

# Black History and the Class Struggle

No. 19



## New Orleans: Racist Atrocity

Page 9

### For Black Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!



### NYC Transit Strike: Union Power vs. Class Collaboration... 14

# For a Revolutionary Workers Party!

# Class-Struggle Road to Black Liberation

NOVEMBER 22—The abandonment of masses of overwhelmingly black and poor people by America's capitalist rulers in the face of Hurricane Katrina is a crime that must be seared into the memory of working people. Months after the catastrophe, New Orleans remains a rotting shell. Bodies are still being found almost daily. Nearly half the devastated city is without power, without medical care and with most of its population unable to return to their homes.

Barely a day after a moratorium on evictions by Louisiana's governor expired on October 25, record numbers of eviction notices were being served. Some 10,000 people now face homelessness as landlords raise rents by as much as 100 percent. With Dickensian cruelty, FEMA has announced that after the Thanksgiving holiday, it will evict as many as 53,000 families from the motel rooms they've been forced to call home. Thousands more will be evicted following Christmas and New Year's. Earlier this month, FEMA, in an unprecedented move, stopped payment to flood insurance policyholders, outrageously claiming that it had run out of money. This is an outright lie. Of the utterly inadequate \$62.3 billion Washington appropriated for relief after hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma, "more than half—\$37.5 billion—is sitting in FEMA's account, waiting for a purpose" (*Time*, 28 November).

When the State of Louisiana requested \$250 billion in funds, this was contemptuously dismissed in the media as the "Louisiana Looters' Bill." In

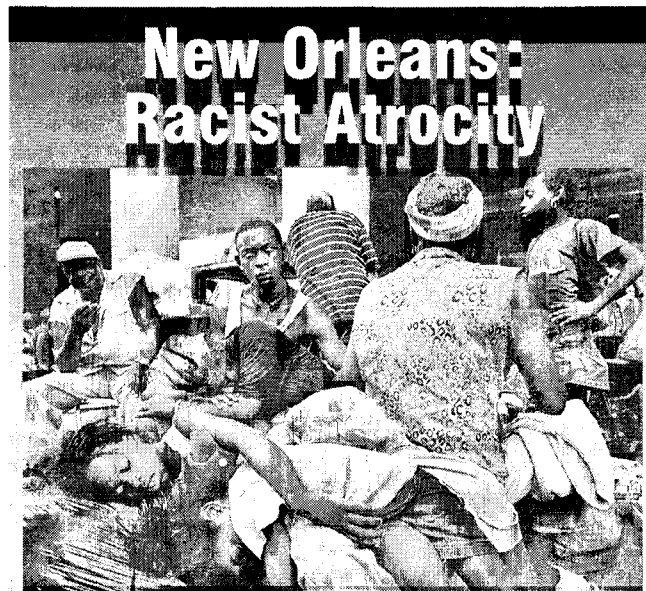
contrast, Congressmen had no problem voting themselves another pay raise as they recessed for Thanksgiving.

It is the capitalist looters who are making out big. Northrop Grumman is in line for \$2 billion in FEMA funds to rebuild

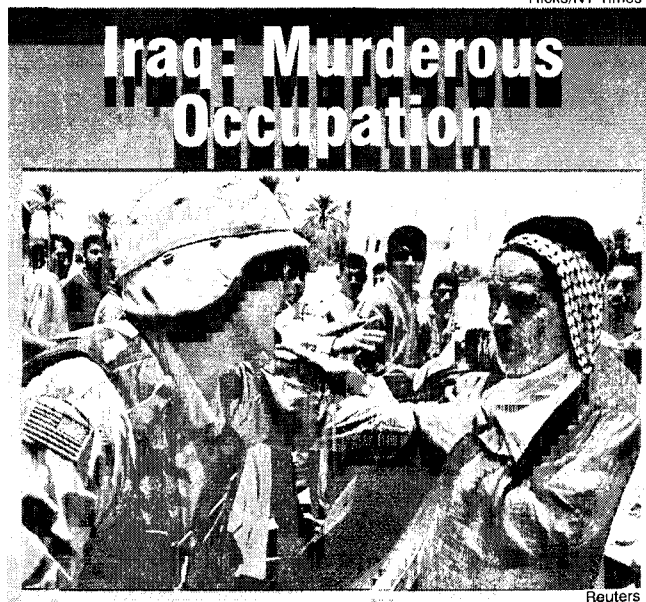
its shipyards, where most of the Navy's surface ships are built. And defense contractor Titan, a company that has its hands in the Abu Ghraib torture scandal, has already received contracts worth over half a million dollars. Meanwhile, nationwide the bourgeoisie continues to intensify its attacks on the working class: on the heels of auto parts supplier Delphi's savage assault on its workers' wages and pensions through bankruptcy maneuvers, GM just announced its plan to cut 30,000 jobs over the next three years.

At the same time, popular support for the Bush administration continues to fall over government corruption scandals, the economy and, mainly, the debacle of the bloody Iraq occupation. On November 17, Democratic Congressman John Murtha of Pennsylvania, a long-time hawk, called to "redeploy U.S. troops" out of Iraq within six months, although when Republicans forced a House vote on the question, Murtha and all but three Democrats voted against immediate troop withdrawal. The Democrats' concern is that through its incompetence and savagery in Iraq, the Bush administration is undermining the reactionary "war on terror" and U.S. imperialism's long-term strategic interests. Expressing this frustration, liberal columnist Frank Rich complained that "the percentage of Americans who now regard fighting terrorism as a top national priority is either in the single or low double digits in every poll" (*New York Times*, 20 November).

The Democratic Party is a capitalist party dedicated to the



Hicks/NY Times



Reuters

fundamental interests of U.S. imperialism. As we wrote in "Big Lies and Imperialist War" (WV No. 856, 14 October):

"Growing opposition in the U.S. population to the Iraq occupation, revulsion over the government's role in the death and destruction of black people and the poor after Hurricane Katrina, anger at the attacks on fundamental democratic rights—the situation speaks to the burning need to build a workers party that would organize *class struggle* against the U.S. capitalist rulers.... Only when the multiracial proletariat seizes power from the blood-drenched, arrogant capitalist rulers can we begin to speak of a world rid of imperialist wars and occupations and offering material security and social justice for all."

We print below, edited for publication, a presentation by Spartacist League spokesman Erica Jones at an October 20 New York City forum.

\* \* \*

We saw it as necessary to have a forum on the fight for black liberation and the fight for a workers America at this time because events such as the racist atrocity in New Orleans have further exposed the irrationality and anarchy of capitalism, its lies and its unsustainability. The tragedy of New Orleans isn't exactly "all natural," as the capitalist rulers and their media would have you believe. The raw, naked truth is that securing the safety of the black and poor living in New Orleans was not considered profitable. The facilities on the Mississippi River from Baton Rouge to New Orleans constitute the U.S.'s largest port, and the Louisiana coast produces one-third of the country's seafood, one-fifth of its oil and one-quarter of its natural gas. But the capitalist system as it

**Democrat Clinton, along with Bush Sr., rushed to back up George W. Bush in face of popular anger over government response to Hurricane Katrina.**



relates to building and securing infrastructure is not rational.

The U.S. government, from Clinton's time to the current Bush administration, knew about the dangers facing New Orleans. They knew that the levees surrounding New Orleans were not built to withstand anything beyond a Level 3 hurricane, that the levees were in poor repair, that the wetlands which provided a barrier to the ocean were rapidly receding. Yet before hurricane season, funding for flood control was drastically slashed as more and more money was provided for the war in Iraq.

The capitalist class and the parties that uphold its rule—Democrats and Republicans—also knew that if a hurricane the size of Katrina hit New Orleans, given the social structure of America, the rich would be protected as they always are—on higher ground. Yet bourgeois politicians such as Clinton, who ran to Bush's side immediately after the hurricane hit, want you to believe that the government is doing all that can be done and that racism has

nothing to do with the relief efforts. And in regard to the destruction of the ports and oil refineries, who do you think is profiting off rebuilding them? You guessed it, the Halliburtons, the Bechtels, etc.

The death and destitution were preventable. Just compare how hurricane situations are handled by the Cuban deformed workers state, where the capitalist class was expropriated and where collectivized property and a planned economy exist. Its government can actually provide for the safety and security of its citizens, even in the face of the long-standing U.S. economic embargo. The Cuban government has repeatedly safely evacuated up to two million people from oncoming hurricanes.

Why didn't the U.S. government prepare to evacuate its poor and black citizens of New Orleans in a similar way? Perhaps a shred of New Orleans history may offer a clue. In 1927, there was a flood of the Mississippi River that threatened to destroy the land and property of the wealthy aristocrats who dwelt in southern

## Table of Contents

For a Revolutionary Workers Party! <b>Class-Struggle Road to Black Liberation</b> .....	2
Capitalist Rulers Left Blacks, Poor to Die <b>New Orleans: Racist Atrocity</b> .....	9
Strikers Defy Taylor Law <b>NYC Transit Strike: Union Power vs. Class Collaboration</b>	
Break with the Democrats! Build a Workers Party! .....	14
Court Battle Looms <b>Mumia Abu-Jamal Is an Innocent Man Free Him Now!</b> .....	18
Fox Endorses <i>Memin Pinguin</i> , Disgusting Racist Stereotype <b>Down With Anti-Black Racism! For Joint Class Struggle in Mexico and the U.S.!</b> ....	22

<b>Black Women's Narratives of Slavery, the Civil War and Reconstruction</b> By Carla Wilson .....	24
<b>AIDS in America: Racism, Poverty, Bigotry</b> .....	29
50 Years Later <b>The Lynching of Emmett Till and the Fight for Black Liberation</b> .....	35
The Evolution Wars: Religious Reaction and Racist Oppression <b>Hail Charles Darwin!</b> .....	40
<b>Join the Labor Black Leagues!</b> .....	47



Mississippi Department of Archives and History

**In 1927 Mississippi River flood, black people were forced to live on levees and to work without pay.**

Louisiana. To divert the damage that the flood might have caused to their property, they devised and implemented a plan to dynamite the levees surrounding the black and poor neighborhoods to take pressure off the levees surrounding their own. As a result, thousands of black and poor Louisiana residents were left homeless. And those black people who worked on the plantations in the region were not allowed to leave because the plantation owners rightly feared that they would never come back to work in slavery-like conditions. So they were herded on top of the levees under the guns of National Guardsmen, and only those families who had members helping repair the levees were allowed access to the food provided by the Red Cross. The rest were left to fend for themselves.

Does this sound familiar? The only interest that this capitalist government serves is the defense of private property and the profit system as a whole. The U.S. capitalist class has a lengthy history of exploiting labor and oppressing minorities. It is futile to appeal to its "conscience" or "morality." Its actions are guided by its class interest, which is to maximize profits. They're not even bothering to count the bodies of many who died during the Hurricane Katrina flood. Almost two months later, there are still over 500 people "missing" from New Orleans Parish Prison, where prisoners had been left to drown in their cells.

### **For Class War Against Capitalist Rulers!**

This reminds me of Iraq, where the U.S. imperialists and their allies aren't even bothering to count the bodies of Iraqis they bombed and murdered under the pretext of the "war on terror," "weapons

of mass destruction" and "Saddam Hussein's links to Al Qaeda." Lies, lies and more lies. Even the lies used to bolster patriotic support for the bloody imperialist war in Iraq remind me of the racist atrocity in New Orleans. Not even a day after the levees broke, the bourgeois media was in a frenzy, telling tall tales of looting, robbery, murder and mayhem in New Orleans. In the face of starvation, the media wrote that blacks "stole" food and white people "found" it.

To be sure that this is racist America that we're talking about, dusted off was the lying slavery-era cry of the black man as sexual predator. Thus there was the scare over alleged rapes. "Hold on to your skirts, Southern belles, we're sending in armed federal guards with shoot-to-kill orders" was the message and method of justification for turning New Orleans into a federally occupied military zone. It wasn't to help people. They'd also have you believe they're helping the Iraqi peoples by bringing "democracy" and "lib-

eration." Even the torture scandals of Abu Ghraib hit close to home. The U.S. houses nearly two million mostly black and Latino men, women and even youth in prison hellholes. It is the prisons of America that provided the training ground for torture like that we hear about in Abu Ghraib in Iraq and in Guantánamo.

The *New York Times* now reports that there was no evidence for the scare stories about New Orleans. The real criminals are the government and its army and police, a few of whom were recently investigated for stealing Cadillacs. And just a week ago, a retired elementary school teacher, Robert Davis, who is 64 years old and black, was brutally beaten by cops in the French Quarter for merely asking about the curfew time. The real thugs and looters are the U.S. imperialists and their allies who are exercising military might and plundering the world.

There is a war going on here at home as well. And as the racist New Orleans atrocity shows, it's a war against black people, poor people and working people. Now more than ever, it is clear that the workers and oppressed minorities in the U.S. must side with the Iraqi peoples who face imperialist onslaught, just as we must side with the victims of the U.S. rulers here in the belly of the beast. We must demand that the U.S. troops get out of Iraq now! Insofar as the forces on the ground in Iraq aim their blows against the occupiers, we call for their military defense against U.S. imperialism, without giving one iota of political support to the insurgents and while opposing communal violence and religious fundamentalism.

At home it is necessary to wage class war to fight against the racist capitalist rulers and to fight for workers revolution to defeat U.S. imperialism. After the hurricane disaster, we called for trade unions to mobilize for the rescue effort and to demand a massive rebuilding effort. Powerful unions such as the TWU transit work-

**Havana,  
4 September 2005:  
Cuban doctors  
preparing to go to  
aid of Gulf Coast  
victims. Bush  
refused Castro's  
offer of almost  
1,600 doctors  
equipped with  
medical supplies.**





AP photos

**Far left: Black Panther leader Huey Newton. Left: 1970 police raid on New Orleans Panther office, part of murderous government vendetta.**

ers and the ILA longshoremen should be mobilizing black, white, Latino and immigrant workers to organize unions in Louisiana, to fight for union jobs at good union wages, for public works and health care, emergency clothing and safety equipment. Such a fight would strike a blow against the capitalist bosses and the government's attempts to pay below-prevailing wages on federally funded construction projects. It is necessary to fight for abolishing the capitalist system in its entirety.

### **Marxism and Black Liberation**

Throughout the history of class society, there has been slave and slave master, lord and serf, and today there is the capitalist class (the bourgeoisie) and the working class (the proletariat). In today's society, the bourgeoisie owns all of the means of production—the factories, the mills, the shops, the plants—along with the modes of transportation and all of the material resources needed to keep production running. The proletariat has its labor power, which it must sell to survive. The bourgeoisie exploits this labor power to create profit.

The state appeared when society first divided into classes. The ruling class needs a special apparatus of coercion and of subjugating the will of others by force. Thus in today's society, the working class is kept under control by the state, which at its core is made up of the cops, the military, the courts and prisons, all of which exist to uphold the bourgeoisie's private property system and keep the workers and the rest of the have-nots in place. Supplemented ideologically by the churches, educational institutions and media, the state is used by the ruling class to suppress anger over such conditions as the ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor.

In the U.S., key to mobilizing the

working class to smash this system of repression is the perspective of revolutionary integrationism. The Spartacist League's program of revolutionary integrationism was developed by Richard Fraser when he was a member of the then-revolutionary Socialist Workers Party (SWP). In his 1953 lectures titled "The Negro Struggle and the Proletarian Revolution" (reprinted in *Prometheus Research Series* No. 3, "In Memoriam—Richard S. Fraser"), Fraser wrote:

"The racial division of society was born with capitalism and will die only with the death of this last system of exploitation. Before capitalism there was no race concept. There was no skin color exploitation, there was no race prejudice, there was no idea of superiority and inferiority based upon physical characteristics.

"It was the advent of Negro chattel slavery in the western hemisphere which first divided society into races....

"Having become the imperialist leader of the capitalist world, the U.S. exports race prejudice as naturally as it does death and destruction to the colonial world."

In the years since the civil rights movement of the 1950s and '60s, the fundamental conditions of life for the majority of black people, particularly in the key areas of employment, housing, wages and education, have worsened. Fifty percent of black men are unemployed in New York City. There are 9,000 homeless black children in the Chicago public school system, and many children walk out of the metal detectors at their school entrances into the metal detectors at the entrance of their local and state prisons. In cities like Detroit, black ghettos look like war zones with dilapidated houses, abandoned businesses and armed police patrolling the streets looking to kill with impunity. For the past 20 years, the "war on drugs" has hit black people with a brutal vengeance—a war of police repression

and imprisonment aimed at the black and minority population that has sent almost a generation of black men to prison. America is as racist today as it ever was.

In the U.S., black workers have historically made up a disproportionate percentage of the bourgeoisie's reserve army of labor, sought after in times of economic boom and war but the first to be laid off when times are bad. American black workers face pervasive racial oppression both on and off the job. And, more and more, the black population has become an excess, surplus population for the ruling class. William Bennett's comment that "you could abort every black baby in this country, and your crime rate would go down" reflects the bourgeoisie's impulse toward genocide of the black population.

However, black workers play a strategic role in the American economy and are represented in union jobs at a higher rate than white workers. For the struggle for black freedom to succeed requires struggle by the working class as a whole to abolish capitalism and establish in its place an egalitarian socialist society. Our program of revolutionary integrationism is premised upon mobilizing the working class to take up the fight for black liberation—a class-struggle fight to uproot the source of black oppression, which is capitalism.

But the struggle of black people in this country for freedom, while part of the struggle of the working class as a whole, is also more than that struggle. Black people are an oppressed race-color caste. And while there are other racial and ethnic minorities, mainly immigrants, who also face oppression because of the inherently racist nature of U.S. capitalist society, the histories of non-white groups of people in this country are not all the same.

The liberal "people of color" rhetoric



that you hear actually erases the distinct history of each racial minority group and liquidates the unique aspect of black oppression rooted in U.S. history—like slavery, like lynching and the Klan, like the degradation and humiliation of riding in the back of the bus, sitting in the back of a restaurant and not being allowed to travel or buy a home where you want. Dividing the working class along race lines is key to maintaining capitalist rule in the U.S. Conscious of the social power that the proletariat would attain through unified struggle, the American bourgeoisie applies “divide and conquer” strategies.

In racist capitalist America, the right to abortion is under attack, and the fastest-growing component of rising incarceration rates is young black and Latina women, who are also getting the HIV virus and AIDS at a higher rate than the rest of the population. Black women workers face triple oppression. They are oppressed as part of a race-color caste, oppressed as women and oppressed as workers. In the U.S. and all over the world, we fight for full equality for women and their complete integration into the workforce. We call for equal pay



Wide World

**Black poet Claude McKay speaking on racial oppression in U.S. at Fourth Congress of the Communist International, 1922.**

for equal work and for free, safe abortion on demand as part of a free, quality health care system. The struggles against exploitation, against women's oppression, against

racial oppression will advance together or fall back separately. The working class cannot be free unless it fights for black freedom, and you cannot have a workers revolution without black freedom at the center of your program. The question of black oppression in the United States is strategic to the revolutionary task of the working class.

## We Are the Party of the Russian Revolution

We base our program on the lessons of the Russian Revolution of 1917. The October Revolution, led by the Bolshevik Party under V. I. Lenin and Leon Trotsky, is the only successful workers revolution in history, where the working class overthrew the rule of its capitalist exploiters and took power. The October Revolution created a workers state based on workers councils, or soviets, and forged a Red Army that triumphed in war against counterrevolutionary forces backed up by world imperialism.

The early Soviet government expropriated the holdings of the capitalists and cancelled the debt owed to the imperialists. It proclaimed the right of working people to jobs, health, housing and education, and took the first steps toward building a socialist society. The revolutionary government gave land to the peasants and self-determination to the many oppressed nations of the former tsarist empire. The regime separated church and state and, significantly, funded secular education and science, promoting a thoroughly materialist worldview. It eliminated all laws discriminating against national and ethnic minorities, women and gays. And it decreed that abortion be free and legal. What made the Russian Revolution successful was the leadership of the Bolshevik Party, which fought not only for the freedom of those oppressed by capitalist rule in Russia but for the emancipation of the international proletariat and for a world socialist order.

As revolutionary internationalists, the Bolsheviks under Lenin and Trotsky saw that for U.S. Communists, the fight for black liberation was a central priority. As early as 1920, a main point on the agenda of the Second Congress of the Communist International was the situation of black people in America. As James Cannon, an early Communist Party (CP) leader and later the founder of American Trotskyism, wrote in *The First Ten Years of American Communism* (1962), “The main discussions on the Negro question took place in Moscow.” It was based on these discussions and the influence and pressure of the Comintern that the American CP of the '20s started to really do

## International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist)

International Center: Box 7429 GPO, New York, NY 10116, USA

Web site: [www.icl-fi.org](http://www.icl-fi.org)

<b>Spartacist League of Australia</b> .....	Spartacist League, GPO Box 3473 Sydney, NSW, 2001, Australia
<b>Spartacist League/Britain</b> .....	Spartacist League, PO Box 1041 London NW5 3EU, England
<b>Trotskyist League of Canada/ Ligue trotskyste du Canada</b> .....	Trotskyist League, Box 7198, Station A Toronto, Ontario, M5W 1X8, Canada
<b>Spartakist-Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands</b> ....	SpAD, c/o Verlag Avantgarde Postfach 2 35 55 10127 Berlin, Germany
<b>Ligue trotskyste de France</b> .....	Le Bolchévik, BP 135-10 75463 Paris Cedex 10, France
<b>Trotskyist Group of Greece</b> .....	Write to: Box 8274, Athens 10010, Greece
<b>Spartacist Group Ireland</b> .....	PO Box 2944, Dublin 1, Ireland
<b>Lega trotskista d'Italia</b> .....	Walter Fidacaro C.P. 1591, 20101 Milano, Italy
<b>Spartacist Group Japan</b> .....	Spartacist Group Japan PO Box 49, Akabane Yubinkyoku Kita-ku, Tokyo 115-0091, Japan
<b>Grupo Espartaquista de México</b> .....	Write to: Roberto García, Apdo. Postal No. 1251 Admón. Palacio Postal 1 C.P. 06002, México D.F., Mexico
<b>Spartacist/South Africa</b> .....	Spartacist, PostNet Suite 248 Private Bag X2226 Johannesburg 2000, South Africa
<b>Spartacist League/U.S.</b> .....	Spartacist League, Box 1377 GPO New York, NY 10116, USA

something to fight black oppression. The CP adopted the understanding of the black question as a special question of doubly exploited second-class citizens, requiring a program of special demands as part of the overall revolutionary program.

I hope this paints a clear picture as to why we proudly say, "We are the party of the Russian Revolution." We militarily de-



WV Photo

**Detroit, 1979: SL-initiated protest stopped Klan from celebrating massacre of civil rights and labor activists in Greensboro, N.C.**

fended the Soviet Union and its collectivized property system and planned economy against the imperialists and internal counterrevolution, in spite of the bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet Union under Stalin beginning in 1923-24. We fought for proletarian political revolution to oust the Stalinist bureaucracy and for the extension of the revolution worldwide.

Communism is far from dead. While the bourgeoisie has been busy perpetuating the lie about the "death of communism" since the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union in 1991-92, it is also actively dusting off its special police "red squads." The government has also initiated some of the worst attacks on democratic rights in recent history, such as the USA Patriot Act and the detention of Jose Padilla, whose case represents the government asserting its "right" to disappear people, and the recent conviction of leftist attorney Lynne Stewart and new attacks on former Black Panther Party members. All of these attacks are ultimately aimed to suppress the working class.

While the U.S. rulers are now grabbing more of the oil wealth of the Near East, their main and ultimate target is the Peo-

ple's Republic of China, by far the largest and strongest of the remaining states where capitalism has been overthrown. Capitalist restoration in China, a country of over a billion people, would mean death and starvation of enormous proportions. China and North Korea are among those states explicitly indicated as potential targets for a U.S. nuclear first strike.

This makes all the more clear our duty to fight for the unconditional military defense of the remaining bureaucratically deformed workers states of China, North Korea, Cuba and Vietnam against the imperialist powers. And that means defending their collectivized economies and the economic and political expropriation of the capitalist class. It also means defending the right of North Korea to develop nuclear weapons. As we did in the former USSR and the East European deformed workers states, we also call for proletarian political revolutions to get rid of the ruling nationalist bureaucracies, whose policies undermine and weaken those states, and install governments based on workers democracy and revolutionary internationalism.

### Trotskyism vs. Black Nationalism

The SWP, formerly the Trotskyist party in the U.S., capitulated to both the liberal civil rights leaders and to black nationalism. They gave up on political combat against the black misleaders and on recruiting cadre from a generation of black youth who were radicalized by the civil rights movement. Many of these youth became involved with the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. The Black Panther Party represented the best of a generation of radical black youth. In high school, when I first became politically engaged, I was immediately drawn toward the Panthers. But in regard to the contradictory and radical-nationalist Black Panthers, all you hear about nowadays is their free breakfast programs. It wasn't their social work that attracted me to them. It was their militancy.

Little do you hear about the militancy of the Panthers. That aspect has been whitewashed by Hollywood and the liberals, who'd have you believe that the Panthers were the Black Panther Party for Social Welfare and not the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. Little do you hear about their offer to send troops to Vietnam to assist in the fight against U.S. imperialism, about how they initially organized independently of the Democrats and Republicans, or about how they advocated armed self-defense against racist attacks. However, the

Panthers rejected mobilizing the revolutionary power of the multiracial proletariat to fight black oppression.

Some of the key leaders and groups, such as the Black Panthers, that came out of the Black Power movement became self-avowed black nationalists. But black people are not oppressed as a nation. There is no economic basis for a separate, independent black economy. Black nationalism is utopian; it's pseudo-nationalism. But even such a form of nationalism is divisive and interferes with the development of class consciousness.

The Panthers were, in fact, confined by a sectoralist perspective of blacks liberating blacks, Latinos liberating Latinos, Asians liberating Asians, etc., and lacked an internationalist class-struggle program. Black workers have an exceptional role to play in the revolutionary struggle to smash capitalist wage slavery. Because of their position as both the most oppressed and the most conscious layer of the proletariat, black workers are slated to be a key factor in the coming American revolution. By rejecting a working-class perspective, the Panther leaders cut themselves off from becoming leaders in the struggle for socialist revolution internationally.

The lack of a working-class orientation also made the Panthers more vulnerable to FBI director J. Edgar Hoover's COINTELPRO, or Counter-Intelligence Program, which was originally set up in 1956 against the Communist Party but was revived particularly to murderously repress and disrupt the Panthers. Some 233 out of the 295 FBI COINTELPRO actions against black organizations were

**Marxist Bulletin 5**  
REVISED

**WHAT STRATEGY FOR BLACK LIBERATION?**

**Trotskyism vs. Black Nationalism**

Key documents and articles  
1955-1978

Spartacist Publishing Co., Box 1377 GPO, New York, NY 10116

---

**Marxist Bulletin No. 5 Revised**  
Key Documents and Articles 1955-1978

**\$1.50 (72 pages)**

**Make checks payable/mail to:**  
Spartacist Pub. Co., Box 1377 GPO  
New York, NY 10116

against the Panthers. At least 38 Panthers were murdered by agents of this racist capitalist state through the instrument of COINTELPRO.

Today numerous former Panthers remain locked up in prison dungeons. The remnants of COINTELPRO remain with the capitalist state's attempt to execute former Panther and innocent death row prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal. Mumia's case is a signature political frame-up spanning both Bush administrations, the Clinton administration, back into the Reagan years. Today COINTELPRO has been repackaged. A clear example of this was the recent FBI killing in Puerto Rico of Filiberto Ojeda Ríos, the Puerto Rican independence fighter who was gunned down by agents of the capitalist state and then left for 12 hours to bleed to death.

### Break with the Democrats!

As outrage over New Orleans and the bloody occupation of Iraq fuels popular opposition to the Bush administration, the Democratic Party hopes to further its electoral fortunes. At the reformist-led September 24 rally against the Iraq occupation in Washington, D.C., and at Louis Farrakhan's October 15 D.C. "Millions More March," Jesse Jackson proclaimed the need to take back the White House in 2008. And believe me, he didn't have the Parliament/Funkadelic conception of painting the White House black.

The Democratic Party is no friend of black people and labor. It was Clinton who enacted "the end of welfare as we know it," leaving both black and white poor families without access to food and medical care. Clinton also presided over a huge increase in incarceration of black and Latino youth. While he pardoned his capitalist crooks and cronies on his way out of the office, he made doubly sure that innocent political prisoner and American Indian Movement activist Leonard Peltier was not to be freed. Clinton paved the way for Bush's Iraq war through eight years of regular bombing attacks and through continuing the starvation embargo that led to the deaths of some 1.5 million Iraqis. He also helped pave the way for Bush's "war on terror" at home with the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996.

But it wasn't just the Clinton-era Democratic Party that was racist and bloodthirsty. The Democratic Party oversaw the Korean War, the Vietnam War and the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba. It was the Congressional Black Caucus that in 1998 voted along with the rest of Congress to have Assata Shakur extradited from Cuba. It was black Democratic mayor Wilson Goode, working with the federal government, who ordered that a bomb be dropped on the MOVE home in Philadelphia in 1985, killing eleven black women, men and children. And more recently, it was black Democratic mayor Jack Ford of Toledo, Ohio, who called black protesters against the Nazis a violent group of gangs and unleashed police terror to subdue them.

A fighting labor movement will not be forged through impotent appeals to the Democrats but through sharp struggles to break with such representatives of the capitalist class enemy. That means seeing that the Democrats are the alternate party of capitalist rule and thus every bit as much a part of the problem as the Republicans—even more so because there is an element of trickery in their posture as friends of labor and the oppressed. What we need is a revolutionary workers party that stands up for labor rights, black rights, immigrant rights, women's rights and gay rights.

It is not just that union leaders tie workers to the Democrats. Tailing them are reformist so-called socialist groups like the Workers World Party and their ANSWER coalition and the International Socialist Organization. Each of them has at one time or another given support to Democratic or other capitalist politicians like the Greens. Even the ultrarevolutionary-sounding Progressive Labor Party has acknowledged in its paper that its supporters have campaigned for Democrats

Dennis Kucinich and Barack Obama.

The lifework of groups like the Workers World Party/ANSWER is protest politics within the framework of bourgeois "democracy." Fundamentally, they believe that the capitalist system can be reformed. Opposed to revolutionary Marxism and a working-class perspective, such groups organize massive rallies to pressure whatever White House administration is in office to give money for food and education not war. If you've ever talked to some of these activists, they will near-unanimously tell you that we have to do something now, and the fight for socialist revolution is too far down the road. I guess by doing something now they mean pushing for certain capitalist politicians to get into office and then begging them for handouts. In many ways they, too, have bought into the "death of communism" phenomenon. Some, such as the ISO, cheered for counterrevolution in the USSR.

That brings me to what to do now. What has to be done now is to organize the working class independently of the capitalist class. This means breaking with the Democratic Party and fighting for a workers party that champions the cause of all the oppressed. In the U.S., it's necessary to combat anti-black racism in all spheres, including among immigrants, in addition to combating the anti-immigrant chauvinism that exists among black people. We also have to intervene into working-class struggles with the slogan, "Full citizenship rights for all immigrants!" We have to organize the working class now to defend Mumia Abu-Jamal from execution by the capitalist state. The working class must be mobilized, on the basis of no illusions in the capitalist courts, to demand that the racist death penalty be abolished and that Mumia be freed now!

For revolutionaries, Marxism is a living science and a guide to action. Revolutionary situations occur rarely in history, and we must be theoretically and politically prepared. Our object is not simply to understand the world but to change it. But to be able to change it requires that we have a lever to effect revolution, to rip up this rotten social system that more and more threatens destruction, if not extinction, for humankind. That lever is a workers party of the Leninist type, organized in a democratic-centralist Fourth International. Such a party cannot be simply proclaimed but must be forged in struggle.

Without the leadership of a revolutionary party, the working class cannot wrest power from the bourgeoisie. Thus most importantly, if you want to get rid of capitalism, join the revolutionary internationalist Spartacist League or the Spartacus Youth Club, our youth auxiliary. ■

PROMETHEUS RESEARCH SERIES 3

**In Memoriam**  
**Richard S. Fraser**

An Appreciation and Selection  
of His Work

---

**Prometheus  
Research Series No. 3**

A memorial to comrade  
Richard S. Fraser (1913-1988),  
who pioneered the Trotskyist  
understanding of black  
oppression in the United States,  
fighting for the perspective of  
revolutionary integration.

**\$7** (includes postage) 110 pages

Make checks payable/mail to:  
Spartacist Pub. Co., Box 1377 GPO  
New York, NY 10116



## Capitalist Rulers Left Blacks, Poor to Die

# New Orleans: Racist Atrocity

SEPTEMBER 12—New Orleans, one of the oldest, most cultured, most complex of American cities, remains devastated, its residents dispersed, its dead still uncounted and unburied. Whole communities along the Gulf Coast have simply disappeared. Hurricane Katrina has ripped away the tattered facade of the U.S. government as “of the people, by the people, for the people,” exposing the racism, venality, ruling-class arrogance and utter ineptitude of the White House gang. A wave of revulsion has swept the country at the government’s response to the disaster, undercutting the post-September 11 “national unity” hysteria that had already taken a beating over the debacle in Iraq. Sections of the ruling class itself are hammering at Bush, not least for damaging the image of the “world’s only superpower” internationally.

Now they are even trying to forbid news media from showing the dead, who are still shamefully left to lie in the open while troops patrol the streets. When the troops were needed to evacuate people from New Orleans, they weren’t sent. Now, they’ve been mobilized above all to assert control over the city, to disarm the remaining population and to enforce the government’s suppression of the truth about the number of dead. While the government and media claim that the number is far lower than initially estimated, it is known that 25,000 body bags have been sent to New Orleans.

They want to hide the evidence of their crimes against the people of New Orleans. But what is starkly exposed is the raw reality of race and class in capitalist America.

It is not just that the victims in New Orleans were primarily black and poor, but a spotlight was thrown on the desperate conditions faced by black people



Heavily armed SWAT teams rolling past New Orleans Convention Center.

across the country. New Orleans has its own peculiarities, including geography. But across the U.S., the mass of black people is forced to live in inner cities that are little more than rotting shells—from Newark and Camden to Detroit and Gary. No jobs, no health care, schools that are little more than prisons. This country’s racist rulers see no reason to spend money to maintain a layer of the black population that is increasingly seen as a surplus population. The horrific images of homeless, hungry and dehydrated black men, women and children in New Orleans prompted many to compare them to images of the Third World. In fact, in measures such as infant mortality, America’s ghettos do approach Third World conditions.

Rap musician Kanye West was widely cheered for saying on a telethon what millions are thinking: “George Bush doesn’t care about black people.” The matriarch of the Bush clan, former first lady Barbara Bush, sniffed disdainfully after looking in on the Houston Astrodome, “What I’m hearing, which is sort of scary, is they

all want to stay in Texas”! With naked class contempt, she declared, “So many of the people in the arena here, you know, were underprivileged anyway, so this is working very well for them.” She was speaking of starving people who had just had everything in their lives ripped up, had just lost their homes and their jobs. Many didn’t even know if their friends and companions and family members were drowned or saved.

But it’s not just Bush and the Republicans. The other capitalist party, the Democrats, is also directly responsible for deaths that likely number in the thousands. The black Democratic Party New Orleans mayor, Ray Nagin, ordered an evacuation but provided no resources for

anyone without a car to get out. Former president Bill Clinton publicly solidarized with Bush Junior and also Senior, seeking to restore the spirit of “national unity.” Nationally, Democratic politicians are clamoring that the administration’s inaction over New Orleans shows its incapacity to respond to “terrorist” threats. They aim to present themselves as the party best able to wage the “war on terror,” a code word for ripping up the rights of immigrants, black people, the labor movement and most everyone else.

Despite differences over particular policies, the Republicans and Democrats are united in defending capitalism—an anarchic, irrational profit-driven system that cannot even provide for the safety and welfare of the population. The situation cries out for a socialist planned economy, in which natural resources and the technological and productive forces of society would be marshaled *on behalf of human needs*, not profit. What is urgently required is to build a workers party that can lead a workers revolution to rip power from the hands

## For a Planned Economy Under Workers Rule!

of the capitalist class and its political agents, right-wing Republican and liberal Democrat alike.

### Criminality Upon Criminality

Billions in government handouts are being shoveled out as fast as possible—to the politicians' corporate cronies. It's a real "gold rush reminiscent of corporate America's efforts to profit from the reconstruction of Iraq," as the capitalists' house organ, the *Wall Street Journal* (9 September) put it. Republican Congressman (and former real estate entrepreneur) Richard Baker of Baton Rouge told lobbyists in Washington, D.C., that "We finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans. We couldn't do it, but God did." Forty years ago, this was expressed as: "urban renewal" means "Negro removal." In fact, the social disaster was *manmade*, and what's happening now is sheer profiteering. Gasoline prices have soared above \$3 a gallon and are expected to go higher. A *Wall Street Journal* (7 September) editorial was cheerfully headlined: "In Praise of 'Gouging'."

The government's generosity toward its corporate pals stands in stark contrast to its murderous indifference and gratuitous cruelty toward the black working people and poor of New Orleans. Fury at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) finally forced the removal of its chief, Michael Brown. When Wal-Mart tried to deliver trucks of bottled water, FEMA turned them back. Absurdly evoking "terrorist" threats, FEMA delayed evacuation flights until they could get federal marshals on board every plane, which is not even done for everyday commercial flights. When starving, dehydrated, dying people tried to board flights out, FEMA "Homeland Security" agents initially stopped them because there weren't working X-ray machines to check if they were carrying bombs!

Many liberals are complaining that the disastrous government response to Hurricane Katrina shows how FEMA, now part of the Department of Homeland Security, has been "neglected" over the years. In fact, FEMA's "mission," established in the heat of the U.S. rulers' anti-Soviet war drive in the 1980s, was to prepare the infrastructure for a military dictatorship in the event of a "national emergency," including plans for rounding up Central American immigrants and U.S. citizens in concentration camps (see "Reagan/North's Plot for Military Coup," WV No. 433, 24 July 1987).

On August 30, two Navy helicopter pilots disregarded orders and ferried more than a hundred hurricane victims to safety. They should have been greeted as heroes. Instead they were reprimanded, and one of

**Thousands, mainly black, were crammed into Houston Astrodome after days trapped by flooding in New Orleans.**

Stravato/NY Times



them was reassigned to overseeing a temporary kennel to hold the pets of service members evacuated from the area. Their commander said, "We all want to be the guys who rescue people. But they were told...that is not the priority." Anger ran so hot over this incident that several men in their unit removed the patches from their sleeves reading, "So Others May Live," in open defiance of military discipline.

New Orleans police tried to keep people from even helping each other. Malik Rahim, a veteran of the Black Panther Party of the 1960s and a local activist in the Algiers neighborhood, which was not flooded and where phones worked, reported that police told people who had dry homes and boats that their help wasn't needed. Rahim wrote that "the people who could help are being shipped out. People who want to stay, who have the skills to save lives and rebuild are being forced to go to Houston" (*San Francisco Bay View*, 31 August).

Rahim described "gangs of white vigilantes near here riding around in pickup trucks, all of them armed, and any young Black they see who they figure doesn't belong in their community, they shoot him." When a band of some 200 people, including visiting paramedics from a downtown hotel, tried to walk out of New Orleans over a Mississippi River bridge into a white area, suburban cops turned them back and fired over their heads, saying, "This isn't New Orleans" (*New York Times*, 10 September).

Now the forces of the capitalist state are taking steps to disarm residents who managed to stay. No one, except for the armed thugs of the government, is to be allowed to defend himself. In this dire situation and in general, we defend the right of the population to bear arms. No to gun control!

The rulers' fear of an armed population harks back to the fear of "servile insurrection" that haunted the slaveowners of the pre-Civil War South. The role of the fed-

eral troops sent in to New Orleans is above all to reassert control *over* the city and its people. Immediately following the flooding, the cops herded prisoners out of New Orleans and into the infamous hell-hole of Angola prison. Many were kept handcuffed on a highway overpass in the merciless heat, held at gunpoint until they could be shipped to a prison. About the only thing this government knows how to build and maintain is prisons. One of the first "public works" undertaken by local authorities was to turn the Greyhound bus station into a jail for "looters," with a sign reading, "Welcome to the New Angola South." We say: Release them and drop all charges against them! Immigrants along the Gulf Coast are in particular danger of deportation if they can't produce legal residency documentation. We call for full citizenship rights for all immigrants! No deportations!

### Capitalist Chaos and Profiteering

The fatal undermining of the flood control system around New Orleans did not begin the day that George W. Bush entered the White House in January 2001. Far from it! Over two decades of neglect include the eight years of the Democratic Clinton administration in the 1990s, during which the U.S. experienced an economic boom and the federal government managed to run a sizable budget surplus.

But the pork barrel triumphed as usual, as politicians of both parties diverted the Army Corps of Engineers' money to far less important projects, as right-wing *New York Times* columnist John Tierney pointed out in "The Case for a Cover-Up" (10 September). Thus the Louisiana Congressional delegation and Democratic Senator Mary Landrieu, who now attacks Bush for not anticipating the breach of the levees, "have been short-changing the levees themselves" and have "directed large sums to dubious Corps

projects aimed at increasing barge traffic, not preventing floods." And it's not just the Mississippi Delta. According to the American Society of Civil Engineers, some 13,000 traffic fatalities each year result from inadequate highway maintenance. Compare this one, all but hidden index of death by government neglect to the number of youth killed each year by firearms—some 2,800 in 2002—which is widely publicized by proponents of gun control.

The Gulf Coast disaster has exposed the deadly logic of the capitalist ideologues who extol the "magic of the market" and preach the virtues of "small government." One of these types, right-wing libertarian Grover Norquist declared: "I don't want to abolish government. I simply want to reduce it to the size where I can drag it into the bathroom and drown it in the bathtub." The White House and Congress reduced the size of government funding for flood control and disaster relief, and as a consequence, there are likely thousands of people, mainly black and poor, who have now drowned.

The decades-long deterioration of this country's government-maintained and -funded infrastructure has gone hand in hand with the *deindustrialization* of the United States. Hurricane Katrina knocked out 10 percent of the country's oil refining capacity. There is *no* spare capacity, which is why oil companies are about to make a killing at the pumps. There has not been a new refinery built in the U.S. since 1976. Over the past quarter-century, total refining capacity has declined by 10 percent while consumption of gasoline has increased by 45 percent.

Why has this happened? At bottom, it is because of the basic laws governing the capitalist system of production. The rate of profit, which determines where the money goes, was too low to induce the oil companies to invest in new refineries. As Robert Mabro, head of the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, explained: "The fundamental problem is that we depend on oil companies that dislike the refining business because of historically low returns but whose deficit can produce an economic, social and political crisis" (*New York Times*, 4 September). Even before Katrina, sharply rising energy costs were dampening the feeble economic expansion. Now the energy crisis, a blatant case of the irrationality of capitalism, is likely to tip the U.S. economy into a recession.

Meanwhile, the airlines are trying to bust workers' unions, destroy their pensions and cut their wages, all the while claiming that high oil prices are making them do it. With early grain ready to ship

but with few facilities working, farmers who ship crops down the Mississippi River are faced with ruin. The shrimping and oystering industries are wrecked. Poultry plants are destroyed, their stock rotting.

### What Needs to Be Done

Over a million people are displaced. The masses of displaced people must be provided with jobs—*union jobs* at union wage scales, with health care, housing, clothing and all other necessities. Instead of being regarded as victims, these working people can be incorporated into a force for their own revitalization. What is needed at the minimum is a massive program of federally funded public works to rebuild New Orleans and the rest of the devastated Gulf Coast. There should be workers committees that would make sure that shoddy designs and penny-pinching construction could be vetoed before they endangered people's lives, and that lifesaving repairs and maintenance would not fall victim to the ax of austerity.

However, not only the Republicans but also the Democrats will oppose any such program that smacks of "socialism." There is one and only one force in American society that can change the current political balance in favor of working people: a revitalized labor movement. A number of Democratic politicians and liberal commentators are talking about public works programs like those of the 1930s New Deal. But it was the great labor battles of the time that forced the U.S. rulers, represented by Democratic president Franklin D. Roosevelt, to institute those projects as well as economic reforms like Social Security, unemployment insurance and welfare.

The labor bureaucracy—in both John Sweeney's AFL-CIO and the recent breakaway coalition led by the SEIU's Andy Stern—are just as opposed to fighting for a program of unionized public works as the two capitalist parties are to accepting it. Despite wide sentiment at the base to participate in relief and rebuilding efforts, the union misleaders have done nothing to undertake the mobilization of unionized workers that is necessary.

The union tops' refusal to engage in class struggle is rooted in their support to the capitalist profit system, expressed politically in their ties to the Democratic (and sometimes Republican) parties. To unleash the social power of this country's multiracial proletariat, there needs to be a fight to replace the labor bureaucracy with a leadership committed to mobilizing labor's power, independent of the capitalist state and politicians,

in the interests of all the exploited and oppressed.


The Bush administration and Congress are handing out billions in no-bid contracts for Gulf Coast rebuilding to the big corporations that are already looting Iraq—Halliburton; Bechtel; the Fluor Corporation. Significantly, Bush issued an order exempting jobs created by these companies from the 1931 Davis-Bacon Act, which stipulates that federally funded construction projects pay prevailing wages, which in practice are usually significantly above the legal minimum wage. This is a calculated blow against the labor movement.

Popular outrage at the response of the Bush administration to the devastation of Hurricane Katrina extends to anger at its crony capitalists who run Halliburton, Bechtel et al. A labor campaign to unionize the corporations engaged in "rebuilding" New Orleans and the rest of the Gulf Coast would have massive popular support. Such a campaign could be an important first step in the long-needed unionization of the South and more generally the revival of the declining union movement.

Reformist leftist groups are pumping out lists of immediate demands for flood relief, for housing, for jobs—all urgent necessities. But what is left out of the equation is *how* we're going to get those things. The agency for social change—the working class, including its key black component—is not what they look to carry out their demands.

Typical of this approach is the Freedom Socialist Party (FSP). In a 4 September statement that calls for "a planned, cooperative economy run by the workers," the FSP argues that "public pressure" can

**Programmatic Statement  
of the Spartacist League/U.S.**

  
**For a Workers Party  
That Fights for a Workers Government!**

**For Socialist Revolution  
in the Bastion  
of World Imperialism!**

SEE PAGE 2

**Organizational Rules and Guidelines  
of the Spartacist League/U.S.**

SEE PAGE 30

**Opponents of the Revolutionary  
Internationalist Workers Movement**

SEE PAGE 37

52 November 2000 46p Spartacist Publishing Co. Box 1377 GPO, New York, NY 10116

**\$2 (40 pages)**

**Make checks payable/mail to:**  
Spartacist Publishing Co.  
Box 1377 GPO  
New York, NY 10116



Bengiveno/NY Times

After leaving thousands to die, authorities left corpses to rot on streets of New Orleans.

prevent the Bush administration from using the crisis to enrich Halliburton, Bechtel, et al. Workers World Party's new front group, the "Troops Out Now Coalition," one of the groups organizing the September 24 protests against the occupation of Iraq, calls for "Money for Hurricane Relief, Not for War." A coalition statement calling for a "national campaign for emergency action" headlines, "The Bush Administration Is Criminally Negligent." It then states, "We call on the Bush Administration" to do all manner of good things, including "a massive jobs program at union wages for rebuilding." What is this, Christian redemption through good works by war criminals?

Such groups cynically appeal to naive young liberals who believe that the American government, even under Bush, can be made to respond to "public pressure." In practice, such pressure politics is a vehicle for bourgeois "lesser evilism," i.e., the Democratic Party.

Left-liberal publicist Naomi Klein states in the *Nation* (26 September), "New Orleans could be reconstructed by and for the very people most victimized by the flood." But how? New Orleans is *owned* already, by corporations and big landlords. They must be *expropriated*, their system of exploitation overthrown *by workers revolution*, before such mass rebuilding in the interests of the people can take place.

### American Capitalism and Black Oppression

Some 40 years after the passage of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights acts, the Gulf Coast disaster demonstrates that the basic condition of blacks as an oppressed color-caste forcibly segregated at the bottom of American society has not changed. Black and white liberals have long hailed the civil rights movement of the late 1950s-early 1960s as a historic triumph in the struggle for racial equality. Certainly, the end of legalized segregation in

the South was a genuine and important democratic gain. But black oppression is rooted in the very structure of American capitalism, as the catastrophe in New Orleans has so graphically demonstrated. As we wrote in an early, basic document of the Spartacist League:

"The vast majority of Black people—both North and South—are today workers who, along with the rest of the American working class, must sell their labor power in order to secure the necessities of life to those who buy labor power in order to make profit. The buyers of labor power, the capitalists, are a small minority whose rule is maintained only by keeping the majority who labor for them divided and misled. The fundamental division created deliberately along racial lines has kept the Negro workers who entered American capitalism at the bottom, still at the bottom. Ultimately their road to freedom lies only through the struggle with the rest of the working class to abolish capitalism and establish in its place an egalitarian, socialist society.

"Yet the struggle of the Black people of this country for freedom, while part of the struggle of the working class as a whole, is more than that struggle. The Negro people are an oppressed race-

color caste, in the main comprising the most exploited layer of the American working class... Because of their position as both the most oppressed and also the most conscious and experienced section, revolutionary black workers are slated to play an exceptional role in the coming American revolution."

—"Black and Red—Class Struggle Road to Negro Freedom," *Spartacist* special supplement, May-June 1967, reprinted in *Marxist Bulletin* No. 9

The mass mobilization of black people in the Southern civil rights movement, and the subsequent Northern ghetto rebellions, disrupted and challenged the racist American bourgeois order. But the civil rights struggles remained under the leadership of liberals like Martin Luther King Jr. who were tied to the Democratic Party and more fundamentally came up against the inadequacy of democratic reform in addressing the de facto segregation and impoverishment of black people.

The deindustrialization of the Northeast and Midwest beginning in the 1970s has been especially devastating for blacks, since unionized industrial jobs were central to the fragile economic base of the segregated black communities. Budget cuts at all levels of government and the slashing of social welfare programs, carried out by Democratic as well as Republican administrations, have hit particularly hard at the large sector of black workers employed in public services, and all but eliminated the slim lifeline formerly available to the unemployed ghetto masses.

The net worth (assets minus debt) of the average black family is today *less than one-tenth* that of whites (\$6,000 versus \$67,000). Black unemployment is almost two and a half times that of whites. And black people are twice as likely to die from disease, accidents



WV Photo

May 1983: ILA mobilized in defense of school busing in Norfolk, Virginia.

and homicide. Seeking to escape poverty and learn a usable job skill, young black men join the armed forces at a rate close to 50 percent higher than their white counterparts, thereby becoming cannon fodder for the U.S. imperialists in their military adventures like Iraq. Over 900,000 black men and women, including one out of every eight black men between the ages of 25 and 29, are in prison, mainly victims of the bipartisan "war on drugs."

The attacks on the black population have also been wielded to undermine the conditions of the entire working class. In 1980, the average CEO received compensation 40 times that of an average worker in his company. Today it's more than 500 times. The average real hourly wage of workers without a college degree is less today than 25 years ago. Today as before, labor and black struggle will go forward together or be driven back separately.

### The Class-Struggle Road to Black Liberation

Black people are not just victims of American capitalism. Despite the destruction of industrial jobs and erosion of union strength, black workers, whose rate of union membership is 32 percent higher than that of white workers, continue to be integrated into strategic sectors of the industrial proletariat—in urban transit, longshore, steel and auto. The proletariat alone has the power to shatter this racist, capitalist system. Won to a revolutionary program, black workers will be the living link fusing the anger of the dispossessed ghetto masses with the social power of the multiracial proletariat under the leadership of a Leninist vanguard party.

But for that to happen, the two main obstacles preventing black workers from playing that historic role must be overcome. These are the Democratic Party, especially its black component, and the trade-union bureaucracy. Beginning in the 1960s, the Republican Party positioned itself as the party of the "white backlash," while the Democrats moved to co-opt young black activists into the government bureaucracy, initially through the "War on Poverty" programs. Since then, black Democrats have often served as mayors of major cities where they act as overseers of the ghetto masses. It is these politicians who have implemented on the ground the killing cuts in social welfare programs. It is the cops under their command who brutalize and imprison young black men en masse.

The trade-union misleadership's willful refusal to combat the racist oppression of blacks, and in recent decades



Reuters

**New Orleans, 1 September 2005: Texas game wardens terrorize black residents who used mail truck to escape rising floodwaters, forcing them to continue on foot.**

of mainly Latino immigrants, is the single most important factor underlying the decline of the union movement. This is nowhere clearer than in the South, which has been the main regional bastion of anti-labor reaction since the building of the integrated industrial unions in the 1930s.

The momentous working-class battles that built these unions, often under the leadership of "reds," took place against the political backdrop of the so-called "New Deal coalition." In the North, this consisted of sections of the liberal bourgeoisie, the labor movement and the black and Jewish minorities. However, key to the Democratic Party's dominance nationally was the support of the white ruling class (the Dixiecrats) in the Jim Crow South, a racist police state in which blacks were stripped of every democratic right and liberty. The New Deal coalition literally extended from black leftist union organizers in the Midwest to Southern sheriffs who were members of the Ku Klux Klan.

Even in the heyday of labor radicalism in the 1930s and early-mid '40s, no serious and sustained effort was made to unionize the South, for the labor tops recognized that this would require smashing the entrenched system of white supremacy and would therefore have destroyed the fragile "unity" of the Democratic Party. That unity was finally broken up by the civil rights movement, as the main body of Dixiecrats decamped to the Republican Party.

Since the 1970s, parts of the South have experienced significant industrial growth, including large-scale investment by European and Japanese corporations attracted by the region's relatively cheap labor. Only a very small fraction of Southern workers are unionized, although there

are some crucially important beachheads of union strength such as the predominantly black ILA longshore union locals on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. Organizing the region's proletariat, which now includes increasing numbers of immigrants, especially from Latin America, cannot be achieved on the basis of narrow business unionism which accepts and adheres to this country's harsh anti-labor laws. It will require a level of working-class and black struggle that challenges the very foundations of the American bourgeois order.

On the one side, the black masses will rally behind racially integrated workers struggles against the local white power structure. On the other side, the Southern branch of the U.S. ruling class—both Democrat and Republican—will resort to police, company goons and professional strikebreakers while using racist demagoguery to turn white workers against the labor movement. The defense of strike pickets and the need to defeat racist terror will be directly linked.

This is a concrete expression of our perspective of *revolutionary integrationism*. Counterposed to both liberal integrationism—the false view that black people can achieve social equality within the confines of American capitalism—and to all forms of black separatism, revolutionary integrationism is premised on the understanding that black freedom requires smashing the capitalist system and constructing an egalitarian socialist society. There will be no social revolution in this country without a united struggle of black and white workers led by their multiracial vanguard party. And there is no other road to eliminating the special oppression of black people than the victorious conquest of power by the U.S. proletariat. ■



# NYC Transit Strike: Union Power vs. Class Collaboration

JANUARY 2—The 2005 New York City transit strike stunned the obscenely rich capitalist rulers of this society and gave a shot in the arm to all working people. For three days, 33,700 members of Transport Workers Union (TWU) Local 100 defied the state Taylor Law banning public workers strikes and shut down the city—the financial center of U.S. imperialism. Finally, here was a powerful union using its strength, not only for itself but also for future transit workers and workers across the country who see their pensions looted and health benefits ripped up by profit-bloated capitalists. Here was a union standing up to the billionaires' government—from the Bush White House down to Republican governor Pataki, Democratic state attorney general Eliot Spitzer and Republican mayor Michael Bloomberg—and its anti-labor courts and cops.

The strike against the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), which was joined by Amalgamated Transit Union MTA bus workers in Queens and Staten Island, drew wide support from the city's ghettos and barrios and from both unionized and unorganized workers. The strike was intensely followed by working people throughout the U.S. and internationally and featured on news broadcasts from Britain to Argentina to Japan. It came at a time of growing popular anger over attacks on workers' livelihoods, over the government's racist abandonment of New Orleans' poor and black population after Hurricane Katrina, over the murderous imperialist occupation of Iraq. The strike was a battle for the rights of labor at a time when the government has taken aim at all of our rights through the "war on terror" backed by both capitalist parties, the Democrats and Republicans.

The strike was provoked by the MTA bosses and carried out by a reluctant union

## Strikers Defy Taylor Law



Bengiveno/NY Times

13 December 2005: TWU rally three days before contract expiration.

leadership. First the MTA demanded that new-hires work an additional seven years, to age 62, before becoming eligible for full retirement benefits. Not only was this a direct attack on the unity of the union, but seven more years of grueling work—breathing steel dust underground, exposed to toxic chemicals and diesel exhaust, bouncing around in bus drivers' seats on choked city streets—would be a death sentence for large numbers of workers. The Local 100 leadership under Roger Toussaint kept talks going for four days after the old contract expired. While the MTA dropped its demand for raising the retirement age, just hours before the new December 20 strike deadline MTA chairman Peter Kalikow ambushed the union by demanding that new-hires pay 6 per-

cent of their wages toward their pensions, up from the 2 percent that workers currently pay. This time the union didn't blink, and the workers walked out.

Bloomberg railed that the leadership of this overwhelmingly black and Latino union was "thuggish." The capitalist rulers saw this strike as something akin to a slave rebellion. But their attempt to divide and isolate the union through racist vilification backfired. A black worker on the picket line told us that Bloomberg's slurs reminded him of the accusations of looting leveled by the media against desperate black people looking for food in New Orleans. Others remarked that this vicious treatment is indicative of the "plantation justice" they endure from the MTA with its onerous disciplinary meas-

**Break with the Democrats! Build a Workers Party!**

ures. Local 100 reflects the working class of the city: white, black, Latino; immigrants from the Caribbean, the former Soviet Union, Ireland, the Indian subcontinent, China and elsewhere. The integrated picket lines graphically demonstrated how the poisonous racial and ethnic divisions fostered by the capitalists to weaken labor can be overcome through class struggle.

The strike demonstrated the potential to link the power of labor to the anger of the ghetto and barrio masses. On its second day, residents of Brooklyn's blighted East New York neighborhood pumped their fists in support when hundreds of TWU picketers from the transit facility there marched through the area. Some teachers brought their classes to the picket lines. While strikers were cheered throughout the city, the bourgeoisie's anti-union demagoguery did help fuel some sentiment against the strike, including among shopkeepers and desperate immigrants fearful of losing their jobs. While the gutter tabloid *New York Post* (22 December) blared "JAIL 'EM!" in a front-page headline with a graphic of Toussaint behind bars, the front page of the *Amsterdam News*, NYC's main black newspaper, the same day ran an open letter by Toussaint and other coverage sympathetic to the strike.

The overwhelming popular support for the strike exemplified revolutionary Marxist leader V.I. Lenin's comment in his May 1912 article "Economic and Political Strikes": "Whereas the liberals (and the liquidators) tell the workers: 'You are strong when you have the sympathy of "society";' the Marxist tells the workers something different, namely: 'You have the sympathy of "society" when you are strong.'"

The transit strike was a golden opportunity to tear up the anti-union Taylor Law by forging a fighting alliance with all of NYC labor at the head of the city's minorities and poor. This task raised to the forefront the need to fight for the independence of the unions from the state and parties of the capitalist class. But the union went into battle with one hand tied behind its back because of the ties of its leadership to the capitalist Democratic Party. As we wrote in the 20 December 2005 Spartacist strike support leaflet, titled "Victory to the Transit Workers Strike! United Labor Action Can Smash the Taylor Law!": "Al Sharpton, Jesse Jackson and the other Democratic Party celebrities who were invited to grace the platforms of TWU contract rallies promote the party of the Taylor Law—of Attorney General Spitzer and of Senator Hillary Clinton, who hailed Spitzer's earlier use of the Taylor Law against the TWU in 1999!"

As Spitzer and the courts slammed the



**Roger Toussaint (far right) at 16 December 2005 press conference with (from left) Democrat Basil Paterson, 1199 SEIU head Dennis Rivera, cop "union" leader Patrick Lynch, teachers union head Randi Weingarten and TWU treasurer Ed Watt. Union tops look to cops, Democrats as labor's allies.**

union with injunctions imposing massive fines—\$1 million charged to the union and two days' pay charged to individual members for every day on strike—and possible jail sentences, the traitors in the TWU International and city labor leadership stabbed the strikers in the back. A statement issued the night the strike began by TWU International president Michael O'Brien "notifying" Local 100 members that they had to "cease any and all strike or strike-related activities and to report to work" was posted by management at doors and gates of transit facilities. By the second day of the strike, the Local 100 leadership faced not only a relentless anti-union barrage from the politicians and press but mounting pressure from dozens of labor "leaders" to call off the strike.

At a press conference on the afternoon of December 21, Toussaint powerfully rebuked the racist diatribes against the union and asserted the necessity to defy unjust laws, referring to Rosa Parks and the civil rights movement. But he also offered that the union would end the strike if the MTA took its pension demand off the table, and in fact state mediators were already cooking up a deal. An hour later, a group of labor tops including teachers union president Randi Weingarten, representing the Municipal Labor Committee, mouthed meaningless "support" for the TWU while refusing to utter the four words: "We support the strike." All they had to say about the Taylor Law was that it should be "reformed," complaining that it's not used against the MTA.

Abandoned by the rest of the labor officialdom, facing fines and possible jail time, and with his phony "friends of labor" in the Democratic Party mainly ducking for cover, Toussaint called off the strike the next afternoon. The Local 100 tops contemptuously refused to consult the membership, whose overwhelm-

ing response was anger at going back to work without a contract when one of the main slogans on the picket lines was "No contract, no work!" George Perlstein, one of five Local 100 Executive Board members who voted against returning to work, declared, "We had them at a stranglehold. I do not understand the concept of giving up the stranglehold for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority to put a stranglehold on us."

### Prepare for Further Struggle

The Toussaint leadership *demobilized* this effective strike. Now the membership must vote on the proposed 37-month contract. The strike forced the MTA to take back its pension demands and its attempts at further "broadbanding" of jobs—i.e., combining job duties, leading to a reduced workforce carrying heavier workloads in more dangerous conditions. The proposal also expands health benefits for all retirees, including by making it available to those under 65 living outside the metropolitan area. By going on strike, the TWU waged a defensive battle that slows down the capitalists' onslaught against pensions and working conditions.

However, the Local 100 tops agreed to a major concession that would make members contribute 1.5 percent of their gross pay to offset the cost of retirees' health benefits. The MTA would also be able to hike this contribution when the plan's spiraling costs rise further. The health care concession comes with slim annual wage increases of 3, 4 and 3.5 percent. As the Toussaint leadership did not make the demand for amnesty for strikers a condition for returning to work, the union and its membership are also faced with the fines. Pataki is threatening to veto a provision refunding some \$130 million in additional pension contributions from union members before 2001 that were kept by

the state. Now he's angry over a reported agreement by which the MTA would provide the money in the event of a veto, railing, "You don't reward illegal strikes."

A much-touted new provision for maternity leave is a sham. Workers with newborn children would get a paltry \$200 per week for up to four weeks, but only after using up all their vacation and sick leave time. There should be maternity/paternity leave at full pay, and the union should demand free childcare.

Workers at Triboro and Jamaica private bus lines, which are about to be absorbed into the MTA, were the first to go on strike, on December 19. But they are left out of the proposed deal and returned to work without a contract.

The agreement should be voted down. Transit workers are particularly fuming over the health care concession. Instead of atomized voting by mail ballot, there should be mass meetings where the members can reject the pact and debate what course of action to take, up to and including resuming strike action. This requires a hard look at the December strike and how to get the kind of leadership labor needs.

### Lessons of the Strike

Like every major strike, this was a bull-headed battle between labor and capital. On one side are the bosses, their government, whether run by Democrats or Republicans, and the repressive capitalist state apparatus, mainly the courts and cops. The role of the courts and government officials during the strike starkly demonstrated that the "democratic" trappings of the capitalist state are but a facade for the dictatorship of the exploiting class. On the other side, the workers have their own weapons: their numbers and power based on their collective labor at the workplace, and their union organization.

This was the first time a major union had defied anti-strike laws since the 1981 PATCO air traffic controllers strike. That strike was smashed after the Machinists and other airline union tops treacherously refused to shut down the airports in solidarity. The union was destroyed, its leaders hauled off in chains. This defeat set the stage for a quarter-century of attacks on labor.

This time around, the transit workers, strategically placed in the economy, faced down the bosses and the state. Unlike manufacturing, transit systems can't be "outsourced." The workers went out solid, challenging the anti-strike injunctions. Many on the picket lines chanted "Taylor Law: Rip it up!" and avidly picked up the call for amnesty for strikers. Despite Pataki and Bloomberg's intransigent stance against the union, the government came

under mounting pressure from major retailers and other business interests, which were losing millions every day, to effect a settlement. The TWU ranks went back to work proud. By engaging in this battle, the union became *stronger*.

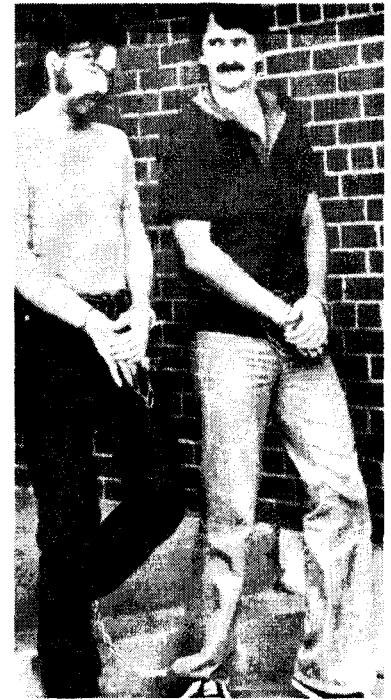
Former Democratic mayor and certified racist pig Ed Koch demanded that the state mete out "medieval" treatment to the strikers. A court date is scheduled for January 20 to decide on imposing the fines as well as possible jail time for union leaders. It is the duty of not only every TWU local but also of labor throughout the U.S. and internationally to demand: No fines! Government hands off the TWU!

Spartacist teams mobilized to go to picket lines throughout the city got an overwhelmingly warm response from transit workers outraged by the lies and anti-union venom spewed by the daily papers. Strikers saw that *Workers Vanguard* was on their side and gave a broader picture of the class struggle and what it takes to defeat the capitalist enemy. Spartacist comrades and supporters distributed thousands of our strike support leaflet and sold some 1,000 copies of *WV* during the strike.

### For a Workers Government!

The same Wall Street bloodsuckers who screamed about "overpaid" public workers and "unaffordable" pensions and union health benefits just gave themselves close to *20 billion dollars* in holiday bonuses. Top execs commonly get \$2 million or more in bonuses; the money that 16 of these parasites rake in this way equals the entire annual health care payment that TWU members are being told to fork over! When the MTA moaned about future deficits as a pretext to demand union concessions, it was sitting on a \$1 billion surplus. Much of MTA revenue goes to pay off debts to Wall Street bondholders anyway. And billionaire mayor Bloomberg had the audacity to call transit workers "selfish" and "greedy"!

Giving a sinister twist to Bertolt Brecht's poem "The Solution," the American capitalists act like they can *no longer afford the people*. With the destruction of the Soviet degenerated workers state through capitalist counterrevolution in 1991-92—a historic defeat for the world proletariat—the arrogant U.S. imperialists thought they had no obstacle in their drive to dominate the world and control its riches. Increasingly irrational in their drive for profit, the capitalist rulers have massively deindustrialized the U.S. Infrastructure is rotting. With the unions taking huge hits, the capitalists are fixated on destroying every shred of social benefit that might still be available to the populace, who, if they have jobs, are supposed to work like slaves and



PATCO union leaders in chains, 1981.

then drop dead. Airline and auto companies declare bankruptcy, or threaten to, in order to rob workers of their pensions. The labor movement must fight tooth-and-nail in defense of retirement benefits as well as for free, quality health care for all!

Every decrepit ghetto is testimony to the sickness of this class society. As for the racist MTA bosses, only with the current contract proposal is Martin Luther King Day finally being made a paid holiday! This profit-driven system can't meet the needs of the population—it must go! It will take a workers revolution, led by a multiracial workers party, to rip the means of production from the capitalist class and institute a collectivized, planned economy where the masses will be able to fully enjoy the fruits of their labor.

The transit strike gave a taste of the enormous potential power of the working class. But to wield this power against this deadly profit system requires fighting against the current labor misleadership, which supports the capitalist system and sees "allies" in the political parties and state agencies of the class enemy. The last thing that Weingarten & Co. wanted to do was jeopardize their privileges and connections in the Democratic Party by engaging in actual struggle, like supporting the transit strike. As a Democratic state assemblyman, NYC Central Labor Council president Brian McLaughlin embodies the class collaborationism of the labor bureaucracy.

Toussaint is part of that bureaucracy and embraces Democratic Party politicians. The Local 100 tops spent hun-

dreds of thousands in union dues to elect Democratic candidates in the last state elections, while AFL-CIO unions nationally spent hundreds of millions in support of John Kerry's bid for the White House. In a speech at a December 10 TWU rally, Jesse Jackson linked the fight for "job security" with "national security." This talk of "national security" promotes the lie that American workers have common interests with the U.S. capitalist exploiters, who are on a murderous rampage against working people and the oppressed from New Orleans to Iraq and Afghanistan. Toussaint retails this lie with his proposals for TWU members to act as auxiliaries to the cops by watching for "terror suspects" in the transit system—i.e., racist profiling.

We say: Break with the Democrats! Workers must rely only on their own class power. That means forging a multiracial workers party—not a party of electoral reformism but one like the Bolshevik Party of V.I. Lenin and Leon Trotsky that led the workers of Russia to power in the October Revolution of 1917. Such a party, based on declassed revolutionary intellectuals and class-conscious workers in the unions and among unorganized workers, would lead the workers in struggle. It would promote international proletarian solidarity and seek to mobilize workers against U.S. imperialism's predatory wars—U.S. out of Iraq and Afghanistan! It would lead the fight for black liberation through socialist revolution. It would fight to mobilize labor in defense of the rights of women and gays. It would demand full citizenship rights for all immigrants and fight to unionize immigrant workers. **Forward to a workers government!**

### **For a Class-Struggle Leadership!**

The Local 100 tops were under intense pressure from the membership when they called the strike. Once the battle was engaged, workers increasingly felt they should stay out for as long as it took to beat back the MTA, Pataki and Bloomberg. The workers started to really feel their power. The Local 100 tops at that point were on their own with an aroused membership. Fearful that the strike would deepen and extend in the face of further attacks by the bosses, the Toussaint bureaucracy called it off.

Toussaint had signaled his willingness to end the strike by getting UNITE HERE president Bruce Raynor and Mike Fishman of SEIU Local 32 B-J building service workers, who supported Bloomberg in the last election, to put in a word with the mayor. "Enter the mediators," as the *New York Times* (23 December 2005)

described the intervention of the state Public Employment Relations Board (PERB). This agency is in no way "neutral." The presence of former AFSCME DC 37 chief negotiator Alan Viani on the PERB is a ploy to make this agency appear "impartial." The PERB, NLRB and all such government auxiliaries have only one purpose: to demobilize labor struggle and maintain class peace.

The Toussaint leadership refused to employ the kind of tactics that could win victory outright. Union leaders at the regional rail lines—Metro-North, LIRR, PATH—not only kept workers on the job, even when some were themselves without a contract, but allowed Metro-North and PATH to run extra train service to help bail out the city rulers. When WV salesmen at Grand Central Station handed out our leaflet to Metro-North workers, they asked us: Where are the TWU pickets? Several of these unionists said they knew the bosses wanted to crush the TWU and then go after them and everyone else. Yet the Local 100 leadership did not appeal directly to the ranks of these unions, or to city and state workers, over the heads of their misleaders.

While turning away from the ranks of labor, Toussaint from the beginning of this battle turned to Police Benevolent Association head Patrick Lynch, whom he has embraced as a "labor" ally ever since becoming Local 100 president in 2000. Lynch appeared on TWU speaker's platforms and at one of Toussaint's press conferences. During the strike, as Toussaint powerfully spoke of the plight of city workers, he kept invoking the cops as part of that workforce. Many workers on the picket lines voiced the illusion that cops were workers, too.

No! The PBA and the other police "unions" are enemies of labor whose job is to safeguard the bosses' private property. The cops, security guards and the MTA's Property Protection Agents have no place in the labor movement. One white worker responding to Bloomberg's racist slur about union "thugs" said, "Yeah, the thugs are here—the thugs in blue." That's right! ***It is the job of the cops to enforce Taylor Law injunctions against the union.*** It's their job to terrorize minorities.

The anti-strike injunctions and massive fines were an object lesson in the role of the courts as part of the capitalists' state machinery. The same lesson should be drawn over the use of the courts to intervene into the TWU, which can only undermine the very purpose of the union: to defend the workers from the bosses.

Toussaint along with a bevy of fake-militants and their "leftist" supporters have long turned to the courts against their

opponents in the union. Five Local 100 vice presidents, including Ainsley Stewart of the Car Maintenance Division and John Mooney of Stations, have a lawsuit against Local 100, although it was put into abeyance leading up to the contract expiration. Prior to taking office, Toussaint dragged the union into the bosses' courts, as did other members of the former New Directions caucus. Nevertheless, Marty Goodman, supported by the reformist Socialist Action group, was long a member of New Directions and supported Toussaint's election. Eric Josephson, supported by the fake-socialist League for the Revolutionary Party, also called for votes for Toussaint, adding a fig leaf of "criticism."

The Spartacist League has always opposed the intervention of the capitalist courts into the labor movement on principle. Thus we opposed Toussaint's candidacy, headlining our article in *WV* No. 746 (17 November 2000), "Sellouts, Traitors, Finks: No Choice in TWU Local 100 Elections." Labor must clean its own house! Cops, courts out of the unions!

Labor needs a leadership based on a program of class struggle and the political independence of the proletariat. This was the type of leadership, composed of Trotskyists and their supporters, that conducted the historic 1934 Minneapolis Teamsters strikes, which helped forge the Teamsters into a powerful industrial union. Summing up the lessons of Minneapolis, Trotskyist leader James P. Cannon said in *The History of American Trotskyism* (1944):

"The modern labor movement must be politically directed because it is confronted by the government at every turn. Our people were prepared for that since they were political people, inspired by political conceptions. The policy of the class struggle guided our comrades; they couldn't be deceived and outmaneuvered, as so many strike leaders of that period were, by this mechanism of sabotage and destruction known as the National Labor Board and all its auxiliary setups...."

"Our people didn't believe in anybody or anything but the policy of the class struggle and the ability of the workers to prevail by their mass strength and solidarity. Consequently, they expected from the start that the union would have to fight for its right to exist; that the bosses would not yield any recognition to the union, would not yield any increase of wages or reduction of the scandalous hours without some pressure being brought to bear. Therefore they prepared everything from the point of view of class war. They knew that power, not diplomacy, would decide the issue. Bluffs don't work in fundamental things, only in incidental ones. In such things as the conflict of class interests one must be prepared to fight." ■

## Court Battle Looms

# Mumia Abu-Jamal Is an Innocent Man Free Him Now!

The fight for freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal, America's foremost class-war prisoner, has reached a critical juncture. On 6 December 2005, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit in Pennsylvania ordered Mumia's legal team to file his appeals brief by January 17. The possible outcome of this appeal could range from overturning his conviction and granting a new trial, or mandating new hearings on his constitutional claims, to reinstating the death sentence, paving the way for a new death warrant.

Mumia Abu-Jamal was convicted on demonstrably false charges of killing Philadelphia police officer Daniel Faulkner on 9 December 1981. As an outspoken journalist and supporter of the MOVE organization, he was known as "the voice of the voiceless." In 1982 Mumia was sentenced to die explicitly for his political views and his past membership in the Black Panther Party. His case must become a focal point of struggle against the capitalist "justice" system and its death penalty—a legacy of black chattel slavery that exposes the naked brutality of this class-divided and racially segregated society. The execution of Stanley Tookie Williams in California last month signaled the rulers' intention to carry out Mumia's execution and to speed up the machinery of legal lynching. In denying Williams clemency, California governor Schwarzenegger cited the fact that Williams had dedicated his 1998 book, *Life in Prison*, to Mumia, Nelson Mandela, Malcolm X and others. **Abolish the racist death penalty!**

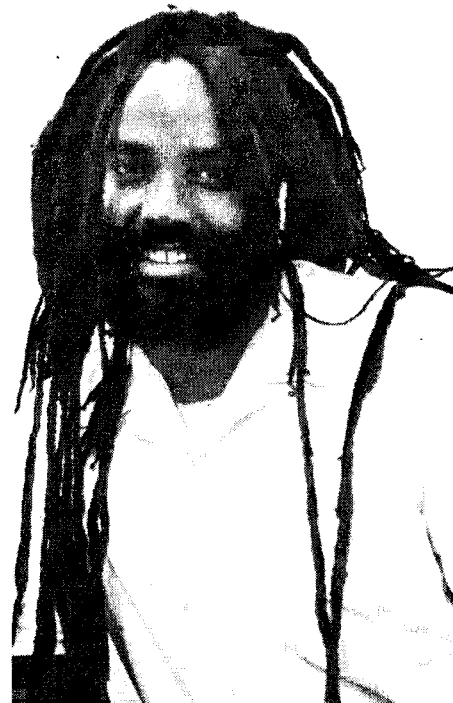
In December 2001, U.S. District Court judge William Yohn threw out Mumia's death sentence but left the conviction intact despite mountains of evidence of his innocence. Prosecutors are appealing to reinstate the death sentence. Mumia's lawyers have continued to add to the evi-

dence of innocence, most importantly Arnold Beverly's confession that he shot the Philadelphia police officer for whose killing Jamal was falsely convicted. But the courts have repeatedly refused to allow Beverly's confession to be heard because it would expose the fact that Mumia's conviction was an intentional frame-up of an innocent man.

Due to the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act signed by Democrat Bill Clinton in 1996, which dramatically cut back the rights of state prisoners to appeal their cases in federal court, the appeals court is not required to consider all of Mumia's claims. One issue it will hear is the racist jury-rigging in the 1982 trial, where Philadelphia prosecutor Joseph McGill struck at least 10 of 14 eligible black jurors. Of the two black people who made it onto the jury, one black woman was removed during the trial by Judge Albert Sabo.

Of the two additional issues the court is allowing, one is the outrageous bias of Judge Sabo. Mumia's legal papers have repeatedly challenged the bias of this racist "prosecutor in robes," which infected every stage of the trial, from blocking important evidence of innocence and saddling Mumia with an incompetent lawyer to barring him from the courtroom for days. Court stenographer Terri Maurer-Carter came forward in 2001 to reveal that during the period of the trial she overheard Sabo say, referring to Mumia, "I'm going to help 'em fry the n----r."

Mumia's post-conviction appeals from 1995 to 1997 were assigned back to Sabo, allowing him to "judge" the fairness of his own conduct. Throughout the post-conviction proceedings, Sabo interfered with Mumia's presentation of new evidence and declared all of the defense witnesses "incredible," with the intent of shielding evidence of his innocence from



Jennifer Beach

further court review. The federal appeals court is only hearing the issue of Sabo's bias during the post-conviction hearings and not of the bias so vividly displayed at the original trial.

The other issue the court will hear is McGill's closing argument to the jury, which erased the "reasonable doubt" standard. In effect, McGill argued that jurors should convict Mumia despite any doubts they had, because "If you find the Defendant guilty, of course, there would be appeal after appeal and perhaps there could be a reversal of the case, or whatever, so that may not be final." In earlier death penalty cases, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court had overruled the same arguments by the same prosecutor. But in this case the court and the prosecutors applied "Mumia rules" in their effort to railroad him.

The urgent need to mobilize the social power of organized labor and its allies for Mumia's freedom was a central theme of the Partisan Defense Committee's 20th annual Holiday Appeal for Class-War Prisoners, held last month in New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Oakland and Toronto. We print below a speech at the New York City benefit, edited for publication, by Rachel Wolkenstein, staff counsel for the PDC and formerly a member of Mumia's legal team.

\* \* \*

Today marks the 24th anniversary of Mumia's arrest for the murder of police



officer Daniel Faulkner, a crime the police, the prosecution and the courts know Mumia did not commit. For over 23 years Mumia has been on death row. All elements of the "criminal justice system" have colluded to kill this man for the crime of being an eloquent and effective critic of racist oppression. Mumia has said that he is "fighting to create revolution in America. Revolution means total change." To the American capitalist state, that means Mumia is a dead man on leave.

It is necessary and urgent, now more than ever, as Mumia's case moves into the last stages of the legal proceedings, to mobilize on the basis that Mumia is an innocent man, known as the voice of the voiceless. He's on death row because of a political, racist frame-up. The federal appeals court has now put Mumia's case on what they call a "fast track" for decision. That means within about six months' time the court will decide what is next for Mumia: death, life in prison or more legal proceedings.

The federal appeals court is not required to consider all the issues that Mumia has raised—and virtually every right guaranteed by the Bill of Rights was violated in Mumia's case. Nor is the appeals court considering the evidence of Mumia's innocence or the state frame-up. It is going to decide in the first instance whether or not to uphold Mumia's death sentence. It is very good and important that the appeals court is now allowing other challenges. These are based on the racially biased jury selection; the D.A.'s prejudicial summary argument to the jury in which he falsely stated that Mumia would have "appeal after appeal," meaning that it didn't matter if he was convicted by the jury; and lastly, a challenge to the kangaroo, lynch mob appeal hearings before the notorious judge Albert Sabo in 1995, '96 and '97. Sabo was popularly known as the King of Death Row. But the real point is that Mumia should never have been arrested, tried or convicted. And our fight is to free Mumia, *now!*

The courts do not sit in judgment and rule in isolation. There has been and continues to be a concerted effort by all wings of the capitalist class—represented by both the Democratic and Republican parties—to see Mumia executed. It will take the social power of organized labor and its allies to create the type of pressure needed to obtain Mumia's freedom—a mass movement centrally based on the power of the working class. The power to withhold labor—to strike. Imagine what it would mean if New York transit struck—not only to secure a decent wage, health care and job conditions, but to



WV Photo

**August 1995: PDC-initiated labor-centered mobilization in New York City, part of international outpouring of protest that helped stay executioner's hand.**

demand Mumia's freedom!

The danger faced by Mumia today began back in 1969 when he was a 15-year-old spokesman for the Black Panther Party, targeted by the FBI's murderous COINTELPRO campaign. The message to the Black Panther Party by FBI director Hoover was: "The Negro youth and moderate[s] must be made to understand that if they succumb to revolutionary teachings, they will be dead revolutionaries." This was the policy of the Democratic Party president, Lyndon Johnson, and his attorney general, Ramsey Clark. Because Mumia appeared and spoke in public at the age of 15 and 16, the FBI put him under daily surveillance. They put him on the Security Index, which was then the version of a terrorist list—those to be rounded up and thrown into a concentration camp if there is a national emergency. Despite the state's efforts shown in some 900 pages of FBI COINTELPRO files on Mumia, which the PDC secured on Mumia's behalf, the state could not come up with even one offense to pin on him.

Mumia's case is a textbook case of police frame-up, an object lesson in the class nature of the capitalist state, which is by no means neutral. The state is an instrument for the organized violence by one class, the capitalist class, defending the profit system—against the working people, against minorities. In the United States, the segregation of the majority of

the black population at the bottom of society is key. This state violence is expressed in the terror and frame-ups carried out by racist, brutal, corrupt police and enforced in the capitalist courts.

Understanding this, and acting on this understanding, provide the only way forward to victory—to Mumia's freedom. While all legal proceedings and legal remedies must be pursued on Mumia's behalf, we cannot have any illusions in or reliance on the capitalist courts, nor in bourgeois politicians, whether they be black or white, Democratic, Republican or Green. The fight to free Mumia must be undertaken independent of the racist capitalist state.

The capitalist injustice system is neither fair nor reformable. Demands for a new trial will not lead to Mumia's freedom. These demands only breed illusions in the capitalist courts, and these illusions demobilized a movement of millions around the world. They were raised by many so-called socialist organizations and their front groups, organizations such as the Workers World Party, the International Socialist Organization, Socialist Action and the like. The mass movement has to be built anew on the basis that Mumia's conviction and death sentence were politically driven, and that it is in the interests of all working people, black and white, citizen and immigrant, to join together and fight for his freedom. The fight for Mumia's freedom is part of the fight for black equality in America, which

itself is part of the broader fight against the capitalist system.

That truth has been shown over two decades of court appeals in Mumia's case. His case has been through the Pennsylvania courts to the U.S. Supreme Court three times, including three post-conviction evidentiary hearings. Each and every court has rejected evidence of Mumia's innocence, evidence of police and prosecutorial frame-up, of trial and appeal proceedings which denied even a scintilla of due process. And over the past three years, courts—federal and state—refused to consider the confession of Arnold Beverly that he, not Mumia, shot and killed police officer Faulkner. Federal court judge Yohn overturned Mumia's death sentence over three years ago. But while the government appeals, Mumia is still on death row, 23 hours a day, locked in solitary in a cell which he has described as if you're living in a bathroom.

### Mumia Was a Marked Man

So I want to talk a little bit about what happened on the early morning hours of 9 December 1981. The prosecution's story is a pretty simple one, and that story has been exposed over and over as false—as lies based on witnesses who were threatened or bought, on non-existent ballistics evidence and on a totally fabricated confession invented by police some two months after the shooting. According to the D.A., two people were on the street corner at Locust and 13th in Philadelphia at approximately 4 a.m.: Mumia's brother Billy Cook and police officer Daniel Faulkner. Mumia reportedly ran across the street when he saw his brother being beaten by the cop. Then, according to the police, Mumia—some 26 years old, known for his mild manner and level-headedness—supposedly shot the cop in the back. Then the cop shot back at Mumia, and then Mumia stood over the fallen cop and shot him "execution style" several times in the head. This is all lies—even by close examination of the cops' and D.A.'s own "evidence."

Now, to understand the frame-up of black radical journalist Mumia Abu-Jamal, you need to remember COINTELPRO and some of the particulars of Philadelphia. In many ways it's a Southern city up North. The Philly police and its intelligence division provided a model for the FBI's COINTELPRO. Mumia was personally very well-known to the Philly police and the FBI as a key founder and leader of the Philly Black Panther Party. He was known for things like protesting the December 1969 Chicago cop and FBI murders of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark and for mobilizing students to

**Artist's depiction of attorney Rachel Wolkenstein being ordered to jail by Judge Sabo at 1995 hearing seeking overturn of Mumia's conviction.**



change the name of Benjamin Franklin High School to Malcolm X High School. Also for writing for the Black Panther national newspaper and then becoming an award-winning radio journalist, exposing the rampant cop brutality, including the attacks on the MOVE organization and the frame-up trial of the MOVE 9.

The Philadelphia Police Department is also uniquely the only police department in the country that the federal Justice Department tried to put into receivership because of its racial bias, police brutality and corruption. That was 1979. At the time of the murder of Faulkner in 1981, there were at least *three* ongoing federal investigations into police corruption, including police and mob connections. Police working as FBI informants were victims of hits in the early '80s. A former federal prosecutor acknowledged that the Feds had a police informant whose brother was a cop, just as Faulkner had a brother who was a cop.

An FBI informant who worked the prostitutes in the red light district, under police protection, confirms that at the time of Faulkner's shooting the word was out that the Feds had a police informant. The commanding officer of the Central Police Division, where the murder of Faulkner took place, the chief of the homicide division and one Inspector Alfonzo Giordano were all under investigation at the time on federal corruption charges. These cops were literally the chain of command in the frame-up of Mumia.

Inspector Giordano was the ranking officer on the scene. He was the central witness against Mumia at the preliminary hearing after Mumia's arrest. He not only was one of the cops under investigation for corruption, but he had been Frank Rizzo's right-hand man. Rizzo had been Philadelphia police chief and then became a notorious mayor. Giordano was involved in the daily surveillance of Black Panther Party members, leading the police

"Stakeout" squad in the 1970 attacks on the Black Panther Party headquarters. And Giordano was also the police supervisor of the year-long siege of the MOVE Powelton Village house through 1978. He knew just who Mumia was.

It is with these facts in mind that the confession of Arnold Beverly must be considered. Beverly states that he and another man were hired by the police and the mob to murder Faulkner, and that Faulkner was a problem for the corrupt police and the mob because he interfered with the graft and payoffs in the Center City area.

The proof of Mumia's innocence is more than Beverly's confession or the lie detector test that Beverly passed. It is the volumes of previous, internally contradictory witness testimony, of physical evidence that did not fit the prosecution's story but which clearly supports Beverly's version of what happened on 9 December 1981.

Faulkner was shot and killed by more than one hired hitman in the Center City red light district as the after-hours clubs were closing. Billy Cook confirms that there was a plan to kill Faulkner that night and that the other person in his car, Ken Freeman, was involved in that plan. Witnesses said that a second person was in Cook's car and ran away. Many police were either on the scene or close to the scene to make sure the hit went off without any problems. This included members of the police Stakeout unit and undercover cops.

### Prosecution's Web of Lies

Even with police and prosecution threats and favors at the time of the 1982 trial, no witnesses testified that they saw Mumia actually shoot Faulkner, and only one witness, the prostitute Cynthia White, testified that she thought she saw a gun in Mumia's hand when he ran to the scene. Since then, several other prostitutes have sworn that she admitted she lied due to police and prosecution threats and favors.

Witnesses have said that the shooter ran away, and some five witnesses, including two of the cops, have said that the shooter wore a green army jacket. Both Beverly and Freeman were wearing green army jackets that night. But Mumia was wearing a red quilted ski jacket with wide vertical blue stripes, and Billy Cook wore a blue Nehru-style jacket with brass buttons. There is no green army jacket in any of the police evidence.

Beverly states that Faulkner was shot and killed before Mumia ever got on the scene and that Mumia was not shot by Faulkner but by another police officer. Homicide cops on the scene told the medical examiners that Mumia was shot by an arriving police officer. That evidence was suppressed. A witness said that Faulkner's gun was still in his holster when he was taken away. And, moreover, the gun that was allegedly Faulkner's was likely a "throwaway"—it was inoperable and dirty.

The available ballistics and blood evidence at the scene is contrary to the prosecution's frame-up version of what happened. The trajectories are wrong—the ballistics supports more than one shooter of Faulkner. The bullets and bullet jackets found do not fit with the prosecution theory. There is absolutely no evidence that Mumia's gun was fired that night. And Mumia's wounds do not fit at all with him being shot by Faulkner. The Stakeout officer who purportedly found Mumia's gun in fact testified at trial that the bullets in Mumia's gun were of a different make than those listed even on the cops' own ballistics report.

So what else happened on the scene after

Faulkner was shot? The cops tried to kill Mumia. He was shot in the chest. He was taken and rammed into a light post and then taken in a police van. Giordano beat Mumia in the police van. He later said that Mumia had confessed to shooting Faulkner and throwing his gun on the ground. The other cop who was in the van with Giordano said there was no such confession.

Giordano arranged the supposed identification of Mumia by the cab driver, Robert Chobert, who became a witness having been promised favors and protection by the police. Later, Chobert admitted that he never saw the shooting. And Giordano also was the first cop who reported that Mumia's gun was found on the street. According to the police radio records, this was some 14 minutes after hordes of police had arrived on the scene, thus contradicting the official police story that Mumia's gun was found within a minute. Giordano's intention was to finish Mumia off by taking him to police headquarters for further questioning. Mumia's only crime was that he survived the cops' attempt to kill him, too.

To complete the picture: Despite Giordano being the senior officer at the scene, despite allegedly hearing Mumia confess and finding the murder weapon (and testifying to that in a preliminary court hearing), Giordano never testified at Mumia's trial. In fact, he was put on desk duty in about May 1982 while the trial was about to take place, and he resigned from the police force the day after Mumia's trial was over. In 1986, he copped a plea on federal charges based on his receiving tens of thousands of dollars in illegal payoffs during the period of 1979-80, and he didn't spend a day in jail.

Mumia's former lawyers, so-called radical leftist lawyer Len Weinglass and Dan Williams, found this evidence too hot and unbelievable. Williams said it could lead to actually arguing that the police knowingly framed up an innocent man! Now I don't have to tell people here that not only is this not unbelievable, but it's the reality of the cops and the courts. And furthermore, just for some empirical fact, as we litigated the 1995 post-conviction hearing in Philadelphia in the summer of 1995, daily we shared the headlines in the papers with the exposés of cop frame-ups of blacks on false drug charges, of which over 300 cases were overturned. Then of course there's the L.A. Ramparts case, the Boston cop with mob ties, and more recently in the news, two New York homicide detectives who murdered while on Mafia payroll.

There is more, much more that the investigation that I and Jon Piper, with some help from comrades in the PDC, turned up, none of which has yet been presented

in court. It's filed in court, but the court has refused to hear it.

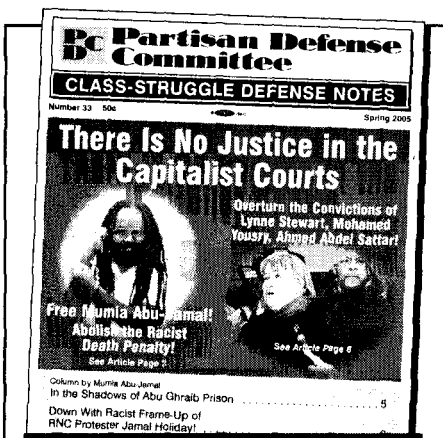
## Mobilize to Free Mumia!

Now, what is the significance of the Beverly evidence and why has it been suppressed? There is a really simple answer: It exposes the fraud that the American legal system can provide justice. It demonstrates the unity of purpose of the cops, the prosecution and the courts to uphold the capitalist rulers' interest. It makes it clear that the injustice to Mumia was not the action of one rogue cop, or prosecutor or judge, but the entire functioning of the so-called criminal justice system, the capitalist system of injustice. Democrats, including former mayor, former D.A., now-Pennsylvania governor Ed Rendell and former president Clinton, as well as Republicans are united in seeking Mumia's execution, no less than they are united in increasing government repressive powers, in seeing leftist attorney Lynne Stewart locked away for life, and, most importantly, in continuing the capitalist system, which can only lead to increased poverty, racial oppression and war.

I want to make it clear that the courts will not free Mumia, nor grant him a new trial or new appeals on the grounds that are before them, without the weight of an international mobilization of the masses, centrally based on the labor movement. The power of international mobilization based on labor, from South Africa to Europe to the U.S., helped stay the hand of the executioner when Mumia was but ten days away from execution in August 1995. So now we need to mobilize again to exert the type of pressure that will impact this appeals court—a mass movement based on labor and its allies. That Mumia is innocent is the truth. That the capitalist state has spent decades framing him up is the truth. That the state will use its lying, corrupt, class- and race-biased forces to see Mumia dead is the truth. But we need to use those truths to bring out more power—social power—to fight for Mumia's freedom *now!* ■

**Send badly needed contributions for Mumia's legal defense, made payable to "National Lawyers Guild Foundation" and earmarked for "Mumia," to: Committee to Save Mumia Abu-Jamal, 130 Morningside Drive, Suite 6C, New York, NY 10027.**

**If you wish to correspond with Mumia, you can write to: Mumia Abu-Jamal, AM8335, SCI Greene, 175 Progress Drive, Waynesburg, PA 15370.**



**No. 33, Spring 2005**

**50¢ (24 pages)**

**Order from/pay to:**  
Partisan Defense Committee  
P.O. Box 99  
Canal Street Station  
New York, NY 10013-0099

## Fox Endorses *Memín Pinguín*, Disgusting Racist Stereotype

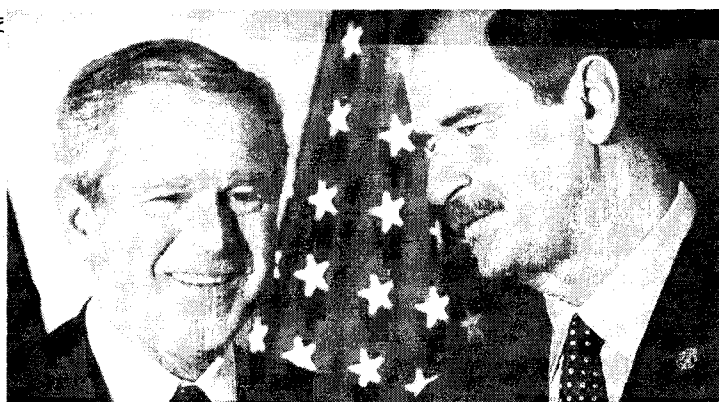
# Down With Anti-Black Racism! For Joint Class Struggle in Mexico and the U.S.!

We print below a translation of a leaflet issued by the *Grupo Espartaquista de México*, Mexican section of the International Communist League, on July 15.

After Fox's racist statement in May that "not even blacks" want to do the work done by Mexican immigrants in the U.S., on June 28 the government decided, as an example of "Mexican popular culture," to dedicate an official postage stamp to *Memín Pinguín*, a comic strip which has *grotesquely racist* illustrations against blacks, who are portrayed as subhuman creatures with crazed, ape-like features. This horrendous, stereotyped drawing comes directly from the epoch of slavery, which survived in the American South until 1865, when justification was sought for the brutal institution by portraying blacks as beings content with the state of things, and/or savages incapable of living in freedom. This stereotype continued to exist during the 20th century, especially under the brutal system of racial segregation (called "Jim Crow"), which dominated the American South. The Mexican *Memín* character is nothing other than an ignorant, lazy buffoon lacking self-respect. Today in the U.S., anyone who used that image of black people openly would be considered a likely supporter of the Ku Klux Klan. In Mexico, the authors of *Memín Pinguín* copied the same image, as well as that of *Memín's* mother—known in the U.S. as "Mammy," a docile house slave—and its spirit of condescending paternalism (reflected here also in the constant use of the diminutive "negrito").

Scandalously, the disgusting caricature has found support among many personalities of the "progressive" Mexican intellectual milieu (from the cartoonists of *La Jornada* to the writer Elena Poniatowska), who rushed to defend the indefensible *Memín Pinguín* as a matter of patriotic honor, resorting to completely

AP  
U.S. president  
George W.  
Bush with  
Mexican  
president  
Vicente Fox.



paternalistic (and racist) apologies for the cartoon's "charming *negrito*." The attitude of these cartoon "progressives" is the reflection of a society in which racist stereotypes are viewed as something natural and are recurrent in the Mexican press, TV and movies. After all, in the territory that today makes up Mexico there were also three centuries of slavery, with their corresponding racist ideological justifications, which necessarily left a mark on society's dominant mentality. Thus, the day the postage stamps with the *Memín Pinguín* illustration were put on sale, crowds of people lined up to buy them despite, or rather because of, the scandal over the racist illustrations (the edition of 750,000 stamps has sold out!). Obscenely, a new edition of the comic strip was just launched.

The capitalist rulers push the hypocritical ideology of nationalism—that we are all Mexicans and our interests are common—as a smokescreen that covers class distinctions and the counterposed interests of workers to the bosses, glorifying the most backward and openly racist aspects of "Mexicanity" and "popular culture." Thus, racist stereotypes of indigenous people as lazy and ignorant are also everyday occurrences. Anti-Semitism is so wide-

spread that *Mein Kampf* is one of the most "popular" and easily obtainable books, available at nearly every book kiosk in downtown Mexico City. In a particularly grotesque example of blindness to racist oppression, the cartoonist Rogelio Naranjo said: "In the U.S. displays of racism are different from those in Mexico. Here, poor people, not races, are discriminated against. Here, indigenous people are discriminated against not for belonging to another race, but for being poor" (*La Jornada*, 1 July). Tell that to the Zapatistas and the ten million indigenous people in the country! The Zapatista uprising in 1994 called the attention of people around the world to the reality of racist Mexican capitalism, which *adds* racial oppression to capitalist exploitation.

The denunciations of racism in *Memín Pinguín* by the imperialist Bush government—that a large part of the Mexican population rightly views as the most racist and immoral murderer of peoples in the world—are thoroughly hypocritical. The imperialists condemn the black population to the ghettos, prisons, unemployment, misery and police brutality. They also terrorize Mexican and Central American immigrants, unleashing the brutal *migra* and, as in the case of "governator" Schwarzenegger, supporting the

fascist, paramilitary "Minutemen." At the same time, they whip up racism through derogatory stereotypes of these immigrants. Racism occupies a privileged place among the points of ideological affinity between the Mexican and American rulers.

Capitalism, in Mexico as well as in the U.S., is inherently racist. Capitalist parasites, who live by exploiting the work of the population, see a danger to their regime in the joint struggle of workers that overcomes national and racial divides, and for that reason they foment racism every day as a means of keeping the workers divided by stupid prejudices. Those who want to take part in the struggle for workers' interests must declare a battle to the end against these stupid prejudices. Our comrades in the Spartacist League/U.S. fight to break down the divisions between black people and Mexican immigrants pushed by the impe-

rialist rulers; they fight to mobilize the entire working class to demand full citizenship rights for all immigrants, and simultaneously for immigrants and workers to take up the struggle for black emancipation as their own.

As a legacy of slavery, black people in the U.S. suffer from *special oppression*, as a race-color caste relegated to the bottom of society. This oppression has historically been the cornerstone of American capitalism. At the same time, blacks are integrated into key sectors of the working class. Due to their position as the most oppressed, but also the most conscious and experienced sector of the proletariat, revolutionary black workers are called on to play a *leading* role in the coming American socialist revolution. That's why for Marxists the struggle for black emancipation in the U.S. is absolutely central. The Mexican exploited and oppressed will find no bet-

ter ally in the struggle for their emancipation than the powerful, multiracial American proletariat, especially its black component. Unlike what nationalist ideologues assert, it is not with their exploiting "fellow countrymen," but with their class brothers and sisters, the exploited of the world, that workers share a fundamental interest: to put an end to this system of exploitation and oppression and replace it with the international rule of the workers.

The communists of the Grupo Espartaquista de México are proud to share with our comrades of the Spartacist League/U.S. the Marxist struggle against imperialism and racism, for the world workers commune. We call on workers to repudiate racist propaganda like *Memín Pinguín* and its official endorsement by the Fox government. For socialist revolution from the Yukon to the Yucatán! Workers of the world, unite! ■

# Join the Campaign to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal!

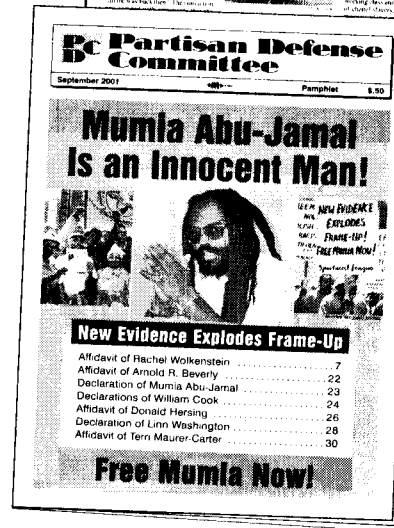
## Funds are urgently needed for legal defense!

Make a contribution today, payable to "National Lawyers Guild Foundation" (earmarked for "Mumia") and mail to: Committee to Save Mumia Abu-Jamal, 130 Morningside Drive, Suite 6C, New York, NY 10027.

**Organize protest!** Pass motions in your unions, campus, community and religious organizations demanding Mumia's freedom. Get your union or organization to make a contribution and join rallies and protests for Mumia. Publicize Mumia's case in your union or organization's newsletter.

**Spread the word!** Contact the PDC for copies of our pamphlet, *Mumia Abu-Jamal Is an Innocent Man!* This 32-page pamphlet arms activists in the struggle for Mumia's freedom with the explosive evidence which completely destroys the more than two-decades-long frame-up of this eloquent fighter for black freedom. It is available for 50 cents. Get the

PDC button: "Free Mumia Abu-Jamal! Abolish the Racist Death Penalty!"—\$1 each. Order the PDC video, *From Death Row, This Is Mumia Abu-Jamal*—\$15. Bundles of the 4-page brochure, *Mumia Is an Innocent Man: Free Mumia Abu-Jamal!*—\$2 for 25 copies. Order from, make checks payable to Partisan Defense Committee at our New York City address below.



### New Evidence Explodes Frame-Up

Affidavit of Rachel Wolkenstein	7
Affidavit of Arnold R. Beverly	22
Declaration of Mumia Abu-Jamal	23
Declarations of William Cook	24
Affidavit of Donald Hirsing	26
Declaration of Lynn Washington	28
Affidavit of Terri Maurer-Carter	30

**Free Mumia Now!**

### Partisan Defense Committee

P.O. Box 99, Canal Street Station, New York, NY 10013-0099  
P.O. Box 802867, Chicago, IL 60680-2867  
P.O. Box 77462, San Francisco, CA 94107-0462

e-mail: [partisandefense@earthlink.net](mailto:partisandefense@earthlink.net)

(212) 406-4252  
(312) 563-0442  
(510) 839-0852



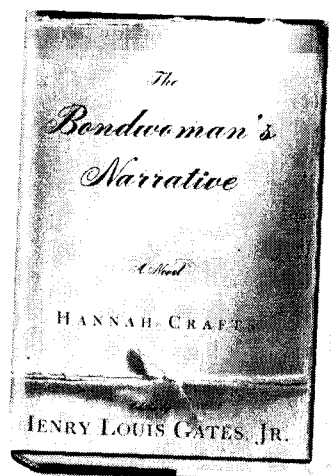
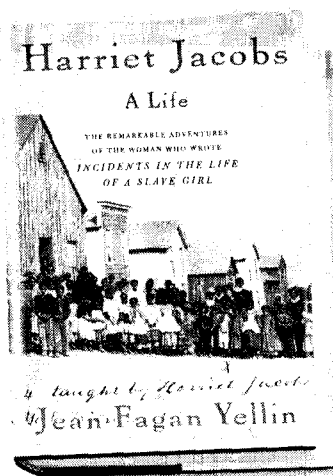
# Black Women's Narratives of Slavery, the Civil War and Reconstruction

Most stories of black women's lives under slavery have never been told. Slave masters routinely brutalized black girls and women, justifying their dehumanizing treatment by labeling them "sexual savages." Stripped, beaten, raped and forced to work as "breed sows," black women suffered a double burden under slavery because of their sex. Men wrote the majority of published accounts of slave life, the most well known being the classic *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. These slave narratives were often produced under the guidance of the anti-slavery movement, using "moral suasion" against slavery to influence a church-going audience, and therefore avoided the topic of sexual

by Carla Wilson

oppression so as not to shock the Victorian audiences they approached for aid.

More than one hundred book-length narratives were written before the end of the American Civil War. The mere existence of former slaves' writings and oratory indicted the theories of racial and mental inferiority that justified the slave system. In this way, the act of exposing the horrors of slavery became vital to the struggle against it. During the 19th century, journalists, schoolteachers and local historians interviewed former slave women, and in the 1920s and 1930s more than two thousand former slaves were interviewed by the Works Progress Administration Federal Writers' Project and by researchers at Fisk and Southern Universities. Most of the Slave Narrative Collection was kept in typescript in the Rare Book Room of the Library of Congress for nearly 40 years. This wealth of oral history was frequently dismissed



as spurious, but after the civil rights movement, and even more recently, due to film documentaries like PBS's *Unchained Memories*, they have found wider interest.

Two valuable slave accounts by women document the period leading up to the Civil War and through the defeat of Radical Reconstruction. One is a work of immense historical research, thoughtfully written by retired English professor Jean Fagan Yellin. *Harriet Jacobs: A Life* (Basic Civitas Books, 2004) expands on the events and people that shaped Jacobs' own *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself* (Harvard University Press, 1987). As recently as two decades ago, Jacobs' autobiographical sketch was considered an obscure work penned by white abolitionist and editor Lydia Maria Child. With Jacobs' authorship authenticated in the mid 1980s, hers became the first recognized slave narrative by a black woman.

The other story, *The Bondswoman's Narrative* (Warner Books, 2002), is a semi-fictional work that dates from the 1850s. Discovered at an auction by Harvard African American Studies scholar Henry Louis Gates Jr., the only person to even bid on the manuscript, the book spent months

on the *New York Times* best-seller list when it was published in 2002.

The fact that a black woman and former slave in the 19th century authored a novel has played a role in generating vigorous interest in this work of fiction. Its authentication meant that a black literary tradition existed much earlier than acknowledged. It also has much to do with the energetic quest for the identity of the author led by Gates, who rescued the book from historical oblivion.

*The Bondswoman's Narrative* represents an important

work because it deals effectively with the role of sexual and physical oppression of black women under slavery. Moreover, unlike many published slave narratives, this book is a manuscript in the author's own handwriting, offering a unique window into the mind of a female slave. Caste, color and class—linked to widely practiced miscegenation of master and slave—are at the core of this sentimental, gothic-style novel. An intriguing aspect of the story is the snobbery based on skin-color privileges and expectations of preferences in plantation life.

The main character of *The Bondswoman's Narrative* is Hannah, a North Carolina house slave serving as handmaid to a mistress passing for a white woman. She is well treated, observant and literate, attentive to every secret of her mistress. When Hannah's mistress' passing as a white woman is about to be exposed as a fraud, Hannah convinces her to escape North. They fail, and land in prison. Once captured, they are left at the mercy of the executor of the estate of the racist master, who had killed himself after learning he married a black woman.

The executor is a singular force for evil in the tale—the blackmailer of the mistress as well as a slave speculator who

trades on the value of light-skinned females, thought to be passing. As an estate manager, he searches through papers to expose the lineage of women and force them onto the “fancy market” in New Orleans’ high-toned bordellos. Eventually, the mistress dies from shock when faced with being sold. Hannah is then given to a government official’s wife in Washington, D.C., whose ignorance and impetuosity strike a portrait in which the slave is in a more decisive role. Hannah is made to read letters and draft replies for her barely literate mistress. After shrilly demanding a new face powder be fetched from the store, the mistress finds it turns her face black. In the aftermath of this makeup malfunction, the mistress is ridiculed throughout Washington and leaves for the North Carolina plantation, where she punishes Hannah by throwing her in with the field slaves.

Hannah is confronted with being a field hand and taken as a sexual partner to a darker-skinned black man with several female mates. Earlier asked to assist fellow slaves seeking freedom in the North, Hannah had told them, “their scheme looked wild and unpromising and that I feared the result would be unfortunate.” She counsels those in flight that they will only face bloodhounds and slave patrols, then bloody torture for their failure. In contrast, in reaction to her own dilemma, her response is swift: “To be driven into the fields beneath the eye and lash of the brutal overseer, and those miserable huts, with their promiscuous crowds of dirty, obscene and degraded objects, for my home I could not, I would not bear it.” She flees within 48 hours of being sent into the fields and huts, passing for a white boy, then a white woman, en route to freedom in the North. The impetus for her escape underscores the influence of racial disdain within the slave community and the inculcation of racist dogmas employed as justification for the “peculiar institution.”

### Incidents in the Life of an Anti-Slavery Heroine

Yellin’s *A Life* was heralded by less fanfare, but this biography powerfully reveals author and activist Harriet Jacobs as a remarkable fighter for the oppressed. Using a pseudonym, Linda Brent, Jacobs wrote her story while in domestic service with a prominent liberal New York family. Links between literacy, black self-sufficiency and political consciousness are key themes in Jacobs’ evolution from fugitive slave, to author, to activist teacher of new freedmen at the Jacobs School for black Civil War “refugees” in Alexandria, Virginia. The story of Harriet Jacobs is the story of an active abolition-

ist fighter who lived through the Civil War, struggled to implement the promises of Radical Reconstruction and witnessed the betrayal of these promises.

Born in 1813, Harriet Jacobs did not know she was a slave until her sixth year, when her mother died and she was willed to an infant girl. Her father lived only six years longer and Jacobs fondly recalls that, although he was illiterate, he became a skilled carpenter, trusted enough by his owners to work on houses in the country and town. From him, she and her younger brother, John, learned to prize education and freedom. Jacobs’ slave life in Edenton, North Carolina, reflected the hierarchy of slave society—whites ruled over blacks, free black people ranked above slaves, but the status of slaves depended heavily on their masters, their skin color and their work as domestic labor or as field hands. Her parents were classified as mulattoes, and her grandmother, Molly, a slave who operated the town’s Horniblow’s Tavern, worked as a cook, seamstress and wet nurse, living freely on site. Harriet learned from her grandmother how to sew as a youngster, and her mistress taught her to read and spell—skills that would eventually help transform her life.

When Harriet turned twelve, her life altered dramatically when she and her brother were sold to Dr. James Norcom. At the same time, her father was moved out to a plantation far from Edenton. Harriet found herself left to the whims of Norcom, a sexual tyrant who stalked her in an effort to make her his concubine.

Gilbert Studios



Harriet Jacobs in 1894. Jacobs’ life spanned the Civil War, Radical Reconstruction and its betrayal. Right: 1862 edition of her autobiographical *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.

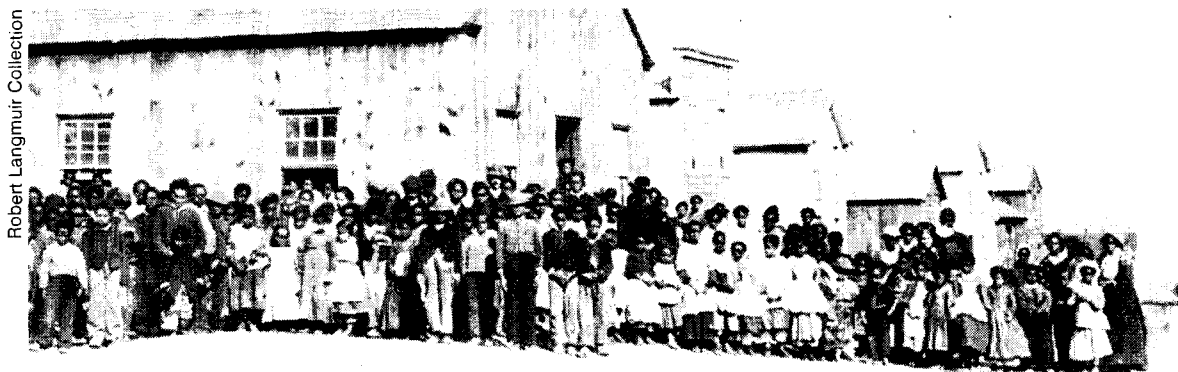
“He told me I was his property; that I must be subjected to his will in all things. My soul revolted against the mean tyranny. But where could I turn for protection? No matter whether the slave girl be as black as ebony or as fair as her mistress. In either case, there is no shadow of law to protect her from insult, from violence, or even from death; all these are inflicted by fiends who bear the shape of men,” Jacobs wrote.

Her account, published in 1861, revealed unspeakable acts of sexual coercion at a time when practically no one dared to speak of such things. She threw harsh light on the sexual brutality underlying reproduction of the slave system, where the violation of black women by white men stood side by side with the separation of families as a calculated, measured provocation aimed not only at women, but at the black men who necessarily reacted with deep humiliation and rage. As labor historian Jacqueline Jones has observed in *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow* (Vintage, 1986): “Whites often intervened in more direct ways to upset the sexual order that black men and women created for themselves, thereby obliterating otherwise viable courtship and marriage practices.... Masters frequently practiced a form of eugenics by withholding their permission for certain marriages and arranging others.” A master might prohibit a marriage for any highhanded reason, forbidding a male slave to seek a wife elsewhere, since their offspring would not belong to him but to

British Library



1864: School in Alexandria, Virginia founded by Harriet Jacobs for former slaves.



the wife's slaveowner. Jacobs, for example, had fallen in love with a free black carpenter who proposed to marry her, but Norcom refused the lover's effort to buy her out of slavery. It is impossible to know how commonplace Jacobs' story might have actually been.

For young Harriet, a desperate act of rebellion meant encouraging and accepting the advances of Samuel Tredwell Sawyer, a youthful white lawyer of the town's aristocracy who ranked above Norcom in social standing. She bore him two children over several years. As a pro-slavery advocate in the North Carolina legislature of 1830, he joined in pushing through a wave of repressive measures aimed at control of free blacks and whites as well. New laws imposed strict penalties against teaching slaves to read or write, the harboring of runaway slaves and aiding runaways or emancipating them.

Less than three weeks after the North Carolina legislature's measures passed, the Nat Turner Revolt occurred in 1831 in Southampton County, Virginia. Deeply religious from childhood, Nat Turner was a skilled preacher and possessed some influence among local slaves. He planned attacks with a band of approximately 60 followers. After killing the family of Turner's owner, the band spread the revolt, in two days killing a total of 55 white people. The revolt was soon crushed; 13 slaves and three free blacks were hanged immediately. Turner himself escaped into the woods, but was captured, hanged, skinned and a purse made of his skin. Dozens more blacks were also killed in retaliation. The news traveled sixty miles downstream to Edenton and the repression that followed was roused with fifes blaring and drums sounding as white mobs formed roving bands of armed slave patrollers imposing martial law.

Fearful that Turner's revolt would inspire others to arms, slave masters put Edenton under round-the-clock patrols, with house-to-house searches. Jacobs recalls how the fear of Turner's revolt prompted slave owners to conclude "that it would be well to give the slaves enough

of religious instruction to keep them from murdering their masters." Worried that any congregating of blacks meant seeds planted for insurrection, the slave masters reduced to rubble the meetinghouse blacks had built communally that served as their church; the congregation was forced to attend the white churches.

Harriet's own situation became more precarious as she grew sick and tired of trying to avoid sexual servitude under Norcom. Finally she fled to a crawlspace concealed beneath her grandmother's roof—a cell roughly seven feet wide, nine feet long and three feet high. There she would spend the next seven years, only leaving the house once. She subsequently escaped to the North in June 1842 and ended in the care of Philadelphia's Vigilant Committee, but as with many who traveled the Underground Railroad, she never divulged her route.

### Abolitionist Fighter

Once in the free states of the North, Jacobs lived in constant trepidation, fearing Norcom and his heirs would seek to claim their "property." Her immediate focus was on finding her children, who had been sent North as servants to their father's kin. At first, Jacobs avoided the abolitionist circles, after an initial encounter in Philadelphia included a warning from Reverend Jeremiah Durham that she should avoid revealing her sexual history because some might treat her with "contempt." Later, she joined her brother, John S., who had escaped Norcom before her and had become a well-known anti-slavery activist. He often shared platforms with abolitionist Frederick Douglass and also worked on the *North Star*. Eventually becoming a frequent letter contributor to the *New York Daily Tribune*, she gained courage to write her autobiography and later served as a correspondent for William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator*, as part of activist circles in Rochester, New York and Boston. Her views were no doubt shaped by her involvement with organized reformers from the anti-slavery and

women's rights struggles in Rochester.

These abolitionists were part of a broad, bourgeois social radicalization among the 19th-century heirs to the Enlightenment, Protestant religious ideals and the American Revolution. Although opposition to slavery was by no means as widespread in the 1830s as it was to become immediately before the Civil War, nonetheless many prominent men, such as the wealthy Tappan brothers of New York and Gerrit Smith, the biggest landowner in the North, had joined the movement by the middle of the decade. Garrison understood that the Constitution was a pro-slavery document but thought that the institution could be done away with peacefully through "moral suasion." The movement split in the 1840s around the questions of women's rights and how to end slavery. Garrison believed the pro-slavery U.S. Constitution should be abolished and that the North should expel the South. Another wing, represented by eminent men like the Tappan brothers, excluded women from office within their organization, was against women's rights and wanted to orient struggles toward political work in Congress. On the left wing of the abolitionist movement were militant ex-slaves, free blacks and white abolitionists—revolutionary fighters like Frederick Douglass and John Brown who became convinced that the fight must be against the whole system of slavery, by armed force, including arming black slaves. Douglass and the insurrectionist wing were thoroughgoing egalitarians and, therefore, were also the most consistent supporters of women's rights.

The Jacobs' move to Rochester coincided with her brother John's hiring by the abolitionists' Anti-Slavery Office and Reading Room. Jacobs stayed with her brother's friends, Isaac and Amy Post, frequent hosts to executive sessions of the Western New York State Anti-Slavery Society. A major feature of their work in the winter of 1849 was mounting protests against school segregation. At the time, the threat of a national compromise over slavery also loomed, as abolitionists countered pro-slavery arguments against

expanding slavery to territories seized in the 1848 Mexican War. Nonetheless, Congress passed the Compromise of 1850, which maintained slavery in these areas. Measures included a more brutal version of the Fugitive Slave Law, which made it a crime for federal marshals not to arrest an alleged runaway slave and for anybody to assist a runaway, while also denying a suspected runaway any legal rights.

Amid this climate, Jacobs finally got her freedom when her close friend and employer negotiated the purchase of her freedom for three hundred dollars. She concludes her autobiographical account a freedwoman. According to Yellin, the draft text ended with a tribute to John Brown, but Lydia Maria Child, her editor, convinced Jacobs to drop it. Was this editorial measure a reflection of continuing debate among the pacifist Garrisonians over what course to take in the unfolding conflict?

It was certainly to Jacobs' credit, and an indication of her political allegiances, that she recognized the significance of Brown's October 1859 raid on the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia (now West Virginia). In the battle that followed, Brown was wounded and ten of Brown's men—including two of his sons—were killed. Militarily defeated and hanged in punishment, Brown's political mission to destroy slavery by force of arms was spectacularly brought to conclusion by more than 200,000 freed slaves who fought in the Civil War.

At the outset, the "war between the states" was being fought only to "preserve the Union," and President Abraham Lincoln only opposed the extension of slavery. Karl Marx understood that the Civil War was at root a "conflict between the system of slavery and the system of free labor." Abolitionists sought to transform the war into a war of emancipation. Frederick Douglass insisted: "*Let the slaves and free colored people be called into service, and formed into a liberating army, to march into the South and raise the banner of Emancipation among the slaves.*" It took two years of ignominious defeats led by politically unreliable Union Army generals to convince Lincoln of the necessity of freeing the slaves. After it became clear that the North could not win in any other way, he declared on 22 September 1862 all slaves in the Confederacy would be free on the first of January, 1863. Almost as important as freedom itself was the government's decision to form regiments of black soldiers. About 180,000 black soldiers served in the Union Army and as many as 29,000 men joined the Union Navy. This helped to turn the tide of battle. The Civil War and Reconstruction

broke the class power of the slave South. It was the last great bourgeois revolution, the second American Revolution; the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments were the legal codification of the revolutionary gains won at riflepoint by the interracial Union Army. The war and its aftermath ushered in the most democratic period for black people in U.S. history, underlining that a truly egalitarian radical vision of social reconstruction ultimately could not be fulfilled by a capitalist ruling class.

### Civil War Years

Harriet Jacobs' role in the anti-slavery struggles and in the emerging Freedmen's Bureau was that of a political field worker. In October 1861, after Union General William Tecumseh Sherman led his troops in an attack on Confederate Fort Walker on Hilton Head Island, a decisive step was made in the Civil War. Sherman's army drew behind it hundreds of former slaves who set up camps on the Sea Islands along the Carolina Coast. Union authorities set up a Department of the South, taking over some 195 plantations, employing 10,000 former slaves to raise cotton and auctioning land off to Northerners and a few freedmen with a bit of money.

Sherman's occupation of Port Royal, South Carolina, became a starting point for the abolitionists and slaves to work together on Southern terrain. Historians have called this "Port Royal Experiment" a "dress rehearsal for Reconstruction." As W.E.B. DuBois later observed in *Black Reconstruction in America* (Atheneum, 1983): "The Negroes were willing to work and did work, but they wanted land to work, and they wanted to see and own the results of their toil. It was here and in the West and the South that a new vista opened. Here was a chance to establish an agrarian democracy in the South." It became clear to Jacobs that it was in places like Port Royal that the future of her people would be determined. She looked at reports from Port Royal and turned her eyes toward Washington. In the spring of 1862, Lincoln had not yet issued his Emancipation Proclamation, but in states that remained loyal to the Union, Congress had designated as "contrabands of war" any men, women and children escaping from Southern masters.

Jacobs' moving report of "Life Among the Contrabands," printed in the *Liberator*, details the chaos among these "refugees." She spent the spring and summer in Washington, setting up hospitals with the newly established Freedmen's Association. Her work often entailed a struggle against the civilian and military hierarchy in the refugee camps. The government-appointed superintendent of

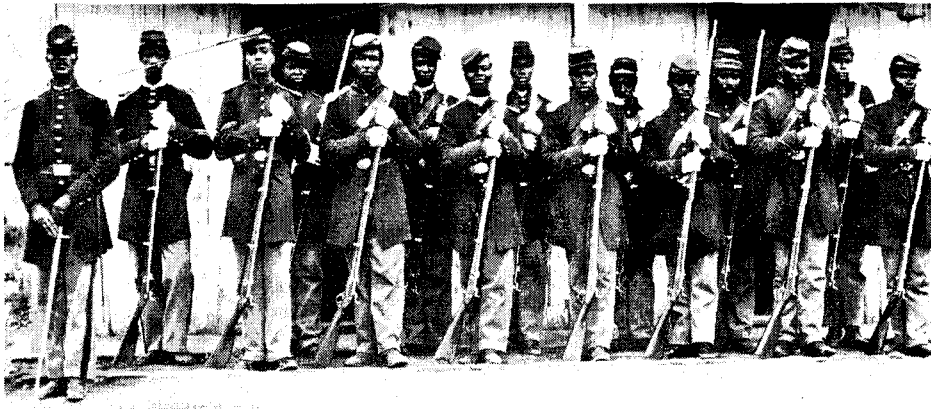
"contrabands" registered and hired people out as workers, with little attention to their needs. Jacobs spent her mornings in a small ground-floor room where "men, women and children lie here together, without a shadow of those rites which we give to our poorest dead. There they lie, in the filthy rags they wore from the plantation. Nobody seems to give it a thought. It is an everyday occurrence, and the scenes have become familiar."

Later that year, she moved to Union-occupied Alexandria and while distributing supplies of clothing and food, Jacobs began to envision a sustained mission. She would produce several letters over the next four years of work, articulating the freedmen's dreams for equality, land, education, jobs and housing. In lengthy letters to Lydia Maria Child she reported what she'd seen of black life, confident her writings would be printed in the abolitionist press. With Alexandria under Union occupation the people still suffered humiliations: "In return for their kindness and ever-ready service, they often receive insults, and sometimes beatings, and so they have learned to distrust those who wear the uniform of the U.S.," she notes. And, allowing herself a moment of outrage: "Oh, when will the white man learn to know the hearts of my abused and suffering people!" By midsummer, the federal superintendent in Alexandria was replaced, with improvements instigated from her collaboration with the Freedmen's Association.

In the summer of 1864, as Union Armies drew closer to taking Richmond, black "refugees" were drafted in response to threats on Alexandria, joining Union forces to defend the city against the Confederacy. Jacobs and her daughter Louisa organized the first commemoration of British West Indian Emancipation, featuring the presentation of a flag to the Colored Hospital—named L'Ouverture for the Haitian liberator—that had recently opened as a receiving place for the Colored Division of the Ninth Army Corps. She presented the flag to the surgeon in chief, addressing herself to black men in Union blues:

"Soldiers, what we have got came through the strength and valor of your right arms. Three years ago this flag had no significance for you, we could not cherish it as our emblem of freedom. You then had not part in the bloody struggle for your country, your patriotism was spurned; but to-day you are in arms for the freedom of your race and the defence of your country—to-day this flag is significant to you. Soldiers you have made it the symbol of freedom for the slave."

The Alexandria celebration was among many commemorations at which black fighters began to forge a sense of struggle not only for an end to slavery, but also to



Library of Congress

**Soldiers of the 107th U.S. Colored Troops at Fort Corcoran, near Washington, D.C. Black soldiers were key to Union victory in the Civil War.**

claim equal rights as American citizens.

Through the remaining days of the war, Jacobs volunteered in Alexandria as a visiting relief worker in the camp and in the hospitals. Freedmen there had already begun building a school and meetinghouse, which she pushed to find funding for at the first congress of the Women's National Loyal League. Jacobs coordinated aid with the goal of opening a free school under black leadership, volunteering her daughter Louisa and Virginia Lawton, the daughter of old Boston friends, as two "colored teachers." Jacobs School's doors opened to 75 students in January 1864. Given her name recognition among readers of *Incidents*, the school was featured in the reform press, with Alexandria becoming a regular stop on tours of the conquered South. A photo of Jacobs among her charges was carefully taken to publicize the ability of former slaves to become exemplary citizens. At the time, the photo hung prominently in the offices of the *Freedman's Record*. By the end of March 1865, Congress established the Freedmen's Bureau, putting it in charge of relief and oversight for former slaves in the South.

### Radical Reconstruction Overturned

Harriet and Louisa Jacobs later went to Savannah, where, Yellin notes, "both control of the schools and control of the land were at stake." Against local government resistance, they opened the Lincoln School, a black-run institution, and attempted to set up an orphanage and home for the elderly. Military rule ended just before Jacobs and her daughter arrived and, though posing as a protector, the Union Army also would be wielded to aid the city's powerful elite and stymie black efforts at freedom. The land question features in many of Jacobs' dispatches because the land with freedmen's settlements where schools were located

was soon turned over to their old masters. Louisa's Lincoln School survived, but by January 1866, all freedmen were ordered to sign contracts for their labor.

The brief labor contracts, Jacobs wrote, "are very unjust. They are not allowed to have a boat or musket. They are not allowed to own a horse, cow, or pig. Many of them already own them, but must sell them if they remain on the plantations." The black population was disarmed. Backed by the Freedmen's Bureau, "free labor" meant that most blacks worked in cotton production, suffering working conditions akin to slave exploitation of prewar years. In exchange for backbreaking field work, the freedmen gave the former masters two-thirds of the crop, kept a third, then saw rations and rent deducted, resulting in a cycle of debt bondage.

However, Reconstruction posed a possibility of socially revolutionary transformations in the South: the regional ruling class, based on land and slaves, had been militarily defeated; under the occupying Northern power, black men and women, formerly slaves, exercised political rights for the first time in the South. Before the defeat of Reconstruction, many political offices in the South were held by black men.

Reconstruction not only brought about voting rights for black men and even many poor illiterate Southern white men but also ushered in the establishment of the South's first public schools, liberalized the South's barbaric penal code and reformed the planters' property tax system. These measures allowed for real prospects for schooling, land and jobs for black freedmen. But Northern capitalists betrayed the promise of Reconstruction, allowing it to be physically smashed, aided by forces such as the Ku Klux Klan. In 1877, the last of the Union troops were withdrawn from Southern occupation, marking a compromise that put Ruther-

ford B. Hayes in the White House. From this defeat of Reconstruction grew the postwar Southern system of sharecropping, poll taxes, chain gangs, lynch law and "separate but equal"—i.e., unequal—Jim Crow facilities.

During Reconstruction, Jacobs and other female abolitionists working as teachers risked their lives to participate in freeing black people from the chains of bondage—their fight for free quality education was put front and center. But the sharpest debate raged over the question of land ownership. Freedmen and destitute white Unionist Southerners wanted the secessionists' estates confiscated, as at Port Royal, and distributed to them. Triumphant Northern rulers, however, would not permit an attack on "property rights," particularly as Northerners and Northern banks were grabbing up a good deal of Southern property. Intensive exploitation of black agricultural labor was allowed as the only way to rebuild the Southern economy, rather than industrial development or capital investment in modernization of agriculture.

This failure and betrayal of Reconstruction perpetuated the oppression of blacks as a color caste at the bottom of American capitalist society. This racial division, with whites on top of blacks, has been and continues to be the main historical obstacle to the development of political class consciousness among the American proletariat. It will take a third American Revolution, led by a multi-racial workers party against capitalism itself, to break the fetters on blacks, women and all the oppressed.

Jacobs served with valor in the anti-slavery battles through Radical Reconstruction, but her story also fell victim to its defeat. At the time of her death in 1897, her name was barely remembered in the Boston abolitionist circles she once frequented. Even in her obituary, the Jacobs School and her relief work during the Civil War and Reconstruction were completely omitted. As the years passed, the memory of Jacobs faded and photos and records of her Alexandria school were lost. Even her book came to be seen as Child's.

Anyone who has ever wondered how black people managed to struggle and survive the hideous tortures meted out during slavery and afterward would gain a lot from reading these books. They offer inspiration to a new generation of fighters facing the daunting task of toppling the dominance of capitalist exploitation and sexual oppression today. Though the Civil War smashed slavery, the dreams of men and women like Jacobs remain to be realized. Finish the Civil War—For black liberation in a workers' America! ■



# AIDS in America: Racism, Poverty, Bigotry

We reprint below a slightly edited and abridged presentation by comrade Karen Cole at a Spartacist League forum in New York City on 17 February 2005.

You can't begin to talk about any aspect of AIDS in any country or area of the world without placing it in an international context. For over two decades, this disease has brought massive misery and death to broad sections of the world, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, but also in Asia and Latin America. Over the last 22 years, over 65 million people have been infected worldwide. The desperate fight to obtain anti-retroviral drugs has become a vehicle for social struggle and has mobilized thousands of youth in South Africa. Nevertheless, at the end of 2003, only about 1 percent of the four million people who need anti-retroviral drugs in Southern Africa get them. No country on any continent has been untouched, and with the continuing spread of AIDS in Russia, China, South Asia and many other countries, much is still unknown, and there is no end in sight.

The possibility of bringing this source of so much misery and death under control, to extend the treatments that are currently available to all those who need it—this essential task is undermined every step of the way by the reactionary capitalist system. In its epoch of imperialist decay, capitalism is a hideous, profit-driven system, propped up by brutal racial and sexual oppression. This is an economic system where those few who

own the means of production exploit the masses that produce all the wealth. The only counterweight to the unrestrained greed of the ruling class is the working class fighting in its own interests and the interests of the oppressed. It is our task to build an internationalist, vanguard working-class party that will seize the means of production and make a revolution that will lay the basis for building a society based on human needs and not on private profit—a party like the Bolshevik Party that led the 1917 Russian Revolution.

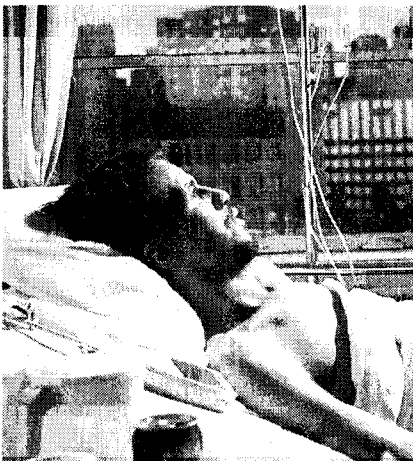
It's not that elements of the capitalist class are incapable of making decisions that provide benefits for more than themselves, but *their actions must always be ultimately consistent with their self-preservation as an exploiting class*. So, every step forward is paid for with persistent world poverty and bloody wars. The scientific problems of eliminating HIV are quite staggering. The HIV virus mutates and develops strains that are resistant to every anti-retroviral drug developed. New strategies must be continually coordinated and systematically researched and developed. The most rational and thoroughgoing weapon would be a vaccine, as has been used effectively against smallpox, polio, hepatitis B and other devastating viruses. But as late as 1994, the U.S. government was spending less than \$100 million per year on development of a vaccine, and the funding is tightening this year.

Vaccines are long-term, high-risk, low-profit projects. So, much remains unknown about AIDS for reasons that have nothing to do with the complex biological

facts of the virus. The advancement of medical science in general is thwarted by the chaos of capitalism and its drive for immediate profits. Compounding these obstacles are the prejudices and bigotry fomented by an irrational, rotting capitalist economic system. For example, the oppression of women that underpins every class society means that women are increasingly bearing the brunt of the pandemic. For instance: an anti-HIV microbicide, an ointment that a woman could apply to herself, with or without the knowledge of her sexual partner, has not yet been developed, and is still years away. Around the world, even treatment with AZT or nevirapine (which have been around for many years) to prevent mother-to-child transmission, is still not readily available. Why? Because in most of the world today, women continue to be the slave of the slave, economically dependent on her spouse, isolated in the home, with lives considered of lesser value.

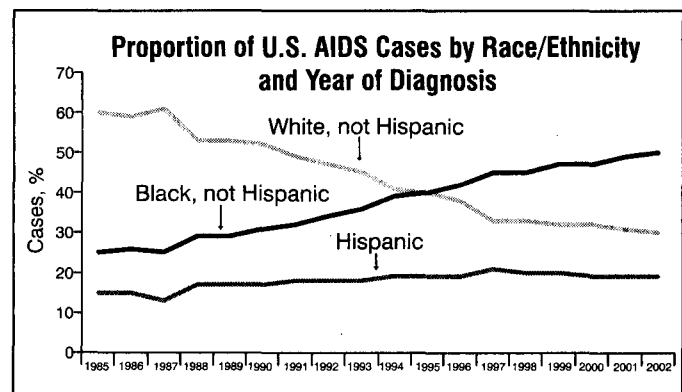
The U.S., which is among the most advanced, industrialized capitalist countries, with some of the most technologically sophisticated medical research, has not been able to eliminate HIV infections. Every country has its peculiar characteristics shaped by the history of its class society. Effective control of HIV requires great medical resources, not to mention clean running water, which poverty-stricken countries in Asia and Africa lack. But in the vastly wealthy U.S., access to quality health care for the masses of people has been deliberately neglected by the ruling class.

The counterrevolution in the Soviet



Reininger/Contact

Left: AIDS patient. AIDS is ravaging black America as shown by graph showing racial breakdown of new HIV infections in 2002.



Union, a historic defeat for the world working class, has emboldened the U.S. capitalist rulers to pursue their goal of worldwide domination through mass murder and torture, from Afghanistan to Iraq. No matter how much they hypocritically yell about “freedom,” the U.S. ruling class is the bloodiest ruling class in history and is the main enemy of the workers and oppressed worldwide. The U.S. has the widest gap in the entire world in the standard of living between rich and poor. It’s virtually the only developed country that has no universal medical coverage. Its rulers want to throw old people on the garbage heap, with the slashing of Social Security.

You may have read new statistics on the high infant mortality rate in the U.S. By the way, although high infant mortality is largely attributable to the lack of health care available to poor women, it is also partly due to the difficulty of getting an abortion in the U.S., as compared with other industrialized countries. Today, there is one abortion clinic left in the state of Mississippi, and it is under attack.

The United States has a hugely profitable pharmaceutical industry whose commercial interests conflict with the lives of millions of people around the world. In fact, the U.S. government continues to hold hostage funds for AIDS, and keeps a stranglehold on the pittance it divvies out in order to force its reactionary, religious agenda on the world. Funds for AIDS are tied to anti-abortion policies, and condoms are put way down the list after the “A” and “B” in the much-lauded Ugandan campaign against AIDS called “ABC.” “A” is for “abstinence,” “B” is for “be faithful,” and the “C” is for condoms.

In this country, millions of adolescents and children get federally funded abstinence-only sex-miseducation programs. These are not just repressive and totally useless for young people, but they

are deadly. Youth are given ignorant, lying, religious propaganda instead of the science-based contraceptive information they need to protect themselves from sexually transmitted diseases and from getting pregnant. For example, federally funded programs give youth false information, such as that tears and sweat can transmit HIV. Most dangerously, they overstate the failure rate of condoms and discourage their use. Recently, Texas A&M University surveyed 29 high schools regarding Bush’s much-vaunted abstinence-only education in his home state and found that these programs had no impact on teen behavior. These teens are left in ignorance when they do have sex, and they *do have sex*, as teenagers *naturally* do. It was reported in November that new federal guidelines for treating rape victims omit mentioning the option of the emergency contraceptive pill.

Anti-science, anti-evolution, faith-based programs mean death as well. National Institutes of Health (NIH) officials warn HIV/AIDS researchers to eliminate certain “key words” from funding proposals—including “sex workers,” “anal sex,” “needle exchange,” “abortion,” “condom effectiveness,” “gay,” “homosexual,” and “transgender”—to improve their chances of being funded.

### Capitalist Rulers Wage War on Working People, Blacks

The fate of specially oppressed sectors of society—black people, immigrants and women—is in large part determined by the course of class and social struggle. Coming out of the struggles of the civil rights movement was a brief moment of the broadening out of public health care, most notably the passage of the Medicaid and Medicare programs, however inferior and substandard. Today, massive cutbacks in Medicaid keep coming down the pike every year. Some 55 percent of people liv-

ing with AIDS rely on Medicaid. Because of federal cutbacks, nearly every state is cutting back on Medicaid coverage. This will impact HIV-positive people, not to mention poor people in general.

The deindustrialization of the major Northern cities over the last several decades meant that the black population, which had migrated in waves to the North for jobs in the first half of the 20th century, was now left with little in the ’80s. Over a million manufacturing jobs were lost during this period and over 2.6 million more have been lost since Bush took office. The capitalist class—which must accumulate profit through the exploitation of working people’s labor—ultimately had little use for those at the bottom when they finished looting what they could from them. As the “last hired and first fired,” the black population supplied, in the words of Karl Marx, a “reserve army” of unemployed labor for the American capitalists.

The color bar is a fundamental dividing line in American society, a key prop for obscuring the irreconcilable divide between the working class and the capitalist class. White workers and immigrant workers are told that black people are their enemy, not the bosses who exploit them all. Up until the last few decades, although black workers often held the most arduous industrial jobs, such as the coke ovens in steel, at least a layer had jobs with health benefits and a pension. These benefits were won because of decades of union struggle and many of these battles were integrated actions, where black and white workers fought side by side on the picket lines. Such integrated class struggle is the only way forward today.

The mass actions of the civil rights movement broke down Jim Crow in the South, but, when the protests came up against the hard economic reality and dehumanized ghetto conditions in the Northern cities, the movement hit the limit of what could be achieved without overthrowing the entire capitalist system. The pro-capitalist leadership of the civil rights movement channeled the struggles into the dead end of the racist Democratic Party.

We seek to build a multiracial, working-class party that will replace the current pro-capitalist labor leadership that only knows how to organize givebacks today. It will take a proletarian, international socialist revolution to complete the tasks of the Civil War, to extend to all oppressed sectors the fruits of their labor. That means seizing the means of production and taking state power from the capitalist class.

The capitalist class has sought to exploit workers at an ever higher rate by union-busting and by moving production



James Schnepf

Promoting potentially deadly ignorance about sex in youth: Federally funded programs push “abstinence before marriage” in schools, government pamphlets.



Painting by Robert Thom



**Horrific "scientific" experimentation on blacks. Left: Dr. Sims, considered "Father of Gynecology," preparing to operate on slave woman. Infamous Tuskegee study withheld treatment for black men with syphilis.**

CDC

to the non-unionized South and out of the country. Today in the U.S., a mere 8 percent of private industry remains unionized. Black workers still play a strategic role in the American economy and are disproportionately in union jobs. However, more and more, the black population has become an excess, surplus population for the ruling class. Just as HIV was beginning to infect the U.S. population, the "war on drugs" was being launched against black people with a brutal vengeance—a war of police repression and imprisonment aimed at the black and minority population. And now, over 20 years later, this has sent much of a generation of black men to prison.

The rate of HIV infection is actually increasing in the most recent period among certain sectors of the population in the U.S. In New York City, the financial center of the world, half of black men are unemployed and HIV infection rates are comparable to the Third World. The rate of HIV infection among women is rising dramatically in the U.S.—as it is everywhere in the world. When AIDS was first identified in the early 1980s in the U.S., religious and social bigotry contributed to AIDS being branded as a "white, gay disease." Now it is branded as a "poor black disease."

Last Tuesday, I heard Jacob Levenson, author of *The Secret Epidemic: The Story of AIDS and Black America*, speak at the Brooklyn Library. First of all, there are virtually no other books that focus exclusively on the history of AIDS among black people in the U.S. Levenson is a young, white journalist who took an interest in why AIDS in the U.S. had become a disease of black poverty. Also speaking was Mindy Fullilove from Columbia University. She was one of the first black health professionals in the mid '80s to try to address the rampant HIV infection which was sweeping the ghettos of the Bay Area, along with crack cocaine. AIDS in this black ghetto was totally ignored, although it is right next door to the gay, white ghetto of the Castro

District. Fullilove jumped into the fray because there were virtually no trained black scientists to consult at the time in the U.S. The researchers and community organizers were told patronizingly they were the "Third World component"—the intention was to relegate care for black people to a ghettoized back burner.

Black people's disproportionately high HIV infection rate in the U.S. was not unknown before then. Before the mid '80s, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) had published statistics that 74 percent of all female cases were black and Latino and 57 percent of pediatric AIDS cases were black. I looked back at Randy Shilts' excellent 1987 book, *And the Band Played On*, which recounts the vicious bigotry and government neglect that contributed to the deaths of thousands of gay men in the 1980s. He makes clear that key to dispelling the myth that AIDS was an exclusively "gay plague" was the evidence that intravenous drug users, who were often black and heterosexual, their spouses and children, as well as hemophiliacs, contracted AIDS. While the profit-driven blood bank businesses were trying to suppress the information, people were getting infected through transfusions. In other words, HIV is borne by blood, semen, vaginal secretions and breast milk, not the wrath of God against Sodom and Gomorrah, or, the more "polite," bigoted way to put it, a disease caused by a so-called "lifestyle."

But Shilts never addressed the impact of AIDS on the black inner-city populations. In our review of Shilts' book, we said: "AIDS, which was first recognized as a disease in gays, is being transformed into a disease of the ghetto, among the desperately impoverished and oppressed: the chronically unemployed, sometimes already homeless, often illiterate, already without any insurance for health care" (*Women and Revolution* No. 35, Summer 1988). The fight for black rights and freedom is central to the American workers revolution, and it's the task of a revolu-

tionary party to be a tribune of the people, as Lenin said, and instill this consciousness into all the struggles of the multi-racial working class.

### AIDS and Special Oppression

We communists fight against all manifestations of social oppression. Defense of democratic rights for homosexuals is part of the historic tradition of Marxism. Murderous bigotry against homosexuals stems from the oppression of women and the straitjacket of the bourgeois family. The reactionary, religious bourgeoisie says that the only legitimate sexual activity for workers is for reproduction of the next generation of workers. The family as an economic unit arose with the rise of class society, and the capitalist class uses the family to instill obedience to the bourgeoisie from generation to generation. More and more, the mythical icon of the monogamous family, enshrined with something called "family values," is used to club poor people over the head and to remind them that they are inadequate. This model has nothing to do with family life actually experienced by workers.

Let me say a word about the current media coverage of a new resistant HIV strain that rapidly leads to full-blown AIDS. While gay activists have expressed genuine concern about the decreasing use of condoms, the hysterical, not-so-thinly-veiled, anti-gay rhetoric escalated every day in the *New York Times* to a crescendo of statements by community leaders and commentators who called for vigilantism and criminalizing gay men as "murderers." One psychologist did at least note: first they don't let gays get married, and then they condemn them for having sex outside traditional marriage relationships.

We are for appropriate public health measures being taken that may override personal liberty when necessary, but legitimate fears of victimizing the victims loom, especially in this post-September 11 period, when civil liberties on every front are under attack. What has also

been glaringly revealed is that 25 years after having repeatedly predicted that a resistant HIV strain that develops quickly into full-blown AIDS could occur, and was in fact inevitable, the public health agencies don't even have the centralized databases that they need to proceed. Partly this is because of the chaotic patchwork of private doctors, laboratories and hospitals that may hold critical information, and partly because of rampant prejudice and discrimination that has not abated, and has forced gay people to fight for confidentiality.

As vilified as gay white men were and are for being "deviant" from the precious norms of bourgeois society, their relatively greater resources allowed them to fight for attention to the AIDS epidemic, especially when the spectre of infection in the larger population was posed. But black gay and bisexual men, IV drug users and their partners, enmeshed in hopelessly impoverished lives in disintegrating neighborhoods, were beneath vilification and faced death on the streets or death in prison.

*The Secret Epidemic* contrasts the gay, white San Francisco Castro District to the black areas of the San Francisco Bay Area in the early '80s. Black men were dying silently in the ghettos of San Francisco, Oakland and Richmond. Black and Latino community activists were isolated and had fewer connections to get money. There were few statistics on sexual behavior or drug use in the Latino Mission, black Western Addition or Bayview/Hunters Point that could inform an epidemiologically coordinated plan of attack. There had been virtually no serious scientific studies of black male/female sexuality in the U.S.—ever—because American medical "science" is often a reflection of the racist belief that black people are inferior, and "natural rapists" to be castrated and lynched. Such views reflect the origins of American capitalism, built on the backs of black chattel slaves.

Black women have been stereotyped as either asexual, selfless "mammies" of white children or sexually insatiable Jezebels, fair game for white men. In fact, as the revelation of Strom Thurmond's secret black daughter showed, from slavery until today, it has been a rite of passage for white men to treat black women as sexual property. When the pioneering Indiana University sex researcher Alfred Kinsey carried out his extensive field interviews back in the late 1940s, he told his co-researchers that he had to withhold his findings about black men because he recognized that publishing anything about their sexuality was too explosive; there was no way to address this issue without



Struggle for health care is key issue for American labor. Striking L.A. grocery workers, January 2004. Indymedia

stoking a violent, racist reaction in America. Slaveowners penned the American Constitution, which lauded liberty and the equal rights of all mankind, and the only way to reconcile such a contradiction was to deem black people less than human. Racism is the bedrock of American capitalism, along with the anti-poor, Puritan work ethic and fundamentalist, anti-sex religious reaction.

In the early '80s as the breadth of the AIDS epidemic began to be known, the black population was so beneath interest to the medical establishment, which was also so blinded by anti-homosexual prejudice, that, in 1981, when Dr. Arye Rubinstein wrote a paper for the prestigious *New England Journal of Medicine* documenting cases of AIDS in black children in the Bronx, his paper was rejected because the editors deemed it impossible that children could have a "homosexual disease." And they certainly weren't concerned that black children had any new, mysterious illness.

According to the CDC, the overall rate of HIV infection has slowed from 150,000 new cases a year in the mid '80s to the current estimate of 40,000 annually. Antiretroviral drugs, if you can afford them, have changed HIV infection into a chronic condition, rather than death, for many. The absolute number of new infections has stubbornly stayed the same for the last decade, but what has been changing is the percentage of black people infected. HIV infection has been decreasing overall in the white population in the U.S., but it is increasing among black people.

As of 2002, black people were half of the new HIV diagnoses reported. Blacks are over half of those tested late and diagnosed HIV-positive and thus will have a shorter life span, even if treated. The

leading cause of HIV infection among black men is sexual contact with other men, followed by injection drug use. The leading cause for black women is heterosexual contact, followed by injection drug use. Black and Hispanic women represent less than 25 percent of U.S. women, but account for 82 percent of female AIDS cases. The majority of black women with AIDS live in the Northeast and the South.

### AIDS and the Incarceration of Black America

We had an article in *Workers Vanguard* almost exactly ten years ago called "Lockdown U.S.A." (WV No. 618, 10 March 1995). In that article we said that 1.5 million were behind bars. Currently it's nearly 2.1 million. Today, nearly seven million people in the U.S. are in jail or are on probation or parole, and that's more than the population of the eight least populated states in the U.S. combined. There has been an explosive growth of prisons over the last three decades in the name of the "war on drugs." Escalating cop terror against the black masses is a social necessity when decent, livable jobs are removed.

These prisons, with their high-tech, security units, are the torture training grounds for the likes of Army Specialist Charles A. Graner, who used his years as a prison guard in the U.S. to train for Abu Ghraib in Baghdad. Graner is being sued by an inmate of the State Correctional Institution-Greene in Pennsylvania for putting a razor in his mashed potatoes, and, with other guards, beating him up and yelling "Shut up, n----r, before we kill you." This is the prison that holds today's foremost class-war prisoner, Mumia Abu-Jamal, on death row, because he is the voice of the voiceless, a fighter for black freedom.

It's important to state here that we consider drug use, prostitution, gambling and age of consent laws (as a few examples, there are others), all as "crimes without victims." In other words, the capitalist state's criminalization of these activities has nothing to do with the welfare of society and everything to do with regimentation and repression. The government should stay out of the bedroom. And drug use or addiction, depending on the circumstances, may be a health concern, but not a crime. Drug addiction, especially among ghetto youth, is fundamentally a reflection of hopelessness and a response to brutal oppression. As Marxists we know that this will not change until social reality changes. The road to a truly egalitarian society is through a socialist revolution.

To this day in the U.S., federal funds are banned for needle exchange programs, which are used all over the world to save lives. And of course, both needle exchange and condoms are banned or unavailable in almost all prisons, although the use of drugs and sexual activity are well known by all.

The state of Ohio, with its miles of empty shells of former steel mills and auto plants, announced they were opening their *fourth* women's prison in January because of rising drug convictions, reduced probation options and longer sentences. Nationally, women are imprisoned mainly for drugs, prostitution, burglary, fraud and larceny. In 1970 there were 5,600 women in prison; now there are some 100,000 and almost half are black. About one million women are under the control of the criminal justice system. Besides inadequate education, health care and drug treatment, probably the meanest aspect is the seizure of these women's children and restrictions against visitation. Most women in prison are mothers. In 2003, the Supreme Court ruled that prisoners with certain drug infractions could be denied *any* family visits. And for the sizable number of inmates who are functionally illiterate, this means they cannot even correspond with their family.

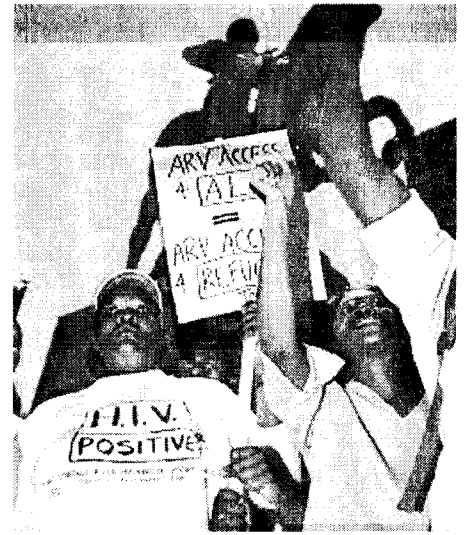
There is a growing ex-felon population and drug felons are banned for life from receiving welfare, that is, any cash assistance, and food stamps. Among other states, California, Illinois and Georgia enforce these lifetime bans. Forty-eight percent of women affected are black or Latina. Anyone with a drug conviction cannot get financial aid for any post-secondary education and is barred from public housing. Ex-felons, many of whom went to prison homeless, cannot even stay with relatives in public housing for fear of causing them to lose their homes, are barred from all sorts of job licensing—such as nursing attendant and childcare—

are tracked by authorities, virtually unemployable, stigmatized, and the family traumatized and destroyed.

Read the compelling book, *Life on the Outside: The Prison Odyssey of Elaine Bartlett*, by Jennifer Gonnerman. Elaine Bartlett is on a speaking tour around the city right now. She spent 16 years in prison in upstate New York, on a 20-to-life sentence, for delivering four ounces of cocaine in a sting operation—her first offense—and became an activist protesting the Rockefeller drug laws while still in prison. The book recounts the impossible barriers she faced when she finally managed to get out of prison. The fabric of her entire family had been irremediably ripped apart by her prison years. The New York State laws are still the harshest in the country, and the recent reforms that shorten the longest sentences only affect the smallest percentage of the incarcerated.

Regarding the rate of HIV infection in black women, I want to mention the "down low" media frenzy which has been hyped everywhere, from a titillating *New York Times* magazine cover story to the Oprah Winfrey show. The "down low" frenzy was provoked by J. L. King's book, *On the Down Low: A Journey into the Lives of "Straight" Black Men Who Sleep with Men*. The book purports to expose the phenomenon of HIV-positive, black, bisexual men who "cheat" on their wives. In fact, it is a backward religious piece, which reinforces bigoted stereotypes of so-called amoral gay men. For example, it purports to give women advice on how to detect if your partner is secretly on the "down low." Such a book, and the publicity around it, reflects the racist and anti-gay hysteria which portrays sinister, predatory and deceitful black men whose alleged uncontrollable sexuality leads them to prey on innocent women and their children.

Certainly, every variety of so-called "infidelity" in marriage is as old as marriage itself. Certainly, black gay and bisexual men face many reasons not to come out, and, on the other hand, nobody is going to oppose honesty in personal relationships. This sensationalized racist stereotype only serves to divert attention from the deep-rooted bigotry that prevents desperately needed AIDS funding for research, health care and education from being available. There is absolutely no evidence that the rate of homosexuality is any higher or lower in the black population than the white. Phil Wilson, of the Black AIDS Institute, points out that the *single biggest driver of the heterosexual spread of HIV to black women is the massive incarceration of black men*. He perceptively compares the U.S. prison system to the migrant worker mining



AFP  
South African AIDS activists at 2,000-strong march on Parliament in Cape Town to demand free anti-retroviral drugs, 16 February 2005.

industry in South Africa in the role it has played in fueling the AIDS epidemic, "where you take large groups of men and move them from their families for an extended period of time."

In America, as in South Africa, as everywhere, men who are forced to leave their homes for an extended period of time have new sexual partners, as do the women they leave behind. This serves to spread HIV among both the migrants in South Africa and men cycling in and out of American prisons, along with their partners. Particularly characteristic of *American* racism is the fact that the rigid racial segregation of black people magnifies the opportunities for infection within this besieged minority population.

## Democrats Paved the Way for Bush Reaction

Bush recently motivated the wholesale elimination of Social Security, in favor of a Wall Street crap shoot, by remarking that the current Social Security system is "unfair" to black people because they die before they can get the benefits. Wretched health care, in contrast to the privileged commodity set aside for the rich, along with early deaths by homicide and coyly named "police interventions" (this is what government statisticians call cops gunning down black people in the streets), has produced a system that condemns poor and black people across the income spectrum to shorter life spans. This life and death statistic is one of the most devastating indictments of the racial oppression of black people as a race-color caste in American society.

But two major attacks on poor women that marked the reactionary, post-civil



rights movement period were overseen by the Democrats and showed the cruelest contempt for black and poor women and children. The first was Jimmy Carter's overseeing of the 1977 denial of Medicaid to poor women for abortions, proclaimed to all with his cruel "life is not fair" speech. And, on the other end, it was Clinton in 1996 who led the charge, along with the Republicans, to ax, as he put it, "welfare as we know it."

Improvements in water quality and hygiene, from the early to late 20th century, narrowed the gap between black and white people's health status. But, beginning in the 1980s, the health gap has been widening, and black life expectancy went down between 1984 and 1990. Black people get less care, inferior care and at a later point in illness across the board.

In an extensive history of racism and health care in the U.S., *An American Health Dilemma: Race, Medicine, and Health Care in the United States*, the authors, two black physicians, W. Michael Byrd and Linda A. Clayton, refer to the "slave health deficit" which has characterized the class nature of the medicine-for-profit health system in the U.S. I want to also refer you to "Wealth Care USA" in the Spartacist League's journal *Women and Revolution* (No. 39, Summer 1991). The Slave Codes declared that slaves were subhuman, they were chattel, property like a mule. Women in particular were

treated like breeding animals and marriages were arranged and torn apart to fit the needs of the white owners. Since pseudoscientific rationalizations had to prop up slavery by "proving" that blacks in general were inferior, the health status of free blacks was as bad as that of slaves.

Mistrust of mainstream medicine among the black population is not a small factor in treatment. Conspiracy theories for AIDS abound. The Rand Corporation and Oregon State University just released a survey that found that 16 percent of black Americans think that government scientists created the disease, and slightly more than half say they believe a cure is being withheld from the poor.

For 40 years, the U.S. Public Health Service withheld treatment from black men with syphilis in Macon County, Alabama, who were told they were being treated for "bad blood" in the infamous "Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male." This so-called study continued until 1972. But it's not just Tuskegee; the "Father of Gynecology," J. Marion Sims, portrayed as an icon in every medical school, performed gynecological experiments on slave women between 1845 and 1852. He bought a slave woman for the purpose of experimenting on her, and he used no anesthesia with the racist justification that black people feel pain less. But the special oppression of the black masses is

not a conspiracy; in fact, conspiracy theories tend to disarm one from taking any action at all. Racism is necessary to the American capitalist economic system, which must be replaced by socialism.

### For a Socialist Future to Combat Poverty, Ignorance and Disease!

I mentioned early on in the talk that the counterrevolution in the Soviet Union was a historic defeat for the world working class. The planned economy, albeit degenerated, was overthrown, after having been undermined for generations by the Stalinist bureaucracy. However, the Bolshevik Revolution was the only successful workers revolution, and the vision and program of the Bolsheviks who made that revolution are models for anyone who wants to end this miserable capitalist system. You really need an international, planned economy to deal with poverty and disease, as well as all the myriad problems of this society. Then, for the first time, the modern gains of science can be put fully at the service of humanity.

Microbes are living organisms, and despite the creationists' babbling, they will continue to evolve, and we will have to continue to live with them. Access to quality health care should be a simple democratic right. It is a basic necessity like education, housing and a job. A planned, socialist economy, under the rule of the working class, would have one purpose—to provide for all in the best way possible. This degenerate, capitalist ruling class kills. It kills masses of people internationally through wars and starvation, and all in the service of maintaining its ruthless profit-driven economic system. It killed over a million and a half people in Iraq through a starvation blockade, and its neo-colonial occupation force continues to kill thousands of people. Here in New York, its cops gun down black youth in the streets and on the housetops of New York like Timothy Stansbury Jr., and while they are struggling to make a living like Ousmane Zongo. It kills because this is a desperate ruling class which has become a bar to human progress for over a century now.

Union struggle in this country in the recent period has centered around fighting for decent health care, as the behemoth "wealth care" industry attempts to shake more money out of the pockets of sick people. Free, quality health care for all is within the bounds of material possibility, but not under capitalism where profit rules. If there are no jobs, why educate people, why even keep people alive? We aim to build a revolutionary vanguard party that will sweep away capitalist rule and open the road for a decent world for all. Join us. ■

## SPARTACIST LEAGUE/U.S.

### Local Directory and Public Offices

Web site: [www.icl-fi.org](http://www.icl-fi.org) • E-mail address: [vanguard@tiac.net](mailto:vanguard@tiac.net)

National Office: Box 1377 GPO, New York, NY 10116 (212) 732-7860

#### Boston

Box 390840, Central Sta.  
Cambridge, MA 02139  
(617) 666-9453  
[bostonsyc@yahoo.com](mailto:bostonsyc@yahoo.com)

#### Chicago

Box 6441, Main PO  
Chicago, IL 60680  
(312) 563-0441  
[chicagospartacist@sbcglobal.net](mailto:chicagospartacist@sbcglobal.net)

#### Public Office:

Sat. 2-5 p.m.  
222 S. Morgan  
(Buzzer 23)

#### Los Angeles

Box 29574, Los Feliz Sta.  
Los Angeles, CA 90029  
(213) 380-8239  
[slycla@sbcglobal.net](mailto:slycla@sbcglobal.net)  
Public Office: Sat. 2-5 p.m.  
3806 Beverly Blvd., Room 215

#### New York

Box 3381, Church St. Sta.  
New York, NY 10008  
(212) 267-1025  
[nysl@compuserve.com](mailto:nysl@compuserve.com)

#### Public Office:

Sat. 1-4 p.m.  
299 Broadway, Suite 318

#### Oakland

Box 29497  
Oakland, CA 94604  
(510) 839-0851  
[slbayarea@sbcglobal.net](mailto:slbayarea@sbcglobal.net)

#### Public Office:

Sat. 1-5 p.m.  
1634 Telegraph  
3rd Floor

#### San Francisco

Box 77494  
San Francisco, CA 94107  
[slbayarea@sbcglobal.net](mailto:slbayarea@sbcglobal.net)

## TROTSKYIST LEAGUE OF CANADA/LIGUE TROTSKYSTE DU CANADA

#### Toronto

Box 7198, Station A  
Toronto, ON M5W 1X8  
(416) 593-4138  
[spartacan@on.aibn.com](mailto:spartacan@on.aibn.com)

#### Vancouver

Box 2717, Main P.O.  
Vancouver, BC V6B 3X2  
(604) 687-0353  
[tllt@look.ca](mailto:tllt@look.ca)

edited reprint from *Workers Vanguard* No. 852, 5 August 2005

# The Lynching of Emmett Till and the Fight for Black Liberation

## 50 Years Later

“Before Emmett Till’s murder, I had known the fear of hunger, hell, and the Devil. But now there was a new fear known to me—the fear of being killed just because I was black. This was the worst of my fears.... I didn’t know what one had to do or not do as a Negro not to be killed. Probably just being a Negro period was enough, I thought.”

—Anne Moody, Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee Organizer, 14 years old in 1955, in *Coming of Age in Mississippi* (1968)

Fifty years ago this month the name Emmett Louis Till became synonymous with the brutal American tradition of lynching. Till was only 14 years old that summer when he left his home in Chicago to join his cousin on a trip to stay with relatives in Mississippi. Within days of his arrival, young Emmett was kidnapped, tortured and brutally murdered for allegedly whistling at a white woman. Till’s gruesome murder, and his mother’s courageous campaign to ensure that the world saw at first hand the stark reality of race-terror by displaying her son’s mutilated body at his funeral, provoked horror and outrage against racist oppression in America. The lynching of Emmett Till, along with Rosa Parks’ defiant stand in Montgomery, Alabama in December of that same year, were key in galvanizing many thousands to join the burgeoning civil rights movement.

Today, a half-century later, black people still sit in the cross hairs of this bloody capitalist ruling class. The explosive struggles of the civil rights movement smashed Jim Crow segregation in the South and broke the back of the anti-Communist McCarthy era. But the social reality remains—black oppression is the cornerstone of capitalist class rule in America. Contrary to assertions that the worst abuses against black people are a thing of the past, a quick survey of the massive prison population, unemployment, miserable ghetto conditions, poverty, deteriorating health care and increasingly segregated schools proves the opposite, not only in the South but throughout the country.

Emmett Till with his mother, Mamie. Chicago, 1955: Emmett Till’s funeral drew as many as 250,000 people to Roberts Temple Church.



Chicago Defender

The current federal investigation of the Emmett Till atrocity is one of a handful of decades-old cases reopened beginning with the 1994 conviction of Byron De La Beckwith for the 1963 assassination of Mississippi civil rights leader Medgar Evers. One reason these cases are being opened is to polish the tarnished image of the South. But union-busting “right to work” laws, attacks on black voting rights, Ku Klux Klan terror like the cross-burnings in Durham, North Carolina this May along with Confederate flags, monuments and Dixie anthems still mark the landscape of the “New South.” Meanwhile, Northern ghettos trap black people into holding pens, and kill-crazy cops stalk the streets.

Bush’s Republican regime pushes ahead to wipe out the remaining gains of the civil rights movement that had been under attack by Democratic as well as Republican administrations for the last three decades. On the heels of the government launching a vindictive IRS tax

investigation of the NAACP, the chairman of the Republican National Committee cynically professed at the NAACP’s convention in July, which Bush refused to attend, that the Republican Party’s decades-long campaign of courting the racist Southern vote away from the Democrats by opposing civil rights legislation, the “Southern Strategy,” was “wrong.”

The re-opening of Till’s case was largely sparked by the determined nine-year effort of a young filmmaker, Keith Beauchamp, and his 2002 documentary *The Untold Story of Emmett Louis Till*. The Feds recently exhumed Till’s body to seek forensic evidence, additionally claiming it is necessary to verify that it was indeed Till in the grave. The only people who ever cast doubt on this question were the defenders of the lynchers. For America’s capitalist rulers, such re-investigations are nothing more than hypocritical attempts to foster the illusion that today’s FBI and Department of

Justice are different from the very same state institutions that worked hand in hand with the Klan in the South. By the mid 1960s, nearly 20 percent of Klan members were FBI "informants" serving as loyal double agents of both organizations. Even when the Senate passed a meaningless resolution this June apologizing for never passing anti-lynching legislation, several senators, including the two from Mississippi, refused to sponsor the bill.

Capitalism is a system based on exploitation of labor, and, in the U.S., a unique and critical mainstay continues to be the subjugation of the black population at the bottom of society. American Trotskyist Richard Fraser wrote in the same year that Emmett Till was murdered: "The dual nature of the Negro struggle arises from the fact that a whole people regardless of class distinction are the victims of discrimination. This problem of a whole people can be solved only through the



UPI

**At enormous personal risk, Mose Wright identified in court Klan thugs who abducted his nephew Emmett Till.**

proletarian revolution, under the leadership of the working class" ("For the Materialist Conception of the Negro Struggle," January 1955). We of the Spartacist League base our program for black liberation upon Fraser's perspective of *revolutionary integrationism*, premised on the understanding that black freedom requires smashing the capitalist system and constructing an egalitarian socialist society. One of our founding documents written at the time of the ghetto upheavals of the 1960s states:

"The Negro people are an oppressed race-color caste, in the main comprising the most exploited layer of the American working class. Because of the generations of exceptional oppression, degradation and humiliation, Black people as a

group have special needs and problems necessitating additional and special forms of struggle. It is this part of the struggle which has begun today, and from which the most active and militant sections of Black people will gain a deep education and experience in the lessons of struggle. Because of their position as both the most oppressed and also the most conscious and experienced section, revolutionary black workers are slated to play an exceptional role in the coming American revolution."

—"Black and Red—Class Struggle Road to Negro Freedom," 1967, *Spartacist* special supplement, May-June 1967, reprinted in *Marxist Bulletin* No. 9

### The Lynching of Emmett Till

By all accounts Emmett Till was an amazing kid. He was bright, fun-loving and considerate. His mother, Mamie Till-Mobley (earlier known as Mamie Till Bradley), and her family had migrated from Mississippi along with hundreds of thousands of other black farmers and sharecroppers fleeing the Jim Crow South in hopes of finding a better life in the "Promised Land" known as Chicago. She knew firsthand the strict social and racial codes of the South that literally spelled life or death if not followed to the letter. So, when she reluctantly allowed Emmett to accompany his cousin Wheeler to Mississippi, she did her best to instill some sense of the dangers and she recounted that she held "the talk that every black parent had with every child sent down South back then" (*Death of Innocence: The Story of the Hate Crime That Changed America* by Mamie Till-Mobley and Christopher Benson, 2003).

By the summer of 1955, white racists in Mississippi were seething in bitterness in the aftermath of the *Brown v. Board of Education* rulings of 1954 and 1955, which opened the door for integrating schools, albeit hedged with limitations and the reservation of "deliberate speed." The Supreme Court decision to allow school integration was a reflection of a growing movement for black civil rights, for the right to vote and for integration. Black men fought on the front lines in World War II, a war proclaimed to make the world "safe for democracy." Black women migrated to the cities to toil in defense plants. When the soldiers returned, they were determined to have a better life. The end of the war ushered in the beginning of the Cold War against the Soviet Union, the preparation for new imperialist wars to "roll back Communism" everywhere on the planet. Most black people were concerned about the "cotton curtain," the iron grip of the racist Southern police state here at home, and

were less likely to buy into or embrace the American bourgeoisie's propaganda about an "Iron Curtain" Soviet threat.

The response of the racist Southern Democrats (the Dixiecrats) to the *Brown* ruling was one of organized terror and defiance from the highest-ranking officials on down. Francis M. Wilhoit described the role of the Democratic Party in *The Politics of Massive Resistance*:

"For it was, after all, the region's political parties—particularly the dominant Democrats—that bore the chief responsibility for politicizing the segregationist masses and getting them to the polls on election day to vote for anti-integration candidates. Furthermore, since membership in Southern parties overlapped with membership in the Klan, the Councils, and other resistance groups, it appeared for a time that the segregationists would get a stranglehold on policy making in the racial area, and prevent even tokenism."

White Citizens' Councils, the suit-and-tie incarnation of the Ku Klux Klan, formed to terrorize blacks through vigilante violence and uphold Jim Crow segregation, flourished throughout Mississippi. These councils, claiming a membership of 60,000, were headquartered in the very county that Emmett was preparing to visit. In May that year in Belzoni, Mississippi, Reverend George Lee, local NAACP organizer, was shot to death from a passing car. Just days prior to Till's arrival, WW II veteran Lamar Smith was gunned down in broad daylight on a crowded courthouse lawn in Brookhaven, Mississippi for urging black people to vote. This was the murderous atmosphere that a lively, self-confident teenager from the North journeyed into that fateful August.

On August 24, after picking cotton all morning, Emmett, his cousins and some friends drove into Money, Mississippi to purchase some candy and sodas at the local grocery store that serviced the black population. The white owner, Roy Bryant, was out of town and his young wife, Carolyn, was tending the store. There are conflicting stories of what happened at the store. Did he whistle? Was he trying to control his stutter? Did he speak up? The only thing that happened that day at the store for sure is that Emmett Till was seen as having "stepped out of line," ignoring "the customs of the South" in the presence of a white woman where this was punishable by death. On August 28, Roy Bryant and his half brother, J.W. Milam, came looking for Emmett at his relatives' home, kidnapping him in the dead of night. Three days later the hideously battered corpse of Emmett Till was found in the Tallahatchie River with a 75-pound cotton gin fan tied around his neck with barbed wire. Mose Wright,



WV Photo

Atlanta, 21 January 1989: PDC-initiated 3,500-strong mobilization met Klan provocation with show of labor/black defiance.

Emmett's great uncle, was able to identify his body only by a ring belonging to his father that the child wore on his finger.

For the vast majority of unnamed lynch mob victims that have filled American history, the story would end here and would have also for Emmett Till if not for the courage and determination of his mother and family. Mamie Till-Mobley immediately alerted the press upon hearing that her son was missing. She fought to have her son's body returned to Chicago after the local sheriff hastily tried to bury the evidence—literally. She defied the Mississippi authorities by opening the padlocked and sealed casket. Most courageously, she insisted that the casket be displayed openly for the world to see, and ensured that graphic photos circulated internationally. An estimated 100,000-250,000 people waited in line for hours at Chicago's Roberts Temple Church of God in Christ to view the open casket. So shocking was Emmett's horrifically mutilated body that an estimated one out of every five individuals needed assistance out of the building. Emmett's death was transformed from "just another lynching" into an internationally known scandal. Although there had been thousands of Southern black men, women and children that met such horrible deaths, this was one that would spark a generation into action.

Mamie Till-Mobley set the tone by immediately demanding an investigation and publicizing the case. Although President Eisenhower and FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover stonewalled her requests for an

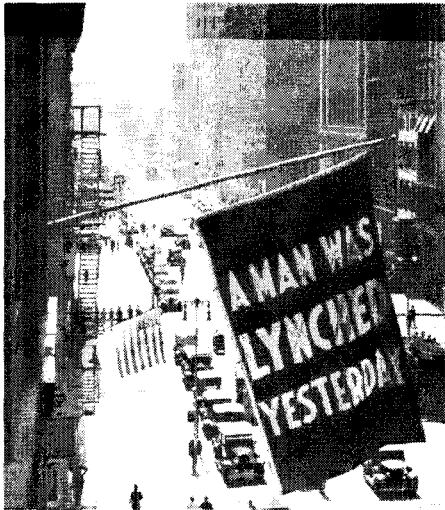
investigation, she persisted in bringing national attention to her son's lynching. Till-Mobley, her father and her cousin Rayfield Mooty, an Inland Steel worker, traveled to Sumner, Mississippi for the trial of Emmett's murderers and braved a gauntlet of white racists each morning as they entered the courthouse. Her uncle, Mose Wright, who had pleaded with Bryant and Milam not to take his nephew, did what virtually no black man in Mississippi had dared to do for nearly a century. He stood up in court and identified the two white men as the kidnapers. According to Wright's son, Simeon, who was in the same bed when Emmett was dragged away, Mose Wright was determined to testify. Knowing full well that he was risking the same fate as Emmett, he told his family that he didn't know if he would live or die, but he knew for sure that he was going to testify. Before Wright testified, the rest of his family had to be spirited away to Chicago. He joined them immediately following his testimony. Similarly an 18-year-old field hand, Willie Reed, came forward as a surprise witness for the prosecution to testify that he had heard Emmett's screams coming from Milam's barn. As soon as Reed stepped off the stand, he went directly to the train station and left for Chicago, rightly fearing for his life. He suffered a nervous breakdown upon arriving in Illinois. It took a tremendous amount of courage for these black witnesses to stand up to white racists in Mississippi, knowing they

might not live to see another day, knowing that the only way to save themselves from the lynch rope was to leave everything behind and escape North. Their actions were not unlike slaves fleeing on the Underground Railroad nearly one hundred years earlier.

At this time, Medgar Evers, a Mississippi NAACP organizer, gained national attention. Evers understood that the only way a case would be built against Bryant and Milam was if he took it into his own hands and mobilized his forces. The NAACP recruited volunteers to dress as sharecroppers and sent them out to gather information. These brave individuals knew full well what lay in store for them should they be detected. Civil rights lawyer Conrad Lynn worked on the case and identified others involved in the killing, but they were never prosecuted. Dr. T. R. M. Howard, leader of the all-black town of Mound Bayou, Mississippi, helped organize and contributed to pay the costs of the investigation and relocation of the witnesses. He also was eventually forced to flee North. He made speaking tours of the country to expose the reign of terror in Mississippi. For the smallest shred of hope that justice might be served, these people put their lives on the line.

But that smallest shred was really no shred at all in the mid '50s in the Mississippi Delta. The ensuing murder trial of Bryant and Milam was exactly what one would expect. All five lawyers in the county joined the defense team so that none could be appointed special prosecutor in the case. Neither of the defendants denied kidnapping Emmett. The jury came back with a verdict of not guilty in just over an hour. It took them "that long" because they stopped to get a soda, hoping to stretch the time for appearance's sake. The jury came up with the lie that the bloated, rotting body that was dragged out of the Tallahatchie River might not be Emmett at all, but a body planted by his mother and the NAACP. Emmett was supposedly alive and well in Detroit, according to the Southern racists. A grand jury would not even indict them on kidnapping charges. Then, just months after the acquittal, *Look* magazine published a confession by Bryant and Milam boasting of their lynching of Till.

A campaign orchestrated by plantation owner, arch-segregationist Mississippi Senator, James O. Eastland, tried to smear Emmett Till and his dead father Louis as rapists. The U.S. army had executed Louis Till in 1945. While serving in Italy, he was charged with raping two white women and killing another, charges that many who served with him stated



Library of Congress

**NYC: NAACP flew this flag outside its headquarters to announce reports of lynchings in 1930s.**

were lies. The same man, Dwight D. Eisenhower, who as a general signed the execution order of the elder Till, sat as U.S. president and refused to investigate the lynching of the son. When Eastland managed to secure the army death records of Louis Till—the same records that Mamie Till-Mobley had been denied—and leaked them to the press, the NAACP took a step back from the case, concerned to maintain their image of “respectability.”

Louis Till was not the only man to be executed or “disappear” under such dubious circumstances during World War II. In her autobiography, Mamie Till-Mobley spoke to the chilling stories she heard from other black soldiers and friends of Louis Till of the “problem that followed them overseas from the United States.” She described 3 a.m. line-ups of black soldiers by racist white officers and Military Police. A woman would be brought in to identify one of the soldiers and the “black soldiers who got pointed out at three in the morning were always taken away. They were not brought back.” As Mamie Till-Mobley astutely pointed out,

“It seemed that the army really didn’t need much more proof than a late-night identification to take black soldiers out. But based on what Louis’s friends told me, it seemed the real offense wasn’t always against white women. Often, it was really against white men. A number of women in those late-night line-ups, it seems, were only identifying the men who slept with them, not men they were accusing of rape.... But for many of the white officers and soldiers from the South, there also was a custom about that sort of thing.... Louis died before he could see what would happen to his son. Bo [Emmett’s nickname] died before he could learn about what had happened to his father. Yet they were connected in ways that ran as deep as

their heritage, as long as their bloodline.... Maybe Emmett did wind up like his father, an echo of what had happened ten years earlier. Maybe they were both lynched.”

### Lynching—“As American as Baseball and Church Suppers”

In 1924, a young Communist from Indochina named Nguyen Ai Quoc—later known as Ho Chi Minh—wrote:

“It is well known that the Black race is the most oppressed and the most exploited of the human family. It is well known that the spread of capitalism and the discovery of the New World had as an immediate result the rebirth of slavery, which was for centuries a scourge of the Negroes and a bitter disgrace for mankind. What everyone does not perhaps know is that after sixty-five years of so-called emancipation, American Negroes still endure atrocious moral and material sufferings, of which the most cruel and horrible is the custom of lynching.”

The story of Emmett Till lays bare the harsh reality of black life in a country built on human bondage. The fight for genuine black equality remains an unfinished task of the American Civil War. The 200,000 ex-slaves and Northern blacks who fought in that war helped turn the tide of the war in favor of the Union Army, but the victorious Northern capitalists betrayed the promise of equality. Radical Reconstruction was the most democratic period in U.S. history. But the Northern capitalists looked at the devastated South and saw opportunity—not for building radical democracy, but for profitably exploiting Southern resources and the freedmen. With the “Compromise of 1877,” the last of the Northern troops were pulled from the South and Reconstruction came to an end. Freed blacks were disenfranchised, politically expropriated and kept segregated at the bottom of society. The institution of Jim Crow segregation began to take shape, marked by strict racial codes, returning the black population to a position of complete subservience, enforced by violence. How or when to address whites, where to live, eat, sit, shop, wash your hands, or take a drink of water were all strictly regulated and backed up through a system of race-terror—the omnipresent threat of the lynch rope.

In the period following Reconstruction, in the late 19th century, lynching reached its height. Lynching is rightfully equated with the summary torture and execution of black people. But this was not always the case. The term “lynch law” is believed to have come from Judge Charles Lynch, a patriot in the American Revolutionary War. Upon discovery of a Tory conspiracy in 1780, Lynch was said to have presided over an extralegal court that meted out summary punishment to the pro-British

Loyalists. Such methods were given free rein in a burgeoning young country with a vast frontier and a roughly established legal system. The evolution of lynching into an act of race-terror is organically linked to the history of black chattel slavery. Lynching became a form of sadistic black subjugation in reaction to the rise of the anti-slavery abolition movement, developing into a widespread social phenomenon in the wake of the defeat of Reconstruction. By the end of the 19th century, “lynch law” had a specific meaning. At its height in the 1880s and 1890s, as many as two to three black people were lynched per week. Sociologist John Dollard wrote in 1937: “Every Negro in the South knows that he is under a kind of sentence of death; he does not know when his turn will come, it may never come, but it may also be any time.”

American historian Leon F. Litwack has found that of the thousands of *recorded* lynchings, about 640 involved “accusations of a sexual nature”—the most notorious and hysteria-inducing accusation. The targets of the race-terrorists were often those who owned competitive businesses and farms, the man who managed to acquire some property and was deemed by the racists to not have enough humility, the man who challenged the system, the man who was educated and/or prosperous. W.E.B. Dubois put it this way: “There was one thing that the white South feared more than Negro dishonesty, ignorance and incompetency, and that was Negro honesty, knowledge, and efficiency” (Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* [1998]).

In many cases, lynchings were not spontaneous mob violence but planned and advertised events bringing trainloads of spectators from near and far. These were ordinary, “church-going, upstanding” citizens, drawn together in a grotesque racist ritual. The “pillars of the community” were often directly involved or had prior knowledge, and they always approved afterward. “Lynching was an undeniable part of daily life, as distinctly American as baseball and church suppers. Men brought their wives and children along to the events, posed for commemorative photographs, and purchased souvenirs of the occasion as if they had been at a company picnic” (Philip Dray, *At The Hands of Persons Unknown* [2002]). Celebratory postcards of mutilated and charred bodies were sent through the U.S. mail to friends and relatives. James Baldwin noted on seeing the red clay hills of Georgia for the first time, “I could not suppress the thought that this



earth had acquired its color from the blood that had dripped down from these trees.”

## The Civil Rights Movement

As Mamie Till-Mobley remarked in a TV documentary, “When people saw what had happened to my son, men stood up who had never stood up before. People became vocal who had never vocalized before. Emmett’s death was the opening of the civil rights movement.” Ten thousand people rallied in Harlem the Sunday following the acquittal. Thousands packed meeting halls and overflowed into the streets to hear Mamie speak around the country. Labor rallies and demonstrations were held to protest the lynching of Emmett Till and race-terror in Mississippi. The CIO Steelworkers Union to which Till’s grandfather belonged wired the Mississippi governor demanding justice.

In the convulsive years that followed, social protest exploded into the civil rights movement. Eventually, Jim Crow, the poll taxes and sham rules that prevented black people from voting were abolished, and segregated schools and other public facilities were formally opened up. However, the civil rights movement was stopped cold when it came North and confronted the hardened economic foundations of black oppression, rooted in American capitalism. The heroic struggles of many thousands of black and white activists were betrayed by the liberal perspective of the leadership of the civil rights movement. Much as the organizers of the demonstrations against Till’s murder appealed to Eisenhower, the strategy of the liberal-led civil rights movement was based on appeals to a section of the American bourgeoisie to right the historic wrongs done against black people, as though black freedom could be attained under the capitalist system.

There were important exceptions to this, exemplified by militant black leaders such as Robert F. Williams, the head of the NAACP branch in Monroe, North Carolina, which heavily recruited from the black working class of the area. Williams, who was denounced by liberal civil rights leaders like Martin Luther King, put forward a program of armed self-defense to fight race-terror as opposed to reliance on the capitalist state and its politicians. This earned him the enmity of the liberal NAACP, which disowned him, as the FBI hounded him out of the country. Williams found refuge in Cuba in 1961 and then China, before returning to the U.S. in 1969. In 1965, the Louisiana-based Deacons for Defense and Justice organized patrols to protect blacks and civil rights workers. At about the same



Danny Lyon

### SNCC activists stage sit-in at segregated diner in Atlanta in early 1960s.

time, in Gulfport, Mississippi, the black longshoremen’s union threatened to close the port down if civil rights activists were injured or arrested.

But despite determined struggle to fulfill the unfinished promise of the Civil War—the promise of black freedom—the civil rights movement could only go so far. The Democratic Party co-opted many of the black leaders into their ranks. They and their political heirs today sit on Capitol Hill, in the statehouses and city halls, administering this system which is based on racial injustice and class oppression, while posing as defenders of black and working people.

### For Black Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!

The lynching of Emmett Till was not an aberration. Such inhuman acts of violence were part of the fabric of the American Jim Crow South—a system that could only be enforced through violence. Nor did the smashing of Jim Crow mark the end of racial oppression in the U.S., in the North or the South. The laws enforcing segregation may be abolished, but segregation and inequality remain as facts. The death penalty represents the lynch rope as the ultimate form of institutionalized state terror, backed in the streets by racist cops who carry out their own summary executions. The continued oppression of black people some 40 years after the inauguration of formal, legal equality demonstrates that black oppression is an intrinsic component of the capitalist order in the U.S.

The capitalist rulers promote the poison of racism to keep the working class divided—to pit white workers against

black workers—in order to more easily maintain their rule. But black people are not simply victims. Black workers represent a large component of the organized labor movement. The way forward lies in multiracial class struggle. A key obstacle to this perspective is the pro-capitalist trade-union bureaucracy, which ties the working class to its exploiters, particularly by promoting illusions in the Democratic Party as a “friend” of labor and blacks.

The road to black freedom lies in the struggle to shatter this racist capitalist system through proletarian socialist revolution, and the power to do that lies with the working class. But this power cannot and will not be realized unless a class-struggle labor movement actively champions the cause of black liberation. The key to unlocking the chains that shackle labor to its exploiters is the political struggle to build a revolutionary internationalist leadership of the working class.

In his 1867 book *Capital*, Karl Marx, the founder of modern communism, captured a fundamental truth of American society in his statement that “labor cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded.” The Spartacist League fights to build a multiracial revolutionary workers party that will wrest the tremendous productive resources of this country out of the hands of the capitalist owners and put these resources into the hands of the working class, those who produce the wealth of this society. Only then will racial oppression be a thing of the past. ***Finish the Civil War! For black liberation through socialist revolution!*** ■

# The Evolution Wars: Religious Reaction and Racist Oppression



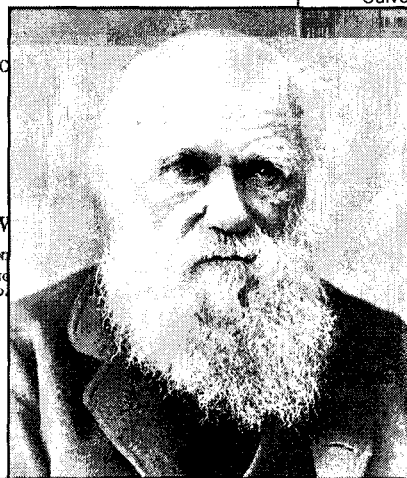
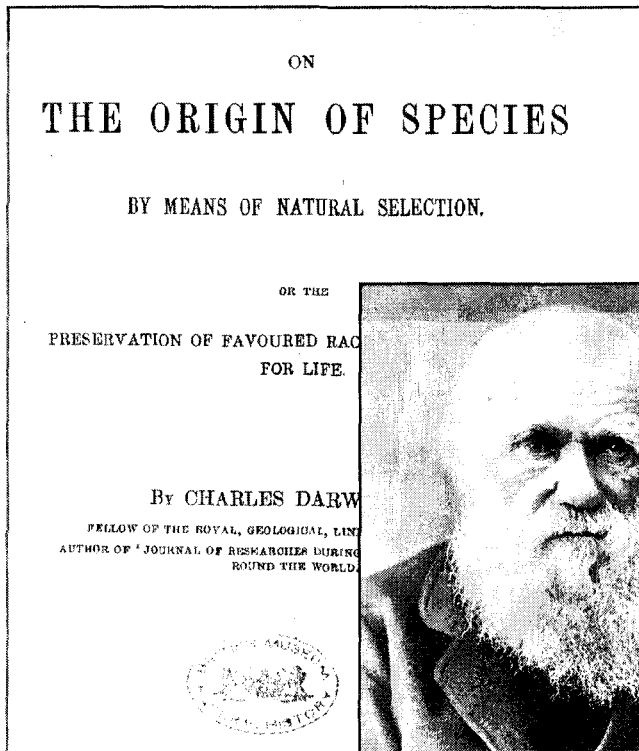
# Hail Charles Darwin!

If ever there were an argument against “intelligent design,” it is George Bush, an ignorant and dimwitted reactionary with state power. Almost 150 years since the publication of Darwin’s *Origin of Species*, this born-again Christian president has thrown the power of his office behind Christian fundamentalism by arguing that religious fables be given equal time with evolution in science classes in America. But the irrational obscurantism of leading circles of the American ruling class should not be mistaken for an absence of purpose. Now, as at other key moments in the history of this nation founded on black chattel slavery, religion is being promoted to inculcate acquiescence to injustice. The brilliant, self-educated former slave Frederick Douglass nailed the intrinsic relationship between the pious religiosity of Southern slaveowners and the hellish reality of those they lorded over:

“I assert most unhesitatingly, that the religion of the south is a mere covering for the most horrid crimes,—a justifier of the most appalling barbarity,—a sanctifier of the most hateful frauds,—and a dark shelter under which the darkest, foulest, grossest, and most infernal deeds of slaveholders find the strongest protection. Were I to be again reduced to the chains of slavery, next to that enslavement, I should regard being the slave of a religious master the greatest calamity that could befall me.... I therefore hate the corrupt, slaveholding, women-whipping, cradle-plundering, partial and hypocritical Christianity of this land.”

—*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845)

For years, the fundamentalist Christian right has been politically pursuing its reactionary religious agenda. But since the second coming of George W. Bush to the White House, they’re stalking the country. Since 2001 there have been chal-



**Charles Darwin’s groundbreaking 1859 *Origin of Species* presented theory of evolution by natural selection.**

lenges to the teaching of evolution in 43 states! Even more widespread but harder to measure is the informal coercion of science teachers to suppress the “E” word. In March, the National Science Teachers Association reported that 31 percent of teachers surveyed responded that they felt “pressured to include creationism, intelligent design, or other non-scientific alternatives to evolution in their science classroom.” Some Imax theaters in science museums are refusing to show movies that mention evolution, the Big

Bang or the geology of the earth!

A tangled web of billionaire Christian ultrarightists, their foundations and misnamed “think tanks” (like the Seattle-based Discovery Institute) provides the money behind this concerted drive to plunge the country deeper into ignorance and backwardness. The “Wedge Document,” an unusually blunt 1999 Discovery Institute manifesto, proclaimed its goal as “nothing less than the overthrow of materialism and its cultural legacies” (*New York Times*, 21 August).

For all the conservative cant coming out of the Supreme Court about the "original intent" of the slaveowning framers of the Constitution, extreme right-wing religious elements seek to shred provisions of that Enlightenment-influenced document, and particularly the Bill of Rights, in favor of an America ruled as a theocracy under Biblical law. The particular version of Christian fundamentalism now associated with the Bush White House developed over the past four decades as an ideological umbrella enabling white racist bigots to link together their hostility to affirmative action and welfare, "women's lib" and legalized abortion, and any tolerance of gay rights. They want a society without public schools, without unions, without separation of church and state, with the death penalty for abortionists and many others, with legal repression and extralegal terror for gays, and with black people and immigrants yoked as subhuman objects of exploitation in a nativist white Christian America.

Bourgeois liberals push reliance on the Supreme Court as the guarantor of the basic democratic rights that the government has in its cross hairs. That strategy offers no more protection than an umbrella with holes in it. The truth is that every gain and every protection that working people and minorities have won in this country have been wrested through class struggle and political battles and outright civil war. Holding on to past gains and gaining a position from which to fight for new conquests require a crystal-clear understanding that the government rules on behalf of the capitalist exploiters, under both Democratic and Republican administrations. Political independence from the Democrats and a class-struggle perspective are key to any successful fight against the current onslaught.

A ruling class that sends more black youth to prison than to college in a society that purports to have equal opportunity bolsters its policies by blaming its victims and finding "scientific" justification for segregation and subordination. Thus the ideological servants of American capitalism revive scientifically discredited myths of biological determinism and genetic inferiority of racial and ethnic minorities. In defense of an economic system and social order based on black chattel slavery, Supreme Court Chief Justice Taney deemed black people "far below" whites "in the scale of created beings" and so ruled in his infamous 1857 Dred Scott decision that a black man had no rights that a white man was bound to respect.

Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection continues to be explosive in

America today because it indicates that all modern humans came from a common African ancestor, and hence there is no scientific basis for separate "races." The truth—that race is not a biological category, but a social and political construct—has profound political implications in the United States. As stated in the *amici curiae* brief filed by the Spartacist League and Partisan Defense Committee in the Supreme Court in 1985 against the teaching of Biblical creationism in Louisiana schools:

"Evolution, the science of man's 'descent with modification' is the particular object of the fundamentalist religious attack. The reasons for this lie in the fact that evolutionary theory deprives man of a mythical 'special' status in nature, and exposes the lack of scientific basis for the various religious and other justifications for belief in racial inferiority. The not so hidden agenda of the proponents of teaching creationism in the schools is to enforce the destructive and dangerous dogma of racial inferiority.

"To the organizations here filing as *amici curiae*, the study of scientific evolution is fundamental to man's quest for a materialist understanding of our world and human society, not the least because it provides material evidence that we are all part of the same human race, definitively destroying the myths of racial superiority."

### The Materialist View of History

Regarding the warfare between science and religion over Darwinian evolution, the eminent British scientist and Marxist J. D. Bernal wrote:

"The very persistence of the struggle, despite the successive victories won by materialist science, shows that it is not essentially a philosophic or a scientific one, but a reflection of political struggles in scientific terms. At every stage idealist philosophy has been invoked to pretend that present discontents are illusory and to justify an existing state of affairs. At every stage materialist philosophy has relied on the practical test of reality and on the necessity of change."

—*Science and History* (1954)

Charles Darwin unshackled biological science from the chains of religion by providing a materialist explanation for the evolution of life on this planet through his careful, meticulously recorded studies of variation of species. As we wrote in our tribute to the late Stephen Jay Gould, who, despite having pathetically conciliated religion toward the end of his life, was a great Darwinian educator and propagandist:

"The revolutionary aspect of Darwin's idea was that the whole evolution of the natural world could be explained on a purely materialist basis—natural selection—rather than through any supernatural intervention. The motor force was survival of the fittest: all organisms produce more progeny than can possibly

survive within their ecological niche—the most intense competition is *within* a species, whose members all compete for the same lifestyle and food sources. The competition *between* species is important, but on a slightly lower level."

—"Science and the Battle Against Racism and Obscurantism," WV No. 797, 14 February 2003

Darwin argued that natural selection, along with other more random processes, drove the evolution of new varieties of life. Darwinian theory is entirely free of moral pronouncements on organisms, whether they diversify and thrive or go extinct. This is contrary to the "social Darwinists" who, unsupported by Darwin himself, exploited the term "survival of the fittest" as "scientific" evidence that the rulers were a higher order of being, in order to justify the status quo of the cruelest exploitation of man by man. Indeed, Darwin was an ardent opponent of slavery, writing in a 5 June 1861 letter to Asa Gray in the very early days of the American Civil War, "Some few, and I am one of them, even wish to God, though at the loss of millions of lives, that the North would proclaim a crusade against slavery. In the long-run, a million horrid deaths would be amply repaid in the cause of humanity.... Great God! How I should like to see the greatest curse on earth—slavery—abolished!"

Evolution is not "progressive," nor does it necessarily lead to superior or more intelligent beings, and it is certainly not predetermined. The mechanics of evolution are a matter of continuing inquiry and argument among scientists. Darwin did not even like the word "evolution" because it implied a climb up a ladder from lower organisms to higher beings (grotesquely depicted in racist "scientific" illustrations of human evolution as a transition from stooped hairy apes to black people to Caucasians). Darwin preferred the term "descent with modification" and was a rigorous and consistent materialist in his interpretation of nature, not viewing a slug as lesser or more imperfect in its function or adaptation to its environment than an ermine-cloaked member of the royal family. As Gould wrote in *Ever Since Darwin* (1977): "Darwin was not a moral dolt; he just didn't care to fob off upon nature all the deep prejudices of Western thought."

Those deep prejudices were unleashed against Darwin upon the 1859 publication of his *Origin of Species* (which may in part explain why Darwin waited more than 20 years to go into print). A *History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* by Andrew Dickson White, a co-founder of Cornell University who fought in the anti-slavery

movement, documents the assault. In Britain, the Vatican founded the "Academia" to combat Darwinian science, while Protestants founded the Victoria Institute for the same purpose. In France, Monseigneur Ségur went into hysterics against Darwin, shrieking, "These infamous doctrines have for their only support the most abject passions. Their father is pride, their mother impurity, their offspring revolutions." Thomas Carlyle, a former Chartist (revolutionary democrat) turned reactionary defender of slavery, was eviscerated by White for his attack on Darwin:

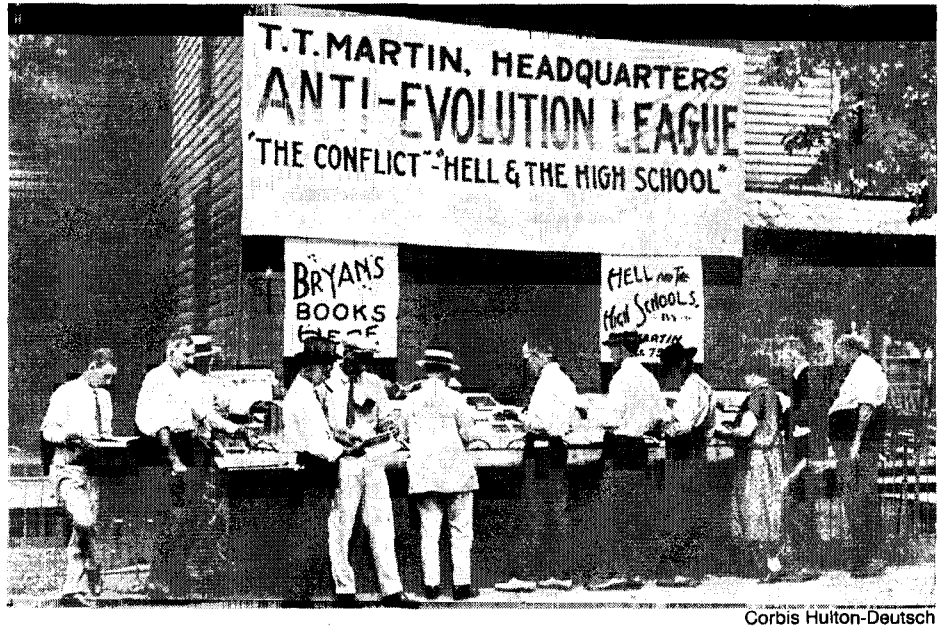
"Soured and embittered, in the same spirit which led him to find more heroism in a marauding Viking or in one of Frederick the Great's generals than in Washington, or Lincoln, or Grant, and which caused him to see in the American civil war only the burning out of a foul chimney, he, with the petulance natural to a dyspeptic eunuch, railed at Darwin as an 'apostle of dirt worship'."

Behind the wrath of the rulers, their high priests and apologists, was worry. Geological evidence of the actual immense antiquity of the planet and fossil evidence of an evolving parade of life forms going back millions of years exposed the Biblical Book of Genesis as a fairy tale. Desperate explanations that God hid fossils within rocks to lure geologists into temptation were a bit far-fetched even for the most blindly faithful. When the geologist and Christian Sir Charles Lyell came over to Darwinism, the church feared that the Darwinian theory, like the findings of Copernicus and Galileo, might prove to be true. Suggestions of a divine design guiding evolution were advanced to shore up the crumbling foundation of Biblical literalism.

Darwin himself took on this forerunner to the "intelligent design" argument in correspondence with the Harvard botanist Asa Gray, a devout Protestant. Although Gray arranged for the *Origin of Species* to be published in America, he was troubled about the book's theological implications and maintained the Christian belief that each living thing reflected intelligent design by a creator and constituted evidence of the loving character of God. In a typically mild but stunning reply, Darwin wrote back:

"I had no intention to write atheistically, but I own that I cannot see as plainly as others do, and as I should wish to do, evidence of design and beneficence on all sides of us. There seems to me too much misery in the world. I cannot persuade myself that a beneficent and omnipotent God would have designedly created the Ichneumonidae [parasitic wasps] with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of Caterpillars, or that a cat should play with mice."

Even conservative columnist George



Corbis Hulton-Deutsch



P&A Photos

**Top: Dayton, Tennessee during 1925 trial of John Scopes for teaching evolution. That summer 40,000 Klansmen marched in Washington, D.C.**

Will wrote, regarding the film *March of the Penguins*, "If an Intelligent Designer designed nature, why did it decide to make breeding so tedious for those penguins?" (*Pocono Record*, 28 August).

Darwin's discovery of the continual motion and interaction between organisms and their environment was embraced enthusiastically by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. According to Gould, Marx offered to dedicate the second volume of *Capital* to Darwin (who declined as he had not read it). In *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1880), Engels wrote:

"Nature works dialectically and not metaphysically.... In this connection Darwin must be named before all others. He dealt the metaphysical conception of Nature the heaviest blow by his proof that all organic beings, plants, animals, and man himself, are the products of a process of evolution going on through millions of years."

Darwin put history into science. Karl Marx put science into history. Marx showed the mechanism by which labor collectively creates wealth that is privately

appropriated by the capitalists, out of which they extract profit. Marx unearthed what had been "concealed by an overgrowth of ideology." As Engels remarked in his 1883 "Speech at the Graveside of Karl Marx":

"The production of the immediate material means of subsistence and consequently the degree of economic development attained by a given people or during a given epoch form the foundation upon which the state institutions, the legal conceptions, art, and even the ideas on religion, of the people concerned have been evolved, and in the light of which they must, therefore, be explained, instead of *vice versa*, as had hitherto been the case."

Engels drew directly on Darwin's work in his 1876 essay "The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man." Engels observed that with the development of erect posture and bipedal motion, "the hand had become free," allowing man to fashion tools. In turn, the use of tools, speech and social organization enabled man to begin to trans-

form and master his environment. Engels wrote:

"Agriculture was added to hunting and cattle raising; then came spinning, weaving, metalworking, pottery and navigation. Along with trade and industry, art and science finally appeared. Tribes developed into nations and states. Law and politics arose, and with them that fantastic reflection of human things in the human mind—religion."

The division between mental and manual labor became key to a class-stratified society, and "all merit for the swift advance of civilisation was ascribed to the mind." So too, the idea of god became independent of the mind that invented it. *Man created god yet became his subject.*

Marx also recognized the duality of religion; it is both an instrument of oppression and a balm for the oppressed. Historically, the religiosity of black people in America has been a solace from unmitigated racist oppression and a promise of deliverance. As Marx said, "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the *opium* of the people."

### You Can't Fight Republicans with Democrats

While it is a hoot to ridicule the demented rightists who think Sponge-Bob, a cartoon character, is gay (he holds hands with a starfish), or the Washington State Republican Party which outlawed yoga classes (did you know the word "om" is hidden in the word "communism"?), their agenda is serious and sinister. Readers are referred to the Web site [www.theocracywatch.org](http://www.theocracywatch.org) run out of Cornell University for informative and regularly updated exposés of this crowd. Although the information provided there is valuable, the Web site's banal, liberal political conclusion—that people should campaign and vote for Democrats in the midterm elections to reclaim the flag—is a false perspective that will only help keep things in this country running rapidly downhill.

It's not just the Republicans! An infuriating series in the *New York Times*, "A Debate Over Darwin," makes this clear. This august spokesman of liberal Democratic Party opinion splashed hogwash across its front page day after day (see [nytimes.com/evolution](http://nytimes.com/evolution)) and legitimized the neo-creo kooky proponents of religious reaction by oh-so-judiciously presenting their views—as if one could debate human origins and evolution with creationists. Thus the *Times* abets the Discovery Institute's purpose by accepting the logic of Bush's demand to give equal status to science and religious superstition. *Science and religion cannot be reconciled.*

We salute the eminent British scientist Richard Dawkins (dubbed "Darwin's Rottweiler"), whose forthright defense of science against the encroachments of religion has roiled the purveyors of superstition. Dawkins concluded in *The Blind Watchmaker—Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe Without Design* (1996):

"Nearly all peoples have developed their own creation myth, and the Genesis story is just the one that happened to have been adopted by one particular tribe of Middle Eastern herders. It has no more special status than the belief of a particular West African tribe that the world was created from the excrement of ants. All these myths have in common that they depend upon the deliberate intentions of some kind of supernatural being."

Every leftist who has ever tried to get so much as a letter printed in the *New York Times* learns the race and class bias of "all the news that's fit to print" in that paper. Turning over page after page of their paper to proponents of "intelligent design" was a political decision in keeping with a decades-long Democratic Party strategy: to conciliate religious reaction in order to present themselves as credible rulers for God, country, family, and the "little guy."

The "culture wars" in America—and evolution is a big one—do indeed reveal differences between the two capitalist parties. After Clinton's 1992 election, a Democratic-controlled Congress passed the "Goals 2000: Educate America Act," which would have required states to adopt federally approved standards for teaching science and history as a prerequisite for receipt of federal funds. Right-wing Republicans, led by neocon Lynne Cheney, went nuts over requirements to teach a little truth about the Ku Klux Klan and McCarthyism. When the Republicans recaptured a Congressional majority in the 1994 midterm elections, they quickly acted to allow states to adopt standards without federal oversight.

These are examples of the not unimportant distinctions between the oddly demented Bush gang and the more liberal Democrats. In the absence of a class alternative, it is precisely such distinctions that explain the, in many cases half-hearted, support for Democrats among labor and the oppressed. But the "lesser evil" is still the class enemy of the working people. Democratic president Clinton outflanked the Republicans by signing legislation to "end welfare as we know it," by invoking the union-busting Railway Labor Act 14 times against potential rail and airline strikes, and by vastly augmenting the arsenal of state repression directed mainly against black people through the passage of his 1996 "Anti-

Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act." Hillary Clinton's recent pandering to the anti-abortion bigots to secure her own electoral fortunes lies on the same continuum.

Jimmy Carter, Democratic president in the late 1970s, epitomizes the contradiction of the religious element in the ruling class. Underneath that humble Southern Christian peanut farmer *stick* is a man who was trained as a nuclear engineer and helped design nuclear submarines for the U.S. Navy. Carter brought being "born again" from its public perception as a backwoods affliction to the apex of political power in the White House. This served to morally rearm post-Vietnam U.S. imperialism for launching Cold War II against "godless Communism."

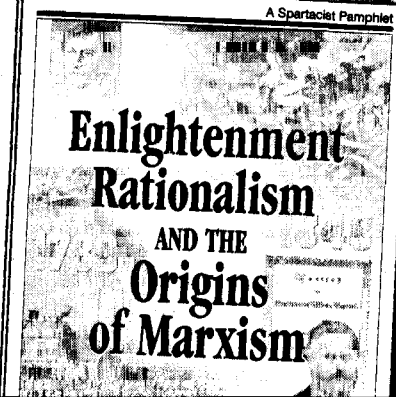
### Religion: Social Glue for a Society Riddled with Contradictions

America is a deeply unstable, stable bourgeois democracy. Stripped of its democratic mask, the state is a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, a class that accumulates vast wealth through the raw exploitation of labor. The working class is divided and prevented from uniting in its own interest mainly through the special oppression of black people as a segregated race-color caste—the last-hired, first-fired bottom rung in a society buttressed by the myth of social mobility for all. Yet black workers still have tremendous potential social power as a leading part of the working class. The material reality of racial oppression itself perpetuates fear of and prejudice against people

**Marxism and Religion**

This pamphlet is the result of the cooperation of the *Workers Union and Black League*, religious abolitionists and socialist revolutionaries who have been working to increase religious literacy and political awareness.

A Spartacist Pamphlet



Enlightenment  
Rationalism  
AND THE  
Origins  
of Marxism

\$2 (48 pages)

Make checks payable/mail to:  
Spartacist Publishing Co.  
Box 1377 GPO, New York, NY 10116



forced by capitalism to live in filthy, violent ghettos with few social services. The color line is the visible birthmark left by slavery and so fundamental to modern American society that it cuts straight across the multiple fissures of successive waves of immigration. As the census forms say, "Hispanics may be of any race." Sure, and where one lands on the wheel of fortune is heavily influenced by whether one appears to be black or white.

America's other peculiarity among advanced capitalist countries is its deeply religious character. Nowhere else—not even in Italy where the Vatican still heavily influences civil society—is there such refractory religiosity and visceral hostility to the long-established facts of Darwinian natural selection as the motor force of evolution. Why? The absence of even a mass reformist workers party that expresses in even a blurry way that working people have needs and interests counterposed to those of their exploiters is a large part of the explanation for political backwardness in the U.S. But like everything else in this country, it also boils down to the central intersection of *race and class*. Religion in the U.S. supplies an ideology that can seemingly harmonize conflicting class interests while keeping this society with two races firmly ordered: capital above labor and white above black.

Although fundamentalist preachers and churches had been around for a while, it was the impact of World War I, the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and massive labor strikes that drew them together as a political movement to fight "godless Communism," immigration, booze and the teaching of evolution. In the summer of 1919 the "World's Christian Fundamentals Association" was founded. The country was gripped by fear, cynically manipulated by the government through legal and extra-legal terror. Civil liberties were nullified as people were jailed for expressing anti-war views. Murderous racist pogroms raged, with 26 anti-black rampages across the country between April and October 1919. Immigrants (who were often anarchists and communists) were rounded up and deported. Labor strikes, such as the Seattle general strike of 1919, were denounced as unpatriotic "crimes against society" and "conspiracies against the government," and broken by deployment of federal troops. In 1921, the trial of the Italian anarchists Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti began, and they were executed in 1927.

The ways in which the fundamentalist movement served to bind a reactionary yet deeply contradicted society together were played out in Tennessee when a for-



G.P. Putnam's Sons

**Above: Young Communists studying atheism following 1917 October Revolution. Right: Russian Orthodox priest on barricades of counterrevolution, Moscow, August 1991.**



Der Spiegel

mer Chicago Cubs outfielder turned evangelical preacher, Billy Sunday, arrived for an 18-day crusade in 1925 against the teaching of evolution. Leaping across the stage and screeching that "education today is chained to the devil's throne," Sunday whipped up more than 200,000 people in multiply segregated rallies against "the old bastard theory of evolution." *Summer for the Gods* (1997), Edward J. Larson's Pulitzer Prize-winning book on the Scopes trial, recounts:

"Thousands attended Men's Night, where males could freely show their emotion out of the sight of women. Even more turned out for Ladies' Night. The newspaper reported that '15,000 black and tan and brown and radiant faces glowed with God's glory' on Negro Night. An equal number of 'Kluxers'—some wearing their robes and masks—turned out for the unofficial Klan Night."

That was the immediate backdrop to the most famous battle between evolution and creationism in U.S. history. In 1925, the Scopes "monkey trial" took place in Dayton, Tennessee. That same year, some 40,000 Klansmen in full regalia marched through the nation's capital. It was a period

when anyone who wasn't as conformist and as patriotic as possible was suspect. Substitute "terrorist" for "communist" and it sounds eerily like the social climate today, and once again religious fundamentalism is advancing in lockstep with social reaction.

John Scopes was indicted for violating Tennessee's statute that banned teaching evolution. The high school biology textbook he taught from reeked of the racist Social Darwinist views of the times. Man was presented as the highest life form of evolution, with the Caucasian race being "finally, the highest type of all." A large political contradiction of the times was that many of the promoters of evolution were Social Darwinists who crusaded for bettering the human race by eliminating the "feeble-minded" through eugenics. By 1936, 35 states had laws compelling sexual segregation and sterilization of those deemed "eugenically unfit." In America, that was a loosely applied euphemism for "poor white trash," black people and immigrants.

Southern slaveowners often denounced the cruelty of Northern capitalism while

falsely portraying themselves as loving Christian protectors of their Negro property. So, too, the eugenics movement enabled William Jennings Bryan, the blowhard orator, 1896 Democratic Party presidential candidate and prosecutor of John Scopes, to posture as a humanitarian! Bryan said, "The Darwinian theory represents man as reaching his present perfection by the operation of the law of hate—the merciless law by which the strong crowd out and kill off the weak." Dismissing geological evidence that the age of the earth was much older than the Bible said, Bryan blustered, "Men who would not cross the street to save a soul have traveled across the world in search of skeletons."

John Scopes was defended by Clarence Darrow, who used the trial as a platform to defend science and defeat Bryan's religious foolishness and phony goodness. As Darrow once said in a speech to a group of prisoners on the false definition of crime in an unjust society, "It is not the bad people I fear so much as good people. When a person is sure that he is good, he is nearly hopeless; he gets cruel—he believes in punishment."

Fundamentalism became notorious and identified with rural backwardness as a result of the Scopes trial. In response, fundamentalists constructed their own world with their own religious schools, universities and social institutions, beginning in the 1930s. But at every peak of fevered anti-communist and racist reaction, they were brought out of their subculture to center stage. Fundamentalists played a large role in the McCarthyite witchhunt of the 1950s, identifying the United States, Jesus and the Bible as God's gifts to humanity and the Soviet Union as the Antichrist and Devil.

What used to be the kooky fringe of John Birch ilk is now frighteningly mainstream and mobilized. No longer content with ruling their own schools, they want to destroy the public schools, and indeed the entire world. Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson and bigwigs who overlap heavily with the Texas Republican Party and the Bush White House are "Dominionists" or "Christian Reconstructionists." They believe that fundamentalist Christians are mandated by God to occupy all secular institutions in order to destroy society as we know it and usher in "the thousand-year reign of Christ." Then, as Bill Moyers wrote in "Welcome to Doomsday" (*New York Review of Books*, 24 March):

"Once Israel has occupied the rest of its 'biblical lands,' legions of the Antichrist will attack it, triggering a final showdown in the valley of Armageddon. As the Jews who have not been converted are burned the Messiah will return for

the Rapture. True believers will be transported to heaven where, seated at the right hand of God, they will watch their political and religious opponents writhe in the misery of plagues—boils, sores, locusts, and frogs—during the several years of tribulation that follow.

"I'm not making this up."

### Communism = America's Last Best Hope

Civilization does not continually advance. Throughout history, human society has also paused, decayed or moved backward. This motion, its tempo and direction are intrinsically linked to the economy and class struggle. Science is not independent of these processes. At the time of the industrial revolution, when the ascendant bourgeoisie challenged and replaced the feudal order, there was not only tremendous progress in the material results of knowledge (e.g., the steam engine), but also leaps in ideas of human freedom (the Enlightenment). But the French Revolution's philosophy of "liberty, equality, fraternity" was limited in application to the new ruling bourgeoisie once it had achieved its own fundamental class interest: the abolition of feudal restrictions on private moneymaking through exploitation of the working people. Marx surpassed the radical idealism of the French Revolution, understanding from his analysis that the dominant ideas of every historical period are those of the ruling class. Enlightenment philosophy could find universal material expression only through the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of workers rule—the dictatorship of the proletariat as a bridge to communism.

The working-class seizure of power in the 1917 Russian Revolution took Marxism out of the realm of ideas and gave it flesh and blood. Despite the relative backwardness of Russia, hostile imperialist encirclement, civil war and invasion by more than a dozen capitalist armies, the establishment of collectivized property and a planned economy spurred huge advances in science, technology, art and ideas. Despite the degeneration of the revolution in its national isolation and its grotesque deformation by the Stalinist bureaucracy, the standard of living as measured by key indexes of modern civilization (literacy, life expectancy, infant mortality, etc.) was testimony to the superiority and tremendous potential of working-class rule.

The last time the U.S. ruling class undertook a sustained effort to promote science education was after the Soviet Union launched its Sputnik I satellite in 1957. Fear of a Soviet lead in military technology led President Eisenhower



Frederick Douglass House

**Frederick Douglass, revolutionary abolitionist.**

to demand a billion-dollar program to improve science education in American schools and to the enactment of the National Defense Education Act in 1958. Creationism was elbowed aside as the newly formed Biological Science Curriculum Study (BSCS) wrote evolution into new high school textbooks.

Once again, the centrality of the struggle for black freedom to all progressive social change in America was revealed. The new textbooks reached Little Rock Central High in 1965 after almost a decade of pitched battles against court-ordered desegregation of Arkansas' Jim Crow schools. The civil rights and Vietnam antiwar movements were ripping apart the conservative fabric of post-World War II America. In *Epperson v. Arkansas*, the trial judge made no secret of his contempt for the state's anti-evolution statute, scheduling the trial for April Fools' Day and ruling in favor of Susan Epperson's constitutional right to teach modern biology, namely Darwin's theory of evolution. This and similar cases went up to the U.S. Supreme Court. For about 30 years, the creationists mainly lost and were decried even in Supreme Court decisions as "anachronistic."

So, what changed? Capitalist counter-revolution across East Europe and in the USSR, where the final undoing of the Russian Revolution took place in 1991-92, defines today's deeply reactionary period. Those wrenching events have been catastrophic for the people of the former Soviet Union and East Europe, especially women, whose rights and lives have been shattered by religious reaction and destitution.

Leningrad's Kazan Cathedral provides a vivid illustration of what's changed. In

the Soviet Union, this former center of the deeply reactionary Russian Orthodox Church was turned into a grand Museum of the History of Religion and Atheism. The central apse showcased an exhibit on Darwin's theory of evolution, with life-size portraits of the transition from ape to man. Today the icon of the Madonna is back and the cathedral is again a nexus of reaction, bolstering an unjust social order with appeals to piety and mystical promises of reward after life on this earth ends.

Drunk with success in its crusade against the Soviet Union, the American ruling class falsely boasts that "communism is dead." With a military budget almost as large as the rest of the world's, according to the 2005 report by the Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, U.S. imperialism is plundering the world without fear of reprisal. The same unfettered imperialist monster that is laying waste to Iraq targets labor, black people, immigrants and all the oppressed at home. When the Soviet Union existed, in order to sport credentials especially in the Third World as top cop for "democracy," the U.S. was forced to concede some basic civil rights to black people at home. Now, with affirmative action gutted, many black voters disenfranchised, jobs destroyed and jails filled, the Democratic and Republican rulers cynically pretend that racism is a bygone thing, that there is no need to talk about racial equality

anymore—at least until the murderous abandonment of the black population in the flooding of New Orleans threw a worldwide spotlight on racial inequality in the U.S.

Science is subordinated to the capitalist state and its purse strings. Science is primarily funded for techniques of war, mass destruction and misery. From the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to the napalming of Vietnam, to the bunker-busting destruction of Baghdad—in the cradle of civilization—the legacy of science in the service of imperialism is measured in mass graves worldwide. Even advances in biological science that could better the human condition, stamp out disease or eradicate hunger are deformed by the profit system. That developing countries must vow to respect drug company patents as a condition of membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO) illustrates the point. AIDS ravages Africa, but anti-retroviral drugs that give people the possibility to live with this disease are priced beyond reach. U.S. imperialism and the WTO have made India knuckle under and pledge to cease producing patent-busting, low-cost generic versions of the same drugs, thereby condemning millions around the world to death.

The war against teaching evolution in the schools is irrational even from the bourgeoisie's own class standpoint. To take the above example, pharmaceuticals

can't be developed without an understanding of modern biology, which is incompatible with and counterposed to Biblical literalism. New bacterial strains emerge every day, exchanging whole DNA sequences and becoming drug-resistant; viruses mutate. Replace modern biology with Genesis and a new threat like the species-jumping avian-borne flu virus has a better shot at killing millions worldwide. The Bush administration has outlawed government funding for extraction of stem cells from new human embryos, thereby blocking therapeutic cloning and growth of tissue transplants for research to help treat diseases such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and diabetes.

To be sure, an elite will continue to be trained at private universities that are beyond the reach of the working class. But the anti-scientific religious dogma pushed by elements of the ruling class retards science even in those bastions of class privilege. Ultimately, it isn't possible to remain a world power and destroy science education and industry, the way the U.S. rulers largely have. In the short term, they can certainly stay on top of the world as Western ayatollahs with nukes. Thus, even a very basic issue like the right to learn Darwin's theory of evolution in public school requires that a multiracial revolutionary workers party be built in this country to rip power out of the hands of the bourgeoisie. Communism is the last best hope for America and the world. ■

# SUBSCRIBE!

## Workers Vanguard

Marxist Working-Class Biweekly of the Spartacist League (includes English-language *Spartacist* and *Black History and the Class Struggle*)

- \$10 for 21 issues
- \$2 for 6 introductory issues
- International rates: \$25 airmail/\$10 seamail

## Espartaco (en español)

Publication of the Grupo Espartaquista de México (includes Spanish-language *Spartacist*)

- \$2 for 4 issues
- International rates \$4 airmail/\$2 seamail

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Apt. # \_\_\_\_\_ Phone (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Make checks payable/mail to:  
Spartacist Publishing Co., Box 1377 GPO, New York, NY 10116



# Join the Labor Black Leagues!

We are pleased to announce the organization in July 2005 of the Labor Black League for Social Defense in Los Angeles, a key center of multiracial class struggle. The LBL was founded based on the ten-point program below.

The first Labor Black Leagues were formed as a result of the Spartacist League-initiated, 5,000-strong labor/black mobilization that stopped the Ku Klux Klan from marching in Washington, D.C. in November 1982. We stand for mobilizing the masses of minority and working people in militant integrated struggle against the brutal system of racist oppression that is capitalist America. Initiated by and fraternally allied with the Spartacist League, a multiracial revolutionary Marxist organization, the Labor Black Leagues are part of the revolutionary movement of the workers and oppressed against the bosses and for socialism.

## If You Stand For—

**1** Full rights for black people and for everyone else in jobs, housing and schools! Defeat the racist assault on affirmative action! For union-run minority job recruitment and training programs! For union hiring halls! Open up the universities to all—for open admissions, free tuition and a full living stipend for all students. Free, quality, integrated public education for all!

**2** A fighting labor movement—picket lines mean don't cross! Defeat police scabherding and strikebreaking through mass pickets and union defense guards! For sit-down strikes against mass layoffs! Fight union-busting; keep the capitalist courts out of the unions! Organize the unorganized, unionize the South! Jobs for all—for a shorter workweek at no loss in pay with full cost-of-living escalator clause! Cops, prison guards and security guards out of the unions!

**3** Fight for women's rights! Defend abortion clinics! Free abortion on demand; free, quality 24-hour childcare! Equal pay for equal work! For free, quality health care for all!

**4** Full citizenship rights for all immigrants; everyone who made it into this country has the right to stay and live decently! Stop deportations! No to racist "English only" laws! Down with anti-Hispanic, anti-Semitic, anti-Arab and anti-Asian bigotry!

**5** Defend the separation of church and state! Full democratic rights for homosexuals! Down with the anti-sex witchhunt—cops and courts out of the bedroom! Down with all laws against consensual activities such as "crimes without victims" like pornography, gambling, drugs and prostitution!

**6** Mass labor/black/Hispanic mobilizations drawing on the power of the unions against the racist terrorists. Stop the Nazis! Stop the KKK!

**7** Abolish the racist death penalty! Free Mumia Abu-Jamal! Free all victims of racist capitalist repression! No faith in the capitalist courts! No to gun control! Defend victims of cop terror and racist police frame-up! No illusions in civilian review boards or community control of the police! Down with the racist and anti-labor "war on drugs"! For decriminalization of drugs! For class-struggle, non-sectarian legal and social defense; support the work of the Partisan Defense Committee!

**8** Unconditional opposition to every attempt to abolish welfare! Down with slave-labor, union-busting "workfare" schemes! Fight any and every attempt of the government to take away or cut back even more social programs such as Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, public health and aid to education and housing! For a massive program of public works—high-quality



WV Photo

integrated housing, schools, libraries, hospitals for the working people and the poor!

**9** Down with the chauvinist poison of protectionism! For international working-class solidarity! Support revolutionary struggles of working people abroad! Defend the deformed workers states—Cuba, Vietnam, China and North Korea—against capitalist restoration and imperialist attack! For proletarian political revolution to oust their Stalinist bureaucracies! For labor action against U.S. imperialist war moves and military adventures! For the right of independence for Puerto Rico! U.S. troops out of Puerto Rico and the Caribbean!

**10** Down with the Democrats and Republicans! For a revolutionary workers party that champions the cause of all the oppressed! Finish the Civil War! Those who labor must rule! For a workers government to take industry away from its racist, incompetent and corrupt owners! Rebuild America on a socialist planned economy!

## —Join the Labor Black Leagues!

Membership pledge: \$3/year unemployed; \$10/year employed.

For more information:

### CHICAGO

Labor Black Struggle League  
Box 6938, Chicago, IL 60680

(312) 563-0441

### LOS ANGELES

Labor Black League for Social Defense  
Box 29574, Los Feliz Station  
Los Angeles, CA 90029

(213) 380-8239

### NEW YORK

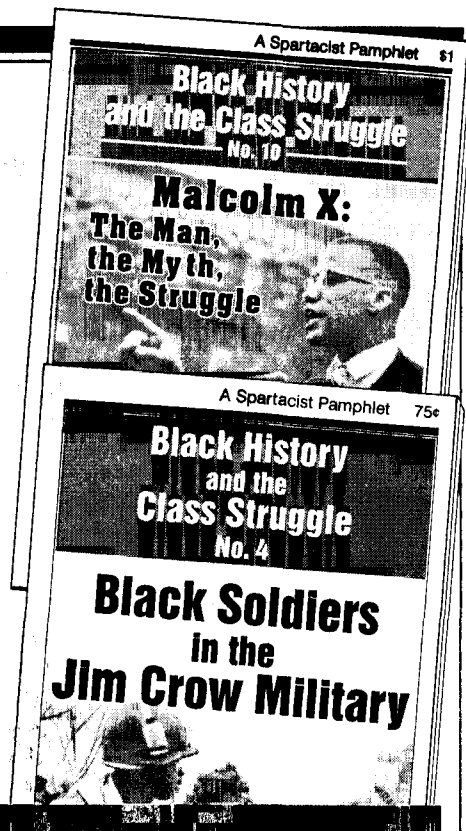
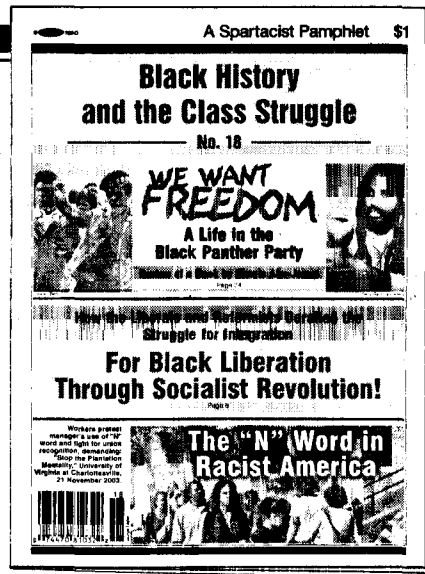
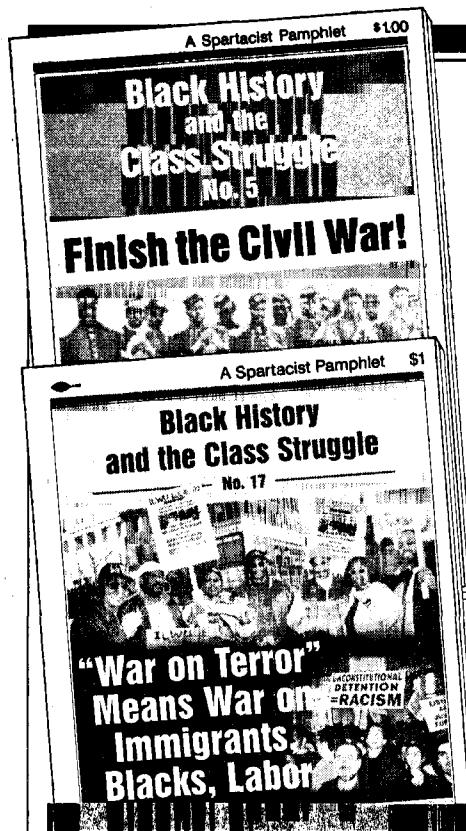
Labor Black League for Social Defense  
Box 2502, Church St. Station  
New York, NY 10008

(212) 267-1025

### OAKLAND

Labor Black League for Social Defense  
Box 29497  
Oakland, CA 94604

(510) 839-0851



Order Back Issues of  
**Black History  
 and the  
 Class Struggle**

**No. 1** \$0.25 (16 pages) Includes:  
 • John Brown and Frederick Douglass: Heroes of the Anti-Slavery Struggle

**No. 2** \$0.75 (32 pages) Includes:  
 • Bourgeoisie Celebrates King's Liberal Pacifism  
 • Malcolm X: Courageous Fighter for Black Liberation  
 • SNCC: "Black Power" and the Democrats

**No. 3** \$0.75 (32 pages)  
 Articles from *Workers Vanguard* detailing the grotesque racist bombing of Philly MOVE, signature of the Reagan years.

**No. 4** \$0.75 (32 pages)  
 Articles dealing with the military question and black oppression.

**No. 5** \$1 (32 pages)  
 Articles on the continuing struggle to finish the Civil War and fulfill the promise of black freedom.

**No. 6** \$1 (32 pages) Includes:  
 • Toussaint L'Ouverture and the Haitian Revolution

**No. 7** \$1 (40 pages) Includes:  
 • Black Troops in Battle Against Slavery  
 • FBI Rode With the Klan: How Mississippi Burning Rewrites History

**No. 8** \$1 (48 pages) Includes:  
 • South Africa: Razor's Edge  
 • Smash Apartheid!  
 For Workers Revolution!

**No. 9** \$1 (56 pages) Includes:  
 • Outrage Over Racist Acquittal of Cops in Rodney King Case  
 • Education U.S.A.—Separate and Unequal

**No. 10** \$1 (48 pages)  
 Articles on Malcolm X: what's missing from Spike Lee's movie; activists remember the civil rights movement and the black power era. Also "New World Order" neocolonialism in Africa.

**No. 11** \$1 (48 pages) Includes:  
 • Stop the Klan! For a Workers America! —Springfield, Illinois labor/black mobilization against KKK provocation on Martin Luther King holiday.

**No. 12** \$1 (48 pages)  
 • South Africa Powder Keg—Wave of strikes and land occupations after ANC neo-apartheid "power sharing" regime.

**No. 13** \$1 (48 pages) Includes:  
 • Lockdown U.S.A.  
 • Racist Backlash Against O.J. Simpson Acquittal  
 • Million Man March Appeases Racist Exploiters

**No. 14** \$1 (48 pages) Includes:  
 • Immigration and Racist "Fortress Europe"  
 • Courageous Fighter Against Racist Terror: Robert F. Williams, 1925-1996  
 • "Workfare": Enslaving the Poor, Busting the Unions

**No. 15** \$1 (48 pages) Includes:  
 • The Frame-Up of Mumia Abu-Jamal  
 • Abolish the Racist Death Penalty! Death Row Speedup Targets Minorities  
 • Down With "English Only" Racism! For Free, Quality Education for All Children!

**No. 16** \$1 (48 pages) Includes:  
 • South Africa Torn by AIDS Crisis  
 • South African Workers Battle ANC Union-Busting, Austerity  
 • Down With the Confederate Flag of Slavery!  
 • The Fight to Unionize the "Open Shop" South

**No. 17** \$1 (48 pages) Includes:  
 • U.S. Bloodbath in Baghdad  
 • South Chicago: Snapshots of Latino and Black Life  
 • In Honor of Stephen Jay Gould: Science and the Battle Against Racism and Obscurantism  
 • The Russian Revolution and the Black Freedom Struggle

**No. 18** \$1 (48 pages) Includes:  
 • Black Disenfranchisement and American "Democracy"  
 • How the Liberals and Reformists Derailed the Struggle for Integration: For Black Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!  
 • Down With Capitalist Rulers' War Against Blacks, Immigrants!

All issues are still available. Complete set only \$15, including postage and handling.  
 Make checks payable/mail to: Spartacist Publishing Co., Box 1377 GPO, New York, NY 10116 USA