

SOCIALIST VOICE

USA SPECIAL REPORT

THE LOS ANGELES UPRISING...AND AFTER

The following report was published in Los Angeles by Humberto Zapata a member of the International Socialist League, a sympathizing section of the International Workers' League (Fourth International)

The events that took place in the City of Los Angeles from April 28 to May Day 1992 have definitely affected the political scenario, not only in Los Angeles but in the whole United States. Reagan and Bush have been ruling this country under a certain political and social stability. But that continuity has been broken.

The Rodney King verdict was only the spark that ignited the already volatile situation in Los Angeles. The tensions in the city have grown as the gap between rich and poor widened. Rich communities such as Hidden Hills, Rolling Hills and Palos Verdes have seen increases in their income up to 63 percent while such neighbourhoods as Lynwood, Watts and the whole of South Central Los Angeles have increased by only 5 percent. The median income was \$100,000 in the first group and \$17,000 in the second. In South Los Angeles, real income was only \$7,023.

In 1965, the year of the Watts' riots, 27 percent of the population was under the poverty level of \$12,000; that figure has grown to 30 percent today. In 1990, Los Angeles county created 300,000 jobs for executives and administrators while there were 22,000 fewer manufacturing jobs.

In the past ten years, about 3.3 million immigrant workers have moved into the State of California, and that has drastically changed the composition of the state. In South Central L.A. the population is 672,416 double what it was in 1965; half the population is Latino, mostly Mexican and central American. In ten years the African-American population went from 81 percent to only 14.8 percent. In that area, half those

able to work are unemployed. Average rent in the United States is \$424 a month, but for California, it is \$606. South Central L.A. had as many liquor stores as 47 combined states.

A BLOW AGAINST THE TWIN PARTIES

Bush had to accommodate his electoral campaign after the Los Angeles uprising. He recently came out with a very costly program to solve the problems faced by urban cities such as Los Angeles. For L. A. he promised \$14 billion. But the big question is where the money is going to come from. Both parties agree on the overall idea of the Bush program, but have no agreement on how to get the funds. The California legislators are discussing a 20 percent increase in taxes to pay for the destruction suffered by the city, which amounts to \$785 million, obviously they want the poor people to pay for the damages. Another alternative is to get the money from the military budget, but Bush does not want to reduce the United States' military might.

Independently of any agreement that Democrats and Republicans could come to, however it is clear that the Los Angeles uprising has forced both parties to put the national problems as the most important point on their political agendas. The problems with Japan and the "free trade" treaty with Mexico and Canada have become issues of secondary importance. The question for them now is to try to find an answer for cities such as Los Angeles where the gangs have become the "normal" place for young kids to hang out.

There are about 100,000 gang members in Los

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Angeles alone; they ranging from 8 to 35 year of age. This gang problem, together with an unemployment rate of 50 percent in some communities, reveal that big cities in the United States are incubating a very explosive situation.

A MILITARY ANSWER TO THE CRISIS?

On the second day of the riots, Bush sent 10,000 federal troops to control the deteriorating situation in Los Angeles. The L.A. Police Department, made up of 10,000 men and women, were unable to control the popular unrest. The soldiers felt totally uneasy about marching into the L.A. streets to stop the violence, but they said they would kill if necessary and they did. As soon as the National Guard joined the police, the number of casualties increased from 22 to 58 in a matter of hours. There is no question that capitalist governments use repression when the masses disregard private property Bush's political answer to the Los Angeles riots was the same as the one he used for the Persian Gulf crisis.

Big urban centres in the United States are looking more and more like "third world" cities, and even the most economically powerful country in the world has no answer for the social problems that the population is actually facing. It is clear that social inequalities are going to continue creating unrest in Los Angeles, and we foresee major confrontations between the police and the working people.

THE POOR ARE UNITING

Poverty is bringing the working class together. Labour unions have been so badly hit during the last ten years that new forms of discontent and political expression are springing up in the United States. Because there are no big working class parties that can lead the struggles of poor people, an L.A. uprising is a way for working people to express their dissatisfaction with the system.

But what is important is the fact that traditional leadership among Blacks is now in a deep crisis. Jesse Jackson is not the kind of leader that young Blacks are going to listen to. A new leadership is emerging, and this new leadership is looking for allies, not in the people already bought by the system but among sectors willing to fight.

The uprising was far from being a racial confrontation between Blacks and whites. There were the

poor: Black, Latinos and to a certain extent whites. The fires were indiscriminately lit because there were no political organisations leading the discontent. But there are strong signs that there a new generation of leaders is coming out of these developments. Blacks could see that are no fundamental differences between them and the rest of the poor people. Some are very close to them. But is it very positive that rival gangs have made an agreement not to kill each other and fight together against police brutality. This is a good beginning.

THE PEOPLE WANT JOBS AND DECENT HOUSING

Community leaders are demanding that liquor stores are not rebuilt in our communities. They want to see Black and Latin people participating in businesses not only as consumers but as owners as well. They are asking for schools, training institutes and recreational centres. They want the kids to have alternatives to alcohol, gangs and drugs.

We think that along with these demands others have to be made. The minimum wage has to be increased to at least \$10 dollars an hour. We have to struggle for a 30 hour workweek with 40 hours pay! Work for everyone who wants work through the construction of national mass public projects! People cannot continue paying high rents; rents have to be cut in half and frozen. Infant mortality in the United States is one of the highest among the industrialised nations. To confront this, it is necessary that the population have access to free medical care! The actual crisis has to be paid for by the rich, not the poor. Tax the rich! The amount of money Bush is promising for the rebuilding of Los Angeles is the same amount the allies spent in two day of the imperialist war against Iraq in the Persian Gulf. The working people and poor of Los Angeles need jobs at decent wages and decent housing!

But none of these demands can be met if a strong alliance between Labour and community organisations does not exist. African-Americans, Latinos, women, gays, Asians, Native Americans and other community organisations must fight together in order to win these demands. The police have to be accountable for their actions to the communities. Put criminal cops in jail! No more beatings Justice for minorities! Down With the racist judiciary system.

Our organisation, the Internationalist Socialist League, calls on all working class organisations to fight together to achieve these demands.