



## As Congress Debates “Withdrawal”

# Imperialist Carnage in Iraq Continues

Promising to start a withdrawal of troops from Iraq, the Democrats rode a wave of anti-war sentiment to win control of Congress in the 2006 elections. Nearly a year later, little has changed. When Bush called for a “surge” of yet more troops, the Democrats squawked but dutifully voted to give him the billions of dollars he demanded. And so the monstrous carnage – which has already killed a million Iraqis and exiled or internally displaced several million more – continues.

The Democrats’ anti-war rhetoric was as phony as the reasons Bush gave for starting the war. As a capitalist party, the Democrats are no less committed than the Republicans to main-

taining the U.S. in its position as the world’s dominant imperialist power. That’s why they were initially almost unanimous in not opposing Bush’s invasion of Iraq. They became critics of the occupation only after it began to fall apart and the U.S. proved unable to quell the armed resistance.

But now the Democrats are faced with fundamentally the same problem as the White House. The U.S. has already lost the war in Iraq: despite reported military gains, its client Iraqi government is a shambles. The greatest problem for the imperialists now is how to stop the disaster from becoming a far greater

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Mass procession in Baghdad’s Sadr City this summer carries coffins of residents murdered in raid by U.S. occupying troops.

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# Laws, Raids and Deportations: Immigrant Workers Face Crackdown

by Jeff Covington

The debate over the immigration “reform” bills in Congress this summer, and now the growing crackdown on undocumented workers, expose the deadly trap that the immigrant rights movement has been steered into.

In 2006 massive numbers of immigrants poured into the streets of cities across the country. It was the largest show of working-class power in years, and it defeated openly racist legislation in Congress. The mass marches also shocked ruling-class politicians, who drafted laws featuring vicious attacks on immigrants. And even though Congress hasn’t agreed on a new law, the influence of far-right national chauvinists and racists has been bolstered. “Homeland Security” chief Michael Chertoff announced that the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) will terrorize immigrants with even more raids and deportations, and ICE punctuated that message by the arrest and deportation of immigrant rights activist Elvira Arellano in August.

Blame for the turnaround lies with the misleaders of the immigrant rights movement. Millions of immigrant workers will pay for their treachery unless a new course of action is opened up.

## “TOMORROW WE VOTE”

The movement burst onto the scene last year with huge protests against the Sensenbrenner bill, which would have branded all undocumented immigrants as felons. But many leaders this year supported the STRIVE bill, a disguised attack whose real aim was to repress and exploit immigrants more effectively. (See below.) Meanwhile, the ruling-class media poured out propaganda filth identifying immigrants with murderers, rapists and terrorists. And the government stepped up the home and workplace raids by federal stormtroopers from the ICE.

The change has been dramatic. In the spring of 2006, millions of marchers, the vast majority Mexican immigrant workers, took off from work and filled the streets of Los Angeles, Chicago and other U.S. cities. But the movement’s leadership – trade union officials, religious and other community leaders – advertised their intentions with the slogan “Today we march, tomorrow we vote.” Accordingly, they diverted the energy of the movement into electoral campaigns for the Democratic Party. They said that when the Democrats controlled Congress, the movement could lobby for a reform bill that would win legal status for the millions of undocumented workers.

The effect of the leaders’ strategy was most visible in the low turnout for the May Day marches this year. The most important example was Los Angeles: In 2006, the “Gran Marcha” on March 25 and the May Day march both brought over a million people into the streets. But on May Day 2007, two different marches at



*Immigrant rights activist Elvira Arellano and her son Saul. ICE agents arrested and deported her in August, a sign of the U.S. government’s mounting crackdown on immigrant workers.*

different times and places, drew only about 10,000 people.

There is no doubt that what happens in Washington is crucial and that immigrant rights can only be secured through political action. But the stark lesson of all mass movements is that mass struggle, not the ballot box, is what wins concessions from the ruling class. Political action must grow out of this struggle and its power, not out of subordination and betrayal to the capitalist parties.

## THE STRIVE AND COMPROMISE BILLS

The result of the passive electoral strategy is clear. The Democrats took control of Congress, the movement leaders did their lobbying – and immigrant workers got smacked in the face, with worse yet to come.

The Democrats’ proposed bill this spring, the so-called STRIVE bill (Security Through Regularized Immigration and a Vibrant Economy), would have created so many financial and legal barriers to the “path to citizenship” that few would ever have made it. It would have created a new guest worker program which, like the old bracero program, would have amounted to virtual slavery, tying workers to their employer by the threat of deportation. It would have increased criminal penalties and created new crimes for undocumented immigrants. It would have funded more walls and fences on the U.S.-Mexican border, thousands more Border Patrol agents to capture immigrants and force others into death marches across the desert, more powers to local police to harass immigrants, and new detention centers to hold tens of thousands.

Many organizations in the immigrant rights movement supported the STRIVE bill. Among the most significant nationally were the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the

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*Pro-Democratic Party misleaders foisted an electoral strategy on the movement which paved the way for government crackdown today.*



National Council of La Raza Unida (NCLRU), and the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). In Chicago leading STRIVE supporters included the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant & Refugee Rights (ICIRR) and Centro Sin Fronteras. They misled immigrant workers (and some activists in their own organizations) by calling it a step forward. They claimed that it was the best the movement could get in the current political climate – a climate they helped create by derailing the marches.

On rare occasions they revealed what that argument really meant: At a Centro Sin Fronteras meeting in Chicago on April 13 of this year, one of the leaders told youth activists why they had to support the STRIVE bill. “We have to accept political reality,” he said: the American people will not accept any increase in the numbers of “brown people” in the country. In other words, accept racism, don’t fight it.

The STRIVE bill led directly to the “compromise” bill put forward by Democratic and Republican politicians, from Ted Kennedy to President Bush, which contained even worse anti-immigrant attacks. Some leading immigrant rights groups, such as ICIRR in Chicago, supported this travesty. Nevertheless, the bill was defeated – not by pro-immigrant forces, but by the most reactionary anti-immigrant politicians who can’t stomach even fake offers of citizenship to immigrants. The open racists were emboldened by the liberals, who joined them in backing more repressive measures when the active movement died down.

Why this betrayal? Revolutionaries know that the Democratic Party represents a wing of the ruling class. All the bills sponsored by capitalist politicians, even the most liberal, serve the interest of bosses who pay low wages to “illegal” immigrants to boost their profits. Despite the expectations of many immigrant activists, the bills their leaders pushed did *not* provide some form of amnesty for all immigrants – let alone unconditional amnesty, a necessary demand. Full rights for immigrants cannot be won through unity with exploiters who feed off the denial of these rights.

### **THE DREAM ACT DECEPTION**

The disastrous course of seeking the support of “friendly” politicians through fundamental concessions is still at work. ICIRR is also campaigning for the so-called DREAM Act (Development Relief and Education for Alien Minors) in Congress. This bill is supposed to assist immigrant youth by granting a temporary residence permit to those who have a high

school diploma or GED, and then offering permanent resident status to those who complete two years of college. But the reality is that very few immigrant youth can afford to go to college, and under the DREAM Act they won’t even be eligible for federal education grants. Education is not what the DREAM Act is really about; rather, its point is to use immigrants as cannon fodder for the imperialist wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. DREAM Act supporters downplay the fact that the more realistic path to permanent resident status in the bill is to serve two years in the U.S.’s “volunteer” army. This deadly trick will reinforce the disproportionate recruitment of Latino and Black youth into the military by economic pressure.

Some immigrant rights organizations courageously oppose the Act. In Los Angeles, the Association of Raza Educators (A.R.E.) is urging immigrant and Latino college students not to support the bill “because it will do irreparable harm to our community by causing a de facto military draft for our undocumented youth.” In Chicago, the Comité Anti-Militarización (CAMi) organized a successful protest and press conference July 13 against LULAC, which had invited recruiters for all four branches of the U.S. military, along with the Department of Defense, to play a dominant role in the “career fair” for Latino youth at its national convention. The League for the Revolutionary Party (LRP) played an active role in CAMi’s work to organize this protest. We consider it vital to work in united actions with militants while seeking to win an audience for our revolutionary ideas.

The LRP also played a key role in convincing the National Immigrant Solidarity Network (NISN), which had been promoting the DREAM Act, to change course. At NISN’s national conference in Richmond on July 28-29, LRP supporters and other activists explained the danger of the military service provision – at a session where the New York youth group Sueños del Barrio was presenting their campaign for the DREAM Act. By the end of the discussion, a large majority of NISN clearly opposed the Act. Even some of the youth who had come in supporting the bill were beginning to question it, saying that they wanted to remove the military part. But the staff leaders continued to defend the Act and the military service provision, saying, “We want Congress to pass the bill, and the political reality is that if the military part is removed, the bill will be dead.” The final resolutions of the conference emphasized the opposition to the military service provision and called for alternatives to the DREAM Act.

### **CAPITALISM’S DIVIDE-AND-CONQUER STRATEGY**

It is clear that many capitalists are eager to hire undocumented immigrants. Yet the ruling class does not want to grant legal status to the great majority. Why this seeming contradiction?

Undocumented status keeps immigrant workers permanently vulnerable, forcing them to be extremely cautious about speaking up against exploitation. This is exactly what capitalism needs: workers who have to accept miserably low wages and can’t complain. Bills like STRIVE are aimed at exploiting immigrant workers more effectively than can the policies of the openly anti-immigrant racists. “Pro-immigrant” politicians are happy to welcome immigrants into the country, in controlled numbers, as long as they live in fear and don’t fight for decent wages and conditions.

Nevertheless, millions of workers are driven to emigrate to the U.S. and other wealthier countries because of the desperate conditions in homelands plundered by imperialism. The bosses realize that these workers can serve as an alternative labor supply, since American workers, through their past struggles in an economy fattened by imperialist spoils, have come to expect higher wages and benefits.

Because of racism, Latino immigrants in the U.S. tend to be concentrated in the lowest-paid, hardest and most dangerous occupations. These include jobs that were once unionized and

well-paid, like meat-packing and construction. But after successful cutbacks by the bosses, these industries were increasingly shunned by U.S.-born workers. Now the capitalists shore up their profits by a heavy reliance on immigrant workforces.

The superexploitation of immigrant labor has increased the division of the working class. By forcing immigrant workers into competition with native-born workers, the capitalists intensify the exploitation of all. The mass use of immigrant labor, at a time of retreats by the unions and minimal job security, has stirred competition, with both white and black American workers.

#### **THE LONG HISTORY OF RACISM IN THE U.S.**

The transformation of the United States from a largely agricultural colonial economy into the premier world power rests on the combination of the exploitation of waves of immigrant workers and the continuous caste subjugation of Black people. (See the LRP pamphlet *Marxism, Interracialism and the Black Struggle*.) First there was slavery, then a system of brutal peonage after the Civil War. With the development of modern industrial capitalism at the turn of the 20th century, Blacks increasingly became a superexploited section of the working class. Black workers were relegated to the worst jobs, and a large “reserve army of the unemployed” was created out of their ranks to be used as replacements for other workers, notably those in active struggles. Opportunities for “upward mobility” were restricted to the immigrant laborers coming mainly from Eastern and Southern Europe.

There were several attempts over time by radical and socialist-minded workers to forge unified Black and white struggles against the bosses and their government. But by and large, most of the immigrant workers allowed themselves to be used against their Black fellow workers. They were seduced by the promises of the “American Dream” and the privileges of being white in a society of racial oppression. But despite their oppression, Black workers became increasingly central in major industries and major cities during the 20th Century; this process was greatly reinforced by the massive ghetto revolts of the 1960’s. During the strikes of the early 1970’s, Black workers were recognized as generally more militant and class-conscious than their white colleagues, and they were able to lead white workers in joint struggles for the first time.

Their role in industry is still important and their reputation as militant leaders is intact; but Blacks have suffered mass and permanent layoffs, notably from better-paid and organized sectors. This rollback was a product of both the decline in American industry and the desire by bosses to curtail their militant presence in the factories. Black workers not only lost jobs faster than whites, but to an extent were replaced by the new waves of immigrant workers, largely Latino, whom the bosses felt could be more easily intimidated and manipulated.

A brutal situation has emerged. The American economy has stagnated since the 1970’s, the once-prevalent myth that workers (including many Blacks) could become “middle class” is fading; the gap between the rich and the masses of poor is widening daily. In this situation, the capitalists, their politicians and their media whip up racism against Black people, Latinos and other immigrants and also stir up hostility between them.

This divide-and-conquer strategy can only be combatted by a conscious struggle for interracial working-class unity rooted in a political program that defends the interests of all workers. The only way that Black and Latino workers can defend against the capitalist attacks is by leading the struggle for jobs and higher wages and benefits for all workers, as well as defending against racist attacks. They do not have to wait for white workers to take this lead; but given the worsening conditions of many non-immi-

## **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 political failures of both integrationism and nationalism in detail, and develops our notion of Black liberation through socialist revolution as the alternative.

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grant white workers, such a struggle has the potential to win the support and participation of much of the entire working class.

#### **THE UNION STRUGGLE AT SMITHFIELD**

To carry out mass struggles workers need their own organizations. The only mass organizations the working class has today are the unions. The unions will have to play a central role in the immigrant rights struggle, but they will not do so without transforming their leadership.

All the unions today are led by bureaucrats who support capitalism. These officials get their income and power by acting as brokers between the capitalists and the workers. They are occasionally willing to mobilize workers for limited actions to maintain their position at the bargaining table, but they fear that workers may go too far and threaten the entire system. A fight for the unions to lead strikes and mass actions – for immigrant rights and for the interests of all workers – will inevitably mean a fight against the bureaucrats for leadership.

An important example of these issues is the ongoing battle at the huge Smithfield pork plant in Tar Heel, North Carolina. After the decade-long effort of the workers and the United Food & Commercial Workers (UFCW) to unionize the plant, the company threatened last November to fire hundreds of undocumented immigrant workers as a way to destroy a union organizing campaign. Companies like Smithfield are happy to ignore workers’ “illegality” – in order to use their status against them when they start to organize a fightback. Over a thousand workers responded by holding a two-day wildcat strike. Mexican immigrant workers led the walkout, and they were joined by many Black and some white workers. The strike forced the company to retreat and showed the enormous potential of united working-class struggle.

The victory was very temporary: Smithfield management only agreed to delay the firing for 60 days. At minimum, more and effective strike action was urgently needed to keep the pressure on the company. But the UFCW bureaucracy did not organize anything of the sort. They focused instead on a consumer boycott against Smithfield products. Management thus felt free to go on the attack again: an ICE raid at the plant in January seized 21 workers, and Smithfield started firing the workers who had been targeted in November.



*LRP placards at May Day march, Chicago. We flew the red flag, opposed the Democrats' and Republicans' bills, and told the truth: "Socialist Revolution is the Only Solution."*

Gene Bruskin, the Smithfield campaign director for the UFCW, said, "Many people regard this as one of the most important, if not the most important, labor struggle going on in the United States. Organizing in the South is really critical to the future of the region." That is very true, but the union officialdom refuses to use a strategy that can win even temporary security for undocumented workers, namely mass mobilizations and strikes that can use workers' power in production to halt profit-making.

LRP supporters raised these points at the NISN conference in July, where UFCW officials gave a presentation on the unionization campaign. We noted that the UFCW already represents the workers at other Smithfield plants across the country. We said that in order to fight the company's racist, anti-immigrant, and anti-worker attacks, the UFCW should call a national strike of workers at all the Smithfield plants it represents. That would force the company to back off its immediate attacks and recognize the union at its North Carolina plant as well. Many activists at the conference were interested in this idea. But UFCW official Ralph Ramirez rejected it out of hand: "That's impossible. All our contracts at the other plants have no-strike clauses."

Of course, the widespread acceptance of no-strike clauses in union contracts in the U.S. today is another example of how the union bureaucrats have betrayed the interests of union members. The bureaucrats are willing to accept them to secure deals with the bosses, particularly as they serve as a handy excuse, as Ramirez demonstrated, for not organizing necessary actions. But workers are left at the mercy of the capitalist courts and arbitrators to redress grievances for the duration of a contract. It is still necessary to organize actions like a national strike of all UFCW Smithfield workers, but it is clear they will be in spite of the contracts and the anti-worker laws.

### **MORE BUREAUCRATIC BETRAYALS**

Union bureaucrats further exposed their true loyalties in July when ICE raided six Swift meatpacking plants and arrested 25

immigrant workers, including a local union officer at Marshalltown, Iowa. These are the same plants that ICE raided last December, triggering a storm of protests at the thirteen hundred arrests and brutal harassment of workers and their families. This year the UFCW tops had nothing but praise for ICE. The head of the local at the Grand Island, Nebraska, plant, said the raid "was done the right way this time." And UFCW headquarters issued a press release on July 10 that said, "It does not appear that ICE engaged in the same level of intimidation and overkill as they did in its raids last December at six Swift plants. To the extent this is the case, the UFCW supports law enforcement efforts that abide by the law and respect the rights of workers."

For the leadership of a union that claims to represent immigrant workers to state its support for ICE's immigration raids, i.e., "law enforcement efforts," is a criminal betrayal of the working class and of immigrant workers in particular. This official statement is Exhibit A in our case for why the entire leadership of all the unions must be replaced by a new, revolutionary, leadership that fights always and everywhere for the interests of all workers and against the bosses and the capitalist state that enforces its laws in the bosses' interests.

The UFCW is not the only union whose leaders are stabbing immigrant workers in the back. SEIU plays a very prominent role in the immigrant rights movement, and its leadership does a lot to divert the movement into electoral channels that prop up the capitalist system rather than threaten it. SEIU President Andy Stern committed a gross betrayal of immigrant workers and all workers by supporting the guest worker programs contained in last year's McCain-Kennedy bill and this year's STRIVE bill. They are happy to cut a deal with the government and the bosses whereby "guest workers" are exploited in conditions of temporary slavery while SEIU receives dues payments for "representing" them.

SEIU even invited Senator McCain to be a featured "pro-immigrant" guest speaker at its rallies in New York. Union bureaucrats are sometimes willing to go outside the Democratic Party – but only to support Republicans. They never dream of breaking from both capitalist parties and standing for the political independence of the working class against its class enemies.

There are some union organizers, and even more rank-and-file members and supporters, who are sincere and courageous in their conduct of the union struggles that exist. Their efforts can help turn the tide in the struggle against the bosses' increasingly cruel offensive; but only if the cynical union leadership and its pro-boss strategy are defeated.

### **STRATEGY FOR THE STRUGGLE**

UFCW organizer Bruskin was right about the national significance of the Smithfield struggle. But it cannot remain just a trade-union fight. While a Smithfield-wide strike could win union recognition, such a victory can only be temporary and inadequate, since immigrant workers are still subject to deportation. Stopping ICE raids and winning amnesty for all immigrants requires taking on the government through mass action.

The successful mass actions so far have been responses to the most intense attacks on immigrants. The marches in 2006 were aimed at stopping the Sensenbrenner bill. This year, the only

march comparable in size was in Chicago, where a quarter million people took to the streets, in large part as an immediate response to a violent ICE raid the week before. Agents armed with automatic weapons had stormed a shopping mall in the Little Village neighborhood and held hundreds of people inside. Activists organized an immediate protest at the mall and spread the word about the May Day march.

The success of the protest against the Little Village raid in Chicago led to the formation of an Emergency Response Network, to enable activists to mobilize protests against immigration raids when they occur. Supporters of the LRP have taken an active part in the network's meetings and events.

The immigrant rights movement has to do more than react to ICE raids and other attacks. One immediate goal should be to build a mass united demonstration to demand, "Stop the Raids and Deportations!" The Emergency Response Network and others should call on all leaders and organizations who claim to represent the immigrant community to join in organizing such a mass united demonstration against raids and deportations.

Working-class revolutionaries must challenge the union bureaucrats and other misleaders to take up the immediate demand of unconditional amnesty for all. Revolutionaries also stand for full and equal rights for all immigrants and the end of all restrictions on refugees from countries victimized by imperialism.

### THE INSPIRATION OF MAY DAY

Revolutionaries also need to explain to our fellow workers that the real power of the working class lies not just in its numbers but in its central role in production and the rest of the economy. The May Day marches in 2006 were so powerful because they required workers to leave their jobs and therefore amounted to *de facto* shutdowns. Undoubtedly the potential for action in the streets to lead to action on the job is a key reason the pro-capitalist leaders prefer to avoid mass protests. Industrial struggles by immigrant workers would be an inspiration to all workers and could spark resistance against all of the capitalist attacks.

The great 2006 protests were inspiring in many ways. It was not only a festival for immigrant rights. It was also a show of solidarity with the tremendous mass struggles going on in Mexico at the time. (See "Mexico: Lessons of 2006," in *Proletarian*

*Revolution* No. 79.) The very revival of May Day, the international workers' day, was a giant step forward for the U.S. working class. The LRP banners "Workers of the World, Unite!" were among those that reminded many immigrants of socialist marches in their home countries where this tradition had not been forgotten.

Significantly, the success of May Day inspired many immigrant workers to call for a general strike of all immigrants. Such an event would be a tremendous spark for the whole working class to start fighting back massively against ruling-class attacks that have been going on for several decades and should not be tolerated longer. A general strike would show all workers their enormous power to choke off profits. And it would inevitably confront state power, which is trying to terrify the immigrant working class. It would be a real "war on terror"!

The real solution to the problems faced by immigrant and non-immigrant workers cannot be won by strikes alone, no matter how powerful. We make no secret of the fact that revolutionaries are not just militant trade unionists. Unions are limited weapons, even in better hands. Mass struggle inevitably casts up new forms – more responsive and representative grassroots working-class organizations like strike committees and workers' councils – and points the masses and their organizations in the direction of revolution.

### REVOLUTIONARY LEADERSHIP

In the struggles of today and tomorrow communists patiently but constantly point out that the capitalist system is the enemy and that its state power has to be overthrown and replaced by a workers' state. Socialist revolution is the only real alternative to the miseries capitalism inflicts on the immigrant masses and all workers. Any concessions won under the present system will be temporary.

The mass actions of the workers themselves are the best demonstration of their real and potential powers. The capitalists also sense this power of the working class, which threatens and frightens them. Even though the working class does not yet have the political consciousness or leadership to get rid of the capitalist system, the wielding of working-class power can stop the attacks and compel the capitalists to make concessions.

Workers cannot ignore the current treacherous leaderships. We have to demand that they begin to mobilize a serious struggle, even as it means angering their friends in the capitalist parties. Class-conscious workers understand that the union bureaucrats and others will only do this under great mass pressure and will sabotage struggles at the first chance. In the process of building these struggles and exposing the current leaders, the most politically aware revolutionary-minded workers will gain support from other workers and become the alternative leadership of the masses.

The potential for an expanded struggle against imperialist and local capitalist oppression now exists, notably in Latin America. Immigrant workers are in a strong position to learn from their experiences, both here and in their countries of origin, that capitalism is a cruel and bankrupt system that needs to be swept away. They are certain to become a crucial component of the revolutionary party vanguard. ●

***Stop ICE Raids and All Attacks on Immigrants!  
Complete, Unconditional Amnesty for all Immigrants Now!  
Equal Rights for Immigrants!  
End All Restrictions on Immigrants and Refugees!  
For a General Strike Against All the Attacks!  
Workers of the World Unite!  
Build the Revolutionary Party of the Working Class!***

## Immigrant Strike at Cygnus

The successful strike by immigrant workers at the Cygnus soap factory in South Chicago in August is a powerful example of how militant workers' action can win victories where the union bureaucrats' legalistic and consumer boycott strategies fail. Cygnus management had threatened to fire any worker whose immigration status couldn't be verified by August 10. In response, almost the entire workforce went on strike, despite the fact that they didn't even have a union. After two weeks on strike, the Cygnus workers won widespread support and publicity, and more importantly, brought production at Cygnus nearly to a halt. To end the strike, management retreated and dropped its threat to fire workers.

The example of Smithfield points to the danger of renewed attacks from Cygnus management. Cygnus workers urgently need to gain union representation to defend themselves. But it is also important that union bureaucrats not be allowed to take over the struggle and sap its militancy. To secure permanent gains requires the united power of the working class and a revolutionary strategy.



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## Carnage

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catastrophe for them. They have no easy answer, and whatever course they take will be paid for by more slaughter in Iraq.

### THE IMPERIALIST DILEMMA

The Iraq war is costing hundreds of billions of dollars and draining the overstretched American military. But the instability of the entire region resulting from the war, plus the overall demands of imperialist domination, require the U.S. to maintain a significant military force in Iraq and nearby for many years to come. Indeed, the White House and all the major Democratic presidential candidates are already threatening to attack Iran in order to reassert American power and mobilize regional allies. Whatever their real intention, the escalating threats inevitably bring the danger of a war against Iran closer.

*The truth is that no matter whether the White House is occupied by Republicans or Democrats, the U.S. will only leave Iraq if it is driven out.* The resistance in Iraq cannot defeat the U.S. militarily, but it can inflict military and economic costs that the politicians at home cannot afford to pay. In this context, rising class struggle and protest in the U.S. could force the government's hand.

Tragically, such an outburst of struggle is unlikely at the moment. There is great potential for a working-class fightback, but that has been held in check, chiefly by pro-Democratic Party trade union and community leaders. Similarly, while anti-war sentiment continues to rise in the working class and in most other layers of society, the once sizable, largely middle-class anti-war movement is demoralized and demobilized, having been led into the dead end of supporting the Democrats. So the politicians in Washington play their cynical games, lying and maneuvering for electoral advantage.

Thus the Democrats in Congress refuse to force Bush to agree to any timetable for even a nominal withdrawal of troops. (See the box on page 9.) They fear being held responsible for the consequences, and do not want to expose the fact that they too intend to keep tens of thousands of troops in Iraq. They prefer to let Iraq burn so they can use it to their political advantage in the 2008 elections. For his part, Bush wants the onus for the inevitable retreat to fall on the Democrats so that they can be charged with surrender. And round and round they go.

For the ruling class, this is a very dangerous game. The Middle East, on whose oil the world economy depends, has been greatly destabilized by the U.S.'s failed occupation of Iraq. And this summer the world financial system shuddered, as mortgage and loan defaults wreaked havoc with credit and panicky investors feared a crash of the grossly overvalued stock market. The inability of the U.S. rulers to resolve their Iraq dilemma does not add to the confidence of capitalists around the world.

Wars abroad and worsening poverty, exploitation and racism

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*House Speaker Nancy Pelosi engineered Democrats' maneuver that allowed Republican votes to pass war-funding bill demanded by Bush.*

at home are not the result of "evil" or greedy individuals. They are inherent in the capitalist system. And in the past few decades of overall economic stagnation, the capitalists have intensified exploitation in an ever more vicious competition for spoils. The only alternative is to overthrow the capitalist ruling classes and their blind, voracious pursuit of profit and to build a classless socialist world.

### THE IMPERIALIST CRISIS

To assess the crisis facing U.S. imperialism, it is necessary to understand what drove the U.S. to invade Iraq in the first place. As *Proletarian Revolution* has explained from the start, the war was not simply the work of an extremely right-wing White House; it was a response to profound developments in the capitalist system.

The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks dealt a humiliating blow to the U.S. Reliant on their domination of the neo-colonial world, the imperialists had to teach a bloody lesson to the masses of the Middle East, as well as to all local dictators who dreamed of any role beyond obedient service to Washington. Moreover, the rulers were anxious to use the U.S.'s status as the world's lone superpower to press their advantage over potential economic rivals. After summarily overthrowing the Taliban in Afghanistan, seizing oil-rich Iraq while flaunting international opposition seemed to many to be the ideal means to their ends.

On top of this, Bush's grand plan was to stabilize Iraq and the Middle East through "democracy." That meant setting up pluralist governmental structures to encourage local power brokers to vie with each other electorally while insuring an open field for imperialist aggrandizement.

Invading and occupying Iraq was always going to be tremendously risky. But awareness of the critical state of the world economy and growing international rivalries drove the ruling class to back the invasion. This, plus an arrogant underestimation of the difficulty of subduing the Iraqi masses, along with outright political opportunism, explains why the invasion initially enjoyed bipartisan support.

Now that the invasion and occupation have failed, the ruling class seeks to limit the damage – and pursue the same goals by different means. On this point all the Republican and Democratic politicians agree, including those few who opposed the war all along out of a fear that it would backfire.



## IN OR OUT OF IRAQ?

However, Washington's chances of keeping the lid on while pulling its troops out are close to nil, as a chain reaction looms. The civil war in Iraq is already showing its potential to spill over the borders and destabilize the volatile region. Iran and Saudi Arabia are increasingly facing off over Iraq, with Iran seeking to prop up a Shi'ite-dominated government, while the Saudi rulers threaten to step up their support of the Sunni insurgency. Further, the establishment of the autonomous Kurdish region in Iraq has only encouraged the Kurds there and in neighboring countries to push for a unified independent nation-state. In response, Turkey is already threatening to escalate its incursions into Iraqi Kurdistan. U.S. troops are barely keeping this explosive bottle corked.

In Afghanistan, the Taliban are resurgent, and the U.S.-backed Karzai government controls little of the country beyond Kabul. In neighboring Pakistan, Islamic radicalism is on the rise, and growing discontent among the professional middle class and the country's impoverished masses threatens Gen. Musharraf's pro-U.S. military rule. In Lebanon, the U.S.-supported government hovers near collapse in the face of Hezbollah forces emboldened by their defeat of Israel's 2006 invasion. And in Palestine, the U.S. and Israeli imperialists have succeeded in pushing the rival Fatah and Hamas forces toward civil war, leav-

ing the imperialists no one to negotiate with to achieve a more stable oppression of the Palestinian people.

The effects of the disastrous war go well beyond the Middle East. The weakening of the U.S. military and its preoccupation with Iraq encourages others to challenge U.S. interests. In the neo-colonial world, Iran's Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Venezuela's Hugo Chávez, most notably, are bucking the U.S. for regional military and political clout as well as a bigger slice of the economic pie. Among other imperialist powers, Russia is for the moment the most aggressive, taking provocative military steps to help advance its economic power, most immediately its claims to oil reserves in the Central Asian states of the ex-USSR. Since the U.S. military needs to be freed from its Iraqi quagmire in order to present a more credible threat to other powers, talk of a "withdrawal" of troops from Iraq corresponds to real needs of the ruling class.

The gravity of the crisis finally shook the ruling class to action after Bush began his second term in office. Bush's grand scheme was collapsing ignominiously. Congress, then still in Republican hands, organized the bi-partisan Baker-Hamilton commission to investigate alternatives. Duly warning against a "precipitate withdrawal" from Iraq, the commission strongly urged a significant pullback, which Bush immediately ignored in ordering his latest "surge" of tens of thousands more troops.

# The Democrats' Congressional Maneuvers

As capitalist parties, the Democrats differ from the Republicans in one key respect: their electoral base is centered on the working class and on racially oppressed people, Blacks and Latinos. Hence the Democrats have to be careful to *not* mobilize their base against the halls of power. In contrast to the Republicans' safer, more privileged petty-bourgeois and middle-class base (plus backward sections of the working class), if workers' struggle is triggered it could turn against the capitalists. That is why the Democrats so often seem to be craven cowards, caving in to Bush and the Republicans at every turn. The problem is not their lack of guts; it's their gut class interests.

So let us see how the Democrats used their newly-won power in Congress. In January, the Senate unanimously approved Bush's nomination of General David Petraeus to head the Iraq operation, even though Petraeus was appointed because he supported sending thousands more combat troops into Iraq. In February, Congress adopted a resolution opposing Bush's "surge." But this was a "non-binding" con game.

Then came their most deceptive maneuvers. In March they passed a bill authorizing \$124 billion in emergency funding for combat operations in Iraq. Their explanation was that the bill contained "benchmarks" for the Iraqi government and U.S. forces to meet, plus an August 2008 deadline for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq. Bush vetoed the bill, complaining of its restrictions on presidential authority.

Beneath the Democrats' rhetoric, however, their vetoed bill had authorized Bush to continue the war, using the cover of national security. It placed no restraint on deploying additional combat and support troops for unrestricted durations, and allowed for U.S. forces staying in Iraq permanently. This travesty of an "anti-war" bill was not just the work of the party leadership under House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. California representatives Barbara Lee, Maxine Waters, Lynn Woolsey and Diane E. Watson – the heads of the Progressive, Black and "Out of Iraq" congressional caucuses – voted against the bill themselves but okayed caucus members' supporting it. This backhanded support – 65 out of 71 members of the Progressive Caucus voted for the bill, as did two-thirds of the Black Caucus – was crucial, since a strong Democratic vote was needed to overcome the Republicans' opposition.

In late May the Democrats went all the way, achieving a new standard in the annals of parliamentary fraud. This time Congress produced a bill that was acceptable to Bush, so the Republicans backed it. But the Democrats served as its enablers. According to the Associated Press, "In a highly unusual maneuver, House Democratic leaders crafted a procedure that allowed their rank and file to oppose money for the war, then step aside so Republicans could advance it." Speaker Pelosi negotiated the final deal but then, along with most of the House leadership, voted against it. Although only 86

Democratic House members voted for the actual funding bill, an overwhelming majority – 216 out of 231 – endorsed a decisive procedural vote that moved the bill forward and made its passage inevitable, given the Republicans' support.

In the Senate, the bill was supported by large majorities of both parties. Presidential rivals Clinton and Obama cast token votes against it, but only after waiting to verify that their votes were not needed for adoption.

In July, Congress again debated war policy, as the imperialists' situation in Iraq and Afghanistan worsened. Nothing was passed, since the Democrats couldn't get enough Republican votes to adopt even a fake troop reduction plan. The real aim of the Democratic politicians – all of them, the "anti-war" liberals as well as the moderate leadership – is not to end the U.S. occupation but to keep it going. They denounce Bush and deplore the war in order to contain and divert the mass anti-war sentiment.

Republicans and Democrats are maneuvering for electoral advantage by either scaring or placating the public. The parties and their rogue's gallery of sound bite-spewing candidates, are dancing to the tune of cash registers ringing up enormous campaign contributions. Their scams, however, have not done them much good in the polls: even though Bush's popularity has dropped below 30 percent, that of Congress is even lower. Their useless "debate" will continue in the fall.

## BUSH'S TROOP SURGE FAILS

But Bush's "surge" has proved a miserable failure politically. At the cost of more U.S. dead and billions more dollars, bombings and sectarian violence have increased in Iraq, including in Baghdad where the troop presence is strongest. Assassinations of government figures continue unabated, and so many Iraqi elected officials are in hiding abroad that parliament struggles to meet. Even the heavily fortified "Green Zone" faces regular bombardment.

The White House is hyping its new alliance with anti-Al Qaeda Sunni sheiks in Anbar province. But this bloc helps to undermine Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's government. And Washington's new allies will likely turn their guns on the U.S. again in the future.

The "surge" was supposed to afford Iraq's government the opportunity to meet certain "benchmarks" of progress to the U.S.'s liking. These included using Iraq's own military to quell sectarian violence and passing a hydrocarbon law opening Iraq's resources to imperialist plunder. But the Maliki government has failed on all counts. Far from reducing sectarian violence, its armed forces have mostly refused to confront the insurgents, while many of them are direct participants. U.S. officials and politicians are barely concealing their wish to replace Maliki with a strongman ruler. We pointed out from the start of the occupation that the imperialists would need a dictatorial regime despite their democratic pretensions. (See *PR's* 68, 71 and 74.) Now their need is absolutely clear, but the chances of such a regime succeeding are minimal.

As for the new oil law, Maliki had to postpone attempts to pass it in the face of a strike against it by the oil workers. (See below.) The Democrats's endorsement of this law shows again the bipartisan concern for imperialist interests that motivate the occupation.

The obvious political failure of the surge sent a new shiver down the ruling class's spine. By July, news agencies were reporting that the White House was "in panic mode" over defections by Republican senators from Bush's persistent stay-the-course policy in Iraq. The *New York Times*, the U.S.'s premier ruling-class newspaper, reversed course and issued an editorial entitled "The Road Home," arguing that "It is time for the United States to leave Iraq, without any more delay than the Pentagon needs to organize an orderly exit."

Like Baker-Hamilton, the *Times* expressed the ruling class's dilemma by emphasizing that it opposed "precipitate withdrawal." Rather, withdrawing troops to bases inside Iraq and

neighboring states was necessary. And that of course is what all the Democratic and Republican doves stand for: keep troops nearby to defend U.S. interests and attack the Iraqi resistance when necessary.

While Bush and a few other Republicans still talk of fighting to victory in Iraq, a rough consensus is developing among ruling-class strategists over what to do next. The inevitable disputes will be over timing and partisan political one-upsmanship. Significant numbers of U.S. troops would be withdrawn from the main fighting in Iraq and stationed at nearby bases – near the oil-producing areas inside Iraq and in neighboring states. Their essential role would be to prevent the Shi'ite-Sunni civil war from spreading and allow the various factions to exhaust themselves in a grisly showdown after which a power-sharing agreement could be negotiated between the combatants.

Despite all the lies and deception, redeployment – the growing ruling-class retreat from the war – is significant. The "shock and awe" that was meant to be a devastating demonstration of American power has turned into a debacle. The stability of the imperial world order, enforced by the American superpower, is being rocked. The U.S. war lit a fuse to the regional tinderbox.

The catastrophe for imperialism that the U.S. has unleashed occurs against the backdrop of a world where masses are rising up by fits and starts. Latin America, South Africa and China are witnessing serious challenges to the status quo by the oppressed and exploited. As we wrote in *PR 79*, the imperialist rulers are facing a genuine crisis of leadership; hence the vicious backbiting in Washington. Tragically, what saves them is the even more severe crisis of working-class leadership.

## THE IRAQI INSURGENCY

The resistance in Iraq is slowly forcing the occupiers to retreat, and in doing so it is aiding every struggle in the world against imperialist depredations. Most Iraqis hated Saddam Hussein's vicious dictatorship, but the American occupation and its reign of murder, torture, and profit-gouging is now far more despised. The Arab masses in Iraq correctly view the American presence as a colonial intrusion that not only oppresses them, but having stirred up a hornets' nest, fails to protect them. It has foisted upon them a venal and sectarian government, which together with Halliburton, Bechtel and other American corporations, has been "rebuilding Iraq" by stealing everything that isn't nailed down. Under Saddam the Iraqis at least had water and electricity. They see the U.S. as responsible for mass unemployment, starvation and bloodshed of such proportions that millions of them have already fled their homeland. Is it any wonder that polls show a huge majority wants the U.S. thrown out?

Consequently the armed resistance has grown stronger and more sophisticated. The mass of Iraqis support the anti-American leaderships of various militias and insurgent groups. But under the cover of resistance, armed thugs are also waging a vicious civil war, whipping up religious and ethnic differences to scramble for bigger shares of the booty once the occupation ends. Prominent opposition leaders, from the populist Islamist Shi'ite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr to Sunni "tribal heads," are alternately fighting against the occupation forces and allying with them.

These leaders, religious and secular, are ultra-reactionaries who prate about populism and dole out small benefits that people can't get from the U.S. or its friends. Unfortunately, some Iraqis believe in what the reactionary misleaders preach, including the subordination of women and the evil of trade unions. But many do not – they support them as the only way at the moment to defeat the occupying army and its local pawns. As long as the U.S. stays in the region, the masses are drawn to supporting these forces.



*Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki. U.S. politicians are blaming their client's powerless government for political failure of their troop "surge."*

Marxist revolutionaries stand for the defeat of American imperialism. The imperialists are the major enemy not only of the Iraqis, but of American workers and all of humanity. (For further discussion of how communists approach resistance in oppressed nations, see “Defend Iran Against U.S. Imperialism” on page 15.)

### WORKING-CLASS STRUGGLE

Siding with the masses in the fight against imperialism helps point the way to the class struggle in the Middle East. Imperialism has no right to be there. Its presence promotes civil war. Its ejection will allow the working classes in the region leverage to create the only alternative to exploitation, oppression and more wars.

In Iraq itself, the working class has been decimated. Strangled by Saddam’s notorious anti-trade union laws, which were endorsed and enforced by the U.S. consul L. Paul Bremer after 2003 and again by the current Maliki government, the beleaguered workers have continued to fight. Most notable was the oil workers’ strike in June, whose main aim was to stop the proposed hydrocarbon law. This law was framed in terms of sharing oil revenues among Iraq’s provinces, but it also allows foreign (in effect, U.S.-based) oil corporations to expatriate the bulk of profits from Iraq’s fields. After months of arm-twisting by the Americans, the Iraqi cabinet passed the bill in July. But because of opposition from Sadr and the Sunnis and other factors, parliament postponed voting on it. When the oil workers shut down the pipelines in June, Maliki called on his army and U.S. planes to threaten the strikers. But Maliki had to temporarily settle the strike by promising not to bring the measure up until October.

The combative and socialist-minded oil workers remain strong, since they are the heart of the Iraqi economy. Their unions oppose the occupation and disdain clerical rule. Further and wider strikes would heavily impact both the economy and the political situation. This is yet another reason why Washington is united in its effort to keep a military presence in the Middle East.

In Iran, despite a virtual blackout in the American media, it

is crucial to note the rapid growth of independent unions and militant strikes. The Islamic regime has been countering with murder, torture and mass arrests. It has beaten and jailed important union leaders like Mansour Osanloo, who leads the powerful transport workers’ union in Tehran – yet the workers are not cowed and are ready to strike again. The workers hate the regime; but a crucial factor that is preventing its overthrow is the repeated threat of armed attack made by not only Bush and Cheney but by all the major Democratic presidential candidates as well.

The continued presence of imperialism in the region is the chief deterrent to a struggle for a better life by the workers of the entire region. Recently, the potentially powerful Egyptian working class has been erupting in the face of the authoritarian Mubarak regime that is lavishly supported by the U.S. Together with the Iranian workers and other superexploited toilers throughout the region they represent the best hope not only for solidarity with Iraqi workers but for the internationalist struggle to overthrow both the Middle Eastern capitalists and the imperialists.

### THE ANTI-WAR “MOVEMENT”

The overwhelming majority of U.S. workers want this war ended and the troops brought back. But we cannot fool ourselves: American workers are hostile to the Iraq war largely because it is losing and seems to be shedding blood for no good reason – not because they object to or even see its imperialist character. At the same time, their anger against the politicians is mounting because Congress and the presidential candidates put forward no answers. Nor are they looking to the anti-war movement, which they see as largely irrelevant.

Congress’s performance, especially the vote handing Bush his funds on a silver platter, should have at least shaken up the anti-war leadership, most of which has relied on electing Democrats as the way to end the war. But angry responses were few.

## “World Can’t Wait” Awaits Democrats

Given the behavior of the two main anti-war groupings, a rival outfit with even further left pretensions has stepped forward. “World Can’t Wait,” an operation run by the Maoist Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP), published a full-page ad in the June 22 *New York Times* that demanded the impeachment of Bush and Cheney because “2008 is too late!” (It did not point out that impeachment would boost Nancy Pelosi, constitutionally the next in line, into the White House.) The ad, continuing the pro-Democratic focus of blaming the war on Bush & Co. alone, was signed by many public figures and a spectrum of the anti-war left.

At a World Can’t Wait public forum in New York on June 25, the most heralded speaker was “Rocky” Anderson, the populist Democratic Party mayor of Salt Lake City. With a U.N. flag flashing on the screen behind him, Anderson called for withdrawal because, he said, the occupation has immeasurably hurt the U.S.’s status in the world. He was given a standing ovation. Sunsara Taylor of the RCP and World Can’t Wait, speaking afterward, called for mass action in the streets and for “prominent people” to stand up and be counted. She criticized the *Congressional* Democrats for betraying the anti-war movement – but she did not challenge Anderson’s call to resurrect the world role of U.S. imperialism.

The blatantly opportunist RCP slobbers over friends in high places. And it has made clear in practice that its slogan “Drive Out the Bush Regime” means “Elect Democrats.”



*Anti-war activist Cindy Sheehan broke from the Democratic Party after Congressional “betrayal.” Most anti-war leaders rely on electing the imperialist Democrats.*

Cindy Sheehan, the mother of a soldier killed in Iraq who energized anti-war activity two years ago by camping out at Bush's ranch in Texas, dramatically announced that she was quitting the Democratic Party because of the May vote. She had denounced the March resolution as a betrayal; in May she spelled out that Iraq was now the Democrats' war as much as Bush's. "Blood is on your hands," she said.

In this, the non-socialist Sheehan is far ahead of many avowed leftists. The main anti-war coalition, United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ) was totally complacent. Judith LeBlanc, cochair of UFPJ and a leader of the invariably pro-Democrat Communist Party, said "I think the Democrats are using the politics of reality." At the UFPJ national assembly in Chicago in late June, not even a ripple of response to the Democrats' funding vote or to Sheehan's outrage was expressed.

The rival ANSWER coalition postures to the left of UFPJ. It criticized the Democratic leadership but did not mention the role of the House liberals like Lee and Waters, fakers who regularly appear on ANSWER platforms. Meanwhile ANSWER and UFPJ continue to put their rivalry ahead of united action. As we write, they are up to their usual sectarian games of calling separate demonstrations this fall, thus dividing the anti-war activists. These various anti-war leftists are what Lenin in his day described as "social pacifists" – really "social patriots" under the skin. No wonder they support Democratic imperialists.

#### THE WORKING CLASS ALTERNATIVE

There are plenty of phony socialists and leftists who blather about how the Democrats are weak-kneed and can't be trusted to take a firm stand against the war. But they are not telling the truth if they do not say openly and clearly that the Democrats are the class enemy. The Democratic Party is a deadly poison for the working class, the only class in capitalist society that has the power to do away with imperialism.

The crisis of working-class leadership can only be overcome through a struggle against the labor bureaucrats, the leaders of the oppressed and the heads of the anti-war protests who have detoured the struggles into the hands of our class's enemies in the Democratic Party. The leftists who tail these misleaders also deserve exposure, since they divert the most politically advanced workers and activists, who are crucial to the coming struggles.

The mass of Americans are angry over the unending war,

along with the allegedly growing economy that plunges working people deeper into debt and threatens their jobs, pensions and health care. As the polls show, they are rightfully cynical over the promises made by the Democrats as well as the Republicans. Present-day American reality ensures that the masses are not about to opt for socialist revolution, even though objectively that is the only real way out. However, that lesson will *never* be learned if advanced workers do not *now* openly propagandize for mass class struggle and proletarian revolution, as opposed to the pseudo-socialists' embracing of populist class collaboration and the Democratic Party.

Just imagine if the powerful transit workers' strike in New York City in December 2005 had not been sold out and cut short by the union leadership. Shutting down profits in the financial center of world capitalism would have done more to hinder the war than any Congressional vote or impeachment drive. That is why supporters of the League for the Revolutionary Party have been an important factor in the transit union. We fought for strike action and the just demands of the workers, confronting the bureaucrats and the treacherous Democrats while also speaking out on the need for workers to oppose the ongoing imperialist wars.

Likewise, in 2006 millions of immigrant workers poured into the streets to fight the attack on them, once again in spite of misleadership. They too are a potential threat to imperialist stability and its war.

We do not argue that workers fighting for their immediate demands is enough to end a war. By themselves, such actions can only present stumbling blocks to the ruling class. There aren't any alternatives to building a fighting working-class revolutionary party. However, the consciousness of our class can only be raised when it engages in such actual struggles – and when revolutionary workers are active within those struggles seeking to show the way forward. Revolutionaries fight within such struggles for demands which could unite the whole working class and undermine the imperialists at home and abroad.

Internationalists recognize that the struggles here aid fellow workers in Iraq, just as their struggles aid us in the U.S. Authentic revolutionary communists are the only ones who unequivocally stand for defeat of U.S. imperialism in Iraq and the rest of the world – including here at home. ●

***U.S. Imperialism Out of Iraq!  
U.S., U.N.: Hands off Iran!***

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# South African Public Worker Strike: Militancy Thwarted by Reformism

by Jim Morgan

Through most of June, South Africa was rocked by the largest strike since the end of apartheid – a bitter strike by 700,000 public sector workers organized in a coalition of 17 unions. Most hospitals and schools were closed. Vicious physical attacks on strikers by the police and threats by the government had little effect on the workers' unity and fighting spirit.

What did drain the workers' fighting spirit was the treacherous role of the trade union bureaucracy, which worked to prevent the strike from spreading to the private sector and ultimately agreed to a miserable settlement. After originally demanding a 12 percent wage increase, the reformist leaders of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) on June 28 caved in to the government's "final" offer of 7.5 percent, which is only about 1 percent more than the current rate of inflation.

Two key factors underlay the bitterness and intensity of this strike. First, the extreme contrasts in wealth and living conditions in South Africa established under the racist apartheid system have essentially deepened. A relatively tiny percentage of blacks have been able to become capitalists or join the privileged middle classes. But the vast majority remain mired in worsening poverty and are enraged at the many broken promises by the African National Congress (ANC) and its government.

Second, the mass working-class organizations built up through the struggle against apartheid remain, along with a high level of political consciousness among the workers and poor. In this context, the public sector strike showed the potential for a return to the road of mass struggle which had forced the end of apartheid in 1994 but was stopped short of overthrowing capitalist rule.

## MISERABLE CONDITIONS FOR THE MASSES

By the late 1980s, the apartheid system of white supremacist rule – under which the population was strictly segregated and Blacks denied the right to vote – had become a liability for the South African ruling class and imperialism internationally. Mass struggles by the workers and poor, who increasingly embraced socialist ideas, threatened to overthrow not just apartheid but capitalist rule altogether. The ruling class's solution was to negotiate an end to apartheid and participate in a transition to democratic rule. The deal was that the ANC leadership would come to power and use its authority – with the help of its allies in the Stalinist South African Communist Party (SACP) and the union bureaucracy – to demobilize the mass movement and guarantee the capitalists' economic interests.

To sell this deal to the masses, this "Congress Alliance" (ANC/COSATU/SACP) promised to radically improve the conditions of the masses: hundreds of thousands of homes would be built, running water, sewage systems and electricity would be brought to millions, education and health care would be expanded and jobs created. Little of this has been done.



Striking workers in Johannesburg, June 2006. Union leaders caved in to government "allies."

Instead the ANC government has successfully carried out a version of neo-liberalism, earning the praise of the International Monetary Fund for its austerity and pro-investor policies. Since the regime placed the highest priority on repaying apartheid-era debts to international banks, one promised social program after another was cut. In the name of creating investor-friendly economic conditions, wages were suppressed, falling well behind inflation. Most notoriously, the government has allowed the HIV-AIDS epidemic to spiral out of control and become the worst such crisis in the world.

The record of the ANC over ten years in power confirms the warnings that revolutionaries made from the start: capitalism could not satisfy the masses' needs. So the pro-capitalist leaders of the anti-apartheid movement had to turn into loyal servants of the system. Only socialist revolution, in which the working class seizes power and re-directs the economy from producing for profit toward producing for human needs, could begin to solve the crisis. (See our pamphlet, *South Africa and Proletarian Revolution*.)

During the public sector strike, Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, the minister for Public Service and Administration, said "We cannot have a situation where the [state's] wage bill is 20 percent of gross domestic product." Indeed, the *capitalist* economy cannot provide for the basic needs of the workers, despite all the promises made by the ANC.

Revolutionaries count on the development of working-class struggles, through which the masses can learn these lessons. The key to success would be the building of a vanguard revolutionary party of the most class-conscious workers to fight to break the working class from the grip of the ANC and SACP/COSATU bureaucrats and lead their class in an independent struggle for its interests.

However, the success of the Congress Alliance in restraining working-class struggle for years led to widespread demoralization and political confusion among would-be revolutionaries in South Africa. The absence of a revolutionary party during the public sector strike was sorely felt.

### NEED FOR REVOLUTIONARY LEADERSHIP

The strike seems to have taken the government by surprise. It had managed to stick public sector unions with below-inflation wage raises in each previous round of bargaining without facing a strike. But this time around, seeing a booming economy and official recommendations to raise the salary of the President and his cabinet by 57 percent, the workers were too angry to be held back by their union leaders. From the beginning of the strike it was clear that workers' militancy was white hot. Hospitals and schools were immediately shut down, and militant picket lines were established at many locations.

But the government knew that with anger at its betrayed promises widespread, a winning strike could have sparked a wave of struggles across the country. So it immediately adopted a hard line. It launched a torrent of anti-strike propaganda through the media and acquired an interdict from the courts banning strikes in "essential services." When many of the affected workers stayed out nonetheless, it announced their firing, sent police to attack their picket lines and soldiers to scab and maintain services. The union leadership responded with calls for restraint on the part of workers, drew up a proposed deal for minimum staff levels to keep essential public services running and reduced their wage raise demand from 12 to 10 percent, thus signaling their willingness to capitulate.

To advance the strike it was necessary to spread the struggle without concern for legality by calling a general strike. Indeed, calls for solidarity strikes were rising among other sectors of workers, particularly the powerful miners' and metalworkers' unions. But the dominant leadership of the trade unions belongs to the Communist Party, and it was desperate to avoid an all-out confrontation with the government. The SACP is, after all, in alliance with the ruling ANC and has no alternative to its pro-capitalist policies. So the union bureaucracy resorted to a series of tricks to deceive workers. First, a day of solidarity marches in every city was organized for July 13. Powerfully attended, these huge demonstrations were strong showings of working-class sup-

port for the strike. But they were used by the bureaucracy to avoid calls for a general strike. Then the mineworkers' union announced that it would be joining the strike, only to have its leaders quickly turn around and say that they had not applied to the courts in time and therefore could not strike legally!

Thus the public sector workers were strangled by the union bureaucracy, cut off from active support by the rest of the unions and left to slowly see their fighting spirit drained. On June 27, the union leaders announced an end to the strike. The deal to raise wages by 7.5 percent, while slightly above the rate of inflation, did not even match the wages the workers had lost while on strike, let alone make up for years of real wage cuts. While workers who were fired for striking in violation of the essential services interdiction were reinstated, they were placed on final warnings. Overall, no one was left in any doubt that the government had won the battle.

### CRISIS OF LEADERSHIP

The strike showed the acute crisis of leadership faced by the South African working class. The Communist Party controls the unions and thus dominates the working class. It has evolved from a hard Stalinist party under apartheid to a more Social Democratic perspective – while maintaining the Stalinist tradition's vicious anti-democratic and at times violent means of repressing militancy. Its political perspective goes no further than encouraging the working class to support the ANC and striving to push it to the left.

The SACP-COSATU leaders increasingly fear that working-class anger at the ANC government is growing to a point where they can no longer control the masses. They are thus pleading not only for more concessions to the working class, but also for a change in the government.

The law currently states that no president of the country may serve more than two terms in office, and current president Thabo Mbeki is set to complete his second term in 2009. Mbeki is anxious to anoint a similarly conservative leader as his successor, but the SACP-COSATU leadership is backing the populist Jacob Zuma. Zuma was deputy president until Mbeki used corruption charges (later dismissed) to force him from office. Zuma soon after faced rape charges which were also dismissed.

Zuma is clearly no left-wing alternative to Mbeki. As deputy president he shared responsibility for years of pro-capitalist policies. While he attracts popular support through radical populist rhetoric, in response to the public sector strike he was anxious to reassure capitalist circles that he could be relied on to be a force for stability. He said, "I don't think it's doing any good for the country. I think that both parties should have found a solution before the strike."

The South African masses can ill afford years more of the ANC government's pro-capitalist policies, no matter which figurehead is implementing them. Worsening conditions of poverty and exploitation will inevitably trigger more mass struggles. The key to their success will be the building of a vanguard revolutionary party committed to leading those struggles toward the working class's seizure of power.

A socialist revolution in South Africa would have a powerful effect well beyond the country's borders. It would not only signal an immediate way forward in struggle against the horrendous conditions of imperialist exploitation throughout the continent. The South African masses' heroic struggle against apartheid won it respect around the world. Its overthrow of those who betrayed that struggle would send a message to the workers of the world to throw off the dead weight of their own betraying leaders and take power in their hands, too. ●



*Jacob Zuma, populist ANC leader seeking South African presidency. Despite support from the SACP and the unions, he has solidly backed the government's anti-worker measures.*

# Defend Iran against U.S. Imperialism!

## *Correspondence with the WCPI*

This past spring the LRP had an exchange of letters with a representative of the Worker-communist Party of Iran (WCPI) in the U.S. In preparing the correspondence for publication, personal references have been removed, and spelling, punctuation and some wording have been edited for clarity. No political changes have been made.

The exchange began when our correspondent sent us the Manifesto below on March 25.

### **Manifesto of the Third Camp Against U.S. Militarism and Islamic Terrorism**

The present conflict between the Western governments and the Islamic Republic of Iran can have disastrous human, political and social consequences. The terrible experience of Iraq has shown to all the catastrophes that can result from economic sanctions and a military attack. Deterioration of living conditions, economic plight, death, destruction and displacement of people, and increased repression by the Islamic regime, would be some of the immediate consequences of economic sanctions or a military attack on Iran. This policy would unleash Islamic terrorism on a regional scale and escalate it internationally.

We must stand up with all our power to the U.S. government's and its allies' bullying. We must put an end to the crimes of the opposite pole, i.e. Islamic terrorism. We must help the people of Islam-stricken countries to get rid of the menace of Islamic terrorist states and forces. American militarism and Islamic terrorism have brutalized the world. Neither of them has a solution to the present crisis and its resulting problems. Rather, they are themselves the cause of this crisis and its aggravation. Civilized humanity must rise up against both these poles and the suffering that they have imposed on the world. The human and genuine solution to the problem of nuclear weapons, to Islamic terrorism and its horrific crimes against the people of the world, and to the militaristic bullying of the U.S. and Western governments lies in the hands of us people.

Amid all this, the struggle of the people of Iran for freedom holds a prominent and critical place. For years there has been a mass social movement in Iran against the Islamic regime and for liberty and equality. The triumph of this movement over the Islamic Republic of Iran would be a decisive blow to political Islam and Islamic terrorism throughout the world. It would also be a powerful response to the U.S. government's political-military interventionism aimed at regime change, in the name of "exporting democracy," and imposition of reactionary puppet regimes on other societies. The victory of the Iranian people would be a giant step forward and a turning point in the struggle against militarist and Islamic terrorism and in defence of liberty, civilisation and universal rights for all throughout the world.

We, the undersigned, declare:

1. *No to war, No to economic sanctions.* Economic sanctions and a military strike on Iran will have catastrophic human, political and social consequences. What happened in

Iraq should not be repeated in Iran. These threats must stop immediately.

2. *No to U.S. militarism, No to political Islam.* In the conflict between the state terrorism of the West and Islamic terrorism, the civilized world is not represented. Both sides of this conflict are reactionary and inhuman. They must be driven back.

3. *Nuclear disarmament of all states.* Neither Iran, nor the USA, nor any other state should have nuclear weapons. The Iranian regime's nuclear project must stop immediately. However, states which have the largest stockpiles of nuclear weapons themselves are not competent authorities to judge on the nuclear capability of other states. Halting the Islamic Republic of Iran's nuclear project is the task of the freedom-loving people of the world, in particular the people of Iran – just as the nuclear disarmament of all states and liberation from the global nuclear nightmare can only be achieved by the struggle of the people of the world.

4. *Attacks on civil liberties in the West in the name of "war on terror" must stop.* The governments in the West are violating or restricting civil rights and liberties in the name of fighting the terrorist threat and safeguarding security. Increased surveillance and control of citizens, curtailing freedom of expression and movement and denying the rights of immigrants are some of the commonest forms that this attack on people's rights is taking. This must be stopped. No excuse for an attack on civil rights and liberties is acceptable.

5. *We actively support the struggle of the people of Iran against a military attack and against the Islamic Republic of Iran.* For 27 years the people of Iran have been fighting against repression, violation of women's rights, sexual apartheid, stoning, torture, execution of political prisoners and poverty and economic deprivation. The people of Iran want to and can determine their own political destiny. Support for the struggle of the Iranian people for freedom, the victory of this struggle against the



*Young Iranian opponents of Islamist regime are brutalized by pro-regime vigilantes, June 2003.*





*Secretary of State Rice demands Iran stop uranium enrichment. We say the U.S. has no right to dictate Iran's energy or arms policies.*

Islamic Republic and the establishment of people's own direct rule will be a crucial step in standing up to the U.S. government's bullying and a decisive blow to Islamic terrorism in the Middle East and the world.

6. *The Islamic Republic must be expelled from the international community.* The Islamic regime in Iran must be kicked out of the international community, just like the racist South African regime, for 27 years of crimes against humanity, for the brutal suppression of the rightful struggles of the people, for the execution of over one hundred thousand political prisoners, for establishing a sexual apartheid in Iran and for promoting Islamic terrorism in the Middle East and throughout the world. We call for the non-recognition of the Islamic Republic as the representative of the Iranian people, for the ending of diplomatic ties with it and the closure of its embassies everywhere. We call for the expulsion of the regime from international institutions.

We invite all humanitarian, secular, anti-war and freedom-loving organisations, forces, parties and individuals in the world to sign this Manifesto and join the Third Camp to confront both poles of terrorism.

The list of signatories is omitted. It can be found at [www.thirdcamp.com/php/amanifest.php](http://www.thirdcamp.com/php/amanifest.php).

#### **Letter from the LRP, April 4, 2007**

As I explained when we met, we in the LRP have strong disagreements with your organization. We regard imperialism as the main enemy of the workers and oppressed around the world. Islamic reactionaries are indeed enemies of the working class, but we do not equate them with U.S. imperialism. In clashes between the two, we do not take a neutral "Third Camp" position. Rather, we stand for the defeat of the imperialist side. We believe this is crucial in exposing the Islamists' lying claims that they are really opposed to imperialism. Such a clear stand is thus necessary to rally the working class against capitalism's imperialist powers and local enforcers. Thus we stand for the U.S.'s defeat in Iraq. Thus we stand in defense of Iran against all imperialist attacks, diplomatic, economic and military. We do not take a neutral "Third Camp" position in such clashes.

Your organization, the WCPI, on the other hand, takes a formally neutral position and occasionally slips into an openly pro-imperialist position. For example, the Manifesto you sent us calls for the expulsion of the Islamic Republic from the international community. As if it is worse than U.S. imperialism! This idea can only encourage support for imperialist hostility to Iran, which leads in the direction of the threatened sanctions and war that your organization opposes.

Nonetheless, we would welcome the opportunity to discuss these and other issues and we would like to schedule a meeting between comrades of the LRP and you and any other WCPI supporters that may be interested.

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#### **Letter from the WCPI, April 5, 2007**

Yes! We met, and I and my friend were carrying the sign: "Say No to Bush's Militarism, No to Political Islam! Viva Freedom, Equality for All! Viva Socialism! Say No to Sanction and Military Intervention!"

As we suggested, we will be happy if we could have a panel discussion. We can discuss our differences in public and give everybody a chance to decide the best strategy in the dirty battle between Bush's militarism and political Islam.

1. In our view, the enemy of all humanity is capitalism (not only the one aspect of it which is called "imperialism").

2. Using terminology like "imperialism" creates an illusion for movements. Nationalist movements and fanatic Islamic movements can hide behind the "anti-imperialist" position, as they were doing for a whole period in the Cold War era! The "traditional left" also has been fooled by this "anti-imperialism"!

3. The "peace movement in the U.S." unfortunately is led by this "anti-imperialist" view – so much so that the pro-Islamists, even the pro-Islamic regime in Iran, have had the chance to "participate" in these peace movements, while they are as barbaric as Bush! Hundreds of thousands of communists and leftists have been killed by these so-called "anti-imperialists," and the working class in Iran has also paid a lot from this "Islamic movement," which is just another banner for capitalism in the Middle East!

4. You misinterpreted the Third Camp position as "neutral"! It is quite the opposite! The Third Camp is about an active movement against both fanaticisms. And it is about the third alternative on the political scene, which is socialism, freedom and equality for all! So as communists who really believe and fight for socialism now (not in the future or in small sects!), we are the party of the third alternative (socialism) and not the "neutral party" as you mentioned!

You write: "We believe this is crucial in exposing the Islamists' lying claims that they are really opposed to imperialism. Such a clear stand is thus necessary to rally the working class against capitalism's imperialist powers and its local enforcers. Thus we stand for the U.S.'s defeat in Iraq. Thus we stand in defense of Iran against all imperialist attacks: diplomatic, economic and military. We do not take a neutral "Third Camp" position in such clashes."

What is "Iran" to you as a communist? Are you talking about a border in which the opposing classes have the greatest class struggle? Are you supporting both sides of this struggle?! Is it possible to support Iranian capitalists who are ruling there by the Islamic flag, and the working class which is already challenging it every day through thousands of strikes?

When you say, "We stand in defense of Iran", your statement doesn't look like that of a communist who should stand against capitalism!

The Third Camp creates a clear communist line between

people, the working class, the youth and women who have been fighting for more than 25 years against the barbarity of the Islamic regime and also against Bush's militarism.

I would claim that our policy is much more understandable, much more clear and shows the alternative which every communist should fight for! And your position creates more confusion!

You write: "For example, the Manifesto you sent us calls for the expulsion of the Islamic Republic from the international community. As if Iran's rulers are worse than U.S. imperialism! This idea can only encourage support for imperialist hostility to Iran, which leads in the direction of the threatened sanctions and war that your organization opposes."

The Islamic regime has killed more than 100,000 political prisoners in Iran. This is the regime of stoning to death, the regime of oppression toward women. This is a totalitarian regime, worse than Hitler and the Khmer Rouge. This a regime which never left any space for opposition, never cared about freedom of speech. The Islamic regime is worse than the Taliban and more criminal and barbaric than any regime in the world. You should be there to feel what I am talking about! This regime arrests workers just for trying to celebrate May First or organizing a union, which has been free in this country!

There is no comparison between "Western capitalism" and the Islamic version of capitalism in this view! But our Third Camp policy is very clear about the core issue in the world, since we have an alternative for humanity!

Your claim that we might indirectly encourage "imperialism" is false, since, just the opposite of your position, we are not supporting "a nation" versus another "nation"! And we show our alternative, which is socialist revolution.

Also, we are very clear about sanctions or any military attack against Iran. But not by "supporting Iran," which indirectly sends a very wrong message to people, namely support for the Islamic government!

The WCPI, the largest and most active leftist movement in Iran and outside Iran, supports socialist revolution as the only modern, humane solution for the barbarity which has been threatening the world.

As I suggested before, I will be more than happy to present my party's views in a public panel discussion. I believe that our audiences will be able to see the differences and decide for themselves.

#### **Letter from the LRP, April 23, 2007**

We are very happy to engage in a dialogue with you and supporters of the Worker-communist Party of Iran. As communist internationalists, we are well aware of the need for such an important exchange of views. Therefore we accept your proposal for a panel discussion and we gladly agree to participate. Marxists well know that open and honest debate is essential. After all, these ideas at issue between us are life and death questions for not only the workers and oppressed of Iran but for all humanity.



*Najaf, Iraq 2004: U.S. troops aim weapons at civilians. Communists stand for defeat of occupiers, but WCPI takes no side between imperialist and resistance forces if U.S. attacks Iran.*

Organizing an honest exchange of ideas for the public to judge will be a refreshing change from the mix of dishonest diplomacy, innuendo, censorship and behind-the-scenes deal-making that the left normally engages in.

To continue our written discussion, let us reply to the points you have made in your e-mail.

#### **1. THE BRUTALITY OF THE IRANIAN ISLAMISTS – AND OF IMPERIALISM**

You list the horrors perpetrated by the Islamic regime in Iran, and you suggest that we do not understand how utterly murderous the government really is. Of course, not being an Iranian organization, we have not suffered the inhumanity of this particular regime. Nevertheless, having had contact with Iranians in exile over the years and having read a great deal about conditions in Iran (and also having had first-hand experience with the brutality of other dictatorships such as South Africa's apartheid regime), we believe we do understand the barbarity of the Iranian regime.

We stand for the defense of Iran against imperialist attack, but that does not mean political support of any kind for the regime. On the contrary, the overthrow of the Islamic regime must be the aim of the Iranian working class. But we believe a position of defending Iran from imperialist attack is essential to preparing that revolution: it is the only way revolutionary communist workers can prove to the masses that they are the only ones who represent a genuine answer to the struggle against imperialism.

It is perfectly understandable that the central focus of your work must be aimed at the overthrow of the criminal Iranian regime, and the state and ruling class which it serves. However, this should not lead you to adopt a highly distorted view of the real balance of power and terror on the world scale and thereby downplay the role of imperialism as the main enemy of humanity. Much of your argument against defending Iran from imperialist attack rests on how politically and morally heinous the Iranian regime is as compared to the imperialist rulers. You say the Islamic Republic is "worse than Hitler" and "more criminal and barbaric than any regime in the world." You add: "There is no



*Iranian rally against Israel, 2005. Iranian regime's anti-imperialist rhetoric masks its capitalist exploitation and oppression.*

comparison between 'Western capitalism' and its status with the Islamic version of capitalism in this view."

We generally avoid arguments over which barbarity in the world is worse than another. We have seen defenders of the Holocaust victims and Armenian genocide victims, for example, argue over such questions to no good purpose. Indeed, Marxists do not base their fundamental judgments of governments or states upon the scale of their crimes or depths of moral depravity, but rather on the class interests they serve, and on how they serve them. We cannot imagine on what basis you think the Iranian regime is worse than Hitler's. It obviously has not killed more people or used more brutal methods. For us, both are examples of vicious, totalitarian regimes. However, you make this a critical issue when you say that there is no comparison between the brutality of Islamist capitalism and that of the imperialist West, and thereby conclude that Iran must not be defended against imperialism.

We believe you vastly underestimate the bloodiness, and more importantly, the political and economic significance, of imperialism. Key to Lenin's understanding of capitalism in this epoch was that the strongest capitalist powers had come to dominate and super-exploit what was then the colonial world. This exploitation allowed and continues to fuel the imperialist ruling classes' ability to afford the concessions of relative democracy and generally higher living standards to the masses at home. Since colonialism proved unsustainably expensive and provocative, the imperialists have, since World War II, generally preferred to contract out their dirty work to local dictators. Thus, for example, the fact that Saddam Hussein ruled Iraq cruelly for decades should not obscure the fact that he did so on behalf of imperialism.

Marxists defend every hard-won democratic gain and economic standard that workers enjoy in the imperialist countries. The relative democracy and prosperity of the imperialist countries has been paid for not only by the workers and poor of those countries, but also by the blood and toil of billions in the colonial and neo-colonial world.

Responsibility for the crimes committed by local dictators on behalf of imperialism ultimately rests with the imperialist powers. This does not absolve local tyrants of responsibility for their crimes. But it does explain why and how the imperialist ruling classes sit atop the world capitalist system.

In the case of Iran in particular, the masses obviously suffered for many years under the rule of the Shah, who was installed by, and ruled on behalf of, U.S. imperialism. The popular revolution in 1979 that overthrew him, in which the working class played such an active part, was then crushed by the brutal fascistic Islamic

forces of Khomeini. Now the Islamic Republic regime balances between the imperialists, on the one hand, and the masses, on the other hand. It resists the imperialists for a bigger slice of the economic pie but does not dare fundamentally challenge them. It represses the masses and yet appeals to them for support with its supposed opposition to U.S. and Israeli imperialism.

Importantly, there is nothing intrinsically more or less brutal about either the U.S. or Iranian ruling classes. All capitalist regimes are essentially as tyrannical as they think they need to be, or think they can afford to be, to maintain their power. Also, the U.S. imperialists are clearly not particularly attached to secular, democratic rule. The U.S. has engineered countless coups to overthrow democratically elected governments. They funded the Islamist forces in Afghanistan opposed to the Soviet-backed regime. Most recently it was the U.S. occupying force in Iraq that introduced Sharia rule. Indeed the U.S. has accepted the Iranian-backed Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) as a governing partner in that country.

And none of this should distract from the monstrous crimes committed directly by imperialism, like the U.S.'s atomic bombing of Japan.

In your Manifesto, you say that "the Islamic Republic must be expelled from the international community." You call for "the closure of its embassies everywhere" and "the expulsion of the regime from international institutions." We strongly disagree. If the U.S. closes the Iranian embassy here, that would be a warlike and imperialist act which all communists must oppose. If the U.S., Britain, etc. throw Iran out of the United Nations – that "den of thieves" controlled by the imperialist powers – that too would be an imperialist act which communists must denounce. The world's biggest and bloodiest criminal gangs have no right to pass judgment on other weaker criminals they are momentarily at odds with.

Why do you not call for the U.S. and the other imperialist powers to be ejected from "the international community" if you are equidistant from both sides, as you claim? To do so would of course be absurd, because imperialism dominates the so-called "international community." But it is indeed a capitulation to imperialism to ask the big criminals to outlaw the weaker ones.

In sum, we feel that because of your justified hatred of the Islamist regime, you have impermissibly veered in the direction of Western imperialism.

## **2. THE "THIRD CAMP" AND "NEUTRALITY"**

You object to our characterization of your position as "neutral." We understand that you believe that since the Iranian and U.S. regimes are both capitalist, communists must oppose both and support a "Third Camp" – the socialist alternative now. We labeled your position "neutral" because you favor neither one side nor the other. However, as we have explained above, we believe your position is actually biased toward Western imperialism.

You say that our position of defending Iran against American imperialism means that in effect we support the Islamist regime. You point out that there is a class line between the Iranian working class and its allies, on the one hand, and the barbaric Iranian Islamist regime, on the other – and you claim that we are crossing it: "When you say that 'We stand in defense of Iran,' your statement doesn't look like that of a communist who should stand against capitalism!"

Please note that we said that "we stand in defense of Iran against all imperialist attacks"; we do not defend the Iranian regime against its own people, for example. Indeed, we have always stood in complete and uncompromising political opposition to the Islamists. From the very beginning, we opposed the Khomeini regime that destroyed the workers' shoras and the incip-

ient working-class revolution against the Shah. In demonstrations in the U.S. against the Shah's regime, we carried signs saying, "No Support to the Mullahs!" and "Khomeini Is No Answer to Imperialism!" We had to defend these signs from patronizing social-pacifists and Stalinists who insisted that Americans have no right to criticize "third world" regimes that the U.S. government attacks. We also argued against leftist Iranian emigres here who called for Western "democratic" intervention against the Islamic regime. We have never retreated from standing for the revolutionary overthrow of the Iranian regime.

Finally, as to your suggestion that our readiness to take Iran's side against imperialist attack doesn't sound very communist, on the contrary, it is the only communist position. Marx and Engels defended the Irish and Indian struggles against British colonialism, regardless of who was leading them. As Lenin explained, it was always the duty of communists to take the side of oppressed nations in wars with "great powers":

**For example, if tomorrow, Morocco were to declare war on France, India on England, Persia or China on Russia, and so forth, those would be "just", "defensive" wars, irrespective of who attacked first; and every Socialist would sympathize with the victory of the oppressed, dependent, unequal states against the oppressing, slaveowning, predatory "great" powers. (*Socialism and War*, 1915.)**

Similarly, Trotsky explained many times that it was the elementary duty of communists to defend the colonies and neocolonies against the imperialists. For example:

**In Brazil there now reigns a semi-fascist regime that every revolutionary can only view with hatred. Let us assume, however, that on the morrow England enters into a military conflict with Brazil. I ask you on whose side of the conflict will the working class be? I will answer for myself personally – in this case I will be on the side of "fascist" Brazil against "democratic" Great Britain. Why? Because in the conflict between them it will not be a question of democracy or fascism. If England should be victorious, she will put another fascist in Rio de Janeiro and will place double chains on Brazil. If Brazil on the contrary should be victorious, it will give a mighty impulse to national and democratic consciousness of the country and will lead to the overthrow of the Vargas dictatorship. The defeat of England will at the same time deliver a blow to British imperialism and will give an impulse to the revolutionary movement of the British proletariat. ... Under all masks one must know how to distinguish exploiters, slave-owners, and robbers! (Leon Trotsky, "Anti-Imperialist Struggle Is Key To Liberation," *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1938-39)*, p. 34.)**

Marx and Engels, Lenin and Trotsky all understood that when oppressor nation states waged war on the colonial or neocolonial countries: 1) the masses of the oppressed country would rally to its defense, and communists, wherever possible, had to



*Lenin speaking at Russian revolutionary rally. WCPI claims Lenin's heritage but rejects his support for oppressed nations against imperialism.*

focus their efforts against the main imperial enemy first, so as to prove that any compromise or betrayal of the struggle against imperial domination was not their responsibility; 2) that a defeat for the great power would weaken the overall capitalist system and stimulate the struggles of the working class everywhere, particularly within the great powers.

### 3. "MILITARY DEFENSE" IS NOT POLITICAL SUPPORT

Calling for the defeat of imperialism is a necessary tactic vital to any successful revolutionary strategy for the Iranian working class. We learned from the Bolshevik tradition that it is a necessary tactic for communists who stand against capitalism. The Bolsheviks developed a tactic which they called "military (or military-technical) defense." Lenin's call for the military defense of Kerensky's bourgeois Provisional Government against Kornilov's attempted putsch was a factor of great importance on the road to the October revolution.

Both Kornilov and Kerensky were not only capitalist but were actively counterrevolutionary. But the Bolsheviks knew that at the moment of Kornilov's military attack on the revolution, there was no possible immediate proletarian insurrection. Kornilov's putsch represented an acute danger to the working-class struggle; Kerensky represented the existing and longer term chronic danger. By showing the working class that the Bolsheviks were the best fighters for their defense, they gained enormous strength and momentum in the struggle to overthrow the Kerensky regime. Of course, Lenin's tactic implied no political support to Kerensky. Or do you believe that Lenin was capitulating to capitalism in using this tactic?

Likewise, there is no immediate revolutionary situation in Iran at this moment. And as every serious Marxist knows, at the initial outbreak of a war – especially a war in which one's country is being attacked – there is no immediate possibility of working-class socialist revolution, the alternative to both capitalist sides. Therefore, in the event of an imperialist attack, defense of Iran is in order. Communist workers must struggle for armed working class militias, independent of the regime's armed forces. Communists advocate that the workers turn their guns against the invaders for the moment, and not against the regime's forces, so



*Washington, DC anti-war demonstration, January 2007. Slogan on placard, like the WCPI's, blames Bush alone and lets pro-war Democratic politicians off the hook.*

long as those forces are actually firing at the imperialist forces and not at the workers. (Obviously, if they fire upon workers, then they must be fired upon in return.) Just as Lenin did not cease to propagandize for revolution while giving military support, neither should Iranian communists do so while defending against the imperialist attack. Military defense does not mean political support to the regime.

The same methodological questions arise today. The bourgeois nationalists could overcome direct colonialism but could not break from the imperialist world market. Thus, today many of those countries are neo-colonial in character and their working classes and peasants are super-exploited well beyond the exploitation they suffered under direct colonial rule. There are still anti-imperialist struggles going on. Do you equate, for example, the Israeli imperialists with the oppressed Palestinians in their struggle – on the grounds that both the Zionist rulers and the PLO and Hamas reactionaries are all capitalist?

In the U.S. only a short time ago, the struggle for Black rights was led by pro-bourgeois figures, whose politics we openly criticized. Yet we didn't equate the murderous bourgeois racist side with the misled Black bourgeois-led side. When mass marches led by Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. were fired upon, we favored shooting back only at the racists, even though King was acting to prevent American Blacks from achieving true liberation through socialist revolution. Were we supporting capitalism in so doing?

These examples all show that such defense does not mean political support to the bourgeois leaders. Rather it is a tactic to enable the working-class masses to survive an acute attack in order to be able to fight another day against their chronic misleaders and oppressors.

#### **4. THE ANTI-WAR STRUGGLE IN THE U.S.**

On the Western scene, you say that the "traditional left" has been fooled by anti-imperialism and capitulates to the Islamists. The capitulation on the part of some sections of the left is cer-

tainly true. But these people have not been fooled – rather they willingly participate in the capitulation to bourgeois nationalism because that is their political position. Nevertheless, this is again a reason not to leave the struggle against imperialism to the capitulators.

Likewise you say that the "peace movement" in the U.S. is "led by this 'anti-imperialist' view." This is incorrect: the anti-war organizations are not led by forces committed to a struggle against imperialism. Even those which claim to be anti-imperialist do not push that position in the protests they lead, because they wish to align with Democratic Party politicians who belong to the anti-Bush wing of American imperialism. Increasingly important sectors – by now seemingly a majority – of the U.S. ruling class wants to extricate itself militarily from Iraq and to avoid war with Iran. This is not at all because they are anti-imperialist. Rather, as in the Vietnam War, they seek to cut their losses in order to preserve imperialism and its power abroad, not to end it!

You cite your sign at a recent demonstration which said (among other, better things) "Say No to Bush's militarism..." In your e-mail, you also refer to "Bush's militarism" as the problem with the U.S. in the Middle East. This

is wrong. George Bush did not invent any unique form of U.S. militarism. His initial invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq were enthusiastically supported by the Democratic Party. The Democrats have only discovered disagreements with his policies now, because they are failing. The Democrats want to reestablish U.S. military power. All three major candidates for the Democratic Presidential nomination are proposing changing fronts in the battle to dominate the Middle East: they all favor threatening an attack on Iran. Yet many people mistakenly think the Democrats are an alternative to Bush's militarism, and your slogan only encourages such illusions. For our part, at anti-war demonstrations we raise unambiguous slogans such as "Defend Iraq/Iran! Defeat U.S. Imperialism!" and "Democrats and Republicans – Two Parties of Imperialist War!"

In sum, the problem with the anti-war movement is that it is misled by bourgeois liberals and chauvinist pacifists, some of whom masquerade as socialists. The masses in the U.S. wish to get out of Iraq and want no war with Iran. Their leaders, and the overwhelming majority of leftists who support them by directing their attack against Bush rather than against imperialism as a whole, are betraying them as well as the masses in the Middle East. As these misleaders did with the anti-Vietnam War movement, they will try to help save U.S. imperialism so as to be able to better maintain super-exploitation abroad, conduct even bloodier future wars throughout the world and further exploit and repress workers and oppressed groups at home.

Today, we counterpose the slogan "Workers' Socialist Revolution Is the Only Solution!" as our answer to social pacifism – and we fight for that goal within the unions, on the working class college campuses and in the anti-war protests.

To sum up, we believe that the differences between our organizations are important and clear. We believe that you, because of your justified hatred of the Iranian regime, have made considerable accommodations to the imperialists – in particular, to the wing that is currently less aggressive militarily. Like you, we feel that these issues must be brought to public attention and

wider debate, so that the struggle for socialist revolution can be advanced more strongly.

#### Letter from the WCPI, April 29, 2007

You write: "We believe we do understand the barbarity of the Iranian regime. ...We stand for the defense of Iran against imperialist attack, but that does not mean political support of any kind for the regime."

Could you define "Iran" in your statement? I can not understand this concept! Is it a geography you are addressing? Or the majority of people there who like everybody else in the world are suffering from a capitalist state? If you are supporting these people, you need to support bringing down the Islamic regime in Iran, and like every communist your plan should be organizing socialist revolution. This is our plan in the Worker-communist Party. We believe that this is the only immediate humane solution to crisis in the Middle East.

"Defending Iran" at most keeps the Islamic Regime in power! But the people in Iran deserve revolutionary change.

You write: "On the contrary, the overthrow of the Islamic regime must be the aim of the Iranian working class. But we believe a position of defending Iran from imperialist attack is essential to preparing that revolution."

Not necessarily! In the last quarter-century of the bloody history of Iran, the imperialists didn't attack Iran! Isn't it true? Your position doesn't create the change we need! We need an active movement to bring the Islamic Regime down, which has been already started by massive strikes by teachers, workers and university students. Defending people against imperialist attack can be done through socialist revolution and creating a free and equal, open and modern society.

You write: "It is perfectly understandable that the central focus of your work must be aimed at the overthrow of the criminal Iranian regime, and the state and ruling class which it serves. However, this should not lead you to adopt a highly distorted view of the real balance of power and terror on the world scale and thereby downplay the role of imperialism as the main enemy of humanity."

I don't see any distortion in my position! It is very clear! Capitalism is an extended phenomenon. I don't divide it into "imperialist" and "non-imperialist," which I think is the true distortion! Instead I show the people that the true alternative is the "Third Camp" position, in which people organize themselves against all sorts of barbarity, and the alternative is socialism. What part of this clear position is "distortion" to you?!

You write: "Responsibility for the crimes committed by local dictators on behalf of imperialism ultimately rests with the imperialist powers. This does not absolve local tyrants of responsibility for their crimes. But it does explain why and how the imperialist ruling classes sit atop the world capitalist system."

In the Worker-communist Party, we follow the single and very practical concept of Marx and Lenin. This world of capitalism is upsidedown and inhumane. We do whatever we can do and wherever we can to change this world. Lenin was a very good example of a person who was not confused about "imperialism"! As a revolutionary he organized socialist revolution in Russia while many "Marxists" were wandering around talking about "imperialism" and saying that Russia is not a good place to start!

We in the Worker-communist Party believe that we have a chance to initiate socialist revolution in Iran. The notion of "who is in the top chain" doesn't apply to the question of "how and where we can break the chain of global capitalism," which by mistake you still call imperialism.

Your version of reality still sees the world as "imperialist vs.

non-imperialist," so you easily miss the globality of capitalism. This is the core difference between us, which then creates opposite political positions.

You have become a militant who will go to Iran to fight against imperialism's attack! Fighting next to Islamic fanatics. We organize the movement to bring down the Islamic regime by socialist revolution, which naturally is the opposite of both fanatic players in this game! Which policy is really distorted?!

You write, "In your Manifesto, you say that 'the Islamic Republic must be expelled from the international community.' You call for 'the closure of its embassies everywhere' and 'the expulsion of the regime from international institutions.' We strongly disagree. If the U.S. closes the Iranian embassy here, that would be a warlike and imperialist act which all communists must oppose."

Again you use words that are naturally unfamiliar for the communist movement, "Iran" and now the "U.S.!" You fail to separate the governments and people again! Our campaign is targeting the international people's movement to boycott the Islamic regime, as was done against the South African government.

The governments of Iran and U.S. were and will communicate constantly and conspire against the people. So boycotting the Islamic regime is a people's request. It creates international pressure against the Islamic government and creates a good environment to unite people all over the world against political Islam, which was created by the help of "imperialists" in the Middle East!

As communists, our goal is taking over the political scene from capitalist governments and bringing people to the scene of politics. The U.S. and Islamic Regime have shown in the last 27 years that they have been constantly working together even during the time they would show the opposite!

You write: "You object to our characterization of your position as 'neutral.' We understand that you believe that since the Iranian and U.S. regimes are both capitalist, communists must oppose both and support a "Third Camp" – the socialist alternative now. We labeled your position "neutral" because you favor neither one side nor the other. However, as we have explained above, we believe your position is actually biased toward Western imperialism."

Thanks! It seems that both of us agree that our position (Third Camp) is not "neutral" and is a clear communist position which should be pro-socialist. Bias?! There is no bias either! As communists, we believe that humanity should end capitalism, taking every single possible opportunity (as Lenin did once!). Our strategy in Iran does not ignore the fact that global capitalism exists, nor does it ignore "Western capitalism," which you still see just through Cold War glasses!

You write: "Calling for the defeat of imperialism is a necessary tactic vital to any successful revolutionary strategy for the Iranian working class. We learned from the Bolshevik tradition that it is a necessary tactic for communists who stand against capitalism."

Please correct me if I am wrong! Was Lenin there to bring down the Tsar to stop the war or not? Was Lenin there to organize the socialist revolution to stop imperialist war or not? I don't know what you have learned from Lenin. But we want to do the same as he did! We are just pushing for socialist revolution to break U.S. militarism in the Middle East.

You write: "On the Western scene, you say that the 'traditional left' has been fooled by anti-imperialism and capitulates to the Islamists. The capitulation on the part of some sections of the left is certainly true. But these people have not been fooled – rather they willingly participate in the capitulation to bourgeois nationalism because that is their political position. Nevertheless, this is again a reason not to leave the struggle against imperialism to the capitulators."





*U.S. military devastated the city of Fallujah in 2004. WCPI downplays brutality of imperialism, demands that Iran – but not the U.S.! – “be expelled from the international community.”*

This is exactly the major argument between us! How can the communist movement become a mainstream movement here? By showing a better alternative than the “Democrats.” By organizing people for socialism, not as an ideology but as the only alternative to this dark era. By fighting for “socialism now.” By drawing a clear line between all kinds of fanaticism and the socialist project. Like you, I believe that communists in the U.S. are far from this stand.

Standing alongside the Islamic regime in Iran and claiming “We don’t support them politically” will not get trust from the people of Iran and will make the people in the U.S. more confused.

#### **Comment by the LRP**

The public meeting proposed and agreed upon during the exchange never took place, since the WCPI representative moved away. Thus the discussion was broken off.

Since our correspondent had the last word, it is only necessary for us to say that our views were fully expressed in our letter of April 23. There are a number of points in that letter that the WCPI representative did not respond to.

1. He does not explain how the regime in Iran can be said to be worse or more brutal than the imperialist powers.

2. He refers to Lenin as “a very good example of a person who was not confused about ‘imperialism’.” Indeed, he compares the WCPI in Iran in the face of an imperialist attack to Lenin in Tsarist Russia during the First World War. “Was Lenin there to bring down the Tsar to stop the war or not? Was Lenin there to organize the socialist revolution to stop imperialist war or not?”

By this comparison he implies that Iranian revolutionaries need not defend Iran, just as Lenin and the Bolsheviks did not defend Russia against the imperialist invasion by Germany. The difference, of course, is that Tsarist Russia was itself an imperialist power, and Iran is not. Lenin did not support the “national defense” of any imperialist power. Indeed, Lenin called for the defeat of “his own” imperialism, as do we today. Our correspondent does not comment on our citation from Lenin – one of many we could have used – calling for socialists to defend any oppressed country against the imperialists.

3. He does not say how the WCPI will respond tactically in case of an imperialist attack on Iran. He mocks us for wanting to defend Iran, “fighting next to Islamic fanatics.” We are confident that in the case of an imperialist assault, the mass of the Iranian working class, not just supporters of the hated regime, will oppose the imperialists. Our co-thinkers would be fighting alongside *them*.

4. Discussing anti-war politics in the U.S., he says that the way to distinguish communists from the pro-Democratic “anti-war” leadership is to fight for “socialism now.” In fact, the LRP is distinguished for always pointing out – in anti-war struggles and everywhere else – that socialist revolution is necessary to stop the capitalist assaults once and for all. But that propaganda assertion is not enough. Revolutionaries, like Lenin, must find ways in practice to convince those we are fighting alongside of

that socialism is the answer to their needs. Standing for the defense of oppressed countries against imperialism is one such way. Of course, since we are neither utopians nor liars, we cannot assure them that revolution is imminent.

5. Again on politics in the U.S., our correspondent does not respond to our criticism of his placard at an anti-war demonstration, “Say No to Bush’s Militarism ...!” We reminded him that the U.S. war on Iraq was not just Bush’s – the Congressional Democrats supported it and still refuse to end it. He seems to believe that calling for socialism as a “better alternative than the Democrats” is all that is necessary to expose the pro-Democratic Party leaders. In fact he notes our disapproval of those in the anti-war protests who capitulated to Islamism and bourgeois nationalism. But he does not comment on our longer argument against the more significant wing in the anti-war protests that capitulates to the pro-imperialist Democrats.

In sum, we think that our conclusion that the WCPI has “made considerable accommodations to the imperialists” is confirmed by our correspondent’s last letter. We hope that comrades of the WCPI in Iran, in the event of an attack by the U.S., will not just stand aside and call for socialism but will see the need in practice to join the working class in facing the imperialists as the fundamental and more immediate danger. Failure to do so will not only aid imperialism. It would criminally give up a vital tactical weapon designed to win the masses away from the hated clerical regime and aid them in taking power themselves. ●

### ***Letters Welcome!***

We invite readers of *Proletarian Revolution* to send letters to the magazine. Names will be withheld on request. Write us at

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# Venezuela

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*continued from page 36*

So what is left? What Chávez calls “socialism” is still within the framework of a bourgeois nationalist developmental scheme, except that he mobilizes the masses with radical rhetoric, a necessary feature of populism. There are the “cooperatives,” which are heavily touted as the new “social economy.” In the main they are nothing more than petty-bourgeois micro-businesses using non-union and casual labor. They now employ five percent of the workforce, while there remains massive underemployment, informal labor and poverty. They are a basis for Chávez getting political support, but they are an insignificant part of the economy.

“21st Century Socialism” stands explicitly for the maintenance of a mixed economy, albeit with a big role for the state in management of major industries like oil. Its nationalizations always include full compensation to the capitalists, and they have not reduced the level of imperialist investment and operation in Venezuela.

A financial column in the *New Yorker* magazine put it frankly:

**If this is socialism, it's the most business-friendly socialism ever devised .... The U.S. continues to be Venezuela's most important trading partner. Much of this business is oil: Venezuela is America's fourth-largest supplier, and the U.S. is Venezuela's largest customer. But the flow of trade goes both ways and across many sectors. The U.S. is the world's biggest exporter to Venezuela, responsible for a full third of its imports. The Caracas skyline is decorated with Hewlett-Packard and Citigroup signs, and Ford and G.M. are market leaders there. And, even as Chávez's rhetoric has become more extreme, the two countries have become more entwined: trade between the U.S. and Venezuela has risen thirty-six per cent in the past year.** (“Synergy With the Devil,” Jan. 8.)

## BONAPARTIST DANGER

Similar discussions about the friendly business environment of Venezuela can be found in a range of mainstream publications internationally. But if Chávez is basically a defender of capitalism and even imperialism, why are sectors of the imperialists and the domestic bourgeois opposition in Venezuela so hostile? At times he has cut into their profits or their way of doing business, although in general the foreign investment atmosphere as well as the ability of national capitalists to make profits is very strong.

What outrages them the most is that they see Chávez's radical populism as too dangerous a game – and in this they could be right. But given the rebelliousness of the masses, he has to engage in what is called “double discourse.” He makes plenty of public assurances about the defense of private property and foreign investment, on the one hand. And he backs up those assurances with actions that serve imperialist interests, such as paying back all the IMF debts of past regimes, and dependably supplying oil to the U.S. war machine. But at the same time his speeches are full of revolutionary and anti-imperialist rhetoric.

The total effect has encouraged the working class, creating problems for Chávez himself. There have been a mounting number of struggles, and there is a massive swelling of sentiment for nationalizations without compensation, for workers' control of industry and for other anti-imperialist and socialist measures that the masses desire. Thus in order to continue his political balancing act between the capitalist/imperialist interests and the masses, Chávez has stepped up his role as a Bonapartist or strongman ruler.

While Chávez was democratically elected, he has tended to rule by decree, concentrated power in the executive branch of government and greatly enhanced the role of the military as his chief power base. These factors always represented a great danger to the working class, as we have pointed out in the past. But this danger has accelerated recently, for example, through the passage of an enabling law that has allowed him to issue a massive number of decrees giving him unprecedented “special powers” to legislate as well as execute. Chávez still needs to discipline oppositional sectors and particular enemies within the bourgeoisie. But the opposition capitalists and imperialists are not his main target. Even his much ballyhooed refusal to renew the license of the anti-Chávez RCTV station was more symbolic than a real punishment. He has had no trouble making pacts with other coup supporters, in the media and other sectors. The measure against RCTV was taken to increase the power of the state. While acting against a right-wing opponent in the specific case, it set an ominous precedent for censorship of working-class and left activity.

Marxists see Bonapartism as inevitable under a class-collaborationist populist regime operating in crisis conditions, since only a strong authoritarian ruler can bind together the classes that in reality are in profound conflict. The objectively weak national bourgeoisie is fundamentally tied to imperialism, on the one hand; and the objectively strong working class has socialist and anti-imperialist sentiments, on the other. Any Bonaparte pretends to be a powerful and righteous arbiter above the contending classes who is uniquely endowed with the ability to make decisions for the good of society as a whole. Behind the pretense, any Bonaparte rests on the armed power of the bourgeois state and turns to the suppression of the working class when necessary.

## THE PSUV TRAP

Chávez's pretense of conducting a fight to the death against imperialism is window-dressing designed to justify a clampdown on the working class and the left in the name of “unity.” The main weapon being prepared is the Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (PSUV; United Socialist Party of Venezuela). The Bonapartist regime has embarked on a high-pressure campaign to create one big populist party.

This party will include the army, from the top level down, and the pro-Chávez sectors of the capitalist class. These capitalists are his true allies; they have recently organized themselves into a grouping conveniently called “Association of Socialist Enterprises.” The “socialist enterprises” are old-school banking, hotel and textile magnates as well as the new-school “Bolibourgeoisie.” (This is the apt term for the new layers of wealthy business and property owners who gained their social position through contracts and opportunities doled out by the Chávez government to its friends.) It is notable that the leader of the Association is a former head of the Democratic Action Party, one of the old traditional capitalist parties whose neoliberal rule instigated a mass rebellion in 1989.

The PSUV also includes workers and peasants, who in many cases are being forced to join, lest they lose their jobs or funding for community projects. In typical populist fashion, the PSUV recruitment drive has been embellished by all sorts of “grass-roots” structures and “participatory” verbiage. None of this is decisive or will make one iota of difference in the character of the PSUV. Chávez is the undisputed originator and the decisive leader of the party.

The chief purpose of the PSUV will be to control working-class struggle, as was made clear by Chávez's insistence that union and left party currents dissolve into his party. As he affirmed at a March PSUV event, “unions should not be

autonomous, one must put an end to that.” Chavismo only has room for union and left leaders and organizations that are willing to function as tools of the bourgeois state apparatus. And political currents, including left-wing tendencies, that are not willing to dissolve into the PSUV are already being dubbed “counterrevolutionary.”

## WORKERS’ STRUGGLES

The Chávez government has been bragging about the great successes of its recruitment drive for the PSUV, reporting almost 6 million enlisted so far – in a country of 26 million people. The working class and poor support Chávez, but these numbers of recruits in a short time can only be produced by the machinery of state power. Nevertheless, even though the party is intended as a weapon of a capitalist government of a capitalist state, it does not mean that the PSUV will succeed in defeating the working class. Venezuelan workers are socialist-minded, optimistic and undefeated as a class. At the same time that they back Chávez, there has been an escalation of labor struggles, indicative of workers’ growing sense that the time has come to press for their demands. And in many of these cases the workers’ actions have been in conflict with what Chávez wants – even if the workers are not fully conscious of this yet.

A prime example is the workers’ takeover of a ceramics factory, Sanitarios Maracay, which has been going on for more than nine months. (Maracay is the capital city of the state of Aragua.) The workers are fighting for nationalization without compensation and workers’ control. They have resisted the usual government efforts at a negotiated solution with their former bosses because of bitter past experiences. On April 24 these workers were violently attacked by the police and National Guard, and union leaders were summarily arrested en route to Caracas to join up with workers from other struggles for nationalization. A month later they initiated a regional strike in Aragua to back the factory occupation, oppose the use of force against workers and denounce

Chávez’s position on union autonomy. Not only that, but the strike was explicitly carried out in solidarity with the struggles of other workers who have been fighting for wage raises, better contracts, the end to subcontracted casual labor and the like.

In general the number of strikes and protests for such demands, as well as for nationalization and workers’ control, has increased – including in major sectors like the vital petroleum sector, as well as in steel and auto and among government workers. (As we go to press, the workers at Sanitarios Maracay appear to have been set back, because of sabotage by supervisory and white-collar staff in league with the Minister of Labor. For our Spanish-language readers, further information and updates can be found at both [www.aporrea.org](http://www.aporrea.org) and [www.jir.org.ve](http://www.jir.org.ve).)

## TROTSKYISM AND CENTRISM

Chávez’s still heavy reliance on mass support means that most workers’ actions are not subjected to physical attacks – although there has been increasing repression. Certainly all assaults and threats, verbal as well as physical, against the union movement as well as other sectors in struggle, must be protested when they occur and also understood as an omen for the future.

But perhaps the greatest immediate threat is the chronic attack on the working class on the level of consciousness. The rhetorical pronouncements about “socialism” and “revolution” spewing out of the regime, now combined with the forced campaign to join the PSUV, have a purpose. They are designed to prevent the most politically advanced layers of the working class from reaching clarity about the program of socialist revolution and the vanguard proletarian party they need.

In any capitalist society, the surface appearances distort the real social relations. This is key to the domination of the working class by capital. The revolutionary vanguard party is the organ of conscious advanced workers; its aim is to cut through the surface appearances and reveal the real relations and the way forward at every turn. It is the highest expression of proletarian consciousness and is the indispensable weapon for a genuine overturn of capitalist relations.

The bulk of the fake left internationally has been applauding Chávez’s fake socialism. Few left groups are willing to state openly that there has been no revolution, no break with imperialism or capitalism – not even a “process” in that direction. This is true even of many groups that label themselves Trotskyist and therefore claim the revolutionary heritage and methods of the Bolshevik revolution. Much of the left also supports dissolving into the PSUV.

The Marxist tradition defines as centrist those left-wing groups who waver between revolutionary rhetoric and reformist deeds. This centrist phenomenon has been widespread among what passes for Trotskyism for a long time.

The roots of present-day pseudo-Trotskyist centrism trace back to the defeat of workers’ struggles internationally after World War II. The Trotskyist movement, born in a weak condition in the 1930’s, made heroic efforts to revive authentic proletarian internationalism. But it was shattered under the attacks of Stalinism, Nazism and the bourgeois-democratic powers. And the revival of imperialism after World War II led to a decisive shift in its class composition, towards the predominance of middle-class elements. In a short time the Fourth International’s leader Pablo devised the theory that non-working-class forces had created “deformed workers’ states” in country after country. (See “Stalinist Expansion, the Fourth International and the Working Class” in *PR* 64.)

The deformed workers’ state theory was a mockery of the basic Marxist principle that the emancipation of the working class can only be carried out by the class itself. It reflected a

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demoralization born of working-class defeats and the change in class viewpoint. The East European countries purportedly became proletarian when the Stalinists took over – but they were “deformed,” not “degenerated” like Soviet Russia, a label that evasively admits that the workers never held state power. The theory credits revolutionary social change to the petty-bourgeois Stalinists, who not only didn’t lead the working class to power but in fact smashed workers’ anti-capitalist struggles in order to set up coalition governments with bourgeois politicians. Only after the workers had been defeated did the Stalinists dare oust their bourgeois partners to create their fraudulent “people’s democracies.”

The theory violated Trotsky’s belief that Stalinism had become irrevocably counterrevolutionary. It was no accident that the same “Trotskyist” milieu that adopted this view also capitulated to equally counterrevolutionary reformists and bourgeois nationalists elsewhere. The fact that the bulk of international groupings had severed their proletarian connection to the heritage of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky was proved in struggle in Bolivia in 1952: no significant section of the international movement opposed the POR’s support to the bourgeois-led popular front.

Since then it has been shown over and over that the majority of so-called Trotskyists have no confidence in the revolutionary potential of the proletariat. This is the heart of the problem with their devotion to Hugo Chávez. Much of the middle-class left sees the populist Chávez as the savior who will carry out the emancipation of the masses, or at least play a progressive role for a good period of time. They fail to grasp that populism, like reformism, is a counterrevolutionary trap, and that revolutionary working-class leadership is needed now and at every stage of the struggle.

### THE TROTSKYIST FRACTION

To our knowledge, only one self-described revolutionary group in Venezuela has consistently opposed political support to Chávez – the JIR (Revolutionary Left Youth), a small section of the FT-CI (Trotskyist Fraction–Fourth International). Given the centrality of this question, we will turn to examining the politics of the JIR and the Trotskyist Fraction.

We consider the Trotskyist Fraction to be a left centrist organization. (See our reply to their *International Appeal*, p. 31). They called for a campaign for class independence in Venezuela. However, as our reply argued, they damaged their own cause by making an appeal for a joint propaganda campaign to centrist groups who are proven class collaborators. The *Appeal* did not serve to raise consciousness among advanced workers as to the problems with these centrists.

Some centrists can break with their past practice and join the ranks of authentic proletarian revolutionists. However, the FT-CI cannot seriously claim that this was the case with these centrist groups. There has been no significant movement to the left among these groups. Rather, the *Appeal* reflected what has been the FT-CI’s routine approach to building the revolutionary party for many years. FT-CI sections are chronically proposing electoral fronts and other types of big political blocs to the centrist groups to their right in a timeless manner, regardless of circumstances.

This is the opposite of Trotsky’s method in building the Fourth International. Today’s centrist groups have little in common with the unstable but often real leftward-moving centrists whom Trotsky approached in the 1930’s when trying to build the original Fourth International. Therefore at this time we do not believe that a revolutionary regroupment policy is generally actionable, and we disagree with the FT-CI’s method of chronic appeals and blocs. Centrist and even left reformist outfits in the future will undergo genuine internal political turmoil, most likely



*From left to right, unidentified activist with union leaders Marcela Máspero, Stalin Pérez, Rubén Linares and Orlando Chirino. Pérez and Linares now promote the PSUV, Máspero and Chirino oppose it. But all of them still back Chávez.*

with a greater outbreak of youth and working-class struggle in combination with a profound economic crisis. But now the chronic call for left “unity” only disorients the advanced layer.

### TRADE UNION LEADERS

In Venezuela, the most militant wing of the trade union movement is headed by nominal Trotskyists. The UNT (National Workers Union) was founded in the spring of 2003 as an alternative to the CTV (Confederation of Venezuelan Workers); the CTV backed the reactionary bosses’ lockout in 2002 that had tried to destabilize the Chávez regime. The UNT gained wide adherence, and the more left-wing leadership groups within it became the mobilizing force for a range of struggles.

All UNT leaders support Chávez, but from the start they have had secondary disagreements over how much autonomy and militancy the new union movement should have in relation to the government. The best known leader is Orlando Chirino. He became one of 25 “coordinators” of the UNT when it was set up, with the idea that elections would be held down the road. Chirino, Stalin Pérez Borges and other unionists with left-wing profiles head the C-CURA (United Revolutionary and Autonomous Class-Struggle Current) within the UNT. There are four other leadership currents, all of which are closer to the government.

The C-CURA leadership is mainly tied to the nominally Trotskyist international, the UIT-CI (Workers International Unity–Fourth International), centered in Argentina. This political identity is important. The UIT had its roots in the big and infamously opportunist MAS party led by Nahuel Moreno, which fell apart after his death in 1987. The UIT rests uncritically on Moreno’s legacy of class collaboration. Recently the UIT supported the presidential candidacy of the populist Evo Morales in Bolivia. (See *PR* 74.)

The UIT’s political role in Brazil is also explicitly populist. Its section in Brazil functions as an internal tendency within the populist PSOL (Party of Socialism and Liberty). The PSOL was founded in 2005 by leftists, including a parliamentarian linked to the UIT, who had been kicked out of President Lula’s PT (Workers Party) after many years of loyal subordination (See *PR* 70.) The new party ran Heloisa Helena, who is affiliated with the Mandelite United Secretariat of the Fourth International, for president. Among her most outrageous electoral positions were her



*Chávez with Morales in Bolivia. They wear coca leaves, a symbol of the indigenous people of the Andes, but their populism is no friend to the struggle to cast off centuries of oppression.*

opposition to women's right to abortion and her defense of the interests of Brazil's state oil company in Bolivia, where the masses have long been fighting for expropriation. None of this stopped the UIT from lauding the PSOL.

The UIT has consistently proven its role as a barrier to class independence: its permanent residence in the pro-reformist/populist swamp is self-evident.

### **CHIRINO BACKS VOTING FOR CHÁVEZ**

In Venezuela, Chirino and his co-thinkers have capitulated to the populist Chávez, no surprise given their practice elsewhere. Chirino's political behavior is colored by his trade unionism as well as the UIT framework. He stated in an interview with the British Venezuela Solidarity Campaign:

**We've been political militants since a very early age. I started as an activist at age 11 and when I was 16, I began a conscientious revolutionary activism... at that time I became a "Trotskyist" and I state it straightforwardly. But first and foremost I've been a trade union leader in this country, fighting in the trenches, defending the autonomy of the movements and its democracy, like the struggle for socialism. In this process of constructing the Bolivarian revolution and above all, since President Chávez left prison, we've shared a lot with him, we talk a great deal, we're beginning to build a Bolivarian Workers' Front (FBT), we were founders of the FBT as a front where all the trade union leaders had to come together who identify themselves with President Chávez and the process.**

Chirino is first and foremost a union leader, and that impacts on the way he operates and the pressures he is under. He always advocates a formal "independence" of the union from

the state. But he has always refrained from building a political opposition to Chávez; he left his base of workers unprepared for the very predictable effort of the Chávez regime to stifle militant struggles. The subordination of the union leaders to Chávez in practice over time invited the attacks at this juncture. In fact, Chirino and his political cohorts have endorsed Chávez – and indeed other less popular pro-Chávez candidates in parliamentary and regional elections – on a predictably consistent basis from 1998 on. They always argue that it is necessary to fight the domestic right wing aligned with U.S. imperialism and to "accompany the workers" through their experiences.

By mid-2005, Chirino was heading a party in Venezuela known as the OIR (Revolutionary Left Option) as well as the C-CURA union current. The OIR and C-CURA led a coalition promoting the formation of the PRS (Party of Socialist Revolution). An OIR correspondent provided an extensive report on the July 2005 launching rally for the new party, attended by 400 people, mainly union leaders and activists who identify with Chirino. The chosen international guests for the launch were mainly UIT representatives from PSOL and their big Argentine section. Also invited were left Chavista outfits that explicitly stand for popular revolution, not workers' revolution. These included groups explicitly committed to the "civic-military" alliance that Chávez always touts. According to Chirino, their presence was based on "practical agreements in daily struggles."

The report specified that Gonzalo Gómez, a major OIR figure, spoke at length about the need for the new party. Gómez noted that Chávez "defines the government as a 'government of the workers'" – and commented that while this is Chávez's intention, there was a "lack of real mechanisms for the exercise of power by the workers." Chirino capped off the event by sending a message to President Chávez: "Here we are, the workers who fight daily, who don't rob the public treasury, and we say to you with much respect: put yourself at the head of a government of the workers and the people."

We note that this seems to be an attempt to apply the "workers' government" slogan from Trotsky's Transitional Program. Trotsky intended the workers' government demand to be raised tactically, as a challenge to expose reformist working-class leaders – not as a polite request to a populist bourgeois politician to form a workers' government. Chirino is among the worst of the fakers who abuse the spirit of the demand totally, as if Trotsky could have ever advocated a popular front!

### **REVOLUTIONARY COUNTERPOSITION**

Revolutionaries grounded in Marxism should have no trouble coming to clear conclusions about the PRS project. While the promoters of C-CURA favor the *organizational* independence of the working class, they are also for political class collaboration, the essence of reformism. Their whole outlook has been to get Chávez to move to the left as the way forward. No one could have believed that they were hoping to mobilize the working class into a political party for the purpose of confronting Chávez. That was the last thing they had in mind.

It is also worth noting that the C-CURA/PRS leaders, along with the large number of left Chavistas with no "Trotskyist" or specifically working-class pretensions at all, speak often of "deepening the revolutionary process" that Chávez is leading, never *counterposing* an actual workers' revolution to Chávez's capitalist state. Chirino does occasionally talk of socialist revolution as a project for the future. But other left Chavistas also talk of deepening the revolution; they want Chávez to carry out more nationalizations and to strike harder at the opposition and the imperialists, whom they see as holding back greater progress for their homeland.

Militants have not looked to Chirino and his milieu for a new political party, but they do look for direction. The crime is that the leadership they get reinforces their confusions and extends them – by claiming that Chávez is already carrying out a revolutionary “process” that can really deliver in their interests.

The general revolutionary approach to fighting reformist leadership and counterposing revolutionary leadership applies to the C-CURA/PRS leadership here. Revolutionaries join in all fights of our class in order to strengthen the struggles. At the same time, we openly intervene to warn our fellow workers that the pro-Chávez politics of their union leadership will compromise the struggle at each key point. We are frank about our aims; we state our desire to go through the test of experiences with our fellow workers in order to convince them of the need to replace reformist or centrist leadership with resolute revolutionary leadership. In other words, we wish to separate the base, the working class, from the top, its misleadership.

We do not agree that calling on Chirino to build an independent workers’ party is useful today. It is possible that such a demand will be appropriate in the future, when the working-class political scene is different. We do see that Chávez’s attacks on union autonomy could push Chirino and his ilk into a more assertive stance: they do need to defend their position and stature as militant union leaders and to maintain a base of support among the rank and file. Thus there will be opportunities to place appropriate demands on Chirino and other union leaders to mobilize the working class for specific actions and campaigns, to take the fight for union independence and other demands forward.

Revolutionaries make such demands in the spirit of the united front: we call for actions that can win real victories if carried out. But we have to make sure that workers are always warned that Chirino’s underlying role is not revolutionary. Despite whatever rhetoric he uses, it is fundamentally reformist. He is above all a left-talking labor broker between the ranks and the Chávez regime.

We have sharp differences with the JIR on how revolutionaries should intervene to fight centrist or reformist currents. To begin, a JIR representative was on the launching committee for the PRS. From the first edition of its newspaper, *En Clave Obrera*, in September 2005, the JIR identified itself as part of the PRS in their masthead. They enthused over the PRS project in a lengthy article. They said that they had been arguing for the construction of a “large party of Venezuelan workers” since April, and they therefore joined enthusiastically with the call for discussion initiated by OIR and others. They note approvingly that there was a call for a workers’ government in a document circulated for discussion. Only in the final section of their article do they lament the “absence” of any discussion of Chávez or his government in the document, stating that “it is necessary to explain that Chávez, even though he calls himself revolutionary and socialist, is heading a capitalist government.”

An entire exposé of the political views of the PRS leaders who put out the document and their attitude toward Chávez was in order. That is not what the JIR did. Rather they acted as if the party they wanted could come about under the Chirino leadership, a posture which was to continue for far too long. The lack of any direct warnings about the C-CURA misleadership was criminally “absent” from the JIR article and others to follow.

#### THE JIR AND THE WORLD SOCIAL FORUM

At the World Social Forum (WSF) held in January 2006 in Caracas and attended by 70,000 people, the JIR also muted its criticisms of the PRS. The PRS had put out a flyer to advertise its forum, “The Bolivarian Revolution and the Struggle for Socialism of the 21st Century: Workers’ Power or Class



2000 workers came to the 2nd Congress of the UNT in May 2006. Pro-government bureaucrats sabotaged union elections, and destroyed the Congress. There is still no elected central leadership, accountable to the ranks.

Collaboration?” The flyer had only praise for PSOL, the UNT and the “electoral triumph of Evo Morales” as examples of “new leaders and new alternatives” to the “parties and governments that apply the recipes of capitalist globalization.” At the forum and in widely published interviews around the event, Chirino was clear about where he stood. “It’s still necessary to keep up support and struggle to maintain Hugo Chávez as president in order to guarantee the continuity of the process.”

The big shock here was not the political line advocated by Chirino – but the failure of the JIR to challenge it. The JIR in fact had a speaker at the PRS forum. Both their speaker at the forum and their follow-up articles should have counterposed to the line circulated by Chirino and other PRS leaders. But according to JIR’s own reports, this didn’t happen.

In fact, given the opportunity to report what had happened at the WSF, *En Clave Obrera* only provided selective quotes from Chirino’s and Stalin Perez’s speeches at the joint forum, thereby providing coverage of the event which managed to avoid bringing up any disagreements. An interview with the JIR spokesman, Ángel Arias, was published by the Argentine section of the FT-CI. (*La Verdad Obrera*, nro. 180.) Arias does mention that he disagrees with “international currents” that advocate a strategy of constructing broad parties like the PSOL of Brazil – “that is to say constructing parties where reformists and revolutionaries co-exist.” But even here he refrains from mentioning exactly who it might be that advocates a PSOL-like solution!

#### NO WAY TO BUILD THE UNIONS

Chirino’s C-CURA union current endorsed voting for Chávez’s re-election at a meeting in February 2006, shortly after the WSF. Then at the UNT’s 2nd Congress in May 2006, with the attendance of over 2000 delegates from across the country, all hell broke loose. The four other factions of the UNT, all more closely tied to the government than C-CURA, argued ferociously

*continued on page 29*

# Double Talk on the Party

Marxism stands for the self-emancipation of the working class. Thus as revolutionary workers, we want to be open about our goals with our fellow workers. The League for the Revolutionary Party champions building the revolutionary workers' vanguard party. This is the central purpose of our existence, since it is the necessary weapon for socialist revolution.

Unfortunately the JIR and the Trotskyist Fraction sections in general rarely advocate the revolutionary vanguard party. Rather their central line is to call for a big independent party of the working class. In Venezuela they demand that the left union leaders build this party. They do generally add that the party should be "revolutionary," "anti-capitalist" and "anti-imperialist." But as we pointed out in our reply to their *Appeal* (see p. 31), this is just confusionist. Specifically, it blurs the difference between a revolutionary vanguard party, like the Bolshevik party that led the Russian revolution, and a broad party of the working class, like a party based on the unions. This latter type of party never can lead the socialist revolution. Only a vanguard party, which is part of a revolutionary International, can actually fulfill revolutionary, anti-capitalist, and anti-imperialist aims.

Lenin fought for the principle of the revolutionary vanguard party. The political collapse of the Second International at the start of World War I had demonstrated that broad parties open to the entire class would be inevitably weighted toward reformism and would tend to capitulate to imperialism. The working class needed a party that could fight off labor-aristocratic and other alien intrusions, would be solidly internationalist and would embody the interests of the most oppressed and exploited.

The cadre of this vanguard party would be the most politically advanced workers – not only militant and combative against the bosses, but armed with a solid Marxist worldview. They would be trained in theory as well as strategy and tactics; and they would operate in a tightly disciplined manner. The strict separation of revolutionary workers into their own vanguard party would allow them the most effective participation in common struggles with other workers, seeking to raise their revolutionary consciousness. Such interventions would enable the initially small vanguard party to become a mass vanguard party over time. (See "Propaganda and Agitation in Building the Revolutionary Party" in PR 59 or on our website.)

## JIR SUBMERGES REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

Trotsky followed Lenin's insistence on building the vanguard party. They both argued that this meant an initial stage of mainly propaganda work devoted to recruiting a core of revolutionary workers as its cadre. Participation in mass struggles was necessary even during the early stages, but the major focus would have to be on propaganda towards the politically advanced workers rather than agitation to the masses – and recruitment on a highly selective basis would be in order. As Trotsky commented, "The stage of individual propaganda was inevitable. When the centrists accused us of sectarianism, we answered them: without a minimal Marxist cadre, principled action among the masses is impossible. But that is the only reason we form cadres." ("The Belgian Dispute and the De Man Plan," *Writings 1934-35*.)

The JIR, in contrast, habitually prioritizes a campaign for a big party based on the unions. If such a big party could exist in Venezuela today, it would have to reflect the dominant views held in the working class and the left. Many Venezuelan workers favor revolutionary, anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist aims, but still

hope that Chávez can lead this struggle for them. This shows that there is much misunderstanding about what these words mean, fostered by Chávez himself and the whole tailist left.

In reality a large number of workers today in Venezuela have mixed consciousness. They are aware that they are members of a working class that has definite interests, and they increasingly want to act in these interests. But this sense of class interest is obviously mixed with reformist and populist ideas. A big party constructed now would have to be based on this level of mixed consciousness and would inevitably capitulate to Chávez and to populism. In other words, we would have a sociologically working-class party dominated by non-working-class politics and leadership, the same problem that caused Lenin to advocate a selective revolutionary vanguard party instead of a broad party.

The JIR submerges any direct call to advanced workers for building the revolutionary vanguard party. Cohering the initial vanguard layer into a Leninist propaganda group is needed the most in Venezuela today; it would be the core for building the vanguard party. The JIR's avoidance of this basic question goes against what Lenin and Trotsky argued for and in our opinion is the gravest mistake.

## THE LABOR PARTY TACTIC

The Trotskyist Fraction's report on their Conference earlier this year concluded that "we have promoted building an Independent Workers' Party in Venezuela, or building a Political Instrument of the Workers in Bolivia, where militant unions can commit themselves to promoting a political organization that, at a minimum, would clearly be class-conscious." (See *IV Conference of the FT-CI; For a revolutionary workers' strategy*, March 2007, on the FT-CI's website.) That is, the FT was referring to Trotsky's call for a labor party in the United States as a precedent for their work in Venezuela, Bolivia and elsewhere.

In reviewing their practice over a long period, it is evident to us that the JIR permanently calls for a labor-type party, even though the FT claims they use it only as a tactic. This chronic call for a "big independent party of the working class" based on the unions, regardless of circumstances, sends the message that such a broad party is a necessary prior stage to building a revolutionary vanguard party. And this is the opposite of Trotsky's method.

Trotsky's approach to a call for a labor party was clearly tactical. He urged revolutionaries to join a movement for such a party only under certain concrete conditions at certain times. Under other conditions he opposed such moves. In the case of the U.S. in 1938, when he did advocate a campaign for a labor party, he had strong reasons to anticipate an actual movement for such a party in the immediate future. Masses of workers had already gone through the experience of the workers' upheavals that built the CIO. This movement had mobilized millions and made the working class very aware of its independent power as a class.

Trotsky noted that those struggles had reached a dead end, especially because of the effects of the great depression. He expected that workers' struggles would inevitably need to shift into the realm of politics, and that a big movement for a labor party would be the likely direction of struggle. The developing movement would initially be open-ended; that is, there would be real opportunities for revolutionary workers to fight alongside fellow workers for a revolutionary perspective..

Earlier in the 1930's under different conditions, Trotsky had opposed advocating a labor party in the U.S. Then the working-

class struggle had been at a lower point; masses of workers had not become conscious of their independent power even on an industrial level. In the absence of a mass radical movement of the class, the work of building a revolutionary vanguard party did not have to go through a labor party stage.

## VENEZUELA TODAY

Venezuela today presents a totally different picture from the U.S. of the late 1930's. The JIR points to important struggles and argues, often very effectively, that they need to be developed and spread. It often makes demands on the union leaders for greater mass meetings and mass mobilizations, and it is right to do so. The key agitational question in Venezuela right now is the need for the working class to strengthen its struggle through the exercise of its power in production, through more massive actions. The regional strike in Aragua (see p. 24) was an important indication of the direction the workers' movement has to take.

Nevertheless, the JIR has itself explained many times that there are not thousands of workers moving to break with Chávez – they didn't even flow into the critically pro-Chávez PRS. The JIR knows that the bulk of militant workers today support Chávez and that it is unreal to expect a mass break in the upcoming juncture. But once the bigger battalions of the working class experience their class power in action, and clashes with the regime develop far beyond where they are now, that may well help create a movement for a mass independent workers' party. If that becomes the logical road for workers to take, Trotsky's tactic would become necessary. Communists would naturally want to intervene alongside their fel-

low workers in such a movement – in order to fight for a revolutionary conclusion. Today the tactic, especially as the JIR has used it, is inappropriate and stagist.

What's more, even when using such a tactic Trotsky followed a principle that the FT-CI and JIR forget. As he once put it:

**A long period of confusion in the Comintern led many people to forget a very simple but absolutely irrevocable principle: that a Marxist, a proletarian revolutionist, cannot present himself before the working class with two banners. He cannot say at a workers' meeting: "I have a ticket for a first-class party and another, cheaper ticket for the backward workers." If I am a Communist, I must fight for the Communist Party.** (*The Labor Party Question in the United States*, 1932.)

Not only did Trotsky insist that revolutionaries tell advanced workers they stand for a communist party; he favored making this clear to more backward workers as well.

The JIR has not presented a convincing case for using the labor party tactic in Venezuela, and they have not used it as a revolutionary tactic in any case. A mass independent party is not possible in Venezuela right now. But building the vanguard revolutionary party is a task that cannot be postponed, and it has to start by consistently arguing for building a propaganda group toward this end. If we believe that the advanced workers' understanding of their revolutionary socialist tasks is key, then we have to say so. Revolutionaries must reject the centrist method of fudging the central task of cohering the vanguard, however small its initial numbers. ●

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## Venezuela

*continued from page 27*

against allowing the scheduled election of UNT coordinators to go forward. They said it would interfere with the campaign to get Chávez re-elected in December. The Chirino faction, which was sure to be the big winner, advocated going forward with the union elections – with the proviso that the UNT would wage a campaign for "10 million votes for Chávez" as a top priority. They argued that "the re-election of President Chávez and the independence of the UNT must be simultaneously supported so as to criticize whenever necessary."

The fighting between the factions disrupted the proceedings, which by most reports seemed rather pre-calculated: all factions except C-CURA walked out after blows were exchanged. The Chirino faction came out with a statement later agreeing that the UNT would be run without elected officers in the name of "unity," until after the presidential elections. To this date UNT elections have not taken place, a dangerous and demoralizing situation for the rank and file and a graphic example of the bureaucratic nature of *all* the UNT leaderships.

## THE JIR IN THE PRS

On July 1, the PRS held a plenary session and formally made the decision to endorse Chávez. *En Clave Obrero* then announced the JIR's decision to constitute themselves as a public fraction within the PRS, in opposition to the "majority." There was no explanation why they had waited so long to take a formal step of separation. They began their statement this way:

**Those of us who came together for the task of building the**

**PRS did so because of the strategic necessity of building a socialist and internationalist revolutionary party, that would fight to achieve a government of the workers and poor – that is, a party that would fight for workers' socialist revolution. We all agreed on this necessity because, despite the fact that the workers and all the poor people of Venezuela had been making heroic strides, this had not led to a truly revolutionary change in the country.**

What is striking here is the JIR's claim that there had been this agreement between the JIR and the Chirino leadership on the nature of the party and its mission from the start. In fact, the same statement goes on to note that "the JIR has been systematically struggling (from within the PRS and publicly) for the PRS to take up the politics of true independence for the working class." And later the document describes the past betrayals of the "majority," such as the decisions perpetrated by C-CURA to endorse Chávez five months earlier.

But they then go on to make a case for the PRS which is very close to an argument for a vanguard party. This is certainly not the picture of the PRS they had been painting in their public press. They say in this statement that it is the duty of revolutionaries "to prepare the workers politically, unmasking and denouncing the politics of Chávez, explaining to the masses how he does not defend the historic interests of the workers," and that "a permanent organization of the most politically advanced layers of the working class and the revolutionary intelligentsia is indispensable in order to confront the reformist and conciliatory tendencies, who are an obstacle to the defeat of the class enemy."

If the JIR really had intended to make the PRS "a permanent organization of the most politically advanced," then that conflicts





One of the many shantytowns surrounding Caracas. This is the face of 21st Century Capitalism. Despite high oil profits, masses still live in intolerable poverty, with high rates of underemployment and informal non-union labor.

with making it the vehicle for “a big independent party of the working class” – which is what they usually said in their newspaper and leaflets addressed to their fellow workers. (See *Double Talk on the Party*, p. 28.) It was bad enough that they had been calling on Chirino for months to build the PRS as a mass party. Now the public fraction statement implies that they were hoping to form a revolutionary vanguard party – with these proven class traitors!

For all this, the fraction declaration fails to explain why the JIR remained in the PRS. After all, if one wants to prepare the workers politically and teach them to trust only their own class and not Chávez, how is that demonstrated by sticking with a party that supports Chávez? You can lecture and lecture the workers about “independence,” but staying in the PRS sends the opposite message in practice – that it is okay to be in this party that supports Chávez, as long as one makes criticisms.

Not only that, but the document leaves the undeniable impression that it is still possible to change what the “majority” is doing. There is not even a direct call to join the JIR fraction or to fight to overturn the Chirino leadership. Is the JIR still unwilling to state squarely that the Chirino leadership is precisely one of the “conciliatory” tendencies that needs to be confronted?

### PRS vs. PSOL?

The JIR has remained a public fraction in the PRS, increasing at times their criticisms of Chirino and his friends. For example, after the C-CURA/PRS made the decision to enter Chávez’s PSUV project for the purposes of “discussion” last January, *En Clave Obrera* (February 2007) said that this represented “the deepening of a path alien to all independent working-class politics.” Its article concluded that those who lead the PRS are in “complete prostration to the leadership of President Chávez.” The JIR called on “those comrades of the party who honestly are for revolutionary working-class politics to reverse their passive and complacent attitude with this situation and to make a common struggle to change the course.” That is, despite their criticisms of Chirino and despite the fact that the PRS had become

nothing more than a shell of an organization at best, by that time, they remained relentless in their efforts to change the PRS.

There was a subsequent split within C-CURA/PRS, when Chávez lashed back at the union leaders, demanding that they repudiate union autonomy as a precondition for entry into the PSUV. Stalin Pérez Borges and a number of other leaders from C-CURA decided to try to enter PSUV anyway – despite Chávez’s assault on union autonomy. Chirino and his allies decided to stay out. But Chirino emphasized that they would all stay together in C-CURA as the most fundamental thing.

The JIR’s response: *En Clave Obrera* (June 2007) came out again with the call for the big independent party. “The important union force that is C-CURA can’t remain at the mercy of a few leaders of the current that have decided to submit themselves to the creation of the PSUV.” Conclusion? “We call on the class-struggle unions, principally C-CURA, to fight for these politics and convoke immediately an Organizing Committee for a big independent workers’ party that will put itself forward as the voice of millions of workers.”

In sum, the JIR did not warn their fellow workers about the political character of the PRS’s co-founders and their history of betrayals. And worse, they refused to break from the PRS when they committed decisive betrayals in front of the workers, both voting for Chavez and then trying to get into the PSUV. The JIR just continued putting out statements which only communicate that the Chirino leadership can be convinced to reverse its course.

In February 2007 we wrote to the JIR questioning their staying in the PRS. They acknowledged receiving our correspondence but never sent a response.

The FT section in Brazil started on a similar road when PSOL was first being formed in 2005. It enthused over the PSOL project in the beginning, much as the JIR enthused over the PRS in Venezuela. As with the PRS, they gave no warning about the forces heading the PSOL and the likely outcome. But they were forced to break with PSOL rather quickly: the reactionary positions that the PSOL candidate Heloisa Helena would take in the presidential campaign became evident early on. Thus the PSOL could not attract the advancing layers of workers that they wished to reach. An FT article, “The Fraud of the PSOL Project,” stated, “The only conclusion we can reach from this balance sheet is that to mix the banners of revolutionaries with reformists, class-struggle positions with those of class conciliation, means that what gets lost always is the independence of the class and the revolutionary strategy.”

One can’t “mix the banners of revolutionaries with reformists”? Then it is up to the JIR to explain what they are still doing in the PRS. In reality there is no principled justification for remaining. The fact that there are militant layers that look toward C-CURA doesn’t change the opportunistic character of adhering to the fraud of the PRS. If anything, it is a more dangerous fraud because of the union leaders’ important influence among the workers.

Revolutionaries would have wanted to intervene in the PRS meetings at the start, to gain an audience among revolutionary-minded workers. But our aim would have been to use whatever interest existed among workers to expose the misleadership of the PRS and argue for the vanguard party and socialist revolution.

## CENTRALITY OF THE VANGUARD PARTY

The essential question separating revolutionary wheat from centrist chaff is the centrality of the proletariat and its party, representing its most advanced consciousness. Pablo conjured up the theory that the counterrevolutionary Stalinists could make the socialist revolution and create workers' states; Morenoism not only accepted the same theory but also capitulated to non- and anti-working class forces again and again. And similar capitulations continue today. It is clear that the historic dispute over the existence of "deformed workers' states" has only resurfaced in different forms in today's world.

The UIT and the associated union leaders in Venezuela believe that they should adapt to Chávez – but, with the workers, push him to the left. They clearly do not believe that a workers' revolution is necessary. They want to use the working class only as a battering ram.

The Trotskyist Fraction represented a far left split from Morenoism, and today has tried to adhere to the class line in coun-

tries where struggles have posed the question sharply, namely Bolivia and Venezuela. But they have made no advances on the level of theory. Their tailing of right-centrist and reformist forces shows that they retain the notion that working-class consciousness is not the critical factor.

Advanced workers must study the histories and theoretical as well as practical records of all self-proclaimed revolutionary groups so that they can evaluate the contending views for themselves. Refusal to capitulate to populists like Chávez is certainly one necessary test, which many centrists have already failed. But the refusal to prioritize the building of the vanguard party is also a test question, and one that the FT-CI and JIR have failed.

In Venezuela, the JIR became the small tail to the big fraud of the PRS, and it is ready to do the same thing again. What is needed is not only to advocate class independence but to carry out the fight for it in the only real way possible, by championing the independence of an authentic internationalist proletarian party. ●

July 2007

# A reply to the Trotskyist Fraction's *International Appeal*

The following document was sent to the Trotskyist Fraction-Fourth International on July 16, 2007, as our response to their *International Appeal: The Tasks of the Left in Response to Chávez's Project*. Their *Appeal* can be found on their website. Sources for all other citations are available on request. This reply is also available in Spanish on our website.

In recent years the potential for a mass fightback against imperialism has been shown in a number of significant upheavals in Latin America. It is the duty of revolutionary workers in imperialist countries to defend all oppressed nations against imperialist attack. We also know that the working class of oppressed nations must come to recognize that its own national bourgeoisie is incapable of breaking with imperialism in this epoch. Therefore, armed with an internationalist outlook, the working class must lead a struggle of all the downtrodden for the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist system. By building its vanguard party internationally, the most class conscious workers will lead the fight for international socialist revolution, the only way to end imperialism. This strategy of permanent revolution represents the only hope for humanity.

Holding back our class from developing consciousness of its independent class interests are the proponents of populism and popular frontism. These workers' and peasants' misleaders held back mass upheavals by pushing these false pro-capitalist ideologies. Populism and popular frontism are strategies of class collaboration and deadly enemies of working class independent struggle.

The most prominent populist misleader today is undoubtedly Venezuela's Hugo Chávez. His radical pseudo-socialist and anti-imperialist posturing, coupled with some actual reforms, have won him wide support among the masses in Venezuela – and well beyond. Behind the left populist façade, Chávez has been taking obvious steps to tighten his grip on the masses. This is what's behind his attempt to bind the workers and bourgeois sectors together in the PSUV (Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela or United Socialist Party of Venezuela), as well as his aggressive opposition to union autonomy. The number of direct attacks on workers carried out by the National Guard and police is still small. But the Chávez regime is using pseudo-socialist populist appeals to preempt and disarm a

greater development of class struggle.

Considering this dangerous context, the *International Appeal* by the FT-CI (Fracción Trotskista- Cuarta Internacional or Trotskyist Fraction- Fourth International) for a united left campaign for independent working-class politics in Venezuela may look promising – since it seems to target Chávez and his pseudo-socialist populist politics. We will explain that it unfortunately fails to advance the revolutionary counterposition to Chávez that is absolutely necessary.

To start, we must state our overall view. The FT-CI is itself a far left centrist current. Its importance derives in part from its correct stance in opposing the dominant left trend of open capitulation to populists like Chávez and Morales of Bolivia. Unlike most groups in Latin America and indeed the world, the small FT-CI sections in Venezuela and Bolivia have courageously stood up against the stream of leftists who advocated a vote for Chávez and the like. Principled stands on electoral matters make these FT-CI groups far more significant than their current size; they are likely to attract some of the most revolutionary minded workers.

However, the FT-CI chooses to withhold their criticisms of other centrists to their right who *have* crossed the class line at key times – when they are proposing or are carrying out a united political campaign with other groups. We will show that the *Appeal* uses exactly this kind of "diplomatic" approach to other centrists, an approach which is disorienting to the advancing layers of the working class and undermines the Trotskyist Fraction's own principled stands in Bolivia and Venezuela. We will later turn to the question of the content of their proposal.

The FT-CI *Appeal* opens by calling on three other left organizations to join them in a "united campaign for the nationalization without compensation and under workers' control and management of all companies and strategic industries of Venezuela and to fight for an independent workers' party and for a government of the workers, peasants and the poor." The choice of allies presents the most blatant problem with the *Appeal*. The groupings addressed are:

1. The LIT (International Workers League) and its principal organization, the PSTU of Brazil (United Socialist Workers' Party);
2. the CRCI (Coordinating Committee for the Refoundation

of the Fourth International) led by the PO (Workers' Party) of Argentina;

3. the POR (Workers Revolutionary Party) of Bolivia.

The FT-CI explains what it sees as the basis for a joint campaign with these three groups:

**While we stood together with the millions of workers in Venezuela in order to defeat the reactionary and imperialist coup in April 2002 and the lockout-sabotage in 2003, our international organizations maintain political independence from the Chávez project, representing the only basis for a united campaign.**

Then, after describing Chávez's "new policy of concentrating power," and the "new Bonapartization of the regime," the FT remarks:

**It is notable that the vast majority of organizations on the Left internationally, including many of those claiming to be Trotskyist, acquiesce to Chávez's bourgeois nationalism. For this reason, we revolutionary Marxists must join forces and raise a program which is clearly differentiated from that of Chávez and which promotes the political independence of the workers.**

However, the real record of the LIT, CRCI and POR shows that they can in no way be regarded as "revolutionary Marxists" or as standing for "the political independence of the workers" in Venezuela or elsewhere. The FT-CI has explained elsewhere that it considers these groups centrist. Concretely, they each have an actual record of crossing the class line and promoting class collaboration.

For example, the LIT-PSTU has not renounced a whole history of class-conciliatory politics that characterizes Morenoism. On the contrary, the LIT rests on Moreno's extensive history of political support for bourgeois parties and alliances: Moreno's political capitulations to Peronism in Argentina perhaps being the most infamous example. More recently, in 2002 the LIT-PSTU called for a vote for the popular front alliance in Brazil that Lula's Workers Party had formed with the bourgeois Liberal Party. And most to the point, both the LIT as a whole – and its representation in Venezuela – called for a vote for Chávez in 2006. The FT-CI's section in Venezuela, the Juventud de Izquierda Revolucionaria (JIR), has operated as a public faction within a left grouping called the PRS (Party of Revolution and Socialism). When the JIR opposed the decision of the PRS majority to campaign for Chávez, they reported that "we were

also opposed by the representative of the LIT-PSTU, which distinguished itself by forming a united front with the majority sectors of the PRS, telling us that we 'screwed up big time'..." Given the LIT's history, their political support for Chávez should have come as no surprise.

As for the CRCI-PO centered in Argentina, they had a dispute with their Venezuelan representation over calling for a vote for Chávez (with CRCI-PO opposing the vote). But this dispute was hardly a matter of principle. After all, in the 2005 presidential election in Bolivia, the CRCI-PO enthusiastically called for a vote for the bourgeois populist candidacy of Evo Morales. Indeed, the PO condemned the FT-CI as "politically bankrupt," "charlatans" and "fools" for opposing Morales.

The third organization is the Bolivian POR. The Trotskyist Fraction's Bolivian section, the LOR (Liga Obrera Revolucionaria or Revolutionary Workers' League), has defined the POR as "inveterate centrists," noting its long history of betrayal. In its press, the FT-CI has denounced the POR's role in actual revolutionary situations. In the course of the 1952 revolution, the POR's political support to the bourgeois MNR guaranteed the triumph of counterrevolution. The LRP understands that this treasonous policy, which secured the almost unanimous support of the Fourth International, actually sounded the death-knell of the original FI as a proletarian revolutionary party. (See our pamphlet *Bolivia: The Revolution the "Fourth International" Betrayed*.) The POR went on to betray the 1970-71 revolutionary movement and the pivotal 1985 class upsurge. In more recent years, the POR has gone through a notable sectarian turn. In regard to the Bolivian uprisings of 2003 and 2005, the LOR aptly notes that "already for some time the POR has converted itself into a sterile sect from the political point of view and that also explains the dramatically horrible role during the last national crises..."

We are not surprised that the FT-CI has not reported any substantive response to the *Appeal* by any of these groups. The obvious question is this: why did the FT-CI put out an *Appeal* that made it seem as if these groups could comprise an effective political counterweight to Chávez?

The FT-CI, despite its commendable willingness to swim against the stream in Bolivia and Venezuela, has a fundamentally wrong conception of how the revolutionary party of the working class is to be built. And this leads them to dishonest diplomacy with other groups in the centrist left, which undermines their principled stand for working class independence in Venezuela.

The approach demonstrated in its *Appeal* was forecast in the short report on its Fourth Conference published in *La Verdad Obrera*. There the FT-CI describes the collapse of much of the centrist left around the world (such as the Mandeliste USec and the Cliffite International Socialism tendency) into open class-collaborationism. The FT-CI then states that as part of the "struggle for the reconstruction of the Fourth International," it would approach currents like the LIT, the CRCI-PO or the POR of Bolivia that criticized "subordination to Chavismo totally or partially" with proposals to them that look "beyond the big political differences that we have."

Something is terribly wrong with this picture. International tendencies like the LIT and CRCI have only tried to cover up their capitulation to Chávez by mouthing this or that criticism; they are no better than the Mandelites or the Cliffites in any essential way. To say that such groups have criticized subordination to Chávez "partially" is to leave unsaid that they have "partially" capitulated to Chávez. In fact the *Appeal* helps these rotten centrist outfits cloak their criminal betrayal of the fight for working-class independence. The FT-CI convention document at least notes a "partial" subordination to Chavismo: but the *Appeal*, intended for



*The left hailed Castro and now cheers on Chavez. Permanent revolution rejects nationalism: the international working class must lead the revolution to smash imperialism.*

broader left and public consumption, simply claims that the “international organizations maintain political independence from the Chávez project.” This is a blatant lie in the case of the LIT, as we have shown. And while the CRCI and POR have not directly endorsed a vote for Chávez, they have directly capitulated to other bourgeois figures and are therefore equally untrustworthy. Isn’t this what revolutionaries should want their fellow workers to understand?

As Trotsky explained, the question of crossing the class line is no “tactical question or ... technical maneuver” but rather “the main question of proletarian class strategy for this epoch ... the best criterion for the difference between Bolshevism and Menshevism.” The FT-CI would claim to understand this, yet the *Appeal* doesn’t demonstrate such an understanding. Rather their convention document stated that these groups should look “beyond the big political differences we that have” in order to form an alternative “pole” to Chavismo . Out of this conception an *Appeal* was constructed which doesn’t even mention that these groups have already betrayed on the “main question of proletarian class strategy.”

There is nothing wrong with a joint campaign of different left groups for a specific purpose, as an abstract proposition. However the FT has no business covering up the dangers of these centrist tendencies to their right. And it is not warning our class in advance of the capacity for more betrayal from these outfits. *The net effect is to raise the prestige of these centrists in the eyes of the workers, rather than raising working class political consciousness about the nature of centrism.*

In Trotsky’s writings about centrism, he noted that reformism was objectively counterrevolutionary. He saw that centrism, whether it was right or more left-wing in appearance, tended to become the critical barrier to revolution at times when reformism was exposed, that is, when the working class was searching for a revolutionary alternative. Trotsky in no way excluded the possibility of winning over whole sections of the ranks or even leaders of centrist parties under certain circumstances; in other circumstances Trotsky thought workers might bypass centrist efforts and be reached directly by the revolutionary vanguard. The main point is that Trotsky always argued for an open fight by revolutionaries *against* centrism, most importantly during the varied tactical maneuvers he advocated in attempting to build the International Left Opposition. As he put it, “Those revolutionists will fight reformism best who are absolutely independent of centrism and view it critically and intransigently.” The fight against populism requires no less.

We must note that the FT-CI regularly publishes exposures of populist politics and criticisms of these centrist tendencies as well. In fact, they are a good source of information, and we have depended on their publications even in composing this critique. Their newspapers offer far more of value than those of most other tendencies. But, the *Appeal*, a central international statement coming out of a convention and intended for a broader audience, does not tell workers the truth about these groups. The fact that critical points were made elsewhere is a poor excuse for an obvious decision to withhold criticism when making a proposal. The reason for the diplomatic cover-up is not because the FT-CI is inherently or habitually dishonest. Rather we believe the reason is this. If the FT-CI had included, within the *Appeal*, an indication of these tendencies’ record of class collaboration, it would have been obvious that the *Appeal* made no sense. At the very least, the FT-CI would have then had to directly ask these tendencies to reverse their history of class collaboration and explain to their readers whether or not they expected them to do so and why. The fact is that none of these tendencies are moving to repudiate their past positions in

favor of a principled stance for class independence.

As we indicated at the start, a second problem with the *Appeal* is the content itself. Toward the end of their statement, the FT-CI sums up their proposal this way:

**In short, comrades, we call for a united campaign on three fundamental points. a) For the nationalization without compensation of all strategic industries under workers’ control and management and opposition to the false nationalizations of Chávez. b) For an independent workers party so that the working class may begin to influence national politics free of all varieties of reformism and bourgeois nationalism. c) The perspective of a workers’, campesinos’, and peoples’ government as the only method for achieving the demands of the workers, the peasants and the poor against the farce of Socialism of the 21st Century.**

Let’s be clear. The FT-CI has not proposed any specific actions. It proposes a propaganda campaign wherein the groups would promote the three points. The FT-CI claims this would be a useful political counterposition to Chavismo. But nothing concrete is put forward beyond listing the three demands.

But what about the three demands? These are *transitional* demands. Such demands can often be tactically crucial – at other times particular demands may be tactically unwise. In any case, simply advocating these demands only gives a partial counterposition to Chavismo. And that is not sufficient for a revolutionary campaign.

Our tendency objects to the widespread misuse of the *Transitional Program* whereby transitional demands are routinely raised as a substitute for being open with our fellow workers about our revolutionary goals. This has nothing in common with Trotsky’s approach. Trotsky formulated the *Transitional Program* to replace the old *minimum* program of reforms that were raised by reformists as the immediate goals of struggle, totally cut off from the *maximum* goal of socialist revolution. In the hands of centrists, transitional demands have been used to replace the *maximum* program – the opposite of Trotsky’s intention. (We urge comrades to read our article “Myth and Reality of the Transitional Program,” in *Socialist Voice* No. 9 or on our website.)

The FT-CI tendency, like many others, uses these demands a lot. But they usually just hint at the need for socialist revolution and the workers’ state when addressing the working class. We will demonstrate our differences with that method concretely. The first demand proposed, nationalization without compensation, is one we believe is key today. However, it’s also true that merely raising the demand is insufficient in the concrete situation. Today the most militant workers in Venezuela are following the leaders of the trade union current C-CURA (Corriente Clasista, Unitaria, Revolucionaria y Autónoma or United Revolutionary and Autonomous Class-struggle Current), headed by Orlando Chirino, Stalin Pérez Borges and others with a long history of affiliation with right centrist organizations. The same people also lead the associated PRS. There are some disputes within the C-CURA/PRS milieu over how much to subordinate themselves to Chávez. But the disputes are secondary. These union leaders all favor some organizational independence for workers, in the sense of union autonomy, but they all also politically tie the class to Chávez and the capitalist state. They all advocated voting for Chavez and then wanted to get into the PSUV (although there has now been a division over that question). The entire current of union leaders basically supports Chávez, although they have their criticisms.

The *Appeal* turns at the end to stating the three point campaign should be directed toward these union leaders. They say:

“for the building of a united campaign directed towards currents within Venezuela, especially the PRS and the trade union C-CURA and to fight for this perspective in each one of our countries and internationally.” But beyond this sentence, the *Appeal* doesn’t explain what they have in mind.

Thus the *Appeal* doesn’t pose the need for revolutionaries to address the betrayals of the union misleaders, who also call for nationalization without compensation – but capitulate to Chávez at the same time. It is vital to defend these union misleaders when they are under attack by the bosses and the Chávez regime. But at the same time we insist on an approach which tries to cut through the illusions also encouraged by the centrists who lead workers’ struggles. We explain that these union leaders are incapable of fighting all the way for nationalization even if they use the words – because fundamentally they do support Chavez. They don’t warn against Chavez’s inevitable opposition to genuine expropriation in the hands of the working class. They do not explain that behind its “socialist” rhetoric, the Chavez government is a capitalist government which will prove an enemy of the workers and the poor. Instead they all push the idea that Chavez is leading a “revolutionary process” within which our class can just participate and push forward its fight for working class demands.

The left union misleaders use the demand of nationalization in a way that fools the workers about the nature of Venezuelan society. On the contrary, revolutionaries use the demand of nationalization to prove the need for socialist revolution. We fight side by side with our fellow workers in the fight for expropriation but we openly affirm that the workers’ own experience will confirm our arguments and prove the need for revolution and a workers’ state. This methodology is key if revolutionaries want to separate the workers from the political misleadership they now follow. As far as the *Appeal* goes, one could think that the FT-CI believes that four groups of leftists banding together will pressure or convince the current C-CURA/ PRS leadership to definitively break from their pro-Chávez political practice.

(On a subordinate point, Chirino and his associates do equivocate on the question of workers’ management. They usually go along with Chávez’s call for *co-management* instead, arguing that it is just an insufficient step toward full workers’ management. But even the FT-CI *Appeal* fudges this kind of question. They raise the demand of “workers’ and consumers’ control,” which also dilutes the central class question. Whether discussing control or management, Trotsky’s *Transitional Program* was unequivocal on the matter.)

The “independent workers party” demand presents even more of a problem. The Trotskyist Fraction calls for “an independent workers party so that the working class may begin to influence national politics free of all varieties of reformism and bourgeois nationalism.” This is confusionist. The only party which will be free of reformism and bourgeois nationalism is the internationalist vanguard party. The FT-CI believes it is applying Trotsky’s labor party tactic to the Venezuelan context. Indeed, this tactic can be very important in certain circumstances. (See “Double Talk on the Party,” p. 28.) However, even where the use of the tactic is correct, it does not mean that revolutionists submerge or muddle their message for the revolutionary vanguard party and program.

Further, we do not agree that this tactic, in Venezuela today, would advance the revolutionary cause. There are not thousands of workers moving to break with Chávez. The militant layers have



*A strike wave in Peru last Spring, the latest in a series of workers’ eruptions in Latin America in the past few years. Attacks on union rights and other basic needs of the workers and oppressed is commonplace from Argentina to Peru to Mexico. An international revolutionary party can unite the struggles of workers across the continent.*

shown they will follow Chirino and other union leaders in practical struggles, but they do not look toward these union leaders at this time to lead in founding a new mass political party. The situation points to the general need for advocating a broad mass action strategy within which revolutionaries would fight for our program and party, and aim to expose the workers’ misleaders. The most politically advanced workers, a minority, are already looking for an alternative to Chávez – even if their consciousness is mixed on the question. We say that above all the explicit call for the proletarian revolutionary vanguard party is needed more than ever to win those that can be won now to the vanguard. (At a later point in time, when the motion of masses in an independent political direction is on the horizon, the idea of a labor party would probably be appropriate.)

Indeed, the FT-CI has already gone through the experience of subordinating the independence of the vanguard party by co-founding the PRS, which they argued would be a mass workers’ party. They have already seen that it was not possible for it to become a revolutionary party. Instead, the PRS-majority has supported Chávez, as the FT-CI has described in detail in their own press. If the FT-CI and the JIR want to continue to call for an independent workers party now, they should at least present a balance sheet of their work in building the PRS and explain how their

currently proposed party would be different than the right centrist PRS that already exists.

The third demand is for the workers', campesinos', and people's government. We presume the Trotskyist Fraction intends this formulation to be a call for a governmental alliance of a number of parties led by the working class, a variant of the workers' government slogan. As with their workers' party proposal, we do not agree that the workers' government tactic is useful in Venezuela today. (The method behind our approach is well taken up in our article "Myth and Reality of the Transitional Program.") Nor do we accept the call for the workers' government as a substitute to be used instead of propaganda for the workers' state. This is not just an issue of wordage. If there was a party today calling for a government led by the working class but explaining the need to smash the entire bourgeois state apparatus and replace it with a dictatorship of the proletariat that would not be a political capitulation to Chávez's populist myth of evolutionary socialism. But in the current context publicizing the idea of a workers' government slogan without talking about the fundamental concept of the workers' state implies that, if not Chávez, then some left reformist or centrist alternative can achieve the solution workers need – without the destruction of the capitalist state. The workers' government slogan is a valid tactic but not in Venezuela at this time. Since Chávez's left tails in C-CURA do argue that a workers' government can be achieved through the "revolutionary process" it is even more critical to tell our fellow revolutionary-minded workers the whole truth.

There is no substitute for the winning of the vanguard workers, no matter how few in numbers, to a clear and consistent revolutionary program. This must be our top priority as revolutionary internationalists. Tactical maneuvers are possible, and they become even more vital with the rise of more massive struggles. But revolutionaries always explain to the advanced workers what they hope to accomplish within any tactical approach.

Trotsky was certainly right to advocate transitional demands and a whole range of tactics which revolutionaries must be prepared to use. But his method was based on the premise that revolutionaries always, at every step, "say what is." As he insisted:

**... on whatever arena, and whatever the methods of functioning, they [the Fourth Internationalists – ed.] are bound to speak in the name of unqualified principles and clear revolutionary slogans. They do not play hide and seek with the working class; they do not conceal their aims; they do not substitute diplomacy and combinations for a principled struggle. Marxists at all times and under all conditions openly say what is. ...**

The FT-CI has sections which deserve much credit for taking correct positions in relation to Chávez, Morales and the like. But the *Appeal* utilizes diplomacy and evasion instead of sticking with a hard revolutionary opposition. In this way, in our view the FT-CI's *Appeal* unfortunately reflects its own failure to separate itself from the rest of the centrist, fake Trotskyist milieu.

We make our criticisms of the *Appeal* frankly and without artificial diplomacy. We don't agree with the particular proposal. But we definitely do agree with the FT-CI that an international campaign that aids the struggle for working class independence is sorely needed. The FT-CI and its section in Venezuela, the JIR, have been effectively publicizing a number of key battles of our class in Venezuela, showing concretely how Chávez opposes the workers' demands for expropriation and workers' control. *En Clave Obrera* has highlighted, in words and pictures, attacks against striking and protesting workers by the National Guard and police, such as was perpetrated against workers at the Sanitarios Maracay plant. This attack, in conjunction with Chávez's decla-

ration of war on union autonomy, sparked a solid regional strike in the state of Aragua late May, which raised the stakes of the conflict greatly. Even though the size of current struggles are small, they are growing. It points to the need for mass united action of the working class.

An international publicity campaign could provide material aid to the pivotal struggle of the Sanitarios Maracay workers, and other strikes and protests. As well, we know that the international "solidarity" milieu provides an invaluable service to Chávez in covering up his anti-working class policies. The myth is perpetrated in Venezuela and abroad that critics of Chávez are objectively pro-imperialist. Information on conflicts like this are heavily suppressed because if the facts are spread, and the voices of these workers can be heard more widely, the reality of the class conflict at the heart of Venezuela is harder to deny. It would shed a lot of light where Chávez doesn't want it. So-called "solidarity" campaigns which submerge differences within the left undermine the genuine struggle against imperialism, a struggle which demands a conscious proletariat.

With our modest resources, the LRP has already participated in many protest actions against American imperialism and intervened energetically within that movement in the U.S., fighting against the stream wherever possible to expose and counter the pro-Chávez populist mythology that is rampant in the Left internationally. We have a consistently principled record in this regard. We are equally consistent in our opposition to every populist pretender at home and abroad. While not hiding our political differences, we stand ready to join with the FT-CI and other tendencies in efforts to aid our fellow workers in Venezuela. Because the FT-CI has comrades on the ground in Venezuela, and is part of a larger international tendency on the continent, they are in a prime position to spark an international campaign of this nature. We look forward to a response from the FT-CI to both our critique of the *Appeal* and our concrete proposal. ●

## Further Reading from *Proletarian Revolution*

- "Hands off Venezuela", PR 70 (2004); [www.lrp-cofi.org/PR/venezuelaPR70.html](http://www.lrp-cofi.org/PR/venezuelaPR70.html)
- "Bolivia: Revolutionary Prospects and Reactionary Threats", PR 74 (2005); [www.lrp-cofi.org/PR/boliviaPR74.html](http://www.lrp-cofi.org/PR/boliviaPR74.html)
- "Stalinist Expansion, the Fourth International and the Working Class", PR 64; [www.lrp-cofi.org/PR/FIPR64.html](http://www.lrp-cofi.org/PR/FIPR64.html)
- "Marx's Bolivar Meets Moreno's Bolivar," PR 29 (1987); [www.lrp-cofi.org/PR/bolivarPR29.html](http://www.lrp-cofi.org/PR/bolivarPR29.html)
- "Propaganda and Agitation in Building the Revolutionary Party," PR 59 (1999); [www.lrp-cofi.org/PR/propagitPR56.html](http://www.lrp-cofi.org/PR/propagitPR56.html)
- "Myth and Reality of the Transitional Program," SV 8 (1979); [www.lrp-cofi.org/PR/TPSV8.html](http://www.lrp-cofi.org/PR/TPSV8.html)
- "The Labor Party in the United States," SV 6 (1978); [www.lrp-cofi.org/PR/laborparty6.html](http://www.lrp-cofi.org/PR/laborparty6.html)



## Venezuela: Chávez vs. Working Class

by Evelyn Kaye

The political scene in Venezuela has centered around the discussion of “21st Century Socialism.” After his re-election in December 2006, President Hugo Chávez began consistently to announce new programs and plans as part of the “march toward socialism.” Much of the international left had been cheering on the “Bolivarian revolution” in Venezuela all along – and has become even more enthusiastic in the past year.

The LRP has stood against this tide from the start. We have argued that the political character of Chávez and his regime is capitalist, specifically populist. The basic function of populist leadership is to prevent the working class from developing a full understanding of the capitalist system and the need to overthrow it. However, given the rising hatred of imperialism and exploitation, this can only be done effectively by a charismatic populist figure who is capable of expressing and symbolizing what people really feel, even though the aim is to manipulate. As we wrote, “Chávez, like other populists, makes a rhetorical claim to represent the ‘people’ against the ‘elites,’ in order to preempt the development of class consciousness and its inevitable challenge to capitalism itself.” (See “U.S. Hands off Venezuela” in *Proletarian Revolution* No. 70 or on the LRP-COFI website.)

Chávez has had clashes with the U.S. which have gone a long way to enhance his stature among the masses as a fighter against imperialism. But as we have demonstrated, his basic perspective is not to end imperialism but only to gain more leverage for sectors of Venezuelan capitalists *within* the imperialist system. Likewise, while he has been forced to give concessions to the working class and the poor, he is not for ending exploitation and oppression. Therefore, while we defend Venezuela against imperialism and defend every gain or reform that benefits the working class and the poor, we are open political opponents of the Chávez regime – as of all bourgeois regimes of whatever stripe.

### BEHIND “21st CENTURY SOCIALISM”

Nevertheless the shift in Chávez’s rhetoric means something. In the past few years, Chávez has been under mounting pressure to deliver on his promises to the masses. It has become obvious that the threat of an imperialist-inspired overthrow of the government, under one guise or another, has receded. At the same time, oil profits have been at record highs for three years. So working-class confidence and expectations have been raised. In response, Chávez has elevated the level of social welfare spending, and has



*Workers took over Sanitarios Maracay ceramics factory last November. In April workers were savagely beaten by the National Guard – which answers directly to Chávez. Workers demanded nationalization without compensation; the regime answered with the armed fist of the capitalist state.*

elevated the rhetoric even more, in order to try to hold onto mass support. Especially key for the regime is the need to keep working-class struggles under control. This has been the chief motive behind Chávez’s “21st Century Socialism.”

Now Chávez doesn’t exactly claim that socialism has been achieved yet, but he does claim that there is a “revolutionary process” underway, building toward socialism. For Marxists this is not hard to see through. Chávez has explicitly opposed the Marxist principle that an actual revolution, an overturn in relations of production, is necessary to achieve socialism. On his July 22 “Aló Presidente” show he reiterated his past claims that Marxism “is a dogmatic thesis that has already passed out of style and that isn’t in agreement with today’s reality.” He added that “theses like the working class as the motor of socialism and the revolution are obsolete.” Thus he rejects the Marxist principle that the working class’s winning state power is the necessary step toward achieving socialism. And he just as explicitly rejects the Marxist definition of socialism as a classless society.

*continued on page 23*