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# PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION

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Re-Create  
the Fourth International

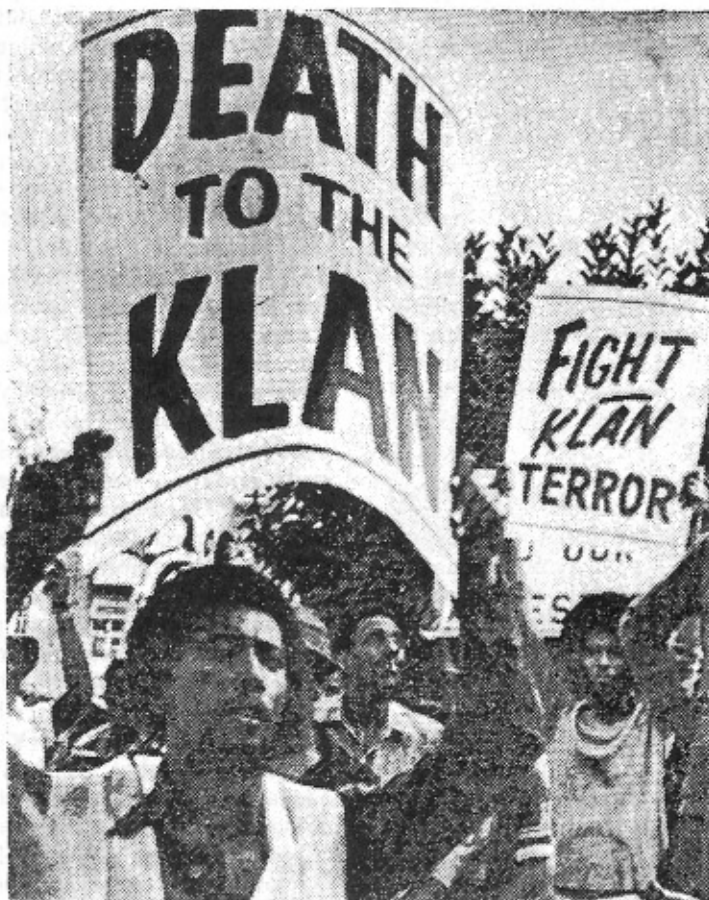
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## Racist Murder Demands Self-Defense

On June 7th, an innocent Black man, James Byrd Jr., was tortured, murdered, beheaded and dismembered by racist scum in Jasper, Texas. The first reaction was enormous shock in the Black communities across the country. This gave way to fear — and to a deep, wrenching anger.

The rage escalated in response to the KKK "celebration" in Jasper on June 27, which proclaimed that "This is Klan country, has been Klan country and will be Klan country from now on."



There was a different response from the powers-that-be — a tidal wave of sound bites flooding TV and radio, expressing the "grief and horror" so "deeply felt" by the bourgeois politicians and their hired Madison Avenue flacks. Through its outpouring of crocodile tears, the ruling class was proclaiming itself to have nothing to do with this racist atrocity. Once again it was pretending that Blacks had a sympathetic friend in the capitalist state power.

Once upon a time, the hopes of Black America in the promises of "American democracy" were high. The victories

won during the civil rights movement and the ghetto revolts gave rise to expectations that equal treatment could become a reality. Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream of a colorblind United States resonated among many. Today, such hopes have been dashed. Blacks, whose labor built so much of this country are still discriminated against, barely tolerated and even savagely killed under this system of exploitation and racism, i.e., capitalism. In fact, things are getting worse. But what can be done?

The answer is socialist revolution. It is not a question of small groups of revolutionaries lecturing the masses about what is to be done. The job of revolutionaries is to consistently put forward the basic elements of our revolutionary program and show how this program is intimately connected to building a revolutionary party to lead the fight to overthrow capitalism. This the LRP has done through our propa-

ganda, and agitation when possible, for mass armed self-defense against racist and fascist attacks. (For example, the

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## COFI/LRP Report

# Fighting For Revolutionary Leadership

The LRP/COFI page was instituted a few years back because we felt that readers deserved a better sense of our activities. But it is also true that a main activity for us is at the heart of the magazine: the fight against centrism. It's a major theme of this issue.

A discussion of centrism was provoked by a question from a reader, resulting (so far) in the piece "Why Has the LRP Been Isolated?" The articles on our work in 1199 and the TWU, perhaps the two most powerful unions in New York City, take up not only the reformist bureaucracy but, of necessity, the left organizations like the International Socialist Organization and Solidarity, that play back-up to the bureaucrats. We also respond to the Workers World Party on the anti-police brutality struggles in Chicago (p. 33). And we begin a well-deserved polemical dissection of the Progressive Labor Party with the article "Road to Revolution 0.0."

We believe that revolutionaries must prove themselves to advancing workers on the level of theory as well as practice. For this reason *Proletarian Revolution* does not shy away from taking on the politics presented by any and all of the centrist contenders for class leadership, as well as the open reformists. But we are limited in terms of size and resources. In order to accomplish more we ask our readers to contribute in two ways. One, to continue supporting this enterprise through monetary donations to the League and its publications. Two, by providing more feedback and letting us know what additional political tendencies and topics our magazine should address.

### NEW YORK HOSPITAL STRUGGLES

This spring LRPers in New York participated in several important hospital workers' struggles, which are unfortunately kept virtually disconnected from each other by the parochial union leaders. Our major activity has been inside 1199 in the fight for a new contract (see p. 3); here we report on other activities. Our leaflets on each of these struggles are available to interested readers.

In late March, Mayor Rudy Giuliani made one of his characteristic racist, anti-worker moves. He announced 900 layoffs in public hospitals, mainly targeting Local 420 workers in institutions in minority neighborhoods.

The main protest rallies were led by the head of this small and chronically besieged local of AFSCME's DC 37, Jim Butler. As usual, Butler backed up his rhetoric with nothing more substantive than prayer: no one could miss the 10-foot cross that Butler's team brings to all his rallies —

under which workers facing the axe were exhorted to pray for Giuliani's soul and his conversion to the side of good. Butler avoided any mass action strategy and made no mobilization demands on more powerful union chiefs like DC 37 head Stanley Hill or 1199 President Dennis Rivera. He touted a legal action against Giuliani which also hadn't a prayer of stopping the cuts.

At the same time, nurses represented by New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA) carried on a two-week strike at Maimonides Hospital in Brooklyn against management's attempts to destroy their rights in scheduling, assignments and benefits. Our leaflet advocated mass militant picket lines to keep out the scabs and denounced an outrageous policy of both 1199 and NYSNA: whenever both unions have members at a hospital, each routinely instructs its workers to cross the others' picket lines during strikes. In this case, 1199 had the nerve to carry out this policy while holding small hot-air "solidarity" rallies for the nurses! The result in the end was that nurses settled for a divide-and-conquer contract. Benefits were maintained, but scheduling rights were preserved for only select departments.

On the side, the ISO threw itself into a fundraising effort for this strike — as a substitute for providing any political strategy that could win. At an ISO forum on the strike, the ISO did criticize the 1199 policy but failed to raise any criticisms of the reformist NYSNA leadership itself, including the representative who spoke from their podium. When we posed the need for mass militant pickets in the immediate strike and for a broad working-class fight against all hospital cuts, an ISOer wishing to counter our obviously sensible contribution charged that we were advocating acts of individual thuggery! (For more on the ISO's hospital work, see p. 5.)

### CUNY ACTIVITIES

At City College, our forum on "Clinton's War Moves" in late February got a good hearing. We also started a study group on Marxist politics, which continues this summer.

City University (CUNY) activists have been working for months to combat Giuliani's plans to eliminate remedial education in the senior colleges, and LRPers have been militant participants. But the CUNY trustees caved in to Giuliani and slammed the door on working-class students, delivering an historic setback especially to Blacks and

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### COFI Pamphlet in German

Inhalt: Die Politische Resolution der "Kommunistischen Organisation für die Vierte Internationale" (KOFI/COFI); Die ungelösten Widersprüche des Tony Cliff; Was hat man "Was tun?" angetan?; Zwanzig Jahre LRP.

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### *Proletarian Revolution*

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# Union Bureaucrats Downsize New York Hospital Workers

Members of 1199, the hospital workers' union in New York, appear to have passed a new contract proposal by a large margin in late June. The contract affects workers in the voluntary (private but "non-profit") hospitals. While the union leadership argued that the contract was a victory, workers' reaction was more relief than enthusiasm. They voted more to avoid a strike than to approve the contract terms. We reprint, starting in the next column, an LRP leaflet addressed to the 1199 workers.

A particularly gross feature of the deal negotiated by President Dennis Rivera & Co. is the use of union pension funds to subsidize early retirements and buyouts for workers not normally eligible for retirement. This moves 1199 further down the road of downsizing and layoffs by helping management permanently close job slots.

The LRP argued that the concession-laden contract should be rejected. This followed over a year of activity in which we urged hospital workers to fight for a strategy of no layoffs and no job cuts in the face of management's plans to reduce the work force by 10-15,000 (out of about 50,000).

In order to argue for a strike, we had to recognize workers' fears, which are based both on the particular history of strike sellouts in 1199 and the obvious fact that most strikes these days are losers. We had to make it clear that the problems of strikes are the fault of a pro-capitalist leadership and strategy and that our approach to a strike includes guarding against the leaders' betrayals. We wrote in an earlier leaflet:

**Rivera doesn't want a strike and has made that very clear. But hospital workers must be prepared to strike rather than settling for layoffs and wage freezes. While many workers are not anxious to strike, we have no choice if we are to defend our jobs. The real question is, are we prepared to strike to win? We must prepare to surround every single hospital with massive picket lines that shut down the facilities and keep out the scabs. Even if Rivera is forced into a strike, this is not the kind of struggle he intends to lead. . . .**

**A fight for a Strike to Win! Strategy means being ready to challenge the union leadership when they try to push their compromises and surrenders to management.**

1199 workers should pay serious attention to what has happened in the United Automobile Workers. Twenty years ago, the UAW had 1.5 million members; today, it has been cut to about 750,000. This was accomplished with the cooperation of the UAW leadership, which told workers to trade concessions for jobs rather than launch a fightback. So the union gave the concessions and still lost the jobs. The strike that shut GM down this June stems from auto workers' outrage at broken promises by management and union leaders.

As with the UAW and other unions, Rivera's strategy of accepting downsizing to avoid a confrontation means that jobs will be lost and the union weakened, leaving workers at a disadvantage in fighting the next round of attacks. Nevertheless, while Rivera took advantage of the fear and demoralization within the ranks, a mood he is largely responsible for, it is inevitable that workers will rebel against these cutbacks. The LRP is fighting to build an opposition that can put a halt to all such sellouts.



1199 members rally in Times Square, June 18.

## 1199: No Layoffs! No Cutbacks! Vote No!

The contract agreed to by 1199 President Dennis Rivera and his cohorts is a lousy deal that deserves to be voted down. Calling this contract a victory is an outright lie. This is not a step forward. It's a terrible retreat *without a fight* by the pro-capitalist Rivera leadership.

It's a retreat from the stated goal of job security. Rivera's nonsense about "virtual job security" leaves one out of four members exposed to layoffs. And the other 75 percent are promised nothing but the right to some job in another place — if jobs are available.

It's a retreat from Rivera's prior claim that 2 percent or 3 percent wage increases are not acceptable. In reality, the 6 percent over 40 months which he's pushing now averages out to less than 2 percent per year.

It's also a retreat from 1199's opposition to the bosses' gimmick of substituting one-shot bonuses for real wage increases. There is no raise in the second year of this deal.

It's a major retreat from 1199's opposition to concessions. The acceptance of mass layoffs in the contract itself

is a big concession. But not only this. Rivera's deal gives 80 percent of full salary to laid-off 1199 workers — but paid out of our pension fund, not the bosses' pockets.

It's a retreat from efforts to stop hospitals from transferring jobs to non-union clinics. All the bosses agreed to do was to discuss the issue.

It's a retreat from 1199's call for quality health care. Downsizing with union cooperation means a decline in health care services to the working class.

### **THE CONTRACT SETTLEMENT STINKS**

We need a real No Layoffs clause in the contract backed by the right to strike. Instead, Rivera and the union leaders are doing management's dirty work in attacking our jobs.

If passed, what will Rivera's proposed contract mean?

- Rivera's plan will mean that by the end of the contract there will be fewer hospital workers.

- Rivera's plan will mean speed-up and harassment on the job as fewer workers will have to work harder to keep things running.

- Rivera's plan will mean a weakened pension fund.

- Rivera's plan will mean some workers bossing around other workers as part of labor-management cooperation.

- Rivera's plan will mean worse care for the poor.

- Rivera's plan will mean a weaker, divided union ripe for further attacks by management.

### **RIVERA'S "VICTORY" IS A LIE!**

Many members will vote for the contract while holding their noses. They realize the contract stinks — they just want to avoid a strike which they see little chance of winning. But Rivera is not even admitting that this is a retreat, that workers should support the contract only because it is better to cut a deal than to risk a strike. Rivera not only wants workers to vote Yes, he wants them to go along with the lie that this contract is a great victory!

### **THE LRP'S STRATEGY**

We in the League for the Revolutionary Party (LRP) have been arguing for months against Rivera's strategy based on collaboration with management. We argue that this policy will lose jobs, weaken the union, and threaten the position of all hospital workers.

The LRP has been calling for an all-out strike with militant mass picket lines to shut down the hospitals. We have also pointed to the ability of a powerful 1199 strike to spread and become a starting point for a mass working class fightback against Giuliani and the bosses' attacks.

1199 workers have the strength to win if they stand united and committed to fight. What's holding back the struggle is the leadership. Gains will only be won and kept through struggle, not through cooperation with the bosses and their political parties.

Many workers are demoralized by the failures of the leadership, past and present, to wage a real fight. The union leadership has a manipulative way of pretending to favor a strike at times — while really doing everything to discourage workers from striking. For example, we all saw how thousands of workers came out on June 18 ready to back a strike to win a decent contract. Workers were afraid to strike but were coming around to the idea that mass action would be necessary to win what we need. Imagine how many more workers would have been there, and ready to fight, if the union had put forward demands that opposed all layoffs and

downsizing and a fighting strategy to win it!

The main problem therefore is really the failure of the leadership to mobilize our power and put forward the kind of demands and actions we need to take the struggle forward.

Yet what is more dangerous, standing up and fighting for the interests of hospital workers and all workers, or letting the bosses take back everything we've won bit by bit without a fight? If we don't stand up for our rights and interests, the bosses will only slam us even harder. If striking is risky, not striking and letting the bosses get away with murder is even more dangerous a course.

### **WHAT A NO VOTE MEANS**

Despite predictions that the contract will win, we urge fellow workers to vote no. A strike holds risks, given the sorry state of the trade union movement and its leadership. But a strike also offers opportunities. There is much that can be done in the course of a struggle to weaken the bureaucrats' hand and change the balance of forces.

Make no mistake. If this pro-management contract passes, we will face double and triple the current attacks.

But given the current political scene in 1199, we have to ask another question. What if the contract passes, despite the efforts of the LRP and other workers who oppose it? The fact is that if we have to build up our forces for the struggles ahead in such a case. Voting No will also be a step in raising awareness of the need to build a fightback that prepares us for the coming battles. If the contract passes, a large No vote will at the very least be a statement to the leadership that there are a good number of us who don't buy this lie about the contract being a victory. It will show that we will not be silently led to slaughter like innocent lambs. Rather we will continue to fight the leadership and convince our fellow workers of the need to build a defense against the layoffs and other attacks.

The more workers see that they are not alone in their opposition to the leadership's sellouts, the more confident and stronger will they become in raising their voices against Rivera's bankrupt strategy. If we don't vote no, imagine the crap Rivera will try and pull next!

### **WORKERS NEED A GENERAL STRIKE!**

As part of the strategy for hospital workers, the LRP has pointed to the fact that 1199 is not alone in facing attacks. Just look at what Giuliani is doing in New York. During the last election, many union leaders like Stanley Hill sucked up to the mayor, hoping he'd give them a break. Hill and others supported Giuliani even as he pursued his racist, anti-working class attacks. Even Rivera didn't oppose the mayor.

So what was Giuliani's response to labor's capitulation? He's gone even more berserk in attacking workers, slashing the public hospitals, eliminating remedial courses at City University, launching vicious police raids on working class families, bullying taxi drivers and street vendors, and the obscene effort to force disabled mothers onto workfare. Imagine how many working class people, especially Blacks and Latinos have died or suffered permanent injury as a result of his policies!

As a health care workers union, 1199 is in a position to point the way forward for all workers by leading a fight not only against the hospital bosses but against the insurance companies, the HMO's and the government, all of whom are dismantling health care gains won by workers over decades. The union is in a position to connect this fight with a general



working class fightback against racist and anti-worker policies.

Taxi drivers, street vendors, college students, workfare workers, police brutality victims and others are beginning to stand up to the attacks. Unfortunately, despite their valiant efforts, these forces by themselves lack the strength to stop Giuliani. But if the biggest union in New York, 1199, were to initiate a spirited fightback through a massive citywide hospital strike, that would be different. It would open up possibilities for a good contract and much more.

We need unity of all workers in a class-wide battle to defeat the capitalist attacks. That's why revolutionaries have argued not only for 1199 to launch a strike against layoffs and other concessions but also to use the struggle to build the classwide fight that is really needed. We advocate a general strike and other mass actions based on the tremendous power workers have to shut down production. As long as the balance of power in society favors the capitalists over the workers, the capitalist attacks will threaten all jobs and all gains. The bosses will step up their racist attacks in order to keep workers divided.

### **BUILD THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY!**

In struggle, we aim to demonstrate that revolutionaries are the best fighters against the bosses. We are eager to join in action with other workers who are seeking to oppose

Rivera's rotten contract deal.

We also seek to prove in practice our contention that a new leadership is needed. In our view, since Rivera's contract deal is a result of his political allegiance to capitalism, the alternative leadership must be a revolutionary socialist leadership. Whereas the labor bureaucrats like Rivera defend the interests of the capitalists and lead workers into the dead-end trap of the Democratic Party, revolutionaries fight for the independent class interests of all workers and for a revolutionary party of the working class. A revolutionary party must be built to lead our struggles today and to fight for a society run by the working class in the interests of all workers and oppressed peoples.

Thus the League for the Revolutionary Party (LRP) argues that we need to build a new leadership for the unions and the working class as a whole. The attacks on health care workers and services are part of the general capitalist attack which stems from the crisis of the capitalist system. The capitalist system can only survive on our backs. The only lasting defense of the interests of all workers is to build a powerful working class party that will lead a socialist revolution to get rid of this rotten system of exploitation and racist oppression.

*Vote No! No Layoffs! No Cutbacks!  
Workers Need a General Strike!*

*Build the Revolutionary Party of the Working Class!*

## **ISO: Going with the Flow**

Rivera's effort to hoodwink workers with his "virtual" job security scheme has been endorsed by the International Socialist Organization (ISO). An article in the ISO's paper (*Socialist Worker*, July 3) praises the union for a "solid contract campaign" and for "the gains" hospital workers "have won around job security." The article does say that the contract wasn't so good on other grounds. But to say that the job security clause represented a net gain is a bold-faced lie.

It is certainly possible to have a contract that contains some limited gains and call it a victory, as was the case with the UPS contract. But not this time. The last contract deal signed in 1994 covered only workers hired before 1992 in its job security clause. The 1998 provision also covers only those workers. So now you have to have worked six years to be covered, whereas before two were enough. And, as the ISO article admits, the "job security" clause has gaping loopholes, so even those covered cannot feel secure.

It is also possible to argue against a strike without whitewashing a lousy contract that is setting up workers for attacks right around the corner. But by prettifying Rivera's deal, the ISO only helps him pretend that he really won something from management when all he did was hand over our pension money.

*Socialist Worker* also fudges the ISO's line. Its article is co-signed by Nathan Alvarez, a well known ISO supporter at NYU Hospital who is an 1199 delegate and a rank-and-file member of the union's Executive Board. Alvarez actively urged a Yes vote on the contract. But the article did not state this line explicitly: it simply provided

the "impartial" observation — in the style of bourgeois journalists who pretend they are being objective — that the contract "will probably be ratified by the membership."

The ISO is proud to have a supporter active in the union. Fine. Why not then proudly and clearly publicize their position on the contract? In contrast, LRP supporter Leslie Lang was active in warning workers against the contract, just as forthrightly as LRP leaflets.

As our leaflet explained, it was not only the immediate matter of influencing the contract vote. Revolutionaries want to let their co-workers know the reality of the deal and urge the need to build an opposition to Rivera so that we don't have to get put on the chopping block again and again.

Speaking the truth to the working class is not an abstract moral principle but a practical necessity for building effective struggles against layoffs and other capitalist attacks — struggles that will have to be taken on the pro-capitalist labor bureaucracy sooner or later. It is certainly critical to building a revolutionary party, which must be based on the highest class consciousness. But this is hardly the first time the ISO has decided to tail labor bureaucrats instead. (See "ISO's Right Turn to Labor," *PR* 51.)

Revolutionaries are tested in practice, in the living class struggle. It is not always easy to stand your ground and take the heat from union bureaucrats who come down on anyone who opposes their sellouts. While authentic Trotskyists understand the need to fight against the stream, the ISO proves once again that it only knows how to go with the flow.

# New York Transit: No New Direction

Transport Workers Union Local 100 (New York City subways and buses) reran its Executive Board election this May. The vote last November featured fraud by the bureaucratic old guard led by president Willie James. New Directions, a "rank and file" reform opposition slate backed by Solidarity and other leftists, had threatened to file a suit with the U.S. Labor Department to overturn that contest. Apparently, given the government's intervention into the Teamsters, the old-guard TWU International leaders got scared and mandated a new election.

ND was presented with a golden opportunity. James had just lost a major lobbying campaign in the New York State legislature to win a big pension improvement. The local's treasury was for the first time several million dollars in the red, and the leadership was blocking attempts to track the money. Finally, ND had exposed James's secret agreement to accept certain new management rules for electronic technicians, giving up seniority, grievance and other long-standing rights without a vote of the affected members, a clear

violation of the contract.

In fact ND was rather confident they would win. But they blew it; this time the James Team beat them by about 52 to 48 percent, a slightly reduced margin. ND picked up one Board seat, making the new line-up James 25, ND 21.

## NEW DIRECTIONS' PAPER "FIGHTBACK"

A partial explanation for ND's defeat is the fraud and slander once again committed by the bureaucrats. Most glaring was the James Team's mass mailing of campaign leaflets in official Local 100 envelopes postmarked by the Local's postage meter. James' backers also engaged in crude red-baiting. And the James leadership accused ND of being strike-happy, knowing that the ranks in transit, like most workers, have lost their confidence in strike action.

This charge, however, was false. A couple of ND leaflets did cautiously state that Local 100 would have to strike against concessions in the 1999 contract. But more often ND issued long statements about their intention to fully inform,

## Now More than Ever: Militant Mass Fightback Needed!

*Excerpts from a leaflet distributed in Eric Josephson's campaign in TWU Local 100:*

My candidacy offers the only alternative to the losing strategies offered by both the James slate and New Directions. Willie "Running Scared" James now blusters about "shutting the system down," and even gets arrested for protesting against the MTA. This thinly veils his acceptance of management's plans. Schermerhorn and New Directions stand for verbal opposition to management with no real fightback program. Only militant mass action can push back management attacks.

... Well-meaning co-workers advised me, "Tone it down. Don't talk about mass action and strikes all the time. It only frightens off potential support. And deep-six the socialist revolution stuff altogether! Then you might get elected. And once you're in, you can do what you like."

But it's not about "doing what I like." It's about the fact that we need a new strategy and leadership for this union. Someone has to tell the truth: we need to mobilize tens of thousands of transit workers in the streets, we need a serious fightback against management and we need to unite with the rest of the working class to fight our common enemy, the capitalist class. And the more people that vote for me, the more it sends a message to both sides of the union bureaucracy that some workers do want a fightback, not business as usual. It will take time: 7 or 10 percent per cent of the membership casting a vote for action is a good place to start.

In my view, to sustain a serious fightback we need a revolutionary leadership. Many co-workers may not yet agree with this, but we can still join together in united action. My advocacy of mass action is of long standing. I have fought year after year for mass mobilizations and boycotts against lousy picks and for strikes against lousy contracts. I am not in favor of reckless adventures: I know

that a strike is a very serious fight. I, like most of my co-workers, am very leery of another strike that would be conducted like the last one. The union leadership betrayed that struggle.

But transit workers have no choice but to fight back, since the bosses are looking for more takebacks. We can't give up so important a weapon of self-defense as the strike. So rather than rejecting the very idea, we need a different strategy for our next strike. We have to say in advance that the government will attempt to use Taylor Law penalties against us. And we have to prepare in advance to defy such anti-worker legalities. We can build toward a no-nonsense strike through actions against safety violations and other attacks, with mobilizations of the whole Local behind each Division. The union can also start campaigning for joint mobilizations with other unions and non-union and forced-labor WEP workers as well. That's how we'll break out of our isolation and revive the union as an instrument of battle against the bosses.

... A fighting TWU can and must play a role in reviving class struggle in this city. A powerful strike could spread into a general strike, a political struggle against the capitalist attacks. In my view, a general strike could not only stop the immediate attacks but could prove that the working class has the potential to run all society, without capitalist exploitation and oppression. As a revolutionary socialist, a supporter of the League for the Revolutionary Party, I see every struggle as part of the needed fight against capitalism. It's because of my allegiance to the working class and opposition to capitalism that I consistently fight to organize resistance throughout the Division and the Local. If you agree with my mass action perspective and see the need to make the TWU a fighting union, vote for me. Send the bosses and union bureaucrats the message!



consult with, educate and mobilize the members in '99 — to do what, they didn't say.

This gets to the deeper reason why ND failed to win. Opposition leaderships that rest on a mobilized membership have beaten established bureaucrats, who always use the corrupt tactics like those of the James team. The core problem is political: ND failed to present a bold alternative to James. Their hesitation and wavering about the need for a strike, their inability to put forward a way to win a strike and their failure to mobilize workers around issues like workfare meant that many workers saw no reason to shift their vote. After all, if you're going to play class collaboration, why not stick with a tried and true player who has established connections with the politicians.

Many ND leaders consider themselves socialists, but for them socialism is a goal reserved exclusively for private discussion, judged to be far beyond the understanding of ordinary workers. Or perhaps they believe that the trade unions do not need a revolutionary program and leadership. In any case, they don't tell the members about socialist ideas, and fighting capitalism is no part of their electoral program.

Further, ND candidates present themselves as bold insurgents, but they have actually held the majority of posts in several divisions for as long as five years. They did not try much to run on their past record, and with good reason — their accomplishments have been quite modest, mostly more efficient grievance-filing. The election issue of their union bulletin, *Hell on Wheels*, included among ND's list of accomplishments that they had prevented an "ill-considered" job action in one division. In the absence of any mass action proposals in their campaign, this claim served to reassure more conservative workers, as well as union officials and management, that ND posed no danger.

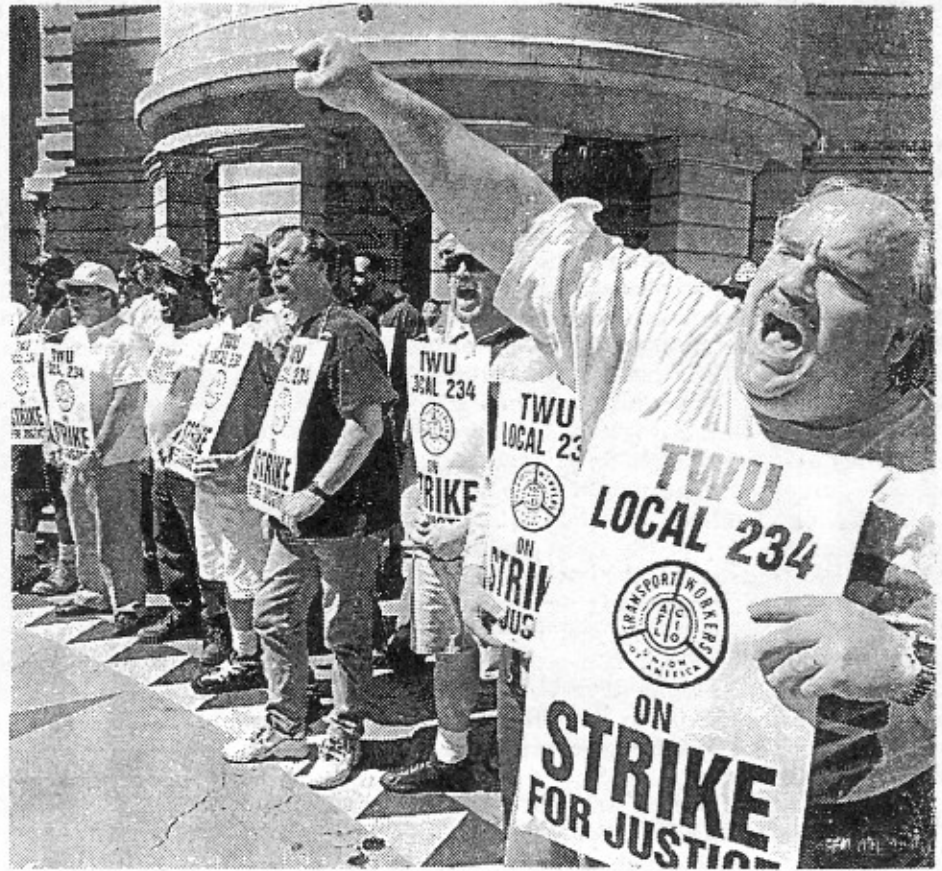
The most reprehensible aspect of ND's campaign was its repeated call for government intervention in the union. This was particularly outrageous in the light of the recent Teamsters debacle: the Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), co-thinkers of ND, helped bring the FBI and courts into their union. (See "Government Out of the Teamsters," PR 56.) TDU, once the poster group of the labor reform movement, suffered a dramatic decline in membership and reputation as a result. New Directions is now the pride of the reformist-centrist left, although this defeat must hurt.

## REVOLUTIONARY CAMPAIGN

Revolutionary-minded workers need to break from this approach and build revolutionary caucuses in the unions, not dead-end reformist outfits. Toward this end, Eric Josephson ran for the Executive Board in Track Division as an open socialist and supporter of the LRP. Despite very limited resources and time, his campaign scored a modest success, gathering about 6 percent of the votes in that division. Most

workers who voted for Eric are not revolutionaries but were attracted to his candidacy because he stressed the necessity for mass action as the only way forward.

Josephson's campaign focused on the main immediate attacks on TWU members and connected them to a range of



*Philadelphia transit strike ended with 9 percent raises over 3 years. Even a half-hearted bureaucrat-controlled strike won gains that Willie "No Strike" James could not. To win lasting gains requires ousting bureaucrats in Locals 100 and 234.*

anti-worker and racist attacks. His leading demands were:  
*Stop Cutbacks and Takebacks with Mass Action!*  
*For Real Union Democracy! No Government Intervention!*  
*Shut Down Unsafe Job Sites!*  
*Stop Police Brutality!*

Eric's campaign also raised key issues he has fought around in the TWU in recent years. He fought for union mobilization against the racist police attacks in New York. He opposed forced labor by welfare recipients (in the "Work Experience Program," or WEP) and called for united action with WEP workers.

Local 100 is critical for the class struggle in New York, and this electoral battle had national importance. The Josephson campaign raised important trade union issues and broader political questions that both James and New Directions ignored. While he did not take the sectarian approach of insisting that workers agree with the LRP's communist program in order to vote for him, Josephson consistently explained the connection between the building an immediate defense based on united working-class action and the need to build a revolutionary party of the working class.

## WORKERS' REARGUARD

The only other left organization to oppose New Directions as well as the James Team was the Spartacist League (SL). But while the SL claims to favor a union mobilization against racist attacks and a fight against state intervention in the unions, in reality they consistently abstain from the struggle in the TWU.

Given their characteristic combination of opportunism and sectarianism, it was no surprise that the SL rejected any support to Josephson's campaign for a mass action program. The SL's reasons are instructive, even though they are just recycled old lies about the LRP and are irrelevant to the basis of the campaign.

First, the SL claimed that the LRP "crossed the class line" in supporting the Polish Solidarity movement against the Stalinist regime in the early 1980's. But it was correct to defend this mass workers' organization against the state capitalist bosses. We condemned the union leaders, who were both pro-imperialist and stood only for reforming the Stalinist state. It was the SL that crossed the class line, calling on the Soviet army to crush the workers' movement.

Second, the SL cited the LRP's "disgusting position" of "opposing efforts to implement racial integration of the schools during the fight over busing in Boston in 1974-75." In reality, our tendency marched in defense of the bused students in the face of the racist mobs, and we defended Blacks' right to choose which schools to go to. But we also warned Black workers not to trust the middle-class integrationist misleaders who taught reliance on cops, federal troops and the courts. The SL, in contrast, endorsed the capitalist courts' plan, "implemented" via its police power, that assigned Black students to schools not of their choice as cannon fodder for social engineering. (See "The Spartacist School of Falsification," *PR* 55.)

The SL's third reason was that the LRP has said that "'revolutionaries' might be compelled to 'join in common action'" with Louis Farrakhan. They point out that he is a reactionary, pro-capitalist demagogue — as if we did not know his record. Indeed, in our article in *PR* 50, after a long political exposé of Farrakhan and the Million Man March, we cited the possibility that, during the inevitable mass struggles that Blacks will initiate in response to the mounting racist attacks, Farrakhan might lead such mobilizations in order to preserve his leadership. If such actions were attacked by the cops or the Klan, we know which side we'd

be on, using the time-honored Bolshevik tactic of military defense against the racists. We have challenged the SL several times to say where *they* would be; they do not reply.

Several threads run through the Spartacists' attacks on the LRP. One is their contempt for the consciousness of the working class, shown by their habitual falsifications of their left opponents' political positions. Another is that their points appear as irrelevant to the union campaign. While they explain how New Directions would mislead the union, they say nothing about why Eric would not be a fighting representative for workers' interests. But isn't that the issue?

## BOLSHEVISM VS. THE SL

The key thread is the SL's reluctance to engage in united mass action while using Bolshevik tactics to split the base from the top. The politics of the leadership is what determines the SL's attitude to any struggle. Walesa is pro-West, so down with Solidarity. They applaud integration, so the bourgeois busing plan is supported at whatever cost to the fight for better schools. Farrakhan is rotten, so the masses he misleads are expendable. The LRP is no good, so its fight for mass action in Local 100 can be ignored.

The often messy class struggle offers a fearsome threat to the bureaucratic routine of a hermetically sealed sect. For example, during the campaign to defend James Frazier, a Black TWU member, from a police frame-up in 1994-95, the SL's sectarianism came to the fore: they refused to join the LRP and others in fighting for a TWU defense campaign. Instead they called on the transit workers to join their own small front group, the Partisan Defense Committee.

It is no accident that with more supporters in Local 100 than we have, for years the SL has done nothing in the TWU. It prints a newspaper biweekly, but aside from this article it did absolutely nothing to intervene in a critical election in which militants were being misled by New Directions. The SL doesn't even mention its own transit cadre as an alternative, proof of the fact that they weren't offering one.

If the SL had even tried to act like Bolsheviks, its supporters would have honestly spelled out their differences with the LRP in order to expose Eric to workers looking for a way to fight back. Instead, they covered their inaction with a lying article written for the record, and posed no alternative that militants could support. Once again the SL proved in practice its inability to intervene in the class struggle and show the way forward to workers. ●

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# Bureaucrats Provoke Splits in S. African Unions

by Matthew Richardson

The last year has seen a growing number of struggles within South Africa's largest trade union federation, COSATU. An ever-increasing number of workers understand that the ANC has betrayed all the promises it made during the anti-apartheid struggle. Many look to the unions to take their struggle forward, but are confronted at every step by ANC and South African Communist Party (SACP) union leaders committed to restraining the workers.

Looking to follow alternative leaderships, workers in many unions have launched struggles around immediate questions like corruption, bureaucratization and union leaders' failure to represent their members. There are also fights around broader political issues, such as breaking COSATU's alliance with the ANC and SACP and forming a workers' party.

Meanwhile, the ANC-SACP union bureaucracy is struggling to maintain its control over the rank-and-file. Strengthened by the "grave train" of privileges it gets from its connections with the state apparatus and monopolies, the ANC-SACP bureaucracy has sought to assert absolute control over every level of the unions. ANC-SACP bureaucrats refer to their attitude toward "rogue" union leaders as "fit in, or fuck off." Most important has been a growing offensive against militants and especially left socialist groups within the unions.

These struggles have resulted in the creation of new unions both by workers unorganized and ignored by COSATU, and out of splits from COSATU unions. Most recently, the union bureaucracy has forced splits in the Food and Allied Works Union (FAWU) and the Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU) which have led to the creation of new unions. This development poses decisive tests for revolutionaries in South Africa: how to fight for a revolutionary socialist perspective within the working class while defending the unity of the unions. This article will address this question in the course of examining the CWIU split.

## THE CHEMICAL WORKERS INDUSTRIAL UNION

Left groups have long enjoyed a strong following among CWIU members. The left's strength largely explains why the CWIU has been widely regarded as among the most democratic and politically radical COSATU unions. Most prominent among left groups in the CWIU has been the Workers International Vanguard League (WIVL), whose politics we have discussed in previous issues. (See PR 54 and 56.)

WIVL member Abraham Agulhas was president of the CWIU since the 1980's, the position of second authority behind the General Secretary, a post held by an ANC-SACP bureaucrat. Workers supported Agulhas for different reasons:

some because of his revolutionary socialist politics, others because they regarded him as the best comrade to lead the union despite their overall support for the ANC. Agulhas is also known by many U.S. unionists because of his featured speech at the 1995 *Labor Notes* convention in Detroit. He played a prominent role in the leadership of COSATU, fighting for COSATU to break its alliance with the ANC-



*CWIU leaders at Cape Town conference.*

SACP and support the formation of an independent workers' party, and he was nominated for the position of COSATU Vice President.

The election of the ANC government in 1994 saw the main CWIU leadership turn further away from militancy and increasingly cover up for the ANC's betrayals. With rank-and-file dissatisfaction growing, WIVL comrades within the CWIU supported the formation of a broader caucus with independent militants and members of other left groups, including the Comrades for a Workers Government (CWG). (We have open questions regarding the WIVL's decision to bloc with centrists like the CWG, but this caucus certainly advanced straightforward aims regarding the key questions of the union struggle today.) The caucus was formed to wage a political campaign against the ANC-SACP union leaders, in order to call for the CWIU to favor splitting from the ANC-SACP alliance. This campaign was to culminate in the CWIU's 1997 National Congress.

## CWIU BUREAUCRATS FIRE ORGANIZER

The caucus's first political battle came at a Western Cape CWIU seminar. With approximately 40 shop stewards attending, the WIVL members of the caucus argued for breaking the union alliance with the ANC-SACP and for forming a workers' party. A number of other workers spoke in support of the proposals, while the main CWIU leaders argued vociferously against them. A significant step forward was achieved when the workers voted for a motion calling for the end of the alliance. But while most of the workers saw the need for a new political direction for the union, a

majority were at that point not in favor of a workers' party.

The level of support for the caucus's ideas scared the CWIU bureaucrats. But luck was on the bureaucrats' side when they found an internal communication by a CWG member who was an appointed CWIU organizer. The communication detailed the membership and political plans of the caucus, and the CWIU leaders used this as an excuse to immediately fire the organizer.

The caucus protested the firing, particularly because it was done undemocratically, without any consultation of the rank and file of the CWIU. This protest found wide support among the workers, who raised the issue at every CWIU meeting only to find that the union's leaders refused to

address the issue.

#### CWIU BUREAUCRATS LAUNCH OFFENSIVE

However, the CWIU national bureaucracy then launched an offensive against the left. Although 50 delegates had voted in favor of electing a new interim leadership at the Branch Executive (an almost unanimous vote), charges were brought against only four of them — those most widely known as radicals. They were charged with violating union laws and bringing the union into disrepute.

The national leaders immediately broke their promise to discuss their inquiry with Western Cape members first,

bringing their charges to the leaders of the other provincial branches and obviously coordinating an attack on the leftists. This became clear when the pro-ANC leaders of the Eastern Cape and Natal branches came to the November CWIU National Executive Committee with new allegations against Agulhas. The Natal leaders alleged that he distributed WIVL pamphlets at a factory while on official union work in Natal two years earlier; the Eastern Cape leaders alleged that Agulhas had walked out of a bargaining meeting with the bosses over a year ago and that he had violated the union's policies by not campaigning for the ANC in the 1994 election. The first two charges were completely

false and unsupported by any evidence. The third charge was true since Agulhas had not campaigned for the ANC, but CWIU members were not compelled to do so.

The Eastern Cape leaders then moved that Agulhas be removed as chair and that he leave the meeting while the charges were discussed. The leaders of the Witwatersrand and North Eastern Transvaal branches spoke against making any decision on these charges as they had never heard them before; but they abstained in the vote, allowing the bureaucracy's motions to pass without opposition. The bureaucrats then successfully moved that Agulhas be removed as President and an official inquiry be conducted into all the charges.

#### WORKERS RALLY TO DEFEND AGULHAS

The four members charged were called to the inquiry without the minimum notice due under the union constitution. When some of those charged informed the inquiry that they could not attend on such short notice, the leadership simply went ahead with the inquiry in their absence, finding all four guilty. As if the political character of this witch hunt was not already obvious, the punishments were clearly delivered according to whom the bureaucracy considered the most politically threatening. Agulhas was not only removed from the union presidency but was also suspended from being a steward for five years, while two of the others found guilty of the same charges received warnings, and one was not punished at all.



Mass attendance at CWIU branch general meeting in NE Transvaal.

address the issue.

Finally, the workers raised the issue at a Western Cape CWIU Branch Executive Committee (BEC) meeting attended by about 50 shop stewards. Not only did the leaders refuse to answer the workers' questions, they unilaterally declared the meeting over and walked out, in breach of the CWIU constitution. But the workers had the presence of mind to continue the meeting. They voted for a motion by Agulhas that by abandoning the meeting, the leaders had forfeited their positions as leaders of the Branch, and that a new interim leadership should be elected.

The ousted leaders maintained that they still held their positions. They launched a factory-to-factory campaign against the new interim leadership, spreading the lie that the WIVL and others had staged a coup in order to impose their position in favor of a workers' party against the ANC. The bureaucrats even tried to whip up the racist slander that "coloureds" were trying to take over the unions.

While workers rejected the slanders, a slight majority of CWIU members voted in favor of reinstating the old Branch leadership — on the basis of supporting its position of maintaining COSATU's alliance with the ANC-SACP.

Nonetheless, there was great pressure from rank-and-file members to get answers on the firing of their organizer and the subsequent actions of the provincial leaders. So much so that at a provincial Branch Executive Meeting in November 1996, the national leadership promised to conduct an investi-



The workers of the company whom Agulhas represented as shop steward, British Petroleum (BP), immediately rallied to his defense, forming a committee for the defense of all those charged. BP workers attended the next Western Cape BEC meeting in force demanding the dropping of all the charges. They faxed a written appeal of the verdicts to the union leaders. But the leaders again showed that their aim was to attack Agulhas and not uphold union democracy: they rejected the request for the appeal on the false grounds that the period for filing appeals had expired.

Opposition to the bureaucrats' attacks continued. The Witwatersrand and North Eastern Transvaal branches nominated Agulhas to run for president at the next National Congress. BP workers attended several provincial CWIU branch meetings across the country to oppose the disciplinary inquiry's verdicts, but the local leaders refused to address the issue, referring the workers back to the national office.

In September, the BP workers decided to stop paying their membership subscriptions (dues) to the union and to direct that money to support their campaign. In the U.S., withdrawal of union dues would generally be seen as splitting the unions' ranks and always carries the danger of encouraging such a development. But in South Africa, subs withdrawal is commonly used by union members to draw attention to their grievances when all other efforts have failed. Some union constitutions even include clauses allowing such protests. The CWIU constitution allowed workers to withdraw subs for a period of six months before forfeiting their membership. Indeed only months before, 2000 CWIU members at SASOL oil refineries in the North Eastern Transvaal had withdrawn their subs for five months to protest the dismissal of their shop steward and his removal as chair of the provincial CWIU Branch.

However, without the BP workers' knowledge, the CWIU leaders had met only weeks before and secretly changed the constitution so that any withdrawal of subs would immediately result in a loss of membership. This was in flagrant breach of the union constitution, which clearly states that only national congresses can change the constitution. Nonetheless, the CWIU leadership expelled all the protesting BP workers within weeks of their withdrawal of subs.

### QUESTIONS OF THE STRUGGLE

The struggle to win the unions to revolutionary socialism is a long and hard battle. Escalating attacks by the union bureaucracy can make it tempting for militants and revolutionaries to split and form their own independent unions. However, union splits always pose the danger of dividing and disorganizing the working class. Moreover, left-wing splits isolate militant socialist workers from the majority of workers, leaving them at the mercy of the bureaucracy; that is why the bureaucrats often provoke splits, as in this case of the CWIU. So revolutionaries must make every effort to maintain the unity of the unions and place all responsibility for splits on the shoulders of the bureaucracy.

No doubt, from the beginning some workers thought of splitting from the CWIU. But through their campaign the BP workers clearly made every effort to pursue their grievances within the union, against a bureaucracy hell-bent on crushing the left no matter what the cost.

The BP workers decided to defer a decision on their future for a couple of months in order to make a final effort to regain their membership of the CWIU. They filed a court case calling for a "declaratory order": a court verdict on

whether the union leaders had violated the union's constitution. Even if the court found in the workers' favor, it would be powerless to force the CWIU to reinstate them or to punish the leaders in any way — declaratory orders are simply pronouncements on the legality of a particular action. However, the workers did hope that if they won the order they could use it to further expose the union leaders and pressure them into conceding their reinstatement.

The union leaders responded to the BP workers' filing for the declaratory order by cynically telling them that they were welcome to reapply for membership to the CWIU as individuals, so long as they dropped all their grievances. This meant that the CWIU leaders would be cleared of all wrongdoing and would be able to choose whom they readmitted and whom they didn't. Naturally, the BP workers rejected this proposed sell-out, although the CWG shamefully argued that they should accept the deal. For revolutionaries, union unity is a concrete principle that guides us in strengthening workers' struggles; for the CWG it is a moral absolute to which workers' struggles must be sacrificed if necessary.

We believe the workers' appeal to the courts was a *serious* mistake. A key principle for Marxists is the independence of the unions from the capitalist state. This principle is not only crucial for defending the unions from court attacks like that against Teamster President Ron Carey in the U.S. recently. It is also key to educating workers that the courts are part of the capitalist state which the working class must struggle against.

The declaratory order would not have given the courts any direct power to intervene in the unions, as such court cases do in the U.S. and elsewhere. But it could be used as a precedent for such intervention. Most importantly, no matter how clearly workers understand that the courts are part of the state, filing for declaratory orders and the like bolsters the illusions that the courts can to an extent render unbiased judgements in favor of the working class, and that workers should appeal to the courts over internal union matters. Revolutionaries cannot absolutely rule out that there may arise exceptional and extreme situations under which using the courts in a union struggle may be necessary, in order to survive an attack and to live to fight another day. But this was not such a situation.

Of greatest concern is the fact that the WIVL, whose insistence on working-class independence has so impressed us, advocated filing for the declaratory order and has maintained this position in discussions with us. While WIVL comrades say they would never support giving the courts any power to directly intervene in the unions, we think their lack of clarity on this crucial question is a real weakness which could lead them to make more serious errors in the future.

### NEW UNION FORMED: OCGAWU

After months of attempting to pressure the CWIU leaders to concede to their demands, the BP workers decided that they had to organize themselves into a new union. Knowing that they would have to organize broader numbers of workers if they were to be able to build a strong union, they decided the union would be a general union: the Oil, Chemical, General and Allied Workers Union (OCGAWU).

The ejection of the BP workers by the union leaders was a defeat for the working class and a victory for the union bureaucracy. However, the formation of OCGAWU is an achievement that has limited the effects of the split. OCGAWU has the potential to become a powerful force in

the class struggle and an example to workers throughout South Africa and internationally. Indeed, given the conservative policies and overall passivity of the COSATU bureaucracy, OCGAWU has already grown to include several thousand members. Moreover, workers in the new independent unions should consider merging into one united independent union.

One crucial question facing OCGAWU will be how it relates to COSATU, the most powerful union federation in the country. OCGAWU cannot afford to set itself in competition with COSATU but should rather set an example for workers in the COSATU unions to follow. We hope that OCGAWU will adopt policies favoring independence from the ANC-SACP and support for an independent workers' party, and will apply to affiliate to COSATU. OCGAWU will be able to influence COSATU workers by participating in its Congresses and by looking for every opportunity to fight alongside them in coordinated campaigns and in COSATU's mass actions.

The key to turning the struggle in COSATU around is the building of new revolutionary party leaderships among the workers in COSATU and elsewhere. This struggle will face the same attacks as the CWIU workers; but with the growing rejection of the ANC-SACP, such struggles will find ever broader support. OCGAWU can be contacted at: P.O. Box 255, Woodstock, Cape Town 7915, South Africa. ●

## LRP Speech at Mayday Rally

*The following speech was delivered by an LRP comrade at OCGAWU's Mayday rally in Cape Town.*

Comrades,

The League for the Revolutionary Party of the United States, as well as its supporters in Australia and Germany, send their greetings to your Mayday rally. We congratulate you on the formation of your new union, and wish you victory in all your struggles.

Comrades, we workers in the United States, like workers everywhere, face the same problem you have: union leaders that are happier holding hands with the bosses than struggling against them, union leaders who go so far as to sabotage the efforts of militant workers to fight the bosses. We hope your struggle, beginning in Chemical, and now in building OCGAWU, will be an example to all workers on how to take forward the struggle.

This points to a special significance in celebrating Mayday. Workers have been celebrating Mayday for well over one hundred years — and yet still we are fighting the bosses just to put bread on the table. And I am in a good position to address this question, since I come from America: the place where struggles first inspired Mayday.

On the 1st of May, 1886, almost half a million workers went on strike for the 8 hour day in the United States. When 40,000 workers marched in Chicago they were attacked by the police and six of the strikers were killed. More attacks on the strikers followed, including the execution of some of the strike leaders. When workers in Europe heard about this, they decided that the 1st of May should be marked as International Workers Day, to commemorate all those workers who have fought and died in the struggle against capitalism.

Since then the United States ruling class has become the biggest imperialist power in the world, exploiting workers everywhere. And while the media tells us that workers in

America are happy and well-off, the truth is that we are working longer than we have in decades, and we are making less. Poverty and homelessness are on the rise. And unlike the image of democracy presented by the media, the American government and ruling class is viscerously racist, discriminating against and attacking Black people and immigrants in particular. But with all these things to fight against, today in America not many workers even know of Mayday, and the class struggle is at a very low level. Many of the traditions of working class struggle have been lost, and the unions are not responding to the bosses' attacks with mass struggle. Why is this?

It is because with their super-profits, the American capitalists have been able to buy-off the union leaders and a whole privileged layer of the working class to support it while it exploits the whole working class, and super-exploits Black people and immigrants in particular, as well as workers all over the world.

This has led to a very bad period in the class struggle in the U.S. over the last 20 years, with fewer and fewer strikes and unions which get weaker every year. And the bosses have been able to get away with many attacks, not just attacking wages and working conditions but privatizing and cutting social services as well.

But there have been signs that the working class is preparing a fightback. A year ago a strike by workers at the United Parcel Service, the country's biggest private mail carrier, defeated a bosses' attack. This was the first major strike we won in many years, and while it was only a small victory, it scared the bosses. So now, through the courts, the government has attacked the union involved, effectively kicking its leader out of the union on charges of corruption: the same government that has used and protected the corrupt union officials for years as they worked with the bosses to sabotage our struggles!

And not only the bosses were scared by the strike of the UPS workers. This one strike scared the union leaders too! Because when the workers are strong, the union leaders fear they cannot control us and do their deals with the bosses. So they have been holding us back even more since the strike.

Today there are some small strikes and struggles going on, and even bigger ones are going to happen in the future. But if we are to succeed, we will have to fight to take control of our unions, kick out the pro-capitalist union leaders and put in their place worker leaders who will not sell-out the struggle. The only leaders who can be trusted not to compromise with the capitalists are the ones dedicated to overthrowing the capitalists: revolutionary socialists.

And we need to build such a leadership to lead all our struggles, in the unions and in the communities. We need to build a revolutionary socialist party.

But the history of the struggle in America shows that for too long we have looked to others to lead our struggles for us, only to find that they betray us. We must say: the leaders we have been looking for are ourselves! We can educate ourselves to lead the struggle. We can build that new leadership!

These are the lessons we have learned from our experience in the struggle, and from the history of the working class's struggles internationally.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to address your rally. Good luck in your future struggles.

*Viva OCGAWU, Viva!*

*Viva Internationalism, Viva!*

*Viva Socialism, Viva!*



# Imperialists, Serbia Out of Kosovo!

by Jeff Covington

Imperialist intervention in the Balkans escalated this spring and summer. As the "Yugoslav" Serbian government widened its assault on civilians in Kosovo, American diplomats, tried to end the war on imperialist terms. The U.S. threatened to resume the economic sanctions against Serbia that originated during the Bosnian war; NATO produced a one-day air-power show over Albania and Macedonia; and the great powers debated sending NATO "peacekeepers" to replace the Serbian army in Kosovo.

The fighting in Kosovo began in March, when the armed forces of the Serbian regime killed 50 Albanians and drove the Albanian population out of dozens of villages. Ethnic Albanians are 90 percent of the Kosovar population, but in 1989 Serbia's nationalist president Slobodan Milosevic revoked the autonomous status of the province, taking away language, cultural, social and political rights. Milosevic whipped up Serb chauvinism against the Albanians, and proceeded to use it to demonize all non-Serbs in what was then Yugoslavia, derailing a united working-class fightback against austerity attacks by the ruling class and the imperialist IMF.

Kosovars have been fighting Milosevic ever since, and the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) first emerged in 1996 to fight for independence and against Serbian oppression. Last year's unrest in Albania gave the Kosovars access to quantities of modern weapons from over the border.

The official pretext for Serbia's latest crackdown was the KLA's attacks on the Serbian police and military. As a high-ranking Serbian police officer said:

**Whenever we tried to enter the village, they shot at us. We had to wipe them out, just like any police in the world would do. (Chicago Sun-Times, March 9.)**

By mid-June several hundred Kosovars had been killed and tens of thousands forced to flee, largely by heavy artillery assaults on villages near the Albanian border, aimed at depopulating the area to block aid from abroad. International protests against the Serbian attacks have spread; in Belgrade itself parents of Serb soldiers have demanded the recall of troops from Kosovo; and the parliament of Montenegro, Serbia's sole remaining partner in rump-Yugoslavia, voted to withdraw its draftees from the Yugoslav army in Kosovo.

## SELF-DETERMINATION FOR KOSOVO!

As communists, we do not support the political programs of nationalists of any kind, Serbian or Albanian, since they call for a reformed capitalism in which workers are primarily exploited by bosses of their own nation. But we defend the Kosovars against national oppression and therefore support their military struggle to oust the oppressors.

This means defending the Kosovars' right to self-determination, the right to choose their own national status. In this case it is abundantly clear that their choice is independence from Serbia. We do not automatically advocate independence for an oppressed national minority, but in this case the repression is so severe that we not only defend their right to choose independence, we advocate it as the only possible choice as well.



*Protest by hundreds of parents of Serbian soldiers sent to Kosovo in June. Rally demanded, "Bring back our sons from Kosovo."*

Working people should have no illusions in the future of an independent Kosovo. Nationalism offers no way out of economic backwardness and isolation. Petty-bourgeois nationalist leaders have already proved their capacity to betray the working class's interests in the rest of ex-Yugoslavia. A proletarian revolutionary strategy is needed throughout the region. The only real solution to national oppression is the taking of state power by the working class, creating a workers' state as part of a Balkan socialist federation.

The fact that KLA forces have attacked Serbian civilians in Kosovo, with the aim of driving Serbs out of the province, exposes the counterrevolutionary nature of bourgeois nationalism. Proletarian fighters would guarantee full rights to the Serbian Kosovars in an independent Kosovo and would prevent attacks against non-combatant Serbs.

## THE ROLE OF IMPERIALISM

The imperialist nations, mainly the U.S., have made a lot of noise about Serbia's actions in Kosovo, including their military display in mid-June. As in Bosnia, NATO has intervened nominally on the side of the oppressed — in order to leave power in the hands of the oppressors. We oppose all the imperialist interventions whatever side they pretend to be on. Sanctions hurt the working people of Serbia, not Milosevic or the ruling capitalists he represents; a NATO occupation will prevent, not permit, self-determination for the Kosovars; and every new military act creates a precedent for

the imperialists to assert their "right" to intervene wherever they can get away with it.

Despite the imperialists' expressions of sympathy for the beleaguered Kosovars, they have all along firmly opposed independence for Kosovo, calling only for a return to some sort of autonomy as part of Serbia-ruled Yugoslavia. Every comment on the subject by U.S. and other imperialist spokesmen makes this clear, for example, NATO's official statement on Kosovo, issued on May 28:

**We support a political solution which provides an enhanced status for Kosovo [and] preserves the territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia . . . .**

Indeed, in late May, the "moderate," pro-Western Kosovar leaders visited Washington so that the U.S. could present them as the viable alternative to the KLA and legitimize the pacifist solution. British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook repeated imperialism's preference, denouncing the KLA for offering the Kosovars "not liberty but a prolonging of their suffering." (*London Financial Times*, June 13.)

The imperialists' attitude confirms the LRP's analysis of the struggles in the former Yugoslavia. We have consistently argued that the goal of imperialism has been to set up a balance of power in the region between two pro-imperialist oppressors: Milosevic's Serbia and Franjo Tudjman's Croatia. Thus when Bosnia seceded from Yugoslavia under conditions similar to Kosovo's, imperialism nominally supported Bosnia in order to maintain the balance. Secession facilitated a convenient division of the spoils later on: pro-Croatian forces now control much of western Bosnia and pro-Serbian forces control much of eastern Bosnia.

Kosovo lies completely in the Serbian sphere of interest. Moreover, it is in a region replete with ethnic and national tensions: Albanians in Macedonia, Macedonians versus Greece, conflicts within Albania. So secession and independence could ignite further national struggles and undermine the fragile stability the imperialists want, to better exploit the region. Hence the U.S. government's opposition, while the European powers are hostile to the flow of refugees the war in Kosovo threatens to send across their borders.

Washington has already declared its intention to use the U.S.-led United Nations "peacekeeping force" in Macedonia to keep Macedonian and Albanian supporters of Kosovo from threatening Milosevic's regional hegemony. With Serbia trying to cleanse the Albanian border region, the KLA will have to try crossing into Kosovo from Macedonia. As the *New York Times* reported on June 12, the U.N.'s Macedonian mission "may have to be beefed up to prevent Macedonia from becoming a staging area for the rebels." As in Bosnia, imperialism's "even-handed" intervention against both sides aims to stymie the struggle of the victims of oppression.

Why do Milosevic & Co. refuse any compromise over Kosovo, despite imperialism's demands? One reason would be the immensely profitable Treпча mining complex, which the *New York Times* called "the most valuable piece of real estate in the Balkans" because of its rich veins of lead, zinc, cadmium, gold and silver. The mine's director told the *Times*:

**The war in Kosovo is about the mines, nothing else. This is Serbia's Kuwait — the heart of Kosovo. (July 8.)**

#### SERBIA THE VICTIM?

Some on the left argue that imperialism's real aim is to break up Yugoslavia; they therefore opposed Bosnian independence. (See "Bosnia and Social-Imperialism," *PR* 47.) Now they say the same about Kosovo, joining the imperialists

in their desire to keep what is left of Yugoslavia together under Serbian rule.

One such organization is the Workers World Party (WWP). The April 9 *Workers World* reports speeches made at a pro-Serbian broadcast on Pacifica radio in New York. The WWP endorsed the comments of Barry Lituchy:

**Clearly it is part of the strategy of the Western powers to break Kosovo away from Yugoslavia, as they have done with other parts of Yugoslavia. . . . What they are really talking about is creating another economically and politically non-viable mini-state out of Kosovo.**

By attributing to the Western powers the opposite of their actual line, Lituchy tries to take an anti-imperialist pose. In fact, his arguments against independence are the same as those of the imperialists themselves!

**The antagonisms between the peoples in Kosovo have been largely manipulated from outside. Kosovo enjoyed autonomy from 1945 to 1989 as part of the socialist federation. And I think that it is the desire of the many peoples in Yugoslavia — of the many non-Albanians, the Serbs, Gypsies, Jews and other minorities that constitute Yugoslavia today — that the Albanians should have full autonomy restored.**

It may well be that many Yugoslavs support Kosovo's autonomous rights — such internationalist sentiments are a boost to the revolutionary working-class strategy. But their government does not support autonomy, and it's the government that controls the military and police exterminators. By hiding the Serbian government's murderous policy behind the desires of "peoples," and by endorsing autonomy as against independence, WWP offers backhanded support to Milosevic's bloody trampling on *both* autonomy and independence.

## THE LIFE AND DEATH OF STALINISM

A Resurrection of Marxist Theory  
by Walter Daum

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

A thoughtful, and indeed in many ways, an ideologically exciting book. Whether you accept its main thesis or not, and . . . this reviewer does not, it will still challenge your presuppositions and force you to rethink your ideas from top to bottom in the most rigorous way. And unlike most would-be Marxist texts these days, it is written in intelligible English, which is no small gain as well. *Al Richardson, Revolutionary History*

\$15 from Socialist Voice Publishing Co.,  
P.O. Box 3573, New York, NY 10008-3573.



On the same program, the WWP's Gary Wilson argued: **The Serbs are not oppressors. The Serbs are historically an oppressed people. They see the old oppressors, the old colonizers coming back. . . . The Serbian people are oppressed people. The Albanian people are oppressed people. They are both oppressed peoples and they have to work out their problems between themselves without outside interference.**

Justifying their line by calling the Serbs a "historically oppressed people" is a canard. Jews in Europe were historically oppressed, but that doesn't justify Israel's racist oppression of the Palestinians. The Boers were dominated by British imperialism, but that doesn't justify their racist domination of South Africa's black majority. Genuine communists oppose all oppression in the here and now, regardless of the oppressors' history.

Moreover, by citing the Serbs' alleged fear of the "old oppressors . . . coming back," *Workers World* echoes the anti-Albanian racism of Milosevic. Serbia was for centuries ruled by the Ottoman Turks, who were Muslims, as are the Kosovars today. Kosovo was the site of Serbia's decisive defeat by Turkish forces in the 14th century. Thus Milosevic and other Greater Serbian nationalists like to paint the Kosovars as the reincarnation of heathen Turkish oppressors. By defending Serbs against their "old colonizers," *Workers World* disguises nationalist racism as anti-imperialism.

#### THE KOSOVAR LEADERSHIP

There is a clear divide within the forces fighting for Kosovo's independence. The "official" opposition, led by the intellectual Ibrahim Rugova, preaches nonviolent resistance and pacifist protest. It cravenly — and futilely — beseeches the Western imperialists to break their alliance with Milosevic and support Kosovo.

*Workers World* tries to pull a sleight-of-hand, citing these bourgeois nationalists' betrayals to claim that Kosovo's struggle itself is unsupportable. Wilson says:

**I was reminded of the movie "Wag the Dog" when I heard the news reports. There were these demonstrations in Kosovo and the speakers were talking in English, the signs were in English and the chants were in English. It was obviously staged for the U.S. media.**

In fact it was even worse than this: the signs and chants of Rugova's supporters promoted pro-imperialist slogans like "NATO Where Are You?" These staged demonstrations by imperialist agents do not necessarily represent public opinion, although it would be easy to see why Kosovars might hope that a strong outside force would rescue them from the government's vicious attacks on civilians. In any case, *Workers World's* complaints are hypocritical, since the WWP long supported not just the Palestinian and South African liberation struggles — but in particular the bourgeois nationalist leaderships of Yasser Arafat and Nelson Mandela, who regularly appealed for aid from the U.S.

#### THE KOSOVO LIBERATION ARMY

*Workers World* constantly claims that the Kosovo Liberation Army is a CIA-controlled operation. Here is the only "evidence" they have produced to back up this accusation: **New York Times Balkans Bureau Chief Chris Hedges has "gone on patrol" with the KLA. The New York Times does not have and has never had a policy of assigning its bureau chiefs to travel with anti-imperialist liberation**

**fighters anywhere. Only U.S.-backed — often CIA-created — armies get this kind of propagandist boost. (*Workers World*, March 19.)**

And it's not even true. A *Times* reporter visited Fidel Castro's guerrillas in the Cuban jungle in 1958, and reported favorably on them. Castro indeed had some support in the U.S. ruling class, since Cuban dictator Batista's rule was becoming increasingly unviable. But Castro was hardly "U.S.-backed" or "CIA-created." His struggle had popular support — as does the KLA today.

We can't rule out that the CIA has a hand in funneling money to the KLA. But that still would not mean the guerrillas are run by the U.S. Just days before Serbia's murderous crackdown on Kosovo, a U.S. spokesman labeled the KLA "terrorist" — not the State Department's normal description of a friendly group. The WWP echoes the U.S.'s "terrorism" charge. And since the U.S. opposes the KLA's program of independence, while the WWP backs the U.S.'s program of autonomy, just who is in who's camp?

In a May 7 article, *Workers World* goes on to state that the KLA is composed of "foreign mercenaries" who are "invading Yugoslavia." Of course, it is true that many Albanians in neighboring Macedonia and Albania strongly support the KLA's cause, and are coming to its aid with money, weapons and manpower. Kosovar youth living elsewhere in Europe are joining the KLA. But that is no problem for internationalists if the Kosovars' cause is just. No communist opposed the International Brigades that came to fight Franco in the Spanish Civil War on the grounds that they were "foreign mercenaries invading Spain." The WWP's logic only works if Kosovars have no national rights in Kosovo — including the right to autonomy that the WWP purportedly supports.

#### SERBIA SOCIALIST?

The truth behind the WWP's line is that it imagines that Serbia, as opposed to all the other countries descending from the Yugoslav break-up, is "socialist." The WWP likewise defended the Soviet Army's occupation of Hungary and its suppression of workers' councils in 1956, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, the Polish Stalinists' martial law outlawing the workers' movement Solidarnosc in 1981, and the Chinese rulers' bloody crackdown on workers and students in Beijing in 1989. For WWP, "socialism" is embodied in Stalinist rule, not the working class. No wonder they have to twist and turn to justify their support for Serbia today.

This "socialist" analysis is destroyed by the fact that Milosevic has been the main force in Yugoslavia and Serbia for privatization of the means of production. He and the bourgeois clique backing him plan to sell the 75 largest firms in Serbia, including Kosovo. According to Rugova, "the Serbian regime has put on sale the major economic facilities of Kosovo, like Trepca, the Electric Company, Feronikl, etc., which is just a form of economic pressure on Kosovo and its citizens." (*Green Left Weekly* [Australia], June 24.)

Rugova appeals to the United Nations to halt the sell-off, showing further illusions in imperialism's good intentions. But *Workers World* says not a word about this or other evidence of Serbia's exploitation of Kosovo. It stands squarely on the side of the bourgeois nationalist exploiters, as well as for the imperialist plans for Kosovo. A more contemptible pretender to communism is hard to imagine. ●

**Self-Determination for Kosovo!**

**NATO Out of the Balkans!**

# On Revolutionary Isolation

by Sy Landy

In the course of a long correspondence, a reader of *Proletarian Revolution* asked:

If your party's line is the best summing up of the class struggles of the 20th century, and if there are many, many serious revolutionaries around the world (as there are), why has the LRP attracted relatively little attention as far as I can tell?

And he went on:

Why is its interpretation of the 20th century not constructed in other parts of the world (e.g., Brazil or Finland or India or Palestine or Zaire, etc.) independently of knowledge of the LRP in the U.S.? I know this may be tough question, but that is what I wonder.

We are often asked these questions in varying ways, and they also reflect problems that we have discussed many times ourselves. After all, we can hardly be satisfied with our current size and limited situation. The questions thus deserve a thorough response. Unfortunately, big questions can be asked well in a few words but are not answered so simply. We will address the first question — "Why hasn't the LRP attracted more attention?" — at some length now, but we have to leave the second for a subsequent issue.

To begin, we note that the writer refers to many serious revolutionaries around the world. We cannot tell if he is thinking of established groups that claim to be revolutionary. Or does he mean individuals, in or out of groups, whom he feels are genuinely serious revolutionaries? There is a huge difference between the two categories.

This difference points to part of the problem. The overwhelming majority of groups that claim to be revolutionary Marxist are indeed "serious" — but they are centrist and not revolutionary. "Centrist" means that they propagate revolutionary rhetoric as a screen for profoundly reformist deeds. This revolutionary veneer does attract good cadres, and that's the rub. The centrist groups, including the false claimants to the mantle of Trotskyism, are responsible for disorienting crucial sectors of the working class.

It was no accident that Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky waged fierce polemical wars on such groups in their day. The LRP has polemicized against each of the major international tendencies, and smaller groups as well, in our attempt to expose their political deceit. We can prove, despite specific differences among them, that what characterizes all these groups is their rejection of Marxism's insistence that only the proletariat can make the socialist revolution. Even those which still identify with the working class (others openly embraced peasant-based guerrillaism or other "socialist" instruments) do not conceive of the proletariat as the revolutionary agency.

## CLIMATE OF CYNICISM

The centrists today begin with far greater resources than we have, adding to the difficulty of exposing them. Yet it is not just a question of how far we can compete with those larger outfits. Even more fundamental is the overall political climate in which we have operated throughout our existence. Decisive material factors have spawned a dominating mood of cynicism about the revolutionary potential of our class. It

will take a major shift in the political scene, not words alone, to expose the anti-working-class cynicism that lies at the heart of all the centrist theories. The massive acts of the proletariat itself will make our class's capacity clear once again, to greater numbers of advanced workers.

We are not spontaneists. Class explosions in themselves do not automatically lead to workers' revolution. The development and intervention of the revolutionary party is critical for revolutionary success. But a resurgence of class struggle internationally does create a political environment in which authentic Marxism is nourished. The ideas and program that we have been putting forward will then begin to make more sense. The struggles that have been breaking out — Indonesia, Australia and Puerto Rico are just the latest examples — already tend to re-assert the central role of the working class and give us much reason for optimism on that score.

The cynical political climate is not just a development of the 1970's and '80's. In fact, the reason why centrism has dominated the left landscape for so long can't be understood without grasping what has happened to the revolutionary class struggle in this century as a whole. It is no accident that our book *The Life and Death of Stalinism* was subtitled *The Resurrection of Marxist Theory*. Stalinism not only usurped the leadership of the international working class; it distorted the very meaning of what Marxism was about. Instead of representing the science of proletarian liberation, this pseudo-Marxism became an ideological cover for class collaboration and the tailing of various pro-capitalist currents.

To come to grips with the theoretical degeneration of "Marxism," we have to understand the character of times past as well as those we ourselves have lived through.

## STALINISM'S COUNTERREVOLUTIONARY ROLE

As Bolshevik Leninists, we have always pointed out that this is the epoch not only of revolution and the transition to socialism; it is also the imperialist epoch of decay which is punctuated by great depressions, world wars and counter-revolution. Marxists have never thought that proletarian revolutions would proceed in a linear fashion without having to surpass tremendous defeats and obstacles. But the obstacles have been greater than what could have been foreseen.

In October 1917, Marxism received its greatest confirmation: the proletarian seizure of power in Russia. The workers' revolution was led by Lenin's Bolshevik Party, which was dedicated to the belief that the Russian October would spark revolutions around the world.

The subsequent quarantining of the Russian workers' state was at first the consequence of the betrayal of proletarian upheavals by the reformists and centrists in the European Social Democratic parties. Then, as the isolated Soviet Union turned inward and degenerated, the nationalist Stalinist bureaucracy itself became more and more responsible for the defeat of workers' revolutions. Stalin and his minions in the degenerating Communist Parties abroad betrayed the Chinese revolution of 1925-7, the German workers in the early 1930's and the Spanish Revolution in the late 1930's. Fascism was the consequence. Then, in what Trotsky termed a "preventive civil war," the Great Purges in Russia killed millions of workers and communists, destroyed and re-



made the state apparatus and severed the last ties to the October revolution and the Bolsheviks who had spearheaded it. Thus the counterrevolution triumphed.

Trotsky saw Stalinism as a counterrevolutionary force, but did not see that the counterrevolution had been completed and thus that capitalism had been restored in the USSR. Rather, he held to the optimistic belief that the end of the Second World War, like the First, would provoke a string of proletarian upheavals that would banish Stalinism from the pages of history. Because Trotsky was assassinated, he did not get to review his thesis in the light of future occurrences. And, indeed, he was right that proletarian revolts did erupt in Europe, Asia and Africa. But they were decapitated and then crushed or contained within capitalist limits. This disaster was largely the work of occupying Soviet armies or betrayals by the Communist Parties.

Trotsky had gravely underestimated the strength of the CP's and the USSR. No longer a degenerating workers' state, Russia had congealed its power as a statified capitalist class society. Resting on new foundations, the Stalinists were often able to aid bourgeois forces in other countries in restoring their power at the expense of the proletariat. And wherever the traditional bourgeoisie was too weak to maintain its grip, the Stalinists created new statified capitalist regimes. The succession of defeats of the world working class allowed beleaguered imperialism to restore itself and usher in the huge post-war prosperity bubble.

#### NEW MIDDLE LAYERS AND THE LEFT

Where post-war prosperity grew, struggles produced reforms and concessions; the ranks of the new middle classes and the labor aristocracy expanded as never before. And given their social position, these layers extended their illusions in capitalism. The Fourth International (FI), especially in the U.S., already had a membership weighted toward the more privileged layers of the working class. A labor-aristocratic reformist world view infected the FI's leaders and their programs in country after country.

This process of class transformation was reflected in theory as well as practice. Trotsky had insisted that Stalinism and social democracy were counterrevolutionary in their essence. The FI, however, came to regard Stalinism and its new-found ability to create "deformed workers' states" as a "blunt instrument" for revolution. Social democracy and its ability to achieve "structural reforms" was also seen as progressive, even if too moderate and slow. Thus, as a whole, reformism was no longer counterrevolutionary; it was seen as a step in the direction of revolution. In the early 1950's, the FI supported its powerful Bolivian section in subordinating itself to bourgeois nationalism during that country's revolution — and no section of the FI denounced the betrayal. That signified that quantity had turned into quality. What passed for "the world proletarian revolutionary movement" had decisively succumbed to centrism. (See our pamphlet, *Bolivia: the Revolution the "Fourth International" Betrayed*.)

In general, the various left groups (including Trotsky's epigones) contending for working-class loyalty more and more reflected the views of the vast new middle-class bureaucratic intelligentsia and the greatly expanded labor aristocracy. The destruction of the post-war proletarian revolts deepened the already existing cynicism.

With the outbreak of the Cold War, some renounced Moscow and attributed "Marxism's" failures to the proletariat's incapacity to hold power, instead embracing Western

imperialism and social democracy. Others continued to defend the East, apologizing for Stalinism's crimes and rationalizing its destruction of working-class consciousness. In the minds of many "revolutionary" groups around the world, the proletariat became at best a mass battering ram to be manipulated for its own good. The concept of vanguard working-class leadership, which for Lenin and Trotsky was essentially composed of workers who were most advanced in class consciousness, was replaced — in the minds of the elitists — by themselves.

#### CRISIS RESURFACES

But by the late 1960's and early 1970's, the world saw the collapse of what had seemed like eternal capitalist prosperity. The working class replied with general strikes. Even the U.S. was rocked by the ghetto revolts and a crescendo of wildcat strikes. The proletarian upsurge transcended and in large part discarded the traditional Social Democratic and Communist misleaderships. Yet the far left was already far too compromised to offer a real alternative, a leadership which would lead a challenge to capitalist state power. On a grand scale, opportunities were missed and struggles betrayed.

With the return of capitalism's chronic economic crisis to the surface, the puffed-up middle strata around the world began to erode by the late 60's. Although afterglow illusions in capitalist democracy and a return to prosperity have doggedly persisted, the proletarian upheavals of the late '60's and early '70's did create new ruptures and some re-examination in the ranks of centrism — and did spur the restoration of authentic Marxism. Our political tendency was born in the wake of the massive French general strike and the Black uprisings in the U.S. This modest re-beginning was embodied in the political current that became the LRP-U.S., later joined with a small number of co-thinkers abroad. (See our pamphlet, *Twenty Years of the LRP*.)

With a growing understanding of the crucial events that had shaped our history and the development of the overall class struggle, we began to resurrect genuinely proletarian Marxist theory. We energetically communicated our views internationally and in the U.S. But we were up against a strong tide.

During the Cold War, most left groups based their world outlook on the notion that the Stalinist bloc nations were economically powerful and, for better or worse, more viable than traditional capitalism. We argued that although it was stronger than Trotsky thought, the economy of Stalinist Russia (and the rest of the bloc) was weak and devolving toward more traditional capitalist forms. We predicted two decades ago that Russia, China *et al* would move toward privatization and a market-dominated economy, even though the basic centralizing drives of capitalism in this epoch would prevent total privatization.

Likewise, when practically everyone else in the world saw a deepening conflict between Stalinist Russia and the U.S., we predicted the opposite. We said that if social revolution didn't prevent it, the weakening of the East would mean that the Cold War would collapse; the danger of a third world war would arise out of conflicts among the major imperialist rivals: the U.S., Japan and Germany. At the time, centrist groups laughed at us for saying such wild things.

As our book on Stalinism went to press, the anarchic patchwork economy of the Stalinist bloc collapsed — an initial and unmistakable consequence of the deepening crisis of world capitalism. Wasteful, inefficient, utterly unplanned and

heavily indebted to Western banks, the Stalinist states opened themselves further to Western imperialism. Gorbachev and other Stalinist rulers saw the handwriting on the wall with the rising tide of proletarian revolt, signaled by the enormous struggles in Poland in 1980-81.

#### AGAINST THE CURRENT

But despite events that proved the correctness of our views, the general political climate has remained hostile. To sum up our answer to why this is so, we can do no better than cite Trotsky's response to a similar question in 1939:

**The question is why we are not progressing in correspondence with the value of our conceptions . . . Yes, it is a fact, which is an expression of the general decay of the workers' movements in the last fifteen years. It is the more general cause. When the revolutionary movement in general is declining, when one defeat follows another, when fascism is spreading over the world, when the official "Marxism" [Stalinism] is the most powerful organization of deception of the workers, and so on, it is an inevitable situation that the revolutionary elements must work against the general historic current, even if our ideas, our explanations, are as exact and wise as one can demand. ("Fighting Against the Stream," in *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1938-39*.)**

In our case, the proletarian struggles that brought down the Stalinist satiated capitalist system confirmed our views and predictions. But because the anti-Stalinist revolutions were derailed, the resulting regimes represented no victory for the working class but an opening for Western imperialism and its allies. As well, the end of prosperity inevitably led to the collapse of the mirage of genuine national independence in much of the formerly colonial world. And to the masses in the imperialist countries, it meant the beginning of a rollback of all past gains. Throughout the world, the imperialist bourgeoisie went on the offensive, determined to deepen its exploitation of the masses and make them pay for the profound crisis of the system. As it became clearer that the still enormously powerful proletariat — in the absence of a strong, tried and tested communist vanguard — could not yet embark on a course of successful revolutionary action, the bourgeois offensive has picked up greater steam.

A net result of these defeats has been our stunted growth and isolation. The illusion that the working class is impotent to reverse the tide of defeats has remained strong. Consequently, the political currents that represent such cynicism have been able to continue parading as Marxist, even though the defeats and their inability to put forward a credible world view has weakened them.

In the U.S., where our League has tirelessly intervened in important fights in unions and in the overall class struggle for two decades, our growth in numbers has also been modest. In this regard Trotsky added:

**The masses are not educated by prognostic theoretical conception, but by general experiences of their lives. It is the most general explanation — the whole situation is against us. There must be a turn in the class realization, in the sentiments, in the feelings of the masses; a turn which will give us the opportunity for a large political success.**

Indeed, although workers know us and respect our comrades as honest and dedicated fighters for our class as well as representatives of a definite revolutionary program and perspective, we cannot win many, even among the relatively advanced, until the tide of pessimism and cynicism turns.

Our answer to the dilemma we face today, stressing the tide of history, the defeats and defeatism, is fundamentally the same answer that Trotsky gave in the late 1930's. But it is also true that the defeats Trotsky based his analysis on had not yet reached their counterrevolutionary depths. Our times have been a product of even further disasters.

We have made mistakes, of course, but the explanation for our relative isolation lies with the general historic tide. To view the problem in any other way, fundamentally, is not only wrong, it leads to substituting petty organizational maneuvers and gimmicks for getting rich quick in place of tenaciously fighting for the revolutionary program.

Trotsky referred frequently to the lessons of the defeat of the 1905 revolution in Russia. For example, from the same document cited before:

**Everybody invented slogans and methods to win the masses and nobody won them — they were desperate. In this time the only thing we could do was to educate the cadres, and they were melting away. There was a series of splits to the right or to the left or to syndicalism and so on. Lenin remained with a small group, a sect, in Paris, but with confidence that there would be new possibilities of a rise. It came in 1913. We had a new tide.**

What has kept us going in spite of limited gains has been confidence in our long-range perspective. Today, once again, the tide is definitely beginning to turn. Fresh forces are arising in important areas of the world.

#### INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

In 1995 the first COFI conference adopted an International Perspectives document that characterized the fall of Stalinism as laying the basis for a new period in the class struggle. We understood that for the moment we were in a highly temporary conjuncture, an interregnum between periods, in which the bourgeoisie had launched a hesitant offensive against the working class internationally. But this conjuncture could only be the prelude to an inevitable opening of a new era of revolutionary struggles. In this document we identified areas of extreme "combined and uneven development" that we felt were most likely to witness the first outbreaks of revolutionary struggle. In this we followed Trotsky, who in his theory of permanent revolution had crystallized the importance of uneven and combined development — not just in the specific situation of pre-revolutionary Russia but (as the theory developed over time) as a worldwide phenomenon.

When backward and advanced conditions of significant force collide in this epoch, class eruptions and social explosions are inevitable. The reactionary conditions which buttress oppression and inhibit the development of bourgeois democracy — let alone proletarian revolution — are no longer simply the product of vestigial pre-capitalist social relations. The chief barriers are those imposed by imperialism. Thus even the winning or maintenance of democratic gains today is contingent upon socialist revolution.

In 1917, the Russian empire was the most dramatic example of uneven and combined development. Today, we have identified the "weakest links" of the imperialist system as areas where the proletariat not only has objective power but where the fabric of world capitalism is the most strained, where the most explosive questions of exploitation and oppression intersect. In our document we pointed to the former Stalinist bloc nations, the "Asian Tigers" (which then were being touted as powerhouses of development), similar



countries in Latin America, and South Africa. We saw South Africa as the country most likely to be the initial launching pad for the coming round of socialist revolutions.

### SOUTH AFRICA RIPE FOR REVOLUTION

There is no doubt that South Africa will be ripe for socialist revolution in the coming years. There, the imperialist bourgeoisie has been trying to mount a successful offensive against the notoriously militant working class. Capitalism, no longer able to maintain apartheid, saved itself by allowing its state to erect an African facade. It appropriated the former leadership of the mass opposition, Mandela's African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP), to first divert and then to try to stifle the workers.

However, the South African proletariat has a very real understanding of its enormous power and feels itself to be undefeated, unlike workers in many other nations. In South Africa the overwhelming majority of workers believe in socialism and know that it won't be accomplished without getting rid of the capitalist class. After its victory over apartheid the proletariat still has great expectations. The Mandela regime has promised much but is obviously not able to deliver.

While large sections of the working class still cling to hopes in Mandela and the regime, it would be wrong to ignore the sharp contradictions of the society, which have already produced significant disaffection. This is a country with an enormous blue-collar working class and a comparatively small labor aristocracy among African workers. Added to the mix is the fact that the trade union bureaucracy is of recent origin and paper-thin, compared to European, American or Japanese standards. Nor is there an entrenched social democracy. However, the SACP is an important reformist force, a party deeply tied to its participation in the ANC government. At the same time, it leads the COSATU trade union bureaucracy. But, given the class polarization, it is heavily factionalized with a restive working-class base.

The chances for a proletarian revolutionary challenge to state power in a few years time are excellent. The decisive question, of course, is whether the proletariat can build its revolutionary party in time. A working-class seizure of power in South Africa will have an electric impact on the international proletariat and oppressed peoples everywhere. Authentic communism would be restored to its rightful place as the champion of the superexploited.

As regular readers of *Proletarian Revolution* know, we have been engaging in discussions with the Workers International Vanguard League (WIVL) of South Africa. The WIVL has a substantial following in the working class, is rooted in a history of struggle against apartheid and is the one organization on the South African left that has consistently opposed the ANC and the SACP. It is encouraging that in the country of the clearest class struggle, we have found a revolutionary group with an outlook that parallels our own world view.

### THE TIDE TURNING

The crisis is already deepening precipitously and the tide is turning, especially in the other uneven and combined countries. We continue to receive communications from comrades in countries of the former Soviet Union, saying that they have agreed with, translated and published articles from *Proletarian Revolution* and selections from our Stalinism book.

Today, the U.S. media provides only a tiny and distorted

glimpse of the enormous struggles that are already beginning to shake the world. Reports from Russia testify to the fact that massive strikes are threatening to tear the country apart. The Indonesian masses have already toppled a seemingly impregnable dictator. South Korea and Thailand have been rocked by working-class struggles, and news of important strikes in China is trickling out. Several Latin American, African and West Indian countries are beset by workers' upsurges. And significant struggles have already broken out in imperialist countries: Denmark, France, Australia.

We would infinitely prefer to have found immediate agreement among the far left everywhere. But given the defeats suffered by the proletariat historically, that was hardly likely. In the deepening world capitalist crisis, mass organizations like the Communist Parties have crumbled and sizable centrist organizations have disintegrated. As capitalism forces more and more workers to rebel and the crisis picks up in breadth and intensity, we can expect that our views will be validated in practice and the number of authentic communists will grow apace.

All this is not intended to oversimplify the amount of struggle we face in the years ahead. Nothing comes automatically. We have to fight the class struggle on the plane of ideas and in practice. We know that our current recruitment of ones and twos in the U.S. is absolutely vital as we expand our activities here and abroad. The vanguard party will never be built unless we develop its nucleus now. However, we recognize that there are layers of sincere revolutionary-minded fighters who are or will be caught in the network of centrist organizations both here and abroad. When, as is inevitable, the class struggle explodes and workers gain consciousness by leaps and bounds, these militants will put their organizations to the test. We confidently look forward to revolutionary splits that will separate real revolutionaries from the incurable centrists.

No Marxist can conceive of an errorless path; what we need is a proven methodology and a program that reflects the actual interests of the working class. A vanguard group which has developed in miserable isolation inevitably must make its share of errors, and then some. The worst kind of isolation is the absence of mass proletarian struggle. That has been our real problem, which the world capitalist crisis is now beginning to put to an end.

We do not believe that one day we will deliver ready-made answers to all questions to some avidly waiting working class. No, isolation has taught us the difference between the elitist arrogance of cynical centrists and the genuine confidence of authentic Marxists. We believe that our method and program have helped lay the basis for the coming internationalist and interracialist proletarian revolutionary party. ●

### *I Would Like More Information About the LRP/COFI*

Name .....

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Send to: League for the Revolutionary Party  
P.O. Box 3573, New York, NY 10008-3573

# Australia: Wharfies' Struggle Betrayed

based on reports by George Patts

Triggered by a vicious union-busting attack against the "wharfies" (dock workers), Australia's waterfront has been the focus of great workers' struggles over the last six months. Not only did the wharfies fight to defend their jobs and their union, but tens of thousands workers around the country rallied to their defense, launching illegal solidarity strikes, battling police and scabs at picket lines, creating a crisis for the ruling class.

By mid-May this inspiring struggle seemed on the verge of defeating not only the attacks against the wharfies but also the anti-union policies of the Liberal Party government and shifting the overall momentum of the class struggle in the workers' favor.

However, as we go to press the struggle is on the verge of defeat. Scared by the workers' growing militancy, the union leaders demobilized the struggle by channeling it into the courts. Committed to working with the capitalists in the interests of ensuring a competitive economy, the leaders of the wharfies union, the MUA, struck a deal with the bosses in which the union will remain on the wharves in return for massive concessions. While the workers have not yet voted on the deal, it is likely that without seeing an alternative, they will accept it. The provisions of the deal include: the loss of around 30 percent of union jobs on the wharves and the outsourcing of another 15 percent to non-union labor; longer hours and speed-up; a substantial pay cut; and the withdrawal of union lawsuits against the bosses and government.

## CAPITALISTS LOOK TO LAUNCH OFFENSIVE

Seeing no alternative to the union leaders' sell-out, the wharfies accepted the deal. While the leaders succeeded in snatching defeat from the jaws of victory, the strengths and weaknesses of the struggle offer tremendous lessons for all workers fighting the capitalists' attacks.

The wharfies' struggle is the latest stage in a growing offensive by the Australian capitalists against the working class. Inspired by the election of the openly capitalist Liberal party in 1996, the bosses' attempt to smash the wharfies' Maritime Workers' Union (MUA), is a radical leap forward by the bosses in Australia. The previous 13 years of Labor Party (ALP) governments saw an escalating austerity gradually imposed on the working class. Crucial to Labor's success was the ALP union leaders' role in restraining workers from fighting back. This period saw the working class's fighting capacity significantly weakened. Now, driven by economic crisis, the capitalists have seized the moment for a new offensive.

Immediately upon their election, the Liberals began the attack, slashing the federal budget by Aus\$8 billion. Central to their strategy was whipping up racism to divide the workers; this they have done in particular by attacks on the land rights that have been won by Aborigines.

But the key to the Liberals' program was an offensive against the unions, starting with their Workplace Relations Act (WRA). Enacted in January of this year, the WRA significantly curtailed the unions' rights and ability to struggle. Compulsory collective bargaining was outlawed, replaced by individual contracts for workers. Solidarity strikes and boycotts were banned, and the courts were given the power to stop strikes they decide threaten serious harm to the economy. A related law makes it illegal for any union to plan action that may be construed as a "conspiracy to harm international trade."

## BOSSSES PREPARE WAR — UNIONS PREACH PEACE

In response to these war preparations of the bosses, the unions preached peace. When the national union federation, the ACTU, was forced by rank-and-file demands to call a mass demonstration at Parliament in 1996 to protest the Liberal government's policies, several thousand workers attended. Looking for a more militant struggle than the passive protest organized by the unions, hundreds of workers, including many Aborigines, took their protest to the very steps of parliament, fighting a pitched battle with police to get inside. Scared by this militancy, the ACTU leaders denounced the militants and backed away from further actions.

After initially promising a struggle against the new industrial laws, the leaders of the Australian Congress of Trade Unions (ACTU) relied on pathetic appeals to bosses not to use the laws. The union leaders' concern from the outset was to avoid a major confrontation with the bosses. They hoped that by committing themselves to "making Australia competitive" by sacrificing the jobs, wages and working conditions of their members, they could maintain their privileged position as the recognized brokers between capital and labor.

Although the wharfies were the bosses' first target, this pro-capitalist perspective was openly embraced by the leaders of the waterfront workers. They cooperated with the Labor government's 13-year program of "waterfront reform," which saw the



Melbourne wharfies' victory celebrations were premature, as union leaders later sold them out to bosses.





*Maritime workers confront company thugs.*

national waterfront workforce cut from 8000 workers to 3800, while wages fell and work hours lengthened. Now, with the bosses preparing to use the new industrial relations laws to attack his members, MUA leader John Coombs promised to do "whatever I can do to remove any suggestion that I cannot deliver on productivity."

The Australian bosses aimed to end the MUA's "closed shop" agreement on the docks, which means that all dock workers must be members of the MUA. Once the dock struggle had begun, the London *Financial Times* clearly explained why international capital wants to defeat the MUA. The "MUA accounts for 25 percent of all worldwide dock disputes," they complained, and has a "working-class mystique that in Britain once surrounded the miners." They demanded a swift end to the struggle "on terms that remove the MUA's closed shop and leave Australia more competitive".

#### **THE WAR BEGINS**

In contrast with the union leaders' passivity, the waterfront bosses began preparations for struggle with military rigor. The main employer hired former soldiers and cops to be trained as scabs in the Middle Eastern port of Dubai by a security company headed by two former British Special Air Service (SAS) commandos. Following this training, the scab leaders were then to train hundreds more scabs in secret camps in Australia. When this plan was exposed and the International Transport Federation threatened to boycott the port, the United Arab Emirates canceled the Australians' visas, thereby ending the scheme.

But the waterfront bosses were not deterred. On January 28, the Patrick Stevedores company locked out 170 workers at the main dock in the industrial city of Melbourne. The union leadership reacted weakly, sending the locked-out workers to other jobs on the wharves while maintaining a "peaceful assembly" in protest. The MUA's Coombs was openly defeatist, saying that "When governments attack us they inevitably win." Predictably, the union leaders' roll-over-

and-play-dead act only encouraged the bosses to attack.

What immediately became known as the "war on the waterfront" began on April 7. Patrick fired its entire unionized workforce of nearly 2000 wharfies. In a paramilitary operation, Patrick's security guards sneaked scabs into the docks and kicked out the workers in the middle of the night. While the Liberal Party pretended to not have known of Patrick's plan, they threw their support behind the company, offering a \$250 million loan to fund the firings.

But the union leaders' passivity did not fool the workers: they knew the war on the wharfies was aimed at the entire working class and had to be defeated. Not only did the wharfies immediately launch a militant struggle and set up picket lines against the scabs, but workers across the country spontaneously stopped work and joined the picket lines and protests. While the ACTU failed to even call for picket lines, solidarity action by workers only grew. In breach of the Workplace Relations Act, groups of workers went on illegal one-day strikes and joined the wharfies' pickets to keep the scabs off the docks. Union workers in factory after factory voted to have up to \$20 deducted from their paychecks each month and sent to support the wharfies. Phone trees were set up to alert supporters when they were needed to reinforce picket lines, and tens of thousands volunteered.

Instead of mobilizing this widespread support to defeat the bosses, the union leaders' first priority was to assert tight control over the pickets. They emphasized that picket lines must be "peaceful," and leftists were banned from distributing literature at the picket lines. Meanwhile, the MUA kept the rest of the union working, even while another shipping company, P&O, was openly preparing to join the offensive against the MUA.

#### **THE WORKERS GAIN THE UPPER HAND**

But in spite of the union bureaucrats' efforts to limit the struggle, spontaneous and more coordinated acts of militant solidarity continued. By April 15, Patrick was forced to

suspend its Newcastle operations by the militant picket lines, citing "fears for the safety of its new non-union workforce." Patrick and the government promised to break the main picket line at Webb Dock in Melbourne on April 17, but hundreds of fully armed riot police were driven back by a militant picket line that had been bolstered by several thousand supporters. The next morning, the riot police returned in greater numbers. Just as they looked set to smash the picket, over one thousand building workers arrived, and the cops retreated in fear. Two days later, 2000 members of the National Union of Workers (NUW) walked out of supermarkets and food processing plants to join the pickets in Melbourne. All of these acts of solidarity were illegal, and while the top union leaders called for workers not to break the law, the NUW's President tried to reflect the ranks' militancy, declaring "If it gets to the stage where a law's a bad law, people have to defy it."

### WORKERS EXTEND STRUGGLE

Intimidated by the power of the struggle, the government did not try to use the courts to punish the workers for their solidarity actions. Encouraged by these victories, more and more workers demanded the struggle be extended nationally to defeat the anti-union laws. A poll by the metalworkers' union showed 54 percent of its members supported industrial action to back the MUA, and 37 percent were prepared to back a national general strike, in spite of the fact that the leaders had discouraged their members from considering such actions. Some rogue union leaders like electrical workers' union President Dean Miguel called for a national general strike. Even the ACTU leaders adapted to the pressure from below by spouting radical rhetoric: ACTU leader Bill Kelty went so far as to tell the ACTU Executive that a national general strike was part of his plan to defend the MUA.

The effects of the struggle spread throughout the economy. Car manufacturing, for example, was crippled. Toyota suspended production due to a lack of parts, and General Motors had to airlift parts to keep production running. As the wharfies' struggle gained support, the capitalists became increasingly divided. While they were united behind Patrick at the beginning, more and more called for a swift end to the dispute, even if it meant giving some ground to the MUA.

Amid this groundswell, union delegates met on April 16 in Melbourne to discuss further action in defense of the wharfies. Under pressure from the ranks, the union leaders faked militancy: Victorian Trades Hall leader Leigh Hubbard asked for a show of hands of all those prepared to launch illegal solidarity action, and every delegate raised their hands. But when it came to proposing a specific action, the union leaders backed away from calling a one-day general strike, proposing instead a four-hour general strike and demonstration in the hope of avoiding the courts declaring it illegal. Thus the state union leaders threw away the opportunity for launching a general strike and calling on the rest of the country's unions to join it.

### WITH FRIENDS LIKE THE LABOR PARTY ...

Nonetheless, the 4-hour strike was widely supported, with over 100,000 workers attending the central demonstration. Before it took place, the Federal court had ruled that the initial firing of the MUA workers was illegal and that they should be reinstated. The union leaders used this decision to keep the struggle in the courts, and to encourage workers to vote for the ALP in the next elections in order to oust the

Liberals and repeal their Industrial Relations laws.

By the early 1990's, the ALP's record of ruling in the bosses' interests had driven workers increasingly to reject the ALP in elections. But the escalation of the capitalist attacks under the Liberals has now given the ALP the chance to move left and appeal for support as the defender of the workers and downtrodden. They provide a lukewarm opposition to the Liberals' anti-Aboriginal policies and budget cuts, in particular coming out against the proposed Goods and Services Tax as anti-working class. The ALP leaders do not simply want to win more votes — they want to show the capitalists and middle class that they are the only party that can insure social stability: they can use the union bureaucracy to restrain struggles and sell austerity to the masses.

At the beginning of the wharfies' struggle, the ALP raised only the most muted opposition to the attacks, and tried to distance itself from the struggle to defend the MUA. With national elections likely this year, *The Australian* (April 13) reported that the ALP leaders were directing the union leaders to "limit disruptive and violent industrial action as far as possible for fear of alienating voters."

But as the wharfies' struggle won the popular support of workers everywhere, the ALP was forced to take a stance further left. It began to openly side with the wharfies, and prominent ALP leaders visited the picket lines at the docks, including prime ministerial candidate Kim Beazley.

But with friends like the ALP leaders, workers don't need enemies. The ALP's general policy remained "waterfront reform," including job losses, wage cuts and speed-up, to be negotiated through the MUA. The ALP exerted all the pressure it could to direct the struggle into the courts, and even when great pressure was placed on it by workers, it refused to come out in support of spreading the struggle against the Liberals' Industrial Relations laws.

The ALP's association with the struggle has spread many illusions among workers that it is on their side against the bosses. To expose these illusions, it would have been necessary for revolutionaries to urge broader numbers of workers to raise concrete demands on the ALP to support the struggle and come out against all the Industrial Relations laws.

With elections expected later this year, outside of any major change in the class struggle militant workers will see a Labor victory at the polls as a victory in their battle against the Liberals and the bosses. Under these conditions it would be necessary for revolutionaries to adopt a position of *critical support* to Labor: voting for Labor in order to go through the experience of a Labor government with their fellow workers, using the common experience to prove that the ALP is a capitalist party and that an alternative revolutionary workers' party must be built.

In any case, a central focus of revolutionary work must be unmasking the treacherous policies of the ALP and union bureaucracy in the wharfies' struggle and any others they claim to support.

### SNATCHING DEFEAT FROM THE JAWS OF VICTORY

The April Federal court decision was not the unmitigated victory the union bureaucrats claimed. The court found that it was illegal to fire the MUA workers on the basis of their union membership, and called for their reinstatement. But the court also upheld the right of Patrick to fire workers in the interests of profitability. Indeed the day after the ruling, Patrick announced that due to "commercial considerations" it was closing seven of its regional operations, meaning



the axing of 600 workers. And financial administrators of Patrick's operations have made recommendations including cutting hundreds of jobs, slashing wages by 30 percent, and using non-union labor for "non-essential" jobs like cleaning and maintenance.

Patrick's lawyers won a High Court injunction against the Federal court ruling; this allowed them to appeal it and banned picket lines within 200 meters of the docks. But the union leaders took the first decision as their opportunity to demobilize the workers, telling them to hold off on their struggle until the Federal Court rules on Patrick's appeal to the earlier order to reinstate the fired workers.

Stepping in to enforce "the rule of law" where the cops had failed, the MUA moved to end the picket lines. Where workers had built what they called "the people's living sculpture" — barricades against the scabs and cops — these were now dismantled. Where their members were still out of work on docks where Patrick had handed over its operations to other bosses, the MUA leaders instructed that scabs be allowed to cross their picket lines.

And, in a display of his commitment to "do whatever" to improve profitability for the bosses, MUA leader John Coombs responded to the first court decision by immediately sending the wharfies back to work... for free! Not demanding a thing from Patrick, the MUA workers have been paid a meager \$250 a week out of their own strike fund! The union is even discussed the idea of offering Patrick millions of dollars in interest-free loans from its own funds to help it "get back up on its feet"!

The High Court eventually upheld the decision to reinstate the fired MUA members, but it also strengthened the call for waterfront reform in the name of profitability. Since the union leaders had already sent the wharfies back to work, the bosses were now in control. An editorial in *The Australian* went so far as to say that the High Court judgment is "potentially so advantageous that it could have been part of the Government's game plan all along," and "the administrators of Patrick have the power to determine the immediate future of the union and non-union workers on the waterfront." (May 5.)

Negotiations between the bosses and the MUA leaders then began. *The Australian Financial Review* (May 6) explained

in plain terms the bosses' strategy:

The administrators need to cull several hundred of the 2000 under-utilized MUA members... The administrators should seek to weaken the union monopoly by simply outsourcing to private contractors.

As we have detailed, this is precisely what the MUA leaders have agreed to.



Cops clear way for company guards and scabs at Patrick's dock in Melbourne.

As we go to press, the wharfies are yet to vote on the proposed deal, so the struggle continues. All efforts must be made among the wharfies to encourage them to reject it and recommence their struggle: *No job losses! No pay cuts! No speed-up!* Wherever possible, the solidarity movement that built up around the wharfies' struggle should be used to encourage the wharfies' sense that if they continue their struggle, they will not be alone.

#### REVOLUTIONARY POLICY

It is necessary to review what revolutionaries should have done in the struggle. An obvious starting point for revolutionary policy would have been to give a conscious expression to the direction of the workers' often spontaneous actions to defend the wharfies:

- *defy the anti-union laws with mass action;*
- *form militant mass picket lines to keep the scabs off the docks;*
- *form workers' defense guards at the picket lines to repel the cop and scab attacks.*

These tactics needed to be framed by an overall approach to the struggle. The coming to power of the Liberals on a program promising war on the working class confirmed what we in the LRP have long argued: that militants and revolutionaries should spread the idea among their fellow workers that a *general strike* is the necessary response

to any class-wide attack. Workers everywhere sensed that the war on the MUA was just such an attack. By joining the wharfies' picket lines, building demonstrations and launching illegal strikes, workers across the country already moved in the direction of a general strike.

Revolutionaries and militants should have agitated for the ACTU to call a general strike against the attacks on the MUA. Transitional to this, every opportunity to spread the struggle should have been seized, from a national waterfront strike by the whole MUA, to state-wide general strikes to give a lead to workers in other states.

The sort of general strike that revolutionaries would have fought for would not have been a protest strike like the 24-hour general strikes that bureaucrats like to use to release pent-up anger. It would be an indefinite general strike: an all-out struggle until the workers win their demands.

Such a general strike could have moved from the immediate defense of the wharfies, to demand the repeal of the Industrial Relations laws and the nationalization without compensation of the waterfront companies. Indeed one of the advantages of the general strike tactic is that it enables the working class to feel its social power and move from defensive to offensive demands and assert its independent class interests. Revolutionaries would fight within a general strike movement to expand its demands to include all the needs of the working class, in particular the most oppressed. These demands would have included the defeat of the Liberals' proposed anti-Aboriginal land rights laws and attacks on immigrants.

However, key to the success of the struggle was exposing the role of the union bureaucrats from day one. Revolutionaries needed to warn their fellow workers of the impending betrayal. The wharfies should have been encouraged to form strike committees at every port to best organize the struggle, committees which could be used to take the struggle forward should the leaders betray as they have. In the unions, committees to defend the MUA should have been called for on a program advocating a general strike.

Such a struggle would have marked a big step forward in convincing workers of the need to build a revolutionary party to lead their struggles with the aim of overthrowing capitalism through a socialist revolution.

## LEFT CAPITULATION

While we are yet to see all of the left groups' post-struggle literature, an analysis of their conduct shows that such a lead is unlikely to come from them.

### The Democratic Socialist Party and Militant.

Typically, the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) offered *not a word* of criticism of the union leaders. Instead, they preferred to cheerlead for them and the struggle in general. But whenever their calls for struggle led them toward a confrontation with the union leaders, they backed down.

Now the DSP says that they knew all along that the union leaders intended to betray the struggle. They write:

**Despite their momentary lapse into class-war rhetoric ... the MUA leaders never had any conception that the fight should continue in order to defend existing working conditions and jobs regardless of Patrick's profitability. ...**

**The MUA and ACTU leadership had no perspective other than self-preservation — within the existing industrial system. But that could only mean accepting Corrigan's "right" to an adequate return on investments through**

**driving down wage levels, working conditions and entitlements. (Green Left Weekly, June 24.)**

But no amount of all-wise journalism can clear the DSP of their responsibility for covering up for the union leaders throughout the struggle.

The Militant group referred disparagingly to the "timid pro-ALP union bureaucrats" and called for the "rank and file" of the unions to determine the course of the struggle. But when it came to putting this mildly critical rhetoric into practice, Militant went into hiding.

A shocking example of the DSP and Militant's cowardly capitulation to the union bureaucracy came in the key April meeting of union delegates in Melbourne. The DSP and Militant combined to raise a motion for a "24-hour stoppage and rally" as the "first steps in a campaign that will continue until all Patrick members are fully reinstated in their jobs with no loss of wages or entitlements". This motion fell far short of the general strike that should have been fought for, and it let the bureaucrats off the hook by not specifying exactly what sort of action it would take to win. But even this was too much for the union bureaucrats. When it became clear that a confrontation with the bureaucrats was imminent, the DSP and Militant withdrew their motion, proving theirs is not the red banner of communists but the pink and yellow banner of social democracy and cowardice.

### The International Socialist Organization

A step to the left of the DSP and Militant is the International Socialist Organization (ISO). Rejecting the idea that it was necessary to fight for a general strike, the ISO pointed to the half-hearted May 6 union protest in Melbourne as "the key to winning" and limited their calls for action to the vaguest possible formulations.

The ISO's policy has been to cheerlead for the union leaders, hailing every inadequate action by the bureaucrats as "fantastic" and quoting them approvingly. For example, at the beginning of May they wrote:

**The pickets must stay until there are guarantees of the wharfies' jobs and conditions, not for two weeks or two months, but for good. MUA National secretary John Coombs said, "We are not going back on their terms. (Socialist Worker, May 8.)"**

But Coombs had already moved to dismantle the pickets and send the wharfies back to work for free, and was talking of accepting mass layoffs in the future! The ISO hopes the struggle will force the bureaucrats to go further than they want. But their cheerleading only covers up for the bureaucrats and holds back the struggle against them that is necessary for victory.

At the April mass meeting, the ISO circulated a motion that in immediate terms was indistinguishable from that of the union bureaucrats', vaguely calling for the ACTU executive "to coordinate sustained and determined national industrial action." They also raised a motion for an additional 24-hour statewide general strike at an unspecified future date. But when this motion came into conflict with the bureaucrats, they also turned tail and dropped it.

### The Spartacist League

An apparent exception to this opportunism is the Spartacist League (SL). They viciously attacked the union leaders and the ALP for preparing a betrayal. But their real policy has been a seemingly ultra-left but in fact opportunist *defeatism*.



First, they counterposed to the needed general strike a national strike limited to waterfront workers. This is typical of the Spartacist tendency internationally, which opposes calling for any general strike unless a revolutionary party is in place to lead it all the way to the seizure of power. They fail to recognize that a revolutionary party cannot be built outside of revolutionary struggles. A mass struggle that threatens capitalism is exactly what enables revolutionaries to most effectively win their fellow workers to the aim of socialist revolution and build the revolutionary party.

The Spartacists also overlook that not every general strike goes so far as to directly and immediately challenge state power. Many general strikes simply force the bosses to back down, conceding the workers' demands. As Trotsky pointed out, a general strike is very useful precisely when the working class in general and their leadership in particular is *weak*, because it gives the workers the opportunity to feel their social power and build a new leadership. (See *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, pp. 238-239.)

Further, the SL fails to understand that through the struggle for reforms, even under pro-capitalist leadership, the working class can develop the organizational muscle and political consciousness necessary to build a revolutionary party and put an end to capitalism for good — so long as it finds a revolutionary leadership that fights side by side with it, exposing the reformists and drawing the revolutionary lessons at each point.

Thus the SL is almost permanently opposed to raising demands on and giving critical support to union or Labor Party leaders in order to expose them. It prefers to stand outside struggles and passively call on workers to break from the ALP and come to revolutionary conclusions. Its radical rhetoric covers an opportunist and profoundly cynical political method.

### Workers Power

A refreshing alternative to the rotten left swamp seems to have been provided by the Workers Power (WPA) group, part of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI) led by Workers Power of Britain, WP(GB). WPA consistently spread the idea of a general strike against the Liberals' attacks and connected this with the need to build a revolutionary party. From the outset of the wharfies' struggle, they told the elementary truth that "Only a General Strike Can Win!"; they warned workers "not to rely on the bureaucrats" because of their preparations to betray the struggle; and called on workers to "build rank and file strike committees and support groups ... to take control of the strike action".

In the wharfies' struggle, WPA raised demands on Labor to support the wharfies concretely, calling for the repeal of the Liberals Industrial Relations laws and for the nationalization of the waterfront bosses. Such demands were needed to expose workers' illusions in the ALP. But as we noted, it is necessary to *always* accompany such demands with propaganda explaining that these leaders will not only betray the overall struggle but will look to limit its power and independence *at every step*. While the WPA evidently wants to expose the ALP, they did not always include such explanations, sometimes not warning the workers at all and other times warning that only "ultimately" the ALP would betray.

While WPA's record in the struggle is far better than

what we have come to expect from their British comrades, this last weakness points to deeper concerns we have about WPA. WP(GB) has a long history of capitulating to the British Labour Party (BLP) and trade union bureaucracy.

The position that most clearly marks WP(GB) as non-revolutionary is their permanent electoral support for Labor. The WPA agrees nominally with WP(GB)'s approach of always voting for Labor "where there is no revolutionary alternative." But in discussions with us, WPA comrades have insisted that their approach to the question of critical support for Labor is tactical, based on the concrete conditions of the struggle.

WP(GB)'s support for the BLP, however, has not been tactical but *strategic*. WP(GB) *permanently* supports the BLP, even when the workers have not been pushing it forward and it has been moving to the right, even when it has been openly attacking the working class. In 1979, when the BLP government of Prime Minister Callaghan launched an open attack against the working class, and masses of workers reacted by abandoning the BLP at the polls, WP(GB) loyally urged a vote for Labor.

WP(GB) called for a vote for Tony Blair's "New Labour" last year, even though Blair had just completed an open struggle against the leading role of the unions in the party, promised to maintain the Thatcher anti-union laws, campaigned in the name of the middle class and was in no way associated with workers' struggles. (We dissected this opportunist method of permanent electoral support in an earlier polemic against British Workers Power, "A Powerless Answer to Reformism," *PR* 23.)

By their political line in the wharfies' struggle, the WPA comrades confirmed that they are to the left of the WP(GB) and have not fully assimilated their comrades' opportunism. Nevertheless, under present conditions, with a Liberal government and a left-moving ALP, WPA is not being put to the hardest test — a Labor Party which is leading the struggle against the working class. Under a Labor government, would WPA be prepared to call for a general strike against anti-working class attacks? We know their British comrades would not, using the same arguments as the Spartacists. It is one thing to support a general strike that could bring Labor to power; a general strike that challenges Labor and could pose the question of real workers' power is quite another.

We hope that the WPA comrades re-examine their tendency's political program, in particular the political record of the British group, and draw revolutionary conclusions.

### AN APPEAL TO READERS FOR DISCUSSION

The wharfies' struggle confirms the LRP's general perspective on the class struggle. In the late 1980's and early '90's, we had fraternal relations with the Workers Revolution Group (WRG) in Australia. The WRG quickly built itself as a militant propaganda group with a significant following among workers, particularly blue-collar immigrants. Unfortunately, the first defeats at the hands of the Liberals had a demoralizing effect on the young group, and it collapsed.

Our remaining comrade in Australia has determinedly worked to spread our ideas and regain interest in genuinely revolutionary politics among workers. The wharfies' struggle presents an opportunity for a discussion about building a revolutionary organization again. We hope readers in Australia will contact us and say what they think of this article. ●

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# Progressive Labor: Road to Revolution 0.0

by Evelyn Kaye

The Progressive Labor Party (PL) presents itself as an intransigently anti-racist and anti-capitalist organization, waving the banner of communism and revolution. No wonder it attracts young people fed up with life under this miserable rotting system.

But behind the left facade there is much less than meets the eye. A driving and passionate hatred of capitalism is absolutely necessary for a revolutionist, but passion by itself is not enough. Communists want nothing less than to transform the world. We must grasp all the weapons of theory, strategy and tactics in the arsenal of authentic Marxism. But PL offers zero on this score. It provides no way forward for the living class upheavals across the globe today, which will soon be hitting the U.S. as well. It misguides those who have already decided to dedicate their lives to revolution.

## PL AND THE "FASCIST" LABEL

To discover the fraudulent nature of PL's Marxist credentials, begin with their newspaper, *Challenge/Desafio*. The constant use of the term fascism is the first thing a reader is likely to notice. By examining how PL uses the term — and by contrasting this with the way fascism has been understood by Marxist revolutionaries — one can learn a great deal about what's wrong with this group.

PL doesn't just call the Ku Klux Klan or the Nazis fascist. It tacks the label onto just about every political leader and aspect of capitalism. A few examples from among hundreds: New York's mayor Giuliani is "fascist"; so is Newark's Black mayor Sharpe James. Indeed, "White or Black, All Politicians Are Fascist." Increasingly "brutal police, hospitals, workplaces and schools are the fascist face of capitalism." "Standard of Care Is Fascist Medicine." "Educational Standards: Bosses' Factions Fight to Win Students, Teachers to Their Fascist Side." Workfare laws are fascist, anti-immigrant laws are fascist. So is the government's intervention into the Teamsters Union: "This is fascism, big time, no matter how many elections the government and union hold."

Unfortunately, folks who believe the PL's rhetoric about fascism are being hoodwinked. Such language is demagoguery, used to whip up the emotions of potential followers in order to manipulate them. It is the mark of a leadership which is not interested in giving its adherents the opportunity to think for themselves.

The U.S. capitalist system today is not fascist. It is still very much a bourgeois democracy. Does that mean Marxists should support it as opposed to fascism? Absolutely not! A democracy under decaying capitalism is by no means a humane, egalitarian system. And especially because it exists in the imperialist epoch, it is exactly the opposite: exploitative, oppressive, racist and unjust in every way — at home and especially abroad.

In fact, American capitalism enjoys a degree of democracy at home precisely because it viciously exploits millions in the neo-colonies. There it inflicts or tolerates bloodletting as barbaric as that which fascism has perpetrated historically. Understanding the difference between fascism and democratic imperialism, however, is not an academic exercise; it is the key to fighting each of these menaces.

Here in the U.S. the politicians and institutions PL denounces are indeed reactionary, racist and anti-working class and are getting more so every day. As *Proletarian Revolution* has often explained, in the context of a deepening economic crisis the system has no choice but to intensify all kinds of attacks on our class. That means increased racism and scapegoating of all kinds for the purpose of divide-and-conquer. It means increasingly repressive laws and acts by the state. And it certainly means that there is no way to reform this system to make it livable.

We have to overthrow capitalism and replace it with a proletarian dictatorship. If capitalism is allowed to continue



Cop guards Klan rally. Police are breeding ground for future mass fascist movement.

it will lead to fascism. But if we don't understand the specific weapons capitalism is using today, we can't fight it, and we can't head off a real fascist development in the future.

## TODAY'S DICTATORSHIP OF THE CAPITALIST CLASS

Fascism in the United States would not simply end affirmative action, increase police brutality, force minorities into the worst schools and housing and force people to work for their welfare checks. It would not simply intervene in the unions to say who's allowed to run for office and to control union funds. It would wipe out the unions as they exist, eliminate their leaders and crush the ranks, replacing unions with state-run organizations whose role is to discipline the workforce. And fascism in power would at minimum put millions of Blacks and Latinos in concentration and slave labor camps. Most likely it would murder them — its program is real genocide.

From the point of view of our class, especially the racially and nationally oppressed who always get pushed to the bottom, the difference between bourgeois democracy and

fascism is enormous. That doesn't mean that people shouldn't understand that both are capitalist! But under bourgeois democracy today, the workers have their own trade unions, political parties, clubs and cooperatives, and Blacks and Latinos have the right to openly organize for their specific interests. These democratic gains are very important to the workers and oppressed, as well they should be.

For example, although racist attacks are increasing, it is because of past Black struggles and the potential of the Black struggle today that the bourgeoisie is afraid to try to wipe out all the gains overnight. And so far they haven't. Take just one example. Does anybody really think that Black political prisoner Mumia Abu Jamal, falsely convicted of killing a cop, would be lingering on Death Row for years and years of appeals, that thousands of people would be allowed to demonstrate in his behalf, under fascism? The system today will kill him if we relent, but as Mumia would testify, the time gained is no small victory. It's not what fascists would permit.

Likewise with the unions, the only large-scale independent organizations of the working class in this country. They represent a gain that is very precious to the working-class struggle — despite all the treacheries of pro-capitalist leadership and the limitations of unionism and unions. Does anybody not know the difference between the situation of a unionized worker and forced labor in a concentration camp? Is there any worker who doesn't care about this difference?

The way PL calls everything fascist shows that it is way out of touch with the real position of the working class and oppressed. This theme will be pursued in future articles, where we will examine PL's work in the unions and other activities. We'll see the impact of their inability to defend the gains of the working class against attack.

#### DRIVES TOWARD FASCISM

To say a society is fascist, as PL says of the current dictatorship of the capitalist class in America, tells workers that conditions cannot get much worse. However, in order to avoid the conclusion that things have already hit rock bottom, *Challenge* argues that the whole capitalist class and government are already fascist, and simultaneously issues warnings about a "growing" fascist threat, without feeling any need to confront the obvious contradiction between the two lines. The LRP believes it is vital that vanguard workers tell their fellow workers very definitively that things *will* get much worse — if the capitalist system and our class enemies are not properly understood, fought and overthrown in time.

We have to understand the underlying direction that capitalist society is moving in under the surface. Therefore we do need to know the factors that contributed to the ascendancy of fascism in the past, in order to understand the present and future prospects.

Fascism is not simply an extension of the attacks we are experiencing today, nor is it simply the degeneration of bourgeois democracy. Although aspects of fascism — national chauvinism, racism and immigrant-bashing — breed within all capitalist countries in the imperialist epoch, fascism means a violent rupture with the previous capitalist structures. It means that the ruling bourgeoisie faces such desperate conditions that it requires not only the absolute smashing of the working class but all facets of bourgeois democracy. Fascism is therefore not a quantitative but a qualitative change. It is the most invasive surgery capitalism can allow to be performed on itself: it will only allow it when the system has gone onto the critical list.

Historically, fascism came to power in the epoch of imperialism only when a number of subjective and objective factors came together. For one thing, the ruling class chose the services of fascists when the society is in such an extreme social and economic crisis that the capitalists can no longer rule through bourgeois democracy, their preferred style. They are then forced to let the state centralize all political power in its hands, not only crushing the working class but disciplining and limiting the freedoms of the bourgeoisie itself, even curtailing bourgeois political parties.

Further: history has shown that reformist parties, including today the Communist, Social Democratic and Labor Parties abroad, as well as some U.S. Democrats like Jesse Jackson, lay the basis for fascism by misleading and betraying working-class opposition to capitalism. But these parties too are destroyed by fascism when it comes to power.

Thus when Marxists speak of fascism, we do not simply mean the removal of democracy. Unlike a military dictatorship which lords over the people without any real mass support, fascism has to rest on mobilizing sections of the petty bourgeoisie and lumpenproletariat, as well as elements of the labor aristocracy and other backward sections of the working class. Fascism requires a mass movement because it doesn't just aim to eliminate the threat of revolution by exterminating the proletarian communist vanguard; it has to go far deeper, destroying all organizations of the workers and the oppressed, trying to completely atomize the masses. To do this it depends not just on the regular bourgeois army and police but on systematic mass terror and street warfare — and this requires the desperate ardor of a mass movement with millions of members.

How does a fascist mass movement develop? Ironically, fascism employs a radical-sounding anti-capitalist appeal in order to demagogically misdirect and whip up the fury of its followers. Not only the working class but the petty bourgeoisie and other layers suffer greatly under the capitalist crisis. These layers can be fooled into believing the problem is "greedy" workers, "undeserving" foreigners, Jews, Blacks, etc., and "parasitic" sections of the ruling class itself. Indeed, fascism has to discipline even sections of the ruling class, to prevent interference with the centralization of power through the state. The forcible seizure of the property of scapegoat portions of the ruling class helps fuel the mass attacks. The best historic example is the Nazis' denunciation of "Jewish capitalism" in the name of "national socialism."

#### TWO WINGS OF FASCISM?

There certainly are fascist organizations in the U.S. today, but they have neither a mass movement behind them nor the support of the ruling class. They are a relatively small, committed layer. The desperate petty-bourgeois and middle classes are fundamentally powerless on their own and are hesitant and wavering by nature, sandwiched between the major class forces, the capitalists and the workers. They don't commit to a fascist party until the fascists have already proven that they, and not the working class, will be the winning side. If the working class doesn't present its alternative in time, if we don't build a genuine vanguard party that can show a decisive way out of the crisis, fascism appears as the only and "final" solution.

A mass fascist movement fighting for state power only occurs when the workers' movement has already raised its banner and has been defeated in major battles. This does not describe the political scene in the U.S. today. Although the



working class is on the defensive, suffering many attacks, it is far from defeated; its biggest struggles lie ahead. For now the capitalists are still confident that they can continue to rule the working masses by mainly peaceful means.

PL constantly cites what it sees as an inter-capitalist conflict in its analysis of current events. On one side it sees "Old Money," represented by Clinton and the biggest corporations (particularly in oil), who back the government. On the other side it sees smaller "New Money" capitalists, who allegedly back the right-wing militias and related attacks on the government. According to PL, these wings are "two brands of U.S. fascism, both deadly."

For example, PL claimed that the McVeigh Oklahoma City bombing trial turned "a spotlight on the brewing civil war between the fascist militia movement and the bigger fascists in control of the federal government." While PL says both wings of the ruling class are fascist, the events around the trial proved the obvious — there is no substantial wing of the U.S. ruling class today that supports violent attacks on the federal government! The bourgeoisie certainly does have important internal divisions as Congressional fights over NAFTA and the IMF indicate. But that does not mean that either side is fascist.

### STALINISM AND FASCISM

There is a history behind PL's "left" posturing today that reveals PL's political method — and indicates why this group could become more dangerous in the future.

The original fascism-mongers were the Communist Parties (CP's) of the late 1920's and early 1930's, the so-called "third-period" Stalinists. They branded virtually everyone a fascist, like PL does today. The CP's moderate opponents in the workers' movement, the Social Democrats, were called "social fascists". The supposed logic behind this term was that reformist leaders, because of their pro-capitalist views, would end up laying the basis for a fascist takeover. Therefore even though it might not be their subjective desire to support fascism, it would be the actual or objective consequence of their weak-kneed opposition.

Nevertheless, the "social fascist" term was scientifically incorrect and disastrous. The purpose of political terminology is to distinguish between different phenomena, not to lump everything together indiscriminately. There is a difference between those who deceive and betray the working class while favoring reforms and democracy, and those who openly intend to smash unions and kill oppressed peoples.

The CP's used the term "social fascist" in order to avoid fighting for a united front of the working class — that is, to avoid waging a political fight within the working class to win workers away from the reformists. The "social fascist" slander was in fact used to wall off the Communist ranks from the mass of workers, even those who considered themselves anti-fascist if not yet revolutionary. Of course, the CP's also excluded anti-Stalinist revolutionaries from contact with their members.

The decisive country in the war against fascism in the 1930's was of course Germany. The German CP refused to fight for a workers' united front that could have smashed fascism before it became formidable. The authentic Marxist program against fascism was advanced at the time only by Leon Trotsky and the Left Opposition, which had been cast out of the CP because of its opposition to Stalin's increasingly counterrevolutionary policies. (See our book, *The Life and Death of Stalinism*, Chapter 4.)

Trotsky recognized that reformist leaders were in a different political and social position than fascist leaders. They were caught in a contradiction, since they supported capitalism but led mass workers' organizations from which they derived their power. They could be pressured by the ranks to mobilize a united fight against fascism; workers of various political stripes could see that such an immediate united defense was an absolute necessity and could strike needed blows against the fascists.

Further, if the communists demanded a united front and the reformists refused to participate, the reformists would stand exposed in front of their membership as the barrier to working-class unity. Workers outside the CP would then be more likely to see the superiority of its political program.

Events proved in blood that the Trotskyists and not the Stalinists were right on every critical question relating to fascism and how to fight it. During this period, the CP not only opposed the united front but even made occasional political blocs with the Nazis against the "social fascist" Social Democrats. To the end, the CP postured cynically and fatalistically: "After the Nazis, our turn." With the working class confused, disunited and demoralized by the "revolutionary" misleadership of the CP and the openly pro-bourgeois Social Democrats, the Nazis took power without firing a shot and then annihilated all the workers' organizations — from the CP to the Social Democrats to the unions.

### FROM ULTRA-LEFT TO REFORMIST RIGHT

The third period is correctly characterized as ultra-left sectarianism. "Ultra-left" because perspectives were based on the delusion that revolutionary success automatically lay right ahead, despite all evidence to the contrary. Sectarian because the CP claimed its job was simply to denounce the Social Democratic leaders and give the workers following them an ultimatum: abandon your big workers' organization, your long-held loyalties and beliefs, and join us. For our part, we refuse to participate within your broad working-class struggles and organizations in a united front. If you don't obey our ultimatum, fellow workers, we can not assist you in building a defense against fascist attacks.

But after the victory of Nazism in Germany and its growing strength internationally, the third-period sectarians flipped, as often happens, into outright opportunism. The Stalinists made an about face. Internationally, the CP's entered bootlicking alliances with bourgeois forces. They identified the workers' interests with the "progressive" bourgeoisie, the wing that opposed fascism. Instead of finally admitting the need for a working-class united front, they flipped from the sectarianism of refusing to unite in action with other workers to the "popular front" of class collaboration.

The CP's sought to tie proletarian organizations to their new bourgeois allies, and that meant rolling back workers' gains. The resulting Popular Front governments paved the way for fascist victories in Spain and France, a turn warned against only by the Trotskyists. In the U.S., PL's ancestors in the CPUSA turned from fascist-baiting of liberals and Trotskyists to all-out support for the bourgeois liberal Franklin Roosevelt. In the Democratic Party camp, they helped derail the working class's potentially revolutionary struggle during the Great Depression years.

### HOW PL "FIGHTS FASCISM"

The CP, from which PL split in the 1960's, has followed the line of supporting bourgeois "anti-fascist" politicians for

decades, justifying this class treason by pointing to the Republicans' ties to the "fascist" far-right. Thus the CP urged a vote for Clinton in 1996 — after he signed his racist, anti-working-class welfare, immigration and crime bills.

In part, PL is still using the technique of the "third period." That is why it calls liberals and union leaders fascist or social fascist. We will look at PL's union work in detail in a future article. For now we take just one example, the BART transit strike in San Francisco last year. PL wrote:

**Our unions will turn as reactionary as the capitalists need them to be. To maintain credibility, they will grandstand for the workers and talk about social needs. To maintain a place at the table, they will act for the bosses and help bring fascist labor conditions to the work place. They are Social Fascists. This strike made it clearer to many of our friends and readers of *Challenge*: The working class has a choice — social fascist union leaders or the growth of the communist movement. (Oct. 15, 1997.)**

Where in fact a struggle is necessary within the working class to both defend the unions from attacks and *expose* their reformist leaders, PL thinks it can convince workers by ultimately denouncing their leaders as fascist. Warning workers of betrayals in the course of participating in a united struggle to defend the unions is one thing; delivering an anathema and expecting workers to accept it *a priori* is ultra-left sectarianism.

Here is an even better example, where a genuinely reactionary organization is involved. In October 1997, NOW, a liberal bourgeois women's organization, and other groups had called for a counter-demonstration against the Promise Keepers, a men-only outfit which uses religion to spew its sexist and racist crap. PL showed up — but on which side?

For starters, *Challenge* gave a graphic picture of the Promise Keepers (Oct. 8, 1997):

**Holding that abortion is the root of all evil, the PKs preach that women gain "emancipation" through "submission" to men. To the right of the Christian Coalition, the PKs ... call for the U.S. to be run by a theocracy (religious rule); they proclaim themselves to be at "war" and organize their membership along militaristic lines. ... They stipulate being "not for integration"...; one of their black spokespersons, Wellington Boone, defends Uncle Tom and says that "slavery was redemptive."**

But while recognizing the overt reactionary nature of the group, (labeled fascist by PL, of course), *Challenge* approvingly printed the following letter from one of their comrades which explained the PL method perfectly. It said that not only were both the PK and NOW fascist, but in fact NOW was the greater danger!

**I agree with the comrade's suggestion that we participate in protests against the racist, sexist "Promise Keepers" October mobilization in Washington. As this comrade noted, we can reach many people with our line on the growth of fascism and, specifically, on how New Money forces are using PK to rally workers and small businessmen against their Old Money opponents.**

**However, I think that our most important political task around this event will be exposing how Old Money similarly works behind the scenes to rally anti-PK forces around their own, even more dangerous, brand of fascism. Groups like the National Organization for Women represent the mass line of the Rockefeller interests, the dominant section of U.S. capital. These organizations push reformism, especially reliance on the Democratic Party, as**

**the way supposedly to defeat fascism. (Sept. 3, 1997.)**

NOW is an obviously bourgeois-democratic organization for women's rights, which stands for legal equality for women on questions ranging from abortion rights to equal pay for equal work. This organization is class-collaborationist to the core and does a miserable job of fighting even for its own program, not only ignoring the needs of working-class women but failing to achieve equality for even middle-class and bourgeois women. (See our pamphlet *The War on Women*.) We can even say that NOW reflects the outlook of important mainstream capitalists like the Rockefellers. But PL's simple-minded analysis fails to account for the fact that few "Rockefeller" corporations indeed support equal pay for women. And PL also argues that this organization is working for "Old Money," the more dangerous brand of fascism!

#### PL VERSUS PK?

When an organization like NOW marches for abortion rights and against the PK line that women belong in the home and that "slavery was redemptive" for Blacks, PL can't choose — it can only sell newspapers and declare itself for communism. In fact, if it really thinks that NOW represents the greater fascist danger, PL should have called for a demonstration against it, not against the PKs!

In contrast, serious revolutionaries take a clear side with the oppressed. We stand ready to march with others for abortion rights and against racism and sexism. Of course, the inevitable capitulations of the NOW leadership must be fought. In the counterdemo we would raise our revolutionary banner, openly criticize the bourgeois reformist leaders and pose the need for a revolutionary leadership to defend the rights of women and Blacks.

This is the policy of the united front. Our priority is to defend oppressed women and Black workers and to win the most oppressed to the revolutionary party by proving in common action, that the revolutionaries, not the reformists, have the program that meets their needs. When the PKs see that women, Blacks and other oppressed workers are not following liberal pacifists but are ready to do whatever it takes to maintain and extend their rights, that will weaken the PK grip on backward working-class men more than distributing a million *Challenges* among them could ever do.

Let's examine the consequences of PL's line. PL's point that both sides contain workers in itself is an empty observation. But it has a deadly implication: if backward workers actually join a real fascist party in the future, when it is in confrontation with a force of, say Black and women workers misled by the NAACP and NOW, PL will say, "a plague on both your houses." If a physical fight breaks out (as has happened many times across the country in attempts to defend abortion clinics against right-to-lifers), and if you believe both sides are fascist, then you should not take sides. So what if women fighting sexism get clobbered? So what if Blacks preferring not to be enslaved get killed?

No physical encounter occurred at the October event, but the point holds. PL showed up, not with the intention of defending the counterdemo, but rather with the claim that it was intervening within both sides to convert people to communism. In fact PL's practice at the event, showed that it really was more interested in the "fascist" side than the "social fascist" liberal side.

*Challenge's* proud report on PL's intervention had nothing to say about how they addressed the male workers on the issue of the special oppression of women workers and work-



ing-class housewives. Should women bear all the child-rearing and household burdens, plus lower wages? Claims about the advantages of communism are great, but they *must* be coupled to immediate concrete fights defending necessary gains for women workers and working-class housewives. That's one way to give working-class women confidence in class power.

#### FROM SECTARIANISM TO OPPORTUNISM

PL's refusal to side with the counterdemo against the Promise Keepers was a textbook ultra-left sectarian act. But, as we noted, the CP's in the "third period" flipped over into opportunism and aligned with an anti-fascist wing of the bourgeoisie later on. Does anything in PL's method prevent it from flipping to supporting bourgeois liberals at some time in the future and immersing themselves in popular frontism?

In fact, PL already differs from third-period Stalinism in that, by its own admission, it has committed opportunist acts throughout its history. It tries to correct these "errors" via numbered documents entitled *Road to Revolution (RR)* 3.0, 3.5, 4.0 and now 4.5. (*RR* 4.5, the latest word for the moment, will be discussed further in our next issue.) Each *RR* claims that in the past PL made opportunist errors which

it is now correcting — until the next correction.

Trotsky pointed out that sectarianism is merely opportunism afraid of its own tendency toward capitulation. PL has good cause to be terrified of itself. You can't stop the inevitable explosion of opportunism with a little cold water at each juncture, or after each juncture, in the form of a "self-critical" document.

PL is really a centrist middle-class organization parading as proletarian Marxist. It doesn't believe that the working class itself has the right and capacity to study its own history fully and to reach the consciousness necessary for building its own proletarian party to lead the revolution. It slanders opponents because it knows it cannot win cadre through open political struggle, and certainly not through an honest rendition of their own political legacy in Stalinism.

PL can win young revolutionary-minded workers only through deception. Authentic Marxism can only be found today under the banner of a re-created Fourth International. It must be based on a full comprehension of the failures of Stalinism and the living value of the program bequeathed to the revolutionary working class by the Trotskyist Left Opposition. ●

## KKK March Halted in Cicero

The leaflet below, produced and distributed by the Chicago LRP and slightly edited here, details a convoluted chain of events this March after the Ku Klux Klan declared it would march in Cicero, Illinois.

Originally the Town Board refused to grant a permit, citing expenses of extra cops and so forth. The Klan sued and won the "right" to demonstrate. But mass anger was building in Cicero, and cops feared that protesters would come from Chicago as well. Police were estimating that up to 8000 people, some armed, might confront the Klan. So town officials offered to distribute the Klan's literature if the KKK would agree to call off its demo.

In the end the Klan backed off and did not march. This was a small victory won indirectly by mass pressure, though not nearly as decisive as a well deserved smashing would have been.

### Deal with KKK Shows Racism of the Bosses' Profit System

On Wednesday, March 11, Cicero officials announced that they had convinced the racist KKK to back down from its plans to rally at City Hall. In order to prevent a "confrontation," Cicero officials agreed to copy and distribute KKK literature to the predominantly working-class population of Cicero! This was an insult to the workers and youth who had planned to show up and confront the KKK and its message of race hate. As one worker put it, "Why don't they just put on the sheets while they're at it?"

The LRP agrees: Cicero Board President Betty Loren-Maltese and her cohorts are king-sized racists. Their actions show that they are not opposed to racism at all. Their real intent was to prevent a mobilization against racism. Above all, they did not want Cicero to become the center of anti-racist struggles which could unite workers and youth across race lines. Because protests against the Klan and Nazis always raise bigger political questions. Like the fact that the whole system is racist — from Clinton's attacks on welfare

and immigrants to the way bosses use racism to pit workers against each other by skin color and nationality.

Through protest and struggle, workers and youth may see that the real enemy is not just the KKK and Nazi maggots, but the rotten system which breeds them. Loren-Maltese may not like the Klan, but she would rather fill the mailboxes of Cicero with the message of race-hatred than permit a confrontation which could show the power of working-class unity. Because she knows that such a demonstration raises bigger questions about the system she serves — the capitalist profit system, a system of class rule based on the exploitation of the working class by the ruling class of bosses. A system which uses racism, even though it usually prefers to keep its KKK/Nazi bloodhounds on a leash.

### CICERO OFFICIALS CHOOSE THE "LESSER EVIL"

So how did all this go down? More than a month ago, the racist scum of the Ku Klux Klan announced that it planned to hold a rally in Cicero on Saturday, March 14. But as the day grew closer, it was clear that the fascists would be confronted by a much larger crowd of protesters. In the meantime, Cicero officials tried to deny the racists a permit to march. The KKK won this round in the courts. Rather than permit mass protest against the Klan (against the racism she pretends to oppose), Loren-Maltese offered to mail out the KKK's racist literature. Initially, the Klan refused this offer and said it would go ahead with its plan to march.

Town officials desperately tried to deflate the growing mass anger. They schemed to promote a so-called "unity" rally designed to lure anti-Klan protesters away to Morton East High School — so that the KKK could hold its hate rally in peace! And then there was the "blue ribbon" campaign. But many workers and youth saw through these diversions. Police officials still feared a mobilization of 8,000 protesters. Finally, Loren-Maltese held a five-hour summit with KKK "Imperial Wizard" Jeffrey Berry. She emerged with the "compromise." The KKK accepted the town's offer to mail out the KKK's race-hate literature.

In the end, the Klan backed down completely: it withdrew its demands unconditionally. This is a victory, but it does not erase the actions of the town government. The KKK's and the Cicero officials' mutual fear of mass interracial working-class protest confirms the power of the working class, but only in a limited way as workers did not get to experience this power firsthand in united mass action.

#### **FOR MASS MOBILIZATIONS TO FIGHT THE KKK!**

Leon Trotsky was the co-leader of the workers' socialist revolution in Russia in October 1917. He said there is one way to reason with a fascist: "acquaint his head with the pavement." And that is what happened when the Klan attempted to march in Chicago two years ago. They were overtaken and soundly beaten by an interracial group of anti-Klan militants at Daley Plaza. This small event was a victory for the entire working class, but the arrest and prosecution of nine protesters also showed the need for a mass mobilization to fight the fascists. Cops and Klan work hand in hand — future mobilizations must be large enough not only to stop the Klan but to guard against the danger of cops attacking the protesters (which is what happened at Daley Plaza).

For this reason, communists point to the need for a united front mobilization of the unions and other mass organizations of the workers and oppressed. However, we warn that the AFL-CIO leadership cannot be trusted to lead the working class in this or any other fight because they are fundamentally loyal to the capitalist system. The middle-class leadership of the main civil rights movements and organizations (PUSH, NOW, etc.) push the same pathetic strategy of "working within the system" — usually the Democratic Party of Bill Clinton and Jim Crow. In other words, turn the other cheek and wait for the next election, etc.

When you turn the other cheek, the enemy breaks your jaw. Communists oppose the misleaders who steer the workers' movement into the death trap of the Democratic Party. Think about it. Yes, we must combat the fascists of the KKK/Nazis whenever and wherever they attempt to speak.

But at this moment, the main danger comes from the mainstream parties of the capitalist ruling class, the Democrats and Republicans. History shows that the capitalists will turn to fascism as a last resort — when faced with the prospect of the workers' revolution! But we are not yet ready to make that revolution. So the bosses would rather keep their fascist dogs on a short leash, for now. The good cop/bad cop strategy of Clinton vs. Gingrich seems to be working. And the so-called "leaders" of the labor and civil rights movements play right along.

The crisis of working-class leadership is the main barrier to building a mass fighting response to racism and other attacks against the working class. While seeking to build the broadest mobilization possible, communists fight within these movements to expose the cowardice and bankruptcy of the pro-capitalist misleaders and to win workers and youth to our program of socialist revolution! We oppose their dead-end strategy of voting for Democrats as the "lesser evil." Instead we fight for an action program which relies on the power of the working class. *We propose mass strikes and mass self-defense mobilizations to fight every attack on our class!*

#### **WORKERS' SOCIALIST REVOLUTION IS THE ONLY SOLUTION!**

The capitalist profit system is based on the exploitation of the working class and oppressed masses. *As communists we explain to our fellow workers that the only way to crush fascism is to overthrow the system which breeds it.* We stand for the revolutionary seizure of power by the working class and oppressed masses. Under a workers' state, the vast wealth of society will be harnessed to build a society based on human need and human cooperation. The basis for socialism has long since been achieved. Human society is faced with a choice between socialism and barbarism. The crisis of human society is reduced to the question of proletarian leadership — that is, the need for the revolutionary party of the working class. Join us!●

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# Chicago Police Brutality: LRP vs. WWP

The last PR detailed the struggle against the racist anti-worker Chicago cops which had been sparked by their attacks on Jeremiah Mearday, an 18-year-old Black youth. In early March, the Chicago police once again harassed and arrested Mearday, then made up false charges as a cover. The police subsequently tried to intimidate witnesses by sweeping through his West Side neighborhood handing out phony subpoenas and threatening arrests.

But the Chicago Committee Against Police Brutality, dominated by Democratic Party politicians, religious figures and middle-class "community" leaders, continues to mislead the struggle by pushing its line of faith in the system. They feature slogans referring to racist cops as "a few bad apples" and begging them to "protect us, serve us, don't beat us."

The LRP, while energetically supporting the protests, also exposed the reformist misleaders. For example, our leaflet prior to the May 19 rally pointed out:

**There are literally millions of workers oppressed by the cops in Chicago. To counter their racist offensive, we have to build the broadest fight-back possible to show the ruling class — and ourselves — how strong we are. The Committee Against Police Brutality has no perspective to build such mass actions. In fact, with their craven pro-cop line, it is impossible to attract the masses of oppressed youth who must be part of real mass actions.**

In response, a leader of the pseudo-Marxist Workers World Party, an active "left" component of the Committee, attacked our work on a public internet bulletin board:

**The LRP's contribution has been to put out a leaflet denouncing "misleading preachers" and promising that the Committee would never call for big demonstrations (bad timing, they called for it two days later.) (alt.politics.socialism.trotsky, May 1.)**

But in fact our prognosis proved correct. Only 400 people showed up, and the organizers managed to kill the spirit of the march with their passive pro-capitalist crap. A key political leader of the Committee, Reverend Paul Jakes, pinned a sign on the door of City Hall reading:

**Drop the Charges Against Mearday. Drop the Charges Against Holder. Do it NOW or Face the Voters.**

Such "threats" tell the ruling class that the Committee leaders will keep the masses passively tied to electoralism. (Eric Holder is a Black cop who was beaten up by a group of white cops.) As well, the Committee's prepared placards had slogans like "Vote Daley Out" and "9000 White police. Only 3000 Black Police," spreading the dangerous illusion that only white cops are a threat to workers and oppressed.

In contrast, the WWP's paper *Workers World* published a thoroughly uncritical article boosting the event. It claimed that "momentum is growing" for May 19, as if a genuinely mass event was in the making. Referring to preparatory rallies, they wrote:

**African American Reps. Danny Davis and Bobby Rush left the rallies with hundreds of leaflets in their hands to be distributed from their ward offices. At their meetings at the Ward Memorial Baptist Church, march organizers discussed plans. Black Masonic groups and members of the**

**African-American Patrolmen's League are expected to provide marshals. (May 21.)**

It is possible and often necessary to participate in a temporary alliances for common action even with bourgeois politicians. Today, unfortunately, given the abjectly pro-capitalist misleadership of the unions as well as the major Black and Latino organizations, few demonstrations are not decorated with these types. What communists must do is argue against class collaboration and reliance on the leadership of capitalist politicians — class betrayals the WWP commits, with a leftish cover.

## UNCRITICAL OF DEMOCRATIC POLITICIANS

For example, this article, totally uncritical of the role of Black Democratic Party pols and Black police, rested atop an article by Louis Paulsen entitled "Capitalism and Cop Violence." This piece seemed to give a pretty good Marxist analysis of the police:

**On paper, the police are ordinary city workers, like firefighters or paramedics. . . . But in reality, the crimes of the police are ignored and hushed up by every level of politician and official, from the watch commander up to Congress and the president. Courts accept the confessions police extract by torture. Prosecutors ignore the crimes of the police. "Oversight boards" dismiss complaints against them. Mayors, governors, and presidents defend the police and shut their eyes to the ongoing violence. . . .**

**This shows that the fight against police brutality cannot rely on some higher level of the capitalist government to control the police. The only way to control the police is to mobilize the poor, working and oppressed people to build a force strong enough to do it.**

Amazingly, though, the article ends with a ringing endorsement of the "mission statement of the Greater Chicago Committee against Police Brutality" which, according to the WWP, "deserves to be read by activists across the United States. It proclaims a strategy of mass mobilization and of building community institutions of control."

What doubletalk! The Committee is composed of the same political figures, i.e. Democratic politicians, and uses the same reformist strategies, i.e. community review boards, that Paulsen denounces. No one could truthfully argue that this committee stands for the mobilization of the poor, working and oppressed people. And no Marxist has any business arguing that "control" of the capitalist police by workers and the poor will be tolerated by a capitalist state.

It comes as no surprise that the phony Marxists of the WWP fail to fight for a movement against the cops and this system. As our internet response to the WWP noted:

**There's been no sign of the WWP raising revolutionary politics to combat the pro-cop illusions of the movement's leaders. That's the difference between us — not the canard that the LRP abstains from actions.**

And in action, Workers World doesn't itself push the abject pro-cop themes of the bourgeois Committee. But it does line up behind the politicians who do. It is a tail on the bourgeois donkey, not the ass itself. ●

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## COFI/LRP

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*continued from page 2*

Latinos. However, one cannot be surprised when the ruling class and its tools act their part. Even Al Curtis, an Executive Board member of the NAACP, voted for the plan.

There are a number of reasons why this attack succeeded without mobilizing the large numbers of students who have rallied against cutbacks in recent years. CUNY students have been affected by the overall demoralization of New York City workers created by the failure of unions and the established Black and Latino leaders to stand up to the seemingly relentless assault by Mayor Giuliani. The defeat of the CUNY movement in 1995, in which labor traitors from Stanley Hill to Dennis Rivera played key roles (see *PR 49*), had a particular impact.

### CHICAGO ANTI-FASCIST AND ANTI-COP STRUGGLES

The Chicago LRP was building for the anti-Klan mobilization that was supposed to take place in Cicero on March 14. The Klan backed down, despite the obscene manipulations of local politicians. One of our leaflets is on p. 31.

As our article on PL explains, at this time the fascists don't try to rule the streets every day. But the cops do, and they, the armed bodies of the capitalist state, are part of the main danger today. (Leaflets are available on request.)

For information on the Chicago LRP's forums and educational discussions, call 773-463-1340.

### BLACK RADICAL CONGRESS

LRP comrades attended this event in Chicago in mid-June as observers. We view this formation as an obstacle to young Black activists moving leftward; its aim is to prevent them from breaking with the Democratic Party. While politically hostile to the leadership (the main groups involved were the CP and Committees of Correspondence), we felt it critical to attend in order to meet youth from different parts of the country who are aware of the current vacuum in Black leadership and are ardently seeking both answers and action.

### WOSA CONFERENCE REPORTS

Meetings were held in Chicago and New York this spring to hear a report by Richard Greeman on the conference hosted in Cape Town last winter by the South African group WOSA (Workers Organization for Socialist Action) and co-sponsored by the Italian group *Socialismo Rivoluzionario*. WOSA has been losing members and its last shreds of credibility because of its reformist line; it hoped the conference would boost its image.

The conference sponsors declared themselves against building vanguard parties and an International. LRPers at both meetings argued for an international of communist workers from every country based on a definite revolutionary program. Greeman's answer was simple and nationalist: if you aren't from South Africa, you have no right to criticize. He echoed the WOSA/SR line that an international would inevitably mean a colonialist relationship between the imperialist centers and the third world. LRP comrades countered that Greeman's alternative of national paternalism was no alternative to that danger, and that a democratic centralist international is necessary for the most oppressed

workers to be able to exercise international leadership over the class struggle.

The LRP also condemned WOSA's expulsion of the WIVL from the Cape Town conference as an act of political censorship. The WIVL had come as invited observers but were kicked out when they raised the need for the vanguard revolutionary party. Greeman defended the expulsion.

### AUSTRALIA

Our supporter in Melbourne was active in the campaign to defend locked out dockworkers. (See p. 20.) He has also been active in anti-Nazi and anti-racist work, arguing in the Committee Against Nazism for both militant mass action and the need to build a revolutionary party to counter the growing racism within rapidly polarizing Australian society.

### EUROPE

LRPers visited France and Germany, attending the annual political Fête sponsored by the French *Lutte Ouvrière* group. At the Fête and in Bonn, Germany we gave forums on the U.S. teamsters' strike, state intervention and the death of rank and file, based on our article in *PR 56*.

At the Workers' Power/LRCI forum on Ireland at the Fête, we differed with the LRCI on three major issues.

1) they called for a "no" vote on the Northern Ireland accord, which in our view can only be understood as an endorsement of the status quo and direct British rule. We see no alternative but to support neither side in this referendum.

2) LRCI calls for an anti-imperialist united front with the IRA, co-authors of the Accord. We stand for military support to defend the IRA from imperialist attack, not for political support to a class-collaborationist popular front.

3) they raise a slogan to disband the Royal Ulster Constabulary, which implies replacing it by a "normal" capitalist police force, though the LRCI says otherwise. We say that the only alternative is a workers' militia as part of a revolutionary strategy to smash the capitalist state. Slogans demanding that capitalism disband its armed forces are effectively utopian and illusory.

The Bolshevik Tendency's British section had buried itself in the Socialist Labour Party, within which they publish the *Marxist Bulletin*; last fall they resigned. Their forum at the Fête drew a balance sheet, but not truthfully; they maintain the fiction that they were and still are only supporters of MB. As we explained in *PR 52*, even the critical support tactic was not appropriate towards the SLP in the 1997 election, much less entryism. Both the SLP and Labor Militant's Socialist Party drew at best 5 percent of the vote, thus representing a small protest current. It was not a question of aligning with a growing movement of workers who were turning to the SLP in order to advance their fight.

### SOUTH AFRICA

An LRP comrade traveled to South Africa in April and May. He attended the WIVL National Congress as an observer and continued the political discussion between the LRP and WIVL. An important difference arose over the question of state intervention in unions; see our article on p. 9. Our comrade also spent time with unions and civic organizations in several cities, holding discussion with their members. The trip added to our knowledge of South African politics as well as our familiarity with South African revolutionaries. ●



## Jasper

continued from page 1  
Cicero article on p. 31.)

While urban Blacks do not yet face the fascist boot, they do face the constant danger of the cops, the armed fist of the ruling class and its state. The inhuman injuries inflicted on Abner Louima, the systematic bludgeoning of Rodney King, and the many big-city cop murders certainly testify to the fact that racist horrors are not confined to out-of-the-way Texas towns. They are an omen of future pogroms that will sweep the country if armed mass self-defense as part of a revolutionary movement is not mobilized in time.

As the capitalist crisis inevitably deepens and joblessness grows, murderous racism will spread like wildfire unless it is massively confronted. As society polarizes, the ruling class will inevitably turn to the Klan and its ilk. For the sake of profit, the capitalists and their mercenaries will blame Blacks, Latinos, Jews, immigrants and the like in the search for scapegoats.

History shows that the proletariat and oppressed peoples will inevitably need their own defense guards, a workers' militia. Such a force can only be created if it is rooted in the industrial working class and spearheaded by the revolutionary vanguard. A long-term organized self-defense will not be built overnight, but it will never be built unless the need for it is shown in word and deed today.

The current Black leadership responded to Jasper by repeating its usual pacifist pieties. Given the vacuum of leadership, it is no surprise that a reactionary posturer like Khallid Muhammad could momentarily seize the limelight by advocating armed self-defense. His demagogic game-playing can only backfire on Black America; it is no substitute for a serious defense in the face of racist attacks.

The problem is not only the capitulations of the liberal and nationalist Black leaders. It is also the failure of the far left, white and Black, to propagandize for and, when appropriate, help organize working-class Black self-defense in the face of brutal attacks. The so-called revolutionary left talks and talks about the necessity for building an alternative. But when it comes to a hard fighting line that would differentiate it from the liberals and their labor lieutenants, it offers next to nothing.

Ad hoc defense guards against today's racist and anti-working class attacks can be the embryos of the future workers' militia. Black struggles in the late '50's and '60's showed the effectiveness of short-term armed defense guards like the southern Deacons for Defense and Robert F. Williams' armed defense units in Monroe, North Carolina. Tragically, the martyrdom of James Byrd Jr. will not be the last vicious racist bloodletting.

## LRP Fund Appeal



Trips were made to South Africa and Europe this past Spring, with more than a little help from our readers and friends. Our goals for the Summer/Fall include upgrading our office computer, increasing travel and sponsoring a number of educationals with invited international guests.

Please help us with our projects by donating what you can. Send to: **Socialist Voice, P.O. Box 3573, New York, NY 10008.**

Specific attacks and provocations demand immediate mobilizations. While the ruling class sheds tears for its victims, it much prefers victims to fighters. It is past time for revolutionary-minded workers to group together and take the lead in convincing the masses of the need to defend themselves. That is why we who fight to re-create the interracialist and internationalist vanguard party of the proletariat inscribe on our banners the need for *Mass Working-Class Armed Self-Defense!*●

## Marxism, Interracialism and the Black Struggle

*A Proletarian Revolution* pamphlet by Sy Landy

An overview of the Marxist understanding of revolutionary proletarian interracialism and the course of the U.S. Black struggle. The pamphlet discusses Black liberation through socialist revolution as the alternative to integrationism and nationalism, two ideologies whose failure it analyzes in detail.

**\$3.00 from: Socialist Voice Publishing Co., P.O. Box 3573, New York, NY 10008.**

## Indonesia

*continued from page 40*

ing-class independence led to the workers' defeat by Khomeini's reactionary Islamic forces.

Indonesia's working class has yet to establish its independent class organizations or declare a revolutionary road. But the reactionaries are already preparing. Racist nationalists have at times succeeded in diverting the masses' anger against Indonesia's Chinese minority. Often called the "Jews of Asia," the Chinese include a wing of the big bourgeoisie that owns major shares of the largest companies. But the main victims have been the many petty-bourgeois shopowners. Like the Jews of Europe, they are a handy scapegoat to divert masses who are beginning to see that capitalism itself is the criminal oppressor.

### GROWING ECONOMIC CRISIS

The economic crisis continues to deepen. Industry is being choked off by the collapse of the Indonesian currency, the rupiah, the drain of foreign investment and the tightening of credit. The World Bank expects unemployment to rise to 20 million in 1998, on top of 50 million underemployed — out of a labor force of 86 million. (About 11 million are manufacturing workers and another 30 million work in services or mineral extraction. The remaining 45 million remain in agriculture.) Rice stocks are dwindling to the extent that Habibie has requested people to fast two days every week.

The crisis is international in scope. All year, stock markets have been dropping across the region. The World Bank says that Asia as a whole is entering into a long, deep depression. Indonesia's capitalists cannot pay back their \$80 billion debt to the imperialists, a large chunk owed to Japanese banks. This will intensify the financial problems of Japan, the locomotive that has driven Asian economic growth. (See "Asian Crisis Jolts World Capitalism" in *PR* 56.) Taking into account the financial crisis in Russia as well as Asia, U.S. Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin warned in June:

**I think it would be fair to say that the situation facing the world today with respect to financial stability is unprecedented.**

*Business Week*, a magazine that has been touting the glories of the "new economy" of globalization, editorialized: **Asia is on the brink of depression. Its deadly deflationary spiral must be reversed. Economies must be reliquified, and companies must be recapitalized. People in the U.S., Japan or Europe who think they can dodge this bullet are dreaming.** (June 1.)

As always, this means: capitalism is in trouble, profits are endangered, therefore workers must pay. Indonesia has served this goal by providing cheap labor for decades, enforced by the military jackboot. For imperialism to renounce this enormous source of superprofits would mean risking the health of world capitalism itself. The imperialists will go to any lengths to squeeze debt repayments out of the working classes of the "third-world" nations, as well as making the workers at home tighten their belts further.

Indonesia's economy had achieved dramatic growth in recent decades, based originally on the oil boom of the 1970's but now including rapid industrialization on the backs of a growing working class. But this meant misery for the great majority, especially peasants who were forced off the land to

join the desperate army of the unemployed in the cities seeking jobs in the sweatshops. As conditions for the masses worsen, it becomes less likely that the cosmetic shift from Suharto to Habibie will quell the storm.

### THE OPPOSITION FORCES

The current upsurge has its roots in struggles that got under way some years ago. New unions independent of the regime formed in the early 1990's. In 1996, Suharto's military took over one of the two legal bourgeois opposition parties, the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI). The army dismissed the PDI's leader, Megawati Sukarnoputri, the daughter of former president Sukarno, the nationalist leader who had

### Superexploitation and Repression

One of Indonesia's worst exploiters is Nike, the shoe company known for endorsements of its products by sports figures. With the fall of the rupiah, Nike now pays workers the equivalent of 75 cents per day, down from \$2.50. Stung by international protests, Nike has offered a third of its workers a raise — \$3.00 a month. In 1997, anti-Nike activists in the U.S. uncovered an internal policy statement by Nike's management. This said in part:

**Nike tends to favor strong governments. For example, Nike was a major producer in both Korea and Taiwan when these countries were largely under military rule. It currently favors China, where the communists and only two men have led the country since 1949, and Indonesia where President Suharto has been in charge since 1967. ... Likewise, Nike never did move into the Philippines in a big way in the 1980's, a period when democracy there flourished.**

It is unusual for capitalists to make the link between superexploitation and repressive brutality so explicit — or to admit so readily the links between Western imperialism and the rulers of statified capitalism mislabeled "communists."

Bill Clinton's visit to China, despite his public relations talk about human rights, shows that he has come to similar conclusions. Any ruling class that successfully keeps the working masses down is a welcome business partner.

headed the country in the initial period of independence from Dutch colonial rule after World War II. After mass protests, combined with workers' strikes for better wages and against military interference with unions, major trade union and opposition leaders were arrested.

Particularly targeted for repression was the PRD. It was formed in 1994 out of several student activist organizations which had supported campaigns over workers' and peasants' issues. Its program is radical bourgeois democracy: its main goal has been to win a "People's Coalition Government" through methods of mass struggle. It has been in a bloc supporting the PDI and the other bourgeois opposition, the Muslim-based United Development Party (PPP).

The regime labeled the PRD "communist," trying to revive fears of the PKI that had been vilified and exterminated in 1965. But the PRD's program has nothing in common with proletarian revolution. In 1996, the PRD called





Indonesian riot police battle anti-Suharto protesters.

for Megawati of the PDI to be president. This year, when the mass upsurge broke out in May, the PRD demanded that Suharto be replaced by an opposition government; it proposed participation by Megawati, Amien Rais, head of the Muslim mass organization Muhammadiyah (who has reportedly encouraged attacks against ethnic Chinese), Budiman Sudjatmiko, the chairman of the PRD and the chair of the PPP, both of whom are still in jail.

The program of the reform bourgeois bloc sounds like those of Nelson Mandela in South Africa or Kim Dae Jung in South Korea, themselves former imprisoned dissidents; Kim's election as president last year ended decades of rule by military-backed politicians. Mandela has already sacrificed his promises to the masses for the profits of capital; Kim is clearly on the same path. The reformist Indonesian bourgeoisie's goal is shown by a statement from an economic adviser to Megawati (*Washington Post*, May 17):

**We need a transition period. Post-Suharto, the economy is going to be terrible. What we need is a leader who has influence and who is respected by the people, who can tell 200 million Indonesians to sacrifice more.**

In the same tone, Secretary Rubin said in June that the crisis-ridden Asian countries needed both the IMF austerity measures and a social safety net "so that you can maintain your public and political support for what needs to be done. You've got wrenching changes in countries that are in very difficult circumstances." (*New York Times*, June 29.)

"What needs to be done," gently persuading the masses to sacrifice, may be the ruling class's strategy for the moment but is not likely to last for the longer run. In more prosperous countries, popular bourgeois leaders like Kim can hope to use "reforms" to bring down workers' wages, although its monopoly of armed force remains the ruling class's last resort. But where the bulk of the working class is already at

the bare edge of subsistence, belt-tightening almost inevitably requires brute force. While the capitalists would prefer a pseudo-democratic solution, the system's crisis will demand a renewed military dictatorship in Indonesia to enforce further austerity and intensified exploitation.

#### FROM PKI TO PRD

Despite its program for bourgeois-democratic rule, the PRD is admired by much of the international far left as the best hope for the Indonesian masses and a beacon for the struggle against imperialism. Its most active promoters are the Australian journals *Green Left* and *Links*. In the U.S., one champion has been *Against the Current*, the magazine published by the Solidarity group. Board member Malik Miah, who is also co-editor of the newsletter *Indonesia Alert*, rhapsodized about the PRD in the January/February issue:

**The PRD ... symbolizes what Suharto's military and Washington fear most: young people in their teens and twenties who are ready to fight and die for a democratic government and control of the country's vast wealth.**

The ruling class no doubt hates anyone who challenges its power, but its fear is of the working class, which represents a challenge to capitalist property in all its forms. Miah takes up the regime's denunciation of the PRD as communist, retorting: "How could these youth be communists? They weren't even born in 1965!" Indeed, the PRD's program cannot seriously be called communist; its "struggle for democracy" evades the issue of doing away with capitalism. Nevertheless, the PRD is not far from the actual program of the PKI, which Miah refuses to admit.

Miah does endorse a critique of the PKI's policies: **The leadership of the PKI willingly ... followed Sukarno's personal leadership and teachings. Sukarno was considered by the party to be a "pro-people's element" and**

even the "great leader of the revolution."

The betrayal of the masses that this policy meant has to be spelled out a bit. After revolutionary origins in the 1920's, the PKI's main leaders were exiled, and the party became reformist under the impact of the Stalinist counterrevolution in the USSR and the predominance of petty-bourgeois elements in its leadership. It revived when Indonesia won independence after World War II, often supporting "progressive" bourgeois nationalists like President Sukarno. In the 1960's, after the split between Chinese and Soviet Stalinists, it followed China's "anti-imperialist" Maoist rulers and joined the government bloc. It endorsed Sukarno's "guided democracy" under the rubric "Nasakom" — nationalism, Islam and communism together. This popular front policy drove it and the masses it led to disaster.

In 1957, for example, there was a mass upsurge of the workers and peasants, who occupied factories, plantations, banks and ships. The trigger was Sukarno's call for a general strike against Dutch-owned companies, in a dispute over remaining colonial holdings. But when the masses seized enterprises throughout the country, Sukarno ordered the military to take over control. The PKI, loyal to Sukarno, agreed that the seized firms should be handed over to the government — and that imperialist companies that were not Dutch-owned should be returned to their bosses. The PKI's support saved Sukarno's regime, but its policy of trusting the generals led to the massive defeat and its own destruction.

Then came 1965. A revived workers' movement began taking over oil and rubber plantations. The PKI thereupon joined the government, sitting alongside generals whom it insisted were still part of the "people's democratic revolution." When Sukarno banned all strikes, the PKI went along because nationalist unity was its priority, not working class independence. Even when the military began its "pro-Sukarno" coup, the PKI relied on Sukarno and its friends in the army for defense. The result was one of the greatest pogroms in history.

#### THE PRD'S "DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION"

The PRD has not of course had the opportunity to commit betrayals of this order. But its ideology of "people's power" and its support for "anti-imperialist" bourgeois politicians undermines working-class distrust of the bosses and generals and paves the way for future defeats.

Miah shares the PRD's illusions. He writes:

**The coming revolution in Indonesia will be a democratic one. It will be national and take up both political and economic demands. It will end the Suharto dictatorship, establish full democracy where all social forces (and ethnic groups) and classes can function without fear of terror, and grant the East Timor people self-determination. . . .**

This is the standard stage theory of reformists, which says that democracy must be won before the working class can fight for socialism. This means that the workers are in fact held back from fighting the capitalist system behind the dictatorship. Because the working class is the only force powerful enough to topple the dictators, this strategy leads to "popular-front" governments that tie the workers' organizations to bourgeois parties, with the workers' and peasants' interests inevitably subordinated to those of capital.

Popular fronts have led to smashing defeats because the working class was ideologically and organizationally tied to sections of the ruling class. This happened in China in 1927, Spain in the 1930's — and Indonesia in 1965. Even though

Miah asserts that the PRD and its allies "are not relying on the elections or splits in the army, and refuse to subordinate their campaign to big business or those seeking to reform the regime's institutions," subordination to capital is the lesson of popular-frontist history. It is criminal that socialists who know what the PKI's strategy led to can encourage parallel policies in Indonesia today.

Trotsky's theory of *permanent revolution* explains that the bourgeoisie, however democratic its pretensions, will defend its property fiercely, as the foundation of its class power. Any mass threat to the property of some is a threat to the property of all. The tame and friendly bourgeoisie implied in "people's power" slogans is a myth.

Thus the tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution — the right of self-determination, political democracy, division of the land for the peasantry — can only be carried out by the proletariat in the course of making the socialist revolution. By championing democratic rights, the proletariat can gain the alliance and support of members of the middle classes and the peasantry. Further, the workers' revolution must spread internationally, since economic survival depends on the world system of production, its division of labor and its potential to create abundance. This potential is beyond the capacity of any one country, especially one kept backward by imperialism.

#### NEW WORKERS' PARTIES

In addition to the PRD, new working-class parties are being formed. Muchtar Pakpahan, the head of Indonesia's most prominent illegal trade union under Suharto, was released from prison after the dictator's fall. His union, the SBSI, the Indonesian Union for Workers' Welfare, organizes factory and transport workers and was legalized by Habibie. It was involved in a 20,000-strong mass strike in Medan, Sumatra in 1994 that led to Pakpahan's jailing.

According to *International Viewpoint*, Pakpahan now calls for a National Workers Party, "based on workers, small business people, intellectuals and progressive non-governmental organizations." He has also invited Megawati Sukarnoputri to be the party's head. This party would be in competition with the Indonesian Workers party, which was founded in late May by the government-supervised unions. Despite the courageous defiance of the old regime by leaders like Pakpahan, any working-class party that ties workers to even the oppositional bourgeois parties is no step forward.



Union leader Muchtar Pakpahan, jailed by Suharto, seeks to build workers' party tied to bourgeois politics.



## FOR A REVOLUTIONARY WORKERS' PARTY

Only workers on the ground in Indonesia can formulate the precise policies needed to take their struggle forward. But the long international experience of the class struggle, including the Indonesian disaster of 1965, screams out against the seemingly straightforward "democracy" strategy promoted by the left both inside and outside Indonesia.

The rivers will again run red with the masses' blood unless the most class-conscious workers fight to lead the working class in an independent struggle to overthrow capitalism, secure the democratic rights the masses demand and go on to build socialism. This can only be achieved by smashing the capitalist state and building a workers' state of armed workers governed by workers' councils. Key policies of a workers' state would be nationalization of the big businesses and the implementation of an economic plan that replaces capitalism's profit drive by planning production in the masses' interests.

Toward this end the revolutionary workers need to build their own vanguard party, not the PRD or a popular-frontist workers' party. In addition to organizing and politically educating the advanced workers, a revolutionary party would seek to lead the masses in all their struggles with the aim of proving to them the need for the socialist revolution. The touchstone of revolutionary policy would be to always warn the masses of the treachery of the reformist leaders and encourage the workers to rely on their own strength and independent organization.

Far from denying the importance of the struggle for democracy, a revolutionary party would prove itself the only reliable champion of the democratic cause. The reformists preach a peaceful and gradual struggle for democracy which is only allowing the old Suharto dictatorship to regather its strength. But revolutionaries would fight for the struggle to press ahead to the overthrow of the dictatorship. Unlike the reformists, who seek to form a new government in back-room deals, revolutionaries would fight for a constituent assembly

of elected representative of the whole Indonesian people. Their party would fight for the right of self-determination of the oppressed peoples of East Timor and Irian Jaya, and defend the ethnic Chinese against nationalist mobs. And it would champion the interests of the peasants and exploited rural poor against the big landowners.

While revolutionaries must explain that the full democracy of a constituent assembly will not be secured without the overthrow of capitalism and the creation of a workers' state, the masses must be convinced of this by their own experience in the struggle. The slogan for a constituent assembly will thus clearly formulate their democratic aspirations and expose the bourgeois democrats who will fear the power of such an assembly.

In connection with the democratic struggle, revolutionaries must always bring to the fore the independent interests of the working class. Revolutionaries should clearly focus the masses' economic demands, calling for the repudiation of the imperialist debt, the extension of the masses' calls for the seizure of Suharto's wealth to the seizure of all the big businesses including the imperialists', for a living wage that increases with the price of goods, and for an eight-hour day with no loss in pay.

To mobilize the masses in the struggle for these demands, revolutionaries should fight for the most powerful form of working class struggle: the general strike, and advance the formation of workers' action committees to organize the struggle. Most importantly, revolutionaries cannot raise the pacifist illusion that the masses can struggle for their demands without an armed confrontation with the military and police. Revolutionaries would look for every opportunity to encourage the arming of the masses and the formation of workers' defense guards. And revolutionaries would seek to split the army by winning to the masses' side the working class soldiers (there are undoubtedly many soldiers who would join or aid a popular militia, like the marines who refused to fire on protesters in mid-May).

A workers' victory in Indonesia would inspire struggles throughout Asia and begin the battle for working-class power everywhere. The crisis, along with imperialism's austerity attack, has already hit Southeast Asia and South Korea. China also faces a financial crisis, and its immense proletariat, increasingly subject to the world's economic gyrations, is restive. And Japan's working class, the heart of proletarian power in Asia, is facing pressure from all the world's imperialists to sacrifice more after a decade of recession.

One way to win international solidarity would be for the developing Indonesian trade unions and workers' parties to spread the call for the repudiation of the imperialist debt. A campaign toward this goal should be waged by revolutionary workers in all the countries under the imperialist thumb, placing such a demand on the leaders of the big workers' organizations. An all-Asian general strike to repudiate the debt, by the working classes under attack from Indonesia to South Korea, would be a giant step forward towards the defeat of imperialism. Moreover, the way the same crisis and attacks are hitting the workers of so many Asian countries simultaneously presents the opportunity for a general strike of all workers across South East Asia, which would be a remarkable display of working class power. ●

**For a Revolutionary Working-Class Party in Indonesia!  
Down with the IMF! Repudiate the Imperialist Debts!  
For a Socialist Federation of Asia!**

## REVOLUTIONARY HISTORY

Vol. 7, No. 1

### A Paradise for Capitalism?

#### Class and Leadership in 20th-Century Belgium

This issue continues the studies by Revolutionary History into those episodes in history in which Trotskyism and Trotskyists have been able to play a significant part. It contains a number of letters by Trotsky on Belgian issues never published in English before. There is also a major account of the Belgian General strike of 1961 and the positions taken at the time by the various tendencies. At this time Ernest Mandel was leading an "entrism" faction in the Belgian Socialist Party, and material is presented to make an assessment of the entry tactic.

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## Indonesia's Revolutionary Crisis

by Arthur Rymer

Of all the countries hit by the great Asian financial crash of 1997, Indonesia has gone through the most far-reaching political convulsions. A hated dictator has been ousted, and "democracy" is on everyone's lips. But despite this victory, the capitalist democracy that most of the mass movement envisages is impossible in a country as superexploited and crisis-ridden as Indonesia. Ultimately only a socialist revolution led by the working class can avert a new period of dictatorship by the imperialism-backed military.

Built-up resentment at the 32-year reign of military dictator-president Suharto, who had himself officially "re-elected" in March, was combined with fury at the rapid inflation and other austerity measures demanded by imperialist financiers like the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Starting in January, the mixture exploded in militant strikes, mass riots against rising food and fuel prices by the poorest sections of the working class, as well as widespread student protests. The movement continued despite deadly repression by the army. It culminated in mid-May with huge demonstrations in the capital, Jakarta, and in other major cities.

Noting the size of the rallies and the ferocity of the urban riots, the ruling class forced Suharto to resign in order to prevent a mass uprising. He was replaced by Vice-President B.J. Habibie, a long-term member of the notoriously corrupt Suharto clan that has raked in profits from all economic activity in Indonesia.

Suharto had ruled through a bloody dictatorship since the CIA-backed military coup he headed in 1965-66. The coup, one of the greatest defeats suffered by the international working class since the Second World War, culminated in the murder of nearly a million people. The victims were largely ethnic Chinese and members of the PKI, then the third-largest Communist Party in the world: "the rivers ran red with blood." The regime's murderous history also includes the slaughter of 200,000 during Indonesia's takeover of East Timor in the 1970's.

### POLITICAL SITUATION OPEN

Habibie is widely seen as the agent of "Suhartoism without Suharto," but he has had to make a show of undoing

the regime's harsh rule. He has ended the outright ban on political parties, allowed the formation of independent trade unions, and promised early elections ahead of the official end of his term in 2003. The press now openly attacks Suharto and publicizes the extent of his family's wealth. Habibie has



also released some of the hundreds of political prisoners. However, leaders of the PKI, the East Timor independence fight and the radical PRD (the People's Democratic Party; Partai Rakyat Demokratik in Indonesian) remain in prison. One of these is Dita Sari, leader of an independent trade union, the PPBI (Indonesian Center for Labor Struggle).

For a time, the political scene is wide open. New trade unions and political parties are springing up. There has been a wave of strikes, involving tens of thousands of workers, since Suharto's fall. The movement's main demands are the repeal of all the regime's repressive laws and the nationalization of the assets of Suharto, his family and his cronies.

Indonesia's situation can be compared to that of Iran after the overthrow of the Shah in 1979 or Russia after the fall of the Tsar in 1917. An oppressive regime has broken down and no stable government yet exists. In Russia the workers were organized in workers' councils, known as soviets; in Iran, there were councils called shoras. In Russia the revolutionary Bolshevik party led the soviets to a socialist revolution. In Iran, the left parties' failure to fight for work-

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