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## The Bankruptcy of "Progressive" Politics

by Arthur Rymer

The 1996 U.S. presidential campaign may have been the duller in memory, but it served one purpose for workers and youth looking to fight the system. It helped prove the bankruptcy of reformism, exposing the liberal and "left" lies about working for progressive reforms within the system. The only "reforms" now are attacks.

It took place in a world rampant with signs of capitalist decay. U.S.-backed regimes intensified their oppression in Indonesia, Turkey and Palestine. Hundreds of thousands of refugees in Zaire faced imperialist-induced starvation. Legislative and corporate attacks on the working class mounted at home. Yet the candidates dealt with none of these crises.

There was massive indifference by the voting public, especially working-class voters, Black, Latino and white. In this they showed their justified contempt for the major parties. Why vote when there is no one worth choosing?

The ruling class as well saw no significant policy difference between the presidential contenders. But by midyear it had become clear that the dominant trend within the bourgeoisie favored Clinton, who had proved to the rulers' satisfaction that he could carry out the attack on the masses they demand. Abroad, he proved his willingness to use military force and economic might to assert imperialist prerogatives, both to victimize dominated countries like Iraq and Cuba and to bully the U.S.'s "allied" imperialist powers.

At home, Clinton fulfilled his 1992 campaign promise to make the U.S. "leaner and meaner," on one level to keep up with international competition, but on a deeper level to squeeze higher profits out of the backs of working-class people. No wonder Democrats got hundreds of millions of dollars from big business, this year nearly matching the traditional Republican take.

Clinton is also setting the tone for liberal and social-democratic parties across the industrialized world. Britain's "New" Labour Party, set to win the general election next year, has also embraced anti-working class "free trade," "free  
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Labor's support to Clinton helped put out fire of militancy that marked early months of Detroit newspaper strike.

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# COFI and LRP Report

## HEALTH CARE ATTACKS IN NEW YORK

The wide range of attacks on hospital workers and health care services in New York demands a powerful response. Closings and layoffs in public hospitals have been announced, and there are threats of the same in voluntary hospitals. Mergers involving hospital "giants" also point to job and service cuts for workers.

But the labor bureaucracy has kept protests restrained and divided. The LRP intervened in favor of joint action by all health-care unions and a full mobilization of all city unions during the Local 144 (SEIU) strike, involving the bulk of nursing homes and a few hospitals. We called for joint 1199/New York State Nursing Association action against a brazen lockout of nurses at Columbia Presbyterian following a one-day strike; for united action of all the unions at demos organized by Local 420 against the equally brazen privatization scheme for Coney Island Hospital; and we argued for working-class action and revolutionary politics at rallies by 1199 against Cornell-New York Medical Center (a non-union empire which is shutting down community hospital services at 1199 facilities in Queens as part of its takeover drive.) Leaflets on the health care attacks are available on request.

## WORKFARE AND THE ELECTIONS

The LRP also threw itself into the fight against the slave-labor transit contract, which had the potential to open up the class struggle in New York. (See p. 5.) We also began raising the issue of the Democratic Party's program of racist slave labor and union busting in other arenas. Revolutionaries must convey to politically advanced workers and youth how

pivotal the role of the labor bureaucracy is in pushing the Democratic Party, whose electoral campaigns have been used to preempt and stifle working-class fightbacks — and how this leadership and strategy can be replaced. To this end, we held two forums on the elections and workfare, including one at City College. We also intervened on the issue at meetings at Bellevue Hospital, where DC 37 President Stanley Hill had come to preach for Clinton, and at City College, where politicians like Al Sharpton and Ruth Messinger had come to advocate voting — for the anti-working-class Democrats.

In August the ISO had sponsored a public forum on Clinton's welfare bill, where activists urged a campaign to get Clinton to veto the bill. Bill Henning of CWA 1180 defended his union's pro-Clinton line, while the ISO politely disagreed. Only the LRP condemned the role of the union bureaucracy in making the welfare betrayals possible.

At a subsequent "Veto the Welfare Reform Bill" demo outside Clinton's birthday bash at Radio City Music Hall, the political tone could best be categorized as utopian liberal: the fantasy chant of "veto, veto" dominated. The sponsoring coalition was pro-Democratic, producing a leaflet thanking New York pols who had voted against the "Republican" welfare repeal bill. Our leaflet exposing the responsibility of Democrat-supporters is available to readers on request.

In September we leafleted a mass 1199 delegate assembly featuring Jesse Jackson in an effort to expose the union leaders' complicity in the Democrats' anti-worker racist attacks. Typically, 1199 delegates were not allowed to speak, but it was noticeable that the majority of delegates, generally more conservative than the ranks, were far less enthusiastic for Jackson and his Democratic spiel than in the past.

On October 30, at a forum on workfare sponsored by the New York Metro Chapter of the Labor Party, Tim Schermerhorn of the TWU's New Directions caucus gave a narrowly trade unionist presentation that provided no analysis of why the transit contract had passed; he falsely claimed that ND had waged an intense campaign against it. LRPers intervened to expose ND's real role, and to point out that the real problem was not just Sweeney and the AFL-CIO leadership's support for capitalism and the Democrats, but also "oppositions" like the Labor Party that refuse to stand up against the bureaucrats. This was shown once again when an ISO supporter raised a motion opposing support for Clinton. A Labor Party speaker responded that the LP already had a position of no electoral endorsements — a cheap evasion, since plenty of LP leaders and endorsing unions are backing Clinton and other Democrats.

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Write for a complete list.

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## Proletarian Revolution

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# Welfare "Reform" Hits New York Working Class

by Bob Wolfe

New York City's welfare to workfare scheme (the "Work Experience Program," or WEP) is now a pilot project for a nationwide expansion of union-busting slave labor.

Racism has been key to the success of this bourgeois scheme. Welfare recipients have been misportrayed as Blacks and Latinos who don't want to work. And the scapegoating is getting even more sinister: the bosses are attempting to not only divide white and Black workers but also to pit Blacks and Latinos, the majority of many public unions, against WEP workers, also mainly Blacks and Latinos.

In a crucial defeat, the Transport Workers' Local 100 narrowly passed a contract that explicitly endorses the replacement of union workers with welfare recipients. This sellout even contains the *union* demand that WEP and union workers in the same work area be kept segregated by the Transit bosses! It proves that slave wages means slave treatment too. (See the following article for details.)

An all-out struggle against slave labor and union busting is on the agenda. Unity against racism and all the attacks on the working class and poor is needed more than ever, now that greater divisions are being promoted to bolster the ruling class's attack on the entire working class.

TWU President Willie James pushed his contract through mainly by threatening the ranks with layoffs if it didn't pass. He has been deservedly vilified by other labor bureaucrats. But superexploitation of welfare workers to eliminate union jobs is nothing new in New York; it's been happening all along, with the collaboration of union leaders. It just hasn't been written into contracts before.

## BUREAUCRACY AND WORKFARE

In recent years, tens of thousands of city jobs have been eliminated while 35,000 workfare jobs were created. Workers have been forced to perform slave-labor in sanitation, parks, hospitals and other city agencies, without any rights or union protection. Chief culprit is Stanley Hill, president of District Council 37, the umbrella union covering the bulk of city workers. Hill has a history of working closely with Mayor Giuliani; he has accepted the loss of thousands of jobs through attrition and buy-outs without a peep.

With the publicity given the transit contract, President Dennis Rivera, president of the 1199 hospital workers' union, was one of those who chimed in with his "critique" of James and Hill on workfare (*New York Times*, Sept. 23.):

**Those who do not challenge this are ceding the field for the destruction of the labor movement. I think the municipal unions have been shortsighted. Sometimes you have to fight for what is right, and this is one of the issues in which we have to fight over principle.**

But Rivera has been equally criminal in allowing the closings of hospitals and services under 1199's domain. Like Hill and James, he has used phony "no layoff" promises to reopen contracts, only to accept wage freezes, givebacks and subcontracting. Above all, as vice president of the state Democratic Party, he has used his powerful union position to push votes for Clinton, who has enshrined slave labor and union busting into a national law.

Since the unions' sellout bargaining strategy allowed workfare, any serious struggle against workfare must challenge the union bureaucracy. Since the fiscal crisis hit New

York in the 1970's, all the unions have practiced "concessions" negotiations, accepting givebacks, job losses, two- and three-tier wage schemes and cuts in services — in exchange for protecting a shrinking layer of high seniority workers.

In this the bureaucracy shows that it represents only the perceived interests of the labor aristocracy, a layer of better-off workers who still believe they have a stake in capitalism and identify with the bosses, not the rest of the class. Even



Nov. 14 rally in New York: placards blame Republican Gov. Pataki for welfare cuts, letting Clinton off the hook. Pro-Democratic leaders will betray workfare struggle.

within their own unions, the bureaucrats defend older, white male workers at the expense of younger, Black, Latino and women workers. With the spread of two-tier wage structures and job security provisions based on seniority, newer workers are treated as second-class citizens by their own unions.

Clearly what the labor bureaucracy does affects the entire working class. As a result of their betrayals, not only has the available pool of good union jobs disappeared, but public and community services are shredded to the point of disaster. Having accepted the very idea of a shrunken union workforce and sacrificed workers to budget cuts, on what basis can the bureaucrats really oppose workfare? Demanding union jobs and wages for all on an equal basis is necessary for the working class, but that means the end of concessions bargaining and trade-offs, the bureaucrats' life blood.

Nevertheless, virtually all the union bureaucrats mouth the lie that they want union jobs for WEP workers. Even Hill has griped, "I'd love to organize as many of them as we could, but we don't have the legal leverage."

The union bureaucrats have allowed city workers to be virtually suffocated by anti-union and anti-strike laws. It is no surprise that special laws against organizing and collective bargaining are part of the initial attack on WEP workers, and that the union leaders bow to these laws. Bound together by their historic acceptance of a losing electoralist and legalistic strategy for the unions, the misleaders will certainly try to impose such chains on WEP workers as well.

If the workers who built the unions had accepted these laws in the 1930's, there would be no unions today. If Blacks and other freedom fighters listened to leaders like Hill in the 1960's, segregationist laws would still be on the books. Under capitalism, the working class is constantly without legal leverage; it has won its rights only by fighting for them.

All along the bureaucrats have allowed the capitalists to pit white workers against Black and Latino workers, "American" against foreign workers, employed workers against the unemployed and those on welfare, as well as union vs. non-union. Adapting to the growing conservative outlook of the ruling class, the bureaucracy has embraced Clinton and his racist propaganda that blames society's ills on the most oppressed — poor immigrants and welfare recipients. Now the chickens are coming home to roost, as the bosses use the attacks on welfare to undermine the unions and form a new caste of segregated workers.

We now face union-busting and lower wages for union workers, plus slave-labor contracts for the poorest workers, legally segregated from their class sisters and brothers to allow their abuse and humiliation. Truly the capitalists' divide-and-conquer tactic is pushing to a new level in its attempts to intensify exploitation and reshape the workforce.

#### DIVIDED WORKFORCE

*Proletarian Revolution* has continually argued that the material basis for working-class unity is more fundamental than the divisions capitalism plays on. Real material benefits do distinguish the more aristocratic, high seniority and skilled sectors of workers from the rest. But even the best wage and job security clauses are now under attack — and this is only the tip of the iceberg.

Under Clinton's welfare reform, New York City alone is expected to quadruple workfare, to create 147,000 WEPs within two years. This staggering figure would nearly equal the size of the city municipal workforce. The dangerous dynamic of this situation — a profoundly divided workforce with a large non-union component — cannot be resisted by any "protective" law the bureaucrats dream of passing. Throughout labor history, scabs have been hired from the desperately unemployed and oppressed, used to bust strikes and unions and then discarded like garbage. Today's unions are crippled to the point that they pose no immediate threat to the bosses; so the bosses bring in WEP workers, hoping to use them in such a fashion in the future as needed.

The ruling powers and its labor honchos are successfully spreading chauvinist attitudes within the organized workforce, including elitism toward welfare recipients. Anti-welfare attitudes are increasingly accepted in Black and Latino-majority unions like the TWU, not only the aristocratic white unions. Any working-class strategy must not only condemn racism and chauvinism but must rest on a materialist understanding of such phenomena so as to combat them. Capitalism creates the horrors of racism and chauvinism, which fester when workers feel frustrated and powerless.

Not many years ago, transit workers would have

responded to threats of layoffs by shutting down New York. Hospital workers, too, have a militant history. Now, as a result of repeated sellouts, workers are demoralized and have lost consciousness of their real power in society. In such an environment, backward consciousness grows.

Mass action can go a long way to reversing this tide. A program for class unity is needed. Most likely it will be the WEP workers themselves who will have to point the way.

#### WORKFARE REFORMED?

Given the rapid growth of workfare, it is not surprising that welfare recipients are beginning to organize to defend themselves from the current attacks. In New York, there are at least two organizations that are attempting to organize WEP workers, WEP Workers Together! and Workfairness, a group apparently led by the Workers World Party. Neither group has yet undertaken mass actions or defined their platforms extensively. We expect to discuss their efforts in more detail in our next issue. Nevertheless the basic elements of a revolutionary view should be outlined from the start.

Clearly WEP workers need to fight for defensive measures to protect themselves from the current abuses. Not only are they exploited for minimum wages, they are forced to work without basic health and safety protection afforded unionized workers and are segregated from other workers at the same job sites. The call for *real jobs with union wages, benefits and protection* is necessary. To make this absolutely clear in a labor scene where multi-tier wages are already the rule, the slogan of *equal pay for equal work* must be advanced. A specific slogan banning job segregation is also needed. WEP workers must also take the lead in fighting for *free child care*, the only way that many women WEP workers and other women workers can fight the double bind between their desire to work and to raise their children.

In line with the demands for equality of WEP workers with union workers, we must demand the right of WEP workers to join unions. But at the same time, we urge WEP workers to form their own independent organization. Nominal membership in unions is an insufficient goal. Today the unions are not fighting to defend even their current members. The existing union leadership has already proved it cannot be trusted to defend the interests of WEP workers; they are the ones that let this program happen in the first place. They have done nothing to stop the segregation that has thrown WEP workers into the lowest positions in the workforce and has made many WEPs rightfully suspicious of being treated the same way in the unions.

Revolutionaries advocate an independent organization of WEP workers based on a fighting movement. Membership in all appropriate unions on an equal basis is a necessary demand, but the independent organization must also be built as a weapon to fight the labor bureaucracy in order to realize this demand and any others.

If WEP workers buy into the reformist strategy of maneuvering within the bureaucracy for a few crumbs, instead of leading an open political fight against the rotten bureaucracy as a whole, they are guaranteed to end up on the bottom of the barrel. A WEP workers' movement could lead an open fight — where every labor bureaucrat is challenged to put up or shut up, and all union workers are directly appealed to on the basis of the need for class unity.

Such a movement can start with demonstrations and marches, but it will have to develop a plan for strike actions and occupations as the struggle develops. For a number of



years, the LRP has been active in propagandizing for a general strike against the capitalist attacks, as the best way to unify the class and fight for classwide demands. At the moment, especially with the demoralizing defeat of the transit contract, it is not possible to agitate in New York for a general strike. However, revolutionary minded workers in the WEP movement must begin discussing the general strike with their fellow workers, because such an action will inevitably be on the agenda as the movement gains strength. It is also necessary to start talking about the classwide demands that such a movement should fight for. The demand of *Jobs for All* will be absolutely critical, as a way both to unify the class and to point the way to revolutionary answers.

In their immediate situation, workfare workers have raised the initial demand that all jobs be paid at union wages. The idea behind this is that workfare workers must expose the bosses' plan to use cheap substitutes for union labor by saying, "We are ready to work, but at the same rate as those currently working at these jobs. We demand that all jobs be paid at union wages." The demand also challenges the union bureaucracy to fight for union jobs for workfare workers.

Important though this tactic is, however, by itself it does not solve the problem. As long as capitalism exists, workers will be fighting each other over jobs, and Blacks and Latinos will be the biggest losers. To end this situation, and in fact provide the full employment we all really need, revolutionary minded workers must begin to popularize "Jobs for All."

#### REVOLUTIONARY ALTERNATIVE

We anticipate future struggles where masses of workers will rally for such transitional demands. Revolutionaries will build and participate in such struggles, using the opportunity to explain the need for socialist revolution. Struggles under capitalism can only win partial and temporary gains. A fight

for Jobs for All will prove, under the guidance of revolutionaries, that capitalism has to be ended and a workers' state created to fulfill such basic needs.

The struggle against slave-labor workfare has the potential to open up the class struggle in New York and the country. Angry, militant WEP workers fighting for real jobs and basic working-class rights can give a shot in the arm to the bureaucratically stifled union workers. While the unions, as the only mass organizations of the working class, continue to hold the critical power for stopping the capitalist attacks, a powerful jolt from outside is necessary to shake them up and help bring down the reactionary bureaucratic apparatus that holds down any struggles.

For this to occur, revolutionary minded workers must join together in unions, in the WEP workers' movement and all other arenas — not just to oppose workfare but to point all the way to the real solution. The LRP has been fighting the labor bureaucrats and politicians on the vital issue of workfare in every way we can. (See the LRP report on p.2.)

Workfare by its nature raises fundamental questions about capitalism that only socialists can answer. Capitalism, allegedly triumphant around the world, is proving that it cannot guarantee the right to a decent job or a decent standard of living. It cannot provide the basic necessities of life to all workers. It cannot treat workers with respect and dignity.

A fighting workers' movement can begin to defend us against the immediate attacks, but we need a revolutionary party and a revolutionary workers' movement to get rid of the real problem — capitalism and the parasitic bourgeois ruling class. Slave labor is only a glimpse of the future that awaits us if capitalism is allowed to survive. The revolutionary answer to workfare is to fight for a socialist revolution, to create a workers' state that will do what capitalism is incapable of: providing a humane life for all. ●

## ***Transit Workers Railroaded with Slave-Labor Contract***

The slave-labor transit contract is a crude union-busting effort by the New York City Transit Authority (TA) to replace union jobs with workfare. It eliminates 500 union jobs by forcing welfare recipients to do subway cleaning work for their welfare checks. Thus it attacks union members and the poorest layers of the working class simultaneously.

The contract allows TA management to use thousands of WEP workers to "perform cleaning and related functions." Further, WEP workers are not to work alongside union members but rather are to be kept segregated — in order to avoid "embarrassment" to union and management. Despite claims that a few WEPs will get real jobs — permanent, full-time union positions — the vast majority will be kept out of the union, with the agreement of the TWU leadership.

This openly anti-union and racist agreement exposes the bankruptcy of capitalism. After a period of downsizing through layoffs and attrition, accompanied by propaganda about how the system could run just as well with a less bloated work force, the TA now admits it needs thousands of laborers to keep the trains clean. Under the profit system, thousands of essential jobs go unfilled because the capitalists cannot afford to pay living wages. A system that can only maintain its vital infrastructure by forcing the poorest, most insecure members of the working class to work for starvation wages doesn't deserve to exist.

Why did the powerful TWU allow it to pass? Essentially

because President Willie James and the TA bosses were able to convince enough workers that unless they accepted this deal, the union would be hit with as many as 2,000 layoffs. For several months before the vote, the TA used this threat to intimidate workers into accepting givebacks. In fact, the contract was re-opened more than a year before it expired.

Despite the threats and intimidation from management and their own union leaders, transit workers still nearly voted the contract down. Passed by only 773 votes (8183 to 7410), the margin of victory was the narrowest ever; subway workers actually voted it down. However, the votes from bus drivers, the traditional base of the union leadership, insured the contract's passage.

#### WEAK LEADERSHIP AND OPPOSITION

The close vote exposed the weakness of James' leadership. James negotiated the deal behind the backs of workers. His previous claim that he would never reopen the contract proved to be an outright lie. Particularly pathetic was the effort by James, who is Black and a one-time welfare recipient, to claim the contract was a humanitarian attempt to help workers on welfare. When James saw this wouldn't sell, he pushed the real message — vote yes or face layoffs.

Unfortunately, James' threats worked in the end, thanks to a big assist from New Directions (ND), the main opposition in the union. Typically reformist operations like ND

adapt to the bureaucratic character of the unions and become conveyor belts into the bureaucracy. ND already holds nine executive board positions and anticipates capturing leadership of the local in the next elections.

New Directions is a reformist caucus influenced by Solidarity, an opportunist left group that claims to stand for socialism. In reality, no one could expect Solidarity to fight for a revolutionary program or party in their transit work or anywhere. They work uncritically in ND, an outfit that has lost any right to call itself militant.

For years ND has proclaimed itself a rank and file opposition that stands for mass mobilizations to defend transit workers. However, the more votes it acquires, the less it emphasizes mass struggle. Thus, while it leafleted against the contract, it made no effort to organize mobilizations against it. Worse, in response to the layoff threat, Tim Schermerhorn, ND's perennial candidate for union president, told reporters that ND's line on the contract "might cost some people their jobs." The idea of accepting layoffs played right into the hands of James, who was running around trying to scare workers into a Yes vote. Schermerhorn's comment reflected ND's attempt to separate the contract vote from the need for a mass struggle against layoffs. Workers demoralized by the failure of both James and ND to fight the threat of layoffs were more easily convinced to agree to the contract.

#### NEW DIRECTIONS' OLD METHODS

ND organized no rally against the contract, just as it failed to build a mass struggle against layoffs. Apparently ND hopes to avoid any major confrontations with management until after the next elections. This approach, openly stated in meetings of some divisions they lead (Train Operators and Conductors), is to wait for local elections next fall: now, when they have only a minority of local leadership positions, they say "We can't do much, but when we win a majority, we will see some real change!" A classical bureaucratic outlook — don't fight, vote! Posts before struggles! Given this strategy, Schermerhorn was only being honest in stating that following ND's lead could result in layoffs.

A different approach was possible. An LRP supporter raised a motion in a Track Division meeting for a rally against the proposed contract that would seek a turnout from WEP workers, other unions and minority groups. The rally would oppose all slave labor schemes and call for all jobs having full union wages, benefits and protection. The motion passed almost unanimously. As a motivating leaflet explained,

**A demonstration by itself can be only a beginning: it can mobilize and build support for further actions. We'll have to strike against layoffs and union-busting. Rallies, mass**

**meetings, etc., can prepare us and help build our confidence. The best situation for this will be right upon rejecting this contract: the ranks will have momentum and increased confidence to build on.**

Getting motions passed in all divisions was not possible, given the way the local is organized and the domination of James' supporters in certain divisions. But wherever ND had significant representation, including elected posts, raising such a demand made sense. If even a few divisions had initiated a rally opposing the contract, they would have had the authority to call on TWU members, WEP workers and others to participate. (During the 1991-92 contract round, New Directions had held a couple of rallies drawing 2000 people each — before they collapsed rather than organize a strike.)

When asked, the New Directions leadership of the Car Equipment Department refused to take up the motion for a rally, showing its business-as-usual attitude. As well, the Track Division leadership, which is independent although usually allied with ND, never acted to organize the rally its division had voted for.

#### REVOLUTIONARY ANSWER NEEDED

New Directions' weak opposition in this contract fight was predictable, and it will continue even if ND wins the union leadership. It is not that ND wants to accept layoffs or slave wages; but they know as well as we do that a real struggle, once launched, could not be resolved by even a heavy show of union militancy by the TWU. The fact that the transit contract was part of a much broader anti-worker attack by the capitalist class means that a class-wide fight is the only practical alternative to capitulation.

Indeed, the only real answer is revolutionary. That is why, in contrast to New Directions, the method of the LRP and its supporters was to fight for mass action to link the contract struggle to a fight for jobs and against layoffs. As we said in our Transit Bulletin during the contract campaign:

**The League for the Revolutionary Party believes that class-wide mass action is key to building a defense against the capitalist attacks. We see the struggle to defeat this contract as a crucial battleground for all workers. As revolutionary socialists, we in the LRP see that the only way for the working class to put an end to the increasingly vicious attacks on our working and living conditions is to overthrow the capitalist system that breeds them and build a new society of equality and abundance. There is no fundamental solution to poverty, joblessness, homelessness, racism, sexism and all the other ills of this society short of smashing the capitalist state and replacing it with a workers' state on the road to socialism.●**

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# China's Capitalist Revolutions

by Dave Franklin

China, the world's most populous country, is touted by bourgeois propagandists as the second largest and fastest growing economy — proof of the benefits of privatization and a source of enormous potential profits. Alternatively, some on the left uphold China as a bastion of socialism, or at least a socially progressive workers' state, in the wake of the fall of "communism" in the USSR and East Europe.

But China is neither of these things. It is a crisis-ridden society plagued by both the particular contradictions of Stalinist statified capitalism and its rulers' foredoomed effort to win a place in world imperialism by selling super-exploited labor power on the domestic and international markets.

The rapidly expanding and increasingly class-conscious Chinese proletariat has other ideas. Workers drew the rulers' particular wrath during the Tienanmen movement of 1989, and labor struggles have accompanied the enormous infusion of foreign capital in recent years. China exemplifies Marx's axiom that capitalism creates its own gravedigger. It is critical for the Chinese working class to adopt a revolutionary strategy and construct an internationalist proletarian vanguard — in time for the inevitable showdown with imperialism and indigenous capitalism. Given China's size and importance, the fate of the world proletarian struggle could lie with its working class.

## CHINA AND WORLD CAPITALISM

The Chinese class struggle can only be understood by examining China's relationship to world capitalism. The post-World War II prosperity bubble that offered partial camouflage to the reality of capitalist decay ended a quarter of a century ago. Capitalism has been fighting off a debilitating worldwide crisis since; its need to deepen its exploitation of the working class has grown accordingly. To this end it increasingly cast an eye towards productive investments in imperialized regions of the world.

This is nothing new, but it is a shift in emphasis from the previous period. Then, imperialism's "third-world" exploitation stressed plundering raw materials and marketing finished goods, an arrangement that perpetuated desperate conditions. Capital now is compelled to tap that backwardness as a source of super-cheap exploitable labor, using the threat of capital flight ("globalization") as a hammer against the better paid workers in the metropolitan nations. And it is more able to: with technical innovations (in particular, computerization and telecommunications) controlled by imperialism, capital movement is easier. The result has been a massive shift of industrialization and trade towards selected portions of the "third world."

The focus of this activity has been East Asia, largely because of relatively stable but highly repressive regimes capable of policing the grinding exploitation. While large portions of the enormous surplus value pumped out of the workers landed in the hands of imperialist powers, several nations in the region emerged as models of capitalist success. Known as the "four tigers," Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong and Singapore graduated from backward, domestic-based economies into export-minded, labor-intensive ones, and even to a significant degree into more sophisticated niches of world capital (e.g. high technology industry and

banking). In the process they have obtained some of the privileges previously reserved for charter members of the imperialist club — major league conglomerates, higher income levels, technical sophistication.



Stalin, Lenin, Sun Yatsen and Chiang Kaishek on China-USSR friendship banner, 1946. In reality, Soviet and Chinese Stalinists served capitalism, betrayed Leninism and socialist revolution.

At the same time, these countries (particularly South Korea) have seen the growth of concentrated, militant working classes whose rising wage demands cut into profits and whose strength implicitly threatens capitalist rule. So increasingly other countries in the area have become sites for capital infusion — not only from imperialist powers like Japan and the U.S., but from the "tigers" themselves. These include Thailand and Indonesia — and most prominently, China. Reforms initiated in the past two decades by Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping opened up the country to imperialist investment and exploitation.

## THE VICTIM OF CAPITALISM

How could this come to pass? How could "Communist" China, once supposedly a beacon for the world's masses against imperialism, become so central to imperialism's plans for super-profits and stabilization? The answer that China is not Communist in any sense is correct but insufficient. It requires a historical understanding of China's subordination to imperialism and the utter inability of Stalinist leadership based on statified capital to provide a genuine alternative.

Pre-capitalist China had once been among the most

advanced societies on earth. A series of dynasties, periodically replaced under the blows of mass peasant rebellions, ruled through the centralized political bureaucracy. China's dynastic centralism, however, could not achieve the centralized, modern nation-state and economy that capitalism could in its progressive epoch.

The last, Manchu, dynasty was already in decline by the 1800's, the point at which Western capitalist encroachment became substantial. The next century saw the acceleration of this decline under the pressure of British-led opium-peddling and gunboat diplomacy. Whole regions were carved into spheres of imperialist influence, and the Chinese masses were subjected to intense degradation and exploitation. But through this process came the creation of modern classes, above all the proletariat within the pre-capitalist society.

By the beginning of this century, the dynasty was but a hollow shell, requiring little to topple it. The push came from a series of limited revolts culminating in the nationalist revolution of 1911. But the middle-class led forces lacked the energy, cohesion and class base to implement and sustain a bourgeois-democratic program; the result was a decomposition of power into the hands of regional warlords. In the imperialist epoch, capitalism too was unable to unify China.

The masses would soon gather forces for a new rebellion. This was the 1925-27 revolution of workers and peasants, a critical focal point in the international class struggle. It was also a key test of competing strategies in the Third International, the organization constructed after the victory of the workers' revolution in Russia in 1917, to which the Chinese masses looked for aid and advice.

By the mid-1920's, the Stalin-led Comintern was pursuing a policy of subordinating proletarian struggles to an "anti-imperialist" bourgeois-nationalist stage. This meant placing a militant working class and the young Chinese Communist Party (CCP) at the mercy and disposal of the nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) and its leader, Chiang Kaishek. Stalin justified this strategy on the grounds that Chinese society was imperialized, backward and primarily agrarian, so the struggle could not go beyond a bourgeois stage.

The revolutionary leader Leon Trotsky countered by pointing out that China's forms of pre-capitalist economy were wedded to a world capitalist system that was in decay; therefore a stage of bourgeois-democratic development could not be completed by capitalist forces. Trotsky argued that the Chinese proletariat had a strategic role far out of proportion to its numbers: to lead the Chinese masses in a socialist revolution that, in the course of advancing proletarian goals and spurring world revolution, could solve the uncompleted bourgeois-democratic tasks.

Thus Trotsky extended his theory of permanent revolution, originally applied to Russia, to other oppressed nations. Russia, both imperialist and imperialized, had had a more centralized structure under the Tsars than did dynastic China. But real centralization could only come under workers' rule.

### THE TRIUMPH OF MAOIST STALINISM

As Trotsky foresaw, Chiang joined the side of imperialism and reaction, in the process butchering countless workers and peasants. Trotsky's theory was confirmed, but in the negative. And the proletarian defeat not only secured imperialism in Asia but further isolated the embattled workers' state in Russia. The resulting cynicism, as Trotsky anticipated, helped consolidate Stalin's position.

In the wake of the 1925-27 disaster and subsequent

setbacks, the CCP became isolated from the working class and its struggles, and operated as a rural-based organization under middle-class leadership. This state of affairs corresponded with the rise of Mao Zedong as party leader. Mao had shown a flare for capitulating to Chiang in the failed revolution. But he had been in the wing of the party emphasizing rural struggle (in opposition even to the Comintern agents) and had been a leader of the short-lived "peasant soviet" in Jiangxi province. When the party became isolated from the working class and was in desperate retreat from Chiang, Mao acquired the credentials to assume leadership.

The Maoists were strengthened by their role in combating the Japanese invasion of the '30's and '40's. In this period, the weak Chinese bourgeoisie faced the trauma of occupation and then the spectacle of the KMT taking over whole industries from the withdrawing Japanese and turning them into individual fiefdoms for officials. Corruption and inflation mounted. A planned KMT offensive against the Maoists after the defeat of Japan turned into a rout, as whole KMT armies melted away in front of CCP forces. When the CCP rolled to military victory, Chiang and the KMT established a regime on Taiwan (trampling on the native Taiwanese in the process).

The final victory by 1949 was as much a product of the Kuomintang's implosion as the CCP's own efforts. Thus the compromising and wary Maoist forces embarked on a disguised bourgeois democratic revolution without the capacity to complete it, much less to establish socialism.

### WORKERS' MOVEMENT CONTROLLED

The workers' movement had revived when the Japanese retreated at the end of the war. Workers in Shanghai seized factories when the KMT armies approached, and the KMT could not curb the subsequent strike wave. But economic misery weakened the struggle. When Chiang collapsed in the late '40's, the working class played a passive role, a situation that Mao actively pursued. The CCP moved quickly to stabilize capitalism, above all by insuring labor discipline. It ordered the workers to cooperate with their bosses in the interest of developing production. And it instructed the KMT's secret police to keep order as it took over the cities.

With the disciplining of the workers, Chinese capitalists were promised that private industry would have a "glorious future." But once the CCP had contained the workers, it began moving in on the private capitalists, aiming for more complete control of the economy and independence from imperialism. It began with a series of campaigns (the "three antis" and "five-antis"), which because of their appeal to the masses, had to be posed not in explosive class terms but as fights against corruption, tax evasion and the like. By the mid-50's, the frightened bourgeoisie had sold its enterprises to the state at bargain prices; the capitalists were compensated and allowed to stay on as managers until party officials could grasp the reins.

Mao addressed a top businessmen's group in 1956:

**We have reformed all capitalist industrialists and businessmen eliminating them as a class and taking them all into our fold as individuals. ... We cannot say the bourgeoisie is useless to us; it is useful, very useful. The workers do not understand this because in the past they have had conflicts with the capitalists in the factory.** (Quoted by Nigel Harris in *The Mandate of Heaven*, p.43.)

Mao moved more radically against private capital only when his overtures to the U.S. during and after the world war



were turned down; the Americans were aligned totally with Chiang. It was the Korean war, when the U.S. directly threatened China, that compelled the Maoists to undertake the intensified statification of the 1950's.

Despite the ruling party's Marxist pretensions, it established nothing resembling proletarian rule. What was set up by the mid-1950's was a statified capitalist economy run by and for a reorganized ruling class. Controversial though such an analysis appeared at the time of the CCP's defeat of imperialism's lackeys, and especially in the prime of Maoist influence on the Western left in the 1960's, it has been proved correct by more recent history's illumination of the capitalist nature of China's rulers.

Unable to crush the masses or to develop as rapidly as necessary, given the Cold War and the Russian threat, the CCP had to institute a series of measures embodying important democratic and material gains. These included distribution of the land to peasants and the destruction of landlord power in the countryside; elevating the status of women; kicking out imperialist firms and providing a measure of unity to a badly fragmented country; raising health and educational standards; beginning a system of job guarantees for urban workers. In the same period, the regime tamed inflation and corruption and increased industrial production, using the Soviet model of development. All this won it a large measure of popular support and willingness to sacrifice.

But there was no systematic securing of the demands of the democratic revolution. From basic issues of women's equality and national consolidation to elementary political liberties, rights and conditions were not only denied but actively combatted by the Maoist state. The cruel practice of foot-binding was abolished, prostitution was curbed, freedom of divorce was granted and women gained entry into the modern work force and limited access to political power. But women's participation in industry varied according to the need and dictates of the Stalinist leadership. Their roles in political leadership was marginal. And employed or not, they bore the brunt of domestic labor.

Working-class rights especially were trampled under the "workers' state." Revolutionists were persecuted, independent workers organizations like soviets and factory committees were not allowed, and the "trade unions" have been mere appendages of the bureaucracy. The system of job guarantees and benefits of state workers — the "iron rice bowl" — was an important concession. But like all concessions under bourgeois rule, it serves as an instrument of social control. It is tied with and dispensed through the *danwei*, or basic work unit. Through the *danwei* the individual workers receive not only their pay and benefits but have them regulated and contained — from recreation to marriage and having children. And (with modifications in recent years) workers are tied to a unit for life. The aim was to divide workers, to atomize and isolate work units from each other.

### THE FAILURE OF MAOIST STALINISM

Despite early successes, the dominant sections of the CCP felt compelled by 1957 to initiate a sharp break from reliance on Soviet aid and much of the Soviet organizational model. Mao denounced the USSR as imperialist, claiming with ample evidence that the Soviet Union under the cover of socialist brotherhood was pursuing its own, hostile

interests: the Soviets had sacked much of the industry in Manchuria in the wake of Japan's defeat, expected its aid to China to be repaid, and assumed Beijing's subservience. For most of the next two decades, Chinese economy and society would be dominated by a variant of Stalinism.

Maoist China isolated itself as much as possible from international capitalism. It emphasized management of economic affairs by party officials chosen for their political adherence to "Mao Zedong thought" rather than technical expertise. In place of material incentives for increased production there were "moral" incentives — ideological exhortations, often through orchestrated mass campaigns. This was closely linked to a voluntarist concept that material



*Cotton workers reading from Mao during Cultural Revolution. In reality, revolution was halted to prevent workers from raising their demands.*

and technical shortcomings could be overcome through ideologically-driven manual efforts. It was also accompanied by a systematic effort to present the society as egalitarian. Recruitment to the party emphasized peasant and worker backgrounds; displays of rank and privilege were discouraged, and there was a certain leveling of wages.

Behind this facade was a different reality. The upper layers of the bureaucracy enjoyed vast if unpublicized amounts of wealth and privilege. Mass recruitment to the party was not designed to prepare the proletariat to rule but to create a loyal and privileged layer. The formal de-emphasis of rank did not eliminate the reality of a stratified and highly regimented society.

The Maoist social model had historical and material roots. A huge but backward and fragmented country, China faced not only a hostile Western imperialist world but by the 1960's a militarily powerful Soviet enemy on its borders. There were thus intense external and internal pressure on Chinese statified capital to expand and preserve itself through an isolated and massive labor-intensive effort as a substitute for modern economic innovation. Thus the CCP that came to power was intensely nationalist and self-reliant.

But the economic successes necessary to underpin any chance of independence were absent: the worst economic times in fact occurred when specifically Maoist policies were most dominant. The Great Leap Forward of the late '50's, characterized by such projects as drafting peasants for labor in "backyard furnaces" which produced virtually worthless steel, led to the greatest famine on earth. The "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution," using student "Red Guards" initiated by Mao in the mid-'60's as a factional

weapon, at its height virtually paralyzed the economy. It so stirred up workers that Mao was forced to turn to the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to rein it in.

By the time of Mao's death in 1976, China was falling further behind not only imperialist Japan but the emerging East Asian "tigers". Government studies carried out over the next two years would reveal that the average peasant was no better off than a quarter of a century before, and rural mass unemployment was a thinly disguised fact. Rural and urban discontent was growing, punctuated by events like the political demonstration at Premier Zhou Enlai's funeral and the creation of the "Democracy Wall" in Beijing. Mao's own designated successor, Hua Guofeng, jailed the most prominent Maoists as the "Gang of Four" and rehabilitated Deng Xiaoping, a party veteran who had long been lightning rod for Maoist hostility. Hua, lacking any real base and with no sense of direction, was himself muscled aside by Deng by the end of the decade. In the process, the reform era extending to today was ushered in.

As for Mao's vaunted anti-imperialism, in the absence of a genuine internationalist proletarian strategy, accommodation was inevitable. The strident anti-imperialist militancy of the '50's and '60's was primarily a reflection of the bureaucracy's self-interest under conditions of isolation; it was not a simple matter of choice but one largely imposed in different ways by the Western and Soviet blocs. Like Maoist egalitarianism, this militancy included window dressing (e.g., aid projects to Africa) that covered for a pro-imperialist policy. For even at the height of this period, China helped prop up some of the most reactionary regimes in the world, like Pakistan's military and the Shah of Iran.

When Nixon in the early 1970's signalled the U.S.'s willingness to use China to counter the Soviets, Mao obliged. The strident tone against the U.S. was modified and a strategic alliance was conceived. Deng's later opening to the West and China's self-conscious pursuit of big-power status was no counterposition to Maoism but its logical extension.

## DENG'S REFORMS

In planning a new direction, Deng was aware of the Asian capitalist success stories and their basis, as well of the fermenting mass discontent in his own country. For two interrelated tasks — expanding the capital base and buying off urban discontent — he sought to apply basic elements of the same strategy in China. For this aim he held a trump card: the enormous mass of exploitable labor — not so much in the existing urban work force as in the vast population of hungry and underemployed rural dwellers. It was necessary to utilize foreign capital and alter the internal operation of Chinese capital so as to maximize this potential.

Political conditions and the economic climate of the time reinforced this effort. China had the leverage to import needed capital and technology while protecting much of its home industry from foreign competition; there also were ready foreign outlets like the U.S. for cheap exports. The Cold War gave China maneuvering room between the Soviet and American rivals, and it faced no imminent conflicts with its sources of foreign capital. (China did fight a brief but bloody war with Vietnam in 1979, but that had no serious effect on its development plans.) The final ingredient, a stable but highly repressive state apparatus, was supplied by the Stalinist regime.

Begun under the slogan of the "Four Modernizations" (agriculture, industry, science and technology, defense)

Deng's program called for openings to foreign investment and a turn towards a mixed economy. Though Deng has been reviled as a "capitalist roader" by Maoists, his aim was not to dismantle the stratified system but to prop it up; his allies included elements in the bureaucracy who wanted a return to the Stalinist model. None of them at the time had an idea how far the reforms would go towards traditional capitalism.

Some benefits were needed for quelling mass discontent and jump-starting the reforms. Urban workers got their first wage increase in many years. Peasants were allowed a long-term lease of their land, and the government raised procurement prices for their products. The result was an impressive growth in agricultural output for several years.

In industry, the lure to foreign investment was key. In the early '80's such investments were few and highly restricted, but they grew as restrictions were lifted. The sources were largely ethnic Chinese based in Hong Kong and Taiwan. These superexploitative undertakings centered in Special Economic Zones (SEZ's) set up by the government in coastal areas and granted hugely favorable wage and tax policies; they produced labor-intensive exports like toys and clothing.

## OPENINGS FOR IMPERIALISM

Major imperialist powers like the U.S. and Japan have been pouring capital in, especially in heavy industrial ventures like aircraft. By the '90's foreign capital was arriving at a feverish pace: in 1993, China was the largest receiver of foreign investment in the world, garnering over \$20 billion. International capital was attracted by cheap land, tax breaks and above all cheap labor.

The other major prop was the growth of the *xiangzhen qiye*, or town and village enterprises (TVE's). Built primarily in rural areas, the TVE's are a complex mix of private and local government firms geared towards the open market. Contributing nearly a third of the national product by 1990, they have been favored by the regime for several reasons. They soak up rural unemployment; they exploit workers without generally having to guarantee jobs and benefits as in the state industries; and isolated rural settings are preferable to large cities where workers can more easily organize.

Fueled by these reforms, all sorts of unabashedly capitalist projects have sprung up, often in partnership with (if not initiated by) party officials at all levels, often secretly and disregarding central directives. Even the army is in on the act, setting up everything from television factories to brothels. The level of interpenetration between state and private capital is far greater than formal structures would suggest.

The result of all this has been a rapidly growing economy, expanding at an average rate of 10 percent since 1978 and 12 percent in the '90's. Emboldened by its gains and increasingly turned to the outside world, China's ruling class is preparing itself to be the regional geopolitical power. The military budget has expanded faster than economic growth, and political-military forays are being launched. These include sending warships to the Spratley Islands, a potentially oil-rich outcropping in the South China Sea astride major shipping lanes; military maneuvers backing reasserted claims to Taiwan; and claiming oil fields controlled by Indonesia.

Important concessions have been thrown to the masses along the way. Over 100 million peasants have been lifted out of absolute poverty, and living conditions rose for many others. For this of course the masses can only really thank themselves for the sweat and toil that created the great mass of surplus value. The greatest benefits went to the capitalist



class: the entrepreneurs and enterprising party officials (often the same). In a time when "paramount leader" Deng was proclaiming that "to get rich is glorious," the newly-acquired wealth and status was now flaunted — with a vengeance.

### THE GROWING CHINESE CRISIS

Its achievements notwithstanding, Chinese capitalism has deep problems. The bloom went off the agricultural sector years ago, after the initial reforms and resulting productivity gains. In fact, since 1985 the grain produced per person has declined every year. Chinese agriculture has never genuinely broken from its backward state. And the chaotic industrialization of the countryside led to the spoilation of large areas.

There is an industrial crisis as well, most pronounced in the state industries. One reason, a favorite target for Western economists, is the "iron rice bowl" which allegedly underutilizes and over-compensates state-industry workers (relative to private and local industries). But that is not the only reason. Local bosses' self-interest, the emphasis on filling quotas rather than quality production (leading to shoddy, useless products), distorted accounting techniques — these have been inherent problems in Chinese state industry and other national Stalinist economies. About one-half of state firms are losing money. The government has recently pumped more money into the state industries, but with a less than proportional increase in output. By now, state industry produces only 43 percent of the national output but commands over 70 percent of its capital resources. As in other capitalist countries the state assumes some unprofitable but necessary tasks private capital won't undertake, so the figure is an exaggeration — but the downward trend is clear.

Even as industry flourishes in other sectors, the whole is less than the sum of its parts. Normally economic growth would help national cohesion, but in China it has contributed to fragmentation. Foreign investment has widened the gap between the interior and the coastal provinces, pulling the

latter in different directions according to which foreign capitalists predominate: Guangdong province (Canton) leans toward Hong Kong; Fujian to Taiwan across the strait; Shandong to South Korea across the Yellow Sea; the Laodong/Shenyang corridor to Japan and South Korea.

Meanwhile, as much economic authority has passed to regional and local authorities, they have used their power to build competing bases. Local protectionism has risen to extraordinary levels. Many cities ban large factories from obtaining goods from non-local manufactures; Shandong province's insistence on producing textiles from the cotton grown there led Shanghai textile mills to import cotton from abroad! Critical construction projects, like the Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze River (a study in mass social dislocation, gross overspending and ecological disaster), have had even technical specifications like the dam's height become the basis for negotiations between local governments reflecting relative power relations. Thus Deng's reforms, like Chiang's and Mao's, are proving unable to unify China. Indeed, under imperialist pressure, they are deepening China's internal divisions.

With the reforms has also come the growth of awesome levels of corruption, not seen since the days of Chiang Kai-shek. It has contributed incalculably to economic inefficiency and underlying instability of the regime. The government has moved to curb the worse excesses, including convicting and executing leading officials. But everybody knows their crimes are just the tip of the iceberg.

The glitter of China's foreign investment and trade is misleading. China has a rising foreign debt burden, already over a \$100 billion. The value of annual exports (which dropped 8 percent the first half of 1996) barely exceeds that amount now.

### IMPERIALISTS STALK CHINA

The window of favorable trade relations is closing for China, in part a victim of success. The U.S. in particular has been unhappy with China's trade, having sustained an almost \$40 billion deficit with China the past year alone, on a level with the contentious deficit with Japan. It gripes about copyright piracy, and though U.S. capital is happy to exploit Chinese workers, it frets that the high technology transfers involved in operations like the joint venture between Ford and Jianglin Motor Co. to build mini-vans will make China too competitive. One senior Clinton official states China "is a far more formidable economic concern for us than Japan." This is hardly true, but the U.S. can assert its imperialist ambitions more easily over China.

The U.S. has ratcheted up its strong-arm tactics: it continues to block China's entry into the World Trade Organization, demands stronger copyright enforcement and continually threatens trade sanctions. "We don't want them to be at the party without meeting their real global responsibilities," said Dana G. Mead, chairman of the National Association of Manufacturers. (*Business Week*, Oct. 16, 1995.) The U.S. asserts imperialist prerogatives against China in ways that it cannot against its real imperialist rival, Japan.

Thus the favorable geopolitical alignment is disappearing, as China's drive for regional power alarms not only its neighbors but every imperialist with regional designs. The Spratley Islands are a flashpoint, with six Asian nations claiming them (and the U.S. Navy claiming the Pacific Ocean). Taiwan is another. The Diaoyu Islands are disputed by China and Japan. East Asia is awash in old nationalist

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scores to settle, new ones emerging and enormous economic and human resources up for grabs. The U.S. has begun pursuing just what the Chinese leaders accuse it of, a policy of containment. At the moment, this is at a low level, e.g., toying with the notion of using Vietnam as a counterweight, and limiting its disputes with Japan.

U.S. imperialism is caught between contradictory tendencies. On the one hand, it is compelled by the class struggle and international competition to exploit Chinese labor to the maximum. On the other hand, the prospect of a new regional power (rising from a land and people who had their noses rubbed in the dirt for so long) is threatening — particularly in a region staked out by the U.S. for geopolitical dominance for most of the century.

The contradiction expresses itself in the differing agendas of corporations and the government. Many firms continue to pour capital into China and want a minimum of political friction; others fear Chinese competition, compelling the government to make waves. As the president of the U.S.-China Business Council, Robert Kapp, complains: "What we see is a colossal discordance between the rhythms of global business and American politics." (*Business Week*, Feb. 12, 1996.) Still, there has been near-unanimous agreement on some tactical questions (e.g. ending copyright piracy); after all, increasing the power and profits of imperialism is in the hearts and minds of all involved.

Overlapping this dilemma is an even more basic one: how to keep the aspirations of the Chinese rulers in check while enabling them to maintain their hold over the masses. Imperialism is deeply worried that China's ruling institutions cannot contain a mass explosion. A debate over the army illustrates the balancing act involved in limiting if not clashing with China's ruling institutions while propping them up:

**Some members of Congress now advocate imposing penalties on China's military industries to punish China for its record on human rights, an idea that some China specialists warn would be counterproductive. Specialists argue that because the military is expected to be the key institution for stability in China after the death of Deng Xiaoping, the senior leader, punishing military industries is fraught with problems of definition and practicality.** (*New York Times*, May 24, 1994.)

What a dilemma for the poor U.S.! As the world's chief imperialist, it seeks a strong national center in China to stabilize exploitation, while individual capitals seek private spheres of interest and a more accommodating regime.

Things should get nastier. What may be emerging is a struggle over China between the U.S. and Japan. Japan has significant productive investments in China, which, like the other East Asian countries, is a necessary source of super-exploited labor and raw materials. And while China's power is growing, it is fragile, based in large part on foreign-controlled capital and with national cohesion so questionable that Pentagon planners wonder aloud whether China will break up after Deng's death. The very size that makes China appear formidable in its expansionist aims is an enormous weakness in the context of continuing backwardness and division. Imperialism will make China pay for its ambition.

## ATTACK ON THE MASSES

Greedy from past ventures, eager to find new forms of exploitation yet facing rising constraints on its prosperity, the Chinese ruling class has launched an offensive against the masses. This has been longer and more pronounced in the

countryside. The lowering of procurement prices in 1984 marked the end of concessions to the peasantry, and rural living standards are now declining. By the '90's, the state was even resorting to giving the peasants promises of future payment instead of cash. But the peasants were paying more for machinery and fertilizer. The chronic underemployment in the countryside has been aggravated, and despite the growth of rural industry, an estimated 100 million peasants have been "freed" from the land to roam the cities looking for whatever work or handouts they can find. Particularly hateful is an array of new taxes imposed on the rural masses by local Stalinist officials, whose aims and methods rival those of the former landlords.

An intensified drive to superexploit the workers has also been under way. It is no accident that the greatest growth rates have been in the SEZ industries: this is where working conditions are the worst. Workers are denied the rights and benefits of jobs in state industries. They are crammed into barracks and face all sorts of hazards. (Their ordeal gained prominent attention only when fires at two foreign-owned firms killed 150 workers. Locked doors blocking exits and other violations of safety codes, made possible by employer payoffs to party officials, led to the carnage. One plant was a virtual prison, with workers locked inside the compound, not having been paid for weeks). Not accidentally, the TVE's are tending more towards becoming outright private ventures, where wages and benefits are lowest.

Meanwhile, the "iron rice bowl" is being emptied. Workers entering the urban work force since 1984 are no longer guaranteed a job. Layoffs (often under the guise of "vacations") have occurred in some state industries, and in many others workers simply aren't paid. The government is utilizing the migrant peasants in a way capitalism has always used the floating reserve army of unemployed: as labor for the most rotten jobs under short-term, low-benefit contracts, and as competition against better-situated workers. (Some reports say that over 100 million ex-peasants have migrated to the cities in search of work.)

Even as they step up the attacks, the bureaucrats shed even further the pretense of representing the masses. Party recruitment is more slanted towards the intelligentsia. The passing of power and privilege from party leaders to their children (Deng himself has two daughters high in the bureaucracy and a real estate tycoon for a son) has reached so far that the top leaders' offspring are known derisively as the "princes' party." Party officials ever more openly use their position to share in the booty. In February of this year, three People's University researchers published a paper concluding that income inequality in China in 1994 was higher even than in the U.S. (Cited in *October Review*, Sept. 30, 1996.)

## THE MASSES FIGHT BACK

A ruling class that exposes its class character by increasing, open corruption and attacks the masses is sure to provoke social explosions. Indeed, the temperature of the class struggle has risen sharply in recent years.

The brutally suppressed mass demonstrations in Tiananmen Square in 1989 revealed sharply that the capitalist bonanza would evoke a mass response. The Western press chose to emphasize the student content of the demonstrations and the illusions in bourgeois democracy of many. But the most promising development, the most threatening to the rulers, was the growing participation of workers. Fed up with inflation and corruption, workers' protests and strikes had



been percolating prior to Tiananmen; the protests in the square became a lightning rod for their grievances. Workers poured into the movement and became its most potent defenders. It is no accident that the most brutal attacks by the regime were against workers' positions; the subsequent repression came down far worse on working-class militants. (See our coverage in PR 34.)

### LOCAL STRUGGLES EMERGE

While the bureaucrats were successful in suppressing an uprising, they could not prevent the emergence of struggles on the local level and at the point of production. A confidential government report listed over 6000 illegal strikes and 200 riots in 1993 alone; and the rate had risen in the first part of 1994. (We have not seen more recent figures.)

Working-class resistance has centered in the SEZ's and against cutbacks in state industry. Shenzhen is the largest SEZ, adjacent to Hong Kong; royal Hong Kong dollar notes are legal tender, and labor costs average 15 percent of Hong Kong rates. In 1993 and 1994 there were over 1100 cases of "collective labor disputes" (i.e., strikes); there are reports of underground unions proliferating. Workers in state industries are resisting, often fiercely, the cutbacks in benefits and security. In March 1994, tens of thousands marched in Manchuria protesting pay cuts. And a more recent wave of layoffs in Shenyang prompted the following report:

"Some workers tried to set a statue of Mao Zedong on fire with gasoline," said Xu Ping, 30, an industrial engineer. "That's how angry they were. People with families are seeing their livelihoods disappear and they are asking, 'What kind of workers' state is this?'" (*New York Times*, June 18, 1995.)

Such protests are the major reason behind recent party decisions to slow its privatization drive and even increase funding for state ventures.

Peasants have also been rising up. While they were considered staunch backers of the reforms in the early days, and a support of the regime in the wake of Tiananmen, this is evaporating. Some resistance is passive, like refusing to cultivate land, or abandoning it. Some is much more active: unrest was reported in 20 of China's 29 provinces in 1993, including 3000 violent attacks on tax collectors. Twice in Sichuan province that year, thousands of peasants attacked officials, trashed their fancy homes and fought battles with police. These are ominous developments for the ruling class, which knows well the long history of Chinese peasant revolts.

The fact of mass revolts is not surprising; it might be asked why they haven't been even deeper. One reason is state repression, but a more fundamental factor has been the continued economic boom in sectors developed during the reform era. This has led to feelings of mobility and faith in continued expansion — and for many workers, material gains. And while incredible levels of superexploitation remain, wages have risen in the SEZ's to the extent that some imperialist firms are shopping around in even lower wage areas like Vietnam. Now Beijing hopes to counter some regional disparities by advertising the lower-wage interior provinces!

For many workers, even superexploitation can be a step up from the gnawing poverty of rural life. Consider the conversation among workers and the journalist Nicholas Kristof:

I returned to Zhou and again tried to chat up her daughter. "So how much do you make a month?" I asked.

"Six hundred yuan each," replied her mother. At that time, 600 yuan was worth a bit more than \$100 — more

than a university professor's salary and a large sum in their home village. Still, it was a tiny amount compared with the huge profits the factory owner was earning from the sweat of her brow.

"It's kind of a tough life here, I guess," I suggested.

"Oh, it's better than the village," the mother gushed. "We earn lots of money here, and the life is pretty good."

"What about your husband?" I asked. "Is he happy about you leaving him and coming to work here?"

Zhou smiled patronizingly at me. It was clear she thought I had asked a stupid question. "How could my husband object?" she asked. "Look at how much money I'm making!" (*China Wakes*, pp. 325-6.)

This example shows the regime's predicament. It was critical to improve mass living conditions. The CCP is now finding this more difficult to achieve, even as it has increasingly relied on buying off the masses. At the same time, the prevailing wages and benefits can no longer sustain workers at the new levels of modernity and proletarian concentration: the masses are less willing to tolerate crass exploitation and more able to do something about it.

This is true not only of China. We noted the growing strength of workers in Korea. Now countries like Thailand and Indonesia are becoming cauldrons of class struggle, where even limited political unrest has unnerved imperialism and its local hatchetmen. Wherever capital moves, its industries turns into an Achilles heel of capitalism and a source of power and hope for the proletariat.

The decisive element missing in this volatile mixture is an authentic Marxist revolutionary party leadership to organize, cohere and provide political direction to the scattered upsurge. Workers' ambivalence, confusion and cynicism toward Marxism is understandable: it has been the alleged ideology of an oppressor for nearly fifty years. Yet at the same time many look to the Stalinist imitators of Marxism as protection against the harsh realities posed by reform.

In the absence of authentic communist leadership, different elements have led or attempted to lead the resistance. Pro-Western trade union advocates like Clinton's favorite, Han Dongfang, at best have terrible illusions in imperialism and at worst are its paid agents. There are various stripes of Stalinists. And there are many serious militants. As hard as the task is, there is enormous potential to win class-conscious workers to the revolutionary Trotskyist program that opposes all forms of capitalism. Unfortunately, while occasional reports suggest underground efforts toward building far left groups, at the point we have no information about them.

### TAMING THE TIGERS

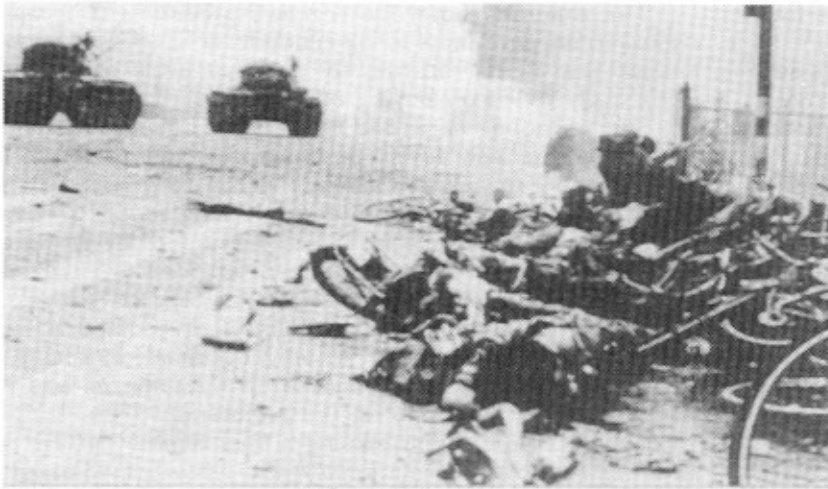
Chinese capital aims to reap the benefits of the "Asian miracle" and reproduce on a vastly larger scale the achievements of the smaller "tigers." But the miracle itself is running out of steam. Export growth has drastically slowed across the region. South Korea, for example, suffered a record \$9.3 billion account deficit in the first half of the year, forcing the resignation of its finance minister. Attempts to move further in high-end industry face stiffened resistance from imperialist powers, particularly Japan, whose recent and prolonged recession spelled an end to the longest and greatest regional success story.

Further down the chain, the problems are more daunting. Thailand saw export growth plunge from 23.4 percent in 1995 to 4.4 percent this year, with an account deficit expected to hit \$15 billion by 1997. Indonesia has \$100 billion in

foreign debt. Bourgeois economists consider the slowdown natural for "maturing" economies. But the masses are not receiving the benefits of maturity and the truly "mature" (imperialist) economies will be themselves in crisis.

So becoming an imperialist power is not the future of China; internal contradictions and the designs of world imperialism prevent this. At best, there will be sectoral modernization lashed to continuing conditions of backwardness. As the world capitalist crisis deepens, China, like all "developing countries," will be forced to submit to imperialism's political domination and economic exploitation, as long as capital rules.

China's future more resembles that of Mexico. Both



*Tienanmen massacre, 1989. Workers had increasingly participated in student-initiated protests before brutal suppression.*

countries have suffered under the yoke of imperialism and had democratic revolutions in this century that were partially successful in curbing foreign domination and enacting land reforms. But the leaders of both the CCP and Mexican PRI determined over time that cutting a deal with imperialism was the only way to enhance their own wealth and power. The terms of these deals were strikingly similar, in view of the low-wage foreign-owned maquiladoras of Mexico's North and the SEZ's of China's coast. Both ruling classes saw enough success to think they could sit at the imperialist table. As to differences, Mexico's profit balloon already exploded with the recent debt crisis. China's is waiting to happen.

### CHINA'S POLITICAL CRISIS

The Chinese ruling class faces a crisis of leadership. Deng is sick and feeble and could die any day. Party chief Jiang Zemin and Prime Minister Li Ping head a list of aging, mediocre bureaucrats that serve as an interim leadership. Not having Deng's historical base or opportunity, they will at best muddle through temporarily. There is an inherent drive to find more decisive leadership and strategy to address the rising social struggles, gathering economic crisis and international conflict. There are several possibilities:

1) A leader or cabal with a base in the bureaucracy that seeks to preserve that position, whose *raison d'être* is not "socialism" but a volatile brand of ethnic (Han) nationalism. There is strong sympathy in the bureaucracy and especially the military for a nationalist strategy, which — as in Yugoslavia — poses a diversion to class struggle, intensifies exploitation under the banner of "patriotism" and provides political fodder for regional expansion and further suppres-

sion of national and ethnic minorities.

2) A hard-line Maoist faction, also nationalist but with more pseudo-Marxist rhetoric. A return to the failed conditions of the past is not possible, but this tendency can play on a nostalgic and even mystical appreciation of Mao; it could make potent appeals to workers and peasants demanding greater security and to the bureaucrats most tied to state industry. Such a neo-Maoist program would re-emphasize the state sector and "iron rice bowl" — along with a greater regimentation of the masses.

3) A leadership openly committed to a pluralist market economy. This would involve a push by elements in the bureaucracy most tied to reforms and imperialist ventures, the emerging entrepreneurial class and sections of the intelligentsia. Such a move would necessarily involve steep resistance from other sections of the apparatus, as in Russia and East Europe. In fact, the program Deng proposed in 1993, a "socialist market economy" that would overhaul 14,000 of the largest state enterprises, essentially amounted to a mixed economy under the control of the CCP. But Deng's plan was never implemented in the face of mass discontent.

Such a transition might occur under the slogan of "democracy." But while the intelligentsia and entrepreneurs may acquire more elbow room, political democracy for the masses is too much a liability for the needs of capital. As well, centrifugal forces already splintering the ruling class would be further aggravated. Indeed, under imperialist influence, regional satrapies could become increasingly independent of Beijing even while the facade of national unity is maintained.

Events in Russia, where hard-line Stalinists and reactionary nationalists have formed alliances, illustrate how these tendencies can overlap. Most important is that all factions of the bureaucracy share an opposition to proletarian rule and any upsurge of the workers. While they may differ, even violently, over the methods employed, they all aim to suppress the workers' interests. But none can solve the deepening crisis.

### A CONFIRMATION OF REVOLUTIONARY THEORY

The development of Stalinist China has fundamentally confirmed the conception of capitalism put forth by Marx, Lenin and Trotsky. It has also led to and confirmed the path along which our own tendency has developed Marxist theory.

Mao's seizure of power was a bourgeois-democratic revolution of sorts, a defeat for imperialism. But as noted, the reforms were limited; they did not complete all the bourgeois democratic tasks of national unification, independence, modernization and political equality. That they are being reversed shows they were not fundamental to the system. Thus with Deng's reforms, women's relative status to men has actually slipped, prostitution has re-emerged, and kidnapping women and selling them into virtual domestic slavery is widespread.

The steps toward national consolidation did not fundamentally overcome the country's fragmentation. As we have seen, the system itself has operated on and reinforced an intense internal parochialism. Neither could the CCP solve the land question. Despite Mao's professed feeling of kinship with peasants, and concessions to and support from them in the early years, the logic of statified capital in China and impelled Mao into an antagonistic relation to this class. At



the same time, rights for national minorities like the Tibetans have been ruthlessly suppressed. The denial of bourgeois-democratic freedoms of political expression and organization is systemic.

The theory of permanent revolution says that it is the task of the proletariat to complete the tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution in the course of carrying out the proletarian revolution. This is indeed a central objective remaining in China for the future workers' state. Capitalism, which in its progressive epoch could achieve the democratic program, is now the barrier to them.

Events obliged us to introduce a corollary to permanent revolution as formulated by Trotsky in the first half of the century. A central reason the bourgeoisie abandons its own program is its need to lock arms with other reactionary forces in the face of the proletarian threat to property. But Mao's revolution and world events in the period following World War II demonstrated something new. When the proletariat is demoralized, contained and above all decapitated (its leadership destroyed), it can be defeated. With its threat to property removed and when local ruling classes are weak, alternate forces may carry out limited bourgeois reforms, gain the support of the masses and widen conditions for capitalist development.

Mao could pose a "revolutionary dictatorship of several classes" or a "bloc of four classes" under conditions in which none of those classes could effectively wield power; the petty bourgeoisie was inherently incapable of ruling, and the proletariat and bourgeoisie were conjuncturally weak. The real ruler was the CCP, which eventually incorporated the tiny, corrupt and ineffective bourgeoisie into a new embodiment of capital. This shift was palmed off as the "socialist" transformation from "New Democracy."

The direction Chinese society has taken also confirms our theory of Stalinism. Two decades ago, well before Deng's reforms, we noted a central contradiction of Stalinist capitalism: proletarian property forms (i.e. state ownership of industry) under capitalist rule. State property embodies gains conceded to the working class, but it burdens the statified economy with blatant inefficiencies from the point of view of capitalism. The system becomes less and less "efficient" compared to traditional monopoly capitalism: it prevents both competition between workers from driving wages down, and competition between firms from forcing the weakest out of business. Thus, we said, there is an inevitable tendency for statified capitalism to devolve towards market-type forms of operation and ownership, through twists and turns and even reversals. We also noted that the private forms could not eliminate state capital, which remains necessary for mobilizing resources, absorbing the brunt of crises and carrying out less profitable but essential economic tasks. Today the two forms coexist in a dubious equilibrium.

Thus the failure of the Maoist strategy was an inevitable outcome of an attempt to circumvent the realities of capitalism on the basis of capitalism itself. Deng's reforms are a logical response of statified capitalism to its own failures. They are in line with the collapse of Stalinist rule in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

Deng's reforms are also a confirmation of the Marxist notion of the epoch of decay. Despite the appearance of capitalist prosperity, the key to the boom period has not been a systematic development of the productive forces, but the use of one of capitalism's oldest techniques, the sweatshop, and other forms of raw superexploitation.

Moreover, the Asian boom came at the expense of other sectors. Industrial production has fallen in whole sectors of the imperialist world, and living and working conditions of workers have plummeted, as firms from Boeing to small garment shops have "outsourced" or completely moved production to China and similar areas. In other regions, particularly Africa, the drying up of productive investments has contributed to social collapse. The imperialists are not only more able technically to invest in areas like China, but they are obliged to by the conditions of capitalist crisis.

#### **THEORETICAL POVERTY ON THE LEFT**

To many on the left, China still serves as a socialist beacon. In part this is reinforced by the CCP's efforts to shore up the statified sector and by its verbal commitment to socialism. Isolated and imperialist-dogged Stalinist leaders like Castro now look to Beijing for aid and comfort.

Others consider China today to be reactionary because they see Deng as having betrayed Mao and overthrown socialism. But while differences between Mao and Deng are apparent, their regimes do not differ fundamentally: where and when did a class counterrevolution take place? The Maoist answer that this was accomplished by clever maneuvers at the top denigrates the masses' role in political upheaval even as it lauds it. For proletarian Marxists, the answer is that Deng could turn so easily to imperialism and private exploitation because China was never a workers' state.

There were very understandable reasons why Maoism was such a potent attraction to begin with. Against heavy odds and brutal conditions, Mao defeated Chiang and stood up to imperialism. He was a charismatic person of color in a white-dominated world. He led a society with the trappings of egalitarianism and mass participation. Unlike Stalin, he attached importance to theoretical matters, and (definitely unlike Stalin) could write with clarity and interest.

But this did not make his revolution socialist. Maoism represented radicalized middle-class politics. The core of the CCP's leadership came from the middle-class intelligentsia; Mao himself was from rich-peasant stock and was radicalized

## **THE LIFE AND DEATH OF STALINISM**

### **A Resurrection of Marxist Theory**

by Walter Daum

*The Marxist analysis of Stalinism that makes today's events understandable and shows the working-class way forward.*

A thoughtful, and indeed in many ways, an ideologically exciting book. Whether you accept its main thesis or not, and . . . this reviewer does not, it will still challenge your presuppositions and force you to rethink your ideas from top to bottom in the most rigorous way.

*Al Richardson, Revolutionary History*

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as a student. Much of the cadre and a number of party leaders came from poor-peasant backgrounds; but their conditions in the besieged enclaves of the '30's and '40's, the party ideology and the securing of official positions once in power led them to a different outlook and behavior from the parochialism and isolation of the typical peasant. They assumed the world view of the pseudo-collectivist, social-engineer bureaucrat.

It would be tempting today to relegate Maoism to the dustbin of history, after Deng's reforms and the collapse of most Maoist currents internationally. But we have already noted its potential in the growing Chinese upheavals. Elsewhere, Maoism attracted many who saw it as an anti-imperialist alternative to Soviet Stalinism, and it still provides ideological fuel for guerrilla movements like "Shining Path" in Peru. As struggles of workers and the oppressed heat up, its popularity among middle-class radicals frightened of working-class independence could revive.

### FAKE TROTSKYISM AND REAL

While most Maoists no longer regard China as progressive, pseudo-Trotskyists still laughably consider it a "deformed workers' state." Their theory has been proved totally bankrupt by history. It could not explain when or how capitalist states in East Europe in the 1940's became proletarian without a workers' revolution or a revolutionary workers' party; indeed, the Stalinist takeovers were accompanied by alliances with the traditional capitalist parties and the crushing of workers' movements. Today the theory cannot decide whether, when or how the same states have restored capitalism. While Trotsky's epigones dispute the current class nature of East Europe, they all say China is still proletarian — despite superexploitation of labor and the blatant privileges of capital. They debase Trotsky while claiming his mantle.

Trotsky could never have accepted such a theory. He characterized Russia of the 1930's as a degenerated workers' state, still embodying gains of the October Revolution however tenuously; the Stalinist bureaucracy was a Bonapartist force, balancing between classes without an independent base of its own. As he saw it, the situation was extremely unstable and temporary: either the proletariat would sweep the bureaucracy away in a victorious political revolution, or else a successful counterrevolution would restore capitalism. The looming world war would provide the acid test. (See our book, *The Life and Death of Stalinism*, Chapter 4.)

We believe Trotsky's assessment of the degenerating workers state was no longer correct after the late '30's. But it was based on that state's origin in a proletarian revolution led by a revolutionary party. This foundation was totally missing from the newer Stalinist states like China.

As to China, Trotsky predicted in the early 1930's that the CCP, basing itself on a peasant army, would come into conflict with the revolutionary working class in the cities. He was extremely accurate in foretelling the Stalinists' relation to the working class as they marched into the cities. (*The Life and Death of Stalinism*, pp. 320-324.) The last thing he could have accepted was that they could establish a workers' state — or that "Trotskyists" would proclaim it one!

One example of such thinking comes from the Spartacist tendency, which favorably compares China's economy to Russia's, claiming a class difference between the regimes.

**In the former Soviet Union and throughout East Europe, capitalist restoration has resulted in the collapse of**

**industrial production, the pauperization of millions of workers, the closure of large numbers of big factories and mines and hyperinflation reaching annual rates of 2,000 percent. This is to say nothing of the bloody nationalist, racist frenzies besetting the region. The effects of counterrevolution have been brutally apparent.**

This bears little resemblance to China. Whereas the gross domestic product in Yeltsin's Russia has plummeted by 60 percent since 1991, the Chinese economy has been growing at an average annual rate of 10 percent for the past few years. . . . Nonetheless, the danger of capitalist counterrevolution is quite real. (*Workers Vanguard*, Dec. 15, 1995.)

As even the Spartacists know, China's grossly unequal "prosperity" has everything to do with the regime's opening the country to imperialist and private exploitation, as well as to its enormous supply of miserably paid labor in the countryside. Implying that successful superexploitation makes a state proletarian must be a new low in rationalizing the moribund deformed workers' state theory.

The deformed workers' statist present the idea of a modern society with no internal laws of motion, an impossibility for Marxists. Similar in this respect are "third camp" theories that depict societies without an internal dynamic, neither capitalist nor transitional to socialism. An unusually explicit formulation of such a "bureaucratic collectivist" theory for China appears in an article by Richard Smith, "The Chinese Road to Capitalism" (*New Left Review*, May-June 1993.)

Smith reasons that the market reforms have barely affected the still mainly state-run industries.

The leading Chinese theorists of market reform took great pains to insist that "the law of value" must be operational in China's "planned commodity economy" because, according to them, ownership is entirely irrelevant to the day-to-day operation of the enterprises. . . .

[But] . . . the real power to direct the pace and pattern of development . . . remained lodged outside and above the level of the firm — in the hands of the party-bureaucracy. It is these real structures of property and surplus extraction — class relations of exploitation, power and domination — which were historically formed and which, so far, have been left largely intact by the reforms, that limit market reform within the system . . . .

However, Smith also observes that "much of the bureaucracy itself has become a force for capitalism," alongside the foreign and domestic capitalists. The only force remaining with a stake in the old system seems to be the working class.

For capitalist social-property relations to conquer China today would require the expropriation of workers from their guaranteed jobs, their right to let their children inherit their jobs, their right to housing, medical care, and many subsidies essential to subsistence — in a word, breaking their "iron rice bowls." These have to be broken in order to open them up to capitalist exploitation. At the same time, legal ownership of society's means of production must pass — by one means or another — into the hands of a class of capitalists.

Of course, under Deng the ruling bureaucracy is already moving rapidly to undermine these workers' gains. So the agent of capitalism is the bureaucratic collectivist class — a ruling class undermining and supposedly even overthrowing itself!

But the privatizers will not be able to go all the way, as



East Europe shows (and our theory predicted). Capitalism in its epoch of decay requires a high level of state intervention, both to stabilize the economy and discipline and pacify the working class. Smith overlooks that the fact that elements in the ruling class defend statified property does not mean that they can't be capitalist. Some are tied to specific state firms or industries; others more broadly seek to temper the immediate extraction of surplus value to achieve social peace and stability — and thereby gain more surplus value in the end.

The deformed workers' state and bureaucratic collectivist theories have predicted nothing. In their original forms (by Ernest Mandel and Max Shachtman, respectively), along with Tony Cliff's version of state capitalism, they both saw the Stalinist system as more dynamic than traditional capitalism — and the inevitable successor to it. All three have been proved false by the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in East Europe and the USSR — and now once more by China.

#### NEEDED: REVOLUTIONARY PARTY LEADERSHIP

Economic disaster, wars of mass destruction, heavy repression — the specific mix cannot be predicted, but these are the ingredients of the capitalist future. The worst can be averted, class, if a revolutionary workers' leadership is built.

Central to the revolutionary program is the understanding that the existing Chinese state cannot be reformed in any fundamental way to serve the masses' interests. Like any capitalist state, it serves the ruling class. It needs to be overthrown and replaced by a state of the working class,

## Did the Spartacists Scab?

The Spartacist League is a pseudo-Trotskyist group with a nasty tendency toward U.S. chauvinism, a pro-Stalinist line in East Europe and a long record of outright lies in reporting the views and activities of opponents on the left.

The expulsion this summer of two leading members — Jan Norden, long-time editor of *Workers Vanguard*, and Marjorie Stamberg, the paper's managing editor who was once the Spartacist candidate for mayor of New York — produced a spate of charges and countercharges. Amid the plentiful garbage is some illuminating information.

To cite only the major differences, the Spartacists accuse Norden, Stamberg & Co. (now calling themselves the Internationalist Group) of adapting opportunistically to non-proletarian forces and non-vanguard leaderships. For their part, the expellees claim the Spartacists are guilty of passive abstentionism and abandoning fundamental Trotskyist principles like telling the truth to the working class and loyally defending working-class interests in the class struggle.

On the matter of truth-telling, Norden and Stamberg are on shaky ground. The paper they ran for twenty years was the main vehicle for Spartacist lies against other leftists. So we have little sympathy for their belated and self-serving recognition of "falsifications and slanders." But one incident they cite bears further examination:

The most stunning examples of the Australian section's repeated "social-democratic drift" came in the last several years, when it repeatedly placed itself in opposition to union strike struggles. The first was an October 1991 24-hour general strike against anti-union laws of the New South Wales state government [in Australia's largest city, Sydney]. In this case some comrades even went to work during the strike. The section also missed a one-day

organized through its own institutions: unions, workers' councils, factory committees and above all the revolutionary party.

Under capitalist leadership of any form, Maoist or openly bourgeois, China will remain prey to imperialism. The global predators seek to revive the pre-revolutionary warlords and protectorates, even under nominal central sovereignty, in order to more freely and directly carry out their superexploitation. Only a workers' state can truly unify China.

Within China, the fundamental conflict is not between sections of the ruling class, state bureaucrats and managers versus outright capitalists and party proponents of private capital. It is between the working class and the ruling class as a whole. The greatest disaster of the deformed workers' state and bureaucratic collectivist theories is that, at times of revolutionary upheaval, they led militants to rely on dissident reformist figures ultimately loyal to the ruling class like Imre Nagy in Hungary in 1956, and Lech Walesa in Poland. If the independence of the proletariat and its revolutionary party is abandoned, there is no way forward for the working class.

An old lament says that "the lives of Chinese have no worth." Superexploitation, famines, imperialist domination and corrupt dictatorships have combined to give the saying a tragic appearance of truth. But these times are coming to a close. The size, volatility and strategic situation of the Chinese working class — in one of the weak links in the capitalist chain — invest it with a tremendous revolutionary potential. The Chinese proletariat needs to build its revolutionary party in time to meet the looming crisis. ●

**general strike in the state of Victoria** [including the major industrial city of Melbourne.]

Norden/Stamberg are imprecise about what their ex-comrades actually did during the Australian general strikes. What does it mean to say that Spartacists "missed" and "placed themselves in opposition to" the workers' actions? Did they advocate breaking the strike? When they "went to work" during a general strike, did they cross picket lines? Whatever the answer, clearly they regarded proletarian militancy as little more than an inconvenience. Norden/Stamberg go on:

**As one comrade put it during the ICL's second international conference,** [the ICL is the Spartacists' international framework] **"The lesson learned in Australia was that a general strike means 'Oh shit!'"**

Readers who remember the SL's false accusations that other leftists crossed picket lines during the New York building workers strike last January (see "*Liars Vanguard Catches LRP Not in the Act*," PR 51) have every right to be outraged at their cavalier attitude.

The Spartacists boast that they re-issued the Norden/Stamberg bulletin under their own label, with their own introduction. But neither this introduction nor the lengthy *Workers Vanguard* report (Sept. 13) mentions the Australian charge, as if it is not worthy of refutation or even notice.

The issue is not just whether Spartacists scabbed on a general strike. It is also that an organization that poses as the moral conscience of the working class treats the matter with arrogant indifference. We have debated issues of socialist politics and principle over and over with the Spartacists and others. But the Spartacists' behavior on this matter speaks louder than a thousand polemics. They are anti-working class hypocrites. ●

# Twenty Years of the LRP

by Sy Landy

In 1976 a small number of comrades founded the League for the Revolutionary Party. It is no secret that the past twenty years have been hard times for all those who call themselves communists. Today however, we look backward upon our accomplishments with tremendous pride. And, most importantly, we eagerly look forward to the coming days with even greater confidence than we had to begin with.

Jim Cannon, the leader of the original U.S. Trotskyists, spoke of the early time when they were almost totally isolated by the strength of the Communist Party, which under the orders of Stalin had just expelled them. He referred to that period as the "dog days." In contrast, the LRP — today's Trotskyists — has had its "dog years." Our organization was born at the beginning of a historic decline in the class struggle in the U.S., during which reformist leaders kept a tight grip on the masses, beating them into cynical passivity.

While we have recognized political errors as well as missed opportunities, altogether they are only a minor reason for our inability to break out of isolation. The real barrier has been the nature of the period we have gone through. Oppressive circumstances still affect us, but the cracks in the encircling walls are beginning to widen appreciably. Mass struggles are on the horizon.

## ASSESSING OUR HISTORY

Trotsky taught us to have little patience with those who judged an organization by size alone. Such people, he said, had only achieved trade union consciousness, not revolutionary consciousness. The decisive question in evaluating a political organization is the power and relevance of its political ideas. If our politics actually reflect the real interests of the working class and point out the road ahead, then with the necessary initiative and courage the numbers will come.

The past twenty years have witnessed the collapse of leftist organizations of far greater size and power than the LRP. Some have simply died. Others survived organizationally as husks, but have surrendered the aspects of revolutionary politics that once animated them.

In addition to newer comrades, a large percentage of the original cadres of the LRP are still with us, certainly as compared to other groups. Leftists whose standard for judgment is sheer activism tend to burn out and leave the movement quickly. We retain a toehold in industry when many others surrendered theirs. Comrades endured because our political ideas not only provided an accurate guideline to what was happening in the world over and over again, but they were so clearly the ideas of authentic Marxism.

Our political program has always been starkly clear, and it remains so to this day: the LRP stands for *proletarian socialist revolution*. We are uncompromising in our internationalism and internationalism, making the struggle to recreate the Fourth International our most important task. We have made these clarion calls the center of our everyday work, not the usual leftist holiday incantations.

Of course, communism demands a high level of activity. Armchair theorists are worthless, because Marxism learns its lessons and finds real proof of its positions only in practice; its entire reason for existence is to help carry on the living class struggle. The party's ability to lead its class can only be developed by these means. This requires the most careful attention to theory and analysis before, during and after

active intervention. As Lenin observed, there can be no revolutionary practice without revolutionary theory.

Given the course of the class struggle over two decades, we have had only limited opportunities to participate in strikes, mass demonstrations and other working-class actions; but we have tried to take advantage of each. Our trade union work has been restricted to a handful of unions; but in those unions our supporters have a long record of open revolutionary work against the bosses and the bureaucracy. Our efforts at fighting to give direction to working-class student movements are well known but likewise restricted to a few locations. Knowing that capitalism is teaching yet another generation of Black, Latino, immigrant and women workers that oppression and superexploitation are its everyday weapons, the LRP has thrown itself into struggles against racism, chauvinism and sexism. We take pride not only in the amount of work that we have done for our small numbers but also in its political quality — and how much we have taught others and learned ourselves from these experiences.

## OUR ORIGINS

In 1975-6, the Revolutionary Socialist League expelled its internal political minority, the Revolutionary Party Tendency, for its efforts to keep the RSL on a revolutionary course. Inside the RSL we had been subjected to a sustained anti-democratic attack which substituted lies and organizational restrictions for political argument. The Central Committee majority not only banned all members from reading our main document but suddenly ordered the end to the political discussion itself. After inventing a constantly changing series of charges, they threw out first our leaders and then all of us. (For an assessment of our fight, see *Socialist Voice* No. 1.)

In February 1976 we launched the LRP. Even though we knew that the utterly bureaucratic way that the expulsions were conducted stemmed from the fact that the RSL could not successfully deal with our political positions, our spirits were not lifted. Instead, it would be fair to say that our mood was that of grim resolution. The fact that the RSL had abandoned the revolutionary road was a tragic defeat. The bizarre character of the expulsions that signalled this desertion and defeat stood in counterpoint to the enthusiasm that had accompanied the formation of the RSL.

The RSL had been born out of a split in the International Socialists in 1973. The IS at that time was composed of both left Shachtmanites and followers of Tony Cliff, the leader of the British IS (now the Socialist Workers Party). The IS, as opposed to the other political groupings in the United States and around the world who claimed a heritage in Trotskyism, believed that Russia and the rest of the Stalinist nations were not degenerated and deformed workers' states. ISers either claimed that these states were a new "bureaucratic collectivist" form of society, neither capitalist nor socialist; or else they held a very similar view that it was a totally new stage in the development of capitalism. Both views saw the Stalinist states as reactionary but as superseding traditional capitalism.

With the ebb of the 1960's student movement, the IS had thrown itself into the working class and built up a considerable presence in major trade unions. As such it was centrally affected by the enormous working class explosions of the late '60's and early '70's. In the wake of the massive French general strike in 1968, country after country around the world



followed suit with massive proletarian uprisings. In the U.S., revolts ripped through the ghettos and wildcat strikes broke out in a rising crescendo across the country. One by-blow was the split in the IS in 1973 out of which emerged the RSL, taking nearly half the membership.

#### AGAINST RANK AND FILISM

In the fight against the IS right wing, we predicted that their work in building reformist "rank and file caucuses" in the unions, in which revolutionary politics were never to be raised, would inevitably lead the IS to align itself with mildly left bureaucrats. Today, the Solidarity group, which descended from the old IS, has openly abandoned even the pretence of Leninism and rests comfortably in the back pocket of Ron Carey of the Teamsters, Jerry Tucker of the Autoworkers and the like. They have even crossed the class line to endorse the bourgeois reformer Ralph Nader for U.S. president.

The RSL at its birth was tremendously energized. At last, we felt, there would be an organization which fought for an open revolutionary alternative to the bureaucrats; a group committed to the reconstruction of the revolutionary party in the U.S. and the rebuilding of a genuine Trotskyist Fourth International around the world. As opposed to the flotsam and jetsam of the centrist far left, the RSL fought for Marx's idea that the working class itself could achieve revolutionary consciousness, build its own party and free itself and the world from capitalism. Authentic communist consciousness was no gift from condescending saviors.

Consequently, we rejected the cynical IS views of Stalinist Russia, both of which, rhetoric aside, dismissed the working class as the revolutionary agency undermining that system. In the RSL, we began to evolve the theory of Stalinism as statified capitalism. We rejected the degenerated and deformed workers' state theories of the mainline pseudo-Trotskyists. Whatever errors in theory Trotsky made in his analysis of the USSR in the late 1930's, he never believed that counterrevolutionary anti-proletarian Stalinists could make the socialist revolution and build workers' states — the position adopted by the post-World War II pseudo-Trotskyists after contemplating the spread of Stalinism to East Europe and parts of Asia. It is not by accident that today so many of these epigones amicably share the Solidarity group with the former ISers.

In the early 1970's, the mortal crisis of capitalism returned dramatically to the surface of events. The bourgeoisie began its offensive against all the gains made by the working class and the former colonial peoples around the world. In the U.S., the 1973-5 economic recession hit workers hard, and the labor bureaucracy was successful in isolating strikes and diverting the workers toward the Democrats and electoral non-answers. Thus, the working class and the oppressed minorities were set up for the massive retreat in the face of the capitalist attack that is still going on to this day.

This containment of the class struggle had its impact on the far left, driving groups to the right. Cynicism, above all about the role of the proletariat, deepened. In the RSL the leadership declared that the workers' struggle in the coming years would be confined to "trade union and democratic demands." This was not just a prediction but an announcement that the RSL would abandon raising the need for revolution as the class goal and conform to a reform perspective.

#### AGAINST LABOR PARTYISM

Not by accident, the RSL crystallized its position on

calling for a labor party in the U.S., thus joining with the rest of the pseudo-Trotskyist milieu in a parody of the position adopted by Trotsky in the late '30's. In our faction fight, we pointed out that Trotsky had put forward the idea of such a party to a militant working class which had just created the CIO industrial unions and, facing an impasse, had to broaden its struggle to the political arena. Addressing these millions of fighting workers, it was impossible to be sectarian and just say "join us, the small Trotskyist party," — these workers wanted a party that reflected the enormous power shown by their mass struggles. He argued that we, like them, want a mass independent workers' party; therefore we call for it.

However, because we do not want a reformist party, we put forward our *transitional program* of class-wide policies that inexorably point to revolution but are also desired by workers who believe they can be achieved through reforms. Fighting side by side with the mass of workers and discussing the lessons of the struggle, we could win them to the idea of a revolutionary party, which we always advocate openly.

For Trotsky, the labor party demand was a *tactic* applicable under particular conditions. For the RSL and the rest it had become a permanent *strategy*, good for all situations. To raise it at a time when the working class was in retreat could only mean creating a reformist party or a playtoy for leftish bureaucrats. The RSL had adopted the manipulative idea of stagism — today a reformist party not created by working-class mass action but by the bureaucrats, tomorrow a revolutionary party. Under that scheme tomorrow never comes. Reformism, according to Bolsheviks, is a counterrevolutionary trap and not a step toward revolution. Thus the RSL, we pointed out, was heading toward capitulation.

The predictions we made twenty years ago have been more than proved. The bankruptcy of this labor party policy has been illuminated garishly by the Labor Party founding convention described in our last issue. The RSL, seven times our size at the time of the expulsion, disintegrated and finally disappeared. The times tested its cadre and its politics and found both corrupted, as we had predicted.

#### INTERNATIONALISM AND INTERRACIALISM

The adaptation of the various left groups to reformism via rank and filism and labor partyism reflects the conservative prejudices of the privileged middle class and aristocratic upper layers of the working class. The LRP recognized early that a healthy revolutionary organization pays special attention to the most oppressed and exploited layers of the working class. These layers' conditions show the future of the whole of the working class; thus the historic interests of the working class are represented by the immediate interests of the most oppressed.

In the United States, this has meant paying special attention to the oppression of Black people, which has been an indispensable weapon of American capitalism. It has increasingly become the model for ruling classes around the world seeking to divide and weaken their own working classes.

From the beginning, the LRP concentrated on elaborating its interracialist strategy as an essential accompaniment to Marxist internationalism. The concept of proletarian interracialism was developed in response to the ghetto rebellions of the late 1960's and early 1970's. Those uprisings were the source of the real gains Blacks wrested from capitalism. Not only did the "inner city" workers and unemployed challenge the U.S. state; they also exposed Martin Luther King's pacifist integrationism as a blind alley. Likewise, their acts

sharply contrasted with the Nation of Islam's combination of militant rhetoric with social passivity.

Capitalism in this epoch demands the superexploitation of oppressed workers; it can tolerate neither color-blind equality nor a separate Black national economy. Proletarian interracialism is rooted in the idea that genuine liberation and real equality can only be achieved through socialist revolution. It champions the right of Blacks to have their own independent organizations as a necessary step in the re-creation of an interracial working-class vanguard party.

### STALINISM AND PREDICTIONS

A party that cannot foresee the general course of world events gives fair evidence that it is not a Marxist party. No one can predict with exact timing every sequence of actual occurrences. However, seeing the general direction of society is both necessary and possible for communists. Without this, no revolutionary strategy is possible. All individuals and all groups, no matter how well armed politically, make mistakes. The decisive question is how well they learn from their mistakes by testing them constantly against reality and come closer to approximating the course of coming events.

We know of no other group calling itself Marxist which predicted the direction Stalinism would turn. In the first issues of this magazine, we observed that the USSR, while strong militarily, was weak economically; the Stalinist countries were crippled by the system's inability to eliminate all the gains of the working class made as a result of the October revolution. We predicted that the crumbling Stalinist economies would have to adopt the more traditional capitalist forms, like privatization and the market, to intensify their exploitation of the workers. We also indicated that they could go only part way in decentralizing economies, given the dominant centralizing and concentrating tendencies at work in all forms of capitalist society, especially in this epoch.

Internationally, despite the obvious hostilities, Stalinism was far more a prop for Western imperialism than a serious economic rival. At the height of the Cold War, we wrote that in all probability a future hot war would occur among the U.S., Japan and Germany; not centered on a struggle between the U.S. and the USSR.

We were laughed at by the left when we made these predictions. No one laughs now. Events in the East have confirmed our projections. The mainline pseudo-Trotskyist theory, in contrast, foresaw nothing. The momentous events culminating in 1989-91 took all these outfits by surprise. Their theory postulated a class difference between the "workers' states" and capitalism; yet Stalinist rulers moved from one to the other peacefully!

The advocates of bureaucratic collectivism faced the same contradiction. The Cliffite state capitalists, spared that problem, nevertheless predicted nothing, having claimed that the U.S.-USSR cold war could only intensify. This notion stemmed from the outlook they shared with the other theories, namely that Stalinism, whether progressive or reactionary, would supersede traditional capitalism. Reality buried that nonsense also.

These analyses in all their variety were rationalizations for pragmatism, not guides to action. The false theories, reflecting the left's underlying middle-class outlook, saw the Stalinist states either as progressive societies embodying workers' power in a distorted way, or as systems where counterrevolution had wiped out the proletarian revolutionary gains or even the proletariat itself. Either way, the

system was powerful and the working class deemed weak.

In contrast, our world view led us to see that Stalinism was in a state of permanent crisis, an exacerbated reflection of the overall world capitalist crisis. The working class was objectively very powerful but subjectively weak because of the absence of the revolutionary workers' party and its struggle to advance class consciousness.

The decisive event that severed the last connections between the Bolshevik party of communist workers who led the revolution, and the state which was increasingly the property of the Stalinist bureaucracy, was the Great Purge at the end of the 1930's. This consolidated the Stalinists as a ruling capitalist class. And unlike the "orthodox Trotskyists" who denied this counterrevolution, we maintained that the socialist revolution could only be made by the working class with its revolutionary party in the lead. They, on the contrary, did not let the crushing of the working class by the Stalinists in East Europe, China and elsewhere prevent them from seeing a progressive role for Stalinism and declaring the creation of "deformed workers' states" in these countries.

We have constantly fought for Karl Marx's central theme that the proletariat could achieve revolutionary consciousness only through its own class actions. Our defining concept has therefore been the struggle for the revolutionary party as the instrument of the advanced workers themselves.

### RE-CREATE THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL!

While we have been restricted to a membership in the United States for most of our organization's life, we have always understood our politics to be that of an international tendency, the basis for a world party of the working class. The interests of the working class are international and can only be solved through the world socialist revolution. A party of the most class-conscious workers, bringing together their experience of class struggle in all corners of the globe, is necessary for the victory of the socialist revolution.

We seek to re-create the Fourth International, the world revolutionary party led by Leon Trotsky after the destruction of the Third International, and the inheritor of the revolutionary politics of the first three Internationals.

In 1987, after extensive political discussions which confirmed general political agreement, we formed a fraternal relationship with the Workers Revolution Group (WRG) in Australia. (See *PR* 28.) The world party we fight to build will be based on democratic centralism, whereby an international leadership will direct the general political struggles of its national sections. But our limited resources prevented such a centralism. Our fraternal relationship recognized this, expressing the fact that our two groups had broad strategic agreement but could not be responsible for each others' important tactical decisions.

Five years later the LRP and WRG established fraternal relations with the League for the Revolutionary Party (FRP) of Sweden. At the same time, the three fraternal groups adopted the name Communist Organization for the Fourth International (COFI). (*PR* 41).

The 1992 general strike in Melbourne, Australia saw the WRG participate in a decisive class battle and win important experience for our international tendency. In the wake of the defeat of that struggle however, the cynicism that spread within the left infiltrated the ranks of the WRG and decimated the group. Then in 1995, political differences between us and the FRP of Sweden made it necessary to dissolve fraternal relations. (*PR* 46 and 48.) Today we maintain the



banner of COFI as we move toward international ties which will be crucial in re-creating the Fourth International itself.

### THE COMING REVOLUTIONARY STRUGGLES

Our analysis of Stalinism is far from simply a historical question: it is key to our perspective on the mass revolutionary struggles looming on the horizon. We were able to foresee the collapse of Stalinism because we understood how the stratified property relations of the East made those economies most vulnerable to the developing economic crisis of world capitalism. Thus we predicted that the collapse of Stalinism in the East would presage a similar crisis in the West, and so the deepening industrial stagnation and financial instability testifies.

Most pseudo-Marxist groups acknowledge that capitalism is headed for a crisis, but their theories point to the opposite conclusion. Those who saw Stalinism as progressive should expect a world capitalist resurgence on the basis of its collapse. Those who saw its societies as capitalist but nonetheless the trend of future capitalist development only show their confusion and pragmatism today.

The working-class eruptions in East Europe during the 1980's showed Gorbachev & Co. the handwriting on the wall and brought the system down. Today, capitalism's bestial agencies, national chauvinism and racism, are doing the dirty work of promoting fratricidal war among toilers around the world. Capitalism is forced to use these weapons because its system is collapsing.

In the post-Stalinist states, bourgeoisification is not proceeding easily; workers do not look favorably on the rampant inflation and mass unemployment that the "Western model" has brought them. In the West, the huge French strikes in late 1995 were echoed in late 1996 and are only a token of what is coming. In the South, the socialist-minded working class of South Africa grows more and more explosively angry over the lack of change brought about by the same old ruling class, now dappled with black faces.

The reformist misleaders of the working class avoid struggle by capitulating to capitalist attacks. They allow huge

reductions in wages and massive growth in unemployment. They embrace division of the working class by openly accepting national chauvinism and covertly adapting to racism.

Nevertheless, mass upheaval and class confrontation are absolutely inevitable; a successful revolutionary conclusion is not. The fight to expose the reformist bureaucrats who dominate the unions around the world as well as their social democratic parties must be intensified. The class struggle received a magnificent shot in the arm when the grip of the Stalinists in the West as well as in the East was shattered; now the rest of the bureaucracy must be smashed if revolution is to succeed. A vital element in the political work necessary in order to re-create the authentic Fourth International is the fight against cynicism, especially cynicism about the revolutionary capacity of the world proletariat. Today, that is the major ideological armament of decadent capitalism and a chief weapon in the hands of its defenders within the workers' movement, the bureaucrats.

The centrists, relatively small and dispirited today, still serve as a vital weapon for the bureaucracy. Their cynical theories still enable them to poison the growth of consciousness and to play a role in detouring advanced workers away from the crucial task of re-creating their revolutionary party. Combat with these forces is an important element in the struggle to build the vanguard party in the U.S. and abroad.

In contrast to the maneuverism of the cynical condescending saviors of Middle-Class Marxism, we reaffirm our belief in the lesson taught us by our major teachers — Marx, Engels, Lenin, Luxemburg, Trotsky: a fighting working class needs to know the truth above all else. After twenty years, the LRP remains dedicated to the idea that a proletariat in action, aware of its real mass power, led by its most conscious vanguard, can destroy the rule of murderous capitalism and create a truly human society.

The Bolsheviks taught us that bad times steel the cadres of a revolutionary party fully as much as good times and successful class struggles. It is no accident that the LRP has not only endured the dog years but has gone far toward arming itself politically for the coming struggles. ●

## Defend Chicago Anti-Klan Militants!

by Guy Lindsay

On June 29, the racist scum of the Ku Klux Klan attempted to hold a "white power" rally at Daley Plaza in downtown Chicago. Instead, they were overtaken and beaten by an interracial group of demonstrators. As Leon Trotsky once observed, there is one way to reason with a fascist, and that is to acquaint him with the pavement!

The League for the Revolutionary Party participated in the counterdemonstration and has been active in the subsequent defense activities. This victory will not be fully secured until we win the release of the anti-Klan protestors facing charges stemming from this event, and we appeal to our readers to join these efforts.

### KLAN ROUTED AT DALEY PLAZA

The city government, together with the bourgeois media, had tried to keep the Klan's rally a secret. But there was a leak, and the Spartacist League (SL) was able to use this information to initiate a small mobilization of anti-Klan militants. In addition to the SL and LRP, supporters of the

Black Panther Group, News & Letters, Refuse and Resist and the A-Zone participated, as well as independent activists.

The action began very suddenly. About fifteen Klansmen appeared on the street, one block from the plaza. Within two minutes they were overwhelmed and soundly beaten. What made the event a unique opportunity was that the KKK arrived without the police escorts the state customarily provides for such occasions. Only after the confrontation did the cops wade into the melee and begin assaulting and arresting anti-Klan militants.

After more cops arrived, the bloodied Klansmen were led to the plaza and allowed to hold their rally. The counterdemonstration did its best to counter the racist filth. There were further incidents with the police, mostly defensive shoving skirmishes, and several retaliatory arrests.

The cops' racist policy was shown by the arrests. A Black youth who had played a militant role was jumped by cops. Another Black youth, an AFL-CIO summer intern, was arrested for taking pictures; a supporter of Refuse & Resist was then arrested for defending him. Other militants were

ambushed and arrested as the demonstration broke up. The arrestees languished in paddy wagons for three hours in the summer heat and were denied access to water or toilets, legal aid or first aid.

### THE REAL MENACE OF FASCISM

The SL has to be commended for taking the initiative and leading an effective action on June 29. However, small-scale actions in themselves are not the way to smash fascism and racism. When small groups of fascists gather, militant counterdemonstrations can discourage new recruits and thereby help stall the growth of fascism. But there is a major obstacle to even these actions: the labor bureaucracy, which sabotages the attempts of the working class to defend itself even in the most immediate sense.

The main threat facing the working class today is not the small fascist groups but the anti-worker racist and chauvinist attacks coming from the mainstream parties and the capitalist system itself. And first in line in defense of this system is again the labor bureaucracy. It is political capitulation to mainstream capitalism that breeds fascism.

Although capitalism today is not yet fascist, the conditions that breed fascist vermin are getting worse; if they are not eliminated, then lynch mobs and even fascist state power will be on the agenda sooner or later. These conditions stem from the fact that the decaying capitalist system cannot provide jobs, decent incomes or a bearable way of life for millions of people.

When fascism triumphed in several countries in the 1930's, it was able to pass itself off as a radical alternative to mainstream capitalism only because the big left parties based in the working class did not offer a way out of the Great Depression. Rather those parties sought to prop up the shaky framework of capitalism through popular fronts — blocs with liberals that tied the workers to the bourgeois program and suppressed working-class action that might endanger the alliance. Their failure to fight to overthrow capitalism drove desperate plebeians into the arms of the fascists.

Unless capitalism is eliminated, depression, fascism and world war are inevitable. Thus in the end, whether racism and fascism are smashed depends on whether the working class succeeds in defeating the labor bureaucrats and building its international revolutionary party to overthrow capitalism.

### THE SL'S "UNITED FRONT"

Only a revolutionary party that fights for independent working-class action and against the agents of class collaboration can prevent graver defeats for our class. Key to building this party in the United States is an uncompromising fight against the pro-capitalist labor bureaucracy.

But this is not the approach of the Spartacists. On July 11, the Partisan Defense Committee (PDC), a Spartacist front group, held what would be the first and last meeting to publicly organize a defense campaign. Built on short notice, the meeting opened with five speeches by SL supporters, some under the hats of the PDC or the Labor Black Struggle League, another SL front.

By hiding behind front groups, the SL dodges taking full political responsibility for its practical work. The PDC's speciality is to run actions that get paper endorsements and even an occasional podium speech from a labor bureaucrat or "left" Democratic politician. In exchange, the PDC says nothing critical about these bureaucrats and politicians at the event, or even in the laudatory coverage of the PDC in the

SL's paper, *Workers Vanguard*. (For examples, see our articles "Frazier Goes to Court," PR 47, "Liars Vanguard Strikes Again," PR 49 and "Defending Mumia Abu-Jamal," PR 50.)

Given the absence of bureaucrats and politicians at the July 11 event, the SL ratcheted up its revolutionary rhetoric. Nevertheless, it shrank from exposing the role of the labor bureaucracy. Although the SL chair read out statements of support from union officials, the hollow and hypocritical character of their support was not pointed out by any Spartacist.

An LRP supporter, speaking from the floor, referred to the PDC leaflet with its many endorsements by union officers and explained that the bureaucrats had no intention of mobilizing a union-centered picket outside the courthouse.

**I look at this leaflet, and I see all these endorsements by various trade union officials promising to build the defense campaign. ... These officials may show up at a meeting and give militant speeches and talk out of the left side of their mouths, but they don't build the action the meeting is organizing, and they don't bring the ranks.**

Astonishingly, no one from the Spartacists denied our criticism of their method of covering up for the bureaucrats. Instead, the SL's Ed Clarkson accused *the LRP* of feeding illusions in the bureaucrats — by making demands on the union leaders. He said, "the LRP misses the whole point of the united front which is that the communists are the best builders. But you guys just whine because the bureaucrats won't do anything."

In fact, it is the SL that *purposely* misses the whole point. Trotsky's method was not only to place demands on bureaucrats but to relentlessly expose their betrayals. This is not "whining," and it is exactly what the SL fails to do.

The PDC amounts to a political fudge by the Spartacists from beginning to end. In its sectarian mode, the SL in effect denies the need for the mass workers' united front by pretending that the PDC is capable of calling mass labor/Black actions by itself. In its opportunist mode, the SL capitulates to union officials and leftish Democrats by muting its political criticisms, and then congratulates itself on its ability to carry out non-sectarian united front campaigns — as if achieving the bureaucratic endorsements were the same as building a real united front.

A real united front entails mobilizing the ranks of the trade unions, the mass organizations of the working class, as well as multitudes of non-union workers. This "minor" distinction is deliberately blurred by the SL. Glowing reports of "growing labor support" for the arrestees are featured in *Workers Vanguard*, replete with faxes and letters from various officials. Not a word of criticism, not the slightest hint that the "supporting" bureaucrats have no intention of mobilizing anybody! (The August 2 issue has a classic example.)

Our predictions were confirmed on the picket line outside the courthouse on July 23, and we pointed this out in a speech concentrating on how the fight against fascism compels the working class to confront the crisis of leadership. An SL speaker made many of the same points but again neglected to criticize the "endorsing" bureaucrats for their failure to mobilize a single worker. Rather the SLers made a point of fussing over the two officials who did make solo cameo appearances. And the speeches and chants were punctuated by the SL/PDC organizer's efforts to read all of the faxes and letters of "support."

After the picket, most of the 30-35 demonstrators (basically the SL and the LRP) went into to the courtroom to show



solidarity with the antifascist militants. Our action in the courtroom made a definite impression on the judge as well as the fascists, but one couldn't help imagining the greater impact of a genuine mass mobilization — if the union officials who have the resources to build one had bothered.

The SL is a centrist outfit: it wavers between revolutionary sounding rhetoric and reformist practice. For this reason, the SL does write criticisms of the labor bureaucrats in other articles, but never under its PDC banner — even though the PDC is described as adhering to the SL program!

In this vein, the September 27 *WW* ran an article "Free Ride for Klan in Chicago — Why?" to address a Klan success in Chicago just two months after the anti-Klan victory. The KKK had been able to come back reinforced and hold an unchallenged rally on September 21. Even though the SL in its PDC guise had kept it a virtual secret, the Klan clearly knew that the unions hadn't been mobilized on June 29, and that emboldened them for a one-sided rematch in September. Thus the June 29 victory was mitigated by the Klan's unopposed return and it was the bankruptcy of the labor bureaucracy that invited it.

In this article the SL did condemn the labor and Black leaderships in Chicago for ignoring their urgent call for the

June 29 mobilization — a point they had failed to make on June 29 or during the defense actions since! They drew the unavoidable conclusion that the bureaucracy's not lifting a finger on June 29 had facilitated the Klan's September 21 "free ride." Exactly our point.

### **DROP THE CHARGES!**

In the trial, initially, the prosecutors and judges took a hard stance against all the anti-Klan defendants, pursuing a trial date which would keep them on polite behavior through the Democratic Party National Convention in August. Since then, charges were dropped against five of the eight militants.

Three defendants face serious penalties, based on trumped-up charges of assault and battery against the police: Dennis Glass, a Black youth; Jeff Lyons, a supporter of Refuse and Resist; and Gene Herson, Labor Coordinator of the PDC. Readers of *Proletarian Revolution* are urged to attend the trials and picket line. Contact the Chicago LRP at (773)-463-1340 for more information.

**Drop All Charges Against the Anti-Klan Militants!**

**Mass Armed Workers' Self-Defense!**

**Smash Racism through Socialist Revolution!**

**Build the Revolutionary Party of the Working Class!**

## **Revolutionaries and Elections in Australia**

by George Patts

The central obstacle to the working class in Australia leading a successful struggle against its capitalist exploiters is the Australian Labor Party (ALP). Based on the unions, the ALP is an organizationally independent workers' party. But its leaders act to chain the workers to the capitalist system.

That is why our coverage of the March 1996 elections in Australia raised the question of how revolutionaries could use the elections to help break the ALP's grip on the working class (*PR* 51). We advocated critical electoral support to the ALP, because we expected the decisive masses of the working class (those who had been mobilized in struggle against Liberal Party state governments) to vote for the ALP. We believed that by going through the experience of voting for the ALP with our fellow workers, revolutionaries could prove through common experience that Labor would offer no defense against the anti-union austerity attacks.

However, the election results confounded our expectation of mass working-class support for Labor. The Liberals won a landslide victory, the result of a big move away from Labor in key working-class areas. Based on this and further investigation, we have concluded that we were wrong to have advocated critical support for the ALP. This article examines why we made this error and what should have been done. We also hope to further our understanding of revolutionary electoral tactics, an important issue to workers everywhere.

### **THE METHOD OF THE CRITICAL SUPPORT TACTIC**

Throughout our organization's history, the LRP has fought against those who have turned critical support into an excuse for permanent, strategic support to reformist parties. We have argued that critical support is a *tactic* to be used selectively, when the conditions of the class struggle are favorable. When decisive numbers of workers are mobilized in struggle and think that voting for their reformist leaders will further their struggle, a clash between the workers'

illusions in their leaders and their leaders' betrayals is inevitable. Revolutionaries join with their fellow workers in voting the reformists into power in order to see who is right, emphasizing that workers should not relinquish their independent struggle for a moment.

Critical support is a specific application of the united front tactic. As Leon Trotsky explained:

**The tactic of the united front still retains all its power as the most important method in the struggle for the masses. A basic principle of this tactics is: With the masses always; with the vacillating leaders sometimes, but only so long as they stand at the head of the masses. It is necessary to make use of vacillating leaders while the masses are pushing them ahead . . . . And it is necessary to break with them at the right time when they turn from vacillation to hostile action and betrayal. It is necessary to use the occasion of the break to expose the traitorous leaders and to contrast their position to that of the masses. It is precisely in this that the revolutionary essence of the united front consists. (*Trotsky on Britain*, p. 255.)**

In this spirit, we in the LRP have emphasized the necessity for critical support to be connected to real struggles of the working class. When workers mistakenly think that reformist leaders are advancing their struggle, revolutionaries can use the critical support tactic to expose this illusion. But when workers who are not engaged in struggle look to reformist leaders, that is generally an expression of their lack of confidence in their class's ability to fight. To advocate critical support under such conditions would be to solidarize with workers' passivity rather than combativity. As we once wrote:

**Critical support is a selective tactic, however, used under particular circumstances. . . . The tactic can be used to win the masses from their leaders only when they are in struggle, when there is an actual movement of a section of the working class. In the absence of such a movement, any kind of support to a non-revolutionary leadership (no**

matter how critical, that is, no matter what conditions or criticisms are raised) must become support for the bourgeois program and direction of the bureaucrat in question. (*Socialist Voice* No.5, 1973.)

#### THE 1996 ELECTIONS

In discussing the then upcoming elections in PR 51, we noted that after 13 years in power, the ruling ALP had presided over historic attacks against the working class which had driven many workers away from the party. However, ... under an escalated attack from the bourgeoisie, accomplished through the open anti-working class policies imposed on the state level by the Liberals, the masses of workers moved back to supporting Labor. This was demonstrated in Labor's high vote in the last federal election [in 1993] in its traditional areas of support, which had previously been declining.

In Western Australia, the Liberal Party government's proposed anti-union legislation sparked a partial blockade of the state by the unions. In Queensland, miners in the town of Weipa struck for equal pay for equal work. The strike escalated to the point where the whole of the Eastern states and cities of Australia were on the verge of a general strike, as dock workers and miners struck in solidarity. Sensing the potential to win popular support, the Labor Party, including then-Prime Minister Paul Keating, openly sided with the workers, while privately planning to betray them and divert them into voting for the ALP. Thus we wrote:

The experiences of the working class under successive Liberal state governments, which have directly attacked jobs, wages, working conditions and the social wage ... have resulted in a rising militancy in defense of those conditions. ... Many workers fear a Liberal Federal Government and so are once again clearly moving back to Labor. ... If revolutionaries were to oppose a Labor vote, we would appear to be an obstacle to a united working-class defense. Instead, we should advocate a critical vote for Labor in the elections with the purpose of exposing Labor in practice by the test of office.

But the results prove otherwise. The ALP lost the federal elections in a landslide win by the Liberal-National Party Coalition. The Labor vote dropped by 6.2 percent to 38.7 percent, compared to the 46.8 percent won by the Coalition.

Of even greater significance was Labor's polling in working-class areas. Tens of thousands of traditional Labor voters deserted the ALP, with the Labor Party losing seats covering mining towns like Broken Hill and Mt. Isa, formerly safe Labor seats like Paramatta in Sydney and Oxley in Brisbane. Several Labor Ministers also lost their seats. Western Australia, a key focus of class struggle, saw a 4.5 percent decline in the Labor vote, and Weipa, a Labor seat that was the site of the most militant struggle against Liberal Party-style capitalist attacks, saw Labor voted out of office.

But with only a 2.2 percent increase in the Liberal Party's vote and an actual decline for the National Party, where did the remainder of the swing from Labor go? It appears that much of it went to the Democrats, a small bourgeois off-shoot of the Liberals, which has held the balance of power in the Senate recently. The Democrats got twice as many votes as in the previous election.

And since voting is compulsory in Australia, with failure to vote punishable by fines, many workers cast so-called donkey-votes of deliberately botched ballots, and others flouted the law by refusing to vote at all.

From these results we see that the analysis on which we advocated critical support to the ALP was clearly wrong. It ran counter to the sentiment among fighting workers; it blunted our arguments that only mass action like a general strike could stop the capitalist attacks, and that a revolutionary party had to be built to lead such struggles to victory and to the socialist revolution. Our mistake indicates our isolation from the masses of workers and their struggles.

In sum, it was necessary for revolutionaries to counterpose to the "vote Labor" propaganda the need for mass action to beat the capitalist attacks and for the building of the revolutionary party.

#### ISO, WP: FOR LABOR NO MATTER WHAT

Among Australia's far-left groups, the International Socialist Organization (ISO) and Workers Power (WP) advocated a vote for Labor in March. The ISO did not even try to offer Leninist reasons; it was openly tailist, simply citing the fact that most workers will vote for Labor:

Despite how disgusted a lot of workers are with Labor, it is still the party most look to electorally. The Liberals are the open party of the bosses. So socialists say vote Labor. (*Socialist Worker*, Feb. 9.)

The WP group presented more radical reasoning for a Labor vote. In their statement on the elections, "Vote Labor but Organize to Fight," they wrote:

In the absence of the organized working class having decisively severed its link to the ALP, these attacks [by the Liberals] have the effect of reinforcing illusions in the ALP, or reconstituting them where they have already been partially broken. Such a prognosis is supported by the experiences of the working class in Victoria and W.A. In both cases viciously anti-worker legislation passed by Liberal style governments has had the effect of pushing workers ... back to the same Labor Party whom many had rejected at the previous election.

But unlike us, WP has not reconsidered their position based on election results that clearly contradicted their expectations. Elections in the state of Victoria shortly after the federal elections again demonstrated that Labor was not winning the support of masses of fighting workers. But WP still insisted on voting for Labor.

That WP has not recognized its error reveals the fact that their real reasons for voting for Labor were fundamentally different from ours. In conversations with us, WP members deny that they advocate permanent electoral support for Labor. But we have shown that this is indeed the position of WP's LRCI tendency internationally. (See PR 52.)

Part of WP's problem can be seen in their reasoning we quoted above. For them, the question of whether revolutionaries advocate critical support for Labor is decided by whether the mass of workers have broken with Labor — without considering whether these illusions express the workers' militancy or their passivity. That this is LRCI's position is most clearly demonstrated by their advocacy of a vote for Tony Blair's Labour Party in Britain, many months before the 1997 election, when popular support for Labour clearly expresses workers' lack of confidence in their class's own ability to defeat the ruling Tory party.

We hope this discussion shows that the uncompromising fight for socialist ideas must be matched by a patient commitment to go through the experience of the class struggle with our fellow workers to test our arguments. Only this way will the workers' revolutionary party be built. ●



# Revolutionary Workers' Campaign in S. Africa

The class consciousness and organization developed by the masses during their struggle against apartheid, together with the weakness of the ruling class, combine to suggest that the South African proletariat will likely play the leading role in the coming world revolution. So we continue to play close attention to the class struggle in South Africa.

Readers of *Proletarian Revolution* will be familiar with the Workers International group. Unlike every other socialist group in South Africa, the WI has combined a consistent fight for the independence of the working class from the capitalist ANC with an intransigent fight for a revolutionary workers' party as opposed to a reformist one. (See *PR* 50 and 52.)

However, we have cautioned readers to consider the WI's affiliation to the international political tendency centered on Cliff Slaughter's Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) of Britain, the Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International (WIRFI). The WIRFI has a rotten record of political support for bourgeois parties — most recently displayed by the dissolution of the WRP into a reformist pseudo-party front — which directly contradicts the revolutionary direction of the WI's policies.

Thus in *PR* 50 we wrote:

**The WI(SA)'s development toward revolutionary politics cannot continue with its allegiance to the WIRFI: either they degenerate into the right-centrist swamp that is the WIRFI, or they see through the WIRFI's opportunism and break from this international tendency. Only then will we be able to determine the real character of the WI(SA).**

Our arguments received a furious response from the WIRFI's Namibian affiliate, to which we replied in our previous issue.

Since then we have learned that the WI's section in Cape Town, which has been responsible for publishing the group's newspaper that so impressed us, has been conducting a protracted political struggle against the WIRFI leadership. In August this culminated in its split from the WIRFI, along with comrades in Durban.

Future editions of *PR* will discuss this political fight and the new socialist group formed in South Africa, as their documents become available. This discussion deserves the attention of all revolutionary workers. Readers interested in this new group can reach them by writing to: WI, Community House, 41 Salt River Road, Salt River, 7925, South Africa.

## WI CAMPAIGNS IN LOCAL ELECTIONS

This year saw the first post-apartheid elections to local governments in South Africa. Elections in most provinces took place in October of last year, but voter registration

fraud by the Inkatha Freedom Party in KwaZulu/Natal and manipulation of electoral boundaries by the National Party



*Clothing workers' strike in Cape Town, 1996.*

in the Western Cape delayed those votes to May of this year.

After two years of rule by Nelson Mandela's African National Congress (ANC), these local elections represented an important test of the masses' attitude toward the government. While the ANC won most local polls, the results indicated growing disaffection. All major parties received fewer votes than in the 1994 national elections, and two-thirds of the electorate chose not to vote at all. The most significant increase in votes went to the so-called independents, who many workers voted for as a protest against the main parties.

The WI's Cape Town group ran four candidates for posts as councillors in the Western Cape, although the other sections of the WI did not participate. Below we reproduce the WI's election manifesto. We do so for two reasons. First, it is an opportunity to better acquaint our readers with this important group. And second, because in all essentials — its anti-electoralism, its arguments on the need for the socialist revolution to satisfy the masses' basic needs, as well as its insistence on the need for a revolutionary party to lead the independent workers' struggles — the WI's election campaign stands as an example to revolutionary workers everywhere of how bourgeois elections can be used to advance the revolutionary interests of the working class.

We have some criticisms of the WI's manifesto. Most important is its lack of clarity on how the election campaign fits into the overall class struggle. This can be seen in the WI's main slogan for the elections, "Vote, Unite, Organize and Fight," which they never precisely explain. This criticism is minor compared to the outstanding achievement the WI comrades' clearly revolutionary campaign represents.

In the pamphlet announcing their participation in the elections, the WI explained their campaign in unambiguously anti-electoralist fashion, almost unique among left electoral campaigns anywhere:

**We shall stand not for the sake of getting votes or to jump on the gravy train [of government corruption], but to expose to the working class and its fellow poor the true nature and limitations of the local government elections . . . that these are part and parcel of the capitalist system which oppresses the poor. But at the same time we shall use the elections and the councils to fight for the interests of the working class and its fellow poor. For instance, when our candidates get onto councils, they will vote against measures which benefit the bosses, and will at all times use their position to fight for issues which are beneficial to the masses, and they will be accountable to the community.**

The right to vote was won by the masses through a long and hard struggle. But the vote does not put food on the table, or solve problems such as unemployment. The Workers International believes that intervening in the elections and elected councils is very important, but the main focus of our activity is outside of electoral politics . . . in the mass struggle of the working class and the building of independent organizations of the working class. Only by waging an all-sided struggle against the capitalist system, and by understanding that its independent activity is the most important aspect of this struggle, will the working class be able to win its main demands. The most important condition for this victory is the building of a truly revolutionary, truly Marxist workers party to lead all the struggles against capitalism.

When going to vote, it is important to do so without illusions. Expect nothing from elections under this rotten capitalist system.

The WI succeeded in distributing ten thousand copies of their manifesto along with an even greater number of leaflets to workers at factories, meetings and in their communities. The WI even appeared on television with their revolutionary socialist message. That this is a great achievement is reinforced by the facts the WI's membership consists almost exclusively of poor workers from the townships and squatter camps, and that their campaign received practically no support from their international tendency. Moreover, they were prevented from campaigning openly in the "African" townships by the threat of violence from the ANC, which regularly uses thuggery and even assassination to silence political opponents in the townships.

The Nationalist Party (the old apartheid party) won the elections in Cape Town by encouraging fears among whites, Indians and so-called "coloreds" in particular, that an ANC victory would mean attacks on their living standards in favor of "Africans." The WI received 1,576 votes, a significant increase over the 855 they won in the Western Cape in 1994, when three times as many people voted.

## Letters Welcome

We invite readers of *Proletarian Revolution* to send letters to the magazine. Names will be withheld on request. Write us at: P.O. Box 3573, New York, NY 10008, USA.

No other left group participated in the elections. The Workers Organization for Socialist Action (WOSA) and its Workers List Party (WLP) boycotted the elections on the grounds that they were based on racist electoral boundaries and other arrangements. This is true, but the 1994 elections, in which they did participate, were based on even more racist foundations; participating in those elections was not only permissible for revolutionaries but the best way to challenge their racist character. WOSA/WLP's real reason for boycotting this year was the collapse of the WLP, whose reformist program failed to attract popular support among workers in the last elections. The WLP continues to be a moribund front for WOSA, which does not have the political courage to admit its failure and drop the pretense of being part of a larger organization.

The International Socialists of South Africa (ISSA — part of the Cliffite International Socialism tendency) supported the bourgeois ANC. Neither the International Socialist Movement (ISM) nor the Comrades for a Workers Government (CWG) took a clear position on the elections. The CWG had previously supported the ANC.

## Workers International Election Manifesto: Vote, Unite, Organize and Fight!

### Preamble

Workers Unite! We have nothing to lose but our chains. Only under the leadership of the working class can society be reconstructed to end the dictatorship of the capitalists and to bring an end to poverty, starvation and exploitation. We call on all workers, socialists and democrats to vote for the *Workers International* on the 29th May 1996, on the basis spelled out below:

The parties of the Government of National Unity (GNU), spearheaded by the ANC-SACP [South African Communist Party] alliance, made a lot of promises to the masses before the April 1994 elections. They gave it a name — RDP [Reconstruction and Development Program]. But the RDP is a miserable failure, and failed to make meaningful changes to people's lives over the past two years. We have always maintained that the RDP will not deliver. In order to mask this failure, the government and media tries to squeeze the maximum mileage out of every contribution made by the RDP. We see on television the great hullabaloo when a rural community's piped water is turned on thanks to the RDP. Water is of course very important, but if this is the main thing the RDP has achieved in two years with still very many communities without piped water to this day, then the situation does not look half bad. We note the presidential projects under the RDP (free health care for pregnant mothers and under six year-olds, school feeding scheme, and other), but despite massive problems with each of these schemes, taken together they are only a drop in the ocean of the needs of the masses. But why is the RDP failing?

It is failing because the new South Africa ensured that Apartheid is removed from the law books, but did nothing to break the stranglehold of the capitalist minority over the economy. The wealth of our country remains in the greedy control of the tiny minority of bosses who enriched themselves on the backs of apartheid practices and oppression. The wealth generated by our economy goes into the coffers of this tiny elite and not to the masses, who are living on the brink of starvation, many, especially among the unemployed are actually starving. On top of this, all social surveys show,



that after two years of the ANC in power, the income and resources of the country still go mainly to the white community. For instance, blacks (87% of the population) get 41.5% of total income, whereas whites (13% of the population) takes 58.5% of the total income. 87% of the land is still in the hands of whites. Infant mortality among Africans is 10% and among whites it is 1%. The picture is the same on every social indicator. These racist inequalities were created by apartheid, but remain unchanged after two full years of the ANC/SACP in power.

The RDP cannot really address any of these problems, because it is part of and accepts this undemocratic system of the bosses, called capitalism. The RDP ensures therefore that the profits of the bosses are protected, and that only the remaining crumbs, left over after the feast of the capitalists, are thrown at the working class. This is why the RDP cannot be implemented. But even if it is fully implemented, it would still not make major changes in the living standards of the masses, because it is too limited, a drop in the ocean.

After telling us that the RDP can only be implemented when the local government is sorted out, Mandela closed down the RDP office early this year. This is an admission that the GNU cannot and will not deliver on its RDP promises. They hope that by shutting down the RDP office the expectation the people have of the GNU will die down with it. But their tricks will not work any longer.

The SACP in its program, in order to cover up for the RDP's weaknesses, claims that the RDP can be a step towards socialism. But this is a lie. The reforms promised in the RDP cannot lead to socialism, because in the first place, no reforms of any significance (mass housing, free health care and education for all, etc.) can be achieved without massive inroads into the wealth of the ruling class (which the RDP does not propose). Socialism is not a gradual accumulation of reforms, but needs a revolution led by the working class against the capitalists and their system.

We do not reject reforms, but when we fight for them, the main point is that in achieving reforms, the power and the confidence of the working class in its own strength is built up, in preparation for the revolution. Reforms also help to defend the living standards of the masses.

After two years we have seen that the GNU is opposed to the interests of the working class. For instance, it is busy privatizing state companies as well as municipal services. This will lead to retrenchments, higher prices and higher profits for the bosses. By passing the anti-worker Labor Relations Act, the GNU has exposed its anti-worker bias. The same can be said of the GNU's acceptance of GATT and the IMF and World Bank, which are in the lead of the massive attacks against the poor worldwide.

The GNU's anti-worker politics has also been clearly revealed by attacks by the police and army on strikers and students, and by the mass dismissal of strikers, for instance the 6,000 nurses in ex-Transkei. Now, the RDP is part of the program of a government which is against the working class using and building its independent strength in struggle to win gains from the capitalist enemy. Therefore we call on the working class and its allies to *not vote* for any of the parties that use the RDP to try and deceive the struggling people.

In our previous manifesto we explained that even the most basic needs of the masses cannot be adequately addressed under this rotten and miserable capitalist system. These needs can only be catered for under a system where there are no capitalists. Where the big factories, mines, banks

and other big companies are nationalized and are under workers control. Only then, can the wealth generated by society be applied to the uplifting of all people under a plan controlled by the working class and its allies. Such a society is what we call a socialist society, which must not be confused with what existed in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. These countries were Stalinist, and used socialist rhetoric and pretensions to fool the working class, but in



*ANC embraces imperialism: Nelson Mandela greeting U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher.*

reality they were anti-working class dictatorships. For us, standing in the election and serving on councils is not a principle *but only a part of this overall struggle for socialism.*

Workers, democrats, socialists, we must not forget for one minute that the local government structures are part and parcel of the capitalist state, which as a whole defends the bosses' system against the working class and its fellow poor. Therefore we must have no illusion in the ability of local government under capitalism to adequately address the needs of the people.

Therefore, we say that for us the elections are part of a wider struggle. We do not make any promises but call on the working class and its allies to use the elections to take the struggle for their rights, which is part of the broader struggle for socialism.

#### **The Pre-Interim Phase Fiasco**

The period from the formation of the transitional councils till the first inclusive local government elections, is

called the pre-interim phase. Councilors in this phase were *not* elected, but *appointed*. The Workers International has from the outset rejected these councils (which included SACP councilors), which turned out to be just as undemocratic as expected.

## **The Basic Needs and Principles We Shall Fight for**

### **1. Against Racist Boundaries**

The manner in which boundaries were drawn for the election was plain racist. Whites by and large have their own wards. Wards of white areas are also bigger with much more resources than wards in other areas. Whites are also given more wards in relation to their population total than blacks. This racism is perpetuated in the rural areas. We stand for the end of all practices related to apartheid. Forward to non-racial boundaries!

### **2. One City, One Tax Base**

This is an important basis on which the favoring of white and rich areas can be stopped. All municipal taxes must be centrally collected and distributed equally to all local authorities on the basis of the number of residents. The same principle must be implemented in the rural areas.

### **3. Accountability to the Community**

Councilors must be made accountable to their constituencies. We stand for regular mass meetings where councilors must report back to the community.

### **4. Jobs For All or a Living Unemployed Benefit**

The ANC, SACP and other parties in the GNU have proven that they are not serious about tackling unemployment. In fact, the problem continues to grow under the GNU. In the 1996 Budget, for instance, the GNU had a lot to say about unemployment, but did not allocate funds to deal with the problem. Instead of tackling this problem head-on, the ANC and SACP leaders are using unemployment to attack workers, telling them to be grateful for their starvation wages because they at least have work! Work at decent wages and conditions is a right, and not a privilege, as these leaders want us to believe.

Capitalism can never provide jobs for all, therefore the struggle against unemployment is at the same time a struggle against capitalism. Our Councilors will fight for local government work schemes, and will support and promote co-operatives. We stand for the subsidization of housing, services and transport for the unemployed, pensioners and the disabled. Even though the issue of a living unemployed benefit is a matter for a national government, our councilors will use their positions to fight for this important need. We stand for a special levy on every business, except small business, to assist with the financing of this program. We maintain that the creation of jobs for all is the responsibility of the state, and we will mobilize the employed and unemployed against the regional and national government in the struggle against unemployment.

### **5. Scrap All Arrears**

We stand for the scrapping of all rent, rates and service arrears in all working class areas (including white) until the day of the elections. We shall fight against the practice of charging people for services that are not provided (as in many townships) and for these to be at affordable levels determined by the community.

### **6. Tax the Capitalists More**

VAT is a tax which attacks the living standards of the working and middle classes. It is a means to allow the government to subsidize the capitalists whose tax burden has been decreased from year to year. As part of our overall struggle against this parasitic tax, our councilors will fight for



*Striking miners, 1996. "Old" class struggles continue in "new" South Africa.*

the abolition of VAT on all matters related to housing (rent, rates, bricks, etc.) and services. The capitalists need to be taxed more to finance local government.

### **7. Housing**

Despite all the promises and hullabaloo, the government is failing to provide houses for the masses. Now, in the 1996 Budget, the GNU reduced the housing allocation by more than half of the previous year's amount. They justify this by pointing to the billions which the housing department could not spend. We reject the concrete slabs which the GNU is selling to our people as houses. We oppose the continuation of segregated areas, created by apartheid, and continued by the GNU. We stand for decent and quality houses in and near the cities. Empty houses, flats and blocks of flats that belong to absentee landlords, must be confiscated by the council and redivided among the homeless.

### **8. Adequate and Equal Services**

Many working class areas still do not have adequate services. Our councilors will fight against this situation, and will campaign seriously for the adequate and equal provision of municipal services (water, roads, drainage, toilet facilities, electricity).



## 9. Community Facilities

All communities must be provided with proper and adequate schools, clinics, day hospitals, libraries, sport fields, playgrounds, parks, meeting places, child care facilities, after school care facilities, extramural educational and cultural activities. Trees and lawns must be grown in all working class areas.

## 10. Subsidized and Efficient Transport

Our councilors will fight for more efficient and subsidized transport to and from work. Transport for the unemployed, students, disabled and pensioners, must be fully subsidized. In the past transport subsidies enriched the bus companies. We need an approach which will benefit the community. Many workers spend long hours on the road to and from work. This is a result of the apartheid practice of housing the oppressed far away from the city centers and industrial areas. As an interim measure, upgrading and expanding the public transport system is the best way of overcoming the negative effects of this situation. The long term solution is for people to be housed close to their places of work. The bosses must be made to pay to subsidize better transport for the workers, because they benefitted most from dumping the oppressed on the barren landscape. The only solution that will resolve all problems with transport, is the nationalization of the transport system under workers control.

## 11. Better Community Health and TB Treatment

Our councilors will fight for improved primary health care. All areas should have adequate health facilities (clinics, day hospitals, ambulances), with sufficient medical supplies, nurses and doctors. TB is the health scourge of the Western Cape. We stand for special TB clinics in every area where it is a problem, and every family which is affected by TB must get full state support until healed. TB is a disease linked to poverty, and is caused by the capitalist system which keeps the majority of the population in abject poverty. In the fight against TB the only meaningful solution is the eradication of poverty, which can be achieved only by struggle for socialism.

## 12. No Society Is Free While Its Women Are In Chains

The oppression of women is rooted in the conditions of the capitalist system. Women have a secondary social status, and are discriminated against in the economy, in many cultures, and in politics. They are projected as sex objects, existing mainly for the pleasure of men. The important domestic work done by women is a vital contribution to the functioning of society. But this work is regarded as of low

significance, as of no real value, and as unworthy of "men." Women have been forced into the role of domestic servants over many, many centuries, and this cannot be tolerated any further. We reject all discrimination against women.

But the liberation of women from domestic labor will not be done through the sharing of house work alone, though this is very important. The long term answer lies in the socialization of domestic work. This means that the state must provide adequate and properly subsidized child care facilities, laundries and community eating houses. These must be non-profit making and subsidized by the state. The standards and quality must be of the highest. Our councilors will fight for the implementation of these basic rights, and will oppose all forms of women's oppression. Workers International says: *Free the women from domestic drudgery so that they can take up their proper place in the struggle for socialism.*

## 13. No to Privatization of Municipal Property & Services

The privatization of municipal property and services in the last years of apartheid, has been a serious attack against the working class and the community. It led to retrenchments, higher prices and more profits for the rich. Now the ANC-led government is continuing this anti-working class practice. Recently, the Cabinet agreed in principle to continue to privatize our water, electricity, roads and other services. We reject and oppose this completely. We stand for the confiscation of all municipal property so privatized. We stand for the taking over by the councils of the services that were put in the hands of the capitalists.

## 14. Full Rights For All Council Employees

These workers (and all others) are entitled to a living wage and humane working conditions. Our councilors will fully support this struggle of the municipal workers for better conditions and wages. We support fully the right of council workers to strike, and we will defy the new capitalistic Labor Relations Act in support of the workers.

## 15. No to the Olympic Bid

The bid for Cape Town to host the Olympics in 2004 is already heaping more burdens onto the working class and its fellow poor. Much needed funds are diverted away from the needs of the masses. Only the bosses stand to benefit from the bid, because they will get contracts. Our councilors will use their positions to oppose the bid.

## These Are Not Promises, but a Statement of Intent and a Call to Action!

Should any of our councilors be elected, we will fight for each and every one of these issues. We will fight against any undemocratic and racist practice, and we will expose the deals made behind the backs of the community. We will fight for local government to break its ties with big business. We call on the working class and their fellow poor to not allow our councilors to be isolated by the capitalists. Vote for our candidates, and actively support them in the struggle to implement the views spelt out in this manifesto. The role of our councilors will be important, but the active support of the working class and its allies will be decisive!

*The Struggle Continues: Vote, Unite, Organize and Fight!  
Build Independent Working Class Organizations!  
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# Bankruptcy

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market" and tough social security programs like those Clinton stands for. Clinton and his clones abroad are convincing many capitalists that it is the traditional parties of the "left," the liberal reformists, who now should be put in charge of the ongoing assault mounted originally by reactionaries like Reagan and Thatcher.

The decisive step in convincing the ruling class of Clinton's usefulness was his support for the bipartisan "end welfare as we know it" bill, signed just before the Democratic Convention in August. This vicious measure, Slick Willie claimed, would put people now on welfare to work — by severely restricting the availability of benefits without creating any jobs. It abandoned several million children who already live below the poverty line. It condemns hundreds of thousands of adults — mothers, the aged and the infirm. It hits immigrant workers particularly hard. Even more, it will create a huge reservoir of workers who can be compelled to work as cheap labor (see p. 3). It gained approval in the better off but still economically endangered layers of the working class, even though it will undermine the wages of the entire class.

Coming on top of Clinton's previous racist, anti-worker bills (immigration, "three strikes and you're out," anti-"terrorism"), this bill ended a pillar of liberal legislation won by the working class in the struggles of the 1930's and 1960's. The capitalists have been experimenting with ways of fanning the fires of competitive division within the working class — two-tier wages, whipsawing workers of one factory against the next, turning workers of one country against another. Although still carefully presented in polite terms, racist and anti-immigrant measures are paramount. Gender is likewise a promising line of increased division. The welfare crackdown fits into the pattern and adds new dimensions. It is meant to soften up the working class for a knifing of Social Security.

## PROGRESSIVES' BETRAYAL PROGRESSES

Clinton not only managed to deliver the welfare crackdown but was still able to maintain social peace. He disarmed the more liberal naysayers with the line that the Republicans' proposal would have been worse. But the key reason was the support by the heads of mass labor, Black and Latino organizations, who didn't blink an eye in urging the president's reelection. They have the power to lead fights against the bourgeois attack — but chose instead to endorse the leader of the attack.

The top AFL-CIO bureaucrats, John Sweeney's "New Voice," ended the less electorally involved policy of the old voices and threw \$35 million and the kitchen sink into the Democratic campaign. The welfare bill with its slave-wage "workfare" attack against unionized workers was labor's reward for early and unconditional support for Clinton.

The Black leadership behaved similarly. Jesse Jackson, once the favorite of the left but whose permanent assignment is to keep Blacks entrapped in Democratic Party electoralism, actually said of Clinton: "He's been fundamentally a good president. And I support him." (*Daily Challenge*, Oct. 17.) Almost as supine, the "intransigent" Al Sharpton led a march outside the August convention in Chicago where he issued empty warnings to Clinton:

**None of us would entertain voting for Dole. But the**

**question is unless Clinton can make a clear line that he is not trying to move toward a "Demopublican" but clearly maintains a stand that means that the president has compassion for the poor, he will soften our turnout and could lose the election.** (*Chicago Defender*, Aug. 19.)

Equivocating as to whether or not Clinton was moving toward a "Demopublican" stand is like musing as to whether or not the Grand Canyon is a big hole in the ground. For when push comes to shove, Sharpton has no strategy except voter registration. His role, like Jackson's, is to herd masses from the streets into voting booths.

Given the fanfare, Louis Farrakhan's leadership proved even more embarrassingly feeble. He had built the "Million Man March" a year ago, in large part as a launching pad for a huge voter registration drive designed to maximize an independent Black political presence in the election. But even this diversion from real struggle came to nothing. Farrakhan was unable to put forward any alternative program or offer even significant pressure that would affect Clinton's relation to the Black vote. He ended up abstaining, not because he thought Clinton was bad for Black people but because he thought Jack Kemp might be better.

Labor's millions and Farrakhan's Million failed in their proclaimed goals of turning the country around. A contained rally which abjured protest and featured atonement and voter registration was no substitute for real mass mobilizations in defense of Black people. The massive spending by the AFL-CIO bureaucrats was a diversion from mobilizing the ranks in defense of the working class. These efforts were used not to advance the oppressed and exploited masses but to dull their resistance. Such leadership is far more deadly than anything the CIA could peddle in the ghettos.

The capitulations of all the mass leaderships show that the working class must turn away from the hopeless reliance on the parties of the bourgeoisie and the present treacherous misleaders. The electoral campaign proved there is no middle ground between the capitalist program of racism, austerity and war — and the revolutionary program that meets the needs of the working class. We have said it for years, but never before has it been so clear: *Workers' Socialist Revolution is the Only Solution!*

## THE CAPITALIST FUTURE

Capitalists by nature are like a pack of ravenous rats. They first chew at the weakly defended; hence the politicians' demolition of welfare and forays against immigrant rights and affirmative action laws, directed against Black and Latino workers. No patter about "inclusion" can hide the ugly racist pitch to the white majority, designed to sell the lie that their present plight is caused by people of color who are cheating them out of tax dollars and stealing their jobs.

This kind of motivation induced California voters to pass Proposition 209, the deliberately mislabeled "Civil Rights Initiative" that outlaws affirmative action across the board. Because of this issue, Latino voters in California bucked the national trend by turning out in record numbers this year; three-quarters of them opposed 209.

During the campaign, Clinton and Dole passionately defended Medicare and Social Security, pledging that these programs would be preserved more or less intact. The truth is that they both aim to cut them drastically. For some time, big bourgeois notables have been noisily demanding action. They insist that these programs are an increasingly costly time bomb waiting to go off. The rest of the ruling class and

their political agents agree.

Post-election news stories show that plans for cuts are already in the works. Democrats and Republicans alike will go along with a host of privatization schemes; even labor bureaucrats may be coopted onto the "bipartisan" cutting boards. They will all claim that they're saving "our children" from massive debts and taxes in the next century. But they will only be trying to save capitalist profits in this one.

#### WHY THE CAPITALIST ATTACK?

For twenty years the ruling class has engaged in an escalating campaign designed to erase all of the gains made by workers in the 1930's and the Black struggle in the 1960's and early 1970's. The corporate attack on wages, benefits and jobs has been joined by an assault on the social wage, the government programs which were concessions forced by past struggles. The reason is capitalism's rate-of-profit crisis, stemming from the system's inexorable drive to accumulate capital, noted by Karl Marx a century and a half ago.

The present generation of new fighters grew up when illusions in prosperity still lingered although the reality had changed decisively. Bemoaning the economic woes facing most workers today, many still think of those days as being the norm of what capitalism in our times can deliver. But this is the epoch of capitalism's death agony. The period of relative prosperity was an aberration, not the norm; nothing even approaching it will ever return so long as capitalism survives.

If capitalism is to hang on, it must turn first to another great depression. Every crumb conceded to the class struggle in the past must be restored to the monopolists and financial oligarchs in order to raise their profit rates. This is why millions of children now toil in factories around the globe; why actual slave labor has returned with a vengeance; why U.S. sweatshops are no longer just words in a history book but are spreading in the American Dreamland as well as abroad. It is why the imperialist powers are tearing at each other today with protectionist schemes, paving their way to trade wars and cold wars tomorrow and, later, another world war. It is why the capitalists are milking the "third world" dry; why Rwanda, Burundi, Zaire, Somalia today are foundering and millions are starving. It is why this anti-human social, economic, political plague will soon engulf the rest of Africa, Asia, Latin America and extend its grip to Europe, North America and the rest of the world.

The capitalists are also quite willing to make profits based on fiction and not the real production of real commodities. The soaring of the stock markets into outer space is testimony to that. However, as Marx also observed, regardless of what the bourgeoisie wants, the system itself needs periodic depressions to restructure capital and to discipline the

working class. Having helped postpone a major depression for over half a century, the balloon of fictitious capital will inevitably explode. We can't predict the date, but the coming depression will make the 1930's look tame.

The working class — even its most dispossessed and oppressed sectors — are only experiencing a taste of what is to come if capitalism is allowed to linger on. But like the media savants of the late 1920's, their descendants today tell us that talk of a great depression is crisis mongering: capitalism has cured itself of that disease. There are also those who say that whatever happens, one thing is sure, the whole idea of a working class explosion is now past history — just as socialist revolution is a dream of the past. In fact, at this moment, the mass of workers themselves believe that.

The small turnout for the elections, plus the voting patterns of those who did hold their noses and vote, both reveal mass discontent and alienation from the political-electoral system. It is anger, not apathy — and that too is just a taste of what is to come. Both the pundits and the proletariat are in for a gigantic surprise. The bourgeoisie is far more aware of the tension, and that accounts for why so many normally Republican capitalists turned to Clinton.

#### CLINTON: LESSER EVIL IS GREATER

This has been a bad year for those on the left who normally justify supporting the Democrats on "lesser evil" grounds. Progressives denounce "Republican" anti-immigrant and anti-welfare measures, as if Democrats had nothing to do with them. The "Communist" Party had to label the merely reactionary Gingrich Republicans "neo-fascist" to justify backing Democrats with blood on their hands. Of course, inasmuch as some of their cuts are less than the Republicans', Clinton and the Democrats are indeed a lesser evil. But the whole approach is wrong.

In 1992, we pointed out that the bourgeoisie gravitated away from the Republican Bush when he reacted to the Los Angeles riot without even a smidgeon of sympathy for the Latino and Black masses. The ruling class turned to a slicker hypocrite who could dribble out the requisite crocodile tears.

They chose Clinton then because they were not yet ready for an overt racist confrontation that could make U.S. cities erupt and could close down key industries and areas of government. On the other hand, the '90's are not the '60's. Nowadays the ruling class has no intention of making concessions to such rebellions beyond a few Black faces in high places. Clinton, like Bush, stood for building up a military response to maintain order and smash any future revolts. A "sympathetic" Democrat could more easily than Bush get away with a hard line toward explosive Black anger.

This year Clinton was preferred for similar reasons. The

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only alternative the bourgeoisie might have felt more comfortable with was Colin Powell. Being Black, a celebrated military figure and a "moderate," he had many of Clinton's advantages without the sleaze. He also had the leeway to be more candid than the candidates. Addressing the Republican convention, Powell said, "We all need to understand it is the entitlement state that must be reformed, not just the welfare state."

Powell could hint that Social Security and Medicare were to be cut, but the Congressional Republicans' harsher attack was perceived by the bourgeoisie to be unrealistic at this time. The tide turned against them when the public was outraged by Congress's shutdown of the federal government last winter. Clinton carried out the thrust of the Gingrich/Dole program by trimming it slightly.

Imagine for a moment that Gingrich and the Republicans had been able to enact their plan of gutting Social Security, preventing even minimal minimum wage gains, privatizing schools and in general eliminating all gains of minorities, women, gays and trade unionists. The Black, Latino, union and women's leaders — and even some Democratic politicians — would have been forced by the anger of their base to organize mass protests, if only to head off explosions they couldn't control. But when Clinton carries out a chunk of that same program, the liberals and reformists work overtime to prevent mass action, lest it endanger Clinton's re-election.

It's at least an even bet that if Bush were still president the welfare system would still be standing. Just as it took the anti-communist Nixon to sign an imperialist peace with China, it takes liberals to repeal the New Deal. And Democrats are needed to end Medicare and Social Security as we know them.

The reactionaries (including fascists) are being kept in reserve. But today the bourgeoisie remains basically cautious, unwilling to risk a dangerous instability when it still is confident it has ways of keeping the working class passive, divided and demoralized.

In sum, the lesser evil cannot be seen as an unfortunately weak bulwark against the greater evil's assaults. It is Clinton's program which delivers the greater blow, because Gingrich's program cannot be carried out at this time. So, while Clinton is the lesser evil in theory, that makes him the greater evil in practice. As well, as the bourgeoisie is aware, it is part of a one-two punch, the left jab that softens up its victim for the later right cross — the knockout blow.

### THIRD-PARTIES: OLD GARBAGE IN SMALL PAILS

Some on the reformist left cast protest votes for the middle class do-gooder, Ralph Nader. On the part of habitual Democratic supporters like DSA and the Committees of Correspondence, this was no step to the left but an ineffectual continuation of their popular-front policy of supporting bourgeois liberalism. Today Nader, tomorrow another slightly less odiferous Democrat. But for the self-proclaimed "revolutionary socialist" Solidarity group, it was a decisive move to the right, across the class line, since they have not previously supported bourgeois candidates openly.

Some labor bureaucrats and leftists stake their hopes in

the newly founded Labor Party. But as we predicted last spring in our pamphlet for the LP's founding convention:

**LPA's labor party will reinforce the AFL-CIO's Democratic Party electoralism. It will ensure that radicalized workers who want to fight the capitalist attacks have no alternative.**

And so it came to pass. For example: whereas Sweeney got himself a token arrest on Labor Day supporting the



Latino march on DC, Oct. 12. Youth are at forefront of immigrant rights battle.

Detroit newspaper strikers, the LP leadership did nothing — notwithstanding the unanimous resolution at the party's founding convention last June for a massive march on Detroit to defend the year-and-a-half-long strike.

In the election, all but one of the Labor Party's endorsing unions campaigned for the Democrats. And any time a Labor Party leader opened his mouth, out came support for one Democrat or another. Adolph Reed of the LP's Interim National Council wrote in the October *Progressive* magazine that he couldn't see voting for Clinton this time. But he voiced support for "a number of good, solid progressives" running for Congress. One was Tom Fricano, a Democratic candidate in New York. Fricano, however, declared support for Clinton's signing the welfare bill. Some progressive!

Of the left parties that ran candidates, the Workers World Party had the most energetic and successful campaign. But for all its socialistic talk and gutsy actions, the WWP also tailed liberal politics by not denouncing the labor bureaucrats and Black and Latino misleaders for their failure to fight against capitalism and the Democrats. *Workers World* even reported that municipal union head Stanley Hill in New York might "be preparing to open a struggle to block the spread

### "Sold Out" Indeed

The October *Labor Party Press* features a photo of Arthur Cheliotis, head of CWA Local 1180 in New York. The caption states that he "spoke for the Labor Party at a sold out panel on Progressives & the 1996 Elections in New York City September 26. The panel included Ralph Nader and representatives of the New Party, the Campaign for a New Tomorrow, and the Campaign for Peace and Democracy."

What the *Press* doesn't tell its readers is that, amid all the third party speakers, the Labor Party's spokesman spoke for labor's enemy, Bill Clinton!

of workfare" — as if Mayor Giuliani's favorite doormat could conceivably stand erect enough to fight. The WWP's real strategy is to convince rather than oppose reformist mis-leaders.

Workers World has always had a popular front strategy; its break from Trotskyism began in 1948 when founder Sam Marcy chose to support the left bourgeois Progressive Party of Henry Wallace. In recent years it has backed Democrats Jackson, Harold Washington and David Dinkins. By keeping quiet about the nature of the bureaucrats, Workers World again leaves room for future support of "left" Democrats. As a promissory note, WWP enthused over the victories of several Black Democratic congressional candidates this year. The assumption that because Black people are oppressed, Black bourgeois politicians will represent their needs has been amply proved false.

### CAPITAL TRIUMPHANT?

The *New York Times* called 1996 the "Year of the Yawn." The *British Economist* asked, "Where's the Outrage?" Both bourgeois organs were gloating over the lack of any significant response by the U.S. working class. And it was indeed a bourgeois victory.

The run-up to November was a period of unusual calm — especially after Clinton's populist appeal over health care and economic slowdown to win in 1992, after Gingrich's "revolution" swept Democrats out of Congress in 1994, and after this year's own populist threat, Pat Buchanan's mobilization of "peasants with pitchforks" in the primaries.

We have said for some time that both left and right populism are tactics for misdirecting and disarming the masses, who have been radicalizing. In echoing the growing hatred of the capitalist rich, populists promote the idea that specific elites are the enemy but the masses' needs can be satisfied under capitalism. Since capitalism depends on sucking the masses dry, when the crunch comes this approach will set workers and the oppressed at each others' throats. Populism is a deathtrap.

However, just as the bourgeoisie hated Roosevelt and his phony denunciations of the "economic royalists," today they fear the populists' rhetoric lest it get out of hand. By dropping a lot of populist rhetoric this summer and fall and avoiding any significant policy disputes, the presidential campaign achieved, at least for the moment, the political stability the bourgeoisie wants.

In the past, we pointed out that populism on the right was growing, in an attempt to contain layers of white labor aristocrats. These skilled blue-collar workers' economic and social positions were being undercut, so they were polarizing to the right, given the absence of a radical class-conscious alternative on the left. In 1994, they bought Gingrich.

But the bourgeoisie got frightened that the Congressional Republican "revolution" would cripple the government and disrupt the economy. They did not want premature vigilante attacks on immigrants and people of color. They feared that the populist anti-government and anti-rich demagoguery combined with obvious governmental giveaways to the capitalists would spark even deeper outrage. So they insisted on a turn back from pseudo-revolution to "moderation."

At the same time, the petty bourgeoisie and labor aristocrats got a load of the fact that the "Republican revolution" meant attacks on *their* entitlements too, plus further gains for the rich. Frustrated, they too backed away. The radical impulsion hasn't disappeared; it simply doesn't know where to

turn. Accepting the limits of capitalism and therefore its imposed scarcity, all these elements find on the left are namby-pamby labor leaders, upper-class do-gooders and "special interests" — Blacks, Latinos and immigrants, et al, whom they have been misled into seeing as rivals for bits of the diminishing pie.

### DUAL POLARIZATION

Another polarization has also been occurring, to the left of mainstream politics. Many Black and Latino workers have had their hopes dashed. Some bit on electoralism when Jackson made his big pitch in 1988 and 1992, but they are now hostile and alienated. They are looking for a way to fight the system, and ignored the election.

Nor are all white workers moving right. Those in the economically worse-off sections of the proletariat are even more alienated from the system than before. They too will be hurt more deeply as the impact of the new welfare situation takes hold. So they too form a part of the social powderkeg.

The fact that the economic decline has momentarily slowed helped the bourgeoisie to produce a moderate electoral yawn. But workers' real wages have stagnated since the end of the prosperity bubble in the 1970's. On the other hand, while official figures lie about the extent of joblessness (and discount the low-wage, two-jobs, forced-overtime and temporary nature of current employment), the worst fears of the increasingly gloomy better-off sections of the working class haven't happened yet. That is the best that can be said for a period in which income gaps grew wider and U.S. capitalists did better at the expense of their imperialist rivals.

Some pundits credit Clinton's easy triumph to a healthy economy, but the boom has essentially been for bosses. The *Times* quoted a Mellon Bank economist: "It's astonishing that the economy can remain so long at virtually full employment and see not one hint of accelerated wage growth." However, not even bourgeois economists expect this shallow "non-recession" to last; conditions are worsening. It is inevitable that the class struggle will break out anew.

Both radicalizing trends can only grow — the leftward-moving workers who hate the system because of its racist and exploitative nature, as well as those who buy into the racism of the right populists who castigate mainstream politicians for giving too much to foreigners and Blacks. Workers looking to stop both increasing exploitation and stepped-up racism instead find only "progressive" pap and capitulations to austerity at every turn. These advanced workers and youth must join to build a revolutionary party within and for our

## The New "Labor Party": Democratic Party Advocates?

Written for the founding convention of Labor Party Advocates' new party, this pamphlet accurately called the shots on the LPA leaders' real intentions and exposed the capitulations of their "far left" supporters. It includes an analysis of Trotsky's labor party slogan, explaining why today's "Labor Party" has nothing to do with building the revolutionary working-class party that is needed.

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*Exodus of refugees from Zaire. Imperialist world offers no resting place for impoverished masses.*

class. Once such a party becomes a strong pole of attraction, even workers now moving to the right for answers can be made to see who are their real allies and enemies.

The blame for the current demoralization lies with the political dope pushers: the Sweeneys and Jacksons whose mantra is always "fight within the system." Wherever fires start, whether in Detroit or St. Petersburg, they rush in to put them out. The more mass anger they face, the more conservative they get.

But the demoralization within our class is not permanent. There are signs of a changing mood. Newspaper reports of CIA drug-dealing in cities like Los Angeles have outraged Black communities. Anti-immigrant assaults have spurred Latinos to begin mobilizing nationally. Welfare recipients have taken steps to organize against workfare.

Labor bureaucrats like Sweeney and liberals like Jackson find their main base of support in the middle class and labor aristocracy. These leaders continually attempt to check the struggles of the workers and oppressed; they are also the chief spokesmen for class peace, bourgeois democracy, electoralism and the possibility of economic equality under this system. Not only is the working class at large disaffected from such leaders; their own base in the better-off layers has been shaken by the loss of income and class position.

The recent overturn in the AFL-CIO bureaucracy, and the wholesale change in the location of power within the Black leadership, both reflect the shock waves among the very elements who have blocked social upheaval. These are signs of weakening in capitalism's border guards. Impressionists deny them because of the seemingly placid surface. But Marxists see that decisive changes are coming.

#### **WHY THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY?**

As welfare "reform" is implemented nationwide, along with more naked attacks on the unions, struggles will break out that have the potential of radicalizing and unifying critical layers of the class more definitively than anything in years. How far these struggles will go and what their impact will be is largely a question of the influence revolutionary leadership will be able to exert. With workfare obviously a union-busting tool, no more will its class as well as racist content be so easily disguised. When the attack on Social Security is revealed, it will add another element to the explo-

sive mixture within the working class. It will also present new dangers for our class, as the labor bureaucrats will want to defend their base in the aristocracy, at others' expense. All the more will the struggles ahead demand revolutionary leadership — to ensure that the demands of the whole class, especially its most oppressed, are fought for and not traded off once again.

The social eruptions the system is making inevitable could take the initial form of mass strikes or urban riots. Either way, a leadership is necessary that does not accept the need for capitalist profits and stability — a leadership that fights for a program, strategy and tactics based only on the interests of the mass of the working class.

The task is to build a league of revolutionary workers strong enough to fight for leadership of the coming struggles. Nowhere in history has a mass revolutionary party been created spontaneously; it requires from the start at least a small group of revolutionaries fighting for this vision within the working class. In the absence of combat for the party now, mass struggles can be easily diverted into reform traps.

We believe that a vision of the humane socialist society can motivate the most dedicated workers to fight for an authentically communist future. And only such a cadre can lead the working class to see through the pipedreams peddled by the reformists — that capitalism can be made to work in the interest of the mass of human beings.

The LRP often talks about the crucial tactic of a general strike against the capitalist attacks. Such mass action unites workers across workplace lines, encourages action by unemployed as well as employed workers, poses the class struggle in the sharpest terms — and shows the working class in its entirety the enormous power it has, in fact the power to remake society.

This tactic is part of the armory of authentic Marxists who know that workers can only gain revolutionary consciousness through their own actions. On the other hand, reformists who want to maintain the system and who conceive of themselves as beneficent saviors for lowly peons favor passive electoral campaigns.

Electoral work is an arena for revolutionary tactics. The LRP is too small today to run in elections. But we will, in the not too distant future. Not because we think the working class can take state power that way: the bourgeoisie will not give up its class power peacefully. We will use the electoral

platform to reach a wider audience, above all to denounce the idea that elections can transform capitalism. We will solidarize with the masses who refuse to vote out of contempt and hostility for bourgeois politicians and their hype; we ask them to vote for us not passively but as a conscious act of uniting with fellow workers to build their own party of revolutionary struggle.

As always, our program begins with the key slogan: *Workers' Socialist Revolution is the Only Solution!* To this end we fight for a program of *Jobs for All*: full public works, a

sliding scale of hours and an escalating scale of wages. We stand against racism, national chauvinism and anti-immigrant attacks; we campaign for defense squads in every necessary situation and point to the need for mass armed working-class self-defense overall. We find every way to champion our slogan, *For Proletarian Interracialism and Internationalism!*

If we are to overcome the obstacles raised by all the misleaderships — populists, “progressives,” nationalists, bureaucrats — the time for revolutionary-minded workers and youth to join the League for the Revolutionary Party is now. ●

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## COFI and LRP

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*continued from page 2*

### LABOR/ACADEMIA LOVE-IN

On October 3, the LRP attended the heavily advertised “Fight For America’s Future: A Teach-in with the Labor Movement,” at Columbia University. This show was billed as a reconciliation between labor and academia, and drew an overflow crowd of over 1,000. When Sweeney gave his duller-than-ever sermon for electoralism, LRPers from the floor denounced his support to Clinton and his cover-up of the welfare attack. The audience did not seem to contain any radical layer that appreciated the need for working-class hostility to the labor traitors. Nevertheless, it is important to speak out against these class betrayals whenever possible. The Columbia event, to be repeated around the country, is an attempt to recruit new middle-class elements to help derail workers’ struggles ahead. When the labor bureaucrats today say “organize the unorganized,” the last thing they want is a working-class movement that produces its own leadership.

LRPers participated in a number of demonstrations, including one against the church burnings, police brutality and racial injustice led by Al Sharpton (July 28); a demo demanding the extradition of “Toto” Constant to Haiti (July 29), a protest against the bombing of Iraq called by Workers World in September, and a protest outside the presidential debate in Hartford, Connecticut, in October. We also joined in a number of rallies in the Bronx and Manhattan following the outrageous “not guilty” verdict in favor of the cop who choked Anthony Baez to death.

### LATINO/IMMIGRANT RALLY

An LRP contingent went to the October 12 Washington march in defense of immigrant rights. (Our leaflet in English or Spanish is available on request.) This was a workers’ demo where many participants, overwhelmingly Latino, considered themselves socialists. Many cheered our placard “Un Voto para los demócratas o los republicanos es un voto a favor del

imperialismo, la guerra, la austeridad y el racismo” (“A Vote for the Democrats or Republicans is a vote for imperialism, war, austerity and racism”), and identified with our communist banner and propaganda for a general strike.

The rally itself was futile, beginning with the national anthem and dragging on with reformist speakers and Democratic hacks. While the gap between the ranks and the speakers did not come to a head that day, the conflict between the needs of immigrant workers and the Democratic program will be recognized by more and more as this movement develops.

### CHICAGO LRP

In addition to the anti-Klan work reported elsewhere in this issue, the Chicago LRP actively intervened in a range of demonstrations, meetings and forums. We gave two public talks, a Marxist analysis of the Russian elections during the summer and a forum this fall at Northeastern Illinois University on the Trotskyist understanding of fascism. Contact the Chicago LRP at 773/463-1340 to get involved in future political discussions and practical activities.

The Labor Day “March” in Detroit paraded only more Democratic Party illusions. The LRP intervened by focusing on the lessons drawn out in our article in *PR* 51 relating to the role of leadership in defusing this struggle. (Reprints are available on request.)

In September, LRP comrades attended a Spartacist forum on racism and the attacks on immigrants. The LRP intervened in opposition to the SL’s integrationism, which inevitably feeds the illusions that racism can be substantially dissipated under capitalism. When we raised permanent revolution as the road for black liberation, their speaker repudiated this fundamental Trotskyist strategy as irrelevant to U.S. Blacks today!

### LRP AT THE DNC

A major arena for intervention in Chicago this summer was the Democratic National Convention, which presented an opportunity to mobilize working-class anger against ruling-class politicians. Predictably, the misleaders of the labor, Black and Latino movements worked hard to deflect anger and the centrist left tailed right behind them. Only the LRP offered a revolutionary alternative.

On August 25th about 1000 people came to a march to defend immigrants’ rights, affirmative action, and living wages called by the *Una Voz* (One Voice) coalition — including Jobs With Justice, New Party and Centro Sin Fronteras. Amazingly, rather than march with their supposed one voice, said reformist groups organized and built separate marches! The New Party’s leaflet urged marchers to come straight to Teamster City for a rally with (pro-Democratic) labor leaders. For its part, Centro Sin Fronteras and other Latino groups kicked off a march with speeches by Democratic pol

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Jesus Garcia and pro-DP CSF leader Emma Lozano.

While the rest of the left sat by passively, the LRP countered these speeches with anti-Democratic Party slogans. As the CSF march progressed, many in a pro-Zapatista contingent responded to our efforts to draw a class line by enthusiastically joining our chants: "Obreros Unidos Harán La Revolución/The Workers United Will Make The Revolution," and "Clase Obrera No Tiene Fronteras/The Working Class Has No Borders".

A pivotal turn occurred when the LRP, a contingent of Zapatista supporters and some anarchists blocked against attempts to force activists into the protest-pit area outside the convention. (The New Party, Jobs with Justice and Acorn had filed a lawsuit against the draconian anti-protest measures adopted by Democratic Mayor Daley and the Chicago city council; their demand was not for free speech but for a better "designated protest area.") Our agitation won over the ranks of CSF, whose leaders were forced to hold their rally outside the proscribed pit.

### **SWEENEY-LED "PROTEST" BLAMES GINGRICH**

The AFL-CIO demonstrated its slavish loyalty to Clinton at a small demonstration at the State of Illinois Building. The demo had clearly been planned to avert any potential embarrassment either for Clinton or Mayor Daley. Incredibly, neither Sweeney nor any other speaker dared to mention, much less solidarize with, the firemen's union, which was picketing City Hall across the street in full view! Needless to say, the union ranks were not mobilized for the shameful display; Sweeney played out his farce before a crowd composed mostly of AFSCME and SEIU bureaucrats and staffers. But the few workers present seemed to enjoy the on-target heckles of LRP vendors in the crowd.

Evidently, Sweeney did not. He began by playing the role of an angry victim: noting that profits and executive salaries are at a record high, he asked why wages are down. An LRP supporter shouted out, "That's why!" Another LRPer yelled, "Because of the Democrats."

Changing the topic, Sweeney pointed to the "unity of organized labor," listing the various unions represented by bureaucrats on the podium. LRPers in the crowd cut through the stroke session, demanding to know what the AFL-CIO was planning for the Labor Day protests and pickets in Detroit called by the striking newspaper workers. Evidently nothing. Changing the topic again, Sweeney denounced "Gingrich's evil agenda." LRPers responded, "That's Clinton's agenda, too!"

### **WAS IT SOMETHING WE SAID?**

On August 27th, the "Not On the Guest List" Coalition, comprised of the Chicago reformist and centrist left, led a march of 800 from Wicker Park to the United Center. Although the demonstration was intended to protest police brutality and the racist justice system, rally organizers had originally planned to enter the cops' protest pens.

After an endless succession of liberal and pacifist speeches, the march got underway. To our surprise, supporters of the misnamed Revolutionary Communist Party marched under the banner "Revolution Is The Only Solution!" Despite this, the RCP joined with the reformists in an attempt to drown us out with "The People United Will

Never Be Defeated!" when we, drawing the class line, raised the slogan, "Workers' Revolution Is the Only Solution!"

The problem with "people united" is that "popular" (multi-class) unity always results in defeat for the working class. Real communists work to build the class struggle, not to bury it. Which is why the LRP also chanted "No Peace, Class War!" when the reformists' chanted "No Justice, No Peace!" At this point, the RCP rolled up its banner and scurried away. Revolution may be the only solution, but don't look for the RCP to actually fight for it.

Later, as the demo entered West Town, we encountered the Workers' World Party (WWP). Led by Gloria La Riva, the WWP's candidate for Vice President, the WWP contingent centered its efforts on amplifying the approved slogans with its bullhorn. But then, as the march wound down Ashland, La Riva gave an unarguable rap about how poverty, racism and war are all caused by the capitalist system, and how both the Democrats and Republicans are parties of the ruling class. As she concluded, the LRP once more raised its main slogan for the day, "Workers' Revolution Is the Only Solution!" Our slogan flowed from the logic of La Riva's speech, and we were joined by marchers in the WWP's own contingent.

Predictably, La Riva and other WWP leaders were horrified and attempted to drown us with the trite "The People United . . ." The LRP then switched to our slogans exposing the Democrats. At this point La Riva & Co. closed up shop and scurried into the crowd, like the RCP before them. Meanwhile, one of their own supporters thanked us for raising revolutionary slogans.

### **SPARTACISTS AT LRP FORUMS**

Breaking their longstanding custom, the Spartacists showed up at LRP forums in New York and Chicago in November. At both, they had nothing to say about the topics at hand and so intervened with their habitual slanders. They added new absurdities, however — including the accusation that the LRP retrospectively didn't support the North in the U.S. Civil War!

Another charge was that we would support a united front with Louis Farrakhan. And we would, under certain circumstances: if he and his supporters were under attack from racists, we would join in their defense. For Marxists, united fronts are not based on political agreement with any reformist leadership, integrationist or nationalist. But the SL's integrationism covers up a labor-aristocratic view that finds any form of Black self-assertion a threat. And since for the SL a united front means some political agreement with the leadership, the SL in practice only wants united fronts with reformist integrationists whom they feel comfortable with, not with reformist nationalists. The implication of their line against us is that they would not join in actions to defend Farrakhan or other Black nationalists in case of an attack from the right.

### **INTERNATIONAL**

The Australian article in this issue was contributed by a COFI supporter in that country, and the letter on Kurdistan comes from a friend of COFI/LRP in Germany. We publish a document on the important work of a new communist group in South Africa. We expect to have further information about this group in future issues. ●

## Letter: Preemptive Counterrevolution in Iraqi Kurdistan?

In PR 40 and 41, we published reports about revolutionary workers' organizations in Iraqi Kurdistan. This summer, Saddam Hussein took advantage of fighting between Kurdish nationalist organizations to send troops back into the region, and Clinton seized the opportunity to bomb Iraq once again. For all the headlines, the U.S. bourgeois media reported nothing about the working-class organizations. This account from a journalist in Germany provides updated information.

In 1991 in Iraqi Kurdistan there emerged workers' and toilers' councils (shoras), along with independent trade unions, unemployed unions and women's unions. They called for such things as the 35-hour week, the right to strike, unemployment insurance and equal rights for women. The latter was very important because of its direct challenge to prevailing reactionary values.

Out of these forces might have come the nucleus of a revolutionary alternative that would represent the interests of the exploited and oppressed masses of the Kurdish people at large. For only an internationalist proletarian strategy could unite the oppressed Kurdish, Arab, Persian and Turkish masses, a precondition for freeing any of them from the rule of the national bourgeoisies as well as the imperialists.

The working-class movement had been suppressed by the bourgeois nationalist parties in 1992, but it re-emerged as these parties became unmasked. In April 1992 they were outlawed by Jalal Talabani, leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), who controlled Suleimania, where they were particularly strong; the pretext was that they were "agents of foreigners." (This, from a politician whose ties to Iran gave Saddam the pretext to move into the North!)

Since then, leading members of the Unemployed Union have been harassed, abducted and even killed by the nationalists. Between 1992 and late 1994, more than 700 women were terrorized, and many of them killed, by governmental and allied Islamic forces on the charge of "deficient chastity." Nazir Omar, a leading member of the Workers' Communist Party of Iraq (WCPI), which was founded in 1993 and seems to be an influential force within the working-class movement in Iraqi Kurdistan, was murdered by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) led by Masoud Barzani in the same year, after addressing a big May 1st rally.

Nevertheless, in March 1994 delegates of various trade unions and of the Unemployed Union gathered in Suleimania to found the Federation of Workers' Unions of Iraqi Kurdistan. On May 1st, these forces were able to mobilize about 50,000 workers in Suleimania alone. On September 1st, a demonstration against the government (which had planned to forcibly remove the residents of a workers' quarter in Suleimania) was shot at by governmental forces. A leading cadre of the protest movement and the Unemployed Union, Bakir Ali, was wounded and then executed on the spot.

While the repression went on unabated in 1996, according to the WCPI up to 200,000 people took part in May 1st rallies all over Kurdistan. While this figure may be exaggerated, there was undoubtedly an immense turnout. This also reflects the fact that since 1995 new committees have been formed to revive the workers' councils; in a number of factories and districts delegates were elected.

All this of course met with the brutal opposition of the nationalist and Islamicist forces paid by Iran. The leader of the Revolutionary Kurdish Hezbollah, Adham Barzani, issued

a death warrant against WCPI political bureau member Rebarwar Ahmad because of an article opposing the reactionary Islamic position against women. This party and the two major Islamicist parties — the Islamic Movement of Iraqi Kurdistan of Sheikh Uthman Abd-el Aziz, and the Kurdish Hezbollah of Sheikh Muhammad Khaled Barzani — have always acted in close collaboration, with the Iranians and the KDP. They have thus become a major force in the region.

The bourgeois nationalist forces attacked May Day rallies; the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) of Jalal Talabani threatened to close down all printing firms that dared to



*Kurds massacred by Turkish army near Iraq border.*

publish such "blasphemous" material. The PUK also tried to close down the WCPI's radio station, but was prevented from doing so by widespread popular opposition. According to the WCPI, the PUK's balance sheet counts more than 7000 people killed since the civil war began. Over 650 political opponents and over 400 women were murdered and dozens of popular protests suppressed by sheer force.

The parallel offensives of the two blocks, the PUK/Iran and the KDP/Iraq, are not only part of both states' struggle for regional hegemony, with Kurdish auxiliary forces interposed. From the point of view of imperialism, they are part of the cynical game of reciprocal containment. They also have the character of a pre-emptive counterrevolution against the working class-based revolutionary movement in Iraqi Kurdistan, which was threatening the grip of the bourgeois forces. Had these bloodsuckers of the Kurdish people and particularly the working class been toppled by a social revolution, this would have had immense effects on the situation of all Iraq and the neighboring states.

Along with the containment of Iran, this is probably one of the major reasons for the U.S.'s stance during the recent crisis. Plainly the U.S. did not want to hinder Saddam from strengthening his grip on Northern Iraq, even if this meant the liquidation of many CIA-financed opposition groups. The rocket assaults on southern Iraq, targeting military installations far from Kurdistan, were nothing but a show. They served Clinton's electoral campaign and were aimed at telling Saddam that he still could not play his own game and ignore the U.S.'s domination over the Middle East. *A. Holberg*



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# Palestinians

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refugee camps.) The logical consequence was the triumph of more openly defiant oppressors, the right-wing government of Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud Party, followed by their provocations and the more widespread Palestinian resistance this fall.

In the face of such a record, communists support the most fundamental democratic demand for the liberation of the Palestinian masses: *Self-determination for All of Palestine! All of Israel Is "Occupied Territory."*

We do not stop at this demand. We explain that only revolution by the working class can achieve Palestine's liberation, and that any lasting liberation depends upon the success of working-class revolution throughout the Middle East and ultimately the world.

## BETRAYALS BY ARAB BOURGEOISIES

Arafat and the PLO provide the clearest example of how bourgeois forces, tied to the maintenance of capitalism and imperialism, cannot play any progressive role in the struggle of the oppressed Palestinian people. Throughout the "peace process" Arafat has dropped basic democratic demands, one after another, in the effort to cut a deal with Israel and world imperialism. As a bourgeois-nationalist leader in this epoch, he knows no other way.

The recent events backed Arafat into a corner. To retain any mass support, he and his Palestinian Authority (PA) police were forced to take a militant posture against Israel and even fire back at Israeli forces in the clashes in Gaza and the West Bank. But his momentary approval among the masses will not last long. By the end of the week's disturbances, PA police were again controlling and dispersing crowds. The protests and general strikes in towns such as Nablus against PA police torture of Hamas militants and others this August show how shaky Arafat's position is. While he negotiates with Israel over whose troops will patrol the Beitar religious settlement in Hebron, the masses march in the street shouting "Destroy Beitar!"

Arafat keeps turning to imperialist powers for assistance like a hopeless addict: even Israel and the U.S. were stunned by his proposal to bring U.S. troops into Hebron. He shamelessly gave French President Jacques Chirac, whose government has brutally oppressed and harassed its Arab population, a hero's welcome — in return for some empty pro-Palestinian words Chirac spouted in a display of inter-imperialist gamesmanship. Such futile cravenness will not play for long with oppressed and impoverished Palestinians.

As the most prominent anti-Arafat force, Hamas currently enjoys support among more militant Palestinians. But Hamas is also connected to the Palestinian bourgeoisie and thus a direct obstacle to the masses' liberation. It wants to cut a deal with world imperialism more favorable to the bourgeois layers it represents. Thus it prefers terrorism as a pressure tactic on the imperialists rather than mass self-defense of the workers and oppressed.

Consistent demands for jobs and decent living standards would expose Hamas as well: like all religious movements, its promise of a paradise after death appeals to the masses only when they lack a decent life in this world. Hamas in particular depends upon mass suffering for its influence, as it uses

its "social welfare" network of hospitals, clinics, etc. to gain mass sympathy and support.

Mass resistance did not just pressure political leaders inside Israel and Palestine. Arab rulers like Egypt's Hosni Mubarak and Jordan's King Hussein have maintained a public posture in support of the Palestinians since the latest flare-up occurred. Though they are committed to cooperation with Israel and the United States, they felt the pressure of the masses' public opinion in their own countries.

## ARAB RULERS FEAR MASSES

Revolutionaries in Palestine must warn their brothers and sisters not to look to such figures for assistance in the liberation struggle nor to believe their posturing. Arafat welcomes governments like Jordan's with open arms, but they have a history of oppression of Palestinians almost as brutal as Israel's. If these Arab leaders were serious about their support of Palestinians, there are many concrete actions they could take — none of which they will ever dare to do.

Such a basic step as economic aid to suffering Palestinians is beyond the pale for these leaders. King Hussein, for example, already kowtows to the IMF and attacks the living standards of workers in his own country, raising bread prices in August in a move that set off riots across Jordan — riots Arafat disgracefully called on Palestinians not to join in.

Opening the borders between Gaza and Egypt and the West Bank and Jordan is a demand no bourgeois leader in any country will touch, but Palestinian protestors in Gaza took the matter into their own hands in the September uprising, ripping down a fence marking the Egyptian border. Israel could not tolerate such an affront to the established imperialist division of the Arab masses of the Middle East, and its troops opened fire on the offending Gazans.

If there were any genuinely pro-Palestinian leaders of Arab nations, the spectacle of rock-throwing youth being met with everything from guns to Apache helicopters would have led them to arm and train the Palestinian masses using the resources at their disposal as heads of sovereign states. In reality, as anti-Zionist dissident Israel Shahak has observed, these rulers don't even arm and train their own armies decently, so great is their fear of the toiling masses they must enlist. As a result, two-tier armed forces are prevalent in Arab nations — a well-armed and trained elite force to protect the ruling stratum and the substandard mass army — which lead to military debacles like the United States slaughtering 500,000 Iraqi soldiers with ease in the Gulf War. The Arab ruling classes prefer weakness and defeat from without to the threat of armed resistance from within.

Therefore revolutionaries do not actually call on such brutal enemies of the working class to carry out these demands. The only call revolutionaries in occupied Palestine must make is for the masses in Egypt, Jordan and other Arab countries to rise up against *their* ruling classes. To achieve that goal, just as for Palestinians to achieve liberation, the working class of each nation must build its revolutionary party as part of the re-created Fourth International.

The oppression of the Palestinians has been key to the existence of Israel and thereby to the maintenance of imperialism's death grip on the workers and oppressed of the Mideast. The Palestinians' uprising must likewise unleash and spread workers' revolutions, if imperialism is to be smashed.

*Re-create the Fourth International!  
For a Workers' Socialist Federation of the Middle East!*

# PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION

Winter 1997

## Palestinians Explode "Peace Process"

by Jeff Covington

The uprising of the Palestinian masses in late September, and the murderous response of the imperialist-backed Israeli occupier state, exposed the fraud of the "peace process" between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization for the whole world to see.

To the consternation of the U.S. and world imperialism, Israel and the PLO cannot reach agreement on even the most limited issues: the Jewish settlers in Hebron, a tourist tunnel opening onto the grounds of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. The masses' resistance forces Yasser Arafat to harden his stance if he hopes to maintain any shred of credibility. It also makes the Zionists see the futility of trying to appease them into submission with surface concessions.

The tourist tunnel was the immediate provocation that set off mass protests, marches and general strikes in the West Bank and Gaza. But the roots of the resistance reach down to the essence of the occupation itself, most clearly expressed this year by the closure of the Territories, in effect since March. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have been cut off from jobs in Israel proper, causing mass unemployment, desperate poverty and the resulting misery, hunger, sickness and deaths.

Israel responded by extending and tightening the deadly state of siege. Checkpoints were thrown up at all entrances to West Bank cities, preventing Palestinians in nearby areas from entering for access to health services, employment and education. Epidemics threatened to spread among Palestinian children because vital immunization programs were halted when doctors and nurses could not be transported to work posts in primary care clinics. Even patients being transferred to hospitals were turned back.

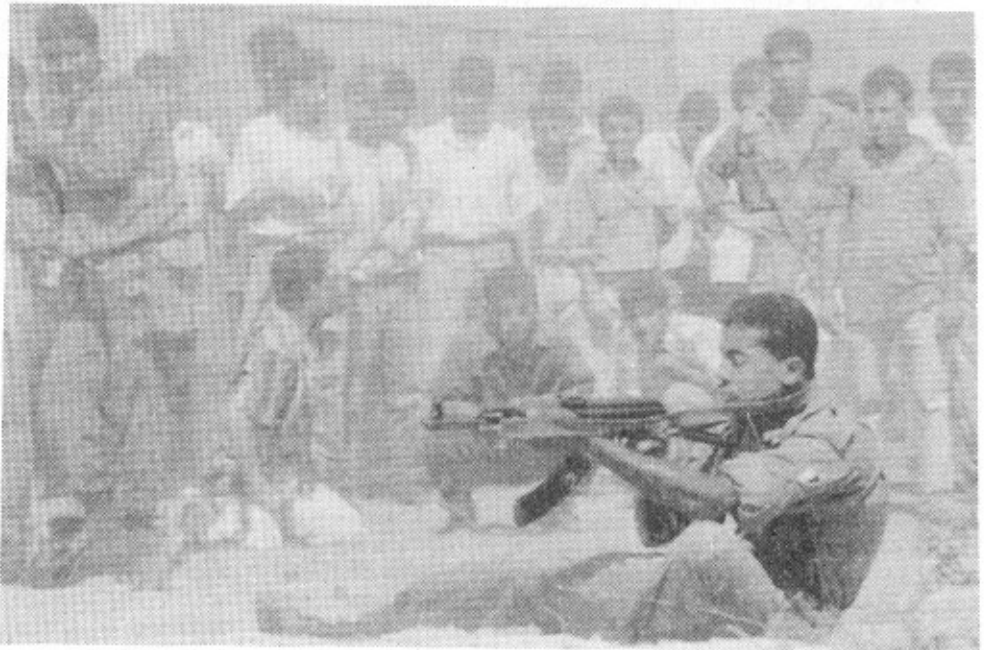
The bloodiest confrontation occurred when a march from Ramallah to Al-Aqsa was halted at an impromptu checkpoint deep in the West Bank. Then, after Israel used Apache helicopter gunships, tanks, mortar launchers and portable grenade launchers — obtained courtesy of the United States, of course — to assist in killing scores and injuring hundreds of Palestinians, doctors were fired on while trying to treat and evacuate the injured. (For more of the outrageous details, see the informative Bir Zeit University site on the World Wide Web at [www.birzeit.edu](http://www.birzeit.edu).)

### TRUE NATURE OF ISRAEL

The clashes further demonstrated many points that revolutionary communists have been making for a long time about Zionism, the PLO, and other players in the region —

such as the militant Islamic fundamentalist group Hamas and the rulers of Arab countries in the Middle East:

- Zionism is a thin religious-historical cover for the



*PLO policeman fires on Israeli soldiers during mass uprising. Soon after, Arafat's cops resumed role of controlling Arabs, in service to imperialism.*

establishment of an imperialist beachhead to police the volatile region and protect vital energy sources. Its essence was starkly revealed by Israeli author Amos Oz: "We're the Cossacks now, and the Arabs are the victims of the pogroms, yes, every day, every hour." The relation of Zionists to infamous anti-Semitic reactionaries is more than a historical analogy: at the very time of Hitler's rise to power, Zionists collaborated deeply with the Nazis — the worse it was for Jews in Germany, the more they'd turn to Zion.

- Israel's existence has always rested on the oppression of Palestinians. When its stability was shaken by the six-year Intifada in the late 1980's and early 1990's, the "left" Zionist government struck a deal with the PLO granting the latter semi-autonomous rule over the West Bank and Gaza — not to establish a Palestinian state but to police the masses more efficiently than the Israeli state could itself. (See PR 45.)

The mass resistance continued, expressed in distorted form this spring through Hamas's suicide bus bombings, and the illusion of peace between oppressor and oppressed was shattered. Israel dropped the facade and turned to naked force: the closure of Gaza and the West Bank and the destruction of entire villages suspected of harboring Hamas militants. (At the same time, Israel terrorized half a million civilians in southern Lebanon into desperate flight through a separate war against Hezbollah — including the bombing of

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