

The

Summer 2011

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# Internationalist



**Defend Libya – Defeat U.S./U.N./NATO War!**

## **Arab East in Upheaval**



Peter Macdiarmid/Getty Images

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### **Egypt, Tunisia: The Military Still Holds Power Turn Popular Revolt Into Workers Revolution!**

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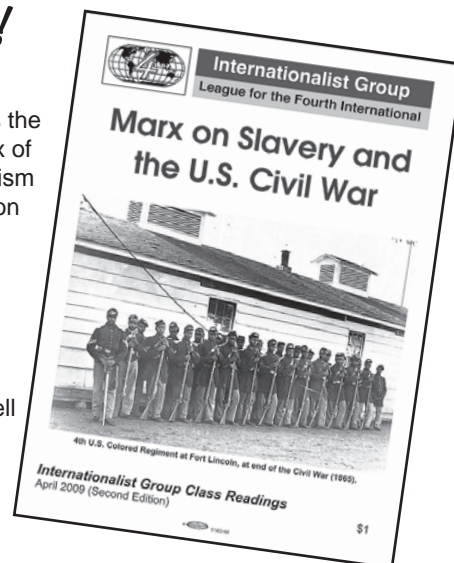
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## Former Black Panther Leader – Courageous Fighter for Liberation

# Honor the Memory of Geronimo ji Jaga (Pratt)

JUNE 3 – Geronimo ji jaga (Elmer Pratt), the Black Panther leader who was the victim of one of the worst ever FBI frame-ups, died in Tanzania yesterday. He was 63 years old. He had spent 27 years in prison, most of it in San Quentin, for a murder that the government knew he did not commit.

In the mid-1960s young Elmer Pratt became a decorated Vietnam veteran, given medals for serving in the U.S. government's dirty (and losing) war of subjugating the workers and peasants of Southeast Asia. That experience deeply radicalized him, and upon returning to the States, he turned on his imperialist masters. He joined the Black Panther Party, then the object of one of the most furious campaigns of violence ever mounted by the U.S. imperialists in their home country.

The campaign was called COINTELPRO (for "counterintelligence program") and it was aimed straight at the movement for black liberation. Eventually 38 Black Panther Party members were murdered by the FBI, police and contract killers in coordinated assaults, while hundreds were jailed on phony charges. The full story of COINTELPRO has yet to be told. Geronimo became an important target for the murderous U.S. government. One of Geronimo's crimes in their eyes was that he survived the massive five-hour 1969 police siege of the Los Angeles Black Panther headquarters that was intended to kill him.

They later framed him for murder using an informant, "Julius Butler," and fabricated evidence. Butler was an informer for the FBI, LAPD and the district attorney, which he repeatedly denied on the stand. The feds knew Geronimo was innocent. Former FBI agent Wesley Sweringen revealed in 1985 that the agency had wiretaps and an informant's report showing that Geronimo was at a meeting in Oakland, California when the murder took place 350 miles away in Santa Monica.

But he was convicted anyway, locked up in maximum security hell-holes within the massive prison system of U.S. "democracy." He was thrown in solitary, allowed three hours of daylight per week, beaten, drugged, denied medical attention for painful Vietnam shrapnel wounds, accused of plotting all sorts of crimes and repeatedly set up for assassination by



**Geronimo ji Jaga (Elmer Pratt) outside the Orange County courthouse together with his daughter Shona and attorney Johnny Cochrane, at his release after release from 27 years in prison, framed for a murder he did not commit.**

guards. Astoundingly he came through all this with his dignity and principles intact. He was a revolutionary fighter for the oppressed, worthy of the name of the heroic Apache leader he took.

Through it all he held firm to his dedication to Black liberation, and endured the seemingly unendurable in the dungeons of the enemy class. He always had an encouraging word – even a good-humored one! – for his supporters. Comrades of the Internationalist Group were privileged to have worked on the campaign for Geronimo's freedom, writing of his case and aiding his dedicated lawyer, Stuart Hanlon. At the end of a long appeals process, with much disappointment along the way, the conviction was overturned and Geronimo was freed on 10 June 1997. His first act was to call for freedom for other unjustly jailed former Panthers, notably Mumia Abu-Jamal.

Geronimo was as strong as a lion. He was kept in jail for more than a quarter century because, the government said in opposing parole, "he is still a revolutionary." Geronimo died young, and his life was likely shortened by the decades of torture he received at the hands of the "democratic" U.S. government. We have lost one of the most courageous and inspiring fighters in the history of the struggle for human liberation and salute him.

For more on his story, see "Geronimo Is Out! Now Free Mumia!" available on-line at <http://www.internationalist.org/geronimo.html>. ■

## Greek Revolt Against Bankers' Diktat

# Protests Sweep Europe Over Capitalist Austerity



Agence France-Presse

**Demonstrators march on Syntagma (Constitution) Square Greek parliament in Athens, June 15.**

JULY 12 – A new wave of mass struggle has broken out in Europe in response to the drive by the capitalist rulers to saddle the workers with the costs of the global economic crisis, already in its third year. Following the Wall Street panic of September 2008, imperialist governments poured in trillions of dollars to shore up tottering banks. Despite “stimulus” measures, mass layoffs spread. Tens of millions of workers in the industrial countries lost their jobs. The actual unemployment rates are often double the reported figures (over 16% of the workforce in the United States rather than the official 9%). Within a year, the banks were once again raking in huge profits, but someone had to pay the costs of the bailout. So last year, in one country after another, under governments of the “left” and right, capital used the crisis to launch a full-scale assault on labor, particularly going after public sector unions to dismantle pension plans, lower wages, slash employment and rip up workers’ rights. Labor protests broke out in Greece, Spain, France, Portugal, Britain and elsewhere (see “Focal Point Europe: Capitalism in Crisis, Class Struggle Erupts” and other articles in *The*

*Internationalist* No. 32, January-February 2011).

The anti-labor offensive has continued, touching off revolts in unexpected places, including the Midwestern U.S. state of Wisconsin. Last year, the bosses won the first round. In Greece, the initial flashpoint, this defeat was embodied in the Memorandum signed by the Greek government with the “troika” of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), European Central Bank (ECB) and European Union (EU). Slashing public workers’ wages by 30 percent in order to lower the budget deficit was supposed to enable the government to pay off debt. Instead, such austerity measures sank the economy deeper into depression. Now, barely a year later, the banks and governments are demanding more cuts, privatizations and layoffs, alleging that if Greece defaults it will likely lead to a chain reaction in Portugal and Spain and an international financial crisis that could sink the euro and shake the world economy. However, now not only the unionized working class but hard-hit middle-class sectors are up in arms saying, “We didn’t cause the crisis. We won’t pay for it.” Even so, the hard

**The Only Solution: Europe-Wide Socialist Revolution!**

fact is that as long as capital rules, it is the mass of workers, poor and intermediate layers who pay to enrich the tiny layer of exploiters.

2011 began with uprisings sparked by unemployed youth in Tunisia, Egypt and elsewhere in North Africa and the Near East – accompanied by a murderous imperialist war on Libya in the guise of “saving civilian lives.” Then came the labor revolt in Wisconsin. By the second quarter protests against brutal austerity were again breaking out in Europe. Beginning in Spain in May and spreading to Greece, along with mass marches of hundreds of thousands, mass assemblies have sprung up, camping out in central city squares. Drawing inspiration from the occupation of Tahrir (Liberation) Square in Cairo, these assemblies of “*indignados*” or “*aganaktismenti*” (the outraged) have attracted many previously quiescent layers of the population. These are not ritual parades by reformist trade unions or the no less ritual clashes with the police by anarchist or semi-anarchist youth. Sparked by university-educated youth consigned to temporary contract jobs, or unable to find work at all, the mass meetings have also drawn in middle-class sectors facing ruin due to the severity of the economic crisis. This presents important opportunities for the struggle against the capitalist offensive, but also real dangers as reactionary forces intervene.

Most of the left effusively hailed the *indignados*’ calls for “real democracy.” For one thing, they parallel the policies of the reformists who have abandoned any pretense of fighting for socialism and instead put forward a purely (bourgeois) democratic program. But such amorphous “movements” accept the capitalist framework – instead directing their ire at corrupt politicians and thieving “banksters” – and could even become a recruiting ground for dangerous rightist and nationalist-populist currents. This has already begun to happen. From Madrid to Athens, assemblies have banned parties, unions and symbols. No communist red, anarchist black or syndicalist red/black flags allowed – but in Greece, national flags abound. “Far left” militants intervening in the squares hide their party affiliations, while in their publications they soft-peddle the bans as due to the history of betrayals by reformist union and party bureaucrats. The effects of the sellouts are real, but in many cases this is crude anti-communist and anti-labor sentiment fed by the bourgeois media and politicians. Rather than acquiescing to these bans, Trotskyists forthrightly explain the need for a revolutionary party and class-struggle trade unionism.

These new petty-bourgeois layers made their first appearance in Portugal on March 12 with mass marches in Lisbon, Porto and other cities numbering up to half a million participants. It was the largest mobilization since the aborted “Revolution of the Carnations” of 1974-75. A group of youth calling themselves the *geração à rasca* (which they translate as “precarious generation”) organized the protest via a Facebook page on the Internet, following the example of the January 25 “day of rage” in Egypt. Signs proclaimed “No Country for Young People” (a takeoff on the Cohen brothers film *No Country for Old Men*), although they could have said old and young, as pensions are being slashed while youth are at best consigned to temp work. Other signs spoke of a “temp

revolution” (*revolução precária*). The marchers denounced the Socialist Party government of José Sócrates, which tried to ram legislation through the Portuguese parliament embodying the IMF austerity demands in return for a €78 billion (US\$113 billion) IMF/ECB bailout, agreed to in May. The official trade union federations (Communist-led CGTP and Socialist-led UGT) had done nothing following a successful November 2010 general strike.

Next came the May 15 protest which brought out tens of thousands in more than 40 Spanish cities. Demonstrators in Madrid protested against police attacks by occupying and then camping out in the Puerta del Sol. This was quickly followed by camps (*acampadas*) in Barcelona’s Plaça Catalunya, in Valencia and elsewhere that continued to occupy the plazas for the next month. The demonstrations were called by a newly minted group, Democracia Real Ya (DRY, Real Democracy Now) under the motto, “We are not a commodity of the bankers and politicians.” While saying “some of us are more progressive, some are more conservative,” the DRY platform proclaimed “we are all upset and outraged [*indignados*] at the social, political and economic panorama” under the Socialist (PSOE) government of José Luis Zapatero. Resisting orders to clear the plazas before May 22 local elections and subsequent police attempts to evict them, the *indignados* held out for weeks. On June 15, several thousand surrounded the Catalan parliament, trying to block a vote on an omnibus austerity law, and on June 19 up to 750,000 marched in 90 cities against the anti-labor “competitiveness pact” adopted by eurozone countries in March.

Following Spain came Greece, where on May 25 an occupation began in Syntagma (Constitution) Square in front of the parliament building in Athens. Some 150,000 people demonstrated in all major cities against the austerity policies of the Panhellenic Socialist Party (PASOK) government of George Papandreou and the *diktat* of the EU/ECB/IMF “Troika.” It is notable that in all three countries, the protests are against “socialist” governments of the parliamentary “left” (despite its name, the PASOK is actually a bourgeois nationalist party). Since the international bankers have trained their sights on Greece as the first target of their “austerity” drive, the scope of protests and intensity of the protesters’ anger have been far greater, producing an explosive situation. On June 5, 100,000 gathered in Syntagma Square, followed by several days of rolling strikes in state-owned companies, a one-day general strike on June 15, and a two-day general strike – the first since the overthrow of the military junta in 1974 – on June 28-29 as parliament voted the austerity/privatization package.

Reference to the brutal colonels’ regime is not hyperbole. Today, Greece is being subjected to debt peonage on a mammoth scale under a dictatorship of finance capital, decreed by a junta of international bankers and enforced by the iron discipline of “the market.” The latter turns out to be the (U.S.-owned) credit ratings agencies and a coterie of banks determined to boost their profits by sticking it to working people. Even some bourgeois economists have commented that it may take another junta to implement the austerity program demanded for “rescuing Greece” (in reality bailing out the



Police face off with demonstrators during June 15 general strike.

banks). The Greek government has threatened just that: in an interview with the Spanish daily *El Mundo* (26 June), Deputy Prime Minister Theodoros Pangalos said that if parliament refused to vote the package of laws accompanying the new bailout, “The next day, people would besiege the banks trying to withdraw their money, the army would have to protect them with tanks, as the police would not be enough, there would be revolts everywhere....” This is no idle observation: a few days earlier, Papandreou named as new finance minister the defense chief Evangelos Venizelos (who knows little of finance but is on good terms with the military).

After all the *Sturm und Drang* (storm and stress) of the protests and parliamentary drama in Athens, PASOK deputies narrowly approved the austerity bill. Zapatero and the PSOE are still carrying out the bankers’ orders in Madrid, despite heavy losses in local elections. And although Portuguese prime minister Sócrates and his PSP were turned out in June, it was the right wing Social Democrats who benefited from the discontent, while the Popular Party in Spain (heirs of the Franco dictatorship) made advances and in Greece the conservative New Democracy is ahead in the polls based on its opportunistic opposition to the austerity package. Despite hundreds of thousands in the streets and thousands camped out in central squares, capital is winning round two against labor as well. With the parliamentary “left” implementing the capitalists’ program, the “extra-parliamentary” left calls for limp trade-union tactics (marches, symbolic “general strikes”) that are doomed to failure, while default and exit from the euro would hit workers with runaway inflation and even more massive unemployment. The only real answer to the capitalist crisis is Europe-wide *socialist revolution*.

### Greek Default and Euro Crisis

The reason that the euro-bankers and “bond vigilantes” are on the warpath again barely a year after the €10-billion IMF/ECB/EU “bailout” of Greece is the sharp economic downturn

exposing the fictional character of the original plan. It’s not only Greece. For months, Western governments and their international financial agencies were prating about a “recovery,” although unemployment is as high as ever. The reality is that the advanced capitalist industrial countries are stuck in a full-scale *depression* that will take years to overcome, through massive destruction of capital (shutting down factories, escalating mass unemployment), imperialist trade war or actual shooting war. There’s no surprise, really: plenty of “mainstream” economists predicted that the first Greek “bailout” wouldn’t work. Piling more new debt on top of old while slashing wages and

jobs only made the situation worse, so today the accumulated international public debt of Greece went from 113% to almost 150% of the gross domestic product and rising.

The bourgeois press and media are full of stories about profligate Greeks, public workers who laze about for years and then collect exorbitant pensions. This is nothing but capitalist propaganda blaming the victims of the crisis in order to exonerate (and fatten the profits) of the looters who set it off.<sup>1</sup> In Greece, workers have taxes deducted from their paychecks (in addition to paying a “value added” tax, now up to a whopping 27%, at the cash register), while the bourgeoisie treats tax evasion as a national sport. The owners of the Greek shipping fleet, the largest in the world (although largely sailing under flags of convenience like Panama or Liberia), pay only 15% on their declared profits, while most earnings are siphoned off to tax havens like the Cayman Islands. When the government announced it was going to increase property tax collection by using Google Earth satellite photos to go after the huge number of undeclared swimming pools in the opulent Athens suburbs, owners rushed out to buy astroturf and asphalt to cover up their assets (Michael Hudson, “A World at Financial War,” *Counterpunch*, 6 June).

In any case, none of the tens of billions of euros now supposedly being deployed to “rescue Greece” will ever find their way to Greek pockets. Even Greek banks, which hold a majority of the debt, will be stiffed. Instead every euro will be electronically transferred to banks in Frankfurt, Paris and elsewhere in Europe just to pay the usurious *interest* on the bonds and notes. Of course, the point was never for Greece to pay off the loans, but to impose financial “discipline” by extracting huge sums through taxes to “service” the mountain

<sup>1</sup> According to statistics of the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Greeks actually work 52 percent longer than Germans (2,119 hours a year compared to 1,390), and receive less than half as much in pensions, averaging under €1,000 a month (“A Tale of Two Europes,” *Kathimerini* [Athens], 6 July).

of accumulated debt. Indeed, the national debt is such a marvelous means of amassing capital that Marx ranked it right up with slavery and the colonial system as one of the key engines of modern capitalism:

“The system of public credit, i.e., of national debts, whose origin we discover in Genoa and Venice as early as the Middle Ages, took possession of Europe generally during the manufacturing period.... National debts, i.e., the alienation of the state – whether despotic, constitutional or republican – marked with its stamp the capitalistic era....

“[T]he national debt has given rise to joint-stock companies, to dealings in negotiable effects of all kinds, and to agiotage [currency speculation], in a word to stock-exchange gambling and the modern bankocracy.

“As the national debt finds its support in the public revenue, which must cover the yearly payments for interest, &c., the modern system of taxation was the necessary complement of the system of national loans. The loans enable the government to meet extraordinary expenses, without the tax-payers feeling it immediately, but they necessitate, as a consequence, increased taxes.... Overtaxation is not an incident, but rather a principle. In Holland, therefore, where this system was first inaugurated, the great patriot, DeWitt, has ... extolled it as the best system for making the wage labourer submissive, frugal, industrious, and overburdened with labour.”

–Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, Chapter 31

Whether for purposes of primitive accumulation in the late Middle Ages, expanding the U.S. empire in the Caribbean and Central America at the dawn of the 20th century (taking over Haiti, Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Honduras, etc., for failure to pay bank debts), or to escape the consequences of financial crisis in the 21st century while ripping up labor gains and turning the remnants of the “welfare state” into platforms for generating private profit, the aim of the capitalists is to relentlessly *expand* the public debt, not reduce it, as another means of enriching themselves while enslaving workers and whole nations.

All the austerity measures won't do bupkis to lower the amounts owed by heavily indebted eurozone countries. It is so obvious – not only to leftists and most academic economists but also to rational capitalists – that default in some form (call it “restructuring,” “rescheduling,” “rollover” or whatever) is inevitable that the markets are already pricing this in as they figure the interest on Greek loans (now running at 30% on two-year notes). But if “rescuing Greece” with more loans only “kicks the can” down the road, what then is the point of the “bailouts”? It's not the size of the Greek public debt (€300+ billion or roughly US\$500 billion) that has the bankers worried, nor even the amounts held by European banks (€21 billion, or US\$177 billion). It's not even the “contagion effect” that a Greek default would force similar action by Portugal and Ireland. As financial journalist John Lanchester notes, with only a little exaggeration, “The ECB/EU/IMF ‘troika’ can write a cheque and buy the Greek economy, or the Irish economy or the Portuguese economy” (“Once Greece Goes...,” *London Review of Books*, 14 July).

Rather, the great fear is that the falling dominoes would

soon topple Spain (€774 billion in debt held by European banks, plus €179 billion by U.S. banks) and then Italy (€99 billion held by European banks and €69 billion by U.S. banks). As one European analyst put it, “If Italy goes, it's no longer a domino. It's a brick” (*New York Times*, 12 July). In addition, while U.S. banks hold little Greek debt directly, it is suspected that Wall Street is in hock to the tune of US\$100 billion in the form of “credit default swaps” (CDSs) insuring European banks should Athens default. Former U.S. Federal Reserve chief Alan Greenspan noted that Wall Street has “huge liabilities” in European banks, including in supposedly secure money market funds, so many banks would be “up against the wall” in case of a Greek default. Capitalist rulers are terrified at the prospect of a collapse of the euro and ensuing global financial meltdown far surpassing the fallout from the 2008 Lehman Brothers bankruptcy. They're playing for time for banks to unload unpayable Greek debt so that when the inevitable default comes, someone else (taxpayers, the Greek government) other than Western bankers will be left holding the bag.

So the European and U.S. imperialists want to sacrifice Greek workers and much of the dwindling middle class in order to save the world capitalist financial order. But, some have asked, why would a “socialist” party like that in office in Athens, impose such a fate on its working-class supporters? As mentioned above, PASOK is not a workers party at all, but a bourgeois-nationalist party catering to Greek capitalist sectors who historically have seen the need for a large state sector because of their own small size. And along with the Greek tanker and freighter fleet, Greece's banks are key to its status as a second-rate imperialist power, financially dominating the southern Balkans and with strong positions in the Near East (Beirut, Cairo). Papandreou will sacrifice Greek workers to prevent that key sector of Greek capital from going down the drain.

## What Is To Be Done?

Some heterodox bourgeois economic writers have called for Greece to simply refuse to pay the debt – i.e., to default and leave the eurozone. Economist Michael Hudson suggests to the multitude congregating in front of the Greek parliament:

“The most effective tactic is to demand a national referendum on whether to accept the ECB's terms for austerity, tax increases, public spending cutbacks and selloffs. This is how Iceland's President stopped his country's Social Democratic leadership from committing the economy to ruinous (and legally unnecessary) payments....

“The crowd's leaders can insist that in the absence of a referendum, they intend to elect a political slate committed to outright debt annulment.”

–“Whither Greece?” *Counterpunch* (24 June)

A senior editor at the top U.S. financial TV channel, John Carney, harked back to “The Ancient and Noble Greek Tradition of Debt Repudiation” (CNBC, 3 June). Carney was referring to laws of Solon, “the founder of Greek democracy,” who upon coming to power in 594 BCE abolished all debts (called *seisachtheia*, or shaking off of burdens), as well as banning debt slavery. Carney doesn't mention that “Greek democracy”

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## Portugal, Spain: Unemployed Youth Take the Plazas

# Rebellion of the Outraged



March for “Real Democracy Now” in Madrid, May 15, attracted many unemployed youth. While left has joined the sit-ins, organizers and spokesmen include bourgeois liberals and even “libertarian” right-wingers.

### Not Empty “Real Democracy,” But Fight for Workers Power!

JULY 12 – For the last two months, across southern Europe hundreds of thousands of people have taken to the streets to denounce economic policies which have produced misery on a scale not seen since the last Great Depression in the 1930s. Rather than limiting themselves to the usual mass marches, from Portugal and Spain in the west to Greece in the east, tens of thousands, mainly youth, have occupied city centers for weeks in an upheaval that has taken the name of *los indignados*, “the outraged.” What particularly sparked their rage is that in all three countries, the ruinous policies have been imposed by governments calling themselves “socialist,” who were elected because they claimed to defend the population against the plutocrats. The initiators of the protests have seized on this sense of betrayal to pose the issue as one of “democracy,” saying that the rules must be wrong in a system where no matter what the

people vote for, governments obey the dictates of the banks. But although many say today they are not “against the system,” in the course of the struggle some will discover that the root of the problem is *capitalism*. The task of revolutionary Marxists is to bring that lesson home and build the leadership to lead the necessary socialist revolution to sweep away that system that today is destroying the lives of millions.

The appearance of multitudes of young people, responding to appeals in Internet social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.), sitting in and camping out in the central squares of southern Europe produced a torrent of bourgeois media attention and set a host of leftist groups wildly cheering. “Like the Arab Spring, the Spanish movement is rooted in economic distress, spread via social media networks and led in the streets by the young,” reported the *International Herald Tribune* (26 May). Same theme from the left: “Pictures of Madrid’s central plaza known as Puerta del Sol bear an uncanny resemblance to Tahrir Square in Cairo,” wrote the *Socialist Worker* [U.S.] (“Signs of a Spanish spring,” 26 May). A Spanish group, Clase contra

Clase, added a comparison to the 1848 Revolutions that swept Europe, “The Springtime of the Peoples Crosses the Mediterranean” (CcC declaration, 20 May). A week later it made a parallel to the 1968 French upheaval, “May ’68/May 2011” (*Contracorriente*, June 2011). Argentine leftist academic Atilio Borón went even further, comparing “The ‘*Indignados*’ and the Paris Commune,” and declaring “Nothing will be the same as before:” (kaosenlared, 22 May).

The “movement of the squares,” as it has become known in Greece, is a new development, and it represents a new layer of the population entering into struggle against the consequences of the global (capitalist) economic crisis that is ripping up their lives. But this kind of breathless enthusing is counterposed to a Marxist analysis. It completely ignores the vital issue of *class*: the class composition of the protests and the class content of their politics. The recent sit-ins and camp-outs were led by relatively privileged middle-class youth, with limited presence of young workers and still less of immigrant workers. Describing the “*geração à rasca*” in Portugal, an article in the French daily *Libération* (4 June) noted that “this peaceful insurrection is first of all that of a younger generation which lacks stable employment even though it has a surfeit of diplomas.” The writer quotes a leading organizer of the March 12 demonstration saying: “We are all collectors of masters, of doctorates and of post-docs. 300,000 of us are unemployed, as for the rest, we are reduced to green slips” (with no job protection, subject to firing/layoff at any moment). Many university graduates have to make do on incomes of €500 (\$700) a month.

The class position of the demonstration organizers is expressed in their demands. Thus the Manifesto of the “Precarious Generation” in Portugal states: “We are not given the chance to show our potential, thus blocking the betterment of social-economical conditions of the country.... We are the highest-qualified generation in the history of our country.... We do believe we have all the resources and tools to provide a bright future to our country and ourselves.” In Madrid a sign proclaimed, “We Are the Best Prepared and Least Valued Generation.” This is not a cry of rage by the downtrodden and oppressed but the lament of a potentially well-off petty-bourgeois layer resentful that their qualifications are not being used and of being forced into the ranks of the proletariat. There is nothing at all in their demands against the capitalist system. A list of Democracia RealYa’s proposals in Spain calls for “reduction of tuition in all university education, reducing the price for graduate students to that of undergrads.” How about calling for *no tuition* and *open admissions* to higher education?

An account of the origins of DRY (kaosenlared web site, 6 June) relates that it grew out of a Facebook page of a “Platform of Groups for a Citizen’s Mobilization,” formed by the initiators and administrators of various blogs which had arisen to voice “discontent with the crisis.” (Nobody on the political left had heard of them, so that this initiative seemed to come out of nowhere.) The nucleus at one point reportedly included several “far left” activists who later dropped out when their proposals were turned down. A component was Juventud SIN Futuro (Youth Without Future: Without Houses, Jobs, Pensions, Fear),

which had held an earlier Madrid demonstration on April 7. Its Manifesto was signed by a number of leading academics and a member of the editorial board of the left-wing bourgeois daily *Público*. But DRY also includes liberal (i.e., right-wing) elements such as the group “nolesvotes” (Don’t vote for them) pushing liberal electoral reform. While the original organizers of the protests come from this privileged layer – also the case in Egypt and Tunisia – as the occupations of the plazas mushroomed, they attracted more heterogeneous crowds.

Among them, leftists showed up, and to some extent trade-unionists who had been active over the last year marching against the austerity program. However, the demo organizers were determined not to allow the protests become or be seen as having a left-wing character, much less socialist or communist, for fear of alienating mainstream middle-class sectors. So DRY issued a call for the May 15 demonstration that emphasized it was sponsored by “non-political and non-union organizations,” and insisted there would be “no banners of a political or trade-union character.” Above all, no hammers and sickles, or UGT or CCOO (or CGT or CNT or any other) union banners. The fact that swastikas were also theoretically banned doesn’t change the character of this anti-communist, anti-labor prohibition. This was no abstract matter. At a May 26 march in Sevilla organizers used a bullhorn to tell people not to take leaflets of (left-wing) parties, and a microphone was seized from a member of a trade-union plant committee. At a June 15 blockade of an eviction in Barcelona, *indignados* roughed up Izquierda Unida (United Left) leader Cayo Lara. This treatment, even of a reformist sellout, is counter to *workers* democracy.

The *indignados* and *aganaktismenoi* don’t just include “non-party” youth and petty bourgeois. They include a striking number of lawyers, business consultants and IT specialists whose views are hardly radical.<sup>1</sup> In fact, some of those connected with the DRY founders are considerably further to the

<sup>1</sup> Some examples:

Tomasz Szablewski, a spokesman for the May 15 Movement, featured in TV reports of the camp in Puerta del Sol: his day job is as a business consultant for the Éveris Foundation, a “neo-liberal” think tank whose leaders have been ministers in both PSOE and PP cabinets and are linked to the BBVA bank, the privatized Telefónica and other leading companies. The Foundation issued an *Informe Transforma España* (Transform Spain Report), delivered to King Juan Carlos last November, calling for political reform to streamline the Spanish state and make it more responsive to the demands of the financial system.

Enrique Dans, creator of “nolesvotes” and an early and prominent supporter of DRY: he has an MBA from UCLA, post-doc at Harvard Business School and is a professor of information systems at Madrid’s Instituto de Empresa.

Olmo Gálvez, a spokesman for DRY: he is a former trade officer at the Spanish embassy in Beijing and a consultant of the French business technology company CapGemini.

Fabio Gándara Pumar, profiled in the right-wing Madrid daily *El Mundo* (22 May) as the founder of the DRY: he is a lawyer with a masters in urban planning. The paper reports, “The father of the Spanish Revolution is not against the system” but says he “believe[s] in the parliamentary system” and was “worried that the anti-system people would ruin the party” on May 15.



Madrid's Puerta del Sol full to the brim at the height of the protests in May.

right. This is the case of the Democracia Participativa outfit, which is sponsoring an October 15 referendum on electoral reform and is closely tied to the Madrid-based Cuban gusano, CIA agent and European Liberal leader Carlos Alberto Montaner; to the virulent anti-communist Peruvian writer and Liberal luminary Mario Vargas Llosa, also based in Madrid; and to the right-wing free-marketeers of the Cato Institute in Washington, D.C. In fact, some of the anti-party and anti-union rhetoric coming from the DRY and 15-M milieu is not at all from left-wing anarchist sorts but from right-wingers similar to the Libertarian Party in the United States.

Although the populist appeal of the amorphous “movement” of the “outraged” has meant that it has attracted right-wing elements, many of its supporters are more mainstream bourgeois intellectuals. Its guru, Stéphane Hessel, is a former French Resistance fighter of German-Jewish origin, one-time French ambassador and co-author of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights who has defended undocumented immigrants in France and stood with Palestinians in Gaza against what he indignantly denounced as Israeli “war crimes” and “crimes against humanity.” His best-selling pamphlet, *Time for Outrage!* published last fall in France and this February in Spain, yearns for the days when Communist and conservative Resistance fighters agreed on a post-WWII *capitalist* order including social security, pensions and public ownership of major enterprises. Today, he argues, all that is threatened because “the power of money ... has never been so great.” Democracia Real Ya proclaimed “we are not a commodity of the bankers and politicians.” Yet that does not make the DRY leftist: right-wing populists and fascists also vituperate against the power of “bankers and politicians.”

While there are some highly dubious types among the initiators and prominent spokesmen of the *indignados* – and the “movement” itself is hardly leftist or “anti-system,” despite

some right-wing media claims and wishful thinking by opportunist leftists – many participants were politically inexperienced middle-class youth, tired of being labeled passive, outraged by their desperate economic situation and seeking somehow to change it. What they experienced during the several weeks that the *acampadas* lasted was something of an extended political “happening.” Many had their first run-in with the police, even though PSOE leaders were wary of setting off a major confrontation. The supposed “participatory democracy” of the endless assemblies and the *anti-democratic* procedures of insisting on consensus (which some eventually abandoned) hardly prepared them for the kind of hard

struggles ahead. The experience of self-organization and the spread of assemblies to working-class barrios broke out of the bureaucratic mold of traditional labor/left mobilization. But in addition to being prey to reactionary forces, a “movement” for classless “real democracy” *cannot* provide an answer to the ravages of the *capitalist* economic crisis.

That requires a mobilization of the working people and their allies on a *class* program, and a fight to build a genuinely communist leadership. That will not be accomplished by chanting “the people united will never be defeated” – the slogan of the Chilean Unidad Popular of Salvador Allende, which suffered a very definite, bloody defeat. As did the Spanish Republic, whose “popular front” bourgeois-democratic politics were a *roadblock* to the proletarian revolution which was then and is today the only road to defeating Francoist reaction.

### Defeat Capitalist War on the Workers – Fight for International Socialist Revolution!

The depth of the capitalist economic crisis is such that not only the working class and poor are heavy attack, but also much of the petty bourgeoisie. Even before the developing crisis broke in the fall of 2008, the fabled “middle class” in the United States, Western Europe and other imperialist countries was being hollowed out. Over the previous quarter century, the incomes of all but the highest earning layers were stagnant or fell, even as profits, stock markets and capitalists’ incomes soared. Between the smashing of unions, the displacement of manufacturing activity to low-wage countries and systematic attacks on social services, the so-called “safety net” of the “welfare state” had become threadbare, and is now disappearing altogether. Driven to the wall, the intermediate layers between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat have belatedly begun to react. Unfortunately, and mainly because of the lack of a fighting workers movement, in the United States this protest has gone mainly to the right, in the

form of the racist Tea Party movement. Where labor has fought, as in Wisconsin until it was called off by union bureaucrats supporting the Democrats, it has eclipsed such demagogues.

In Europe, the situation is distinct due to the existence of a union movement ostensibly linked to socialist or labor parties. Under pressure from the ranks, the labor tops have sometimes gone through the motions of fighting back against the capitalist onslaught, as in the dozen or more one-day “general strikes” in Greece last year (and now a two-day walkout) and the weekly mass mobilizations against pension “reform” in France in October-November 2010. The British unions have dragged their feet on even holding peaceful parades against the attacks by the Conservative-Liberal coalition. But even where accompanied by rock-throwing and brutal police attacks as in Athens, these marches have had a ritual quality and haven’t made a dent in the governments’ determination to carry out the austerity measures dictated by the banks. Moreover, in Portugal, Spain and Greece – the current focus of protest – the attacks on workers gains have been carried out by “left” governments of parties claiming to be socialist. Thus the appearance of largely petty-bourgeois movements of *indignados* and *aganaktismenoi*, and their hostility to “parties” and “unions” in general is a direct result of the *betrayals* by the misleaders of the working class.

However, while their anger is directed against bankers and capitalist governments, the protesters’ consciousness is by no means revolutionary, or even necessarily leftist, as we have seen. The “movement” is politically amorphous and tentative, but not “anti-capitalist” as some would have it. A banner in Madrid’s Puerta del Sol declares, “We Are Not Against the System, The System Is Against Us” (*No somos antisistema, el sistema es antinosotros*). In fact, the demands have clearly been formulated to *avoid* calling into question capitalism/imperialism. In Spain, the DRY calls for nationalizing only those banks which have been bailed out and prohibiting investment in tax havens. It calls for idle housing to be rented at moderate rates, and for handing over the property to cancel debt in the case of foreclosures, rather than to stop foreclosures. While calling for shortening the workweek, it does not specify no loss in pay. While calling for a “reduction” of military expenses, it has not a word against NATO, or Spain’s participation in the NATO war on Libya. But there is no vehicle to achieve even these minimal *bourgeois* measures.

How, then, should revolutionary communists intervene in such a context? It is necessary to patiently explain that the capitalist system as a whole is in crisis, that it’s not just a matter of greedy bankers and corrupt politicians (although there are plenty of those), that while putting forward *transitional demands* that challenge capitalism, that ultimately and *immediately* the only way to defend gains won through hard struggle over the last century is by fighting for, and carrying out, international socialist revolution. To lead that struggle, it is *above all* necessary to forge the nucleus of a revolutionary workers party like the Bolsheviks of Lenin and Trotsky. The vast bulk of the European left is doing nothing of the sort. They don’t challenge the “democratic” (bourgeois) program of the “movement of the squares,” because this left is itself

thoroughly reformist – even those components once called the far or extreme left – and doesn’t fight for, or even believe in, socialist revolution. Their calls for nationalizing banks, restoring “public ownership” of utilities, etc., are merely an appeal to restore the bourgeois “welfare state” of yore. But the capitalists will do nothing of the sort unless they fear for the survival of their system – and even then, such measures cannot end the economic crisis or eliminate mass unemployment.

So what has been the response of the European left to the rise of this new “movement” of outrage over the new wave of attacks on workers’ livelihoods? The particular responses of the different left groups vary. Faced with bans on party symbols or identification, they have almost all been “discreet” – i.e., hidden their affiliations. As Miguel Romero of Izquierda Anticapitalista (IA, Spanish section of the “United Secretariat of the Fourth International”) put it this way: “it is necessary to be very prudent and reserved, notably in relation to self-affirmation” (*International Viewpoint*, May 2011). José Luis Centella, general secretary of the Communist Party of Spain (PCE), vowed “we respect the rhythms and forms of the mobilization that has arisen since May 15,” and he even “understand[s] when they [the indignados] say we don’t represent them” as they manhandle the leader of Izquierda Unida, the left electoral front of which the PCE and IA are a part. How very prudent and respectful and understanding of anti-communist exclusion! Other Stalinist outfits emphasize that they agree with the (bourgeois) democratic program of the *indignados* and say “let the citizenry go through its own experience” (PCE-ml).

Several social-democratic groups which when it suits them pretend to be Trotskyist – En Lucha (affiliated with the British Socialist Workers Party), Militante (leading component of the Corriente Marxista Revolucionaria), Socialismo Revolucionario (affiliated with the Committee for a Workers International) – see the “movement” through rose-colored glasses and accept its “democratic” framework. *En Lucha* (5 June) writes, “How We Will Achieve a Real Democracy.” *Militante* (21 May) claims that “most of the demands” approved by assemblies “clash with the underpinnings that support the capitalist system.” Nonsense. Here and there, leftists have managed to get this or that plank passed, but even bourgeois journalists can see that “despite the creative explosion in the slogans, the demands are moderate” (*Público*, 29 May). A spokesman for Socialismo Revolucionario admits that “Some participants in the movement reject political organisations, trade unions and even the revolutionary left, in general,” but only pleads for “allowance in the movement for tendencies and groups that support basic and democratically agreed demands” (CWI, 6 July). So what about those who call instead for workers revolution?

Even the democratic demands raised by various left groups are extremely limited. There is little mention of the reactionary king Juan Carlos, protector of the army, Guardia Civil and the rest of the repressive apparatus of the capitalist state. The camp at the Plaza del Sol has called for down with the monarchy, but to replace it with what? While seeking to mobilize the working class, poor and hard-hit petty bourgeois to fight the capitalist assault, a revolutionary nucleus would fight to bring down the

monarchy, inherited from the Franco regime, in the struggle for a *workers republic*. It would defend the right of self-determination and for independence for Euskadi, the Basque country divided and oppressed by Spain and France, for *returning the enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla* to Morocco. It would call to *mobilize the unions against police attacks on the anti-austerity protests*, such as the brutal assault by the Mossos d'Esquadra against demonstrators on May 27, and for the *formation of self-defense squads*. This would, of course, clash with organizers' policy of "non-violence" (toward the state). Where are the demands in defense of immigrants? Trotskyists call for the basic democratic demand for *full citizenship rights for all immigrants*, with or without papers, as was granted by the Paris Commune of 1871 and the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917.

Curiously, one of the most glowing in its portrayal of the "movement" of *indignados* is the centrist Fracción Trotskista (FT), led by the Argentine Partido de Trabajadores Socialistas, and its Spanish affiliate Clase contra Clase (CoC). In 20 articles (plus an equal number of videos) in a special section on "The Spanish May" on the FT web site, there are few critical comments about the politics of the leaderships of the "movement" (or non-leaderships, since they pretend not to have any). There's barely a mention of the existence of groups like Democracia Real Ya, as if this movement just arose by itself, a virgin birth. All the CoC (20 May) has to say about the purely "democratic" platforms approved by the assemblies is that "they are a very good point from which to advance." After ten days or so the FT/CoC complained that "some anarchist and autonomist currents" are pushing to "reject any organization of workers or political group" (26 May). But like the reformists, it accepts the overall framework of a fight for "real democracy." The CoC does call for bringing down the monarchy, but as part of a "constituent process of the entire Spanish state, a Constituent Assembly" based on a "single electoral conscription" rather than a fight for *workers power*. Its main call is for connecting with the workers movement, and it has publicized meetings of "outraged workers" in the Barcelona region.

Others of the ostensibly Trotskyist groups have also sought to establish contact between the *indignados* in the plazas and barrios and the trade-unions, although encountering a good deal of resistance. Almost uniformly, their main emphasis is on the demand for a general strike. A general strike against the anti-labor trade-union law, plans to raise the retirement age and other the anti-working-class "austerity" measures demanded by the international bankers and domestic capitalists and implemented by the "Socialist" government is certainly called for. But a one- or even two-day work stoppage, as the term is generally understood in Spain today, is essentially a "day of action" that will resolve nothing. Even adding the *indignados*, it won't make the government budge, any more than last year's September 29 general strike did. And all the talk of "anti-capitalism" – a common denominator in the pseudo-Trotskyist milieu – is a fraud unless it means mobilizing the exploited and oppressed for a struggle for power. In the mouths of these opportunists, "anti-capitalism" is just a slightly more "left" version of the "anti-globalization" rhetoric of a decade ago, covering any sort

of reformist (or sub-reformist) trade-union demand

A real strategy to confront the capitalist war on working people would involve striking key industries and companies to *demand that temporary contracts be converted into full-time positions*; to *shorten the workweek with no loss in pay*, dividing up the available work to provide jobs for the unemployed; to *index wages against inflation* (directly challenging the euro pact); to *occupy the banks* and place them *under workers control*, *opening their books for inspection by workers commissions* to determine where the money has gone. It would mean mobilizing *workers strikes against the war on Libya*, including to shut down the NATO base at Rota. In the context of such a program for mobilizing working-class power on the road to socialist revolution, the *call for a general strike*, directed both at the unions and at ranks of workers as in May 1968 in France, is indeed necessary. But in that case it would sharply pose the question of which class rules, "who is the master of the house," as Trotsky put it in the 1930s. That underscores the vital need to cohere the nucleus of a *revolutionary workers party, a Bolshevik-Leninist party to lead the struggle for international socialist revolution*. ■

## Protests Sweep Europe...

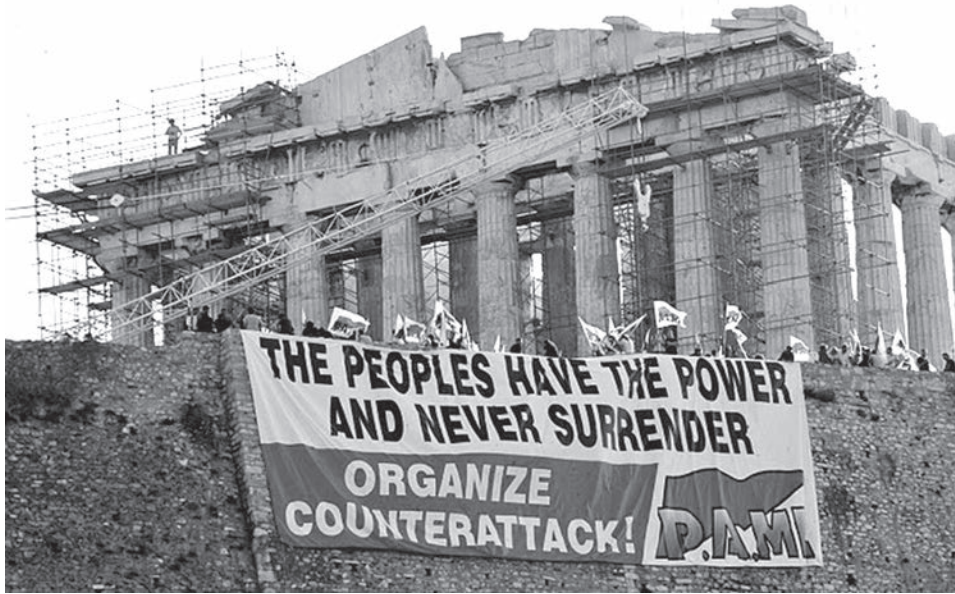
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was based on a slave society: while ending exclusive rule by the aristocracy (*eupatridae*), Solon's reforms only provided for government by the wealthy, not including small peasant owners and sharecroppers (*thetes*); nor that the poor turned against him when he refused to divide the land – just as the abolition of slavery in the United States and Brazil failed to provide land for the former slaves.

Hudson likewise looks back to Greek antiquity, remarking that "Sparta's kings Agis and Cleomenes urged a debt cancellation" in the late 3rd century BCE. What Hudson leaves out is that when Agis abolished debts and tried to redistribute land in 244 BCE, he was murdered by resentful landowners; and when Cleomenes tried again in 227, the landed interests brought in the Macedonians to defeat this attack on their power, forcing the Spartan king into exile and stopping his reforms. To be sure, Greek working people today cannot defeat the assault on their livelihoods and their lives without *repudiating the debt to the imperialist banks*. But this will not be accomplished by simply holding an election or voting it down in a referendum. The capitalist bloodsuckers who profit from this modern debt slavery won't be swayed by democratic niceties. They would certainly call in military force to stop this attack on their interests, as Macedonians did over two millennia ago. Or as the Greek generals did in 1967 to prevent an election victory by the current Papandreou's grandfather Georgios and his father Andreas. Only this time, George Jr. seems prepared to call in the military himself in defense of Greek and European capital.

Some petty-bourgeois sectors, including left nationalists such as the Greek Communist Party (KKE), are in favor of simply refusing to pay the accumulated mountain of debt and leaving the eurozone. Speaking at a rally during the June 15 strike called by the PAME labor federation, KKE general

KKE



**Banner of the Communist-led PAME trade-union federation at the Acropolis in Athens, June 27, on eve of two-day general strike.**

secretary Aleka Pappariga declared, “the slogan that is relevant and mature today is: rupture, overthrow, disengagement from the EU.” A leader of PAME, Alekos Arvanitidis, added: “We do not recognise any debt.... We do not to accept that we should pay a single cent, not one euro. The plutocracy must pay. Now, we must struggle for disengagement from the EU.” Those calling for Greece to leave the European Union and replace the euro with the drachma point to the experience of Argentina, which in January 2002 defaulted on its unpayable debt. The fact that it has ever since been frozen out of international financial markets has not stopped the South American country’s economy from growing. But the immediate result of this step by the bourgeois politicians under pressure from the street was years of mass unemployment of Argentine workers. The same would be true in Greece today.

How do the advocates of a Greek default and exit from the euro plan to get there? PAME leader Arvanitidis asked: “So, what kind of movement do we need? A peaceful movement, a movement of silent protest, a movement of which simply makes contemptuous hand gestures?” (In Madrid’s Puerta del Sol, when demonstrators waved both hands in the air it was a kind of silent applause. In Greece, the symbol of protest in Syntagma Square, holding up all five fingers of an outstretched hand, the *moutza*, is a traditional insult or curse.) His answer was “a movement that will be a thorn in the sides of the plutocracy.” Actually, what’s required is to *overthrow* all the capitalists, with workers revolution. But that’s not what the Greek Stalinist-reformists have in mind. Their real aim was highlighted the next day in demonstrations calling for “a powerful KKE in the struggles and elections.” Like others on the reformist and popular-frontist left, including the SYRIZA and ANTARSYA coalitions, the KKE is calling for new elections to vote out PASOK. What will likely result is a return

of the rightist New Democracy, but even if there was a strong left showing, it at best produce another “left” bourgeois regime.

The several ostensibly Trotskyist groups in Greece basically are all calling for a general strike. Last year (see our article, “Greece on the Razor’s Edge,” *The Internationalist* No. 32, January-February 2011), when the Greek unions were calling a one-day “general strike” just about every month, some leftists, such as Marxistiki Foni, supporters of the International Marxist Tendency (IMT) of Alan Woods, called for a two-day general strike. So now that Greece has had its first two day general strike in years, what next? “What is required is that the struggle be escalated into an extended political general strike”

(“Greece: A Critical Moment in the Struggle,” In Defense of Marxism web site, 30 June). But even in calling for an open-ended general strike, the pseudo-Trotskyists do not call for real preparations for a struggle for power. What about the need to form workers defense guards? Or calls to fraternize with the army, to win over the ranks to the side of the workers? They don’t even call to forge a revolutionary vanguard party, saying only that a “mass revolutionary tendency will emerge within the workers’ organisations.” In fact, they are not preparing for revolution at all, but raising one pressure tactic after another.

The pseudo-socialists ignore the fact that the current war on workers is not a policy (“neo-liberalism”) which could be changed, but a *necessity* for a decaying capitalist system. Keynesian policies were abandoned in the late 1970s because of a severe crisis caused by a falling rate of profit. While the current profit rates are obscene, schemes like “tax the rich” or taxes on stock market transactions (the Tobin tax) will not make it profitable for capital to invest in productive capacity, as it has failed to do on a substantial scale in the advanced capitalist countries since the early 1980s. Instead, bankers furiously refuse to take a “haircut” (loss) on Greek loans, however packaged. Their response is not irrational: they know, if the reformist left does not, that the entire international capitalist financial system is technically (and actually) bankrupt and could come crashing down on the least hiccup. Companies refuse to invest, refuse to hire and instead sit on vast piles of cash, while executives cash out by paying themselves fabulous sums for accomplishing nothing. Their attitude, like that of Louis XV and the Old Regime prior to the French Revolution, is *après moi le déluge* (after me comes the flood) – and they act accordingly.

The only way to lift the crushing burden of debt that is keeping Greek working people in thrall is socialist revolution, not just in Greece but throughout Europe and the world. ■

## If You Believe This...

# The “Icelandic Revolution” Hoax

One of the myths perpetrated by the organizers of the Puerta del Sol sit-in in Madrid and by commentators on the occupation of Syntagma Square in Athens is that the good citizens of Iceland simply refused to pay the banks’ debts, rejecting terms negotiated with the international bankers saddling every Icelandic family with thousands of dollars of long-term debt which would have taken years to pay off. The anarchist website kaosenlared (31 May) summed up the story like this:

“This is the brief story of the Icelandic Revolution: an entire government resigns in bloc, the banks are nationalized, a referendum is held so the people can decide on overriding economic issues, those responsible for the crisis are jailed and the constitution is rewritten by the citizens.”

A business website, *El Confidencial* (20 March), spoke of “the revolution without arms in Iceland, the country with the oldest democracy in the world (dating from 930), whose citizens managed to change it by demonstrations and banging pots and pans.”

An “Icelandic Revolution”?! Did we miss something? Not at all. This is a fairy tale worthy of Hans Christian Andersen, and the Icelandic people are far from living happily ever after. The fact that would-be leftists peddle such nonsense is a measure of their democratic illusions ... and how distant they are from actual revolutionary struggle.

What is true is that in the wake of the September 2008 Wall Street crash following the Lehman Brothers bankruptcy, mass demonstrations forced the resignation of the conservative cabinet of Icelandic prime minister Geir Haarde, the first and so far only government to fall as a result of the economic crisis; that the banks were nationalized and several bankers arrested; and that the population has rejected terms of a settlement demanded by Britain and the Netherlands to pay off investors in those countries who lost billions of dollars deposited in what amounted to an on-line Ponzi scheme, Icesave, sponsored by Iceland’s leading bank, the Landsbanki. But that in no way means that the Icelandic population has painlessly escaped from the consequences of the world capitalist economic crisis.

On the contrary, the standard of living of Iceland has been cut in half, a far bigger fall than in Spain or even Greece, where wages have plunged by 30 percent. The economy as a whole declined by 10 percent in 2009-10. Stock market prices plunged by 98 percent, meaning that anyone who invested their savings there was completely wiped out. The Icelandic currency, the króna, has lost roughly 60 percent of its value, while exchange controls have been imposed so that foreign currency is available only for government-approved imports. Moreover, tens of thousands of home owners (out of a total population of only 330,000) stand to lose their houses to foreclosure by the banks. And neither the government nor companies and individuals can obtain credit from international financial markets (or from the “restructured” private banks, which are still reporting fat profits).

There is nothing inherently “anti-capitalist” about nation-

alization of the banks by a bourgeois government. In fact, such action is usually done to *save the capitalists* from the disaster of bankruptcy by socializing losses. In Iceland, when the three main banks (Landsbanki, Glitner and Kaupthing) were nationalized in September-October 2008, this meant that the billions of euros they owed to foreign investors suddenly became the responsibility of the government, and taxpayers would foot the bill. And while voters twice turned thumbs down on a deal over the Icesave debt with the British and Dutch banks (the first time by 93% to 2%), in response the international ratings agencies reduced Iceland’s “sovereign” (government) debt to “sub-investment grade,” and they may further reduce it to junk bond status when over \$1 billion in bond and loan debt comes due later this year, making it impossible to refinance in the market.

The dozen or so bankers arrested are mostly operations-level managers while the so-called “Viking” banker/investors and top government officials are still free. Former Kaupthing chief Sigurdur Einarsson is holed up in London, while Jon Asgeir Johannesson, the main shareholder in the Glitnir bank and head of Baugur investments, who bought up high street stores in London and Gramercy Park real estate in New York, is still jet-setting around. Former prime minister David Oddson, who ran the country for 14 years before naming himself head of the central bank in 2004, a main architect of Iceland’s bank privatization, is editor in chief of the main bourgeois daily, *Morgunbladid*, which one commentator quipped would be like “appointing Nixon editor of the *Washington Post* during Watergate” (quoted by Robert Wade and Silla Sigurgeirsdottir, “Lessons from Iceland,” *New Left Review*, September-October 2010). And while the most drastic cutbacks in public employment and services were postponed until this year, the hammer will soon come down, sending unemployment (already eight times its pre-crisis level) skyrocketing.

So the conservative government was toppled, but what has Iceland got instead? The British Socialist Workers Party speaks of a “saucepan revolution” resulting in the installation of a government coalition between the Social Democratic Alliance and the Left Green Movement. Yet it was these reformist leftists who agreed to the 2009 deal to pay billions to the British and Dutch banks, and then when that was turned down they agreed to a second deal, which was also rejected by the voters. Social-democratic prime minister Johanna Sigurdardottir vows that “We need to keep going... We have to get an agreement” to pay the Icesave bill, which amounts to \$17,500 for every man, woman and child in the country. Some “revolution,” and some “socialists” and leftists these are, who would mortgage the future of the working people to pay off the bankers!

At the end of 2008, Iceland’s overall external debt stood at €50 billion, almost six times the the GDP (down to €8.5 billion in 2010). This debt is literally unpayable, no matter how much budgets are cut or exports increased. Iceland exists today

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# CUNY Board of Trustees Backs Down After Denial of Honorary Degree Provokes Outrage

## Witch Hunt Against Tony Kushner Spiked

MAY 21 – McCarthyite witch hunting in academia was spotlighted this month when the Board of Trustees of the City University of New York (CUNY) overturned a faculty recommendation to award an honorary degree to renowned playwright Tony Kushner. The motive for this unprecedented action by the CUNY Board was Kushner's defense of the Palestinian people oppressed by Zionist Israel. The faculty at John Jay College had voted to recommend the degree to Kushner, a Pulitzer Prize winner of left-leaning views most famous for his play *Angels in America*. Trustee Jeffrey Wiesenfeld, a former FBI counterintelligence agent who has made a name for himself as a bush league Joe McCarthy, attacked Kushner as anti-Israel and pro-Palestinian. Using quotes gleaned from the rabidly anti-communist and pro-Israel website *Front Page*, he demanded the degree be denied. The Board of Trustees, called to order by this ultra-Zionist attack dog, dutifully complied and turned down the nomination. Then all hell broke loose.

This was the second time in the space of a few months that blacklisting by officials of the City University of New York caused an uproar. In January, the CUNY tops got egg on their faces when Brooklyn College adjunct Kristofer Petersen-Overton had his appointment canceled by the college president, again over his defense of Palestinians, due to pressure from State Assemblyman Dov Hikind (a co-founder of the Zionist terrorist Jewish Defense League) and the self-same trustee Wiesenfeld. A campaign of protest and exposure forced B.C. to backtrack and rehire Petersen-Overton (see "CUNY Adjuncts 'Won't Take No for an Answer,'" *Revolution* No. 8, April 2010). Now Wiesenfeld was back on the attack, and in a paroxysm of Zionist zealotry smeared Kushner as a "self-hating Jewish anti-Semite" and extremist because of his (relatively mild) criticisms of Israel. Wiesenfeld also accused Palestinians of "worship[ing] death for their children" and called them "not human" (*New York Times*, May 5).

Back in 2007, Wiesenfeld was a driving force behind the firing of Arab American educator Debbie Almontaser, who had



Steven Thrasher/Village Voice

**Class Struggle Education Workers and CUNY Internationalist Clubs came out to opening night of Tony Kushner's new play, May 5. After Board of Trustees had denied him an honorary degree, Kusher (left) was heartened by outpouring of support from CUNY faculty and students.**

been appointed principal of a new Khalil Gibran International Academy, the first Arabic dual-language school in the U.S. The *New York Post* mounted a vicious campaign against her, Department of Education chief Joel Klein duly fired her and United Federation of Teachers president Randi Weingarten joined in the bashing. Responding to a rabbi who supported Almontaser at a rally, Wiesenfeld told him to "get yourself a suicide bomb and go blow yourself up." While Wiesenfeld is a real piece of work, and many at CUNY are calling for his resignation, it is the Board of Trustees itself that is the real culprit and should be abolished. (See "'Look Who's Trusteeing at CUNY,'" *Revolution* No. 5, September 2008.)

When the Board of Trustees snapped to attention and followed Wiesenfeld's lead, faculty and students at CUNY reacted with indignation. A letter of protest was issued by a long list of distinguished professors; a special Facebook page was established as a clearing-house of protest statements, and the CUNY faculty union, the Professional Staff Congress (PSC), denounced the Board's move and called for Wiesenfeld's resignation.

Shortly after the CUNY trustees shamefully nixed his





**Protest outside emergency meeting of CUNY Board of Trustees executive committee, May 8, which due to outpouring of protest reversed the denial of honorary degree to Tony Kushner. While many called for resignation of trustee Jeffrey Wiesenfeld, CSEW and Internationalist Clubs called for abolishing the BoT altogether.**

honorary degree, on May 5 Kushner's new play, *The Intelligent Homosexual's Guide to Capitalism and Socialism with a Key to the Scripture*, opened at New York's Public Theater. A number of CUNY faculty and students, supporters of the CUNY Internationalist Clubs and Class Struggle Education Workers (CSEW), came out to defend him against the witch hunters, rushing over from a protest against budget cuts called by the PSC. Dozens of theater-goers and passersby enthusiastically greeted the comrades, and Kushner himself came out to greet them, saying he was "incredibly touched" by their support. In a story on this impromptu solidarity protest, the *Village Voice* (May 5) quoted

CSEW activist Sándor John saying that the proposed degree was to recognize Kushner as "a great playwright and an important contributor to the cultural life of the city and of the world" and noting that Wiesenfeld has "a history of attacking academic freedom, and a history of attacking any views which are at all critical of Israel's policies." The trustees, he said, had made "a scandalous intrusion on the rights of the faculty, the rights of the students, and an attack on academic freedom and artistic freedom."

The affair grabbed national headlines, as Kushner is one of the foremost playwrights in the U.S. and internationally, who had already accumulated 15 honorary degrees in recognition of his work. Kushner ably defended himself with a hard-hitting letter to the trustees setting the record straight. In a panicky attempt at damage control, the Board of Trustees executive committee held a special, one-point meeting on May 9 which hurriedly voted to grant the honorary degree after all. Outside, several faculty, students and others held signs, including "'45 Alumna Outraged by CUNY BoT." CUNY Internationalist and CSEW signs highlighted the need to *abolish* this den of witch hunters, union-busters, real-estate speculators and all-round nincompoops, a point also made in our short flier that read: "Enough is enough. Give the Board of Trustees a *dishonorable* degree ... and a *dishonorable discharge*. Not just Wiesenfeld but the whole Board of Trustees must go. Who elected them, anyway? *Abolish the Board of Trustees*. CUNY should be run by elected representatives of faculty, students and workers."

## **Review: *The Intelligent Homosexual's Guide to Capitalism and Socialism with a Key to the Scriptures*, a play by Tony Kushner**

By R. Titta

Tony Kushner is the Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright of *Angels in America*, an epic drama on the experience of AIDS in the United States during the reactionary Reagan era. His latest work, with the intentionally funny title, *The Intelligent Homosexual's Guide to Capitalism and Socialism with a Key to the Scriptures*, is now being performed at the Public Theater in Greenwich Village. Some supporters of *The Internationalist* were involved in organizing the successful protest against the CUNY Board of Trustees for attempting to deny Kushner an honorary degree bestowed on him by John Jay College. The motives of the CUNY Board were blatantly political, aimed at Kushner's leftist views, specifically his opposition to policies of the government of Israel. The same night that his play opened, some of the pro-Kushner protestors stood before the

theater in solidarity with Kushner, who came out and greeted them in a scene captured in the *Village Voice*.

Kushner's new work is a compelling human drama that is also deeply political, telling the story of one Italian-American family from Brooklyn with a long history of anarchist and communist activity. For this, Kushner must be heartily commended, since it is rare in the United States to find a successful artist so thoroughly engaged in real social questions and aiming a critique at the very heart of American capitalism. In postwar McCarthyite North America, a reactionary wave of criticism condemned literary and artistic creations that had socialist content, while sentiments such as "art for art's sake" and movements such as "abstract expressionism" were officially promoted (including by the CIA).

Particularly in the 1950s a critical premium was put

on personal psychology as a hallmark of true art. Representational depictions of poor people in struggle and discussions of socialist or Marxist ideas (except to despise them) were attacked by bourgeois critics, to the extent that it was dangerous for the artist even to address such topics. While the Civil Rights and anti-Vietnam War movements served to weaken the oppressive strictures American bourgeois society imposed on art, they have not been eradicated. A playwright, author, painter or musician who takes up the cause of the working class and the oppressed, or seeks to address communist ideas or the history of the class struggle in America, still risks being pilloried by bourgeois critics for making “propaganda not art.”

Tony Kushner has not escaped such criticism, but he remains refreshingly defiant of the stereotype of the narcissistic artist, concerned about only “personal” things and avoiding larger social questions. The title of his play contains references both to the work of George Bernard Shaw (author of *The Intelligent Woman’s Guide to Capitalism and Socialism*), a playwright Kushner obviously admires, and to Mary Baker Eddy, founder of the Church of Christ, Scientist, whose *Key to the Scriptures* is the main text of the Christian Science denomination. From these references one might not be prepared for the intensity of discussion that takes place in the play of Marxist ideas, especially dialectics and the alienation of labor, nor for the historical background of the Marcantonio family.

The family is depicted as relations of Vito Marcantonio, the CP-sympathizing congressman from East Harlem of the 1930s and 1940s, whose portrait hangs on the wall of the family living room. The father, Agosto Marcantonio, is revealed to have been the grandson of one of the Paterson, New Jersey, anarchist workers who helped a weaver named Gaetano Bresci return to Italy and kill King Umberto I in 1898. Agosto, called “Gus,” himself is a retired longshoreman, and he and his late wife were longtime members of the Communist Party. Gus is revealed to have recently attempted suicide, and he calls his family together to discuss his intention to try again. His proclaimed reason is that he has manifested early signs of Alzheimer’s, but in the course of the discussion the true reason emerges as political despair.

In Gus’s view, he has spent his life, in the union and in the Communist Party, seeking the overthrow of the capitalist system in America. This may seem improbable given the long commitment of the Stalinized CP to pro-Democratic Party reformism, but Gus like many CP militants did not join the Communist Party to be a reformist. He may have done mental backflips over the years to find justifications for the CP’s reformist (and sometimes outright reactionary) policies, but he is portrayed by Kushner as a Marxist in his heart of hearts.

Gus feels that now (during the George Bush II era), the prospects of overthrowing the capitalist system are bleaker



**The Intelligent Homosexual’s Guide to Capitalism and Socialism With a Key to the Scriptures, by Tony Kushner, with, from left: Michael Cristofer, K. Todd Freeman, Linda Emond, Stephen Spinella and Steven Pasquale, at the Public Theater.**

Sara Krulwich/The New York Times

than ever. The longshore union was greatly weakened by containerization – to Gus’s regret, he was involved in negotiating one of the “guaranteed annual income” contracts that ultimately brought two-tier pay status to the longshore workers. This betrayal is underscored by a poster on the living room wall, “An Injury to One Is an Injury to All,” the old Wobbly (Industrial Workers of the World) slogan adopted by the International Longshore and Warehouse Union. It is rather amazing these days to see an author dealing with such things as the onslaught against industrial labor, to even mention a word like “containerization,” and to know something about it. And it sure beats the anti-labor vituperation of anti-communist finks Budd Schulberg and Elia Kazan’s *On the Waterfront*.

Gus is also despairing from the collapse of the USSR and the ensuing bitter splits that have much reduced the Communist Party, which Gus feels will soon disappear altogether. (In fact, the CPUSA leadership is proposing to rename the party in order to ditch the dreaded “C word.”) Yet the old man retains a lot of revolutionary energy, and here and there he lashes out at the capitalist system with the ardor of his youth.

Gus’s family is populated by characters nearly as fascinating as he is. His sister is named Clio, for the Greek goddess or muse of history. Clio has an unstable past of alternately living in a convent and joining the Tupac Amaru movement and even, briefly, Sendero Luminoso in Peru. She has returned to Paterson, the place from which her anarchist grandfather had to flee. She is living in subsidized housing, where she uses her education to help the people living there, all poor and black, cope with official white society. She is a calming and even wise presence, with an extremely dry sense of humor.

Gus’s children have all dealt with the politics of their parents in their own way. A lesbian daughter, “M.T.” or “Empty” (for Maria Teresa), is a committed Democratic Party supporter and she has many arguments with her father, who as we have seen, is cast in a revolutionary light despite his allegiance to the reformist CP. In an angry moment Gus tells M.T., “what you

call progress I call the prison rebuilding itself!" (This has the sound of a *cri de coeur* from the playwright himself.) Another son, much younger, is depicted as having missed out on most of the radicalism of his family. He is ironically called Vito, after his famous great-uncle, but is a reactionary, anti-union small businessman superexploiting Latino workers at minimum wage.

The middle child, Pil (for Pier Luigi), is in some ways an obviously autobiographical creation of Kushner's. He is a gay high school teacher in Minneapolis, in his 50s, and conflicted about whether to pursue a passionate affair with Eli, a younger hustler he's fallen in love with, or renew a commitment to his husband Paul, a black atheist theology professor, who has lately been reduced to adjunct status.

Pil also holds strong Marxist views. He is still working on his Ph.D. thesis, the subject of which is the CP-led San Francisco general strike of 1934. He has discovered that Harry Hay, one of the founders in 1950 of the Mattachine Society – the first gay rights group in the U.S., constituted mainly at first of ex-CP members – was an active participant in the 1934 strike. In a passionate argument with his father, Pil denounces the Stalinists' revolting and reactionary line against homosexuality. In the same argument, Pil lauds the role of the Trotskyists in organizing the Minneapolis general strike the same year, which Gus considers a victory for the working class.

But then in admiring the Trotskyists (called "Trotskyites" in realistic Stalinist fashion), Pil blurs the distinction between the followers of Trotsky and the followers of the anti-Trotskyist renegade Max Shachtman, who eventually joined Norman Thomas's CIA-infested Socialist Party. So in Pil's somewhat confused argument, the "Trotskyites" merge with the "Socialists," who are held up as being much more progressive on the question of homosexuality. Proof is adduced with reference to "The Homosexual in Society," an early gay rights essay written by Robert Duncan, which first appeared in 1944 in *Politics*, a magazine edited by Shachtmanite Dwight Macdonald. In Duncan's essay anti-homosexual prejudice is revealed in all its brutality as akin to anti-black racism, with the difference that many influential homosexuals disguised their identities and refuse to struggle.

Despite its provenance, the essay is indeed a landmark in the struggle against the oppression of homosexuals. The opening words of Duncan's essay give an idea of its importance: "I propose to discuss a group whose only salvation is in the struggle of all humanity for freedom and individual integrity; who have suffered in modern society persecution; excommunication; and whose intellectuals, whose most articulate members, have been willing to desert that primary struggle . . .". On the other hand, Kushner's regard for Dwight Macdonald as a Trotskyist is entirely mistaken, and has likely been picked up from the unending Stalinist campaigns to associate Trotsky with his anti-communist political enemies. Macdonald's brief flirtation with Trotsky and Trotskyism was followed by many years as a leading and virulent Cold Warrior, associated with the CIA-funded Committee on Cultural Freedom.

The discussion between Gus and Pil on homosexuality is nevertheless one of the most charged and exciting in the play. Pil at one point recalls for Gus that the Stalinists once outrageously

held that homosexuality leads to fascism. (Homosexuals were routinely expelled from the party.) But Gus does refer to the fact that the Bolsheviks abolished all laws against homosexuality immediately upon coming to power. At the end of the play there is a quiet scene, moving and satisfying, between Gus and Eli, the young "hustler," that seems to unlock Gus's despair. Kushner here reveals his own ability to recognize and criticize the reactionary policies of the Stalinized CP while also honoring the revolutionary commitment of many militants like Gus.

There is much to tell about this play, including its view on the question of suicide, the discovery toward the end of the play of a satchel with surprising documents buried in a wall and more, but I will stop here. I think Tony Kushner has created an excellent work of art, depicting a human drama somewhat in the vein of Arthur Miller's plays (especially *The Crucible* and *A View from the Bridge*) but without the surreptitious McCarthy-era Aesopian language used by Miller to disguise his subjects from bourgeois censorship. Kushner shows himself to be a highly engaged leftist intellectual. Questions of sexuality and the family are clearly bound up for him with the question of reform vs. revolution. He is especially grappling with the negative aftermath of the counterrevolution in the USSR. The play indicates that in his most honest moments Tony Kushner is an artist for whom the flame of revolution has not gone out. ■

## Neo-McCarthyites Target Campus Leftists Inquisitors Still Going After the Rosenbergs

Some have questioned what the furor over CUNY's denial of an honorary degree to playwright Tony Kushner has to do with academic freedom (see Stanley Fish's May 8 blog posting "The Kushner Flap: Much Ado About Nothing" on the *New York Times* website). The answer is: plenty.

In *Angels in America*, Tony Kushner's drama of AIDS in the reactionary Reagan era, the figure of Ethel Rosenberg appears to haunt the dying witch-hunter Roy Cohn, Senator Joe McCarthy's right-hand man, who even on his deathbed symbolizes the cruelty and hypocrisy of official American society. Today's McCarthy clones are still haunted by the spectre of the Rosenbergs. On the *NewsRealBlog* (10 May), one Phyllis Chessler wrote breathlessly, "Just Who Nominated Tony Kushner WON'T Surprise You." This retired CUNY professor declared: "When I first described the City University of New York as the Communist University of New York, I had no idea how right I was. It seems that Dr. Michael Meeropol, the son of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, is one of two professors at John Jay College who nominated Tony Kushner for this honorary degree." Right-wingers hailed Chessler for uncovering a nefarious plot by the son of "Communist spies."

While the attack on Tony Kushner was spearheaded by one unhinged CUNY trustee, Jeffrey Wiesenfeld, it was the product of a whole apparatus of professional witch hunters. Wiesenfeld says he went to the website of Norman Finkelstein, who he describes as "another discredited individual, that merci-

AP



**Hail the heroic Rosenbergs! Julius and Ethel on trial for espionage in 1951 at height of McCarthyite witchhunting.**

fully we rid ourselves of at this university,”<sup>1</sup> where he found quotes from Kushner. Actually, Wiesenfeld left out a step: the quotes he cited are all to be found on David Horowitz’s Internet site Frontpagemag.com, which has been going after Kushner and Finkelstein for years. Chessler, too, works closely with Horowitz, the megalomaniacal red-hunter whose on-line outlets include the “David Horowitz Freedom Center.” His self-appointed mission (for which he receives big bucks from nefarious sources) is “the defense of free societies ... under attack by leftist and Islamist enemies at home and abroad.”

During the anti-Communist witch hunts at the onset of the Cold War against the Soviet Union, American universities were systematically purged of “reds.” Senator Joe McCarthy’s bloodhounds roamed the land (as former *New York Times* reporter Selwyn Raab put it), looking for “subversive” faculty members to be pilloried. More than a dozen professors at City College of New York and Brooklyn College were fired after hearings of the House Un-American Activities Committee and the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee. These days, witch-hunting, like prisons and police, has been heavily privatized, outsourced to the likes of Fox News, the *New York Post* and professional inquisitors like Horowitz. Enlisting student snitches as junior G-men to turn in their professors, in addition to his web sites this modern-day Savonarola published a hit list, *The Professors: The 101 Most Dangerous Academics in America* (2006)

Horowitz is an extreme Zionist, as are Wiesenfeld and Chessler, of the sort that think Obama has “thrown Israel to the

<sup>1</sup> Finkelstein, whose parents were survivors of the Auschwitz and Majdanek concentration camps, taught for nine years at Hunter College before he was forced out by the campus administration following publication of his book *The Holocaust Industry* (2000), which exposes how Zionists exploit the Nazi genocide as an ideological weapon to silence criticism of Israel’s treatment of Palestinians. Subsequently, after teaching for six years at DePauw University in Chicago, Finkelstein was denied tenure due to a campaign of vilification against him led by Alan Dershowitz.

dogs.” They are closely tied to the Muslim bashers who tried to prevent the construction of an Islamic cultural center and mosque in Lower Manhattan last year (see “Mobilize Against Racist Attacks on Muslims and Immigrants,” *The Internationalist* No. 32, January-February 2011). One of the poisonous specialties of this crew is hounding people of Jewish ethnicity whom they regard as insufficiently pro-Israel and anti-Arab. They go after the “crypto-communist” Tony Kushner with the same fervor that Joe McCarthy, Roy Cohn and the witch hunters of their day (including many anti-communist liberals) orchestrated the legal lynching of the Rosenbergs, the firing of the “Hollywood Ten” and blacklisting of hundreds in the entertainment industry, and the hunt to ferret out “reds” supposedly hiding under the bushes on campus.

Michael Meeropol is a visiting professor of economics and interdisciplinary studies at John Jay College. His younger brother Robert, who directs a foundation to aid youth and children of parents targeted by state repression, detailed in a posting “Communist Coup?” (Director’s Blog, Rosenberg Fund for Children website, May 19) how the modern-day Savonarolas conjured up their Rosenberg-Kushner amalgam. For our part, we salute the Meeropol brothers, who have stood tall through decades of smears and anti-communist campaigns, which even now are being conducted against them by the vilest bigots in America, nearly 60 years after the state murder of their heroic parents, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. ■

## “Icelandic Revolution” ...

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solely at the pleasure of Washington, of the White House and the bankers cartel known as the International Monetary Fund. They know the money will not be repaid, but figure the amounts involved are piddling on an international scale. The external debt of Greece, on the other hand, and even more so of Portugal and Spain, are large enough that financial authorities worry that a default could trigger a general financial collapse. So long as national governments are subject to the world market, no matter how “progressive” or “leftist” their rhetoric, they *cannot* break the stranglehold of finance capital. The experience of the non-existent “Icelandic Revolution” demonstrates it.

The idea, pushed by liberals, anarchists, pseudo-socialists and the “citizen’s movement” in Spanish cities, that one could get out from under the crushing burden of debt simply by voting not to pay is a deadly dangerous “democratic” illusion. Not only revolutionary Marxists but mainstream economists know that this is not how capitalism works. In a country like Spain, the imperialists would stage a military coup (as the CIA is reportedly weighing in Greece today) and send the Guardia Civil into the streets to deal with petty-bourgeois youth in the Puerta del Sol rather than let a major country refuse to pay the bankers “their” interest and principal. The demand to **repudiate the imperialist debt** is thoroughly justified, and utterly necessary. But it will take **workers revolution** to achieve it, and **international socialist revolution** to secure it. ■

## Barack Obama's 2012 Reelection Campaign Has Begun U.S./NATO Murder, Inc.

MAY 11 – On May Day weekend, the United States and its allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization went on a killing spree in North Africa and South Asia. On Friday, the bells of Westminster Abbey pealed, crowds waved Union Jack flags and lords and ladies attended the wedding ball at Buckingham Palace for the odious royal marriage in London. Pomp and ceremony done with, the very next day, April 30, NATO warplanes struck Tripoli, bombing a residential compound where Muammar al-Qaddafi was present. As the U.S./NATO campaign of bombing the Libyan army forces which are battling pro-imperialist monarchist/Islamist rebels was going nowhere, this was a blatant attempt to *murder* the Libyan leader. But it was soon eclipsed when on Sunday evening, President Barack Obama announced that U.S. forces had killed Osama bin Laden, in a raid by Navy SEAL commandos on his home in a suburb of Pakistan's capital. This *assassination* succeeded, and the imperialist rulers launched into an orgy of self-congratulation, declaring a "victory" in the "war on terror," while vowing that, of course, the war would go on.

Several hundred yahoos converged on Ground Zero at the site of the former World Trade Center, brought down in the 11 September 2001 (9-11) attack, to wave the Stars and Stripes. A crowd gathered in Times Square to chant "U.S.A., U.S.A." all night. In Washington, drunken college students partied in front of the White House, swilling beer and waving cigars. Police and military were out in force around the country. The bourgeois media sought to whip up a blood frenzy, with NYC tabloids leading the baying pack: "We got him" proclaimed the *New York Post*, followed by "Demon Killed," "How We 'SEALed' Monster's Fate," and the like. The *Daily News* had "How We Nailed Him," "Al Qaeda Treasure Trove in Den of Evil," and so on. As the U.S.'s initial claim of Bin Laden dying in a firefight unraveled and it became undeniable that this was a cold-blooded *execution* of an unarmed man, the mainstream media got in on the act. Liberal pundits, sociologists and theologians assured queasy readers that revenge is oh-so-human and "Killing Evil Doesn't Make Us Evil" (Maureen Dowd in the *New York Times*, 8 May).

Osama bin Laden, the scion of a wealthy Yemeni-Arabian clan who fashioned himself a *mujahed* (holy warrior), was the man that President George W. Bush sought "dead or alive" – but preferably dead. His face was on FBI "wanted" posters, along with the offer of a \$25 million bounty. But above all, having learned that projecting a hateful figure like Hitler does wonders to build popular support for war, U.S. rulers adopted "UBL"



Reuters

**After NATO failed to assassinate Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi on April 30, instead killing his son in bomb attack on residential compound (above), the next day a U.S. Navy SEALs hit squad executed an unarmed Osama bin Laden in his home in Pakistan.**

(his acronym in Pentagon/CIA bureaucratese) as the "face of evil" for their terror war. Billed as the mastermind behind the 9-11 attack on the WTC, he is held responsible for the deaths of some 2,600 civilians in that act of indiscriminate terror. (Another 300+ died at the Pentagon, but that was indisputably a military "command and control center," if ever there was one.) Yet the U.S. government has wantonly slaughtered far, far more innocent civilians in nearly a decade of war since then: over a million dead in the first three years of the Iraq war, according to a study by the British medical journal *Lancet* (11 October 2006). Only the U.S. styles *its* mass murder "collateral damage."

The May Day weekend one-two punch – missing Qaddafi but knocking out bin Laden – underscores that the U.S. and its NATO imperialist allies are in the assassination business big time. Murdering heads of state is supposedly against international law, and ever since President Gerald Ford signed Executive Order 11905 in 1976, U.S. government employees were not supposed to engage in "political assassination." This was reiterated by Ronald Reagan in 1981 (EO 12333), but that didn't stop him from seeking to murder Qaddafi five years later. By one 2006 count, since 1976 the U.S. engaged in at least a dozen major assassination attempts. And, of course, there are the innumerable attempts by the U.S. government to assassinate Cuban leader Fidel Castro (Britain's Channel

4 TV tallied these in a 2006 documentary, *638 Ways to Kill Castro*). Assassination by the U.S. of its perceived enemies is, to paraphrase the remark by H. Rap Brown, “as American as apple pie.” But if a rival power did it, Washington would be railing against “state-sponsored terrorism.”

In the April 30 air strike in Tripoli, reportedly by a Danish warplane, British prime minister David Cameron justified this as targeting “command and control.” While the Libyan leader escaped harm, his son Saif al-Arab Qaddafi and three of his grandchildren were killed. This was murder, plain and simple, and the commanders who ordered the strike should, by rights, be prosecuted for war crimes – which, of course, will never happen. If the compound in an upscale Tripoli residential neighborhood was indeed a “known command and control building,” as a NATO spokesman claimed, Libyan military forces are directed in a truly novel way. When a reporter from the *Washington Post* (1 May) toured the gutted residence, the only thing remotely military in evidence was “a pile of PlayStation games..., including *Modern Warfare 2*.” That this was a blatant attempt to “decapitate” the Libyan leadership is underscored by subsequent NATO air strikes against a parliamentary building and “the sprawling compound housing members of Colonel Gaddafi’s family” (*London Evening Standard*, 10 May).

It is because the U.S. is trying to claim the moral high ground in a “war” against “terrorism” that it ham-handedly tried to cover up the fact that its special forces were dispatched to murder Osama bin Laden. The initial account by a “senior administration official” claimed he “resisted the assault force” and was killed in the middle of an intense gun battle. This was then spun by White House “counterterrorism” chief John Brennan into a story of bin Laden supposedly using his wife, who was then killed, as a “human shield.” The idea was to portray him as a coward who hid behind women. But on May 3, the putz of a White House spokesman Jay Carey told reporters he had a new “narrative” to feed to them, admitting that Bin Laden was not armed, did not hide behind a woman and that the woman in question was not killed. The next day it came out that there was no “firefight” at all in the building where he resided. Bin Laden was shot twice, in the head and the chest, to make sure he was dead. The three other men in the building, one of them a son, were similarly executed.

The bottom line is that the last thing the U.S. wanted is to have Osama bin Laden alive in its possession. Islamists everywhere would have demonstrated for him to be freed. And Washington sure as hell didn’t want him in front of a court (as some liberals wished) – not even in a rigged show trial like they staged for Saddam Hussein and Slobodan Milosevic – where he could regale the world media about how he and the CIA and the Pakistani ISI worked hand-in-glove in their covert war against the Soviet “infidels” in Afghanistan during the 1980s. (Obituaries in the bourgeois press also skated gingerly around that chapter.) While piously claiming that they were ready for “all contingencies, including capture,” and had a legal team on call, top administration officials “acknowledged that the mission always was weighted toward killing” (*New York Times*, 10 May). Other U.S. “national security officials” were a good

deal franker when they bluntly told Reuters (7 May), “This was a kill mission.” The only real question was whether the U.S. would assault the building or just bomb it, like NATO did in its failed attempt to kill Qaddafi.

The media was filled with stories lauding the Navy SEAL Team 6 who executed bin Laden as the “best of the best.” This killer elite of U.S. special forces is portrayed as something out of a Tom Clancy spy novel. Described as “sort of like *Murder, Incorporated*” by a retired Special Forces officer quoted by Jeremy Scahill in his blog at *The Nation* (2 May), SEAL Team 6 is used for “black ops” which, if discovered, “never happened.” An assault group of the “storied” SEAL Team 6 took part in the 1983 U.S. invasion of the Caribbean island of Grenada, where it gunned down radio station workers but failed to hold the station. In Vietnam, a Navy SEAL death squad headed by Lt. Robert Kerrey – later a U.S. Senator, presidential hopeful and head of The New School university – became notorious years later for the massacre it carried out in the village of Thanh Phong. In the current U.S. war in Afghanistan, Navy Seals and Army Delta force operatives are part of Task Force 373, a secretive hit squad that goes around the country targeting individuals on a “kill or capture” list known as the JPEL. U.S. cables released by Wikileaks last year revealed that this force has also “killed civilian men, women and children and even Afghan police officers who have strayed into its path,” as the London *Guardian* (25 July 2010) reported.

Now we are treated to a seemingly endless stream of ridiculous war propaganda aimed at making bin Laden look weak and his U.S. killers compassionate. It was breathlessly revealed that he used a remote to channel surf TV (what a couch potato!), that he dyed his hair black to hide his age (how vain!), that he “had herbal ‘Viagra’ [Avena syrup] in his medicine cabinet” (“Droop Dead,” *Daily News*, 9 May). Then there was the story of how U.S. forces supposedly “follow[ed] Islamic tradition of burial within 24 hours” by washing bin Laden’s dead body, wrapping it in a white sheet and placing it “inside a weighted bag,” whereupon it was “eased into the sea” (*New York Times*, 3 May). What crap! The U.S. disposed of the evidence just as Russian mobsters stuffed their victim’s remains into a bag and dumped them in the Hackensack River some years ago, or the death squads of the (U.S.-allied) Argentine junta used to toss their captives out of helicopters into the Atlantic Ocean (the only difference being that sometimes the Argentine military pushed the leftists out alive if they had survived the torture).

The spin doctors at the White House aren’t overly concerned that the successive stories they spun were hardly believable – they figure the tabloids will print just about any garbage they put out, and virtually the entire spectrum of U.S. (bourgeois) politics, including most liberals, would cheer killing bin Laden, while the few party-poopers would soon shut up out of fear of being labeled unpatriotic. They got that right. Obama could then go to Ground Zero (the World Trade Center) where he could have a “victory lap” that only the most right-wing teabaggers would begrudge him. His numbers would shoot up in the opinion polls, although whether that

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**Defend Libya – Defeat U.S./U.N./NATO War!**

# **Imperialist Marauders in the Quicksands of North Africa**



Goran Tomasevic/Reuters

**NATO bombs cars of Qaddafi supporters south of Benghazi, eastern Libya, March 20. Some “no-fly” zone.**

## **“Antiwar” Social-Democrats Back Pro-Imperialist Rebels, Pave Way for Bombing**

APRIL 8 – The United States and its NATO allies have embarked on a war of imperialist domination against Libya – yet despite their overwhelming firepower they could soon be caught in the shifting sands of North Africa. U.S. president Barack Obama at first said the attacks would last “days, not weeks,” but after a week of massive “shock and awe” bombing, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and War Secretary Robert Gates admitted that the operation could drag on for months and even into next year. The initial pretext was to protect civilian lives, as claimed in United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973. But that cover story was soon blown as French, British and U.S. submarines and warplanes fired off hundreds of cruise missiles and bombed Libyan troops far from any conceivably threatened populations. Claims to be aiding “Arab revolutions” are transparent lies. The purpose

of the war is to topple (and possibly murder) Libyan leader Muammar al-Qaddafi and nail down imperialist control of this strategically placed, oil-rich North African and Mediterranean country – or failing that, to dismember it.

Wanton carnage is the stock in trade of the imperialist warmongers. All the talk of limiting “collateral damage” and avoiding civilian casualties is belied by the spectacular photo of planes striking the passenger cars of Qaddafi supporters retreating from Benghazi. It recalls the photos of the horrendous “mile of death” in the 1991 Persian Gulf War, where the U.S. Air Force indiscriminately slaughtered Iraqis leaving Kuwait, “like shooting fish in a barrel.” That was mass murder worthy of the Nazis, and U.S. imperialism is hardly less bloodthirsty today notwithstanding Obama’s appeals to the Muslim world. When Republicans like Bush II and Cheney attack

Corbis



**The “Mile of Death,” where in 1991 U.S. planes bombed Iraqis leaving Kuwait City, killing thousands. Now the imperialists are at it again.**

Middle Eastern countries, they almost say outright that it’s an American crusade against Islam and they’re out to grab the oil. When the Democrats go to war or occupy a country, from Haiti to Libya, they claim its a “multilateral” effort and give it a “humanitarian” label with a U.N. stamp of approval. Both claim to be delivering democracy as they’re dropping bombs. Whatever the rhetoric, the result is a new colonial occupation.

Libya has long been in the crosshairs of the American military. The U.S. Navy was formed to fight “Barbary Corsairs” in North Africa, and the Barbary Wars (1805-15) were Washington’s first foreign intervention. To this day the U.S. Marines sing of their battles “from the halls of Montezuma [Mexico] to the shores of Tripoli [Libya].” Those who appeal to the U.S. to come to the aid of the Libyan rebels would exchange a tinpot dictator for an empire with the largest and most destructive military in the history of the world, which rides roughshod over peoples, nations and whole continents. When Cyrenaica served as a granary for the Roman Empire it endured slavery as its produce fueled Roman conquests. Under the direct sway of the U.S. empire no less than under Qaddafi, Libya’s oil riches will not produce prosperity for the Libyan people but fabulous wealth for a tiny neocolonial ruling layer and enslavement of the masses. The task of proletarian revolutionaries is to break the chains of empire, not just to oust the satrap.

### **Obama’s “Humanitarian” Imperialist War**

The hypocrisy of the imperialists knows no bounds. Barack Obama claims he ordered the bombing of Libya in the

name of “universal values.” Apparently those values include threatening to assassinate the Libyan leader, the message delivered by bombing Qaddafi’s compound. When Ronald Reagan ordered the bombing of Tripoli 25 years ago, it was precisely for that purpose. It’s not hard to imagine the reaction of U.S. rulers to anyone applying similar “values” to certain locations in Washington, D.C. Another tack taken by U.S. rulers is to try to disguise with bureaucratic gobbledygook the gruesome reality of the new war they claim they are not waging. Thus State Department spokesmen speak of “time-limited, scope-limited military action” while the Pentagon refers to “kinetic military action.” We are reminded of the lines from Communist playwright Bertolt Brecht’s “German War Primer”:

“When the leaders speak of peace,  
the common folk know that war is coming.

“When the leaders curse war,  
the mobilization order is already written out.”

And when the U.N. and a Nobel Peace Prize winning U.S. president talk of “humanitarian” action to “protect civilians,” you know that bombs will soon be falling on Libyan cities.

Euphemisms like “no fly zones” and “kinetic” action were a staple in the Pentagonese lexicon under Donald Rumsfeld back when the U.S. was launching the invasion of Iraq eight years ago almost to the day that Washington commenced bombing Libya. Then their *casus belli* (justification for war) was the claim that Saddam Hussein possessed “weapons of mass destruction.” By the time it was definitively proven that this was a sheer invention, the U.S. occupation of the Mesopo-



tamian country had been accomplished. It continues today, with almost 50,000 U.S. troops still “in-country” despite the “withdrawal” of combat units (many of which were simply renamed “advise and assist brigades”). In Libya the pretext was supposed massacres by pro-Qaddafi forces. A Libyan rebel spokesman provided the figure of 6,000 dead, which was then duly repeated by Al Jazeera TV and U.S. officials (*Bloomberg/Businessweek*, 4 March). But there is no evidence of anything even remotely of that magnitude, and most of the dead have been killed in combat.

Human Rights Watch, which acts as an pressure group and propagandist for “humanitarian” imperialist wars (e.g., against Yugoslavia), reported that Libyan security forces killed 24 protesters during Libya’s “day of rage” on February 17, notably in Benghazi and Bayda. Yet when Iraq exploded with protests in more than a dozen cities a week later and the U.S.-backed government “killed at least 29 people” (*Washington Post*, 27 February) the story was buried in the press.<sup>1</sup> More recently, British prime minister David Cameron claimed that the U.S., UK and French bombing of Libya had “saved hundreds of thousands of people from a humanitarian disaster,” according to the London *Guardian* (29 March). But no such massacres have been reported in the several cities that have been reoccupied by Libyan government troops. In fact, the only recent conflict involving such numbers of casualties was the war and occupation of Iraq by U.S. imperialism and its UK junior partners, in which a million people were slaughtered.

To build public support for the war, the U.S., British and French media caricature Qaddafi as a “madman,” a “megalomaniac” and a bloodthirsty dictator with really bad hair. Granted that the Libyan strongman’s ravings give them plenty of material to work with. But leaving aside the fact that there are plenty of deranged capitalist rulers around, the “democratic” imperialists have murdered far more people than a tinpot or crackpot dictator in a small country ever could, no matter how evil. Just between the Korean War, the Vietnam War and the Iraq War, the United States alone has produced more than 6 million dead – as much

<sup>1</sup> Much was made of an attack on a mosque at Zawiyah, west of Tripoli, with the *New York Times* (25 February) reporting “around 100 dead and 200 injured” based on a phone call from the besieged city. But this came in the midst of an intense firefight in which rebels claimed to have killed many government troops, many of those who took refuge in the mosque were armed with rifles, and the number of dead according sources at the local hospital was ten.



BBC

as the entire population of Libya. The French colonialists in Indochina and Algeria, the British in Malaya and Kenya were just as bloody. The Italians put 100,000 Libyans in concentration camps when they ruled the country between 1911 and 1945; at least 80,000 died through combat, starvation and disease. Today they all complain that Qaddafi is “killing his own people,” as if the Western powers slaughtering other peoples is somehow morally superior – and gives them the right to bomb Libya.

### Did the Whole “Libyan People” Rise Up Against Qaddafi?

Qaddafi has “lost the legitimacy to lead,” declares Hillary Clinton. How did she determined that? The warmongers claim that “the Libyan people” as a whole are rising up against the *rais* (Leader) and it’s only guns that are keeping him in power. But on the ground, the reality is far more contradictory. There is certainly widespread discontent after four decades of his erratic regime, called the Great Socialist People’s Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, or state of the masses. It was hardly socialist and in many ways similar to other military-based and police-state regimes in North Africa and the Middle East – such as Tunisia and Egypt, whose rulers Qaddafi defended against mass revolts. But Libya did spread around some of the oil wealth, raising living standards for the poor well above those of neighboring countries. It has by far the highest ranking in Africa on the U.N. Human Development Index and a greater chance of children completing college than in the U.S. As a result, Qaddafi has maintained a base of support, as has Ahmadinejad in Iran under the Islamic Republic – though in both cases you wouldn’t

know it from reading the press.

Consider this undeniable fact: Libyan soldiers and militia members hold out and fight, even against heavy odds, whereas the rebel “freedom fighters” cut and run as soon as the first shells land. Pro-government forces held on to Ajdabiya for eight days, even as they were being pounded by NATO bombs and missiles; they then staged an orderly withdrawal of 200 miles, regrouped and counterattacked, rapidly regaining the lost ground. Can this solely be due to fear? The so-called rebel “army,” on the other hand, spends most of its time in macho posing on tanks hit by Western airstrikes and shooting off their weapons in celebration, then turns tail and scatters in flight variously described by reporters as “chaotic,” “panicked,” “headlong,” “pell-mell” and “terrified retreat.” A senior rebel officer described his forces as having “dissolved like snow in the sand.” Some “revolutionaries”! Moreover, buried in the mounds of shameless war propaganda churned out by the bourgeois press, there is the occasional report indicating that something less than the entire Libyan people have risen up against Qaddafi.

Thus when Libyan soldiers drove into the rebel capital of Benghazi on March 17, it turns out that they were joined by numerous government supporters *living in the city*. An article by the McClatchy newspapers (24 March) reported: “most unnerving was the discovery that hundreds, if not thousands, of Gadhafi sympathizers were among them. During the loyalist attack, rebels here say, men in civilian clothes came out of their Benghazi homes and attacked the city along with Gadhafi forces charging in from the south.” Some residents of Ajdabiya were reportedly less than happy to see the rebels return, and during the rebels’ drive to the west it is reported that: “At some towns and villages, residents turned against them and fought alongside loyalist troops” (*Independent*, 31 March). This was the case in the town of Al Aghayla. In the city of Bin Jawad the reporter witnessed residents shooting from their homes at rebel fighters and “around 220 men, either members of the Hosseini clan or people associated with them, being dragged out of their homes, beaten up and taken away” by the rebels searching for “fifth columnists.”

### Inter-Imperialist Rivalries and Plans for War on Libya

For Washington, the war on Libya started out as a target of opportunity. Under pressure from the Arab masses, it had to sacrifice U.S.-backed dictators Mohammed Ben Ali in Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt – a linchpin of American imperial domination of the Middle East. So the strategic planners in the White House, whose motto is “never let a good crisis go to waste,” evidently decided to go after Qaddafi. It would also have the benefit of building up the U.S.’ new Africa Command (Africom). The Pentagon, however, already bogged down in Afghanistan and heavily deployed in Iraq, was none too eager to launch a third Middle Eastern war. In his March 28 TV address, Obama made much of the transfer of control of the current intervention to NATO. This is a fiction – the North Atlantic Treaty Organization has always had a U.S. commander. Canadian general Charles Bouchard, who is now formally be in charge of the Libyan operation, is



### Campaign badge for Franco-British “war games” targeting “Southland,” set for March 2011. Did Operation Southern Mistral turn into Operation Odyssey Dawn?

subordinate to U.S. admiral Samuel Locklear in Naples, head of NATO operations in the Mediterranean, and U.S. admiral James Savidis at NATO HQ in Belgium.

Who *was* itching to attack Libya was France and Britain. Within 36 hours of the approval of U.N. Resolution 1973, the French began bombing near Benghazi in Operation Harmattan (named for the winter winds in the southern Sahara), even before NATO had agreed on an order of battle and rules of engagement. Moreover, last November the French and British war ministers agreed to a joint military exercise, scheduled to begin March 15, which was eerily similar to the actual attack on Libya. Code-named Operation Southern Mistral (for the springtime winds in southern France), it involved a long-range aerial attack (“Southern Storm”) against a dictator in the fictional country of Southland, authorized by a pretend U.N. Security Council resolution. Commenting on this strange coincidence, U.S. Democratic Congressman Dennis Kucinich asked the obvious question: were these war “games” a cover for Operation Odyssey Dawn? He added:

“Were opposition forces in Libya informed by the US, the UK or France about the existence of Southern Mistral/Southern Storm, which may have encouraged them to violence leading to greater repression and a humanitarian crisis? In short was this war against Gaddafi’s Libya planned or a spontaneous response to the great suffering which Gaddafi was visiting upon his opposition?”

–*The Observer* (London), 27 March

### Break with Left Accomplices of Imperialist Attack

We have spelled out how from the beginning the uprising in Libya, although it fed on the frustrations of youth and working people with the authoritarian Qaddafi government, was in fact

led by pro-imperialist forces. The prominent role of Islamists, many of them former members of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, is perfectly evident, including many of the bearded fighters in the rebel “army,” such as it is. The monarchists and civilian and military leaders with CIA ties of long standing, play a leading role. U.S. officials now confirm that “the CIA has been in rebel-held areas of Libya since shortly after the U.S. Embassy in the capital, Tripoli, was evacuated in February,” reports the *Los Angeles Times* (31 March). The rebels are not *simply* an imperialist mercenary operation – if they were they would be considerably more coherent and effective. So long as it was a civil war between them and the Qaddafi regime, Trotskyists took no sides. But since the French/British/U.S. began military operations under the cover of the United Nations and now formally being run by NATO, the Libyan insurgents are effectively agents of imperialist domination who must be defeated.

During the 2008 election campaign, at a time that liberals and most of the left were either enthusiastically backing Barack Obama or doing their best to sidle up to the Democratic candidate, we warned that “U.S. Imperialism Seeks a New Face on System of War and Racism” (*The Internationalist* No 27, May-June 2008). Now the first African American president is bombing an African country. President Obama didn’t even bother to ask Congress for a war powers resolution, even though candidate Obama emphasized that the U.S. Constitution requires it. A few Democratic legislators were miffed and politely tsk-tsked the administration for not going through the motions. Some liberals complained of the cost at a time of budget cutbacks. Peace groups called protests for the record, though the numbers were tiny – and not by accident, since most of these same liberals and leftists had been screaming for weeks to support the Libyan rebels (just not militarily). Some even backed – or did not oppose – imposing a “no fly zone,” just as they did against Yugoslavia in the late ’90s.

When the imperialists attack a semi-colonial country like Libya, it is not enough to oppose the bombing or call for a different foreign policy, as various pseudo-socialists and “peace coalitions” do. They only want a more “peace-loving” imperialism and eagerly chase after ruling-class “doves” to denounce the war hawks. Yet it is the *imperialist system* which is the cause of the endless wars of the 20th and 21st century. But today what the reformists are doing is even worse than their usual “antiwar” class collaboration: ***they paved the way for the attack by acting as propagandists for the pro-imperialist Libyan rebels.*** The social democrats are championing the cause of the “revolutionaries” who have insistently demanded Western military action against Qaddafi. They try to cover their tracks by piously saying no to intervention, but the stark fact is that they have acted as ***accomplices*** in preparing the road to imperialist war.

In fighting to defend Libya and defeat the imperialist war, the key is to break politically with all bourgeois forces *and their opportunist left tails*, and to undertake the struggle to ***build genuinely Leninist-Trotskyist workers parties to lead the struggle for workers revolution***, through a socialist federation of the Near East and in the heart of imperialism, from Europe to North America. ■

## Clinton and Obama’s Afrikakorps: Provoking Genocide in Rwanda, Pushing for Bombing Libya

According to various accounts, Susan Rice, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, along with Samantha Power of the National Security Council, were key players who “had been pressing the case for military action” against Libya (*New York Times*, 19 March). In the *Times*’s portrayal, “Ms. Rice was an Africa adviser to President Clinton when the United States failed to intervene to stop the Rwanda genocide” in 1994. An article in *The Atlantic* (September 2001) by the same Samantha Power, titled “Bystanders to Genocide,” quotes Rice saying, “I swore to myself that if I ever faced such a crisis again, I would come down on the side of dramatic action, going down in flames if that was required.”

This is shameless apologizing for the crimes of U.S. imperialism, for which Susan Rice was co-responsible. The United States under Bill Clinton didn’t stand by while genocide occurred, *it helped instigate the slaughter and blocked efforts to stop it.* Washington backed the Rwanda Patriotic Front, a Tutsi-dominated exile group led by Paul Kagame, who as a top intelligence officer in the Ugandan army had been trained at the U.S. Command College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. A great deal of evidence points to the RPF shooting down the aircraft carrying the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi, an event that touched off the mass slaughter. The RPF then opposed calls for increasing the contingent of U.N. “peacekeepers” to stop the genocide, as did the U.S., fearing that the “blue helmets” would block the rebel drive for power.

After playing a dirty role over Rwanda, as Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Susan Rice went on to support Kagame’s invasion to topple Zairean dictator Mobutu Sese Seko in 1996 with a Tutsi military force drawn from Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi and Zaire (see “Congo: Neo-Colonialism Made in U.S.A.” *The Internationalist* No. 3, September-October 1997). Since then she has been pushing for U.N. intervention in Darfur, Sudan, where Washington has been backing insurgents against the Khartoum government, accusing the latter of “genocide” and killing hundreds of thousands in Darfur – a sheer invention. These wildly exaggerated figures were made up by the “Save Darfur” movement led by Zionists and Clinton administration officials, and have been contested and refuted by investigators (see Mahmood Mamdani, *Saviors and Survivors: Darfur, Politics and the War on Terror* [Pantheon Books, 2009] and Gérard Prunier, *Darfur: The Ambiguous Genocide* [Cornell University Press, 2007]).

Since the Obama administration apparently decided against intervention in Darfur, war criminal Susan Rice, following in the footsteps of Republican National Security Advisor and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice over Iraq, has settled for “dramatic action” in Libya in the latest of Washington’s “humanitarian” wars. ■

# Defend Libya Against Imperialist Attack!

## Defeat U.S./U.N./NATO Assault!

MARCH 18 – Last night the United Nations Security Council voted by 10-0 (with Russia, China, Germany, Brazil and India abstaining) to launch military action against Libya in the guise of “protecting civilians.” After weeks of the Western media churning out war propaganda and liberals clamoring for “humanitarian” intervention, the U.N. issued a declaration of imperialist war. The alleged “humanitarian” concerns are the same kind of smokescreen used to justify the U.S./NATO attack on Yugoslavia in 1995 and 1999, as well as the U.S.’ 2003 invasion of Iraq, supposedly (among other pretexts) to defend the Kurds and Shiites. The “no fly zone” and air strikes to bomb Libyan forces authorized by the Security Council resolution represent a major shift from what was a civil war between the brutal bourgeois Qaddafi regime in Tripoli and a monarchist/Islamist/pro-imperialist opposition in Benghazi. Now, in the face of the U.N. action and giving no political support to Qaddafi, revolutionaries and all opponents of imperialism are duty-bound to *defend Libya* while seeking the *defeat of the U.S./U.N./NATO attackers*.

Libya, a former Italian colony and then British protectorate, is a semi-colonial country under attack. Imperialist forces covet it for geostrategic reasons – vast high-quality oil deposits and key Mediterranean/African location – and wish to get rid of Muammar Qaddafi, with whom U.S. rulers have had an on-again, off-again feud for decades. Recently the Libyan leader had been cooperating with the U.S.’ “war on terror” against Islamists who also threatened his rule. But with popular uprisings and unrest sweeping the Near East and North Africa, Qaddafi’s CIA-backed opponents evidently figured this was a good opportunity to get rid of the erratic strongman who has sometimes been a thorn in Washington’s side. The result is the latest case of “humanitarian” imperialist aggression. Recall how the U.S. used the Haitian earthquake of January 2010 to occupy the hard-hit Caribbean island country. For poor and working people, imperialist occupation is always a greater evil. We don’t call on the U.S., U.N. and NATO to “aid the people” – they don’t and won’t – we demand they get the hell out, and stay out!

The situation in Libya is notably different from that in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain and elsewhere in the Near East where there have been mass plebeian uprisings for democratic rights against U.S.-backed dictatorships. In Libya, the initial protests were called by exile opposition groups tied to the CIA. In the ensuing civil war pitting the Qaddafi’s Islamic-populist regime against a motley crew of monarchist, Islamist and pro-imperialist bourgeois forces along with some of Qaddafi’s bloodiest henchmen, proletarian revolutionaries had no side. But with the U.N. vote, the rebels are now cat’s paws of imperialist forces, and we call for their defeat and for defense of Libya. At the same time, we continue to be for a revolution of the Libyan working people and oppressed groups (such as the Berbers) to bring down Qaddafi, denouncing not only his police-state repression but also his repeated collaboration with U.S. (and Italian and French)



imperialism whenever he has been given a chance.

The fight against the imperialist assault on Libya is not limited to the North Africa country. Egyptian workers should oppose the imperialist invasion by blocking U.S. warships from transiting the Suez Canal. Tunisian workers should stop NATO warships from docking. In Bahrain, instead of appealing to the U.S. for aid, as protesters have been doing, any truly democratic revolution would not only bring down the U.S.-allied Sunni monarchy which has long oppressed the overwhelmingly Shiite population, but would also drive out the U.S. naval and air bases which are the linchpin for its operations in the Arab/Persian Gulf, as part of international workers revolution from the oil fields of eastern Arabia to the factories of Iran.

Much of the social-democratic left in the United States and internationally (including the International Socialist Organization and Socialist Alternative in the U.S., the Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Appeal in Britain and their satellites) have been cheerleading for a supposed Libyan “revolution,” taking up the rhetoric of U.S. secretary of state Hillary Clinton and more generally supporting the Libyan bourgeois opposition. Now they are in a pretty pickle as the U.S. and U.K. governments (with the support of the Labour Party “opposition”) launch military action supposedly aiding these same rebels. Other reformist leftists of a Stalinoid bent (such as Workers World Party and the Party for Socialism and Liberation) have historically hailed Qaddafi, making the Libyan leader out to be some kind of anti-imperialist – forcing them into a mealy mouthed position due to Qaddafi’s more recent alliance with Washington.

While the social democrats wave the Libyan monarchist red-black-and-green with a crescent and star in support of the rebels fighting for a pro-imperialist bankers and Islamists government, and the forlorn Qaddafi apologists of yesteryear halfheartedly raise the green flag of Islamic populism (and crony capitalism), the communists of League for the Fourth International fight under the red flag and hammer, sickle and 4 to *smash imperialism through international socialist revolution*. ■

**Defeat the Pro-Imperialist, Monarchist and Islamist Opposition!  
For Workers Revolution Against Qaddafi Police State!**

# Libyan Showdown

MARCH 15 – Over the past three months, a wave of popular uprisings has spread across Arab North Africa and the Near East, toppling U.S.-backed dictators in Tunisia and Egypt and shaking monarchies, emirates and other bonapartist regimes around the region. The imperialists have sought to preserve their domination by keeping both the governments and the opposition under their thumb. Even when they have to had sacrifice one or another used-up strongman to the revolt of the working masses, they make sure power stays in the hands of the army. While much of the left joins the bourgeoisie in hailing victorious “revolutions,” *The Internationalist* has pointed out that the military/police apparatus of these dictatorships is still running the show under the new pseudo-“democracy.” In order to put an end to pervasive poverty and autocratic rule, we have insisted, it is necessary to turn popular uprisings into workers revolution.

For the most part, these upheavals have remained at the level of mass demonstrations and strikes. But in Libya, where Col. Muammar al-Qaddafi has ruled since overthrowing the British-imposed monarchy in 1969, fighting broke out almost from the start. Although Qaddafi was once a bugbear of U.S. rulers, since the late 1990s he sought to buy his way into the good graces of imperialism. The Libyan leader suppressed Islamic fundamentalists, staunched the flow of African immigrants to Europe, invested in major “multinational” firms, invited in European and U.S. oil companies and carried out “free market” economic “reforms,” while always ruling over the toilers with an iron fist. The Great Socialist People’s Libyan Jamahiriya, as he calls his regime, far from being a “state of the masses” is a cover for capitalist exploitation by the Qaddafi clan and its partners. After 41 years of his heavy-handed, capricious rule, when events in Tunisia and Egypt broke the fear barrier, many youth and working people were ready to rebel.

But that is only part of the story. The situation in Libya differs significantly from that in other countries in the region in several ways. While feeding off the desperation and pent-up rage of unemployed youth and hard-pressed workers, this revolt was organized and led from the outset by CIA-tied exile opposition groups and the traditionally monarchist local bourgeoisie in eastern Libya, long hostile to Qaddafi. It



EPA

**Libyan rebel rally in Benghazi, March 23, featuring flags of France and of the monarchy installed by the British after World War II.**



Maher27777/Wikipedia

**Leftist apologists for Libyan rebels claim that waving monarchist flag doesn’t mean support for the monarchy. Oh no? Right: Benghazi youth with photo of King Idris, whose base was eastern region of Cyrenaica.**

was soon joined by top officials of the Qaddafi regime, among them the justice minister and the long-time interior minister (in charge of the police). Moreover, a key role is played by Islamist elements, including the *jihadi* Libyan Islamic Fighting Group. These ruling-class elements, just as reactionary as Qaddafi, are now appealing for U.S. military action. (Air strikes, please, not troops – for now.) Some rebels are adamant against *any* foreign military intervention, yet plebeian youth yearning for secular democracy are being used by bourgeois opposition leaders for an agenda that can only be pro-imperialist and *anti*-democratic.

Many leftists in the West recall when Qaddafi was the personification of radical Arab nationalism, with an Islamic twist. But lately the Libyan Leader has praised Tunisian dictator Zine el Abidine Ben Ali and Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak and denounced the masses for bringing them down, saying this produced terror “as if it was the Bolshevik or the American revolution.” Still, Libya was not simply a U.S. neo-colony and the imperialists were never quite comfortable in their embrace of the leader of the Green Revolution, even after he was reborn as a disciple of “neoliberalism.” On top of which, Qaddafi has refused to go quietly into the night and vowed to fight to the last bullet. So unlike in Tunisia and Egypt, President Barack Obama is calling openly for Qaddafi’s departure, freezing Libyan assets and pushing through a United Nations Council resolution calling for the International Criminal Court (whose jurisdiction the U.S. rejects) to investigate him for possible war crimes – while preparing military action.

As U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton hails the Libyan “revolution,” the imperialist media are in full battle mode. “Massacres” by government troops are reported with inflated tolls of civilian casualties when in fact there are battles with combatants dead on both sides. Stunning “victories” by the rebels are proclaimed when government forces simply withdraw after probing attacks. (Libyan military officers who have joined the rebels, in contrast, understand that Qaddafi is holding back in order to avoid mass casualties that would be used as an excuse for U.S./NATO intervention.<sup>1</sup>) There is silence about racist assaults in rebel-held areas on black African migrant workers who are accused of being pro-government “mercenaries.” And although at least 130 Western reporters are holed up in the capital, Tripoli, there is hardly a mention

<sup>1</sup> “‘He is playing with us,’ said Major Ibrahim Fatouri in Benghazi. ‘This is the one time in recent years that he has cared what the world thinks of him’.” (*Observer* [London], 6 March).



**Pro-Qaddafi rally in Tripoli’s Green Square, March 4. Imperialist media in full battle mode don’t report support for Libyan regime even when it takes place right under their reporters’ noses.**

of mass demonstrations of thousands of government loyalists taking place under their noses. Qaddafi is demonized as a madman who has completely lost touch with reality.

It all recalls the way Serbian strongman Slobodan Milosevic – who was indeed a nationalist butcher – was portrayed as a monster as the U.S. geared up to bomb Serbia in support of the Kosovo Liberation Army in 1998-99. The fact that the Kosovo Albanian nationalists were slaughtering Serbs was swept under the rug, including the fact that KLA commander (and later Kosovo prime minister) Hashim Thaçi was involved in drug and sex trafficking and running a gruesome ring that was killing Serb prisoners in order to harvest their organs and sell them. Even years later, the chief prosecutor at the Yugoslav war crimes tribunal Carla del Ponte said she was prevented from investigating these charges.<sup>2</sup> For that matter, how about an investigation for war crimes of U.S. presidents George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama, each of whom is responsible for the wanton murder of far more civilians than Qaddafi (or even Milosevic)? Don’t hold your breath waiting: “international law” is a fiction and plaything in the hands of the dominant powers.

At present there are seesaw battles around oil ports and along the coastal road between what is described as a “ragtag rebel army” and pro-Qaddafi militias. The government has managed to blow up ammunition depots in Benghazi and Ajdabiya, while untrained rebel volunteers are using up ammo with abandon. In western Libya, the city of Zawiyah is under government siege, with the working population locked down and subjected to indiscriminate fire. The armed clashes have escalated to outright civil war, while Washington reposes.<sup>2</sup> “Kosovo: Report alleging PM links to organ trade endorsed,” *Guardian* [London], 17 December 2010.

tions its forces, moving warships into the Mediterranean. This “robust diplomacy,” as Secretary of State Hillary Clinton likes to call it, gives the Pentagon and White House time to develop “options” for future military action. That could include a “no fly zone” (beginning by knocking out Libya’s air force and anti-aircraft defense systems), blocking Libyan telecommunications or sending in troops (to provide “humanitarian” aid, to be sure).

Unlike many leftists who once sang the praises of Qaddafi, we in the League for the Fourth International never politically supported Arab nationalism and have always fought Islamic reaction. At the same time, we denounced Ronald Reagan’s 1986 bombing of Libya, a wanton attempt to assassinate the Libyan leader that killed his year-old daughter and several hundred Libyans. Many democratic-minded youth may have joined the initial protests unaware of their sponsorship by pro-imperialist forces. In the cities of western Libya and the Berber (Amazigh) regions, the uprising may at first had a character of communal self-defense. But *in the present civil war, communists oppose both the Islamic-populist strongman Qaddafi and the pro-imperialist, monarchist and Islamist opposition*, calling instead for *workers revolution*. In the case of military intervention by the U.S. and its NATO allies, in whatever guise, *class-conscious workers must defend Libya and fight to defeat the imperialists and their Libyan puppets*.

In Libya more than anywhere else in the Middle East today, the class contradictions in the popular uprisings for “democracy” have come to the fore. In earlier cases, union-led protests (in Tunisia) or workers strikes amid huge mass mobilizations (Egypt) were key in driving out the dictators. Yet even after some reshuffling of personnel at the top (such as installing new prime ministers) the apparatus of the *dictatorship* remains in place. In those cases, the imperialists had their agents among the protesters, but they were only one element in a vastly larger upheaval. To be sure, many Libyans voiced grievances similar to those of protests from Algeria to Bahrain, but in this case bourgeois reactionaries looking to imperialism are in control. Everywhere, the vital element of a revolutionary proletarian leadership has been absent, and this is what must urgently be built. Only by fighting on a working-class program can Qaddafi’s threadbare populist appeal be undercut and the pro-imperialist politics of the bourgeois opposition be defeated

### Libya Uprising: Bourgeois Opposition Forces Ascendant

The imperialist media have sought to portray events in Libya as one more spontaneous mass popular uprising just like others in the Middle East. But in fact the February 17 Libyan “Day of Rage” was announced well in advance by the National Council for the Libyan Opposition (NCLO), which operates out of Britain and the U.S. Already on February 9 the



Libyan Islamist rebel fighter with Koran and grenade.

Saudi-owned pan-Arab newspaper *Asharq Al-Awsat*, printed in London and New York, reported on the plans, and that Qaddafi “privately met with Libyan political activists, journalists, and media figures” while “warning against the consequences of participating in any potential disturbances.”

The uprising broke out in Benghazi, capital of the region of Cyrenaica which had been the base of King Idris, head of the Senussi order of Sufi Muslims. Having opposed the 1911-1945 Italian occupation of Libya from a comfortable perch in Cairo, at the end of World War II Idris was installed by the British as king of Libya. On February 17, protesters immediately began flying the flag of the Libyan monarchy (red, black and green with a white crescent and star). Leftist supporters of the rebels argue that this does not represent nostalgia for Senussi rule. Yet photos from February 17 show demonstrators in Benghazi carrying portraits of King Idris. Indeed, a main component of the NCLO is the Libyan Constitutional Union of Muhammad as-Senussi, considered by royalists to be the legitimate pretender to the Libyan crown. On February 24, Al Jazeera English interviewed “Crown Prince” as-Senussi saying he called on “the international community to help remove Gaddafi from power and stop the ongoing ‘massacre’.”

Another favorite on Al Jazeera these days and a main component of the Libyan opposition (as well as co-founder of the NCLO) is the National Front for the Salvation of Libya (NFSL). Founded in 1981, this outfit has been an instrument of the American CIA from its inception under Ronald Reagan, as well as being financed by Saudi Arabia.<sup>3</sup> In 1984, the NFSL attempted to murder Qaddafi but was foiled. The NFSL’s last conference (July 2007) was held in the United States. The Salvation Front was the main source of news about the Libyan

<sup>3</sup> CIA support for the NFSL is not only rumored, it has been detailed in Richard Keeble, *Secret State, Silent Press: New Militarism, the Gulf and the Modern Image of Warfare* (University of Luton Press, 1997) and Joseph Stanik, *El Dorado Canyon: Reagan’s Undeclared War with Qaddafi* (Naval Institute Press, 2003). It was the subject of hearings in 1981 by the U.S. House of Representatives Intelligence Committee where there were objections (soon leaked to the press) to the plans to assassinate Qaddafi.

revolt in the first days before correspondents arrived and is part of the opposition coalition in Benghazi today.<sup>4</sup>

Along with the monarchists and CIA assets, a big chunk of the opposition consists of Islamic fundamentalist figures and currents. In the days leading up to February 17, the regime released 110 Islamists from jail among other steps in an effort to head off protest. But on February 15, it arrested Fathi Terbil, a lawyer representing the families of Islamists were killed in a 1996 prison massacre. Many had been jailed in the suppression of a 1990s insurgency in Cyrenaica by the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, some of whom had fought against Soviet troops in Afghanistan – when they and Osama bin Laden were being bankrolled by the U.S. The arrest touched off an angry protest that set the stage for the explosive “Day of Rage.” While almost no Islamic chants were reported earlier in Tunisia, and scattered attempts by the Muslim Brotherhood to chant its slogans in Cairo fell flat, on February 17 in Benghazi, Libya one of the main chants was “There is no God but Allah, and Muammar [al-Qaddafi] is the enemy of God.”

Since Western media have ridiculed Qaddafi’s claims that the uprising is Islamist, it is worth quoting a London *Economist* (5 March) report:

“[T]he Islamists and secular liberals, with the shared aim of dishing the dictator, have struck up an alliance....

“Based on relationships forged in the notorious Abu Salim prison, a loose Islamist front is emerging. Old-time sheikhs and graduates schooled in Salafi pietism (who seek to emulate the behaviour of the Prophet’s comrades)<sup>5</sup> have teamed up with Muslim Brothers who temper their enthusiasm for *sharia* law with pragmatism in their dealings with non-Muslim people and governments.

“The jihadists take a more rigid line, saying they will tolerate anything – as long as it does not conflict with Islam.... The Islamists grumbled when an American-trained secular profes-

<sup>4</sup> Subsequently, the former military commander of the NFSL “army” showed up in Benghazi and declared himself commander of the rebels’ “army.” See “Qaddafi and the Imperialists: On and Off,” on page 28 of this issue.

<sup>5</sup> Salafism is a component of the Sunni branch of Islam who consider the practices of the first three generations after Muhammad to be the model of an Islamic society. This includes many reactionary aspects of 7th-8th century Arab society, particularly strictures on women, that are not found in the Koran itself. While some Salafists are merely extreme conservative pietists, others are prominent in Islamist political currents promoting *jihād*, in this case meaning holy war, against infidels. The Wahabi sect which dominates Saudi Arabia and from which Osama bin Laden stems is Salafist, and the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, founded by former *mujahedin* (holy warriors) who had fought the Soviet army in Afghanistan, was allied with the Algerian Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat.



Agence France-Presse

**U.S. and Islamists, back together again. Abdul Hakim al-Hasidi, leader of Libyan rebel forces in Damah, fought with CIA-sponsored mujahedin (holy warriors) against Soviet Army supporting Afghan reform regime in 1980s. Trotskyists hailed Red Army intervention in Afghanistan, opposing Islamist reactionaries then and now.**

sor was given the education portfolio on the new council.... “All in all, the Islamists are gaining ground. Mosques, hitherto closed between prayer times to limit public assembly, are open round the clock. The imams have started to preach politics, offering their pulpits to Islamists tortured by the regime. The clerics have also begun to dispense welfare.”

Meanwhile, the *New York Times* (8 March) reports that the military leader of the rebellion in the eastern city of Darnah, Abdul Hakim al-Hasidi, is a veteran of the anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan and of the Islamic insurgency in Libya. As we have noted, Washington has no compunctions about allying with the most extreme Islamic reaction in the service of counterrevolution and furthering its imperial aims. Now imperialism and Islamism are making common cause again.

Proletarian revolutionaries, in contrast, *hailed* the Soviet Army’s 1980s intervention in Afghanistan against U.S.-backed *mujahedin* and denounced the Kremlin pullout, a capitulation to imperialism that paved the way to the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union. When the Soviets pulled out we offered to send an international brigade to help fight against the “holy warriors” who threw acid in the faces of female university students and gunned down educators for the “crime” of teaching girls to read and write. In Algeria, revolutionary Marxists (Trotskyists) have opposed the murderous military and Islamist insurgents alike, both of whom wantonly slaughtered unveiled women, trade unionists and communists. In Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Iran and elsewhere Trotskyists oppose all political alliances with the forces of religious reaction – or with any bourgeois political currents – as we fight for the revolutionary political independence of the working class and rural and urban poor from their exploiters.

A third and increasingly prominent component of the rebel coalition consists of defectors from the Qaddafi regime. A number of the Leader’s top deputies quickly joined the



rebellion, so quickly in fact that it leads one to wonder if the shift in loyalties wasn't perhaps prearranged through the "good offices" of the CIA or Britain's MI6. Thus on February 21, Mustafa Abud al-Jalil, Qaddafi's justice minister, resigned and turned up in Al Bayda, where three days later he presided over a meeting of opposition political figures. On February 22, General Abdul Fatah Younis, interior minister and head of the regime's special forces, resigned and joined the rebellion. Younis was often referred to as Qaddafi's No. 2. In addition, oil minister Shukri Mohammed Ghanem has reportedly fled the country, and a number of Libyan ambassadors and diplomats around the world have quit or declared their allegiance to the rebel "government."

On March 5, a Transitional National Council held its first meeting, led by Jalil with Benghazi lawyer Abdel-Hafidh Ghoga named TNC spokesman. A three-member "crisis committee" was named, headed by Mahmoud Jibril, a former Qaddafi planning official, and including Omar Hariri (a veteran of the 1969 coup that installed Qaddafi in power) in charge of military affairs (Reuters, 5 March). General Younis is now described as "the most senior military figure in the Benghazi opposition group," and is reportedly in "direct phone contact" with British foreign secretary William Hague (*Financial Times*, 7 March). In short, at least at the top, the rebellion is now formally led by high-level turncoats from the Qaddafi regime, in fact, the very people who were in charge of his notorious police, special forces and prisons. They in turn are appealing to the imperialists for military aid. Combined with the prominent role of monarchists and Islamists, the rebel coalition hardly spells "democracy" for Libyan working people.

As Manlio Dinucci noted in the Italian leftist daily *Il Manifesto* (25 February): this was not so much "a revolt of the impoverished masses, as in Egypt and Tunisia, but a real civil war due to a split in the ruling circles. Whoever made the first move exploited the discontent against the Qaddafi clan, widespread above all in the population of Cyrenaica and among urban youth, at a time when the whole of North Africa was shot through by rebellion. But unlike Egypt and Tunisia, the Libyan insurrection appears to be prearranged and organized in advance." Indeed it does. And the conclusion? For authentic communists it must be to expose the ruling-class forces behind this operation and to organize for a genuine revolution, not just to overthrow the absurdly megalomaniacal Qaddafi – the would-be "king of kings of Africa" – but to bring down the *dictatorship of capital* and to throw off the *yoke of imperialism*.



Al Jazeera

**No intervention banner in Benghazi. Whoever made this had resources.**

### **U.S. Imperialists Prepare Attack**

As to the Libyan rebels being in close contact with U.S./U.K. imperialism, of this there can be no doubt. In addition to the propaganda operation orchestrated from London and Washington by the CIA-backed NFSL and NCLO, there have been numerous reports of U.S., British and French military advisors in eastern Libya. While these have been largely unverified, there was no denying when eight British agents and a "junior diplomat" were seized shortly after alighting from a helicopter outside Benghazi on March 3. U.K. foreign secretary Hague and Prime Minister David Cameron finally made red-faced admissions about a "diplomatic mission" that had encountered "difficulties." But those detained included six special forces soldiers and two MI6 (foreign intelligence) officers, *one of whom had been there for months*. Moreover, witnesses reported that as many as 20 people were involved, and the London *Guardian* (7 March) reported government sources saying it had dispatched "advisers to eastern Libya to help the rebels."

Now there is a big push by right-wingers and some imperialist liberals to declare a "no-fly zone" over Libya in order to aid the rebels. There is talk of arming the opposition, using a third country as a "cutout." Veteran Middle East correspondent Robert Fisk reports that Obama asked Saudi Arabia to supply weapons to Benghazi ("America's secret plan to arm Libya's rebels," *Independent* [London], 7 March). And the various NATO countries are positioning their forces to strike at Libya. Canada has sent a 13-member "reconnaissance team" to Malta, just off Libya in the Mediterranean, and a reporter for the Montréal daily *Le Devoir* reports that "Canadian special forces (JTF2) are 'on standby' to depart for Libya." The *Times of Malta* (3 March) reports that "400 US Marines were dispatched on Thursday to a US base on the Greek Island of Crete ahead of their deployment on warships off Libya." The USS *Kearsage* and *Ponce* steamed into the Mediterranean via the Suez Canal, followed

by the nuclear aircraft carrier USS *Enterprise*. All they need is the go ahead order from Obama.

But what about those youth in Benghazi who say (for example, in a video interview with Real News) that they are opposed to foreign intervention? Pictures are being circulating on the Internet, particularly by left groups that want to politically support the rebels without having the taint of backing imperialist intervention, of a big banner on a building in Benghazi proclaiming: “NO FOREIGN INTERVENTION – Libyan People Can Manage it ALONE.” Several things can be said about this. First, these youth are not calling the shots in Benghazi. Second, all sorts of bourgeois opposition politicians say they are opposed to “foreign intervention,” by which they mean troops on the ground, *at the same time as they beg the U.S. to provide a “no fly zone”* – i.e., to bomb his airforce and anti-aircraft defense. That would an imperialist act of war, no matter what the rebels say. Third, look more closely at that banner: very fancy. Whoever made that has resources at their command. Colloquial English, too – and no Arabic. Curious.

It’s also worth looking at the web sites purporting to be from Libyan youth, notably <http://www.libyafeb17.com/> or <http://twitter.com/EnoughGaddafi>. Also quite professional, and no Arabic language site connected with them. Curiouser. However, the English-language ShababLibya/LibyanYouthMovement twitter and Facebook sites do have an Arabic web site (<http://shabab-libya.com/>). What do we learn there? That the “director of Youth Site for Libya” is a certain Allaedin Ezzedin, a “senior on-line marketing expert in the Bay Area, California,” one of whose role models is Hasan Al Banna, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Shades of the Google marketing exec Wael Ghonim who left his posh villa in the United Arab Emirates to set up a Facebook site in Egypt that attracted many youth. And recently the London *Financial Times* (12 March), in an article about “Civil Society on Rise in Rebel Areas of Libya,” interviewed Ahmed ben Musa, a founder of the Libyan Youth Movement, who just happens to be a “30-year-old Halliburton employee.” Halliburton?! Are Dick Cheney’s cronies in on this?

Something’s fishy here, and, as you suspected, it’s all connected ... to the United States Government. Libyafeb17 and EnoughGaddafi are pushed by Movements.org, the web site of an Alliance of Youth Movements. This “alliance” turns out to be a USG-sponsored outfit “dedicated to identifying, connecting, and supporting digital activists from around the world.” It was launched by, and funded by, the State Department in 2008 with corporate sponsors including Facebook, Howcast, MTV, Google, YouTube, AT&T, Pepsi, CBS News, MSNBC, JetBlue, Gen-Next and Access 360 Media, as well as Columbia Law School. The Alliance’s 2009

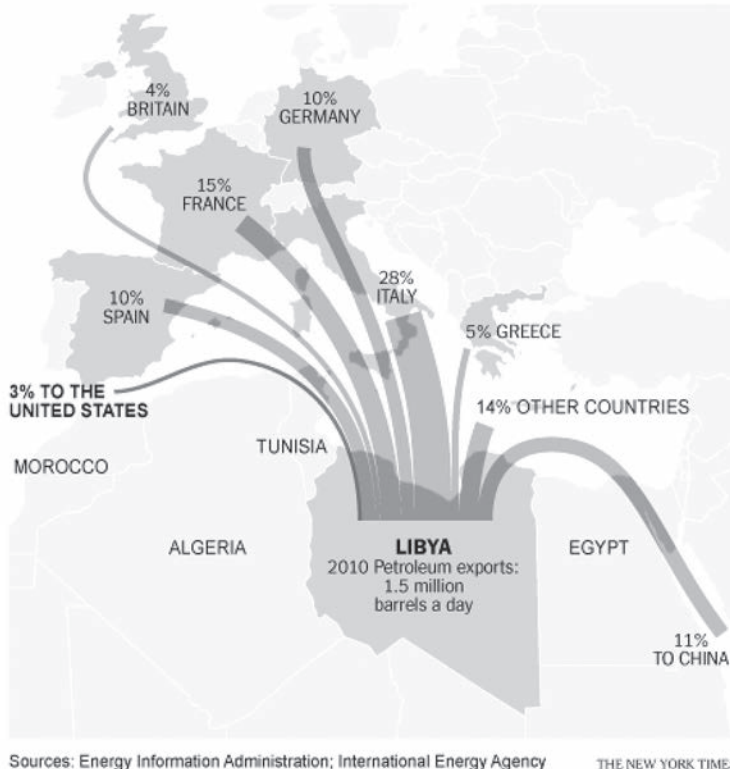
The screenshot shows the Movements.org website. At the top, it says "MOVEMENTS.ORG IDENTIFY. CONNECT. SUPPORT." with a navigation menu: HOME, BLOG, HOW TO, CASE STUDIES, ABOUT, SHARE YOUR STORY. Below the navigation is a "SUPPORTERS" section. It features a list of corporate partners: Howcast, Edelman, Google, MTV Music Television, Meetup, Pepsi, CBS News, Mobile Accord, YouTube, Facebook, MSNBC, National Geographic, Omnicom Group, Access 360 Media, and GenNext. Below this is a "Public Partnerships" section featuring the logos of Columbia Law School and the Department of State of the United States of America.

Corporate Partnerships

Public Partnerships

### Libya's Oil Exports

About 85 percent of Libya's oil exports went to Europe last year; 11 percent went to China and only 3 percent to the United States. But in addition to 1.5 million barrels a day in petroleum exports, the country sent 350 billion cubic feet of natural gas to Europe, mainly through a pipeline to Italy.



Summit was addressed by Hillary Clinton, heard papers such as one by State Department official Jared Cohen (now Director of Google Ideas) on “Moldova’s Twitterrevolution,” and included such “youth movements” as the Teheran Bureau, Un Millón de Voces contra las FARC (Colombia) and the Movimiento Joven de Venezuela which has been active against the government of Hugo Chávez. These are “youth movements” made to the measure, and on the orders, of imperialism.

Undoubtedly, many Libyan youth have joined in the uprising to protest the heavy-handed Libyan security apparatus. But they are being manipulated by a pro-imperialist cabal of CIA assets, monarchists, Islamists and ex-Qaddafi officials, and by phony “youth movements” sponsored by Washington. Again, many of these same elements were present in Egypt in the uprising that toppled the dictator Hosni Mubarak (see box). Unlike various pseudo-socialists, authentic Marxist revolutionaries there would have refused to join any political alliance with such bourgeois currents. But in Egypt the ballyhooed “Facebook revolution” was surpassed by a vast plebeian mobilization and a strike wave by workers who don’t “tweet” with their I-phones or friend people on social networks but fought cops in the streets. In Libya, the stage of mass mobilization was passed within a day, quickly turning into a civil war between two reactionary bourgeois forces, and

now faces the threat of imperialist attack.

What would be the goal of U.S. imperialist intervention? Some simplistic leftists respond in knee-jerk fashion that the Yankees want to grab Libya’s oil. Yes, but. Although Libya is a major producer of petroleum and natural gas, only 3% of its oil exports go to the United States, while 85% go to Europe (37% to Italy alone). Moreover, most of Libya’s oil is already pumped under production-sharing agreements with international oil companies including Italy’s ENI/AGIP, France’s Total, Spain’s Repsol-YPF, Russia’s Gazprom, Petrochina, Norway’s StatoilHydro, as well as Occidental, ConocoPhillips, ExxonMobil, Shell, Hess, Marathon and BP. No doubt the imperialists would like to control it all, and to weaken Libya in the OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) cartel where Qaddafi has been a hardliner, along with Chávez’s Venezuela. But Washington’s fundamental interest in Libya is more broadly geostrategic:

- to dump an erratic leader who has been and could be again a troublemaker for the U.S. in this vital region;
- to get back such assets as Wheelus Air Force Base near Tripoli, closed by Qaddafi shortly after taking power in 1969, which could serve as an important staging point for the U.S.’ newly formed Africa Command; and
- above all, to *control energy supplies to potential rival powers.*

As Manlio Dinucci wrote in the article quoted earlier, titled “Libya in the Great Game” (*Il Manifesto*, 25 February), by overthrowing Qaddafi: “The United States could thereby control the energy spigot on which Europe in large part depends, and which also supplies China.” This has long been the strategic goal of U.S. imperialism in the region. As we noted well before the 2003 invasion of Iraq:

“The real aim of the U.S.-orchestrated campaign of war threats and ultimately military action against Iraq is to graphically demonstrate the *world domination of Yankee imperialism.* The American rulers, from Wall Street to the White House and the Pentagon, deem themselves to be ‘masters of the universe,’ and they want to show everyone who’s the boss. An important part of this is control of petroleum supplies. Washington wants to have its hand on the oil spigot, so it can turn it on or off at will. This is directed not so much at Iraq, although the Seven Sisters oil monopolies are still upset over the nationalization of their properties there, as *at the U.S.’ imperialist allies and rivals.* The U.S. imports very little oil from the region, which goes overwhelmingly to Japan and Europe.”

—“Defend Iraq Against U.S. Imperialist Attack!” *The Internationalist* No. 5, April-May 1998

From Yugoslavia to Iraq to Libya – under Democrat Bill Clinton in 1998, Republican George W. Bush in 2003, and Democrat Barack Obama in 2011 – U.S. imperialism uses “human rights” as a smokescreen for its quest for global hegemony. ■

## Qaddafi and the Imperialists: On and Off

Back in the early 1970s, shortly after he took power, kicked the U.S. out of its gigantic air base and set up a National Oil Corporation, Muammar Qaddafi was hailed by much of the left as an “anti-imperialist.” Never mind that his “nationalization” of Libyan oil consisted mainly of production sharing agreements with the oil “multinationals” who agreed to give Libya a share of the profits. Never mind, also, that Colonel Qaddafi presented his “Green Book” as a “Third Universal Theory” counterposed to capitalism and “atheistic communism.” His Islamic version of “socialism” was based on a supposed “partnership” of workers and capital, in which trade unions will be replaced by “syndicates of engineers and technicians.” (This notion was borrowed directly from the ex-syndicalist Mussolini when as Il Duce (Leader) of fascist Italy he set up a corporatist capitalist state.) Never mind, once again, that under a 1973 law, Qaddafi specifically ordered that communists be repressed.

Despite his rhetoric, from the outset the Libyan leader was prepared to cut a deal with U.S. imperialism – and did, whenever it would let him. Patrick Seale and Maureen McConville in their book, *The Hilton Assignment* (1973), reported that the U.S. spy agencies early on sized up Qaddafi as a fanatical anti-communist. He aided Sudanese strongman Gaafar Nimeiry in 1971 in thwarting a coup by leftist officers and subsequently banning the Communist Party. The U.S. tipped Qaddafi off about a brewing coup plot in the Libyan military, while the British and Italian secret services squelched an attempt to free monarchist prisoners. In the late 1970s, a couple of supposedly former CIA agents, Edmund Wilson and Francis Terpil, “made a deal with Col. Muammar el Qaddafi to supply the Libyan strongman with explosives for huge sums of cash,” plus former Green Berets to set up a training school in terror tactics, according to investigative reporter Seymour Hersh (“The Qaddafi Connection,” *New York Times Magazine*, 9 and 16 August 1981). Hersh reported that several participants thought they were working on a CIA “op.” In 1980, Qaddafi hailed the CIA-sponsored *mujahedin* fighting the Soviet Army in Afghanistan.

Under the Reagan administration in Washington, with its close ties to the oil industry, things began to change. The U.S. began actively plotting to overthrow the Libyan leader. In June 1981, Reagan signed a secret intelligence “finding” directing the CIA to support anti-Qaddafi exiles. In October 1981, the National Front for the Salvation of Libya was set up. In May 1984 the NFSL sent a team of 15 gunmen to try to kill Qaddafi in his residence. Despite U.S. Executive Order 11905 (issued by President Gerald Ford in 1976) banning U.S. participation in political assassinations, the NFSL was financed by the CIA, and its agents trained the hit squad in Europe, Sudan and Morocco,



Patrick Kovarik/AFP

**That was then. Libyan leader Muammar al-Qaddafi (right) with French president Nicolas Sarkozy in July 2007. Qaddafi helped finance Sarkozy’s election campaign, now he wants his money back.**

Jack Anderson reported in the *Washington Post* (12 June 1985). When that assassination attempt failed and several of the plotters were executed, Washington turned to military provocation under the code name “Operation Prairie Fire,” repeated sending an armada to invade waters claimed by Libya in the Gulf of Sidra in early 1986. When Qaddafi finally responded in March, U.S. jets bombed a Libyan patrol boat, killing 35 sailors.

Following the bombing of the La Belle discothèque in Berlin, Germany in which two U.S. soldiers were killed, Reagan launched massive air strikes against Libya in mid-April, supposedly in retaliation. The earlier deadly U.S. attack on Libyan patrol boats was passed over in silence by the imperialist media, and in fact, the April attack, “Operation El Dorado Canyon” had long been in the works.

From the early 1980s until the late ’90s, Qaddafi was repeatedly at odds with U.S. and French imperialism. He actively intervened in a civil war in Chad, Libya’s neighbor to the south, occupying the Tibesti desert region and backing Muslim FROLINAT insurgents. After Libyan tanks occupied the Chadian capital in December 1980, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency along with French intelligence began funding the forces of ousted president Hissène Habré, as well as founding the NFSL and its exile army. The latter was described as “a bunch of Libyan contras,” referring to the Nicaraguan counterrevolutionary mercenary army bankrolled by Washington in the same period. Habré regained power in 1983, and after a series of skirmishes defeated the Libyans (who had lost their Chadian allies) in 1987. However, in 1990, Habré was ousted by Idriss Déby, backed by Qaddafi. The NFSL army was obliged to leave Chad, 350 of its soldiers settling in the U.S. where they continued to receive military training (*Washington Post*, 18 May 1991, cited in a

December 1996 Congressional Research Service brief on Libya).

However, in the mid-1990s, Islamist *mujahedin* (holy warriors) who had been armed, trained and paid by the U.S. to fight against the Soviets in Afghanistan began an insurgency in the Cyrenaica region of eastern Libya. Qaddafi reacted strongly, and was eventually able to suppress the insurgency. As the United States was also increasingly at odds with its former Islamic mercenaries, with Clinton ordering the bombing of a plant in Khartoum in response to 1998 embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, the Libyan leader sought a rapprochement with the West. Particularly after George W. Bush invaded Iraq in March 2003, Qaddafi intensified negotiations with Washington, eventually turning over materials for a dubious nuclear weapons program (most of the crates from North Korea were unopened). Libya also agreed to pay compensation for the victims of the 1986 La Belle disco, 1988 Pan Am Flight 703 and 1989 UTA Flight 772 bombings, in exchange for removal of economic sanctions on Libya in 2008.<sup>1</sup> Libyan and U.S. agencies began collaborating closely in fighting Al Qaeda in Africa.

At the same time, Libya increased its holdings in major European corporations. The Libyan Investment Authority, Libyan Central Bank and other government agencies own 2% of the Fiat auto company, 7.5% of UniCredit (Italy's biggest bank), 2% of the Italian defense and aviation manufacturer Finmeccanica, 7.5% of the Juventus football club and more than 3% of Pearson PLC, the textbook publisher (which also owns the London-based *Financial Times* and *Economist*), as well as a stake in Swedish and Russian aluminum companies Kubal and Rusal. Qaddafi also supported European rulers politically. After France became the first country to recognize the rebels' "transitional council" in Benghazi, Qaddafi's son Saif al-Islam demanded that "Sarkozy must first give back the money he took from Libya to finance his electoral campaign" (*Foreign Policy*, 16 March). Inter-imperialist rivalries also come into play: the fact that Germany imports only 7.5% of its oil from Libya helps explain its non-participation in the NATO assault. On the other hand, when Rome recognized the rebel council it was partly out of concern by Italy's ENI that France's Total was parlaying its support into bigger oil concessions. Both will be in a pickle, however, if Qaddafi holds on in Tripoli and the oil-producing areas.

The Libyan leader also tried to gain favor with the imperialists by clamping down on African immigration to West Europe, cutting the number of immigrants trying to enter Italy from Libya by more than three-quarters. This should give pause to black radicals and nationalists who still see Qaddafi as a champion of black African interests (e.g., an article on the Black Agenda Report website [23 March], noting that the Arab League is "contemptuous of Black Africa and Qaddafi's attempts to bring about African-Arab unity"). Appealing for

<sup>1</sup> In all of these cases, the U.S. blamed Libya, although the evidence is contested at the very least. In the case of the Pan Am 703 bombing, the former Libyan intelligence officer Abdel Basset Ali al-Megrahi was clearly framed, as the farcical trial and evidence presented by left-wing investigative journalist Paul Foot demonstrated. In 2007, the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission submitted an 800-page report concluding that Megrahi's conviction was likely a "miscarriage of justice" (*New York Times*, 29 June 2007).

EU aid, last year Qaddafi remarked at a ceremony in Rome, standing next to Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi, "Tomorrow Europe might no longer be European, and even black, as there are millions who want to come in." He added:

"We don't know what will happen, what will be the reaction of the white and Christian Europeans faced with this influx of starving and ignorant Africans.... We don't know if Europe will remain an advanced and united continent or if it will be destroyed, as happened with the barbarian invasions."

–BBC, 31 August 2010

Qaddafi may have said what he expected racist European rulers wanted to hear. But it's quite a statement from a leader who once praised blackness and championed a United States of Africa.

But now the wheel has turned once more, and Yankee imperialism is again after Qaddafi's scalp. The Libyan contras, held in reserve in the U.S. all these years, have suddenly turned up in the rebel capital of Benghazi. On March 25, the media reported that Khalifa Hifter had suddenly been named head of the rebel armed forces. He would replace Abdel Fatah Younes, who had been head of Qaddafi's special forces and interior minister until he suddenly switched sides at the beginning of the revolt. Younes, who is from eastern Libya, would remain as chief of staff. A few days later, with a little digging, the McClatchy newspaper chain reported that Hifter, a former commander of Libyan forces in Chad until he was captured in 1987 and "turned" by the CIA, "spent the past two decades in suburban Virginia" where "he established a life but maintained ties to anti-Gadhafi groups." Suburban Virginia? In other words, he was a CIA asset.

A little more digging turns up a May 2006 memo by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada which cites a chapter of the book *Manipulations africaines*, published in *Le Monde Diplomatique* (March 2001) saying that "the Haftar force, created and financed by the CIA in Chad, vanished into thin air with the help of the CIA shortly after the Hissène Habré government was overthrown by Idriss Déby" in 1990. A Congressional Research Service Issues Brief (19 December 1996), posted on the web site of the Federation of American Scientists, reports that the NFSL as well as its military wing, headed by former Col. Khalifa Hiftar, is "in exile with many of its members in the United States" and that sources indicate that "the United States provides money and training for the NFSL." Subsequently, both Younes and Hiftar are claiming to be the commander of the hapless rebel forces, separately (and infrequently) visiting the "front" with their respective security details.

But Qaddafi is not reverting to his "anti-imperialist" posturing of yesteryear. In a personal letter (6 April) to "Our dear son, Excellency, Baraka Hussein Abu Oumama," the Libyan leader pleads with the U.S. president to call off the bombing so that they can make common cause against Al Qaeda. Thus both the Libyan regime in Tripoli and the opposition in Benghazi are seeking the blessing of Washington. Revolutionary Marxists (Trotskyists) oppose both politically while defending Libya and seeking to defeat the imperialist onslaught and the rebel forces led by pro-imperialist quislings<sup>2</sup> masquerading as democrats. ■

<sup>2</sup> Vidkun Quisling was the fascist leader of the puppet government of Norway under the German occupation in World War II.

## From Messengers for Qaddafi to Cat's Paws for Imperialist Intervention

## Libya and the Opportunist Left

Over the decades authentic Trotskyists have defended Libya against imperialist attack while giving no political support to Qaddafi. For opportunist leftists in the early years, however, it was enough that Qaddafi taunted Washington. They portrayed the Libyan leader as a paragon of the “Arab Revolution.” This was a strange “revolution” that was not aimed at toppling the local ruling classes – in fact, its protagonists were *bourgeois* nationalists – but instead was directed mainly at an external enemy, Zionist Israel. Thus *Intercontinental Press* (8 December 1969), published by the U.S. Socialist Workers Party, carried an article noting that “The leaders of the

Libyan revolution of September 1 are continually disavowing Marxism and the class struggle.” Still, it declared the foundation of the Libyan Arab Republic to be “A Step Forward of the Arab Revolution.” The laws of uneven and combined development, the SWP argued, would force Qaddafi to abandon his “narrow, nationalist” version of a Koran-based Arab Socialism.<sup>1</sup> Instead, the laws of the market induced Qaddafi to abandon his socialist claims in favor of free-market capitalism.

Most groups in the petty-bourgeois left in the early 1970s portrayed Qaddafi as an “anti-imperialist,” but one tendency went further. That was the organization led by Gerry Healy which claimed to be the International Committee of the Fourth International. Although Healy had once labeled Qaddafi a fascist, by the mid-1970s his British organization, the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP), and his U.S. subsidiary, the Workers League, positively lionized the Libyan leader. They also swooned for Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. This was no accident. The WRP put out a daily newspaper, *Newsline*, which seemed far beyond the organization’s financial means. For years there were rumors of funny money behind it. But when in 1985 Healy’s lieutenants staged a coup and ousted the WRP’s “founder-leader” they revealed that the party had received *over 1 million pounds* over seven years from various Arab dictators and petro-sheiks, including rulers of Kuwait, Qatar, Abu Dhabi,

<sup>1</sup> The American SWP was fraternally tied to the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USec). Today, the Socialist Action group, which is similarly linked to the USec, writes that “much of the left fell for his [Qaddafi’s] rhetoric, as they had—and still do—for other bourgeois populists in neocolonial countries” (*Socialist Action*, March 2011). They neglect to mention that the cheerleaders for the Libyan leader included the SWP, to which most of the Socialist Action leadership belonged at the time.



**Qaddafi TV speech, March 2. In the 1970s, most of the left hailed him as an “anti-imperialist” while authentic Trotskyists gave no political support to the bourgeois nationalist strongman. Today the opportunist left supports the pro-imperialist opposition, paving the way for U.S./French/UK bombing.**

Iraq and particularly Qaddafi’s Libya. Here is the breakdown:

Libya .....	£542,267
Kuwait .....	156,500
Qatar .....	50,000
Abu Dhabi .....	25,000
PLO .....	19,997
Iraq .....	19,697
Unidentified	
or other sources .....	261,702

Total .....£1,075,163

—reprinted in *Workers News*, April 1988

In exchange, the WRP performed certain services, including photographing Iraqi leftists who protested in London against Hussein’s executions of Iraqi Communists.

Healy’s American acolyte during this period was Workers League leader David North, now head of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) which puts out the World Socialist Web Site (WSWS). Today, the WSWS poses as champions of Trotskyism, with articles such as “Libya and the bankruptcy of Arab nationalism” (23 February) exposing Qaddafi’s “socialist” pretensions and hailing the anti-Qaddafi, pro-imperialist rebels. Nowhere do the Northites confess to the fact that they were once *paid propagandists for Qaddafi*, receiving *blood money* to hail his “revolution.” We have documented how North & Co. (in another incarnation he is the head of a non-union commercial printing operation) oppose unions, fingered supporters of the U.S. SWP for repression by Khomeini’s Islamic Republic in Iran and engaged in a host of anti-working-class actions.<sup>2</sup> But in the litany

<sup>2</sup> See “Where Were You, David North?” *The Internationalist* No. 29, Summer 2009; “Socialists in Bourgeois Electionland,” *The Internationalist* No. 28, March-April 2009; and “SEP/WSWS: Scab ‘Socialists’” (December 2007) available on our web site, [www.internationalist.org](http://www.internationalist.org).

of crimes of these cynical imposters, it should not be forgotten that they were once messengers for Qaddafi.<sup>3</sup>

For many years, the staunchest defenders of Qaddafi on the U.S. left were the followers of ex-Trotskyist Sam Marcy in the Workers World Party (WWP). Marcy broke politically with Trotskyism in defending the Kremlin’s repression of the 1956 Hungarian workers uprising. A few years later he broke organizationally as well in siding with Mao Zedong’s China against the USSR in the Sino-Soviet split. The Marcyites typically sing the praises of hard-line Stalinist regimes (Kim Il Sung’s North Korea is a favorite) and of “Third World” nationalist strongmen such as Saddam Hussein or Muammar Qaddafi, while “at home” they organize protests with liberal Democrats such as Jesse Jackson and assorted popular-front antiwar movements. Lately, however, they have been waffling over Libya. An editorial in the 3 March issue of *Workers World* (published February 23) declared, “Of all the struggles going on in North Africa and the Middle East right now, the most difficult to unravel is the one in Libya.” On the one hand, it stated:

“Getting concessions out of Gadhafi is not enough for the imperialist oil barons. They want a government that they can own outright, lock, stock and barrel. They have never forgiven Gadhafi for overthrowing the monarchy and nationalizing the oil.”

On the other hand:

“Progressive people are in sympathy with what they see as a popular movement in Libya. We can help such a movement most by supporting its just demands while rejecting imperialist intervention, in whatever form it may take.”

Conclusion: “It is the people of Libya who must decide their future.” I.e., don’t ask the WWP.

A 2004 split-off from the WWP, the Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL), continued the Marcyite tradition of political support to Stalinist and bourgeois nationalists and domestic reformism. In fact, their overall politics are still virtually identical to those of the WWP, although the PSL tries to give it a more hip radical veneer with portraits of Che Guevara while pursuing crass electoralism. But the PSL, too, has been having stomach pains over Libya. An article titled “Libya and the Arab revolt in perspective” (*Liberation*, 24 February) stated: “At present, the revolt has not produced any organizational form or leader that would make it possible to characterize it politically.” It also opined that “Gaddafi is not a



Patrick Baz/AFP

**Opportunist leftists push fiction of a “Libyan Revolution” that is opposed to imperialist intervention. Yet Libyan rebels have pleaded for U.S./French/British/NATO/U.N. forces to strike Qaddafi forces. Here rebel fighters atop bombed tank.**

puppet of imperialism like Mubarak was,” but “developments in the last decade have greatly and understandably diminished his credibility among progressive and anti-imperialist forces in the region, almost all of which have declared their solidarity with the Libyan revolt.” As in the case of the WWP, the conclusion is: “it is the people of Libya and the Arab world who will determine their future.” This is a “perspective”?!

The Marcyites continue to hail Qaddafi’s supposed “strong anti-imperialist positions” in the past, ignoring the evidence of his collaboration with Washington in the 1970s (see “Qaddafi and the Imperialists: On and Off”). But since the U.S. invasion of Iraq (according to the WWP), or “in recent years” (so says the PSL), Libya “finally succumbed to U.S. demands” (WWP) and “has made many concessions to imperialism” (PSL). A subsequent article in *Workers World* (10 March) details how Libya slashed billions of dollars of subsidies for basic necessities and sold off hundreds of state firms. But they seem to have discovered this fact only after February 17, for at the time of Qaddafi’s visit to the U.N., *Workers World* (24 September 2009) published an article gushing over Libya’s “40 years of revolution.” What changed was not Libya, which has avidly sought imperialist favor since the mid-1990s. Rather,

<sup>3</sup> This sordid history is documented in several articles published by *Workers Vanguard*, the newspaper of the Spartacist League, when it was the voice of revolutionary Trotskyism, which can be found on the web site Anti-SEP-tic. These include: “Healyites, Messengers of Qaddafi,” *WV* No. 158 (20 May 1977); “More from Healy, Messenger of Qaddafi,” *WV* No. 174 (23 September 1977); “Healyites Got Blood Money,” *WV* No. 517 (4 January 1991); “Northite Blood Money,” *WV* No. 523 (29 March 1991); “Northite Fool’s Gold,” *WV* No. 533 (22 November 1991).



Mahmud Hams/AFP

### Check out those wheels: this isn't the wretched of the earth. Rebels flee from Ras Lanuf on March 30.

the Marcyites' recent mealy-mouthed positions reflect the fact that two different forces they tail after (liberal imperialists and semi-colonial bourgeois nationalists) have come into conflict. That's why WWP and PSL now talk with marbles in their mouths.

If the Stalinoids are feeling conflicted over their one-time putative "anti-imperialist" hero Qaddafi, the social democrats are solidly for the pro-imperialist rebels. First and foremost is the International Socialist Organization (ISO), which seized on the WWP and PSL's embarrassment to tweak their reformist rivals with whom they organizationally compete in the antiwar, student and other "movements." An article by the ISO, "Taking Sides About Libya" (*Socialist Worker* website, 28 February), takes the Marcyites to task for not endorsing pro-rebel demonstrations in San Francisco and elsewhere, declaring that their "allegiance to police states" has "no place in the fight for social justice." No place? Hmm. This was the line of openly pro-Democratic Party groups like the moribund United for Peace and Justice who insisted on no cooperation with the WWP (via the International Action Center) and PSL (via International ANSWER). But the ISO hastens to add, "Of course, socialists and radicals of all stripes must continue to work together to oppose U.S. military intervention" despite disagreements.

Covering its left flank with this fig-leaf (the ISO claims to oppose U.S. intervention while supporting a "movement" which is crying for it), the polemic also serves to ward off any internal dissent over its support to the Benghazi "democrats," portraying any opposition as "siding with the tanks." Earlier (February 22), the ISO ran an incredible string of outright falsehoods taken from Andrew Solomon in the *New Yorker* portraying Qaddafi's Libya as identical to the usual U.S.-backed African dictatorship (it "does not take care of even the most basic government obligations," makes "no effort to provide adequate public accommodation," does nothing to "raise the standard of living for the population as a whole," etc.). While of late, the regime has

presided over mounting unemployment, increasing concentration of wealth, falling real income and other consequences of the U.S./IMF "free market" economic policies it has adopted, unless one understands that Libya has far and away the highest standard of living in Africa, one can't understand why Qaddafi continues to have substantial support in much of the country.

Proof? There are the reports of residents joining loyalist troops and militias to fight the rebels, even in Benghazi. As for the standard of living, there is the fact that there are (or were) more than 1.5 foreign-born workers in Libya, mostly from Egypt and Libya. Or just take a gander at the photos of the cars the rebels are driving to battle: those are some pretty hot wheels. In most of Africa and the Near East, virtually nobody among the impoverished masses has a car, new or old, much less late model Toyotas, Nissans, 4x4 Land Rovers and Land Cruisers, etc. The "pro-democracy" rebels are hardly the downtrodden wretched of the earth but a well-to-do layer of businessmen, engineers, bankers, imams and managerial employees of "multi-national" corporations, plus some of their counterparts from the Qaddafi regime. In fact, a good part of Qaddafi's travails are due to the fact that his regime *didn't* carry out a social revolution and left the eastern bourgeoisie in place. Meanwhile, his economic policies created a substantial middle class which considers Qaddafi and his cohorts to be uncouth country bumpkins, wants to live like Europeans and has been hard-hit by the regime's new Western-inspired economic policies.

The ISO printed a piece by Richard Seymour (author of the blog *Lenin's Tomb* and a supporter of the British Socialist Workers Party), "The West's Fear of Qaddafi's Fall" (*Socialist Worker* website, 24 February). Seymour insisted that "the trouble for the U.S. and UK governments in this revolt is that they really, really don't want Qaddafi to fall." The trouble for the ISO is that the U.S. and U.K. governments really, really *do* want Qaddafi to fall. Barack Obama said so, Hillary Clinton said so, David Cameron said so, and now they're trying to do



so, while piously pretending to protect the civilian population. More fundamentally, the ISO's "trouble" is that their "third camp" politics – taken from their mentor, the late Tony Cliff, who called the USSR "state capitalist" and during the anti-Soviet Cold War summed up his position as "neither Washington nor Moscow" – inexorably place them in the "first camp," that of imperialism. As they focus on "democracy" while blithely crossing the *class* line, these "State Department socialists" end up with State Department-sponsored "youth movements," and mercenary *mujahedin* (holy warriors) who want back on the CIA payroll like they were in fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan (and the Cliffites praised them as "freedom fighters").

Cliff's SWP in Britain (with which the ISO was initially allied in the International Socialist Tendency, until they parted ways in 2001 accusing each other of being insufficiently opportunist) has been at the forefront of those who – while peddling imperialist war propaganda against the Qaddafi regime and hallucinatory tales of "new forms of democracy" in Benghazi – claimed that "Libyan revolutionaries" are opposing Western interference. It quoted Abdel Hafidh Ghoga, the spokesman for the rebels' Transitional National Council, saying, "We are against any foreign intervention or military intervention in our internal affairs" (*Socialist Worker* [UK], 5 March 2011). That was when the rebels thought that the Qaddafi regime would simply collapse, but a few days later, this same Ghoga was singing a different tune: "The Libyan people are facing genocide.... We demand a bombardment of the camps where he (Qaddafi) keeps his mercenaries and the roads he uses to transport them and his security forces" (Reuters, 10 March). So much for the myth of an anti-intervention sector of the Libyan rebels.

While the ISO and SWP/UK are the largest and most outspoken left groups in championing the cause of the monarchist, Islamist, ex-Qaddafi and pro-imperialist Libyan rebels, they are joined by the whole of the social-democratic milieu in portraying these reactionaries as fighters for "democracy." *Socialist Action* (March 2011) calls for "Victory to the Workers' and Peasants' Uprising Against Qaddafi!" while adding a ritual call, "US Hands Off Libya!" It says it must give its "political support" to the workers, peasants and youth who are supposedly separate from the "middle-class professionals—doctors, lawyers, academics, etc." and defecting military officers who "would turn over Libya to imperialist intervention." SA's claim that it is only the latter who are pleading for aid from the U.S. and Europe is a fairy tale. Despite the single banner against foreign military intervention and a few quotes from youth interviewed by liberal media, there is no indication of any significant sector of the rebels opposed to the U.S./UK/U.N./NATO "no-fly" zone or calls on the imperialists to use their bombs to get rid of Qaddafi and his regime.

Another social-democratic group, Socialist Alternative (SAlt), likewise calls, in a March 19 statement, for "Victory to the Libyan Revolution!" while adding "No to Western Military Intervention!" An earlier article by SAlt's mentor and leader of the Committee for a Workers International, Peter Taaffe, hailed "Herculean efforts to remove Gaddafi dictatorship in Libya" (CWI web site, 8 March). SAlt and the CWI are less not on promoting an imaginary anti-intervention, worker-peasant

sector of the "revolution" and admits that "people's committees" in the east are "not fully based upon the real involvement of working class people." But while professing opposition to Western *military* intervention, SAlt/CWI calls for workers in the West to implement *economic* sanctions against the Qaddafi regime: "trade unions should block the export of Libyan oil and gas" and "bank workers should organise the freezing of all the Gaddafi regime's financial assets." Whether trade-unions or governments carry out such measures to strangle Libya economically, the Taaffeites are calling for *imperialist sanctions which proletarian revolutionaries and class-conscious workers resolutely oppose*.

Still another denizen of the social-democratic swamp, the Workers International League (WIL), a satellite of the Allan Woods' Socialist Appeal group inside the British Labour Party and his International Marxist Tendency (IMT), is even more open about the fact that "reactionary bourgeois agents" are running things in Benghazi, and that the rebels are led by "direct representatives of imperialist interests" ("Libyan Interim Government – agents of imperialism," In Defense of Marxism web site, 1 April). At the beginning, however, Woods was ecstatic: "Uprising in Libya: Tremble, tyrants!" (IDoM, 23 February). "The revolution has already spread to the west," and "the fall of Gaddafi is now only a matter of time," proclaimed Woods, who is forever announcing revolutions here, there and everywhere, from Venezuela to Argentina, Bolivia, Iran and now Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. While saying *sotto voce* (in a stage whisper) that "we must oppose imperialist aggression," whether bombing or in other forms, the IMT is strangely low-key about this. As over Iran, which led to a split in Woods' international, their big problem is that their hero Hugo Chávez is a big pal of Qaddafi's.

In claiming to support the "Libyan Revolution" while simultaneously opposing imperialist military intervention, it should have occurred to the various social democrats that the very people they're seeking to tail after in Libya won't appreciate this pro-forma opposition to Western bombardment of Qaddafi, which the rebels see as their only hope of survival, much less victory. In fact, along with the "cruise missile liberals" and Labour Party leaders, a few Western leftists, of sorts, have come out for the imperialist bombing campaign – or at least against denouncing it. Like a number of left apostates did over the bombing of Yugoslavia by Tony Blair and Bill Clinton in 1999, they want to "give war a chance."

Chief among them is the British Alliance for Workers Liberty (AWL) of Sean Matgamna, who developed a passion for the anti-Trotskyist renegade Max Shachtman, who refused to defend the Soviet Union against imperialism in World War II and went on to become a propagandist for the U.S. government in the Korean War, the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba and the Vietnam War. Matgamna recently wrote an essay, "Why we should not denounce intervention in Libya" (*Solidarity*, 23 March). He takes his stand on the basis of "any humanitarian, socialist or even decent liberal point of view." Of course, the imperialists "humanitarian" concern "is not unconnected with their concern for Libyan oil. Of course they are hypocrites." Of course, the humanitarian "decent liberal" Matgamna would "not give positive political support to the governments and the ruling

capitalists” while supporting their war. But of course. (He also backed the imperialist-backed Kosovo Liberation Army in '99, and notoriously supports Israel in its war against the Palestinians.) Going a step beyond the reformists of the antiwar movement, the AWL are outright apologists for imperialist war.

Another of this ilk is the Lebanese academic Gilbert Achar, a long-time spokesman for the USec and a fellow at the International Institute for Research and Education founded by USec leaders Ernest Mandel and Livio Maitan. In an interview which Achar “gave to my good friend Steve Shalom” of *Z Magazine* and was reposted on the web site of the USec’s *International Viewpoint* (March 2011), Achar claims that “given the urgency of preventing the massacre that would have inevitably resulted from an assault on Benghazi by Gaddafi’s forces, and the absence of any alternative means of achieving the protection goal, no one can reasonably oppose it” [U.N. Resolution 1973, calling for military action against the Libyan regime in the name of protecting civilians]. This set off a flurry of responses, including from the SWP/U.K. leader Alex Callinicos, who in reply agrees with “my old friend Gilbert Achar” that sometimes asking for help from the imperialists is okay, just not in this particular case. That such an oh-so-collegial “debate” between a coterie of “left” academics could even take place is proof positive that none of them have the remotest connection with revolution or Marxism.<sup>4</sup>

For revolutionary Trotskyists such a “discussion” is an abomination: it is not only necessary to fight against imperialist intervention tooth and nail, it is an obligation to *defend* a semi-colonial country under attack, whatever the pretext or its internal regime, and to seek the *defeat* of the imperialist attackers, no matter how “democratic” or “humanitarian” they claim their mission to be. Leon Trotsky defended Ethiopia (then called Abyssinia) under the feudalist and slave owner Haile Selassie against imperialist Italy in the mid-late 1930s. French Communists stood on the side of the Rif rebellion in the early 1920s, and Communist-led dock workers refused to ship munitions to the French troops defending the colony of Morocco. Was Berber tribal leader Muhammad Abd al-Krim a progressive? Hardly. V.I. Lenin defended the “Boxer Rebellion” in China in 1900 which sought to restore the Manchu Qing dynasty. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels defend the Sepoy Rebellion in India in the late 1850s, even while noting that it was sparked by a mutiny of mercenary soldiers who carried out no small number of atrocities and was led by feudalist Muslim forces.<sup>5</sup> In all these cases, the fundamental issue was the fight against imperialism. As Lenin wrote in his pamphlet,

<sup>4</sup> Achar is at least consistent in his support for imperialism: in 1980 he – along with Tariq Ali – put forward a resolution in the USec calling for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan in the face of the CIA-sponsored Islamist onslaught (see Gilbert Achar, *Eastern Cauldron* [Monthly Review Press, 2004]). And in 2006 he supported the pseudo-elections being held under the U.S. occupation of Iraq.

<sup>5</sup> See “Lenin on the ‘Boxer Rebellion’” and “Marx on the Sepoy Revolt” in *The Internationalist* No. 21, Summer 2005.



**Libyan rebels threaten black African workers. Opportunist leftists alibi lynchings, claiming racism was due to Qaddafi.**

*Socialism and War* (1915):

“If tomorrow Morocco were to declare war on France, or India on Britain, or Persia or China on Russia, and so on, those would be ‘just’ and ‘defensive’ wars, *irrespective of who attacked first*; any socialist would wish the oppressed, dependent and unequal states victory over the oppressor, slave-holding and predatory ‘great’ powers.”

Today the overriding issue in Libya is the struggle against imperialism. For decades the dictatorships of this strategically vital region, as well as the Zionist oppressor state in Israel, have rested on the support of imperialism. The uprising in Libya was fueled precisely by Qaddafi’s adoption of the dominant capitalist economic policies as a part of his alliance with imperialism. To call on the imperialists to intervene, militarily or through punishing economic sanctions, is to guarantee that at this moment of great and potentially revolutionary upheaval the dominant imperial powers, first of all the United States, will continue to be the arbiters, exploiters and oppressors of the Arab masses. It is necessary to organize a struggle for *workers revolution* throughout the regime not only against the strongmen such as Qaddafi but also against imperialism and the “democrats,” monarchists and Islamists who would serve as its front men.

Those leftists who openly call for Western military action, such as the AWL and Achar, are what Lenin called social imperialists, like the German Social Democrats who voted for war credits in 1914 in the name of fighting tsarist reaction. Once the Maoists might have called them “running dogs” of imperialism, although in this case “lap dogs” would be more to the point. On the other hand, by drumming up political support for the pro-imperialist Libyan rebels whose rebellion is dependent on and who call for U.S./UK/U.N./NATO intervention, the social-democratic and other “social pacifists” in the “antiwar” movement are serving as cat’s paws, that is to say dupes or stooges, who have paved the way for imperialist attack. Today as in the past, a real struggle against imperialist war and domination requires fighting to smash the imperialist system by socialist revolution throughout the region and the world. ■

## Worker Mobilization Brought Down “Pharaoh,” But U.S.-Backed Army Junta Grabs Power

# Egypt: Mubarak Gone, Workers to Power!

### End the Siege of Gaza – Open the Border Now! For a Socialist Federation of the Near East!

FEBRUARY 13 – On February 11, the Egyptian strongman Hosni Mubarak was ousted after 30 years in power. After 18 days of continuous protests by hundreds of thousands of Egyptians, and two days after strikes swept across the country, the hated dictator departed. The streets of Cairo, Alexandria and other cities exploded in joy. Upwards of 2 million people streamed into Maidan al-Tahrir (Liberation Square) to celebrate. Fireworks exploded overhead, youth danced on burned-out armored personnel carriers. The slogan “The people want the regime to fall,” borrowed from Tunisia, became, “The people, at last, have brought down the regime.”

This is at best a partial truth, at worst a deadly illusion. The determined mass protests, courageously resisting and throwing back every bloody assault by the regime, played a vital role in forcing Mubarak out. The workers mobilization was what finally triggered his downfall. But although the despotic *Rais* (Leader) is gone, the army-based regime that has lorded it over Egypt for more than half a century remains. Talk of “democracy” under the dictatorship of capital, particularly in semi-colonial countries like Egypt, is a lie. The ouster of Pharaoh, as the Egyptian president was unaffectionately known, must lead to workers revolution if autocratic rule is to be swept away.

Demonstrators remarked over and over that for the first time they were proud to be Egyptian. They wanted to honor the more than 300 martyrs who were killed by the regime in the recent mobilizations: their blood was not shed in vain. But beyond the pride in having brought down the despot, we must look at the hard facts:

- The huge repressive apparatus is intact: The notorious Central Security Force which viciously beat demonstrators is still in place. The Republican Guard, in charge of protecting



AP

**Suez Canal workers strike on February 9 demanding ouster of company chairman (an admiral), pay increase and social equality. Strike wave by Egyptian workers finally forced out Mubarak.**

the government, is still in place. The 2 million-strong National Police as well as the army of police spies, squads of *baltagi* (regime-paid rent-a-thugs) and legions of torturers are still in place.

- While government media have begun to wobble, and Law 100 giving the state control of union elections was recently annulled by restive justices, the gigantic apparatus of the corporatist regime – including the National Democratic Party, the official Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF) and other state organizations that controlled every aspect of Egyptian life – is still intact.

- The 30-year-old national emergency law is still in place, and the military is in no hurry to remove it. The army command is unchanged: The head of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, which now holds the reins of power, is Field Marshall Hussein Tantawi, referred to by junior officers (according to U.S. cables released by WikiLeaks) as “Mubarak’s poodle.”

- The sinister longtime intelligence chief and short-lived

“vice president,” Omar Suleiman, who was in charge of the “extraordinary renditions” of CIA prisoners to Egypt’s dungeons, is still around. Praised by Israeli leaders and popular with U.S. officials because he was “not squeamish” about things like torture, Suleiman messed up Washington’s “orderly transition” by openly asserting on a TV talk show that the Egyptian people lacked a “culture of democracy.”

In short, the revolution that so many Egyptians yearn for may have begun, but it is far too early to proclaim victory. While the masses are still in ferment, at this point the brutal military-based government has been replaced by naked army rule under Mubarak’s poodle and Israel’s buddy. In the name of “democracy,” the Egyptian army (with Washington’s backing) just staged a coup.

What concretely has happened so far? The Egyptian masses overcame every obstacle to demonstrate unmistakably their hatred for Mubarak – but they did not attempt to take power. When U.S. president Barack Obama praises the Egyptian people for acting “peacefully,” with the “moral force of non-violence” (this from the imperialist warmonger who is slaughtering Muslims in Afghanistan and Iraq!), he is hailing the fact that they did not storm the presidential palace or seize TV and radio stations – although police stations were burned down in Suez, Ismailia and other outlying cities.

Mubarak having become a liability because of popular hostility, the generals finally dumped him in order to preserve their positions, from which many have grown obscenely rich. The “hundred families” who own Egypt are desperate to get the masses off the streets so they can rest easy in their gilded estates. The merely well-to-do were nervously watching CNN inside their well-manicured gated communities. And the U.S. imperialists are still hoping to preserve the fundamentals of the puppet government they have propped up for decades. So for the greater good of imperialist-capitalist domination, Mubarak had to go.

The credit for driving out the tyrant belongs to the Egyptian masses, who even on the last crucial day refused to compromise, and even strengthened their mobilization, encircling the presidential palace and state television headquarters. But this was not enough: the army did not “resign” Mubarak until chief of staff Lt. Gen. Sami Hafez Enan got the go-ahead from the U.S., in the form of Obama’s statement saying that the Egyptian president’s February 10 TV speech was not the “immediate, meaningful or sufficient” transition Washington required. A revolutionary mobilization is needed to sweep them all out. *But what kind of revolution? How is it to be accomplished? And which class shall rule?*

The core of the opposition which sparked the two and a half weeks of anti-regime protests is among well-educated, and well-heeled, young professionals in the capital: doctors, lawyers, business execs. Wael Ghonim, who launched the Facebook page that attracted a wide following, is a Google executive who says he could have “stayed in my villa in the [United Arab] Emirates and made good money” rather than protesting and getting thrown in jail, blindfolded for 12 days. On February 10, Ghonim “tweeted” his “trust” in the Egyptian

army and proclaimed “mission accomplished” – even as the final tug of war was looming. That night the consensus figure of the bourgeois opposition, former International Atomic Energy Agency chief Mohammed ElBaradei posted his reaction to the Mubarak speech: “Army must save the country now.”

So these proponents of (capitalist) democracy are not about to spark protest against army rule. For that matter, the military could ultimately have crushed the protests in Tahrir Square, at a cost of many lives to be sure. There were doubtless discussions about just that at the command level in Cairo and Washington. Why didn’t they crack down? Leaks from Egyptian army and U.S. “diplomatic” sources say the generals were afraid that soldiers would not obey any orders to fire on the crowd. Perhaps. But there was no evidence of budding mutiny in the ranks, nor was there any sign of discontent in the military when the high command took power.

What decisively changed matters was when the working class entered the scene this week. In response to appeals by protest organizers and a newly formed independent Federation of Egyptian Trade Unions (FETU), strikes broke out just about everywhere. On February 8, some **6,000 Suez Canal workers** at five service companies struck in the cities of Suez, Port Said and Ismailia. On February 9, about **400 steel workers** in Suez downed tools; **750 bottling plant workers** in Sadat City staged a sit-in; 2,000 pharmaceutical workers in Quesna struck; **hundreds of phone workers** rallied in front of company headquarters in Cairo; **5,000 postal workers** protested in front of the Egypt Post Authority; **1,500 workers in the textile center of Mahala al-Kubra** marched; **4,000 workers at the coke and chemical factory** and **thousands of workers at the al-Nasr automobile plant, a silk factory and military factories** in the Cairo industrial suburb of Helwan struck; **health, museum and other government employees** demonstrated in the capital, and **Cairo bus drivers** walked out. Demands included increases in their starvation wages, converting temporary workers into full-time employees, ousting regime-imposed company directors, and in many cases, removal of Mubarak as president.

Even bourgeois journalists recognize that the action by the Egyptian working class was the tipping point for the military. Various leftists and labor militants have celebrated this fact. Still, while workers joined the struggle, the working class was not *leading* the mobilization. Interviews with strikers in Mahalla expressed support for the “youth rebellion” as something separate. Yet so long as the workers are just one more sector in struggle, and even if they should come to the forefront, it will not be possible to bring down the capitalist dictatorship until they undertake a fight for their own class rule, for *workers power*.

At present, the mobilizations have not yet subsided. Activists are demanding guarantees from the army that it will support a civilian regime and “free elections.” News blogs and Internet video postings today are reporting divisions in Maidan al-Tahrir over whether to take down the protest encampment or to stay. The military Supreme Council says it will rule “until a new government is formed” – quite an open-ended formulation. Today (February 13) that was changed to “for a period of six months or until ... elections are held” – still pretty elastic. But even so, it

takes a lot of money to compete in bourgeois elections. Who in Egypt has that kind of money? The people who ran Mubarak's authoritarian regime, and those who grew rich off it. The "crony capitalists" will do everything to preserve their domination.

### For Red Revolution on the Nile!

Even under Mubarak's police-state rule, a small left has managed to eke out a semi-public existence, including the Communist Party of Egypt (CPE) and the Revolutionary Socialists (RS). (There are also several bourgeois and petty-bourgeois Arab/Egyptian nationalist currents which claim to be socialist.) From various reports, the CPE and RS have been present in the mobilizations, but they have not played an independent role. This is not only due to relative size, compared to the bourgeois opposition such as ElBaradei's Movement for Change, and the April 6 Youth Movement. It is primarily a result of the fact that these "socialists" are politically indistinguishable from the capitalist "democrats."

Thus in a February 1 statement ("The Revolution Will Continue Until the Demands of the Masses Are Achieved"), the Communist Party puts forward a four-point program including removal of Mubarak; formation of a coalition government for a transition period; calling a "constituent assembly to draft a new constitution"; and prosecution of those responsible for the hundreds killed. This is a purely bourgeois platform, a faithful reproduction of the Stalinist program of "two-stage revolution," in which the first stage is capitalist democracy (and the second stage never arrives because in the meantime, the bourgeois democrats massacre the left).

For its part, the Revolutionary Socialists issued a statement ("Glory to the Martyrs! Victory to the Revolution!"), also dated February 1, which calls for nationalization of the companies, land and property looted by Mubarak and his crony capitalists; restoration of "Egypt's independence, dignity and leadership in the region" rather than acting as guard dogs for the U.S. and Israel; for a "people's army" that "protects the revolution"; for the formation of "revolutionary councils" and for a "popular revolution." But while this statement has more leftist verbiage, it does not call in any way for a struggle for socialist revolution.

The RS are followers of the late Tony Cliff who characterized the Stalinist-governed Soviet Union, a bureaucratically deformed workers state, as "state capitalist" and refused to defend the Soviet Union against imperialist attack. The two are related, as Cliff's anti-Marxist "theory" served to justify his pro-imperialist stand in the anti-Soviet Cold War. The Cliffite International Socialist Tendency is a left social-democratic current which constantly seeks to hook up with various petty-bourgeois and even bourgeois "movements," from antiwar movements to electoral coalitions, in order to pressure capitalist governments. Building a revolutionary communist vanguard is the furthest thing from these reformists' intentions.

Thus in Egypt as everywhere, the reformist Stalinists and social democrats follow similar playbooks, in which the language may vary but the essential bourgeois content is identical. The RS calls for "Egyptian workers to join the ranks of the revolution," but not to *lead* it. While expressing reservations

about the army, the RS yearns for an army like "the one which defeated the Zionist enemy in October 1973" – that is, for the bourgeois army of the reactionary Anwar Sadat, which for that matter did not defeat Zionist Israel in the 1973 war which was by no means a defense of the Palestinians. The RS calls for "popular councils," not *workers* councils, and for a "popular revolution" not *workers revolution*. Even when the most prominent RS spokesman, the journalist Hossam el-Hamalawy, talks of *permanent revolution* he poses this in classless terms, to "empower the people of this country with direct democracy from below" ("The workers, middle class, military junta and the permanent revolution," *3arabawy*, 12 February).

Leon Trotsky based his theory of permanent revolution on the experience of the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917 and the defeat of the Chinese Revolution of 1925-27. He held that in colonial and semi-colonial countries subjugated by imperialism, the democratic, national and agrarian tasks of the classical bourgeois revolutions could only be accomplished by the working class taking power, supported by the impoverished peasantry, and proceeding directly to socialist tasks of expropriating the bourgeoisie and extending the revolution to the imperialist centers. Hence Trotsky's insistence on the need for a communist vanguard party of the proletariat to lead this struggle for socialist revolution. Modern-day revisionists like Cliff (or the pseudo-Trotskyist Ernest Mandel) turn this program into a caricature, arguing that objective circumstances will compel this outcome, thereby justifying their tailing after "popular" "movements."

Contrary to the RS, there is no such animal as a "popular revolution." A popular uprising, as a description of a mass upheaval including various class forces, yes. But a revolution establishes a new state power, which necessarily has a class character – either bourgeois or proletarian. Talk of a "third way" is simply eyewash to hide the capitalist nature of the regime. And as in Salvador Allende's Chile in 1970-73, organizing for popular/people's unity/revolution promotes suicidal illusions in the nature of bourgeois "democrats." The butcher Augusto Pinochet was appointed defense minister by Allende, who praised the general's "constitutionalist" credentials. This is the program of the *popular front*, tying the workers and the oppressed to their exploiters and oppressors, that has led to bloody defeat from the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s until today.

Characteristically for Cliffites, they do not draw a *class line*, but rather seek to carve out a niche on the left of the *bourgeois* political spectrum with a dash of pink "socialist" artificial coloring. But in semi-colonial countries where bonapartist military-police regimes are the norm, there is not much political space there to inhabit. The RS, EGP and other leftists have endured the exactions of the Mubarak dictatorship, and may soon face repression at the hands of the military junta, against which they must be vigorously defended. But at times of revolutionary upheaval, such as the present moment in Egypt, the Stalinists' and social democrats' reformist program would sink revolutionary struggle in a "democratic" swamp.

In the volatile situation which the mobilization against the Mubarak regime and now its fall have opened up, Trotskyists would put forward a *transitional program* to take the struggle

from the immediate demands of the workers and oppressed to the goal of socialist revolution. Many of the burning issues in Egypt today are democratic questions, but which can only be resolved through revolutionary class struggle. Thus the League for the Fourth International calls for a *revolutionary constituent assembly*, organizing for the formation of *workers councils* such as the soviets in Russia in 1917 to overthrow capitalist rule with a *workers and peasants government*. As part of this struggle, Trotskyists would call on the Egyptian *fellahin* (peasantry) to seize the estates returned to the large landowners by Mubarak and to carry out *agrarian revolution*.

There will almost certainly be an explosion of strike actions by Egypt's long-suppressed working class. Trotskyists would fight for the workers to dissolve the corporatist ETUF and for *trade-union independence from state control*, as well as from political ties to bourgeois parties. The struggle against mass unemployment and the ravages of inflation can be addressed by fighting for a *sliding scale of wages and hours*, to divide the available work among all takers and form neighborhood committees to control prices. Workers should *occupy factories owned by Mubarak cronies* (like the Misr National Steel Company) as well as other military, state-owned and private capitalist enterprises, while forming *workers defense squads* to fend off attacks.

While the reformists conciliate bourgeois liberals (like ElBaradei's Movement for Change), conservatives (the Wafd) and Islamists (Muslim Brotherhood), communists fight for the *complete separation of religion from the state*, a key democratic demand. It is vital to defend the embattled Coptic Christian minority, as many of the demonstrators in Liberation Square understood. When a few Islamists tried to strike up a chant of "Allahu akbar" (god is great), many others began chanting "Muslim, Christian, we're all Egyptian!" At the same time we fight for *complete equality for women*, including not only *equal legal rights* but also the right to *free abortion on demand*, *equal pay for equal work*, etc. Such demands will be ferociously

resisted both by reactionary fundamentalists of all religions, and by the "secular" bourgeois politicians who consider such fundamental demands "unrealistic." (Neither the EGP nor RS statements say a word about women's rights.)

A key issue in Egypt is the struggle against imperialism and Zionism. While the bourgeois "youth" leaders express confidence in the Egyptian army and President Obama, Trotskyists fight to defeat U.S. imperialism in its predatory colonialist war and subjugation of Iraq and Afghanistan. Raising the demand to *block passage through the Suez Canal to U.S. warships and military supplies* could arouse mass support, mobilize workers action, and set off a sharp clash with the military junta, as the U.S. Sixth Fleet is reportedly steaming toward Egypt.

This is also a key moment to escalate the struggle in defense of the Palestinian people, demanding that *Egypt immediately open the border to Gaza* to relieve the population in this giant concentration camp besieged by Zionist Israel. Organizing mass marches to open the border could mobilize tens of thousands, and put the military in a difficult bind. There should also be a concerted effort to win over the ranks of the conscript army, including the formation of soldiers councils fighting for workers power.

Such a proletarian internationalist program for a socialist federation of the Near East, including for an Arab-Hebrew workers state in Palestine, will clash sharply with bourgeois and petty-bourgeois Egyptian and Arab nationalist currents, with Islamic fundamentalists and bourgeois liberals and conservatives. Yet it could galvanize the working class at a time when protests are spreading from Algiers to Teheran. It will take hard struggle, but in revolutionary times events move quickly and the masses' consciousness can advance at a rapid pace, *provided there is a revolutionary leadership to mobilize them*. Certainly the imperialists, Zionists, militarists and a host of autocratic regimes in the Near East fear that following the February upheaval an Egyptian October could follow. Red revolution on the Nile would shake not only the region but the entire world. ■

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## Mass Revolts Against U.S.-Backed Arab Dictators

# Egypt, Tunisia: Turn Popular Uprisings into Workers Revolution!



Peter Macdiarmid/Getty Images

**Battle over Kasr al-Nil Bridge in Cairo raged for hours on January 28. Demonstrators confronted huge numbers of riot police, braving water cannon and clouds of tear gas. As night fell, protesters broke through police lines and took the bridge**

FEBRUARY 4—An aging dictator toppled in Tunisia, another is tottering in Egypt: North Africa and the Near East are in turmoil, Washington is worried, Wall Street has the jitters. The world's eyes are glued on Cairo as battles rage back and forth in the squares of the Egyptian capital and on the bridges across the Nile. With U.S. troops still occupying Iraq and bogged down in a losing war in Afghanistan, suddenly a new spectre is shaking the imperialist world order: *revolution* by the wage slaves held down by the modern pharaohs. But even the fall of Arab satraps of the U.S. empire will not bring democracy for the downtrodden and oppressed masses until the stranglehold of imperialism is broken. The key is to forge a revolutionary leadership to mobilize the working masses in the struggle to bring down the dictatorship of capital.

For almost a month, unemployed youth and workers in Tunisia demonstrated and struck against police terror. Then on the evening of January 14, only a few hours after thousands of protesters braved police clubs and tear gas in the streets of the capital, Tunis, word spread from cellphone to cellphone that President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali had fled to Saudi Arabia. Signs calling for “*Ben Ali dégage*” (get lost) were replaced by one proclaiming (in English), “Game Over.” In 27 days of protest, they had driven out the tyrant who had ruled Tunisia with an iron fist for 23 years. More than 200 were killed by the regime, but the paralyzing spell of fear of repression was broken. The news raced across North Africa and the Near East at Internet speed: for the first time ever in this region dominated by imperialist-backed regimes, an Arab autocrat had been

brought down by the Arab street. Presidents, kings, sheiks and emirs worried that “Tunisian fever” could spread. Millions of their long-suffering subjects hoped it would.

Shortly after, inspired by the Tunisian example, youthful Egyptian activists called a national “Day of Rage” for January 25. They were protesting the rule of President Hosni Mubarak, who has governed Egypt under an “emergency law” for the last 30 years. “Revolution day,” as it soon became known, brought out tens of thousands in Cairo, as well as the industrial cities of Suez and Mahalla, the port of Alexandria and cities around the country. The turnout far exceeded even the organizers’ expectations, the militancy unprecedented. Demonstrators fought riot cops, clambering onto the armored water cannons, blocking windows and turning the nozzles upward. Three days later, hundreds of thousands flooded into the streets, chanting “The people want the regime to fall” and “Overthrow Mubarak!” After a battle for the Kasr al-Nil Bridge that lasted for hours, as night fell the protesters finally broke through the police lines. Soon the nearby headquarters of the National Democratic Party went up in flames.

Leon Trotsky wrote in the preface to his magisterial *History of the Russian Revolution*, “The most indubitable feature of a revolution is the direct interference of the masses in historical events. . . . [A]t those crucial moments when the old order becomes no longer endurable to the masses, they break over the barriers excluding them from the political arena, sweep aside their traditional representatives, and create by their own interference the initial groundwork for a new régime.” Today the Tunisian and Egyptian masses have burst onto the scene of history. As we write they are still holding fast, thwarting every attempt by the rulers to return to “normalcy.” That is the first condition for revolution, but only the first. Whether the working people prevail is yet to be decided by the class struggle. The imperialists are trying to rob them of victory with rhetoric about “democracy” and plans for an “orderly transition.” We must mobilize to demand: *U.S. imperialism out of the Middle East and Africa!*

The mass uprisings (*intifadas*) are about more than the rule of one or another strongman. Millions throughout the region are fed up with the omnipresent police states and the grinding poverty they have enforced. From Algeria in the west to Jordan in the east and Yemen in the south, tens of thousands of demonstrators are literally defying death at the hands of entrenched regimes, emboldening many more to follow their lead. The pro-Western regimes sitting atop this seething volcano can hear the rumblings, and their imperialist patrons are worried – U.S. president Barack Obama first and foremost. So are the Zionist rulers in Israel, who together with Mubarak in Egypt have acted



**Demonstrators in Tunis demand no restoration of the dictatorship, January 26.**

Hassene Dridi/AP

as Washington’s gendarmes in the Near East. With a population of over 80 million, Egypt is the largest Arab country and pivot to the region, which the Pentagon and White House have declared vital to “American interests.” Revolution in Egypt could shake U.S. imperialist world domination.

### Washington Groping for Plan B

Many Tunisians talk proudly of “our revolution,” vowing to defend it against those who are trying to steal it. The Western media quickly dubbed it the “Jasmine Revolution,” recalling the “Cedar Revolution” in Lebanon that installed a pro-U.S. prime minister (since ousted). Parallels were made to the U.S.-engineered color-coded “revolutions” (orange in Ukraine, rose in Georgia) in countries of the former Soviet Union. By giving it a seal of approval, the imperialists sought to put an end to the agitation. In Egypt, too, demonstrators and Western media alike talk of a revolution, even as the police were beating protesters bloody. But neither feel-good labels nor tear gas, water cannon and rubber bullets have stopped the surging crowds. Ruling-class hopes of rapid, cosmetic “regime change” have been dashed on the determination of tens of thousands unemployed and working-class youth who are refusing to quit the battle until the old regimes are gone. From Tunis to Cairo, militants have said, “we are prepared to die for the revolution.” So for the imperialists, it’s time for Plan B. Their problem is they haven’t got one, so they’re improvising.

Step One has been to bring in the military as alleged saviors against the hated police. In Tunisia, army chief General Rachid Ammar reputedly refused an order from Ben Ali to fire on protesters, for which he was cashiered. Within a day, Ammar was back and the Tunisian president and his avaricious wife were on a plane that spirited them off to Jiddah, Saudi Arabia, dumping ground for used-up dictators beginning with Uganda’s Idi Amin. A leading Tunis newspaper splashed a picture of General Rachid



Reuters



**Tunisian army chief Gen. Rachid Ammar poses as “guarantor of the Revolution” after refusing to fire on demonstrators protesting against Ben Ali regime. Now he tells protesters against the “transition regime” headed by Ben Ali’s former prime minister to go home.**

Ammar across its front page, the army stood between demonstrators and marauding cops, and marchers put flowers in the barrels of soldiers’ guns. Yet while posing as the guarantor of the “revolution,” the general called on protesters to leave the “new” government of Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi (Ben Ali’s former right-hand man) in peace. The protesters ignored his plea and camped out in downtown Tunis for a week, surrounded by soldiers. On January 29 the police drove them out.

In Egypt, too, the army was brought in after the Central Security Force (CSF) couldn’t control the 100,000-strong crowd in Cairo on January 28. Despite an orgy of violence from the riot cops, firing off volley after volley of tear gas grenades bearing the label “made in U.S.A.,” they were overwhelmed by youth fighting with nothing more than their bare hands and some rocks. In other cities, including Alexandria and Suez, the police were routed by unarmed demonstrators. When the tanks and soldiers arrived, they were often (but not universally) welcomed. But while protesters in Cairo’s Tahrir (Liberation) Square chant “The people and the army are one hand!” militants are worried as the army locks down key points in the Egyptian capital. Soon the police will be back. And everyone is acutely aware that the military has been the backbone of the hated regime throughout Mubarak’s 30-year “emergency” rule.

So in Egypt, Step Two in the plan to safeguard imperialist/capitalist interests is underway: find a “credible” replacement for Mubarak acceptable both to the imperialists and demonstrators. Currently (February 4) Washington is pushing for Oman Suleiman, who as intelligence chief presided over the clandestine “renditions” of prisoners to be tortured in Egypt’s dungeons. But at 75, with four heart attacks already, this Egyptian Dick Cheney may not do the job. The bourgeois opposition in Cairo has coalesced around the figure of Mohammed ElBaradei, the former head of the International Atomic Energy Agency who returned to Egypt last year proposing to run for president on a program of “free elections,” period. ElBaradei has been endorsed by the Muslim Brotherhood, which has been anath-

ema to Mubarak and the U.S., as well as by youthful leaders of the April 6 Movement. To gain “street credibility” in Egypt, this former U.N. bureaucrat has to appear independent of the U.S., so he duly criticized Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton for clinging to Mubarak. But while Washington hesitates, it is far from clear that with either Suleiman or ElBaradei as figurehead the U.S. can get the “orderly transition” it seeks.

Obsessed with visions of falling dominoes, the imperialists have been hard at work for weeks redeploying their henchmen to put an end to any dreams of revolution, or even democracy. The liberal Egyptian daily *Al-Masry*

*Al-Youm* (16 January) reported that in Tunisia: “Ahmed al-Khadrawi, an officer in the Tunisian National Guards, said that chief of staff Rasheed Ammar who was removed by Zine al-Abedine Ben Ali four days ago has received last-minute instructions via the US Embassy to take charge of Tunisian affairs if the situation gets out of control.” Which is exactly what Gen. Ammar did. In Egypt, most senior and mid-level military officers have received U.S. training. In fact, Egyptian chief of staff Lt. Gen. Sami Hafez Enan and a delegation were in Washington when the protests broke out. U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff vice chairman Gen. James Cartwright “said he could not discount ‘hallway’ conversations about the protests between the Egyptian and American military commanders” (*New York Times*, 29 January). Duly briefed, the officers rushed back to Cairo to deal with the protests.

### **Opportunists Pursue Class Collaboration With Talk of Revolution**

Leftists in the imperialist countries have demonstrated in solidarity with the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, justly denouncing Paris’s support up to the last minute for Ben Ali in the former French “protectorate” and calling for an end to Washington’s nearly \$2 billion in annual aid to Egypt, mainly in the form of military hardware. At the same time, many pseudo-socialists blithely hailed the “Tunisian Revolution” and are now doing the same over Egypt, as if deposing the leader (which is a start) amounted to overthrowing the system. This recalls the hosannas for an “Arab Revolution” back in the 1960s, when that signified political support for nationalist colonels like Egypt’s Gamal Abdel Nasser. Nasser’s “socialist” pretensions were only a cover for accumulation of capital by the capitalist state on behalf of a weak bourgeoisie, and were soon abandoned. Mubarak’s military-based regime is in fact the heir of Nasser’s “state capitalism.” The bankruptcy of the bourgeois nationalists (and their leftist backers), unable to resist imperialism and even make a dent in the poverty of the

White House



**Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak meets with U.S. president Barack Obama in the White House, September 2010.**

masses, opened the way for Islamic fundamentalists to pose as defenders of the downtrodden.

Mindless cheerleading does not aid the Arab masses in a bitter struggle against their imperialist-backed oppressors *and the substitute rulers that the U.S. is seeking to bring in*. While liberal and leftist commentators lambaste the “hypocrisy” of U.S. mouthing “support for the legitimate aspirations” of the Egyptian people while clinging to its ally Mubarak, the crisis planners in the State Department, Pentagon and CIA are preparing the “option” of a “people power” operation like they pulled off when Ronald Reagan finally dumped Philippine strongman Ferdinand Marcos in 1986. In that case, while the widow Corazon Aquino grabbed the limelight as the symbol of popular defiance of the U.S.-backed dictator, the reins of power passed to Marcos’s defense minister Juan Ponce Enrile and General Fidel Ramos, who saved capitalist rule and imperialist domination from potential revolutionary overthrow. The Filipino left capitulated to the bourgeois “democrat” Aquino behind whom stood the generals. In Tunisia and Egypt today, the army is being prepared for such a role, civilian figurehead to be determined.

While the media report the vast outpouring of opposition to Mubarak “from all walks of life” – rich and poor, Muslim and Copt, old and young, etc. – powerful forces are maneuvering for position. The idea that the military is or could be “friends of the people” is a deadly illusion which must be fought tooth and nail: it is the army which will impose a new “democratic” capitalist regime. The Muslim Brotherhood is biding its time, seeking to expand its influence over the mobilizations while keeping a lid on its slogans, in order to avoid confrontation with the U.S. at this point. Whether it would cooperate with imperialism to suppress Marxists, as it did after World War II, and even slaughter the left as Ayatollah Khomeini did in Iran in

1979 (despite opportunist leftists’ delusional hailing of the Islamic “revolution”), or pretend to be “anti-imperialist,” the Brotherhood is an arch-reactionary anti-communist force. Washington uses the spectre of Islamic fundamentalism to justify its “global war on terror,” but it is quite prepared to deal with the Islamists – witness its long-standing alliance with the Wahabist Saudi monarchy – in the interests of counterrevolution.

In fact, *all* these bourgeois forces – the military, the Islamists, traditional conservatives and liberals – would maintain dictatorial rule over the Egyptian masses. It will take nothing less than a revolution that overthrows capitalism to sweep away these dictatorships, for any pretense of “democracy” in the semi-colonies can only be a sham. To pretend that what has already been achieved in Tunisia and Egypt amounts to a revolution is a swindle by the imperialists, who use such rhetoric to demobilize the masses. When this is pushed by leftists, it only demonstrates their inveterate tailism, chasing after whatever is popular. The dictator may be gone or leaving, but the dictatorship remains. These regimes rested on

a whole edifice of corporatist rule – including omnipresent state “parties,” police, secret police, military and “union” apparatuses – *all of which remain intact*. The torturers are still in place, as is the army of police informers, etc. Yet the depth of the oppression and strength of the rage against decades of police-state domination is such that the masses have – so far – refused to go home until the regime is brought down.

This has opened a potentially revolutionary situation in Tunisia and Egypt, as the rulers are no longer able to rule in the old way and the ruled refuse to go on “living” in the old way. The uprisings could quickly turn into insurrectionary struggles. In Tunisia, which has been eclipsed in the headlines by events in Egypt, thousands demonstrated in the capital on January 27 against the “transitional” government, with general strikes in Sfax and other interior cities. For now, the holders of state power, however tenuous their hold, are counting on wearing down the masses in struggle. They were caught unawares by the determination of the youth, but historically, in the absence of a revolutionary leadership, such tactics often work, as the pressures of daily life and economic hardship eat away at the will to struggle. As the dictatorships begin to crumble, the protesters are crying out for leadership. The *New York Times* (30 January), not usually given to reporting such sentiment, quoted a “veteran dissident” in Jordan saying, “People want their freedom, people want their bread. People want to stop these lousy dictators from looting their countries. I’d follow anybody. I’d follow Vladimir Lenin if he came and led me.”

### **Revolutionary Leadership Requires a Revolutionary Program**

The key issue of revolutionary leadership comes down to a question of program. Various would-be socialists talk of a “democratic revolution” throughout the region, in order to

justify class-collaborationist alliances with “democratic” bourgeois forces. Other leftists talk of a “radical redistribution of wealth.” But neither democracy nor the elimination of poverty are possible without expropriating the ruling class and smashing the yoke of imperialism. In Tunisia there are widespread demands for a constituent assembly. In a country where the president won election by “votes” of 99.27%, 99.4%, 94.5% and (as a show of liberalism) by 89.6%, calls for a constitutional assembly are appropriate. But who shall convoke such an assembly? The present “transitional government” is nothing but the old regime in new clothes. For any semblance of democracy, it is necessary to first overthrow the dictatorship. Thus Trotskyists call for a *revolutionary constituent assembly* at the same time as we fight for the seizure of power by the working class, supported by the urban and rural poor.

In Egypt as well, where revolutionary democratic demands must likewise be part of a program for workers revolution, the struggle against the military-based regime must include shattering the structures of corporatist control which chained all sectors of society to the state. Thus the struggle for *trade unions independent of state control* is key. (How this is carried out may differ: in Egypt the official trade unions were simply government agencies, whereas in Tunisia there was significant opposition to the Ben Ali regime in certain unions and regional federations, which played a leading role in the uprising.) In a social/economic context where massive youth unemployment was a detonator of the upheaval, workers should demand jobs for all, by dividing up the available work among all those seeking it, drastically *reducing the workweek with no loss in pay*. The fact that university graduates were among the hardest-hit by joblessness underscores the need for a socialist planned economy.

Tunisia under Ben Ali and Egypt under Mubarak were real police states. As anti-regime demonstrators are subjected to murderous assault by police commandos and party militias, it is urgently necessary to form *armed workers self-defense squads*. The people’s committees which have arisen in both countries as the police disappeared could give rise in working-class areas to such bodies of proletarian democracy. The struggle to *abolish the special police forces* will be another key front in the struggle to dismantle the dictatorships. And a genuine struggle for democracy for the oppressed must include the formation of *people’s tribunals to try the regime criminals*, from those who looted the state treasury to the police torturers and murderers – and those who issued their orders. To hell with toothless “truth commissions” as in South Africa that let the murderers go free! But these struggles against the mechanisms and legacy of bonapartist, police-state rule can only be realized through revolutionary struggle against capitalism.

As Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels underlined in the *Communist Manifesto*, every serious class struggle is a political struggle. It is vital to fight for the revolutionary independence of the working class from the bourgeoisie, opposing all political alliances with capitalist parties and politicians, not only with Islamic fundamentalists such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt or Ennahda in Tunisia, but also with liberals such as

ElBaradei. Following the Stalinist dogmas of the “popular front” and “revolution in stages,” reformist Communist parties in both countries are desperately seeking to form such blocs – even, in the Tunisian case, where they can’t (so far) find a willing bourgeois partner. Such class-collaborationist coalitions will only serve to preserve semi-colonial capitalism and block genuine revolution. It is above all necessary to build a genuinely Bolshevik *communist party*, to lead the struggle for a *workers and peasants government* based on workers councils, proceeding from democratic tasks to socialist revolution.

This must be seen as an international struggle, to be extended throughout the region and to Europe as well. Nationalism, even in leftist and “socialist” garb, has been the downfall of revolutionary struggle in the Near East. The fight against the Egyptian and Tunisian dictatorships must include the struggle to *defeat the imperialist war and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan* – including *closing the Suez Canal* to the imperialists’ warships and supplies. Any revolution in Egypt must *defend the Palestinian people* under the Zionist jackboot, starting by *dismantling the Israeli-Egyptian blockade of Gaza*. While both the Palestinian nationalists of Fatah and the Islamic fundamentalists of Hamas have prohibited demonstrations of solidarity with the uprising in Egypt, proletariat revolutionaries should fight for an Arab/Hebrew Palestinian workers state, as part of a *socialist federation of the Near East*. The fight for a *socialist federation of the Maghreb* (North Africa), can extend the struggle to Algeria, where jobless youth clashed with the military and police on January 7-8, and to Morocco, where support for independence of the Sahrawi people, will be key to bringing down the U.S.-backed monarchy.

You didn’t need a crystal ball to see this crisis coming. Egypt has been shaken by militant labor struggles since 2007 in the textile center of Mahalla al-Kubra and elsewhere (see “Egypt: Mubarak Regime Tottering,” *The Internationalist* No. 31, Summer 2010). Tunisia saw a revolt by unemployed workers in the mining region of Gafsa in 2008, which was brutally put down by Ben Ali. The upheaval in Tunisia and Egypt may indeed have *begun* a revolutionary overthrow of the old order of deeply corrupt imperialist-backed regimes – but only if the present *intifadas* are deepened into a struggle to sweep away neo-colonial capitalism through workers revolution. As we noted during the run-up to the U.S. invasion of Iraq:

“A successful workers revolution anywhere in the region would sound the death knell for tottering monarchies such as Saudi Arabia and Morocco, nationalist military-dominated regimes (Iraq, Syria, Turkey, Egypt, Libya, Algeria) and imperialist protected oil sheikdoms (Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, etc.), while offering the prospect of liberation for Iranian working people who have smarted under the dictatorship of the shah and the mullahs.”

–“U.S. Prepares New Desert Slaughter – Defeat U.S. Imperialism! Defend Iraq!” *The Internationalist* No. 14, September-October 2002

The key is to build genuinely Leninist communist parties of the working-class vanguard, forged on the Trotskyist program of permanent revolution. ■

## U.S./NATO Murder Inc...

*continued from page 22*

lasts through the 2012 elections is hard to predict: at least he would be relatively protected on the “wimp factor” front. The debate about whether torture (a/k/a “enhanced interrogation methods”) contributed to the successful “kill,” and Obama’s refusal to release photos of bin Laden to display as a hunting trophy, would be used to portray the Democratic president and assassin-in-chief as “tough but moderate.”

In fact, the present administration has gone on a binge of assassinations. If Bush II was the “collateral damage” president, Obama has been the “targeted killings” president. The *Columbia Journalism Review* (May/June 2011) reports, in an article on “Covering Obama’s Secret War,” that the Democratic president has authorized 193 drone strikes in Pakistan since taking office, “more than four times the number of attacks that President George W. Bush authorized” in eight years. When Democratic candidates said “we can do better” than Republican Bush at imposing U.S. imperialist world domination, this is what they meant. In the 7 October 2008 “town meeting” debate, Obama declared: “if we have Osama bin Laden in our sights and the Pakistani government is unable or unwilling to take them out ... we will take them out. We will kill bin Laden.” He even declared this to be “our biggest national security priority.” So as we have written before, liberals who voted for Obama, and opportunist leftists who sidled up to him, thinking he was a “peace candidate,” can’t say they weren’t forewarned.

The U.S. murder of Osama bin Laden should be a reminder that imperialism is not a foreign policy but a system: tactics and even strategy may vary, but the basics do not change. The U.S. goal is not to spread “democracy,” as Bush claimed, or to “stand up for our values abroad” and “make the world a safer place,” as Obama said in pronouncing bin Laden dead, or all of the poppycock about justice and peace spouted by American presidents. It’s about making the world safer for exploitation by the giant corporations and dominant capitalist powers. The U.S. isn’t spending hundreds of billions of dollars a year to go after a shadowy network of a few hundred Islamist fighters nicknamed Al Qaeda. Its “war on terror” is a war to terrorize the world into submission to Washington’s dictates – and to make clear to its imperialist allies and rivals who is top dog. And in this epoch of capitalist decline, of endless wars and economic crisis, it is a war directed against poor, oppressed and working people here. Occupying Iraq and Afghanistan, bombing Libya, executing bin Laden and destroying unions while rolling back the few remaining gains of the Civil Rights movement in the United States are all part of the same war.

Class-conscious workers and opponents of imperialism must seek to *defeat* this war by the oppressors against the oppressed, both abroad and “at home.”

As for “Al Qaeda” – a/k/a the World Islamic Front – the U.S. will move bin Laden’s No. 2, Ayman al-Zawahiri, to the top of its hit list, for the war must go on. U.S. rulers seem to have a peculiar notion that they can kill an ideological movement by killing a single leader, all evidence to the contrary

notwithstanding. But despite the ravings by right-wing ideologues on American hate radio, the U.S. government is not at war with Islamism. In fact, it designed constitutions for Iraq and Afghanistan that enshrine Islam as a state religion and *sharia* (Islamic religious code) as a source of civil law. Moreover, in Afghanistan Washington will now use the demise of bin Laden to step up its push for “reconciliation” with the Taliban (“U.S. Sees Chance to Accelerate Negotiations with Taliban,” *Washington Post*, 4 May). No one in Washington is demented enough to think the weak, corruption-riddled puppet government in Kabul can win the war. As we have noted: “The actual U.S. strategy is not to defeat the Taliban but to weaken it enough so that elements of the Islamists can be brought into a political deal” (“Defeat U.S. War on Afghanistan and Iraq,” *The Internationalist* No. 30, November-December 2009).

Since the onset of the anti-Soviet Cold War, U.S. rulers have sought to use religious reaction in the service of imperialist domination. In the 1980s the U.S. financed *madrassas* with Saudi Wahabist instructors in Pakistan where Afghan refugees were taught from Islamist textbooks prepared at the University of Nebraska (on a U.S. government contract). Taliban bomb-making manuals were derived from the ones prepared by the CIA for its Nicaraguan contra mercenaries. As for us, Trotskyist communists, we opposed the *mujahedin* who were funded, armed and trained by the U.S., and hailed the Soviet Army intervention to fight them in the ’80s. Today, we oppose the Islamist reactionaries when Washington is once again allying with them in Libya and seeking an alliance in Afghanistan. When Al Qaeda was set up in early 1989 as the Soviets were withdrawing from Afghanistan, the Trotskyists proposed to the Afghan government to form an international brigade to fight against the CIA’s holy warriors. When that offer was turned down, we raised \$40,000 for the heroic defenders of Jalalabad, under siege by bin Laden’s forces.

The assassination of bin Laden is no aberration. “Targeted killing” is only the latest U.S. euphemism: under Richard Nixon it was called “termination with extreme prejudice.” Remember the fate of Patrice Lumumba, Ernesto Che Guevara, Orlando Letelier and many others – and Washington’s puppets who became liabilities, like Ngo Dinh Diem and Rafael Trujillo. If today Obama wants to hold off on publishing photos of the dead body, it is doubtless because gory photos will show bin Laden was executed at point-blank range, and because the U.S. commander in chief wants to keep a lid on the torture photos from Abu Ghraib, which he suppressed after earlier pledging to release them. The fact that the operation gave its target the code name “Geronimo,” angering many who honor the heroic Chiricahua Apache fighter, harks back to the days of U.S. expansion to the West and its genocide against the Native American population, when General Philip Sheridan sneered, “The only good Indians I ever saw were dead.” So no tears for Osama bin Laden, but his undoubted crimes are far surpassed by those of the mass murderers who claim to have brought him to “justice.”

Meanwhile, as the head of the Pakistani armed forces (accused of harboring bin Laden) bitterly remarked, the U.S. will have material for “Hollywood movies for the next decade.” ■

## Mobilize the Power of the Working Class to Defeat the Militarized Popular Front

# Brazil: Reformists Tail “Strike” By Military Firemen in Rio de Janeiro

The following article was issued as a special supplement of *Vanguarda Operária* (July 2011), the newspaper of the *Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil*.

JUNE 30 – The occupation of the headquarters of the Military Fire Corps of the State of Rio de Janeiro by striking firemen on the night of June 3 not only unleashed a clash with the authoritarian state government of Sérgio Cabral Jr., but also a political struggle inside the workers movement. The main tendencies to the left of the governing Workers Party (PT) of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva – namely the Party of Socialism and Freedom (PSOL) and the United Socialist Workers Party (PSTU), particularly the latter – are ostentatiously backing the movement of the Rio firemen. As the leading forces in the teachers union of Rio de Janeiro (SEPE-RJ), they have linked a strike at schools in the Rio state

network to the action of the militarized firemen (*bombeiros militares*, their official title). However, intervening in union assemblies and with a leaflet, the Comitê de Luta Classista (CLC – Class Struggle Caucus), linked to the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil (LQB – Fourth-Internationalist League of Brazil), has sharply criticized the posture of the leadership for feeding dangerous illusions in these *auxiliary forces of the repressive apparatus of the Brazilian state*.

The repression of the firemen by Rio’s “governator” is typical for this politician who likes to present an iron-fisted image, and of the coalition state government of his PMDB (Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement) and the PT which he leads. Fearing that elements of the Shock Brigade (of the militarized state police) might refuse to repress their firemen “comrades,” Cabral sent the Special Operations Battalion (BOPE), to carry out an operation like those in the movie *Tropa de Elite* (Elite Squad), using tear gas, percussion grenades and rifle fire. Some 439 firemen were jailed in the largest mass arrest in the city’s history. He also denounced the mutinous firemen as “cowards, vandals and irresponsible criminal elements.” In response to



SOS Bombeiros

**Militarized police and firemen march together in June 12 parade along Copacabana beachfront. The militarized firemen are also auxiliary forces of the repressive apparatus of the bourgeois state.**

the arrests, a front was formed of parliamentary parties from right to “left” which introduced bills to the state and federal legislatures to amnesty the militarized firemen. The authors included conservative PR (Republic Party) spokesman and former Rio state governor Anthony Garotinho, as well as leaders of the PT and PSOL (Chico Alencar), the right-wing Democrats and the social-democratic Partido Comunista do Brasil (PCdoB). Even Cabral came out for amnesty.

From 2007 on, the LQB has condemned the bonapartist Cabral for seeking to install a veritable police state and criminalize all opposition. We explained that his government – a “popular front” which subordinates the workers to bourgeois sectors by means of an alliance between the PT, a reformist (pro-capitalist) workers party, and parties of the bourgeoisie itself, in this case the PMDB – had declared war on the unions and the poor. We noted how Governor Kill-’Em-All in Rio was propped up by Lula’s popular-front government in the Palácio do Planalto, Brazil’s White House. Lula sent troops of the elite National Security Force to occupy the hillside slums of Rio using counterinsurgency tactics they perfected while

acting as mercenary troops in the imperialist occupation of Haiti. At the same time we warned that the PSTU, which sometimes tries to disguise itself as Trotskyist, *was seeking to ally with the Militarized State Police* (see “Luta operária contra a frente popular militarizada do PMDB e do PT no Rio de Janeiro,” *Vanguarda Operária* No. 10, May-June 2008). On marches, in the SEPE-RJ and in the trade-union federation led by the PSTU, Conlutas, the CLC has fought against any participation by the police.

Today the scenario is being repeated. The PSOL, which claims to support demilitarization and even disarming of the firemen, doesn’t mention this controversial issue in its amnesty motion. Meanwhile, these ex-PTers support the “just struggle of the Rio firemen” to raise their salaries to the level of the militarized police (PSOL-RJ statement, 6 June). The PSTU has been even more enthusiastic, with a flamboyant exhibition on its web site on “The Days In Which Rio Was Painted Red” (the color of the “striking” firemen). It distributed thousands of stickers with the slogan, “We Are All Firemen.” The PSTU proclaims, “A red tsunami takes the city and spreads over the state.” It foresees that the present situation could advance to the point where it gives rise to a “Cabral Out” movement.<sup>1</sup> In the June 12 demonstration by the firemen (and militarized police) along the Copacabana beachfront, which they put at 50,000 participants, Rio PSTU leader Cyro Garcia declared that “the winds of North Africa and Europe are beginning to blow here.” A reader might conclude that the city was about to explode with class struggle. So are we going to have barricades in the squares in the coming days?

The “red tsunami” not only swept with it the reformist PSOL and PSTU, which openly support capitalism, but also various centrists who combine pseudo-revolutionary rhetoric and a practice which doesn’t infringe on the bourgeois order. Most notably in this respect, the Partido Causa Operária (PCO – Workers Cause Party) called on working people to “completely support the struggle of the firemen” (*Causa Operária*, 12 June). The PCO labeled the BOPE “fascist,” citing the attack on the Fire Corps headquarters as proof. It rightly criticizes the PSOL for praising the Pacification Police Units (UPPs) which have placed various Rio *favelas* (slums) “under a state of siege.” It mouths a few words about demilitarizing the fire-

<sup>1</sup> A reference to the “Collor Out” movement in 1992 which backed by students, youth, labor and much of the bourgeois media succeeded in driving the conservative president Fernando Collor de Melo from office and subsequently impeaching him over a series of corruption scandals, freezing of bank accounts and runaway inflation.



Silvia Izquierdo/AP

The “governator” Sérgio Cabral Jr. reviews the elite police of the National Security Force, January 2007.

men, but neglects to mention that the firemen’s struggle is for their conditions to be *closer* to those of the other “auxiliary military forces,” the militarized state police. And why don’t they comment on the fact that these same firemen *participate in imposing the UPPs*, as they recently did in the occupation of the Mangueira slum district?

“The action was coordinated by the Secretariat of Security, by the Militarized and Civil State Police, with the support of the Brazilian Navy (the Marine Corps), the Federal Police, the Fire Corps and the Public Defender’s office.”

–*O Globo*, 20 June

At the same time, a tiny Coletivo Lenin, despite its orthodox Trotskyist pretensions, followed the example of the PSTU by writing, in a June 11 note on its blog, that “*All working people and combative youth of the city should unite in solidarity with the rebel firemen.*”

Other centrists criticize the PSTU for its support for the firemen. The Liga Bolchevique Internacionalista (LBI) writes, in a June 6 note on its site, that “we cannot support the demands of the firemen’s movement.” It prioritizes the demand for demilitarization of the Corps, noting that its military character derives from clauses of the 1988 Constitution (Article 144). It criticizes the “offensive against the poor population of the *favelas*” by the Cabral government, but is silent about and doesn’t explain how the firemen are part of this. Nor does it mention the main auxiliary military function of the firemen: *the heavy participation of militarized firemen in the Rio “milicias,”* that is, in the extra-official *death squads* which terrorize the hillside slums. In reality, the LBI would like to support the firemen if the latter would only change their demands a bit.

The Liga Estrategia Revolucionária-Quarta Internacional (LER-QI, Revolutionary Strategy League – Fourth Interna-

tional), part of the Trotskyist Faction (FT) led by the Argentine Socialist Workers Party (PTS), has taken a harder stance against the firemen's "strike." The LER's 5 June declaration was titled, "No Support to the Repressor Sérgio Cabral or to the Firemen's Mutiny." It points out that the firemen want to continue to be auxiliary military forces, demanding salaries equal to those of the militarized police; it mentions the connection of the firemen to paramilitary actions (like the 1981 bomb attack on the Riocentro convention center) and that they are "the backbone of those who kill, repress and extort from various communities in the state." What, then, is the proposal of the LER? "The PSTU and Conlutas must take the lead in organizing the struggle against capitalist exploitation and state repression, which means not defending institutions of repression but instead to fight for the dissolution of all organs of repression...." Everywhere and always, the LER's watchword is to make the PSTU/Conlutas fight.

In this manner, the LER functions as a pressure group on a reformist party and the union federation it leads, which only seek to modify capitalism rather than bringing it down. This empties the LER's more radical calls of any value, because it is perfectly obvious that the PSTU and Conlutas are not going to break the framework of bourgeois rule. With its perspective of a bourgeois "democratic revolution" – a legacy of the PSTU's mentor, the late Nahuel Moreno – the Morenoites of our day, by rejecting *proletarian* revolution, tail after distinctly anti-democratic forces ... like the police. This is not just a political choice: the social base of the PSTU is in the trade-union bureaucracy, whose job is to control the ranks by seeking an accord with the bosses, while the PSOL is based on the elected officials of the bourgeois parliamentary system. Even though the LER and the FT make posthumous criticisms of Moreno and say they have broken with Morenoism, in practice they follow the same "democratist" political line. In Argentina, the PTS has just formed a Left and Workers Front on the basis of a reformist electoral program – a typical propaganda bloc, which if it prospers would be the doorway to a popular front.

### Who Are the Militarized Firemen and What Do They Want?

In many counties, firemen, even though they may feel close to the police in the sense of being part of "uniformed services," are distinct entities. The police are part of the "special bodies of armed men" who constitute the backbone of the capitalist state; they are professional repressors. Firemen fight fires and give aid – they are not armed. In Mexico during May Day parades, the police are booed while the firemen (part of the civil administration) are cheered. In Brazil also, many see the firemen as lifesavers. That's why their propaganda in which they proclaimed themselves heroes had an impact.



**Tanks in the street as Brazilian Marines occupy Rio favela of Mangueira on June 24. As always, firemen participated in this military occupation.**

However, reality is different. In particular during the military dictatorship that lasted from 1964 to 1985, the corps of firemen were put under the command of the militarized state police and participated in the repression. Even after the fall of the dictatorship, they were designated as "military forces, an Army reserve." Concretely, the "Military Fire Corps of the State of Rio de Janeiro" has since 1995 been under command of the Secretariat of Public Security, its members are soldiers of the state military forces (as is also the case with the militarized police) with military ranks (private, corporal, sergeant, captain), they are commanded by colonels and subject to military discipline.

The military character of Brazilian firemen is not only a question of laws and regulations. They receive military training. One third of the Rio corps, more than 5,000 firemen, is officially armed – "a small army," as *O Globo* (19 June) noted. Moreover, they are authorized to have up to three arms (a revolver, a shotgun and a carbine), whereas the militarized police can only (officially) have two revolvers. And even though they are supposedly prohibited from using them while on duty, these arms are frequently used against the population. Although the government pretends that there is a war between the "forces of law and order" and the militias which kill with impunity in the *favelas*, no one in Rio is ignorant of the fact that "the paramilitary forces are led, almost entirely, by state public agents: civil police, militarized police, militarized firemen and agents of Desipe (prison officers), as well as by members of the Armed Forces," as the Final Report of the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry on Militias in the State of Rio de Janeiro (14 November 2008) concluded. A large portion of those leaders are militarized firemen.

The scope of the bloodbath in the *morros*, the hillside slums, of Rio is horrifying. Of the 5,000 people killed every year in the state of Rio de Janeiro – a homicide rate without comparison internationally – *more than 1,000 are killed by the*

*police*, both militarized and civilian, three times as many as in São Paulo. Even though they are classified as “killed while resisting arrest,” the large majority of these deaths are summary executions, according to prosecutors and even some police officials. And almost half (45%) of the other, non-official murders are carried out by the militias (*O Estado de S. Paulo*, 1 June). We’re not talking here about crimes of passion, gunfights with drug traffickers or rogue cops. What we have here is a whole *system for control of the population by the “auxiliary military forces” of the capitalist state*. And now the militarized firemen, many of whom form the axis of this system, want to raise their salaries, status and “working conditions” to the level of the militarized police – which would give them greater power to increase their paramilitary domination over the poor who reside in the *favelas*.

Take a look at the demands of the militarized Rio firemen: they want, first of all, “to return to the Secretariat of Public Security or Civil Defense” (feeling themselves diminished by being assigned to the Secretariat of Health during the campaign against dengue fever). This was immediately agreed to by Cabral, who created a new Secretariat of Civil Defense. Secondly, they want to raise their salaries to the level of militarized police in the Federal District (the capital, Brasília, which has the highest salaries in the country for this sector), which the militarized police in Rio are also seeking. They are demanding that the federal Congress approve the bill for a constitutional amendment (PEC 300), which would inscribe the equalization of all militarized (but not civil) forces in the Constitution. And finally, they want amnesty. The mass arrest of the firemen by Cabral was a bonapartist measure which could later be used against the working class, constituting a threat to democratic rights in general. However, the amnesty which they are pushing for goes beyond this: it would add a new article to Federal Law 12.191 of 2010, which amnestied militarized police and firemen in their “labor” movements from 1997 to 2010, extending this to include any action by these military forces during 2011. This would be a *carte blanche* stimulating bonapartist actions by these military forces, as occurred in 1997.

Is it possible that the Brazilian parliament would concede such an amnesty to any sector of working people? It’s inconceivable. The reason for the almost unanimous agreement by the bourgeois parties to the amnesty law is that they recognize that they depend on the military and paramilitary forces, which are the backbone of the capitalist state and which they view as essential in order to maintain their class rule over the working people and rural and urban poor. Some sectors would still like to “demilitarize” the corps of firemen and even “disarm” them. This was the proposal by Rio state deputy Marcelo Freixo (PSOL) and of the Final Report of the commission of inquiry on the militias which he led. However, the bills embodying this have gone nowhere. Even if the militarized firemen were separated from the militarized police, this would be no guarantee that the function of the firemen as an auxiliary military force, which is largely based in their extra-official positions of leadership, would change.

The “strike” of the Rio de Janeiro firemen is *not* a move-



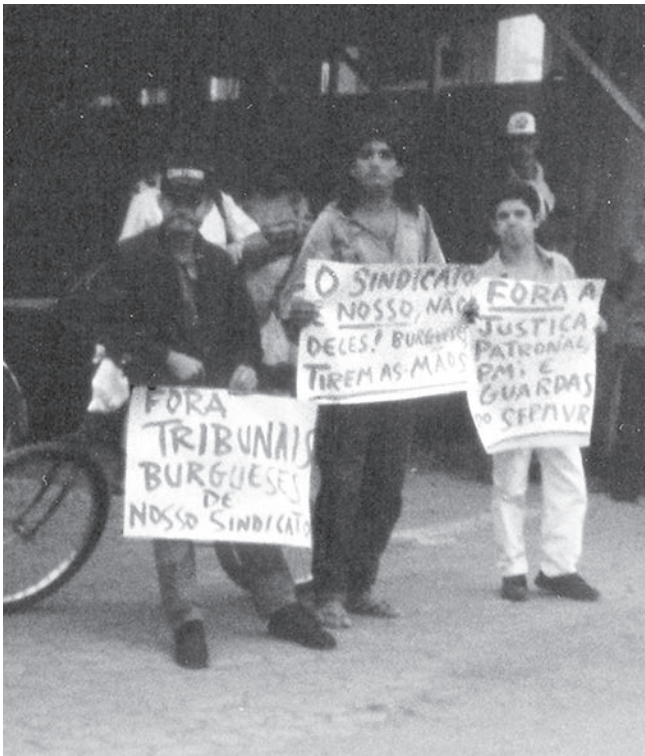
**Leon Trotsky, in Red Square, Moscow, 1920. Trotsky wrote of Germany: “The worker who becomes a policeman in the service of the capitalist state, is a bourgeois cop, not a worker.”**

ment of workers against the employer-state as part of the class struggle against capitalist rule, but instead represents an effort by a sector of the repressive apparatus to improve its position and remuneration as an “auxiliary military force” of capital, distinct from civilian public employees and in conjunction with the militarized police and even with the top commanders of the Corps. If anyone had any doubts about the *reactionary* nature of the movement, all you have to do is cast a glance at the banners in the demonstrations which proclaim, “Militarized Police and Firemen United” and consider the fact that the leaders of the firemen’s movement, who are officials (captains) rather than soldiers, joined with the militarized police to form a “United Front of Public Security Entities.”

### **Trotsky: “Policemen Are Ferocious, Implacable Enemies”**

In its first congress in July 2008, Conlutas (led by the PSTU), seeking to distinguish itself from the CUT (Single Union Federation, a principal support of the governing PT), and following the failure of its projected fusion with the Intersindical labor federation (led by the PSOL and other left currents), baptized itself “a combative, class-struggle coordinating body.” It’s a curious idea of “class struggle” that includes the members of the repressive apparatus of the capitalist state as part of the proletariat. It’s not just a matter of the militarized firemen: the PSTU and Conlutas have for some





**July 1996, Volta Redonda municipal workers made history by voting to drop police from membership in the union (SFPMVR). Signs say: “Bourgeois Courts, Hands Off Our Union,” “Bosses’ Justice, Militarized Police and Municipal Guards – Get Out of the SFPMVR.”**

years avidly sought to unionize the police “sector,” both civil and militarized. So avidly, in fact, that “unions” and associations of police participated in the Conlutas congress, and the PSTU defended their presence tooth and nail on the pretext of “represent[ing] the whole of the working class.” Against this dangerous and treacherous thesis, the Comitê de Luta Classista insisted in its founding program (1997): “Trade unions belong to the working class, not to the bourgeoisie and its agents... police (of any sort) are not part of the working class, they are the armed fist of the bourgeoisie.”

Immediately following the formation of the CLC, this fundamental point of its program proved to be of great current importance in the face of “strikes” by the military police and firemen in 1997 throughout the country. The PSTU bragged of having ostentatiously supported this “rebellion” in Belo Horizonte, where it was led by the Shock Battalion of the Minas Gerais militarized state police, which was “accustomed to repressing our strikes” (*Opinião Socialista*, 3 July 1997). These Morenoites made a shameful appeal for unity between these “workers in uniform” (the military police!) and “their unarmed brothers”. Other reformist tendencies did the same. *Combate Socialista* (25 June 1997), a Morenoite current inside the PT (now part of the PSOL), proclaimed: “Total Support to the Strike of the Minas Police.” *O Trabalho*, another pseudo-Trotskyist current (followers of the late Pierre Lambert) in the PT, counted the leader of the “union” of civil police of the state

of Alagoas in its ranks. The ex-Maoist PCdoB campaigned in the UNE (National Student Union, which it has controlled for years) on the watchword, “The people and police united, will never be defeated,” at the same time as it called for disarming the population.

Against this support to the police mutiny, the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista declared: “No to coalitions with the bourgeoisie and its police!” (*Vanguarda Operária* No. 2, August-October 1997). We said loudly that “the militarized police are enemies of the working class and we fight for the removal of all sorts of police from the CUT.” We quoted the words of the great Bolshevik revolutionary Leon Trotsky, which we had already published in the first issue of *VO*, warning against illusions in the working class about the German police on the eve of the taking of power by Hitler’s Nazi fascists:

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

—*What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat* (January 1932)

Recently, various centrist groups have reproduced the same quote. While they only use Trotsky’s words in order to pressure the PSTU or PCO, we sought from the beginning to *put into practice the Trotskyist program*. In July 1996, the Union of Public Employees of the City of Volta Redonda (SFPMVR) in the state of Rio de Janeiro, led by several comrades of the recently founded LQB, made history by disaffiliating policemen (municipal guards) from the union. For this genuinely class-struggle action, they were sharply repressed by the bourgeois courts, aided by the whole of the left, including the PT, PCdoB, PSTU, LBI, Causa Operária and other left tendencies.

Currently, in order to justify its ruinous policy of embracing the “strike” by the militarized firemen of Rio, the PSTU published a lengthy article (written by its main leader, Eduardo Almeida, and a colleague) attacking the LER-QI, “Polemic: Why It’s Correct to Support the Struggle of the Firemen.” In this text, the PSTU claims that its support for these auxiliary military forces is an expression of the military strategy of the Third (Communist) International to “split the bourgeois armed forces before the insurrection.” Today, in contrast to its position in 1997, the PSTU accepts that, “Obviously the police are not part of the proletariat and work in a repressive instrument of the bourgeois state, part of the superstructure in the service of the ruling class.” But it immediately adds that, “because they are recruited from the proletariat, the police also sell their labor power and suffer the abysmal quality of life as does any other worker, since they receive low wages” and therefore “they can be split.” In other words, the PSTU wants to split the police by supporting their “strikes,” treating them as if they were workers. This opportunist reasoning is diametrically opposed to the revolutionary position of Trotsky in Germany in the 1930s.

In peddling the fairy tale that its current policies follow those of the Third International of Lenin and Trotsky, the PSTU

equates the police with soldiers in the army. Yet there is a big difference between soldiers subject to obligatory military service (conscription), as is the case in Brazil, and police who are voluntarily recruited to an institution of repression. Trotsky himself, in *The History of the Russian Revolution* (1930), gives a vivid description of the distinction made by the Russian workers between the police and soldiers during the February 1917 Revolution:

“Toward the police the crowd showed ferocious hatred. They routed the mounted police with whistles, stones, and pieces of ice. In a totally different way the workers approached the soldiers. Around the barracks, sentinels, patrols and lines of soldiers stood groups of working men and women exchanging friendly words with the army men.”

Later on in the same chapter, he writes:

“The police are fierce, implacable, hated and hating foes. To win them over is out of the question.... It is different with the soldiers: the crowd makes every effort to avoid hostile encounters with them; on the contrary, seeks ways to dispose them in its favor, convince, attract, fraternize, merge them in itself.”

As we see, in Germany and Russia, Trotsky had the same policy toward the police, and he distinguishes them from soldiers.

What of the militarized police and militarized firemen in Brazil today? It's one thing to have illusions in the British police, the famous *bobbies* who had the (never justified) fame of being unarmed. There also we reject any presence of police in the trade-union movement, because they are class enemies of the working people. But in Brazil, a country with innumerable massacres carried out by the Militarized Police, to think that the police are, or should be treated like, “workers in uniform” can lead to deadly misunderstanding. The police are professional repressors: this is the job they carry out, whether in the BOPE, the Shock Battalion or the Militarized Police as a whole. The militarized firemen are, precisely, auxiliary military forces – that is, they aid the *militarized police*. They aid the Army and the National Security Force which Cabral invited to Rio in 2007 to impose “law and order.” As we already saw in its present “strike,” the Rio firemen are seeking a closer equivalency with their “brother” policemen. On top of this, there is the role of the militarized firemen in leading the militias which keep the Rio slums in a state of siege, which would only be made worse with better wages and working conditions for the Corps.

### “Demilitarizing” the Militarized Firemen?

So what then is the alternative? Virtually the entire Brazilian left, both those who support the “strike” (PSOL, PSTU, PCO and other smaller groups) and those who criticize it call for “demilitarizing” the firemen. For some, such as the LBI, this is their main slogan in the dispute; others, such as the LER-QI,



Marco Antônio/AP

**Militarized police and militarized firemen of the state of Alagoas on “strike,” July 1997. The PSTU gave “total support” while the LQB warned against any support to these professional assassins.**

give less importance to it. (Interestingly, when a teacher from the SEPE-RJ who is a member of the PSTU dared to pronounce the word “demilitarization” in his speech during the occupation of the steps of the Rio Legislative Assembly, he was rejected by the firemen.) Certainly there is no reason why a civil service such as putting out fires, being lifeguards on the beaches and saving people in danger needs to be a military force. But what does it mean to raise demilitarization of the firemen as a slogan. In the Report on the parliamentary inquiry into the militias, which was unanimously approved by the state Legislative Assembly and forwarded to the federal Congress by Deputy Marcelo Freixo of the PSOL, demilitarization is presented as a measure to regularize and make repression less arbitrary and more efficient in the name of “defense of the Democratic State of Laws.” That does not mean making them any less violent.

Thus the Report proposes: “20. Disarmament/demilitarization of the Fire Corps, in view of the quantity of participation by its members in militia activities, in addition to, as is well known, various other criminal activities above all due to their possession of firearms.” This proposal was preceded by, “11. Creation of a Chamber for Repression of Organized Crime, involving specialized organs of the Civil Police, the Public Prosecutor and Court system.” Also: “16. Enabling the Public Prosecutor to factually and effectively exercise an external supervision of the Police, as well as supervising the whole of the security system.” Yet substituting greater control of the *favelas* by the official police (which murders with impunity more than 1,000 residents a year), as opposed to the present control by paramilitary groups led by militarized police and militarized firemen, isn't exactly a step forward from the point of view of the working people. Moreover, this raises the question: who exactly is going to carry out the demilitarizing (and disarming!) of the militarized firemen?

Interestingly, the PSTU, in its main article on the firemen's struggle, *opposes disarming the militarized firemen!* "But, pay attention firemen and policemen, demilitarizing doesn't mean disarming." So it is announcing that these forces they can keep the pistols, shotguns and rifles that are frequently used to intimidate and subjugate the poor people. The PSTU is offering, in its supposed effort to "divide" the military forces, to guarantee the continuation of the rule of the militias in the slums! In any case, even if the law calls for it, the firemen are not about to surrender their firearms, particularly in the present climate of insecurity which reigns in the *morros* and other neighborhoods of Rio. Nor are they going to peacefully hand over the economic basis of their domination: "sales of gas, alternate means of transportation, and the '*gatonet*' (cat net, or pirate cable TV service) and ... clandestine security services," as Deputy Freixo said in an interview with *O Dia* (5 September 2010). This economic power could not exist without a connection with legal enterprises, from the gas agencies to companies like Sky-TV (known as "sky-meow" in the *favelas*).<sup>2</sup>

In addition to the "demilitarization" preached by the bourgeois and reformist parties, whose aim is to regularize the system of repression, the LER-QI offers a democratist utopia: in its article of 5 June it calls on the PSTU and Conlutas, as usual, to "fight for the dissolution of all organs of repression." One has to ask: *who* would dissolve the police repressive apparatus, and *how* would it perform this feat? In several articles in recent years criticizing the PSTU, the LER simply repeats its call for "dissolution" without further explanation. It thereby implicitly suggests that this could be accomplished without overthrowing the present bourgeois state. But when, in November 2010, in the midst of the massive uproar provoked by the brutal police occupation of the Complexo do Alemão hillside slum, the PSTU came out for "dissolution of the police," the LER had to admit that this was "as we have always called for," but insisted, "When this party [the PSTU] calls for dissolving the police it is in order to reform the police." ("A democratic police is impossible" says an article by the LER of 3 December 2010.) In reality, this is a *utopian reformist* conception, whether

<sup>2</sup> The PSTU argues that there are tensions between the low-paid sectors of the militarized police and firemen and the (much better paid) elite troops of the BOPE. There was an example of such a conflict in the *favela* of Batan (in the western part of the city of Rio) where journalists of *O Dia* were kidnapped and tortured in 2007. The following year, right in the middle of the publicity about the parliamentary inquiry into the militias, it was reported that a corporal in the Shock Battalion and a soldier in the militarize state police threatened a lieutenant in the BOPE. The reason: the latter had signed a contract with NetServiço – a company jointly owned by the Globo Network of Roberto Marinho and Embratel (a subsidiary of Telmex, owned by Carlos Slim, the third richest man in the world) providing broadband Internet access at "popular prices." The lower-rank militarized policemen demanded "an explanation" of this competition with their extra-legal *gatonet* service, which depends on access to the signal of Sky Brasil, a company owned by the same Globo Network and Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation. As you can see, at bottom there was a conflict between two "armed media monopolies," a sort of "public-private partnership of a new type," as one commentator put it ironically.

coming from the mouths of the PSTU or the LER.

The PSTU has the virtue of explicitly laying out its view: it wants to "put an end to the present-day police, to investigate and arrest all of its rotten gang, and create a new one. The new police would have to be organized in a radically different way than the present-day one." There would be no distinction between civil and militarized police ("it serves no purpose"), there would be "more democratic liberties" for the police and "its commanders and officers would be elected by the population where they live" (Eduardo Almeida, "How to Confront Urban Violence?" article by the PSTU dated 27 November 2010). To underline the "realistic" character of its proposal, Almeida writes that "the election of local police chiefs is practiced in many countries, even in the United States"! Yes indeed, and in the U.S. state of Arizona the fascistic sheriff of Mariposa County, who organizes paramilitary bands to hunt down undocumented immigrants, is elected by popular vote. How great a "democratic advance" is that! In the present climate of insecurity and hysteria over "crime" instigated by the bourgeois media and politicians, the program of cleaning up the police and electing their chiefs could lead to legalizing the death squads.

The utopian idea that without bringing down capitalism it would be possible to "dissolve" the repressive military apparatus in Brazil, which serves to brutally subjugate the starving legions despite welfare programs like "Fome Zero" (Zero Hunger), is absurd. In this epoch of decaying capitalism, it will take a social revolution to win basic democratic rights.

Despite the reformist character of the PSTU's call, the LER-QI responds generously, "The PSTU is attempting to find a theoretical and programmatic solution based on revolutionary tradition." The LER claims that, "As a lesson from the Commune, the police was dissolved." Yet this was not the lesson drawn by the great Marxists from the experience of the 1871 Paris Commune. The conclusion drawn by Karl Marx at the height of the Commune was, "the next attempt of the French Revolution will be no longer, as before, to transfer the bureaucratic-military machine from one hand to another, but to smash it." On the eve of the Russian October Revolution of 1917, Lenin stressed: "The words, 'to smash the bureaucratic-military machine,' briefly express the principal lesson of Marxism regarding the tasks of the proletariat during a revolution in relation to the state" (*The State and Revolution* [August-September 1917]). Alternatively, Lenin spoke of crushing, suppressing, demolishing and destroying the state apparatus by means of revolution, but never of "dissolving" it as if this is something that could be decided by a bourgeois-democratic assembly concerning some secondary state agency.

The PSTU's recent polemic against the LER begins and ends with the characterization, "a scandalous error." This is an implicit response to the article by the LER, "The Scandalous Position of the PSTU in Defense of the Police" (*Palavra Operária*, 23 April 2008). However much they scandalize each other, as we remarked above, they both share the same "democratist" outlook contrary to the struggle for socialist revolution. If the former seek to get along with the murder-

ous police, the latter use the language of bourgeois liberal defenders of “human rights” who are guided by “democratic” imperialism. As against democratic-reformist illusions about demilitarization and dissolution of the repressive organs, the Comitê de Luta Classista (the trade-union tendency linked to the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista) has fought for years to expel any and all police from the unions and to mobilize the power of the unions in defense of the oppressed. Thus in June 2008, the CLC introduced – and the SEPE-RJ approved – a motion following the kidnapping and murder of three black youths by the army in the *favelas*:

“The tentacles of the militarized popular front of class collaboration in the state of Rio de Janeiro has built a bridge of repression in the slums from the African population of Rio to that of Haiti, training there and killing here, training here and killing there.... We call on the SEPE to join with the residents to carry out protests and mainly to mobilize the power of the working class.... EXPEL THE BRAZILIAN TROOPS FROM THE *FAVELAS* OF RIO AND HAITI!”

### The Struggle to Build a Trotskyist Party in Brazil

It is a truism to say that there is no solution to the problems of crime and police violence under capitalism. Any social democrat or bourgeois sociologist will say it. The question is, what conclusion is drawn from this? After militarized police murdered 30 people in a massacre in the Baixada Fluminense (an impoverished working-class region outside of the city of Rio) in 2005, the worst slaughter in the state’s history, when calls were raised to “dissolve all the repressive bodies” (put forward by the sociologist Luis Mir) and for the “extinction of the militarized police and the formation of another public security agency of a strictly civilian and technical character” (put forward by the Movement for Land, Work and Freedom, a tendency inside the PSOL), we insisted on the need to “Mobilize the working people for workers and peasants self-defense” (“El Brasil de Lula – Tierra de masacres” [Lula’s Brazil: Land of Massacres], *El Internacionalista* No. 5, May 2005):

“In situations such as presently prevails in Brazil, when the urban and rural working people confront private militias of the employers and death squads, it is necessary to raise to the mass organizations of the exploited the call to form *workers and peasants self-defense groups*.”

Noting how an unarmed population aids violent criminals and murderous police and military, we called to fight against any arms control law. Stressing the need to combine mobilization in the factories and the *bairros*, we pointed to the important petrochemical and metalworking sectors in the region, and also to the presence of the teachers union, the SEPE-RJ:

“With a class-struggle leadership, it would be possible to organize working-class self defense in the Baixada Fluminense and the city of Rio. But this requires a political struggle against the pro-capitalist labor bureaucracy subordinated, directly or indirectly, to the popular front.”

This bureaucracy is not limited to the now pro-government CUT, or to even more right-wing labor federations such as Força Sindical. The leaders of Conlutas, of SEPE-RJ and of

the health workers union Sinsprev-RJ – that is, the PSTU and PSOL – and of the Intersindical (led by the PSOL) are also intransigently opposed to independent action by the working people, seeking to place their struggles at the tail end of the capitalist state, in this case through support for the military firemen and police “in struggle.” (When the PSTU refers to “self-defense associations” it is in order to ask permission from the state to “protect ourselves against bandits,” not from attacks by the police.) In reality, these sectors of the left are making a political bloc with other bourgeois sectors in a substitute “militarized popular front.” In order to combat the *whole* of the bourgeoisie and attack the economic bases of the militias, it is necessary to put forward a program of transitional demands – including a massive plan of public works under workers control, notably constructing millions of houses; and fighting unemployment by shortening the workweek with no loss in pay – that point to the expropriation of capital through socialist revolution. We also demand the cancelling of all laws criminalizing or regulating the use or sale of drugs: Down with the “war on drugs,” which serves as a cover for the class war against working people, blacks and the poor, particularly in the impoverished neighborhoods of the *favelas* and *morros*, which serve as a training ground for Brazilian troops who murder the poor people of Haiti.

Above all, in order to carry out a revolution it is indispensable to have a deep knowledge and understanding of the nature of the bourgeois state. Throughout Latin America there has been much confusion about the relation between the police and the workers movement. At the end of September 2010, parts of the left in Ecuador supported a police mutiny, arguing that they were other “workers” threatened by the bourgeois populist government of Rafael Correa, when in fact this action by the police was linked to a coup attempt by sectors of the Armed Forces.

In Brazil, the equating of the police and workers comes from the corporatist tradition of Getúlio Vargas’s *Estado Novo* (New State), and more recently from the Workers Party that considers all state employees to be “public servants.” At bottom, both support to “strikes” by police and militarized firemen and proposals for the “democratization/demilitarization” of these corps are derived from the social-democratic conception of the supposed “neutrality” of the state, which has become the registered trademark of the PT which claims to “govern for all” – that is, treating as equals the rich and poor, as if there were no social classes. This is the opposite of the Marxist understanding that the state is an instrument of the rule of capital for the repression of the exploited and oppressed.

The polemical struggle around the movement of the Rio firemen throws a sharp light on the fact that the great majority of Brazilian parties and groups who claim to be Trotskyist in reality are social democrats, whose perspectives are strongly influenced by their origins as tendencies within Lula’s PT. When they speak of “socialism with freedom and democracy” (PSOL), of a “democratic revolution” (as do the Morenoites of the PSTU, from Egypt to Brazil), or even when they reject that bourgeois-reformist vision (in the case of the ex-Morenoites of

the LER), their perspectives are counterposed to the authentic Trotskyist struggle for socialist revolution. The controversy over the militarized firemen underscores anew the vital importance of building a *revolutionary workers party* based on the Trotskyist program of *permanent revolution*, which fights for a *workers and peasants government*. To carry out an agrarian

revolution in the countryside or to defeat imperialism in Libya, to combat repression by Brazilian military forces in Haiti and in the *morros* and *favelas* of Rio, requires a revolutionary leadership to lead the working people in the struggle for workers power, and to extend the revolution throughout the Americas and into the entrails of the imperialist monster. ■

## The 2011 Mutiny By Rio Firemen Is *Not* the Same As the 1910 “Revolt Against the Whip”

Polemizing against comrade Cecilia of the LQB/CLC at an important meeting of the SEPE-RJ teachers union, Miguel Malheiros of the PSTU (who was rejected by firemen when he called for their demilitarization during one of their demonstrations) made an decidedly infelicitous comparison between the mutiny of the firemen of Rio de Janeiro and the *Revolta da Chibata* (Revolt Against the Whip). The mutiny by the militarized firemen in Rio included commanding officers and demanded equal prestige and salary with the militarized police and the elite Special Operations Battalion and National Security Force. In other words, they are asking for increased recognition and improved conditions, in order to better repress the poor black population with, shall we say, “softer” methods, using powerful water cannons or, on other occasions, using riot clubs and more lethal forms, such as high calibre firearms.

The Revolt Against the Whip, on the other hand, was directed against the officers, so much so that the unit commander and three other officers were killed when they disobeyed orders from those led by the “Black Admiral,” João Cândido, a seaman. The *Revolta da Chibata* occurred mainly in order to eradicate the punishment of sailors by whipping, a leftover from slavery which persisted in the Brazilian Navy. Whipping had already been abolished in 1890 after the proclamation of the republic in Brazil, which took place in 1889, the year after slavery was abolished. Yet in order to provide sadistic pleasure to the white officers nostalgic for the beatings of black slaves in the public squares, the government of Hermes da Fonseca placed this instrument of torture in the hands of the Navy command.

Moreover, the mutineers against the whip were recruited by force and in their great majority were black, assigned to exhausting manual labor on board the ships. None were involved in massacres or murders of the poor, as around 20% of the Corps of Firemen are (through their participation in the militias in the hillside slums of Rio de Janeiro), who are voluntary recruits trained in military/police repression.

Even the events which inspired the 1910 revolt had a very different ideological content than those motivating the present-day militarized firemen of Rio. The Revolt Against the Whip was inspired by the British workers movement (Chartism) and mainly by the Revolt of Battleship Potemkin in Russia, which took place after “Bloody Sunday” in January 1905, when the tsar ordered the shooting of thousands of striking workers. Then in June 1905, seamen on the battleship ferociously and



**João Cândido, the “Black Admiral,” reads declaration during the Revolt Against the Whip, November 1910.**

justifiably punished the commanders of the warship due to the horrible working conditions and starvation rations on board. They also refused to continue the war against Japan, which had produced more than 5 million casualties among the Russia population in the context of the 1905 Revolution (the “dress rehearsal” of the Russian Revolution of 1917, as Lenin put it).

As one can see in comparing the two mutinies (and not “strikes”), the mutineers led by the Black Admiral did not call for more impressive warships with powerful cannons of higher calibre, or to use water cannon on the population, as the militarized firemen do against strikers and the population. They also did not shoot to kill, as the militarized firemen do, when they participate in the occupation of the hillside slums along with the Special Operations Battalion and Shock Troops of the militarized state police, the National Security Force or other sectors of the armed fist of the capitalists. The Revolt Against the Whip was directed against the officer corps, whereas the leaders of the militarized firemen of Rio hailed the creation of a Secretariat of Civil Defense headed by the commander of the Corps of Militarized Firemen as a “great victory.” ■

## “War on Drugs” = Capitalist War Against Workers and the Poor

# Mexico: Against Militarization, Fight for Workers Revolution

### Forge a Revolutionary Workers Party!

MAY 7 – Today the convoy of the March for Peace with Justice and Dignity, headed by the poet Javier Sicilia, arrives in Mexico City. The mobilization will culminate tomorrow with a rally in the Zócalo, Mexico City’s monumental central square. Spurred by the March 28 murder of the poet’s son in Cuernavaca, Sicilia’s mobilization has garnered broad support. Parallel protests are scheduled tomorrow in more than 20 Mexican cities, along with various actions at a number of Mexican consular offices abroad. This mobilization has intersected a growing clamor against the violence that has intensified since Felipe Calderón’s rise to power, which in the last four years has brought a bloody toll of over 40,000 dead. Just in the month of April, some 145 bodies were discovered in hidden graves in San Fernando, Tamaulipas, the same city where in August of last year the bodies of 72 migrants were discovered, most of them from Central America.

In the past few days, columnists from various newspapers have called on readers to join the demonstration. Yesterday, the Mexican Conference of Bishops announced its support, blaming “narcotrafficking and organized crime” (but not the government). Even President Calderón of the right-wing National Action Party (PAN) saluted the demonstration as “a civic expression.” Various labor organizations have joined the call, including the Mexican Union of Electrical Workers (SME). Reflecting the mobilization of such diverse sectors, there are differing accounts as to the nature of this “movement,” among them the “No más sangre” (No more blood) initiative of the cartoonist “Rius” (Eduardo del Río) supported by the Movement of National Regeneration (MORENA), that of Sicilia himself, more non-partisan, and that of the leftist Metropolitan Coordination Against Militarization and Violence (COMECON) in the Federal District. Nevertheless, what all these elements have in common is their classless appeals for peace – or against violence – instead of proclaiming the need for class war against the government and all wings of the bourgeoisie.

Sicilia stated quite explicitly that “we are not against the government,” that “the mobilization is to make demands on the government, not to bring it down,” and that he proposes to repair the “fabric of society,” as quoted in *La Jornada* (6 May). He also says that “right now we have a co-opted state that necessarily must be reformed from within,” that it is necessary to “remake the public institutions,” etc. Sicilia wants the state to “do its job,” as he said yesterday when he headlined a protest in Topilejo: “We must learn to be citizens, to demand that the rulers and the misnamed ‘political class’ do their duty” (*La Jornada*, 7 May). Our view as proletarian revolutionaries is exactly the opposite: we insist that what is needed is for the

capitalist state to be brought down, since it is the source of the violence against the exploited and oppressed.

Other elements are trying to connect up with the wave of indignation unleashed by the assassination of Sicilia’s son, while offering it a more leftist gloss. While the League of Workers for Socialism (LTS) denounces the drug war and militarization, the Socialist Workers Party (POS), followers of the late Argentine pseudo-Trotskyist Nahuel Moreno, repeat Sicilia’s slogan “we’re fed up” in an editorial in *El Socialista*, and call for the formation of a “great front of struggle” against insecurity and unemployment. With their cries of “down with Calderón,” the program of these organizations that claim to be socialist is perfectly compatible with that of MORENA, which is the current brand-name of the popular front around the figure of Andrés Manuel López Obrador, popularly known by his initials AMLO. When they lay the blame on the government, it is only in preparation for López Obrador’s 2012 election campaign. *Ultimately, all of them have the same program of calling on the state to stop violence.*

Regardless of their talk of struggling against militarization and the police state that is hanging over the country, it is impossible to do this as part of a movement “against violence,” “for peace,” or whatever one might call it. When the POS denounces “insecurity” or the COMECON (of which the LTS is a member) calls for “an end to violence and impunity,” they take the side, even if only implicitly, of the bourgeois state, because they don’t stand on the only possible alternative: a workers movement fighting to take power. They thereby help to drum up the “anti-crime” hysteria with which the government wants to justify the militarization of the country.

In reality, the current “war on drugs” is not a war between the government and the drug traffickers, but a fight *among sectors of the ruling class* for the control of territories and markets. If it is carried out with arms, instead of with lawsuits and “price wars,” this is on account of the peculiarities of the business of moving and distributing prohibited substances and “illegal” immigrants. The commercial entities engaged in this business (the Gulf cartel, La Familia, Los Zetas, etc.) could not exist without their ties to the state. Moreover, the biggest organized crime syndicate is the capitalist state itself. When the media refer to “organized crime,” are they by any chance talking about the gift of Telmex (the former state telephone monopoly) to Carlos Slim? Or the concession of the mines to the Grupo México, the company of the infamous Germán Larrea<sup>1</sup>? Or the protection granted by PAN governments to those guilty of the unending *industrial homicide* of miners, from Pasta de Conchos and now Sabinas in Coahuila, to the

<sup>1</sup> Larrea is the owner of the Pasta de Conchos mine in the state of Coahuila, where 65 miners were buried alive in 2006.

mines of Sonora, Guerrero and Jalisco?

At moments of intensified class struggle, revolutionary communists call for the formation of *workers self-defense groups*, a slogan that is absent from the propaganda of the opportunist leftists who partake in the movement “against violence.” We raised this slogan in Oaxaca in 2006 and in union struggles from Lázaro Cárdenas<sup>2</sup> to the SME<sup>3</sup>. But in the end, the only way to put an end to the violence perpetrated by the state and the ruling class is by means of a social revolution. All attempts at “reform,” at “democratic” control of the police, at supervision over the police, of calling for the jailing of the uniformed assassins, are doomed to failure, because the bourgeoisie needs its repressive machine, the backbone of its state.

We wrote (“Militarization and Hunger in Mexico,” *The Internationalist* No. 28, March-April 2009) that while under the seven-decades rule of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), “Mexican governments maintained control through the all-encompassing mechanisms of a corporatist regime,” since 2000 the “ultimate recourse” of PAN governments “is greater use of the military, bringing Mexico closer to militarized pseudo-democracies like Colombia.” This is not a peculiarity of the PAN. It would be the same under any bourgeois party (PRD, PRI, PT<sup>4</sup>, Greens, Convergencia<sup>5</sup>, etc.) U.S. imperialism’s “silent invasion” of the country would also continue, with its hundreds of agents who are an integral part of this militarization.

Moreover, “peace” movements end up helping bonapartist elements who promise to put an end to crime and violence with forceful repression. In a note in *La Jornada* of 3 May, Luis Hernández Navarro<sup>6</sup> insists that the May 8 march is quite different from the mobilization in 2004, when prominent right-wing politicians launched an anti-violence movement, in the midst of a wave of kidnappings of bourgeois figures. It is true that there is a certain difference: that was a rightist movement while this is a popular-frontist “progressive” one. Nevertheless, if this movement achieves any power, it will have to base itself on the same capitalist state, and will end up reinforcing it, although with a “leftist” vocabulary.

There is ample historical precedent for movements of this sort, notably in Italy, where the left has sought to oppose the corruption and violence that flourished under center-right (Christian Democracy) governments. Even when they succeeded in installing a center-left government, such as in the “historic compromise” of Aldo Moro<sup>7</sup> with the PCI in the

1970s, or more recently in the government of l’Unione<sup>8</sup>, which included Rifondazione Comunista<sup>9</sup>, the results were disastrous. In the case of the “Historic Compromise,” the slogans “against violence” prepared “public opinion” to support a witchhunt (with the PCI in charge of the police!) against leftist radicals, including rank and file union committees and veteran anti-fascist partisans. Later, the “leftist” Unione government participated in the occupation of Afghanistan, and wound up paving the way for the far-right Berlusconi government with its bonapartist tendencies. (See “Italy: Popular Front of Imperialist War and Anti-Labor Attacks” in *The Internationalist* No. 25, January-February 2007.)

In the case of Mexico, the militarization of the country and the thousands of deaths under the current six-year presidential term are the expression of the war of the capitalists against the workers and the poor. Taking the reins of the state amidst massive plebeian mobilizations protesting the electoral fraud that gave him his “victory,” Calderón overtly based himself on the armed forces. Seemingly infatuated with dressing up in military fatigues and soldier’s cap while reviewing the troops, Calderón intensified the bonapartist tendencies of the regime, announcing that there would be less carrots and a lot more sticks for the population. Today, these same pressures manifest themselves in the push to approve the “reforms” of the National Security Law, which would give “special powers” to the executive to impose martial law in regions “threatened by ungovernability.” In the end, these measures aren’t directed against the narcotraffickers, but against those who would dare to protest against the government and its policies of starvation and union-busting.

Against the fraudulent “war on drug trafficking” we call for *elimination of all laws that prohibit or regulate the consumption and selling of drugs*. It’s none of the state’s business what anyone wants to do with their own body. Against harassment by criminal gangs in competition – and sometimes in cooperation – with police forces, targeted against migrants who cross Mexico heading for the northern border, it is necessary to fight for *full citizenship rights for all immigrants*, in Mexico as well as in the U.S. We fight for the *expulsion of all imperialist agents*. But the most important thing is to underline that the only real way out of capitalist barbarity is *revolutionary struggle for a workers and peasants government, extending beyond the borders in an international socialist revolution*. The necessary instrument for achieving this task is a *revolutionary workers party* that would act as a tribune of the people, defending all the oppressed. ■

<sup>2</sup> Site of Mexico’s largest steel plant, in the state of Michoacán, where in April 2006 workers drove off a joint attack by thousands of state and federal police and the Mexican navy.

<sup>3</sup> In October 2009, the Calderón government dissolved the Luz y Fuerza del Centro (LyFC) company and fired all 44,000 of its employees.

<sup>4</sup> PT, a fake “Labor Party” set up by the PRI corporatist apparatus under president Carlos Salinas, now often allied with the PRD and López Obrador.

<sup>5</sup> Convergence for Democracy, a bourgeois liberal party, part of the López Obrador popular front.

<sup>6</sup> Prominent intellectual and opinion editor of the liberal Mexico City daily *La Jornada*.

<sup>7</sup> Aldo Moro (1916-1978), leader of the Catholic/Mafia “Christian Democratic” (DC) party, the historic party of post-war Italian capi-

talism, who accepted the offer of Italian Communist Party (PCI) secretary Enrico Berlinguer for a “historic compromise” for “national solidarity” between the two parties in the 1970s. Previously the Cold War *raison d’être* of the DC was to keep the Communists out of the Italian government.

<sup>8</sup> L’Unione, the coalition behind the second government of Romano Prodi (2006-2008).

<sup>9</sup> Partito della Rifondazione Comunista (PRC, Party of Communist Refoundation), founded by dissidents from the Stalinist PCI who split in 1991 when the party abandoned any vestigial pretense of communism and renamed itself as the Democratic Party (PD).

# Canadian Federal Election Not Maple Leaf Social Democracy But Fight for Workers Power!

**NDP: Party of Imperialist War on Libya, Capitalist Austerity “at Home”  
Forge a Revolutionary Workers Party!**

With Canadian CF-18 fighter jets flying daily bombing missions over Libya under the NATO operational command of Canadian Lt. Gen. Charles Bouchard, Canada went to the polls on May 2 in the fourth federal election since 2004. By voting down the budget on March 22 and bringing down Stephen Harper’s minority Conservative cabinet with a no-confidence vote three days later, the combined Liberal, New Democratic Party and Bloc Québécois opposition clearly hoped to end the five-year Tory reign. Instead, with a slight (1.8 percent) increase in its share of the vote and less than 40 percent of the total, the Conservative Party gained a 167-seat majority in parliament. The Liberal Party, which governed Canada for 69 years in the 20th century, got the lowest seat count (34) since Confederation in 1867, and the Quebec Bloc was almost wiped out. With the most right-wing government in memory, Harper can ram through his program of vicious capitalist austerity, greater Canadian participation in bloody imperialist “peacekeeping” missions, a beefed up military and a crackdown on “crime”: more cuts, more jets and more jails.

While the Tories promise to go at it with a vengeance, the media and much of the left focused on the dramatic surge in the vote for the New Democratic Party, the so-called “orange wave.” Actually, the NDP is more akin to what used to be called “parlor pinks,” a collection of well-behaved social democrats who are not about to make waves in Ottawa. NDP chief Jack Layton, now Leader of the Official Opposition, gave a taste of what his tenure in Stornoway will be like when the New Democrat Members of Parliament joined those of every other party in unanimously voting for the bombing of Libya. Now that it has 103 MPs, the NDP will have more resources to devote to playing parliamentary gains, and may occasionally sound off with a little verbal sparring in the Commons. But as a “responsible” leader of a “government-in-waiting,” Layton says he “favour[s] proposition over opposition” and vows to bring “constructive solutions” to Ottawa. At bottom, the NDP



**Quebec is key to class struggle in Canada. More than 50,000 workers demonstrated in Montréal on March 12 against the privatization of public services by the Liberal provincial government of Jean Charest.**

shares the all-party consensus for pro-business policies and while saying it prefers “civilian deployment” in Afghanistan (meaning sending more police, like currently in Haiti, rather than soldiers), it, too, is a party of imperialist war.

Harper’s Tories, who are now in the saddle, are a decidedly reactionary bunch. Harper started out in the Reform Party, a far-right party based in western Canada that drew on the constituency of the right-wing populist Social Credit Party. (The Socreds had a reputation for anti-Semitism, blaming the world’s ills on a conspiracy of Jewish bankers.) In 2000 the Reform Party morphed into the Canadian Alliance, which in 2003 fused with the Progressive Conservatives to form the Conservative Party. Harper will move quickly to enact bills that previously been blocked in parliament, including an omnibus crime bill, further lowering taxes on corporate profits from 21 percent to 15 percent, and buying an entire fleet of F-35 fighter jets for \$30 billion. He will also continue to push for privatization of public services and go after public workers’ pay and pensions, while “social conservatives” will demand further restrictions on abortion rights, the agribusiness lobby will call for an end to the Canada Wheat Board, and the party’s energy company allies will promote oil production from the



Alberta tar sands, some of the dirtiest fuel around.

Michael Ignatieff's Liberals posed as a "progressive" option, but on every issue they are just as much defenders of Canadian imperialism as Harper's Conservatives. Liberal prime minister Jean Chrétien dispatched troops to Afghanistan in 2001, and the party platform in these elections still wants to keep a "non-combat" mission there (like the 50,000+ U.S. "non-combat" troops who are still occupying Iraq?). Liberal prime minister Paul Martin sent Canadian forces to Haiti in 2004, aiding U.S. and French paratroopers in ousting the elected government of Jean-Bertrand Aristide. In the 1960s and '70s, Canadian military forces worked with U.S. troops in Vietnam, and over the decades Canada has been a main supplier of imperialist "peacekeeping" forces operating under the guise of the United Nations. On domestic policy, Ontario's Liberal premier Dalton McGuinty mimicked the federal conservatives in calling for privatization, lower business taxes and building more prisons. Plus he gave a helping hand to right-wing Toronto mayor Rob Ford by passing Bill 150 eliminating transit workers' right to strike.

Although the Bloc Québécois sometimes posed as "progressives," it was anything but. This bourgeois nationalist party was formed in 1990 by defectors from the Liberals and Progressive Conservatives, led by Lucien Bouchard who had been a minister in Brian Mulroney's Tory cabinet in Ottawa. The BQ lost momentum after the 1995 referendum on Quebec "sovereignty" was narrowly defeated. While appealing to nationalist sentiment by only speaking French in parliament, it backed the Liberal and Tory governments on key issues like a U.S.-dominated "free trade" zone and sending Canadian troops to Afghanistan. In 2008-09 it didn't fight Harper's \$75 billion bailout of Canadian banks, only asking for federal subsidies for Quebec logging companies, too. At the provincial level it supported the Parti Québécois's "zero deficit" policies, which led to drastic cuts to social services and rising tuition rates. The BQ even voted for the F-35 jets, so long as they brought profits to Quebec's military industries. So in an election turning on Harper's economic policies, the BQ was hardly seen as an opposition, and voters abandoned it in droves.

### **The New Democratic Party: Maple Leaf Social Imperialists**

The New Democratic Party has been around for half a century, formed as a fusion between the old Cooperative Commonwealth Federation and the Canadian Labour Congress. With a working-class base and pro-capitalist leadership, the NDP is still what Lenin called a "bourgeois workers party," barely, but about as "moderate" or rightist as you can get in that framework. Its leaders have frequently been straight-out bourgeois politicians: former Ontario NDP premier Bob Rae, after gutting public services in the province in the mid-1990s switched over to the Liberals; current NDP leader Jack Layton is the son of a Progressive Conservative cabinet minister; Thomas Mulcair, head of the Quebec NDP, was a minister in the Liberal provincial government of Jean Charest. The NDP supported sending troops to Afghanistan from the outset, in 2005 it voted for the Liberals' war budget and this year Layton

called for Canada to bomb Libya even before the U.N. authorized it. Layton has been open to coalition with the Liberals, or even with the Conservatives (in 2004). No wonder the *Toronto Star* endorsed the NDP this time.

But what did the NDP have to offer working people in this election? It claimed it would "attack skyrocketing tuition" and pledged to lower medication costs, although it didn't say how or when. While "reaffirming women's rights to abortion," any talk of improving women's status within Canada leaves a bad taste when you consider that these *social imperialists* supported sending Canadian military forces to Afghanistan to install a regime under which women are imprisoned in head-to-toe burkas (and Canadian troops torture prisoners). On the industrial front, the NDP push Maple Leaf chauvinism with the Investment Canada Act while calling to cut taxes on business and urging workers to take pay cuts. When the NDP have been in power as in British Columbia they have spearheaded major assaults against the Native and immigrant population, giving support to the racist cops who in 2009 brutally beat a man of Fijian descent while baying against "brown people." In Ontario, the NDP voted for a "back-to-work" law in 2008 to break a Toronto transit strike, as it had earlier done (in 2002) to break a Toronto garbage workers strike.

The dramatic wave of support for the NDP in this election clearly reflected the concern of working people and sections of the middle class that Harper's policies could hit them hard. In Quebec, where 40 percent of the workforce is unionized (much higher than anywhere else in North America), workers voted *en masse* for what they saw as a pro-labour party, even though the union tops called to vote for the Bloc (FTQ) or "anybody but Harper" (CSN). A key element in the surge was the support of a large part of Québec Solidaire, a petty-bourgeois left-wing nationalist coalition, some of whose members ran on the NDP ticket. Layton comes from Quebec, albeit from a "leafy Anglo-enclave," and can speak passable colloquial French, unlike some of the NDP's 59 elected MPs from Quebec who, despite their surnames, speak little or no French, have never set foot in the ridings they supposedly represent, and/or have no connection with the province except that they are studying at McGill University in Montréal. But the NDP's contradictions over Quebec go far deeper than the language capabilities of its candidates.

The New Democratic Party was long notorious for its "federalist" opposition to anything that smacked of independence or "sovereignty" for Quebec, and for a long time this meant that it had a marginal presence in the province. In 2005, the NDP tried to feign sympathy for Quebec with its Sherbrooke Declaration, which claimed to support Quebec's right to self-determination, saying it "would recognize a majority decision (50% + 1)" in a referendum on Quebec's status. However, it strongly supported federalism, specifically did not repudiate earlier NDP positions, and in the next breath said the federal government would have to make its own decision "in the spirit of the [1998] Supreme Court ruling" on Quebec secession. That ruling denied that the province could leave the confederation without the consent of the other provinces and the federal parliament. This anti-democratic ruling was made into law

in the so-called Clarity Act (2000), which Layton earlier opposed and then embraced. In presenting the new NDP caucus on Parliament Hill on May 24, Layton repeated his support for the Supreme Court ruling.

So long as it was an also-ran opposition party with scant presence in the province, the NDP's stance on Quebec didn't matter much. But now that it is the Official Opposition, with a majority of its caucus from Quebec, the ambiguities and contradictions will come to the fore. This will particularly be the case with its supporters in Québec Solidaire, which includes a hodgepodge of the would-be socialist left<sup>1</sup>. Some endorsed the NDP in the elections, while others backed the Bloc Québécois. The Parti Communiste du Québec, in particular, threw a fit over the NDP sweep in Quebec, calling it "a disaster for Quebec" and scolding Quebec voters for being "impulsive" as well as "quite cynical and not very political, lacking a sufficiently developed critical spirit" for not voting for the BQ, the *capitalist* party backed by these "communists" (PCQ statement, 9 May). Several of these reformist outfits don't call for independence (or even sovereignty) for Quebec any more than the NDP does, but they all support "progressives" in the framework of popular-front (class-collaborationist) politics, and they will all now try to pressure the NDP.

On those infrequent occasions when a bourgeois workers party runs independently against the capitalist parties and challenges capitalist interests on key issues, such as defending strikes or taking action against imperialist war, revolutionaries can consider giving *critical support* to its candidates to expose the contradictions between its claims to represent the workers and its actual policies of supporting capital. In this case, as usual with the likes of the NDP, there is nothing for class-conscious workers to support in its campaign, which from strikebreaking to imperialist war *supported* the bourgeoisie. As Trotskyists who stand for free tuition and open admissions to higher education, for women's right to free abortion on demand, for international workers solidarity, for defeating Canadian/U.S./NATO imperialism in its wars on Afghanistan and Libya, the League for the Fourth International was for *no vote for the NDP* in this election, as also the last time around (see our October 2008 leaflet, "Canadian Federal Elections: No Choice for the Working Class," reprinted in *The Internationalist* No. 28, March-April 2009).

### The Reformist Left in the Wake of the NDP

So what did the several self-proclaimed Marxist groups say about the latest federal elections? The Communist Party of Canada ran a slate of 20 candidates (3,000 votes) while the Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist), running under

the name of the Marxist-Leninist Party fielded 70 candidates (10,000 votes). Their programs are hardly to the left of the NDP, and with its call to "Dump the Harper Tories, Block the Right, and send a progressive majority to Ottawa!" the CPC campaign was a slightly veiled call for a coalition with the Liberals. Now, they say, "After The Election: Struggle Shifts Outside Parliament" (*People's Voice*, 16-31 May). With an absolute Conservative majority, that much is obvious. But in calling on the unions to join a "broad-based, pan-Canadian fightback movement," these ex-Stalinist reformists are calling for an "extra-parliamentary" *popular front* to tie the workers to bourgeois allies. The CPC (ML) Stalinist reformist version is to use "the historic election of the NDP as the national opposition in the Parliament" to "hold the Harper government to account" (*TML Daily*, 9 May).

The International Socialists were even more enthusiastic, headlining: "Take the Surge to the Streets." In case anyone wasn't clear about what surge the I.S. was referring to, it declared: "To continue the 'orange wave' we need to take the surge to the streets to confront Harper's agenda" (*Socialist Worker*, May 2011). A month earlier, it counselled voters, "A vote for the NDP is the best option. However disappointing its track record, it is not beholden to the corporations... every gain for the NDP would be seen as a setback for their [Harper and Ignatieff] agenda." So throw away your disappointment, the I.S. urged, forget about NDP support for Canadian troops in Afghanistan, for racist cops at home, for Maple Leaf Anglo chauvinism, for pro-business and anti-labour policies and cheerfully go with the orange flow! Following the lead of their guide, the late Tony Cliff, the I.S. and their comrades around the world are always ready to climb aboard any supposedly "progressive" bandwagon – and some not-so-progressive ones as well.

A *Socialist Worker* (30 April) election supplement even had a catchy slogan, "Vote Like an Egyptian!" Detecting a "new global movement for change," they say that struggles in Wisconsin show that "Not only does everyone want change, but we can all see that it is possible." And as the Egyptian and Tunisians keep on demonstrating "to push their revolutions forward," in Canada, while voting for the NDP so it can "increase its share of seats in Parliament, the only way it will be able to push for real change ... is to build support outside parliament for what it wants to do inside it." But "everyone" doesn't want the same kind of change: there is the little problem of class. There has in fact been no revolution in Egypt and Tunisia, the dictators have been toppled while the military-based dictatorships remain. And as the Cliffites in Egypt sought alliances with the Muslim Brotherhood, these Islamists are now backing the military as it cracks down on demonstrators. As for the NDP, what it wants to do inside parliament is hardly to defend the interests of the workers.

With their method of "make the lefts fight," from Cairo to Toronto and Madison these second-line social democrats end up building "mass movements" to support non-proletarian and decidedly non-revolutionary forces. The idea that simply by mass mobilization it is possible to pressure capitalist and pro-capitalist forces into action in the interest of the workers

<sup>1</sup>In addition to the **Union des Forces Progressistes** and **Option Citoyenne** which formed Québec Solidaire, QS includes the **Parti Communiste de Québec**; Quebec supporters of the **Communist Party of Canada**; **Gauche Socialiste** (Quebec affiliate of the United Secretariat); **Socialisme Internationale** (affiliated with the International Socialist Tendency of the late Tony Cliff); **Alternative Socialiste** (part of Peter Taaffe's Committee for a Worker's International); the **Tendance Marxiste Internationaliste** (part of Alan Woods' International Marxist Tendency), as well as environmentalist and feminist groups.

USWA Local 1005



The lockout by U.S. Steel of the Hamilton, Ontario steel plant is now (August 2011) in its ninth month, as the militant workers continue to hang tough. The leadership of USW Local 1005 is fighting the union-busting attack with Canadian nationalism, when what's needed is cross-border union solidarity action. See article, "For International Labor Action to Defeat Hamilton Steel Lockout," *The Internationalist* supplement (May 2011). See also "Lessons of the Inco-Vale Strike" in the same supplement. Both are available at our web site, [www.internationalist.org](http://www.internationalist.org).

is *extra-parliamentary cretinism*, which as Marx said of its parliamentary variant, "holds those infected by it fast in an imaginary world and robs them of all sense, all memory, all understanding of the rude external world" (Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* [1852]). While hailing a supposed "Libyan Revolution" and waving the flag of the Libyan monarchy installed by Britain after World War II (see "From Tunisia to Egypt to Libya and Beyond: Spread the Revolution," *Socialist Worker*, March 2011), the I.S. is politically supporting "revolutionaries" who were begging for, and finally got, U.N./NATO imperialist intervention, commanded by a Canadian general. It is blinded to the fact, as we have shown in detail<sup>2</sup>, that this Libyan revolt is in fact led by monarchists, Islamists, ex-Qaddafi politicians and CIA terrorists.

For its part, Fightback, the Anglo Canadian group of the International Marxist Tendency is over the moon about the outcome of the election. Their May 3 article states that the NDP "must be the voice of workers in struggle" while the NDP must be put "under pressure and given the opportunity for socialist ideas to come to the fore." Same theme from Socialist Action, which sees the "stunning gains" for the NDP indicating a "seismic shift." SA argues: "In terms of class politics, the NDP electoral breakthrough places an obstacle in the path of the capitalist austerity drive." Actually, in terms of class politics, the NDP *supports capitalist austerity*, just with a slightly different mix. SA wants "an NDP government

<sup>2</sup> See "Libyan Showdown" and "Libya and the Opportunist Left" in our special supplement "Imperialist Marauders in the Quicksands of North Africa," *The Internationalist* (April 2011).

committed to socialist policies." Dream on. Also from the New Socialist Group, albeit a bit less starry-eyed: "We need to mobilize against the coming wave of austerity and for positive changes, but orient somewhat differently to the NDP than we might have otherwise." The NSG writes: "Of course, we should not generate illusions that the NDP will resist the Harper agenda and change the world for us." So tail after the NDP without illusions.

The whole panoply of opportunist social-democratic leftists has for years buzzed around the NDP. Now these reformists see their opportunity to practice their "extra-parliamentary" pressure politics big time, but in a situation where the NDP will have zero clout in parliament. It will all be a big charade. Yet big battles are indeed looming, as the Tories gear up to carry out their union-bashing, privatizing agenda, claiming a "mandate" from less than 40 percent of the voters and under a quarter of the electorate. The Canadian Union of Postal Workers have voted by almost 95 percent to authorize a strike if contract negotiations break down. CUPW strikes in the 1970s energized workers throughout Canada, with militant locals from Montréal to Vancouver. In Toronto, the Canadian Union of Public Employees is facing an offensive by rightist mayor Ford to push through privatization of garbage collection. In Saskatchewan, teachers working without a contract since last August have walked off the job two days in a row. The struggle will indeed go into the streets, but the key to a successful battle is precisely *not* to tail after the NDP but to wage a militant *class* struggle independent of all the parliamentary parties.

What Canadian and Quebec workers need is not a parliamentary party of orange or pink social democracy but to forge a revolutionary workers party in the heat of class struggle. We in the League for the Fourth International seek to build the nucleus of such a party, under the banner of the Bolsheviks led by Lenin and Trotsky, whose essential lessons remain true today. A transitional program would fight capitalist austerity not by pressurizing parliament but demanding free, quality health care and education for all, and a shorter workweek with no loss in pay to fight mass unemployment, pointing toward a socialist planned economy to replace the boom-bust cycles of capitalism. We defend the rights of Native peoples facing racist oppression and exploitation of their lands. We demand full citizenship rights for all immigrants. And we fight for the independence of Quebec, to combat the national oppression of the Francophone Québécois and the chauvinism of the Anglo bourgeoisie (and its Maple Leaf social-democratic adjuncts), and so that Quebec workers can combat "their own" capitalist rulers and join with their class sisters and brothers in the rest of Canada and throughout North America to bring down imperialism through international socialist revolution. ■

## Republicans, Democrats Are the Parties of Capital – We Need a Class-Struggle Workers Party!

# Wisconsin: Mobilize Workers' Power to Defeat Union-Busting Bill!

FEBRUARY 18 – Yesterday thousands of workers and students occupied the Wisconsin state capitol in Madison while tens of thousands surrounded the building for the third day in a row seeking to block the vicious “budget repair” bill being rammed through the state legislature by Governor Scott Walker. The unions have called on all 98,000 teachers to head to the capital Friday. Already so many have “sicked out” that the Madison schools had to shut down. The university is up in arms. This is the most massive labor mobilization in the United States in years. It shows that the working class is mad as hell and ready to fight. We have the power to stop Walker in his tracks. But to mobilize that power it’s necessary to break with the parties and politicians of capital and build a workers party that can wage this *class struggle* through to victory.

A demonstrator held up a sign in the capitol’s corridors saying “The Class War Is Here.” That is so right. This is perhaps the most blatant piece of union-busting legislation since the days when labor unions were prosecuted under “criminal syndicalism” laws early in the last century. Slashing wages and benefits with a meat ax, the right-wing Republican Walker is going after the state’s public sector workers with a vengeance. The bill would effectively eliminate collective bargaining, while threatening to bring in the National Guard if the unions dare strike. But this assault on labor will not be stopped by relying on the Democrats, whose most audacious act has been to flee the state. Legislative grandstanding may delay a vote but it will not win this battle. Workers’ power can.

There should be an immediate statewide public workers strike to sink the anti-labor bill, and it needs to rapidly spread to all sectors of labor to *shut Wisconsin down*. Teachers should mobilize together with students and parents to turn schools into strike organizing centers. Teamsters should tie up the Interstate highways with their rigs. There should be appeals for solidarity action elsewhere in the country. The resistance in Wisconsin can electrify the country, just as the occupation of the Republic Windows and Doors factory in Chicago did in December 2008 – but on a far larger scale. It will take nothing less than a *statewide general strike* to defeat labor hater Walker. But union leaders block militant action as they chain workers to the Democrats. Now is the time to unleash labor’s power – it’s *use it or lose it!*

The Wisconsin anti-union bill is only the first of a slew of anti-labor legislation in the works outlawing strikes and hamstringing public sector workers. Hundreds of labor unionists jammed into the Ohio state capitol in Columbus on Tuesday and again yesterday to protest Senate Bill 5, which would eliminate collective bargaining. The Illinois legislature is gear-

ing up to ban teachers’ strikes. In New York, where strikes by public sector workers are already outlawed under the state’s infamous Taylor Law, Democratic Governor Andrew Cuomo is slashing health care and education while threatening to rip up pensions and go after union seniority provisions in the state constitution. New York City’s billionaire mayor Michael Bloomberg is threatening thousands of teacher layoffs. But they are not alone: Democrat Barack Obama in the White House has taken the lead in freezing government workers’ wages and spearheading attacks on teachers unions.

The fact is that the assault on labor is not just some right-wing Tea Party affair – it is a *bipartisan capitalist attack*, and it can only be defeated by mobilizing working people, the poor and oppressed independently of and against the parties of the bosses. A number of left groups (including the International Socialist Organization, Socialist Alternative, the Socialist Equality Party and other social democrats) call to “tax the rich” to make up for budget shortfalls. The rulers are not short of dollars. Bankers are making money hand over fist. A single hedge fund manager gave himself a cool \$5 billion last year, triple the size of the Wisconsin state deficit. The U.S. spends trillions on its imperialist wars and occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq. And if state treasuries had more cash, you can bet your bottom dollar they wouldn’t use it to fund public education. *The purpose of this budget battle is to smash the unions!*

We must stand and fight or see decades of union gains go down the tubes in a race to the bottom. Working people must break with the Democratic Party of racist police repression and imperialist war, and forge a class-struggle workers party that defends all the oppressed in fighting for socialist revolution. *It’s us or them.* ■

### More Reports from Wisconsin

When teachers in Madison, Wisconsin decided to “sick out” on February 17 to protest Governor Scott Walker’s draconian union-busting bill, it set off a labor revolt the likes of which has not been seen in the U.S. in decades. The Internationalist Group decided to send a reporter to Wisconsin to cover the dramatic events. On-the-spot reports about the struggle can be found on our web site, [www.internationalist.org](http://www.internationalist.org), including: “Wisconsin: Epicenter of the Battle Over Workers’ Rights” (February 19), “To Win, Prepare to Strike Wisconsin!” (February 20) and “Wisconsin Unions Vote to Prepare a General Strike – The Time to Act Is Now.”

## Defeat Governor's Legislative Coup d'État

# Wisconsin: For a General Strike, Now!



Craig Schreiner/Wisconsin State Journal

**Thousands jam into the Rotunda of the Wisconsin State Capitol, Feb. 18, to protest union-busting bill.**

MARCH 13—A law challenging the very existence unions of government workers has just been rammed through the legislature in Wisconsin. In addition, wages have been slashed by up to 10 percent to make up for cuts to health insurance and pensions. The labor movement and workers nationwide and internationally are vividly aware of the stakes. There has been a lot of talk in the last three weeks about a general strike. The Wisconsin South Central Labor Federation even voted to authorize one. But now that the moment of truth has arrived, the union bureaucrats have gotten cold feet. They are doing everything to *prevent* strike action and instead to divert anger at this vicious law into a drive to recall Republican senators. To be replaced by whom? The Democrats' "alternative" budget bill would also have drastically slashed wages and benefits.

We have said from the outset that "It will take nothing less than a *statewide general strike* to defeat labor hater Walker." But we warned, "union leaders block militant action as they chain workers to the Democrats" (*The Internationalist* leaflet, 18 February). There should be no delay: this is the hour for powerful labor action. ***For a general strike to shut down Wisconsin now!***

When Governor Scott Walker announced on February 11 a

bill to eliminate collective bargaining rights for almost all state, county and municipal employees, except for the Wisconsin State Patrol and firefighters, it was a blatant attempt to destroy public-sector unions. Using a phony state "fiscal crisis" as an excuse, its intent was to rip up a half-century of workers' hard-won rights. Walker and his Republican cohorts tried to ram this draconian union-busting law through the state legislature in a matter of a couple days, declaring an end to hearings of the joint finance committee after only a few hours. But the working people of Wisconsin reacted angrily and massively, taking to the streets in huge numbers to emphatically demand, "Kill the Bill!"

Walker's position, as one commentator put it, was "my way or the highway" – so the Democratic state senators took him at his word and drove off to Illinois, depriving the governor of the enhanced quorum required to vote on fiscal bills. As thousands of protesters occupied the state Capitol for more than two weeks and tens of thousands repeatedly protested outside (more than 100,000 ringing the square on three Saturdays running), the wannabe Duce of Madison was stymied, and increasingly frustrated. Sending police across the state line to kidnap legislators was ruled out. He admittedly considered sending provocateurs into the protests, but dropped that for

tactical reasons. Finally on Wednesday, March 9 the governor decided he had had enough of democratic niceties and proceeded to carry out what can only be called a legislative coup d'état.

Walker had aides take scissors to slice out the budgetary provisions of the bill, hoping to do away with the need for a "superquorum" (while also eliminating the supposed reason for such draconian action). The Senate majority leader then called a vote on less than two hours notice, and at 6 p.m. held a hurried Senate-Assembly conference committee that lasted only a few minutes. Moments later, the Senate gaveled through the excised "budget repair" bill by an 18-1 vote with no Democrats present. On Thursday, the Assembly dutifully voted the anti-labor bill, and on Friday the governor signed it, hoping to cancel union rights with a stroke of a pen. But the issue will not be decided by parliamentary sleight of hand – workers' rights can only be won and defended through hard class struggle on the streets and in the plants.

Working people and defenders of democratic rights in Wisconsin are ready and willing to fight. The minute word leaked about the plan to drum the bill through the Senate, people headed to the Capitol in droves to try and stop this outrage. The *Wisconsin State Journal* (10 March) headlined the next day: "Thousands Storm Capitol As GOP Takes Action." The article described the pandemonium:

"Thousands of protesters rushed to the state Capitol Wednesday night, forcing their way through doors, crawling through windows and jamming corridors, as word spread of hastily called votes on Gov. Scott Walker's controversial bill limiting collective bargaining rights for public workers...."

"Shortly after 8 p.m. Wednesday, hundreds of protesters gathered outside the locked King Street entrance to the Capitol, chanting 'Break down the door!' and 'General strike!'"

"Moments later, police ceded control of the State Street doors and allowed the crowd to surge inside, joining thousands who had already gathered in the Capitol to protest the votes...."

"At one point, officials estimated up to 7,000 people had spilled into the Capitol, some coming through doors and windows opened from the inside, including one legislative office and several bathrooms. Some door knobs and door handles were removed...."

Union officials issued angry statements: Marty Beil, executive director of the Wisconsin State Employees Union, said that the governor and his cronies had turned Wisconsin into a "banana republic." Phil Neuenfeldt, president of the Wisconsin State AFL-CIO, said that "Senate Republicans have exercised the nuclear option to ram through their bill attacking Wisconsin's working families in the dark of night." But when it comes to labor *action*, it's a different story. Even as protesters were chanting "general strike" while trying to break down the doors of the Capitol, the union tops were preaching caution.

The next day the *Wisconsin State Journal* (11 March) reported, "'General strike' has been one of the chants that re-

March 10, 2011

WISCONSIN  
STATE JOURNAL

## Thousands storm Capitol as GOP takes action



Thousands of protesters rushed to the state Capitol Wednesday night, forcing their way through doors, crawling through windows and jamming corridors, as word spread of hastily called votes on Gov. Scott Walker's controversial bill limiting collective bargaining rights for public workers.

The Capitol overnight crowd had gone mostly silent by 2:15 a.m. Thursday after a nearly continuous stream of protest songs, drumming and the occasional bagpiping since about 7:30 p.m. Wednesday. Protesters on the ground floor of the state Capitol rotunda led others in Woody Guthrie's

## Calls, preparations for general strike grow

Walker moves to tighten anti-strike laws

Gov. Scott Walker's collective bargaining bill allows state employees to be fired for three unexcused absences during a state of emergency declared by the governor.

The provision appears to tighten

Calls for a general strike are growing among union members and supporters as the state Legislature advanced a law stripping public sector unions of almost all bargaining rights, but it remains unclear whether strikes or pickets will appear soon.

Union leaders say the Republicans' fast-track passage of the bill has fueled strike talk, but for now most are urging legal measures such as recall of Republican legislators as a way to repeal the law.

sounded through the Capitol during massive protests Wednesday and Thursday after the Legislature passed a bill that would remove bargaining rights for about 175,000 workers and create major obstacles to basic operations for unions representing teachers, state workers and local government employees." But, the paper said, "Union leaders say the Republicans' fast-track passage of the bill has fueled strike talk, but for now most are urging legal measures such as recall of Republican legislators as a way to repeal the law."

Teachers are a main target of Walker's law. Even though enough Madison teachers called in sick to shut down the schools for four school days, and many others around the state did likewise so they could join the protests at the Capitol, Wisconsin State Education Association Council president Mary Bell urged her union's 98,000 members not to walk out. Instead, the Madison teachers union, MTI, concentrated on negotiating a concessionary contract with the local school board before Walker's new law kicks in. The agreement, which would extend the contract through mid-2013, would take an estimated \$3,900 annually out of the pay check of the average teacher, amounting to a 7.35% wage cut.

A number of other contracts have been extended, some until 2014, but those covering 39,000 state workers expire today (March 13), because two Democratic senators voted against them (one was later rewarded by Walker with a plum state government job). Currently the union tops are pushing to recall Republican legislators, and various legal actions. Suits have been announced charging that Walker violated the state law on open meetings, since the public was excluded from the Senate vote; the conference committee and Senate vote violated a provision of the state Constitution requiring 24 hours notice before a vote by a government body. The Madison district attorney says he is investigating, etc.



**Strike calls have been frequent in protests in Madison, Wisconsin but union tops are blocking action.**

But at most such tactics would only delay the law.

Usually when union leaders want to drag their heels and head off militant action, they put the blame on the membership, saying the ranks aren't ready. Certainly, to undertake a general strike in this country that hasn't seen one in more than 60 years would take a lot of guts and gumption. But of all the times in recent memory, right now, as workers stand to lose thousands of dollars in wages and any semblance of job security, is when they are *most* likely to take such a bold step. And many are ready. "General strike" was once again a frequent chant among the 150,000 trade-unionists and supporters (including quite a few from neighboring and far-away states) who filled Capitol Square and all the way down State Street on Saturday

Talk of a general strike has not just been whistling in the wind. On February 21 the South Central Labor Federation voted that "SCFL endorses a general strike, possibly for the day Walker signs his budget repair bill." At the same time it set up an education committee to prepare materials for union locals about how to fight "this naked class war waged upon us." A history professor at Macalester College (St. Paul, MN), Peter Rachleff, prepared a brief history of general strikes, pointing to the 1886 May Day struggles for the eight-hour work day. In Milwaukee, the governor called out the National Guard to squelch a strike that shut down virtually every factory in the city (as Walker threatens to do today), killing seven strikers. Thus serious preparation for a strike should include organizing workers defense guards.

The SCFL educational materials include a "how to" guide on strike preparations by Dan La Botz of *Labor Notes* on the series of "Days of Action" in various cities in Ontario in 1995-98. Like many one-day "general strikes" in Europe, these were not real general strikes which pose a contest for power, over which class shall rule, but rather a series of labor demonstra-

tions whose ultimate purpose was to moderate the anti-labor policies of the provincial government of Tory (Conservative) premier Mike Harris. La Botz doesn't mention that they failed to do that. But even if they had brought down Harris, what was the alternative: the discredited labor-backed New Democratic Party? The NDP was voted out of office after imposing a wage freeze and curtailing bargaining rights of public sector workers.

This underlines that a general strike is ultimately and inevitably political. Many in Wisconsin portray the battle as one against the Republican governor and legislators and reactionary forces such as the Tea Party movement and Americans for Prosperity, the political action committee of

Charles and David Koch, millionaire funders of ultra-rightist outfits who were Walker's biggest financial backers. The toilet paper kings (Koch Industries owns the Georgia-Pacific paper company) are sinister for sure, but the far right are not the only ones going after labor these days. In New York state, a liberal Democratic governor, Andrew Cuomo, got elected on a union-bashing platform and is demanding \$450 million in givebacks while threatening 10,000 layoffs. And nationally Barack Obama has imposed a wage freeze on federal workers while spearheading attacks on teachers, even supporting the firing of an entire district teaching staff in Rhode Island.

Illusions in the Democratic Party are a big problem in Wisconsin. As a result of their grandstand play of decamping to Rockford, Illinois, the 14 Democratic senators were hailed by the protesters demonstrating against Walker's union-busting bill. On Saturday, when they returned to Madison, supporters chanted "Fab(ulous) 14, our heroes." They then paraded in a line around the Capitol with senators and the crowd chanting "thank you" to each other. State Assembly Democrats sported their orange T-shirts claiming to support Wisconsin working families. But for all their phony "friend of labor" rhetoric, the Democrats were prepared to vote for all the budget cuts the governor wanted. They only want to preserve the unions' bargaining rights (and dues check-off), because labor is a key source of funds for this capitalist party.

Just about every left-wing and self-proclaimed socialist group in the country has written about the events in Wisconsin, which are the biggest upsurge in labor struggle in decades in the U.S. Mostly it is just cheerleading, ducking the key issue of the Democrats. In 20 articles on Wisconsin, the Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL), a Stalinoid-reformist outfit, assiduously avoiding taking on the Democratic Party. Its main activity in Wisconsin was circulating a petition to "tax

the rich,” lending credence to Walker’s talk of a budget deficit. (While claiming there was a \$137 million budget shortfall this year, right after taking office he legislated \$140 million in tax breaks for businesses, banks and industry.)

The problem is not lack of money – right now the Federal Reserve is funneling tens of billions of dollars to the banks at essentially 0% interest, not to mention the trillions they gave to Wall Street for the “bailout” and hundreds of billions paid to business under the “stimulus” bill. It is not the job of revolutionaries to give helpful hints to the bosses’ government about its budget priorities and how to finance them. We have nothing against taxing the rich, but a “millionaires tax” will not do a thing to defend working people. To think that it would is to promote illusions that the capitalist pols would spend money on education, workers’ pensions, health care if only they had the dough. We need to mobilize our power to defeat the attacks on working people, poor, oppressed minorities and other victims of capital.

The social-democratic International Socialist Organization (ISO), one of the biggest pushers of the “tax the rich” nostrum, just published an editorial, titled “Now is the time to fight” (11 March). But according to the ISO, a general strike is not the way. It argues that “given the low level of strike activity in the last decade, and the overall decline of the labor movement over the past 30 years,” therefore “calling for a general strike – no matter how enthusiastically it is received – is unlikely to get very far.” Its alternative is to “build union activity in the workplaces” by “organizing pickets before work or noontime marches to other unionized workplaces.” In other words, do anything but don’t strike during working hours. So here the ISO is actively aiding the sellout bureaucrats in suppressing calls for militant union action.

Another group, the World Socialist Web Site, which also goes under the name of the Socialist Equality Party (WSWS/SEP), takes a somewhat different tack. The WSWS chimes in on the need for a general strike, and criticizes the Democrats and union bureaucrats for trying to squelch struggle. But in numerous articles, while referring to Walker’s “anti-worker” law, it never mentions the fact that this is *union-busting* legislation. The reason why not is simple: the WSWS *opposes* unions as inherently bourgeois. They even tell workers not to vote for unions in union recognition votes. These *scab socialists* try to hide this dirty fact by denouncing the bureaucrats, who have hamstrung workers struggle for decades. But the unions remain workers organizations, even though they are betrayed



John Hart/Wisconsin State Journal

**Illusions in the Democratic Party. Demonstrators thank 14 Wisconsin Democratic senators. Yet the alternative budget bill of the “Fab 14” included the same drastic pay cuts as that of Republican governor Walker.**

by the union misleaders who tie them to the capitalist parties, principally the Democrats.

That is why it is necessary to build a class-struggle opposition in the unions, to oust the pro-capitalist bureaucrats and break with the Democrats and bourgeois politics overall. The Wisconsin union-busting law, by outlawing collective bargaining for government workers, aims at destroying public sector unions. Following the decimation of many private sector unions over the last three decades, these are the mainstay of what is left of the labor movement. Walker & Co. would certainly make impossible the class-collaboration policies of business unionists who are willing to sacrifice all sorts of union gains as long as they get to negotiate the sellout. Class-struggle unionists do not call for or rely on such mechanisms as a dues check-off, precisely because the government and the bosses can use it as a weapon to cripple labor by cutting off its finances. But we oppose anti-union attacks as an assault of workers’ rights and gains.

***A statewide general strike is urgently needed in Wisconsin, and the time is now.*** To win against all the union-bashers, it is necessary to promote the political independence of the workers movement and break with both Democrats and Republicans, the partner parties of American capitalism, as well as minor bourgeois parties such as the Greens, and sundry reformists (of which the social-democratic NDP in Canada is an extreme example) who only seek to modify the workings of the capitalist system rather than bringing it down. Thus the Internationalist Group, in calling for a general strike in Wisconsin, links this to the need to ***build a class-struggle workers party*** to lead the fight for a workers government and socialist revolution. ■



## Full Citizenship Rights for All Immigrants! Workers of the World Unite!

# New York City May Day 2011



May 1st, or May Day, is the international workers day. In the United States union leaderships substituted the patriotic Labor Day parades. But now, May Day has been revived as a result of immigrant workers' actions. Ever since the mass mobilization and walkouts of millions in 2006, it has become *the* day for highlighting the struggle for immigrant rights and for worker rights. May Day 2008 was also the day when ILWU dock workers shut down every port on the U.S. West Coast to demand an end to the war on Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as to defend immigrants. But U.S. rulers keep on waging imperialist war (now against Libya as well), deporting immigrants and attacking workers here. Democrat Obama is deporting even more than Republican Bush, setting a quota of 400,000 deportees a year.

The 2011 May Day march in New York City drew several thousand participants. As in 2010, there were two separate events, one of the left and immigrants' rights groups at Union Square and a second by the more main-line union bureaucracies at Foley Square. However, this year, the two converged.

The Internationalist Group, CUNY Internationalist Clubs, Class Struggle Education Workers and Orquesta Skarroñeros, an immigrant youth band, had a sizeable contingent (45 marchers) that marched from Union Square. Preceded by red flags with the hammer, sickle and "4" of the Trotskyist

Fourth International, the contingent was led by a large IG banner in Spanish calling for "Full Citizenship Rights for All Immigrants" as well as "Workers of the World, Unite!" and "For a Revolutionary Workers Party!" A second IG banner (in English) had the image of our button proclaiming "La lucha obrera no tiene fronteras" (Workers struggle knows no borders).

It was the most prominent left contingent (one blogger noted, "you couldn't miss it"), notable for the number of immigrant youth and workers, the combative chants and slogans – particularly in contrast to the bourgeois politics from the official sponsors. Where speakers on the podium kept chanting "Sí se puede" or "Yes, we can," Democrat Obama's campaign slogan in the 2008 elections, the internationalist contingent chanted, "Hey Obama, what do you say, how many kids did you deport today." We also chanted, "Luchar, vencer, obreros al poder" (Struggle to win, workers to power) and "Asian, Latin, black and white, Workers of the world unite!"

The competing coalitions are both subordinate to the capitalist parties. Neither will mobilize the kind of worker-immigrant action in the streets that is needed to defeat the "bipartisan" war on immigrants. Today as in the past, the struggle for immigrants' rights is intimately bound up with the struggle for workers revolution, here and around the world. ■

# Defend ILWU Local 10!

On April 4, dock workers in Local 10 of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) in the San Francisco Bay Area stopped work for 24 hours as part of nationwide protests called by the AFL-CIO. Around the country, these were mostly limp rallies commemorating the anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King in 1968 as he supported striking Memphis sanitation workers. The AFL-CIO called to oppose “Republican budgets” – i.e., support Democrats. But the Bay Area dock unions took the day off and shut down the ports of Oakland and San Francisco to show their solidarity with workers in Wisconsin who were battling that state’s union-busting attacks.

The Pacific Maritime Association, the cartel of West Coast shipping companies, retaliated by filing a federal lawsuit against Local 10 and its then-president, Richard Mead. Local 10 was the only union in the country to actually take labor action in defense of Wisconsin workers, and now the bosses want to make them pay for it: labor must say *no way*, and prepare to back up Local 10 with labor action to force the PMA to drop its charges! On April 25, a support rally called by the SF Labor Council was held outside PMA headquarters in downtown SF.

Union dock workers are in a strategic position at one of the world capitalist market’s key chokepoints. The PMA lawsuit seeks to stop these workers from using their power. In 2008, when the ILWU shut down all ports up and down the coast on May 1 against the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the PMA declared the shutdown “illegal” and threatened to sue. However, it backed off when the ILWU warned that contract negotiations would not go forward until the lawsuit was dropped. Now the PMA is trying again, encouraged by the all-out assault against the remaining gains of organized labor in the U.S.

If the bosses win this struggle, the damage would go beyond whatever fines and sanctions the judges decide to impose on the union. What the PMA wants is to put an end to the ILWU tradition of international workers solidarity actions, from boycotting the Nedlloyd Kimberley (a ship from apartheid South Africa) in 1984 and refusing to ship arms to the U.S.-backed dictatorship during the civil war in El Salvador, to solidarity action with Liverpool (England) dock workers and last October’s protest led by Local 10 against impunity for the cop who killed Oscar Grant (see article on opposite page).

What is urgently needed is class-struggle action by labor



ILWU Local 10 banner at April 4 rally in San Francisco.

and oppressed groups facing the onslaught of capitalist austerity and union-busting attacks. But labor officialdom instead sought to feed off the widespread sentiment of solidarity with embattled Wisconsin workers and use it to support the capitalist Democrats. With its flag-waving “We Are One” sloganeering, the labor tops built support for the ruling party of racist American imperialism, at a time when U.S. bombers are raining death on the people of Libya and Afghanistan.

At the San Francisco April 4 rally, a representative of the police “union” spoke along with Democratic Oakland mayor Jean Quan, a “progressive” elected with enthusiastic support from Local 10 and other unions, who told the assembled workers that they would have to accept layoffs. When workers greeted this representative of the bosses with some well-deserved booing, they were chastised by their “leaders” from the podium! We say, break with the Democrats, cops out of the unions! Meanwhile, Local 10, which was the only union to actually stop work on that day, was not allowed a speaker at the rally.

In Wisconsin and around the country, the class-collaborationist labor bureaucracy is blocking militant union action and must be politically fought and driven out by a class-struggle opposition. At the same time, it is necessary to defend ILWU Local 10 against the attacks by the employers and their state. Along with unions around the country, militants in the Professional Staff Congress representing faculty and staff at the City University of New York pushed for a statement of solidarity from the PSC. But fine words are not enough, what’s needed is a powerful working-class mobilization to defeat the ruling-class war on poor and working people, “at home” and abroad. ■

## Mobilize Workers' Power Against Racist Cop Terror

# ILWU Shuts Ports Demanding Justice for Oscar Grant

*An abbreviated version of this article appeared in Revolution No. 8 (April 2011), the newspaper of the Internationalist Clubs at the City University of New York.*

At two o'clock in the morning of New Year's Day, 2009, Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) cop Johannes Mehserle stood over Oscar Grant and shot him in the back with a Sig Sauer P226 semi-automatic pistol, killing the 22-year-old black man. It was a cold-blooded execution: another officer had pinned Grant face-down on the platform so he couldn't move. It was the kind of cop murder, particularly of African American and Latino young men, that happens over and over in racist capitalist America. But Oscar Grant wasn't killed out of sight in a dark alley – instead this

police crime took place in front of dozens of witnesses on the BART train being held in the Fruitvale station in Oakland, California. Some of them videoed it with their cellphones.

Following the cues of police spokesmen, local newspapers and television painted the picture of police intervening in a chaotic "brawl" (*San Francisco Chronicle* headline, 2 January 2009), claiming Grant died "in scuffle with police" (*Monterey County Herald* headline, 2 January). The BART police and the district attorney announced an "investigation" of the gun's "discharge," after cops on the scene tried unsuccessfully to confiscate the cell phones and cameras of potential witnesses. Of course, the five police officers involved weren't talking: they were preparing a cover-up. But it didn't work. Eyewitness videos showing the police murder caught fire on the internet, and by the next day it was international news. Oscar Grant was murdered because he was black: the racist police figure they have a license to kill with impunity, and they do.

Working class and black Oakland was infuriated. Grant was a union meat cutter at a local supermarket, and father of a four-year-old daughter. While many had celebrated the new year full of hopes in the election of Barack Obama, yet another police slaying of an unarmed black man showed that some



**ILWU at 23 October 2010 Oakland rally demanding justice for Oscar Grant, murdered by the cops.**

things were not about to change. Obama was put in office to be the head enforcer of U.S. capitalism, which ever since it was founded on the bedrock of slavery has enforced the oppression of the black population. Despite the passage of civil rights laws (many of them increasingly undermined), black people are still forcibly segregated at the bottom of this color-caste system. Particularly since the end of formal Jim Crow segregation, brutal police repression backed by the "justice" system is the prime instrument of this régime.

Police routinely kill innocent black people with impunity across the country. But last October 23, Local 10 of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) shut down the port of Oakland for the day shift and led a rally of 600 outside Oakland City Hall to protest the insulting "involuntary manslaughter" verdict against Mehserle (by a jury in Los Angeles on which there was not one black person) and to demand "justice for Oscar Grant." This was a first for the U.S. labor movement, at least in recent years. The protest was endorsed by the San Francisco Labor Council and numerous labor and community organizations. It received messages of solidarity from maritime workers in France and from Mumia Abu-Jamal on Pennsylvania's death row.

Relatives of the slain Oscar Grant, union officials and victims of other incidents of police brutality spoke to the crowd. The Longshore union carried its large banner with the slogan “An injury to one is an injury to all.” Up to a hundred mainly black longshoremen came out, as well as Oakland teachers. ILWU representatives at the protest recalled the police killing of two striking dock workers during a 1934 port strike in San Francisco – Bloody Thursday, July 5, that sparked the San Francisco General Strike. Earlier, last July 19, ILWU members and supporters of Oscar Grant outnumbered a pro-police “Free Mehserle” demonstration in the white suburb of Walnut Creek.

A number of left groups were prominent in building the action, and in pushing the slogan “Jail Killer Cops,” one of the main demands of the demonstration. This call shows illusions about the nature of the state, which backs its professional strikebreakers and racist killers in uniform to the hilt. Still, the fact that a major labor union organized a protest and stopped work against the murderous action of the racist cops and courts is extremely significant. While mainly symbolic, the ILWU action points toward a real mobilization of workers’ power in militant class struggle against the brutal enforcers of capitalist “law and order.”

On 5 November 2010, killer cop Mehserle was sentenced to two years in prison. As Mumia Abu-Jamal commented, with sentence reductions and good behavior he could end up doing less time for the *murder* of a black man than one black man, the famous rapper Dwayne “Lil’ Wayne” Carter Jr., spent in prison for simply possessing a gun (see “Free Lil’ Wayne!” in *Revolution* No. 7, April 2010). That night, hundreds angrily protested the verdict in the streets of Oakland, as they have repeatedly since New Year’s Day 2009. The police mobilized military force, arresting 152. Two days later the cops gunned down another unarmed black man, Derrick Jones, in East Oakland.

The stark fact is that to achieve justice for Oscar Grant and his supporters, the racist system that murdered him must be brought down through workers revolution.

### “Jail Killer Cops”?

So what is to be done here and now? In the aftermath of the police killing of Oscar Grant, just about every “reform” measure to alter the functioning of the cops was proposed. BART management set up a committee to “investigate” its cops. A Coalition Against Police Execution (CAPE) was set up by activists from NGOs (foundation-funded “non-governmental organizations”) which called for a “citizen review board to monitor excessive force” and supervise “diversity training” for the cops. Ever since the Black Panther Party set up its patrols to keep tabs on the local police in the late 1960s, Oakland has had (liberal) “Copwatch” groups. Yet racist cop terror continues unabated.

All these measures, “community policing,” hiring more black cops, putting in black police chiefs, black mayors and governors, and even a black president – have not stopped the police in the least from demeaning, harassing, beating and killing African Americans from coast to coast. They only serve to prettify a system that will *never* provide the equal employment, education, housing or health care that have so long been promised and denied to the black population. The oppression of blacks and racism are

built into U.S. capitalism, poisonous weapons vital to keeping the working class divided. And the ruling class will least of all permit any real reforms to the police, who along with the courts and armed forces are the core of the capitalist state.

The current left-wing version of these deceptive “reforms” is the call to “jail killer cops.” This demand is particularly pushed by the Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL) and its International ANSWER coalition, but in protests over the killing of Oscar Grant it has been raised by virtually the entire Bay Area social-democratic left (International Socialist Organization, Socialist Viewpoint, Socialist Organizer, etc.). At the same time, Jack Heyman, a militant union activist in ILWU Local 10, who was one of the main organizers of the October 23 union action, wrote that “killer cops belong in jail” while correctly observing “that’s not how justice in capitalist America works” (*Counterpunch*, 18 October 2010). But in supporting the call to jail killer cops, he and others suggest that it *could* work that way.

Here it is important to distinguish between the clamor of the mass of the oppressed black, Latino and immigrant population who live in inner city ghettos and barrios that are occupied by the police, and the demands of leftist labor militants and would-be socialists. At a BART hearing on 7 January 2009, many Oakland residents demanded that the cop Mehserle be jailed. This racist murderer should certainly be behind bars for the rest of his life. But when the killer was finally arrested (and then released on bail) two weeks after he shot Oscar Grant, it was hardly the victory many (such as the By Any Means Necessary group) claimed. Mehserle is currently in jail<sup>1</sup>, yet the whitewashing verdict (claiming it was an accident) and minimum sentence were a slap in the face to the black population and all victims of cop terror.

An oppressed population demanding that a particular cop guilty of a heinous crime be jailed is desperately seeking some measure of justice. Communists patiently explain that they are justified in their desire, but that even in the rare case where the rulers decide to take a minimum measure in order to head off militant protest, this won’t put a dent in the system of racist repression by the capitalist courts and cops. However, when leftists call to “jail killer cops” in general, they are propagating the bourgeois democratic myth that under pressure, the state can be made to serve the interests of the masses. This flatly contradicts the crucial Marxist understanding of the state as the instrument of the ruling class to enforce its class interests against the exploited and oppressed, and feeds dangerous illusions.

That, of course, is exactly what the reformist left does all the time, with its calls for books not bombs, jobs not war, tax the rich, etc., as if it is all a question of mass pressure to change government “priorities” rather than a fight against capitalist/imperialist class rule. Usually this is done through “popular front” style coalitions and “movements,” in which leftists tie the masses to a segment of the ruling class, usually via some token Democrats. If none were on the platform on October 23, that has something to do with the fact that black liberal Democratic Oakland mayor Ron Dellums (a longtime member of Democratic Socialists of America) was the *boss*

<sup>1</sup> Mehserle was released on June 13.

of the cops who were smashing heads and arresting protesters while he was appealing for “calm.”

The San Francisco Bay Area is the capital of the popular front in the United States, in large measure in order to rein in a militant labor movement centered on the ILWU. One supposedly revolutionary organization active in the area, the Spartacist League (SL), responded to calls to jail killer cops with a curt, “In your dreams” (*Workers Vanguard*, 16 January 2009). While it was correct to take the PSL/ANSWER to task for spreading illusions, with its sneering reply the SL does not distinguish them from the masses demanding justice. By one-sidedly arguing that any jailing of an individual cop would just be to “refurbish illusions” in the supposed neutrality of the state (*WV*, 24 April 2009), it even suggests that this would actually be a bad thing. And it hardly mobilized for protests against the cop killers of Oscar Grant.

The SL made those remarks in a polemical exchange with the misnamed International Bolshevik Tendency (BT), which tags along with the “jail killer cops” reformists while admitting that this won’t stop police brutality and terror. The BT recently (*1917*, March 2011) published a strange piece against the Internationalist Group for what it “can only assume” the IG position on the ILWU action to be, while claiming that the demo called to “jail the killer cop” rather than to “jail killer cops” in general (Mehserle was already in jail). The SL recalled a BT article on “Cops, Crime & Capitalism” (October 1992) which grotesquely went on and on about the problem of urban “crime” in black neighborhoods – the codeword of racist support for the police – in the aftermath of the 1992 protests against the acquittal of the racist Los Angeles cops who beat Rodney King. The BT also called then for “workers defense guards” to “prevent bloody spontaneous explosions, like riots.” How helpful, to the bourgeoisie.

One small group in the Bay Area, the Revolutionary Workers Group (RWG, associated with the former *Étincelle* minority of *Lutte Ouvrière* in France) used the occasion of a racist murder of a black worker by the capitalist state ... to equate the “The Violence of This Society” with that of cop death squads in uniform! In the sanctimonious tone of a preacher’s homily (or a capitalist politician’s stump speech), the RWG’s October 2010 leaflet on Oscar Grant and the ILWU action declared, “The violence in many of our communities is epidemic,” citing black and Latino areas in the East Bay. This kind of “evenhanded” liberal hand-wringing is used to justify ever-increasing police repression of the black community.

While noting the importance of a union-centered protest against racist police brutality, the Internationalist Group did not endorse the October 23 rally because of disagreement with the “jail killer cops” slogan. Mobilizing union power to protest police brutality is a step in the right direction, but only a step. It sharply poses the need to break with the Democrats and all capitalist parties and to forge a workers party to lead the struggle for socialist revolution. One organization on the Bay Area left that has actively protested the cop murder of Oscar Grant, Advance the Struggle (A.S.), underlined the importance of mobilizing labor in endorsing the October rally and calling on other unions to join the work stoppage. It argued that Meh-

serle was only arrested and convicted because the ruling class was scared of awakening oppressed working people, adding:

“If we successfully organize a general political strike for the 23rd, there is no doubt that he would receive the maximum sentence. Hell they might even give him the death penalty if we really shake things up. But the real justice will come when we come out of this struggle with a new level of militancy, consciousness and organization that can liberate us from the cycle of exploitation, incarceration, and imperialization.”

Although the ILWU work stoppage and protest action were a long way from a general political strike, even the latter would by no means guarantee that the ruling class would give their killer cop more than a rap on the knuckles. A.S. asks: “Now what fear can we strike into the ruling class? What justice can we really get? What will it take to put an end once and for all to racist police murder?” Their answer is: “When we not only make an example out of a racist killer cop, but build a movement that can eliminate the structures that create racist killer cops, that is when we will have justice for Oscar Grant.” Actually, no – it will take a workers revolution, not just a movement, it won’t just have to eliminate structures but to smash the capitalist state, and it will require the leadership of a communist vanguard party.

Advance the Struggle has been denounced by Socialist Organizer as “ultraleft” and by the International Socialist Organization as “squarely in the ‘adventurist’ camp” for insisting on the need for an actual strike against attacks on public education in March 2010 (while the ISO tried to obfuscate the issue). But although it is certainly for more militant action, the A.S.’s arguments here appeal to the same conception as their reformist detractors, that if they stir up enough trouble and build a strong enough movement, it can induce the police to stop being murderous guardians of the bourgeois order, or at least to tone down or clean up their act.

It is doubtless true that the Mehserle conviction was conceded at all because the ruling class saw it as the easiest way out. But granting concessions is not the only thing the capitalist state does when it gets scared: it is just as capable of stepping up repression. A rare concession here, sure, balanced by a massacre or a lynching there... but it won’t stop until the whole system is brought down by revolution. A real general strike would advance the struggle to the point where the question of class power is posed. The task is not to frighten the ruling class, but to *defeat* and *overthrow* them.

Unions should mobilize their power in the struggle against black oppression and police brutality, as well as in defense of immigrants’ rights. Labor/black/Latino defense guards can respond to particular threats. Faced with heinous crimes like the cop murder of Oscar Grant, what’s urgently needed is for labor organizations to mobilize immediately, in the streets and with political strike action, in defense of the outraged black population against the rampaging police.

The key is to forge a revolutionary workers party that champions the cause of black freedom through socialist revolution, the central political question in American society. For Oscar Grant and all the victims of the class war, we fight for a socialist future without cops and without racism. The way to get there is workers revolution. ■

# “Secure Communities” = War on Immigrant Communities Drive Out ICE – Migra Go to Hell!

Full Citizenship Rights for All Immigrants! Democrats, Republicans – Enemies of Immigrants! Build a Revolutionary Workers Party!

By Cristina and Fred

The following article is re-printed from *Revolution No. 8*, April 2011.

In May 2010, then-governor David Paterson quietly issued a “memorandum of understanding” signing New York state on to the Department of Homeland Security’s “Secure Communities Program.” This followed the signing of Arizona’s infamous Senate Bill 1070, a racial profiling law that allows police to arrest suspected “illegal” immigrants based on their appearance. Anyone who “looks Mexican” could be subject to arrest. The Arizona law was widely protested in New York and across the country. Now a similar law has been passed by Georgia.

The CUNY Internationalist Clubs and the Internationalist Group joined protests against the racist Arizona law. But while many on the left pointed the finger of blame exclusively at right-wing reactionaries, we warned that a far greater danger to undocumented immigrants is the federal government, which under Democrat Barack Obama is deporting far more people every year than Republican Bush ever did, and jails many more immigrants than notorious Arizona sheriff Joseph Arpaio.

“Secure Communities,” a nationwide program passed under the Bush administration and expanded under Obama, is part of the ongoing racist attack on immigrants. It establishes a system that allows ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement of the Department of Homeland Security) and other federal agencies to work with local police to arrest and deport more undocumented immigrants. This has already led to an escalation of unjust incarcerations and deportations of immigrants living in the United States.

Under this program, fingerprints and other biometric data of every person arrested by local or state police in cooperating districts are sent electronically to federal immigration authorities and get automatically run through an ICE database for comparison. Over 750 jurisdictions in 35 states have joined the program. This poses a huge threat to immigrant communities



Internationalist photo

Part of the Internationalist contingent at New York City May Day 2011 march.

and will inevitable break up families and separate children and parents.

While the feds whip up fears of “criminal aliens,” in fact those charged with violent crimes are *much less* likely to be deported than those accused of minor infractions. An October 2010 study of “New York City Enforcement of Immigration Detainers” by Justice Strategies found that only one-third of non-citizens charged with A-1 felonies (the most serious) were put on hold by the ICE, over half of those held on class A misdemeanors were detained, for an average of two and one-half months longer than those not held for immigration reasons.

Moreover, ICE’s own records reveal that nearly 79% of individuals deported nationally from October 2008 through June 2010 had no criminal record or were arrested for minor offenses like traffic violations (*New York Times*, 18 August 2010).

When news came out last fall about Paterson signing on to the “Secure Communities” there was a wave of concern among immigrants in New York City. The *Queens Chronicle* (14 October 2010) reported that at a packed meeting at PS 19 in Corona, “immigrants from Latin America and South Asia told stories about friends who were arrested and deported, at times torn away from their U.S.-born children.”

There was even greater alarm when it was reported that ICE agents were already present in the infamous Rikers Island jail, despite NYC Executive Order 41 supposedly prohibiting cooperation with federal immigrant authorities. Through the Criminal Alien Program (CAP), agents were permitted to check the immigration status of inmates. According to the *New York Times* (10 November 2010), “Officers comb through lists of foreign-born inmates, then question, detain and deport about 3,200 of them a year.” This particularly affects youth in New York City, as every year more than 13,000 young men age 18 and under pass through Rikers, the largest prison in the country.

Democratic politicians and liberal immigration reform groups held rallies at City Hall to protest the ominous Secure Communities program. At the City Council hearings, Democrats Christine Quinn, Jumaane Williams and Ydanis Rodríguez peppered the NYC corrections commissioner with questions about what ICE was doing at Rikers. But in order not to make trouble for Andrew Cuomo, the Democratic candidate for New York governor in 2010, who as NY attorney general was in charge of enforcing the anti-immigrant measure, they waited until *after* his election.

Even then, they introduced a *non-binding* resolution in the City Council that simply asks the governor to withdraw from the Secure Communities program. This resolution, which would have no effect even if it were passed, was promptly consigned by the Democratic Party-dominated Council to a committee where it has sat ever since.

The message is clear: in order to fight anti-immigrant programs like “Secure Communities,” racist practices like the NYPD “stop and frisk” program and ICE police snatching immigrant youth from Rikers, *it is necessary to mobilize independently of and against both parties of capital.*

Many voters in 2008 put their faith in the Democratic Party in hopes that Obama would enact immigration reform that would help undocumented immigrants gain citizenship. The CUNY Internationalist Clubs warned that no such legislation would be passed, not even the so-called DREAM Act, which wanted to use immigrant youth as cannon fodder for U.S. imperialist wars. In fact, deportations have soared. In the fiscal year 2010, ICE reported 392,862 deportations, an increase of over 23,000 deportations compared with 2008.

Prisons are a big money maker in the U.S. (for the capitalists who own them), so are deportation centers! According to the Detention Watch Network, in 2009 the U.S. government detained approximately 380,000 people in immigration custody in about 350 facilities at an annual cost of more than \$1.7 billion. Writing in the *Daily News* (16 May 2008), columnist Albor Ruiz notes that there have been more deaths in ICE custody than at the Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo torture camps combined. *We demand that these concentration camps be shut down and that all the detainees be freed, now!*

For the Democrats and Republicans the Secure Communities Program is a bipartisan decision and their xenophobic vision of immigration “reform.” Democrats and Republicans are capitalist parties and partners in the persecution of immi-

grants. We say break with the Democrats – Build a revolutionary workers party! Down with “Secure Communities” and the racist war on immigrant workers. Full citizenship rights for all immigrants!

As we protest in our schools and on the streets, students must look to join with the working class – including more than 15 million undocumented immigrants – to *defeat the U.S. imperialist terror-war abroad and its racist repression, union busting and trampling on democratic rights “at home,”* on the road to international socialist revolution. ■

*Subsequent to the publication of this article, in June Governor Andrew Cuomo “suspended” New York state cooperation with federal immigration officials under the “Secure Communities” program. However, authorities were quick to point out that this would do nothing to alter New York City’s decades-old policy of allowing la migra to have agents at the Rikers Island jail where they comb through the records and interrogate any inmate they think might be an “illegal alien.” As a result, thousands of inmates are deported from Rikers every year, including high school students held there even though charges were subsequently dropped. A bill in the NYC City Council would limit ICE “detainers” to certain cases (e.g., those with prior convictions or outstanding deportation orders). That is not enough. We demand that the migra cops get the hell out of New York.*

## ICE Kidnaps Immigrant Youth from Rikers

While ICE gets free rein inside the jail, GED programs for youth inmates are being cut back. Last year the Island Academy and Horizon were shut down, to be replaced by a program with a much smaller enrollment and a sharply reduced teaching staff.

In Rikers, 90% of the inmates are black or Latino. Only 3% are charged with crimes of violence. Many are there because of drug laws which make a crime out of someone’s private activity which is no business of the government. And quite a few are picked up in the NYPD’s massive “stop and frisk” campaign under which youth are stopped on the street, harassed and humiliated by police for no reason other than their race – out of over half a million stops annually, 80% were black or Latino.

At a City Council hearing on November 10, city officials said that ICE agents were stationed at Rikers Island for the last 20 years, but they could cite no legal basis for the presence of *la migra*. And according to Manhattan Borough president Scott Stringer, under CAP the New York Police Department has for at least the last decade routinely “given the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency the names of all arrestees,” no matter what they charged with or if they were convicted (*New York Times*, 4 April).

## Public Sector Unions...

*continued from page 88*

numerous state legislatures. On March 30, the Republican governor of Ohio signed a law even more draconian than Wisconsin's canceling collective bargaining rights for public employees and allowing employers to impose contracts. But it's not just Republicans. Late last month, the Democrat-controlled Massachusetts House approved a bill eliminating collective bargaining on health and welfare issues. In New York, the legislature enacted a budget from Democratic governor Andrew Cuomo that includes \$271 million in cuts for New York City schools and \$107 million for the City University of New York. Last week, Mayor Michael Bloomberg unveiled his budget for New York City including \$300 million in cuts from the schools budget and the elimination of more than 6,000 teachers' jobs, 4,500 of them through layoffs. It would also take another \$51 million from childcare for low-income workers. Naturally, neither state nor city budgets cut a dime from the police.

On May 12 a demonstration has been called by a "Strong Economy for All Coalition" sponsored by NYC and state unions (including UFT, PSC, SEIU, 1199, 32BJ, CWA, Municipal Labor Committee, Central Labor Council, NYSUT, NY state AFL-CIO) as well as several "community" groups including Make the Road and Communities for Change (formerly ACORN). Billed as "the day Wall Street stood still," there will be a march from City Hall to the financial district (after the markets close) and a multi-form "teach-in" by various unions in the world center of high finance. But while the protest is fueled by anger over the mayor's announced layoffs and city and state budgets that take from the poor and give to the rich, the *political* message from the organizers is to support the Democratic Party – the same Democrats, from President Barack Obama and Governor Cuomo on down, who are spearheading the *bipartisan* capitalist attack on public workers' unions!

A recent column in the *Daily News*, reproduced on the Coalition web site, states that the May 12 rallies aren't only about building opposition to Bloomberg's budget, "but also about setting the stage for the next mayoral election." It quotes David Birdsell of Baruch College saying, "There hasn't been a really kind of strong, Democratic unionist argument for the way the city should run." But what is the "Democratic unionist argument"? In the 2009 mayoral election, some unions supported the Democratic candidate, NYC comptroller Bill Thompson, while others (such as the United Federation of Teachers under Mike Mulgrew) sat it out. This pro-Bloomberg neutrality didn't get teachers a contract. But Democrat Thompson was hardly a "friend of labor," coming out *against* a 4 percent raise for teachers. In the 2010 election for governor, the UFT didn't

back Democrat Cuomo because of his attacks on teachers unions. Instead, it shoveled COPE dollars to the Working Families Party ... which endorsed Andrew Cuomo for governor.

For starters, the Coalition accepts the fiction that there is a budget gap that has to be covered. This is simply a lie, and should be exposed as such (see "What Fiscal Crisis?" in *Revolution* No. 8, April 2011). New York City is actually running a *surplus* of over \$3 billion and growing, far more than the threatened cuts. Why? Because while working people are still facing massive unemployment (over 17 percent when you count the jobless workers who are simply eliminated from the workforce in government statistics), the Wall Street bankers are making money hand over fist, and with the huge bonuses being paid out, even the low tax rate on the rich is bringing in hundreds of millions. To cover the fictitious budget gap, the Coalition is calling to "make the big banks and millionaires pay" by reinstating the so-called "millionaire's tax" that Cuomo and the Democrats in Albany just eliminated. This "tax the rich" ploy pushed by liberal Democrats, labor bureaucrats and reformist leftists *won't do a damn thing to stop the attacks on the unions.*

Taxing the rich is fine by us, but even if Bloomberg had billions more in city coffers, he would still be pushing for thousands of teacher layoffs. The billionaire mayor is out to eliminate seniority and teacher tenure, which would spell the end of the union. He wants to build support for this union-busting plan by raising the spectre of mass firings of the younger teachers he has brought in who are touted in the big business press as better than experienced, union-conscious teachers. Besides, they're cheaper: a principal can hire two first-year teachers for the price of one 20-year veteran. All three major NYC dailies are on the warpath, running articles bashing teacher seniority. But it is everywhere the case that teachers when they start out are far less effective educators than after they have a few years experience; most of the new hires are gone after five years; and without seniority job protection, administrators can ride



**Bureaucrats and Democrats, ticket for defeat. UFT/AFT presidents Michael Mulgrew and Randi Weingarten march with Democrats Robert Jackson, John Liu, Al Sharpton and Charles Barron.**



roughshod over teachers' rights. Which is exactly what Bloomberg and the other corporate "education reformers" want. Class-struggle militants must *defend all teachers jobs*, demanding the union use its power to ensure there are *no layoffs*.

The teacher layoffs are union-busting, pure and simple. It is an attack by capital on labor. But the labor bureaucrats refuse to fight it head-on. They accept the lie pushed by the bourgeois press that unions are unpopular with "the public." Yet the experience of Wisconsin showed that when labor demonstrated day after day, "disrupting" business as usual for weeks on end to stand up to Governor Walker's anti-labor plan – in short, the minute the unions started acting as unions instead of one more lobby group, their popularity shot up, with over two-thirds of respondents in opinion polls defending the unions. The labor chiefs avoid talking about the working class, because again they buy into the bourgeois lie that the "American people" are afraid of anything that smacks of class politics. They keep saying it's about the middle class, but the large majority of working people aren't middle class by any measure, they're barely making ends meet and they want a leadership that defends them and their interests.

The bottom line is that the *labor misleaders support the capitalist system, and today the entire capitalist class is waging war on workers*. The union tops will give up anything to get a "seat at the table," but even in the best of times the working people they supposedly represent only get a few of the crumbs. Today, as has been the case for the last several decades, workers are being told to give back what few gains they have made. Because these labor "statesmen" are beholden to the system of production for profit, they will even preside over the destruction of the organizations they sit atop, as occurred with many American unions in the 1980s and '90s. In Europe, with its long tradition of class struggle and (reformist) workers parties, union leaders at least know how to fake it when forced by pressure from the bosses and resistance from the ranks, which is what they did last year. Most U.S. union bureaucrats, on the other hand, have never seen a serious class battle in their lives and wouldn't have a clue about how to wage one even if they wanted to, which they don't. *The labor tops fear class struggle like the plague just as European social democrats in World War I feared revolution.*

## Against Mass Layoffs: Labor and Students, Shut NYC Down!



On June 12, as city unions protested against NYC mayor Bloomberg's threat to lay off thousands of teachers, Class Struggle Education Workers (above, in UFT march across Brooklyn Bridge) were the only ones calling to prepare for strike action.

### Lesson of Wisconsin: Break with the Democrats!

The current war on the workers is part of a global counter-revolutionary offensive by capital that has been going on for the last three and a half decades. With profit rates falling sharply in the mid-1970s and labor militancy on the rise (1969 GE strike, 1970 postal strike, auto walkouts in the early '70s, followed by coal wildcats in the middle of the decade), as soon as the U.S. rulers were able to get rid of the albatross of the Vietnam War, even at the cost of accepting defeat, they unleashed an offensive against the unions. Although many date this to 1981 with the victory of Ronald Reagan, thus making the Republicans the enemy, in fact it began with the bank-engineered 1974-76 "fiscal crisis" in New York, and it was Democratic NYC mayor Abe Beame and Democratic New York governor Hugh Carey who got sellout labor leaders like Victor Gotbaum to sacrifice union gains. Then, as now, the labor bureaucrats' ties to the Democrats and loyalty to the capitalist system got them to sacrifice their members' interests.

The attack on labor escalated under Democrat Jimmy Carter, who drew up the plan to bust the PATCO air controllers that Reagan eventually implemented. It was an international offensive of capital: just as the government and bosses were destroying U.S. unions (Greyhound, Hormel and others), Margaret Thatcher smashed the strike by British coal miners

in 1984-85. At the same time, the imperialists were stepping up the pressure on the Soviet Union, attacking it on its southern flank (Afghanistan), escalating the arms race (Star Wars) to force the USSR to spend more on the military, and tightening the economic screws on East European countries that had been borrowing from Western banks. In the end, the Stalinist misrulers of the Soviet Union and East European simply handed over the bureaucratically degenerated and deformed workers states to the capitalists, so committed were they to seeking an impossible “peaceful coexistence” with imperialism that they were incapable of waging class struggle.

In the course of the counterrevolution that brought down the Soviet bloc, President George Bush I proclaimed a “New World Order.” U.S. rulers attacked Iraq in 1991, Yugoslavia in 1995 and again in 1999. The French ruling class went after public workers pensions in 1995, but had to temporarily back off when they were met with mass labor resistance. Since the turn of the new century there has been almost continual imperialist war (Afghanistan, Iraq, now Libya) and since the economic crisis burst in 2008, a renewed assault on the unions. The capitalist politicians claim they have to lay off workers, force employees to pay for health care and rip up pension plans because they have to pay more than \$3 trillion for the bank bailout, and almost \$1 trillion a year for their wars. The lesson is that all attempts to combat this onslaught with “normal” business unionism (backroom deals, lobbying the Democrats, etc.) are doomed to fail. The global capitalist offensive can only be thrown back by undertaking revolutionary class struggle.

And that is something the present labor leadership *cannot* deliver. For proof, all you have to do is look at the example of Wisconsin. Repeated mass mobilizations of more than 100,000, occupying the state capital, sickouts by teachers that shut down schools in Madison, Milwaukee and elsewhere. Everything was building toward a frontal collision between an energized union movement and a widely despised right-wing governor. By February 21, the Madison-area South Central Federation of Labor voted a motion to “endorse a general strike, possibly for the day Walker signs his ‘budget repair bill’.” There hasn’t been a general strike in the United States, even on a local level, since 1946, so this was important. But what happened? D-Day came and went, but nobody walked out. The SCFL and Wisconsin AFL-CIO were so worried that things could “get out of hand” – that is, they so feared their own membership – that instead they diverted the protests into the electoral effort to recall Republican state senators (and elect Democrats in their place).

The Democrats, meanwhile, had promised to vote for all the givebacks that the Republican governor was demanding, amounting to a wage cut of 8-10 percent for most state workers. They wanted to keep the shell of the unions, so that labor could continue to fund the Democratic Party. And the union leadership was so desperate to keep their dues base, real estate and other perks of class collaboration that they were willing to give up everything as long as they had a seat at the bargaining table. So here we had this huge labor mobilization in Wisconsin, tens of thousands chanting “What’s disgust-



Internationalist photo

**Class Struggle Education Workers, Internationalist Group and CUNY Internationalist Clubs in March 24 rally at NYC City Hall.**

ing? Union busting!” mass popular support, and what is the result? Litigation in the capitalist courts, which amounts to delaying tactics, and voting for capitalist politics. *As long as labor is trapped in the shell game of bourgeois politics it will suffer defeat after defeat. That is why the pro-capitalist union bureaucrats who chain workers to the capitalist Democrats must be ousted and a new leadership forged on the program of hard class struggle.*

That means fighting the capitalist offensive not on a narrow “labor” basis, but as part of a broader *class* fight. The workers movement must become the champion of all the oppressed. The demonstrations in Madison were noticeably white, even more so than the state’s population. And that is because there was no mass participation from Milwaukee, where there is a large African American, Latino and immigrant population, and where Scott Walker was county executive for eight years before becoming governor. Black parents were up in arms by the cuts to BadgerCare, a state-level health insurance program for children and low-income families that Walker’s budget would slash, but this was not highlighted in the protests. A class-struggle leadership would call for free medical care for all, which would also counterpose it to Democratic president

Obama's health care "reform" that is a bonanza for the insurance companies.

Another key issue was the role of the police. Many union leaders, and even some leftists (notably Socialist Alternative), highlighted the "support" for the labor protests from some sectors of the police. But the police are not part of the workers movement, they are the armed fist of the ruling class and a key pillar (along with the courts and military) of the capitalist state. The cops are no friends of oppressed racial and ethnic groups, whose neighborhoods they patrol like occupied territories. Praising the police could only create distrust among black youth and others. This is also true of the Latino population, immigrants in particular. Dane County sheriff David Mahoney got a lot of praise for pulling his deputies off of duty at the Capitol declaring they would not be "palace guards" for the governor. But for the past several years, Mahoney has been notorious for handing over immigrants picked up for traffic violations to the ICE immigration police. So as one longtime left-wing activist from the Madison area put it, they wouldn't be "palace guards," instead they would act as border guards!

Some immigrant groups did participate in the protests, but to get a really massive turnout of thousands, there should have been demands that the police stop handing over residents to *la migra*. It should also have been highlighted that the Republican majority in the state legislature planned to introduce an Arizona-style anti-immigrant law that would empower police to stop anyone they suspected of being an "illegal immigrant," i.e., anyone who "looks Mexican." There is a long history of immigrant labor struggles in the Wisconsin area going back to the 1960s, and to defend immigrants would have received tremendous support. In fact, tens of thousands of Latinos, blacks and white workers did come out for the May Day march in Milwaukee which addressed immigrant rights. Immigrants in Wisconsin are particularly sensitive to the threats to their very presence because this is the home state of Republican Rep. Jim Sensenbrenner who was the main sponsor of the notorious HR 4437 bill calling for deportations of millions of undocumented workers, and which sparked the massive immigrant worker protests and walkouts on May Day 2006.

A class-struggle leadership would ***demand that the government and corporations "open the books" to inspection by workers committees***, so that the public can see for itself the fraud of the supposed deficits that are being used to justify attacks on the unions. In New York they would also see how the capitalist legislators of both parties have systematically failed to budget money for pension funds, leading to the looming crisis over workers' retirement. Instead of lobbying Democrats over limiting cutbacks and givebacks, it would demand a ***massive program of public works, at full union wages and under union control***. Against mass unemployment, a fighting union leadership would call for a ***shorter workweek, with no loss of pay***. It would prepare to defend its picket lines with ***labor defense groups***. It would call for ***expropriation of the banks by a workers government***. And it would call for ***strike action by all public sector workers to prevent layoffs***.

Faced with Bloomberg's present threats to fire thousands of teachers, we say: ***labor and students, shut NYC down with a citywide strike!***

In New York state, that would mean ***smashing the Taylor Law***, which makes strikes by government employees illegal, orders huge fines against unions and strikers, as well as jailing of union leaders. This vicious anti-labor law can be shredded, but it will take united action by the most powerful unions to do it. And that means ***breaking with the Democrats and ousting the pro-capitalist bureaucrats***. The union tops actually support the Taylor Law, because they want the dues check-off and other arrangements of institutionalized class collaboration which the law affords in exchange for banning strikes, which they have no intention of waging in any case. To fight this requires serious preparation and mobilizing the most powerful unions. When Transport Workers Union Local 100 struck the NYC subways in 2005, it was 100 percent effective in shutting down the subways and buses. However, it didn't shut down the suburban rail lines (LIRR, Metro-North and PATH): even though unions there said they would respect picket lines, no pickets were dispatched. Above all, the TWU was left to fight alone by the rest of NYC labor.

Finally, and centrally, it is necessary to build a revolutionary workers party, to fight for a workers government. Not a parliamentary party like the Labour Party in Britain, whose main role is to keep the militant union ranks in check, but a party that can actually lead the class struggle, in the plants and on the streets, and where engaging in campaigns in the bourgeois elections, uses those as a platform for revolutionary agitation. Such a party would fight for an internationalist program, including full citizenship rights for all immigrants, and for workers to take power internationally. This is not pie in the sky, bye and bye, but something that many of the most conscious working people readily understand. In Wisconsin, while the right-wing Republican governor imitated Reagan's busting of PATCO, the labor demonstrators occupying Capitol Square in Madison saw themselves as following the example of the Egyptian protesters in Tahrir (Liberation) Square in Cairo. If the Egyptians can topple the dictator Hosni Mubarak, they argued, we can bring down the dictator Scott Walker.

But while the Egyptian workers did oust the dictator Mubarak, the whole apparatus of the military-based dictatorship is intact. And while working people demonstrated in the hundreds of thousands in Wisconsin, Walker is still pushing through his union-busting program. "Resistance" is not enough, it is necessary to fight for workers revolution, from Egypt to Wisconsin. Certainly in New York City, the very heart of international finance capital, it should be evident that so long as real power remains in the hands of the Wall Street banks and stock markets, the working people who make the economy run will always be under attack. Understanding the need to mobilize our power against all wings of the ruling class is key to defeating the capitalist war on the workers and opening the way to a workers government that will expropriate the expropriators, and make possible a socialist society of abundance for all. ■

## You Can't Fight the Union-Busters Without Fighting Capitalism

# Lessons of Chicago CORE

**CTU "Reformers" Bow to Democrats, Accept Layoffs, Strike Limits – Build a Class-Struggle Opposition!**

Around the world, from Greece to the United States, the masters of capital are waging a war to make us pay for the global financial crisis, touched off by Wall Street, that has led to a new Depression. In the U.S., teachers and teachers unions are the targets of choice for ruling-class politicians who are using the crisis to ram through "reforms" that would wipe out decades of labor gains and gut social programs of the threadbare "safety net." This winter/spring the focus was on Wisconsin governor Scott Walker's law eliminating bargaining rights for public employees, mainly teachers, and similar laws pushed by right-wing Republicans in Ohio and other states. But in Democratic-controlled states, governors and legislatures hammered away at seniority and teacher tenure. Now Medicare and Social Security are at risk as Democrats and Republicans push rival plans to "balance the budget" on the backs of the workers, and the drumbeat for corporate "education reform" is coming straight from the Obama White House.

On July 30, a national "Save Our Schools March" has been called in Washington by a host of liberal education luminaries, both national teachers unions and a slew of local and state affiliates, as well as a handful of Democratic Congressional representatives. The march is also being built by many leftist and dissident opposition groups in and around the education milieu. The Guiding Principles are: no to resegregation of the schools, no to high-stakes testing, against tying teacher pay to student test performance, equitable funding of public education, etc., but no mention of who's behind the war on public education. Many of these groups were last together when they were out there pumping for Democrat Barack Obama for president in the 2008 election. Once in office he spearheaded the attacks on teachers, hailing the firing of the entire staff of the Central Falls, Rhode Island schools. And now that he's up for reelection? Both the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and National Education Association (NEA) have endorsed Obama for president in 2012, as well as supporting test-linked teacher evaluations.

No thanks. Defenders of free, equal, integrated public education for all need to mobilize independent of and against all the champions of the "free enterprise system" who would reserve quality education for the elite and consign the rest to limited "skills training." Those who really seek to defend the children who are being victimized by the present dysfunctional system – and would be even more so if the privatizers succeed in their wrecking operation – must fight to defeat Obama's "Race to the Bank" just as much as George Bush II's "No Vendor Left Behind."

Education workers need a real opposition to the education "reform" agenda being pushed by a holy alliance embracing the likes of the Business Roundtable and National Conference on Education and the Economy, billionaires like Bill Gates and Eli Broad, right-wing Tea Party Republicans and liberal Democrats. Although they may have their differences on other issues, we are facing a united *ruling class offensive against public education*, part of a broader capitalist war on the workers, and it can only be defeated by fighting on a program of sharp *class struggle*. All the "moderate" efforts to "shift the conversation" by lobbying and other forms of pressure politics (including demonstrating in the streets) are doomed to failure. Not convinced? Just look at the results so far. Who's winning the war on public education? It ain't us or our kids.

### Chicago CORE: Quintessential Union "Reform" Caucus

The onslaught against public education has been going on for a while now, and the misleaders of the teacher unions have sought to be "part of the conversation" from the outset. Since this has meant selling out teachers at every turn, it has spawned a multitude of union opposition groups of varying degrees of militancy. In a number of cities where the incumbent leaderships were notably weak and ineffective, these oppositions have won office. This includes Progressive Educators for Action (PEAC) in United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA), which took office in 2005, and the Caucus of Rank and File Educators (CORE), which took over the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) last year, as well as victorious union reform slates in Milwaukee, Minneapolis and Washington, D.C. New York City, where the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) is run by the bureaucratic steamroller of the "Unity Caucus," has a constellation of activist groups including the Independent Community of Educators (ICE), Teachers for a Just Contract (TJC), Grassroots Education Movement (GEM), along with a number of parent/community groups with similar reformist aims. Class Struggle Education Workers (CSEW), which is politically supported by the Internationalist Group, has a very different program.

Although it was formed only a couple of years ago, Chicago CORE is in several ways the model of such union reform caucuses. It was formed in opposition to the notoriously corrupt regime of Marilyn Stewart, who collaborated with Arne Duncan, even as the "CEO" of the Chicago Public Schools (who went on to become education czar for his basketball buddy Obama), closed scores of schools in black and Latino neighborhoods to make way for semi-privatized "charter schools" while firing some 6,000 teachers. CORE won a run-off election in June 2010 with 60 percent of the vote, running on a vague program that came down to "throw the bums out." The CORE victory was loudly cheered by the reformist left and education activists around the country. *Labor Notes* (21 June



**CORE candidates for leadership of Chicago Teachers Union, June 2010. From left: Michael Brunson, Karen Lewis (president), Jesse Sharkey (vice-president), Kristine Mayle.**

2010) hailed the victory by the “feisty” caucus. *Rethinking Schools* (Fall 2010) saw a “huge victory” by CORE, which “led a growing grassroots movement against the school closings, charter schools, and ‘turnarounds’.” Most effusive of all, the newspaper of the Internationalist Socialist Organization (ISO), *Socialist Worker* (14 June 2010) proclaimed “A New Day in the Chicago Teachers Union,” adding that Duncan “no doubt got a case of heartburn upon hearing the election results.”

Karen Lewis, the new CTU president elected on the CORE slate, talked a tough line. In an address to the union membership, she announced to the school board, “You’ve met your match. We will no longer be played. We will no longer be the scapegoats....” She declared that the “so-called school reform” is “not an education plan” but “a business plan” cooked up by “corporate America [which] realized they didn’t have a big enough share of the money in K-through-12 education, about \$380 billion.” Lewis said that the new leadership should be judged not on their words, but on their actions. So let’s do just that.

As the CSEW noted at the time:

“CORE, ICE, TJC and similar groupings in other union locals all have pretty much the same program. They basically oppose the leadership’s sellouts and want to go back to the trade-union reformism of the past. CORE’s election platform consisted of things like ‘get members on board with a common strategy,’ ‘mobilize the union against budget cuts,’ ‘develop a legal strategy,’ ‘develop a political strategy,’ and similar meaningless phrases. They’re going up against Arne Duncan’s hand-picked successor, in Barack Obama’s hometown. Is the CTU membership ready for the blast they are going to get accusing them of selfishly sacrificing kids’ education and other hogwash straight from the White House?”

—“Obama, Democrats Spearhead Teacher-Bashing, Union-Busting Corporate Education “Reform” (16 June 2010), reprinted in *The Internationalist* No. 31, Summer 2010

The CSEW insisted that, “in the present imperialist epoch, the reformist or even ‘social’ trade unionism of the past is impossible. There is a bipartisan capitalist consensus to go after unions, rip up their gains and eliminate workers’ minimal job protections in the name of competitiveness.”

This fundamental fact of trade-unionism in these times of decaying capitalism was almost immediately driven home by the bosses of the Chicago Public Schools. Less than two weeks after the CTU election and before Lewis took office, the School Board voted to lay off up to 2,000 teachers on the basis of their principals’ rating, regardless of tenure and seniority, while raising class sizes to 35 students. Teachers who had been selected as coaches and mentors to rookie teachers were laid off. Even the big business press recognized that this cynical ploy “could save money by making it easier for CPS to dump higher-paid veteran teachers instead of less expensive probationary teachers and to avoid the cost of dismissal

proceedings” (*Chicago Sun-Times*, 24 June 2010). The battle was joined. And what did the CORE leadership of the “new CTU” do? Did they mobilize the membership for mass pickets jamming the Loop, to shut down summer school, to occupy CPS headquarters? No, they went to federal court, the bosses’ courts, asking for an injunction on procedural grounds, just as Stewart did in the past (and the UFT in New York does every time union action is called for).

Class-struggle unionists are not opposed to using every legal means to thwart the attacks on the public schools, the students, the teachers and staff. But we underline that the courts are not neutral, they are part of the bourgeois state just as the police and legislature are, and they exist in order to enforce the interests of the exploiters against the exploited. We hold that to defend the workers’ interests it’s necessary to mobilize the ranks of labor at the head of all the oppressed independently of and against the courts, the cops and all the capitalist parties and politicians. Reformist leftists, in contrast, pretend that if enough pressure is brought to bear in the streets, or otherwise, the courts can be induced to come down on the side of “the people.” So what happened in this case? For starters, the CTU suit said nothing about the over 500 “provisional” teachers who were dumped, and did not challenge the CPS’s “right” to lay off the 749 tenured teachers, only the way it was done. In October, a sympathetic judge ruled against the CPS and ordered that these teachers be put on a recall list and given priority when hiring resumes. Lewis hailed the “stunning court victory” – yet almost 1,300 teachers were still out of a job.

Then this past April came the fight over SB7 – the state Senate bill which sharply curtailed collective bargaining and seniority rights for Illinois teachers, while allowing the school board to increase teaching hours with no increase in pay. Coming in the wake of the Walker bill next door in Wisconsin, state NEA and AFT officials worked with Democratic legislators to craft a law that would gut everything but the right of the teachers unions to bargain (and collect dues, which are then used to support the Democrats in elections). Under the terms of the law, unions would have to get 75% in a strike authoriza-

tion vote, and could only walk out after 60 days of mandatory “bargaining,” allowing a “reasonable period” for mediation, another 14 days to consider the mediator’s report, up to 75 days for more “fact-finding,” 30 days following the fact-finder’s report, and giving ten days notice of intent to strike – forced to wait more than two-thirds of the school year before being able to legally strike! Union officials complained that these restrictions were unnecessary since the CTU hadn’t struck in 23 years, but on April 12, *CTU president Lewis endorsed this vicious anti-union legislation.*

### Social Democrats, Union Bureaucrats and Capitalist Democrats

Lewis’s *betrayal* of the union ranks caused some embarrassment for the International Socialist Organization, since CTU vice president Joel Sharkey, elected on the CORE slate, is a long-time prominent ISOer. For several days, the ISO kept mum about this dirty deal behind the backs of the membership. But on April 21, the ISO’s main writer on labor and the Democrats, Lee Sustar, posted an article on the *Socialist Worker* web site, “A crisis for teachers union reformers?” saying that Lewis had “shocked” CORE members by her stab in the back. Sustar said that Lewis “acted alone,” and complained that she “withheld that information from the CTU House of Delegates,” which she addressed by Skype on April 13. He claimed “other CTU elected officers and members” only learned of the deal after the meeting. What Sustar didn’t tell readers is that the ISO is up to its neck in the CTU bureaucracy, whose paid staff includes a number of ISOers, and that the ISO’s CTU vice president Sharkey learned of Lewis’s sellout on the night of April 12, as he admitted to a CORE meeting two weeks later (according to a May 21 leaflet by the League for the Revolutionary Party). So Sustar’s April 21 article was a *cover-up* for the ISO’s own betrayal.

On the day that article appeared, Marjorie Stamberg of Class Struggle Education Workers posted a commentary, “Big ‘Surprise’ – Chicago Teachers Union Reform Leader Sells Out,” on several New York education activist blogs. A week later (April 27), an ISO supporter responded by posting a defense of CORE and arguing, “No one should have to apologize for supporting these genuine reform movements – warts, growing pains and all.” “We should see union leadership as merely a tool, not an end-all be-all” he intoned, denying that the Sustar article was “somehow hiding” the ISO’s role in CORE. But there was no mention that Lewis’s No. 2 in the CTU leadership, Sharkey, is a prominent ISOer, or of Sharkey’s April 25 admission before many witnesses that he knew of Lewis’ betrayal almost immediately and said nothing of it to union delegates at a meeting the next day. The writer piously hoped that the CTU ranks would reject Lewis’s “unilateral agreement,” and on May 4 the CTU House of Delegates did reject SB7. Yet this was just covering CORE’s ass, since the CTU tops did nothing to mobilize against the bill which was ultimately signed into law by Democratic governor Pat Quinn, *whom the CTU had endorsed* (along with other Democrats) in the November 2010 elections. Maybe that political support

for capitalist politicians is one of the “warts” the reformists want us to overlook.

As the ISO wrote on April 21, “breaking teachers’ unions is at the top of the capitalist agenda in the U.S.” Quite right. That agenda is being carried out by liberal Democrats as well as Tea Party Republicans, and the role of the ISO has been to chain the ranks to the pro-Democratic labor bureaucracy, which calls on the services of these reformist pseudo-socialists to cover its left flank. And the ranks have been protesting, as the labor revolt in Wisconsin showed, with repeated demonstrations of over 100,000 people and calls for a general strike. At the Left Forum held in New York City on March 20, an ISO activist speaking on “The Wisconsin Uprising and Beyond” told the audience that the reason a general strike didn’t materialize when Governor Walker passed his union-busting bill was that the union bureaucrats were afraid that it would cause problems for the Democrats. What the speaker didn’t say was that at the moment when a general strike was posed and could have broken out, *the ISO editorially opposed it.* *Socialist Worker* (11 March) wrote that, “calling for a general strike – no matter how enthusiastically it is received – is unlikely to get very far.” Certainly not if the ISO has anything to do with it!

The most important lesson to be drawn from the experience of Chicago CORE is that these sellouts are not a matter of individual betrayals but are built into the nature of union “reform” caucuses organized on the basis of “grassroots democracy” and labor militancy. Such groups cannot withstand a concerted onslaught by the bourgeois state and the bosses’ parties because they are in fact beholden to capitalism. This past July 6, Chicago CORE hosted a “National Conference to Fight Back for Education” (organized together with PEAC from Los Angeles) that brought together education activists from around the country and Puerto Rico. An account by *Labor Notes* (8 July) noted, “Even where reformers have won power, they haven’t been able to beat back all the attacks,” citing the cancellation of teachers’ scheduled pay raises by Chicago’s new mayor, Obama’s former chief aide Rahm Emanuel, and his schools chief Jean-Claude Brizard (a graduate of Eli Broad’s principals’ academy) along with the SB7 debacle (while not mentioning CTU chief Lewis’s role). It noted also that the UTLA agreed to a contract with four furlough days, while Los Angeles schools are laying off 2,000 staff members.

CORE isn’t the first union reform group to win office in Chicago. In 2001, Deborah Lynch, currently of PACT (Pro-Active Chicago Teachers and School Employees), won the CTU presidency, only to be voted out in 2004 after she negotiated concessionary contracts. This past March, PEAC’s Julie Washington lost her bid for the UTLA presidency after negotiating concessions on health care, salaries and furloughs, in order to avoid layoffs. The fact is that such reformers do no better (and sometimes worse) in defending the union membership than the old guard pie cards they replace, because they all accept the capitalist framework, as do the reformist leftists who support them and staff their apparatus.

“Progressive” Democrats and social democrats will not and *cannot* defeat the bosses, because they are tied to the ruling class by an umbilical cord that feeds them. This has been proven over and over since the 1970s, as one “rank-and-file” caucus after another has won office, and then promptly sold out. Arnold Miller’s Mineworkers for Democracy, Ed Sadowski’s Steelworkers Fightback, Ron Carey of Teamsters for a Democratic Union, Roger Toussaint of New Directions in the TWU, and now Karen Lewis of Chicago CORE: it’s the same story. The only difference with ICE/TJC/GEM/NYCORE in New York is their slim chance of beating the “Unity” juggernaut.

As the CSEW June 2010 leaflet noted:

“Reform caucuses that only fight for union militancy, democracy and the like, are doomed to fail once they come into office because they are incapable of battling an implacable foe. That’s what happened with New Directions in TWU Local 100 and the sellout of the 2005 New York City transit strike, and it’s been repeated over and over in the Teamsters, Steelworkers, Mine Workers and elsewhere. The bureaucracy must be defeated and driven out of the unions, replaced by a leadership with a program of hard class struggle if labor is to succeed against the concerted capitalist offensive.”

Lest we be accused of unfairly singling out the International Socialist Organization, it should be said that the ISO’s “strategy” is no different than that of a host of other reformist “socialist” and even “communist” outfits. Solidarity, the Freedom Road Socialist Organization (FRSO) and the Progressive Labor Party (PLP) also have supporters among the officers and staff of the Chicago Teachers Union and hailed the CORE victory. The LRP has criticized CORE, comparing it to the New Directions caucus which sold out NYC transit workers, but fails to mention that LRP supporters in the TWU gave critical support to New Directions when it ran for and won office in 2000. The World Socialist Web Site also criticizes the ISO and CORE, but usually omits that it opposes all trade unions, even praising scabbing and joining with the bosses in calling on workers to vote against unions in representation elections.

### “Labor Lieutenants of the Capitalist Class”

Over a century ago, American Socialist Daniel De Leon coined the apt description of the union bureaucrats as the “labor lieutenants of the capitalist class.” This petty-bourgeois layer sits atop workers organizations (the unions) while disciplining them on behalf of the ruling class. They generally won office and entrenched themselves by winning some concessions or reforms from the bosses. But over the last three decades, the sellout labor bureaucracy has presided over the destruction of their own organizations, so firm is their loyalty to capitalism. Although this trend began in the 1970s under Democrat Jimmy Carter, the signal event was the stab in the back of the 1981 PATCO air controllers strike against Republican Reagan. While unions have been decimated in much of the private sector, now public employees unions (teachers first and foremost) are under the gun. And the role of union reform caucuses is to defuse the struggle to bust the

union-busters, gaining positions for themselves only to sell out once in office.

On the eve of the second imperialist world war, Leon Trotsky, the founder of the Fourth International and co-leader together with V.I. Lenin of the October 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, wrote a prescient commentary, “Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay” (August 1940), explaining the growing together of the trade unions and the capitalist state. Summing up, he wrote:

“In other words, the trade unions in the present epoch cannot simply be the organs of democracy as they were in the epoch of free capitalism and they cannot any longer remain politically neutral, that is, limit themselves to serving the daily needs of the working class.... They can no longer be reformist, because the objective conditions leave no room for any serious and lasting reforms. The trade unions of our time can either serve as secondary instruments of imperialist capitalism for the subordination and disciplining of the workers and for obstructing the revolution, or, on the contrary, the trade unions can become the instruments of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat.”

When union demonstrators and labor supporters in Wisconsin chanted over and over, “This is what democracy looks like,” they failed to grasp this basic fact. More to the point were the few signs declaring, “This is what class war looks like.” And to lead the working people, and all the oppressed, the Internationalist Group and League for the Fourth International seek to build a vanguard workers party that fights for a workers government and socialist revolution throughout the world. Join us in the struggle. ■

### League for the Fourth International

LFI, Box 3321, Church Street Station, New York, NY 10008, U.S.A. E-mail: internationalistgroup@msn.com

#### Internationalist Group/U.S.

**Internationalist Group**, Box 3321, Church Street Station, New York, NY 10008, U.S.A.  
Tel. (212) 460-0983 Fax: (212) 614-8711  
E-mail: internationalistgroup@msn.com

#### Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil

**Brazil:** write to Caixa Postal 084027, CEP 27251-740, Volta Redonda, RJ, Brazil

**Rio de Janeiro:** write to Caixa Postal 3982, CEP 20001-974, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil  
E-mail: lqb1996@yahoo.com.br

#### LIVI/Deutschland

**Germany:** write to Postfach 74 06 41, 22096 Hamburg, Germany

#### Grupo Internacionalista/México

**Mexico:** write to Apdo. Postal 70-379, Admón. de Correos No. 70, CP 04511, México, D.F., Mexico  
E-mail: grupointernacionalista@yahoo.com.mx

**Break from the Democrats and All Capitalist Parties!  
Unchain Labor’s Power – Build a Revolutionary Workers Party!**

# What It Will Take to Defeat the War on Public Workers Unions

MAY 14 – Across the United States and around the world, labor is under frontal attack by capital. In the worst economic crisis since the last Great Depression, the bankers and capitalists who set it off are trying to make their victims pay. Public sector workers in particular are facing the most serious assault in decades, in many places threatening the very existence of their unions. In Greece, government employees including teachers and railway workers have seen their wages cut by 30 percent, accompanied by mass firings. In France, the age of eligibility for retirement has been sharply raised. In Britain, drastic budget cuts threaten huge layoffs and gutting public services like the national health service. At the same time, workers have fought back with more than a dozen general strikes in Greece over the last year and a half, millions of French workers taking to the streets every week last fall, and most recently a quarter million marching against cuts in London on March 26. But that hasn’t stopped, or even slowed the bosses’ war on the workers.

In the United States, the attack on public employees in Wisconsin is the most notorious: teachers and most government workers have had their right to collective bargaining canceled. Other provisions of the anti-labor law that Governor Scott Walker rammed through the state legislature in March threaten to decimate public sector unions altogether. This marks a decisive moment for unions across the country, equivalent to Ronald Reagan’s destruction of the PATCO air



Yuri Keegstra

**Some of 150,000 demonstrators outside Wisconsin state capitol in Madison, February 26, protesting law that canceled collective bargaining rights for public sector workers.**

traffic controllers union in 1981. Walker’s attack set off a wave of massive labor protests lasting for weeks, including an unprecedented occupation of the state capitol by workers and students. Nothing like this had been seen in the U.S. in many years. Suddenly, this Upper Midwest state became the unlikely epicenter of world class struggle. Everywhere in the U.S. workers intensely followed the struggle in Wisconsin, caravans drove to Madison to join the protests. Declarations of support came from unions from as far away as Egypt and Iraq.

Meanwhile, anti-labor bills have been steaming through  
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