

# PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION



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## The Gulf Coast Catastrophe – Racist Capitalism’s “Perfect Storm”

People everywhere were shocked by the destruction wrought across America’s Gulf Coast by Hurricane Katrina. But horror turned to outrage as days went by while tens of thousands of mostly Black working-class and poor storm victims in New Orleans were abandoned by a government that didn’t give a damn about their fate.

They were crammed into the Superdome and Convention Center like slaves in the bellies of slave ships. They sat on roofs and watched helicopters fly by, often without offering help. They huddled in attics amid rising flood waters. They cradled loved ones in their arms as they died from dehydration or lack of medical care. For days they were forced to survive amid squalor and death, denied food and water.

As this horror was broadcast to the world, President Bush and his administration did virtually nothing for days. The media whipped up a racist frenzy over stories of armed Blacks taking over the city. In response, New Orleans’ Democratic mayor, Ray Nagin, while appealing for state and federal aid, ordered police to stop helping relief efforts and prioritize fighting “looters” – largely people desperately seeking food, water and other vital supplies.

Louisiana’s Democratic governor, Kathleen Blanco, stopped aid from entering the city until she had amassed an invasion force of National Guardsmen with orders to shoot to kill.

For the capitalists’ politicians, protecting business interests



*New Orleans under siege. The government brought in troops under shoot-to-kill orders ahead of buses, food and water for flood victims.*

was more important that saving lives. Only a massive public outcry forced political leaders to act. When they finally did, it was to combine belated relief efforts with attempts to blame and criminalize the survivors – and cover up the scandal with endless press conferences and photo opportunities.

The Gulf Coast catastrophe was a man-made disaster. Vicious racial oppression and class exploitation turned New Orleans into a death trap for the poor in general and for Black people in particular. Relief has been little and late for poor whites as well, both in smaller cities and towns as well as rural areas receiving little or no media coverage. And thousands of undocumented Mexican, Central American and Asian immigrant workers are receiving no governmental assistance at all.

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# COFI/LRP Report

## CHICAGO LRP

Last spring we attended meetings called to defend Howard Morgan, a 14-year Black police officer of the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad who was shot 25 times (many in the back) by four white Chicago cops while driving home early one morning and still faces trumped-up criminal charges.

On June 19, the LRP intervened at the Chicago meeting of the tour of Iraqi labor leaders, which featured two representatives of the Federation of Workers Councils and Unions of Iraq (FWCUI), connected to the Worker-Communist Party of Iraq. (See PR 69 on the WCPI.) In a meeting which drew the entire Chicago left, we were the only group to condemn the speakers' refusal to take a side against U.S. imperialism, no matter how misled and reactionary the current leadership of the resistance may be. An LRPer spoke from the floor:

**I believe a workers' revolution to overthrow capitalism is the only way to defeat the attacks of U.S. imperialism. As a revolutionary socialist, I disagree with your position which condemns the occupation and the resistance equally. The masses of oppressed Iraqis identify with the resistance against occupation. They do not favor the Islamic fundamentalists and their criminal attacks on women, they do not favor the Baathists and their criminal attacks on Shi'ite civilians. But an oppressed people understands that the main enemy, the main cause of the devastation Iraqis face, is the U.S. occupation – as you yourselves have documented in your comments tonight. That mass sympathy against the occupation is why the resistance lives on. I believe the working class must take the leadership of the resistance movement away from the reactionaries, the fundamentalists and Baathists. Your position will leave the majority of the people, who rightly support the resistance, under the influence of the reactionaries.**

The FWCUI speakers did not answer our argument at all, just repeating the horrors perpetrated by Baathist and Islamist elements. They did claim to "recognize the right of an occupied people to resist the occupation," but they based this right on the United Nations' Geneva Convention. This pro-imperialist position is consistent: the FWCUI calls for replacement of the U.S. occupiers by U.N. "peacekeepers," who would also be run by the leading imperialist powers.

The AFL-CIO held its "split convention" in Chicago in July. Chicago LRPers participated in the smattering of left events scheduled to coincide with the convention, which strikingly demonstrated the disorientation, isolation and increasing irrelevance of the once-smug labor left milieu.

A Labor Solidarity with Palestine meeting, a "Workers Fight Back" conference and a protest called to demand that the federation end its leading role in the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) were all poorly attended. Through the NED, the AFL-CIO openly colludes with the CIA, the U.S. State Department, the World Bank and other imperialist bodies in subverting labor and popular struggles to enforce labor exploitation, austerity programs, the extraction of natural resources and debt-collection. But as with the other events, the "progressive" bureaucrats did not materialize, let alone mobilize the ranks.

More recently, Chicago LRPers joined the picket lines of Northwest Airline mechanics, members of the Airline Mechanics Fraternal Association, whose strike is being sabotaged by rival unions belonging to both the AFL-CIO and the Change to Win Coalition (CWC) that broke from it in July. We opposed the split in the AFL-CIO, mainly because we saw no serious turn toward mass defense by either faction. The actions of both sides in the first major test since the split sadly supports our contention. Although leaders of HERE-UNITE, a CWC-allied union, had pledged strike "support," the CWC union directly involved with Northwest, the Teamsters, has refused to stop shipments to the airline. The leadership of the AFL-CIO has been more openly hostile to the strike, while its major union at Northwest, the International Association of Mechanics, has deliberately participated in performing scab work.

We also participated in a demonstration called by the abortion rights organization NARAL and other liberals to protest Bush's choice for the Supreme Court, John Roberts. LRPers drew the class line with the chant, "Working Class, Take a Stand! Free Abortion On Demand!" The ISO refused to join with us in pushing this elementary socialist demand to avoid embarrassing their liberal friends.

Chicago LRP is planning political discussions and is eager for collaboration with revolutionary-minded workers and youth. Please get in touch with us at 773-759-1340.

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## *Proletarian Revolution*

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# CCNY Cracks Down on Anti-Military Protesters

Three City College of New York students and one campus worker were arrested for participating in a non-violent protest against military recruiters at a “career fair” on March 9. The vindictive College administration suspended the students from classes; the worker, Theater Department secretary Carol Lang, who has been at CCNY for thirty years, was suspended from her job without pay for almost a month.

Here are the basic facts (further details can be found at the website [www.citydefensecampaign.org](http://www.citydefensecampaign.org) and at [www.lrp-cofi.org](http://www.lrp-cofi.org)). At the March 9 protest, about fifteen demonstrators had chanted anti-war slogans in front of a National Guard recruiting table; private “rent-a-cops” and campus “peace officers” ushered them from the room and then physically attacked two protesters, Nick Bergreen and Justino Rodriguez. The two were arrested along with a third student, Hadas Thier, who was taking pictures. The level of repression was stepped up when the cops seized Carol Lang in her office on campus two days later. The arrestees were charged with assault – a standard cop practice to cover their own brutality.

College President Gregory Williams quickly issued a statement claiming – contrary to all non-cop observers – that the four arrestees, not the police, were guilty of violence. His administration then took the unprecedented step of suspending all four and docking Lang’s pay without even the pretense of a hearing. The claim was that the four “posed a continuing danger on campus” – an obvious fabrication.

The students are supporters of the International Socialist Organization (ISO) on campus. Lang is organizationally unaffiliated but has often worked with supporters of the League for the Revolutionary Party (LRP) in campus and union activities.

## CHARGES DROPPED

The “CCNY Four” were supported from the start by the City Defense Campaign, a coalition of students, workers and faculty members on campus. Resolutions of support came from the faculty union of the City University, of which CCNY is a branch, and from the CCNY Faculty Senate. The Campaign held public protest demonstrations and a teach-in on the issues of free speech, military recruitment and the war in Iraq. It also collected over a thousand signatures on campus and off demanding that all the charges be dropped as well as over a thousand dollars to help pay for defense expenses and compensate Lang for her lost wages.

As a result of the active defense effort, the criminal charges were dropped against all four, and the three students were reinstated. Clearly there was no evidence to try them, nor to support President Williams’s Alice-in-Wonderland process of sentence first, trial afterwards.

Lang’s disciplinary punishment continues. She finally got an administrative hearing over her suspension in June, held well off campus, at which she was dealt an additional five weeks’ suspension without pay, pending arbitration of her case this fall.

## UNION PITCHES IN – AGAINST WORKER

Carol Lang has also been outrageously discriminated against by her own union, Local 384 of AFSCME District Council 37. She was nominated for the presidency of her local but then removed from the ballot on the grounds that she had been off the payroll for several weeks and therefore was ineligible to run. LRP supporters were among the DC 37 workers who spoke out at two union meetings in Carol’s defense.

An editorial in the New York City civil service newspaper *The Chief* called the decision a “disgrace” and observed:

**By the logic of the Local 384 decision, every labor leader who ever went to jail for seeking better wages or working conditions, or protesting a war or the killing of Amadou Diallo, could have their positions challenged if being arrested violated a technical definition of good standing.** (June 10.)

DC 37’s blatantly discriminatory ruling was upheld in July by AFSCME’s national Judicial Panel, in a process *The Chief* accurately labeled a “kangaroo court” whose chairman tailors his rulings to suit the AFSCME bureaucracy and “doesn’t concern himself with trade union issues or principles.” (August 26.)

To top it off, Lang was denied the \$800 “signing bonus” awarded to all CUNY DC 37 workers in their long-delayed contract, on the grounds that she was off the payroll on March 31, the day the ratification of the contract was announced! This additional theft of rightfully earned wages was accepted by union officials, Lang was told by CCNY payroll workers. There will be a rally protesting the undemocratic treatment of Lang and other workers by the union at DC 37 headquarters, 125 Barclay St., at 5:00pm on Tuesday, September 27.

Why is the union acting this way? A few years ago several top DC 37 officials were convicted on corruption charges, after the union had settled for a multi-year no-gain contract. (See “Hands Off DC 37!” in *PR* 58.) This year the union again agreed to a rotten contract, so any militant committed to fight for the workers’ interests or who even raises questions about union operations represents a danger to the bureaucrats in power.

## CCNY AND THE MILITARY

The crackdown at CCNY takes place in the midst of a

## THE LIFE AND DEATH OF STALINISM

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– Al Richardson, *Revolutionary History*

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stepped-up climate of tension and repression in the United States. The working class has been under economic assault for decades. Dissent against the wars and occupations was stifled under the patriotic chest-beating that followed the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

By this spring, however, opposition to the anti-working-class assault was mounting. The war against Iraq is increasingly unpopular, and recruitment has sagged well below Washington's needs for policing the world. Re-enlistment is down, and "stop-loss" orders have forced thousands of soldiers into involuntarily extended tours of duty – a "back-door draft." Protests by soldiers, their families and outraged opponents of the war are growing.

The City University authorities are tailing their ruling-class bosses by hardening their line against student, worker and faculty activists. CUNY is a working-class university, with a majority of Black, Latino, Asian and immigrant students. Cutbacks and rising costs at CUNY have become the norm over the years and have inspired numerous rounds of protests. So police presence on CUNY campuses has been expanded, and arresting student demonstrators on trumped-up charges is becoming standard practice.

In a direct link to the military, CCNY gets over 10 million dollars in grants from the Pentagon, far more than all the other CUNY campuses together. No wonder the administrators worried when protesters forced military recruiters to abandon their efforts

last fall. As an LRP supporter said in a speech at the Defense Campaign teach-in:

**The American ruling class has targeted places like City College, with its high percentage of working class Blacks and Latinos, as prime places to recruit. As the economy continues to sputter, job opportunities in this country are dwindling, and they are especially bad for working-class youth of color in the major industrial areas, where unemployment reaches over 50 percent. So military recruiters prey on CCNY students, trying to trick them into going over to Iraq to kill Iraqis, and possibly die – all for a war that does not benefit us at all. It only benefits the few who are part of the U.S. ruling class.**

There is growing nationwide resistance in high schools as well as colleges against military recruitment, especially the targeting of working-class and Black and Latino youth. In the fall term, anti-military recruitment actions will continue at CCNY. Protests against the harassment and punishment of Carol Lang will be reinvigorated. Her suspension from work and the docking of her pay will be appealed this fall. Those interested in joining the campaign can contact the websites cited above or call us at 212-330-9017. Statements of support and contributions for the defense can be sent to the City Defense Fund, 809 W. 181st St. #182, New York, NY 10033. ●

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## Gulf Catastrophe

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*continued from page 1*

The facts are undeniable. The Katrina disaster was a massive crime committed by the capitalist ruling class against the most vulnerable sections of the working class and poor.

### 1. The Disaster Was Predicted and Preventable

Hurricanes in the Gulf are a natural and frequent phenomenon, but the flooding that destroyed New Orleans was widely predicted and totally preventable. Successive federal, state and local governments – Republican *and* Democratic – refused to spend the money on the levees, sea gates and pumping stations needed to save the city and its people. They preferred to line the pockets of capitalists and pray that New Orleans would survive.

### 2. The Evacuation Plan Meant Survival of the Richest

Faced with an inevitable catastrophe, the governor and mayor developed an evacuation "plan" that was utterly indifferent to the fate of the poor. Those who had cars and money for gasoline were able to evacuate and survive; the poor were abandoned to face hideous conditions and in many cases death. As local officials made clear to residents *before* the hurricane, those who could not find their own way to evacuate the city would be "on their own." By the time the flood struck, the fate of most of its victims was sealed.

### 3. It All Adds Up To Racist Mass Murder

Then countless more were left to die by a shocking refusal to provide emergency services. Some emergency responders were unavailable and unprepared because thousands of National Guardsmen and their crucial equipment had been deployed to Iraq; relief efforts were clearly hampered by corruption and bureaucratic infighting and buck-passing. But the biggest factor preventing aid was the vile contempt held by all levels of authority for the poor, and especially for Black people – added to the fear of a Black-led urban uprising.

Not only did state and federal authorities then abandon them for days without even sending relief; they sent relief away! Arguing (ridiculously) that the city had fallen under the control of armed and rampaging Black gangs, the state and federal authorities refused to allow aid into the city before it was under military occupation. They blocked volunteer rescuers and even the Red Cross from entering the city, turned back deliveries of food and water, and sent convoys of empty buses *away* from the city. (Hundreds of buses were just left in parking lots.) Meanwhile, untold numbers drowned in the rising flood waters, and died for lack of food, water, medical assistance and protection. Their bodies were left to rot in the putrid water or be eaten by rats on dry land.

When the National Guard finally did enter the city, they did so like a conquering army and acted with outrageous racism. Whites were evacuated first, with Guardsmen even helping them with their luggage. Meanwhile, the tens of thousands at the Superdome and Convention Center were rounded up at gunpoint. Under the guise of searching them for weapons, the National Guard forced them to divide into lines with men on one side and women and children on the other; families were broken up and dispersed across the country. The line-ups echoed what slave traders did to their captives and what the Nazis did in concentration camps.

## RACE AND CLASS: THE LEGACY OF HISTORY

One of the most scandalous episodes occurred when hundreds of people tried to cross a highway bridge over the Mississippi River to reach neighboring Jefferson Parish. They were met by a line of sheriffs who fired over the heads of the crowd to disperse it. The cops told them that "the West Bank [of the Mississippi] was not going to become New Orleans and there would be no Superdomes in their city." These were code words: poor Black people were presumed to be potential criminals and were not to be allowed out of New Orleans under any conditions. (The incident was first reported in *Socialist Worker*, Sept. 9.)

Cops halting a march over the bridge revived memories of Selma, Alabama in 1965, where 600 marchers led by Martin Luther King, Jr. were attacked by police with tear gas and billy

clubs as they tried to cross the Edmund Pettus bridge to get to Montgomery, the state capitol. Forty years after the height of the civil rights movement, Black working-class Americans are still treated as third-class citizens by the racist police.

The Black revolt of the 1960's changed much of the face of the South. However, Katrina uncovered a fact already known by many, Black and white: the old violent racism persists right under the surface. The armed police power of white-dominated suburban parishes was far more quickly mobilized to repel waves of desperate Black families fleeing the floods than was any force trying to aid them. While many whites in the South and elsewhere were genuinely moved by the plight of the thousands of Black victims, there were enough "law and order" vermin there to continue the long tradition of murderous Southern inhospitality.

In its history the United States has seen massacres of American Indians and the horrors of slavery, race riots and Klan lynchings. The government's response to the hurricane's aftermath was not quite as overt. It was not a conspiracy to wipe out people who were poor and Black. But the same conditions of capitalist exploitation and racism that trapped tens of thousands in the New Orleans flood entrap millions in cities across the country. A plausible fear of working-class rebellion combines with racism in the minds of cops and politicians. The result in New Orleans was a "perfect storm" of all the ugly features of American capitalism, and it led to perhaps the greatest single act of racist mass murder ever to take place in this country.

#### FIGHTING THIS MURDEROUS SYSTEM

For most people, the Gulf Coast catastrophe is a shocking human disaster. But for this country's cold-blooded ruling class it is primarily a disaster in public relations. While the authorities are now belatedly sending some temporary relief to the hurricane survivors, their greatest concern is to save face for the richest and most powerful ruling class in world history. The fact that we live under a brutal capitalist system waging war against Blacks, Latinos, immigrants and the entire working class has been cruelly exposed.

The immediate struggle to survive by those most directly affected by the hurricane continues. Private companies like Halliburton and Bechtel, which have already profited from the invasion of Iraq and been caught trying to steal millions more in the process, have already moved in like vultures to make a killing from rebuilding projects. The working-class, poor and oppressed victims of the hurricane will need to organize to fight for housing, financial support and jobs, and should receive the active support of workers and all fighters for justice. And the most politically conscious workers and youth have a special duty: to make sure that the political lessons of this tragedy are fully understood – in order to show the way to the overthrow of this rotten system once and for all.

This country's murderous ruling class cannot be allowed to get back to business as usual. The very best capitalism can offer is a brief return to everyday misery at home and bloody wars abroad – before it drags us all into worse. We have seen how the capitalist system, and its Republican and Democratic parties, are the enemies of the working class and poor, and particularly of people of color. We cannot afford to get trapped in electoralist and other diversions by reformist, populist politicians who will claim to be able to fix the system. The Gulf Coast catastrophe must be made the spark for massive struggles against deepening racism, exploitation and poverty. Out of those struggles there must grow a new political leadership, and an internationalist, working-class revolutionary political party dedicated to the only solution to the ever worsening nightmare of life under capitalism: working-class revolution to sweep away that system and build a socialist society

of freedom and abundance cleansed of exploitation and racism.

#### "NO ONE CAN SAY THEY DIDN'T SEE THIS COMING"

In the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) head Michael Brown, Homeland Security Director Michael Chertoff and President Bush all claimed that no one imagined a disaster like the flooding of New Orleans. Even Bill Clinton rushed to their side, repeating the same lie.

In fact, the danger of a hurricane triggering a flood that would submerge and destroy New Orleans had been recognized for decades. After a deadly flood in 1995, Congress passed the Southeast Louisiana Urban Flood Control Project (SELA). Some work was funded shoring up levees and building pumping stations, but the federal and state governments, Republican and Democratic, refused to fund the massive and urgent construction that was necessary to prevent a disaster. Funds were also diverted into the tourist business and private pockets.

By 2001, a FEMA report identified a hurricane-triggered flood of New Orleans as among the three worst-case disasters that could strike the U.S., along with an earthquake hitting San Francisco and terrorists attacking New York City. As the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* warned the following year:

**A major hurricane could decimate the region, but flooding from even a moderate storm could kill thousands. It's just a matter of time ... Evacuation is the most certain route to safety, but it may be a nightmare. And 100,000 without transportation will be left behind ... struggling to survive. Some will be housed at the Superdome ... Others will end up in last-minute emergency refuges that will offer minimal safety. But many will simply be on their own ... Thousands will drown while trapped in homes or cars by rising waters. Others will be washed away or crushed by debris. Survivors will end up trapped on roofs, in buildings or on high ground surrounded by water, with no means of escape and little food or fresh water, perhaps for several days.** (June 24, 2002)

This didn't stop the Bush Administration, however, from massively cutting the funding of the New Orleans projects while initiating an orgy of tax cuts for the rich. As the *Times-Picayune* summed up, "federal budget cuts have all but stopped major work on the New Orleans area's east bank hurricane levees ... [which] won't be finished for at least another decade." Walter Maestri, the head of emergency management for Jefferson Parish, explained: "It appears that the money has been moved in the president's

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budget to handle homeland security and the war in Iraq, and I suppose that's the price we pay. Nobody locally is happy that the levees can't be finished, and we are doing everything we can to make the case that this is a security issue for us." To no avail.

Much attention will focus on the murderous cuts Bush made to New Orleans flood protection. But governments for decades have refused to fund the necessary work. Money for Lake Pontchartrain levees and drainage in New Orleans got cut under Clinton as well as Bush, according to a series of reports in early September in the *Chicago Tribune*. Thus past neglect of New Orleans paved the way for Bush to seal the city's fate.

The disrepair of the New Orleans levees and pumps, along with the Louisiana wetlands that helped protect the city, is not just a matter of capitalist greed but a product of the system's historical decay. Since the end of the post-World War II boom, capitalist profits have stagnated, and the ruling class has tried every possible method to keep them from falling, squeezing workers' wages and benefits while demanding speed-up and longer hours. The capitalists have also degraded the natural environment, polluting air, water and soil, violating and eliminating regulations designed to moderate the worst effects of their industry. With real profits eroding, they can little afford to invest in precautions that safeguard masses and are ever more inclined to take even greater risks. Thus the destruction of New Orleans is one of the worst disasters to result from decades of environmental degradation, but it will hardly be the last.

#### **A BIPARTISAN CRIME**

American capitalists normally mask the cruel injustices of their rule at home with imperialist patriotic bombast, saving their worst crimes for the poor of the "Third World." While their policies allowed the destruction of New Orleans at the cost of thousands of lives, the U.S. military continues to lay waste to the entire country of Iraq, including razing cities like Fallujah last

fall, at the cost of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi dead. (And this was on top of twelve years of U.N. economic sanctions, which, with Saddam Hussein's help, starved hundreds of thousands before that.) Even in the "Third World," however, when natural disasters strike, the imperialists often choose to send aid to conceal their day-to-day role in economically pillaging those countries. Thus even for this blood-soaked ruling class, the response to an emergency in an American city was particularly shocking.

The most apparent criminal failure to save the people of New Orleans was the White House's. With all the resources of his superpower state, Bush smirked and did effectively nothing. But local officials are no less guilty. The catastrophe in New Orleans was a bipartisan crime.

#### **1. The Murderers in Washington, ...**

For two days after the hurricane, as images of tens of thousands of people stranded in a flooded city were beamed around the world, Bush remained on his five-week vacation, playing golf and even flying to attend a fund-raiser. A stark contrast to his interrupting his previous vacation to rush to Washington to try to "save the life" of a single brain-dead white person – Terry Schiavo, who was being removed from hospital life-support. (This act catered to the "right-to-life" movement, whose real aim is to enforce the subordination of women.)

When he was finally forced to realize the extent of the crisis, pious statements of "concern" aside, his first reaction was to blame the victims. Seizing on racist descriptions of a city that was allegedly under the control of armed and raging Blacks, Bush's first act was to send soldiers – not to provide relief, but to defend private property.

And when he finally deigned to visit the devastated areas, it was all for show, not aid. Carloads of Secret Service agents screened every victim he met with metal detectors; wherever his august presence passed, helicopter flights were banned, thus further delaying the delivery of food and supplies.

Meanwhile, FEMA's response was a shocking display of inadequate resources and incompetence borne of racist and anti-working-class contempt. As soon as he was elected, Bush's administration sought to cutback on FEMA's task of helping the victims of natural disasters. The first person tapped to head FEMA, Joe Allbaugh, was not an emergency management expert but one of Bush's campaign managers. Allbaugh's priority was to cut back on FEMA's relief services, which he described as having become an "oversized entitlement program" like welfare. Allbaugh's goal was greatly helped by the post-September 11 absorption of FEMA into the newly created Department of Homeland Security; its attention turned further away from natural disasters and toward strengthening police-state powers under the guise of fighting terrorism.

Allbaugh soon left his position to become a lobbyist for companies profiting from the war in Iraq, and now is busy securing multi-million dollar contracts for firms profiting from the destruction in the Gulf Coast. Indeed to this end, in response to Hurricane Katrina, Allbaugh arrived in Louisiana before his replacement, his old college roommate, Michael Brown. As has become widely known, Brown's appointment showed the complete disdain the Bush administration had for FEMA's purported goal of disaster relief – Brown's previous experience was overseeing horseshows, and he was even forced to resign from that job! Brown waited five hours after the hurricane struck Louisiana before requesting that FEMA send an expanded force of relief workers, gave them two more days to get there, and then included in their tasks the responsibility to "convey a positive image of disaster operations to the general public."

## **Marxism, Interracialism and the Black Struggle**

***A Proletarian Revolution* pamphlet  
by Sy Landy**

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

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With the complete failure of local authorities and FEMA to respond to the unfolding tragedy, the White House refused to mobilize its powers to save the stranded and dying. Instead President Bush went on a public relations tour of staged photo opportunities and insulting speeches. When he finally made it to Louisiana and dared to step off Airforce One, Bush immediately congratulated his buddy “Brownie” for doing “a heck of a job.” While tens of thousands of people were fighting for their lives in New Orleans, Bush fondly reminisced about partying in the city during his college days and looked forward to sitting on the porch of arch-racist Mississippi Senator Trent Lott’s rebuilt mansion.

Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice remained on vacation in New York, taking in a Broadway play and spending thousands of dollars on shoes at a Fifth Avenue boutique. She was eventually forced to return to Washington to help the White House’s public relations disaster control, arguing that race couldn’t possibly have been a factor in not getting relief to New Orleans. Vice President Cheney stayed on vacation even longer.

Bush’s mother, the former First Lady, also seized the opportunity to spit on the hurricane survivors with ruling-class arrogance. In a radio interview following a visit to hurricane evacuees who had been taken to the Astrodome in Texas, she worried: “What I’m hearing, which is sort of scary, is they all want to stay in Texas. Everyone is so overwhelmed by the hospitality.” Not satisfied with this racist idiocy, she continued to explain that since “so many of the people in the arena here, you know, were underprivileged anyway, so this is working very well for them.”

## 2. ... in New Orleans’ City Hall ...

Days into the crisis, New Orleans’ Mayor Nagin seemed to voice the frustration of millions when he blasted the inaction of the state and federal governments and demanded they “get off [their] asses and do something” to address the crisis. But Nagin, along with Louisiana Governor Blanco, with forewarning of a disaster and with the power to seize all the city and state resources to safely evacuate residents, didn’t care enough about the poorer residents to make sure they were evacuated.

Not only did planners acknowledge that perhaps hundreds of thousands would be trapped in the city unable to evacuate for lack of assistance, but city and state officials had seen it first hand only a year before when hurricane Ivan bore down on New Orleans. The day before the hurricane hit, the *Times-Picayune* wrote of the “large group ... mostly concentrated in poorer neighborhoods” who wanted to evacuate but could not. Elsewhere, in an article entitled “Poor, Black and Left Behind,” journalist Mike Davis described the evacuation as looking “sinisterly like [arch-racist politician] Strom Thurmond’s version of the Rapture. Affluent white people fled the Big Easy in their SUV’s, while the old and car-less – mainly Black – were left behind in their below-sea-level shotgun shacks and aging tenements to face the watery wrath.”

Still, Nagin and Blanco didn’t change their plans. Not long before Hurricane Katrina struck, Nagin joined City Council President Oliver Thomas, Red Cross Director Kay Wilkins and others in preparing a public service announcement whose basic message the *Times-Picayune* summed up: “In the event of a major hurricane, you’re on your own.” The paper added,



*New Orleans residents waiting for evacuation buses under highway on September 3, six days after hurricane hit.*

“In scripted appearances being recorded now, officials ... drive home the word that the city does not have the resources to move out of harm’s way an estimated 134,000 people without transportation.” (July 24, 2005.)

But of course their excuse is a lie. The Mayor had the power to mobilize all forms of public transportation and did not. The world has seen the tragic images of hundreds of school buses flooded in New Orleans when they could have been used for evacuations long before the flood struck. But Nagin had already agreed with Governor Blanco that they would not evacuate the city’s poor.

Further, Nagin didn’t even bother to prepare sufficient shelter for those trapped. He told people to go to the Louisiana Superdome, which predictably lost power, running water and all sanitary facilities. And despite the Superdome’s previous designation as a mass shelter, no supplies were stockpiled. Over twenty thousand people were kept there for four days without food, drinking water, fresh clothing or medications. That was a cold-blooded decision: they didn’t want such relief to attract more evacuees to the crowded shelters. Rather than provide food for the living, they stockpiled ten thousand body bags for the inevitable dead.

## 3. ... and in the Louisiana State Capitol

With New Orleans flooded, FEMA dragging its feet and seemingly the entire Bush Administration on vacation, the power to help save those trapped in New Orleans (as well as the devastated across the state) shifted to the Louisiana’s Governor Blanco. But her response was no less criminal. A day after Hurricane Katrina hit, when action was called for, her response was to urge a state-wide day of prayer! But worse was yet to come.

Blanco and all the authorities joined the media in pushing racist descriptions of New Orleans being under the control of gangs of armed, marauding Black thugs. In response, the National Guard forces under her control were ordered to seal off the city until reinforcements could arrive. Red Cross trucks full of food and water, medical assistance and convoys of buses were prevented from entering the city.

Lieutenant General H. Steven Blum, chief of the National Guard Bureau provided a particularly blunt description of the

authorities' viewpoint to a Pentagon news conference. Ignoring the absence of rescue efforts, he asserted that:

**The most contentious issues were lawlessness in the streets, and particularly a potentially very dangerous volatile situation in the Convention Center where tens of thousands of people literally occupied that on their own. We had people that were evacuated from hotels, and tourists that were lumped together with some street thugs and some gang members ... it was a potentially very dangerous situation.**

In plain language, he was worried about middle-class whites being "lumped together" with poor and working-class Blacks. But witnesses at the convention center, and hours upon hours of videotape, told a different story. NBC journalist Tony Zumbada, for example, reported from the Convention Center:

**They are just left behind. There's nothing offered to them, no water, no ice, no C-rations. Nothing for the last four days. They were told to go to the Convention Center. They did. They've been behaving. The attitude there is unbelievable, how organized they are, how supportive they are of each other. They have not started any melees, any riots, nothing.**

**They just want food and support. And what I saw there, I've never seen in this country. And we need to really look at the situation in this Convention Center. It's getting very, very crazy in there and very dangerous. And somebody needs to come down with a lot of food, a lot of water. There's no hostility there, so they don't need to be bringing any guns or anything like that. They need support.**

But guns they *were* ordered to bring – by the thousand. Governor Blanco held a press conference to brag of having received National Guard reinforcements "fresh back from Iraq, well trained, experienced, battle tested and under my orders to restore order in the streets ... They have M-16s and they are locked and loaded. ... These troops know how to shoot and kill and they are more than willing to do so if necessary and I expect they will." What she had ordered was not a relief operation, but an invasion.

The newspaper *Army Times* (Sept. 2) ran an article entitled "Troops Begin Combat Operations in New Orleans," describing the National Guard's plan to "fight the insurgency in the city" while carrying out relief operations. It quoted Brigadier General Gary Jones, commander of the Louisiana National Guard's Joint Task Force, promising to make New Orleans "look like Little Somalia." "We're going to go out and take this city back," he promised. "This will be a combat operation to get this city under control."

At the conclusion of the mission, Lt. Gen. Blum bragged how the National Guard force "stormed the convention center and took it down" and how, surprisingly, "there was absolutely no opposition, complete cooperation ... no violent resistance, no one injured ... we did not have to fire a shot." No wonder! The fantasy of an "insurgency" in the city was even more imaginary than Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction.

At the end of his press conference, Blum was asked one final question: whether the need to build up an invasion force of National Guard was "one reason it took until Friday to get aid in?" "That is not only fair, it is accurate," he replied. "You've concisely stated exactly what was needed, and I told you why. We took the time to build the right force. The outcome was superb."

## THE RULING CLASS SEARCH FOR SOLUTIONS

Hurricane Katrina has swept away the last of the post-September 11 patriotic blather of America being united and free. The vicious exploitation and racist oppression this capitalist soci-

ety is based on, and the murderous profiteers and politicians who rule over it, have been exposed.

For some time to come, Republicans and Democrats will continue to scandalize one another with accusations and counter-accusations over who is responsible for the monumental failures at every stage of this disaster. The ensuing investigations will continue for as long as possible and will further prove that both capitalist parties are to blame, just as they have both, in their different ways, always served this racist capitalist system.

But beyond the headlines and behind the scenes, in corporate boardrooms and politicians' offices, a debate is already raging over how the ruling class can stabilize its rule amid the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. In time, the capitalists will have to turn from the neo-liberal free-market anarchy of wholesale privatization and tax cuts that has served recently to boost profits; now this strategy has become so destabilizing that it sank a major American city and threatens to trigger massive struggles. A section of the ruling class sees the need to pursue policies that strengthen their state power – not just to act domestically and internationally with their military, but also to allow the government to intervene economically.

For example, the shifting of a sizable portion of American industry to the "Third World" has taken advantage of cheap labor. But it has also weakened the domestic economy's industrial base. Here and elsewhere, the capitalists will need a government that more strongly directs investment. As the economy continues to decline, government will also be called on to prop up bankrupt industries whose collapse would threaten the system, as well as to discipline capitalist excesses in order to better keep down the working class. And certainly in the short term, they will need a political leadership that can adequately fake concern for the masses' plight where the Bush Administration has so miserably failed.

From the right, Colin Powell is already positioning himself to possibly try to save the Republican Party by offering it a Black and apparently more "compassionate" military face to front for it. Behind him, both inside and outside Republican ranks, more extreme right-wing demagogues are jockeying for position. But the greater immediate threat to the masses comes from the left-leaning defenders of capitalism.

## THE DANGER OF POPULISM

The Gulf catastrophe has the potential to spark huge class struggles in this country. But populist politicians who claim to "feel the people's pain" and to stand against the "big corporate" interests maneuver to avoid struggles that genuinely threaten capitalist rule. Populism means much more than pushing popular demands. It means utilizing mass sentiments to blur the class line, in order to divert attacks on capitalism as a system. No matter how radical or militant their rhetoric, the populists' goal is to turn active struggles sooner or later into passive electoral reformism.

Leaders of the Democratic Party's right wing like Hillary Clinton have voiced some criticisms of Bush's response to the hurricane, but they represent fundamentally the same policies of imperialist war abroad and austerity at home. They have been careful not to challenge Bush in any way that might further destabilize the ruling class.

But others are posturing to their left. Before the hurricane struck, some were already trying to take advantage of the growing anti-war sentiment and rising working-class anger at high prices and falling wages – while working to keep such sentiments safely within the limits of electoralism. Vice-Presidential candidate John Edwards, for example, switched from supporting the invasion of Iraq and "staying the course" to calling for setting a date for the



withdrawal of U.S. forces. In response to the hurricane, he has revived his populist theme of “Two Americas” – rich and poor – with the aim of bringing them together through patriotism.

Outside of the party’s top circles, any number of would-be “progressives” are pushing for the Democrats to adopt more radical policies. Some, like the *Nation* magazine, are calling for a “New New Deal” – state economic intervention and public works like that President Franklin Delano Roosevelt used to revive capitalist profits and contain the huge class struggles during the depression of the 1930’s.

Further to the left are “socialist” groups which formally oppose the Democrats but try to be popular by concentrating their fire on the Republicans: slogans like “Bush lies, people die” inevitably raise illusions in the supposedly oppositional Democrats. Similarly in the anti-war movement, they raise nationalist slogans around the war like “Money for New Orleans, Not for War” – thus dressing opposition to the war in America-First nationalism. All these efforts lead away from mass struggle and to eventual electoral support either for the Democrats or some reformist alternative.

One example: on September 8, Bush suspended the Davis-Bacon laws requiring clean-up and reconstruction contractors to pay workers at least the prevailing wage rates and benefits. This dealt another blow to workers, in the interest of profits for Bush’s fellow capitalists – the real looters! AFL-CIO head John Sweeney

denounced Bush’s move, but his only action was to appeal to Congress to reverse the “short-sighted” decision. Even when faced with outrage upon outrage, the labor leaders will not call mass action: they are afraid to upset the capitalist system that feeds their privileges.

Minister Louis Farrakhan of the Nation of Islam likewise calls for aid and comfort for the victims of Katrina, but not struggle against the system that victimized them. He is calling a “Millions More Movement” rally in Washington on October 15. Unlike his “Million Man March” ten years ago, this time women and gays will be invited. (See “Farrakhan No Answer to Racism” in *PR* 50.) But he is again calling for “atonement” rather than struggle. And plenty of Democratic politicians will be there to offer themselves as the way forward. If the official leadership is allowed to get its way, the rally will be another diversion of the struggle for Black liberation, a safety valve for the justified and explosive anger of the Black masses.

The working class and oppressed need their own political party, and elections can definitely be used to rally attention to issues and encourage further mass struggle. But encouraging support for the capitalist Democrats or their reformist shadows like the Green Party only undermines the growing sense of class hostility to the capitalists and their politicians among workers and diverts workers from struggle and toward electoralism. This is precisely what happened in the lead-up to the last presidential election, as we show in

## Mayhem in the Media

Television played a key role in the crisis after Katrina. It brought shocking pictures to the world of thousands of poor, largely Black, people in New Orleans desperately calling for food, water and transport to get off of rooftops and out of the hellish Superdome and Convention Center. These images alone condemned the U.S. government for its appallingly anti-working class and racist indifference to the lives of people in its own country.

But the media also helped the government whip up racism and to put the blame for their plight on the victims themselves. First came the complaints that the tens of thousands who failed to evacuate were responsible for their own misery. It took a while for announcers to grasp that so many people were too poor to own cars or even afford bus fare.

Then there were the stories of “looters” who broke into stores and other buildings to retrieve necessities for survival. Yes, there was looting of TV sets and other non-essential goods by both Blacks and whites, though the racist media coverage concentrated on the acts of Blacks almost exclusively. Some of this was the understandable reaction of poor people to grab stuff they could work a lifetime for and never afford. And all of this was greatly exaggerated in its extent by the media – the acts of a relative few given as much

attention as the helpless plight of tens of thousands.

But on the other side, many people seized provisions for those the government had abandoned. There were numerous reports of people cooperating, sharing the few supplies they had. And there were genuine working-class heroes who commandeered abandoned vehicles and drive people to safety, obtain electric generators to get power going, etc.

There are also accounts of unarmed crowds disarming gunmen at the Convention Center. These people too acted heroically, but their stories were not circulated hundreds of times on TV.

Rapper Kanye West’s brave outburst on NBC’s live telethon that “George Bush doesn’t care about Black people” has become well known. But he also indicted the media: “I hate the way they portray us in the media. You see a Black family, it says they’re looting. You see a white family, it says they’re looking for food.” And he connected this racist coverage with the danger of government repression, concluding “They’ve given them [the National Guard] permission to go down and shoot us.”

Rapes and murders were widely reported to have taken place at the Convention Center and the Superdome. We know that in times of crisis not all

people act heroically or cooperatively. Criminals terrorize poor working-class communities in normal times; disasters are no different. No doubt such crimes occurred, but there is also no doubt that the media exaggerated the criminal activity, thus giving the authorities the “justification” for their gross delays in sending aid.

Another story given wide play by the media was the reported shooting at relief helicopters. No such shots were caught on camera and no aircraft were actually hit. Federal and military officials have cast doubt on the story of the rescue helicopter that came under fire outside Kenner Memorial Hospital on August 31. Even if such shots were fired, they could have come from people desperate to call attention to themselves to be rescued.

Overall, the media painted a picture of New Orleans as being essentially under the control of armed gangs of rampaging Blacks. Typical was the *New York Times* (Sept. 3) description of the city a place where “gun battles, fistfights, holdups, carjackings and marauding mobs of looters ... held sway.” Such racist media coverage was used by the politicians and military to suspend airborne relief efforts for hours, and land-based relief efforts for days. The media’s racism, in short, helped take the lives of countless innocent victims of the disaster.



*In line at the New Orleans airport, destination unknown.*

our article on the anti-war struggle (page 19).

The same cannot be allowed to happen to the struggles which have the potential to arise in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Key to avoiding this fate is for the most class-conscious workers and youth coming together to build a working-class political party with a theory and program that can take the lead in advancing the most immediate struggles and link them to the only alternative to worsening life under capitalism: socialist revolution.

### **THE MASS STRUGGLES TO COME**

The aftermath of natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina brings to the fore urgent human needs on a huge scale: food, water, housing, financial support and reconstruction. But again, under the rule of the capitalists' one true god, private profit, a struggle is required every step of the way just to secure those demands for the most immediate victims. And wars expose a nation's class divisions and injustices like nothing else, as capitalist politicians rally the workers and poor to sacrifice their lives on the battlefield and their wages and living conditions at home. Disaffection grows as more and more ask themselves: What are we fighting for? What are the rich sacrificing?

Not surprisingly then, throughout history natural disasters and wars have often sparked revolutionary upheavals. For one historical example, the experience of the great Russian famine of 1891, in which the Tsar abandoned millions of peasants to starvation, radicalized a generation of workers, youth and intellectuals. Mass struggles against Tsarist rule grew steadily, culminating in a revolutionary uprising in 1905, the dress rehearsal for the triumphant socialist revolution of 1917.

Now the U.S. ruling class is confronted with a storm of its own. Anger at rising prices and falling wages was already combining with increasing opposition to the bloody quagmire that the U.S.'s occupation of Iraq has become well before Hurricane Katrina struck. Now the deadly consequences of American capitalism's grinding exploitation and poverty, and racism's cruel concentration of capitalism's worst effects upon people of color, is front-page news. A sense of injustice is widespread, but by far the strongest among Blacks, Latinos and immigrants. A single act of racist police brutality could set off a firestorm of protest in any major city. A creeping sense of the need to fight back against economic attacks is growing among workers. While not as apparent today, a single strike could also spark a massive fightback. The Katrina events have served to undermine the authority of not just establishment politicians but also the union and community leaders who are capitalism's last line of defense.

The potential for an outbreak of working-class struggle in this country has not been so great in years. The capitalists have been fighting a one-sided class war against the working class, as

our hands have been tied behind our back by union and community leaders who channel every attempt to fight back into the dead-end of electoralism. The opportunity must be seized to begin the fightback. The populist claim that it is only a matter of rich against poor, of "the people" against "big business," is meant to preempt the development of class consciousness and a growing challenge to capitalism. In contrast, we revolutionaries put forward a program of demands and mass action to do just that, beginning now with the needs of the immediate victims of Hurricane Katrina.

### **HURRICANE SURVIVORS' STRUGGLES**

While we mourn those killed in the Gulf Coast catastrophe, the struggle of hundreds of thousands of homeless, jobless and displaced hurricane survivors is only just beginning. While the federal government is publicizing the billions in relief it is sending to the Gulf Coast, much of it is lining the pockets of profiteering contractors. Washington is sending relief with the aim, not of truly helping the hurricane victims, but of covering up its own crimes, and will no doubt try to abandon the survivors at the first opportunity.

Only an organized struggle by the survivors can avoid this. Workers everywhere, particularly in trade unions and community groups, should fight for their organizations to do all they can to support the survivors. Aid donations are helpful, but most important will be supporting and encouraging the survivors' struggles for relief and justice against a government which will surely abandon them again. Such organization and struggle has many precedents. For example, after the 1985 earthquake that hit Mexico City, many working-class victims organized protests and won demands for houses to be built for the poor and other concessions. The struggles by the survivors of Hurricane Katrina will have to go a lot further.

#### **1. Self-Organization**

It is crucial that the hurricane's survivors, dispersed in towns and cities across the country, organize to fight for their interests. Meetings must be held to form survivors' committees that debate and vote on demands to raise and elect a leadership. Such committees must open themselves to the tens of thousands of undocumented immigrants from the Gulf Coast who are being denied any government assistance and who also have to fight for their rights and interests. That would provide a fantastic example of internationalist and anti-racist struggle for the rest of the workers' movement. And the various committees should link up to form a nationwide organization to coordinate the struggle.

With such organization, the survivors will be able to have their own voice and feel their power, and that alone would scare the hell out of the ruling class. Indeed, at the Houston Astrodome the formation of a Survivors Leadership Group has been announced. It has already won demands, including improved day-care and specialized care for the elderly. While we lack much information about this particular group, its organization and successes show the potential for such struggles. Unions should be forced to make their offices and resources available for use by hurricane survivors' committees – and to mobilize their own members for unified actions.

#### **2. A Program of Economic Demands**

Essential will be the development of a clear program of demands for the survivors' committees to fight for. Only they will be in the best position to formulate such demands, but some demands are apparent: full unemployment benefits (not just one-time, disorganized FEMA promises), quality emergency housing,

food, clothing, medical care, childcare and education. When the committees demands are not immediately met, they must respond by organizing demonstrations and inviting the broadest possible participation.

As rebuilding efforts begin in New Orleans and across the Gulf Coast, survivors will have to fight for the rebuilding to be done in the interests of the working class and poor. One crucial fight will be for their own "Right of Return," the right of all those who wish to return to New Orleans to be provided quality housing as close to the city as possible until they can go back. Already real estate agents are pursuing evacuated New Orleans residents like ambulance chasers, trying to take advantage of their desperate situations to get them to sell their properties cheap. And local capitalists and politicians have long dreamed of driving the poorest, particularly Blacks, from the city; they now look upon rebuilding efforts as an opportunity to launch a massive gentrification project to keep the poor out of the city for good. Under these circumstances it is quite likely that many of the workers and poor of the city will have to literally fight for the right to return. The fight for the government to pay for the building of quality housing for every single working-class and poor New Orleans resident who lost their home will be crucial.

Hurricane survivors want not just handouts but jobs, and the survivors should fight for the greatest possible number of jobs to be filled by displaced residents, receiving whatever training is necessary free of charge. Such a struggle would give the survivors all the more reason to join trade unions in opposing Bush's suspension of the Davis-Bacon Act.

### 3. Self-Defense

In just trying to survive the hurricane and evacuate New Orleans, Black survivors faced threats of deadly racism from National Guardsmen and police. All evacuees, including those holding legal gun permits, were disarmed before evacuating. Meanwhile, racist whites have been lining up outside of gun stores in fear of incoming Blacks. Dispersed mostly throughout the South, where the Klan and other gangs feed off the region's vicious racism, Black people displaced by the hurricane face the particular threat of racist attack. Survivors' committees should affirm their right to armed self-defense and organize for it.

### 4. Inspiring Class-Wide Struggle

The Gulf Coast catastrophe, and particularly the murderous effects of racist capitalism in causing so much death and destruction in New Orleans, have revealed the crises of poverty, exploitation and oppression across the country. Likewise, the struggles of the survivors of Hurricane Katrina can be an inspiration to the rest of the working class. The needs of the Katrina survivors are starkly clear, but similar demands are needed by all workers: massive public works, including rebuilding rotting infrastructure (the New Orleans levees and pumps are just a fraction of what is needed); jobs for all at a living wage; housing, health care and education. Revolutionaries will fight to link all these vital struggles, and will popularize the need for general strikes to unite the working class and shut the system down to win our demands.

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

Hurricane Katrina has revealed with tragic and deadly clarity how capitalism directs economic activity toward private profit at the expense of the most urgent human needs. Moreover, the flooding of New Orleans pales in comparison to the human misery and environmental destruction wrought across the world by imperialist superexploitation and war. Indeed, capitalism threat-

ens the very existence of life on the planet, through everything from pollution-fueled global warming to the potential for nuclear war. The hurricane was just one glaring, concentrated example of daily life under capitalism: in which thousands starve and die anonymous deaths, including those from preventable diseases, because they cannot afford basic medical care; in which millions languish in prisons because poverty fuels crime while the police and the courts target the poor and particularly people of color; and in which scores die miserably either directly at the hands of imperialism or under the jackboot of its local enforcers.

A socialist society run in the interests of the vast masses of humanity, and not a tiny elite class of profiteers, is the only alternative. It is not pie-in-the-sky dreaming or just a "smarter" way of running things; it is the logical conclusion of capitalism's development. Capitalism has itself laid the basis for transcending the misery to which it condemns humanity. It long ago built up the economic productive forces – industry, technology and a globalized economy – to the point where the potential exists to produce an abundance of all need resources. But that potential remains trapped by capitalism's pursuit of profit.

To redirect society's productive forces toward producing in the interests of the majority, control of the economy will have to be seized from the capitalists. The state power, which has cops and soldiers to defend its rule, will have to be smashed in a revolution that puts the majority, the workers and oppressed, in control. This cannot be achieved in one country – it will take revolutions across the world to prevent sabotage and attack by the capitalists and to unleash the productive potential of the world economy.

By planning economic production in the interests of the masses of humanity, workers' states would do so much more than just improve their immediate living conditions. Class society first arose in history as a result of a scarcity of necessary goods. The struggle to control small surpluses of food, for example, saw society divide into a tiny elite who enjoyed the profits of rule over an exploited majority. Scarcity continues to underpin capitalist class society, driving nationalism and racism as the way capitalist forces rally support in a fight of all against all for dwindling resources. By producing an abundance of necessary goods for all, workers' states would undermine the very basis for the existence of classes. Necessary work would be divided equally among all. And the introduction of labor-saving technology, instead of creating unemployment as it does under capitalism, would be used to shorten the work-week and free workers' lives for greater leisure. In such ways the basis would be laid to the development of a society free of all forms of exploitation and oppression.

Moreover, capitalism has created the class with the potential to overthrow it: the working class. With no way to survive without working for and being exploited by the capitalists, the working class has no fundamental interest in maintaining the system. Drawn from across the world and forced into cooperation and labor in their jobs, the working class can turn this organization against the capitalists in collective struggle. Strikes and other forms of mass struggle can not only defend and even win temporary improvements in the masses' conditions, they show workers their real power. General strikes by the entire working class in particular raise the question of re-starting the economy under the working class's control and direction. Through the experience of such struggles, more and more workers can come to revolutionary socialist conclusions – if there is a proletarian revolutionary party leadership present to help show the way. The League for the Revolutionary Party is dedicated to bringing together the most class-conscious workers and youth to move the building of this party forward. ●

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# Social Security under Attack

by Dave Franklin

The Bush administration has stumbled badly in its campaign to dismantle the Social Security system that has been warmly supported by the American working class for decades. Bush made his privatization scheme the top domestic priority for his second term, confident that it could be steamrolled through Congress by a sales pitch delivered to the public. Instead, the proposal met popular opposition, particularly from the working class and poor. And in the aftermath of the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, Bush's plan is going nowhere.

But this is no reason for wild celebration. The mass opposition has been mostly passive in nature, and Bush & Co. have not given up. Moreover, a genuine crisis is brewing over how Social Security can be maintained. Bush's assault has laid the groundwork for alternate methods of attack by its supposed defenders in the Democratic Party. And the existing system itself, as we will discuss, is riddled with fundamental class flaws.

## THE PROGRAM THAT "WORKS"

Social Security was conceived as part of the package of New Deal legislation in the 1930's under pressure from mass upheavals, and over the years it has appeared successful by almost all capitalist standards in its manageability and service as a significant social sop. Its functioning is pretty simple: its funds come from payroll taxes and are primarily disbursed as income for retirees and disabled workers, along with their spouses and children. It requires relatively small administrative costs and leaves less room for fraud at all levels than other governmental programs. It has paid for itself. Its spread over a broad section of the working population underlies its popularity and has prevented it from being a target of racist backlash like the welfare program. And it does go a way towards providing minimum allowances for retirees. In short, the program "works."

Even so, it operates within a capitalist system in deep stagnation and under a ruling class determined to maintain its profits regardless of human cost. A major worldwide depression has been averted only through a protracted and ever-deepening attack on the international working class and oppressed peoples. This has been



Seniors protest Bush's anti-working-class Social Security "reforms."

evident enough in the U.S., with speed-up and the cuts in wages and benefits of employed workers. But there are other points of assault, including the "social wage" through which workers and the poor are sustained in ways which are not provided by private employers. The government programs which provide such services have over a long period either been shredded (e.g., welfare), reduced (unemployment benefits) or threatened (Medicare) by Republican and Democratic administrations alike.

Until very recently, Social Security seemed untouchable; even the Gingrich-led Conservative "revolution" of the 1990's steered clear. But the rightward drift of American politics under the free enterprise banner emboldened Bush and a section of the ruling class. During his first term Bush was already speaking of the supposed benefits of privatizing the system. But then such talk was devoid of any details. Once into his second term, how-

## Fight Police Terror!

**No Support to Capitalism's Racist Anti-Worker Police!  
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- Why the chief barriers to effective struggle are the Democratic Party politicians and the union bureaucrats.
- Why a revolutionary party must be built by the workers and poor if we are to stop being sold out.

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ever, Bush's campaign began in earnest. He tried to whip up an atmosphere of mortal crisis. Early in the year he warned that by 2018, "you're either going to have to raise the taxes of people or reduce the benefits." School children were likewise cautioned: "The system will be bankrupt by the year 2040."

In doing this, Bush was grossly distorting the projections of Social Security trustees that in 2018, because of the growing proportion of retirees to active workers, the money paid out in benefits will begin exceeding the amount collected in taxes (thus cutting into the substantial surplus fund that has and is being built); and that under current formulas by 2042 benefits will start to be gradually reduced. While the ratio of retired to active workers is significant, to get a real sense of proportion note that in 1950, sixteen workers were paying into the system for every retiree drawing benefits, while by the mid-1970's the ratio had already fallen to three to one. Yet, Social Security has been running a surplus.

### BUSH'S FLIMSY CASE

There *is* a looming crisis in Social Security, but it is on a far different basis than the falsified arguments of Bush. Its crisis, unlike the basket-case version promulgated by Bush, has far more to do with the crisis of society in general than the operation of Social Security itself.

From a false premise, Bush derives a false and cruel solution: privatization. Under his scheme, a significant portion of each worker's payroll tax (some conservatives favor the whole thing) would be diverted into a private account, which could later be used for financial investments. The formal argument is that future retirees will then be free to invest much of their income where they wish – and that those investments will pay dividends which, combined with the "public" funds, would exceed existing payments.

Bush has played up the "freedom" angle to absurd extremes. For example, during the 2000 election campaign, he talked about how recipients could choose the "safest investment in the world," U.S. government bonds. That of course is exactly how the Social Security surplus is now being invested! His real aim is to steer funds into the stock market.

More importantly, and this part Bush particularly doesn't want to talk about, over time benefits will be severely reduced; that is, after all, the real reason for the proposal to begin with. And investments in the stock market can hardly be expected to compensate for those reductions. The argument for stock investments

conveniently ignores the fees paid to Wall Street parasites, many of whom are naturally enough pushing for the proposed changes. Moreover, stocks themselves are wildly overvalued as it is. And the prospect for a sound capitalist future to back up investments is highly dubious. Thus Bush's case is a house of cards.

Bush has a substantial history of relying on flimsy sales campaigns to back up his power plays. Even when the lies become public knowledge, as the case with the "Weapons of Mass Destruction" justification for the Iraqi war, he can blow the revelation off; the deed is done. But it has been different with Social Security. The public suspicion of his schemes was already sufficiently widespread, and it grew as details dribbled out.

Opposition is centered on the concept of privatization itself. The notion of turning over even part of workers' savings to financial interests is a frightening thought. Even conservative backers of the plan recognize this: the Cato Institute, for example, renamed their privatization plan the "Project on Social Security Choice." "Privatization" is becoming the "p word."

With their backs stiffened by popular opposition, Democratic Party politicians chose to confront Bush on the issue instead of their customary rollover. They have even been joined by a significant number of Republicans who fear the political fallout of trashing Social Security. Some Republicans have proposed a "lite" version of Bush's plan. But for now, the proposal is mired in the "legislative process" with few prospects of any movement on it any time soon.

For all the Democrats' opposition, workers should have no misunderstandings about their intentions or program. They offer no genuine defense of the existing gains, much less of fundamental interests of the masses. They represent a graveyard of mass aspirations and struggles, Social Security included.

### CLASS BIAS

Even as it was conceived, Social Security is not by any means a cut-and-dried gift to the working class. Tying one's income to the amount taxed in one's lifetime may seem a fair and reasonable policy, particularly since lower-income workers receive a benefit based on a higher percentage of their wages. But inevitably, as a program run by the capitalist state, major class inequalities are built into its operation.

To begin with, a large and growing proportion of workers are forced to work "under the table" or as "contracting" workers; they don't pay the Social Security tax and will therefore receive no

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benefits. This is particularly true for immigrant workers who, predictably, have the worst and most dangerous jobs. But even those working within the system have the calculations stacked against them. For the simple fact is that those who get paid less for their labor will get paid less when they are no longer working. Those who generally have less or no other means to fall back on – e.g. pensions, insurance plans, investments or inheritance – will get lower Social Security benefits. Those who have been most ravaged by the physical and psychological demands of their working years will have less means to deal with the results of those miseries; and indeed tend not to live longer to collect more benefits.

A subordinate but truly revealing point is that no Social Security tax is levied on incomes over \$87,900 per year. While social classes cannot be accurately defined by a given income level, that income roughly matches the financial divide between the bulk of the working class, on the one hand, and the bourgeoisie, professional classes, and truly aristocratic sections of the working class, on the other. It is as if a special and conscious demonstration has been given to the capitalists and its dependable allies that they will be assured of more than their fair share of compensation in old age. The actual process is not that conscious, but neither is it accidental: it reflects the political power and privileges of capitalism's rulers and favored.

### DEMOCRATS' DECEPTION

The class bias created and protected by the Democratic Party only promises to get worse as the fiscal problems with Social Security do intensify. The "demographic" factor – the increasing ratio of retired to active workers – is real, even if not by itself that big a deal and deliberately overplayed by Bush & Co. A more basic problem than that is the sorry state of funding for government programs in general, including those in far worse shape than Social Security. To be sure, Bush has aggravated this problem greatly with his tax cuts for the rich combined with the massive and growing costs of the Iraqi occupation. His proposal would aggravate Social Security's problem, as funds are diverted into private accounts. The state debt will grow as the government borrows money to cover current retirees.

But the problem goes beyond Bush and his individual initiatives. As the capitalist crisis intensifies, the greater the tendency to exploit the masses, including through more attacks on the social wage. The Democrats and their ideological spokesmen well know cuts in Social Security will be made one way or the other. But with the system presently running a surplus, and anxious to score factional points against Bush, they avoid talking the issue up. Instead they whisper about the changes to come, like higher tax rates. (For that matter, a tax hike was quietly implemented in the early 1980's, following recommendations by a committee headed by Alan Greenspan, who became Federal Reserve chief under Democratic and Republican administrations.) Extending the retirement age and cutting benefits are other options. This will no doubt be posed as the "soft" alternative to privatization or the open trashing of Social Security.

Privatization has been a key spearhead of the global capitalist offensive. But it has also become a flashpoint for an emerging backlash by the world's masses against the offensive. Even in the United States, the heartland of privatization, the setback for Bush's agenda may well represent the reversal of this drive's momentum. Elements of the American ruling class have been emboldened – those who not only want to head off mass discontent but feel a more systematic, productive and competitive maintenance of the system will require more state intervention in social programs. How can this be reconciled with the continued need for stepped-up attacks on the masses? One way is through re-strengthened

state programs that in various ways make greater demands on the masses; reduced benefits, more stringent qualifications, etc.

For such a strategy, the Democrats have proved themselves historically to be the more suitable political instrument than the Republicans. Their identification with New Deal and New Deal-type legislation plus their phony reputation for representing the interests of workers and oppressed minorities, make them better able to create, package and sell Social Security cuts. Thus protecting even the existing living and working standards of the masses requires a relentless struggle against their supposed defenders among the Democrats as well as the Republicans.

Revolutionists have a clear and forthright attitude towards Social Security and the attacks on it. We are tenacious defenders of past mass gains as they undergo attack from the right and the ruling class in general. This is despite the various distortions built as a matter of course into such concessions under capitalism.

At this time, revolutionists (and even leftists in general) do not have the numbers or influence to successfully defend Social Security, either by their own efforts or by their ability to mobilize mass opposition. However, the leadership of the trade unions, as well as leaders of organizations of oppressed and poor, are in such a position. For example, by now they could have called out the ranks for a massive demonstration against the attacks, under the demands: Defend Social Security! Defeat the Bush Plan! No Cuts! This is, after all, what the leaders of both trade union factions claim to stand for, and the issue is certainly popular with the ranks. Such actions could be major steps towards building a serious defense.

The fact that the union leaders have taken no such steps is a sad reminder of their resistance to virtually any kind of mass mobilization, even over issues they say they support. They are too busy lobbying Congress and greasing the palms of Democratic politicians – their version of "mobilization" – and at any rate do not want genuine mobilizations to become a habit lest they be used against themselves and their friends in the capitalist parties. And they may well be looking down the road to the time when they feel obliged to compromise their position against cuts, particularly when the Democrats themselves will be proposing them.

Even while defending the existing program, Marxists are open about all its problems: its limits, its class bias, the inevitability of further capitalist attempts to reduce or destroy it. We argue that only a revolutionary workers' state would make possible a truly humane approach to caring for the aged and disabled.

In the society run by the workers, there will be a clear need for a common fund for the aged and disabled, provided for by the productive portion of the population. In that sense, social security will remain, even with the overthrow of capitalism. What will be radically altered is the class discrimination in the collection and dispersal of funds. The proletariat would immediately impose a truly progressive tax and benefit structure that begins to level the playing field. This would come in tandem with the leveling of incomes in general that will be taking place in society as a whole over time.

Even more fundamental for genuine care will be the growth of the productive forces, unfettered from capitalist relations. The massive social surplus created as a result will leave a far greater availability of resources for expanded care. Moreover, with changes in the work processes and the reduction of work time, there will be more opportunities for the aged and disabled to participate in productive activities, if they so desire.

All this is a long way off. But it still must be seen as part of the vision of what is possible once the capitalist rulers and their system are dispensed with. The Social Security fight could prove to be an important component in stemming the capitalist offensive. ●

## COFI/LRP report

continued from page 2

### NEW YORK LRP

New York City subway and bus workers, members of Transport Workers Union (TWU) Local 100, will see their contract expire on December 15. Local President Roger Toussaint has signaled that they are planning a sellout. Toussaint and his cronies mailed a deceptive “survey” to the membership asking them to rank contract demands in order of importance. This is meant to trick the members into accepting the trade-off of wage hikes against job security, for example, rather than preparing to strike for all just demands. Members, including LRP supporter Eric Josephson, are circulating a petition demanding that Local 100 leadership fight for a No-Layoff contract with big wage hikes and no give-backs or tradeoffs. Almost all who see the petition sign it, showing that there is a basis for a fightback.

In an effort to build a revolutionary opposition, Josephson will be attending the upcoming TWU International Convention as a delegate. Our program for a fightback includes demands to build a strike of all airline workers, for full TWU International support for all TWU Local 100 contract demands and actions, and for a political break with the capitalist Democratic and Republican Parties. Look for the *Revolutionary Transit Worker* bulletin ([www.lrp-cofi.org/TWU100/RTW](http://www.lrp-cofi.org/TWU100/RTW)), supported by the LRP, for reports on this vital sector of struggle.

The LRP participated in numerous small and medium-sized demonstrations in the past months. On April 18 we went to the “Racial Justice Day” protest at City Hall against police brutality. Called for by a coalition of Black, gay and transgendered groups, it drew about 500 mostly young people of color. On April 23 we joined a rally in support of Mumia Abu-Jamal in Harlem called for by the Friends and Family of Abu-Jamal.

The government of the Dominican Republic has been stepping up its repression of Haitian immigrants, in attacks ranging from police harassment and brutality to deportations. On May 23 we participated in a small protest in front of the Dominican consular headquarters in Times Square. Haiti itself is under occupation by U.N. troops under imperialist orders. On July 6, hundreds of these troops attacked Cité Soleil, an impoverished section of Port



LRP contingent at anti-war march in Harlem, March 19.

au Prince, killing at least 23 people. There was a small protest on July 21. On June 4 there was a small protest against the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) in a largely Dominican section of Harlem. CAFTA affects every Central American country and the Dominican Republic; it is yet another attempt to intensify the super-exploitation of the masses of these countries.

On July 31 we joined the anti-war protest in New York in Harlem’s Marcus Garvey Park. (See the article on page 19.)

At CCNY we continued our regular sales, discussion group and public forums in the midst of a defense campaign around the “City College Four.” (See page 3.) We conduct forums and activities of different varieties in New York and we urge interested readers to contact us.

### BOLIVIAN UPHEAVAL AND THE ENCUESTRO CONTINENTAL

In June 2005, the Bolivian masses rose up to overthrow President Carlos Mesa. This was the second upsurge in two years driven by the unfulfilled demand for the nationalization of hydrocarbon (oil and gas) resources. Despite showing the enormous potential for working-class power and a worker-peasant-indigenous alliance, this uprising also ended with a stabilizing transfer of power from one bourgeois president to another. (See *Proletarian Revolution* Nos. 69 and 74 for background information.)

Nevertheless a third uprising is virtually inevitable, and its development is vital for all internationalists dedicated to the defeat of imperialism and socialist revolution worldwide. In this spirit, LRPers traveled to La Paz in August to participate in an “Encuentro Continental” (Continental Conference) called in the immediate aftermath of the uprising around three slogans: “in defense of nationalization of the hydrocarbons, for struggle against privatization, and in defense of the national sovereignty of our peoples.”

The three-day event was hosted by the Federación Sindical de Trabajadores Míneros de Bolivia (FSTMB; the miners’ union) and other Bolivian unions, in conjunction with Julio Turra, Executive Director of the powerful CUT (Central Unica dos Trabalhadores: United Labor Federation) of Brazil as well as the International Liaison Committee of Workers and Peoples (ILC). This latter grouping, like Turra, is closely associated with the international Lambertist tendency, a pseudo-Trotskyist outfit whose affiliates typically embed themselves as loyal oppositionists in the unions and social-democratic and labor parties.

The bulk of participants from outside Bolivia were from neighboring countries, with a maximum presence of about two hundred people. Our chief purpose was to use the opportunity to talk to as many revolutionary-minded workers and leftists as possible. The LRP’s basic statement for the conference emphasized the central need for a vanguard revolutionary party and international. It is on our website in English and Spanish and is also available by regular mail upon request.

Despite the fact that the Lambertists themselves generally disdain frank revolutionary discussion, the Encuentro turned out to be run relatively freely: LRPers and others with dissident views were not denied rights of expression. However, the event was organized in the time-honored tradition of political confusionism, intended to obstruct political clarity or sharp debate.

And fundamentally it was heavily bureaucratic as well. The main banner on the stage featured the main slogans of the event, plus a picture of Che Guevara. Romantic notions to the contrary, although known as a fighter against imperialism, he was himself a Stalinist who adhered to a peasant guerrilla strategy, not working-class power. And the bulk of time was devoted to “preaching to the choir,” i.e., repetitious speeches about already accepted generalities like the need for a fight for nationalization, the evils of

imperialism, and the traitorous role of Evo Morales in the past struggle. (Morales is a leader of the cocoa growers and a leading presidential contender, basing himself on the party Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS), which despite its name is a bourgeois party.)

Concrete information, never mind real debate on political issues facing the unions and the working class, was discouraged. For example, one workshop was supposed to take up the topic of “a political instrument for the working class,” a concept which had been motivated in pre-conference documents by the FSMTB and others by the dire need to defeat Morales and other pro-capitalists with a working-class alternative. The FSMTB document, extremely radical in tone, had talked about the failures of leadership in the last two uprisings and the critical need for a working-class alternative. Yet when it came to the workshop only the LRP and a few others pushed for an examination of the matter.

While stressing the revolutionary party as strategic, LRPers of course recognize the tactical impact that advocating a broad party based on the unions can have at specific junctures. In the end, even left unions like FSTMB had no intention of discussing such a “political instrument” or party at the conference because they were not about to act on it in reality.

The main conference organizers, Turra and Miguel Zubieta, head of the FMSTB, and their left supporters palpably dodged confronting the betrayals of the union bureaucracy itself. For example, Jaime Solares, the head of the COB (Bolivian Workers’ Central) who played a high-profile and traitorous role in both the 2003 and 2005 upsurges, was on the platform for the beginning and end of the Conference. In the face of the 2005 uprising, Solares came out for a Chávez-type “civic-military” solution. Yet he was allowed to give a long, windy speech about “socialist revolution” and so forth, while others on the platform like Zubieta breathed not a word of criticism. Only the LRP and a few others brought up serious criticisms of the role of left leaders like Solares and Turra, as well as supposed anti-imperialist nationalists like Hugo Chávez, in accepting a bourgeois transition in Bolivia.

Exposing the current misleaders of the workers and oppressed is a vital aspect of proving the need for an authentic Trotskyist party leadership. In this regard, our revolutionary interventions and propaganda seemed to get their most positive response from the small number of rank-and-file workers at the event, as well as from youth and workers whom we met at a march in El Alto. Our open arguments for a proletarian revolutionary party stood out in contrast to the centrist milieu that submerged this central principle. In an atmosphere where the notion was prevalent that the current “pause” in the struggle would inevitably extend through the December presidential elections, we also raised challenges over the lack of a mass action program for the unions.

The bulk of conference participants were representatives of “Trotskyist” groupings with whom we have profound differences on fundamental questions. Nevertheless, we didn’t oppose the final Conference “decisions” (made by “acclamation”) which centered around the call for “an international day of united mobi-

## *An Appeal to Readers*

*Proletarian Revolution* No. 75 goes to press at a time when the vicious contempt for people of color and poor workers at the heart of American imperialism has been brutally exposed by Hurricane Katrina. Our rulers have made blatantly obvious their criminal indifference to the lives, not just of Iraqis, Afghans and others who get in the way of their military conquests abroad, but also toward poor workers, especially Black workers, in the U.S. Only public exposure forced them to make gestures of pretended concern. But their new-found humanity is an open fraud, and the shock of Katrina and its aftermath is arousing a profound shift in consciousness on U.S. soil.

Abroad, for some years now, key countries in Latin America have seen tremendous political ferment and even revolutionary upheavals. Our recent trip to Bolivia (see p. 12) showed us the desire for a revolutionary message among militant workers in that country and others.

The League for the Revolutionary Party has very limited resources, yet the political situation and opportunities today demand that we expand and do more. Now more than ever we believe that our magazine and organization, authentic voices for socialism, deserve your support. With your help, we hope to increase the number of political trips we can make, both across the U.S. and abroad – as well as the distribution of free or inexpensive Marxist literature in English and Spanish to unemployed and low-wage workers.

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lization on October 17” based on the original three slogans for nationalization, against privatization and in defense of the sovereignty of the oppressed peoples. The final resolution called for “Nationalization without indemnification of the hydrocarbons, under workers’ control”; it further called for similar struggles in all countries, not just Bolivia.

We note, however, that the possibility of a powerful international mobilization on October 17, as called for by the resolution, is limited by the fact that most of the organizations participating are small left groups with limited resources. Nothing was done to push union leaders who command far greater resources, like Julio Turra of the CUT, to commit to mobilizing their base. LRPers not only intervened at the Conference as much as possible but were interviewed by various media; in all cases we put forward our policy of agreement on united actions while making our political differences clear.

We urge interested readers to help us develop *Proletarian Revolution* into a resource for coverage and analysis of Bolivia. We will be producing more substantive material on Bolivian and Latin American perspectives. Those interested in participating with us in solidarity actions or political discussion should contact us by email (lrpcofi@earthlink.net) or telephone (212 330-9017) for details on upcoming events. ●

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# Defeat U.S. Imperialism

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*continued from page 24*

the children of the rich enjoy elite college educations and SUV's, deep resentment and a powerful sense of betrayal have spread. Bad economic times are usually good for the traders in human flesh, the military recruiters. Yet for many months, the Army and Marines have failed to meet recruitment targets – a first for the Marines, whose tough-guy image attracts a particularly patriotic and chauvinist section of the population.

## FOR WORKING-CLASS INTERNATIONALISM!

When Washington prepared for and then executed its invasion of Iraq, we repeatedly argued that opposing the war was not just a moral obligation for American workers, but also a practical necessity for defending their own living conditions at home from the capitalists' attacks:

**It is the internationalist duty of all to come to the defense of the Iraqi masses against the U.S.'s bloody war. But it is also an elementary act of self-defense for the U.S. working class. The war will strengthen the ruling class in its relatively more "peaceful" economic war against the working class and poor at home. The cost of war will be used as an excuse for further attacks on our standard of living, and appeals to patriotism will be used against our strikes and protest struggles. The anti-Arab racism whipped up by the ruling class after September 11 and intensified by the current slaughter not only means the harassment, jailing and deportation of thousands of immigrants, but also increased racism against all people of color in the U.S.**

**Revolutionary communists don't just condemn the current war; we openly declare that the U.S. working class, with the workers of the world, have a side to take – for the defense of Iraq and for the defeat of U.S. imperialism! We don't echo pacifist bleating against war in general, but call for a class war against imperialism.** (LRP Statement, *Defend Iraq, Defeat U.S. Imperialism!* March 21, 2003.)

The extent to which workers in the U.S. initially supported or were indifferent to the invasion of Iraq is sad evidence of the extent to which the American working class has been politically and morally debased by imperialism. As Marxists, we understand that consciousness is fundamentally shaped by social experience: appeals to reason and political arguments can convince some, but the great majority only change their political attitudes as a result of further experiences of life and struggle under capitalism.

Imperialism fuels the grip of conservative ideas on the working class. The super-profits it extracts from the neo-colonial world allow the ruling class at home to sustain not only a large middle class of professionals and small businesspeople, but also a sizable "labor aristocracy" of privileged workers with a partial stake in the system. This middle class and labor aristocracy represents a significant social base of support for ruling-class ideologies, particularly nationalism. Long-entrenched racism further intensifies the ties between the white middle class and labor aristocracy and the capitalists.

But as we are now seeing, the same capitalist system that inculcates conservative and reactionary attitudes among workers also undermines those views with its deepening poverty and oppression. Falling profits and growing economic stagnation spur the capitalists to intensify their exploitation. The heaviest of these attacks are aimed at the poorest and most oppressed workers, but they also hit the more privileged workers. Thus the illusion that America is a united land of the free and prosperous

becomes less appealing.

A clear example of the combined impact of the ongoing occupation of Iraq and the continuing capitalist economic attacks on working-class consciousness was seen in the Bush Administration's failed attempt to gut Social Security. The White House mistakenly expected that a scare campaign about an imminent crisis would allow it to push through Congress a massive attack on the system. But the effort ran up against popular support for the program and the profound distrust of the Bush Administration based on its record of lies over Iraq.

However, opposition to Bush's plan, like to so many other attacks, remains passive. There have been no demonstrations or other protests through which workers could gain a sense of their power to really challenge the capitalists' attacks. As long as there is no organized class fightback, deteriorating social conditions will fuel mainly cynicism and desperation, not radical consciousness, and the capitalists and their politicians will be free to prepare new assaults.

## THE POTENTIAL FOR MASSIVE STRUGGLES

While the American working class continues to turn against the war, domestic attacks and crises will be the factor that spurs it into action. Cuts to funding infrastructural projects and emergency preparations in order to fund the war and line the pockets of the rich are clearly to blame for the catastrophe in New Orleans. The basis for a massive explosion of struggle against both the war and the attacks at home is growing – except for a leadership prepared to show the way forward.

The working class is saddled, on the one hand, with Republican and Democratic politicians who supported the war (or passively went along with it) as well as the domestic anti-working class attacks; and on the other, with union and community leaders who refuse to mobilize the workers and poor, for fear that their mass struggles would threaten the system and their privileged places in it. But they cannot hold back the anger and the need for struggle indefinitely.

The most important task at present is for the most politically aware and militant workers to come together to build a revolutionary party leadership that is prepared to show the way forward for such mass struggles and beyond, to a socialist society free of exploitation, oppression and war.

As we have seen, when the ruling class is able to exercise unrestrained power abroad, as with its initial invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, it is also in a stronger position to launch greater attacks at home. Now that the Iraqi resistance has decisively challenged it, U.S. imperialism is weaker in the face of the workers and oppressed here.

This further proves the practical necessity of working-class internationalism. Revolutionary socialists are loyal to no nation but only to the international interests of the workers and oppressed. We do not play into bourgeois efforts to cut America's losses in Iraq by passively "bringing the troops home" but call for the defeat of U.S. imperialism abroad, just as we work toward mass struggles that have the potential to defeat the capitalists at home. ●

## *Letters Welcome!*

We invite readers of *Proletarian Revolution* to send letters to the magazine. Names will be withheld on request. Write us at P.O. Box 1936, Murray Hill Station, New York, NY 10156, USA.

# What's Wrong with the Anti-War Movement?

by Joseph Andrews

Anti-war activists face a glaring problem: once the U.S. invasion of Iraq began, the “movement” failed to really challenge this ghastly war, chiefly because of the anti-war leadership’s higher dedication to getting the Democratic Party into power. Now that public opinion in the U.S. has turned against the ongoing occupation and Bush’s approval ratings are hitting new lows, will there be a mass struggle against the war, or will anti-war organizing remain a tail on the kite of imperialist politicians?

The central problem is the class nature of the “movement.” It is the working class that has the power to stop the war. A mass fight-back by workers against their deteriorating conditions at home, which many are beginning to see as connected to the failing but murderous occupation of Iraq, could force the ruling-class war-mongers of both parties to retreat. But if the leadership of the struggle remains in the hands of the current middle-class progressive organizations, their opportunist squabbles and unwillingness to confront the pro-war Democratic Party will lead straight to the same dead end.

## SECTARIAN OPPORTUNISM

The present anti-war leadership now includes three coalitions claiming a national reach: United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ); Act Now to Stop War and End Racism (ANSWER); and the Troops Out Now Coalition (TONC). The three are not equally to blame for the present state of affairs, but all share some responsibility.

UFPJ did the most to submarine the anti-war struggle throughout the 2004 presidential election campaign. It draws much of its organizational cadre from pro-Democratic Party social-democratic and Stalinist organizations (the reformist Communist Party and Committees of Correspondence), and its most influential member organizations and staff members were committed to a Kerry victory in the 2004 election. Thus UFPJ turned its efforts from opposing the war to opposing “the Bush agenda.” That Kerry’s agenda also included continuing and even intensifying the war in Iraq was tacitly ignored.

As a result, the April 2004 uprising in Iraq, the high point to date of linked Sunni-Shi’ite efforts against the occupation, met with hardly an echo in the U.S. movement, and its suppression aroused barely a peep of protest in the U.S. The destruction of Fallujah, coming so soon after the election (and with Kerry’s blessing), was greeted with pained murmurs. This left the field open for the government and the bourgeois media to push a fairy-tale narrative of Iraq advancing to freedom through elections in January under occupation supervision, again slowing the growth of opposition to the war.

After the election, UFPJ made a frank turn toward “legislative” work, lobbying Congress as a substitute for mass action. Arab and Muslim organizations asserted that UFPJ representatives censored pro-Palestinian speakers, in an effort to appease their pro-Zionist member organizations, and similar censorship has been carried out against anyone expressing solidarity of any sort with the Iraqi resistance. UFPJ’s drive to stifle anything resembling anti-imperialism, in order to keep things tame in hopes of establishment support, made it an outright obstacle to anti-war work.

So the rift between UFPJ and its rivals has a certain political character. But that between ANSWER and TONC seems purely bureaucratic. A split in the pro-Stalinist Workers World Party (WWP) resulted in the formation of a Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL), and the two factions divided WWP’s front groups between them like property in a divorce settlement: WWP



*Antiwar activist Cindy Sheehan denounces U.S. imperialism but is being turned into a symbol of an alternative patriotism.*

got the International Action Center (IAC) and the PSL took ANSWER. The IAC went on to form the TONC with various allies. Both the WWP and the PSL have refused to publicly clarify the reasons for their split, and the continuing division between ANSWER and IAC/TONC looks like nothing more principled than turf wars.

The ANSWER/TONC demands have a more radical posture than UFPJ’s, but these groups are no less likely than UFPJ to harass revolutionaries and stifle criticism of the Democrats who inevitably grace their podiums. For example, a small “community speak-out” held by TONC in Harlem in July at times took on the character of a rally for the political ambitions of New York City Councilman Charles Barron. Those who took the promise of an “open mike” at face value – including LRP supporters who sought to warn against Barron and other Democrats – were threatened by hired security before finally being allowed to speak when the audience had largely gone home. Our white supporters present were race-baited, while our Black comrades were maligned for working with whites – this by the followers of supposedly revolutionary and anti-racist organizations!

Previously, at a March 19 TONC-sponsored rally in Central Park, Rep. Charles Rangel was allowed to speak at length, yet not a single speaker – including several WWP pseudo-revolutionaries – said a word about his call to strengthen the imperialist military through the introduction of a draft. From the point of view of the

WWP, which raised the slogan “No Draft, No Way” as a centerpiece of its mobilization, the free ride to the notoriously pro-draft Rangel was crassly opportunist. (Unlike the social-pacifist left, as Leninists we campaign against all bourgeois armies; we do not use our opposition to a drafted imperialist army to serve as an excuse for preserving the present mercenary army, the U.S.’s international police force.)

### **UNITED FRONT VS. LIBERAL BLOC**

Common to all three coalitions is the notion that unity in action requires prior agreement on a minimum liberal political program. (See below for some examples.) Seemingly a “common sense” approach to unifying the struggle, it leads inevitably to exclusion, censorship, splits and capitulation to imperialism: the forces with the firmest allegiance to the existing order want to ensure that nothing gets out of hand and therefore deploy “unity” as a weapon for political blackmail. As with the TONC’s treatment of Barron and Rangel, the watchword of ideological unity is rarely if ever directed against bourgeois liberals but is used primarily for censorship (and self-censorship) of the left.

This contrasts with the working-class method of the united front: unity in action. When workers go on strike against their common enemy, the boss, they do so despite their varied political viewpoints and despite even differences over the precise demands of the strike. A working-class led anti-war movement would need to agree only on time and place for its protests. All participants would be welcome to march with their own slogans and programs. And if bourgeois politicians pretending to stand against the war wanted to speak, they would be answered and exposed by anti-imperialist working-class speakers from the same podium.

The present anti-war scene, designed to make liberal imperialist politicians welcome and comfortable, echoes the much wider movement of the Vietnam War era. In the late 1960’s and early 1970’s there was a growing radicalization of workers and youth, brought about by the war, the then-existing military draft and the initial assaults on the working class signaled by the end of the post-World War II economic boom. Million-strong marches built by radicals and self-styled revolutionaries were handed over to be dominated by liberal Democrats who opposed the war as a losing proposition for imperialism. Myriad opportunities to develop a large revolutionary struggle were sacrificed on the altar of unity under liberal politics. The “Vietnam syndrome” – popular opposition to costly militarist adventures abroad – forestalled major U.S. interventions for a time. But imperialism survived to fight another day. Today’s wars were made possible by the misleadership of the anti-war movement then.

### **THE ANTI-WAR SPLIT**

The division in the anti-war leadership has been around ever since the U.S.’s first war against Iraq in January 1991, when two rival national demonstrations against the first Iraq war were held in Washington DC a week apart. (See “The Real Anti-war Scandal” in *PR* 38.) The Campaign for Peace in the Middle East, UFPJ’s predecessor, condemned Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait as well as the U.S. military build-up. Ostensibly this was a “plague on both your houses” stance, but it allowed the Campaign’s backers to endorse the U.N. sanctions against Iraq, which were also war measures against the Iraqi population. This amounted to supporting imperialist militarism while rejecting an all-out war.

The rival Coalition to Stop U.S. Intervention in the Middle East, the WWP’s front group of the moment, tried to position itself as the more left of the two groups. It added a “third-world” gloss to its liberal stance by avoiding criticism of Saddam Hussein’s regime. But the Coalition’s opposition to imperialism

was little better. It did not denounce U.N. sanctions until the split made some differentiation necessary. And its main spokesman (then as now), former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark, called for U.N. action and urged “Full support for regional, Arab and United Nations diplomatic efforts and actions to end and not escalate the crisis” – as if making peace was the U.N.’s real role.

This unprincipled split simmered for years, occasionally producing rival demonstrations in the same city on the same day. In 2005 it erupted with a vengeance. First UFPJ flatly refused to coordinate with either ANSWER or the TONC for the March 19 demonstrations on the second anniversary of the invasion of Iraq. On the East Coast, UFPJ concentrated its resources busing a few thousand people into Fayetteville, North Carolina for a rally in front of Fort Bragg, while the TONC held its somewhat larger march in New York; UFPJ urged its supporters who could not make it to Fayetteville to engage in local acts of civil disobedience at military recruitment stations rather than attend the TONC march. (ANSWER split the difference and built for both.)

On May 1, UFPJ held an event in conjunction with nuclear disarmament campaigners, marching to the U.N. under the slogan “No more nuclear excuses for war.” The focus on nuclear disarmament, at a time when this issue is being used as the pretext for U.S. saber-rattling at Iran and North Korea, is indicative of the imperialist logic of liberal pacifism. WWP was unable to support the UFPJ event, given its political support for North Korean Stalinism, but did not wish to openly attack it. So TONC made a half-hearted effort to revive the tradition of workers’ marches on May Day, tacking a few economic demands onto their usual laundry list. The result was a fiasco, an event just a few hundreds strong.

Repeated displays of organizational weakness by ANSWER and the TONC emboldened the conservative forces in UFPJ. So when ANSWER unilaterally issued a call in May for a demonstration in Washington on September 24, couched in the name of “unity” and demanding a “50/50” stitch-up between ANSWER and UFPJ in determining the program for the event, UFPJ replied by announcing its own march on the same day, to be followed by a lobbying effort. This open split stood until mid-August, when a joint rally and march was announced.

This change of heart seems to have multiple reasons: logistical, in that ANSWER secured permits for a march route past the White House; and political, in that the increased visibility of the anti-war movement brought about by the Sheehan encampment (see below) meant that any split on the ground would be exposed to a national audience. While the agreement for a united event preserves the right of each coalition to its own slogans, banners and speakers, no such rights apply to radicals or revolutionaries who do not accept the ideological limits established by the main coalitions. The speakers’ list will be carefully selected to confine discussion to liberal opposition to the war and to ensure that any politician who deigns to appear will meet with no inconvenient criticism or exposure.

### **THE CINDY SHEEHAN PHENOMENON**

A refreshing change from all the opportunism and maneuvers has been the initiative of Cindy Sheehan, whose son Casey was killed in Iraq in 2004. Sheehan has been a leading figure in Gold Star Families for Peace, founded in January 2005 for those whose relatives died in combat. This group, along with other organizations like Iraq Veterans Against the War, has reflected widespread discontent with the war and the occupation among military families and former soldiers.

For several months, her speeches at scattered anti-war meetings, press conferences and rallies attracted little attention. But on August 5, at a Veterans for Peace convention in Dallas, Sheehan



announced plans to spoil the five-week vacation of the “lying bastard” Bush, by camping out in front of his Crawford, Texas compound to demand a meeting and an accounting. With earthy, righteous indignation, she toppled the last pillars of the ruling class’s justifications for war:

**The other thing I want [Bush] to tell me is “just what was the noble cause Casey died for?” Was it freedom and democracy? Bullshit! He died for oil. He died to make your friends richer. He died to expand American imperialism in the Middle East. We’re not freer here, thanks to your PATRIOT Act. Iraq is not free. You get America out of Iraq and Israel out of Palestine and you’ll stop the terrorism!”** (MRzine, August 9.)

The next day, “Camp Casey” was established in Crawford, and the capitalist media, sensing that anti-war sentiment could no longer be safely ignored, descended like vultures.

The renewed attention brought to the anti-war struggle is welcome, even though its motivation is mixed. Genuinely radical horror over the war is mixed with self-defeating liberal pacifism and patriotism. However, if the Holy Trinity of American patriotism is Baseball, Mom and Apple Pie, then it was as if one member of this sainted cohort had risen up in symbolic insurrection against the Commander-in-Chief. Yet Sheehan’s sudden fame had more to do with her personal honesty and bravery than with the media-friendly symbolism. Her frank denunciations of Bush’s lies and their deadly consequences, for American troops and the Iraqi people alike, struck a national chord of dissatisfaction.

Since the beginning of her vigil, Sheehan has been under a two-pronged attack from capitalist opinion-shapers. From the right, the response was predictably crass. They threw everything they could at her in hopes that something would stick, from family disputes to labeling her a traitor.

In recent media appearances, Sheehan seems to increasingly be taking the advice of public relations spin doctors tied to the Democratic establishment to tone things down. This is a sign of the second, more subtle prong of the ruling-class attack, from establishment figures presenting themselves as her allies who seek to use anti-war activities to bolster the electoral chances of the pro-imperialist Democrats. MoveOn.org, an internet adjunct to the Democratic Party machine, held a nationwide round of candlelight vigils to “support” Sheehan. Yet this same organization has pushed for a phased withdrawal from Iraq, a position that Sheehan and the Gold Star Families for Peace have rejected in favor of immediate withdrawal. Liberals are using her protest as an occasion to denounce Bush for not devoting adequate resources to the war. Whatever her own views, she is being turned into a symbol of a patriotic alternative.

Cindy Sheehan is not a revolutionary. Like thousands in this country, she has suffered great loss and is fighting to come to grips with it. Her condemnations of the war combine personalized denunciations of “neo-cons” and Bush’s “rich friends” with a partial understanding of the role of imperialism as a system; she mixes a wounded patriotism with glimmers of internationalism. She has had the courage to act on her anger, and through struggle and debate, to develop her understanding of the world – just as hundreds, thousands and millions more will do, hopefully in more revolutionary ways.

## **ANTI-WAR STRUGGLE AND REVOLUTION**

Within the anti-war struggle there must be a fight to confront patriotic false consciousness. The rise in disgust with the war has taken place despite, not because of, the tactics followed by the anti-war leaders. It came even though the “movement” first buried itself in support of pro-imperialist, pro-war Democrats,

and then splintered.

One way the dominant anti-war organizations contribute to patriotic consciousness is through pushing the slogan “Bring the Troops Home.” This is not just a non-hostile way of calling for an end to the war. It is U.S.-nationalist, since it implies that the main victims of the war are the American forces, not the Iraqis. While many of the troops were wheedled into the army by economic incentives and many don’t want to be there, they are nevertheless part of an occupying, murdering and brutalizing force. As well, the liberals who push “Bring the [U.S.] Troops Home” generally propose to continue the occupation with U.N. forces, so that the imperialist rule over the Iraqi population will continue under a new facade.

The slogan also feeds into and often coexists with “Support Our Troops,” the pro-war mantra used to justify support for the U.S. military effort. The combined slogan is a deliberate lie, since the government is supporting the war, not the troops: it is cutting veterans’ benefits, chiseling soldiers out of health care and breaking all promises about how long they have to stay in Iraq.

Of course, many people who favor “Bring the Troops Home,” like Cindy Sheehan, are against the war and the occupation. But the slogan adds to the rampant patriotic illusions, and it doesn’t serve the interests of working-class soldiers who need to really understand that they are in Iraq and Afghanistan not because of some miscalculation but because they are being used to serve imperialism.

The growing discontent with the war has happened, so to speak, “spontaneously,” because of the fundamental class division basic to capitalist society, as we describe on the back page. To hasten the end of this war, to hamper the onset of new ones and ultimately put an end to the capitalist system which necessitates war in general, this spontaneity must give way to consciousness.

The capitalists have at their command all sorts of mechanisms for reinforcing a patriotic consensus: the schools, the media, the churches, the union bureaucracy – and even the leadership of the anti-war “movement” itself. When the anti-war leaders seek by their methods and slogans to come to terms with the prevailing patriotism – by emphasizing U.S. troops, by pleading with Congress to “set the date,” by supporting the Democratic Party or by politically censoring and policing the protests – they thereby prolong the very war they claim to oppose.

Genuine consciousness against the war and the system that breeds it requires two elements: a massive working-class fight-back against the ruling-class attacks, and the activities of acknowledged revolutionaries to expose and explain the drives of capitalist imperialism. What might well begin as an explosion of anger over the economic attacks on workers would undermine the war of conquest and expand awareness of the links between imperialism abroad and oppression at home.

By fighting to put forward our program within the anti-war movement, revolutionaries strengthen the struggle – against the sabotage, conscious or unconscious, by its current leaders. We do this not through ultimatums, demanding that the movement as a whole accept a revolutionary analysis as a precondition for joint struggle, but through a fight for unity in action. To this joint struggle we bring our slogans: *U.S. Out of Iraq Now! Defeat Imperialism through Socialist Revolution! Build the Revolutionary Party of the Working Class!* We are confident that these represent the main lines of social development, the urgent needs of our class in the U.S., Iraq and throughout the world. The future of humanity depends on the most advanced workers – the minority seeking a genuinely anti-imperialist response to the present carnage – fighting to lead our class to realization of its historic tasks. ●

# Iraq Constitution Maintains Imperialist Grip

Despite the embarrassing breakdown of negotiations over Iraq's constitution in August, with three "final deadlines" missed in ten days, the Bush administration still put forward another round of self-congratulatory rhetoric to mark the occasion, just as it did for the Iraq elections last January. But with every transparent attempt to cover the reality of U.S. imperialist occupation with a façade of democracy, the rhetoric sounds more and more phony. The constitution rubber-stamps the imperialist looting carried out by the occupying forces, lays no basis for an Iraqi government genuinely independent of imperialism, and resolves none of the crises that threaten to tear the country apart.

So irrelevant were the niceties of Iraq's "sovereignty" that when the constitution was "presented" to the national assembly that was supposed to approve it on August 28 – two weeks late according to the U.S.-imposed schedule – no vote was even taken and most of the assembly was absent. For all the parliamentary trappings, the document reeks of illegitimacy even under the neo-colonial formulas decreed by the occupiers.

## CONSTITUTIONAL CONTRADICTIONS

Saddam Hussein and the rulers before him could only hold Iraq together by means of dictatorial strongman rule. They granted the Sunni minority a relatively privileged status compared to the Shi'ite majority and the Kurds, whom they brutally suppressed. Today U.S. imperialism holds Iraq together by its own behind-the-scenes dictatorial rule, but finding a stable arrangement of buffer layers in the Iraqi population has been an impossible task, even on a temporary basis.

This magazine explained from the start of the U.S. invasion that the U.S.'s alleged goal of establishing "democracy" in Iraq was a fraud. We predicted that even the pluralism the U.S. had in mind – a deal among leaders of the several religious and national factions that would hold the country together under U.S. domination – would prove futile. The interim prime minister appointed by the U.S. in 2004, Iyad Allawi, was the main candidate for the

role of central deal-making broker. But he lost miserably in the January election, so there is no clear solution along these lines. To prevent civil war and keep imperialism in real control, naked strongman rule will have to be restored. But Washington must still try to keep a "democratic solution" in place or admit failure.

The status of the Sunnis in the constitutional negotiations illustrates the pluralism problem, the one most discussed in the U.S. media. The occupiers urgently wanted to bring Sunni political leaders into the agreement, in order to undermine the widespread support among the Sunni population for the military resistance against the occupation. A wide array of Sunni leaders were invited to cooperate and participate in the process.

But the Shi'ite and Kurdish leaders also had angry, oppressed mass bases to worry about. The Kurdish political leaders bargained over the amount of autonomy the Kurdish region of Iraq will have, to cover for their betrayal of the Kurdish people's right to self-determination – up to and including the right to form their own free and independent state of Kurdistan. The Shi'ite leaders' base is the majority of the Iraqi population, and they head the present Iraqi government. But the Shi'ite masses, who have suffered brutal oppression for so long, have gotten increasingly fed up with a government that failed to meet their needs any more than previous governments did. The masses continue to suffer atrocious living conditions: massive unemployment and chronic shortages of electricity, water, and other basic utilities and public services.

## PROTESTS EXPOSE SHI'ITE DIVISIONS

This tension exploded August 7 in Samawa, a major city of Shi'ite southern Iraq. Hundreds of people staged a militant protest demanding the resignation of the pro-government provincial governor, burning police cars and throwing rocks at police in riot gear. Police opened fire on the protest, killing one person and wounding forty.

The Shi'ite leaders saw the threat of even broader mass Shi'ite rebellion against their own government, and they had to react. On August 11 they stunned both their own U.S. allies and the Sunni leaders by demanding the right to autonomy for all of Shi'ite south and central Iraq, a full half of the country's 18 provinces. "Autonomy" for a majority of the country makes little political or economic sense, but the aim was to play up the Shi'ite-Sunni division to deflect Shi'ite mass discontent away from their own leaders.

The Sunni leaders could no longer trust the constitutional process after the Shi'ite leaders announced their expansive autonomy demand. While some of the details of autonomy rights in a "federalist" Iraq were moderated or deferred in the course of further negotiations, the constitution maintains the right to regional autonomy in the Kurdish north and some parts of the Shi'ite south, where Iraq's oil reserves and facilities are located. Despite the desperate and heavy-handed efforts of the U.S. to bring all parties back together, in the end compro-



Summer 2005: Iraqis protest lack of clean water and electricity in Samawa. Two-year occupation has failed to restore vital services.

mise was no longer possible, and the Sunni leaders had no choice but to come out in opposition to the proposed constitution and call for a “No” vote in the referendum on October 15.

But the Shi’ite leaders’ goal of keeping the Shi’ite community united behind them failed anyway. Radical fundamentalist Shi’ite leader Moqtada al-Sadr has joined the Sunni leaders in opposition to the constitution and to the entire principle of federalism and autonomous regions in Iraq. On August 26 al-Sadr led demonstrations of as many as 100,000 Shi’ites in Baghdad and a number of southern Iraqi cities against the constitution.

No major political force, however, opposed the reactionary religious principle that is central to the constitution, which guarantees Islamic religious authorities the power to veto all laws, making paper promises of democratic rights hollow. This will subordinate the minority Sunnis, and will subject women, labor unions and national minorities to arbitrary and reactionary clerical rulings.

Despite the setbacks and complications that have arisen, the U.S. plan at the moment seems to be to push through the constitution as it currently stands. The U.S. is still looking for some face-saving concessions to the Sunni collaborators, if they can successfully pressure their Shi’ite and Kurdish allies.

### IMPERIALIST ECONOMICS

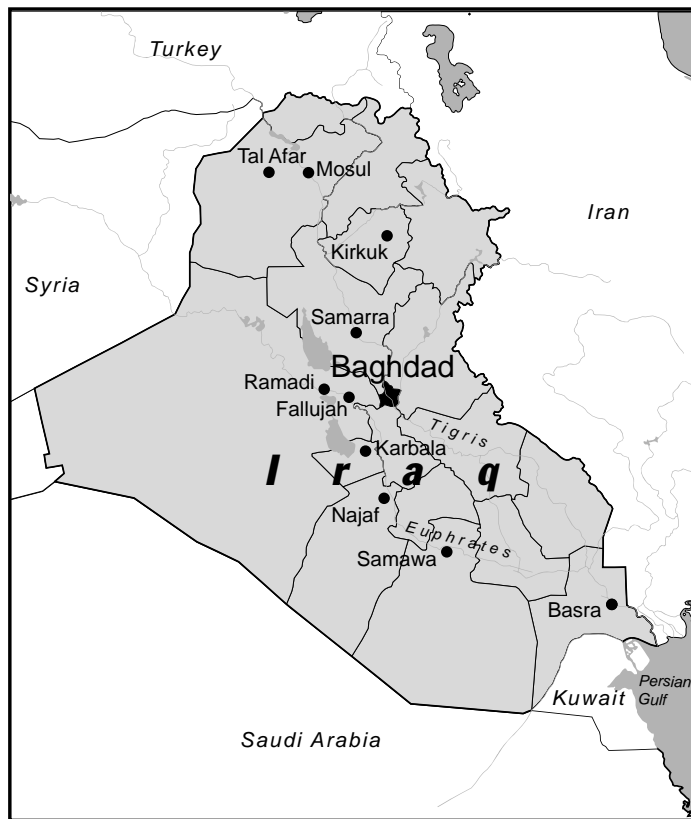
The real economic issues in Iraq are not even officially discussed in the constitutional negotiations. All economic questions – life and death issues for the masses – have been subordinated to the debate over the division of oil revenues. The Iraqi masses’ desperate need for electricity and clean water, along with a decent living standard and jobs for all, goes unresolved. Two years of brutal occupation have failed to answer such problems and the constitutional wrangling does not even address them! In all this flim-flam the imperialists and their junior partners have shown only contempt for the people they are claiming to democratically represent.

For all the squabbling, the question hidden under the table is Iraq’s economic structure. The American occupiers will continue their stranglehold over the economy. Last year the U.S. colonial governor, L. Paul Bremer III, decreed regulations governing banking, investment, patents, copyrights, business, taxes and trade. These eliminated the economic centrality of the Iraqi state and put in place a “market economy” – that is, one that guaranteed private ownership of resources, foreign access to Iraqi oil and U.S. control of reconstruction. These rules were folded into the “Transitional Administrative Law” under which the constitution was drafted, and the constitution has left them in place.

In particular, Bremer’s decrees privatized and subjected to foreign control all government-owned sectors, except for oil extraction. As for oil, Allawi had proposed that the Iraqi government “disengage from running the oil sector” and that it be opened to foreign investment. The U.S.-appointed interim Finance Minister explained at a Washington press conference in December 2004 that the oil law would be “very promising to the American investors and to American enterprise, certainly to oil companies.” That is where things are in the constitution as well.

### THE REAL POWER

Everyone has heard George Bush promise that American military forces in Iraq “will stand down when [pro-U.S.] Iraqi forces stand up.” That more than anything else makes clear who the real power is in Iraq. Any genuinely sovereign state rests on its monopoly of armed force: the army, police and courts that enforce the interests of the ruling class. That power remains American, no matter who signs what piece of paper, and no matter what the Iraqi masses vote for.



As communists, we advocate military support for the resistance against the occupation. That is, in any conflict between U.S. occupation forces and resistance forces, we are on the side of the resistance. We defend the right of Iraqis and all oppressed people to use all available means to attack the occupiers, who brutally exploit and devastate the people and resources of Iraq to maintain the power and wealth of the U.S. ruling class.

At the same time, we oppose any political support for any of the bourgeois leaderships in the resistance, whether religious or secular. We oppose their strategy of using car bombs in civilian areas, which even when aimed at occupation forces inevitably kill more innocent Iraqis than occupiers. We oppose the targeting of recruits to the Iraqi army, who the great majority of the time have refused to fire on fellow Iraqis when the occupation or the puppet governments have tried to use them against the resistance. We oppose sectarian violence between Sunnis and Shi’ites.

The working class and oppressed masses of Iraq face a growing crisis of political leadership, as more forces accommodate to the occupation, on the one hand, and the resistance moves away from mass struggle, on the other. Yet in the face of all this, Shi’ites in Samawa and Sunnis in Ramadi have defied “their own” political leaders in mass confrontations, while Kurds in the north have given new voice to the right to self-determination that their leaders have tried to abandon.

It is the task of the most class-conscious Iraqi workers to build the political leadership that the Iraqi masses need and deserve. That leadership is the revolutionary party of the working class, dedicated to the struggle for socialist revolution, which must be built out of the experience of the masses themselves in struggle. Right now, it is essential that revolutionaries challenge the misleaders of the unions to organize a class-wide armed militia to defend workers. But, only with the leadership of the revolutionary party will the Iraqi masses overcome the obstacles that all the Iraqi bourgeois leaders put up, and carry the struggle against the occupation to victory. ●

## ***Anti-War Discontent Rising***

# **Defeat U.S. Imperialism!**

The bloody occupation of Iraq is growing increasingly unpopular in the United States. The White House's abundant lies justifying its war have been exposed. They falsely claimed that Saddam Hussein possessed Weapons of Mass Destruction. They promised a "cakewalk" invasion that would bring freedom to the Iraqi people and stability to the Middle East. Instead they delivered a nightmare of carnage and destitution to the Iraqis and rising terrorist attacks around the world – at a cost of the lives of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, thousands of American soldiers and a billion dollars a week.

Threatened by the growing anti-war sentiment, capitalist politicians – both Republican *and* Democratic – who previously competed with one another to support the invasion now mouth criticisms. Walter Jones, Jr., the North Carolina conservative representing a district with a large Marine base – previously best known for leading the idiotic nationalist renaming of French fries as "freedom fries" – joined with several other Congress members of both parties to sponsor a resolution for setting a withdrawal date from Iraq. It is an effort to save the "honor" and effectiveness of U.S. imperialism from the "quagmire" into which it has sunk in Iraq.

Down the economic ladder, millions of America's workers and poor are turning against the war for fundamentally different reasons. Their disillusionment with the war is combining with bitter indignation at declining living standards and has the potential to fuel great struggles in the future. The challenge for revolutionaries will be to convince more and more workers in the course of their struggles that the imperialist capitalist system is the source of both their exploitation and the horrors of war, and that socialist revolution is the only solution.

### **GROWING WORKING-CLASS DISCONTENT**

Increasing numbers of workers are conscious of the fact that the invasion of Iraq has brought renewed misery upon the Iraqi people. However, because of the comparative privilege of living in the world's superpower, most American workers remain detached from the horrific reality of the occupation. With a sense of powerlessness to change government policies, and still influenced by patriotism, they are yet to be moved to take action against the war. Instead they focus on getting or keeping jobs, paying their bills, raising their families and other daily struggles.

Nevertheless, many have been particularly affected by the deaths of thousands of U.S. soldiers, drawn mostly from the ranks of workers and the poor, who have been killed (and many more grievously wounded) in a war with no legitimate justification and no end in sight. Moreover, the war and its massive economic costs coincide with deepening economic stagnation and deteriorating living conditions. The U.S.'s control over the world's oil reserves may have been strengthened by the invasion and occupation of Iraq, but workers have not benefited: oil prices were rising steadily even before Hurricane Katrina swamped Gulf produc-

tion, and this fuels price inflation across the board. Wages are competing with rising prices, while increasing dividends, bonuses and professional incomes are feeding a bonanza for the capitalists and their lackeys.

The war has long been unpopular among the most oppressed sections of our class. Many Black workers remain skeptical of a racist nation's promises to spread democracy with the blood of the poor. Workers from immigrant families, particularly from Latin American and Middle Eastern nations, have varying degrees of anti-imperialist consciousness from their countries of origin deepened by their experience of racism and exploitation in the U.S.

As working-class parents watch their sons and daughters leave to fight in what is increasingly seen as a "war for oil" while

*continued on page 18*



*Hundreds of thousands protested U.S. occupation in Baghdad on April 9, second anniversary of U.S. troops entering the capital.*