earlier years, the New Deal alliance that Reuther lauded had crippled key labor struggles. For example, in 1946 the CIO announced a campaign to organize the South, grotesquely called “Operation Dixie.” This vital task ran head-on into Jim Crow segregation. The fight for integrated unions would have aroused a vicious backlash from Dixiecrats and their Klan auxiliaries, blowing apart the New Deal coalition. In the face of the Cold War witchhunt, CIO leaders, fearing the prospect of black workers falling in with Communist labor organizers, scuttled the effort after only two years. The working class is still paying for this crime. The open shop South remains a bastion of racist reaction and a “sword of Damocles” hanging over labor’s struggles.

Black and Red

The intervention of Lenin and Trotsky’s Communist International was crucial in

Detroit, June 1943: A black man is dragged from streetcar by racist mob during anti-black riots.



workers and the CP were concentrated, was the last holdout. One authoritative account gives a picture of Walter Reuther working in tandem with the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) to put Local 600 in receivership in the early 1950s: “He described the local’s anti-Korean War stance as a response to the dictates of the Communist party and suggested that an aerial picture of the River Rouge plant printed in *Ford Facts* was evidence of espionage. At the end of the lengthy meeting, the executive board voted unanimously to take control of Local 600 and soon dismissed or suspended many of its leading Negro caucus activists and their white progressive allies” (David M. Lewis-Colman, *Race Against Liberalism*, 2008).

As the witchhunt escalated, Communist workers were beaten up and fired, and attempts were made to evict “reds” from public housing. Particularly in Detroit, CP supporters who were victimized were heavily black. As Lewis-Colman observed, Reuther became “concerned about the race issue in the union. Like many liberal anti-Communists, Reuther believed that racism had become an effective issue for Communists.” Specifically, he wanted to clean up the image of racist U.S. imperialism to neutralize CP influence and to bolster the Cold War drive against the Soviet Union. As such, he would later support Martin Luther King’s liberal pacifism in the South. At the same time, he allied himself with the racist and FBI-linked Association of Catholic Trade Unionists. As

driving home the centrality of the fight for black freedom to the American proletarian revolution. James P. Cannon, a leader of the early CP in the U.S. and later the founder of American Trotskyism, emphasized that Lenin and the Russian Revolution “contributed *more than any other influence from any source* to the recognition, and more or less general acceptance, of the Negro question as a *special* problem of American society—a problem which cannot simply be subsumed under the general heading of the conflict between capital and labor” (“The Russian Revolution and the American Negro Movement,” in *The First Ten Years of American Communism* [1962]).

The SWP tirelessly fought for black rights and equality during World War II and subsequently made headway recruiting black workers, including in Detroit. When Cannon wrote this essay from semi-retirement in 1959, though, the Southern civil rights struggle was polarizing American society and had brought to the fore differences in the SWP on the black question. Cannon was addressing this debate by inference when he observed that the “expansion of the communist influence in the Negro movement” in the 1930s happened despite the CP’s call for self-determination, which invented a separate “black nation” in the Deep South. Cannon continued: “In *practice* the CP jumped over this contradiction. When the party adopted the slogan of ‘self-determination,’ it did not drop its aggressive agitation for *Negro equality and Negro rights on every*

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front.... It was the CP’s agitation and action under the *latter* slogan that brought the results.”

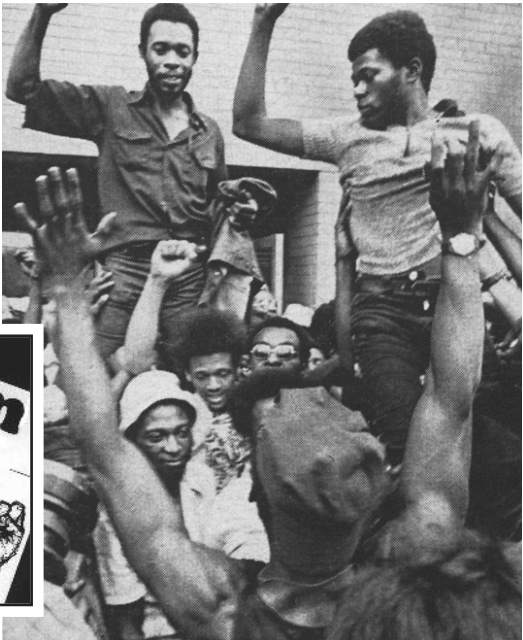
A “Freedom Now” resolution adopted at the SWP’s 1963 Convention codified a wholesale embrace of black nationalism and was accompanied by a policy of abstention from the Southern civil rights struggle. This abstention meant an entire generation of black youth was lost to the revolutionary movement. In a matter of a couple of years, the degenerating SWP would descend into full-blown reformism.

The SWP’s rejection of Marxism over the black question did not go unopposed. Richard Fraser, an SWP member who addressed American black oppression and struggle in his lectures and written documents in the 1950s, was a key figure. By 1963, Fraser was in opposition to the SWP majority, and his tendency submitted a resolution on revolutionary integrationism. The Revolutionary Tendency (RT), forebear of the Spartacist League, supported the basic line of that resolution in a “Statement in Voting on the Negro Question” while giving its own explanation that black people “are not a nation; rather they are an oppressed race-color caste, in the main comprising the most exploited layer of the American working class. From this condition the consequence has come that the Negro struggle for freedom has had, historically, the aim of integration into an equalitarian society.”

Objecting to the SWP majority’s abstentionism and view that “inevitably ours is a white party,” the RT called on the party to “expend significant material resources in overcoming our isolation from Southern struggles.... A successful outcome to our action would lead to an historic breakthrough for the Trotskyist movement.” As the RT put it in the 1963 document “For Black Trotskyism”: “The Negro question is so deeply built into the American capitalist class-structure...that only the *destruction* of existing class relations and the change in class dominance—the passing of power into the hands of the working class—will suffice to strike at the heart of racism and bring about a solution both real and durable.” The leadership of the RT, representing Marxist continuity, was expelled beginning in December 1963 in the rapidly rightward moving SWP’s first political purge.

The SWP’s abandonment of the perspective of building a multiracial vanguard party impacted the development of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers in Detroit. Some of its founding members had been around the SWP, while others came from a Maoist background. Comrade Don Alexander has recounted meeting one of them, John Watson. According to Watson, he was among a number who had attended Friday night Militant Forums and been impressed with the SWP. But the

Detroit, 1973: Organizers of victorious auto sit-down strike being carried from plant. Inset: Shop newsletters issued by Detroit-area Revolutionary Union Movements, from which nationalist League of Revolutionary Black Workers emerged.



Detroit Free Press

SWP was chasing the pacifist preachers and black nationalists and had nothing to offer them, except to advise them to form a separate black party. So they concluded: why not? And that is what they did.

Dead End of Black Nationalism

Detroit in July 1967 was witness to one of the last, and bloodiest, of a series of ghetto rebellions sparked by racist police as well as job and housing discrimination. National Guardsmen and federal troops poured into Detroit as the inner city was turned into a war zone with tanks rumbling down the streets. However, when the majority black 82nd Airborne was sent to Detroit to quell the rebellion, military hardware was soon mysteriously finding its way to the besieged ghetto, illustrating how in times of social upheaval a heavily working-class and minority army will not always remain loyal to the capitalist rulers. As punishment, the 82nd was sent back to Vietnam.

Soon-to-be Democratic mayor Coleman Young had joined his former antagonist, Walter Reuther, in calling on President Lyndon Johnson to send in federal troops. By the time the rebellion was suppressed, 43 black people had been killed, hundreds injured and over 7,000 arrested. Young and Reuther enlisted in the bourgeoisie’s “New Detroit Committee” aimed at saving the Motor City for the Big Three.

In the 1960s, the unemployment rate for black people and youth in Detroit was sky-high. Working conditions in decrepit auto plants were horrendous. Tens of thousands of black workers in the plants were excluded from the skilled trades and trapped in the dirtiest, hottest, most backbreaking and dangerous jobs. The largely white UAW bureaucracy was hostile to its black membership. Racist foremen, speedup and industrial injuries were

common. The title of the book *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying* came from a Detroit blues song of the ’60s that starts, “Please, Mr. Foreman, slow down your assembly line. No, I don’t mind workin’, but I do mind dyin’.” The book documents the period and the development of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers.

After the 1967 ghetto upheaval, black nationalists at Wayne State University coalesced around a community newspaper, the *Inner City Voice*, to form a “black Marxist-Leninist party.” Many black workers hired into the plants in the late ’60s scorned the appeals for “nonviolence” pushed by Martin Luther King and the liberal leadership of the civil rights movement. These militants recognized black workers had some social power at the point of production but did not draw the conclusion that the multiracial working class uniquely could strike real blows against racist American capitalism. *Inner City Voice* cadre made contact with just such black militants at the Dodge Main assembly plant and formed the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM).

A May 1968 wildcat strike over speedup that involved both black and white workers resulted in racist disciplinary actions. In response, DRUM initiated a boycott of nearby racist bars, another three-day wildcat and a rally of 3,000 workers in the plant parking lot. Word of DRUM’s audacity spread. ELRUM was formed at Eldon Ave. Chrysler, as were a number of groups at other plants. Based on this growth, the *Inner City Voice* activists formed the League in early 1969.

In 1970 at the Eldon Ave. Chrysler plant, a black worker who had been fired shot dead two foremen and a white co-worker. Ken Cockrel, a lawyer and founding member of the League, defended him. Blaming the deaths on horrific conditions

at Chrysler and the worker’s lifetime experiences of racism, Cockrel took the jury to the plant so they could see the conditions. In the end, the worker was found not responsible for his acts and awarded worker’s compensation for company-inflicted injuries.

DRUM correctly called for rehiring fired workers and opening the skilled trades to blacks, opposed speedup and unsafe conditions and denounced the betrayals of the UAW tops. But many of their demands were unsupportable: hiring black foremen, general foremen and plant managers; that “a black brother be appointed as head of the board of directors of Chrysler Corporation”; and that “50 percent of all plant protection guards be black.” Such demands would simply put “black faces in high places” and had nothing to do with mobilizing class struggle. That DRUM considered a black director of Chrysler or a black security guard to be a “brother” speaks volumes about the political bankruptcy of black nationalism.

Some white workers respected DRUM picket lines and wanted to work with the group, but DRUM avoided organizing them. They lumped white workers together with the white racist rulers and the trade-union bureaucracy. Especially in Detroit at that time, while there were conservative white workers, there also were young white workers who hated the Vietnam War. However, the League had little interest in politically engaging these workers. In this vein, a supporter of the Spartacist League who had led an effective wildcat strike against Michigan Bell was turned away from their door.

The League’s nationalism also rendered it incapable of building a united class-struggle opposition to the racist, pro-capitalist union bureaucracy typified by UAW secretary treasurer Emil Mazey, who vilified DRUM as a “black peril” more dangerous than the “red peril” of Communism. Instead, the League threatened to pull black workers out of the UAW. Typical was a poem that came out of the DRUM struggles, which concluded: “U.A.W. is scum/OUR THING IS DRUM!!!!”

The League itself split in 1971. The community-oriented wing of Ken Cockrel moved quickly into Democratic Party politics, giving support to Coleman Young. Its more workerist wing—represented by General Baker among others—joined the Stalinist Communist League with its ludicrous theory of the Negro nation in the Deep South and formed the Communist Labor Party. Despite the anti-UAW rants of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, Baker became a UAW bureaucrat, receiving a union award in 2011, for those who “exemplify the teaching and life” of Martin Luther King.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

Ikea Workers...

(continued from page 5)

and a recruiter. He kept contact with its supporters until at least 1950, five years after the Soviet Red Army smashed Hitler’s Third Reich and put an end to the Holocaust. Fascism has always sought to eradicate the organized workers movement in order to shore up capitalist rule. At the same time, the Nazis sought to paper over the conflict between workers and capitalists through chauvinist propaganda portraying the nation as a happy and united family.

Such is the origin of Ikea’s corporate values. Kamprad’s transparently phony egalitarianism, embodied in his modest car and Ikea’s slogan of furniture “for the many,” melts away before the fact that he is the richest man in Europe and fifth richest in the world. Now the world’s largest furniture retailer, Ikea last year made profits of 3.3 billion euros (\$5 billion) through savage exploitation and anti-union attacks.

Revelations that Ikea used private investigators to spy on and entrap employees in France have provoked outrage. When workers in Turkey managed to

organize a union, the company retaliated with harassment and firings. After the workforce at a furniture assembly plant in Virginia owned by an Ikea subsidiary voted to join the Machinists union three years ago, the company worked overtime to try and block this. Full-time workers there start at \$8 an hour, while those hired from temporary contractors get even less.

The Need for Revolutionary Leadership

Ikea’s peculiarities aside, all capitalist enterprises, and all capitalist states, bolster their domination by projecting a false sense of common interests between the boss and the worker. Workers slave and bosses profit, but everyone is supposedly on the same team. Union bureaucrats often seek to shame the employer into upholding its own declared principles or those of the nation as a whole. “Ikea values,” “Swedish values,” “Canadian values,” it’s all the same: by pushing nationalism or loyalty to the employer, the pro-capitalist labour misleaders help to spread the lie that the exploiters and the exploited can and must work together for the common good.

Working people need a leadership that recognizes that the interests of the work-


ing class and the capitalist class are separate and directly opposed to one another. The workers must fight to resist all of the attacks on wages, benefits and jobs. It is necessary to demand decent jobs for all through shortening the workweek at no loss in pay and that wages be fully indexed to inflation. A massive program of public works is needed to rebuild the decaying infrastructure of this country. Medicare, welfare, pensions and other crucial social programs must be vastly expanded to meet the needs of the entire population. Such demands directly challenge the profit-driven capitalist system. They thus point to the need for the working class to do away with the whole system of wage slavery.

The class-struggle perspective necessary to organize the unorganized and revitalize the labour movement is integrally linked to the fight for a new leadership of the working class. Unlike the pro-capitalist NDP, a revolutionary workers party would fight not only to regain what the working people have lost in recent decades but to rip power from and expropriate the tiny class of exploiters, from Kamprad and his lackeys to the owners of the banks and major industries. Working people and oppressed minorities will have

a real future when the capitalist state has been swept away through socialist revolution, creating a society where the wealth produced by labour will be used to the benefit of all, not the profit of a few. ■

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WORKERS VANGUARD

Capitalists Gut the Motor City

Detroit: The Rise and Fall of a Labor/Black Stronghold

The following is a presentation, edited for publication, given by comrade Barry James at a March 22 forum in Chicago.

The “Motor City” was the center of American capitalism’s principal industry and a stronghold of a powerful unionized black proletariat. Today, Detroit is the world capital of closed auto plants, with the world’s most skilled army of homeless. It was

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in Flint, Michigan, in 1937 that a sit-down strike brought the auto giant General Motors to its knees. Michigan now is a newly minted “right to work” state.

Detroit is a monument to the irrationality of the profit system—a system based on the private ownership of the means of production. When the city went into bankruptcy, government spokesmen and the bourgeois press pointed the finger at mismanagement by city officials and “exorbitant” union contracts, which were alibis for the perpetrators. The auto giants brought in waves of labor, including many black workers, to toil on the assembly line only to then toss them on the scrap heap when the plants became unprofitable. A proletarian revolution is necessary to rip the productive wealth of society from the capitalists and build a collectivized, planned economy where production is based on social need, not profit.

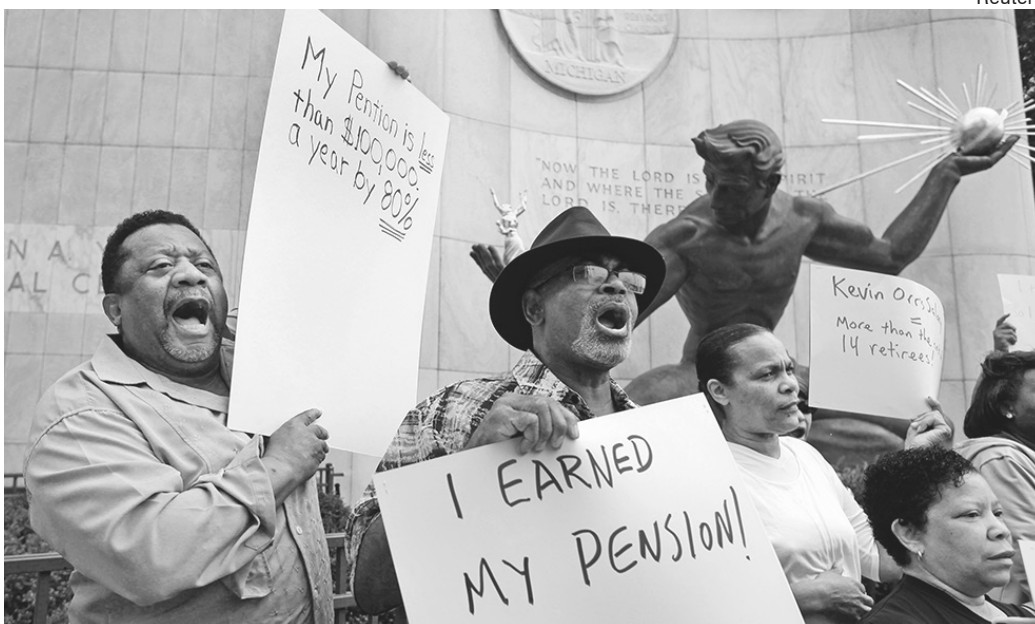
In recent years, Detroit’s population has fallen sharply, leaving an 82 percent black populace that the capitalist rulers consider surplus. The U.S. bourgeoisie presumes that it can starve the poor, gut pensions and impoverish working people without repercussions. This calculation, indeed the plight of Detroit, owes much to the role of the trade-union bureaucracy in suppressing labor struggle.

Barack Obama, a Wall Street Democrat who is overseer of racist U.S. imperialism, was hailed for bailing out the auto bosses. The 2009 bailout meant remaining members of the United Auto Workers (UAW) would work for less, if at all, to restore company profits. In return for allowing the automakers to shave billions owed the retiree health care trust, the UAW took equity stakes in the “new” General Motors and Chrysler—and one seat on the board at the latter. True to form, GM and Chrysler announced plant closures and workers were saddled with a no-strike pledge for six years. The UAW tops assured the automakers, including Ford, that wages and benefits would end up on par with foreign-owned plants in the open shop South! A newly hired autoworker at a remaining plant in Detroit would earn \$14 an hour. This wage, adjusted for inflation,



Detroit News

Above: Striking auto workers in Detroit, 1945. Below: AFSCME city worker retirees protest against pension cuts, August 2013.



Reuters

is three cents less than what Henry Ford was paying in 1914 when he announced the \$5 day.

Current UAW president Bob King has promoted the bailout, turning a defeat for the union into a badge of honor for Obama, with the union bureaucrats pouring millions of dollars into Obama’s reelection. At one time, the UAW was the symbol of union power. Today, the UAW Solidarity House crew can barely choke out the words “working class,” let alone reference the class-struggle methods that built the union.

In the course of the decades-long withering of the trade unions, the UAW tops habitually unfurled the banner of poisonous protectionism: “American Jobs for American Workers.” King may oppose the Pentagon’s School of the Americas, which trains anti-labor death squads for repressive regimes in Latin America, but he can China-bash with the best. The role of the labor bureaucrats was explained by Leon Trotsky in his 1940 article “Trade Unions

in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay”:

“Monopoly capitalism is less and less willing to reconcile itself to the independence of trade unions. It demands of the reformist bureaucracy and the labor aristocracy, who pick up the crumbs from its banquet table, that they become transformed into its political police before the eyes of the working class.”

Turning back the ruling-class war against the unions requires breaking labor’s political subservience to the Democrats and the capitalist order. A fight inside the unions is required to oust the current sellouts and install a class-struggle leadership.

Workers, Black People Made to Pay

In the years prior to Detroit’s bankruptcy filing, former mayor David Bing ended city services, including road repairs, streetlights and garbage collection, to the parts of Detroit he deemed expendable. Meanwhile, the underfunded fire department adopted a “let it burn” policy. Unsatisfied, the Michigan governor appointed

an emergency manager in 2013 to conduct a fire sale of city assets and slash costs, beginning with unionized labor. We oppose the devastating attacks on the pensions and health benefits of city workers past and present. We also oppose the privatization of the city water department to pay back the banks, higher utility service fees be damned.

A number of capitalist philanthropies are donating money to keep the Detroit Institute of Arts from being looted, dubiously claiming that they will make contributions to reduce the pension cutbacks, too. Outrageously, the plundering banks object to taking any “haircut” on their loans from which they have extracted massive profits. For their part, the Michigan public union tops, committed to a course of lobbying Democratic Party politicians, whine that the state constitution “protects” pension benefits. In early December, this protection was tossed out the window when a federal judge ruled that a bankrupt Detroit could wipe out city workers’ pensions, a precedent that has emboldened other municipalities in their efforts to gut pensions.

As for the cops and prison guards, they are *not* workers, but the repressive arm and professional strike-breakers of the capitalist state and we demand their ouster from the unions. The pensions of the retired thugs in blue who “made their living” terrorizing the black populace are no concern of ours. Police from the Detroit area, home to many Arabs, have also helped carry out Obama’s “war on terror.” A case in point is a 2009 FBI raid in which an imam who served the poor—not least hungry Christians—was blown away. He was shot 21 times and then handcuffed while the Feds’ wounded attack dog was airlifted for veterinary care.

The Ford Foundation has a vision of remaking the city into a young, high-tech, artistic-urban farm. Such “reimaginings” can only heighten the sense of siege in black Detroit, which is ringed by white suburbs that were called “sundown towns”—meaning if you’re black you’d better be out by then. In the 1950s, Dearborn mayor Orville Hubbard infamously said to an Alabama newspaper that a black man moving in to Dearborn would be responded to quicker than a fire. This is not simply ancient history. Last November, a 19-year-old black woman met her death by a shotgun blast to the face while seeking help on the porch of a Dearborn Heights home after a car accident.

Not a few of the city’s suburbs are affluent. Adjacent to Detroit is Oakland County, whose elected manager—an all-round retrograde and Ku Klux Klan defender—proposes to build a fence

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