

Greece: For Workers Struggle Against EU Starvation Diktat



Supporters of PAME, a trade-union formation affiliated with the Greek Communist Party, protest against new austerity measures in Athens, July 22. Inset: Greek prime minister Tsipras with German chancellor Merkel and French president Hollande at Brussels summit, July 12.

AFP; EPA (inset)



Greek voters decisively rejected the bloodsucking “bailout” of the country pushed by the imperialists of the European Union (EU) and the U.S.-dominated International Monetary Fund (IMF) in a referendum on July 5. Just one week later, the Syriza-led capitalist government trampled on the referendum results and sold out to the imperialists. In exchange for the prospect of 86 billion euros (\$96 billion) in new loans, Syriza prime minister Alex Tsipras agreed to punishing austerity measures that are even harsher than those rejected in the referendum.

While final agreement on the bailout has not yet been reached, the Greek government has hiked the regressive VAT (sales taxes) and has pledged to slash pensions and rip up union contracts. Trampling on the remnants of Greece’s national sovereignty, the EU is demanding reorganization of the judiciary and government administration. Public assets, including utilities, airports and real estate, are to be placed in a trust fund administered by Greece’s imperialist creditors, with the aim of selling them off to raise 50 billion euros to be mainly used to pay off debts and recapitalize the banks.

Since 2010, the EU and the IMF have imposed draconian austerity measures on Greece in exchange for a series of “rescue packages.” Those “rescued” have not been the Greek people, but Greek and international banks: 90 percent of the bailout money has gone to debt repayment. The EU is an unstable consortium of capitalist countries that works to increase profits by squeezing the workers throughout Europe, while its dominant members—Germany and, to a lesser extent, France and Brit-

Down With the EU! No to Syriza Sellout!

ain—use it to further subordinate the weaker, dependent European countries.

Greece is in a profound economic and political crisis triggered by the 2007-08 global financial meltdown, and Greek working people are being bled white to pay for it. Today, over half of Greek youth are unemployed; 300,000 people have no access to electricity; and an estimated 800,000 have been cut off from medical care due to poverty or lack of insurance. What industry did exist in this country of 11 million people has been decimated by the German-dominated EU “single market.” Factories across the country stand empty.

The fascists of Golden Dawn and other

right-wing forces will seek to take advantage of Syriza’s sellout and posture as the populist “saviors” of the nation from the EU. If the ruined petty bourgeoisie and masses of unemployed do not see the working class leading a fight to combat crushing joblessness and poverty, they will be increasingly attracted to the “radical” solutions offered by the fascists. Golden Dawn is known to be supported by large numbers of cops and has historic ties to the military, including the junta that seized power in 1967 and ruled Greece until 1974. Today, two retired army generals are among its Members of the European Parliament. The fascists are a deadly threat to immigrants, gay people

and all working-class organizations. Urgently needed are mass, united-front mobilizations centered on the power of the organized proletariat to stop the fascists.

Faced with the ever-worsening economic crisis and the growing menace of fascism, it is vital to unite the toiling masses against the attacks of the imperialists, the Greek bourgeoisie and the Syriza government. To this end, our comrades of the Trotskyist

Group of Greece initiated a call on July 17 to build workers action committees to fight for the burning needs of working people and their allies (see “ENOUGH!” page 10). It urges Greek workers and the oppressed to repudiate Syriza’s sellout agreement and the Greek debt as well as to repudiate the EU and the euro currency. Our perspective is premised on the need to imbue the proletariat with the understanding of its own class interests and potential social power. As the TGG-initiated call states, building workers action committees would be a step toward “a government which will act in the interests of the working people and be subordinated to

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Young Spartacus

Before It Became All About Marriage...

How New Left Gay Liberationists Were Won to Trotskyism

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Irish Taaffeites Back Call for Cop “Union”

The following article is reprinted from *Workers Hammer* No. 231 (Summer 2015), newspaper of the Spartacist League/Britain, section of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist).

On 30 April, a vote took place in Dail Eireann (the Irish parliament) on the “Industrial Relations (Members of An Garda Siochana and the Defence Forces) Bill 2015.” The bill was proposed by Labour Party TD (member of parliament) Michael McNamara. It aimed to allow the Garda (Irish police) to join the trade-union

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movement—something which is effectively prohibited by law—and to grant them the “right to strike.” In the upshot, the McNamara proposal was defeated in parliament by a combination of the two governmental parties—the bourgeois Fine Gael and the social-democratic Labour Party—with the main bourgeois opposition party Fianna Fail.

The McNamara bill did receive the support of 24 deputies—an odd mix of some that are regularly on the receiving end of cop violence and those that would welcome moves towards a police state. The bloc was composed of an assortment of self-styled leftists (including former supporters of the now defunct United Left Alliance), the [Irish nationalist] Republicans of Sinn Fein and a coterie of right-wing elements. The latter included a new

party, Renua Ireland, an anti-abortion split from Fine Gael. Joining them all in support of the cops was the TD Paul Murphy of the Socialist Party, Irish affiliate of the Committee for a Workers International (CWI) [whose U.S. section is Socialist Alternative].



Demotix

“Workers in uniform” at work: Irish cops (Garda) brutalizing activists at “people’s protest” outside parliament in Dublin, September 2014.

The cops in Ireland are generally despised and resented by the working class. For class-conscious workers it is a simple fact of life under capitalism that the police are their enemies. As far back as 1913, when the working class was confronted with murderous cop violence

during the Dublin Lockout, revolutionary syndicalist workers’ leader James Connolly called for an armed workers militia. The workers of Dublin, both men and women, responded and the Irish Citizens Army was founded to defend the working class against attacks by the police.

cops are not part of the workers movement but its irreconcilable enemy. The police force, prisons and courts constitute the core of the capitalist state, the bosses’ apparatus of repression which exists to ensure that the capitalists can go about their business in relative peace, reaping enormous profits off the backs of the working class. One of the tasks of the International Communist League as Marxist revolutionaries is to instil into the working class the understanding that the capitalist state is not some neutral arbiter between the interests of the different classes but exists to enforce the will of the bosses. The job of the cops includes breaking strikes and terrorising the oppressed. Our call is: Cops and prison guards out of the unions! The same applies to security guards, who are private cops acting as auxiliaries to the bosses and their state.

Police “Strikes”: Threat to Workers/Minorities

Within the Garda ranks there exists an ominous organisation—the Garda Representative Association (GRA)—which seeks the very legal changes that the McNamara bill and the Socialist Party support. The GRA has been campaigning for years for the right to strike. We warn that any move for police “unionisation” or the “right to strike” is not a development in the direction of trade-union consciousness. Quite the opposite. Such moves express the bonapartist appetites of the police to break free from the fetters of bourgeois democracy and to act as judge, jury and executioner, unhindered by the courts or by parliament and its laws.

While the forms of bourgeois democracy—free elections to a sovereign parliament, etc.—serve to camouflage the reality that capitalist rule is based on armed force, the ability of the cops to operate without the constraints of formal democracy is clearly a heightened danger to all the oppressed. In a country where most cops do not carry guns, the GRA’s current campaigns provide a flavour of what a strike by the Garda would demand. Not only do they want more cops and higher salaries, they are running a campaign to have the Uzi submachine gun restored to the armed response units. They have welcomed the provision of pepper spray to the rank and file, but feel it doesn’t go far enough and call for all cops to be armed with Taser stun guns. Also, they want better armour protection for their members and the issuance of leg restraints!

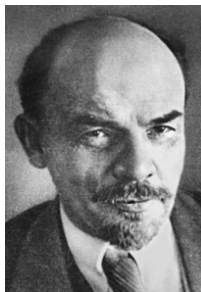
A successful police strike, whether for more pay, for weaponry or for more autonomous powers, can only mean enhancing the confidence and the ability of the cops to carry out their task of repression. What do Paul Murphy and his fellow “socialists” think a stronger, better-organised police force would be used for? In Ireland the Garda regularly carry out arrests, harassment and detention of dissident Republicans, as well as brutal violence against the homeless and evictions of tenants from their homes. In 2013 the cops were

In Memory of Leon Trotsky

Seventy-five years ago, on 20 August 1940, Leon Trotsky was killed by a Stalinist agent in Mexico. Co-leader with V.I. Lenin of the 1917 Russian Revolution, Trotsky was an intransigent fighter against the Stalinist bureaucracy’s betrayal of that revolution, founding the Fourth International in 1938. Today, we in the ICL fight to reforge the Fourth International, destroyed by liquidationist forces in 1951-53, as the indispensable prerequisite for the victory of world



TROTSKY



LENIN

socialism. We print below excerpts from a statement by the National Committee of the then-Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party on Trotsky’s assassination.

Leon Trotsky, organizer of the Russian Revolution and its true representative, has finally been done to death by Stalin, the betrayer of the Revolution and the mass murderer of the whole heroic generation that made it....

But the great fruit of Trotsky’s more than forty years of dauntless work and struggle remains imperishable. For Trotsky, who stands on a historical eminence by the side of Marx and Lenin, worked like them not for a day, but for eternity. The richest products of his genius are preserved in his writings. They constitute both a faultless analysis of the decay of capitalism and a clear program of struggle for the socialist future of humanity.

Armed with these weapons the oppressed of all the world will arise out of the bloody welter of the present society and fight their way to freedom. They have been deprived of the physical presence of Trotsky. But no power on earth can destroy the mighty inheritance he has left behind—the gift of his incomparable genius to the cause of humanity....

Comrade Trotsky was not only the teacher of the vanguard of the proletariat. He was also its organizer. He was the architect of the Fourth International, the new international association of revolutionary workers. It is arising on firm foundations in all countries of the world. The Fourth International will be the greatest monument to the memory of Trotsky. It will be the instrument for the final realization of the aim to which he devoted his entire life—the liberation of all humanity from slavery, exploitation and war.

—“Fight Now as Never Before, Comrades!” *Socialist Appeal*, 24 August 1940

WORKERS VANGUARD 4

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Bob Severn; Socialist Party (inset)

Taaffeite Socialist Party echoes prison officers’ “union” in demanding “No Prison Closures” at 2013 protest outside London Parliament.



WORKERS VANGUARD

Reformist Left Plays in Bernie's Sandbox

Oscar Wilde's description of British upper-class fox hunting—"the unspeakable in pursuit of the inedible"—is an apt summation of the spectacle of reformist "socialists" hotly debating whether or not to support Bernie Sanders' campaign for president. Socialist Alternative (SAlt) kicked off that debate more than a year ago. Flush with excitement over the 2013 election of its supporter Kshama Sawant to Seattle's city council, SAlt announced: "There has not been a more propitious time in modern American history to begin to build a pro-working class political force" (socialistalternative.org, 16 April 2014). SAlt then began to churn out articles pleading with Sanders to make a run for president as an independent rather than as a Democrat. Finding this offer one he could easily refuse, Sanders announced his run for the Democratic Party nomination as well as his intention to support whichever candidate the Democrats nominate, presumably Hillary Clinton.

Thus rebuffed, SAlt rallied with Pepe Le Pew-like doggedness to Plan B: its members will work in the Sanders primary campaign while not advocating a vote to him (as a Democrat) in order to pressure him to run in the general election as an independent. Belaboring the obvious, SAlt acknowledged that Sanders' campaign could "be used as a convenient 'left flank' by Clinton to draw in support from union members and activists who are fed up with corporate politics" (socialistalternative.org, 9 May). Wringing its hands, SAlt opines: "It would be tragic if Sanders' campaign ends up playing this role," as if it could be anything other than a vehicle to rope the disaffected back into the Democratic Party fold. Indeed, despite his rare and completely nominal claims to being an "independent socialist," for the past 25 years Sanders has been a member of the Democratic Party congressional caucuses.

In this capacity, the Vermont Senator's record of service to U.S. imperialism has been nearly impeccable. In the 1990s, he supported the NATO war against Serbia instigated by Democratic Party president Bill Clinton as well as the UN starvation sanctions that killed more than 1.5 million Iraqis. Over the years, he has generally backed every U.S. military intervention abroad, including in Afghanistan and Iraq. In 2001, Sanders voted in favor of the "Authorization for the Use of Military Force," which launched U.S. imperialism's war and occupation of Afghanistan and later Iraq. More recently, he backed a Senate resolution supporting the 2014 Israeli massacre of Palestinians in Gaza.

On the home front, Sanders enlisted

involved in a spate of state-sponsored kidnappings of Roma (Gypsy) children. Most recently the Irish state has been targeting the anti-water charges protests. Across Ireland there have been mass protests against the introduction of a regressive charge on domestic water. This tax, borne largely by the poor and by the working class, was dictated by the International Monetary Fund and the EU, and has been implemented by the utterly servile Irish government. In order to get the EU diktat through, the Irish state has resorted to using police violence, the courts and the prison system. Many of the protests have been at the community level and have been met with brutal cop assaults. A number of protesters have been



in the "war against crime" (read: black people), supporting Clinton's 1994 "Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act," which vastly expanded the crimes punishable by death at the hands of the federal government, poured 100,000 more cops onto the streets to patrol the inner cities and provided billions more in funding for prisons. It is small wonder that Sanders' response to the explosion of outrage in black Baltimore against racist cop terror was to comment: "Being a cop is a hard job."

With such a background, Sanders has even elicited some criticism from the inveterate opportunists of the International Socialist Organization (ISO), who are engaged in a debate with SAlt over the probity of the latter's tactics in supporting the candidate. Arguing that "his record should lead socialists to question" Sanders' purported "independence" is none other than ISO leader Todd Chretien, himself an experienced participant in bourgeois electoralism. In 2006, Chretien ran for the small-time capitalist Green Party's nomination for the U.S. Senate in Califor-

nia. For years, the Green Party has served as a stopover for disgruntled liberals on the road back to the Democratic Party.

All the ISO's current hypocritical lectures on "independence" are designed to mask their own capitulation to the Democrats mediated through the likes of the Greens. Moreover, news of the large crowds Sanders has attracted with his verbiage about "political revolution against the billionaires" exerts the kind of pull that the ISO cannot resist: numbers. Chretien promises that the ISO will not be "stuck on the sidelines": "Not at all. The Sanders' campaign gives us an opportunity to debate socialist politics. If Sanders wants to bring movement and union activists into the Democratic Party through its left entrance, we should try to get them back out that door and into the streets. We can engage on political issues with People for Bernie groups and encourage them to take part in activism outside the electoral arena." —socialistworker.org, 20 May

In short, the ISO proposes to redirect the energies of campaigners for "Bernie" to putatively more promising tasks—like maybe re-hydrating the desiccated remains of the Occupy movement or some other vehicle designed to pressure the capitalist Democratic Party to "serve the people."

To this end, the ISO trots out Howie Hawkins, a leader of the Green Party who won nearly 5 percent of the vote in his 2014 New York gubernatorial campaign against Democrat Andrew Cuomo. In an article titled "Bernie Sanders Is No Eugene Debs" (socialistworker.org, 26 May), Hawkins argues, "Too many self-proclaimed socialists in the U.S. have abandoned the socialist principle of independent political action." He should know! From the Peace & Freedom Party in the late 1960s to the Greens today, Hawkins is a veteran of capitalist "third parties" whose purpose is to channel social discontent into the ballot box. After some grandiose misuse of longtime Socialist Party leader Debs and also of Karl Marx, Hawkins gets down to business: "From an independent socialist point of view, all the money and time going into Sanders' handoff to Clinton is time and money that could be going into getting Jill Stein's Green Party candidacy on every ballot in the country."

The independence of the working class from all the parties—the Greens included—that represent the interests of

the capitalist exploiters is the elementary precondition for struggle against this system of wage slavery. It was well over 150 years ago, following the failed bourgeois revolutions of 1848, that Marx and Engels grasped that any support to or mixing of banners with the parties of the bourgeoisie or petty bourgeoisie was anathema to the workers' fight. Against calls for support to the German Democratic Party of the time, Marx argued in his 1850 "Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League":

"It is our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent until all the more or less propertied classes have been driven from their ruling positions, until the proletariat has conquered state power and until the association of the proletarians has progressed sufficiently far—not only in one country but in all the leading countries of the world—that competition between the proletarians of these countries ceases and at least the decisive forces of production are concentrated in the hands of the workers. Our concern cannot simply be to modify private property, but to abolish it, not to hush up class antagonisms but to abolish classes, not to improve the existing society but to found a new one."

In Defense of Debs

The reformist riders in the third-party clown car at the Democratic Party rodeo invoke the heritage of Eugene V. Debs. Such fondness is not for the Debs who campaigned for the overthrow of the capitalist order by the revolutionary proletariat but rather for the early Socialist Party, which included both fighters for workers revolution and outright racists and apologists for the American imperialist order. SAlt positively salivates: "For all the faults of the Socialist Party in the first few decades of the 20th Century, it would be an excellent development if we had today a similar 'socialist' organization of tens of thousands of people with dozens of elected officials" (socialistalternative.org, 7 July).

James P. Cannon, a founding leader of the American Communist movement and later of American Trotskyism, was part of the left wing of the Socialist Party that exited that organization under the impact of the 1917 Russian Revolution. In his article "The Debs Centennial" (*Fourth International*, Vol. 17, No. 1, Winter 1956), Cannon reviled those who "have discovered new virtues in the old Socialist Party, which polled so many votes in the time of Debs" for doing "an injustice to the memory of Debs." He concluded: "The triumph of the cause he served so magnificently will require a different political instrument—a different kind of party—than the one he supported. The model for that is the party of Lenin."

While the reformists pitch their respective tents in the camp of the parties of the capitalist class enemy, we in the SL struggle for a revolutionary workers party like Lenin's and Trotsky's Bolsheviks that aims for nothing other and nothing less than the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of workers rule. Such a perspective is dismissed as at best a hopeless utopia by SAlt and the ISO, who preach that one must reach people "where they are at." But the Bolshevik Revolution actually happened. And there were a good number of subsequent proletarian uprisings that failed due to both the lack of a revolutionary party to lead the workers to victory and the treachery of self-proclaimed "socialists" who defended the capitalist order.

The course charted by the ISO and SAlt—a progression of baby steps of reform through building "movements" that will pressure the capitalist state into enacting a decent social order—has never happened anywhere. Not in the 19th century, not in the 20th, nor will it ever. But as the current embodiment of social-democratic opposition to working-class struggle and socialist revolution, the ISO and SAlt have a bridge or two they are trying to sell in the current round of bourgeois elections in America. ■

NOTICE

Workers Vanguard skips alternate issues in June, July and August. Our next issue will be dated September 4.

Young Spartacus

Before It Became All About Marriage... How New Left Gay Liberationists Were Won to Trotskyism

On June 26, young comrades from the International Communist League, gathered in New York City for a “Youth Work-In,” heard a presentation on the history of the Red Flag Union (RFU, formerly Lavender & Red Union).

The class, given by our comrade Steve B., drew on his history as an RFU member. He described how the RFU and Spartacist League (SL) fused their organizations and political futures in the late 1970s. The Lavender & Red Union (L&RU) developed out of the New Leftist gay liberation milieu and had as its aim socialist revolution, understanding the need to build a vanguard party that would fight in the interests of all of the oppressed. Simultaneously, it shared the gay milieu’s sectoralism—the belief that each oppressed sector of society must fight separately for its own liberation. His talk emphasized how, in the midst of the rapid and tumultuous political developments of the New Left, the RFU was able to develop a deeper understanding of revolutionary politics and be won to Trotskyism, eventually fusing with the Spartacist League in August of 1977.

All of this took place in a period of American radical politics very different from the narrow terrain of the gay rights milieu today, which has embraced the bourgeoisie’s “family values” campaign. Over the last two decades, the struggle for gay equality has largely been over legal marriage and the right to serve in the U.S. imperialist military, focusing on “legitimate” acceptance into particularly reactionary institutions. A snapshot of the NYC Gay Pride Parade this year gives a telling picture of the state of gay activism. Coming on the heels of the U.S. Supreme Court decision allowing same-sex marriage nationwide, the 2015 Pride march was sponsored by Wal-Mart among over 50 other corporations. It was kicked off with a gay marriage ceremony officiated by union-busting Democratic governor Cuomo—a far cry from the historic 1969 Stonewall rebellion against commonplace police repression and anti-gay violence. Steve’s talk pointed out that even in the 1970s, a wing of the gay liberation movement was turning toward the Democratic Party. Today, the absorption of the gay liberation movement into mainstream politics is by and large complete.

The SL has always stood for the right of gay, lesbian and transgender people to marry (and divorce!), as we support any gain in civil and democratic rights that the working class and oppressed can wrest from the capitalist state. We fight for a society in which people are not forced into the legal straitjacket of marriage to obtain the benefits, rights and privileges this capitalist society grants only to those who abide by the stricture of “one man on one woman, until death.” At the same time we also recognize that marriage is a conservatizing institution. Further, the right to marry does not shield LGBT people from continued bigotry and violence in this deeply homophobic society.

Gay oppression flows from the repressive institution of the heterosexual, monogamous family unit—the root of the oppression of women that arose along



WV Photo

with the establishment of the “rightful” inheritance of private property. Together with organized religion, the family is a key prop for the ideological regimentation of capitalist society, instilling bourgeois morality and sexual “norms” as well as obedience to authority. Any “deviations” that threaten the maintenance of this crucial institution are considered “sinful”—from same-sex relationships to abortion, to intergenerational sex. Only workers revolution can lay the basis for the replacement of the family through socializing childcare and housework, and thus allowing women full participation in all areas of social and political life. Replacing the family will establish the conditions for the final withering away of anti-gay prejudice and reaction.

The fight against gay oppression is inseparable from the struggle for democratic rights for all of the oppressed. The creation of a genuinely free and equal society, sexually and otherwise, requires the destruction of capitalist class rule and the creation of a communist world. We seek to build a revolutionary vanguard party to lead the working class in a fight for socialist revolution, the seizure of state power on behalf of all the exploited and oppressed. We print Steve’s presentation below, edited for publication.

* * *

In August 1977, at a Benedictine monastery in Montecito, California, with sweeping views of the Pacific Ocean, the Spartacist League and Red Flag Union fused, following over a year of intense study, debate and joint work. It was the waning days of the New Left, and the SL’s insistence on winning left-moving elements on a programmatic basis had paid off once more. At the fusion conference, leading Spartacist League comrade George Foster made the simple and powerful statement that this was a con-

Red Flag Union conference in Los Angeles, June 1977, featured debate between SL and pseudo-Trotskyists. Two months later, SL and RFU fused. Below: Selection of literature from the period.



firmation of Lenin’s understanding of the vanguard party as the tribune for all the oppressed.

The RFU’s organizational predecessor, the Lavender and Red Union, had been founded in March 1974 as a “gay liberation-communist” group. The L&RU proclaimed three purposes. First, to support gay liberation struggles from a communist perspective through study groups, film and theater presentations, forums, maintaining a bookstore and conducting work in the gay community. Second, to work to reverse counter-revolutionary trends in the gay community. Third, to refute and struggle against the anti-gay positions taken by many self-described revolutionaries, by providing a Marxist approach to the oppression of gay people. It was faithful to that mission, battling exclusions from Maoist and Third World nationalist events and launching two major campaigns in the gay community in Los Angeles: a boycott of the popular Studio One bar in West Hollywood for its racist and sexist door policy and leading a strike at the gay community and service center in Hollywood.

The L&RU put out 21 issues of its paper, *Come Out Fighting*, over a two-year period, with a subscriber base of over 200. It maintained correspondence with gay leftists in the U.S. and abroad as well as with a number of left groups. There was a dues structure, an office and bookstore and production of leaflets. There were organized demonstrations and picket lines, class series and theoretical tracts (if largely focused on sexual oppression). There was a very healthy internal study regimen which served us well—and even without a full program and with a very muddled world view, the L&RU practiced its own form of democratic centralism. This was one point in terms of party and program that became important acquired knowledge: that disciplined political functioning proceeds

from essential programmatic unity.

In a way, the early L&RU was acting like a party formation without the goods. Yet in its three-year existence, it established something of a reputation. A few years ago, a graduate student from Washington University in St. Louis contacted the Prometheus Research Library about the group. I sat down with him for an afternoon. He was doing a dissertation about gay liberation and the left, and told me that all his research kept leading him back to the L&RU as the far left pole of gay liberation.

The fusion with the Spartacist League was a historically unique event, when you look at what was then called the gay liberation movement. The Mattachine Society, formed in Los Angeles in 1950, was largely founded by members and ex-members of the Communist Party, like Harry Hay. Indeed, it could be said that the founding cadre of the modern gay liberation movement was littered with former leftists. I can’t tell you how many people I had known in gay liberation who had honed their organizational skills in left groups, the antiwar movement, or women’s and civil rights movements. So the L&RU was very distinct: an organized gay group with a trajectory back to a communist organization; seemingly all of the traffic had been in the opposite direction. One of the characteristics that set us apart as revealed in early documents produced by the L&RU was a recognition that the ultimate goal was a socialist revolution and that building a vanguard party to lead the working class to power was a necessity.

New Left Potpourri

As the RFU wrote on the eve of our fusion with the SL: “We did not know we were founded on a political contradiction.... We attempted to reconcile with a hyphen two fundamentally different polit-

ical perspectives: the sectoralist view of the gay liberation milieu and what we imagined to be the communist approach.” It took some time to cast away the baggage of gay sectoralism. In looking back, I found it useful to check out Bruce M.’s talk from last year about the Communist Working Collective fusion which preceded our fusion by six years (see “From Maoism to Trotskyism: Recollections of a Participant,” *WV* No. 1038, 24 January 2014). Maoism, which had been hegemonic in the New Left of the late ’60s, was fractured and reeling in the early ’70s due to China’s alliance with U.S. imperialism under Nixon.

I remember the proliferation of Maoist study groups and collectives around the U.S. Two members of the RFU had been around the Potomac Socialist Organization in D.C. I had some contact with them and the Philadelphia Workers Organizing Committee during the summer of 1976 while I was working on a gay rights project organized by the National Lawyers Guild in D.C. Both groups had gay members and were grappling with the reactionary Maoist position, which saw homosexuality as an illness caused by capitalism. I had tried to read Mao that summer, but it inevitably resulted in a very nice nap. The best description I found of this period was in *Women and Revolution* (“On ‘Gay Liberation’: A Marxist Analysis,” *W&R* No. 13, Winter 1976-1977) so I will quote from that:

“It is precisely the rejection of Marxist materialism which characterized and ultimately destroyed the New Left. Abandoning this foundation, it floundered and splintered into a pack of mutually hostile, self-delimited ‘primary oppression’ groups. The belief that only the oppressed can understand, and therefore combat, their own oppression led to the creation of exclusionist tendencies—first along racial lines and then along sexual lines, and ultimately, in an absurdly logical extension, to exclusively lesbian organizations, all-male gay groups, Jewish feminists, Jewish lesbian feminists, fat feminists, etc.”

These groups took as their mantra: the personal is political. They reflected the program of New Left lifestyleism—a belief that a sum total of individual lifestyle choices could effectively transform society. Gay lifestyleism, in particular, was the belief that simply by enough individuals being out of the closet, gay oppression could be combated and even done away with.

In preparing for this talk I saw an issue of the L&RU’s paper with an apologetic article we wrote addressing a protest by the feminist group the Fat Underground. They complained that we had used a cartoon with a rather corpulent cigar-smoking man representing capitalism. As a comrade said to me: you can’t make this stuff up. The idea that every particular group of the oppressed must organize separately against its particular circumstances is what we call sectoralism. If you

pair that with a program that there must be organizations to lead each sector in separate struggle, you get polyvanguardism. These programs, by fragmenting potential allies in the struggle against capitalist misery into narrow interest groups, serve to disarm revolutionary struggle rather than quicken it. All the various forms of oppression brought on by capitalism are important to combat. But it is the job of a single revolutionary party, based on the power of the working class, to do so, and to do so in the course of organizing to overturn the entire capitalist system.

Sectoralism and polyvanguardism pervaded the entire left. The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) had separate printed programs for blacks, women, gays and Chicanos. The self-proclaimed socialist-feminists of the Freedom Socialist Party (FSP) were one of the big losers in our fusion with the SL. They were certain that their pandering to gay sectoralism would be irresistible to us and that we would choose it over the unitary proletarian program represented by the SL. At the time, they were angling to secure the United Secretariat franchise in the U.S. as part of Ernest Mandel’s International Majority Tendency (IMT). I believe this required them to break out of Seattle and display some component of organizational stability. Bagging the RFU would have made them a serious contender for the franchise. Their draft statement for an IMT regroupment provided for the right of any oppressed group to form separate caucuses inside their party to promote their rights and resist “any manifestation of racism, sexism or homophobia in the organization.” This caved to anti-communist prejudice, reflecting the New Left’s distrust of revolutionary organizations.

Running Up Against the Russian Question

My own political history had been in gay liberation on the East Coast. Well before I met the L&RU, I gave a speech of chemically pure sectoralism at the closing session of the Gay Academic Union conference here in NYC in November 1974 where I put forward what was then called the patchwork majority: all the oppressed combining together as some sort of megapressure group on the powers that be. There was even a button to wear, representing the various constituencies. It was a very big button. The working class was just another oppressed group. Although I never mentioned the Democratic Party in the speech, it was always the elephant (well, donkey) in the room, especially as the gay movement began to shed its more radical aspects.

I had grown weary of my illusions in the Democrats and wondered what answers Marxism had to offer. At the end of the day, the L&RU wasn’t a big leap for me when I met them in the fall of 1976. I was involved in a political fight at the Peoples



Kay Tobin Lahusen

Mattachine Society marches in New York City, 1970.

College of Law (PCL) in Los Angeles. PCL was a microcosm of the left. There were separate caucuses for blacks, Latinos, women, gays, Asian-Americans and workers. There was a very heavy Maoist influence—the Revolutionary Union/Revolutionary Communist Party had students and/or faculty there. At the end of every class, be it Torts, Crimes or Contracts, we had that very silly Maoist exercise of criticism, self-criticism. There was also a lingering Communist Party presence at PCL, as well as a good number of guilty liberal types and nationalists of every ilk.

A group called the Venceremos Brigade had been founded by some members of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in 1969. They would organize hundreds of youth to go to Cuba to help with the sugar cane harvest. Early on there was a crisis about openly gay people being on the trips. We had a gay caucus at PCL with two members who had been on the brigade and surreptitiously had met some Cuban gays at midnight in a cane field (or so the legend goes). This ignited a huge controversy in the Venceremos Brigade and in 1972 they banned openly gay people from the brigades.

In the fall of 1976 there was a proposal before the governing council of PCL to provide space at no cost for a Venceremos Brigade fundraiser at the school. We had a showdown at a governing council meeting that ran into the wee hours of the morning. The gay caucus had asked the L&RU to come and be one of our presenters in the debate. In the debate, we supported the Cuban Revolution, but also made clear the anti-gay attitude of the Castro government and its reflection in the Stalinist and Maoist left in the U.S. And so while we wanted to allow the Brigade to be at our school, we did not want to give them a political endorsement. What was important for me was that in the coming months (and timing is very important in politics), all of us were introduced to the SL’s position on the deformed and degenerated workers states. Unlike most gay leftists who had recoiled from Cuba’s persecution of gays and abandoned or become indifferent to the defense of Cuba, some of us were able to re-evaluate the political nature of the Castro regime. We decided that we could defend Cuba against U.S. imperialism and internal counterrevolution and still condemn the Stalinist perversion of Bolshevism. We adopted the Trotskyist program that you militarily defend a deformed workers state despite its deformations.

One more short story from PCL. We had in-house childcare that was staffed by students including one gay man, Ted, who was probably the most gentle, caring man I had ever met and was by far the kids’ favorite. A Revolutionary Union supporter raised a motion to ban gay men from doing that job. Disgusting. They saw homosexuality as a sickness spawned by

bourgeois decadence which would disappear after the revolution. Talk about an embracing of bourgeois prejudices and social institutions. Of course, it was wrapped in the usual fake-revolutionary rhetoric of the proletarian family as a “fighting unit for socialism.” I was ripe for a Trotskyist understanding of Stalinism.

Fighting for Political Clarity

The RFU numbered 16 with histories in various organizations: Progressive Labor’s Worker-Student Alliance in SDS; the DuBois Clubs (the Communist Party’s youth group in the ’60s); the Southern Christian Leadership Conference; CORE (the Congress of Racial Equality); Maoist study groups; the International Socialists; the Peace and Freedom Party; the social-democratic New American Movement (NAM); a hodgepodge of ex-CPers and others. Our comrade Clay probably had the broadest experience—he had been in France the year after the May 1968 general strike. He had also spent time in SDS and a study group of ex-SWPs.

We were actively courted by a number of fake Trotskyists and social-democratic types. I guess what made the L&RU different was our seriousness about building an organization that would make a revolution—while we were determined to illuminate the source of gay oppression and find a party that would champion our fight, we also wanted to be taken seriously and challenged. The various opportunists patronized us; the SL uniquely argued for programmatic clarity from start to finish.

The pace of the political differentiation within our group quickened when we had a factional fight on the Russian Question—that is to say, over the adoption of the historic Trotskyist position in defense of the degenerated and deformed workers states from imperialism, without giving an ounce of political support to their Stalinist misleaders. In many ways the anti-Soviets in the L&RU, who were to later fuse with the Revolutionary Socialist League (RSL), did us a great service. Fighting the right wing in your own organization tends to clarify things. Not surprisingly, the two factions were on opposite sides of discussions over every key issue of program and building a Leninist party. But it was the fight on the Russian Question that ultimately set the stage for our subsequent understanding of the importance of program, the vanguard party and the final shedding of gay lifestyleism and sectoralism.

The L&RU had been very fortunate to come across the SL in March 1976, intersecting a program that was steeped in the tradition of the Bolshevik Revolution. In those days, if you were serious about the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, studying the successful example of the Bolsheviks was a given. By the time I joined the L&RU in January 1977, the primary question I had to deal with was

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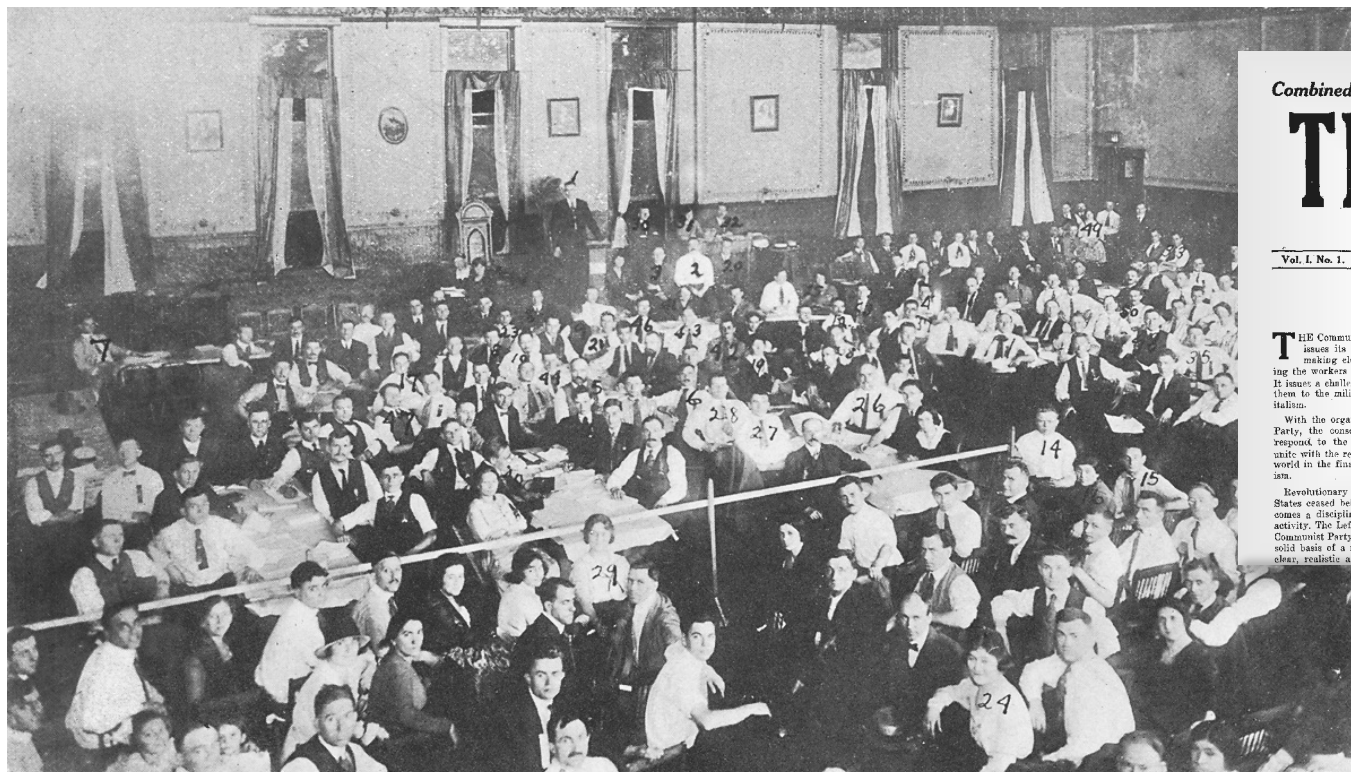


Sandy Lillydahl/UMass Amherst

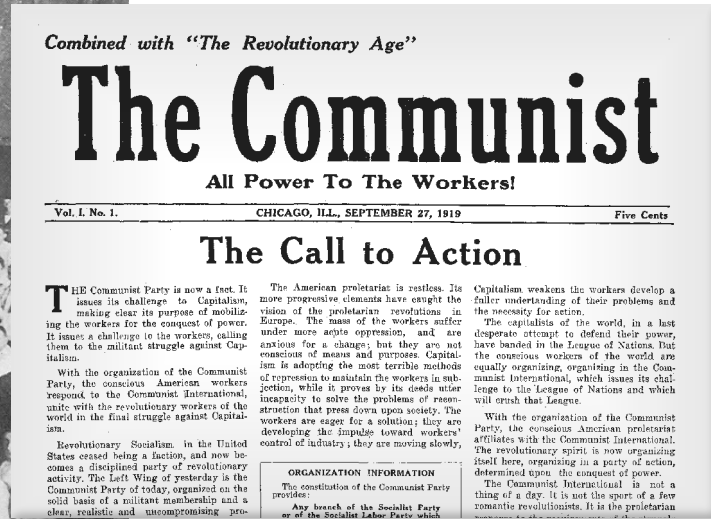
Venceremos Brigade, 1970: SDSers help harvest Cuban sugar crop as expression of solidarity with Cuban Revolution. Cuban Stalinists’ persecution of gays was subject of debate within New Left.

Book Launch

The Communist International and U.S. Communism, 1919-1929



Lusk Commission



Founding convention of the Communist Party of America (CPA), one of two Communist parties formed in U.S. in 1919. First issue of CPA's *The Communist*, 27 September 1919.

The following is the first part of a presentation, edited for publication, by Prometheus Research Library associate Jacob A. Zumoff, who discussed his book *The Communist International and U.S. Communism, 1919-1929*. The talk was delivered at a May 9 book launch in Oakland sponsored by the PRL, a working archive of American and international Marxist history, documentation and related interests. We reviewed the book, an instructive read for everyone from committed socialists to those just beginning to explore revolutionary politics, in WV No. 1067 (1 May).

PART ONE

In November 1917, the Bolsheviks in Russia seized state power amid the devastation of the First World War, announcing that they were proceeding to build socialism. As the American Communist John Reed put it, the Bolshevik Revolution “shook the world” by making a workers state flesh and blood instead of just a goal. In Europe, in Asia and in the Americas, left-wing militants rallied to the Revolution and to the new Third, or Communist, International (the Comintern) that Lenin, Trotsky and other Bolshevik leaders founded in early 1919.

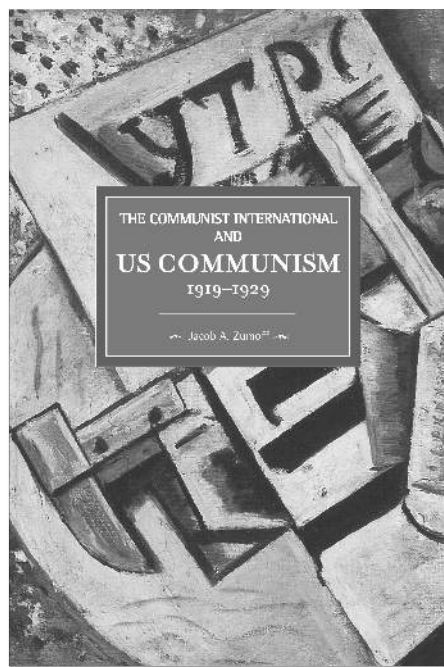
The Bolsheviks envisioned the Comintern as a genuinely revolutionary International able to create Communist parties from those socialist militants who rejected “social chauvinism” (that is, support to imperialist militarism using socialist rhetoric) as well as parliamentary reformism, both of which had caused the social-democratic Second International to collapse at the beginning of WWI. By the summer of 1919, the American Communist movement was born, its enthusiasm matched only by its divisions.

The subject of this talk—and my recent book—is how these early Communists, inspired by the first successful workers revolution in history, sought to forge a party in the U.S. capable of making a revolution in this country. In particular, I analyze what I call the “Americanization” of Communism: how Communists understood and applied the lessons of the international Communist movement to the U.S. Although historians of American Communism are divided on many issues, they share a broad agreement that this

process of Americanization was counterposed to what they often refer to as the “interference” of the Communist International. What I argue, on the other hand, is that in the early 1920s the Comintern helped the early Communists come to grips with American society. The Comintern reinforced the early Communist movement politically: for example, by stressing the importance of maintaining the independence of the working class and by emphasizing the importance of the

in the ranks of the Industrial Workers of the World, the IWW. For all of them, the Bolshevik Revolution resonated strongly. As Ruthenberg put it in 1922: “Without the Russian revolution there would have been no Communist movement in the United States.”

Unlike most of the Social Democratic parties in Europe, the official leadership of the U.S. Socialist Party did not openly support its “own” bourgeoisie in WWI, an interimperialist war in which workers had



fight against black oppression. By the end of the 1920s, however, reflecting the political degeneration of the Russian Revolution under Joseph Stalin, the Comintern's interventions became more negative.

There are several points that I want to make in this forum. First is the importance of the Russian Revolution and the Bolsheviks in the forging of a Communist Party (CP) in the U.S. Thousands of workers and intellectuals who saw themselves as fighting for socialism as they understood it rallied to the banner of the Bolsheviks. These included left-wing Socialists like John Reed, C.E. Ruthenberg and James P. Cannon, as well as many of the numerous semi-autonomous foreign-language federations that had been affiliated to the Socialist Party (SP). There were also many individual militants who had been

no side. On paper the SP opposed the war, and many of its leaders—of the left, the right and the center—were arrested for antiwar activities.

One of the key things to keep in mind about the American SP is that it was barely a party in the way that many of us would think of such. It was oftentimes more of a loose federation. For instance, most of the Socialist Party's major newspapers were not even owned by the party but were owned by different groups within the party, and each one often set its own political line. For the better part of a decade, there had been left-wing dissidents within the Socialist Party who were opposed to the gradual, reformist approach of the leadership. And after the Russian Revolution, these leftists looked to the Bolsheviks.

This leads to my second point: these early Communists had very little understanding of what Bolshevism was, what the difference was between, for example, left-wing émigré groups, militant labor unions and left-wing social democracy on the one hand, and a Leninist party on the other. These leftists supported the Bolsheviks because Lenin's party had made a revolution, but they did not understand *why* the Bolsheviks had been the only ones *capable* of making a revolution. And this situation was not unique to the United States. Much of the history of the Comintern under Lenin and Trotsky consisted of trying to teach their followers what Bolshevism consisted of, trying to impart the lessons of Leninism.

Previous Historians of American Communism

I want to talk about the historians of American Communism because my approach goes against most of what has been written by historians—what academics call the “historiography.” The best historian of early American Communism was Theodore Draper. In the 1930s and '40s, he had been a supporter of the Communist Party, but he broke with the CP at the start of World War II. Although Draper was an anti-Communist by the time he wrote his books, he was an excellent historian. His two books on the CP in the 1920s, *The Roots of American Communism* (1957) and *American Communism and Soviet Russia* (1960), are based on meticulous research, including both archival research and interviews with all the living Communist leaders willing to talk to him.

Draper's views are summarized in the conclusion of *American Communism and Soviet Russia*. He wrote, “Even at the price of virtually committing political suicide, American Communism would continue above all to serve the interests of Soviet Russia.” He went on to argue that the influence of the Comintern cut off the CP from “other forms of American radicalism such as the open, democratic, pre-World War I Socialist party, the farmer-labor movement, or the syndicalist movement, all of which were far more indigenous and independent than the American Communist party.”

In the 1970s and '80s, after many New Left militants had quit active politics and

gone to graduate school, a new generation of historians began to write about the CP. They mainly wrote about the 1930s, when the Communist Party was much larger, and they tended to emphasize what they saw as the “American” aspects of Communism. Nevertheless, they accepted the same basic framework as Draper. For them, the division between “American” and “foreign” in American Communism remained undisputed and they agreed that Soviet and Comintern influence was unquestionably negative. What the New Left historians tended to do was to invert Draper’s schema; they argued that what they saw as the “American” traditions were much more prominent in the CP than Draper had allowed.

What sets my book apart is my emphasis on the way that the International helped the American Communist Party grow roots in America. The Comintern was animated by proletarian internationalism and understood that only international workers revolutions, particularly in the advanced industrial countries, could safeguard the Russian Revolution and lay the basis for international communism.

I should note that I am not the first historian to touch on this theme. Michael Goldfield, particularly in his writings on the black question, and Bryan Palmer, particularly in his recent biography of James P. Cannon, have both written on various aspects of it. And, most importantly, in many ways my approach goes back to Cannon’s Trotskyist appreciation of the origins of American Communism—especially revealed in his correspondence with Draper, which was published in the early 1960s as *The First Ten Years of American Communism*. I also want to recommend a book of Cannon’s writings that we at the Prometheus Research Library edited and published in 1992, *James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism*.

The view expressed in my book runs *counter* to the perspective of much of the left. Thus, in the Summer 2014 issue of *International Socialist Review*, which is published by the International Socialist Organization (ISO), there is an article on the Comintern (“Zinovievism and the Degeneration of World Communism”) by Joel Geier, one of the ISO’s leaders, in which Geier sneers that “the American party was almost a ward of the Comintern.” More recently, another social democrat, Dan La Botz, complained in a review that my book doesn’t appreciate the domineering role of the Soviet Union in American Communism.

In *Lessons of October* (1924), Trotsky identified “the essential aspect” of Bolshevism as the “training, tempering, and organization of the proletarian vanguard as enables the latter to seize power, arms in hand” when presented with a revolutionary opportunity. Rather than have Communist parties mindlessly imitate the Bolsheviks, the early Comintern fought for them to assimilate the political lessons of the Bolsheviks and apply these to the conditions of each society. In a speech at the Third Comintern Congress in 1921, Lenin stressed that the Comintern’s “fundamen-



V.I. Lenin with other members of the presidium of the First Congress of the Communist International, March 1919.

tal revolutionary principles” were the same everywhere, but “must be adapted to the specific conditions in the various countries.” Only later, under Stalin (in the context of a fight in the American CP), did the Comintern argue that capitalist societies were the same throughout the world and that differences were at most superficial.

This all poses the question: if Draper was such a good historian, despite his ideological biases, why did I go through the trouble of re-tilling the ground he had cultivated so well? The answer is that a lot has changed since the 1950s and ’60s, in particular with the capitalist counterrevolution and the destruction of the Soviet Union in 1991-92. The counterrevolution was a disaster for the working class and the oppressed, most immediately in the former Soviet Union and the deformed workers states in Central and East Europe but also internationally.

More narrowly, the counterrevolution affected historians of American Communism in two broad ways. First, it led to the opening of archives in Moscow, including those of the Comintern. Draper’s ability to marshal archival resources still amazes me, but the Comintern files dwarf what he was able to assemble. Second, the counterrevolution led to a view among the bourgeoisie that capitalism was triumphant, and to a retrogression of political consciousness among the left and labor movement. Today, amid a global capitalist depression, the very idea that capitalism can be replaced with a social system based on collective ownership and production for use rather than for profit is seen as obsolete or even impossible by most intellectuals, workers and oppressed people.

Historians of American Communism, in their own way, reflected this widening of archival sources combined with the narrowing of political vision. Some anti-Communist historians seized upon the archives to “prove” once and for all that Communists were pure evil. More seriously, there are historians who got

their degrees largely after the counterrevolution in the Soviet Union and who imbibed the “death of communism” of the last two decades. They treat Communists as an interesting historical phenomenon, with only academic importance, like, for example, the Shakers. If the revisionists were New Left historians, this school of thought can be referred to as the “No Left” historians, because it is informed by the collapse of any sense of a socialist alternative to capitalism.

The Americanization of U.S. Communism

There are three aspects of the process of Americanization that I want to focus on. The first is the basic question of the need to form a unified, legal Communist Party; the second is the fight against black oppression; the third is the struggle for political independence of the working class.

The pre-Communist left wing in the U.S. was amorphous but had three main components, although oftentimes they overlapped. There were left-wing social-democrats like Ruthenberg; militant syndicalists who had been in or around the IWW, like Cannon, who had also been a member of the SP; and foreign-language groups in the Socialist Party. They were united in their opposition to the Socialist leadership, but not much else. Even before forming a Communist Party, they split over whether they should remain in the SP to fight to win over other dissident Socialists, or leave the party immediately. This was resolved in practice when the leadership of the Socialist Party expelled those remaining at its 1919 convention, but the Communists remained divided into two separate parties, each of which had fundamentally the same political program.

What followed was a years-long process of mitosis, where the different groups formed a variety of competing parties. In my research, I looked at Ruthenberg’s letters to his wife during this period. Ruthenberg was in the leadership of the Communist movement, and at one point he mused: “I am sick and tired of the whole business and only wish I could drop out without leaving people who are depending on me in the lurch.” He didn’t drop out, but many others did quit, probably tens of thousands. Along with the Red Scare repression of the immediate post-war period, this confusion was responsible for the swift decline in the ranks of left-wing socialists. In 1919, there were probably around 60,000 sympathizers of the left wing; five years later, there were about 17,000 Communists.

The Comintern leaders were no less frustrated. Max Bedacht, an American CP representative in Moscow, wrote to his comrades in 1921, complaining about “the little esteem that the general office has for the American business in general.” Eventually, the Comintern, along with American leaders like Ruthenberg and Cannon, were able to get American Communists into *one* party. In a literal sense, without the Comintern there never would have been a Communist Party in the U.S.

I want to make a point here about unity.

The type of unity that the Comintern advocated was *communist* unity: it was based on the fact that all the Communist groups shared the same political program, with secondary differences over tactics. The Comintern was clear that Communists needed to split from the centrists and reformists in the SP leadership, for example Morris Hillquit, who was specifically denounced in the Comintern’s Twenty-One Conditions for admittance. A Leninist party is formed through splits and fusions.

The eventual organizational unity did not mean that the early CP was a genuinely Bolshevik party. Forging a Bolshevik party in the United States meant more than uniting all the pro-Communist tendencies. It required a political break with the CP’s left social-democratic and syndicalist origins. The most immediate challenge was the more than a dozen foreign-language federations, each of which had its own newspapers, its own buildings, its own functionaries, etc. Ironically, these first pro-Bolshevik groups in the U.S. were, in their organization, non-Bolshevik. In many ways, they were closer to the anti-Bolshevik Bundists in Russia, who had insisted on the exclusive right to carry out work among Jewish workers in the tsarist empire—similar to what is today called “identity politics,” organizing solely on the basis of one’s own ethnic identity, not on political program.

I want to make clear that the foreign-language groups were not appendages to the party. If anything, the English-language party was an appendage to the foreign-language groups. There was a Yiddish-language publication years before there was a *Daily Worker*. And when there was a *Daily Worker*, the Yiddish publication still had a higher daily circulation.



1940s cartoon by William Gropper in the Yiddish-language Communist publication *Morgen Freiheit* titled: “Garment Center with Newspaper Boy Selling Morgen Freiheit.”

Then there were the Finns, who made up a huge chunk of the party.

While the dominance of the foreign-language federations kept the CP from Americanizing, the high number of foreign-language workers in the Communist ranks was actually a hallmark of a society like the U.S., which had been formed by waves of immigration. By the 1920s, huge sections of the working class, especially in major Northern cities, were first- or second-generation immigrants. Both the SP and the IWW had their own foreign-language groups. Communist parties in other countries with a largely immigrant-derived working class, such as Argentina and Canada, had similar issues and often had similar foreign-language groups.

Within the Socialist Party, these foreign-language federations essentially had free rein, reflecting the decentralized nature of American social-democracy. Many, but not all, foreign-language groups were on the left of the SP, and they contributed many of the early American Communists. But after affiliating to the CP, many continued to resist control by the American leadership—and when I say the American leadership I essentially mean the English-speaking leadership, many

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Some American delegates to Communist International’s Fourth Congress in 1922, including James P. Cannon (standing, top left).

Book Launch...

(continued from page 7)

of whom were first- or second-generation immigrants themselves—and wanted to have a monopoly on work among their own particular ethnic or linguistic group. More importantly, on a political level they tended to see themselves as the foreign franchise of the European movement, not part of a movement in the United States. The foreign-language groups did not understand, and in many cases did not want to understand, how the U.S. differed from Europe. They often acted as if they were in tsarist Russia right before the Revolution.

This perspective fed into a broader impatience, one shared by many early Communists in various places who felt that revolution was just around the corner. This is what Lenin polemicized against in his pamphlet “Left-Wing” Communism, an Infantile Disorder (1920). As one example, when public transportation workers in Brooklyn went on strike, the Communists issued a leaflet telling them to forget higher pay and instead fight for revolution. They weren’t appreciated; I think they were driven off the picket line.

The early Communists believed that the U.S. was entering a period of severe repression, and that Communists had to be illegal as a matter of principle. Now, to be fair, in 1919-21 this was not so hard to believe on a superficial level. Europe was exploding and there was a wave of militant strikes throughout North America.



Foreign-born radicals herded to New York’s Ellis Island for deportation during Red Scare, January 1920.

Sandra Bland...

(continued from page 12)

long run by black Democrats, “community control” and myriad other schemes to reform the police have proved to be the hoaxes that they are. The “rough ride” in a police van that broke Freddie Gray’s neck following his arrest by a gang of black and white cops is a chilling illustration.

Black Lives Matter also begs the federal Department of Justice to withhold funds from local police departments until discriminatory policing is ended. But as the saying goes, “The fish stinks from the head.” The federal government enforces the racist “war on drugs,” runs prisons and oversees the entire rotten system that the cops “serve and protect.” Attorney General Loretta Lynch might launch an investigation into Bland’s death because, in her words, “the black community is not handled with the same professionalism and courtesy” that other people get from the cops. How obscene! Black people are run roughshod over by a system that increasingly deems them an expendable population. And Lynch is its top cop. The role of the black Democrats is to channel the anger and frustration of the black masses back into prayer meetings and more schemes to “reform” the killers in uniform.

The aftermath of DuBose’s killing has



Striking steel workers in Chicago, September 1919. Strike leader William Z. Foster was later recruited to the Communist Party. Right: Foster addressing 40,000 stockyard workers after victorious 1918 strike for union recognition.

The U.S. bourgeoisie was scared enough to institute widespread repression, the Red Scare, in which militants were swept up, jailed and often deported. But the point is this was a temporary exception, not the rule. The U.S. was not an unstable monarchy or a fascist regime; it was a bourgeois-democratic republic where the ruling class preferred the “rule of law” to naked repression and terror.

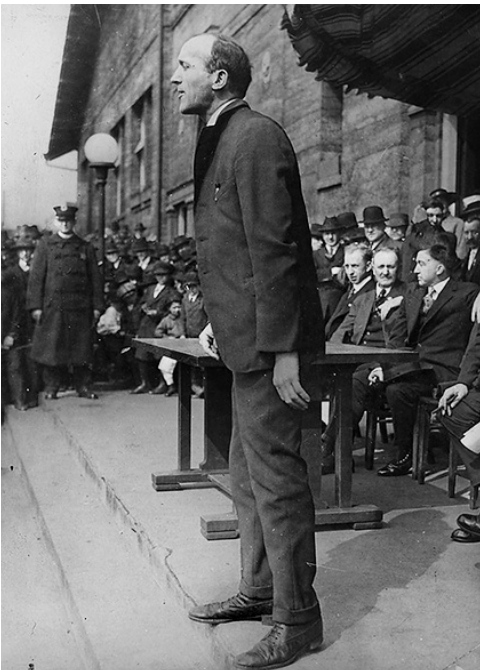
The “roaring twenties,” a period that is often associated with unprecedented affluence, posed particular problems for Communists. Rather than destroy the labor movement, such as Mussolini did in

Italy, the U.S. bourgeoisie weakened the working class through increased exploitation. This was assisted by the reactionary American Federation of Labor (AFL) trade-union bureaucracy, which preached “partnership” with capital instead of class struggle. Meanwhile, trade-union membership sank dramatically. Much like our own times, this reactionary period and a lack of social struggle threatened to sap the revolutionary juices from many Communists. Rather than deal with this reality, the foreign-language leaders and ultraleft Americans dwelled in a fantasyland of underground conspiracy and imminent revolution.

The Fight for a Legal Party

There were some Communist leaders, such as Cannon and Ruthenberg, who sensed that it was not necessary to be an illegal party. Being illegal hindered the party’s real work. Moreover, American workers rejected a party that either was indifferent to its right to organize legally or too ignorant to know that it had that right. As a former organizer for the IWW, Cannon understood something about state repression, but he also understood the need to fight it, not just accept it as inevitable.

In 1921, the Communists formed a legal party, called the Workers Party. But even then, they did not agree on the relationship between the illegal party and legal party—what the Communists referred to as “Number 1” and “Number 2.” A large section of the membership and leadership thought that only members of the illegal party were real Communists and that the people in the legal party were sellouts. Those who made a fetish out of illegality became known as the “geese,” perhaps because they cackled so much. Cannon and other Americanizers were called the “liquidators” because they wanted a legal party. This fight was not only a tactical



Daily World

issue: it was about understanding American reality and what was necessary to build a party here. The American Communists, if left to their own devices, would have been unable to resolve this fundamental political problem.

Both the geese and the liquidators sent representatives to Moscow for the Fourth Comintern Congress in 1922. Cannon later recalled that, when he was in Moscow, Trotsky was sympathetic and told Cannon and Bedacht (another liquidator) to present their argument on “one sheet of paper, no more.” That is probably an important political lesson in itself! After siding with Cannon and the liquidators, the Comintern leadership forcefully intervened into the American party. They made clear that a legal party was a necessity and that the illegal party should be liquidated.

This is only one example of Comintern fights against ultraleftism; there are others. The Comintern struggled to get American Communists to fight for Communist politics within the American Federation of Labor. The AFL bureaucracy, led by Samuel Gompers, was one of the most venal pro-capitalist union leaderships in the industrialized world. But the AFL organized the majority of unionized workers. In this case, the Comintern fought against not just foreign-language groups, but also many American sympathizers of the IWW (for example, John Reed). This fight paved the way to making the Communists a small, but real, factor in many trade unions. It also paved the way for recruiting William Z. Foster, perhaps the best-known militant labor leader in the U.S., who had led the 350,000-strong 1919 steel strike. At bottom, the question was how to forge a Bolshevik party under American conditions. And it took so-called foreigners to appreciate much of what made American society unique and how Communists should approach it. [TO BE CONTINUED]

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- Chicago.....Box 6441, Main PO, Chicago, IL 60680, (312) 563-0441
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- New YorkBox 3381, Church St. Sta., New York, NY 10008, (212) 267-1025
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New Spartacist Pamphlet

Newly available for purchase is our publication *Then and Now*, which explains how class-struggle leadership made a key difference in three citywide strikes in 1934. We reprint below the pamphlet's introduction describing its contents.

The "Then and Now" article in this pamphlet addresses the crucial political lessons of the 1934 strikes by Minneapolis truckers, maritime workers on the West Coast and Toledo auto parts workers. Waged amidst the all-sided destitution of the Great Depression, these strikes, like others that year, confronted the strikebreaking forces of the capitalist state. A key difference was that these strikes *won*. What made this outcome possible is that their leaders were, at the time, committed to a program of class struggle. Unlike other trade-union leaders of that day—and today—they did not buy into the notion that the workers had interests in common with the employers, their political parties or their state. Instead, these strikes were fought by mobilizing the mass strength and solidarity of the workers in opposition to the forces of the capitalist class enemy.

The review of Bryan Palmer's book *Revolutionary Teamsters* provides a more in-depth study of the Minneapolis truckers' strikes, which were led by the Trotskyists of the Communist League of America (CLA). Here they confronted the Farmer-Labor Party (FLP) governor of Minnesota, Floyd Olson, who commanded the allegiance of many workers with his often radical-sounding, friend-of-the-little-guy rhetoric. The FLP postured as a "third party" alternative to both the Democrats and Republicans, but it was no less a capitalist party.

This is effectively addressed in the 1930 article "The Minnesota F.L.P." by Vincent Dunne, who went on to become a central leader of the truckers' strikes. As Dunne makes clear, the two-class Farmer-Labor Party was based on the subordination of the workers' struggles to farmers and other petty-bourgeois forces "whose

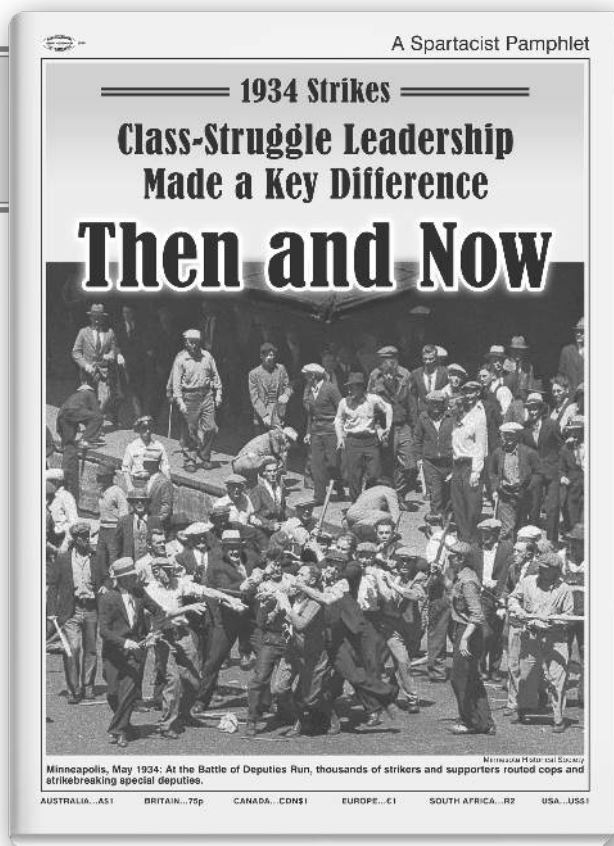
political outlook is bounded by the illusion that it is possible to achieve security under the capitalist order." After an on-again, off-again alliance with the Democratic Party, the FLP finally merged with the Democrats in 1944.

Dunne and other CLA leaders of the Minneapolis strikes had been armed for battle against farmer-labor populism by Russian revolutionary leader Leon Trotsky, who in the early 1920s had intervened to pull the young American communist movement back from giving political support to the capitalist "third party" candidacy of Robert La Follette, a maverick Republican Senator from Wisconsin. The excerpts from Trotsky's introduction to his book, *The First Five Years of the Communist International*, summarize his opposition to this opportunist course which, if pursued, would have politically liquidated the fledgling Communist party.

Today, what remains of the gains that were won through the momentous class battles of the past continues to be ravaged in a one-sided class war enabled by trade-union misleaders, who have long forsaken the very means through which the unions were founded. The working class, the poor, black people, immigrants and countless others at the bottom of this society have paid the price in busted unions, broken lives and all-sided misery.

To be sure, it is not easy for the workers to win in the face of the forces arrayed against them. Many strikes, even very militant ones, will lose. But as was demonstrated in the three 1934 strikes addressed in this pamphlet, when important working-class battles are won it can dramatically alter the situation. These victories inspired a huge labor upsurge later in the 1930s that built the mass industrial unions in this country.

Hard-fought strikes can provide an important school of battle for the workers in which they learn the power of their collective strength and organization and begin



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to understand the class nature not only of the capitalist system but of the government, laws and political parties that defend its rule. But while able to strike important blows against the conditions of the workers' exploitation, trade-union struggle on its own cannot end that exploitation. To win that war there must be a struggle for working-class power under the leadership of a revolutionary party that can arm the workers with the understanding and consciousness of their class interests in the fight to emancipate labor and all of the oppressed from the bondage of capitalist exploitation. ■

Pensions...

(continued from page 12)

pension and other cutbacks that challenge the very capacity of people there to survive. In the 1980s, the union officialdom in the U.S. and Britain set the stage for the anti-labor offensive, signaling their prostration to their respective capitalist rulers by abandoning the PATCO air traffic controllers strike here as that union was being destroyed by Ronald Reagan and by sabotaging the militant British miners strike. Subsequently, the scope and intensity of these assaults were further fueled by the explosion of bourgeois triumphalism in the aftermath of the 1991-92 counterrevolution in the Soviet Union, disarming workers in the face of capitalist reaction.

In this country, the first major assault on pensions in the post-World War II period occurred in the early 1960s, the heyday of American capitalism, when thousands of auto workers found themselves without pensions after Studebaker went belly up. A decade later, the federal government launched the Pension Benefit Guarantee Corporation (PBGC) with the aim of covering pensions in the private sector that vanished when a corporation went bankrupt. With the financial bubbles and subsequent recessions in recent decades leading up to the massive 2008 economic implosion, countless pension plans evaporated (and IRAs and 401(k)s tanked with the market). As a result, it is now projected that the PBGC will run out of funds to cover abandoned pensions in the next decade. Meanwhile, lawmakers only pretended to put money into state-provided pensions, so that there are now almost one trillion dollars in unfunded obligations to workers covered by these plans.

In fact, the mechanisms used to disappear the benefits that had been funded by workers, normally by forgoing wage increases in exchange for a better-funded retirement, were simply outright theft. While Wall Street and private employers dipped into pension funds to fuel speculative ventures, state and other government pensions, including Social Security, were

similarly looted to fund other projects by politicians who were loath to raise more tax revenues from a populace that from left to right correctly held them in low regard as predators solely devoted to feathering their own nests.

A special dishonorable mention must be given to the trade-union bureaucrats, who couple pious denunciations of the attacks on their members' wages and benefits with hand-in-glove collaboration with the bosses and government officials in the ongoing anti-labor assault. Thus, it is virtually a ritual that each newly negotiated union contract, normally combining peanut-sized raises with benefit cuts, is crammed down the throats of reluctant union members as the bureaucrats whine: "This is the best we can hope to get." In that spirit, Teamsters president James P. Hoffa hypocritically denounced the MPRA last month as "devastating for those least able to take such a hit to their living standards" (*Detroit News*, 15 July).

What Hoffa neglected to mention is that the union reps to the Central States Pension Fund, a combined employer/union board overseeing the pensions of about 275,000 working Teamsters, retirees and surviving spouses, had lobbied intensely *for* the MPRA bill because the Fund was running out of money. Or that seven years earlier in a sweetheart deal to expand union membership at United Parcel Service, the Teamsters tops had allowed the company to stop paying into that fund with predictable consequences for its liquidity. Recently, the same union bureaucracy began informing Teamsters members that pension cuts could be initiated as early as next year. Outraged union members are currently attempting to mobilize to beat back the pension-slashing attacks. The cutbacks should be scrapped. But it is not promising that a leading role in this effort is being played by Teamsters for a Democratic Union, an opposition grouping within the union notorious for both drafting and then helping implement the 1989 consent decree that led to government control over union elections and finances.

It must be remembered that the union benefits that are now being eaten away

piecemeal were made possible by the hard class battles of the 1930s (see the new Spartacist pamphlet *Then and Now*), battles that were for the most part led by reds imbued with the understanding that workers share no common interests with their bosses. It will require similar battles led by militants so inspired to fend off today's attacks as well as to replenish the ranks of the trade unions and regain the wages and benefits that make survival possible, not least retirement at full wages. As a start, the labor movement should demand that the federal government insure the full value of both public and private pension funds. Government-provided health care should be universally available at no cost at the point of delivery. In the absence of concerted class struggle, the ruling class will not provide these or any other necessities to the workers whose labor it exploits, much less retirees who add no value to capitalist production.

The unions remain the general organizations of the working class, which workers must defend when they are under attack. However, it must be recognized that the bureaucrats that head the unions today have not the stomach to engage in the battles necessary to advance workers' class interests. As consummate labor lieutenants of capital, they seek to demonstrate their value to bourgeois rule by

enforcing extortion from the working class, notably the gutting of wages and benefits. Recently, the labor tops have signaled their intent not to challenge low-wage standards by seeking to have their members excused from the latest minimum-wage increases.

Union officialdom, with its overwhelming fealty to the capitalist Democrats, has brought disaster on the American working class. It is imperative to replace these labor traitors with a leadership committed to the independence of the working class from all representatives of the class enemy. Leon Trotsky in *Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay* (1940) charted the way forward:

"Does this mean that in the epoch of imperialism independent trade unions are generally impossible? It would be fundamentally incorrect to pose the question this way. Impossible are the independent or semi-independent reformist trade unions. Wholly possible are revolutionary trade unions that not only are not stockholders of imperialist policy but that set as their task the direct overthrow of the rule of capitalism. In the epoch of imperialist decay the trade unions can be really independent only to the extent they are conscious of being, in addition, the organs of proletarian revolution."

To this end, it is crucially necessary to forge a party that is revolutionary, proletarian and internationalist. ■

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The TGG aims to mobilize larger forces in this defensive struggle, while recognizing that those forces will not share our political outlook. Comrades from the TGG and other ICL sections have distributed thousands of copies of the united-front call to key sectors of the working class in Athens and Thessaloniki (Greece's second-largest city). We have approached other organizations, including trade unions, leftist and immigrant rights groups, urging them to take up the call themselves and organize workers committees. Our comrades leafleted a massive rally on July 22 in Athens organized by PAME, the trade-union front of the Greek Communist Party (KKE), in opposition to the Greek parliament's vote that day for further measures dictated by the imperialists, as well as to a smaller rally of other leftists and trade unionists at the same time. The call has been received with interest and sparked debate.

Syriza was voted into office in January based on its pledge to ease the burden of austerity and to negotiate better terms from the imperialist creditors, while keeping Greece within the EU and maintaining the euro as Greece's currency. While most left groups either voted for Syriza or enthused over its victory, the TGG opposed any vote to Syriza because of its class character as a bourgeois party. Moreover, we made clear before the election that Syriza's commitment to keeping Greece in the EU amounted to a pledge to enforce more hunger and joblessness. This is now being demonstrated in practice to many working people who voted for Syriza. (For more on the left and Syriza, see "Syriza Is Class Enemy of Workers!" WV No. 1068, 15 May.)

[illegible]

The following call, which has been translated from Greek, was initiated by our comrades in the Trotskyist Group of Greece on July 17 and distributed in Athens and elsewhere in the country.

Repudiate Syriza's sellout to the EU and the banks. The EU and its currency the euro have been a tragic trap of suffering for the great bulk of the Greek people. The EU and euro must be repudiated. Committees composed of workers from different tendencies and their allies—youth, unemployed, immigrants, pensioners—must be set up throughout the country to struggle for this and toward a govern-

JGH!

ment which will act in the interests of the working people and be subordinated to them. This battle cannot be won within a parliamentary framework. We also call upon all like-minded and class-conscious working people throughout the misnamed European Union to support us in our aims and to consider the implications for their own countries. Break with the Capitalists and their Banks!

- Cancel the debt! Down with the euro and the EU! Rip up the Third Memorandum!
- For common class struggle of Greek, German and other European workers against Schäuble, Merkel, Hollande and all the EU criminals!
- Workers defense guards to smash the fascist threat! Defend immigrants against racist attacks!
- Abolish the VAT and all regressive taxes! Decent housing for all, no evictions! For workers control of food distribution and prices!
- Abolish business and bank secrets—Open the books!
- Expropriate the banks, utilities, transportation, ports and shipping industry! Industrialize Greece!
- For decent pensions for all retirees pegged to the cost of living, now! Quality health care for all!
- Fight unemployment—Jobs for all through a shorter workweek with no loss in pay!

sures, but Greece's creditors demanded more. With the imperialists and the Greek bourgeoisie whipping up fear of total economic collapse if Greece didn't accept a new bailout, Syriza organized a July 5 referendum on the latest EU austerity proposal, calling for a "no" vote with the stated intention of using the vote as a bargaining chip to secure better terms from the EU.

Our comrades of the TGG issued a statement for the referendum, “Vote NO! Down With the EU! No Support to the Syriza Government!” (reprinted in *WV* No. 1071, 10 July). Our comrades explained that “a ‘no’ vote would help rally the working people in Greece and throughout Europe against the EU capitalists and their bloodsucking banks.” At the same time, our statement sharply opposed the Syriza-led government.

In the referendum, the KKE, a mass reformist party, called for casting an invalid ballot, claiming that a “no” vote was an indirect vote for Syriza’s alternative austerity plan. *No!* The “no” vote was nothing other than a message to the imperialist leaders of the EU and IMF to go to hell. In the January elections, our comrades had given critical support to the KKE, which opposed Syriza and the EU. At the same time, we sharply criticized their nationalist-populist program, which is a major political obstacle to the struggle for socialist revolution. The KKE leadership’s refusal to mobilize for a victory for the “no” vote in the referendum is in complete contradiction to its stated opposition to the EU.

In fact, many KKE members ignored their leadership and voted “no,” and this was a good thing. In voting against the austerity package, the Greek population delivered a well-deserved slap in the face to the EU imperialists. By rushing after the referendum to lick the imperialists’ boots and agree to more austerity, Syriza now stands far more exposed as lackeys of the EU imperialists than they would have if the “yes” vote had won.

The struggle against the EU is a question of vital importance for working people throughout Europe. The ICL has stood against the imperialist EU and the euro from the beginning. The common euro currency has allowed the German bourgeoisie to keep its industrial exports cheap

throughout the eurozone. At the same time, the German capitalists, with the able assistance of the social-democratic SPD party and the trade-union bureaucracy, have driven down wages in Germany.

The imperialists and the Greek ruling class have stoked fears that exiting the EU and the euro would result in the economic isolation of Greece, a small country that is heavily reliant on imports, including for more than half of its food. The reality is that there is no way out of the spiral of debt and untrammelled imperialist looting of Greece within the framework of the EU. Greece should leave the EU and the euro.

Control over currency is one of the basic prerequisites for national sovereignty. Ordinarily, a debtor country can get some relief and regain economic competitiveness by devaluing its currency. But this is not possible within the euro. As the recent experiences of Argentina and Iceland show, default and currency devaluation, while initially harsh, may lead quickly to economic recovery and a rise in employment as the weakened currency makes exports more competitive.

Bourgeois elements, including the likes of German finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble, have argued that Greece should leave the eurozone, seeing that as a better way to maintain capitalist profits. In con-



Economic crisis in Greece has led to ominous growth of fascist Golden Dawn, shown here at 2013 rally.

Gay Liberation...

(continued from page 5)

Trotsky's permanent revolution versus the Stalinist dogma of "socialism in one country." We put out a pamphlet titled *Permanent Revolution: A Vindication of Marxism*. The pamphlet is quite revealing in documenting our movement away from Maoism, and just how far we had left to go. What I remember most about that time was the intense study that took place over the next few months. After Trotsky's *The Permanent Revolution* (1930), we read *In Defense of Marxism* (1942) and *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936) back-to-back with weekly discussions. My worn, heavily marked up copy of *In Defense of Marxism* testifies to its key role in winning me to a Trotskyist understanding of the Russian Question. Then came James P. Cannon and *The Struggle for a Proletarian Party* (1943). Next to Mao, Cannon was very refreshing.

The previous November, Jimmy "ethnic purity" Carter, the Democratic Party peanut farmer from Georgia, had been elected president. Reaction was in the air. After its defeat in Vietnam, U.S. imperialism was determined to refurbish its image and so came Carter's anti-Soviet "human rights" campaign. Washington embraced every right-wing tinpot dictator worldwide, especially in Latin America, with Jorge Rafael Videla in Argentina as well as Augusto Pinochet in Chile, who came to power in a bloody CIA-engineered coup that toppled the popular-front Salvador Allende government.

That was also the year of Anita Bryant's "Save Our Children" campaign, which had overturned a gay rights ordinance in Dade County, Florida. We intervened into protest demonstrations that sometimes numbered up to 100,000 and put to the test our programmatic agreement with the Spartacist League. I remember sitting down with a good friend of mine from PCL at a bar in L.A., convincing him to join the SL/RFU contingent at a major gay rights march behind the slogans: "Down with Carter's Anti-Soviet 'Human Rights' Campaign! Full Democratic Rights for Homosexuals!" He and his partner joined the SL in the months after the fusion.

It's hard to talk about being won on the Russian Question without including some personal information. I had joined the L&RU as one of four people from the gay caucus at PCL. The other three were my best friends, sometime housemates and in a way mentors. They made up what would become the L&RU state capitalist minority, which advanced the position that Russia was ruled by a new capitalist class and was as "bad" as U.S. imperialism.

During what was probably a three-month fight, I was constantly being colared at school and at home and argued with. I was repeatedly tested to defend my position as it evolved, which was a good experience. Having the fight centered upon the history of a faction of the SWP that folded to bourgeois pressures was compelling. That is to say, our fight was over the same issue of whether to defend the Soviet Union that divided the SWP in 1939-40. Similar anti-Communist pressures in the 1970s led the minority to tail bourgeois public opinion.

Spartacist contingent at June 1977 gay rights demonstration, New York City. SL opposed Democrat Carter's anti-Soviet "human rights" campaign that was embraced by reformists and liberals at the time.



The L&RU minority would often pile on about the crimes of Stalinism. I would respond: so when did the property forms change? Why call this a new capitalist class and not a parasitic bureaucracy? In what year did the counterrevolution you say occurred actually happen? I was never satisfied with their convoluted answers and evasions. At some point I realized that first came their firm resolve to distance themselves from and not defend the Soviet Union. Only later did they develop a theory to justify it. They basically said that by 1938, after the purge trials, a state capitalist class was in control.

The Final Break from Sectoralism

In what was put out as a special supplement to the last issue of *Come Out Fighting* (May 1977), we addressed why gay oppression—unlike black oppression or women's oppression—is not a strategic question for Marxists. We pointed out that: "There is absolutely no question that gay people suffer some of the most brutal forms of physical and psychic abuse. However, intensity of oppression doesn't automatically translate into strategic importance." And we explained:

"A strategic question is any contradiction that poses a fundamental block to the unification of the working class and is incontestably a principal obstacle to revolution. Without its correct resolution, the seizure of power, the beginning of socialist revolution, cannot be achieved....

"On this basis, we can say, that the black question is a strategic question, and the gay question is not. Racism is probably the largest single brake on the action and consciousness of the American working class. No revolution can be made in the US without the active participation of the most advanced strata of black workers and without breaking the stranglehold of racism on the white workers....

"Gay people are a sizable minority of the population, perhaps the largest single minority. However, by and large gay people do not occupy a special place in the economic life of US society. They are no more concentrated in the working class than in any other class....

"The mistreatment of gays primarily takes the form of discrimination, legal harassment, medical mistreatment, and psychological abuse. It primarily affects gay workers as individuals, not as a group. Substantial super profits are not made by virtue of any special relationship of gays to production."

However, in this supplement, we still raised the slogan "Gay Liberation Through Socialist Revolution." Dropping that slogan was our final break from sectoralism.

In June of 1977, we held the Stonewall Conference at PCL. It was there that the majority declared our agreement on the Russian Question, our fusion perspective with the SL and the name change to the Red Flag Union. Others in attendance included the SWP, FSP, RSL and the Socialist Union. While the political meat of the conference was the Russian and party questions, there was a big brouhaha about the SL having a so-called "closet rule." This guideline is simply that comrades do not share their sexuality as part of their public political profile—i.e., that we want to be identified solely by the program we stand for. It seems a pretty sim-



Women's demonstration in Russia, March 1917, with banner reading: "As Long as the Woman Is a Slave There Cannot Be Freedom—Long Live Women's Equality." Following 1917 October Revolution, Bolsheviks overturned criminal penalties for homosexuality.

ple thing, and it also provides protection for comrades who might be potentially targeted for victimization. The manufactured uproar over this was a rotten bloc by all those who lost out in seeking fusion with us, and an act of desperation. Here we are doing a national speaking tour, trumpeting a fusion of a group from the gay liberation milieu. And the key question, supposedly, is whether each comrade would publicly share their particular sexuality. The outrage was simply very sour grapes. It was especially rich coming from a group like the SWP which between 1962 and 1970 had forced homosexual members to resign.

The fusion with the RFU enriched the Spartacist League in many ways. It certainly led to a greater exposition of our understanding of homosexual and women's oppression and the need to replace the bourgeois nuclear family and the oppressive sexual roles it imposes. Organizationally, with the infusion of cadre in

addition to our successful regroupments of the previous few years, we were able to shift some resources toward our local in Detroit, seeking to sink some roots in the black proletariat. RFUers all came in as party members and we were spread around the country. Two of our members were immediately co-opted to the Central Committee.

In closing, I have been musing about the relevance of this talk in terms of current youth. You've grown up in a post-Soviet world and there has been a retrogression in consciousness. When I was in Montreal, a comrade mentioned the exclusion of males at some feminist events. Again, sectoralism run amok—and whose interest does that serve? There is a deep alienation in class society that benefits the rulers. They proffer the notion that the best you can do is to carve out a protective niche to pursue your own personal interest in this world—a deeply anti-social standpoint.

Modern sectoralism also reflects pessimism about the viability of social struggle in general. But you will find the serious person who has a gut hatred of capitalism, racism and imperialist war and is searching for answers. I came across many outraged youth at the large demonstrations in protest of the racist cop murders of black men in the U.S., and I certainly found it challenging to disabuse them of their illusions and introduce them to a Marxist framework. But that's our job. There is even more social tinder out there ready to ignite. Nonetheless, while the anger is righteous, the outrage will dissipate if not linked to the power of labor.

While the Bolshevik Revolution is now 40 more years removed than when I came of age politically, the lessons still resound. Uniquely it is the International Communist League that carries that revolutionary

Women and Revolution



Journal of the Women's Commission of the Spartacist League/U.S.

THIRD BOUND VOLUME OUT NOW!

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With issue No. 45, included in Volume 3, *Women and Revolution* ceased 25 years of publication as a separate periodical due to lack of resources. Now folded into *Spartacist*, the quadrilingual theoretical and documentary repository of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist), *Women and Revolution* reflects our commitment to the fight for women's liberation through socialist revolution.

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Sandra Bland's Death

The Police Are Guilty

On July 13, the lifeless body of 28-year-old Sandra Bland was found hanging in a county jail cell in the town of Hempstead on the edge of East Texas. A Chicago native, Bland was political and outspoken, a black activist who wanted to end police terror and racism. Three days earlier, a Texas state trooper had pulled her over for not signaling a lane change. When she was less than cheerful and refused to put out her cigarette, the cop took her for “uppity.” Dashboard video captured him drawing his Taser, threatening, “I will light you up,” shortly before he forced Bland out of her car and off camera slammed her to the ground. She was then charged with assaulting a police officer.

Bland was stopped on the road to historically black Prairie View A&M University, her alma mater, founded during Reconstruction on the site of a former slave plantation. Cops make it their daily routine to patrol that road—part of an effort to keep black students, faculty and campus workers “in their place.” As recently as 2003, the local district attorney threatened to prosecute Prairie View students if they tried to vote, and in the ensuing years they have had to continue to battle local officials in the courts over exercising that right.

The official version of how Bland died in her Waller County jail cell is the dubious story that she committed suicide. Her family, friends and many activists have insisted that she would not have hurt herself and suspect foul play. Whatever the exact circumstances of her death, the police are guilty as hell. And Bland is hardly the only one. Last month, six black women were found dead in jails across the country, while some 4,200 people have died in Texas alone over the past decade during attempted arrests or once behind bars.

What happened to Bland is an all too familiar story in the states of the former Confederacy. Indeed, on the streets of the U.S., North and South, whether isolated backwaters or cosmopolitan centers, stopping, beating and shooting black men and women for “driving while black” is standard police procedure. A scant six days after Bland died, 43-year-old Samuel DuBose was blown away by a University of Cincinnati cop who stopped him because his front license plate was missing. The *Washington Post* has tallied over 570 fatal police shootings nationwide already this year (more than the FBI, which nominally tracks the statistic, has reported for every year since 1976). Black people were killed at three times the rate of whites.



At protests sparked by these killings, many ask: why does it keep happening? Black people in the U.S. constitute an oppressed race-color caste, stigmatized for the color of their skin regardless of class. The main enforcers of this social order are the cops, the thugs in blue at the core of the

repressive state machinery by which one class, the ruling capitalists, holds down another, the workers. Cop terror against black people—whether down and out or up and coming—is not an “excess”; it’s a calculated program. It is the way U.S. capitalism, which is built on the bedrock of black oppression, resolves the contradiction between the assertion of some formal equal rights and the forcible segregation of the bulk of the black population at the bottom of society. Black oppression serves the capitalist rulers by keeping working people from uniting against the class enemy.

The racist killers were doing what they are hired, trained and paid to do, something that no amount of reform will change, including the “community involvement and oversight strategies” demanded by the Black Lives Matter movement. Waller County itself shows what “community control” of the cops looks like in Texas. As chief of police in Hempstead, Glenn Smith was so blatantly racist even by local standards that he got fired in 2008. He ran for sheriff later that year and was elected by a landslide. Smith is now in charge of the investigation of Bland’s death in the jail he oversees. But even where blacks are the majority, as in Baltimore, a city

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Pension Robbery

Bosses to Workers: Slave Away, Drop Dead

Last December, Congress and the Obama administration launched a stealth attack on pensions of workers covered by multiemployer plans in industries like mining, trucking and construction by passing and signing into law the Multiemployer Pension Reform Act (MPRA). The MPRA is a “reform” in the same sense that the guillotine reformed executions previously carried out by the rather more extended process of drawing and quartering. This measure came into being without a whisper of debate as an amendment to the omnibus budget legislation rushed through to provide the monies necessary to run the government.

The MPRA allows the bosses not just to whack the pensions of active workers but to decrease the pensions of retirees, an option that was blocked by existing legislation until the act was passed. It is estimated that 10 percent of multiemployer plans, covering about one million workers, are facing insolvency. The Treasury Department recently appointed a hatchet man, Kenneth Feinberg, to oversee the MPRA’s implementation, supposedly to block unwarranted employer attempts to curtail pensions, but more to the point, investing him with the power



Chicago, April 8: Teamsters protest cuts to pensions proposed by union trustees of Central States Pension Fund and permitted under new federal law.

to slash benefits if cutbacks are rejected by workers and retirees.

In recent months, egregiously underfunded public employee retirement systems in several states, most notably Illinois and Pennsylvania, have been targeted for benefit slashing. Democrats and Republicans alike have sought ways to get

around existing legislative roadblocks to such attacks. As the pension rollbacks in bankrupted Detroit demonstrate, in the absence of any meaningful social struggle by workers and retirees, the road to such cutbacks by the capitalist rulers will be cleared in one manner or another. Not surprisingly, given the scent of blood in

the water, calls for the “reform” of Social Security have recently resurfaced, including the raising of the retirement age. With only 18 percent of private-sector workers covered by plans that guarantee specified benefits upon retirement (down from 35 percent in the early 1990s), state/government pensions, like Social Security itself, are the last major repository of such plans.

In Pennsylvania, the Republican-dominated state senate, with all-out support from many Democratic mayors throughout the state, recently passed a bill to end defined-benefit coverage for state workers by forcing them into 401(k) defined-contribution plans. Democratic governor Tom Wolf recently vetoed this rollback, preferring alternative strategies to screw the workers. The anarchic capitalist system is incapable of providing financial security for its subjects who face increasing immiseration in direct relation to the increasing wealth of the ruling class that owns the productive property. In the short run, however, the difference between defined-benefit and defined-contribution plans is significant. A *defined-benefit* plan pays out a guaranteed monthly amount, normally dependent on wages earned, upon retirement; a *defined-contribution* plan puts the onus on the individual, specifying what you must put into the fund, with generally lower payouts and no guarantee of anything upon retirement.

For decades now, American workers have been subjected to cutbacks to pension and health benefits. Indeed, such benefits are under similar attack in virtually every industrial society, especially of late Canada and Britain. Today in Greece, the dominant imperialist powers of the European Union (i.e., Germany and France) are committed to enforcing

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