

# PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION



Re-Creat  
the Fourth International

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## Democrats No Answer to Bush

The U.S. ruling class is now going through the process of deciding who will be the leader of the world's leading imperialist power for the next four years.

A president, normally, is chosen by the voters in the primary and general elections. But the big bourgeoisie has the dominant say – through its finances and the parties and media it controls. Every major candidate must defend U.S. capitalist interests to the hilt; on that level there is no choice possible. Nevertheless, the capitalists must take into account the sentiments of the middle strata and the working class. So in large part, the election is a process in which the needs of the masses are expressed and then blocked, detoured and divided – so that the ruling class can test how best to maintain its rule.

The Bush administration was appointed by the Republican-dominated Supreme Court in 2000 after a roughly 50-50 popular vote and an outrageous case of racist vote-stealing in Florida. It is facing increasing discontent, among the capitalists as well as the petty bourgeoisie and the working class, over its foreign and domestic policies. Polls show that Bush has been steadily losing much of the popularity he enjoyed as a result of the September 11 attack. And everyday life shows that the hatred felt for Bush among working-class people, over the war and economic issues, is intensifying. Neither Washington nor Wall Street can ignore this.

### FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC WORRIES

At the outset, the overwhelming majority of the ruling class approved the Iraq war: it was an assertion of U.S. dominance over its imperialist rivals as well as over the super-exploited countries of the "third world." But even then, many bourgeois spokesmen



California supermarket strikers on the march. Class-wide workers' action, not electing Democrats, is the only way to stop capitalist attacks.

were troubled by the arrogance of Bush's unilateral approach, not only bypassing the United Nations but treating even the formal niceties of imperialist diplomacy as irrelevant. As a result the U.S. military is vastly overextended in Iraq and Afghanistan, even though it is by far the world's greatest armed power; and its diplomacy is in shambles. The steady stream of troop losses in these occupied countries intensifies the problem. The resistance of imperialist "allies" like France and Germany rumbles under the surface, punctuated by the growing trade war and currency maneuvers.

Within the U.S. bourgeoisie there is a growing belief that Bush has overreached and is committed to a policy that will inevitably cause more instability in an unstable world. They have to find a way to share the bloodletting burden and reduce the hostility to American domination abroad. Given the need to incorporate and deflect the growing mass hostility to the war, this is being sold as an "anti-war" stance. Democratic contenders like John Kerry and Wesley Clark, who supported the war at first, ended up criticizing Bush's methods and unilateralism. They worry about being mired in Iraq but of course accept that the imperialist occu-

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## Iraq: Fighting Imperialist Devastation . . . . . 23

# U.S. Sponsors Death-Squad Coup in Haiti

Whether or not President Aristide was kidnapped and thrown out of his country by a U.S. military escort, as he has claimed, it is clear that his ouster was engineered by the U.S. government. Along with its French and Canadian imperialist allies, the U.S. openly backed the allegedly “democratic” bourgeois political opposition. It also encouraged and armed the thugs – led by death-squad members from the former Duvalierist military – who had taken over much of Haiti during February.

Aristide had fulfilled his mission for the Haitian capitalists and their imperialist masters. Over the years he encouraged the working class, peasantry and other poor to stop striking and organizing their own communities and to depend instead on the resource-starved and imperialism-dominated Haitian state. He had convinced many workers and peasants that electing him would bring them bread and work.

Where he couldn't persuade or wear down the workers, he repressed them, even if less harshly than previous Haitian regimes. Up to twenty unionists sat in Aristide's jails at his ouster. Land reform has been non-existent. And the pro-Aristide “Chimère” militias spent more time harassing his political opponents than fighting for the demands of any workers or peasants.

The late-January revolt against Aristide of one such militia, the “Cannibal Army” street gang in the city of Gonaïves, signaled the downfall of his regime. Within days, hundreds of disciplined, well-equipped and well-armed men came over the Dominican border and quickly took over the major cities and towns of northern and central Haiti. Their leaders included notorious mass murderers from the time of Haiti's military dictatorship.

## ARISTIDE'S FIRST EXILE

Aristide was first elected president in 1990 as a radical-talking Catholic priest. Even though he never backed his words with action, the Haitian army and bourgeoisie didn't trust him to shut down the movement of general strikes and other mass struggles that had started in 1986 with the revolutionary overthrow of the  
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# LRP/COFI Report

Our report of activities is much shortened, because of the need to include a statement on the coup in Haiti that came to a head as we were preparing for publication.

## U.S. ANTI-WAR WORK

The LRP, participating in New York and Chicago planning meetings for the March 20 anti-war mobilizations, has fought against the patriotic policies and slogans advanced not just by liberals but also by nominal socialists.

A year after the United States launched its invasion of Iraq, the anti-war struggle in the U.S. is still dominated by competing middle-class leaderships. United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ) has a strong pro-Democratic Party “Anybody but Bush” component. A nominally more radical alternative (including the Workers World Party, the International Socialist Organization, various anarchists, etc.) also wishes to accommodate to the liberals but cannot swallow UFPJ's hardened pro-Israel stance.

The most prominent spokesman of the WWP-led ANSWER coalition, former Democratic U.S. Attorney Ramsey Clark, came out in support of the presidential candidacy of Democrat John Kerry. That Kerry originally voted for the war and now endorses the occupation exposes nakedly the contradictions of left-led liberal front-groups. A week after Clark's endorsement was reported, neither ANSWER nor the International Action Center, which Clark heads, has issued a denial.

The LRP has consistently advocated that anti-war actions should be built on a principled united front basis (unity in action, freedom of political views), as opposed to a political bloc based on a (liberal) lowest-common-denominator program. We fought for our right to speak at the rallies, a basic democratic right of any organization building the event. Moreover, there is a gaping lack of any revolutionary, anti-imperialist alternative to the dominant liberal views presented from the anti-war podiums — despite the presence of “socialists” in various disguises, including that of revolutionaries. (For an example of working-class revolutionary politics raised from an anti-war podium, see the account of our speech at the April 5, 2003 rally in Chicago in *PR* 67.)

With the Democratic campaign against Bush taking center stage, the coalitions have excluded revolutionary speakers. UFPJ, for example, announced that its official position is to not criticize the pro-imperialist policy of replacing U.S. with U.N. forces. The  
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# Lessons of the California Supermarket Strike

by Jeff Covington

As we go to press, the strike of supermarket workers in Southern California has just ended, after 141 days. A contract agreement was reached between leaders of the United Food and Commercial Workers union (UFCW) and the Safeway, Kroger and Albertsons companies. The contract was ratified at the end of February by the hard-pressed rank and file.

Contract terms are reported to include piddling lump-sum payments instead of wage increases for current workers. Contributions to health care benefits by the companies will be capped. Even worse is the growth of a two-tier system under which new hires (who of course will not be voting) will earn even less in wages and benefits.

These terms are a pretty accurate reflection of how the union leadership conducted the strike. The union, through the ranks' willingness to stay out and inflict severe losses on the companies (\$2.1 billion by one estimate), was able to blunt the threat of further health cuts and even total defeat through mass firings and decertification – the fate of the 1981 air traffic controllers strike to which this one had been compared. But the ranks, after months of hardship, will now return to work under worse wage and benefit conditions.

Last October supermarket workers in Southern California launched the largest strike by far in the country since the September 11 attacks, with 70,000 workers hitting the bricks. This is the most important strike in the U.S. since the UPS walk-out in 1997.

The strikers were mostly part-time workers, making mostly under \$20,000 a year; not surprisingly, the people who fill these slots are largely oppressed workers, including Blacks, Latinos, women and immigrants. Their struggle to defend their health-care benefits and stop devastating wage cuts for new hires struck a

chord with the working-class population of southern California. When the strike began, very few were crossing picket lines to shop at Vons and Pavilion (owned by Safeway), Ralphs (owned by Kroger) or Albertsons.

But the bureaucrats who sit at the head of the unions did everything in their power to turn this important strike into one of the worst betrayals on a long list. At every turn they sabotaged the strike, undermining the militant united power that the workers showed in struggle with “strategic” decisions that left the union’s position weak and demoralized the strikers.

The most prominent of these betrayals were the pulling of pickets from Ralphs stores at the end of October, just three weeks into the strike, and the slashing of strike pay to the workers in late December. Such is the twisted logic of people who support the capitalist system but run the mass organizations of the working class: they give presents to the bosses at Halloween, and play dirty tricks on their own union’s workers at Christmas.

## BOSSES CHOSE CLASS BATTLEGROUND

The bosses picked this battle carefully and prepared for it thoroughly. For them it was a test case for forcing massive cuts on a union seen as strong and militant, particularly in that area. They provoked the strike with a contract proposal of outrageous attacks. First, they set a strict cap on payments for health care coverage, leaving workers and retirees entirely at the mercy of the blood-sucking health care industry and the skyrocketing prices they are charging for medical care. Second, they instituted a two-tier wage and benefit system—in effect, the employers want new hires to have to work full-time to earn the modest wages part-timers make now.

As soon as the strike began, the supermarket companies showed their capitalist class solidarity, joining forces to fight against their workers. Safeway, Kroger and Albertsons negotiate union contracts together, and as soon as the UFCW struck Safeway, the other two responded with an immediate lockout. The three companies made an agreement to share all the profits they made during the strike.

In the face of the attack, the workers showed their own class solidarity through the strikers’ fighting spirit and the widespread community support for them. But the union is saddled with a leadership that does not share that spirit and does not believe in broad working-class solidarity in struggle. It believes only in class collaboration between the workers and the bosses. And when the bosses mobilize for open warfare, all that’s left for these sorry bureaucrats is capitulation.

## THE ROLE OF LABOR BUREAUCRATS

It is necessary to uncover the real reasons behind the bureaucrats’ betrayals in order to combat them effectively. In the wake of an impending disaster like the one in California, there are two different superficial conclusions that people often come to: either the leaders just made a lot of mistakes by accident or incompetence, or



Supermarket workers march to stop wage and health-care cuts.

they are just fat cats in cahoots with the bosses. Neither of these views can serve as fundamental explanations of the bureaucrats' role, although they can both be very true. Fat cats they are: when union honchos like Los Angeles UFCW Local 770 President Rick Icaza who pull in \$250,000 a year slash workers' strike pay to \$150 a week or less, it is revolting. But this is just one gross reflection of the root problem, the class divide between the ranks of union workers and the layer of bureaucrats who run the unions.

The essential role of the labor bureaucracy in the capitalist system is as brokers for the sale of the workers' labor power to the capitalists. As such, their very existence – and their six-figure salaries – are dependent on the existence of the capitalist profit system itself. Therefore any method of struggle that even points to the question of challenging the capitalist system of exploitation and profit altogether, is repellent to union bureaucrats – they avoid it like the plague. At best, they want to get what they see as a good deal for the workers, but only within the limits of what is “reasonable” so that the capitalists can still make profits.



*UFCW strikers confront bosses, cops. Labor bureaucracy holds back militancy to accommodate capitalists' profits.*

Indeed, a centerpiece of the bureaucrats' public relations campaign has been to emphasize how high the supermarket firms' profit margins have been recently (and that therefore the supermarket bosses can afford to toss some bones). But companies base their plans not simply on their present level of profits, but on what they expect their future profits to be. And with non-union, low-wage Wal-Mart set to expand its business in the grocery industry – in particular in California where it is planning to launch a number of “Supercenters” – the supermarket companies are planning for their competitive attack by waging war on the union to slash wages and benefits.

#### **HOW TO FIGHT WAL-MART – AND HOW NOT TO**

The supermarket strike is but one example (if a very important one) of the Wal-Mart problem facing the working class. Wal-Mart is the world's largest company. It got this way by being ruthless with its competitors, its suppliers and above all with its workers. It represents the cutting edge of corporate attacks on the work and living standards of American workers. In its impact on the California supermarkets, it is not simply a competitor to the supermarket bosses but their labor relations advisor.

A clear and immediate response to the Wal-Mart danger is to launch a massive unionization drive at the behemoth. But while the AFL-CIO bureaucracy pays lip service to this goal, in practice

they are not serious at all about taking on the task. To successfully organize Wal-Mart will at the very minimum mean mass demonstrations, coordinated strikes by other unions, bold organizing tactics (legal and illegal) – most certainly including battling, mass pickets. This is far more than the timid, legalistic tactics of the bureaucrats will allow. Instead the labor fakers make pathetic stop-gap appeals to keep Wal-Mart out of particular areas and markets via city zoning regulations and the like. In this they get outflanked by Wal-Mart through tactics like petition drives, which no doubt collect the signatures of many working-class people who are attracted to Wal-Mart's low prices on basic consumer items.

Thus the labor bureaucracy as a whole employs methods that can't stop Wal-Mart, and can hardly hope to even contain it. This has created a far more difficult situation for the UFCW bureaucrats in particular, who are hardly up for the challenge. They publicly dismiss the supermarkets' concerns about the need to compete with Wal-Mart, while underneath being very concerned about the companies' profitability. They knew that whatever strike they led would be limited and would accept concessions. But still they grossly underestimated the extent of the bosses' attacks, their resolve and intransigence.

#### **WHY THE RALPHS PICKETS WERE PULLED**

When we look at the UFCW leaders' betrayals in light of their fundamental role in the system, the real reasons for their betrayals will become clear. If profitability is sacred, and methods of struggle that call into question the need for the profit system are taboo, then broad, industry-wide united struggles are a great risk, to be avoided if at all possible. For decades the bureaucrats have kept strikes isolated, often refusing to even call out all workers at the same workplace or in the same union to strike together, much less all workers across a whole industry, much less all workers in a general strike. For the bigger and broader a strike becomes, the more it can pose the question: who runs society, the bosses or the workers? For a bureaucrat, the mere threat of asking the question sets off alarm bells: “Don't go there.”

But from the very beginning, the UFCW leaders had a problem in the California supermarkets; the companies themselves forced a broader struggle on them! The lockout of Albertsons and Ralphs workers placed a joint, industry-wide struggle right in the hands of the union. For the fighting ranks of workers, that meant great potential power; for the fearful bureaucrats, it meant a great potential risk. It so contradicted the very essence of their role in the system that they rushed to throw away the dangerous power as if it were the Ring of Doom.

Of course, it would have been too transparently craven to simply not picket the scab-operated locked-out Albertsons and Ralphs stores at all and only picket Safeway's Vons and Pavilion stores from the get-go. The bureaucrats are brokers, but they have to maintain the front of putting up some kind of fight so they don't lose face before the ranks as union leaders. So they waited three weeks and then just pulled the pickets from Ralphs. They thus proved that not only will they do everything in their power to keep strikes as isolated as possible, but even when a broader strike is forced on them, they will do everything in their power to make it isolated again!

As they did so, they sowed confusion at every turn with a trail of misinformation. They made the lame excuse that by pulling the Ralphs pickets they were setting one employer against the others, when everyone knew that the three supermarket firms were sharing their profits during the strike/lockout. They made the equally lame statement that the move was a “gesture of thanks” to the community for its support, to give them easier shopping options. This was as if to say: “Thank you for supporting us; now to show

our appreciation we will stop supporting ourselves and we invite you to aid the enemy while he is beating us down.”

Yet for union audiences the bureaucrats denied that they were actually telling people to shop at the scab-run Ralphs stores. This was partly pre-emptive face-saving and partly a response to the evident anger among the ranks of the strikers that the picket lines were pulled. The bureaucrats were entirely contradicting themselves, a fitting match for their contradictory role in society as the labor lieutenants of the capitalist class.

### UNION LEADERS UNITE AGAINST UNITED STRUGGLE

While pulling the Ralphs pickets was the clearest example of the union leaders’ fear of a broad, united struggle, other important betrayals exposed the same thing. For starters, there was the Los Angeles transit strike taking place simultaneously with the supermarket strike in the fall. For working-class fighters, that should have been a golden opportunity to use the potentially massive combined strength of two powerful unions striking together; for the bureaucrats of both unions, the two strikes were happening in two different worlds. Conveniently for the leaders of both unions, the transit strike was quickly sold out and a rotten contract rammed down workers’ throats.

Then there was the criminal saga of the distribution center (food warehouse) picket lines. These were cynically manipulated by the leaders of the UFCW and the Teamsters to create the appearance of cross-union solidarity – while they actually took great care to ensure that the picketing was as ineffective as possible. A Teamster worker expressed the essence of the matter in a Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) article in late December:

**The timing was terrible. First the pickets were extended November 24 after we had already supplied the stores for the Thanksgiving holiday. Then they pull them down December 22 just in time to make us work 12 to 14 hour days to clean up the mess and get ready for the remaining holidays.**

The Teamsters leadership in fact had given contradictory signals about its solidarity from the beginning. As the supermarket strike began, they reportedly stated that Teamsters would “not drive a single truck from a distribution center once the picket line goes up.” (Quoted by pirate radio station Free Radio San Diego, October 10.) Yet the Teamsters and UFCW leaders collaborated to make sure that picket lines didn’t go up at distribution centers at all, until they orchestrated the deliberately ineffective show of solidarity in late November. The true face of the Teamster bureaucrats’ contempt for strike solidarity was revealed in the words of the Teamsters Joint Council President, Jim Santangelo: “Everyone has the right to cross a picket line,” and “This is not our strike.”

(The TDU itself offers no real alternative for militant workers: see for example our article in *PR 56*, “Government Out of the Teamsters.” But their current oppositional role and long-term presence in the union allows them insights into the betrayals of the leadership.)

### HEROIC RESISTANCE

In the face of all this bureaucratic treachery, one section of striking UFCW and Teamster workers made a heroic stand of resistance, understanding that while it may not be Santangelo’s strike, it is *their* strike. The TDU’s account of what happened

when the leadership called off the picket lines in December deserves to be quoted at length:

**Rank and File Power defeated the attempt to remove pickets from the Vons Distribution facilities. The UFCW picketers refused to move when their leadership informed them of the decision to remove pickets. The 2,000 Vons Teamsters have honored the line. All Teamsters salute the Vons Teamsters of Locals 848 and 630 for showing tremendous solidarity despite the back to work directive.**

**The Teamsters leadership has since tried to explain the maintaining of pickets at the Vons facilities as a strategic move on their part. The truth is the only reason the pickets have remained at the Vons distribution facilities is that rank and file Teamsters have refused to budge.**

As Teamsters Local 630 member Frank Villa said, “These UFCW guys are heroes. They’re not letting Jim Santangelo move them. If not for them, the Teamsters would have been out of this completely.” (*Labor Notes*, February 2004.)

While this class-conscious stand has not been enough to turn the tide of this strike, this kind of courageous action will always be key to overcoming the bosses’ attacks and the bureaucrats’



*Marching strikers rail at Ralphs, one of the grocery chains that locked out union workers – but union bureaucrats betrayed struggle early on by removing picket lines from Ralphs stores.*

betrayals in the approaching mass struggles of the working class. Revolutionaries would fight to provide leadership to workers engaged in such actions, campaigning to spread their resistance throughout the ranks.

But in this battle, workers’ resistance did not spread to the point where the bureaucrats’ control of the situation was threatened. Part and parcel of the bureaucrats’ entire strike strategy, an element of every betrayal, was the need to demoralize the ranks. Only then would the kind of settlement that safeguards the capitalists’ profitability be possible, as the workers lose hope that continuing their struggle would achieve anything better. It may not be coincidental that just days after the flare-up of militant struggle at the Vons distribution centers, the UFCW leaders made the infamous move to slash strike pay. It is to be expected that they would want to dump water on any possible lingering embers of workers’ confidence in their struggle, before there was any chance the spark of militancy could spread and burn brighter instead of just burning out.



*Cops arrest UFCW striker. Police are capitalists' troops in ongoing class war.*

The UFCW leadership had foreshadowed these moves a few days in advance when it made its official sell-out “compromise” contract counter-proposal December 19. They offered to accept virtually all of the bosses’ two-tier scheme to slash wages for new hires, asking for only pennies more than what management had demanded. (Where the bosses proposed a starting wage of \$8.90 per hour for newly hired food clerks, the union bureaucrats actually responded with a counter-proposal of \$8.95! For general merchandise/meat clerks, they held out for a whopping \$7.90 where the bosses offered \$7.55.) And they made major concessions on health care as well.

This is not what the bureaucrats wanted going into the struggle – as we pointed out above, they grossly underestimated how hard a line the companies were going to take. Thus they were caught off-guard by how badly the strike was going, even from their own perspective. Still, with this proposal they hoped that the stage was set for a face-saving sell-out: one that gives management almost all of what it demanded while leaving just enough crumbs to enable them to call the defeat a victory. But to their alarm, the companies weren’t even giving them that – the bosses were out for even more blood.

#### **AFL-CIO’S “NATIONAL CAMPAIGN”: NO ANSWER**

Hence the desperate intervention by the AFL-CIO in mid-January. With the prospect of not just losing the strike but losing face as well, the national union bureaucracy suddenly saw what little is left of its own prestige and relevance at stake in this struggle. “New organizing” has been AFL-CIO President John Sweeney’s calling card, and a crushing defeat of low-paid, part-time workers

of color and immigrants who are already organized – right at the scene of the Justice for Janitors campaign which was his one prominent success – would be a bad stain on his reputation.

The AFL-CIO proclaimed it was turning the California supermarket strike into a “national campaign.” But after the failure of a local strategy riddled with holes, they merely added similar ineffective strategies rather than reinforcing the strike itself. That way they could fail on a national, not just a local, scale. For the bureaucrats, “national campaign” means extended public relations, boycotts, publicity-stunt arrests rather than effective mass pickets, demonstrations in front of corporate executives’ houses or in other cities – but all for show, out of an inability to build the strike. Rather than an extension of a solid strike, it is a substitute for one.

#### **WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN DONE**

Revolutionaries, like all serious working-class fighters, look for every opportunity to turn things around. It was important and encouraging to note the marked anger of the rank and file at the various bureaucratic betrayals – and their willingness to openly defy bureaucratic orders, as the pickets at the Vons distribution facilities demonstrated.

During the strike, the way forward was to demand mass meetings of all strikers, where workers could elect strike committees empowered to lead the struggle. Strike committees could carry out militant and necessary actions like organizing militant mass pickets of all struck and locked-out stores, and all distribution centers, that would keep people out instead of respecting the laws of the bosses’ courts. Forming strike committees would force the bureaucrats to actually lead the struggle, or else the strike committees would simply shove them aside and take over full leadership of the strike and the local union. The UFCW could also have demanded that Central Labor Councils provide massive support to the picket lines and pour real resources into the strike in the form of mobilized labor. This is the opposite of how the strike was conducted and the opposite of the AFL-CIO’s “national campaign.”

The course of the strike revealed the treachery of the present union leadership; not to all the strikers, but to the most militant and class-conscious layers. With these workers, in the supermarkets and other industries, revolutionary Marxists want to begin a discussion about the deeper lessons of the strike, the conclusions to be drawn, and the strategy the working class needs to adopt.

We believe the answer to the betrayals by the bureaucratic leadership is not to reject the need for working-class leadership or the need for unions. It is no use to try to ignore the labor bureaucracy. What is urgently needed is a head-on challenge by militant, class-conscious workers fighting to take over leadership of the unions themselves. As ineffective as the bureaucrats are at waging struggle against the bosses, they will fight like cornered rats to protect their position against challenges from the ranks. So a serious struggle for leadership must have audacity and commitment, and a clear program of uncompromising class struggle within the union as well as against the bosses. We believe the only form of organization that can meet these demands is the revolutionary party of the working class, built by the vanguard of the class itself.

This vanguard leadership will champion the fight for class militancy, including taking the level of struggle beyond the limits of unionism to a class-wide political fight. A central element in that strategy would include the use of the general strike weapon. Through such a fight we would seek to prove that the only way to truly secure the underlying demands of the supermarket strike – decent wages for all, full protection against layoffs, guaranteed health care, will be through socialist revolution and the construction of the workers’ own state. ●

# Imperialism's China Card

by Dave Franklin

With each passing week, China becomes a more central cog in the world class struggle. In the more immediate sense, this has presented great opportunities for world capitalism. China has become a great oasis of super-exploitation for the capitalists of the world, the number-one destination for setting up industrial shop. This process has been played with great effect against workers in other parts of the world and has done much to prop up sagging imperialist profits.

But in large part as a result of those same processes, China has undergone great class turmoil. Struggles by workers and peasants have multiplied and deepened in sophistication over the past several years. These developments are of great concern to the world's imperialists, not to mention the ruling Stalinist bureaucracy in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to which they are increasingly tied.

Given the CCP regime's revolutionary origins, it is especially important to have a genuinely Marxist understanding of the social forces at work in the most populous country on earth. Various organizations considering themselves Trotskyist have thrown up a hodgepodge of analyses of China, using their criticisms of Stalinism as a cornerstone of their revolutionary claims. But their understanding of Chinese Stalinism is damning evidence against their pretensions. They end up in one form or another as defenders of Stalinist rule and thereby of imperialism's China card – the CCP.

## THE STALINIST CONQUEST

Central to a genuine revolutionary analysis is an understanding of the nature of Stalinism as it has evolved over the years. While Stalinism has always served capitalist interests in China and the world – even when that wasn't readily apparent to either the capitalists or the Stalinists themselves – its character, directness and intensity has changed with circumstances. It was a great tragedy that the CCP was from early times dominated by leaderships subservient to the strategy of class collaboration dictated by the Communist International controlled by Stalin.

In the 1920's, though only in the early stages of its degeneration, the Comintern was already fashioning a disastrous strategy for a ripening revolutionary situation in China. Western capitalism had greatly contributed to the fragmentation of the country over the course of a century, but it had helped produce a potent working class increasingly radicalized by class and national oppression. This proletariat, leading a restive peasantry, had the potential to fuse the democratic and socialist revolutions in an all-out fight to seize power from the imperialists and their Chinese compradors. To this strategy, developed by Leon Trotsky and his Chinese supporters, Joseph Stalin counterposed one that sought to limit the struggle to a "democratic" stage. This meant slavishly supporting the bourgeois-nationalist Chiang Kaishek, and thus setting the stage for the subsequent butchering of millions of workers, peasants and party members in a catastrophic counter-revolution in 1927.

For over two decades following this massive defeat, the country was plunged into warlordism, Japanese occupation and near-economic ruin by Chiang. Capitalism had made the country virtually unmanageable. For the good of the system itself, imperialism needed a force other than its compradors to run the society.

This role would be filled by the Chinese Communist Party, which had hardened in its support of capitalism. By the late 1930's, Stalinism internationally had become a consistently coun-



*Shop floor of Shanghai subsidiary of Japanese consumer electronics manufacturer Pioneer. Top inset: Hiroyuki Mineta, chairman of Pioneer's Shanghai subsidiary. Bottom inset: Chinese worker assembles DVD player. For the capitalists of the world, China has become the first choice for exploitation.*

terrevolutionary force, its center in the Soviet Union a stified capitalism secured through bloody counterrevolution. The CCP itself had abandoned its links to the working class, through both the defeat of the 1925-27 revolution and the pursuit of a rural-based strategy championed by Mao Zedong. Its program for China was unmistakably one of bourgeois nationalism. But the hostility of Chiang and imperialism (in both Western and Japanese forms) invested the CCP with a credibility among the Chinese masses that would in the end serve well the imperialists themselves.

In the late 1940's, the CCP's final victory in the civil war with Chiang's dissolving armies was a decisive display of the Stalinists' capitalist nature. Paramount to Mao and other party leaders was insuring that the workers did not become an independent, militant force. The CCP instructed Chiang's secret police to keep order, and commanded workers to co-operate with their bosses – many of whom welcomed the Communists' victory – in the interest of promoting production. Shortly after the Stalinists took over China's cities, they jailed a thousand Trotskyists and their sympathizers, the vanguard of the proletariat.

Not until the working class was safely corralled and the Stalinists were threatened by American armies invading Korea, did the CCP begin stripping control of industry from private hands. And even then the takeovers had to be posed as fights against corruption and incompetence rather than in more explosive class terms. The capitalists were duly compensated and even allowed to stay on as managers until party officials themselves could take over.

In this manner the CCP leadership solidified its bourgeois-democratic revolution and began performing its role as a regent ruling class; it substituted as a state-capitalist ruling class for a native bourgeoisie that was too weak and compromised to rule itself. The Stalinists performed an invaluable service for the world bourgeoisie. They kept an important and potentially rebel-

lious working class in check, and they stabilized an economy whose implosion would have brought chaos to a strategic area of the world.

But imperialism had to pay a stiff price for the mess the Stalinists were cleaning up. Western imperialism was kicked out after decades of humiliating and exploiting the Chinese. The USSR at first demanded the same imperial privileges in China that Tsarist Russia had once enjoyed; then it looted Chinese industries in Manchuria in the wake of World War II and then offered “assistance” to Maoist China on exploitative terms. China was a harsh critic of imperialist practices for years and itself an inspiration – if a misleading one – for many of the world’s oppressed masses.

Getting rid of the imperialist boot was one of the genuine gains of the Stalinist revolution and its aftermath. There were others, like the seizure of landlords’ holdings for distribution among the peasants, as well as in health, education and women’s rights. Over time urban workers would win rights to jobs. But these were not the achievements of a *workers’* revolution; indeed they were allowed only in the absence of a proletarian alternative and as a result were very limited in their democratic and class content.



*Mao Zedong in Beijing, October 1, 1949, proclaiming the founding of the People’s Republic of China.*

theory of stratified capitalism put forth by the League for the Revolutionary Party in our book, *The Life and Death of Stalinism*, not only analyzed the laws of motion of the Stalinist system but foresaw the inevitable devolution of that system towards the adoption of forms characteristic of private capitalism.

## MAOISTS VERSUS PRAGMATISTS

The years following the successful consolidation of power provided the fuel for such a commitment. There was a major split within the ruling class: “pragmatic” elements adhered to a Soviet-style technocratic economic model, but “radicals” led by Mao were in charge for the most part. The political break with the Soviet Union in the late ’50’s was driven in part by distrust of Russian imperialism. As Nikita Khrushchev wrote in his memoirs, “In many areas of our economic relations we had thrust ourselves into China like colonizers. . . . Stalin’s demands for concessions from China were intolerable.”

The break was also connected to the distinct strategy of development that Mao initiated. The Maoists emphasized political adherence to “Mao Zedong thought,” as opposed to technical expertise in economic management. Material incentives for increased production were de-emphasized in favor of a voluntarist concept of “moral” incentives of ideological exhortations, often through orchestrated mass campaigns. This was part of a systematic effort to present a façade of egalitarianism to the society.

There were historical and material roots for such a strategy. In a huge but fragmented country facing hostile imperialist powers, the isolationist, labor-intensive effort at development that

characterized the Maoist period appeared viable. But it proved to be disastrous in both economic and political terms. It created gross inefficiencies and, at the height of the “Great Leap Forward” and Mao’s “Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution,” virtual economic breakdown.

The Cultural Revolution in the late 1960’s succeeded in stirring up workers, both those who opposed it and those who took Maoist rhetoric about fighting bureaucracy seriously. Workers’ uprisings, along with Mao’s youthful “Red Guard” supporters, were suppressed by the People’s Liberation Army on Mao’s orders.

After the atrophy of the Cultural Revolution, Mao’s death in 1975, the subsequent jailing of prominent Maoists and the ascension of Deng Xiaoping to power, the party pragmatists took control. But the Soviet model of development they identified with seemed unviable: Chinese Stalinism lacked the strength and centralization that the Soviet regime had inherited from the Bolshevik Revolution; moreover, it started from an even lower technical base relative to the imperialist powers. China was falling further behind not only the imperialist powers but also other countries in the region. Taiwan, for example, to which Chiang had fled in 1949 and imposed his rule, was successfully exploiting Cold War rivalries and the raw exploitation of their own working masses to begin climbing up the capitalist food chain.

It was clear to Deng & Co. that important changes had to be made. They chose the path of an economic opening to the West and its capital and advanced technology (a political opening had already occurred under Mao) and the more direct use of capitalist economic techniques and organization within the economy internally. The underlying purpose of all this was a more efficient and intense exploitation of the Chinese masses.

These desires neatly meshed with those of the imperialists, whose own economies were in varying states of stagnation and in need of increasing labor exploitation. A huge deal was in the offing. More than a few capitalists saw a mass Chinese consumer market as the main payoff. But the most important and successful component of the emerging partnership was that China became an arena for super-exploitative capital investments. The imperialists, now with a greater technological ability through automation, reclaimed China as a base for industries previously reserved for the imperial centers.

In our article, “China’s Capitalist Revolutions,” in *Proletarian Revolution* No. 53, we analyzed Chinese Stalinism’s need for this agreement and what it did to fulfill its end of the bargain.

**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 inter-related 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 later the internal operation of Chinese capital 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 ingredi-**



**ent, a stable but highly repressive state apparatus, was supplied by the Stalinist regime.**

By far the most important and enduring of the advantages the CCP held were the abundant cheap labor supply, and the tight control by the Stalinist regime itself. It was able to parlay one of capitalism's cruelest weapons – the labor reserve army – to an extent and in a fashion other “third-world” regimes could not possibly match. This set up the orgy of super-exploitation that has followed. Neither the Chinese rulers nor the imperialists were originally aware of how extensive and deep the partnership would become. But it has an absolutely lawful development, a variant of the devolution of statified capital toward private capital that our tendency predicted in analyzing the nature and direction of the Stalinist Soviet Union.

## INTRODUCTION OF “FREE MARKET” FEATURES

The original steps Deng undertook were relatively modest: agricultural reforms that allowed peasants long-term leases on their land and raised procurement prices for their products, and highly restrictive openings to foreign investments in Special Economic Zones in coastal regions. The lengthy process has seen some retrenchments, notably after the vicious repression of the protests of workers and students in 1989 in Tiananmen Square, and in the wake of mass protests of workers and peasants in the mid-90's. Nonetheless, what has occurred over the last quarter of a century is the transformation of China into a society illustrating the most naked forms of capitalist exploitation – under the rule of an allegedly communist regime.

The main reforms have had overlapping aspects: allowing foreign capital to develop export industries; opening the internal economy to foreign ownership and control; privatization of much of the statified sector. After a period in which foreign firms had to accept joint ownership with Chinese firms, they have been given far more freedom for their own ventures. With changes introduced by then-President Jiang Zemin in 1997, and the introduction of China into the World Trade Organization in 2001, foreign firms have not only proliferated in the export regions but have entered the Chinese market en masse. Almost 25,000 foreign investment projects were approved in 2002, an enormous number itself and a 33.4 percent increase from the year before. In 2002 alone, \$50 billion of foreign investment projects poured in.



*Deng Xiaoping, architect of China's turn to overt capitalism.*

China's economy has shifted in basic ways towards privatization. There are now over 2 million private firms (compared to 800,000 in 1988) employing 70 million workers. Openly private domestic industry accounted for 17.9 percent of economic output in 2001, according to government statistics; but collective and joint-ownership enterprises often mask firms of genuinely private ownership and control. The year 2001 marks the point at which private companies were outproducing the public sector, and the trend has expanded. Very recently, for example, the government arranged a mass sell-off of state firms; in October, the party Central Committee approved the sale of 196 “strategic” companies in energy and natural resources that had previously been protected.

Among the main beneficiaries of the CCP's privatizing have been the adult children of party leaders, the “princelings” whom the

masses hate and deride. This reflects the very real phenomenon of inheritance, which becomes more naked with each passing year.

Inheritance has long existed under statified capitalism, including in China. The regency in its earlier times handed down power, status and wealth through indirect means. Ruling-class officials used political power and connections to secure privileges for their offspring. As with the more general phenomenon of property in statified capitalism, it was collective in form but private in content.

But this method of passing down power between ruling-class generations is contradictory. It has to resolve itself: over time, form and content must align. In China there has long been a trend towards traditional forms of capitalist private property. By the mid-80's, private wealth, including ownership of the means of production, was made inheritable. By itself a landmark of sorts, this feature was given more teeth as property itself increasingly assumed a private form – both in the growing private sector and the conversion of state to private property. The whole process was recently given an important codification with the insertion into the Constitution of a statute protecting private property “legally obtained.”

## CAPITALIST SUPER-EXPLOITATION

The Chinese devolution has meant wrenching, harsh changes for hundreds of millions of working people already hard-pressed, even as a middle class and bourgeoisie have begun to bloom. Deteriorating conditions in the countryside, including pollution, tax-gouging by corrupt and empowered local officials and more open forms of unemployment with de-collectivization, have helped to drive an estimated 150 million peasants and agricultural laborers into urban areas in the largest internal migration in history. They move out of necessity and because they are now allowed to, given the relaxing of restrictions on moving to cities from the countryside. (At the same time, migrants are denied residence permits and the dwindling but real benefits associated with them.) Stalinist officials are becoming increasingly hip to the notion that bourgeois “freedoms” mean above all the freedom to exploit and be exploited.

Many migrants found jobs in town and village enterprises (TVE's) – but not enough, and the TVE's themselves are in decline. Millions of others found jobs in the coastal Special Economic Zones (SEZ's). The regularly employed are the lucky ones. For others, moving to cities has often meant vying for the worst forms of menial and transient labor (for example, an elaborate class structure has developed over collecting scraps from garbage), or simply and desperately roaming or laying idle.

Meanwhile, masses of workers in the state industries that are either privatizing or collapsing are undergoing layoffs. This is most pronounced in the “rust belt” of the Northeast, once China's strongest industrial area. Official government figures conclude that over 26 million have been laid off in state industries since 1998 alone, while only a little over 17 million have found other work. And it's a downward spiral: if 50 percent of those laid off found new work in 1998, only 9 percent laid off in the first half of 2002 had successfully landed other jobs. These workers are the prime victims of the demise of the “iron rice bowl” of job guarantees and benefits that was a central Stalinist concession to the masses, even while the new “safety net” of unemployment benefits and the like is in a pathetic state.

Given the immediate and historical circumstances of the working masses, Chinese wages are among the lowest in the world, even when compared not just to workers in imperialist areas but also to other third-world workers. While the average wage in China is about 40 cents an hour, in Mexico it is about \$1.60. For capitalists across the globe desperate to expand or even

maintain profits, this is a big difference, made even more significant by the fact that Chinese wages have been relatively stagnant for a long period while those in other third-world areas have typically risen with increased proletarianization.

It is no wonder, then, that international capitalism has been racing to set up in China, transforming it into the “workshop of the world” – more accurately, the sweatshop of the world. In addition to the horrid wages, much of the labor has been performed in abysmal and dangerous conditions, with workers locked in dormitories after working the better part of the day and being gouged by employers with no protection from the state or non-existent unions. Indeed, China has become the country most popularly identified with sweatshop oppression.

### INTERNATIONAL EFFECTS OF SUPER-EXPLOITATION

The more capital has shifted production to China, the greater the impact has been on the working class internationally. While labor bureaucrats and domestic manufacturers in the imperialist countries have exaggerated the impact of these capital shifts to East Asia for protectionist purposes, the impact is real, particularly in the garment and textile industries in the U.S. where hundreds of thousands have lost jobs and factories have moved or closed. Increasingly, workers in poorer countries in Eastern Europe and Latin America are also seeing their jobs outsourced.



*Unemployed workers in Beijing.*

At the same time, capital has honed the skill of throwing the workers still employed onto the defensive. In Mexico, for example, where over 300 manufacturing plants were moved to China in the past two years, wages were cut in plants where the bosses opted to stay.

The pauperized unemployed and underemployed masses constitute the “reserve army of labor,” a phrase coined by Marx. Malleable and desperate, the jobless have everywhere been used as the objects of the worst forms of exploitation and as a hammer against better-situated workers. The devolution in China has transformed relatively hidden and indirect forms of unemployment into open tools of capitalism, a centerpiece of the “race to the bottom” that is the preferred international capitalist strategy for development. It is ironic that in a country where the laws of capitalism were supposedly dispensed with, one of the most characteristic weapons in the capitalist arsenal has received its greatest historical expression.

With such a massive influx of capital, it should be no surprise that CCP leaders can boast of a number of important successes under the reforms. This is certainly true in terms of raw industrial output. For example, 50 percent of cameras, 30 percent of air conditioners, 25 percent of washing machines and 20 percent of the refrigerators now produced in the *world* are now made in China.

By the end of 2002, China was the world’s 5th largest trading nation, with \$266.2 billion of exports in that year alone. It is also the home for sectors of high-end production, like computer chips. It has made advances in attracting information technology (even its skilled labor is dirt cheap) and has directly appropriated or parlayed the development of advanced technology to run Mag-lev trains and become the third nation to send people into space.

All this has caused consternation among the imperialist states and classes. The CCP leaders’ dream of crashing the imperialist party as a political, military and economic competitor is a nightmare among ruling circles in Japan, the U.S. and elsewhere. The imperialists’ thirst for quick and necessary profits has produced the very conditions they find threatening. But however the Chinese challenge plays itself out in a world and region of rising and dangerous rivalries, China will not rise to imperialist status. Those neighbors that were somewhat successful in climbing the ladder of imperialist status are far smaller in size and population, and were allowed a window of opportunity not available to their massive neighbor. Capitalism in this epoch of decay does not allow the elevation of a third-world country and people on such a scale. Indeed, the premise of China’s recent development has been the conditions that its backwardness helped create. At the same time, China’s development has come at the expense of other world regions.

Even now, the problems stand out in sharp relief. Growth rates claimed by the Chinese government of between 7 and 10 percent between 1998 and 2001 appear as substantially exaggerated (even if they do stand out in a world of capital stagnation). In fact, one estimate based on energy consumption claims the economy has actually been shrinking in recent years. And a huge debt problem is mounting, a result of easy loans for development and the maintenance of thousands of decrepit state industries. By the summer of 2003 outstanding debt was equal to 138 percent of GDP – up from 88 percent in 1995 and above levels considered safe in other countries.

Even the center of its success in manufacturing has numerous and serious qualifications. Among them:

- Foreign firms account for 81 percent of China’s exports and dominate the domestic market in a range of industries, including auto, mobile phones and retail, since being given leeway by the Chinese government.
- Industry is still grossly slanted towards low-end consumer goods, like toys and garments.
- With some exceptions, the strategic production of higher-end goods is still reserved for the imperialist centers. For example,



*Haier Group factory in China's eastern port city of Qingdao.*

Monitowue Co. of Wisconsin manufactures ice-making machines in China but keeps their core technology – the evaporation plates on which the ice is formed – in the U.S. This is hardly an isolated case.

- No Chinese-owned and controlled firm has risen to world-class status (unlike, say, some Indian software firms).
- Much of the profit from the foreign-owned plants manages to find its way out of the country, even as China sends billions of its proceeds to prop up U.S. treasuries.

In general, the Chinese economy and society remain mired in backwardness. China is terribly distorted in its industrial mix and even more so in its regional development, with the hinterlands largely shut out of the investment binge. The inevitable slide into worldwide recession or worse will have a magnified effect in the export-dependent economy. It is a measure of the country's fragmented development that imperialism worries as much about it falling apart as it becoming a serious rival.

For its part, world imperialism will deepen the contradictory character of its attitude towards and its role in Chinese capitalism. On the one hand, various sectors of the international bourgeoisie are fueling the protectionist and nationalist clamor against outsourcing to China, for political and military as well as economic reasons. The rivalries between imperialist powers and China, and among the imperialist powers themselves, will intensify in the coming period as East Asia becomes an increasingly dangerous and strategic "hot spot" in a world made more hostile by capitalist stagnation.

On the other hand, imperialist firms will continue heading to the Chinese exploitation heaven. As President Bryan Huang of Bearing Point Co. says: "Where can we sustain our cost advantage for the next 40 years? We're convinced that China is the only place." (*Business Week*, Aug. 11.) Fiat boss Cesare Romiti has proclaimed that, "China is becoming the America of the future." And on a basic class level, imperialists are wising up to the essential role of the Stalinists in this operation. More and more they see the CCP not as a necessary evil to deal with but as a trusted police agent for their interests.

Thus, the level of propaganda against party suppression of protest has declined markedly since the Tiananmen massacre: a function not only of a general awareness of the Stalinist role but the realization that the protests are more and more consciously aimed at the reform process the imperialists back. A more specific benchmark of this appreciation is the reaction to the recent SARS crisis. The Chinese authorities initially stonewalled evidence of the disease; but their later efforts using the party machinery to



*Auto factory in Guangzhou.*

control the outbreak impressed imperialist observers who saw potential in other areas as well:

**Some now argue that a more accountable party is the only organization with the reach and strength to build a national surveillance system to handle future epidemics. And the party may also use its muscle to overcome local protectionism and insure that recalcitrant industries live up to the market-opening commitments to the World Trade Organization.** (*Business Week*, June 23.)

Of course, no one should expect the imperialists to openly say they appreciate the Stalinists' counterrevolutionary role in suppressing the proletariat. They are not Marxists, and in any case would not wish to embarrass the Stalinist rulers with such a frank observation. Revolutionists are obliged to comprehend the evidence and do just that, however.

Capitalist investors in China are making a tenuous assumption: that the Chinese masses will, with a few carrots and many sticks, go along with the rates of exploitation that have been inflicted on them. But the Chinese workers have asserted their interests in this period of devolution. The Tiananmen demonstrations were a dramatic example of protest both against, and with higher expectations of, the reform process. Waves of mass protests have characterized the scene since.

### **MASS PROTESTS BY WORKERS AND PEASANTS**

Much of this protest has taken place among the peasantry. The peasants were generally supportive of the initial reforms and were a sort of political bastion against the Tiananmen events. But they have turned increasingly bitter over time and have taken actions, often violent and often against party officials. Given their sheer mass and their historical weight, this shift is of fundamental importance.

But even more critical is the mounting resistance by the working class. Much is centered in the "rust belt" amid the collapsing state sector. There have been various forms of protests by hundreds and even thousands of workers against layoffs, unpaid pensions and wages and other promises of a "social net." But there has been ferment as well in the strategic SEZ's. For example, in April of last year, more than 1000 workers occupied a toy factory in Guangdong province.

Capital has relied on the fact that most workers in the SEZ's, often coming from desperate circumstances, will actually see their toil in the sweatshops as a step up from their previous existence. Many do, as they continue to pour in from the countryside. This is an unquestionably conservative influence. But the



*Night-shift workers at guarded factory gate in Shenzhen.*

accumulating collective experience of the workers in the concentrated factories is building class awareness and resentments, and the potential for massive and militant action grows. The bosses try to counteract this by moving some work to isolated regions (with hints of moves to the devastated Northeast). But there are limits to such mobility, and the integrated nature of production in the coastal zone is irresistible. In the end, class struggle goes wherever the capitalists build their factories.

Even the use of the labor reserve army has its drawbacks for capital. The millions and millions of unemployed are a powerful source of discontent and instability, and capital's police agents in the CCP are well aware of that. They want to keep a lid on things, but turmoil is inevitable.

While of course much news is suppressed there is unmistakable evidence of the growing resistance. This includes:

- Labor arbitration cases in 2002 have been estimated at over 200,000, as opposed to 120,000 in 1999 and 23,000 in 1995.
- A report circulated among China's police force, "A Study of Mass Incidents," noted that large-scale public disturbances were increasing annually, particularly in the countryside.
- Sources in the Ministry of public Security reported to a Hong Kong journal that the number of demonstrations and reported protests soared from an average of 80 per day in 2001 to more than 700 per day by the end of 2002.

All this reportedly led the new Party leader, Hu Jintao, to warn the CCP Politburo that the state of society was "forcing people to rise up, to rebel and to seek to overthrow the leadership of the Communist Party."

The whole reform process, as we have noted, has a central motive of appeasing the restless masses with capitalist prosperity.



Hu Jintao

This was an underpinning to Deng's original reforms a quarter of a century ago. And it was behind the declarations of a recent Central Committee meeting to develop the cities still further to soak up rural discontent. There is an obvious contradiction here: the very means designed to appease the masses have in fundamental ways added to their ferment. And the rapid growth of industry over a period of time, despite the layoffs of recent years, has added

to the social weight of the proletariat, and its potential to rule society. The class struggle in China is a beacon for the international proletariat.

### **PSEUDO-TROTSKYISTS AT SEA OVER CHINA**

The blatantly pro-capitalist orientation of the CCP leadership and its subordination of the Chinese workers and peasants to the profit needs of international imperialism exposes nakedly the falseness of all claims that China is either socialist or proletarian. Indeed, many of the political tendencies claiming to be Trotskyist are now saying that China is no longer a "deformed workers' state." This was the label given to the Stalinist states erected after World War II, which were not created through proletarian revolutions but were nonetheless held to be proletarian because the Stalinists seized power, had nationalized property and had introduced a planned economy. The formulation was invented by Michel Pablo, the leader of the degenerating Fourth International, to account for the Stalinists' crushing of working-class movements at the same time that they remodeled their

countries after the allegedly proletarian USSR. (See *Life and Death of Stalinism*, Chapter 7.)

While all of Pablo's theoretical followers have acknowledged that China has moved in a capitalist direction – no one claiming political sanity could say otherwise – they have come up with wildly varying explanations of whether and when China has reverted to capitalism. Their rampant confusion is not surprising, given that they all left the firm ground of Marxist class analysis when they decided that a workers' state had come into being without the conscious revolutionary defeat of capitalism by the workers – and with the deliberate defeat of the working class by a party that had long before abandoned its working-class roots.

Part of the theory was based on fact: the stratification of the major means of production. But another part was fiction: even at its most stratified, the Stalinist economy was never "planned" in any Marxist sense of the term. It was a command economy, with party officials and technocrats drawing up and passing along directives based on unscientific, arbitrary and myopic assumptions, and which could never be carried out according to prescription. No Stalinist economy was ever truly centralized in the sense of coordinated, regulated functioning. In fact, the highly bureaucratized political centralism was intended to compensate for the atomized economy – and ultimately contributed to it. In China, it is no accident that the most centralized phases of this "planning" turned into the biggest failures. The "Great Leap Forward," which ended up starving an estimated 30 million peasants, was a disaster not only because the backyard furnaces producing worthless steel diverted agricultural production, but also because production figures were falsified by lower party officials eager to please.

Certain aspects of the economy bring the reality of "planning" out in sharp relief. Information and data – the vital infrastructure for genuine planning – have always been distorted. In 2000, former Prime Minister Zhu Rongji warned that "falsification and exaggeration of statistics are rampant." National statistics are cobbled from provincial ones; and each province and town reports figures to satisfy state targets. When the government does audit, it admits that more than two-thirds of the biggest Chinese companies falsify auditing (as opposed to an estimated 5 percent of American companies). Similarly, the extent of regional protectionism inhibiting the national economy is truly amazing. Today, for example, the city of Shanghai prohibits non-Shanghai truckers from entering the city between 7 am and 9 pm, to aid local shippers. Can one imagine this occurring in the U.S., or for that matter Taiwan?

The formal aspects of stratification that the Pabloites cling to are themselves vanishing. The State Planning Commission, which drew up the Five-Year Plans, was swept aside in 2003, and the percentage of industry under state ownership (not including the collectives and joint enterprises) is estimated at 25 percent and dropping – less than in a number of Western countries at stages in their capital development. Thus the form is merely playing catch-up to the reality of economic anarchy that is in many ways worse than in pluralist capitalism.

Because their basic analysis of Stalinist societies was nothing but a rationalization, the Pabloites could never account for, let alone predict, the evolution of those societies. Long ago our tendency, in analyzing Stalinist states as forms of stratified capital, noted that Stalinism was historically weak compared to the familiar forms of monopoly capitalism; we predicted their devolution towards the latter. This insight was dramatically borne out by the collapse of Stalinism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. It is being further proved by the transformation in China and other surviving Stalinist-ruled countries.

## ABANDONING THE CHINESE “WORKERS’ STATE”

Those Pabloites who hold that capitalism has been restored in China have done nothing to repudiate the method of Pabloism – indeed, they are applying it again, in reverse. (To use Trotsky’s image, they are running the film of reformism backwards.) They still believe that the CCP established a workers’ state by substituting for the working class. They have simply become convinced that too much of the “workers’ state” has been undermined to maintain the fantasy. So now, in addition to a “socialist revolution” not made by the working class, they invent a capitalist transformation made by a ruling class that in effect overthrew itself.

That is, another central tenet of Marxism is that the overthrow of a class society like a workers’ state requires a decisive and violent change of class rule, the smashing of the state apparatus. When Stalin overthrew the remnants of workers’ rule in the Soviet Union in the 1930’s, he unleashed a sustained and bloody purge that killed, imprisoned and enslaved millions. It was a necessary act for consolidating the capitalist class. No such thing has occurred in China. Not only has there been no decisive class overthrow; in fact, the transformations in Chinese society have taken place through a relatively peaceful and orderly conduct of affairs within the political elite, at least compared with the factional bloodletting of the Maoist years.

Since there has been nothing decisive in class terms to specify when the supposed workers’ state was overturned, the various groups pick different criteria, policies, etc., to determine when the change took place. Take the Australian Democratic Socialist Party, which has a wide influence among the left in Southeast Asia. The DSP says that the 14th Congress of the CCP in September 1992, which approved building a “socialist market economy,” “signaled a qualitative change in the class nature of the Chinese state”:

**While the process of capitalist restoration in China was not yet complete, there was sufficient evidence to conclude that this process was the outcome of a conscious orientation by those who commanded political power and therefore China, like Russia and the former Soviet bloc countries, was ruled by a capitalist state.** (*Green Left Weekly*, Jan. 27, 1999.)

For Marxists, the role of consciousness is indeed decisive in a creating and maintaining a workers’ state – the revolutionary consciousness of the working class and its advanced leadership. It was the consciousness of the Russian revolution – by revolutionary elements still embodied in the working class and even in sections of the already Stalinized Communist Party – that had to be wiped out by the Stalinist counterrevolutionaries to consolidate Soviet capitalism. For the DSP, in contrast, the decisive element is the change in consciousness of the ruling bureaucracy, even though it was always independent of and hostile to the working class.

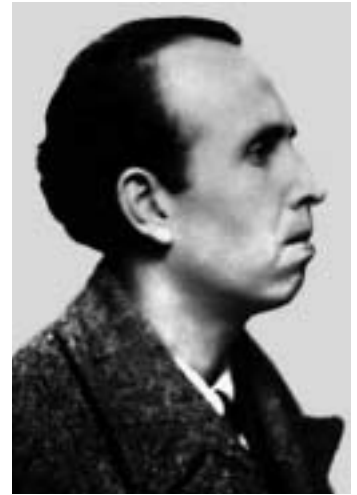
Another adherent of Pabloism-in-reverse is Workers Power (WP) of Britain, the flagship of the newly renamed League for the Fifth International. WP looked back at “the change of policy [that] culminated in the adoption of a new programme for a ‘socialist market economy’ by the Fourteenth Party Congress in October 1992” and admitted, eight years later:

**With hindsight we can now see that this was the point at which the character of the state changed. Whilst continuing to be a bonapartist regime that had to secure its own economic base and at the same time balance between the main social classes, it consciously decided to transform its economic base from a planned economy to a state capitalist one.** (Website statement “China: capitalism triumphant in the 1990s,” November 2000.)

What may be unique to WP’s position is the contention that

capitalism did not triumph in the economy until some time after the alleged workers’ state had ceased to exist. For they also say:

**Capitalism was restored in China by 1996. The fact that this was carried out relatively smoothly under the continued rule of the Chinese Communist Party was made possible by two principal factors. First, nearly two decades of “market reforms” had created powerful capitalist sectors within China, and secondly, the crushing of working class political opposition in the aftermath of the 1989 massacre in Tiananmen Square had removed the most important social obstacle to capitalism’s return.**



*Michel Pablo, inventor of the “deformed workers’ state” formulation.*

Fumbling for an explanation tied to the class struggle, WP treats the bloody suppression of the Tiananmen Square protest as the set-up for the transition. But a set-up is not the transition itself, which somehow managed to occur quite peaceably years afterward. And while the Tiananmen crackdown was a real setback for the masses, it was by no means a decisive defeat. Its immediate effect (as WP admits) was to *slow* the march to privatization. And there have been massive waves of protest since, even if not as politically concentrated.

For the mainstream Pabloites, the forms of the so-called planned economy were a key factor that made them declare China and the other Stalinist-ruled countries to be workers’ states. For Workers Power, these forms were not only independent of a state genuinely ruled by workers, but also (for a period at least) independent of even their pseudo-workers’ state. Only when these forms seemed to be of no decisive importance does WP judge the economy to be truly capitalist. This position is a beautiful extension of Pabloite logic: economic forms exist independent of actual class relations.

As if to refute WP’s position that the economic transformation, however long delayed, took place by 1996, it wasn’t until 1997 that a new wave of devolutionary reforms was introduced; until then privatization had been in a relative stall. This wave was, however, the decisive signal for another Pabloite outfit, the United Secretariat, to give up on its “workers’ state.” And its rationalization is perhaps the worst of all. An article by G. Buster explains the transformation as follows:

**The last symbol of a planned economy has thus disappeared with the definitive installation of the market as regulatory mechanism. But when and how did China become capitalist? . . . The CCP said its farewell to the working class in October 1997 when it announced the privatization of public sector enterprises, with the dismissal of 200 million workers in five years. Capitalist restoration was already an irreversible fact.** (*International Viewpoint*, December 2003.)

That layoff figure, however, comes close to the total number of workers in the country; if true, it would mean that the CCP had indeed bade farewell to the Chinese working class by liquidating it. Fortunately for the prospect of proletarian revolution, the actual number of layoffs of the 1997 privatization drive has been

reasonably estimated at about one-tenth Buster's figure. But why be careful about the fate of couple hundred million workers when you're desperate to get out from under a nonsensical and increasingly indefensible theory? The false figure got through because it enhances a date that saw no smashing of the state or civil war.

A former United Secretariat affiliate, the Pioneer group in Hong Kong, dates the transformation a decade earlier: to 1988, when China's constitution was amended:

**In 1982 and 1988 the constitution was twice amended, so as to explicitly permit the long-term growth of private capitalist economy. A state which engaged itself in the long-term development of capitalist economy while at the same time denied the working class all democratic rights, could not have been a workers' state in any sense. In such a state the working class could only be an oppressed and exploited class, i.e., a subjugated class. ... Therefore, when China amended its constitution in 1988, it signified that the class nature of the state machinery had changed, and that a bourgeois state had already been restored.**

Thus instead of a revolutionary change from one ruling class to another changing the state, we have the state apparatus itself changing its class content. It is Marxism, not the state, that has been turned upside down.

The deformed workers' state theory is no theory at all, just a convenient label that allows one to say that nationalization is good, bureaucracy is bad. Any adherent can interpret it any way, so every conceivable date is provided for the decisive moment when the alleged workers' state disappeared. At none of these moments did the hundreds of millions of Chinese workers rise up to defend "their" state. The workers have fought hard battles to defend gains that had been granted to them out of fear of their

power. But any who had illusions that the Stalinist state was on their side would have been gravely weakened in the struggle.

### STICKING WITH THE CHINESE "WORKERS' STATE"

Some mice refuse to leave a sinking ship. That is, there remain Pabloites who have stuck to China's supposed proletarian status; and they too offer varying reasons. One such group is the Brazilian Liga Bolchevique Internacionalista, which argues that "The possibility of a peaceful transition of a workers' state to a capitalist economy (whether called state capitalism or not) is a fiction." (*Luta Operária*, March 97.) That is true enough, but as we have pointed out, this argument really works in reverse: since China today has a capitalist economy but has had no violent counterrevolution, the claim that it had been a workers' state without a workers' revolution is all the more vacuous.

The LBI's insistence on waiting for a genuine counterrevolution before they give up calling China a workers' state may seem admirable, but it comes a bit late in the day. For they and others have already accepted the loss of their "workers' states" in the USSR and East Europe through peaceful, gradual transformations. The stick-with-China school of Pabloism has therefore to twist even harder to find arguments that keep China "proletarian."

The Spartacist League takes almost perverse pleasure in sticking with the Stalinists. But though the SL raises a number of separate points as evidence that a workers' state exists, in the end it comes down to one: the CCP remains in power.

Nevertheless, they do assert the economic superiority of Stalinism, China included. The SL maintains that the Soviet Union was productively superior to Western capital. (They tried to demonstrate this with blatantly doctored growth statistics that only their members or the truly ignorant could possibly believe; see *PR* 68 for our refutation.) The economic collapse of the Soviet Union made a mockery of this claim, but they continue in a backhanded manner to press this argument for China. Not long ago they favorably compared the Chinese economy to Russia's after Stalinism's collapse, and chalking it up to the class differences in regimes:

**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.** (*Workers Vanguard*, Dec. 15, 1995.)

But of course this growth was due to the imperialist investment pouring in and the growing private sector – the very things that the SL believes are threatening the workers' state!

Since then, the Spartacists have been forced to discuss more the embattled nature of the state economy. But even with this proviso, they continue to trumpet the advantages of the statified economy. For example:

**It is the "socialist" (i.e. collectivist) aspects which are responsible for the positive economic developments in China in recent years: the vast expansion of investments in infrastructure (e.g. urban construction, canals, railroads and the giant Three Gorges Dam project), the ability of China to have navigated successfully through the 1997-98 East Asian financial economic crisis and then a generalized world capitalist recession.** (*WV*, Nov. 21, 2003.)

There are undoubtedly productive things going on in Chinese public works – just as there are in public works in any capitalist country. But it is a measure of the SL's desperation that they include the Three Gorges Dam – a project renowned for its corruption, callousness towards millions of displaced residents and financial and ecological waste – as a positive example. As for the Stalinists' "navigation" through economic crises, this is a rehash of the previous bankrupt argument. Now as then, it is the priva-

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tized and imperialist sectors that keep China afloat and provide financing for the public works.

Another piece of evidence the SL offers is the system of inheritance in China (or in their eyes, the lack of it), which of course is related to property ownership in general. To the SL, establishing the right to inheritance in China would mean destroying the Stalinist state:

**The aims of China's would-be exploiters – centrally to secure the right to buy and sell property and hand it down to their offspring – can only be achieved through smashing the existing state apparatus by one means or another and replacing it with a new one based on the principle of private ownership of the means of production.** (*Spartacist*, Summer 1997.)

But as we have pointed out, inheritance already exists in reality. The SL needs a lot better excuse than this.

### STALINIST POWER = WORKERS' STATE

For the Spartacists, the biggest proof that China remains a workers' state is the Stalinist regime itself. The Stalinist party is the alpha and omega of the alleged workers' state. Its rise to power defined that state's beginnings. And the SL considers the state apparatus created, ruled and maintained by the Stalinists as the central structure that has to be smashed before capitalist exploitation is triumphant.

For example, the SL rejects the notion that Stalinists can allow a pluralist economy under their control. To this end, they approvingly quote Sujian Guo, an academic emigré from China: "The experience of other former communist countries has shown that there is no single case of making privatization successful with the communist party remaining in power and its political system intact." That is true, because Soviet and Eastern European Stalinists thought they could manage the economic transition without preserving party power. It is precisely those examples that propelled the CCP onto its pluralist path – not privatizing every single enterprise, of course – while feverishly plotting to maintain party authority.

The SL has traditionally been more critical of the CCP leaders than some other Pabloite groups, and they can't ignore the march towards private capitalism. But even at their most critical, they see the Stalinists as "contradictory," meaning that they have a good side. It is in this light that they interpret actions and events.

**The Beijing bureaucracy essentially acts as a transmission belt for the pressures of the imperialist-dominated world market on the workers state. The brittle and contradictory character of this bureaucratic caste can be seen in the fact that in the face of working-class unrest, the current regime has often reversed some of its economic "reforms" and occasionally put some of its own on trial for corruption, sometimes with a penalty of execution.** (*WV*, May 17, 2002.)

But *any* capitalist class can – and at times must – be able to make concessions in the face of mass pressure. And this often involves disciplining members of the ruling class itself. As for being "brittle," this is true only in the sense that the capitalist class in general is brittle before its proletarian gravediggers in this epoch. But the Chinese rulers have proven to have the stability a hardened capitalist class demands. The fact that Stalinist ruling classes in Europe and the ex-USSR have been able to morph into traditional bourgeoisies with without bloody counterrevolutions is evidence enough of their class character. (And as we earlier noted, the transition in China has been taking place with a marked lack of discord within the ruling circle itself.)

The Spartacists' outlook leads them to downplay the bureaucracy's openly capitalist functioning, even as it has to acknowl-

edge the process. Thus, in arguing against other leftists' trumpeting of the recent decision to legitimize the membership of capitalists in the Party, *Workers Vanguard* stated:

**According to an official survey of China's two million business owners 600,000 are party members and have been for some time. The overwhelming majority of these were long-time CCP managerial cadre who took over the small state-owned enterprises they were running when these were privatized over the past several years.** (Nov. 21, 2003.)

In other words, the fact that the involvement of private capitalists in the Party is even deeper and of longer standing than the recent decision suggests is presented as a reason not to take the Party's public welcome to capitalists too seriously!

Similarly, the SL downplays the openly capitalist manifestations of the Chinese economy. While they lash out against the increasing unemployment, the exploitation in SEZ enterprises, low wages in collectives, etc., they refuse to discuss this in Marxist terms: it is the superexploitative extraction of surplus value through use of the labor reserve army by the government and the imperialists. They warn that the imperialists' "ultimate goal is to reduce China to a giant sweatshop under neocolonial subjugation" – overlooking that China already *is* a giant sweatshop which, while not under the direct control of imperialism, is most certainly a subordinate and critical link in the chain of world imperialism.

At the same time, China is a vast country engaged in political, economic and at times even military competition with the imperialists. Despite our rejection of any notion that "Communist" China was ever a workers' state, China is certainly a country oppressed by imperialism. Consequently we stand for the defense of China against imperialist attacks, whether through military or economic means.

### CCP: PROP FOR IMPERIALISM

While the imperialists have always feared most the workers taking power into their own hands, they are more and more apprehensive about any disruption of the Stalinist regime that has proved essential for the cauldron of exploitation in China that so powers the world capitalist machine. Thus any political defense of the fictitious "workers' state" in China becomes ever more obviously a defense of the world order of imperialism.

In this context, China's naked but steady devolution to an increasingly privatized capitalism has left the pseudo-Trotskyist theorists in disarray – not even to speak of the Maoists and others who once held China up as a socialist model.

Many on the far left gave their support to Stalinism on the grounds that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" – that is, no matter how viciously the Stalinist regimes acted against the working classes they ruled over, at least they were an alternative to imperialism. Our analysis, in contrast, pictured the Stalinist regimes, above all the Russian, as props for imperialism during the post-World War II period when the world was in upheaval. The Chinese Stalinist rulers are providing an even more devastating case. They have dreams of becoming a serious rival to the Western imperialist powers, which will not happen. But they already serve as imperialism's loyal compradors in the most massive super-exploitation yet seen on the planet.

That this is done by a regime still speaking in the name of even a maniacally distorted Marxism (along with "Mao Zedong Thought and the Theories of Deng Xiaoping") is a crime against human sense. That the super-exploiting state has long been defended, and regarded as proletarian, by would-be communist revolutionaries shows that they have turned from bowdlerized Marxism to unconscious defense of the imperial order. ●

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# Democrats

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*continued from page 1*

pation must maintain its grip there.

On the home front, the economy is supposedly doing well, but the people are not. Profits are up – mostly because of organized labor’s decades-long capitulations in the “one-sided class war,” and also because of the massive looting of the federal treasury via tax cuts for the upper bourgeoisie instigated by Bush and passed by Congress under Democratic as well as Republican leaderships. Bush’s enormous budget deficits endanger widely popular programs like Medicare and Social Security.

The bourgeoisie has reason to be on guard. The working-class mood is one of anger at the pigs gorging at the economic trough, coupled with fear of unemployment in the face of massive job losses in the class-divided “boom.” There have been some signs of militancy, as in the New York transit workers’ near-strike in 2002 (see *PR 66*) and the California strikes this winter (see page 3) – but no successful major strike in years.

## DEMOCRATIC PARTY’S REACTIONARY ROLE

The Democrats’ role is to guarantee that mass anger and fear do not translate into struggles that could overturn the trough. During Bush’s term, they have acted as “Bush lite,” voting for most of his programs while offering modest criticisms and amendments to cover their rear.

The process by which the moderate-conservative bourgeoisie has achieved success in detouring anger is vital for working-class activists, above all revolutionaries, to understand. One benchmark: a year ago, there were massive protests in the United States, along with the rest of the world, against the Iraq war. This



*Clinton’s welfare “reform” launched slave-labor “workfare” program*

year the protests in this country will be significantly smaller, even though pro-war and pro-occupation sentiment is far weaker. A major reason is the election. The anti-war struggles, along with the re-emerging struggles of the working class and the oppressed against the whole array of bourgeois attacks from wages to police brutality, are being diverted – once again – into Democratic Party campaigns, the historic graveyard for social upheaval in the United States. Even an occasional large demonstration will tend to be well-controlled and twisted into a Democratic Party campaign rally.

The Democratic Party claims to be the “party of the people.” But in reality it is a major party of the capitalist class, beholden to Wall Street and imperialist interests as well as to lesser sections of the capitalists. It rests on an electoral base that includes large sections of the working class, including both trade unionists and those in oppressed groups. It overwhelmingly receives the votes of Black working-class and middle-class people. It is also the main political vehicle for the hopes of the liberal wing of the middle-class intelligentsia.

Given that the Democrats’ working-class base has interests which are fundamentally opposed to those of the ruling class, the bourgeoisie normally prefers to have the government run by the Republicans, whose main electoral base is more reliably pro-capitalist: large sections of the petty bourgeoisie and suburban wings of the more conservative labor aristocracy. So Democratic politicians have to constantly prove their allegiance to big business, even when they are nominally taking positions in opposition.

Since the end of the post-World War II boom, when the capitalists have been stepping up their anti-working-class attacks, the Democrats’ traditional New Deal liberal calls for social spending have become increasingly empty. Indeed, because of the allegiance that the trade union bureaucrats and the leaders of Black, Latino, immigrant and women’s rights organizations have given to the Democrats, Democratic politicians have been responsible for some of the deepest cuts to working-class gains.

## CLINTON SET STAGE FOR BUSH

The Clinton years generally set the stage for Bush’s sharp right turn, as Clinton proved to be a loyal tool of the capitalists in both foreign and domestic policy. Clinton signed the “welfare reform” act that drove hundreds of thousands off the welfare rolls and set up slave-labor workfare programs. He triggered the health care “reform” that promoted managed care in the interest of HMO’s and insurance companies, resulting in a 25 percent increase in the number of people without insurance. A recent book points out that “Under Clinton . . . the distribution of wealth in the U.S. became more skewed than it had been at any time in the previous forty years – with, for example, the ratio of wages for the average worker to the pay of the average CEO rising astronomically from 113 to 1 in 1991 under Bush I to 449 to 1 when Clinton left office in 2001.” (Robert Pollin, *Contours of Descent: U.S. Economic Fractures and the Landscape of Global Austerity*, 2003.)

Clinton’s “anti-crime” and “anti-terrorism” acts framed Bush’s Patriot Act. He sponsored viciously punitive immigration legislation. His reputed affinity to Black people was acceptable to the ruling class because it was accompanied by his workfare programs and by his fulsome embrace of the death penalty and increased financial support to the police. He bucked the unions and the majority of Democrats by aligning with the Republicans and pushing through both NAFTA and facilitated trade with China.

Because all this was carried out by a Democratic president, the opposition was far more muted than it would have been otherwise. Some on the left, notably the Communist Party and the Democratic Socialists, always call for voting Democratic to keep out the greater evil, the Republicans. But Clinton proved far more harmful to the working class than the usual Democrat – and especially to its oppressed sectors. Because the union bureaucrats and Black leaders deflect direct combat with the bosses into Democratic electoralism, they hesitate to attack Democratic administrations. Therefore, under Clinton the Democrats got away with a lot more than Republicans could, at a time when a mobilized fightback was on the horizon. Clinton was then not the lesser but the greater evil. His incorporation tactics paved the way for Bush’s even deeper reaction.

## THE DEMOCRATS' SPECTRUM

Given their dual role of operating for the interests of capital and appealing to a working-class base, it is no wonder that Democratic politicians embrace a spectrum of ideologies. Their task is to reflect the needs of dispossessed sectors of the masses, demobilize their struggles by channeling them into the voting booths, and let their misleaders vie with each other for influence and pieces of the economic pie. Undercutting upheavals and dividing the base ensures that demands on the system will be for peanuts compared to the actual needs, which capitalism cannot cede.

Most Democratic politicians these days normally take minimal liberal positions on social issues like racial equality and women's rights. (On the other hand, on gay and lesbian rights they fall far short of even that: see box on page 19.) On the party's left, some spokesmen and "community representatives" set themselves up as the brokers for Black and Latino needs. Others defend "working families"; some even demagogically mouth the slogans of the anti-war protests. In the center, they use protectionist rhetoric to appeal to workers on nationalist grounds. On the right, they more openly defend imperialist and militarist interests.

On economic issues, a pseudo-populist style is the norm. Populism appeals to "the people" against "the corporations" or "the rich." But it is overtly class-collaborationist, so it scares the big capitalists far less than a program based on the underlying economic power of the working class. Moreover, as a result of past betrayals, today's populism carries with it no threat of mass action like the labor struggles in the 1930's and 1940's, the massive ghetto upheavals of the 1960's and early 1970's and the anti-Vietnam war movement. Thus the two-faced Democrats can placate their ruling class masters and still lure workers to march to their political-economic graveyard.

In the current campaign, virtually all the Democratic candidates ended up responding to the growing tide of fury and frustration by pushing populist anti-Bush rhetoric. Howard Dean caught fire with his "outside-the-Beltway" stance condemning his rivals and the Congressional Democrats for caving in to Bush on the war; he became the front-runner for a few months. John



*Democratic front-runner John Kerry has same imperialist world-view as Bush, calls for stronger U.S. military in Iraq.*

Edwards used even sharper populist oratory to condemn Bush's economic policies, and thereby gained support among industrial workers facing joblessness. When these campaigns revealed the depth of hatred for Bush, the other candidates joined in, and Dean was sidelined.

The Democrats' strategy has been to pin the growing mass discontent solely on Bush. He and the neo-conservative Republicans have become their Axis of Evil. The universal slogan is "Anybody but Bush," a line overtly pushed by forces as disparate as the Democratic wing of Wall Street, the AFL-CIO chieftains and liberal "socialists." Tying the mass anger to Bush has allowed the candidates not to go beyond "ordinary Americans are being screwed" and "we stand with you" demagoguery, a substitute for a serious program of action.

This sentiment has produced a string of primary victories by Kerry, whose career has jockeyed between mainstream liberalism and Clinton's rightward-leaning New Democratic line, with a

## Sharpton's Dead-End Strategy

Al Sharpton's presidential campaign was not meant to win but to consolidate his political base and make him the "Recognized Leader of the Black Community." It was designed to secure his spot as the go-to guy for the Democrats whenever they want Black votes. But other Black Democratic politicians want to maintain themselves as brokers on their own account. That is why many of them, like New York Congressman Charles Rangel, backed not Sharpton but Wesley Clark; their gamble was that the Clintons would keep control of the Democratic gravy train. Both they and Sharpton lost their bets.

Sharpton has backed off the activist stance and rhetoric that propelled him to the front of some past police brutality

struggles. When Timothy Stansbury Jr. was shot to death by a cop on a Brooklyn rooftop in January, and even when the killer cop was exonerated by a grand jury in February, Sharpton did not break his campaign stride to use his clout to build even one protest action.

Not only hasn't Sharpton become the top dog, he hasn't done well with Black voters either. The big losers in this game are Black workers. The only way for the Black working class to fight for real change is to struggle against the system, not bargain for more power within the Democratic Party as just another interest group. The brokers want the exclusive right to misuse Harlem and other Black communities as they see fit, using Black voters as stepping stones in their political careers. In this, they reflect their real

base, the Black middle class that thinks it is personally moving upward in this racist society.

It is time that Black workers took the lead in the Black freedom struggle. Workers are not dependent on the establishment politicians and middle-class do-gooders. Black workers are a crucial force in strategic industries and in many of the vital services in the big cities. Latino, immigrant and white workers are hurting badly too. Black workers have a history of struggle and gains to defend that weren't granted by beneficent politicians but were won by the threat of militancy. Together with other militant workers, Black workers have to take the lead in fighting for a general strike and in building the revolutionary working-class party.

record of playing all sides of all fences. Kerry vaulted to the top because, as a wealthy patrician anointed as a Vietnam war hero and then a Vietnam protester, he seems best able to defeat Bush. Like almost all the Democrats in Congress, he voted for not only the Iraq war but also the Patriot Act, both of which he now criticizes. But he is hardly an opponent of U.S. militarism. As to what to do about Iraq now, he accuses Bush of having a “cut-and-run strategy” (speech to the Council on Foreign Relations, December 3, 2003) and instead calls for expanding the U.S. military presence abroad by 40,000 troops because “our armed forces are spread too thin” (speech at Drake University in Iowa, December 16).

### **WORKING-CLASS STRATEGY**

The task for revolutionaries during this electoral period is to use the mass interest now focused on politics to show an alternative way forward. We must reach advanced workers with the old Marxist truth, that even reforms are won by mass, potentially revolutionary, action.

This working-class strategy sounds far-out but is in reality far more practical than consorting with the Democrats. The union bureaucrats, to take an important example, have fallen on their faces in this primary season. Labor as usual played the Democratic Party game, and this time suffered a huge bashing. The AFL-CIO bureaucrats endorsed the old “pro-labor” warhorse, Congressman Richard Gephardt, in reality a cautious capitalist politician who repeatedly let Bush off the hook by backing his imperial and anti-worker policies. A few, more daring, bureaucrats bet on Dean, whose anti-war stance was combined with an overall conservative record as governor of Vermont. After

these two turned out to be big losers, the labor statesmen scrambled onto the Kerry bandwagon. Their opportunist maneuvers to gain clout in the Democratic Party showed once again the bankruptcy of their electoral strategy.

As Lenin pointed out years ago, one serious strike would do far more for the working class than any electoral victory. Working-class anger does not have to remain frustrated and channeled into passive voting for lip-synching politicians and their lies. We call on all advanced workers who understand that the working class can only free itself by its own acts, to join with us in re-creating the authentic communist revolutionary party.

In the U.S. today, the working class is little aware of its power to transform society. That’s why revolutionaries often urge the widening of local strikes into general strikes to defeat the ruling class austerity measures and turn around the one-sided class war. A general strike would mobilize union workers and non-union workers, as well as the unemployed. It would forge unity between labor’s struggles and the fight against police brutality and other racist attacks. It would stop profit-making and war-making dead in their tracks and would be a giant step for the working class to gain consciousness of its power to change society. Such a mass struggle will help build the revolutionary party under whose leadership our class can overturn the monstrous system run by both ruling-class parties which despoils our class at home and abroad.●

March 1, 2004

***Democrats and Republicans: Two Parties of  
War, Racism and Austerity!  
General Strike Against the Capitalist Attacks!  
Build the Revolutionary Party of the Working Class!***

## **Defend Gay Marriage**

The right of gays and lesbians to marry is moving to the front line in the long struggle for gay rights. The increasingly reactionary character of our ruling class, and its mounting defense of conservative social and religious institutions, dictate a showdown. Right-wing sections of the bourgeoisie, afflicted by the underlying crisis eating away at capitalism around the world, are focusing on what they see as the moral degeneration of the old order. They, and their traditional and religious followers within the petty bourgeoisie and backward sections of the working class, fear and loathe gay marriage as a threat to “family values” and the family itself. Whipping up mass patriotic and religious superstition is key to maintaining their legitimacy, and homophobia is an inevitable weapon in their arsenal.

The problem is not just open reactionaries. Even the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, in a long-overdue decision, pointed out that mealy-mouthed alternatives like “civil unions” for same-sex couples ought not to pass constitutional muster: “Separate is seldom, if ever, equal,” the court said, echoing the U.S. Supreme Court half a century ago on school segregation. But nominally liberal and populist politicians like the Democratic Party’s front-runner John Kerry and runner-up John Edwards have fearfully embraced the “civil unions” evasion that even George W. Bush is willing to allow.

Unless gays have the legal right to marry, their equality before the law is a lie, no matter what other marriage-lite arrangements are conjured up by squirming populist politicians. As Marxists, we have no love for the repressive and hypocriti-

cal institution of marriage itself: it is a buttress for a system which not only exploits our labor but also attempts to corrupt love and every other decent human feeling on the altar of profitability. Intimate human relationships in a better world will not need the approval of the parasites in the churches and states that plague us today. Nevertheless, we recognize that many people today see no alternative, and need the personal assurance and the legal and economic protections afforded by marriage. They have the absolute right to so choose.

In the fight for gay marriage rights, we Marxists emphasize the societal and class roots of the attack. We point out that gay rights cannot go forward in a nation where all the gains made by workers, Black and Latino people and immigrants are being rolled back. The fight to defend and advance the rights of gays is linked as well to the need to defend against the present assault on the right to privacy, the right to profess Muslim beliefs and the right to protest American imperialism, all endangered by the patriotic and chauvinist claptrap. Those gay leaders who proclaim that their stress on marriage rights is a means to prove that gays are also defenders of the bourgeois family and the glories of America – and who rely on Democratic politicians to win gay rights – are leading the struggle into a dead and potentially deadly end.

Above all, we try to convince our fellow fighters that the only lasting way to achieve and defend gay liberation is through working-class socialist revolution and the overthrow of capitalism, the antiquated social idiocy that rules our lives and invades our bedrooms today.

# “Anybody but Bush”?

## A Dialogue on the Democrats

The following dialogue did and did not take place. Yet the questions posed here are fought out between radical-liberal-populist “socialists” and authentic Leninists every day. The left leaders in the “Anybody but Bush” camp are selling out the growing number of activists and workers who want a real end to the deepening attack on the masses, here and abroad.

### BUSH THE IMPERIALIST REACTIONARY

Q. George W. Bush’s is a qualitatively worse administration than any other in memory; he is a near-fascist. Look at the Patriot Act and the chauvinist attacks on Muslims and dissenters that rip up the Constitution. How can you not support a Democrat to get rid of this reactionary?

A. Bush is a particularly rotten, reactionary and racist capitalist, but the Democrats are no alternative. The current bunch supported Bush’s repressive legislation and even initiated its predecessors under Clinton. Bush’s Patriot Act is criminal and chauvinist – but still not quite as bad as the crime of Franklin Roosevelt, the liberal Democratic demigod, in throwing thousands of Japanese-Americans into concentration camps. Liberal presidents as well as reactionaries engage in criminal acts against oppressed and exploited people. It is part of the job description.

When you demagogically claim that violating democratic norms makes Bush a near-fascist you are deluding people: real American fascism would mean far worse subjugation of Blacks, Latinos, Jews, Muslims and immigrants – plus the crushing of the unions and the termination of all rights to free speech. You are trying to panic people into voting for the Democrats. And you are covering for the run-of-the-mill capitalist politicians, war criminals and autocrats all.

Q. So you admit that Bush is a rotten reactionary! I still ask you, how can you not support a Democrat against Bush?

A. Where do you get that “admit” garbage? We have said all

along that the President of the United States is a filthy imperialist, the greatest terrorist on the planet today! Osama bin Laden is a piker compared to this mass killer. But we also remember when you (or your mommy and daddy) told us that we had to support the Democrat Lyndon Johnson to stop Barry Goldwater, the Republican reactionary (and “fascist”) who would plunge the U.S. deeper into the Vietnam War. Who plunged imperialism deeper, the liberal or the reactionary?

Q. That was yesterday. What about the war on Iraq today, in violation of international law? What about Bush giving the Israelis free rein to imprison and murder Palestinians?

A. What about all the Democrats who supported the war? How many, even now, even pretend that they would end the imperialist occupation of Iraq? Not one. As for international “law,” it is whatever the White House says it is. Clinton set the precedent for Bush in his war on Serbia a few years ago. And on Israel, the Democrats’ “peace process” and Bush’s “road map” differ on only secondary questions. Both cover for the misery and massacres inflicted on the Palestinians.

Capitalist politicians have differences over particular wars. The ultra-reactionary chauvinist Patrick Buchanan was a far more adamant opponent of both Iraq wars than any liberal Democrat. Whatever their disagreements on this or that war, they all defend American imperialism, which must spread its tentacles throughout the world if it is to survive. They have no choice.

Yes, Bush has overseen a dangerous turn in American politics. But the LRP has hammered away at the fact that the turn represents a widespread bourgeois understanding about U.S. imperialism’s need to maintain its grip over an unstable world. Some sectors of the ruling class still don’t get it, but look again at the bipartisan support for his war. Disagreement was mostly over cosmetic questions, not the blood-soaked invasion and occupation. The Democrats are a lesser evil only rhetorically. No Democratic president is going to stop the profit-gouging drive against working people abroad or at home.

### DEMOCRATS: CAPITALISM’S SOFTER COPS

Q. Bush’s “war on terrorism” is killing innocent people in Afghanistan and Iraq today! We have to end this now. After that, we can move on to deal with underlying issues.

A. That’s what you types said during Vietnam and every other war. But the Democrats are part of the problem and not even a temporary solution. As our lead article shows, Kerry, the likely Democratic nominee, is demanding a bigger and longer-term U.S. military presence in Iraq. By backing a “lesser evil” rather than fighting for a real alternative, all you are doing is enabling the next imperialist war, and all the wars after that. And ensuring that someone like you will then say, OK, but let’s vote for the Democrat now to end this war, and then tomorrow . . .

By the way, look at how many innocent Yugoslavs and Somalis Clinton murdered – not to speak of the hundreds of thousands of Iraqis killed by starvation and disease in the eight years of Clinton’s sanctions. And which party’s imperialist president was it that actually used nuclear “weapons of mass destruction”? And against civilians!

Q. You can’t seriously mean that the Democrats are the same as the Republicans. Look at Bush’s reactionary judges, his tax cuts for the rich, his handouts to the corporations.

## Marxism, Interracialism and the Black Struggle

### A Proletarian Revolution pamphlet

by Sy Landy

An overview of the Marxist understanding of revolutionary proletarian interracialism and the historical course of the U.S. Black struggle.

The pamphlet discusses the idea of Black liberation through socialist revolution as the alternative to integrationism and nationalism, whose failure it analyzes in detail.

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A. I don't say they're the same; just that the Democrats are no answer to the Republicans. Both parties are inextricably tied to the capitalist system and must defend it at home and abroad. (And both have long records of handouts to the corporations.) Normally, they defend the system in different ways. At home, the Republicans are the "hard cops," the Democrats softer. The liberals' job is to pretend they are on the side of beleaguered workers, racially oppressed people, unemployed and the overburdened middle class. When the masses rise up, the Democrats make some concessions. These are meant to contain and detour workers, not at all to meet their increasingly desperate needs.

Today, when capitalism is caught in a fundamental crisis throughout the world, the system cannot easily give sops. Given the evidence of Clinton, any Democratic administration is going to roll back past gains just like the Republicans, with only verbal sops. They are just as big liars as the Republicans . . .

Q. Oh, don't start with the Clinton-Lewinsky "no-sex" bit.

A. That's not my point. Clinton's attacks on the working class were disguised; remember his milk-the-poor workfare, styled as "welfare reform"? It not only attacked working-class people directly; it also paved the way for Bush's "tax reform" designed to enrich the rich. And "tort reform" to protect the insurance profiteers and the medical establishment from malpractice suits. Clinton launched a whole series of lightly disguised assaults on gains won by workers and Black people. They paved the way

for the capitalist looting orgy now going on.

Q. OK, but there are sincere liberal spokesmen too.

A. They're worse in a way, because they can better sell the take-away programs which have soaked the workers and the unemployed over the last three decades and opened the way for Bush. Given the acts of their "friends," workers became more and more frustrated, disarmed and cynical – seeing no way to fight back. Our point is that the Democrats softened up the masses for the even more devastating attack which is now coming. Supporting Democrats to stop Republicans isn't using fire to stop a fire; it is fueling a growing conflagration.

#### DEMOCRATS: THE MASSES' PARTY?

Q. Look, whatever you say, the Democrats are preferable to the Republicans – it's just obvious. That is why workers, Blacks, Latinos, pro-environment and anti-war people support the Democrats. We who want to mobilize the people and get them to fight back against the current attacks must relate to the Democratic Party.

We progressives are not blind followers of the Democratic politicians. We want to use the elections to stimulate a populist upheaval; that is the way to stop Bush's attacks. We know it takes mass mobilizations to stop the corporate assault. The old-line Democratic apparatus hated Dean for example, because he put together an opposition full of non-elite types in order to take over

## Democratic Party "Leninists"

With pseudo-Trotskyists and other leftists barreling rightward every day, it is no wonder that there are "Leninists" who cite Lenin in defense of voting Democratic – and not just the Communist Party, which has long been embedded deep in the Democrats. The typical argument quotes the passage from Lenin's pamphlet *"Left-Wing" Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, in which he debates left communists who refused on principle to participate in bourgeois elections.

Lenin argued for campaigning for the British Labour Party (which despite its name has always been a pro-capitalist and pro-imperialist party) in 1920. He explained that putting the Labour leaders, Henderson and Snowden, in office would expose their true pro-capitalist role:

**At present, British Communists very often find it hard even to approach the masses, and even to get a hearing from them. If I come out as a Communist and call upon them to vote for Henderson and against Lloyd George, they will certainly give me a hearing. And I shall be able to explain in a popular manner, not only why the Soviets are better than a parliament and why the dictatorship of the proletariat is better than the dictatorship of Churchill (disguised with the signboard of bourgeois "democracy"), but also that, with my vote, I want to support Henderson in the same way as the rope supports a hanged man – that the impending establishment of a government of the Hendersons will prove that I am right, will bring the masses over to my side, and will hasten the political death of the Hendersons and the Snowdens just as was the case with their kindred spirits in Russia and Germany.**

Doesn't that reasoning mean that today we should support the Democrats getting into office, "in the same way as the rope supports a hanged man"?

Not at all. In contrast to the Democrats, the Labour Party was created by workers' struggles. It was an independent class

party, although politically dominated by bourgeois and petty-bourgeois leaders. Lenin urged the British Communists of his day to support Labour as a mass working-class-based alternative to "the historical system of two parties of exploiters" – the British Liberals and Conservatives, led by Lloyd George and Churchill – "which has been hallowed by centuries of experience and has been extremely advantageous to the exploiters." He wrote:

**The fact that most British workers still follow the lead of the [Labour Party] and have not yet had experience of a government composed of these people . . . undoubtedly indicates that the British Communists should participate in parliamentary action; that they should, from within parliament, help the masses of the workers see the results of a Henderson and Snowden government in practice, and that they should help the Hendersons and Snowdens defeat the united forces of Lloyd George and Churchill. To act otherwise would mean hampering the cause of the revolution, since revolution is impossible without a change in the views of the majority of the working class, a change brought about by the political experience of the masses, never by propaganda alone.**

The condition of facing two parties of exploiters still holds in the U.S. – the Republicans and Democrats. Yes, many U.S. workers back the Democrats, the way many British workers once backed the Liberal Party before the rise of Labour. But we don't have a labor party or any mass working-class party whose lead most American workers follow. Nor do American workers lack experience of the Democrats – they just don't see an alternative.

It is up to Leninists today to promote the real alternatives: massive class struggle and a revolutionary working-class party. Supporting the Democrats would be analogous to supporting the Liberals in Lenin's day – endorsing the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. Try finding a Lenin quote advocating that!

and toss them aside. The Democratic Party is the party of the social movements. You can't deny it!

A. No? I just want to make one little change in your claim. Rather than calling it the "party" of the social movements, substitute the word "graveyard."

Look at Kerry and the drop-out also-rans, the populist-come-latelies after Dean's campaign caught fire. Do you take Edwards' law court-trained "sincerity" seriously? Do you believe that they will honestly carry out their populist pap if they win? You know it's a pack of lies. And saddling the next mass struggle with populist ideology means trying to strangle it in advance. For all their rhetoric, even the "left" candidates, Kucinich and

## Kucinich, Nader and the Tailist Left

On the Democratic fringe, Dennis Kucinich, the only candidate who actually voted against the Iraq war, never got any serious bourgeois backing. He was running not to win but to help trap anti-war activism within the Democratic Party. He said, "The Democratic Party created third parties by running to the middle. What I'm trying to do is to go back to the big tent so that everyone who felt alienated could come back through my candidacy." That's his road to the graveyard.

But he enticed at least one "far left" organization, the Left Turn outfit that split from the International Socialist Organization. The ISO had already crossed the class line in 2000 to support the Green Party bourgeois campaign of Ralph Nader (whose theme was "saving American corporate capitalism from itself" – see our pamphlet, *The Nader Hoax*). Left Turn has gone a step further in supporting a candidate of a major capitalist party, not just the Greens. In an enthusiastic account of Kucinich's campaign in the August issue of their magazine, they label him the "delegate of globalization's combatants" and urge Green Party activists "to put their Party loyalty on hold, combine tactics and back Kucinich in 2004."

The ISO itself has not yet officially endorsed Nader's present candidacy, but it is already covering up his pro-imperialist and anti-struggle politics. On Iraq, the ISO notes that "his campaign's web site now features a statement in opposition to both the invasion and occupation." (*Socialist Worker* editorial, February 23.) So it does, but the ISO fails to mention Nader's solution, which is the same as Kucinich's: "U.S. Out, U.N. In." Nader calls for a U.N. trusteeship over Iraq; that is, handing the imperialist conquest over to multilateral imperialist control.

The ISO also claims that Nader's platform defends abortion and gay marriage, but in fact it mentions neither. (He did come out for gay marriage rights in TV interviews, when pressed.) Worst of all, like last time, Nader nowhere supports any Black or Latino struggle within a capitalist system built on racism, other than to make the same abstract calls for equality as any bourgeois politician. The ISO says nothing about this characteristic omission.

The ISO's editorial concludes, "We deserve better than [a] choice between the lesser of two evils." Four years ago they claimed that his campaign "could open the way to the development of an independent working-class political party." It didn't happen, and it won't. No way a working-class party genuinely independent of capitalist interests could support imperialism and ignore crucial workers' struggles. In place of the two capitalist evils, Nader and the ISO offer a third.

Sharpton, and the "movement" man, Dean, never once used their platforms to mobilize the mass actions or movements you claim to want. What they want is good citizens passively voting to achieve "progressive" goals. Their function is to demobilize potential mass upsurges, not encourage them. And your function is to cover for them.

The gains made by workers and oppressed people under capitalism come from mass, class-based struggles that threaten to transcend the system. That forces the capitalist politicians to try to buy them off. The trade union bureaucrats, like the Black, Latino and immigrant leaders, are tied to the Democrats. When the movements are explosive, the leaders and the "left" Democrats sound fierce. Their populist rhetoric blames evil corporations but not the capitalist class system, and sets up an appeal for the Democrats. Remember how Jesse Jackson led an angry Black struggle back into the Democratic Party in the 1980's?

As soon as the movement is demobilized, the leaders play the "special interest" game. Each sector competes within the Democratic Party for a larger share of whatever scraps of patronage and sops are still left: Blacks vs. Latinos, whites against both, U.S.-born workers against immigrants, and on and on. Instead of uniting in the struggle for solid gains for all, the leaders fight each other for tidbits and whip up rivalries among the followers. The once promising struggles are then dead; all that remains is populist rhetoric on the tombstones.

### BACKING DEMOCRATS MEANS CALMING STRUGGLE

Q. OK, I agree that social gains are won by mass struggles. I'm an activist myself. But how does that conflict with also voting for the Democrats to get rid of Bush? I can favor both.

A. If you're at all serious about the need to elect Democrats, it certainly does conflict. If you really mean "Anybody but Bush," you have to push for the most moderate, "electable," Democrat. And before you know it you'll be calculating how to win over swing voters; then you'll worry that mass protests and strikes had better wait until after the election. That's how the Black leaders and union bureaucrats figure – stay calm, make sure "our" side wins in November. If you want the Democrats to win at all costs, then you had damned well do all you can to keep mass struggle out of the picture.

The Democratic Party is a death-trap for the struggles of the exploited and oppressed. You reformists are judas goats, helping to lead the working class to the slaughterhouse. You have nearly obliterated the fundamental principle of socialism, that the independent working class must re-create its own revolutionary party and put an end to class collaboration.

A genuine working-class party, a revolutionary party, would tell the truth about the system and fight *for* mass struggles. It would seek to take leadership of these struggles from the middle-class populists who inevitably sell out workers and oppressed people. Anyone who rightly hates Bush for stomping on working people should be equally sick of the Democrats. Join us in the struggle to demand that the unions lead a general strike to stop the capitalist attacks on jobs, wages, health care and the masses at home and abroad.●

## 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. 769, Washington Bridge Station, New York, NY 10033, USA.

# Iraq: Imperialist Devastation and Revolutionary Reconstruction

Iraq is a deepening hellhole. The U.S. occupiers' promises to the Iraqi masses of freedom and better lives have proved to be vicious lies. A proletarian alternative to the imperialist wreckage is sorely needed.

Previous articles in *Proletarian Revolution* dealing with the invasion and occupation of Iraq have assessed the situation and analyzed the reasons for this imperialist adventure. It was important to explain that the war, and the follow-up occupation, did not simply result from rash behavior by President Bush and a cabal of "neo-conservative" advisers; it was rooted in the drives of world imperialism to keep restive oppressed masses down.

The war was also a stage in the growing rivalry between the United States and other imperialist powers like Germany, France and Japan. Iraq was the favored location for these moves, given its strategic position in the Mideast and its massive oil reserves. A U.S. chokehold on Iraqi oil could give Washington greater leverage over its imperialist competitors and its restive pawns. It was a set-up for the acceleration of U.S. military presence in the Middle East. Based on our Marxist understanding of the Iraqi events, we have fought for the demand that U.S. imperialism must be forced out of Iraq now and for military defense of the resistance in Iraq against the occupation.

In analyzing the occupation, we focused on the importance of Shi'ite religious leaders, in particular the Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani and Muqtada al-Sadr. Both have been obliged to utilize mass sentiment to further their own power positions, but they do not want mass upsurges to get out of hand and threaten the capitalist relations they rest on. We predicted, correctly, that they would seek to avoid a full-scale confrontation with the U.S. and its puppets in the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC).

In this article we will pay more attention to discussing the revolutionary alternative to the imperialist occupation, beyond the need to defeat it. We will outline how the Iraqi masses can be won to the revolutionary banner. Indeed, to truly defeat imperialism requires the creation of this alternative.

## CONDITIONS IN "LIBERATED" IRAQ

U.S. imperialism has its own program for Iraq. While the invasion was rooted in fundamental drives of the system, Bush & Co. were nonetheless animated by the particular neo-conservative scenario, whereby the U.S. would be welcomed as a liberator by the Iraqi people and could introduce "democracy" while rebuilding the country. That, together with U.S. military power, would make Iraq into a model to try to stabilize the entire region.

Behind the benign cover was the cynical calculation that the Iraqi masses, made desperate by the deprivations and oppression of the Saddam regime (conditions largely imposed by the imperialists themselves), would accept the political dictates of the U.S. and be content with minimal work and pay. The U.S. could thus acquire a strategic protectorate in the region. Favored imperialist firms, mostly American, would enjoy the fruits of "reconstruction," dominate the oil industry, reap windfalls as contractors, and buy off much of the industrial base in a fire sale – all with a stepped-up rate of labor exploitation.

Some of these goals began to be achieved with the success of the invasion. But the American military and political machine did not count on the sheer volume of the military destruction it had wrought, the breakdown of Iraqi society or the success of the eco-



*Iraqi workers in payroll line at phosphate plant in Al Qaim.*

omic sabotage by guerrilla elements. And even these problems took a back seat to the imperialists' need to protect their own military and the political occupation force. The wreckage the U.S. inflicted on Iraqi society should not be seen as a "mistake" by imperialism but as a logical outcome of its policies.

The results, both intended and unintended, are monstrous. The overwhelming majority of Iraqis are now out of work (the Iraqi labor ministry estimates 70 percent), and the occupation has denied unemployment benefits. Those workers fortunate enough to have a job are absorbing hammer blows. Occupation chief Paul Bremer has issued orders continuing the vicious anti-labor, anti-union laws under Saddam Hussein for public sector workers. But he has also canceled the "special payments" for state employees provided under Saddam's regime that included benefits necessary for survival – housing, food, service subsidies. The lowest wage for an Iraqi public sector worker has been subjected to a wage table that puts their pay at a fraction of what sweatshop workers get in neighboring Arab countries.

Bremer has made it clear that workers' attempts to fight back will be dealt with harshly. He issued an edict in June threatening to arrest anyone encouraging strike activity or disruption in factories or economically important enterprises. Trade union offices were ransacked and members arrested by the U.S. military in December.

The state of services in the country is an international scandal. Baghdad and many areas are blacked out for most of the day. Clean water is in pathetically short supply. The phone and sewer lines are chewed up. (Cell phone service has recently been installed, but at exorbitant prices charged by monopolistic contractors.) Crime and garbage mount. Meanwhile, the occupation is seen, and acts, more and more like the oppressive force it is. Masses are harassed and civilians killed; towns are surrounded with razor wire in the name of fighting "terror." Labor militancy in particular is singled out for repression.

## RESISTANCE MOUNTS

These terrible circumstances – which Bremer trivializes as Iraq's "untidiness" – are producing a reaction U.S. imperialism never counted on. From the first day of the invasion, the American government was surprised that the populace in south-

ern Iraq did not rise up in enthusiasm. The support for the invasion that did exist has largely dissipated in a sea of righteous anger. The guerrilla activity that has sent American casualties climbing has not ended, despite the capture of Saddam and U.S.-inspired infiltration into its network. It has far deeper roots and support than would be possible if the U.S. lies were true that it is made up of Saddamists and al-Qaeda.

The isolated hit-and-run tactics, which indeed often are led by reactionary elements and have caused Iraqi casualties and deepened mass misery through economic sabotage, are not the fundamental barometer of the mass resistance. Nor are they where the potential for a revolutionary mass movement lies. More important is the growing organized expression of anger and resistance. The mass toleration and tacit support for the guerrilla war is indeed the most chilling aspect of the conflict for the U.S. But the notion that such sentiment can be transcended by a revolutionary political challenge to the occupation is a truly terrifying possibility for American imperialism.

Iraq has been rocked in recent months by a wave of huge protest demonstrations. By far the largest, involving tens of thousands of people, were the rallies in Baghdad and Basra for direct elections and ending the occupation. While Sunni Muslims have also been involved in big protests, the Shi'ites have been at their center. And although the militant Islamic organization led by al-Sadr has had its hands in the protests, they have generally cemented Sistani's status as the leading opposition figure.

Although independent working-class struggles have been relegated to the background of the mass protests, they are numerous and of critical importance. Unions are alive in Iraq. Some were organized in the wake of the fall of Saddam. According to journalist David Bacon, who visited Iraq in the fall as part of a delegation of U.S. trade unionists, two federations have active union committees in many factories: the Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions and the Federation of Workers Unions and Councils. (Their names vary slightly in different translations.) The IFTU was forced underground by Saddam in the 1980's but now had to be recognized by the IGC. It appears to be led by the Iraqi Communist Party, which sits on the IGC. The FWUC was founded by younger workers, including members of the Worker-Communist Party of Iraq. (On the ICP and WCPI, see PRs 68 and 69.)

There was a weekend of militant demonstrations in January in Amarah centering on the critical issue of jobs. It was violently



*In the midst of popular hatred of the U.S. occupiers, guerrilla activity in Iraq has not ended.*

suppressed by British troops, and six Iraqis were killed. Unemployed Iraqis, promised jobs by occupation authorities that never appeared, attacked the city hall.

The most important example was the recent victory of Southern Oil Company workers in defying Bremer's wage scale and winning wage increases that were triple Bremer's imposed rates (though still monstrously low). The union was able to utilize the strategic economic position of the oil workers; it secured a wage hike from the oil ministry by threatening to stop work and oil production. It also declared that oil workers would join the armed resistance if their demands were not met.

The fear of this militancy growing into a mass rebellion caused major adjustments in Bush's game plan months ago. One was the tamping down of the drive towards privatization of the network of state industries. Bremer had wanted the sell-off to proceed, but pulled back amid concern over the anger that would occur over the inevitable layoffs. As an official with the occupation authority stated, "It's just disappeared from the agenda; it was just too risky."

Another change was the IGC's suspension of the civil law statutes, thereby allowing Islamic leaders to assert religious law in civil matters like marriage and divorce and to suppress various rights, notably those of women. (The original U.S. game plan favored a more secular handling of such affairs.) There have been significant widespread demonstrations led by women protesting these IGC regulations, indicating that not all rebellious sentiment has been hijacked by the clerical reactionaries. And there have been squawks in the U.S. Congress and media about the setback to Iraqi women. But the conquerors are far more willing to make concessions to reactionary religious practices than to the material well-being of the masses.

#### **GOVERNMENT PLAN IN SHAMBLES**

On the governmental front, the occupation declared a July 1st deadline for transferring "sovereignty" to a provisional government. But the U.S. and the Governing Council have opposed direct elections. Bremer floated ideas like expanding the IGC into a national assembly or convening a national meeting of "leaders" to select a governing body. Any such arrangement would be expected to closely adhere to American wishes.

Washington is dicker with the various bourgeois sectoral leaders, who are vying over who gets the largest crumbs from the imperialist lion. The imperialists seek to install a puppet regime with a pseudo-democratic cloak; the squabbling shows how difficult it is for them to concoct even a phony democratic regime. As we have pointed out in past articles, to maintain control over a united Iraq the U.S. eventually will have to create another Saddam Hussein and hope that he will be less troublesome than their old pawn. But for now they keep trying to slap together a new government that they can call "democratic" without actually permitting mass rule.

Sistani's identification with direct elections has enhanced his popular standing among the majority Shi'ites. The growing outpouring of anti-imperialist sentiment has provoked further maneuvering by Bremer, in particular to try to cut a deal with the Shi'ite leaders. To this end, the U.S. appealed to the United Nations, even though initially, it sought to keep the U.N. role in Iraq at an absolute minimum in order to expand its own power at the expense of other imperialists. Now the U.S. hopes the U.N. can expand contacts with Islamic misleaders and cool the masses' fervor. Whether the U.S. will go along with a face-saving compromise on the election issue is another matter.

For his part, Sistani has played a treacherous role. He has already hinted that with U.N. participation, he can be even more





*In Amarah, British occupation troops assault militant protesters demanding jobs, January 11, 2004.*

malleable to a compromise on direct elections. In one stroke he fosters illusions in the U.N., the imperialist enforcer of the murderous 12-year embargo against Iraq, while sowing the basis for a sellout on the elections issue. Although he continues to hang tough on the issue of elections themselves, he is signaling openness on their timing and the governing arrangement in the interim.

Overall, the plan to transfer power to a supposedly legitimate Iraqi government by July is in total shambles. The puppet Governing Council admits it has no mandate to negotiate an agreement; desperate attempts to cobble together a constitution close to the February 28 deadline fell through repeatedly; the U.S. scheme for “caucuses” in lieu of elections has been abandoned. The problem is that any Iraqi regime with a really popular mandate would have to tell the U.S. forces to leave; but the bourgeois Iraqi leaders dealing with the U.S., not to speak of the imperialists themselves, won’t hear of that.

These maneuvers do not change the nature of the occupation or the basic conditions of the Iraqi masses. The U.S. plans in any event to still try to pull the strings in the country, backed by a continued mass military presence. Bush wants to create the illusion of a power hand-off as an “accomplishment” to boast of in the U.S. election campaign. In fact, both he and the Democrats know that the U.S. is going to have to maintain a huge military presence to back its neo-colonial aims, regardless of what electoral arrangement it ends up with. Life will only remain oppressive and miserable for the Iraqi workers and peasants if this strategy is unchecked.

### **THE WORKING-CLASS SOLUTION**

Iraq is caught in a maze of contradictions. On an immediate military basis, the Iraqi masses cannot defeat Washington’s juggernaut. Yet politically they can not only cripple the armed occupation but could begin to send U.S. imperialism reeling toward its eventual destruction. The fate of Iraq lies with the working class.

Such is the devastation now being wreaked upon Iraq that only one practical and realistic solution is possible: a proletarian revolution which establishes an Iraqi workers’ state and which inevitably would result in the wildfire spread of such revolutions throughout the Middle East and beyond. The Iraqi workers and the masses of the Middle East certainly know that something extreme and desperate is necessary. However, they – along with most other people at the moment – view the only objectively practical solution as impractical.

Given the enormous anti-imperialist sentiment bathing the Middle East and elsewhere, coupled to the yearning for a decent life by millions and millions of workers and poor, a proletarian

upheaval in Iraq would almost immediately ignite the region. The power of the Middle Eastern rulers, pawns and junior partners of imperialism all, and the reactionary clerical fundamentalists would be dealt a mortal blow. Middle Eastern workers’ states would become an immediate reality and a beacon for exploited and oppressed masses everywhere, including in many of the economically floundering imperialist states themselves. Not only would imperialism be undermined in Iraq, but a workers’ state there would then have the international resources to begin to solve the problems that now look insoluble.

An Iraqi workers’ state would seize all strategic industries without giving any compensation to their present foreign and comprador owners. It would repudiate the imperialist debt, thereby setting off a chain reaction throughout the debt-laden “third world.” It would launch a massive program of public works to bring water, electricity, roads and a modern infrastructure to the Iraqi masses. This would not only lay the basis for a revived economy but would provide full employment. Armed bodies of workers would rule their own state. Their councils would rule industry and the whole land. Women would be free and equal. Discrimination based on ethnicity and religious beliefs would be ended. The right of self-determination for the Kurds would be ensured, and thus the inspiration for an independent workers’ Kurdistan would spread to Turkey and Iran.

This solution is not only possible – it is an absolute necessity. The colonial revolution that swept the world in the decades following World War II proved once again that if capitalism is not smashed the grip of imperialism remains; budding democratic gains and meager economic advances are both soon lost. That is the bleak picture which awaits Iraq unless a working-class socialist revolution triumphs. The only way that can occur is through the vanguard leadership of the most advanced workers, the revolutionary Marxist workers who understand the objective world and are fully conscious of the power and mission of their class. Today, they probably number only a handful in the country; but if they unite and create the nucleus of the future communist revolutionary party, they will hold the destiny of Iraq in their hands.

### **IMMEDIATE DEMANDS**

It will be no easy matter even then to win the masses to the revolutionary solution. The most immediate and decisive issue is the democratic necessity for ridding Iraq of the imperialist scourge. While democratic issues are crucial, economic devastation is inexorably raising class issues to the forefront. Yet the workers’ movement is in a desperate state. Mass unemployment and poverty make basic survival the foremost daily issue. The imperialists and their puppets are strongly armed. Forces under the leadership of reactionary religious and secular leaders who fight the imperialists one day and will inevitably deal with them the next are also mobilized militarily. As far as we know, even though many individual workers are armed, they are not organized in their own defense against the anti-proletarian elements.

Today, the pre-party nucleus would have as its central task the winning of advanced workers (who will be constantly created through struggles) to the revolutionary communist program and the task of re-creating the authentic Fourth International. Therefore it would be a propaganda league, putting forward the necessity of revolution and party-building to those ready to listen.

However, good propaganda is not abstract. Revolutionary workers must show these fellow fighters that our Bolshevik-Leninist political views can reach the mass of militants living under present conditions and point the way forward from today’s struggles to tomorrow’s victories. Workers must work and eat today and cannot be asked to wait until the revolution occurs.



*Women's groups in Iraq are struggling for their democratic rights. Revolutionary communists stand for full and equal rights for women.*

Therefore popular propaganda and even agitation for immediate gains must also begin now, if revolutionary ideas are to be seen as relevant. Workers come to see revolutionary answers as a result of their victories, not out of their defeats and destruction.

Our foremost demand is "U.S. Out Now!" But power is now in the hands of the imperialists and their tools. It is necessary for the working class to demand of Bremer and the occupation authority that they start fixing the horror they have made. Struggles must demand the turning of the lights back on and repair of the water pipes. Demanding that the imperialists carry out measures while they are occupiers is no contradiction to the need to oust them; it is key to winning the masses for that struggle.

Other democratic demands include basic civil liberties and equal rights for all. These are demands primarily on the occupiers, but also against the religious and nationalist attacks on democratic freedoms and equal rights made by some of the purportedly anti-U.S. elements. In particular, we stand for full and equal rights for women and for the Kurdish people to realize their goal of self-determination in their own independent state.

### **WORKING CLASS DEMANDS**

A fight for measures specifically in the material interests and position of the working class is desperately needed. Such a fight naturally means the mobilization of the organizations of the working class that do exist. On the immediate level this includes demanding that the union leaders and working-class organizations begin to lead fights for jobs and decent wages; to oppose the occupation and to lead in creating sorely needed workers' defense guards, the embryo of the future workers' militia.

But the devastation in Iraq now is so vast that trade-union struggles alone can make only a dent. The idea of winning standard union contracts under conditions of 70 percent unemployment and military occupation is absurd. As revolutionists we openly say that only the overthrow of capitalism and the building of socialism can fulfill the masses' needs. But a fight to defend and improve living conditions through mass struggle can prove this to the working class.

As the class conflict inevitably develops, revolutionaries can effectively agitate for class-wide transitional demands as measures that working-class revolutionaries must lead struggles for. These demands include jobs for all at a living wage, a massive public works effort to repair and expand the damaged and rotting infrastructure, and reconstruction of the industrial sector, particularly oil.

To fund these tasks, revolutionaries would fight for the expropriation of all imperialist holdings in the country, including everything taken during the occupation by the imperialists, as well as for the repudiation of all debts to imperialist states and concerns, estimated to be in the hundreds of billions of dollars.

These demands mirror in many ways the tasks of a workers' state. But revolutionaries would present them as united front demands on the masses' misleaders to put them to the test of struggle, expose them and prove the need for communist revolution.

### **FOR A REVOLUTIONARY CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY!**

In counterposition to the ever-changing proposals for a "democratic" fraud, revolutionaries fight for a Revolutionary Constituent Assembly – a democratic assembly created through the revolutionary overthrow of the imperialist occupiers and their local henchmen. A fight for a revolutionary constituent assembly could rally the masses in struggle and help prove the need for a socialist revolution to secure their democratic rights and freedom from imperialist domination.

Sistani's insistence on direct democratic elections for the U.S.'s proposed new Iraqi government was a device to magnify the power of the Shi'ite majority under religious misleadership. His "democracy" is a fraud: it denies women equal rights to vote and run for office. But Sistani struck a popular chord. In counterposing the revolutionary constituent assembly slogan, revolutionaries would spell out that it be elected by direct democratic voting while making clear the anti-women, anti-democratic and pro-imperialist thrust of Sistani's demand. This tactic might take the form of the slogan "Free and Direct Democratic Elections, Yes! But to a Revolutionary Constituent Assembly!"

While fighting in solidarity with the masses in the living struggles, revolutionaries must raise our own ideas about what a new government should do. The struggling workers are not interested in democracy in the abstract; they want tangible results. So revolutionaries would explain that in such a constituent assembly they would call for an independent workers' bloc and fight for class-wide and society-wide demands. These demands could be placed on any leader claiming to be for an Iraq free of imperialism whom the masses had illusions in as a genuine fighter for this goal.

### **WORKERS REVOLUTION IS THE ANSWER**

A constituent assembly by its nature is a bourgeois institution – the most democratic capitalist institution possible. History shows that even the best bourgeois democracy is pallid compared to the round-the-clock mass democratic participation that existed in the Paris Commune and the early Soviet workers' state. A bourgeois government within a capitalist state cannot carry out the workers' demands, even to fulfil such elementary needs as jobs for all. Nevertheless, creating a constituent assembly in a potentially revolutionary situation like Iraq's would be an enormous step forward in breaking with the imperialists and their collaborators.

In the struggle for a constituent assembly, proletarian revolutionaries would do everything possible to strengthen the forces of the working class and raise its consciousness about the existing misleadership and what is to be done. Our interest is not that a constituent assembly launch a better bourgeois government. It is to side with the masses in their struggle for anti-imperialist self-determination, and through the common struggle to prove the need to transcend bourgeois democracy with proletarian socialist revolution – the only way to win genuine mass democracy. That is the lesson of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution.

Even a revolutionary constituent assembly cannot be the

basis for a socialist revolution – mass organizations of the workers and oppressed are needed. Revolutionary workers' party advocates would therefore campaign among our fellow workers to organize workers' councils analogous to the Commune of 1870, the Russian soviets of 1905 and 1917, the Iranian shoras of 1979, and many others: political bodies that unite the working class across industrial as well as religious and ethnic lines. Such class-based workers' institutions can not only fight for workers' interests under a bourgeois state but also can form the basis of a revolutionary workers' state.

The recognition that even the most democratic bourgeois regime is insufficient would bring the Iraqi working class to the doorstep of proletarian socialist revolution, the only real answer to the arrogance of imperialism and its wars, its exploitation, its oppression – and the misery it inflicts on us all.●

February 27, 2004

***U.S. Out of Iraq!  
Build the Unions and the Working-Class Struggle!  
For a Revolutionary Workers' Party!***

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## LRP-COFI

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*continued from page 2*

LRP cannot endorse events held under such conditions but will attend them with our own anti-imperialist slogans and literature.

### CHICAGO LRP

In Chicago anti-war meetings, LRPers tried to spark political discussions in order to plant a revolutionary pole of attraction in this sadly moribund milieu. We explained, for example, that laundry-list slogans like “Money for Jobs, Housing, Health Care & Education, Not for Wars & Occupation” create illusions in the capitalist state by implying that imperialist war is just a bad policy choice rather than an inevitable by-product of the world crisis of capitalism.

We also argued against the social chauvinist slogan, “Bring the Troops Home!”, which mimics the all-pervasive pro-war slogan, “Support Our Troops.” “Bring the Troops Home” accepts the idea that “our” side is the United States and that the main victims of the war are “our” soldiers, the occupying force in Iraq — not the Iraqis themselves.

LRPers joined a demonstration in support of gay marriage rights in February. The speakers at this event refrained from any criticism of the Democratic Party, despite the Democrats' despicable role in blocking the right to gay marriage in Massachusetts and John Kerry's explicit position against gay marriage.

### NEW YORK LRP

At 1199-SEIU Delegate Assemblies, LRPers distributed a leaflet criticizing the union's endorsement of the Democrat's then-front-runner, Howard Dean: “Dr. Dean and the Democratic Party: Bad Medicine for Workers.” It explained that Dean, like all the Democrats, is a pro-capitalist politician, geared to fooling working people into thinking he is sympathetic to their interests.

In comments from the floor and in the leaflet, we pointed out that 1199 president Dennis Rivera had described union support for Dean and the Democrats as “absolutely critical” to maintaining the job security, benefits and wages of the membership in the 2005 contract. Rivera paints a picture of doom and gloom about 1199's bargaining position in the next contract battle, selling the line that the solution is electoral: Push Bush out the Door! But for fifty years the labor leaders have promoted the Democratic Party, and the result is that the unions are still heading downhill. Given all the attacks on workers from New York to California, what is needed is a united, massive fightback against all the bosses and their politicians.

At City College, the LRP held a forum in mid-February on the presidential election: “Bush vs. Bush-Lite.” It led to a lively discussion among the dozen people attending. A couple of attendees argued for supporting the Democrats to end the Iraq war; we pointed out that that “solution” was futile, since not only had the

Democrats voted for the war, but Kerry was advocating an even greater troop commitment there. Another said she agreed with our analysis but didn't see what she could do. We explained the role of a revolutionary nucleus in advancing working-class struggles (as in the LRP's work in the unions and the anti-war actions) with the aim of building a revolutionary workers' party.

At an ISO forum on campus on a similar topic, we intervened to show that the ISO, despite its nominal opposition to the Democrats, was in reality pushing their view. Although their speaker at the forum mentioned that the Democrats were no better than Bush, their flyer for this meeting — seen by thousands of students, not just the handful at the meeting — attacked “Republicans on a rampage” and “Bush's Agenda.” The same was true for an anti-war planning meeting the ISO called to compete with the LRP forum; its flyer featured a photo of Bush plastered over with “Lies, Lies, Lies.” When the bulk of the campus material attacking Bush as the sole villain comes from the ISO, who needs Democrats?

The LRP joined in a demonstration on February 28 against the coup in Haiti. It drew a couple of hundred people, quite small in comparison to previous Haitian protests in New York against, for example, police brutality. The turnout undoubtedly reflected the Haitian population's disappointment with Aristide's record in office. Several demonstrators also indicated illusions in the U.S., taking the imperialists' pro-democracy, anti-“terrorist” word and calling on them to keep their promises while denouncing them for never carrying them out.

### LRP CONFERENCE

The LRP held a special national conference in New York in January to assess our progress in expanding and transforming our press. A League-wide discussion took place beforehand, which resulted in significant changes to the document drafted by the Central Committee. The document adopted concluded that *Proletarian Revolution* had achieved greater frequency, while preserving its advanced political quality. This achievement was partly offset by the fact that we had not achieved periodicity or the further popularization of our press. The CC took responsibility for these failures, and the conference adopted plans to achieve these goals.

In conjunction with the special convention, a politically exciting Educational Conference open to friends and supporters of the League discussed the method and utilization of the Trotskyist Transitional Program.

### INTERNATIONAL

A document amplifying our political break with the Workers International Vanguard League of South Africa in 2000 will shortly be posted on our web site. A follow-up statement on the fraud on the international workers' movement perpetrated by Ukrainian and Russian members of the London-based Committee for a Workers' International will also be on our web site.●

# Haiti

*continued from page 2*

father-and-son Duvalier dictatorship.

In 1991, the army chased Aristide out and started taking vengeance on their real foes: politically active workers and peasants as well as street peddlers and other poor people. The army and a fascistic group, FRAPH (Front for Advancement and Progress in Haiti), tortured and murdered over five thousand people. Many FRAPH leaders, it turned out, were on the payroll of the CIA.

During the military regime, Aristide in exile continually bargained with racist U.S. imperialism to get reinstated. The Republican administration under Bush I was unwilling to cut even a phony leftist like Aristide any slack, fearing that he couldn't repress the Haitian masses with sufficient ruthlessness. Clinton's Democratic administration, however, thought Aristide could do the job with proper training. At any rate, the murderous military regime was becoming an embarrassment to the imperialists while failing to enforce "stability" in Haiti. Washington needs "social peace" for the continued super-exploitation of Haitians and to stop more Black refugees from coming to the U.S.

Clinton got Aristide to agree to the important imperialist demands: privatization and social service budget cuts in Haiti, accelerated loan repayments to the IMF and other imperialist banks, layoffs, etc. On conclusion of this agreement in 1994, Clinton sent Aristide back to Haiti to resume his presidency, escorted by 20,000 U.S. Marines and surrounded by Haitian capitalist politicians.

Aristide dissolved the Haitian army, but the U.S. refused to disarm the thugs. The worst criminals went to the Dominican Republic to re-arm and re-group, in all likelihood with U.S. aid. They laid low during the governments of Aristide and his front-man Préval from 1994 till this year. Thus support of right-wing mass murderers and racist oppression and exploitation have been bipartisan U.S. policies.

Aristide in power tried to balance between the capitalists and the masses. To back up the bourgeois opposition, the U.S. under Clinton and then Bush II issued an embargo on aid to Haiti, supposedly in order to restore democracy. In reality, the imperialists objected to Aristide's refusal to privatize all Haitian state-owned industry and his promise to raise minimum-wage earners from "misery to poverty," in his own words. They also resented the organization of the chimères, which harassed anti-Aristide movements.

Though Aristide's reforms were too much for the Haitian and imperialist bourgeoisies, they were too little for the masses, who sank ever deeper into poverty and hunger. Aristide's cronies and



*Aristide and Clinton shake on deal that returned Aristide to power in return for imposing pro-imperialist austerity on masses. Aristide made good on his promise, but not enough to maintain imperialist support.*

government officials, on the other hand, flaunted the wealth they had gained from obvious graft. The workers and peasants increasingly saw Aristide's regime as an ordinary, corrupt Haitian government – which it was. When the counterrevolution struck, they didn't rally to Aristide in any numbers.

Apologists for Aristide insist that his government did as much as it could for the Haitian masses and still keep the imperialists and their allies happy. In fact, the Haitian events show that no improvement is possible for workers under imperialist capitalism, particularly for terribly poor and exploited countries like Haiti. The ongoing global economic crisis requires the capitalists to remove all barriers to intensified exploitation. Any capitalist government must enforce these attacks.

There is no solution in Haiti short of workers' revolution, spreading first of all to the Dominican Republic and then throughout the hemisphere. Faced with the brutality of imperialism's economic and military attacks, workers' general strikes and uprisings have already occurred in the Caribbean and Latin America. But they will not gain and keep state power without a revolutionary proletarian party leading the struggle. Building such parties is the prime task of revolutionaries in every country. The Haitian workers are now paying for the lack of a committed and organized revolutionary leadership. ●

*March 2, 2004*

***U.S. and U.S.-Backed Thugs Out of Haiti!  
End All Restrictions on Haitian Refugees to the U.S.!***

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# Brazil: Workers' Party Betrays Workers

Latin America's economies are collapsing under the weight of huge foreign debts, and its living standards are under assault from austerity programs imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. The continent has been rocked by a wave of mass rebellions, including the toppling of pro-IMF governments in Ecuador, Argentina and most recently Bolivia by mass protests, strikes and uprisings.

In this context, since the end of 2002, the attention of Latin America has been fixed on the electoral victory and resulting government of the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT: Workers' Party) led by the former metalworker and union leader Luis Inácio da Silva, popularly known as "Lula." Brazil's economy is the size of the rest of the continent's combined, and it is home of the region's most organized and potentially powerful working class.

The PT is a party based on the working class, which in the past had proclaimed socialism as its aim and promised to repudiate Brazil's massive foreign debts as well as radically redistribute the land. Millions throughout Latin America hoped that its rise to power would show a way out of the capitalist crisis. These illusions were fed by many prominent self-proclaimed socialists, who celebrated the PT victory as a turning point in the struggle for democracy and socialism and even "the end of neo-liberalism" – the imperialists' free market ideology.

In its first year the PT government has already betrayed its promises to the workers and poor. It implemented IMF-backed austerity measures that the previous, openly capitalist, government could not have hoped to get away with. The Brazilian masses' fate for years to come, and to a great extent that of the rest of the continent, will be determined by whether the working class can break from the PT's grip and lead a successful struggle against it and the capitalist system it represents. The key will be whether revolutionaries learn the lessons of the PT's betrayal and build a genuinely revolutionary party to lead those struggles.

## THE PT'S PRO-CAPITALIST EVOLUTION

The PT grew out of the massive struggles of Brazil's working class and peasantry in the 1970's that forced an end to the military dictatorship that had ruled the country since 1964. Mass

strikes drove the rise of a powerful new trade union movement, the Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT: United Workers' Central) independent of the state-sponsored corporatist unions of the Confederação Geral dos Trabalhadores (CGT: General Workers' Federation). In the countryside, 4.5 million landless peasants scratch out a living while a small number of capitalists own most of the land and leave much of it uncultivated. There grew a movement of peasant land occupations, led by the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST: Rural Landless Workers' Movement).

At its formation in 1979, the PT had deep roots among the masses. Local unions and other mass organizations served as its local structures, and its first electoral campaigns proclaimed the decisive importance of mass struggles and not elections. The party's program was anti-capitalist and in favor of some vision of socialism. But while centrist self-styled Trotskyists played a role in the PT from its earliest beginnings, there was no genuinely Trotskyist force in Brazil fighting for a revolutionary program. Thus the PT was from the beginning dominated by reformist socialists in alliance with liberation theologians and less radical reformists.

The PT won an increasing vote in elections throughout the 1980's and '90's; it won the governorships of several important states as well as the mayoralties of many cities. Once in power, it accommodated its policies to capitalist interests while trying to maintain its mass working-class support. Its "participatory budgets" became a hallmark of these efforts. In them, local communities would have the opportunity to vote on a range of budget decisions. But because the overall budget limits were set by the national capitalist government, this increasingly meant the masses "participating" in deciding how to spend an ever smaller budget.

Through a series of electoral campaigns, the PT leadership signaled the ruling class and imperialists that it would not challenge the system. But pressure from the ranks continued to force the leadership to promise radical reforms that the capitalists could not tolerate, like repudiating the country's foreign debt. Until the PT leadership had proven its ability to truly dominate its members and millions of working-class supporters, it would be strongly opposed by the capitalists.



*Lula supporters celebrate PT election victory, October 27, 2002*



*Capitalist Vice President Alencar beams at Lula's betrayals of workers.*

As the capitalist crisis deepened, PT state and city governments increasingly implemented privatization and cuts in spending on social services, and used the police and army against strikes and land occupations. In the election that brought Lula to power in 2002, by which time the masses had had the experience of the PT in local office, the vote for local PT candidates fell. Thus while illusions in Lula led to him winning 61 percent of the popular vote overall, in local elections the PT did miserably.

### LULA'S BATTLE FOR BOURGEOIS SUPPORT

By 2002 the Brazilian ruling class was facing a political crisis. Local capitalists were increasingly dominated by the imperialists through the opening up of the economy by free trade measures, and profits were falling sharply. The previous Cardoso regime had advanced neo-liberal austerity measures as far as it could. The economy had deteriorated, mass unemployment and poverty were growing, and the government was embroiled in corruption scandals. Meanwhile, mass struggles were erupting across the continent. When Argentina's pro-IMF government was pushed from power, Brazil's ruling class feared it could be next.

Lula saw his opportunity and launched a new campaign to win bourgeois support. The PT leadership offered to use its



*Landless workers of MST rally against capitalist landowners in 1997.*

remaining prestige and power over the masses to push further neo-liberal reforms. Seeing the capitalists' fear of the growing upheavals and of the prospect of Brazil defaulting on its debts, the PT leaders planned to win imperialism's backing by promoting themselves as the only alternative to growing radical nationalism and socialism throughout Latin America. The PT leaders planned to offer to continue to pay the country's debts in order to negotiate a lowering of U.S. barriers to Brazilian products.

But to win the support of the local bourgeoisie and the imperialists, the PT leadership understood that it would have to prove that it was ready to rule by overturning every one of the party's important commitments to the masses. All references to socialism and anti-imperialism were purged from the party program. The demand to repudiate the debt was junked, replaced by a call to audit and re-negotiate it. Then Lula and his advisors decided to forge an electoral alliance with the openly capitalist Liberal Party; its leader, textile magnate José Alencar, joined Lula as his running-mate and vice presidential candidate. This deal proved that the PT campaign was for a class-collaborationist popular front, an alliance with openly bourgeois parties designed to carry out a bourgeois program.

During the election campaign, in a move designed to pressure the PT from the left, a referendum was organized by the CUT, the MST, left organizations and churches on the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and the foreign debt. Ten million people participated, with 95 percent voting in favor of repudiating both. In response, U.S. Trade Representative Robert Zoellick arrogantly warned that Brazil would have to choose between keeping the FTAA or trading "with Antarctica." Lula had in the past condemned the FTAA as a "type of economic annexation of Latin America by the U.S.," and the outraged masses expected him to hit back at this arrogant imperialist. Instead, he rejected the referendum and committed the PT to paying the debt and renegotiating the FTAA with the Bush Administration. "We have a number of things to settle with Comrade Bush," Lula quipped.

Then, when incumbent President Cardoso signed an emergency \$30 billion loan to prevent a default on the debt, Lula rushed to embrace the deal. When the MST occupied the estate of Cardoso's son, Lula condemned the occupation. He further demanded that the MST cease all occupations for the duration of the electoral campaign. The MST leadership dutifully agreed in the hope of receiving places and influence in a PT government.

To maintain popular support, the PT did promise some reforms, including raising the minimum wage, implementing a modest and gradual land redistribution, and launching a "Zero Hunger" campaign that would provide food subsidies for Brazil's millions of malnourished poor. But the PT leadership's campaign for bourgeois support was strikingly effective. Soon leaders of various business associations were rushing to endorse him. Soon even the IMF's Managing Director, Horst Köhler, had words of praise for Lula, calling him "really a leader of the 21st century." Germany's State Secretary of Finance, Caio Koch Weser, summed up how Lula's presidency could be so advantageous for imperialism: "The key is that the [neo-liberal] reform momentum gets the benefit of the enormous credibility that the president brings." (*Financial Times*, Jan. 27, 2003.)

### THE PT'S FIRST YEAR IN POWER

Upon coming to power, the PT wasted no time in making its commitment to the capitalists clear. Lula's ministerial appointments included big businessmen and Cardoso allies. A few peripheral ministries were awarded to left-wing PT, CUT and MST figures, but with no power over funding; their job was to implement the real power-holders' cuts and other betrayals.

The PT leadership understood that the crisis of capitalist profit-making demands significantly escalated attacks against the masses' living standards. Facing the danger of explosive struggles in response to its betrayals, the new PT government moved with breathtaking speed to catch its opponents off guard and launch historic attacks against them.

Brazil's foreign debt now accounts for fully 65 percent of the country's Gross Domestic Product. Thus Lula's decision to continue to pay it condemned the masses to endless poverty. But Lula was not satisfied by earlier agreeing to the IMF's demand that the government maintain a 3.75 percent budget surplus to pay bond holders, and increased the promised surplus to 4.25 percent. This meant an additional transfer of \$2.4 billion to foreign capitalists. The government also announced moves toward privatizing the Central Bank.

Not surprisingly, Lula slashed the federal budget by \$3.9 billion. The PT went back on its promise to increase the minimum wage to as much as \$100 a month, raising it instead to just \$67; adjusted for inflation, this is less than the minimum wage under Cardoso. Even Lula's "Zero Hunger" campaign had its budget slashed by \$10 million, leaving each malnourished Brazilian with

an insulting 2.5 cents a day worth of food subsidies.

Having avoided any definite promises on land redistribution before the election, Lula announced that in 2003 his government would settle 5500 landless families on 200,000 hectares of unused land, a plan that amounts to one-tenth the number of families settled by the Cardoso government and just one-twentieth of what the MST was expecting. And Lula has continued Cardoso's use of the army to violently evict squatting peasants from unused lands, and has jailed occupation leaders.

### THE GREAT PENSION STRUGGLE

The PT government launched an immediate attack on the organized working class. Lula announced constitutional reforms that would drastically reduce public sector workers' pensions, attacks that Cardoso had tried but failed to implement.

The PT's attack triggered a massive fightback, culminating in a month-long nation-wide strike by public sector workers in July 2003. But the CUT leadership succeeded in isolating the public sector workers and preventing private sector workers from joining the struggle. The government eventually succeeded in defeating the struggle and passing (in slightly modified form) its pension reform legislation with little parliamentary opposition.

This victory has emboldened the PT to launch more direct attacks on the entire working class. It is planning changes to labor relations laws that strike at its trade union allies in the CUT. Lula has already introduced legislation that would exempt private companies from legally established standards of employment, thus opening the way to starvation wages and dangerous work. Further, Lula has introduced another law that eliminates payments by private capitalists into trade union funds and ends obligatory payments of union dues.

In the countryside, the government's official crackdown on land occupations is encouraging the landowners' use of private militias to terrorize and murder peasant militants, looking to break the MST. All these attacks make a united fightback both necessary and possible. For this to be successful, militant workers will have to break the grip of the PT and pro-PT bureaucrats that dominate their mass organizations.

### REVOLUTIONARY POLICY IN BRAZIL

As capitalism slides toward ever deeper crisis with competition for profits intensifying and national debts rising, the PT leadership, like reformists the world over, can find no alternative but making the masses pay for the capitalists' crisis; for within the limits of the system there is none. Genuine revolutionary communists must take this understanding as the starting point in raising their fellow workers' revolutionary consciousness. To truly put an end to the attacks and win the masses' demands for jobs and a living wage, healthcare and education, land for the landless and a generally improving standard of living, the capitalist system will have to be overthrown. The entire economy will have to be redirected away from producing for private profit and toward producing the needs of the working class and poor. Further, the classless, communist society free of all forms of exploitation, oppression and want will only be able to be built when imperialist capitalist rule is overthrown the world over.

It is always crucial for revolutionaries to combat workers' reformist illusions that their demands can be won without overthrowing the capitalists' state. Revolutionaries must always seek to explain that only a revolution that smashes the capitalists' state power of soldiers and police – putting in its place a workers' state based upon the armed working class and committed to defending the rule of the working class – can open the road to communism.

Straight talk on the class nature of the capitalist state and its

“armed bodies of men” is a hallmark of the authentic Marxism of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky. It is especially necessary under conditions of a popular front government. For a key function of popular fronts is to present the state as a source of compromise and unity between the classes, masking its true nature as the violent enforcer of capitalist rule.

### AN ACTION PROGRAM FOR BRAZIL

Revolutionaries recognize that masses will only come to revolutionary consciousness on the basis of their own experience of successful struggle against the capitalist attacks, and the active participation of the vanguard revolutionary party in those struggles, leading them forward and teaching the lessons.

The starting point for any successful working-class struggle is *independence from the capitalist class, its political parties and state*. In Brazil, that means above all *no support to the popular front PT government*. The longer popular fronts like the PT's remain in power, the more they weaken the workers' struggles and pave the way for greater capitalist attacks and the rise to power of more right-wing political forces. The working class cannot afford to restrain its struggles for fear of toppling the PT from power. The working class can defend its interests from the capitalists only by relying on its own power to struggle.

With the masses increasingly the target of broad attacks from the PT government and bosses, revolutionaries must advocate tactics that can unite the whole working class. With class struggles still in an overall state of decline and the bourgeoisie becoming bolder in its attacks, the key to agitation must be arguments and calls for a *general strike*. Revolutionaries would of course support every working-class struggle, no matter how small. But they must seek to link them with broader struggles, explaining the need to unite them all in a general strike. The working class can only prepare itself for power in the course of mass struggles in which they regain a sense of their class power and learn revolutionary political lessons.

Revolutionaries recognize that the trade unions organize only a minority of the working class and that their structures are often too narrow and bureaucratic to adapt to rapidly changing conditions in struggle. Therefore, we would advocate the formation of new mass action organizations of the working class, from strike committees to workers' councils, to most effectively organize the struggle and take it forward in the event of betrayal by the reformist union leaders.

While the course of the mass struggle will ultimately be determined by the urban and industrial working class, the struggles of the peasants for land are of tremendous importance. Although the working class remains in the grip of the PT-aligned union bureaucrats, the MST bureaucracy is comparably weaker, and the landless remain very militant; their fight could re-ignite the workers' struggle. In the face of the PT's betrayed promises to redistribute land, revolutionaries would fight within the MST for a massive campaign of land seizures. In the face of the state's armed forces and the landowners' militias, revolutionaries would advocate the formation of mass armed self-defense guards and

### ***LRP/COFI Online***

Our website features basic documents of the LRP/COFI in English, German, Russian and Spanish, as well as statements, leaflets and news items to help keep readers informed of our activities.

Visit our website at [www.lrp-cofi.org](http://www.lrp-cofi.org)



Farmers stand inside the National Institute for Agrarian Reform (INCRA) in Brasilia, Jan. 20, 2004. About 600 farmers invaded the institute to demand land for 6,800 families, a promise broken by the government. The complete sign at right reads 'INCRA promised but didn't fulfill.'

demand that the MST leaders support them. In fact, such a demand should be fought for throughout the workers' movement in preparation for attacks on strikes and other struggles.

#### EXPOSING THE PT IN PRACTICE

While revolutionaries give no political support to the PT government, they also recognize that many workers retain illusions in the PT. To expose these illusions in practice, wherever significant groups of workers mistakenly hope that pressuring the PT can force a halt to the attacks or even win improvements in their interests, revolutionaries must not hesitate to raise specific demands on the PT government. Aiming to expose illusions in the PT rather than raise them, revolutionaries would always seek to explain to their fellow workers that the struggle will prove that the PT government is the enemy of the working class, and that to secure all its demands the working class will have to overthrow the capitalists and seize state power.

The greatest obstacle to a united working-class fightback, as was shown in the pension struggle, is the PT-aligned union bureaucracy. Revolutionaries must explain to their fellow workers that the union bureaucracy will try to hold back and betray the mass struggle in the interests of maintaining social stability and defending their privileged position in the system as brokers between the capitalists and workers. The union bureaucracy can be forced to launch struggles, but will ultimately turn against them. The most advanced workers must establish revolutionary communist party groupings in all the mass organizations, to advance a united struggle while fighting to replace the established reformist leaders. These groups will demand that those leaders organize the struggle the workers need while always warning their fellow workers that the bureaucrats will betray; only a revolutionary communist party leadership can be relied on to take the struggle to victory.

Reformists and centrists will typically cheer on the workers' struggles without fighting for the decisive actions necessary, and without demanding that the workers' current leaders back them and put the unions' power behind them. Typically, they say that criticizing the PT-aligned bureaucrats will only alienate them and make

them less likely to lead such struggles. Some sectarians, knowing no other way to address the working class than by lecturing it from the sidelines, argue that raising demands on the reformists only encourages illusions. But there can be no avoiding the pro-PT CUT bureaucracy. If the working class is to launch the mass struggles it needs to defend itself, there will have to be a fierce battle in the unions to expose the PT bureaucrats. But the working class will only join a struggle against the bureaucrats when they have been able to test them in practice, and that requires raising demands of struggle on them to expose them in practice. That was the method of Lenin and Trotsky.

#### CENTRIST LEFT FAILS TEST OF POPULAR FRONT

Tragically, at this point the groups in Brazil claiming the banner of revolutionary communism have learned none of these lessons. Rather, they act as barriers to radical workers finding the genuine revolutionary perspective that can lead to victory over imperialist capitalism. As we have noted, in its earlier years many different socialist groups operated inside the PT. But most

of the more left-wing reformist organizations as well as the pseudo-revolutionary centrists were expelled years ago; others remain by virtue of their utter capitulation to the PT leadership. These groups trace their political ancestry to the pseudo-Trotskyist tendencies led by the now-deceased Ernest Mandel and Nahuel Moreno.

The most appalling role has been played by the Democracia Socialista (DS: Socialist Democracy) tendency of the Mandelite, barely-revolutionary-even-in-words, United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USec). The DS had eight members elected to parliament on the PT ticket (six deputies and two senators). It hailed the PT victory as "a great shift in the relationship of forces in Brazilian society. . . a popular victory and a serious defeat for neoliberalism."

But in fact the DS has gone along with the PT's worst capitulations to neo-liberalism. For example, before the elections it went so far as to justify the PT leadership's abandonment of repudiating the imperialist debt. DS members are on staff in a number of government ministries. Most prominently, one of its leaders, Miguel Rossetto, is the Minister for Agrarian Reform. It is a principle of the Marxist movement to never support, let alone join, a bourgeois government. But the USec's journal *International Viewpoint* has defended his role, saying that from his ministerial position, Rossetto could "help the self-organization of rural workers." (May 2003.) This helpful "Trotskyist" minister has denounced the peasants' land occupations and sent the police to attack them and arrest their leaders.

The main test of the DS came with the PT govern-



Democracia Socialista leader, Miguel Rossetto



*Reformist Senator  
Heloísa Helena,  
ousted from PT  
for voting  
against  
pension cuts*



ment's pension reform. During the parliamentary votes on the pension bill, their six deputies and two senators split three ways – pro, con and abstaining. Some members voted differently on different readings of the bill. Only one, Senator Heloísa Helena, consistently voted against; she then dared the PT leadership to expel her, which they eventually did. The rest of DS, far from leaving the PT, voted unanimously at their national congress of November 21-22, 2003 to stay in, and hailed its minister Rossetto as a hero.

#### **A NEW REFORMIST PARTY TO FOLLOW?**

Senator Helena was not entirely alone among PT parliamentarians in voting against Lula's pension bill. Two other prominent leftist PT members also did so: deputies Luciano Genro of the Movement of the Socialist Left (MES) and João Batista Babá of the Socialist Workers Current (CTS). In an outrageous attack on the democratic rights of PT members, Lula immediately moved to expel them from the party, a move which became finalized in October.

These PT leftists' opposition to the pension reform and expulsion from the party has no doubt raised their profile among workers looking to fight Lula's betrayals. But in reality these reformist socialists offer no real alternative, having succeeded in staying in the PT as long as they did because they never raised a principled fight against the leadership's policies. The DS as a whole always favored remaining inside the PT no matter what the political cost. The more left-wing, centrist, Morenoite tendency broke from the PT some years ago; the MTS and CTS were formed as splits in order to remain inside the PT. The majority Morenoite grouping went on to become the Partido Socialista dos Trabalhadores Unificado (PSTU: Unified Socialist Workers Party) outside the PT.

The PT was never going to really represent the masses' revolutionary communist interests – mass reformist parties are too bureaucratic and the class struggle too explosive for that. What was needed inside the PT was for revolutionaries to clearly explain that the leadership represented the class enemy and to mobilize the most class-conscious workers against the PT leadership – to prove that the party could not be reformed and thus break as many workers as possible from the PT in order to build a vanguard revolutionary party.

In particular, this perspective meant prioritizing the working-class struggle against the PT, both now in the national government, and before when the PT was in local governments. But the PT leftists always sacrificed the workers' struggles to the aim of reforming the PT, or at least pushing it to the left. Thus in the 2002 election that brought the PT to power, they criticized the leadership's alliance with the Liberal Party but went along with it.

They ran on the same popular-front slate rather than split over the issue and prepare workers to fight the new pro-capitalist government. Similarly, their votes against the pension reform bill were more in the spirit of criticism than of rallying workers against the government. While they supported the public workers' strike, they in effect accepted defeat in advance and did not use their prominent positions to call for a general strike against the government's policies.

These left reformists' passive approach was founded on a cynical attitude toward the potential of working-class struggle. It continued after their expulsion in their call for the creation of a new socialist party. They discussed a joint effort with the PSTU, but soon fled in horror from the latter's identification with militant struggles and its revolutionary rhetoric. At a meeting at the end of last year they declared themselves the Movement for a New Party (MNP). But they made clear that this party will be founded on the perspective of reformist electoralism, not of mobilizing the masses in militant mass struggle.

Implicitly blaming their passive perspective on a lack of militancy among workers, they declared that "great social conflagrations are not on the political horizon." In fact they practically pledged to do nothing to change this supposed state of affairs: they proclaimed that "great struggles are not announced" and asserted that "the task of this new party is to present an electoral alternative in 2006." But the masses, from the huge strike against Lula's pension reforms to land occupations, are trying to launch great struggles but are not finding a revolutionary leadership prepared to lead an all-out fight against the capitalists and their PT government. Thus the MNP is in reality an attempt to create a new party to trap radicalizing workers breaking to the left of the PT, to prevent them from going too far and advancing beyond radical electoralism.

The League for the Revolutionary Party and the Communist Organization for the Fourth International have long warned against such moves to create new reformist parties. (See *PR* 63.) The established reformist parties, under conditions of capitalist crisis, are less able to deliver reforms to the masses and turn more and more to implementing austerity measures on behalf of the capitalists. As the working class becomes disillusioned with the mainstream reformists, the centrists are increasingly drawn into the vacuum, using revolutionary rhetoric to give cover to their attempts at reviving reformism.

Such developments are a grave threat to the potential development of mass struggle and revolutionary consciousness of the working class, acting as they do to revive reformist illusions and create a barrier to militant workers drawing revolutionary conclusions from the struggle. Revolutionaries must oppose the centrists' attempts to initiate such parties. If these efforts do gather significant support, revolutionaries would join the new parties only for the purpose of exposing their leaders' reformist programs and winning workers away from them and to the task of building the revolutionary party.

#### **PSTU: LEFT TAIL OF THE PT**

The major party to the left of the PT that claims to represent revolutionary Trotskyism is the PSTU. In reality, it represents only the most radical version of reformist capitulation to the PT. It too raises illusions in a reformist road to socialism and in the possibility of the PT acting on the side of the workers.

Typical of most centrists, while the PSTU says it favors socialist revolution, it never spells out that this means a violent revolution in which the armed working class rises up, overthrows and smashes the capitalist state and creates its own workers' state, the dictatorship of the proletariat, to repress the capitalist armed

force. Rather, they raise all sorts of illusions in the possibility of reforming the capitalist state.

For example, in Brazil the police and soldiers have a certain tradition of struggle *for their own interests* that has led many workers to mistakenly think they are a legitimate part of the working-class and union movement. While revolutionaries may favor police strikes at certain times if they will temporarily disorganize the capitalist state, we always warn that the fundamental role of the police is to be violent enforcers of capitalist rule. Revolutionaries fight for the absolute independence of the working class from the police, including driving them out of the unions.

The PSTU, on the other hand, reinforces the illusions that the police are a part of the working class that can be made to serve its interests. In its 2002 electoral program, the PSTU called to raise the salaries and working conditions of the police and even improve their equipment! Further, far from explaining the counterrevolutionary nature of the police and how they will have to be suppressed and defeated by the armed working class, the PSTU's electoral program calls for subjecting the Brazilian police and army to "democratic control" by the population – a deadly illusion to spread.

Nonetheless, the PSTU does engage in revolutionary rhetoric, and has made a point of strongly criticizing the PT's alliance with the bourgeoisie and its anti-working class policies. In the first round of the national elections it ran an independent campaign against the PT, and received over 400,000 votes – a considerable achievement. But in the second and decisive round of the election, it turned around and advocated a vote for the PT-Liberal alliance.

Under many circumstances, when the masses have illusions that voting for bourgeois workers' parties like the PT will advance their struggle, it is appropriate for revolutionaries to go through the experience of voting for the reformist party, in order to prove to their fellow workers that the reformists will betray the struggle by putting them to the test of office. However, with the PT running in an alliance with the capitalist Liberals, use of such "critical electoral support" was ruled out. Encouraging a vote for a cross-class alliance can only undermine workers' sense of class independence. Indeed, blurring the class line between the capitalist class and the working class, and uniting the two in the cause of populist national unity, is the aim of popular fronts; revolutionary communists have always opposed giving them any form of political support.

The PSTU's support for the PT-Liberal alliance in the second round of the election shows that its differences with the popular front are tactical, not principled. But as Trotsky explained:

**The left centrists seek to present this question as a tactical or even as a technical maneuver, so as to be able to practice their little business in the shadow of the People's Front. In reality, the People's Front is the *main question of proletarian class strategy* for this epoch. It also offers the best criterion for the difference between Bolshevism and Menshevism. (*Writings 1935-36*, p. 43.)**

And practice their little business in the shadow of the popular front the PSTU does! It utterly failed to prepare the masses for the fact that in office the PT would represent the capitalists against the workers – and that the masses would have to prepare to launch mass struggles against the PT government. On the contrary, the PSTU acted as if it couldn't tell whether the PT government would be on the workers' or capitalists' side! PSTU leader and presidential candidate José (Zé) Maria said in a television interview reported by the PSTU's British supporters:

**Certainly, the electoral win of Lula is going to mean many**

**fighters in future. Because of this, we are going to support him in the second round. What we will need is to analyze if these fights will be "with" Lula or "against" Lula.** (www.socialistvoice.org website, undated.)

Supporting the PT-Liberal popular front alliance meant viewing the future PT government as a gain of the workers to be supported against the possibility of other capitalist parties coming to power. But this necessarily means that in the current struggles against the PT government the PSTU must hold back from proposing tactics of mass struggle, like the general strike, that would threaten to topple the government and even challenge the capitalist state. Instead, the PSTU supports current struggles only with vague encouragement for more militancy, not with the key tactics of mass struggle necessary to win. Similarly, in the case of the landless, the PSTU criticizes the MST bureaucracy for restraining the struggle. But its alternative is only encouraging more land occupations; like the rest of the left, the PSTU fails to advocate the mass armed self-defense groups needed in the face of bloody attacks.

The PSTU's perspective is typical of most of the centrist left internationally. Rather than fight for an authentic revolutionary program, it seeks a shortcut to popular support by promoting militant reformism and ditching revolutionary policies that it fears might "scare away" the workers. Thus the PSTU from the time of the PT's election promoted the idea of the formation of a new mass socialist party to rival the PT. It hoped that by aligning with prominent PT-left leaders, it could rally increasing numbers of workers to its banner when disillusionment with the PT government grew. Thus it muted its criticisms of PT leftists like the DS's Helena, MTS's Genro and CTS's Babá, promoting the idea that they could play a role in building a revolutionary alternative to the PT.

As we have explained, the only new party these dyed-in-the-wool reformists could build would be a new reformist party to entrap radicalizing workers. In the end, however, the PT leftists were too scared of the PSTU's mildly radical rhetoric and support of mass struggles to ally with them; the PSTU was bureaucratically excluded from the formation of the Movement for a New Party. Left out in the cold, the PSTU can only complain about this undemocratic maneuver and criticize the MNP's electoralism. But centrists, vacillating between revolutionary rhetoric and reformist practice as they do, are incapable of conducting an independent policy for long, and the PSTU will continue to look for opportunities to unite with the left reformists.

## THE STRUGGLE AHEAD

Lula's PT government has already sought to go further in attacking the masses than the neo-liberal regimes that preceded it. The acceleration of the international crisis of capitalism can be measured by the time it has taken social democratic and populist mass parties to fully embrace the policies of free market austerity. Where it took Britain's Labour Party five decades of gaining and losing power and internal struggles to fully embrace such policies, and South Africa's African National Congress less than five years, Lula's PT has begun implementing them in less than a year.

The struggle against the pension reform and the continuing struggles of landless workers are only an indication of the struggles that lie ahead. The PT's further attacks on the workers, urban poor and peasants will demand a massive fightback. The key to its success will be whether revolutionary-minded workers succeed in building a genuine vanguard revolutionary communist party leadership capable of breaking the working class from the PT leaders onto the road of the struggle to overthrow capitalism. The deepening crisis of capitalism means that there is no time to waste.●

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## Venezuela

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the backing of U.S. imperialism. In short, the proposed “referendum” is a reactionary organizing tool to build momentum for another coup.

Revolutionary internationalists defend the right of self-determination for Venezuela, which in the current context must include unconditional military defense of the Chávez regime against the looming attack. This position, which Trotskyists refer to as military-technical support, is used when it is necessary to defend a non-proletarian government under attack by imperialism. It means favoring the right of the besieged government to get arms and other tactical aid from any source it can. It is a recognition that the attack by imperialism means that workers should be aiming their guns not at the victimized bourgeois government but, for the moment, solely at the common enemy.

Military support is important for revolutionaries in Venezuela today. But it also means that internationalists have to campaign for military aid to Venezuela and opposition to the coming imperialist attack within the working classes of other countries, including the U.S. Military support also means that we openly state that we have no political agreement with our temporary military allies. It is clear that the Chávez government is politically incapable of providing the full defense against imperialist attack that will be needed.

Fighting for a revolutionary political policy within the mass struggle to defend the current regime is absolutely vital if the Venezuelan working class is to achieve its interests in the coming period of bloody confrontation. Therefore we fight for massive working-class adherence to the struggle against the impending coup, but advocate an independently class-organized force. We strive above all to aid the development of a revolutionary working class party in Venezuela, part of a re-created Fourth International. It must warn the workers not to politically trust Chávez and the minority coterie of pro-bourgeois and military reformers that he represents.

Workers’ revolution is not a goal which can be indefinitely postponed. It is the only way to crush what will inevitably be repeated coup attempts if imperialism doesn’t get its pound of flesh. It is the only answer for the Venezuelan working class. In this regard, our most important work in the coming days is to convince other revolutionary-minded workers of the need to build the party of proletarian revolution and engage in every struggle designed to raise workers’ consciousness of what is to be done.



*Chávez talks of a “third way,” neither capitalist or communist. In practice he defends capitalism and private property.*



*“Bush, Don’t Mess with Venezuela”*

Such a party would build support internationally, with an economic and political program geared to leading an international fight against imperialism. In explosive Latin America today, a united struggle of the workers and oppressed is just waiting for the right leadership to emerge.

### CHÁVEZ: NO REVOLUTIONARY

Our political opposition to Chávez is based on the fact that he is already a barrier to the revolutionary unity of the masses. He is a petty-bourgeois nationalist who wishes to complete a capitalist nation-building project; this brings him into tactical but not fundamental conflict with imperialism. He has not attacked imperialist-capitalist property rights in Venezuela. As his Foreign Minister, Jesus Arnoldo Perez, has said in reference to the United States, “I don’t think that there can be a divorce . . . we’re condemned to get on with each other.” Chávez has not taken the necessary measures to undermine the comprador opposition, despite their coup attempts. Because he defends capitalism and private property, he will eventually openly betray the masses or cripple their struggle decisively.

Chávez’s project is not new to Venezuelan bourgeois nationalism. The idea has always been that increased oil profits should eventually result in the building up and diversifying of the entire Venezuelan economy. But the history and nature of imperialism proves that it will never allow a national capitalist vision to be fulfilled in Venezuela. The goal of economic sovereignty has long been a pipedream for Venezuela in the imperialist world – as it is for all of Latin America, a continent rich in natural resources.

Like his friend “Lula” of Brazil used to do, Chávez advo-

cates a “third way,” supposedly neither capitalist nor communist. He talks of a free market with “socialist” distribution. In reality the fantasy “revolution” he promises could really only amount to a benevolent capitalist welfare state – that is the most that improvements only in the sphere of distribution could mean. Yet even that limited vision is no longer possible under the U.S. empire. It is a cruel joke to tell Venezuelan workers and unemployed that they can qualitatively change their lives without taking state power for themselves. And whatever capitalist utopia Chávez promises for the future, his practical deeds today show his commitment is to actual capitalism, which can only mean a life of misery for the masses.

Chávez operates on a continuum with other bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalist politicians, including most prominently Lula and Cuba’s Castro. Far less moderate than Lula at the moment, Chávez nevertheless is trying to cut a better deal with imperialism, not overthrow it. His relation with the supposedly communist Castro is a key component of Chávez’s image as a



*Chavez and friend Lula at the G 15 Summit in Caracas on February 27. In 2002 Chavez backed Lula's presidential campaign, touting him as a "great man". Lula stabbed the working class in the back – but Chavez remains loyal.*

“revolutionary,” which is necessary to capture the massive anti-imperialist sentiment at home. It is also a way of thumbing his nose at U.S. imperialism to gain concessions. But he has absolutely no plans or ability to implement a Castroist type of political revolution which included radical measures to nationalize industry. And Castro himself – from Chile in 1973 to Nicaragua in 1989 – argued against such measures and for a more accommodating approach to U.S. imperialism. (See “Cuba Faces U.S. Threat; ‘Socialism in One Country’ No Answer” for more of our analysis of Cuban statified capitalism in *PR* 31.)

## **OIL AND CHÁVEZ’S AIMS**

Chávez wishes to change the way imperialism operates without undermining the imperialist capitalist system itself. In his attempts to pressure Washington, he has so far pursued a relatively independent foreign policy, including vocal opposition to the FTAA (Free Trade Area of the Americas), his revived leadership of OPEC and the alliance with Castro. But the main precondition for a bigger cut of profits for Venezuela is to assert state rights over the nominally nationalized but completely pro-imperialist-run oil company. Clearly Venezuela’s oil resources are its main bargaining chip with the U.S. In order to make any headway in improv-

ing the dire economic and social conditions of the country, real nationalization is a necessity.

The core of the opposition has been in the managerial layers of the oil company, along with other major businesses grouped in the Fedecameras association and the Chamber of Commerce. The bulk of the middle class also associates its well-being with privatization and a “free market.” These forces lean heavily on Washington for support. The comprador capitalists and monied managerial class identify their profits and fat salaries as directly tied to foreign, primarily U.S., interests; they are hostile to the nation-building project, especially since that would mean more state control over their operations and higher taxes.

When PdVSA was first nationalized, the same Venezuelan managers who had been running the industry for the transnational corporations Shell, Chevron and Gulf were kept on. PdVSA management was given a huge degree of autonomy and huge funding from the state. From the onset, ties to the former owners of the newly “nationalized” companies were maintained through technical and commercial contracts, granting them heavily discounted prices. Before Chávez, the Board of Directors was drawn only from the layer of PdVSA managers and was chosen by them. It set policies that benefited them, not the state – and certainly not the Venezuelan masses. Over time, further loopholes and complex financial schemes were utilized to prevent profits from going to the government.

From the mid 1990’s on, this policy expanded dramatically, into what became known as “the opening” (“la abertura”). This meant piecemeal privatization of the industry, as different sections were sold off and outsourcing became more prominent. One costly example was a joint venture with U.S. capitalists for all data processing. This new company, INTESA, joined the oil lock-out before its contract was to be ended; through its control of data, it ended up as a serious contributor to the sabotage of PdVSA and a hindrance to getting it functioning again.

Prior to the “strike,” the share going to imperialist pockets got bigger as PdVSA internationalized its operations. (For example, PdVSA operates in the U.S. under the name of Citgo.) European and American refineries were purchased, but the costs of purchase were absorbed by the Venezuelan branch of PdVSA, lowering the government’s share still further. PdVSA management systematically bought refineries, signed long-term supply contracts and granted substantial discounts to its new affiliates abroad. In order to ensure that the profits were beyond the government’s reach, the contracts were used as collateral to secure foreign loans. Thus Chávez inherited monstrous PdVSA debts of over 9 billion U.S. dollars. At least \$500 million annually moves from its domestic accounts to foreign affiliates, which never paid dividends to the holding company in Caracas.

Chávez instituted changes to increase the profits flowing back to the government. But he has honored the debt payments to the imperialists (outlays which represent at least 30 percent of the budget) and has done nothing to invalidate a huge number of long-term deals that are costly to Venezuela and which prevent the country from determining the usage of its oil reserves. And Chávez himself has sold off parts of the industry, in a process he refers to as “streamlining.”

The sectors of the national bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie that are not directly tied to imperialism – the layers that would favor a return to a more government controlled oil policy and a more protectionist stance against foreign competition in general – are very weak. Any serious bourgeois nationalist force must therefore seek support from the masses to pressure the big capitalists and managers to act for the “welfare of the nation.” Either give up something or risk losing it all, Chávez says to them when the masses take to the street in his defense.

## THE POPULIST TRAP

Thus Chávez needs the masses as a battering ram to get his reforms through. All political commentators recognize that his predominant tactic to gain support is “populism.” The right disdains him exactly for his association with the masses in the streets, while the “left” hails him for the same thing. But populism means much more than just a popular movement. Even when it is the leading ideology of a mass anti-imperialist movement which we support, we oppose the imposition of the ideology. It is a method of utilizing mass sentiments to blur the class struggle in order to divert it from attacking capitalism as a system. Given the rebelliousness of the Latin American masses today, this nationalist ideology must style itself as “revolutionary” anti-imperialist to get a following.

And so Chávez, like other populists, makes a rhetorical claim to represent the “people” against the “elites,” in order to preempt the development of class consciousness and its inevitable challenge to capitalism itself. He constantly talks of the rich versus the poor, while hailing the “productive” business sectors in Venezuela and Latin American capitalist politicians like Nestor Kirchner of Argentina and Lula – even though these leaders are actively propagating neo-liberal attacks on their own working classes today. (See *PR* 69 for background on Kirchner and page 29 in this issue on Lula.)

Like many populists, Chávez is also an aspiring Bonapartist. While he was democratically elected, he has tended to rule by decree. He has concentrated power in the executive branch of government and has enhanced the role of the military. This represents a great danger to the working class.

Chávez came to fame with an attempted army coup in 1992 and openly calls his government a “civic-military regime.” The army is his means of ensuring control over the masses – and to a degree maintaining some degree of power over recalcitrant capitalists and managers. He attempts to bridge the divide between the masses and the capitalists and their lackeys by placing the military above them. He has the military involved in many social projects, in order to win over more of the officer corps while getting the public to trust them. But his support in the military is problematic at best. There are already known hostilities, which will inevitably develop as he pushes ahead. During the April coup parts of the military joined the opposition and only swung back to Chávez in response to the mass outrage. Since support for “Chavismo” within the military is far from solid, he has been forced to rely increasingly on mass support.

## CHÁVEZ AND “THE POOR”

The Venezuelan masses turned toward Chávez after suffering two decades of economic misery and betrayal by the dominant capitalist party, Acción Democrática (AD) and the CTV union federation (Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela) closely tied to it. Since 1958, when stable bourgeois democratic rule was implemented, AD generally commanded the votes of labor, loosely analogous to the situation of the Democratic Party in the U.S. During the oil boom of the mid-70’s when Carlos Andres Pérez of the AD was president, oil and iron ore were nationalized, import substitution industries were subsidized and social programs were expanded. By 1989, when he was again elected, he turned sharply toward neo-liberalism. After mass food riots in 1989, the organized working class pressed for general strike action and the CTV reluctantly called short strikes for show.

A turbulent decade followed. But while AD no longer held the political allegiance of large sectors of the working class moving toward the left, and workers were already splitting from the CTV toward more radical alternatives, the working class had not



yet been able to demonstrate and build its own alternative before Chávez came on the scene. His failed coup against Pérez was popular because he openly identified with the riots. There was no mistaking his timing. Chávez’s popularity was due to the vacuum of leadership for the working class and the oppressed. He won great support among the urban and rural poor, particularly among the downward-spiraling petty bourgeoisie and the informal sector.

This sector works in a large underground economy that avoids government regulation. So-called *informales* drive taxis, offer door-to-door mechanical services, clean homes, sell clothing on downtown streets and work as day laborers. Youth, women and Colombian *indocumentados* (undocumented immigrants) make up a large share. It grew as a result of the contraction of jobs in the formal sector from the late 1970’s on. A majority of informal sector participants are underemployed. Today this sector represents over half the working class and is ridden with massive poverty.

However, the informal sector – and therefore what is understood in Venezuela as “the poor” – includes not only workers but also small-scale entrepreneurs and the self-employed as well as traditionally lumpen elements. We have noted that the ideology of populism obscures the class line dividing capitalist society. Chávez pushes the idea of “a movement of the poor,” rather than a movement of the working class leading all the poor and oppressed as communist revolutionaries do. The question of which class should lead the struggle is left unsaid, and class consciousness is deliberately avoided. It allows sectors of the capitalist class to lead the masses.

Moreover, the poor-versus-rich view easily leads to a distinction within the working class between “the poor” and the more stably employed; thus one sector fights the other instead of



*Allende after 1969 electoral win in Chile. Allende, like Chavez, advocated class collaboration as a step toward "socialism." Time and again the masses demanded arms and a decisive strategy against bosses' strikes and coup threats. In 1973 the masses paid the price when the U.S. backed a successful military coup that crushed the movement.*

the class uniting to fight for greater equalization of wages and jobs for all. Steadily employed workers can be deemed to be part of the "rich" by poor workers; they can come to see themselves in that false light as well. In this way the unity and power of the working class are divided and inevitably conquered.

Populism is not a path to class consciousness but a barrier and a trap. Not by accident, Chávez's relationship with the formally organized working class has been far more ambiguous than his advocacy for the poor. Concrete information on the political viewpoints within the working class is not readily available to us. Nevertheless, it is evident that, so far, the employed working class has moved in the direction of defending the Chávez regime rather than the opposition, which clearly represents the greatest immediate threat. The bulk of the middle class, managerial employees and the most highly skilled workers mainly back the opposition.

Since the failure of the opposition's lockout attempt, activist support for it in these sectors seems to have waned. Nevertheless, the problem for Chávez is that he will have to try to discipline and control the entire working class – not just the upper layers that he can denounce as reactionary – in order to pursue his nationalist capitalist project.

#### **LEFT TURN?**

Despite his radical rhetoric, Chávez has held back in opposing imperialism. We have already cited his continued debt payments. Another striking example of the shallowness of his "anti-imperialism" was his pledge to *not* stop supplying oil to the U.S. in the case of the war against Iraq. His energy minister, Rafael Ramírez, vowed that the government would never use oil for political purposes. Recently, Ramírez reversed his stance of opposing Iraq's readmission into OPEC while it is under U.S. occupation.

But such compliant behavior by Chávez & Co. has not subdued the reactionaries. Everyone knows that it was the huge outpouring of the masses that decisively ended the first coup attempt in April. Upon his return to power, Chávez would not even punish the coup leaders, despite the popular demand. Rather he called for class peace, as if such a thing were possible. This conciliatory attitude emboldened the reactionaries and led to the subsequent economic sabotage in the form of the bosses' oil "strike" as well

as the escalation of attacks on other workers.

The lockout did show in its own way how a production shut-down could strangle the economy. It also demonstrated how important are the blue-collar workers in production in getting the industry working again.

Given the forces arrayed against him, Chávez has had to do more than in the past to rest on the poor and the working class. Since the oil strike, he has not only extended public programs in health, education and other services but has also decreed or negotiated wage raises affecting millions of workers. Most of these measures were financed by increasing the debt burden. But these reforms are only a drop in the bucket, given the desperate situation of the masses, the majority of whom still live well below official poverty levels.

Underneath the overt mass support enjoyed by Chávez, class tensions are inevitably rising. Recent developments in the workers' movement are a beginning indication of this. While Chávez has placed his own people into the executive ranks of the state oil enterprise, he has now had to put two workers on the managing board for show. More significantly, the industry, which previously had a high proportion of managerial and non-union white-collar employees, has now been dramatically streamlined so that the proportion of blue-collar workers is higher. There are reports that workers now expect more of a real say in the industry and that arguments with the new managers are breaking out.

The two-month oil lockout affected not only oil workers but also workers elsewhere in the economy, as other businesses took the opportunity to force lockouts, announce dismissals, withhold pay and so forth. Workers used the occasion to take over some of the shut facilities and start running them on their own. (A notable example is the Sheraton Airport Hotel in Caracas.) Chávez had already been forced to back peasants who on their own initiative have been taking over unused land. But after the oil lockout he had to accelerate a policy of defending workers' takeovers of failed and shut-down factories and plants. Currently his strategy is to push the notion of workers' cooperatives, some of which the government is currently subsidizing. In this way he wants to turn the workers into petty-bourgeois business operators who compete against each other within the capitalist economy rather than challenge it. But some workers are already demanding nationalization of the failed companies.

#### **THE UNIONS**

The political ferment in the working class means that there are real opportunities for revolutionary intervention. The developing union situation is complex, and not enough information is available publicly yet. The most potentially important development has been the formation of a new labor federation, the UNT (Unión Nacional de Trabajadores or National Workers Union) in the spring of 2003, an event which seems to reflect a real rise in class confidence and activity.

Chávez came into government with no explicit plan for dealing with the working class. He clearly wanted to get rid of the old CTV union leadership (and even the CTV altogether, which was not possible). Early on, a takeover of the leadership of the CTV failed; eventually the idea was spawned to create a specifically Chavista union movement. The purpose was to bind the working class to his national capitalist program. But the new federation is far from being entirely under his control. It includes explicitly pro-Chávez unions but also contains long-standing independent unions and unions that broke away recently from the CTV, like the oil workers' union.

Neither Chávez nor a representative showed up at the founding conference of the UNT last spring, although both were

expected. Nor did the regime provide state TV coverage of the discussions. And the final political decisions of the conference are not yet published; nor have there been reports on a projected follow-up conference. But there were more than 1200 delegates present, and political discussion at workshops tended toward the left of Chávez's program. Points in the plan of action included demands for a shorter work week, the creation of a fourth shift to reduce unemployment and ending the bosses' right to fire workers. As well, delegates called for fights for a general raise in pay and to achieve equality for subcontracted and temporary workers.

A question of great importance is to what degree the UNT has won over, or will be able to win over, the masses of workers. Because it has not called any mass actions in its own name yet, its real influence is difficult to gauge, although it claims to be larger than the CTV. The collaborationist CTV has clearly lost the much support since it supported the reactionary oil "strike." Yet while a number of unions have broken from the CTV since then, it still officially claims one million members. The CTV leadership is now under considerable pressure to deliver something, given the "strike" flop and the desertion of locals to the UNT. For this reason the leadership claims that it will concentrate more on the economic struggle, as opposed to political combat.

What this will mean in practice remains to be seen. It is not clear how many in the ranks of the CTV actually supported the policies of their leadership in the lockout, and whether they do now. It would not be the first time in history that reactionary pro-imperialist policies of union bureaucrats did not reflect all the layers of the membership. Most often the bureaucracy serves the interests of the labor aristocrats and frequently caters to the most reactionary sentiments to be found within that strata.

As a general principle, while revolutionaries find their deepest roots within the lower reaches of the working class, we also know that the aristocratic status of better-paid workers is fleeting and it is vital to win them from their capitulatory mis-leaders to class unity. The struggle for revolutionary proletarian leadership in Venezuela cannot simply abandon the workers who are now so treacherously misled in the CTV.

A fight for leadership of the working class by revolutionaries must be made, including the fight to overturn misleadership in all workers' institutions. Workers should be appealed to based on their class interests, in the CTV where possible as well as in the UNT and other unions which remained independent (like the important steel workers' union, SUTISS, Sindicato Unico de Trabajadores Siderúrgicos y Similares).

## ***Literatura del LRP en español***

Tenemos disponibles nuestros artículos sobre Bolivia y Argentina en español. También tenemos otros documentos y folletos. Si desea añadirse a nuestra lista de correspondencia por favor escribanos y notifiquenos si desea algún documento o artículo en particular o si desea recibir todos nuestros documentos en español.

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The best elements can be won over time if authentic Trotskyists insist on workers' basic right to strike and on immediate demands for wage raises, an end to layoffs and improvement in conditions. Even though Chávez has responded to pressure before, especially from public-sector workers, workers can hardly depend on the beneficence of any capitalist government – especially a regime caught in such a profound economic bind. Workers in private industry have been under siege; the strike weapon, not dependence on the government, is their only means for achieving even their elementary needs. It is probably no accident that the UNT Congress, while very radical-sounding on a grand scale, did not take up the question of strikes. This reflected pressure from the Chávez regime desperately trying to achieve stability and a "pro-investment" atmosphere – inevitably at the expense of the workers.

It is clear that the experience of the oil "strike" has radicalized layers of the working class and moved them in the direction of running industry themselves and fighting for their overall demands. This opens the way for greater working-class acceptance of the proletarian revolutionary program. Key demands should be the nationalization of the entire oil industry under workers' management, including the invalidation of all illicit deals made during "la abertura." Nationalization of other failing industries and enterprises under workers' management, without compensation and with guaranteed job protection, is a necessary demand to counterpose to the proliferation of decentralized cooperatives dominated by the market. Also critical to the economy is the fight for nationalization of the banks without compensation and repudiation of the imperialist debts. Debt repudiation alone would ignite all of the Latin American working class, now slaving to pay imperialism for the debts incurred by their rulers.

Given the impending threat of a pro-imperialist coup, it is vital for revolutionary workers to start demanding that all progressive unions form union defense guards to train and arm the working class against the reactionary killing squads. Such a mobilization would be a counterweight to the dangerous reliance on the army fostered by Chávez. It would be a decisive step in the development of independent working class protection, self-activity and leadership. With Venezuela moving toward a civil war scenario, and given all the revelations about U.S. involvement, the question of internationalist strategy must move from rhetoric to reality. The Venezuelan masses can only defend their sovereignty with a vigorous campaign for international solidarity. This requires that Venezuela itself stand for both the repudiation of all imperialist debts as well as for the unconditional self-defense of all nations under imperialist attack.

Unlike the Chávez regime, workers will give practical support to the mass struggles in Iraq and elsewhere, most notably by holding their government accountable for its continued delivery of vital oil supplies to the U.S. while it occupies Iraq and threatens Venezuela itself! If the bosses can stop oil production to help imperialism, then the workers must be ready to use their power to boycott the transfer of oil and other supplies to imperialist warmongers. Above all, Venezuelan revolutionary party advocates must frankly proclaim the necessity for their class to take power and establish their own state as part of a Socialist United States of Latin America.●

*February 28, 2004*

***U.S. Hands Off Venezuela!  
Unity of the Working Class and the Poor!  
Repudiate the Debt!  
Build the Revolutionary Party!  
Re-Create the Fourth International!***

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# PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION

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Spring 2004

## The Working-Class Way Forward

# U.S. Hands Off Venezuela!

by Evelyn Kaye

Venezuela is under the imperialist gun. A domestic opposition, supported by the U.S., is battling to get rid of Hugo Chávez, the popular president who claims to oppose imperialism and its neo-liberal programs. Any victory for the bourgeois opposition would mean a decisive defeat for the workers and oppressed. A victory for the masses at home requires revolutionary class struggle against the imperialist capitalist system as a whole. Chávez, however, straddles between the capitalists on the one hand and the toiling and oppressed population on the other.

The masses have had high expectations from the Chávez government since he was first elected in 1998. They have shown they want a decisive fight against reaction, while Chávez has equivocated and conciliated. As for needed

improvements in the lives of the vast majority, Chávez has produced very little. But he is under increasing pressure to deliver.

When Chávez came to power, substantial sections of the comprador bourgeoisie took a wait-and-see attitude. The energy minister at the time, Ali Rodríguez, commented that “Hugo Chávez has been the most effective bulwark against the country's social explosion.” In 2002 Chávez appointed Rodríguez head of the state oil company, PdVSA (Petróleos de Venezuela, South America).

The oil industry is the engine of the Venezuelan economy. As this article will explain, contention over oil policy has galvanized the opposition. But behind this quarrel is the fact that Chávez has stirred up the mass struggle in Venezuela to dangerous proportions in the past few years, according to most capitalists. And it is exactly this struggle that the domestic opposition and the imperialist overlords must halt if they are to defend profit-making and social stability.

Mass struggles beat back a U.S.-backed coup attempt in April 2002, an embarrassing defeat for Yankee imperialism. Nine months later, mass resistance played a large role in defeating an extensive boss-led oil industry lockout (a so-called “strike”) and getting things running again.

Race and class correspond quite highly in Venezuela, as elsewhere. The contrast between the middle-and upper-class neighborhoods, where mostly lighter colored people live, and the barrios, mainly home to darker-skinned Venezuelans, tends to match the contrast in complexion between the opposition and pro-



government rallies. No doubt the opposition has stirred up a racist as well as a class-based reaction, given that Chávez identifies himself with pride as a mixture of Indian, Black and European.

### DEFEND VENEZUELA!

The popular displays of hostility and the measures taken by Chávez so far have not been enough to disempower the anti-Chávez forces. There are still important oppositionists in the army high command as well as in high-level positions in government and industry. They have the support of much of the middle class and white-collar labor aristocrats.

On the surface of events, the polarizing issue at the moment is whether or not there will be a referendum to recall Chávez. According to law, a referendum can be held to recall any elected official after half his term, if it is petitioned for by 20 percent of the eligible voters. After much equivocation, Chávez allowed the Organization of American States (OAS) and the “neutral and non-partisan” Carter Center (founded by the former U.S. president) to oversee the counting of legal signatures. A final decision, already delayed, should be released within a few weeks.

However, opposition elements have already been vocal about the need for “rebellion” if the referendum doesn’t go forward. They have not agreed to abide by the results, while Chávez has. All of this foreshadows the inevitable opposition cry of foul if the petition is rejected. In one way or another, they can expect to get

*continued on page 35*