

1917

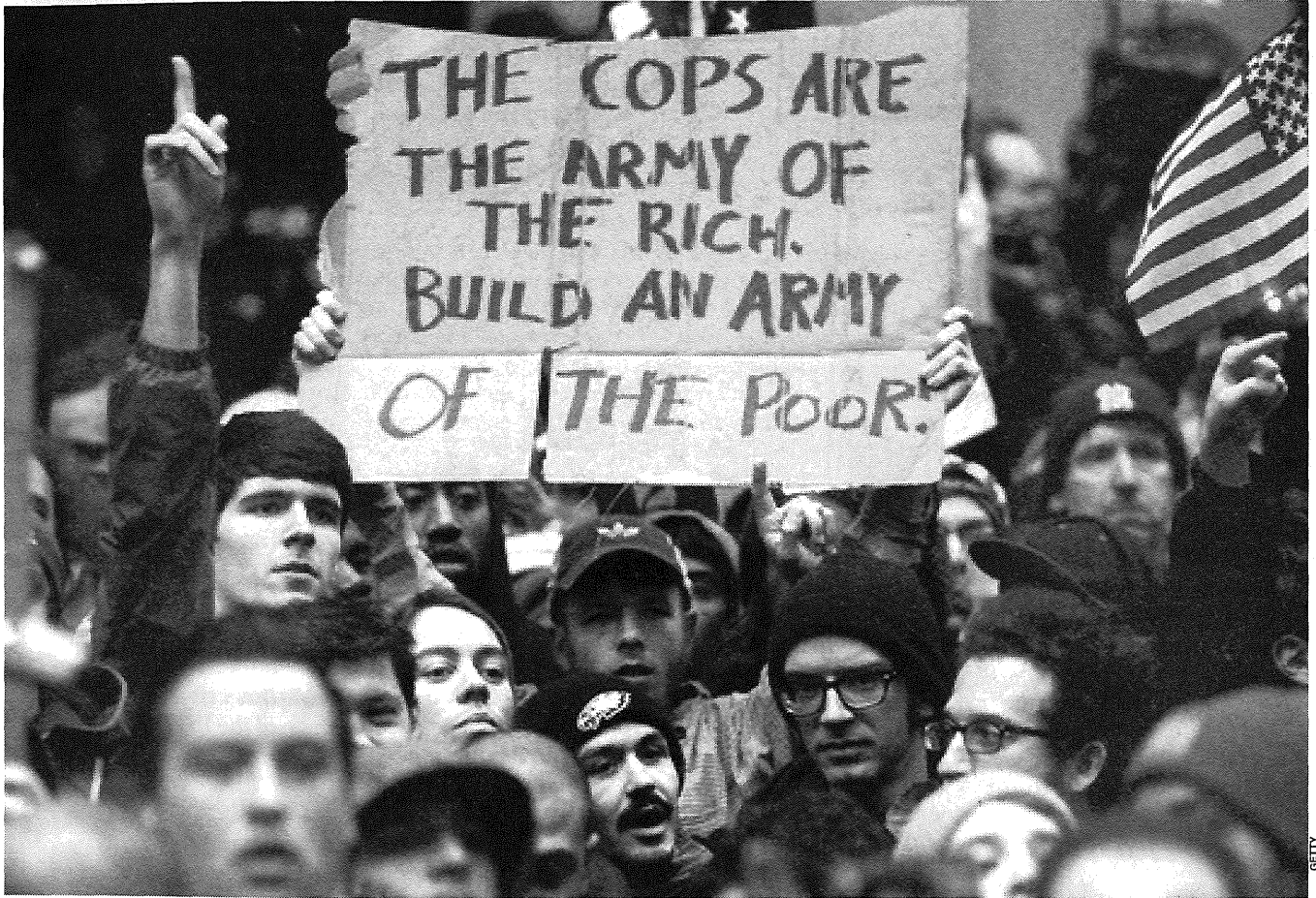
"To face reality squarely; not to seek the line of least resistance; to call things by their right names; to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be; not to fear obstacles; to be true in little things as in big ones; to base one's program on the logic of the class struggle; to be bold when the hour of action arrives—these are the rules of the Fourth International."

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Economic Crisis & Neocolonial Wars

Pathologies of Capitalism

The world economy is entering what George Magnus, a senior economic adviser to Switzerland's UBS bank, has described as "a once-in-a-generation crisis of capitalism, the footprints of which can be found in widespread challenges to the political order" (*Financial Times*, 12 September 2011). The three largest imperialist centers—the U.S., European Union and Japan—are locked in a seemingly intractable

downward spiral in synchronized, but distinct, crises.

Popular anxiety about a looming collapse has been magnified by the inability of the ruling elites to provide any semblance of a rational plan to reverse or even manage a rapidly deteriorating economic situation. This is reflected in a significant decline in the popular legitimacy of individual political leaders and their parties, as well as in the core insti-



Occupy demonstrator in Zuccotti Park, 23 October 2011

tutions of capitalist rule.

After two decades of economic stagnation following the implosion of a 1980s real estate bubble, revelations that the Japanese government had deliberately withheld vital information on the diffusion of poisonous radiation from the Fukushima nuclear disaster pushed public confidence to a new low. Meanwhile, the Eurozone debt crisis, which continues to metastasize, threatens to trigger a global financial meltdown. Attempts to redress the problems created by the accumulated debts of Europe's financiers through savage austerity attacks on working-class living standards are encountering growing, and potentially seriously destabilizing, resistance.

Even in the U.S.—the biggest and most powerful imperialist country, with the most backward working class—popular disenchantment with the system of unregulated “free enterprise” is reaching proportions not seen since the Great Depression of the 1930s. The widespread appeal of the politically primitive “Occupy Wall Street” movement (which correctly identified the social dominance of the top “1%” as the core problem in American society) points to the possibility of major eruptions of political and social unrest in the coming period.

The following is the text of a presentation given in Toronto by Tom Riley on 24 September 2011.

The accumulation of “stresses” in the global financial system in recent months recalls the run-up to the September 2008 collapse of Lehman Brothers—an event that very nearly led to a total international meltdown. It turns out that all the claims over the past few years about how government stimulus, bank bailouts and tightened regulations had put the global economy on the road to a solid “recovery” were false. The bankers were rescued when their bad debts were nationalized, and the injection of government stimulus funding into most major economies averted a complete collapse. But the problems that led to the banking crisis and subsequent recession three years ago have not dis-

appeared, and the stop-gap measures taken to stave off disaster appear to have only magnified the problem.

It is clear that at the moment the big three capitalist economies—the U.S., EU and Japan—are stalling. It is also clear that the “emerging markets” of Brazil, Russia, India and the Chinese deformed workers’ state—all of which depend on exports to the more developed capitalist countries—cannot save the day. Some prominent bourgeois economists—notably Carmen Reinhart of the Peterson Institute for International Economics in Washington, and Harvard’s Kenneth Rogoff—have declared that we are at the beginning of the “Second Great Contraction,” the first, of course, being the “Great Depression” of the 1930s.

The business press is now reluctantly acknowledging that the “recovery” is over and the global economy is likely to be in a slump until consumers get out there and start spending again. In the meantime, everyone is supposed to grit their teeth and get ready for the kind of painful austerity we have been seeing in Greece. Everyone, that is, except the ultra-rich, the people who reaped most of the rewards from the speculative bubbles that triggered the crash in the first place. They are described as “job creators” who must be exempted from the general belt-tightening.

But they are *not* creating jobs—corporate America is currently sitting on something like \$2 trillion in liquid assets, and businesses around the world are canceling orders, trimming payrolls and shrinking inventories in preparation for the coming storm. The jobs that have been shed over the past few years have, on the whole, been relatively well-

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Capitalism Can't Be Fixed!

On the Occupy Movement



17 November 2011: Los Angeles cops confront Occupy sit-in at Bank of America

REUTERS

The following statement was first published on 1 November 2011.

Zuccotti Park in lower Manhattan sits across the street from the former site of the World Trade Center. Renamed "Liberty Square" by demonstrators, it has become Ground Zero for "Occupy Wall Street" (OWS), a modern-day tent city that evokes images of the Hoovervilles of the Great Depression, and the 1932 Bonus Army encampment of 43,000 World War I veterans in Washington D.C. that was brutally dispersed by General Douglass MacArthur and Major Dwight D. Eisenhower.

While tens of thousands have participated in the rallies and marches, only a few hundred are actually sleeping in the park. But their encampment has inspired a movement that has powerfully resonated with tens of millions of Americans:

"A new AP-GfK poll shows that 37 percent of the American public supports OWS, while research firm Chitika shows that online interest in the movement has swelled 150 percent over the past month.

"This will have major implications on the upcoming elections," says Gabriel Donnini, analyst at the Westborough, Mass.-based online analytics firm, Chitika. "The movement is not dying out or going quietly and candidates will need to address the concerns and demands voiced by those on the streets and making a buzz on the

Internet," he adds."

—*Christian Science Monitor*, 24 October [2011]

The popularity of OWS is partly attributable to its largely undefined politics—it presents itself as a blank slate onto which almost anyone can write their own demands. The slogans carried on the homemade cardboard signs reflect the eclectic and somewhat politically primitive character of the participants: "I'll Believe Corporations Are People When Texas Executes One"; "The Wall Must Fall"; "Lost My Job, Found an Occupation"; "CNN: Where is Our Embedded reporter? It's a War, Man."

Many of the key initiators of OWS cut their teeth in the "anti-globalization" milieu that made its debut in the December 1999 "Battle of Seattle." While the media initially tended to play up the youth angle, the median age of OWS "facilitators" is a lot closer to 30 than 18. They are not naive guitar-strumming college students, but veteran activists with considerable organizational experience.

Reasserting the Centrality of Social Class

The impact of the OWS movement can be attributed to the fact that it speaks to the deep anxieties of ordinary working people, who are already experiencing growing material hardship at a time when the economy appears headed over a cliff. The courage and initiative of the OWS protesters

have tapped into these concerns and not only given tens of thousands of Americans a chance to express their pain and fear, but have provided a forum to discuss how to go about solving their problems.

While there is a considerable spectrum of opinion among participants, the dominant ideology of the leading activists (in what is supposed to be an essentially leaderless movement) can be loosely characterized as anarcho-liberalism. Their worldview has been shaped by the contemporary radical liberalism of Noam Chomsky, Naomi Klein and Barbara Ehrenreich, rather than the classical anarchism of Mikhail Bakunin, Emma Goldman and Peter Arshinov. Many of them have supported the Green Party, and in 2008 some undoubtedly voted for Barack Obama (perhaps holding their noses) as a "lesser evil."

The speeches and writings of the leading figures in OWS tend toward militant reformism. While denouncing corporate greed and the manifest injustice and grotesque inequalities of U.S. society, they demand a better deal for Wall Street's victims. In the 1 October [2011] issue of *The Occupied Wall Street Journal* (distributed at an OWS rally on 5 October [2011]) Arun Gupta lists the following demands: "end corporate personhood; tax stock trading; nationalize the banks; socialize medicine; fund government jobs with a real stimulus; lift restrictions on labor organizing; allow cities to turn abandoned homes into public housing; build a green economy." The unspoken presumption is that the evils of the "free market"—hunger, poverty, inequality and war—can be eliminated or at least tamed. But capitalism is an inherently predatory social system premised on the principle of a permanent struggle of "each against all." It can't be fixed—and rather than wasting time and energy trying to do so, it is necessary to build a movement committed to overturning the whole system of wage slavery and establishing organs of working-class power.

Capitalist Democracy: 'a system of minority rule'

The Occupy movement, by pointing out that the "1%" are the cause of the misery of the vast majority, has touched on the ugly reality of the one-sided class war that has raged for decades in the self-proclaimed "World's Greatest Democracy." It is hardly a secret that Wall Street is the home of many of President Obama's biggest backers, as well as key figures in his administration. The growing recognition that the two-party system of U.S. capitalism is a fraud has been a crucial element in the success of the OWS movement to date. To co-opt the protests and channel the discontent fueling the Occupy movement into dead-end bourgeois electoralism, the Democrats (and their labor lieutenants) have to convince capitalism's victims to identify with their oppressors. Conversely, to the extent that participants and sympathizers in the OWS movement begin to understand that poverty, inequality, racism and imperialist war are integral to the capitalist social system, the possibility exists for a rebirth of a mass socialist left in the American working class—a development that would change the face of global politics.

Under capitalist "democracy" every dollar is equal; every citizen is not. The game is rigged in favor of the "1%" on top because they have more wealth than the bottom 90 percent. The OWS critique has generally failed to point

out the necessary link between political rule by and for the majority ("democracy") and the radical reconstruction of the economy to meet the needs of the majority ("socialism"). But James P. Cannon, the founder of American Trotskyism, spelled it out quite clearly in a talk he gave in 1957:

"The authentic socialist movement, as it was conceived by its founders and as it has developed over the past century, has been the most democratic movement in all history. No formulation of this question can improve on the classic statement of the *Communist Manifesto*, with which modern scientific socialism was proclaimed to the world in 1848. The *Communist Manifesto* said:

"All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interest of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority."

"The authors of the *Communist Manifesto* linked socialism and democracy together as end and means. The 'self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority,' cannot be anything else but democratic, if we understand by 'democracy' the rule of the people, the majority."

Cannon pointed out that working people (the majority) have little influence over the decisive factors that shape their lives as long as the capitalist ruling class (the "1%") controls the economy:

"In the old days, the agitators of the Socialist Party [SP] and the IWW [Industrial Workers of the World]—who were real democrats—used to give a shorthand definition of socialism as 'industrial democracy.' I don't know how many of you have heard that. It was a common expression: 'industrial democracy,' the extension of democracy to industry, the democratic control of industry by the workers themselves, with private ownership eliminated. That socialist demand for real democracy was taken for granted in the time of [SP leader Eugene] Debs and [the IWW's Big Bill] Haywood, when the American socialist movement was still young and uncorrupted.

"You never hear a 'democratic' labor leader say anything like that today. The defense of 'democracy' by the social democrats and the labor bureaucrats always turns out in practice to be a defense of 'democratic' capitalism...."

"Capitalism, under any kind of government—whether bourgeois democracy or fascism or a military police state—under any kind of government, capitalism is a system of minority rule, and the principal beneficiaries of capitalist democracy are the small minority of exploiting capitalists...."

Most anarchists would agree with Marxists that capitalism is "a system of minority rule" that operates for the benefit of a tiny layer of the population. The divergence between these two tendencies within the workers' movement has historically tended to revolve more around means than ends. The anarchist influence in OWS is particularly evident in the organizational framework of the General Assembly (GA), where all decisions are supposed to be arrived at by "consensus," with participants employing hand signals to indicate agreement or disagreement with speakers. On one level the GAs appear to be genuinely democratic and fairly egalitarian, but they can also be terribly inefficient. As a rule, things only get done through the interventions of "facilitators" who attempt to



17 November 2011: Occupy Wall Street protesters attempt to close New York Stock Exchange

guide the flow and content of deliberations. In the end, whoever is most charismatic, has the loudest voice and/or the most friends, usually has their view declared by the facilitators to be the “consensus.” Where disagreements are particularly sharp, “consensus” is sometimes reached only after supporters of a minority position are worn down and drift away from the discussion to take up some other project. Despite the stated intent of its practitioners, the time-consuming (and sometimes chaotic) process of reaching consensus often ends up being no less “hierarchical” than a democratic discussion in a properly chaired meeting with decisions by majority vote.

From Tunis to Cairo to New York

The history of class struggle is one of waves, with successful uprisings in one country inspiring renewed resistance elsewhere. The Tunisian produce vendor driven to immolate himself last December [2010] after years of police harassment, unleashed a wave of popular protest that ultimately toppled long-time dictator Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali. This success in turn inspired disaffected Egyptian youth to occupy Cairo’s Tahrir Square for 18 days, beat off attacks by hired thugs and eventually compel the hated Hosni Mubarak to step down on 11 February [2011]. Among the tens of thousands of workers who occupied the Wisconsin state legislature a few days later to protest Governor Scott Walker’s union-busting attack on public-sector collective bargaining rights, some carried signs saluting the Tahrir Square protests. Participants in the huge anti-austerity actions in Greece, as well as the *indignados* who occupied Puerta del Sol in Madrid last summer also acknowledged the inspiring struggles undertaken by youthful Tunisian and Egyptian protesters.

The OWS initiative, modeled on the Arab Spring, has sparked a wave of similar protests in hundreds of cities across North America with Occupy encampments full of

youthful protesters decrying the power of the capitalist financial elites and the growing gap between rich and poor. As Paul Krugman, perhaps America’s leading liberal intellectual, has pointed out, the gross inequality of income in the U.S. today closely parallels that of the late 1920s on the eve of the Great Depression. Krugman also observed:

“For the first time since 1917, then, we live in a world in which property rights and free markets are viewed as fundamental principles, not grudging expedients: where the unpleasant aspects of a market system—income inequality, unemployment, injustice—are accepted as facts of life. As in the Victorian era, capitalism is secure... because it has no plausible alternative.”

—*The Return of Depression Economics and the Crisis of 2008*

Krugman is right that the growth of inequality is connected to “the fundamental political fact of the 1990s: the collapse of socialism,” by which he means not only the destruction of the degenerated Soviet workers’ state but also of the very idea of an egalitarian economic order (i.e., socialism) “as an idea with the power to move men’s minds” (*Ibid.*).

But Krugman is no advocate of social equality. His concern is to find a way to channel the energy and enthusiasm of the Occupy movement into some sort of “grass-roots” Democratic counterweight to the right-wing Republican Tea Party. This would signify the death of the hopes that OWS has inspired, but so far there is little evidence of such a development. Certainly the decision by Oakland’s Democratic mayor Jean Quan (a member of the party’s “left” wing) to launch a brutal assault on the Occupy encampment in her city on 25 October [2011] can only complicate Krugman’s project. Various professional reactionary demagogues, like Sean Hannity, Glenn Beck and Rush Limbaugh, have recently begun worrying that if Democrats are unable to control the Occupy movement we could soon see the emergence of a genuinely radical left-wing movement in America, which could destabilize



GETTY

Police block Occupy Wall Street marchers in Times Square, 15 October 2011

the whole two-party shell game that has functioned so well for so long. After years of paranoid denunciations of imperialist chieftain Barack Obama as a “big government” crypto-socialist, these representatives of racist capitalist reaction fear that popular anger with the “1%” may give them some *real* radicals to contend with.

Occupy Wall Street Touches a Nerve

The OWS project was initially proposed in July [2011] by *Adbusters*, an anti-consumerist, environmental magazine. It was subsequently promoted via Twitter by the internet-based U.S. Day of Rage and the anarcho-hackers of Anonymous, whose signature look is the Guy Fawkes mask worn by the protagonist of Alan Moore’s “V for Vendetta,” a 1980s graphic novel that Warner Brothers made a film version of in 2006.

The mood in America today is very different than it was in May 1970, when right-wing “hard hats” attacked an anti-war demonstration on Wall Street after the Ohio National Guard murdered four protesters at Kent State University. These days many construction workers passing through Zuccotti Park make a point of expressing their own hatred for Wall Street. New Yorkers have opened their homes to OWS members who need a hot shower or a solid night’s sleep. The social polarization of American society is evident in the growth of inequality in New York:

“From 2009 to 2010, 75,000 city residents were pushed into poverty, increasing the poor population to more than 1.6 million and raising the percentage of New Yorkers living below the official federal poverty line to 20.1 percent....”

“Manhattan continued to have the biggest income gap of any county in the country, with the top fifth of earners (with an average income of \$371,754) making nearly 38 times as much as the bottom fifth (\$9,845).”

—*New York Times*, 22 September [2011]

Between 1980 and 2005, roughly 80 percent of the total increase in U.S. income was scooped up by the top one per-

cent of the population. For decades most Americans accepted social inequality as not only inevitable but justified—rich people got rich, they believed, by working harder, saving more, coming up with new inventions and organizing more efficient means of producing and marketing products. But the fallout from the financial meltdown of 2008 has changed all that, as Glenn Greenwald observed in a perceptive article posted on “Tom Dispatch” (25 October [2011]):

“It’s not that Americans suddenly woke up one day and decided that substantial income and wealth inequality are themselves unfair or intolerable. What changed was the perception of how that wealth was gotten and so of the ensuing inequality as *legitimate*.”

“Many Americans who once accepted or even cheered such inequality now see the gains of the richest as ill-gotten, as undeserved, as cheating. Most of all, the legal system that once served as the legitimizing anchor for outcome inequality, the rule of law—that most basic of American ideals, that a common set of rules are equally applied to all—has now become irrevocably corrupted and is seen as such.”

“It is now clearly understood that, rather than apply the law equally to all, Wall Street tycoons have engaged in egregious criminality—acts which destroyed the economic security of millions of people around the world—without experiencing the slightest legal repercussions. Giant financial institutions were caught red-handed engaging in massive, systematic fraud to foreclose on people’s homes and the reaction of the political class, led by the Obama administration, was to shield them from meaningful consequences. Rather than submit on an equal basis to the rules, through an oligarchical, democracy-subverting control of the political process, they now control the process of writing those rules and how they are applied.

“Today, it is glaringly obvious to a wide range of Americans that the wealth of the top 1% is the byproduct not of risk-taking entrepreneurship, but of corrupted control of our legal and political systems.”

This explains why support for the Occupy movement spread so rapidly and why attempts to repress it by police action have backfired. On Saturday, 1 October [2011], when cops trapped 700 marchers on the Brooklyn Bridge, and then commandeered five Metropolitan Transportation Authority buses to haul them off, the Transportation Workers Union (TWU) vigorously objected. John Samuelson, the union local’s leader, declared: “TWU Local 100 supports the protesters on Wall Street and takes great offense that the mayor and NYPD have ordered operators to transport citizens who were exercising their constitutional right to protest—and shouldn’t have been arrested in the first place” (*Daily News*, 3 October [2011]).

There has been considerable opposition to attacks on Occupiers in other cities as well—particularly in Oakland, where protesters have gained some union support for their attempts to organize a general strike for Wednesday, 2 November [2011] (see “Mass Protest Against Police Attack” on page 8). In New York, the city’s Central Labor Council voted in favor of a mass trade-union centered march in solidarity with OWS set for 5 November [2011]. The outpouring of support for OWS shows the potential for the explosive growth of leftist sentiment within the unions and oppressed communities, although thus far the Occupy movement has

yet to succeed in actively engaging the participation of the black and Latino masses—traditionally the most militant sectors of the American proletariat, who are also hardest hit by the capitalist economic crisis.

Capitalism Can't Be Fixed— Fight for Socialism!

It is necessary to build a new class-struggle union leadership committed to a program that links the fight to undo the effects of the capitalist attacks on unions over the past several decades with an offensive to improve the lives of working people—including a fight to win full citizenship for “undocumented” immigrants. A class-conscious leadership of the workers’ movement would not shrink from openly advocating the expropriation of the banks and corporations and the need to establish a workers’ government.

The leading core of OWS militants, lacking any sort of coherent socialist program, are politically incapable of even approximating such a leadership—despite the fact that their (necessarily transient) actions have galvanized mass resistance to the devastation wreaked by capitalist irrationality. They are, however, correct that the “1%” who own and control most of society’s wealth have devastated the lives of many tens of millions of Americans, and hundreds of millions of others. The estimate that the other “99%” have essentially common interests is a considerable exaggeration—because this would include millions of cops, screws, military officers, managers and others whose material interests bind them closely to the ruling elite. On a global scale the estimate of 99 percent is probably considerably closer to the mark, but in all cases the vast majority of the population has interests which are objectively counterposed to those of the “1%” on top. Within this majority, however, the strategic core is composed of the workers who operate the transport, communications, manufacturing, agricultural production and everything else upon which a modern economy depends.

The political consciousness of this strategic section of capitalism’s victims—the working class—is critical, because it alone has the material interest and capacity to organize and operate a planned, egalitarian economic order. This is only achievable on the basis of the *expropriation* of the bankers and bosses and the suppression of whatever violent attempts they make to thwart the will of the majority. Such a revolutionary overturn cannot be achieved through Congress; an insurgent workers’ movement will need to create its own “congresses” rooted in workplaces and working-class neighborhoods, as well as new armed bodies committed to “serve and protect” the interests of the oppressed majority against the “1%” of capitalist parasites and exploiters.

The situation today has many similarities to that described over 70 years ago by Leon Trotsky:

“The strategic task of the next period—a pre-revolutionary period of agitation, propaganda and organization—consists in overcoming the contradiction between the maturity of the objective revolutionary conditions and the immaturity of the proletariat and its vanguard (the confusion and disappointment of the older generation; the inexperience of the younger generation). It is necessary to help the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find the bridge between present demands and the socialist program of the

revolution. This bridge should include a system of *transitional demands*, stemming from today’s conditions and from today’s consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat.”

—*Transitional Program*

Trotsky’s reference to the “inexperience of the younger generation” points to the importance of studying the lessons of the past in order to avoid making the same old mistakes. A lot of time can be wasted trying to reinvent the wheel. The energy and mass enthusiasm generated by the Occupy movement demonstrates that many of the best and brightest members of a generation have seen through the capitalist mantra that “There Is No Alternative” to the rule of the monied elites. What excites them about the Occupy movement is the apparent possibility to participate in a struggle which asserts that fundamental social change is possible.

As Karl Marx observed in the *German Ideology*, “The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas.” The dominance of the “1%” is defended not only by their enormous police, intelligence and military agencies, but also by a vast array of ideological instruments. Only a disciplined political organization which wins the allegiance and respect of the most advanced layers of working people and the oppressed on the basis of popularizing a program of consistent class struggle can pose a serious threat to the capitalist rulers. A movement with no clear program, and (ostensibly at least) no leadership, like the Occupiers, can help raise the general level of political consciousness and galvanize opposition to some of the most egregious crimes of capitalism, but it can only end up modifying, not ending, the tyranny of the “1%.”

A revolutionary workers’ party would put forward a program that addresses the growing inequity in American society with demands for raising wages and ending unemployment through a massive investment in public infrastructure and shortening the workweek from 40 to 30 hours with no loss in pay. It would also include calls for affordable housing, free quality daycare and healthcare, the elimination of tuition and the cancelation of student debt for post-secondary students. A class-struggle workers’ leadership would fight all manifestations of discrimination based on color, creed, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation. It would also unconditionally oppose all foreign military adventures and alliances (including support for apartheid Israel) and oppose any funding for the capitalist police and armed forces.

The problems that the Occupiers seek to address are inherent in the nature of capitalism. They cannot be addressed by replacing evil right-wing bankers by friendly community-oriented ones, or by breaking up big oligopolies into smaller scale enterprises. The capitalists act as they do in accordance with the dictates of profit maximization, not because they are particularly wicked or irrational individuals. If the core of active participants in the Occupy movement are to go forward and participate in the creation of a viable mass, militant left in North America, rather than ending up as shills for the Democrats or simply disappearing from political life, they must begin by recognizing that “Capitalism Can’t Be Fixed.” And that the only way out of the capitalist madhouse is the road of revolutionary socialism mapped out by Marx, Lenin and Trotsky. ■

On Occupy Oakland's 'General Strike'

Mass Protest Against Police Attack



Occupy Oakland rally, October 2011

The attempt by Occupy Oakland to initiate a "general strike" on 2 November 2011 in response to the massive police attack on their encampment a week earlier struck a chord with tens of thousands of working people in the San Francisco Bay Area and across North America. It should not be called a "general strike" because the vast majority of workers went to work, but it was nonetheless a powerful mobilization which, at its height, involved some 30-40,000 people. There was no "business as usual" in Oakland that day, as some shops closed and demonstrators forced several bank branches to shut down. Daytime shipping was reduced at the port of Oakland, before being entirely blocked by a mass demonstration in the evening.

The capitalist media sought to play up the fact that a few bank windows were broken by "black bloc" participants, but attempts to discredit the mobilization as "violent" fell flat. A few days earlier, Copwatch had posted a video on YouTube which identified two police infiltrators wearing black clothes at Occupy Oakland (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VrvMzqopHH0>).

After the main demonstrations ended, the police brutally attacked a few hundred people attempting to occupy a vacant building previously used by the Travelers' Aid Society (an advocacy organization for the homeless) which had been closed due to funding cuts. Had this occupation been carried out as part of the mass protest, it might have provided an important political focus for opposition to Oakland's cops and Democratic Party administration.

During the day the police kept a low profile and did not attempt to prevent the protests. Oakland's "1%" was certainly aware that, despite the foot-dragging of the union tops, there was substantial sentiment among the ranks for walking out and joining the action. The scale of the demonstrations and their labor orientation point to the possibility of more powerful mobilizations in the future—but this will require a political fight in the union movement to build a class-struggle leadership committed to ousting the pro-capitalist misleaders and breaking with the Democrats once and for all.

The following IBT statement was distributed in Oakland in the days leading up to the 2 November 2011 protest.

Whenever Iranian or Syrian police teargas and beat anti-regime protesters, the White House is quick to issue an outraged denunciation. Yet state repression has routinely been used by the American ruling class against any movement it considers a potentially serious political challenge (even those whose actions are limited to the supposed constitutional rights to "free speech" and "free assembly"). The violent response to the movement spawned by Occupy Wall Street (OWS) is the most recent example.

On 24 September [2011], barely a week after OWS began, New York cops attacked marchers on their way to Union Square, arresting more than 80. A week later, on 1 October, 700 protesters were arrested on the Brooklyn Bridge. On 12 October, New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg announced that the OWS camp at Zuccotti Park would be removed. But the outpouring of solidarity was so great that the Bloomberg administration had to back off—at least temporarily.

Police Repression Fuels Resistance

It would be unrealistic to imagine that each instance of premeditated police violence (or the threat of same) will indefinitely continue to generate ever greater support for the movement against corporate tyranny. Police attacks on Occupy protesters in Chicago, Atlanta, Boston, Denver and other cities have reportedly been somewhat more successful. Yet it has clearly come as an unpleasant surprise for America's rulers that a large swath of the population has disregarded the mainstream media's depiction of the Occupy movement as a mix of youthful naifs and unkempt, socially-marginal malcontents.

On Friday, 28 October, Mitt Romney, campaigning for the Republican presidential nomination in traditionally conservative New Hampshire, found it expedient to join

President Obama in claiming to “sympathize” with key concerns of the OWS protesters. Their sympathy is evidence of the fact that, at least so far, the combination of police repression and bourgeois propaganda has failed to make a dent in a movement that was initially written off as juvenile theatrics. Popular support for the Occupiers has risen in lockstep with public awareness of their message—the complaint that in what purports to be the land of the free, the “1%” at the top lord it over the other “99%.” While oversimplified, it is nonetheless a potent idea and open to a spectrum of interpretations. One protester, who was on the right track, carried a sign that read: “When the rich steal from the poor it’s called business. When the poor fight back it’s called violence.”

Oakland Mayor Jean Quan, who gave the order for an assault on the Occupy encampment in her city on 25 October [2011], did not anticipate the public’s revulsion at the scenes of police brutality and violence that quickly circulated on the internet. Anger has focused on a potentially life-threatening injury suffered by Scott Olsen, a 24-year-old former U.S. Marine and member of Iraq Veterans Against the War, whose head was split open by a teargas canister.

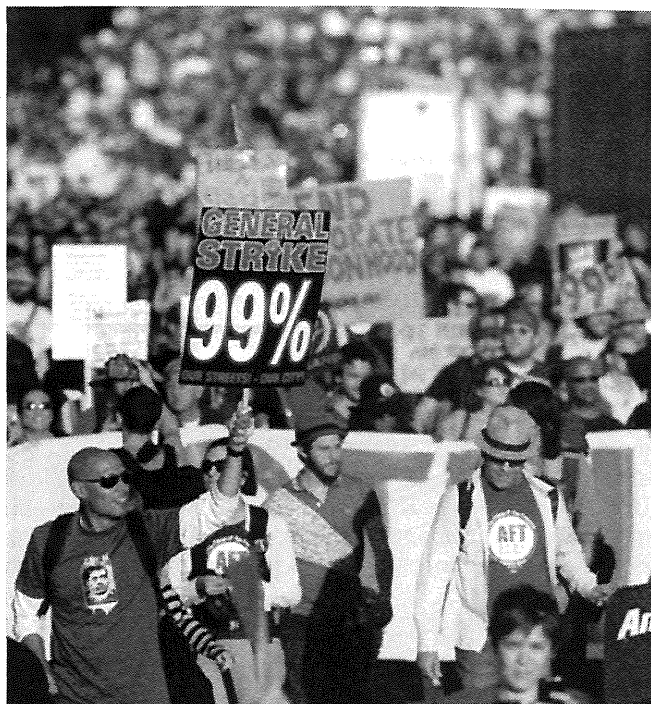
A few weeks prior to ordering the attack, Quan, a “left” Democrat who once identified with the defunct Maoist Communist Workers Party, had been proclaiming her support for the Occupy movement. Her first response to the widespread popular outrage at the police assault was to deny personal responsibility. When that did not fly, she “apologized” for the attack and met with Olsen’s parents to express her “concern” for his condition. When Quan attempted to speak at a rally of Occupy supporters on Thursday, 27 October, she was booed off the stage.

Resisting the Violence of the Ruling Class

Rather than cowing the militants, the attack on the Oakland encampment appears to have outraged them. A meeting of a couple of thousand protesters the next night voted overwhelmingly in favor of attempting to launch a one-day general strike on Wednesday, 2 November. (The Oakland General Assembly operates on the basis of a “modified” consensus model where any proposal with 90 percent support is adopted.)

The Bay Area has long been a stronghold of the left and workers’ movement in America and the last general strike that ever took place in the U.S. occurred in Oakland in 1946. The series of port shutdowns carried out in recent years by the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) in defense of Mumia Abu-Jamal, in opposition to the Iraq war and in protest of the racist police murder of Oscar Grant has doubtless helped the activists of Occupy Oakland understand the potential political and social power of the labor movement.

There has been some union support for the proposed mass strike—ILWU Local 10 is backing a blockade of the Port of Oakland on the evening of 2 November, and the Oakland Education Association (teachers) and Alameda County Carpenters Local 713 have endorsed the protest and called on their members to support the action. Yet it does not appear that these unions are actually prepared to officially strike on 2 November. The labor bureaucrats representing city workers have negotiated a deal with management to allow their members to use leave-time in order



2 November 2011: Over 30,000 march in Oakland

to participate in the protests, but this makes it a matter of individual choice rather than collective action.

Capitalism Can’t Be Fixed—Expropriate the ‘1%!’

It is unfortunate that this general strike initiative, which could link the demands of organized and unorganized workers, is constrained by the timidity of a union leadership that shudders at the idea of breaking the “no-strike” clauses in the contracts they negotiated with the bosses. But even with these limitations, this call represents an important step forward for the Occupy movement. It not only gives political expression to the intense opposition to the brutal suppression of the right to protest and free assembly, but also points in the direction of the future labor-centered mass actions necessary to challenge and ultimately uproot the domination of the “1%,” i.e., the capitalist ruling class. *Capitalism can’t be fixed*—it is a social system based on exploitation and no combination of Robin Hood tax, jobs bill, tightened financial regulations or any other reform can change that. To solve the fundamental problems the Occupy movement is attempting to address, it is necessary to construct a revolutionary party capable of leading the working class and oppressed in expropriating the “1%” and reconstructing society on an egalitarian, socialist basis with full employment and universal access to free post-secondary education, decent housing and quality healthcare—a social order in which economic activity is geared to meeting the needs of the many, rather than the enrichment of a few.

Hands Off ‘Occupy’ Protesters—Drop All Charges Now!

Break with the Democrats—Build a Revolutionary Workers’ Party!

Expropriate the Banks & Corporations with No Compensation!

Capitalism Can’t Be Fixed—Forward to a Workers’ Government!

Capitalism...

continued from page 2

paid compared to those that have been created—many of which are only casual or part-time. Right now the total *real* unemployment rate in the U.S. stands at roughly 20 percent and is likely to get worse. Capitalists only “create jobs” and expand their operations when they see an opportunity to turn a profit—and at this point, with all economic indicators pointing down, that day seems a long way off.

The long string of capitalist victories over labor during the past few decades has produced a global economy with unprecedented levels of inequality. On 1 July 2011, the Associated Press reported: “Workers’ wages and benefits make up 57.5 percent of the economy, an all-time low. Until the mid-2000s, that figure had been remarkably stable—about 64 percent through boom and bust alike.” This provides a rough index of how unevenly the pain has been distributed so far.

Origins of the Crisis

The roots of the current crisis can be traced to a pronounced decline in the rate of profit beginning in the mid-to-late-1960s—a decline related to the growth of what Karl Marx called the organic composition of capital (see articles in 1917 Nos.31 and 32). The capitalist offensive launched in the 1970s aimed at improving profitability by weakening unions, pushing down wages and wresting back concessions made in the post-World War II period. The smashing of the U.S. air traffic controllers’ union in 1981 and the defeat of the British miners’ strike a few years later represented significant milestones in this campaign. Hobbling the traditionally protectionist unions also made it easier to push through a series of “neoliberal” trade agreements to increase capital mobility and gain greater access to the economies of many “underdeveloped” nations.

Soon major corporations began moving production facilities from the “advanced” to “newly industrializing” countries to take advantage of lower wages, lower taxation rates and the absence of environmental and other regulations. Workers in the imperialist countries were told that they needed to make concessions in wages, benefits and working conditions in order to remain “competitive.” In auto and other industries that remained in the “advanced” capitalist countries, heavy investment in robotics and computerization simultaneously increased productivity and reduced the workforce.

The deregulation of transport, communications and, most importantly, finance was another significant aspect of the neoliberal turn of the 1980s. Exchange controls were abandoned and restrictions on issuing credit eased. An increasing percentage of economic activity involved “financial services”—paper shuffling—rather than the production of new value in the form of actual goods and services. In the U.S. the percentage of corporate profit accruing to the financial sector quadrupled—from less than 10 percent in 1980 to roughly 40 percent by 2007. Manufacturing output tripled during the same period, but as a share of total GDP it fell by a third—from 21 to 13 percent. Today total U.S.

public and private debt is estimated at \$57 trillion—roughly four times the national income. Eighty percent of this debt, which works out to \$185,000 for every man, woman and child, has been accumulated since 1990.

The 2008 banking crisis grew directly out of the preceding housing bubble and the fraudulent “securities” and financial instruments associated with it. Mortgage companies vied with one another to issue what insiders referred to as “NINJA” loans—NINJA borrowers had “No Income, No Job and No Assets.” Of course no one would loan money to such people... unless somebody else assumed the risk. And that’s how it worked. The dubious mortgages were sold to investment banks, which bundled them together into bonds and resold them to hedge funds as high-interest “mortgage-backed securities.” Mortgage-backed securities had traditionally been pretty safe investments—because the banks and trust companies issuing them were on the hook in the case of a default. So they were rather careful about who got a loan for how much.

In the new “financialized” economy, the hedge funds bought “credit default swaps” (a form of insurance) to cover the risk of default. At every step the issuers of these various pieces of paper collected substantial fees and, as long as the housing bubble kept inflating and prices kept rising, everything was fine, because the loans could be refinanced to take advantage of higher valuations. All of these “financial instruments” were certified as Triple A investment grade after supposedly being carefully evaluated by credit ratings agencies (which were hired by the investment bank that issued them in the first place). When the bubble burst, a lot of people lost their homes, but the debts remain, and the interest charges keep piling up. Clearly much of this behavior was consciously fraudulent—but when the perps are billionaires, it is unusual to see them being held to account.

The easing of credit that produced the housing bubble helped offset the fall in real wages that had begun in the 1970s, but inequality continued to grow and has today reached unprecedented levels. Government fiscal policy aimed at restoring capitalist profitability played a role. During the past decade expenditures on “homeland security” and military adventures abroad pushed up costs, while tax breaks for those at the top simultaneously reduced revenues. In a column written a few months ago, Mark Bittman of the *New York Times* observed that while a quarter of American children go to bed hungry at least some of the time:

“The richest 400 Americans have more wealth than half of all American households combined, the effective tax rate on the nation’s richest people has fallen by about half in the last 20 years, and General Electric [GE] paid zero dollars in U.S. taxes on profits of more than \$14 billion.”

—*New York Times*, 29 March 2011

How is that possible? Well, GE’s tax department has a staff of 975 and spends an additional \$20 million a year on outside lobbyists, most of whom specialize in helping write tax legislation. And, of course, GE is just one of many corporations doing essentially the same thing.

By the way, guess who President Obama appointed to head his “Council on Jobs and Competitiveness”? None other than GE Chairman Jeffrey Immelt, whose personal “compensation package doubled to \$15.2 million last year,

while this year, GE is seeking major concessions from the unions that represent its shrinking American workforce" (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 5 April 2011).

'Financial Engineers': Glorified Paper Shufflers

As the housing bubble was expanding, there was a lot written about the genius of the "financial engineers" who designed these innovative new products, and the notion was floated that perhaps we had somehow arrived in a "post-industrial society" in which money made money. But in fact, debt and accumulated interest are nothing but claims on real goods and services produced by actual working people. Some of what is produced must necessarily be used to replace the human and material inputs consumed in the production process, and so the magnitude of what remains constitutes the absolute limit on aggregate industrial and financial profits. This value is fixed, not infinitely expandable. The contraction of the financial system was inevitable, and the largely fictitious profits suddenly evaporated as the whole ponzi scheme began to unwind.

Among the first banks to fail when the September 2008 financial crisis broke were those of tiny Iceland. When the island's conservative rulers proposed to cover the bankers' bad debts, the resulting explosion of popular anger brought down the government. The new social-democratic administration sought to push through the same policy. But again the resistance was so great that the government ultimately backed down and let the banks go bust. Nothing too radical really, but several leading financiers were charged with criminal activity, and creditors and bondholders ended up getting a rather severe "haircut."

Iceland has been the exception, however. In virtually every other jurisdiction, the state stepped in to honor the claims made by the holders of "toxic" assets. In the U.S., the bankers got a \$700 billion bailout with which to "recapitalize." Presented as absolutely essential to stabilizing the economy, this was effectively a lifeline to the biggest speculators.

While the bankers immediately celebrated by paying themselves hefty bonuses, the U.S. government proceeded to finance the expanded deficit by increased borrowing (in some cases from the very same institutions that had just received the handout). The parasites who run the financial houses began to express concern that perhaps the government would not be able to continue to cover its expanding debt, and last month Standard & Poor's downgraded the U.S. government's credit rating a notch for failing to tackle "structural issues" with sufficient aggressiveness. In particular, the ratings agency complained that the government was proposing "only minor policy changes on Medicare and little change in other entitlements, the containment of which we and most other independent observers regard as key to long-term fiscal sustainability."

Serving & Protecting Corporate Speculators

In pitching his "Jobs Bill" to Congress earlier this month, Obama, whom the trade-union bureaucracy has backed as the supposed defender of working people and the poor, openly talked about "reforming" (i.e., shredding) what remains of the U.S. "social safety net" (i.e., Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security).

Every call to "rescue" Greece, Italy or the Bank of America



OLIKRISTINN PHOTO

Mass protest in Reykjavik, Iceland, 17 January 2009

from default is in fact a proposal to protect wealthy speculators from taking a hit. Bank "rescues" have two stages: first, transfer outstanding liabilities to the public and, second, announce that workers, students and pensioners are going to have to sacrifice in order to balance the budget. As Richard Wolff, writing in the *Guardian* on New Year's Day [2011], aptly observed: "Like someone convicted of murdering his parents who demands leniency as an orphan, corporate America demands conservative government and austerity on the grounds of excessive budget deficits."

What we are seeing in Europe and North America today parallels the "Structural Adjustment Programs" imposed by the IMF [International Monetary Fund] in many "underdeveloped" capitalist countries in the 1980s—where massive state borrowing (much of which ended up in the pockets of the elites) was paid off by lowering the standard of living of most of the population. The resulting social upheavals were routinely dismissed in the Western press as "IMF rioting."

A Gallup poll released just this week showed that Americans favor increasing taxes on the rich and corporations by a margin of more than two-to-one. In February 2011, the University of Maryland's Program for Public Consultation released a study showing that the three most popular proposals for reducing the federal deficit were: 1. cutting the Defense Department budget; 2. cutting spending for the occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan; and 3. cutting funding for the CIA and other intelligence agencies. The same study found approval for increased funding for job training, education and environmental protection



GETTY

20 October 2011, Athens: Demonstrators ready to counter police violence at austerity protest

(Marketplace Morning Report, 17 February 2011).

Such sentiments, which are nothing more than ideas about how to improve capitalism, are too radical to be discussed seriously by the mainstream media. Only a mass popular radicalization on a scale capable of destabilizing capitalist rule would put them on the agenda for the bourgeoisie. This was the context for Franklin Delano Roosevelt's "New Deal" in the 1930s. Today, with the rate of profit severely depressed and no immediate threat posed by a potentially insurgent workers' movement, even mildly "progressive" reforms are off the agenda.

Imperialist 'Right to Plunder'

All wings of the U.S. ruling class agree that American military supremacy is their most important competitive advantage. It was not under George W. Bush, but Bill Clinton, that the U.S. Secretary of State brazenly asserted that America has an inherent right to the "unilateral use of power" to ensure "uninhibited access to key markets, energy supplies and strategic resources" (johnpilger.com, 1 November 2004).

That, in a nutshell, sums up the motive for imperialist military intervention abroad. Naturally, for public relations purposes, the pursuit of "national interests" (i.e., corporate interests) has to have a more transcendent rationale. When George W. Bush invaded Afghanistan and Iraq, he was acting to "protect the homeland." President Obama likes to cultivate a more "humanitarian" image, and so for Libya

we heard about "RTP"—the "Responsibility to Protect." But in fact, as usual, it was the "Right to Plunder." Lesser imperialist powers allied with Washington (like Britain, France, Germany, Australia and Canada) participate in particular ventures to a greater or lesser extent, depending on how they calculate the risks and benefits.

There is of course no guarantee that attempts to forcibly seize "energy supplies and strategic resources" will succeed. The total cost to the U.S. Treasury of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan may top \$3 trillion by some estimates. Some well-meaning people suggest that money currently being spent on the Afghanistan conflict should instead be spent on reconstruction at home. Such notions reveal profound illusions about the nature of capitalist rule. The U.S., Canada and the rest of the NATO axis have not spent the last decade trying to establish control of Afghanistan because they care about liberating women, or providing clean drinking water or economic opportunities for Afghans. They have spent blood and treasure in pursuit of significant material interests.

NATO's Strategic Defeats in Afghanistan & Iraq

During the recent self-righteous commemorations of "9/11" there was little mention of the fact that Osama bin Laden and the other core cadres of Al Qaeda were originally recruited, trained and equipped by the CIA in the 1980s to fight a Soviet-supported nationalist regime committed to modernizing Afghan society. The Soviets' withdrawal

from Afghanistan in 1989 touched off years of bloody internecine conflict among the various gangs of *mujahedin* "freedom fighters," which only ended when the Taliban, backed by Pakistan, emerged on top in 1996.

Washington initially welcomed the Taliban as a stabilizing factor in a region that had become much more strategically important after huge oil and natural gas deposits were discovered in the vicinity of the Caspian Sea. The Taliban's brutally repressive, misogynist, theocratic rule was not a problem—but its lack of subservience soon chilled relations. The 9/11 attacks provided the opportunity to launch a "War on Terror" that began with the invasion of Afghanistan. The idea was to use it as the launching pad for a string of imperialist military bases across what had formerly been Soviet Central Asia.

But things did not work out as planned. Despite a decade of helicopter gunships, hi-tech drones, Hellfire missiles and B-1 bombers, the NATO coalition has been unable to either subdue the Taliban fighters or assert effective control of Afghan society. In fact, a few weeks ago they were having difficulty hanging on to the U.S. embassy. At this point, therefore, in a strategic sense, we can say that NATO has lost the war in Afghanistan. As revolutionary internationalists we welcome this setback. We give no political support whatsoever to the Islamic reactionaries of the Taliban, but we welcome the defeat of the NATO imperialists and their puppets.

After invading Afghanistan, the next stop for the U.S.-led "War on Terror" was the invasion of Iraq. (Because of domestic political calculations, Canada's Liberal government officially sat that one out, but contributed what it could.) In Iraq, as in Afghanistan, it proved much easier to depose the existing regime than to establish effective control over a hostile population. Revolutionaries opposed the occupation of Iraq from the beginning and, as in Afghanistan, defended all blows struck against the occupiers and their hirelings by indigenous resistance forces. In Iraq, as in Afghanistan, the imperialist crusaders have failed to achieve their central strategic objective—the creation of a stable client regime to provide a base for the direct military control of the enormous oil resources of the region.

'Humanitarian' Bombing of Libya

NATO's most recent "humanitarian" mission was to provide logistical and military support to what the capitalist press hails as the "Libyan Revolution." As we noted in a statement published at the time, unlike the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt which were more or less spontaneous in origin and directed against long-time imperialist clients, the Libyan revolt was initiated by a group with a longstanding connection to the CIA. Right from the start, the imperialists clearly saw the "Libyan Revolution" as an opportunity for "regime change"—i.e., getting rid of Muammar Qaddafi. It is worth recalling that in 2002 a leaked Pentagon document had Libya on the list of seven potential targets for a nuclear first strike. The others were China, Russia, North Korea, Iran, Syria and Iraq (*Daily Mirror* [London], 11 March 2002).

Qaddafi originally came to power in a 1969 coup which overthrew the pro-imperialist monarchy headed by King Idris. He quickly moved to close British military installations at Tobruk and El Adem and also kicked the U.S.

Airforce out of the Wheelus base near Tripoli, which had served as part of the Strategic Air Command encirclement of the Soviet Union. After the Americans departed, Qaddafi invited the Soviets to use the base. Over the years his regime also gave substantial material support to a wide variety of "anti-imperialist" movements, including the Nicaraguan Sandinistas, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Provisional Irish Republican Army.

The Qaddafi regime also nationalized Libya's oil resources. This was depicted as a "socialist" measure, but in fact, like the nationalizations carried out by Nasser in Egypt, or more recently by Chávez in Venezuela, it was a case of the state acting on behalf of a weak national capitalist class. The relative autonomy enjoyed by Qaddafi and other left-nationalist regimes in the 1970s and 80s was largely due to the existence of the Soviet counterweight to NATO. With the victory of capitalist counterrevolution under Boris Yeltsin in August 1991, that changed.

There is no question that Col. Qaddafi ruled a rather nasty police state. But this is not why he was on the imperialist hit list. Libya sits on the biggest oil reserves in Africa, and Libyan oil is of a particularly high grade—which makes it extremely profitable. Under Qaddafi's rule, a substantial portion of oil revenues went into domestic development projects, which is why Libya scored relatively high on the UN's Human Development Index of literacy, life expectancy and standard of living. Qaddafi's only real "crime" from the standpoint of imperialism was insubordination and a tendency to what the U.S. State Department calls "resource nationalism." Had he been a more reliable agent of foreign oil corporations, he would very likely still be in his palace in Tripoli.

One of the first acts of Libya's "revolutionaries" was to call for NATO intervention. When Qaddafi's regime failed to immediately implode, NATO commenced its "humanitarian" bombing to complement the special forces dispatched to lead the "rebels." The legal cover for this unprovoked attack on a sovereign nation was a UN Security Council

U.S. Army 1st Cavalry Division crosses from Iraq to Kuwait, December 2011

AP PHOTOMAYA ALLERUZZO





1917 PHOTO

IBT contingent on Occupy Toronto demonstration, 22 October 2011

motion claiming that Qaddafi's forces were intent on killing large numbers of civilians. But as Richard Haass, president of the U.S. Council on Foreign Relations, commented: "The evidence was not persuasive that a large-scale massacre or genocide was either likely or imminent."

Donald Trump, speaking to Fox News, explained the Libyan mission as follows: "We are NATO. We back NATO in terms of money and weapons. What do we get out of it? Why won't we take the oil?" Why not indeed? The lead story in the business section of the *New York Times* (23 August 2011) the day after the "rebels" arrived in Tripoli was "Scramble Begins for Access to Libya's Oil." The article observed that "Western nations—especially the NATO countries that provided crucial air support to the rebels—want to make sure their companies are in prime position to pump the Libyan crude."

Of course, as George W. Bush discovered in Iraq, it is sometimes easier to declare victory than to achieve it, particularly as many of the rebels employed by NATO to fight Qaddafi's army turn out to be Islamic radicals with a history of connections with Al Qaeda. So the story may not be over just yet.

Like the disastrous speculative bubbles created by the "banksters," the predatory imperialist attacks on insufficient-

ly obedient neocolonial regimes are ventures in which costs are socialized, while benefits are privatized. The across-the-board austerity measures being imposed on working people throughout the "developed" capitalist world, like the vicious attacks on uncooperative neocolonies abroad, do not result from mistaken policy choices or the short-sightedness of individual politicians. The brutal Bush/Cheney "shock and awe" rhetoric has given way to Obama's sonorous "humanitarian" banalities, but the fundamentals remain unchanged.

That is because capitalism has a logic—the interests of the many will always be sacrificed for the few at the top. Ordinary people lose their homes; daycares and schools are closed; pension funds are looted; wages slashed and public assets privatized—all so that bankers and other speculators don't have to take a "haircut" on their bad investments.

The continuing assault on working-class living standards has been met with considerable resistance to date—from the spontaneous outpouring we saw in Wisconsin last winter, to the repeated militant mass strikes waged by Greek workers. Today, the supposedly "class neutral" capitalist state—which actually functions as the "executive committee of the bourgeoisie"—is seen by tens of millions

of working people as nothing but a weapon wielded by the privileged and well-connected to destroy gains painfully accumulated over generations. It is a short step from this recognition to understanding that any serious resistance to these encroachments must necessarily pose the question of power.

Capitalists' Nightmare—the 'Revival of Marxism'

The massive disorders that erupted across England last summer revealed a disintegrating society with a generation of angry and despairing youth who feel they have no future and therefore nothing to lose. Britain's rulers claimed to have been shocked, but in fact planning had been underway for such outbursts for some time. A 2007 document produced by the British military projected the likely consequences of growing social inequality:

"[T]he gap between rich and poor will probably increase and absolute poverty will remain a global challenge.... Absolute poverty and comparative disadvantage will fuel perceptions of injustice among those whose expectations are not met, increasing tension and instability, both within and between societies and resulting in expressions of violence such as disorder, criminality, terrorism and insurgency."

—"The DCDC Global Strategic Trends Programme, 2007-2036," 3rd ed., British Ministry of Defence, January 2007

The same report discussed the likelihood of "the resurgence of not only anti-capitalist ideologies, possibly linked to religious, anarchist or nihilist movements, but also to populism and the revival of Marxism."

The revival of Marxism on a mass scale would be a very welcome development, particularly given the extremely degenerate quality of most ostensibly Marxist groups today. In 2008, the U.S. Communist Party, like much of the international left, called for workers to support Obama and the Democrats. In 2010, the self-proclaimed "hard communists" of the Spartacist League (the Trotskyist League up here) spent a few months avidly alibiing the American military occupation of Haiti. When NATO attacked Libya this year, many leftists, including the International Marxist Tendency (who are meeting down the hall) and the French Nouveau Parti anticapitaliste, one of the biggest "far left" groups in Europe, openly supported the imperialist-backed "rebels."

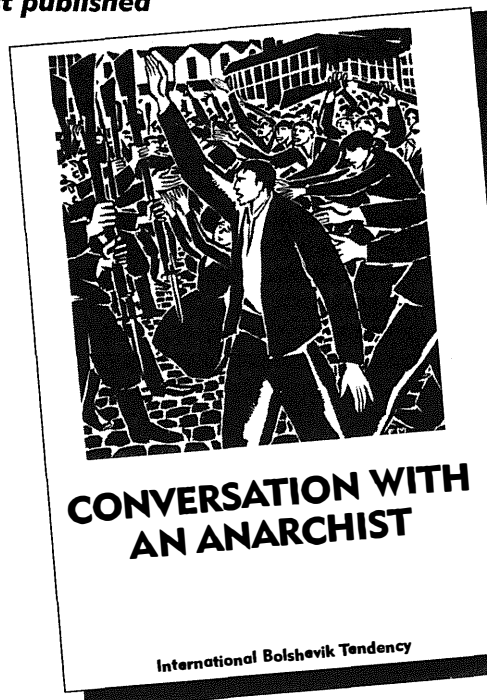
Yet the squalid opportunism of many who claim Marx's legacy cannot detract from the profound insights regarding the inner contradictions of the capitalist mode of production contained in *Das Kapital*. In recent months, a few prominent bourgeois thinkers have made favorable references to Marx's magnum opus. Nouriel Roubini, a New York University economics professor (known on Wall Street as "Dr. Doom" for correctly predicting the collapse of the U.S. housing bubble and the consequences for the American financial system years before it occurred) mentioned Marx in an interview with the *Wall Street Journal* last month. Roubini observed that Marx was right about the inherent tendency of capitalism toward cyclical crises, and commented: "At some point capitalism can...destroy itself. That's because you can not keep on shifting income from labor to capital without...having an excess capacity and a lack of aggregate demand. We thought that markets work. They are not working. What's individually rational...is a self-destructive process" (*International Business Times*, 14 August 2011).

Contrary to Roubini, who is no Marxist, capitalism will not simply destroy itself. And neither can it be fixed by tinkering with tax policy or heftier injections of stimulus. The pathologies manifest in economic crises and neo-colonial wars are expressions of the profound irrationality of capitalist society. The pursuit of profit maximization has not only produced extreme social polarization and immense human suffering, but it also threatens the entire biosphere upon which life itself depends. The melting of the polar ice caps, the massive BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico and the nuclear catastrophe at Fukushima (which has now released more than 20 times as much radiation as the bomb that destroyed Hiroshima in 1945) can all be traced to the drive to enhance "shareholder value."

The irrationality of the global capitalist order can only be transcended through the expropriation of the ruling class and the reorganization of the means of transport, communication and production into an integrated planned economic system on a world scale. This cannot be accomplished without a series of convulsive social struggles—socialist revolutions—that rips power from the hands of the capitalist class, smashes their coercive state agencies and institutes a new social order in which production is organized on the basis of meeting human need.

The essential precondition for such a transformation is the creation of a revolutionary party deeply rooted among the workers and oppressed. The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 proved that with such a leadership ordinary working people are capable of reorganizing society from top to bottom. It is this example that we of the International Bolshevik Tendency look to, and it is to this project that we seek to recruit a new generation of revolutionary fighters. ■

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IBT Speech to German Anarchists

Anger Boils Over in Britain



Burned-out building in Tottenham, northeast London

In October 2011 the Duisburg branch of the anarcho-syndicalist Freie ArbeiterInnen Union (FAU) invited a member of the International Bolshevik Tendency to speak to their group about the riots that erupted across Britain two months earlier. Our comrade prefaced his remarks by showing a short video clip from BBC News featuring black activist and writer Darcus Howe. The following is an edited version of the presentation translated from Bolschewik No. 29.

The video you have just seen is typical of the way the British media covered the August riots. The journalist showed no interest in examining the underlying causes of the riots, but concentrated instead on dismissing them as having “no excuse,” and accusing Howe himself of being a rioter. Howe, meanwhile, expressed an opinion that is fairly widespread in the British left—the idea that the riots marked the beginning of a profoundly revolutionary movement, comparable to the dramatic upheavals in Egypt or Tunisia earlier in the year. But this is just wishful thinking.

The reasons for the riots are not particularly mysterious. They first broke out in Tottenham in northeast London, in response to the 4 August [2011] shooting death of a young black man, Mark Duggan, after police stopped the cab he was riding in. After the killing, the police refused to talk to Duggan’s family or offer them any explanation of what happened, choosing instead to go straight to the media with what turned out to be a pack of lies. Initially, their story was that Duggan had fired first at one of the policemen, and his colleagues had simply shot back. This story fell apart when it was revealed that the bullet that hit the cop had been fired by a police-issued weapon. It is

hard to be sure exactly what happened, but it appears that Duggan was lying on the ground when he was shot—or rather executed. Two days after Duggan’s murder, rioting broke out when police attacked a 16-year-old girl with a baton during a vigil being held by his friends and family.

There has been a lot of anger slowly accumulating in Britain over the years. In the video, Darcus Howe mentioned one important factor—the “Stop and Search” program that permits the police to detain anyone on the grounds of suspicion of intent to carry out criminal activity, a power that is of course used by racist cops mainly against blacks and Asians. The 21 October 2010 *Daily Mirror* reported a London School of Economics study which revealed that blacks are 26 times more likely to be stopped and searched by the police than whites. A stop and search incident touched off riots in Hackney in east London two days after the initial eruption in Tottenham.

Duggan’s murder generated such outrage partly because of the large number of people British police have killed with complete impunity in recent years—many of whom were blacks and immigrants. According to the *Guardian* (8 August 2011), at least 333 people have died in police custody in Britain since 1998 *without a single charge being laid!*

On 15 March 2011, the reggae artist Smiley Culture died mysteriously during a police raid on his flat in Warlingham, Surrey. The police, who claimed he was dealing cocaine, spent two hours in his house. According to the official version, in the midst of their raid, they permitted the suspect to go to the kitchen to make a cup of tea, and he instead took the opportunity to stab himself to death with a 20-inch knife. Anyone remotely familiar with police practice during raids on suspected drug dealers would naturally have difficulty believing this story. The Independent Police Complaints Commission, a supposedly neutral authority headed by a former police officer, admitted recently that there were indeed irregularities in the circumstances surrounding Smiley Culture’s demise, but concluded nonetheless that there was no need for further investigation.

In recent years there have been numerous cases where police have been caught brazenly lying about the circumstances in which they killed people. One of the most infamous was in July 2005, two weeks after the bombings on London transport, when police executed Brazilian immigrant Jean Charles de Menezes in the Stockwell tube station. His crime? He was a foreigner wearing a rucksack. Initially the police claimed that he had acted suspiciously by jumping the barriers and attempting to flee, but this turned out to be a complete invention.

In 2009, Ian Tomlinson was clubbed to death during protests at the G-20 summit in London. At first the cops claimed that Tomlinson had been injured by a hail of missiles thrown by leftist protesters, but a video made by an American tourist with his camera phone showed that this was just another lie, and that, in fact, Tomlinson had been bludgeoned by the police.

As the phone-tapping scandal around the Rupert Murdoch-owned *News of the World* (NOTW) broke, it came to

light that police press officers had long been on the paper's payroll. Earlier, Tory Prime Minister David Cameron had hired former *NOTW* editor Andy Coulson as his press officer *after* revelations surfaced of the role of the *NOTW* in hacking cellphones belonging to families of the victims of the 7 July 2005 bombings. This not only illustrates the intimate connections between the cops, the media and the professional politicians at the top of British capitalism, but also their casual disregard for "the rule of law," i.e., bourgeois legality.

Of course there has been no shortage of other scandals in Britain. In 2009, we learned how members of parliament from all the major parties had been misappropriating public funds for various private purposes—some to enlarge their real estate portfolios, others to have the moats on their country homes cleared. Given the venality and cynicism that characterize Britain's political establishment, it was a bit much to have to listen to the "right honourable members" across the narrow parliamentary spectrum (including the Labour "lefts") echoing Cameron's denunciation of the riots as "acts of criminality pure and simple."

The vast and genuinely anti-social criminality of the well-connected elites and their servants continues unabated. A recent example is the Con-Dem government's bogus claim that in order to stave off economic collapse, it is necessary to pump billions of pounds into the banks—a policy known as "quantitative easing." Of course it is all to be paid for by ordinary working people already on the hook for the 2008 bailouts (partial nationalizations) of the Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) and Northern Rock. The costs associated with covering the bankers' bad bets are to be recouped through austerity measures targeting the working class and the poor. To add insult to injury, the bankers, including those who ran RBS and Northern Rock into the ground, have been rewarded with substantial bonuses, while various transnational corporations, such as the Boots pharmacy chain and the mobile phone company Vodafone, have been given huge tax exemptions.

The massive cuts in public-sector spending undertaken by the Tory-Liberal Democrat alliance were essentially approved in advance when Alistair Darling, the Chancellor of the Exchequer under Gordon Brown, promised that if Labour managed to get re-elected, "we will cut deeper than Margaret Thatcher." The coalition is just getting started and eventually aims to cut between 25 and 40 percent of public-sector spending. The effects are already severe.

Many of the Tottenham youth subjected to regular stop and search harassment have been forced out onto the streets because funding for youth clubs was canceled. The Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), which provided low-income teenagers with help paying for books and bus fares, has also been scrapped, making it impossible for many youth to continue their education. Schools are targeted for semi-privatization through the "free schools" and academies programs, childcare funding has been cut and the government is mooting plans for introducing "public-private partnerships" in the National Health Service.

The official number of unemployed has risen to more than 2.5 million, and one in three British children now lives in poverty. In London there are eight university graduates for every job opening, while tuition has shot up to as much as £9,000 per year. When thousands of students demonstrated in December 2010, riot police kettled them for hours in the freezing cold. Of course the more oppressed sections

of the population—those victimized by racial or ethnic discrimination—are particularly hard hit and, as the primary users of many social services, working women are also under attack with cutbacks in childcare, advice centers, etc.

The bureaucrats of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) responded to the cuts by calling for a national demonstration months in advance and then sat back and did nothing. When it finally took place in March [2011], more than 250,000 trade unionists and others took to the streets. Local anti-cuts groups have sprung up all over the country—with the active participation of most of the left, including the IBT.

The manifold symptoms of social decay in contemporary Britain provided the background to the riots, particularly the virulent and unrelenting police racism and corruption and the growing gap between a tiny layer of the super-rich and a significant stratum of the working-class population that has been completely devastated. In Britain, unlike in many other European countries, social housing estates sometimes sit close to affluent neighborhoods and the massive houses of the well-to-do. This proximity not only exacerbated the resentment of capitalism's victims, but also intensified the anxiety and outrage at the rioting on the part of many of those who have, thus far, not been feeling a great deal of pain.

The rioters were poor, relatively young and ethnically diverse. The initial outbreak in Tottenham on Saturday, 6 August [2011] had spread to several other areas of the city (Brixton, Walthamstow and Islington) by the following evening. At the height of the disorders on Monday night, south London's Lewisham, Peckham, Clapham, Woolwich, Bromley and Croydon erupted, as well as Camden in north London, and Hackney, East Ham and Stratford in the east. There were also outbreaks in other cities, including Birmingham, Salford and Manchester.

In many places crowds of youths pelted police with whatever missiles they could lay their hands on. In Peckham, a small liquor store was set on fire, which forced the inhabitants of the apartments above to jump out of the windows to save themselves. Various things were looted from shops, including running shoes, diapers, alcohol, clothes and TVs. In Croydon, a whole block of buildings was burned down. In Ealing, in west London, a man was attacked and killed while trying to extinguish a fire in a bin. The media made much of a video showing an injured person being helped to his feet by a group of youths who then proceeded to steal the contents of his backpack.

Media reports focused on the mayhem while largely ignoring the poverty and systematic police racism that lay at its roots. Police complaints about "politically correct" restrictions on their activities were beyond cynical given their long record of wanton murder. There was some discussion of employing rubber bullets, which have been routinely used in Northern Ireland, but had previously been considered too brutal for the British mainland.

People who volunteered to help clean up in Clapham the day after the riots wore t-shirts with slogans like "Looters are scum." The fascist English Defence League (EDL), seizing the chance to pose as vigilantes trying to prevent looting, gathered in the predominantly white suburb of Eltham in southeast London (where Stephen Lawrence was stabbed by racists 18 years ago), but were prevented by police from marching to nearby Lewisham (an area with a large black population).

The reflex racism of the British establishment was clearly



SOCIALIST PARTY PHOTO

Angry youth attacking a police car

exhibited by historian David Starkey's depiction of the riots as an expression of black culture—pointing in particular to the Patois spoken by Caribbean immigrants and the lyrics in rebellious hip-hop music. Starkey counterposed this to the “eloquence” of Tottenham's black MP, David Lammy, who has supposedly embraced the cultural values of the white upper crust. These racist stereotypes (which overlooked the fact that both Patois and Cockney feature in the speech of London youth of all ethnicities) were widely regarded as absurd.

The attitude of the ruling class was obvious in the draconian treatment meted out to supposed looters by the capitalist courts: a man received six months in jail for taking a few bottles of water from a shop in Brixton; a mother was jailed, although later released, for accepting a few clothes for her child; and many relatives of those convicted were threatened with eviction from social housing. The intent was clearly to intimidate the victims of the existing social order.

While the role of racist police repression in setting off the events was pointed out by many on the left, Ken Livingston, the Labour Party candidate for mayor of London, took a different approach and complained that government cuts depleted the repressive capacity of the cops. This repulsive toadying to the bosses' thugs found an echo in an 8 August 2011 statement posted to the website of the supposedly “revolutionary” Socialist Party (the sister group to Germany's Sozialistische Alternative Voran):

“Given how widely predicted rioting was, there was also anger that police were not prepared to protect local areas. Many blamed government cuts to police services.

“Paul Deller from the Metropolitan Police Federation said: ‘Morale among the police officers dealing with this incident, and within the police service as a whole, is at its lowest level ever due to the constant attacks on them by the Home Secretary and the government in the form of the reviews into police pay and conditions.’”

Unlike the tame reformists of the Socialist Party [who consider cops to be “workers in uniform”], Marxists have always recognized that the police, prisons and armed forces represent the core of the repressive apparatus that maintains the entire system of social injustice that is capitalism.

The Socialist Workers Party (whose German co-thinkers publish the paper *Marx21* inside the Left Party) took the symmetrically erroneous position, claiming that the riots themselves were “a deeply political act” through which working-class people were taking back what belonged to them. A similar argument is made by many anarchists who also tend to regard indiscriminate looting as an inherently revolutionary act. Marxists shed no tears for the missing property of the various corporate chains, which are presumably well-insured anyway, but the job of revolutionaries is not to promote looting as a solution to the inequities and exploitation of the capitalist system. Our task is to seek to organize and politically educate working people and the oppressed to understand that it is necessary to set about creating an organization—a mass revolutionary party—with the capacity to overturn the whole system. The working class needs to seize the entire means of production through socialist revolution—not to smash a few windows and grab whatever is on display.

We call for the immediate release of all those charged with looting—the real criminals are those who profit from a social system that condemns millions to abject poverty. Yet we are also opposed to indiscriminate violence against ordinary people—there was nothing revolutionary about running over those three men in Birmingham who were trying to defend local shops. The fact that many people expressed their justified anger by taking a plasma TV or a nice pair of running shoes is an expression of the alienation and depoliticization of large sections of the British working class.

This is hardly surprising, as the organized left and workers' movement have been in retreat for decades. During the 1980s, the government of Margaret Thatcher passed the most reactionary anti-trade union legislation in Europe and destroyed significant sectors of British industry, laying the basis for the defeat of the miners' strike in 1985. The trade-union bureaucrats, who have passively submitted to one attack on workers' rights after another, are currently active in opposing any and all proposals for serious strike action against the cuts. A year-and-a-half ago TUC head Brandon Barber announced that there would be no support for “destructive” strikes like those of the 1930s. These days, with anger growing in the ranks, Barber has begun striking a slightly more militant posture. But we can expect nothing but betrayals from him and the rest of the caste he represents. Their idea of “political action” is to continue to channel massive amounts of money to the Labour Party traitors, who, during the 13-year reign of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, retained the viciously anti-worker legislation pushed through by Thatcher. And there has been no change on that score—when Ed Miliband took over as Labour's new leader last year, he made a point of denouncing “irresponsible strikes.”

A few decades ago Ralph Miliband, Ed's father, aptly described British social democracy as an agency of the ruling class which, from its inception, was completely useless as an instrument for the socialist transformation of society. Yet much of Britain's supposedly “revolutionary” left continues to pimp for Labour at election time,

while simultaneously bemoaning the fact that it does little or nothing to advance the interests of working people. In power, Labour eagerly participated in the failed imperialist adventures in Afghanistan and Iraq, while imposing its own austerity program at home. Today local Labour councilors routinely implement every cut decreed by the ConDem government. The only exception to this that I am aware of was Kingsley Abrams, a Lambeth Labour councilor, who was suspended from the party for daring to merely *abstain* on a vote to impose cuts in his London borough.

The seething anger that fueled the riots has not gone away, but to turn it into an effective force, it is necessary to give it an organized and consciously revolutionary expression. Now, I know that many in this room will disagree with me on this, but in my view, the only way this can be accomplished is through the creation of a disciplined combat organization—a revolutionary workers' party—rooted

in the trade unions and the oppressed communities. Such a party would seek to participate in the creation of multi-ethnic workers' defense guards to protect local communities against the growing threat posed by the fascist EDL, as well as against routine police harassment. It would also struggle to utilize the enormous potential power of the trade unions to resist state violence and to beat back the rapacious assault on living standards that the capitalists and their lackeys in Labour are so determined to implement. A revolutionary party capable of organizing effective resistance to capitalist attacks can only be built on the foundation of a program that links the day-to-day struggles of ordinary working people to the strategic necessity to overthrow capitalism and replace it with a democratically-planned economy in which production is geared to meeting human need, rather than generating private profit. This is a very big job, but in my opinion, it is the only way forward. ■

Con-Dem & Labour: Different Knife, Same Cuts **For a General Strike to Smash Austerity!**

David Cameron's ruling Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition hopes to inoculate British capitalism from the economic contagion spreading across the Eurozone by imposing the same draconian austerity measures which have brought social tensions to a head in Europe's southern tier, most notably Greece. The British government has drastically cut public expenditures through measures that include freezing child benefits and public-sector pay, and "reassessing" the disability payments of 1.5 million beneficiaries. After the chancellor's 2011 "autumn statement," the Institute of Fiscal Studies predicted that between 2009 and 2013, real median household income will fall by over seven percent (*Guardian*, 1 December 2011).

Thousands of services—including youth centers, libraries and refugee advice facilities—have been closed down, and major steps have been taken toward privatizing public health services. Britain's economy is stalled, with growth below one percent and falling, and the government has a budget deficit in excess of £150 billion. More than 2.5 million people are out of work (including a million youth aged 18-24), while an estimated 10 percent of children already live in "severe" poverty (defined as a family living on less than half the average income). These figures are expected to rise further as a result of the latest round of cuts.

Reprinted below is a leaflet first distributed at a 26 March 2011 national demonstration called by the Trades Union Congress (TUC) that drew over a quarter of a million people. Many of the marchers expressed anger at the current trade-union leadership's refusal to initiate anything more than impotent, token protests. While one-day public-sector strikes were held in June and November 2011, the union bureaucrats have shown little appetite for seri-

ous resistance to the capitalist offensive. As a result, opposition to the current attacks has taken on various forms: from wildcat strikes by construction workers; to a series of "Occupy"-style encampments across the country; to three days of urban rioting last summer (see article on page 16).

In the face of this vicious and continuing assault by the bosses and their state, mass strikes and other forms of coordinated united-front action are both urgently necessary and entirely possible given the widespread anxiety and growing anger at the base of society. Yet the organizations of Britain's ostensibly revolutionary left (the largest of which are the Socialist Party and Socialist Workers Party) whose supporters include scores of trade-union shop stewards and workplace activists, as well as thousands of other militants, have thus far not even attempted to initiate any serious united-front mobilization for rank-and-file action to overcome the sabotage of the sell-out TUC leadership. They have instead focused on promoting their own, competing, anti-cuts front groups. This petty organizational sectarianism is, at bottom, an expression of political paralysis resulting from decades of opportunist adaptation to the pro-capitalist Labour tops and the union misleaders.

The Con-Dem's vicious austerity measures are now being dutifully imposed across the country by local authorities—Tory, Lib-Dem and Labour. An attack of this scale demands a unified response by all those affected—public and private sector workers, young and old, women and men, employed and unemployed—in opposition to all the cuts. To be drawn into discussions of what is least bad to cut is to accept the government's programme.

We must begin by clearly identifying the root of the problem—capitalism—and aim to make it impossible for the ruling class to conduct business as usual. A movement that merely aims to dull the pain that capitalism inflicts will be incapable of stopping the attacks. Petitions and press releases are entirely insufficient—serious resistance will involve going beyond what is permitted by the reactionary laws created by politicians whose only concern is to serve the interests of the rich.

A serious struggle against the cuts must remain entirely free of the Labour traitors who have enforced 'neo-liberal' policies for 13 years, retained the Tory anti-union laws and are now administering savage cuts in councils across the country. During the election campaign Labour promised to cut as deep and hard as the Tories. Now Labour politicians, and the trade-union leaders who fund them, are pretending to oppose the policy they endorsed. We should not be deceived by this charade. Working people need to form a new party that will really stand for our interests.

The recent student protests, which so vividly illustrated the power of mass protest, rejected the toady Labourite leadership of the National Union of Students. On their own, students do not have the social weight to fundamentally change society, or even to prevent the imposition of higher fees and restore the EMA [Education Maintenance Allowance], but student protest can provide important support for struggles by education workers and the wider organised working class. We need to aim for mass actions that hit the capitalists where it hurts with co-ordinated strikes, mass defiance of the anti-union legal straitjacket and a perspective of building up to a general strike to smash the cuts.

United resistance to *all* the cuts!

Vigorous strikes by public sector workers in defence of the health service, childcare facilities, youth centres, libraries and all services under threat could rally support from those who depend on them. The disproportionate impact on women should be addressed by mobilising to win equal rights in the workplace, free childcare and free healthcare, including contraception and abortion. An effective resistance must also seek to organise mass opposition to evictions and repossessions, and the seizure of empty housing to house the homeless.

In order to gain mass popular support, a movement to smash the cuts needs to boldly proclaim that we will not pay for the capitalists' crisis. All workers must resist benefit cuts for the unemployed, redundancies and workplace closures. The answer to unemployment is to demand that the available work and hours be divided among those able to work, on full pay. Enforcing this is likely to require mass occupations of workplaces, whether the business is profitable or unprofitable.

The capitalists' divide and rule tactic of blaming unemployment and inadequate public services on immigration must be answered with a fight to stop all deportations and detentions, and the demand for full citizenship rights for all immigrants. All foreign workers should be brought into the trade unions on equal rates of pay, and alliances forged with trade unions across the European Union and beyond. David Cameron's tirades against 'multi-culturalism' echo the racist filth of the fascist BNP [British National Party] and EDL [English Defence

League], which feed on social and economic crisis. These groups pose a deadly threat to the trade unions and the oppressed, and must be driven off the streets by mass militant direct action.

The police attacking and kettling our demonstrations are not 'workers in uniform' but the armed thugs of the bosses. To deter such aggressive tactics we need organised workers' defence guards, and a political fight to kick cops and screws out of the union movement.

The major obstacle to effectively resisting the attacks is the fact that the leadership of the British working class are lackeys of the bosses. The trade union leaders who have put up no resistance and taken months to organise a national demonstration cannot be expected to sanction effective strike action. It is necessary to get rid of them, replacing them not with a politically heterogeneous rank and file movement but with leaders who are prepared to openly defy the anti-union laws and are committed to a programme of revolutionary class struggle aimed at breaking up the capitalists' state and replacing it with organs of working class power.

'Alternative' visions of capitalism

The Eton-educated millionaire cabinet ministers have perversely seized on the capitalists' financial crisis as an opportunity to redistribute more of society's resources in favour of the rich and powerful. Cuts to public spending are designed to improve the bottom line of the banks and corporations. There are some differences within the ruling class—advocates of balancing the books whatever the cost currently have the upper hand, but others argue for more gradual cuts or even a Keynesian infusion strategy of public spending. In the long run neither approach will serve the interests of working people.

The TUC's publicity for the 26 March [2011] demonstration describes it as a 'March for the Alternative: Jobs, Growth, Justice', and argues that cuts are 'not an economic necessity'. With graphs and charts showing that British debt is not as bad as some other countries, a recent TUC pamphlet proposes a fantastic 'alternative' in which cuts are made more fairly, taxes and spending increased and the British economy sails out of recession:

'Cuts are not the cure says that spending cuts and last month's VAT increase hit the poor and those on middle incomes while a fair tax regime that raises more money from the finance sector through a Robin Hood tax and cracks down on tax avoidance and evasion would be a fairer way of tightening belts.'

The Coalition of Resistance (COR) was launched in August 2010 with a founding statement, signed by Tony Benn and 73 other luminaries including Labour and Green MPs, that makes a similar proposal:

'An alternative budget would place the banks under democratic control, and raise revenue by increasing tax for the rich, plugging tax loopholes, withdrawing troops from Afghanistan, abolishing the nuclear "deterrent" by cancelling the Trident replacement.

'An alternative strategy could use these resources to: support welfare; develop homes, schools, and hospitals; and foster a green approach to public spending—investing in renewable energy and public transport, thereby creating a million jobs.'

Right to Work (RTW), run by the Socialist Workers

Party (SWP) also puts forward essentially the same plan and asserts that the cuts are simply a choice of the Con-Dem coalition, a view summed up in the publicity blurb for the RTW pamphlet, 'Defending the Welfare State':

'The cuts are being made while big business and the rich fail to pay billions in taxes and while billions more are squandered on illegal wars and a new generation of nuclear weapons.

'This pamphlet argues that Cameron's cuts are completely unnecessary. It seeks to arm activists with the arguments they need to use at work or college.

'The money is there to pay for decent public services for all. We have to resist the Tory assault on our way of life and build a movement capable of opposing the cuts and fighting for a better world.'

The COR and RTW have agreed to co-ordinate their attempts to pressure the government to shift its priorities but, co-ordinated or not, this kind of mealy mouthed cap-in-hand approach is virtually guaranteed to fail. What is necessary is a broad united front anti-cuts movement focused on building militant mass resistance to the capitalist attacks. Within such a movement revolutionaries would seek to win adherents to a perspective of uprooting, rather than reforming, capitalism.

Beware false friends

A major point in the agreement between the COR and RTW is that 'both campaigns would work with Labour Party members who supported the aims of the campaigns'. In fact, what this signals is an orientation towards working with any Labour representative who wants to jump on the anti-cuts bandwagon and score some points against the Tories. Individual Labour members who are genuinely prepared to fight should not be deterred from joining the anti-cuts movement, but they are putting themselves on a collision course with their own party. What is necessary is a decisive split with the Labour traitors who assured the City and global markets during the election campaign that they would 'responsibly' attack the working class on behalf of Britain's financial institutions.

On the local level there is an illusion that the way to fight cuts is via Labour Party councillors. Austerity budgets have now been imposed by Labour-controlled local authorities all over the country, but we have yet to hear of a Labour councillor voting against any of them. Even Councillor Kingsley Abrams in Lambeth, who was suspended from the Labour whip for supporting the protests, abstained when it came to the actual vote on a budget containing £37 million of cuts. The six Labour councillors in Hackney who issued a strongly worded statement opposed to the cuts then turned around and voted to pass the budget.

The only way that any local councils are going to refuse to pass on the cuts and thereby shatter the cosy tri-partisan consensus is if they face angry mass opposition. The Labour Party operates as an agency of the capitalists within the working class. To look for it to lead a fight is to cripple any prospect of effective resistance from the start.

This issue is starkly posed in debates over whether to invite Labour councillors who have voted for the cuts to speak at protests. A long article in the SWP's theoretical journal on 'The student revolt and the crisis' concludes:

'It is also important that this unity in action stretches into the Labour Party, which continues to hold the loyalty of core



30 June 2011: Public-sector workers protest in London

sections of the working class...Existing Labour-controlled councils are already implementing cuts in jobs and services. This is an illustration of how Labourism both expresses and contains workers' resistance. But the best way to confront this contradiction is by working with and against Labour politicians and activists *within* the movement against austerity rather than by trying to restrict that movement to the would-be politically enlightened.'

—*International Socialism* 129, Winter 2011

It seems entirely reasonable to 'restrict' speaking rights at anti-cuts events to those who actually oppose the cuts—but not for the SWP, who routinely invite Labour speakers onto platforms. *Socialist Worker* (19 February [2011]) specifically criticised the Socialist Party's Dave Nellist for arguing 'that we shouldn't work with Labour councillors who don't renounce all cuts.'

WorkersPower gives the SWP's line a more left-sounding spin. Back in October, when Ed Miliband was complaining about 'irresponsible strikes', it declared that he needed to be 'forced off the fence' (*Workers Power*, 8 October 2010). What fence? Miliband has always had both feet firmly planted in the capitalist field.

In a resolution dated 16 February 2011, calling for a 'united front policy towards Labour', Workers Power asked:

'Should Labour councillors who have already voted for cuts be allowed to speak on anti-cuts platforms? This is a local tactical question, not one of principle. Such a tactic might help to expose pro-cuts Labour councillors in front of their voters, but at other times it may be divisive and cause unnecessary divisions in the local anti-cuts movement.'

—'Policy: council elections, councillors and anti-cuts candidates'

The Labour Party is a bourgeois workers' party, based on the trade union bureaucracy, and firmly committed to the interests of British capital. It has betrayed the working class time and again. Only those who have no serious intention of resisting could consider welcoming people who vote for cuts into the anti-cuts movement. Social democrats often talk tough and make big promises when they are out of office—but Labour is not even doing that!

In the same resolution, Workers Power opposes standing 'anti-cuts' candidates in the May [2011] local elections and instead calls for re-electing the Labour councillors who voted for austerity budgets:

'However if local anticuts groups decide, at democratically convened mass meetings, to stand anti-cuts candidates against our advice then, in the interests of unity, we may decide to campaign with them to help try to build the anticuts movement. But this will naturally depend on local priorities and it won't change our general position in the election of a critical vote for Labour.'

Labourism by another name

The Socialist Party offer the following advice to Labour councils:

'By using their reserves and borrowing powers to avoid making cuts, councils can gain time to build a mass movement in their support. Manchester city council, for example, is estimated to have £100 million in reserves. To strengthen such a stand—and this answers the lie that there is "nothing Labour can do"—Ed Miliband could promise that an incoming Labour government would write off all local authority debts incurred from avoiding cuts.'

—*Socialism Today*, March 2011

It is conceivable that in the run up to the next general election Ed Miliband will promise something like this. But once elected it is certain that he will do no such thing. It is odd for the Socialist Party to even suggest this, considering that they long ago declared Labour to be simply a bourgeois party like the Lib-Dems and Tories.

Instead the Socialist Party promotes warmed up Labourism, calling for a 'new mass workers' party' to contest elections on an explicitly reformist basis:

'The battle against the cuts is a top priority for the working class, but it must be linked to the need to argue for an electoral alternative. The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) actually assumes even greater importance in this battle and it should strongly feature in all the anti-cuts battles. Without a serious electoral challenge, there is a danger, for example, that councillors carrying out cuts can remain impervious to the suffering that their callous approach can cause. Industrial action is vital, of course, but it must be buttressed by pressure for candidates—trade unionists in the first instance—to challenge them in elections.'

—*Socialism Today*, February 2011

Through the auspices of the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN), which they dominate, the Socialist Party has set up their own anti-cuts movement on the grounds that the Labour loyalism of the COR and RTW prevents them from opposing all cuts. There is some truth to this observation, but the non-SP wing of the NSSN opposed the idea of a third anti-cuts coalition:

'Anyone concerned about the real interests of the working class cannot but realise that we need to unite the existing campaigns into one, democratic, mass movement—and certainly resist any attempt to launch yet another campaign.'

—*Workers Power*, 31 January 2011

Unity is, of course, not an end in itself—it all depends on political programme. It is necessary for all those who want to fight the cuts to come together to discuss how to proceed in order to win this struggle. But one thing is clear from the start—effective resistance means politically breaking with those who fetishise capitalist legality or 'unity' with Labour traitors.

A crisis of leadership

TUC leader Brendan Barber's vague talk of strike action, which he treats as just one means of protest among many, is only intended to contain and channel militant sentiments in the ranks. Barber laid out TUC policy quite clearly back on 28 January [2011]: 'No-one is talking about a general strike, but of course these attacks on our members could well give rise to industrial action around specific disputes' (*Independent*). The cuts are not a bunch of 'specific disputes', but a generalised attack, and defeating them requires a generalised response—exactly what Barber is afraid of.

The trade union lefts like the RMT's [National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers] Bob Crow, Mark Serwotka of the PCS [Public and Commercial Services Union], Matt Wrack of the FBU [Fire Brigades Union] and Jeremy Dear of the NUJ [National Union of Journalists] have been talking big, but doing little. Like the leaders of the larger unions, they hide behind legal bans on solidarity strikes and the complex balloting procedures required by the law. Even the most elementary strike co-ordination, let alone a real general strike, will require shredding these reactionary entanglements.

A general strike is not a revolution, but it does raise the question of who holds power in society. The current leadership of the workers' movement (and most of the left) demonstrate little appetite for a fight. It is necessary to show the ruling class that their attacks will be vigorously repulsed—but the forces capable of leading successful resistance are not yet in place. What is needed is a leadership committed to a programme of working-class independence, rejection of any sort of alliances with capitalist parties, and the determination to wage militant class struggle. Revolutionaries seeking to construct a party capable of providing such leadership could win a hearing in workplace-based strike committees, which, if co-ordinated at the local and national levels, could provide a mechanism to carry out a general strike and circumvent the sabotage of the trade union bureaucrats.

Beating back the current offensive is the immediate task. But it is only a beginning, because the capitalists will inevitably launch new assaults. To secure a decent future, working people need to struggle to get rid of the entire dog-eat-dog system of production for profit. Only the working class, led by a revolutionary party linked to militant leadership in the trade unions, can open the road to a world in which the production and distribution of wealth are organised to benefit the many, not the few. ■

Sixth International Conference of the IBT Capitalist Crisis & Revolutionary Opportunity

In April 2011, delegates from all sections of the International Bolshevik Tendency (IBT), as well as non-delegate members and close sympathizers, met in Western Europe for the organization's Sixth International Conference. The international conference, the highest decision-making body in the tendency, discusses and debates outstanding programmatic issues, evaluates the work of the preceding period and outlines future perspectives. It also has the responsibility to elect a new International Executive Committee.

The global economic crisis provided the backdrop for a variety of discussions, including recent developments in inter-imperialist relations, the growing stresses in the European Union and the increasing weight of China in the world economy. The "Tasks and Perspectives" document, which was adopted with only minor modifications, began:

"Global capitalism is mired in its most severe crisis since the 1930s. The historic proportions of the present slump—the first great depression of the 21st century—point to the fact that we have entered a new phase of capitalist decomposition. The coming period will be marked by intensified class struggles and sharpened global contradictions...."

With international capitalism "teetering on the brink of a second wave of financial and economic collapse associated with falling aggregate demand and the unprecedented levels of public debt incurred over the past two years," the document noted that trouble in any sector (such as the unfolding crisis in the Eurozone) could "quickly spread throughout the globalized economy" and projected that:

"The ruling classes are likely to respond by pushing austerity measures that far outstrip the severe cutbacks that have already been made and/or proposed, and they may attempt to drive down wages to subsistence levels. Under these conditions, the ability of the working class to resist will initially, in many cases, be undermined by material hardship, but the eventual consequence must be a revival of raw class struggle and the creation of conditions in which the ideas of revolutionary socialists will gain a potential base among the broad masses not seen for generations."

We also observed that U.S. imperialism's failed military gambits in Afghanistan and Iraq had exacerbated the economic downturn and contributed to growing geopolitical instability:

"Combined, the 'wars' will end up costing the American ruling class trillions of dollars—a liability that has only compounded the looming debt crisis associated with the financial meltdown, threatening to unseat the U.S. dollar as the currency of international exchange. Millions of working-class Americans, disproportionately blacks and Latinos, have lost their jobs, their homes and any



Protests in front of Italian parliament, December 2010

remaining hope that the lives of their children would be more materially secure than their own."

At the same time, we are witnessing important and historically unprecedented changes in the capitalist world order:

"The Chinese deformed workers' state has emerged as a major factor in world politics and the global economy as the relative position of the U.S. deteriorates....The United States, the leading capitalist power, is massively indebted to China, which props up the American colossus for fear of destabilizing a global economic order on which it uneasily depends. More than that, China is redirecting its investments from American Treasury Bills to acquisition of minerals and other raw materials from Latin America to Africa, often in direct competition with imperialist powers."

The economic crisis has also highlighted the limited and fragile character of European economic integration:

"The economic crisis has exacerbated tensions within the European Union (EU), though the German and French

bourgeoisies—at the heart of the bloc—plan to continue cooperating within this framework for the foreseeable future. The EU is an unstable alliance, and a breakdown or radical redesign cannot be ruled out in the coming period. The euro has not been able to displace the U.S. dollar as the global currency, and its maintenance required the bailout of the Greek and Irish economies with only grudging acceptance from Germany, whose chancellor recently had to quash serious speculation about a return to the Deutschemark.”

The prospect of deepening European instability poses the possibility of radical shifts and disjunctures in a global economic order long dominated by the U.S.:

“Russia, which has, against the odds, managed to reassert itself as a major player on the world stage, is another complicating factor. Moscow, although playing a weak hand, seeks a spot at the top of the global imperialist order and has developed stronger ties with Germany. The collapse of the EU could trigger a rapid realignment of ‘great powers’ the likes of which have not been seen for some time.”

Explosive Class Struggles on the Horizon

The tempo and intensity of class struggle in Europe are likely to rise dramatically in the coming period:

“The global economic crisis has resulted in the virtual bankruptcy of Iceland, Greece and Ireland, while Portugal, Italy and Spain are on the brink of meltdown. Workers and youth in those countries have responded to the capitalists’ ‘recovery’ program (austerity and unemployment for the masses) by launching important protests and labor actions....The chances of pitched class battles in the coming period are high.”

Attempts by more militant elements of the European proletariat (particularly in Greece) to resist bourgeois austerity have thus far had little impact: “The working class has fought back, but it is disorganized and badly led. Indeed, the most important factor hampering even effective defensive action is the treacherous labor bureaucracies and the reformist political parties.”

The Tasks and Perspectives document projected the inevitability of resistance in the U.S., but observed that there have been “few signs of a generalized working-class or socialist revival: these are dark times in the belly of the beast.” However, the surprisingly rapid rise of the Occupy Wall Street movement across North America in the autumn of 2011 reflects a profound dissatisfaction with the status quo that could portend explosive class battles in the near future. Given a combination of a low level of class consciousness and the abject servility of the official leadership of the workers’ movement, we anticipated that popular resistance might initially take non-traditional forms:

“We may see the development of new organizations that go beyond the scope of OROs [ostensibly revolutionary organizations] or trade unions or even united fronts, which combine elements of a political party with those of a campaign or bloc. We must be careful neither to embrace these too eagerly nor dismiss them as not conforming to preconceived ideas of organization, but should make a sober assessment of the political basis of these formations.”

The document projected that the inspiring “Arab

Spring” uprisings which toppled pro-imperialist dictators in Tunisia and Egypt would be unable to address the contradictions of capitalist “underdevelopment” in the absence of an authentically socialist leadership rooted in the working class. The global crisis of proletarian leadership can ultimately be resolved only through the creation of a mass international revolutionary party capable of leading the working class and oppressed in a struggle to seize power, expropriate the bourgeoisie, overturn “free market” tyranny and establish a socialist planned economy on a world scale.

Conference attendees also participated in a concurrent educational series, including a session on some of the most important lessons to be gleaned from the long history of revolutionary trade-union work. While we are the inheritors of a rich tradition of Trotskyist interventions in the organized labor movement, the IBT unfortunately does not currently have the forces to undertake this type of work in a concerted fashion. Nonetheless some comrades have been able to carry out limited exemplary actions. For instance, in 1917 No.32 we reported on a teachers’ walk-out to protest educational cuts that was initiated by an IBT supporter in New Zealand. For several decades IBT supporters and friends have also been intimately involved in strike actions by dockers in California, which have provided a practical demonstration, albeit on a relatively small scale, of the social power the working class can wield with militant leadership. Despite the inadequacy of our current resources, the IBT recognizes the strategic importance of the fight to build a class-struggle leadership in the trade unions, and we are committed to undertaking this vital work as opportunities present themselves.

Our Political Opponents

Whether in the mass organizations of the proletariat or on other fronts of the class struggle, winning fresh forces to the Marxist program requires a combination of tactical flexibility and political intransigence. The reforging of a mass, revolutionary international party will be a complicated process involving splits and fusions among existing leftist formations and the skillful development of exemplary mass work to politicize and build a base among broader layers of the working class and oppressed. As a small sub-propaganda organization, the chief priority of the IBT today must be to seek to forge a pole of international regroupment through struggle for programmatic clarity within the left and workers’ movement. As Lenin insisted, the responsibility of revolutionaries at every stage in the development of a proletarian vanguard party is not only to provide leadership on the ground in actual class struggles, but also to formulate a clear Marxist response to key issues facing the working class while drawing sharp “lines of demarcation” with reformist and centrist pseudo-socialists.

In many areas where we are active, most of the organizations of the “far left” have been moving incrementally to the right for several decades, thus increasing their programmatic distance from us and the Leninist-Trotskyist political tradition they claim to uphold. On the one hand, this rightward drift, recently manifest in a widespread willingness to embrace NATO’s “humanitarian” cover story for bombing Libya, reduces the likelihood of any significant regroupment from their ranks. On the other hand, the contradictions are sharpened for any of their members who take the

heritage of Bolshevism at all seriously, while the distinctions between hard-communist class-struggle politics and flabby social-democratic lesser-evilism have become much more obvious even to relatively inexperienced people.

In formal programmatic terms, the political organization closest to us is the U.S.-based Internationalist Group (and its somewhat ephemeral League for the Fourth International—IG/LFI). Like the IBT, the IG was founded by cadres driven out of the ex-Trotskyist Spartacist tendency. During its decade-and-a-half existence, the IG has refused all proposals to discuss our common history and the lessons to be derived from it (see our letter to the IG of 15 December 1996, reprinted in *Trotskyist Bulletin* No.6). The IG leadership has also avoided any serious discussion of the substantive differences that have arisen between us, including their blanket denunciation of participants in the 1999 anti-WTO “Battle of Seattle,” their rejection of the Fourth International’s policy on workers’ sanctions in the 1930s (see 1917 No.31) and, most recently, their repudiation of the call to “jail killer cops” (see “IG on ‘Jailing Killer Cops,’” page 30). To cover their unwillingness to engage in serious programmatic debate, the IG leadership has on occasion stooped to the sort of misrepresentation and outright slander characteristic of the degenerate Spartacist League (SL) of the 1980s and 1990s.

The IG’s leading cadres are talented and energetic, and, on most questions, our programmatic positions are substantially similar. Yet their aversion to seriously addressing their own origins, and critically evaluating the profoundly flawed practices they assimilated as part of the leadership of the degenerating International Communist League (ICL—the international tendency headed by the Spartacist League/U.S.)), has produced a brittle organization with a sometimes sectarian and occasionally near-hysterical leadership style and a stilted internal life. While the IG’s leadership is capable of producing sophisticated and informative propaganda on a wide range of issues, its attempts to project the image of a far larger and more influential organization, and distaste for serious political interaction with leftist opponents, have resulted in an inability to develop new cadres. After a decade and a half, the IG/LFI has yet to report on a founding conference (or any other sort), perhaps because no such gathering has taken place. This is not a healthy sign from an organization that at one point or another has claimed to be active in at least a half-dozen countries.

The increasingly insular and cultish Spartacist League/U.S. and its international affiliates continue to drift away from their origins as the Trotskyist opposition to the American Socialist Workers Party’s descent into reformism in the 1960s. The SL’s downward political trajectory combines sectarianism (recently extended to a rejection of the united-front tactic in general and specifically in defense of Mumia Abu-Jamal) with bizarre opportunist lunges—the most spectacular of which was the overtly pro-imperialist support for American military forces in Haiti in 2010. After months of defending the indefensible—chiefly in polemics against ourselves and the IG—the SL eventually repudiated its position as a social-imperialist capitulation, but could not explain how such a position was swallowed by the entire membership without demur. The SL has referred to this capitulation as their “August 4th”—a reference to

the betrayal of the Second International at the outset of World War I. We see their Haiti position (which had been preceded by a series of earlier social-patriotic capitulations) in somewhat less world-historic terms as evidence that the ICL cadre is now so depoliticized that it is effectively brain dead (see “Sclerotic Spartacists Unravel,” May 2010). While its weight in the left has continued to shrink, the ICL’s formally Trotskyist posture on many issues still allows it to attract (and then destroy) the occasional high-quality young recruit. Given the rightward drift of the left generally, the SL/ICL remains an important opponent for us, particularly in North America.

In Britain, our most important opponents are probably the heterodox centrists of Workers Power (WP—flagship of the League for the Fifth International [L5I]). Workers Power is a politically unstable organization with an appetite for mass work, an essentially unserious attitude to questions of political program and, paradoxically, a capacity to sometimes approximate hard-left Trotskyist positions—which makes it more attractive to some youthful radicals than its larger more staid “Trotskyist” competitors.

Workers Power’s constant attempts to swim with the stream of petty-bourgeois radical opinion have led to many political gyrations. This adaptationist impulse is evident in its recent unexplained alternation between mutually contradictory calls for the construction of a “revolutionary tendency in the Labour Party” and an “anti-capitalist party” along the lines of France’s reformist Nouveau Parti anticapitaliste.

A willingness to support whatever “mass movement” happens to be popular at any given moment led the nominally Soviet-defensist WP to back Lech Walesa in the 1980s, Boris Yeltsin in 1991 and virtually every other counterrevolutionary formation that arose during the protracted process of capitalist restoration in the degenerated and deformed workers’ states of the Soviet bloc.

In 1995, the “anti-imperialists” leading Workers Power refused to defend Serbia against NATO bombers—a shameful betrayal replicated by their recent embrace of imperialism’s auxiliaries in carrying out “regime change” in Libya. The L5I’s distance from Trotskyism was perhaps most clearly illustrated by an apparently serious suggestion that the collection of Third World nationalists, trade-union bureaucrats and liberals that lead the World Social Forum declare themselves “a new world party of socialist revolution” (see “Doubletalk & Zigzags,” 1917 No.32).

The New York-based League for the Revolutionary Party/Communist Organization for the Fourth International (LRP/COFI) is a state-capitalist variant of a “Third Camp” current that defected from the Trotskyist movement over 70 years ago. The LRP has a moralistic petty-bourgeois streak that shapes its attitude on a variety of questions, including Israel/Palestine. At the same time, the LRP has managed to stay its political course over the years and can at least be counted on to say what it means and mean what it says. Moreover, it has the capacity to approximate a revolutionary position on some questions of vital importance to the American workers’ movement—particularly the necessity of a hard break with the bourgeois Democratic Party and “third party” liberals like Ralph Nader. This is sufficient to qualify it as one of the more serious leftist organizations in the U.S. today.

The International Socialist Tendency (led by the British Socialist Workers Party [SWP]), the two groups deriving from Ted Grant's Militant Tendency in Britain (the Committee for a Workers' International and the International Marxist Tendency) and the United Secretariat (USec) are the more active ostensibly Trotskyist formations we encounter internationally. While each is thoroughly reformist, they all possess the social weight, geographical dispersion and ability to present a sufficiently plausible Marxist face to allow them to continue to recruit serious militants. The USec is distinguished from the other three by the political heterogeneity of its sections, which in some cases has resulted in several affiliates in the same country. In recent years the North American Socialist Action (SA) grouping has been operating as a sort of left opposition within the USec.

The Tasks and Perspectives document observed that the general shrinkage and rightward evolution of many of the ostensibly Trotskyist currents have not been equally characteristic of Maoist and anarchist formations, some of which have increased their influence in areas where we are active. Our continuing involvement in the struggle to free Mumia Abu-Jamal, which has brought us into contact with some of these groups in the past period, has underlined the importance of engaging with militants who may identify with leftist traditions openly hostile to Lenin and/or Trotsky.

Taking Stock, Moving Forward

In assessing our work since our 2008 conference, we noted that despite some limited successes (e.g., gaining supporters in France and Poland), we have yet to make any major breakthroughs internationally and have in fact suffered some reverses. In 2010, one recently-recruited comrade left the IBT to become an anarchist in the aftermath of the explosive protests against the G-20 in Toronto.

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More significantly, we failed to win over members of the Coletivo Lenin (CL) in Rio de Janeiro, some of whom eventually aligned themselves with Sam T., a talented but troubled former IBT member who departed in September 2008 after deciding he was no longer prepared to carry out the directives of the organization. Our failure to win the Brazilian comrades came as the disappointing culmination of several years of effort and represented the loss of what had appeared to be a promising opportunity to undertake work in an extremely important part of the world.

Despite our small forces, IBT comrades play a modest but real role in "far left" politics in those areas where we are active. We intervene in major political mobilizations and meetings, organize educational classes, hold public forums and, when possible, participate in united-front actions with other groups. We also regularly attend major international leftist events, including the annual Liebknecht/Luxemburg commemoration in Berlin, the Left Forum in New York, the Fête de Lutte Ouvrière near Paris and the SWP's "Marxism" in London.

Our single most important activity is the regular (if infrequent) publication of propaganda in English, German and French. Given our limited resources, we often have to choose to address some issues at the expense of others. In doing so we attempt to take up the most important questions and those most likely to push forward the process of revolutionary regroupment:

"As the political level of our competitors has declined, we cannot assume that the majority of the younger comrades who join OROs care, or even know, about some of the defining moments of the 20th century, or are aware of some of the basic elements of Marxism. However, it would be wrong to conclude from this that our task has shifted toward becoming the 'educator of the masses' or that it requires a programmatic adulteration of Trotskyism. What sets us apart is our program, and the program of revolutionary socialism must be presented in clear and accessible terms in order to attract the best elements. The weapon of polemical critique remains our most powerful one."

There are, of course, trade-offs: our limited ability to comment in a timely manner on important issues of the day can make it impossible to intersect some potentially serious people. In an attempt to broaden our audience, the conference document noted that "it will be useful for us to produce more introductory socialist materials for the raw elements (both organized and unorganized) we encounter on demonstrations and at political meetings." But we remain committed to placing a priority on addressing vital issues confronting the international workers' movement. The history of the Trotskyist movement has repeatedly confirmed the importance of quality over quantity—doing fewer things better—as the only way to forge effective revolutionary cadre. Trotsky outlined this policy for the International Left Opposition in July 1931:

"Our strength at the given stage lies in a correct appreciation, in a Marxian conception, in a correct revolutionary prognosis. These qualities we must present first of all to the proletarian vanguard. We act in the first place as *propagandists*. We are too weak to attempt to give answers to all questions, to intervene in all the specific conflicts, to

formulate everywhere and in all places the slogans and the replies of the Left Opposition. The chase after such universality, with our weakness and the inexperience of many comrades, will often lead to too-hasty conclusions, to imprudent slogans, to wrong solutions. By false steps in *particulars* we will be the ones to compromise ourselves by preventing the workers from appreciating the *fundamental* qualities of the Left Opposition. I do not want in any way to say by this that we must stand aside from the real struggle of the working class. Nothing of the sort. The advanced workers can test the revolutionary advantages of the Left Opposition only by living experiences, but one must learn to select the most vital, the most burning, and the most principled questions and on these questions engage in combat without dispersing oneself in trifles and details. It is in this, it appears to me, that the fundamental role of the Left Opposition now lies."

—"Some Ideas on the Period and the Tasks of the Left Opposition"

Many of the leading comrades of our tendency are members of the "class of '68"—and they are getting on in years. Their contributions remain critical, but at the past two conferences we have deliberately sought to increase the weight of younger comrades in our leadership collective. These comrades have taken on important responsibilities and have generally performed them well. Today, they carry out

much of the work of the tendency.

Building a Marxist organization can be a very slow process during periods of retreat and/or relative class quiescence. Today, with the prospect of accelerating class struggle, we stand poised to enter a different period, one characterized by higher stakes and greater risks. The cadres of the IBT face the future confident that the programmatic acquisitions of the past that we have fought hard to maintain and defend through the lean years will soon find a vastly larger audience, and that with the influx of fresh forces we will have opportunities to play a much more significant role in the class struggle. Our Tasks and Perspectives document concluded:

"We find ourselves at a conjuncture where capitalism stands discredited in the eyes of millions of people around the world. The working class is looking for a way out of their misery, but their traditional leaders do not lift a finger to change the situation and in fact work to reinforce the power of the bourgeoisie. There is a crisis of proletarian leadership that can be solved only on the basis of the historic program of Trotskyism—represented after the destruction of the Fourth International by the RT/SL and its political continuation, the IBT. Our tasks include seizing every opportunity that comes our way to win new adherents to the program of Bolshevik-Leninism. Our perspective is to survive and grow by expanding what we are programmatically, not by changing it."

Letter to French Leftists On the 'Revolutionary Constituent Assembly'

The following is a translation of a letter sent to the *Courant Communiste Révolutionnaire* (part of the French *Nouveau Parti anticapitaliste's* Platform 4 and sympathizers of the Trotskyist Fraction-Fourth International) addressing perspectives for the Spanish 15M Movement (also known as the indignados), which provided something of a model for the subsequent "Occupy Wall Street" movement.

11 August 2011

Comrades,

We read with interest issue No.1 of *Révolution Permanente* (June 2011), journal of the *Courant Communiste Révolutionnaire* (CCR) of the NPA, as well as issue No.8 of *Stratégie Internationale* (June 2011), published by supporters of the Fraction Trotskyiste-Quatrième Internationale (FT-QI) inside the CCR. We find ourselves in overall agreement with Juan Chingo's article, "Leçons politiques et stratégiques de l'automne français" in *Stratégie Internationale*, which seems to be a serious analysis of the treacherous role of the trade-union bureaucracy in sabotaging working-class resistance to Sarkozy's attack on pensions last fall.

However, there remain important differences, which we believe it is necessary to clarify. One crucial issue is the perspective for the 15M (15 May) movement in Spain. Revolutionary socialists clearly have a duty to intervene in the 15M movement despite the fact that it is not centered on the proletariat and its demands are not socialist in character. The fact that youth, workers and middle-class elements have embraced the petty-bourgeois utopian call for "real

democracy" as the answer to the mass unemployment and other devastating consequences of the global capitalist crisis reflects the bankruptcy of the existing leaderships (trade-union and partisan) of the workers' movement. Marxists intervene among the masses to convince them of the necessity of orienting toward the socialist revolution.

As defenders of bourgeois-democratic rights, we defend the right of nations to self-determination, demand full citizenship rights for all immigrants, support demands for proportional representation in parliament and call for the abolition of the monarchy. We also support the struggles of the masses to improve their lives, e.g., a fight for higher wages. Yet as Marxists, we do not sow illusions that reforms can solve the fundamental problems created by capitalism. Instead we seek to draw a sharp class line and put forward a program that can help prepare the working class to struggle for power. As Leon Trotsky explained in the *Transitional Program*:

"The Fourth International does not discard the program of the old 'minimal' demands to the degree to which these have preserved at least part of their vital forcefulness. Indefatigably, it defends the democratic rights and social conquests of the workers. But it carries on this day-to-day work within the frame-work of the correct actual, that is, revolutionary perspective. Insofar as the old, partial 'minimal' demands of the masses clash with the destructive and degrading tendencies of decadent capitalism—and this occurs at each step—the Fourth International advances a system of *transitional demands*,



REUTERS

Protest by 'los indignados' against austerity and unemployment, Valencia, 27 May 2011

the essence of which is contained in the fact that ever more openly and decisively they will be directed against the very bases of the bourgeois regime. The old 'minimal program' is superseded by the *transitional program*, the task of which lies in systematic mobilization of the masses for the proletarian revolution."

This basic strategic orientation—the transitional program for workers' power—aims at linking the immediate needs and aspirations of the masses to the necessity of a workers' state and a socialist planned economy. Unlike a Stalinist or social-democratic "stagist" strategy, the transitional program builds a "bridge between present demands and the socialist program of the revolution" (*Ibid.*).

In "L'irruption de la jeunesse provoque les premières fissures dans le regime issu du franquisme" (a statement on the 15M movement originally published by the FT-QI's Spanish comrades in *Clase contra Clase* No.25 [June 2011]), Santiago Lupe advocates the construction of a revolutionary workers' party to lead the fight for a workers' republic. Yet the strategic perspective he outlines is inadequate to those tasks. Lupe writes:

"Through struggle, we must impose a constituent process throughout the Spanish state, a Revolutionary Constituent Assembly, made up of representatives, elected by every so many inhabitants, where we will discuss how we will resolve all the democratic questions and all our economic and social needs. We must win this radical democratic solution, that thousands of us are already demanding in the streets, only with our struggle. The bosses' parties and the monarchy are going to defend themselves tooth and nail to prevent that, which is why this process can only be begun, by those who fight, on the ruins of the current regime, by a provisional government formed by the workers and groups in struggle that will overthrow the regime inherited from Franco and impose a workers' republic."

While posed in a very left-wing fashion, we think that the demand for a "revolutionary constituent assembly" in Spain today represents a political adaptation to the illusions of the 15M movement in the need for bourgeois-democratic reform. If the masses were to take up this demand there is no reason to expect that it would automatically open the door to a struggle for workers' power—instead it could give Stalinists and other reformists the chance to divert popular anger into haggling over the form and content of such an assembly, which they would doubtless treat as a necessary "stage" prior to the transition to socialist rule. Trotsky observed, in relation to the colonial and semi-colonial countries, that, "It is impossible merely to reject the democratic program: it is imperative that in the struggle the masses outgrow it. The slogan for a National (or Constituent) Assembly preserves its full force for such countries as China or India" (*op. cit.*). He continued:

"The relative weight of the individual democratic and transitional demands in the proletariat's struggle, their mutual ties and their order of presentation, is determined by the peculiarities and specific conditions of each backward country and to a considerable extent—by the degree of its backwardness. Nevertheless, the general trend of revolutionary development in all backward countries can be determined by the formula of the *permanent revolution* in the sense definitely imparted to it by the three revolutions in Russia (1905, February 1917, October 1917)."

In both neocolonial and imperialist countries where the population has no recent experience of bourgeois democracy, the masses often have illusions that more "democracy" will alleviate their hardships. Bourgeois-democratic illusions are widespread in "normal" capitalist societies, but in situations of rising mass anger with the irrationality of the profit system, Marxists have an opportunity to shatter illusions in the possibility of meaningful reform under the continuing rule of the bourgeoisie.

Under military dictatorships, fascist regimes, absolute monarchies, etc., the workers often think that life under liberal democracy would be qualitatively better. In economically backward countries where the land question and other tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution have not been resolved, the desire for "democracy" often dominates the aspirations of the masses. In such situations it is the duty of Marxists to explain that only the working class, the natural leader of all oppressed social layers, has both the material interest and social power to successfully address these issues. During the anti-Mubarak uprising in Egypt earlier this year, the issue of the constituent assembly was clearly posed, as we noted:

"Many who have suffered under Mubarak imagine that free elections will solve their problems. Some have called for a constituent assembly to draw up a new democratic constitution. Marxists support the masses' yearning for democracy while insisting that a constituent assembly capable of sweeping away autocratic rule requires the revolutionary overthrow of the present regime. The fundamental issue posed in Egypt today is which class shall rule. In order to move forward, the anti-Mubarak revolt must begin to create institutions which will allow workers and the poor to exercise their will. An essential step is to establish new unions which are independent of the bosses and their state. It is also necessary to set up councils of delegates from different workplaces and working-class neighborhoods throughout the country, just like Russian workers did in the revolutions of 1905 and 1917."

—"Mass Revolt in Egypt," 1917 No.33

In our view the call for a constituent assembly is inapplicable in Spain today, because the population has experienced bourgeois democracy for a generation. As you note, the present regime "issued from Francoism," but despite that it is qualitatively similar to other bourgeois-democratic societies. The job of Spanish revolutionaries in the present context is to explain that the "real democracy" that can end unemployment and satisfy the needs of the masses can be nothing other than a workers' republic. Your suggestion that a revolutionary constituent assembly might itself produce a workers' republic—a suggestion doubtless aimed at more easily getting a hearing from those in the grip of the petty-bourgeois prejudices currently prevalent in the 15M movement—tends to confuse things by conflating the class character of the two institutions. A constituent assembly is not a proletarian body, but rather an expression of the bourgeois-democratic struggle which the proletariat might have to take up and seek to lead on the road to establishing the rule of workers' councils, i.e., soviets. In the best case a constituent assembly, dominated by the revolutionary socialist party, can endorse a soviet government, thereby helping to neutralize the resistance of the petty bourgeoisie.

We know of several cases where comrades of the FT-QI have proposed revolutionary constituent assemblies when there is already a functioning bourgeois democracy. For example, in 2001, your Bolivian comrades wrote:

"The revolutionary Marxists of the LOR-CI support the democratic aspirations of the mass movement, but unlike all these sectors, we argue that there cannot be any Constituent Assembly able to fulfill the needs of workers and the oppressed people of Bolivia—if it is convened by the present government and political regime....[W]e fight for a Constituent Assembly called by a provisional government of labor organizations, built on the ruins of the revolutionary fall of the current régime...."

—*Estrategia Internacional* No.17, April 2001

You noted that the peasant masses had entered the political scene frustrated at the inadequacies of the bourgeois democracy that had existed for a decade-and-a-half in Bolivia. It was the desire of these masses for a constituent assembly that led you to adopt the slogan as your own, and to attempt to justify your position with reference to the Bolshevik-Leninist tradition:

"It was Lenin and Trotsky's understanding of this situation that led them to struggle for formal democratic demands, not only in semi-colonial countries lacking a parliamentary tradition such as Russia in 1917 or China from 1927 to 1929, but also in countries with a long tradition like France in 1934 (see Leon Trotsky 'A Program of Action for France,' 1934)."

—*Ibid.*

In reading over "A Program of Action for France" (and other works by Trotsky from the period), we can find no example of him advocating a revolutionary constituent assembly in France, where bourgeois democracy was then under attack by rightist forces. Trotsky did advance several democratic demands, including the abolition of the senate and presidency in favor of a single legislative assembly elected on a democratic basis. These are supportable demands that, like proportional representation, Marxists advocate. However, Trotsky's proposals did not center on making bourgeois-democratic demands—the perspective he outlined was one of creating organs of proletarian rule:

"Constituted as organs of popular defense against fascism, these workers' alliance committees and these peasant committees must become, during the course of the struggle, organisms directly elected by the masses, organs of power of the workers and peasants. On this basis the proletarian power will be erected in opposition to the capitalist power, and the Workers' and Peasants' Commune will triumph."

In 2002 in Argentina (a country with a bourgeois-democratic system), you again demanded a revolutionary constituent assembly: "as Marxist revolutionaries, we raised the demand for a Revolutionary Constituent Assembly after the December days to differentiate it from the 'democratic' versions, even the most 'radical' that the bourgeois regime could adopt to survive" (*Estrategia Internacional* No.18, February 2002). We think that in this situation Marxists should have opposed all attempts by the reformists to divert a potentially revolutionary crisis into a discussion of how best to refurbish the mechanisms of the bourgeois republic. Raising the call for a constituent assembly in a country where bourgeois democracy had existed for almost two decades could only confuse matters, as we noted at the time:

"The key task of Trotskyists in Argentina today is to struggle to forge a revolutionary leadership based on a programme of proletarian political independence from all wings of the bourgeoisie. The influence of Peronism (bourgeois nationalist populism) within the Argentine workers' movement cannot be combated by attempts to project demands for a constituent assembly as the road to a workers' government. This can only create confusion and help set the stage for defeat."

—"Blunting the Edge of Revolutionary Criticism,"
reprinted in 1917 No.25, 2003

In our view, the job of revolutionaries in Spain today is not to present the socialist program as some sort of radical democratic alternative but to advance a proletarian perspective aimed at mobilizing for workers' power.

Trotskyist Greetings,

Josh Decker, for the International Bolshevik Tendency

Sectarian Confusion & Political Dishonesty IG on 'Jailing Killer Cops'

This statement was posted on www.bolshevik.org on 12 June 2011.

In 1917 No.33 (2011), we noted that the Internationalist Group (IG) had ignored the 23 October 2010 port shutdown in the San Francisco Bay Area protesting the racist cop murder of Oscar Grant. This important action was initiated by class-struggle militant Jack Heyman, whose activities in the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) the IG had previously promoted with enthusiasm. We speculated that the IG's reticence might have resulted from a reluctance to endorse the union's call to "jail killer cops," a demand that has been a point of contention between the IBT and the degenerated Spartacist League (SL). The IG did not express an opinion one way or the other:

"Unwilling either to defend or to distance itself from the SL's brainless sectarian repudiation of the call to 'Jail Killer Cops,' the IG has opted to ignore the most important labor action against racist capitalist injustice since the 1999 ILWU shutdown of U.S. West Coast ports in solidarity with Mumia Abu-Jamal (also initiated by Heyman)."

—"Another 'Blank Page,'" 1917 No.33

Our polemic apparently touched a nerve, and the IG broke its silence on the issue with an April [2011] statement entitled "ILWU Shuts Ports Demanding Justice for Oscar Grant." The IG allows that "the ILWU action points toward a real mobilization of workers' power in militant class struggle against the brutal enforcers of capitalist 'law and order,'" but explains that "the Internationalist Group did not endorse the October 23 rally [organized by the union as part of the port shutdown] because of disagreement with the 'jail killer cops' slogan."

In the lead-up to the action, Heyman wrote:

"Local 10 of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union has called for a labor and community rally October 23rd in Oakland to demand justice for Oscar Grant and the jailing of killer cops. Bay Area ports will shut down that day to stand with the black community and others against the scourge of police brutality."

—*Counterpunch*, 18 October 2010

The IG chose to interpret this call as sowing reformist illusions:

"Heyman, a militant union activist in ILWU Local 10, who was one of the main organizers of the October 23 union action, wrote that 'killer cops belong in jail' while correctly observing 'that's not how justice in capitalist America works' (*Counterpunch*, 18 October 2010). But in supporting the call to jail killer cops, he and others suggest that it *could* work that way."

In order to give its argument some plausibility, the IG equates calls for jailing killer cops with advocacy of "community policing," hiring more black cops, putting in black police chiefs, black mayors and governors, and even a black president." Yet demanding that murderous cops who carry out extra-legal executions be prosecuted and sent to prison does not amount to a call to reform the capitalist state. The IG does recognize that "the racist police figure they have a license to kill with impunity, and they do," and also notes

that "Police routinely kill innocent black people with impunity across the country." So should Marxists be indifferent to such outrageous crimes? Only sectarian imbeciles could denounce the demand that the perpetrators of such racist murders be held to account as reformism.

The fact that the police *are* essentially above the law—i.e., that they routinely trample civil liberties, rights and freedoms supposedly guaranteed by bourgeois legality—is widely recognized by the victims of capitalist rule. Far from "propagating the bourgeois democratic myth that under pressure, the state can be made to serve the interests of the masses," organizing widespread opposition to particularly egregious cases—like the cold-blooded execution of Oscar Grant—can provide an opportunity to help militant workers and rebellious youth see that the pervasive and systemic racism of American capitalism can only be ended through socialist revolution.

While essentially agreeing with the SL on this issue, the IG gently chides *Workers Vanguard* for "not distinguish[ing] the reformists spreading illusions] from the masses demanding justice":

"An oppressed population demanding that a particular cop guilty of a heinous crime be jailed is desperately seeking some measure of justice...However, when leftists call to 'jail killer cops' in general, they are propagating the bourgeois democratic myth that under pressure, the state can be made to serve the interests of the masses."

The IG apparently agrees that [Grant's killer Johannes] Mehserle "should certainly be behind bars for the rest of his life," i.e., in jail. In that case, why should they object to the proposition that other cops who commit equivalent crimes also "be behind bars for the rest of [their lives]"? American capitalism is deeply racist and incapable of operating on a genuinely democratic basis, but Marxists are not indifferent to violations of formal democratic rights.

In a 2009 polemic, the SL wrote:

"the BT's cry to 'jail the killer cops' borrows from the social-democratic lie that this state can be made accountable to the 'will of the people.' The BT says so itself, writing, 'whenever a few cops can be held accountable for a few of their crimes it is a small victory for their victims.' In reality, even on those rare occasions where the rulers find it necessary to punish one of their murderous gendarmes, the purpose is to refurbish illusions in the state as some kind of 'neutral' arbiter."

—*Workers Vanguard*, 24 April 2009

This went too far for the IG, which, in its recent statement, commented:

"By one-sidedly arguing that any jailing of an individual cop would just be to 'refurbish illusions' in the supposed neutrality of the state [the SL] even suggests that this would actually be a bad thing."

Yet in an effort to avoid being too closely associated with our criticisms, the IG approvingly cited some earlier SL smears:

"The SL recalled a BT article on 'Cops, Crime & Capital-

ism' (October 1992) which grotesquely went on and on about the problem of urban 'crime' in black neighborhoods—the codeword of racist support for the police—in the aftermath of the 1992 protests against the acquittal of the racist Los Angeles cops who beat Rodney King."

Anyone who actually reads "Cops, Crime & Capitalism" (1917 West No.2) will see that this is a complete misrepresentation. Far from complaining about "black crime," we explained the intimate connection between the pervasive racism of American capitalism and state repression:

"Working people, blacks and other oppressed layers are ambivalent about crime. Black people, for example, are the most frequent victims of crime, and many want more police protection for their neighborhoods. On the other hand, they are also the most likely victims of police brutality and misconduct. Blacks, especially young males, have been so uniformly stereotyped as criminals that much of the bourgeois rhetoric about law and order is racist code for 'get the blacks.' It is estimated that a black male is almost six times as likely as a white male to do time in a state prison during his lifetime."

The statement discussed the social conditions that engender anti-social behavior and how the legal framework of the "war on drugs" provides a "pretext for police oppression of black youth."

The IG's recent leaflet includes the slanderous assertion that: "The BT also called then [i.e., in 1992] for 'workers defense guards' to 'prevent bloody spontaneous explosions, like riots.'" The IG cannot cite a source for this accusation because it is pure invention. What we actually wrote was:

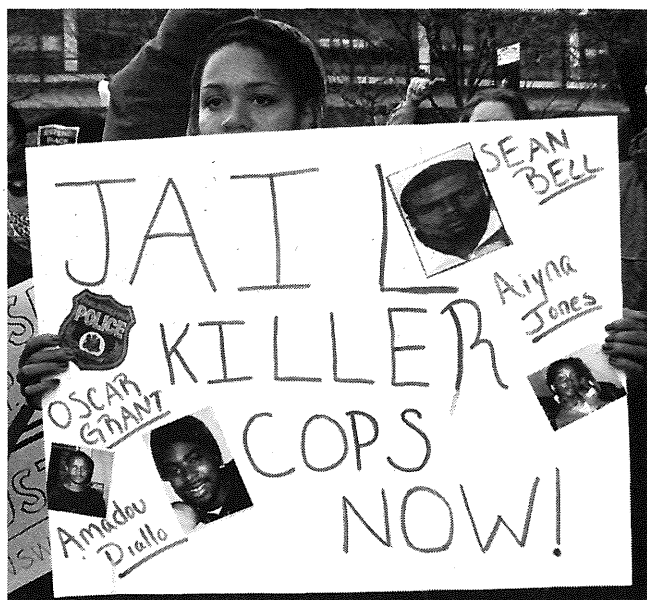
"Only the proletariat has the social power and the objective interest to eliminate the causes of crime. A strong workers movement which established integrated workers defense guards could take a big step toward defending workers and the oppressed from both crime and police brutality. Workers defense guards would have nothing in common with the Guardian Angels (or equivalent community policing scams) who work with the police, nor with vigilantes who are often racist, ethnically-based gangs defending 'their turf' against 'outsiders.'

"To be effective workers defense guards should be integrated to cut through the racism which so divides the working class. They would generally be initiated in response to attacks upon workers' picket lines by the capitalist state, its fascist allies or the private goons of individual employers. Once engaged in class struggle, workers will quickly see the usefulness of defense guards in protecting workers and the oppressed in other areas of their social life, including the fight to be free of crime and police harassment."

—"Cops, Crime & Capitalism"

In our statement on the Rodney King protests ("LA: Days of Rage," May 1992), we stated "as revolutionary Marxists, we share the rage of South-Central Los Angeles," and concluded:

"In the wake of the LA events, bourgeois media and politicians are quick to remind us that 'rioting accomplishes nothing.' This may be true in the long term, but it is also true that every paltry reform or gesture toward racial justice that the capitalist state has made in the past has been in direct response to anger in the streets. LBJ's 'War on Poverty' in the 1960s was aimed at keeping social peace in the wake of nationwide ghetto explosions.



DIANE BUKOWSKI

'...the scum who actually pull the triggers must not be allowed to beat the rap.' —Workers Vanguard, 1978

When things settled down, the 'Great Society' spigot was almost entirely turned off. The only reason that one of Rodney King's club-wielding assailants, Laurence Powell, will stand trial a second time (unfortunately not before an all-black and Hispanic jury) is because of the South-Central eruption. Voting for BEOs [black elected officials] and Democrats, on the other hand, has only led to a deepening of black poverty and an escalation of police brutality.

"The bourgeois media is full of admonishments that all citizens must 'respect the law.' But since when has the American legal system ever treated blacks as equals?... "Marxists can have nothing but contempt for the hypocritical condemnations of 'violence' and 'lawlessness' now gushing forth from newsrooms, pulpits and capitalist presidential aspirants. Yet serious militants must also recognize that racism, poverty and the violence of the capitalist state will not be ended by unorganized explosions of black and minority rage, however justified. Because the black masses lack the program and the leadership to fight for a real social revolution, their spontaneous anger often strikes at the wrong targets, and leaves their real exploiters and oppressors untouched."

This is not the first time the IG has slandered us in regard to the 1992 events. In a 25 July 1996 statement (reprinted in our *Trotskyist Bulletin* No.6), Abram Negrete, a leading IG member, falsely alleged that the IBT "called for workers' defense guards (sic) to stop 'violence' like the Los Angeles upheaval." We rebutted this baseless accusation in a 15 December 1996 letter to the IG (also reprinted in *Trotskyist Bulletin* No.6), and invited the IG to withdraw it. The IG, which neither responded to our letter nor repudiated Negrete's outrageous charge, has chosen instead to cynically recycle it in its recent statement.

The political dispute over "jailing killer cops" is linked to a variety of other questions. In a 28 July 2009 letter to the SL's Canadian affiliate we observed: "When it was a revolutionary organization, the SL understood that bourgeois democratic rights can only be preserved by oppos-



MUSEUMOFTHECITY.ORG

Los Angeles 1992: 'Days of Rage' set off by acquittal of racist cops who beat Rodney King

ing egregious violations committed by state authorities. And it knew how to address such issues without creating illusions." We pointed to the attitude taken by *Workers Vanguard* (then edited by IG leader Jan Norden) toward the post-Watergate investigations of the illegal actions of America's political police:

"Without exception the entire secret police—the most felonious organization in the country—is guilty of the same charges [brought against John J. Kearney, head of the FBI's 'Squad 47' charged with illegal phone taps and letter opening in New York] and probably much more that is far worse. From Kearney of 'Squad 47' to William Calley [a junior American army officer who ordered the massacre of civilians in the village of My Lai during the Vietnam War], to Adolph Eichmann, capitalism's butchers and hit men are always 'only following orders.' And while we demand that the big guns who gave the orders be brought to justice, the scum who actually pull the triggers must not be allowed to beat the rap. Put away all the FBI/CIA criminals! Smash the capitalist secret police through workers revolution!"

—*Workers Vanguard*, 21 April 1978

This approach is no less valid today. In our letter we also recalled that, when U.S. federal agents dragged Spartacist supporter Jane Margolis out of the national convention of the Communication Workers of America in July 1979, the SL responded by suing the U.S. Secret Service:

"This is no ordinary lawsuit. At its heart, the case of Jane Margolis versus the Secret Service poses a significant question concerning the independence of the labor movement from coercive state control....

"The facts of this case are without precedent in the history of the organized labor movement in America. Never before have federal police agents disrupted a national

convention of a major trade union to forcibly remove an elected delegate...."

—*Workers Vanguard*, 23 November 1979

The statement observed that "the rights of labor are the cornerstone of democratic rights generally...." The democratic right not to be executed by racist cops is one of vital interest to working people and the oppressed, and Marxists have a duty to fight to ensure that "the scum who actually pull the triggers" do not "beat the rap."

The SL's suit against the Secret Service was followed in the early 1980s by successful lawsuits in defense of democratic rights against the anti-communist Moonie cult, California Attorney General George Deukmejian, the FBI and the U.S. Attorney General. We consider all of those initiatives to have been valuable contributions to the protection of the democratic rights of the entire left and labor movement. The opposition of the SL and IG to raising the demand to "jail killer cops" should logically compel them to denounce such lawsuits on the grounds of promoting illusions in the possibility of reforming the capitalist state. The SL has thus far refused comment, and we anticipate that the IG will be similarly anxious to avoid addressing this awkward question.

We very much regret that the leading comrades of the IG, with whom we share much history and many programmatic positions, seem incapable of transcending the pervasive cynicism that characterized the thoroughly degenerated Spartacist League of the 1980s and 1990s. Yet their treatment of the "killer cops" issue provides another example of how, when faced with difficult political questions, they have a persistent tendency to resort to evasions and slander. The IG leadership's chronic inability to "face reality squarely" and "be true in little things as in big ones" belies its claim to uphold the banner of Trotsky's Fourth International. ■

Death Sentence Dropped Free Mumia Now!

On 7 December 2011, the death sentence imposed on Mumia Abu-Jamal—wrongly convicted for the murder of Philadelphia police officer Daniel Falkner 30 years earlier—was finally lifted. Philadelphia District Attorney Seth Williams announced that he was abandoning attempts to execute Mumia (a former Black Panther and journalist known as the “voice of the voiceless”) after the U.S. Supreme Court refused to overturn a 2001 decision by Federal District Court Judge William Yohn voiding the death sentence. Yohn upheld the conviction, but ruled that the jury had been improperly instructed during the penalty phase of Mumia’s 1982 frame-up trial. Mumia is leaving death row, but is still condemned to rot in prison for the rest of his life without the possibility of parole.

Mumia, whose struggle for freedom has become a potent political symbol of resistance to institutional racism, is America’s best-known class-war prisoner. His case powerfully illustrates that for those in the clutches of the U.S. judicial system, “innocence is no defense.” Over the decades Mumia’s supporters have unearthed a mass of evidence of his innocence—including recantations by key prosecution witnesses, proof of gross judicial bias and a sworn statement by a man hired to murder Faulkner, Arnold Beverly, that Mumia had no involvement in what was a contract killing. But the courts have steadfastly refused to hear any of it. The reason the Philadelphia DA is no longer seeking to execute Mumia is because doing so would require a new sentencing hearing which might have focused attention on the evidence of his innocence.

At a rally for Mumia held in front of the U.S. embassy in London on 9 December 2011, two days after Williams’s announcement, a representative of the International Bolshevik Tendency made the following remarks:

“We need to be very careful about calling this a victory. Although it is a good thing that Mumia is now removed from the immediate threat of the death penalty, it is important to recognize that there are many in the U.S. state machinery who made this tactical decision consciously. For too long, they have had to deal with Mumia—a nuisance and a danger to them—the reasons why they wanted to kill him in the first place.
“Now they are hoping that Mumia will be forgotten, that the movement will die down.”

Mumia must not be forgotten. The fight to win his freedom remains a powerful lever for exposing the machinations of the capitalist injustice system in the citadel of the “free world.”

While we favor pursuing every possible legal avenue, it is important not to have illusions in the conscience or goodwill of the operatives of the juridical system that framed Mumia in the first place. This same point was made in January 1927 by James P. Cannon, National Secretary of the International Labor Defense (the legal defense arm of the American Communist Party) in connection with the case of Sacco and Vanzetti, two Italian anarchist immigrants framed-up on bogus murder charges:

“One policy is the policy of class struggle. It puts the center of gravity in the protest movement of the workers of

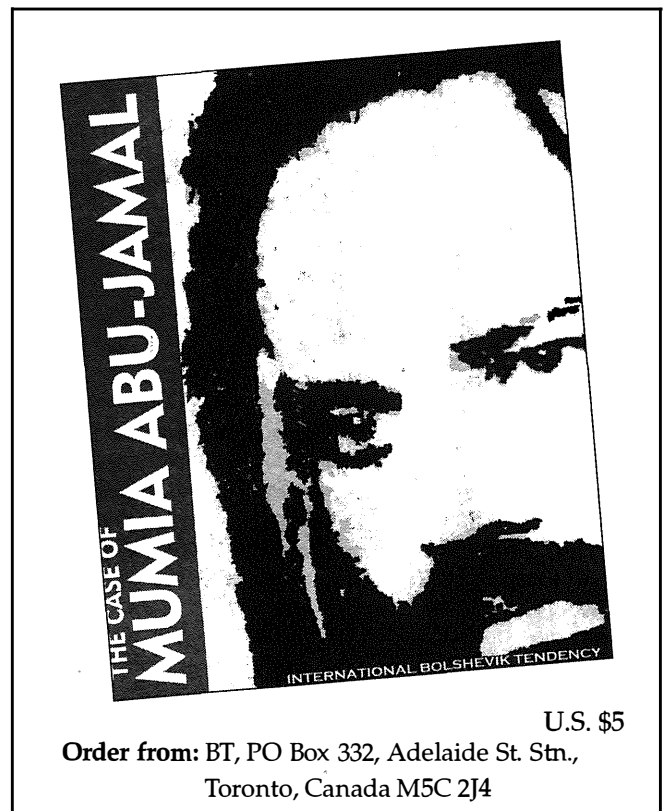
America and the world. It puts all faith in the power of the masses and no faith whatever in the justice of the courts. While favoring all possible legal proceedings, it calls for agitation, publicity, demonstrations...This is what has prevented the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti so far. Its goal is nothing less than their triumphant vindication and liberation.

“The other policy is the policy of ‘respectability,’ of the ‘soft pedal’ and of ridiculous illusions about ‘justice’ from the courts of the enemy...It tries to represent the martyrdom of Sacco and Vanzetti as an ‘unfortunate’ error which can be rectified by the ‘right’ people proceeding in the ‘right’ way.”

— “Who Can Save Sacco and Vanzetti?,”
reprinted in *Notebook of an Agitator*

Mumia is only alive today because a wave of international mass protest stayed the hand of the executioner only days before he was scheduled to die on 17 August 1995. Since then, the courts have brazenly refused to admit evidence of his innocence and declared that the truth, at this point in the proceedings, is “legally irrelevant.” Making the evidence of Mumia’s innocence “relevant,” and ultimately winning his freedom, will require a sustained political campaign, centered on the organized labor movement in the U.S. and abroad, to expose the hideous truth about the rigged system of racist capitalist injustice in America.

Free Mumia now! Abolish the racist death penalty!



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United-Front Demonstration Against Afghan War 'Marxists Are Not Pacifists'



1917 PHOTO

United-front protest against Afghan occupation

The following remarks were made by an IBT spokesperson to an antiwar rally in Toronto on 15 October 2011. The demonstration was organized on a united-front basis to demand: "Canada Out of Afghanistan Now!" Other organizations participating included Barrio Nuevo, BASICS Community News Service, Canada South Asian Solidarity Association, International League of Peoples' Struggle-Canada, May 1st Movement, NDP Socialist Caucus, Proletarian Revolutionary Action Committee, Socialist Action and Women United Against Imperialism.

We are pleased to be here today participating in this united-front demonstration to mark the 10th anniversary of the criminal occupation of Afghanistan. We fully support the demand that Canadian imperialism's armed thugs should get "Out of Afghanistan Now!"

As Marxists we think that it is very important to link the issue of imperialist wars like the attack on Afghanistan to a broader understanding of the necessity to struggle against the entire capitalist system. We see it as particularly important to develop this consciousness within the working class and among radicalizing youth. While revolutionaries are quite happy to protest against imperialist war alongside liberals, social democrats and pacifists, we also have a duty to combat what Leon Trotsky (the founder of the Red Army) referred to as "the narcotic and debilitating illusions of pacifism." Vladimir Lenin, Trotsky's partner in the Russian Revolution of 1917, asserted that in the long run the only way to end imperialist wars is through overthrowing capitalism:

"Our slogan must be: the arming of the proletariat in

order to defeat, expropriate and disarm the bourgeoisie.... Only *after* the proletariat has disarmed the bourgeoisie will it be able, without betraying its world-historic mission, to consign all armaments to the scrap-heap."

—"Military Programme of the Proletarian Revolution," September 1916

Marxists are not pacifists. The kind of antiwar movement we want to build is one that tells people the truth—starting with the proposition that "Capitalism Can't Be Fixed!" In neocolonial wars like those waged on Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan, socialists side with the oppressed people against the imperialist aggressors. We do so in Afghanistan despite being completely opposed to the reactionary misogynist, theocratic Taliban—a formation that, like Osama Bin Laden's Al Qaeda, originated in the *mujahedin* the CIA trained in the 1980s to combat the pro-Soviet left-nationalist regime of the PDPA [People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan]. While we are completely opposed to the Taliban politically, we support every military blow they strike against the NATO invaders.

NATO troops are not in Afghanistan to liberate women, build schools or combat "terrorism"—NATO itself is the world's largest and most dangerous terrorist organization. The "mission" in Afghanistan, from the beginning, was to gain control of transit routes for the immense oil resources of the Caspian Basin. It is now clear that, from a strategic point of view, the imperialist war in Afghanistan has been lost. The Taliban have survived and imperialist forces are being pulled out bit by bit. We welcome this defeat.

This war was never very popular in Canada—despite all the attempts by the ruling class to infuse the population with patriotic militarist poison. But we must also see that the strategy pursued by the official peace movement in relation to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan has failed almost as spectacularly as the military interventions themselves. A good part of the reason for this, in our view, is that they were exclusively organized around liberal, pro-capitalist pacifist politics in an attempt to gain mainstream "respectability."

We favor a different approach—a class-struggle approach to antiwar work that links imperialist wars abroad with attacks on working people and the oppressed here at home. An outstanding example of this was the mass antiwar strike on May Day 2008 by U.S. dockers. On that day, 25,000 members of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union shut down every port from San Diego to Seattle to protest the occupation of Iraq.

This important action (which was largely ignored by the corporate media of course) was initiated by Jack Heyman, a friend of ours and a long-time class-struggle militant on the waterfront. It was carried out in defiance of threats of legal action by the shipping bosses and government labor arbitrators. It was the first political strike ever conducted by American workers against an ongoing imperialist military intervention and stands as a model for future, larger and more militant actions—in the U.S., Canada and elsewhere. ■

Fightback's 'NDP Family' Values IMT Glorifies Layton's Legacy

The following letter was sent to *Fightback*, journal of the Canadian section of the International Marxist Tendency.

26 August 2011

Comrades,

Your 23 August obituary praising NDP leader Jack Layton, "our Party leader," graphically illustrates the distance between *Fightback* (and the International Marxist Tendency) and the Trotskyist tradition you claim to represent. While we had no wish to see Layton lose his battle with cancer, Marxists do not prettify his political record. He was a reformist social democrat, which is to say a political agent of the capitalist class within the workers' movement.

You do at least object to the "near cult of personality around the Party Leader" and note that "negative...developments occurred during his tenure." In describing Layton's "biggest mistake," you write:

"In the winter of 2008, with a Harper minority government and a weakened Liberal Party led by Stéphane Dion, Layton negotiated a deal that would bring to power a Liberal-NDP coalition government to replace Harper. As *Fightback* wrote at the time, this would have been a massive blunder. If it had gone through, it would have saved Canadian Liberalism from collapse, and absolutely discredited the NDP in the eyes of a population seeking change. The federal NDP would have been part-and-parcel of the austerity regime that the Liberals would have implemented (the same austerity currently being reigned over us by Mr. Harper). At the time, we called for Jack Layton's resignation to prevent a coalition from being formed. Such a development could have led to the destruction of the NDP as Canada's labour party."

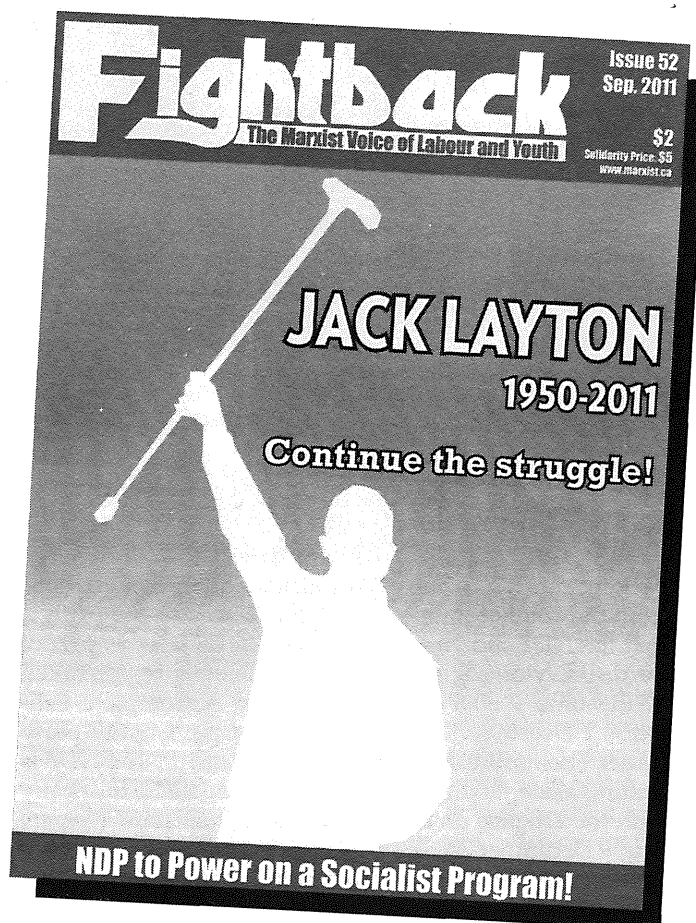
While correctly denouncing an NDP alliance with the Liberals (the traditional ruling party of the Canadian bourgeoisie) as "class collaboration," your critique was posed essentially on the level of tactics, rather than principle. This was evident in your proposal for an alternative, less overt, arrangement with the Liberals:

"If they [the Layton leadership of the NDP] had stuck to principle and opposed the Conservatives' attacks on workers and women, without entering into any deals with the capitalist parties, there would have been huge optimism in the country. The majority is indeed opposed to Harper, but the coalition has no redeeming features. The NDP could then have worked to impose conditions on a minority Liberal government to benefit the working class. If the Liberals were not willing to meet these demands then they would have worn the responsibility and the NDP would be in a prime place to replace them."

—4 December 2008, www.marxist.ca

Under David Lewis's leadership the NDP propped up Pierre Trudeau's minority Liberal government from 1972 to 1974 with just such an informal bloc, or "corridor coalition."

In your statement on Layton's death you seek to sani-



tize the NDP's record on Canadian imperialist participation in the occupation of Afghanistan:

"At the 2006 [NDP] federal convention in Quebec City, almost all of the convention delegates supported a strongly worded resolution calling for all Canadian troops out of Afghanistan. Jack Layton also rose to speak in support of the resolution. Unfortunately, the party bureaucracy aimed to water down the content subsequently. Despite this, the majority of working-class Canadians came to see the NDP as standing for 'Troops out now,' especially in Quebec. Layton won the moniker of 'Taliban Jack' for his anti-war stance from the corporate media and deserves praise for not backing down. This is a lesson to future NDP leaders not to bend to corporate pressure."

This obscures the fact that the NDP agreed, in principle, to the occupation of Afghanistan from the outset. Alexa McDonough, Layton's predecessor, told parliament that "on behalf of my party and caucus colleagues I indicated publicly on Friday that the New Democratic Party was prepared to support the government's commitment of Canadian troops as part of the United Nations sanctioned stabilization force" (*Hansard*, 19 November 2001). In 2006,



TOM HANSON—CP

13 March 2006: Tory PM Harper in Kandahar 'supporting the mission and the troops in Afghanistan'

Peter Stoffer, the party's critic for Veterans' Affairs, said, "I support the mission and the troops in Afghanistan, and so does our party" (*Toronto Star*, 15 April 2006).

Fightback claims that Layton "deserves praise for not backing down" on the 2006 call for withdrawing troops from the combat mission in Afghanistan. But the truth is that the NDP did "back down" two years later as part of the deal Layton engineered with the Liberals, as you noted at the time ("NDP-Liberal Coalition: A Complete Sell-Out," 2 December 2008, www.marxist.ca). Deputy party leader Thomas Mulcair spelled it out clearly: "The NDP is putting aside its differences that have existed historically with the Liberals on such issues as Afghanistan" (*Toronto Star*, 9 December 2008).

Also missing from your salute to Layton is the fact that only a few months ago, in March [2011], the NDP parliamentary caucus unanimously endorsed the participation of the Canadian military in NATO's "humanitarian" attack on Libya. After returning to the House of Commons as leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition in June, Layton once again led his entire caucus in joining the Tories and Liberals in voting to extend the Libyan mission. Only Elizabeth May, leader of the petty-bourgeois Green Party, voted against the extension (*AFP*, 15 June [2011]).

Your statement not only "salutes... a fighter who will be missed by millions," but claims that Jack Layton "represented a path towards social justice." You even suggest that his earlier political career as a social-democratic municipal politician can serve as a "model" for the future:

"People will sorely miss Jack Layton but the struggle continues. We shall have to go on in the fight against Harper's austerity without him. We should all cherish Jack's roots of activism and social justice, from his days in Montreal and Toronto City Council, and let it serve as a model for our party's future. On this basis the conservative agenda can be defeated and the hopeful and optimistic world that Jack envisioned can be built."

While formally critical of the notion that "change could be achieved purely through parliamentary manoeuvres,"

you pose the "fight for power" in parliamentary reformist terms:

"With the vision of power on the horizon, the cracks and divisions within the Party are set to become ever clearer. Federal Conservative minister James Moore made an astute observation at the convention in Vancouver. He said, 'Half the party wants to be Liberals, the other half wants to be socialists.' Layton was able to keep the two wings of the party unified. With Jack's passing, who is now going to be capable of assuming that role? In times of change and crisis, this task becomes nearly impossible. The NDP cannot go in two different directions at once. And with the prospect of coming to power in the middle of the capitalist crisis, a path must be chosen. There is no room in the 'centre.'"

Fightback's "revolutionary" strategy of calling for the pro-imperialist NDP to take power "on a socialist program" is an expression of social-democratic political appetites. You claim that the NDP "is a party of tens of thousands of workers and youth, with a set of ideas that answers their demands and aspirations," but ignore the fact that the party won its record 103 seats in the May [2011] elections on the basis of a platform that was so rightwing that Layton himself was reportedly at a loss to explain how it differed in substance from that of the Liberals.

Chantal Hébert, one of the more astute commentators on Quebec politics in the English-Canadian media, observed that much of the NDP's appeal in Quebec was to people "craving a governing alternative to Stephen Harper's Conservatives." She points out that far from attempting to present a pro-working class alternative, Layton sought to appeal to voters in Quebec as a champion of class collaboration, i.e., an alliance with the Liberals:

"In the last election, the fact that Layton was the biggest cheerleader of the aborted 2008 Liberal-NDP coalition—a concept whose popularity endures to this day—gave him a lift in Quebec."

—*Toronto Star*, 25 August [2011]

Instead of telling the simple truth about the supposed breakthrough in Quebec, you write approvingly that "Jack Layton rightly deserves credit in leading the NDP to its current all-time high":

"It is a terrible tragedy that Jack Layton will not be able to enjoy the success that he helped to build for the NDP. Despite his mistakes, one thing is very clear: there were few people who battled so courageously and tenaciously for social justice than Jack Layton. We extend our deepest condolences, not just to Jack's personal family, but to the wider NDP family and the Canadian labour movement that have been deeply shaken by this blow."

Your willingness to assign "credit" to Layton for expanding the NDP's parliamentary caucus through a campaign that openly embraced the notion of a potential coalition with the Liberals signifies that, regardless of whatever tactical differences you may have had with "Jack," you identify with him as the head of the "NDP family" to which you belong.

Yours for socialist revolution,

Jordan Briggs

for the International Bolshevik Tendency (Toronto)

IBT Statement on NATO's Libya Campaign

Defeat the Imperialists!

The following statement was first published by the International Bolshevik Tendency on 1 April 2011.

NATO's massive military campaign in Libya, which is taking place under the guise of a "humanitarian" effort to "protect" civilians, is at bottom an attempt by the U.S., Britain, France and other lesser imperialists to secure valuable oil and natural gas reserves and depose Muammar Qaddafi, a sometimes troublesome client.

During the four decades he has ruled Libya, Qaddafi (unlike Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak, the recently deposed dictators of Tunisia and Egypt) has exhibited considerable independence from imperialist control. Qaddafi modeled himself on Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser, who seized the Suez Canal and galvanized mass support in the Arab world in the 1950s by posing as an implacable enemy of imperialism and Zionism. In the 1970s Qaddafi, a self-styled "socialist" who routinely denounced the Saudi royals and other pro-imperialist Arab rulers as thieves and Zionist lackeys, nationalized Libya's oil and gas industry. Under Qaddafi's regime some of the profits from the energy sector, which accounts for the vast majority of the country's exports and government revenues, were used to provide education and healthcare for the population.

The oil majors were never happy with Qaddafi. In 2007 Amy Goodman interviewed retired American general and former NATO head Wesley Clark, who revealed that Libya was on the Bush administration's hit list in 2001.¹ Qaddafi managed to reach a modus vivendi with Washington by agreeing to actively cooperate in the "war on terror" abroad and impose IMF-style "structural adjustment" policies at home. Soon Libya was reopened for foreign investment, many state-owned enterprises were sold off and food subsidies and other "socialist" measures scaled back. While these concessions were enough to remove Libya from the hit list for a time, the Obama administration could not pass up an apparent opportunity to gain direct, unmediated, access to Libya's extensive oil reserves (currently estimated at 44 billion barrels—more than any other country in Africa).

The fall of Ben Ali and Mubarak led Qaddafi to fear that he might be next. Like Tunisia and Egypt, Libya has a lot of unemployed youth and there have been signs of popular unrest. When demonstrators occupied government housing projects in several cities in January [2011], the regime responded by offering to set up a \$24 billion



NATO chiefs Cameron and Sarkozy celebrate in Benghazi, 15 September 2011

development fund.

According to a Saudi-owned publication, when Qaddafi learned of plans for a "Day of Rage" on 17 February [2011] (the fifth anniversary of the brutal suppression of a previous protest) he personally intervened in an attempt to halt it:

"Libyan leader Colonel Muammar Gaddafi has dealt with the calls being issued by the National Conference for the Libyan Opposition and Libyan activists for a Libyan 'Day of Rage' to take place on 17 February, modeled on similar events in Tunisia and Egypt, by issuing an unprecedented warnings [sic] against any attempts to create chaos and instability in Libya.

"In the last few days, Gaddafi privately met with Libyan political activists, journalists, and media figures and he issued severe warnings that these professions would be held responsible should they participate in any way in disturbing the peace or creating chaos in Libya."

—"Gaddafi ready for Libya's 'Day of Rage'," *Asharq Al-Awsat*, 9 February [2011]

The National Conference for the Libyan Opposition (NCLC) was established in 2005 at the initiative of the CIA-

¹ "About ten days after 9/11, I went through the Pentagon and I saw Secretary Rumsfeld and Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz. I went downstairs just to say hello to some of the people on the Joint Staff who used to work for me, and one of the generals called me in. He said, 'Sir, you've got to come in and talk to me a second.' I said, 'Well, you're too busy.' He said, 'No, no.' He says, 'We've made the decision we're going to war with Iraq.' This was on or about the 20th of September....

"So I came back to see him a few weeks later, and by that time we were bombing in Afghanistan. I said, 'Are we still going to war with Iraq?' And he said, 'Oh, it's worse than that.' He reached over on his desk. He picked up a piece of paper. And he said, 'I just got this down from upstairs'—meaning the Secretary of Defense's office—'today.' And he said, 'This is a memo that describes how we're going to take out seven countries in five years, starting with Iraq, and then Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and, finishing off, Iran.'"

—*Democracy Now*, 2 March 2007

connected National Front for the Salvation of Libya, set up in 1981 by Mohammed Youssef Magarieff, a former official who had broken with the regime two years earlier.²

In Benghazi, Libya's second largest city, and other smaller centers, the recent NCLC-initiated protests routed Qaddafi loyalists and left rebels in control of the eastern part of the country. Undoubtedly many of the demonstrators were motivated by hatred for an oppressive regime and a desire for "freedom" and "democracy" and presumably imagined that they were participating in semi-spontaneous mobilizations similar to those taking place elsewhere in the region. But unlike in Tunisia or Egypt, the Libyan uprising seems to have been effectively directed from the beginning by a mélange of conscious pro-imperialists, disaffected elements of the old regime and Islamist reactionaries. This may explain why the *Wall Street Journal* (23 February [2011]) was far more positive about the Libyan protests than it had been about those in Tunisia and Egypt: "The U.S. and Europe should help Libyans overthrow the Gadhafi regime." The same sentiment was echoed by the rest of the corporate media, as well as by practically every reactionary Arab regime.

The rationalization for military intervention in Libya recalled the "humanitarian" concerns used to justify the NATO/U.S. bombing of Yugoslavia in 1995 and 1999. As many critics have observed, no equivalent calls have been made for the protection of protesters in Bahrain, Yemen, Saudi Arabia or other reliable client states, just as none were heard when the Zionist military was massacring Palestinians in Gaza two years ago.

Initially the revolt against Qaddafi appeared to have considerable momentum. Two Libyan pilots flew their fighter planes to Malta and reports circulated that military units were refusing orders and some were even going over to the protesters. Various diplomats broke with the regime, as did some key domestic figures, including air force head Aref Sharif and Interior Minister Abdel Fattah Younes. On 21 February [2011], in an apparent attempt to boost the opposition, British Foreign Secretary William Hague publicized rumors that Qaddafi had fled the country.

The loss of Benghazi and a wave of defections from the regime created widespread expectations that the government would soon fall, but within a matter of days, Qaddafi managed to consolidate his support and launched expeditions to recapture rebel-held territory. Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya, citing unpublished reports from Libya, provided the following account of how this was achieved:

"Amongst the ranking members of the military, Mahdi

Al-Arab, the deputy chief of Libya's military staff, was said to have renounced Qaddafi. Al-Arab, however, has modified his position by saying that he does not want to see Libya spiral into a civil war that will allow foreign intervention and tutelage. This is why Al-Arab prevented the people of his city, Zawarah, from joining the revolt and going to nearby Tripoli....

"On February 23-24, 2010 [sic] he [Qaddafi] met with the leaders of the three biggest tribes in Libya (Werfala, Tarhouna, and Wershfana), to secure their support. His own tribe, Qaddafi is supporting him and it seems that the Madarha and Awlad Slieman tribes are also supporting him."

—"Libya: Is Washington Pushing for Civil War to Justify a US-NATO Military Intervention?," Global Research, 25 February [2011]

Nazemroaya also reported that Qaddafi promised to "step down in about one year" and not attempt to install one of his sons in his place.

Unlike in Egypt and Tunisia, where the protests were mass popular expressions of opposition to brutal oppression, the conflict between Qaddafi loyalists and the rebels headquartered in Benghazi amounted to a small-scale civil war between qualitatively equivalent capitalist factions. Marxists take no side in such conflicts, although we of course oppose the killing of civilians by the combatants. The entry of the NATO powers, however, transformed this conflict into a struggle between a neocolonial country and several imperialist powers (and their indigenous proxies). Class-conscious workers must oppose this reactionary, colonial war in every possible way, including labor strikes against the production and transportation of war materiel.

After their experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan the U.S. and other imperialists are reluctant to openly invade another predominantly Muslim country. While the rebel forces are dismissed by many analysts as a negligible factor, the overwhelming dominance of NATO airpower (as well as the probability of some sort of imperialist military presence on the ground)³ is obviously creating very serious difficulties for the Qaddafi regime. There has been considerable speculation about a possible partition and the recognition of Benghazi as the capital of an "independent" protectorate in Libya's oil-rich eastern region. The rebels' Transitional National Council appears to be laying the basis for turning over the country's petroleum resources to their imperial godfathers:

"Libyan rebels in Benghazi said they have created a new national oil company to replace the corporation con-

² According to Bob Woodward's account in *Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA 1981-1987*, Magarieff was linked to the CIA via Sudan's President Nimeri. Woodward cites a 5 December 1983 CIA report that Magarieff "believed that Sudan and the U.S. were his only friends....he said that following another period of training he hoped to mount a campaign against Libya that would give his organization more credibility." Woodward writes "until this happened [CIA chief William] Casey would not be able to get a presidential finding supporting the anti-Qaddafi movement." The National Front for the Salvation of Libya apparently lost little time establishing "credibility":

"The LNSF claimed responsibility for the daring attack on Qadhafi's headquarters at Bab al Aziziyah on May 8, 1984. Although the coup attempt failed and Qadhafi escaped unscathed, dissident groups claimed that some eighty Libyans, Cubans, and East Germans perished. According to various sources, the United States Central Intelligence Agency trained and supported the LNSF before and after the May 8 operation."

—"LIBYA: a country study," Federal Research Division, Library of Congress

³ The *Sunday Mirror* [London] reported on 20 March [2011] that, "Hundreds of British SAS soldiers have been operating with rebel groups inside Libya for three weeks...."



REUTERS

27 February 2011, the day the TNC was proclaimed, anti-Qaddafi 'rebels' on guard at Brega oil terminal, 300 km from Benghazi

trolled by leader Muammar Qaddafi whose assets were frozen by the United Nations Security Council.

"The Transitional National Council released a statement announcing the decision made at a March 19 meeting to establish the 'Libyan Oil Company as supervisory authority on oil production and policies in the country, based temporarily in Benghazi, and the appointment of an interim director general' of the company.

"The Council also said it 'designated the Central Bank of Benghazi as a monetary authority competent in monetary policies in Libya and the appointment of a governor to the Central Bank of Libya, with a temporary headquarters in Benghazi.'

"The Security Council adopted a resolution on March 17 that froze the foreign assets of the Libyan National Oil Corp. and the Central Bank of Libya, both described in the text as 'a potential source of funding' for Qaddafi's regime."

—Bloomberg.com, 22 March [2011]

We do not pretend that the Qaddafi regime is in any way progressive. It is not. But getting rid of Qaddafi's corrupt and brutal dictatorship is the job of the workers and oppressed masses of Libya—not foreign colonialists and their local proxies. Over 70 years ago, the great Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky outlined the Marxist attitude on this issue:

"In Brazil there now reigns a semifascist regime that every revolutionary can only view with hatred. Let us assume, however, that on the morrow England enters into a military conflict with Brazil. I ask you on whose side of the conflict will the working class be? I will answer for myself personally—in this case I will be on the side of 'fascist' Brazil against 'democratic' Great Britain. Why? Because in the conflict between them it will not be a question of democracy or fascism. If England should be victorious, she will put another fascist in Rio de Janeiro and will place

double chains on Brazil. If Brazil on the contrary should be victorious, it will give a mighty impulse to national and democratic consciousness of the country and will lead to the overthrow of the Vargas dictatorship. The defeat of England will at the same time deliver a blow to British imperialism and will give an impulse to the revolutionary movement of the British proletariat."

—"Anti-Imperialist Struggle is Key to Liberation,"
23 September 1938

Various conservative commentators, including former U.S. Marine Eric Margolis, have noted the obvious parallels between the current NATO campaign in Libya and the U.S.-led assault on Iraq in 2003:

"As in the case of Iraq, the assault on Libya was preceded by a huge barrage of anti-Gaddafi propaganda and steaming moral outrage by western media and politicians. American TV crews rushed to Libya to witness the wicked colonel get his comeuppance. None went to Bahrain or Yemen."

—"A New Crusade," 21 March [2011]

George Friedman of the pro-imperialist think tank STRATFOR describes the Transitional National Council as "a very diverse and sometimes mutually hostile group of tribes and individuals, bound together by hostility to Gadhafi and not much else." He considers them to be little more than "a Western puppet":

"The West's ability to impose order on them without governing them, particularly in a short amount of time, is difficult to imagine. They remind me of Hamid Karzai in Afghanistan, anointed by the Americans, distrusted by much of the country and supported by a fractious [imperialist] coalition."

—"Libya, the West and the Narrative of Democracy,"
STRATFOR, 21 March [2011]

Many liberals who were taken in by the "humanitarian"

cover story and supported the idea of a “no-fly” zone professed shock when this morphed into air strikes on Libyan military units. Leftist supporters of the Benghazi-based “Libyan Revolution” find themselves in the uncomfortable position of having to explain why those who embrace NATO’s military intervention should be viewed as anything other than imperialist stooges. Earlier there had been reports of some elements of the anti-Qaddafi coalition expressing opposition to foreign intervention, but this sentiment apparently evaporated as Qaddafi’s forces advanced.

The British Workers Power group has been among the most enthusiastic backers of the Benghazi rebels. On 19 March [2011], as the imperialist bombing commenced, Workers Power continued to pledge its “unconditional support”:

“The rebellion against Gaddafi’s dictatorship deserves unconditional support and that is not altered by the UN decision....

“Those who oppose powerful states have the right to get hold of arms wherever they can and to take advantage of any weaknesses in their oppressors’ situation. That remains true even where the weaknesses are the result of imperialist action. If, under cover of the no-fly zone, Libyan insurgents and revolutionaries can retake positions, undermine the morale or the loyalty of Gaddafi’s troops and even advance on the capital, Tripoli, that is a step forward for the Libyan revolution and should be welcomed. “At the same time we must oppose the US, British and French attack. The imperialist attack allows Gaddafi to pose at home as defender of the nation. It gives him a popular cause where before he had none. Now he can try to rally part of the people and deploy them against the revolution.”

—“Victory to the Libyan Revolution!”

Workers Power’s celebration of the opportunities created for the “Libyan Revolution” by imperialist intervention unmasks its ostensible “opposition” to NATO’s military campaign as cynical posturing. This latest disgraceful political capitulation recalls its earlier cowardly refusal to militarily defend Bosnian Serbs against attacks by British, French and American warplanes in August-September 1995 (see “LRCI Splits Over Bosnia Betrayal,” 1917 No.17). In each case Workers Power determines its position not on the basis of Marxist principle but rather in accordance with what is currently popular.

A genuine struggle to uproot the hated and corrupt Qaddafi dictatorship must be linked to a broader mobilization against the entire system of global capitalism that subjects the vast majority of the world’s population to brutal exploitation. This must begin with unconditional opposition to any and all imperialist interventions in neo-colonial countries like Libya.

The defense of Libya against imperialist attack is an issue of vital importance not only to working people and the oppressed in North Africa and the Middle East, but also to workers in the imperialist countries themselves. In “developed” and “underdeveloped” countries alike, the historical interests of working people are essentially identical.

The only way to liberate the enormous productive capacity of humanity from the destructive irrationality of endless bloody wars for division and redivision of resources and spheres of influence is through a chain of socialist revolutions that overturn the entire imperialist world order. These in turn require the construction of Leninist-Trotskyist parties deeply rooted in the proletariat and armed with the program of permanent revolution. ■

Libya & the Left...

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Engineering Department at the Petroleum Institute, where his research was partially funded by the U.S. Department of Energy. With this background, he seems well qualified to oversee the return of Libya’s oil and gas fields (which had been nationalized under Qaddafi in the early 1970s) to Western control.

For Military Defense of Neocolonies Against Imperialist Attack!

Marxists, unlike social democrats, unconditionally defend the right of subjugated nations to resist the predations of the “advanced capitalist” global powers. In 1956, revolutionaries backed Egypt against a joint British/French/Israeli intervention aimed at reversing the nationalization of the Suez Canal. When the U.S./UK and others attacked Serbia in 1999, Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq two years later, Marxists took sides—despite the reactionary character of the regimes headed by Slobodan Milosevic, Mullah Omar and Saddam Hussein.

The attack on Libya, like the earlier interventions in Serbia, Afghanistan and Iraq, was preceded by a barrage of lies—in this case focused on claims of a wholesale slaughter of civilians by the Qaddafi regime following the 17 February 2011 “Day of Rage” protest. The chief source for these reports was Al Jazeera, the news agency operated by the rulers of Qatar, who supplied weapons and hundreds of soldiers to the insurgents. The lurid tales of “massacres” of civilians by the Libyan air force turned out to be grossly exaggerated.

On 2 March 2011, two weeks before the bombs began to fall, Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, told a Congressional subcommittee “that the Pentagon has no confirmation that Libyan strongman Muammar al Qaddafi is using his air force to kill civilians” (CBS News, 2 March 2011). On 22 March 2011, after the bombing had commenced, *USA Today* carried an article by Alan Kuperman of the University of Texas noting that, “Despite ubiquitous cellphone cameras, there are no images of genocidal violence, a claim that smacks of rebel propaganda.” Two weeks later Richard Haass, president of the U.S. Council on Foreign Relations, wrote that the “evidence was not persuasive that a large-scale massacre or genocide was either likely or imminent” in Libya (*Huffington Post*, 6 April 2011).

It is now clear that there was no more “genocide” in Libya than “weapons of mass destruction” in Iraq in 2003. Justifying military aggression with lies is a time-honored practice, as Adolf Hitler reminded his top commanders on 22 August 1939, as final preparations were underway for attacking Poland:

“I shall give a propaganda reason for starting the war, whether it is plausible or not. The victor will not be asked whether he told the truth. When starting and waging a war it is not right that matters, but victory.”

—quoted in *Hitler and Stalin*, Alan Bullock

This has certainly been the case in Libya. No one in the bourgeois media has shown much concern about fol-

lowing up on stories of civilian massacres by the regime, which had been so important in legitimizing military intervention. The fact that much of the international “revolutionary” left eagerly swallowed and regurgitated this imperialist propaganda—and has yet to admit they were hoodwinked—testifies to their political adaptation to the capitalist social order.

The UN Security Council, professing profound concerns about the well-being of ordinary Libyans, used these tales to justify the imposition of sanctions, the freezing of Libyan assets abroad and the creation of a “no-fly zone.” The latter resulted in the insertion of NATO airpower into what had previously been a civil war between the Qaddafi regime and imperialist-linked dissidents centered in Benghazi.

Estimates of total casualties inflicted by the 9,600 “humanitarian” bombing sorties carried out by British, French and other NATO aircraft from April to October 2011 vary considerably, but it is generally agreed that thousands of Libyans were killed (many of them civilians) and many thousands more seriously wounded. NATO bombs massively damaged Libya’s infrastructure and displaced tens of thousands of people from their homes. The pretence that this destruction was motivated by a desire to “protect” civilians is belied by the casual indifference with which victims of NATO’s air war have been treated.

After months of bitter conflict, the cumulative effect of the imperialist bombardment (supplemented by opposition militias aided by hundreds of foreign special forces) succeeded in decimating Qaddafi’s military. According to many accounts, the most effective indigenous forces fighting the regime were Islamists, some of them linked to Al Qaeda. For the most part, however, the “rebels” were not a major factor, apart from their value in drawing fire from Qaddafi’s forces, who thereby made it easier for NATO airstrikes to target them. The role of the ragtag anti-Qaddafi fighters, like the politicians of the Transitional National Council (TNC—aka National Transitional Council), who enjoyed the backing of the imperialists from the start, was to put a Libyan face on “regime change.”

In a 1915 pamphlet entitled, “Socialism and War,” the great Russian revolutionary Vladimir Lenin declared that in cases of imperialist military attacks (“humanitarian” or otherwise) on neocolonial countries, “every Socialist would sympathise with the victory of the oppressed, dependent, unequal states against the oppressing, slaveowning, predatory ‘great’ powers.” There is no ambiguity: revolutionaries militarily side with oppressed countries against imperialist attack *regardless* of the crimes (real or imagined) of the ruling regime. When Mussolini attacked Ethiopia in 1935, Leon Trotsky immediately responded: “Of course, we are for the defeat of Italy and the victory of Ethiopia” (“The Italo-Ethiopian Conflict,” 17 July 1935). The fact that chattel slavery persisted under the regime of Haile Selassie was irrelevant:

“If Mussolini triumphs, it means the reinforcement of fascism, the strengthening of imperialism, and the discouragement of the colonial peoples in Africa and elsewhere. The victory of the Negus, however, would mean a mighty blow not only at Italian imperialism but at imperialism as a whole, and would lend a powerful impulsion to the rebellious forces of the oppressed peoples. One must really be completely blind not to see this.”

—“On Dictators and the Heights of Oslo,” 22 April 1936

NATO’s victory over Qaddafi, by vindicating Obama’s supposed “new war doctrine” for U.S. imperialism, helps pave



U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and Joint Chiefs Chair Mike Mullen

the way for future aggression in Africa and the Middle East. The eagerness with which the overwhelming majority of the world’s self-proclaimed “Trotskyist” organizations accepted the imperialist narrative graphically illustrates their distance from the political heritage they claim to represent. Instead of forthrightly standing for the military victory of Qaddafi’s forces over NATO and its proxies, these revisionists supported the latter as representing a “revolutionary” movement or, at best, adopted a position of effective neutrality. In doing so, they turn their backs on the anti-imperialism of the Communist International under Lenin and Trotsky.

Rationalizing Support for Imperialist Auxiliaries

Probably the most overtly pro-imperialist position was taken by the British Alliance for Workers’ Liberty (AWL), which blandly observed:

“The most far-reaching of the [North African] uprisings so far has been in Libya. Of course it is unusual in that its ultimate success was dependent on military intervention by NATO.”

“Successful campaigning by the Western left to prevent NATO intervention would have flown in the face of the express wishes of the revolutionary movement itself, and resulted in a massacre in Benghazi which would have been a tragedy in itself but also an enormous defeat for the ‘Arab Spring’ as a whole.

“Workers’ Liberty didn’t oppose the [NATO] intervention.”

—5 October 2011

The AWL’s characterization of the motley collection of

long-time imperialist assets, Islamic reactionaries and defectors from the Qaddafi regime in Benghazi as the leaders of a “revolutionary” movement whose wishes had to be respected was widely shared by many supposedly Trotskyist groups, although most were less candid about NATO’s central role in the conflict and less willing to spell out the ultimate logic of their position. Instead, they employed varying combinations of factual misrepresentation, non sequiturs and special pleading in awkward attempts to maintain some pretence of “anti-imperialist” orthodoxy while supporting NATO’s “rebel” proxies (who were falsely equated with the courageous youth who had earlier brought down the hated pro-imperialist dictators in Tunisia and Egypt).

Alan Woods, a leading figure in the ultra-opportunist International Marxist Tendency (IMT), was among those offering the most unqualified endorsement of NATO’s Benghazi allies:

“[Frederick] Engels explained that the state is armed bodies of men. In Benghazi and other cities controlled by the rebels, the old state has ceased to exist. It has been replaced by the armed people, revolutionary militias, which Lenin said were the embryo of a new state power.”

—“Uprising in Libya: Tremble, tyrants!,” 23 February 2011

An essentially similar, if slightly more restrained, assessment was advanced by the Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI—from which the IMT split in 1992), which also characterized the Benghazi uprising as a “revolution” while warning that it might be “hijacked by remnants of the Qaddafi regime, pro-bourgeois opposition ‘leaders’, reactionary tribal leaders and imperialist interests” (“Gaddafi must go! It’s a fight to the finish,” 28 February 2011). A few weeks later the CWI was denouncing the UN “no-fly” zone as an imperialist military intervention:

“The UN Security Council’s majority decision to enact a militarily-imposed ‘no-fly-zone’ against Libya, while greeted with joy on the streets of Benghazi and Tobruk, is in no way intended to defend the Libyan revolution. Revolutionaries in Libya may think that this decision will help them, but they are mistaken. Naked economic and political calculations lay behind the imperialist powers’ decision.”

—“No to Western Military Intervention—
Victory to the Libyan Revolution—Build an
Independent Movement of Workers and Youth!,”
19 March 2011

While recognizing that “The largely self-appointed ‘National Council’ that emerged in Benghazi is a combination of elements from the old regime and more pro-imperialist elements” (*Ibid.*), the CWI continued to hail the supposed “Libyan revolution” spearheaded by the TNC.

The CWI’s competitors in the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) took an essentially similar approach—touting the “revolution” while warning that appeals to the West for funds and NATO air support invited imperialist “blackmail”:

“Libya’s Transitional National Council (TNC), the body that grew out of the revolution, made a series of simple demands in the first crucial days of the uprising. It asked for the recognition of the TNC, access to the billions in sequestered regime funds in order to buy weapons and other crucial supplies, and an immediate halt to the ‘mercenary flights’ that provided Gaddafi’s regime with its foot soldiers.”

“The West, in effect, blackmailed the revolution.”
—*Socialist Worker*, 26 March 2011

Like the IMT and CWI, the SWP treated the 17 February

2011 protests that kicked off the revolt as largely spontaneous in origin:

“Inspired by the events in Egypt and Tunisia, a loose network of young activists joined by notables, among them judges and respected lawyers, called for peaceful protests on 17 February. These protests, despite the modest demands, turned into the first public displays of opposition to the regime.”

—*Socialist Review*, April 2011

In fact, it was not “a loose network of young activists” but rather the imperialist-linked National Conference for the Libyan Opposition (NCLC—subsequently subsumed by the TNC) that initiated the 17 February demonstrations, as the SWP subsequently admitted. While not explicitly repudiating its previous claim that the protests had originated with “a loose network of young activists,” the May 2011 issue of *Socialist Review* stated that: “Exiles in the National Conference for the Libyan Opposition coordinated with dissidents to plan a ‘Day of Rage’ for 17 February.” There was no need to “blackmail” the NCLC, an organization whose founders included people with a long-standing connection with the CIA, as documented in our 1 April 2011 statement (see “Defeat the Imperialists!” reprinted on 37).

The “Trotskyist” publicists for the Benghazi rebels initially brushed off reports of support for the imposition of a “no-fly” zone and played up expressions by the TNC of formal opposition to foreign military intervention. For example, on 1 March 2011, the IMT wrote:

“According to Al Jazeera, Abdel Fattah Younes, Libya’s former interior minister who defected to the opposition, has stated that the idea that the people would welcome foreign troops was ‘out of the question.’

“This has been confirmed by Hafiz Ghoga, spokesperson of the newly formed ‘National Libyan Council’ [i.e., TNC] that has been set up in Benghazi. Ghoga is quoted as saying: ‘We are completely against foreign intervention. The rest of Libya will be liberated by the people...and Gaddafi’s security forces will be eliminated by the people of Libya.’”

—“No to imperialist intervention in Libya”

The TNC’s initial posture of opposition to Western intervention may have been motivated by a desire to consolidate popular support and rebut the regime’s (essentially correct) claim that the leaders of the revolt were in league with foreign interests whose chief objective was to re-appropriate Libya’s fossil fuel resources. During the first few weeks, several prominent figures (including both the justice and interior ministers) defected, and the Benghazi rebels, along with their backers, may well have hoped that the regime would simply implode. As Qaddafi’s loyalists regained their balance and moved to recapture Benghazi, the TNC began desperately demanding NATO air cover. The fact that this shift apparently failed to produce any sort of rift within the rebel camp refutes the narrative of a hijacked revolution.

There was, in fact, no “Libyan revolution”—the Benghazi revolt was, at its core, an expression of a long-standing division among the traditional ruling elites in which an unstable amalgam of monarchists and former Qaddafi loyalists (joined by cadres of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group) made a bid for power. Their revolt tapped a deep well of popular anger and resentment, and most of the TNC’s supporters doubtless imagined that they were involved in another chapter of the “Arab Spring” which had already toppled dictators in the

region. But the revolt in Libya had a different character right from the outset, which explains the enthusiastic support from Washington, Paris and other NATO capitals.

By mid-March 2011, as the bombing was about to commence, even the IMT expressed some uneasiness about the character of the “rebel” leaders they had been promoting:

“These people successfully stepped into the vacuum of leadership that emerged in Benghazi when the state collapsed in the face of the revolution, but rather than strengthening the revolution, they weaken it. There are also Islamists, who can be of no appeal to working people in the cities. There are human rights activists and pro-democracy groups, whose main objective is some kind of bourgeois democracy, but who do not take into account the social and economic demands of ordinary working people. Side by side with all these there is the revolutionary youth and the working class and poor.”

—“Why has the revolution stalled in Libya?,”

17 March 2011

A few weeks later the IMT downgraded its assessment of the “rebel leaders” even further, comparing them to “the Karzai regime in Afghanistan or the Maliki regime in Iraq”:

“This brings us to the role played by the Interim Council that was established in Benghazi. This Council was thrown up by a situation in which the masses had brought down state power, but did not know what to replace it with. There was a *de facto* power vacuum created. In this situation accidental elements came to the fore, *who are now clearly playing a counter-revolutionary role.*”

—“Libyan Interim Government—agents of imperialism,” 1 April 2011

The TNC leadership was indeed counterrevolutionary, but it was hardly “accidental”—it was made up of representatives of most opposition formations, including the initiators of the 17 February “Day of Rage.”

In October 2011, as the imperialists celebrated Qaddafi’s murder, Alan Woods was still blathering about a continuing “Libyan Revolution”:

“It is a confused and contradictory situation, the outcome of which is as yet unclear. On the one hand, the mass movement, including the working class, is pushing for its own demands. On the other hand, the bourgeois elements are manoeuvring with the imperialists to take control of the situation. The main motor force of the Revolution is the young rebel fighters who are honest and courageous but also confused and disoriented and can be manipulated by the fundamentalists and other demagogues.”

—“After the death of Gaddafi: Revolution and counterrevolution in Libya,” 21 October 2011

The essential elements of the situation were clear enough—NATO had orchestrated a low-overhead “regime change” in Libya, designed to reopen its oil and gas fields for foreign exploitation. However “confused and disoriented” young Libyans may have been, it is hard to imagine that they were more befuddled than those IMT members who took Woods’s brainless objectivism seriously.

Unlike the IMT, many former boosters of the TNC-led “Libyan revolution” had some inkling that when Tripoli fell, it was the imperialists, not the Libyan masses, who had come out on top. The British SWP, for example, schizophrenically “celebrated” Qaddafi’s fall while acknowledging that the main beneficiaries were likely to be Western oil corporations:

“The end of Gaddafi’s regime is a cause for celebration.



PAN-AFRICAN NEWS WIRE

U.S.-led bombing campaign was the decisive military factor

He will be the third Arab dictator to fall this year.

“But the nature of the struggle in Libya is now fundamentally different from the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt that originally inspired it. It became so once Western forces decided to appropriate it.”

“The imperialist powers hijacked the Libyan revolt and bent it to their own needs. They forced the new rebel authority in Benghazi to reaffirm trade contracts and international oil deals.”

—*Socialist Worker*, 20 August 2011

Other groups also pushed the notion of a “hijacked” revolution. The French Nouveau Parti anticapitaliste (NPA), which in March 2011 had co-signed a declaration with the Stalinist Communist Party and others demanding that French imperialism recognize the TNC, issued a 21 August 2011 statement insisting that while events in Libya had paralleled the “revolutionary processes underway in Tunisia and in Egypt,” somehow “under cover of a resolution from the UN, the member countries of NATO attempted to hijack the process underway by an aerial military intervention.”

Socialist Action (SA), an American group historically linked to the NPA, also hailed the Libyan “revolution,” but attempted to give its backing of the TNC a leftist spin by offering “political support in their fight against the quislings who would turn over Libya to imperialist intervention” (*Socialist Action*, March 2011). The fact that the TNC quislings were soon actively demanding imperialist intervention presumably contributed to SA’s eventual decision to rethink its position. But as NATO was preparing to go in, Socialist Action (along with the rest of what remains of the late Ernest Mandel’s “United Secretariat of the Fourth International” [USec]), was critical of “the role of Hugo Chavez, Daniel Ortega and Fidel Castro in their one-sided, if correct, denunciation of imperialism’s interests and intentions in this affair, while denying or ignoring Qaddafi’s repression and murders” (*Ibid.*). It is hardly surprising that such left-nationalist or Stalinist bonapartists (whom SA and the USec have fawned over for years) were not particularly concerned by Qaddafi’s anti-democratic transgressions. But at least they understood what the imperialists were up to and did not ascribe a transcendent “revolutionary” dynamic to the TNC.

Socialist Action’s line change (which they have yet to acknowledge as such) was not made public until after

Tripoli had fallen to the TNC/NATO alliance in August. In a 2 September 2011 statement entitled, "Imperialist Victory Is No Gain For Libyan People," Jeff Mackler, Socialist Action's leading figure, wrote:

"In the early days of these mass protests, there were unmistakable but only modest indications of the independent character of at least a portion of the anti-Gadhafi leadership, as when anti-government protesters unfurled massive banners from rooftops, declaring, 'No Foreign Intervention: The Libyan People Can Manage It Alone.' Even then, it was not always clear whether opposition to foreign intervention referred to troops on the ground only, since major elements of the opposition had announced early on, and even demanded, support by U.S./NATO forces and a 'no-fly zone.'"

At a point when it appeared that the Qaddafi regime might melt down, it made sense for the leaders of the TNC lash-up to assert their preference for rearranging Libyan society without foreign supervision. However, as soon as Qaddafi's supporters proved capable of organizing a serious counter-offensive, the TNC's tune changed. In his statement, Mackler acknowledged the abrupt shift in attitude:

"Whatever self-organization was evidenced in the earliest days of the mass protest was essentially spontaneous and created to organize the distribution of food and the coordination of vital services as Gadhafi's forces bombarded Benghazi. We have yet to see any indication that these organizational forms gave rise to or were based on independent political forces aiming at developing a program to advance the interests of the masses. Nor is there evidence that they took on the task of consolidating an alternative to the leading bourgeois and pro-imperialist forces, which fully understood the need to rush to the 'leadership' of the mass movement. "Given the political void among the anti-Gadhafi forces, the TNC was quickly recognized as the nation's 'legal' government....The Europeans' and Americans' public pretensions of 'protecting civilians' from Gadhafi's forces rapidly gave way to their real objectives—'regime change' pure and simple."

Characterizing the conflict after NATO's intervention as an "imperialist-led conquest of Libya," the SA statement continues:

"The right of self-determination of all oppressed nations, even those led by heinous dictators, must be supported as against imperialist interventions. Imperialism's defeat in any confrontation with oppressed nations weakens its capacity for future interventions and opens the door wider for others to follow suit. While revolutionary socialists have every right and obligation to criticize and oppose dictatorships everywhere, these criticisms are subordinate to the defeat of imperialist intervention and war. Revolutionaries are not neutral in such confrontations. We are always for the defeat of the imperialist intervener and would-be colonizer."

This implies, but stops short of explicitly stating, that socialists should have taken a position of militarily supporting Qaddafi's forces against the imperialists and their TNC proxies (rather than pretending that a revolution was unfolding as Socialist Action and its co-thinkers did). Mackler's statement also fails to acknowledge the role of the CIA-connected NCLC in organizing the original "Day of Rage," and instead treats the Benghazi events as essentially spontaneous in origin. He does, however, note that with the TNC's ascension to power, "we are compelled to recognize the tragic truth that a severe defeat has been

inflicted on the Libyan people":

"Today the imperialist boot is on the ground in Libya and deeply implanted. The Libyan masses have not been liberated. Thousands have been killed. Imperialism's sights are now focused on doing the same in Syria and eventually in Iran."

While belated and inadequate, SA's line change does at least recognize that the overthrow of Qaddafi was a victory for imperialism and a defeat for working people and the oppressed. This represents a clear shift to the left, the origins and ultimate implications of which remain unclear.

Ken Hiebert, a long-time USec supporter in Canada who is critical of Socialist Action's change of position, inquired why—if March 2011 marked the beginning of "a six-month imperialist-led onslaught that wrought death and destruction on the Libyan people"—SA was "still calling for Victory to the Uprising! as late as April 28, 2011[?] Why is it that only in the September issue of their paper does SA revise its view?" Hiebert suggests that the logic of SA's new position means that those groups that wanted to see a victory by Qaddafi's forces against NATO were "more far-sighted than the leadership of SA." He also wonders, if "the only force that could oppose the imperialist intervention was the Libyan army, shouldn't we have been supporting the army and it [sic] leadership?" But thus far, to our knowledge, Socialist Action has not chosen to respond.

To avoid promoting politics that lead to "severe defeats" in future, Socialist Action needs to answer Hiebert's questions and make an honest accounting of the roots of their original mistake and the process through which they came to reject it. They should also explicitly state that in hindsight they recognize the necessity to side militarily with Qaddafi's forces against NATO.

WSWS: NATO Defeatist, but not Libyan Defensist

The policy that Socialist Action retrospectively adopted parallels the one arrived at by David North's World Socialist Web Site (WSWS—aka Socialist Equality Party [SEP]). Initially the WSWS (18 February 2011) observed:

"The events in Libya are part of the uprising that is engulfing the Middle East and North Africa. The protesters themselves draw a parallel between what is happening in Libya and what has already taken place in Egypt and Tunisia."

There is no question that the mass mobilizations in Tunisia and Egypt resonated in Libya, and doubtless most of those who demonstrated against Qaddafi saw themselves as participating in a revolt inspired by the overturn of Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak. But it is also indisputable that the 17 February 2011 "Day of Rage" which kicked off the Benghazi uprising was initiated by the NCLC, which was founded by Libyan "dissidents" with long-standing CIA connections.

Unlike the left groups which began by identifying the Benghazi revolt with those in Tunis and Cairo and then proceeded to claim that a good revolt had been "hijacked" by bad elements, the WSWS did not shrink from the unpleasant truth about the pro-imperialist character of its leadership. While still characterizing the rebellion as a "legitimate popular uprising," the SEP leadership quickly decided that it was morphing into something else:

"What began as a popular revolt against the repressive Gaddafi regime is increasingly being channelled, with the help of an interim administration in Benghazi, Libya's second city, into the pretext for an imperialist intervention.

Such an operation would seek to establish a *de facto* client state in Libya. It would help imperialist forces assert control over the country's large oil and gas fields and serve as a bastion of reaction against the working-class uprisings sweeping the entire region, from Morocco to Iraq."

"Inside Libya, Gaddafi's former justice minister, Mustafa Abdel Jalil, who now heads the opposition National Libyan Council in Benghazi, called for foreign air strikes and a no-fly zone. Citing sources within the council, the *New York Times* reported that this stance was adopted at a heated council meeting where 'others strongly disagreed'. There has been deep opposition to such a call within popular protests against Gaddafi, because of fears of a return to neo-colonial rule—fears that Gaddafi is exploiting to posture as a defender of Libyan sovereignty."

—5 March 2011

When NATO bombing commenced, the question of Libyan sovereignty was indeed clearly posed, and the nature of the conflict changed from being an intra-elite struggle to a fight between a neocolonial regime and a coalition of imperialists and their lackeys. The attitude of Marxists changed accordingly—from defeatism on both sides to military support for Qaddafi and his supporters against the imperialists and their TNC auxiliaries. The WSWWS correctly assessed NATO's intervention as intended:

"to ensure that any regime that replaces Gaddafi serves not the interests of the Libyan people, but rather the demands of Washington and Big Oil. The US hopes to use Libya, moreover, as a base of operations for suppressing revolutionary movements of workers throughout the region."

—18 March 2011

The next day the WSWWS issued the following appeal:

"The *World Socialist Web Site* calls on workers and young people to reject the war propaganda under a humanitarian guise with the disgust it deserves. The fight against political oppression, social exploitation and war is inseparable from the building of a socialist movement that unites the international working class in a struggle against capitalism and imperialism."

—19 March 2011

What was missing was a call for military support to Qaddafi's forces attempting to resist the imperialist assault. This was not an accident—the unwillingness to adopt a Libyan defensist position derives from the SEP's contention that Lenin's policy of recognizing the right of all nations to self-determination is no longer applicable. This position was spelled out in a 1994 document entitled, "Marxism, Opportunism and the Balkan Crisis":

"In politics, terms which had a definite social and class content in one period often come to represent something quite different in the next. This is the case with the slogan of 'self-determination.'

"Vast changes in world economic and political relations have created corresponding changes in the character of the national movements....

"Can one speak today of the national bourgeoisie of Bosnia, or Kazakhstan or Kashmir seeking to 'capture the home market,' thereby creating conditions for the 'victory of commodity production' and hence a fuller development of the class struggle?

"On the contrary, these new ethnocentric movements seek the Balkanization of existing states. Rather than proposing to create a home market, they desire more direct economic ties with imperialism and globally-mobile



July 2009: Qaddafi and Obama shake hands at G-8 summit

capital. The 'right to self-determination' is invoked as a means of advancing the interests of small sections of the local bourgeoisie."

The political conclusion drawn by the SEP is that "there is no answer to the problems of national divisions" short of socialist revolution. The political logic of such sterile ultimatism was evident in the WSWWS treatment of events in Libya. While denouncing the imperialist assault (and accurately describing the TNC as "dominated by recent defectors from the regime, along with CIA assets and other reactionary forces" [24 March 2011]) the SEP's response was profoundly flawed by its refusal to take sides in what boiled down to an attempt to re-impose neocolonial rule.

Workers Power—Centrist Confusionism & Imperialist Lackeys

While failing to defend Qaddafi's forces, the SEP at least pointed out the predatory intent of the NATO powers and their Libyan auxiliaries in the TNC. The same cannot be said for the British Workers Power group (flagship of the League for the Fifth International [L5I]), well known for incongruously combining leftist rhetoric with grossly opportunist positions. It was no surprise to find that Workers Power's initial take on what it termed the Libyan "revolution" was virtually identical to that of the IMT, CWI, SWP and assorted other revisionists. When NATO started bombing, the L5I loudly denounced the UN-mandated imperialist intervention, while continuing to "unconditionally support" the imperialist quislings of the TNC:

"The rebellion against Gaddafi's dictatorship deserves unconditional support and that is not altered by the UN decision....

"Those who oppose powerful states have the right to get hold of arms wherever they can and to take advantage of any weaknesses in their oppressors' situation. That remains true even where the weaknesses are the result of imperialist action. If, under cover of the no-fly zone, Libyan insurgents and revolutionaries can retake positions, undermine the morale or the loyalty of Gaddafi's troops and even advance on the capital, Tripoli, that is a step forward for the Libyan revolution and should be welcomed.

"At the same time we must oppose the US, British and French attack."

—"Victory to the Libyan Revolution!," 19 March 2011

A week later Workers Power sought to explain why, if indeed it opposed the imperialist attack, it refused to side with Qaddafi:

"Others on the left decided to support Gaddafi when the bombs started falling, calling on all the Libyans to form an anti-imperialist united front. This position assumes that the working class should automatically side with those targeted by imperialism, irrespective of political context or the war aims of either side....Are the workers and the poor of Libya supposed to make common cause with Gaddafi so that he can continue his repression of their revolution?"

—"Nato over Libya—the tide begins to turn,"
26 March 2011

Workers Power viewed NATO's military intervention into what had been a nascent civil war as an opportunity "the forces of the democratic revolution" (i.e., the TNC and its followers) should take advantage of: "It would be bizarre, indeed, to refuse to continue the campaign against Gaddafi's repressive apparatus because it had been weakened by imperialist action!" (*Ibid.*). As the months went on, the L5I leadership was compelled to offer a series of shifting rationalizations for supporting NATO's proxies. In June 2011, the L5I asked: "Are the rebels fighting on the ground simply tools of imperialism? No. First as we have said the NATO powers did not give weapons or munitions to the rebels—i.e. they did not enhance the latter's independent capacity to overthrow Gaddafi" ("Libya and the struggle against imperialism," 15 June 2011).

How then to explain the widely-publicized presence of hundreds of NATO and other special forces sent in to stiffen the TNC militias? The article continues:

"Despite having military operations in Libya for three months a direct command structure to liaise between the NATO air force and naval actions and the Benghazi ground forces was only established in early June."

The existence of a "direct command structure" linking the rebel militias and NATO controllers might seem to most people to be pretty good evidence that the former were being wielded as "tools of imperialism." Workers Power admitted that the "rebels" not only had a "pro-imperialist counterrevolutionary leadership," but had been involved in "racist pogroms against sub-Saharan Africans." Yet none of this made any difference:

"Socialists will always support a genuine mass movement that is fighting for democratic rights against a dictatorship, no matter how 'anti-imperialist' their credentials....

"In Poland in the 1980s it was right for socialists to support Solidarnosc as a mass trade-union movement—again despite the pro-capitalist, pro-catholic, policies of its leadership. In France in the Second World War Paris was liberated by a Communist Party led resistance movement that was certainly not anti-imperialist in any sense.

"The crucial perspective within all these social movements is to fight for a revolution *within* the revolution. Every revolutionary movement carries within it the seeds of a counter-revolution, whether it is the threat of co-optation or bureaucratisation. The threat for the Libyan resistance is very real—the TNC is staffed with ex Gaddafi men, pro-privatisation, pro-imperialism and anti-working class."

—*Ibid.*

Revolutionary movements are not, as a rule, led by those with "pro-imperialist and anti-working class" programs. In Russia in 1921 there was a "genuine mass movement...fight-

ing for democratic rights against a [Bolshevik] dictatorship" that extended from the confused Kronstadt mutineers to the hardened counterrevolutionary officers of the White Army. The "socialists" who supported this movement (like Workers Power and other leftists who backed Lech Walesa and the rest of the capitalist-restorationist leaders of Poland's Solidarnosc in 1981) were acting as shills for imperialism. In a polemic aimed at Workers Power written a few years prior to the triumph of counterrevolution in the Soviet bloc, we observed:

"The duty of revolutionists is to tell the truth—not to ascribe 'revolutionary' dynamics to reactionary political movements. In following the leadership of Solidarnosc, the bulk of the Polish workers were acting *against* their own historic class interests."

—"Solidarnosc: Acid Test for Trotskyists," 1988

The same could be said of those workers in Libya who identified with the TNC. In a statement marking the triumphant entry of NATO's proxies into Tripoli, Dave Stockton, one of Workers Power's founding cadres, wrote:

"Those imperialists who once supported him [Gaddafi] have gone over to opposing him and are trying to bring him down—to them we say: get out of the way, this has nothing to do with you, the people of Libya alone will defeat Gaddafi and his wretched cronies...."

—"Should socialists support the Libyan revolution?,"
22 August 2011

Who was Stockton hoping to fool? The "people of Libya" did not bring down Qaddafi—NATO did, as even the newest recruit to Workers Power must be aware. Stockton neatly encapsulates the rightist thrust of the L5I's crystallized confusionism by observing: "In conclusion, socialists always oppose imperialism but they do not always support those who are fighting imperialism."

Contrary to Workers Power, revolutionaries always, and without exception, militarily side with those neocolonial forces resisting imperialist aggression. It is impossible to "always oppose imperialism" without also militarily supporting those who resist attempts to reimpose neocolonial rule, however unpalatable their leaders may be. This policy, which originated with the Third (Communist) International under Lenin, and was upheld by the Fourth International of the 1930s and 1940s, retains all its validity today for reasons Trotsky spelled out over 70 years ago:

"The struggle of the oppressed peoples for national unification and national independence is doubly progressive because, on the one side, this prepares more favorable conditions for their own development, while, on the other side, this deals blows to imperialism. That, in particular, is the reason why, in the struggle between a civilized, imperialist, democratic republic and a backward, barbaric monarchy in a colonial country, the socialists are completely on the side of the oppressed country notwithstanding its monarchy and against the oppressor country notwithstanding its 'democracy.'

"Imperialism camouflages its own peculiar aims—seizure of colonies, markets, sources of raw material, spheres of influence—with such ideas as 'safeguarding peace against the aggressors,' 'defense of the fatherland,' 'defense of democracy,' etc. These ideas are false through and through. It is the duty of every socialist not to support them but, on the contrary, to unmask them before the people."

—"Lenin and Imperialist War," 30 December 1938

Polemic with Irish Anarchists

Anti-Imperialism vs. Pro-Intervention 'Solidarity'

The following IBT statement was distributed in Ireland in December 2011.

When the UN "no-fly" zone over Libya was imposed, the Workers Solidarity Movement (WSM) wrote:

"the WSM in general is 'against the intervention by the UN or any other collection of imperialist "peacekeepers"' because "There can be no "just settlement" that involves any imperialist power or the UN or similar bodies."

—"UN Resolution imposes 'unprecedented' No Fly Zone on Gaddafi", 18 March 2011

While claiming to oppose UN/NATO interventions "in general", the WSM opined that, "the no fly zone should perhaps be an exception to this general position". At bottom, the WSM's willingness to make an "exception" in Libya derived from the pressure of popular opinion, which had been shaped by a successful disinformation campaign alleging a wholesale slaughter of civilians by Gaddafi's forces. The WSM statement included the following comment by one of their members:

"I'm very sceptical of US or UN military 'interventions' generally, but in reality my scepticism is a luxury people in Libya don't have. And I'm both confused and glad that this [UN] resolution is based upon the defense of civilians. Let's hope that the self determination and desire of people to have control over their own lives is assisted by it."

The comrade's confusion is understandable. There can never be any basis for hoping that NATO's actions are motivated by a desire either to defend civilians or assist them in gaining "control over their own lives". In Libya, as everywhere else, the imperialist great powers act solely in pursuit of their own interests. What sort of "revolutionaries" could imagine anything else?

With disarming naïveté the WSM explains its policy as one of striking a "balance" between opposition to imperialist intervention in general and "solidarity" with the neo-colonial masses bamboozled by honeyed lies about NATO's "humanitarian" and "democratic" intentions:

"This question of where the balance lies between international solidarity with pro-democracy movements and opposition to imperialism could well rapidly return to the top of the agenda in a very much bigger way as the regime in Syria continues its months long military suppression of the democracy movement there."

"Part of this is down to a standard dogmatic polarization between pro-intervention liberals who think the bombs are being dropped to protect Libyans on the one hand and on the other the nationalists and hard core Leninists who think Gaddafi's [sic] past make [sic] him an enemy of imperialism today."

—"As Gaddafi falls – Lessons from Libya – imperialism, anti-imperialism & democratic revolution", 20 October 2011

In fact, Leninists defend neo-colonies against imperial-

ist aggression regardless of the character of the indigenous regimes (i.e., including anti-working class bonapartist dictatorships like Gaddafi's). We oppose, in principle, *without exception*, any and all military interventions in neo-colonial countries by imperialist predators. This demarcates Leninists from "revolutionaries" who are prepared to make "exceptions" rather than buck popular opinion.

The WSM is quite right that the current situation in Syria (where the imperialists are hostile to the regime) more closely parallels that of Libya than Tunisia or Egypt, where popular mass mobilisations forced pro-imperialist dictators to step down. The Syrian "rebels", like their Libyan counterparts, while clearly aided and favoured by the West, are essentially an indigenous formation which seeks to displace the regime of Bashar al-Assad in order to establish their own right to exploit and oppress the Syrian masses. We defend Syrian civilians against wholesale state repression, but revolutionary socialists have no reason to support either side in the current conflict between oppressors and would-be oppressors. But if the US, Britain or France intervenes militarily in Syria – as they did in Libya in 2011 and, earlier, in Kosovo in 1999 – then the international workers' movement has a duty to militarily support the Assad regime against the imperialists and their proxies.

The WSM has apparently decided that categorical opposition to imperialist intervention in neo-colonial countries is "dogmatic" and "unbalanced", and instead proposes to support such interventions if they are sufficiently popular:

"while retaining the right to advise and criticise we should start off with a defense of the popular movement and an acceptance that the decision about how to balance political opposition to imperialism with the military need for imperialist intervention is theirs and theirs alone to make. In any case it is not as if the imperialist powers themselves are going to pay attention to what the minuscule groups of anarchists, Leninists or other revolutionaries have to say anyway."

—*Ibid.*

The imperialists certainly do not much care what anarchists or Bolsheviks think. But the role of revolutionaries is not to persuade (or pressure) the ruling class to behave better, but to advance a political programme that shows working people how to break their chains and *overthrow* the capitalist predators. The first step is exposing the reformist lie that the repressive apparatus of the capitalist state can be utilised as an agency of liberation by the oppressed. To declare that it is up to a "popular movement" (almost inevitably dominated by bourgeois elements) to decide whether or not to support imperialist military intervention is to place popularity above principle and abdicate any pretence of providing revolutionary leadership. "Revolutionaries" who seek to "balance" a supposed "military need for imperialist intervention" with the imperatives of overturning global capitalist rule are in effect volunteering to serve as the political agents of the bourgeoisie within the workers' movement. ■

NATO, Rebels & 'Revolutionary' Apologists

Libya & the Left



MOISES SAMAN—NEW YORK TIMES

19 June 2011: Tripoli house destroyed by NATO bombing

Upon hearing of Muammar Qaddafi's execution, U.S. President Barack Obama, who had shared a photo-op with him as recently as 2009, proclaimed: "working in Libya with friends and allies, we've demonstrated what collective action can achieve in the 21st century." Obama was particularly pleased that, "Without putting a single US service member on the ground, we achieved our objectives," and alluded to future targets:

"In a line aimed at the region's other despots, the president said, 'Today's events prove once more that the rule of an iron fist inevitably comes to an end.'

"Asked if that sends a message to Syria's Bashar al-Assad, who has mounted a brutal crackdown on protesters, White House Press Secretary Jay Carney simply restated existing policy that Assad 'has lost his legitimacy to rule.'"

—*New York Post*, 21 October 2011

U.S. Vice President Joe Biden compared the outcome in Libya to earlier, less successful adventures in Iraq and Afghanistan:

"In this case, America spent \$2 billion total and didn't lose a single life. This is more of the prescription for how to deal with the world as we go forward than it has been in the past."

—*Ibid.*

Israeli journalist Orly Azoulay praised Obama's "new war doctrine," pointing to the integration of "massive air

power" and "local rebel forces":

"General Qaddafi's death is yet another victory for the new war doctrine adopted by United States President Barack Obama: No ground forces in enemy countries, but rather, utilizing massive air power—including drones—in order to pulverize enemy strongholds. In Libya's case at least, this doctrine also included cooperation with local rebel forces."

—Ynetnews.com, 21 October 2011

This is a fair summary of events in Libya—"massive air power" destroyed the armed bodies loyal to Qaddafi and opened the door for local quislings to scramble to fill the vacuum. Yet things do not always go according to plan, and it is sometimes easier to depose an existing regime than to impose a viable successor, as NATO discovered in Afghanistan a decade ago.

In both Libya and Afghanistan, the immediate result of "regime change" was the installation of new puppet leaders with strong American connections. Afghan President Hamid Karzai—who was appointed leader at a conference in Bonn, Germany in December 2001—had worked with the CIA as a fundraiser for the anti-Soviet *mujahedin* 20 years earlier. Libya's new prime minister, Abdurraheem el-Keib, who holds American citizenship, attended school in the U.S. and taught at the University of Alabama before moving to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to chair the Electrical

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