

Ferguson: The Real Face of Racist Capitalist America



Reuters photos, Facebook (inset)



Police unleashed massive repression during demonstrations in Ferguson, Missouri, after August 9 cop killing of Michael Brown (inset).

The killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, by cop Darren Wilson on August 9 was met with demonstrations of anger in cities across the country. The utter racist contempt in which the cops hold black people was evident to everyone who saw the events in Ferguson. Everything the cops did was a calculated provocation. The young man's body was left to lie in the hot sun for hours, not unlike the bodies of lynching victims left to hang from trees. When Brown's friends and family left flowers and candles at the spot where he was killed, the cops tried to drive mourners away. One cop let his dog piss on the makeshift memorial, which police vehicles later drove over.

When people took to the town streets in protest, cops pointed guns in their faces and fired volleys of tear gas and wooden and rubber bullets. Hundreds of people from the broader St. Louis area and across the country piled in to Ferguson to express their outrage and their solidarity with the besieged community. Imposing a curfew and whipping up hysteria over "outside agitators" allowed the police to further ramp up the repression. Over 200 were arrested, most for failing to disperse, and many were injured. Meanwhile, Brown's killer remains suspended with pay, i.e., on a paid vacation.

"It's either stand up or die." This statement by one protester gave voice to the fury over the daily reality of cop terror faced especially by black people in racist capitalist America. Just the most recent victims of police killings include: Eric Garner, killed by a police choke hold in Staten Island on July 17; John Crawford,

gunned down on August 5 in an Ohio Wal-Mart because he was holding an air gun he had picked up off a shelf; Ezell Ford, shot dead by the LAPD on August 11 while complying with police instructions to lie on the ground; Dillon Delbert Taylor, an unarmed 20-year-old white man, gunned down by a Salt Lake City cop on the same day; Kajieme Powell, a mentally disturbed black man killed by St. Louis cops in a hail of a dozen bullets on August 19. The Malcolm X Grassroots Movement produced a report last year listing 313 black people killed in 2012 by cops, security guards or vigilantes like George Zimmerman, the killer of Trayvon Martin. That works out to one life snuffed out every 28 hours.

Reporters from *Workers Vanguard* attended an August 22 press conference in St. Louis, where young activists who had been participating in the Ferguson protests spoke of their bitter experiences with the cops, something shared by black youth throughout the country. If you find yourself in the wrong place at the wrong time, you will be pulled over by the police and forced to "play Twister" on the hood of the car. You can be arrested or given a ticket for not showing your license or insurance fast enough. You can get hit with a warrant for outstanding tickets you never knew about.

Beneath the raw, bleeding abscess of police brutality, there is the slower destruction of the lives of black youth caused by capitalist economic decay. Having let industry rot while waging a one-sided class war against unions, the ruling class deems

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Spartacist Leaflet, August 20

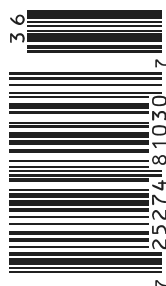
Every cop in America knows that a badge is a license to kill black people. Michael Brown, an unarmed black 18-year-old, was executed by a white cop in broad daylight for the "crime" of walking in the street after being told to move onto the sidewalk. Shot six times, including twice in the head, he was left exposed in the street for hours, his lifeless body treated with less respect than a stray dog. As always, the police have since tried to tarnish the victim as the criminal. Fifty years after the passage of the Civil Rights Act and the formal abolition of Jim Crow segregation, this is what it still means to be black in America.

Ferguson, Missouri, is at a flash point. Tired of being told to "get to the back of the bus"—that is, shut up, get out of the street and get home before curfew—protesters have come out in defiant opposition to cop terror and racist injustice, which are inherent in this capitalist system. In this majority black St. Louis suburb, protesters continue to brave an army of mostly white cops firing tear gas, wooden and rubber bullets and stun grenades. One uniformed police thug was caught on video screaming: "Bring it, all you fucking animals!" Now Ferguson is up against a deployment of National Guardsmen, an army of occupation. We demand: **Cops, National Guard out now! Free the arrested protesters and drop all charges now!**

The National Guard are the reserve Army troops used to put down labor, black people and leftists who dare challenge the powers that be, from defending segregation in Little Rock in 1957 and smashing the 1965 Watts uprising to mobilizing against striking Teamsters in Ohio and killing Vietnam antiwar student protesters at Kent State in 1970. The police, who have always used every means at their disposal to enforce capitalist "law and order," in recent years have gotten their hands on war matériel left over from U.S. imperialism's occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq. The same U.S. ruling class that wreaks terror on its neocolonial victims abroad also brutally grinds down the working class, black masses and immigrants at home. The message is: submit or else.

Aghast at the scenes of armored vehicles and cops pointing M-16 assault rifles at residents in the Ferguson war zone (where journalists have been among those treated like enemies, tear-gassed and arrested), liberals complain about "excessive" force. And with more far-sighted elements in the government expressing concern that their own guard dogs had slipped the leash, a black highway patrol officer and local resident was put in charge to pacify the crowds. But it makes no difference whether the cops are black, white or Latino, local, state or federal—they serve and protect a system

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Break with the Democrats! Build a Revolutionary Workers Party!

“Conspiracy and Treachery in Alabama”

Spartacist No. 4, May-June 1965

The events that unfolded in Alabama in 1965, half a century ago, attracted world-wide attention. They marked a turning point in the fight for black rights, posing a concrete opportunity to win militants away from Democratic Party liberalism to revolutionary Marxism.

In early 1965, Martin Luther King Jr. launched a voter registration campaign in Selma, Alabama, where only 2 percent of eligible black people were registered. Police jailed King and arrested more than 1,000 protesters, many of them black school children. At a February 18 protest, a state trooper shot and killed 26-year-old Jimmie Lee Jackson while he was protecting his mother from the trooper’s nightstick.

In response, civil rights leaders organized a march from Selma to Montgomery, where infamous Dixiecrat George Wallace sat in the governor’s mansion. On March 7, on the Pettus Bridge spanning the Alabama River in Selma, mounted police and state troopers attacked marchers in what became known as “Bloody Sunday.” Three days later, by prior arrangement with U.S. Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach, King turned back from another march to Montgomery in the face of fierce local police resistance. He did so without informing the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), which organized many young black militants. This set up SNCC activists for police violence.

The situation in Selma escalated. Against the wishes of King and his supporters, SNCC leaders organized protests, which police attacked. Finally, in late March, King did lead a march from Selma to Montgomery. After a rally at the Capitol, Viola Liuzzo, a white woman from Detroit, was shot and killed by a group of Klansmen, including FBI informer Gary Rowe.

By this time, the system of Jim Crow segregation in the South had become economically obsolete with the dying out of sharecropping, and it was an embarrassment hampering the U.S. rulers in their Cold War drive against the Soviet Union. As the bourgeoisie on the whole acquiesced to the demand for legal equality in the South, the Lyndon B. Johnson administration offered civil rights legislation and Great Society social welfare programs to head off the exploding protest movement and co-opt black militants into the Democratic Party. In 1964, Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act. During the Selma campaign, he introduced the Voting Rights Act into Congress.

In the early 1960s, the Revolutionary Tendency, the predecessor of the Spartacist League, had fought inside the rightward-moving Socialist Workers Party (SWP) to seize the historic opportunity presented by the mass struggles for black rights to recruit militants to Trotskyism. The policy of the majority of the SWP, which had been the historic party of Trotskyism in the U.S., was to support whatever leadership



Selma, Alabama: State troopers attack civil rights marchers demanding voting rights, March 1965.

emerged from the black movement, from liberal reformers to black nationalists. As a result, the SWP criminally abstained from intervention into the black struggle; notably, it did not send cadres to the South.

In late 1963, the SWP expelled the founding cadres of the Spartacist League. From its early days, the Spartacist tendency raised various transitional demands linking the fight for black liberation to labor’s fight against the capitalist exploiters. A founding document of the Spartacist League, “Black and Red—Class Struggle Road to Negro Freedom” (1966, reprinted in *Marxist Bulletin* No. 9), articulated these demands, including the call for a Freedom-Labor Party. This was an expression of working-class political independence and the need to mobilize the ranks of labor under the banner of black freedom.

The following article was part of our effort to intervene into the tumultuous struggles of the civil rights movement.

* * *

From the beginning the black voter registration campaign in the South was an assertion of potential independence—directed against the underlying social system as well as the segregationist political apparatus which helps maintain it. Revolutionary in implication because it involved organizing masses of black workers and share-croppers in struggle, the mass character of the movement poses a dangerous threat to the American ruling class and its politicians. Hence they use every means at their disposal to derail the movement—including sending in such kept leaders as Martin Luther King—to head it off and deliver it to the Democratic Party where the job of beheading and neutralizing it can be finished off.

Racist Bosses Supported March

The spectacle of Northern “liberal” political bosses, such as [NYC mayor Rob-

ert] Wagner and [New York governor Nelson] Rockefeller, shedding crocodile tears over the racist violence and supporting the Selma-to-Montgomery march, corroborates our opinion. For example, Wagner’s representative to the march, Deputy Mayor Paul Screvane, was in direct control of the New York City administration last summer when thousands of his cops terrorized the people of Harlem for four days under the pretext of suppressing a “riot.” And this was merely an *intensification* of the daily oppression and intimidation of Negroes and Spanish-speaking minorities carried out by the “liberal” big-city machines. (Wagner’s true role was made clear a few weeks ago at a Catholic breakfast-rally attended by 5,600 N.Y. cops featuring ultra-rightist William F. Buckley as speaker. Buckley, in the course of a long invective against the civil-rights movement, praised the “restraint” of the Alabama troopers and pleaded that they had been “provoked” and were justified in attacking the Selma marchers with clubs, cattle-prods and tear gas. For this,

amidst enthusiastic “stomping, whistling, and cheering” by “New York’s Finest,” Wagner congratulated Buckley for his “eloquence.”)

Perversion in Selma

Through the King leadership, Lyndon Johnson managed to corral the Selma civil-rights movement into a virtual rally of support for himself and for these same racist bosses in the Democratic Party. In fact, the march acquired the character of an “official” parade directly launched from Washington, with a corps of food and latrine trucks, doctors and nurses, swarms of politicians, etc., plus Federal troops standing guard along the route. The tempo of mass pressure for democratic rights in the South had made it necessary for Johnson to offer some sort of voting rights law. However, in the granting of this concession, Johnson has made every effort to bend it to the interests of capitalism—and particularly to the benefit of his party. It is clear that Johnson timed his Voting Rights bill and the deployment of troops to coincide intimately with King’s maneuvers in Selma. In this way Johnson, the racist cracker, has made himself appear as a “great white father” and the Federal government as benefactor and defender of the Negro people—a master stroke of cynical dupery.

Celebration on the Left

The mindless enthusing of the [SWP’s] *Militant* and others over the Selma-to-Montgomery march only attests to the extraordinary political shrewdness of Johnson: firmly directing King’s activities with one hand, staunchly defending “states’ rights” with his other hand, all the while cautioning “both sides”; and then sending in troops and pushing the vote law from the “middle of the road.” In addition to adding its voice to the chorus celebrating the march and the mobilization of Federal troops, the “revolutionary” *Militant* committed the further betrayal of calling upon Johnson to *keep his troops*

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Free Chelsea Manning!

One year ago, Chelsea (formerly Bradley) Manning was sentenced to 35 years in prison for leaking military documents and diplomatic cables that exposed the U.S. government’s global war crimes and sinister machinations. With Obama ramping up aerial bombardments in Iraq while presiding over a wave of racist cop terror at home, the international workers movement must mark this anniversary of Manning’s sentencing with renewed resolve to fight for her freedom. (For more information about her case, see WV Nos. 1026 and 1028, 14 June and 9 August 2013.)

Prosecuted under the Espionage Act, Manning was nobody’s spy. She revealed information she had access to as a military analyst in Iraq so that the whole world could see the horror covered up by the capitalist media’s embedded reporters. Her motive was to force a public debate on U.S. policy based on the facts. She continues this fight today from her prison cell. In an op-ed piece published in the *New York Times* (14 June), Manning wrote: “As Iraq erupts in civil war and America again contemplates intervention, that unfinished business should give new urgency to the question of how the United States military controlled the media coverage of its long involvement there and in Afghanistan. I believe that the current limits on press freedom and excessive government secrecy make

it impossible for Americans to grasp fully what is happening in the wars we finance.”

We hail Manning’s courageous acts. Her disclosures document the truth: beneath the cloak of “democracy,” the U.S. government is the biggest terrorist force on the planet.

Financial contributions are urgently needed to sustain a legal appeal of Manning’s conviction and also challenge the inhumane conditions of her imprisonment. Jailed in the all-male Army prison at Fort Leavenworth, Manning is being denied the hormone treatments she has requested, which even the military’s own doctors deem medically necessary. While a new legal team prepares the appeal of Manning’s conviction, her original trial attorney and the American Civil Liberties Union have filed official notice of their intent to sue the military for cruel and unusual punishment if Manning is not given proper medical treatment.

The Partisan Defense Committee has donated to Manning’s legal defense and urges readers of *Workers Vanguard* to do likewise. To donate by check or money order, please make payable to: Courage to Resist, 484 Lake Park Ave. #41, Oakland, CA 94610. Note “Manning Defense” on the memo line. Write to Manning at: Chelsea E. Manning 89289, 1300 North Warehouse Road, Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2304.

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Public Education Under Nationwide Assault

California Ruling Pits Minorities Against Teachers Unions

On June 10, the State Superior Court in Los Angeles ruled in *Vergara v. State of California* that laws codifying teacher seniority and job protections discriminate against poor and minority students, who the court claimed are more likely to be taught by incompetent teachers. Hypocritically blaming teachers for the failings of the grossly underfunded, segregated and blatantly unequal public school system, the *Vergara* suit was a ploy to pit black people and Latinos against the unions. This blow to the teachers unions is the latest in a years-long offensive carried out by both Democrats and Republicans. Since the ruling, two similar lawsuits have been filed in New York, with others in the works in Connecticut, New Jersey, Minnesota and Tennessee. In California, Democratic governor Jerry Brown has appealed the ruling; teachers unions have announced their intention to appeal as well.

The fight to defend union jobs and working conditions for teachers goes hand in hand with the fight for quality, integrated education. But instead of mobilizing on this basis, which would win wide support from working people and the black masses, the California teachers union tops have played into the anti-union smear campaign, joining with Governor Brown's efforts to "streamline" the firing process. The California Teachers Association even praised Brown for signing AB 215, a state law expediting the process of firing teachers accused of "egregious misconduct." The allegiance of the labor officialdom to the capitalist Democratic Party is a recipe for defeat.

The woeful state of public education is a searing indictment of racist American capitalism, which is incapable of meeting the basic needs of the exploited and oppressed. It will take socialist revolution to sweep away this rotten system and usher in a society that provides decent jobs, quality education and other necessities for everyone.

The following presentation, given by comrade Reuben Samuels at a Bay Area Spartacist League meeting in late June, has been edited for publication.

* * *

I joined the Spartacist League amidst the 1968 New York City teachers strike. As Mayor John Lindsay slashed the school budget, he pitted the barrios, ghettos and black teachers against the mainly white and disproportionately Jewish teachers union through a scam called “community control.” Devised by the Ford Foundation, the Lindsay administration and the federal Office of Economic Opportunity—which ran Lyndon B. Johnson’s “War on Poverty”—the “community control” scam

CORRECTION

In “Zionist Bloodbath in Gaza” (WV No. 1050, 8 August), we wrote that Hamas “in the 1970s and ’80s was promoted by Israel as a counterweight to the PLO and more left-wing Palestinian groups.” In fact, Israel supported the Islamic Association, a predecessor to Hamas, beginning in the late 1970s, and Hamas itself from its founding in 1988 until fall of the following year.



Neon Tommy

February 20: Teachers unions' press conference outside Los Angeles courthouse during Vergara trial.

broke up the administration of New York public schools into at least 30 independent, community-based school boards. Each board would set its own budget, pitting community against community in a relentless competition over shrinking resources. And each would have the right to hire and fire, thereby breaking the collective bargaining power of the city-wide United Federation of Teachers under Albert Shanker.

The teachers strike was provoked when the newly minted school administrator of the mostly black Ocean Hill-Brownsville district summarily fired 13 teachers. One teacher was fired for allegedly losing control over his class; it was claimed students were even throwing chairs at one another. Upon review, however, it was demonstrated that the chairs were bolted to the floor.

An unholy alliance of civil rights and black nationalist leaders, the “old” left and the New Left, and the liberal establishment united to break the strike, crossing picket lines and setting up so-called “liberation schools.” As you can surmise from “Beware Liberal Union-Busters!”, our ‘68 strike leaflet [reprinted in WV No. 956, 9 April 2010], we were uniquely unpopular for defending the strike while denouncing the Shanker leadership. The union leaders’ narrow-minded “business union” approach and callous indifference to the plight of minority youth undermined the strike, isolated the union and further fueled racial polarization. No wonder a character in Woody Allen’s *Sleeper* (1973) quips that civilization was destroyed when “a man by the name of Albert Shanker got hold of a nuclear warhead.”

Separate and Unequal

Today, American public education is more segregated than any time since the civil rights movement. The Civil Rights Project coined the term “apartheid schools” to describe schools with 1 percent or less white student enrollment. In Chicago one-half of schools meet this criterion. In the Los Angeles metropolitan area, roughly 30 percent of Latinos attend schools in which whites make up 1 percent or less of enrollment.

Prior to large-scale deindustrialization in this country, back when American capitalism required more of an educated work-

force, California ranked among the top ten states in per-student expenditure. Student academic performance was reputed to be excellent. In 1978, the state's Proposition 13 ballot initiative put a cap on the property taxes used to fund public schools. Prop 13 represented a racist backlash by homeowners against having their taxes fund social programs particularly benefiting poor people and minorities. Today, California ranks 39th in per-pupil spending. Adjusted for cost of living, California ranks 46th. In math and English skills,

the state's fourth- and eighth-graders rank between 42nd and 47th.

Between 2008 and 2013, the K-12 student-per-teacher ratio in the “Golden State” increased from 21-to-1 to 25-to-1, the highest in the nation—the national average being 15-to-1. An important measure of public education resources is the student-to-librarian ratio. In California in 2011-12, that ratio was 7,374 students for every librarian, also the highest in the nation. The Oakland Unified School District only funds two full-time and two part-time librarians for 37,000 students. As a consequence, one-third of Oakland’s school libraries have been shut down.

In California, 80 percent of students graduate from high school. But just 63 percent of Oakland Unified students graduate, including only 51 percent of black males. With concentrations of black men literally locked up and out of the labor force, unemployment levels among black youth resemble those of young people in Spain, Italy and Greece. A 2009 North-eastern University study found that across the country on any given day, nearly one out of four black male dropouts were in prison or jail, as opposed to one out of 14 non-black males.

Twenty-three percent of California students are English learners, also the highest rate in the nation. Los Angeles Unified not only has more English learners than any other school district—about one-third of its 600,000 students—but more than 80 percent of its students live in poverty.

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SL Leaflet...

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built on a bedrock of racist oppression, from chattel slavery to wage slavery. The job of *all* police is to protect capitalist property and the rule of the few who profit from the exploitation of the many.

What occurred in Ferguson is no aberration. The proliferation of SWAT teams, the cop occupations of barrios and ghettos across America and the mass incarceration fueled by the “war on drugs” have for decades been part of daily life for black people. Over the same period, the capitalists increasingly deindustrialized the economy, abandoning the auto and steel plants that used to provide jobs, further sealing in the desperation of the ghetto wastelands. In their drive for profit, they have driven society to ruin and made everyone else pay for it. With no jobs on offer for working-class and minority youth, the capitalists don’t see much need to spend money on educating them, much less on providing any social programs. What is on offer is unbridled state repression.

Defying the odds, Michael Brown managed to stay outside the maw of the prison system, graduated from high school and was about to start college. His mother spoke the bitter truth: “Do you know how hard it was for me to get him to stay in school and graduate? You know how many black men graduate? Not many. Because you bring them down to this type of level, where they feel like they don’t got nothing to live for anyway. ‘They’re going to try to take me out anyway’.” This U.S. racist hellhole consigned Trayvon Martin, Oscar Grant and countless others to a similar fate.

Echoing racist Southern sheriffs who denounced Northern freedom riders, the government and bourgeois media mouth off about “outside agitators” in Ferguson. Meanwhile, from Obama’s White House on down, black Democrats and preachers keep telling protesters to simmer down, stay away from the “lawless elements”



Manhattan, August 20: Al Sharpton at press conference with New York City mayor Bill de Blasio, clergy and cops. Sharpton diverts anger over cop killings into empty “police reform” schemes and voting for Democrats.

and get on home. This time around, many protesters aren’t going for it.

The killing of Michael Brown hit a nerve among those who are unwilling to silently witness one more cop killing of a black person. They are fed up with the empty promises of “hope” and “change,” fed up with the paternalistic advice to pull up their pants and their bootstraps, fed up with being blamed for the ills of society, fed up with the illusion of equality wrapped around the core reality of systematic racist oppression. One Howard University student remarked: “This issue is about the fact that this country is not post-racial, this country is not just, this country is not free.”

The authorities want to herd the mass outrage back into the ballot box, while Democratic Party politico Al Sharpton chimes in to scold Ferguson residents for low voter turnout. There should be no illusions in the Democrats or the federal government, which oversees this rotten system that the cops “serve and protect.” The notion that the Feds will rein in racist local law enforcement is a lie. FBI agents have been embedded in the Ku Klux Klan and involved in heinous crimes, such as

the 1963 Birmingham church bombing and the 1979 Greensboro massacre of leftists and union organizers. With many in Ferguson seeking redress from a Department of Justice investigation, we warn that Attorney General Eric Holder & Co. are the top cops who step in to get people off the streets with the promise that justice may come in the sweet by-and-by, at best enacting cosmetic reforms.

The spontaneous displays of anger by the working people and dispossessed in Ferguson are justified and essential. But unless the labor movement actively mobilizes in defense of the oppressed, such atomized outbursts will remain powerless against the capitalists and their repressive forces, leading to more despair. Significantly, some unions in New York City are calling their members into the street to join an August 23 protest in solidarity with victims of police brutality, like Eric Garner, killed by the cops last month. But Sharpton’s purpose in organizing this protest is to push for federal intervention to bring “justice.”

Organized labor’s most powerful weapons—its numbers, multiracial composition and capacity to halt the wheels of

production-for-profit—are squandered by union tops who politically chain workers to the class enemy. The labor misleaders are slavishly loyal to the Democratic Party and push the lie that the government can be pressured to promote the interests of workers and the poor. The same capitalist state that terrorizes black people will go after the working class when it engages in militant struggle. Labor rights and black rights will either go forward together or fall back separately. For labor to flex its muscle in defense of itself and all the oppressed, a new, class-struggle leadership must be forged that doesn’t play by the bosses’ rules.

We do not suggest that this will be an easy road, particularly when the labor movement has been losing a one-sided class war waged by the bosses. But it is the only way forward. There will be no black liberation in this society short of a socialist revolution that breaks the shackles of racist American capitalism. And there will be no socialist revolution that does not emblazon the fight for black freedom on its banners.

Missouri was a slave state, and Ferguson lies just north of heavily segregated St. Louis. In 1857, the infamous Dred Scott decision that a black man “had no rights which the white man was bound to respect” sanctioned the reach of the Southern slaveowners into the North. The grave of the former slave Dred Scott on West Florissant Avenue is just a few miles down from where the Ferguson protests have riveted world attention.

It took a Civil War, the second American revolution, to smash the slave system. But the promise of black freedom was betrayed by an alliance of Northern capital with the Southern propertied classes against the aspirations of black freedmen. It will take a third American revolution, a proletarian socialist revolution, to finish the Civil War, eradicate racist capitalist oppression and establish an egalitarian socialist society. The Spartacist League is dedicated to building the multiracial revolutionary workers party that is necessary to achieve this purpose. ■

Racist America...

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much of the black population to be surplus, no longer even needed as the “last hired, first fired.” If not gunned down in the streets, many are hauled off to prison. This mass incarceration is largely the result of the “war on drugs,” which Jesse Jackson and other black Democrats once fervently pushed.

The systematic oppression of black people, rooted in the economic foundations of American capitalism, is a legacy of slavery and the defeat of Reconstruction that followed the smashing of slavery in the Civil War. After the Great Migration that began during World War I, millions of black workers were integrated into the industrial economy in the Northern cities. However, the black population remained forcibly segregated at the bottom of society, constituting a race-color caste.

Despite widespread deindustrialization in recent decades, concentrations of organized labor, including a significant component of black workers, do exist. Those workers embody the possibility of fusing the power of labor with the anger of the dispossessed black masses. This requires breaking labor’s political chains to the capitalist Democratic Party, whose representatives came to Ferguson to douse the fires by urging a turn to the ballot box and preaching various empty “police reform” schemes.

The working class is the only force with the social power and class interest to do away with this rotten capitalist system and its racist police guard dogs. Because it is ingrained in the capitalist economy and every social institution in this country, racial oppression cannot be smashed without a thoroughgoing socialist revolution.



Amalgamated Transit Union Local 788 members at contract rally in downtown St. Louis, August 28. Mobilizing social power of integrated labor movement is key to fighting exploitation, racial oppression.

tion. In turn, the fight for black freedom must be emblazoned on labor’s banner if the working class is ever going to emancipate itself.

Democrats Move In

Working to defuse the situation in Ferguson, Barack Obama promised that Attorney General Eric Holder would head up an investigation into Michael Brown’s death. One young speaker at the August 22 press conference observed that the black president and attorney general only took notice of Ferguson after hearing about “the looting and the rioting.” Many who participated in the protests hope the federal investigation will be more than a whitewash, but also know that’s likely what it’s going to be. In fact, the whole purpose of any investigation is to refurbish the illusion that the capitalist government gives a damn about black people.

Earlier, black Democratic Party politicians like Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson had arrived in Ferguson to put a lid on the protests. Sharpton, the featured speaker at Michael Brown’s funeral, used

his sermon to attack the protesters and black youth in general. Bellowing, “we are not anti-police, we respect police,” Sharpton blamed black people for their own oppression, with bigoted claptrap about not being “a gangster or a thug” or engaging in “ghetto pity parties”!

Protesters from Ferguson made clear that they were fed up with being treated like animals by the lily-white police force and city administration. A “solution” Sharpton favors is hiring more black cops—as has been done in many cities in order to improve the effectiveness of the police in repressing the black population. So the authorities brought in black Missouri highway patrol captain Ron Johnson to be the “good cop.” But after hugging protesters and retailing anecdotes about his own son with tattoos and sagging pants, he enforced the city curfew and set the scene for the arrival of the National Guard.

Not everyone is buying the snake oil from Sharpton. But the same bourgeois reform politics have been served up by others in a different guise. One of the groups organizing black youth around

the protests in the St. Louis area was the Organization for Black Struggle (OBS). While the OBS pays lip service to “the creation of a society free of all forms of exploitation and oppression,” its activity has centered on appeals to the White House to conduct a thorough investigation of the local police. Such pressure politics end up channeling black anger right back into the fold of the Democratic Party.

Another group active in the Ferguson protests was the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP), whose members posture as more militant and were gone after by the cops. But the August 18 statement issued by the RCP neatly illustrates the contradiction between their anti-system verbiage and the actual content of their demands. It declaims: “We stand with the angry ones, the rebellious ones, the ones who will not take it.” Fine, but what do they propose? The RCP writes that Darren Wilson, “this murdering pig, must be charged and taken into custody. *NOW!*”

So the “revolutionary” RCP is fighting for...a good prosecutor to get rid of the bad cop! With this rehash of what

Cops Are Not Workers!

New York City: Cops Bash Unions Over Garner Demo

In the face of a concerted backlash by three cop “unions,” some 8,000 integrated anti-police brutality protesters rallied in Staten Island on August 23. Cosponsored by Al Sharpton’s National Action Network, the NAACP, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) and the 1199SEIU health care workers union, the protest featured a march from the spot where a gang of NYPD thugs fatally strangled Eric Garner with a choke hold on July 17. The Sharpton-led demo was a tightly run affair and had a clear agenda to steer anger over the killings of Garner, Michael Brown and others into impotent demands for police reform. The blowback from the cops in advance of the rally took special aim at the unions. Even so, several unions turned out.

Patrolmen’s Benevolent Association (PBA) honcho Patrick Lynch attacked UFT president Michael Mulgrew in an August 17 letter to the *New York Post* for

getting “involved with a march that has nothing to do with teachers or his union.” With Lynch organizing an online protest against Mulgrew, the heads of the Detectives’ Endowment Association and the Sergeants Benevolent Association chimed in. One railed against the UFT for “aligning themselves with extremists like Al Sharpton,” and the other denounced any

union participation in the protest. Meanwhile, the *Post* ran a series under the banner “The War on Cops,” and the Staten Island Chamber of Commerce and the NYPD added to the frenzy by advising businesses along the march route to close up shop in anticipation of unrest.

Although despised by the cops, former FBI fink Al Sharpton is simply a

loyal operator for the Democratic Party, to which the pro-capitalist trade-union tops tie the fortunes of labor. Under such leadership, the demo was never going to be an expression of militant opposition to racist cop terror, especially not with union-supported Democratic mayor Bill de Blasio staunchly defending the NYPD “broken windows” clampdown on petty crimes—of which Eric Garner is a casualty. In contrast to the elemental outpouring of anger in Ferguson, the NYC rally was consciously staged to be respectable and “peaceful.”

In an attempt to appease the cops, an official 1199SEIU sign was introduced on the eve of the rally reading, “Support NYPD. Stop Police Brutality.” From the podium, Mulgrew offered: “Everyone wants to live in a safe community and work with the police who are there to protect and serve them.” This sentiment

continued on page 11

Sharpton has to say about “bad apples” on the police force, the RCP sows dangerous illusions in the armed bodies at the core of the capitalist state. The truth is that murderous brutality is inherent to the job of the cops, which is to defend the ruling class by suppressing workers, blacks, immigrants and all other victims of capitalism’s ravages. And with greater social inequality that violence is all the more pronounced.

In Ferguson, police trained laser sights on activists and rolled out heavy hardware to intimidate protesters. As local musician Tef Poe put it: “I never imagined that a neighborhood I drove up and down as a teenager would resemble Gaza.” And in fact, the display of military-grade equipment presented the government with an image problem.

An article in the London *Economist* (23 August) set out the view that “smarter policing” would make “rioting” less likely. It continued: “A Pentagon programme that gives surplus military hardware to local law-enforcement agencies can make them seem like occupying armies rather than public servants. That is both costly and counterproductive.” Even this organ of finance capital recognizes that there is something irrational in such an arrangement. So now Commander-in-Chief Obama piously laments the blurring of the lines between “our military and our local law enforcement,” undoubtedly with the midterm elections in mind.

Many liberal reformers are demanding an end to the Pentagon program providing weaponry to the cops, instead preferring old-school police methods. Let’s be clear: the cops didn’t need special weapons to kill Michael Brown, just as the NYPD didn’t need any when they choked Eric Garner to death. As it happens, the Ferguson police department purchased its assault rifles and other weapons without recourse to the Pentagon program. The bourgeoisie will always ensure that its hired guns get what they need to crush



WV Photo

August 23: Staten Island rally protesting police brutality.

“unrest,” including backup from the National Guard and ultimately the Army if necessary. The cops have acted and will act like an army of occupation in minority and poor communities, until workers seize power and sweep away the entire apparatus of the capitalist state.

Labor Must Fight Racial Oppression

The St. Louis area is a crossroads between North and South. Majority black Ferguson is one of a myriad of suburban hamlets a few miles from downtown St. Louis. Whites and more middle-class blacks live on its west side, while the population of the east side is more black and working-class, all ruled over by a white local government.

Michael Brown’s mother, Lesley

McSpadden, is a member of the United Food and Commercial Workers, and many trade unionists participated in the Ferguson protests as individuals. The St. Louis Coalition of Black Trade Unionists and SEIU health care workers marched with union banners. However, these contingents were mobilized in lockstep with the Democrats and preachers who sought to divert protest into avenues acceptable to the capitalist rulers.

This country’s history has shown over and over again that the struggles of black people and labor go forward together or fall back separately. This was illustrated in the building of the industrial unions in the 1930s. To overcome the crippling ethnic and craft divisions among workers and the exclusion of most unskilled workers from the unions, it was necessary to wage war against the color bar. Trotskyists, Communists and other reds led several of the key class battles that forged the CIO industrial unions (see “Then and Now,” page 6). As part of the CIO organizing drive, thousands of workers in St. Louis joined the UE electrical workers union. In 1937, a 53-day sitdown strike at Emerson Electric was victorious, sparking strikes involving black and white workers at several other factories. These strikes drew on multiracial support from the broader community, including a campaign that forced the St. Louis relief board to pay relief (welfare) to the strikers.

The notion of workers collectively engaging in hard struggle in their own interests, much less in those of the black masses, may come off as fantastical today. Responsibility for this lies mainly with the conservative bureaucrats atop the labor movement, who have sapped workers’ fighting spirit by allowing the unions to be eviscerated while barely lifting a finger in defense of minorities. The whole perspective of the labor tops is predicated on the lie that the working class and the owners of industry share a common interest in the profitability of American capitalism. By refusing to actively fight against anti-black racism, repression and anti-immigrant bigotry, labor misleaders have criminally aided the rulers in weakening and dividing the working class. With a class-struggle leadership, the unions could become battalions of labor, fighting for jobs for all and against every manifestation of oppression.

The Fight for Black Liberation

Liberals and Democratic politicians are fond of urging young people today to take the path of the 1950s-’60s civil rights movement, by which they mean respect for bourgeois law and its enforcers and the strategy of operating within the system, especially through the ballot box. The black middle-class leadership of the civil rights movement, epitomized by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., subordinated the fight for black rights to Democratic Party liberalism. The mass struggles succeeded in dismantling the Jim Crow system of legal segregation and passing voting rights legislation (today under

steady attack). The smug racist and anti-Communist consensus of the 1950s was broken down, and the door opened for the protests against the U.S. imperialist war in Vietnam.

But in the North, the liberal formula for equal rights under the law provided no answers to the miserable conditions of black life entrenched in American capitalist society: joblessness, crumbling homes, overcrowded schools, racist cop terror, etc. Following the elemental ghetto rebellions that exploded in the 1960s, a slew of black mayors and other office-holders were elected in order to more effectively enforce poverty and repression. The upheavals also convinced the rulers to fund more social programs to pacify the ghettos, before going on to slash such programs in subsequent decades.

Today, those who aspire to be new liberal civil rights leaders have no better answers than their forebears. Special prosecutors, police review boards, investigations by Holder, a “review” by Obama of police weaponry and training are all about cleaning up the image of U.S. capitalism’s racist machinery of repression. The Democrats only want to mobilize black people as voting cattle for the umpteenth time. Tellingly, the NAACP has announced a door-to-door voter registration campaign, with the macabre slogan: “Mike Brown Can’t Vote, But I Can.”

The Democratic Party is a political vehicle for the tiny elite that profits from the exploitation of workers and lords over the oppression of blacks. What is required is a new party based on the needs of working people, a revolutionary workers party. Fighting to build such a party, our organization stands on the program of revolutionary integrationism, which means combating all aspects of racial oppression as part of the fight for an egalitarian socialist order—the only way to achieve real equality. **For black liberation through socialist revolution!** ■

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1934 Strikes

Class-Struggle Leadership Made the Difference

Then and Now

Part One of this article appeared in WV No. 1050 (8 August).

The 83-day West Coast maritime strike was launched on May 9. It was the eve of the second Minneapolis Teamsters strike, and the second Toledo strike was on. The largest and longest

Part Two

of the 1934 citywide strikes (Minneapolis and Toledo were discussed in Part One of this article), the West Coast labor action involved ports from Los Angeles to Seattle. But the decisive events, first and foremost a four-day general strike, unfolded in San Francisco. A battle that would transform SF into a union town for decades to come, the strike has been the subject of countless labor histories, academic studies and other works. Mike Quin's *The Big Strike* (1949) provides probably the most thorough account. It is also addressed at some length in such books as Art Preis's *Labor's Giant Step* (1964), Jeremy Brecher's *Strike!* (1972) and Bruce Nelson's *Workers on the Waterfront* (1990), which is also a superb study of the history of "seamen, longshoremen, and unionism" up to and including the 1930s.

Regarding the 1934 West Coast maritime strike, Nelson argues:

"Among the many threads that were part of the Big Strike's dynamism, four stand out as crucial: first, the strikers' militancy, steadfastness, and discipline in the face of an adversary who wielded an arsenal of weapons ranging from private security forces and vigilantes to the bayonets and machine guns of the National Guard; second, a solidarity that swept aside old craft antagonisms and culminated in a general strike; third, a rank-and-file independence and initiative that came to mean frequent defiance of AFL norms and officials; and finally, in the face of an increasingly hysterical and violent wave of anti-Communist propaganda, a willingness to assess the Red presence in the strike independently, from the workers' own standpoint, and a growing tendency to view Red-baiting as an instrument of the employers."

There is no gainsaying the determination, combativity and courage of the ranks of the union. But it was critical that the workers had a leadership that was animated at the time by a program of class struggle. The workers were aware of the importance of this leadership, which is why they didn't buy into the bosses' anti-Communist hysteria.

Prior to the strike, San Francisco was known as one of the most open shop cities in the U.S., the product of the crushing defeat of a 1919 longshore strike. Dock workers labored as little more than slaves under the whip of the "Blue

Book" company union. This "union" enforced the rule of corrupt gang bosses who called the shots in handing out work to men made to assemble for the daily "shape up." Up until 1933, the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) in SF had been little more than a paper union. Nationally, the union was ruled with an iron fist by ILA president Joseph Ryan. In the pocket of shipping bosses and capitalist politicians who handsomely rewarded him for his services, Ryan was notorious for hiring thugs and murderers to literally dispose of union militants and keep the New York port strike-free.



Union longshoremen picket San Francisco docks during 1934 strike.

Bancroft Library

After joining the ILA, together with thousands of other West Coast longshoremen, in the summer of 1933, the Communist Party (CP) supporters in the Albion Hall group emerged as a caucus that would successfully challenge Ryan and his stooges on the West Coast for leadership. The group's *Waterfront Worker* (WFW) newsletter had run articles preparing the membership to take on the employers and the government. Voicing the growing anger and fighting spirit of the longshoremen, it put forward a strategy for victory. It stressed not only the need to smash the hated "Blue Book" company union, but also to break through the AFL bureaucracy's lily-white craft unionism,

which had led to the repeated defeat of strikes by longshoremen and seamen as well as other maritime and port workers.

The WFW frontally took on the historic racism of the West Coast longshore union, especially its refusal to allow black workers to join. This racist exclusion made black workers ready fodder for the employers' strikebreaking wars. In 1934, black longshoremen in San Francisco were few. Isolated in segregated gangs on two docks, they were widely distrusted, if not openly hated, for their role as scabs in previous longshore strikes. Addressing the deadly danger of this racial animosity to the

Francisco, including a sizable contingent from the UC Berkeley football team. Critical to stopping the move-

ment of scab cargo off the docks were the Teamsters. Defying the longtime head of the SF Teamsters local, Mike Casey—a trusted ally of the employers and the city's rulers who had ordered his members to scab on previous longshore strikes—the Teamsters membership decided to honor the strike.

On the first day of the strike, Albion Hall member and strike leader Henry Schmidt, together with one of the few black members of the SF ILA local, went to the pier where most of the black longshoremen were still working and called on them to join the strike and the union.

Some 75 black longshoremen were signed up, many returning to their neighborhoods to convince others not to get taken in by employer appeals for scab labor. Breaking through the racist color bar—which was and is a central weapon of America's capitalist rulers in their bid to divide and conquer workers in struggle—the strike leaders wrote an important page in U.S. labor history, one that would prove vital to the upcoming Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) union organizing battles. The growing ranks of black longshoremen in the Bay Area longshore local became a militant backbone of the union as a whole.

The San Francisco General Strike

Given the importance of shipping to the U.S. economy, the West Coast maritime strike had to counter even greater government intervention than the strikes in Minneapolis and Toledo. Roosevelt personally intervened to postpone the first strike deadline, to which the ILA bureaucrats agreed. After the strike erupted, the Assistant Secretary of Labor, Edward McGrady, was sent in to try to end it. Ryan and other AFL leaders worked in cahoots with the shipping bosses and the government, both nationally and locally, providing a graphic example of the treachery of the union officialdom. Early American socialist Daniel De Leon popularized the apt description of the AFL tops as "labor lieutenants of the capitalist class."

Ryan flew to the West Coast in order to foist deals on the membership that he had cooked up in backroom negotiations. He was roundly repudiated by the ranks amid catcalls and cries of "fink" and "faker." Teamsters leader Mike Casey, who was also part of those negotiations, had vowed to get members of his union back on the job moving scab cargo. After witnessing the reception given to Ryan by longshoremen, Casey quickly backed off his promise.

As the economy reeled under the impact of the strike, San Francisco's Industrial Association—a conglomerate of the city's most powerful financial and other capitalist interests—moved in to take charge of the strikebreaking and open the port. A torrent of red-baiting attacks on the strike leadership was unleashed in an effort to prepare "public opinion" for a bloody onslaught against the workers. The Hearst press blasted the strike as "COMMUNISM VS. AMERICAN LABOR," while California's Republican governor, Frank Merriam, raved against the "horde of irresponsible, professional agitators" leading "sabotage strikes." Such rants were echoed by the leadership of the SF Central Labor Council (CLC) which passed

union's fight, the WFW called for integrated gangs on the docks and demanded a fight to bring black workers into the union.

Gaining authority through its leadership of several job actions on the SF docks, the Albion Hall group put forward a series of demands. The chief one was the call for a union hiring hall to break the employer's total control over hiring in the slave-market "shape up." In addition, the group sought to end the pitting of port against port, and worker against worker, by securing a coastwide agreement and cementing the fighting unity of all organized and unorganized maritime and port workers. At a February-March 1934 convention of rank-and-file delegates representing 14,000 longshoremen on the West Coast, the Albion Hall group's demands were adopted. Following the convention, the union ranks overwhelmingly voted in favor of a strike. Members of the Albion Hall group were elected to the strike committee in San Francisco, with Harry Bridges as its leader.

After repeated efforts by the Federal government of Franklin Roosevelt and the ILA misleaders to head off a strike through an arbitrated settlement, on May 9 longshoremen up and down the West Coast walked off the job. Seamen's unions, which had their own contract demands, quickly joined them. By the end of May, at least 25,000 maritime workers were out. In the first few days of the strike, the employers had recruited nearly 1,000 scabs in San



Silver Dollar Books

National Guard occupying San Francisco's waterfront during port strike, July 1934.

a motion on June 22 “strongly advis[ing] the International Longshoremen’s Association, its members and representatives, to disavow all connections with the communistic element on the waterfront.”

The main battle took place on July 5. With the city’s rulers promising to open the port that day, more than 2,000 strikers massed at the docks to stop the movement of scab cargo. An army of cops and deputies unleashed tear and “vomit” gas on the crowd. Driven back, the picketers retreated up Rincon Hill. Armed with only sticks and stones, they built barricades, fought off the police and retreated to higher ground. After hours of fighting, the strikers made their way to the ILA union hall. Here they were ambushed by hundreds of cops who opened fire on those outside the hall and hurled tear gas canisters inside, to drive other workers out into the line of gun fire. Over 70 workers were shot, most in the back. ILA member Howard Sperry and Nick Bordoise, a CP supporter and member of the Cooks Union, lay dead on the blood-drenched street.

At the end of the day, Governor Merriam ordered in the National Guard to occupy the waterfront. Some 2,000 troops were supplied with bayoneted rifles and machine guns and issued orders to “shoot to kill.” The balance of forces had dramatically shifted to the disadvantage of the strikers. As Harry Bridges said, “We cannot stand up against police, machine guns, and National Guard bayonets.”

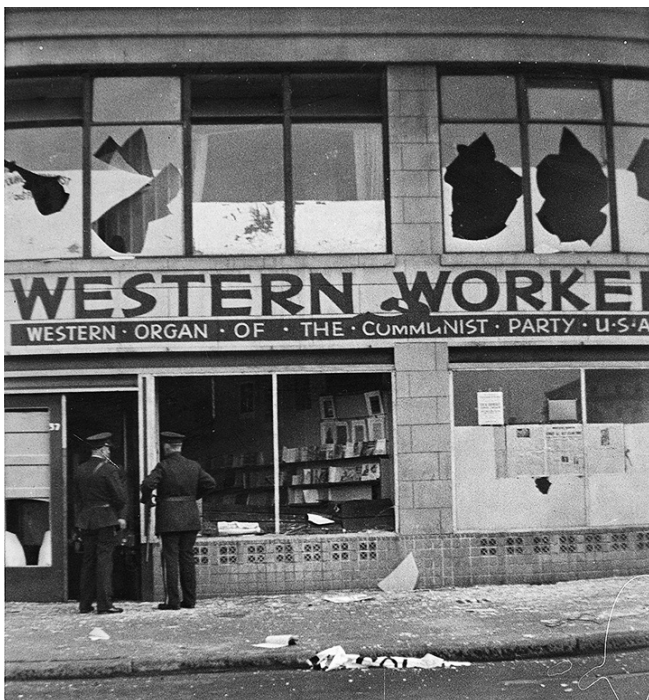
But that equation would soon change. With support already building for a general strike of union members around the Bay Area, a signal event set it off. On July 9, tens of thousands of workers marched silently and solemnly up Market Street in San Francisco in a funeral procession for the two slain picketers. Even the official record of the Industrial Association spoke to the impact of this powerful display of proletarian discipline: “As the last marcher broke ranks, the certainty of a general strike, which up to this time had appeared to many to be a visionary dream of a small group of the most radical workers, became for the first time a practical and realizable objective” (quoted in *The Big Strike*).

The Teamsters, once again defying Casey, went on strike on July 12. By then over 60 unions had voted in favor of a general strike. Amid an avalanche of working-class anger and a determination to strike, the local AFL officials on the CLC moved to contain it by designating themselves the leaders of the “strike strategy” committee. The general strike began on July 16 and ended four days later. Strikers manned picket lines on highways leading into the city. Nothing was supposed to move without permission of the strike committee, and the workers maintained proletarian order and discipline. San Francisco was crippled, with at least 100,000 workers out. But the employers and the government had an ace in the hole, the treacherous AFL bureaucrats.

Throughout the general strike, CLC head Edward Vandeleur maintained direct contact with SF city officials and with the head of Roosevelt’s NRA agency, General Hugh Johnson. Just two days into the general strike, the CLC strike committee put forward a resolution calling for government arbitration of all issues in the waterfront strike. Despite the bitter opposition of longshoremen and seamen, the measure narrowly passed in a disputed vote.

The same day, the police, National Guard troops and strikebreaking vigilantes launched an anti-Communist reign of terror. A series of raids began on the CP’s Marine Workers’ Industrial Union, the offices of the party’s newspaper, the *Western Worker*, and many other radical organizations and meeting places. Offices, furniture and equipment were smashed and those inside beaten bloody, leaving a trail of victims who were then rounded up and arrested.

Raising the prospect that martial law would be declared and union delegates arrested, on July 19 the CLC bureaucrats put forward a motion to end the general strike. Narrowly passing by a vote of 191 to 174, with most delegates abstaining,



SF Public Library

the strike was ended after four days. California governor Merriam gave thanks that “the sane, intelligent, right-thinking leadership in the labor organizations has prevailed over the rash counsel of communistic and radical agitators.” Mayor Angelo Rossi joined in celebrating “the real leaders of organized labor” and was, in turn, congratulated by ILA president Joseph Ryan.

With their backs against the wall, longshoremen voted to accept arbitration on July 21. Honoring their commitment to stay out until all the maritime unions had voted, the longshoremen delayed going back to work for ten days. Returning to work on July 31, maritime and dock workers marched together across the Embarcadero, a disciplined and unbroken proletarian corps.

Although forced to submit to the very arbitration process they had repeatedly rejected, the longshoremen and seamen went back armed with confidence in the power of their class. Through repeated job actions over the months to come, they drove all the scabs off the waterfront

as a committee inside the AFL by John L. Lewis and other union officials, unions associated with the drive to organize industrial workers were expelled from the AFL in 1936, reflecting the commitment of the craft-union bureaucrats to only allowing skilled workers into the “house of labor.” The AFL and CIO would remain separate federations for close to two decades.

In his book *John L. Lewis: An Unauthorized Biography* (1949), Saul Alinsky described what led Lewis to spearhead the CIO organizing:

“Lewis watched the unrest and flare-ups of violence through the summer of 1934. He saw the Dunne Brothers in Minneapolis lead a general strike of truck drivers into a virtual civil war. Blood ran in Minneapolis. “In San Francisco a general strike spearheaded by Harry Bridges’ Longshoremen’s Union paralyzed the great Western city for four days. “Before that year was out, seven hundred thousand workers had struck. Lewis could read the revolutionary handwriting on the walls of American industry. He knew the workers were seething and aching to be organized.”

The fact that the three 1934 citywide



Bancroft Library

Above: Longshore strike leader Harry Bridges (center) on July 9, day of mass funeral for two unionists killed in cop attack. Left: San Francisco offices of CP newspaper, the *Western Worker*, trashed by anti-union thugs on July 17.



President Roosevelt joined by CIO leader John L. Lewis (second from right) during 1936 election rally.

and established work rules and conditions in defiance of the conditions of the settlement.

The arbitrated settlement had granted hiring halls run jointly by the employers and the unions. Under this arrangement, the ILA was put in control of job dispatch but employers were still allowed to choose among the available workforce. With the union in charge of dispatch and the longshoremen ready to take on any employer who refused to hire candidates from the hall, the union would solidify its control of hiring. However, the very strike leaders who had politically armed the workers to take on the bosses and their government would soon come to embrace Roosevelt’s Democratic Party administration and subordinate the workers’ struggles to it.

Aftermath

The 1934 Toledo, Minneapolis and San Francisco strikes opened the road to the class battles later in the decade that finally organized workers in the mass production industries into the CIO. Originally set up

strikes had been led by leftists alarmed Lewis, who was determined to cut off Communists and Socialists from gaining leadership of the radicalized workers. Despite his political conservatism and contempt for union democracy, Lewis was at the same time a more farsighted bureaucrat who perceived the need to organize industrial unions in the mass production industries.

Lewis—who had driven reds out of the UMW and exterminated every vestige of opposition to his dictatorial rule of the union—now saw the usefulness of the talented and experienced CP unionists in the fight to build the CIO. The political precondition for Lewis bringing CP members and supporters on board as organizers was the party’s 1935 turn to supporting Roosevelt as the representative of a so-called “progressive wing” of the American bourgeoisie. The impetus for this turn was the coming to power of Hitler’s Nazis in Germany in 1933, a monstrous defeat for which the policies of Stalin’s “Third Period” bore no small responsibility.

The Stalinists and Social Democrats in Germany, who commanded the allegiance of millions of workers, did nothing to mobilize them in united action to smash Hitler’s brownshirts. The leaders of the Social Democratic Party had long ago gone over to the side of their “own” bourgeoisie in opposition to the fight for workers power. For its part, the CP criminally equated the Social Democrats with the capitalists’ fascist shock troops. After the resulting disaster in Germany, Stalin dumped the ultra-radical rhetoric of the “Third Period.” By 1935, in the name of the “popular front against fascism,” the Communist Parties around the world were ordered to ally with the “democratic” bourgeoisie against Nazi Germany.

Having many years earlier abandoned Marxist class principles in the service of the policies of the Moscow Stalinist bureaucracy, few Communists in the U.S., or for that matter anywhere else, objected. They were all too accustomed to changing their political positions on a dime. In many ways, Darcy, Bridges et al., who broke with the CP’s “Third Period” denunciations of the AFL unions as “social fascist” and went into the ILA, were simply premature popular frontists.

CP supporters would be among the leaders of the gigantic working-class struggles that forged the CIO in the late 1930s. Carrying the American trade-union movement to unprecedented heights, these strikes set the stage for the further development of class consciousness in the working class, the most advanced elements of which were receptive to the idea of forming a workers party in opposition to the two capitalist parties. But the Stalinists and other strike leaders channeled these workers into support for FDR’s Democratic Party. As Bolshevik leader Leon Trotsky succinctly wrote in “Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay” (1940):

“The rise of the CIO is incontrovertible evidence of the revolutionary tendencies within the working masses. Indicative and noteworthy in the highest degree, however, is the fact that the new ‘leftist’ trade union organization was no sooner founded than it fell into the steel embrace of the imperialist state. The struggle among the tops between the old federation and the new is reducible in large measure to the struggle for the sympathy and support of Roosevelt and his cabinet.”

Only the Trotskyists of the CLA, whose supporters led the Minneapolis Teamsters’ strikes, remained true to the principles and program of revolutionary Marxism. The A.J. Muste-led American Workers Party (AWP) had merged with the Communist League of America following the Toledo and Minneapolis strikes to found the Workers Party of the United States in December 1934. But Muste soon returned to the pulpit of religious pacifism and later preached the strategy of nonviolence to future liberal leaders of the civil rights movement and, in his final years, to Vietnam antiwar protesters. Other leaders of his organization made their own kind of peace with capitalist society. Nonetheless, a number of the AWP veterans of “The Battle of Toledo” remained adherents of Trotskyism, that is,

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Then and Now...

(continued from page 7)

to the ideals and goals that had inspired the 1917 Russian Revolution.

Spreading out from their base in Minneapolis, the Trotskyists were at the forefront of organizing truckers throughout the Midwest, transforming the weak, craft-divided Teamsters into a powerful industrial union. This course was obstructed when the Roosevelt administration, aided and abetted by Teamster president Daniel Tobin, brought sedition charges under the Smith Act against the Trotskyists for their opposition to the interimperialist slaughter of World War II. The central union leaders in Minneapolis as well as national Trotskyist leaders—29 in all—were convicted and jailed. Criminally, the CP supported the government’s persecution of the Trotskyists.

While the Stalinists have long portrayed WWII as a great democratic war against fascism, the Trotskyists recognized that, like World War I, it was a conflict between the imperialist powers to redivide the world. Calling for the defeat of all the imperialist combatants, the Trotskyists took no side between the competing Allied and Axis powers. At

the same time, they fought steadfastly for the unconditional military defense of the Soviet bureaucratically degenerated workers state.

In contrast, the Stalinists were among the most rabid supporters of U.S. imperialism during the war, portraying it as a supposed “anti-fascist” ally of the Soviet workers state against Hitler’s Germany. In the West Coast longshore union, Bridges enforced a no-strike pledge and massive speedup on the docks as part of the war effort. He also played a major role in smashing a 1944 strike by Montgomery Ward workers in the Midwest. Ordering the now CIO-affiliated International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) on the West Coast to ship scab cargo, Bridges went on to urge all of labor to make a permanent no-strike pledge, not only during the war but “indefinitely thereafter.”

For a Revolutionary Workers Party!

Crime, as they say, does not pay. A few years after the end of the war, leaders of the Communist Party were themselves prosecuted under the Smith Act as purported advocates of the “violent overthrow” of the U.S. government. Bridges himself was repeatedly hauled into the courts and threatened with deportation on charges of being a CP member. We take no satisfaction in the bitter irony that the Stalinists were themselves prosecuted under the very laws that they had urged the capitalist state to bring down on the Trotskyists. These trials were opening shots in the first Cold War against the Soviet Union, U.S. imperialism’s “ally” in WWII.

Communists and other militants who had led the CIO organizing battles were driven from the unions. This witchhunt was codified in the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act, which demanded a “loyalty oath” from union officials and outlawed sympathy strikes, hot cargoing and other class-struggle weapons that had built the unions. In 1949-50, eleven unions associated with the CP, including the ILWU, were expelled from the CIO. The red purges cemented the leadership of a hardened pro-capitalist, anti-Communist bureaucracy whose first loyalty was to U.S. imperialism.

The bureaucrats condemned, and continue to condemn, Taft-Hartley as a “slave-labor act.” But the union misleaders themselves helped put on the shackles



Pathfinder Press

Eighteen leaders of SWP and Minneapolis Teamsters were sent to prison in 1943 for opposition to imperialist World War II.

and have bowed before the government’s strikebreaking laws ever since, sapping the fighting strength of the unions. A watershed was when the labor tops let Reagan get away with smashing the PATCO air traffic controllers strike in 1981. While mouthing impotent words of “solidarity,” the AFL-CIO leadership did nothing to mobilize the powerful airline unions in strike action to shut down the airports. The aftermath has been a three-decade tsunami of union-busting that has devastated the ranks of organized labor.

The AFL leaders of old abhorred the class struggle. Today, the union tops argue that it is simply not possible for labor to struggle. Instead, to preserve their diminishing dues base, they engage in dog-eat-dog jurisdictional disputes with other unions, a throwback to the backstabbing of the craft unions that had to be surmounted to organize industrial unions. Rather than mobilizing for battle against the capitalist rulers, the bureaucrats peddle the lie that the workers have a stake in maintaining capitalist profitability. This class collaboration is codified in the subordination of labor to the parties of the capitalist class enemy, particularly the Democrats.

To be sure, it is not easy for the workers to win in the face of the forces arrayed against them. The situation is all the more daunting given the ebb of class and social struggle, a condition reinforced by the decades of betrayals by the trade-union

bureaucracy. But the rulers, aided by their labor lieutenants, cannot extinguish the class struggle that is born of the irreconcilable conflict of interests between workers and their exploiters. The very conditions that grind down workers today can and will propel them into battle, together with their allies, against the class enemy. Winning these battles is, at bottom, a question of leadership.

The 1934 strikes showed what militant unions could accomplish in a period of growing class and social discontent. Under a leadership that grasped the class nature of American capitalist society and the social power of those whose labor makes it run, the workers fought against improbable odds and won. These are the kind of battles that will need to be waged today to organize the growing masses of unorganized workers. For the workers to prevail over their exploiters, it is essential to win them to a Marxist political program that links labor’s fight to the building of a multiracial revolutionary workers party capable of leading the struggle to do away with this whole system of wage slavery through socialist revolution. Although our forces are currently small, it is the purpose of the Spartacist League, as it was of our Trotskyist forebears, to win the workers through patient education and in the course of struggle to the program and perspective of forging the party of international working-class revolution. ■



In name of “anti-fascist unity” during World War II, Stalinist CP sought to enforce no-strike pledge, eulogized imperialist Commander-in-Chief Roosevelt.

Alabama...

(continued from page 2)

in Alabama, and reiterated its demand to the bourgeoisie that the American troops in Vietnam be sent to Alabama. The grotesqueness of the demand is clear when one recalls what troops are fighting in Vietnam—the notorious Marines and the anti-communist elite “Special Forces”! For “revolutionists” to proclaim that the democratic revolution in the South can be carried out on the bayonets of imperialism, instead of by the organized black and white workers in struggle against such forces, is simple treachery.

Breach in the Democratic Party

In spite of Johnson’s efforts to make his voting rights bill “work” for racist capitalism, it appears that what will emerge is a potentially valuable concession by the power structure to the civil rights movement, giving Negroes in Alabama and several other states the right to vote. Of course the ruling class intends to do all it can to assure that this right is not exercised in a way that would threaten it, i.e., by going outside the Democratic-Republican party framework. In addition, it is vital to note that (as numerous news analysts have pointed out) the bill applies in practice solely to those Southern states in which Democratic machines bolted for [Republican presidential candidate Barry] Goldwater in 1964, while ignoring the voter restrictions of other states, such as Louisiana, which remained loyal to Johnson. Thus, it is obvious that Johnson wishes to pay back Governor Wallace and various

other Southern politicians for this defection. Through the services of King and other “policemen,” Johnson feels he has the Southern Negro vote “in the bag” and can afford to push a voting law through Congress—toward pulling the rug out from under his opponents inside the Democratic Party with black votes in 1966 and ’68.

A Southern Labor Party

Recognizing this trap, civil-rights militants in the South must make it their main task to broaden the struggle for democratic rights into a political struggle against Johnson and the two-party fraud, and to work towards an independent party based on the needs of the Negro people and the whole working class. With such an organization, ready to defend itself and its people from the racist attacks of cops, troopers, and hoodlums, black people would have little trouble getting and keeping the right to vote, Federal law or no. Only in the context of organizing for independent political struggle does voter registration have meaning.

In addition, the civil rights movement must realize that it cannot look to the Federal government for “protection” of any sort. If the past history of Federal inaction and collaboration with the segregationist apparatus is not enough proof, the Selma case should make it clear that Johnson will mobilize Federal forces and pass voting-rights bills only when he feels that the interests of the American racist status quo will benefit. Once the Negro people begin to assert their real power and independence, and attempt to use these laws for their own political action, these same troops will be turned against

them in the interests of racist oppression. The civil-rights movement will then find itself witch-hunted, its meetings raided and supporters arrested, by the same F.B.I. it is presently beseeching to protect it. The illusion of “non-violence” spread by King and others is a criminal disarming of black people, and is consistent with the role of these “leaders” as agents of the power structure. The movement must scrap these illusions once and for all and begin to organize the Negro people to defend themselves from violence. The movement must look to itself, not to the Federal government, for protection.

By developing now a party commanding respect and winning gains through the organization of black power, yet a party without racial exclusivism, Negro militants will lay the basis for eventual working-class fusion. This fusion will come about when

the exploited section of the white South is driven into opposition and in desperation is compelled to forego color prejudice in order to struggle along class lines against its real enemies—the owners of land and industry and their state.

Only Through Struggle

The Selma-Montgomery events must be clearly recognized as an intended perversion of the civil-rights movement. But militants can turn the projected empty voting-rights law against the Democrats, against the maintenance of the capitalist system, the survival of which is inextricably linked with the continued oppression of black people. The key to filling the voting process with content is voting for and building a new party fighting for the political, social and economic rights and needs of the working people. ■

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8

WORKERS VANGUARD

Teachers...

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Twenty percent will have dropped out by senior year.

Anti-Union Assault on Public Education

The background to the court decision in *Vergara v. California* is the increasing privatization of public education along with systemic racial segregation. Quality schools prepare the exceptional and the wealthy for Stanford while urban holding pens prepare poor black and Latino students for Pelican Bay state prison. Nobody is talking about privatizing schools in Palo Alto, although Silicon Valley is the cockpit of the privateers.

Privatization is a way for the capitalist government to slash the cost of educating poor and minority youth. But for individual capitalists, there is money to be made. K-12 education in America is a \$500 billion-plus market. Including higher ed and career training, the education sector represents 9 percent of the U.S. GDP, more than either energy or technology.

Why is Silicon Valley the cockpit of education privatization? Testing, text books, teaching apps and software are growth industries. Replace teachers with iPads and apps, and you can test, direct and monitor what the little devils are doing every minute of the day. The Silicon Valley-based Rocketship chain of charter schools says it saves half a million dollars a year by using fewer teachers, replacing them with non-certified instructors at \$15 per hour. These instructors monitor up to 130 kids at a time in cubicles in the schools' computer labs. L.A. Unified has no money to fix crumbling schools or to hire enough teachers at a decent salary, but it found money to give every student an iPad.

Teachers unions are the biggest obstacle to privatization. So the Bush and Obama administrations teamed up with philanthropists like the Gates Foundation, Los Angeles billionaire Eli Broad and Walmart's Walton Family Foundation to bust or eviscerate teachers unions under the watchword of "reform." Rocketship shows one way to replace teachers with Walmart-style associates, Teach for America another. That program recruits students from elite universities for a brief passage through ghetto schools.

What does school "reform" look like on the ground? In 2004, Oakland launched a "small schools" campaign backed, in part, by a \$9.5 million Gates Foundation grant. The city closed a dozen large schools and opened 48 small ones in their place. Fremont High, one of Oakland's worst-performing schools, with 1,862 students, was broken into five high schools. Result: an exponential increase in administrative bureaucracy and costs, no noticeable change in academic performance. In 2009, after spending \$2 billion on its "small schools" experiment, with poor and minority students as guinea pigs, Gates admitted failure.

In 2013, then-superintendent Tony Smith reconsolidated Oakland's three worst high schools, including Fremont, turning them into—you guessed it—"community schools." This meant firing all the teachers, who could only be selectively hired back as "teachers on special assignment" with eleven-month contracts that had to be renewed annually. One teacher "reconsolidated" out of a job was Oakland Unified veteran Michael Jackson. He had put in 27 years at Fremont, founding its Media Academy in 1986, a bright spot in those fenced-in grounds of concentrated desolation. One Media Academy student told the lively campus newspaper *Green and Gold* (12 June 2013) that even before she got to Fremont "my sisters and her friends were talking about Jackson and how he bailed a student out of jail so he could walk the stage." Jackson was close to retirement anyway, but now he was forced out, gone.

The L.A. schools also experimented with a variation of Smith's "community schools." In 2008, L.A. mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, a Democrat and former teachers union organizer, spearheaded the "Part-

nership for Los Angeles Schools." Under this initiative, eleven poorly resourced public schools were placed in a "turn-around" program. All school staff were fired and told to reapply for their jobs. Typical was Markham Middle School in Watts, which replaced its veteran teachers with "Teach for America" freshmen. The following year, the "Terminator" governor Arnold Schwarzenegger cut education funding by some \$10 billion, resulting in the loss of more than 2,000 L.A. teachers. Markham saw a *72 percent* reduction in teaching staff. The following school year, these vacancies were covered by a rotating pool of substitutes.

In response, the Southern California ACLU recruited students from three of L.A.'s poorest middle schools, including Markham, as plaintiffs for a 2010 lawsuit, *Reed v. State of California*. In the name of protecting students' rights to equal and



AP
Silicon Valley mogul David Welch, architect of anti-union Vergara lawsuit.

adequate public education, the suit targeted teacher seniority, blaming the policy of "last hired, first fired" for the disproportionate impact of the 2009 layoffs on the poorest schools. As if shredding seniority would attract better teachers to under-resourced ghetto and barrio schools! Rather than fighting layoffs or fighting for more resources for poor schools and their teachers, the ACLU attacked the teachers.

The Vergara Cabal

The *Vergara* suit expanded *Reed* and took it statewide. Aimed at five provisions of the California Education Code governing teacher job protection and seniority, *Vergara* argued that by making the firing of "grossly ineffective teachers" difficult, these laws made the concentration of bad teachers at poor and minority schools inevitable, thereby violating the constitutional right of students attending those schools to equal access to quality education.

Let's be clear. California teachers do not have tenure as you might understand it—lifetime employment. During a two-year probation period, teachers can be fired without cause; after two years, a cause must be given and is subject to review by an arbiter, just as in any union job and many non-union jobs. This provides certified teachers with partial protection against arbitrary firings for such things as skin pigment, sexual orientation, political views or criticizing the administration.

Vergara was initiated in 2010 by Silicon Valley fiber optics entrepreneur David Welch and his nonprofit Students Matter. The defendants were Governor Brown and his state superintendent of public instruction, Tom Torlakson. The two state teachers unions, the California Teachers Association and California Federation of Teachers, joined the suit as codefendants so they would have standing.

Welch, who has no background in education or education policy, modeled his Students Matter on Michelle Rhee's StudentsFirst. During her brief tenure as Washington, D.C., schools chancellor, Rhee trashed union rights for teachers. The high-pressure, teach-to-the-test regime she imposed generated a correspondingly massive cheating scandal before she was run out of town. Students Matter supporters include not only Rhee's StudentsFirst but also the California Charter Schools

Association, Oakland's Tony Smith and Los Angeles Unified superintendent John Deasy. Deasy, a former deputy director at the Gates Foundation, was both plaintiff and defendant in the *Vergara* suit.

In L.A., Deasy implemented the so-called Value-Added Model (VAM) for assessing teachers based on test scores. VAM comes straight out of corporate American culture à la Silicon Valley. There employees are assessed on how much "value" each contributes to the bottom line. Every year the bottom 5 percent are cut, stimulating performance through cutthroat competition. Nothing succeeds like fear itself. During the *Vergara* trial, Deasy denied any connection between student performance and poverty. "I believe the statistics correlate," he said, "but I don't believe in causality."

In an article on VAM titled "The Harm Behind the Hype," Stanford education professor Linda Darling-Hammond explained: "Test scores largely reflect whom a teacher teaches, not how well they teach. In particular, teachers show lower gains when they have large numbers of new English-learners and students with disabilities than when they teach other students. This is true even when statistical methods are used to 'control' for student characteristics" (*Education Weekly*, 5 March 2012). Bottom line: The most precise determinant of student success is the student's zip code.

Misinformation Campaign

The *Vergara* suit originally recruited three white and five Latino students as plaintiffs. (A black student was only added later.) The three white plaintiffs and one Latina did not testify or make any submissions at all. Education writer Alan Singer reported in the *Huffington Post* (24 August): "The father of one of the white students is president of a coffee and tea company with between \$10 and \$25 million in annual revenue and over fifty employees. The father of the second white student is vice-president of Wilshire Associates, an investment management company. The parents of the third white student are wealthy real estate developers specializing in the affluent Encino market." Such were the (silent) spokesmen for the dispossessed and downtrodden.

Beatriz and Elizabeth Vergara, after whom the suit is named, both attended a "pilot school" in L.A. that is free to fire teachers at the end of the school year for any reason. Plaintiffs Monterroza and Martinez both attended charter schools that do not recognize teacher seniority or job protection. One teacher accused by the suit of being very bad was Pasadena's 2013 teacher of the year, a 2011 Pasadena Educational Foundation grant recipient and a 2008 recipient of the Star of Education Award from the NAACP's Altadena chapter. Another teacher had never received a negative evaluation in her 28-year career.

The defendants made a number of motions challenging whether the plaintiffs had any legal standing whatsoever,

i.e., whether they could demonstrate personal harm from teacher seniority and job protection. The unions complacently thought that the case would be thrown out. Instead, higher courts threw out the challenges. The case went to trial in January. Judge Rolf Treu of the California Superior Court for the County of Los Angeles, obscenely citing *Brown v. Board of Education*, ruled:

"Evidence has been elicited in this trial of the specific effect of grossly ineffective teachers on students. The evidence is compelling. Indeed, it shocks the conscience.... There is also no dispute that there are a significant number of grossly ineffective teachers currently active in California classrooms."

How did Judge Treu uncover the shocking "number of grossly ineffective teachers?" The ruling declared: "Dr. Berliner, an expert called by State Defendants, testified that 1-3% of teachers in California are grossly ineffective. Given that the evidence showed roughly 275,000 active teachers in this state, the extrapolated number of grossly ineffective teachers ranges from 2,750 to 8,250." But Berliner told the *Los Angeles Daily News* (13 June): "I never said that." He added, "I'm on record as saying I've visited hundreds of classrooms and I've never seen a 'grossly ineffective teacher'." Berliner had testified about flaws in VAM. Asked to estimate the percentage of teachers who might fall into VAM's low-performance category for four straight years, he guessed it was 1 to 3 percent. The *Daily News* reported, "He was alarmed, he said, when he read the ruling and saw how his 'guesstimate' was used."

If you hadn't heard of the *Vergara* case, despite its importance, don't blame yourself. The California Teachers Association and California Federation of Teachers have done nothing to take the case out of the courtroom and into the streets, except a modest protest in L.A. on the day of the decision. Instead, their response to the decision is to appeal to the very courts that denied their earlier motions. In contrast, the union-busters and school-privateers behind Students Matter have not restricted their cause to the courthouse. They went public with a high-powered PR campaign, and are going national.

The two national teachers unions, the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association, represent about a quarter of all union members nationally, with 4.6 million members. No wonder this bastion of unionization has been in the crosshairs of Wall Street and the White House. Despite their numbers, teachers alone wield little social power. But as we argued in "Beware Liberal Union Busters!", teachers can and must be a bridge between the communities they serve, especially the ghettos and barrios, and organized labor in this country.

One last point: The kids locked up in classrooms seven hours a day, nine months a year for 12-13 years, are our future. What happens to them there affects the transmission of culture, science and history to the next generation, or lack thereof. ■

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Irving Barber Learning Centre (IBLC)
Room 315
Information and readings: (604) 687-0353
trotskyist_vancouver@shawcable.com

Iraq...

(continued from page 12)

descent into sheer chaos. And it is U.S. imperialism that is the bloodiest enemy of the world's working people, as most graphically illustrated by the hundreds upon hundreds of thousands of Iraqis slaughtered in the service of its quest for dominance in the region. Any force, however unsavory, that attacks, repels or otherwise impedes U.S. forces strikes a blow in the interests of the exploited and the oppressed.

Washington Moots "Stupid Shit"

It is now acknowledged by many bourgeois spokesmen that the U.S. created the "mess" in Iraq. This is normally followed by the injunction that it is Washington's job to fix it. Obama's current and patently farcical plan for a fix is tantamount to attempting to cure cholera by infecting the patient with Ebola. It is coming from a president who, a few months ago, intoned that U.S. foreign policy should be informed by the concept "Don't do stupid shit." At about the same time, Dick Cheney and neocon Bill Kristol received



Reuters

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry with Iraqi Kurdish regional president's chief of staff at Erbil airport, June 24.

much media coverage for their claims that the weak-kneed Obama was conciliating the enemies of the U.S. in the Near East and Russia, thereby squandering the fruits of the American "victories" in Iraq and Afghanistan. This received a humorous savaging on *The Daily Show*.

Congressional Republicans quickly endorsed the Cheney-Kristol refrain. None, however, have been so bold as to push legislation for an increased U.S. military presence, as they are facing midterm elections with a populace not currently disposed to go there. From the president to John McCain, none have dared suggest

the reintroduction of American "boots on the ground." Meanwhile, Democratic presidential hopeful Hillary Clinton has waded in to accuse Obama of abandoning the Syrian resistance while denouncing his do-nothing-stupid posture, piously intoning that "great nations need organizing principles" (*The Atlantic*, 10 August).

These accusations are the purest hogwash. Barack Obama is the imperialist chief executive who upped the ante in Afghanistan, the president who has pushed the NSA monitoring of all Americans, the architect of the assassination-by-drone program targeting purportedly turncoat U.S. citizens in obvious violation of their constitutional right to a trial. It is Obama who awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Madeleine Albright, who, as Bill Clinton's ambassador to the United Nations, notoriously defended the deaths of 500,000 Iraqi children during the U.S.-sponsored embargo of Iraq as "worth it."

Several of the liberal talk show hosts at MSNBC have expressed concern over Hillary and Barack's bellicosity, although they have become perhaps more positively disposed toward such following the video of journalist James Foley's beheading by ISIS. Front-line journalism is a hazardous profession, more so when the reporters are perceived, frequently with good reason, as PR men for the enemy.

Washington's stated policy of refusing to negotiate with terrorists is itself a blatantly apparent lie. Sergeant Bergdahl was not returned to this country via Federal Express, nor were the five Taliban prisoners released from the Guantánamo hellhole to Qatari custody the benefactors of a special forces operation led by the Haqqani network. The U.S. could have simply made the deal proposed by ISIS for Foley's return. It preferred trying to spring him through a (failed) Special Ops mission in Syria. And now the imperialists have the figure of the slain American journalist to try to rally public sentiment behind military action.

The War at Home

Why has there been this "enemy at the door" furor? In fact, the U.S. rulers constantly play this card to poison the working class with "one nation indivisible" patriotism. Since the end of World War II, apologists for U.S. imperialism across the political spectrum have argued that it is the only power with the resources—overweening military power, money, size, a large and trusting population, geographic isolation from potential invaders, etc.—necessary to assure the perpetuation of a liberal, stable and peaceful world order. And if Americans forsake this burdensome responsibility, then it is claimed that liberty, stability and peace on the planet will be forfeited. (A recent exposition of this worldview, titled "Superpowers Don't Get to Retire," by the neocon Robert

White House meeting between Ronald Reagan and anti-Soviet Afghan mujahedin leaders, 1983.



Kagan appeared in the May 26 issue of the *New Republic*.)

The reality has been a virtually unending series of wars since WWII, most frequently initiated when the Democratic Party has been in power. In the quest to maintain and extend its world dominance, U.S. imperialism has produced some ten million corpses of those who stood in its way. Apologists for the U.S.-dominated world order see the overthrow of the degenerated workers state in the USSR in 1991-92 as its crowning achievement. That counterrevolution has led to the increased ravaging of the world's toiling masses by their profit-bloated capitalist masters. It is that historic defeat for the international working class that has resulted in the political disarming of many of its advanced layers by erasing their belief in the superiority of socialism and, thus, of the possibility of an alternative to capitalist exploitation and oppression. An atmosphere of freedom and wellbeing may pervade the think tanks of the bourgeoisie, but it is not to be found in the world where most working people reside—not anywhere and certainly not here.

The declining economic strength of the American empire is an objective obstacle to its aspirations. The constricted economy that has emerged in the supposed aftermath of the Great Recession has for the nonce regained its capacity to produce profits but not jobs. Not even the optimists see the possibility of any significant economic expansion. This economic reality has necessitated a paring down of the defense budget, although to be sure any cuts there will hardly alter the balance of military power in the world, where the U.S. has unrivaled supremacy. The diminished prospects that face most working people have led to a generalized disdain for those holding or running for elected office, who are viewed with justice as do-nothings, indifferent to the plight of the common man, and as self-seeking predators.

Those who might vote in the November elections see the prospect of further military involvements as further threat to the little that remains of their ability to sustain any semblance of a life. Currently, about 59 percent of the population is employed, a level that has persisted since the onset of the Great Recession. If the employment-population ratio had returned to prior levels, an additional nine million people would now be working. About one-fifth of those currently employed hold part-time jobs, and median income levels are 6 percent less than before the recession. These material parameters of persistent misery and despair are especially acute in black communities across the nation. An economically deprived, dispirited and distrustful population can create difficulties for a ruling class seeking to maintain world domination.

Such discontents constitute an explosive mixture. The bourgeoisie recognizes this fact, which helps explain its attempts to constantly strengthen and extend the reach of its police forces and prison system, even though widespread social rebellion is clearly not now on the agenda in this country. The working class—the only social force with the objective interest and power necessary to overturn the capitalist system—finds its struggles blocked by a union bureaucracy whose loyalty to their capitalist masters is such that it currently eclipses their concern for the very survival

of the trade unions as a meaningful force.

The Democrats, the party of bourgeois rule that masquerades as the friend of working people, rescued the bankers and fat cats at the onset of the Great Recession. Since then, they have offered nothing to America's working and poor people other than the prospect of peanut-sized raises in the minimum wage accompanied by watermelon-sized exceptions to such raises. The reformist left continues its dead-end attempts to force the Democrats to the left while frequently sharing an appreciation for U.S. imperialism's enemies list. Particularly blatant is the International Socialist Organization (ISO), which cheered capitalist counterrevolution in the then-USSR and in recent years has made common cause with the Syrian rebels against the Assad regime, although not with ISIS.

In "Obama's New War in Iraq" (socialistworker.org, 28 August), the ISO's Ashley Smith observes that ISIS and its ilk were nurtured by the U.S. and its client states "to combat secular nationalism and Communism." The article notes that "Democratic President Jimmy Carter and Republican Ronald Reagan both collaborated with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan to back the fundamentalist Mujahideen during the popular uprising against the USSR invasion and occupation of Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989."

Smith refrains from recounting how the ISO was among the foremost "left" cheerleaders for the Islamic reactionaries, whose resistance included throwing acid in the face of women teachers and committing unspeakable barbarities against Soviet soldiers and any supporters of the modernizing nationalist regime that requested Soviet intervention. In the sharpest contrast, we declared: "Hail Red Army in Afghanistan!" and "Extend social gains of the October Revolution to Afghan peoples!" We said that it was better to fight the forces of counterrevolution there than to fight them in Berlin and Moscow.

On at least a superficial level, many working people in the U.S. perceive that the hardships they endure here are not unrelated to their rulers' exploitation and oppression abroad. The truth is that the arterial bleeding caused by the stagnant and decaying capitalist system will not be stanchied by reformist Band-Aids. While the reformists plead for "butter not guns," we Marxists aim to win the most conscious layers of the working class to the understanding that what is necessary is the overturn of the U.S. imperialist order through socialist revolution. It is vitally necessary to fight to forge an international revolutionary working-class party committed to that end. ■

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Garner Demo...

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was in line with keynote speaker Sharp-ton, who decried the NYPD’s supposed few “rotten apples,” concluding: “If you don’t take the rotten apple out, it’s going to rot all the other apples.”

Such arguments are rotten to the core, yet these lies are widely accepted and reinforce illusions in phony reform schemes like civilian review boards, federal investigations and cop body cameras. From Rodney King to Eric Garner, no video can save you from the depraved blue-shirted thugs. Cameras worn by Albuquerque cops have done nothing to stop their killing spree.

The police backlash against the August 23 rally is a vivid expression of the fact that cops are *not* workers: they are the guardians of the system of capitalist exploitation and proven enemies of labor. The unions were built in hard, often bloody, struggle against the bosses and their cops, Pinkertons, National Guard, etc. The job of the cops is to defend capitalist rule and profits by violently suppressing workers struggle and terrorizing the poor and oppressed. As a Spartacist League sign at the August 23 rally expressed: “Cops Are the Armed Thugs of the Capitalists—Enemies of Workers, Blacks, Immigrants! Cops Out of the Unions!”

It is criminal that the sellout mislead-ers atop the AFL-CIO and Change to Win

federations accept the framework that the hired guns of the class enemy are “work-ers in uniform,” a refrain repeated by the reformists of Socialist Alternative. In *What Next?* (1932), Marxist revolution-ary Leon Trotsky polemicized against suicidal illusions in the police: “The worker who becomes a policeman in the service of the capitalist state, is a bourgeois cop, not a worker.” Cop “unions” are not organizations of workers but of shock troops for racist “law and order,” constantly pushing a bonapartist agenda of more cops, more pay, more guns and fewer constraints in going after labor, blacks, immigrants and radicals. Many victims of cop terror in NYC such as Garner, Sean Bell and Ramarley Graham,

come from union families. When miners used to sing the old labor anthem “Which Side Are You On?”, there was never any question which side the cops were on.

The fight for justice for the countless victims of cop terror demands the inde-pendent mobilization of the working class and the oppressed against the Democratic and Republican parties of capital. As we wrote in “Outrage over Cop Choke-Hold Killing of Eric Garner” (WV No. 1050, 8 August):

“Racist police brutality is an integral part of the capitalist system. But a massive mobilization of labor could give the cops pause. To achieve this requires a political struggle against the craven labor bureauc-racy, which has shackled the potential power of the unions.”■

Oakland Port...

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however, ILWU members were escorted into the port by an “alternate route” in order to get around protests at the gates and work the *Zim Chicago*. The same Zim ship was also worked when it docked in Seattle on August 25, with longshore workers crossing picket lines.

It was the solidarity of Bay Area long-shoremen that made the protest against the *Zim Piraeus* so successful. But this was *not* a labor action carried out by the union to protest Israeli atrocities in Gaza. On the contrary, the ILWU International’s Coast Longshore Division issued statements that “the ILWU has taken no position on the issue associated with the demonstration,” arguing that what prevented longshoremen from working was simply concern for their “safety,” particularly pointing to the large police mobili-zation at the port.

There is no question that the Oakland cops are a clear and present danger to the health and safety of longshoremen. In 2003, cops fired wooden bullets and other “non-lethal” projectiles at ILWU workers and demonstrators protesting U.S. imper-ialism’s invasion of Iraq. But by reduc-ing the question of honoring the Zim protest pickets only to one of “safety,” the ILWU International bureaucrats turned their back on defense of the Palestinians against Zionist terror.

In the end, it was only after an elabo-rate ruse that the *Zim Piraeus* was worked at all. On August 19, the ship sailed out of the Golden Gate, purportedly headed to Los Angeles, only to make a U-turn and head back to Oakland, where it was docked and partially unloaded at a differ-ent terminal, the Ports of America. The at least tacit connivance of the union lead-ership is evident from an August 19 press release by the ILWU International that breathed a sigh of relief that “longshore workers were able to safely enter the gate of an Oakland terminal on Tuesday night and work the ZIM vessel PIRAEUS.” A number of Bay Area longshoremen were angry that some ILWU members ended up working the ship, correctly seeing this as undermining the unity and strength of the union in the face of its ongoing con-tract battle with the shipping bosses of the Pacific Maritime Association (PMA).

The blocking of the Zim ship to protest Israel’s barbarity in Gaza was a just cause.



Reuters

Gaza City, August 27: Residences in Shejaya neighborhood devastated by Israeli offensive.

It should not only have been supported by the ILWU but *led* by it and other unions. The very nature of longshore and other work at the port, which is dependent on world trade, underlines that labor’s fight is international. That means actively cham-pioning the cause of their class brothers and sisters across the globe. Defense of the Palestinians against the Israeli rulers and their U.S. sponsors is in the direct interests of the American working class. The ongoing wholesale assault on labor, blacks and all of the oppressed “at home” is the domestic face of the brutal depreda-tions financed and carried out by the U.S. capitalist rulers abroad.

At the Oakland Zim protests, demon-strators drew comparisons between the brutality meted out to the Palestinians in Gaza and the reign of cop terror against black people protesting the police killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. ILWU members are also quite aware that their union has found itself in the cross-hairs of U.S. government repression. Going on three months of working with-out a contract, many union members recall the 2002 contract battle. Invoking U.S. imperialism’s “war on terror” abroad, the Bush administration’s head of Homeland Security warned the ILWU International president that a strike would “threaten national security,” and the government threatened to militarize the docks.

That the one-sided class war against the workers and oppressed has continued

for decades virtually unabated is due in no small measure to the betrayals of the union misleaders. Rather than mobiliz-ing their members to fight even in their own interest, much less in defense of the exploited and oppressed of the world, the trade-union tops shackle the workers to the profitability and strategic interests of U.S. imperialism.

BDS Is Not the Answer

A leaflet by the Arab Resource and Organizing Center and its youth group, Arab Youth Organizing—the central groups in the “Block the Boat” coali-tion—thanked ILWU Local 10 for its support, declaring: “As workers, you hold the power to create effective change.” But the reality is that the protest organizers, who also included reformists like Workers World Party and the International Social-ist Organization, don’t look to the power of labor. On the contrary, “community pickets” reduce the workers to little more than passive observers. During the Zim actions, ILWU members literally stood on the sidelines as protesters picketed. While some longshore workers expressed hostility, mainly over lost wages, others enthusiastically supported the protesters, including directing organizers to make sure that all terminal gates were covered.

Whatever the protesters’ intentions, the very basis of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement that animated the Zim protests is to appeal to the cor-

porations and governments that exploit and oppress the workers. In our discus-sions with protesters, many vehemently denied any illusions in U.S. imperialism, pointing to their opposition to U.S. pol-icy in the Near East. However, the funda-mental premise of BDS remains: through “militant” pressure the imperialists can be made to alter their policy and act on behalf of the Palestinians. Behind the often trenchant exposures by BDS spokes-men of American hypocrisy in the Near East is the not-too-subtle call to align U.S. policy with its “democratic” rhetoric.

To seek to pressure the capitalist rul-ers to make more “socially responsible” or “ethical” investments is to build dan-gerous illusions that the imperialists are somehow less bloody than the Zionist rulers. Notably, at the August 16 protest our sign “Down With Obama’s Airstrikes Against Iraq!” was virtually the only one, among a sea of banners and placards, that explicitly opposed the U.S. bombing raids.

In our discussions and debates with both the protesters and the workers, we underlined that only a series of socialist revolutions in the Near East could answer the aspirations of the oppressed Palestin-ians and other peoples of the region. We fight to bring the *class* axis to the fore. The Israeli Jewish and Palestinian Arab populations are interpenetrated peoples, laying rival and antagonistic claims to the same territory. Under capitalism, the exercise of the national rights of one nec-essarily comes at the expense of the right of self-determination of the other. Only in a socialist federation of the Near East can conflicting claims over land and resources be equitably resolved and all discrimi-nation based on language, religion and nationality done away with.

Several protesters noted, quite rightly, that if not for their “community picket line” the Zim ship would have been worked. Nonetheless, in making workers not much more than spectators, community pickets do little to advance the consciousness, soli-darity or fighting power of the one class in this society with the power to bring down the main enemy of the peoples of the world, U.S. imperialism. Unleashing that power will take a new leadership of the unions, one rooted in a program of prole-tarian internationalist struggle. Those who truly want to end exploitation and oppres-sion must take up the fight to forge revo-lutionary workers parties around the globe that can lead the struggle for the socialist liberation of humanity.■

Spartacist League/SYC Forums

Defend the Palestinians!
Zionist Bloodbath in Gaza
Down With U.S. Aid to Israel!
For a Socialist Federation of the Near East!

NEW YORK CITY

Saturday, Oct. 4, 3 p.m.
322 West 48th Street, 1st Floor
(Between 8th and 9th Aves.
Take A, C or E to 42nd St.)
For information: (212) 267-1025
nysl@tiac.net

CHICAGO

Saturday, October 11, 2 p.m.
Roosevelt Branch
Chicago Public Library, Meeting Rm.
1101 W. Taylor Street
For information: (312) 563-0441
chicagospartacist@sbcglobal.net

Trotskyist League/Ligue Trotskyste Forums

From World War I to Today
100 Years of Imperialist Barbarism
For Workers Revolution to Sweep Away the
Capitalist Order Worldwide

TORONTO

Saturday, Sept. 27, 7 p.m.
OISE
Room 3311
252 Bloor Street West
(St. George subway)
For information: (416) 593-4138
spartcan@on.aibn.com

VANCOUVER

Saturday, Oct. 4, 1:30 p.m.
Roundhouse Community Centre
Multimedia Room
181 Roundhouse Mews
(corner of Davie and Pacific)
For information: (604) 687-0353
trotskyist_vancouver@shawcable.com

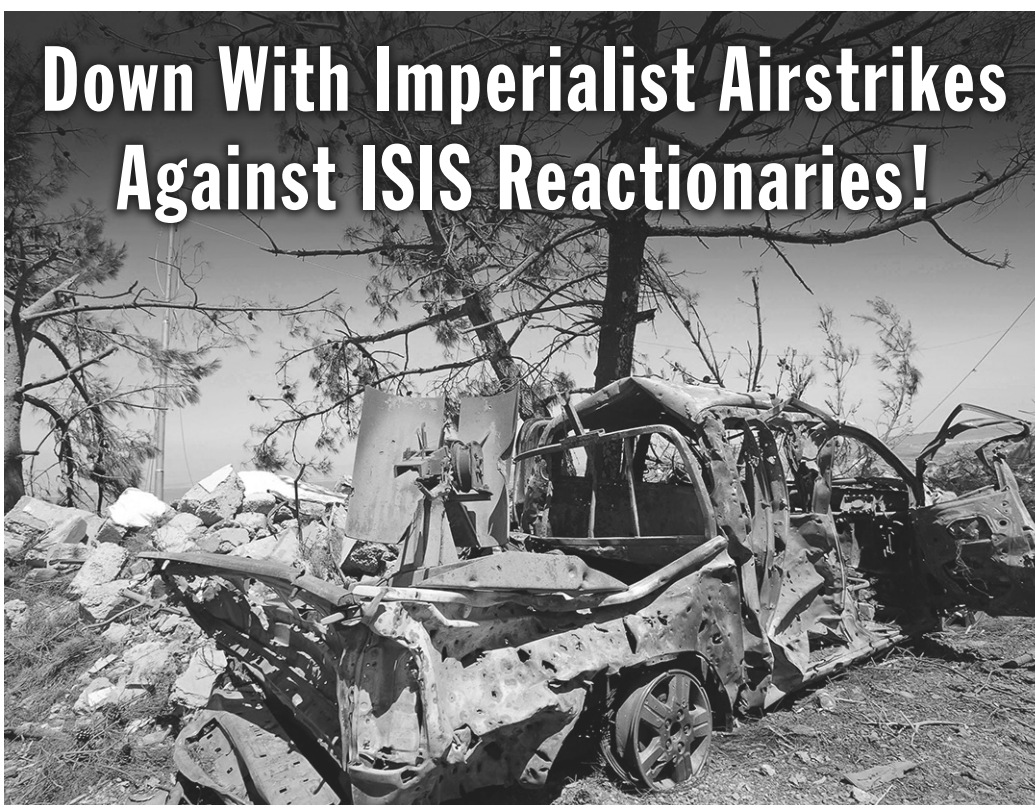
WORKERS VANGUARD

U.S. Out of Iraq! No Intervention in Syria!

Since early August, President Obama has shifted the basis for his attacks on ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria) from a supposed campaign to prevent genocide to a war against a cancer that not only has the temerity to murder American civilians in that region but also poses a substantial threat to citizens in the U.S. The “humanitarian” cloak that Obama donned as he ordered the first strikes against ISIS in northern Iraq was useful for imperialist propaganda purposes. But what hit closer to home was the fate of thousands of imperiled American residents and ExxonMobil representatives in the city of Erbil.

While the bulk of the American populace remains war-weary, the president seems to have seized the script for the second Gulf War co-authored by Bush, Rumsfeld and Cheney and simply replaced all references to the evil Saddam Hussein with references to the evil ISIS. To date, these ultra-reactionary Islamists, currently numbering about 15,000 fighters, have not been accused of harboring weapons of mass destruction. In fact, ISIS—whose method of rooting out “apostates” like the Christians and Yazidis as well as Turkmen and other Shi’ites amounts to mass butchery—is the spawn of Al Qaeda in Iraq, itself a product of the U.S. occupation. The founding elements of Al Qaeda, including Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, leader of its Iraqi affiliate, were trained and funded by the CIA as it assembled a reactionary

Down With Imperialist Airstrikes Against ISIS Reactionaries!



Reuters

ISIS vehicle destroyed by U.S. airstrike, Mosul Dam, August 21.

horde to oppose the Soviet Union’s intervention in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

Once again, a coalition of U.S. imperialism’s allies is to be assembled, including not only Britain and Australia but also Saudi Arabia and Qatar—both of which have funded ISIS or other Al Qaeda types—as well as jihadist forces opposed to ISIS. This is to be buttressed by a

newly constituted and hardly nonsectarian regime in Baghdad, which commands armed forces bathed in communal blood. On the Syrian front, the arms provided to the relatively impotent “democratic” opposition to Bashar al-Assad’s regime will be upgraded.

The Kurdish *pesh merga* forces, which have been shielded by the U.S. for years as

part of Washington’s effort to secure oil-rich Iraqi Kurdistan as its client, may receive a similar upgrade. This, however, is more problematic, as the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), which heads the regional government in Iraqi Kurdistan, angles for the foundation of a Kurdish state, an outcome totally unacceptable to the Turkish and Iraqi governments. Then, there is the not small matter that both the KDP and the rival Patriotic Union of Kurdistan remain on the U.S. terrorism list, albeit on a lower tier of evil.

Obama has ordered more regular surveillance flights over Syria to assess the feasibility of airstrikes on ISIS-controlled areas in that country. Attacks are supposed to be conducted in a manner that does not benefit the enemy Assad regime—an impossibility exposed by Assad’s offer to support such strikes if the U.S. requests Syrian permission. This was a clever riposte, but it may well backfire given that the U.S. maintains its opposition to Assad’s rule. We oppose any and all U.S. interventions against whatever forces in Syria.

As we pointed out in “Iraq in Flames: Legacy of U.S. Occupation” (WV No. 1049, 11 July), it is the American imperialists who triggered and continue to fuel the reactionary, mainly Sunni-Shi’ite communal conflicts in Iraq and beyond, conflicts in which the world’s toilers have no side. This template also fits Libya’s

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Labor: Defend the Palestinians! Protests Block Israeli Ship at Oakland Port

Protesting the Zionist massacre of over 2,000 Palestinians in Gaza, demonstrators stopped the Israeli ship *Zim Piraeus* from being worked for four days at the port of Oakland. In their majority, longshore workers in Bay Area Local 10 of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) honored the protest pickets. Even when the ship was finally worked, it was only partially unloaded, and it left the port without picking up the cargo it had been scheduled to take on.

The protests began on Saturday, August 16, when some 3,500 demonstrators, responding to a call put out by the “Block the Boat” coalition, converged on the port. The ship, which was scheduled to be worked that morning at the Stevedoring Services of America (SSA) terminal, did not even try to pull into the dock that day. Over the following three days, longshoremen refused to cross the picket lines to work the ship. On Tuesday, SSA could not get enough longshoremen to work any ship during the day shift, tying up not only the *Zim Piraeus* but also three other ships at the terminal. The idling of the *Zim* ship, costing its Israeli capitalist



WV Photo

August 19:
Protest at Port
of Oakland
in solidarity
with besieged
Palestinians.

owners a hefty sum, was a genuine and important statement of solidarity with the besieged Palestinian masses.

Spartacist League members and supporters participated in the Oakland demonstration and pickets with placards demanding: “Defend the Palestinians! For a Socialist Federation of the Near East!”

and “Down With U.S. Aid to Israel! All U.S./UN Troops Out of the Near East Now!” In contrast to the organizers of the *Zim* protests, who subscribe to the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign that calls on the imperialists and corporations to punish Israel through trade and other sanctions, our

starting point is the need for international working-class solidarity with the Palestinians. This includes time-limited labor boycotts, like refusing to handle Israeli cargo, to protest such atrocities as the recent one-sided massacre in Gaza.

An SL sign at the protest also raised the demand “Labor: Hot Cargo Military Goods to Israel!” Such a standing boycott of military shipments would strike a real blow against the Zionist butchers and, even more crucially, their U.S. imperialist patrons. Our aim is the mobilization of the social power of labor in defense of the exploited and oppressed masses of the world as part of advancing the *class struggle* of the workers against their own capitalist rulers.

The Workers Must Take the Lead!

We salute the Local 10 members who respected the picket lines and refused to work at SSA. On August 23, longshore workers at the L.A./Long Beach port honored protest pickets against the *Zim Haifa*, and that ship was not worked during the day shift. The same day in Tacoma,

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