

Amtrak Train Wreck

Capitalist Murder on the Tracks

The May 12 Philadelphia Amtrak derailment lays bare how the country's rulers sacrifice the safety of workers and the public on the altar of capitalist profit. Amtrak Train 188 flew off a notoriously tight curve on the Northeast Corridor at over 100 miles per hour (twice the speed limit), killing eight people and injuring more than 200. As is the norm in industrial accidents, the bourgeoisie's mouthpieces and government representatives rushed to blame the worker involved, with Philly's Democratic mayor Michael Nutter deriding the 32-year-old engineer, Brandon Bostian, as "reckless." In fact, those who know him have described Bostian as very safety-conscious. He also reportedly often posted online messages urging the railroad companies to do more to advance safety.

The immediate cause of the derailment is not known, not least because Bostian has no memory of the crash. But what is clear is that for decades the government and the rail companies have obstructed and undermined safety measures that could have prevented this accident and many others. Following the fatal September 2008 train crash in Chatsworth, California, the federal government mandated that railroads implement a system known as positive train control (PTC) by the end of 2015. This technology relies on either transponders or GPS to prevent trains from exceeding the speed limit on any given section of track and can also prevent train collisions.

The National Transportation Safety Board found that between 2004 and 2014, PTC could have prevented or mitigated 25 train accidents in which a total of 65 people died and over 1,100 were injured. But the rail companies view PTC only as another expense. Thus, they have been making excuses for not implementing it while lining up Congress to extend the deadline.

Amtrak has an older safety system known as automatic train control on the section of track where the Philadelphia derailment occurred, but it was only operational on the southbound track. By the time train service resumed after the wreck, Amtrak had switched on automatic train control in both directions. Of course, that is little comfort to the injured or families of the dead.

Whatever technology is in place (or not), an essential safety precaution would be having two people in the locomotive cab! Since 1983, Amtrak has insisted on operating its passenger trains in the Northeast Corridor with only one engineer. Freight trains of 100 or more cars, at one time worked by a crew of five or six, are today often manned by only an engineer and a conductor. And the freight rail bosses are now pushing to have only a single crew member on their trains, a recipe for disaster that the rail unions have been resisting.



Reuters

Search for victims after preventable May 12 train disaster in Philadelphia.

The ongoing reduction in train crew size is part of the bosses' antiunion offensive that kicked into high gear with the deregulation of the industry in the 1970s. Railroad employment has plunged from over 600,000 in 1970 to less than 250,000 today (leaving 20,000 at Amtrak).

The Philadelphia derailment recalls that of a Metro-North commuter train at

of the Teamsters, has criticized the company's "turning of long understood standards of fatigue mitigation here on their heads."

In a *New York Times* opinion piece (18 May), Richard White, author of *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* (2011), debunks the myth that there was ever a time when American "trains ran efficiently, safely and depend-

For Union Control of Safety!

Spuyten Duyvil in the Bronx in 2013. In that accident, the engineer, suffering from fatigue exacerbated by sleep apnea, nodded off as the train approached a sharp bend. Then, too, positive train control or a second crewmember in the cab (or even an alerter alarm) could have prevented the derailment, in which four were killed. The company not only tried to blame the engineer, William Rockefeller, but also seized on the accident as a pretext for a crackdown on New York City transit workers for trivial infractions.

Just recently, the Bronx district attorney announced that Rockefeller will not face criminal charges, although his job remains in limbo. Criminally disregarding the dangers of fatigue, this year Amtrak has introduced variable start times and shorter breaks, with many workers already made to endure 12-hour shifts. The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers (BLE), today a part

ably," concluding "there was no such golden age." As in other inherently dangerous industries like mining, the only way to establish and enforce safety is through mobilizing labor's power. Workers must be able to shut down unsafe equipment and operations with the full backing of the unions. A fight for higher manning levels, from the cabs to the maintenance crews, and a shorter workweek with no loss in pay not only would open up more jobs but also is literally a question of life and death.

Any effort by the unions to control safety will invariably come up against the rail corporations and the bosses' state. The capitalists and their government have long recognized the potential power of the transport unions to interrupt commerce and cut off the broader flow of profits. Thus, they have taken measures to curtail the ability of rail workers to strike. The 1926 Railway Labor Act (RLA)

was enacted to buy labor peace after decades of unrest marked by major work stoppages in which soldiers were dispatched against striking workers. Establishing guidelines for official union recognition, the RLA virtually outlawed strikes by locking unions into endless "cooling off" periods and government-imposed mediation. Later extended to cover the airline industry, the RLA served as a model for subsequent labor legislation, all of which has sought to hobble labor's power by putting the unions under the thumb of the state.

This country's major unions were built through militant class struggle that often defied such antiunion laws and faced down attacks by strikebreakers, cops and the military. Instead of strike action, though, the trade-union leadership today substitutes begging the bosses for some crumbs and lobbying Congress. This policy of class collaboration has led to one defeat after another for the unions and demoralized their membership.

A stark illustration is given by the union bureaucracy's support to supposed "friend of labor" Democrats, who in fact, no less than the Republicans, represent the interests of the capitalists. The real role of the Democrats can be seen in President Barack Obama's use of the RLA last year to force striking workers at Philadelphia's SEPTA commuter rail system back to work. He also invoked the RLA to prevent a national rail strike in 2011; his Democratic predecessor Bill Clinton wielded the RLA 14 times to squelch airline and rail strikes, including heading off a nationwide Amtrak strike in 1997.

In order for the unions to effectively champion the interests of their members, a new, class-struggle leadership must be forged. Such a leadership, recognizing that the interests of workers are counterposed to those of their capitalist exploiters, would rely on the social power of the workers themselves, not the agencies and representatives of the class enemy. Uniting all rail workers—passenger and freight, skilled and unskilled—in joint action would maximize that power and go a long way toward breaking down craft divisions, paving the way for forming one industrial rail union. The BLE merger with the Teamsters in 2004 was something else entirely: a move by the labor statesmen to further their hobnobbing in the halls of Congress.

The Railroads and Capitalist Decay

The Northeast Corridor, stretching between Boston and Washington, D.C., is Amtrak's busiest and most profitable line. While ridership has been growing every year, government funding has been strangled. Like the rest of the country's dilapidated rail system (not to mention crumbling roads, bridges and other infrastructure), the Northeast Corridor has been deprived of billions of dollars needed for essential maintenance, repairs and upgrades, including to its century-old bridges. The day after the Philadelphia

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An Activist Remembers the Civil Rights Movement

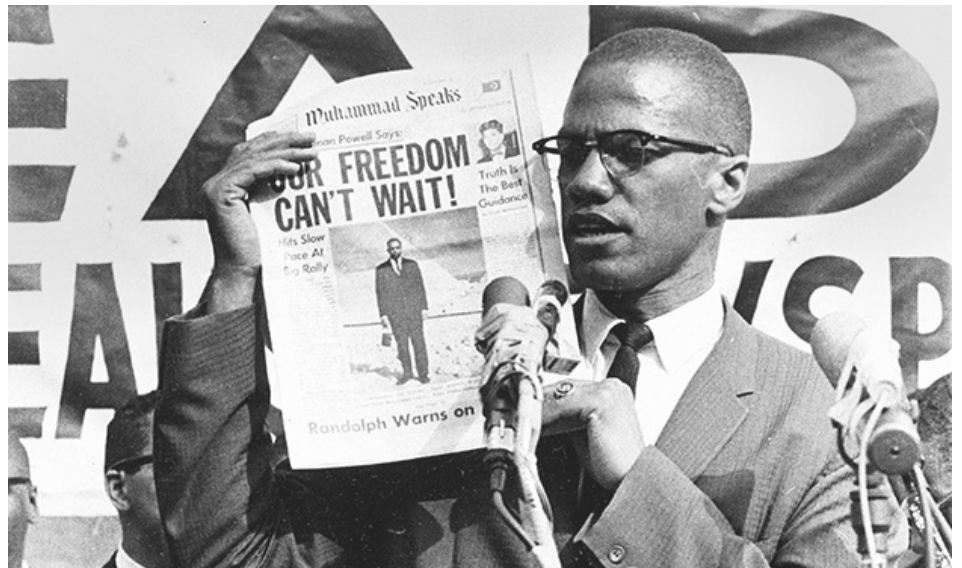
Malcolm X: The Man, the Myth, the Struggle

We reprint below comments by Spartacist League Central Committee member Joseph Seymour at a December 1992 forum in Oakland, California, originally published in the Spartacist pamphlet *Black History and the Class Struggle* No. 10. That forum featured presentations by three comrades who had participated in

the turbulent civil rights struggles of the 1960s, at the time that Malcolm X rose to prominence.

* * *

When I was 19 years old, I was involved with a left-wing socialist group at City College, which is located on the fringes



Malcolm X addressing a Black Muslim rally in New York City, 6 August 1963.

of Harlem. We organized for Malcolm X to come and address the student body. Now, he didn't come with a big entourage, and since I was chairing the meeting, just before he spoke I found myself standing next to him in the auditorium. I felt terribly intimidated and sheepish—I mean, here I am with Malcolm X. Just to make conversation, I noted that the previous summer I had gone to Cuba where I had met some people from the Nation of Islam. Malcolm expressed real interest and sympathy for the Cuban Revolution. He said he didn't know very much about it and asked what my impressions were. He wasn't just being polite. He really wanted to know what a 19-year-old college kid thought of the Cuban Revolution.

A few minutes later he spoke to several hundred students, most of them white and generally liberal, and the main point he made was to attack support for and illusions in the Democratic Party. At that particular time, Lyndon Johnson was pushing the Civil Rights Bill and a lot of people thought that the President of the United States had finally taken a hard line against white supremacy. Malcolm said, "Don't be fooled! Johnson's best friend in Washington is Georgia Senator Richard Russell who is an arch segregationist." He said, "When somebody says they are against racism but their best friend is Richard Russell, it's like somebody saying they are against train robbing and their best friend is Jesse James."

This incident reveals what's missing from Spike Lee's [1992] film *Malcolm X*—the momentous political struggle in this country and abroad which formed the background of Malcolm's rise to prominence. The debate that was raging among the activists. Did you support the Cuban

Revolution and the Vietnamese Revolution against U.S. imperialism? Or did you support the U.S. government in trying to overthrow Castro and in trying to destroy the Viet Cong in blood in the name of anti-communism? Did you attack John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson as war criminals who oppressed and savaged the dark-skinned peoples of the world? Or did you look to them to bring democracy and civil rights and racial equality to black people in this country? Did you believe that civil rights militants had the right to defend themselves against the cracker sheriffs and the Klan and the White Citizens Councils? Or did you maintain that in fighting for their democratic rights black people could do no more than engage in nonviolent protest?

These were the issues which polarized American society. These were the issues that defined Malcolm's politics and determined his appeal. Because what he was in the minds of everybody—black, white, left, right, center—he was the best known, the most powerful, the most incisive enemy of what we at the time called the "white power structure." Spike Lee doesn't understand that because he doesn't understand how convulsive and explosive American society was in the early 1960s. The civil rights movement, in the sweep of its mass support, in the aspirations for freedom and equality which it generated among black people, and in bringing into existence a whole generation of young radical activists, had a *revolutionary potential*.

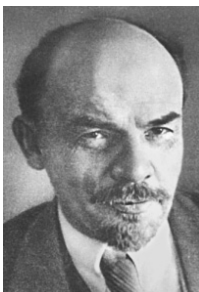
In the South, the entire black community was mobilized—hundreds of thousands of people were confronting a totalitarian racist police state which they had lived under for three-quarters of a century, since Radical Reconstruction was

Socialism and Art



TROTSKY

The 1917 October Revolution, which shattered the capitalist order in backward Russia, was animated by the goal of building a society on socialist principles—that is, the satisfaction of people's material and cultural needs. The birth of the Soviet workers state in what the Bolsheviks viewed as the opening shot of world socialist revolution gave rise to a great wave of artistic experimentation and ferment. This creative energy was later smothered by the Stalin-led



LENIN

bureaucracy that usurped political power from the proletariat beginning in 1923-24 amid the continuing isolation and backwardness of the Soviet Union. In the excerpt below, Bolshevik leader Leon Trotsky explained the material foundation of culture.

If the dictatorship of the proletariat should prove incapable, in the next few years, of organizing its economic life and of securing at least a living minimum of material comforts for its population, then the proletarian régime will inevitably turn to dust. The economic problem at present is the problem above all problems.

But even a successful solution of the elementary problems of food, clothing, shelter, and even of literacy, would in no way signify a complete victory of the new historic principle, that is, of Socialism. Only a movement of scientific thought on a national scale and the development of a new art would signify that the historic seed has not only grown into a plant, but has even flowered. In this sense, the development of art is the highest test of the vitality and significance of each epoch.

Culture feeds on the sap of economics, and a material surplus is necessary, so that culture may grow, develop and become subtle. Our bourgeoisie laid its hand on literature, and did this very quickly at the time when it was growing rich. The proletariat will be able to prepare the formation of a new, that is, a Socialist culture and literature, not by the laboratory method on the basis of our present-day poverty, want and illiteracy, but by large social, economic and cultural means. Art needs comfort, even abundance. Furnaces have to be hotter, wheels have to move faster, looms have to turn more quickly, schools have to work better.

—Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution* (1924)

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**On the
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**Black History
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**Malcolm X:
The Man,
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What's Missing from Spike Lee's Movie
Activists Remember the
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"New World Order" Neocolonialism in Africa

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abandoned and defeated in the aftermath of the Civil War. In the North it was different, because blacks had, legally, the formal democratic rights which the Southern civil rights movement was fighting for. They could vote, they could go into restaurants and ride buses with white people. But blacks in the North as well as in the South did not consider the civil rights movement in this narrow a way. They saw it as a movement for *general* social equality, even though there was no coherent or agreed-upon program for how to achieve that.

In Spike Lee's movie, you don't realize that at one point there were probably more civil rights militants in the town of Albany, Georgia than there were in the entire Nation of Islam nationally. A whole generation had been standing up to the cops in the South and in the North. Like Malcolm X, they came to understand the link between racism in the United States and the oppression by the American government and the big corporations of dark-skinned people throughout the world.

Preachers' Pacifism vs. Militant Self-Defense for the Movement

That's why the question of nonviolence at that moment was so decisive and so important. It wasn't about the right of individuals to defend themselves or their families. In the movie they show Malcolm X's father (who was a black-nationalist minister) warding off an attack by local Klansmen by threatening them with his pistol. But that wasn't what the debate was. We were talking about armed self-defense for a *mass movement*—a movement which embraced millions and which was confronting the capitalist state.

The question of nonviolence was basically a question of your attitude toward the system. To say that the civil rights movement had the right to defend itself against racist terror was really to say that you had the right of revolution; that you didn't accept the rules of the game. And when King pledged nonviolence, what he was really saying is he was pledging allegiance to the white power structure. He was saying that the black movement cannot go beyond the bounds set for it by the liberal wing of the ruling class represented by the Democratic Party. That's what it meant. And that's why Malcolm X called King a "20th century Uncle Tom" whose primary concern is to defend the white man.

When Malcolm said that, a lot of people in the civil rights movement, even people who were critical of King, thought that this was exaggerated and unfair. Yet a few months after Malcolm was assassinated, the black ghetto in Watts in Los Angeles rose up. Black youth ran through the streets demonstrating defiance of the ruling class. The police and the National Guard were sent in and killed more than 30 black kids—most of them unarmed, most of them in cold blood. What did King do? Did he call upon the LAPD and the FBI and the National Guard to "turn the other cheek," to throw away their guns and resort to "nonviolent resistance"? No! He said it was necessary that "as powerful a police force as possible be brought in to check

them." Malcolm X was known above all at the time as a person who said that the oppressed black masses had the right and the duty to overthrow the system which oppressed and degraded them, although he did not have a coherent program to do that.

The Myth of "Black Capitalism"

While Malcolm X was alive, he was slandered as some kind of crazed fanatic and advocate of black violence against white America. But today there is a different kind of falsification, which in its way is no less pernicious. He is now presented as a pioneer advocate of black-owned business, as a man who believed in the economic development of the segregated ghetto within the framework and under the rules set by white-dominated American capitalism. This line and lie is perpetrated not only by nationalist hustlers like Farrakhan, who when Malcolm split from the Nation of Islam said that he deserved death for defying Elijah Muhammad, but it's also perpetrated by the house organ of international financiers. A recent issue of the London *Economist* says that Malcolm's message was "black capitalism."

It is true that Malcolm sought, both as a Muslim and somewhat later, to break poor blacks from the degrading pathology of ghetto life: alcoholism, drug addiction, wife-beating, prostitution. He told black people that they should stand on their own two feet and not depend on the white man. But by that he did not mean that they



Supporters of Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party hold sit-down protest outside 1964 Democratic Party National Convention as part of attempt to unseat all-white official state delegation.

should take over grocery stores and dry-cleaning stores and open sweatshops in the ghetto to rip off and exploit their own people! This I will tell you, that while he was alive, *no one*, absolutely no one believed that Malcolm X was an advocate of "black capitalism" or any other kind of capitalism. Quite the contrary.

If Malcolm X did not advocate liberal integrationism like King, and he did not advocate separatist capitalism like Farrakhan, what *did* he stand for in a positive sense? The movie shows that it was his pilgrimage to Mecca which broke Malcolm from a narrow, racially defined black nationalism. That is true. But the movie does not show that Malcolm under-



John Herman Williams



Marzani & Munsell

Ex-Marine and NAACP leader Robert F. Williams (inset) organized armed self-defense against KKK terror in Monroe, North Carolina, in 1957.

took a second trip to North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa which had a profound effect on his political outlook. After that trip Malcolm talked not only about opposing racial or national oppression, but "overthrowing the system of exploitation."

Does that mean that Malcolm had become a Marxist or was moving toward Marxism? This is the position that was argued by the late George Breitman, for example, a professed Trotskyist who edited a number of Malcolm's speeches and writings. But that too is a falsifica-

face value the pretense of these new ruling elites that they were opposed to racism the world over; that they were believers in and champions of social equality. Much of Malcolm's energy in the last period of his life was directed at getting what he called the Afro-Asian bloc to pass a resolution in the United Nations condemning racism in America. To begin with, there was no way that was going to happen, because all of these regimes depended on money from Washington and London and Paris, even though they denounced Western imperialism at every opportunity. They denounced Western imperialism, they flirted with Moscow, they said they were nonaligned in the Cold War—as a ploy to get *more* money from Washington and London and Paris. But even if they had passed a resolution in the UN condemning racism in the United States, the American ruling class would have ignored it.

While Malcolm's campaign to enlist the United Nations in the service of anti-racism was misdirected, he nonetheless understood that simply by its own resources and its own efforts, the American black community could not achieve equality, could not overcome and break the power of the American government and its ruling class. That's why he was so desirous of finding powerful allies outside the U.S. But Malcolm X did not see that there existed a powerful force *within* the United States, potentially hostile to the white power structure, namely the racially integrated working class.

He saw American society as racially divided, but not as class-divided. His view was shaped by his own personal experience. He had been a ghetto hustler, then a prisoner for several years, and then the minister of a black-nationalist religious sect. Unlike millions of other American black men and women, he had never worked with whites or Hispanics. He knew nothing of the trade-union movement. He had never been involved in a strike or defending a picket line against the cops and the scabs. He did not understand that it is the strategic role of blacks in the working class which gives them the potential leverage to overturn the racist capitalist system.

Black workers, armed with a revolutionary socialist program, and organized by a multiracial communist party, can lead backward white workers even though they have racist attitudes and prejudices, in struggle against the ruling class. Malcolm X believed and stated very forcefully that black people must fight for equality and freedom "by any means necessary." The necessary means is working-class revolution. And that revolution when it comes will rightly honor Malcolm X as a courageous fighter and a martyr for the cause of the liberation of humanity. ■

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PROMETHEUS RESEARCH SERIES 3

In Memoriam Richard S. Fraser

An Appreciation and Selection of His Work

PROMETHEUS RESEARCH LIBRARY August 1990

New York University's recent art show, "The Left Front: Radical Art in the 'Red Decade,' 1929-1940," which closed April 4, was a bittersweet experience. (An earlier version, based on Northwestern University's collection, was shown in Chicago last year.) In the present period, with successful workers struggles few and far between, the pro-working-class images—photos, movies of mass May Day parades in New York City, pictures of Great Depression misery, protests, strikes, the fight against Jim Crow segregation—were, of course, moving. The show included over 100 works by artists in the U.S., many of which are lithographs and etchings, reproducible techniques designed to be accessible to workers.

But there was something wrong with this picture. It wasn't the individual artworks themselves, but the sentimental, prettifying view of and narrow focus on the U.S. Communist Party (CP). The John Reed Clubs and their successor, the American Artists' Congress, both Stalin-

by Helen Cantor

ist front groups from day one, were the admired centerpiece of the show, to the exclusion of what was a far more complex intersection of politics and art at the time.

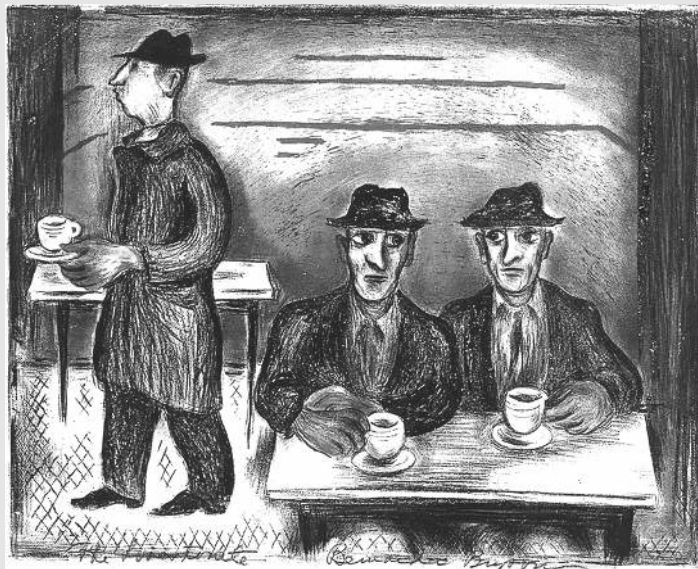
The show's co-curators, Jill Bugajski and John Paul Murphy, Northwestern PhD graduates, did make some observations regarding the American CP's relations with Moscow. And, of course, an academic art show can't be about everything; you do need some kind of focus. The problem is that the presentation blurred out the horrible effects of Stalinism's censorship of intellectual efforts, including art. This censorship was an ideological counterpart to the consolidation of the Moscow bureaucracy headed by Stalin (which had usurped political power from the Soviet working class beginning in 1923-24) and its murderous betrayals of the struggle for proletarian revolution worldwide. The show presented an alternate reality: a provincial "social realism"-style tin-roofed shack on the all-American prairie, false shelter from the wild storms raging internationally.

The "Left Front" referred to 1929-40 as the "red decade," a term coined by onetime Stalinist admirer turned anti-Communist author Eugene Lyons. The curators, who unlike Lyons were approving in this description, put up a big red 1937 Spanish Civil War poster by the anarcho-syndicalist CNT trade union. Okay, but what about the Stalinists' murder of anarchists, POUM militants and others after the heroic Barcelona Days? What about Hitler's rise to power in 1933, unfought by the German Communist Party? What about the 1936-1938 Moscow Trials of the Old Bolsheviks (party members before 1917) and the executions, exiles and mass labor camps for revolutionaries in the USSR? Ending the decade, what about the 1940 assassination of Leon Trotsky in Mexico via a Stalinist killer's ice axe? This decade runs red with the blood of our comrades, is what I thought.

I found myself wandering around the Village after seeing the show, muttering: "Not revolutionary art, propaganda! Stalinist hacks! But some pieces were sincere, good! But Esenin and Mayakovsky committed suicide!" And so on. So what follows is not an "art review," except for one comment: There is nothing "revolutionary" or "radical" (terms the curators flung around) about this art as such, whether in terms of experimental technique or new concept. It's propaganda and genre art, with a few exceptions, by artists who sympathized with the poor, the workers and even with the CP. The pedestrian aesthetic level was not entirely the Stalinists' fault, since American art in general was pretty provincial until the explosion of abstract expressionism after World War II—the 1913 New York Armory Show that introduced Cubism to the U.S. knocked *everybody* for a loop.

Stalinists and Artists in the U.S. "Red Decade"

NYU's *Left Front* Art Show



Courtesy of Belverd and Marian Needles Collection

Pieces displayed at the exhibit. Left: Bernarda Bryson Shahn's *The Lovestonite*, 1933, depicts two cadre giving the cold shoulder to a supporter of the expelled Jay Lovestone. Right: 1931 Soviet pamphlet titled "American Artists of the John Reed Club."



Rather, I want to discuss the politics the pictures don't show, and the revolutionary Trotskyist alternative to the CP's lies and crimes regarding culture, as so much else.

Stalinism Lite

The Marxist program of world socialist revolution that animated the Bolsheviks of 1917 was flatly rejected with Stalin's 1924 invention of "socialism in one country" (meaning "socialism" in *only* one country). This dogma and the Moscow bureaucracy's later proclamation of "socialist realism" and ban on "modernist" art encouraged the production of some really dreary art by CP-influenced artists in the U.S. Such works are about what you could expect from a party whose big Popular Front slogan was "Communism is 20th Century Americanism."

So why is this period popular again? Theodore Draper, in a 1986 "Afterword" to his classic book *American Communism and Soviet Russia* (1960), writes of a generation of academic social historians (Paul Buhle, Mark Naison, etc.) who were former New Leftists: "Radicals have usually preferred to behold their promised land in the future; these post-

New Leftists have been impelled to find it in the past. They have invented a radicalism of nostalgia."

This now third-hand nostalgia seems to have impelled the New York show. Co-curator John Paul Murphy's essay "The Left Front: From Revolutionary to Popular" references the 2007 recession and protests like Occupy Wall Street, stating: "In this context, the bracing images by 1930s artist-activists become newly vivid." The 1930s, that's okay, but go no further—any earlier, any more vivid, and *then* they would have to deal with the Bolshevik-led October 1917 Russian Revolution, which actually overthrew the bourgeoisie. That far back these historians don't want to go. Because then they would have to take a side. So that's why they start with 1929. It's not really about the Great Depression.

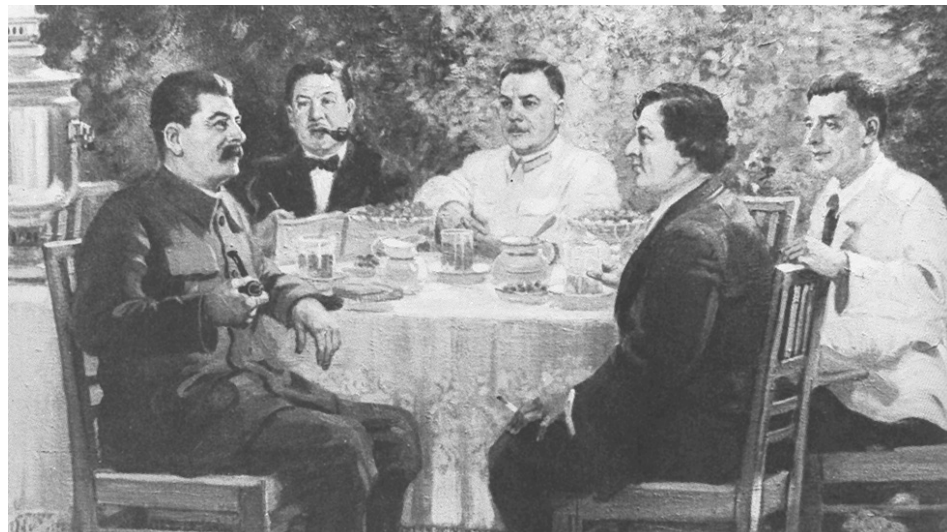
By 1929, the U.S. CP's subservience to the conservative Moscow bureaucracy had been solidified. Earlier, when still a revolutionary force under Lenin and Trotsky's leadership, the Communist International helped "Americanize" the CP by emphasizing that the fight for socialist revolution and the struggle for

black liberation are inextricably linked, as a new book, *The Communist International and U.S. Communism, 1919-1929* (2014) by Jacob Zumoff, details. But that perspective was dumped by the Stalinized Comintern, which in 1928 ordered the CP to chop off its left wing—the Trotskyists around James P. Cannon—and then in 1929 its right wing, centered on the loathsome Jay Lovestone, who had bet on the Right Opposition of Nikolai Bukharin a little too long. What remained was a crippled, pliant CP, faithfully lurching after every turn of Stalinist policy.

In the U.S., the CP's "Left Turn" of 1928-29 included policies like dual unionism (leaving the AFL unions to create "red" ones), the demand for self-determination of the so-called Black Belt in the South, and attacks on other leftists, mainly the Social Democracy, as "social fascists" worse than the Nazis. Though sounding very radical, all this allowed the Communists to evade the hard political struggle to crack through the obstacles to an American revolution, a goal the CP leadership had, in fact, abandoned. At the same time, the tremendous authority of the Bolshevik Revolution and some of the CP's activities, which included leading strikes and fighting for black rights, such as its "Scottsboro Boys" defense work throughout the 1930s, gave the Communists credibility in the eyes of many. This is the period in which the John Reed Clubs were founded, in 1929.

Ultraleftism and "Proletarian Culture"

The "Left Front" displayed the 1932 "Draft Manifesto" of the New York John Reed Club, whose Moscow-inspired Proletkult (proletarian culture) theme was that art *must* be a class weapon. "This class struggle plays hell with your poetry," said the *actual* John Reed, author of *Ten Days That Shook the World* (1919), a founder of the American CP who died in 1920 and who knew firsthand more about revolution and poetry than anybody in the Stalinist clubs named after him. Then-Trotskyist sympathizer Max Eastman recalled Reed's statement in *Artists in Uniform* (1934).



Aleksandr Gerasimov

Artists at a Meeting with Stalin and Voroshilov, 1938-51, an example of the stultified, Stalinist-imposed "socialist realist" style, depicts the artist himself perched loyally at Stalin's left elbow.

An essay commissioned for the show by University College London art history professor Andrew Hemingway points out that the John Reed Clubs, and especially the Communist writer Mike Gold, held to “the notion of Proletarian Art—the idea that the working class would organically produce a great artistic style, a form of heroic realism, out of the crucible of its own direct experience.” Trotsky’s classic *Literature and Revolution* (1924) refutes this simple-minded proposition in two ways. First, the proletariat needs to conquer political power because under capitalism it has no access to wealth and leisure and thus cannot possibly create its own culture. Second, and more profoundly, once successful proletarian revolutions begin to create a world socialist society, the proletariat will cease to exist as a class, along with all other classes (thus the withering away of the state), and the new culture will be a truly universal *human* culture for the first time.

Unless trivialized as genre painting or propaganda, “Proletarian Art” is a contradiction in terms. Trotsky wrote in “The Suicide of Vladimir Mayakovsky” (1930):

“The current official ideology of ‘proletarian literature’ is based—we see the same thing in the artistic sphere as in the economic—on a total lack of understanding of the *rhythms and periods of time* necessary for cultural maturation. The struggle for ‘proletarian culture’—something on the order of the ‘total collectivization’ of all humanity’s gains within the span of a single five-year plan—had at the beginning of the October Revolution the character of utopian idealism, and it was precisely on this basis that it was rejected by Lenin and the author of these lines. In recent years it has become simply a system of bureaucratic command over art and a way of impoverishing it.”

The John Reed Clubs’ “Manifesto” also intoned that artists must “fight against fascism, whether open or concealed, like social-fascism.” The Stalinist view of social democracy (“social-fascism”) as worse than fascism proved catastrophic in Germany, where the CP refused to initiate a united front with the reformist Social Democratic Party to stop the Nazis’ rise to power in 1933. Maybe this could have stopped the Holocaust. A few cartoons satirizing evil fascists hardly compensate for this betrayal.

The U.S. CP also regarded the “social fascists” as the main enemy. In NYC on 16 February 1934, Alan M. Wald recounts in his useful book, *The New York Intellectuals* (1987): “The Communist Party, carrying out its line against ‘social fascism,’ violently disrupted a Socialist Party rally at Madison Square Garden organized to protest the Austrian chancellor Dolfus’s [sic] armed attack on workers’ houses in Vienna, which were mainly occupied by Austrian Social Democrats.”

Herding Cats

Organizing artists is like trying to herd cats—and without state power, the American CP had no real coercive force, unlike in the USSR. That’s why there are some good, even famous, artists in this show—like Rockwell Kent, Stuart Davis, Isabel Bishop, Reginald Marsh and the “Ashcan School” among others—who went their own way artistically. But the CP tried to crack down as much as it could.

In his essay, Hemingway remarks that some influential Party cadre “bemoaned the character of much of the membership as ‘uprooted bohemian elements’ and *‘hangers on of the art world,’* and complained of the difficulties they faced” [emphasis in original]. As a general rule, artists and bureaucrats of whatever stripe are oil and water. When artists in the Works Progress Administration art project held a 1937 sit-down strike against cuts in the relief program, its director, Holger Cahill, fumed: “These people are psychopaths, they are basically unemployable, and you can’t do anything with them.”

In our 1992 obituary of Fritz Brosius, a German Expressionist-inspired artist and longtime friend of the Spartacist League, we wrote: “In 1932, when the New York John Reed Clubs had been forced to admit their ‘grave error’ in asking the Mexican



Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

muralist Diego Rivera—a supporter of Leon Trotsky—to speak, Fritz [then a CP member] broke discipline by going to Rivera’s New York studio as an act of protest against the party’s campaign” (“Fritz Brosius: Artist and Friend,” WV No. 553, 12 June 1992). Later, in 1938, Fritz married a member of the Socialist Party and was “excommunicated” from the CP; he found out about it by reading the CP press.

Popular Front Abroad, “Socialist Realism” in USSR

In 1935, after the Seventh Congress of the Comintern proclaimed the “Popular Front,” the John Reed Clubs were summarily disbanded and replaced by the American Artists’ Congress, which was shorn of any “class struggle” rhetoric. Today’s “Left Front” co-curator John Paul Murphy writes: “But as the ‘Red Decade’ drew on, it became apparent that the far left could not ostracize itself entirely from mainstream liberalism if it were to have political impact. So new forms of solidarity emerged, coalescing into a ‘Popular Front.’” No, Stalin in Moscow *ordered this line* for all the



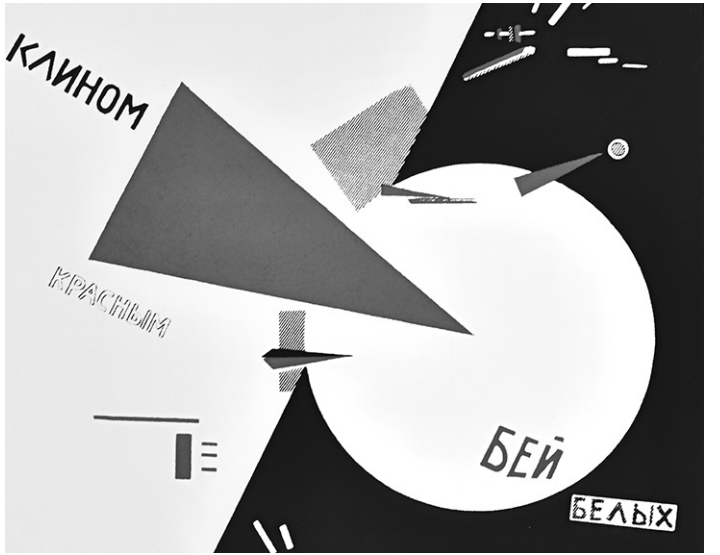
Fritz Brosius

Image from the 1938 series *Spartacus 1918-1919* by Fritz Brosius displayed in the Spartacist League local hall in New York.

CPs of the world, beginning in France in 1934, to further the aims of Soviet foreign policy. Namely, to enlist the imperialist “Western democracies” (formerly known as capitalist swine) in defending the USSR as Germany rearmed, and that meant no more anti-capitalist rhetoric.

George Orwell, just returned from fighting in a POUM militia in the Spanish Civil War, observed in 1937 of the Stalinist line in the British context, “The Popular Front boloney boils down to this: that when the war comes the Communists, labourites etc, instead of working to stop the war and overthrow the Government, will be on the side of the Government provided that the Government is on the ‘right’ side, i.e. against Germany” (“Letter to Geoffrey Gorer,” *An Age Like This, 1920-1940* [1968]). For the Ameri-

Artists El Lissitzky (far left) and Kazimir Malevich, 1920. Right: Lissitzky’s Russian Civil War poster *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge*, 1919-20.



El Lissitzky

can CP, it boiled down to: vote Democrat and screw the working class (for example, the CP’s wartime no-strike pledge).

“Left Front” co-curator Jill Bugajski’s essay is more tart, and accurate so far as it goes, though she too skirts unpleasant realities. In “Red Paradise to Red Dilemma,” she mentions the hideous 1936-38 Moscow purge trials of Old Bolsheviks, but politely does not “name names.” In fact, leaders of the American Artists’ Congress put out a letter defending the show trials. This shameful statement was signed by its president, Stuart Davis (a modernist), as well as Raphael Soyer, William Gropper, Max Weber, Harry Gottlieb and other “Left Front” artists. Relentless repression of avowed communists, including the Trotskyists, was a complement to efforts to join hands with bourgeois forces.

Meanwhile, the USSR settled down into the stolid academic style of “socialist realism.” The *New Yorker* art critic Peter Schjeldahl writes of the American scene in his review of the show (“Left Turns,” 26 January): “The tendency most dramatically missing from the movement is Socialist Realism—utopian subjects, academic forms—which, in 1934, became by

diktat the sole style allowed Soviet artists. In America, the nearest equivalents to that ideal were advanced by American Scene painters, such as Thomas Hart Benton and John Steuart Curry, whose patriotic content—folk heroes, sturdy Midwestern farmers—irked leftists.” Yeah, because subject and style were uncomfortably close to what Hitler, with his ban on “degenerate art,” thought uplifting: the most banal, sentimental and somehow disturbing magazine illustrations of old farmstead “just plain folks.”

Many American artists also no doubt realized that giant Stalin figures overseeing the forced collectivization of the peasantry and the crazed breakneck industrialization in the USSR wouldn’t be too popular in the U.S. This was the period of Soviet boy-girl-tractor novels like Ilyin’s *The Great Assembly-line*, which Trotsky read in exile in 1935, commenting, “The grimmest aspect of the assembly-line

romance is the absence of political rights and the lack of individuality on the part of the workers, especially the proletarian youth, who are taught only to obey.”

Disillusionment with Stalinist orders on art took its toll, but the Hitler-Stalin pact of 1939 and the USSR’s invasion of capitalist Finland and Poland set off a wave of hysterical anti-Communism that caused the American Artists’ Congress to lose almost all of its liberal fellow-traveler members. After World War II, the vicious McCarthyite witchhunting of the late 1940s and ’50s further crushed what was already an attenuated movement. The Trotskyists were the most consistent defenders of the USSR throughout its *entire* existence, upholding its socialized property forms while fighting for the Soviet proletariat to oust the bureau-

cratic caste that was a roadblock to world revolution. Sweeping away the global capitalist order is the only solution to the horrendous, and ultimately insoluble, problems of an isolated workers state.

Art and Revolution: So Much to Fight For

The censorship imposed in the USSR was an especially bitter blow to artists, because the October Revolution was associated with worldwide cultural upheavals that gave birth to modernism and abstract art. The Revolution offered artists the freedom and resources to explore their new visions. Vasily Kandinsky in 1919 was named Director of the Museum of Pictorial Culture in Russia and put in charge of 22 provincial museums. (At the invitation of the Bauhaus, he left in 1921.) Marc Chagall established a school where Kazimir Malevich and El Lissitzky spread new visual and graphic languages. Lenin, while cringing privately at the freewheeling enthusiasms of culture commissar Lunacharsky—notably the futurists in their bright yellow shirts and decorated faces, painting the trees in front of the Kremlin bright colors for May Day—never considered censorship. Freedom of expression for all, except active counterrevolutionaries, was a fiercely guarded principle during Lenin’s lifetime.

Trotsky in exile rallied still-revolutionary Communists in the fight for a new, Fourth International after the historic defeat in Germany in 1933—and the fact that no opposition had been voiced nor a balance sheet drawn within the Comintern. Trotskyism won significant forces in the U.S., both in the Minneapolis Teamsters 1934 organizing strikes and among the “New York Intellectuals” (see Alan Wald’s book). Trotsky’s continued interest in art and literature brought influential cultural figures to his side for a time.

Northwestern’s “Left Front” catalog printed, amid a mosaic of different takes on art, a shard that glitters with revolutionary truth, shining a critical light on the rest of the show. This was a small excerpt from the “Manifesto: Towards a Free Revolutionary Art” signed by French surrealist Andre Breton and Mexican muralist Diego Rivera, two of the most universally recognized and innovative artists of the period. They had held lengthy discussions with Trotsky in Mexico, resulting in that very powerful statement, first printed in *Partisan Review* (1938). It observed:

“In the present period of the death agony of capitalism, democratic as well as fascist, the artist sees himself threatened with the loss of his right to live and continue working. He sees all avenues of communication choked with the debris of capitalist collapse. Only naturally, he turns to the Stalinist organizations which hold out the possibility of escaping from his isolation. But if he is to avoid complete demoralization, he cannot remain there, because of the impossibility of delivering his own message and the degrading servility which these organizations exact from him in exchange for certain material advantages. He must understand that his place is elsewhere, not among those who betray the cause of the revolution and mankind, but among those who with unshaken fidelity bear witness to the revolution, among those who, for this reason, are alone able to bring it to fruition, and along with it the ultimate free expression of all forms of human genius.” ■



Part One of the article that concludes here appeared in WV No. 1068 (15 May).

In 2005, Sharon Smith, a leading figure in the International Socialist Organization (ISO) and a self-styled theorist, produced a book, *Women and Socialism: Essays on Women's Liberation* (Haymarket Books), which is slated for a revised, expanded edition to appear later this year. An excerpt from this new edition, "Theorizing Women's Oppression: Domestic Labor and Women's Oppression," which appeared in *International Socialist Review* (March 2013), outlines what the ISO says is its new approach to feminism. Smith's "theorizing" draws heavily on the concept of unpaid domestic labor as the basis of women's oppression, as put forth in Lise Vogel's *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory* (Haymarket Books, 2013).

Smith begins by criticizing Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, a veritable requirement for entrée into the petty-bourgeois feminist milieu: "Marx's and Engels's

PART TWO

articulations of women's oppression often contain contradictory components—in some respects fundamentally challenging the gender status quo while in other respects merely reflecting it." Smith makes an even stronger criticism of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, an event that liberals, feminist and otherwise, consider as at best a utopian experiment that failed and at worst the birth of a totalitarian police state.

Playing to anti-Communist prejudices, Smith contends that the Bolsheviks supported the traditional role of women by elevating motherhood to the highest social duty: "Despite the enormous achievements of the 1917 Russian Revolution—including the legalization of abortion and divorce, the rights to vote and run for political office, and an end to laws criminalizing both prostitution and gay sexuality—it did not produce a theory that challenged either natural heterosexual norms or the primacy of women's maternal destinies." Smith then quotes a statement by John Riddell, a leftist historian who is frequently published in the ISO's *International Socialist Review*: "Communist women in that period viewed childbearing as a social responsibility and sought to assist 'poor women who would like to experience motherhood as the highest joy'."

By leaning on a quote taken out of context, Smith and Riddell falsify Bolshevik doctrine and practice. The Bolsheviks viewed the replacement of the family by collective means of raising children not

The Marxist Approach to Women's Liberation Communism and the Family



tended to slight the role of the mother-child bond in infant survival and early childhood development, although even a rudimentary acquaintance with the work of the prerevolutionary foundling homes would have revealed the shockingly low survival rates for infants in institutional settings and the obstacles to healthy child development.”

This analogy is entirely invalid. The treatment and fate of young children in the impoverished foundling homes of tsarist Russia can by no means be compared to collective childcare in a revolutionary society. A workers state, especially in an economically advanced country, would have the human and material resources to provide far better care for young children in all respects than a mother in the setting of a private, family household.

Furthermore, the Bolsheviks put great emphasis on the health and well-being of mother and child. The 1918 Labor Code provided at least one paid 30-minute break every three hours to feed a baby. The maternity insurance program implemented the same year provided for a fully paid maternity leave of eight weeks, nursing breaks and factory rest facilities for women on the job, free pre- and post-natal care and cash allowances. With its networks of maternity clinics, consultation offices, feeding stations, nurseries and mother and infant homes, this program was perhaps the single most popular innovation of the Soviet regime among women.

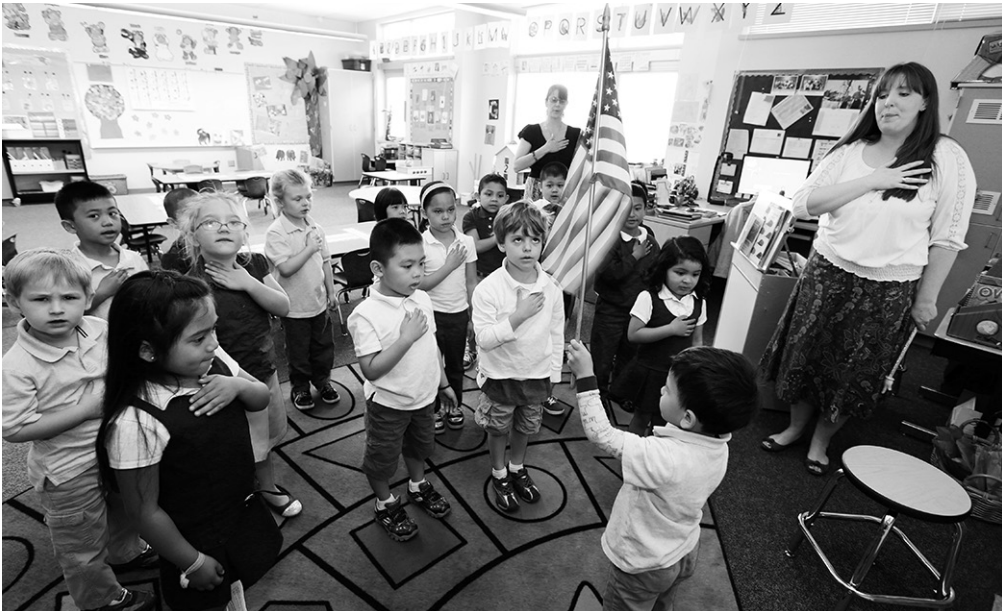
Feminists in the U.S. and elsewhere usually denounce the proposition that “biology equals destiny” as an expression of male chauvinism. Yet Goldman makes the assumption that women, or for that matter men, who are not biologically related to infants and young children cannot develop the same protective feelings toward them as their birth mother. Parents of adopted children may well argue with this idea. But modern adoption practices in the U.S. are also based on the concept that only in a “family”—be it biological mother and father, adoptive parents or gay or transgender parents—can a child get the proper care and love. Far from being a fact of nature, the idea that raising children can succeed only in a family setting is a *social construct*.

When people lived as hunter-gatherers (the vast majority of the 200,000 years our species has been around), the band or tribe, not the “pair bond,” was the basic unit of human existence. One example from the not-too-distant past comes from the testimony of 17th-century Jesuit missionaries among the Naskapi hunting people of Labrador. As related by Eleanor Burke Leacock in her fine introduction to Engels’ *Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (International Publishers, 1972), Jesuits complained about the sexual freedom of Naskapi women, pointing out to one man that “he himself was not sure that his son, who was there present, was his son.” The Naskapi’s reply is telling: “Thou hast no sense. You French people love only your own children; but we love all the children of our tribe.”

The disappearance of classes and private property under communism would lead inevitably to the full freedom of sexual relations and to the disappearance of any concept of legitimacy or illegitimacy. Everyone would have access to the fullest benefits of society by virtue of being a citizen of the international Soviet.

The Family as Carrier of Bourgeois Ideology

Vogel and Smith implicitly limit the concept of domestic labor to physical activities. Thus Smith writes: “The day-to-day responsibilities of family still center around feeding, clothing, cleaning, and otherwise caring for its members, and that responsibility still falls mainly on women.” But raising children for their future entry into the labor market is not like raising calves and lambs for the live-stock market. The reproduction of human labor power has not only a biological but also a *social*, i.e., *ideological* character. Taking a child to church or religious instruction is also a form of domestic labor, in its own way important for the



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maintenance of the capitalist system; likewise, taking a child to a movie that glorifies “family values,” patriotism, etc. The family is the primary institution through which bourgeois ideology in its various forms is transmitted from one generation to the next.

The ABC of Communism (1919), written by two leading Bolsheviks, Nikolai Bukharin and Evgeny Preobrazhensky, explained that the tiny minority of capitalists cannot dominate the working class solely through the use of physical force and coercion carried out by the police and military. The maintenance of the capitalist system also involves the force of ideas:

“The bourgeoisie is well aware that it cannot control the working masses by the use of force alone. It is necessary that the workers’ brains should be completely enmeshed as if in a spider’s web.... The



Viktor Bulla

Lenin consults with veteran Bolshevik Elena Stasova at break during Second Congress of Communist International, 1920.

capitalist State maintains specialists to stupefy and subdue the proletariat; it maintains bourgeois teachers and professors, the clergy, bourgeois authors and journalists.”

Bukharin and Preobrazhensky pointed to three main institutions by which bourgeois ideological domination is maintained: the educational system, the church and the press, with the mass media today also including films, television and the Internet.

In the advanced capitalist countries, where children are widely viewed as the property of their parents, the family has a different relationship to each of those institutions. From the age of five or six, children are legally required to attend school (public or private), and younger children often go to preschool. From the time that they’re toddlers, children watch television, with some parents, usually mothers, controlling which programs they watch. Unlike school teachers and TV producers, clergymen have no such automatic direct access to young children—in the U.S. and elsewhere, the parents decide whether or not their children are subjected to religious indoctrination. At least initially, such indoctrination is imposed upon children against their subjective desires. There probably isn’t a four- or five-year-old on the planet who would not

rather play games with other children than attend religious services.

Consider a ten-year-old boy whose parents are practicing Catholics. He has been taken to church for as long as he can remember. He has attended Catholic school either in place of public school or supplementary to it. He has heard prayers said before meals at home and experienced multiple expressions of religious belief in everyday domestic life. Such a child may well adhere to Catholic beliefs and doctrines at least until a later stage in life when free of parental authority.

Conversely, consider a ten-year-old whose parents are irreligious. His knowledge of religion is limited to what he has learned in public school, occasional information gleaned from TV programs and movies and discussions with other children who are religious-minded. Such a child will almost certainly be irreligious. But being irreligious does not immunize a child from other, likely “progressive” forms of bourgeois ideology. A child raised by parents who subscribe to “secular humanism” will likely adhere to political liberalism in the U.S. or social democracy in West Europe and possibly intellectual elitism. There is also a current of atheistic libertarianism (associated with Ayn Rand) that glorifies self-centered individualism and “free market” capitalism. Religion is not the only form of reactionary bourgeois ideology.

The family oppresses children as well as women, and it is plenty deforming to men’s consciousness as well. This basic social truth is ignored if not denied by both liberal and “socialist” feminists. For them to recognize that the oppression of children is intrinsic to the family would mean (horror of horrors!) criticizing the socially conditioned behavior of women in their role as mothers. Professed Marxists like Vogel and Smith, who propagate the thesis that domestic labor is the basis of women’s oppression, implicitly treat mothers as only doing good for their children.

Against the Sexual Repression of Children

While most feminists would condemn the physical abuse of children, they are effectively indifferent to psychological abuse. To take one example, the children of fundamentalist Christian parents (whether Catholic or Protestant) suffer mental torture in believing that they will go to hell if they behave badly.

Far more widespread and psychologically damaging is the sexual repression of children extending well into adolescence. Capitalist society is geared to penalize the expression of sexuality in children from birth. Even the most enlightened parents cannot shield children from the anti-sex, moralistic ideology that pervades American society—everywhere from the pink- and blue-themed aisles at Toys “R” Us and the ban on public nudity to the demonization of any sexual activity by children, including masturbation. As infants’ and toddlers’ primary caregivers, mothers more than fathers begin the process of that sexual repression, teaching children to feel shame about their bodies and to suppress their natural curiosity.

August Bebel, a principal leader of German Social Democracy in the late



Corbis

Bourgeois values of patriotism, religiosity are drilled into children from early age.

19th and early 20th centuries, comes off as a radical sexual libertarian compared to today’s “socialist feminists.” In *Woman Under Socialism* (1879), he insisted:

“*The satisfaction of the sexual instinct is as much a private concern as the satisfaction of any other natural instinct.* None is therefor accountable to others, and no unsolicited judge may interfere.... The simple circumstance that all bashful prudery and affectation of secrecy regarding natural matters will have vanished is a guarantee of a more natural intercourse of the sexes than that which prevails to-day.” [emphasis in original]

One can read hundreds of pages written by today’s “socialist feminists” without finding any argument that a socialist society will enable everyone to better fulfill their sexual needs and desires.

The Communist Future

Under communism, people will be genuinely and truly *free* to shape and reshape their interpersonal relations. Of course, this freedom is not absolute. Humanity cannot transcend its biological makeup and relation to the natural environment. Communist man and woman, too, will grow old and die. Neither can mankind sweep the slate totally clean and build society anew. Communist humanity will inherit for good and ill the accumulated cultural heritage of our species. We cannot know the sexual practices of communist society because these will be determined in the future. Any projection, much less prescription, would carry the imprint of attitudes, values and prejudices shaped by a repressive class society.

A fundamental difference between Marxists and feminists, whether liberal or professed socialist, is that our ultimate goal is not gender equality as such but rather the progressive development of the human species as a whole. The communal raising of children under conditions of material abundance and cultural richness will produce human beings whose mental capacities as well as psychological well-being will be vastly superior to people in this impoverished, oppressive and class-divided society. In a 1932 speech on the Russian Revolution, “In Defence of October” (*Fourth International*, July-August 1947), Leon Trotsky said:

“It is true that humanity has more than once brought forth giants of thought and action, who tower over their contemporaries like summits in a chain of mountains. The human race has a right to be proud of its Aristotle, Shakespeare, Darwin, Beethoven, Goethe, Marx, Edison, and Lenin. But why are they so rare? Above all, because almost without exception, they came out of the upper and middle classes. Apart from rare exceptions, the sparks of genius in the suppressed depths of the people are choked before they can burst into flame. But also because the processes of creating, developing and educating a human being have been and remain essentially a matter of chance, not illuminated by theory and practice, not subjected to consciousness and will....

“Once he has done with the anarchic forces of his own society man will set to work on himself, in the pestle and the retort of the chemist. For the first time mankind will regard itself as raw material, or at best as a physical and psychic semi-finished product. Socialism will mean a leap from the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom in this sense also, that the man of today, with all his contradictions and lack of harmony, will open the road for a new and happier race.” ■

Australia: Fighting for a Revolutionary Perspective

Class Struggle and the 1975 Ouster of the Whitlam Government

The following article is reprinted from *Australasian Spartacist No. 225 (Autumn 2015)*, newspaper of the Spartacist League of Australia.

Australasian
SPARTACIST

This year marks 40 years since the Labor government led by Gough Whitlam was dismissed by the English Queen's representative, the then governor-general, Sir John Kerr. The ouster of Whitlam in November 1975 brought to a head a political crisis that was developing in this country during a decade of intensifying social and class struggle. From the mid-1960s, unfolding social revolution in Vietnam sparked massive protests against the Vietnam War and conscription and, combined with powerful proletarian actions, ignited youth and other layers of the population to take up broader struggles, including the fight for Aboriginal rights. Women were propelled into the fight for equal pay and abortion rights, against the deep male chauvinism characteristic of Australian capitalist society.

Today's left-inclined workers and youth, who have come to politics in a world shaped by capitalist counterrevolution in the Soviet Union and one-sided class war against workers and oppressed, would find it useful to study the lessons of this period of heightened struggle. Four decades ago, with the proletariat demonstrating an instinctive desire to fight against the capitalist rulers and threatening to break out of the confines of bourgeois parliamentarism, the social-democratic misleaders in the trade unions and ALP [Australian Labor Party] adapted to the prevailing mood and stood far to the left of today's very right-wing ALP regimes. However, the purpose of such left-wing posturing by the leadership was to co-opt the more advanced and restive layers of the proletariat and behead any challenge to capitalist stability and profits. While some declared themselves socialists and even communists, in reality these misleaders constituted a left-reformist layer within the workers movement, whose actual program was limited to ameliorating the worst excesses of capitalist rule. As a consequence they were all the more dangerous an obstacle to the historic interests of the working class.

The turmoil of this period created openings for our small Trotskyist group, then known as the Spartacist League of Australia and New Zealand (SL/ANZ), to connect with advanced workers and seek to raise their political consciousness through revolutionary propaganda and intelligent tactics. A key element of our intervention was to debunk the lie promoted by Laborites of all stripes that workers can achieve their needs through the parliamentary road. As Lenin wrote in his seminal work, *The State and Revolution* (1917), "To decide once every few years which member of the ruling class is to repress and crush the people through parliament—this is the real essence of bourgeois parliamentarism...." Through hard political combat we fought to win the best elements among the left and proletariat to the perspective of building an internationalist revolutionary Marxist party to fight for socialist revolution.

Whitlam's ALP Enlisted to Rein in Proletarian Struggles

The Whitlam Labor government came to office in 1972. Not only was this a period

of heightened proletarian struggle in Australia but also internationally. These years saw mass working-class upheavals shake France in 1968, Italy in 1969 and Portugal in 1974-75. The absence of genuine revolutionary Trotskyist leadership and the betrayals by the pro-Moscow Stalinist Communist parties and social democrats resulted in these struggles being defeated.

In Australia, this period saw the biggest upsurge in trade-union unrest since World War I. Class struggle exploded with intensity in 1969, with a near general strike in Victoria. The struggle was ignited over the jailing of Victorian Tramways Union official and supporter of the Maoist Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) [CPA(ML)], Clarrie O'Shea,

ing the most militant wing of the anti-war movement.

From the mid-1960s strikes began to take on a political colouration. The New South Wales branch of the Builders Labourers Federation solidarised with the struggles of oppressed groups such as prisoners, gays, women and Aborigines. On several occasions CP [Communist Party of Australia] and CPA(ML)-led maritime unions struck to defend opponents of the Vietnam War caught in the crosshairs of state repression. The Seamen's Union refused on occasions to ship armaments and ammunition to Vietnam thus concretely impeding the imperialist war against the heroic struggle of the Vietnamese workers and peasants. This

that the military victories of the Vietnamese forces were having a radicalising effect on the proletariat at home. By 1971 the number of working days lost to strike activity in Australia had risen to over three million—over 400 percent higher than in 1967. That same year, a *Sydney Morning Herald* editorial warned that "in parts of Australia...we are approaching a situation intolerably close to industrial anarchy." Significantly, shop stewards committees, which embraced immigrant worker militants, were playing a more prominent role somewhat independent of the older, more conservative Australian-born leaders who made up the majority of union officialdom.

The Australian capitalist class resolved that measures needed to be taken to contain proletarian struggles. The deeply conservative Liberal/Country Party Coalition, which had been in power for 23 years [mainly under prime minister Robert Menzies], was at that time incapable of doing so and moreover stood in the way of modernisation. Thus a decisive section of the Australian capitalist rulers, including media magnate Rupert Murdoch, promoted the reformist Whitlam-led Labor Party in the 1972 federal elections.

From its formation in the 1890s, the ALP has been a bourgeois workers party: a party based on the mass of organised workers but led by the pro-capitalist trade-union bureaucracy and their parliamentary counterparts, whose role is to act as political police for the bourgeoisie in the labour movement. In his June 1913 article "In Australia," Russian revolutionary leader V.I. Lenin described the leaders of the ALP as "trade union officials, everywhere the most moderate and 'capital-serving' element...." Through this mechanism, in times of crisis, such as the two world wars of last century, the ALP has served the ruling class by presiding over the capitalist order and keeping the working class in check.

No less in the 1970s, it was Whitlam's job to lull the workers and when necessary discipline them in order to return to capitalist business as usual. It helped that he was a known quantity. Whitlam earned kudos from the bourgeoisie for purging the "Socialist Left" from the Victorian branch of the ALP in 1970. Devoted to bourgeois parliamentarism, Whitlam made it clear in the lead up to the 1972 elections that taxes on the wealthy would not rise and that he had no intention to nationalise anything. Whitlam was also an enthusiastic and eloquent purveyor of the reformist illusion that the capitalist state could be reformed to meet the interests of the masses. He was aided in his efforts to hoodwink workers by the misleaders in the trade-union bureaucracy.

Refurbishing the Image of Australian Imperialism

With the ALP under pressure from its proletarian base, the bourgeoisie was prepared to concede, for a time, some concrete reforms in order to placate workers and the oppressed. In his book *A Secret Country* (1989), John Pilger captures the whirlwind of change that accompanied Whitlam's ascension to power:

"Conscription was ended immediately and the last Australian troops were ordered home from Vietnam. Young men imprisoned for draft evasion were freed unconditionally. The Federal Government assumed responsibility for Aboriginal health, education and welfare and the first land rights legislation was drafted....



Quality Press

Late 1960s, early '70s saw outburst of class struggle in Australia. Left: Sydney protest in support of Victorian Tramways Union leader Clarrie O'Shea, jailed in 1969 for defying government anti-strike measures. Below: Maritime workers march against the Vietnam War.



News Ltd/Newspix

for defying the government's anti-strike penal powers and refusing to pay Arbitration Court fines. It saw 200,000 workers walk off the job in Victoria and 150,000 in NSW [New South Wales state] the day after O'Shea's imprisonment. Ultimately over one million workers in all states struck to demand the release of O'Shea. A *Sun-Herald* correspondent reported that "Demonstrations I have seen accompanying the strikes have been the most intense since the coal strike in 1949." A general strike was only averted when O'Shea was released from prison after his fines were anonymously paid. The workers' actions succeeded in shelving the penal powers for a decade. This victory combined with the radical-sounding anti-imperialist rhetoric of the CPA(ML) attracted many youth, then breaking to the left of the ALP, to the Maoists who were also lead-

war ended in 1975 with the defeat of the imperialist forces and their South Vietnamese puppet regime by the troops of the North Vietnamese Army and southern peasant-based National Liberation Front (NLF), leading to the overturn of capitalist rule in South Vietnam and the formation of a unified workers state, albeit bureaucratically deformed from inception by the rule of a parasitic nationalist Stalinist caste.

Mirroring the development of a defeatist wing of the American ruling class, who were spooked by spiralling defeats particularly after the North Vietnamese/NLF's 1968 Tet Offensive, sections of the Australian ruling class were also increasingly looking for a way to extract themselves from that losing war. Suffering humiliating routs on the battlefield, the bourgeoisie were doubtless concerned

“Equal pay for women was introduced. Wages, pensions and unemployment benefits rose. A national health service was established, open to all. Spending on education was doubled and university and college fees abolished. Censorship was ended and the divorce laws reformed, with the establishment of the world’s first ‘family courts.’ Legal aid became a universal right. A range of cultural initiatives for Aborigines, women and immigrants were encouraged and funded; ‘access’ and ethnic radio networks were set up.”

Notorious for its official White Australia policy, Australia had long been viewed with distrust by Southeast Asian and Pacific Island countries. By the mid-to-late 1960s "White Australia" was an impediment to Australian business interests, not least with Japan, the growing imperialist economic powerhouse in the region. Thus, Whitlam helped to end the ALP's explicit embrace of "White Australia," one of its founding tenets. And he sought to modernise insular Menzies-era Australian capitalism, including through acting with greater "independence" from its U.S. big brother vis-à-vis moves to engage in Asia. Formal independence was granted to Papua New Guinea and immigration for Asian and Pacific islanders was liberalised. Whitlam also gave diplomatic recognition to the People's Republic of China. These mainly cosmetic moves were designed to project a more tolerant and multiracial Australia in order to promote the interests of Australian imperialism.

Some of Whitlam's reforms, such as no-fault divorce and relatively free health care and education, greatly benefited working people. However, as is always the case under capitalism, reforms are only ever a pallid and highly reversible glimpse of what will be achievable once workers have overthrown the capitalist system. As we wrote at the time: "While significant, these changes hardly touch the real needs of the masses and in fact disarm them by helping to prepare the way for the very harsh measures Whitlam will be forced to institute for the benefit of Australian capitalism" ("Capital's Labor Trustee: Australian Labor Party Elected," WV No. 17, March 1973).

Whitlam's Usefulness Comes to an End

With the onset of a sharp global economic downturn in 1974 capitalist rulers around the world made efforts to increase the rate of exploitation of the proletariat. This recession was also marked by rising unemployment and spiralling inflation, accelerated by the October 1973 OPEC (Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) cartel's decision to raise crude oil prices by 70 percent. The market price for oil soon quadrupled and the effects were felt in Australia by early 1974 as escalating transport costs filtered through the economy. Inflationary pressures sparked proletarian struggles for higher wages. Already in 1973 Whitlam had attempted to rein in wages by putting forward a referendum for state control of wages and prices. This referendum was resoundingly defeated not least due



Gloaguen/Gamma-Rapho

North Vietnamese troops take Saigon, 30 April 1975. Military victory over imperialists and South Vietnamese puppet regime overthrew capitalist rule and established deformed workers state.

to widespread opposition from the working class.

Forced to an early federal election in May 1974, the ALP was re-elected with a slightly reduced majority. The Labor caucus attempted to revive their standing amongst workers through electing “left” leader and prominent anti-war campaigner Jim Cairns as deputy prime minister. While that year’s September budget delivered a few paltry social welfare reforms it did nothing to arrest the growing unemployment and erosion of wages caused by inflation. Whitlam, with the connivance of then ACTU [Australian Council of Trade Unions] head Bob Hawke and other prominent union leaders, continued to push for wage restraint while arguing that some reforms would have to be wound back. Despite deep-set illusions in the ALP, many unions rejected the Laborite tops’ messages of restraint and cutbacks, and fought to defend the wages and living standards of their members. Working days lost to strike activity in 1974 were double that of 1971. In 1974-75 workers’ struggles succeeded in offsetting inflation as average wages grew by 28.7 percent. Faced with growing unemployment, inflation, a strike wave, and a decline in popularity, by late 1974 the ALP government’s failure to protect profits by holding down wages led it to adopt an anti-strike campaign, with the minister for labour accusing unions of “bloody-mindedness” and causing “near anarchy.”

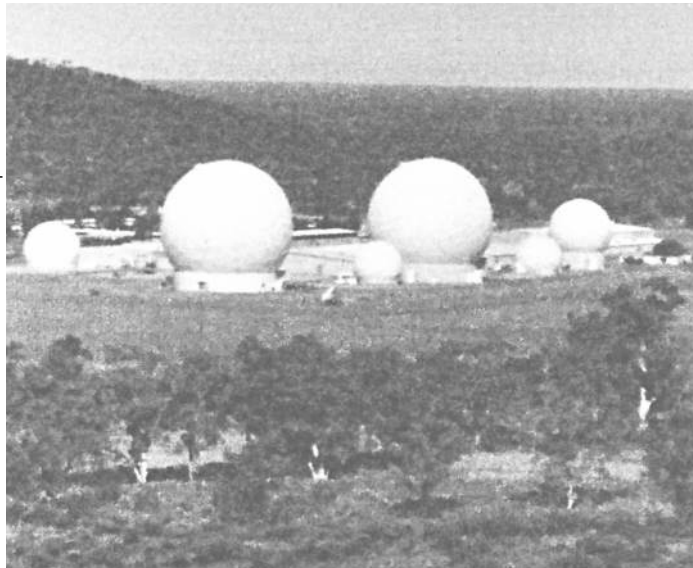
But for the bosses it was too little, too late. Ultimately the Whitlam government's inability to stymie working-class struggles would become its epitaph. As we wrote in *Australasian Spartacist* No. 25, November 1975:

"Although the ALP tops have been ever more slavish in boot-licking devotion to business and profit it has not been enough. Wage indexation has not produced the results required. The bosses have increasingly resorted to lockouts, provoked strikes, attempted speedup, and attacked union rights in a campaign of attrition against union strength. For the bosses the time has come for the government to put its foot down; but the Labor Government's strategy of restraining the working class through the sell-out union bureaucrats has not been effective enough. The L/NCP [Liberal/National Country Party coalition], uninhibited by any ties to the unions, will be prepared to launch a crackdown on the unions at every opportunity. Finally, in recession conditions the ruling class cannot afford even the ALP's piddling reforms."

The CIA and British intelligence services played a role in Whitlam's ouster (see "The CIA, the Queen's Agent and the Man Who Got in the Way: Gough Whitlam, 1916-2014," [WV No. 1061, 6 February]). On the face of it this might seem odd since Whitlam had long proven himself a staunch defender of the U.S./Australia alliance, signed in 1951 during Cold War I against the Soviet Union. Whitlam's loyalty to this counterrevolutionary alliance included backing the construction of the U.S. spy base at North-West Cape in 1963, congratulating the then Indonesian

president Suharto after he had overseen the mass slaughter that destroyed the Indonesian Communist Party in 1965-66, and backing the war in Vietnam. On the right wing of the ALP, he only switched his position and called for troops out of Vietnam in 1968, when it became obvious that the imperialist forces were losing. While the Whitlam government in 1972 was one of the first in the West to recognise the People's Republic of China, this measure was entirely in keeping with imperialist interests, occurring shortly before the sealing of the anti-Soviet U.S./China alliance.

As PM [Prime Minister], Whitlam first clashed with the U.S. administration



**Pine Gap facility,
set up as
anti-Soviet
spy base, now
repurposed
to snoop
on China.**

after the U.S. carried out the bombing of Hanoi and the port of Haiphong in late 1972. Having been elevated to power on a wave of opposition to the war in Vietnam, Whitlam felt impelled to protest this barbaric war crime which killed some 1,600 people. His comments coincided with waterfront union bans against U.S. shipping. Despite Whitlam's assurances that his government was by no means anti-U.S., his dissent sparked a furious response from Washington. It was also revealed later that the CIA had become concerned by Whitlam's meddling with the U.S. government's highly secretive

Pine Gap “communications” base near Alice Springs. Shortly before his sacking, Whitlam accused National Country Party leader, Doug Anthony, of being tainted by CIA money. He also claimed that Anthony’s friend, Richard Stallings, who supervised the construction of Pine Gap, had been a CIA agent, the obvious implication being that there was more to Pine Gap than “communications.” Later revelations exposed Pine Gap as an anti-Soviet spy base, which was key to longstanding U.S. plans for a nuclear first strike against the USSR. The question of the bases underscored the importance of our internationalist Trotskyist fight “at home” for the unconditional military defence of the Soviet Union, a degenerated workers state, against imperialist attack and internal capitalist counterrevolution. Revelations also pointed to the CIA filtering funds to the Liberal and Country Parties as well as infiltrating some unions, with CIA money linked to the virulently anti-Communist National Civic Council of B.A. Santamaria and right-wing union officials associated with it.

Alongside the growing economic instability, these factors, combined with the ALP Attorney-General Lionel Murphy's police raid on ASIO [Australian Security Intelligence Organisation] headquarters in early 1973 and the links of some Labor lefts to unions influenced by the CPA or its Maoist and pro-Moscow Stalinist spin-offs, were a cause of deep suspicion to both the U.S. and Australian ruling classes and their intelligence services. The pretext for Whitlam's sacking was a series of "scandals" surrounding his government. The most spectacular was the so-called "loans affair" where the government attempted to raise a U.S. \$4 billion loan for resource-based infrastruc-

ture projects from sources in the Middle East. The Opposition seized on this to claim government financial impropriety. It gave the L/NCP coalition, led by Malcolm Fraser, the trigger to use their numbers in the Senate to block the federal budget on 16 October 1975, thus denying the government financial supply. The “crisis” was resolved on 11 November when Governor-General Sir John Kerr, who had links with not only the British monarchy but also ASIO and the CIA, used the supposedly moribund “reserve powers of the crown” to withdraw Whitlam’s

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U.S. military aid to Ukraine has been used by NATO governments to fuel the slaughter of innocent civilians in Ukraine. Right: Artillery and rocket fire from Ukrainian forces in Ukraine.

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Australia...

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commission and install Fraser as the caretaker prime minister.

Proletarian Outpouring Against Whitlam's Dismissal

Following the blocking of supply and Whitlam's subsequent dismissal there was a tremendous outpouring of proletarian rage. Mass protests occurred. At different points docks across the country were shut down, rail networks were sporadically at a standstill, and building sites were idle. Storemen, meatpackers, miners, clothing workers, journalists, printers, teachers, office and carworkers, shipbuilders, metal and manufacturing workers all walked off the job at different points and often together. Their protests were joined by students.

Almost a week after blocking supply, Fraser called a public demonstration to rally support behind the L/NCP coalition. Outnumbered by a counter-demonstration of Labor supporters, Fraser was forced to retreat into parliament house without finishing his speech. There were multiple calls for a general strike by unions across a wide range of industries. The ACTU refused to take up these calls. Massive union shop stewards meetings, representing hundreds of thousands if not millions of workers, were held in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. Proletarian outrage was immense. But this wasn't just about the ousting of the Whitlam government. It was about the workers seeking to defend their organisations and livelihoods against an avowedly right-wing, union-busting government that was hell-bent on stripping back Whitlam's reforms. As NSW State Secretary of the Federated Engine Drivers Union, Jack Cambourn, put it, "we are not going to strike to save [Gough], we are going to strike to save ourselves."

The bourgeoisie and their pro-capitalist Laborite representatives in the union movement were becoming increasingly fearful. Former Liberal Party leader, Bill Snedden, later opined that "the peace of the country was threatened and there could have been an insurrection." Immediately after Whitlam's sacking there was a clear consensus across the bourgeois political spectrum that despite the manner of Whitlam's removal it was vital to restore faith in the parliamentary system. From the day of his dismissal Whitlam played a prominent role in channeling anger into the ballot box. Speaking from the steps of federal parliament Whitlam called on an angry crowd of supporters who had spontaneously gathered there to "maintain your rage...until polling day."

With so many workers in the unions and in ALP branches straining to take all-out strike action, the Laborite misleaders worked frantically to contain the movement in safe parliamentary channels. At a press conference immediately after the dismissal ACTU leader Hawke insisted that Whitlam had "no alternative but to accept this amazing decision." He argued against a national strike, counselling that it "could unleash forces in Australia which we've never seen before." Showing his absolute devotion to bourgeois rule Hawke infamously implored workers to "cool it," declaring "we are on the edge of something terrible happening."

Proletarian militancy was at its height in Victoria. Defying Hawke's calls for restraint, some 30 left-wing unions in Melbourne unanimously voted for a half-day general strike on 14 November. Pre-existing fissures between the hardened anti-communist right wing and left wing in the labour movement were widening. Enter prominent CPA supporter and Metal Workers union official in Victoria, John Halfpenny. Widely popular for his left-sounding rhetoric, Halfpenny announced the decision to strike, declaring that if Hawke says "'do nothing' he will be swept aside by the angry mood of the people." Less than 24 hours later this highly skilled traitor covered for Hawke saying that the ACTU president had "clarified" his call to "cool it" as simply opposing indefi-



Australasian Spartacist

Spartacist banner at November 1975 rally in Sydney after British Queen's agent ousted Whitlam Labor Party government.

nite strikes. Thus Halfpenny sought to put himself at the head of the struggle in order to derail it. With workers champing at the bit to take mass action Halfpenny declared, "We didn't create this crisis. Far from trying to disrupt society the slogans are to return to stability."

Despite Hawke and Halfpenny's calls for restraint and stability, on 14 November 400,000 workers struck in Victoria with 30-40,000 workers and students rallying in Melbourne's City Square. Hawke and other Labor leaders addressed the rally and it was left to Halfpenny to tell the angry crowd to leave before peak hour to avoid disrupting transport home! Here in the persons of Hawke and Halfpenny you had the right and left wings of Laborite reformism coming together to pour cold water on the militancy of workers and stabilise capitalist rule. Even so, some 15,000 reportedly refused to disperse instead marching to the stock exchange. Against the sell-out Labor-loyal tops, an internationalist Leninist-Trotskyist vanguard party with deep roots in the proletariat could have had a decisive impact.

Such a Leninist party will be built in this country by splitting the working-class base of the ALP from the pro-capitalist leadership, centrally through the political fight to replace the social-democratic union misleaders with a class-struggle leadership of the unions linked to a revolutionary workers party. In the process the most advanced layers of the proletariat will be broken from Laborite nationalism, loyalty to the capitalist state, and illusions in parliamentarism and bourgeois democracy, and won to the communist program and party.

The Fight for Revolutionary Leadership

In the tumultuous events around Whitlam's dismissal, thousands of workers across the country were pushing for extra-parliamentary actions while simultaneously rallying behind the ALP, which they viewed as their political representation in the hallowed halls of parliament. In opposition to the Labor traitors and their left hangers-on, just prior to Whitlam's dismissal we warned:

"Whitlam, Hawke and their reformist and centrist fellow travellers want the working class to believe that what is at stake is not a class conflict but the undemocratic character of the Senate and/or the Governor-General, the violation of constitutional conventions, etc. The abolition of the Senate and that vestigial remnant of past British imperialism, the Governor-General, would make the parliamentary system marginally more democratic; but *in essence* the vaunted 'democracy' of Parliament is pure sham and no number of reforms can change it. The bourgeoisie controls social wealth and Parliament serves its needs, as the political organ for working out how best to maintain and reinforce its class rule. It is democracy *for the capitalists*, and they will never allow it to be used against their basic interests.

—"For a General Strike to Keep the Liberal Union Bashers Out!" *Australasian Spartacist* No. 25, November 1975

Following Whitlam's dismissal, we headlined "Whitlam/Hawke Sabotage Workers' Defence" (*Australasian Spartacist* No. 26, 25 November 1975). Putting forward the call for a defensive general strike to kick Fraser out, we also raised

a series of demands based on the *Transitional Program*, the founding document of Trotsky's Fourth International. In the face of growing unemployment and the government's attempts at a wage freeze we called to "Smash the indexation wage freeze and Labor budget cuts!" and demanded "an immediate 35-hour week at full pay for all workers and a full, unconditional cost-of-living adjustment to all wages!" Against the Laborite fraud of channeling workers' struggles into the capitalist courts we called to "Abolish the arbitration system!" Emphasising that the capitalist rulers' stranglehold on society and exploitative rule must be broken by taking industry out of their hands we demanded: "Open the books of the corporations! Workers control of hiring! Nationalise basic industry and financial institutions under workers' control—no compensation!" We declared, "Not the bosses' parliament but a workers' government!"

Linking workers' desire to get rid of the Fraser government with the need for a workers government, alongside the call for a defensive general strike we also prominently raised the slogan, "For an ALP/ACTU government pledged to expropriate the capitalist class!" This slogan sought to confront workers with the perspective of a government that was both *socially* and *structurally* at variance with a bourgeois parliamentary regime—i.e., based exclusively on the organisations of the workers movement and incorporating wholesale (extra-parliamentary) defensive organisations of the working class. This demand, along with the call for a general strike, sought to exacerbate the contradictions between the aspirations and objective interests of the working class, centrally organised in the trade unions, and the policies and actions of their misleaders.

Ultimately the purpose behind sharpening this inner differentiation would be to politically destroy the ALP through splitting it into its pro-capitalist and proletarian elements, the latter being organised or led by a Leninist party. Through our intervention we aimed to break workers and leftist youth from Laborism and bourgeois parliamentarism, pointing them in the direction of a fight for the dictatorship of the proletariat. As we explained at the time, the capitalist state machine—at its core the military, police, prison system and courts, "must be smashed—and replaced with a profoundly democratic workers state based on workers' own organisations to expropriate the capitalist class."

In putting forward the demand for a defensive general strike we wrongly, however, included in our propaganda the call to "restore the Labor Government" (and earlier, "to keep the Labor Government in power"). A political general strike, no matter how limited and defensive, necessarily would have challenged Laborite parliamentarism. Yet, the call to "restore the Labor Government" limited in advance the outcome of the general strike to re-establishing the widely discredited Whitlam government—at a time when the futility of parliamentary reformism had just been so devastatingly exposed. It gave a form of political support to a *capitalist* government, echoing the position of our reformist opponents, who masquerade as socialists and have a policy of strategic support to Labor and

support bourgeois governments.

The call to "restore the Labor Government" thus ran counter to the entire revolutionary thrust of our intervention, including our demand "For an ALP/ACTU government pledged to expropriate the capitalist class!", which is not without historical precedent in the revolutionary workers movement. For example, French and Greek Trotskyists raised similar calls in 1945-46 in the unstable conditions of post-war Europe. Also in this tradition, albeit under very different circumstances, was Lenin's short-lived offer to the Russian Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries (SRs) in September 1917. If they agreed to form a government independent of the bourgeoisie and on the basis of their majority in the soviets, Lenin argued in "On Compromises," the Bolsheviks would (for the moment) refrain from using revolutionary methods to oust them. The Mensheviks instead embraced the counterrevolutionary bourgeois forces leading to them being swept aside in the Bolshevik October Revolution, which created a victorious workers state.

In calling for a general strike and an "ALP/ACTU government" we were also guided by the tactics put forward by our U.S. comrades during the 1974 crisis in Britain. In "Why We Call for a General Strike in Britain Now" (WV No. 39, 1 March 1974), we argued for a limited, defensive general strike against the Heath Tory government's attacks, concluding with the call, "Oust the Tory Government! For a Labour Party/TUC [Trades Union Congress] Government Pledged to a Socialist Program of Expropriating the Capitalist Class!"

As with the "ALP/ACTU" slogan, the "Labour Party/TUC" slogan was a way to propagandistically address the question of power. It sought to intersect the consciousness of the proletariat in motion, pointing to the need for a government of workers' organisations and proletarian rule. As the article on the British crisis soberly explained, a general strike poses the question of state power and can easily lead to a revolutionary situation. Marxists do not play at revolution. The leadership of the British labour movement, like its counterpart in Australia, was consciously anti-revolutionary and would betray a general strike if it seriously challenged capitalist state power. Thus, taking account of the objective need for a general strike, the illusions workers still had in British Labourism, and the treacherous leadership of the working class, we explained:

"A general strike cannot at this point be organized in opposition to or over the heads of the TUC, the established union leadership. On the other hand it would be criminal for a revolutionary organization to accept, unchallenged, this leadership of the TUC—of proven, professional class collaborators—during a general strike. It is necessary to organize directing bodies for the general strike that would allow the masses to check and frustrate the policies of the TUC, that would go towards becoming a kind of dual power within the general strike movement."

Similarly in Australia in 1975 there existed a basis to aggressively propagandise for widening the power and authority of the shop stewards committees to organise and deepen the strike movement, shifting the axis from the union tops to the most advanced and militant layers of the working class. This in turn could have opened the potential for higher forms of proletarian organisation such as broader workers councils or soviets.

In reviewing our intervention into the tumultuous events surrounding the fall of the Whitlam government, we of the Spartacist League of Australia, a section of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist), are fighting to politically arm the cadre of a future Leninist-Trotskyist vanguard party, part of a reformed Fourth International. It is only when the international working class takes power and institutes a collectivised and planned economy on a global scale that a future of abundance, free from exploitation, racist oppression, women's oppression and war, will be guaranteed. *For a workers republic of Australia, part of a socialist Asia! ■*

Amtrak...

(continued from page 1)

disaster, the Republican-led House Appropriations Committee voted to slash a further \$250 million from Amtrak’s budget. Amtrak gets off cheap for the injury and death resulting from its unsafe operations, with a 1997 federal law capping payouts at \$200 million per accident. Meanwhile, the lives of train crews as well as passengers are put at risk by deteriorating and antiquated equipment. A retired Amtrak engineer recently told *Workers Vanguard*: “Mechanical failures of rail systems occur routinely. Speedometers fail to register the correct speed or just stop working all together. Brakes can go ‘soft,’ making it difficult to make proper stops. All-important signals can ‘drop in your face’ from a ‘proceed’ indication to a ‘stop’ indication. Automatic switches can fail.” Amtrak was established as a public corporation through a 1970 federal law that separated off the highly unprofitable passenger service from the ailing rail companies. As is typical in so-called bailouts, the government nationalized the loss-making portion of industry while allowing the capitalists to reorganize and again make profits hand over fist. Despite the spin-off of Amtrak, freight and passenger trains continue to share the tracks of the Northeast Corridor and across the nation, leading to a number of deadly collisions. In recent years, the consequences of

corner-cutting by the freight lines have been most dramatically shown in oil train disasters like the 2013 Quebec train explosion, which killed 47 people and leveled much of downtown Lac-Mégantic. The Department of Transportation estimates that there will be ten derailments a year of trains hauling crude oil or ethanol. Three such accidents have already occurred so far this year in the U.S. Oil shipments pass through hundreds of counties and dozens of major metropolitan areas on poorly

maintained tracks and in the majority of cases in inadequate tank cars. Of course, fossil fuels and other hazardous materials need to be transported but that must be done safely, not by the cheapest means. Safe, efficient and affordable mass transit should be considered a necessary public service. But capitalism—under which the capitalist class, a tiny handful of people, extracts tremendous wealth by exploiting the working class, centrally in the factories, mines, and transport sys-

tem—is hardly rational. For the bourgeoisie, maximizing short-term profit matters above all else. Thus, they let infrastructure rot away while gutting public services like health care and education. Whenever a major disaster strikes, Democratic politicians give lip service to putting more money into the nation’s railroads. But the fact remains that the country invests far less of its gross domestic product in rail than many of the world’s capitalist powers, not to mention the Chinese deformed workers state with its extensive high-speed rail network. The arrogant U.S. imperialists think that they can allow their industrial base to wither and still maintain their military dominance over their imperialist rivals as well as neo-colonial peoples across the globe. Capitalism makes industrial murder commonplace—from train wrecks to collapsing roads and bridges and exploding chemical plants, pipelines and electrical transformers—with the lives of workers and the public written off as mere collateral damage. Under the leadership of a revolutionary workers party, the social power of the proletariat could be unleashed to overthrow capitalist rule and establish a workers America. When the working class is in power, it will marshal the wealth and productive forces of society to rebuild the bridges, highways and factories, in addition to constructing decent housing and schools, opening the road to an egalitarian socialist society in which the needs of all are fulfilled. ■



June 2014: Striking commuter rail workers in Philadelphia man picket line shortly before President Obama forced them back to work.

ILWU...

(continued from page 12)

the terminals, a provision that is likely to be tied up for years in legal challenges. Many other jobs now claimed by the ILWU are currently done by other unions like the IBEW and IAM machinists. The new contract further opens the door for inter-union war on the docks by removing a “memorandum of understanding” over jurisdiction between the ILWU and the Teamsters, which has been in the ILWU’s master contract since 1961.

Which Way Forward for the ILWU?

Amid the wreckage of other industrial unions, the ILWU still stands as a potential powerhouse of organized labor. This has nothing to do with the myth that until recently the ILWU maintained the militant traditions on which it was founded. Rather, it is the union’s pivotal position in container shipping, where it has its hands on the levers of global trade, that has enabled it to maintain top wages and benefits. But that power has been sapped by the ILWU misleaders, who tie the workers’ interests to the profitability of American capitalism and the electoral fortunes of the Democratic Party. It is precisely these class-collaborationist policies that have led to disaster for other former powerhouses of American labor. Look no further than the ravaged remains of the United Auto Workers (UAW), which was once the symbol of industrial unionism in this country. After decades of give-

backs, the union-busting 2009 bailout of the Detroit auto bosses, engineered by the Obama administration with the complicity of the UAW tops, slashed tens of thousands of jobs and halved the pay of new hires under a two-tier wage system. While the Big Three auto bosses are now swimming in profits, the pay of many UAW members is on a par with the starvation wages of the masses of unorganized manufacturing workers. It is this example that the shipping industry’s publication of record, the *Journal of Commerce*, points to as a “model” for dealing with the ILWU. In a report on its annual TPM conference of trans-Pacific global shipping companies, the *Journal of Commerce* (13 March) argued that the industry bosses must use the showdown over the contract at the West Coast ports to “spur action”: “Congress and the White House must evaluate all options to avoid a repeat of the recent situation. Our economy respects collective bargaining, but surely we can find a better way to represent the interests of thousands without threatening the livelihoods of millions. Overall U.S. labor and management work well together, and there are multiple examples. Ford and the United Auto Workers found ways to work together during the depths of the recession, and Ford has emerged as one of the most successful and innovative car companies in the world. The stakeholders should settle for nothing less here. “Once we’ve modernized our labor contract system, we can get on with the work of modernizing our ports.”

That is, over the mutilated body, and possibly the corpse, of the ILWU! During the recent negotiations, the PMA manufactured a crisis in West Coast shipping, slashing work shifts and

then blaming the union for gridlock at the ports. The aim was to get the Obama administration to intervene. The White House obliged by sending in its Labor Secretary, who threatened that if a deal wasn’t made negotiations would move to Washington, D.C. Now, the head of the PMA, James McKenna, argues that the disruption of shipping during contract talks demonstrates that labor relations are not “sustainable.” The truth of the matter is that the ILWU bureaucracy barely flexed the union’s baby finger, the effect of minimal job actions paling in comparison to the congestion caused by the PMA’s semi-lockout of the union. Throughout the contract battle, the ILWU International ranted against “foreign-owned companies” for supposedly endangering the union and the American economy. Such patriotism only serves to shackle the union to the interests of U.S. imperialism, further isolating the ILWU from its class allies. Nowhere is it clearer that the workers’ fight is international than on the docks, the portals to the world capitalist market. But rather than building a fighting alliance of all port unions both in the U.S. and internationally among the millions of workers in the global cargo chain, the ILWU misleaders have only further isolated and weakened the union.

To turn the tide for the union requires the understanding that workers have no interests in common with the bosses, their government and their political parties. The answer to the threat of job loss due to automation is the fight for a shorter workweek at no loss in pay. This would not only spread the available work around among longshoremen but also open the door to union jobs for the unemployed. There must be a massive drive to organize the tens of thousands of non-union workers at the ports, such as the port truckers, who are crucial to the movement of cargo. To build such working-class unity means combating the anti-immigrant racism that is used to enforce brutal exploitation, from port trucking to the vast inland warehouses. The way forward lies in the struggle to forge a new leadership of the unions that will mobilize the workers to fight it out class against class. This is not simply a question of fighting to improve the present conditions of the workers under a system based on their exploitation but of ending the entire system of wage slavery, unemployment, poverty and war. For that the working class needs its own party, one that will arm the workers with the consciousness necessary to fight for their own class rule through proletarian socialist revolution. ■

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WORKERS VANGUARD

ILWU Contract

Shipping Bosses Buy Labor Peace, Undermine Union

Members of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) voted up a new five-year contract with the Pacific Maritime Association (PMA) with 82 percent in favor. By the standards of union contracts these days, when it is considered a “victory” for the union simply to survive, the ILWU contract might appear a veritable pot of gold. In addition to a wage increase totaling \$6.50 an hour by the contract’s end and small increases in pensions, there were no cuts to the union’s health plan, which has no co-pay. This means that the ILWU will not have to shoulder the cost of the \$150 million a year tax, mandated for so-called “Cadillac” plans under Obama’s Affordable Care Act, which goes into effect in 2018. But as the old saying goes, all that glitters isn’t gold.

Vast changes are posed in the shipping industry with the widening of the Panama Canal, the consolidation of shippers into ever-larger conglomerates operating ships able to carry up to almost double the number of containers and the installation of automated cranes and yard vehicles at the largest terminals in the U.S. Throwing a little money the ILWU’s way, the PMA simply opted to buy itself some time, and five years of labor peace, to see how things shape up. Meanwhile, the shipping bosses obtained provisions that will continue to erode the fighting capacity of the ILWU by heightening already existing divisions in the union. This includes contract language aimed at stopping the ILWU from honoring picket lines of its own members!

With the onset of container shipping, the union was divided in 1959 between A-men who get the first choice of available work and B-men who only get to pick from among the unfilled jobs and are not accorded union membership. The widespread automation accompanying containerization slashed the workforce by a factor of ten and brought yet another division, the “steady men.” A layer of highly paid skilled workers, consisting largely of crane operators and mechanics, the steady men work directly for individual stevedoring companies, bypassing and undermining the ILWU hiring hall that is the embodiment of the union’s power. Later, the workforce was further divided by a category of “casual” workers, who only get work when the A and B lists have been exhausted and have no benefits or union rights. These divisions are a danger to the very existence of the ILWU.

Under the new agreement, casuals and other longshoremen with less work experience will not get the full wage increase, widening the divide between those first entering the industry and the A-men. Mechanics, on the other hand, get a larger increase. It is also widely rumored that the walking bosses—who are organized in their own ILWU locals and are responsible for overseeing union work at different terminals—got a massive wage increase. If so, this is a blatant attempt to bribe the walking bosses into becoming company men. In 1919, a strike by the Riggers’ and Stevedores’ Union, which represented longshore workers in San Francisco, was defeated and the union smashed after the gang bosses of that day split off from the

union in the course of the strike. They formed the notorious “blue book” company union that ran the hated “shape up” system, under which corrupt gang bosses in league with the shippers called the shots on who would get work on the docks.

Longshore workers and their union allies literally laid down their lives in the class battles of 1934 to smash the “blue book” and win union control of hiring (see “Then and Now,” WV Nos. 1050 and 1051, 8 August and 5 September 2014). The hiring hall and ILWU-run job dispatch were designed to equalize work opportunity among all longshoremen. This system

Any struggle to restore the fighting power of the ILWU must begin with bringing the steady men back to the hall and championing union rights, pay and benefits at the highest rate for *all* longshore workers. Equal pay for equal work! For equal manning scales, at the highest level, at all West Coast ports!

Picket Lines Mean Don’t Cross!

A “letter of understanding” attached to the new agreement mandates that any picket line set up by an ILWU affiliate will not be considered “bona fide” unless representatives of the union and the ship-

fundamental labor principle at stake:

“It is a basic right of our members to honor union picket lines. If any ILWU affiliates’ members are willing to stand up and fight for their contract, and they choose to go out on strike, we can’t let somebody outside our organization, union or employer, decide our picket line is not valid, and not worthy of support. Union members have a fundamental responsibility to honor other unions’ picket lines—that is what we can do—that is what we have done.”

It was the mobilization of the union’s muscle in container shipping that led to the IBU’s affiliation with the ILWU in 1980, following a West Coast port shutdown protesting the arrest of the then-president and secretary-treasurer of the IBU for refusing to obey a strikebreaking order. More recently, in 2011 ports throughout the Pacific Northwest were shut down to back up the fight of ILWU Local 21 in Longview, Washington, against a union-busting offensive by the giant Export Grain Terminal (EGT) consortium. But that action was short lived as the ILWU International bureaucracy retreated in the face of relentless state repression.

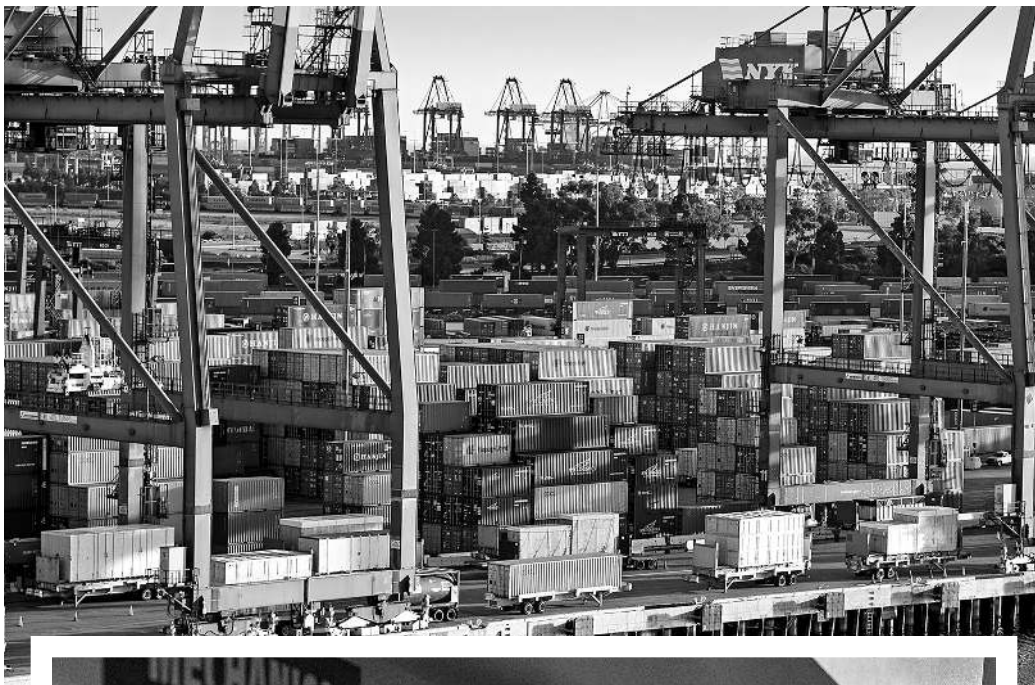
While the union preserved its jobs at the EGT terminal, driving out scabs from the Operating Engineers union, the resulting contract was a major setback. It set the stage for other grain terminal operators in the Pacific Northwest to demand the same terms. Those outfits later succeeded in imposing a contract settlement that guts the union hiring hall and institutes deadly dangerous 12-hour shifts while eliminating provisions allowing the union to stop work when the safety of its members is threatened.

Throughout the showdown with the grain terminal bosses who locked out longshoremen for over a year, the ILWU leadership impotently stood by as scabs took over longshore jobs and unions like the IBEW electrical workers crossed ILWU picket lines. To protest such backstabbing by AFL-CIO affiliates, ILWU International president Robert McEllrath opted to open the union up to further attacks by splitting from the AFL-CIO. In arguing for this suicidal move, McEllrath wrote that “the ILWU sees the honoring of picket lines as a fundamental principle that can’t be compromised.” In fact, ILWU bureaucrats have ordered their members to cross picket lines set up by the overwhelmingly immigrant and unorganized port truckers at both the L.A./Long Beach and Oakland ports.

Nor is the ILWU bureaucracy any stranger to the dirty game of pitting union against union in a scramble to defend its own shrinking turf. It was the sainted Harry Bridges who first gave the companies free rein to automate on terms favorable to the bosses, giving up thousands of jobs in exchange for guaranteed income for the remaining longshoremen. With another round of automation looming, Bridges’ heirs are banking the union’s future on claiming exclusive ILWU jurisdiction over waterfront maintenance and repair jobs.

This was reflected in the new contract language giving ILWU mechanics the right to inspect and repair chassis leaving

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AP (top); Almeida/NY Times
Top: Containers piled up at Los Angeles port in January as shipping bosses engaged in semi-lockout. Above: ILWU Local 13 hiring hall in L.A.

has been increasingly subverted since the 1960-61 Mechanization and Modernization Agreement negotiated by the ILWU’s historic leader, Harry Bridges. In addition, the coastwide unity of the ILWU has been undermined by unequal manning scales at different ports, creating resentment and tensions between ILWU locals as well as opening the door for the shipping bosses to play port against port.

ping bosses both attend a meeting, within 24 hours, of the joint PMA-ILWU port labor relations committee. In short, this agreement sets up longshore workers in container shipping, where the union’s power is concentrated, to scab on ILWU locals and affiliates that have far less leverage. A letter from the San Francisco regional director of the Inland Boatmen’s Union of the Pacific (IBU) addressed the