

1917

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

JOURNAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL BOLSHEVIK TENDENCY

No. 30



2008



Drive Out the Imperialists!

Middle East Morass

A growing section of America's traditional foreign policy establishment is beginning to fear that the decline of U.S. imperialism may be irreversible. Richard Haas, president of the Council on Foreign Relations (Washington's imperial brain trust), has suggested that "the American era in the Middle East is over" (*Economist*, 30 June 2007). Haas

told the German weekly *Der Spiegel*:

"During the Cold War, the United States faced a single challenge that was greater than any we face now. But I can't think of a time when the United States has faced so many difficult challenges at once. What makes it worse is we are facing them at a time when we are increasingly stretched



SEAN SMITH—GUARDIAN

American soldier watches armored vehicle burn

militarily. We are divided politically. We are stretched also economically, and there is a good deal of anti-Americanism in the world. It's a very bad combination."

—Spiegel Online International [English],
13 November 2006

Zbigniew Brzezinski, the architect of Washington's successful anti-Soviet campaign in Afghanistan in the 1980s, complains in his recent book, *Second Chance*, that America's rulers foolishly squandered their post-Soviet dividend, and warns darkly that, if the next president does not carry out a radical overhaul of foreign policy, "[t]he crisis of American superpower would then become terminal."

Brzezinski and Haas, as leading figures in the so-called "realist" camp of imperial strategists, were always skeptical about the Bush/Cheney regime's plans for remaking the Middle East through the conquest of Iraq. But the results of that failed gamble have produced consternation across a broad spectrum of the ruling class. Robert Kaplan, an avowed proponent of U.S. "empire" and an influential Washington journalist, frets that "if we do not find a way to agree on basic precepts, Iraq may indeed turn out to have been the event that signaled our military decline" (*New York Times*, 21 September 2007).

The glib neo-conservative assurances that "liberating" Iraq would be a cakewalk were given credence by what appeared to be a quick and painless victory in Afghanistan in 2001. The initial success against the Taliban deluded American policy makers into thinking that sheer military might could solve all problems. Not all proponents of invading Iraq predicted easy success, but none expected that, five years after "victory," 160,000 U.S. troops would still be bogged down there, with vast swathes of territory remaining "no-go" areas and no prospect of consolidating a viable puppet regime.

The U.S. adventure in Iraq is now widely regretted, but it was not foisted upon Washington by a small clique of conniving neo-cons, as liberals allege, nor by an "unpatriotic" Israel Lobby, as some "realists" suggest. The neo-conservatives and "Christian Zionists" energetically promoted the idea of a modern crusade against the Arab infidels, but "regime change" in Iraq was a *bipartisan* policy from the start, embraced by liberals and conservatives

alike. Bill Clinton signed the 1998 "Iraq Liberation Act" which made "regime change" in Baghdad official policy. It was Clinton's Democratic administration, acting in concert with the United Nations, which imposed years of starvation sanctions estimated to have caused the deaths of over one million Iraqis. In 2002, a majority of Congressional Democrats gave Bush the green light to launch his war. The Democrats have consistently authorized funding for the war, and promise to keep occupation forces in Iraq indefinitely.

Washington's plan to maintain a unified Iraq, administered by a consortium of pliable Kurdish, Shiite and Sunni quislings, is unachievable. Leading Shiites viewed U.S. occupation as a means of gaining the upper hand over their Sunni rivals. But they are clearly opposed to U.S. overlordship in the long term, and are seeking closer ties with Iran. American attempts to bring the Sunnis back into the fold are a case of too little, too late. In the north, a low-grade border war between the Iraqi Kurds and the Turks is underway. Meanwhile significant insurgencies in Afghanistan and Pakistan are gaining ground. The sclerotic autocracies of Saudi Arabia and Egypt, long Washington's most dependable Arab allies, are increasingly unstable. And Tehran, America's regional nemesis, has massively increased its influence by successfully defying U.S. threats.

In short, American control is slipping, and the possibility of devastating regional conflicts is growing more likely. Yet the "debate" between Democrats and Republicans amounts to little more than haggling over technicalities. For them, the question is not *if* the U.S. should remain in Iraq, but how occupation forces should be deployed; not *if* Iran should be threatened, but what mix of diplomacy, sanctions, conventional or nuclear weaponry will provide the most effective level of intimidation; not *if* military funding should be increased for the Saudis, Egyptians and

continued on page 12

Contents

Middle East Morass	1
James P. Cannon: American Bolshevik	3
Cannon's Biography and Its Critics	5
On 'Revolutionary Regroupment'	11
Of Presidents & Principles	26
Screws Out of the TUC!	27
French 'Far Left' Moving Rightward	30
'Not a Tactic But a Crime'	35
WSWS: Being Determining Consciousness	37
Venezuela & the Left	56

1917

Editorial Board: C. Lichtenberg, B. Logan, T. Riley
Signed articles or letters do not necessarily represent the viewpoint of the International Bolshevik Tendency.

Subscription: U.S. \$10/4 issues

Order from/pay to:

BT, Box 332, Adelaide St. Stn.,

Toronto, Canada M5C 2J4

closing date: 15 February 2008

From Wobbly to Left Oppositionist

James P. Cannon: American Bolshevik



1928: Cannon in Russia

We print below, with permission, edited excerpts of Bryan D. Palmer's presentation at the book launch for James P. Cannon and the Origins of the American Revolutionary Left, 1890-1928, held at Tamiment Library in New York City on 12 October 2007.

James P. Cannon worked throughout his life to realize the American revolution—to create a working-class vanguard party capable of providing leadership in the struggle to make a revolutionary workers' state. Cannon is an intrinsically important figure who traverses and intersects in his political life almost all strands of the revolutionary left, in both the pre- and post-Bolshevik periods. Largely through his united-front work he linked Communist (and later, Trotskyist) militants with revolutionary anarchists and other leftists, while, at the same time, providing a trenchant critique of their programmatic shortcomings.

In writing my book I wanted to try to use Cannon's story to introduce an appreciation of the impact that Stalinism and the political *defeat* of the Russian Revolution of 1917 had on the American party in the 1920s. In doing this I hoped to offer an alternative historiographic interpretation that would help put communist possibility back on the interpretive and political maps.

So how to sum up Cannon's complicated history for an audience such as this? In this, the first volume, which runs from his birth in 1890 to his final expulsion from

the Communist Party in November 1928, I treat it in six, roughly chronological, segments. The first we might call "native son." Most people who have read the recollections of Cannon published in the Trotskyist milieu are aware of his Kansas background as the "Rosedale native son." What I tried to do, and I think this is of limited importance politically, is to dig into his background to fill out our understanding of Cannon and put flesh on some bones. What I found both confirms Cannon as he presented himself to history, and also calls into question some of the Cannonesque narratives of his own beginnings. The scholar in me likes those chapters because of how deep they dig into the historical truth about his origins, and also because the peculiarities and particularities of the sources—some of which are fictional accounts he wrote that were never published and are buried in the Cannon papers in the Wisconsin archives—throw new light on his background, his childhood and his relations with his parents.

The second part of the book deals with how Cannon came to join the revolutionary left. This involves a combination of factors both in his family background and his break with his small town roots. I think there are some interesting points to be made about how Cannon came to identify with the revolutionary left. He got involved through his intense interest in social justice and his youthful involvement in labor defense campaigns. He did not begin as a trade unionist, although he would be involved in left-wing union politics (as a Wobbly [member of the Industrial Workers of the World—IWW] and later as a communist) for most of his life.

The chapter on Cannon's activity as a Wobbly—which has a lot of detail—differs with the standard historiography by treating the IWW as more than simply a syndicalist/spontaneist organization. In fact, the IWW was a multi-faceted political organization, and Cannon was part of what we might call the "Vincent St. John wing." As such, he was part of a cadre of hand-picked organizers who were sent into the hot spots of the class struggle, in places like Akron and Duluth, to organize workers and help provide leadership in class confrontations.

In this sense, the Wobblies really were, as Cannon described them later in a pamphlet, "the anticipation of revolutionary communism." At the time he had never heard of Leninism, but he was learning important things about organizing and tactics that he would later employ, in a far more sophisticated manner, as a Bolshevik. For Cannon, the Wobblies were not the *antithesis* of a vanguard party as they are so often presented. Their "St. John wing" was an embryonic formation that pointed in some senses in the direction of a party formation.

Cannon was not really schooled in trade unionism during his time in the IWW so much as he was schooled in the class struggle, which is something slightly different.

He's thrown into a series of labor-capital conflicts as part of a nascent revolutionary force orchestrated by St. John, and gets his training in the course of strikes, mass mobilizations, free-speech fights, etc. I think this was critical in Cannon's later development as a revolutionary because, with his outlaw Wobbly origins, Cannon never really absorbed the methods of class compromise of the trade-union bureaucracy. You really cannot say that about [William Z.] Foster, who, despite his positive contributions—and there were many—came to politics through his experiences as a trade unionist.

A critical turning point for Cannon comes at the age of 27, when the Russian Revolution erupted in the middle of World War I. He is transformed by seeing what a Leninist vanguard party can accomplish and understands the necessity to connect particular struggles at the point of production with a larger, political struggle to overthrow the bourgeois order and create a workers' state. And he is acutely aware of the importance of labor defense at a moment when working-class militants were being jailed and deported en masse, their offices raided by police and their meetings attacked by vigilantes.

Cannon began to see the necessity of a theory that could tie this all together—an *internationalist* approach that could distill the lessons of the Russian Revolution, particularly the organizational form of the Leninist party. His subsequent development is largely a process of filling in, refining and developing a more sophisticated understanding of the Bolshevik experience.

In 1917, Cannon realized that he could no longer really be a Wobbly, and moved into the communist underground, where he was one of very few figures of national importance. I think C.E. Ruthenberg noted that at the formation of the Communist Party there were really only maybe half a dozen people who had any direct experience in the class

struggle—and Cannon was one of them.

In that milieu Cannon, the native-born Irish-American radical, rubbed shoulders with the socialist theoreticians of the Russian and Finnish language federations, and became familiar with both their strengths and weaknesses. Theodore Draper and other historians have tended to dismiss them as sort of other-worldly sectarians, but Cannon, who battled these people over the need to create a mass legal communist party, nevertheless had tremendous respect for the Marxist thinkers of the Lettish and Russian sections. He also saw their limitations—not just their separation from the American class struggle, but their difficulty even imagining the *possibility* of revolutionary class struggle in America.

Cannon made his way through a maze of different underground bodies in this period: the Communist Labor Party, the Communist Party (which he was not in, but negotiated with) and the United Communist Party. It all culminated in the birth of American communism with the founding of the Workers Party in 1921, which represented an entirely different organizational framework for revolutionary activities.

Cannon, more than any other figure in the early communist movement, brought people together, sought out people with personalities very different than his own, appreciated what they could contribute, put them where they needed to be and developed them. Alexander Bittelman, a leading figure in the Jewish Socialist Federation who became William Z. Foster's leading theoretician, had tremendous respect for Cannon, even though they were factional opponents in many disputes in the party. This is what Bittelman had to say about Cannon's role in the formative period of the Workers Party:

"As I became acquainted with Jim, I began to notice and appreciate his skills in internal party politics, bringing unity into the warring groups of the Jewish Communist and left-wing movements. He managed by his political skills as well as by his charming personality—when he chose to be charming—to win the respect and also the confidence of our group, the Jewish section of the Communist Party, as well the Olgin-Salutsky group which had formerly been the Jewish part of the Workers Council. I remember a certain image of him that I acquired after a while: it was the image of a caretaker of a large experimental institutional laboratory moving about various machines, tools, gadgets, testing tubes, et cetera making sure they operate properly: oiling, fixing, changing, improving, adjusting. His humor and his wit played no small part in all of that."

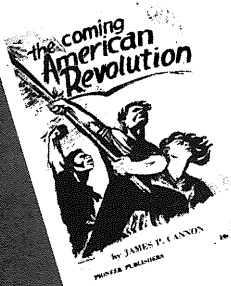
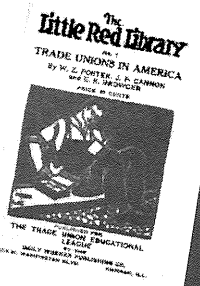
This is an incredibly laudatory—and I think very important—assessment of what Cannon was doing at that critical moment. If you want the negative version you can read Benjamin Gitlow's book, or Earl Browder's unpublished remembrances.

Cannon's campaign to create an effective, above-ground revolutionary party in America had the active support and guidance of the Communist International in those very early years. The revolutionary Communist International also pushed the young communist movement in the U.S. to seriously address the question of racism in America for the first time, and to break from the Socialist Party's policy on the black question, which had been heavily influenced by the lily-white racism of the craft unions.

Cannon's successes in the early years were considerable. He was instrumental in bringing together person-

James P. Cannon: American Communist Pioneer

From Wobbly to Bolshevik

Author of *James P. Cannon and the Origins of the American Revolutionary Left, 1890-1928*

Bryan D. Palmer

Friday 12 October, 6:30pm
 Tamiment Library, NYU
 Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, 10th Floor
 70 Washington Square South
 (West 4th Street, LaGuardia and Greene Streets)

Meeting hosted by Tamiment Library
 Co-sponsored by Freedom Socialist Party, International
 Bolshevik Tendency, Prometheus Research Library,
 Socialist Action, Socialist Equality Party

printed by union labor

alities of very different sorts—Lovestone, Shachtman, Abern, Bittelman and even leaders like Ruthenberg—and also in integrating the foreign language federations into an effective party that recognized the necessity of bringing communist ideas into the mainstream of the American working class. The tragedy, of course, for Cannon (and for all of us) is that this occurred in the relatively short period during which the Communist International was healthy. The defeat of the German Revolution in October 1923, and the death of Lenin in early 1924, set the stage for the political degeneration of the Communist International, as a bureaucratic faction, headed by Joseph Stalin, gradually consolidated control within the Russian Communist Party, abandoning the perspective of world revolution in the name of “socialism in one country.”

Cannon later noted that this shift had its counterpart in the U.S., where in the mid-1920s the trade unions were in retreat and there was generalized political movement to the right. Even in the traditional bastions of working-class radicalism, the garment trades and the mines, where revolutionaries had played essential roles, there were anti-communist pogroms. The Communist Party was wracked by bitter factionalism and there was a great deal of programmatic confusion.

The brightest spot for the CPUSA in this period was the work of the International Labor Defense [ILD], led by Cannon, which through its Leninist united-front strategy in defense of class-war prisoners broadened its appeal beyond the CP's traditional base and mobilized vastly larger forces in ongoing campaigns. Cannon used his connections in the workers' movement to help broaden support for Sacco and Vanzetti and bring attention to the cases of the Centralia Wobblies, Tom Mooney and many others. The ILD also sought to challenge racism—particularly Southern lynching—and the deportation of immigrant radicals. The ILD's activity, while the CP's best work in the mid- to late-1920s, was at the same time hindered by the factionalism and ongoing Stalinization of the American Communist Party.

This brings me to the final section of the book. It took Cannon a long time to come to appreciate the critique of Stalinism offered by Trotsky. This is understandable given the dearth of information and his immersion in labor-defense work. When he and Maurice Spector (the leading

figure in the Canadian Communist Party) did get access to Trotsky's critique in 1928 at the Sixth Comintern Congress, the lights went on. My book concludes with his expulsion and an account of how the Stalinists provided the Left Opposition with its initial American cadres.

I want to close with a few remarks on the current period and the lessons Cannon can provide. The first point, which Cannon came to with difficulty, and slowly, was the realization that much of his development as a Bolshevik leader during the mid-1920s took place in a political environment which was becoming increasingly toxic as the Stalinization of the American party progressed. He only slowly grasped the primacy of program—i.e., that factional alignments must be determined on the basis of agreement on decisive political questions. The second point, which, while obvious, is still very relevant today, is the importance of labor-defense work and the value of a united-front approach where possible.

My final point is the issue of revolutionary regroupment. Many people in this room believe—fervently believe—that without a revolutionary alternative the prospects for humanity are dim indeed. It is necessary to work today to bring together those people who are serious about creating the only instrument that can carry out a socialist revolution—a mass Leninist combat party. Of course it all pivots on the question of political program.

Some divisions have a principled character—and are unbridgeable. Yet, if we look back to the situation in 1919 when Cannon sought to regroup subjectively revolutionary militants dispersed among a welter of mutually hostile far-left formations, it is clear that sometimes the initiative of even a few individuals (aka the subjective factor) can help change enough minds to unlock the existing configurations and produce a regroupment on a principled basis. We live in a very different time of course, and have the benefit of a rich accumulation of historical experience and also the burden of a long string of defeats, betrayals and capitulations. The last couple of decades have produced some new and very significant obstacles. But in the heartland of imperialism it has never been easy to build an effective mass revolutionary party—or even a sizable propaganda group with roots in the working class. From Cannon we can learn how it was done in the past, and that can tell us a lot about how it can be done in the future. ■

Revolutionary Continuity & Historical Memory

The Cannon Biography & Its Critics

James P. Cannon and the Origins of the American Revolutionary Left, 1890-1928, Bryan D. Palmer, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007, 542 pages, \$50 hardcover.

The first volume of Bryan D. Palmer's biography of James P. Cannon, the historic leader of American Trotskyism, is an important contribution to the documentation of the red thread of revolutionary continuity in North America. Palmer's extensive and painstaking research brings Cannon alive as an individual and provides a valuable account of the momentous events in which he participated.

Palmer's book traces Cannon's political evolution from a footloose cadre of the anarcho-syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) through his pivotal role in the creation of the American Communist Party (CP) in the early 1920s, and concludes with his crucial decision in 1928 to align with Leon Trotsky and the International Left Opposition. In a projected second volume, Palmer intends to cover Cannon's years as the central leader of American Trotskyism from 1928 through to the 1950s.

James Cannon was the most important revolutionary leader who has yet emerged in the North American left.

An able propagandist with an ability to make complex ideas easily accessible to working people, Cannon did not pretend to be an innovative theorist. He was, however, a committed partisan of proletarian liberation who devoted his very considerable talents to the struggle to build an organization with the political capacity to lead a socialist revolution in the United States.

Palmer, a prominent labor historian, is a worthy biographer of Cannon because, unlike most leftist academics, he openly identifies with Marxist class-struggle politics. He celebrates Cannon as someone who, like Marx, recognized that, as important as it is to understand the world, "the point, however, is to *change* it."

Histories of the Communist Party

In 1962, Cannon published *The First Ten Years of American Communism*, a compilation composed chiefly of letters he wrote in reply to inquiries from historian Theodore Draper, who was working on a two-volume history of the early years of American communism. Draper's books, *The Roots of American Communism* (1957) and *American Communism and Soviet Russia* (1960), are still essential for anyone studying the first decade of the American CP. (Cannon's incisive comments on both volumes, originally published in *International Socialist Review*, are reprinted in his book.)

Draper wrote a preface to Cannon's book in which he commented:

"For a long time, I wondered why Jim Cannon's memory of events in the Nineteen-Twenties was so superior to that of all the others. Was it simply some inherent trait of mind? Rereading some of these letters, I came to the conclusion that it was something more. Unlike other communist leaders of his generation, Jim Cannon *wanted* to remember. This portion of his life still lives for him because he has not killed it within himself...."

When Cannon made his critical decision to join with Leon Trotsky in resisting the bureaucratic strangulation of the Russian Revolution by the parasitic caste headed by J.V. Stalin, he was well aware of the difficulties that lay ahead:

"In the summer of 1928 in Moscow, in addition to the theoretical and political revelation that came to me when I read Trotsky's *Criticism of the Draft Program of the Comintern*, there was another consideration that hit me where I live. That was the fact that Trotsky had been expelled and deported to far-away Alma Ata; that his friends and supporters had been slandered and expelled and imprisoned; and that the whole damned thing was a *frame-up!*

"I had been gradually settling down into an assured position as a party official with an office and staff, a position that I could easily maintain—as long as I kept within definite limits and rules which I knew all about, and conducted myself with the facility and skill which had become almost second nature to me in the long drawn-out factional fights.

"I knew that. And I knew something else that I never told anybody about, but which I had to tell myself for the first time in Moscow in the summer of 1928. The foot-loose Wobbly rebel that I used to be had imperceptibly begun to fit comfortably into a swivel chair, protecting himself in his seat by small maneuvers and evasions, and

even permitting himself a certain conceit about his adroit accommodation to this shabby game. I saw myself for the first time then as another person, as a revolutionist who was on the road to becoming a *bureaucrat*. The image was hideous, and I turned away from it in disgust.

"I never deceived myself for a moment about the most probable consequences of my decision to support Trotsky in the summer of 1928. I knew it was going to cost me my head and also my swivel chair, but I thought: What the hell—better men than I have risked their heads and their swivel chairs for truth and justice. Trotsky and his associates were doing it at that very moment in the exile camps and prisons of the Soviet Union. It was no more than right that one man, however limited his qualifications, should remember what he started out in his youth to fight for, and speak out for their cause and try to make the world hear, or at least to let the exiled and imprisoned Russian Oppositionists know that they had found a new friend and supporter."

—*The First Ten Years of American Communism*

Cannon understood that Stalinism was not inevitable, but at bottom a by-product of the series of political defeats that ensured the isolation of the Soviet workers' state. Draper was a meticulous researcher whose years in the Stalinist movement in the 1930s allowed him to distinguish between the significant and the trivial, and navigate the primary sources in ways that would have been almost impossible for anyone who had never been a participant. While he relied a great deal on Cannon's recollections, Draper was convinced that the heavy-handed bureaucratism he had witnessed as a functionary in the American CP in the 1930s was both natural and unavoidable in a Leninist organization.

In his book, Palmer discusses how historians of American communism since Draper have fallen into two camps. One is composed of crude anti-communists like Harvey Klehr and John Earl Haynes, who follow Draper in viewing American communism as simply "Made in Russia" but whose work is vastly inferior to that of their mentor. Lacking any sense of proportion, they miss all the shades and nuances and are only interested in spy-baiting and hunting for traces of Moscow gold.

The other camp is composed of left-liberals like Maurice Isserman and Sean Wilentz, who were shaped by the 1960s New Left. They tend to concentrate on the CP's role in particular episodes of the class struggle and the fight for black equality, while avoiding the critically important issue of the relationship between the American party and Moscow. This is a serious flaw, as Palmer observes:

"Only by confronting how Stalinism constrained and ultimately suffocated the indigenous American revolutionary ranks that consciously gravitated to communism can we resurrect something of the meaning of the early twentieth-century working-class radicalism that remains absolutely necessary to the rebirth of the revolutionary Left. Cannon takes us in this direction."

Alan Wald: The Politics of Social-Democratic Despair

Palmer's book has been positively reviewed by many of the ostensibly revolutionary groups in the U.S. Several have observed that he is the first historian since Draper to



1017

12 October 2007: Bryan Palmer speaking at Tamiment Library in New York

provide significant new insights regarding the early history of American communism. Alan Wald, an erudite left academic and former ostensible Trotskyist who included a sympathetic sketch of Cannon in his 1987 book, *The New York Intellectuals*, reviewed Palmer's book in the July-August 2007 issue of *Against the Current*, a journal published by a mélange of Trotskyoid social democrats. While praising Palmer's scholarship, Wald takes exception to his "agenda":

"This aspect of Palmer's framework—no different from that of Cannon and Trotsky—is the weakest facet of the conceptual viewpoint underpinning the book, at least for this reader.

"One need not adhere to the 'straight-line thesis' (the simplistic notion that Leninism led ineluctably to Stalinism) to see the progression from October 1917 to the triumph of Stalinism as disastrously coupled, not merely a transformation into opposites.

"The justification of violent political repression in the name of defending alleged revolutionary 'advances' is also a stance that seems untenable today, more than ever when the 'advances' turn out to be the early stages of one of the most brutal dictatorships known to humankind.

"Then there is the view that certain vanguard groups and individuals possess the true 'revolutionary program,' one that will rescue humanity from economic and political catastrophe; claims of this type have become the hallmark of too many cult-like political sects—Trotskyist, Maoist and otherwise—to be affirmed so categorically. And the rooting of the definition of 'Stalinism' in a highly specific economic theory (Trotsky's pre-WWII analysis) seems more likely to fuel intra-Trotskyist polemics than to clarify matters for the general reader."

What Wald identifies as a weakness in Palmer's approach is precisely what makes his book qualitatively superior to most academic treatments of North American communism—i.e., sympathy for Cannon's political struggle to create a "vanguard group" with a revolutionary program. Wald considers all such attempts to be tragically misguided:

"One can scarcely disagree with Palmer's call to reclaim pre- and anti-Stalinist communism for the construction of a new revolutionary Left, but the precise significance of Trotskyism for the 21st century is another matter. Surely the U.S. Left would have been better off had Cannon successfully won a majority of the idealistic Communist rank and file to his program, yet there is little point in playing the 'what if' game in regard to subsequent developments.

"We know that promising political, social, and religious organizations evolve in all sorts of unexpected ways, especially after carving out a small arena of success. Moreover, the history of the 20th century strongly suggests that a 'healthy' socialist revolution was not on the agenda for any advanced industrial society, so it seems doubtful that even a sizable U.S. party with a true 'revolutionary program' could have done much to replace Stalinist authority internationally."

Palmer does not share Wald's historical pessimism, and saw the publication of his book as an opportunity to promote political debate within that section of the ostensibly Trotskyist left that identifies with the Cannonist tradition. To this end, he invited half a dozen organizations to co-sponsor a meeting to launch his book at New York's Tamiment Library in October 2007. Every group invited responded positively—and so it was that the Freedom Socialist Party, International Bolshevik Tendency (IBT), Socialist Action,

Socialist Equality Party and the Spartacist League (SL—in the form of the Prometheus Research Library [PRL]), all signed on as co-sponsors. (The Internationalist Group replied too late to be officially included.)

Spartacist League: Talented Archivists

The Autumn 2007 issue of *Spartacist* (No. 60) features a 20-page review of Palmer's "very impressive" book, characterizing it as "far better than one would expect from a sympathetic, but nonetheless academic, source." In the 1970s, Joseph Hansen, the sophisticated revisionist then leading the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), dismissed SL leader James Robertson as a "talented archivist." In his prime, Robertson was much more than that, and even today his severely degenerated group is still capable of making valuable contributions to the study of the history of American Trotskyism.

The PRL has published two important books: *James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism* (1992), a collection of his 1920-1928 speeches and writings, and *Dog Days: James P. Cannon vs. Max Shachtman in the Communist League of America, 1931-1933* (2002), documenting the internecine struggle that nearly destroyed the fledgling American Trotskyist movement. *James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism* is frequently cited by Palmer, who acknowledged that his "greatest debt in the archival realm...is to the Prometheus Research Library."

While paying homage to Palmer's book as "an important resource for historians of American Communism for some time to come," the *Spartacist* reviewers raise various criticisms. Their skeptical dig at Palmer's passing observation that Cannon "never really engaged with the potentially transformative *gender* politics of a militantly feminist approach to the personal realm," identifies a real, though minor, weakness in the text, i.e., an occasional accommodation to prevalent fads among left academics. It is true, however, that while the Trotskyist movement in Cannon's time did not dismiss questions of women's oppression, relatively little attention was paid to these issues until the resurgence of the women's movement in the 1960s. The *Spartacist* reviewers also make some useful observations on the book's treatment of the CP's disastrous "farmer-labor" turn, but their other criticisms are substantially without merit.

An example is their complaint that "Palmer's use of [the term] 'revolutionary Left' reflects a failure to make a qualitative distinction between communism and the radical-populist, social-democratic, anarchist and syndicalist movements that were often intertwined in the left internationally before the Bolshevik Revolution." Palmer responded to this criticism at the Tamiment meeting:

"Again on the question of the 'revolutionary Left': I also have to say that I followed Cannon. Cannon said he became a revolutionary in 1911. Before that, he said, he was a sympathizer. But when he actually joined the Wobblies, for him, he made a choice to be a revolutionary. And so I've taken him in some senses at his word.... I don't think you can read the book and not see that I view the founding of the Workers Party, the establishment of a Bolshevik organization and Cannon's role in it as a fundamental—a revolutionary—step forward. On the other hand, there were antecedents that must be considered part of the American revolutionary tradition.

And you don't really see them in any serious sense prior to Cannon's birth in 1890."

The Russian Revolution qualitatively transformed the political landscape in the U.S. and everywhere else. Palmer makes it abundantly clear that Cannon's identification with Bolshevism after 1917 was not a case of a personal evolution, but rather a response to a world-historic event that entirely redefined what it meant to be a revolutionary. Cannon certainly recognized his debt to his teachers and in *The First Ten Years of American Communism* paid tribute to Eugene Debs and the revolutionaries of the IWW. The "Declaration of Principles" adopted at the 1966 founding conference of the then-Trotskyist SL noted: "We also look for inspiration to the example of such revolutionists in the United States as F. A. Sorge, Vincent St. John, [and] Daniel De Leon..." (all of whom were active prior to 1917).

The *Spartacist* reviewers "take exception" to Palmer's reference to the "revolutionary Left in its age of innocence up to 1928," i.e., before the CP was completely Stalinized and the revolutionary impulses of its cadres stamped out. The review cites the sewer socialism of Victor Berger as evidence that much of the American left was pretty rotten long before Stalinism. That is indisputable. But no one reading Palmer's book would get the impression that by the "revolutionary Left" he was referring to people like Victor Berger or Morris Hillquit.

In attacking "[t]he idea of Cannon as an innocent," the SL cites Claude McKay's description of him as an effective political fighter who used "tricks of the typical American politician...in a radical way." Yet it is clear that Palmer was not using the term "innocent" in the sense of callow or naive, but rather uncorrupted, pure in revolutionary intent. James Robertson used the same term in precisely the same way in 1972 when he addressed the SL's Boston branch after a bruising internal struggle: "In a real sense the SL has lost its innocence. But we must resist this—we want to educate the comrades out of this clique experience, we do not want to and will not institutionalize bureaucratic forms..." (*Spartacist League, Internal Discussion Bulletin* No. 18).

For all its problems, and there were many, the American Communist Party of the 1920s was a very different sort of organization from that of the 1930s. The expulsion of Cannon and his supporters in 1928 marked a turning point for the CP, with the introduction of loyalty oaths, demands that members condemn political documents they had never seen, and the use of physical violence as a substitute for political debate.

The *Spartacist* review criticizes Palmer's supposed failure to emphasize the import of the lessons the Communist International taught its American adherents. Palmer, the SL asserts, "gives short shrift to the *substance* of those lessons. He does not, for example, include any discussion of the collapse of the Second International into social chauvinism as the war began [in August 1914]." When Emily Turnbull of the PRL repeated this accusation at the Tamiment meeting, Palmer replied that, while he was well aware of the significance of the betrayal of 4 August 1914, he had to make decisions about what to include. He said that the publisher had pressed him into cutting some 60,000 words to get the book down to 542 pages.

The *Spartacist* reviewers also object to Palmer's observation that the mid-1920s activities of Cannon's International Labor Defense (ILD) constituted "something of an inter-

lude of peaceful coexistence in the factional gang warfare" convulsing the CP at the time. The SL does admit that Palmer cites various instances "in which the Ruthenberg-Lovestone forces tried to undercut the ILD's work." It hardly seems improbable that on occasion the ILD's successful mass actions might have attenuated some of the bitter, dead-end factionalism that was absorbing most of the energy of the party cadres. While, to our knowledge, Palmer's treatment of the ILD is the most extensive and detailed account yet published, there is certainly much more that could be written.

Northite Flip-Flops on Cannonism

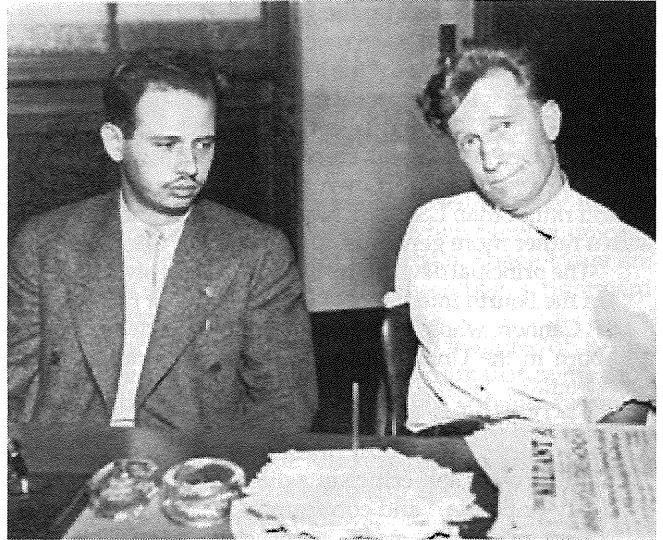
Like the other sponsors of the Tamiment meeting, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP—flagship of David North's "International Committee" [IC]) claims Cannon's mantle. Fred Mazelis and Tom Mackaman, who reviewed Palmer's book for the World Socialist Web Site (WSWS) on 18 September 2007, praised Cannon as "an internationalist who recognized that genuine internationalism required the fight to unite Marxist theory and practice, to make socialist principles and perspective live in the actual struggles of the American working class."

In the 1960s, when it was headquartered in England and run by Gerry Healy, the IC held a dramatically different view. At a July 1965 meeting attended by Fred Mazelis and a few others, Tim Wohlforth, then leader of the IC's American section, stated bluntly: "We are not Cannonites. We do not want to return to Cannonism. We want the destruction of Cannonism" ("Conversations with Wohlforth," *Marxist Bulletin* No. 3, part iv). Between 1964 and 1966, Wohlforth produced a series of articles on the history of American Trotskyism for the IC's journal, *Fourth International*. These were subsequently published in book form as *The Struggle for Marxism in the United States: A History of American Trotskyism*.

Wohlforth's thesis was that Cannon's political limitations made the degeneration of the American movement inevitable after Trotsky was assassinated in 1940 (shortly after Max Shachtman led a factional split over the "Russian Question" that claimed almost half the membership):

"While [Trotsky's] role in the 1940 factional struggle was essential in order to *save* the movement, his role after the split was becoming critical to the process of *developing* that which was saved. But this learning process was terminated by Stalin's axe and the party was forced to carry on as best it could on its own resources—not the least of these being what it had learned from Trotsky in the preceding period."

Trotsky had indeed provided crucial political leadership for Cannon's followers in the 1939-40 faction fight. It is also true that in the aftermath of World War II Cannon and other leaders of the SWP, the leading section of the Fourth International at the time, clung too tightly to Trotsky's pre-war predictions, and proved unable to successfully account for the post-war peasant-based social revolutions in China and Yugoslavia and the creation of the Soviet bloc in Eastern Europe. The Cannon leadership's inability to explain these major events with its wooden "orthodoxy" seriously disoriented the American Trotskyist cadres. But until the early 1960s, when it embraced Fidel Castro's petty-bourgeois July 26th Movement as "unconscious Trotskyists,"



MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Minneapolis 1934: Max Shachtman and Jim Cannon

the SWP played a critical role in defending key elements of the Trotskyist program and upholding its traditions.

When Cannon died in August 1974, Gerry Healy's long-time lieutenant and the all-purpose IC hatchetman, Michael Banda, produced an obituary dismissing him as a pragmatist who had never really been a Trotskyist. A month later, Healy deposed Wohlforth as the IC's American leader. Before long Wohlforth was on his way back to the SWP. As a first step, he penned a reply to Banda's obituary of Cannon. This was sharply denounced by Alex Steiner and David North in a lengthy 1976 polemic entitled, "The Fourth International and the Renegade Wohlforth":

"We draw the attention of our readers to an article recently published in the newspaper of the revisionist Thornett group in England. It is Wohlforth's assessment of James P. Cannon and it was written in opposition to the obituary of Cannon written by Cde. Michael Banda of the Workers Revolutionary Party.

"The central aim of Wohlforth's assessment is to argue that Cannon represented the ideal of an 'American Trotskyist,' which must be resurrected as a very special national phenomenon. Cannon is presented first and foremost as an American leader, nourished on the soil of America, who must be applauded for his attempts to build a national revolutionary movement."

North and Steiner took particular exception to Wohlforth's assertion that it would be an error "to attribute to Trotsky's intervention everything that was healthy in the American movement and to Cannon's contribution only a negative pragmatism." They also specifically rejected the following statement by Wohlforth on Cannon's role in building the Trotskyist movement in the U.S.:

"The American party was built through a relationship between a serious proletarian leadership around Cannon, with some history behind it, and Trotsky.... This leadership emerged from that section of the old Communist movement closest to the working class which, at the same time, was determined to build a **Leninist** party."

In their 1976 polemic, Steiner and North denounced this as "anti-Marxist, nationalistic, impressionistic drivel."

Eight years later, the North/Steiner polemic was reprint-

ed in a book published by the IC entitled, *The Fourth International and the Renegade Wohlforth*. In a foreword to the book, North commented: "the lessons of the struggle against Wohlforth, despite the passage of ten years, have lost none of their political urgency." A few years later, however, after breaking with Banda and Healy and establishing himself as the *lider maximo* of his own rump IC (this one based in Detroit rather than London), North produced another book, with a rather more generous appreciation of Cannon:

"The principal devil figure in Banda's repulsive depiction of the Fourth International is not Healy, but rather James P. Cannon, whose unforgiveable crimes, aside from being born in the United States, are almost too numerous to detail."

—*The Heritage We Defend* (1988)

A few pages later North praised Cannon's capacity for "straightforward self-criticism, which was never practiced by Healy or Banda," and continued:

"Cannon, to his credit, never claimed infallibility....If Cannon...is to be criticized, it must be for becoming somewhat too immersed in his trade union activity. However, that tendency, which was part of his political makeup as a 'genuine workers' leader' (as Trotsky described him), was not without its redeeming features!"

—*Ibid.*

Like Wohlforth, North's view of Cannon was shaped by what seemed politically expedient at the moment—initially to demonstrate his loyalty to Banda/Healy, later to distance himself from them.

The WSWS review of Palmer's book noted, apparently without deliberate irony, that "Cannon has been consistently underappreciated." The reviewers also observed:

"Cannon made his share of mistakes during the years of permanent factionalism inside the CP. 'When I came out of the nine years of the CP, I was a first-class factional hoodlum,' he was later to explain. Yet Cannon did emerge, and he did survive as a revolutionary. This can be explained by the fact that, despite the mistakes, Cannon never wavered on the fundamental programmatic issues that had brought him into the revolutionary movement."

Cannon's frank self-criticism is something that North, Mazelis and other IC old-timers would do well to emulate, as in the 1960s, 70s and 80s their organization had a well-deserved reputation for cop-baiting and thuggish behavior toward other leftists. While fulsomely denouncing Healy, Banda and Wohlforth, the IC leaders are clearly incapable of making an honest assessment of their own role in this shameful political history.

The Spartacist leadership is similarly appreciative of Cannon's capacity to recognize and struggle to transcend his flaws:

"In overcoming the CLA's [Communist League of America] unmerited factional polarization Cannon completed his education as a Leninist, learning to put program and principle qualitatively above organizational considerations. In later years Cannon recognized that it took Trotsky's guidance to break him from the bureaucratic factional practices of the degenerating Comintern."

—*Dog Days: James P. Cannon vs. Max Shachtman in the Communist League of America, 1931-1933*

Under Trotsky's influence, Cannon was able to overcome the impatience, rudeness and other attributes he developed

as a "factional hoodlum" in the CP. James Robertson, on the other hand, came to enjoy life as a big frog in the little pond of the Spartacist League in the 1970s, and evolved in the opposite direction. After a promising beginning, his regime gradually came to approximate Gerry Healy's political-bandit operation of the mid-1960s. Today, the paramount concern of the central leaders of both the SEP and SL are organizational advantage and personal prestige. This is why, despite the ability of each to project a Trotskyist facade, both outfits are obstacles on the road to reorganizing the Fourth International.

While most groups claiming to be Trotskyist in the U.S. have found little to complain about and much to praise in Palmer's account of Cannon's early years, the second volume promises to be considerably more controversial. It will deal with Cannon's participation in the various factional struggles, splits and fusions that shaped American Trotskyism. It will also address Cannon's role in the fight against the revisionism that ultimately politically destroyed the Fourth International in the 1950s. Unlike the struggle against Stalinism in the 1920s, these issues are all hotly contested among ostensible Trotskyists today. We look forward to the second volume of this work with great anticipation. If it is as thoroughly researched as the first volume, it will be an exceptionally valuable contribution to the history of the Trotskyist movement in North America and beyond. ■

Just published—

A reply to ICL's 'Dossier'

On the Logan Show Trial

INTERNATIONAL BOLSHEVIK TENDENCY

U.S. \$5

Order from: BT, PO Box 332, Adelaide St. Stn.,
Toronto, Canada M5C 2J4

IBT Exchange With ICL

On 'Revolutionary Regroupment'

On 3 November 2007, the International Bolshevik Tendency (IBT) held a public meeting in Toronto to commemorate the 90th anniversary of the October Revolution. Guest speaker Bryan Palmer, James P. Cannon's biographer, addressed a crowd of 60 on the topic of "The Russian Revolution and the North American Left." Among those in attendance were supporters of the New Democratic Party, Socialist Action, Socialist Equality Party, Socialist Project, and the Trotskyist League (TL—aka "Spartacists"), as well as a representative of *Upping the Anti*, a semi-anarchist publication.

During the discussion period, several Spartacist speakers disputed the idea that any significant revolutionary regroupment is possible today. Tynan M., declared, "in the 1960s through to the 1990s, we Spartacists pursued regroupments with organizations around the world claiming to be Trotskyist...but what we discovered was that we were the only organization in the world that stood on the program and principles of Trotskyism." John Masters, the TL's senior figure, added:

"The possibility of regrouping the genuine revolutionary forces in the period roughly 1919 to 1921 was decisively shaped by a huge epochal victory for the proletariat—the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. There have been other epochal or major events which, while not of the same scale, have posed the possibility of major regroupment of genuine revolutionary forces. For example, May '68 in France shook the left. In a different way, the Khrushchev revelations and the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 shook big parts of the left. There were possibilities, things opened there. But let's face it: the destruction of the Soviet Union in 1991 is what shaped the current period and it is a disastrous defeat that has produced demoralization, disillusionment, heavily into the working class. And I'm sorry, 'fragmented' isn't the point: the vast majority of the left, including self-professed Marxists, supported counter-revolution. There is no basis for any substantive revolutionary regroupment there. That's not to say there isn't a basis for winning individuals or even small groupings here or there. But what we are faced with in this period I think is a very different task—it is fundamentally upholding the principles of revolutionary Marxism, including learning the lessons of history and not pretending to blur over things...."

While comrade Masters is quite right that epochal victories are usually required before massive political realignments occur within the workers' movement, some very important regroupments have taken place in periods of generally rightward motion. The handful of socialists of the "Zimmerwald Left," who met in September 1915 in Switzerland to raise the banner of proletarian internationalism in the midst of a barbaric world war, took a very important step on the road to a new, revolutionary socialist international. In the aftermath of the Nazi victory in 1933—one of the most severe defeats ever suffered by the international working class—Leon Trotsky actively sought to regroup the best militants from various small splits from social democracy and the Stalinized Communist International. During the McCarthyite 1950s in the United

States, the then-Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party made a small, but significant, regroupment when a few young revolutionaries (including James Robertson, Shane Mage and Tim Wohlforth) broke with Max Shachtman's rightward-moving Independent Socialist League.

There is abundant evidence that millions of people around the world are eager to fight capitalist oppression. Some of them join various ostensibly socialist organizations. The job of revolutionaries is to win the best militants to the program of genuine Marxism, i.e., Trotskyism.

Comrade Samuel Trachtenberg, speaking for the IBT, responded to Masters as follows:

"I think that the political perspective put forward by the comrades of the Trotskyist League today is one that you will find they have been putting forward in their newspapers for the last several years. And I would argue that it is an extremely demoralizing and pessimistic perspective. It boils down to arguing that, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the so-called post-Soviet era that they are talking about, what we have seen is not just a huge defeat for the working class, which it certainly was, but a defeat of the working class so monumental that no class struggle, no real progress of any sort—whether a call for a general strike in France last year, whether we see uprisings by workers in Bolivia or Mexico, or fighting to build a revolutionary party through revolutionary regroupment—is possible. Nothing is possible in the so-called post-Soviet era, according to them, but [to] uphold the Trotskyist tradition in their own bunker. As they put it, they themselves have developed a 'bunker mentality' in reaction to the so-called post-Soviet era.

"So what do you do? Well, it seems that the argument that is being made today [is] that revolutionary regroupment was possible because of the victory of the Russian Revolution. Well, we don't have the Russian Revolution around at this moment, so what do you do? Well, you wait for another Russian Revolution to occur. But guess what? We cannot have another revolution in the United States, Canada or anywhere else without a revolutionary party. And you cannot have a revolutionary party hiding out in their bunker abstractly upholding the tradition in isolation from the class struggle and from the rest of the left.

"In terms of how do you build a revolutionary party and what the Bolsheviks did for 20 years before the revolution—well, the Marxist movement at that point did something similar, I would argue, to what we are doing at the moment. [Georgy] Plekhanov, in a period when Marxists were extremely small and tiny and did not have the capacity to go out and organize the masses and mass struggles, put out publications, polemics and critiques of the populists, Narodniks, anarchists and other left socialist trends within Russia at that moment. (Trotsky himself was recruited from the populists.) And I would argue that is something we can do today. Because within groups like the International Socialists, within groups like the Communist Party of Canada, even within groups like the Trotskyist League, even there, you will find people, comrades, who are subjectively revolutionary—who really are interested in a revolution—but are stuck in a bad organization with bad politics and bad program." ■

Middle East...

continued from page 2

Israelis, but what form the "aid" should take.

The similarity in policy prescriptions between Democrats and Republicans reflects an identity of class interests. Imperialism is not a policy option, but a global system of exploitation and oppression based on the division of the world into spheres of influence for a handful of predatory advanced capitalist powers. Control of the fantastic oil wealth of the Middle East is crucial to the maintenance of American global hegemony. U.S. leaders in the White House, Congress, State Department and Pentagon are painfully aware that loosening their grip on the region will accelerate America's decline.

The "War on Terror" was a strategy designed to consolidate U.S. supremacy in the Middle East through the creation of permanent American military installations, elimination of recalcitrant regimes and stabilization of regional clients. These measures were intended to ensure U.S. control of a huge chunk of global petroleum resources, which would translate directly into influence over rivals. The spectacular failure of Washington's Mid-East gambit to date has had the opposite effect: endangering American clients, emboldening opposition and providing enemies with unexpected leverage.

In an attempt to hedge its position, Washington is now taking an active interest in every conflict underway from the Horn of Africa to Central Asia, providing arms, intelligence and other support to favored factions and governments. While still deeply involved in Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. is positioning itself for future interventions.

Oil, the Middle East and U.S. Imperialism

When former Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan's autobiography was published in September 2007, the American media honed in on his comment that: "I am saddened that it is politically inconvenient to acknowledge what everyone knows: the Iraq war is largely about oil." Greenspan is the most important Washington policy-maker to acknowledge the obvious about U.S. Middle East policy:

"The intense attention of the developed world to Middle Eastern political affairs has always been critically tied to oil security. The reaction to, and reversal of, [Iranian Prime Minister Mohammed] Mossadeq's nationalization of Anglo-Iranian Oil in 1951 and the aborted effort of Britain and France to reverse [Egyptian President Gamal Abdel] Nasser's takeover of the key Suez Canal link for oil flows to Europe in 1956 are but two prominent examples. And whatever their publicized angst over Saddam Hussein's 'weapons of mass destruction,' American and British authorities were also concerned about violence in an area that harbors a resource indispensable for the functioning of the world economy....

"[P]rojections of world oil supply and demand that do not note the highly precarious environment of the Middle East are avoiding the eight hundred pound gorilla that could bring world economic growth to a halt."

—*The Age of Turbulence*

The suggestion that "liberal democracies" (as the impe-

rialist powers advertise themselves) engage in war and conquest in order to secure sources of raw materials has long been anathema to liberals and reformists. Why go through the bother and expense of seizing territories and installing satrapies when the same raw materials can be much more easily obtained on the "free market"? A variant of this argument is commonly employed to rebut the Marxist proposition that the Iraq war was a classic case of imperialist plunder. After all, argue imperialism's liberal apologists, if Washington was truly motivated by a desire to access oil, why not simply make a commercial arrangement with Saddam Hussein? Vladimir Lenin, co-leader with Leon Trotsky of the Russian Revolution, addressed this question directly in 1916:

"Of course, the bourgeois reformists, and among them particularly the present-day adherents of Kautsky, try to belittle the importance of facts of this kind by arguing the raw materials 'could be' obtained in the open market without a 'costly and dangerous' colonial policy; and that the supply of raw materials 'could be' increased enormously by 'simply' improving conditions in agriculture in general. But such arguments become an apology for imperialism, an attempt to embellish it, because they ignore the principal feature of the latest stage of capitalism: monopolies....

"Finance capital is interested not only in the already discovered sources of raw materials but also in potential sources, because present-day technical development is extremely rapid, and land which is useless today may be made fertile tomorrow if new methods are devised (to this end a big bank can equip a special expedition of engineers, agricultural experts, etc.), and if large amounts of capital are invested. This also applies to prospecting for minerals, to new methods of working up and utilizing raw materials, etc., etc. Hence, the inevitable striving of finance capital to enlarge its economic territory and even its territory in general. In the same way that the trusts capitalize their property at two or three times its value, taking into account its 'potential' (and not present) profits, and the further results of monopoly, so finance capital in general strives to seize the largest possible amount of land of all kinds in all places, and by every means, taking into account potential sources of raw materials and fearing to be left behind in the fierce struggle for the last scraps of undivided territory, or for the repartition of those that have been already divided."

—*Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism*

The power of monopolies, which rests on their ability to command privileged access to markets and to control existing and potential sources of raw materials, imparts a vicious territorial imperative to capitalist competition. In search of exclusive "spheres of influence" for their respective monopolists, the major capitalist powers brutally parceled the globe at the dawn of the twentieth century. It was at this time—the birth of the "petroleum age"—that the oil of the Middle East became an immensely valuable prize. In June 1920, Walter Hume Long, Britain's First Lord of the Admiralty, candidly observed: "If we secure the supplies of oil now available in the world we can do what we like" (*New York Times*, 27 June 1920). The subsequent history of the Middle East has been decisively shaped by the struggle of rival imperialists to subjugate the region's indigenous peoples and control their territory.

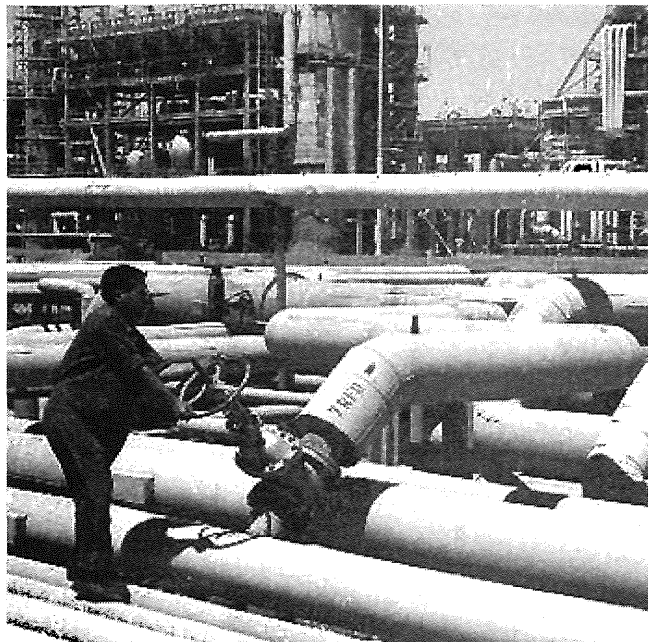
The United States remained largely aloof from the orig-

inal scramble for Africa and the Middle East. While liberal ideologues attribute this to America's "anti-colonial" principles, in fact Washington was already successfully colonizing its Latin American "backyard" and had brutally ravaged the Philippines. As Paris and London haggled over the division of the territories of the Ottoman Empire in the wake of World War I, Washington piously espoused an "open door" policy of free trade—in reality an attempt to gain access to the colonies of the older imperialist powers. At the same time, the U.S. sought to keep the Latin American "door" firmly shut to European interference.

One of the first fruits of the "open door" was obtained in 1928, when two American companies, Jersey Standard and Socony (later known as Exxon and Mobil), wrangled a 24 percent stake in the Turkish Petroleum Company (which had a massive oil concession in British-administered Iraq). Until then the oil fields of the region had been the preserve of British, French and Dutch interests. What ultimately proved much more important for America's regional and global standing, however, was the signing of a deal with King Saud in 1933 opening up Saudi oil fields to Standard Oil of California—and subsequently to Texaco, Exxon and Mobil. These four firms comprised the Arabian-American Oil Company (Aramco).

In the midst of World War II, U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt told Lord Halifax, the British ambassador, that "Persian oil...is yours. We share the oil of Iraq and Kuwait. As for Saudi Arabian oil, it's ours" (Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money, and Power*). At the outset of the Cold War, the U.S. State Department identified the Middle East as "a stupendous source of strategic power, and one of the greatest material prizes in world history" (cited in Melvyn Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power*). Washington was prepared to temporarily support British colonial authority in the Middle East so long as London remained cooperative. In the medium term, however, the U.S. worked to displace the British in the most lucrative oil-producing countries. American policy in the region aimed at forging anti-Soviet alliances and actively repressing left-nationalist or pro-socialist movements. To this end, Washington aided a variety of reactionary Islamist formations.

The pursuit of these objectives sometimes created confusion. The U.S. initially welcomed Mossadeq's regime in Iran as a means of breaking the British monopoly on Persian oil. When Mossadeq nationalized Anglo-Iranian Oil (later British Petroleum—BP) in 1951, U.S. President Harry Truman opposed British plans to invade Iran. Only when Mossadeq refused to permit U.S. oil majors to move in did Washington discover that he was some type of "communist," and began a sophisticated covert campaign in cooperation with the British to terminate Iran's fledgling bourgeois democracy and restore the ersatz Pahlavi monarchy. One key U.S. ally was Ayatollah Seyyed Abolqassem Kashani, the great godfather of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and founder of the Devotees of Islam (an Islamist terrorist organization modeled on the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood). John Waller, who ran America's covert campaign, recalled that the CIA provided "money both to Kashani and to his chosen instruments, money to finance his communication channels, pamphleteering, and so on to the people in south Teheran" (quoted in Robert Dreyfuss, *Devil's Game: How the United States Helped Unleash Fundamentalist Islam*, 2005).



Oil worker in Iraq

Kashani, who had a popular base among the residents of Tehran's slums, organized mass mobilizations against Mossadeq and the Moscow-line Stalinists of the Tudeh Party. The CIA and MI6 did their bit by paying thugs to pose as Tudeh members and attack Shiite religious symbols. In his history of the MI6, Stephen Dorril writes:

"A key aspect of the plot was to portray the mobs as supporters of the Tudeh Party in order to provide a suitable pretext for the coup and the resumption of control by the Shah....[MI6 agents] hired a fake Tudeh crowd, comprising an unusual mixture of pan-Iranians and Tudeh members, paid for with fifty thousand dollars given to them by a CIA officer. Richard Cottam [a CIA officer] observed that agents working on behalf of the British 'saw the opportunity and sent the people we had under our control into the streets to act as if they were Tudeh. They were more than just provocateurs, they were shock troops, who acted as if they were Tudeh people throwing rocks at mosques and [mullahs].' 'The purpose' [another writer said], 'was to frighten a majority of Iranians into believing that a victory for Mossadeq would be a victory for the Tudeh, the Soviet Union and irreligion.'"

—MI6

Under the Shah, Mossadeq's nationalizations were annulled and a 40 percent share in the new oil consortium was given to five big American companies. While BP retained a stake, the British monopoly on Persian oil was broken. The Tudeh Party was driven underground, and any perceived threat of social revolution was vanquished. The coup immensely strengthened the political hand of the clergy and provided practical training for those who were eventually to lead the Islamic Revolution. It was during this period that Ayatollah Khomeini, inspired by his mentor Kashani, was busy working alongside the Devotees of Islam to fuse Shiite religious reaction with political activism.

The U.S. applied similar tactics elsewhere in the Middle East. A decade after Mossadeq was deposed, the CIA helped Baathist Party members and elements of the military take

power in Iraq, toppling the left-bourgeois government that had nationalized Iraq's oil industry. The new regime jailed and executed hundreds of members of the Iraqi Communist Party (see 1917 No. 26).

Washington tended to favor the Islamist opponents of secular nationalism and socialism. During the 1950s and 1960s, the Saudis, America's foremost regional ally, funneled millions of dollars to Muslim Brotherhood sections throughout the region, targeting in particular Nasser's left-nationalist regime in Egypt. A "former senior CIA official" summed up U.S. policy for journalist Robert Dreyfuss as follows:

"The Cold War was the defining clarity of the time. We saw Nasser as socialist, anti-Western, anti-Baghdad Pact, and we were looking for some sort of counterfoil. Saudi efforts to Islamicize the region were seen as powerful and effective and likely to be successful. We loved that. We had an ally against communism."

—*Devil's Game*

This policy reached its height in the 1980s, when Washington worked in tandem with Riyadh and Islamabad to fund and arm the *mujahedin* against the Soviets and their allies in Afghanistan.

The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989 appeared to usher in an era of unrestricted American domination in the region far surpassing anything dreamed of in 1945. The Soviet "threat" was no more, and in any case, Moscow had never exerted the same control over its Syrian and Egyptian clients that Washington had over its Persian Gulf dependencies. The prospect of social revolution was posed on several occasions, most potently during the 1958 Iraqi Revolution and during the revolt against the Shah in the 1978-79 Iranian Revolution, but in both cases was fatally undermined by the lack of effective working-class leadership. In 1958 the Iraqi Communist Party supported the "progressive" wing of the bourgeoisie led by Abdel Karim Qasim, while in Iran the Stalinists in the Tudeh Party bowed before "anti-imperialist" Khomeini and the mullahs.

Iran's Islamic Revolution represented a major setback for Washington. It removed America's most important client in the region and led to the expropriation of U.S. oil interests in the country. But a socialist revolution in Iran could have touched off a series of struggles to expropriate imperialist property throughout the region, with reverberations far beyond the Middle East. In one sense, therefore, the victory of the ayatollahs was a blessing for Washington: by crushing the Iranian workers' movement, the Islamic "revolutionaries" suppressed the only social force that could have fundamentally challenged imperialist domination and capitalist exploitation.

By the end of the 1970s, the U.S. had control over most of the region's petroleum resources. The Gulf sheikhdoms had "nationalized" their oil holdings, thereby asserting formal ownership over the mineral resources in the ground, while maintaining an important role for U.S. multinationals in production. Washington and the oil companies accepted these moves as a necessary evil, so long as the ruling regimes remained aligned with the imperial metropole and American corporate property was safeguarded. The Gulf oil producers carry out all transactions in U.S. dollars, underpinning the greenback as an international reserve currency.

The triumph of counterrevolution in the Soviet bloc

meant that Washington, Bonn, Paris, London and Tokyo no longer had a common enemy to keep their mutual antagonisms in check. The U.S. Department of Defense responded with a strategic review, entitled *Defense Planning Guidance*, which declared: "Our strategy must refocus on precluding the emergence of any future global competitor." The authors of the review, Zalmay Khalilzad and Paul Wolfowitz (both of whom came to prominence in the administration of George W. Bush) proposed: "In the Middle East and Southwest Asia, our overall objective is to remain the predominant outside power in the region and preserve US and Western access to the region's oil" (cited in *Middle East Report*, Summer 2006). Under George Bush Sr. and Bill Clinton these objectives were pursued through brutal "humanitarian" neo-colonial wars in Iraq, Somalia and Yugoslavia, with U.S. military toeholds being established in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain and Eastern Europe. (The American military pulled out of Somalia in 1993 after 18 U.S. Rangers were killed in a fire-fight in Mogadishu.)

Iraq has the second largest proven oil reserves in the world, estimated at 115 billion barrels, and perhaps twice that. This is an alluring prize for U.S. imperialism. As the UN's murderous sanction regime groaned on, Washington's rivals—particularly France and Russia—quietly pushed for ending the embargo, and signed tentative oil deals with the Baathists. When it became clear that the sanctions had failed to generate enough internal opposition to topple Saddam Hussein, the American bourgeoisie closed ranks behind a policy of "regime change" from without. America's economic decline, manifested in a depreciating dollar and a ballooning current account deficit, was to be reversed by using its unrivalled military power to gain control of Iraq's oil and establish a permanent presence in the heart of the Arab world. The plan was to cement Washington's "full spectrum dominance" over its imperial rivals while reducing its reliance upon the increasingly unstable Saudi monarchy.

The failure of this high-stakes gamble has greatly increased political and military instability in the region and pushed up the price of oil (and with it, the cost of producing and distributing most commodities). Clay Sell, U.S. Deputy Secretary of Energy, observed:

"We know that the world is not running out of energy resources, but nonetheless, above-ground risks like resource nationalism, limited access and infrastructure constraints may make it feel like peak oil just the same, by limiting production to something far less than what is required."

—*Wall Street Journal*, 19 November 2007

"Resource nationalism," Washington's euphemism for attempts by oil producers to exert some control over their resources, is on the rise. But the U.S. is at least as worried about the flight from the dollar, as Iran is now demanding payment in euros or yen and Russia and Venezuela have taken steps in the same direction. This reduces demand for dollars, which in turn increases the incentive for other oil exporters to follow suit. Kuwait no longer pegs its currency to the dollar, but rather to a "basket" of currencies, including the euro. Other members of the U.S.-aligned "Gulf Co-operation Council"—Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman and Bahrain—are reported to be contemplating similar moves (*Economist*, 24 November 2007). In his syndicated column, Gwynne Dyer summed up the situation:



AP

Al-Sadr followers march through Najaf in March 2007, fourth anniversary of U.S. invasion of Iraq

"The downward pressure on the dollar will continue, because the United States is borrowing 6 percent of its Gross Domestic Product from foreigners each year to cover its trade deficit.

"Foreign banks were happy to go on lending so long as they had faith in the integrity of U.S. financial institutions, but that has been hit hard by the sub-prime mortgage crisis....

"Above all, there are now alternatives to the U.S. dollar. The last time it faced a comparable crisis was in 1971, when a different Republican president was trying to run another unpopular war without raising taxes.

"Richard Nixon devalued the U.S. dollar and demolished the Bretton Woods system that had fixed all other currencies in relation to the dollar, inaugurating the current era of floating exchange rates.

"There was no other candidate then for the role of global reserve currency, so the dollar stayed at the center of the system despite all the turbulence.

"This time, by contrast, there is the euro, the currency of an economic zone just as big as the United States....

"But nothing is likely to happen very fast."

—*Cincinnati Post*, 27 November 2007

Washington's dollar hegemony has provided the U.S. with crucial economic (and political) leverage, as Benn Steil, Director of International Economics at the Council

on Foreign Relations, noted:

"The US is extraordinarily fortunate in that its currency is also the international standard of value—if that would disappear, US leverage in many dimensions would also go.

"What countries need in a financial crisis is dollars and that gives the US enormous leverage."

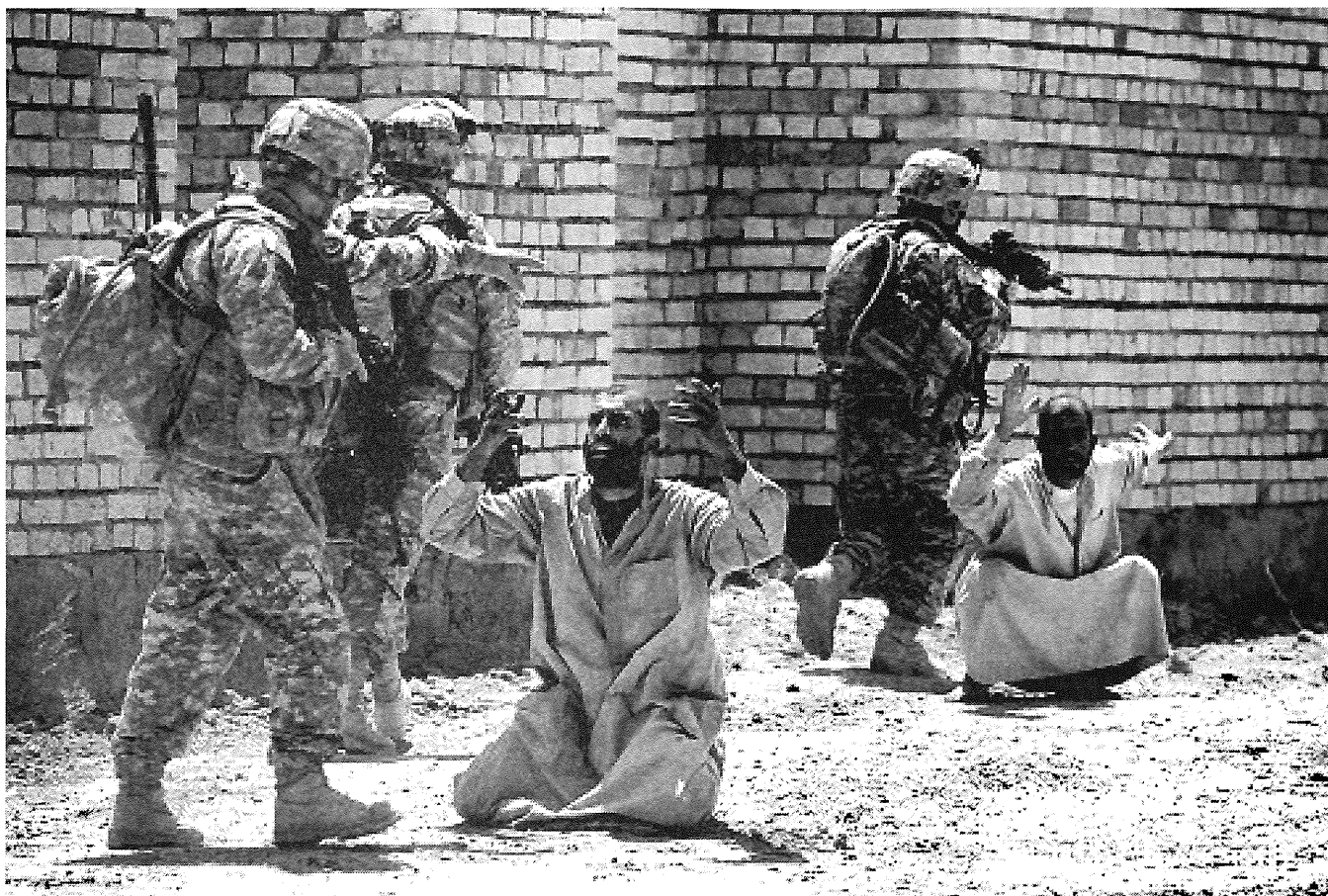
—*Financial Times* [London], 28 December 2007

By denominating oil contracts in dollars, the Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia, help maintain the dollar's international role; in exchange, the oil sheikhs get security guarantees. As Washington's military position in the region deteriorates, the value of these guarantees falls, and pressure builds to abandon the dollar.

Iraq: Operation Enduring Fiasco

After five years of fighting, the manifest inability of the mighty U.S. military to subdue Iraqi resistance has further weakened the "world's only superpower." Yet the American bourgeoisie, both Democratic and Republican, see no option but to remain in Iraq indefinitely, hoping that somehow their position will improve.

The Bush administration's "surge" of 30,000 more U.S. troops to join the 130,000 already in Iraq was supposed to create "breathing space" for Sunni, Shiite and Kurdish politicians to establish a stable client regime. But the



American military in Iraq: occupation is a crime

"surge" failed for the same reason that previous attempts have—there is no significant element of Iraqi society that supports a long-term U.S. occupation. This is why, after five years of "training," the puppet army is still of no use in policing the American occupation:

"Militia infiltration of Iraq's security forces is so bad in some places that American soldiers sometimes do not know whether to trust their Iraqi counterparts. 'We don't trust 'em,' said 1st Lt. Steve Taylor, serving at a joint Iraqi-American security station in Sulakh. 'There's no way to know who's good and who's bad, so we have to assume they're all bad, unfortunately.' In the Ameel neighborhood of Baghdad, the local commander of Iraqi national police has been replaced three times since March because of ties to militias or insurgent groups. In some instances, American soldiers have been killed by Iraqi security forces that they were actually training."

—Brian Katulis, Center for American Progress,
11 June 2007

In October 2007, Ricardo Sanchez, the former top "coalition" commander in Iraq, summed up the U.S. position as "a nightmare with no end in sight," and bemoaned the fact that "[a]fter more than four years of fighting, America continues its desperate struggle in Iraq without any concerted effort to devise a strategy that will achieve victory in that war-torn country or in the greater conflict against extremism" (*New York Times*, 13 October 2007).

The UN estimates that of a population of 27 million, some 2.5 million have fled the country and another 2.2 million are

internally displaced, largely as a result of "ethnic cleansing." This is by far the largest refugee crisis in the Middle East since the Palestinians were driven from their homes by Zionist terror during the creation of the state of Israel.

The Bush administration credits its "surge" with reducing the daily death toll in Baghdad. In fact, however, this is largely attributable to a decision by Moqtada al-Sadr, the populist Shiite cleric, to order his Mahdi Army (which exercises *de facto* power in the city's vast Shiite slums) to suspend operations. The fact that this occurred shortly after Iraq's nominal prime minister, Nouri al-Maliki, met with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in August 2007, led to speculation that Ahmadinejad had asked Sadr to rein in his militia to strengthen Iran's diplomatic position vis-à-vis the United States.

Sadr expects to wait out the Americans in Baghdad just as his forces waited out the British in Basra, Iraq's second city. In September 2007, British forces declared victory and withdrew from the city center to an airport several kilometers outside (*Guardian Weekly*, 7 September 2007). While the withdrawal supposedly showed that local army and police units could handle things, according to Toby Dodge of the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London, the British were "driven out by Islamic radicals with nothing more than rocket-propelled grenades and mortars" (*New York Times*, 9 October 2007).

The Americans are pressing the British to remain in the south to secure the supply route from Kuwait, to hold the puppet army together and patrol the border with Iran, but

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown is looking for a way out. Washington's only significant partner in the "coalition of the willing" may be gone by 2009.

One cleric with the Mahdi Army, which has filled the vacuum of power in Basra, told the London *Guardian*: "Now is not the time to escalate the situation with the British. They retreated to the airport and that's fine, for now. Our goal is to get rid of the governor of Basra, consolidate our control over the city, and finish with the collaborators" (*Guardian Weekly*, 23 November 2007). Like its Islamist counterparts in Palestine and Lebanon, the Mahdi Army has assumed many of the functions of state power. Today in Basra, *sharia*-based tribunals, with Mahdi Army goons acting as bailiffs, provide Islamist "justice."

Awakening Councils—U.S. Hires Sunni 'Allies'

In Iraq's predominantly Sunni regions, particularly Anbar province and west Baghdad, the U.S. military has hired Sunni tribal leaders, former insurgents and warlords as allies in its struggle against "Al Qaeda in Iraq." Previously, these same Sunni leaders welcomed the *jihadi*ists as allies against the U.S. military, but the relationship soured as a result of indiscriminate attacks on civilians and a lack of obeisance to the tribal leadership. The final straw seems to have been Al Qaeda's declaration of an "Islamic State of Iraq" and its attempts to levy a 25 percent tax on the earnings of other insurgent groups in west Baghdad.

A senior Sunni sheikh described the marriage of convenience with the U.S. in the following terms:

"It's just a way to get arms, and to be a legalised security force to be able to stand against Shia militias and to prevent the Iraqi army and police from entering their areas. The Americans lost hope with an Iraqi government that is sectarian and dominated by [Shiite] militias, so they are paying for locals to fight al-Qaida. It will create a series of warlords. It's like someone who brought cats to fight rats, found himself with too many cats and brought dogs to fight the cats. Now they need elephants."

—*Guardian Weekly*, 16 November 2007

The Sunni members of the "awakening councils" want jobs in the security forces, but the Shiite-dominated "government" does not want to put rivals on the payroll. Vali Nasr, an expert on Iran and Shiism, told Seymour Hersh: "The American policy of supporting the Sunnis in western Iraq is making the Shia leadership very nervous." He continued:

"The White House makes it seem as if the Shia were afraid only of Al Qaeda—but they are afraid of the Sunni tribesmen we are arming. The Shia attitude is 'So what if you're getting rid of Al Qaeda?' The problem of the Sunni resistance is still there. The Americans believe they can distinguish between good and bad insurgents, but the Shia don't share that distinction. For the Shia, they are all one adversary."

—*New Yorker*, 8 October 2007

Washington's new Sunni "allies" have hardly made a secret of their intentions. Abu Abed, a member of the insurgent Islamic Army, who now leads the "Ameriya Knights" and gets an allowance from the U.S. of \$400 a month for each fighter he commands, has an ambitious agenda:

"Ameriya [a neighborhood of Baghdad] is just the beginning. After we finish with al-Qaida here, we will turn

toward our main enemy, the Shia militias. I will liberate Jihad [a Sunni area taken over by the Mahdi army], then Saida and the whole of west Baghdad."

—*Guardian Weekly*, 16 November 2007

Washington's alliance with Sunni insurgents pushed Maliki and other "moderate" Shiites closer to Tehran. Maliki has warned his American patrons that Iraqi Shiites "can find friends elsewhere" (*Asia Times Online*, 26 October 2007). Since 2005, the Maliki government has concluded a variety of bilateral agreements with Iran, covering military assistance and the construction of an oil pipeline from southern Iraq to Iran. In October 2007, a few months after the largest Sunni political bloc, the Accordance Front, withdrew its six ministers from his cabinet, Maliki awarded contracts for \$1.1 billion to Iran and China for the construction of power plants in Baghdad's Shiite Sadr City and between the two Shiite holy cities of Najaf and Karbala.

Imperialist Resource Grab & the Elusive Oil Law

A critical step in fashioning a pliable "national unity" puppet government is for the Shiite, Sunni and Kurdish leaderships to come to some agreement on sharing petroleum revenue. The Sunnis, whose territories in western and central Iraq have no significant oil deposits, insist on central government control, while the Kurds, concentrated in the oil-rich north, want "autonomy" in deciding what happens to oil pumped on their territory. The Shiites are divided on the question—some favor autonomy for the oil-rich Shiite south, while others (including Maliki) are fearful of handing too much leverage to the Kurds. Washington, which has thus far opposed proposals for balkanizing Iraq, would prefer to see control in the hands of a malleable federal government. Of course, the occupation authorities are concerned that foreign, particularly American, oil companies end up with control of Iraq's petroleum.

When an agreement seemed imminent in early 2007, an *Economist* (3 March 2007) report headlined: "That long-awaited share-out." The deal was all that the multinational oil barons could have hoped for, as Naomi Klein observed:

"The law that was finally adopted by Iraq's cabinet in February 2007 was even worse than anticipated; it placed no limits on the amount of profits that foreign companies can take from the country and placed no specific requirements about how much or little foreign investors would partner with Iraqi companies or hire Iraqis to work in the oil fields. Most brazenly, it excluded Iraq's elected parliamentarians from having any say in the terms for future oil contracts. Instead, it created a new body, the Federal Oil and Gas Council, which, according to the *New York Times*, would be advised by 'a panel of oil experts from inside and outside Iraq.' This unelected body, advised by unspecified foreigners, would have ultimate decision-making power on all oil matters, with the full authority to decide which contracts Iraq did and did not sign. In effect, the law called for Iraq's publicly owned oil reserves, the country's main source of revenues, to be exempted from democratic control and run instead by a powerful, wealthy oil dictatorship, which would exist alongside Iraq's broken and ineffective government."

—*The Shock Doctrine*

The “production sharing agreements” (PSAs) envisioned by the draft law—30-year contracts worth tens or even hundreds of billions of dollars to foreign oil companies—would mean a return to the sort of arrangements that predominated in the Middle East prior to the nationalizations of the 1970s.

However, the draft law turned out to be another casualty of the ethnic hostilities tearing Iraq apart. The Kurds insisted that the Federal Oil and Gas Council not be given the right to “approve” contracts, and the draft was amended to permit only the rejection of contracts that do not meet certain criteria. When the proposed legislation arrived in parliament, the Kurds complained that it was unbalanced, and the Kurdish government in the north began unilaterally signing deals with international oil companies. The main Sunni party, Tawafiq, responded by insisting that the legislation make it clear that the federal government retained sole ownership of oil fields and had the exclusive right to sign contracts. There seems little prospect that Iraq’s fractured parliament is going to pass an oil law any time soon. The U.S. is trying to make the best of the situation by pressing the Iraqis to reverse Saddam-era oil contacts, thus opening future possibilities for American companies. In October 2007 it was revealed that the Iraqi government had canceled an old contract with the Russian company Lukoil for the development of a massive oil field in the Iraqi south.

Iraq’s trade unions played a significant role in the fight over the oil legislation. The Iraqi Federation of Oil Unions (IFOU), with 26,000 members in southern Iraq, struck for several days in opposition to privatization plans. Maliki’s government responded by sending the military into the oil fields with arrest warrants for strike leaders accused of “sabotaging the economy” (United Press International, 7 June 2007). A month later the oil minister used legislation passed by Saddam Hussein’s regime to declare the union illegal (“IFOU Statement on Attack by Minister of Oil,” 20 August 2007).

This was the third time since the U.S. invasion that the oil workers shut down production. Over 90 percent of Iraq’s federal budget is derived from oil revenues, and the petroleum industry provides most of the country’s fuel for transport, cooking and heating. Iraqi oil workers have the social power to spearhead a formidable movement against the occupiers. A revolutionary workers’ party would seek to use the struggle against Washington’s resource grab as a springboard for a fight for genuine national and social liberation. Such a party, armed with the program of permanent revolution, would mobilize the proletariat in support of the daily struggles for survival by Iraq’s impoverished masses and would also actively defend religious and ethnic minorities, women, gays, lesbians and all those victimized by the imperialists, their puppets and the reactionary militias.

Occupation With, or Without, Balkanization

While official U.S. policy remains committed to a unified Iraq, important elements of the American ruling class are planning for the day when the country breaks into three: Iraqi Kurdistan in the north, the Sunni Arab west and the Shiite Arab south. The Hunt Oil Company of Dallas, Texas, run by Ray Hunt, a close political ally of

Bush and a member of the president’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, has already signed a contract with the Kurds. Liberal economist Paul Krugman noted:

“[W]hat’s interesting about this deal is the fact that Mr. Hunt, thanks to his policy position, is presumably as well-informed about the actual state of affairs in Iraq as anyone in the business world can be. By putting his money into a deal with the Kurds, despite Baghdad’s disapproval, he’s essentially betting that the Iraqi government—which hasn’t met a single one of the major benchmarks Mr. Bush laid out in January—won’t get its act together. Indeed, he’s effectively betting against the survival of Iraq as a nation in any meaningful sense of the term.”

—*New York Times*, 14 September 2007

In October 2007, the U.S. Senate overwhelmingly approved a non-binding resolution supporting the creation of a loose Iraqi confederation with three effectively independent ethno-religious regions.

Dismembering Iraq is likely to create more problems than it would solve. Even assuming compliant regimes in all three semi-states—a very big assumption—there are many triggers for massive conflicts, including the division of Baghdad and the question of who gets Kirkuk, the oil-rich province claimed by both Kurds and Sunni Arabs. Turkey, a key regional ally of the U.S. with its own hideously oppressed Kurdish minority, has made it clear that it has no intention of tolerating an independent Iraqi Kurdistan.

While there is a widespread recognition that the Iraq adventure has been a disaster, no significant element of the U.S. bourgeoisie is prepared to advocate outright withdrawal:

“[T]he building of US military bases in Iraq continues apace, at a cost of over \$1bn a year. Shortly after the invasion, the US established 110 bases in Iraq. The present plan appears to consolidate these into 14 ‘enduring bases’ in Iraqi Kurdistan, at Baghdad airport, in Anbar province, and in the southern approaches to Baghdad. This does not point to an early US disengagement. And nor does the construction of a US embassy able to house 1,000 staff on a 100-acre site on the banks of the Tigris—the biggest US embassy in the world.”

—*Guardian*, 9 June 2007

Some ruling-class strategists, groping for a way out, have proposed a “Korea model” for Iraq—i.e., a permanent U.S. military presence that is accepted domestically. Meanwhile, Iranian influence is rising, as Vali Nasr observed:

“In the political vacuum that followed Saddam’s fall, Iranian influence quickly spread into southern Iraq on the back of commercial connections—driven by a growing volume of trade and a massive flow of Iranian pilgrims into shrine cities of Iraq—and burgeoning intelligence and political ties. Iran’s influence quickly extended to every level of Iraq’s bureaucracy, Shiite cleric and tribal establishments, and security and political apparatuses. The war turned a large part of Iraq into an Iranian sphere of influence, and equally important, paved the way for Iranian hegemony in the Persian Gulf. With the Iraqi Army gone, there is no military bulwark in the Persian Gulf to contain Iran’s expansionist ambitions.”

—*Foreign Policy*, March/April 2007

Many of Iraq’s Shiite leaders have spent substantial amounts of time in Iran, and some—including the leadership

of the Iraqi Islamic Supreme Council—sided with Tehran during the Iran-Iraq war. Maliki's regime, which owes its existence to the American military, has used its Iranian connection to increase its room for maneuver. Tehran wields real clout in Iraq, both in the halls of government and in the streets. But there are many obstacles to a close alliance between Iraq's Arab Shiite leaders and the Persian-chauvinist fundamentalists who rule Iran.

The expansion of Tehran's influence is counterposed to Washington's bid for hegemony in the region. America's imperialist rulers have therefore sought to manufacture the appearance of an Iranian nuclear threat because, ultimately, military pressure is the only tool they have to counter Tehran's *political* challenge. The imperialist media, which raises a clamor whenever a Western journalist or academic is detained in Iran, has been virtually silent about the U.S. seizure of hundreds of Iranians in Iraq. One "former senior intelligence official" told journalist Seymour Hersh that American forces "had five hundred [Iranians] locked up at one time. We're working these guys and getting information from them" (*New Yorker*, 5 March 2007).

Almost half the warships of the U.S. Navy, including two aircraft carrier groups, are stationed close to Iran. American and Israeli commandos have reportedly been operating in Iranian territory since 2004, spying on military installations and identifying potential targets for future air strikes (*Financial Times*, 5 March 2007). The U.S. is also quietly aiding anti-Tehran rebels on Iran's borders. Hundreds of Iranians have been killed in guerrilla strikes by the Iraq-based Party for Free Life in Kurdistan (PJAK—an offshoot of the Kurdish Workers Party [PKK] which is active against the Turks). While the U.S. considers the PKK a "terrorist" organization and tacitly approves Turkish military actions against it, Washington views the PJAK entirely differently, feting its leader and holding discussions with its commanders (*New York Times*, 23 October 2007).

Tehran alleges that separatist guerrillas in Khuzestan and Baluchistan provinces are supported by British and U.S. intelligence respectively. The U.S. has continued Saddam Hussein's policy of supporting the guerrillas of the Mujahedin e-Khalq (MEK)—which Washington officially designates a "terrorist" group—as a tool for undermining the Islamic Republic.

Washington's dark warnings of Iranian nuclear "ambitions" reflect the strategic imperatives of American imperialism rather than any imminent Iranian "threat." Unlike Israel, India and Pakistan—three nuclear-armed American allies—Tehran is a signatory to the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) which restricts access to nuclear technology by neo-colonies. The treaty is supposed to guarantee Western support for civilian nuclear energy programs for countries which renounce nuclear weapons and acquiesce to inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Years of inspections by the IAEA have failed to uncover anything remotely "suspicious" in Iran, yet Washington (backed by Paris and London) absurdly insists that the only possible reason for oil-rich Iran to want a nuclear program is to develop weapons.

In the 1970s, when the Shah held power, the U.S. actively promoted the development of an Iranian nuclear energy program. At that time, Henry Kissinger, then U.S. secretary of state, asserted that the "introduction of nuclear power will both provide for the growing needs of Iran's



TAHAR ABED AL-ADIM—AP

March 2003: Iraqi women in Yousifiya denounce invasion

economy and free remaining oil reserves for export or conversion to petrochemicals." Today, Kissinger dismisses such arguments on the grounds that the Shah's Iran was "an allied country, and this was a commercial transaction" (*Washington Post*, 27 March 2005).

An Iranian nuclear arsenal would present problems for American imperialism. Tehran's influence would be significantly enhanced by breaking Tel Aviv's regional nuclear monopoly, and the potential cost of an attack on Iran would be raised considerably. But there is no evidence that the mullahs are seeking to obtain a nuclear deterrent, and even if they were, it would take years to create. Washington's consternation over Tehran's nuclear "ambitions" provides a cover for pressuring Iran, as Seymour Hersh observed:

"This is much more than a nuclear issue,' one high-ranking diplomat told me in Vienna. 'That's just a rallying point, and there is still time to fix it. But the Administration believes it cannot be fixed unless they control the hearts and minds of Iran. The real issue is who is going to control the Middle East and its oil in the next ten years.'"

—*New Yorker*, 17 April 2006

Washington's antipathy for the ayatollahs has not prevented it from working quietly with them on occasion, and the "anti-imperialist" regime in Tehran has often shown its willingness to make a deal. In 2001, Iran cooperated with the U.S.-led assault on Afghanistan, and the following year signaled its openness to adopting a "Malaysian profile" vis-à-vis Israel—i.e., withholding formal recognition while staying out of Israel's sphere of influence, if Tel Aviv were prepared to do the same. Following the 2003 conquest of Iraq, Tehran offered a "grand bargain" to Washington, as Scott Ritter, once a top UN weapons inspector, reported:

"Iran had been trying to get the United States to engage in direct one-on-one talks...even going so far as to propose, via a two-page letter sent through a Swiss intermediary, peace with Israel (indirectly stated in the form of acceptance of the principle of land-for-peace, which builds on a March 2002 declaration in Beirut, supported by such staunch American allies as Egypt and Saudi Arabia, which seeks

a comprehensive peace with Israel in return for Israel's withdrawal to the territory it had controlled before the 1967 war). The Iranians also proposed to cut off funding to Hamas and the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization], and to seek a halt to terrorist attacks against civilians within the 1967 borders. And, from the nuclear point of view, Iran agreed to abide by the 93+2 formulation of safeguard inspections, which included signing an Additional Protocol [which would institute further reporting obligations to the IAEA]. In return, Iran sought an end to all sanctions, and security assurances from the United States, including the re-establishment of relations."

—*Target Iran*

Iran's offer was ignored, and Washington has consistently refused any security guarantees to the Islamic Republic. Flynt Leverett, a former member of Bush's National Security Council, acknowledged: "The dirty secret is the administration has never put on the table an offer to negotiate with Iran the issues that would really matter: their own security, the legitimacy of the Islamic republic and Iran's place in the regional order" (*New York Times*, 5 December 2007).

In 1996, Bill Clinton issued an executive order forbidding U.S. companies from engaging in business with Iran or financing the development of the country's oil and gas industries (*Z Magazine*, June 2006). The 1996 "U.S. Iran-Libya Sanctions Act" also mandated penalties for non-American companies that invested more than \$20 million in Iran's oil and natural gas sectors.

Washington's hope that sanctions would seriously undermine the regime has not been fulfilled. The mullahs remain firmly in control in Iran, but the sanctions have hurt the country's oil industry, which produces only two-thirds of what it did in 1974. Limited domestic refining capacity has forced Tehran to import millions of liters of gasoline daily, and when rationing began in June 2007 widespread rioting ensued. But the overall political effect of the imperialist sanctions has been to reinforce popular support for the development of nuclear energy. While there is significant disaffection and unrest in Iran, the mullahs have thus far successfully defused potential challenges with a mixture of concessions and repression.

Iraqi soldiers stop car at Baghdad checkpoint



KHALID MOHAMMED—AP

The European imperialists share Washington's desire to see "stability" in the Middle East and to reverse Tehran's growing influence, but they have no interest in turning Iran, with its massive petroleum reserves, into an American protectorate as it was under the Shah. Paris and Berlin are trying to coordinate their policy toward Tehran with Washington's because they want a place at the negotiating table to advance their own interests. Germany is one of Iran's largest trading partners, and more than 1,700 German companies are active in the country. Under American pressure German and French firms have recently scaled back their activities—German government export credit guarantees for trade with Iran were cut from \$3.3 billion in 2004 to \$1.2 billion in 2006 (*New York Times*, 21 September 2007). In October 2007, the Bush administration imposed a new list of sanctions and provocatively designated Iran's Revolutionary Guard, as well as four state-owned banks, "supporters of terrorism." Germany's three biggest banks (Deutsche, Commerzbank and Dresdner) and Siemens, the giant engineering firm, decided that doing business in Iran had become too costly and closed their operations. Many French companies have also pulled out.

The pro-American "hawkishness" of French President Nicolas Sarkozy reflects the thinking of France's ruling class, which feels it could benefit from involvement in Iraq. In August 2007 Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner became the first member of the French government to visit Iraq since the invasion. That same week, reports surfaced that Total, a major French oil company, was interested in acquiring a stake in Iraq's oil fields (*New York Times*, 22 August 2007).

Britain, unlike France and Germany, participated in the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 with the expectation that its "special relationship" with Washington would pay dividends. But there have been none. The British military, badly burned by its defeat in Basra, still has more than 7,000 troops tied up in a losing war against the Afghan Taliban, and Gordon Brown does not seem anxious to sign up for another potential fiasco in Iran. In March 2007, when a handful of British military personnel were apprehended in Iranian waters, London quietly rejected American proposals for "aggressive" air patrols over Iranian Revolutionary Guard positions (*Guardian*, 7 April 2007). Vincent Cannistraro, a retired CIA officer, told Seymour Hersh that when British forces intercepted a truckload of Iranian weapons in Afghanistan, "The Brits told me that they were afraid at first to tell us about the incident—in fear that Cheney would use it as a reason to attack Iran" (*New Yorker*, 8 October 2007).

The *New York Times* (29 October 2007) opined that a military assault on Iran would make no sense in the short term, even without "calculating the international fury or the additional mayhem Tehran could wreak in Iraq or what would happen to world oil prices." In Washington, newly-minted "realists" like Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates have also been urging caution. The December 2007 National Intelligence Estimate produced by America's 16 spy agencies, which suggested that Iran had ended its nuclear weapons program in 2003, was a preemptive strike against any attempt by the lame duck Cheney/Bush gang to attack Iran.

There seems to be a consensus, for now, within the American ruling class that it is best to pursue a diplomatic

path in attempting to bring Tehran to heel, with what the *New York Times* calls "clear rewards and security guarantees" in exchange for Iran scrapping its nuclear program. Such "guarantees" would be entirely worthless, as Tehran's theocrats are undoubtedly aware.

The threat of imperialist aggression in the short or medium term remains acute, as is evident from the fact that during the presidential primaries every major candidate, both Republican and Democrat, made it clear that they would keep the option of an aggressive military strike against Iran "on the table." Barack Obama, who criticized Hillary Clinton for endorsing Bush's war threats, had himself introduced the "Iran Sanctions Enabling Act" in May 2007 to tighten enforcement of the 1996 sanctions against non-American companies investing in Iran.

One obvious lesson of "regime change" in Iraq is that a nuclear deterrent is a critical factor in defense of national sovereignty. John Pike of GlobalSecurity.org observed: "Any country in the region that was not at least learning what it would take to develop a nuclear program is asleep at the switch" (*New York Times*, 22 September 2007). The Islamic Republic is a fundamentalist hell-hole in which ethnic and religious minorities, women and homosexuals are brutally repressed, and workers are denied the most elementary democratic rights. Despite this, Marxists defend Iran's right to possess nuclear weapons and oppose all imperialist sanctions, which are, in effect, acts of war, and frequently pre-emptive military attacks, as they did in both Iraq and Serbia.

Defend Iran Against Imperialist Aggression!

In the event of an attack on Iran by the United States (or Israel acting as an American proxy), revolutionaries would side militarily with Iran against imperialist aggression. A policy of *military* defense, however, does not imply any *political* support to the reactionary Iranian regime.

Some ostensibly revolutionary organizations spout anti-imperialist rhetoric, but refuse to take sides when imperialist powers attack neo-colonies. The Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) slogan, "No to imperialist war, no to Iran's Islamic regime," effectively equates Iran with the imperialists. A leading CPGB theorist, Mike Macnair, who openly advocates the creation of a "third military camp," confuses the issue by making an analogy to the Bolsheviks' policy in the First World War:

"[D]efeatism in the imperial countries directly involved in a colonial war no more needs to imply 'defencism of the other side' than, for example, defeatism for Russian workers in 1914-18 meant 'victory to the kaiser'....

"Communists in the imperialist country or countries involved should be *defeatist*—that is, fight against the war—including by agitation as far as possible in the armed forces: ie, in the same way that Lenin urged 'defeatism' in relation to the 1914-18 war. In relation to what should happen 'on the other side', their primary approach should be one of solidarity with the workers' movement and communists in the 'target' country."

—*Weekly Worker*, 8 November 2007

Russian Marxists were not defensist toward Germany in 1914-18 because World War I was an *inter-imperialist* war—i.e., both sides were imperialist. In colonial wars, by contrast, revolutionaries want to see the victims militarily defeat the imperialist aggressors.

Macnair's second, supplementary, rationalization for the CPGB's shameful neutrality in the case of the imperialist invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan is the claim that to take the side of the oppressed in such conflicts is to reject the political independence of the working class from the bourgeoisie:

"[T]he idea of an anti-imperialist bloc or front of the working class with the 'national bourgeoisie' or 'patriotic forces' is a strategic illusion. We have seen the results of this illusion repeatedly since the 1940s: in the fate of the Indonesian, Iraqi, Chilean and relatively recently the Iranian workers' movements. The class contradictions are paramount and the national contradictions, though real, subordinate, in the behaviour of the colonial bourgeoisies and state apparatuses."

—*Ibid.*

Defending oppressed nations against imperialist predators does not mean political alliance with the bourgeoisie, nor does it imply a renunciation of the fight for socialist revolution. In defending the heroic 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin, Lenin brusquely dismissed those who "treated the national movements of small nations with disdain," and wrote that "to imagine that social revolution is *conceivable* without revolts by small nations in the colonies... is to *repudiate social revolution*" ("The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up," July 1916). The issue of military support for colonial revolts against imperialist rule was a key line of demarcation between the revolutionary Communist International of Lenin and Trotsky and the corrupted social-imperialists of the Second International.

A Region in Flames

The rise of Iranian influence has significant implications for the Middle East as a whole. With the exception of tiny Bahrain, which is predominantly Shiite, Washington's regional Arab allies—Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, United Arab Emirates and Egypt—all have sizable Sunni majorities. Their rulers view with trepidation the rise of a so-called "Shiite crescent" arcing from eastern Saudi Arabia through Iran and Iraq (with Shiite majorities), Syria (governed by Alawites, a Shiite sect) and into Lebanon (with a Shiite plurality). The Saudis are not only threatened by Iran militarily—Riyadh has a standing army of 75,000 troops, compared to Tehran's 450,000—but also by the possibility that its persecuted Shiite minority, concentrated in the oil-rich Eastern Province, might look to Tehran to support a bid for autonomy or even outright independence.

When Dick Cheney visited Saudi Arabia in November 2006, King Abdullah warned him that the Saudis were prepared to intervene in support of Sunni insurgents in Iraq if the U.S. pulled out (*New Yorker*, 5 March 2007). The Saudis, like the Turks and Egyptians, have recently signaled their intention to build nuclear reactors—ostensibly for civilian energy programs, but almost certainly for weapons research as well (*Times* [London], 7 February 2007).

Seeking to promote a regional anti-Tehran bloc of "moderate" Sunni states and Israel, the U.S. signed a massive \$20 billion arms deal with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, with another \$30 billion for Israel (*New York Times*, 16 August 2007). When the Israelis bombed a Syrian military installation in September 2007—an outrageous provocation widely interpreted as an expression of U.S. disapproval of an Iranian-Syrian entente—none of the Sunni "moderates" made a peep,



ARIF ALI—AFP—GETTY

Lahore, 5 November 2007: Pakistani police attack lawyers' protest

despite the furious anger of their populations.

During the Cold War, Washington actively promoted Islamic fundamentalism as a counterweight to secular left-nationalism and socialism. Zbigniew Brzezinski asked: "What is more important to the history of the world? The Taliban or the collapse of the Soviet empire? Some stirred-up Muslims or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the cold war?" (cited in Richard Dreyfuss, *Devil's Game*). But in arming and training the first generation of *jihadi* cadres, America's rulers fashioned a creature they can no longer control.

Today, Washington is encouraging the Saudis to bankroll a new generation of *jihadists*, this time to counter the growth of Iranian-Shiite influence. The Saudi princes have long played a dangerous game, gambling that they will not be overthrown by the Islamist formations they have sponsored, like the Muslim Brotherhood and various Salafist groups. A U.S. government consultant told Seymour Hersh that the Saudis have assured the White House:

"[T]hey will keep a very close eye on the religious fundamentalists. Their message to us was 'We've created this movement, and we can control it.' It's not that we don't want the Salafis to throw bombs; it's who they throw them at—Hezbollah, Moqtada al-Sadr, Iran and at the Syrians, if they continue to work with Hezbollah and Iran."

—*New Yorker*, 5 March 2007

Hersh also reported a conversation with a "former intelligence official" who told him that American attempts to bolster the Lebanese government against Hezbollah had created a problem:

"[W]e're financing a lot of bad guys with some serious potential unintended consequences. We don't have the ability to determine and get pay vouchers signed by the people we like and avoid the people we don't like. It's a very high-risk venture."

—*Ibid.*

Some of the money is thought to have immediately

gone to radical Sunnis. Alastair Croke, a former British MI6 agent, told Hersh that Fatah al-Islam "were being offered weapons and money by people presenting themselves as representatives of the Lebanese government's interests—presumably to take on Hezbollah" (*Ibid.*). A few months later, the Lebanese government, claiming that Fatah al-Islam was linked to Al Qaeda, sent the army on a 15-week campaign to dislodge it from its base in a Palestinian refugee camp.

The U.S. is also reported to be funding the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood—an offshoot of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, nemesis of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, one of Washington's most important allies in the region.

Pakistan: U.S. Ally & Failing State

U.S. policy in Pakistan is similarly schizophrenic. Pakistan, which connects the Middle East to the South Asian subcontinent, has long been one of Washington's most valuable clients in the Muslim world. Its "stability" is therefore of considerable strategic importance for the U.S. During the Cold War, Pakistan's deeply reactionary ruling class, which has governed through a succession of murderous military and "civilian" regimes, was a reliable ally in the crusade against "atheistic" Communism. In the 1980s, the CIA relied on Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) to channel funding, arms and logistical support to the anti-Soviet *mujahedin* in Afghanistan. When the Soviets pulled out in 1989, the *jihadists* were deeply rooted on both sides of the Afghan-Pakistan border:

"The Islamic Group of Pakistan was rich and powerful, and well connected with the Muslim Brotherhood's worldwide networks. Most of the top ISI officials were now confirmed Islamists with Muslim Brotherhood links. The Islamic Group and the Brotherhood, in turn, maintained strong ties to Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and the other militant Islamists in Afghanistan, and to the burgeoning mujahideen network from dozens of countries who came

and went freely through the madrassa system....

"Where I was, nobody was looking ahead at what would happen to these unemployed freedom fighters," says Walter Cutler, who was U.S. ambassador in Saudi Arabia during most of the 1980s. "I don't recall any discussion about, 'Gee, I wonder if these guys are going to pose any threat?' We didn't really focus that much on political Islam. It was the Cold War. The fact that you had these zealots, trained and armed with Stingers, didn't come up."

—Robert Dreyfuss, *Devil's Game*

Today these "zealots" and their offspring are battling NATO forces in Afghanistan and threatening the stability of Washington's client to the east. In 2001, when Pakistan's military dictator Pervez Musharraf was dragged into Washington's war against the Taliban, he set off an Islamist insurgency in Pakistan's semi-autonomous "tribal areas" bordering Afghanistan that has since spread to adjoining provinces. Farouk Adam Khan, a prominent Musharraf ally, blames the Islamists' popularity on "pro-American policies, particularly the Musharraf-Bush axis," (*New York Times*, 2 November 2007) but resentment of endemic corruption, extortionate taxation and high interest rates for farmers are also factors.

In the Swat region of the North-West Frontier Province, a group calling itself the Movement for the Enforcement of Islamic Laws has burned television sets, shut down music and video shops, bombed girls' schools and called for banning polio vaccinations which, they claim, make men impotent. A March 2007 report by the province's Home Department warned that "[m]orale of law enforcement agents and the people supportive of government [are] on the decline. Talibanization, lawlessness and terrorism [are] on the rise" (*Ibid.*).

Hoping to stabilize the situation by lending "democratic" legitimacy to Musharraf's military regime, Washington engineered the return of Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Benazir Bhutto (who had been living in Britain to evade corruption charges) to participate in a projected presidential election. In what Tariq Ali aptly characterized as an "arranged marriage," Musharraf agreed to drop the charges against Bhutto and resign from the military in order to contest the presidency as a civilian.

Bhutto's main qualification for high office was her name. William Dalrymple, a prominent historian of South Asia, described the PPP as the "political wing" of the Bhutto family (*Guardian Weekly*, 7 September 2007). She was an uncritical supporter of U.S. policy who initially won the office of prime minister in 1988 after the Reagan administration brought intense pressure to bear on Pakistani President Gulam Ishaq Khan.

Bhutto's tenure was marked by extrajudicial killings, torture, corruption and nepotism, with her husband, Asif Zardari (aka "Mr. Ten Percent") installed as minister of investment. During her second term as prime minister, the ISI groomed the Afghan Taliban for power. It is unclear if it was Taliban/Al Qaeda Islamists, agents of Pakistani state security or a collaborative effort of the two which dispatched Bhutto at a PPP rally in Rawalpindi in December 2007. Most of the PPP's plebeian members who engaged in violent protests after her assassination were convinced that it was a state-sanctioned operation.

The death of Bhutto removed the most prominent political figure capable of bringing the current regime a mea-

sure of popular legitimacy and damping down the various religious, ethnic and class conflicts that threaten Pakistan's "stability." The U.S. Special Operations Command is hoping to farm out the job of combating the Islamist insurrection by providing equipment and training to the militias of anti-Taliban tribal leaders on Washington's payroll. This plan seems unlikely to succeed, as even Pakistan's Frontier Corps, the state agency charged with securing the border regions, is widely suspected of aiding and abetting Taliban insurgents.

Frederick Kagan of the American Enterprise Institute and Michael O'Hanlon of the Brookings Institution recently discussed the possibility of direct U.S. military intervention:

"So, if we got a large number of troops into the country, what would they do? The most likely directive would be to help Pakistan's military and security forces hold the country's center—primarily the region around the capital, Islamabad, and the populous areas like Punjab Province to its south.

"We would also have to be wary of the internecine warfare within the Pakistani security forces. Pro-American moderates could well win a fight against extremist sympathizers on their own. But they might need help if splinter forces or radical Islamists took control of parts of the country containing nuclear materials. The task of retaking any such regions and reclaiming custody of any nuclear weapons would be a priority for our troops....

"Beyond propping up the state, this would benefit American efforts in Afghanistan by depriving terrorists of the sanctuaries they have long enjoyed in Pakistan's tribal and frontier regions."

—*New York Times*, 18 November 2007

The international workers' movement must vigorously resist any attempt by the U.S. or NATO to expand the "War on Terror" from Afghanistan to Pakistan. Any imperialist intervention against the Islamists in the frontier regions would also threaten Pakistan's large and cosmopolitan proletariat, which has the social power to sweep away the military autocrats, Islamic theocrats, landlords and big capitalists alike.

Pakistan's tiny and immensely wealthy ruling class sits atop a population that is hideously exploited and oppressed. In this country of 160 million, barely 50 percent of girls ever attend school, half the population is illiterate and a third are chronically hungry. The "neo-liberal" reforms introduced under Musharraf made life much harder for workers and poor people, as many state-owned enterprises, employing thousands and providing subsidized public services, were privatized. In the private sector, real wages, working conditions and job security are all declining.

Yet in the face of continuing political, economic and social assaults, the Pakistani working class remains relatively quiescent. Aasim Sajjad Akhtar, an activist with the People's Rights Movement (which bills itself as a "left-wing political confederation of working-class struggles committed to structural changes in the Pakistani state") notes:

"The Pakistani left has...become progressively less and less influential amongst the organized working class since it reached its peak as a political force in the early 1970s. Private sector trade unions are almost nonexistent due to the severe fragmentation of production processes that has been the dominant feature of the manufacturing sector

over the past two decades. Trade unions still exist in some shape or form in the public sector which includes the vast industrial powerhouses of railways, telecommunications, airlines, and public utilities such as water, electricity, and gas. Sadly, the vast majority of these public sector unions are severely co-opted by the state, a trend that can be traced back directly to the state's efforts to dismember a militant and politicized trade union movement in the 1970s."

—*Monthly Review*, October 2005

A series of military and "civilian" autocrats have done what they can to atomize the proletariat and destroy its organizations through sheer repression. But the most important factor is the allegiance of Pakistan's left and labor leaders to the PPP, which they view as the most viable alternative to Islamist reaction and military dictatorship. This has channeled working-class struggles into the dead end of bourgeois electoral politics.

The International Marxist Tendency (IMT), an ostensibly Trotskyist organization led by Alan Woods, which has supporters in Pakistan, recently pointed out:

"The one element missing in this movement against the Musharraf dictatorship is the entrance of the Pakistani proletariat onto the scene as an organized force. If the movement continues for any length of time, achieves a greater rhythm and higher momentum, the workers, who are not unaffected by the rapidly changing situation, could join in. Then the floodgates would open."

—Marxist.com, 16 November 2007

The "jewel in the crown" of the IMT, its Pakistani section, known as The Struggle, has done its bit to keep the floodgates of proletarian struggle shut by its decades-long submergence in the PPP. At election time, The Struggle calls on Pakistani workers to vote for the PPP candidates. Some IMT supporters have even run as PPP candidates and been elected to the National Assembly.

The PPP is not a *bourgeois workers'* party, like Britain's Labour Party, but a *bourgeois* party pure and simple, with a program reflecting the interests of the Pakistani bourgeoisie and a leadership largely composed of members of the country's traditional ruling class. On the occasion of the Bhutto assassination, Alan Woods offered the following alibi for the IMT's slavish loyalty to this corrupt capitalist political machine:

"Some so-called 'lefts' will say: But Benazir's programme could not have provided the way out. The Marxists in the PPP are fighting for the programme of socialism—for the original programme of the PPP. But the masses can only learn which programme and policies are correct through their own experience.

"The January elections would have given the masses an opportunity to advance at least one step in the right direction, by inflicting a decisive defeat on the forces of reaction and dictatorship. Then they would have had the possibility of learning about programmes and policies, not in theory but in practice....

"The masses always adhere to their traditional mass organizations. The PPP developed in the heat of the revolutionary movement of 1968-9, when the workers and peasants came close to taking power."

—Marxist.com, 27 December 2007

The PPP was launched in 1967, shortly before a wave

of mass student protest and workers' strikes drove Ayub Khan, the ruling military despot, from power. Like many Third World bourgeois nationalist movements in that period, the PPP liberally sprinkled its propaganda with references to "socialism" to appeal to militant workers and the leftist intelligentsia. Like Gamal Abdel Nasser's "Arab socialism," Julius Nyerere's "African socialism" and Muammar Gaddafi's "Islamic socialism," the PPP's "socialism" was never more than a rhetorical device that put a left gloss on policies intended to preserve and strengthen the existing social order.

Throughout its history, the PPP has served as little more than a vehicle for the political ambitions of the landowning Bhutto family and their associates—which is why Benazir Bhutto's 19-year-old son was immediately proposed as party leader when she was assassinated. The administration of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Benazir's father, who took office in 1971 when military rule had become so unpopular that the Pakistani bourgeoisie thought it prudent to provide a civilian facelift, was characterized by widespread corruption, special deals for landed aristocrats, endemic police repression and flagrant disregard for promised land reform.

The PPP leadership's allegiance to U.S. imperialism and its eagerness to collaborate with military autocrats remain unchanged. Woods' claim that a PPP electoral victory would represent "a decisive defeat on the forces of reaction and dictatorship" perversely inverts the truth. Bhutto's election was supposed to provide a democratic facade for military rule, and reduce the risk of mass struggles against the Pakistani ruling class.

There are few societies on Earth where it is clearer than in Pakistan that the historic tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution can only be accomplished through the rule of the proletariat. Yet the petty-bourgeois democrats leading the IMT and its Pakistani section, who ostensibly uphold the Trotskyist program of permanent revolution, dedicate their practical activity to maintaining the political subordination of the workers' movement to the bourgeois PPP.

The IMT's subservience to the PPP, which only serves to tie the proletariat to its class enemy, is rationalized by pointing to its mass base. Trotsky rebutted this argument years ago in criticizing the Chinese Communist Party's disastrous "bloc" with (i.e., political subordination to) the bourgeois Guomindang in the 1920s:

"Such 'blocs' abound in the revolutionary as well as the parliamentary history of bourgeois countries: the big bourgeoisie leads the petty bourgeois democrats, the phrasemongers of the national united front, behind it, and the latter, in turn, confuse the workers and drag them along behind the bourgeoisie. When the proletarian 'tail,' despite the efforts of the petty bourgeois phrasemongers, begins to stir too violently, the bourgeoisie orders its generals to stamp on it."

—"The Chinese Revolution and the Theses of Comrade Stalin," 17 May 1927

For Workers' Revolution to Uproot Imperialism!

The political order established in the Middle East at the conclusion of World War I, which was partially overhauled after the U.S. took over as the dominant imperial power after

World War II, is in a precarious condition today. The prospect of civil war hangs over Lebanon, Palestine and Pakistan. The failing imperialist military occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq have set the stage for a convulsive bloodletting.

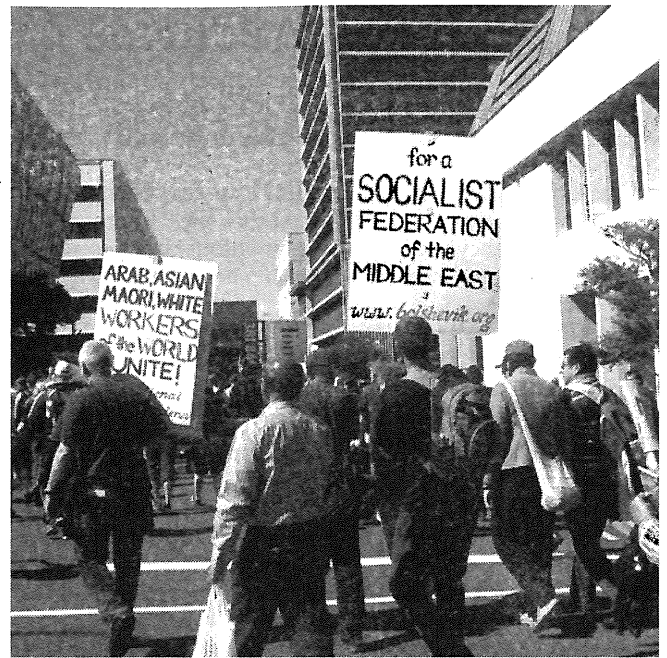
The United States entered the Cold War in a position of unquestioned military and economic supremacy. The other major imperialist powers—West Germany, France, Britain, Japan—had no choice but to accept American leadership in the global war against “communism.” But with the Soviet Union gone, and America’s vaunted military bogged down for years in an unsuccessful attempt to establish control of Iraq, the other imperialist powers are less inclined to unquestioningly accept Washington’s leadership.

The Iranian mullahs have the impression that they, not the U.S., are holding the winning hand in the region, and thumb their nose at Washington’s bellicose threats. The U.S. is now deliberately—if half-heartedly—responding by incubating a new generation of Sunni *jihadists* to act as a counterweight to the Shiite fundamentalists aligned with Tehran. The seeds of future wars and imperialist interventions are being sown by the desperate acts of a declining hegemon.

Despite widespread hysteria about “terrorism” and insurgent Islamism, the prospect of social revolution, which seems remote today to many, does seriously concern farsighted elements of the bourgeoisie. A 90-page report entitled *Global Strategic Trends, 2007-2036*, compiled in January 2007 by the Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre of Britain’s defense ministry, lists “terrorism,” “rogue states” and the proliferation of “weapons of mass destruction” as potential threats to global political order. But a significant concern of the authors is that growing global social inequality could well lead to a “resurgence of not only anti-capitalist ideologies...but also to populism and the revival of Marxism.” The report takes a gloomy view of “globalized” capitalism:

“Globalization will result in critical interdependencies that will link members of a globalized society that includes a small super-rich elite and a substantial underclass of slum and subsistence dwellers, who will make up 20% of the world population in 2020. A severe pricing shock, possibly caused by an energy spike or a series of harvest failures, could trigger a domino effect involving the collapse of key international markets across a range of sectors. The impacts of this collapse could be transmitted throughout the globalized economy, possibly resulting in a breakdown of the international political system, as states attempt to respond to domestic crises and local effects of wider economic collapse. Sophisticated societies that depend on complex, transnational networks for the supply of basic human needs, such as food that cannot be provided indigenously, are likely to face severe infrastructure failure, collapse of public services and societal conflict.”

“The globalization of labour markets and the reducing level of national welfare provision and employment could reduce peoples’ attachment to particular states. The growing gap between themselves and a small number of highly visible super-rich individuals might fuel disillusion with meritocracy, while the growing urban under-classes are likely to pose an increasing threat to social order and stability, as the burden of acquired debt and the failure of pension provision begins to bite. Faced



IBT marching in Wellington, New Zealand, March 2007

by these twin challenges, the world’s middle-classes might unite, using access to knowledge, resources and skills to shape transnational processes in their own class interest.”

While the bourgeois strategic planners who wrote this tend to put a minus where Marxists would put a plus, and underestimate the strategic importance of the working class in any successful revolt, we are broadly in agreement regarding the fragility of the imperialist world order and the possibility that the eruption of social struggle in one sector of the global economy could spread rapidly and even penetrate traditionally politically backward strata in the imperialist homelands.

The endless thirst for higher profits that propels the rulers of the United States and its imperialist rivals into predatory colonial wars abroad also requires a continuous offensive against working people at home—attacks not only on wages and living standards, but also on the democratic rights won by the struggles of previous generations. This is why, in the final analysis, there is an identity of interests between working people in imperialist countries and those in the neo-colonies. Capitalism can never be transformed into a social system that will serve humanity: it must be destroyed and replaced with a globally planned socialist system in which meeting human need, rather than generating super-profits for parasites, is the guiding principle.

Workers in the advanced capitalist states, who possess both an objective interest in overturning the existing system of imperialist exploitation and the social power to do so, have a vital role in making an egalitarian global social order a concrete reality. To unlock this potential, it is necessary to create a revolutionary leadership within the working class—a Trotskyist vanguard that is capable of harnessing the energy and anger of the tens and hundreds of millions of victims of international capital. The International Bolshevik Tendency is dedicated to the project of constructing such a leadership through the struggle to reforge the Fourth International, World Party of Socialist Revolution. ■

ICL Rejects 'Executive Offices' Of Presidents & Principles

The Fifth International Conference of the International Communist League (ICL, formerly the international Spartacist tendency) arrived at a momentous conclusion:

"The chief pressure operating on our party, especially in this period of post-Soviet reaction, is Menshevik, i.e., social-democratic, opportunism, not ultra-left sectarianism. And the essence of Menshevism in this period is capitulation to bourgeois liberalism."

—*Spartacist*, Autumn 2007 (emphasis in original)

To avoid such capitulations, conference delegates unanimously approved a "most significant" decision: henceforth the ICL would "categorically oppose running for executive positions in the capitalist state." The fact that the Spartacist group managed to exist for forty-odd years without this position had "a lot to do with the state of the party and the prevailing conception, in fact, that the overriding problems were sectarianism and not Menshevism," according to J. Bride, a member of the group's International Secretariat. Those familiar with how things work in the Spartacist tendency are unlikely to be surprised that credit for this historic step goes to the Dear Leader, James Robertson.

The new line was introduced during the 2007 French presidential election campaign:

"Communists seek to have deputies in parliament in order to use this as a platform for revolutionary opposition to capitalism, its state, its government, its parties and its social-democratic lackeys.

"However, this is different from a presidential election, in which one is running to become the chief of French imperialism. The president is the head of the army and has enormous powers, in particular in France. He can declare martial law, dissolve parliament, etc. The positions of president, and of mayor on the local level, are not parliamentary offices that can be used as platforms to oppose the system. They are executive offices of the bourgeois state—the mayor and the president execute the decisions taken by the bourgeoisie."

—*Workers Vanguard*, 13 April 2007

While acknowledging that "Trotskyists did not object to running in such elections—including at the time of Trotsky and Cannon," the ICL asserts that its new position is simply a more consistent application of Lenin's teachings:

"As our recent conference document states: 'The problem with running for executive offices is that it lends legitimacy to prevailing and reformist conceptions of the state.' Our entire purpose is to bring to workers the understanding that in any socialist revolution the bourgeois state must be destroyed and replaced by the dictatorship of the proletariat. Lenin taught this, and all history has proven it. To run in elections for executive office thus represents an obstacle to our strategic goal."

—*Ibid.*

The ICL has thus far avoided the question of "executive authority" in a parliamentary system. After all, it is Gordon Brown who will decide how long British troops remain in Iraq and Afghanistan, just as it was Tony Blair who sent them there in the first place. Perhaps the ICL comrades will eventually conclude that running for parlia-

ment is also "an obstacle" because the winning party ends up exercising executive power.

This is not the first time this question has been raised in the Marxist movement. In 1893 F. Wiesen of Baird, Texas, wrote to Friedrich Engels asking "for a statement against the putting up of candidates 'for President,' as we want to abolish the President and that is a denial of revolutionary principle." Engels, who was not inclined to agree, replied: "I do not see what violation of the social-democratic [i.e., revolutionary] principle is necessarily involved in putting up candidates for any elective political office or in voting for these candidates, even if we are aiming at the abolition of this office itself."

Engels counseled Baird not to be overly rigid on tactical questions:

"One may be of the opinion that the best way to abolish the Presidency and the Senate in America is to elect men to these offices who are pledged to effect their abolition, and then one will consistently act accordingly. Others may think that this method is inappropriate; that's a matter of opinion. There may be circumstances under which the former mode of action would also involve a violation of revolutionary principle; I fail to see why that should always and everywhere be the case."

Of course, the only way to "abolish" the institutions of the bourgeois state is through socialist revolution, but Engels was right to suggest that there is no sense in treating tactical questions as matters of "principle." In certain situations, a revolutionary boycott of presidential elections might benefit reformists by allowing them to posture as the only "socialist" alternative to the capitalist parties.

Reformists seek office hoping for a chance to administer the capitalist state. Marxists see bourgeois elections as opportunities to present the program of expropriating capitalist property, and replacing the bourgeois state with a workers' state, to a broad audience. A revolutionary campaign for president no more promotes reformist illusions in the state than running for the legislature gives credence to notions of a "parliamentary road to socialism."

The Internationalist Group, which aptly described the ICL's new position as a "novelty," correctly observed:

"In the unusual case in which a revolutionary candidate had enough influence to be elected, the party would already have begun building workers councils and other organs of a soviet character. And the party would insist that, if elected, its candidates would base themselves on such organs of workers power and not on the institutions of the bourgeois state."

—*Internationalist*, July 2007

If a genuinely Marxist party appeared to have enough popular support to conceivably win a major national election, elements of the ruling class would certainly prepare an extra-parliamentary response—i.e., a coup led by a Kornilov or a Pinochet. A serious revolutionary organization would take this into account and prepare accordingly. In such circumstances, the electoral result, like the outcome of the election for Russia's bourgeois Constituent Assembly five days after the Bolshevik-led revolution, would be essentially irrelevant. ■

Which Side Are You On? Screws Out of the TUC!



UNITEDCAMPAIGN.ORG.UK

October 2007: Screws at union rally in front of Parliament

The following statement, dated 10 November 2007, was produced by the IBT's London branch.

On 29 August, the Prison Officers Association (POA) defied the government and walked off the job for a day, in protest against a 2.5% pay offer. The government's unwillingness to aggressively go after the POA has been celebrated by various reformist leftists as an example of how militant trade unionists can successfully defy reactionary legislation. But the POA is not a workers' organisation—they represent the personnel of a vital arm of state repression. This is why the government has been so reluctant to move against them and also why it is a mistake to view their action as a blow against anti trade-union laws.

Marxists do not consider police and prison officers as part of the workers' movement, regardless of their social origin, as Leon Trotsky made clear:

'The fact that the police was originally recruited in large numbers from among Social Democratic workers is absolutely meaningless. Consciousness is determined by environment even in this instance. The worker who becomes a policeman in the service of the capitalist state, is a bourgeois cop, not a worker.'

—'What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat', 1932

The Socialist Workers Party (SWP), Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and Socialist Party (SP) were all enthusiastic about the POA's strike. The SWP opined:

'Prison officers should have the right to strike and to a union....'

'There is a clear lesson for other workers here. If prison officers can take unofficial illegal strike action over Brown's cuts and force concessions from New Labour ministers, surely other public sector unions must be able to do the same.'

—'Prison officers' unofficial strike rattles government', www.socialistworker.co.uk, 1 September [2007]

While the CPGB characterised the POA's members as 'direct agents of state repression', they nonetheless consider them 'exploited workers' and concluded:

'Communists are certainly in favour of prison workers and members of the police force having the right to form and join trade unions and having the right to strike. It is akin to our demand that members of the armed forces be given such rights.'

—*Weekly Worker*, 6 September [2007]

The SP took a similar tack:

'All England and Wales prisons were affected and the government was left reeling in shock. This united and determined action will be applauded by socialists and trade unionists throughout the labour movement and stands as an example of how to treat the anti-union laws.'

—*The Socialist*, 30 August [2007]

Socialist Worker acknowledged that prison guards are usually right-wing and many are overt racists:

'Prison officers' work, upholding law and order, frequently pushes them to accept the most right wing ideas and actions of the system. One of their main jobs is to control prisoners—and throughout the prison system, many officers have a proven record of racism and violence.'

—op. cit.

The *Weekly Worker* also tempered its enthusiasm for the POA with a disclaimer:

'While Marxists can only but approve of prison officers and other workers in uniform trying to assert themselves as workers by organising in trade unions and striking, we never lose sight of the reality of the state's institutions of repression of which they are part.'

—op. cit.

The SP's statement, by contrast, simply praised the strikers' 'courageous stand':

'Prison officers' leaders are perhaps less intimidated by threats of prison than others might be, knowing that they would be looked after inside by their own union members! They would also meet a good reception from a layer of fellow inmates, some of who welcomed the strike action, despite suffering deprivations on that day.

'This support is partly because the officers were tipped over the edge into taking their first ever strike action not just as a result of a derisory pay offer, but also because of terrible prison overcrowding, a situation that badly affects prisoners and officers alike.'

'However, this does not detract from their courageous stand, which should be noted well by other trade union leaders, who in any case would also be treated as heroes by other trade unionists and workers if they defied the anti-union laws in the interests of their members.'

—*The Socialist*, 30 August [2007]

The SP's enthusiasm for the 'courageous' screws led them to invite POA General Secretary Brian Caton to speak at the opening rally of 'Socialism 2007'. Perhaps he will be invited to join Peter Taafe in singing the Internationale at the conclusion of the conference.

Workers Power (WP), which has occasionally criticised those who describe cops and screws as 'workers in uniform', tried to give its support for the POA a slightly leftist tilt:

'...we do support prison wardens' right to organise and to strike, and their demands for better pay, just as we support prisoners' demands for democratic rights and better conditions. Any action that weakens the ability of the capitalist class to exploit and rule us has to be a good thing. Especially if it proves that the anti-union laws are toothless...if we only have the guts to defy them.'

—*Workers Power*, September [2007]

Permanent Revolution (PR, a 2006 split from Workers Power) took essentially the same view, claiming in a statement dated 31 August [2007] that: 'By supporting its [the POA] action...we push the fight for wider union action against Brown's pay freeze forward'. Smashing anti-union legislation and Brown's public-sector pay freeze requires a willingness to take on the capitalist state—those who want

to paint disgruntled members of the repressive apparatus as a vanguard of a resurgent workers' movement act to undermine the possibility of any serious struggle.

Abuse by Prison Officers: Systematic and Routine

Many of those leftists who have hailed the POA action suggest that prison officers have a contradictory role—sometimes good and sometimes bad:

'We cannot by any means always endorse every trade union action that they take. There are many demands that they might make—such as those that would improve their own conditions at the expense of prisoners' rights—which we would never support and would in fact argue should be actively fought against by the trade union movement as a whole.'

—*Weekly Worker*, 6 September [2007]

In their statement of 31 August [2007], PR takes a similar position:

'The POA is a curious hybrid. Part of its membership is based in special hospitals like Broadmoor and operates, effectively like mental health nurses, though with extremely dangerous patients. Another part of its membership in the prisons—the screws—is, like the police, a coercive arm of the state. Their role in inflicting repression on working class prisoners is well documented and they have operated a no-strike deal with the state for many years (like the police) in order to carry out the role effectively. They are not, in other words, the archetypal union militants you would expect to be carrying the torch on behalf of the wider movement in the current struggle against pay-restraint.'

Screws are indeed a 'coercive arm of the state', which is why they are not, and can never be, part of the 'wider workers movement'. The brutal abuse of prisoners is routine in Her Majesty's prison system. A few years ago the Prison Service admitted that officers at Wormwood Scrubs regularly 'subjected inmates to sustained beatings, mock executions, death threats, choking and torrents of racist abuse' (*Guardian*, 11 December 2003). All just part of the routine for POA members on the job.

The idea of kindly screws functioning as benign social workers, anxious to help rehabilitate prisoners, and concerned for the welfare of their charges is simply a bourgeois myth. The function of the repressive state apparatus is to intimidate and crush anyone who falls afoul of capitalist law and order. The abuse of those caught up in the machinery of the prison system is brutal and systematic—it is not down to a handful of 'rogue elements'.

PR tries to spin its support to the screws as a matter of smart revolutionary tactics:

'But life throws up contradictions and while weird purists who pass themselves off as leftists can only wail and denounce the POA revolutionaries have to take an active approach that uses the contradiction to hasten the break up of the capitalist order. That's why we should support the POA strike and call on the union to defy the court injunction and intensify its action.

'Such an approach can pose the question to the POA—who are you loyal to, the working class movement and its discipline, or the state?'

—op. cit.

A critical history of the Militant Tendency

Marxism vs. 'Militant' Reformism

The CWI's Kautskyan Caricature of Trotskyism

INTERNATIONAL BOLSHEVIK TENDENCY

£3

Order from: IBT, BCM Box 4771
London WC1N 3XX Britian

The POA membership are hired capitalist thugs. PR supporters should ask themselves how better rewarded and equipped agents of capitalist repression would be likely to 'hasten the break up of the capitalist order'. 'Weird purists' like Lenin and Trotsky, who asserted that the repressive bourgeois state could never be wielded as an instrument of liberation by the oppressed, had harsh things to say about 'socialists' who pedalled similar notions as 'Marxist' tactics.

Reformist Cretins & Social-Democratic Illusions

To accept the POA as part of the workers' movement implies that the coercive elements of the bourgeois state can somehow be brought under workers', or 'community', control. This approach is in absolute contradiction to the Marxist position on the state. Prison officers are an integral part of the coercive apparatus which brutally enforces a social system based on exploitation and oppression. Like cops and members of the officer caste, screws are class enemies—they have no place in the workers' movement.

The SP, who are among the most vocal proponents of the view that cops, screws, etc., are really 'workers in uniform', have long upheld the social-democratic illusion that the working class can use the capitalists' state to build socialism. In the one union where the SP has real influence, the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS), they say nothing about the presence of immigration officers. A genuinely Marxist group would call for throwing these vicious thugs out of the union movement (see 'The most disgraceful defeat: PCS capitulation on pension scheme', [\[shevik.org/leaflets/PCSBetrayal.html\]\(http://shevik.org/leaflets/PCSBetrayal.html\)\). The SP leadership pretends that there is no contradiction between defending 'illegal' immigrants persecuted by the state, and supporting the demands for higher wages and better working conditions for those who harass and deport them.](http://www.bolsh</p>
</div>
<div data-bbox=)

In its 31 August [2007] statement, PR echoes one of the SP's traditional justifications for including cops in the union movement when it brightly proposes:

'...we can also help split the union from those within its ranks who see their role as guardians of capitalism's prison houses and win those who aren't to a longer term struggle of fighting to overthrow the capitalism's [sic] system of (in)justice and replace it with one based on the needs and interests of the working class.'

Individual prison officers may indeed grow tired of doing the capitalists' dirty work and come to solidarise with the oppressed against the oppressors. But there is a class line that separates the organs of capitalist repression and the organisations of the working class. In order to become part of the workers' movement, a screw, or a cop, must first resign their post. Those who remain on duty to carry out the instructions of Her Majesty's government are, despite any private reservations they may have, agents of the bosses and, as such, opponents of the struggle for human liberation.

The workers' movement should of course welcome and encourage any individual screws who are ready to change sides, but only social-democratic cretins can regard those who carry out the essential repressive functions of the bourgeois state to be part of the workers' movement. Rather than support the prison guards, socialists should be campaigning to expel the POA from the TUC [Trades Union Congress], and throw immigration cops out of the PCS. ■

Mumia Abu-Jamal is innocent — Free him now!

The life of Mumia Abu-Jamal hangs in the balance. As we go to print, the U.S. Third Circuit Court of Appeals is preparing a decision on oral arguments delivered last May by defense counsel.

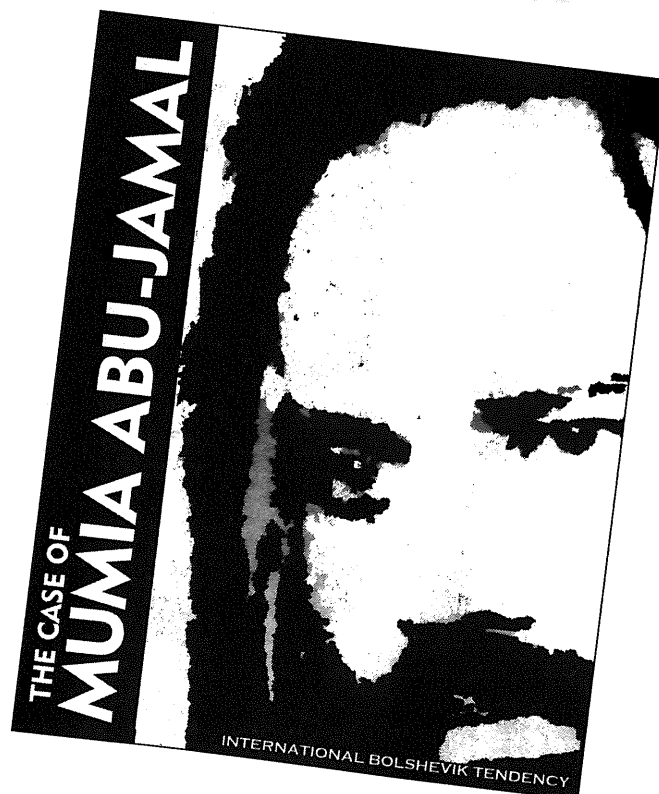
Mumia is an innocent man. The International Bolshevik Tendency demands his immediate freedom and the abolition of the racist death penalty. Free Mumia!

Financial contributions to Mumia's legal defense are urgently required. Please make checks payable to the National Lawyers Guild Foundation (indicate "Mumia" on the bottom left) and mail them to the following address:

Committee To Save Mumia Abu-Jamal
P.O. Box 2012 New York, NY
USA 10159-2012

This 90-page pamphlet is the most comprehensive treatment of the evidence and legal/political issues in the case of Mumia Abu-Jamal. It is essential reading for those committed to the fight to free America's best-known political prisoner.

Order from: **BT, PO Box 332, Adelaide St. Stn., Toronto, Canada M5C 2J4 U.S. \$5**



French 'Far Left' Moving Rightward

No to Popular Frontism!

A month after Nicolas Sarkozy was elected president of France in May 2007, his party, the right-wing Union for a Popular Movement (UMP), won a majority in the legislative elections. Sarkozy, who campaigned on a promise to revitalize French capitalism by "liquidating once and for all" the "heritage of May '68," quickly launched a series of vicious attacks on workers and the oppressed.

Last year more than 20,000 "illegal" immigrants were expelled from France and tens of thousands more face deportation. Under a law touting the "autonomy of universities," post-secondary institutions have been opened to corporate investors while administrators can now replace public employees with contract staff. Sarkozy has pledged to phase out tens of thousands of government jobs and introduce a strikebreaking "minimum service" in public transit and education. The new government has overhauled the "special scheme" pensions in the transportation and energy sectors and plans to extend the standard contribution period to 41 years for all workers (in the early 1990s it was 37.5 years).

In autumn 2007, a wave of campus occupations protesting the moves toward privatization was aborted through a combination of state repression and reformist misleadership. The labor bureaucrats hobbled attempts at resistance by civil servants and broke the back of a potentially powerful transit strike in November. The day before transportation workers were set to walk off the job, Bernard Thibault of the General Confederation of Labor (CGT) stabbed them in the back by agreeing to enterprise-by-enterprise negotiations. A presidential spokesperson saluted this strikebreaker: "Bernard Thibault has seen to it that the crisis can be resolved from the first day of conflict" (*Le Monde*, 15 November 2007). Rank-and-file railworkers continued their actions for over a week, and on 20 November 2007 joined striking civil servants as some 700,000 people demonstrated across France. But without a viable alternative leadership, resistance soon fizzled out.

A Crisis of Leadership

Sarkozy's easy victories resulted from the treachery of the union leaders and reformist workers' parties. Socialist Party (PS) leader, François Hollande, openly admitted that his party has only tactical differences with the UMP:

"If we had been in government, we would have gone to work on pensions—both the general scheme [for private-sector workers] and the special schemes. Strike calls would have undoubtedly been launched. But we would have proceeded differently than the current government."

—*Le Monde*, 18 November 2007

Last year various "revolutionaries" voted for the PS as a way to "beat the right," despite open declarations by the Socialist Party leadership of its intent to carry out the capitalists' agenda. None of the PS careerists who jumped ship to join Sarkozy—including Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner—have felt any need to repudiate their previous views.

The French Communist Party (PCF), which positions

itself slightly to the left of the PS, is primarily concerned with maintaining its share of elected positions. In the March 2008 municipal elections, PCF candidates ran on joint lists with the PS and openly bourgeois parties (Left Radical Party [PRG], Republican Citizens' Movement [MRC] and the Greens). Some of these popular-front blocs even included the Democratic Movement (MoDem—François Bayrou's faction of the defunct "center-right" Union for French Democracy).

The French "far left" has sought to occupy the political terrain vacated by the PS and PCF. The Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR—flagship of the United Secretariat) is eagerly proclaiming its willingness to dissolve into a "New Anti-Capitalist Party" (NPA) organized on a social-democratic basis:

"If it [the NPA] sees the light of day, the LCR will have no reason to exist as such. It's about forming a militant party which resembles society, a party which will be neither a party of passive adherents nor an elitist revolutionary vanguard."

—*Le Parisien*, 24 August 2007

The LCR's program for the 2008 municipal elections provides a classic example of "sewer socialist" reformism:

"The principal themes that the LCR will defend in the course of these elections will be housing, the question of the re-municipalization of water and waste-management services, transportation, public services for infants and the elderly, local democracy, for real control over decisions by the population."

—*Rouge*, 17 January

While rejecting an open alliance with the PS in the first round in favor of setting up popular-frontist lists with assorted petty-bourgeois and bourgeois elements (Greens, MRC, "alter-globalists" and Breton nationalists), the LCR advocated "technical agreements" with PS-led coalitions for the second round where MoDem was not participating.

The rightward devolution of the pseudo-Trotskyist Lutte Ouvrière (LO) has been no less grotesque. After backing

October 2007: Strikers oppose Sarkozy



Ségolène Royal, the unsuccessful PS presidential candidate, LO participated in municipal joint slates with the PS and PCF as well as the bourgeois PRG, MRC and Greens (which it considers part of "the left"):

"In the current political circumstances, Lutte Ouvrière desires a union of all the forces of the left beginning in the first round, and we are ready to participate in it. Our candidates will be present on such lists except where the Socialist Party, the Communist Party or both prefer division and refuse this alliance. Only in this case will Lutte Ouvrière present its own lists."

—*Lutte Ouvrière*, 25 January

The demoralized reformists leading LO did not even bother trying to disguise their motivation for participating in the popular-front lists, stating simply that "obtaining municipal councilors is extremely important for our political influence" (*Lutte de Classe*, December 2007-January 2008).

The following text was posted on www.bolshevik.org on 19 April 2007

Bourgeois democracy is valuable to the bourgeoisie chiefly because it promotes the illusion that voters decide social and economic policy, and must therefore accept responsibility for the consequences. While specific mechanisms vary from one country to another, capitalist elections are always organized to ensure that the interests of the bourgeoisie are not threatened. At the same time they provide an opportunity for different factions of the ruling class to sort out their differences.

This year's two-round presidential and legislative elections center on the issue of how best to "rationalize" French capitalism, i.e., increase profits by reducing overhead and labor costs. There is an overwhelming consensus within the French bourgeoisie that in order to reverse its deteriorating position relative to its imperialist rivals, it must drive down popular living standards. Yet any attempt to do so is likely to encounter significant working-class resistance of the sort manifested in the mass strikes of 1995-96, and, on a lesser scale, in last year's confrontation over changes to the labor code (see "Revolt Against Globalization," 1917 No.18 and "The 'Anti-CPE' Movement in France," 1917 No.29).

The spectacular failure of America's war in Iraq, which has dramatically reduced Washington's leverage over its European rivals, is seen by the French ruling class as an opportunity to participate in the reconfiguration of the imperialist world order on a scale not seen since the end of World War II. The French bourgeoisie seeks to entrench itself as the dominant power in its former colonies, particularly in Africa and the Middle East, and massively expand its influence in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

While refusing to participate in the disastrous U.S. adventure in Iraq, France has played a key role in imperialist attempts to bully Iran into abandoning its nuclear energy program and has contributed 2,000 troops to NATO's colonial occupation of Afghanistan and almost as many to the United Nations' force in southern Lebanon. French soldiers are also active in the effort to prop up the client regime Washington imposed on Haiti. France currently has 3,000 soldiers in the Ivory Coast, where French forces destroyed the tiny air force and brutally gunned down some 60 unarmed protesters in November 2004 (*Guardian* [London], 21 December 2004). Another 1,100 French soldiers are providing protection to the neo-colonial regime

of Idriss Déby in Chad, and 300 more are helping François Bozizé cling to power in the Central African Republic. In all, there are currently over 36,000 French troops deployed outside France.

The constant propaganda in the domestic media portraying French intervention in its neo-colonies as a force for progress goes hand-in-hand with racist denunciations of the supposed threat posed by the brutally oppressed immigrant and Muslim populations at home. An ugly anti-immigrant mood has characterized much of the election campaign, as capitalist politicians propose to address the debilitating poverty of the ghetto masses by increasing "flexibility" for employers through gutting existing labor legislation and by introducing compulsory military service.

The presidential candidate of the ruling Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) is Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy, who prides himself on his role in the brutal suppression of the October-November 2005 riots by black and Arab youth who were enraged at police chasing two teenagers to their deaths. Sarkozy is openly courting supporters of the fascist National Front with slogans such as: "France, love it or leave it!" Some elements of the UMP are so uncomfortable with Sarkozy's crude chauvinism that they have opted to support François Bayrou of the "center-right" Union for French Democracy (UDF).

Sarkozy's main opponent, Ségolène Royal of the Socialist Party (PS), who is promoting a "strong France" through maintaining a high level of military spending and the French nuclear arsenal, is also pandering to anti-immigrant chauvinism with promises to introduce boot camps for "delinquents" (i.e., minority youth from the suburban ghettos). Royal combines this with vague talk of raising the monthly minimum wage to 1,500 euros "as soon as possible" and "mastering globalization" with a variant of the Tobin tax.

Marie-George Buffet, presidential candidate of the French Communist Party (PCF), positions herself just slightly to the left of Royal with promises of boosting the minimum wage immediately, and talk of converting the "neo-liberal" European Union into "a social, democratic, eco-friendly Europe." Buffet applauded President Jacques Chirac for dispatching more troops to Lebanon last summer and claims that French imperialist forces in the Middle East can provide "international security and protection for the civilian populations [of Israel-Palestine] under the flag of the UN" ("Pour une autre politique à gauche—le programme," 23 January [2007]).

Despite their occasional *pro forma* references to "socialism," both the PS and PCF are what Lenin termed bourgeois workers' parties, i.e., reformist formations whose unambiguously pro-capitalist leaders aspire to nothing more than a chance to govern on behalf of the bourgeoisie. The "plural left" government of 1997-2002, a "popular front" (i.e., cross-class coalition) composed of the PS, the PCF and a few small bourgeois formations (the Greens, the Left Radical Party and Jean-Pierre Chevènement's Citizens' Movement), eagerly participated in NATO's criminal attack on Yugoslavia in 1999 and the reactionary U.S.-led occupation of Afghanistan a couple of years later. At home, there was little to distinguish its policy of privatizing public assets and attacking working-class gains from the austerity policies of its right-wing successor.

This time the Left Radicals and Chevènementistes agreed not to contest the presidential election in exchange



LCR's Olivier Besancenot with José Bové

for the PS standing down in a number of constituencies in the legislative elections. The Greens were unable to reach a similar deal, but François Hollande, PS general secretary, made it clear that they will still have a place in any new popular front:

"These past weeks we have taken important steps and parties which presented [presidential] candidates in 2002—Left Radicals, Citizens' Movement—have decided to support Ségolène Royal in the first round in exchange for an electoral agreement. We are open to others joining us.

"But this regroupment is also for the second round. For several weeks we have engaged in a discussion with the Greens to conclude a governmental agreement that includes an electoral section. I hope we'll be successful. The Socialist Party cannot, nor does it intend to, govern alone, and the Greens, along with others, are an essential component of the left."

—15 January [2007], hebdo.parti-socialiste.fr

The PCF, which depends on no-contest agreements with the PS to maintain its parliamentary fraction, is running its own presidential candidate in the first round, but will support Royal in the second, if she makes it that far. While Buffet has thus far publicly avoided comment on the question of her party's participation in a PS-led popular front, it is no secret that the PCF will be just as eager to join a new version of the "plural left" as it was in 1997.

Left Reformism & Class Collaboration

In 2002, after five years of anti-working-class attacks by the last "plural left" government, an unprecedented ten percent of voters supported ostensibly Trotskyist "far-left" candidates in the first round of the presidential elections. This expression of dissatisfaction by a large section of the traditional base of the PCF/PS had only limited impact because none of the major "revolutionary" formations stood for a hard break with popular frontism.

Pierre Lambert's Partides Travailleurs (PT), which received some 130,000 votes in 2002, is backing Gérard Schivardi this time. Schivardi, a former member of the PS and mayor of the small town of Mailhac, billed himself as a "mayors' candi-

date" who would champion the interests of French municipalities against the European Union (EU) bureaucracy. Daniel Gluckstein, the PT's leading spokesperson, has touted this campaign as a step in the direction of breaking France's "subordination" to the EU, which "empties universal suffrage of all meaning" (*Informations ouvrières*, 18-24 January [2007]). In supporting Schivardi's campaign, the Lambertistes, who still claim to be "Trotskyists" of some sort, demonstrate the logic of their bizarre notion of "re-conquering" bourgeois democracy and their obsessive anti-EU nationalism.

Arlette Laguiller, the perennial presidential candidate of Lutte Ouvrière (LO), another of France's ostensibly Trotskyist groups, claims to stand for the working class. Yet this self-proclaimed revolutionary openly acknowledges that the slogans advanced in her campaign:

"are not in the least revolutionary demands, far from it. They are merely indispensable measures to allow workers to regain their living conditions from 30 years ago, which were even then difficult for working people."

—Arlette Laguiller speaking at Nice,
18 February [2007]

Why should class-conscious workers consider voting for a "revolutionary" who aspires to recreate conditions that are "difficult for working people"?

The Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR) opted to run Olivier Besancenot for president after concluding that the "anti-neo-liberal" coalition that coalesced to oppose the proposed EU constitution in 2005 was unlikely to turn into a suitable electoral vehicle. This decision produced a serious rift in the LCR cadre. In May 2006, four members of the LCR's political bureau—Christian Picquet, Alain Faradji, Céline Malaisé and Francis Sitel—co-signed a call for a "unitary" multi-class electoral bloc with the PCF, dissident Socialists around Senator Jean-Luc Mélenchon and an assortment of petty-bourgeois formations, including a faction of the Greens, the Citizens' Convergence for a Left Alternative, the Republican Left and the Movement for a Republican and Social Alternative.

The LCR majority, led by Alain Krivine, does not object in principle to participation in a cross-class coalition, but did not share Picquet's enthusiasm for a "unitary" campaign dominated by the PCF. In June 2006, an LCR national conference called to discuss the question voted to send observers to meetings of the "anti-neo-liberal collectives" promoting a "unitary" left campaign, but announced that Besancenot's candidacy would only be withdrawn if the PCF pledged in advance not to participate in any future government with the "neo-liberal" PS. While rejecting collaboration with the PS, the LCR remains perfectly happy to pursue a bloc with the constellation of small capitalist parties whose presence in any governmental coalition signals to the bourgeoisie that its fundamental interests will be protected.

In October 2006, the "anti-neo-liberal collectives" adopted a political program that called for "a democratic and social Sixth Republic" with a "new division of national wealth," declaring: "France and Europe must not be, nor even appear to be, associated with the aggressive policy of domination of the United States." Two months later, the "anti-neo-liberal" gambit imploded when the PCF used its organizational control of the collectives to impose its leader, Marie-George Buffet, as the "unitary" presidential candidate. Jean-Luc Mélenchon announced that he and his

supporters would support Royal rather than Buffet, and a minority of the collectives opted to support the campaign of José Bové, a radical farmer nationalist best known for leading the Confédération Paysanne in dismantling a McDonald's franchise.

The Picquet faction of the LCR wanted to support Bové, but Krivine et al refused to withdraw Besancenot on the grounds that Bové was also willing to support a PS-led coalition government. The French adherents of the International Socialist Tendency (IST) who operate in one of the LCR's smaller factions, also preferred Bové to Besancenot, but their mentor, Alex Callinicos of the British Socialist Workers Party, advised them not to openly campaign for Bové because splitting the LCR would "weaken one of the main instruments for renewing the French left" (*Socialist Worker* [London], 10 February [2007]).

While the French supporters of the IST have found a home in the LCR, adherents of the International Marxist Tendency (IMT—associated with Alan Woods and the late Ted Grant) have attached themselves to the PCF and its youth group. These self-proclaimed "Trotskyists" who "categorically reject the arguments of those who see in the difficulties of the last period signs of the irreversible 'historic' decline of our party [i.e., the Stalinist PCF]" (www.lariposte.com, 30 May 2005) are enthusiastically backing Buffet. The IMT is outraged by the LCR's pretense of "refusing any sort of agreement with the PS":

"To beat the right, the PCF must support the PS candidate in the second round of the presidential election and systematically give its support to Socialist candidates who take the lead in the first round of the legislative elections. The sectarian policy of the LCR on this question comes down to letting the right into power. Standing down in favor of Socialist candidates does not in any way imply providing cover for the politics of the PS."

—www.lariposte.com, 20 December 2006

Everyone knows that the LCR, which in 2002 voted for Jacques Chirac as a "lesser evil" and which today proclaims that "Sacking the right in 2007 is for us a public health measure" (*Rouge*, 17 November 2006), is going to end up voting for the PS in the second round (if Royal is still on the ballot). Besancenot admitted as much when asked how he intended to vote in the second round:

"I'll tell you the night of the first round [April 22]. You should know that the LCR has never hoped to benefit politically from a bad situation, and in fact I'm standing against Nicolas Sarkozy. I differentiate between the left and the right. As far as a vote recommendation, that depends on what is said in the framework of the campaign."

—*Le Monde*, 28 February [2007]

'Beating the Right' vs. Trotskyist Principles

The French electoral system provides the "far left" with an opportunity for socialist speechifying and "Trotskyist" posturing in the first round. In the second, in which the top two candidates have a runoff, the fearless "revolutionaries" are virtually all prepared to vote for popular-front candidates in order to "beat the right." But popular frontism can only "beat the left" (i.e., the interests of the working class and oppressed). The strategy of building a cross-class coalition is an explicit repudiation of the central axis of socialist politics—the necessity for the workers'

movement to remain independent from the bourgeoisie. Leon Trotsky, co-leader with Vladimir Lenin of the Russian Revolution, declared in 1936 that "the Popular Front is the main question of proletarian class strategy for this epoch" and as such provides "the best criterion for the difference between Bolshevism and Menshevism" ("The POUM and the Popular Front").

Reformist parties involved in popular fronts are not necessarily more likely to govern in the interests of the capitalist class than they would on their own. But when they act as a component of a popular front, their working-class character is effectively suspended and the contradiction between their ostensible socialism and their actions as the open agents of the capitalists is therefore suppressed. Voting for candidates who are openly committed to the creation of a cross-class coalition can only hold back the class struggle. Trotsky's observation that "All the Popular Fronts in Europe are only a pale copy and often a caricature of the Russian Popular Front of 1917" is just as true today as it was in the 1930s.

At its October 2006 national conference, Lutte Ouvrière, which is capable of making occasional criticisms of the reformist logic of lesser-evilism, adopted a document which recalled the formula it used in 1974 and 1981 when it supported the candidate of the "Union of the Left" popular front: "Without illusions but without reserve, we call to vote for Mitterrand." In denouncing a refusal to vote for "left" candidates today as "imbecilic leftism," LO advanced the following opportunist calculation: "it is precisely to be in a position to give them [workers] reasons to vote for Arlette Laguiller that we do not currently, nor during the campaign will we, say to them that the left is the same as the right" (*Lutte de Classe*, December 2006–January 2007). But when the "left" is a coalition of openly bourgeois parties with reformist workers' parties there is no way for working people to cast a class vote.

The LCR and LO are not alone in abandoning the Trotskyist position of hard opposition to popular frontism. Many smaller formations that claim to represent "orthodox" Trotskyism also accept the logic of lesser-evilism. For example, the group known as the Cercle (now part of the Groupe pour la construction du Parti ouvrier révolutionnaire), one of the surviving fragments of Stéphane Just's 1984 split from Pierre Lambert's Organisation Communiste Internationaliste, attacked LO for its (entirely disingenuous) hint that it may decide not to back Royal in a second round runoff against Sarkozy on the grounds that this fails to take advantage of "the popular aspiration to 'beat the right'" (*Combattre pour le socialisme*, 12 January [2007]). They also denounced the LCR's objections to PCF cooperation with the PS as placing:

"obstacles to the inevitable aspiration of the masses for a government to carry out policies that conform to their immediate needs and aspirations, a government that cannot be conceived at the current stage by excluding the Socialist Party in advance."

—*ibid.*

The Groupe Bolchevik (GB), the most left-wing of the Justist organizations, criticizes LO and the LCR for failing to pose a revolutionary alternative, but stops short of making the repudiation of a bloc with any bourgeois party a precondition for electoral support. The GB is prepared to vote for PS and PCF candidates even though they are run-



MICHAEL SAWYER—AP

November 2007: Youths trash cop car in Paris suburb

ning on the basis of establishing a coalition government with capitalist formations, claiming that this represents an application of the “workers’ united front”:

“the Groupe Bolchevik cannot support any candidate. Nevertheless, we call on those workers who are able and who desire to vote to choose, during the first rounds [of the presidential and legislative elections], a candidate from a working-class organization (PS, PCF, LCR, LO) over all the bourgeois candidates. For the same reasons, the Groupe Bolchevik calls to vote for a candidate of a workers’ organization in the second round, or to abstain if one is not present.”

—*Révolution Socialiste*, April [2007]

The GB asserts that: “To Get Rid of Sarkozy and Le Pen, Break with the Bourgeoisie and Open the Road to a Workers’ Government and to Socialism!” (*Révolution Socialiste*, January [2007]). But in France today, a “break with the bourgeoisie” requires revolutionaries to make electoral support for reformist workers’ parties conditional on their repudiation of any perspective of coalition with capitalist parties. That is what the Russian Bolsheviks demanded of the Mensheviks and other reformists in 1917 when they called on them to eject the “Ten Capitalist Ministers” and govern in their own name. This approach remains every bit as important today as it was 90 years ago. Would-be revolutionaries who are prepared to vote for reformist parties when they campaign as components of a multi-class political bloc are, in effect, supporting a popular front. The GB asserts that it “accords only minor importance to electoral tactics,” yet voting for the “workers’ component” of the popular front is neither a minor, nor a tactical question. Marxists oppose popular frontism as a matter of principle.

Electoral Tactics and Class-Struggle Politics

In June 1940, several leaders of the American Socialist Workers Party (SWP) visited Mexico, where they discussed tactics for the U.S. presidential election with Leon Trotsky. As the SWP was unable to stand its own candidate for president, Trotsky suggested a policy of “critical support” to the

Communist Party (CP), which was then, as a result of the Hitler-Stalin Pact signed less than a year earlier, assuming an anti-imperialist posture of opposition to American involvement in World War II. Trotsky suggested that the SWP should try to take advantage of “the coincidence between their slogans and ours,” which, he observed, could only be “transitory,” by approaching the CP ranks and clearly posing the conditions for electoral support:

“I have a concrete suggestion, that we publish a letter to the Stalinist workers: during five years your leaders were protagonists of the democracies, then they changed and were against all the imperialisms. If you make a firm decision not to permit a change in line then we are ready to convoke a convention to support your presidential candidate. You must give a pledge. It would be a letter of propaganda and agitation to the Stalinist workers. We will see. It is probable that the line will change in some weeks. This letter would give you free possibilities without having to vote for their candidate.”

—“Discussions with Trotsky,” 12-15 June 1940

Trotsky did not view critical support to the CP as some sort of “class against class” categorical imperative, but rather as a “very short and very critical” maneuver:

“Our party is not bound to the Stalinist maneuver [i.e., critical support in the presidential election] any more than it was to the SP maneuver [i.e., the American Trotskyists’ successful entry into the Socialist Party]. Nevertheless we undertook such a maneuver. We must add up the pluses and minuses.”

James P. Cannon, the SWP’s central leader, raised the following objection:

“It is a false issue: [U.S. President Franklin D.] Roosevelt vs. the Stalinists. It is not a bona fide class opposition to Roosevelt. Possibly we could support [CP candidate Earl] Browder against Roosevelt, but Browder would not only repudiate our votes, but would withdraw in favor of Roosevelt.”

Trotsky replied:

“That would be the very best occurrence for us. After laying down our conditions for support, this capitulation would win us a section of the Stalinists.”

Trotsky’s approach was diametrically opposed to a policy of automatically voting for reformist parties regardless of their record and declared intentions. Electoral support to candidates of the PCF/PS when everyone knows they will form a coalition with bourgeois forces amounts to endorsing class collaboration. A revolutionary policy must begin by making independence from the bourgeoisie a precondition for any form of electoral support. This is not the omega of Trotskyist electoral tactics, but it is the alpha.

The French working class has repeatedly demonstrated its capacity for struggle and its desire to find a way to effectively resist capitalist attacks. What it lacks is an organization capable of providing revolutionary leadership, which is prepared to aggressively combat the defeatist, pro-capitalist policies of the trade-union bureaucracy and their parliamentary counterparts among the “socialist” and “communist” left. The critical task of forging such a leadership must begin by assembling a nucleus of militants committed to a revolutionary “class against class” policy and unconditionally opposed to every form of popular frontism. ■

Popular Front: Not a Tactic But a Crime

'The Main Question of Proletarian Class Strategy'



French Popular Front 1936: Léon Blum (SFIO), Edouard Daladier (Radical-Socialist Party) and Maurice Thorez (PCF)

The following quotations were originally printed in *Spartacist* No.27-28 (Winter 1979-1980) published by the then-revolutionary international Spartacist tendency.

"The question of questions at present is the People's Front. The left centrists seek to present this question as a tactical or even as a technical maneuver, so as to be able to peddle their wares in the shadow of the People's Front. In reality, the People's Front is the *main question of proletarian class strategy* for this epoch. It also offers the best criterion for the difference between Bolshevism and Menshevism. For it is often forgotten that the greatest historical example of the People's Front is the February 1917 revolution. From February to October, the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries, who represent a very good parallel to the 'Communists' and Social Democrats, were in the closest alliance and in a permanent coalition with the bourgeois party of the Cadets, together with whom they formed a series of coalition governments. Under the sign of this People's Front stood the whole mass of the people, including the workers', peasants', and soldiers' councils. To be sure, the Bolsheviks participated in the councils. But they did not make the slightest concession to the People's Front. Their demand was to *break* this People's Front, to destroy the alliance with the Cadets, and to create a genuine workers' and peasants' government.

"All the People's Fronts in Europe are only a pale copy and often a caricature of the Russian People's Front of 1917, which could after all lay claim to a much greater justification for its existence, for it was still a question of the struggle against czarism and the remnants of feudalism."

—Leon Trotsky, "The Dutch Section and the International" (15-16 July 1936), in *Writings of Leon Trotsky* (1935-36), [emphasis in original]

"For the proletariat, through its parties, to give up its own independent program means to give up its independent functioning as a class. And this is precisely the meaning of the People's Front. In the People's Front the proletariat renounces its *class independence*, gives up its *class aims*—the *only aims*, as Marxism teaches, which can serve its interests.... The People's Front is thus thoroughly and irrevocably non-proletarian, anti-proletarian.

"By its very nature, the People's Front must be so. The establishment of the People's Front, by definition, requires agreement on a common program between the working-class and non-working-class parties. But the non-proletarian parties cannot agree to the proletarian program—the program of revolutionary socialism—without ceasing to be what they are....

"The People's Front, understood in its fundamentals, is the major form of the preparation among the masses for the achievement of national unity within the democratic nations in support of the coming war. Under the slogans of the People's Front, the masses will march forth to fight for 'their own' imperialism....

"Thus, the People's Front is the contemporary version of social-patriotism, the new form in which the betrayal of 1914 is to be repeated."

—James Burnham, *The People's Front: The New Betrayal* (1937) [emphasis in original]

"26. Reformist-Dissidents [the followers of Jean Longuet] are the agency of the 'Left Bloc' within the working class. Their success will be the greater, all the less the working class as a whole is seized by the idea and practice of the united front against the bourgeoisie. Layers of workers, disoriented by the war and by the tardiness of the revolution, may venture to support the 'Left Bloc' as a lesser evil, in the belief that they do not thereby risk anything at all, or because they see no other road at present.

"27. One of the most reliable methods of counteracting inside the working class the moods and ideas of the 'Left Bloc,' i.e., a bloc between the workers and a certain section of the bourgeoisie against another section of the bourgeoisie, is through promoting persistently and resolutely the idea of a *bloc between all the sections of the working class against the whole bourgeoisie....*"

"31. The indicated method could be similarly employed and not without success in relation to parliamentary and municipal activities. We say to the masses, 'The Dissidents, because they do not want the revolution, have split the mass of the workers. It would be insanity to count on their helping the proletarian revolution. But we are ready, inside and outside the parliament, to enter into certain practical agreements with them, provided they agree, in those cases where one must choose between the known interests of the bourgeoisie and the definite demands of the proletariat, to support the latter in action. The Dissidents can be capable of such actions only if they renounce their ties with the parties of the bourgeoisie, that is, the "Left Bloc" and its bourgeois discipline.'

"If the Dissidents were capable of accepting these conditions, then their worker-followers would be quickly absorbed by the Communist Party. Just because of this, the Dissidents will not agree to these conditions. In other words, to the clearly and precisely posed question whether they choose a bloc with the bourgeoisie or a bloc with the proletariat—in the concrete and specific conditions of mass struggle—they will be compelled to reply that they prefer a bloc with the bourgeoisie. Such an answer will not pass with impunity among the proletarian reserves on whom they are counting."

—Leon Trotsky, "On the United Front" (2 March 1922), in *The First Five Years of the Communist International*, Vol. 2 [emphasis in original]

"The job of the cartel [the 'cartel de la gauche,' or 'Left Bloc,' in France] always consisted in *putting a brake* upon the mass movement, directing it into the channels of class collaboration. This is precisely the job of the People's Front as well. The difference between them—and not an unimportant one—is that the traditional cartel was applied during the comparatively peaceful and stable epochs of the parliamentary regime. Now, however, when the masses are impatient and explosive, a more imposing brake is needed, with the participation of the 'Communists'....

"The coming parliamentary elections, no matter what their outcome, will not *in themselves* bring any serious changes into the situation: the voters, in the final analysis, are confronted with the choice between an arbiter of the type of Laval and an arbiter of the type of Herriot-Daladier. But inasmuch as Herriot has peacefully collaborated with Laval, and Daladier has supported them both, the difference between them is entirely insignificant, if measured by the scale of the tasks set by history."

—Leon Trotsky, "France at the Turning Point" (28 March 1936), [emphasis in original]

"The July days [in Spain] deepen and supplement the lessons of the June days in France with exceptional force. For the second time in five years the coalition of the labor parties with the Radical bourgeoisie has brought the revolution to the edge of the abyss. Incapable of solving a single one of the tasks posed by the revolution—since all these tasks boil down to one, namely, the crushing of the bourgeoisie—the People's Front renders the existence of the bourgeois regime impossible and thereby provokes the fascist coup d'état. By lulling the workers and peasants with parliamentary illusions, by paralyzing their will to struggle, the People's Front creates favorable conditions for the victory of fascism. The policy of coalition with the bourgeoisie must be paid for by the proletariat with years of new torments and sacrifice, if not by decades of fascist terror."

—Leon Trotsky, "The New Revolutionary Upsurge and the Tasks of the Fourth International", July 1936

"What was inexcusably criminal on the part of the [Spanish] Socialist party, the Communist party and the Maurin-Nin party of 'Marxist Unification' was not only that they wrote a 'common program' with the discredited bourgeois parties—which was bad enough—and that thereby, politically speaking, they appeared before the masses in *one party* with the bourgeoisie, but that this 'common program' was dictated and written by the bourgeoisie, and that in every other respect the joint party—under the pseudonym of the 'People's Front'—was dominated by the bourgeoisie."

—Max Shachtman, "The Spanish Elections and the People's Front," *New Militant*, 14 March 1936 [emphasis in original]

"In France the Popular Front took shape as the union on a reformist program of the working-class parties with the great 'middle-class' Radical-Socialist Party. There were no such parties in the United States, but the same social forces nevertheless operated under similar conditions, and the United States equivalent of the Popular Front was simply the New Deal Roosevelt Democratic Party."

—"Editor's Comments," *New International*, December 1938

"It is the specific question of LaFollette and LaGuardia. The movements backing them are not dreams, but the genuine, homespun authentic American type of 'Farmer-Labor' and 'Labor' Party. And what sort of movements are they? About this no elaborate argument is needed. Are they 'anti-capitalist'? Not one of their leaders would dream of pretending so. They are dedicated heart and soul to the preservation of capitalism.... Are they 'free of all entanglements with capitalist parties'...? How absurd: their chief task in 1936 was to gather votes for Roosevelt. Do they run genuine representatives of the proletariat for office? LaFollette and LaGuardia are the answer."

"The Farmer-Labor Progressive Federation and the American Labor Party are both vicious muddles of class collaboration, Popular Frontism, outworn Populism and atavistic liberalism, the docile instruments of labor bureaucrats and careerist 'progressive' capitalist politicians.

"Support of these movements at the present time in actuality represents the perspective of the liquidation of independent working-class politics. That is the long and short of it."

—"A Manifesto to the Members of the Socialist Party," *Socialist Appeal*, 14 August 1937

Northites Inc.: Toeing the Bottom Line Being Determines Consciousness

In the spring of 2007, the Socialist Equality Party/International Committee (SEP/IC) was rocked by a public scandal when Scott Solomon, an embittered former adherent, revealed that David North is not only the leading figure of the SEP and IC, but is also CEO of Grand River Printing & Imaging (GRPI), a multi-million dollar business in Michigan. The SEP leadership would apparently prefer to keep its successful commercial venture secret, but it cannot deny the facts.

The GRPI evolved from the in-house printshop that used to produce the *Bulletin*, the newspaper of the Workers League (WL—the SEP's predecessor). When the WL/SEP suspended publication of the *Bulletin* in favor of producing an online daily on its World Socialist Web Site (WSWS), the party print shop was apparently quietly transformed into a full-blown business.

At about the same time, the SEP/IC leadership discarded the traditional Marxist view of trade unions as defensive organizations of the working class and declared that they had become simple agencies of the capitalists. North wrote a lengthy essay on this theme entitled "Globalization and the Unions," in which he announced the "objective transformation of the AFL-CIO into an instrument of the corporations and the capitalist state." We polemicized against this in 1917 No. 29 (see "SEP: Defeatist and Confusionist: The Class Nature of the Unions").

The Northites recently seized upon the squalid deal signed by the United Auto Workers (UAW) in October 2007 with General Motors, which permits the company to offload responsibility for its retirees' health-care coverage with a contribution of cash and a \$4.4 billion convertible note (based on the value of GM common stock) to a Voluntary Employee Benefit Association (VEBA). The deal benefited the bosses by massively reducing their liabilities, while giving the UAW bureaucracy, which gets to manage the fund, a major new source of revenue and influence. The only ones to lose out will be retired autoworkers, whose benefits will be reduced when VEBA's investment portfolio underperforms.

In a 12 October 2007 statement, the SEP wrote:

"The so-called 'voluntary employees beneficiary association,' or VEBA, will turn the union into a profit-making enterprise and make the union bureaucracy full-fledged shareholders in the exploitation of the workers. The UAW bureaucracy will get its hands on a massive cash hoard, including shares in GM, which will ensure its income even as it administers ever deeper cuts in the benefits of retired union members."

—"The middle-class 'left' and the UAW-GM contract"

Seemingly oblivious to the parallel between the UAW bureaucracy's relationship to VEBA and the SEP's to the GRPI, the Northites declared: "The open transformation of the UAW into a business is not a sudden or unexpected development." But the auto union has not been transformed into a capitalist enterprise; the UAW remains part of the workers' movement, despite the grotesque, and grow-

ing, corruption of its leadership. Leon Trotsky described the tendency of the labor bureaucracy in the imperialist countries to be transformed from mere agents of the bourgeoisie into "stakeholders" in the ventures of the ruling class:

"The intensification of class contradictions within each country, the intensification of antagonisms between one country and another, produce a situation in which imperialist capitalism can tolerate (i.e., up to a certain time) a reformist bureaucracy only if the latter serves directly as a petty but active stockholder of its imperialist enterprises, of its plans and programs within the country as well as on the world arena."

—"Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay,"
1940

Yet Trotsky concluded:

"in spite of the progressive degeneration of trade unions and their growing together with the imperialist state, the work within the trade unions not only does not lose any of its importance but remains as before and becomes in a certain sense even more important work than ever for every revolutionary party. The matter at issue is essentially the struggle for influence over the working class."

When the IC first announced that it was writing off the unions, our German comrades projected that North & Co. might one day "find themselves in a political bloc with the capitalists in their attack on the institutions of the workers' movement" (1917 No. 20). The SEP's October 2007 statement does exactly that, declaring: "The Socialist Equality Party would advise workers, should the UAW come to their plant, to vote to keep it out."

No doubt GRPI management would give similar advice to any employees thinking about unionizing. Socialists, by contrast, believe that workers should be organized. In a case of vice paying homage to virtue, the SEP's 12 January 2006 statement for the U.S. mid-term elections advocated "a guaranteed right of workers to join a union and control the union democratically; the outlawing of union-busting tactics and wage-cutting." This was coupled with a peculiar demand for "government support for small and medium-sized businesses." Even the reformist left has not historically been in the habit of demanding public funding for private capitalists, but then few of them ever owned "medium-sized businesses."

Sri Lankan Exceptionalism in the IC

The SEP/IC's October 2007 statement on the UAW makes it very clear that its anti-union stance is not only applicable in North America:

"Two facts demonstrate that the transformation of the UAW is not simply the product of the subjective characteristics of corrupt leaders or misguided policies, but rather the expression of fundamental objective processes rooted in the nature of trade union organizations and the impact of major changes in the structure of world capitalism. The first is the protracted period, now extending over decades,



GRPI

GRPI: 'The company now has sales revenues over \$20 million and 90 employees'

in which the unions have worked openly to suppress the class struggle and impose cuts in workers' wages and benefits, along with massive layoffs."

"The second fact is the international scale of the degeneration and transformation of the unions. This is not an American, but rather a world phenomenon, embracing the unions in the advanced capitalist centers of North America, Europe and Asia, as well as those in so-called 'less developed' countries. From the American UAW and AFL-CIO, to the British Trades Union Congress, to the German Federation of Unions, to the Australian Council of Trade Unions, to the Congress of South African Trade Unions, the unions have adopted a corporatist policy of labor-management 'partnership' and worked to drive down labor costs at the expense of the jobs, wages and working conditions of their members.

"The driving force behind this universal process is the globalization of capitalist production, which has eclipsed the former primacy of national markets, including the labor market, and enabled transnational corporations to scour the earth for ever-cheaper sources of labor power. This has rendered the unions, wedded by dint of their historical origins and class-collaborationist tendencies to the national market and the national state, obsolete and impotent."

It seems, however, that Sri Lanka is an exception to this "world phenomenon." It is perhaps not a coincidence that this is the one country in which a leading member of an IC section is also a union president. Unlike North's role as the boss of a capitalist enterprise, the IC seems proud of their Sri Lankan comrade's activities. The WSWS report on a 13 November 2007 SEP public meeting in Colombo to denounce the ongoing war against Tamil separatists mentioned that one of the main speakers was "K.B. Mavikumbura, an SEP central committee member and president of the Central Bank Employees Union (CBEU)." The article extensively quoted Mavikumbura's account of his recent union activities:

"We presented a resolution in the CBEU calling on workers to unite on socialist policies to end the war. We pointed out that the campaign for the withdrawal of the military from the north-east, which is under de facto military rule, is a necessary condition to unite workers....

"Recently I attended a trade union meeting to organise a picket in support of teachers. The government had said it could not increase the salaries of teachers as it had to pay for the war. It took out an order in the Supreme Court to intimidate teachers. I explained that workers should take up a political fight against the government. The central question is to oppose the war, but the trade unions leaders rejected that. Instead they said workers should form an alliance with the opposition United National Party (UNP), which is notorious for attacking workers' rights. Workers need to build an independent political movement based on a socialist perspective."

—"SEP holds public meeting in Colombo to oppose the war in Sri Lanka"

Anyone in the political orbit of the Northites might wonder how Mavikumbura's activities can be squared with the view that unions are simply agencies of the bosses.

'Transformation Into a Business'

Does the IC position on the unions simply reflect a loss of confidence in the capacity of the working class to oust the bureaucrats and gain control of its own mass organizations? Or is it a reflection of the social pressures of running a successful business? As Marx observed, being tends to determine consciousness, and for North & Co., the increasing revenues of the GRPI could certainly provide a material basis for the growth of personal/political corruption within the SEP/IC leadership.

Alex Steiner and Frank Brenner, former close associates of North who continue to identify politically with the SEP/IC, hint at this in the conclusion of a lengthy document dated 16 December 2007 which recalls how Gerry Healy (the former head of the IC) accepted large sums of

money from various Middle Eastern regimes to act as their left publicist:

"This too was one of the key lessons of the WRP [Workers Revolutionary Party] split—that the 'unanimity' of Healy's leadership group masked all kinds of opportunist relationships based on personal and financial arrangements. We have no doubt that the silence of the rest of the IC leadership is also based, at least in part, on opportunist considerations of a financial and personal nature."

—"Marxism Without Its Head or Its Heart"

The IC's revisionism did not commence with the transformation of the WL printing plant into a business, nor as Steiner and Brenner argue, when North et al abandoned the struggle against "pragmatism." Gerry Healy's political-bandit operation (including its American satellite run initially by Tim Wolkforth and later by North) was very distant programmatically from Trotskyism long before they began promoting Colonel Qaddafi and other Middle Eastern despots.

Leftist organizations that obtain substantial funding from sources outside their field of political activity will inevitably tend to become depoliticized and subject to alien class forces. Trotsky made this point in an 8 October 1923 letter addressing some of the early symptoms of the growing bureaucratization of the Soviet Communist Party:

"There is without question an inner connection between the separate and self-contained character of the secretarial organization—more and more independent of the party—and the tendency toward setting up a budget as independent as possible of the success or failure of the party's collective work of construction."

—*The Challenge of the Left Opposition (1923-25)*

North et al said essentially the same thing in their major 1986 statement renouncing Healy:

"Moreover, elements among the journalists, actors and actresses who passed from Fleet Street and the West End into the Political Committee of the WRP, without any apprenticeship in the class struggle, provided a physical link to material resources such as the Party had never known. Apart from the day-to-day struggle of the Party membership inside the working class, huge amounts of money were raised. The central leadership thus acquired an independence from the rank and file that destroyed the foundations of democratic centralism."

"Healy's high-flying diplomacy and his sudden access to vast material resources, based largely on his opportunist utilization of Vanessa Redgrave as the WRP's calling card in the Middle East, had a corrosive effect on the Party's political line and its relation to the working class. Whatever its original intention, it became part of a process through which the WRP became the political captive of alien class force. At the very moment when it was most in need of a course correction, the 'success' of its work in the Middle East, which from the beginning lacked a basic proletarian reference point, made it less and less dependent upon the penetration of the working class in Britain and internationally."

—"How the Revolutionary Workers Party Betrayed Trotskyism"

The commercial success of the GRPI today gives the SEP leadership far more independence from their ranks than is usually the case in bureaucratized leftist groups where dis-

posable income tends to be closely tied to the size of the dues base. The SEP's web-centered political activity requires a cadre of talented writers and editors, but the fact that the group conducts very little real public activity means that there are few opportunities for new recruits to develop outside of attending the occasional in-house event. Over time, we would expect the cash flow generated by the GRPI to have much the same effect on the SEP/IC's upper strata as VEBA will on the occupants of Solidarity House.

The following commentary on the SEP/IC and GRPI originally appeared on the IBT website in May 2007.

In recent weeks reports have surfaced that David North, leader of the ostensibly Trotskyist Socialist Equality Party and its International Committee, also (as David Green) acts as CEO of Grand River Printing & Imaging (GRPI—www.grpinc.com/grandriver-history.html), one of Michigan's larger printing companies, which reported \$25 million in business transactions last year. Like other readers of the SEP's online daily, we have been waiting to see what the World Socialist Web Site has to say about the flap over the GRPI. It seems that, for the time being at least, North et al have decided that discretion is the better part of valor, and are maintaining radio silence.

Most of the comments printed below were written by our comrade Samuel T., who was recruited to the Workers League (predecessor of the SEP) during Fred Mazelis' 1989 campaign for mayor of New York City. Sam left the WL in 1991 when it refused to call for the defeat of U.S. imperialism in the first Gulf War (see *Trotskyist Bulletin* No. 8).

On the weekend of 31 March/1 April [2007] Sam and a couple of other IBT supporters went to Ann Arbor, Michigan to attend an SEP anti-war conference that was advertised as open to "all WSWS readers." When our comrades arrived, however, they found that supporters of organizations other than the SEP were not really welcome, and the SEP leadership seemed a bit put out by our criticisms of their claim that trade unions are no longer working-class organizations (see 1917 No. 29).

Gerry Healy, the founder-leader of the British Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) who headed the IC until the mid-1980s, had a well-deserved reputation as a cynical political thug with a penchant for pseudo-dialectical gibberish and crisis mongering. In the late 1960s, along with Ernest Mandel and the Pabloist "United Secretariat" (USec), the IC hailed various Middle East bonapartists as manifestations of a trans-class "Arab Revolution." The IC also shared the Pabloists' enthusiasm for Mao Zedong's "Red Guard" faction during the massive intra-bureaucratic wrangle known as the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution." Today, in a symmetrical deviation, North's SEP denies that China was ever any sort of workers' state.

By the 1980s, the political prostitutes of the IC were acting as paid publicists for Libya's Muammar el Qaddafi and other Arab despots. The most despicable act of these political gangsters was providing intelligence to Saddam Hussein's reactionary Baathist regime on émigré members of the Iraqi Communist Party. When the WRP/IC imploded in 1985-86, former members came forward and told of being sent to take photographs of leftist exiles at demonstrations, which the WRP leadership then passed on to the Iraqi embassy.

After Healy's fall, the current IC leadership, headed by David North, sought to adjust the group's image to something more closely approximating the "anti-Pabloite Trotskyist" tradition it falsely claims to represent. In their disingenuous account of their belated break with Healy, entitled "How the WRP Betrayed Trotskyism," the WL leadership downplayed their record of years of slavish obedience to Healy's every pronouncement. The insistence by North et al that they bear no political responsibility for the IC's crimes, and that everything was Healy's fault, recalls Nikita Khrushchev's 1956 attempt to whitewash the crimes of the Soviet bureaucracy by blaming everything on Stalin. People who go back and examine issues of the *Bulletin* will see for themselves that the Workers League's uncritical adulation of Qaddafi and the rest of the IC's bonapartist bankrollers was every bit as enthusiastic as the WRP's. They will also see that the SEP/IC, like the USec and almost every other pseudo-Trotskyist tendency, consistently supported counterrevolution in the former Soviet bloc, from Lech Walesa's Polish Solidarnosc in 1981 to Boris Yeltsin's pro-imperialist rabble in Moscow a decade later. With the passage of time, and an influx of politically raw new members, the SEP/IC leadership has tried to distance itself from its inglorious history. The tone of the WSWWS today is far less hysterical than the *Bulletin* used to be, but the program it puts forward is no more revolutionary.

Some have suggested that the SEP leaders' role in the GRPI may be connected to their repudiation of the Trotskyist analysis of the trade unions. We don't claim to know for certain. But it was clear in Ann Arbor that there is a great deal of confusion in the ranks of the SEP on their position regarding the unions. Many newer members seem uneasy with the line, while the older cadres adamantly defend it, even if there is little consistency in the arguments they use, and none of them are able to explain how the AFL-CIO today is qualitatively different than it was in the 1960s and 70s. One senior SEP member ventured that perhaps the destruction of the USSR had somehow transformed U.S. unions into simple tools of the bourgeoisie, commenting: "Well, the collapse of the USSR has changed everything, so why wouldn't it also change the unions?"

* * *

These comments are from internal discussion in the IBT.

Lenin drew a connection between the 4 August 1914 betrayal of the Social Democrats and the privileged social position of the labor aristocrats who constituted their social base. Trotsky made similar observations regarding the Stalinist bureaucracy, and also traced the Shachtmanites' [a right-wing split from the then-Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party (SWP)] abandonment of defense of the USSR in 1940 to their petty-bourgeois social composition. In 1953, James P. Cannon argued that the Cochranites' [a subsequent right-wing faction in the SWP] liquidationist politics reflected the conservatizing effects of relative economic stability on older workers. In 1983, we pointed out that the SL's [Spartacist League] dive on saving the Marines in Lebanon, and its offer the next year to provide defense guards for the Democratic Party, were related to the desire of [SL leader James] Robertson to cultivate a "respectable" image with elements of the ruling class.

It can be a dangerous thing for a small group with

Potemkin village inclinations, which the Northites have always had throughout their history, to accumulate assets out of proportion to their actual social weight. It would be surprising if running a major commercial enterprise did not affect the political consciousness of the SEP leadership—as Marx remarked, "being determines consciousness."

I was struck by the following passage from the SEP's 2006 election program:

"To establish the economic foundation for the reorganization of economic life in the interests of the broad mass of the working people, we advocate the transformation of all privately owned industrial, manufacturing and information technology corporations valued at \$10 billion or more—companies that, taken together, control the decisive share of the US economy—into publicly owned enterprises, with full compensation for small shareholders and the terms of compensation for large shareholders to be publicly negotiated."

"Property rights must be subordinated to social rights. This does not mean the nationalization of everything, or the abolition of small or medium-sized businesses, which are themselves victimized by giant corporations and banks. Establishing a planned economy will give such businesses ready access to credit and more stable market conditions, so long as they provide decent wages and working conditions."

—"For a socialist alternative in the 2006 U.S. elections," 12 January 2006 (emphasis added)

How many printing companies in the U.S. are worth more than \$10 billion? I notice that Rupert Murdoch is offering \$5 billion for Dow Jones (which includes the *Wall Street Journal*). Would the SEP consider that a "medium-sized business"?

When I was a member, WLers were exhausted by mindless public activity (8-hour shopping mall sales, etc.). I think perhaps the turn away from mass agitation toward a more realistic propaganda perspective where members are not run into the ground accounts for why SEPers now project a more controlled, rational image in public (a high-pressure environment is not good for anyone's sanity)....

In the old WL there was no escaping getting chewed out at an internal meeting (unless you were in the leadership) for not selling enough papers, doing enough work, contacting enough workers or giving the party enough money—there was no pledge schedule, rather comrades announced how much they were giving that month at a local meeting and then were pressured to give more.

The sense I got from what I was told when I was in, was that the org financed itself almost completely through contributions from members (who were bled dry and encouraged to collect money on the streets, go door to door, borrow from relatives, etc.). The other source was lit sales (which is one reason we'd get screamed at regularly for not selling enough).

I remember as a member asking about Cuba and its class character. When not attacked for raising the question to begin with (on the grounds that it reflected a potential desire to accommodate to Castroism), I was offered a wide range of explanations by different senior comrades. Some

gave me a version of the 'phantom capitalist' theory (a Lambertiste position, that, as I found out later, was never adopted by the Healyites) [Pierre Lambert, leader of the French Organisation Communiste Internationaliste participated with Healy in the IC until they parted ways in 1971]. Other WLeRs told me that despite what I had read in books and newspapers, there was indeed significant private ownership in Cuba. They were all improvising, because the IC/WL/SEP to my knowledge always avoided any attempt to seriously explain their position in writing. Members who ask too many questions about touchy subjects like Cuba soon learn not to, as it is taken as displaying an appetite to abandon the working class. I suspect that a similar approach is being used today with those deemed too inquisitive about the GRPI.

On the myspace [website] discussion of the issue, one neophyte supporter of the SEP summed up the explanation he had been given as follows:

- 1) the GRPI does not fund the SEP;
- 2) the GRPI provides employment for a number of comrades;
- 3) no one is getting rich through their involvement with the GRPI;
- 4) the GRPI is a successful company and has won awards for being a quality employer.

If I were a member, I would be wondering what the purpose of the GRPI is, if it neither serves the needs of the SEP, nor makes anyone rich. I'd also be curious about which SEP comrades get jobs there and how they get selected. I suppose it's nice to win awards, but most people would rather work in places where they have union protection instead of having to rely on management goodwill. (I think it is safe to assume that, since "unions have essentially completed their degeneration" they do not represent GRPI's workforce.)

When the SEP liquidated its printed publications in favor of online publishing, they claimed that doing so was merely recognizing the reality that, in the new age of internet communication, printed matter was becoming obsolete as a way to reach people. It is clear that the SEP has continued to invest tremendous resources to produce its online daily. The WSWs, which is generally pretty well written and covers a wide range of topics from a leftist perspective, possibly has the largest readership of any English-language ostensibly Marxist publication. It gives the SEP a cyberspace presence that far exceeds its weight in the real world.

The existence of the GRPI, and the time and energy that North et al obviously pour into it, makes me wonder if the real motivation for curtailing the production of printed propaganda was to permit the company to reach its full potential. When I was a member we had to buy large numbers of the weekly *Bulletin* on consignment—each member probably sold around 100 papers a week. The group also printed a monthly *Young Socialist*, a monthly Spanish publication for immigrants, a monthly or bi-monthly French-language publication sold in Quebec and to Haitian immigrants in New York (amongst whom we had a significant readership), a monthly Canadian newspaper, tons of leaflets, a quarterly theoretical journal, and, most months, a pamphlet or a book. The discovery that

paper printing was obsolete (although not for commercial purposes apparently) might also have been a result of a decision that meeting sales quotas by going door-to-door, hanging out at supermarkets, strike chasing and all the other things we used to do, was not an efficient use of members' political time. It is notable that the change to online from paper publishing, and the transformation of the old party printing plant into a full-blown business enterprise seems to roughly coincide with the change of position on the unions. This may well be a classic case of "program generating theory."

Marxists have generally seen revisionism as an expression of alien class pressures within the workers' movement. Small propaganda organizations, with little organic connection to the labor movement, experience that pressure in more indirect ways than mass workers' parties. In a small leftist group the personal qualities and political appetites of leading members are at least as important in determining the line and the character of its internal regime as the blind social forces that shape mass consciousness.

Marx and Engels wrote a fair number of polemics against the development of personality cults within small socialist organizations, whereas Lenin, Trotsky and Luxemburg, who operated in an atmosphere where socialist ideas were part of the mainstream of the labor movement, tended to dismiss the significance of such behavior.

Ignoring historical context and employing a caricature of the Leninist/Trotskyist analysis of trade-union, social-democratic and Stalinist bureaucracies, the IC has long denounced all other left groups as "petty bourgeois" (while their own social composition is no different) and simultaneously demanded that critics of their highly bureaucratic organization demonstrate upon what materially privileged stratum the IC leadership is based. The recent publicity surrounding the GRPI may lead the IC leadership to be a bit more careful about baiting other groups as "petty bourgeois" for a while.

A small and rigidly hierarchical ostensibly socialist organization, without significant connections to the labor movement or any other mass social movement, that has a largely literary political existence, with little public activity beyond occasionally running candidates in bourgeois elections, is likely to develop some peculiar political deviations. If the leaders of such an organization are also subjected to the social pressures of running a multi-million dollar business, it is hardly surprising that they may come to exhibit indifference to the actual struggles and needs of the working class, or at least find it difficult to connect the limited immediate struggles of the class to the necessity for socialist revolution (i.e., to find the sort of "bridge" that Trotsky outlined in the *Transitional Program*).

Trotsky saw it as essential for revolutionaries to struggle for the Marxist program within the existing mass organizations of the proletariat, i.e., the unions. The SEP leadership, by contrast, tends to advance a sort of abstract "Sunday Socialism" in which the key operational proposal is often the call to "build the SEP."

For decades the IC has tended to cater to the backward consciousness of the more privileged sections of the working class and to show little interest in questions of

special oppression. Those who insist on the importance of Marxists addressing such questions are attacked for “hating the working class” or being motivated by black-nationalist, bourgeois-feminist or other alien class ideologies. Tim Wohlforth, while still leader of the Workers League, spelled this out with his infamous comment that “The working class hates hippies, faggots and women’s libbers, and so do we!” While far less crude today, the WSWs coverage of the destruction of New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina, for example, was profoundly flawed by the tendency to ignore the blatant racism that characterized capitalist officialdom’s response to the crisis.

The cadres who produce the WSWs can certainly not be faulted for their work ethic—it is an impressive achievement for such a small group to have sustained such a venture for so long. But the value of such a project, from a revolutionary point of view, depends on the political program it advances. The profound revisionism of the SEP on the social revolutions that produced the Cuban and Chinese deformed workers’ states, its support to capitalist restorationists in the Soviet bloc, its defeatist and reactionary position on the trade unions, its historic tendency toward indifference to issues of special oppression and its abandonment of the Bolshevik position of “revolutionary defeatism” in imperialist wars, negates any value the WSWs might have as an instrument for socialist propaganda. ■

Order from/pay to: IBT, BCM Box 4771, London WC1N 3XX Britain

Price (including postage): £6.50/U.S.\$10.50 Europe £8.50/U.S.\$13.50 elsewhere

Venezuela...

continued from page 56

Some of the proposed constitutional amendments, like reducing the workweek, extending pension coverage and prohibiting discrimination on the basis of health status or sexual orientation, were supportable. It is significant that there was no proposal to decriminalize abortion, access to which remains severely restricted. Other “reforms” were anti-democratic—including the removal of a 180-day limit on presidential “state of emergency” declarations, and raising the number of signatures required for a recall referendum from 20 to 30 percent of the electorate. Another amendment guaranteed capitalist property. Taken as a whole, the constitutional reform package was unsupportable.

A “yes” vote in the referendum was an endorsement of Chávez’s brand of bonapartist reformism. Yet the most deadly opponents of workers and the oppressed mobilized heavily for a “no” vote. In this situation, the appropriate tactic for revolutionaries was to advocate a spoiled ballot as an expression of hostility to the imperialist-backed opposition and no political support to the bourgeois Bolivarian regime.

Millions of Venezuelans who had previously backed Chávez came to this conclusion and refused to vote. Some may have been discouraged by the high-profile defection of General Raúl Isaías Baduel, who had played a key role in restoring Chávez after the reactionary coup of April 2002. Others were undoubtedly affected by the low-intensity sabotage campaign by rightist elements. But it seems that most workers who stayed home did so because they were suspicious of the anti-democratic political “reforms” and Chávez’s commitment to defending the prerogatives of the big capitalists.

Alan Woods, leader of the International Marxist Tendency (IMT) whose Venezuelan affiliate is the Revolutionary Marxist Current (CMR), argued for “completing the Revolution” with “a massive ‘Yes’ vote in the referendum” (Marxist.com, 20 November 2007). Woods was upbeat about proposals that would have allowed the president to create new sub-national political jurisdictions to bypass state governments controlled by hostile forces.

Chávez had also proposed various grassroots institutions with limited decision-making authority. The centerpiece was to be a massive expansion of the “communal councils” of between 200 and 400 families in urban areas. In January 2007, Chávez announced that the several thousand communal councils already in existence would receive \$5 billion in government funding, up from \$1.5 billion the year before. The councils, which tend to have a heavily plebeian character, incorporate a variety of pre-existing formations:

“[T]he Bolivarian Circles, the Local Public Planning Committees, the UBEs [Electoral Battle Units] and the CTUs [Urban Land Committees] were all vehicles for popular mobilisation and participation which flourished to varying degrees in the early to mid 2000s, as the Bolivarian revolution developed. But they seem to have been superseded or subsumed by the rise of the communal councils, which have become the predominant structures for people power in Venezuela at present.”

—Venezuelanalysis.com, 10 October 2007

Chávez's suggestion that the communal councils could form the core of a new state apparatus delighted many of his "Marxist" admirers, even though it is generally acknowledged that they are not genuine organs of proletarian power. The New Zealand section of the International Socialist Tendency (IST), for instance, which claims that there is "a dual power scenario in Venezuela," admits that "these councils are not the same as the workers' soviets of 1917 Russia" ("Venezuela's deepening revolution & international socialist coordination," 1 May 2007).

The British Workers Power group, which in the February 2007 issue of its paper had observed that the communal councils "lack the class independence of soviet-type bodies and they are not the source of the state power but a 'participatory' and subordinate creation of it," subsequently flipped its position:

"...the large, partially armed, popular militia, the new communal councils, the minority of factories under some degree of workers control, the cooperatives, all show that there are important elements of dual power existing between the workers' new organisations and the institutions of the capitalist state. A revolutionary period has begun, but the revolution, that is the overthrow of this state, has not yet occurred."

—Workers Power, September 2007

Workers Power's initial assessment was closer to the mark. Far from creating a situation of "dual power" or prefiguring a socialist republic, the communal councils are multi-class formations whose chief function is to strengthen Bolivarian bonapartism by tying the popular masses to the capitalist state via the presidency.

Bolivarian 'Socialism': Cooperatives & Co-Management

Chávez's leftist supporters are inclined to interpret the expansion of cooperative micro-businesses and the state sector as evidence of the emergence of "socialist" property. When Chávez first took office there were fewer than one thousand co-ops; today there are tens of thousands, employing hundreds of thousands of people previously excluded from the formal sector of the economy. The government provides start-up capital in the form of loans and encourages "endogenous" networking with other cooperatives and the quasi-independent government-backed Bolivarian social "missions." The results have been mixed:

"Experience has shown how difficult it is to decree such experimental changes in people's lives from above. The government placed the number of cooperatives at 140,000 in 2006, but this year the Ministry of the Popular Economy announced that it counted only 74,000. Worse yet, a more recent census indicated only 48,000. Many cooperatives never got off the ground, and in other cases, cooperative members pocketed the money they received from loans or the down payments for contracts. One pro-Chávez congressman admitted, 'Up until now, no one can say the cooperative program has been successful. In fact, there is little to show considering all the money that has been spent.'"

—Venezuelanalysis.com, 28 August 2007

Many cooperatives have failed, while those that have succeeded have done so as tiny capitalist enterprises which have figured out how to turn a profit. Cooperative



La Matoma construction co-op fixes street in Caracas barrio

workers, as "owners" of marginally-viable micro-businesses, often earn less than the minimum wage. Some big companies have opted to outsource work to cooperatives rather than expand their unionized workforce.

In the countryside, the government has distributed almost two million hectares of state-owned land to over 150,000 poor peasants who in many cases belong to farming cooperatives. More than 300,000 hectares of privately-owned "under-utilized" land have also been taken over, while big landowners using their land "productively" have not been touched (Venezuelanalysis.com, 26 March 2007).

Workers in some urban cooperatives are involved in "co-managing" their companies with the owners or government bureaucrats. Some leftists have interpreted this as a form of "workers' control of industry," which it is not. Genuine workers' control is characterized by dual power in the workplace, not institutionalized class collaboration. It tends to develop in pre-revolutionary situations and constitutes what Trotsky called a "school for planned economy."

Two of Venezuela's most celebrated examples of "nationalized" companies under co-management are Invepal and Inveval—private enterprises whose owners participated in the December 2002-January 2003 bosses' lockout against Chávez. Hundreds of enterprises went out of business due to the lockout and hundreds of thousands of workers were thrown out on the street as a result, but very few companies have been taken over by the state. Invepal (then known as Venepal) owed its workers back wages, while Inveval (then known as Constructora Nacional de Válvulas) declared bankruptcy. In 2005, the government agreed to purchase the facilities after workers demanding nationalization occupied the premises.

At Inveval, a valve factory dependent on contracts with the state oil company, *Petróleos de Venezuela Sociedad Anónima (PDVSA)*, the employees' cooperative has a 49 percent stake, and a factory council elected by a workers' assembly runs the operation. Yet the company, which operated at only 10 percent capacity in 2007, remains subject to market fluctuations. One factor in this was a decision by PDVSA officials to renege on signed deals (Venezuelanalysis.com, 27 July 2007).

In February 2006, workers at Inveval launched the Revolutionary Workers Front of Co-managed and Occupied



FRANCESCO SPOTORNO—REUTERS

Venezuela Energy Minister Rafael Ramírez (right) signs deal with Chevron's Alireza Moshiri, 26 June 2007

Factories (FRETECO), which includes representatives from a dozen or so other companies. The project has received little support from the leadership of the National Workers Union (UNT—the main union federation) and is further handicapped by its leaders' political loyalty to the government. The IMT reported on a FRETECO meeting in October 2006 presided over by CMR supporter Jorge Paredes:

"The gathering was officially opened at 6pm by Jorge Paredes, worker and president of Inveval, who welcomed all those present. Amongst the invited guests were representatives from the Ministry of Labour, Julio Barba from the Ministry of Light Industry and Commerce, as well as the former Minister of Environment Ana Elisa Osoria who expressed a keen interest in the struggle of the workers in occupied factories."

—Marxist.com, 17 October 2006

The meeting concluded "with all workers and invited guests singing the Venezuelan national anthem."

Invepal is a paper mill in Carabobo state where the government also handed a 49 percent ownership share to the employees' cooperative. The experiment in co-management turned ugly when work was contracted out at the company's Maracay operation:

"Required by the government to prove himself in running the company, the newly elected president employed contracted management which then proceeded to hire contract workers whose conditions were much worse than 'worker-owners.' The massive protests within the factory in reaction to this resulted in equally massive firings: 120 workers were fired in November 2005. They are still manning the barricades 11 months later."

—Venezuelanalysis.com, 25 October 2006

In February 2005, workers' assemblies were permitted to elect managers at the state-owned aluminum firm, Alcasa, although the president of the company was appointed by Chávez. The workers have apparently disappointed their Bolivarian benefactors. Alcasa's "revolutionary" spokesperson, Alcides Rivero, recently complained of "a culture where workers only worked to get money" (Venezuelanalysis.com, 30 October 2007).

The situation at the "co-managed" state electrical company Cadafe is even more tense. According to one observer, there are:

"...bitter experiences in the struggle for co-management, such as in the electricity industry. It wasn't that electricity workers no longer wanted co-management, but that they no longer raise it 'because of the huge fight they had against the management of [state-run company] Cadafe. The management of Cadafe went out of its way to sabotage and defeat moves to introduce co-management. If you go to most workers in the electrical sector and even mention the word co-management, it sends a shiver down their spines.' [Federico] Fuentes said the workers still raise the concept of workers' participation, but no longer talk of co-management specifically."

—Green Left Weekly, 2 August 2007

Yet even these limited experiments with co-management are exceptions to the rule. Chávez briefly threatened to take over Siderúrgica del Orinoco (Sidor), one of Latin America's largest steel companies, which had laid off thousands of workers when it was privatized in 1998. In May 2007, when workers demanding re-nationalization blockaded the entrance, Sidor management responded by offering to increase production of metal piping for the domestic market. Chávez accepted the proposal and agreed to allow the Argentine Techint Group and its partners to retain their 60 percent share of the firm. Earlier this year, 14,000 permanent and contract Sidor workers went on strike for a wage hike and the payment of outstanding pension contributions. The Ministry of Labor, perhaps in recognition of the company's previous cooperation, intervened with a request that the workers reduce their demands by half (Venezuelanalysis.com, 2 February).

Chávez also refused to nationalize Sanitarios Maracay, a ceramics factory that workers occupied for six weeks in early 2006 and then again later that year when the owner decided to close the plant. The workers responded by electing a factory council to keep the operation running. In April 2007, Sanitarios workers on their way to a FRETECO rally in Caracas were assaulted by police and National Guard forces. Twenty-one people were arrested and 14 were injured by buckshot. A month later, 3,000 UNT workers in the state of Aragua staged a one-day strike to protest this outrage.

In August 2007, Humberto Lopez, a former UNT leader at Sanitarios, led a group of white-collar employees and company supervisors who seized the plant and deposed the factory council. They made a deal with the owner, under the auspices of the Ministry of Labor, which returned the factory in exchange for an agreement to pay back wages to the workers. A system of co-management was introduced with a commission of 13: three from the Ministry of Labor and five each representing the workers and the owner (Venezuelanalysis.com, 18 August 2007).

Significantly, the government did not introduce "co-management" in Compañía Anónima Nacional Teléfonos de Venezuela (CANTV), one of its two major acquisitions in 2007. CANTV, Venezuela's main telecommunications company and largest private enterprise, which had been privatized in 1991, was purchased back for \$1.3 billion. The government also "nationalized" Caracas' electrical utility,

Electricidad de Caracas, by having PDVSA purchase the 82 percent share held by AES Inc. of Arlington, Virginia for \$739 million.

'Re-nationalizing' Venezuela's Oil Assets

Venezuela's oil industry was nationalized in 1976, but in the 1990s lucrative exploration and production rights were handed out to the petroleum multinationals. Under "Operating Services Agreements" (OSAs) the foreign oil companies did not buy and sell crude, but merely acted as "contractors" rendering "services" to PDVSA (which retained nominal ownership of the oil). According to Rafael Ramirez, Venezuela's energy minister, the "fees" paid to these "contractors" just happened to be linked to world oil prices, and the companies thereby avoided paying the 50 percent tax rate on oil profits.

Chávez ended this arrangement by converting the OSAs into "mixed enterprises" in which PDVSA holds a majority share. The royalty rates were raised and many former "contractors" were charged back taxes. Despite some grumbling, most of the foreign multinationals ultimately agreed to the new terms.

Turning the OSAs into "mixed enterprises" was merely the first step in what Chávez called the "re-nationalization" of Venezuela's oil. On May Day 2007, the president announced the "re-nationalization" of what is thought to be hundreds of billions of barrels of extra-heavy crude oil in the Orinoco region. France's Total, Norway's Statoil, Chevron and British Petroleum agreed to sell part of their stake in the Orinoco Belt to PDVSA, while U.S. conglomerates ExxonMobil and ConocoPhillips, which resisted the takeover, had their investments (estimated at \$750 million and \$4.5 billion respectively) expropriated. They have appealed to the International Center for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID), an agency of the imperialist World Bank. In February, ExxonMobil obtained temporary court orders freezing \$12 billion in PDVSA assets in Britain and the Netherlands pending the ICSID's ruling (Venezuelanalysis.com, 8 February).

Most multinationals decided to go along with the "re-nationalization" because they can reap enormous profits. To diversify foreign participation in developing the resources of the heavy crude of the Orinoco Belt, the government has secured investments from Brazil, China, Iran and Russia. The Chávez regime has made it clear that it favors foreign ownership of a significant portion of its oil industry, as long as PDVSA maintains majority control and applicable taxes and royalties are paid.

While Marxists certainly defend the right of every neo-colony to control its natural resources, Chávez's "re-nationalization," which has amply compensated the oil majors, hardly constitutes a blow against international capitalism. There is nothing inherently "anti-imperialist" about nationalized oil companies, as the *New York Times* (10 April 2007) observed:

"During the last several decades, control of global oil reserves has steadily passed from private companies to national oil companies like Petroleos de Venezuela [PDVSA]. According to a new Rice University study, 77 percent of the world's 1.148 trillion barrels of proven reserves is in the hands of the national companies; 14 of the top 20 oil-producing companies are state-controlled."

The "anti-imperialist" hue of Chávez's oil policies derives largely from the attempt to reduce dependence on the U.S. market, which currently absorbs half of Venezuela's petroleum exports. In an era of dwindling and uncertain oil supplies, Venezuela's estimated 300 billion barrels of light and heavy crude is a significant prize. It is possible that current calculations may considerably understate the country's reserves. Investigative journalist Greg Palast claims that an internal report of the U.S. Department of Energy suggests that Venezuela might actually possess 1.36 trillion barrels of oil (ZNet.com, 24 May 2006). If this is true, it would make Venezuela the single most important source of petroleum on the planet and vastly increase its strategic importance.

Washington is concerned about Venezuela's growing influence within the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who, like Chávez, is high on U.S. imperialism's list of enemies, joined the Bolivarian leader in blaming rising oil prices on the weak U.S. dollar (*New York Times*, 19 November 2007). In September 2007, Chávez ordered PDVSA "to convert its investment accounts from dollars to euros and Asian currencies" (*New York Times*, 30 November 2007). Iran has long campaigned for OPEC to begin pricing oil in euros rather than dollars, a move that would considerably accelerate the deterioration of America's international position.

Wriggling Out of Uncle Sam's Grip

Chávez's success in loosening Washington's hold can be attributed to three factors: rising oil prices, which have both filled government coffers and enhanced Venezuela's geo-strategic importance; the regime's relative independence from the elements of the national bourgeoisie most closely aligned with Washington; and the American military's diminished capacity for intervention in Latin America while it is bogged down in Iraq.

In May 2007, Venezuela announced its intent to withdraw from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, two key mechanisms of U.S. imperial control in the hemisphere. The IMF's influence in Latin America has recently declined dramatically:

"IMF lending in the area has fallen to \$50 million, or less than 1 percent of its global portfolio, compared with 80 percent in 2005."

"The international lender's worldwide portfolio has shriveled to \$11.8 billion from a peak of \$81 billion in 2004, and a single nation, Turkey, now accounts for about 75 percent."

—MiamiHerald.com, 1 March 2007

In August 2007, Chávez announced that Venezuela would purchase \$1 billion worth of Argentine bonds:

"With Argentina wanting to diversify its sources of financing after its 2001 debt default, Mr Chávez has stepped in, buying bonds totaling \$4.7 billion before the latest purchase. With his help 'Argentina is freeing itself from Dracula, it's breaking the IMF's chains,' Mr Chávez said."

—*Economist*, 9 August 2007

Chávez played a key role in launching the Banco del Sur (Bank of the South) to replace the IMF with a fund



Chávez and Ahmadinejad

of \$7 billion to promote regional infrastructure as well as research and development. The Banco del Sur was officially launched in December 2007 at a signing ceremony in Buenos Aires attended by representatives of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela. The Associated Press (9 December 2007) reported that Augusto de la Torre, the World Bank's chief economist for Latin America, claimed that "this new initiative is not perceived as a competitor," but that is clearly what Chávez intends.

The Banco del Sur and Venezuela's Argentine bond purchases complement the "Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas" (ALBA), an initiative to promote Latin American cooperation launched in 2004 by Chávez and Fidel Castro to compete with the imperialist Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) project. Under ALBA, Cuba provides medical services to hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans in exchange for oil. In April 2006, Bolivia's newly-elected president, Evo Morales, decided to join ALBA:

"Mr Morales has said that Venezuela has promised aid totaling \$2 billion (or more than 20% of Bolivia's GDP) since he took office. Venezuela has bought \$100m of Bolivian government bonds; it has also given a loan for farming, and 5,000 grants for Bolivians to study in Venezuela.

"In April, Mr Morales signed a 'Peoples' Trade Treaty' with Mr Chavez and Fidel Castro, Cuba's communist president. Under this, Venezuela is to swap 200,000 barrels a month of subsidised diesel fuel for 200,000 tonnes a year of Bolivian soya. Cuban doctors and teachers, probably paid for by Venezuela, have already started to work on health and literacy programmes in Bolivia; Cuba is also donating medical equipment.

"Only in Cuba and Venezuela can we find unconditional support," said Mr Morales recently. He complained of 'blackmail and threats' from 'other countries'. That seemed to be a reference to the United States, which has linked much of its aid to its 'war on drugs' and coca

eradication."

—*Economist*, 8 July 2006

Shortly after being sworn in as Nicaraguan president in January 2007, Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega announced that his country would also join ALBA. Within a few weeks Venezuela had:

"...already agreed to forgive more than \$30 million in Nicaraguan debt, provide more than two dozen generating plants to alleviate an electricity shortage and open an office of Venezuela's development bank in Managua to offer low-interest loans to small businesses."

—*New York Times*, 24 February 2007

At an April 2007 ALBA summit in Caracas, plans were developed to promote healthcare, education and economic development in the region:

"Chávez also proposed the idea of the construction of a petrochemical plant in Haiti, along with an oil refinery to refine the crude sent from Venezuela. He also proposed the construction of refineries in Nicaragua, Ecuador, Bolivia, Dominica, and Cuba. Chávez also said his government has plans to sell the seven refineries that it owns in the United States and to build a new network of refineries in Latin America."

—*Venezuelanalysis.com*, 30 April 2007

Caracas and Buenos Aires have:

"...agreed to build a plant in Argentina that will turn liquid natural gas from Venezuela into usable gas. The plant will allow Venezuela to send liquid gas to Argentina by ship, a shift in strategy for Mr. Chavez as discussions for a natural gas pipeline from Venezuela via Brazil have bogged down.

"The gas conversion plant would be a joint project between Venezuela's state oil company, Petroleos de Venezuela, and the Argentine state oil company, Enarsa."

—*New York Times*, 7 August 2007

Venezuela is also seeking to strengthen economic ties with Russia. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Larov indicated that state-owned Gazprom was studying the possibility of forming a joint company with PDVSA to undertake natural gas and oil projects, while Russia's vice president, Alexander Zhukov, acknowledged interest in future South American pipeline projects:

"Zhukov emphasized the potential prospects in the construction of the Gas Pipeline of the South. This project, promoted by the Venezuela president, would be the construction of a 10,000-kilometer natural gas pipeline from Venezuela through the Brazilian Amazon and extending south to Argentina. Its estimated cost would be around US\$ 23 billion, and would transport 150 million cubic meters of Venezuelan gas per day from the Caribbean Sea to Argentina."

—*Venezuelanalysis.com*, 23 October 2007

In 2006, Venezuela, Syria and Iran signed an agreement "to build a \$1.5 billion oil refinery in Syria" (*New York Times*, 2 November 2006). In July 2007, the Iranian and Venezuelan governments began construction of a \$700 million petrochemical plant near Tehran, with plans for an identical facility in Venezuela. A joint automobile company, Venirauto, is already in business. The first 300 units rolled off the assembly line in Caracas in July 2007, though the plan is to produce 25,000 cars annually by 2010:

"The company Venirauto, which is 51% Iranian and 49% Venezuelan, is producing two different models. The first model, the Turpial at a price of Bs. 17 million (US\$7,906), is a 4-door sedan based on the old Kia Pride model. The second is the Centauro, at a price of Bs. 23 million (US\$11,069), and is based on the Peugeot 405 given that the French firm is the main supplier of engines and technology to the Iranian company."

—Venezuelanalysis.com, 10 July 2007

Venezuela and Iran have signed deals worth approximately \$17 billion, a collaboration Chávez celebrated by grotesquely designating Iran's Ahmadinejad "one of the greatest anti-imperialist fighters" (Associated Press, 28 September 2007).

Venezuela has also strengthened ties with the bureaucratic leaders of the Chinese deformed workers' state:

"China's links with Venezuela are now its strongest in Latin America. As well as the US\$1.5bn already committed to Venezuela, the Orinoco joint venture [between PDVSA and the China National Petroleum Corp] could require further investment of US\$3bn-4bn, making Venezuela by far the greatest recipient of Chinese investment in the region."

—Economist.com, 10 April 2007

In August 2006, Beijing signed an agreement with Caracas that projected raising oil imports from Venezuela to a million barrels per day by 2012. (The U.S. currently imports over a million barrels per day from the Bolivarian republic.) China has also offered to provide tankers and help Venezuela construct new drilling platforms. In November 2007, the two countries agreed to endow a joint development fund with \$6 billion, two-thirds provided by the Chinese Development Bank and one-third by Venezuela (Venezuelanalysis.com, 7 November 2007).

Yankee Imperialism Bristles

All of this activity has further alarmed an American foreign policy establishment already concerned by the erosion of U.S. influence in Latin America:

"The White House was outraged when Chile and Mexico, Latin America's representatives on the UN Security Council in 2003 and two of Washington's closest allies in the region, opposed a resolution endorsing the invasion of Iraq. In fact, of the 34 Latin American and Caribbean countries, only seven supported the war. Six of them (Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama) were engaged in trade negotiations with the United States at the time. And the seventh, Colombia, receives more than \$600 million a year in U.S. military aid."

—*Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2006

Latin America remains a critically important market for the U.S., which exports more than \$100 billion a year to Mexico and another \$50 billion to the rest of the region. Chávez's outspoken denunciations of U.S. imperialism and his regime's pursuit of regional autonomy have not been well received in Washington. U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice characterized Chávez as "one of the most dangerous men in the world" (*Independent* [London], 16 May 2006). A March 2006 U.S. National Security Strategy document complained: "In Venezuela, a demagogue awash in oil money is undermining democracy and seeking to destabilize the region" (cited in *The Progressive*, 24 September 2006).

Chávez has responded to these threats with a modest expansion of the Venezuelan military. In January 2007, the Pentagon estimated that Venezuela had spent more than \$4 billion on arms in the previous two years (*New York Times*, 25 February 2007). In 2006, when the U.S. suspended arms sales to Venezuela and blocked the acquisition of military aircraft from Spain and Brazil by denying export licenses for the American-manufactured components in them, Chávez turned to Russia, purchasing five submarines in addition to "24 Russian Sukhoi-30 two-seater attack aircraft, 34 helicopters and 100,000 Kalashnikovs" (*Guardian*, 15 June 2007).

George W. Bush, under whose watch the U.S. government orchestrated the failed April 2002 coup against the democratically-elected Bolivarian leader, hypocritically expressed concern about "the undermining of democratic institutions" in Venezuela (*New York Times*, 1 February 2007). The various agencies of U.S. "democracy"—including the National Endowment for Democracy, the International Republican Institute and the National Democratic Institute—have showered financial and technical support on Venezuela's pro-imperialist opposition. In 2006, the Associated Press revealed that the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) alone had doled out more than \$26 million in Venezuela since 2002 to "strengthen democracy." Eva Golinger, author of *Bush vs. Chavez: Washington's War Against Venezuela*, reported:

"The work of USAID and its OTI [Office of Transition Initiatives] in Venezuela has led to a deepening of the counterrevolutionary subversion in the country. Up until June 2007, more than 360 'scholarships' have been granted to social organisations, political parties, communities and political projects in Venezuela through Development Alternatives Inc. (DAI), a company contracted by USAID, which opened an office in the El Rosal sector of Caracas in June 2002. From the centre of Caracas, the DAI/USAID has given more than US\$11,575,509 to these 360 groups and projects in Venezuela, under the program 'Venezuela: Initiatives for the Construction of Trust' (VICC). The majority of the programs funded by DAI focus (according to their materials) on 'political dialogue, public debate, citizen's participation and the training and capacitation of democratic leaders'."

—Venezuelanalysis.com, 12 September 2007

Bolivarian Bourgeoisie's Bonanza

While many of Venezuela's big capitalists revile Chávez, others are more impressed by the fact that business is booming under the "socialist" president. The head of the Caracas Country Club, Fernando Zozaya, when asked about Chávez's Bolivarian vision, replied: "Let's say it's a very special type of socialism" (*Guardian*, 13 November 2006). José Guerra, the former head researcher at Venezuela's central bank, was less coy: "State-supported capitalism isn't just surviving under Chavez,' he said. 'It is thriving'" (*New York Times*, 3 December 2006). A leading mouthpiece of American capitalism made a similar observation:

"Local and foreign companies alike are raking in more money than ever in Venezuela. Two-way trade between the U.S. and Venezuela has never been higher. Venezuela exported more than \$42 billion to the U.S. last year, including 1 million barrels of oil daily, and imported \$9

billion worth of American goods, up 41% from 2005."

—*BusinessWeek*, 25 June 2007

Venezuela's GDP, which stood at US\$117.1 billion in 2000, grew to \$181.9 billion by 2006 ("World Development Indicators database," World Bank, April 2007). Low interest rates and high inflation have led to massive borrowing and a financial boom:

"[B]ank profits grew 33 percent last year, led by increases of more than 100 percent in credit card loans and 143 percent in automobile credit, according to Softline Consulting, a financial analysis firm here. The banking and insurance industries' contribution to the gross domestic product rose 37 percent in 2006, the central bank said.

"The market looked attractive enough two years ago that the Stanford Financial Group of Houston put political risk on the back burner to open a dozen branches here. Now, remodeling its office tower in the Caracas business district of El Rosal, the bank has seen its revenue in Venezuela grow fourfold, and its credit portfolio nearly tripled last year."

—*New York Times*, 15 June 2007

Members of what is called the "bolibourgeoisie"—entrepreneurs with government connections and public contracts—are not alarmed by Chávez's talk of "transcending capitalism." Venezuelan Banking Association director Francisco Aristeguieta, who seems happy enough with the status quo, remarked: "President Chavez is saying it's the job of all of us for Venezuela to press ahead" (*New York Times*, 7 May 2007). Chávez has periodically assured his bourgeois allies that: "[W]e have no plan to eliminate the oligarchy, Venezuela's bourgeoisie. We have demonstrated this sufficiently in over eight years" (Venezuelanalysis.com, 4 June 2007).

The main employers' federation, Fedecámaras, lost its affiliate in the state of Bolívar because of its opposition to the regime's proposed constitutional reforms (Venezuelanalysis.com, 27 November 2007). Alejandro Uzcátegui of Businessmen for Venezuela (Empreven), a pro-Chávez association, opined: "We think President Hugo Chávez has done a very good job" (WashingtonPost.com, 3 December 2006). Empreven is part of the Confederation of Socialist Businessmen of Venezuela (Conseven), a pro-government business federation established in May 2007. Its leader, José Agustín Campos (former leader of Acción Democrática, one of the two pro-imperialist parties that shared power before Chávez was elected), explained that Conseven "will live in harmony" with the co-managed enterprises and Bolivarian cooperatives (*El Universal* [Caracas], 6 May 2007).

Gustavo Cisneros, the billionaire owner of the Venevision television network, who supported the April 2002 coup, changed his mind when former U.S. President Jimmy Carter arranged for him to meet Chávez in the run-up to the 2004 presidential recall referendum:

"At the meeting, according to Mr. Cisneros, Mr. Chavez compared his social programs to those of Franklin D. Roosevelt.

"In recent comments about the meeting, the president said Mr. Cisneros, whose other companies range from breweries to the Leones baseball team in Caracas, understood he could coexist with the socialist-inspired transformation of society that Mr. Chavez says he wants."

—*New York Times*, 5 July 2007

British journalist John Pilger insightfully observed:

"In Washington, the old Iran-Contra death squad gang, back in power under Bush, fear the economic bridges Chávez is building in the region, such as the use of Venezuela's oil revenue to end IMF slavery. That he maintains a neoliberal economy, described by the American Banker as 'the envy of the banking world' is seldom raised as valid criticism of his limited reforms. These days, of course, any true reforms are exotic."

—*Guardian*, 17 August 2007

The redistributive policies of the Bolivarian government, and Venezuela's booming economy, have meant rising living standards for most Venezuelans. Unemployment has been reduced by half since Chávez took office, and now officially stands at 7 percent, with a majority of the workforce presently employed in the "formal" (as opposed to underground) economy. Social programs have also expanded considerably:

"Social spending will be significantly increased for 2008, to 46 percent of the national budget, up from 41 percent in 2007. This includes an increase in the funding of the social missions of the Chavez government, which will receive a total of Bs. 5.5 trillion (US\$ 2.5 billion), an increase of nearly 62 percent from the 2007 level. These social missions include the national health program Barrio Adentro and the literacy and education programs Robinson, Rivas, Che, and Sucre, among many others."

—Venezuelanalysis.com, 20 October 2007

According to government statistics, the rate of poverty among Venezuelan households has fallen from 42.8 percent in 1999 to 33.9 percent in 2006, while "extreme poverty" declined from 16.6 percent to 10.6 percent (Instituto Nacional de Estadística website, September 2006).

Recently, however, wages have been falling behind inflation, which is currently running at 20 percent per annum, and some basic foods have been in short supply. The Bolivarians' attempt to hold living costs down by appealing to the capitalists to be good citizens, while freezing prices on some essentials, has led to shortages, as merchants stockpile goods while waiting for prices (and profits) to rise. Many farmers have simply sold their products across the border in Colombia. As supplies dwindled, the Venezuelan government backed down and raised the price of milk 30 percent and coffee by 40 percent. In February, Chávez announced that the price of rice, a basic staple regulated since 2003, would be increased 44 percent "to give incentive to rice producers" (Venezuelanalysis.com, 11 February). This illustrates the impossibility of finding some "third way" between a collectivized economy, where the production and distribution of goods are consciously planned, and a capitalist one, where decisions are determined by the pursuit of maximum profit.

Administrative Agents of the Bourgeoisie

While Chávez retains a substantial social base, the decision of some three million of his traditional supporters to sit out the constitutional referendum signifies that many are losing confidence in him. Of course, the Bolivarian leaders do not trust the masses, and do not want to see an authoritative alternative leadership develop within the organizations of the working class. Since it was founded in 2003 as a pro-Chávez breakaway from the Venezuelan



APORREA.ORG

C-CURA leaders Stalin Pérez Borges (center) and Orlando Chirino (right)

Workers Confederation (CTV) which had supported the rightist coup in 2002, the UNT has been run by “national coordinators” appointed by its major components. In May 2006, at the union’s second congress, leaders of the Bolivarian Socialist Workers Force (FSBT—the hard-core Chávezistas) blocked a proposal by the UNT’s largest faction, the Classist, Unitary, Revolutionary and Autonomous Current (C-CURA—led by two self-described Trotskyists, Orlando Chirino and Stalin Pérez Borges, who have recently had a falling out) that UNT members should elect their national leaders.

While not opposing elections in principle, FSBT supporters argued to postpone them to allow union militants to concentrate on campaigning for Chávez in the December 2006 presidential election. Chirino subsequently complained:

“The argument last year was that we had to give priority to the presidential elections. We were not against calling for a vote for Chávez, but we argued that the best way to campaign for that call was that it should come from a legitimately elected leadership. Unfortunately, it did not happen.”

—interview posted on the website of *International Socialism*, 9 May 2007

It seems clear that the FSBT feared that it could not win a vote, and that a UNT leadership with a mandate from the base might turn into a potential rival to Chávez for the allegiance of the masses. On 28 December 2007, Chirino was notified that he had been fired from his job at PDVSA. This act of political persecution—stemming from Chirino’s advocacy of a spoiled ballot in the constitutional

referendum and his refusal to join Chávez’s new political party—is an anti-democratic attack on the Venezuelan workers’ movement as a whole.

When the four labor federations representing workers at PDVSA were amalgamated to form the United Oil Workers Federation of Venezuela (FUTPV), no elections were held to legitimize the leadership. C-CURA, which claims the support of a majority of Venezuela’s 60,000 oil workers and controls Fedepetrol, the largest component of the new federation, refused to endorse the FUTPV bargaining committee appointed to negotiate with PDVSA last year (Venezuelanalysis.com, 29 September 2007). Fedepetrol sought to put direct pressure on PDVSA management:

“This week, beginning Monday, July 23, oil workers have called for pickets at the gates ‘of all oil installations’ throughout the country, both administrative and operational, including ports, refineries and oil rigs, demanding the removal of the Manager of Human Resources, Dario Merchan, a relative of [Energy Minister and PDVSA President Rafael] Ramirez, who they claim has delayed negotiations for the collective contract 2007-2009, and protesting what they say are the daily violations of the existing collective contract and failure to pay workers entitlements. A further demonstration supported by more than 160 unions affiliated with Fedepetrol has also been called for the August 2nd, in front of the Presidential palace, Miraflores.”

—Venezuelanalysis.com, 23 July 2007

The leader of Fedepetrol Anzoátegui, José Bodas (a member of C-CURA), denounced the pro-management



March 1938: Cárdenas announces oil nationalization

elements of the FUTPV bargaining committee for describing the workers who took action against PDVSA's stalling as "counterrevolutionaries."

In September 2007, striking oil workers were attacked by the police:

"Some 150 workers from the oil refinery of Puerto La Cruz, together with workers from the Jose Industrial Complex were marching to the offices of the Venezuelan Oil Corporation (CVP) in Urbaneja municipality to present a document to Ramirez, who was meeting with a negotiating commission of the United Oil Workers Federation of Venezuela (FUTPV), when they were intercepted by Immediate Response Group-Police Force of Anzoátegui.

"In the resulting clashes, which lasted three hours, 40 workers were arrested and three were injured, including Richard Querecuto, who was shot in the left shoulder. A bus carrying passengers was also attacked by police who launched a tear gas bomb inside causing panic and asphyxiation. With news of the police repression 4,000 workers from Petroanzoátegui, Petrocedeño, and the project San Cristóbal immediately stopped work."

—Venezuelanalysis.com, 29 September 2007

While PDVSA and state officials sought to distance themselves from the gratuitous brutality of the police, the incident graphically illustrates how the "Bolivarian" state apparatus serves the bosses, as well as how the division between the interests of labor and capital is just as real in PDVSA as in the private sector.

The British Socialist Workers Party recently reported another example involving the public-sector union Fentrasep:

"The elected representatives of Fentrasep, the public employees' trade union with some 1.5 million members, went to the Ministry of Labour in mid-August [2007] to renegotiate the collective contract for their members. The minister, Ramón Rivero, is a member of the Bolivarian Trade Union Federation and an ex-Trotskyist. He refused to meet with the delegation and locked them inside a room in the ministry. No food or drink was provided; the delegates' families passed them through the windows. After six days they were driven out by hired thugs."

—*Socialist Review*, October 2007

Whatever label they affix to themselves, those who administer the capitalist state inevitably end up serving the interests of the bourgeoisie. Leon Trotsky made the following observation about the function of bureaucrats like the FSBT's Rivero:

"The trade union leaders are, in an overwhelming majority of cases, political agents of the bourgeoisie and of its state. In nationalized industry they can become and already are becoming direct administrative agents. Against this there is no other course than the struggle for the independence of the workers' movement in general, and in particular through the formation within the trade unions of firm revolutionary nuclei...."

—"Nationalized Industry and Workers' Management," 12 May 1939

PSUV: Chávez's Bourgeois Populist Party

Following his overwhelming victory in the December 2006 presidential election, Chávez announced plans to enroll his mass plebeian base and the various political organizations supporting the Bolivarian project into the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV). Chávez's Fifth Republic Movement (MVR) immediately signed on along with a variety of other groups, but the three largest pro-Chávez parties outside the MVR—For Social Democracy (Podemos), Fatherland for All (PPT) and the Venezuelan Communist Party (PCV)—all remained aloof.

Podemos, the Venezuelan affiliate of the Socialist International, which originated as a pro-Chávez split from the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS), voted "no" in the constitutional referendum. The PPT, a pro-Chávez split from La Causa Radical, voted "yes," as did the PCV, from which the MAS and La Causa Radical originally split decades ago.

The PCV leadership, which ostensibly refuses to join the PSUV because it is not "Marxist-Leninist," is careful not to be too independent. Several members of its Central Committee have joined the PSUV, and the PCV pledges to work closely with the new party. PCV Secretary General Oscar Figuera declared: "You will never see the Communist Party in the opposition. You will always see them accompanying the leader of the process: President Hugo Chávez Frías" (Venezuelanalysis.com, 19 March 2007). Chávez was initially angered by the refusal of the PCV and PPT to join the PSUV, but subsequently proposed a "Patriotic Alliance" of the three for the November 2008 mayoral and gubernatorial elections.

The PSUV is a mass party with a nominal membership of millions of poor and working people, as well as a majority of the legislators in the National Assembly, top state officials and pro-government capitalists. Chávez explicitly proposed it as a cross-class, populist formation open to:

"...all revolutionaries, socialists and patriots, men and women, the Venezuelan youth; I invite the workers, housewives, professionals and technicians, nationalist businessmen...to build a united political party...."

—cited in *International Viewpoint*, January 2007

Before the party had a chance to work out a formal program or a constitution, Chávez had already appointed Diosdado Cabello, the ultra-wealthy MVR governor of the state of Miranda, to head a "provisional discipline committee" (Venezuelanalysis.com, 1 December 2007).

C-CURA decided to join the PSUV project in January 2007 supposedly to guarantee its working-class character. But Chávez's opposition to the existence of political tendencies within the PSUV and his declaration that the "unions should not be autonomous, one must put an end to that" (Venezuelanalysis.com, 2 May 2007) was too much for some in C-CURA to swallow. Chirino, who is associated with the International Workers' Unity-Fourth International (UIT-CI—an international tendency led by former supporters of the Argentine revisionist Nahuel Moreno) had staked his reputation on safeguarding the "independence" of the labor movement, and so not only refused to join the PSUV but also urged his followers to spoil their ballots in the December 2007 referendum.

Stalin Pérez Borges and his supporters, who publish a journal entitled *Marea Socialista y Clasista*, joined the PSUV and voted "yes" in the referendum. According to Pérez Borges: "There is no contradiction between organizing in the PSUV to support the revolution, and also having independent unions. Both are part of the same fight towards socialism in Venezuela" (Venezuelanalysis.com, 12 September 2007). Launching the Movement for the Construction of a Workers Party represented a left shift for Chirino, who claims to be strongly for working-class political independence but who voted for Chávez in 2006 and supported the creation of the FBT (Bolivarian Workers Front) within the CTV.

Alan Woods, perhaps the world's foremost "Trotskyist" Chávista, denounced Chirino as one of the "sectarian clowns and half-wits" who dare criticize the Bolivarian caudillo:

"The role of Orlando Chirino and other so-called Trotskyists' who called on people to spoil the ballot papers was absolutely pernicious. These ladies and gentlemen are so blinded by their hatred of Chavez that they are no longer capable of understanding the difference between revolution and counter-revolution. This writes them off entirely as a progressive force, let alone a revolutionary one. But let the dead bury their dead."

—Marxist.com, 3 December 2007

The IMT, which has some influence within the workers' movement in Venezuela, eagerly enlisted as official "promoters" of the PSUV:

"The task of revolutionary Marxists is to throw themselves completely in this fight and participate alongside the masses in the creation of the PSUV. Any other policy would be utter sectarianism and would only contribute to isolating them from the *real existing* revolutionary movement. In this respect, the policy adopted by a section of C-CURA (the left wing current within the UNT) of refusing to join the PSUV and attempting to set up a so-called 'Independent Workers' Party' is a criminal mistake which can only lead to the isolation of some advanced worker activists from the mass revolutionary movement."

—Marxist.com, 5 September 2007

Many of the world's ostensibly Marxist groups, impressed by Chávez's popularity, have taken a similar view. For example, the British Workers Power group argues:

"...given the mass character of the PSUV, the fact that these masses are overwhelmingly workers, peasants and the urban and rural poor, and that socialist and revolutionary ideas are being debated in it, it would be sectarian for revolutionary communists to do anything other than join

this party and participate vigorously in these debates."

—Workers Power, September 2007

Workers Power seems particularly excited by the Bolivarian leader's talk of going international: "Even more important, Chavez has called for the PSUV to be part of the founding of a new International." These chronic opportunists are already pledging to join "any international initiative Chavez may promote in the months ahead" (*Ibid.*).

Bolivarian Reformism: Everything Old Is New Again

Such displays of opportunist appetite from supposed revolutionaries are hardly unprecedented. In the 1950s, Michel Pablo, the arch-revisionist who played a key role in the political destruction of Trotsky's Fourth International, was similarly enthusiastic about a hypothetical "Arab Revolution." Pablo argued that revolutionaries should join the petty-bourgeois Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) because it had a mass base: "[T]he revolutionary Marxist tendency and the essential forces of a mass Labor Party of tomorrow will emerge from the inevitable social and political differentiation within the present FLN" ("The Arab Revolution," November 1958). Similar delusions about the revolutionary potential of mass petty-bourgeois nationalist movements are promoted by all of Chávez's leftist admirers.

Trotsky criticized this impulse in addressing the arguments put forward by Joseph Stalin and Nikolai Bukharin in the 1920s to defend the disastrous policy of liquidating the cadres of the Chinese Communist Party into the bourgeois Guomindang:

"Every bourgeois party, if it is a real party, that is, if it embraces considerable masses, is built on the self-same principle. The exploiters, fakers, and despots compose the minority in class society....In every mass bourgeois party the lower ranks are therefore more democratic and further to the 'Left' than the tops....That is why the constant complaints voiced by Stalin, Bukharin, and others that the tops do not reflect the sentiments of the 'Left' Kuomintang rank and file, the 'overwhelming majority,' the 'ninetenths,' etc., etc., are so naïve, so unpardonable."

—*Third International After Lenin*, 1928

The job of revolutionaries is to tell the truth—not to recycle popular illusions. And the truth is that multi-class formations led by left-talking petty-bourgeois bonapartists, like China's Guomindang in the 1920s or Venezuela's PSUV today, are dead-ends for the working class.

Young leftists may believe that the Bolivarian "revolution" is completely unprecedented. But Alan Woods is old enough to remember how, in 1956, Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser electrified the neo-colonial world by nationalizing the Anglo-French Suez Canal Company; survived a coordinated military assault by British, French and Israeli forces and then took over hundreds of foreign businesses. Eventually, Nasser proclaimed that his government was taking a "socialist" path:

"On the ninth anniversary rally of [the] 23 July 1952 coup d'état, Nasser delivered a speech in which he declared a shift in his social policy. In the four days preceding the rally, 19-22 July 1961, a series of decrees and regulations were issued which greatly extended public control of the

United Arab Republic's (UAR) [the short-lived political union between Egypt and Syria which fell apart later that year] economy. Socially, they constituted the most significant step taken by Nasser since he assumed power. Nasser defined the basic principles of this new policy as follows:

"The revolution heralded the end of imperialism and the liberation of the regime from domination of capitalism and feudalism—for the purpose of establishing social justice and obliterating the contradictions between the classes, and for the sake of rescuing the oppressed from the hands of the oppressors. The revolution will turn labourers into unexploiting property owners and will benefit all classes."

—Rami Ginat, *Egypt's Incomplete Revolution*

In Nasser's vision of "the people" leading the construction of "Arab socialism," workers and managers shared power on company boards of directors. His political party, the Arab Socialist Union, struck an "anti-imperialist" note with its advocacy of a "non-aligned" movement of neo-colonial states. It was all positively Bolivarian.

An even closer precedent for events in Venezuela was the regime of Lázaro Cárdenas, who won Mexico's 1934 presidential election. Cárdenas' government, the only one on Earth prepared to offer refuge to Leon Trotsky, sponsored a national literacy program and sought to expand access to medical care for the impoverished masses. Under Cárdenas, workers were permitted to seize idle factories, and thousands of agricultural and industrial cooperatives were founded. In June 1937, the Cárdenas administration expropriated the accumulated bond debt of the National Railways of Mexico, effectively nationalizing the enterprise. A year later, on May Day, he turned over control of the whole operation to the railway workers' union.

On 18 March 1938, Cárdenas announced the nationalization of Mexico's petroleum resources. Faced with furious resistance by British and American oil corporations, he turned to the petroleum workers:

"The workers stepped into the breach and ran the industry through local trade-union committees which functioned in the interregnum before the national petroleum administrative apparatus could be organized. They were subject to the orders of a governmental commission in Mexico City, consisting of four officials and three trade-union leaders. Overnight, the trade-union locals had become administrative organs."

—Nathaniel and Sylvia Weyl, *The Reconquest of Mexico*

Leon Trotsky, who greeted the nationalization as "a highly progressive measure of national self-defense" against imperialist domination, noted that the "expropriation of oil is neither socialism nor communism":

"The international proletariat has no reason to identify its program with the program of the Mexican government. Revolutionists have no need of changing color, adapting themselves, and rendering flattery...."

—"Mexico and British Imperialism," 5 June 1938

Trotsky subsequently commented:

"It would of course be a disastrous error, an outright deception, to assert that the road to socialism passes, not through the proletarian revolution, but through nationalization by the bourgeois state of various branches of industry and their

transfer into the hands of the workers' organizations."

—"Nationalized Industry and Workers' Management," 12 May 1939

Today various self-proclaimed Trotskyists heap praise on Hugo Chávez as a "socialist" despite the fact that the measures undertaken by his government fall far short of those implemented by Cárdenas.

Hugo Chávez, like Cárdenas and Nasser, is a left bourgeois populist. Yet many "revolutionary socialists" have been actively promoting the illusion that the measures introduced by Chávez are paving the way for overturning capitalism. A good example of this is an essay entitled, "Strategies of the Left in Latin America," by Claudio Katz, an Argentine leftist, that appeared in the July-August 2007 issue of *International Viewpoint*, journal of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USec):

"Socialist maturity requires a prior process of learning which is not improvised in the expeditious path toward power. That preparation includes social achievements and democratic conquests that are obtained through reforms. This last term is not a bad word, nor is it situated in the antipodes of revolution. It is a useful instrument to gradually develop the revolutionary leap forward, building bridges which move the oppressed closer to the socialist goal.

"A combination of reform and revolution can enable the link between immediate conquests and radical ruptures with capitalism. The first type of achievement is indispensable for creating popular power and the second for defeating an enemy that will not renounce its privileges.

"To connect reform with revolution is the way to adapt the correlation of forces and popular action with the possibilities of anticapitalist transformation in each country.

Contact the International Bolshevik Tendency

New York Box 405, Cooper Station
New York, NY 10276 USA

Bay Area Box 31796
Oakland, CA 94604 USA

Toronto Box 332, Adelaide St. Stn.
Toronto, Canada M5C 2J4
(416) 461-6864

Wellington Box 9671
Wellington, New Zealand
(027) 243 1098

Ruhr Postfach 100601
47006 Duisburg, Germany

London BCM Box 4771
London WC1N 3XX
Britian
07951 313 236

Internet ibt@bolshevik.org
<http://www.bolshevik.org>

But it is necessary to replace the old counterposing of both roads with their confluence."

The "old counterposing" of the revolutionary and reformist roads, which distinguished Leninism from Kautskyism, hinged on the question of whether the capitalist state could serve as a vehicle for socialism. Alan Woods of the IMT, who shares the USec's objectivist methodology, thinks that Venezuela's bourgeois state has been undergoing an incremental transformation:

"In relation to the question of the character of the state we can say that the Venezuelan state is still, in the main, a capitalist state apparatus. However, this state apparatus operates in conditions of revolution and is therefore riddled with all sorts of contradictions and has been weakened as a tool of the ruling class. And at this particular moment in time it is not under the direct control of the capitalist class, in the sense that the ruling class cannot, for now, use this capitalist state in order to impose its class rule. However, this does not mean that the state apparatus even now has ceased to be a source of sabotage and blocking of the revolutionary initiative of the masses; and if it remains untouched it will eventually become a tool for smashing the revolution. It is clear that there is certain understanding of this problem among the rank and file masses of the Bolivarian revolution and even among some layers in the leadership, but unfortunately there certainly is no clear idea of how to solve this problem."

—Marxist.com, 5 September 2007

The IMT's former co-thinkers in the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) seem inclined to agree, with references to "the Venezuelan state which, at this stage, cannot be described as a workers' state" (*The Socialist*, 19 April 2007). This clearly implies that the CWI thinks that at some future point Bolivarian alchemy may succeed in turning the Venezuelan bourgeoisie's repressive machine into its opposite. While such a view contradicts the core of the Marxist position on the state—i.e., that states are inextricably welded to the rule of a particular social class—this revisionist notion is consistent with previous claims by the CWI that similar metamorphoses occurred in Ethiopia, Somalia and various other places (see our pamphlet *Marxism vs. 'Militant' Reformism*).

The Australian Democratic Socialist Perspective (DSP), a former USec affiliate which no longer pretends to any sort of "Trotskyism," claims that the "transformation" of Venezuela's capitalist state into a "workers' and farmers' state" has already occurred:

"In the process of transformation from a capitalist state toward socialism, the social missions have played a key role in bypassing the normal functions of the old state machine....

"The establishment and consolidation of a workers' and farmers' government, at the head of an embryonic workers' and farmers' state, which occurred as a result of the popular victory over the April 2002 coup and the December 2002-January 2003 bosses' oil boycott, led to the development of an alternative state machine, centred on the social missions, the other popular organisations and the revolutionary army."

—quoted in Venezuelanalysis.com, 10 October 2007

Leon Trotsky's *Transitional Program* became fashionable

among Chávez's legion of foreign admirers after the head Bolivarian urged Venezuelans to read it during the 22 April 2007 broadcast of *Aló Presidente*, his weekly television program. Suddenly the IMT, CWI, USec, DSP and others who had previously regarded the founding programmatic document of the Fourth International as obsolete and ultra-left began to praise Chávez for treating it as some sort of social-democratic blueprint for building socialism while holding hands with the bourgeoisie. According to the DSP:

"Written in 1938, the book is an argument for how a program of struggle for increasingly deep-going reforms that, without abolishing capitalism, make deep inroads into the capitalist system, can raise the level of consciousness and organisation of the working people and open the road to socialism."

"The transitional approach seeks to find ways to draw masses of people into political activity and increasingly radicalise the broadest layers so they are willing and able to fight for even more radical measures. This explains why, at the same time as Chavez promotes policies increasingly attacking capitalist interests, he continues in his speeches to urge the capitalist class to join the revolutionary project."

—*Green Left Weekly*, 10 October 2007

Trotsky, who completely opposed such crude class collaborationism, could hardly have imagined that his *Transitional Program* would one day be used as left-cover by a bourgeois head of state. At bottom, the Bolivarian project is about modernizing and stabilizing Venezuelan capitalism. Trotsky's program of "transitional" demands is a codification of the experience of the Bolsheviks in the period leading up to the October 1917 revolution, and that of the revolutionary Communist International under Lenin, in politically preparing the exploited and oppressed to struggle for state power.

The *Transitional Program* is aimed at mobilizing capitalism's victims to *smash* the bourgeois state and the social order it defends—not to "transform" it. In explaining the demand for a "sliding scale of wages and hours," Trotsky observed:

"It is easier to overthrow capitalism than to realize this demand under capitalism. Not one of our demands will be realized under capitalism. That is why we are calling them transitional demands. It creates a bridge to the mentality of the workers and then a material bridge to the socialist revolution. The whole question is how to mobilize the masses for struggle."

—"The Political Backwardness of the American Workers," 19 May 1938

Despite the claims of various "Marxists" and "Trotskyists" who have volunteered their services as publicists for the Bolivarian strongman, no "revolutionary process" is underway in Venezuela today. While there is a real danger of violent rightist reaction and the possibility of civil war, Venezuela is not currently in a pre-revolutionary situation, i.e., the normal mechanisms of bourgeois rule continue to operate. Nor is it in a revolutionary, or "dual power," situation, which would be marked by the development of potential organs of proletarian rule and a general recognition by all strata of society that things simply cannot go on as before.

The USec's resolution endorsing Chávez for president



'The political aim, the conquest of power by the proletariat for the purpose of expropriating the bourgeoisie.'
—Leon Trotsky, *Transitional Program*

in 2006 claimed that the election would:

"...be the occasion to demonstrate that, in spite of the limits of the government's action in favour of the workers and the poorest sectors in Venezuela, in spite of a state structure originating in bourgeois democracy, Hugo Chavez is a decisive support for the victory of the Venezuelan revolutionary process."

—*International Viewpoint*, October 2006

The phrase "revolutionary process" is commonly employed by revisionists seeking to blur the distinction between reforming the capitalist state and working for its revolutionary overthrow. USec scribe Stuart Piper optimistically projects that the "process" underway in Venezuela is "a nationalist, anti-neoliberal, anti-imperialist revolution, within which there is a socialist revolution struggling to get out." According to Piper, "paradoxically, both aspects are crystallised in the personality of Chavez himself" (*International Viewpoint*, May 2007).

The CWI has taken a somewhat less upbeat view than the IMT or USec:

"The continuation of capitalism in Venezuela and the failure to resolve the pressing social problems, together with frustration and anger at growing bureaucracy and waste, now threatens to undermine the revolutionary process."

—*The Socialist*, 26 January 2006

The CWI has even expressed doubts about Chávez's ability to provide revolutionary leadership:

"Chávez is right to see the importance of Trotsky and his theory of the permanent revolution. Yet it remains to be seen if he applies its lessons in practice. This is the key issue in Venezuela and in Latin America in general."

—*The Socialist*, 18 January 2007

While posing "the key issue" as the likelihood of the Bolivarian leader going Trotskyist, the CWI also sees a role for the masses: "it will be the working class in Venezuela who will ultimately decide this [the issue of socialist revo-

lution]—not just president Chávez" (*The Socialist*, 18 May 2006).

The IMT has tended to paint Chávez as the embodiment of an objectively revolutionary dynamic who "understands" the inexorable necessity to initiate a struggle to smash the state machinery he has wielded for almost a decade:

"Chavez sees the need to 'deepen' the revolution. He understands that the revolution cannot stand still. It must move on. He can see that every time he tries to push the process further, the bureaucracy comes up with a thousand and one obstacles. He feels that he cannot make this state machine do what he wants. The only road is therefore to break this machine and build a new one based on the workers."

—Marxist.com, 9 January 2007

In endorsing "comrade President Chavez" prior to the December 2006 presidential election, Alan Woods pompously lectured those who lacked faith in the Bolivarian Bonaparte:

"The strength of Hugo Chávez, and the secret of his success, is that he embodies the revolutionary aspirations of the masses and gives voice to their deep desire for a fundamental change in society. He has awakened millions of people to political life and for the first time has given them hope of a change, a sense of dignity and purpose.

"There are left sectarians, who for some strange reason imagine that they are Marxists, who do not understand this phenomenon."

—Marxist.com, 29 November 2006

There is no question that Chávez has inspired millions of Venezuelans with dreams of the golden socialist future he promises. The job of revolutionaries, however, is not to reinforce these illusions but rather to alert the masses to the fatal dangers of Bolivarian-style class collaboration. Trotsky made this point in criticizing the "tail-endist" policy pursued by Stalin and Bukharin toward the radical-nationalist Guomindang in China in the 1920s:

"But, we are told by Stalin and Bukharin, the authors of the draft program, Chiang Kai-shek's northern expedition roused a powerful movement among the worker and peasant masses. This is incontestable. But did not the fact that Guchkov and Shulgin brought with them to Petrograd the abdication of Nicholas II play a revolutionary role? Did it not arouse the most downtrodden, exhausted, and timid strata of the populace? Did not the fact that Kerensky, who but yesterday was a Trudovik, became the President of the Ministers' Council and the Commander-in-Chief, rouse the masses of soldiers? Did it not bring them to meetings? Did it not rouse the village to its feet against the landlord?"

....Opportunist policies have always been based on this kind of non-dialectical, conservative, tail-endist 'objectivism.' Marxism on the contrary invariably taught that the revolutionary consequences of one or another act of the bourgeoisie, to which it is compelled by its position, will be fuller, more decisive, less doubtful, and firmer, the more independent the proletarian vanguard will be in relation to the bourgeoisie, the less it will be inclined to place its fingers between the jaws of the bourgeoisie, to see it in bright colors, to over-estimate its revolutionary spirit or its readiness for a 'united front' and for a struggle

against imperialism.”

—*The Third International After Lenin*

In Venezuela today, as in China in the 1920s, the fundamental task for revolutionaries is to struggle to establish the political independence of the working class from the bourgeoisie, i.e., to split the Bolivarian movement along class lines. The IMT, in rejecting such an approach, employs the same arguments that Stalin used to defend his liquidationist policy in China:

“Beyond Chavismo, beyond the Bolivarian movement, there exists no possibility of developing a revolutionary mass movement. Any attempt to do so will bring a separation of the main revolutionary layer from the majority of the masses.”

—Marxist.com, 18 October 2006

Like other leftist apologists for the Bolivarian project, the IMT has generally tended to blame “reactionaries in the state bureaucracy” for thwarting Chávez’s socialist intentions:

“There are honest Bolivarians in the government who are fighting to advance the cause of the workers and peasants and who support workers’ control and nationalization. But they are being constantly blocked by right-wing elements who sabotage the President’s decrees and undermine the Revolution.”

—Marxist.com, 19 December 2005

Recently, however, the IMT leadership has evidenced some impatience with the disparity between the leftist rhetoric of the “Bolivarian Revolution” and the pro-capitalist reality. Alan Woods, frustrated by Chávez’s attempt to placate his right-wing critics in the aftermath of the failed constitutional referendum, complained that he missed the chance to effect a peaceful transition to socialism after his electoral triumph in December 2006:

“It would have been quite possible for the President to introduce an Enabling Act in the National Assembly to nationalize the land, the banks and the key industries under workers’ control and management. This would have broken the power of the Venezuelan oligarchy. Moreover, this could have been done quite legally by the democratically elected parliament, since in a democracy the elected representatives of the people are supposed to be sovereign.”

—Marxist.com, 11 January

This confused tangle of wishful thinking and vintage Kautskyan reformism is premised on the notion that socialist revolution is a matter of correct parliamentary tactics and skillful maneuvers to gain positions of influence within the capitalists’ repressive apparatus. The IMT imagines that, if he wanted to, Chávez could use his presidential office to “legally” uproot capitalism while incrementally transforming the bourgeois state he presides over into a workers’ state.

Woods blames the Bolivarian shift to the right on “reformists” who filled the head of the glorious leader with bad advice:

“Following the advice of those who want to reach a deal with the counterrevolutionaries, Chávez granted amnesty to a number of opposition leaders connected to the April 2002 military coup and the shutdown of the oil industry which caused \$10 billion dollars damage to the economy and nearly succeeded in wrecking the Revolution.”

“Chávez said he hoped the amnesty decree would ‘send

a message to the country that we can live together despite our differences.”

“‘Helped’ by his reformist advisers, the President has drawn some incorrect conclusions from the referendum. During ‘Aló Presidente’, on 6 January 2008 he said:

“‘I’m compelled to slow down the pace of the march. I’ve been imposing on it a speed that’s beyond the collective capabilities or possibilities....

“‘Improvements are needed in our alliance strategy. We can’t let ourselves be derailed by extremist tendencies. We are not extremists nor we can be [sic]. No! We have to pursue alliances with the middle classes, including the national bourgeoisie. We can’t support theses that have failed in the whole world, as the elimination of private property. That’s not our thesis.”

—Marxist.com, 11 January

This should make it clear for those who can read that the “Bolivarian socialism” the IMT has been promoting for the past few years, like the “Arab socialism” and “African socialism” touted by the Militant tendency several decades earlier, does not involve the expropriation of the means of production—it is simply capitalism under a different name.

Workers’ Revolution: The Only Road to Socialism

One of the fundamental axioms of Marxism is the proposition that every state exists to defend the rule of a particular social class. This is why the road to socialism can only be opened by smashing the repressive machinery of the bourgeoisie and replacing it with institutions committed to defending collectivized, i.e., proletarian, property forms. A bourgeois state cannot be gradually turned into its opposite by replacing “bureaucratic” functionaries with “revolutionary” ones.

A revolutionary policy for Venezuela must begin from the Marxist understanding of the nature of state power and the necessity of irreconcilable opposition to all wings of the bourgeoisie. A Trotskyist organization would seek to build a base in workplaces from which to intervene in the unions and address members of the communal councils and other Chávista mass organizations. While taking an active role in combating the rightist opposition, it would advance the perspective of permanent revolution, which is based on the recognition that in semi-colonial countries like Venezuela the capitalists are too weak and dependent on foreign imperialism to be capable of fulfilling any of the tasks of the bourgeois revolution.

Only through the creation of a Venezuelan workers’ state can the oppression of workers, landless peasants, slum dwellers, indigenous peoples and other victims of capitalism be ended. A victorious socialist revolution in Venezuela would quickly spread beyond its borders and make the creation of a Socialist Federation of Latin America and the Caribbean an immediate possibility. It would also find a powerful echo within the proletarian masses of the northern imperial colossus and awaken them to the necessity to struggle to uproot the global system of imperialist exploitation, and to utilize the powerful productive forces developed under capitalism for the construction of a rationally-planned, egalitarian socialist world free from exploitation and poverty. ■

Marxism & the 'Bolivarian Revolution'

Venezuela & the Left



REUTERS

November 2007: Chávez speaks in Maturín at rally supporting 'yes' vote on constitutional referendum

In January 2007, shortly after winning re-election, Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez declared: "We're moving toward a socialist republic of Venezuela" (*Guardian* [London], 10 January 2007). The National Assembly then passed an "enabling law" granting the president authority to issue decrees. In December 2007, Chávez suffered a major setback when his plan to amend the country's constitution in a "socialist" direction was narrowly defeated in a national referendum. Chávez has since promised to slow the pace of change, yet the so-called "Bolivarian Revolution," which has mobilized millions of workers and poor people and excited many of the world's ostensibly "Marxist" organizations, has always stood for the preservation of capitalist property.

Hugo Chávez, who was first elected president of Venezuela in December 1998, heads a state apparatus organically tied to defense of the capitalist social order. His advocacy of "socialism" reflects a distance from the ruling bourgeois oligarchy that allows him to contain the mass plebeian unrest that has periodically shaken Venezuelan society. Chávez is hardly the first left-wing "strongman" to come to power in a neo-colony. When he was assassinated in August 1940, Leon Trotsky, the great Russian revolutionary, had been working on an article that dealt with this phenomenon:

"The governments of backward, i.e., colonial and semi-colonial countries, by and large assume a Bonapartist or semi-Bonapartist character; and differ from one another in this, that some try to orient in a democratic direction, seeking support among workers and peasants, while others install a form close to military-police dictatorship. This likewise determines the fate of the trade unions. They either stand under the special patronage of the state or they are subjected to cruel persecution. Patronage on the part of the state is dictated by two tasks which confront it. First, to draw the working class closer thus gaining a support for resistance against excessive pretensions on the part of imperialism; and, at the same time, to discipline the workers themselves by placing them under the control of a bureaucracy."

—"Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay,"
1940

The recently defeated constitutional reform package was advertised by Chávez as setting a course "headed straight towards socialism" (*Economist*, 16 August 2007). The right-wing opposition and its imperialist mentors denounced "Cuban-style communism" and claimed that the proposal to remove presidential term limits proved that Chávez intended to be "president for life."

continued on page 42