

Black History and the Class Struggle

No. 9

Los Angeles Explodes

There Is No Justice in Capitalist America



Workers Vanguard

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Introduction

This year's headlines dictate the subject of this edition of *Black History and the Class Struggle*. For those committed to the struggle for black liberation, the salient political event of 1992 was the acquittal of the sadistic racist cops who beat Rodney King, touching off an upheaval of protest which swept the streets of Los Angeles, gripping the whole country in its wake. The outrage at the sneering injustice of this replay of the 1857 Dred Scott decision, and the widespread national sympathy for the L.A. protesters, who encompassed not only blacks and Hispanics but also a significant number of poor white youth, altered the immediate political climate in Bush's America. The L.A. upheaval put into the spotlight deep fissures and widespread discontents at the base. As an alarmed ruling class unleashed fierce state repression, the working masses of America and throughout the world glimpsed the seething bitterness at the very core of the "New World Order" so recently proclaimed with such triumphant fanfare.

Nearly 20 years ago, similar explosions of indignation and betrayed expectations rocked the inner cities from Harlem to Detroit to Watts. Those upheavals also marked a crucial juncture of contemporary American history: they signaled the foundering of the mass, liberal-led civil rights movement confronted by the entrenched realities of de facto segregation and ghetto poverty in the major Northern cities (see our *Black History and the Class Struggle* pamphlet No. 2, published February 1985). A mass movement built on the courage of millions of black and white activists did overturn the "Jim Crow" system of official "separate but equal" segregation and disenfranchisement of Southern blacks, but had no perspective for challenging the grinding oppression of the Northern ghetto masses.

Now, after two decades of an increasingly reactionary and racist climate, feeding off economic decline, the ultimate outcome of the riots of the 1960s is seen to be a sick joke. The bourgeoisie, scared enough to realize the value of coopting some of the "talented tenth," instituted some token "anti-poverty" programs and installed a few highly visible "black faces in high places." Today these black Democrats display their true colors as servants of the power structure in repressing the masses. In L.A., black ex-police lieutenant and present mayor Tom Bradley presides over mass arrests throwing thousands of alleged "looters"

behind bars, while immigration feds conduct racist sweeps targeting "illegals"; in Atlanta, Mayor Maynard Jackson, a veteran of the old civil rights movement, has protesting students at one of the most elite black universities locked onto their campus like criminals; in New York, militant protests against the cops' execution-style killing of a Dominican man are squelched as "progressive" black mayor David Dinkins turns out the cops to re-establish "law and order" just in time for the Democratic convention.

Racist Cop Terror: An American Custom

In our first article written the day after the beating of Rodney King, we headlined "'New World Order' LAPD-Style," linking the rampaging cops' racist reign of terror to U.S. imperialism's just-concluded slaughter of over 100,000 people in the Persian Gulf. Citing Bush's boast that "The kind of moral force and national will that freed Kuwait City from abuse can free America's cities from crime," our article also noted that "the kind of kill-crazy sadism and thug mentality that uses non-white people for target practice with high-tech weaponry is nothing new for the LAPD.... The LAPD is a notorious violence cult with state power."

The enterprising amateur cameraman whose footage of some dozen cops beating and kicking a defenseless black man was widely shown on the TV news performed a service to millions of "average" Americans who really did not know how this country works. The blurry footage provides such a vivid and unmistakable picture of the action that the viewer can almost hear the savage blows and the racist taunts and laughter of the cops as they inflicted a beating which might easily have killed their victim. Black journalist Mumia Abu-Jamal, who is a prisoner on Pennsylvania's death row, captured the impact of the atrocity caught on videotape:

"There, *in living color*, stood the obvious—a Black man, suspected of an offense, is publicly beaten in a spasm of racist insensate rage, for no reason other than the lamentable fact that it has long been American custom to do so, when the doers are armed with the power of the state. "In that blinding, naked moment, the fears of generations of Black men leapt to the fore, for by such customs are marked our common reality."

Due to the accident of the atrocity having been videotaped, and the ensuing
continued on page 41

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Videotape Shows...What Happens All the Time Racist Cop Terror U.S.A.

The public fury generated by the sadistic racist beating of Rodney King by L.A. police has brought the issue of police brutality into sharp national focus. Nobody but the most rabid cop sympathizer believes it is an "aberration," as LAPD chief Daryl Gates called it. Blacks and Hispanics have always known the truth about it, and many have directly experienced it—the only new thing is people have camcorders to videotape it. Now TV viewers from coast to coast wince at each swing of the police batons, each kick to the head, each blow to the kidneys—deeply angered, with compassion and empathy for the black man as he lay helpless before the taunting, torturing cops. And from New York to Atlanta and Chicago, the media has suddenly unearthed a mountain of similar cases, which they had buried until now.

After 15 days, transcripts of the L.A. patrol car computer messages from the night of the beating were finally made public. LAPD thugs Laurence Powell and Timothy Wind, under indictment as two of King's principal attackers, bragged: "I haven't beaten anyone this bad in a long time." The voice on the



WV Photo

Spartacists at 9 March 1991 L.A. demo protesting cop beating of Rodney King.

other end responded, "Oh, not again...I thought you agreed to chill out for a while." Powell and Wind described their previous call, involving a black family, as being "right out of Gorillas in the

Mist." Foot patrol officers responded, "Ha ha ha ha...let me guess who be the parties." Straight from the racist pigs' mouths—to say the least, this undercut Gates' absurd claims that the beating was not racially motivated.

Racist police terror an "aberration"? We're reminded of the study by eminent Canadian biologist Farley Mowat, who investigated trappers' claims that wolves were devastating the herds of caribou. Mowat found the wolves were getting a bum rap. After thousands of years, wasn't it curious that wolves' insatiable appetite for killing increased so dramatically in the presence of...trappers? In this case, is one to believe that the cops' thirst to beat up people is somehow stimulated by the presence of a video camera to record it? We rather think it's the opposite.

In fact, racist cop atrocities occur all the time. But now with video cameras everywhere, you get to see it for yourself. The cops see home videos as a threat to their control of the streets (like guns in the hands of the people). But it's fundamental to the criminal "justice" system to pretend that cops' testimony is implicitly to be believed. So...the victim fell down the steps, banged his head against the pavement, was shot trying to escape. Possibly the police will figure a way to ban videos, at least as evidence.



Michael Kamber/Impact Visuals

The "armed fist of the capitalist state" in action—cop terror is no "aberration."

the way the Pentagon kept reporters in the Persian Gulf from showing the carnage left by its murderous blitzkrieg.

Cop terror is enormously, but not exclusively racially biased. It is of great assistance in becoming a victim if you are black or Hispanic, but don't rely on that too heavily. New York police abused a white woman editor who objected to them berating her taxi driver, ran down an elderly doctor on Park Avenue (one of only two cases in which an NYC cop was ever indicted for murder). The cops have this macho creed of cowardice: they're not like soldiers, they don't expect to be shot at. Which is why they have those elaborate funerals, bringing out thousands every time one of them is on the receiving end. *They're* supposed to do the killing.

"Desert Storm" Comes Home

In our last issue we pointed to the direct connection between Bush's war of annihilation against Iraq and the war against blacks and Hispanics at home. On the same day the videotape was first aired, Bush was at a nationwide cop convention, sitting next to "Choke Hold" Gates and singling out the L.A. top cop as an "All American hero." Appealing for the kind of "moral force" and "national will" shown in "Desert Storm," Bush described his draconian crime bill as "taking the handcuffs off police." That's like when he said that the army would "not be asked to fight with one hand tied behind their back" on the day that the terror bombing of Baghdad began. The beating of Rodney King symbolizes what Bush's talk about unleashing the police is all about. Blacks and other minorities are to be used for cannon fodder in war, and target practice at home.

Now embarrassed over his endorsement of Gates, Bush scrambled to distance himself. Attorney General Richard Thornburgh ordered the FBI to "review" complaints of police brutality received by the feds in the past six years—some 15,000 cases. The "review" is to find out if there is a "pattern" of abuse. Asking Thornburgh and the FBI to "investigate" patterns of racism is like asking Himmler and the Gestapo to find out if there's a pattern of discrimination against Jews! Thornburgh was governor of Pennsylvania when the Philly cops dropped a bomb on the black MOVE commune in May 1985, killing eleven people. And every civil rights worker knows how the FBI worked hand in hand with the Klan.

Nowhere was the sudden "discovery" of racist police brutality more grotesque than in New York City. Feeling the heat

Families of victims and survivors of racist cop assaults protested at Police Plaza in NYC, 20 March 1991.



over the L.A. videotape, NYC prosecutors announced the indictment on murder charges of five cops in the beating and choking death of Federico Pereira in Queens on November 5. But the police have counterattacked, attempting to intimidate and trash the teenagers who witnessed the murder, and now the killer cops have been reinstated. The likelihood of getting convictions is remote, if history is any precedent. *Newsday* (21 March) reported that before this week, only two on-duty cops had ever been indicted for murder, in 1985 and 1924! Both were acquitted. In 1990, of 41 deaths in police custody, there were only two indictments. This is on a par with El Salvador, where only a couple of military officers have ever been indicted for death squad killings, and none ever convicted.

El Diario-La Prensa (24 March) complained bitterly:

"Blacks and Hispanics have known about police brutality for a long time. In most of the Inner City, the Police behave like an occupation army in enemy country. They don't look upon our people as citizens to be protected. To them, we are the enemy."

On March 20, families of murdered victims and survivors of police terror gathered in a demonstration outside NY police headquarters. The protest was called by the Congress of Puerto Rican Rights, and joined by supporters of ACT UP and the Spartacist League. In poignant testimony, some carried photographs mounted on posterboard of their dead loved ones, others had photos of themselves after experiencing police brutality in NYC. Federico Pereira's mother Laura came with her husband, Tito Nieves, a top Latin band leader and singer. Only because they had the tireless will and resources to challenge the cops' lying story about their son's death ("assaulting five cops") was the case reopened.

David Cotto's sister Lizette cried out,

"My brother was killed like a dog!" David had been depressed and threatening to kill himself with a knife, so the family called the cops, who came into their Sheepshead Bay apartment and fired eleven shots into the distraught youth. Arnaldo Deliz, 16, carried his own picture, his eye blackened, his face swollen. Arnaldo is deaf and mute. He and a friend, Juan Vergara, both students at the Lexington School for the Deaf, were waiting for a bus near the school when the cops questioned them about a stolen car. When they didn't answer, the cops beat them with flashlights on their faces, punched and kicked them in the chest, stomach and groin. They were kept in police custody for two days without their parents being allowed to see them.

The Gang in Blue Uniforms

Chief Daryl Gates remains in hot water in L.A., as angry demonstrators pack hearings of the police commission and city council. On March 12 some 400, mainly Samoan Americans, gathered in Compton to demand that killer cop Alfred Skiles be brought to justice for the murder of two brothers on February 12. Called to the house in a domestic dispute, the cops ordered Pouvi and Italia Taulaulelei to kneel, then hit them with 20 bullets, mostly in the back, calmly stopping to reload. Seven-year-old Niles, son of one of the murdered brothers, carried a sign that read: "My Daddy Knelt. Why 12 Bullets?"

The ACLU had a full-page ad in the *Los Angeles Times* asking, "Who Do You Call When the Gang Wears Blue Uniforms?" They are demanding Gates' resignation—now that he's become an embarrassment, the bourgeoisie, anxious to restore police "credibility," finds him expendable. Others call for civilian review boards or special commissions. More militant activists want to imitate

the Black Panthers citizens' patrols, tracking the cops with use of videotape this time around.

None of these schemes will do much good. In August 1988, over 400 New York police staged a full-scale cop riot in Tompkins Square. There were 121 complaints of cop brutality, but although there was plenty of videotape evidence, the cops stonewalled and there was never a single indictment, let alone a conviction.

The "pattern" of racist cop terror is that any black or Latino can be singled out for "stepping out of line." Ghetto youth get the brunt, but a member of the Harlem Globetrotters shopping on glitzy Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills can get it, or a group of black Santa Monica high school students having a picnic at a park in Pacific Palisades, which the ruling class thinks is "for whites only." It happened to five-year-old Patrick Mason, blown away by an Orange County cop as he was sitting at home watching TV.

The "pattern" is seen in the number of black men in jail—four times the rate of imprisonment of black men in South Africa! Or the "workfare" scheme which has thrown thousands of black single mothers off welfare, forcing them either to starve or work for slave wages while leaving their children alone on the streets. And the scourge of AIDS, which due to "malign neglect" ravages minority communities without medical care or social services.

Not only is racist cop brutality no "aberration," it's part of an overall "pattern" of *genocide* by this racist capitalist system against ghetto blacks it no longer

has any use for. In the past, minorities were a large part of the "reserve army of labor," available for when they were needed by the bosses. "Last hired, first fired," as the saying went. Since the mid-1970s it's been "first fired, never rehired." Even during the so-called "Reagan boom," black unemployment remained at depression levels, and now it's getting worse. A *New York Times* (19 March) profile of Milwaukee reported that as the Midwest "rust belt" city pulled itself out of a deep slump in the early '80s, switching from manufacturing to service industry, white unemployment fell from 5.3 percent to 3.8 percent, while black unemployment rose from 17 to 20 percent.

Blacks in America are in terrible danger. At a House hearing called by liberal black Democrat John Conyers, Manhattan borough president Ruth Messinger called for an "Operation Urban Storm," to "undertake the liberation of the millions of Americans in our cities trapped by the tyranny of poverty, illiteracy, hunger, unemployment, crime and hopelessness." We've got news for Messinger, a member of Democratic Socialists of America: George Bush has already launched his "Operation Urban Storm," a so-called "war on crime/war on drugs" which is really a war on the black and Hispanic poor. *Rodney King was one of its first victims.*

And while the cops stomp through the ghettos and barrios with their heavy weaponry, their helicopters, their Taser guns and tear gas, the *right to self-defense* is denied to the population. Gun control bills are rushed through Con-

gress, just when people need protection most. This, too, is part of the "pattern." The ruling class insists on its monopoly of armed force. The working class and minorities must be intimidated, subjected to arbitrary brutalization by the "guardians of law and order." New York City has some of the tightest gun laws in the country: Malcolm X was assassinated after he was refused the right to bear arms. And who gets the rare police permits? Back in the 1930s, the *Daily News* publisher was licensed to carry...a Thompson machine gun. During the recent *Daily News* strike, the city sanctioned professional armed terrorists in ski masks and blue jumpsuits to guard newsstands and delivery trucks, while hundreds of cops were put at the disposal of the *News* scabherders.

As Marxists we understand the capitalist state is the executive committee of the ruling class, and the cops are one of those special armed bodies of men whose *job* is to protect capitalist property from the many whose blood and sweat make the profits for the few. It's a system built on a bedrock of racist oppression, from chattel slavery to wage slavery. And now that an entire generation of ghetto youth has been simply discarded by this country's callous rulers, it should be clearer than ever that the only way to eliminate the "pattern" of cop brutality is to do away with the system of racist American capitalism, for which the "gang in blue uniforms" are the front line of defense. And the key element is forging a revolutionary workers party which acts as a tribune of the people and champion of all the oppressed. ■

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There Is No Justice in the Capitalist Courts!

The following is adapted from a statement by the Partisan Defense Committee issued on April 30.

L.A. Racist Cops Walk

The videotape of Los Angeles cops viciously pummeling black motorist Rodney King sparked a wave of outrage in L.A. and across the country. The amateur video caught the cops in their routine practice of terrorizing blacks and other minorities. Now the despicable verdict by a no-blacks-allowed Simi Valley jury acquitting the would-be killers is a green light for racist terror—from skinheads and KKKers to big-city and small-town cops across the country.

Moving the trial out of L.A. to virtually all-white Simi Valley—where active cops and their families outnumber the black population—was a sure way the racist capitalist state could come up with a not-guilty verdict. The jury watched the same videotape the whole world saw—they saw over and over again how Rodney King was stunned by Tasers, repeatedly beaten and kicked as he lay helpless on the ground. But it didn't matter. The judge instructed the jury to see the videotape "through the cops' eyes" and that's what they did.

Now the rage and explosion over this hideous injustice will be used to justify more repression and more cop violence in the name of white racist "law and order." Already the National Guard has been placed in readiness to impose martial law. A state of emergency has been declared and a dusk-to-dawn curfew imposed. We say: cops and National Guard, army of occupation—out of the ghettos and barrios!

This racist verdict was a provocation guaranteed to generate desperate outrage by the city's besieged minority population. The point is not to seize articles of consumption but to expropriate the means of production. That's a big leap, representing the shift in consciousness from that of outraged poor people to that of conscious and organized working people.

This country today "leads" the world in the percentage of its population incarcerated by its "justice" system, exceeding even apartheid South Africa. Unable

to provide jobs and homes to millions of people, this country's rulers are willing to spend ever greater sums of money to lock up those the system has no use for, as well as those who want to fight for something better. The only "growth industry" in America today is construction of new prisons, where the number of blacks and Latinos behind bars is vastly disproportionate to their weight in the population.

This is life in the "New World Order." The beating of Rodney King took place just days after the U.S. mass murder mission in Iraq, prompting Bush to declare, "The kind of moral force and national will that freed Kuwait City from abuse can free America's cities from crime." Rodney King knows well the immoral force of the Los Angeles police, as does former Black Panther leader Geronimo ji Jaga (Pratt) who has spent over 20 years in prison framed by the LAPD and FBI, and the families of the 28 victims killed over the past 25 years by the Special Investigations Section (LAPD's secret hit squad). This is what black Democratic mayor Thomas Bradley calls "the finest large-city department in the nation."

The cops and courts are instruments of racist class oppression. This is how the thugs in blue "serve and protect" their capitalist masters, not just in L.A. but in the inner cities across the country. When not terrorizing the ghettos and barrios they are out busting picket lines, like the 1990 cop riot against striking Los Angeles janitors. Wednesday's verdict is a grotesque reaffirmation of Supreme Court Justice Taney's decision in the Dred Scott case 135 years ago that blacks "had no rights which the white man was bound to respect." The message written in blood and bruises upon the body of Rodney King, and now buttressed with all the pomp of "due process," is that the racist cops can do *anything* they want to *anybody* they want *anytime* they want.

Black people in Los Angeles are increasingly vulnerable—shoved out of the labor force, they are pushed back and forced to

survive on the shrinking margins of the dangerous inner cities. The working class must not allow the black population to be isolated—the *powerful L.A. unions such as longshore, aerospace and city workers should organize work stoppages and mass mobilizations to solidarize with and defend the black community* as the LAPD looks to spill more blood to "celebrate" their racist victory over Rodney King. It is a measure of the craven prostration of the pro-capitalist union "leaders" in the face of this racist crime that instead of organizing powerful actions against the cops who torture and kill black people, who arrest strikers and protect scabs, they are busy whipping up anti-Japanese protectionism and turning out working-class votes for the Democratic politicians.

There is no justice in this racist capitalist country for Rodney King, for Patrick Mason, the five-year-old black child shot and killed inside his own apartment by a trigger-happy Orange County cop, for the countless victims of cop terror nationwide. Justice will come when the killer cops are tried by tribunals of their intended victims—when the power of the capitalist class and of their racist hirelings in blue is smashed by a thoroughgoing revolution so that those who labor will rule.

Over a century ago this country promised freedom to its black citizens, 200,000 of whom fought in the Union Army to smash the slaveholders' rule in the South. But that promise was betrayed by victorious Northern capitalism. It will take a third American Revolution, a revolution by the working people and all the oppressed, to win black liberation—in a socialist America.

* * *

For more information about the Partisan Defense Committee and our program of class-struggle defense contact the PDC at P.O. Box 99, Canal St. Sta., New York, NY 10013, (212) 406-4252. ■

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**Workers, Blacks, Latinos, Asians—
Organize to Sweep Away this Rotten Racist System!**

Outrage Over Racist Acquittal of Cops in Rodney King Case

MAY 3—Even as the first flames leapt into the sky over Los Angeles, accumulated seething anger erupted in cities across the country as word of the racist verdict spread. As L.A. burned, turmoil spread coast to coast. While paramilitary cops, National Guard and U.S. troops occupied South Central L.A., a state of emergency was clamped on San Francisco and Atlanta, the National Guard was called in to Las Vegas, and curfews were imposed in half a dozen cities from Berkeley to Atlanta. In every city which erupted in indignation over this verdict, bitter memories were stirred of the many other victims of rampaging cop terror.

The searing image of a lynch mob in blue uniforms sadistically, methodically, repetitively torturing a black man lying helpless on the ground became the symbol of racist police brutality in America. Now the verdict broadcast to the world what black people already know well: there is no justice in the racist capitalist courts. "They've been killing us, stomping us, slapping us for years," bitterly remarked a street gang member in L.A. "And when we get 'em on tape, they get found not guilty in a system that doesn't count for us," added another.

**As outrage swept
the West Coast
after the verdict
in the Rodney
King case, a
San Francisco
protester is seized
by the cops.**

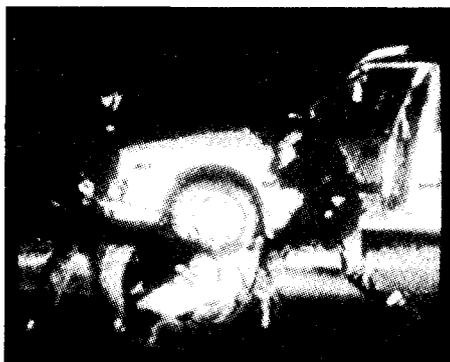
Chinn/SF Examiner



"This says it's open season on black people," said Jody Earl, a black Angeleno, 33. Ron Boyle, 40, added, "The justice system doesn't work in America" (*San Francisco Examiner*, 1 May). This conspicuously interracial outburst against the oppressive cops and courts spread so dramatically because of years of grinding poverty and social con-

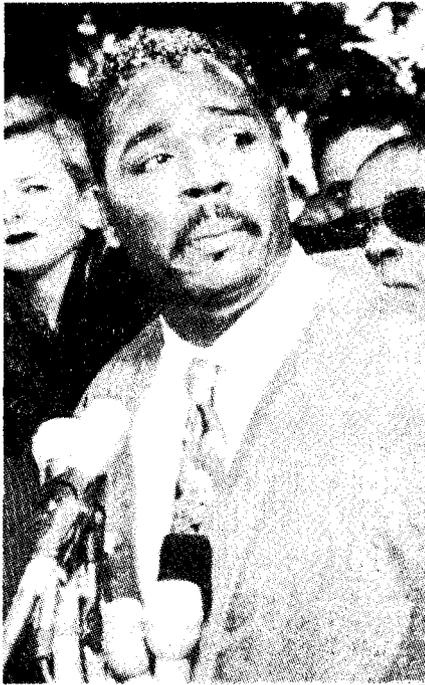
ditions oppressing Latinos and many whites as well as blacks. Polls show an overwhelming majority of the population disagreed with the verdict absolving the cops who beat Rodney King. One reported that even 47 percent of whites think the rioting is "understandable."

The racist media, while playing over and over pictures of the vicious beating



George Holliday Video

Amateur cameraman shows what happens all the time: L.A. cops repeatedly beating defenseless black man. Shown on TV, video of assault on Rodney King shocked millions who didn't know truth about racism in America.



Rodney King

of a white truck driver, hesitated in vilifying the desperate crowds that took to the streets. They whine that "there are better ways" to protest, but it's obvious that the wave of unrest has at least focused world attention on the grievances of black America. As demonstrators from Berlin to New Delhi solidarized with the explosion of rage in Los Angeles, and racist rulers from Japan to South Africa scoffed at Washington's pretensions to world "leadership," Bush & Co. worry that their "New World Order" could go up in smoke. *America's rulers know they are guilty, and they're nervous as hell—as well they should be.*

The malicious California governor Pete Wilson—who wants to starve welfare mothers and just ordered the first execution in the state in 25 years—called out the National Guard, at the behest of black Democratic mayor Bradley. And the haughty imperial president George

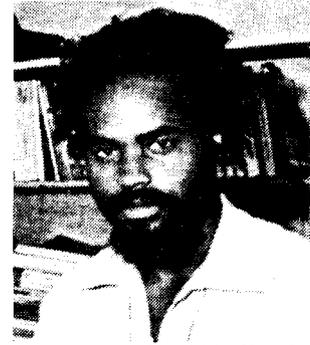
Bush got on TV with a "get tough" speech announcing that U.S. troops were being deployed. Armored personnel carriers rolled into South Central. It was the Seventh Infantry from Fort Ord, which carried out the invasion of Panama, Marines from the Gulf War, SWAT kill squads made up of FBI, federal marshals and Border Patrol. Now this army of occupation of 30,000 heavily armed troops aims its bayonets at blacks, Latinos and Asians at home.

In the face of the police-state occupation of black and Latino L.A. it is necessary to mobilize the power of the integrated union movement. Hours after the cops moved in, the Partisan Defense Committee issued a leaflet [see page 6] demanding that the major unions including longshore, aerospace and city workers must organize work stoppages and mass mobilizations to solidarize with and defend the ghettos and barrios now literally under the gun. We demand: *Cops, troops out of the ghettos and barrios!*

After three days in L.A., the death toll exceeded that of the 1965 Watts riots and even that of Detroit in 1967: it currently stands at 49 dead, of whom at least 17 are black, 15 are Hispanic, 8 white, and 2 Asian. The police and press are covering up the numbers of victims of the cops. As CNN reporter Charles Zewe reported from the scene, of the dead "most of those who died were black, most of those who died were shot in confrontations with police." There were 1,765 reported injuries and 6,345 arrests.

L.A. is "seething with a kind of rage I've never seen," said Zewe. A 52-year-old black man remarked, "Martin Luther King was a waste. His methods have changed nothing." Black people are being pushed beyond the limit, terrorized by cops and courts, driven out of the industrial workforce, denied decent education and housing. U.S. capitalism has no use for a whole generation of black ghetto youth who were once kept on the bench as a "reserve army of labor." Now

all that awaits them is death—slow death from epidemics of disease, malnutrition and drugs, or fast, in the gas chamber or gunned down on the streets. On points, the U.S. is now worse than South Africa, where they just sentenced a white cop to hang for ordering a 1988 massacre of eleven black people, but the death penalty has been suspended there.



Philadelphia Magazine

Mumia Abu-Jamal is on Death Row in Pennsylvania because this crusading black radio journalist, known as the "voice of the voiceless," earned the enmity of Philadelphia rulers and cops for his outspoken defense of black radicals against racist repression. The fight to save Jamal has become a rallying cry for death penalty abolitionists around the world.

The rage of the inner city intersects widespread frustration and disgust extending throughout the population. Particularly in this election year, it is self-evident that both capitalist parties are bankrupt. Meanwhile, the abject betrayal by the UAW tops of even the mainly white, middle-aged Midwest Caterpillar strikers has driven home the need to sweep out the racist, bought-and-paid-for AFL-CIO bureaucracy.

The Rodney King verdict has illuminated the whole *system* of American capitalism, built on a bedrock of racist oppression. It cannot be reformed, it must be smashed. The question is how. The situation cries out for revolutionary leadership, to organize the social power of labor and unite behind it all the oppressed in a struggle for state power that gets rid of the whole rotten racist capitalist system and opens the road for genuine emancipation for all.

King Verdict Lit the Match

Day after day, black L.A. watched on TV the "trial" of four of the more than a dozen racist cops involved in beating Rodney King. Once the case had been moved out of L.A. to lily-white Simi



WV Photo

Geronimo (ji Jaga) Pratt, America's foremost class-war prisoner, has spent over 20 years in the prison hellholes of San Quentin and Folsom for a crime the government knows he didn't commit, because their own phone taps showed he was in Oakland when it happened. A former leader of the L.A. Black Panthers, he survived a 1969 LAPD/SWAT machine-gun raid on Panther headquarters, only to be framed for murder as part of the FBI's infamous "Counter-Intelligence Program" (COINTELPRO) to "neutralize" radical black leaders. Freedom now for Geronimo Pratt!

Valley, a bedroom suburb for cops and home of the "Ronald Reagan Memorial Library," it was all over. In Simi Valley they love L.A. police chief Daryl Gates, the Sultan of SWAT, who earned his spurs as an LAPD commander in Watts in '65 and defended his killer cops by "explaining" that blacks just die more often than "normal people" from the choke hold. For anyone trying to get a conviction of the cops (which the prosecution wasn't), this was "the jury from hell," as one commentator put it. As his aunt, Angela King, said on TV: "Rodney King is out there on that ground begging for his life, and I'm sure those jurors saw that videotape 1,000 times and felt no remorse."

In contrast to Simi Valley, South Central is 95 percent non-white, equally black and Latino, "a flat plain of poverty and high unemployment" (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 1 May). A decade ago, ten of the twelve largest non-aerospace factories in the area were shut down, decimating the unionized black workforce. Between 1973 and 1986, the average yearly income of black high school graduates in Los Angeles declined by 44 percent, while Latino earnings fell 35 percent. This is the tinderbox in which the racist verdict in the "Rodney King trial" lit the match. One effect of the rioting was to bring together the warring black and Latino street gangs against the cops. Graffiti on one wall read, "Crips Bloods Mexicans together forever tonite 4/30/92."

The ghetto explosion exacerbated tensions between black residents and Korean merchants (as well as the community of Koreatown just north of South Central). When Jewish shopowners left



WV Photo

Angry longshoremen protest union-busting attack on ILWU at L.A. harbor rally, 17 February 1992. Under a class-struggle leadership, the powerful battalions of the organized labor movement will be mobilized to lead the fight for black emancipation.

after the '65 Watts riots, the Koreans moved in—and became a lightning rod for plebeian resentments. This was crystallized by the killing of black teenager Latasha Harlins last March, shot in the back of the head by a Korean store owner. Now, caught in a vise, Korean merchants responded to the looting with murderous gunfire, while thousands of Koreans then marched with desperate appeals for "peace and justice." The racist hostility against Koreans, whipped up by black nationalist demagogues and aspiring black businessmen who want to exploit "their" market, is a poisonous diversion from the real enemy of the black masses. Most West Coast Asians are among the most miserably exploited people around.

While the bourgeoisie fumed about the "criminality" of looters trucking away goods from broken store windows, by all indications this was a thoroughly integrated affair of downtrodden and impoverished people. This is indeed understandable, but won't do anything to eliminate the entrenched poverty of America's inner cities. As we wrote at the time of the 1960s ghetto explosions:

"For the last three summers ghettos across the country have been rocked by elemental, spontaneous, non-political upheavals against the prevailing property relations and against the forces of the state which protect these relations. In no case have they been genuine race riots. The risings have usually been provoked by the police, in the course of 'normal' brutalities (Watts 1965) or in an effort to crush a movement which is exceeding the bounds set for it by bourgeois society (Harlem 1964). As the struggle against the police expands, the black street-fighters turn on the merchants and shopkeepers, the visible representatives of

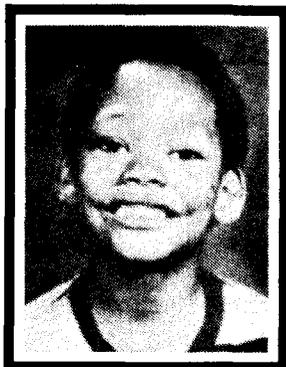
the oppressive class society, and smash whatever cannot be carried off. Yet despite the vast energies expended and the casualties suffered, these outbreaks have changed nothing. This is a reflection of the urgent need for organizations of real struggle, which can organize and direct these energies toward conscious political objectives. It is the duty of a revolutionary organization to intervene where possible to give these outbursts political direction."

—"Black and Red—
Class Struggle Road to
Negro Freedom," *Spartacist*
Supplement, May-June 1967

The point is not to seize articles of consumption but to expropriate the means of production. And that takes a leap in consciousness and organization to do away with the capitalist order.

Riots are an expression of despair, often including ugly incidents of indiscriminate attacks on individuals who happen to find themselves at the wrong place. In the '60s, ghetto uprisings were the product of the failure of the civil rights movement to make a dent in the racist conditions in the urban centers of the North. To do so meant going up directly against the Democratic Party—to which the liberal preachers like Martin Luther King Jr. were beholden—and attacking the capitalist economic underpinnings of black superexploitation and discrimination. While avowed revolutionary nationalists like the Black Panther Party were active in the ghettos at that time, today what is most striking is the utter vacuum of black leadership.

There's a sense among many blacks that they won't get anything until they burn the place down. But as many have pointed out, after the '67 riots that devastated black Detroit, it was never built



L.A. Times

Remember Patrick Mason. The five-year-old black child was blown away in his own home in 1983 by an Orange County cop who kicked in the door and shot the little boy with a .357 magnum from a distance of 3 feet.

up again. But the deeper truth is that Detroit turned into a ghost town because the auto bosses looted the industry and closed down plant after plant. It's *the capitalists* who have destroyed the wealth of this country built up by the sweat of the workers. It's not who's in the White House but the inexorable workings of an irrational system.

For Black Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!

A program for black emancipation must start with the knowledge that the whole system of racist capitalist oppression has got to be brought down. In the '60s this was taken as a given by militant radical leaders, like Malcolm X and the Panthers, but many were gunned down by the FBI's murderous COINTELPRO or thrown behind bars, while more opportunist elements joined the Democratic Party. But even the best of these militant fighters failed to understand that the only social force that could eliminate this racist system is the integrated working class.

To change the consciousness of frustrated black youth, in the first instance what is required is a powerful struggle for *jobs*. This is not a matter of going



Dykes/L.A. Times

Mass arrests of suspected looters: Free all the victims of the racist dragnet! Stop the *migra* raids!

hat in hand to lobby (beg) Congress, but of mobilizing the organized labor movement in militant struggle for a shorter workweek at no loss in pay, for union hiring halls with union-run job training

and skills upgrading programs to enroll minority youth. In sweatshop havens like L.A., organizing the unorganized can greatly reduce the rampant poverty.

The power of labor, breaking with the tame trade-union bureaucrats, must be brought to bear in the fight for black emancipation, acting as a champion of all the oppressed. For mass organized labor/black defense against racist terror—gun control kills blacks! And the working people must be mobilized politically to defend their class interests. As Spartacist League spokesman Don Alexander said at a May 2 Bay Area SL educational conference, "From black Democratic Party mayor Tom Bradley to Jesse Jackson and Bill Clinton and Willie Brown and Ron Dellums, the capitalist ruling class and their political representatives are united in defense of white racist 'law and order' and in suppressing with cops and troops the burning rage of the masses." "Workers revolution... that's when we'll get *our* justice!"

This generation has grown up without seeing mass social struggle, so many don't see where the power will come from to accomplish this. There *is* a basis for multiracial unity in this country, but it can never be on the basis of "reforming" a status quo which forcibly keeps one race on the bottom. Not empty appeals for "brotherhood" but the fight to smash capitalist exploitation and oppression can bring the working people of all races together. The key factor in that struggle is the building of a multiracial workers party on a revolutionary program. ■

International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist)

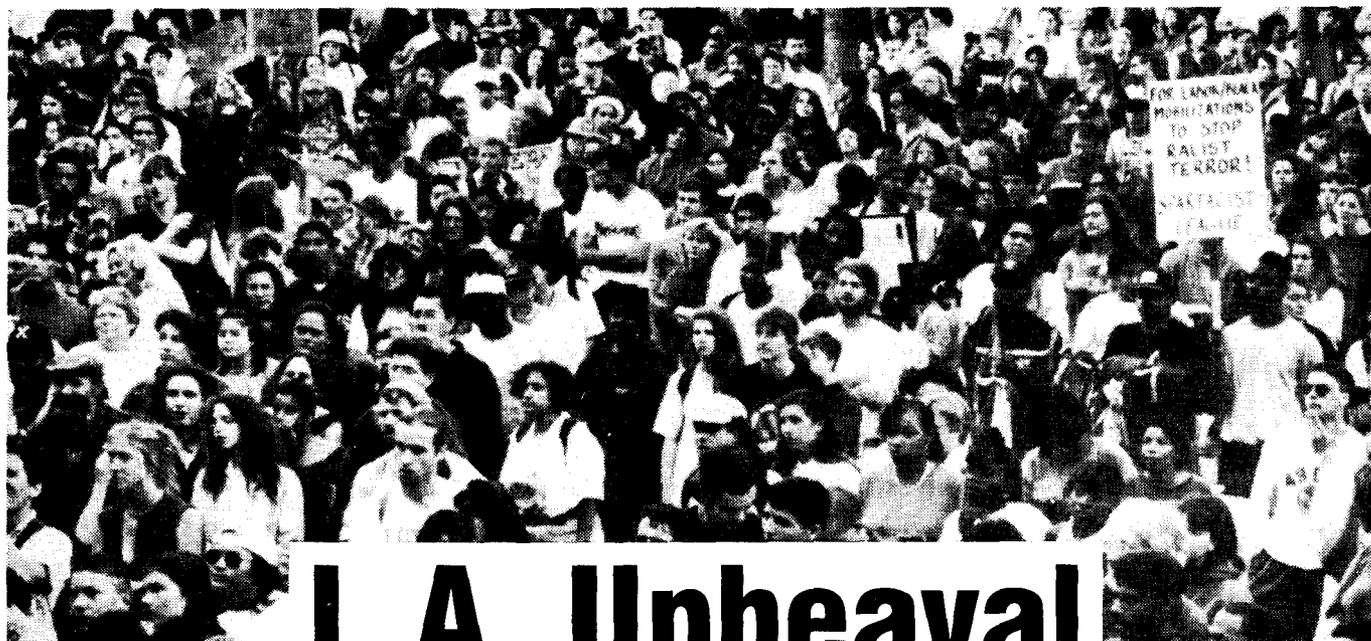
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For Black Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!



WV Photo

L.A. Upheaval Shakes America

MAY 11—The U.S. imperial president's 31-car motorcade swept into South-Central Los Angeles at dawn like Norman Schwarzkopf moving into Kuwait City. Federal agents and police were stationed on rooftops, armed with sniper rifles and automatic weapons. Soldiers flooded Slauson and Crenshaw Boulevards; Secret Service agents, cops and handlers with bomb-sniffing dogs streamed through the area. As the motorcade sped past the burned-out rubble from the Crenshaw district in South L.A. to the Salvadoran immigrant area of Pico-Union to Koreatown, the Bush brigade met with unmasked bitterness and seething hostility from Los Angeles' poor. "Go to hell, you hypocritical liar!" one man jeered. A 35-year-old father of three, laid off for nearly a year from his

aircraft construction job at McDonnell Douglas, screamed out, "We need better education, more jobs, a stake in the community."

A week earlier, on April 29, the pent-up anger of America's poor, minority and working people exploded against the armed enforcers of this racist capitalist state. Across the country, young blacks, Hispanics, Asians and whites have poured into the streets to protest the "not guilty" verdict acquitting the Los Angeles cops who savagely beat black motorist Rodney King, and to show solidarity with the L.A. upheaval. The match that lit up L.A. has burned a gaping hole in the New World Order that is widening with each passing day. From the White House to the California state house, America's rulers know they

are *all* guilty, and they're nervous as hell. Bush dispatched an army of U.S. troops and federal agents, occupying Los Angeles with a force larger than that used in the 1965 U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic. And in the wake of the riots, from L.A. to SF to NYC there is an ominous escalation of police bonapartism, as the uniformed thugs act as a law unto themselves on the streets.

In San Francisco on Friday, May 8, some 575 protesters were busted in a police trap. Cops blocked the agreed-upon march route and then charged into the anti-racist demonstrators, arresting and photographing them, then loading them onto Muni buses for transport to Pier 38, where they were warehoused into the early hours of Saturday morning.

**Free the Victims of the Racist Roundups!
Cops, Troops, Migra Out of the Ghettos and Barrios!
For Labor/Minority Action Against Racist Cop Terror!**

This came a week after Mayor Frank Jordan, SF's former chief of police, declared a state of emergency and curfew, giving police sweeping powers. Jordan rode to office on a racist backlash vote. His new police chief is former sheriff Richard Hongisto, a liberal darling who brags he is a card-carrying member of the ACLU as he busts demonstrators' heads. After thousands were arrested last week, including student protesters who sat down during rush hour on the Bay Bridge, Hongisto crowed that police departments around the country "will be sending people here to take lessons on how to do it right" (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 2 May).

In New York, meanwhile, a racist scare-mongering campaign swept the city on April 30. As the rumors got wilder and wilder, big companies in midtown sent workers home early, small shopowners slammed down their shutters from Harlem to Bedford-Stuyvesant, night-shift workers were told not to come in. With the pictures of L.A. burning fresh in their minds, white property owners were worried that blacks were rising up to demand justice, and convinced that "they're coming to get us." As protesters gathered in Times Square that afternoon, they were surrounded by hundreds of riot cops, who provocatively and repetitively broke into their line of march as demonstrators headed downtown. It was later reported that on the Police Citywide-One radio band, for a period of minutes a voice repeated: "Shoot them. This is a direct order. Shoot them" (*Newsday*, 6 May).

And in L.A., driving through downtown when a demonstration is antici-

L.A. upheaval was multiracial explosion of outrage against the injustice of the capitalist system. America's rulers are all guilty.

Ted Sequi



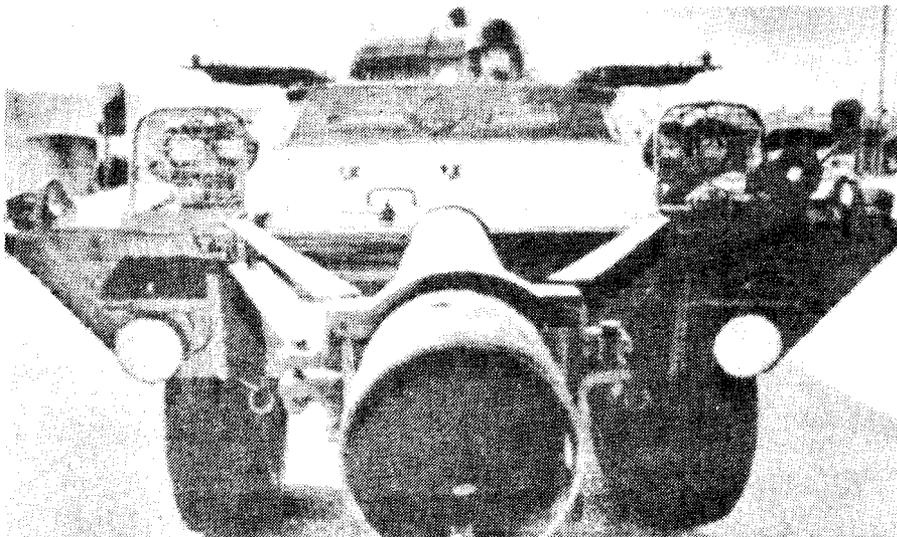
pated is like being in Guatemala City, with armored vehicles and M-16-toting cops and troops everywhere. On Saturday, May 9, a small group of leftist protesters was surrounded by an army of police. The day before, cops charged into Korean students protesting the racist verdict and demanding aid to rebuild burned-out stores.

The Los Angeles riot was the largest in the U.S. in this century, and state repression was the bloodiest. At press time, the death toll was 58, injuries 2,383, arrests 16,291. Little reported is the fact that hundreds of Border Patrol cops and Immigration and Naturalization Service agents have been brought in to round up undocumented workers for deportation. The dreaded sea-green vans of *la migra* are cruising the Mexican and Central American neighborhoods. Between a third and a half of those arrested were

Latinos, and more than 2,000 "illegals" have been rounded up, mostly in curfew sweeps and raids. In the past, L.A. has ordered its police not to cooperate with the INS, but now a reported 500 of those arrested have already been turned over for deportation back to El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico.

Meanwhile, police in Los Angeles are going on house-to-house and apartment-to-apartment searches looking for booty and those suspected of looting it. Cops kick in the doors and begin hauling out TV sets, clothes, etc. If residents don't protest, this supposedly "proves" the items were looted! As for the well over 1,000 people still being held behind bars, on May 5 Governor Pete Wilson signed into law an emergency measure extending the period during which suspects can be held without charge from 48 hours to a week. If some Third World country ordered such a draconian police-state measure they would immediately be cited by Amnesty International. But this passed the California legislature without a single dissenting vote. Moreover, it is being illegally used on people *already* arrested.

Now the Bush administration has announced the formation of a joint federal-state law enforcement task force to prosecute those involved in the riot. This unit is reviewing videotapes to identify suspects. Among those targeted are members of leftist organizations, with the L.A. county sheriff trying to pin the riots on the Maoist Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) in particular. The White House has ordered the "Justice Department" to charge any rioters they can under federal laws, no matter how obscure, in addition to state prosecution. And in order to pursue the witch-hunt against leftists, they're going to



Ho/L.A. Times

LAPD war on minorities: paramilitary SWAT teams used battering rams mounted on tanks in "search and destroy" missions in ghettos and barrios.

dust off old L.A. Red Squad records. A few years ago, the cops were directed to destroy the tens of thousands of pages of their witchhunting surveillance. But instead, they just took them home. One stash was found in a cop's garage after he moved.

The press is filled with squabbling in the ruling class about the response, or lack thereof, by the LAPD during the first hours after the verdict came down. As angry demonstrators descended on Parker Center police headquarters, Chief Daryl Gates headed out to a fund-raising dinner to oppose the timid police-reform measure Proposition F. Fires blazed as firefighters waited for escorts, while scores of cops were standing around the South Los Angeles command post. At the corner of Normandie and Florence Avenues, the first flash point of the unrest, the cops were ordered out. It was here that *for over an hour* a TV helicopter broadcast the scene of white motorists being pulled from their cars, of lumpen black toughs viciously kicking and beating white truck driver Reginald Denny as he lay in a pool of blood. Denny was finally rescued by local residents who took the profusely bleeding man to a hospital unit.

The conclusion is inescapable that Gates and the police command wanted the riot to explode, deliberately letting the fires spread and refusing to intervene, while the cameras rolled. Their aim was to build up a mood of popular hysteria among whites, in order to justify murderous repression in the name of "restoring law and order." Now Bush intends to use the image of that gruesome incident of Reginald Denny being brutalized as the Willie Horton TV campaign ad of 1992, as he runs for re-election against the L.A. riots. However, as the *Washington Post* (11 May) noted, most of those who died were blacks, killed in black neighborhoods; many blacks were killed by cops, but not one cop killed by blacks; no one died in interracial violence in Koreatown, nor were any Koreans killed by blacks. "And: The video images of white people being savaged by mobs had little to do with the way people actually died."

In the aftermath, Los Angeles' mayor Bradley attacked police chief Gates from the "law and order" right, for letting the protests get out of hand. After 17 years of the administration of black Democratic mayor Tom Bradley, ghetto poor have little more regard for him than for Gates, the personification of racist cop terror. George Bush denounced this uprising of the black and Latino poor as



WV Photos

Demonstrations from coast to coast expressed outrage over acquittal of racist cops who beat Rodney King. Top: Parker Center in downtown L.A. the night the verdict was announced. Bottom: Times Square, New York City, May 1.

"the brutality of mob, pure and simple." His spokesman Marlin Fitzwater blamed the L.A. conflagration on the "liberal programs of the '60s and '70s." The Democrats blamed it on 12 years of "neglect" by the Reagan/Bush White House. But black and Latino youth of South-Central understood in their own way they were up against the whole rotten, racist system.

Yet the impoverished residents of the ghettos and barrios lack the class consciousness and social power to move from protest to the struggle for state power. To bring down this racist system requires the leadership of a fighting, multiracial workers movement that truly champions the cause of the

oppressed, rather than acting as job-trusting bureaucrats and labor cops for the capitalists, holding down and dividing up the ranks as the sellout labor officialdom does today.

"Just as Much About Class as About Race"

There have been several waves of urban riots in the U.S. during this century, all at times of great social tensions but with different political characters. The post-World War I race riots in East St. Louis and Chicago were a result of the return of white troops who pushed black labor back out of industry. The 1964-68 ghetto upheavals came in the context of the civil rights movement, as Northern

blacks wanted to fight for equality but found no road to struggle under the liberal leadership. The recent eruption in L.A. comes after more than two decades in which the working class and minority poor have been ground down while the rulers revel in their wealth and flaunt their racism. In an elemental way, the explosion of rage over the Rodney King verdict became a backlash against the "greed decade" of the '80s. *Business Week* (18 May) quoted a black businessman: "These riots have been as much about class as about race."

Reporters on the street during the first night were at first incredulous and then finally said it over the air: the "rioters" were not just young blacks but also Hispanics and even white street kids. The *Wall Street Journal* (1 May) labeled it "a multiracial free-for-all." While TV anchors at first called the looters "thugs," it soon became apparent that this was a popular, community affair involving whole families. "A lot of people feel it's reparations; it's what already belongs to us," a self-described former gang member said of the looting. Last week the poor of South-Central moved to get theirs. "Looting? What about the S&L ripoff?" everybody asked. But the savings and loan scams garnered hundreds of *billions*. For working people and the ghetto poor to get their hands on the real wealth and power we have to expropriate the means of production and

reclaim the product of our labor.

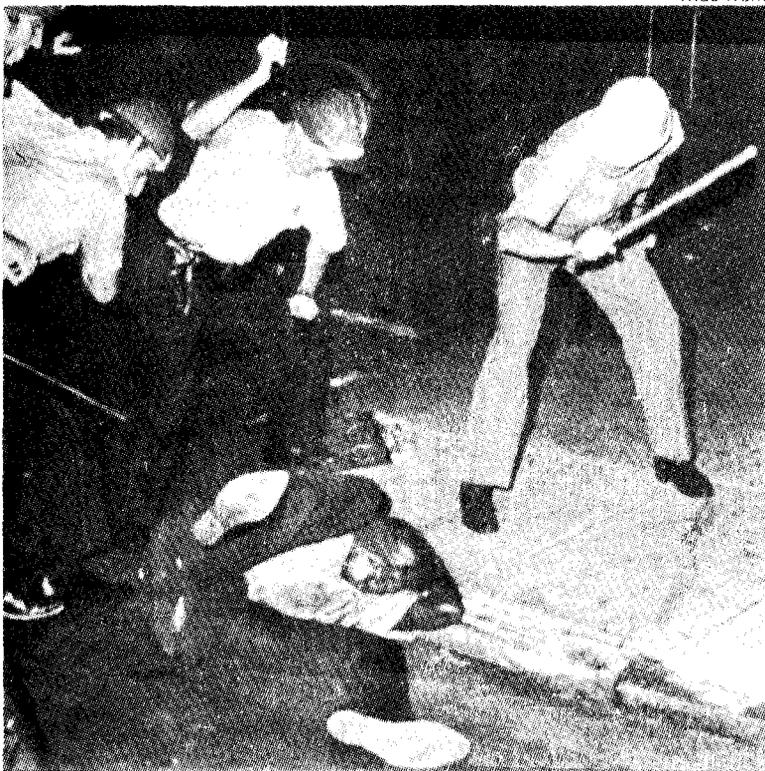
It was a new generation of black youth who erupted in L.A., disturbing the order of Bush's America. They have little reason to be moved by the celebration of Martin Luther King Day or impressed by the legal gains of the civil rights movement. Joe Hicks, local head of the SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference), the historic organization of Martin Luther King, noted: "There is an incredible lack of respect for black elected officials. They are considered symbols of the white power system. They are impotent and unable to deliver the goods for blacks. They get absolutely no respect." There was more than a little hostility on the streets toward black yuppies living in upscale enclaves like Ladera Heights. And the words "black-owned" scrawled on store windows didn't save a lot of businesses from going up in smoke.

If the symbols of South-Central are the book of food stamps, the crack house and the prison cell, Simi Valley—the site of the trial—is symbolized by the American Express gold card, the backyard swimming pool and the country club golf course. Separated from L.A. by the Santa Susana Mountains, it's the quintessential "white flight" suburb. Here racist prejudice is the flip side of economic privilege. The manager of a local McDonald's boasted: "It's one of few communities left where you can go

shopping and not get hit up by people wanting money." One resident exclaimed between hitting golf balls, "I'm happy to live away from that kind of atmosphere...gangs, homeless people who don't work and don't have money because they don't work."

This is cop heaven: out of the 8,300 members of the LAPD, fully 2,000 live in Simi Valley, report Marc Cooper and Greg Goldin in the *Los Angeles Reader* (8 May). Simply to be able to afford to live there shows that they have become a highly paid praetorian guard. The homeowners of Ventura County look to the police to seal off their world from those without jobs and without money in the hellish ghettos and barrios—and if the cops have to break some black heads to instill respect for the rights and privileges of property, so be it. This is the mindset that bought the racist cops' defense that they were protecting "society" from "the likes of Rodney King." Actually, millions saw on TV that Rodney King was a thoroughly decent person, and the real question is who is going to protect him and all of us from the cops.

Outrage over the acquittal of the killer cops who beat Rodney King extended far beyond the black community. For the first time ever, Latino gangs joined with the Crips and Bloods in going after the police in South-Central. Moreover, many white youth have been so ground down

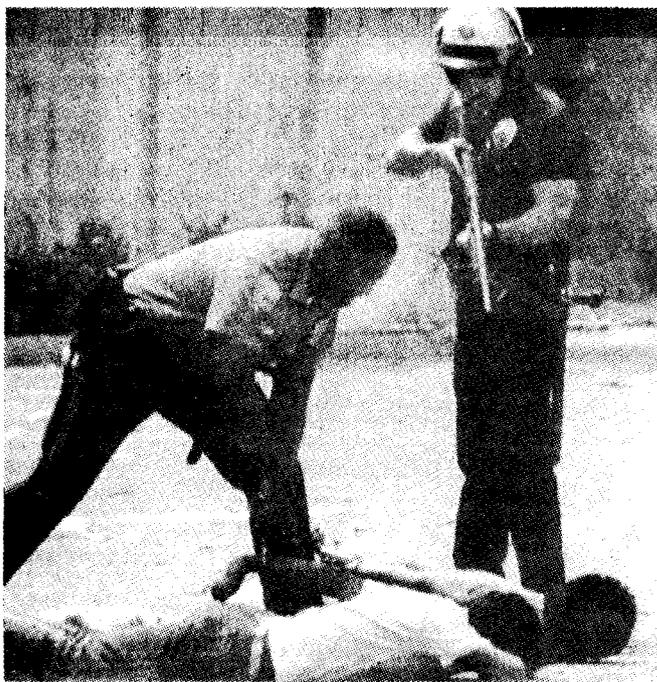


Wide World



Muhammad Speaks

Rodney King beating followed decades of racist cop brutality. Left: Philadelphia police brutalize rebellious black youth, 1964. Above: Martin Luther King preached turn-the-other-cheek pacifism, supported federal troops to suppress 1965 unrest in Watts.



AP



Kennedy/L.A. Times

LAPD's murderous suppression of uprising in South-Central L.A. (left) is lauded by imperial president George Bush. After Gulf War, Bush praised L.A. police chief Gates, vowed to bring "New World Order" to American cities.

in recent years that they joined with the black and Latino poor in seizing an opportunity to break into the consumer society. In Seattle, a young white looter shouted into TV cameras: "It's not black vs. white. It's rich vs. poor. And we're poor."

The white youth who joined blacks, Hispanics and Asians in protests across the country were not just the children of middle-class liberals, who reminisce about how they once marched in the civil rights demonstrations of the 1960s. In Seattle, San Francisco and elsewhere there is a layer of white street kids who, like blacks and Hispanics, cannot find jobs at a living wage. The issue of *Business Week* (27 April) which came out shortly before Los Angeles went up in flames put it bluntly: "Let there be no mistake: The current job outlook is bleak." The cop acquittal and L.A. conflagration became a lightning rod for the anger of a broad range of people who feel oppressed, exploited, degraded and deprived by this racist, capitalist system.

Cops Are the Armed Thugs of the Capitalist Class

Just as the videotaped beating showed the everyday reality of racist cop brutality in the U.S., the "trial" showed the routine workings of the capitalist courts. The cops, courts and D.A. offices protect their own: that is the highest law in the American system of racist "justice." It's notorious that until recently not one Salvadoran military or police official was ever jailed for violating human rights,

but when has a police officer anywhere in *this* country ever been convicted of criminal charges in beating or killing a black man? Every cop regards his badge as a license to brutalize and terrorize dark-skinned people.

Nowhere is that license used with such abandon as in Southern California. The list of victims is huge: five-year-old *Patrick Mason*, shot to death while watching TV; pregnant *Delois Young*, shot in the stomach, killing her near-term fetus; Cal. State Long Beach football star *Ron Settles*, stopped for speeding and brutally beaten like Rodney King, found dead in jail; *Eulia Love*, shot down on her front lawn over a \$22 gas bill; *Arturo Jiménez*, shot as cops drove by the Ramona Gardens project in East L.A.

The rulers of this country unleash the cops to commit such racist atrocities, and then protect them from the ensuing demands for justice, because the police are the guard dogs to "serve and protect" their capitalist masters. Of course, the owners of the Fortune 500 and their kept politicians have contempt for blacks and Latinos and see them as a threat. The basic role of the police in this and every capitalist state is to defend the interests of property against the working class, the "wage slaves," as Karl Marx put it. Police attacks on picket lines and scabherding—abetted by the cowardice and treachery of the sellout labor bureaucracy—have been key to defeating every major strike in this country over the past decade—PATCO, Greyhound, Hormel, Eastern. Recall the leaders of the air con-

trollers union being hauled to prison in chains, like black slaves in the Old South.

The coincidence of racist and anti-labor cop terror was graphically demonstrated in Los Angeles two years ago when predominantly Latino janitors sought to organize Century City, a glitzy complex of skyscrapers and high finance. A union march was attacked by the LAPD, who clubbed strikers even as they sat on the ground completely defenseless. Needless to say, no charges were brought against the rioting cops. Nonetheless, the janitors won union recognition, a demonstration of labor's potential power. On Friday, May 8, SEIU Local 399 representing the janitors held a march of 200-300 from their union hall around the Pico-Union area to take back the streets. Chanting "Gates must go!" they protested the police and media branding "illegal aliens" as criminals.

The paramilitary L.A. cops—with their armored personnel carriers, tanks with battering rams, Blue Thunder helicopters, their SWAT teams and choke holds—think they can get away with murder, *and do*, because they have never been on the receiving end of workers power. L.A. has been an "open shop," anti-union city ever since 1910 when two labor organizers, the McNamara brothers, were railroaded after the Los Angeles Times building was damaged by an explosion. But in recent years union organization has spread.

It is long overdue for the multiracial labor movement in Los Angeles to give

the LAPD a well-deserved lesson in justice. The April 30 statement by the Partisan Defense Committee [reprinted on page 6] declared: "*the powerful L.A. unions such as longshore, aerospace and city workers should organize work stoppages and mass mobilizations to solidarize with and defend the black community.*" Within hours after the racist acquittal, the labor movement should have pulled out its ranks throughout the area. This is not "pie in the sky." The longshoremen of the ILWU have brought together allied unions in the Harbor Coalition, which on more than one occasion in recent years has shut down the vital L.A.-area ports, including, in October 1990, to protest cops invading the union hall.

In the time-honored style of Stalinist and social-democratic ILWU chiefs before him, the new International president David Arian issued a statement denouncing the racist verdict and the "corporate-controlled government," only to end up calling on *George Bush's "Justice" Department* to prosecute the cops on civil rights charges! Our call for labor action against racist cop terror was well received among workers, youth and minorities (over 27,000 copies of the special *WV* supplement have been distributed to date in the Bay Area and L.A.). The bright flames in the night sky over L.A. make it clear as day that the pro-capitalist union tops must be swept away in order to bring out the power of the working class in defense of the oppressed.

Against White Liberal and Black Nationalist Despair

The L.A. upheaval and its sympathetic echoes throughout the country give the lie to the preachers of both white liberal and black nationalist despair. In recent years a school of academic liberalism, best represented by Andrew Hacker, has put forward a pessimistic view of black/white relations in this country. The conditions of most blacks are terrible and getting worse, they acknowledge, but nothing can be done about it because of the deeply ingrained racist prejudice and narrow economic self-interest of the majority of whites. This view is mirrored by nationalistic black intellectuals like Spike Lee. In fact, Hacker's latest book is titled *Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile and Unequal* (Scribner's, 1992).

Hacker shows that in 1990 the median income of white families was \$37,000, more than 70 percent greater than black families. But that median income is a statistical fiction embracing Wall Street

yuppies and unemployed Midwest industrial workers, well-heeled doctors and rural store clerks. What do the country-club types in Simi Valley have in common with the Caterpillar workers in Peoria, Illinois, who just waged a desperate five-month strike to preserve their livelihood only to be knifed in the back by their union bureaucracy? It has become practically a cliché for older white workers, like those at Caterpillar, to declare that "the American dream is dead." They've seen their own living standards cut sharply over the last two decades and expect that their children will have it even worse.

A sophisticated social scholar like Hacker is, of course, well aware of the economic and class divisions within the white population. However, like most liberals, he believes that the more affluent whites are, the less likely they are to be racist, to feel threatened by the claims of the so-called black "underclass." Thus he maintains: "The term 'liberal' tends to be associated with men and women who are at least minimally middle class." The white working class is here presumed to all share the bigoted outlook and social values of an Archie Bunker.

It is true that the economic resentments of lower-class whites can be channeled by racist demagogues against the black poor. Witness Klansman David Duke's campaign for Louisiana governor last year. But the widespread outrage over the King verdict and the L.A. upheaval show that American society can also be polarized along different lines. An overwhelming majority of the population disagreed with the acquittal. And, significantly, the black nationalists had little to say to the conspicuously *multi-racial* protests following the verdict. A New York Times/CBS poll shows that 61 percent nationwide said the U.S. was spending too little on improving the conditions of blacks, and 78 percent said what's needed is more jobs rather than more cops (*New York Times*, 11 May).

Hacker explains the decline of the Democratic Party and seemingly permanent hold of the Republicans on the White House in terms of white racism: "The increased visibility of black men and women in its [the Democratic Party's] councils has some bearing on the fact that none of its presidential candidates has won a majority of the white electorate since Lyndon Johnson's victory in 1964." Similarly, two moderately liberal publicists, Mary D. and Thomas Byrne Edsall, argue that the Republican hold on the White House stems in good part from "fear that a Democratic presi-

dent will raise taxes from the largely white lower-middle and middle classes in order to direct benefits towards the disproportionately black and Hispanic poor" (*Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics* [Norton, 1991]).

The Democrats cannot counter the Republicans' racist demagoguery because, as a partner party of the capitalist system, they share the responsibility for the declining living standards of the multi-racial working class. In Los Angeles, Atlanta, New York and virtually every big city, it is black Democratic Party administrations who are today busting heads and calling for more cops to crush the masses outraged by the racist verdict in L.A. In the last four presidential elections the Democrats' candidates—Carter, Mondale, Dukakis and now Clinton—all deliberately distanced themselves from black causes and presented themselves as more efficient managers of the American capitalist enterprise.

Right-wing ideologues charge that liberals want to improve the lot of blacks by taking things away from lower- and middle-class whites. Such an idea presupposes that all white Americans share some fundamental, common interest. But poor black and Latino youths in South-Central L.A. and older white Caterpillar workers in Peoria, Illinois are victims of the same basic economic forces—an exploitative economic system, whose destructive effects are compounded by the decay of American capitalism as its rulers become ever more violence-crazed and rapacious. It is necessary to *polarize this society on the basis of class struggle*. It's almost commonplace today to say that what's needed are jobs, decent medical care for all, quality housing and education. But the only way to get this is to smash capitalism and build a socialist economy, based on production for human need not profit.

Ghetto Wastelands and Decaying American Capitalism

Before World War II the majority of blacks lived in the rural South as a deeply impoverished American peasantry. In the early '40s, millions were drawn into the Northern cities to work in the shipyards, munitions factories and other booming war industries. Until the mid-1960s the U.S. economy was expanding enough to employ most blacks who migrated to the cities. During this period the black industrial proletariat formed the core of the Northern black communities, and gained increasing weight in the local trade unions, especially in the Midwest. As a result the relative incomes of black



WV Photos

Multiracial Los Angeles labor movement must act against racist cop terror. Left: Heavily Latino janitors organize Century City complex, 1990. Right: Longshoremen protest Southern Pacific's union-busting last February.

working-class men increased from 45 percent of those of white workers in 1939 to almost 70 percent in 1969, and the relative income of black women increased even more substantially.

However, in the late '60s, as U.S. imperialism suffered a stunning defeat in Vietnam, American capitalism ceased growing fast enough to absorb the children of black workers into industry. After the 1974-75 world downturn, the owners of capital increasingly shifted their manufacturing operations to low-wage countries abroad while increasing the rate of exploitation at home. The threat of plant closures or moving offshore was used to force through union givebacks, two-tier wage systems and speedup. Under Democrat Carter, the UAW gave back billions to Chrysler and GM, while the bosses were dismantling plants like Dodge Main. Soon after, Reagan's breaking of the PATCO air controllers strike in 1981 signaled the beginning of a massive union-busting offensive.

As a result, the average weekly income for production workers has fallen by 20 percent from 1973 to 1991. And with the manufacturing sector shrinking drastically, young unskilled workers coming into the labor market had been forced to accept poverty-level wages in fast-food restaurants, supermarkets, car washes and the like. From 1973 to 1990, the income of working parents under the age of 30 was driven down by 32 percent, and of young black families by a phenomenal 48 percent. The effects of this have been devastating, both for the individuals and for the

communities where they live.

As the fat cats and junk bond artists wallowed in their schemes for looting industry of productive investment, two million manufacturing jobs have disappeared in this country over the past decade. The number of steel workers in northern Indiana—a unionized, relatively well-paid and racially integrated workforce—has been cut in half. Over 1,200 textile and apparel plants in North Carolina—the main industry in the upper South—have been closed down. The *Oakland Tribune* (1 May) described the impact of the deindustrialization of America on the Los Angeles black community:

"Famous manufacturers, like General Motors, Firestone, Goodyear, and Bethlehem Steel, all used to provide South Central residents the chance for a living wage and upward mobility—including those without education.

"By the 1980s, most such jobs vanished, a result of declining U.S. competitiveness. In the ashes, residents were forced into a lower-wage economy of light industry, welding shops, furniture makers, garment factories, fast food restaurants and other employers."

At the same time, the so-called social "safety net" was slashed to ribbons. Bush is blaming the L.A. riots on Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society" programs of the '60s, which supposedly habituated blacks to accept joblessness and dependence on welfare. What hypocrisy! Over the past 20 years funds for Aid to Families with Dependent Children—the main welfare program—has been cut by 42 percent in real terms (adjusted for inflation).

In response to Bush's attacks, many liberals are now glorifying the LBJ "war on poverty." Even Spike Lee, interviewed on his way to the Cannes Film Festival, declared, "The Democratic administration tried to help the poor, but Reagan and Bush are not concerned" (*Libération*, 5 May). In fact, the "Great Society" was never intended to eliminate poverty. Its main aim was to co-opt a layer of black activists in order to re-establish control over the rebellious ghettos. Already in 1967, we wrote that the millions of dollars being poured into various programs "have succeeded in confusing or buying off a large number of potential youth leaders in Harlem through a combination of money and pseudo-radical nationalistic rhetoric. The so-called 'anti-poverty' projects have also served to foster a certain amount of illusions among the ghetto masses" ("Black and Red—Class Struggle Road to Negro Freedom," *Spartacist* supplement, May-June 1967).

Once the turmoil in the black communities was damped down, in the early '70s these poverty programs were massively cut. By 1980, the last year of the Democratic Carter administration, poor mothers were getting 25 percent less in federal and state funds to support their children than ten years earlier under Nixon. When Reagan came in, he deliberately manufactured a budget crisis by cutting taxes for the rich in order to take an ax to what remained of social welfare programs in this country. But while the black poor were being ravaged, a layer of black yuppies emerged,

moving out of the ghettos. Currently, the top 20 percent of black families account for almost *half* of all black income—a degree of inequality *greater* than among whites.

Despite the Bush administration's attacks on the "liberal social policies of the 1960s" and the liberal Democrats' counterattacks on "Reaganomics," the two capitalist parties have put forward different variants of the same policy—to promote a dependent black petty bourgeoisie—and both have carried out the devastating cuts in the inner cities. Today Bush's housing and "urban development" secretary Jack Kemp, Democratic front-runner Bill Clinton and black nationalist demagogue Louis Farrakhan are all promoting black-owned businesses as the "solution" to ghetto poverty. They even use the same "empowerment" rhetoric, mocking the radical 1960s "black power" movement.

Yet compared to the situation in 1965, at the time of the L.A. Watts riot, conditions in the ghettos have been getting worse, *much worse*. Black urban poverty is up, non-white unemployment is up sharply, and among non-white teenagers today only one in four has any job at all, usually at minimum wage. The *New York Times* (7 May) editorialized: "The fires of Los Angeles cast harsh new light on the way America writes off places.... Even worse, America writes off people—another generation of young black men." We put it even more starkly a few years ago, writing of the bogus "workfare" reforms in our article "Genocide U.S.A." (WV No. 463, 21 October 1988):

"This is not welfare reform, it's a plan to turn the ghettos into vast cemeteries—because *there are no jobs to get*. The aim of this legislation is to see to it that layers of the minority population *die*, because this decrepit capitalist system no longer needs them."

But we have also insisted that the desperate condition and increasing numbers of the black ghetto poor must not obscure the fundamental fact that *black workers still play a strategic role in the American economy and even more so in the organized labor movement*. Twenty-five percent of all black workers are unionized compared to 17 percent for whites and Hispanics. Older black workers have enough seniority to remain a strong presence in shrinking but still basic industries like auto and steel. And blacks of all ages are disproportionately represented in those basic jobs which keep American society functioning—bus drivers, subway motormen, longshoremen, garbage collectors, postal workers, nurses and other hospital workers.

These black proletarians can serve as

a bridge between the ghetto poor and the organized labor movement. Conditions are overripe for a massive social explosion in this country extending from the ghettos and Hispanic barrios to white skilled workers, many of them one paycheck away from bankruptcy and eviction. The eruption of integrated protests following the acquittal of the racist cops in the Rodney King case signals the potential for just such a new wave of militant social struggle.

For a Revolutionary Workers Party!

The revealed widespread hatred for racist cop brutality, the desire for brotherhood among the diverse peoples of this country, the demand to eliminate poverty must be directed toward a program of



UPI

Black Panther militants in chains after their headquarters were shot up in SWAT team attack, Los Angeles, 1969.

socialist revolution, not a revival of the Democratic Party "coalition." It will be a *defeat* for the working class and the black and Hispanic poor if the struggles are diverted into a phony New Deal, a new "rainbow coalition," a new liberal agenda. For then nothing fundamental will change.

Yet much of the left is pushing for just such a "popular front" with the Democratic Party, and even sowing illusions that George Bush can be pressured into serving the interests of black people. Thus, for example, the reformist Communist Party, which seems to have become mentally unhinged since the fall of the Kremlin bureaucracy last August, "demanded," no less, "that President Bush speak out and order the Justice Department to act to end police brutality"! Bush spoke out, all right, and ordered the National Guard and U.S. Army, Marines, Marshals, Border Patrol et al. to abet the LAPD's racist brutality.

The self-styled "socialist-feminists" of the Freedom Socialist Party likewise called on Bush's Justice Department to take action, and for the White House to

"make billions of dollars available to the cities." Other leftists echoed the liberals' pleas for civilian review boards and other face-saving reforms for the system...at the precise moment that millions of people are drawing the lesson that "the system doesn't work."

The mobilization of massive firepower to put down the L.A. upheaval and the wave of cop rampaging across the U.S. in its wake mark a considerable escalation of police bonapartism and a sinister contraction of the right of expression at the base. The American ruling class was given a fright and they're bringing in a whole army to banish it. With its economy declining, the bourgeoisie feels its power slipping away. Meanwhile there is a widespread disgruntlement with the traditional political

establishment, a discontent that is capitalized on by such types as the fascist David Duke, ultrarightist Pat Buchanan, Democratic populist maverick Jerry Brown and now Texas billionaire Ross Perot, who is running as an "outsider" against the "politicians" at whose trough he fed for many years.

The mass eruption in Los Angeles represents a dramatic breakdown of capitalist "law and order." Thus on the one hand it poses the danger of a much harsher bonapartist regime marked especially by the police-state suppression of any black unrest. At the same time, it can open the road to revolutionary social struggle uniting the working class, whose conditions have been driven down over the past two decades, and the desperate minority poor in the ghettos and barrios. Decisive in the outcome will be the construction of a multiracial communist vanguard party such as Lenin and the Bolsheviks built in tsarist Russia's "prison house of nations," which led the multinational working class in a successful insurrection against the capitalist order. ■

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Black Students Under Siege in Atlanta

Cops Off Campus!

The news of the acquittal of the cops who beat Rodney King pierced Atlanta University Center like a siren. People poured out of classrooms and dormitories and into the streets in protest. And just in case students didn't get the message from the videotape that it's open season on black people for the racist enforcers of law and order, it was beaten into their heads by the army of police and GBI (Georgia Bureau of Investigation) agents who rampaged against the students' protest of police brutality.

It looked like television clips of Birmingham in 1963 when Police Chief Bull Connor unleashed savage cop violence against young black demonstrators. Except this time it wasn't white cracker racists leading the charge against black youth—it was black Democratic Party mayor Maynard Jackson and the black chief of police, Eldrin Bell.

On Friday May 1, the Atlanta University complex was sealed off by a thick blue line of cops. Students who attempted to march downtown in protest of the verdict were denied a permit to do so by the mayor. Then an *on-campus* march and rally was surrounded by police who clubbed and gassed demonstrators and bystanders, and hauled away anyone they could grab. Students were beaten into buildings, under orders that no one was to be in the open, then police fired tear gas canisters inside crowded dormitories! Overhead, military helicopters bombed the campus with tear gas. When a number of police were themselves overcome by the fumes, the authorities equipped dozens of state troopers with stun guns. A curfew was slapped on. Police forcibly dispersed any groups larger than two (!) on campus. Women at Spelman College were locked down in their rooms like prisoners.

The Spartacus Youth Club fired off a telegram to Mayor Maynard Jackson:

"The maelstrom of police violence at Atlanta University against black students is a national outrage.... Scores are injured and many languish in jail. We demand: Drop the charges against the Atlanta protesters! Cops off campus—Now!"

Waving their civil rights credentials in one hand, the city fathers lectured



Michael Harreison

Atlanta University students take to the streets on April 30 to protest racist L.A. verdict. The next day, cops seized campus to clamp down on student unrest.

the students on "nonviolence," and with the other hand they ordered a violent cop siege of the campus. Having long ago sold their souls to the Democratic Party, these miserable "leaders" played their appointed role as the black overseers on George Herbert Walker Bush's plantation.

The *Atlanta Constitution* moaned that students no longer heed "the voices of the civil rights establishment," but are tuned into rap music with its "uncompromising eye on social, economic and political injustices." Maynard Jackson lamented that this generation of youth are not steeped in "King's philosophy of nonviolence." It could not be clearer that what this politically bankrupt layer of elected officials mean by "nonviolence" is *submission*.

Thirty years ago, establishment politicians and the media demonized Malcolm X for speaking out for black self-defense in counterposition to Martin Luther King's turn-the-other-cheek pacifism. Against charges of "inciting violence," Malcolm wrote in his *Autobiography*:

"It takes no one to stir up the sociological dynamite that stems from the unemployment, bad housing, and inferior education already in the ghettos. This explosively criminal condition has existed for so long, it needs no fuse; it fuses itself; it spontaneously combusts from within itself....

"I believe it's a crime for anyone who is being brutalized to continue to accept that brutality without doing something to defend himself. If that's how 'Christian'

philosophy is interpreted, if that's what Gandhian philosophy teaches, well then, I will call them criminal philosophies."

While many Atlanta students have rejected the "criminal philosophies" shoved down their throats by the city fathers, there are still plenty of illusions in petty-bourgeois black nationalism, the utopian belief that establishing a separate black economic community can take the racism out of capitalism. In the aftermath of the cop siege, a group called "Students for African American Empowerment" designed an insignia for "black-owned businesses" so you could know at a glance which stores to patronize, boycott or trash.

Justified anger against police violence and the whole racist system is being misdirected by the would-be "talented tenth" into schemes for "black capitalism" and base bigotry, especially against Asian merchants. Atlanta is already the citadel of "black empowerment" in racist America. What that means under capitalism is that a small layer of self-satisfied black businessmen and political hustlers lord it over the masses of black people who suffer under desperate economic conditions.

Real power will come when we link up with the power of the organized, integrated working class in an uncompromising fight against the capitalist system that keeps black people forcibly segregated at the bottom of the economy and subjected to all forms of racial oppression. *Black liberation through socialist revolution!* ■

Black Liberation and the Fight for a Workers Party

The Bankruptcy of American Capitalism

We print below an edited talk by Frank Hunter of the Spartacist League Central Committee, given in New York City at an East Coast SL educational conference on April 18.

It's appropriate, since we seem to be next to a room called the Sulzberger Parlor, that today's *New York Times* is headlined: "Young Black Men in Capital: Study Finds 42% in Courts." It's an article which says that the American social safety net has been replaced by a dragnet. The first part of that is a lie; there never was one. The second part is all too real. Eighty-five percent of black men in the District of Columbia are arrested sooner or later, mostly sooner. Forty-two percent of the black men between 18 and 35 are under the "supervision," as the euphemism is, of the judicial system in this country. Fifteen percent are in prison, 21 percent are on parole or probation; 6 percent are on bond or are wanted.

After World War II, the head of General Electric, Charles E. Wilson, who was one of the more adept practitioners of labor discipline in this country, spoke for the capitalist class when he said the problems of the United States can be summed up as two: Russia abroad, labor at home. The only reason Wilson didn't add blacks to his formula was that Jim Crow was still in place; a few years later, he certainly would have. A more astute spokesman today would add the upsurge of Latino labor, particularly on the West Coast and the Southwest, to the worry points of the bourgeoisie.

So today, even as the ideologues of the rulers of this country arrogantly proclaim the end of history, the death of communism, and their dreams of the end of class struggle, they have not let up one iota in their attacks on the working class and the poor and the blacks and the Latinos in this country. Soviet workers facing the wonders of the "free mar-



NYC transit workers demonstrate against layoffs. To unchain labor's power, the pro-capitalist union tops must be swept aside.

ket" should ask a Caterpillar worker, or perhaps a motorman out here on the No. 1 line, about the wonders of the "free market."

Or they could ask a Bolivian tin miner, who's gone because of Jeffrey Sachs. Or a Polish steel worker. Or anybody in the East German proletariat, which has seen a 75 percent drop in industrial production, the annihilation of that economy. But Russian workers don't really have to ask, because unfortunately today they're getting firsthand the experience of the homelessness, the unemployment that you see every day on the streets of New York and Detroit.

Just a year ago, MI tanks and Patriot launchers were rumbling up those streets, coming up Broadway through the

canyons of Wall Street. And the "Democratic Socialist" mayor Dinkins was rolling out the red carpet to celebrate Desert Slaughter and the triumph of the New World Order in the Persian Gulf. A lot of people turned out, but nowhere near the number that have been laid off in this recession in the state of New York alone—over half a million people.

As the U.S. economy spirals into Chapter 11 and Walt Disney has replaced U.S. Steel in the Dow Jones industrials, the only growth industries in this country are the think tanks that produce this kind of statistics, the misery index in America, and the repressive apparatus. There's a boom in jail construction all over this country, for this place imprisons more

WV Photo

—14 August 1981



AP



WV Photo

Opening shot of ruling class' union-busting offensive: Air traffic controllers union leaders led away in chains. PATCO marchers in 1981 "Solidarity Day" rally. 15,000 union members fired outright were betrayed by AFL-CIO labor tops. Real labor solidarity would have shut down the airports and won!



of its people than any society on earth. From New York and Detroit and Los Angeles to Warsaw and Moscow it is desperately necessary to fight.

The International Communist League stands before the working class and tells the truth. Only workers political revolution to sweep away the counterrevolutionary regimes now in power can save the Soviet workers state. The alternative is being played out in Yugoslavia and Armenia and Azerbaijan and elsewhere today: vicious nationalist fratricide, both a product of and fueling the disintegration of those societies. All the old rot, the anti-Semitism, of tsarist society is rising to the top.

This ruling class fills the press with the "death of Communism." They lie. It's Stalinism which is shattered. Communism lives, it lives in the Russian proletariat, it lives in the South African miners, in the militant Korean working class, in the Central American workers and peasants. It lives in the working class of this country. The question is leadership.

In the U.S. that means above all the fight to forge a workers party that will lead the workers and oppressed in struggle. There will be no social revolution, no fundamental change in this country, without united struggle of black and white workers led by a multiracial vanguard party. That is the truth. And likewise it will only be a workers revolution led by such a party as the Bolsheviks created in Russia that will open the road

to black freedom. There is no other road. That is the road of revolutionary integrationism, the emancipation of blacks in the framework of an egalitarian socialist society.

Persian Gulf War: "New World Order" Massacre

With the groveling appeasement of imperialism by the Gorbachev regime, the U.S. rulers got a chance to try out their high-tech murder machine, on Iraq. As the bombs and the cruise missiles rained down on Baghdad last January, Bush declared his "New World Order." Against a country the size of Kentucky was pitted the most deadly collection of weaponry ever assembled. It wasn't a war, it was a cold-blooded massacre.

This war was a test for revolutionaries in this country. And we in the Spartacist League and the ICL sought to mobilize our class against their war. From the beginning we demanded, "Break the Blockade of Iraq! Defeat U.S. Imperialism! Defend Iraq!" And, opposed to the "AFL-CIA" labor traitors who backed their masters to the hilt, we called for labor strikes against the war.

That's what we fought for. The rad-lib types, the ones that call themselves socialists, fell in line behind the fig leaf of UN sanctions. Their demand was "no blood for oil," by which they meant American blood. So as soon as Bush got his cheap 100-hour war, there was no protest. Bush got his "kill," his cheap

victory. It was a deadly demonstration to the world that U.S. imperialism is back in the saddle.

Labor's Gotta Play Hardball to Win!

But the cheers aren't so loud now in New York or elsewhere, now that the yellow ribbons have been replaced by pink slips. What they call the Reagan years in reality goes back to the 1974-75 recession. It was in the early '70s that the "American Century," launched after World War II, ended its short reign. And we had better not forget that it was ended by the costly and courageous struggle of the Vietnamese workers and peasants, to whom we owe a huge debt and to whom, when we take power, we will repay that debt.

It goes up through the time of "ethnic purity" Carter, who used the Taft-Hartley slave labor law against the miners, who launched the anti-Communist "human rights" crusade against the Soviet Union and planned the busting of PATCO. In this country, since that period there's been a 20 percent drop in the real income of workers. And at the other end of the "Reagan Revolution," between 1977 and 1989 the top 1 percent of families in this country increased their income by 77 percent. Every worker feels that he's scrambling. He knows that his children will have nothing, even compared to what he had.

In Peoria, Illinois an older white workforce, over half of them nearing retire-

ment at the age of 62, stayed out for almost six months against Caterpillar, the largest construction equipment company in the world, only to be ordered to crawl back by their union leadership. The response was outrage. A woman striker, one of the few women (and there are very few black workers), said: "I've been out there five months busting my buns on the street. I think it absolutely sucks." These are proud unionists. Most of them have been there for 25 years or more. They're crawling back to a vindictive company which has made it clear it's going to get rid of as much as a sixth of them.

It's one thing to be defeated in battle. Comrades, very few strikes win in this

This is particularly insane in the auto industry. Because north of the border, and especially south of the border, there's a tremendous reservoir of allies in the class struggle in the Mexican proletariat. From Ontario to Mexico City there's an integrated auto industry in North America that offers the possibility for joint class struggle like never before.

PATCO, Phelps Dodge, Greyhound, Hormel, Pittston, the mass firings, the scabs, the pickets shot down—this is the norm in the struggles of American labor, which are at an all-time low. And now Caterpillar. Like PATCO and the bombing of MOVE, this is intended as a message to this country, to cow

heaval in the unions to turn them into instruments of class struggle against the bosses.

American Capitalism = Racist Oppression

An older white Caterpillar striker said: "I'm afraid that if things continue the way they are right now, then the United States is going to be in one heck of a position. Because there's going to be riots in the streets. 'Cause the American dream's gone. The American dream's gone." But the dream was always a lie for blacks, for Latinos, for the poor, for many, many workers in this country.

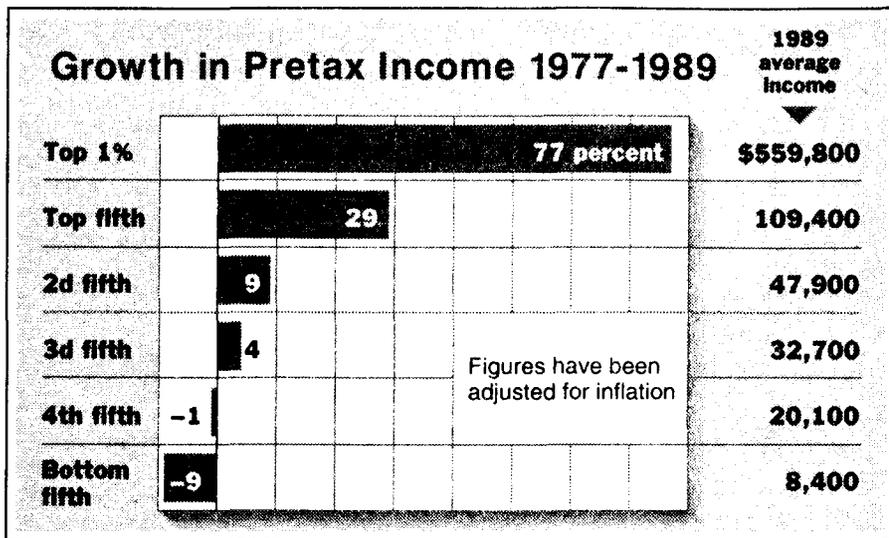
Andrew Hacker has assembled a very useful book called *Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal*. What he means by two nations, it's an old quote from Disraeli about Victorian England, rich and poor. In central Harlem, the infant death rate is the same as Malaysia. In East Harlem it's worse: 42 per thousand. Most Third World countries would be aghast. And incidentally, it far exceeds Cuba.

In disease, the increase of death rates just for being black is astounding. For tuberculosis, it's seven times the rate of whites. For AIDS, three and a half times. In the South Bronx—and this is an astounding statistic for the people that know the field—531 infants out of every 1,000 require neonatal hospitalization. More than half. That means retardation, that means brain damage, that means no hope.

From 1970 to 1990, black income as a percentage of white income *fell*. Black unemployment, which is almost always double that of whites, is *increasing* relative to white. Increasingly, it's no longer last hired and first fired, but never hired at all. There's a deadly threat implicit in this. If blacks are no longer part of capitalism's reserve army of the unemployed, they become an expendable population.

So to keep order in their "New Order," they have more cops, more prisons, more executions. In this country blacks now constitute almost half of everybody in jail. A lot of people don't make it to jail. Between 1976 and 1987—the latest figures which were available—1,800 black men, women and children were shot by cops and killed. That is almost as many people as are on death row of all races: 2,500.

In New York City, in all of history, exactly one cop has gone to jail for murdering anybody. He was a drunk, I think a sergeant, who ran down an elderly Jewish psychiatrist on Madison



New York Times Graph

The Carter/Reagan years: the rich got richer, working people and the poor got the shaft.

world, and when they do they can shape things for a generation. But it's another thing to be sent back when you'd hung tough, and there was no scabbing. The whole country was watching: will the threat of scabbing play in Peoria against a major industrial union? The UAW bureaucracy answered with a resounding "yes."

What paved this way for betrayal was the most grotesque pro-capitalist poison emanating from Solidarity House in Detroit—the lie that there's a "partnership" between labor and capital in this country against workers with other color skins abroad. They never mention British investment in America, which is twice that of the Japanese. And it's always Mexican workers, Japanese workers who are portrayed as the enemy. The UAW bureaucracy is fundamentally no different in this regard than the racist pig Senator Hollings, who said that it was good ole American know-how that did Hiroshima and they'll do it again.

the poor and working people, to embolden the Klan and the Nazis. Even the *New York Times* discovered, in its article after the Caterpillar strike, that hiring scabs "tells the workers that management sees them as mere commodities, like the steel and rubber it buys to make their goods." They gave no credit to Karl Marx.

This has been in a fundamental way true about the labor bureaucracy for a long time. Trotsky said in the late '30s, the trade unions of our time can either serve as secondary instruments of imperialist capitalism for the subordination and disciplining of workers and for obstructing the revolution, or, on the contrary, the trade unions can become instruments of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat. There is no middle road. The CAT strikers, all workers, must draw the lessons—that the traitors who did this will not be pressured or reformed, they must be ousted. And that requires a fundamental up-



Nieto/Newsday

Growth industry in racist America: Jail population has doubled over the last decade. U.S. surpasses all countries, including South Africa, in rate of imprisonment.

Avenue after the St. Patrick's Day parade a few years ago. He was sentenced to manslaughter.

Forty percent of the people on death row are black. And there's a flood of executions coming in this country. We're in America, where capital punishment means if you don't have the capital, you get the punishment. One of those on death row is Mumia Abu-Jamal. And I would strongly encourage comrades and friends to become involved in his defense.

The Democratic front-runner, Governor Clinton, returned to Arkansas to personally supervise the execution of brain-damaged Ricky Ray Rector. It took 50 minutes to find a vein and kill him. In Arkansas there's 45 more people on death row. Clinton set execution dates for 25 of them. He's shown that he would be a hands-on chairman of the executive committee of the ruling class.

Black Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!

Without an integrated workers party as a force for black liberation, all the shit in this society rises to the top. And it is the defeats of black struggle and the dead-end and deadly reliance on the Democratic Party that has left black workers and students prey to crap like the anti-Semitic demagoguery of a Jeffries or a Farrakhan, or the vicious anti-Korean racism of FBI fink Al Sharpton, who picks up on a long tradition of anti-Asian bigotry in this country. But make no mistake, this is a deeply racist ruling class. And they have the means of state power. To join in this endemic bigotry, for black people, is suicide.

In his book on American education, titled *Savage Inequalities*, the liberal writer Jonathan Kozol tells of talking to Charles Mingo, a 49-year-old principal in a school on the South Side of Chicago:

"On the wall of his office is a photograph of Martin Luther King surrounded by police within a crowd of angry-looking people. He tells me that the photograph was taken in North Lawndale. It was an open housing march. My daddy was his bodyguard. It was a march to Cicero, he got turned back. One of his few defeats....

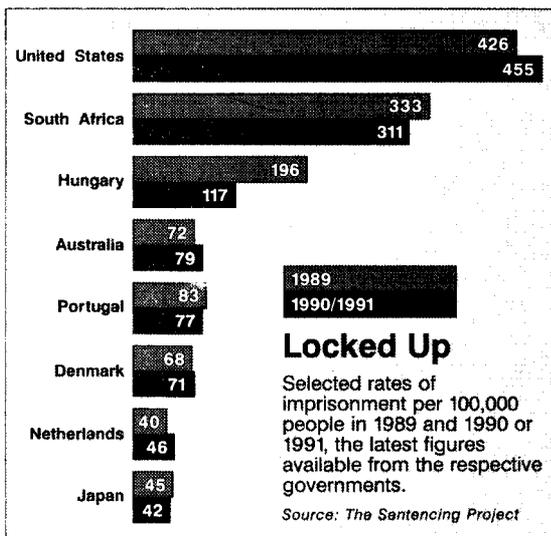
"What he managed in the South he could not pull off in Chicago. He couldn't march to Cicero. Police would not permit it. They were sure he would be killed. In certain ways that picture says it all. This is where the struggle stopped. You see the consequence around you in this school."

There's a lot of truth in that, because when the liberal pacifist-led civil rights movement collided head-on with the

economic and social reality of racist American capitalism and its ruling party in Chicago and the other Northern cities, the Democratic Party, it died.

But now, once again, the "popular front" is gearing up to "fight the right"—Duke and Buchanan and Bush—in an effort to keep black and working people tied to the Democrats. Many black workers are voting with their feet this year. In primaries, the black vote is off 50 percent. And the black front men for the Democrats are worried.

Jesse Jackson's former campaign manager Ron Daniels is the toast of the reformist left, and he looks to the Socialist Party and the Communist Party of the '30s, saying they "forced the Democratic Party to the left." Daniels is selling a lie. The Communist Party delivered militant workers and blacks into the arms of FDR and the Dixiecrats,



New York Times Graph

Join the Labor Black Leagues!

The Labor Black Leagues stand for mobilizing minorities and working people in militant integrated struggle against the brutal system of racist capitalist oppression. The LBLs are fraternally allied to the Spartacist League, and are part of the revolutionary movement of the workers and oppressed against the bosses and for socialism.

For more information write

ATLANTA

Labor Black League for
Social Defense
Box 16921, Atlanta, GA 30321

OAKLAND

Labor Black League for
Social Defense
Box 751, Oakland, CA 94604

CHICAGO

Labor Black Struggle League
Box 6938, Chicago, IL 60680

NEW YORK

Labor Black League for
Social Defense
Box 3238, Church St. Station
New York, NY 10008

Industrial Murder, U.S.A.



Hamlet, North Carolina, September 3, 1991: Twenty-five workers, mostly women, died after being trapped inside a horrible inferno at Imperial Food poultry plant when the bosses locked the fire exits. The state of North Carolina, which never once inspected the plant in 11 years, fined Imperial \$808,150—a little over \$32,000 for the life of each worker. Even that will likely never be paid. Every day in this country 300 workers die from injury or disease from the job. But in over 20 years OSHA has sent only *one* boss to jail for maiming workers.

and we are paying for it today. There is a straight line from there to the suppression of black and working-class struggle to serve the war effort, the no-strike pledge, the obscene applause for the atomic bomb.

The Democratic Party was and is the party of racism, union-busting and war. The “fight the right” rhetoric of the popular front is the method by which the bourgeoisie’s political agents in the working class have saved decaying capitalism time and again, with bloody consequences for the proletariat, from Spain to Chile to the American South.

Last September in Hamlet, North Carolina, 25 black and white workers, mostly women, were hideously burned to death in a grease fire inferno. The doors were locked to that plant, because the bosses said the workers were stealing a piece of chicken. The workers had no union, they had no safety committee, they had no right to shut down the job, even though they knew it was dangerous, because the Democratic Party-loyal labor bureaucracy has never undertaken and will never undertake the kind of battle it will take to organize the South against the Democrats, against the Klan, against the cracker sheriffs.

After World War II the CIO did launch an abortive campaign to organize the South, called, typically in a reactionary fashion, “Operation Dixie.” It was sabotaged from the start by the deepgoing anti-Communism of these labor lieutenants of capital. From Winston-Salem and Peoria to France in Cold War I, and from Solidarność to the Russian miners in Cold War II, the “AFL-CIA” bureaucracy has functioned as the advance guard of capitalist reaction. They must be ousted for the labor movement to fight.

Jim Cannon, who was the finest communist politician this country ever produced, a Wobbly (IWW) who went on to become a leader of the early CP and a founder of American Trotskyism, could have been talking so precisely of the present gang of union tops, when he wrote in 1928:

“The fight for a class movement of the American workers is in the first place a fight against the capitalist ideology which dominates them. The labor bureaucrats of the AFL and the unaffiliated unions of the same type are the direct bearers of this ideology in the working class and must be fought as such. The labor bureaucracy is a part of the capitalist rationalization and war machine—its ‘labor’ wing.”

Cannon also recognized, however, that the bureaucracy’s deeply reactionary

character made it brittle and vulnerable, and he forecast and eagerly looked forward to and took a leading role in the coming explosion of class struggle, for the mass of workers in auto and steel and Teamsters. And it was a Trotskyist leadership in the Minneapolis general strike which paved the way in many ways for the CIO upsurge. These labor battles were led and formed by reds. They brought millions of black workers into social struggle in this country.

Cannon points out that “Everything new on the Negro question came from Moscow—after the Russian Revolution began to thunder its demand throughout the world for freedom and equality for all national minorities, all subject peoples and all races.” It was the Bolsheviks who brought to American Communists the recognition that the black question is a special problem of American society.

Hacker sees this. As liberals go, he’s about as good as you get. But he can’t see a way out. He concludes his book: “A huge racial chasm remains, and there are few signs that the coming century will see it close.” Interviewed later, Hacker was asked if he had any hope for race relations in America and he said, “No.” “What we’re talking about is a condition, not a problem—and while you can solve problems, you can’t solve a condition.” He can’t envision solving this condition because he only conceives of *this racist capitalist society*, where black is pitted against white, against Hispanic, against Asian, for shares of a shrinking pie. Hacker reduces everything to a question of good will. But it wasn’t good will that smashed slavery—it took a civil war!

We communists look to the Russian Revolution because at every critical turning point in the history of the international workers movement since November 7, 1917, the Russian question will tell you where to go forward. A quote from Cannon: “The Russian Bolsheviks on November 7, 1917, once and for all took the question of the workers’ revolution out of the realm of abstraction and gave it flesh and blood reality.” It was in this prison house of nations that the Bolsheviks built a revolutionary party based on the social power of the working class, a party which brought to power that enormously diverse class. As Cannon said, “The October Revolution put socialism on the order of the day throughout the world.... It showed in life what kind of party the workers must have.” That’s the party we are building. Join us. ■

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Education U.S.A.— Separate and Unequal



Alcock/Chicago Sun-Times

Carl Schurz High School, Chicago
Annual Expenditure Per Student: \$5,276
Number of Students: 3,100; Teachers: 184



Kachaturian/Time

Rye High School, Rye, N.Y.
Annual Expenditure Per Student: \$12,570
Number of Students: 536; Teachers: 73

In his book *Savage Inequalities—Children in America's Schools*, Jonathan Kozol asks a 14-year-old black student what she has learned about the civil rights movement in her school. She replies: "Every year in February we are told to read the same old speech of Martin Luther King. We read it every year. 'I have a dream'.... We have a school in East St. Louis named for Dr. King. The school is full of sewer water and the doors are locked with chains. Every student in the school is black. It's like a terrible joke on history."

Today the American ruling class is turning back the clock on public education by a century. Almost four decades since the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision struck down the doctrine of Jim Crow segregated education, schools in the North are *more* segregated than in the Deep South. Kozol writes, "In day-to-day fact, the 1954 *Brown* decision is now dead. Indeed, this nation has yet to live up to the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* deci-

sion. Our schools are still separate, but they're certainly not equal." In this racist capitalist society *separate can never be equal*.

What grabs headlines are the eruptions of raw racist violence—cross-burnings on college lawns, black schoolchildren terrorized and painted with white shoe polish by a white gang on city streets. But the marauders take their cue from the government whose official policies are a rapid-fire rollback of black rights and an intensified resegregation of America. "Neighborhood schools" may not sound as bad as the "white academies" that mushroomed in the South following the *Brown* decision, but the effect is the same. A just-released report to the National School Boards Association by Harvard professor Gary Orfield on the "Status of School Desegregation: The Next Generation" reports:

"Segregation for Hispanics has increased dramatically during a period when the nation's Hispanic enrollment has soared.... Segregation has also grown slowly and steadily for blacks in those

central cities that were desegregated under policies that left their surrounding suburbs unchanged."

Kozol's book has received a lot of attention as part of the hubbub over the ignorance and functional illiteracy of growing numbers of American youth. A front-page *Newsday* headline blared, "Your Kids: Dumber, Fatter, More Murders, More Suicides." "Education reform" is a buzzword in the media, reflecting the concerns of at least a section of the ruling class that American schools seem unable to train the technicians and managers the U.S. needs to remain competitive with its imperialist rivals. In international competitions of industrialized countries, American students routinely rank second to last. Nearly one-quarter of all U.S. students don't graduate from high school. More than 90 percent of those that do graduate can't solve math problems much beyond basic addition, or read and understand newspaper editorials.

But Kozol has thrown a spotlight on

what the media and the government would like to ignore: the *decline* of America's public schools simultaneous with the *increase* of racial segregation and class inequality. He offers no solution except that the government should throw more money into the squalid segregated dumps that pass for schools in American cities. Well, you can solve a lot of problems by throwing money at them. To get that money requires *breaking the power of the bourgeoisie* and to spend it effectively to create genuinely equal, integrated educational opportunity will take a *social revolution*.

From liberals like Jesse Jackson, we hear that the way to solve the problems of the poor and ameliorate the degradation of the ghetto is through education.



Higgins/NY Times

Ghetto schools are prisons for minority youth: students at Brooklyn's Thomas Jefferson High punch in with ID cards, November 1991.

From black nationalists and "politically correct" academics we hear that the way to end discrimination against oppressed minorities is through a curriculum of "multiculturalism" to build tolerance and self-esteem. From Harvard economist Robert Reich we hear that class structure and economic productivity are irrelevant, that what this country needs is an education system to train a generation of creative "symbolic analysts." This is all *crap*. You cannot eradicate race and class oppression through education, nor can you "reform" what passes for education in the ghetto without a revolutionary transformation of society.

In Mahwah, New Jersey, a third-grade teacher wondered why a bright young black child in her class only attended school once every four days. After school one day she visited his home and discovered the family had four sons and one pair of shoes to share among them. Her pupil attended school when it was his turn to get the shoes. Throughout the CUNY university in New York City there are dozens of homeless students. They

stay in the libraries until the lights go out, then look for a couch or hallway to sleep in, and wash up in the bathrooms before class in the morning. The problem for these youth is not in the classroom—it is race and class oppression which deprives them of jobs, housing, health care and every other social service.

Even such a just and basic demand as quality, integrated education is rendered meaningless if the capitalist class has no reason for giving most children such an education. As we wrote in "U.S. Economy Dead in the Water" (WV No. 541, 27 December 1991): "If every black person in their mid-20s had earned a master's in business administration from an Ivy League university, this degree would have as much value in the job

market as a diploma from Martin Luther King Jr. High School in South Chicago or Atlanta." Today the bosses who destroyed and looted the industrial plant of this country sneer at the destitution and broken lives of those whose labor created all the wealth that the capitalist rulers have stolen. In contrast, during World War II when there was a labor shortage and the war industries were booming, California shipyard owners recruited untrained and often semi-literate black youth from the rural South who learned to read and write, and became skilled apprentices in little more than three months.

The ruling class spends on educating those they exploit and oppress only what they can realize back in profit. Having taken the wrecking ball to the auto factories, gutted the steel mills and closed many of the mines, there are few jobs left for which to train the children of the working class and poor. And if educating the sons and daughters of white workers has increasingly become an expendable overhead for decaying American capital-

ism, the children of black workers and poor are deemed an *expendable population*. Once a reserve army of labor to be maintained, albeit minimally, today for the racist rulers the black ghetto poor are not worth "wasting" money on even to keep alive, much less educate.

A World Apart

Throughout his book, Kozol continually contrasts the rich potential of this country, and the suburban country club public schools, with the squalor that he finds in America's segregated and savagely unequal inner-city schools. His empirical evidence is powerful, especially when he lets the youth speak for themselves about how they view this society that has tossed them on the scrap heap. Take Camden, New Jersey—a factory town abandoned by the capitalists where 60 percent of the population is on welfare and the schools are 98 percent Hispanic and black—where one eleventh-grader explains: "So long as there are no white children in our school, we're going to be cheated. That's America. That's how it is." Among other snapshots from Kozol's *Savage Inequalities*:

- **East St. Louis:** In this 98 percent black city there is no garbage collection, and backyard dumps breed rats "the size of puppies." City Hall was lost to a creditor, and it was recently announced that all but 10 percent of the remaining 230 city workers would be laid off. Doctors warn of the danger of cholera and typhoid in a city where illness and disease among children is already rampant, and where there is no place to have a baby since the obstetrics wing of the only hospital was closed down. At Martin Luther King High School, there are 26 textbooks for 110 students, many missing the first hundred pages. Science labs are 30 to 50 years out of date, supplies of chalk and paper regularly run out, paychecks for teachers come two weeks late. Repeatedly, the whole school has shut down when raw sewage backs up through the drains.

- **Chicago:** On an average morning in Chicago, 5,700 children in 190 classrooms come to school to find they have no teacher. The city's dropout rate of nearly 50 percent is regarded by some as a blessing. If over 200,000 of Chicago's total student population of 440,000 did not disappear during their secondary years, it is not clear who would teach them. Lathrop Elementary School has been without a library for 21 years and the books, abandoned and piled in the lunchroom, have sprouted mold.

- **New York City:** PS 261 in the South

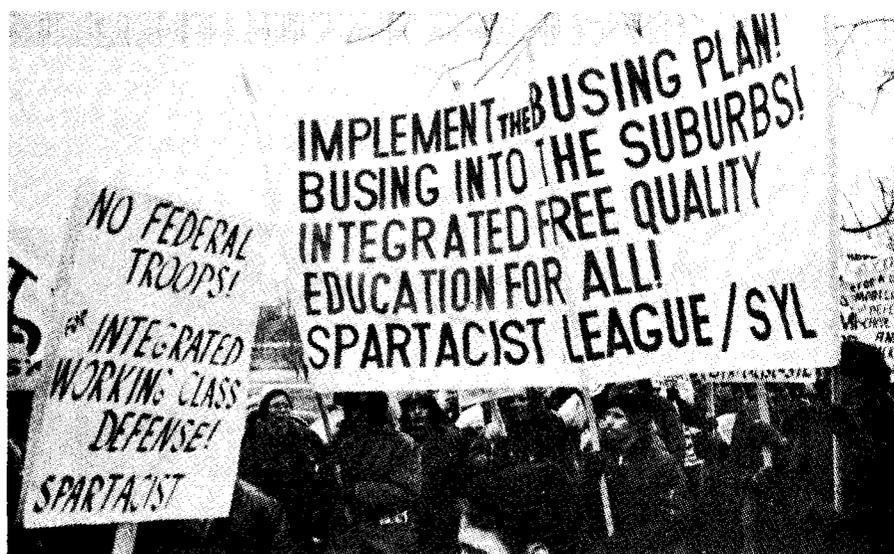
Bronx is housed in a former roller skating rink. There are no windows, no playground, and no reference books. Encyclopedias are “for the suburbs,” a teacher explains. At Morris High School, waterfalls cascade down the stairs following a heavy rain. The blackboards are so cracked that teachers don’t let the kids use them for fear they will cut themselves. At another high school in the area, five classrooms with 42 students each have no textbooks. Former Board of Education president Robert Wagner Jr. reported on a visit to a school “where there were five Haitian youngsters literally [having classes] in a urinal.” Ninety percent of the male prison inmates in New York City are dropouts from the city’s public schools.

• **New Jersey:** In Paterson, four elementary schools are housed in abandoned factories. One school has no cafeteria, the kids eat lunch in the boiler room; another has one physics section for 2,200 students. The former principal of Paterson’s East Side High, Joe Clark, became the appropriate education “hero” of the Reagan years for policing the halls with a bullhorn and a baseball bat. According to one school official, “Two thirds of the kids that Clark threw out are now in the Passaic County Jail.... This is a very popular approach in the United States today. Don’t even breathe a whisper of desegregation. Keep them in confinement so they can’t subvert the education of the suburbs.... Carry a bat and tell them they’re no good if they can’t pass the state exam. Then, when they are ruined, throw them into prison. Will it surprise you to be told that Paterson destroyed a library because it needed space to build a jail?”

Private Property, Race and Class Privilege

As with his first book in 1967, *Death at an Early Age*, Jonathan Kozol has done the public a real service by telling it like it is in *Savage Inequalities*. But as a liberal—and surely one of the last admirable and honest liberals left in America—Kozol has no viable solution to offer. He points to school funding based on property taxes as the root of inequality, but his answer is steeper income taxes for the rich to fund education for the poor. The problem is that so long as the means of production, distribution and finance are in private hands, the capitalists can and will sabotage any reforms that go against their interests.

In a capitalist society where public schools are primarily funded by local property taxes, even the term “public education” is an oxymoron. There are



WV Photo

Spartacist contingent in December 1974 pro-busing march in Boston.

two “publics”—those who’ve got property and those who don’t. And families from the red brick housing projects cannot provide a tax base for education comparable to that of families from the green lawns and white picket fences.

In 1968 in Texas, the issue of school funding through property taxes was challenged in a class action suit by poor, largely Hispanic parents. At the state level they won their case, and Texas experimented with what is derisively called a “Robin Hood” plan—taxes that take a few crumbs from the rich and give to the poor. The wealthiest and whitest of Texans stampeded the Supreme Court with their plight and even herded “concerned parents” in other posh enclaves like Beverly Hills to file *amicus* briefs in defense of class privilege. Echoing the credo of *Animal Farm* where “some are more equal than others,” the Supreme Court ruled:

“The Equal Protection Clause [of the Constitution] does not require absolute equality...we have no indication...that the system fails to provide each child with an opportunity to acquire the basic minimal skills necessary.”

Who determines the “basic minimal skills necessary” for ghetto youth is a ruling class which has no use for them except as part-time hamburger flippers in minimum-wage fast food joints.

The civil rights movement attempted to remove the formal legal inequalities imposed on black people in America. But the strategy of pressuring the government for legal reforms could not answer the *systemic* racism, the forcible segregation of blacks at the bottom of the economy, that is the bedrock of American capitalism. The civil rights movement could not even integrate the schools. The *Brown* decision ushered in

court-ordered desegregation in the South where schools had been segregated by law. But the *de facto* segregation of Northern cities, where blacks were legally “equal” yet systematically discriminated against in housing, jobs and education, was a nut that the liberal-led civil rights movement could not crack. It took 19 years after the *Brown* decision for the government to even establish guidelines for integrating the schools above the Mason-Dixon line.

Take 1954, add 19, and you’re in the streets of Boston and Louisville in 1973-74 where the racial integration of public schools in the North exploded in the busing crisis. Although totally inadequate even as a solution to school segregation, busing was at least a minimal attempt to allow the black poor a share in the benefits of American capitalist society. *And it was smashed*—by the liberal Democrats in Congress and by the Supreme Court, while racist mobs attacked black schoolchildren in the streets. During the months of mounting crisis in Boston, reformist outfits like the Communist Party and the Socialist Workers Party looked to the racist government and called for federal troops—the armed fist of the capitalist state—to protect black schoolchildren. In contrast, the Spartacist League fought for *labor/black defense* to protect the democratic rights and the lives of black people and to force the implementation of the busing program. And while the limited Boston plan bused kids from the poorest black neighborhoods to the poorest white neighborhoods within the city, we also called for *extending* busing across district lines to the suburbs where the good schools are.

Under the Nixon administration, desegregation efforts ground to a halt with

the 1974 *Milliken v. Bradley* Supreme Court decision which effectively stopped any city-suburban busing. Under Democrats and Republicans, it's been a steady retreat since. Yet, as Gary Orfield reports, "The very strong political leadership against integration policies apparently had less effect on public attitudes than did the actual experience of students and families in integrated schools." He cites a new national survey by the *Boston Globe* which showed that when asked whether they would back busing if it was the only way to integrate schools, whites said yes by a 48-41 majority, blacks agreed 76-21, and Hispanics supported busing 82-18. New cases before the Supreme Court threaten to end what public busing desegregation programs remain, and voluntary city-suburban programs like METCO in Boston can't possibly serve the mass of the population.

Bush League Education "Reform"

Cynically proclaiming himself to be "the education president," George Bush sneers that "dollars don't educate students." Arguing that the problem with public schools is they are not "competitive" enough, Bush's solution is to subordinate public education to "the magic of the marketplace" and let public funds "follow the students" into the schools of their "choice"—including private schools. In other words, rich schools will be rewarded for being rich, and schools for the minority poor will be stripped of their already inadequate funds and told to somehow "improve" without money if they want to survive. It's pure "social Darwinism"—survival of the "fittest" and devil take the hindmost. And in racist, capitalist America the hindmost are black and, increasingly, Hispanic children in the ghettos and barrios, while the mass of white working people scramble to survive and their children also get a substandard education.

Within the public school system, "magnet schools" are held up as an example of the benefits of "choice." Originally sold as pilot projects to elevate education in the ghettos, in reality magnets were designed to stem "white flight" from the cities and are increasingly the preserve of the children of yuppies. Magnet schools are highly competitive institutions whose students are selected through qualifying exams and test scores. These magnets don't attract the poor, but offer an upper layer an adequate education, while those who can't make the grade go down the tubes. In Chicago in 1989, a "fine arts" magnet

Chicago teachers strike, 1987. Black Democratic mayors like Harold Washington acted as Reagan's enforcers in vicious slashing of school budgets.



school was built especially for a new "middle income" condominium near a black housing project. Kozol reports the children from the black housing project were not even allowed to apply to the magnet school until the third grade. Instead, they were sent to "a small, prefabricated metal building surrounded on three sides by junkyards."

Another idea bandied about by the Bush administration is the establishment of a national examination to improve, through competition, the performance of American youth. As Kozol quipped, "Any farmer in Vermont could tell the President that you don't fatten your lambs by weighing them." But Bush wants to starve the lambs and this proposal is the "justification" for a government policy of killer cuts. Forget about paychecks for teachers, and books and science equipment for students... just test rich and poor "equally," and when the poor flunk, well then, that supposedly proves the ruling class shouldn't waste its money on the swelling ranks of the underclass.

"Voluntary" Segregation

While the government prepares to completely pull the plug on funding for inner-city schools and make *de facto* separate and unequal education official government policy, black politicians and cultural nationalists obscenely accommodate this attack on black rights with demands for "Afrocentric" schools exclusively for young black men. These proposals are a cynical *withdrawal* from struggle serving only to bolster the racist status quo. As we argued in "For Quality, Integrated Education for All!" (*Women and Revolution* No. 39, Summer 1991):

"Self-segregation of black males will only serve to reinforce and legitimize the social segregation that already exists.

Just as freedom fighters in South Africa reject the program for bantustan education pushed by the apartheid racists, we denounce a plan to segregate black male youth in holding pens in the name of 'African American immersion'!... Kenneth Clark, the black sociologist whose research guided the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, hit the nail on the head in denouncing schools for black males as 'prep schools for correctional institutions'."

A defeatist, separatist mood has always grown in periods of political reaction and racist rollback. At the college level, more and more black students are choosing to go back to traditionally all-black schools. And on the individual level, who can find fault with a black coed who doesn't feel safe on a mostly white campus where racist attacks have become commonplace. But the entrenched racism of this society is not susceptible to individual or psychological solutions; it requires the concrete collective action of *class struggle*. And that requires a struggle to oust the misleaders of the labor movement who've done little to defend the black population (or the unions themselves) from the attacks coming down.

It is revealing to see who today's proponents of black-only schools hark back to for inspiration. In *Savage Inequalities*, Jonathan Kozol notes that among black parents and school officials favoring segregated schools for black males, "Booker T. Washington was cited with increasing frequency, Du Bois never, and Martin Luther King only with cautious selectivity." As the voice of accommodation to the racist defeat of Radical Reconstruction, Booker T. Washington founded the Tuskegee Institute to train blacks in manual and domestic skills, while his own children went to the best schools his money could buy!

However “militant” the rhetoric, who’s behind the proposals for segregated schools are Booker T. Washingtons of the second mobilization. “Community control” of institutions in what is essentially an apartheid system only masks the *class* nature of racist capitalism. The cynical calculation of the ruling class in selecting its front men was explained to Kozol by a New York City social worker: “The presence of a white man at the head of a large urban system that is warehousing black children would be quite suggestive and provocative. An effort is made to find a suitable black person. Failing that, an Asian or Hispanic.”

The Black Panthers vs. Cultural Nationalism

What is left today of the ‘60s civil rights movement are the heirs of the liberal-pacifist King tradition along with hustlers and cultural nationalists who present themselves as though they, along with Malcolm X and the Black Panther Party, were some kind of happy family. But Malcolm spoke in militant opposition to King’s dead-end strategy of pressuring the Dixiecrat Democratic Party. Though many Panther leaders—those not murdered or jailed by the capitalist state—eventually were co-opted to Democratic Party ethnic constituency politics, the Panthers initially advanced a gut-level opposition to racist capitalism.

The proposal for “Afrocentric” education is hardly a new one. In the 1960s the Black Panthers made scathing attacks on the “cultural nationalists” who they derided as “pork chop” nationalists—i.e., people who used the slogan of “Black Power” to secure their own advancement:

“Cultural nationalism manifests itself in many ways but all of these manifestations are essentially grounded in one fact: a universal denial and ignoring of the present political, social and economic realities and a concentration on the past as a frame of reference.... Because cultural nationalism offers no challenge or offense against the prevailing order; the influx of ‘Black and Proud’ actors, movie stars, social workers, teachers, probation officers and politicians is tremendous.... The power structure, after the mandatory struggle, condones and even worships, this new found pride.”

— *The Black Panther*,
2 February 1969

The battle between the Panthers and the “cultural nationalists” of Ron Karenga’s “United Slaves” organization was drawn in blood over the black studies programs at UCLA. Karenga’s “US” had control over these programs which centered on the glorification of “African heritage.” As the Panthers increasingly won the allegiance of militant black students, Karenga saw them as a threat

to his “Afrocentric” preserve. Coincident with the launching of the FBI’s COINTELPRO campaign to destroy the Panthers, which was coordinated with the local cops, L.A. Panther leader Bunchy Carter and others were murdered by Karenga’s dubious outfit.

The *New York Times* (5 January 1991) cites Karenga as one of the major influences behind the concept of segregated “Afrocentric” schools, noting: “For all its currency, the conflict over the proposal to start a small ‘African centered’ high school mainly for black boys in New York City has a past that is as old as the Ocean Hill-Brownsville school wars of the late 1960’s and the move prompted by that upheaval toward community control of the schools.” In New York, the campaign for “community control” was funded by the Ford Foundation and backed by the city fathers to quiet the ghettos, decentralize and cut school funding, and break the teachers union.

In 1968 the United Federation of Teachers struck against the dismissal of union leaders at the Ocean Hill-Brownsville school. In the name of “community control,” black nationalists, New Leftists and liberals set the black ghetto poor against the teachers. The UFT bureaucracy, led by the social-democratic Cold Warrior Albert Shanker, used inflammatory racist code words such as “mob rule” and was indifferent to the needs of the black community. So-called socialists like the Communist Party, Progressive Labor and the Socialist Workers Party actively scabbed.

The Spartacist League uniquely swam against the stream, and without blunting

our denunciation of the racist union tops, we called for a victory to the strike. In a leaflet titled, “Beware Liberal Union Busters!” we called for a “radical alliance of teachers with the doubly oppressed black and Puerto Rican working people.” Such an alliance, we wrote, “must begin by pointing out that the central problem of black education lies not in the classroom but in the political-economic system of capitalism. The capitalist system needs the product of the ghetto schools not as creative human beings but as a pool of low-skilled and unemployed workers to keep the general wage level down. The Black Nationalists have not seen through the liberal myth that ‘becoming educated’ is the way out of the ghetto for the mass of black and Puerto Rican youth.”

The ingrained racism of the labor tops, with their reactionary politics and white job-trusting policies, was and is a barrier to bridging the gap between organized labor and the ghetto poor through united struggle against their common enemy for a decent education for *all* children. The refusal of the unions to struggle for black rights contributed not only to the increased immiseration of the inner cities but also to the suicidal narrowing and weakening of the trade unions.

Today America’s rulers throw the nationalist slogan of “community control” back in the faces of the ghetto poor. Arguing that the problem is not with the financing of public schools in the inner city, they preach that it is the fault of “community” mismanagement, poor “family values,” etc. This finds its echo among the black nationalists, whose



Aleksandr Rodchenko

“Books in all branches of knowledge” cries out 1925 Soviet literacy poster.

appeals for segregated "Afrocentric" schools reduce the question of racist oppression to one of bad "ideas," "curriculum" and "values."

Reading, Writing and Revolution

Public education is a historic gain of the working class, won through hard struggle. It is a sign of the utter decay of capitalism that conditions are being rolled back to the 19th century, when Marx and Engels called for public education as a vital democratic demand aimed at breaking the old aristocratic private school system and the hold of the church. The tenth demand of the 1848 *Communist Manifesto* called for "Free education for all children in public schools." This gain fueled the growth of dynamic American capitalism a century ago as wave after wave of immigrants arrived and went to school.

That was *then*. Now, as a 1983 report on education ("A Nation at Risk") stated, "For the first time in the history of our country, the educational skills [and economic attainment] of one generation will not surpass, will not equal, will not even approach, those of their parents." Tens of millions of people are struggling to hang on to their nominal status of "middle class" and get their kids a decent education. And millions are losing. Moreover, on every index of economic

distress and poverty—whether it's unemployment, food stamps or welfare—the majority are white. But like everything in capitalist America, the attack on education has a racist edge.

Black people have never been treated as equal even to the hideously oppressed and penniless waves of diverse immigrants to the USA. It took the Civil War to establish public education for black people in this country; to smash the slave system in which teaching black-skinned people to read or write was a crime punishable by death. Since the victory of Northern capitalism in the Civil War and the defeat of Radical Reconstruction, the black population has been compacted as a doubly oppressed *race-color caste*. While a thin layer of blacks have made it into the middle class, their hold is very tenuous—massive layoffs of public employees threaten them in particular—and for the mass of the black population social mobility is exactly zero.

In this country, the color line is the dividing line. Light-skinned Hispanics can move up—like some millionaire Cuban *gusanos* in Miami—but most dark-skinned Puerto Ricans in New York or Mexicans in Texas are entrenched in poverty. Native American Indians are relegated to lives of impoverishment and discrimination. Child labor is back with a vengeance in the textile sweatshops as a new wave of des-

perately impoverished Asian immigrants try to eke out an existence in a country whose language and culture is unknown to them. On the other end, the elderly who frugally saved for retirement now see much of their life savings go out the window with the cut in interest rates.

The situation desperately cries out for a massive class-struggle fight on behalf of *all* the children of the working class and poor. Although blacks, Koreans, Arabs, Hispanics are all oppressed, "the people united" is by no means a pre-ordained outcome as each struggles for a piece of the shrinking American pie. Today, racist bourgeois politicians appeal to Hispanics as a swing group against blacks, while black nationalist demagogues like Louis Farrakhan and Al Sharpton whip up hatred against Jewish, Korean and Arab people.

The answer lies in building a party like Lenin and Trotsky's Bolsheviks. Before the 1917 Revolution, tsarist Russia was a prison house of peoples of many ethnicities and many languages. By building a revolutionary party based on the social power of labor, with a clear political program to bring that ethnically diverse working class to power, the Bolsheviks shattered the old order of the landlords and the capitalists.

Knowledge is an essential weapon in the fight for social equality, and therefore education as a means to eliminate the distinction between mental and manual labor was a key goal of the Bolsheviks. They abolished child labor, instituted compulsory education for all children and made literacy mandatory for everyone through the age of 50, reducing the workday by two hours for anyone doing such study. Tuition was abolished, along with all academic titles. With the political counterrevolution led by Stalin, many of the Bolsheviks' education reforms were reversed as schools were again devoted to instilling servility. Education via catechism became the norm and a major pedagogic text was entitled *I Want to Be Like Stalin!*

Despite Stalinist betrayal, the tremendous achievements in literacy and education, not only in the Soviet Union, but throughout Eastern Europe, China and Cuba, show that a revolutionary transformation of society is the genuine prerequisite to achieving education for the masses. Today, we need a workers party to fight as a tribune of the people for the interests of all the oppressed. Only the destruction of the capitalist system and the creation of a workers America will strike at the heart of racism and achieve equality through *revolutionary integration* into a socialist society. ■

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Furor Over Multiculturalism

Education in Oakland: No Money, No Books

"Get sick, get well, hang around the inkwell...

Twenty years of schooling and they put you on the day shift.

Look out kids, they keep it all hid."

—Bob Dylan, *Subterranean Homesick Blues*

Dylan was an optimist: today you can get neither schooling nor a full-time job, much less day shift.

California, the former "education state," now ranks 48th out of the 50 states in the money it spends on public schools. In Oakland, 91 percent of the student population is minority, mainly black, and 74 different languages are spoken. Across the state, of five million enrolled in public school, almost one in five speak little or no English. As Republican governor Pete Wilson takes the ax to public education, what bilingual education exists stands to be totally wiped out. Particularly hard hit by the budget cutbacks are the minorities, who make up over 40 percent of the state population, and an even greater proportion of the students at public schools. The black dropout rate in the Oakland high schools is over 50 percent.

Against this dismal backdrop, the Oakland school district has been embroiled in a raging fight over "multiculturalism." Four years ago, the state Board of Education adopted history and social studies curriculum guidelines to replace texts which, for example, did not cover non-Western world history from 500 AD to 1789 at all. Last year, the Oakland school board rejected a new set of history and social studies books published by Houghton Mifflin and approved by the state government, arguing that they at best trivialized the history of blacks and other minorities and at worst were racist. Though a majority of teachers had voted to accept the books, opponents complained they

were simply "Eurocentrism" disguised as multiculturalism, and a committee was formed to write history from a real "multicultural" perspective.

But as summer ended, the rewriting committee was still fighting to forge a "consensus" on how to convey the history of each and every racial and ethnic group—and when school opened, students in Oakland had no history books

age, the more heavy-handed is the lying propaganda. The history of wars is written by the victors, not the vanquished; and the history of class struggle is written—or more accurately, obscured—by the ruling class. Certainly it is true, as some multiculturalists argue, that internalization of racist stereotypes is a bitter and crippling effect of racism. As we wrote about proposals for segre-

Pedroncelli/AP



Bay Area demonstration against 1991 school budget cutbacks protests "death of public education."

at all! With the school year almost half over, kids in the fourth, fifth and seventh grades in Oakland still do not have any history books. Teachers are bringing in their own materials, or working the copy machines overtime trying to photocopy the now-contraband new texts while being threatened with violation of copyright laws for doing so. And the debate rages on.

Pain, Anger and Racism

The public school system of today cannot teach the "real history" of any oppressed group—and the younger the

gated "Afrocentric" schools: "Black history and the struggles of oppressed peoples of all races are excluded and belittled in school textbooks. The social conscience and pride that comes from participation and leadership in struggles against racist oppression is not the education that the bourgeoisie wants you to get" ("For Quality, Integrated Education for All!" WV No. 517, 4 January 1991).

For an idea of what's involved in the dispute, take the issue of slavery in the U.S. The old California fifth-grade history textbook, *Our History* (1983), teaches the standard bourgeois lie about

the Civil War that "the country did not go to war over slavery. It went to war over the issue of keeping the states united in order to preserve the nation." The post-Civil War era of Reconstruction is portrayed as "extremist," with standard derogatory caricatures of "carpetbaggers" and "scalawags" who simply "added to the angry feelings" between North and South. The new state-approved text, *America Will Be* (1991), includes 50 pages on slavery in the South, but deals with Reconstruction by skipping it entirely, and concludes with goey idealism that "Slavery went against America's ideal of freedom. For this reason it had to end."

One Bay Area group, Communities United against Racism in Education (CURE), published a critique of the Houghton Mifflin textbooks. It notes that *America Will Be* introduces the term "racism" only in relation to treatment of European immigrants in the late 1800s. But in criticizing the text, CURE objects to use of the term "slave" rather than "African people held in captivity" or "Black people forced to work for no pay" or "African people stolen from their families and societies." The content of the state-approved texts generally seems to be sappy liberalism, and since they uphold the present racist capitalist system, they *must* lie. But attempts to liberate blacks through terminology or rewriting school books is pure idealism.

Slavery, of course, was written into the U.S. Constitution, and it took a second American revolution, the Civil War, to overthrow it. Karl Marx and Marxists have written much on this crucial issue in American history. The Spartacist League's *Black History and the Class*

Struggle pamphlet series has highlighted the history of fighters like John Brown, Frederick Douglass, Toussaint L'Ouverture and others. This revolutionary history will not be taught in the schools until after a victorious socialist revolution. Those who think that they can force the state to present a "socially and culturally relevant curriculum" in the voice of different oppressed groups in fact share the bourgeois liberal myth that American society is just a conglomeration of "constituencies."

And this view can be reactionary. Thus CURE complains that the books state that "most experts support" the position that the first Indians in America came over the Bering land bridge from Asia, without giving "equal time" to "traditional Native beliefs" which say they sprang from the earth and have always been here. Columnist David Kirp remarked, "It goes unnoticed that other creationists, the fundamentalists, offer much the same criticism about how evolution is taught" (*San Francisco Examiner Image* magazine, 24 February 1991).

Most American public school textbooks are rank exercises in ruling-class ideology. They're shot through with vintage Cold War anti-Communism. Thus the 1983 fifth-grade text wrote: "Americans had long been worried about the worldwide growth of communism. The take-over of Cuba by Fidel (fee-dell) Castro in 1959 added to those fears." Where they see "takeover," the workers and peasants of Cuba see social revolution.

The new California guidelines are no exception, emphasizing the "centrality of Western civilizations as the source of American political institutions, laws and

ideology." California school superintendent Bill Honig is perfectly clear on what's allowed. He says, "If everything becomes hostile race and class warfare, we are going to lose this country. The issue is not multiculturalism. We agree with that. The question is, Are you also going to talk about the political and moral values that are essential for us to live together?" ("Class Struggle," *New York Times Magazine*, 29 September 1991). What he means is accepting the ruling class' rules that allow *them* to live in peace, while thousands live in misery.

History Isn't Nice

"The history of all past society has consisted in the development of class antagonisms, antagonisms that assumed different forms at different epochs. But whatever form they may have taken, one fact is common to all past ages, viz., the exploitation of one part of society by the other."

—Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848)

Ironically, the principal historian for the Houghton Mifflin books, UCLA professor Gary Nash, has a reputation as a left-liberal "multiculturalist." But he does like a happy ending. "You can turn American history into a story of unremitting oppression of exploited minorities," Nash told an interviewer, "That's just as distorted as the old view." He's one of those types Marx described in the *Communist Manifesto* as "a part of the bourgeoisie...desirous of redressing social grievances, in order to secure the continued existence of bourgeois society. To this section belong economists, philanthropists, humanitarians, improvers of the condition of the working class, organisers of charity, members of societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals, temperance fanatics, hole-and-corner reformers of every imaginable kind." California's full of them—and we can add today's "multiculturalists" to this list.

Karl Marx was profoundly right when he wrote that "being determines consciousness." The black cultural nationalists and liberal multiculturalists stand this on its head and argue that consciousness determines being—i.e., that changing the ideas that kids are taught in school will somehow change the reality of racial oppression and discrimination in society at large. American children increasingly are unable to read, write or do basic arithmetic, because this capitalist society has no work for them to do, and callously throws away millions of young lives. That is not the least of the reasons why the bourgeoisie is incompetent and unfit to rule this planet. ■

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Bush Goes After Public Education, Nationalists Push Segregated Schools



New York City, April 30: Spartacus Youth Club demands "Open Admissions and Free Tuition" in striking students' march at city workers rally. Young Spartacus

For Quality, Integrated Education for All!

Education has always been grasped as a prized weapon in the struggle for black emancipation. The black troops who turned the tide in the Civil War against the slaveowners went into battle with their spelling primers strapped to the same belt as their cartridge boxes. Knowledge—and a good musket—were recognized as the necessary artillery to combat servitude and enforced ignorance. A direct gain from the defeat of the slavocracy in the Civil War was the establishment of a public education system for all. But the defeat of Radical Reconstruction ushered in a period of Jim Crow segregation and separate and unequal schools for black people—a situation that still exists *de facto*, if not *de jure*, today.

Last December, the federal Department of Education tried to ax scholarships for minority students, declaring

them "discriminatory." After a public outcry from students, educators and civil rights organizations, Bush's hatchet men withdrew this specific attack and scurried back behind closed doors to revamp their plans for racist rollback. Now the White House is scheming to liquidate public education entirely into the "free market"! Public funds will "follow the students" to private schools—which will duplicate on a national scale the "white flight" to racist "academies" in the South following the Supreme Court's 1954 desegregation decision. Of course the ruling class isn't united behind the administration's plans to simply destroy the public education system and turn America into a "Third World" country. But with the U.S. capitalist economy in decline, they'll have a hard time coming up with the money. And all wings of the ruling class agree that—leaving aside a

thin layer of blacks who will be educated to take up positions in the professions—education for the vast mass of poor black youth is a "luxury" that "we" can no longer afford.

The normative standard for the U.S. ruling class is to offer its downtrodden and exploited black masses abstract equality: the *illusion* of formal democratic rights in a whole system of racist oppression that wipes out any economic means for achieving genuine equality. But today's rulers are so ominously intent on reversing every gain black people have won that they don't even bother with the lying promises. This is a program to officially enshrine the racist status quo: rich white people will send their children to well-financed private schools or suburban "public" country clubs that the black population has no access to, while the poor clock time in urban



Library of Congress

Literacy is a weapon in the struggle for freedom. Black Civil War soldiers with school teachers and spelling books.

holding pens where little education can take place because there's no money for teachers, books or equipment—and little in the way of jobs promising a future for minority youth as a motivation for study.

Black youth, particularly young black men, are fast becoming “missing persons” from a society that's locked them into ghettos with no exit from poverty, unemployment and cop terror. At *minimum* what's necessary is massive funding of public education, a busing program extended to the suburbs where the better schools are, and jobs for all. To open the schoolhouse doors to minority youth, the Spartacus Youth Clubs fight for open admissions and no tuition and a state-paid living stipend for students. The elite private universities should be nationalized and open to all!

As a result of *struggle* in the civil rights movement some gains were wrested from the government which decided it had better throw some money at the problems of black America lest the whole country blow up. The big lie of the civil rights movement was its preaching of reliance on the federal government as the defender and protector of the oppressed. The bedrock of racial oppression in this society is the capitalist economic system in which blacks are a doubly oppressed race-color caste. The government is the enforcer of the racist capitalist order. Segregated housing, racist cop terror, unemployment and the violence against black people in the “war on drugs” all send a straightforward message that American capitalism is no longer interested in preserving blacks as a “reserve army of labor.” The racist rulers of this country have decided that the financial cost of black life is expendable overhead. Moreover, education is dangerous—it can make people “uppity” and rebellious. Besides, where would they

get “volunteer” soldiers for their next bloody war unless millions of young men and women are desperate enough to enlist in exchange for job training?

Jim Crow's New Clothes: “Voluntary” Segregation

On the “home front” of Bush's “New World Order,” the White House aims to drop “smart bombs” at the black population with this attack on public education. What's necessary is a massive fightback on behalf of all working-class youth! Instead, what we're getting from middle-class black elected officials and black nationalists is *accommodation* to the attack on black rights dressed up as proposals for “Afrocentric” schools exclusively for black males. In Milwaukee, two “African American Immersion” schools have been designed as segregated schools for black male youth in the elementary and middle grades. Similar plans are being debated for implementation in New York, Detroit, Baltimore and elsewhere.

Two generations since the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* overturned the doctrine of separate and *unequal* education, black and white children rarely attend the same schools. Busing for school integration is dead—killed by liberals in Congress following the lead of violent racist mobs in the streets. White flight has left schools in most major cities with declining tax revenues, decrepit facilities and an overwhelmingly black and Hispanic student enrollment.

Black youth are routinely “tracked” out of pricier college prep programs, disproportionately disciplined, and young black males in particular are tagged as “problem learners.” Meanwhile segregated housing patterns assure majority white suburban schools of hefty property taxes and facilities resembling scenic country clubs for a chosen few (although

posh surroundings do not necessarily make for learning, and among rich and poor in this country there is a growing “equality” of ignorance).

What looms behind the proposal for segregated schools are the deadly and grim facts of life and death for black male youth. Nearly one out of four black men between the ages of 20 and 29 is in prison, on probation or on parole. Forty percent of black males in their 20s are unemployed. The death rate for black men in Harlem over the age of 40 is higher than that of the same population in Bangladesh! For millions of black women there are no jobs, welfare is disappearing, and the government's “workfare” program threatens to rip away welfare benefits *and the children* of single mothers who won't take whatever subminimum job Big Brother wants them to slave at. All these social conditions reflect the vicious poverty and deprivation of basic needs endemic to capitalism, the root cause of the black American nightmare.

Ironically, the proposal for “voluntarily” segregated schools is made by turning upside down the argument advanced for integration by NAACP attorneys Thurgood Marshall and Spottswood Robinson in the watershed *Brown v. Board of Education* battle. Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote in 1954 that to separate black children from white children solely because of their race generates “a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone.” Advocates of the Milwaukee plan grotesquely claim that segregation is necessary for black children to understand their own self-worth.

Self-segregation of black males will only serve to reinforce and legitimize the social segregation that already exists.

Just as freedom fighters in South Africa reject the program for bantustan education pushed by the apartheid racists, we denounce a plan to segregate black male youth in holding pens in the name of "African American Immersion"! In a racist society, separate is always expressly unequal—a guarantee of inferior facilities and greater social regimentation for blacks. If compulsory segregation used to be the means by which a Jim Crow society deprived blacks of attaining any economic or social power, it is now increasingly the means for social control. Kenneth Clark, the black sociologist whose research guided the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, hit the nail on the head in denouncing schools for black males as "prep schools for correctional institutions" (*New York Times*, 10 January).

Black History and Class Struggle

The Milwaukee program, and others like it, are packaged under the rubric of cultural nationalism and stress the need for black teachers and a curriculum centered on African culture and the achievements of black Americans. But in America today, youth of *all* races are lacking the basic skills—reading, geography, mathematics—that *any* culture demands. At bottom, however, these segregated schools have little to do with discovering race pride as an expression of dignity, and nothing to do with race consciousness of black oppression. To reduce the fight against institutionalized racism to a question of individual self-esteem is a not-so-new twist on the old "blame the victims" theme.

Segregating black children from white, and black boys from girls, buys into the racist condemnation of all black males as incipient criminals who must be isolated and whipped into shape. This is not the militant black nationalism of



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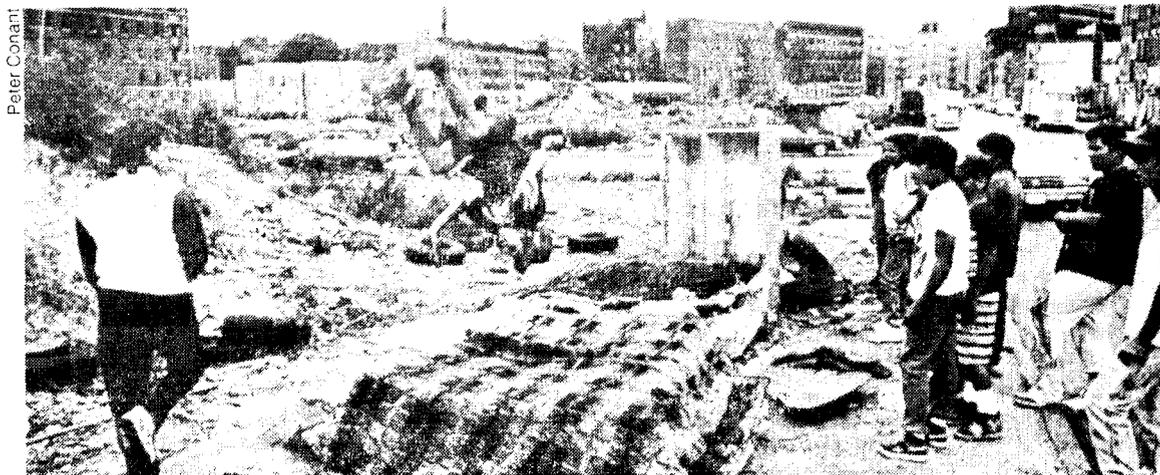
Civil rights activists in the 1960s demonstrate for integrated education.

the '60s, which at least expressed opposition to this whole racist system, although it lacked the program to change it. Today's move for segregated schools is a cynical cultural-nationalist *withdrawal* from struggle at the very moment that the ruling class is intensifying its attacks against the black population.

Certainly the internalization by blacks—and whites—of racist stereotypes is a most pernicious and crippling effect of racism. Black history and the struggles of oppressed peoples of all races are excluded or belittled in school textbooks. Marxists solidarize with every genuine effort to expose the racist ideology which presents oppression as "natural" and even just. The Spartacist League's *Black History and the Class Struggle* pamphlet series highlights the history of fighters like John Brown, Frederick Douglass, Toussaint L'Ouverture, Malcolm X and others because that history must be reclaimed by the

working class and minorities to fight the injustices of the present. But the struggle for freedom is not ultimately a psychological battle, but a political one. As Marxists we understand that education is a class question. Quality education for the masses will be possible only with the expropriation of the bourgeoisie and the establishment of working-class rule.

The idealist concept of "African American cultural values" as promoted by these segregated schools is a bogus abstraction. There is no distinct set of values that all blacks adhere to. There's a world of difference between Angelo Herndon, a black Communist who led black and white unemployed workers during the Depression and who for his leadership was thrown into jail for leading a "slave insurrection" in Atlanta, and say, Martin Luther King Jr., whose turn-the-other-cheek pacifism and liberalism shackled blacks to the Dixiecrat



Peter Conant

American capitalism's "recreational facilities" for youth in South Bronx ghetto.

Democratic Party. Moreover, any conception of the role of black people in society cannot be separated from the social mechanisms and institutions that transmit such knowledge. School textbooks today celebrate King for his misleadership of black struggle—and omit that he was assassinated in Memphis where he went to support a sanitation workers strike, or that he opposed the Vietnam War. Black revolutionaries like Herndon are still a complete “blank space” in “official” history.

Black Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!

For a small “talented tenth” black elite, token gains of the civil rights movement brought more black faces in high places and a tier of black Democratic Party mayors who act as overseers of inner-city ghettos on behalf of the racist capitalist ruling class. Like Booker T. Washington, whose authority grew in the wake of a wave of racist terror that smashed Radical Reconstruction and who glorified segregation of the races, black misleaders today push cynical segregationist schemes in the face of resurgent racism. They’ve made their peace with the system and aren’t about to lead any fight against it.

Faced with a labor movement that’s done little to defend the black population (or itself) from the bosses’ attacks, and seeing no gain from gradualist liberal integrationism, ghetto youth and petty-bourgeois college students gave a hearing to the sinister demagogue Farkhan with his message of segregation

and “black capitalism.” But capitalism only works for people with capital, and exhortations for blacks to “pull yourself up by your own bootstraps” are meaningless if you have no money for boots.

For a layer of petty entrepreneurs seeking to profit from pathetic “black capitalist” schemes, segregation poses a chance to exploit “their” market, “their” people, their way. This perspective is nothing new. Black business owners were the last to join the civil rights movement because they knew black access to white-owned firms would hurt their pockets. To comprehend the futility of “black capitalism” one need only look at a list of Fortune 500 firms, or consider the fate of historically black colleges. Blacks aren’t missing from the echelons of the bourgeoisie because of a lack of self-esteem, but because a small minority, the ruling class, makes the rules, writes the laws and tax codes to perpetuate the rule of the rich, owns and controls the government, and uses the cops and courts to “legally” terrorize ghettos and barrios. The ruling class also controls the major universities—and black colleges get a fraction of the crumbs thrown toward education.

Separatism does have an appeal today among a layer of black youth who rightly hate this racist society and bitterly resent the betrayals of black freedom struggles by leaders preaching accommodation. But the mechanism for white domination and black oppression in the U.S. is not forced assimilation, but *segregation*. The case for integrated schooling was argued

powerfully by Frederick Douglass, who fought his way out of slavery, educated himself, and became a powerful leader of the left wing of the abolitionist movement. In 1872 he wrote:

“From our observations during a trip to the South we are convinced that the interests of the poor whites and the colored people are identical. Both are ignorant, and both are the tools of designing educated white men; and the poor whites are more particularly used to further schemes opposed to their own best interests. The cunning ex-slaveholder sets those who should be his enemies to fighting each other and thus diverts attention from himself. Educate the colored children and white children together in your day and night schools throughout the South, and they will learn to know each other better, and be better able to cooperate for mutual benefit.”

The tasks Frederick Douglass confronted after slavery was smashed still remain and the promise of black emancipation is still unfulfilled. If militant black youth who despair of the long-betrayed promises of equality in American society as it is become reconciled to the illusory solace of separatist programs, the revolutionary class struggle will lose fighters and leaders we urgently need. Racial oppression is so deeply built into the American class structure that only the *destruction* of existing class relations and the change in class rule—the passing of power into the hands of the multiracial working class—will strike at the heart of racism and bring about equality through *revolutionary integration* into a socialist society. Finish the Civil War! Black liberation through socialist revolution! ■

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After joining the Trotskyist movement in 1934, Fraser was an organizer and union activist for close to 30 years and a member of the Socialist Workers Party National Committee for 25 years. During internal debates in the SWP in the 1950s he developed and fought for the programmatic perspective of Revolutionary Integration, while the majority, with George Breitman as its spokesman, tailed the liberal pacifist/Democratic Party leadership of the civil rights movement and soon capitulated to black nationalism.

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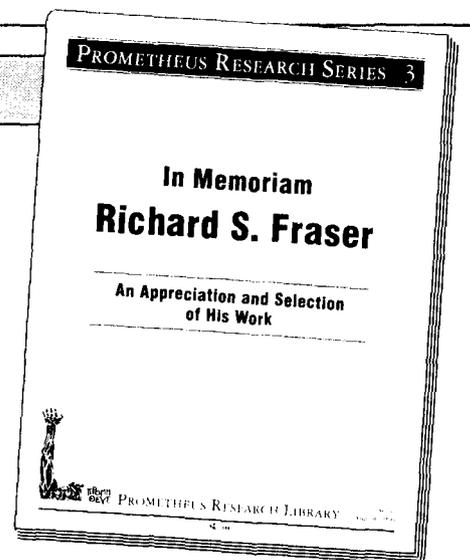
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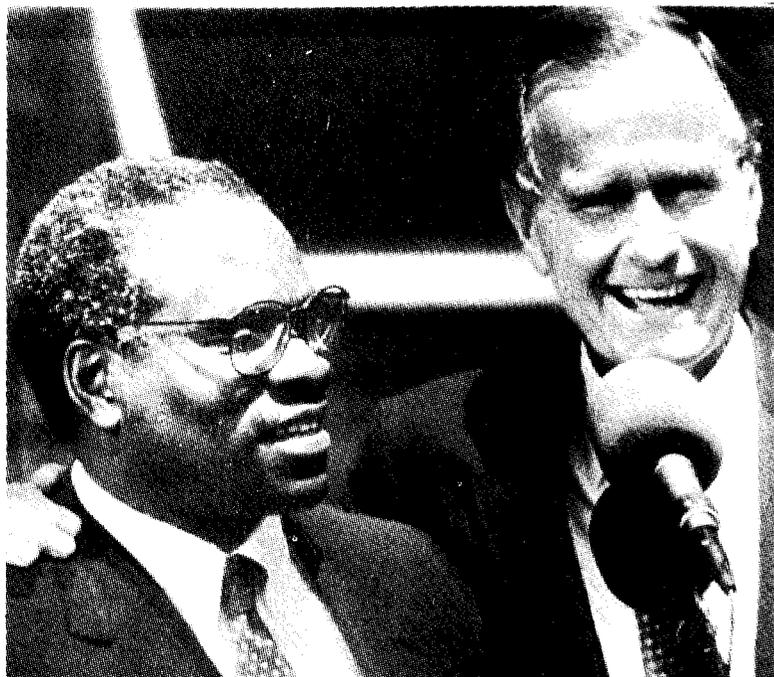
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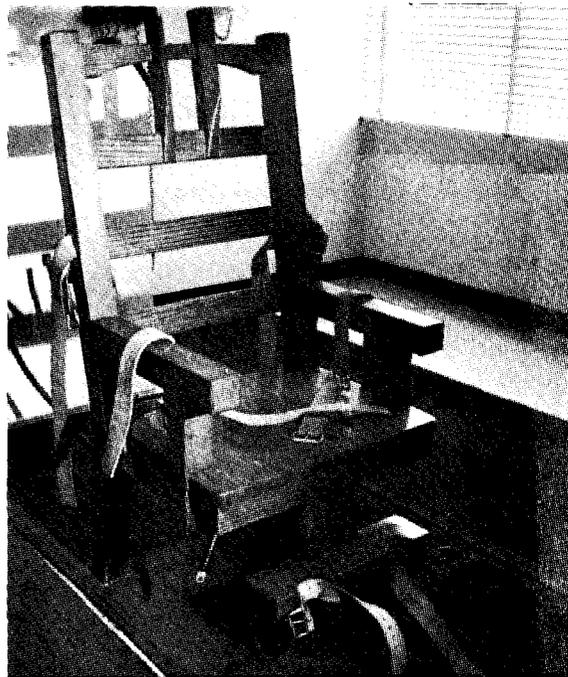


Clarence Thomas: Anti-Abortion Hanging Judge Confirmed

Sex, Race and Reaction



Berry/Boston Globe



Starr/Picture Group

Bush pushes through nomination of black reactionary Clarence Thomas, who is "personally" not "bothered" by the racist death penalty.

On October 15, black reactionary Clarence Thomas was narrowly approved for a seat on the Supreme Court. Thomas replaces Thurgood Marshall, one of the leading lawyers of the civil rights movement, a prominent liberal and the first black on the high court. The drive of the Reagan/Bush administrations to pack the court with conservatives has already gutted prisoners' rights and opened wide the floodgates to the racist death penalty. The 1980 Republican convention vowed to eliminate women's right to abortion by appointing "right to life" judges. Now, with the "god squads" on the streets besieging clinics and Thomas on the Supreme Court, after years of whistling away at the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision legalizing abortion they're gearing up to throw it out. But the issue won't be settled by the judges in their black robes.

The 52-to-48 Senate vote was preceded by a sordid "hearings" circus, marked by cynical use of the race card by an administration which got elected using the vicious "Willie Horton" racist fear-mongering campaign, and now obscenely poses as champion of the black man. The bizarre week in Washington was a televised orgy of prudery and prurience in the service of racism and sexism. It was a peculiarly American saga, focusing a harsh glare upon the workings of bourgeois politics in its palpable decay. It was a "Capitol mud bath," as one reporter described it. European observers shook their heads in disbelief at the tawdry spectacle of politics as soap opera. Millions of Americans were disgusted, while the hearings' TV ratings swamped the baseball playoffs.

What we found most disgusting was how the real crimes of Clarence Thomas

—a certified enemy of black rights and women's rights, a Reaganite right-winger who had chopped away at and subverted even the most minimal equal rights laws, a black front man for white supremacy whose associates, as we noted in our last issue, are tied to the bantustan governments of apartheid South Africa, a hanging judge who is "personally" not "bothered" by the racist death penalty—were covered up.

Although pitched over the question of "sexual harassment," in fact the fight on Thomas' nomination was over abortion rights. Those for abortion were against Clarence Thomas, those against it were for him on the Supreme Court. While the feminists looked forlornly to the Democrats, on issues from busing to abortion to strikebreaking this capitalist party demonstrated again that it shares the basic program of racist, sexist, anti-



Anita Hill is savaged by Republican hatchet man Orrin Hatch for accusing Thomas of sexual harassment.



Lopez/NY Times Photos

working-class reaction with its Republican counterpart.

We're now in the third term of Reaganism, yet a solid majority of the population still strongly supports abortion rights. When there's an election centered on the issue of abortion, the "pro-choice" candidate usually wins—as the Republicans are finding out to their chagrin.

What's needed are mass mobilizations of labor, women and minorities to put a stop to the anti-abortion crusade in the streets. A workers party must be forged which will champion the cause of all the oppressed and lead a fight for "Free abortion on demand! Free quality health care for all!"

Hearings Circus

Following Thomas' nomination, there was an initial set of hearings in September in which the White House correctly calculated the Democrat wouldn't dare give a hard time to a black candidate, no matter how conservative. Despite a paper trail documenting his view that abortion was against "natural law," Thomas brazenly stonewalled, claiming he couldn't remember anything, his previous written statements and speeches were irrelevant. And the Democrats just ate it.

They knew Clarence Thomas was an enemy of black rights. They knew his track record as head of civil rights at the Department of Education and then as chairman of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), where his job for the Republican administration was to systematically dismantle the legal and administrative framework for any recourse against racist discrimination in the schools and on the job. The Democrats never asked about this. They hardly touched the death penalty.

But as the Senate was about to rubber-stamp him, with most of the

Democrats voting "no" for form's sake, the whole process exploded over charges of sexual harassment. From the outset, it must be said that we don't know what went on between Clarence Thomas and his then-assistant, Anita Hill, now a university professor of law. Sexual harassment cases are often enormously ambiguous precisely because there are seldom witnesses, and in cases like Hill described, interpretation can depend a lot on the situation and the individuals involved.

And in any case, this was hardly the crucial issue. The most telling display of Congressional impotence is that Thomas' transparent amnesia and ultrarightist positions didn't cause a ripple. Moreover, they had earlier circular-filed Hill's charges. And when they took up the issue, after a leak produced an outcry from the bourgeois feminists and other professional women, it soon became a mutual mudslinging contest in which the Democrats are manifestly not the equals of their Republican colleagues in slime.

After Anita Hill's detailed and graphic testimony, the Senators all duly professed shock. But Thomas, instead of his usual "can't remember," simply announced he would not answer any questions about his personal life. And when he denounced the hearing as a "high-tech lynching for uppity blacks," that was it. The Democrats clammed up. After a White House strategy session, the Republicans launched a character assassination campaign to destroy Hill's credibility. She was articulate and exuded credibility, so they sought to discredit her in the method of rape trials, explaining her cool delivery as "arrogance," questioning her mental stability, suggesting it was "a fantasy," she was a "vengeful woman" who had been "spurned," etc.

Smear jobs, sexist and racist stereo-

types, revolting hypocrisy—it turned people's stomachs, even as their eyes were riveted to the spectacle on their TV screens. The spectacle of the Democrats on the Judiciary Committee sitting in judgment on somebody's moral character: when Teddy Kennedy called the Republicans' tactics "shameful," Orrin Hatch shot back, "If you believe that, I know a bridge in Massachusetts I can sell you," a reference to Chappaquiddick, where Kennedy walked away from a car accident leaving his staff aide Mary Jo Kopechne drowned. On the Republican side, Orrin Hatch, the witchhunter from Utah, waving *The Exorcist*. And arch-segregationist Strom Thurmond, posing as a defender of blacks. Columnist Robert Reno recoiled at the sight of:

"Strom Thurmond—who once received 39 electoral votes running for president on a platform that people the color of Clarence Thomas should not be allowed to sit in a white toilet or at the front of a bus—gallantly defending Thomas' right to sit in splendor in that great marble chamber where only one black man has sat before."

—*Newsday*, 16 October

The Senate is "the last plantation." This notorious millionaires' club is also an exclusive "old boys' club." Both supporters of Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas bridled at the spectacle of this corrupt fraternity of 98 white men and two white women—whose plush quarters in the Senate Office Building are staffed by a small army of young women who slave for them around the clock—sitting in moral judgment on a black man and a black woman. But then Thomas was handpicked by the patrician George Bush, the preppie killer of tens of thousands of Iraqis, who (but for the anti-discrimination laws he's trying to overturn) certainly would never let the likes of Thomas or Hill into his country

club, or for that matter the Skull and Bones Society at their mutual alma mater, Yale.

It's been noted how many of the players in this drama came out of Yale Law School—not only George Bush, Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill but also Thomas' defender Arlen Specter, Thomas' mentor John Danforth, Thomas' ego-maniacal buddy John Doggett...and the Kennedy staffer who first got the story from his old classmate Hill. *Newsday's* Reno commented that Yale seems to have been "churning out whole graduating classes full of career-obsessed twits." The hearings provided insight into the layer of "buppies" (black yuppies) who signed up with the Republicans and made it into the mid-upper strata of the Reagan/Bush apparatus, always looking out for Number One. Hill was part of this crowd, too. And as *Village Voice* columnist James Ridgeway skeptically wrote:

"Then we have the idea that Anita Hill, a student and protégé of failed Supreme Court nominee Robert Bork and a polished graduate of Yale Law School—is one of the more sophisticated educational spas in the country—is just a little ol' barefoot Baptist girl from Oklahoma who was undone by her superior's sexist comments. Can you imagine her shock: the man she had been helping to undercut sex and race discrimination rules in the workplace since she'd left the ivy walls actually harbored less than p.c. attitudes toward women!"

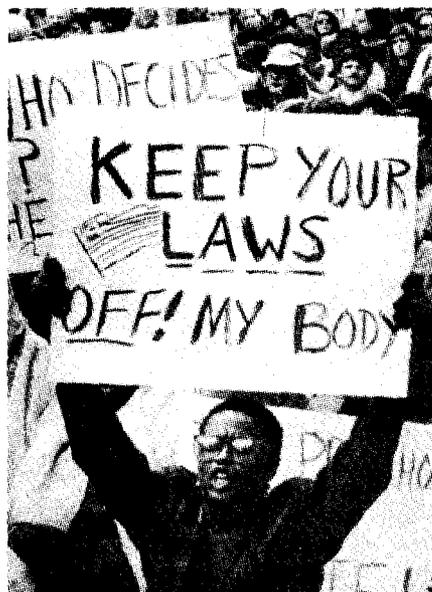
"Anti-Porn" Feminists Join Bible Bigots

And then we have the feminists who pander to the most reactionary prejudices of this society—pushing the same "anti-pornography" garbage as the Bible bigots who are trying to close down abortion clinics. The feminists join them in crusades to close down movie houses and ban *Playboy* or *Hustler*. NOW thought they could nail Clarence Thomas for going to X-rated movie houses as a law student! The hearings were a Moral Majority morality play, a soap opera of puritanical mores for the masses purveyed by their cynical rulers. On camera they profess outrage over the boss allegedly talking dirty to Miss Goody Two-Shoes, Gary Hart's presidential bid is sunk by his shenanigans with Donna Rice, they're "shocked" at Virginia Senator Charles Robb playing beach blanket bingo with beauty queen Tai Collins. As far as we're concerned it's not the peccadillos of the bourgeoisie that we care about, but their crimes against the working people, against women and blacks, against Vietnam and Iraq.

It says something about the end-of-the-20th-century American social cli-

mate that we Marxists are fighting to defend many tenets of the *bourgeois* revolution—the separation of church and state, rights of privacy, etc. "Womanizing," drinking, smoking (grass or tobacco), buying dirty books, gambling—*these are not crimes*. As we wrote in our 1987 *amicus curiae* brief on behalf of Indiana booksellers charged in an "obscenity" case, "Laws against gambling and various sexual practices reflect official puritanism allied to organized religion, which acts as an important ideological pillar of capitalism, convincing the masses there can be no happiness this side of the grave."

We agree with Betty Dunklee, the 62-year-old home health care worker who



David Vita
At New York rally in 1989 to oppose Supreme Court's onslaught against abortion rights.

told the *New York Times* (14 October), "Who cares if Clarence Thomas looked at pornographic literature?" Her advice was that the next guy who gets nominated for something "ought to say, first thing: 'I get drunk. I smoke pot. And I chase women. Any other questions?'"

The question of sexual harassment is another matter, and it's a very real issue. In the wake of Hill's account of her experience, women's rights groups say their phones are ringing off the hook. Hill's dignified, articulate testimony certainly struck a nerve among women. (At the same time, anti-discrimination lawyers report that many women who have brought cases are trying to get confidential settlements, wanting to avoid the vilification that Anita Hill faced, and expecting a backlash as a result of Thomas' victory.) Even if all Hill said is true, her experience is a shallow

reflection of the blatant sexual discrimination and sexual harassment of women at the workplace.

Very often, sexual harassment is not ambiguous at all, it is blatant and concerted—for instance, the New York Fire Department, where the first women firefighters faced a campaign of harassment intended to drive them out. And the *New York Times* (20 October) notes that when women first began working in the coal mines in the early 1970s, "like their male colleagues, they were stripped down and slathered in axle grease in a primitive hazing ritual. Unlike the men, they were spread-eagled and tied to wooden supports."

What doesn't get talked about is the situation of working women, desperately in need of a job just to make ends meet, many of them single mothers working at minimum wage in the most dangerous conditions, where the supervisor fires anyone he doesn't consider pretty enough or pliant enough. As Ridgeway pointed out, "In truth this soap opera before a live audience has actually obscured the real politics that underlie women's issues in the United States. In 1959 there were 22 million women in the labor force, accounting for 33 per cent of all working Americans. By 1991, working women numbered some 57 million, or 45.5 per cent of the labor force, accounting for three-fifths of the increase in the civilian labor force since 1979." And as American capitalism has waged war on the unions to create a more "flexible," cheaper labor force, part-time non-union women workers often fill what were once full-time unionized jobs. Moreover, as Ridgeway notes, this has broader social ramifications:

"This trend in the changing nature of the work force has been accompanied by a reduction in social welfare programs as part of the New Right agenda of the Reagan years. As a result, welfare becomes workfare; there are cuts in child care, a weakening of the health-care system, reduced access to and increased cost of affordable housing, a worsening of public transit—on which working people depend to travel to work—an increase in the cost of energy, and constant harassment of women by the Right's ongoing intimidation of their reproductive rights."

We would only add that every one of those Reagan cuts in social programs has been voted for by a Democratic Congress.

The feminists' concerns arise from the attempt of a layer of professional women to integrate themselves into the upper layers of the American capitalist power structure. But this is a racist, sexist society. Questions of sexual harassment and treatment on the job are really questions



April 1989 Chicago rally opposed racist death penalty. Supreme Court refused to stay legal lynching of black Georgia prisoner Warren McClesky (right).



WV Photo

Karas/Atlanta Journal and Constitution

of power. And they won't really change until there is a fundamental change in society itself. In a revolutionary setting, sexual harassment will get short shrift as the working class and the oppressed set out to create a society based on real equality.

America: It Always Comes Back to the Black Question

It was notable that while the Clarence Thomas hearings exploded over sex, they zeroed in on the question of race. That is the way of things in this deeply racist country, where the black question is the key to the American workers revolution. The Clarence Thomas affair served to split blacks and women, two key constituencies of the Democratic Party, and also sharply posed sex and class divisions among blacks.

Many black people were disgusted by Thomas' cynical use of the race card on behalf of George Bush. The demagogic purpose was to guilt-trip the Senate liberals, and it worked. But this is extremely dangerous territory. Many worried about the consequences of high-impact TV coverage retailing racial stereotypes about "oversexed black men." The black community was split, for instance between some black men who felt "maybe this is a sister who doesn't want to see a black man get ahead," and others saying that appeals to race are no cover for harassing women ("Blacks Say the Blood Spilled in the Thomas Case Stains All," *New York Times*, 14 October).

Predictably, black conservatives leapt to Clarence Thomas' defense. Interestingly, the swing votes were Southern white Democratic Senators (Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana) responding to post-

civil rights era "moderate" blacks, the constituency that Virginia's black Democratic governor Doug Wilder, a supporter of the death penalty, bases himself on and without which white Democrats can't get elected in the South. The *Washington Post* (16 October) noted that Thomas' nomination "split core Democratic constituencies, pitting blacks against feminist groups," which will serve to further shred the Democratic Party.

The Chicago black newspaper, the *Defender* (14 October), supported Thomas with a front-page headline, "High-Tech Lynching." In contrast, the *New York Amsterdam News* (19 October) ran a stinging front-page story, "Black Skin, White Mask! Who Is the Real Clarence Thomas?", slamming the hypocrisy of this enemy of black rights claiming to be the victim of a racist lynching:

"Neither Judge Thomas, who in many respects is a reprise of the Willie Horton caper, nor Professor Hill, who is being touted as the Rosa Parks of sexual harassment, is representative of mainstream Black American working men and women. They are members of the Black elite, DuBois' 'Talented Tenth,' who climbed the ladder of success from humble origins, a minority within a minority...while the vast majority of Black Americans continue to live the horrors of the American nightmare.

"Though secure within their niche of the Black bourgeoisie, there are some differences between Judge Thomas and Professor Hill that go beyond sex. Judge Thomas personifies power without respectability, and Professor Hill reflects respectability without power. And you need not be reminded who will be the eventual winner in capitalist and sexist America."

The article by Don Rojas and Herb Boyd noted that "this affair has not only

raised some critical issues about sexual harassment in general but has also exploded the myth of Black homogeneity and Black unity." They add: "Black America, like White America, is divided along class and gender lines, and this obviously reflects the prevailing pattern of social relations generic to American capitalism."

"Supreme Disaster for Poor Women"

In the end, the storm over Clarence Thomas and sex harassment changed very little in terms of the Senate vote. Liberals voted against him, conservatives voted for him. And since liberals are in the minority in this country, they lost. But the grotesque spectacle will have ramifications in lots of other ways. Bush and the White House gang were more triumphant than they've been since the days of Desert Storm. To the discomfort of the Supreme Court judges, they swiftly swore in Thomas on the South Lawn before the Republican inner circle and with the Marine Band. The Republicans are already gearing up for the '92 elections in which they intend to use the disaster the Democrats made out of the Thomas hearings, along with the rest of the "sleaze factor": the S&L scam, Congressional bounced checks ("Rubbergate"), etc.

Bush & Co. have a clear reactionary social agenda, and as usual they get down and dirty to win. They have taken the measure of the Democratic gutless wonders, who are perpetual losers because the liberals have no fundamental differences with their more resolute rivals in reaction. In the aftermath of their victory with Thomas, the Bush administration openly joined forces with

the Operation Rescue bigots to argue before the Supreme Court that blocking abortion clinics does not violate the "KKK act" because it isn't "discriminatory"—they want to keep everyone out. In writing of the anti-abortion siege of Wichita, we warned that reliance on the capitalist courts and laws would only rebound against supporters of women's and minority rights.

While the Democrats on the Judiciary Committee didn't nail Clarence Thomas for being "pro-life," the Republicans made very sure he was pro-death. Their bloodhound Arlen Specter, a former prosecutor in Pennsylvania (where crusading black journalist Mumia Abu-Jamal sits on death row), pushed for an unequivocal statement from the nominee that he considered the death penalty constitutional. Thomas assured Specter, saying, "There is nothing that would bother me personally about upholding it in

appropriate cases." This grotesque spectacle was played out at the very moment that the Supreme Court was refusing a stay of execution to Warren McCleskey, whose landmark legal battle underlined the racist character of the death penalty. McCleskey was strapped into the electric chair and murdered on September 25. Thomas complains about a "high-tech lynching," but he has no problem with racist legal lynching by the state. Nor do the Democrats.

On the day that Clarence Thomas was confirmed, *Daily News* sportswriter Mike Lupica did a good thing. He went up to Planned Parenthood in the South Bronx to talk to Dr. Irving Rust, who has been with the clinic for the past 15 years. What does this all mean for the young black women in the waiting room at 149th and Cortland Avenue? asked Lupica in his column, titled "Supreme Disaster for Poor Women." The dedi-

cated black doctor said of George Bush and his black hatchet man:

"They don't understand what a time bomb the abortion issue really is. They have all forgotten the way it was before *Roe vs. Wade*. Well, I haven't forgotten. I had just become a resident then. And all the beds that are filled with AIDS patients now were filled back then with women who had had septic abortions. "You knew this was going to be the kind of nominee Bush would come up with, you just didn't know he'd be black. Now the court will be 6-to-3 against abortion for sure. *Roe vs. Wade* will be gone within a year. Then they'll push the whole abortion issue back to the states. And poor women, the women in these rooms right now, will be back behind the streets, the way they were in the good old days. And Clarence Thomas will be part of that."

But it doesn't have to come to that. All defenders of women's rights must join in mobilizing a class fight against a return to the era of the coat hanger and the lynch rope. ■

Introduction...

(continued from page 2)

public outcry, some of the cops involved were indicted for their crime. But the decision to hold the trial in suburban Simi Valley, where cops' families outnumber minority families, was a calculated provocation aiming to dispirit and intimidate blacks by underlining their isolation. The farcical trial ending in the outrageous acquittal was in the style of other symbolic acts perpetrated during the Reagan/Bush years. The destruction of the PATCO union, one of the first acts of the Reagan presidency, was deliberately aimed at demonstrating with what ruthlessness the ruling class would repress all union struggles, as they led away in handcuffs the leaders of the overwhelmingly white, relatively privileged and well-paid air controllers. The most murderous message to black America directly was the aerial bombardment of the Philadelphia MOVE commune on Mother's Day 1985, a deliberate massacre of eleven black people including five children (see our pamphlet No. 3, February 1986).

But the provocation in Simi Valley was a big gamble for this country's rulers. For it blew the lid off the L.A. ghettos and barrios and became the lightning rod for an explosion of revolt against the fundamental economic and social conditions of American capitalism in decay: the unemployment, homelessness, discrimination, segregation, cop terror which are the only future America offers most of its black citizens, especially the angry and desperate youth. Too

late, the rulers scrambled to assure us that "we understand your grievances, but violence is not the way." Thereby proving the opposite—this is America, and only violence usually gets much attention around here. And at least in the short run, concerted efforts to evoke the spectre of "black rioters," including the much-televised pictures of the indiscriminate beating of a white truck driver, to feed the racism of whites did not succeed in dissipating the broad sympathy for the black and Hispanic masses. Worst of all, from the standpoint of the rulers, the indignation expressed by L.A. minorities intersected a realization that wide layers of the working people have deep grievances: the virtual depression conditions, which hit minorities the hardest, have in fact hit everyone hard.

The articles collected in this pamphlet include one early article published two weeks after the beating of Rodney King. We reprint here considerable material prompted by the tumultuous events following the court verdict, including the text of the special *Workers Vanguard* supplement dated 4 May 1992—over 100,000 copies were distributed nationwide. These articles explore the confrontation between the outraged minorities and poor of Los Angeles and the LAPD, the naked fist of the racist capitalist state. They document the revolutionary program of the Spartacist League and Partisan Defense Committee as we fought within the limits of our small forces to stand with the oppressed and to spur the labor movement to take action in support of the rights of the besieged black and Hispanic masses.

This pamphlet focuses as well on the underlying sources of the L.A. upheaval. Articles examine the recent history and current conditions confronting black working people and youth: the stagnant economy, the demise of public education, the fundamentally racist cast of the "injustice system" as highlighted particularly in the spectacle of the Clarence Thomas/Anita Hill hearings starring two prominent advocates of the racist death penalty. The concluding article examines the particular history of Los Angeles as an open-shop town where untrammelled police bonapartism flourished in the absence of a strong labor movement. This article considers as well demographic changes in L.A.—the recent arrival of Spanish-speaking immigrants, including many refugees from U.S.-backed "death squad" regimes who bring with them their militant labor traditions.

In analyzing the present political landscape of this country, we look back to Karl Marx in his pioneering study of capitalism, which methodically described the workings of the system in order to lay bare the basic fault lines along which that system can be fought and overthrown. Our unique ability to tell the truth derives from our Marxist understanding of the world gained through our active involvement in the struggle to change it.

"Ignorance Never Did Anyone Any Good": The Fight for Education

Exploring the roots of the L.A. explosion, the pamphlet highlights the question of education. The materials selected

consider not only the decline of public education as a whole in this country—a decline which directly reflects the absence of jobs for which young people need to be educated—but also the increasing segregation of higher education and the arguments of demagogues who claim to see in the separation of the races a source of “black pride” and “independence.”

A generation after the liberal civil rights movement won the inclusion of talented black students into the prestigious private and state universities, increasing numbers of black youth are looking to black-majority colleges, many of them upgraded agricultural and teachers colleges in the South, because of skyrocketing college costs or as an alternative to the felt insecurity of confronting threats and racist affronts at integrated schools. Yet the political logic of segregation remains that elucidated over a century ago by a black Reconstruction legislator: “if schools are segregated, white children will have good schools and black children will have none.” The logic of this statement remains impeccable; the difference today is that white workers’ children increasingly do not have good schools either.

Well aware that “ignorance never did anyone any good,” black parents are particularly anguished over the issue of education. They see all around them the proof that the “American Dream” is as remote from their lives as it ever was, yet understandably want to believe “things will be different for our kids.” Yet as they struggle to reassure their children that black is beautiful and “a mind is a terrible thing to waste,” capitalist society is sending the reverse message to the young people. Talk about a Dred Scott decision: in the 1987 McCleskey decision, statistics proved that whether or not the death penalty was applied in murder cases depended directly on the race of the victim. But the Supreme Court upheld the validity of the death penalty, ruling that its racist application was normal, inevitable, natural. In a hundred ways, from the schools to the job market to the courts, minority youth are being told that black life is essentially without value to “white” society. To change the correct perception of black youth that they are being thrown on the scrap heap, the objective conditions of life must be transformed by smashing the racist class rule of the capitalists and establishing the working class in power.

Yet in the absence of such a struggle for power, alienated black youth may be

easy prey for the solacing lies of “leaders” who are working hard to misdirect discontent into support for poisonous efforts to whip up hatred against Jews and Asian merchants. Under all the “new” trash talking, the program of these demagogues is nothing but the same old discredited Booker T. Washington line of “pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps”—a formula for continued subservience so long as capitalism ensures a grossly unequal distribution of bootstraps and boots. Claiming to favor “black capitalism,” these schemes for keeping the oppressed divided against each other have the white capitalists laughing all the way to the bank. Behind the “empowerment” rhetoric lies nothing more than the appetite of aspiring black petty entrepreneurs to exploit their “own” people after driving the local Korean deli out of business.

To underscore this point we include in the pamphlet a guest column by Mumia Abu-Jamal written following a Hispanic upheaval in Washington. Abu-Jamal, whose political views probably stand closer to the early Black Panthers than to communism as we understand the term, is passionately a radical rather than any kind of apologist for this vicious racist system. From his sympathies as a revolutionary derives his ability to incisively lay bare the mechanisms of racism which perpetuate this outmoded social system, and to indict as suicidal for blacks the search for scapegoats among other sectors of the oppressed.

“The System Doesn’t Work”

Neither “black capitalism” nor any well-meaning schemes for “reforming” the system can root out racism from a social order founded on the *inequality* of social classes, from an economy whose motor force is the exploitation—by the tiny stratum which owns everything that counts—of the working people whose labor creates everything of value. Yet this fundamental fact is also the key to bringing down this hateful system. For particularly in this period of capitalist decay, the working class as a whole faces the prospect of the same impoverishment and hopelessness that the black population endures in intensified form. Particularly in the wake of the “greed decade” with the rich in this country becoming filthy rich, the workers becoming the poor and the poor becoming homeless, millions of workers of all races are fed up. The employed have endured increased exploitation backed by the threat of unemployment, while feeling

rising personal indebtedness and falling living standards; the retirees face recurring government threats to steal their Social Security funds; the youth face a future as McDonald’s hamburger jockeys, as cannon fodder for the next “Operation Desert Slaughter,” or competing for a shrinking number of industrial jobs at permanent poverty wages, thanks to the sellout “two-tier” wage deals negotiated by the pro-capitalist misleaders of the unions.

The vicious cop terror and draconian repression which frontally targets America’s minorities has not left the working class unscathed, as modern “labor law” has begun to resemble more and more the old codes whereby unions were seen as “cartels” through which monopolistic workers unfairly ganged up on kindly capitalists. Today it’s RICO “racketeering” laws being used against strikes, for example to encourage union leaders to abandon members arrested for stopping scabs, lest the defense of their own best militants be termed a “conspiracy.”

For students, the “rollback” of the minimal civil rights gains is exemplified in the area of education by the switch from the promises of “open admissions” made following the turbulent 1960s to the present imposition of higher tuitions and fees which is forcing the kids from working-class and poor minority families out of the public colleges. These attacks have provoked huge student demonstrations at New York’s CUNY campuses and elsewhere.

The distrust and disgruntlement of much of America in this presidential election year was shown graphically by the fact that one Ross Perot (a right-wing capitalist kook whose bid for the presidency strikingly recalled the candidacy of the racist, labor-hating Henry Ford back in 1923) almost precipitated a first-rate constitutional crisis until he was persuaded not to run against the usual two “partner parties of capital”: the arrogantly reactionary Republicans and the Democrats, who these days barely manage at all to mouth their usual lying promises to the workers and oppressed.

But the “Perot phenomenon” also shows that, left to itself, plebeian discontent will not automatically find its way toward radical class consciousness. The broad anti-racist response which greeted the L.A. upheaval will once again be submerged in the normal workings of racist “business as usual” unless the masses glimpse a way forward out of the bleak prospects which confront them. Millions of people who wished for justice for Rodney King saw that “the



WV Photo

27 November 1982: Thousands of defiant protesters stopped the Klan from marching in Washington, D.C. This action organized by the Spartacist League exemplifies our program for mass labor/black defense against KKK fascist provocation.

system doesn't work," but the rotten system won't collapse of its own accord—it must be thrown out. To weld together the dissatisfaction of the multiracial working class and the militancy of the minority youth facing the deadly prospect of being forced permanently out of the proletariat, what is required is revolutionary leadership which does not shrink from the necessary struggle for power.

The Los Angeles explosion tore a giant hole in the triumphalism of the bourgeoisie, which was busy congratulating itself on the collapse of Stalinism and proclaiming "the end of ideology" and indeed "the end of history," not to mention "the death of communism" in a "post-Marxist world." If these prophecies were true, it would be bad news indeed for all of us, for it was in good measure the spectre of another form of social organization counterposed to capitalism—even represented only in the grossly deformed incarnation of Stalinist "Communism"—which wrested from the ruling class of this country some concessions to the masses' aspirations. Thus, it was largely the embarrassment of the black freedom struggle undercutting the Cold War, giving the lie to the claim of America as a "free country," which prompted a section of the federal government under the Kennedy/Johnson Democrats to break with the Southern

Dixiecrats and acquiesce to formal racial equality under the law.

There are too many charlatans of the "left" today who accept or even *hail* the "victory of the free world" and the prospects for reimposing on Soviet working people the exploitation, poverty, racism and mass violence which comprise the "magic of capitalism." Bowing to a "New World Order" which is actually built on sand, they turn their backs not only on the restive minority populations here but on the embattled proletarians from South Africa to Latin America to South Korea, who are not and will never be reconciled to the dominion of imperialism. Fortunately, communism is rooted in the reality of the class struggle, which exists in open and in muted forms so long as class division exists, here and everywhere else.

Because the American bourgeoisie's class war on the working masses has been so one-sided during the memory of the young generation, militants tend to see only the painful and pathetic reality of the racist ideology which pervades all sectors of society in "normal" times. But when powerful social struggles erupt, these attitudes are rapidly swept aside by the developing consciousness of shared class interest. The history of this country has shown this numerous times, and will again. Those who doubt it, even after the remark-

able solidarity shown during the L.A. events, those who would consign all the whites in this country to perdition as a solid reactionary mass, need to come to grips with one essential problem: there are a lot of them. The means must be found to *split* them along some other axis than the color line.

What's left of basic industry and services in this deindustrializing country is still heavily black. Black workers in industry, transport and city jobs provide a bridge to social power for the ghetto masses. Their strategic role puts black workers in a position to *lead* the multiracial proletariat, including backward whites, in struggle against their common exploiters.

It took a social revolution, the Civil War, in which black soldiers turned the tide for the Union, to uproot the outmoded system of chattel slavery in this country. Socialist revolution, in which black workers will play a vanguard role as the section of the proletariat with the least to lose and the most to gain from a fundamental reshaping of the existing social order, is the only means for delivering ourselves from the capitalist bondage that took the place of the chains of slavery. The key is to forge a multiracial communist leadership that can intervene at moments of sharp social convulsion to change history forever.

—August 1992

Mumia Abu-Jamal is a radical black journalist whose columns appear frequently in *Workers Vanguard* and other periodicals. An anti-racist activist from his early teens, a former Black Panther and presently a supporter of the MOVE group, Abu-Jamal was framed up in the killing of a Philadel-

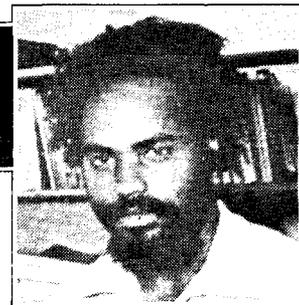
phia policeman and is now fighting for his freedom and his life. This column, written in 1991 in support of a Hispanic upheaval in the nation's capital, exemplifies his powerful writer's gifts animated by his passionate commitment on the side of the oppressed. It shows why the "city fathers" and cops

of Philadelphia so hate and fear this "voice of the voiceless" that they seek to silence him forever.

For more information about the defense campaign for Mumia Abu-Jamal please contact the Partisan Defense Committee, Box 99, Canal Street Station, New York, New York 10013.

From Death Row, This is Mumia Abu-Jamal

A Rage in the District



Fires dance upon the upturned metallic corpses of police cars cooking in twilight.

Sirens wail in electronic alarm, as strobe lights sweep in a maddening circular arc.

America's capital city experiences one of the first riots of the season, but this burst comes with a difference. Recent history, since the 1960s, reflects Blacks in riot, enraged at a system of total economic, political exclusion. The recent unrest in Washington, D.C. was marked by brown faces, not Black ones, and indeed, was directed at a political system headed and faced by Blacks.

Recent immigrants from Central America, fleeing America's deadly policies of low intensity warfare against workers, peasants in lands like El Salvador, found, upon arrival, not the promised land of milk and honey, but of menial jobs, ethnic alienation, and hostility born of the eternal conflict between the newly-arrived and those who came before.

The reported genesis of the riot, that a Black female police officer ordered a Latino drinker to cease his open, public drinking, is, as always, insufficient.

It may have been a spark, but even a spark needs kindling to catch, to expand, to explode into flame.

People riot when other methods of redress are foreclosed, and when despair reaches intolerable depths of the soul. Many of the peoples of the riot areas of D.C. came to El Norte when government repressions at home left few options; leave or die—and so, they came, by the tens of thousands, drawn by promises of peace, of freedom, of a better life north of home.

Many found crippling, poisonous toil in the fields of the nation's hotlands; grapes, oranges, and tomatoes picked in a daily grind of survival. Some fled to U.S. cities and, when they sought government help, were stunned to find Black faces in civil service, Blacks who, like their predecessors before them, viewed the newcomers with suspicion, for "they were foreigners," "they talked funny," or "they can't even speak English!"

America has historically been hard on its newcomers, as evidenced by the Kensington Riots of May 1844 Philadelphia, where Protestants attacked (predominantly Irish) Catholics, destroying neighborhoods; and in 1902, when

Irish, aided by a predominantly Irish police force, attacked N.Y. Jews; also when Wyoming whites in summer 1885 massacred Chinese miners.

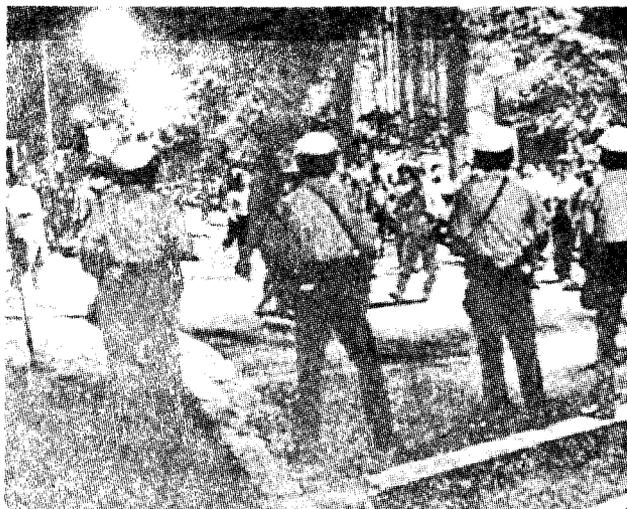
To every people who arrive in America is given resentment and resistance to their presence.

Blacks, surely among those who received the rawest of receptions (and the only people who did not come here willingly), can ill afford to continue this cycle, for among all America's peoples, we have the least hope of fading into the fiction of a so-called "melting pot" (nor should we wish to!).

Though Black faces sit in high places, they still possess no true power, only the curious "option" of continuing "business as usual."

The politics of exclusion, of distinction, of high & low, must give way to the commonality of human, for it is precisely "business as usual" that has brought us to this hour of alienation, of bubbling hatreds, of riotous anger, of social and psychic discontent.

It is past time for fundamental change.

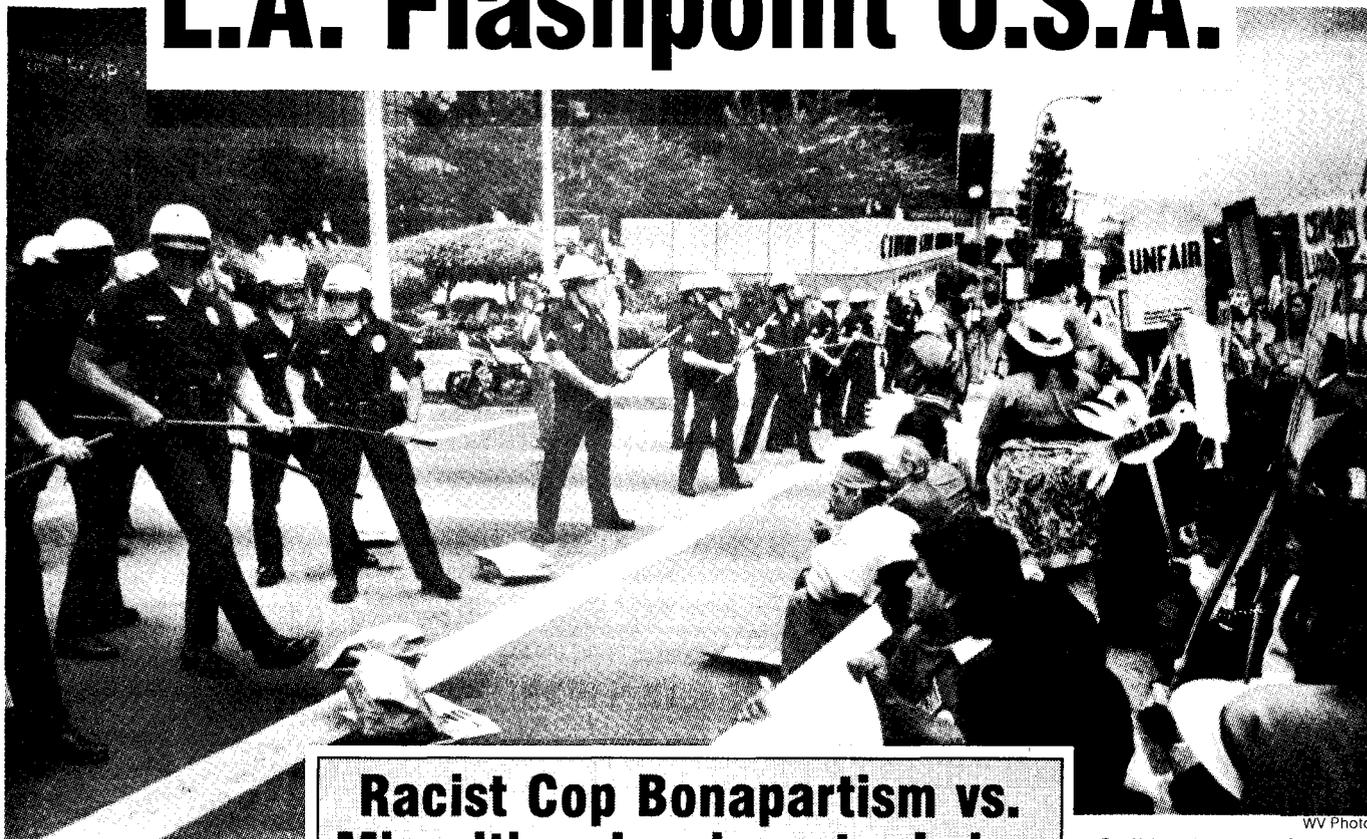


D.C. cops block street, 6 May 1991.

Lustig/Washington Post

reprinted from *Workers Vanguard* Nos. 555 and 556, 10 July and 24 July 1992

L.A. Flashpoint U.S.A.



Racist Cop Bonapartism vs. Minorities, Immigrants, Labor

WV Photo
Striking janitors face LAPD attack, June 1990.

Four years ago, in a report commissioned by L.A. mayor Tom Bradley, Los Angeles was hyped as a "vibrant mosaic," the "leading hub of world trade," a "cross-roads city" that "welcomes and encourages diversity." The 1988 report entitled "L.A. 2000, A City for the Future" boasted, "Just as New York, London and Paris stood as symbols of past centuries, Los Angeles will be THE city of the 21st century." In a "New World Order" dominated by American imperialism, just as Miami would be the capital of Latin America, L.A. would serve as hub of the Pacific Rim. This calculation was the basis for an ambitious building boom of corporate centers financed by Asian capital. But the explosion of outrage that ripped through the impoverished ghettos and barrios, following the acquittal of the racist L.A. cops who savagely beat black motorist Rodney King, blew a gaping hole in the city boosters' script.

In "La-La Land," smug yuppies relied on desperate "illegals" from Central America to make their gardens bloom and care for their kids while they organ-

ized in "ecology-minded" movements to keep "them" out of the neighborhood. They would drive past teeming black and Latino South-Central as they cruised the freeways in their BMWs. At the top, city rulers pointed to their glitzy steel-and-glass developments in Century City and downtown. But at the base, there is an economy of raw exploitation where hundreds of thousands of desperate immigrants labor for the minimum wage in sweatshops that now occupy the sites of the former unionized manufacturing plants. The destruction of industry decimated what income base there was in the already impoverished black ghetto. And on April 29, the smoldering rage at the bottom burst into flames that consumed the "city of angels."

By the end of the 1980s, Los Angeles had replaced San Francisco as the West Coast power center and become the second-largest financial center in the U.S. With the highest percentage of immigrants of any city in the country (over 40 percent of the total population), it was perhaps the most ethnically

diverse metropolis in the world. The L.A. school district reports that over 80 languages are spoken by its students, while the London *Economist* describes Los Angeles as a place where one can buy a kosher burrito in a store run by Koreans. But in this epoch of capitalist decay, the melting pot has become a pressure cooker. With this intense social change and strife on its doorstep, the film industry has produced a spate of recent films on the L.A. cauldron, from the white liberal *Grand Canyon* to the black nationalist *Boyz N the Hood*.

There has also been an avalanche of books on changing L.A., including David Rieff's vapid *Los Angeles: Capital of the Third World* (Simon & Schuster, 1991), the diverse collection of essays edited by David Reid, *Sex, Death and God in L.A.* (Pantheon, 1992), and leftist author Mike Davis' wide-ranging and knowledgeable *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (Verso, 1990). In *The Third Century: America's Resurgence in the Asian Era*, Joel Kotkin argued that the



Sarah Leen



Skid Row "Nickel" district in shadow of glitzy downtown hotels and office buildings.

WV Photo

massive immigration of Asians and Latinos to L.A. was emblematic of a new "Manifest Destiny" for the declining "American Empire," in which the U.S. would emerge as "a 'world nation' with links to virtually every inhabitable part of the globe." But far from representing a revitalized future for American imperialist global exploitation and competition, Los Angeles' much-vaunted "growth economy" epitomized the decay and parasitism of U.S. capitalism.

The shameless looting of productive investment and destruction of industry was personified by Michael Milken, the '80s junk bond king who operated out of Beverly Hills. While Milken raked in a \$500 million "salary" in one year, tens of thousands of workers in L.A.'s auto, steel and rubber plants were thrown out of their jobs as the plants were closed down in the deindustrialization of America. Today over half of black youth in L.A. are unemployed, driven back and isolated on increasingly mean streets. Hovering above them, the "Blue Thunder" helicopters of L.A.'s paramilitary police force maintain a reign of terror over the ghettos and barrios, against the poor and homeless. And then with the blatant injustice of the racist Simi Valley verdict letting the LAPD killer cops walk, to paraphrase the city's motto, it "all came together in L.A."

What followed was a multiracial social upheaval. The media show endless reruns of the brutal beating of white truck driver Reginald Denny, trying to paint the conflagration as a vicious race riot (naturally, they play down the fact

that Denny was rescued by blacks). There were ugly incidents, particularly the pernicious channeling of black anger not against the state but against Korean store owners. But what really shook the rulers of this country was that this was an integrated explosion of pent-up anger by the poor, minority and working people whom they have viciously ground down. The L.A. riots were widely seen as a "wake-up call to America." Various liberals and reformists saw this as an opportunity to cement a new "popular front." Thus Mike Davis wrote:

"Most of our political and business leaders have suddenly given lip service to portentous ideas like 'the war between the haves and the have-nots.' If they are serious, then surely they must recognize what Los Angeles most desperately needs is not a Pyrrhic 'victory' over rioters, but a truce between hostile ethnic and economic strata that can become a framework for negotiating a new social contract to replace the faded vision of the Bradley years."

—*Los Angeles Times* (15 May)

While Davis dreams of erecting some kind of "New Deal" on the smoldering ruins of South-Central Los Angeles, the only deal the bosses have to offer the working class, poor and minorities is an increasingly raw one.

Rather than the pipe dream of class peace, what L.A. showed was the potential for explosive class struggle. As we wrote in our article "L.A. Upheaval Shakes America" (WV No. 551, 15 May): "Conditions are overripe for a massive social explosion in this country extending from the ghettos and Hispanic barrios to white skilled workers, many of

them one paycheck away from bankruptcy and eviction. The eruption of integrated protests following the acquittal of the racist cops in the Rodney King case signals the potential for just such a new wave of militant social struggle." To realize this potential, what is required is a multiracial revolutionary party that can bring to bear the consciousness and organization necessary to direct the anger and outrage that erupted in L.A., and reverberated across the country, into a revolutionary fight to sweep away this whole system of capitalist exploitation, racism and poverty.

Fool's Paradise for the Rich, Nightmare for the Poor

The bourgeois reaction of the 1980s—brought home in massive union-busting, slashing social programs for blacks and Hispanics, starving the poor and aged, and a wholesale legal counterrevolution abrogating democratic rights—was a program that had been playing out in California over the last 25 years, ever since Reagan was elected governor in 1966. Riding to power on a white racist backlash following the 1965 Watts rebellion in L.A., he campaigned as the "law and order" candidate who would root out "welfare cheats," hold the line against integrated "fair housing" legislation and otherwise use an iron heel to keep blacks, Hispanics and the burgeoning Vietnam antiwar movement in line.

The Reaganites' "supply side economics" of cutting taxes for the rich and upper income suburbanites, while stealing money from welfare mothers and

inner city school kids, was presaged in the 1978 Proposition 13 "tax revolt" led by Howard Jarvis, head of the Apartment Owners' Association of L.A. A white middle-class revolt against government programs viewed as benefiting the ghettos and barrios, in L.A. the Prop 13 "movement" was linked with BUSSTOP, a racist mobilization that smashed even the limited moves that were ordered in 1978 for school integration (after a 15-year court battle). Blacks, Latinos and the poor were increasingly immiserated and rigidly segregated. Welfare was slashed, libraries and hospitals were devastated, the public school system was ravaged. The former "education state," California now ranks 48th among the 50 states in per capita expenditure on public education.

In the 1980s, big businesses reaped huge tax windfalls from Prop 13 (Standard Oil for example saved \$47 million a year). The California "defense" industry grew fat off the biggest peacetime military buildup in U.S. history. Real estate magnates secured tax breaks for development scams and speculation that earned them fortunes while looting revenue for social programs. The "L.A. 2000" report boasted of the region's "robust" economy: "the largest aerospace center in the world; the greatest concentration of high-tech industries; and a healthy manufacturing sector. The ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach presently handle the highest volume of shipping of any port in the nation. Moreover, the ports offer direct access to Pacific Rim countries, many of which are exhibiting spectacular economic growth." But the rulers were living in a fool's paradise on borrowed money and borrowed time.

The collapse of the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe and the counterrevolutionary ascendancy in the Soviet Union burst the bubble for war industry in the West. One-third of Southern California's aerospace workforce has been axed and hundreds of thousands more layoffs are coming down the pipes. Last week the L.A.-based Hughes Aircraft announced the dismissal of 9,000 workers. Meanwhile, East Asian flight capital has taken flight. Just as Reagan financed his "Star Wars" and other military boondoggles through massive borrowing from Japanese moneymen, German bankers and Arab oil sheiks, the "redevelopment" of downtown L.A. was financed by foreign capital. And while the L.A. ports were the busiest in the country, as Mike Davis points out, "more than half the containers which arrive in San Pedro filled with computers, cars and televisions return

with nothing in them" (*City of Quartz*).

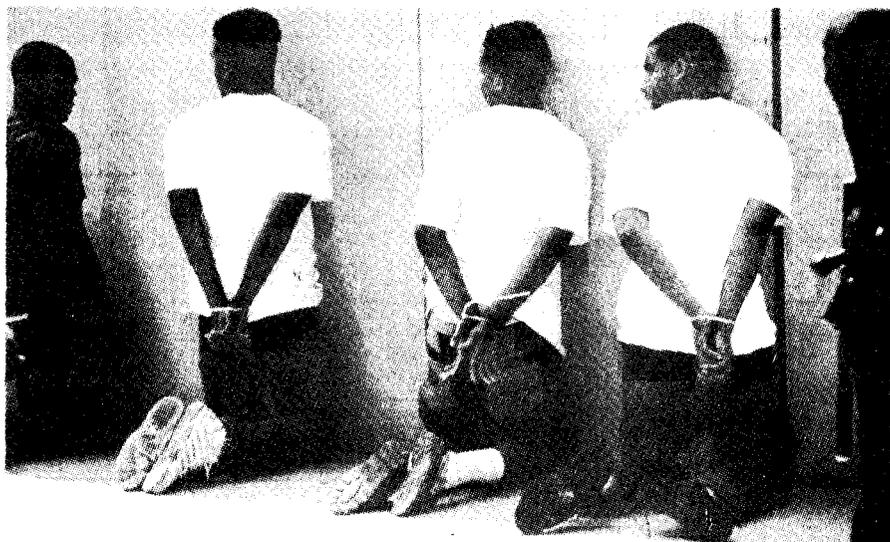
Of course, there isn't much to trade. The industrial heartland of Southeast Los Angeles has been transformed into a virtual "free trade zone" of low-wage sweatshop labor which, in the words of one economic analyst, was "competing head-to-head not with Germany and Japan, but with Bangladesh and the Philippines." More to the point, Mexican workers earning the minimum wage in L.A. are competing with Mexican workers making *one-tenth* as much just over the border in the *maquiladora* plants of Tijuana, which has grown from a honkytonk town into a huge industrial city producing for the American market. At the bottom, L.A.'s "growth economy" is a nightmare for a hard-pressed and increasingly marginalized black population, for hundreds of thousands of disenfranchised and brutally exploited Latino and East Asian immigrants, and for white unionized workers who have seen their jobs and unions decimated.

Over the past decade one of the biggest growth industries in L.A. has been private security firms whose armed cops patrol rich white neighborhoods. NIMBY (Not In My Backyard) yuppies have banded together in defense of the "environment" against new development. At a 1987 conference of "Not Yet New York," one group called for a statewide "Elbow Room" (or as the Nazis called it, *Lebensraum*) initiative to restrict immigration, seal the border with Mexico and impose obligatory "family planning." As Davis puts it: "hysterical homeowners' associations, supported by local businessmen, have begun to wage war against the very im-

migrant labor upon which their master-race lifestyles depend." Meanwhile real estate magnates and developers have demagogically presented themselves as the defenders of "cheap" high-rise housing for the working class and minorities against the "slow growth" NIMBYs.

L.A. has not built a unit of public housing since the early 1950s, when any further plans were defeated by a *Los Angeles Times*-led campaign denouncing them as "socialistic." Today whole families of immigrants are crammed into tiny apartments where they have to "hot bed" it (sleep in shifts) to get any rest. Others live in "reconverted" garages with no plumbing or electricity. To get to the office buildings and homes that they clean, they have to travel for hours by bus. (Until recently there has been no rapid transit in L.A., as it was also proclaimed to be "socialistic" by a cabal of West Side developers and General Motors.)

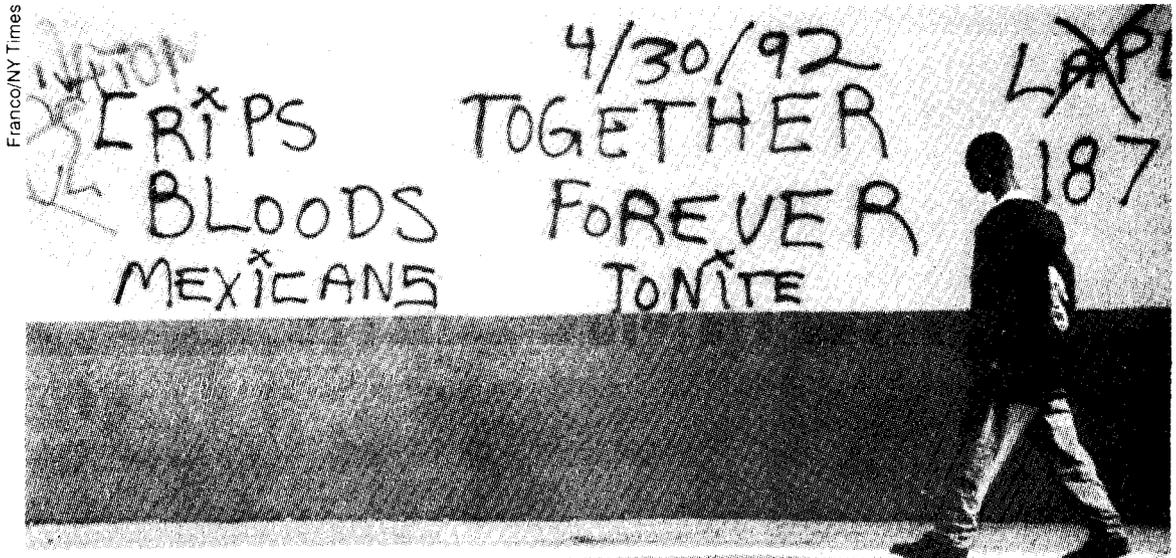
And while City Council members debate deporting the homeless to the Santa Monica mountains, they have implemented various "design innovations" to make life even more unlivable for the completely destitute. The last public toilet in L.A.'s Skid Row, "Nickel," directly abutting the Downtown citadel, was bulldozed. Round-top "bum-proof" benches, uncomfortable to sit on and impossible to sleep on, were installed at bus stops. An overhead sprinkler system in "Skid Row Park" is turned on randomly throughout the night to drive out the homeless. In the winter of 1987, when the temperature plummeted and a number of people froze to death on the street, the cardboard



Der Spiegel

Thousands of black and Hispanic youth and working people were rounded up in racist police dragnet after L.A. exploded in outrage.

LAPD
nightmare:
gang truce
in the
wake of
L.A. riots.



shanties erected by the homeless to protect themselves were torn down by the LAPD. The head of the Planning Commission explained that while it was not "illegal" to sleep on the streets, erecting "any sort of protective shelter" was against the law.

"The Thin Blue Line"

L.A. has been a seething volcano just waiting to explode and the rulers sitting on top knew it. The overriding force "holding the line" against the majority of the city's population—on whose backs a thin layer at the top were enriching themselves—was the LAPD. As John Gregory Dunne described it in the *New York Review of Books* (24 October 1991), "the department functions more like a panzer division than a normal police force, a high-tech army on wheels trained to respond to incidents in seven minutes or less." It's not just on wheels: LAPD helicopters, equipped with 30 million candlepower spotlights called "Night-sun," thunder over the ghettos and barrios *19 hours a day*. To facilitate joint action with forces on the ground, rooftops have been painted with street numbers, in Davis' words, "transforming the aerial view of the city into a huge police grid."

In a bunker on the fourth and fifth sublevels of City Hall is housed the most powerful, state-of-the-art police communications system in the world—designed to speed up LAPD response time and coordinate information with database "hit lists" of "suspects." (This only underlines that the LAPD command deliberately refused to intervene when the riots erupted because the cops wanted a conflagration to promote interracial violence and to whip up a white racist frenzy that could be channeled into support for more murderous cop repression.) The

"Emergency Command Control Communications System" was brought in at the time of the 1984 Olympics when the Reaganites' "anti-terrorism" scare was at a fever pitch. Now, Peter Ueberroth, who was the director of the '84 Olympics, is brought in to head the "healing process" to "rebuild" L.A.

The "war against drugs" supplanted the "war against terrorism" as the all-purpose ticket for terror sweeps of the ghettos and barrios. As increasing poverty, lumpenization and despair in the black ghettos and Hispanic barrios gave rise to gangs like the Crips and the Bloods, a frenzy was whipped up over "gang-related crime." In 1988, the LAPD launched "Operation HAMMER." Declaring "this is Vietnam here," the cops carried out "search and destroy" missions.

In August 1988, eighty-eight cops descended on two apartment buildings in a black neighborhood on Dalton Avenue. Armed with sledgehammers and battering rams, they completely demolished four apartments—smashing windows, walls and furniture, ripping out toilets and throwing washing machines into bathtubs, and spray-painting the walls with "LAPD Rules." Meanwhile those who were arrested were forced to whistle the theme song of *The Andy Griffith Show* as they were marched through a gauntlet of cops beating them with flashlights and fists. When it was all over, the LAPD had two arrests of non-residents on penny-ante charges of possessing small amounts of marijuana and cocaine. A year and a half later, an L.A. jury awarded the 55 residents \$3 million in damages.

The Dalton Avenue assault was not a case of cops running amok but rather an example of *standard operating proce-*

dure by the L.A. cops. A May 1991 *Daily News* study of 387 LAPD shootings (167 of them fatal) over the period from 1985 to 1990 showed that not one officer was criminally charged. A January 1992 American Civil Liberties Union report on the LAPD's canine unit showed more than 900 people bitten by police dogs in a three-year period ending early 1991; 70 percent of the dog-bite victims were Latino, 20 percent black and only 2 percent white. The kill-crazy sadism and thug mentality of this paramilitary force—whose helicopters, armored personnel carriers, tanks and SWAT teams have long been the stuff of TV shows and movies—was televised to millions of Americans who watched in horror at the videotape of an LAPD gang torturing a defenseless black man, Rodney King.

In the face of nationwide public fury, the L.A. city administration set up an "independent commission" to investigate the cops. The Christopher Commission report opened with the statement: "The Rodney King beating stands as a landmark in the recent history of law enforcement, comparable to the Scottsboro case in 1931." The landmark here was that the cops were caught on camera employing the racist terror that is the daily fare dished out to oppressed minorities by police forces across the country. True, the L.A. cops may be one of the most blatant examples of police bonapartism, acting as a law unto themselves. Right up to his resignation last month, Daryl Gates flaunted the fact that the LAPD chief is not even formally responsible to the mayor or city council. Gates became something of an embarrassment to the powers that be. To rein in these dogs of war, the Christopher Commission report called for increased training, "cultural awareness" sessions and the

creation of a "citizen Police Commission" to review complaints.

As communists with a Marxist understanding of the state, we oppose cop bonapartism and warn that the police-state terror of the LAPD is not going to be curbed through better training or "independent" investigation into its "excesses." The cops are the armed enforcers of capitalist "law and order." The paramilitary forces of the LAPD reflect the fragility of the propertied, wealthy few whose rule can only be enforced and maintained through brutal subjugation of those whose exploitation and oppression feeds their profits. From the standpoint of minorities, poor and working people, the record of the more traditional, corrupt Los Angeles Sheriff's Department is hardly better. Some of the worst examples cited in the recent Amnesty International report on police brutality in L.A. were carried out by LASD deputies against black and Latino residents of Lynwood, a neighborhood near South-Central Los Angeles.

Small wonder that youth in the ghettos and barrios are receptive to the idea (peddled by groups like Progressive Labor and the Revolutionary Communist Party) that they are living under a fascist dictatorship. To preserve its decrepit rule, the bourgeoisie is increasingly turning this country into some kind of "democratic" police state using measures that found naked expression in Los Angeles. Behind the bonapartist cops stands an arsenal of legal repression like the 1988 "Street Terrorism Enforcement and Prevention Act" (STEP). Drawn up by the local D.A.'s office and passed with overwhelming bipartisan support in the California legislature, this law not only made membership in a gang a felony offense but allows for prosecution of parents of gang members. The net effect is to criminalize virtually every non-Anglo youth in the city and county, as well as white street kids.

L.A. now has the largest prison population in a country which has more people behind bars than any place else in the world. The cops barricade off whole neighborhoods in "Narcotics Enforcement Zones." Curfews are selectively applied to the ghettos and barrios as police sweep the streets for violators to add to their computer database of "suspects." In a Rand Corporation study of 5,633 people arrested during the recent riots in L.A., more than 2,000 were hauled in for "curfew violation." Despite the media images of marauding mobs, barely 10 percent (570) were arrested on "violence" charges, and of those 143

were for weapons possession. This is an indication not of violent crime but of the fact that any sane person in Los Angeles is likely to have a gun. Only *ten* of those arrested, overwhelmingly Latinos and blacks, were charged with homicide. And of over 50 deaths listed as "riot-connected," not one was a cop.

"Forty Year War" on L.A. Labor: Now a Century Old

That the LAPD rivals the military in some Third World military dictatorship is because they have never felt the mobilized power of an organized labor movement. Los Angeles is an anti-union, "open shop" city—a legacy which goes back to the robber barons who conspired to enrich themselves through the creation of this sprawling desert metropolis. These are the "titans" who drained the Owens Valley dry, diverting water to the San Fernando Valley where the desert lands they had procured through various real estate swindles began to bloom. The water wars of the 1920s were the subject of Roman Polanski's movie *Chinatown*.

In *Cadillac Desert* (1986) Marc Reisner describes L.A. in the latter years of the 19th century: "By the end of the Civil War, when San Francisco was the Babylon of the American frontier, Los Angeles was a filthy pueblo of thirteen

thousand, a beach for human flotsam washed across the continent on the blood tide of the war." The creation of the city that grew up in its place was plotted by a cabal of railway tycoons, developers and bankers. Led by General Harrison Gray Otis, founder of the *Los Angeles Times*, and his son-in-law Harry Chandler, who together headed a dynasty that ruled the city for three generations, they looted the region. To compete with San Francisco they constructed a completely manmade harbor. Against the booming port city to the north, at the time the most unionized city in the world, the robber barons of L.A. boosted their city as a haven of "economic freedom" from organized labor.

In the 1890s, General Otis militarized labor relations in Los Angeles. Otis drove through the streets in a custom-built car with a small working cannon on the hood and his L.A. Times Building resembled a medieval fortress. Unions that existed were locked out or smashed by the Merchants and Manufacturers Association, picketing was outlawed and radicals were run off the streets. As Louis Adamic wrote in his book *Dynamite: The Story of Class Violence in America* (1931), "Otis had become the most savage and effective enemy of labor unionism in the country, and

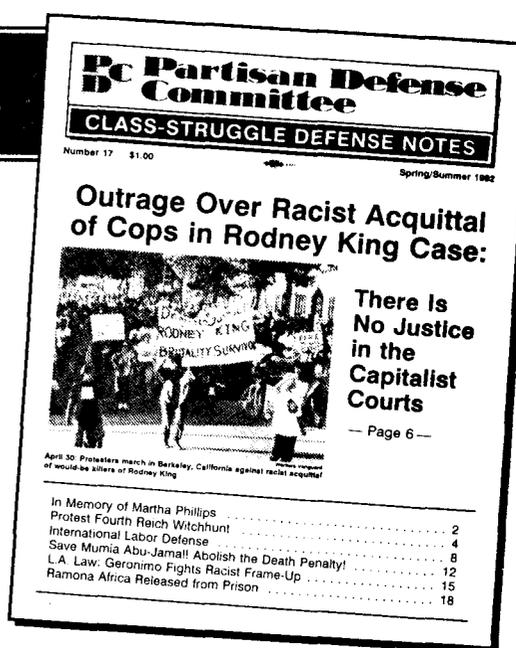
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as a result of his doings Los Angeles was—and is today—the outstanding open-shop town in the United States.”

Key was the jailing of the McNamara brothers in 1911. The McNamaras, organizers for the Iron Workers, were charged with dynamiting the Times Building. Their case galvanized labor in L.A. against the hated union-busting Otis regime. Demonstrations of 20,000 came out in support of the McNamaras, and Socialist Party candidate Job Harriman was poised to take the mayoral elections. But when defense lawyer Clarence Darrow had the McNamaras change their plea to “guilty,” the tide was turned. The streets outside the courthouse, which had been filled with the McNamaras’ defenders, were empty. The McNamara boys were thrown behind bars, one for life. Otis rode high in the saddle, trampling any opposition to the rule of his dynasty. This was the high point of what the *Times* termed the “Forty Year War” against labor, a defining event which has conditioned class relations in Los Angeles ever since.

Davis reports that “one AFL union after another had been broken in a succession of violent metal trades strikes and street transport lockouts. Only IWW seamen and longshoremen defied the Merchants and Manufacturers Association crusade to make the open shop complete” (*City of Quartz*). Through the 1920s, white mainstreeters from the

Midwest flocked to L.A., making it one of the most right-wing nativist cities in the country. In the ‘30s, tens of thousands of “Okies” from the Oklahoma-Texas dust bowl joined the Depression migration to the Los Angeles basin. The first years of the stormy CIO organizing drives which established industrial unions in the Midwest auto, steel and rubber centers passed L.A. by. But as the U.S. geared up for World War II, industry in Los Angeles was booming. In March 1941, the UAW-CIO won an NLRB election at the North American Aviation plant in Inglewood.

On June 5, the 12,000 workers at North American struck. Roosevelt immediately ordered them back to work, and dispatched an army of 3,500 battle-ready troops to open the plant. As Art Preis reports in *Labor’s Giant Step* (Pioneer, 1964), “Roosevelt acted with confidence because he felt he had the backing of high CIO and UAW officials.... Thus, the United States government waged its first military engagement of World War II on American soil against American workers resisting hunger wages.” As troops drove workers back with blows from the rifle butts, cries broke out “Heil Roosevelt!” Soldiers armed with trench mortars, antitank guns, machine guns and two anti-aircraft guns cleared the area. Local strike leaders yielded, advising workers to go back. In a final blow, the UAW International

suspended local union officers, rebaiting them as communists.

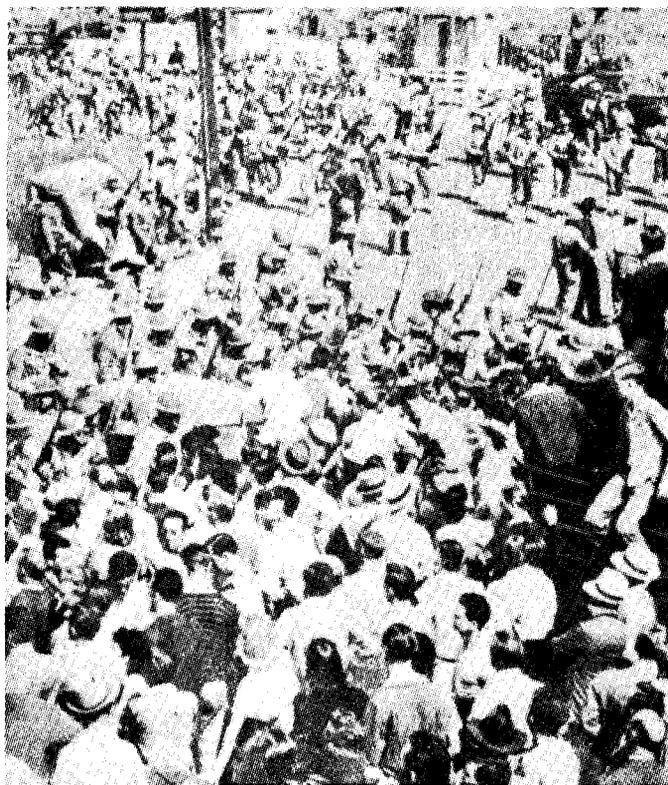
When the UAW was finally established in the aircraft plants of Southeast L.A., and the Steelworkers at the Kaiser plant in Fontana out in San Bernardino County, it was strictly from the top down. During the war years, women workers were heavily employed in the aircraft plants, and many black workers from the South found jobs there. But the pervasive atmosphere of racist reaction (which exploded in the 1943 anti-Mexican “Zoot Suit” riots) continued to dominate the area. (North American refused to hire *any* blacks.) Chester Himes’ 1945 novel *If He Hollers Let Him Go* tells of the experiences of a skilled black shipyard worker confronted by Jim Crow segregation in and out of the plants. In his autobiography, Himes noted that he had lived in the South, survived seven and a half years in prison, five Depression years in Cleveland, “But under the mental corrosion of race prejudice in Los Angeles I had become bitter and saturated with hate.”

The Fire Last Time—Watts 1965

On April 29, the racist rulers of America watched their TV sets in horror and fear at the multiracial explosion of outrage which engulfed the streets of South-Central Los Angeles. In an elemental way the eruption in L.A., which was echoed in integrated protests and upheavals across the rest of the country, was a revolt against a system which has condemned the working class, minorities and poor to minimum-wage exploitation, unemployment lines, soup kitchens, broken unions, broken lives. As we noted at the time, “The match that lit up L.A. has burned a gaping hole in the New World Order that is widening with each passing day. From the White House to the California state house, America’s rulers know they are *all* guilty, and they’re nervous as hell.”

The glamour capital of the U.S. is now seen worldwide as the symbol of the desperate conditions of life for impoverished blacks and Latinos in America. The first installment of a special six-part series in the *Los Angeles Times* (11-16 May) titled “Understanding the Riots,” opined: “The date could be August, 1965, when Watts first erupted. But this is April, 1992, the verdict is in, and the eyes of the world are watching.... How did Los Angeles reach the point of crisis—again?”

On 11 August 1965 the black population of Watts in South-Central L.A. erupted in outrage against their system-



UAW

**“Open shop”
L.A.: Roosevelt
sent in federal
troops to break
UAW strike at
North American
Aviation in
June 1941.
Bonapartist
cops ride
roughshod in
town where
labor has
historically
been weak.**

atic brutalization by the police, temporarily driving the cops out. At the time, bourgeois journalists nervously described it as the beginning of the "second Civil War." The National Guard was called in. As Gerald Horne, author of the upcoming book, *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the Meaning of the 1960s*, commented: "It took 15,000 troops to subdue Watts and South Central Los Angeles in 1965, which is more than it took to subdue the Dominican Republic."

Coming a year after the Harlem police riot, the explosion in Watts presaged the ghetto upheavals that would spread through the inner cities of America. Martin Luther King Jr. came out endorsing the brutal cop/Guard suppression of the black rebellion, in which 31 blacks were killed: "It was necessary that as powerful a police force as possible be brought in to check them" (*New York Times*, 16 August 1965). The spirit of King's pacifism was captured in the Black Muslims' famous cartoon, captioned: "If there is any blood spilled in the streets, let it be *our* blood!"

For black militants across the country, this graphically demonstrated what the preachers' policy of turn-the-other-cheek "nonviolence" really meant: support for the racist capitalist order. In the context of growing opposition to the U.S. war in Vietnam, this would soon lead to a split in the civil rights movement and the emergence of the "black power" wing.

The Watts upheaval grew out of a background of rising black unemployment and a rigid pattern of segregation going back decades which kept blacks out of houses, schools and jobs outside of "their" neighborhoods. Many Southern blacks had immigrated to Los Angeles at the time of the Second World War, when the city was a center of war production. The Roosevelt administration enforced "fair employment" orders on government contractors, war industries and unions to make up for the labor shortage. But when the war ended, thousands of blacks were driven out of their jobs.

Rigidly segregated in South-Central L.A. on one side of Alameda Street, which came to be known as the "Cotton Curtain," blacks were kept out of the higher-paying jobs in the auto, steel and rubber factories on the other side of the street. On the other side of the "Cotton Curtain" lived Southern white workers, many of whom had also come to L.A. during the war. It was a line that blacks were not to cross. Any who tried were

1992



Kaul/L.A. Times

City of Rage. U.S. Army, National Guard and LAPD occupied L.A. ghetto to suppress Watts rebellion of 1965, and again this year to squelch upheaval after the racist acquittal of cops who beat Rodney King.

1965



Malmin/L.A. Times

set upon by white gangs with names like the "Spookhunters." But the top enforcer of segregation was the LAPD under Chief William Parker.

Brought in to combat corruption in the LAPD following the "Brenda Allen" scandal of the late 1940s (where the cops were exposed as being on the protection payroll and client list of a local madam), Parker militarized the LAPD. He mod-

eled them on the Marines, in line with his conception of the cops as the "thin blue line"—the last line of defense for (white) "society."

A viciously right-wing puritanical bigot and self-proclaimed white supremacist, Parker waged war on "race mixing." Cops were sent in to drag white women out of black bars on Central Avenue. According to one black busi-

nessman, during the 1950s L.A. cops blockaded his record store warning whites to keep out because "it was too dangerous to hang around black neighborhoods."

Parker was the enforcer of the L.A. rulers' viciously racist, anti-labor social order. As one observer described it, Parker "was to the Los Angeles oligarchy what the army in El Salvador is to its oligarchs, the enforcer of their rigid social views" (John Gregory Dunne in the *New York Review of Books*, 24 October 1991).

In 1953, the LAPD chief supplied "crime statistics" to bolster the *Los Angeles Times* crusade against public housing as evidence of "creeping socialism." Parker ranted that public housing would lead to "jungle life." Under a *Times*-sponsored mayor, plans were laid and carried out to level Bunker Hill, where poor Mexican Americans and whites crowded together in ramshackle rooming houses, and use the site for luxury redevelopment. Residents of Chavez Ravine, which like Bunker Hill had been one of the proposed sites to build public housing, were driven out of their homes to pave the way for Dodger Stadium.

Meanwhile blacks and other minorities were prevented from moving to other neighborhoods by Jim Crow housing legislation and deed restrictions providing for the "exclusion of all non-Caucasians from occupancy, except as domestic servants." Sometimes non-Christians were banned as well. In 1964, when the civil rights movement was protesting against Jim Crow segregation in the Deep South, Proposition 13, which voided California's "fair housing laws," was passed. Nine months later Watts exploded.

The liberal pacifism and legalism of

the civil rights movement had no answer to the oppression of blacks outside the South who had formal "legal" equality but, as in Watts, were brutally terrorized by racist cops, segregated in impoverished ghettos ridden with unemployment and despair. Black oppression is rooted deep in the social and economic structure of American capitalism and can only be solved through a thoroughgoing socialist revolution. The young black militants who broke with King's cringing pacifism to embrace the slogan of "black power" represented the best of a generation. But they never found the bridge to the program of a revolutionary integrated struggle for *workers power*.

Aftermath of Watts

The L.A. rulers used the Watts riot to whip up a white racist "law and order" frenzy. LAPD chief Parker took to the airwaves to warn: "It is estimated that by 1970, 45 percent of the metropolitan area of Los Angeles will be Negro. If you want any protection for your home and family...you're going to have to get in and support a strong police department. If you don't, come 1970, God help you." This was echoed by the McCone Commission, headed by ex-CIA chief John McCone, in its "investigation" of the Watts upheaval. The Commission's report predicted "that by 1990 the core of the Central City of Los Angeles will be inhabited almost exclusively by more than 1,200,000 Negroes."

The Watts rebellion and the racist alarmism of the McCone Commission spurred the creation of the "Committee of 25," representing the interests of the biggest Downtown L.A. corporations. As Mike Davis puts it in his essay "Chinatown, Revisited?" (*Sex, Death and God in L.A.*) the Committee of 25 "was the closest thing to an 'executive committee of the bourgeoisie' that Southern California had seen since the class wars of the 1930s." Although opposed to black Democrat Tom Bradley when he ran for mayor, they came to see in this ex-cop the man they needed for the job of redeveloping L.A.'s Downtown as a fortress against the hideously oppressed minorities that surrounded it.

Bradley's 1969 mayoral campaign had been backed by more farsighted sections of the bourgeoisie, particularly represented by Westside Jewish liberals. They recognized the need to have a black mayor to keep the lid on. Although defeated in that bid by fellow Democrat and racist populist demagogue Sam Yorty, in 1973 Bradley was elected with the money

and enthusiastic backing of the Westside establishment and the *Times*, and the votes of the city's black population. Various rad-libs and reformists, with the Stalinists of the Communist Party in the lead, hailed Bradley's election as a victory of a great "progressive coalition." But as we wrote at the time:

"The ruling class didn't have to fear that Bradley's election might lead to the frustration of 'rising expectations' (the usual bourgeois explanation of ghetto rebellions); Bradley gave oppressed blacks nothing to expect. The rulers understand that, in addition to maintaining a façade of representative democracy, a moderate black politician obedient to the dictates of finance capital can often be an effective vehicle for containing and channeling the militancy of labor and oppressed minorities."

—WV No. 26, 3 August 1973

An ex-LAPD lieutenant who campaigned in his uniform and openly appealed to the forces of "law and order," Bradley paid back his minority constituents with even more poverty and deprivation. While programs for the poor received nothing from the city's revenues, his administration gave developers massive tax breaks for the "renewal" of Downtown and other real estate speculation which earned them vast fortunes. Even the miserable federal and county aid for social programs was overwhelmingly diverted to redevelopment. As one black resident of South-Central commented bitterly during the 1992 upheaval, "Having a black mayor didn't make any difference. Everything was the same. If it had been a white mayor, it would have been the same."

Capital of the Third World

By 1990 the Downtown citadel, whose development had been spurred by the racist alarmism of the LAPD and the McCone Commission, was surrounded not by blacks but by a "second city" of over one million impoverished Spanish-speaking immigrants. At the time of the Watts rebellion, the population of greater L.A. was 85 percent white; by the time of the 1990 census it was 40 percent Hispanic, 37 percent white, 13 percent black and 10 percent Asian. As an article in the *Village Voice* (9 June), entitled "The First Multicultural Riots," noted:

"After the 1965 Watts riot, politicians made pious promises to improve conditions in the inner cities... Instead, whites moved wholesale to the western part of the city or plowed over desert land in all directions to build new, homogeneous (read: lily-white) suburban communities. The new suburbs are self-incorporated and have rules to keep 'undesirables' from moving in.

"That left the city to the terribly poor

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1943 "Zoot Suit" riots were a racist pogrom by L.A. cops and club-wielding U.S. sailors against Mexicans and blacks.

and the terribly rich, who built up walls, set up sophisticated electronic surveillance systems, and hired private police to protect them. Los Angeles re-emerged just a scant 10 years later as an even more segregated city of isolated communities."

An article in the *New York Times* (28 June) noted that this election year the most common sign on the front lawns of Hollywood Democrats, who were the main force behind the election of Bradley in 1973, wasn't "Vote for Clinton" but "Armed Response."

Today in Watts and South-Central L.A. the population is more than half Latino. One demographic researcher commented, "If you take the past 27 years, I would challenge you to find any other place of equal poverty that has experienced such dramatic economic and demographic change" (*New York Times*, 15 May). While the city's aerospace industry was a big recipient of the Cold War II military buildup against the Soviet Union, its population was also swelled by desperate refugees from death squad terror and murder in Central America—the front line of the "war against Communism" in America's backyard. Some 300,000 Salvadorans—close to 10 percent of the entire population of that country—sought refuge in Los Angeles.

While there are long-established Mexican communities such as East L.A., over the last decade the neighborhoods of Pico-Union, Koreatown and the vast South-Central district have filled up with Central Americans and Mexicans, many of whom paid *coyote* smugglers their last savings to bring them across the border to *El Norte*. Yet once arrived in the "land

of opportunity," they found their opportunities severely limited. The poverty rate in Watts is three times the national average and higher than 1965. If statistics show the median household income has risen slightly, it's only because many immigrant families are crammed in two and three to a house, and impoverished "illegals" don't answer the knock of the census taker. The looting during the recent explosion in South-Central was more like the 1989 hunger riots in Caracas than what the bourgeoisie calls a "race riot."

An example of that was the June 1943 "Zoot Suit" riot in Los Angeles. For a week, war-drunk sailors and soldiers went on a racist rampage against young Mexicans (and blacks) in downtown L.A., while the LAPD regularly arrested nattily dressed minority youth. Mobs brandishing clubs careened through Chavez Ravine and other barrios. They had intended to continue through the black district, but as Carey McWilliams notes in *North From Mexico* (1948), "Learning that the Negroes planned a warm reception for them, the mobsters turned back." The lynchers had been whipped up by the Hearst press, which following their vicious campaign to lock up Japanese Americans in concentration camps then made Mexicans the next target of their xenophobia. As shown in Luis Valdez' movie *Zoot Suit*, sensationalist coverage of the "Sleepy Lagoon murder" case was wielded to whip up hatred of "*pachucos*" (gang members).

During and after the war, Mexican labor was brought in under the *bracero* program, and then expelled in 1954 in "Operation Wetback." In recent years

immigration has swelled as a result of the U.S.-engineered Mexican "debt crisis" which has sent living standards plummeting. Today Los Angeles has the second-largest Mexican population after Mexico City. Desperate Latino and Asian undocumented workers supply the superexploited labor for the garment, furniture and plastics sweatshops that now occupy the sites of the former rubber, steel and auto plants. With the destruction of manufacturing in L.A. during the 1970s and '80s, blacks in South-Central were mostly driven out of unionized jobs. In Vernon, the industrial heartland of Southeast L.A., 80 percent of the workforce in the garment industry is undocumented and all work for minimum wage.

As David Rieff commented in his book *Los Angeles: Capital of the Third World*:

"For all L.A.'s tradition as an anti-union town, nothing quite like it had been seen in the city, or anywhere else in the United States, since the rise of the trade union movement more than a century earlier. This was the employer-employee relationship as the late nineteenth-century plutocrats envisaged it in their most extravagant moments, a throwback to the last American gilded age...when Jay Gould boasted that he could buy one half of the American working class to kill the other half."

While they pointed to the mass immigration to Los Angeles over the past decade as a symbol of the city's "vitality," the wage-gouging sweatshop bosses and parasitical speculator "developers" who run L.A. have counted on playing the vast, multi-ethnic minority populations off against each other.

Asians were upheld as the "model minority." The entrepreneurial skills of

Korean and other Asian small shopkeepers were pointed to as the guarantee of L.A.'s prosperity as the "capital of the Pacific Rim." Beginning in 1970, immigration from South Korea took off. In the past decade the Korean population of Los Angeles County has more than doubled, from 60,000 in 1980 to 145,000 in 1990. Most were urban, educated professionals who saw little opportunity in South Korea. Although they arrived with some personal savings, most "got ahead" by having their whole families work 16 hours a day in the small retail businesses they ran in south L.A.

Rising resentment against Korean shopkeepers—crystallized by the 1991 murder of black teenager Latasha Harlins by a Korean store owner, and inflamed by black nationalist demagogues who aspire to be the exploiters of "their" ghetto market—was brought home in blood and fire during the recent upheaval. Conspicuously staying out of the area during the early hours as South-Central burned, the cops clearly wanted to inflame interracial hostility and violence, particularly between blacks and Asians. Meanwhile, most Asian immigrants are among the miserably exploited, who are a sizable proportion of the sweatshop labor.

Employers have used undocumented Hispanic workers as a battering ram against the few jobs that blacks had held onto. For example, in the early 1980s an SEIU local of black janitors who cleaned downtown high-rises was



WV Photo

Korean youth protest in solidarity with Rodney King, L.A. City Hall, 8 May 1992.

smashed and replaced with non-union, minimum-wage immigrant labor. And while the bosses brutally exploit desperate "illegal aliens," holding the threat of deportation over their heads, they fan the flames of racist reaction against Hispanics and Asians with anti-immigration hysteria and virulent Japanese-bashing. Now black nationalists and businessmen are demanding that Hispanic workers be driven out of jobs in the reconstruction sites.

Within the logic of capitalism, the smaller the pie, the more brutal the struggle for a piece of it. And as decaying capitalism's pie shrinks rapidly, the struggle is the fiercest among those for whom society makes it hardest to survive. For the racist rulers, pitting the oppressed and exploited against each other is an essential prop to maintain their increasingly decrepit system of raw exploitation. That is why they were so shaken by the *multiracial* character of the upheaval that erupted in L.A. following the acquittal of the racist cops who savagely beat Rodney King. They are haunted by the spectre of integrated class struggle.

For a Multiracial Revolutionary Workers Party!

In the aftermath of the L.A. upheaval, an article by Mike Davis in the *Los Angeles Times* (15 May), titled "To Restore Hope to Lost Generation, Talk to the Gangs," and a column by radical journalist Alexander Cockburn (*San Francisco Examiner*, 20 May) recommended a program put forward by the Crips and the Bloods under the slogan "Give Us the Hammer and the Nails, We Will Rebuild the City." The two formerly warring gangs offer to eliminate drug dealing and gang warfare in return for \$3.7 million in schools, hospitals and other social and reconstruction programs in South-Central. In exchange for the

money, the Crips and the Bloods offer themselves as part of a new force to police the area.

Davis argues, "Like the 1965 Watts riot, this conflict has united warring gangs around a vision of black power and community self-determination." Following the recent L.A. conflagration, gang members have appeared on many TV talk shows where they have been quite articulate in expressing the poverty and degradation that is everyday life for blacks in South-Central—contradicting the image of drug-deranged, inhuman outlaws portrayed by the bourgeois media and the LAPD. But the Crips and the Bloods are a far cry from the former gang members of the '60s, like "Bunchy" Carter and Jon Huggins, who in the aftermath of Watts founded the L.A. branch of the Black Panther Party.

The Panthers expressed a gut-level hatred for the whole system of racist, capitalist "Amerikkka," and they were met with the full force of the state. As opposed to the black cultural nationalists who pimped off the "war on poverty" programs of the '60s, the Panthers initially fought to remain independent of the bourgeois establishment. In contrast, the Crips and the Bloods are quite conscious that what they want for themselves is to cash in on the L.A. riots. Recently, the two gangs announced the formation of their own new non-profit corporation, whose main trade will be selling gang truce T-shirts. As the secretary of the new Crips-Bloods organization, Hands Across Watts, put it: "It's straight economics. I make money off of you, you make money off of me. It's either join the system or get rolled over by it. That's the American way" (*Los Angeles Times*, 6 July).

Davis himself notes in an article in *The Nation* (1 June), "The only



Robert Morrow

Multi-ethnic Los Angeles. More than 80 languages are spoken by school children in L.A.

national leader whom most Crips and Bloods seem to take seriously is Louis Farrakhan, and his goal of black economic self-determination is broadly embraced.... At the Inglewood gang summit, which took place on May 5, there were repeated references to a renaissance of black capitalism out of the ashes of Korean businesses. 'After all,' an ex-Crip told me later, 'we didn't burn our community, just *their* stores.' Louis Farrakhan—the man who wanted Malcolm X dead and who praised Adolf Hitler as a “great man”—carries the ideology of black nationalism to its most reactionary conclusions. This has gained broader currency today, as in the L.A. movie *Boyz N the Hood*, which compares the hero to Farrakhan and is infused with his “black capitalist” message.

From Booker T. Washington on, sections of the black petty bourgeoisie have had aspirations to be the exploiters of “their own” people. Farrakhan is a sinister demagogue whose “empowerment” rhetoric and program match that of the Reaganite right, from black businesses to “anti-drug” repression. He also sneers that “women, gays, lesbians and Jews have taken advantage of civil rights laws, antidiscrimination laws, housing laws,” and looks back with nostalgia to segregation, lamenting that “throughout the South the economic advancement that we gained under Jim Crow is literally dead” (*Nation*, 28 January 1991). And while the Crips and the Bloods offer themselves up as auxiliaries to the LAPD in policing the ghettos, Farrakhan’s “Nation of Islam” is in line for a contract from the Bush administration to operate as the security force in an L.A. housing project, as they earlier did in the Mayfair Estates in Washington, D.C. (*Los Angeles Times*, 3 July).

The Crips and the Bloods’ idea that somehow they are going to “get theirs” by joining the system in racist capitalist America is not only reactionary but totally utopian. The forcible segregation of the black population in this country at the bottom of the economic ladder is an essential part of the bedrock of American capitalism. Fantasies of getting rich by selling T-shirts only feed into the plans for minimum-wage, non-union “enterprise zones” being pushed by both Bush and the Democrats. There is no separate road to equality for the oppressed black masses in the United States apart from an integrated class-struggle fight to bring down the capitalist system which is the source of black oppression.

For many ghetto youth, the idea that the power of labor can be mobilized on behalf of the oppressed, not to mention



Popular 1990 strike by heavily minority teacher assistants in L.A. schools. Latino hotel workers, janitors and construction workers have also waged sharp union struggles recently. WV Photo

in defense of the unions themselves, seems bizarre. This isn't surprising, given recent experience. It's not that there haven't been hard-fought labor battles in this country over the past decade. But they have been repeatedly stabbed in the back by the bosses' labor lieutenants in the leadership of the trade-union movement. The job-trusting AFL-CIO tops who scream about immigrant workers stealing “our jobs” presided over the destruction of the unionized manufacturing plants that are now the sites of Third World sweatshop labor in L.A. Yet the racist, pro-capitalist labor fakery are not identical with the union movement, which is based on millions of working men and women.

White workers from Hormel meatpackers and Pittston coal miners to middle-aged Middle American Caterpillar workers have struck against the capitalists, who exploit them just as they keep black and Hispanic workers and poor locked in misery. Recently in L.A., Latino workers have been at the center of a series of labor struggles. In 1989, the hotel workers fought to defend their union against the giant Hyatt chain. A year later the mainly Latino janitors waged a militant strike which faced down police attack and won union recognition. Recently, during the state of emergency in L.A. the janitors union held a march of several hundred from

their union hall protesting the racist cop terror of the LAPD.

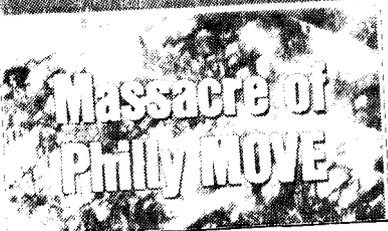
These workers can be a vital spark for the North American working class, many having experience of militant class struggle and more open to internationalist ideas because of their origins. Yet most are in a very precarious position, subject to deportation and employer blackmail. The labor movement must demand full citizenship rights for foreign-born workers. And Latino workers must resist the treacherous appeals of aspiring bourgeois politicians who would pit them against blacks. Historically and today, black oppression in this country built on slavery is key to ruling-class domination of the workers and poor. During the L.A. upheaval the Partisan Defense Committee and Spartacist League demanded that the powerful L.A. unions such as longshore, aerospace and city workers organize work stoppages and mass mobilizations to solidarize with and defend the black community.

What is desperately needed is common class struggle to unite organized labor with all strata of the oppressed against their common capitalist oppressors who have impoverished and brutalized the working people who built the wealth of this country. This requires the leadership of a Leninist vanguard party to act as a “tribune of the people.” ■

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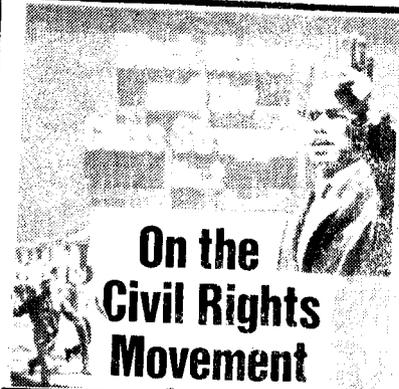
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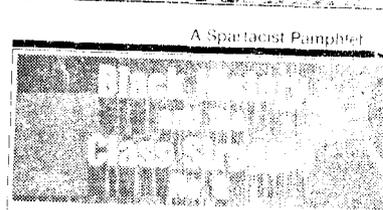
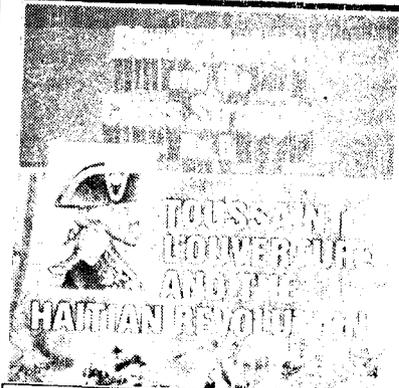
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