

## Capitalism Hazardous to Your Health Measles Outbreak: For Mandatory Vaccinations!



Jim West

**Above: Child receives MMR vaccine in Michigan health center in midst of measles outbreak, March 27. Right: March for Science in Portland, Oregon, April 2018.**



AP

The fearmongering and lies of anti-vaccine zealots are taking a real-world toll. Measles, the highly infectious disease that was declared eliminated in the U.S. in 2000, has returned with full force amid a precipitous drop in immunizations nationally. Over 700 cases across 22 states are confirmed already this year, with the great majority in New York City and its environs. Nevertheless, virtually no action was taken by government officials to counter

this potentially deadly disease for half a year after it first broke out last fall in the ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities in Brooklyn's Williamsburg and Borough Park and in suburban Rockland County.

Measles can be prevented by one of the most highly effective vaccines available for any disease. Since the measles virus is so contagious, a very high rate of vaccination (almost 95 percent) is needed to attain "herd immunity," that is, protection

against the disease spreading to people, such as infants and the sick, who cannot be vaccinated because they have weakened immune systems.

The failure to immediately provide free vaccinations is an example of the depraved indifference of the capitalist rulers to the health and welfare of working people and the poor. Measles can be devastating. In the years before the first vaccine became available in 1963, some 50,000 people in the

U.S. were hospitalized annually with complications, such as ear infections, pneumonia and acute encephalitis, a swelling of the brain that can be fatal. Worldwide, the disease killed an estimated 2.6 million every year. We are for mandatory vaccinations for measles and other common infectious diseases for which vaccines exist.

Early last month, NYC mayor Bill de Blasio finally ordered the immediate

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*The following statement was issued on April 21 by the International Executive Committee of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist).*

Social democrats and other reformists are beating the drums for the European Union (EU) in upcoming elections to the European Parliament. Typically, the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) propounds that "Europe is the answer." The very act of campaigning for and participating in the European Parliament betrays the interests of the working class. This "parliament" is not a parliament but a diplomatic forum. It is used by the imperialists to falsely present their consortium as a "free" and "democratic" union of peoples that transcends the nation-state.

Our international tendency has always opposed the EU and its predecessor organization, the European Economic Community (EEC), which were initially established as an economic appendage to the U.S.-led NATO military alliance against the Soviet degenerated workers state. The EU is today dominated by German imperialism, and secondarily by France. The EU is a consortium of

capitalist states whose purpose is to maximize the exploitation of the working class in each of its countries and to enforce the economic domination and subjugation by the imperialist powers of poorer countries such as Greece, Ireland, Portugal and East European member states, including through its financial instrument, the euro. The EU is also designed to increase the European

imperialists' competitiveness against their rivals in the U.S. and Japan.

The EU is not a superstate but a series of treaties entered into by states. In *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916), V.I. Lenin exposed the Social Democrat Karl Kautsky's reactionary-utopian notion of "ultra-imperialism," in which the capitalist powers would supposedly overcome their mutual rival-

ries as they jointly exploited the world. Because capitalism is organized on the basis of particular national states, it is sheer Kautskyism to posit a pan-European bourgeois state, or a stable common currency. The EU is subject to continual tensions arising from the disparate national interests of the European imperialists, which constantly threaten

*continued on page 2*

## Down With the EU! No Participation in Its Pseudo-Parliament!

**For a Socialist United States of Europe,  
United on a Voluntary Basis!**



(continued from page 1)

to tear it apart, and can be broken up by class struggle.

It is unprincipled for Marxists to participate in the European Parliament. Prior to 1979, delegates were appointed by the governments of the EEC. The post-1979 direct election of delegates did not change its essentially diplomatic character. As we wrote in the newspaper of our U.S. section 40 years ago, in regard to participation by the pseudo-Trotskyist United Secretariat (USec) in the Europarlament elections, “What if NATO’s North Atlantic Council were constituted by direct elections, or the colonialist British Commonwealth set up a pseudo-parliamentary body: would the USec seek representation in these imperialist alliances? We can only assume that they would!” (*Workers Vanguard* No. 233, 8 June 1979).

The International Communist League does not seek to renegotiate the particular terms and provisions of the EU; to do so would reinforce illusions that the EU can be reformed in the interests of the working class. The misleaders of the working class



September 2015 demonstration in Thessaloniki, Greece, after Syriza government acceded to further EU-ordered austerity.

propagate the lie of a “social Europe,” the false view that the EU can be an instrument for social progress for the workers and the oppressed. Our attitude toward the EU is intransigent opposition: we seek to

shatter it through proletarian internationalist struggle. We fight for workers revolutions across the continent, leading to a *Socialist United States of Europe, united on a voluntary basis.*

The institutions of the EU, including its “parliament,” are nothing more than bodies that regulate the terms of exploitation and oppression of the capitalist order in Europe under the leadership of Germany. The treaties regulating the EU represent the balance of power between the imperialists themselves and between the imperialists and the oppressed dependent countries. The European Parliament is an impotent advisory body that tinkers with the treaties negotiated by the heads of EU member states. No matter what the platform on which a member of its “parliament” is elected, his role is that of a diplomatic representative of a capitalist state. Such service in negotiating reactionary treaties necessarily entails sharing responsibility for their outcome.

To participate in any way in the EU “parliament” would compromise the class independence of the proletariat. On that basis, the ICL on principle does not give critical electoral support to left opponent organizations running for this “parliament.” In “*Left-Wing Communism—An Infantile Disorder*” (1920), Lenin pointed out that the masses learn from experience and not simply from communist propaganda. At the time, he urged Communists in Britain to help put the Labour Party in *government* so that the masses could learn that the Labourites were class traitors. The ICL has used this tactic when appropriate. However, one cannot expose reformists by electing them to the European Parliament. The very act of running means accepting the framework of tinkering with the EU imperialist treaty.

Like the League of Nations of old (and the United Nations today), the EU is a den of imperialist thieves and their victims. Up until 1934, the Stalinist bureaucratic caste in Moscow and the Communist parties that supported it opposed participation in the League. When the Kremlin changed course in 1934 and joined it, this marked the onset of the popular-front policy, based on the invention of a “progressive” wing of imperialism. Pillorying Stalin’s betrayal, the Trotskyists quoted his own 1927 declaration regarding the League in an article in *New International* (July 1934):

“The Soviet Union is not prepared to become a part of that camouflage for imperialist machinations represented by the League of Nations. The League is the rendezvous of the imperialist leaders who settle their business there behind the scenes. The subjects about which the League speaks officially, are nothing but empty phrases intended to deceive the workers. The business carried on by the imperialist ring-leaders behind the scenes, that is the actual work of imperialism which the eloquent speakers of the League of Nations hypocritically cloak.”

The EU is an alliance of states that are *unequal*, with the dominant imperialist oppressor states lording it over the poorer, oppressed countries. It is held together through economic force and blackmail exerted by the more powerful imperialists. An example is the imposition of the euro, which devastated living standards

of working people and benefited German capitalism. Control over currency is a key component of national sovereignty. Ordinarily, a debtor country can gain some relief and regain economic competitiveness by devaluation. But this is not possible within the eurozone.

How the imperialists oppress the dependent countries in the EU was described in a *Financial Times* (11 May 2014) article, “How the Euro Was Saved.” In 2011, when then Greek prime minister George Papandreou proposed a referendum on a bailout, the leading EU powers united to stop the referendum and organized a political coup to replace him. French president Nicolas Sarkozy, Angela Merkel of Germany, IMF director Christine Lagarde and the EU’s two presidents met to plot how to block the referendum. They proposed a “national unity government” to be headed by Lucas Papademos, a former vice president of the European Central Bank. Within a week, Papademos took over. No election was held.

In July 2015, Greece’s Syriza government called a referendum on accepting further austerity as the condition for another EU bailout deal. Some 60 percent of the population voted “no,” delivering a slap in the face to the EU. Prime Minister Tsipras then agreed to an even more savage program of starvation, misery and humiliation drawn up by the EU masters. In response, our comrades of the Trotskyist Group of Greece (TOE) called for forming workers action committees that would repudiate this sellout, and repudiate the EU and the euro. The TOE explained that these committees would fight for such demands as canceling the debt; workers defense guards against the fascists; expropriation of the banks, utilities and ports; jobs for all through a shorter workweek at no loss in pay. These demands were linked with the need to struggle toward “a government which will act in the interests of the working people and be subordinated to them” (“Repudiate Syriza’s Sellout to the EU! ENOUGH!” WVNo. 1072, 7 August 2015).

The only mass workers party in the country, the Greek Communist Party (KKE), played a treacherous role in demobilizing struggle when it counted. The KKE refused to call for a “no” vote in the referendum. This proved the hollowness of the KKE’s claims to oppose the EU. The fact that the KKE runs for and participates in the European Parliament, for which the EU pays substantial subsidies, underscores its actual subordination to the EU and the European capitalist order.

The trade-union misleaders and reformist workers parties have played the key role in propping up the EU and the capitalist bosses, exemplified by the SPD’s “GroKo” (Grand Coalition) with Merkel. Germany’s predominance in the EU is due in no small part to the SPD. The last SPD-headed government introduced a series of anti-working-class “reforms,” including the Hartz IV laws and Agenda 2010, dismantling numerous welfare provisions. This directly led to the introduction of a huge low-wage sector in the country, greatly strengthening the competitive position of the German bourgeoisie.

The ICL’s British section supports Brexit and called for a vote to “leave” in the 2016 referendum. In contrast, Labour “left” leader Jeremy Corbyn betrayed his working-class supporters by campaigning against Brexit and more recently has come out for a second referendum, in defiance of the vote of the populace. With austerity continuing to stalk the workers of Europe, the reformists’ servile support for the EU has fueled the growth of the far right and fascists.

The ICL’s opposition to the EU and its “parliament” is proletarian, internationalist and revolutionary. To build a society free of hunger, want and oppression requires a series of socialist revolutions that will expropriate the capitalist rulers, especially in imperialist centers like Germany and the U.S., and establish an international planned economy based on workers rule. What is needed is the construction of revolutionary workers parties, sections of a reformed Fourth International, to lead the working class to power, sweeping away the rotten capitalist-imperialist system. ■



TROTSKY

The Russian Question and the Class Line

In 1939, James P. Cannon, leader of the then-Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party in the U.S., delivered the speech excerpted below on the vital necessity for revolutionaries to defend the Soviet Union despite its degeneration under the Stalinist bureaucracy. His fire was directed against a minority faction headed by Max Shachtman, among others, which argued to abandon that position in the face of petty-bourgeois public opinion.

Like Shachtman, the reformists in the defunct International Socialist Organization renounced the Soviet Union as a workers state and embraced imperialist “democracy” against Stalinist “totalitarianism.” In continuity with Trotsky and Cannon, the ICL fought for the unconditional military defense of the USSR and the deformed workers states of East and Central Europe, as well as for proletarian political revolution to oust the Stalinist misrulers. Today, we uphold the same program for the remaining deformed workers states—China, Vietnam, North Korea, Cuba and Laos.

The mighty power of the October revolution is shown by the vitality of its conquests. The nationalized property and the planned economy stood up under all the difficulties and pressures of the capitalist encirclement and all the blows of a reactionary bureaucracy at home. In the Soviet Union, despite the monstrous mismanagement of the bureaucracy, we saw a tremendous development of the productive forces—and in a backward country at that—while capitalist economy declined. Conclusion: Nationalized and planned economy, made possible by a revolution that overthrew the capitalists and landlords, is infinitely superior, more progressive. It shows the way forward. Don’t give it up before it is lost! Cling to it and defend it!

On the Russian question there are only two really independent forces in the world. Two forces who think about the question independently because they based themselves, their thoughts, their analyses and their conclusions, on fundamental class considerations. Those two independent forces are:

- (1) The conscious vanguard of the world bourgeoisie, the statesmen of both democratic and fascist imperialism.
- (2) The conscious vanguard of the world proletariat.

Between them it is not simply a case of two opinions on the Russian question, but rather of two camps. All those who in the past rejected the conclusions of the Fourth International and broke with our movement on that account, have almost invariably fallen into the service of the imperialists, through Stalinism, social and liberal democracy, or passivity, a form of service....

We do not examine the Russian revolution and what remains of its great conquests as though it were a bug under a glass. *We have an interest! We take part in the fight!* At each stage in the development of the Soviet Union, its advances and its degeneration, we seek the basis for revolutionary action. We want to advance the world revolution, overthrow capitalism, establish socialism. The Soviet Union is an important and decisive question on this line.

—James P. Cannon, “Speech on the Russian Question” (15 October 1939)

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# South African Trotskyists' Open Letter to SRWP

# No to Coalitions with Bourgeois Parties!

**SPARTACIST** SOUTH AFRICA

We print below an April 23 open letter by Spartacist South Africa to the Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party (SRWP), which was launched to run in the May 8 elections to the National Parliament and provincial legislatures. The SRWP seeks to appeal to black workers and others who are bitterly angry that 25 years after the fall of the white-supremacist apartheid system, the ruling bourgeois African National Congress (ANC) has failed to deliver on the promise of equality and decent lives. However, the SRWP has not made clear whether or not it renounces supporting and/or forming coalitions with bourgeois parties, such as the ANC and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) of Julius Malema, former head of the ANC Youth League. The letter by our South African comrades draws the line for the political independence of the predominantly black working class against all bourgeois parties.

After a convulsive wave of class struggle centered on black workers in the 1980s, and following the 1991-92 counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union, the white capitalists turned to the ANC and its Tripartite Alliance partners—the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU)—to stabilize their rule. The old apartheid system was ended and the ANC was swept into power in the 1994 elections. Since then, the Alliance has presided over neo-apartheid capitalism on behalf of the same white ruling class, with a few black faces added to its roster. The police massacre of 34 black striking platinum miners in Marikana in 2012 was the bloody signature of this system of entrenched poverty, brutal exploitation and violent suppression of the proletariat. The SRWP was initiated by leaders of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), which was expelled from the Tripartite Alliance after refusing to support the ANC in the last national elections (see “Metal Workers Union Drops Electoral Support to ANC,” WV No. 1039, 7 February 2014).

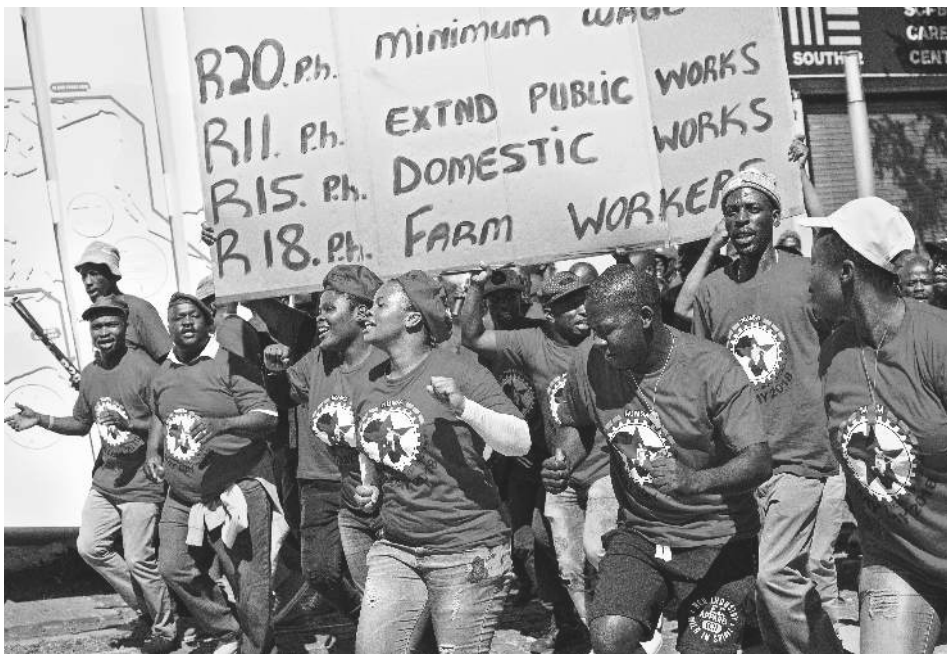
In 1994, as virtually the entire left internationally supported the ANC, we told the truth: a vote for the ANC meant “a vote to perpetuate the racist oppression and super-exploitation of the black, coloured (mixed-race) and Indian toilers in a different political form. The workers and all the oppressed must be mobilized independently of the capitalist masters” (WV No. 598, 15 April 1994). The ICL gave critical support to the Workers List Party, a left-reformist outfit whose campaign drew a crude class line against the ANC. As the SSA stresses in its letter, building a revolutionary workers party in opposition to all capitalist parties is key to the fight to overturn neo-apartheid capitalism and finally achieve the national liberation of the black masses.

\* \* \*

For the past few years, we have been following the developments around NUMSA leaving the Tripartite Alliance and lay-

ing the groundwork to launch the SRWP. From the beginning, we have openly raised our criticisms of the NUMSA leadership, while noting the potential significance of the decision to withhold support for the ANC. Although the SRWP's programme does not represent any fundamental break with the Stalinist-derived reformism of the SACP, you appeal to the desire among sections of the working class for a party that represents the proletariat's class interests against the capitalists. In light of this, and without minimising the fundamental

white capitalist class; national oppression of the black majority; hideous oppression of black women; and all the other evils of “our post 1994 experience.” The betrayals committed by the NUMSA leaders in service of the Tripartite Alliance include knifing workers strikes—from Mercedes-Benz in 1990 to Volkswagen in 2000—and backing Jacob Zuma's bloodstained presidency for a second time just months after the August 2012 massacre of striking black mineworkers at Marikana. Marikana shows that cops have no place in the workers movement.



Newscom

**April 2018: Protesters in Johannesburg join nationwide strike called by South African Federation of Trade Unions demanding increase in minimum wage.**

political differences we have with the SRWP, we are considering giving critical support to your party's campaign in the upcoming elections as a means of expressing class opposition to the ANC, EFF and other bourgeois parties. Necessarily, the basis for any critical support is class independence from bourgeois formations like the ANC-led Tripartite Alliance and the EFF. But your draft election manifesto takes no position on your attitude toward voting for these formations or entering coalitions with them. Where do you stand?

The preamble of the SRWP's draft election manifesto points out that “the experience of all former imperialist colonies and our post 1994 experience” has demonstrated that “it is impossible to resolve the national, gender, race and class question in South Africa and the rest of the post-colonial world without simultaneously defeating capitalism and imperialism and establishing socialism.” While this is absolutely true, the leadership of NUMSA, including SRWP chairman Irvin Jim, along with the likes of [South African Federation of Trade Unions] SAFTU general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi, were for decades a loyal pillar of the ANC-led Tripartite Alliance that has administered the neo-apartheid capitalist state—thus perpetuating the superexploitation of the mainly black African proletariat, along with its coloured and Indian components, by a predominantly

Together with our comrades of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist), Spartacist/South Africa has consistently opposed voting for the ANC, EFF or any other bourgeois parties, or giving any political support to the ANC/SACP/COSATU Tripartite Alliance—a nationalist *popular front* that serves to subordinate the working class to its class enemy. This principled position flows from the Trotskyist perspective of permanent revolution, expressed in South Africa by our call for a *black-centred workers government*. The bourgeois-nationalist forces of dependent countries are incapable of solving any of the fundamental problems posed by imperialist domination because of their subordination to imperialist capital and mortal fear of their own proletariat. Only working-class power can resolve these problems, posing the need for socialist measures and the extension of proletarian revolution to the advanced capitalist countries. This is counterposed to the schema of “two-stage revolution” (a.k.a. the “National Democratic Revolution”) which has been pushed by the SACP to alibi the Tripartite Alliance.

We have consistently opposed voting for workers parties that are part of the popular front. Opposition to popular fronts is the tradition of Russian revolutionary leader V.I. Lenin, whose intransigent opposition to the Provisional Government

(the popular front of its day) following the February 1917 revolution was decisive for setting the Bolshevik Party on a course toward the working-class seizure of power in October.

Despite the fact that the SRWP claims to stand in the Leninist tradition, on the critical issue of coalitions with bourgeois parties, and in particular with the ANC and EFF, it is evasive. While the EFF uses left-sounding populist rhetoric, both of these are bourgeois-nationalist parties that represent the class enemy. In November 2018, *Business Day* reported that Zanoxolo Wayile, then interim chair of the SRWP, “said the party would not rule out possibly working with parties with the same ideological outlook, such as the EFF, but has not yet entertained such discussions” (“Numsa Workers' Party Hopes to Shake Up the Left in SA,” [businesslive.co.za](http://businesslive.co.za)). A December 2018 document on the SRWP's attitude towards the 2019 national elections states, “We only consider alliances with organizations of workers, small farmers and the poor, not any capitalist or reformist parties,” without naming these parties. As already mentioned, the SRWP's draft election manifesto makes no mention at all of the ANC-led Tripartite Alliance or the EFF, much less stating the SRWP's attitude toward them.

The question of the political organisation of the proletariat, independent from and in opposition to all capitalist parties, is central for genuine communists who would fight for socialist revolution in South Africa. So, comrades, where do you stand: would you vote for, or form coalitions with, the ANC or EFF? This is a question of vital importance to all class-conscious workers. For our part, we are prepared to give critical support to your campaign, and would call on such workers to vote for the SRWP while maintaining our own Leninist-Trotskyist banner, but only if your answer is a clear “no.” ■

**SPARTACIST** SOUTH AFRICA

No. 16 February 2019 R2

**The Land Question and Permanent Revolution**



“Since I was born I never had a piece of land that I can call home.” Women speak in support of land expropriation without compensation at public land hearing in Sediberg Town Hall, Vereeniging, July 2018.

Over the last year, the African National Congress (ANC) has done a lot of lip service over the question of land. On the one side, the party has given lip service to the urgent and historic need of the black majority by making a preliminary move with the bourgeois-nationalist Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) to begin the process of expropriating the land to allow for land expropriation without compensation. While trying to sell us as a reversal of its double-crossing policy of rejecting the “willing seller, willing buyer” method of land redistribution, the ANC has on the other side sought to reassure capitalist investors that nothing is really going to change.

The ANC's maneuvering is, in its own way, a testament to the potential exploitation of the land question. As political commentator Randeep Sanyal put it, the prospect of land expropriation evokes “hope in many poor black South Africans” while “provoking fear and uncertainty among many white South Africans and business people”.

Only mass revolutionary action can end all of this. The expropriation of land is a necessary part of the process of the overthrow of the capitalist system. The expropriation of land is a necessary part of the process of the overthrow of the capitalist system.

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**Expropriate the Bourgeoisie! For a Black-Centred Workers Government!**

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## Forge a Leninist-Trotskyist Party! For a Black-Centered Workers Government!



# France's New Caledonia Colony

# Independence for Kanaky!

The following is the first part of an article translated from *le Bolchévik* No. 226 (December 2018), newspaper of our comrades of the *Ligue trotskyste de France*, with two minor factual corrections regarding French imperialist machinations in Ivory Coast.

## PART ONE

The referendum held on November 4 in New Caledonia resulted in a win for the “no” vote on independence, but with a majority of less than 57 percent. This was a rude awakening for the loyalist partisans of France, who were counting on 10 or 20 percent more. The struggle for independence, which had been put on hold for 30 years prior to this referendum, has been re-ignited due to the narrow margin of the loyalist victory.

Kanak youth, who were said to be indifferent or even increasingly pro-France, in reality mobilized en masse to vote for independence. The lower voter turnout in the Loyalty Islands, which are overwhelmingly pro-independence, shows that some of the Kanak population abstained, not due to indifference but because they justifiably had little faith in the sincerity of a ballot organized by the colonial power. The principal Kanak union, the Federation of Unions of Kanak and Exploited Workers (USTKE), which is well established in the Loyalty Islands, called for non-participation in the ballot because of this.

This referendum marks another dark page for the French left on the colonial question: to our knowledge we are the only ones to have taken a position in favor of a “yes” vote on independence before the referendum. We reprint below, edited for publication, the speech by our comrade Alexis Henri at the October 25 Paris meeting of the *Ligue trotskyste de France*, in which he showed how LO [Lutte ouvrière, a prominent reformist group in France] distinguished themselves by their hypocrisy and hostility to independence.

LO found themselves to the right of the French Communist Party (PCF), which did express some sympathy for the *indépendantistes*, even though, as is usual for them, this was mostly for the purpose of promoting a “fair” neocolonial policy from the “country of the Rights of Man.” They wrote that if the “yes” vote were to win, “Our country [France] will also have to define financial relations with the new

## For a Workers and Peasants Government Centered on the Kanak People!



Ingrid Chanene/USTKE

**Nouméa, 3 August 2016: Port workers march at USTKE protest against racist “glass ceiling” excluding the Kanak from higher positions.**

nation and a close and respectful partnership permitting the economic and social development of the territory-nation” (PCF Declaration, 30 October 2018).

The POID [Democratic Independent Workers Party, disciples of the late pseudo-Trotskyist Pierre Lambert] dodged the question by hiding behind the USTKE. As for the New Anti-Capitalist Party, they took advantage of the differences on the referendum between the USTKE and the other *indépendantistes*, who were advocating a “yes” vote, to declare: “It isn’t up to us to decide for the Kanak, either about their future or their attitude to the referendum” (*l’Anticapitaliste*, 25 October 2018). With such a “vanguard,” the Kanak don’t need a rear guard! In contrast, we Trotskyists struggle to mobilize the working class, both here and there, to wrest Kanaky’s independence from the claws of French imperialism, and to forge a revolutionary Leninist-Trotskyist vanguard party.

\* \* \*

Dear comrades and friends, on November 4 a referendum will be held in Kanaky on the question: “Do you want New Caledonia to accede to full sovereignty and become independent?” Unlike the referendum of 1988, which was tied to the

approval or not of a new colonial statute, this time the question is clearly posed and our call is to vote “yes.” Even if the “no” vote wins, we base ourselves on the Kanak struggle of more than a century and a half against French occupation in order to make a clear call for immediate independence, whatever the outcome of this referendum and subsequent ones planned for 2020 and 2022. We are for driving French imperialism completely out of the Pacific.

Independence would be an enormous step forward for the Kanak people and all the workers and oppressed of this archipelago. It would be a defeat for French imperialism, and therefore favorable for the class struggle here in France. The most eloquent precedent in this regard is Algerian independence, which opened the way for [the pre-revolutionary events of] May ’68, as we explained in *le Bolchévik* (No. 225, September 2018).

At the same time, we are very aware that independence alone is not sufficient to emancipate Kanaky from imperialist capitalist domination and oppression. We can see how French imperialism today continues to look for ways to “punish” neighboring Vanuatu (formerly “New Hebrides”) for having freed itself from the direct tutelage of France and Britain in 1980.

This is why our perspective for Kanaky is for a workers and peasants government centered on the Kanak people. Such a government would be very conscious of the vital need to extend the revolution to the imperialist centers of the Pacific—that is to say, Australia, Japan and the United States—as well as the former French colonial power. This is the perspective of Trotsky’s permanent revolution.

### Kanak People’s History of Anti-Colonial Struggle

The Kanak people have hardly ever stopped struggling against the occupation of their country by French forces. The “taking possession” of the island in 1853 was marked by innumerable revolts over the years, generally drowned in blood. Of particular note was the revolt of 1878, led by Great Chief Ataï, which halted the colonists’ land-grabbing for more than 15 years.

Louise Michel, one of the surviving heroes of the Paris Commune of 1871,

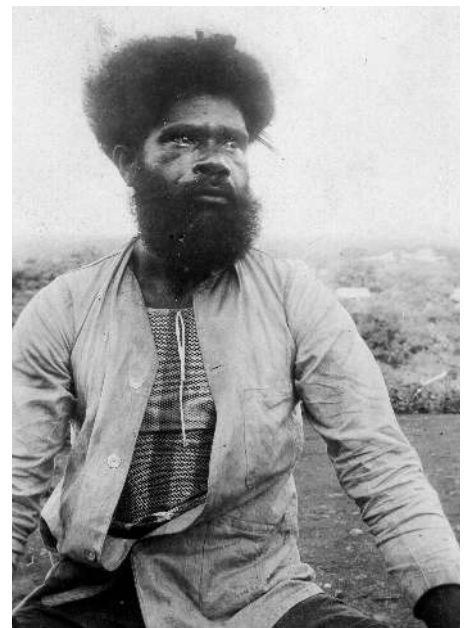
who had been deported to New Caledonia, famously solidarized with the revolt. We have to insist on the point that she was quite alone in this at the time. The French workers movement, which was just beginning to revive itself after the massacre of the Communards, has a sordid history on the colonial question, except for the period of the early Communist Party in the 1920s, which was born out of the Russian Revolution of October 1917. I will return shortly to this question, including to the LTF’s own serious deviations during the 1980s.

The French state profited from each defeat of the Kanak, carrying out new massacres and seizing the land of those they defeated. They took practically all the coastal plains and valleys to gradually “confine” the Kanak in “reserves” made up of the most mountainous and infertile lands, barely 8 percent of the area of Grande Terre [the main island].

In April 1917, a new revolt broke out in the North of the country, specifically against conscription for the [World War I] European battlefields. Once more, the French colonial troops carried the day. Around 300 Kanak were killed. In the 1920s, forced labor, which was already in effect throughout the French colonial empire, was systematized in Kanaky.

At the end of the 1920s, after three-quarters of a century of France’s “civilizing mission,” the Kanak population was half, or even by some estimates a quarter, of what it had been a century earlier; they were less than 30,000. The colonial administration seriously considered the outright disappearance of the Kanak people. There was not one single Kanak doctor, or even a high school graduate.

The Kanak people didn’t have the right to leave the reserves, except for tightly monitored work purposes. The colonial administration grouped the clans into



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**Bwéé Noël Pwatiba, a leader of 1917 war against French colonialism. Revolt was sparked in part by forced enlistment of the Kanak to fight in Europe in World War I; one-third did not return.**

“tribes” created arbitrarily in line with their confinement in the reservations, and named tribal “chiefs” who were to serve as go-betweens, in defiance of rules prevalent among the Kanak on the authority of clan chiefs.

However, the Kanak continued to resist their annihilation. During World War II, New Caledonia represented a strategic prize in the Pacific. For two years, it was one of the principal American military



Adapted from Reuters

bases, with tens of thousands of soldiers permanently stationed there. Our U.S. comrades have written extensively on the racism against blacks in the army at that time, but for the Kanak, the treatment of black American soldiers compared favorably to the iron rule of the French. The only example in which the French imperialists showed themselves to be less reactionary, or more hypocritical, than their meddlesome American allies was their refusal to have brothels racially segregated!

For the first time, thousands of Kanak had access to steady jobs in order to serve the logistical needs of the American troops. At the end of the war, the French colonists were no longer able to reimpose the medieval practice of forced labor. Having seen the infrastructure deployed by the American army, the Kanak were now conscious that the Gaullists [postwar rulers of France under General Charles de Gaulle] were pathetic losers by comparison.

In addition, there was an exponential growth of the Communist Party among the Kanak, thanks to the work of Jeanne Túnica y Casas, who promised them complete equality with whites, even if it



Félix Arsapin

**Jeanne Túnica y Casas, co-founder of Caledonian Communist Party. Her struggle for full equality of Kanak people and whites led to meteoric growth of the party among the Kanak after World War II.**

remained in the framework of the chauvinism of the tricolor [French flag]. But Túnica y Casas had to take refuge in Australia after her house was blown up (quite possibly by the French state, even while the PCF was in government). Usually at loggerheads, Catholic priests and Protestant clergy united against the Communist danger, everywhere pushing the idea that Communists would take the remaining Kanak land away from them. This is the origin of the Caledonian Union, a party which had a base among the Kanak because it stood for their greater participation in public affairs and put forward some social measures in their favor.

In the 1950s, the increasing entry of the Kanak into the proletariat, including in the nickel mines and refineries, marked the birth of the trade-union movement out of the struggle for wage equality for all the different ethnicities. From this period, the Kanak won the right to vote, at least on paper. It is hardly accidental that many are still not registered.

Following the Gaullist coup d'état of 1958, the *Métropole* [European France] reclaimed strict control of New Caledonia. The Gaullists wanted to maintain control of the nickel industry from Paris, and they went back on autonomy provisions that had been decreed by Defferre [minister for "Overseas France"] in 1956 during Guy Mollet's [Socialist Party (SP)] government. (This was during the period of France's war against Algerian independence.) Right-wing reaction struck the Kanak and the pressure on their lands intensified. In response, a new wave of struggle began to build. This was a direct product of May '68. Caledonian students in France, both black and white, became radicalized as a result of the massive general strike. This was the Red Scarves movement. Another group called itself

the "1878 Group" in memory of the great revolt led by Chief Atai.

All this ferment gradually pushed the Caledonian Union (UC) toward becoming pro-independence. Most of the white *broussards* [rural Caldoches (long-term European inhabitants), many of them cattle ranchers] left the party. In 1981, its president Pierre Declercq, a French-born left-wing Catholic, was assassinated by loyalists. The UC found itself at the heart of an Independence Front.

Obviously, the vague, deceptively soothing declarations of [then SP president François] Mitterrand on the destiny of the Kanak had nothing to do with any sympathy for their liberation. Mitterrand had been with the *Cagoule* ["Hooded Men"] fascists in the 1930s, and then in the [Nazi collaborationist] Vichy government. He was also the very man who in the early 1950s succeeded in "turning" Ivory Coast political leader Houphouët-Boigny, who was a deputy of the RDA [African Democratic Rally], allied to the French Communist Party. Houphouët went on to become the pillar of *Françafrique* [French neocolonial policy in Africa]. Mitterrand, the personification of French Algeria, as minister of police and minister of the guillotine during the Algerian War, had the blood of innumerable Algerian militants on his hands.

The Independence Front, renamed the Kanak Socialist National Liberation Front (FLNKS), boycotted the colonial elections of 1984. The secretary-general of the UC, Eloi Machoro, made a famous and heroic gesture, smashing a ballot box with an axe. Mitterrand quite simply had him assassinated later by a commando of GIGN [elite French police] killers, all the while inflaming French chauvinism by making everyone believe that it was a plot by perfidious Albion [Britain] and Australian subjects of Her Majesty to drive France out of the Pacific.

The Kanak revolt lasted several years. The Kanak suffered dozens of dead, killed by racist *broussards* and/or the forces of the French state. I don't have the time here to go into more detail on the uprising, but I will say that the turning point was the Ouvéa massacre on the Loyalty Islands, where 19 Kanak were slaughtered—some of them in cold blood—by French special forces who stormed their cave hideout.

This massacre took place in the midst of the 1988 presidential election in France. The blood of the Kanak contributed to the defeat of [Prime Minister Jacques] Chirac. Unfortunately, the chauvinism of the French left meant that his defeat in the end simply contributed to the re-election of Mitterrand, with [Michel] Rocard as prime minister, who became one of the mentors of [current president Emmanuel] Macron.

Rocard knew how to wave the carrot as a complement to the bloody violence that the Kanak had just suffered. This carrot was the Matignon Accords, under the terms of which the FLNKS was offered the management—within the colonial framework—of the two majority-Kanak regions. The North Province afterwards obtained rights to the Koniambo mine complex and the promise of a refinery for the ore. But in fact, the Nouméa region and nickel production by the Société Le Nickel, the island's main mining company for a hundred years, remained fully



Louise Takamatsu

**November 1984: Caledonian Union leader Eloi Machoro smashes ballot box during colonial elections. French president Mitterrand had him assassinated in retaliation.**

in the hands of French imperialism. The Kanak were also promised that a vote on self-determination would take place in ten years, in 1998. At the end of that ten-year period, it was Jospin [Socialist Party prime minister] in France (with the PCF again in the government) who negotiated a new postponement of a vote for 20 years, up until the present.

**Nature of the November 4 Ballot**

Now, 20 years later, the FLNKS has declared that independence is just around the corner and professed their optimism that the "yes" vote would win at the referendum. The opinion polls categorically deny such a prognosis, and six months ago I was struck by the unshakeable confidence that a pro-colonialist newspaper like *Figaro* had placed in the forthcoming result of the ballot.

The USTKE, the principal union organizing the Kanak, and the second on the archipelago after the Federation of Unions of Workers and Employees of New Caledonia, which is linked to the [French trade-union federation] CFDT, is calling for non-participation in the referendum. They held several meetings in Paris and at the [French CP's] *l'Humanité* Fête to explain their position.

For the USTKE, it is not a genuine referendum for self-determination in the sense that 20,000 Kanak are not even on the electoral rolls, while on the other hand thousands of colonists have been registered in the course of different revisions of the lists. In theory, in line with the accords signed in 1988 by the FLNKS, more or less only those who have been residents of New Caledonia since at least the 1980s, and their descendents, would have the right to vote. This therefore included the entire layer of Europeans brought in en masse by the Gaullist government at the end of the 1960s and early '70s at the time of the "nickel boom," which was explicitly intended to make the Kanak a minority population.

But as a matter of fact, the USTKE has shown that each time the Kanak pressed for their whole population to be actually registered, the government reopened the lists, and it was always the *métropolitains* [French-born residents] and other persons having so-called "material and moral interests" in New Caledonia who were added. The USTKE estimated that 6,000 to 7,000 such voters were improperly

added. As a result, this long-time colonial tampering has made the Kanak a minority in a referendum that concerns their own destiny.

These denunciations by the USTKE are absolutely credible. We have no doubt of the deceit carried out by the French state, which uses all possible means to hang on to its colonial possessions. Joseph Andras also reports, in his recent book *Kanaky*, that there were pro-independence Kanak who refused to register on the list for the referendum since they considered that the whole ballot was a masquerade aiming to give a democratic face to colonial domination. However, to the extent that we can judge from afar, the situation is very different from the 1987 ballot organized by Chirac, when all of the Kanak pro-independence organizations called for abstention. Then, there was a 98 percent "no" vote regarding independence in a completely fake ballot marked by the near-total abstention by the Kanak.

The USTKE fears that if Kanak people participate, French imperialism will claim that the Kanak themselves contributed to the very strong result expected from the "no" vote and that this would show that they wish to remain French. Certainly, in any colonial conflict, there is also a layer of loyalists. But the reality is that a significant section of the Kanak want to take part in the vote, and doubtless there are some who believe in the promises of the FLNKS that the "yes" vote can win.

However, there are also some who don't have these kinds of illusions but wish to take advantage of the first opportunity given to them to give voice to independence, even if the result is a foregone conclusion. In his book, Joseph Andras cites veterans of the struggles of the 1980s who, this time around, absolutely want to vote. There are also Kanak who fear an overwhelming victory for the "no" vote and for that reason want to vote "yes." That is why we think that not only can one vote "yes" despite the electoral cheating of French imperialism, but that it is an opportunity to take a stand for independence.

In any case, even if the "no" vote wins, we would not conclude that the Kanak people have freely chosen their chains and that it would be necessary to respect this result. We will continue to call for immediate independence for Kanaky, including if the two additional referendums projected for 2020 and 2022 continue to give a clear victory to colonialism.

**French Imperialist Maneuvers to Stay in Power**

This is, in short, the whole problem of referendums organized by a colonial power. Even when they are carried out in the framework of a growing struggle for independence, they are inevitably biased in favor of colonialism, independent of the problem of the electoral rolls. For a fair referendum, the prior withdrawal of all French imperialist troops would be necessary. Algeria's independence referendum was held on 5 July 1962, after the French troops had been driven out. In the same way, in Crimea, the population was able to express its predominantly Russian identity in a referendum only after the

*continued on page 6*

**Arrested in September 1974, Marie Moenteapo and Déwé Gorodé were part of new generation of Kanak independence fighters that arose after May 1968 upheaval in France.**



Archives de la Nouvelle-Calédonie, fonds photographique La France Australe, 113 Fi 2241

Measles...

(continued from page 1)

vaccination of everyone over six months of age in and around Williamsburg, unless they are medically exempt or can prove their immunity. Even then, the mandate allows for evasion through the payment of a \$1,000 fine. Nonetheless, the directive, together with the efforts of medical professionals, has resulted in an uptick in vaccinations—and sparked blowback from anti-vaxxers, who orchestrated lawsuits by Brooklyn residents as well as by Rockland County parents challenging an emergency order there.

The attorney for the latter railed against such public health measures as “a wholesale effort to punish people who have legitimate religious exemptions.” Meanwhile, with increasing numbers of parents claiming exemptions for their children, low vaccination rates have made communities across the country vulnerable to epidemics of measles and other diseases. Among the current measles hot spots are Washington State and Oregon, where liberal and libertarian resistance to vaccination is touted by many as a defense of individual rights. But there is no individual “right” to spread infection. We are opposed to religious and philosophical exemptions, which almost every state permits in this class-divided society that encourages all manner of social backwardness.

Sometimes, individual rights clash with the demands of public health, and the issue has to be considered in the concrete. Quarantines, for example, involve restriction on personal movement. In response to measles outbreaks at the University of California Los Angeles and Cal State University L.A., county public health officials had the schools quarantine over 1,000 students, faculty and staff who were potentially exposed to the illness. Those who cannot provide proof of immunization are to be confined to their residences for up to 21 days, after which they will no longer be a risk to others. This quarantine is supportable under the circumstances, as are the closures of schools in NYC that have not provided student immunization records to the city health department.

Vaccines, like all health needs, should be freely available to all. We stand for quality health care for everyone, free at the point of delivery—a demand that runs up against the profit-gouging corporations that are at the core of the U.S. health care system. Our aim is to mobilize the multiracial working class to fight for the expropriation of the health care and pharmaceutical industries as part of sweeping away the capitalist order through socialist revolution.

A Plague on Anti-Vaxxers

Anti-vaxxers paint their crusade as one against the evils of Big Pharma and their paid-for government agents. There is more than plenty to distrust about the capitalist government. But the anti-vaccine hysteria

has nothing to do with a “healthy” mistrust of the state. Rather, it is motivated by anti-scientific prejudices. The safety of the MMR (measles, mumps and rubella) vaccine, which the anti-vaxxers falsely claim causes autism and other disorders, has been repeatedly demonstrated by exhaustive scientific studies. But for years, these scammers, backed up by Christian fundamentalists and celebrities from Hollywood to Trump Tower in New York, have pushed their own alternative reality. They argue that the vaccine is more dangerous than the virus itself, taking advantage of the fact that most people in the U.S. no longer have firsthand experience of measles.

The anti-science zealots have waged a well-coordinated campaign of glossy publications, online blitzes and mass phone calls. That this irrational nonsense can get a sympathetic hearing reflects the abysmally low level of science education in this deeply religious country. The fanatics harass doctors and others promoting the

the supposed dangers of vaccines. One of the most prominent spokesmen for the retrograde anti-vaxxer movement is Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who served as a lawyer for those bringing suit against the recent NYC public health mandate.

Anti-vaccine activists specially target certain communities, such as Somali Americans in Minnesota and Hasidim in New York. Among those repeatedly visiting the Minneapolis area was Andrew Wakefield, co-author of a fraudulent—and ultimately revoked—1998 study in *The Lancet* medical journal supposedly linking vaccines to autism. As a result of this campaign, the Somali American community’s vaccination rate, which had been among the highest in the state, fell to a mere 42 percent, and a measles outbreak followed in 2017.

Likewise, prior to the current epidemic, a slick brochure, “The Vaccine Safety Handbook,” was widely distributed in the Hasidic neighborhoods of Brooklyn. It featured false warnings that vaccines cause autism and contain cells from human

with women, setting up a hotline and preparing its own brochure.

Capitalism and Infectious Disease

Democrat Adam Schiff, chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, has been calling for social media conglomerates to step up censorship of “vaccine misinformation.” Already, Facebook blocks anti-vaccination pages and groups, Instagram suppresses hashtags like #vaccinescauseautism and Pinterest banishes all search results having any relation, pro or con, to vaccines. Liberals have cheered on such moves, which are part of a growing trend by tech giants to censor media content according to what they deem acceptable—an ominous development that has already redounded against leftists, minorities and perceived opponents of the U.S. rulers. Instead, it is necessary to expose and defeat the dangerous quackery being peddled.

For the rulers of this capitalist society, it is an article of faith that health care is best served when left to private enterprise. But unless the well-being of the rich and powerful is threatened, the bourgeoisie sees little point in investing in public health. American families shell out a fortune on health insurance, prescription drugs and hospital stays, while Big Pharma spends notoriously little on developing new vaccines. The capitalist ruling class shows far more interest in funding potential bioweapons like anthrax, plague and rabbit fever.

Vaccines, which have saved countless lives, are among the world’s greatest medical advances, like clean water, sewage systems and antibiotics. But no vaccine alone can make up for the damage wrought by U.S. imperialism and the other capitalist powers, which have imposed on much of the planet the desperate conditions in which hideous scourges thrive. Some 110,000 cases of measles were reported worldwide in the first three months of this year, with over 170 million children under the age of 10 unprotected from the disease. A major anti-vaccine backlash was provoked by the CIA earlier this decade in Pakistan, one of the countries now hit hard by measles. A fake vaccination program, launched to obtain Osama bin Laden’s DNA prior to his assassination, led to real vaccinators being condemned to death and aggravated a polio crisis.

Many diseases that today afflict millions could be wiped out like smallpox was four decades ago, if only the heavy weight of the profit motive, as well as crippling superstition, were to be lifted from society. To make that a reality, the means of production must be ripped out of the hands of the capitalist class. Workers rule on an international scale promises the dawn of a communist world free of oppression, want and backwardness. Then, with tremendous resources available to medical science, human well-being would truly jump off the charts. ■



Science be damned: Robert F. Kennedy Jr. at head of February anti-vaxxer rally in Olympia, Washington.

benefits of vaccines, seeking to intimidate them into silence. Anti-vaccination bills are currently pending in 20 states, and on the rare occasion legislators repeal non-medical exemptions, like in California in 2015, the vaccine rejecters find other ways to avoid immunization. There are classrooms in the state today with as few as 42 percent of kindergarteners vaccinated due to a cottage industry of rogue doctors who, for a fat fee, hand out bogus medical exemptions to well-heeled, self-absorbed parents.

Politicians of both capitalist parties have for years pandered to anti-vaccine quackery. During the 2008 presidential campaign, Barack Obama claimed that the relationship between vaccines and autism was “inconclusive,” while a few years later Hillary Clinton pledged to investigate the matter. In 2012, prominent Democrats in the House Government Oversight Committee joined Tea Party Republicans in lambasting federal health officials over

fetuses. An editor of the brochure declared in an email: “Vaccines contain monkey, rat and pig DNA as well as cow-serum blood, all of which are forbidden for consumption according to kosher dietary law.”

The added stigma of being potential disease carriers has intensified prejudice against and fear of Hasidic Jews. Such are the gross results of the concerted campaign by the anti-vaxxers. In fact, de Blasio’s emergency declaration had significant support in the Brooklyn Jewish community. Most ultra-Orthodox rabbis consider vaccines to be kosher and have urged Jews to be vaccinated. The head of the United Jewish Organizations encouraged Williamsburg residents to comply with the vaccination order. An organization of Orthodox Jewish nurses is waging a campaign to encourage vaccinations, including by arranging home meetings

Kanaky...

(continued from page 5)

withdrawal of the Ukrainian troops and under the protection of Russian troops.

Quite to the contrary, France sent thousands of extra cops and soldiers, supposedly to make voting conditions safe. Moreover, Macron had just reshuffled his government, naming as overall head of the police forces a man who was subprefect in Iparralde (Northern Basque Country) from 2010 to 2012, right in the middle of [the Basque separatist] ETA’s disarmament. The man chosen to run the political police (the “DGSJ”) made his mark coordinating police repression in Corsica. This brings to mind Pasqua, Chirac’s police minister in the 1980s, who said that “Defense of Bastia [a Corsican city] begins in Nouméa.” The French bourgeoisie professes its confidence in the referendum but holds the truncheon and the gun at the ready. We say: *French soldiers, cops and gendarmes out of Kanaky!*

But the French bourgeoisie has other, more cunning, means to influence the situation in its favor. Since the 1980s it has increased the economic dependence

of the archipelago on French state subsidies. First place in the colony’s economy goes not to nickel but to financial transfers from Paris, notably the payment of public servants.

These functionaries, often of French origin, receive substantial colonial subsidies as expatriates, notably those designed to compensate for the high cost of living. Under this system, France artificially maintains the nominally high salary levels that make New Caledonia appear like a haven of very high GDP per inhabitant in comparison to the rest of the Pacific region, owing to the fact that the CFP (the colonial money in circulation) is tied to the euro. This helps to maintain the fear that the standard of living would collapse in the case of independence. (In reality, French money leaves the Hexagon [France] briefly at best, since a good part is deposited in French banks, and another part serves to import goods and services provided by French businesses.)

An additional consequence of the high level of nominal salaries and prices is that profits are higher for imports than for local products. All this is designed to maintain and reinforce economic dependence on Paris.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

SPARTACIST LEAGUE/U.S.

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6

WORKERS VANGUARD



ISO...

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claiming to stand for an illusory “third camp” between capitalism and Stalinism—encapsulated in the slogan “neither Washington nor Moscow.” In reality, the so-called third camp was always the camp of imperialism. Cliff’s equally Stalino-phobic British Socialist Workers Party was affiliated with the ISO until the early 2000s, when its American satellite split away after a bitter factional struggle over competing opportunist appetites.

Like Shachtman, who supported Washington’s Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961, Cliff and his American cothinkers worked overtime in support of imperialism. In the 1980s, the ISO threw its lot in with the forces of capitalist restoration in Poland around the purported “union” of Solidarność, which was an instrument of the Vatican, Wall Street, and Western social democracy. The ISO also championed the CIA-backed *mujahedin* fundamentalists in Afghanistan against the Soviet Army’s military intervention—one of the few progressive acts carried out by the Moscow Stalinist bureaucracy—which could have crushed the woman-hating butchers. We said, “Hail Red Army!” and denounced the Kremlin’s withdrawal of Soviet forces in 1988-89 as a betrayal. The ISO, in contrast, rejoiced: “We welcome the defeat of the Russians in Afghanistan. It will give heart to all those inside the USSR and in Eastern Europe who want to break the rule of Stalin’s heirs” (*Socialist Worker*, May 1988).

In the early 1990s, the ISO—along with every imperialist ruling class on the planet—got what it wanted. The restoration of capitalism in the USSR and East Europe had the U.S. bourgeoisie rejoicing over the “death of communism” and the Cliffites were singing in tune, trumpeting that Boris Yeltsin’s coming to power “should have every genuine socialist rejoicing” (*Socialist Worker*, September 1991). The final undoing of the Soviet Union in 1991-92 ushered in a global offensive against the world’s working class and oppressed by the imperialist ruling classes, as well as profound economic and social devastation. The collapse of the USSR qualitatively threw back political consciousness such that advanced workers generally no longer identified their aspirations for a better life with the fight for workers power and a classless, communist future.

The ISO assumed that the post-Soviet world would generate mass radicalization and open up a left niche. Today, some former members admit that this demented fantasy was off. For the last 25 years, these opportunists tried to cash in on the backward ideological climate—to which they had in their own way contributed—by moving farther to the right. ISOers continued their practice of hyper-activism within single-issue “movements,” acting as a barnacle on whatever liberal coalition was on offer from the campus left and trying to maneuver their way into positions of leadership.

With Cold War season over, the ISO still promoted the “human rights” guise for U.S. imperialist intervention. *Socialist Worker* spent the last few years sup-



Moscow, November 1919: V.I. Lenin and Leon Trotsky, principal leaders of Bolshevik Revolution, at commemoration of its second anniversary. ICL fights for new October Revolutions worldwide.

porting the CIA-backed “democratic” rebels in the so-called “Syrian Revolution,” berating Washington for not doing enough while slandering leftists opposed to U.S. intervention for their “Islamophobia.” The ISO also echoed the Democratic Party’s hysteria against Russia, the main ally of Syrian president Bashar al-Assad. (See “Pimps for U.S. Imperialism,” WV No. 1097, 7 October 2016.)

Class Independence vs. Class Collaboration

The ISO’s plunge into demoralization and self-destruction was evident at its February convention, described as the “most painful” in the history of the organization. There, several longtime leaders like Ahmed Shawki, Paul D’Amato, Sharon Smith, Lance Selfa and Lee Sustar—regular writers for their *International Socialist Review* journal and publishing company Haymarket Books—were voted off the Steering Committee. Things blew up just three weeks after the convention when a letter was circulated alleging that the former leadership had protected a member accused of sexual assault in 2013 and then concealed it from the membership. We have no way of knowing the truth of the allegations. A mere two weeks later, the ISO ceased to exist.

Following the letter’s receipt, nearly the entire 2013 Steering Committee was either suspended or forced to resign. The new leadership had no qualms over dumping the old guard, which had already been sacked from leading bodies for putting up some resistance to dissolving whole hog into the Democrats. These gestures by the old guard, labeled the “arch-conservative” minority, were nothing more than an attempt to preserve the organization’s existence. As then-*Socialist Worker* labor editor Lee Sustar put it: “If the ISO were to accept that its independence from the Democratic Party is ‘strategic’ rather than a principle, then the question arises as to why the ISO should exist outside the DSA.”

The ISO’s occasional talk of “independence” from capitalist parties was fraudulent. Among other things, it politically endorsed and ran its own candidates on the ticket of the capitalist Green Party, which acts as a shill for the Democrats. Todd

Chretien’s Green campaign in 2006, as well as the ISO’s support to union-buster Ralph Nader earlier and Green Party activist Jill Stein later, were the very opposite of fighting for the necessary independent mobilization of the working class against the capitalists and all their parties.

In the labor movement, the ISO’s activity reinforced illusions in capitalist politicians and state agencies by acting as waterboys for a wing of the labor bureaucracy. Union formations it supported over the years, from the Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) to the CORE caucus in the Chicago Teachers Union, regularly endorsed Democrats for office and proved themselves to be total class collaborationists when in leadership positions. The TDU were cheerleaders for government intervention, inviting the courts into the affairs of the union to supposedly “clean out” corruption, although the purpose of the state was to destroy the powerful Teamsters. (See “Lawyers for Government Union-Busting,” WV No. 738, 30 June 2000.)

As further proof of being deep in the pockets of the class enemy, the nonprofit that managed the finances for the ISO and Haymarket Books—the Center for Economic Research and Social Change (CERSC)—received money from sources tied to U.S. big-business interests, including the Wallace Global Fund and Rockefeller Brothers Fund. CERSC accepted grants from a variety of bourgeois “charitable” sources and liberal institutions. Such ties recall the old saying: “He who pays the piper calls the tune.”

Leninism: What It Is and What It Isn’t

In search of the ISO’s original sin, a number of former members have published documents attacking Leninism, even though the ISO’s life and death had zilch to do with Lenin. The Cliffite cast-offs are burnishing their anti-Communist “god that failed” credentials as they dive headfirst into the DSA. Both groups have embraced every rotten social-democratic position that Lenin and the Bolsheviks had to defeat in order to lead the October Revolution.

The March 21 “A Letter from Canadian Comrades” published on socialistworker.org grotesquely links the ISO’s purportedly “Leninist party model” to the alleged sexual assault cover-up. The letter claims: “When people make the stability or preservation of the leadership and its ‘Leninist’ authority their top concern, they may avoid suspending or expelling members, especially ‘leaders’ for oppressive behavior,” adding, “We’re convinced that what should be discarded isn’t socialism from below, but the ‘Leninist’ micro-party model.” The ISO’s mantra of “socialism from below” is its way of saying that Leninism is elitist, a version of the bourgeois lie that Leninism leads to Stalinism.

The ISO never had any semblance of or need for Leninist organizational practices, because it was thoroughly hostile to the entire purpose of a Leninist vanguard party: to lead the working class, through conscious and collective action, to the taking of state power. All experience has

shown that even the most militant struggles by the workers spontaneously produce a consciousness that is limited by a framework that accepts capitalism. Socialist consciousness can only be brought to the working class through the intervention of a democratic-centralist Leninist vanguard party—made up of advanced workers and declassed intellectuals—which seeks to instill in the working class an understanding of its historic revolutionary mission of abolishing the rule of capital.

The purpose of democratic-centralism is for the party to speak and act with a single voice while allowing the fullest possible debate among its membership. Unlike the Cliff tendency, we do not publicly thrash out internal differences. Doing so is tantamount to inviting more backward layers of society to be the jury to decide matters of revolutionary strategy, and making the party more permeable to bourgeois ideas. Regarding Leninist organizational principles, the founder of American Trotskyism, James P. Cannon, wrote:

“Democratic-centralism has no special virtue per se. It is the specific principle of a combat party, united by a single program, which aims to lead a revolution. Social Democrats have no need of such a system of organization for the simple reason that they have no intention of organizing a revolution.” —“Leninist Organization Principles,” 3 April 1953, *Speeches to the Party* (1973)

Insofar as the ISO honchos displayed any pretensions to Leninism or democratic-centralism, it was to justify the bureaucratic suppression of their membership. The external reflection of this internal bureaucratism was the ISO’s hatred of open political debate on the left and rejection of elementary workers democracy. The ISO had a special animus toward us as revolutionary Trotskyists: it regularly resorted to red-baiting, exclusion and thuggery against our organization.

The task of a vanguard party is also to act, in Lenin’s words, as a “tribune of the people” championing the cause of the exploited and oppressed and combating every manifestation of national, racial and sexual oppression. As opponents of workers rule, the ISO could provide no program for the liberation of black people or women, which requires the overthrow of the system of exploitation in which their oppression is rooted. Instead, the ISO, having rejected the working class as the motor force for revolutionary change, embraced petty-bourgeois liberalism like #MeToo feminism and Democratic Party constituency politics. The ISO simply reaped what it had sown.

The difference between the ISO and the Spartacist League always came down to the difference between reform and revolution. For revolutionary, proletarian, internationalists in the U.S. imperialist belly of the beast, our central strategic task remains the same: breaking the allegiance of the working class to the Democrats to forge a revolutionary vanguard party that can lead the fight for socialist revolution. It is only under the banner of Leninism that the workers of the world can at long last sweep away the capitalist exploiters into the dustbin of history. ■

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# WORKERS VANGUARD

## Anti-Communists Go Home to the Democrats



Daniel Biskup  
Left: ISO's newspaper hailed victory of Boris Yeltsin's forces of capitalist counterrevolution in former Soviet Union; Orthodox priest (above left) on Yeltsin's Moscow barricades, August 1991. Right: ISO unfurled banner at 2007 Obama campaign rally in Chicago, later celebrated inauguration of imperialist Commander-in-Chief.



# ISO: Rest In Pieces

After nearly half a century in the orbit of the Democratic Party, the International Socialist Organization (ISO) has finally landed. In March, the reformist group and publisher of *Socialist Worker* voted to disband following internal disarray over how to capitalize on the “emerging socialist movement”—which is neither socialist nor a movement but a layer within the capitalist Democratic Party. The popularity of Bernie Sanders and the growth of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), with its rising Congressional star Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, posed an existential crisis for the ISO, which had long assumed dominion over petty-bourgeois “fight the right” activism in the U.S. The collapse, spurred by a scandal involving an alleged cover-up of an alleged sexual assault in 2013, also laid bare an organization mired in bureaucratic rot.

As its former members perform a political autopsy, what is in the guts of the ISO is no mystery: anti-Communism. The organization was born upholding imperialist “democracy” against Soviet “totalitarianism,” promoting the cause of imperialist-backed counterrevolutionary forces whose aim was the destruction of the Soviet bureaucratically degenerated workers state. The domestic corollary of its anti-Sovietism was to chase after a supposed “progressive” wing of the bourgeoisie at home, that is, the Democrats, and prettify capitalist rule. Though paying occasional lip service to Marxism, the ISO was always a staunch enemy of proletarian revolution.

For the last two years, the ISO has been eclipsed by the DSA in the anti-Trump “resistance,” whose entire purpose is to get Democrats elected in 2020 by selling the lie that they can represent an alternative for workers and the oppressed. Within the left, the prevailing pro-Democratic Party pressures of the Trump era have fractured other pseudo-socialist groups like Socialist Alternative and Workers World Party.

The DSA, with its nearly 60,000 members, has attracted droves of millennial Berniercrats behind the trending banner of “democratic socialism.” The expressed goal of the DSA, which is organically embedded

in the Democrats, is to “realign” the party of slavery, Hiroshima and Vietnam. The ISO wanted a cut of the DSA’s electoral success, but was stifled by the fact that it was supposed to feign at least one degree of separation from the Democrats by not *openly* endorsing them. At the same time, the ISO always gave Democrats backhanded support or celebrated them outright, as it did with Wall Street’s man Barack Obama.

Last summer, a debate ran in the pages of *Socialist Worker* between those advocating a “clean” versus a “dirty” break from the Democrats, a squabble over whether to officially campaign for candidates running on the Democratic ballot. Well before the ISO’s annual convention in February, which established an “Elections committee,” the organization had been touting a new crop of Democratic Party “progressives” and the 2020 presidential bid of long-serving imperialist politician Sanders. The tomes of internal bulletins published in the lead-up to the convention document the enthusiasm for joint work with the DSA and support to DSA candidates.

After all, if the DSA represented a supposed “unprecedented” opening and if the Sanders campaign put “socialism in the air,” why not swim with the big fish? Former honcho Todd Chretien lamented during a workshop at the DSA-affiliated *Jacobin*’s “Socialism in Our Time” conference in New York last month that the ISO had been “built for a period of defeat,” i.e., with the labor movement in steep decline, and thus was unable “to adapt our politics and our form for a new sort of movement.” Far from advancing the cause of socialism, Sanders, Ocasio-Cortez and their ilk serve to deepen deadly illusions in the capitalist Democratic Party. Such illusions are the greatest political obstacle to militant class struggle and a key mechanism for co-opting discontent among youth.

As we wrote in “Opponents of the Revolutionary Internationalist Workers Movement,” published alongside the SL/U.S. Programmatic Statement in 2000:

“Lacking a revolutionary perspective, the reformist left is inexorably led to the gates of the Democratic Party, reinforcing

its influence. This has many expressions, from overtly calling for votes for Democratic candidates to somewhat more masked appeals to ‘fight the right’ (i.e., the Republicans) to working hand in glove with the labor bureaucracy. Deriving from the reformist view of the ‘neutrality’ of the capitalist state, and in the absence of a mass social-democratic party in this country, the Democratic Party is offered as the vehicle through which the capitalist state can be pressured to serve the interests of the working class and oppressed.”

### Shachtmanism Full Circle

The ISO and the DSA have a common granddaddy, Max Shachtman, who split from the Trotskyist movement in 1940, dumping the position for the unconditional military defense of the Soviet Union and subsequently rejecting its class nature as a workers state. Shachtman eventually ended up an unabashed social-patriot in the right wing of American social democracy, working in the Democratic Party and with the agencies of U.S. imperialism to push counterrevolution. He became the most effective ideologist of “State Department socialism.”

The ISO’s forebears flunked the most basic acid test for Marxists: defense of the world’s first workers state, born through the October 1917 Russian Revolution led by V.I. Lenin and Leon Trotsky’s Bolshevik Party, which was a historic victory for the international proletariat. Despite its subsequent degeneration under a conservative bureaucratic caste headed by J.V. Stalin that seized political power in 1923–24, the key gain of the October Revolution remained: the collectivized economy, which laid the basis for full employment, universal health care, free education and affordable housing.

To his dying day, Trotsky fought to defend the workers state, which was being undermined by the Stalinist bureaucrats. These misrulers had renounced the struggle for workers revolution internationally in the name of building “socialism in one country” and seeking “peaceful coexistence” with imperialism. Trotsky’s last political struggle was against Shacht-

man and others on the Russian question. We Trotskyists in the ICL fought for the unconditional military defense of the USSR against imperialism and capitalist counterrevolution, as well as for proletarian political revolution to replace the Stalinist bureaucracy with a government based on workers democracy and revolutionary internationalism.

Both Michael Harrington, who was the founder of the DSA, and Hal Draper, whose Independent Socialist Clubs were the precursor to the ISO, followed Shachtman into the Cold War Socialist Party (SP) in 1958. Harrington, a leader of the SP until 1973, was a loyal servant of U.S. imperialism, supporting its war in Vietnam and acting as a consultant to the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. Draper, a left-wing critic of the SP leadership, split in the early 1960s, coalescing his group around the New Left student movement in Berkeley. As the student protests grew more radical, old-style Cold War social democracy was pushed to the sidelines. Renaming itself the International Socialists (I.S.) in 1969, Draper’s group used Marxist-sounding rhetoric about revolution and claimed to be “anti-imperialist,” but anti-Communism was its real program and essential reason for existing.

The I.S. had a loose association with Tony Cliff’s followers in Britain. Capitulating to the Cold War Labour government, Cliff had refused, in 1950, to defend the North Korean and Chinese deformed workers states against a counterrevolutionary war on the Korean peninsula by U.S. imperialism and its British allies. Cliff came up with a theoretical justification for his programmatic departure from Trotskyism by maintaining that the Soviet Union was “state capitalist” and that the bureaucracy was a new ruling class. (See “The Bankruptcy of ‘New Class’ Theories,” *Spartacist* [English-language edition] No. 55, Autumn 1999.)

In 1977, with the U.S. capitalist rulers about to launch Cold War II, a section of the I.S. split off to form the ISO, adopting Cliff’s “state capitalist” line and

*continued on page 7*