

## Cancel Puerto Rico's Debt!

JULY 23—For over a week, Puerto Rico has been convulsed by mass protests calling for Governor Ricardo Rosselló to resign. Tens of thousands of youth and working people have marched nearly every day against this hated lackey of the U.S. imperialists. On July 17, an almost 100,000-strong demonstration at the governor's mansion, La Fortaleza, was attacked by cops who fired tear gas and rubber bullets, injuring many and arresting at least five, including for "violence against the authorities." We demand: **Drop the charges! Hands off the protesters!**

The protests were sparked by the leaking of a trove of private group chats between Rosselló and his cabinet that dripped with vile anti-woman and anti-gay bigotry and exuded contempt for the thousands killed by Hurricane Maria. The scandal, pop-

ularly known as RickyLeaks, tapped into widespread discontent among the population oppressed under the boot of the U.S. colonial masters represented by Democrats and Republicans alike.

U.S. colonial domination has bled Puerto Rico to the point of collapse. A few years ago, with Puerto Rico mired in a deep recession, itself the result of decisions made in Washington, Wall Street bankers and hedge fund managers swooped in to collect on a debt that now stands at \$124 billion. To this end, in 2016 the Obama administration set up a financial oversight junta to impose brutal austerity measures—slashing wages, pensions and health care; privatizing education and gutting social services. The next year, the devastation caused by Maria

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El Nuevo Día

**San Juan, July 17: Riot cops confront protesters outside La Fortaleza, official residence of Governor Rosselló, amid mass demonstrations demanding his resignation.**

## Down With Trump's Anti-Immigrant Drive!

### Pelosi, the Squad—Democrats Are Enemies of Immigrant Rights

The sadistic treatment of immigrants at the border has once again become a political football for the two bourgeois parties. Tens of thousands of asylum-seekers are jailed in overcrowded and filthy detention camps, while military-style I.C.E. raids and deportations stoke fear, threatening to tear apart families and destroy livelihoods. The current Commander-in-Chief revels in unadulterated nativist bigotry, but Washington's war on immigrants is thoroughly *bipartisan*. Barack Obama and his predecessors enforced the same racist program—from the militarization of the border to nightmarish detentions and mass deportations. The Democrats' chastising of Trump for his brutality is a cynical attempt to cast themselves as the party of "decency," aiming to dupe working people and minorities into supporting their bid for the White House in 2020.

The Republican and Democratic parties represent the capitalist class, whose rule is based on the exploitation of labor and racial oppression at home and the drive to strengthen imperialist domination abroad. Creating the desperate conditions that force countless migrants to flee north, the U.S. imperialists have for over a century ravaged their semicolonial backyard in Latin America and the Caribbean through economic subjugation enforced by military intervention, coups and puppet regimes. These are the work-



Office of Rep. Henry Cuellar

**Democratic Obama (left) and Republican Trump (right) administrations have carried out same racist measures against immigrants, including their mass detention in hellish conditions.**

ings of imperialism—a system in which a handful of the richest, most advanced capitalist countries have divided and redivided the world as they compete for control of markets, raw materials and access to cheap labor. Interimperialist rivalries have already resulted in two world wars.

The current feud in Washington kicked off in late June when four black and minority first-time Democratic members of Congress known as "the Squad," opposed a bill funding border police facil-

ities. Trump launched an anti-immigrant tirade against Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ayanna Pressley, Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar, telling them to "go back and help fix the totally broken and crime infested places from which they came." (They are all U.S. citizens.) The four have received death threats, especially Omar, who, as a Muslim born in Somalia, is particularly targeted.

In capitalist America, where anti-black racism has always been the touchstone of

social reaction, Trump's diatribe is ultimately directed at black people. "Go back to Africa" has long been a rallying cry of white-supremacists against black fighters for equality. It is part and parcel of the racist message that this is a "white man's country" where black people must "know their place."

In response to Trump, the Democrats seized the chance to posture as the friends of the oppressed and to stage a show of unity. This was all mere theatrics. Far from the "socialists" they are sometimes labeled as, the members of the Squad are capitalist politicians who retail the con that working people and minorities have a stake in choosing between what Malcolm X described as the smiling fox and the growling wolf. As he pointed out, "They'll both eat you."

Against all parties of capital, we fight to build a multiracial workers party committed to the struggle for socialist revolution. Such a party would raise the call for full citizenship rights for all immigrants—everyone who makes it here, no matter how, should be entitled to all the rights of those born in the U.S. Crucially, it would seek to mobilize the social power of the labor movement to demand: **No deportations! Free all the detainees!**

Nancy Pelosi and the Squad are just as committed as Trump to border security, immigration control and the interests of U.S. imperialism. In one of their first votes after being elected last year, the four "progressive" Congresswomen supported funding the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which runs I.C.E. Their real concern is that Trump's rants are an obstacle to selling U.S. imperialism's "democratic" credentials. In her July 12 testimony to a House committee, Ocasio-Cortez complained that abuses like family separation at the border detention centers were occurring "in front of an American flag." With Trump as a convenient cover, her denunciations of the migrant detention centers as "concentration camps" gloss over the history of such camps under her idol, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who interned some 120,000 people of Japanese descent, the vast majority U.S. citizens, during World War II.

For her part, Omar is fond of remarking how Trump violates the "core beliefs" and

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## For a Revolutionary Workers Party!

Immigration...

(continued from page 1)

“values” on which the U.S. was founded—this about a country founded on the genocide of Native Americans and the enslavement of black people. Meanwhile, Tlaib declared in her July 12 House testimony that the situation at the border was dehumanizing not only to migrants but also to the border agents! This was after the revelation of the secret Facebook group of thousands of border agent thugs boasting about the death of immigrants, posting vulgar and misogynistic threats, including against minority Congresswomen.

The call by the Squad and other Democrats to “abolish I.C.E.” amounts to nothing more than replacing one bloody anti-immigrant police force with another. According to Ocasio-Cortez, instead of being housed under DHS, which was set up by George W. Bush, immigration enforcement should be under the Justice Department like the original *la migr*a, the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Under Bill Clinton and for decades before, the INS was infamous for carrying out roundups against immigrants, including to break up union organizing drives. Never raised by the Democrats before Trump’s presidency, their slogan to “abolish I.C.E.” is simply a maneuver against their GOP rivals. You certainly never heard it when Obama used I.C.E. to deport a record number of people and expand the immigration detention system.

The capitalist state exists to defend the rule and profits of the bourgeoisie through violence and repression. It can never be reformed to represent the interests of the working class and oppressed. The bourgeoisie’s anti-immigrant regulations and laws, which represent their particular economic and political interests, are neces-

sarily repressive and chauvinist, no matter which party is in power. Trump relies on I.C.E. raids in order to sow terror, like the one at an electronics repair company in Texas in April that arrested over 280 immigrants, the majority of them female. During his reign, Obama relied on desk-top raids based on investigations into workers’ residency status, which were less disruptive to businesses.

Immigrants, especially those who are undocumented, are in a vulnerable situa-

tion, but they are not just victims: immigrant workers form a vital component of the multiracial U.S. proletariat. Often with experience in class and other social struggle in their homelands, as well as awareness of the brutalities of U.S. imperialism, these workers have the potential to serve as a human bridge linking U.S. workers with their class brothers and sisters internationally.

Undocumented immigrants in particular are used by the ruling class as scapegoats for the miserable conditions workers suffer, while often being forced into the most dangerous and exploitative jobs. Defense of immigrants is crucial for advancing the unity and strength of the whole of the working class—black, white, Latino; native-born and immigrant—in its struggles against the capitalist exploiters. Some unions have declared themselves “sanctuary unions” by, for instance, providing legal advice and incorporating certain protections for members into contracts, such as prohibitions on employer retaliation based on immigration status. Well and good. But this is a far cry from what is needed: a class-struggle fight in defense of immigrant rights, including through strike action.

The American labor movement is crippled by a misleadership whose fundamental loyalty is not to the workers but to the U.S. capitalist order. Chaining the working class to the Democrats, the labor tops have sapped the unions of their strength, doing little to defend their members in

the face of attacks on wages and benefits. The protectionist “America first” poison pushed by the AFL-CIO tops peddles the lie that U.S. workers have common interests with their exploiters and inflames anti-immigrant prejudices against “foreign workers.” Demonstrating their fealty to the capitalist state, the AFL-CIO organizes border agents.

There needs to be a political battle inside the labor movement to forge a new leadership, one based on the understanding that the interests of capital and labor are irreconcilable and that workers must be mobilized independently of and in opposition to the bosses’ parties and state. At a “Socialism Conference” in Chicago in early July hosted by the Democratic Socialists of America—an arm of the Democratic Party whose prominent members include Ocasio-Cortez and Tlaib—its *Jacobin* publication and Haymarket Books, we intervened into a panel on “How to End the Bipartisan War on Immigrants.” Countering the notion that some “bright horizon” would arise with the next elections, our comrade said:

“Democrats are the enemy of the working class and the working class needs its own party, a revolutionary multiracial workers party that will fight for full citizenship rights for all immigrants, that will fight for black liberation, that will fight for women’s liberation and that will fight to smash the capitalist state. What you guys are talking about is rearranging the deck chairs on the capitalist *Titanic*. What we need is a whole new party, a workers party that will fight for a workers government.”■

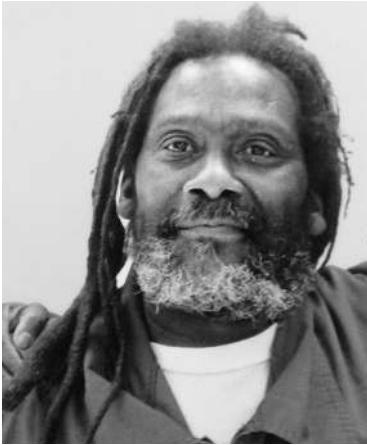
even further into poverty. Therefore, we emphasize the *right* of independence.

The bourgeois opposition parties, mainly the Partido Popular Democrático, have been prominent at the demonstrations against Rosselló. Kicking this enemy of the workers and oppressed out of office would be gratifying. But rather than replacing one capitalist politician with another, what is needed is to give the outpouring of anger by working people an independent political expression—a revolutionary workers party that would lead the struggles of all the oppressed against the ravages of capitalism. Our perspective is to build Leninist vanguard parties in the U.S. and in Puerto Rico whose goal is to establish workers rule.■

NOTICE

Workers Vanguard skips alternate issues in June, July and August. Our next issue will be dated August 23.

Eddie Africa Paroled



Justice for the MOVE 9

Eddie Africa

and longtime MOVE supporter, wrote: “Forty years is far more than 40 years if your name is Eddie Africa. That’s because MOVE people face the fury of county and state officials, and that meant a kind of cruelty that most prisoners have never seen nor imagined.”

On June 21, after being incarcerated for over 40 years in Pennsylvania’s dungeons, Eddie Africa was released, the fifth of the MOVE 9 to be paroled over the past year. MOVE, a largely black, back-to-nature radical group, has been a target of the racist capitalist state since the early 1970s. The MOVE 9 were sentenced to 30-100 years for the death of a cop killed in police cross fire during a murderous siege of MOVE’s Powelton Village home in Philadelphia on 8 August 1978. The state vendetta against MOVE reached a peak with the 1985 bombing of their Osage Avenue home by the police and the Feds, which killed eleven people, including five children, and reduced a whole black neighborhood to ashes. The bombing was ordered by black Democratic Philly mayor Wilson Goode.

Over the years, prison authorities and guards heaped further vicious abuse on the MOVE 9. In celebrating Eddie’s release, class-war prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal, who is a former Black Panther



TROTSKY

The Fight for an International Trotskyist Party

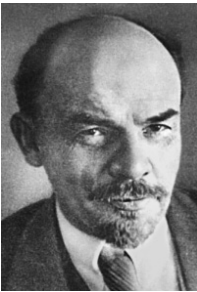
From our inception, the Spartacist League/ U.S. has been committed to building the necessary instrument in the fight for a socialist future: an international revolutionary proletarian party based on strong national sections. A statement of this purpose is contained in our 1972 article “Genesis of Pabloism,” a seminal polemic against the anti-Leninist revisionism that had destroyed Trotsky’s Fourth International two decades

earlier. The perspective of the International Communist League, of which the Spartacist League is the U.S. section, is to reforge the Fourth International to lead the working class to power worldwide.

In his struggle to found the Fourth International, Trotsky repeatedly underscored the imperative need for revolutionary organization on an *international* basis. Prolonged national isolation within one country must ultimately disorient, deform and destroy any revolutionary grouping no matter how subjectively steadfast. Only a principled and disciplined international collaboration can provide a counterbalance to the fierce pressures toward insularity and social chauvinism generated by the bourgeoisie and its ideological agents within the working-class movement. As Trotsky recognized, those who deny the need for a programmatically founded democratic centralist world party deny the Leninist concept of the vanguard party itself....

The Spartacist League has refused to passively acquiesce to the national isolation forced upon us. We have emphatically rejected the ersatz “internationalism” which achieves its international connections at the price of a *federalist* non-aggression pact thus renouncing in advance the struggle for disciplined international organization. We have sought to develop fraternal ties with groupings in other countries as part of a process of clarification and polarization. Our aim is the crystallization of a cohesive democratic centralist *international tendency* based on principled programmatic unity, the embryo of a reborn Fourth International.

—“Genesis of Pabloism,” Spartacist No. 21, Fall 1972



LENIN

WORKERS VANGUARD



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The closing date for news in this issue is July 23.

## #MeToo Witchhunt Snarles Black Harvard Law Professor

In May, black Harvard law professor Ronald Sullivan and his wife, Stephanie Robinson, were stripped of their positions as faculty deans of the university's Winthrop House residence hall in retaliation for his having joined the legal defense team of Harvey Weinstein, the former Hollywood mogul accused of serial sexual assault. This reprisal capped a semester-long campus #MeToo vendetta against Sullivan, who was simply practicing what is taught in every law school in the country—the accused are legally innocent unless proven guilty and everyone has the right to an attorney. This right applies no less to the unsavory Weinstein. Many of Sullivan's colleagues at Harvard Law School and the Massachusetts Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers sided with him, pointing to the chilling effect on attorneys everywhere if one is deemed morally guilty by association with a client. But for the #MeToo crowd, to be accused of a sex offense is to be guilty of it, never mind due process and the presumption of innocence.

The Harvard Black Law Students Association denounced the “racist undertones” of the campaign against Sullivan, who was removed from his post after he left the Weinstein defense team, citing conflicts with his teaching schedule. Campus feminists had launched a petition, staged protests and vandalized the Sullivan family's home, claiming that he “does not value the safety of the students.” In so doing, they made a target of a black attorney known for representing victims of racist police terror and frame-ups. Among these were: the family of 18-year-old Michael Brown, whose killing by Ferguson, Missouri, cops in 2014 fueled the growth of the Black Lives Matter movement, a black Harvard student brutally beaten by the cops, and thousands wrongfully imprisoned in New Orleans in 2005 after Hurricane Katrina.

Sullivan himself noted of the calls for his removal as a Harvard residence hall dean: “It is not lost on me that I'm the first African-American to hold this position.” Attempts to link Sullivan to the alleged crimes of his former client are no small matter in a society founded on chattel slavery and maintained on the structural oppression of the black population, with the vast majority forcibly segregated at its bottom. Black people are a race-color caste: no matter how rich, famous or accomplished, capitalist America brands them for their skin color. Black athletes, entertainers and academics commonly face harassment and racist targeting. Ten years ago, well-known black Harvard professor Henry Louis Gates Jr. was arrested for trying to enter his own home a few blocks from campus.

False accusations of violating the purity of “white womanhood” have long been used as the racist rallying cry for the lynchings of black men like 14-year-old Emmett Till, or to railroad them to prison. The very right of those accused of rape to their counsel of choice was won in a landmark Supreme Court case involving nine black youth known as the “Scottsboro Boys,” who were framed up beginning in 1931 for rapes that never happened. This high court ruling was issued amid mass protests organized by the American Communist Party to demand their freedom, and as a result of the efforts of its legal defense arm.

Given this history, it is an outrage that the Association of Black Harvard Women accused Sullivan of working to “embolden rape culture” on campus. This is patently ludicrous and further belied by the fact



Phil Farnsworth

**Ronald Sullivan, professor and director of Criminal Justice Institute at Harvard Law School.**

that, as one of Sullivan's former students told the *Boston Globe*, he had advocated for her and other student victims of sexual assault, offering to handle their cases free of charge. This track record doesn't matter for the campus feminists, though.

Sexual violence is an expression of the degraded status of women in capitalist society, where they are enslaved in the institution of the family, the main source of women's oppression and a crucial prop to the system of exploitation. The #MeToo torchbearers trivialize such violence by conflating the horrific crime of rape with unwanted advances, bad dates and regrets after consensual sex. Far from helping to make women safer, the feminists seek to strengthen the powers of the capitalist state—the biggest and most brutal abuser of women—to regulate personal behavior. It is precisely the repressive state apparatus that enforces the subjugation of women, particularly poor, working-class, black and other minority women, who suffer from lack of access to abortion and general health care, low-paying jobs and other hardships.

#MeToo mob justice, which has destroyed careers and lives through “trial by media,” would tar defense attorneys as “accomplices after the fact.” This crusade is a threat to everyone's rights, including the right to legal counsel. Such attacks often begin by denying them to some vilified group. Witness the “war on terror,” which was directed first against Mus-

lims, and then extended to black activists, trade unionists and leftists. In 2006, leftist lawyer Lynne Stewart was railroaded to prison on charges of material support to terrorism for providing legal representation to Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman, who was imprisoned on conspiracy charges stemming from the 1993 World Trade Center bombing.

In the end, those who will pay the most are working people, against whom the capitalist state machinery of repression is aimed—the police, courts and prisons all exist in order to defend the rule and profits of the tiny class of exploiters. In an *Atlantic* article on Sullivan (14 May), staff writer Conor Freidersdorf observed:

“Harvard's decision may deter ambitious young lawyers from undertaking the defense of *any* potentially controversial client, including indigent men who stand accused of rape or sexual assault. That raises the odds of wrongful convictions, especially among the poor. Harvard grads are relatively unlikely to be affected.”

### Anti-Sex Frenzy and Bourgeois Institutions

Sullivan's persecutors whined that his providing counsel to Weinstein was so “trauma-inducing” that Sullivan was unfit for the dean's *in loco parentis* job of babying 400 college students. Such complaints partake of the neo-Victorian climate on campuses, where feminists and the authorities have demonized a lot of consensual

casual sex and infantilized women as mere victims in need of protection by the campus patriarchs with more cops, safe spaces and trigger warnings. Even before #MeToo, any semblance of due process on campuses for those accused of sexual harassment and assault had already been torn to shreds thanks to the kangaroo court system set up under Title IX.

Sullivan was also denounced by his #MeToo inquisitors for having spoken in defense of black Harvard economics professor Roland Fryer, who was subjected to two different Title IX investigations for supposedly engaging in “unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature,” a very elastic and subjective charge. In an interview for the *RealClearInvestigations* article “Harvard, the NY Times and the #MeToo Takedown of a Black Academic Star” (29 January), Sullivan stated: “This process has been deeply flawed and deeply unfair,” adding: “It shows what the current [#MeToo] movement, some blood in the water, and good coaching [of witnesses] can produce” (brackets in original). On July 10, the university suspended Fryer for two years and barred him from the research lab that he created.

The Harvard administration is certainly no defender of women. As the number one think tank for U.S. imperialism, Harvard has as its mission educating the scions of capital, war criminals to be and the future administrators of an economic order in which the oppression of women and black people is materially rooted. In 2005, then Harvard president Lawrence Summers opined that women lack the “intrinsic aptitude” for science and engineering. Summers personifies what Harvard is all about. After he received a PhD from the university, he went on to become president of the World Bank, an instrument of U.S. imperialism for pillaging dependent countries, and later a top official in the Clinton and Obama White Houses, where he helped put the squeeze on workers and the poor at home.

An elite training ground for the children of the bourgeoisie and its trusted agents, Harvard was built on the backs of slaves. The riches amassed from slave-traders and slaveowners were the seed money for its current \$37 billion endowment. It was only two years ago that the crest of a notorious slaveowning family who endowed Harvard Law School was removed from its seal. When student activists covered the crest with tape in 2015, racist yahoos defaced the portraits of black tenured faculty, including that of Sullivan. Harvard and all other private universities should be nationalized and made tuition-free, their doors thrown open to working-class, black and Latino youth.

The campaign against Sullivan underscores how feminism as an ideology reflects the concerns of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois women who want a seat at the table of power and prestige with their male counterparts. Women's liberation from domestic servitude and sexual violence, as well as class exploitation, can begin only with the shattering of the capitalist order through socialist revolution. The seizure of power by the multiracial working class, led by a Leninist vanguard party, would also set the stage for the emancipation of black people, with a workers government providing decent jobs, as well as free, quality, integrated housing, health care and schools for everyone. The barbaric heritage of slavery would be buried once and for all. ■



Bettmann

**Washington, D.C., 1934: Communist Party-initiated march demanding freedom for Scottsboro Boys, black youth falsely accused of raping two white women.**



# 15th National Conference of the SL/U.S.

# In the Predominant Imperialist Power

The Spartacist League/U.S., section of the International Communist League, held its 15th National Conference late last year. The highest decision-making delegated national meeting of the membership, a conference is charged with critically reviewing the work of the organization, addressing issues in dispute and electing a new Central Committee. Even before the Conference Call had been issued, there was an intense political struggle with a small minority that promoted the politics of “people of color” liberalism and Chicano nationalism, while denigrating the strategic centrality of the black question in the U.S.

This faction, which had not declared itself as such and did its work in secret, had been politically defeated before the conference, with its two most vociferous advocates simply quitting. The politics it promoted reflected the pressures that have battered the SL/U.S. in this period that continues to be defined by the devastating global impact of the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet degenerated workers state in 1991-92 and the absence of much in the way of working-class struggle in the U.S. Those pressures bearing down on us have been amplified with the election of the flagrantly racist Trump administration and the frenzied “fight the right” response by Democratic Party liberals and the reformist left.

The conference document, “In the Predominant Imperialist Power,” stressed the centrality of our international to the SL/U.S.’s fight to maintain its revolutionary program and purpose as a small Leninist organization in the world’s most powerful imperialist country. In particular, it underlined the importance of the ICL’s Seventh International Conference (see “The Struggle Against the Chauvinist Hydra,” *Spartacist* [English-language edition] No. 65, Summer 2017). The 2017 conference crucially corrected a long-standing perversion of Leninism on the national question, particularly as it applied to relatively advanced multinational states such as Canada, which oppresses Quebec. That fight led to the emergence of a layer of cadres in the ICL who became the basis for a largely new International Executive Committee. Many of these ICL cadres, particularly Québécois comrades as well as the leadership of the Mexican section, played a critical role in the discussions and political struggles leading into, at and after the SL/U.S. conference.

Although still in the process of being tested and consolidated, this generational shift in leadership, coming out of political struggle, is vital to the very future of the ICL. That future is rooted in fighting to preserve the dearly bought lessons of past struggles waged by our revolutionary forebears. These stretch back to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels and the 1917 October Revolution led by V.I. Lenin and Leon Trotsky’s Bolshevik Party, as well as James P. Cannon, the founder of American Trotskyism. From the inception of the SL/U.S., our founding cadre fought to break out of national isolation, understanding that the combined impact of the strength of U.S. imperialism and the relatively backward consciousness of the American working class would lead to deformations. The appendices to the

## Revolutionary Internationalism Is Key

1974 declaration formally constituted international Spartacist tendency on the principles of proletarian revolutionary internationalism.

SL/U.S. conference document included our 1974 “Declaration for the Organizing of an International Trotskyist Tendency,” which formally constituted the international Spartacist tendency on the principles of proletarian revolutionary internationalism.

Noting that our continuity is not simply political but also personal, the conference document underscored: “We are fortunate to still have and be able to work with all our senior cadre and particularly Jim Robertson, who is 90 and who has been in the workers movement for over 70 years. He has been essential to maintaining the unbroken *programmatic* continuity of our movement.” Comrade Robertson remained an active collaborator and an essential component of the leadership of the SL/U.S. and ICL up until he died in April. Although his death is a tremendous blow, he was vital to forging

a new generation of cadre to carry forward his life’s work in the struggle for the socialist emancipation of humanity.

Another of the appendices to the conference document were the minutes of a series of meetings in 1963-64 of Robertson and other members of the Revolutionary Tendency (RT), which was fighting to maintain the program of Trotskyism against the political degeneration of the once-revolutionary Socialist Workers Party (SWP). Anticipating their expulsion from the SWP, the members of the RT debated their future existence, with the central question being propaganda. One wing argued for establishing an infrequent theoretical magazine open to others on the left. Robertson argued for a newspaper that could serve as a timely and regular organ for intervention in working-class and other struggles as well



as for polemics against organizations falsely claiming adherence to revolutionary Marxism. Robertson’s conception, which he underlined “is the traditionally Leninist approach,” reflecting the perspective of fighting to build a vanguard workers party, was adopted. It would become embodied in the publication of *Workers Vanguard*.

In the lead-up to the SL/U.S. conference, our ability to continue to publish *Workers Vanguard* on a biweekly basis was called into question by the political defections of two younger cadres, one of whom was National Secretary and the other slated to become WV editor. Overwhelmed by the pressures of “fight the right” liberalism and a sense of demoralization over our current and future existence, they reneged on the political commitment and integrity required for communist leadership. While both pulled back from the abyss and continue to play important roles in the party, their actions led to the implosion of the SL/U.S. leadership configuration. However, the central party leadership rebounded, forging a new axis of leadership in both the Political Bureau and *Workers Vanguard*.

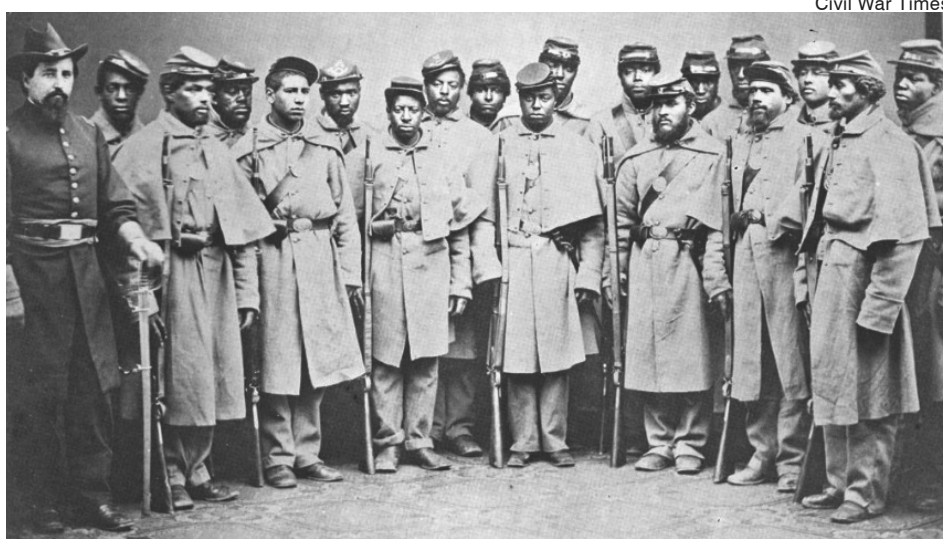
The conference underscored our commitment to the production of the biweekly *Workers Vanguard* as critical to our existence, allowing us to intervene as events unfold and influence the consciousness of the several thousand who read or peruse our press. Reflecting our commitment to forging a revolutionary, multiracial workers party that acts as the tribune of the people, we have also begun the semi-regular publication of Spanish-language *suplementos en español de Workers Vanguard* and the inclusion of bilingual pages in the paper (see “Introducing: Suplementos en español de *Workers Vanguard*,” WV No. 1151, 22 March).

As the flagship paper of the ICL, *Workers Vanguard* also publishes timely line articles on vital international issues. At the same time, as a sectional publication, it is necessarily nationally limited. The critical instrument for the ICL is quadrilingual *Spartacist* (in English, French, German and Spanish). As comrade Bishop, the editor of English-language *Spartacist*, noted in a report to the conference, beginning with issue No. 23 (Spring 1977), *Spartacist* became the organ of our international tendency and is today published by the International Executive Committee. It embodies the application and extension of the lessons of the first four Congresses of the Communist International (CI), as exemplified by our substantive articles on executive office and the constituent assembly (see “Down With Executive Offices of the Capitalist State! Marxist Principles and Electoral Tactics,” *Spartacist* [English-language edition] No. 61, Spring 2009 and “Why We Reject the ‘Constituent Assembly’ Demand,” *Spartacist* [English-language edition] No. 63, Winter 2012-13).

Political opportunism is always national and narrow in character. In line with the recognition that it is impossible to survive as a Marxist nucleus in the world’s most powerful imperialist country without the international to help maintain our revolutionary moorings, the fight to further integrate the SL/U.S. into the ICL was fundamental to the proceedings of the confer-



Above: Enslaved family on Georgia plantation in early 1860s. Below: Black Union Army recruits during Civil War. Black troops were key to smashing slavocracy; black workers will play leading role in liberating black masses and working class as a whole through socialist revolution.



# On the Liberal Myth of “Trump’s Base”

The discussion on the centrist article on Brett Kavanaugh’s nomination, which appeared in *WV* No. 1137 (27 July 2018), led to a further important correction that had been resisted by the central SL/U.S. party leadership until the 15th National Conference. The same leading international comrade who objected to the Kavanaugh article also objected to *WV*’s repeated references to “Trump’s base” as the source of the anti-immigrant measures and flagrant racism of his administration. For example, we wrote in the Kavanaugh article: “Like the roundups and detentions at the Mexican border, Trump’s [anti-Muslim] ban plays to his white-supremacist base.” Our conference document wrongly asserted that this statement was “not narrowly false”; actually, it was simply false.

While Trump has many supporters, including fervent ones, he does not have a base that is independent of the longstanding electoral base of the Republican Party. The idea that “Trump’s base” is responsible for the current reactionary political climate is a direct echo of the Democratic Party “resistance,” which blames white workers who voted for Trump, whom they label “deplorables,” both for Trump’s ascendancy and for his policies in office. The purpose is to push illusions in the other party of American capitalism by whitewashing the Democrats’ role in the bourgeoisie’s war against the working class, immigrants, black people and all the oppressed.

By adopting the framework of “Trump’s base,” we were capitulating to these liberal bourgeois forces. To argue, as we had, that Trump’s policies are determined by his “base” subscribes to the lie that the policies of the capitalist state are determined by the “will of the people” as opposed to the capitalist ruling class.

In defending the liberal myth of “Trump’s base,” several leading comrades argued that our use of the term did not refer to white workers. This was reflected, for example, in the Introduction to *Black History and the Class Struggle* No. 26 (August 2018), which stated, “While some white workers did vote for him, Trump’s base is the petty-bourgeois Tea Party types as well as other reactionaries and religious nuts.” However, as a March motion passed by the SL/U.S. Political Bureau in the aftermath of the conference rightly noted, “Whatever definition of Trump’s ‘base’ is used, it is a way for the liberal bourgeoisie to whitewash itself and cover up its own track record, posing as ‘friends of the oppressed’

The political logic of *WV*’s harping on “Trump’s base” would be to write off the possibility of winning white workers to the fight against racial oppression and for working-class power—that is, to reject the perspective of integrated class struggle and socialist revolution. By joining the anti-Trump chorus about his “base,” we partook in the idealist and liberal notion that racism among the white masses is the source of racial oppression rather than the American capitalist system in which it is rooted. As the Political Bureau motion further argued:

“Backward consciousness is not the source of racial oppression, although it is part of sustaining the oppression and economic degradation of blacks, Latinos and other minorities, and of maintaining the oppression of the working class as a whole. Racial oppression fundamentally stems from the American capitalist system and its ruling class, which divide the working class along racial lines. The responsibility for increased reaction under the Trump presidency lies centrally with the bourgeoisie represented by *both* its parties and supported by the labor lieutenants of capital.”

In the *WV* No. 1137 article and elsewhere, border guards and the cops were particularly identified as elements in “Trump’s base” that he was whipping up for further acts of racist violence. In fact, such acts are part of their job. These armed forces are at the core of the capitalist state, whose very purpose is the violent repression of workers and the oppressed as well as any who would oppose U.S. capitalist rule. This is true regardless of which party is in power.

However, *WV* repeatedly asserted that Border Patrol and other police agencies were “emboldened” by Trump, implying that the state somehow became more repressive under his administration and that it would be less repressive if a Democrat were in power. Notwithstanding Trump’s rhetoric, police violence and anti-immigrant crackdowns have not fundamentally changed between his, Obama’s and previous administrations. As Leon Trotsky put it in response to those who argued that the nature of the police changed under a social-democratic government, “Though governments may change, the police remain.”

Trump has emboldened fascist terror gangs. But he didn’t come to power based on mobilizing these racist murderers. His victory was secured by the mechanisms

of American bourgeois democracy. That he found widespread popular support in the 2016 election is in no small measure because the Democrats

responded to his call, “Make America Great Again,” by declaring, “America Is Already Great.”

The Republicans openly stoke racist reaction, while the Democrats lie and then do the same thing. In 2016, however, the Hillary Clinton campaign did not even make a pretense of offering anything to working people ground down by massive economic dislocation. The Democrats have since invoked the bogeyman of “Trump’s base” to explain their defeat and refurbish their credentials. By echoing this myth, we were politically flinching toward the Democratic Party.

In correcting the false notion of “Trump’s base,” we also concurred with comrades who criticized the slogan, “Democrats paved the way for Trump.” Especially in the way it was used for the current *Black History* pamphlet cover—“Racist Trump White House: Democrats Paved the Way”—the slogan implies that there is a qualitative difference between the Democrats and Republicans. It echoes the liberal view that if only the Democrats had a “better” candidate (for example, Sanders) or if only the Obama administration had been “better,” Trump would not have won. We received a letter from a longtime supporter, B. Montoya, who argued as much after we used the slogan in the wake of Trump’s 2016 victory. But we wrongly defended the slogan (see “Democrats, Liberals and the Union Tops,” *WV* No. 1104, 27 January 2017). By insisting so much on “Democrats paved the way,” we made it seem as though the Democrats’ greatest crime was laying the groundwork for Trump’s rise, letting them off the hook for their own attacks on working people and the oppressed.

Correctives to capitulations to the pressures acting on the SL/U.S. have repeatedly come from leading comrades outside the country, underlining the key role such comrades play in helping the SL/U.S. maintain its Marxist program and moorings. We anticipate that liberal pressures will only sharpen and heighten in the coming period, as campaigning for the 2020 presidential elections gets under way. Against the drive by liberals and reformists to “defeat Trump” and elect Democrats, whether “corporatist” or “progressive,” we put forward our revolutionary program for proletarian independence and the need to forge a multiracial workers party that fights for a workers America.

ence. As a leader of the ICL’s Greek section put it, “The antidote to national narrowness is nothing less than internationalism.”

## The Struggle Against Liberal Pressures

This conference was the first such gathering for the SL/U.S. during Donald Trump’s presidency. It was thus vital to situate struggles in the party in the context of the political pressures we face. In opposition to the liberal “fight the right,” anti-Trump “resistance,” we have held the line against the reformist left’s open embrace of the capitalist Democratic Party, especially its “progressive” wing represented by the likes of Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. For its part, the Cliffite International Socialist Organization, faced with the growth of the Democratic Socialists of America since Trump’s election, outright dissolved with many of its former members fully embracing the Democratic Party—an embrace rooted in the Cliffites’ anti-Communist support for “democratic” imperialism against the Soviet Union. In opposition to our “own” imperialist ruling class, we stand for the unconditional military defense of the Chinese deformed workers state, including against Trump’s trade war, which the Democrats fully support.

Nonetheless, demoralized liberalism and despair of integrated class struggle have seeped into our organization, exemplified not only by the promotion of liberalism by the now-erstwhile minority, but also a number of other political flinches and capitulations. One clear example was the centrist article, “Capitalist Injustice and the Supreme Court” (*WV* No. 1137, 27 July 2018), which was our initial piece on Brett Kavanaugh’s nomination to the Supreme Court.

The opening paragraph of the article baldly declared, “Kavanaugh’s confirmation would give the Supreme Court a solid right-wing majority lasting perhaps a generation. This would strengthen the hand of the capitalist rulers in their drive to crush the already attenuated rights of the working class and oppressed.” As an 18 October 2018 SL/U.S. Political Bureau motion noted, “The first section of the article in particular—i.e., its political envelope—represented a capitulation to ‘fight the right’ pressures in the Trump era and accepted the current dismal state of class and social struggle in the U.S. as a permanent feature.” By so doing, the article represented a flinch toward the liberal wing of the Democratic Party, which promotes the federal courts, and especially the Supreme Court, to defend gains like abortion rights. Reforms beneficial to workers, black people, women and all the oppressed are not won through the good graces of “enlightened” or “progressive” politicians or judges; they are the product of hard-fought class and social struggles and cannot be defended against the capitalist rulers without such struggles.

The article, in fact, sowed the illusion that the capitalist state can be reformed in the interests of working people and the oppressed by never stating that the working class has no side as to who sits on the Supreme Court, which is part of the core of the American capitalist state. A Québécois comrade who is a central leader of the ICL strongly objected to the article, rightly noting, “Kavanaugh is certainly bad news for the working class and the oppressed, but a ‘progressive’ judge would still be a judge of the Supreme Court.” This point was amplified by a Spartacist League/Britain comrade, who wrote, “The reader would conclude from

that statement that having a ‘left-wing’ majority would *weaken* the capitalist rulers—reformist nonsense.”

The criticisms of the Kavanaugh article were for months strongly resisted by elements in the SL/U.S. central party leadership. However, the interventions by leading comrades outside the U.S. led to an important political corrective that the conference endorsed. It also laid the basis for another corrective that took place after the conference on our repeated references to “Trump’s base” (see article above).

## Black Oppression: What Makes America America

In the months leading up to the conference, a discussion that had begun as a push to translate more *WV* articles into Spanish and to seriously study the oppression of Mexican Americans in the Southwest and the country more generally was seized on by a small minority to promote “people of color” liberalism and Chicano nationalism. Essentially, they were importing a form of Democratic Party “constituency politics” into our organization. The handmaiden to this anti-Marxist program was the equation of the special oppression of Mexican Americans and Latinos in the U.S. with the race-color caste oppression of black people—all the while writing off white workers, without whom socialist revolution in this country would be impossible.

Ignorantly identifying the Mexican-derived population in the U.S. as a “caste,” the minority minimized the forcible segregation of the majority of the black population as a race-color caste, obliterated class divisions in the Latino population and reduced the question of slavery to a historical footnote. Far from an artifact, the structural oppression of black people at the bottom of society is to

this day fundamental to maintaining the capitalist order in the U.S. by obscuring the class divide between the workers and their exploiters, perpetuating backward consciousness and undermining the workers’ struggles. As we wrote in the SL/U.S. conference document, black oppression

“is the fundamental reason the working class has never had a party of its own. It lies behind why this is the only advanced capitalist country without any real national health care system. The ‘right to work’ measures recently expanded by the *Janus* decision have their origins in the former states of the Confederacy, the ‘Open Shop’ South. Those threatening to

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**WORKERS VANGUARD**  
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**Ola de huelgas sacude maquiladoras en México**



Concentración masiva de huelguistas de las maquiladoras en Matamoros, 16 de enero.

El siguiente artículo se publicó en Workers Vanguard No. 1104 (25 de febrero de 2019) en español y inglés. 16 de febrero—A lo largo del mes pasado, una serie de huelgas de masas se realizaron en las maquiladoras de la zona fronteriza de Estados Unidos y México. En total, más de 70 de las 115 maquiladoras de Matamoros, que está al otro lado del Río Bravo de Nuevo Laredo, Texas. En los meses de junio, las huelgas fueron organizadas en la Compañía de Transformación de México (CTM) contra sus demandas por un aumento salarial del 20 por ciento y un bono anual de 32 mil pesos (unos \$1600). Conociendo como el movimiento 2012, esta huelga continúa, que ha desafiado a la dirección sindical, sigue extendiéndose de fábrica a fábrica. Las huelgas obreras se han dado en apoyo al empleo decente, mejores condiciones de trabajo de autonomía y calidad de trabajo, en una ciudad donde más del 70 por ciento de la población vive en la pobreza, y se está empeorando a pesar de la fuerte inversión en la zona maquiladora. En torno a la ola de huelgas, Susan Prieto Terrazas, una dirigente de Ciudad Juárez, se presenta como una dirigente.

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Conference...

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overturn abortion rights have their roots in the segregationist movement. The forcible segregation of the overwhelming majority of the black masses remains the touchstone of social reaction in capitalist America. "Indeed, one cannot understand the special oppression of Mexican Americans and Latinos without understanding the black question.... Latinos, Asians and other populations that are predominantly non-white suffer oppression as non-whites, but, as an intermediate layer, they also navigate a society where the main dividing line is between black (at the bottom) and white (at the top)."

Responding to the minority's claim that Mexican Americans, like black people in the U.S., suffer oppression as a "caste," comrade Robertson noted that "in caste-ridden countries (e.g., India, the U.S., Japan) the invariant criteria for caste is a sexual line of division drawn in blood." The concept of race—and racism—was perfected in American slavery, in which black skin was deemed a sign of inherent "inferiority." Permanent and hereditary, the color line was enforced so rigidly that anyone who had "one drop" of African ancestry was branded as black.

Under slavery this was wielded to ensure that the offspring from the rape of a slave by anyone in the master's house would remain in bondage. After slavery, the "one drop" rule served to enforce racial segregation. As veteran American Trotskyist Richard S. Fraser put it in his 1953 lecture on the black question, the point of the "one drop rule" was not "to keep a visibly white person of one-sixty-fourth Negro ancestry in the ghetto in segregation with dark people, but to prevent social contact between white and black in the beginning of such a family descent by stigmatizing the offspring of mixed marriages as black" ("The Negro Struggle and the Proletarian Revolution" [November 1953], printed in "In Memoriam—Richard S. Fraser," *Prometheus Research Series* No. 3 [1990]).

The brutal legacy of "a sexual line of division drawn in blood" runs from racist terror and lynchings under the Klan rallying cry of "protecting white womanhood" to so-called anti-miscegenation laws outlawing black/white intermarriage, which existed in some states until the late 20th century. Although no longer legally enshrined, the relatively low rate of intermarriage between blacks and whites is testament to the endurance of the race-color caste oppression of black people. In contrast, the most common form of intermarriage in this country is between Latinos and whites. While the children of black/white marriage are invariably designated as black, the children of Hispanic/white marriages may be considered either Hispanic or white depending on many factors, including class and skin color.

As a longtime black cadre wrote in response to the minority, key to ending all forms of capitalist oppression "is the recognition that the fight for black freedom and equality is fundamental to bringing down the entire structure of capitalist rule in this country." The black question is *the* strategic question of the American socialist revolution. Unless the multiracial proletariat takes up the fight for black



Adapted from map by U.S. Army Center of Military History

freedom, it will never free itself from capitalist wage slavery.

Our goal is to forge a multiracial workers party committed to the program of revolutionary integrationism: a proletarian-centered struggle against every manifestation of racial oppression based on the understanding that the complete integration and equality of black people can be realized only in an egalitarian socialist society. Key to the struggle for workers power is the black proletariat. As we wrote in "Black and Red—Class Struggle Road to Negro Freedom," a key document adopted at the 1966 founding conference of the Spartacist League, "Because of their position as both the most oppressed and also the most conscious and experienced section, revolutionary black workers are slated to play an exceptional role in the coming American revolution."

It was precisely this understanding and perspective that the underground faction rejected. Nonetheless, a wide layer of comrades in the SL/U.S. were initially swayed by the minority's "caste" arguments, indicating a disturbing shallowness on the black question. As part of addressing the issue, a cadre educational on the black question by comrade Jacob Zorn was organized and held on the eve of the conference. His presentation, which was published in *WV* during Black History Month (see "Black Liberation Struggle: The Key to American Socialist Revolution," *WV* Nos. 1148 and 1149, 8 and 22 February), began by reasserting the centrality of the fight for black freedom to working-class revolution in the U.S.: "Any party which sets out to lead a workers revolution in the United States but which does not fight for black liberation will fail. The struggle against black oppression has proven its ability, time and again, to shake American capitalism to its core."

The Latino Question: A Struggle for Equality and Integration

In addition to the election of a new Central Committee of the SL/U.S., an initial impetus for holding a National Conference was to deepen and extend our understanding of the oppression of the Latino and Mexican-derived populations in the U.S. Seizing on this impetus, the minority sought to abuse and misuse the 2017 ICL conference and its vital corrective on the national question by claiming that the

right of self-determination applied in *all* of the territory seized from Mexico in the conquest of Texas, the 1846-48 Mexican-American War and the 1853 Gadsden Purchase. As the conference document noted, this is a revanchist line that "denies the reality that for the overwhelming majority of Mexican Americans and Latinos, the question is not one of self-determination but of integration."

The Mexican-derived and Latino populations in the U.S. suffer special oppression—that is, their oppression is trans-class and not solely defined by class exploitation. They have endured vicious discrimination and segregation, poor and monolingual education, dilapidated housing and lack of medical care, police terror and disproportionate incarceration, as well as, historically, vigilante and state terror on a mass scale. However, their response has not been to fight for self-determination in territories that have long been integrated into the political economy of the United States. The defining feature of their struggle is for equality and integration.

There is a national question in the American Southwest, specifically in those contiguous border regions that are mainly populated by a Spanish-speaking population, which is part of a nation, Mexico, while residing in what is formally the United States. Though it has not appeared in our press for many years, our position has always been that the right of self-determination applies in these areas. Moreover, as our 1971 article "Labor and La Raza" pointed out, as an attempt to correct historic injustices committed by the U.S. capitalist rulers, a workers government in the U.S. would transfer "a substantial section of the border areas back to Mexico," adding: "The Chicanos would then be free to decide whether to return to Mexico with these areas or definitely opt for settlement in the U.S."

However, these positions have nothing in common with those argued by our former minority, which was based on "identity politics"—i.e., organizing solely on the basis of one's own ethnic

identity—rather than the revolutionary proletarian internationalism of Marxism. The minority even resurrected the mythical nation of Aztlán. This represented a rejection of the Leninist understanding of what constitutes a nation, substituting in its stead a concoction of 20th-century Chicano nationalism.

The minority also repeatedly referred to Mexican Americans as a "conquered people." In fact, the Mexican-American War resulted in the conquest of territory, not a people. It was a war waged for territorial expansion of slavery, a basic point challenged by the minority as it sought to downplay the centrality of slavery and black oppression. The U.S. seized that vast portion of Mexico that contained the fewest number of Mexicans—nearly 80,000 in the stolen territories, compared to six to eight million at the time in what is today Mexico. As the conference document noted, "Mexican Americans are not a conquered people; they are immigrants and their descendants."

At the same time, the Latino population in the U.S. is highly variegated, comes from different national backgrounds and has different experiences depending on geographic location, migration patterns and class. Moreover, by its sheer scale and historic relationship to U.S. imperialism, immigration by Mexicans and other Latinos is different from that of previous populations—it is not a product of one or two or three waves of immigration but a constant flow. This flow is conditioned by the fact that between the U.S. and Mexico is a roughly 3,000-kilometer (1,970 mile) border where the First World and the Third World meet, with the U.S. capitalist rulers seeing Mexico and Central America as little more than a pool of superexploitable cheap labor.

Indeed, a substantial percentage of Latinos are part of the working class, and as such are a strategic component of the multiracial American proletariat. Over the past decade or two, as U.S. industry increasingly moves into the low-wage, non-union South, Latinos searching for work have also moved there, where previously their numbers had been tiny. As the conference document noted:

"Seven of the ten states with the fastest-growing Latino populations are today in the former Confederacy. There these workers have played an important role in labor struggles, such as the successful unionization of the Smithfield meatpacking plant in Tar Heel, North Carolina in 2008, which required the unity of Latino, black and white workers in the face of anti-union drives, including deportations. This underlines the necessity for the workers movement to fight against deportations, for full citizenship rights and against the segregation and oppression of both black people and Latinos. Any struggle to revitalize the labor movement through organizing the unorganized, including in the South, will require that the labor movement take up the oppression of both black people and Latinos."

This understanding underscores the desperate need for a Leninist workers party

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6

WORKERS VANGUARD



whose leadership and membership is 70 percent black, Latino and other minorities. Forged in opposition to all the political parties of the capitalist class enemy, such a party would fight to mobilize the multi-racial working class in defense of all the oppressed. It would call on labor to wage a class-struggle fight not only against the bipartisan anti-immigrant drive, but also for demands that address the oppression and discrimination suffered by Latinos in the U.S., the majority of whom were born in this country. Such demands include: quality, integrated housing, education and health care free at the point of delivery, as well as bilingual education, not only to learn English but to maintain Spanish capacity. (Bilingual education would also give U.S.-born children the opportunity to learn multiple languages in addition to English.) As we argued in “Labor and La Raza,” the fight to make Spanish a recognized standard language in the Southwest borderlands would “go a long way toward making the Chicanos not feel like foreigners in their own country.”

Struggles over the questions of “caste” and “self-determination” also led to discussion and debate on aspects of the American Indian question. Native Americans have endured and continue to endure horrific oppression under U.S. capitalism. Their lands have been stolen, their languages virtually silenced and their cultural practices suppressed. As the conference document noted:

“There’s probably no population in this country that has suffered more than American Indians, who were, uniquely in the U.S., subjected to outright genocide. But that does not mean that the Indian question is qualitatively similar to the black question, including in its strategic nature. We reject the view that the most oppressed are the most revolutionary.... The European conquest happened. It was savage and bloody. It cannot be undone.”

As Engels put it in a February 1893 letter: “History is about the most cruel of all goddesses, and she leads her triumphal car over heaps of corpses, not only in war, but also in ‘peaceful’ economic development. And we men and women are unfortunately so stupid that we never can pluck up the courage to a real progress unless urged to it by sufferings that seem almost out of proportion.”

Key to addressing the Native question is the understanding that “at bottom, the American Indian question is today *not* a land question but a social one,” as the document stated. A workers government in the U.S. would seek to spend the money to provide a decent life for all, not least Native Americans. It would fight to ensure the social emancipation of American Indians, promoting their voluntary integration on the basis of full equality while providing the fullest possible regional autonomy for those who want it.

**The Working Class and Its Discontents**

The conference document included a preface that sought to situate Trump’s rise as reflective of the decline of U.S. imperialism. While U.S. imperialism remains the world’s pre-eminent power, both militarily (by far) and economically, it has experienced a relative decline since the heyday of the post-World War II “American Century”—in 1945, the U.S. share of

the world’s gross product stood at nearly 50 percent; today, it is less than 25 percent. To boost profits in the face of intensified international competition, U.S. capitalists, under both Democrats and Republicans, have for decades pursued a union-busting drive to increase the exploitation of the working class at home.

In the face of these attacks, the pro-capitalist labor bureaucracy has lain prostrate, preaching that the fortunes of the workers lie with a more profitable U.S. capitalist order and chaining the proletariat to the Democrats while sowing illusions in the bosses’ laws. The result has been a trail of crippled unions, busted strikes and declining wages. With unions representing less than 11 percent of workers, nearly half of working Americans today make less than \$30,000 per year.

The conference held an Industrial Commission on our intervention in and

ety. While white workers have the greatest access to the dwindling number of higher-paid and skilled jobs, black workers, who remain the most highly unionized sector of the working class, are generally employed in the hardest jobs at the bottom end of the pay scale. Latinos have more access to semi-skilled and skilled work in unionized workforces, while Latino immigrants predominate in some of the lowest-paid, most backbreaking, non-union jobs. Meanwhile, conditions for all workers continue to deteriorate.

Another reporter to the commission, comrade Jennings, pointed out that our trade-union supporters have gained particular authority and respect in fighting against the poisonous racial and ethnic divisions fomented by the bosses. While confronting expressions of racism by backward white workers, our supporters have also had to deal with the notion of

made by leaders selected on the basis of the program.... It is people who have to make the party, with the party program as their weapon.”  
—“On Selecting the Leadership” (1942)

In the SL/U.S. the outgoing leadership has always taken responsibility for recommending a slate of comrades for the new CC. In addition, a Nominating Commission is elected at the beginning of the conference to hear and solicit the recommendations of conference delegates for candidates to the CC. Presenting its proposed CC slate to the conference, the head of the Nominating Commission reported that it represented a selection of those comrades who have shown a proven capacity to lead the work as well as a high programmatic understanding of the conclusions of the 2017 ICL conference and the more recent struggles in the SL/U.S. in defense of the centrality of the fight for black freedom and the program of proletarian internationalism. Cutting against the bourgeois division between mental and manual labor, the conference also elected to the CC a number of comrades who play key roles in central party administration.

Underlining the vitality of the new ICL leadership, whose interventions into the discussions of the SL/U.S. have been critical, the conference added key components of the Grupo Espartaquista de México and the Trotskyist League in Quebec and Canada as full members of the SL/U.S. Central Committee. Our commitment to maintaining the biweekly *Workers Vanguard* was also central to the selection of comrades to lead the section.

Noting that “the key task facing the party is the ongoing struggle for communist continuity,” the conference document pointed out: “Our senior cadres are the repositories of, collectively, hundreds of years of work, experience and training.... We are certainly the only Trotskyist party in history that has managed to get to a point where we have so many cadre who still uphold our revolutionary program, insofar as we have been tested.” At the same time, we face the painful contradiction of fighting to defend and extend our party while organizationally our forces are contracting under the combined impact of aging and mortality, several quits of intermediate cadre and an unfavorable objective situation defined by the absence of much class struggle.

The national terrain in many countries is rapidly changing, reflecting the inevitable contradictions generated by the capitalist system itself. In the U.S., the capitalist rulers’ decades-long onslaught against the working class and oppressed will inevitably produce social and working-class struggles. Our job is to hold the internationalist, proletarian and revolutionary banner of communism high and apply the lessons of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky in order to intervene when and where struggle breaks out. In the 1845 *Theses on Feuerbach*, Marx put it simply: “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.”■



Rubiera/Fayetteville Observer  
**17 November 2006: Walkout at Smithfield plant in Tar Heel, North Carolina, after company, in collaboration with *la migra*, fired immigrant workers. Joint struggle of Latino, black and white workers was crucial to 2008 unionization victory.**

intersection with the working class. A presentation by comrade Francis at the commission noted that the small uptick in strikes since 2018 has generally not been carried out by the core of the organized industrial proletariat but rather by more impoverished unionized workers, such as teachers and other school employees and hotel workers. The slogan of the hotel strikers, “One job should be enough,” spoke to the felt needs of the overwhelming majority of the working class.

This underlines the desperate need for the labor movement to mobilize in defense of its members while waging a concerted drive to organize the unorganized. But such a struggle runs straight up against the trade-union bureaucracy, which has served as an active accomplice of the bosses’ one-sided class war. The union misleaders have sold to their members multi-tier contracts, helped the bosses gut pensions and health plans and enforced other givebacks. Their “American jobs for American workers” protectionism has in turn fed nativist reaction against foreign-born workers.

Reports on various unionized workforces submitted for discussion at this commission confirmed the racial and ethnic hierarchy of American capitalist soci-

“white-skin privilege,” the lie that white workers benefit from the oppression of black people and other minorities, which serves to alibi the bourgeoisie. Black oppression and discrimination against non-white workers serves to deepen the exploitation of *all* workers by the capitalists. It is in the interest of white workers to fight for black freedom and against racial and ethnic chauvinism.

International comrades at the commission, particularly from Greece and South Africa, where the working class is far more combative and where many workers look toward the heritage of the Russian Revolution, spoke to the importance of learning from the history of the SL/U.S. trade-union work and its exemplary actions against fascist terror, successfully mobilizing the power of labor in united-front action. Today our roots in the working class are slender but nonetheless real and important. Our main vehicle for intervention in the U.S. is *Workers Vanguard*. In a period marked by a dearth of struggle by the multiracial working class, comrades at the commission underlined the importance of articles addressing the hard-fought labor battles of the past, such as our 2015 *Then and Now* pamphlet on the lessons of the three 1934 strikes led by Reds that paved the way for the organization of industrial unions in the U.S.

**The Fight for Revolutionary Continuity**

The main reports at the conference were given by comrade Williams, the National Chairman, on the question of leadership, and comrade Wilde, who was elected National Secretary, on the conference document. After discussion and debate, the conference concluded with delegates electing a new Central Committee to lead the SL/U.S. until its next conference. The leadership of a Leninist organization is as vital to the party as the party is to bringing revolutionary consciousness to the working class. As James P. Cannon wrote:

“We all know that it is the program that makes the party. But it doesn’t make the party automatically. The party also is

**Chattanooga...**  
(continued from page 8)

supply of parts to U.S. and foreign auto-makers (see WV No. 1149, 22 February). The strikers won their demands.

In the case of Volkswagen, the vehicles that roll off the line in Chattanooga contain engines built at its plant in Silao, Guanajuato, where workers went on strike in 2012. The interests of workers on both sides of the border would be considerably advanced by international labor solidarity actions. However, the UAW bureaucrats have for decades poisoned the well with their “American Jobs for American Workers” protectionism, in part to deflect from their complicity in making the U.S. resemble a low-wage manufac-

turing haven. Such chauvinism only aids the efforts of the auto bosses to pit auto workers in the U.S. against their class brothers and sisters abroad.

What is posed is a fight for a new leadership of the unions, one committed to a class-struggle program and outlook. Such a leadership would prepare the vitally necessary battles against the capitalist exploiters, such as organizing the unorganized and the fight for black rights. It would do everything to break down the racial and other divisions within the working class, while raising the banner of international solidarity. Labor’s chains to the Democrats must be broken, and a workers party forged, a party that aims not simply to improve the lot of the working class, but to rid the world of the system of capitalist wage slavery altogether.■

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# WORKERS VANGUARD

## UAW Tops Play by Bosses' Rules, Again

# Bitter Union Defeat at Chattanooga VW Plant

In June, for the second time in five years, the United Auto Workers (UAW) narrowly lost a key representation election at Volkswagen's assembly plant in Chattanooga, Tennessee. The close vote, 833 to 776, indicates substantial support for the union among the workforce in the face of the fierce anti-UAW campaign unleashed by the VW bosses, state officeholders, the bourgeois media and the business-financed "Southern Momentum" group operating inside the manufacturing facility. There was more than enough basis for a much-needed union victory: Volkswagen is the lowest-paying automaker in the U.S., and unsafe work conditions have brought an epidemic of serious injuries. But the UAW bureaucrats, who have sworn off "adversarial unionism" and pledged their commitment to ensuring VW's profitability, crippled their own organizing effort.

Having renounced the class-struggle methods that built the union in the first place, UAW officials doubled down on the same entirely legalistic strategy that inflicted the previous defeat in Chattanooga and a long string of other labor setbacks. For years, they retailed the company's claims of "neutrality" toward unionization as good coin. The truth was always something else entirely. In the weeks prior to the recent vote, workers were subjected to mandatory anti-union meetings, one-on-one confrontations by supervisors and threats to close the plant in the event of a union victory.

The failure of the UAW tops to demonstrate in action the union's determination to fight in effect gave credence to the fear-mongering by the union-busters to close the facility, which is in fact VW's only U.S. assembly plant and, moreover, is planning to ramp up production. A union leadership worthy of the name would have mobilized to give union supporters a sense of their collective power. Union-initiated work stoppages in response to deeply felt needs, such as to enforce a slower line speed or to defend victimized temporary workers, could have built the confidence of the workers in the union to defend their interests and jobs.

One thing is certain: a major breakthrough in the South, where the legacy of Jim Crow segregation is a major cudgel against the unions, is not going to come about by playing by the rules dictated by the bosses and their Democratic and Republican political representatives. The pro-capitalist UAW bureaucrats, whose whole perspective is based on the lie that workers and their exploiters share common interests, have done just that every step of the way. Earlier this year when the automaker hatched a legal ploy to block the election, the union tops capitulated by abandoning any claim to represent the 162 maintenance workers at the Chattanooga plant who had voted for UAW representation in 2015 but had never received a first contract because of company stonewalling.

Shortly after the vote tally was announced on June 14, the UAW tops issued



Production line at Chattanooga Volkswagen assembly plant, 2017. Unsafe conditions, backbreaking pace have led to many serious injuries.

## For a Class-Struggle Fight to Organize the South!

a statement proclaiming, "Our labor laws are broken." No, they are not. The capitalist state's labor laws did what they were designed to do: keep the unions in check. It cannot be otherwise in a system of production for profit, based on the exploitation of labor. Predictably, the UAW statement called on Congress to fix these laws. The union bureaucracy's allegiance to the capitalist order and reliance on false "friend of labor" Democrats shackle the potential power of the unions to the class enemy.

The union tops also attach great significance to who sits on the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). They especially bemoan "Trump's NLRB," whose rulings delayed the recent vote for several weeks, giving Volkswagen more time to bully union supporters into submission. In fact, similar delays and legal chicanery took place before the 2014 representation election loss under Obama's NLRB. The entire job of the NLRB, irrespective of its makeup, is to ensnare unions in legal proceedings in the interest of class "peace."

Before the class battles of the 1930s that built the CIO industrial unions, workers had no legally recognized rights as wage slaves. The very right to organize was won through sharp class struggle involving mass pickets, factory occupations and secondary boycotts, often in defiance of anti-labor laws. Major victories for labor came in three 1934 citywide strikes—in San Francisco, Minneapolis and Toledo—all led by Reds intent on fighting it out class against class. Workers won by standing up against the might of the capitalists and their security guards, police and National

Guard. The putatively pro-labor legislation signed by Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt, including the 1935 Wagner Act that established the NLRB, was passed in order to contain militant workers struggle within the framework of capitalist rule.

For the UAW to restore itself as a bastion of union power, there must be a concerted campaign to organize the South, where nearly two dozen assembly plants, and many more parts suppliers, operate union-free. This task is impossible without putting front and center the fight against black oppression, which is the bedrock of American capitalism. Anti-black racism has long served as a wedge between black and white workers and to further the exploitation of all labor. The VW Chat-

tanooga plant, where the majority of the workforce is white, is no exception.

In 2014, anti-union forces put up billboards that defaced the UAW's name to read "United Obama Workers," with the "O" word acting as code for the "N" word, and issued propaganda comparing the UAW to the invading Union Army during the Civil War. If only the latter were true! The Union Army, bolstered by the emancipated slaves, smashed the Southern slavocracy on the battlefields. This time around, Southern Momentum and its ilk railed against the "Detroit-based UAW," a racist dog whistle that is also a not so subtle denunciation of the union as a bunch of Northern "carpetbaggers" (a derogatory term for Radical Republicans in the South during Reconstruction). Meanwhile, Governor Bill Lee, who preached the "union free" gospel to a compulsory meeting of Volkswagen workers on April 29, later decreed July 13 "Nathan Bedford Forrest Day," celebrating the Confederate general who after the Civil War founded the Ku Klux Klan race-terrorists.

The UAW tops have done damage to the union's prospects, and not only in the South, by refusing to organize temporary workers, who are roughly one-third of the VW workforce but were excluded from the union vote. In the lead-up to current contract talks with the Big Three automakers, General Motors made known that it wants to employ more temps at its UAW-organized plants. In manufacturing industries, workers hired through temp agencies are more likely to be black or Latino and to earn paltry wages and no benefits, while working on the line alongside permanent employees.

The temp agencies are parasites on behalf of big capital. What is sorely needed is for labor to mobilize its social power based on its central role in production to smash the institution of temporary employment by bringing temps into the unions and winning equal pay and benefits for equal work. By organizing every worker in a plant, the union maximizes the collective strength of the workers in preparation for its future struggles against the bosses. This perspective is linked to the fight for industrial unionism, the principle that all workers in an industry should be organized in a single union regardless of job title, and for the closed shop, where only union members can be hired.

In auto, the atomization of the workforce has been further accomplished by the contracting out of parts production to a vast network of suppliers, which for Volkswagen and other automakers stretches into Mexico. At the same time, in the era of "just in time" manufacturing, each of these plants is a potential choke point; the withholding of labor in any one has the potential to ripple more widely. Earlier this year, in the town of Matamoros, just south of the U.S.-Mexico border, 50,000 workers, most of them women, halted production in 70 maquiladora factories, interrupting the

*continued on page 7*



August 2001: Mass strike meeting at Volkswagen plant in Puebla, Mexico. VW workers on both sides of border are natural allies; international solidarity in action against the bosses is crucial.