

1917

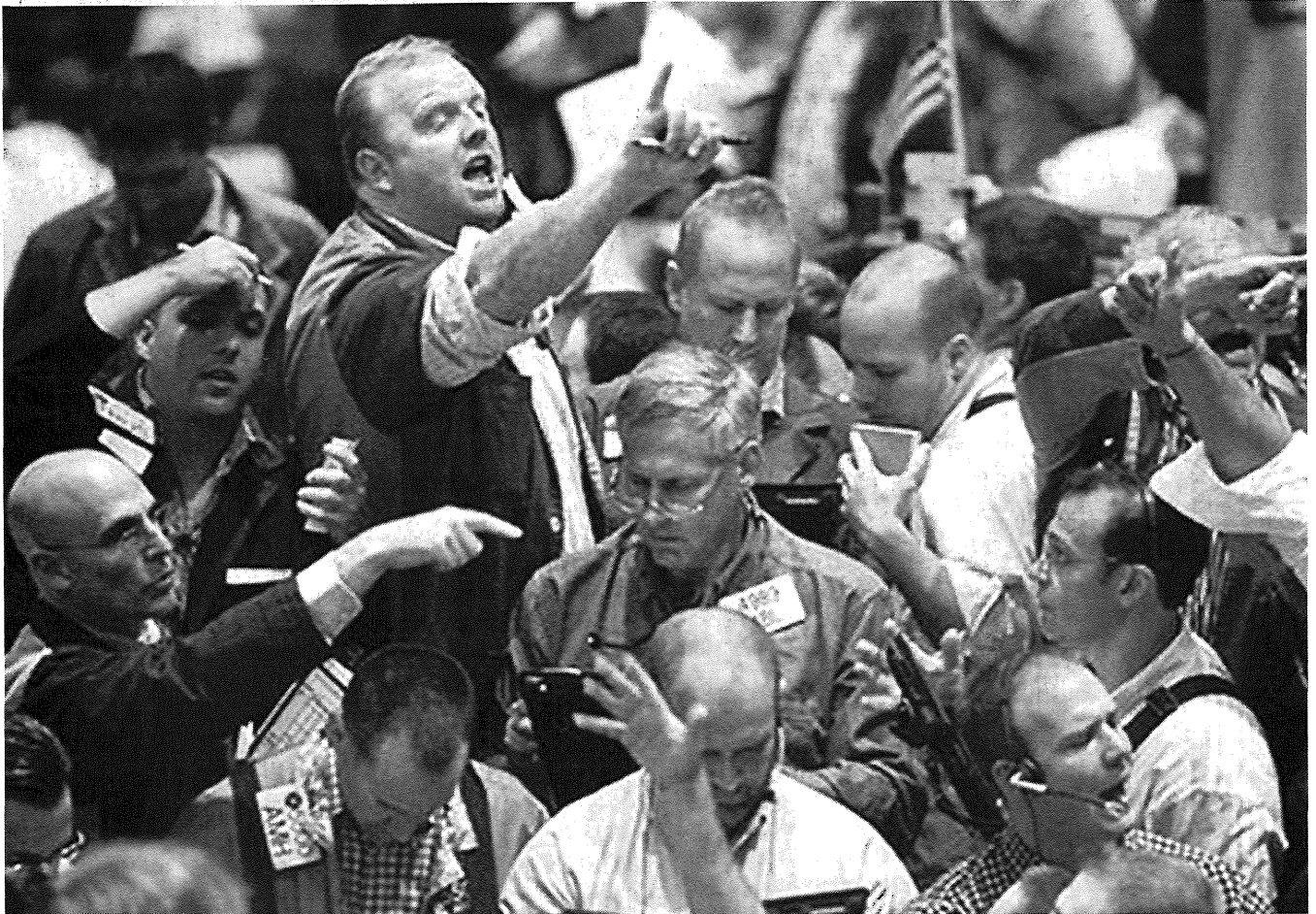
"To face reality squarely; not to seek the line of least resistance; to call things by their right names; to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be; not to fear obstacles; to be true in little things as in big ones; to base one's program on the logic of the class struggle; to be bold when the hour of action arrives—these are the rules of the Fourth International."

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'Inequality, Unemployment & Injustice' Capitalist Meltdown

Global capitalism is currently in the grip of the most severe economic contraction since the Great Depression of the 1930s. The ultimate depth and duration of the downturn remain to be seen, but there are many indicators that point to a lengthy period of massive unemployment in the imperialist camp and a steep fall in living standards in the so-called developing countries.

The bourgeois press is relentless in seizing on even the smallest signs of possible "recovery" to reassure consumers and investors that better days are just around the corner. This paternalistic "optimism" recalls similar prognostications following the 1929 Wall Street crash: "Depression has reached or passed its bottom, [Assistant Secretary of Commerce Julius] Klein told the Detroit Board of Commerce, although

'we may bump along' for a while in returning to higher trade levels" (*New York Times*, 19 March 1931). The next month, in a major speech approved by President Herbert Hoover, Klein's boss, Secretary of Commerce Robert P. Lamont, reiterated this upbeat projection:

"Declaring that after such industrial cataclysm, time and the slow working of economic readjustments were necessary before the world could return to economic health and vigor, Mr. Lamont said that there could be no doubt that many of these necessary readjustments had been and are being made and that business even now was responding sluggishly to the stimulus of these needed changes. He added that whatever were the causes of our present difficulties, the corrective influences now had been at work for many months."

—*New York Times*, 30 April 1931

But Hoover's stimulus failed to produce the anticipated "corrective influences" and the depression dragged on for years, turning the 1930s into a lost decade of unthinkable hardship for tens of millions of ordinary working people.

Today, parallels with the 1930s are becoming increasingly obvious:

"With the release of the jobs report on Friday, the broadest measure of unemployment and underemployment tracked by the Labor Department has reached its highest level in decades. If statistics went back so far, the measure would almost certainly be at its highest level since the Great Depression.

"In all, more than one out of every six workers—17.5 percent—were unemployed or underemployed in October."

"Nearly 16 million people are now unemployed and more than seven million jobs have been lost since late 2007.

"Officially, the Labor Department's broad measure of unemployment goes back only to 1994. But early this year, with the help of economists at the department, *The New York Times* created a version that estimates it going back to 1970. If such a measure were available for the Depression, it probably would have exceeded 30 percent."

—*New York Times*, 8 November 2009

The U.S. economy, which grew by 2.1 percent in 2007, stagnated in 2008 and shrank by 2.5 percent in 2009. The economies of the Eurozone and Japan also contracted, by 3.9 and 5.3 percent respectively (IMF, *World Economic Outlook Update*, January). Gross fixed capital formation in the advanced industrial economies, which fell 2.1 percent in 2008, was projected to drop another 12.4 percent in 2009. Meanwhile government deficits and levels of national debt have climbed sharply, particularly in the U.S. Some of this is attributable to declining tax revenues as unemployment rises and incomes fall, but much of it stems from the costs of the failed military adventures in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the government bailout of Wall Street speculators that Neil M. Barofsky, inspector general for the Troubled Asset Relief Program, estimates "could end up costing \$3 trillion" (*New York Times*, 21 July 2009).

The effect of a prolonged downturn in a "globalized" economy, characterized by fabulous wealth for a handful at the top and desperate poverty for billions at the bottom, will inevitably magnify the already enormous disparities.

For those in the neocolonies struggling to eke out a living on a dollar or two a day, this crisis will literally be a matter of life and death.

Capitalism & Economic Crisis

After the experience of the 1930s, bourgeois economists paid a good deal of attention to the origins of capitalism's inherent boom-bust tendency, but in recent decades most considered that the problem of periodic crises had been solved. Paul Krugman, winner of the 2008 Nobel Prize for Economics, recalled how a previous Nobel laureate declared that the business cycle had been tamed:

"In 2003 Robert Lucas, a professor at the University of Chicago and winner of the 1995 Nobel Memorial Prize in Economics, gave the presidential address at the annual meetings of the American Economic Association. After explaining that macroeconomics began as a response to the Great Depression, he declared that it was time for the field

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Correction

The article in 1917 No. 31 entitled "Capitalism in Crisis" stated: "Between 1988 and 2007, credit card debt mushroomed from 168 percent of GDP to 350 percent." This should have read: "...credit market debt mushroomed from 168 percent of GDP to 350 percent." Credit cards account for only a relatively small portion of total credit market debt.

1917

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USec Flagship Renounces Trotskyism

NPA: France's New Reformist Party



PHOTO THÉÂTRE ROUGE—JMB

Paris, 19 March 2009: NPA participates in union-organized day of action

Reprinted below is a leaflet initially distributed by IBT supporters in London in November 2009.

The emergence of France's Nouveau Parti anticapitaliste (NPA) has generated considerable interest within the European left. The NPA's charismatic leader, Olivier Besancenot, has become a household name in France and the broad outlines of his group's policies are known to millions.

At the time of the party's founding in February 2009, a public opinion poll reported that 23 percent of respondents considered Besancenot to be the 'best opponent' of President Nicolas Sarkozy, compared to only 13 percent who favoured Martine Aubry, leader of the much larger Parti socialiste (PS), which has long been one of the traditional governing parties of the Fifth Republic.

Many on the British left are impressed with the NPA's popularity, but few have more than a vague notion of what it actually stands for, or what it does. Sensationalised red-baiting by the bourgeois press and enthusiastic endorsements by much of the 'far left' have given the impression that the NPA has succeeded in winning mass support while maintaining a more or less revolutionary profile. But a careful examination of the NPA's origins, politics and activity reveals it to be a reformist formation whose leadership are chiefly concerned with electoral manoeuvring and acutely aware that to be a major player in French politics they need to appear as militant 'anti-capitalists' to left-wing youth and working people.

In the final analysis, to be truly 'anti-capitalist' an organisation must be committed to a revolutionary socialist

programme. The NPA, which was launched by the Ligue communiste révolutionnaire (LCR), the former leading section of the fake-Trotskyist 'United Secretariat of the Fourth International' [USec], does not even pretend to stand in the tradition of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky. In the interview in which he first publicly floated the idea of the NPA, Besancenot explicitly spelt out its anti-Leninist character: 'If it [the NPA] sees the light of day, the LCR will have no reason to exist as such. It's about forming a militant party which resembles society, a party which will be neither a party of passive adherents nor an elitist revolutionary vanguard' (*Le Parisien*, 24 August 2007).

Origins of the NPA

In April 1995, Arlette Laguiller, who repeatedly stood as the candidate of the ostensibly revolutionary Lutte ouvrière (LO), first passed the 5 percent mark in the French presidential election. LO quickly poured cold water on speculation that it might form a 'new party' in a bid to displace the moribund Parti communiste français (PCF) as the hegemonic group to the left of the PS. In the 2002 presidential election Laguiller's vote edged up to 5.7 percent while the LCR's Besancenot, then an unknown young postal worker, received a surprising 4.25 percent. The growth in support for the 'far left' reflected massive working-class disenchantment with five years of capitalist austerity administered by the 'Plural Left' government—a popular front composed of the PS, PCF and a few small bourgeois fragments.

The PCF sought to distance itself from the Plural Left's record of cuts with condemnations of the 'neo-liberalism' of the European Union's 'constitutional' treaty, which its erstwhile partners in the PS supported. The PCF was joined by the LCR, an assortment of left-nationalist bourgeois mavericks and a minority current in the PS led by Senator Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who once belonged to Pierre Lambert's ostensibly Trotskyist Organisation communiste internationaliste.

The PS leadership, along with the rest of the bourgeois political establishment, was stunned when the 'No' side won the May 2005 referendum on the EU 'constitution'. The PCF, Mélenchon and various others, including a right-wing minority in the LCR led by Christian Picquet, proposed to follow up on their referendum victory by fielding a common candidate in the 2007 presidential election. The LCR leadership, however, insisted that it would only participate in such a venture if there was a firm commitment not to join any coalition government that included the PS. When the PCF rejected this condition, the LCR opted to run Besancenot. In the end, there was no 'unity' candidate, as Mélenchon decided to back the PS and the rest of the other 'anti-neoliberal' groupings balked at the prospect of becoming adjuncts to the PCF.

The result of the first round of voting in April 2007 seemed to vindicate the LCR's tactic. Besancenot received 4.1 percent of the vote, compared to only 1.9 percent for PCF leader Marie-George Buffet and 1.3 percent for LO's Laguiller. Eager to obtain the LCR's endorsement in the second round, Ségolène Royal, the PS candidate who was formally supported by the bourgeois Left Radicals and Jean-Pierre Chevènement's Mouvement Républicain et Citoyen (MRC), proposed to Besancenot 'that he participate in public meetings and in a commission to enrich her programme with some of [the LCR's] propositions' (*Libération*, 30 April 2007). The LCR rebuffed this overture, but nonetheless ended up supporting Royal in the second round.

With the balance of forces on the 'left of the left' apparently shifting in their favour, the LCR leadership decided to launch the NPA in a bid to pull in eco-liberals, 'alter-globalists' and dissident social democrats. To this end they were prepared to abandon any association with Trotskyism or 'revolutionary communism', dissolve the LCR and rebrand themselves as simple 'anti-capitalists'. Such sentiments are pretty mainstream within the French workers' movement. Even the PS, at its June 1971 Épinay Congress, advocated a 'break with capitalism':

'The congress mandated its new leadership to prepare a governmental accord with the PCF. The final motion made reference to the union of the left strategy, the break with capitalism and the workers' class front. Épinay marked the real beginning of the PS and its renewed connection with the traditional synthesis of French socialism: anti-capitalism, confidence in the reforming action of the state, humanism....'

—'Le Parti socialiste depuis 1971',
www.parti-socialiste.fr

The LCR's formal renunciation of Trotskyism in favour of a variant of this traditional 'French socialism' was a signal to supporters of Buffet, Mélenchon et al that the new party was committed to joining the reformist mainstream. The NPA's declaration of 'independence' from the discredited PS, i.e., its categorical refusal to con-

sider participating in any sort of coalition with it, was only a tactical manoeuvre but posed a direct challenge to the PCF, which can only maintain its apparatus and parliamentary representation through aggregating its vote with that of the PS in return for a proportion of positions won. The LCR leadership calculated that many workers who had historically supported the PCF and PS had been so alienated by the betrayals of the Plural Left that they were indifferent to the fate of their elected representatives in the National Assembly and local councils, and therefore might gravitate to a new 'anti-capitalist' party that remained independent of the PS.

Picquet and his supporters objected to Besancenot's 'sectarian' attitude towards Buffet and Mélenchon, both of whom had been ministers in the Plural Left government. But a large majority of the LCR membership supported the proposed turn, which was overwhelmingly endorsed in January 2008 at the group's 17th National Congress. That gathering issued 'a call to everyone':

'individuals, activist groups, political currents, wanting to join together in an activist, national and democratic organised political framework, a party building international links with forces defending such a perspective.

'We speak to women and men of all origins, with or without papers who think their lives are worth more than profits: to youth who answer "resistance!" in the face of attempts to leave them a precarious future; to activists in community groups and trade unionists who take action every day in their neighbourhoods or on the job; to socialist, anti-neoliberal and communist activists, to all national and local political organisations or currents, who think it is time to unite, beyond former divisions, and above all those who have not found a party appealing enough to get involved....'

—*International Viewpoint*, February 2008

To draw as many people as possible into preparing the launch of the new party, local LCR cells set up hundreds of 'NPA committees' throughout France.

As the global financial crisis unfolded in the autumn of 2008, the French ruling class was clearly becoming alarmed by the possibility of massive social upheaval. A worried Sarkozy attempted to reassure the population that 'the crisis is not a crisis of capitalism' (*Le Figaro*.fr, 25 September 2008). The LCR floated a few radical-sounding proposals, including one 'to unify all public and private banks in a single public banking system placed under the control of workers, consumers and users' (*Le Monde*, 17 October 2008). Besancenot also suggested that it might be necessary to 'reveal banking, commercial and industrial secrets', i.e., to permit workers to examine the books of the capitalists (*L'Express*, 26 November 2008). Henri Weber, a PS leader who had once belonged to the LCR, denounced the 'ultra-archaic character of the solutions' proposed by Besancenot (*Le Monde*, 30 October 2008).

NPA's Founding Congress

The roughly 600 delegates who met in February 2009 at the NPA's founding congress claimed to represent some 9,000 people. At its dissolution, the LCR had reported a membership of 3,200. While many who signed NPA membership cards were apparently not interested enough to participate in the election of delegates, there is no question

that the NPA is significantly broader than the ex-LCR. A small minority of the new adherents is composed of members of various ostensibly Trotskyist groupings, including Gauche Révolutionnaire (French section of the Committee for a Workers' International), the Groupe CRI (a small split from the Lambertists), Fraction L'Étincelle (recently expelled from LO) and the Prométhée group. French supporters of the International Socialist Tendency had already liquidated into the LCR years earlier.

The main debate at the NPA congress pitted Besancenot's majority against 'Unir', Picquet's grouping, which had the support of 16 percent of the delegates. The Unir current argued for aligning—'without conditions'—with the 'Left Front', an alliance of the PCF and the Parti de gauche (PG), recently founded by Mélenchon's ex-PS tendency, in the June 2009 European elections. The NPA majority was only prepared to do so on the basis of a firm public commitment to remain 'independent' of the PS. This 'sectarianism' was too much for Picquet who, along with a section of his base, subsequently left the NPA and formed Gauche Unitaire, which joined the Left Front.

The ex-LCR leadership has sought to lend legitimacy to the claim that the NPA is an entirely new formation by actively promoting new people to prominent positions. Among the most outstanding is Raoul Marc Jennar, a former Christian Democrat from Belgium, who was a spokesperson for radical farmer José Bové's presidential campaign. On his website, Jennar brags that, among his other accomplishments, since October 2007 he has been acting as a 'consultant to the Cambodian government and UN consultant for the tribunal charged with judging the leaders of Khmer Rouge'. In a letter of 7 April 2008 endorsing the NPA project, Jennar asserted that it was time 'to construct an authentic left force that is democratic, reformist/revolutionary and pro-environment. This means closing the parenthesis opened by Leninism, rejecting the methods (formulated in the 21 conditions) and beginning the construction of a new political subject'. With these impeccable credentials, Jennar was put at the head of one of the NPA's seven party lists for the European elections.

Back to the Second International

The programmatic and organisational framework of the NPA is that of the Second International—not of the Leninist Third International or Trotsky's Fourth International, neither of which admitted parties like the NPA. The 'Founding Principles of the Nouveau Parti anticapitaliste', adopted at its first conference, do not even mention the October 1917 Russian Revolution—the only successful seizure of power by the proletariat to date. Instead the document refers vaguely to continuing the work 'of those who tried with or without success to overturn the established order and resist oppression'. In the NPA principles 'socialism' is described in Third Campist terms as something 'radically opposed to the bureaucratic dictatorships which, from the ex-USSR to China, usurped its name while reproducing the mechanisms of exploitation and oppression they claimed to fight'.

While the Stalinist regimes in the Soviet Union, China and other deformed workers' states could certainly be described as 'oppressive', they were also based on the expropriation of capitalist property and the suppression of



GETTY IMAGES

Laguiller and Besancenot at auto worker demo, October 2008

the chief 'mechanism of exploitation' under capitalism, the buying and selling of labour power. This 'mechanism' only reappeared in the USSR after the 1991 triumph of capitalist counter-revolution spearheaded by Boris Yeltsin with the support not only of world imperialism but of every reformist agency in the workers' movement, including the LCR. The reintroduction of capitalist 'freedom' under Yeltsin enriched a handful of parasites, while pushing tens of millions into desperate poverty. Life expectancy plummeted, while every sort of social pathology—from domestic violence to murder—surged. Between 1991 and 1998 GDP fell by an estimated 40 percent.

The LCR's 'democratic socialist' indifference to the defence of the deformed and degenerated workers' states is of a piece with the NPA's electoralist strategy. The parliamentary cretinism that underpins virtually all the new party's practical activity is complemented by the Second International-style 'maximum' programme outlined in its 'Founding Principles':

To put an end to crises implies putting an end to exploitation, thus to the private property in the means of production, exchange and communication at its base. The financial system, services essential for life and large enterprises must come under the control of workers and the population, who will appropriate and run them within the framework of democratic planning. Freed from capitalist property and appropriation, production and the distribution of wealth will benefit all of society.'

The NPA's principles note that 'a social revolution will be necessary to bring down capitalism', and even mention 'overturning' the bourgeoisie's repressive apparatus:

It is not possible to place the state and the current institutions at the service of political and social transformation. Accustomed to the defence of the interests of the bourgeoisie, these bodies must be overturned to create new institutions at the service and under the control of workers and the population.'

The document also contains a rough outline of an 'emergency programme' to 'prepare the socialism that we want': 'We defend an emergency programme which, responding to immediate needs, calls into question capitalist property in the means of production, attacks capital and its profits to raise wages, pensions and social-welfare minimums

and satisfy the needs of the population.

'This programme insists upon the social appropriation of the product of labour by the expropriation without compensation of the large capitalist groups starting with those of the CAC 40 [the top corporations listed on the Paris stock exchange] and the essential services and branches under the control of workers and the population.'

The 'Founding Principles' propose that 'redundancies must be banned on pain of requisition without indemnity of companies that lay off workers', and call for the 'reduction and sharing of work time until unemployment is abolished'. In its practical activity, the NPA tends to pose its call for 'banning' redundancies as a policy option that should be adopted by the existing bourgeois state.

In a nod to internationalism, the principles also proclaim: 'Any anti-capitalist victory in France or in a neighbouring country would have to immediately extend itself in Europe and more broadly in the world.' To that end, the creation of 'a new International' of 'anti-capitalist and revolutionary forces' is advocated:

'...the anti-capitalists of an imperialist country must above all struggle against their national capitalists, their own imperialist state and its army. It is to this end that we support the expropriation, by the workers and the people of the given country, of French companies that exploit the workers and resources of the oppressed countries. And wherever the French army (or those of other imperialist countries) is present, we support popular resistance and the military defeat of the imperialist armies.'

In its most leftist formulations the NPA hints at going beyond the framework of militant reformism:

'It is by developing and generalising struggles, generalised and prolonged strikes that we can block attacks and impose demands. It is the relationship of forces issuing from mobilisation that will allow a government to be put in place to impose radical measures that break with the system and begin a revolutionary transformation of society.'

Yet the strategy remains essentially social-democratic, with a combination of electoral successes and 'popular mobilisations' enabling an 'anti-capitalist' government to wield the existing state apparatus as an instrument of social transformation:

'From the municipality to parliament, we will support all measures that would improve the situation of workers, democratic rights and respect for the environment. We will contribute to putting them in place if the electors give us the responsibility. But we will remain true to what we fight for and will not participate in any coalition that contradicts that struggle.

'Our elected officials refuse to co-manage the system. They tenaciously oppose anti-social measures and defend tooth and nail, in complete independence from right-wing and social-liberal majorities, the interests of the workers and the population.

'At the national level, the application of such a programme would involve confronting the dominant classes and would demand a formidable popular mobilisation likely to generate new forms of power that would give an anti-capitalist government the tools for its policies.'

In its 'General Resolution on the Political and Social Situation', the NPA projected 'effective means to control

the police by the population' as a step in the process of putting 'an end to the Fifth Republic by a constituent process for a social and anti-capitalist republic'. This gradualist, incremental approach, so characteristic of social democracy, is the real content of the radical-sounding phrases about 'overturning' the organs of capitalist rule.

French Workers Fight Back: NPA as Pressure Valve for Capital

The founding of the NPA took place in the context of a massive mobilisation of French workers against Sarkozy's plans to respond to the global financial crisis of 2008 with further austerity and job cuts. In the first few months of 2009, workers in the healthcare, energy, rail, postal and car parts sectors joined students and teachers in lycées (secondary schools) and universities in a wave of strikes and demonstrations that in some cases included factory occupations. As conflicts hardened, in some places the control of the official union leadership was challenged by elected strike committees and daily general assemblies. Jean-François Copé, a leading figure in Sarkozy's Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP), did a little free publicity for the NPA when he accused Besancenot of encouraging 'illegal' and 'violent' behaviour (*Libération*, 21 January 2009). There were a few places where the justified anger of the victims of capitalist attacks went beyond the bounds of bourgeois legality, but the NPA did not play a leading role in them. Workers at the Continental tyre factory in Clairoux ransacked a government building at Compiègne, while those at 3M, Caterpillar, Sony and other companies made headlines by briefly detaining their managers—a tactic the bourgeois media denounced as 'bossnapping'.

The trade-union bureaucracy scrambled to isolate and contain the more militant outbursts, while also calling a series of national 'days of action' to let off steam. On the first day of action, 29 January [2009], some 2.5 million people took to the streets to protest the plans of the government and *patronat* (employers). A few days earlier, the leaders of the nascent NPA signed a joint statement with the PCF, PG and various other organisations, declaring:

'We demand increases to wages, the minimum wage, the minimum old-age income and social-welfare benefits. We propose the repeal of the fiscal package of summer 2007; a redistribution of the state budget to respond to social needs and to develop public services at all levels; a tax reform to prevent companies from, as they do today, privileging speculation to the detriment of employment and working conditions.'

—'Déclaration unitaire pour le 29 janvier:

"Ce n'est pas à la population de payer la crise!""
26 January 2009

Less than two weeks later these same groups, joined by the PS, LO and the bourgeois MRC, appealed to Sarkozy to make a 'course correction':

'The message of the day [of action] of 29 January is clear. Those who work... must not pay for the crisis. Contrary to what the prime minister has claimed, the day of 29 January clearly carried the demand for a course correction ["changement de cap"], notably on the question of wages, employment and public services. Nicolas Sarkozy and the government cannot run away from these demands and ignore the main points put forward in the united trade-union platform.

'More broadly, a large public debate is necessary in the country on the alternative measures to the current political choices that really and effectively go after the roots of this crisis and impose a different distribution of wealth and another type of development.'

—Communiqué commun des organisations de gauche réunies le 4 février', 5 February 2009

As working-class sentiment shifted leftward, former Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin warned of a 'risk of revolution': '[People have the] feeling that we're doing a lot for the banks, we're doing a lot to help businesses but that the workers themselves are paying the costs of the crisis, that it's always the same ones who suffer' (LePoint.fr, 19 April 2009).

While signing joint statements with reformist and bourgeois parties, the NPA distinguished itself with repeated calls for a 'general strike'—sometimes even a 'prolonged general strike'—and suggestions that French workers should follow the example of their counterparts in the colonies of Guadeloupe and Martinique who waged general strikes lasting 44 and 38 days respectively, wresting major concessions from the bosses. In a statement released a few days prior to the second national day of action on 19 March [2009], the NPA noted:

'A single "all together" day [of action] will not suffice. In Guadeloupe and Martinique, it was after several weeks of general strike that the government and the bosses folded.

'To ban redundancies, [to win] 300 euros net for everyone, a minimum wage of 1,500 net [per month], to achieve the withdrawal of the neoliberal reforms, it is necessary to prepare a general strike movement to make MEDEF [the employers' association] and the government back down.'

—Communiqué du NPA. Faire céder le gouvernement et le patronat', 16 March 2009

The inaugural issue of *Tout est à nous!*, the NPA's weekly newspaper, called for a 'general strike' on its front page, and reported that the 3 million people who demonstrated on 19 March demanded 'that the government change course ["change de cap"] and stop ruling for a minority'. Echoing this sentiment, the NPA wrote that:

'...between the extension of quality public services financed by taxes and the multiplication of tax cuts to its friends the rich, this government long ago made up its mind. Exactly the opposite of this policy, a tax revolution, is necessary, with a return to progressive taxation and real taxation of profits and wealth and, above all, capital.'

The NPA's signature on joint declarations with the PS, the PCF and bourgeois parties to demand that Sarkozy implement various Keynesian measures and establish a more progressive tax system was a signal to the ruling class (and its labour lieutenants) that, despite its sometimes leftist rhetoric, the NPA could be counted on to contain its activities within the bounds of the capitalist political and social order.

Besancenot's repeated calls for a 'general strike' were nevertheless seen by the trade-union leaders as meddling in their affairs. In October 2008, Bernard Thibault, leader of the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT), the union traditionally aligned with the PCF, complained: 'I see that Olivier Besancenot is attempting to be a politician while at the same time a leader of social struggles' (Le Monde, 7 October 2008). François Chérèque, leader of



'Bossnapping' at Fulmen factory in Auxerre, January 2009

the Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail (CFDT), issued a similar denunciation of 'rapacious' NPA militants who were 'touring enterprises in difficulty' (AFP, 16 March 2009).

The artificial distinction between the 'social' and 'political' spheres dates from the CGT's 1906 Charter of Amiens, which stipulated that unions should remain 'independent' of all political parties. Since the end of WWI, this convention has routinely been invoked by trade-union and party leaders seeking to justify the reformist activities of their parallel (and often interconnected) bureaucracies. In a letter of July 1921, Leon Trotsky explained to revolutionary syndicalist Pierre Monatte that the Charter of Amiens no longer had any progressive content:

'To every thinking Communist it is perfectly clear that pre-war French syndicalism represented a profoundly significant and important revolutionary tendency. The Charter of Amiens was an extremely precious document of the proletarian movement. But this document is historically restricted. Since its adoption a World War has taken place, Soviet Russia has been founded, a mighty revolutionary wave has passed over all of Europe, the Third International has grown and developed.'

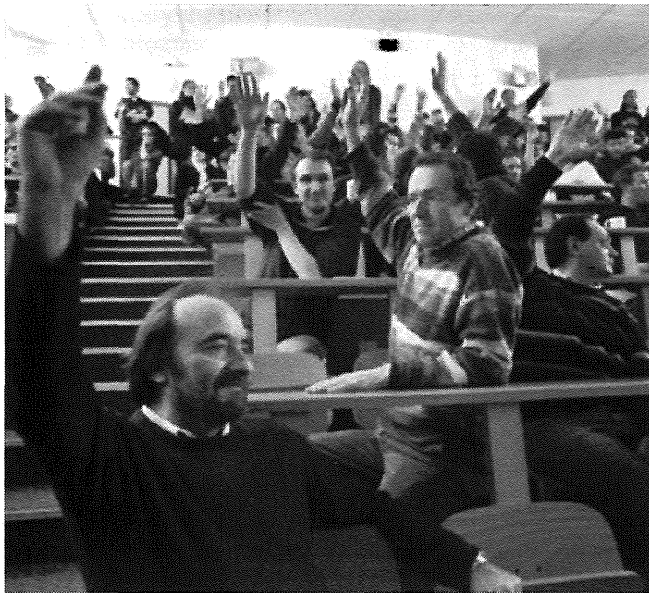
—*The First Five Years of the Communist International* Vol.1

Within the unions the NPA's strongest support comes from teachers and other white-collar workers, but as the protests became more militant its influence rose in other sectors as well:

'Recruitment is visible notably in the car manufacturing sector with new recruits at Renault, Citroën, Peugeot and Ford as much as in the most proletarian of public services, such as the post office and the SNCF [railways]. But this is not yet sufficient to constitute bastions. "We have reinforced ourselves but we don't yet have big company sections", noted Basile Pot, one of [the NPA's] leaders. But the influence of Besancenot's slogans is itself real. It is perhaps this radicalisation that frightens the CFDT.'

—*Le Monde*, 21 March 2009

The trade-union bureaucrats were not the only ones alarmed by the NPA's growing influence. Xavier Bertrand,



ANNE-CHRISTINE POUJOLAT—AFP

Strike vote by researchers and teachers at Aix-Marseille I University, 2 February 2009

secretary general of Sarkozy's UMP, denounced 'certain far-left manipulators' who 'have but one desire: to stir up violence' (AFP, 25 April 2009). France's leading right-wing newspaper, *Le Figaro* (23 April 2009), reported that anonymous CGT and CFDT hacks were accusing members of the NPA and LO of initiating most of the 'bossnappings' and other radical actions.

The NPA denounced the cowardly union leaders' role in stifling rank-and-file initiatives, but by the last major day of action on May Day [2009], when participation dropped to 1.2 million, Besancenot et al were toning down their agitation for a general strike. When the tide was high the NPA leaders made no serious attempt to mobilise the more advanced layers of workers for concrete actions that could have broadened the struggle. Eventually the union leadership regained sufficient confidence to shift from national protests to 'decentralised mobilisations', which were obviously intended to demobilise their ranks. While complaining about this sabotage, the NPA leadership has also formally renounced any ambition to fight for the leadership of the labour movement: 'The NPA told the CGT that its fear of the construction of an NPA current inside the CGT was without foundation. The autonomy of the unions goes without saying for the NPA' ('Communiqué du NPA. Rencontre NPA-CGT', 2 October 2009).

NPA's Reformist Electoralism

In contrast to their essentially passive role in the labour upsurge, Besancenot et al actively prepared for the European elections, challenging the PCF and Mélenchon on the issue of 'independence' from the PS. Mélenchon signalled that while he had no affinity for the PS, he was not prepared to break with the PCF, which remained dependent on its electoral bloc with the Socialists:

'Jean-Luc Mélenchon has nevertheless tried to reassure his young "comrade" [Besancenot] by evoking a durable alliance and total independence vis-à-vis the PS. But resistance is likely to come from the PCF. Weakened for

several years, the Communists only survive electorally thanks to agreements made with the party from rue de Solferino [PS], in particular for regional elections. It is thus risky to distance itself from the PS....'

—*Journal du Dimanche*, 8 February 2009

Besancenot hoped that a strong showing in the European elections would establish the NPA as the dominant player to the left of the PS. The NPA strategy was to attract support from traditional PCF/PS voters who were looking for a more dynamic organisation but were not ready to break with reformism. A 2008 opinion poll indicated that 90 percent of those considering voting for Besancenot in the 2012 presidential election would want him to participate in a popular-frontist 'government of the left' (*L'Express*, 26 November 2008). As leading NPA member Pierre-François Grond put it, most of those who vote for Besancenot in the first round 'are going to vote left [i.e., for the PS et al] in the second round' of elections 'whatever the NPA advises' (*Libération*, 4 May 2009).

The NPA's campaign for the European elections made it clear that rather than challenging the existing consciousness of its electoral base the NPA adapts to it. In its first official meeting, the NPA's National Political Committee summed up their electoral message as advancing 'a social, democratic and eco-friendly Europe' and 'an anti-militarist and anti-imperialist Europe of women's rights' (*Tout est à nous!*, 26 March 2009). A key element in the NPA campaign was a promise to give everyone a wage increase of 300 euros per month 'by taking the 10 GDP points that have passed from the pockets of workers to those of the capitalists these past 25 years: in France, this represents more than 170 billion euros per year' (*Tout est à nous!*, 30 April 2009). The NPA proposed that 'a veritable energy revolution' could be paid for by 'a tax on the profits of the energy sector. This would permit the creation of more than 800,000 jobs.' According to the NPA, through the creation of a public banking service, 'a single European currency like the euro and a European central bank could serve democratic planning indispensable for placing the economy at the service of the well-being of the peoples' (*Tout est à nous!*, 4 June 2009).

Despite its attempts to appear as a practical, responsible reformist party, the NPA only won 4.9 percent when the votes were tallied—far short of the 9 percent that opinion polls had predicted at its founding (*Le Monde*, 14 May 2009). Moreover, it failed to elect a single Member of the European Parliament (MEP). The PCF-dominated Left Front did better, winning more than 6 percent of the vote and ending up with four MEPs. The NPA's disappointing showing strengthened the hand of Picquet's supporters who remained in the NPA. Their 'Convergences et alternative' grouping, which claims to have the support of 1,000 NPA members, is represented on the NPA's executive committee and has a column in *Tout est à nous!* Convergences et alternative has continued to argue that the Left Front and the NPA should form joint lists to contest the regional elections in March 2010.

On 30 June 2009, Besancenot and Mélenchon (now one of the Left Front's MEPs) agreed in principle to the idea of 'autonomous and independent lists' excluding the PS in the first round with 'technical' or 'democratic' fusions with the PS in the second round ('Déclaration commune du NPA et du PG après leur rencontre 30/06', 2 July 2009).

The NPA failed to reach a similar agreement with the PCF, which refused to break with the PS in the hope of retaining its 185 regional councillors. The NPA has sought to broaden its coalition by drawing in various petty-bourgeois anti-neoliberal, ecological, 'alterglobalist' and feminist movements. To this end, it organised a series of meetings of the 'radical left' this autumn. The PCF, with the support of Picquet's Gauche Unitaire, has the PG wavering, as Mélenchon does not want to stand independently of the PCF, which is proposing to take a 'flexible' approach to the elections, i.e., to run jointly with the PS where doing so is necessary to win.

NPA & the British Left

The Socialist Party of England and Wales (SP), the leading section of the CWI, has endorsed the decision of its French affiliate, Gauche Révolutionnaire (GR), to join the NPA:

'Gauche Révolutionnaire fights for the NPA to put forward a socialist programme, based on the power of the working class to organise and change society. Such a party could make the case for an end to the crisis-ridden capitalist system and its attacks on living standards, through the socialist transformation of society.'

—*Socialist*, 25 March 2009

GR's 'fight' does not seem to have gone much beyond suggesting that the NPA's declaration of principles be amended to call for 'a government of workers at the head of a new state formed by the working class organised in committees...having overturned the bourgeois state' ('Amendement pour le congrès de fondation du NPA', 5 February 2009). Had the ex-LCR leadership wanted to disguise the overt reformism of their project, they could undoubtedly have come up with some equivalent formulation. But the NPA is explicitly committed to the reform of the capitalist state, not its overturn. The CWI itself has a long history of advocating a parliamentary road to socialism via reforming the bourgeoisie's repressive apparatus (see *Marxism vs. 'Militant' Reformism*).

If Gauche Révolutionnaire were capable of fighting for a Marxist attitude towards the capitalist state, they would have attacked the NPA leadership's support of the 'justified' struggle of French prison wardens for 'better working conditions and the creation of jobs' (*Tout est à nous!*, 14 May 2009). According to the NPA, 'prison is unliveable for the wardens, too' (*Ibid.*). Once again, however, it would be rank hypocrisy for GR to challenge Besancenot on this issue without simultaneously attacking the SP, who recently sank to a new low when they recruited one Brian Caton, general secretary of the 'union' of British prison officers.

The SP's concern for the well-being of screws, cops and the other hirelings who enforce capitalist rule is paralleled by the overt nationalism it pushed during its campaign for the European elections as part of the 'No2EU—Yes to Democracy' bloc. Joining the SP in this rotten cross-class venture were a few 'left' union bureaucrats, the Stalinist Communist Party of Britain and the tiny bourgeois Liberal Party. The NPA's social-democratic reformism was actually somewhat to the left of the nationalist tilt of the No2EU programme:

'Nation states with the right to self-determination and their governments are the only institutions that can control the movement of big capital and clip the wings of the trans-national corporations and banks. This means

democratic control of the major banks, including the Bank of England, and full public ownership and democratic accountability of railways, postal services, NHS, and the energy industry.'

—www.no2eu.com/economiccrisis.html

Alex Callinicos, a leading figure in the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), who considers the NPA to be an 'exciting' venture, described the ex-LCR leadership's decision 'not to make explicit commitment to the revolutionary Marxist tradition the basis of the new party' as necessary 'for long-term strategic reasons'. Callinicos' 'long-term strategy' turns out to be remarkably similar to the traditional Menshevik/Stalinist theory of 'stages':

'The political experience of the 20th century shows very clearly that in the advanced capitalist countries it is impossible to build a mass revolutionary party without breaking the hold of social democracy over the organised working class. In the era of the Russian Revolution it was possible for many European communist parties to begin to do this by splitting social democratic parties and winning substantial numbers of previously reformist workers directly to the revolutionary programme of the Communist International. October 1917 exercised an enormous attractive power on everyone around the world who wanted to fight the bosses and imperialism. 'Alas, thanks to the experience of Stalinism, the opposite is true today. Social liberalism is repelling many working class people today, but, in the first instance, what they seek is a more genuine version of the reformism that their traditional parties once promised them. Therefore, if the formations of the radical left are to be habitable to these refugees from social democracy, their programmes must not foreclose the debate between reform and revolution by simply incorporating the distinctive strategic conceptions developed by revolutionary Marxists.'

—*International Socialism*, Autumn 2008

Callinicos thus essentially proclaims the project of building the type of revolutionary vanguard party advocated by Lenin and Trotsky to be obsolete. In its place, Callinicos proposes to return to the model of the Second International, where reformists and revolutionaries can peacefully co-exist in what Karl Kautsky called a 'party of the whole class'.

Callinicos is critical of the NPA leadership's aversion to the idea of joining the PS in a coalition government:

'while the LCR are entirely right to oppose as a matter of principle participation in a centre-left government, they can't assume that everyone attracted to the NPA will share this attitude....

'It is important that revolutionaries warn against the dangers posed by the radical left participating in centre-left governments. But they should not make the fact that these formations, if they are successful, will confront the problem of participation a reason for not building them now.'

—*Ibid.*

Callinicos suspects that the ex-LCR may not be sufficiently deferential to those to its right, and warns that it would:

'be a disastrous mistake for revolutionary socialists to seek to dominate the NPA and its counterparts elsewhere thanks to their organisational weight. Any such attempt would severely hold back the development of the radical left. But this does not solve the problem of the

struggle between left and right that is unavoidable in any dynamically developing political formation.'

—*Ibid.*

This parallels the criticisms of Picquet and others that Besancenot is being 'sectarian' towards the PCF and Mélenchon's PG:

'The balance of forces in France allows the anti-capitalist left to relate to Mélenchon from a position of relative strength. But nevertheless his break with the PS is a significant one....

'The development of the NPA may generate more breaks, not just in the PS but in the Communist Party as well. The NPA will have to know how to relate to such openings in a way that involves more than just offering the choice of joining the party or engaging in "classic" united fronts on specific issues. For all the excitement it has generated, the NPA will be quite a small force (albeit significantly larger than the LCR) on the French political scene and in the workers' movement. This will limit its capacity to lead in any real upsurge of social struggles. Realising the NPA's very great potential will require a willingness to intervene in the broader political field and sometimes to make alliances with other political forces, some of which, in the nature of things, will be reformist.'

—*International Socialism*, Spring 2009

French supporters of the League for the Fifth International (L5I), the international tendency headed by Workers Power, joined the NPA hoping to see it somehow morph into 'a new revolutionary leadership for the next round of struggle and not a weak electoral coalition of centrists and reformists' (*Workers Power*, March 2009). Correctly identifying the NPA's founding principles as a classic 'minimum/maximum programme', the L5I nevertheless insists that the new party is a 'centrist' formation that may yet avoid 'the trap of accommodating to reformism' ('Days of action in France: we need an indefinite general strike to win', 25 March 2009).

In Workers Power's major statement on the NPA, Dave Stockton, one of the group's senior figures, makes the bizarre claim that launching the NPA and repudiating any pretence of 'revolutionary communism' signalled a 'sharp turn to the left' by the LCR:

'The LCR's left turn began over two years ago, in the six months before the 2007 presidential elections. For most of the early years of this century, the LCR had identified neoliberalism, not capitalism, as the enemy and sought to create an anti-neoliberal party with intransigently reformist forces like Attac and the French Communist Party (PCF).

'The lowest point of this rightward-moving policy was the panic which led them to call for a vote for incumbent right-wing president Jacques Chirac in [2002], "holding one's nose", to keep out the fascist Jean Marie Le Pen.'

—*Fifth International* Vol. 3, No. 2, Spring 2009

No sooner had Stockton's article appeared than the NPA re-enacted this 'low point' in Hénin-Beaumont (Pas-de-Calais department), where the candidate of the fascist Front National (FN) won enough votes in the first round to qualify for a runoff with Daniel Duquenne of the Alliance Républicaine. In response, the NPA joined the PS, PCF and the UMP in calling to 'block the FN in the second round' (*Tout est à nous!*, 2 July 2009)—i.e., to vote for the Alliance Républicaine. When Duquenne beat the fascist candidate

and became mayor, the NPA declared that voters 'have avoided the worst' (*Tout est à nous!*, 9 July 2009).*

The L5I's claim that in launching the NPA the LCR had 'swung to the left', like Stockton's assertion that the NPA has adopted 'positions that are really very close to the revolutionary Trotskyist tradition', only illustrates the gulf that separates Workers Power from that tradition.

Workers Power also maintains that the NPA 'has adopted a programme that is far better, far more revolutionary than anything developed by the European left since the collapse of the Soviet Union' (*Fifth International* Vol. 3, No. 2, Spring 2009). Yet [in the same article] they acknowledge that the NPA's programme is essentially reformist, while pretending to think that Besancenot et al can be nudged into promoting something approximating a revolutionary policy:

'This revolutionary policy will mean a struggle within the NPA against its rightwing minority around Christian Piquet [sic]. A decisive test in the class struggle, when the question of reform or revolution is sharply posed, will mean a break with his minority. The left majority of the NPA, meanwhile, must find clarity on the revolutionary programme and strategy through the course of the struggles ahead and beware of an attempt by the ex-LCR leaders to vacillate back towards the politics of reformist concession and compromise.'

—*Ibid.*

The LCR majority quarrelled with Picquet over whether it was smarter to disguise 'the politics of reformist concession' with leftist rhetoric or serve it straight up. The attempt to paint Besancenot's 'left majority' as a group of naifs being pushed towards acting as a revolutionary instrument recalls similarly optimistic projections by Ernest Mandel, Michel Pablo and others in the LCR's political tradition regarding an endless succession of Stalinists, petty-bourgeois guerrillas, Third World bonapartists and assorted non-proletarian 'blunt instruments'.

One way to make the NPA seem more 'revolutionary' is to contrast it to Germany's Die Linke, which was once greeted with enthusiasm by many on the 'far left':

'Luke Cooper from Workers Power argued that in the European left over recent years there were two divergent experiences on building a new left formation; one in Germany had led to the consolidation of a new reformist party [Die Linke], while in France the NPA was a fighting party, which was illustrated by its campaign for an indefinite strike in the spring movement. He did note problems too, however. The NPA were right not to concede to the Left Front, but they stood on a reformist platform in the elections. The programme was indistinguishable from the Left Front's and so the NPA had left themselves open to the charge of sectarianism.'

—'Marxism conference debates future of the left',

[Workers Power statement] 10 July 2009

The reason the NPA occasionally finds it useful to posture as a 'fighting party' while Die Linke wallows in passive electoralism is that French workers have recently been considerably more combative than their German counterparts. The NPA's sometimes militant rhetoric is designed to appeal to PS and PCF voters disenchanted with the discredited Plural Left.

Admitting that the NPA 'stood in the Euro elections on a left-reformist platform' and is 'unclear on the road to power for the working class and on its attitude to the capi-

talist state', the L5I also asserts that the NPA 'was founded as a fighting party with a political programme for the overthrow of capitalism, not its piecemeal reform' (*Workers Power*, August 2009). In his article, Stockton attempts to disappear this glaring contradiction with an acknowledgement that 'there are still areas for improvement and development' in the NPA, while praising the 'transitional' character of elements of its 'emergency programme' as displaying a willingness to 'challenge the laws of profit and private ownership and open the road to socialist measures'. The idea that the experienced reformists running the NPA may, in the heat of the class struggle, somehow spontaneously transcend the programme that they elaborated so carefully is nothing but a rationalisation for offloading the necessity for conscious Marxist intervention onto an imaginary 'objective dynamic' in history.

The L5I was very upbeat about the NPA's role in the strikes earlier this year:

'The NPA can play a critical role in all this and needs now to take concrete actions along these lines. If it does so—and if it avoids the trap of accommodating to reformism—it can begin to wrest leadership of the French working class movement from the hands of the reformists and open a struggle for working class power.'

—'Days of action in France: we need an indefinite general strike to win', 25 March 2009

A statement released a week later reiterated the same idea:

'The NPA can and must play a crucial role in the current movement. It is the only force organised at the national level that can provide a clear perspective to the movement and in particular become the organiser and builder of the general strike. It is absolutely necessary for the NPA to define an action programme based on the immediate needs of workers, the unemployed and workers with precarious jobs.'

—'Faisons payer la crise aux capitalistes! Stop aux "réformes" et aux attaques de Sarkozy!', 2 April 2009

This portrayal of the NPA as uniquely capable of providing 'a clear perspective', even though it is 'unclear' on the issues of state and revolution, was accompanied by bogus descriptions of its attitude towards class collaboration:

'The NPA is in a very good position to take the leadership of the resistance in France. Unlike the traditional parties of the working class, the NPA has no stake in the capitalist system, which has caused the crisis, and have [sic] vowed not to enter into coalitions and alliances with capitalist parties.'

—*Workers Power*, April 2009

A similar claim appeared in a statement of 10 July [2009] in which *Workers Power* asserted that 'the NPA was built from below through opposition to the union bureaucracy and the politics of class collaboration'. It would be highly significant if that was indeed the NPA's policy, but it is not. The NPA leadership has made it abundantly clear that it is prepared to enter coalitions with components of the Plural Left—including bourgeois ones—if the price is right. *Workers Power* distorts the reality of the NPA to convince the British left to use it as a model 'to form a new workers' party without waiting for the approval of the trade union leaders' ('It's time to create a new working class party', 10 June 2009).

The NPA is not the first manifestly reformist formation

that the L5I has sought to paint in 'revolutionary' colours. A few years ago *Workers Power* was hailing the Second International and ascribing a revolutionary potential to the World Social Forum (WSF), which we characterised at the time as 'a popular-frontist lash-up of Third Worldists, trade-union bureaucrats and NGO hustlers':

'Revolutionary Marxists say openly that we want to help it [the WSF] develop into an international movement, able to direct the struggle against capitalism and imperialism—a new world party of socialist revolution.

'Over a century ago the forces of Marxism faced similar challenges within a period of rising struggles when the movement, which came to be known as the Second International, was born. There are many lessons to be learned in the way that this movement was founded in 1889....'

—*Workers Power*, January 2003

The lesson that Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks drew from the experience of 'a party of the whole class' was that revolutionaries need to organise themselves separately from reformists. *Workers Power* appears to have arrived at the opposite conclusion—which explains their consistently 'optimistic' distortions regarding the NPA and the suggestion that it provides a model for the left in this country. The 'strategy' is clear enough—to help build a British NPA within which to take up residence as the 'Marxist' left wing. This sort of stagist approach to building a revolutionary organisation will, in practice, inevitably reduce itself to Kautskyism. Revolutionaries may indeed make a tactical decision to pursue the struggle against reformism through short-term entries into bourgeois workers' parties, but we neither advocate the creation of a reformist organisation nor project such a development as a necessary 'step forward'.

Marxists have a responsibility to struggle to raise the existing level of consciousness of the 'class in itself' to that of the 'class for itself': to help working people see the necessity of revolutionary solutions to the problems they confront. A genuinely revolutionary group does not act in accordance with short-term calculations of narrow organisational advantage, but rather seeks to advance the historic interests of the working class. Any expansion of membership or electoral support is not a gain, but a loss, if it results from programmatic compromise that undercuts revolutionary class consciousness. The problem with the entire NPA project is that it is premised on exactly the opposite conception.

For a Revolutionary Workers' Party!

The attempt to create mass revolutionary workers' parties has always presented Marxists with difficult problems. Over a hundred years ago the great Polish revolutionary, Rosa Luxemburg, observed:

'The forward march of the proletariat, on a world historic scale, to its final victory is not, indeed, "so simple a thing." The peculiar character of this movement resides precisely in the fact that here, for the first time in history, the popular masses themselves, *in opposition* to the ruling classes, are to impose their will but they must effect this outside of the present society, beyond the existing society. This will the masses can only form in a constant struggle against the existing order. The union of the broad popular masses with an aim reaching beyond the existing social order, the union

of the daily struggle with the great world transformation, that is the task of the [revolutionary] Social-Democratic movement, which must logically grope on its road of development between the following two rocks: abandoning the mass character of the party or abandoning its final aim, falling into bourgeois reformism or into sectarianism, anarchism or opportunism.'

—*Reform or Revolution?*

The duty of Marxists is always to 'say what is' rather than adapt to what is currently popular. The only path to a socialist future lies through the creation of a Leninist-Trotskyist party capable of mobilising the working class for the revolutionary reconstruction of society in the inter-

ests of all those oppressed and exploited under capitalism. Creating such a party requires both energy and tactical flexibility, and above all a willingness to call things by their right names. Those who push illusions that the recycled reformism of the NPA will provide a shortcut to the growth of mass revolutionary consciousness do not help, but rather hinder, the struggle to build the instrument with which 'the popular masses themselves, in opposition to the ruling classes, are to impose their will.' ■

*The NPA had initially sought to run against the fascist candidate as part of a popular-frontist bloc with the PCE, PG, LO and the Greens, but was spurned by its projected partners.

Workers Power, Chávez & the 'Fifth International' Doubletalk & Zigzags

Delegates to the November 2009 "International Encounter of Left Parties," held in Caracas at the invitation of Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, endorsed his proposal to hold a conference in April 2010 to discuss launching a "Fifth International." Among those supporting this initiative were representatives of El Salvador's Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN), Nicaragua's Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN), Evo Morales' Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) of Bolivia, the Alianza País de Ecuador and various other leftist organizations from around the world. The new "International" is advertised as "a space for socialist-oriented parties, movements and currents in which we can harmonize a common strategy for the struggle against imperialism, the overthrow of capitalism by socialism" (Venezuelanalysis.com, 30 November 2009).

The League for the Fifth International (L5I), whose flagship is the British Workers Power group, has been critical of a proposed Bolivarian Fifth International headquartered in Caracas. Castigating Alan Woods' ostensibly Trotskyist International Marxist Tendency for being insufficiently critical of the Venezuelan *líder máximo*, the L5I observed:

"...Chávez' simultaneous support for the brutally repressive regimes of Presidents Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe and Mahmoud Ahmedinejad of Iran indicate his confusion of socialism with 'anti-imperialist' military bonapartism. This shows that his purpose in creating a new International is to establish a support mechanism for his own, and what he evidently regards as analogous, regimes.

"...[I]t is completely crazy to see him as the instrument, conscious or otherwise, of the world revolution."

—"Hugo Chávez, the call for the Fifth International and his Trotskyist supporters," 25 November 2009

Quite right. Yet we recall that only a few years ago, when Chávez launched his populist Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (PSUV), Workers Power described it as a "multi-class alliance, what Leon Trotsky called a popular front party," but nonetheless concluded that, in view

of its mass appeal, "it would be sectarian for revolutionary communists to do anything other than join this party." In the same article, the L5I leadership declared its intention to participate in "any international initiative Chávez may promote in the months ahead" (*Workers Power*, September 2007).

The L5I still maintains an upbeat attitude: "Hugo Chávez' call for a Fifth International in November 2009 offers an excellent opportunity to popularise the idea of a new world party of socialist revolution" (*Workers Power*, Winter 2009/10). The apparent contradiction between declaring the proposed "International" to be a revolutionary opportunity while at the same time decrying it as a prop for bonapartists is rationalized as follows: "Chávez conceives of the Fifth International as a support mechanism for his regime and its policies. But he will find that the revolutionary impulses of the masses will outstrip his limited notions of socialism" (*Ibid.*). This recalls how Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel routinely invoked the supposedly "objectively revolutionary dynamic" of history to justify their enthusiasm for a succession of non-proletarian formations—from Ben Bella's petty-bourgeois Front de Libération Nationale in the 1950s to Khomeini's Islamic Revolution in the 1970s.

To put a leftist spin on its political adaptation to the Bolivarian bonapartist's initiative, the L5I portrays its hypothetical intervention in the campaign for the "Fifth International" as an attempt to rescue it from:

"bourgeois nationalists merely dressed up as socialists. If it were to be founded under the aegis of Chávez and his bourgeois regime, then it would never be able to chart a course of class independence."

—"Venezuela's President Hugo Chávez calls for Fifth International," 25 November 2009

Of course there was never any possibility of a real competition between the tiny L5I and Chávez over whose "aegis" would be used in founding his "International." But for their own reasons, Workers Power's leaders find it convenient to talk about a struggle for the "class independence" of what

they acknowledge amounts to little more than a “support mechanism” for various bourgeois regimes. Rather than attempting to distinguish its “Fifth International” from Chávez’s initiative, the L5I plays on the ambiguities:

“The Fifth International is a vital weapon in the hands of the world working class and its allies. Its historic mission will be to overthrow capitalism and oppression across the world. It needs to be built, and it needs to be built on a revolutionary basis. Everyone who is committed to this project should join us in this fight.”

—*Workers Power*, Winter 2009/10

Workers Power calls on those who support “class independence” and a “revolutionary programme” to join the “fight” to revolutionize the Bolivarian International:

“The League for the Fifth International, which will, if it is able, intervene in Chávez’s gathering in 2010, calls on all who support the struggle for a new International based on proletarian class independence and a new revolutionary programme, (whatever name or number they presently give to it) to join forces with us in 2010 to take real steps in this direction.”

—“Venezuela’s President Hugo Chávez calls for Fifth International,” 25 November 2009

The “real steps” proposed by the L5I refer to yet another fantastic projection—a joint conference with the French Nouveau Parti anticapitaliste (NPA):

“it is the duty of all who consider themselves anticapitalist, like the NPA in France, all who call themselves revolutionary socialists, communists, Leninists and Trotskyists, to combine forces and to convene a conference of their organisations.”

—*Ibid.*

There is no chance that the NPA will feel a “duty” to participate in a bloc with Workers Power—and not only because of the vast disproportion of forces. The NPA has no interest in promoting “proletarian class independence” in Venezuela or anywhere else. It was founded on the basis of a commitment to reformist electoralism, and has already in its short life demonstrated an appetite for class-collaborationist alliances. Instead of discussing how best to expose “bourgeois nationalists merely dressed up as socialists,” François Sabado, one of the NPA’s senior members, wrote a statement posted on the group’s website in which he fulsomely endorsed Chávez’s plans for an “anti-imperialist front”:

“On the basis of this call, a broad world anti-imperialist front can be established, to mark its solidarity with the struggle of the peoples for their social and political rights, to oppose the new US bases in Colombia, to support, in particular, the mobilization of the people of Honduras against the new dictatorial regime.

“In the trial of strength in which the imperialists are confronted with the struggles of the peoples, such a world front would constitute an important instrument to fight the power of the ruling classes, not only in Latin America but in the whole world.”

—translated in *International Viewpoint*, November 2009

Workers Power’s ridiculous “tactic” of demanding that the NPA change its spots recalls an earlier proposal that the assorted reformist cranks and bourgeois officials of the World Social Forum (WSF) transform themselves into a force for socialist revolution:

“Parties [in the European Social Forum (ESF)] must declare



Ahmadinejad & Chávez: Welcome to the 5th International

that they will not govern in coalition with the capitalists or on their behalf but will struggle to overthrow them. “In this way, we can unite the ESF (and the WSF too) not only into a democratic forum and co-ordinator of action, but also into a new World Party—a fifth international—to struggle for an end to the rule of global capital and the establishment of the rule of the majority of humanity.”

—*Workers Power*, October 2003

Chávez later put forward the same idea:

“Chávez has called for a ‘new International’ during his recent visit to Spain....

“The idea of the WSF giving birth to an anti-imperialist International, with agreed policies and co-ordinated action, was invoked by Chávez and others.”

—*Workers Power*, March 2005

At the time Workers Power, adapting to popular illusions in the Venezuelan strongman, was gently criticizing him for having “taken far too few radical or socialist measures which could have won over the organised working class to his side” (*Workers Power*, January 2003). We commented:

“This overlooks one detail—Chávez is a *bourgeois* politician. His job is neither to expropriate capitalists nor to ‘build organs of working class and popular resistance.’ His task is to ensure the continued domination of capital over labor and to strengthen the position of the Venezuelan bourgeoisie in the international capitalist world order. If Chávez is someone Workers Power expects to carry out ‘radical or socialist measures’ why not invite him to help launch their Fifth International?”

—1917 No. 26

It turns out the Venezuelan *caudillo* did not need an invitation from the L5I. As Chávez announced plans for a “Fifth International” to “overthrow capitalism” and “fight imperialism” alongside Mugabe and Ahmadinejad, Workers Power correctly observed that it would be “completely crazy” to regard him as “the instrument, conscious or otherwise, of the world revolution.” But was it any less “crazy” to have called on Chávez to take “socialist measures” in 2003, or to have joined him in promoting the absurd notion that the multi-class WSF swamp could somehow be forged into a revolutionary International? L5I members who are serious about building a genuinely Marxist international tendency must reject the doubletalk and political zigzags their leaders pass off as clever “tactics.” ■

Meltdown...

continued from page 2



September 2009: Unemployed flood job fair in Kentucky

to move on: the 'central problem of depression-prevention,' he declared, 'has been solved, for all practical purposes.'"

"Lucas wasn't alone in claiming that depression-prevention was a solved problem. A year later Ben Bernanke, a former Princeton professor [who currently chairs the U.S. Federal Reserve]...gave a remarkably upbeat speech titled 'The Great Moderation,' in which he argued, much as Lucas had, that modern macroeconomic policy had solved the problem of the business cycle...."

"Looking back from only a few years later...these optimistic pronouncements sound almost incredibly smug."

—*The Return of Depression Economics and the Crisis of 2008*

Liberals like Krugman trace the origin of the current difficulties of international capitalism to the dismantling of the regulatory framework established in the United States in the 1930s. This explanation comes with easily identifiable "bad guys" (Bernie Madoff and the unindicted crooks running Goldman Sachs et al) as well as a ready-made solution—to simply reverse the "neoliberal" measures introduced by Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher and their counterparts. But the present crisis is not simply a matter of bad policies pursued by short-sighted politicians. The union-bashing, deregulatory program of the neoliberals was itself a response to the stagnation of the major capitalist economies in the mid-1970s that followed two decades of relatively high growth rates and rising living standards.

The Great Depression, which had been triggered by the bursting of a U.S. stock-market bubble, was only overcome through the massive devastation of World War II—a cataclysm that killed some 70 million people and shattered the economies of much of the advanced capitalist world. This unprecedented social catastrophe resulted in a marked leftward shift of the entire political terrain, particularly in continental Europe, where most of the traditional ruling elites were discredited by their collaboration with the Nazis. Soviet-style "socialism" was seen as an appealing alternative by millions of workers in Western Europe and beyond. The physical destruction of most of Europe's and Japan's industrial plant required massive capital invest-

ments (often financed by U.S. "reconstruction" money), which, combined with pent-up demand from the depression and wartime austerity, produced conditions for robust growth. The triumphant American bourgeoisie sought to secure its position at home with a postwar "labor accord" that entrenched a viciously anti-communist trade-union bureaucracy, while conceding significant improvements in wages, living standards and social services (see "American Labor Besieged," 1917 No. 19). In Europe, the generally more combative workers' movement was also able to wrest concessions from their rulers.

Between 1950 and 1973, gross domestic product (GDP) in the countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development grew by an average of 4.3 percent annually. During this period most bourgeois economists agreed that a Keynesian "mixed economy" could ensure continual expansion with only relatively mild cyclical fluctuations. Most mainstream observers attributed the global recession of 1974-75, which shattered this comfortable illusion, to a combination of a spike in crude oil prices and a "wage-price spiral" caused by excessively powerful unions. In fact, this conjunctural crisis was a manifestation of a deeper structural decline in the profit rate beginning in the 1960s. The response of leading sections of international capital was to rip up the "postwar consensus" and return to a more bare-knuckled, old-fashioned brand of capitalist rule.

Reagan's successful smashing of the air traffic controllers' union in 1981 and Thatcher's victory over the British miners a few years later marked important victories for the capitalists' campaign to increase profits at the expense of wages and social entitlements. In the U.S., the workday was lengthened, wages driven down and many workers compelled to take on multiple jobs to make ends meet. In the imperialist heartlands, deindustrialization increased the pool of unemployed workers and undermined the unions, as corporations shifted production to "newly industrializing" areas in Latin America and East Asia where wages were lower. At the same time, manufacturers were investing heavily in robotics and computerization and introducing "lean production" techniques in a bid to raise productivity.

A key component of what became known as "neoliberalism" involved trade agreements aimed at eliminating tariff protection for domestic producers, particularly in "developing" (i.e., neocolonial) countries, and removing restrictions on capital mobility across national borders. While free-market apologists hailed the shift of manufacturing to the Third World as evidence that capital was leveling the international playing field, the reality was rather different. Thomas Pogge of Yale University found that whereas per capita income in countries making up the richest 10 percent of the world's population was 60 times greater than that of the poorest 10 percent in 1980, it had increased to 122 times by 2005. To illustrate the grotesque inequalities of global capitalism, Pogge calculated that "Doubling the wealth of all in the bottom four quintiles would still take just 15.3 percent of the wealth of the top 1 percent" (*Dissent*, Winter 2008).

The Reagan/Thatcher neoliberal program also involved large-scale deregulation of finance, transport and communications to unleash the "creative power" of market competition and open up new avenues for profitable investment. The deregulation of the banking system in the U.S., which set a pattern for the rest of the "developed" countries, had

unintended consequences. In 2005, Harry Shutt, formerly of the Economist Intelligence Unit, observed that by permitting financial institutions to issue virtually unlimited credit, state authorities were, in effect, ceding to them the power to create money:

"For, by giving private enterprise, particularly in the financial sector, increased license to create and allocate credit while yet maintaining an implicit or explicit guarantee that the state would underwrite any major losses, the authorities were giving a powerful incentive to irresponsible, or even criminal, behaviour.... Moreover, in a climate of intensifying stagnation, where corporate profitability was ever harder to sustain at minimum acceptable levels, the temptation for corporate managers not merely to allocate funds to excessively risky investment but to resort to outright fraud became increasingly irresistible."

—*The Decline of Capitalism*

'Neoliberal' Bubble Bursts

Neoliberalism produced a major upward redistribution of wealth. Between 1974 and 2004, the median annual income of American men in their thirties fell from \$40,000 to \$35,000 a year in constant dollars, while "CEO pay increased to 262 times the average worker's pay in 2005 from 35 times in 1978" (Associated Press, 25 May 2007). At the same time, the capitalists reduced systemic overhead costs by slashing government social spending and cutting corporate taxes:

"Over the three decades from 1972 to 2001, the wages and salaries of even those Americans at the 90th percentile (those doing better than 90 percent of their fellow citizens) experienced income gains of only 1 percent a year on average. Those at the 99.9th percentile saw their income rise by 181 percent over these years (to an income averaging almost \$1.7 million). Those at the 99.99th percentile had income growth of 497 percent."

—*Monthly Review*, June 2007

The fall in real wages and deregulation of banking, transportation and communications produced a partial restoration of profitability (see Fred Moseley, "The United States Economy at the Turn of the Century: Entering a New Era of Prosperity?"), though GDP growth and capital accumulation rates remained lower than in the 1950s and early 1960s. Big capital increasingly turned to financial speculation in search of higher returns. This pushed up nominal profit rates during the 1990s and 2000s but, as has become evident, much of this was fictitious.

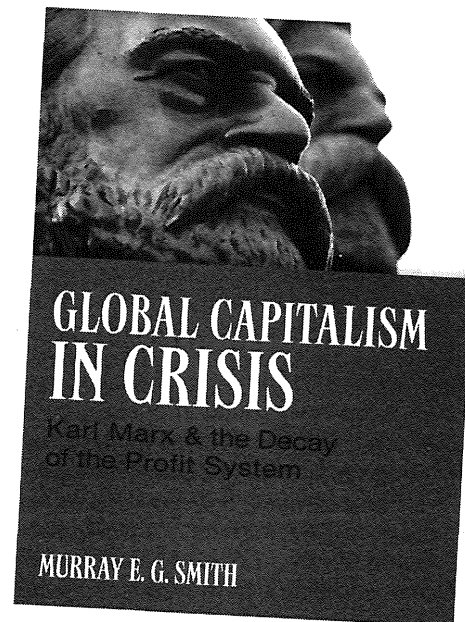
The expansion of the financial bubble was presided over by Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan, a disciple of Ayn Rand and Milton Friedman (high priest of the "Chicago School" of free-market theology). During Greenspan's tenure at the Fed (from 1987 to 2005) total public and private debt in the U.S. soared, from roughly \$20 to \$50 trillion, while the financial sector's share of gross profits quadrupled from 10 percent in the early 1980s to 40 percent in 2006 (see Robert Chernomas, "The Economic Crisis: Class Warfare from Reagan to Obama," in *Bankruptcies and Bailouts*). This was paralleled by a shift in the ratio of U.S. GDP to total financial assets (including bank deposits, stocks, bonds and other securities), from 1:4 to 1:10 in the same period. A similar process was under-

way internationally. In 1980, total global financial assets were valued at 119 percent of total production; by 2007 this had tripled to 356 percent. Mitsubishi Securities estimated the size of the global "real economy" in 2008 to be \$48.1 trillion, compared to a global financial economy (stocks, securities and deposits) of \$151.8 trillion.

The internationalization of financial speculation, which allowed highly-leveraged institutions to make risky bets in overseas markets, ensured that a major problem anywhere in the system would quickly become a problem everywhere. This became evident as American real-estate values began to sour and a chaotic chain reaction rocked global credit markets in 2008. In the U.S., home mortgages had been pooled and "securitized" for decades without problems. Investors bought shares of the total payments from long-term "prime" mortgages issued to borrowers with substantial equity in their properties and sufficient income to make the payments. Defaults were unusual, so these investments were generally considered safe. This changed with the introduction of "collateralized debt obligations" (CDOs) in the 1990s, which expanded the mortgage pool beyond—and eventually far beyond—prime mortgages.

Millions of working people lured by the banks into taking out these "subprime" mortgages did so in an attempt to maintain their living standards in the face of falling real wages. To offset concerns about higher risks, the CDOs were tiered—with "senior" shareholders entitled to get paid before others. This was sufficient for the rating agencies to grade them as "triple-A" on the grounds that even if many borrowers defaulted there would still be enough cash flow to cover the "seniors." The triple-A rating in turn attracted pension funds and other institutional investors looking for better rates of return than government or corporate bonds

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offered. To meet the increased demand, those packaging the CDOs simply ventured deeper into subprime territory.

Illusions that CDOs, "credit default swaps" and other high-return "derivative" investments could somehow indefinitely defy gravity did not survive the bursting of the speculative housing bubble in the U.S. The macro irrationality generated by the innovations of Wall Street's "financial engineering" was of no concern to most of the participants so long as their portfolios continued to grow, as *BusinessWeek's* Paul M. Barrett observed:

"It's rational for a mortgage company to loan \$500,000 to a borrower who can't pay back the money if the lender can immediately sell the loan to a Wall Street investment bank. It's also rational for the investment bank to bundle a bunch of risky home loans and resell them—for a tidy profit, of course—to hedge funds as a bond. Such bonds, known as mortgage-backed securities, were attractive to hedge funds and other investors because they paid relatively high interest. Sure, the bonds were risky (remember that the home buyers never really should have qualified as borrowers in the first place), but many investors bought a form of insurance against the bonds' defaulting. The sellers of this insurance, called credit default swaps, assumed they'd be able to collect premiums and never have to pay out very much because real estate prices would keep rising forever—so those original dubious borrowers would be able to refinance their unrealistic loans. Everyone felt especially rational about all of this because prestigious credit-rating agencies issued triple-A stamps of approval for the exotic, high-interest securities. Never mind that the rating agencies were paid—i.e., bought off—by the very investment banks peddling the mortgage-backed securities."

—*New York Times Book Review*, 15 November 2009

The rapid deflation of the American real-estate market produced a panic which, in September 2008, brought the entire financial system to the brink of collapse. To avert a total meltdown, the U.S. government agreed to cover the liabilities of institutions deemed "too big to fail." While the con artists running Ponzi schemes had their losses made good with hundreds of billions of dollars from the public coffers, millions of their victims watched as their mortgages went "underwater" (the market price of their houses shrinking beneath the amount still owed).

The bailout of the financial racketeers in the U.S. (paralleled by similar interventions in other rich countries) provides an object lesson in the realities of class politics. This has not been entirely lost on the public, which is deeply disturbed that the architects of the disastrous collapse not only escaped any consequences, but are now collecting new windfall profits for supposedly helping to clean up the mess they made.

In November 2008, Timothy Geithner, who is currently U.S. secretary of the treasury but was then heading the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, decided to bail out American International Group (AIG). AIG got into trouble when it was unable to cover credit default swaps it had issued to Goldman Sachs and various other high rollers to insure them against losses on CDOs involving subprime mortgages. Robert Scheer, a former reporter for the *Los Angeles Times*, observed:

"Now Geithner's Treasury concedes that AIG 'should never have been allowed to escape tough, consolidated

supervision.' But none of AIG's scams were regulated, nor were any of the others at the center of the larger financial debacle, because of laws pushed through Congress by Geithner's boss, Lawrence Summers, when they both were in the Clinton administration. Specifically, they prevented regulation of those opaque CDOs and CDSs [credit default swaps] that would come to derail the world's economy.

"As the inspector general's report stated: 'In 2000, the [Clinton administration-backed] Commodity Futures Modernization Act (CFMA)...barred the regulation of credit default swaps and other derivatives.' Why did the financial geniuses of the Clinton administration seek to prevent that obviously needed regulation? Because the Clintonistas believed the Wall Street guys knew what they were doing...."

"Sounds nonsensical today: The inspector general's report notes that AIG, because of the deregulatory law that Summers and Geithner pushed through, was 'able to sell swaps on \$72 billion worth of CDOs to counterparties without holding reserves that a regulated insurance company would be required to maintain.' But why, then, is Summers once again running the show with Geithner when both have made careers of exhibiting total contempt for the public interest?"

—www.truthdig.com, 25 November 2009

Scheer and other liberals call for increased government supervision and a return to the policies enacted under Franklin Delano Roosevelt. But FDR was responding to a powerful labor movement and growing leftist sentiment in favor of a radical overhaul of the entire social system. After decades of capitulation by the leaders of the unions in the U.S. and other advanced capitalist countries, the workers' movement is not seen as capable of threatening the interests of the ruling elites. So instead of a policy of populist concessions, the Obama administration, which is willing to spend trillions of dollars bailing out the Wall Street speculators, is issuing dark warnings of "hard choices" ahead because "the country must live within its means."

Even during the post-war "boom" years, a significant percentage of the population in the richest countries was condemned to chronic poverty. Today, the vast majority is facing the prospect of sharply declining living standards as jobs disappear and wages fall. Pensions, social security, unemployment insurance and what remains of gains won through hard class struggle in the past are coming under increasing pressure.

Marxism, Capitalism & Socialism

Marxism offers much more than a moral critique of the irrationality of capitalism. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels referred to "crises that by their periodical return put the existence of the entire bourgeois society on its trial, each time more threateningly." In the third volume of *Capital*, Marx analyzed how such events result from the inner dynamics of capital accumulation, which create a tendency for the rate of profit to fall, and observed that during crises "production comes to a standstill not at the point where needs are satisfied, but rather where the production and realization of profit impose this."

Financial meltdowns, recessions and depressions must be understood in relation to the economic structure and development of capitalist *production*. Under capitalism,



1917 PHOTO

7 November 2009: IBT forum 'Capitalism—Toward the Abyss' draws 75 people in Toronto

value (represented by money) is created at the point of production by "living labor," i.e., the activity of human beings producing commodities. By setting in motion the means of production, workers conserve and transfer the pre-existing value of "constant capital" (raw materials, machinery, etc.) to the final product. But their labor also creates two streams of new value: "variable capital," which is equivalent to their wages (i.e., the money with which the capitalist purchases the unique commodity known as "labor power") and "surplus value," from which all profits, interest and ground rents ultimately derive.

The dynamics of capitalist competition compel each enterprise to seek to maximize profits by underselling its competitors and enlarging its market share. To this end, capitalists attempt to gain an advantage by lowering production costs through technological improvements that raise labor productivity. To remain competitive, rival firms are forced to introduce similar technology, thus negating the initial advantage of the original innovators. The net effect is to increase the total constant capital invested while reducing the proportional weight of labor inputs—thereby raising what Marx referred to as the "organic composition of capital" (the ratio of constant capital to variable capital plus surplus value). A rise in the organic composition is associated with increasing productivity, but also with a long-term decline in the average rate of profit, i.e., the return on total capital outlay.

The rate of profit is the basic regulator of economic life under capitalism, and its upper limit is set by the ratio of surplus value to the constant capital stock. The fundamental contradiction of "free-market" economics is that the sole source of the surplus value from which profit derives (living labor) is systematically displaced from the production process by capitalists compelled by competition (and the basic antagonism between bosses and workers) to reduce costs by introducing labor-saving technology. This increases the rate of exploitation (i.e., the ratio of surplus value to variable capital) but tends to depress the average rate of profit over time. To be sure, there are counter-tendencies that slow

the decline, and the process is periodically interrupted by the destruction of a portion of constant capital during crises and wars. Yet in the long run no countervailing force is sufficient to negate the tendency of surplus value to decline in relation to the stock of constant capital.

Marx's observation that "[t]he true barrier to capitalist production is *capital itself*" refers to the fact that the tendency of the rate of profit to fall is embedded in the very structure of capitalism. Empirical analysis of the performance of major capitalist economies in recent decades tends to conform to Marx's projections, as Murray E.G. Smith outlined in a talk reprinted in *1917* No. 31. Smith's conclusions are paralleled in broadly similar studies produced by Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy, Fred Moseley, Anwar Shaikh and Ahmet Tonak. The current crisis is a violent reassertion of the capitalist law of value, i.e., the relatively depressed *real* profit rate has pulled back down to earth a nominally higher profit rate artificially inflated by dividends on fictitious (unproductive) capital.

The basic irrationality of capitalism makes both economic and political crises inevitable. There is already evidence of rising bitterness with the "free-market" economy. A 9 November 2009 BBC poll commissioned on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall found "widespread dissatisfaction with free-market capitalism." Only "11% of those questioned across 27 countries said that it was working well" whereas "23% of those who responded...feel it is fatally flawed. That is the view of 43% in France, 38% in Mexico and 35% in Brazil." These numbers, already high, are likely to go up if the economic situation continues to deteriorate.

Yet disenchantment will not automatically translate into increased support for a socialist alternative. With protectionism and xenophobia on the rise, immigrants, refugees and migrant laborers in the advanced countries are being scapegoated for the system's failures. This underscores the burning necessity of mobilizing the workers' movement to crush the nuclei of fascist formations like the British National Party and abort their efforts to direct popular

distress into attacks on the organized labor movement and the oppressed (see 1917 No. 31).

In the early years of the 20th century, and again in the 1930s, attempts by each of the major capitalist powers to solve their economic problems at the expense of their rivals produced trade wars, economic blockades and eventually world wars. The first great inter-imperialist conflict created the preconditions for the successful workers' revolution in Russia in 1917. Krugman, whose breadth of vision distinguishes him from many of his liberal colleagues, is well aware that the counterrevolutionary destruction of the degenerated Soviet workers' state in 1991 was a decisive factor in shaping the world we live in today:

"This is a book about economics; but economics inevitably takes place in a political context, and one cannot understand the world as it appeared a few years ago without considering the fundamental political fact of the 1990s: the collapse of socialism, not merely as a ruling ideology, but as an idea with the power to move men's minds."

"For the first time since 1917, then, we live in a world in which property rights and free markets are viewed as fundamental principles, not grudging expedients; where the unpleasant aspects of a market system—inequality, unemployment, injustice—are accepted as facts of life. As in the Victorian era, capitalism is secure...because nobody has a plausible alternative.

"This situation will not last forever. Surely there will be other ideologies, other dreams; and they will emerge sooner rather than later if the current economic crisis persists and deepens."

—*op. cit.*

There will inevitably be revolts against a system characterized by "inequality, unemployment, injustice," where factories are closed, production cut back and the lives of billions

shattered. The pathology of capitalism is also apparent in the wholesale degradation of the natural environment upon which all life depends. Croplands are turned into deserts, tropical rainforests are clear cut, marine life is wiped out by factory fishing, the ozone layer is severely depleted and climate change threatens massive destruction. All of this is the direct result of the pursuit of maximum profit—a single metric that assigns no particular value to clean air and water and regards human health and well-being as "externalities."

Krugman and his fellow bourgeois ideologues are not entirely wrong to talk of "the collapse of socialism." In organizational terms, the socialist movement is weaker today than it has been for a century and a half. Moreover much of what passes for the "far left" no longer even pretends to uphold the tradition represented by the giants of revolutionary socialism (see our article on France's "Nouveau Parti anticapitaliste" elsewhere in this issue). Yet capitalism's defenders engage in wishful thinking to imagine that a future mass turn toward finding a plausible alternative to capitalism will not arrive at the need to "expropriate the expropriators." A modern economy can only transcend the anarchic chaos of capitalism through reorganizing production on a collectivized, i.e., socialist, basis. Only socialism offers a realistic plan for employing the enormous technological capacity developed under capitalism to ensure a secure, comfortable and sustainable material existence for all.

The first step on the road to the socialist future is a revolution to uproot global capitalism and establish the direct rule of the working class and the oppressed. This in turn requires the forging of a revolutionary party committed to the political program elaborated by Marx, Lenin and Trotsky. There is no other way for humanity to escape the madhouse of capitalism. ■

Karl Marx on Capitalist Crises

Since capital's purpose is not the satisfaction of needs but the production of profit, and since it attains this purpose only by methods that determine the mass of production by reference exclusively to the yardstick of production, and not the reverse, there must be a constant tension between the restricted dimensions of consumption on the capitalist basis, and a production that is constantly striving to overcome these immanent barriers.

It is not that too much wealth is produced. But from time to time, too much wealth is produced in its capitalist, antagonistic forms.

The barriers to the capitalist mode of production show themselves as follows:

(1) in the way that the development of labour productivity involves a law, in the form of the falling rate of profit, that at a certain point confronts this development itself in a most hostile way and has constantly to be overcome by way of crises;

(2) in the way that it is the appropriation of unpaid labour, and the proportion between this unpaid labour and objectified labour in general—to put it in capitalist terms, profit and the proportion between this profit and

the capital applied, i.e. a certain rate of profit—it is this that determines the expansion or contraction of production, instead of the proportion between production and social needs, the needs of socially developed human beings. Barriers to production, therefore, arise already at a level of expansion which appears completely inadequate from the other standpoint. Production comes to a standstill not at the point where needs are satisfied, but rather where the production and realization of profit impose this.

If the rate of profit falls, on the one hand we see exertions by capital, in that the individual capitalist drives down the individual value of his own particular commodities below their average social value, by using better methods, etc., and thus makes a surplus profit at the given market price; on the other hand we have swindling and general promotion of swindling, through desperate attempts in the way of new methods of production, new capital investments and new adventures, to secure some kind of extra profit, which will be independent of the general average and superior to it.

—Excerpted from *Capital* Vol. 3, Chapter 15

Spartacist League's 'Real World' Social-Imperialism Imperialist Troops Out of Haiti!

The following statement was posted on www.bolshevik.org on 9 February.

In a stunning and almost inexplicable move, the Spartacist League/U.S., leading section of the International Communist League (ICL), has announced its opposition to calling for the removal of U.S. troops from Haiti (*Workers Vanguard* [WV], 29 January). The core of the SL's argument, which flatly contradicts the Trotskyist tradition it claims to uphold, is contained in the following passage:

"there are no good alternatives facing Haiti today. The U.S. military is the only force on the ground with the capacity—e.g., trucks, planes, ships—to organize the transport of what food, water, medical and other supplies are getting to Haiti's population."

But it is no secret that the "trucks, planes, ships" of the U.S. military occupation are not being devoted to providing "such aid as the desperate Haitian masses can get their hands on." Imperialist forces have in fact been obstructing the delivery of aid and assistance, most of which has been provided by relief agencies like the Red Cross and Médecins Sans Frontières. The objective of the U.S. military has been to "secure" the country—its role in delivering aid is essentially just a cover. The *New York Times* online, in an item dated 17 January, reported:

"The World Food Program finally was able to land flights of food, medicine and water on Saturday, after failing on Thursday and Friday, an official with the agency said. Those flights had been diverted so that the United States could land troops and equipment, and lift Americans and other foreigners to safety.

"There are 200 flights going in and out every day, which is an incredible amount for a country like Haiti," said Jarry Emmanuel, the air logistics officer for the agency's Haiti effort. 'But most of those flights are for the United States military.'

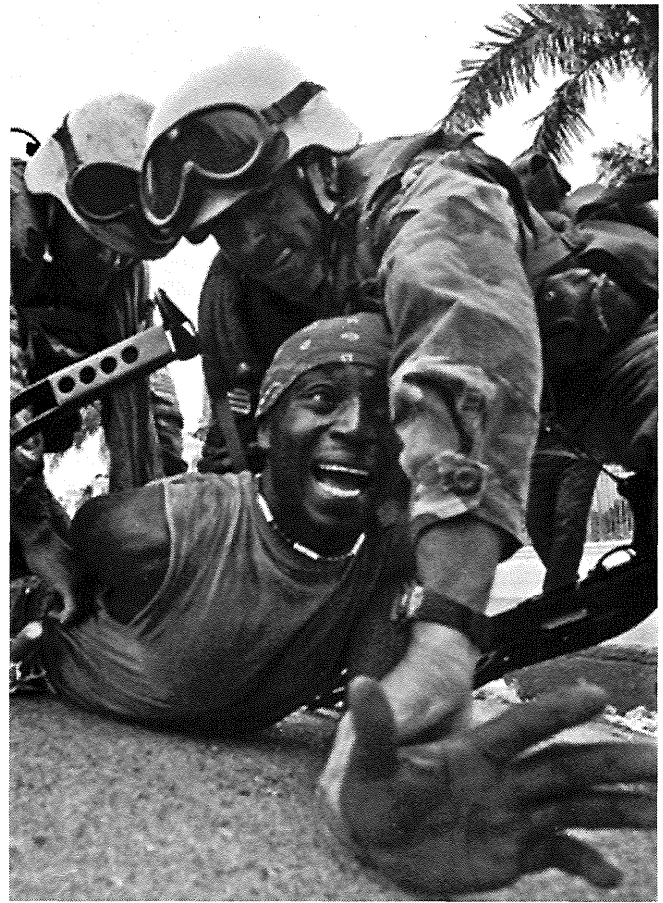
"He added: Their priorities are to secure the country. Ours are to feed. We have got to get those priorities in sync."

The reason that the priorities are not "in sync" is because the imperialists are now, and always have been, indifferent to the welfare of the Haitian masses. *CounterPunch* (28 January) quoted an Al-Jazeera correspondent as saying:

"Most Haitians have seen little humanitarian aid so far. What they have seen is guns, and lots of them. Armored personnel carriers cruise the streets and inside the well-guarded perimeter [of the airport], the United States has taken control. It looks more like the Green Zone in Baghdad than a center for aid distribution."

An article that appeared on *USA Today* online (25 January) casts some light on the priorities of the U.S. military intervention:

"The [Marine] Corps governed Haiti from 1915 to 1934 after an invasion force was sent to prevent an anti-American dictator from assuming power. Young, non-commissioned officers governed Haiti with little supervision.



AFP—GETTY IMAGES—JEWEL SAMAD

Imperialist gendarmes arrest man desperately seeking food

"The Marines were reminded of that history as they prepared for the Haiti mission, said Lt. Col. Gary Keim, who commands a logistics battalion.

"We were required to reread it,' he said. 'We've been here before. We've been successful before.'

"The Marines viewed those years as a model for nation building and counterinsurgency strategy. Many Haitians viewed it as imperialism. Roads, bridges and schools were built during the U.S. occupation, but that did little to help Haiti govern itself."

John Pilger, writing in the *New Statesman* (28 January), also provides some insight into what the U.S. is up to and why:

"The theft of Haiti has been swift and crude. On 22 January, the United States secured 'formal approval' from the United Nations to take over all air and sea ports in Haiti, and to 'secure' roads. No Haitian signed the agreement, which has no basis in law. Power rules in a US naval blockade and the arrival of 13,000 marines, special forces, spooks and mercenaries, none with humanitarian relief training.

"The airport in the capital, Port-au-Prince, is now a US military base and relief flights have been rerouted to



IBT marches in San Francisco Bay Area demonstration, 25 January

the Dominican Republic. All flights stopped for three hours for the arrival of Hillary Clinton. Critically injured Haitians waited unaided as 800 American residents in Haiti were fed, watered and evacuated. Six days passed before the US air force dropped bottled water to people suffering dehydration."

"Not for tourists is the US building its fifth-biggest embassy. Oil was found in Haiti's waters decades ago and the US has kept it in reserve until the Middle East begins to run dry. More urgently, an occupied Haiti has a strategic importance in Washington's 'rollback' plans for Latin America. The goal is the overthrow of the popular democracies in Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador, control of Venezuela's abundant petroleum reserves, and sabotage of the growing regional co-operation long denied by US-sponsored regimes."

Marxists do not call on aid agencies to leave, nor do we demand that whatever aid the imperialists might send be refused. Rather we call for the unconditional removal of all imperialist troops, who serve the oppressors, not the oppressed, and who will do no good for the Haitian people. Trotskyists have always taken this position in distinction to all sorts of fake-socialists, who argue that it is more "practical" and "realistic" to beg or seek to pressure the imperialists to act in a humane and helpful way.

As is commonly the case when ostensibly Marxist groups make revisionist departures, this latest shameful dive by the SL is covered with lots of "orthodoxy." WV also throws in some pointed criticisms of reformists who promote illusions in the role of imperialism:

"The ISO [International Socialist Organization] demands that 'Obama immediately stop the military occupation of Haiti,' while calling for the U.S. to 'flood the country with doctors, nurses, food, water and construction machinery' (*Socialist Worker* online, 19 January). Likewise, a January 14 statement on Workers World's Web site demands 'the removal of all U.N. combat troops,' while calling for 'all bonuses from executives

of financial institutions that received bailout money to be donated to Haiti."

The WV article continues:

"The notion that U.S. imperialism can be pressured into serving the needs of the oppressed, rather than its own class interests, shows boundless illusions in the good offices of the rapacious American ruling class.... But neocolonial domination and aggrandizement are inherent to imperialism, and no amount of pressure and pleading can change that."

Very true. But this observation only sharpens the contradiction in the SL's position. Instead of demanding the removal of the hired guns of "the rapacious American ruling class," the SL wants them to remain in Haiti—a position to the *right* of that of the ISO and WWP:

"We have always opposed U.S. and UN occupations in Haiti and everywhere—and it may become necessary to call for U.S./UN out of Haiti in the near future—but we are not going to call for an end to such aid as the desperate Haitian masses can get their hands on."

—*Ibid.*

The Internationalist Group (IG) correctly identified what this means:

"So here we have the SL saying, first, that it opposed U.S./U.N. occupation in the past, and may do so again in the future. *But it doesn't oppose it now!* And now is when the troops are arriving. WV denounces us for calling for U.S./U.N. troops to get out, and when it says the military machine is indispensable to provide aid, it means it wants the troops to stay, 'piggish imperialist manner' and all. The bottom line is, the Spartacist League *supports the imperialist occupation.*"

—"Spartacist League Backs U.S. Imperialist Invasion of Haiti," 30 January

The WV article attacked the IG, which like the IBT is calling for the immediate departure of imperialist troops, as "cynically toying with rhetoric, blithely unconcerned with the fact that, in the real world, if the policies they advocate were implemented, they would result in mass death through starvation." In the past, the Spartacists have been sharply critical of similar "real world" rationalizations by reformists demanding that imperialist troops act in the interests of the oppressed. The Autumn 2007 issue of *Workers Hammer*, published by the ICL's British section, bitterly recalled how Tony Cliff's International Socialists supported the dispatch of British troops to Northern Ireland in 1969:

"In a classic example of capitulating to their 'own' bourgeoisie and shamelessly peddling illusions in British imperialism as a force for 'peace', they declared: 'The breathing space provided by the presence of British troops is short but vital. Those who call for the immediate withdrawal of the troops before the men behind the barricades can defend themselves are inviting a pogrom which will hit first and hardest at socialists' (*Socialist Worker*, 11 September 1969)."

The SL was similarly critical when in 1974 the American Socialist Workers Party, then led by Joe Hansen, called for sending federal troops into Boston to protect black schoolchildren on the basis that there was no other "practical" way they could be saved from rampaging racist mobs.

In 1982, during the murderous siege of Beirut by the Israeli military, the Palestine Liberation Organization asked that U.S. Marines and French troops be sent in as “peacekeepers” to ward off the Zionists—a demand that was dutifully echoed by much of the left. *WV* printed an exchange between an SL supporter and a reformist who defended this policy on the grounds that “We live in the real world.” The SLer described the U.S. Marines as a “threat” to the Palestinians, and noted: “If anybody thinks those Marines are going to be a buffer [between the Israeli army and the Palestinians], just look to Vietnam, just look to the Dominican Republic to know what that threat means” (*WV*, 6 August 1982).

When the Marines set up camp in Beirut, it became very clear that they were not there to rescue the oppressed Palestinians but rather to establish a beachhead for the U.S. military in the Middle East. The 15 October 1982 issue of *WV* summed up their mission as follows: “They are there to shore up the new Gemayel regime which is based on the Phalange killers who carried out the Sabra and Shatila massacre.” A year later, in October 1983, when the Marines’ barracks were destroyed by an “Islamic Jihad” truck bomb, the SL leadership flinched and called for “Marines Out of Lebanon, Now, Alive!” Our criticism of this cowardly social-patriotic call to save the Marines led to a series of sharp polemical exchanges (reprinted in *Trotskyist Bulletin* No. 2). This was not the only such flinch by the SL leadership (see “A Textbook Example,” *Bulletin of the External Tendency* No. 2 and “No Disaster for the Working Class,” 1917 No. 2).

While we are broadly in agreement with the IG’s assessment of the SL’s scandalous capitulation over imperialist intervention in Haiti, we do not agree that it signifies a qualitative degeneration. The IG leaders’ eagerness to come to this conclusion results from

their willfully blind allegiance to everything the SL did prior to their own departure in 1996. Their refusal to acknowledge, or even discuss, the SL’s various deviations from the Trotskyist program in that period, including the “Marines Alive” position, is hardly mysterious, as the leading IGers were integral components of the SL regime at the time.

For many members of the ICL, however—particularly younger recruits—this latest political deviation does test their faith in their leadership’s claim to represent the continuity of Trotskyism. At a Spartacus Youth Club public event in Toronto on 3 February, a couple of our comrades who raised the issue of the U.S. military in Haiti found considerable confusion among the membership. The most senior ICL comrade present became so frustrated at his inability to successfully defend the indefensible that he “lost it,” to the evident consternation of others in attendance.

In “The Road to Jimstown,” our 1985 analysis of the political degeneration of the SL, we wrote:

“The Spartacist League was not just one left grouping among many—it was the crystallization of the left-wing opposition to the political destruction by Pabloite revisionism of the revolutionary Socialist Workers Party (SWP)—a party built by James P. Cannon and trained by Leon Trotsky to carry forward Bolshevism amid the destruction of the Communist International by the syphilis of Stalinism.”

The Spartacist League in its best period was distinguished from its centrist competitors by its fidelity to revolutionary principle. But its social-imperialist position on Haiti is just the latest confirmation that the revolutionary flame that once animated the Spartacist tendency was extinguished long ago. ■

Debout, les damnés de la terre!

Haitian Disaster: Neocolonial Nightmare

The following statement was presented by an IBT supporter to a meeting of the Toronto Haiti Action Committee on 28 January.

Haiti has been devastated by an earthquake, but the horrific result of this natural disaster was conditioned by centuries of racism and neocolonial oppression. Having cast off the yoke of French domination in history’s only successful slave revolt, the Haitian people were made to pay a terrible price for their audacity.

Even before the earthquake Haiti was the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere; a country in which the vast majority were forced to live in grinding poverty—most subsisting on less than \$2 a day. It is difficult to find words to express the misery and suffering that they must now endure.

Yet the top priority of the imperialist powers is not to rescue Haiti’s impoverished millions but to restore “order” and protect the property of foreign investors and the domestic elites. They have seized the country’s airport and set up militarized zones, restricting the dis-

tribution of desperately needed aid. The real reason that thousands of foreign troops are being deployed is not to help the victims but to ensure “stability” and maintain Haiti’s neocolonial status. The *Toronto Star* aptly described the international “Friends of Haiti” conference held in Montreal earlier this week as a gathering of “bankers, diplomats and aid officials.”

Nothing fundamental will change in Haiti until the imperialists are driven out and the property of the domestic ruling class is expropriated by a revolutionary workers’ and peasants’ government. Haiti can only truly be rebuilt as part of a Socialist Federation of the Caribbean. Class-conscious working people in North America and beyond can best show solidarity with Haiti’s oppressed through participating in the struggle to uproot the system of global capitalism that has so abused and brutalized them.

Imperialism knocked Haiti down—

Socialism will build it up!

Debout, les damnés de la terre!

Cops, Courts Aim to Silence 'Voice of the Voiceless' For Labor Action to Free Mumia!

Reprinted below are excerpts from a statement published in February by the San Francisco Bay Area-based "Labor Action Committee To Free Mumia Abu-Jamal" on recent developments in the case.

Mumia Abu-Jamal is a former Black Panther, award winning journalist, behind-bars commentator on critical social issues—and an innocent man on death row. In April 2009, after more than two decades of court rulings that ignored mounting evidence of his innocence, the Supreme Court upheld his 1982 frame-up conviction without comment. Then, this January, the Court moved closer to reinstating his death sentence—which had been put on hold by lower court rulings.

On January 19th the Supreme Court "vacated" the Third Circuit (federal appellate) ruling, which—after upholding Mumia's conviction—said that Mumia's death sentence had been imposed under faulty instructions to

the jury. The Third Circuit had instructed Pennsylvania state courts that under *Mills v Maryland*—a 1988 Supreme Court precedent—Mumia's sentence should be decided again in a new sentencing hearing, or (if no such hearing was held) converted to a life sentence without the possibility of parole. In *Mills*, the Supreme Court had struck down a Maryland statute which said that juries in capital cases must be unanimous on any aggravating or mitigating factor when deciding the sentence. The *Mills* ruling said that while aggravating factors need be unanimous, factors that mitigate against imposing death required a simple majority only. The Third Circuit said *Mills* applied in Mumia's case, and so required reconsideration of the sentence.

But now, the Supreme Court has ordered the Third Circuit to reconsider this decision. They did so in light of their recent ruling on another case, *Smith v Spisak*. Having summarily tossed out Mumia's appeal against his conviction last year, the Court waited until now, after its *Spisak* ruling, to take up the cross-appeal by the Philadelphia DA, seeking to reinstate Mumia's death sentence. It was obvious that the Court planned to use its *Spisak* ruling against Mumia, and now it has. The clear implication was that the Third Circuit had just lost its reason (the *Mills* precedent) for setting aside Mumia's death sentence:

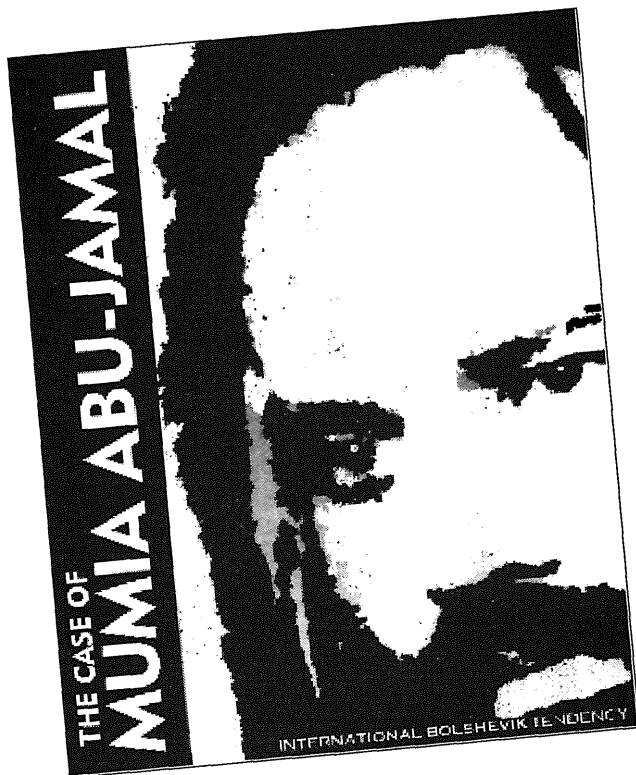
"Of the cases summarily decided [January 19th], one is especially noteworthy: the Court has granted the petition in *Beard v. Abu-Jamal* (08-652), vacating and remanding to the Third Circuit to consider in light of *Smith v. Spisak*."

—www.scotusblog.com

Smith v Spisak stemmed from a case in Ohio of an avowed neo-Nazi, who confessed in court to murdering five people for racist reasons. *Spisak's* death sentence had been set aside, based on faulty jury instructions under the *Mills* precedent, similar to Mumia's, in two lower court rulings. The Supreme Court unanimously reversed these, and said *Spisak* should be executed. The *Mills* ruling had the effect of inhibiting, somewhat, the rush to execute. But in its current ruling in *Spisak*, the Court said that *Mills* may not apply in any given state, based on differing jury-instruction forms which may or may not be confusing to jurors on the issue of mitigating factors. Thus the Court watered down what was considered to be a binding national precedent, with language allowing different states to make their own interpretations—a "states rights" position.

It is important to see through the haze of legal gibberish here. In saying that *Mills* didn't apply in the *Spisak* case, the Supreme Court allowed itself to say, only days later, that *Mills* probably didn't apply to the politically more important case of Mumia Abu-Jamal either. The Court thus weakened its own precedent in order to reinforce and strengthen the death penalty generally. And at the same time, it used the case of a confessed racist murderer to set back the struggle of a world-renowned, innocent and anti-racist death-row prisoner—Mumia Abu-Jamal.

This 90-page pamphlet is the most comprehensive treatment of the evidence and legal/political issues in the case of Mumia Abu-Jamal. It is essential reading for those committed to the fight to free America's best-known political prisoner.



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Taking precedent-breaking legal measures against hard right-wing targets in order to use them against the working-class left, is a long-established tactic of a ruling class which seeks above all to preserve its own power. But in the case of Mumia Abu-Jamal particularly, breaking legal precedent in order to hasten his execution is the norm. In making its flat-out rejection of Mumia's appeal last April, the Supreme Court had to knowingly violate its own well-established precedent in *Batson v Kentucky*—the 1986 ruling which said that purging a jury on the basis of race was unconstitutional. One of the best-known legal precedents in modern U.S. history, *Batson* required that convictions be thrown out for even one incident of racially-based juror exclusion. And, it was to be applied retroactively. In Mumia's 1982 trial, the prosecutor used at least 10 out of 15 peremptory challenges to exclude blacks for reasons that were not applied to prospective white jurors.

Many other precedents have been broken as well by appellate courts, which were then upheld by the Supreme Court. The Third Circuit reversed a well-established rule preventing prosecutors from undermining the principle of "innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt" in their summations to the jury. In Mumia's case, the prosecutor said that Mumia would go free immediately if acquitted, but would get "appeal after appeal" if convicted, thus saying to the jury that if in doubt they should convict, not acquit. Having tossed this practice in an earlier case involving the same prosecutor, they upheld it in Mumia's case, and this in turn was upheld by the Supreme Court. (In yet another case, the Third Circuit later restored the earlier precedent on this issue.)

Still more fundamental is the question of innocence itself. In order to convict and uphold Mumia's conviction the prosecution manufactured false confessions, planted evidence, and threatened "witnesses" into saying they saw what they didn't see. All of these illegal tricks were used against Mumia, yet no court has overturned the conviction because of them. Meanwhile, the real evidence—including witnesses who saw the real killer or killers run away, and a witness (William Singletary) who said Mumia didn't shoot anybody but who was not called to testify—should have proven Mumia's innocence from the start. But more evidence of innocence has come in since the trial, including witness recantations, another man (Arnold Beverly) who confessed, and photos of the crime scene that show that police lied.

"Innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt" is perhaps the most fundamental of all legal precedents, predating the U.S. legal system itself. The whim of the feudal lord to execute whom he pleased, has (supposedly) been replaced in bourgeois society by the rule of law. And if the state has failed to really prove guilt or has ignored new evidence of innocence, but is still holding the prisoner, there is the ancient precedent of *habeas corpus*, under which the state must explain why it is still holding the person.

But in the U.S., where the term "lynch-law" entered the language, and where the legal system is based largely on the law of the slave-holders, both of these fundamental principles have been thoroughly undermined. In the Supreme Court's *Herrera v Collins* decision, and in

the 1996 Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (ATEDPA) signed by Democratic President Bill Clinton, U.S. legal precedent makes it nearly impossible to overturn a fraudulent conviction on appeal. The "facts" of the case as established in state courts must now be accepted in federal appeals courts regardless of merit, and the "timeliness" of appeal filings must be observed, thus gutting the right of *habeas corpus*. For U.S. courts, if you're outside these narrow boundaries, and especially if you're targeted as an enemy of the state the way Mumia is, innocence is no defense!

A small handful of innocents on death row have been released for factors such as false confessions, police corruption of witnesses, ineffective assistance of counsel, or the confession of someone else to the crime. And more recently, DNA evidence has provided relief to some frame-up victims, although even this can be distorted by police, or studiously overlooked by the courts (see the Kevin Cooper case for instance: www.savekevincooper.org). In one state out of 50 (Illinois), death sentences were systematically tossed when half of death row inmates were found to be innocent.

The case of Mumia Abu-Jamal shows that the much-heralded "rule of law" in this so-called democracy is a fraud from beginning to end. For nearly half a century, Mumia has been hounded by the state's forces of "law and order." First targeted when he was 15 under the FBI's counter-intelligence program (COINTELPRO) for his political work as an activist exposing police racism and brutality, Mumia was framed on the spot in December of 1981 for killing a police officer who was probably talking to the Justice Department about the corruption of inner-city cops in his district. A man named Arnold Beverly later confessed that he was hired by corrupt cops to kill the officer, Daniel Faulkner, because Faulkner had been "interfering" with police pay-offs in downtown Philadelphia.

While we support pursuing all available legal avenues to defend Mumia in court, and we support and urge that donations be made to Mumia's legal defense fund, we find that there is no point in petitioning corrupt authorities such as Obama and the U.S. Justice Department to correct wrongs which they themselves are either responsible for, or firmly committed to. Pleading with such a system to have a change of heart can only sow illusions, and undermine Mumia's defense. The petitions demand nothing, they only ask for an internal review of the system, by the system.

We have no quarrel with the millions of well-meaning individuals around the world who have already signed the two petitions (one to the U.S. Justice Department under [Eric] Holder, and another to Obama). The problem is rather one of leadership.

When longshore workers shut down West Coast ports and marched through San Francisco streets in 1999, they chanted, "An injury to one is an injury to all! Free Mumia Abu-Jamal," thereby uniting the black freedom struggle and the workers movement in one powerful action. We know that if freedom is to be won for Mumia, a massive movement of working people must be mobilized. Educate, agitate, organize and demonstrate! Build workers actions to free Mumia! ■

On the Lindsey Oil Refinery Strike Militant Tactics & Poisonous Nationalism



The following statement was distributed at the Socialist Workers Party's July 2009 "Marxism" event in London.

On 26 June [2009], construction workers at Total's Lindsey Oil Refinery defeated an attempt by management to fire 51 union members who had been involved in an earlier wildcat strike in January [2009]. As part of the settlement, management agreed to reinstate over 600 workers sacked for participating in sympathy strikes. The solidarity of thousands of other trade unionists at construction sites across the country was key to the victory at Lindsey. It provides a powerful example of how militant action can successfully defy the bosses and their state. Ultimately, however, workers need class-conscious political leadership to successfully combat capitalist exploitation.

With two million out of work and another million redundancies likely by year end, there is a lot of bitterness amongst British workers today. The ruling class is clearly worried by the prospect that a wave of labour militancy could smash the legislative shackles forged by Thatcher and Blair that appeared to have hobbled the once-mighty unions. The bureaucrats who sit atop the official organisations of the working class have so closely identified themselves with their corporate masters that they are widely mistrusted by their ranks. The Labour Party, which retains a vestigial connection to the workers' movement, has moved so far to the right that it can no longer be relied on to perform its historic function of channelling plebeian anger into dead-end parliamentary reformism.

The bosses' problems with Lindsey began in late January [2009], when a wildcat strike quickly spread to large construction and engineering projects across the country. At issue was the employers' decision to subcon-

tract the construction of a refinery extension to an Italian company, IREM, which planned to employ its own Italian and Portuguese workers, under the terms of the European Union's 'posted workers' directive, rather than hire locals. In an industry characterised by a series of long-term contracts, with jobs often passed on by word of mouth, Lindsey workers resented the foreign labourers brought in to displace them and suspected that management did so to get around the National Agreement for the Engineering Construction Industry ('The Blue Book') and undermine the informal control the union has traditionally exercised over hiring and working practices.

This suspicion was confirmed by the bourgeois press: 'companies working in the sector state privately that the attraction of using foreign rather than British workers is that they are much less likely to stage illegal strikes. There is an industry tradition of staging "sympathy stoppages" on the death of a worker's relative or a retired worker—a site in Southampton suffered a limited walkout for this reason only last month.

'British workers are also seen as being prone to walk out over problems with site facilities, such as hot-water boiler breakdowns. Tea breaks—protected in an industry-wide agreement with the unions—are another "huge bone of contention" and had led to walkouts, one insider stated. 'The engineering construction sector, at the heart of last week's dispute at the Lindsey oil refinery, lost more than 22,400 days to unofficial action in the year to November. This equates to almost one day for every one of the roughly 25,000 blue-collar workers employed—about 32 times worse than the average for the UK workforce as a whole for the same period.'

—*Financial Times*, 7 February 2009

While the defence of long-established prerogatives, both formal and informal, played an important role in motivating the Lindsey strikers, the action was also tainted by nationalism, expressed in the now infamous slogan: 'British jobs for British workers'. This reactionary and xenophobic demand, which Gordon Brown was spouting a couple of years ago, was also used by the fascist National Front in the 1970s. Members of its successor organisation, the British National Party (BNP), turned up at the Lindsey picket lines proclaiming that it was 'a great day for British nationalism' (*Telegraph*, 30 January 2009).

The Lindsey workers knew enough to send the BNP packing, but the nationalism that had attracted the fascists continued to characterise the strike. Newly-arrived IREM workers, housed on a barge in Grimsby, were subject to chauvinist insults. One Italian worker observed: 'This is my first time in the UK and it is the first time in my 20 years of working abroad that I've experienced anti-foreign feelings' (*Guardian*, 7 March 2009).

Sentiment among the Lindsey strikers was heterogeneous, and a decisive intervention early on by class-conscious militants in favour of recruiting all IREM workers who wished to join the union, while imposing a closed shop with union control of hiring, could have put the struggle on an entirely different footing. Linked to demands for dividing the work equitably at no loss in pay, this approach could have set an example of how trade unions throughout the EU can 'level up' pay and working conditions. In this way it might have helped to popularise the idea of forging a single industrial union for all workers in the construction industry across Europe. Of course, even prior to achieving that, a class-struggle leadership would seek to extend union membership to all workers employed in their sector, give parity to members of foreign unions in Britain and seek to negotiate reciprocal agreements for British trade unionists abroad.

In the absence of an internationalist leadership, what bubbled to the surface was the putrid nationalism pushed for years by the Labourite union bureaucrats. This was personified by Derek Simpson, leader of Unite, who posed for a photo in the *Daily Star* with two models holding 'British jobs for British workers' signs.

Keith Gibson, a supporter of the Socialist Party (SP) who was elected to the Lindsey strike committee, did manage to get a few supportable demands adopted, including: 'All immigrant labour to be unionised', 'Trade union assistance for immigrant workers—including interpreters—and access to trade union advice—to promote active integrated trade union members' and 'Build links with construction trade unions on the continent'. The acceptance of these demands suggests that the strikers were not all a bunch of rabid xenophobes, as some leftists have intimated. Yet Gibson's demands, which served as little more than window dressing, did not address the key issue—equal treatment for foreign and native workers. In its press, the SP openly endorsed calls for putting the interests of 'local' (i.e., British) workers first.

In early February [2009], the bosses backed down and agreed that 102 of the 195 jobs would go to 'British workers'. By promoting national divisions, this settlement weakened the workers' movement in Britain and abroad. The union bureaucrats naturally proclaimed it a great victory:

'This is a good deal which establishes the principle of fair access for UK workers on British construction projects. We



June 2009: Workers picket Lindsey Oil Refinery

now expect other companies in the construction industry to level the playing field for UK workers. The workers involved in the unofficial strike can now get back to work.'

—Unite's statement on the Lindsey Oil Refinery dispute, 5 February 2009

The 'Far Left' & the Lindsey Strike

The Socialist Party's adaptation to the existing backward consciousness in the union was documented in their repetition of Simpson's assessment of the settlement:

'This deal has set the benchmark for dozens of other sites throughout Britain and in fact throughout Europe. This heroic struggle by 1,000-plus construction engineers in the refinery, supported by walk-outs at 20-plus other sites has resulted in a victory for the workers.'

—*Socialist*, 12 February 2009

A 'benchmark' setting employment quotas by nationality is a 'victory' for the capitalist practitioners of 'divide and conquer'. The SP also hailed the recent strike near Milford Haven in Wales that guaranteed priority for 'local labour':

'Workers at South Hook were not opposed to ladders from Poland getting work on the site as long as local ladders were given the opportunity of the work first under the union agreement and then foreign workers employed with the same pay and conditions.'

—*Socialist*, 27 May 2009

Workers Power (WP) correctly opposed the nationalist thrust of the Lindsey strike, though they tended to depict the impulses behind the workers' actions as purely reactionary, claiming that 'British jobs for British workers' was 'the premise of the whole dispute' (www.workerspower.com, 5 February 2009). They did, however, recognise that socialists should have sought to intervene in the struggle to combat xenophobic sentiments while fighting management attempts to undermine the union.

The Spartacist League/Britain (SL) declared 'Down with reactionary strikes against foreign workers!', but stopped short of calling to physically disperse the pickets:



No2EU: popular-frontist, nationalist lash-up

'The strikes were not intended to secure more jobs or indeed any gains for the working class as a whole, nor to defend existing jobs. They were about redividing the existing pool of jobs according to the nationality of the workers. These reactionary strikes, pitting British workers against foreign workers and immigrants, are detrimental to the interests of the multiethnic working class in Britain and those of the workers of Europe as a whole.'

—*Workers Hammer*, Spring 2009

The SL correctly attacked the SP's promotion of 'local' labour:

'They include the demand for "Union controlled registering of unemployed and locally skilled union members, with nominating rights as work becomes available". In other words, jobs would be filled from "local" (ie, British) applicants. This is a version of "British jobs for British workers".'

—*Ibid.*

The same point was made in a leaflet of 4 February 2009 issued by Gerry Downing of Socialist Fight:

'The SP motion, which then became the property of the strike committee and the mass meeting, but not the property of the Unite leadership—Simpson, Woodley or Jerry Hicks—says "Union controlled registering of unemployed and locally skilled union members, with nominating rights as work becomes available". That is simply BJ4BW in another form.'

Downing's statement continued:

'We reject the notion that "Union control of hiring is always preferable to the bosses controlling hiring. Enforcing an illegal closed shop would be a massive advance for the working class movement in this country".'

'On what basis would the union nominate people for jobs? The only issue that may be in question is equal access to jobs, but that is down to the subcontracting system itself, not nationality.'

—reprinted in *Socialist Fight*, Summer 2009

A closed shop means that in order to get hired you have to join the union. Union dispatch of workers to jobs prevents employers from discriminating against union militants. Both of these measures are potentially open to abuse by bureaucrats, but hardly more so than other union prerogatives.

Downing's opposition to union control of hiring would leave the capitalists free to manipulate national and other antagonisms within the proletariat. *Workers Hammer*, which had no criticism of Downing's statement, did not comment on his opposition to union control of hiring and contented itself with a string of abstractly correct generalisations:

'The bottom line for the trade-union movement must not be *whom* the contractors hire, but *at what rate of pay and under what conditions they work*. The way to undercut attempts by the bosses to "level down" the wages and working conditions.. is for the unions to demand: *Full union pay for all work at the prevailing rate, no matter who does the job! Equal pay for equal work!*' (emphasis in original)

Union control of hiring and a closed shop would allow workers to do more than merely 'demand' equal treatment from the bosses—they could impose it. So why not advance these elementary common sense demands?

A campaign to establish union control of hiring would strengthen the labour movement against non-union competition from home and abroad. This gain, which has been won by unions in many countries over the years, represents a significant step forward for the working class, as James P. Cannon, the historic leader of American Trotskyism, explained:

'The demands of the maritime workers in the present strike are perfectly reasonable from this standpoint. In standing pat for the union hiring hall they are only asserting their determination to safe guard the organizations which they have already won in struggle and maintained in struggle. The fight for the hiring hall is in essence the old familiar fight for union recognition; when the unions supply workers from the union hall they have union recognition in its best form. The demand of the bosses for the re-establishment of the practice of hiring and firing whom they please, is a proposal to substitute individual bargaining and the black-list system for collective bargaining and a reasonable protection to the worker against discrimination.'

—'The Maritime Strike', *Labor Action*,
28 November 1936

'No2EU'—Nationalist Popular Frontism

The Lindsey wildcat strike in January [2009] was followed by various other actions in defence of 'local' work-

ers. At a demonstration of power station workers at Staythorpe on 24 February [2009], a substantial section of the crowd chanted: 'What do we want—foreigners out!' The spread of this sort of ugly xenophobia could threaten the very survival of the labour movement.

The leadership of the SP has been attempting the difficult manoeuvre of surfing the rising tide of nationalist sentiment, while retaining their leftist credentials. Joining with the Stalinists of the Communist Party of Britain (CP/B) and the leadership of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT), the SP campaigned for the election to the European Parliament on 4 June [2009] as part of 'No2EU—Yes to Democracy'. No2EU was backed by various other left groups, as well as by the tiny Liberal Party—an openly capitalist political formation—whose adherence formalised the popular-front character of this nationalist lash-up.

No2EU promoted the reactionary campaign to give 'local' workers preferential treatment: 'To ferry workers across Europe to carry out jobs that local workers can be trained to perform is an environmental, economic and social nonsense' (www.no2eu.com/workersrights.html). Complementing this nationalist rubbish was a salute to the British imperialist state:

'Nation states with the right to self-determination and their governments are the only institutions that can control the movement of big capital and clip the wings of the trans-national corporations and banks. This means democratic control of the major banks, including the Bank of England, and full public ownership and democratic accountability of railways, postal services, NHS, and the energy industry.'

—www.no2eu.com/economiccrisis.html

The SP hopes that No2EU will somehow turn itself into a 'new workers' party':

'For the Socialist Party, No2EU is not only about this election. We see it as a potential step towards the creation of a mass political party that would represent the millions of workers, pensioners and young people who are facing increased hardship as a result of capitalist crisis.'

—*Socialist*, 6 May 2009

Workers Power, which had sharply criticised the SP's capitulation to nationalism over the Lindsey strike, awkwardly attempted to explain why it would like to climb aboard an electoral expression of the same sentiment:

'We need a new working class party, so that at the next election the choice is not just between the official discredited parties of the establishment and the expenses scandal. We need a new party so that there is a progressive, anti-racist, pro-working class alternative to the dangerous divisive arguments of UKIP and the outright racism of the brutal BNP.'

'In the European elections, Bob Crow and his RMT transport union launched a new electoral challenge, jointly with the Communist Party and the Socialist Party. This is important and shows that forces exist that could build a challenge to Labour.'

'But the name they chose for their electoral platform speaks volumes. They called it No 2 EU, stressing opposition to foreign governments, foreign bosses and even the free movement of foreign labour. The danger is that this plays along with the divisive nationalism that is building up strength in Britain today. Instead of

putting the blame where it belongs, at the door of the rich bankers, capitalists and government in Britain, it diverts attention away from home. It leads to dangerous divisions in the working class, like the "British Jobs for British Workers" strikes in construction, which targeted not the bosses who are sacking workers, but foreign workers' jobs.

'The RMT and their backers look likely to be holding a conference after the election to discuss setting up a new party. Workers and campaigners, socialists, antiwar activists and anti-racists should attend the conference and back efforts to set up a new working class party, while opposing nationalism and all attempts to blame foreign workers.'

—'Build a new workers' party—now', 8 June 2009

The idea that the nationalist No2EU popular front can be a base for launching an internationalist workers' party is beyond naive. Yet it is hardly more absurd than WP's proposal a few years ago that the collection of Third Worldists, trade-union bureaucrats and NGO hustlers who composed the World Social Forum should launch 'a new world party of socialist revolution'.

The race to create a new reformist swamp took another turn with the release of a Socialist Workers Party (SWP) 'Open letter' on 9 June [2009] calling for 'a conference of all those committed to presenting candidates representing working class interests at the next election'. The SP has so far showed little enthusiasm for the SWP's overture, apparently preferring the role of big fish in the No2EU pond. Workers Power, which enjoyed its role as left cover in the SWP's social-pacifist 'Stop the War Coalition', has predictably welcomed this latest manoeuvre.

For a Revolutionary-Internationalist Workers' Party!

The current global economic crisis has laid bare the fundamentally irrational character of capitalism in the epoch of imperial decay. Millions of workers have lost their jobs while bankers, whose failed gambles are covered by public bailouts, busy themselves repossessing people's homes. Not since the Great Depression of the 1930s has the financial aristocracy been so reviled. Never in the lifetime of most activists alive today has capitalism been on such shaky ground.

And yet the impulse of most of the 'revolutionary' left has been, on the one hand, to adapt to the nationalism of backward workers, while, on the other, to attempt to cobble together some new reformist electoral vehicle to fill the vacuum created by the implosion of New Labour.

Marxists must speak plainly and truthfully about what needs to be done. Capitalism has long since forfeited its right to exist. The working class, with a fighting communist party at its head, must expropriate the assortment of bankers, speculators and industrialists whose destructive activities are the natural and inevitable result of a system based on private ownership of the means of production and the other essential preconditions for human existence. Building a revolutionary workers' party, the most urgent task of our time, requires waging political war on 'internationalists' who push nationalist poison and 'revolutionaries' who seek to place new reformist obstacles on the road to proletarian power. ■

New Zealand Teachers Protest Cuts IBT Supporter Leads Walkout



1017 PHOTO

On 4 August 2009, teachers and other staff members at Wellington High School in New Zealand's capital walked off the job to protest the National government's gutting of Adult and Community Education (ACE) night classes. Despite heavy rain, hundreds of students, parents, ACE participants, trade unionists and political activists marched with the teachers to Parliament. The demonstration, which was extensively covered in the media, succeeded in focusing national attention on the government's attacks on ACE, which provides training for 220,000 working-class New Zealanders every year. While slashing ACE funding from \$16 million to \$3 million, the government simultaneously increased private school funding by \$35 million.

The teachers' action was initiated by Adaire Hannah, an IBT supporter in the Post Primary Teachers Association (PPTA), with a motion that was passed unanimously by the Wellington High School PPTA branch. The union's national leadership, which had paid scant attention to the ACE cuts, was alarmed by the prospect of an "illegal" job action originating from the ranks. Hannah was immediately summoned to the union's headquarters, where PPTA President Kate Gainsford and five other officials unsuccessfully tried to bully her into scuttling the walkout. Hannah's intransigence on the issue was endorsed by her fellow teachers at a subsequent branch meeting, where the plan to walk out in collaboration with the school's ACE staff was reaffirmed.

In the lead-up to the action, press releases were sent out, community groups were notified and placard and banner-making sessions were organized. In the face of the teachers' determination, the Wellington High School Board of Trustees—their employer—reluctantly sanctioned the protest, effectively removing the threat of legal repercussions.

After walking out, the teachers and their supporters marched to Parliament. Halfway along the route, Gainsford and several PPTA staffers joined in. During the rally, Hannah,

who was acting as MC, was approached by a union official with a request that Gainsford be permitted to address the crowd. Hannah replied that the PPTA president was welcome to queue up for the open mic after the scheduled speakers had finished. When Gainsford did speak, her failure to propose any serious resistance to the government's anti-working class attack was noted by many of the protesters.

The issue of the *PPTA News* that appeared after the walkout announced that the union would participate in a number of events during the 12 September 2009 National Day of Action against the ACE cuts. The Wellington rally, which again took place in the rain, drew 200 people and featured Gainsford on the speakers list along with a local Labour Member of Parliament, two ACE officials and Hannah. In her remarks, Hannah called for militant action on a national scale: "We need to stand up and say that when the government attacks *any* section of our colleagues we will fight back." She also warned against electoralist illusions and pointedly reminded the audience of the Labour Party's record of imposing austerity:

"The Labour Party has promised to reinstate Adult and Community Education. But we had better remember that when it was the government it underfunded education too, and all other social needs. And it did not reverse the restrictions on workers' right to strike. Labour is just as opposed to workers' solidarity as National.

"Don't put off fighting for our real needs today because it may harm Labour's [election] chances. No government—National or Labour—will be generous unless we are determined to fight.

"As a socialist I believe that the sort of problems we are experiencing internationally can only be solved through a radical reorganization of the entire economic order. These attacks are part of a more general assault on working people and the poor by those who own and control most of the wealth."

Exchange with CPGB on Lenin's Electoral Tactics Bolsheviks, Ballots & the Class Line

We reprint below an exchange that took place last year in the letters pages of the *Weekly Worker*, newspaper of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). Beginning as a discussion on tactics for the June 2009 election to the European Parliament, in which the CPGB called for voting for candidates of the popular-frontist 'No to EU—Yes to Democracy' (No2EU) coalition, it developed into an exchange on the question of revolutionary policy toward bourgeois political formations in general, and, in particular, the Bolshevik Party's attitude regarding candidates of the liberal Constitutional Democrat (Cadet) party in elections to the Tsarist Duma.

Barbara Dorn (IBT) in *Weekly Worker*, 28 May 2009

The CPGB's call for conditional critical support to 'No to EU—Yes to Democracy' candidates in the European elections overlooks one significant aspect of this rotten nationalist project—the involvement of the openly bourgeois Liberal Party. When bourgeois and working class forces present themselves together on the same electoral slate, Marxists call this a popular front, and it automatically precludes any political support, no matter how critical. In his article 'Republican democracy, voting tactics and communist strategy' (May 21), CPGB leader Jack Conrad does not think the participation of bourgeois forces is even worth mentioning, let alone including in his list of conditions for critical support.

This organisational embrace of the 'progressive bourgeoisie', while contradicting No2EU's formal claim to stand for the interests of the working class, is completely in line with its nationalist programme, which feeds into the reactionary poison of 'British jobs for British workers'. This on its own would be reason enough not to give critical support. It is vital that we fight all capitalist attacks, whether carried out in the name of the European Union or of the nation-state, and build active solidarity between workers of all nations.

Conrad then goes on to call for a vote to the Labour Party if, or more likely when, No2EU rejects the CPGB's conditions. But, after 12 years of this viciously anti-working class government, the idea that there are any class-conscious workers who still believe that Labour represents their separate class interests is absurd. To apply the tactic of critical support to New Labour today can only be done on the basis of 'lesser evilism', which defeats the purpose of the tactic—to develop working class consciousness in a revolutionary direction.

Critical support can potentially be useful at times when the reformists pretend to stand for our interests as a class against the bosses. It is a way of engaging in dialogue with class conscious workers over the best programme to advance those separate class interests. With Labour and No2EU today, there is no such impulse to intersect.

In the absence of any candidates standing for the independent interests of the working class, even in a deformed reformist way, revolutionaries call for workers to spoil their ballots in the European elections.

James Turley (CPGB) in *Weekly Worker*, 4 June 2009

Barbara Dorn (Letters, May 28) raises the issue of some Liberal Party members' participation in 'No to EU—Yes to Democracy'. It is certainly yet more evidence of the chauvinist philistinism of the latter's programme that it attracts a Eurosceptic faction of a Whig splinter group.

But comrade Dorn misses this point entirely, and instead gives us the line of the International Bolshevik Tendency on popular fronts at the level of self-parody. The fact that the Liberals are involved automatically makes this a popular front; the fact that it's a popular front automatically precludes any possibility of support. The CPGB's line of posing conditions on support was therefore unprincipled—support should just have been denied.

Firstly, there is no class character that *automatically* precludes Marxists from giving support to a political formation. For all the accusations of Kautskyite heresy from the IBT, the CPGB stands in the tradition of Bolshevism here—these are the same Bolsheviks who urged intellectual supporters to vote for the liberal bourgeois Cadets. IBT comrade Alan Davis has argued in these pages before that they were wrong to do so—but to argue against this on the basis of *principle* rather than *tactics* (and the tactic actually worked out quite well) is a fundamental break from Marxist politics proper into the arid terrain of ultra-leftism.

Secondly, the role of the bourgeois section of a popular front is for the most part a kind of collateral; its involvement is offered to the communists' allies to insure that the communists will not attempt to implement their full programme. The role of these Liberal Party members has been to piggyback on a programme that had already been decided. To focus on this rather pharisaic point is to take emphasis away from the more fundamental class-collaborationist character of the front—its chauvinist, red-brown *programme* and implicit alliance with the bourgeois *state*.

Comrade Dorn also claims that no 'class-conscious workers' still believe that Labour represents the separate interests of the class. But this is simply to ignore the facts that the vast bulk of the trade union movement is still affiliated to Labour, that there remain sections of the Labour Party ostensibly committed to independent working class representation, and so on.

Glyn Matthews, writing in the same issue, suffers from similar confusions. What happened to the days when we realised that Labour had been 'exposed as a pro-imperialist party' and could no longer be supported? Well, those days *never happened*. What we decided was that the Iraq war was the key polarising issue in British politics and principled opposition to it the key requirement for support. Respect passed that test, if it failed all the others—and so did a small handful of *Labour* candidates in the 2005 general election!

It is plain now that the Iraq war is drawing to an end and that, when it is over, it will be no more a polarising



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Pavel Miliukov: leader of Cadet Duma fraction

issue than is the presence of British army bases in former colonies in general. The anti-war movement is basically gone. Its recent revival has had nothing to do with Iraq and everything to do with Israel/Palestine. The conditions we raised in that period are no longer appropriate. And, once again, anyone who says that election tactics must never change, or must add up to a consistent picture in themselves, misunderstands what tactics actually means.

Barbara Dorn (IBT) in *Weekly Worker*, 11 June 2009

James Turley argues that the International Bolshevik Tendency's rejection of the 'No to EU—Yes to Democracy' campaign as a popular front 'misses the point' because the involvement of the bourgeois Liberal Party had no effect on No2EU's 'chauvinist, red-brown programme' (Letters, June 4). But comrade Turley is mistaken to imagine that the issue of whether or not to offer electoral support (however 'critical') to cross class, or overtly bourgeois, formations is merely a tactical question for Leninists.

Claiming that 'there is no class character that automatically precludes Marxists from giving support to a political formation', Turley cites as evidence the willingness of the Bolshevik leadership 'to vote for the liberal bourgeois Cadets' in 1906. At the time Lenin and his fellow Bolsheviks adhered to the organisational conceptions of the Second International, and functioned as a faction of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party [RSDLP], a Kautskyan 'party of the whole class'. They also accepted the idea that a revolution against Russian tsarism would necessarily usher in a period of capitalist development—rather than begin to lay the basis of a socialist economy. This is reflected in a comment in a key document Lenin wrote on this issue: 'The central issue is: on what lines should the socialist proletariat enter into agreements with the bourgeoisie, which, generally speaking, are inevitable in the course of a bourgeois revolution' ('Blocs with the Cadets', November 1906). Because they conceived of the tasks of the Russian Revolution as

essentially bourgeois-democratic, the pre-1917 Bolsheviks were prepared to discuss the idea of electoral agreements with what they described as the 'revolutionary bourgeoisie'; that is, 'only with parties which are fighting for a republic and which recognise the necessity of an armed uprising' (*Ibid.*). This category did not include the Cadets, as Lenin made clear in his November 1906 'Draft election address'.

In reviewing Lenin's writings at the time, we find that he had in fact *opposed* the idea of a bloc with the Cadets at the RSDLP's Tammerfors conference in November 1906, but was outvoted. The conference approved the bloc in principle, but left it up to each local organisation to decide electoral policy in its own area. Lenin did not like the policy, but accepted it in order to maintain a 'united' party with the Menshevik reformists: 'The sanction of blocs with the Cadets is the finishing touch that definitely marks the Mensheviks as the opportunist wing of the workers' party. We are waging a ruthless ideological battle against the formation of blocs with the Cadets, and this struggle must be developed to the widest possible extent... The question is how to combine this ruthless ideological struggle with proletarian party discipline.... Does the sanction by Social Democrats of blocs with the Cadets necessitate a complete severance of organisational relations—i.e., a split? We think *not*, and all Bolsheviks think the same way... Therefore, our *duty* at the present time is to avoid intellectual hysteria and preserve party unity, trusting to the staunchness and sound class instinct of the revolutionary proletariat' ('Party discipline and the fight against the pro-Cadet Social Democrats', November 1906).

But party unity with the Mensheviks proved to be a dead end. The precondition for successful proletarian revolution, as the October Revolution demonstrated so powerfully, is a political split between revolutionaries and reformists. The greatest single contribution of Bolshevism in the organisational sphere is the recognition that revolutionaries must organise themselves independently of reformists. Lenin and the other cadres of the Bolshevik faction did not fully come to this understanding until 1912, when the final definitive split with the Mensheviks occurred.

The Bolshevik Party's struggle for hegemony in the Russian working class in 1917 hinged on exposing the attachment of the 'socialists' in the provisional government to their liberal bourgeois partners, codified in the slogan 'Down with the 10 capitalist ministers!' When Lenin introduced this orientation in his *April theses*, he was regarded by many 'old Bolsheviks' as venturing into the 'arid terrain of ultra-leftism'. The adoption of the *April theses* marked the completion of the qualitative transformation of the Bolsheviks from a revolutionary social democratic to a communist formation.

It is quite true that the nationalism and protectionist logic of the No2EU programme are poison for the workers' movement. That, of course, is why the Liberals find it so congenial. The Liberal Party presence in No2EU is indeed minor, amounting to what Trotsky once called the 'shadow of the bourgeoisie', and even without Liberal participation No2EU's reactionary programme would be a sufficient guarantee to the capitalist class that the 'socialist' backers of the project are harmless reformists. The adherence of the Liberals to No2EU is chiefly significant because it has formalised and concretised the 'fundamental class-collaborationist character of the front', as comrade Turley put it.

Working class independence from all wings of the

bourgeoisie is the first step on the road toward ending unemployment, racism, poverty, war and all the other pathologies that come with life under the tyranny of capital. Of course, reformist workers' organisations do not necessarily need a bourgeois political partner (or even the shadow of one) in order to betray their base. We need only look at the Blairite New Labour traitors to see that. There is a curious symmetry between Turley's mistaken assertion that 'the CPGB stands in the tradition of Bolshevism' in being open to 'giving support to bourgeois political formations', and your current attempts to once again recycle the same old Labour loyalism that has deformed the British left for so many decades.

James Turley (CPGB) in *Weekly Worker*, 18 June 2009

Barbara Dorn spins a fascinating yarn about the history of the Bolshevik faction—a narrative only slightly undermined by a distinct lack of support from one Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (Letters, June 11).

Keen readers of his famous pamphlet *Leftwing communism: an infantile disorder* can only wonder at what the International Bolshevik Tendency comrades make of it. This book was, after all, published in 1920—long after the moment that Dorn and her comrades mark as Lenin's Damascene conversion to permanent revolution.

It is also not a minor work, but one of Lenin's most extensive interventions on the question of strategy and tactics, one widely cited (if less widely understood) in the communist tradition. Finally, it is notable for its extensive treatment of precisely those parts of Bolshevik Party history that comrade Dorn, were she a Russian comrade before World War I, would have found somewhat contentious.

Presumably, then, we should expect thoroughgoing self-criticism from Lenin? Not so: 'The entire history of Bolshevism,' he writes, 'both before and after the October Revolution, is full of instances of changes of tack, conciliatory tactics and compromises with other parties, including bourgeois parties!' And to refuse to engage in such tactics and compromises in the much harder international struggle—is that not ridiculous in the extreme?'

We cannot take everything Lenin wrote for good coin, of course, and this is precisely the period of war communism and the resultant bureaucratisation of the Bolsheviks, which would be later used to such devastating effect by Stalin. I cite it to indicate to the comrades that, as far as Lenin was concerned, alliances with bourgeois parties are not deduced from the revolutionary potential of the bourgeoisie as a class, but by the demands of the situation on the proletarian party, in relation to the overall strategy pursued, and *nothing else*. Whether one follows Lenin's earlier political emphases or the later demands for 'iron discipline', on this point he is utterly consistent and crystal-clear: anyone who rules out a tactic in advance is no Bolshevik.

On the question of a deal with the Cadets, what Lenin opposed in 1906 was a *strategic alliance*, as proposed by the Mensheviks. But Dorn neglects to mention that the Bolsheviks did strike a *tactical* deal with the Cadets in the дума elections, which resulted in the Bolsheviks winning all six seats in the workers' curia. And, of course, Lenin referred to this approvingly in *Leftwing communism*.

One last note for Glyn Matthews (Letters, June 11). No, comrade, I did not say that there were no polarising issues in contemporary British politics—just that the Iraq war

was not one any longer. The rest of his letter follows from this misapprehension and is thus wholly redundant. It is time the inhabitants of Planet Matthews learnt basic reading comprehension.

Bolshevism and Electoral Tactics (IBT)

The following item was submitted as an article to the Weekly Worker, but the editor opted to shorten it and publish it as a letter. While the political content of the abridged version that appeared in Weekly Worker (9 July 2009) was not altered, we reproduce below an expanded version of the text.

In recent weeks we have had an exchange with James Turley in the *Weekly Worker* on the subject of Lenin's attitude toward voting for bourgeois parties. In a previous discussion with the CPGB, in which the same issue was raised, we wrote:

'The most interesting political point raised in comrade [Mike] Macnair's contribution is his reference to Lenin's 1920 assertion in "*Leftwing communism: an infantile disorder* that the Bolsheviks had been correct to vote for the bourgeois Cadets in the second round of elections to the tsarist дума. Macnair appears agnostic on the issue, commenting only that "Lenin may have been wrong" on this point. We think Lenin was indeed mistaken to pose this as a model for the fledgling Comintern, and note that voting for the Cadets stands in contradiction to the policy outlined in his famous April theses, the document that laid the political basis for the victory of the October Revolution.'

—*Weekly Worker*, 19 May 2005

In his letter of 4 June 2009, comrade Turley cited the Bolsheviks' electoral support to the Cadet party as evidence that 'there is no class character that automatically precludes Marxists from giving support to a political formation'. We replied:

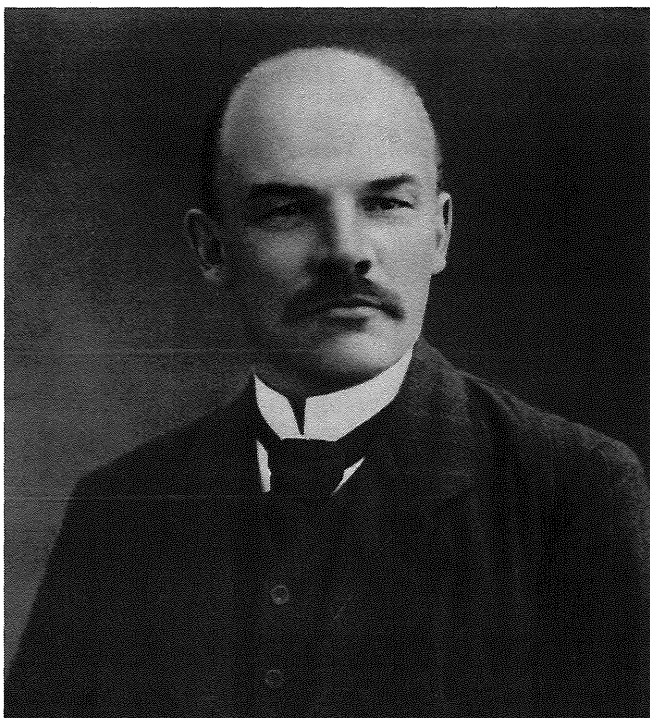
'Because they conceived of the tasks of the Russian Revolution as essentially bourgeois-democratic, the pre-1917 Bolsheviks were prepared to discuss the idea of electoral agreements with what they described as the "revolutionary bourgeoisie"; that is, "only with parties which are fighting for a republic and which recognise the necessity of an armed uprising" ["Blocs with the Cadets", November 1906]. This category did not include the Cadets, as Lenin made clear in his November 1906 "Draft election address"....

—*Weekly Worker*, 11 June 2009

In his reply of 18 June 2009, comrade Turley quoted Lenin's comment in *Left-Wing Communism* that 'the entire history of Bolshevism, both before and after the October Revolution, is full of instances of changes of tack, conciliatory tactics and compromises with other parties, including bourgeois parties!' This is of course quite true, and we have often participated in united actions with various bourgeois formations to defend abortion rights, to win equality for gays and lesbians, to stop fascist mobilisations, etc.

But the nub of our difference is the CPGB's insistence that it is perfectly principled for communists to vote for cross-class formations or outright bourgeois parties. Turley charged that we were 'spinning a yarn' to suggest that Lenin saw voting for the Cadets as unprincipled:

'as far as Lenin was concerned, alliances with bourgeois parties are not deduced from the revolutionary potential of the bourgeoisie as a class, but by the demands of



NO CREDIT

V.I. Lenin, 1910

the situation on the proletarian party, in relation to the overall strategy pursued, *and nothing else....*

'On the question of a deal with the Cadets, what Lenin opposed in 1906 was a *strategic alliance*, as proposed by the Mensheviks. But [the IBT's Barbara] Dorn neglects to mention that the Bolsheviks did strike a *tactical* deal with the Cadets in the дума elections, which resulted in the Bolsheviks winning all six seats in the workers' curia. And, of course, Lenin referred to this approvingly in *Leftwing communism*.'

—*Weekly Worker*, 18 June 2009

It is true that the Bolsheviks were prepared to make deals involving support to Cadet candidates during some stages of the convoluted Tsarist electoral process. It is also true that Lenin retrospectively endorsed this policy in '*Left-Wing' Communism*, his famous 1920 polemic against those who rejected the idea of any and all 'compromises':

'Prior to the downfall of tsarism, the Russian revolutionary Social-Democrats made repeated use of the services of the bourgeois liberals, i.e., they concluded numerous practical compromises with the latter. In 1901-02, even prior to the appearance of Bolshevism, the old editorial board of *Iskra* (consisting of Plekhanov, Axelrod, Zasulich, Martov, Potresov and myself) concluded (not for long, it is true) a formal political alliance with Struve, the political leader of bourgeois liberalism, while at the same time being able to wage an unremitting and most merciless ideological and political struggle against bourgeois liberalism and against the slightest manifestation of its influence in the working-class movement. The Bolsheviks have always adhered to this policy. Since 1905 they have systematically advocated an alliance between the working class and the peasantry, against the liberal bourgeoisie and tsarism, never, however, refusing to support the bourgeoisie against tsarism (for instance, during second rounds of elections, or

during second ballots) and never ceasing their relentless ideological and political struggle against the Socialist-Revolutionaries, the bourgeois-revolutionary peasant party, exposing them as petty-bourgeois democrats who have falsely described themselves as socialists.'

The 'formal political alliance' with Peter Struve refers to his brief involvement with the revolutionary left. Struve was one of a dozen delegates at the 1898 founding congress of the RSDLP and the author of its manifesto. He subsequently moved far to the right and ended up as a political adviser to the White Army's General Wrangel during the Russian Civil War.

The Bolsheviks' willingness to 'support the bourgeoisie against tsarism (for instance, during second rounds of elections, or during second ballots)' derived from their presumption that Tsarism would be overthrown by a bourgeois-democratic revolution. Their policy was also shaped by the necessity to manoeuvre within the framework of a grossly undemocratic, multi-tiered, indirect electoral system where voters were assigned to different 'curia', with 'one elector to every 2,000 voters in the landowner curia, one to each 7,000 in the urban curia, one to 30,000 in the peasant curia and one to 90,000 in the worker curia' (*Lenin Collected Works* Vol. 12, p. 514). A member of the Bolshevik Duma fraction outlined his party's approach as follows:

'The Bolsheviks thought it necessary to put up candidates in all workers' curias and would not tolerate any agreements with other parties and groups, including the Menshevik-Liquidators. They also considered it necessary to put up candidates in the so-called "second curiae of city electors" (the first curiae consisted of large property owners and democratic candidates had no chance there at all) and in the elections in the villages, because of the great agitational value of the campaign. But in order to safeguard against the possible victory of reactionary candidates, the Bolsheviks permitted agreements respectively with the bourgeois democrats (Trudoviks, etc.) against the Liberals [Cadets], and with the Liberals against the government parties during the second ballot for the election of electors in the city curias. The five big towns (St. Petersburg, Moscow, Riga, Odessa and Kiev) had a direct system of elections with second ballot. In these towns the Social-Democrats put up independent lists of candidates, and as there was no danger of Black Hundred candidates being elected no agreements were entered into with the Liberal bourgeoisie.'

—A. E. Badaev, *The Bolsheviks in the Tsarist Duma*

The Bolshevik policy was clearly spelled out in resolutions adopted at a series of RSDLP conferences, beginning with the Menshevik-dominated Tammerfors conference in November 1906. The resolution on election tactics adopted at that conference stated that a key goal was 'to defeat the counter-revolutionary plans of the reactionaries who are endeavouring to dominate the Duma in order to use it to group backward social elements around the monarchy.' The resolution also stated:

'During the first stage of the elections in the workers' curia [according to the election law of 11 December 1905, eligible voters in the workers' curia elected 'representatives' (first stage), who in district electoral assemblies chose 'electors' (second stage), who finally in guberniia electoral assemblies with electors from the other curiae picked the actual Duma deputies], absolutely no partial or local agreements are permitted with groups

or parties which do not adhere to the viewpoint of the proletarian class struggle.

'In all other curiae [i.e., landowners', peasants' and other urban residents'], if during the course of the election campaign there appears to be a danger that the lists of the right-wing parties will win, local agreements are permitted with revolutionary and democratic opposition parties....

'The forms of such agreements must correspond to the local conditions and may involve either a territorial distribution of candidacies within a single electoral district or the composition of joint lists of elector candidates.'

—*Resolutions and Decisions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Vol. 1*

A similar policy was agreed to at the July 1907 conference in Kotka:

'In the second and subsequent stages [of elections] agreements are permitted with all revolutionary and opposition parties up to and including the Constitutional Democrats (and related groups, such as the Muslims, cossacks, etc.).'

This motion stipulated that 'the only agreements permitted are those of a purely technical nature'.

At the Bolshevik-dominated Prague conference in January 1912, the same policy was endorsed for the elections to the Fourth Duma:

'[I]n cases of a second ballot...for electors in the second stage assemblies of urban curia representatives, agreements may be concluded with the bourgeois democratic parties against the liberals, and then with the liberals against all the governmental parties. One form of agreement could be the compilation of common lists of electors for one or several cities proportional to the number of votes cast in the first stage of the elections.'

These narrow 'technical' agreements were further restricted in the big cities where, 'because of the clear absence of any Black Hundred threat, agreements are allowable only with democratic groups against liberals', i.e., with Socialist Revolutionaries and other Trudoviks against Cadets.

Max Shachtman, the pre-eminent American renegade from Trotskyism who, like Peter Struve, ended up backing counterrevolution, cited Bolshevik support to Cadet candidates to justify his shift toward voting for the 'lesser evil' Democratic Party imperialists (see *New International*, Fall 1957). Various other revisionists have used the same argument over the years, and it is abundantly clear that the CPGB leadership considers it a licence to cross the class line.

But such comparisons are entirely illegitimate because this tactic was conditioned by the anomalous situation the Bolsheviks found themselves in: as the socialist leadership of the most militant sections of the proletariat in a semi-feudal society that they were convinced had to undergo both a bourgeois revolution and a period of capitalist development before a socialist transformation was on the historical agenda.

In Britain, where the bourgeois-democratic revolution had occurred hundreds of years earlier, Lenin recommended that the fledgling Communist movement attempt to form a united front with Labour against the capitalist parties:

'The Communist Party should propose the following "compromise" election agreement to the Hendersons and Snowdens: let us jointly fight against the alliance

between Lloyd George and the Conservatives; let us share parliamentary seats in proportion to the number of workers' votes polled for the Labour Party and for the Communist Party (not in elections, but in a special ballot), and let us retain *complete freedom* of agitation, propaganda and political activity.'

—'*Left-Wing' Communism*

Lenin suggested that if the Labour Party rejected this offer, it would provide the Communists with an opportunity to expose it as an agency of the capitalists, just as the Bolsheviks had exposed the reformist parties in the Provisional Government by calling on them to break with the 'ten capitalist ministers' and assume responsibility in their own name:

'If the Hendersons and the Snowdens reject a bloc with us on these terms, we shall gain still more, for we shall at once have shown the *masses* (note that, even in the purely Menshevik and completely opportunist Independent Labour Party, the *rank and file* are in favour of Soviets) that the Hendersons prefer *their* close relations with the capitalists to the unity of all the workers.... It should be noted that in Russia, after the revolution of February 27, 1917 (old style), the Bolsheviks' propaganda against the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries (i.e., the Russian Hendersons and Snowdens) derived benefit precisely from a circumstance of this kind. We said to the Mensheviks and the Socialist-Revolutionaries: assume full power without the bourgeoisie, because you have a majority in the Soviets (at the First All-Russia Congress of Soviets, in June 1917, the Bolsheviks had only 13 per cent of the votes). But the Russian Hendersons and Snowdens were afraid to assume power without the bourgeoisie....'

—*Ibid.*

For revolutionaries, offering political support to capitalist formations is a matter of principle, not 'tactics'. The CPGB's attempt to defend a policy of electoral class-collaborationism by hiding behind the 'purely technical' arrangements the Bolsheviks were forced to get around the obstacles created by the Tsarist autocracy is unworthy of any militant with an ounce of revolutionary integrity:

'Many sophists (being unusually or excessively "experienced" politicians) reason exactly in the same way as the British leaders of opportunism mentioned by Comrade Lansbury: "If the Bolsheviks are permitted a certain compromise, why should we not be permitted any kind of compromise?"...Every proletarian—as a result of the conditions of the mass struggle and the acute intensification of class antagonisms he lives among—sees the difference between a compromise enforced by objective conditions (such as lack of strike funds, no outside support, starvation and exhaustion)—a compromise which in no way minimises the revolutionary devotion and readiness to carry on the struggle on the part of the workers who have agreed to such a compromise—and, on the other hand, a compromise by traitors who try to ascribe to objective causes their self-interest....'

—*Ibid.*

'Communists' who are prepared to give electoral support—however 'critical'—to bourgeois parties do not stand on the legacy of Lenin and Trotsky, the leaders of the October Revolution, but rather embrace the policy of Kerensky and the Mensheviks. ■

For Union Independence from the Capitalist State! EFCA, Bureaucrats & Democrats



DAVID MCNEW—GETTY IMAGES

Los Angeles immigrants' rights rally

Reprinted below is a leaflet initially distributed by IBT supporters in the San Francisco Bay Area in Spring 2009.

On 10 March 2009, the United States Senate began hearings on the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA). The bill, first proposed in 2003, failed to pass in 2007 and seems unlikely to even come to a vote this time. Both the AFL-CIO and "Change to Win" union federations, which invested hundreds of millions of dollars getting Democrats elected in 2008, had hoped that the EFCA would allow them to recoup their investment by expanding their dues base. They are bitterly disappointed to see that, once again, the Democratic "friends of labor" (including President Barack Obama, who had co-sponsored the EFCA in the Senate) have double-crossed them.

The EFCA was supposed to ease requirements for union recognition by granting automatic National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) certification wherever a majority of employees signed union cards. This "card check" would avoid a drawn-out certification process, during which employers routinely stack the vote by intimidating workers, firing union supporters and replacing them with anti-union employees. On 21 May 2009 Obama declared that the EFCA's proposed card check did not have enough support to pass, but that perhaps some "compromise" could be worked out.

If the EFCA merely introduced a card check it would be a supportable reform, but it came with a poison pill: binding arbitration to impose an initial two-year contract if no agreement is signed within a month of certification. While the bureaucratic union leadership viewed this as a bonus—expanding their membership base without risk-

ing serious struggle—class-conscious militants oppose binding arbitration on principle as a form of state control of the workers' movement.

Compulsory arbitration has one objective: preserving "industrial peace" by avoiding strikes. It was introduced in the U.S. in 1920, when the Kansas Court of Industrial Relations was created "for the purpose of preserving the public peace, protecting the public health, preventing industrial strife, disorder and waste, securing regular and orderly conduct of the businesses directly affecting the living conditions of the people" (quoted in Thames Ross Williamson, *Problems in American Democracy*). At that time the trade unions were opposed to compulsory arbitration for the simple reason that it took away their only effective weapon—the right to strike. The bosses also opposed the court because they did not want the government setting wage rates and conditions of employment.

Democrat 'Friends of Labor' Let EFCA Die

The virtual unanimity of corporate America in opposing the EFCA shows that big business today remains just as hostile to government intervention in "labor relations" as in the 1920s. The politically bankrupt union bureaucrats, on the other hand, who shrink from confrontation with the bosses, have veered from brandishing EFCA endorsements from Obama and Joe Biden as if they were signed contracts to squealing about being "betrayed." For example, David Macaray, formerly with the Association of Western Pulp and Paper Workers, was singing the praises of the EFCA in February:

"But here's the astonishing part: If the parties can't reach a mediated settlement *within 30 days*, the FMCS [Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service] has the authority to finalize the contract. In effect, it would be binding arbitration. The notion of an outside party—a government agency, no less—setting the terms of a labor agreement would put the fear of God in management, causing them to do everything in their power to reach an equitable agreement. It's a profound improvement to the process."

—www.counterpunch.org, 20 February 2009

Macaray must know that "a government agency"—the NLRB—has been "setting the terms of labor agreements" in the U.S. for more than 70 years and it certainly has not put "the fear of God in management." In 2005, the median time for the NLRB to issue a ruling in cases of Unfair Labor Practice complaints was 1,232 days (i.e., more than three years) and the average restitution for workers who "won" was a piddly \$3,800 (with a chance they might regain their jobs).

By May, Macaray was denouncing the Democrats:

"Earlier this week it was acknowledged by labor officials and Democratic insiders that the EFCA (Employee Free Choice Act), as presently written, wasn't going to pass. While the bill may be reintroduced in a different form, the crucial 'card check' component has been pronounced dead. Although labor wonks across the country were disappointed by the news, most weren't surprised by it.

"Despite all the hoopla and anticipation, skeptics had predicted long ago that this ambitious bill, which would have provided working people with far greater access to labor unions, had virtually no chance of passing. Why? Because it was too explicitly 'pro-labor'."

"Big Business and the Democratic Party (despite its lip service) simply couldn't allow legislation this progressive to become law."

—www.counterpunch.org, 22 May 2009

At rallies around the country the union tops had pitched the EFCA with disingenuous claims that "the President wants you to join a union," a reference to a slogan used in the 1930s when Franklin Delano Roosevelt occupied the White House. There is indeed a connection between Obama's policies and those of FDR: both serve and protect big business, not the working class. Roosevelt's 1933 National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA), which was overturned by the courts a year after it was passed, mentioned the right of collective bargaining as a sop to the union leaders who had supported his election campaign. In 1935 the NIRA was replaced by the National Labor Relations Act (also known as the Wagner Act), which formally recognized the right to organize. However, contrary to reformist mythology, FDR did not give the unions anything: "this was a right won in fact by direct mass struggles—strikes," as Art Preiss noted in *Labor's Giant Step*.

Roosevelt postured as a friend of the unions in order to contain the enormous wave of "illegal" sitdown strikes and plant seizures that gave birth to the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). The impetus for this labor revolt was provided by three illegal, leftist-led general strikes in Toledo, San Francisco and Minneapolis. Farrell Dobbs, a Trotskyist militant who played an important role in the Minneapolis strike, subsequently observed:

"Class collaborationist union officials hailed the Wagner Act as 'Labor's Magna Charta.' This, of course, was utter nonsense. Their lavish praise of the new law was really an expression of hope that it would enable them to keep the workers suckered into reliance on the capitalist government as a substitute for use of union power against the bosses."

—*Teamster Power*

Today, unlike in FDR's time, the American bourgeoisie is not facing a large-scale labor insurgency. The existing system serves the capitalists well, and the only reason for them to go along with a card check or make any other concessions would be to deflect an upsurge of labor militancy.

The EFCA represents an extension of FDR's Wagner Act and the subsequent Taft-Hartley (1947) and Landrum-Griffin (1959) laws that banned mass pickets and "secondary" strikes (solidarity actions such as "hot-cargoing") and granted federal courts the power to issue strike-breaking injunctions. The tools that built the industrial unions in the 1930s (mass picketing, workplace occupations and secondary boycotts) must be taken up once again if American unions are going to regain lost ground. The reason that these tactics are illegal is because they work. Every major gain labor ever made has come by struggles that ignored the limits set by the employers and their state.

In his important 1940 essay, "Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay," Leon Trotsky outlined how, in the age of monopoly capitalism, trusts, syndicates, consortiums, etc., concentrated control of economic activity in a small number

of oligarchic interests bound up with and dependent on the state. He also discussed how, in a parallel process, a pro-capitalist labor bureaucracy was consolidated that sought to free itself from democratic rank-and-file control while simultaneously seeking to preserve and extend its position by gaining influence over government policy rather than through direct confrontations with capital. The bureaucrats historically embraced state intervention in "regulating" labor relations, and only wanted a role in shaping the legislation. The weakness of the labor movement in the U.S. today is directly attributable to the union bureaucracy's slavish legalism, its political dependence on the Democratic Party and the subordination of the union to the agencies of the imperialist state. As Trotsky wrote: "The primary slogan for this struggle [against the bourgeoisie and the pro-capitalist labor bureaucracy] is: *complete and unconditional independence of the trade unions in relation to the capitalist state.*"

Selling Out 'Undocumented' Workers

The EFCA promised to increase both back pay awards and penalties for employer discrimination, yet did not challenge the Supreme Court's 2002 ruling (*Hoffman Plastic Compounds, Inc. v. NLRB*) denying back pay to undocumented workers fired for engaging in union activity. This was no mere oversight. The chauvinist trade-union bureaucracy refuses to stand up for equal rights for the 12 million "illegal" immigrants in the U.S., three quarters of whom are from Mexico or elsewhere in Latin America. The failure of the union leadership to fight for full citizenship rights for all—including the undocumented—is of a piece with their preference for begging the Democratic wing of the ruling class to rewrite its labor legislation rather than risk taking on the bosses.

The current capitalist crisis is characterized by widespread job losses, falling wages, housing foreclosures and collapsing pensions. This has generated enormous anxiety among working people and created conditions where tumultuous social upheavals are an immediate possibility. Inevitably, attacks on the working class hit the most oppressed strata hardest, as rightist demagogues seek to blame rising unemployment on "illegal" immigrants "stealing" jobs. In fact, in recent years wages and working conditions in several traditionally open-shop cities, including Los Angeles, have improved somewhat as an influx of immigrants from countries with more militant traditions has revitalized the local labor movement.

The potential significance of this phenomenon was dramatically demonstrated by the May Day 2006 protests, when over 1.5 million people took a day off work in opposition to legislation targeting undocumented workers. This "day without immigrants" closed down schools, retail stores, meatpacking plants and even the port of Los Angeles where truck drivers (mostly unorganized immigrants) refused to work. It was the largest demonstration in the U.S. since the Vietnam War.

The size of the protest and its level of organization shocked the U.S. bourgeoisie and demonstrated the enormous potential that exists for mass working-class resistance. In an implicit recognition of the increasing importance of Latino immigrants within American trade unions, the AFL-CIO provided some logistical support in the background, but the bureaucrats did not want to be publicly identified with an illegal action that many par-

ticipants referred to as a "general strike." The timidity of the union misleaders not only reflects their subservience to the ruling class, but also their fear of an upsurge from below. If the labor movement spearheaded a serious fight to win equal rights for undocumented immigrants, the groundwork could be laid for organizing millions of the unorganized. Yet the corrupt parasites atop the unions have no appetite for a fight, and are rightly fearful that they could easily be pushed aside in any large-scale eruption of militant labor struggle.

SEIU: New Frontiers of Bureaucratic Business Unionism

One of the biggest backers of the EFCA was the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), which has a high concentration of Latino immigrants in its ranks. After spending some \$67 million on Obama's presidential campaign—more than any other union—the SEIU today has net assets of only \$34 million (*Wall Street Journal*, 19 May 2009).

At the SEIU's quadrennial convention in May 2008, this massive give-away to the Democrats was approved by delegates who were told that the payoff was assured because Obama would be "a U.S. president who is committed to leading the movement for workers' freedom to form unions and who will make it a priority to get the Employee Free Choice Act passed by Congress" (Resolution 107).

Convention delegates also approved the leadership's "Justice for All" program that includes several measures to tighten centralized control. A key mechanism for this is the introduction of "member resource centers":

"Local unions that have already established Member Resource Centers are now providing members prompt access to trained organizing staff that provide members information in their own language, help solve job-related problems using 21st century technology 24/7, and engage members in the core activities of our union...."

—Resolution 204a

Grievances that used to be handled by shop stewards elected in each workplace are now supposed to be dealt with through centralized call centers under the direct control of the SEIU tops. In a parallel move, the bureaucrats have also created an "Organizing Corps" of college students that:

"will be a new group of temporary organizers modeled after the Peace Corps or Teach for America. It will be aimed at people interested in doing social justice work for a portion of their life, but who are unsure of what work they want to do long term."

—Resolution 205a

So instead of entrusting unionization drives to experienced field organizers, the SEIU leadership proposes to use student temps with no connection to the membership and no long-term stake in the union. The students may not be as effective, but from the point of view of the bureaucrats they have the "advantage" of being less likely to build a base in the membership that could potentially provide a point of support for internal opposition.

The "Justice for All" plan will also give the national leadership control over the finances of each branch and turn elected local leadership posts into full-time staff positions. To serve as a local union officer, workers will have to quit their jobs, thereby becoming dependent on the goodwill of the national office, which reassigns staffers at will

and terminates anyone deemed uncooperative.

The bureaucrats' plans to remove political power from the base and introduce highly centralized organizing mechanisms (which are to include advertising in capitalist mass media and write-in campaigns) go hand in hand with a strategy of attempting to increase their weight within the Democratic Party. The only time the union tops seek to mobilize their ranks is when they want to provide a crowd at a rally. The failure of the EFCA, which was the centerpiece of the SEIU bureaucrats' "practical" politics, dramatically illustrates the dead end represented by "21st century" business unionism.

The Left and the EFCA

Much of the left hailed the EFCA as a major step forward. The Communist Party praised it as a bold initiative, while the International Socialist Organization wrote:

"The [EFCA] legislation could play a role similar to Section 7(a) of President Franklin Roosevelt's National Recovery Act, which enshrined into federal law the right to organize and buoyed the formation of mass industrial unions. Labor organizers seized the moment to argue that 'the president wants you to join the union'...."

—*Socialist Worker*, 20 February 2009

Socialist Action, a U.S. affiliate of the moribund United Secretariat, was somewhat more skeptical, but still supported the EFCA. The Spartacist League (SL), which usually stands to the left of the ISO and Socialist Action, found common ground with them on this issue. While warning that "binding arbitration is a trap," the SL nonetheless concluded that it was necessary to support the EFCA because the near-unanimous opposition of the American bourgeoisie meant that it "represents a referendum on unionization" (*Workers Vanguard*, 30 January 2009).

To our knowledge, the only tendency, apart from ourselves, to oppose the EFCA was the Internationalist Group (IG)*, which recalled the opposition of the American Trotskyist movement to FDR's 1935 Wagner Act. The SL responded to the IG with a piece entitled, "The IG and National Association of Manufacturers Oppose the EFCA" (*Workers Vanguard*, 24 April 2009). While admitting that articles in the Trotskyists' *New Militant* had been "scathingly critical" of the Wagner Act, the SL claimed that they "do not, in fact, explicitly oppose the bill." In making this assertion, the authors of this crude piece of hackwork blithely ignored the 4 May 1935 *New Militant* article photographically reproduced by the IG that characterized the Wagner Act as "a Noose for Labor." To our way of thinking, describing FDR's law as "a Noose for Labor" is about as explicit as it gets.

To turn the tide and begin to win real gains, the workers' movement needs a leadership that is prepared to challenge not only the capitalists' anti-labor legislation, but the entire system of exploitation for profit as well. The unions have to start playing hardball with the bosses. This means a complete break with the Democratic Party of racism and imperialist war, ousting the labor bureaucracy and a fight to forge a revolutionary workers' party committed to uniting the oppressed and exploited in a struggle to smash capitalist rule and open the road to an egalitarian, socialist future.

*We subsequently learned that the League for the Revolutionary Party also opposes the EFCA. ■

IMT on Iran, Yesterday & Today

'Revolutionary Process' & Rose-Tinted Glasses

The following letter was sent to the International Marxist Tendency (IMT).

20 June 2009

Comrades,

In assessing the recent mass demonstrations in Iran against perceived electoral fraud, Alan Woods observed:

"Like a heavy rock thrown into a still lake, [President Mahmoud] Ahmadinejad's coup has stirred up Iranian society to the depths. Nobody can say where events will end. But one thing is certain: Iran will never be the same again. The masses are starting to move, and the movement will not easily be halted. We are entitled to say with confidence: the Iranian Revolution has begun!"

—www.marxist.com, 15 June 2009

Your website features as an accompanying article Fred Weston's 11 February [2009] piece marking the 30th anniversary of Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic Revolution:

"The truth is that the 1979 revolution in Iran was a workers' revolution. Had it not been for the mobilisations of the working class, the Ayatollah and his friends would have remained in exile in France waiting for better days. Instead on February 1, 1979 Khomeini was able to return to Iran to be welcomed by a huge crowd of millions. Are we really to believe that this one man provoked and led the revolution?"

The article contains a link to a 9 February 1979 piece by Ted Grant that essentially answers Weston's question:

"Because of the failures of the Communist Party and radicals, even to attempt to organise opposition within the ranks of the working class, discontent surfaced at the mosques. Radical sermons were preached, which though cloudy and nebulous, were interpreted by the masses in their own fashion."

"The masses interpreted the sermons of the mullahs as really standing for a struggle against the totalitarian and authoritarian regime of the Shah."

—"The Iranian Revolution"

Khomeini's success was guaranteed when Iran's powerful leftist organizations backed him with the expectation that the ascension of the Shiite theocrats would represent a brief "anti-imperialist" stage in an inevitably unfolding process of socialist revolution. But in reality, as the then-Trotskyist international Spartacist tendency noted, the mullahs' movement posed a deadly danger to the working class and all of the oppressed. This assessment was codified in the slogan "Down with the Shah! No Support to the Mullahs!" which virtually every other ostensibly Trotskyist organization, including your own, considered wildly sectarian. In the article cited above, Ted Grant endorsed the popular delusion that the victory of the Islamic reactionaries would be short-lived:

"Support for Khomeini will melt away after he forms a government. The failure of his programme of a Muslim theocratic republic to solve the problems of the Iranian people will become apparent."



Moussavi addresses supporters in Tehran, 15 June 2009

What is apparent today is the failure of Grant et al to foresee the consequences of political capitulation to the forces of Islamic reaction. The delusion that the victory of the Khomeinists was somehow part of an "objectively revolutionary" process paved the way for the wholesale liquidation of the Iranian left. It is grotesque that, 30 years later, the IMT continues to insist that "the 1979 revolution in Iran was a workers' revolution."

The IMT's inclination to see a "revolution" whenever large numbers of people take to the streets is not restricted to Iran. A decade of bourgeois-populist rule is, for you, the "Venezuelan Revolution"—despite the fact that the capitalist state remains intact and there is no sign of dual power. Your faith in the "revolutionary process" leads you to fantasize about the day when "comrade President Chávez," the Bolivarian bonapartist who heads a bourgeois state, will, through some "dialectical" process, lead the masses to socialism (for our assessment, see "Venezuela & the Left," 1917 No. 30).

We note that Chávez's view of the "Iranian Revolution" today is sharply counterposed to your own. The Venezuelan president, who promptly telephoned his Iranian counterpart to congratulate him when his electoral victory was announced, declared: "The victory of Dr. Ahmadinejad in the recent election is a win for all people in the world and free nations against global arrogance." Chávez lauded Ahmadinejad as "a courageous fighter for the Islamic Revolution, the defense of the Third World, and in the struggle against imperialism" (PressTV.ir, 13 June).

Alan Woods suggests that, "like the Russian Cadets [in 1917], the liberal reformers in Iran are terrified of revolution" (*op. cit.*). But if Iran's defeated presidential candidate, Mir Hussein Moussavi, and his supporters are analogous to the Cadets, then Ahmadinejad is playing the role of Prince Golytsin (the Tsarist premier). IMT members should be asking themselves why their hero Chávez is so enthusiastic about supporting the candidate of the status quo.

Leninist Greetings,

Josh Decker

for the International Bolshevik Tendency

'People's War'...

continued from page 64

the Nepalese bourgeoisie.

The CPN(M) strategy was outlined in a statement distributed in the hundreds of thousands across Nepal on the first day of the "people's war." It blamed "feudal and comprador and bureaucratic capitalist rulers" for Nepal's economic underdevelopment and undemocratic political structure:

"the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)—the proletarian party of the sons and daughters of the masses of the people—has resolved to initiate the process of forcibly smashing this reactionary state and establishing a New Democratic state. This resolve is based on the feeling of service and devotion towards the people, on the commitment to the almighty ideology of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism to free humanity forever from the yoke of class exploitation, and on the study of history of the Nepalese society in that light....This path will unfold by making uses (sic) of all forms of struggle in keeping with the historical stage of development of Nepal and principally, as we have said all along, according to the strategy of encircling the city from the countryside, with agrarian revolution as the axis and from the midst of and in conjunction with the rural class struggle."

—"March Along the Path of People's War to Smash the Reactionary State and Establish a New Democratic State!", reproduced in Karki and Seddon

The Maoists' invocation of class struggle was not simply rhetorical. A significant socio-economic transformation was undertaken in their rural "base areas," where landlords' estates were redistributed, peasant debts cancelled, agricultural communes established, rudimentary road

and irrigation networks constructed and a parallel government set up. After centuries of oppression, women, lower castes and minority ethnic/national groups were accorded legal equality for the first time, sharing the benefits of the meaningful, albeit modest, social reforms.

The success of Nepal's Maoists ran counter to the reigning "death of communism" propaganda offensive of bourgeois ideologues in the immediate post-Soviet period, and exerted an appreciable influence on new layers of militants around the world. Following the triumph of counterrevolution in the USSR and East Europe and the defeat or co-optation of most insurrectionary Third World left-nationalist movements, many young leftists had embraced the amorphous and often overtly reformist politics of "anti-globalization," anarchism and simple neocolonial "solidarity." But for those disenchanted by summit-hopping and moral witness, the revival of Maoist guerrillaism in Nepal, India and the Philippines renewed the appeal of "Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought." The *Financial Times* (21 February 2006) warned that the "menace of Maoism is making a comeback."

CPN(M)'s Historic Compromise

The year 2006 proved to be a turning point for the Nepalese "people's war." In April a general strike and 19-day mass mobilization in Kathmandu and other centers paralyzed the monarchy. Having successfully "encircled the city from the countryside," the Maoists played only a peripheral role in the strike. After a round of negotiations with bourgeois and Stalinist parliamentary parties, the CPN(M) agreed to participate in "multi party competition within an anti-feudal and anti-imperialist constitutional frame[work]" (*Economic and Political Weekly*, 22 July 2006). Two years later, after winning a plurality in national elections to a constituent assembly, the Maoists formed a coalition government with elements they had once denounced as members of the "reactionary camp."

The price for admission to mainstream bourgeois politics was steep: landed property and factories seized from the landlords and capitalists were returned, the "people's courts" and "people's committees" dismantled and the People's Liberation Army guerrilla force disarmed. In May 2009, when the CPN(M) was finally turfed out of the government after a constitutional wrangle, it had little to show for the sacrifices made by so many of its supporters, thousands of whom had perished in the "people's war." By contrast, Nepal's ruling elite emerged in a much stronger position.

The outcome of the CPN(M)'s rapprochement with the ruling class, which continues to shape the contours of Nepalese politics, has produced considerable dissension and confusion among Maoist currents internationally. Many defend the CPN(M)'s coalition as an example of tactical flexibility. More left-wing elements characterize it as a "betrayal" resulting from a "right opportunist line" of adaptation to bourgeois reactionaries, rather than forging a "New Democratic" alliance with "progressive" capitalists.

In the end, the CPN(M)'s left-Maoist critics, like its rightist apologists, ignore the fundamental political fact that reconciliation to bourgeois rule is a *logical outcome* of the class collaborationism that lies at the heart of Mao Zedong's concept of New Democracy, which is merely a variant of the Stalinist/Menshevik notion that semi-colonial countries must undergo a period of capitalist development before

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proletarian revolution is placed on the historical agenda. The necessary corollary to this “two-stage” theory of socialist revolution is that the “national bourgeoisie” (as opposed to the bad “comprador” capitalists) is identified as an ally of the working class and peasantry. The CPN(M)’s February 1996 statement made this clear:

“[W]hether it is workers, peasants, women, teachers, students, small traders, lower ranking civil servants, doctors, professors or members of other classes, including the national bourgeoisie, all are victims of this state of feudals and of comprador and bureaucratic capitalists.”

This petty-bourgeois utopianism derives from a peasant-based, rural-centric worldview. For the CPN(M), as for Mao himself, workers’ struggles are seen essentially as adjuncts to the broader strategy of encircling the cities with peasant “base areas.” When the proletariat finally did raise its head—independently of the Maoists—it was enough to persuade even the most ardent monarchists that the only way to safeguard the holdings of the ruling class

was to opt for a republic. The CPN(M)’s commitment to two-stagism resulted in subordinating the working class and poor peasants to the newly-minted “anti-feudal” national bourgeoisie.

This is not the first time that workers and the oppressed have been sacrificed on the altar of two-stage revolution. However, unlike in Iraq in 1963, Indonesia in 1965 or Chile in 1973, Nepal’s rulers have *not yet* succeeded in decapitating the working class and driving the left underground. Invigorated by its show of strength in April 2006 and benefiting from the restoration of certain bourgeois-democratic rights, the Nepalese proletariat appears to be as combative and politically-conscious as it has ever been. But this militancy poses a threat that the bourgeoisie will inevitably attempt to crush. As the storm clouds of reaction gather, Nepal’s workers must seek to establish their own independent political organs with a perspective of leading all the oppressed in a revolutionary struggle to seize state power.

I. Combined & Uneven Development: Nepal, China & Indonesia

Western tour operators promote Nepal as a “land of contrasts.” As Michael Hutt observed in 2004:

“their brochures and guidebooks have regularly contrasted the steamy jungles with the rarefied atmosphere of the high snowpeaks, and the modern urban bustle of Kathmandu with the ‘traditional’ ways of the kingdom’s remoter ethnic communities. However, there are many other contrasts and contradictions that do not figure in tourist literature: between the constitutional definition of Nepal as a Hindu state and the presence of significant religious minorities; between its status as a multi-party democracy under a constitutional monarchy and the long term presence of a well-entrenched communist movement; between its status as a unitary state with one official state language and the presence within its borders of scores of different ethnic groups speaking dozens of different languages; between its status as one of the most aided ‘developing’ nations on earth and the impoverishment and marginalisation of a large chunk of the population; and between its reputation as a land of peace and the ruthless violence of the struggles for power that have taken place at several junctures in its history.”

—“Monarchy, Democracy and Maoism in Nepal”

Some 85 percent of Nepal’s 30 million people reside in rural areas, and 75 percent earn their living on the land, whether as paid laborers, sharecroppers or small farmers. The population is unevenly distributed across three distinct geographical zones:

“To the south, adjacent to India, is the fertile low-lying strip of the Tarai or plains region, home to 48 per cent of the population, mainly Madhesis. The central hill region—with altitudes ranging from around 600 to over 4000 metres—including Kathmandu, has long dominated Nepali politics; it contains around 44 per cent of the population. Finally, there are the precipitous peaks of the north—Everest, etc—rising along the frontier with the People’s Republic of China. The western hill and mountain

regions have always been the poorest parts of the country and the strongest base of Communist support.”

—*New Left Review* No. 49, January/February 2008

In 2009 Nepal’s median income was \$470, according to the U.S. State Department, and 66 percent of the population lived on \$2 a day or less. Health expenditure per capita is extremely low—before the initiation of “people’s war” there were no hospitals in the Rolpa and Rukum districts. Life expectancy (60 years) is among the lowest in South Asia, while infant mortality is among the highest. Only 62 percent of men, and a mere 26 percent of women, are literate. Many villages lack reliable electricity, water and roadways.

The distribution of wealth in Nepal is extremely unequal—the bottom 10 percent of households have 1 percent, while the top decile has over 50 percent. In the countryside, according to the latest agricultural census (2001), 25 percent of households are “landless” (a proportion that is higher among ethnic minorities), 28 percent are “marginal cultivators” with less than 1 hectare and another 20 percent are classified as “small cultivators” with between 1 and 2 hectares. The paltry landholdings of marginal and small owners often require household members to work the fields of large landowners for wages or a share of the crop, or to engage in portering and other forms of day labor. Many work as wage laborers in Nepal’s urban centers and neighboring countries. Indeed, some 10 percent of Nepalese work abroad, and their remittances accounted for 17 percent of national income in 2008 (*Economist*, 1 August 2009).

Landlessness and tenancy are especially common in the southern plains region of the Tarai, where a form of bonded labor (Kamaiya) persists. Historically derived from a system of compulsory unpaid labor services rendered to the upper caste Brahmins and Chetris, modern Kamaiya allows poor peasants to service debts (often falsified) to large landlords. The Kamaiya system was formally abolished in July 2000, when the central government, under

Maoist pressure, inaugurated a redistribution scheme. In many cases, however, the land doled out to former bonded laborers quickly reverted to the landlords, as the impoverished Kamaiyas once again fell into debt.

The glaring inequality in land ownership, the persistence of sharecropping, the survival of bonded labor and the primitive agricultural technology (hand tools and animal-drawn implements) are often cited by journalists and university professors as evidence of the feudal or semi-feudal character of Nepal's economy. There is a tendency to ascribe the backwardness of the country to the "extractive" biases of its corrupt politico-economic elites and its supposed isolation from the global economy, and to conclude that if "feudalism" is the problem, then (more) capitalism, and further integration into the world market, is the solution.

Maoist intellectuals have offered more useful and sophisticated analyses of Nepalese underdevelopment, focusing on the role of class exploitation and imperialism. Baburam Bhattarai, the CPN(M)'s leading theoretician and number two leader (after Pushpa Kamal Dahal, aka Prachanda), wrote a doctoral dissertation at India's Jawaharlal Nehru University in the 1980s that was later published as *The Nature of Underdevelopment and Regional Structure in Nepal: A Marxist Analysis*. Bhattarai's study is a serious attempt to develop a detailed historical materialist understanding of Nepalese political economy. His basic thesis is stated succinctly in one of the CPN(M)'s key documents:

"After the rise of capitalism to its highest stage, imperialism—because of the process of centralisation and concentration inherent in the capitalist process of development—no social system in the world is able to remain outside the influence of imperialist intervention. The more these social systems are primitive and backward, the more damaging is the influence of imperialist intervention on their internal development process. Particularly in the case of societies that are on the verge of transition from feudalism to capitalism, the effects of imperialism distort the internal production relations, promoting the growth of comprador and bureaucratic capitalism (i.e. a capitalism that functions as an agent of foreign monopoly capitalism, engages in financial and commercial activities instead of productive activities and assumes a monopolistic character from the outset by relying upon the state) instead of indigenous forms of industrial capitalism. That is why it is necessary to smash the relationship with imperialism while bringing about a progressive transformation in 'internal' production relations through revolutionary means."

—Bhattarai, "The Political Economy of the People's War," in Karki and Seddon

Bhattarai's emphasis on the domination of global capitalism, the use of backward indigenous institutions by finance capital and the role of the domestic "comprador" bourgeoisie as an agent of imperialism have certain parallels with the concept of combined and uneven development elaborated by the great Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky. In the 1938 *Transitional Program*, adopted at the founding congress of the Fourth International, Trotsky makes the following observation:

"Colonial and semi-colonial countries are backward countries by their very essence. But backward countries are part of a world dominated by imperialism. Their development, therefore, has a *combined* character: the most primitive economic

forms are combined with the last word in capitalist technique and culture....

"The central task of the colonial and semi-colonial countries is the *agrarian revolution*, i.e., liquidation of feudal heritages, and *national independence*, i.e., the overthrow of the imperialist yoke. Both tasks are closely linked with one another."

Yet there are two key differences between Trotsky's analysis and that of Bhattarai. First, Trotsky stressed not only the persistence of "primitive economic forms" but also their combination with "the last word in capitalist technique and culture." Bhattarai and the Maoists tend to understate or even ignore the dynamic importance of the growth of wage labor in agriculture and the development of a small, but strategically significant, industrial sector in the Kathmandu valley and Tarai.

Secondly, while Trotsky explicitly asserted that the unsolved tasks of democracy and national independence can only be solved by a *socialist* (i.e., proletarian and internationalist) revolution against both imperialism and the "national bourgeoisie," the CPN(M) poses the struggle "to smash the relationship with imperialism" in very different terms. Bhattarai argues that "there is no doubt that the semi-feudal relation remains the principal and determining relation, both qualitatively and quantitatively." This recalls Mao Zedong's assertion in 1945 that "[i]t is not domestic capitalism but foreign imperialism and domestic feudalism which are superfluous in China today; indeed, we have too little of capitalism" ("On Coalition Government"). Bhattarai and his party make an identical claim for Nepal:

"because of the backward semi-feudal state and very low level of development of the productive forces in Nepal, the principal form of the new production relations would not be socialist at the outset but capitalistic, and only after going through a transitional stage would a socialist transformation be carried out. In the New Democratic stage, the key basic industries and financial companies would come under the social ownership of the state, some of the larger means of production would be jointly owned by the state and private enterprise and in agriculture, the largest sector of the economy, there would be widespread private ownership by the peasants while in small and medium industry and trade there would be ownership by private industrialists and traders."

Unlike the "semi-feudalism" that exists in Nepal today, the CPN(M)'s New Democratic capitalism would supposedly produce "independent and self-reliant development, free from the oppression and exploitation of imperialism and expansionism." It would also conduct international trade "on the basis of equality, mutual benefit and national needs," give "land to the tiller" and abolish the debts of the peasantry. Posing the central axis of social conflict as a struggle between "reactionary" and "progressive" classes (rather than between exploiters and those they exploit), the CPN(M) calls for "joint participation" by workers, peasants, the petty bourgeoisie and the "national bourgeoisie"—what Joseph Stalin referred to as a "bloc of four classes."

Stagism vs. Permanent Revolution

In March 1926, while still paying lip service to the idea that the industrial proletariat would play a leading role in the coming Chinese revolution, Mao asked: "Who are

our enemies? Who are our friends? This is a question of the first importance for the revolution" ("Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society"). The passage is a favorite for Maoist advocates of a New Democratic alliance with "progressive" capitalists. Yet Nepal's Maoists are unable to concretely identify any bourgeois "friends" of the working class and poor peasantry. Indeed, there is a profound contradiction at the heart of Maoist political economy. On the one hand, there is a recognition that imperialist domination stifles the formation of a national bourgeoisie capable of carrying out significant democratic reforms and launching indigenous industrial development. On the other hand, the whole strategy of two-stage revolution is premised on the notion that the social weight and political authority of the native bourgeoisie is so great that there is no possibility of overturning the entire exploitative system of capitalist private property.

In his 500-page tome on Nepalese underdevelopment, Bhattarai provides an intricate account of the historical development of the "reactionary" classes and the complex interdependencies between large landowners and usurer, merchant and "bureaucratic" capital and imperialism. Yet the "national bourgeoisie" barely warrants a mention, and there is no description of any actions that would qualify it as a "friend" of workers and poor peasants or as a supporter of any sort of "progressive" revolution. This is because, in the epoch of imperialism, there can be no historically progressive bourgeoisie in Nepal, or anywhere else.

The central premise of two-stage revolution—that colonial and semi-colonial countries must first undergo a prolonged period of capitalist development before becoming "ripe" for socialist revolution—has a sordid pedigree. Before the October Revolution of 1917, the Mensheviks insisted that the Russian working class could only act as an accessory to the liberal bourgeoisie's supposed strivings for a democratic republic. In 1906 Pavel Axelrod, a leading Menshevik, argued:

"Social relations in Russia have not matured beyond the point of bourgeois revolution: history impels workers and revolutionaries more and more strongly towards bourgeois revolutionism, making them involuntary political servants of the bourgeoisie, rather than in the direction of genuine socialist revolutionism and the tactical and organizational preparation of the proletariat for political rule....

"We cannot, in absolutist Russia, ignore the objective historical requirement for 'political cooperation' between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie."

—"Axelrod's Speech at the Fourth Party Congress," in Abraham Ascher (ed.), *The Mensheviks in the Russian Revolution*

Lenin rejected the Menshevik strategy of class collaboration and observed that the entire bourgeoisie was so completely integrated with the landed aristocracy, so fearful of the proletariat and so dependent on the Tsarist autocracy for protection that it was incapable of carrying out any repetition of the "classical" bourgeois revolution of France in 1789. In February 1917, mass strikes and street demonstrations led to the Tsar's abdication and the formation of soviets (workers' councils) in the factories—the political nucleus of an alternative state power—but the Menshevik and Socialist Revolutionary leaders of these bodies pledged allegiance to the newly-formed bourgeois Provisional Government. The initial response of many "old Bolsheviks"

(including Stalin) was also to extend conditional support to the new regime as a manifestation of a "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry"—a conception Lenin had formulated without ever suggesting a bloc with the bourgeoisie. Lenin's vigorous intervention (with his famous "April Theses") reversed this policy and set the Bolsheviks on a course that permitted them to lead the working class to power six months later.

Lessons of the Guomindang Disaster

The October Revolution of 1917 provided a living refutation of the two-stage theory, which had mechanically projected the experiences of Britain and France into a universal model of socio-historical development. In the aftermath of the revolution, however, it was not clear to Lenin, Trotsky or the other leaders of the Communist International (Comintern) that the Bolshevik strategy was applicable in colonial and semi-colonial countries, which were generally more backward and had a far smaller proletariat than Russia. As a result, in the early 1920s, the Comintern endorsed the idea of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) entering into an alliance with the bourgeois-nationalist Guomindang.

Within the Bolshevik leadership, a group headed by Trotsky grew more and more concerned about the liquidationist trajectory of the Guomindang entry, while the dominant Stalin faction, which characterized the strategy as a "bloc of four classes," gradually began recycling Menshevik arguments regarding two-stage revolution. The Guomindang orientation was increasingly shaped by the diplomatic exigencies of Soviet foreign policy and the ongoing internal factional struggles in the Russian party, rather than by the logic of the class struggle in China.

In March 1926 the CCP's bloc with the Guomindang almost fell apart when Chiang Kai-shek carried out a mini-coup in Canton in response to what he mistakenly thought was a Communist plot to kidnap him:

"Chiang at once invoked his powers as garrison commander and...put Canton under martial law, posted loyal cadets or police in crucial buildings, disarmed the workers' pickets,

Guomindang executioner beheads Communist





August 1966: 'Beloved Bung Karno' chatting with mass murderer Suharto

and arrested the more than thirty Russian advisers now in the city. A number of senior Chinese Communist political commissars were held in Whampoa for 'retraining,' and the publishing of CCP-affiliated newspapers was suspended. Within a few days Chiang slowly eased the pressures, and by early April he declared that he still believed in the alliance with the Soviet Union; but no one was sure how to interpret these statements. "[Comintern envoy Mikhail] Borodin had been away from Canton since February, holding a series of secret conferences on Comintern strategy with Russian colleagues in Peking. In late April he returned, and over the next few days he and Chiang reached a 'compromise': in the future no CCP members could head Guomintang or government bureaus; no CCP criticism of Sun Yat-sen's Three Principles of the People was permitted; no Guomintang members could join the CCP; the Comintern had to share its orders to the CCP with a Guomintang committee, and a list of all current CCP members was to be given to the Guomintang Executive Committee. Borodin accepted these terms because Stalin was just entering on a critical power struggle in Moscow and could not afford the blow to his prestige that would be caused by a complete eviction of the CCP and the Soviet advisers from Canton."

—Jonathan Spence, *The Search for Modern China*

To avoid alienating the hypothetical "anti-imperialist" bourgeoisie, Moscow directed the CCP to tamp down class struggle in the cities and temper peasant revolt in the countryside. Trotsky acidly commented:

"The official subordination of the Communist Party to the bourgeois leadership, and the official prohibition of forming soviets (Stalin and Bukharin taught that the Kuomintang 'took the place of' soviets), was a grosser and more glaring betrayal of Marxism than all the deeds of the Mensheviks in the years 1905-1917."

—*Permanent Revolution*

In early 1927 Trotsky warned that Chiang was preparing to crush the growing labor movement and advocated forming workers' councils to lay the basis for resistance to such an attempt. Stalin dismissed this as "skipping over the revolutionary-democratic stage of the movement" (quoted in Spence) and claimed that Chiang and the rest of the Guomintang leaders "have to be utilized to the end,

squeezed out like a lemon and then flung away" (quoted in Leon Trotsky, *Problems of the Chinese Revolution*).

But that is not how things worked out. During the Guomintang campaign against reactionary warlords, workers in Shanghai (traditionally the center of the Chinese labor movement) rose up and seized control of the city in anticipation of the arrival of Chiang's forces. The CCP had its members use their positions of leadership to disarm the insurgents and surrender the city to the Guomintang. Chiang took advantage of the opportunity and, in collaboration with local rightist paramilitaries, massacred tens of thousands of Communists, militant workers and students.

In the aftermath of this enormous defeat, Trotsky generalized his theory of permanent revolution and concluded that the policy Lenin outlined in his April Theses a decade earlier was universally applicable:

"With regard to countries with a belated bourgeois development, especially the colonial and semi-colonial countries, the theory of the permanent revolution signifies that the complete and genuine solution of their tasks of achieving *democracy and national emancipation* is conceivable only through the dictatorship of the proletariat as the leader of the subjugated nation, above all its peasant masses."

—*Permanent Revolution*

Trotsky, following Marx, recognized that despite its numerical preponderance, the peasantry could not play an *independent* political role in the revolution. This does not negate the vital strategic importance in backward countries of revolutionary workers winning the support of the peasantry (or at least the more oppressed layers) in any struggle with the bourgeoisie and its imperialist backers. But history has repeatedly demonstrated that the peasantry, a highly stratified petty-bourgeois mass of (at least aspiring) property owners, must inevitably follow one of the two fundamental (and mutually antagonistic) classes in capitalist society, the proletariat or the bourgeoisie:

"As all modern history attests—especially the Russian experience of the last twenty-five years—an insurmountable obstacle on the road to the creation of a peasants' party is the petty-bourgeoisie's lack of economic and political independence and its deep internal differentiation. By reason of this the upper sections of the petty-bourgeoisie (of the peasantry) go along with the big bourgeoisie in all decisive cases, especially in war and in revolution; the lower sections go along with the proletariat; the intermediate section being thus compelled to choose between the two extreme poles. Between Kerenskyism and the Bolshevik power, between the Kuomintang and the dictatorship of the proletariat, there is and cannot be any intermediate stage, that is, no democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants."

—*Ibid.*

Mao played no particular role in the debates that convulsed the CCP and the Comintern over the Guomintang. His enthusiasm for poor peasant struggles in his famous February 1927 "Hunan Report" was not well received by the Comintern. Beginning in 1925, i.e., well before the Shanghai massacre, Mao focused his efforts on peasant organizing in Hunan, showing little interest in the urban proletariat. In assessing the turbulent events of 1926-27, including the failed "Autumn Harvest Uprising" in Hunan, Mao wrote that out of ten the "urban dwellers and the

military rate only three points, while the remaining seven points should go to the peasants in their rural revolution" (quoted in Spence). After the 1927 debacle, the Communist Party as a whole abandoned the urban centers and concentrated on consolidating peasant base areas in the countryside, where the Guomindang exerted little influence. New Democracy was essentially a reformulation of the two-stage theory to fit these circumstances. While the CCP continued to formally acknowledge the centrality of the proletariat, in deference to the "class against class" rhetoric that characterized the Comintern's "Third Period," in practice it made little attempt to reestablish any influence in the working class.

Maoism & the Destruction of Indonesian Communism

Throughout the 20th century, in a variety of situations, the disastrous defeat suffered by the Chinese workers' movement in April 1927 has been repeated, as Stalinist parties restrained mass struggles to avoid alienating the "progressive" bourgeoisie. Indeed, Mao and the CCP bear particular responsibility for the devastating bloodbath in Indonesia in 1965. The Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI—Indonesian Communist Party) was the largest Communist party in the capitalist world, with a membership of three million and another nine million in the affiliated Indonesian Peasants Association. Despite the party's unparalleled objective strength and the clearly pro-socialist strivings of the masses, the PKI leadership, with the active support and encouragement of the CCP, pursued the chimera of unity with President Sukarno's bourgeois Indonesian Nationalist Party.

The 28 May 1965 issue of *Peking Review* contained a letter from Mao Zedong congratulating the PKI on the occasion of its 45th anniversary and saluting it as "Faithful to Marxism-Leninism and resolutely opposed to modern revisionism, a staunch shock brigade of the international communist movement." The next issue (4 June 1965), which was headlined "Great Victories of Indonesian C.P.'s Marxist-Leninist Line," reprinted the full text of speeches delivered at a huge rally in Jakarta by the leader of the CCP's delegation and PKI Chairman D.N. Aidit (it also contained excerpts from Sukarno's address to the rally). Aidit began with a salutation to "Your Excellency President of the Indonesian republic, the great leader of the Indonesian revolution, beloved Bung Karno!" He went on to rebuff the "imperialists and their lackeys" who had complained that "during the celebrations of the 45th anniversary of the founding of the Indonesian Communist Party, the portrait of Sukarno is displayed together with those of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin." Aidit explained:

"The relations between President Sukarno and the Indonesian Communists is not a secret or illegal one; it is an honest kind of relation—proper and legitimate—between revolutionaries who believe in the truth of Marxism and serve the cause of revolution."

Pointing to the danger of an "invasion by imperialist troops," Aidit proposed a "combination of the well-trained armed forces and the armed people" which, he asserted, was a "great possibility" because:

"relations between our people and the armed forces are daily becoming closer in the implementation of the task

of the Indonesian revolution.

"I would like to avail myself of this opportunity to express thanks to President Sukarno for the promise he has made to arm the workers and peasants when necessary."

It is hard to imagine anything more self-defeating or craven. "Beloved Bung Karno" of course never considered it "necessary" to arm the PKI. After a ritual call to "struggle against opportunism," Aidit implored the PKI ranks to be "brave, and steeled and tempered Communists with strict discipline, both the Party's discipline and the discipline of the state."

While Aidit was groveling before Sukarno, the CIA was laying the groundwork for "disciplining" (i.e., exterminating) the PKI. In October 1965 the head of the military, General Suharto, closed the PKI's newspapers, banned its affiliated organizations and ordered mass arrests. The party leadership did nothing to resist and continued to pathetically profess allegiance to Sukarno. While isolated pockets of PKI militants did spontaneously attempt to defend themselves, the party was easily routed and *half a million* leftists, workers and poor peasants were slaughtered. The Indonesian left never recovered from this debacle, and the country groaned under Suharto's rightist military dictatorship for decades.

After the PKI was smashed, Beijing cynically criticized Aidit et al for "abrogat[ing] the independent role of the proletariat and turn[ing] it into an appendage of the national bourgeoisie" (*Peking Review*, 14 July 1967). While some surviving PKI leaders subsequently issued a "self-criticism" from exile, they continued, with the approval of their Chinese mentors, to advocate a strategy of "unity" with the bourgeoisie:

"By correcting the mistakes made by the Party in the united front with the national bourgeoisie it does not mean that now the Party need not unite with this class. On the basis of the worker-peasant alliance under the leadership of the working class, our Party must work to win the national bourgeois class over to the side of the revolution."

— *Peking Review*, 21 July 1967

The idea that the national bourgeoisie has to be "won" to the side of what is, according to Maoist theory, its own revolution lays bare the fundamental incoherence of the two-stage strategy. Like the liberal bourgeois Cadets in pre-1917 Russia, Sukarno's nationalists were simply pursuing a different policy than other, more overtly rightist, factions of the ruling class. They were prepared to make some reforms in order to stabilize capitalist rule, in contrast to Suharto and his backers, who sought to crush, rather than co-opt, the organizations of the workers and peasants. Such left/right divisions exist to varying degrees in every capitalist society. But while the ruling factions may quarrel with each other over tactics, they are united in opposition to any serious threat to capitalist property. No sizable section of a bourgeoisie ever has, or ever will, sign up to participate in a regime whose eventual goal is the liquidation of capitalist social relations. New Democracy was only established in China after the capitalist state was smashed through a civil war and the big bourgeoisie routed, leaving the CCP in complete control.

The Making of the Nepalese Bourgeoisie

The ultra-reactionary and backward character of Nepal's ruling class should make the inherent danger of seeking a "progressive" bourgeois ally obvious. During the 17th

and 18th centuries, the territory that comprises modern-day Nepal was divided into a number of petty hill states whose rulers claimed descent from the aristocratic Rajput families that had long ruled in parts of India. From the 11th century onward, warrior-leaders of high caste (Brahmin and Chetri) and Indo-Aryan extraction had gradually migrated from India to the Nepalese hills, conquering the various indigenous ethnic groups (collectively referred to as *janajatis*, or "hill tribes"). The new rulers typically integrated the *janajatis* by assigning them a lower caste status, subjecting them to mandatory military service and onerous taxation. The Indo-Aryan population was itself stratified with low caste artisans and peasants accompanying the warrior-leaders in migration. The complex social divisions of contemporary Nepal (there are an estimated 60-70 ethnic groups and castes, and some 70 languages or dialects) result from this history of conquest and social differentiation.

The origin of the Nepalese state is usually traced to the conquests of Prithivi Naryan Shah of Gorkha, the ruler of one hill state that successfully overran many of its neighbors. The "Gorkhali expansion" was facilitated by superior armaments, the weakness of neighboring Mughal India (then the object of French-British contention) and Shah's willingness to promise land to the subjects of his rivals. By the end of the 18th century, the Shah monarchy controlled most of contemporary Nepal. Its expansion was eventually checked by an 1814-16 war with the British East India Company, which was then consolidating its control over the Indian subcontinent.

While Nepal avoided formal colonization, it had a semi-colonial relationship with Britain via the Indian Raj. As in Egypt, Ethiopia, Afghanistan and Persia, the engineers of the British Empire sought to reduce their overheads by permitting the Nepalese a measure of autonomy in exchange for control of foreign policy and trade. The 1816 Treaty of Sugouli, which remained in force until 1923, forbade Nepal from direct communication with any Western power:

"For nearly a century, then, Nepal was a kind of political dependency of Great Britain, an arrangement that had benefits both for the British and for the rulers of Nepal. The former were guaranteed a self-manning buffer against possibly hostile powers to the north, a regular supply of soldiers from the hill regions of Nepal (the famous Gurkhas), a small but growing captive market for manufactured goods, and probably even more important, at certain times raw materials and primary products from both Nepal and Tibet. The latter were guaranteed a minimum of support and protection, and—more importantly—virtual insulation from outside pressures for change."

—Piers Blaikie, John Cameron and David Seddon,
Nepal in Crisis: Growth and Stagnation at the Periphery

Unable to expand further through external conquest, Nepal's leading aristocratic families intensified their exploitation of the peasantry and fought among themselves for control of the state. In the 1846 Kot Massacre, the Kunwar family (who later called themselves "Ranas") were able, with British support, to gain control of the government, eliminate their main competitors and subordinate the weakened Shah monarchy.

The Ranas dominated Nepal for a century, during which

time the country was gradually integrated into (i.e., subordinated to) the world capitalist market. The Ranas inherited and extended a system of land tenure under which all land, except for some communally-held territories occupied by *janajati* groups, was in principle controlled by the state. Chunks of state land—and the peasants who worked them—were allotted to noble families, soldiers, religious teachers and priests as a reward for their services to the regime. Most of this parceled (*birta*) land went to members of high castes who were related either to the Ranas or to the royal family. In exchange for access to a subsistence plot, peasants had to pay rent to the *birta* landlord, render unpaid labor services and also pay land taxes. In order to meet these requirements peasants frequently had to borrow from their landlords, a practice that often resulted in bonded servitude.

As the population grew, demand for land increased, permitting landlords to extract ever higher rents and interest payments. As agents of the state, the landlords found an additional revenue stream from administering "justice," collecting fines and regulating local markets. Yet unlike European feudalism, no permanent landed aristocracy emerged because the state retained ownership and control of the *birta* allotments.

The British grudgingly allowed the Ranas to maintain a monopoly over internal trade. This led to the creation of a national network of market towns and bazaars, where Nepalese merchants eventually established themselves as intermediaries between the world market and the domestic peasant and artisan producers. The merchants played a key role in introducing industrial commodities into the country, which wreaked havoc on both peasants and landlords:

"[The merchants] destroyed peasant artisan and household industry, especially in textiles, and profited from the growing poverty by means of usury. They ruined and displaced many of the old landlords to establish themselves as a new class which entered land rents into circulation of industrial commodities and profits. They thus assisted the growth of foreign industrial capitalist preponderance over production in Nepal by impoverishing rather than transforming it, while establishing the international interests they represented in alliance with the village priests and state bureaucrats as an opposition or counter hegemonic force within the country."

—Stephen Mikesell, *Class, State, and Struggle in Nepal: Writings, 1989-1995*

The traditional balance between agriculture and handicraft industry was shattered as indigenous products were displaced by the far cheaper imports. As the integration of remote Nepalese villages into the global economy grew and agricultural production became increasingly dependent upon the market for both inputs and sale of outputs, credit from Nepalese merchants became vital for both peasants and landlords.

The dominance of merchants (and through them foreign industrial capital) precipitated the transformation of the landed estates into private (i.e., capitalist) property. The Ranas, the royal family and their allies opted to transform their holdings into a convertible form of wealth by permitting landlords to sell, mortgage or rent their property without restriction. This accelerated the fusion of landed property and merchant capital under the domination of foreign capital. As the big merchants established them-

selves as landlords, they maintained existing sharecropping arrangements, while landed proprietors ventured into financial and commercial activities. In his *Ethnological Notebooks*, Karl Marx described a similar process in 1850s India, and ridiculed those who simplistically described these social relations as essentially “feudal.”

In the 1930s, the Ranas attempted to counter the effects of foreign capital penetration and revive indigenous manufacturing (particularly in textiles) through a combination of import quotas and subsidies from the newly created Cottage Industry Department. As time passed, many Nepalese elites (merchants, landowners and intelligentsia) became resentful of the Ranas’ control of the state apparatus. The Nepali Congress Party, launched in 1950 through a merger of two previously existing anti-Rana parties (the Nepali National Congress and the Nepal Democratic Congress), claimed to stand for “democratic socialism,” but was a thoroughly bourgeois-nationalist formation based on landowners. The new party was supported by King Tribhuvan, the rump Shah monarch, and also the

Indian Congress Party, which was eager to displace the British-loyal Ranas. The Indian regime assisted Nepali Congress militias in obtaining weapons and provided a base for their insurgency.

Congress had relatively little difficulty overcoming the government’s troops, but was alarmed at the prospect that its narrow struggle against the Ranas might erupt into a wholesale rural revolt against the entire system of inequality and exploitation. To avoid such an outcome, Nehru and other Indian leaders helped negotiate an agreement between the king, the Ranas and Nepali Congress. The so-called Delhi Compromise of 1951 (aka “Democracy Revolution”) preserved the old state machinery and maintained existing social relations, while allowing a wider section of the ruling elites to participate in governmental affairs. The Shahs regained their position of supremacy, and the Ranas and Nepali Congress formed a joint cabinet. To appease popular demands for more radical change, King Tribhuvan cynically promised elections for a constituent assembly but then reneged.

II. Nepalese Maoism: From ‘People’s War’ to ‘Multi-Partyism’

The origin of Communism in Nepal is often traced to a 1947 strike at the Biratnagar jute and cloth mills led by Man Mohan Adhikari, a militant of the Communist Party of India. The Biratnagar strike, the first significant industrial struggle in Nepal, established a strong Communist tradition in the workers’ movement. In September 1949, Adhikari and his supporters joined with Pushpa Lal Shrestha and leftist dissidents from the Nepali National Congress to form the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN).

The king’s refusal to permit the election of a constituent assembly gave the CPN a focus for popular agitation. While the party rejected the Delhi Compromise, it embraced the debilitating Stalinist two-stage strategy, calling for an all-party conference, an interim government and a constituent assembly—essentially the same demands the CPN(M) would later put forward. For two decades the CPN was wracked by bitter personalism and internal squabbling over whether the class-collaborationist “first stage” should involve an “anti-feudalist” bloc with Congress against the monarchy or an “anti-imperialist” alliance with other bourgeois parties (and even the monarchy) against Congress, which was deemed a stooge of imperialism and Indian expansionism. Initially the CPN called for a People’s Front of “progressive forces” to oppose Congress. In 1955 the party dropped its demand for a republic and accepted the king as constitutional head of state—a move that had the additional benefit of restoring the CPN’s legal status.

In 1959 King Mahendra agreed to permit Nepal’s first general election under the terms of a palace-dictated constitution, which invested the monarchy with ultimate authority. When the victorious Congress party proposed a modest reform of what remained of the *birta* landowning system, the king invoked emergency powers, dissolved parliament, banned political parties and arrested their leaders. Nepali Congress attempted to organize another insurgency from Indian territory, but its plans were abort-

ed when the outbreak of fighting between China and India in 1962 compelled Nehru to drop support for the rebels. For its part, Nepali Congress came to grudgingly accept the monarchy as a force for “stability” in the Cold War.

Mahendra’s dissolution of parliament and declaration of a new “partyless democracy” (Panchayat) in 1962 split the CPN into several competing factions. The central committee, backed by the most right-wing elements, welcomed the king’s move as “progressive.” Others in the CPN advocated a bloc with Congress to restore parliament. The largest faction, led by Mohan Bikram Singh, put forward the party’s original demand for a constituent assembly. The CPN(M) derives from Singh’s CPN (Fourth Congress), which in 1979 committed itself to “training guerrillas, proletarianizing party cadre, creating separate base areas, taking action against local cheats, and initiating an agrarian uprising” (quoted in Thapa). Until 1996, this commitment had remained entirely rhetorical.

For many years the most prominent Maoist group was the CPN (Marxist Leninist), which originated in the Jhapa Uprising of 1971 in eastern Nepal—the only significant Communist agrarian revolt prior to the CPN(M)’s “people’s war.” Modeling themselves on the Naxalbari Maoist guerrillas in neighboring India and the Red Guards of China’s Cultural Revolution, members of the Jhapa District Committee decided to eliminate rural “class enemies” and managed to execute seven before being crushed by government repression. This failed military adventure inspired many supporters of other Stalinist fragments and resulted in the CPN (Marxist Leninist [ML]) emerging as the largest Communist formation in the country by 1990.

Despite its militant record, the CPN(ML) consistently deferred to Nepali Congress. In 1979 it launched a student movement against the autocratic Panchayat system that rapidly gained wide support. But when Nepali Congress (operating from India) negotiated an agreement with the king to settle the issue by holding a referendum, the

CPN(ML) demobilized the movement. The military then brazenly proceeded to fix the result through a combination of voter intimidation and ballot box stuffing.

By the end of the 1980s, the Nepalese economy, while still overwhelmingly agricultural, had developed a significant service and industrial sector. Many merchants made major investments in hotels and other tourist facilities, while the establishment of carpet and clothing factories permanently shifted the balance of Nepalese exports from agricultural to manufactured goods. The imposition of imperialist-dictated "structural adjustment programs" in the mid-1980s "liberalized" investment regulations and facilitated the penetration of foreign capital, primarily from India and the United States. All of these players had an interest in acquiring a degree of political influence commensurate with their economic clout.

Plebeian grievances against the regime were of an entirely different character. In the 1960s, King Mahendra's land reforms redistributed a mere 1.5 percent of arable land and subdivided what remained of the communal lands into individual plots too small to be viable. The effect was to worsen the plight of landless and poor peasants, as many newly "enfranchised" smallholders fell into debt and dependence on large landowners. "Structural adjustment" and privatization, meanwhile, eliminated the subsidies for electricity, water, fuel and basic consumption goods that had allowed the rural and urban poor to survive.

In 1989 the CPN(ML) managed to enlist the support of a dozen or so left groupings to launch a *Jan Andolan* ("People's Movement") against the constitutional ban on political parties. This initiative was supported by Congress and the section of the ruling class it represented. From the first "mass gathering" of February 1990, the CPN(ML) allowed Congress to act as the public face and propagandist for the movement so as not to alienate the monarchy. However, vicious police repression and mass arrests radicalized the protests in both the countryside and the cities. The campaign grew for seven weeks before culminating on 6 April 1990, when 10,000 Jyapu peasant women armed with scythes joined workers in Kathmandu in a march on the palace. Carrying red flags and calling for an end to the monarchy, the demonstrators had moved far to the left of both Congress and the CPN(ML). As the crowd neared the palace, the military opened fire, massacring as many as 1,500 people. In order to dampen mass anger and demobilize the demonstrators, the king, Congress and the CPN(ML)-led Left Front quickly signed an agreement on 9 April to lift the ban on political parties. Once mass protests dissipated, Congress and the monarch brushed aside the CPN(ML)'s demand for an elected constituent assembly, and instead set up a narrow "constitution drafting committee" that included representatives of the CPN(ML).

The committee drafted a constitution that allowed a multi-party parliamentary system, but invested the monarchy with significant "emergency" powers. Like the 1951 "Democracy Revolution" before it, the *Jan Andolan* opened a path to government positions and sinecures for politically-disaffected sections of the privileged elites. In both cases *all* wings of the ruling class opposed significant mobilizations of the toilers out of fear that they might pose a potential threat to the entire system of private property. The CPN(ML)'s insistence that workers' and peasants' struggles must not offend its bourgeois "allies" was a far

more valuable guarantee to the exploiters than anything their security apparatus could provide.

The actual *experience* of class struggle in Nepal refutes any claim that the primary objective for working people should be the elimination of "feudalism." Trotsky's observations regarding the situation in China in 1927 are entirely applicable to Nepal today:

"as it turned out, the bourgeoisie did not put forward a single political group that would agree to participate in revolutionary struggle against Bukharin's feudalism. And it is not accidental. In China there are no noble lords standing in opposition to the bourgeoisie. The landholder as a general rule is the urban bourgeois. The small landholder—the kulak, the gentry—is closely linked with the usurer and urban bourgeois.

"Unless one is playing with words, there is no feudalism in China. In the Chinese village there are serf-owner relations which are crowned, however, not by feudal, but by bourgeois property forms and a bourgeois sociopolitical order....Of course, in China poverty and bondage take inhumane forms such as were hardly to be encountered even in the age of feudalism. Nonetheless, the attempt to create feudalism in China, still more its prevalence, relies not on facts, but on the naked desire to justify collaboration with the bourgeoisie. The facts have avenged themselves. In China there has been found no such bourgeoisie or section of the bourgeoisie that would agree to carry on a revolutionary struggle against feudalism, i.e., against itself."

—"New Opportunities for the Chinese Revolution, New Tasks, and New Mistakes," September 1927, *Leon Trotsky on China*

Long March Toward Bourgeois Democracy

In 1991 the CPN(ML) merged with a smaller Stalinist organization and renamed itself the CPN (Unified Marxist Leninist), commonly referred to as the UML. With the introduction of a bourgeois parliamentary system, the UML began functioning as run-of-the-mill social democrats, making promises prior to elections, then renegeing on them. Man Mohan Adhikari, the UML's new president, candidly dismissed the label "communist" as merely a "trademark": "But people recognize the name. I personally would have no trouble changing it to something else. In another country we could be social democrats" (*Pacific Affairs*, Spring 1995). The CPN(M)'s Prachanda denounced the UML for abandoning the perspective of New Democracy in order to become "the most reactionary of revisionists" ("The Third Turbulent Year of the People's War," quoted in Karki and Seddon). Yet the UML's craven electoralism and eagerness to govern with bourgeois parties are entirely logical corollaries of the class-collaborationist, two-stage strategy. At its first congress in 1993, the UML endorsed the notion of "multiparty people's democracy" as the road to a "multiparty polity and a pluralistic society with continuous struggle against feudalism, monopoly capitalism and all forms of suppression and exploitation" (*Pacific Affairs*, Spring 1995).

When the mass mobilizations of April 1990 forced an end to 30 years of Panchayat, there was widespread hope that "democracy" could somehow deliver relief from grinding oppression. It did not take long for these illusions to evaporate as the masses "increasingly realised

that radical land reform, women's liberation, the right of self-determination of nationalities and social justice could not be brought about through parliament under the 1990 constitution" (*Economic and Political Weekly*, 19 May 2007).

In 1994 Adhikari formed the first national "Communist" government in South Asia. During its nine months in office, the UML failed to enact even a modest land reform measure and did little to reverse the privatizations carried out by the previous Congress regime. It enforced World Bank and IMF-imposed "structural adjustment" measures, which helped push the ratio of Nepal's debt service to exports (a rough index of the degree of domination by imperialist financiers) to an unprecedented 35 percent. Prior to dissolving his government in July 1995, Adhikari received (and ignored) a 38-point version of the list of 40 demands the CPN(M) delivered to Nepali Congress in February 1996 prior to taking up arms.

The immediate spark for the "people's war" seems to have been a wave of vicious police repression aimed at breaking the back of resistance in the Maoist strongholds of Rolpa and Rukum. Dubbed "Operation Romeo," the campaign, which was characterized by random arrests, torture, rape and extra-judicial killings, backfired badly. As one Maoist cadre observed: "They picked up a rock to drop it on their own feet" (quoted in Thapa).

The Maoists' insurgency tapped a deep reservoir of anger and frustration among rural toilers. The CPN(M) rallied support on the basis of its unreserved condemnation of the existing system of exploitation and its willingness to organize a fight to transform Nepal into a New Democracy. While upholding the "national bourgeoisie" as an integral revolutionary ally in theory, the CPN(M) flatly denounced all other political parties as reactionary or revisionist. This left the identity of both the "national bourgeoisie" and its political representatives (with whom a "united front" was supposed to be forged) up in the air.

The eclecticism of the 40 demands only further muddied the waters. Some of the major social goals could only be achieved through smashing the bourgeois state, e.g., ending the dominance of foreign capital, giving land to the tiller and guaranteeing work for all. Most, however, were proposals for reforms: free speech, an end to the "special rights and privileges of the King," equal property rights for women, autonomy for ethnic minority groups, revocation of unequal treaties with India, a new constitution to be drafted by "people's representatives," etc. A few had clearly reactionary implications, like the xenophobic call to stop "cultural pollution" from the importation of Hindi films, newspapers and magazines. Pradip Nepal, a UML spokesperson, commented:

"The demands were broadly similar to the demands made by all of the opposition political parties involved in parliamentary politics and could have been fulfilled by the general decision of the cabinet. Even pure rightist [monarchist] parties like the Nepal Sadvawana Party and the Rastriya Prajatantra Party are raising similar demands today."

—"The Maoist Movement and its Impact on Nepal,"
in Karki and Seddon

Of course, none of the opposition parties (including the UML) had actually attempted to implement these policies when they were in office. Their failure, combined with the CPN(M)'s apparent seriousness, gave the Maoist program

considerable popular resonance.

During a decade of "people's war" the Maoists pursued a two-track (and ultimately contradictory) strategy. On the one hand, they undertook a classic guerrilla campaign with nascent organs of political administration in rural base areas defended by a peasant army. At the same time, the CPN(M) leadership continued to pursue formal and informal talks with the government and opposition parties on the basis of their 40-point program. The relatively minimal nature of many of the demands opened the door to negotiations and made it possible to cast opposition parties which supported some of the CPN(M)'s positions in the role of "progressive," "anti-imperialist" bloc partners. Gradually the list was whittled down, with three "political" demands—interim government, constituent assembly and republic—receiving the most attention. As early as 2001, the Maoists even signaled a willingness to drop the call for a republic in the interest of reaching a compromise agreement.

Left-Maoist critics of the CPN(M) tend to view the party's post-2005 evolution as a case of the logic of negotiation overwhelming the imperatives of "people's war." The CPN(M) leaders, like those of the CPN(ML) before them, are derided as adherents of the "right opportunist line" who inexplicably abandoned the perspective of New Democracy and liquidated hard-won gains in order to sit at the table of the bourgeoisie. This explanation boils down to ascribing the failure of a strategy to the personal shortcomings of those who carry it out. What is missing from such analyses is any consideration of the integral connection between "people's war" on the one hand, and class collaboration on the other. The success of the guerrilla campaign left the CPN(M) with only two options—to try to overthrow the ruling class or work out some sort of New Democratic *modus vivendi* with it.

Dynamics of 'People's War'

As the prior experience of the Jhapa militants and the Indian Naxalites demonstrates, rural rebellions rarely go beyond executing a few landlords before they are crushed. By their very nature peasant struggles are isolated from centers of commerce, industry and finance. Even the poorest peasants—in Nepal, the *sukumbasi*—typically view the acquisition of land as the solution to their problems. They tend to be dependent on landed patrons for survival and are often hesitant to engage in a very risky struggle at the urging of de-classed intellectuals. When they are not immediately crushed, agrarian insurgencies usually survive by conciliating landlords and rich peasants, or by retreating into socially—and geographically—marginalized areas. This is essentially what the Naxalites have done, embedding themselves among indigenous "tribals" in India's forests. The Naxalites are consequently absent not only from the towns and cities, but also from the large-scale capitalist agriculture in the heavily-policed plains (*Economic and Political Weekly*, 22 July 2006). Workers, unlike peasants, have the social power to stop the flow of profits, the lifeblood of capitalism, because of their strategic relation to the means of production, transportation and communication.

The exceptional success of "people's war" in Nepal stems from a number of factors. The arduous terrain afforded a degree of protection that few other peasant insurgencies have enjoyed, while the extremely underdeveloped road

and rail network made it difficult for government forces to speedily reverse guerrilla conquests. According to the *Economic and Political Weekly* (22 July 2006), roughly two-thirds of the country “had traditionally remained beyond the reach of any development projects, social welfare schemes, and agencies of administration (including police).” The comparatively large number of landless peasants, and the absence of big landowners in much of the west, also helped tip the balance in favor of the insurrection. Another important element was the undifferentiated brutality of the police and Royal Nepal Army (RNA), as the Brussels-based International Crisis Group (ICG) recently observed:

“Even before the significant escalation of late 2001 and entry of the RNA, police actions against the Maoists were brutal and targeted anyone suspected of being a sympathiser. They resulted in warrantless arrests, torture, rape and extrajudicial executions, as well as cases of excessive force—such as the burning of an entire village at Khara in Rukum district in 2000. These actions only increased the rebels’ popularity in the affected areas....”

“The army promised to give the Maoists a ‘bloody nose’ and was under intense pressure by the high command and the palace to deliver results. Given its inexperience in counter-insurgency, the army was only able to deliver bodies rather than strategic gains. One source in close contact with the army during the latter stages of the conflict recalled that ‘there was tremendous pressure right down the chain of command *every day* for a high kill count’. There were also incentives: officers and other ranks were told that delivering results, even in these terms, would enhance their prospects of a coveted position on a UN peacekeeping mission.”

—“Nepal: Peace and Justice,” 14 January

Of the 13,000 people killed during the civil war, “the vast majority died at the hands of the state” (*Ibid.*). In April 2002, Interior Minister Devendra Raj Kendal explained the government’s program of offering cash incentives for turning in CPN(M) leaders, dead or alive: “Anyone reporting their (Maoists) whereabouts or submitting their heads can get the prize in the same bag they take the heads” (*Economic and Political Weekly*, 7 September 2002).

The Nepalese ruling class is supported by the country’s largest foreign investors, the U.S. and India. Itself a victim of imperialist domination, India is a major player in the strategically important Himalayas:

“The Nepalese are keenly aware their nation exists at the pleasure of India and could share the fate of their neighboring mountain kingdoms. The Indian Army occupied Sikkim in 1970 without a shot; the tiny mountain state was forthwith annexed to India. In 1975, Sikkim became a state within the Indian union....”

“Thus, four long-independent Buddhist Himalayan kingdoms—Tibet, Ladakh, Sikkim, and Bhutan—were absorbed by their powerful neighbors, India and China. Though the religion and culture of the latter three were no less rich and distinctive than that of Tibet, the outside world paid scant notice to the annexation of the other ‘little Tibets.’”

—Eric Margolis, *War at the Top of the World: The Clash for Mastery of Asia*

India is anxious to prevent Nepal from developing economic or security links with China, which would undermine

the raft of unequal deals Kathmandu has signed since the 1950s and potentially threaten Indian access to Nepal’s largely untapped hydroelectric capacity. In 1988, India imposed a 15-month blockade on Nepal for importing military equipment without New Delhi’s prior approval, as stipulated in the 1950 Peace and Friendship Treaty. The Indian bourgeoisie is also concerned that a successful Maoist uprising in Nepal could inspire its own hideously exploited toilers to “pick up the gun.” To avoid this outcome, the Indian government has been funding weapon acquisitions for the Nepalese military. Indian authorities have also worked with the West Bengal state government, led by the Stalinist Communist Party of India (Marxist), to detain exiled Nepalese Maoists.

American imperialism has long used Nepal as a base for intelligence gathering and covert operations in the region, particularly against “Red China.” Millions of dollars given to the Dalai Lama and his circle of counterrevolutionaries helped support the activities of “Khampa” Tibetan guerrillas who operated in the 1960s and early 1970s from bases in Nepal. Today, the primary U.S. objective is to maintain Nepal’s status as a pro-Indian buffer state to help militarily encircle and diplomatically isolate the Chinese deformed workers’ state. Washington shares the Indian bourgeoisie’s fears about the influence of Nepalese Maoists and the possibility of a “red corridor” stretching from Kathmandu to Naxalite-controlled eastern India. During the civil war in Nepal, the Bush administration placed the CPN(M) on its so-called terrorist watch list, where it remains. American Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage declared that the Maoists posed “a significant risk of committing acts of terrorism that threaten...the national security, foreign policy, or economy of the United States” (*Strategic Analysis*, January 2009). A similar sentiment was expressed by the U.S. ambassador, James Moriarty:

“It’s not Islamic fundamentalism, obviously,’ Moriarty said, ‘but it is a very fervent brand of Maoism that could cause great trouble in this area. They’ve said they’re going to invade the United States. I’m not too worried about that, but you ignore what they say at your own peril. You can’t pooh-pooh the Maoists and the threat that they represent.”

—*Harper’s Magazine*, May 2005

As part of its “war on terror,” the U.S. sent millions of dollars in military assistance, as well as 20,000 M-16 assault rifles and a squad of advisers, to strengthen Nepal’s security apparatus.

Social Gains in Maoist Base Areas

Against the all-sided social oppression and murderous exploitation perpetrated by Nepal’s ruling class, the Maoists could point to modest, but significant, social reforms in the areas controlled by the “United Revolutionary People’s Council” (URPC), which the CPN(M) established in 2001. The URPC was designed to function as a nascent alternative government and to institutionalize New Democracy, with “people’s committees” at ward, village, area and district levels. The Maoists termed them “3-in-1 committees,” after the “three-thirds” policy of Mao’s party during the second “United Front” with the Guomindang in the early 1940s:

“The so-called ‘three-thirds’ system—the practice whereby the Communists occupied no more than one-third of the posts in the guerrilla area governments—was not a

'United Front' in any functional sense, i.e., in the sense of its being necessary for peasant support. Unity between the peasants and the party was not based upon the three-thirds system, because the peasants actually supported the Communists through the mass organizations and the army. The three-thirds system was a device for incorporating local non-Communist leaders, landlords, rich peasants, and other well-known people into the regional governments."

—Chalmers Johnson, *Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power: The Emergence of Revolutionary China 1937-1945*

The CPN(M)'s "3-in-1 committees" operated in practice as fronts for the party. A third of the members were open party members, while the rest mostly came from the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and Maoist-led "mass organizations."

In the CPN(M) base areas the estates of large landowners were divided among the peasantry, debts to moneylenders were eliminated, bonded servitude was abolished and the Kamaiya laborers, in some places at least, finally received modest tracts of land. The Maoists encouraged cooperative systems of farming in the "hills" to overcome the limitations of small landholding, while in Rolpa and Rukum three "communes" were set up (*Monthly Review*, November 2005). Small-scale production of cotton, soap, candles and paper was established along with food processing, while labor-intensive public works programs built rudimentary road and irrigation systems. Health care and education became more accessible to the poor, especially to women and *dalits* (members of the lowest caste—the so-called "untouchables").

Following Mao's example, the CPN(M) did not go after the land of the rich peasants, leaving merchants, traders and other private commercial interests to operate unhindered. Not only was this in consonance with New Democracy, it also provided the party and the PLA with a tax base. Despite fiery denunciations of Indian expansionism, the Maoists "fastidiously avoided touching any of the substantial Indian economic interests in Nepal" (Saubhagya Shah, "A Himalayan Red Herring?" in Hutt).

Of particular concern to the Maoists was the appalling oppression of members of lower castes and marginalized ethnicities. *Dalits*, for example, are forbidden to share water taps, roads and electricity in some areas. Ethnic minorities were historically integrated into the lower tiers of the caste system and prevented from owning significant tracts of land. This complex amalgam of class, caste and ethnic oppression is further compounded by a profoundly misogynist culture:

"The abject status of women in Nepal...is reflected in a Nepali saying: 'If my next life is to be a dog's life and I can choose, I'd rather be a dog than a bitch'. The faces of Nepalese women are of women trafficked, of anaemic women who die neglected in childbirth, of poor and illiterate women behind bars for miscarriages or abortions, of menstruating women sequestered in cold and unhygienic *cauchholoo* sheds, of women without a son abandoned or supplanted in a polygamous marriage and of culturally disadvantaged girl children burdened with a 1:4 ratio of labour load in comparison with their brothers.

"The gender profile of Nepal reveals that women suffer from 23 discriminatory laws. A woman's life span is shorter than a man's by two and a half years. More than



Nepalese women bear burden of economic backwardness

40 percent of girls are married off by age 15 and have their first child by 19. Nepal's maternity death rate, 905 out of 100,000, is matched only by Afghanistan. Women watch one in every ninth child die under 5....Dowry, polygamy, wife beating and mass trafficking are common. Citizenship is through the male line and rights to ancestral property are restricted to unmarried daughters."

—*Cultural Dynamics* Vol. 16, Nos. 2/3, 2004

In the Maoist base areas discrimination against *dalits*, ethnic minorities and women was formally banned and each group was guaranteed representation in the "people's committees." Women have a significant presence in the lower (though not higher) echelons of both the party and PLA—in the latter, the percentage of female fighters has been estimated at 40 percent. Images of ethnic Magar women carrying assault rifles have become emblematic of Nepal's "people's war." Women are allowed to inherit property, attend school and get divorced. They are no longer subjected to child marriages or polygamy, while domestic violence and rape are both punished severely.

The emancipatory role of Nepalese Maoism has, however, been limited. This is due not only to the extremely low level of the productive forces in the countryside, but also to the political program and petty-bourgeois class basis of the CPN(M) itself. Like the Russian and Chinese Stalinists upon whom they model themselves, Nepal's Maoists embrace and promote the reactionary institution of the nuclear family. A *Le Monde* journalist traveling in Maoist-held Rukum in 2003 visited a makeshift jail where a third of the inmates were being punished for "sex before marriage and extra marital sex" (*Ibid.*). Marriage and fidelity are, if anything, enforced to an even greater degree inside the party than outside it. Hisila Yami (aka Parvati), a leading female cadre who is the party's chief spokesperson on gender issues, commented: "a code of conduct is formulated for women and men, particularly for the combatants, so that sexuality leads to marriage, if both partners are not married...If one or both are married,



SAGAR SHRESTHA—IRIN

Young female Maoist fighter, October 2005

they are warned and punished" (*Ibid.*). Parvati seems to be comparatively more enlightened than other leaders of the CPN(M). In her recent book, *People's War and Women's Liberation in Nepal*, she even advances some criticisms of "the marriage institution":

"It is an alliance of convenience for men to perpetuate their hegemonism in property relations. For women the same alliance in fact marginalizes them to domestic slavery. Sadly this holds true amongst the communists too, although to a lesser degree."

A leading member of the CPN(M), Pampa Bushal, was dropped from the Central Committee and sent to a village for "re-education" after his "sexual misconduct" with a married female comrade came to light. Homosexuals are also reportedly ostracized.

The Maoists' views on sexual morality recall what Trotsky termed the "Thermidor in the family" in the Soviet Union, when the conservative bureaucratic caste headed by Stalin reversed the Bolsheviks' unprecedented efforts to liberate women and decriminalize homosexuality. Ultimately they reflect the class basis of the CPN(M). Sexual oppression and patriarchal ideology are materially rooted in the institution of the family, which is endemic to all class-divided societies. Women's oppression is a function of their role as the unpaid providers of household labor. To sustain their support among the smallholding

peasantry, the Maoists cannot afford to offend the conservative social mores that enforce monogamy as a means of ensuring rightful inheritance of property.

While celebrating the nuclear family, the CPN(M) seeks to ameliorate some of its symptoms with moral exhortation, e.g., campaigns to share household chores more equally between the sexes. Yet women's liberation is only possible through massive investment in the construction of institutions—daycare centers, schools, laundries, cafeterias, etc.—to socialize the household tasks traditionally assigned to women. The liberation of women in Nepal cannot be achieved even on the basis of the creation of a collectivized, planned economy on a national scale; it requires a level of development that would only be possible through the extension of the revolution to other countries with far higher levels of labor productivity.

CPN(M) on 'People's War' & Urban Insurrection

The CPN(M) was only able to establish stable and authoritative "people's committees" in a relatively small portion of the 80 percent of Nepal they eventually controlled. Outside their secure base areas where their grip was much more fragile, the PLA was subject to periodic, but crippling, assaults from the security services. Parvati's triumphant declaration in 2005 that the "old state's presence is now limited to the capital, district headquarters and highways" (*Monthly Review*, November 2005) revealed just how tenuous the Maoists' hold really was. With the major urban centers of industry, finance, commerce and political administration secure, along with the country's major transportation network, the Nepalese state was "encircled" but not imperiled. The RNA was unable to regain control of the entire country, but the PLA was incapable of conquering the heavily-defended urban areas. With generous imperialist support, the RNA had grown to a well-equipped force of 90,000—far larger than the estimated 30,000 poorly armed (if highly motivated) members of the PLA and Maoist militias.

The CPN(M) seems to have anticipated this state of affairs. At its Second National Conference in January 2001 it adopted the "Prachanda Path"—a combination of rural "people's war" with urban insurrection. Previously the CPN(M) had considered a strategy of armed working-class uprising to be applicable only in advanced capitalist countries, but with this turn it formally recognized the validity of both the Russian and Chinese models and concluded that at least since the 1980s it has been necessary to meld the two strategies:

"There should be no confusion at all that basically, the developed imperialist countries must essentially pursue the path of armed [urban] insurrection and the oppressed countries of the third world protracted people's war even today. But the change occurred in the world situation as mentioned above has created a situation that necessarily links the characteristics of armed insurrection and protracted people's war with one another, and, moreover, there is a need to do so....

"The military line of general armed insurrection contains some fundamental characteristics such as continuous intervention by the political party of the proletariat at the centre of reactionary state on the ground of political propaganda right from the beginning, training the masses

including the workers with continuous strikes and street struggles on the basis of revolutionary demands, developing works in the military force and bureaucracy of the enemy in a planned way, waging intensive political struggle against various revisionist and reformist groups from the central level, and, lastly, seizing the central state power through armed insurrection in appropriate international and national situation, etc. It is evident that the proletariat of a third world country should concede and apply the above-mentioned characteristics of general armed insurrection, too."

—"The Great Leap Forward: An Inevitable Need of History," *The Worker* No. 7, January 2002

Nepal has undergone a significant transformation since the early 1970s, when 94 percent of the "economically active" population was involved in agriculture. Today 13 percent are engaged in industry and another 21 percent are employed in providing services—together accounting for over 60 percent of Nepal's GDP. Nepal's working class, which is concentrated in the urban areas of the Kathmandu valley and the Tarai, is militant and relatively politically conscious. The *Economic and Political Weekly* (12 August 2006) reported that newsstands commonly sell Marxist classics alongside mainstream magazines. There is also a high level of unionization: a U.S. State Department publication recently estimated that approximately one million workers belong to a union ("2009 Investment Climate Statement—Nepal," February 2009). Nepal's unions are organized not along industrial lines, but rather by political party affiliation. The largest labor grouping, the General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT), is linked to the UML, while the Nepal Trade Union Congress (NTUC) is aligned with Nepali Congress. Both federations have representation in the textile and carpet industries, but the membership of the GEFONT has a higher proportion of blue-collar workers while the NTUC tends to have more civil servants and petty-bourgeois professionals. Although the control of the parties has weakened somewhat in recent years, on important issues both of the major federations continue to subordinate their activities to the requirements of their respective parliamentary godfathers.

In laying the basis for the armed insurrection dictated by the Prachanda Path, the CPN(M) worked hard to expand its influence in the cities. The Maoist student union, which was already an important force in 2001, initiated a campaign against educational inequities and private school fees. Other CPN(M)-aligned groups organized protests against the monarchy, government and army abuses as well as caste and religious discrimination. The Maoists also established their own All Nepal Trade Union Federation (ANTUF). Reflecting the CPN(M)'s ambivalence toward workers' organization, the actions of the ANTUF did not seem to be governed by any consistent strategy. It commenced operations with a series of explosions intended to encourage industrialists to make "donations." While sometimes linked to demands for improved wages and working conditions, many of these actions did not appear to have substantial support from the workers in the factories targeted—perhaps because successful bombings often meant significant staff cutbacks, if not the closing of the enterprise altogether. Support for the ANTUF grew after it organized a strike against 12 major businesses in September 2004.

The CPN(M)'s view of the cities and the struggles of the proletariat as mere *adjuncts* to agrarian-based "people's war" has limited its capacity to win the confidence and allegiance of the urban working class. In neither its popular agitation nor its theoretical documents has the party projected the formation of workers' councils or any other organs of proletarian rule. Instead, the Maoist-controlled trade union is touted as the most appropriate body to represent workers within a multi-class "united front." The prospect of "new democratic" exploitation by "national" capitalists is unlikely to have a great deal of appeal for most workers, as many *already* toil for Nepalese industrialists. What is indisputable is that despite widespread discontent with the parliamentary cretinism of the UML, the urban working class has not embraced the Maoist alternative.

April 2006: End of 'Prachanda Path'

The CPN(M)'s failure to win the allegiance of the urban proletariat left it without a viable road to taking state power, compelling it to seek a rapprochement with the parliamentary parties in order to gain influence in Kathmandu. Following King Gyanendra's October 2002 dismissal of the government, Bhattarai wrote that the conflict "between the retrogressive and progressive forces" would continue until "the feudal-bureaucratic forces are completely swept away by the ultimate victory of democratic revolution." But he also complained that the CPN(M)'s projected partners in the "democratic revolution" were far too cozy with the "feudal-bureaucratic" forces:

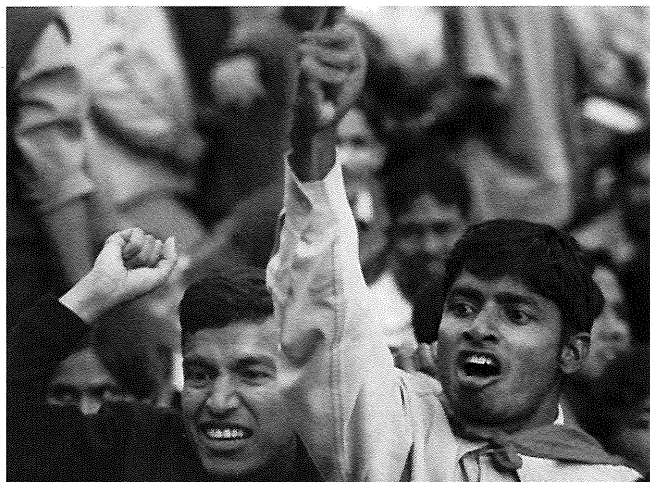
"The principal weakness and mistake in this whole process of major parliamentary parties was not to grasp the age-old feudal monarchy as the foremost bulwark of reaction and instead to fancy it as an ally of 'democracy'. Consequently, during the past 12 years in power these parties could not introduce a single programme to cut the roots of feudalism and bureaucrat capitalism and prepare a material base for sustainable bourgeois democratic institutions....

"Also, the CPN(Maoist) has publically committed itself to a multiparty system in the future. That is why their constant appeal to all the parliamentary parties has been—'you accept republicanism, we will accept multipartyism'."

—*Economic and Political Weekly*, 16 November 2002

The only limitation to "multipartyism," according to Prachanda, was that "the activities of such elements upholding feudalism and inviting foreign domination will be curbed" (*Economic and Political Weekly*, 7 September 2002). In June 2003 the CPN(M)'s central committee formally approved a "multiparty competitive democratic system" (quoted in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 22 July 2006).

But despite their differences with the monarch, neither the UML nor Congress found the Maoists' overtures enticing. During the preceding five years, these parliamentary lackeys of the Nepalese ruling class had themselves shown little regard for democratic niceties in their drive to stamp out the Maoist insurrection. And following the dissolution of parliament, members of both the UML and Congress had accepted positions in subsequent governments appointed at the king's discretion. The picture began to change in February 2005, when the king declared an "emergency" and assumed full executive powers (as



PAULA BRONSTEIN—GETTY IMAGES

19 April 2006: demonstration against King Gyanendra

he was entitled to do under the 1990 constitution). Only after the monarch proceeded to arrest scores of prominent political activists and suspend media and communications did the parliamentary parties and bourgeois “civil society” begin to raise serious objections. Even then the UML and Congress, at the behest of their Indian and American backers, limited themselves for months to merely calling for the re-instatement of the old parliament. This had no popular appeal, and as the Maoists’ demands for a republic and constituent assembly rapidly gained support (even within the ranks of the UML and Congress) the leaders of these parties changed tack.

Over the summer of 2005, India facilitated discussions between the Seven Party Alliance (SPA), a coalition of all parties enjoying significant parliamentary representation, and the Maoists. Bhattarai began to float the possibility that it might be necessary to undergo a preliminary sub-stage of a democratic republic because of the “vacillation of a large section of the urban and rural middle classes toward revolutionary change,” and the opposition of both China and India to major upheavals in the region (*Washington Times*, 30 July 2005). In November 2005, the SPA and Maoists signed a 12-point agreement to work toward “ending autocracy and establishing absolute democracy” (*Economic and Political Weekly*, 21 October 2006). The SPA rejected the Maoists’ call for a republic, but agreed to the idea of a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution. The agreement was vague on specifics and left open the possibility of a restoration of the old parliament. It also included a clause calling for United Nations “supervision” of the Maoists and RNA—a longstanding demand of the CPN(M).

In March 2006 the SPA and Maoists issued separate but identical calls for a four-day general strike and campaign of civil disobedience to begin on 6 April. Contrary to the plans of the party leaders, however, the strike and demonstrations did not conclude on 9 April, but instead grew larger and more militant. Like the *Jan Andolan* of 1990, the protests developed a momentum of their own, and soon participants were demanding an end to the monarchy. According to the ICG:

“Initially, party cadres and leaders were hardly seen in the protests and very rarely in the lead. Party flags, a staple of any organised demonstration, were few and far

between. Most corner meetings, rallies and marches were spontaneous, managed by local activists or instigated by Maoist cadres rather than guided by central party planning. The participants were overwhelmingly ordinary people, neither hardcore mainstream party or Maoist supporters.”

—“Nepal: From People Power to Peace?” 10 May 2006

The RNA’s attempt to impose a curfew enforced by a “shoot to kill” policy failed to quell the protests—firing on the crowds only further stoked popular anger. Between three to four million participated in the demonstrations and strikes over 19 days. The largest protests took place in Kathmandu, with smaller ones occurring in district centers across the country. Some 6,000 demonstrators were injured—in Kathmandu 18 people were killed and another 150 suffered broken arms or legs. Unlike in 1990, there were few instances of pro-regime thugs in “retaliation committees” attacking protesters, and there were reports that many retired soldiers and even cops participated in the demonstrations.

Nepal was in a pre-revolutionary situation in April 2006. By bringing normal life to a standstill, the general strike clearly posed the question of which class should rule. The mainstream party leaders, especially those of the UML, were widely discredited and unable to offer any practical solutions to the problems faced by the workers and peasants. The state machinery ground to a halt as much of the civil service, including many in senior positions, joined the demonstrations. Intellectuals and professionals abandoned the regime, and some sections of the security services defected as well. Such situations pose tremendous opportunities for a revolutionary party that has won the confidence of the most militant workers and is able to connect the immediate demands of the masses to the need to seize state power. A Bolshevik-Leninist party would have linked the call to abolish the monarchy and convoke a constituent assembly to the need for democratically-elected workers’ and poor peasants’ councils to give direction to the struggle, along with workplace-based militias capable of dealing with attacks by the RNA or other components of the bourgeois repressive apparatus. The next logical step would have been to organize the expropriation of the big landowners and capitalists, both foreign and domestic. An organization which, during those critical few days, had been able to pose a clear alternative to the existing order could have ignited a social revolution that would have reverberated across South Asia and far beyond.

The CPN(M), the only party claiming to represent any sort of revolutionary alternative, did not and could not offer such a program. Its cadres played an instrumental role in the smaller centers, but had little influence among workers in Kathmandu. The CPN(M) leadership, moreover, opted to align with the parliamentary parties to assume responsibility for restoring bourgeois law and order in the capital. When the king made a desperate last-ditch offer to appoint a civilian government, even his formerly servile parliamentary lackeys in the SPA were forced to spurn him:

“Far from pouring oil on troubled water, the king’s proclamation had, in the Nepali phrase, added ghee to the fire. People poured onto the streets in greater numbers than ever, determined both to send a message to the palace both by defying the curfew and to let the party leaders know compromise was not an option.

"Kirtipur, the small and independent-spirited town outside the capital that had earlier hosted one of the most impressive peaceful mass meetings, was deserted. 'No one's here. We're all heading to Kathmandu', said young men walking toward the ring road. 'We want a republic—everyone's supporting that now'. Crowds breached the security cordon around Kathmandu's twin city, Patan, and picked up numbers as they moved downhill towards the bridge into the capital. 'We're marching on the palace', shouted exuberant protestors above the din of anti-king slogans...."

"At one point on the route taken by the largest procession, a Western military expert estimated the crowd that had passed him numbered some 200,000 to 300,000."

—*Ibid.*

In an attempt to stop things from spinning out of control, the SPA and the palace worked out a hasty backroom deal. The king restored parliament and vaguely nodded at the "road map" provided by the 12-point agreement. This was enough for the SPA to abruptly declare victory, call off further mobilizations and claim credit for all that had been achieved. The CPN(M) denounced the deal as a "historic mistake," but its willingness to sign onto the November 2005 agreement undercut its criticism of the parliamentary parties. When the SPA leaders asked the Maoists to lift their blockade of Kathmandu, they grudgingly did so. The second *Jan Andolan* came to an end.

The CPN(M)'s good behavior during the April 2006 events impressed both its parliamentary allies and the Nepalese ruling class. Over the next two years there was a series of negotiations involving the SPA, the Maoists and (to a lesser extent) the palace over the form of bourgeois democracy to be installed. The first step was a number of agreements between the CPN(M) and Nepali Congress' G.P. Koirala, who headed the restored parliament. When Koirala was prime minister in the late 1990s, he had directed the anti-Maoist offensive. At the time Prachanda characterized him as a "fascist," but now Koirala was employing Maoist language to warn against disruption by "reactionary forces" (BBC News Online, 9 November 2006). The restored parliament was supposed to be replaced by an interim government, a temporary constitution and eventually the election of a constituent assembly. To secure representation in the provisional government, the CPN(M) agreed to a wholesale reversal of everything achieved during 10 years of "people's war." The "people's committees" and "people's courts" in the Maoist base areas were to be dissolved, and all property expropriated during the civil war was to be returned. In line with a vague agreement that eventually PLA forces would be "integrated" into the bourgeois state apparatus, the Maoists agreed to UN "monitoring" and partial disarmament. PLA cadres were sequestered in seven cantonments, with their weapons warehoused under lock and key, although the key apparatus remained in the possession of the CPN(M).

In return the Maoists received various paper commitments from the government: a worthless pledge by the army not to use its weapons against "the other side," i.e., the Maoists. The agreement made a pretense of subjecting the RNA to restrictions similar to those on the PLA—it was to remain in its barracks and have a "like number" of its (far more numerous) weapons locked up. The agreement also provided for the deployment of the army as border guards, airport security, etc., with the police force (which

had been charged with suppressing the Maoists prior to 2001) handling domestic security. Other provisions included promises of an end to caste, ethnic, regional and gender discrimination, "scientific" land reform and "inclusive democracy." Prachanda declared that the sub-stage of multi-party competition had proven to be "a necessary process for the bourgeoisie and the national capitalists alike, let alone the middle-class" (quoted in *Journal of Contemporary Asia* Vol. 38, No. 2, May 2008).

CPN(M) 'Sub-Stage': Running the Capitalist Government

The CPN(M) pointed to three objective factors that made it necessary to abandon the "Prachanda Path": the lack of economic development in the base areas, the need to win more support in the urban areas and the risk that a foreign military intervention would crush any attempted urban insurrection. While any revolutionary movement has to contend with the possibility of imperialist interference, the other two factors derive wholly from the strategy of rural-based guerrilla warfare. In pursuit of expanded influence in the cities, the CPN(M) opted to join the bourgeois interim government. Prachanda spun this overt class collaboration as an important step on the road to New Democracy:

"we've raised the class question, nationality question, gender question and the regional question. If all these four issues are solved then it amounts to having a new democratic republic...but since we are also talking about peaceful competition with the bourgeoisie, its form looks like bourgeois democracy, whereas it is new democratic in essence."

—quoted in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 19 May 2007

The Maoists were presented with an unusual opportunity to realize this program after their surprisingly strong showing in the 10 April 2008 constituent assembly elections. The *Economist* (12 April 2008) reported, in advance of the results, that "the Maoists are believed, in the absence of any reliable opinion poll, to be widely detested." When the votes were counted, the CPN(M) had won 220 of 575 seats in the assembly, twice as many as Nepali Congress, which finished in second place. The Maoists took half of the first-past-the-post seats, and another 30 percent of those assigned by proportional representation:

"Kathmandu-based Western diplomats and their Indian and Chinese counterparts could provide no credible reason why the Maoists made such surprising gains. On the contrary, it had been believed that the election would bring the Maoists down to their proper size—putting them in a position from which they could neither think of going back to the jungles for another phase of armed struggle nor command enough assembly seats to shake the foundation of a newly-installed government."

—*Asia Times Online*, 19 April 2009

The first sitting of the constituent assembly in May 2008 declared Nepal a republic. The question of the monarchy was no longer important to the ruling class—even many of the royalists in the assembly voted for a republic. The bourgeoisie was far more concerned with ensuring an orderly return to the status quo in both the cities and the countryside, where the top priority was to completely liquidate the Maoists' alternative organs of power. While the CPN(M) was not the capitalists' preferred option, its presence in the

government provided valuable cover for maintaining the existing system of exploitation and oppression.

In the summer of 2008 the CPN(M) entered a coalition government with the UML and the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (MJF), a regional party led by a former Maoist. Ostensibly a representative of the *madhesi* people of the Tarai, the MJF is in fact an agency of large landowners fiercely opposed to agrarian reform. Prachanda became prime minister and Nepali Congress leader, Ram Baram Yadav, was elected (with the support of the UML) to the supposedly ceremonial position of president. In fact, the office of president was created in order to divide authority over the army, thus ensuring that even a Maoist parliamentary majority would not legally exercise full control of the state apparatus. The CPN(M) went along with this, as it was anxious to reassure the ruling class that it posed no threat to its essential interests. Bhattarai made this very clear during the negotiations to put together the coalition government:

"Just the other day we were at a gathering of nationalist [capitalists] and traders and we tried to show them that our main focus right now is to do away with feudalism and do away with the feudal relations of production, and the very dependent capitalism, not national and international capitalism....We are not against productive and industrial capitalism, you know, which provides goods, provides jobs, creates value within the country, and at least resists the imperialist interventions within the country. That type of national capitalism we promote. We tried to convince the nationalists and traders that we will create a favourable environment."

—*Economic and Political Weekly*, 10 May 2008

Bhattarai spelled out the class-collaborationist implications even more clearly in a subsequent interview:

"Both the management and workers have a common interest now, for the development of the economy. They both fought against the feudalism, autocracy and monarchy. Now, to create a vibrant industrial economy, is in the interests of both the management and the workers. But this reality is not sinking in their minds. This government is playing its role in creating a healthy relationship between the two. There were some disputes, especially regarding the minimum wage issue. This has been solved. So what I appeal to the management is that they should provide the minimum wage. The workers shouldn't resort to *bandas* [political general strikes] and strikes. If this understanding is honoured we'll have a healthy environment in the days to come."

"...At least for some time, there should be no *bandas* and strikes in the industrial, health, education sectors, on the major highways, in the public utility sectors. The government is trying to build a political consensus on this issue."

—*Kathmandu Post*, 12 January 2009

The interviewer posed a question that went to the core of the two-stage strategy:

"Q: Have there been efforts by your government to distinguish between the two categories among capitalists in Nepal, and formulate policies that will help industrial capitalists but not bureaucratic or comprador capitalists?"

The CPN(M) leader responded by admitting that the Maoist distinction between "reactionary" and "progressive" elements of the capitalist class was essentially meaningless:

"The same person or the same group often has a double

character in Nepal. Class differentiation is very low. The same person may be doing an agricultural job and a service job. It is very difficult to categorise which class a particular person or group falls into. Among industrialists also, they may be doing some good work, making investment within the country, and they may also be playing a comprador capitalist role, trading in foreign goods and making profits. There is this dual character. This is the character of a transitional society, so we should be patient and transform this situation."

The Maoists will have to be very patient indeed if they intend to wait until the capitalists lose their appetite for "making profits" and instead begin performing "good work."

Tensions within the CPN(M) over its abject capitulation to the class enemy came to a head when it turned out that land previously belonging to the royal family and seized from peasants in the Tarai had been turned over to a member of the MJF who had somehow in the interim acquired formal title to it. This was too much for Matrika Yadav, who resigned as Minister for Land Reform in the coalition government and eventually left the party altogether, charging that it had "abandoned its revolutionary character and has been entrapped in the whirlpool of the parliamentary parties and practices" (*Telegraph Nepal*, 12 February 2009). Yadav has since set up a new party, which claims to be the *real* CPN(M).

After the CPN(M)—which merged with a smaller group in early 2009 to become the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) or UCPN(M)—had returned property to landlords and publicly embraced former royalists as "nationalists," Nepal's rulers and their imperialist godfathers concluded that it was no longer necessary to have Maoists running the government:

"Despite the transition to a federal democratic republic and continuing rhetorical commitments to a progressive, socially inclusive 'new Nepal', rumours of the old Nepal's death have been greatly exaggerated. The end of the monarchy has in many respects benefited the interests it used to serve: the scapegoating of former king Gyanendra, much as he was responsible for his own woes, has freed the Kathmandu elite to regroup and rebrand themselves. With the UCPN(M) now cast as the authoritarian ruler, and providing examples of continued illiberal behaviour, it is easier to categorise anti-Maoist resistance as democratic.

"The noisiest conservative revival has been spearheaded by the urban upper classes. That the Maoists are not the new Khmer Rouge they predicted has not deterred constant cries of 'totalitarian dictatorship'....Ironically, it is only when they propose genuinely illiberal measures such as completely banning strikes that the 'liberal democrats' have rushed to embrace them. In contrast, a budget so un-Maoist that it satisfied the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was greeted with derision for its excessive ambition as well as claims that programs such as a national literacy scheme were camouflaged steps towards a takeover of the state."

—ICG, "Nepal's Faltering Peace Process,"
19 February 2009

While the capitalist media was full of denunciations of thuggish behavior by members of the UCPN(M)'s 50,000-strong Young Communist League, it was in fact the police who were responsible for most killings in the first half of 2009. According to a 13 August 2009 ICG report, Maoist

supporters were far more frequently the victims of violent assault than perpetrators.

Opposition squealing reached a crescendo in early May 2009 when the government attempted to dismiss the Chief of Army Staff, General Katawal, who had publicly stated prior to the formation of the coalition government that he would not permit the integration of “indoctrinated” PLA members into the army. Ignoring the Maoist defense minister’s objections, Katawal enlarged the army by 3,000 and postponed the retirement of eight officers responsible for some of the worst brutalities of the civil war. He also ostentatiously boycotted a national sporting event that included UCPN(M) participants. When the “Marxist-Leninist” defense minister finally moved to dismiss Katawal, the opposition parties, the capitalist media and the ruling class exploded with anger. For them, an “independent” army was the guarantee that nothing much would change under a Maoist-led bourgeois government.

The situation became so tense that Prachanda was forced to cancel a planned trip to Beijing to sign a new “Peace and Friendship” treaty that would have provided \$16.4 million in economic aid and made China Kathmandu’s chief international backer (*Asia Times Online*, 17 March 2009). With Indian representatives engaging in a flurry of backroom diplomacy, the Maoists’ coalition partners, the UML and MJF, both came out in opposition to the dismissal, as did President Ram Baram Yadav, who cited a clause in the interim constitution requiring “political consensus” on such matters. Ironically, Bhattarai had earlier touted this clause as evidence that “the system conceived by the present interim constitution is not yesterday’s parliamentary system” (*Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. 38, No. 2, May 2008). Faced with a non-confidence motion in the assembly, Prachanda was forced to step down, and his government was soon replaced by a UML-led coalition.

Nepalese Rulers Weigh ‘Suharto Option’

The UCPN(M)’s “flexibility” provided the Nepalese ruling class with a very cheap victory. Not only were the “people’s committees” and “people’s courts” largely liquidated and the PLA demobilized, but the landowners had their property returned. The UCPN(M)’s most important service, however, was to stabilize the tottering capitalist social order at a time of popular turmoil and acute revolutionary possibility by legitimizing a refurbished brand of bourgeois democracy. Having exhausted their utility for the elites, the Maoists were cast aside like a “squeezed lemon.”

Despite this dismal record, the UCPN(M) remains a potent force in Nepal. Since May 2009, hundreds of thousands of people have participated in a series of nation-wide demonstrations demanding “civilian supremacy” over the army. In the areas where the Maoists have influence, the “people’s committees” have been reactivated and land seizures have resumed. In late November 2009, the party orchestrated a move by thousands of landless squatters onto a tract of land in the country’s far west. The government responded by sending in police, who cleared the camps, burned down 1,500 shacks and killed four squatters. The Maoists countered with a one-day general strike on 6 December 2009, which closed shops, roads and public transport in the capital.

The Maoist leadership is aware that if it is to maintain its base and increase its authority, it must continue to organize militant actions. It is feeling some pressure on its left from



REUTERS

Sinister General Katawal at ‘Democracy Day’ in Kathmandu, 24 April 2009

Matrika Yadav’s “real” CPN(M), which has managed to win over a significant number of disaffected Maoist cadres with radical rhetoric and bold land seizures in the Tarai. The events of May 2009 appear to have strengthened left-wing elements in the UCPN(M) who had argued for moving more rapidly toward establishing a “people’s federal democratic national republic” (conceived as full New Democracy) as opposed to Bhattarai’s policy of “consolidating” the “federal democratic republic.” In the aftermath of the May debacle, Bhattarai sought to distance himself from his previous conception of a protracted “sub-stage” of bourgeois rule:

“We knew the bourgeois forces, after the abolition of the monarchy, would try to resist, and our main contradiction then would be with the bourgeois democratic parties.... “After April 2009... that phase of the Constituent Assembly and implementation of the bourgeois democratic republic was more or less complete. Our understanding is to now carry on the struggle forwards to complete the New Democratic Revolution.”

—“Nepal: Interview with Baburam Bhattarai,”
World People’s Resistance Forum (Britain) website,
30 October 2009

This renewed commitment to a “New Democratic Revolution” does not represent a break from the fatal logic of the two-stage theory, and thus it opens the door to another round of class collaboration. The Maoists’ militant street demonstrations chiefly serve as a means to exert pressure on the other parliamentary parties. In October 2009, the UCPN(M) suspended its boycott of the constituent assembly to lend its support to the UML-led government’s budget. Two months later it announced that the “main contradiction” had shifted: “According to the party CC [central committee] decision, the contradiction has been changed.

The question of nationality has been in the centre and the main contradiction is decided to be in between the interference of imperialism (specially the Indian expansionism) through the puppets and the remnants of feudalism, and the Nepalese people" ("UCPN-Maoist Develops a new Tactical-Line," Red Star website [English], 6 January). This paves the way for another "anti-imperialist" lash-up with the "patriotic" bourgeoisie, while encouraging a dangerously complacent attitude toward the army as the guarantor of "national independence." Echoing Aidit's illusions in the Indonesian military in 1965, Maoist leader Lila Mani Pokharel is reported to have claimed that the army would side with the Maoists in any showdown: "The Nepal Army has the clear idea as to who were traitors and who were the real nationalists....Unequal treaties and unequal relations with India should be the major concern of the youth population and remain committed to safeguard Nepal's National Independence" (*Telegraph Nepal*, 28 December 2009).

This combination of popular mobilization with delusions regarding the capitalists' repressive apparatus is likely to prove fatal. For the first time since 2005, India has resumed military assistance to Nepal and is openly encouraging the government to formally renounce any plans for integrating the PLA. To date, nothing has changed—the UCPN(M) is pressing for all its fighters to be incorporated, the army is opposed to accepting any of them and the United Nations (which is supervising the cantonments where the PLA is languishing) has proposed a partial integration.

The army is seeking to end restrictions on the import of weapons imposed by the 2006 peace agreement. It is also actively intervening in domestic politics with lengthy policy documents calling for a referendum on secularism and federalism, and upholding Nepal's first monarch, King Prithviraj Shah, as a symbol of national unity. There are clear signs that preparations for an offensive against the Maoists have begun:

"Continued observance of CPA [Comprehensive Peace Agreement] formalities is far from guaranteed. Generals have not hidden their desire for a decisive, 'do or die' assault on the Maoists. They have increasingly argued that the stalemate in the insurgency was solely attributable to external factors rather than lack of army capacity: [King] Gyanendra let them down with his foolhardy and

underdeveloped political strategy; international backers froze support just when they needed it most; the NA [Nepal Army] was constrained by its own determination to minimise casualties and treat the Maoists as 'misguided brothers and sisters' rather than military opponents.

"Such arguments are tenuous at best. They have been deployed not for their accuracy but to salvage wounded pride and, for some, to support the argument that Nepal needs a 'Sri Lanka solution': an intensely bloody endgame in which Prachanda would play the part of Prabhakaran, the late leader of the Tamil Tigers....

"...Some in India have publicised their willingness to tolerate army rule to counter Maoist entrenchment or disorder."

—ICG, "Nepal's Future: In Whose Hands?"

13 August 2009

In December 2009, Nepal's ambassador to the U.S., Sukhdev Shah, ominously suggested that the liquidation of the PKI in 1965 and the bloody right-wing military dictatorships in Chile and South Korea provide the Nepalese bourgeoisie with a model for a possible "last option":

"There is little or nothing to take a bet on how the events are going to unfold over the coming months and years, but the present cat-and-mouse maneuverings by political parties and Maoists are likely to move the conflict to center-stage for a showdown. If this comes to pass, [the] army will have a greater chance of claiming victory, provided that the conflict involves mostly the leadership on the top. Another big uncertainty is if Nepal has the good fortune of some strongmen rising to the occasion—the likes of Korea's Park Chung-Hee, Chile's Pinochet, Indonesia's Suharto—to take up the challenge of suppressing dissent and mobilizing the machinery of the State to focus on only one mission: Building a strong and prosperous nation.

"With so many options tried over so many years to eradicate poverty and catch-up on the bandwagon of growth, opportunities and prosperity, this last option may just have a chance to succeed."

—*My Republica* [Kathmandu], 20 December 2009

While Nepal's ruling class clearly recognizes that there is a fundamental antagonism between the interests of the exploiters and their victims, the Maoists continue to pursue the same strategy that proved fatal for the PKI.

III. Maoist Metaphysics: the 'New Democracy' Riddle

The dramatic developments in Nepal have produced considerable discussion among Maoists internationally—particularly within the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM), which was established in 1984 by 20 Maoist organizations from around the world, including the CPN(M). RIM represented the first serious attempt to form a Stalinist "International" since the 1943 dissolution of the Comintern. However, it is not a centralized organization, but rather a confederation of disparate national groups, united only by their common identification with "Marxism-Leninism-Maoism" and a magazine (*A World to Win*). Some RIM affiliates have uncritically defended the UCPN(M) at every step, portraying its mistakes and zig-zags as clever tactics. The Quebec-based Parti communiste

révolutionnaire, for example, simply dismisses criticism of the Nepalese Maoists:

"For our part, we never hesitated to support the revolution in Nepal. And we are continuing to do so, very clearly and with all the enthusiasm that the possibility of a communist victory should inspire. The revolutionaries in Nepal certainly don't need a crash course about the Marxist understanding of the state; they don't need sermons but revolutions."

—*Red Flag* No. 1 (English), December 2009-January 2010

A group of former supporters of Bob Avakian's Revolutionary Communist Party, USA (RCP) who run the "Kasama" website share this view:

"When making revolution, there are no guarantees and no proscribed path to power. There are not only two models (as some claim). Or to put it another way: If at this point in history the proletariat had made twenty revolutions, perhaps there would obviously be twenty 'models,' meaning we might have realized there are no fixed models."

—J.B. Connors, "Learning from the Maobadi,"
30 March 2009

For almost a decade, the RCP breathlessly retailed the exploits of their Nepalese comrades, giving special prominence to the enthusiastic dispatches sent by Li Onesto, an RCP supporter who became the first "foreign journalist" to report from the guerrilla zones. When the CPN(M) decided to join the bourgeois government in the aftermath of the April 2006 showdown, the torrent of RCP coverage turned into a trickle. In early 2009, the RCP published an exchange of letters with the CPN(M) dating back to October 2005. In explaining the decision to go public with the dispute, the RCP solemnly invoked "Marxist principles" and "internationalist" duties, but it seems that the largest factor may have been the UCPN(M)'s lack of respect for the profound wisdom of RCP Chairman Bob Avakian:

"Just as we had decided that it is now correct to take this course of action [going public], an article written by Roshan Kissoon appeared in your English language journal *Red Star* (#21) in which there is an open repudiation of the whole of Marxism, beginning with Marx himself, an open rejection of the whole experience of the proletarian revolution up to this point, and an open proclamation that the revolution in Nepal can do no more than build a modern capitalist state, leaving the question of the struggle for socialism and communism to future generations.

"As part of the anti-communist diatribe in *Red Star* #21, Kissoon launches a vicious and unprincipled attack and personal slander on the leader of our party, Chairman Bob Avakian, which is reprehensible and unacceptable."

—"January 29, 2009 Letter from the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA to the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)"

Kissoon had apparently been unimpressed with Chairman Bob's homemade "new synthesis," ungenerously remarking that "nobody outside of the RCP USA actually believes this nonsense, and the RCP USA resembles a strange cult rather than a real Communist party. Ground Control to Chairman Bob..." (*Red Star* Vol. 2, No. 1, 1-15 January 2009). The UCPN(M) was apparently unaware that, according to Bob Avakian, "today Maoism without Bob Avakian's new synthesis will turn into its opposite. Instead of making the leap forward that is required, there will be a retreat backward, ending up sooner or later—and perhaps not that much later—in outright opposition to revolutionary communism" (*Revolution* No. 162, 19 April 2009). Kissoon has a point about the RCP and its fatherly leader, just as the RCP makes a case that the UCPN(M)'s policies amount to "an open repudiation of the whole of Marxism, beginning with Marx himself." (Of course the same could be said of Mao Zedong's endorsement of the PKI's prostration before Sukarno, but the RCP is unlikely to go quite that far.)

The Avakianites' critique of the concessions made by the Nepalese Maoists is pretty sharp:



19 January: Maoist-led sit-in near Indian embassy protests 1950 Indo-Nepal Treaty. Banner reads 'Nationalist and Republican forces unite to safeguard national independence.'

"The organs of people's power built up in the countryside of Nepal through the revolutionary war have been dissolved, the old police forces have been brought back, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), although never defeated on the battlefield, has been disarmed and confined to 'cantonments' while the old reactionary army (formerly the Royal Nepal Army, now renamed the Nepal Army) which previously feared to travel outside its barracks, except in large heavily armed convoys, is now free to patrol the country—with the blessing of a CPN(M) Defense Minister."

—*Revolution* No. 160, 29 March 2009

The RCP traces the origin of the problem to Bhattarai's October 2005 "New State" article in which the idea of adding a "sub-stage" of bourgeois democracy was originally proposed. In a 4 November 2008 letter, the RCP denounces this as a deviation that opened the door for "astounding theoretical propositions...such as the 'joint dictatorship of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie.'" The RCP is aware of the disastrous experiences of two-stage revolution in Iran, Iraq, Indonesia and Chile, and the contrast with the success of 1917: "Lenin's line was clear—the task of the revolution was *not* to consolidate a bourgeois republic but rather to fight to 'smash' the bourgeois state apparatus and establish a completely different type of state. And this, of course, is exactly what he did" (letter of March 2008).

True enough, but what about the concept of New Democracy, which provided the framework for the CPN(M)'s class collaboration? After all, Bhattarai was explicitly endorsing "multi-partyism" years before the 2005 "New State" article without any objections from the RCP. Yet Lenin's policy was one of intransigent opposition to *all* wings of the ruling class. The central proposition in *State and Revolution* is that there cannot be any middle ground between the dictatorship of the proletariat and the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. In a tortuous attempt to reconcile Lenin with Mao, the RCP argues that New Democracy is merely a form of the dictatorship of the proletariat:

"New democracy requires a joint dictatorship of the revolutionary classes under the leadership of the proletariat and its vanguard, that is to say, a *specific form of the dictatorship of the proletariat* appropriate to the stage of the democratic revolution. While the system of new democracy recognizes and protects the interests of the national bourgeoisie, it targets as an enemy the comprador and bureaucrat capitalist sector which is, after all, the *dominant form of capitalism in Nepal.*"

—"November 4, 2008 Letter from the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA to the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)"

So the RCP believes that antagonistic social classes can collaborate in establishing a "joint dictatorship" because under "proletarian" leadership this cross-class regime would somehow constitute a form of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

These mind-numbing metaphysics are intended to demonstrate that the theory of New Democracy was validated by the experience of the 1949 Chinese Revolution. If the Indonesians got it wrong, the Chinese at least got it right. And there is indeed a crucial difference between the two experiences: unlike the Indonesian (and Iraqi, Iranian, etc.) Communists, Mao's CCP did carry out a social revolution that resulted in the expropriation of both foreign and domestic capital. But this was not, in fact, what Mao had envisaged in the program of New Democracy; and the ultimate victory of the CCP demonstrated not the viability, but the *impossibility*, of "joint dictatorship."

New Democracy: Chinese Popular Front

New Democracy was the Chinese version of the "popular front" strategy formally adopted at the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in 1935—a panicked attempt by the Stalinist bureaucracy to line up capitalist allies to counter the rising danger of Nazi Germany. After the CCP's "Long March" from its rural "Jiangxi Soviet" in southeastern China to the isolated caves and mountains around Yan'an, in northwestern Shaanxi province, it became increasingly apparent that Japanese imperialism was preparing to invade northeastern China. The CCP responded by attempting to establish a second "united front" with the Guomindang.

Prachanda speaks at Kathmandu rally, 11 September 2009



The Communists had already significantly moderated their agrarian program by adopting a policy of safeguarding the property of rich and middle peasants, as well as the lands of "all anti-Japanese soldiers" (a category that could include even large landlords with a son in the Red Army). The Guomindang responded with several preconditions which, in February 1937, the CCP accepted. These included the incorporation of the "Soviet" government into the Guomindang's Republic of China and the absorption of the Red Army into the National Revolutionary Army, an end to land confiscations and the introduction of a "thoroughly democratic system based on universal suffrage." Chiang Kai-shek had never been particularly concerned about "universal suffrage" in the areas the Guomindang controlled, but he was anxious to introduce it in the CCP's territory as a means of providing leverage for rich peasants and landlords. The significance of this turn was not lost on the CCP's peasant supporters:

"Fear of and hostility to the Second United Front tended to be strongest where land revolution was most successful, that is where the return of the former elite threatened the new economic and political order, and where peasants had already embraced a revolutionary political vision. The party called on those whom it had led in the land upheaval, primarily poor peasants and hired laborers, to accept concessions in the soviet area in the interests of anti-Japanese national unity and for the quid pro quo of enabling workers and peasants in other parts of China to win freedoms, including the right to vote. These were rather abstract propositions to convey to a peasant population that had not itself experienced the hardship of Japanese attack but had known landlord and warlord oppression prior to the exhilaration of land revolution."

—Mark Selden, *The Yanan Way in Revolutionary China*

This was the context for the introduction of the term New Democracy as a designation for the system introduced in the CCP base areas following elections in May 1937.

Although the Red Army was formally designated the "Eighth Route Army" and nominally placed under the control of the Guomindang's Military Council, it continued to operate independently. The base areas, as well, remained autonomous of the central government. A series of clashes with the Guomindang in 1938-39 compelled the CCP to reiterate its commitment to the "united front" by formally introducing the "three-thirds" system. It was during this period that Mao wrote a number of articles in which he elaborated his strategy of class collaboration. Among the most important of these texts are "The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party" (December 1939), "On New Democracy" (January 1940) and, somewhat later, "On Coalition Government" (April 1945). These works are known to Western Maoists primarily through the expurgated English-language versions published in the *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*. Stuart Schram, the foremost anthologist of Mao's writings in the English-speaking world, noted in 1969:

"The *Selected Works*, published in Peking [Beijing] in Chinese in 1951, and then translated into various languages, include only about half of Mao's writings during the past half century. Moreover, the texts included in the *Selected Works* have been subjected to such numerous and profound changes by the author that one cannot accept even a

single sentence as being identical with what Mao had actually written without checking it against the original version."

—*The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung*

For example, the *Selected Works* version of "The Role of the Chinese Communist Party in the National War" (October 1938) omits the following paean to the Guomindang:

"The Kuomintang and the Communist Party are the foundation of the Anti-Japanese United Front, but of these two it is the Kuomintang that occupies first place. Without the Kuomintang, it would be inconceivable to undertake and pursue the War of Resistance. In the course of its glorious history, the Kuomintang has been responsible for the overthrow of the Ch'ing, the establishment of the Republic, opposition to [the rightist] Yüan Shih-k'ai, establishment of the Three Policies of uniting with Russia, with the Communist Party, and with the workers and peasants, and the great revolution of 1926-7....

"In carrying out the anti-Japanese war, and in organizing the Anti-Japanese United Front, the Kuomintang occupies the position of leader and framework.... Under the single great condition that it support to the end the war of resistance and the United Front, one can foresee a brilliant future for the Kuomintang...."

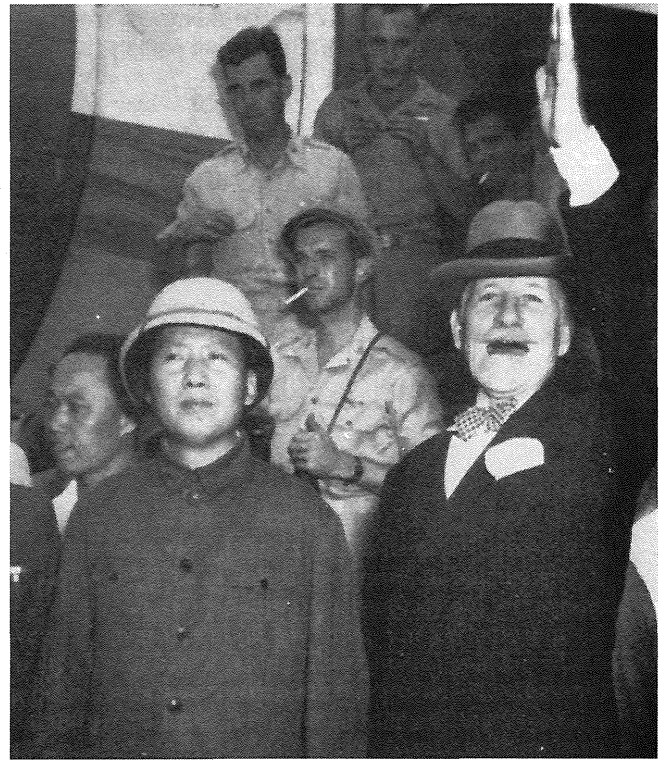
—*Ibid.*

Mao's theoretical pronouncements on New Democracy undergo similar revision. According to Schram, the original definition of New Democracy in "The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party" read:

"A new-democratic revolution is a revolution of the broad masses of the people led by the proletariat and directed against imperialism and feudalism; it is a revolution of the united front of several revolutionary classes. China must go through this revolution before she can go forward to a socialist revolution [changed to 'socialist society' in 1951]; otherwise, it is impossible.

"This kind of new-democratic revolution differs greatly from the democratic revolutions in the history of European and American countries in that it results in the dictatorship of the united front of all revolutionary classes ['under the leadership of the proletariat' added in 1951], not in the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. During the Anti-Japanese War, the anti-Japanese democratic regime that ought to be established [changed to 'the political power built up in the anti-Japanese base areas under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party' in 1951] is a regime of the Anti-Japanese National United Front, which is neither a 'one-class dictatorship' of the bourgeoisie nor a 'one-class dictatorship' of the proletariat, but a 'joint dictatorship of several parties' belonging to the Anti-Japanese National United Front [changed to 'a joint dictatorship of several revolutionary classes under the leadership of the proletariat' in 1951]. All those who stand for resistance to Japan and for democracy are qualified to share this political power, regardless of their party affiliations."

Mao not only explicitly denied that the "joint dictatorship" envisioned under the "new-democratic revolution" would be a form of the dictatorship of the proletariat; he also played down the "leadership" role of both the CCP and the proletariat. It is clear that in the early 1940s Mao



Mao with U.S. Ambassador Patrick Hurley, China 1945

anticipated that the CCP would participate in some sort of "democratic regime" alongside the Guomindang as a representative of the "revolutionary classes." The resemblance to Bhattarai's "democratic" sub-stage is unmistakable.

Schram also shows that the *Selected Works* version of "On Coalition Government" has similar post-facto inclusions of the phrases "led by the Communist Party" and "under the leadership of the proletariat." This was presumably designed to balance the document's projection of a lengthy period of capitalist development:

"Some people fail to understand why, so far from fearing capitalism, Communists should advocate its development in certain given conditions. Our answer is simple. The substitution of a certain degree of capitalist development for the oppression of foreign imperialism and domestic feudalism is not only an advance but an unavoidable process. It benefits the proletariat as well as the bourgeoisie, and the former perhaps more. It is not domestic capitalism but foreign imperialism and domestic feudalism which are superfluous in China today; indeed we have too little of capitalism."

The CCP had been negotiating with the Guomindang for a role in such a "democratic" capitalist regime since 1943. Especially with the entry of the United States into World War II after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Guomindang had focused at least as much attention on eliminating the Communists as on fighting the Japanese. A Guomindang assault on the CCP's New Fourth Army in 1941 killed some 3,000 Communist troops. Despite the Guomindang's clear intentions and American promises of up to \$600 million in equipment for Chiang's armies, the CCP participated in the January 1946 Political Consultative Conference (PCC) sponsored by U.S. General George Marshall. The Chongqing conference produced an agreement to form

a coalition government, with half the members from the Guomindang and the other half from other parties (including the CCP). There was also an agreement to integrate CCP military units into the national army, which the U.S. would help train and equip.

Mao was enthusiastic about these agreements, which a February 1946 Central Committee statement hailed as "a great victory for China's democratic revolution. From now on China has reached the new stage of peace, democracy, and reconstruction" (quoted in Odd Arne Westad, *Cold War and Revolution: Soviet-American Rivalry and the Origins of the Chinese Civil War*). The Yan'an center informed each party bureau that all "of the party's activities must be suited to this new stage," and warned against any "left-wing" deviations. Although Liu Shaoqi was later blamed for the "right-opportunism" of this period, Mao himself was reportedly the most ardent exponent of the turn, which he expected to herald a "new democratic era."

The Chinese Communists agreed to dismantle the institutions of political power in their base areas in exchange for a legal presence in the Guomindang-controlled cities, just as the Nepalese Maoists have recently done. In an interview with U.S. observers, Liu acknowledged the possibility of a Guomindang double-cross, but suggested that the likelihood would decline "after democracy has been carried out in China for a certain period." Liu said that the next step of the process was "drafting the constitution through which a parliamentary and cabinet system of government akin to that of the United States and Great Britain will be adopted" (*Ibid.*).

The only reason that the CCP did not enter a coalition government in 1946 was the intransigence of its would-be partner. Flush with military aid from the U.S., Chiang unilaterally revised the PCC agreement and launched an offensive in Manchuria, where Communists had taken over from the Japanese. The CCP countered by tightening its grip on its base areas, reorganizing the People's Liberation Army and renewing land confiscations. The ensuing civil war raged for three years until the Guomindang fled to Taiwan and Mao proclaimed China as a People's Republic in October 1949.

In June 1949, with the PLA in control of the north and sweeping through Guomindang strongholds in the south, Mao wrote "On the People's Democratic Dictatorship," which became a classic text in the Maoist canon. Unlike the essays already cited from 1939, 1940 and 1945, it did not have to be retrofitted with references to the leadership of the working class and the Communist Party. All attempts to inaugurate a New Democratic alliance with the national bourgeoisie had failed, since the Chinese capitalists had overwhelmingly supported Chiang during the civil war. As the PLA consolidated its military control, Mao reinterpreted New Democracy to mean a "democratic coalition government" uniting the working class, peasantry, urban petty bourgeoisie and national bourgeoisie, but excluding the Guomindang and its "accomplices." In Mao's conception, this was *not* the dictatorship of the proletariat, but simply the long-awaited realization of the "joint dictatorship." Not until 1958, during the disastrous "Great Leap Forward," did the term "dictatorship of the proletariat" replace "people's dictatorship" as the official description of the character of state power in China (Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After*).

New Democracy was a complete fiction right from the start. The big bourgeoisie, which had sided with Chiang during the civil war, fled to Taiwan, Hong Kong or the West. The capitalists who remained were retroactively classified as the "national bourgeoisie." Most of them were pretty small fish: shopkeepers, owners of small-scale enterprises and managers of industrial and commercial establishments. They had little clout under Chiang and even less under Mao. The bourgeois state had been smashed and was replaced by the PLA. Mao nonetheless went through the motions of establishing a New Democracy. In September 1949 a new "Political Consultative Conference" was convoked with participation from 14 small political parties. Eleven of the new government's 24 ministries were initially headed by non-Communists. In reality, these parties were entirely subordinate to the CCP and had no role in determining policy. While encouraging the elimination of the landlords in the countryside, the CCP initially allowed some industrial and commercial concerns to remain in private hands, but by 1956 even these had been nationalized.

The Chinese Revolution of 1949, in short, did not produce any approximation of the New Democracy that Mao had projected as a necessary historical stage. Instead, China was transformed into a society qualitatively similar to the Soviet Union under Stalin, with collectivized property and central planning, in which a petty-bourgeois bureaucratic caste monopolized political power. The People's Republic was therefore a *deformed workers' state* from its inception. This once again confirmed the fundamental Marxist proposition that a "joint dictatorship" of antagonistic social classes is impossible—the state power must defend either bourgeois or proletarian property forms.

Menshevik Stagism & Economic Voluntarism

The program of New Democracy, like all other variants of Stalinist two-stage theory, presumes that capitalism is potentially capable of acting as an agency of social progress, economic development and national emancipation in semi-colonial countries if only the "national bourgeoisie" can be freed from the shackles of imperialism. But this is utopian and completely unrealizable. The emergence of a world capitalist market dominated by a handful of monopoly players foreclosed any possibility of colonial and semi-colonial countries retracing the path of "classical" development taken by the advanced countries. The search for a progressive "national bourgeoisie" is not only illusory, but as the case of Indonesia demonstrates, can often prove fatal.

The "national bourgeoisie" is a category that can be defined and redefined according to political convenience. When Prachanda pledged in June 2008 to establish "special economic zones" (SEZs) in Nepal, the Communist Party of India (Maoist) was sharply critical. The Indian Maoists have taken a leading role in struggles against attempts by the Stalinist-led Left Front government in West Bengal to set up SEZs on vast tracts of land seized from poor peasant cultivators. The fact that West Bengal SEZs have benefited major Indian firms, like the Tata conglomerate, as well as foreign corporations, led the CPI (Maoist) to label Indian industrialists as "compradors" on the grounds that their activity is "part and parcel of imperialist policies of globalisation." Instead it proposes that capitalists



21 December 2009: Maoist supporters on the streets of Kathmandu during three-day general strike

pursue a “people-oriented model of development,” which would “be organic to the growth in people’s living conditions, serving their needs and [arising] from an indigenous bourgeoisie and not from giant corporations of the TNCs [transnational corporations] and compradors” (*People’s March*, July 2007).

Despite their disagreements about who constitutes the “national bourgeoisie,” the CPI (Maoist) and UCPN(M) both agree that a stage of capitalist development is necessary before there can be any talk of socialist revolution. The fact that serious subjectively revolutionary fighters persistently adapt to the bourgeoisie is intimately connected to their acceptance of the Stalinist dogma of “socialism in one country.” Stalin’s formula, which he initially introduced as a factional weapon within the leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union after Lenin’s death, implicitly rejected the Leninist understanding that capitalism in the imperialist epoch is a global system binding the social structures of different countries together.

If one begins by assuming that a precondition for socialist revolution in any given country is economic self-sufficiency, then the idea that backward countries like Nepal must undergo an interim stage of “genuine” capitalism follows logically. The UCPN(M)’s conception of New Democracy has been premised on the idea that by breaking the connection with imperialism (and its domestic agents, the “compradors”), Nepal could develop a modern capitalist economy and thus lay the material basis for the later establishment of a fully socialist society within the confines of its own borders. The UCPN(M)’s adaptations to Nepal’s ruling class flow from this mistaken conception.

One of the fundamental tenets of Marxism is that capitalism in the imperialist epoch operates as a brake on the development of the productive forces on a global scale, despite the

existence of technology that makes material abundance for all achievable. In an 1878 interview with the *Chicago Tribune*, Marx described socialism as “not merely a local, but an international problem, to be solved by the international action of workmen” (*Marx and Engels On the United States*). The RCP, which insists on defending Stalin’s anti-Marxist conception of socialism as a nationally-isolated phenomenon, implicitly recognizes the problem that economic backwardness poses in Nepal, but advises the UCPN(M) to “solve” it as Mao did in China—through utopian idealism:

“Earlier in the history of the Chinese revolution, the question was clearly posed as to whether it would be possible to build socialism in a backward country. Indeed, Mao’s whole thesis of new democracy was based very much on showing how it was possible to do so and, of course, he then went about doing so in practice. In the course of the Cultural Revolution Mao raised the slogan ‘grasp revolution, promote production’, thus correctly showing that the productive forces of society could be unleashed by further revolutionary transformation—the exact opposite of the argument that many are making in Nepal now that development must come by capitalist means.”

—letter of 4 November 2008

Mao’s economic voluntarism was simply the flip side of his previous New Democratic Menshevism, which projected an extended period of capitalist development that never happened. In order to build “socialism” in a country significantly more backward than Tsarist Russia, Mao opted to deny reality, and in 1956 declared that China was on the verge of completing the “transition to socialism.” The Cultural Revolution of the 1960s was premised on the absurd notion that a fully communist society could be creat-



GETTY

12 November 2009: UCPN(M) militants, chanting 'down with the puppet government' and waving red flags, block entrances to main government complex in Kathmandu

ed by revolutionary will alone, and that Mao Zedong Thought could surmount all material obstacles. The inevitable exhaustion that followed this utopian experiment prepared the ground for the subsequent turn to market reforms under Deng Xiaoping, whose ascension RIM mistakenly claims marked the restoration of capitalism in China.

Bhattarai: Trotskyism 'More Relevant' than Stalinism in Nepal

Despite their bitter experiences in conciliating Nepal's rulers, the leaders of the UCPN(M) have given little indication that they are seriously questioning the central tenets of New Democracy. That has not prevented the ostensibly Trotskyist International Marxist Tendency (IMT—associated with the late Ted Grant) from asserting that the Nepalese Maoist party "recognises [the] role of Leon Trotsky" (www.marxist.com, 20 October 2009). The basis for this claim was an article by Bhattarai that appeared in a UCPN(M) Nepalese-language journal in which, according to the IMT translation, he wrote:

"Today, the globalization of imperialist capitalism has increased many-fold as compared to the period of the October Revolution. The development of information technology has converted the world into a global village. However, due to the unequal and extreme development inherent in capitalist imperialism this has created inequality between different nations. In this context, there is still (some) possibility of revolution in a single country similar to the October revolution; however, in order to sustain the revolution, we definitely need a global or at least a regional wave of revolution in a couple of

countries. In this context, Marxist revolutionaries should recognize the fact that in the current context, Trotskyism has become more relevant than Stalinism to advance the cause of the proletariat'. (*The Red Spark*, July 2009, Issue 1, Page-10, our [IMT] translation from Nepali language)."

—"Communist Party of Nepal recognises role of Leon Trotsky," www.marxist.com, 20 October 2009

If the translation is accurate, it is indeed highly significant that Nepal's leading Maoist theoretician is prepared to acknowledge the importance of aspects of Trotsky's political analysis. But the IMT goes further:

"In the past, the Nepali Maoists used to blame 'revisionism' introduced by Khrushchev, Brezhnev and Deng for the failure of socialism in Russia and China, but now they have put the blame squarely on Stalinism. This is a development that we welcome and encourage."

"In the past, the UCPN(M) had trained the party cadres exclusively on the basis of Maoism and Stalinism, but the lessons of their 10-year armed struggle have stressed the correctness of the principles of the Permanent Revolution (as synthesized by Dr Bhattarai) and refuted the Maoist-Stalinist theory of revolution, i.e., 'revolution in one country' and the 'two-stage theory'.

"The time has come for Marxist internationalists to give a helping hand to the Nepali Maoists to resolve the contradictions that flow from their past mistakes and help develop a workable strategy based on proletarian internationalism."

—"Maoists in Nepal looking for new strategic direction," www.marxist.com, 20 October 2009

There has been no sign of any "synthesized" perma-

ment revolution in the discussions within the UCPN(M), although its members are clearly not satisfied with the standard Maoist explanation “as to why those proletarian powers [the Soviet Union under Stalin and China under Mao] turned into their opposites without any bloodshed, right after the demise or capture of the main leadership” (CPN[M] letter to RCP, 1 July 2006). Bhattarai, who originally espoused the idea of a bourgeois democratic sub-stage prior to New Democracy, has continued to advocate the strategy of a “transitional stage” against proponents of a more rapid push for a “people’s republic.” We have seen no evidence that he has changed his mind regarding the necessity of a period of capitalist development for Nepal and other neocolonial countries. His comments about Trotskyism are ambiguous at best. It seems likely that having recognized the impossibility of economically transforming Nepal through exhortation and Mao Zedong Thought—and the equal impossibility of enticing Nepal’s rulers into voluntarily liquidating their privileged position in some sort of New Democracy—Bhattarai has concluded that socialist revolution is off the agenda in Nepal, except as a by-product of struggles elsewhere.

Whatever the case may be, the ultra-liquidationist IMT is hardly qualified to lecture on “proletarian internationalism” given its lengthy record of opportunist promotion of various petty-bourgeois bonapartists and counterrevolutionaries like Poland’s Lech Walesa and Russia’s Boris Yeltsin (see *Marxism vs. ‘Militant’ Reformism*). The IMT’s attempt to claim that Bhattarai has transmogrified into some sort of crypto-Trotskyist did not impress one UCPN(M) supporter, who commented:

“This is not (as the [IMT] website consciously implies) some vindication of Trotsky’s *historic* role or core positions, but a provocative way of arguing against dogmatic assumptions and mechanical thinking.

“It is relatively unusual for supporters of Mao to cite Trotsky in this way (but among the Nepalis there have been references to Rosa Luxemburg, Che and Trotsky before).

“But... it is certainly not the case that if ‘XXX is mentioning YYY, he must be a closet YYY-ist.’ Similarly when Chavez mentions Trotsky (as he occasionally does) some of these same international Trotskyist forces think that this must mean Chavez too is a closet Trotskyist. The simple-mindedness of this speaks for itself.”

—Nando Sims, “On Rumors of Nepali Maoists, Trotskyism and Socialism in One Country,”
kasamaproject.org, 22 October 2009

Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, who claims to be using his position as head of the capitalist state to incrementally transform Venezuela into a socialist society, has occasionally sought to give his bourgeois-nationalist policies a more leftist coloration with references to the writings of Leon Trotsky. The IMT has interpreted the populist demagogy of the leader of the “Bolivarian Revolution” as evidence that Venezuela is headed in a socialist direction (see “Venezuela & the Left,” 1917 No. 30).

Bolshevik-Leninism: the Only Road

The need for programmatic clarity and revolutionary leadership in Nepal is becoming ever more acute. By mobilizing the masses while leaving them politically unarmed, the UCPN(M) is laying the basis for a bloodbath, just as

surely as the PKI did under Mao’s tutelage. The growing danger of a final military “solution” cannot be countered by another rotten alliance with some elements of the bosses’ parties. Time is running out:

“The refrain of ‘give war a chance’ has grown steadily louder and more insistent in the months since the Maoists first assumed leadership of the government....”

“This means the priority for spoilers is to create circumstances where a return to conflict appears a reasonable option. The possibilities here are numerous.... A push for ‘zero tolerance’ policing, already being touted in the press, could be used to crack down on the YCL [Young Communist League] and provoke a response. Stirring up trouble in the Tarai would not be difficult, given the volatile political mix and the opportunities to play on multiple divisions. The declaration of a state of emergency could be proposed as a reasonable step to contain disorder, especially as it would grant the delayed constitutional process a six-month extension. The president, given the green light by parties happy that he intervened against the Maoists, may be encouraged to take further steps.”

—ICG, “Nepal’s Future: In Whose Hands?”
13 August 2009

Echoing an increasingly common theme in Nepal’s bourgeois media, the ICG has challenged dissatisfied Maoists to put up or shut up: “If Maoist ideologues Kiran, Gaurav [leading “left” figures] and their cohorts really want to be pure revolutionaries then they should go back to the jungles, resume the ‘people’s war’ and stop pretending to be part of the process” (*Ibid.*). To avert disaster, Nepalese revolutionaries must indeed renounce participation in “the process” of bourgeois stabilization and explain to the restive masses that the only way their needs can be met is through the seizure of state power and the expropriation of the exploiters.

Yet a workers’ revolution in Nepal could not survive indefinitely, much less achieve a classless society, in isolation. What the working class requires is a consistently *internationalist* perspective premised on the recognition that any revolution must spread to the powerful Indian proletariat (including its hundreds of thousands of immigrant Nepalese) and attempt to mobilize support from workers throughout the region and in the imperialist centers of Japan, Europe and North America. Key to the situation is the massive Chinese proletariat. A revolutionary workers’ government in Nepal would make clear its unconditional defense of the surviving gains of China’s 1949 revolution and appeal to Chinese toilers to sweep aside the ruling Stalinist bureaucracy and establish their own institutions of proletarian political power.

The road to overcoming Nepal’s profound backwardness, ending sexual and ethnic oppression and achieving a socialist future runs through the struggle for a Socialist Federation of South Asia. Time and again, Nepalese workers and peasants have demonstrated extraordinary revolutionary fervor. To harness their heroic energy it is necessary to overcome what Trotsky called the “historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat” through the construction of a Bolshevik-Leninist party whose cadres possess not only courage, stamina and a willingness to sacrifice, but also a capacity to learn from and apply the lessons of revolutionary history. ■

Maoist 'New Democracy' or Permanent Revolution? 'People's War' in the Himalayas



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On 13 February 1996, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) [CPN(M)] launched a "people's war" in one of the world's most backward and impoverished countries. The *casus belli* was the refusal of the ruling coalition government, led by the Nepali Congress Party, to address a 40-point list of demands issued by the Maoists' United People's Front of Nepal, including a call for a "new constitution...drafted by the people's elected representatives" and an end to the "special rights and privileges of the King and his family" (reproduced in Arjun Karki and David Seddon [eds.], *The People's War in Nepal: Left Perspectives*).

Within 24 hours Maoist insurgents and their sympathizers had attacked a variety of targets throughout the country. The office of the state-owned Agricultural Development Bank was raided in the central district of Gorkha (the historical home of the famous "Gurkha" mercenaries) and records of debts worth several million rupees were burned. In the Maoist stronghold of the western Rolpa and Rukum districts, police outposts were stormed and weapons seized. According to the CPN(M), a Pepsi bottling facility in the capital city of Kathmandu was partially "torched," a liquor factory owned by a "comprador bourgeois" in Gorkha was "blasted" and, in a raid on the house of a "notorious feudal-usurer" in eastern Nepal, 1.3 million rupees in cash was seized and many loan docu-

ments were destroyed (see *The Worker* No. 2, June 1996, excerpted in Deepak Thapa, *A Kingdom Under Siege: Nepal's Maoist Insurgency, 1996 to 2003*).

A week after the declaration of "people's war," Interior Minister Khum Bahadur Khadka declared: "I am confident that we will be able to bring the present activities under control within four or five days" (Sudheer Sharma, "The Maoist Movement: An Evolutionary Perspective," in Michael Hutt [ed.], *Himalayan 'People's War': Nepal's Maoist Rebellion*). By the end of the second week, almost 5,000 incidents had occurred, ranging from attacks on police outposts to the confiscation of landlords' property. Khadka was soon replaced, but six years later he was reinstated. By that time, some 60 to 70 percent of rural Nepal was under Maoist control; by early 2005 it was 80 percent.

The guerrillas' surprising success was facilitated by Nepal's mountainous and largely inaccessible terrain, as well as by the regime's inexperienced and brutally indiscriminate security forces and the venality, short-sightedness and incompetence of its ruling class. Yet the most important factor was the Maoists' dedication to organizing a popular struggle against oppression. While Trotskyists advocate a strategy of mass proletarian insurrection, rather than rural "people's war," we unambiguously side with the Maoist insurgents in their military confrontation with

continued on page 38