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Re-Create
the Fourth International

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'96 Election: Racist, Anti-Worker Trap



U.S. election will decide which imperialist will lead the global campaign of war, racism and austerity.

by Walter Daum

At the start of the year, the ruling class's election ritual was a farcical clown show, aimed at winning back an audience that is more and more fed up with Washington and therefore votes less and less. Now, with the rise of right-wing populist Pat Buchanan, bourgeois politicians are falling over themselves to stop him from igniting explosions they wish to stave off.

Only yesterday, Newt Gingrich and Rush Limbaugh were the stock horror figures for Democratic advocates. Now they join the liberals and the entire bourgeois establishment in pointing with horror at Buchanan. The dominant capitalists are afraid that his rhetoric will prematurely heat up trade war,

heighten racial polarization and stir up working-class anger.

The AFL-CIO misleaders are also quaking. Having channeled working-class political activity into dead-end electoralism for so long, they now see the labor-aristocratic section of their base marching to a drummer different from the establishment Democrats they favor. The rapid growth of Buchan- anism is a massive rebuke to a bureaucracy that has squashed so many attempts to create a working-class alternative.

Buchanan's triumphs will not make him president. His program is impossible for mainstream big business to accept. If the U.S. retreats behind tariff walls and abandons its leadership of world imperialism, trade war will quickly esca- late into a shooting war. And, as we noted in our last issue:

Millions of whites, working-class and petty-bourgeois, are angry at the erosion of their living standards. Many are now attracted to the populist Republican right, whose leaders denounce big government, corruption and moral decay — their racism only slightly hidden. The bourgeoisie certainly wants the benefits of a racial backlash, but it fears the right will rashly provoke a race war by going too far too fast.

We also noted that they fear the alternative: that inad- vertyntly the right would spark a working-class fightback against the whole bourgeois offensive that is driving masses to despair.

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COFI and LRP Report

WHAT IS COFI?

Since the founding of the League for the Revolutionary Party (U.S.) in 1976, our primary goal has been the re-creation of the Fourth International.

The Communist Organization for the Fourth International was formed in 1993 to fight for the international revolutionary program initially developed by the LRP. The fraternal organization was composed of three sections: the LRP, the Workers Revolution Group in Australia and the FRP (League for the Revolutionary Party) in Sweden. Fraternal relations had existed between the LRP and WRG for six years. With the adherence of the FRP, COFI was formed.

In PR 48, we reported on the political accomplishments of the COFI Conference last winter. COFI's defining political resolution was reprinted in that issue.

But as we also reported, COFI suffered major organizational setbacks. The leadership of the Australian group resigned before the conference. At the conference itself, differences between the FRP and the others came to a head and proved that there was no longer any basis for fraternal links — and that, in fact, the initial formation had been premature.

This left only the LRP (U.S.) and a small COFI representation in Australia, not yet capable of continuing a separate press. We also retain individual sympathizers at large and promising contacts abroad.

As a fraternal grouping of national organizations, COFI no longer exists. However, the LRP has inherited rich lessons from the international experience gained through COFI — notably from the general strike movement in Victoria,

Australia in 1992. (See "Australian Crisis: Labor and Left on Trial" in PR 43.) The advances embodied in COFI's documents could not have been achieved in one country alone.

Further, we believe that the name Communist Organization for the Fourth International is a precise expression of what we stand for; nor do we have any interest in abandoning COFI's program and goals. For these reasons we maintain the identification, LRP (COFI) on our masthead. (Previously it had said LRP, U.S. Section of COFI.) This column and magazine will continue to carry reports on both our international and national activities.

We are confident that, especially with the acceleration of class struggle from South Africa to France, revolutionary interventions in international struggles will win the advancing layers of the working class to the banner of COFI and international socialist revolution.

*Workers' Socialist Revolution is the Only Solution!
Build the Revolutionary Party of the Working Class!
Re-create the Fourth International, World Party of Socialist
Revolution!*

CHICAGO LRP

The Chicago LRP has been intervening at a full range of meetings and events, showing our willingness to debate competing tendencies and to participate in united actions whenever possible. In September we joined in a protest against three cops who had beaten to death Jorge Guillén, a Honduran immigrant. We also attended a rally sponsored by the Spartacist League against U.S./U.N./NATO intervention in the Balkans.

We attended a number of discussions on the French strikes, including a Labor Militant forum (December 12) and a presentation by a United Electrical Workers rep returning from a visit to France (December 15). At the latter, during the discussion period, LRPers intervened to point out that the array of leftists in the audience seemed to be interested in general strikes in France but gave no support to the fight for the general strike in the U.S. We noted that Solidarity and the ISO had derided our calls for the general strike in reference to the "War Zone" battles in Decatur.

On November 11, Chicago comrades went to DePaul University to attend a supposed support meeting, promoted by the ISO, for the Detroit newspaper strikers. We were greeted at the door by ISO hacks backed up by campus cops. While we were allowed in, the ISO banned the Spartacist League from even entering the building! Despite our political hostility to the SL, we vociferously demanded that they be allowed in — and especially denounced the ISO's collusion with the campus police.

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Proletarian Revolution

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again will be forced to resist.

In February, the largest of the three main union federations, the CGT, announced another "week of action," but it got no support from the other large union federations. The result was much smaller demonstrations and no strikes. Still facing hostile public opinion, however, the government demanded new talks with the unions.

When the strike movement revives, it could usher in a new stage in the world class struggle. As the world bourgeoisie seeks to restore profitability by restoring depression-level living standards for the masses, resistance becomes inevitable. The French bourgeois paper *Le Monde* called the autumn strikes the "first revolt against globalization," overlooking the Zapatista peasant uprising of 1994 against NAFTA as well as strike struggles in China, Korea and other countries. But it was the first mass mobilization of the working class of an imperialist power in the current period, thereby posing a decisive threat to capital's offensive. And it was certainly not the last.

COMMUNIST WORK IN THE MASS STRUGGLE

Thus the strike movement advanced the cause of socialist revolution. In particular, it gave communists an unmatched opportunity to take major steps toward rebuilding the nucleus of the proletarian revolutionary party. We need to draw the lessons of what should have been done, and what must be done when the workers' explosion inevitably re-detonates.

The French workers' last great eruption was in 1968, when millions rose up against the bourgeois attacks that signalled the end of the postwar boom. That historic event sparked general strikes and mass revolts across the globe. The political earthquake showed that the working class was no longer in the pocket of the traditional reformist and nationalist petty-bourgeois dominated workers' parties (Socialists and Communists). Although the French Communist Party still retained enough strength to prevent the workers from destroying the bourgeois state, this was more due to the lack of a revolutionary alternative than to its own vestigial support.

The 1968 explosion was an implicit demand by the proletariat for a new revolutionary leadership, a party that would not just talk about socialism in the abstract while defending the bourgeois state in practice, but would show the way to actually attain state power. The far left emerged in 1968 far larger and far more energized. But it still failed the test put to it by the workers' uprising. The various groups chose either to tail the reformist working class-based parties, or to try to create new substitute parties with different names and a slightly more left veneer.

This fall, when the French workers rose up again against the resurgent bourgeois attack, the far left again proved itself a failure. It stayed within the compass of the same trade unionist and petty-bourgeois reformist politics that the workers were trying to free themselves from in practice.

AGITATION AND PROPAGANDA

We are not talking about any absurd dream of instant revolution. While a small nucleus of revolutionaries cannot directly move the entire working class, it can gain a hearing among workers with the most advanced political consciousness. Revolutionaries must be able to show this layer how to lead our fellow workers — how to overcome the trade union bureaucracy that is dedicated to holding back the struggle to what capitalism can afford. Providing such a clear direction

would prove the need to build the revolutionary party to the decisive advanced layer of rebellious workers.

Communists must neither water down their program for mass consumption — nor treat their full program as an ultimatum to workers who are fighting the capitalist attacks but are not yet ready to draw revolutionary conclusions. We must combine agitation, addressed to all working-class militants, with propaganda, aimed at the most advanced. The primary propaganda task of revolutionaries was to show advanced workers that the bourgeois attacks were inexorably driven by the decay of capitalism. Only the socialist revolution can put an end to the deepening exploitation and oppression.

The mass struggle makes possible the agitational use of transitional slogans, far-reaching demands that flow from the immediate concerns of the workers but point beyond what capitalism can afford to yield. Thus they form a bridge from the present consciousness of the masses to the revolutionary internationalist program.

From what we have seen, the groups in France that consider themselves Trotskyist carried out no such strategy. Some treated it in stagist fashion as a trade union and student protest action, not a potential struggle for power. Others remembered to talk about revolutionary goals but put forward no strategy to make the rhetoric concrete to the strikers, many of whom were developing to the point of seeing the need to challenge bourgeois power.

Indicative of this was the advance in popular slogans from "Withdraw the Juppé plan" to "Juppé resign" (although the unions did not officially take up this demand). There were reports of workers' assemblies calling for a general strike to force the withdrawal of Juppé's program. There were signs of growing solidarity with homeless and immigrants, along with efforts to spread the largely public-sector strike to the private sector, where immigrant workers are strong. Some workers were reported to want a "government of the strike." Reports in the bourgeois press noted an internationalist class consciousness among the workers. They knew that Reagan and Thatcher had smashed PATCO and the British miners and that they now faced a similar attack in the guise of reform.

With these considerations in mind, we propose slogans and tactics that communists could have addressed to the mass movement — as it developed by the middle of December, when its initial defensive character had begun to change. Obviously from a distance we cannot be certain about tactical moves or the precise wording of slogans. Our proposals aim to develop the revolutionary consciousness of the movement and especially of its most advanced layers, with the aim of building the revolutionary party, the re-created Fourth International, that the workers' struggle needs for success.

GENERAL STRIKE

The working class was debating throughout the struggle how to extend the strike movement. The CGT held a national congress in the first week of December, at which the "general strike" slogan was debated — and defeated in favor of "everywhere generalizing the strike." The same watery slogan was raised by Marc Blondel, leader of the other main labor federation involved in the strike, the FO. According to the account in the allegedly revolutionary *Lutte Ouvrière* paper (Dec. 29), the CGT's debate "probably did not have much to do with the interests of the workers." In reality, a general strike would not be in the interests of the pro-capitalist labor bureaucrats.

The “generalized” strike remained on the trade union level, at best extending to more workplaces a limited struggle for various reforms. Those who insisted on this slogan were in reality attempting to *block* the political generalization of the struggle. Their notion of spreading the strike was meant to avoid a clarion political-economic call to arms in favor of pseudo-practical bureaucratic technical preparation.

Moreover, the “generalized strikes” could not accomplish even this limited aim. The massive autumn movement was a medley of independent strikes. That gave it great spontaneous force, but it also made it possible for the movement to deflate rapidly as soon as the railworkers won major concessions and returned to work. That the December movement revealed many aspects of a general strike shows what a setback it was for the unions to refuse to advance the struggle by uniting the strikes in organized fashion.

A general strike brings to the fore not just economic demands but the whole capitalist assault on the working class and especially its most oppressed sections. When the union federations refused to take responsibility, the workers had all the more need to form strike committees and workers’ assemblies to create the base for putting forward an alternative centralized leadership that their mass action required.

At first a general strike would be fought for as the best defense against the bourgeois attacks. But it can also pose the question of which class rules society, since it draws the class line inevitably against the state and thereby lays the groundwork for workers to reach revolutionary conclusions. A political struggle for a general strike would bring closer the creation of a revolutionary proletarian party.

Revolutionary intervention could help advance an on-going general strike by fighting for “Jobs for All” and other transitional demands that can help move mass consciousness beyond capitalist confines: “A Full Public Works Program,” “A Sliding Scale of Hours” to divide the available work among all workers, and “Expropriate the Banks and Corporations” to pay for the jobs and services workers need. Since the bourgeoisie understands that a general strike threatens its power, the general strike needs “Workers’ Defense Guards” as a step towards mass working-class armed self-defense.

The National Front of Jean-Marie Le Pen, the racist nationalist party, gets more votes than either the CP or SP. Le Pen criticized the Juppé plan but also denounced the strikes, given the Front’s pro-capitalist and proto-fascist character. A fight for the general strike would have gone a long way toward exposing Le Pen’s anti-worker politics.

UNITED WORKERS’ ASSEMBLIES

Mass assemblies are necessary arenas for spreading the strikes, for giving all workers a say on strike strategy and for giving revolutionaries the opportunity to compete for leadership. There were general assemblies from the start in single workplaces and a few strike centers, but most did not unite workers from different sectors and with different employers. At first united assemblies would be motivated as weapons for the general strike; propagandistically, we would explain that such organizations can take over the leadership of the strike, become bases for workers’ dual power and even a workers’ government.

United assemblies would include the most oppressed sectors of the working class, the Arabs, Africans and immigrants who are underrepresented in the public-sector unions but would have maximal interest in leading the strike movement to the most far-reaching conclusions.

Communists have to be careful to combat the democratic illusion (sure to be promoted by centrists) that general assemblies are themselves sufficient for the workers’ victory (or even for workers’ power). This notion is a way to avoid challenging the union bureaucrats over the general strike issue and other political demands. It also dodges the question



French postal worker with anti-Juppé placard.

of who leads the mass assemblies; in the hands of reformist they will ultimately capitulate to capitalism and its needs. A fight for leadership in the mass struggle is indispensable for building the revolutionary party.

WORKERS’ GOVERNMENT

Even without a general strike, the question of state power was already implicit in the scale of the strike movement. A general strike would begin to show that the workers do not need the bourgeoisie to run society: that a workers’ state can do the job far better for the masses. Revolutionaries seek to find ways to make the issue explicit. One possibility would have been to extend the “Juppé resign!” demand to “Down with Juppé/Chirac!” This becomes not just a demand on President Chirac to appoint a new prime minister and cabinet, but a demand for an end to the bour-

geois state: the whole judicial, parliamentary and armed apparatus that keeps the capitalists on top.

As soon the government, and especially the state, is challenged, if revolutionaries are not in a position to lead the working class to seize state power, the question arises of what to call for in the place of the bourgeois officials. The Trotskyist Transitional Program, like the programs of the early, revolutionary, Communist International, explains the "workers' government" tactic. This slogan challenges the workers' present hesitant, treacherous leaders to break with the bourgeoisie and take power themselves. It can be addressed agitationaly to the mass of strikers, since it presents the idea that the workers should run society in accessible form. (See our analysis in *SV 8*.)

The workers' government slogan has to be presented in a concrete form any time it is used. In Germany in the early 1930's, for example, Trotsky urged the Communist Party to offer to support the Social Democrats if they formed a government based on the working class. It was a tactic both to expose the Social Democrats' capitulation to the bourgeoisie and to raise consciousness of the need for workers' power.

In the recent French situation, the obvious parliamentary alternative was the Socialist Party of the late president Mitterrand. But the SP has been responsible for a decade and a half of austerity attacks, and for that reason it had been overwhelmingly rejected at the polls in the spring of 1995. Moreover, the leaders of the SP and the union federation connected with it, the CFDT, were not endorsing the strikes but openly defending the bourgeois government. As for the working-class based Communist Party, it too had participated in Mitterrand's cabinets and, while it supported the strikes and its members were active in them, the CP had not taken leadership as a party.

The paper *Pouvoir Ouvrier* ("Workers Power," affiliated with the LRCI) posed the problem without giving an answer:

What to put in place of Chirac and Juppé? Replay the presidential election to put Jospin [Socialist] or Hue [CP] in office? Surely not. We have all paid too much for the SP-CP and SP governments. (December 1995.)

True. But that wasn't LRCI's thinking when they urged a voted for Jospin in the spring. And it is safe to say that this tendency, which always supports the reformists electorally, will do so again next time around.

Revolutionaries, however, do not ask workers to support governments that the workers know will make them pay for the bourgeois crisis. In the December strikes, we would have to have considered slogans like a "CGT-FO government." The point is to call in effect for a government of the strike and thereby make the power question concrete — to say "workers to power" in a way that is understandable by masses in motion who do not yet accept socialist revolution.

INTERNATIONALISM

The specter of "globalization" has been used in France as in other countries to pit workers of one country against all others: if you don't accept lower wages and benefits, we'll ship your jobs across the border or across the ocean where other workers will be happy to take up our offer. Everywhere the response of union officials has been nationalist, begging capitalist governments to protect "our" workers' jobs and others be damned. The ruling classes accept the last clause but not the first: they take the absence of class solidarity as a license to cheapen all jobs, at home and abroad.

In February, the head of the CGT's international depart-

ment gave a speech in New York; he made bureaucratic use of internationalist sentiment to defend the unions' nationalism, at the same time defending as its refusal to call for a general strike. We needed solidarity from other European unions, he said, before risking a general strike — leaving unexplained why a French general strike could not have appealed successfully for solidarity. The echoes that the French movement inspired without explicitly asking for them show that a clear call for an international general strike, given the universal depth of the bourgeois attack, would have won broad European support.

Even the bourgeoisie's economic experts at their annual winter meeting in Davos, Switzerland, urged Europe's ruling classes to "go slower" in their austerity attacks. The threat of the French strike movement was understood at least by them. As a German comrade wrote us:

The German bourgeoisie — or at least some of their propagandists in the press — seemed to fear the worst, an infection of the German working class by the French virus.

The German trade union bureaucracy held its members in a stranglehold, refusing to allow any concrete aid to the French strikers. An official general strike call by the French unions, with an appeal to European allies for support, would have gone a long way toward breaking this bureaucratic hold.

Our Europe-oriented slogans are not meant to direct attention away from U.S. (or Japanese) capital, nor from the World Bank and IMF dominated by U.S. capital. But the E.U. and the Maastricht treaty are widely seen as the instigators of the attacks on French workers. So the focus of our slogans would be on Europe. Also, given France's imperialist role, the movement must be urged to denounce, in particular, the NATO takeover of Bosnia and France's imperialist arrogance in reviving nuclear testing in the Pacific.

Given the role of international capital in fomenting the attacks on French workers as on all others, propaganda slogans like "Jobs for All throughout the European Union" at a common wage standard, "Stop the Attacks on Immigrants" and "A Europe-wide General Strike" should have been raised — not only in France but as propaganda by far left affiliates in the other E.U. nations. We note the absence of the traditional Trotskyist slogan for the "United Socialist States of Europe" in the press of all the groups we have seen. We have to ask: why hasn't this been raised?

Even if the centrists do not agree with our slogans, surely they must see that in today's "globalized economy" some discussion of international action slogans was vital. Revolutionaries cannot ignore the bourgeois strategy of pitting workers against each other, whether it be Europe versus Japan and/or America or vice versa. We call on revolutionary-minded workers in these organizations to confront their leaderships with such questions.

In country after country, the workers have shown their anger against the attacks. And everywhere today the articulated response is coming from petty-bourgeois political tendencies. Both right and left, they argue for a nationalist response: open or veiled hostility to the workers abroad or to immigrants or other "races" of workers at home who are forced to work for low wages. The so-called far left either echoes nationalism or remains abstract or silent.

POLICIES OF THE FAR LEFT

The larger pseudo-Trotskyist organizations made no effort to raise the question of state power, as far as we can see. Most important is Lutte Ouvrière, which had won a re-

markable 5 percent vote in the spring presidential election. LO played a purely trade unionist role, echoing the strike demands but not presenting a strategy for challenging the bourgeoisie's right to rule. LO talked of expropriating enterprises that make profits and still lay off workers, opening the books of corporations and the state, halting state subsidies to the bosses and using the money saved to create jobs that serve the people. But it uttered no hint that such measures would mean wiping out the bourgeois state and setting up a workers' government on the road to a revolutionary workers' state. LO's demands were hijacked from the Transitional Program and cleansed of their revolutionary meaning.

After its electoral success, LO had called for a new party "representing the political interests of the working class":

The working class needs to react politically. It needs a political party: not an electoral party, but a party which plays a part in social struggles, which initiates them, which knows how and wants to organize them, united them and make them victorious, consciously using workers' strikes and demonstrations as a political weapon. (*Class Struggle* (U.S.), Sept.-Oct. 1995.)

Such a party, according to LO, would have been based on the industrial militants of the CP but would surpass the CP's limited politics. But would it be a revolutionary party? LO does not even propose to fight for the new party to become revolutionary. In any case, during the autumn strikes LO dropped the call for its new mass party, without explanation, probably figuring that such a demand was too advanced for what it took to be a trade-unionist struggle. Thus in response to the workers' gigantic upsurge, LO moved to the right, tailing the footsteps of the CGT bureaucrats.

The Revolutionary Communist League (LCR), French section of the United Secretariat, called for a general strike *without* hinting at the power question, thereby failing to arm the workers. The Workers Party (PT), which does not call itself Trotskyist but has a large pseudo-Trotskyist faction led by Pierre Lambert, holds high offices within the FO federation; many FO officials had social security posts to lose if the Juppé plan went into effect. The PT takes credit for stimulating the refusal by FO and the CGT to accept the Juppé plan. (But then it must share blame for the FO's refusal to join the CGT's February actions.) In its case, too, we see no sign that it tried to advance the strike movement politically. All three groups played not even a superficially revolutionary role but simply tailed the bureaucracy.

In sum, the French workers demonstrated their class's social power and shook the ruling class at home and abroad. But the Chirac-Juppé government and the essence of its austerity plan remain in place. Thus the working class showed its revolutionary capacity but also its fundamental weakness: its reformist leadership that ties it to capitalism and subordinates it to the capitalists' interests.

The French workers' fight was a slap in the face of those who preach that the working class is dead, that workers cannot break through the class collaborationism of their unions and parties and that the idea of a general strike is absurd on its face. Themes that the League for the Revolutionary Party has been sounding for years to a background of titters on the left were shouted by a chorus of millions. In France the working class took a giant step forward toward reclaiming its revolutionary heritage. The crying need is for a revolutionary leadership to make that heritage conscious. ●

Haiti Occupation Switches Frontmen

by Eric Nacar

Réné Préval took over as president of Haiti in February. An agronomist and former bakery owner, he had been in exile during the military dictatorship that overthrew his political associate, ex-president Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Préval's first act on succeeding Aristide was to beseech the United Nations troops occupying Haiti to remain, especially the U.S. contingent. The latter are set to withdraw in the spring: troops from Canada, the U.S.'s imperialist junior partner, are to replace some of them.

Aristide has worked expertly to make the imperialists feel secure in reducing their military occupation. He has confused and demobilized the Haitian working people. Since the deal he concluded with the U.S. in Washington in 1993 and '94, the imperialists got everything they could reasonably hope for. Many Haitians now look to the U.S., Canadians, French, etc., — imperialist tormentors and robbers, the supporters of the Macoutes and military dictatorships — as their protectors. Many workers, peasants and slum-dwellers have actually disarmed in favor of the reorganized Haitian National Police.

It wasn't easy. The imperialists recognized that the Haitian bourgeoisie and the military and other thugs who work for them could not maintain "stability" in Haiti. To terrorize the masses was no longer sufficient: it was necessary to fool them as well. By the spring of 1995, the masses were growing increasingly restive.

The old Macoutes and FRAPH, a fascistic group set up

with the CIA's help that slaughtered thousands of workers and others suspected of radicalism (or who were just in the wrong place at the wrong time) were growing bolder again, assassinating worker and peasant leaders and even firing into mass demonstrations. U.S. Green Berets in Haiti describe how their commanders told them to protect FRAPH.

Aristide's government continually postponed land reform, while proceeding with plans imposed by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank for privatization of state industry — mainly cement, electric generation and flour milling. Aristide had surrounded himself with politicians from the more conservative, bourgeois wing of his Lavalas popular-front movement, particularly Mayor Evans Paul of Port-au-Prince and Prime Minister Smarck Michel.

The parliamentary elections of July and August gave Aristide a chance to shift a bit. As usual, he didn't come out openly for any candidate or party, but he distanced himself from the bourgeois wing of Lavalas and seemed to favor the more radical petty-bourgeois wing, Bo Tab La. He leaned increasingly on such figures as long-time supporter Chavannes Jean-Baptiste, a leader of a large peasant organization that pressures the government for land reform and supports farming co-operation. (Other more left-wing youth, peasant and slum-dwellers' associations urged an electoral boycott but provided no revolutionary working-class alternative.)

The elections were marked by mass abstentions (over 50 percent), extreme disorganization and, apparently, fraud by all sides. So chaotic were they that some districts had to poll

two or even three times, and the whole process took over a month. Despite misgivings by openly racist U.S. politicians like Senator Jesse Helms, the imperialists on the whole accepted the results: Bo Tab La won a plurality, not a majority, they are no threat anyway, and the masses seemed willing to give the new parliament a chance.

But they did not stay passive. The last phase of Aristide's administration featured massive but sporadic uprisings by poor peasants and urban slum-dwellers, and also mass strikes, especially by employees of industries facing privatization.

*Mural shows
Aristide and his
successor Préval.
Imperialism puts
on a new face.*



With characteristic skill and shrewdness, President Aristide demobilized the struggles against the imperialist occupiers, World Bank and International Monetary Fund. His government quickly promised a wage hike for state employees; they returned to work but have yet to see the raise.

The biggest threat yet to his rule broke out when gunmen shot two Bo Tab La parliamentary deputies and killed one of them, Aristide's cousin Jean Hubert Feuillé. The weapons used were traced to the home of ex-General Prosper Avril, a brutal former dictator. The workers, artisans and slum dwellers in Port-au-Prince and other major cities held mass demonstrations and set up barricades, stopping and searching cars for weapons. Crowds in the town of Les Cayes justifiably executed a Macoute and burned or ransacked Macoute homes and buildings. In a few towns, U.N. troops shot workers who were pursuing fleeing Macoutes and other reactionaries.

With consummate skill, Aristide derailed this potentially revolutionary struggle. He made a now-famous speech at Feuillé's funeral, much distorted by the U.S. media, saying, among other things,

I give to the Haitian police the order to carry out ... disarmament. ... Here is what I am asking of the Haitian people: ... Accompany the Haitian Police when they are going to enter the home of those who have big weapons, give them information. ... The Haitian people should go with the police into the homes of the wealthy looking for weapons, not just the homes of poor people.

The phrases in italics are those reported widely in the media, making Aristide seem to call for the mass disarmament of the rich. Nothing could be further from the truth: in

essence, he called on the masses to cease the mass disarming of the bourgeoisie that they had started, to rely on the police — the armed thugs of the bourgeoisie — and help them disarm poor people.

It worked, but Aristide had help. Forces to his left supported the disarmament. The National People's Assembly (ANP) is a radical middle-class party that disagrees with Aristide over the imperialist occupation, which they oppose. They left open the possibility that Aristide might break with imperialism; they said that the "disarmament campaign and de-Macoutization must continue all the way" and called for popular organizations to support it. Revolutionaries know that Aristide has always been a front man for capitalism and a deadly enemy of the workers and peasants, even in his earlier "liberation theology" phase.

Revolutionaries say that the workers and other toilers must defend themselves against the U.N. and the Haitian police, however "re-organized" and "democratic." For this they need to get more weapons, not give up the ones they have. They'll have to re-institute the mass house searches and roadblocks, organizing mass workers' guards to this end, and centralize them in a single Haitian Workers Militia.

Now Aristide has returned to private life, leaving behind nothing but unfinished business. The imperialists feel secure enough to reduce the UN presence, knowing that Aristide preserved the old Macoutes and coup supporters as a counterweight to the currently demobilized masses. After a miserly increase in the minimum wage early in his resumed term, Aristide managed to postpone all important economic decisions. He never disavowed privatization or the Haitian and imperialist-staffed commissions planning it.

At the end of November he presided over a "National Dialogue" conference of mostly middle-class radical "popular organizations." This conference among other things condemned privatization and called on Aristide to finish out the three years of his term stolen from him by the '91 coup. With his usual demagogy, he avoided criticizing the anti-privatization resolutions and said that if the people wanted him to finish out his term, "I will not turn my back on" them. Obviously he always planned to obey the U.S.'s orders to resign, which with typical racist arrogance had decided that a few hundred white bankers and capitalist politicians would decide who governs Haiti, not millions of Haitians. Everyone expects him to run Préval's government from behind the scenes, and to run for president again in five years.

But there will be no "normal" electoral process in Haiti. Immense revolutionary and counterrevolutionary risings will break out before five years. The Haitian masses, though confused and demobilized by Aristide, compromising leftists and other pro-capitalist misleaders, have not been defeated by any means. They still have the advantage over the Macoutes and other thugs.

Revolutionaries must create the proletarian party to take

their struggle to victory by advancing all struggles for the workers' and peasants' economic and physical self-defense. Land reform means the defense, arms in hand, of the peasants from cops and landlord thugs, and the seizure of the land by those who work it. Revolutionaries need to build the struggle against privatization and show the need to take it further, to the expropriation of all industry and great fortunes and their application to massive public works programs — in order to provide Haitians with jobs amenities taken for granted in the U.S.: electricity, running water, telephone

service, roads, schools, public transportation.

Given the crisis rampant throughout much of the Western hemisphere, a mass revolutionary uprising would spark working-class eruptions even beyond the Caribbean. In such a situation, the position of the imperialist troops, to say nothing of their indigenous lackeys, would become untenable. To start this process requires merciless criticism of and opposition to Préval, Aristide and all of the leaders of Bo Tab La and Lavalas, who disarm the masses politically and materially in service to their imperialist masters. ●

Capitalism Revives Human Bondage

by Ed Lazarow

Capitalism never fully replaced bondage with "free," i.e., wage labor. Indeed, in this century of imperialism, slave labor has returned to areas where free labor had prevailed.

The most notorious examples have been the German Nazi and Russian Stalinist concentration camps. Seemingly in contrast, the crisis-ridden capitalism of the past two decades attacks workers' gains under the banner of anti-statism, "democracy" and the free market. Imperialism has learned to hide its exploitation behind many disguises, but its inherently ruthless drive for profit is reaching every corner of the globe with a vengeance that cannot remain hidden.

One inevitable result of the "free market" attacks is the resurgence of bonded labor, ranging from peonage (debt servitude) to indenture (servitude for a fixed time) to outright chattel slavery (where people are bought and sold as property and forced to toil under the overseer's lash).

Examples exist right in the United States. "Illegal" immigrant workers especially are susceptible to enslavement. Last July, in a rare raid, federal police shut down a garment plant in Los Angeles where workers from Thailand were held prisoner. (People in the busy industrial strip surrounding the plant had seen food and fabric go in and clothing come out, but no workers.) Most of the captives were young women, forced to sew from sun-up to sun-down every day to pay off the owners for smuggling them into this country. Their enslavers counted their work at a few dollars a day; thus the "debts" would never be paid off. The imprisoned workers were finally released — to the tender mercies of the INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service).

Thousands of Asian, Latino and other workers are smuggled into the U.S. as peons every year, forced to live in rat-holes and slave away their debt to "snake-heads" (the Chinese term for smugglers of undocumented immigrants) in factories, restaurants and brothels. Alongside the resurgence of servitude is an explosion of equally illegal child labor, especially in the garment industry.

Years of capitalist crisis make this inevitable. The bosses must squeeze workers harder all the time. The capitalist state feels no great pressure any more from the misled, demobilized unions to enforce laws (and amendments to the U.S. Constitution!) against slavery, child labor and other abuses. The government's anti-regulatory, anti-immigrant policies guarantee the increasing enslavement of Asians and Latin Americans entering the U.S. illegally, fleeing imperialist-caused impoverishment in their home countries.

"FREE TRADE" = CHILD SERVITUDE

In colonial and neo-colonial countries, the expansion of servitude is much worse. In Egypt thousands of children, both

boys and girls, have been sold by their impoverished parents to work on jasmine plantations. Jasmine is best picked before the dawn: the exhausted children must toil in darkness for less than enough to eat. Adult overseers beat them with canes if they don't work fast enough. Egyptian economists attribute the recent growth in child servitude directly to the World Bank: in return for debt relief the Bank imposed deficit reduction, lower tariffs and export-expansion programs on the government. Forced to find a way to export more cheaply, jasmine growers turned to mass child servitude to comply.

In India, thousands of laborers and their families work as hereditary peons in quarries, despite laws and campaigns against this practice. The growth of carpet production for export in India and Pakistan, following the expansion of international "free trade," has led to a great increase in indentured child labor. Desperately poor parents sell their 6-year-old sons to rug manufacturers, who work them twelve or more hours a day and beat them if they don't perform adequately. When they reach their teens they are too big to fit behind the looms and their hands are too big to separate the threads, so the owners let them go — if they live that long.

A twelve-year-old Pakistani boy who escaped such a factory in 1994 publicly denounced the system — and was assassinated in 1995, almost certainly by the agents of the carpet manufacturers. No one has been arrested for this crime. This expansion of indenture and child labor follows *inevitably* from imperialism's crisis, which whips up international competition in order to superexploit labor everywhere.

SLAVEMASTERS RAVAGE AFRICA AGAIN

According to the British organization Anti-Slavery, on a world scale there are now more slaves than ever in the past. The worst servitude is found in Africa, the continent which Western imperialism has raped and pillaged most devastatingly. Here chattel slavery is again growing — a nightmare of human history, the most abhorrent form of oppression.

It was widely believed that chattel slavery had finally been eliminated over a hundred years ago. But it persisted in many corners of the world. Haile Selassie and his nobles in Ethiopia, staunch U.S. minions, held African slaves until well after World War II. The reactionary monarchy of Saudi Arabia, another U.S. accomplice, did not abolish slavery (primarily of Africans) until 1964.

Today, over 100,000 Black Africans remain chattel slaves in Mauritania. Slavery was officially "abolished" three times, once under French colonialist rule and twice under independence. Public slave markets have disappeared, but the Muslim Moorish landowners and merchants continue to privately buy and sell their Muslim slaves, Wolof-speakers of Black Senegalese ancestry. Moorish landowners and military offi-

cers have massacred and driven out free Blacks from southern Mauritania into neighboring Senegal and seized their land for themselves since the late '80's. The rulers of Mauritania are reliable junior partners of the U.S. and other Western imperialists, who of course have no problem with their racist massacres and slaveholding.

The most horrendous situation obtains in the Sudan. That country's rulers are Arabic-speaking Muslims from the North of the country. (Though they would be considered Black in Europe and North America, they do not regard themselves as such.) The residents of the southern half of the country are Black Africans, mostly Christians and followers of traditional religious practices; a few are Muslims.

For 25 years, Southerners have been fighting on and off for autonomy or independence from the mostly Arab North. In 1989 the current Northern government seized power in a military coup led by General Omar al-Bashir. Behind him stands the sinister Hassan al-Turabi, a Muslim scholar and leader of the virulently racist (anti-Southern Black) fundamentalist Islamic Front. This outfit has many features of fascism: in the interests of wealthy Northern businessmen and landowners, it seeks to crush all labor unions and left-wing parties and impose a sort of totalitarianism, the regimentation of the whole country under very strict Shari'a (Muslim law). The regime also mobilizes smaller merchants and farmers impoverished by the world economic crisis and the endless war to subdue the South.

The Bashir-Turabi regime has been waging a war of genocide against the South. The regular army uses heavy artillery and aerial bombardment against civilians, destruction of crops and livestock and interdiction of food-relief shipments; some estimate a million deaths. Millions more have had to flee — as the government intends, in order to break the cohesion of the various southern peoples and deprive the People's Liberation Army of its social base.

To the same end, as well as to gain labor to exploit, the government systematically enslaves untold numbers of Southerners. The regular army and Northern farmer militias are sent to fight in the South. Their pay is people: they sell or keep as slaves anyone left alive.

The U.S. and other imperialists want to keep a united capitalist Sudan, and that means Northern rule. They tolerate the government's suppression of the Southern independence struggle. The imperialists warn the regime from time to time against too close ties with Iran or attempts to spread "Islamic revolution" but will only seek the end of fundamentalist rule if they can find a friendlier but equally repressive regime.

FARRAKHAN: FRIEND OF SLAVE-OWNERS

Anyone claiming to stand for Black liberation has the elementary duty to struggle against the enslavement of Black Africans. Minister Louis Farrakhan of the Nation of Islam has a reputation among millions of Black people in the U.S. as a champion of Black rights. But he and the NOI don't criticize Black slavery in Mauritania, they front for it.

In the case of Sudan, the NOI flatly denies the existence of slavery. The NOI newspaper *The Final Call* has accused "the Jewish press" of inventing stories about Sudanese slavery in order to distract attention from supposed Jewish domination of the original Western slave trade (which ended well over a hundred years ago). Farrakhan ignored a request for prominent Black African and U.S. anti-slavery activists to speak at the Million Man March on October 16. Akbar Mohammed, the NOI spokesman on international affairs, has

denied the existence of Black slavery in Sudan and Mauritania.

Apparently in the interests of Muslim solidarity, both the Islamic Conference and the Arab League also maintain silence. Remember that at least some of the slaves in Sudan and all of those in Mauritania are themselves Muslims. And the truth is that the Mauritanian government was one of the first Muslim regimes to establish close ties to Israel!

Farrakhan's solidarity is with imperialism and the Arab bourgeoisies and against Black African workers and peasants, Muslim and non-Muslim. This is of a piece with his collaboration (despite loud criticisms) with U.S. capitalism. It was only a few years ago that Farrakhan offered Washington the services of NOI to run a penal colony in Africa filled with U.S. Black prisoners. He pointed out that penal colonies in Australia had enhanced British power, and his proposed African camps would do the same for the U.S.

Another example: Farrakhan and the NOI were almost the only prominent Black leaders and organizations not to oppose the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and other leaders of his Ogoni ethnic group in Nigeria by that country's military dictatorship, on trumped-up murder charges. An article in *The Final Call* (Dec. 12), while briefly citing some criticisms of Saro-Wiwa's trial and execution, is almost entirely a presentation of the regime's case. Farrakhan's recent trip to Nigeria constituted an embrace of the military dictatorship.

Mass pressure embarrassed the U.S. and other imperialists into tut-tutting the Nigerian government on the eve of the execution. But they continue to get plenty of cheap oil from the Shell Oil company, which has essentially taken over Ogoniland in southern Nigeria. Shell has pushed out and poisoned the Ogonis with massive pollution. When people rise up in protest, Shell calls in the Nigerian troops and police, who act as Shell's private security guards, often travelling in company helicopters. And in the interest of Shell and other imperialist companies and governments, the dictatorship of General Abacha (and Babangida before him) has shot strikers, imprisoned unionists and political opponents, shut down newspapers and overturned elections when their candidates lost.

Throughout the world, imperialism is using superexploited and even slave labor in its increasingly cutthroat global competition. This in turn drives down the wages and conditions of all workers. It also paves the way for various nationalist capitalist demagogues to whip up national and racist chauvinism against abysmally paid foreign workers.

The U.S. has learned to use Black faces to cloak its rape of Africa. African workers have learned to be suspicious of all representatives of American imperialism, the stridently "dissident" as well as official, Black as well as white. ●

South Africa and Proletarian Revolution

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Class Struggle Leads Up to Australian Vote

by George Patts

In the prelude to the March 3 federal election, the Labor Party (ALP) government and the national union body, ACTU, wanted to demonstrate to the bourgeoisie their ability to police a still combative working class. This was necessary in the wake of last year's rising industrial battles, in which the working class once again assumed a prominent position in Australian politics. Of most significance were the partial general strike in Western Australia that blockaded the state for 24 hours, and a substantial miners strike that threatened to spread nationwide.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA: PARTIAL GENERAL STRIKE

The conservative and anti-working class State Government of Premier Court announced its "second wave" of industrial relations reform, escalating its attacks against workers in that state. The legislation attacked the right of workers to join unions of their own choosing, the deregistration of unions, the right to strike and the political role unions play. In the wake of the anti-worker union legislation and the rising militancy of workers within the state over the last two years, the state labor and trades council organized a nationally coordinated statewide blockade, involving government, transport and waterside workers.

This partial general strike had a chance of fighting back against the conservatives' attacks. But the opportunities were betrayed by the union bureaucrats, who refused to call out all workers in a general strike and defend the blockade, which could have shut the state down and halted the government's attacks dead in its tracks. In a betrayal of the striking workers, the union bureaucrats agreed to some of the attacks, including the imposition of secret ballots for strikes.

The partial strike did prove that the workers of Western Australia are far from beaten; this fight has yet to go the full round.

NORTH QUEENSLAND WEPa MINING DISPUTE

During October and November, a mining dispute between the national mining union and the giant mining company Comalco, a subsidiary of the multinational CRA, took on national proportions. The Wepa mine dispute was over the issues of unionization and equal pay for equal work.

CRA has had a history of union-busting. It has been the political spearhead of the bosses' attempts to have union-

free workplaces in Australia. In recent years, it has escalated its attacks on workers, in the guise of so called "enterprise deals," in which it has offered financial inducements to workers if they leave the union and sign up on individual contracts. (See PR 43 for background on Australian labor.)

All this has been made possible by the complicity of the union bureaucrats of the ACTU with the federal Labor Party Government and its "Accord" social contract — designed to drive up productivity and attack hard-won working conditions by sacrificing thousands of jobs for meager pay raises.

A core of workers at the Wepa mine chose not to sign the company's individual contracts and struck over the issue of equal pay for equal work. Initially isolated, the striking workers gained considerable support from other workers under attack from CRA and workers in other industries facing similar union busting deals.

The ACTU decided to act. Themselves now under attack from CRA's union-free contracts, the ACTU bureaucrats called several key unions out on strike in support of the Wepa mine workers. Mine workers around the Eastern states of Australia went on an indefinite strike, shutting down most of the industry. Waterside workers, themselves under attack from the bosses and from a proposed government sale of the national shipping line to the well known anti-union P&O Corporation, went on a 5 day strike and threatened to bring the country to a standstill. The use of such industrial muscle had not been seen since the 1970's.

Aiming to head off the building fight back behind the Wepa workers, the ACTU looked for a way to divert the threat of a nationwide general strike. Not only were miners and waterside workers mobilized, but there was the potential for transport workers, health workers, teachers and other workers to take strike action across the country, both over their own outstanding wage claims and in solidarity with the Wepa workers.

Such was the serious threat posed by the mobilizations, that the Labor Party Prime Minister, Paul Keating, had to come out and publicly attack CRA and support the striking workers — this from a politician who has delivered handsome profits to the Australian and international bourgeoisie. Keating denounced CRA's union bashing campaign in Wepa and around Australia.

Taking advantage of the public appearance of Labor Party support behind the strikers, the union bureaucracy used

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ex-Prime Minister and ex-union boss Bob Hawke as the workers' representative. Hawke promptly delivered the workers to the bosses' industrial courts and quickly put an end to the industrial dispute. He promised the strikers a deal and enabled the bosses to end a serious political threat and return to business as usual.

MARCH FEDERAL ELECTION

Keating consciously chose to wage the election contest over industrial relations and the social wage. He has been forced to support union industrial actions. As in the last general election (1993), Labor has shrewdly used the right-wing, anti-union agenda of the Liberal Party to gather in working-class support. The Liberals refused to unveil any specific policy details, fearing a repeat of the last election where the ALP was able to highlight the Liberal plan that included increased taxes, lower wages for youth, eliminating awards and stepping up privatizations.

While Labor is behind in the polls, the ALP's stance in supporting the labor movement against the current attacks indicate how the ALP continues to rest firmly on its working-class base. Similarly, the union bureaucrats have mobilized working-class support for Labor while acting as policemen of the workers. Whatever fightbacks workers have attempted — whether against bosses, conservative state governments or the Federal Labor Government, there have been attempts by the labor bureaucrats to make them anti-Liberal, pro-Labor struggles.

Labor claims to be the defender of workers' rights through its maintenance of the award system of minimum wages and working conditions and its support for wage rises connected to productivity gains under enterprise bargaining.

REVOLUTIONARY HISTORY

Vol. 5, No. 4, Spring 1995

Through Fascism, War and Revolution: Trotskyism and Left Communism in Italy

The predominance of the Italian Communist Party and its promotion of the ideas of Gramsci have resulted in much of the history of the revolutionary left in Italy being obscured or totally hidden. This issue corrects the imbalance by presenting for the first time in English a series of essays describing the rise and development of the Italian Trotskyist and Left Communist movements from the late 1920's to the aftermath of the Second World War.

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It will also claim it has created hundreds of thousands of jobs — regardless of the official 9 percent unemployment rate and a youth unemployment rate of over 30 percent.

Through the 1980's, the working class showed an increasing, widespread rejection of Labor, as a result of the austerity policies of the federal government. But under an escalated attack from the bourgeoisie, accomplished through the open anti-working class policies imposed on the state level by the Liberals, the masses of workers moved back to supporting Labor. This was demonstrated in Labor's high vote in the last federal election in its traditional areas of support, which had previously been declining.

The experiences of the working class under successive Liberal state governments, which have directly attacked jobs, wages, working conditions and the social wage (be it the Kennett government's frontal attack in November 1992 in the Victoria, or more recently the graduated attacks of Liberal State Governments in South and Western Australia), have resulted in a rising militancy in defense of those conditions (the partial Victorian general strike in 1992, plus the actions described above). Many workers fear a Liberal Federal Government and so are once again clearly moving back to Labor.

Labor has sought to prove to the bourgeoisie that it alone can pacify the working class. Union muscle, flexed at the end of last year, is a clear indicator to the bourgeoisie that the Australian working class is far from defeated and that only the union bureaucracy and ALP can deliver to it a pliable labor force. Keating uses phrases like social chaos and breakdown, and the threat of L.A. riot-type rebellions of an underclass, to describe the dangers a Liberal government would pose.

Wary of the class struggles provoked by Liberal governments at the state level, some capitalists support Labor and its policies of social peace and a more gradual erosion of the masses' living and working conditions. Other capitalists, who want a more substantial escalation of the attacks on the working class, favor the Liberals.

The Labor Party is no defense against the bourgeois attacks. Rather, Labor's policy is to continue the austerity attacks step-by-step over time, thus preparing the way for a Liberal-led onslaught in the future. Only mass strike action can halt the capitalist attacks.

But many workers look to Labor to continue their defensive struggles against the Liberal attacks on the political level. If revolutionaries were to oppose a Labor vote, we would appear to be an obstacle to a united working-class defense. Instead, we should advocate a critical vote for Labor in the elections with the purpose of exposing Labor in practice by the test of office. We say to our fellow workers: the Labor Party is on the capitalists' side and will attack the working class, but you do not believe us. You think they will defend you from the capitalists' Liberal-style attacks. So we will join with you in voting for Labor and then we will see who is right. But we repeat our warning: beware that Labor and its union leaders will betray us. Prepare to rely on our own class strength to defeat the capitalist attacks.

A revolutionary leadership of the working class is necessary to stop the betrayals of the union leaders and the attacks of the bourgeoisie and its pro-capitalist Labor Party federal government. Now more than ever, as the Australian working class is regaining its militancy and strength, such a leadership needs to be built. ●

February 28, 1996

Detroit Left Strikes Out

by Evelyn Kaye

Four months ago, the Detroit newspaper strike looked like a spark that could ignite the labor movement. Yet after the militant pitched battles of the Labor Day weekend, the union bureaucrats found the way to undermine the struggle. The bureaucrats insisted that workers honor court injunctions limiting the picketers at the key Sterling Heights production center. As we noted in our last issue, "Mass militant picket lines at the plant are necessary to stop production, not just hamper distribution. This requires mass action to smash the injunction, which in turn requires a fight against the pro-capitalist union leaders."

While workers and left supporters continue to rally at the distribution centers on weekends, official union support for even that action waned and was recently cut off. The boycott strategy has been pushed to the hilt, while sundry complaints were filed with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). The bureaucracy is holding the strike in a death grip.

Over the years, the LRP has been the foremost advocate of building the revolutionary party as the key weapon to fight for socialist revolution. We believe that class struggles like the Detroit strike will inevitably break out. The task of revolutionaries, especially when our numbers are few, is not to stand behind the rest of the working class and push it into action; it is to build a vanguard of revolutionary workers who can lead the mass of workers with more backward consciousness. The importance of revolutionary leadership has been demonstrated in the negative in Detroit.

LEFT IMPACT ON THE STRUGGLE

While the LRP has no members in Detroit, many left groups do (with supporters in the UAW, Steel and other industrial as well as public sector unions.) They have not raised anything like the necessary revolutionary politics. If they had, the impact of the left on the struggle could have made a difference, because participation of leftists in the strike was heavier than their small numbers would indicate.

In Detroit, where a layer of workers has engaged in direct action, the left has argued for militant picket lines. But that in itself is not enough. The centrists do not explain why the bureaucrats are so firmly against this policy and why a fight against the bureaucracy is central to winning. Instead, the left has only tailed the existing level of militancy.

In general, the role of the pro-capitalist labor bureaucracy is to control class struggle. But bureaucrats still respond to pressure, and newspaper strikes have been quite militant in recent years: witness New York in 1990, Pittsburgh in 1992, and San Francisco in 1994. Nevertheless, none of these strikes stopped concessions and layoffs.

The lesson the bureaucracy generally draws from the failure of these strikes under conditions of economic crisis is that class collaboration, not class struggle, is needed. The lesson the left wishes to draw at this point is to revive

old-fashioned trade unionism. As the left-backed Unity Victory Caucus stated, for example, "Shutting down production wins strikes and breaks lockouts. That's not an old-fashioned, romantic ideal. It's a fact."

But that "fact" is less than the full picture. In their arguments for militancy in Detroit, the left groups pointed to



Strikers battle cops during hot summer at Sterling Heights printing plant.

struggles like Pittsburgh as the way forward, ignoring their end result. They attempt to substitute themselves for the image they hold dear of militant trade unionism. They avoid a revolutionary explanation of why trade-union militancy is not enough — and fail to show how to not only defend but to transform such militancy into revolutionary struggle.

"LABOR/COMMUNITY/RELIGIOUS COALITION"

No less than three separate support committees backed by left participants have been involved in the Detroit strike, raising their notions of trade-union militancy. The first, the Labor/Community/Religious Coalition to Support the Newspaper Strike, meeting under the auspices of the Detroit AFL-CIO, was formed two weeks after the strike began in July. The well-housebroken Workers World Party (WWP) was active in this coalition, where it has called for action that sounds more militant at first than its usual recipes. The *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* also reprints Coalition statements uncritically.

A Coalition statement of October 24 says in part:

The Coalition's main function from the beginning has been to build support for the strike among trade unions, the community, and religious groups. . . . The coalition has had an additional function. It has served as a vehicle for activists to convey their ideas and suggestions as to how they believe the strike can be strengthened. . . . The coalition is quite clear that only the striking workers and their unions can decide the strategy and tactics for the strike. We are also keenly aware that the objective here is to restore the striking newspaper workers to their jobs under a decent union contract. It is within the context of these considerations that we make the following recommendations regarding what we think should be done to bring the strike to a successful conclusion.

The recommendations included a call for a national

labor march on Detroit, with no specific purpose indicated. Second was a demand for a "consistent mass action strategy to win the strike," motivated by arguments against scabs and for mass picket lines to defy the injunctions. Third was a call for a one-day work stoppage by area unions in solidarity.

However, WWP in no way confronted the bureaucrats' endorsement of the injunction destroying the strike. Instead, they used the general strike demand as a way of avoiding a real fight for immediate actions to shut down the plant. Thus, when the injunction was first imposed and was hotly debated among the strikers on the weekend of September 16-17, WWP proudly circulated their one-day general strike petition, thereby helping the bureaucrats get off the hook.

As a UAW Local 2334 resolution backed by the Coalition posed it: "The Delegate Body [of the Metro Detroit AFL-CIO] should call for a referendum vote in all local unions in the tri-county area to authorize this action."

Because it made a general strike depend on a vote by all the bureaucratically controlled Detroit unions, this petition was a barrier to launching a real general strike, whether for one day or one hour. The general strike had to be posed as a demand to be made by workers on the union leaders; it has to be absolutely clear that advanced workers would have to fight for it and build an alternative leadership for the struggle. As it was, with a veneer of militancy (and no doubt a genuine desire to politely pressure the union bureaucracy) WWP continued their usual tame line of posing no political alternative to the labor bureaucracy.

"UNITY VICTORY CAUCUS"

The Unity Victory Caucus, formed in October, has been touted by Solidarity, the Trotskyist League and Socialist Organizer among other groups as a vehicle to fight more vigorously for militancy and to pressure the bureaucrats. It includes bargaining committee members from each of the six striking locals as well as some union officials. It also contains a strong left influence, but few if any operate as open socialists rather than just union members.

The Caucus's initial proposals for action included resuming mass picketing at Sterling Heights in defiance of the injunction and building support for a one-day general strike. In total, its proposals read basically the same as the Coalition. As well, the initial Caucus flyer invited the Coalition to join it. Of course, invitations to join a united front are appropriate, but in this case the reader could only guess why this made sense: why didn't the Caucus just join the existing Coalition? The question remained when the Caucus in practice failed to counterpose to the bureaucracy on any essential issue in a way that would distinguish it from the Coalition.

Further, the Caucus's initial statement said that "our purpose is to supplement the programs already implemented by the Metropolitan Council of unions." When the statement was issued in October, the Council had just come out in opposition to resuming mass picketing at Sterling Heights. As well, the bureaucracy had just proposed a sellout deal, offering a return to work without a contract, plus substantive concessions. Was this the "program" the UVC wished to "supplement"? Nowhere was the real issue spelled out by the UVC (never mind the Coalition). Just the opposite: the founding statement said "no surrender" without mentioning who wanted to surrender!

Caucus backers did want a support committee more independent of the bureaucratic stranglehold. Thus their literature had one significant difference from the Coalition's:

a call for mass meetings of all the striking unions, something which had not occurred in many months but which the Coalition types never mentioned. But the UVC still would not come out of the closet with clear and timely criticisms of the bureaucracy.

A later statement uncritically reprinted in Socialist Organizer's paper took a step backward from the Caucus's initial posture of militancy. It added the suggestion, "Enlist the help of the UAW's Bob King to assist our members in conducting nonviolent civil disobedience actions." This retreat attempted to wipe out the workers' rejection of civil disobedience in favor of mass militant pickets over the Labor Day weekend, which had been the strike's biggest achievement. (See the next article for more discussion on civil disobedience vs. mass picket lines.)

"STRIKE TO WIN COMMITTEE"

The other strike-support group is the Rank-and-File All-Unions Solidarity Committee, which later became the Strike to Win Committee. To our knowledge, it was founded by the Revolutionary Workers League (RWL) and contained a few independents and close associates of the RWL. It put out leaflets from the very beginning, calling for mass pickets and warning against the betrayal of the bureaucracy in opposing militant strike policy. In contrast with the other formations, this group called for elected strike committees to fight for leadership for the strike altogether.

For its troubles, the Strike to Win Committee was nastily red-baited by the unions, particularly right after the hacks urged that the injunction at Sterling Heights be honored. The September 24 *Detroit Journal*, the weekly paper funded by the unions, announced that "radical groups" affiliated with the RWL may "be interpenetrated by security personnel hired by Detroit newspapers" and "also could be receiving financial aid from the Detroit News and Free Press in an effort to discredit the striking unions." Obviously the bureaucrats set up such smears on the RWL militants at this point because they needed to crush any resistance to their defeatist strategy.

Nevertheless, very little aid was offered to the Committee or the RWL against this reactionary ploy. Other so-called leftists were more interested, as usual, in proving that they were well-behaved and of no threat to the bureaucracy. It is perfectly possible to have both political and practical differences with the RWL, as we do. It is another matter to side, implicitly or explicitly, with bureaucratic liars in their attacks coming from the right.

The chickens came home to roost pretty quickly. The *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* (Jan.-Feb. 1996) complains of the intensification of red-baiting suffered by the UVC despite the fact that it contains "few, if any, members of left organizations" (the shamefaced authors seem to think that is a good thing!). It concludes that the union tops "may be laying the groundwork for shutting down the strike . . . militant strikers and strike-supporters are being purged from strike headquarters and strike support work." The reason for baiting UVC and even Coalition activists is the bureaucrats' need to stamp any semblance of militancy with the label of "outside agitators" — exactly why they baited the RWL.

MILITANCY ALONE IS NOT ENOUGH

A real problem with the Strike to Win Committee was its single-minded notion of militancy as the way to win. It openly posed a fight against the union bureaucrats as necessary to build a militant strike, but it wouldn't move beyond

the isolated strike. As much as the Coalition and the Caucus, the RWL-led Committee contended that a militant strike was a sufficient answer. They failed to raise the question of a general strike, which had been clearly in the air for months.

Nor did the Committee back up its opposition to the bureaucracy with any substantive analysis. Readers of its leaflets would conclude that bureaucrats are simply bad or corrupt people. It might be argued that the Committee would be stepping beyond its bounds to provide a revolutionary explanation: a united front is an agreement on action, not on overall politics. However, the RWL published no newspaper during the strike and made no other effort to put out its views. Moreover, the Committee was not a real united front. What limited it was the RWL's lack of any revolutionary perspective and its desire to hide its political conclusions.

FOR REVOLUTIONARY LEADERSHIP

In sum, all the centrists have avoided the revolutionary implications posed by the strike. Many toyed with notions of a one-day general strike but posed it mainly within the framework of a limited trade-union action. In fact, the Detroit strike has already shown that the LRP's conception of a vanguard heavily based on the oppressed workers is needed to break out of the limited struggle.

While the left has called for "solidarity" and an "alliance" between labor and Blacks to support the strike, the real question was much more the other way around. The most conscious workers have to lead. In no way could the mainly aristocratic craft-based union members of the newspaper strike, with their limited vision and continuing illusions in the system and the union leaderships, present themselves as a vanguard for the class as a whole to follow.

They certainly do not represent the outlook of the most oppressed Black and Latino workers in Detroit, whose social separation from the strikers is far more profound than the "geography" separating mainly white suburbs from the inner city and other Black areas. Nor do they reflect the conditions of the majority of unskilled and lower paid white workers.

This conclusion was concretely driven home when the *Detroit Journal* (Dec. 31) ran an "unbiased" article on the racist cop murder of unemployed steelworker Malice Green in Detroit in 1992. The article presented the police point of view without taking sides on this critical working-class issue.

What is objectively necessary is not a militant leadership but a revolutionary leadership, based above all among Black and Latino workers. This is not an arbitrary or abstract question of skin color but a question of material conditions and consciousness. By virtue of their position in U.S. society, their history of special oppression and experience in strategic industries and unions, Black workers have to take a leading role in working-class struggle, especially in a city like Detroit.

Thus the task of revolutionaries in Detroit was not to limit themselves to the narrow questions posed by the union bureaucracy but to make an appeal to revolutionary workers throughout the area. At its height, the Detroit strike presented unquestionable opportunities. Black and Latino workers in the UAW, AFSCME (the union with the most Black members in the Detroit area), SEIU and elsewhere should have been appealed to, in order to make the strike an opening for the class-wide political fight — the real answer to the attacks.

To point to the opportunities as well as the necessities for successful struggle is in no way to paint a pollyanish

picture that guarantees an immediate response to revolutionary propaganda. In Detroit, Black workers have lived in depression-like conditions since the '70's. Recent cutbacks in health care and education, on top of decades of attacks on industrial jobs, have had a sharp racist edge. In the context of the general hesitancy of the U.S. working class to engage in struggles at the moment, it is no surprise that Black and Latino workers in Detroit are demoralized and do not appear as seething revolutionaries despite the anger under the surface. Nevertheless, revolutionaries have the obligation to say the truth and chart a course for our fellow workers.

HOW TO STOP THE ATTACKS

If the LRP were able to intervene in the Detroit unions, we would favor a motion for a one-day general strike in support of the newspaper strike. But we would not limit ourselves to that. Here is what we wrote in a leaflet circulated in Detroit in October:

Although many workers do not yet accept the necessity of socialist revolution, the whole working class has no choice but to fight the capitalist attacks. The survival of workers is at stake. The question is, how do we fight the attacks? The tremendous enthusiasm and support of workers for the militant Detroit strike shows that workers are ready to fight back and are looking for a new strategy and leadership. In this situation, revolutionaries use every opportunity to argue for the strategy of the general strike. A general strike is the most powerful action our class can take today to defend and unite itself. Such powerful united action would hit capitalism at its heart and change the entire balance of forces in the class war. By posing demand that can defend the whole class, such as Stop All Layoffs and Cutbacks! Stop Police Brutality, Racism and Anti-Immigrant Attacks! and Jobs for All at a Living Wage! the general strike can attract all workers into united action. White workers, Blacks workers, Mexican workers and other oppressed workers will see the reason to unite against the common enemy. Union and non-union, employed and unemployed can be won to the idea of fighting side by side for the benefit of all.

The militant picket lines over Labor Day presented an inspiration for all workers: Black, Latino and white can relate to the fight to defend jobs against the bosses. Examples of class power in action present an opportunity to spark the necessary wider class struggle. But now the opportunity for a general strike growing out of the newspaper strike barely exists, as the inspiration of class confrontation has been dissipated by the labor hacks. Who wants to join what looks like a losing struggle?

The current union leadership and its strategy must be fought. Time is running short, and a lot of momentum has been lost. Revolutionaries and all working-class supporters must continue to fight for action with militant strikers whenever possible, to beat this attack. There is no question that a victory for the newspaper bosses would be a defeat for the whole class.

Stepping over the homeless on the streets and slamming the doors on the vast majority of oppressed workers, the union leaders can claim that the crisis is just a fight for a contract. We cannot obscure the fight for the revolutionary program and the need to appeal to the most revolutionary-minded workers to lead the way in solving the very real crisis for us all. ●

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ISO's Right Turn to Labor

by Amy Stern

For a long time, one of the nice things that could be said about the labor work of the International Socialist Organization was that they were pretty much not doing any. The ISO found a home on upper middle-class college campuses, where they recruited to the most minimal pseudo-socialist politics. Their mentors in the British Socialist Workers Party of Tony Cliff had devised the strategy of building a large base through middle-class student activism — and then bringing those politics into the working class.

For the past couple of years the ISO has been making a turn to labor work, by and large playing the role of cheerleaders for leftist trade union bureaucrats. This article will analyze the ISO's behavior on the labor scene and show that at no time has the ISO waged a fight against the pro-capitalist labor leaders that would be worthy of an organization calling itself revolutionary.

THE STALEY STRUGGLE

The ISO's own account of their approach is presented in article in a March 1995 *Internal Bulletin* by "Lance S." of Chicago. Unlike those who believe in "keeping their socialist politics completely separate from their trade union work," Lance writes, they aim to "link socialist politics with the trade union struggle" and "to make socialist ideas part of the ongoing debate in the labor movement." For the ISO, however, this means not raising the necessary political strategy, but simply not hiding the fact that they are socialists. The ideas they contribute are not at all socialist, just a version of what they think workers will accept.

The key example is the ISO's work around the fight of the locked-out workers of the A.E. Staley company in Decatur — the pivotal struggle in the central Illinois "war zone." The ISO was active in the Staley Workers Solidarity Committee in Chicago, which specialized in muting criticisms of the union bureaucrats and imposing a virtual ban on revolutionary politics. (See PR 47 for amusing details.)

A decisive event was the June 25, 1994 demonstration in Decatur. Strike leaders Dave Watts (head of the local union) and Ray Rogers (the publicity hack known for his disastrous "Corporate Campaign" strategy) led the workers into a trap, where many got pepper-gassed by the cops. Rogers and Watts had planned a quick, staged civil disobedience action — a barrier to militancy, not a step toward it. In practice the workers strained to confront the cops because many really wanted militancy, not just pacifism — although they didn't necessarily see the two as counterposed. But Rogers and

Watts had intended the event to be a brief photo opportunity, not a real struggle of any sort. When things got hot they withdrew their support and left the militants in the lurch.

As the LRP's leaflet at the event argued, what was immediately necessary was mass militant picket lines to shut down the plant as well as a strategy to spread the struggle



Police tear-gas unionists during civil disobedience at Staley struggle.

into a general strike. The ISO, in contrast, joined in the civil disobedience without counterposing the need for militant pickets or mass self-defense. Given a real opportunity to put forward a new course and expose the leadership's pacifist strategy, the ISO deliberately ducked it.

The *Internal Bulletin* explains the ISO's line on June 25: In the current period, when workers are beginning to regain confidence to fight back, we need to relate to workers at their current level of consciousness, rather than at a level we would want it to be. For example, it would be ideal if the Staley workers occupied the plant and barricaded the doors to keep the scabs out. But even the most militant workers don't believe this is possible.

This is a classic example of tailism. The ISO judges in advance the limitations of workers' thinking and then "follows" the supposed limited ideas of the ranks rather than putting forward what they believe is necessary and possible.

Lance offers further excuses:

Moreover, if the ISO was a predominantly working class organization, dozens of whose members were Staley workers, we would be in a better position to organize around a concrete program to win the struggle. In the absence of both of those conditions, we should take our stand with the best militants and attempt to argue with them a strategy that will take the struggle further.

If they had dozens of Staley members they would be better placed to offer a concrete program. True enough, but no excuse for not telling the truth. Lance adds that the ISO is not "a predominantly working-class organization"; it had been known in Chicago as "that student group." So the only route is to "take our stand with," i.e., tail, "the best militants" and argue for "a strategy that will take the struggle further" — but certainly not raise revolutionary politics.

Lance continues:

In the context of the Staley struggle, in which many workers compare their struggle to that of the civil rights movement, "civil resistance" marked out the tactics of the most militant workers. Also, the civil resistance campaign represented a step forward from the more passive tactics, such as the corporate campaign . . .

But civil disobedience was not a step toward more militant action: workers who had been unprepared to defend against cop attacks on June 25 hardly felt more confident to move forward at the next big action, on October 15.

TAILING MILITANCY NO ANSWER

In fear of a repeat of June's confrontation at the plant gates, in October the leaders marched the workers to a deserted road, about a mile and a half from a Caterpillar plant which could have been a rallying point for action. Watts and Rogers climbed aboard a pick-up and offered the workers a choice: "We can all go home . . . or we can sit down and block this intersection. We can sit all night if you want." At this point, many workers simply began walking away in waves of hundreds. About 100 workers hesitantly sat down in the middle of the intersection, militants who wanted to fight but had no way forward. Most got back up quickly, recognizing the futility of this humiliating, symbolic gesture. Other militants refused to join the charade; the majority stood back.

Naturally, the leaders excluded any march to Caterpillar from the "democratic" choices. LRP supporters at the rally pointed this out, shouting that "We should march to CAT and shut it down!" But demoralization had already set in by this point and we were unable to effect a change.

As for the ISO, Lance reports:

At the October 15 event, when Staley workers occupied a state highway intersection, we encouraged all ISO members to sit down in the intersection. Several ISO members also circulated around the crowd with the Staley activists agitating for more people to sit down as well. Our actions were in sharp contrast to the actions of the few dozen members of the ultra-sectarian Revolutionary Workers League . . . [who] agitated around the edges of the crowd against civil disobedience in favor of greater industrial militancy. Needless to say, this sort of ultraleft posturing does nothing but bring the left a bad reputation.

There may have been an incorrect approach in the RWL's agitation that day, but the opportunist ISO proves no such case. It was simply not true that winning workers to a more militant strategy was ruled out, especially earlier in the struggle when the ISO was muting public criticisms of the boycott and civil disobedience. But even if agitation were not possible at a given point, the ISO became part of the problem and not the solution when it actively aided the bureaucrats in *agitating* for passive civil disobedience.

In united-front action with our fellow workers in situations where civil disobedience was chosen by the ranks (which was *not* the case on October 15), revolutionaries might well participate, out of class loyalty. We would explain

that we are not sectarians and will participate in united action of our class — but within the united front all workers should be free to express their views. In such actions we would want all the more to be open about the dangers — like getting gassed or kicked by the cops — and continue arguing for a change in strategy.

Revolutionaries believe that only through class victories will workers gain the confidence to become revolutionaries and take on the system altogether. We fight for strategies that can actually win. When the bureaucrats succeed in imposing a defeatist strategy on a struggle, we show what a revolutionary party leadership could do. Our aim is to convince the most advanced that the problem is not caused by the mass of workers (a notion that breeds further demoralization and lack of confidence), but by the traitorous leadership.

But for the cynical ISO, the questions of how the struggle was actually doing and of warning of the dangers ahead never came up. They presented no real alternative and therefore contributed to the defeat of the Staley strike. The ISO relied on the argument that they were simply following the will of the most militant workers as their excuse for not advocating the changes in policy they knew were necessary. In reality, in their "turn to labor" the ISO also wanted to maintain good relations with the bureaucrats. Tailism and hiding criticisms of the bureaucracy go hand-in-hand.

In a recent edition of *Socialist Worker* (Jan. 19), after the collapse of the Staley struggle, the ISO featured a centerfold of interviews with Staley strikers who were "road warriors" during the strike (members who went around the country on behalf of the union). The strikers still retain illusions in the struggle's misleaders. They don't see how Tucker's in-plant strategy failed to prepare workers for the lockout originally. Or how Rogers' Corporate Campaign was always an attempt to substitute for, not supplement, a fighting strike strategy. They now disclose how Watts sabotaged June 25, but they don't see his reformist politics as the reason why. (See PR 45 for background.)

Such criticisms were never made in any article the ISO had run before (or since). While some articles suggested the need for more militancy, they never championed a course of rank-and-file control and never discussed any significant dispute with Rogers or Watts over the course of the strike. So here the ISO hints at criticisms by taking them from workers, still not putting forward a critique from its own point of view, never mind a socialist analysis.

ISO: "ULTRALEFTISM IN ACTION"?

Calling for action and activism without raising any opposition to reformist leadership is the ISO's trademark. But with the turn to labor, the ISO is going opportunistically from situation to situation, deciding what best suits their narrow organizational needs rather than even consistently following their usual opportunist line of tailing militancy.

This was most crassly demonstrated in their work in a contract struggle at Brown University in Providence. Here we quote from an internal account by "Jesse S":

As contract negotiations came to a close it became clear that the union was prepared to accept a fairly strong offer . . . in return for a two-year wage freeze affecting only new hires. Although a significant fraction of the rank and file was disgruntled by the freeze, there was virtually no desire to strike. Despite that fact, and the fact that we had only tenuous links inside the union . . . we were impatient and decided to challenge the union leadership with a leaflet

which called on workers to ... "vote no."

The results were predictable: first, the union membership followed its inclination and its leadership and voted "yes" by a fairly large margin; second, the meeting took on a divisive tone as more militant but also crankier workers unproductively blasted their union leaders (including their rank and file representatives); and third, the union leaders — who are among the labor movement's most left-wing, and certainly among our most valued allies — were furious at us. We had set ourselves up for potential disaster . . .

This article criticizes the ISO for "ultraleftism in action." It argues for staying on good terms with "left-wing" leaders instead of advocating ideas that neither these leaders nor the less militant workers under their sway favor — the more militant workers be damned! As it makes clear, it is unity with the bureaucrats the ISO is really after:

We should be aware that right now we need left union leaders more than they need us. And to go against them publicly during a sensitive union vote artificially opposed us to them in a sectarian way that only angered them and made us look arrogant in their eyes. This is not to say that there won't be times when we must, for reasons of principle, go against union leaders — but this was not such a case. We must remember we are on the same side as the union leaders — against the bosses — and forgetting that will be ruinous. It also means paying attention and showing respect (not calling people "union bureaucrats" in public.)

The ISO's desire to rationalize their kiss-up to the bureaucrats comes through loud and clear. Temporary factors (how many ISO members are in the union, how many workers are already convinced to vote down the contract) do not remove the obligation of true revolutionaries to tell the objective truth to our class, above all to the fighting layers whom the article calls "crankier" and professional bureaucrats call "troublemakers." It may under some circumstance be necessary to accept a contract with concessions, but never can we say that voting for a two-tier system promotes unity and not divisiveness.

ULTRA-OPPORTUNISM IN ACTION

The Providence report is a blatant exercise in rationalized opportunism. In the Staley fight, the ISO's unwillingness to take on the treacherous policies of union bureaucrats was made even clearer in 1995. The struggle had been so clearly butchered by two years of sellouts that its ability to survive much longer was starkly posed. At that point the ISO attempted to play a more "independent" cheerleading role, breaking out to get their own solidarity franchise.

For example, on June 13, 1995, the ISO organized a meeting in New York, officially sponsored by the "Solidarity Organizing Committee of Decatur, Illinois." This was a pretense at a united-front solidarity meeting attended overwhelmingly by ISOers — one that had everything to do with puffing up the ISO as insiders in the labor scene and just about nothing to do with real workers' solidarity.

The only ISO speaker was the chairman, who began by pointing to the attack on workers by Republicans and the bosses, thereby catering to the pro-Democratic bureaucrats present. He then glorified the worker and student struggle against the New York budget cuts that spring (see PR 49), singling out Local 1199 (the hospital workers union) for special praise. This meant hiding the acts of 1199's leaders in deflecting the student struggle against the cuts, a history

quite well known among student activists. (We don't even expect the ISO to talk about 1199 President Dennis Rivera's refusal to lead the workers' fightback that was really needed.)

Then Terry Alaimo, a vice president of 1199, gave a straightforward appeal for support to the Democratic Party, saying that the lesson workers should learn is that they'd have been better off with ex-Mayor Dinkins and ex-Governor Cuomo; disgracefully, the ISO applauded her when she concluded. Other bureaucrats also got away with making their usual Democratic Party endorsements without any challenge from the ISO.

To cap off the night, the ISO chair let Ray Rogers speak at length from the floor about the boycott and Corporate Campaign that he falsely claimed would win the Staley battle. Unfortunately, Staley "road warrior" and forum speaker Mike Griffin saluted Rogers as a "friend" and declined to raise his differences with him. So did the ISO, and as usual the chair effectively avoided allowing open discussion from the floor from which this hogwash could be challenged.

Another ISO-sponsored forum, entitled "Fighting for Labor's Future," took place in 1199's hall on the night of the Sweeney victory at the AFL-CIO convention, October 26. This meeting was different in that the speakers were not entrenched bureaucrats. Those present were open to hearing a different point of view, and there was no threat of censorship from labor bureaucrats. Nor was there any pressure to capitulate to pro-Democratic Party speeches.

Nonetheless, the ISO showed an impressively wide opportunist streak. For example, ISOers roundly applauded Mike Griffin when he touted Sweeney's victory as a big step forward for labor. The fact that the ISO officially gave no political support to Sweeney (not even "critical") did not stop them from allowing their meeting to take on the atmosphere that a victory was at hand. On a superficial level, ISOer Lee Sustar criticized Sweeney for crushing rank-and-file opposition in Local 32B-32J in New York as well as in SEIU locals in Los Angeles. But he called it positive that "Trumka was out there making a difference in Detroit," a woefully false statement, and also applauded having Linda Chavez-Thompson, a Latina, on the slate. Most importantly, Sustar skillfully covered the ISO's political ass on the question of the Sweeney leadership by saying that rank-and-file control was decisive rather than who was elected on top!

Here's the big lie the ISO always invokes when it needs to argue that the betrayals by pro-capitalist leaders of the workers are not decisive. Taken to its logical absurdity, it matters not if the president of a union is Sweeney, Donahue, a fascist or a supposedly socialist ISO member. This is a pure rationale for the ISO not waging a fight against Sweeney's politics at their own meeting, or at least warning the workers there that Sweeney would do no more to aid the Staley struggle than had Kirkland — which is of course what happened.

It is fine to raise money for striking workers and to express solidarity and respect despite political differences. But the ISO patronized the strikers by not telling them what they really thought of the strategies being put forward.

After the speeches no discussion was allowed, only announcements. An ISO supporter who is an 1199 delegate announced an upcoming management/union demonstration against the Republican health care plan as a "walkout," even as he noted that the bosses were supplying buses to the rally and were allowing the workers to leave work early to attend!

The only break in the "solidarize, don't criticize" atmosphere came when a shop steward announced an up-

coming public hearing over the possible privatization of Harlem Hospital and took the opportunity to openly criticize local labor leaders by name; he aptly described 1199's Rivera and District 37 President Stan Hill as demagogues who have always refused to unite the unions for any fighting purpose. He also brought up the question of a needed fight against racism in the workers' movement. Not a socialist, this worker appeared far more politically advanced than the ISO!

On November 2, the ISO brought the same miserable politics and slogans to the joint hospital union and bosses' demonstration; they marched proudly as participants with their implicitly pro-Democratic "Fight the Right" and meaningless pseudo-activist "Turn Anger into Action" slogans. In contrast, the LRP leaflet for this event took on the 1199 bureaucrats for sponsoring a pro-boss, pro-Democratic lovefest under the guise of a workers' rally. (Copies are available to readers on request.) The demonstration was indeed a virtual tribute to the Democratic Party, even more than expected since it was capped off by a guest speech by Hillary Clinton. Apparently "Turn Anger into Action" means calling on the bureaucrats to turn workers' anger into pro-capitalist action.

ISO'S RANK-AND-FILIST ORIGINS

The ISO originated two decades ago as a political tendency fighting to defend rank-and-filism against the turn of their predecessor organization, the International Socialists (IS), to a more direct bureaucratic approach. Rank-and-filism meant ardent calls for rank-and-file control of union struggles, elected strike committees, democratic mass meetings and the like — notions that were hardly at the forefront of any phase of their recent work.

We described the split of the ISO from the IS in *Socialist Voice* No. 5, in writing about a dispute over the IS's desire to support the Steelworkers' Ed Sadlowski in his oppositional run for the union presidency in 1975. His campaign involved no genuine mass mobilization (it opposed involvement by the ranks) and therefore support could not be justified even on the IS's customary rank-and-filist basis. We cited a document on the Sadlowski campaign in which the IS minority, the future ISO, indicted their organization for abandoning rank-and-filism. Among other things, the minority complained:

We are abandoning our orientation to change from the bottom up, and beginning to claim that the union can be significantly changed from the top down. . . . We now claim that the immediate problem blocking the formation of a rank and file movement is the absence of effective leadership (ours), rather than a problem of steelworkers' consciousness, i.e. steelworkers are not convinced of the necessity of fighting.

This revealing passage shows that rank-and-filism was not simply a term signifying support for workers' democracy and control of the unions by the ranks. The future ISOers knew that it meant blaming the ranks instead of the leadership for the union's problems; that is why they counterposed a change in the ranks to a change "from the top down." As a method of covering up the central political treacheries of the bureaucracy, the difference between the anti-worker ideology of "rank-and-filism" and the IS's more overt bureaucratic approach was one of style, not substance. The only way to fight the pro-capitalist bureaucrats is to counter reformist with revolutionary leadership. As we put it:

There is no particular politics of the rank and file. The

ranks' consciousness is often a mixture of conservative and rebellious ideas co-existing in contradictory fashion. Those members of the ranks who are organized by the self-proclaimed rank-and-filists are provided with an amorphous program and "anti-elitist" spokesmen, who interpret the ranks' will through their own unacknowledged class outlook and hide their own supposedly socialist politics. The rank-and-filists thereby vocalize (tail) the demands of a section of non-revolutionary, therefore, pro-capitalist workers. The ISO demonstrates, like the IS before it, that



Placard at Staley solidarity demo reads "Scabs have no honor." Neither do union hacks who sold out the struggle.

what this comes down to is placing the blame for the lack of heightened class struggle upon the workers rather than the bureaucrats. (SV 5.)

It is true that non-revolutionary workers accept the limits of capitalism; in that sense their consciousness can be described as reformist. But it is also true that capitalism pushes workers toward rebellion in ideas and in action. Thus the consciousness of the vast majority of the ranks is mixed, subject to change and flux. The drive toward class struggle holds great promise for overcoming the current consciousness — if revolutionary workers intervene to lead the way. The reformist rank-and-file leaders who claim to vocalize the demands of the members as a whole, really choose their own politics with which to try to lead their fellow workers — without being honest enough to say that they are trying to lead, an approach they denounce as "top-down." They too inevitably propose a reformist path which can not really empower the ranks.

The ISO abandoned rank-and-filism as its dominant strategy for the period when it followed its British mentors and declared that working-class politics had entered a "downturn." This meant an objectively determined stage (which turned out to be from 1975 through 1990) in which class struggle would be limited and low-level. In essence, the downturn was an excuse for the Cliffites to end a phase of attempting to build through rank-and-file movements and turn to the middle-class sectoralists. The aim was immediate growth, and it meant functioning even more conservatively in labor. (In the great British miners' strike of 1984-85, the SWP would not even raise their usual demands like rank-and-file control of the strike, because the "downturn" doomed the struggle to stay under the leadership of Scargill.)

In reality, there was no practical basis for rank-and-filism, since the pro-capitalist policies of the union leaders,

along with the objective factors of economic recessions in the late 1970's and early '80's, dried up the layer of "rank-and-file" militants whom the ISO had tailed.

REFORMIST RANK-AND-FILISM

Today the ISO wavers between the reformist line of "left" and local labor bureaucrats and the occasionally more militant reformist line of rank-and-file leaders like Staley's Dan Lane and Mike Griffin. *Socialist Worker's* belated exposure of leadership defects in the Staley strike exhibits the problem. In either case the ISO avoids sharp counterposition to the leadership of the unions. They carve out an organizational justification for their existence as the socialist group that will help the ranks to fight harder — or, at present, often help the bureaucrats themselves fight a bit harder. Either way, their militant activist stance requires no particular criticism of the bureaucracy.

Note that the "rank-and-file" formations supported by the ISO in the past were not swamped by rank-and-file workers. Generally the members were leaders who put together a program based chiefly on what they thought would attract numbers, not on what they saw as necessary for the working class. As in the case of Lane and Griffin, such leaders can be sincere. But because they still hold reformist politics, they pose no alternative to the bureaucracy.

It is nevertheless significant that while the ISO has turned back to labor in recognition of the declared ending of their "downturn," it still doesn't see workers as capable of reaching revolutionary consciousness. Here is the description of the present period in the *ISO Members' Handbook*:

At the ISO convention in 1991, we adopted the following organizational perspective: the fall of Stalinism, imperialist realignment and economic crisis signify the onset of protracted crisis on a world scale. In the U.S., the present period is one of transition, between a period of capitalist stability to one of instability — and between the retreat and setbacks for the working class which characterized the years from the mid-1970's through the end of the 1980's, and a future period of upturn in working-class struggle, which is some years away. This period of transition is one in which, over time, workers will begin to rebuild their confidence to struggle. The present period is one during which there will be a growth of reformism — growing numbers of workers, students and those oppressed by capitalism will begin to fight back against various aspects of the system, around limited demands, such as for abortion rights, against racism and police brutality, around wage demands and so forth.

What fatalism to see a foreordained "growth of reformism"! This is the epoch of capitalist decay, in which capitalism can only progress in one sector at the expense of others, and never make lasting or widespread reforms. The objectively necessary demand of the epoch is workers' socialist revolution. Political periods within the epoch are shaped by the interplay between the objective circumstances pushing toward revolution and the subjective forces available for the revolutionary struggle, most decisively the revolutionary party. With this understanding, there was nothing at all automatic about the past period being a downturn at all, since the objective economic crisis was undermining pro-capitalist illusions. It was the pro-capitalist leaderships and their centrist left-covers propping up the system that decisively held back workers' struggles.

With the fall of Stalinism, a main prop for the system

has been defeated; together with the deepening of the world economic crisis, this points to a new revolutionary period ahead. Struggles like the recent French strike wave, where the workers have gone way beyond their leaders' wishes but have not reached revolutionary conclusions, do not necessarily imply a sustained growth of reformism — that is, a growing belief in capitalism's ability to render reforms.

REFORMIST STAGES

We cannot assume that when workers rise up against racism and the like that their struggles must remain reformist. Such stagism is in fact a centrist method that insists on fixed stages of struggle for democratic and reformist demands under pro-bourgeois leadership — and continually postpones the fight for revolutionary politics and leadership. As we see clearly with the ISO, these "objectively" reformist stages are then declared to rest on the masses' level of consciousness, also defined as fixedly reformist. Given this vicious cycle of perpetual reformist stages, for centrists the revolutionary stage never comes.

The labor policy of the ISO is a backhanded capitulation to the labor aristocracy, whose role is to defend capitalism by providing a continual base for reformism. Cliffite theory denies that reformism and the reformist labor bureaucracy rest on a specific strata within the working class, the labor aristocracy. Rather the ISO sees the whole class as the base for reformism. Thus when they use the label "bureaucrats," the term is a hollow putdown; it does not signify the enemy of our class. No wonder there is no principled reason why pro-capitalist bureaucrats have to be politically opposed.

There is no reason to believe that the ISO can carve out a place for itself directly on the bureaucrats coattails. Other reformist and centrist groups in the U.S. — among them Solidarity, SWP, DSA, CoC and the CP — are already positioned to occupy those spots. With an inevitable upheaval in the unions, the ISO, given its slightly more left-wing stance and its rank-and-filist heritage, may orient again to a layer of union militants. But this will be a layer with far less viability than during the prosperity period, the heyday of local union militancy.

One thing for certain is that when the class struggle heats up we will see new and deeper splits among ISO members arguing over whom to tail. Given the identification with rank-and-filism and "socialism from below" (on the level of rhetoric if not the real content), most members may cling to this supposed *raison d'être* for the ISO's existence as a separate organization. Others may be unwilling to abandon their courtship of local bureaucrats. Those truly committed to the working class will hopefully come to understand the contradictions between ISO practice and proletarian Marxism. ●

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Election

continued from page 1

Buchanan has thrown the Republican party into disarray. Bob Dole, who seemed a shoe-in for the nomination after Colin Powell backed down (given the emptiness of most of his rivals) has been exposed as less in touch than ever. "I didn't realize that jobs and trade and what makes America work would become a big issue," he complained.

Four years ago the Los Angeles uprising — a class economic explosion — forced the ruling class to ditch its support to the openly callous George Bush and find someone who could mouth populist sweet-talk and promise people some hope. Given the rising fears today, more candidates, even Dole, will don populist clothes and inveigh against corporate greed.

The bourgeoisie will put up with that and even finance it, but only if it really trusts the candidate. Clinton at first will continue his moderate conservative line, to reassure the big capitalists and widen his Wall Street support. The bourgeoisie normally feels a deeper affinity for the Republicans, but given the chaos inside the GOP, Clinton can now present himself as the reliable bird-in-hand. As one Morgan Stanley financier put it:

Wall Street does not seem to worry about the return of President Clinton, which is easy to explain when you see the Standard & Poor 500 has risen nearly 50 percent in his first term. (New York Post, Feb. 22.)

That is, the electoral show is not just fun and games. Capitalism is demanding far deeper cuts in social programs to keep profit rates from falling. The Republican right is openly demanding a butcher job, but Clinton and the Democrats are just as committed to capital. Thus Clinton has made concession after concession to his Republican "opponents" in Congress.

CLINTON'S "CONCESSIONS" TO CAPITAL

Clinton first agreed to prioritize balancing the budget in seven years — a meaningless number even by bourgeois standards, but a cover for slashing social programs more deeply. As Newt Gingrich put it, this "changes the whole game. You cannot sustain the old welfare state with a balanced budget." Then Clinton agreed to accept Congress's slanted economic forecasts. Next this alleged champion of "health care for all" signed on to hundreds of billions of dollars in cuts to Medicare and Medicaid. Then he accepted the Republicans' favorite, a big tax cut for the rich. And the short-term financing bill he signed in late January secretly slashes social programs of all kinds.

Not that Clinton had to be pushed. He has sworn all along to "end welfare as we know it." He was originally the head of the Democratic Leadership Council, the crew that wants Democrats to talk (and act) indistinguishably from right-center Republicans. Thus it is a bit naive for liberals like the *New Yorker* magazine to act shocked:

Who would have imagined even a year ago that a Democratic President would be supporting the most draconian budget proposal in more than sixty years ... ? This has

been, to say the least, one of the most extraordinary compromises in recent political history. (Jan. 29.)

The whole Clinton presidency has been a watershed for the Democrats: despite his populist campaign in 1992, his actual policies have been unrelenting economic austerity for the working-class masses and a "soft cop" rendition of the reactionaries' racist and anti-immigrant demagoguery. The latest example: in his State of the Union address in January, Clinton announced he would sign an executive order — not even wait for Congress — to deny federal contracts to businesses that hire "illegal" immigrants.

This is an attack on immigrants, not businesses. The purpose of such measures is not mainly to restrict immigrants



Clinton, Gingrich and Dole carve out budget to bleed working class.

from the country but to increase their vulnerability and the chauvinist atmosphere. Victimizing undocumented workers forces them further underground and makes them accept even lower wages and conditions through fear of exposure. The sweeping atmosphere of racism and chauvinism that is used to justify the cuts in health, education and "poverty" programs, slashing the "social wage" won in the past by the entire working class. The constant threat of layoffs, lowered real wages and growing social decay compound the anger and fear besetting all workers today.

On top of all this, government officials at all levels are escalating their customary cynicism and corruption. The First Couple has a record as sleazy as all the corporate and high finance scam artists who compose America's patrician elite. In Congress, politicians get their graft in the form of hefty campaign contributions in return for legislating corporate tax loopholes. Senator Dole, still the leading Republican presidential candidate, is the author of hundreds of these.

People have put up with all the thievery and fraud when times were better and the government seemed to be helping out. But given the austerity attack and the hoopla over "values," contempt for the federal politicians is mounting. Clinton's support in the polls rises as "the Republican revolution" proves to have been just another fraud, but there is no enthusiasm for him either. Given their common, well known penchant for changing positions with every sniff of a new political breeze, a Clinton/Dole presidential choice looks like it could provide the lowest voter turnout in history.

COLIN POWELL AND THE BOURGEOIS DILEMMA

That is not a good situation for the capitalist class. Its political dilemma is shown by the rise and fall of Colin Powell's candidacy. As we explained in our last issue, the bourgeoisie needs a Respected Leader to restore its domination as the world's leading imperialist power and to carry out the all-out economic attack on the working class. Clinton is far too weak and tarnished to play that role.

Powell, with his strong image, clean hands and rags-to-riches rise, would have made an attractive leader for the ruling class: they hoped he could squeeze the masses and keep them quiet. But he represents something more. When Clinton said in his State of the Union speech that "the era of big government is over," that was just to assure the bourgeoisie that he's dedicated to cutting social programs. In reality, the state's role must inevitably expand — although not with "welfare measures" unless forced to. Expansion stems from the need of capitalism in its epoch of decay to mobilize capital centrally, defend itself from its own internal and external rivalries — and police the potentially revolutionary working classes of the U.S. and the world.

Clinton's presidency, along with the Republicans' Congressional triumph in 1994, marks the bourgeoisie's second-stage attack after the post-war boom. In the late 1960's, capital began to hold back the gains it had been forced to give sections of the working class in the imperialist countries. For twenty years there was a slow decline in the profit rate and stagnation in workers' gains. But in the current conjuncture, signalled by the collapse in 1989-91 of the statified capitalist Stalinist states (the weakest links in the imperialist chain), the system can no longer afford only a gradual decline. It has to restore profitability, no longer by simply eroding workers' gains but by slashing them wholesale.

Whipsawing workers of one nation against another is a chief capitalist weapon. Given the national dimension to the accelerating global competition, trade war and then hot war — a Third World War — are inevitable, if capitalism remains dominant. And given the ethnic and racial dimension of superexploitation, racism and chauvinism are also endemic to the system. Imperialist wars and race wars are decisive instruments for diverting the class war of the proletariat.

However, the capitalists themselves resist their own system's drives, preferring to go slow and resort to war and genocide only as last resorts. Because of the efforts of the labor leadership and the petty-bourgeois leaders of the oppressed Blacks and Latinos, the immediate danger of a class explosion can be avoided, and therefore there is no reason to accelerate the already unsettling moves toward international and race war. Thus they wish to smother Buchanan now.

But the bourgeoisie has to ready itself to remove its democratic facade in the future. As we wrote:

During an acute period of unresolved class confrontation between proletariat and bourgeoisie, capitalism traditionally turns to a Bonaparte, a Man on a White Horse, who seems to stand above the class struggle and represent the people at large. . . . Then, wielding a greatly centralized state power, he uses his popularity to defend the ruling class, its property and its system. (PR 50.)

General Powell would have served admirably as a strong-but-cautious transitional figure to such a Bonaparte — and may yet do so. But the ruling class doesn't think it needs Bonapartism or even its preparatory stage yet. It faces deep discontent but little organized opposition from the working class, even from the Black and Latino masses who are the

immediate focus of its present attacks.

If the bourgeoisie had thought the danger of explosions against its racial and class attacks was imminent, the pressure on Powell would have been far greater. A "strong-man" president would be needed to mobilize the nation behind the ruling class. Plus, as a Black man, Powell would be useful in diverting the anger of people of color. As well, he is known to see the need to go slow on removing the social wage; he could act incorporatively toward workers in general. Finally, as a general known to be "tough but cautious," he could hope to fend off intra-imperialist war.

Powell withdrew his candidacy rather than fight a bruising struggle. At the same time, his advisers knew that a mud-slinging fight could damage his "above-the-battle" image and scar him for future use. There was pressure to run, but it wasn't born out of bourgeois desperation. In the absence of Powell, mainstream capital has been checking out alternatives to Clinton and Dole, like Steve Forbes and Lamar Alexander. But the bourgeois establishment may yet have to find a Respected Leader to bury Buchanan's impact.

ANTI-WORKING CLASS POPULISM

While the establishment bourgeoisie cannot accept Buchanan's program, its escalating economic attacks threaten to deepen the radicalization of the middle strata as well as layers of the working class. This danger was mirrored on the surface of electoral politics by the early victories of the overtly hard-right radical Buchanan over the shilly-shallying conservatism of the far better funded Phil Gramm.

Buchanan remains the only candidate who seems to be addressing the concerns of millions of workers. Well known for his reactionary views on immigrants, gays, women's rights and Black gains, he now also trumpets the crimes and depredations of the big corporations. Buchanan can draw votes from beleaguered petty-bourgeois social conservatives of the religious right, plus their fellows among the more secular Perot supporters, along with "Reagan Democrats" — white blue-collar labor aristocrats.

Buchanan focuses on Wall Street's investments abroad; his pseudo-solution is to build a strongly nationalist "America First" through heavier tariffs and other blocks on "free trade." He calls for a Fortress America, a lean and mean competitor in the world market; a U.S. that will stop policing the world for international imperialism and concentrate on winning trade wars against rival imperialist powers.

Buchanan's America would be an exploitative hell for the U.S. workers he now pretends to defend. In reality, he is chastising the multinationals from the vantage point of mid-sized sections of U.S. capital that thrive on low wages and are disadvantaged by the giant global competitors. In warning the white labor aristocrats of the danger of a loss of "our European heritage," he augments external chauvinism with an internal racism designed to further diminish the wages of all workers. His policies point to a self-defeating war between exploited workers here and abroad.

Buchanan's willingness to attack big capital foreshadows the future fascist spokesmen who will attempt to delude and smash a mass working-class movement when it arises. White supremacists are active in his "movement." His own coded racist and anti-Jewish language is aimed at winning the sinister types now testing out fascist organizing; he wants them for his mainstream electoral campaign. Lynch mobs and pogroms are not yet on the order of the day, but as the economic crisis deepens, masses will lose their last vestiges of

hope in capitalist revival. Then, if no proletarian revolutionary alternative arises, the pseudo-revolutionary fascist forces will flourish, as capitalists transfer their support to their last line of defense.

Meanwhile, Buchanan has publicly saluted Ross Perot, Ralph Nader, Jesse Jackson and even the AFL-CIO, for their nationalist fight on NAFTA and other trade issues. Presumably at least Nader, Jackson and the AFL-CIO leaders are embarrassed by the embrace of this reactionary racist. But their policies *do* overlap. Reformists in all countries are



Buchanan's populist guise hides threat to all working class behind scapegoating of Blacks, Latinos, women and gays.

fundamentally as nationalist as the reactionaries — that is why Lenin styled them “social chauvinists.” What normally prevents their close embrace is not their political principles but their ties to working-class institutions like unions, which are anathema to the reactionaries. It is a fitting tribute to the miserably housebroken AFL-CIO leaders that Buchanan can treat them as part of his family.

WORKING-CLASS LEADERSHIP VACUUM

In the working class, awareness is growing that both major parties are its enemies, feeding off the public trough and corporate bribes and balancing the budget by dumping all the costs on them. Clinton lies that “our economy is the healthiest it has been in three decades.” But everyone knows we’re in the midst of “jobless growth” and a “contained depression” — conditions great for the stock market but increasingly desperate for the vast majority who see layoffs and cutbacks on all sides.

There is substantial working-class sentiment to junk all the politicians. There is growing hostility to the “system” — although yet little understanding of what that is. Workers do not see how to fight back in a political way, to challenge the state power of the capitalists. Nevertheless, the angry discontent with the electoral scene shows that underneath the

surface the working class is far from quiescent.

Last fall’s major political events were the Million Man March in Washington that in effect gave leadership of the Black masses to Minister Louis Farrakhan, and the election of the “New Voice” AFL-CIO slate headed by John Sweeney. Both were surface indications of rumbling below.

The Black and labor leadership changes reflect the smoldering dissatisfaction of the masses. But in themselves, the new leaders offer nothing to working-class people of any color except continued tailing of the rightward-moving Democrats. They speak in fashionably populist terms of rich versus poor and “corporate greed” versus the “common man.” At all costs the essence of the system as class against class must be hidden.

Sweeney has already failed tests posed by major struggles during his brief tenure. He did not lift a finger for the Caterpillar strikers or locked-out Staley workers in Decatur, Illinois; the Detroit newspaper strikers — or even the beleaguered building maintenance workers strike in New York City by his own former local (see page 32). In a December speech celebrating class collaboration he talked of mass action safely across the ocean — while advising an audience of New York businessmen that *they* should do something about the austerity attack:

I was in Europe last week, traveling with President Clinton, and I couldn't help but be impressed with what is going on in France. In this country, when we're faced with cuts in vital services that benefit workers and the poor, we shut down a few parts of the government. In France, the workers shut down the country . . . I hope it never comes to that here in America.

He’s “impressed” by the massive French strikes and fears something similar might happen here. He implies the mildest of threats, but then comes the assurance of what side he is on. Like his predecessors, Sweeney prefers sweet-talking presidents and plutocrats to fighting for the workers he represents. In fact, since he knows that the workers can erupt, he chooses to enlighten the capitalists, not the workers:

Addressing this audience, I feel like I'm among old friends. Whether you're leaders in business, labor, government, education or community service, I feel we're bound together by the value we share — the sense of mutual responsibility that defines this city and this nation at their best. If I come here with warning, rest assured that it's a friendly warning — a call to action from one friend to another, so that, together, we can avoid a danger that threatens us all.

And what is that danger? “American workers are down on their government, down on their employers, and down on their own future.” Workers are “blaming their bosses” for the terrible conditions they face. Sweeney’s message is that if the bosses keep attacking the unions, they will spark an explosion that will threaten bureaucrats as well as bankers. And it’s in the cards, he observed:

For a growing number of American workers, blocking bridges seems like the very mildest form of protest. And that's not what their union leaders are telling them — that's what their daily lives are telling them.

To cut off protest, Sweeney follows the same strategy as the Kirkland team before him: vote Democratic unto death. Ignoring the vicious attacks on working people, Sweeney praises his travelling companion Clinton for his role in the budget impasse and for his State of the Union address, and expects the federation to endorse him soon. Sweeney also

plans to fork over \$35 million in the 1996 campaign, seven times more than the AFL-CIO normally spends in federal elections.

A labor leadership worthy of the name would denounce the budget crisis as the anti-working class attack it is. The deficit was expanded by Democratic Congresses and Republican administrations in the 1980's, when tax rates on top brackets were slashed by more than half. Instead of taxing billions from the wealthy, the government borrowed what it needed and so has to pay back substantial (and tax-free) interest. The result is a wholesale and continuing transfer of wealth from working people to capitalists.

In the early 1970's, the labor bureaucrats, faced with massive wildcat strikes and a blue-collar rebellion, worked might and main to channel discontent through the electoral safety valve. Their "success" is a major reason that the attacks escalated from the 1980's on: the fighting workers' movement was purposely killed off.

BLACK LEADERS IN RETREAT

The Black leadership is no better than labor's. Jesse Jackson periodically promotes rumors about running against the Democrats, but his political role has always been to corral any independent motion back into the Democratic fold. According to the *Nation's* editorial board,

Jackson delivered a gentle rebuke to those of us who questioned the merits of working within the framework of Democratic leadership . . . "I don't want to be a source of aid and comfort to Dole-Gingrich-Arney," he insisted. "But . . . I'm waiting till spring before I determine the effect of an independent move." (Jan. 22.)

That is, he'll keep up the hopes of the dwindling forces who still expect any backbone from him — in order to nudge them back into Democratic electoralism when it looks like there is no alternative.

In any case, Jackson has surrendered the top Black leadership spot to Farrakhan, who has his own version of "independence" — bargaining between the two bourgeois parties. He hopes to register eight million new Black voters as a power base. But there isn't much maneuvering room for Farrakhan between Clinton and the Republicans. His long-time confidant, the journalist Askia Muhammad, tries to paint Clinton in rosy colors:

I believe President Bill Clinton has reached one of those defining moments of his lifetime, not just of his Presidency. By squaring off against the very symbol of the "Republican Revolution of 1994" — balancing the budget on the backs of the poor — the nation is better off for having him in office. (*Daily Challenge*, Dec. 22-26.)

Needless to say, that's not exactly what Clinton has done. Farrakhan himself cannot be as blatant, but given his ambition to secure financial aid from Washington, the only possible source, for his utopian Black capitalist program, he is just as tied to the moderate wing of the Democratic Party.

The strategy of electing Democrats was counterposed in the 1970's by Black and labor leaders to urban riots and wildcat strikes. A turn to politics was necessary, but the reformist electoralist strategy was a deliberate attempt to divert the ghetto masses from rebellious class-based action.

Today, Black elected officials are legion — the vaunted achievement of all those years of electoralism. But they went from rhetorical radicalism right into the role of presiding over the attack on Black jobs and wages. Today they play the same losing electoralist games as their trade-unionist friends

and with the same ugly results. Only a handful of Representatives — including less than half of the Congressional Black Caucus — even voted against the austere government financing bill agree on by Clinton and Gingrich.

A testament to the utter failure of the pro-Democratic strategy was the announcement that Kweisi Mfume, a year ago the chair of the Black Caucus, now finds himself so powerless in Congress that he decided to leave — to try to revive the decrepit old NAACP. With many Blacks having become disillusioned with voting, Farrakhan is taking up the dirty banner of electoral diversion.

REFORMIST PARTY ADVOCATES

Some who claim to speak for working people want to avoid supporting the Democrats directly, so there are several left-supported third party campaigns in the offing. The best-known candidate, Ralph Nader, may go on the ballot for president as the Green Party nominee in California and other states — not to mobilize mass anger but to pressure Clinton leftward. According to the *New York Times* (Jan. 20), Nader's monied California backers would keep him off the ballot if they thought he would actually harm Clinton.

Similar tactics are being used by Labor Party Advocates, an outfit controlled by left labor officials. LPA will hold a founding convention for a labor party in June. It will not run candidates but will put a little pressure on the Democrats — and allow friendly bureaucrats to organize support for them in order "to stop the right." As we wrote in 1991:

The key to LPA is its refusal to run candidates. It aims at gently pressuring the union bureaucracy to give up on the Democrats. It states that it will eventually go ahead and form a labor party without first winning the support of officialdom. But the real plan is to keep the organizing effort as unthreatening to the bureaucrats as possible: no programmatic discussion where radicals and socialists can advance a platform; no interference with union support to Democrats; no possibility for ordinary members to play any role; indeed, no real activities of any kind. LPA serves only as a vehicle to stall workers' desires to organize against the Democrats. (PR 40.)

LPA came into being because some perceptive union officials understand that their very existence is now endangered. If they continue to quash militancy, the capitalists will no longer need them. Something must be done, but nothing that can get out of hand. The bureaucrats will create a labor party (whether via LPA or another route) only under one condition: that a mass upsurge breaks out. Then thousands of bureaucrats will jump on the labor party bandwagon in order to forestall "anarchic" action by workers.

For years, the people who have done most of the footwork for LPA are not union bureaucrats themselves but members of left organizations, mainly those that label themselves Trotskyist. They fool themselves into the self-serving belief that they are helping the workers take a step toward a better world, as if LPA embodies the kind of mass labor party Trotsky called for in the working-class eruption of the 1930's ("I will not say that the labor party is a revolutionary party, but that we will do everything to make it possible.") But they rationalize building a purely reformist bureaucratic shell, not a mass movement.

If the new party adopts any program at all, it will not challenge the top bureaucracy's acceptance of U.S. capitalism, including its imperialism, racism and chauvinism. As well, since Mazzocchi & Co. are doing all they can to allow

endorsers to back Clinton, the left LPAers are indirectly building support for the Democrats — despite their illusion that this is the first step on the road to breaking with them.

The main problem with the existing left third-party schemes is that, whatever their criticisms of Clinton and the Democrats, they stand for an electoralist solution. A genuine revolutionary party would certainly use the electoral arena and run revolutionary candidates — but in order to denounce electoralism itself and win people to revolutionary politics. The revolutionary strategy is mass action against the state, not passive electoralism even of the “independent” variety. At a time when the elections point working peoples’ attention to political solutions, the need is to give revolutionary answers — even if only to the tiny advanced layer of fighters who are open to them.

LESSER EVILISM

Revolutionaries have to deal with a still widespread opinion among workers: we have to vote for the no-good Democrats in order to stop, or at least delay, the far-worse Republicans. One activist writing to the LRP last year put it this way:

If I do not do the little I can also by voting to keep Bush and Newt and cronies out of power, I cannot sleep well at nights. I by no means think that the Dems represent me or my interests. However, I do believe that Clinton is slightly less evil than Bush. And I certainly believe that what the Repubs are doing now in Congress is worse than what was happening. Mind you, voting is by no means a solution. I just believe in using all the means at hand.

We answer that you have no business sleeping well at night if during the day you have helped deceive people into thinking that one of the bourgeois parties is not part of a social system of exploitation and racism. Is Clinton less evil? Only if a soft cop is better than a hard cop, only if he is not more dangerous because he is more deceptive.

Moreover, voting for the Democrats may keep the Gingriches out of office one time — but not the next. Clinton is barreling to the right, barely keeping a step behind the Republicans. After workers get screwed by the Democrats over and over, they either give up or look to the Republicans — or to radical right-populists, or worse.

With Buchanan advancing, liberals are dusting off the fascist-mongering flim-flam they wielded to lure votes against Nixon and Reagan; in fact, they were already labeling Gingrich & Co. as barbarians against whom the very existence of civil government had to be defended.

Thus *New York Times* columnist Anthony Lewis charged the Congressional Republicans with “attempting a coup” by shutting down the federal government this winter. In the leftist *Nation*, former presidential candidate George McGov-

ern likened the radical Republicans to Nazis and cold-war Stalinists in their efforts to “deride the U.S. government and all its works,” thereby endangering “the last, best hope of earth.” Civilization itself, it would seem, depends on Clinton emerging triumphant.

The “Communist” Party is marching ahead down the same path. CPUSA chairman Gus Hall proclaims:

Ridding the U.S. Congress of the fascist-like wing of the Republican Party and its criminal Contract is the greatest challenge our people and our country face. . . . After careful consideration, we have come to the conclusion that our party leadership has, to this point, underestimated the fascist danger inherent in the politics, ideology and actions of the extreme right majority in Congress. (*People's Weekly World*, Feb. 10.)

Among the developments Hall lists for reassessing the fascist danger in Congress are the drive to eliminate “big government,” the new level of anti-immigrant scapegoating and the new Crime Bill that jails people for life under “three strikes and you’re out.” But these are all Clinton’s policies! No surprise: the CP is campaigning against Republican “fascists” in order to support “whatever candidates and tactics fit into the overall goal of undoing the Republicans” — including backhandedly backing the imperialist establishment.

Another “fascist”-mongering outfit is the SWP: the *Militant* (Feb. 26) ran the front-page headline, “Buchanan puts forward fascist agenda in Iowa,” justifying the term by citing the candidate’s economic demagoguery. This is nonsense. Buchanan is not mobilizing goon squads to break up union meetings; he is appealing hypocritically to unionists at factory gates. He is not clamoring to nationalize the predatory corporations when he denounces them; on the contrary, he wants to *reduce* taxes on companies and stocks and *eliminate* taxes on interest, dividends and inheritances. He is certainly a dangerous racist, less covert than others, but he still doesn’t call for the genocidal actions that are part of a fascist program. He is using the fascist types attracted to his campaign to bolster his mainstream effort — just as liberal Democrats sometimes use radical leftists. Buchanan is an out-and-out Republican, even if he opportunistically appeals for workers’ votes with a pseudo-radical charisma.

The CP’s motive for playing the “fascist” card is obvious: they’ll use any excuse to dupe people into voting Democratic. What the SWP is up to we do not know, but they are also contributing to the atmosphere that drives people into the Democrats’ arms. Under the guise of stopping fascism, the CP, SWP & Co. will lead voters into the trap of backing the bourgeois establishment, the imperialist stalwarts who rain misery upon the world’s peoples in order to suck them dry.

Hopping rightward just a bit behind is the International Socialist Organization. ISO won’t stoop to voting for Demo-

The Democratic Party: Graveyard of Black Struggles

A Proletarian Revolution pamphlet by Sy Landy

This pamphlet is a collection of articles from this magazine that deal with the aspirations and actions of Black people as they have challenged the electoral process. They analyze political campaigns spanning the decade 1983-1992, ranging from Harold Washington and Jesse Jackson to Louis Farrakhan and Bill Clinton. They detail the role of the Democrats in absorbing and derailing struggles for equality and justice.

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crats, but they are in effect plugging for them with their anti-right rhetoric. The ISO National Committee provided a blatantly opportunist justification in a 1995 internal Perspectives document:

In the immediate aftermath of Clinton's election, much of our audience appeared to want to "give Clinton a chance." We were going against the grain. This quickly changed as more and more people felt betrayed by Clinton and began to look for an alternative on the left.

Today, the situation is again different. Clinton is still president, but there has been a clear shift of power in Washington to the Republicans. The main focus of our agitation, therefore, should be against the Republicans and the right. This does not mean that we will be uncritical of Clinton or the Democrats, but we have to provide both in terms of ideas and activity a left alternative to the right wing's attacks.

That is, since "our audience" has illusions in Clinton, let's not trouble them with the fact that he's just as much a class enemy, just as responsible as the Republicans for the political rightward shift. Let's "fight the right" and leave people with their false hopes. Naturally, the ISO's "left alternative" is not so left: as we show in a separate article (page 14), it is to cover for labor bureaucrats selling out strikes and fightbacks. For the pseudo-revolutionary left, the alternative to the right is the not-quite-so-right.

MASS ACTION AND THE REVOLUTIONARY ANSWER

How can the elections be used to build an alternative? In December the French workers showed our class's power by fighting *en masse* to stop an austerity attack parallel to that in the U.S. To unleash that power takes a leadership genuinely independent of the bourgeois parties — committed to the overthrow of capitalism and to a new society where the working class rules in the interest of the vast majority of humanity. That means a revolutionary working-class party.

At present only a tiny minority of working-class militants see the possibility of building such a party. But when sections of the class do break out into fighting action against the capitalists, many more will see the opportunity of widening the strike action.

Our slogan, *General Strike against the Capitalist Attacks* conveys the power of the working class if it is united against the capitalists and their profit-making. It is a call for the conscious, unified self-activity of the working class; it is counterposed to all the amorphous populist calls for "people's" as opposed to working-class protest. Above all it is a call for class action, in contrast to relying on the voting booth. A general strike would also expose "pro-worker" demagogues like Buchanan, who could never support such an independent working-class action.

Given that our revolutionary aim is open, we stress that the intent of the general strike slogan is political. A general strike is not a purely trade unionist action but a massive movement including all the unemployed and oppressed. A general strike would begin defensively, as a movement against the attacks, but it would have the power to demand from the ruling class what workers need: for example, *Jobs for All*. On the issue of the budget deficit, the working class could refuse to pay for the capitalists' massive debt build-up, demanding that the state *Repudiate the Debt*. Revolutionaries could argue for the Marxist answer to the economic crisis,

Expropriation of the Banks and Corporations, a direct challenge to capitalist property rights.

A successful general strike sharply poses the question of which class wields state power. Through a general strike, workers will see clearly that society can do nothing without them, that bourgeois rule is not inevitable, that our class can make society run in its own interests. A general strike would give a tremendous boost to building the mass revolutionary proletarian party of the most politically conscious workers.

COMMUNISTS AND ELECTIONS

Can the election season be used to spread revolutionary ideas? Communists do not call for election boycotts on principle: we believe in taking advantage of elections, whenever possible, to run our own candidates to explain our views. But even then communist candidates run in order to denounce electoralism as a fraud: working-class gains are won only by mass action where workers' power lies, not in the bourgeois voting booth where millionaires rule.

Lenin rightly criticized sectarians who refused to participate in bourgeois elections. Communists have to use elections to show workers that they are being fooled into thinking that bourgeois elections can benefit them. It is necessary to go through elections with fellow workers: not lying about possible electoral gains, but demonstrating concretely, through experience, that workers have to get rid of bourgeois parliaments and take power into their own hands.

At this time communists are too few to run electoral campaigns, but we can still campaign against electoralism. As one step, we can propose protest rallies against the capitalist politicians, Democrat or Republican, wherever they campaign. Let the politicians of the parties of racism, imperialism and austerity know what working-class people think of them! Let the workers know that their best answer is mass revolutionary action!

The chief target of a revolutionary anti-electoralist campaign should be the misleaders of the working class and the oppressed. For example, at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in August, demonstrations against the likes of Sweeney and Jackson would show the hatred of working people for those who betray them by supporting the Democrats. Demands for such actions should be placed on LPA and other organizations that claim to stand for working people and the oppressed.

There will be many so-called leftists who object: by protesting against Clinton and those who support him, they will say, you're in effect backing Dole and Gingrich, the greater evil. We reply that Clinton's the one backing Dole and Gingrich. We've heard their argument often: the classic example in recent history was the Democratic presidential campaign of Lyndon Johnson against Republican Barry Goldwater in 1964. Johnson took full advantage of the support given him by the left; once elected he escalated the Vietnam war, pulling the liberals behind him — something Goldwater could never have done. The "lesser evil" became the greater.

Fighting for the revolutionary party is not easy, certainly. But it is far more realistic than voting for Democrats.

*Down With the Democrats and Republicans!
Two Parties of Imperialism, War, Austerity and Racism!
General Strike Against the Capitalist Attacks!
Build the Revolutionary Party of the Working Class!
Workers' Socialist Revolution is the Only Solution!*

COFI/LRP

continued from page 2

We also hosted our own forum on "The Fight for Socialism in South Africa." We are currently organizing a five-part class series entitled "The Crisis of Workers' State Theory." As well, the Chicago LRP is striving to build a student group; we now have a literature table and are doing political work at a local university and high school. Please call 312-463-1340 for more information on the class series, campus activities and other upcoming events.

NEW YORK LRP

In the fall, the LRP held a forum on South Africa at City College, attended by a number of African students. We also held a public forum on Colin Powell's electoral pullout and changing political lineup in the U.S. The lead article in this issue continues that discussion.

Our campus work has also included interventions in the remnants of the CUNY Coalition Against the Cuts, a hodgepodge of reformist and left student activists attempting to rebuild a fightback against the budget cuts — unfortunately in the same way that led to defeat last spring (see *PR* 49). The Coalition, along with various unions and politicians, is planning a mass demonstration in March; we will certainly participate and counter the organizers' cheerleading for the Democratic Party, a leading agent in slashing CUNY last year and in the past.

We also oppose Coalition ideas for civil disobedience, raised by the anarchist Love and Rage group and the ISO. This is a futile political strategy: it suggests that action by handfuls, not masses, are enough to fight off the capitalist attacks, and miseducates youth to trust cops not to beat them senseless. Self-defense plans must accompany any serious plan for action against the cuts.

David Suker, a City College student activist, has been brought up by the College administration on bogus charges arising out of last spring's movement. If found guilty, he will be dismissed, and a militant fighter will be lost to the CUNY struggle. Defend David Suker! Drop the charges now!

After John Sweeney's victory at the AFL-CIO Convention in October, we attended an Labor Party Advocates meeting chaired by Labor Militant. The speakers included representatives from the Detroit strike as well as three union officials from striking locals in Decatur. Given the auspices of the meeting, it was conspicuous that no speaker from floor or podium said anything about how a labor party could help

Fund Appeal

We continue to receive a good number of supporting donations from readers. We appreciate all contributions, and once again appeal for funds.

As a working-class organization with limited resources, we must count on the help of readers and friends. Our publications are priced below cost of production in order to build a working-class readership. We also go out of our way to distribute our literature abroad. Please send whatever you can to:

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these struggles!

An LRPer pointed to the fact that the call for a labor party today was a call for the workers to vote, not fight. The strikes showed first off the need for mass militant picket lines to stop production and defend against the cops, as well as the overall need for a general strike to stop the bourgeois attacks — and open the road to revolutionary struggle. Another LRPer spoke about our trip to South Africa (see *PR* 50) and the rising revolutionary consciousness of workers there — a sharp contrast to U.S. leftists, who won't even tell their fellow workers that the capitalist system was the problem!

In November we joined in a march against police attacks in defense of Latino political prisoners. A big contingent from the Partido de los Trabajadores Dominicanos (Dominican Workers Party) attended. The PTD distributed copies of a joint statement they produced with the Partido Revolucionario Dominicano (Dominican Revolutionary Party, despite its name a bourgeois liberal party), which criticized the Republican attacks on immigrants and social services, while letting the Democrats completely off the hook.

In January we attended a forum by KILI (Unity-Struggle-Unity Committee), a left group composed of Haitian immigrants. Part of the discussion focused on important recent struggles of workers in Port-au-Prince. More general questions of method in approaching workers' struggles also came up for discussion. For example, KILI posed the notion of opposing work within the AFL-CIO unions, while the LRP defended the Trotskyist position of fighting within even the most corrupt unions for leadership. We hope to continue discussion with the Haitian left on such important questions.

Other New York activities are cited in the articles on the New York labor scene and the French strikes in this issue. The New York LRP is planning future educational meetings as well as forums on campuses and other locations. Call us at 212-330-9017 for information.

LRP CONVENTION

A main activity for the LRP in this period was our national convention, held in New York over the weekend of January 13-15. The main document, the *U.S. Perspectives*, was written in the light of the COFI International Perspectives adopted last year, which argued that the world is moving toward a new period of revolutionary mass struggles. It also summarized the ongoing work we have been doing in assessing the U.S. political scene at this juncture. It provides a Marxist understanding of the reasons behind the bourgeoisie's escalated attacks against Blacks, Latinos, immigrants and women, and their connection to the attacks on the whole working class, especially the industrial workforce. Now the bourgeois elections are being used to work out this program. Populism, left and right, is emerging as an immediate barrier to independent working-class consciousness.

We reconfirmed our leading slogan, "Re-Create the Fourth International." We have used this wording to avoid any implication of gluing together the present false claimants to Trotskyism. The notion that there currently exists a "family of Trotskyism" must be rejected, especially today when the pseudo-Trotskyists generally march rightward.

In the past, *PR* has often used the slogan, "Socialist Revolution is the Only Solution!" We have learned that the betrayals by reformist social democracy and Stalinism have confused even advanced workers about what socialist revolution and communism mean. When the masses rise up in the near future, centrists will add revolutionary rhetoric to their

current populist line and try to confuse the matter further.

In light of the "people united" increasingly prevalent from right to the left, we decided to specify our slogan as "Workers' Socialist Revolution." For the same reason, our party slogan has now been extended to "Build the Revolutionary Party of the Working Class!"

We also reaffirmed the centrality of the General Strike slogan in this period. Our political propaganda work still must fight to show advanced workers that their class has the power and ability to unify to achieve its goals; only then can talk of socialist revolution seem credible to more than a small layer.

While there were no fundamental differences among comrades at the convention, there was a lively discussion wherein questions were raised for further elaboration. Among them: new assessments of the directions being taken by the various centrist groups; the relation between cuts in higher education and the ruling class's need for a new kind of domestic industrial workforce; and the relation between the escalating attempts to reinforce female subordination via "traditional family values" and the cutbacks in social services.

The *Tasks for the Conjuncture* session focused on the priorities of a small group of revolutionaries with strained resources, geographically limited for now to New York and Chicago. The centrality of our propaganda magazine was confirmed, and efforts to improve its effectiveness as a vehicle for building the revolutionary party were assessed.

We decided to focus our efforts in 1996 on continuing work on the U.S. Black struggle, and an outline of documents dealing with this work was adopted. We projected as well an educational series and future publications. We aim to show that we are the only tendency that has followed Trotsky's suggestion in applying the theory of permanent revolution to the situation of Blacks in the United States; that is the only analysis that avoids capitulating to either reformist integrationism or bourgeois nationalism. Practical work in the struggle will be accelerated.

Ongoing trade-union-related work will be politically deepened. Issuing a new pamphlet on the labor party question was put on the front burner for 1996. It will show that *today* a call for a labor party in the U.S. can have only reformist consequences, the opposite of what Trotsky intended when he favored the slogan in the 1930's.

The ruthless selection of priorities was deemed a painful necessity. We cannot be all over the place, participating in all struggles and arguing all questions as much as we would like. Nevertheless, in addition to our major immediate tasks, our document also discussed the need to start work on a serious analysis of the intricate and changing nature of the "Latino question." There are many Spanish-speaking workers — Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Dominicans, Central Americans — who reside here as both citizens and immigrants and who are intensely oppressed in this racist society. Already Latinos have played key roles in major arenas of class struggle in the U.S. — from the Los Angeles riots to critical strikes and organizing drives. We need *PR* to become a vehicle for discussing this question much more than in the past, because it is in integral part of the revolutionary assessment of the American working class.

The conference also contained a session on Labor Perspectives and an assessment of the work of our budding Chicago group. It closed with the adoption of a new constitution. The convention was followed by two educational sessions to which friends of the LRP were invited. One,

"British Centrism and the Socialist Labour Party," was given by Matthew Richardson and will appear in a future issue. The other, "The U.S. Black Question and Centrists' Denial of Lenin's Theory of the Labor Aristocracy," given by LRP National Secretary Sy Landy, is part of a broader work in progress which will be published soon.

The convention was animated by the feeling was that we face greater opportunities than ever before, although our recent growth has been very modest. Nevertheless, we agree with Trotsky's point that those who judge organizations by numbers alone have only reached trade unionist consciousness; program counts first. The huge political gains made at the recent COFI and LRP conferences have reinforced our revolutionary optimism. As our Tasks document summarizes,

We have fundamentally succeeded in fighting off the cynicism that infects the middle class left and was borne out of the historical defeats of the working class with the Russian counterrevolution and subsequent events. We could only accomplish this as revolutionary workers who understood what materially had caused these defeats and how and why these defeats would be overcome.

We have just celebrated our 20th anniversary. Armed with our program and understanding of the new political period, we are confident that the coming year will accelerate our growth. ●

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF STALINISM

A Resurrection of Marxist Theory
by Walter Daum

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

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

The analysis of Stalinism as a "deformed capitalist state" made by Walter Daum is very persuasive. The idea that it was a particular form of state capitalism because of its origins in a defeated workers revolution has much to commend it. . . . Read this book by all means. . . . But heed our "health warning." His aim . . . is not to give Trotskyism a decent burial: on the contrary, he wants to revive the corpse and give it a facelift.

Communist Review

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New York

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Latino community to his war on the mass of the oppressed and poor. While divide-and-conquer remains the strategy, Giuliani has made adjustments. Hill now sits at the table in order that Giuliani may more easily isolate Local 420, the hospital section of DC 37 led by James Butler. Butler was one of several local heads who called the DC 37 vote rigged.

BEVONA'S DEFEATIST STRATEGY

Sweeney's hopes of a labor-capital partnership got a rude slap in the face from the landlords in the Realty Advisory Board. Representing most of the large office buildings in New York, the RAB answered Sweeney with demands for two-tier wages, clearly intending to replace senior workers with lower-paid new hires. The hiring of thousands of scabs from day one of the strike drove the point home.

Given Sweeney's direct ties to 32B and Bevona, this was a major challenge. It was also an attack on a largely unskilled immigrant workforce, the sector Sweeney had claimed would be the focus of his AFL-CIO presidency. Yet any notion that Sweeney's election meant a new dawn of AFL-CIO militancy was disproved by the New York strike.

Thirty thousand janitors, porters, repairmen and elevator operators were striking at over 1000 commercial office buildings. The minimal point of the strike had to be to stop the provision of services to the buildings. Yet no effort was made to build picket lines that could stop the thousands of hired scabs. No effort was even made to stop Local members themselves from crossing the line; hearing complaints, the union hacks promised their loyal members that 32B-32J scabs would be punished "later." Nothing was done to stop other unionized and non-unionized workers from making deliveries, hauling trash, making repairs and providing other services to the buildings. While some members of other unions did honor the overwhelmingly passive picket lines, many did not. Often UPS drivers left packages outside buildings for pre-arranged pickup rather than cross the line, but this hardly helped.

Things got so bad that other union leaders in the city became openly contemptuous of Bevona and even discussed calling their own rallies to stop the rampant strike-breaking. (Of course, these leaders had waged no fight at the Central Labor Council to stop other unions from crossing picket lines, a fight which did not depend on Bevona.)

Bevona's "strategy" was to beg the building tenants, bosses themselves, to pressure the landlords to play fair. The sight of isolated, freezing pickets would supposedly tweak capitalist heartstrings. Union leaflets were directed at tenants, not workers. That was no way to win. As an LRP leaflet to striking workers explained, Bevona preferred to lose the strike rather than challenge the power of the capitalist bosses. A leadership serious about winning the strike would

have organized mass rallies of all union members as well as militant mass pickets. The leadership, as is usual in strikes nowadays, pointed to the massive police force protecting the scabs against strikers as a reason the scabs couldn't be stopped. Bevona kept the pickets spread out at over 1000 locations so that in most places strikers felt weak and isolated. At the majority of buildings, it was only two or three strikers against a greater number of scabs and cops, presenting an image of weakness.

But the union clearly had the forces to start the fight by taking a decisive stand against scabbing at key centers — if the ranks demanded it. Mobilizing thousands of workers at the World Trade Center or the Empire State building could have shut these places down. Mass pickets could call on other workers to respect the picket lines — no deliveries, no services, no repairs, no garbage pickup. A real victory at an important location could have turned the strike around and won it respect and adherence from other unions and workers throughout the city.

However, this is hardly what Bevona wanted. Given his defeatist strategy, the final settlement could have been a lot worse. Landlords got a two-tier system, with starting pay cut by 20 percent rather than the 40 percent demanded. While this is not as bad as what some unions have, it is a beachhead for the bosses. As well, new hires will get no pension contributions for two years, and management can hire temporary replacements during vacations at 60 percent of union scale!

Bevona could only sell its deal after he had demoralized workers sufficiently with the prospect of an even greater defeat based on a strike that had been going nowhere but down for a month. Even then, he didn't dare put the contract to a vote of the ranks.

More important in a sense that the rotten contract itself, the strike failed to catalyze a wider working-class fightback, desperately needed by the entire working class. Bevona ended the strike one day before the first mass rally was to take place, and when the issue of scabs was finally beginning to force sections of the labor bureaucracy to move.

An active struggle against scabbing in the 32B-32J strike could have served as an inspiration to all workers and acted to change the balance of forces and reverse the decline of New York unions. Given the dissatisfaction of city workers with their contracts, a building workers' strike displaying real working-class power could have broken down the sense of helplessness that has paralyzed the working class as a whole.

THE STRIKE SUPPORT COMMITTEE

For this reason the LRP focused on a strategy to realize the 32B-32J strike's potential. If that had happened, revolutionaries would have had opportunities to work towards spreading it to a general strike.

As part of our intervention, we attended a series of meetings of strikers and left supporters initiated by the Revolutionary Socialist Group. (See *PR* 49 for a discussion of the RSG's role in the student struggle last spring.) A planning meeting on January 26 to establish a Worker-Student Strike Support Committee was attended by union militants and a wide assortment of left groups. Until that point there had been a number of small rallies and marches but no central activity organized by the union leadership.

We attended the planning meeting to join with strikers and others who wanted effective action. We also wanted to argue for the revolutionary politics and leadership that the struggle demanded. We were ready to work with the commit-

Letters Welcome

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tee on specific actions — but not join it. Its leaflets perpetuated the rank and filism of the RSG (shared by many other centrist groups) by not pointing to the need to take on the union leadership. We wanted common action, not a propaganda bloc. Given the state of the strike, the need to aim at one or two key locations and actions was obvious to all.

We proposed a march to the union headquarters to call on Bevona to organize actions like a mass rally and mass pickets to shut down the World Trade Center. We also supported other ideas for mobilization. Unfortunately, our proposal for making demands on Bevona was rejected as divisive by the strikers as well as the leftists present.

At the January 30 meeting, our motion for a rally at the WTC to be followed by a march to the union offices was also rejected, in favor of the WTC rally alone. The rally turned out to be too small to shut down anything. Subsequent events also proved our contention that it was necessary to take on the union leadership directly to prevent a sellout.

HOSPITAL UNION CONFLICTS

With the building workers' strike ended, the central battle on the New York labor scene is being waged around hospitals. Both the 14,000 public hospital workers in Local 420, and 1199, the union of mainly private "voluntary" hospital workers led by Dennis Rivera, face a massive hemorrhaging of jobs because of deep cuts in Medicare and Medicaid.

The two unions have historically been at each others' throats, given the bureaucrats' narrow sectoralism. Both public and private hospitals are heavily dependent on government aid, and the competition for funding is often reflected in inter-union hostilities. Now 1199 has rejoined the AFL-CIO — in part, according to the *New York Times* (Feb. 18), "to make it easier for the union to win the right to organize workers at whatever city hospitals ... Giuliani decides to

privatize." Rivera denies this but has played no role in the fight against privatization.

Last November, Rivera built a demonstration jointly with hospital management, to which Local 420 was not invited; it served as a campaign rally for the New York Democratic Congressional delegation and featured speaker Hillary Clinton. Butler also pretends that the Democrats are defending the health care of workers against Republican attacks and refuses to call any united actions.

More and more the unions accept deals that include cutbacks, thereby collaborating in the attacks on schools, hospitals, transit and other services. Despite the high density of unionization in New York (35 percent, well above the nationwide rate), the unions barely fight for their own contracts, much less the wider class interests of workers.

But the continued attacks have created a tremendous build-up of anger and resentment among working people, particularly Blacks and Latinos. Under the surface New York is waiting to explode, as did Los Angeles in 1992. No wonder Giuliani's main boast is his increase in police "toughness." The main danger for the mayor comes from the ignored battalions of workers inside and outside the unions. The need to keep resistance divided has led Giuliani to seek an accommodation with union leaders.

The task for revolutionaries is to win over the most advanced workers to the struggle to build a revolutionary party. Whenever possible we counterpose unity in action to the class collaborationism of the union misleaders. If workers understood their real strength, they would not accept the sellouts imposed by their leaders. In the unions we fight for a revolutionary program, with demands like "Jobs for All" that express the true interests of all workers. We also work to build a revolutionary party leadership, which must include members of the oppressed workforce of unions like 32B, 420, and 1199.●

Liars' Vanguard Catches LRP Not in the Act

"Scab 'Socialists' Caught Out at CUNY: Picket Lines Mean Don't Cross!" So read the headline of the Spartacist League's exposé in the February 16 *Workers Vanguard*, along with a photo of LRP supporters and others standing outside the City University of New York Graduate Center on January 30 during the Local 32B-32J strike. The caption alleged that the individuals in question were "perplexed over picket lines they'd planned to cross."

Many readers would indeed be shocked at reports of socialists violating a basic trade union principle — if they weren't aware that the Spartacists habitually make such charges against left political opponents, charges that are so often lies that they can't be taken at face value.

Inquiring minds want to know: how did the SL paparazzi know they could catch us not crossing a picket line at that very spot and time? Was it perhaps because the SL itself had attended the previous planning session and knew where the Support Committee meeting was scheduled? Well, yes. Had the Spartacists at that time argued with any of the militant strikers or leftists that holding a meeting at the Grad Center would be unprincipled, as their paper now says? Well, no.

In fact, holding the meeting there was a dumb tactic. But the LRP was in no way "perplexed." We had already

succeeded in convincing members of the Committee — both 32B-32J militants and left supporters — that the meeting should move elsewhere. We warned that using the Grad Center would open the Committee to false charges by hypocrites like local president Gus Bevona, who was clearly looking for ammunition to use against militants.

However, it was not a principled question of crossing a picket line. 32B-32J and its strikers were not engaged in shutting down buildings. The immediate problem was that the Bevona leadership wasn't even building picket lines to stop scabs and services to the buildings, supposedly the official strike policy. The Support Committee was planning a struggle to shut down one or two strategic sites as a strategic first step toward reversing the misleadership's passivity.

If the SL were serious about keeping out scabs and winning the strike, they would have mobilized their forces to help stop the scabs at a strategic location like the Empire State Building or the World Trade Center — as the February 2 *WV* proposed. But rather than treat the strike as a serious working-class battle, *WV* went for a fraudulent photo op like any other cheap scandal sheet. Then they scurried away from both the support meeting and the picket line — to the photo lab where their idea of the class struggle is fought.●

New York Unions Beg for Class Peace

by Bob Wolfe

"It's nice to come home to a city where there is labor peace." So said AFL-CIO President John Sweeney, addressing the Association For a Better New York in December after a visit to strike-bound France.

Only a few weeks later, labor peace in New York was shattered by the month-long building workers' strike of Local 32B-32J of the Service Employee's International Union (SEIU), the local Sweeney once ran. Thanks to the efforts of Sweeney's hand-picked successor, Gus Bevona, also vice-president of SEIU, a strike with potential to win was turned into a near-disaster and a defeat for the workers.

BUREAUCRATS' RAW DEAL

Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, detested by workers for his anti-union, racist political demagoguery, now emerges as the key broker for labor. Despite his open use of police as strike-breakers, Giuliani was hailed by Bevona for his key role in settling the strike. Meanwhile, Giuliani and Stanley Hill, head

of the biggest municipal union, DC 37, openly collaborated in pushing through a five-year sellout contract, which frees Giuliani to carry out his harsh austerity program without serious union opposition. And the city teachers, who voted down their parallel contract, are now isolated.

Conservative critics like the pro-business Citizens Budget Commission have accused the mayor of betraying his election promises to take on the unions. Even "pro-union" opponents, including Manhattan politician Ruth Messinger, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America (like Sweeney and a host of other labor bureaucrats), criticized Giuliani's agreements with Hill and the teachers as too generous.

In reality, these contracts stick city workers with a two-year wage freeze and a series of concessions, in return for the dubious paper promise of no-layoffs for three years — except in a "fiscal emergency." Plus, the "no-layoffs" deal excludes city hospital workers, who face massive job losses — especially if Giuliani succeeds in carrying out his threats to privatize several municipal hospitals.

After teachers voted down their contract, Hill and his hacks worked overtime to pass their deal. Despite bureaucratic manipulation and evidence of vote fraud, the vote was the closest in union history. Official totals announced by the union showed 43 percent voted no, including overwhelming rejection by hospital workers in Local 420.

GIULIANI'S LABOR PEACE

City workers have seen rotten contracts before. Since the financial crunch in the mid-70's, there have been a series of low-wage-plus-concessions contracts. What makes this deal different is the open collaboration between union heads and their supposed enemy, the Republican mayor.



Union hack Bevona told January rally: "I will not sell you out." One week later, he knifed the strike, and Sweeney declared victory.

The depth of the bureaucrats' collaboration became clear last May, when Hill and teacher's union president Sandra Feldman signed on to a letter authorized by Giuliani which asked the New York State legislature and governor to support the mayor's efforts to reduce Medicaid and welfare payments. These traitors claimed Giuliani's budget offered "balance, fairness, and hope" — despite its knifing of the poor and unemployed. DC 37 made a \$2000 contribution to Giuliani's re-election.

Why have the pro-Democratic unions become Giuliani allies? After the defeats of Democratic Mayor Dinkins and Governor Cuomo, the bureaucrats decided to accept political "reality" and play ball. Giuliani in turn needs the unions, given his growing unpopularity plus his strained relation with Republican Governor Pataki.

As we pointed out in PR 47, Giuliani's original strategy was to win the white middle class to a program of vicious austerity by whipping up racist hostility against Blacks, Latinos and immigrants. Initially, Giuliani aimed to divide the municipal unions, levelling the brunt of his attacks on DC 37 while dealing more gently with the more aristocratic unions with whiter memberships.

More recently he has tried to cover his racist attacks, hoping to win over conservative sections of the Black and

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