

Capitalists Tell Workers: Pick Your Poison



AP



Reuters

Left: In lead-up to Detroit bankruptcy filing last year, then-mayor David Bing and Michigan governor Rick Snyder (center) announce appointment of Kevyn Orr (right) as city's "emergency manager." Right: Several hundred retirees and their supporters protest cuts to pensions, health benefits outside Detroit federal courthouse on April 1.

Detroit Pension Robbery

In May, over 32,000 active and retired Detroit city workers started receiving ballots asking them to vote on a bankruptcy scheme that will slash their pensions, eliminate their medical plans and gut their unions no matter what the result is. Officials overseeing the nation's largest ever municipal bankruptcy are pressuring workers and retirees to vote "yes" on what they call the "grand bargain": draconian attacks on retirees and current public employees as well as basic services in return for funding from the state of Michigan, private foundations and the Detroit Institute of Arts' backers to "rescue" the city. Municipal workers and retirees vested in the city's pension plans have been placed among the many classes of creditors being asked to approve the package. Make no mistake: eliminating or diminishing pensions is pure theft of workers' earnings. The Detroit pension rip-off is a harbinger of what lies in wait for workers across the country.

Largely crafted by federal mediators, the "grand bargain" is a grand scam. The plan involves sweetheart deals with Wall Street banks, secret concessions from union leaders and a battery of state laws hammering at the rights and the very lives of the residents of this 82 percent black city. Once bankruptcy was declared last July, the presiding judge was legally empowered to "cram down" whatever terms he decides, irrespective of the objections of individual creditors.

The facts about the deal speak for themselves:

- It was widely reported that pension checks for former city workers would drop by 4.5 percent. The plan also calls for a "claw back" of "overly generous" interest earned in their retirement annuity accounts, in effect doubling or tripling the actual reduction in monthly pension payments, which even now average only about \$1,600. Exempted from the most severe cuts are the police—the racist, anti-labor guard dogs of the capitalist class—as well as firemen.



Bloomberg

Detroit neighborhood in ruins in shadow of headquarters of General Motors, recipient of massive government bailout.

- Retiree health care coverage is eliminated, an especially vicious blow to as many as 7,500 retirees too young for Medicare. The city walks away from a \$4.3 billion liability in return for setting up a \$450 million health care trust. While mid-range Obamacare insurance can cost around \$5,000 per year (not including hefty out-of-pocket expenses), Detroit retirees are slated to receive a mere \$175 per month to help buy it.
- Unelected authorities vested with special powers will oversee the massive slashing of benefits and wages. State lawmakers have approved a legislative package that for at least 13 years subjects the city to the diktats of an oversight commission, composed mainly of state officials or people appointed by Republican governor Rick Snyder. Modeled on a board that controlled New York City budgets after the 1975 municipal fiscal crisis, the commission will have final say on labor contracts and will exert authority over and above elected city officials.
- The big banks will make out as always. In late April, the main architects of the Detroit bankruptcy—Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr and U.S. bankruptcy judge Steven Rhodes—cut a deal with Bank of America and UBS, granting them \$85 million to settle claims stemming from wildly speculative financial

"swaps" that the banks had already handsomely profited from. The city had made these transactions in the mid 2000s to shore up the pension plans, only to see them go belly-up during the subsequent world financial crisis.

- Linked to the bankruptcy are plans to privatize the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department. This is a direct attack on a unionized workforce and a sure sign that further suffering is in store for city residents. Already, the water department is sending out crews to shut off 3,000 homes behind in their bill payments *each week*.

The bankruptcy ballot is a complete sham. As one retiree said, "When you open your envelope, there's a gun to

your head." And if the deal is turned down, the government and the courts threaten far worse terms, including pension cuts of as much as 27 percent. The choice, another retiree aptly put it, was between the "deep blue sea with a heavy stone around our necks or burning in hell."

By the lights of the pro-capitalist labor officialdom, workers and retirees have no option other than accepting terms dictated by the capitalist government and courts. To help prepare the creditors' ballot, in late April bureaucrats from 14 municipal unions agreed to massive concessions in new five-year contracts. As a rubber stamp for pension and health care cuts, the government appointed an official retirees committee including representatives from AFSCME, the largest union of city workers, and the United Auto Workers (UAW). Under pressure from angry retirees, some AFSCME officials are telling unionists to hold off on voting. But construction union officials have agreed to kick in cash for the grand scam while the UAW tops have started a fund drive—another illustration of the bureaucrats' program of subordinating workers' class interests to those of the U.S. capitalist rulers, as represented by the Republican and Democratic parties.

Marxists reject the entire framework of the Detroit bankruptcy vote. Guaranteed pensions, decent health plans and other gains for working people came not through the beneficence of their exploiters but through hard class struggle. And it will take real struggle to halt the rulers' efforts

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Women and Revolution



Ida B. Wells A Black Woman's Fight Against Lynch Terror



Donald Duster Collection

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On East Ukraine

23 May 2014

Dear Comrades,

You write in “Right Sector Fascist Provocation at Leftist Event on Ukraine” [WV No. 1045, 2 May]: “We opposed the recent U.S.-backed Ukrainian coup that was spearheaded by the fascists and stand in opposition to the Kiev regime’s provocative military forays in eastern Ukraine. We oppose U.S./EU sanctions against Russia and the U.S./NATO military presence in the Baltics and elsewhere in East Europe. While giving no political support to Vladimir Putin’s Russian-chauvinist regime, we supported Russia’s intervention in Crimea, which allowed the people of that region to exercise their right of self-determination through reunification with Russia.”

So far, so good. Crucially missing, however, from this description of your position regarding the current situation in eastern Ukraine are your stance with respect to the pro-Russian or secessionist forces there, on the one hand, and the Russian support for them, on the other. By not defining your stance on these two key issues, you allow your opponents to surmise what it would be, and they will not let this opportunity pass to smear you as is their custom. My own view is that, given the more heterogeneous nature of the population in eastern Ukraine (as compared to that in the Crimea), you should oppose the pro-Russian/secessionist forces and their Russian backers there to the same degree as you oppose “the Kiev regime’s

provocative military forays in eastern Ukraine” and any U.S./EU/NATO meddling there.

With comradely greetings,
B.R.

WV replies:

We addressed developments in eastern Ukraine subsequent to the article cited by B.R. in “U.S. Imperialism Behind Bloody Repression in Ukraine” (WV No. 1046, 16 May), which takes stock of the differences in the ethnic makeup of Crimea compared to that region. Crimea was historically a part of Russia and is majority ethnic Russian. Eastern Ukraine has a more mixed population, but it is heavily assimilated and Russified in terms of language and culture. There is a high degree of intermarriage of Russians and Ukrainians, with many people having both Russian and Ukrainian heritage. For example, according to one survey, in Donetsk province only 39 percent of the population considers itself Russian but a full 93 percent is Russian speaking; in Luhansk, the numbers are 55 percent and 89 percent, respectively.

From day one of the coup spearheaded by forces from western Ukraine, Kiev made no secret of its virulent hostility toward ethnic Russians and Russian culture. An attempt was made to ban Russian and impose the Ukrainian language. In Donetsk, Luhansk and other eastern cities, protesters rose up, enraged by that move as well as the pres-

ence of virulently anti-Russian fascists in the government. Since then, Kiev’s repression has only escalated; it is now bombing cities and killing dozens of civilians. In the face of this military offensive and the accompanying fascist terror, revolutionary Marxists cannot remain neutral: the interest of the working class—in Ukraine, Russia and internationally—clearly lies in defense of the population of eastern Ukraine.

The key fault line in Ukraine has long been between the three more rural and historically Uniate Catholic provinces in the west—a breeding ground of Ukrainian nationalism, including the fascists of Svoboda and Right Sector—and the heavily Russified, Russian-speaking and Orthodox east, where the bulk of industry is located. Although earlier polls suggested that a majority in the east wished to remain part of Ukraine while maintaining close ties with Russia, the hostility of the new Kiev regime has changed many minds. Sentiment in the east for separation may well harden under the repeated blows of the central government, which is gearing up, in the words of newly installed President Petro Poroshenko, one of the world’s richest men, to defend the country’s territorial integrity “no matter what.”

The people of eastern Ukraine should be

able to decide the fate of their region. The massive vote in the May 11 referendums in Donetsk and Luhansk provinces, while only a straw poll, strongly indicated a desire to pull away from Kiev’s control. We defend the democratic right of the population there to conduct the referendum and to act on the vote for “self-rule,” whether that entails pursuit of a federated Ukraine, independence or adherence to Russia. This position does not constitute political support for the insurgent leadership, which is by all indications entirely wedded to capitalist rule. In fact, the new self-declared prime minister of the Donetsk People’s Republic, Alexander Borodai, is an ardent anti-Semitic Russian nationalist.

Neither is our position dependent on the level of support accorded by Russian president Vladimir Putin to the “pro-Russian” forces. (In contrast to Crimea, where capitalist Russia acted on its perceived national interests by annexing the peninsula, Putin has at least for now publicly distanced himself from the insurgents in eastern Ukraine.) In our defense of that region’s population, we are guided by the approach of V.I. Lenin, who opposed all privileges for one people or nation with regard to another in order to foster the fighting unity of the multinational working class. ■

Correction on Indian Stalinists, Congress and World War II

7 June 2014

Dear Comrades,

I liked Trotsky’s 1939 “An Open Letter to the Workers of India” that you ran in the last issue alongside the front-page India article. However, I think the opening sentence of your introduction to that letter is inaccurate. It says: “With the outbreak of World War II, India’s bourgeois-nationalist Congress Party and its Stalinist sycophants lined up behind ‘democratic’ Britain.”

Britain entered India into the war without even a pretence of consulting its colonial subjects. Congress leaders were initially divided on support to Britain in the war. On the right wing of the party, Gandhi’s position was for unconditional support to Britain, but the “left” wing represented at the time by S.C. Bose was “in favour of an all-out war on British imperialism” (*Communism and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1939-1945*, D.N. Gupta). But when the Congress Working Committee met in September 1939, Gandhi was not able to win the Congress leadership to his position. Nehru came up with a compromise position between those of Gandhi and Bose. Essentially, it made Congress’ support for the British conditional on a promise of some degree of independence after the war. I think the following statement from our article on the Quit India movement accurately sums up the Congress position. It says:

“For its part Congress’ formal position was that its support to the war was conditional on being granted independence from Britain. What this boiled down to was ‘demanding’ some concessions in exchange for producing cannon fod-

der for the imperialist war effort. Then, emboldened by Britain’s difficulties as Japan advanced through the Pacific and into Burma and cognisant that they might soon need to deal with another imperialist overlord, Congress went from conditional support to open opposition, seeking to force a settlement with British imperialism.”

—“Stalinist Alliance with Churchill Betrayed Indian Revolution,” WV No. 970, 3 December 2010

With growing sentiment among the masses for independence, and Britain refusing to give an inch, in August 1942 Gandhi launched the Quit India movement. During the war, many Congress leaders were jailed by the British. By contrast, Jinnah and the Muslim League supported Britain unreservedly throughout the war.

As for the Stalinists of the Communist Party of India (CPI), they certainly were slavish in support of “democratic” Britain, but not at the *outbreak* of the war. Again, as we said in the above article:

“During the period of the Stalin-Hitler pact the CPI as all the other parties of the Comintern (which would be formally liquidated by Stalin in 1943) denounced the ‘democratic’ facade of the British imperialists in their war against Germany.... But when Hitler’s ‘Operation Barbarossa’ was launched against the Soviet Union in June 1941 and the wartime alliance between Britain and the USSR was sealed, the Comintern instructed another sharp turn to the ‘People’s War Against Fascism’ and all-out support for the war effort in the imperialist countries and their colonies.”

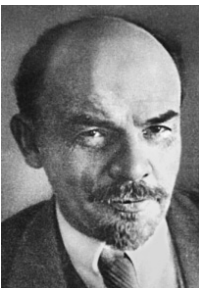
Comradely greetings,
E. McDonald



TROTSKY

The Chinese Proletariat and the Tiananmen Uprising

To mark the 25th anniversary of the mass protests centered in Beijing’s Tiananmen Square, we reprint below excerpts from our article written immediately following the 3-4 June 1989 massacre of working people and students by the Stalinist regime of Deng Xiaoping. Far from backing down after the repression, millions of workers across China continued to wage mass strikes and protests, driven by anger over official corruption and



LENIN

the effects of Deng’s “market reforms.” While the imperialist media painted the upheaval as simply a pro-Western student movement for “democracy,” we emphasized that it marked an incipient proletarian political revolution against the bureaucracy whose rule undermined the workers state established with the overthrow of capitalism in the 1949 Chinese Revolution. Under the impact of the proletarian upsurge, the army, including the officer corps, had begun to fracture.

The “Beijing Spring” reverberated in the Soviet Union and the East and Central European deformed workers states, which would soon face the sharply posed alternatives: workers political revolution or capitalist counterrevolution. The Chinese bureaucracy was able, over the next few weeks, to reassert control, mainly through bloody repression against the workers. The crucial missing element, during the Tiananmen events as well as today, is an authentic communist—i.e., Leninist-Trotskyist—party to lead the combative proletariat.

JUNE 6—Chinese Stalinism has provoked a political revolution that may well spell the doom of this bureaucratic, anti-worker regime. The massacre of students and other protesters by the despised Deng regime has brought China to the brink of civil war. The bloodletting, with victims numbering perhaps in the thousands, did not succeed in intimidating the populace. Defiant and heroic, the rebels marched out of Beijing’s Tiananmen Square singing the socialist workers anthem, the *Internationale*....

Conditions are exceptionally favorable for the working class to take charge in China. Industrial workers have enormous social weight in the main arenas of struggle, Beijing and Shanghai, as well as Wuhan and Canton. It was the hundreds of thousands of working people pouring into the streets who stymied the regime’s attempt to impose martial law. Motorcycle squads of workers reported on troop placements around Beijing. And the mass of soldiers identify with the working people. They, too, are hard-hit by the raging inflation resulting from Deng’s market-oriented policies....

Only the working class, under the leadership of a genuine communist vanguard party, can unify China through developing a just, egalitarian and prosperous society. The restoration of centralized economic planning, under a workers and peasants government, is necessary to begin to even out the now enormous regional differences. At the same time, a Chinese soviet government would scrupulously respect the national rights of the non-Han minorities, granting autonomy for Inner Mongolia, Tibet and the Turkic-speaking peoples of Sinkiang....

A truly communist China would help forge the unity of the world working class and oppressed toilers against imperialism. A first and elementary step is to generously aid the reconstruction of impoverished Vietnam, whose decades-long struggle inflicted the greatest-ever defeat on U.S. imperialism. And Chinese workers must link up with the powerful Soviet working class, whose resistance to Gorbachev’s market-oriented perestroika can open the road to proletarian political revolution in the USSR. A revolutionary internationalist government in Beijing would also be a tremendous impetus for socialist revolution in Japan, the industrial powerhouse of Asia. To construct a Leninist-Trotskyist communist party in China it is necessary to break workers and radical students from liberal illusions and Stalinist-nationalist prejudices.

—“Beijing Massacre—Civil War Looms,” WV No. 479, 9 June 1989

WORKERS VANGUARD



Marxist Working-Class Biweekly of the Spartacist League of the U.S.

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The Spartacist League is the U.S. section of the International Communist League

(Fourth Internationalist).

Workers Vanguard (ISSN 0276-0746) published biweekly, except skipping three alternate issues in June, July and August (beginning with omitting the second issue in June) and skipping the last issue in December, by the Spartacist Publishing Co., 299 Broadway, Suite 318, New York, NY 10007. Telephone: (212) 732-7862 (Editorial), (212) 732-7861 (Business). Address all correspondence to: Box 1377 GPO, New York, NY 10116. E-mail address: vanguard@tiac.net. Domestic subscriptions: \$10.00/22 issues. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Workers Vanguard*, Box 1377 GPO, New York, NY 10116.

Opinions expressed in signed articles or letters do not necessarily express the editorial viewpoint.

The closing date for news in this issue is June 10.

No. 1048

13 June 2014

Albuquerque Cops' Killing Spree

Across the country, outrage greeted the release of a video documenting a March 16 shoot-to-kill operation carried out by the Albuquerque Police Department (APD). The target was James Boyd, a 38-year-old homeless man with a history of mental illness who was “illegally camping” in the hills outside the New Mexico city. After shooting Boyd once, an APD assault team closed in on him as he lay prone, moaning: “I can’t move” and “Please don’t hurt me anymore.” They again opened fire; he did not survive.

Far from an aberrant horror, Boyd’s killing was another grisly addition to the APD’s body count, which has continued to grow. At the time, a Department of Justice (DOJ) investigation of the department was underway. When its findings went public in early April, 23 people were revealed to have been shot dead by the Albuquerque police since 2010. Two months on, the APD has taken three more lives.

Long-simmering anger erupted as the Boyd video went viral, with hundreds taking to city streets on March 30. The APD responded with what it knows best: vicious



Albuquerque Police Department

March 16: Cops corner and kill James Boyd, a homeless man, in foothills outside Albuquerque.

repression. Ten hours into the demonstration, local riot cops, along with the National Guard and police from other cities, fired tear gas into the dwindling crowd, arresting

six. On June 2, after Boyd’s autopsy had confirmed that the fatal bullet struck him in the lower back as seen in the grim footage, some 20 people—among them rela-

tives of victims of police killings—entered the mayor’s office to stage a sit-in. Thirteen protesters were arrested, 12 of them on trespassing and other misdemeanor charges. The remaining person, David Correia, a University of New Mexico faculty member, was hit with a bogus fourth-degree felony: “battery of a peace officer.” It is no accident that this well-known opponent of police brutality was singled out. ***Drop all charges against the protesters now!***

Victims of the APD’s terror are often homeless and/or mentally ill. Mostly, they are poor in a state that, with Mississippi, ranks among the poorest of all 50 states. One APD officer, who in 2011 gunned down a man, described his job on Facebook as “human waste disposal.” Such murderous appetite is nothing new to the department. In “The Return of the Albuquerque Death Squads” (*CounterPunch*, 23 November 2011), Correia described “the extrajudicial police shootings that turned 1970s Albuquerque into a killing field,” particularly targeting Chicano and Native American activists. *When not outright*
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Rikers Island: Racist House of Horrors



AP



Daniel Kramer

Family members display photos of mentally ill prisoners who met their grisly end at Rikers Island. Jerome Murdough (in left photo), baked to death in his cell on February 15; Bradley Ballard (right), died in solitary on 11 September 2013.

On a frigid night in February, ex-Marine Jerome Murdough, who was homeless and suffering from schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, took shelter in the stairwell of a New York City public housing building. Arrested for trespassing and unable to post the \$2,500 bail, he was thrown into a mental observation unit on Rikers Island, the city’s main jail complex. Within a week, Murdough was dead. A city official explained that he “basically baked to death” in a cell heated by faulty equipment, a victim of the indifference of the guards as to whether he lived or died. It was not his jailers but an AP journalist, exposing the many crimes committed by the authorities against inmates at Rikers, who informed Murdough’s family of his death.

There are vast numbers of potential Jerome Murdoughs at Rikers at any given time—around 12,000 men, women and children, at least 90 percent of them black or Latino. The majority are awaiting trial, in some cases for years. Others are due to be transferred to faraway state prisons or are serving sentences of less than a year. The NYPD’s racist stop-and-frisk campaign, the vigorous enforcement of petty misdemeanor offenses and impossible parole conditions all feed a system in which poor black and Latino men cycle through the jail on a regular basis, even if never convicted. As a former warden put it: “Most Rikers inmates are serving a life sentence—one six-month bid at a time.”

And lives are regularly cut short on the inside. Five months before Murdough’s

death, another black schizophrenic man, Bradley Ballard, died in solitary, where he had been thrown for allegedly making a lewd gesture to a female guard. Guards denied Ballard some of his medication. Days later, he was found naked and unresponsive in his cell, covered in feces and with his genitals badly infected and swollen from a ligature.

In 2012, 25-year-old Jason Echevarria died in his cell after ingesting soap that inmates had been given to clean up after raw sewage flooded their cells. Vomiting blood, he begged for medical attention for hours. One of the few officers who responded to Echevarria’s cries was told by the duty captain: “Don’t call me if you have live, breathing bodies. Only call me if you need an extraction, or if you have a dead body.” Echevarria’s death is unusual only for the fact that the captain has actually been indicted, albeit only on the grounds of violating the civil rights of an inmate.

Today, over 4,000 inmates at Rikers have a serious mental illness—twice the number of a decade ago. The closure of mental health facilities, the difficulty of obtaining health care and the dire straits for so many caused by the economic crash of 2008 have fueled this dramatic increase. The prognosis is grim: those with mental illness are incarcerated longer and are more likely to be injured than other inmates.

The unspeakable violence and brutality of jail, from Rikers to L.A. County, exacerbates all kinds of mental condi-

tions. And this is not unusual in capitalist America, where such barbarism is the product of a society in decay. Rejecting the possibility of establishing a decent mental health care system as a drain on its coffers, the ruling class instead hires goons to torture and torment the sick in its jailhouses for the poor. Notably, the level of violence by Rikers guards is way up, even by official estimates.

Systematic solitary confinement is central to a ghoulish system that makes, and keeps, inmates insane. The guards have been the driving force behind the rampant solitary lockup at Rikers—there are now nearly 1,000 such cells, up from just 12 in 1990. Norman Seabrook, head of the Correction Officers’ Benevolent Association (COBA), proudly stated in a February 21 interview with PBS: “We fought vigorously to ensure that those that committed infractions in the city’s jail system are sentenced to punitive segregation time.”

Mentally ill inmates in Rikers are responsible for about two-thirds of those “infractions.” City officials have admitted that solitary confinement and “therapeutic” units at Rikers are rife with abuse and neglect. They describe walls covered with feces and body fluids as well as inmates who scream incessantly and throw themselves into walls and doors of the cells they are locked in 22-24 hours a day.

Young people are not spared this treatment. In New York State, anyone 16 years or over is prosecuted as an adult no matter the charge. As a result, hundreds of teen-

agers are locked up in Rikers, a testament to the reality that black inner-city youth are all but written off as expendable by a ruling class that has no jobs for them to fill. On any given day, a quarter of the teenagers at Rikers are in solitary. A report by the Board of Correction noted that mentally ill teenagers can be kept in segregation for months, receiving therapy by shouting to a counselor through a cell door. And even the smallest gestures provoke a backlash from the guards, such as when COBA recently protested against teenage inmates receiving pizza from health care staff.

After the death of Murdough, Mayor Bill de Blasio formed a task force charged with reducing the number of mentally ill people packed off to jail. But the pipeline to Rikers has remained wide open under his watch. In de Blasio’s first three months in office, the number of misdemeanor arrests was virtually unchanged from the same period last year.

De Blasio has also appointed a new correction commissioner, Joseph Ponte, known as a reformer...for reducing the number of prisoners held in solitary confinement in Maine from 100 to less than 50. Seabrook reacted to the appointment by spewing racist garbage that in Maine the “biggest gang problem was the Aryan Nation” whereas in New York City “I got Bloods, I got Crips, I got the Latin Kings.” Ponte has since assured the guards that no solitary cells will close.

There is a vicious gang in the pay of the city at Rikers: the sadistic thugs of COBA. But it is widely portrayed as a union dealing with the “safety” of its members, like a public employee’s union fighting City Hall for better work conditions. Nothing is further from the truth. The guards are the armed thugs of the racist capitalist class who stalk the halls of jails striking fear into black and Latino inmates. They are a crucial part of the apparatus of the capitalist state that, together with the cops and courts, is used to repress the working and oppressed masses on behalf of the capitalist rulers. Cops and guards are not workers and have no place in the union movement.

The multiracial working class, with its hands on the wheels of production, is the only social force with the power and the interest to shatter the capitalist order and its repressive machinery. Nothing short of socialist revolution will do away with the depravities of America’s dungeons. When the working class is in power internationally, the wealth now appropriated by a tiny class of exploiters can be put to serving the needs of humanity, from providing quality housing to health care, opening the door to a future in which all can thrive. ■

Reformist Left: Shills for U.S./EU Imperialists Over Ukraine

Throughout the ongoing crisis in Ukraine, the International Communist League and its sections have stood staunchly against the machinations of the U.S. imperialists and their counterparts in the European Union (EU). Not so the vast bulk of reformist groups across Europe, as well as in the U.S., which have in one way or another lined up in support of the “democratic” imperialist powers.

The U.S. and European states helped instigate and inflame the turmoil in Ukraine that began with the outbreak of the Maidan protests last November after then-president Victor Yanukovich rejected “partnership” with the EU. Throwing money and publicity behind the protests, Washington in particular was central to the formation of the new government that was installed with the February 22 coup. For the U.S./EU imperialists, the aim has been to establish a client state on the border of capitalist Russia, which under the rule of strongman Vladimir Putin has increasingly become a thorn in their sides as well as a political rival.

We warned from the outset about the presence among the Maidan protesters of a significant fascist element, centered on the Svoboda party, which derives from the Ukrainian nationalists led by Stepan Bandera, whose forces committed mass murders of Jews and Poles in collaboration with the Nazis during World War II. After the war, the Banderaites worked with Western intelligence against the Soviet Union. The coup that ousted Yanukovich was spearheaded by fascists and supported by the U.S. and EU. Among the first actions of the new parliament was to abolish the official status of Russian and other minority languages, a measure that the interim president vetoed under pressure to give the coup a “democratic” veneer.

The establishment of a right-wing Ukrainian-nationalist regime in Kiev alarmed the Russian-speaking population of eastern and southern Ukraine. Faced with the prospect of the further extension of the NATO military alliance to its very doorstep, capitalist Russia moved quickly to bolster its troop levels in Crimea to secure its national interests there, particularly its strategic Black Sea Fleet based in Sevastopol. The ICL supported this intervention based on our support of the democratic right of Crimea’s ethnic Russian population to self-determination. In opposition to the imperialist lie that Russia was intervening into a foreign country, we pointed out the fact that “Crimea is Russian,” including its historical adhesion to Russia, and explained:

“The people of Crimea have every right to self-determination, including independence or incorporation into Russia. In the present juncture, exercising that right might well depend on the support of Russian forces. Indeed, it was the new Crimean government that requested Russian intervention.”

—“Ukraine Coup: Spearheaded by Fascists, Backed by U.S./EU Imperialists,” WV No. 1041, 7 March

The validity of our position was underlined by the massive vote in favor of rejoining Russia in the subsequent Crimean referendum.

Our defense of the Russian intervention



ITAR-TASS

Reuters

Top: Fascist Right Sector thugs take oath of allegiance to Ukraine at their Kiev headquarters, June 3. Obama with Ukraine’s president-elect Petro Poroshenko in Warsaw the next day.

did not and does not imply any political support to the Putin regime, a capitalist government based on Great Russian chauvinism. We opposed Russia’s murderous 1994 and 1999 invasions of Chechnya, a country in the Caucasus whose population is overwhelmingly Muslim, and call for that country’s independence. During the 2008 war between Russia and U.S.-backed Georgia, we were revolutionary defeatist on both sides: the class interests of the workers of Georgia and Russia lay in a struggle to overthrow their respective capitalist rulers through socialist revolution. We also champion the rights of the Tatar and other oppressed minorities in Crimea and elsewhere in Russia.

After Crimea rejoined Russia, the Kiev regime launched an ongoing campaign against insurgent forces in the east. Hundreds have already been killed in the Ukrainian military’s bloody crackdown. On May 2, a fascist-led mob firebombed a trade-union building in the southern city of Odessa, massacring more than 40 anti-government protesters. Behind the repression lies the hand of the Kiev regime’s patrons—the U.S. and EU imperialists. While Washington and (to a lesser extent) the EU are implementing sanctions against associates of Putin for “intervening,” the CIA and FBI are busy advising Kiev how best to suppress the separatists. We oppose the imperialists’ sanctions against Russia and their military provocations in the region.

Spurred on by the repression unleashed by Kiev, insurgents in the eastern provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk held May 11 referendums in which the overwhelming vote was for “self rule.” We defended the right of the people there to conduct the referendum and to act on the result of the vote, which could entail a push for a federated Ukraine, independence or unification with Russia. Upholding the democratic rights of all nationalities is crucial to our goal of forging the revolutionary unity of the proletariat across national, ethnic and communal lines. An urgently needed

expression of such working-class unity would be the formation of multi-ethnic, non-sectarian workers militias to crush the fascists, who represent a threat to *all* workers and minorities in Ukraine. This perspective requires steadfast opposition to the schemes of the imperialist powers.

The situation in Ukraine is a result of the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union, the world’s first workers state, in 1991-92. The imperialist-spearheaded counterrevolution led to economic collapse and the bloody resurgence of national antagonisms, unleashing untold misery on the peoples of Russia, Ukraine and the other former Soviet Republics. To the best of our ability and resources, the ICL fought to defend the USSR against capitalist restoration and for workers political revolution to oust the Stalinist bureaucracy, whose politics fatally undermined the gains of the 1917 October Revolution.

The imperialists’ mouthpieces in the bourgeois media are warning of a “new cold war” between the West and Russia. This characterization disappears the *class line* that existed between the U.S. and its West European allies on the one hand and the Soviet degenerated workers state and the deformed workers states of East Europe on the other. The current regime

in Russia represents the very capitalist class that the imperialists fought tooth and nail to restore to power throughout the Cold War. After capitalist restoration, the oligarchs enriched themselves by looting the former state-owned industries.

Apologists for U.S./EU Imperialism

In contrast to the ICL’s proletarian internationalist perspective, most reformist groups in the U.S. and West Europe have effectively lined up with their capitalist rulers, retailing lies about “Russian aggression.” In the U.S., the International Socialist Organization (ISO) hailed the Maidan mobilizations as “action from below” even while admitting the role of the fascists. And when the White House railed at Russia’s reincorporation of Crimea, the ISO and Socialist Alternative/Committee for a Workers’ International chimed in with cries of “Russian imperialism.”

In Britain, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), leading section of the tendency founded by Tony Cliff, saves the bulk of its outrage for Russia, notwithstanding some limited criticisms of the U.S. and EU. A *Socialist Worker* (March 3) article by SWP honcho Alex Callinicos lectured: “Russia’s seizure of military control over Crimea has brought Ukraine to the brink of war.” Callinicos whitewashed the role of the fascists in the Kiev coup, offering that “those who claim Yanukovych’s overthrow was a ‘fascist coup’ are parroting Moscow propaganda.” In fact, the fascists of Svoboda and the Right Sector were the shock troops for the coup and quickly became prominent components of the new Kiev government.

Such details are incidental to the SWP, which is known for tailing after almost any “popular” movement, no matter how reactionary. This goes back to their origins, when they capitulated to their own “democratic” imperialist rulers by refusing to defend the Chinese and North Korean deformed workers states during the Korean War of the early 1950s. The British *Socialist Worker* (6 May) also grotesquely alibied the May 2 fascist massacre in Odessa, reporting only that “the Russian and Ukrainian governments each blamed forces sympathetic to the other side,” even though video footage clearly showed the fascists firing into the trade-union building as people jumped to escape the flames.

It was the German-dominated EU’s attempt to extend its tentacles into Ukraine that sparked the current crisis. Part of the European left supports EU expansion, purveying the lie that this imperialist alliance can be transformed into a “social Europe,” where democracy and prosperity prevail. The Pabloite United Secretariat’s (USec) German-language journal *Inprekorr* (March-April) published a statement by French New Anti-Capitalist Party

Clarification on East Ukraine Population

In “U.S. Imperialism Behind Bloody Repression in Ukraine” (WV No. 1046, 16 May), the use of the term “interpenetrated peoples” in regard to eastern Ukraine was misleading. This heavily assimilated, predominantly Russian-speaking area, inhabited by both ethnic Ukrainians and ethnic Russians, is more accurately described as a territory of mixed population. The term “interpenetrated peoples” for us is not simply a sociological characterization but has programmatic significance, describing situations where two or more

antagonistic peoples have claims to the same territory (e.g., Israel/Palestine or Northern Ireland). In such cases, the democratic right of national self-determination—that is, the right to form a separate state—cannot be achieved for one people under capitalism without violating the rights of the others. In eastern Ukraine, there is no national conflict between ethnic Ukrainians and ethnic Russians, as indicated by the turnout and overwhelming vote for “self-rule” in the May 11 referendums in Donetsk and Luhansk provinces.

NOTICE

Workers Vanguard skips alternate issues in June, July and August.

Our next issue will be dated July 11.

activist and longtime USec spokesman Catherine Samary that claimed the solution to the Ukraine crisis was a “Bigger Europe.” In its May-June issue, *Inprekorr* printed a declaration by Zbigniew Marcin Kowalewski defending the right of Ukraine to join the EU, because anything else would be “the chauvinism of the privileged.”

The fake Trotskyist groups prettifying the fascist-infested Maidan movement today had earlier supported fascist and other anti-Soviet forces during Cold War II in the late 1970s and 80s. Notably, some Stalinist-derived organizations have not been as shrill. In Germany, which has extensive trade relations with Russia, the government has performed something of a balancing act between supporting the new regime in Kiev and trying not to break all ties with Russia. The concerns of a section of the German ruling class were reflected in a March 22 statement of the social-democratic Left Party (formed in part by East German ex-Stalinists), which opined: “The answer to the separation of the Crimea by the Russian federation which is contrary to international law and which we condemn must lie in diplomacy.”

And then there are those that have been somewhat more critical of the imperialists and their fascist allies in Ukraine. In Italy, Rifondazione Comunista denounced the U.S. and EU for supporting the fascists in Kiev and opposes the sanctions against Russia. But Rifondazione also states that it fights to ensure “Europe is independent of the USA,” thereby declaring their allegiance to the presumably more enlightened EU imperialists. In fact, the EU is an imperialist bloc whose purpose is to tighten the screws on European workers



March 16: Crowds gather in Simferopol's Lenin Square to celebrate Crimea's vote to secede from Ukraine and rejoin Russia.

While aiming most of their fire at the EU and U.S., WP also claims that capitalist Russia is one of the “recent graduates to the imperialist club,” and furthermore so is China. They thus lend support to the U.S. and Japanese imperialists’ ongoing military provocations against the Chinese deformed workers state (see article on page 12). The reformists’ demonization of “Russian imperialism” is a blatant capitulation to their own capitalist rulers.

For Marxists, labeling a country imperialist is not an epithet but a scientific characterization of that country’s role within the global economic system. Bolshevik leader V.I. Lenin’s 1916 pamphlet *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capital-*

Soviet Union, except for a very limited intervention in 1994 when Russian troops in Serbia served as soft cops for NATO. This is in stark contrast not only to the U.S., which as the self-appointed “world’s policeman” invades and bombs countries across the globe, but also to second-rate imperialist powers like Britain and France, which repeatedly send their troops abroad to advance their national interests. More than a century of rape, pillage and war by the imperialists of the U.S., Europe and Japan proves that these are, in fact, the biggest enemies of the world’s working people.

The Capitalist State and National Oppression

Groups like those in the Cliffite tendency justify their opposition to self-determination for Crimea by retailing the imperialist line that the referendum was not democratic due to the supposed Russian invasion. For their part, Rifondazione Comunista and Workers Power, which acknowledged in theory the right of self-determination for Crimea, refused to support the intervention of Russian troops that made the implementation of that right possible. In fact, the presence of Russian troops was welcomed by the vast majority of Crimeans for that very reason: it enabled them to finally hold a referendum to rejoin Russia after years of being prevented from doing so by successive Kiev governments.

The leader of the French Left Party, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, denounced some of the cruder lies in the bourgeois press about Russian troops “invading” Crimea, but at the same time declared in a March 5 blog post: “Currently, the number one issue is to avoid war. This means above all to prevent the partition of the country: we do not touch the borders in Europe! Neither here nor anywhere.” Upholding the sanctity of borders in Europe is, of course, the line of the West European ruling classes, which oppose the exercise of self-determination by oppressed nationalities at home, such as the Basques and Catalans.

In opposition to such chauvinism, we call for the right of independence for the Basques on both sides of the French

and Spanish border as well as for the Catalans, whose scheduled referendum on self-determination later this year has been declared illegal by the Castilian-chauvinist government based in Madrid. We stand for the right of Catalonia and other nations not only to “unilaterally” hold a vote on independence but to *act* on a vote in favor of secession.

The generally more left-sounding Stalinists of the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) also express chauvinist opposition to changing borders. In a March 14 statement on the Crimea referendum posted in English on the KKE Web site, they wrote: “The secession of the Crimea and its assimilation in Russia will further strengthen the nationalist current, both in Ukraine and in Russia.... There is also the danger of opening ‘Pandora’s Box’ in other regions as well, especially in the Balkans, leading to other regions being assimilated e.g. the assimilation of Kosovo into the so-called ‘Greater Albania’ which is linked to the annexations of the territories of neighbouring countries. There are in any case examples from the dismemberment of Yugoslavia which, in the name of the self-determination of the peoples, paved the way for border changes.”

The Pandora’s Box that the KKE is so fearful of opening is full of claims on Greek territory by bordering states. Also weighing heavily on their minds and those of the Greek bourgeoisie are Greek claims on the island of Cyprus, which was bloodily partitioned in 1974 into separate Turkish and Greek zones. The KKE’s obsession with not ceding an inch of “Greek soil” provides the framework for their position on Crimea.

That the KKE’s defense of the borders of the bourgeois state is based on the purest Greek nationalism is demonstrated in the April 27 issue of its newspaper *Rizospastis*, which denies the existence of Macedonian or Turkish minorities in Greece. The KKE calls for upholding the borders drawn up by the British and French imperialists in the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, which ended the predatory war against Turkey waged by these powers and their Greek lackeys. In opposition to such nationalism, our comrades of the Trotskyist Group of Greece uphold the right of the Macedonian minority in Greece to self-determination, including the right to unite with the existing state of Macedonia. We also defend democratic rights for the Turkish-speaking and other non-Greek minorities in Greece.

To cover its chauvinism, the KKE argues that the assimilation of Crimea into Russia would not “solve in essence any of the real problems of the Crimean people” because they would be joining a capitalist rather than a socialist country. Some left gloss was also provided by the inveterate reformists of the International Marxist Tendency, led today by Alan Woods, which conveniently sidestepped taking a position on Crimea while calling for a “united socialist Ukraine.” Concretely, this echoes the chauvinist line that Ukraine is one and indivisible—i.e., a denial that there is any aspect of national oppression posed in the country.

Arguments to the effect that self-determination is meaningless under capitalism and should be postponed until there is socialism are not new. Lenin argued

continued on page 10



Grozny, February 2000: Draft-age Chechen men rounded up by Russian special police. ICL opposed Russian invasion, demanded independence for Chechnya.

and to act as a tool for its larger powers, particularly Germany, to exploit weaker, dependent capitalist states. Its eastward expansion will only mean increased misery for the working class across the continent.

The EU maintains racist fortress Europe, under which the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas have become mass graveyards for desperate immigrants fleeing war and hunger inflicted by *both* the U.S. and EU imperialists in their African and Near Eastern neocolonies. Rifondazione has made its own contribution to fortress Europe by participating in bourgeois governments from 1996-98 and 2006-08. *Down with the EU and racist fortress Europe!* We fight for the expropriation of the bourgeoisie through socialist revolution and for an internationally planned economy that will overcome the limits of the nation-state. *For a Socialist United States of Europe!*

Capitalist Russia: Not in the Imperialist Club

The British Workers Power (WP) group, part of the League for the Fifth International, has published a Summer 2014 “Ukraine Supplement” headlined “Stop Nato’s New War Drive” that includes a polemic against the USec’s blatantly pro-imperialist line on the Maidan protests.

ism put forward a Marxist description of modern imperialism as that epoch of capitalism marked by monopolies, the dominance of finance capital and the export of capital. A few major advanced capitalist states had divided the world into “spheres of influence,” where each controlled markets and access to raw materials. Rising imperialist powers like Germany sought to redive the world at the expense of established powers like Britain and France. The result of the interimperialist rivalries was the horrendous slaughter of World War I.

Russia today is not imperialist, though it has potential to become so. Key to the fact that Russia’s imperialist aspirations have not been realized are the efforts of the existing imperialists, led by the U.S., to keep Russia out of their club. Russia is also hampered by an economy that is heavily dependent on extraction and export of natural resources. With the important exception of the armaments industry, mainly an inheritance from the Soviet Union, no branch of Russian manufacturing is competitive in the international market.

While it is a regional power, Russia does not play a role in the carve-up of the world on a global scale. Over the past 20 years, Russia has never intervened militarily outside the territory of the former

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We print below a forum, edited for publication, given by Lisa Martin on April 5 in New York City.

Why do we say on the flyer for this forum that Ida B. Wells is a forgotten courageous fighter for black rights? It is true that some people have heard of her and there are now a number of biographies of her life. But her role has been purposely minimized and she has been turned into a harmless icon.

Born a slave in 1862 in the middle of the Civil War, Ida B. Wells was in the forefront of the fight for black rights in the post-Reconstruction era—a time of widespread lynch-rope terror when black people, although not returned to slavery, were being solidified as a race-color caste at the bottom of American society. She refused to accommodate racist reaction in any way and so was anathema to those like Booker T. Washington and his apologists who repudiated militant struggle against the racist status quo. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) initially kept her out of its leadership and even appropriated some of her efforts while disappearing her role in the anti-lynching struggle.

In contrast to Wells, Booker T. Washington was a black leader whom all the white racist capitalist leaders could appreciate. Coming to the fore in the 1890s, he represented acquiescence to forcible segregation. Washington is famous for his Tuskegee Institute, which was created to prepare blacks for menial labor, and for his “Atlanta Compromise” speech in 1895 that advocated that black people work hard, accept segregation and submit meekly to racist oppression.

Washington’s emphasis on “industrial education” appalled Wells, who observed in the article “Booker T. Washington and His Critics,” which ran in the magazine *World Today* (1904):

“This gospel of work is no new one for the Negro. It is the South’s old slavery practice in a new dress. It was the only education the South gave the Negro for two and a half centuries she had absolute control of his body and soul. The Negro knows that now, as then, the South is strongly opposed to his learning anything else but how to work.”

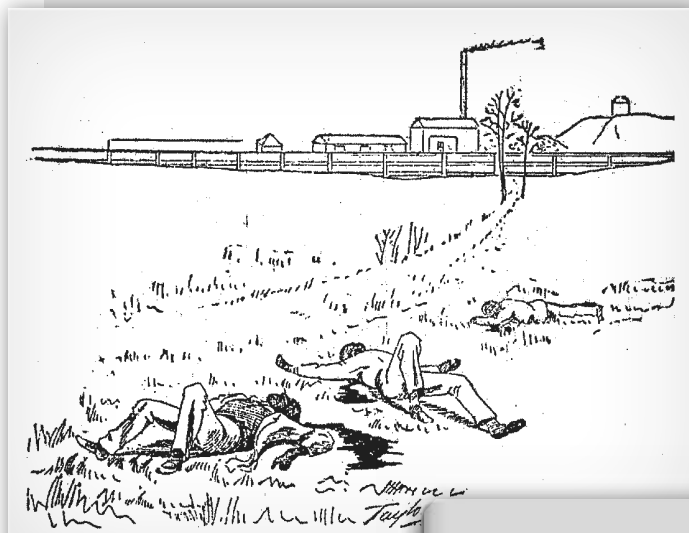
Wells characterized the Tuskegean’s answer to lynching as “give me money to educate the Negro and when he is taught how to work, he will not commit the crime for which lynching is done.” In her eyes, Washington ignored the fact that “lynching is not invoked to punish crime but color, and not even industrial education will change that.”

As comrade Don Alexander pointed out in a forum, it makes perfect sense that Washington is being rehabilitated in this reactionary period [see “The Rehabilitation of Booker T. Washington,” *WV* No. 1000, 13 April 2012]. The current Democratic president Barack Obama, the first black CEO of bloody U.S. imperialism, hailed Booker T. Washington as “the leader of a growing civil rights movement.” Both Obama and Washington came to the fore in periods of reaction and serve well the white ruling class, in part by despicably telling black people that their ongoing oppression in this racist capitalist society is their own fault.

On February 27, Obama gave a speech to young black men at the White House. He lectured them on their “responsibilities,” adding that “you will have to tune out the naysayers who say the deck is stacked against you.” And this speech was given in the presence of the parents of Trayvon Martin and Jordan Davis, two young black men who had been shot dead by racists in Florida, a state with a “stand your ground” law that promotes vigilantism. This blame-the-victim crap is sickening, but it is in line with Booker T. Washington. In 1906, three weeks before a horrific anti-black pogrom in Atlanta,

Ida B. Wells

A Black Woman’s Fight Against Lynch Terror



Memphis Appeal-Avalanche

Drawing depicts March 1892 lynching victims Thomas Moss, Calvin McDowell and Henry Stewart, friends of Ida B. Wells. Wells’s pamphlet stressed the importance of armed self-defense for black people.

Georgia, Washington gave a speech denouncing black people for committing too much crime. The white racist press ate it up.

We oppose Obama and all other politicians from the capitalist parties on principle. Democrats, Republicans and Greens all represent the interests of the ruling class. We’re for a workers party independent from the class enemy. Such a party, born out of class struggle by the multiracial working class and integrated unions, would fight for the rights of blacks, immigrants, women and gays as part of the struggle to overturn capitalism.

Growing Up Amid Racist Reaction

Ida B. Wells represented continuity in a long line of black women who were in the forefront of the fight against slavery and for black liberation. Harriet Tubman played a vanguard role in laying the groundwork for black freedom in the U.S. as a conductor on the Underground Railroad and a military strategist and spy during the Civil War. Harriet Jacobs was an active abolitionist fighter who lived through the Civil War, struggled to implement the promises of Radical Reconstruction—the most democratic period for black people in this country—and witnessed the betrayal of those promises.

Wells grew up during Reconstruction, which went through distinct phases, and experienced the exhilaration of the freed slaves during those volatile years. In her youth, she came to expect full equality and refused to accept anything less. Wells persistently fought against the stream of reaction that was ascendant after the defeat of Radical Reconstruction. That defeat gave rise to a new political alliance of big planters, Southern capitalists and

SOUTHERN HORRORS. LYNCH LAW IN ALL ITS PHASES



Miss IDA B. WELLS.

Price, . . . Fifteen Cents.

THE NEW YORK AGE PRINT.
1892.

certain Northern financial interests, in particular, investors in Southern railroads, land, mining and timber. In “Black and Red—Class Struggle Road to Negro Freedom” (1966) [reprinted in *Marxist Bulletin* No. 9], one of the Spartacist tendency’s founding documents, we describe what happened:

“This bloc initiated a campaign of violent race hatred among their political opponents which succeeded in destroying the developing black-white unity. In the context of the new racism the Black people were disenfranchised, stripped of all legal rights, and permanently denied access to adequate education. Those setbacks were codified into a series of laws institutionalizing the rigid segregation which has been the dominant feature of the South ever since.”

The civil rights struggles in the 1950s and ’60s resulted in real gains for black peo-

ple in the realm of legal equality. Yet the black masses remain specially oppressed: economically the last-hired, first-fired, and through state and extralegal racist terror forcibly segregated at the bottom of society in ghettos, prisons and prison-like schools.

When Wells was born, the Civil War was raging and her hometown of Holly Springs, Mississippi, was in the thick of the fighting. Located 40 miles southeast of Memphis, Tennessee, and almost 200 miles north of Vicksburg, Mississippi, Holly Springs changed hands at least 57 times during the war. In November 1862, Union general Ulysses S. Grant entered Holly Springs with a force of 5,000, nearly doubling the population of the town. After the Union victory in the war, 200 federal soldiers occupied Holly Springs, which became the regional headquarters of the Freedmen’s Bureau.

The first couple of years after the Civil War were called Presidential Reconstruction. During this time, racist “black codes” were passed in many states, land that had been given to freedmen was taken back, and racist attacks were rampant. In 1866, horrific racist massacres in Memphis and New Orleans made many realize that President Andrew Johnson’s leniency toward the former Confederates had unleashed renewed barbarism.

The clash beginning on May 1 in Memphis between recently discharged black veterans and racist mobs, mainly Irish cops and firemen, resulted in the deaths of 46 black people. Hundreds of black homes were also burned down. Then on July 30, New Orleans cops—many Confederate veterans—attacked a Radical-dominated constitutional convention called by the governor and attended by 25 delegates who were guarded by 200 black supporters, many former soldiers. Thirty-four black people and three white Radical Republicans were killed and over 100 were injured.

The political tide turned toward a more radical Reconstruction. The Congressional Reconstruction Acts of 1867-68 were passed, placing the states of the former Confederacy under martial law. Two things came out of this period: voting rights for black men and public education for both black and white children. However, the capitalist class did not and could not make a serious effort to redistribute land to the former slaves because of its own interest in protecting private property.

Learning the Importance of Struggle

Ida was inspired by her father Jim Wells. He was active in Reconstruction politics and refused to back down when the racists tried to intimidate him. With Reconstruction making public education available for the first time, Jim and Lizzy Wells insisted that their children receive as much education as possible. Ida later recalled, “Our job was to go to school and learn all we could.”

Jim Wells was apparently active in the town’s Loyal League, a black political organization run by A.C. McDonald of Shaw University and Nelson Gill of the Freedmen’s Bureau. The Republican-affiliated Loyal League was founded in 1863 in the North. The Republican Party began as a pro-Union, anti-slavery capitalist party. The Democratic Party, in contrast, was a pro-Confederate, pro-slavery party. Following the Civil War, thousands of black freedmen throughout the South organized and voted for the Republican Party through the Loyal League, also known as “Lincoln’s Legal Loyal League.”

The Loyal League held torchlight parades at night in Holly Springs during election campaigns. Hundreds and even thousands of black marchers would fill the city streets with what whites referred to as “obscene pictures” of the Demo-

cratic Party candidates painted on thin cloth, ten to twelve feet long. Of course, the racists did not think it “obscene” that when marching for the Democratic Party they carried a coffin in a mock funeral procession for Nelson Gill, who with his wife ran one of two freedmen’s schools in Holly Springs, the one allied with the Baptists. Ida attended the Methodist-run Shaw University (now Rust College), where her father was a trustee.

The town was relatively violence-free, although white hostility did show itself on the sidewalks of the town square. Gill’s school let out about the same time each afternoon as the Female Institute and Bethlehem Academy, which were attended by whites. The students from each flocked home in groups. The whites claimed right of way, but Mrs. Gill would no more cede to them than her husband would back off in politics. She placed herself in the center of her pupils, who would lock arms to form a solid wall across the sidewalk. The white girls would have to pass around or come into contact with the black girls. Ida’s uncompromising attitude



Library of Congress
Booker T. Washington (left) with steel magnate Andrew Carnegie, 1906. Washington counseled black people to accept segregation, subservience.

toward full equality was formed in this atmosphere.

Her first fight was against segregation in train travel. As a young woman, Wells began teaching school in Woodstock, Tennessee, 12 miles north of Memphis, where she lived with her aunt and sisters. Although she had been riding the train without incident for over a year, one Saturday evening in 1883 en route to Woodstock a conductor decided she did not belong in the first-class car because she was black. At first, Wells ignored the conductor, but he returned and picked up her bags to move them to the second-class smoking car. Wells resisted. The conductor grabbed her arm as she braced herself against the seat. He tore her clothing, so she bit his hand, drawing blood. The conductor returned with two other men to force this petite woman into the smoking car. Instead, she demanded to be let off. She was dumped off the train unceremoniously as white racist passengers cheered.

Wells did not back down. She sued the railroad, winning \$200. The railroad appealed. The suit was going nowhere, but her attorney, who she suspected was bought off by the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad, promised that it would not further harass her. Once again she was thrown out of first class and once again she sued. This time, she retained another attorney and was awarded \$500 on the basis that the separate car was not equal. It took until 1887 for the appeal by the railroad to be settled, with the judges ruling against Wells and holding her liable for \$200 in court costs.

This legal fight was but one example of resistance to racist reaction. While the recall of the final Union troops from the South in 1877 represented the official end of Radical Reconstruction, black people engaged in ongoing struggles against their enforced segregation up until and after the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court decision made “separate but equal” segregation the law of the land. Separate is never equal in this racist society, as Wells was quite aware.

A Crusading Journalist

Wells published an article about her case, introducing her to the field of journalism. Meanwhile, Wells was fired from her teaching job in Memphis because she publicly denounced the deplorable condition of the segregated black schools there. It was as a journalist that she took up the fight against lynching.

In 1894, Frederick Douglass, the radical abolitionist leader, wrote about the epidemic of lynching in “Why Is the Negro Lynched?” He observed:

“Not a breeze comes to us from the late rebellious states that is not tainted and freighted with Negro blood. In its thirst for blood and its rage for vengeance, the mob has blindly, boldly and defiantly supplanted sheriffs, constables and police.... There is nothing in the history of savages to surpass the blood-chilling horrors and fiendish excesses perpetrated against the coloured people of this country, by the so-called enlightened and Christian people of the South.”

Douglass explained that the myth of the black rapist was invented after the Civil War to justify lynch law. He pointed out that during the Civil War and Reconstruction, even while scores of black people were killed by white mobs, the charge of rape was never made as justification. Instead, it was claimed that black people were plotting insurrection and planning to kill all white people and take over.

Wells took the myth of the black rapist head-on as editor of the *Free Speech*, an outspoken Memphis newspaper. An 1891 editorial stated: “Those Georgetown Kentucky Negroes who set fire to the town last week because a Negro named Dudley had been lynched, show some of the true spark of manhood by their resentment.” Wells advocated black retaliation against white racist terror as the only way to stop the atrocities.

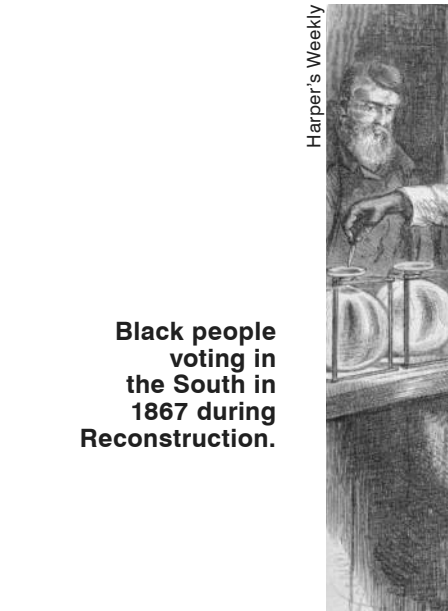
Galvanizing her campaign against racist lynching was the March 1892 victimization of Calvin McDowell, Henry Stewart and her close friend Thomas Moss. Wells described the lynching of the three “peace-



National Portrait Gallery
Harriet Tubman, 1885.

ful, law-abiding citizens and energetic businessmen” who ran a grocery store in a Memphis suburb. A white man named Barrett, the owner of a rival store on the opposite corner, had gone into their grocery with a drawn pistol, threatening to “clean them out.” After hearing that Barrett was returning with a group to attack them, her friends “mustered forces and prepared to defend themselves against the attack.” Barrett came with a 12-man posse, supposedly with a warrant. Wells continued:

“When they entered the backdoor the young men thought the threatened attack was on, and fired into them. Three of the officers were wounded, and when the



defending party found it was officers of the law upon whom they had fired, they ceased and got away.... “Excitement was at fever heat until the morning papers, two days after, announced that the wounded deputy sheriffs were out of danger. This hindered rather than helped the plans of the whites. There was no law on the statute books which would execute an Afro-American for wounding a white man, but the ‘unwritten law’ did. Three of these men, the president, the manager and clerk of the grocery—‘the leaders of the conspiracy’—were secretly taken from jail and lynched in a shockingly brutal manner. ‘The Negroes are getting too independent,’ they say, ‘we must teach them a lesson.’ What lesson? The lesson of subordination. ‘Kill the leaders and it will cow the Negro who dares to shoot a white man, even in self defense.’” —*Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases* (1892)

In *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells*, published decades after her death in 1970, Ida wrote: “Like many another person who had read of lynching in the South, I had accepted the idea meant to be conveyed—that although lynching was irregular and contrary to law and order, unreasoning anger over the terrible crime of rape led to the lynching; that perhaps the brute deserved death anyhow and the mob was justified in taking his life.” But these three black men were lynched “with just as much brutality as other victims of the mob; and they had committed no crime against white women.” She described how this “opened

my eyes to what lynching really was. An excuse to get rid of Negroes who were acquiring wealth and property and thus keep the race terrorized.”

In her 1895 pamphlet, *The Red Record: Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynching in the United States*, Wells stated: “During the past thirty years in the South...more than ten thousand Negroes have been killed in cold blood, without the formality of judicial trial and legal execution...and for all these murders only three white men have been tried, convicted and executed.” During the 1890s, lynchings in the South averaged two per week. Black people were resisting segregation and disenfranchisement and these lynchings were used to force acceptance of Jim Crow.

The Right of Armed Self-Defense

Wells was in favor of black armed self-defense. In her autobiography, she relates how she bought a pistol “after Tom Moss was lynched, because I expected some cowardly retaliation from the lynchers. I felt that one had better die fighting against injustice than to die like a dog or a rat in a trap. I had already determined to sell my life as dearly as possible if attacked. I felt if I could take one lyncher with me, this would even up the score a little bit.”

In her pamphlet *Southern Horrors*, which the newspaper *New York Age* published after she was driven out of Memphis, she further stressed the importance of armed self-defense for black people:

“Of the many inhuman outrages of this present year, the only case where the proposed lynching did *not* occur, was where the men armed themselves.... The only times an Afro-American who was assaulted got away has been when he had a gun and used it in self-defense.

The lesson this teaches and which every Afro-American should ponder well, is that a Winchester rifle should have a place of honor in every black home, and it should be used for that protection which the law refuses to give. When the white man who is always the aggressor knows he runs as great a risk of biting the dust every time his Afro-American victim does, he will have greater respect for Afro-American life.”

Contrary to the pacifist mythology of the civil rights movement, there is a long history of armed self-defense on the part of black people. The approximately 200,000 black soldiers who fought in the Civil War held onto their arms as long as they could. In the 1930s, Southern union organizers and sharecroppers armed to defend themselves. During the 1950s and ’60s, black gun clubs such as that started by Robert F. Williams in Monroe, North Carolina, and the Deacons for Defense in Louisiana were organized around the country to stop racist Klan terror. Many black soldiers returning from Korea and Vietnam refused to put their guns down and utilized their military training to defend the civil rights struggle from Klan terror. The racist capitalist state has systematically disarmed black people in order to fully subjugate them.

The entire working class has an interest in opposing gun control laws. If you support gun control, you support the capitalist state having a monopoly of arms. This is what Martin Luther King Jr. pushed.

continued on page 8

Marxist Bulletin

5

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(continued from page 7)

Rape and Race

The article had noted that the “rape of helpless Negro girls and women, which began in slavery days, still continued without let or hindrance, check or reproof from church, state or press.” It continued:

The white racists were infuriated that she spoke openly and boldly about consensual sex between white women and black men, which was an explosive issue.

Let's be very clear. The accusation of rape had nothing to do with any crime against women. Instead, it was a cover for the hideous barbaric lynchings being carried out across the South. Rape was not even claimed as a justification in the majority of lynchings, but it did not matter. As Wells pointed out in *Southern Horrors*:

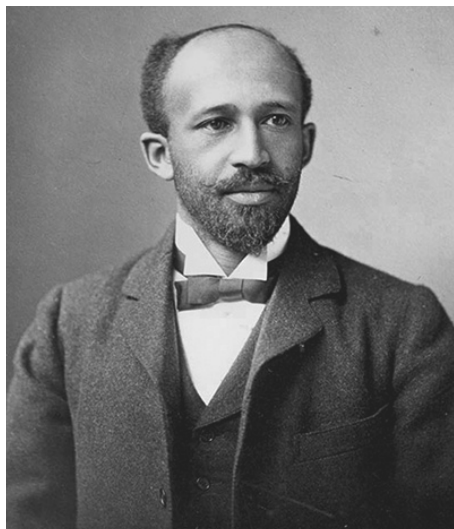
“This cry has had its effect. It has closed the heart, stifled the conscience, warped the judgment and hushed the voice of press and pulpit on the subject of lynch law throughout this ‘land of liberty.’ Men who stand high in the esteem of the public for christian character, for moral and physical courage, for devotion to the principles of equal and exact justice to all, and for great sagacity, stand as cowards who fear to open their mouths before this great outrage.... Even to the better class of Afro-Americans the crime of rape is so revolting they have too often taken the white man’s word and given lynch law neither the investigation nor condemnation it deserved.”

Wells observed that rape of black women by white men went unpunished. And as far as the Southern racists' concern for the well-being of even white women, they had shown during Reconstruction

On the International Stage

Wells began her speaking career on October 5, 1892 at a talk organized by black women in New York that launched the Women's Loyal Union. This appearance was followed by invitations to speak in Boston; Philadelphia; Wilmington, Delaware; Chester, Pennsylvania; and Washington, D.C. In Philadelphia, her talk was widely attended, including by many from the old abolitionist movement. Also attending was Catherine Impey, the editor of *Anti-Caste*, a magazine published in England that opposed caste oppression in India.

Wells's first European engagement was at the home of Isabelle Fyvie Mayo, a Scottish author who provided shelter to students from Ceylon (today Sri Lanka) and India. The gruesome lynching of Henry Smith in Paris, Texas, in 1893 had shocked and outraged Mayo. In view of a mob of 10,000, Smith was tortured with hot irons for almost an hour and then



University of Massachusetts
W.E.B. Du Bois, circa 1907.

doused with gasoline and burned to death. Wells wrote about it, noting that “the mob fought over the hot ashes for bones, buttons, and teeth for souvenirs.” When Mayo was told that many people were not aware of and so did not care about lynchings, she agreed to form a group called “Emancipation” that would take up the fight against lynch terror.

After first speaking in a drawing room at Mayo's home before a small group of organizers, Wells went on to speak to a meeting attended by approximately 1,500. Wells gave talks all over Scotland, informing people of the atrocities occurring in the American South. She proceeded on to the English cities Newcastle, Birmingham and Manchester and got resolutions passed all over Britain. Those resolutions were published throughout the U.S., including the South, further enraging the racist authorities.

Wells traveled directly from her first anti-lynching lecture campaign in Europe to the Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago. It was a segregated event. Black people were not allowed, except at the Haitian exhibit. The Expo had reproductions of antebellum plantation scenes glorifying slavery and contained no hint of the violence and repression black people were being subjected to.

Wells saw possibilities in forcing visitors, who came to celebrate the progress of white men, to confront the bloodlust of white lynch mobs. Wells waged an uphill battle, even against Frederick Douglass, who was somewhat skeptical of her plan to publish an 81-page pamphlet, *The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition*. Douglass wrote the introduction. Wells contributed a chapter titled "Lynch Law"

Robert F. Williams and wife Mabel in Havana, 1961, with pistol given to him by Fidel Castro. Champion of armed self-defense against KKK terror, Williams was expelled from NAACP and driven into exile.



and another on the convict lease system in the South that enslaved black people on chain gangs and was used to drive down wages of free labor. The Haitian government had asked Douglass to supervise its exhibit. So Wells was able to distribute 10,000 of these pamphlets from a desk she manned at the Haitian Building.

Like Douglass, Wells was a staunch champion of women's rights—even though feminist leaders like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, formerly avowed abolitionists, turned their movement for women's rights into a tool of racist reaction following the Civil War. Feminists organized against passage of the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution because it gave votes to black men and not to women.

Wells worked with the suffragists in a much later period and fought against their disgusting conciliation of Southern racists. In January 1913, Wells formed the Alpha Suffrage Club, the first suffrage group for black women in Chicago. The group sent Wells as its delegate to a national suffrage parade held on March 3, 1913 in Washington, D.C., during the presidential inauguration of the vile racist Democrat Woodrow Wilson.

To appease racist Southern white women who did not want an integrated march, the president of the Illinois Suffrage Association decided to exclude Wells from their delegation. Wells was outraged and declared she would boycott the march if she could not march under the Illinois banner. Instead of boycotting, though, she came out of the crowd along the parade route and slipped in next to a white Illinois delegate, successfully integrating the march without official permission.

Wells was a woman in a very anti-woman period. From the time she was 16 years old and took care of her siblings, Wells was maligned for taking on such responsibility as an independent young woman. Rumors went around that she was being kept as the mistress of an older white man, which infuriated her. Wells's struggle for full equality was complicated by the fact that she wanted respectability as a woman, something which black women under slavery had been denied.

Slave masters routinely brutalized black girls and women—including Ida's mother—justifying such dehumanizing treatment by labeling them “sexual savages.” Stripped, beaten and raped, black women suffered an extra burden under slavery. But “respectability” under capitalism, particularly in Victorian times, meant that a woman should be subjugated to a man in the nuclear family. Black working-class women are triply oppressed in capitalist society by race, sex and class.

Women's right to vote in the U.S. was not recognized until after the Russian workers revolution of October 1917, which gave women the vote. The Bolshevik Revolution put the question of women's rights on the international agenda as never before. Full equality for women necessitates replacing all the functions of the family with free 24-hour childcare, dining halls, laundries, cleaning services, not to mention free abortion on demand as part of free, quality health care for all. This real equality is what the Bolsheviks took steps toward after they took power. No capitalist government will ever do so.

Wells saw herself as an anomaly. She refused to limit herself to what were seen

as “women’s concerns.” Wells had many suitors; many were writers who sparred with her in the press. Wells obviously was only going to get together with a man with a strong political backbone, someone who could respect her as his full equal. She married Ferdinand Barnett, a black lawyer living in Chicago, in 1895. They first met when they worked together on the anti-lynching pamphlet for the Columbian Exposition of 1893. Barnett owned a black newspaper, the *Chicago Conservator*, for which Wells began to write in 1893. They shared political views.

The Barnetts and W.E.B. Du Bois coalesced into an anti-Booker T. Washington camp following the 1903 publication of Du Bois' book *The Souls of Black Folk*, a polemic against Washington. Du Bois presented his idea of a "talented tenth" elite of the black population who would uplift the black masses. Wells was particularly opposed to Washington's servile acceptance of segregation because of her own bitter experience in Memphis.

White race riots and lynchings of blacks in Springfield, Illinois, in 1908 led to the founding of the NAACP the following year. Wells spoke from the floor of Cooper Union at the initial NAACP meeting to urge the assembly not to compromise with Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee machine.

Du Bois was the only black person on the nominating committee for the NAACP's leadership body. Also on that committee were Mary White Ovington, a member of the Socialist Party (SP), and Oswald Garrison Villard, the grandson of abolitionist leader William Lloyd Garrison and an avid Booker T. Washington supporter. Those two shunned Wells; Ovington was very condescending to blacks, seeing them only as victims, and thus opposed an outspoken radical black woman like Wells having a leadership position. Both Wells and William Monroe Trotter, another outspoken black radical of the time, were purposely omitted from the leadership body by Du Bois.

Later, Du Bois in his 1940 book *Dusk of Dawn* erased Wells from the campaign that saved Steve Greene of Arkansas, giving the credit to the NAACP. Greene was a black man who killed a white farmer in self-defense. In 1910, Greene arrived in Chicago wounded from the shootout and was extradited to Arkansas to be lynched. The Negro Fellowship League run by Wells raised money and organized a defense committee that spirited Greene to safety. Wells had him returned to Chicago and hid Greene successfully.

Wells was a militant reformer. She was religious and was part of the black middle class, albeit somewhat of a thorn in their side. She appealed for federal legislation to ban lynching. Such a ban was her ultimate goal, as she did not have a Marxist perspective. She was a courageous liberal.

Wells has to be taken in historic context. The victory of the North in the Civil War opened the road for the development of the working class. The proletariat is key to the overthrow of capitalism, which is the only way forward for black liberation. While the young American working class waged some explosive struggles, including for the eight-hour day, it was still in its formative stage. Following the Civil War, a populist movement developed based on black and white poor farmers in

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the Midwest and the South. Big Business mobilized to smash this interracial movement, ultimately driving a wedge between its black and white components.

Wells took an important outspoken stand in defense of union organizing. The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP) had been founded in 1925. Railway sleeping car porters were commonly referred to as “George,” after George Pullman of the Pullman Company. Porters were overwhelmingly black, and the practice derived from the Old South, where slaves were named after their masters.

The union leadership sought to build its membership by targeting one of the Pullman Company’s biggest terminals: Chicago. In December 1925, women from Wells’s Chicago women’s rights club invited A. Philip Randolph, the head of the BSCP and a member of the Socialist Party, to speak at their meetings. Wells hosted Randolph at her home. The club women, together with a sympathetic minister, campaigned to promote the Brotherhood, defying a storm of protest by the black press and most of the clergy.

For more than two years, as the *Chicago Defender*, a black newspaper, obsequiously defended the Pullman management and opposed the BSCP, Wells and her cohorts

clearly see the need for American revolutionaries to systematically organize the whole multiracial working class against the atrocities being committed against black people. His color blindness was expressed in his statement: “We have nothing special to offer the Negro, and we cannot make separate appeals to all the races.”

The American Socialist Party belonged to the Second International, which also included the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party. The Russian party split into two parts in 1903. The leader of the left wing of that split, known as the Bolsheviks, was V.I. Lenin. In *What Is To Be Done?* (1902), Lenin put forward that it was not enough to struggle for economic demands for the workers—revolutionaries also had to fight against all attacks on the oppressed. Lenin wrote: “The social-democrat’s ideal should not be the trade union secretary, but *the tribune of the people*.” The Bolsheviks championed national rights for oppressed minorities. They organized labor defense guards to defend Jewish people against tsarist pogroms and fought for women’s rights as part of their working-class program.

After the Bolsheviks took power, they organized the Third (Communist) International and recruited from socialist parties



Museum of the American Railroad

Above: Pullman porters in Chicago, 1922. Three years later, Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, led by A. Philip Randolph (inset), was founded.

Anti-black racism is the main weapon used by the capitalist rulers to divide and weaken the working class as a whole. The fight for black rights was and is a matter of self-defense for all workers. This became very clear in 1919 when there was an attempt to organize black and white meatpacking workers in Chicago. A racist riot killed many black people and isolated black workers in their segregated neighborhoods. What was needed were integrated labor defense guards to protect black workers and their families. These were not organized. Instead, the bosses were able to recruit blacks as scabs, which helped defeat the organizing drive.

In the wake of the Russian Revolution and under the prodding of the Bolsheviks, the CP over time came to appreciate the struggle against black oppression. While they won to their ranks a small group of radicals from the African Blood Brotherhood in Harlem in the 1920s, this work did not really take off in a big way until the 1930s. Despite Stalinist degeneration, the CP did good work in the South fighting for black rights in this period. The International Labor Defense (ILD)—a non-sectarian defense organization initiated by the Communist International on which the Partisan Defense Committee is based—took up the case of the Scottsboro Boys. These nine black youths were threatened with legal lynching and would have been murdered by the state of Alabama were it not for the international campaign waged by the ILD and the Comintern.

As much as things have changed, they have remained the same. Despite the civil rights movement, black oppression remains the bedrock of capitalism in Obama’s America. The fight to organize the South is as crucial to the workers movement as ever, especially since many industrial unions have been decimated. Public schools in this country are more segregated than they were 40 years ago. Black people and Latinos have become the majority in the nation’s prisons as the prison population has swelled to over



George Meany Archives

two million during the last two decades. The death penalty is legal lynching—the majority of those on death row are black or Latino—and a part of the legacy of chattel slavery. It has become less popular in some quarters, but in the South the death penalty is going strong.

The fight against racist terror and oppression continues. Our communist program is for revolutionary integrationism. We are for the full integration of black people into an egalitarian socialist society. We strive for equality for black people, but not by relying on the good graces of the capitalist politicians of the Democratic or Republican Parties, the enemies of labor and black struggle. Instead, we seek to mobilize the working class in independent action.

Black rights and labor rights will either go forward together or fall back separately. We aim to build a revolutionary party like the Bolsheviks that can uproot racist oppression through a thoroughgoing workers revolution that will expropriate the capitalist class and establish a workers government. Triply oppressed black women workers will play a key role in building that revolutionary party. When black people fight for their rights as in the 1950s and 1960s, it clears the ground for the entire working class to struggle for workers power. We want to turn fighters for black freedom into fighters for communism. We aim to finish the Civil War through workers revolution! When the working class in power writes its official history, Ida B. Wells, the uncompromising fighter, will not be forgotten. She will hold an honored place as a historic fighter for black equality. ■



V.K. Bulla

July 1920: Lenin addresses Petrograd demonstration commemorating heroes of world proletariat during Second Congress of Communist International.

raised support for the union within the black middle class. Milton Webster, BSCP local organizer, believed that Wells’s club women were instrumental to the union gaining a voice in black Chicago. By siding with labor in this struggle, Wells alienated others in the black elite.

Black and Red

The early SP in the U.S. included everyone from outright racists like Victor Berger to liberals like Mary White Ovington to revolutionaries like Eugene V. Debs. Debs was an anti-racist who spoke out against lynching and was in favor of organizing integrated unions. But even Debs, who was among the best of the Socialists, did not

and anarchist groups around the world to form Communist parties that attracted those inspired by the Russian Revolution. The Comintern made a special point that Communists in the U.S. had to organize to defend black people. James P. Cannon, a founding member of the Communist Party (CP) and later leader of American Trotskyism, stated in *The First Ten Years of American Communism* (1962): “Everything new on the Negro question came from Moscow—after the Russian Revolution began to thunder its demand throughout the world for freedom and equality for all national minorities, all subject peoples and all races—for all the despised and rejected of the earth.”

Albuquerque...

(continued from page 3)

killing people, the APD is busy torturing them. Cops fired stun guns at a deranged man who had doused himself in gasoline, setting him ablaze; at a 75-year-old homeless man for refusing to leave a bus stop; and at a 16-year-old boy for refusing to lie on a floor covered in broken glass.

The crimes of the APD should be met with massive, militant protest. As Marxists, we seek to direct outrage over cop violence into a fight against the entire so-called justice system and its police enforcers. Reformist socialist outfits active in the Albuquerque protests, however, preach reliance on the same justice system to allow some kind of popular control of the cops. One of them, the Solidarity group, calls to “organize and protest in the streets, in the ballot boxes and in the courts to ensure the DOJ holds the APD accountable” (16 April). “Accountable” to whom? Along with

local police, the courts, prisons and armed forces, the DOJ is part of the bourgeois state apparatus—armed bodies of men whose job is to violently repress class and social struggle in service of the capitalist rulers. Society’s castoffs are especially vulnerable to the cops’ sadistic brutality.

The DOJ investigation found a pattern of the APD using deadly force “in an unconstitutional manner,” no news to city residents who live in fear of the thugs in uniform. The Feds often step into such situations to help with damage control and make a show of “cleaning up” local police so that they can more effectively go about their business of terrorizing the population. When the DOJ examines the conduct of its own, lo and behold, it turns up nothing. The FBI cleared its agents 150 times out of 150 shootings from 1993 to 2011, just as APD internal affairs and the local District Attorney’s “investigative grand juries” have given the cops a pass on all the shootings in Albuquerque. For that city, the DOJ proposes 44 remedies—

including the usual palliatives like revising the “civilian oversight process”—none of which are to be implemented without the approval of the local cops!

Peddling measures to supposedly allow civilian oversight and control of the police is the stock and trade of the ANSWER coalition led by the Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL). When in 2010 PSL/ANSWER joined a National Day Against Police Brutality in Albuquerque, they proclaimed: “We want police accountability. We want the police oversight commission to have some power to represent the community” (PSLweb.org, 2010). Albuquerque is itself glaring proof of the worthlessness of such schemes. Its oversight commission dates back to the 1990s, when the APD was engaged in a similar killing spree. Over the years, the police chief has simply overruled the commission whenever it found a cop killing “unjustified.” On April 15, three commission members resigned, noting its impotence, complicity and cozy relations

with APD brass. Today, PSL/ANSWER seem to have quietly shelved the call for more robust civilian oversight in favor of the no less bankrupt strategy of pressuring the mayor—who as the APD’s boss is complicit in its murderous rampages—to rein in the cops.

From Oakland to New York City, New Orleans to Boston, cop violence is endemic to the capitalist system, as are imperialist wars and occupations, the mass incarceration of black and Latino youth in this country and the poverty that stalks working people. The capitalist state cannot be reformed to serve the interests of the working class and minorities. The families of those who have been killed by the police have won some money in lawsuits and deserve every penny they can wrest from the city. What is necessary to win justice is to destroy, root and branch, the whole state apparatus that upholds capitalist class rule and in its place construct a workers state, laying the basis for the emancipation of all the exploited and oppressed. ■

Ukraine...

(continued from page 5)

forcefully against this position, including in his 1916 theses on “The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination”:

“The proletariat cannot remain silent on the question of the *frontiers* of a state founded on national oppression, a question so ‘unpleasant’ for the imperialist bourgeoisie. The proletariat must struggle against the enforced retention of oppressed nations within the bounds of the given state, which means that they must fight for the right to self-determination. The proletariat must demand freedom of political separation for the colonies and nations oppressed by ‘their own’ nation. Otherwise, the internationalism of the proletariat would be nothing but empty words; neither confidence nor class solidarity would be possible between the workers of the oppressed and the oppressor nations.”

Cheerleaders for Counterrevolution

While much of the pseudo-Trotskyist left stands against the exercise of self-determination for Crimea today, their posture was very different when it came to the imperialist-sponsored counterrevolutionary movements that wielded self-determination as a key tool in the overthrow of the Soviet workers state. The USec, among others, supported a host of counterrevolutionary “independence” movements in the Baltic republics, going so far as to salute fascist nationalists like the Estonian “Forest Brothers” for their “armed struggle against Stalinism” (see:



Moscow, August 1991: Confederate flag flies on Yeltsin’s counterrevolutionary barricades. ICL defended Soviet degenerated workers state, fake left hailed capitalist counterrevolution.

“Why They Misuse Trotsky,” *Spartacist* [English-language edition] No. 49-50, Winter 1993-94). You know that you have to hold on to your wallet when organizations that sided over and over again with the forces of “democratic” counterrevolution in Soviet bloc countries now parade around with calls for a “socialist” or “Soviet” Ukraine. Take the Workers Revolutionary Party (EEK) in Greece and the Communist Workers Party (PCL) in Italy, sections of the Coordinating Committee for the

Refoundation of the Fourth International (CRFI) headed by the Argentine pseudo-Trotskyist Jorge Altamira. In a March 30 declaration of their “Workers Euro-Mediterranean Conference,” they came out against Crimean self-determination, declaring: “No to all annexations, no to the dismemberment of Ukraine—for an independent, united, socialist Ukraine!” Such rhetoric about a “socialist Ukraine” is pretty rich coming from the Altamira tendency, which hailed Boris Yeltsin’s pro-imperialist countercoup in Moscow

Vietnam...

(continued from page 12)

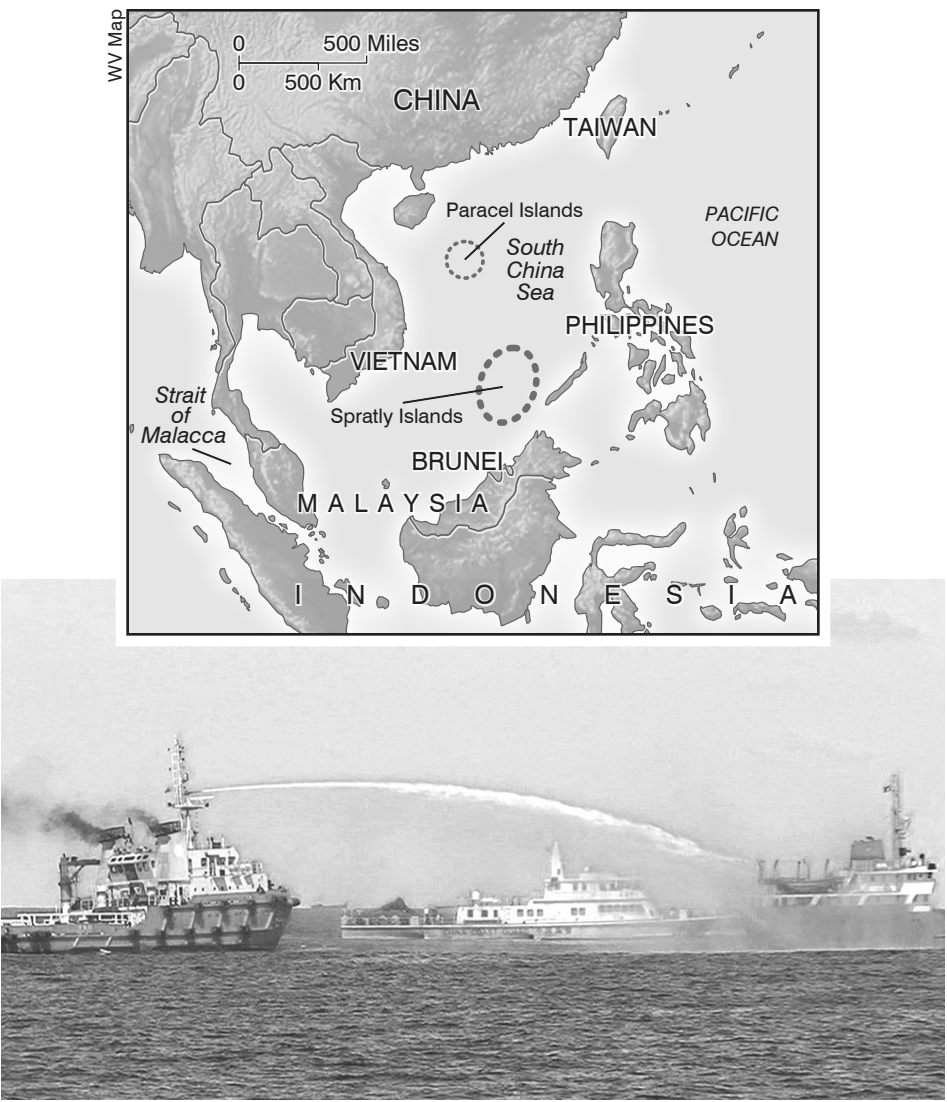
antagonism between the Soviet Union and Beijing developed into a full-blown split. Among the betrayals marking this split were the Kremlin’s delivery of MIG fighter planes to capitalist India during its 1962 border war with China and China’s seriously disrupting, at times, the flow of Soviet military aid to Vietnam during that country’s war with the U.S. Mao declared “Soviet social imperialism” to be his main enemy. This dovetailed with the American rulers’ strategic aim of destroying the Soviet degenerated workers state, at the time the main obstacle to U.S. world domination. The Chinese Communist Party’s stance led it into an alliance with U.S. imperialism against the Soviet Union, sealed with Richard Nixon’s 1972 visit to China in which he drank champagne with Mao as the U.S. escalated its bombing of Vietnam and mined Haiphong harbor.

In 1979, China invaded Vietnam, acting as a cat’s paw for U.S. imperialism. The invasion came in the wake of Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping’s visit to the U.S. in pursuit of foreign investment. Recently, the Chinese Stalinists have worked together with the imperialists to

draw up sanctions to punish North Korea for testing its nuclear weapon systems. By pursuing such policies, the Stalinist bureaucracies dangerously undermine the defense of the social gains of the revolutions that overthrew capitalist rule. An example of how the Vietnamese bureaucracy promotes reactionary anti-Chinese chauvinism among the workers and peasants was a ceremony held for the first time in Hanoi in January to protest China’s having taken control of the Paracel Islands in 1974. This anniversary has traditionally been commemorated by counterrevolutionary Vietnamese émigrés overseas, who are bitter that China took these islands away from the capitalist South Vietnamese government, a U.S. puppet. But this year in Hanoi, demonstrators chanted anti-China slogans while laying flowers at the feet of the statue of eleventh-century emperor Ly Thai To.

Trying to explain the phenomenon of two “Communist” countries facing each other down in a military confrontation, the Workers World Party (WWP) wrote a May 22 editorial that was completely in sync with their Stalinoid tradition and utter anti-Marxist liberalism. On the basis that China is “a strong power” and Vietnam “a relatively small, underdeveloped country,” they call on China “to take the first step in de-escalating this crisis.” While claiming to defend both countries against imperialism and capitalist counterrevolution, WWP does not acknowledge that Vietnam is in fact giving a hand to the U.S. as it tightens the noose around China. Using language similar to everyone from neo-cons to Obama to anti-Communist social democrats, WWP demands that China “erase all traces of big power domination.” Refusing to distinguish between the workers states and their imperialist-appeasing bureaucratic rulers, WWP can only plead with the latter to do the right thing.

If the imperialists succeed in transforming China once again into a giant sweatshop through capitalist counterrevolution, it would give a shot of adrenaline to the imperialists’ whole decaying profit system. Both military encirclement and economic penetration have their place in achieving this goal. Beijing’s “socialism with Chinese characteristics” has meant fostering profit-making enterprises and welcoming imperialist and overseas Chinese investors. Such measures have sharply increased inequality and favored



Chinese ship shoots water cannon at Vietnamese vessel in South China Sea, May 7.

the growth of capitalist forces within China. Yet the impact of imperialist investment in China and Vietnam is contradictory: economic growth has raised incomes and brought about significant growth of a young, urbanized proletariat. The bureaucrats of both countries understand that they are sitting atop a volcano of social unrest. Although lacking the infrastructure and more sophisticated technology of China, Vietnam has a vibrant, militant proletariat that has been fighting against low wages, inflation, growing inequality and the corruption of the bureaucracy, staging over 800 strikes in 2011. In many cases, their exploiters are the same, such as the Taiwanese sports shoe manufacturer Yue Yuen, which was the target of

in August 1991 that opened the floodgates to capitalist counterrevolution and has since tried to cover its tracks by denying that the counterrevolution even happened! To this day, they claim, as in their March 30 statement, that there is an “on-going process of capitalist restoration” taking place in Ukraine and other parts of the former Soviet Union. It should be noted that Savvas Michael Matsas, current leader of the EEK, was the longstanding leader in Greece of the fake-Trotskyist tendency led by political bandit Gerry Healy. While the Healyites nominally stood for “defense of the Soviet Union,” they supported just about every anti-Communist force encircling the Soviet workers state, from Khomeini’s mullahs in Iran to the CIA’s *mujahedin* in Afghanistan and Polish Solidarność. Those leftists who supported the imperialists’ anti-Soviet drive in the guise of “anti-Stalinism” bear their own small measure of responsibility for the social devastation and the upsurge in nationalist chauvinism that swept the former USSR and East Europe after counterrevolution. Workers and youth looking for a revolutionary Marxist program must turn to the Bolshevik political arsenal—the experiences of the October Revolution, the early Communist International and Trotsky’s Fourth International. New gains for the workers and the oppressed will be won only by those who have fought to defend past gains. In opposition to the reformists and centrists who long ago made peace with their own capitalist rulers, the ICL fights to forge a party that can lead new October Revolutions. ■

the biggest strike in China in decades and which manufactures one-third of its total output in Vietnam. If revolutionary workers governments were in power in Beijing and Hanoi, the conflict over the Paracels would be easily resolved with both countries sharing technology and cooperating in development of the area’s natural resources, and in mutual defense against imperialism. The Trotskyist program of proletarian political revolution—the overthrow of the Stalinist bureaucracies and the establishment of governments based on workers, peasants and soldiers councils—constitutes the only truly effective defense of these states and is part of the strategy of proletarian revolutions internationally to put an end to the imperialist order. ■

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10

WORKERS VANGUARD

Detroit...

(continued from page 1)

to steal what remains of those gains. For a start, the labor movement should demand that the federal government insure the full value of both public and private pension funds. Government-provided health care should be available to all at no charge. The ruling class has no intention of providing these or other necessities to the workers whose labor it exploits, much less to the unemployed, the ghetto poor and everyone else on the bottom. In fighting for these necessities, the working class must be won to the understanding that the way forward is to sweep away capitalist rule and create its own government, laying the basis for the socialist reconstruction of society to meet human needs.

Detroit Scheme: Threat to All Workers

With the Detroit bankruptcy, the racist capitalist rulers are once again making the working class and the black poor pay for the greed, decay and irrationality of the system of production for profit. Once a powerhouse of the U.S. economy and a center of integrated union power, Detroit has been turned into a giant, rusting disaster area by the auto corporations that abandoned the city in order to exploit cheaper, non-union labor in the U.S. South and overseas. What had once been the fifth-largest metropolis in the U.S. is today the 18th-largest. Hollowed out by the decline of the American auto industry and further wrecked by the financial crisis, Detroit today faces estimated long-term debts of over \$18 billion.

The former Motor City, where hundreds of thousands of unionized black auto workers once had the semblance of a decent job, is now a vast urban wasteland. Simply put, black Detroit has been deemed expendable by the racist ruling class, which endlessly blames “overly generous” union contracts for the devastation the capitalists themselves have wrought. While black industrial workers were the first to be written off by the bourgeoisie, since their labor was no longer needed to produce profits, such ruin now increasingly stalks the working class across the country. (For more, see our article “Detroit: The Rise and Fall of a Labor/Black Stronghold,” WV Nos. 1044 and 1045, 18 April and 2 May.)

From Obama on down, the government has made clear that Detroit’s black masses are not about to receive a smidgen of the largesse that was dished out not too long ago to the big banks and auto companies. Continuing a move undertaken by the Republican Bush White House, the Democratic Obama administration bailed out General Motors and Chrysler with tens of billions of dollars when they threatened bankruptcy. With the companies claiming that they could no longer afford to pay union pensions and health bene-

fits to retirees and new-hires, the UAW tops saluted their Commander-in-Chief and willingly agreed to massive give-backs. These included a two-tier wage scheme that allowed the automakers to hire assembly-line workers at a bit more than half the previous pay scale as well as a no-strike pledge. GM, for one, has since bounced back to reap record profits for its owners—a capitalist success story recently dimmed by the exposure of the GM bosses’ murderous indifference to those who purchased a Cobalt.

The UAW bureaucracy’s role in gutting union wages as part of the auto bailout was the climax of decades of sacrificing its members on the altar of the profitability of American capitalism, not least



Reuters

Then-UAW head Ron Gettelfinger (second from left) with CEOs of GM, Ford and Chrysler at 2008 Congressional hearing on auto bailout that showered billions on industry giants while gutting the union.

through peddling chauvinist “America first” protectionism. In sapping the fighting strength of the UAW, once the powerhouse of the U.S. labor movement, the union tops undermined the ability of the working class in Detroit to counter the auto bosses with concentrated power. The labor sellouts thus not only helped prepare the ground for the devastation of Detroit but opened the door to further attacks on workers more broadly, as seen, for example, in the anti-union “right to work” law passed in Michigan in December 2012.

The outcome of the Detroit bankruptcy scheme will have far-reaching consequences for public-sector workers across the country. Pension obligations for public employees had been considered legally protected until two recent municipal bankruptcies—one in Pritchard, Alabama, and another in Central Falls, Rhode Island, where pensions were cut as much as 50 percent. In fact, Michigan and some other states have constitutional statutes guaranteeing public employees’ pensions.

Detroit’s “grand bargain” would change all that. It would set a precedent for supposedly cash-strapped governments to slash pensions, as well as eliminating hard-won medical benefits and throwing work-

ers onto the mercy of the “Obamacare” insurance marketplace. Officials in San Bernardino, California, which is also in bankruptcy, see Detroit as a test case for slashing their obligations to the state’s public employee retirement system. From California to Illinois and New Jersey, Democratic and Republican politicians are looking for a way out of their commitments to retirement plans, many of which are woefully underfunded.

For decades, public union misleaders had helped state and local governments hold the line on increased wages and benefits with the promise of greater contributions to pension funds. A form of deferred wages, pensions are supposed to be held in trust until they are needed. But those funds became a honeypot for high-rolling bankers and hedge fund managers, in league with state pension plan managers, for some of their riskiest investments. And when these imploded, pension funds were burned.

American corporations (steel, airline and auto companies, to name just a few) have long utilized bankruptcy as a tool to loot pensions, slash labor costs and bust unions. Now capitalist politicians are using the same weapon against government workers. In Detroit’s case, the rulers are counting on the isolation of the city’s overwhelmingly black popula-

tion from the mainly white workforce in the rest of the state to push through cuts that will be the leading edge of an assault on *all* workers. The Detroit plan is a continuation of the war waged by both the Democratic and Republican parties of capital against public employee unions, which, due to deindustrialization in the Midwest and Northeast and the precipitous decline of private-sector unions, now comprise about one-half of organized labor. We say: All labor must fight the assault on public workers! No to pension and health care cuts!

For a Class-Struggle Perspective

For workers and retirees, the Detroit bankruptcy ballot is a lose-lose situation. But the “Moratorium Now! Coalition to Stop Foreclosures, Evictions, and Utility Shutoffs” backed by the reformist Workers World Party (WWP) tells workers and retirees to vote “no” in order to wage a fight “in the courts and in the streets” to “make the banks pay.” By signing on to the ballot hoax and urging yet more court suits, WWP & Co. are telling people to rely on the very instruments the ruling class is using to force through the bankruptcy and its savage cuts. As for the union misleaders and Democratic Party pols who are complicit in the scheme, mum’s the word from the WWP.

Meanwhile, the counterfeit “Trotskyists” of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) have switched from telling pensioners to vote “no” to acknowledging that the ballot is itself a fraud. This shift, to be sure, is not to help prepare the way for some desperately needed union struggle in defense of pensions and health benefits. A May 15 SEP statement argues for “action committees” against the bankruptcy plan to be “organized independently of and in opposition to the trade unions.” This puts the SEP in league with the very forces driving the bankruptcy scheme, which want to crush whatever is left of public workers unions in the city.

Conflating the unions—the basic economic defense organizations of the working class—with their pro-capitalist misleaders, the SEP has opposed organizing non-union auto plants, as seen in its gloating over the UAW’s defeat in Chattanooga earlier this year, and openly alibied for scabbing. And these political bandits do not stop there. Two years ago, as millions were outraged over the killing of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin by a racist vigilante in Florida, a statement by the SEP’s presidential candidate Jerry White

opined that the killing “is not fundamentally about race” and concluded by urging a “fight for socialism” (see “SEP Denies Racism in Trayvon Martin Killing,” WV No. 1005, 6 July 2012). The SEP peddles the grotesque notion that the socialist liberation of the working class means denying the reality of black oppression—a cornerstone of capitalist rule in the U.S. To anyone tempted by the SEP’s “Marxist” verbiage, we say: Buyer, beware!

The crisis in Detroit glaringly shows the need to sweep out the sellout labor bureaucrats and forge a new, class-struggle leadership of the unions—independent of and opposed to all capitalist parties—as part of the fight to build a revolutionary workers party. The arrogant capitalist rulers presume that people will passively accept being thrown from their jobs and homes, losing vital services and any hope for a decent future for themselves or their children. But there is enormous resentment at the base of society toward the tiny class of obscenely rich exploiters. The key is to harness and direct anger among workers and minorities toward the eradication of racist capitalism.

Laying out the programmatic framework for such a struggle, the 1938 Transitional Program, written by Bolshevik revolutionary Leon Trotsky, raised a series of “*transitional demands*, stemming from today’s conditions and from today’s consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat.” Against the catastrophe of mass unemployment, we call for a shorter workweek with no loss in pay to spread the available work. Desperately needed is a massive program of public works to rebuild America’s decaying infrastructure—from housing, schools and hospitals to roads, transit systems, bridges and dams. Such a fight would unite private and public unions together with the unemployed and would mobilize the power of labor in the interests of the ghetto and barrio poor, striking a blow against the racial and ethnic hostilities whipped up by the capitalists to prop up their rule.

Against the swindles of the finance capitalists who control the economy, Trotsky wrote: “Only the expropriation of the private banks and the concentration of the entire credit system in the hands of the state will provide the latter with the necessary actual, i.e., material, resources—and not merely paper and bureaucratic resources—for economic planning.” But as he emphasized, “*The state-ization of the banks* will produce these favorable results only if the state power itself passes completely from the hands of the exploiters into the hands of the toilers.”

There may be no better argument for the revolutionary overturn of decaying capitalism than the situation in Detroit today. What must be done is to build a workers party that champions all the exploited and oppressed in the struggle for a workers government, where those who labor rule. The victory of the workers on a world scale will lay the basis for an internationally planned socialist economy that will finally rid the planet of poverty, racial and national oppression, war and all other evils of capitalist society. ■

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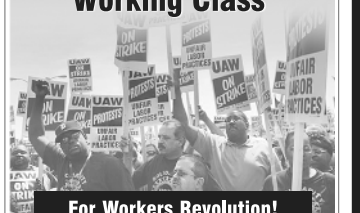
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WORKERS VANGUARD

As U.S. Imperialists Tighten Vise on China

Vietnamese Stalinists Fuel Anti-China Frenzy

For several days in mid May, upwards of 20,000 Vietnamese waving flags and carrying metal bars rampaged through industrial parks in central and south Vietnam. They hunted down Chinese workers and set fire to Chinese and other foreign-owned factories, screaming: “We are Vietnamese!” This outpouring was the culmination of a series of anti-China protests in at least 22 of Vietnam’s 63 provinces that left over 20 people dead and nearly 100 injured. Beijing sent a small armada to evacuate its nationals. Seeking to prevent foreign investors from pulling out of the country, the Vietnamese Stalinist bureaucrats moved to rein in the anti-China frenzy they had unleashed.

The stated reason for this bloody nationalist rampage was a \$1 billion deepwater oil-drilling platform deployed by China near the Paracel Islands, which lie roughly equidistant from the coastlines of Vietnam and China. Vietnam also mobilized its navy and coast guard to face off with the approximately 80 Chinese vessels that accompanied the rig, resulting in periodic clashes and skirmishes between the two countries.

What is behind this confrontation is that the Vietnamese government is directly lined up with the U.S. imperialists in their drive to encircle China, the most powerful of the remaining countries where capitalist/imperialist rule was overthrown. The Chinese Stalinist bureaucracy is seeking to push back against Washington’s attempts to dominate the South China Sea. A crucial component of U.S. strategy is building closer ties with Vietnam, which like China is a bureaucratically deformed workers state. Today, the Vietnamese coast guard is partly U.S.-funded and is trained by the U.S. and Japan.

The Vietnamese actions took place following Obama’s recent tour of Asia, which was all about, as CNN pointed out, “China, China, China.” While unable to secure firm commitments to sign onto the Trans-Pacific Partnership—an attempt by the U.S. to create an anti-China Asian economic bloc—Obama was successful on the military front. In Japan, he expanded the parameters of the longstanding Japan-U.S. security treaty to include the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands in the East China Sea, a strategically important link in China’s military perimeter. We support China’s claim to these islands against imperialist Japan (see “U.S., Japanese Provocations in East China Sea,” WV No. 1041, 7 March).

In the Philippines, an American neo-colony, the U.S. Commander-in-Chief signed a new ten-year defense deal that will give U.S. troops, ships and planes expanded access to bases there. A new “comprehensive partnership” was signed with the Malaysian government that includes strengthening “security” and cooperation on “defense.” We demand the removal of all American bases and all



AFP photos

Above: Anti-China protesters in Vietnam’s Dong Nai province on May 14. Below: USS *Blue Ridge* enters Tien Sa port at invitation of Vietnamese government in April 2012 amid rising tensions with China.



80,000 U.S. troops from the Asia-Pacific region, as part of the struggle to mobilize the U.S. working class against its own exploiters and their predatory military adventures.

Vietnam Signs on to U.S. Anti-China “Pivot”

Four decades ago, the U.S. imperialists were humiliated on the battlefield by the heroic Vietnamese workers and peasants in a victorious social revolution against landlord and capitalist rule. The cost was high: almost three million Vietnamese killed and many more maimed. Even today, Vietnam suffers a high rate of birth defects resulting from the millions of tons of Agent Orange defoliant dropped by American planes. The vengeful U.S. imposed a starvation embargo on Vietnam that was lifted only in the late 1990s.

It is a bitter irony that today Vietnam is acting in concert with U.S. imperial-

ism in targeting China. The diplomatic rapprochement of the Vietnamese Stalinists with Washington is a product of the country’s isolation following the counter-revolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union, as well as the continuing pressures of poverty and the historic mutual animosity between Vietnam and its bigger and stronger Chinese neighbor. This rapprochement began with Democrat Bill Clinton’s visit to Vietnam in 2000, the first by a U.S. president since the American defeat. Following in her husband’s footsteps, ten years later Hillary Clinton declared at a meeting of ASEAN member states held in Hanoi that the U.S. has a “national interest” in the South China Sea. Since then, U.S. diplomatic, economic and military ties with Vietnam have increased. It was reported that in the anti-Chinese rampage at the Binh Duong industrial park outside Ho Chi Minh City, an electronics plant flying U.S. and

Vietnamese flags was not touched.

Vietnamese prime minister Nguyen Tan Dung has called on the U.S. to play a more forceful role in the region. Top military officials from both countries have met, and U.S. naval ships are now permitted to visit Vietnamese ports. On a visit to Washington last July, Vietnamese president Truong Tan Sang and Obama announced a U.S.-Vietnam comprehensive partnership, which, in the words of the *East Asia Forum* (6 August 2013), provides Vietnam with “more confidence—and indeed more options—in confronting China in the South China Sea.”

To cement that agreement, in December John Kerry pledged \$18 million in new assistance to enhance the capacity of coastal patrol units, beginning with training and the provision of five fast patrol vessels to the Vietnamese coast guard. On May 20, Vietnam signed onto the Proliferation Security Initiative, created by George W. Bush, that allows member countries to stop ships carrying cargo “for a recipient that might use it to harm the U.S. or other country.”

Stalinist Policies Benefit Imperialism

The characterization of China and Vietnam as deformed workers states signifies that the economies in both countries are based on collectivized property forms, which have made possible a tremendous leap in the living standards and social conditions of the working masses. But at the same time, the working class does not wield political power, does not control production and does not decide international policy. We stand for the unconditional military defense of these countries against imperialism and counterrevolution, while fighting for workers political revolution to oust the parasitic bureaucratic castes.

Formed and organized on a national basis, the bureaucracy of every deformed workers state seeks to maximize its own economic privileges and political grip on society. The anti-Marxist dogma of “socialism in one country,” first put forward by Stalin in 1924 as the ideology of the consolidating conservative bureaucracy in the Soviet Union, is at the root of the nationalist policies of all Stalinist regimes. Hoping to placate the imperialist powers, Stalin increasingly turned the Communist parties worldwide away from any fight to overthrow their own rulers and toward pressuring those rulers to peacefully “coexist” with the USSR. The same suicidal policy is today pursued by Beijing and Hanoi, leading to periodic alignments with imperialist powers as the bureaucrats seek to defend the “socialism” of their own country at the expense of other workers states.

In the late 1950s and during the 1960s, *continued on page 10*

For Workers Political Revolution from Hanoi to Beijing!