

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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JEFF J MITCHELL—GETTY IMAGES

Ukraine, Russia & the Struggle for Eurasia **Tectonic Shifts in Global Politics**

In September 2014, a television interviewer asked Zbigniew Brzezinski, former U.S. national security adviser and longtime Cold Warrior, what threat the “Islamic State” (aka ISIS) posed to the United States. He responded:

“...we are facing a kind of dynamically spreading chaos

in parts of the world. Now in the Middle East, but that could spread to other portions of West Asia, to Central Asia, even into Russia, perhaps even into China. It could spread and is spreading somewhat into Africa, and so forth. And then we have this residual, late-Cold War—or



Vladimir Putin, François Hollande and Angela Merkel meet in Moscow, February 2015

Cold War revived—conflict with Russia, not directly by military force, but clearly overly [sic] the stability and security and freedom of Ukraine.”

—MSNBC, 14 September 2014

The chaotic wars in Ukraine and in the Levant are linked by the role U.S. covert operations played in both. While routinely ignored by the imperialist propaganda machine (the so-called free press), this connection is the operational aspect of the strategic framework Brzezinski laid out almost 20 years ago in his influential book, *The Grand Chessboard*. In the introduction, he opined: “It is imperative that no Eurasian challenger emerges capable of dominating Eurasia and thus of also challenging America. The formulation of a comprehensive and integrated Eurasian geostrategy is therefore the purpose of this book.” This region “has been the center of world power” for the past 500 years, Brzezinski explains, because some “75 per cent of the world’s people live in Eurasia, and most of the world’s physical wealth is there as well, both in its enterprises and underneath its soil.” U.S. global dominance depends on controlling Eurasia—which includes Europe, Russia, the Indian subcontinent, East Asia and the Middle East.

Control of the massive petro resources of the Middle East has long been a key objective of American foreign policy. The invasion of Iraq in 2003 was intended to establish U.S. military/political command and control of the region. The project failed when the Shia-based regime imposed by American imperialism at considerable cost in blood and treasure gradually aligned itself with the Iranian theocracy in Teheran. To counter Iran’s growing influence, the U.S. and various Arab clients funded and armed *jihadi* insurgents in an attempt to overthrow Syria’s Baathist regime, Teheran’s most important regional ally.

In September 2013, Barack Obama aborted an unpopular bombing campaign to support the insurgents after Vladimir Putin, reluctant to lose Russia’s only Arab ally, proposed that Syria unilaterally relinquish its stock of chemical weapons (see “Middle East Upheaval,” 1917

No. 36). Carl Gershman, the head of the U.S. National Endowment for Democracy, commented:

“Russian President Vladimir Putin has had some success recently using his support for the Assad regime in Syria to strengthen Moscow’s position in the Middle East. But his progress on this front is much less important than Moscow’s growing troubles in its ‘near abroad,’ as it refers to the strategically vital area to its immediate west.”

—*Washington Post*, 26 September 2013

Noting that “Ukraine is the biggest prize” in East Europe, Gershman suggested: “The United States needs to engage with the governments and with civil society....” He argued that “the opportunities are considerable” to open Ukraine up to foreign capital penetration, which

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Irish Working Class Organise to Fight Back **No Payment! No Meters!** **Abolish the Water Charges!**

Published 1 December 2014 on bolshevik.org

Recent weeks have seen dramatic scenes of working people taking action to defend themselves against the imposition of the hated water charges. Over 100,000 took to the streets of Dublin on 11 October, with at least twice that number demonstrating locally across the country three weeks later.

More significant than one-day demonstrations, however, are the many forms of local organisation that have sprung up—street meetings, estate committees, local groups delegating to area groups—bringing in people who have never been politically active before, including significant numbers of young women. The militant action of many of these groups is directed towards preventing Irish Water installing unwanted water meters. Residents with posters in their windows declaring they don't want a meter have been standing on their stopcocks, blocking entrances to their estates and risking arrest in order to prevent installation—very often successfully. Meanwhile, a majority of households deliberately missed the initial October 2014 deadline for water charges registration (since extended by the government to February 2015), and the overwhelming sentiment is for a mass non-payment campaign.

The government has been forced into offering carrots—commitment to a flat rate for three to four years, and a 100 euro giveback payment for those who register—and sticks—ways of deducting outstanding payments from private rental deposits and house sales. This has backfired, if anything leading to an increase in opposition to the charges—senior government members now expect to be met by protests at any public event they attend and the number of communities preventing meter installations increases by the day.

The water charges are only the latest in a long line of attacks, but after six years of austerity, workers' anger has boiled over. Two years ago a campaign for non-payment of the household tax nearly got off the ground but foundered for two main reasons. First, the government established a way to use the Revenue to collect household tax from wages and benefits. Second, the campaign was derailed by major participants projecting an electoral strategy as the way forward by promoting constituency-based organisation in opposition to those arguing for the kind of organisational forms that have been so successful recently.

With the water charges, things could be different. The creation of Irish Water as a company separate from the state, widely seen as a prelude to privatisation, means the government could not use the Revenue to collect the charges. Electoralism is still a very real danger, but the sheer numbers of people taking action on their own streets, without waiting for the election of "friendly" councillors and TDs, indicate a level of working-class self-organisation not easily limited to an electoral strategy.



Irish workers protest water charges

The largest campaign against the water charges is Right2Water (R2W), sponsored by Sinn Féin, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and five trade unions (the Communication Workers' Union, the CPSU, Mandate, OPATSI and Unite). R2W has organised petitions and big demonstrations but has refused to call for mass non-payment of the charges, despite that being the prominent chant on its own demonstrations. Sinn Féin leaders initially declared that they would be paying the water charges, only to backtrack when the strength of public feeling became apparent. Despite this, recent polls have shown Sinn Féin clearly ahead of the three main political parties (Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil and Labour).

Sinn Féin were odds on favourites to win the recent Dublin West by-election, but were overtaken on second preference votes by Paul Murphy, standing for the Socialist Party's Anti-Austerity Alliance (AAA). This success was undoubtedly due to the fact that the AAA focused their campaign on the water charges and called for mass non-payment, offering advice and support to those facing the charges. Since then, Murphy and other prominent Socialist

Party (SP) members have faced vilification in the bourgeois press for militancy on demonstrations, accused of “inciting” violence, amid dire warnings of a “sinister fringe” of “dissident republicans” being involved in the protests. All water charges campaigners, regardless of political views, should defend the SP and other targets of these attacks. In truth, it has been the Gardaí, the armed forces of the Irish state that have instigated violence.

In a clear attack on the right to protest, three young men in Dublin have been convicted (with a 28 day suspended sentence) for defying an injunction against impeding the installation of meters—with jail terms likely if that injunction is defied again. Others are being threatened with arrest and prosecution for public order offences. Loopholes in the law and errors made in arrest procedure should be utilised to get as many charges dropped as possible but ultimately we need to recognise that the legal system is part of the existing social system—an agency of the capitalist exploiters, not their victims, in the class war.

While supporting the mass movement, the Socialist Party tends to imply that the real fight will take place in the Dáil: “If a broad election challenge does not emerge from the movement, then Independents [without] any real record of fighting or Sinn Féin, who have not and will not fight austerity or capitalism, can be the ones to benefit” (socialistworld.net, 21 November 2014). While election campaigns undoubtedly provide a platform for important ideas to be discussed and a measure of the strength of feeling among voters, they are also largely a distraction: austerity will not be defeated by electing left-wing TDs or even a left-wing government.

Working-class people are already taking matters into their own hands. IBT supporter Alan Gibson, a leading member of “Cobh Says No to Austerity”, reports more than 20 local estate/street groups organised against meter installations in this town of 11,000 people. As the Irish Water contractors drive over the bridge from Cork each morning, “spotters” in cars follow them to their destination and alert activists and residents in which part of town it will be necessary to resist installations. Alan and two others were arrested on 30 October for “obstructing the work of Irish Water”, with others lining up to take their place on the stopcock when they were taken off to the local Garda station. The roads to whole estates have been blocked off, and public meetings and demonstrations draw larger numbers than Cobh has seen in living memory. At the time of writing, Cobh Says No has been successful in stopping any meters being installed where the residents do not want them.

Cobh Says No is talking to other local groups across the country to promote national co-ordination around resistance to water meters, non-payment of the charges and a call for both the charges and Irish Water to be abolished. We need to build on these embryos of workers’ self-organisation in order to not only resist current attacks but to build towards a future society in which the necessities of life, such as water, housing, education, childcare and reproductive rights, are available to all.

Unfortunately the campaign also called “For a safe water supply owned and operated by citizens for citizens and not for profit”. Although well intentioned and designed to oppose privatisation, this slogan as phrased falls into the trap of implying that all “citizens” are in this together, from billionaire Dennis O’Brien to those who

are struggling to feed their children, let alone pay water charges. We live in a class society, and this has seldom been so evident as in this fight, where the opposition to the charges is predominantly working class, both in social background and in self-identification.

The reality is that the water charges are yet another attempt to impose the costs of capitalist crisis on the working class. One important element that has largely been missing from this struggle is workers organised not just in their neighbourhoods but in their workplaces. While the Communication Workers’ Union, the CPSU, Mandate, OPATSI and Unite have come out in opposition to the water charges, SIPTU leader Jack O’Connor initially echoed the government’s threats when he said that mass non-payment would mean Irish Water “will drift into insolvency, and then the Government of the day ... will be faced then with the costs associated with putting the investment back on the balance sheet—and that would entail tax increases and public spending cuts”. The SIPTU leadership has since been forced to backtrack but still will not commit to joining the protests.

The contractors who install the meters are largely not unionised and show a mixed reaction to community resistance, from bottles of urine left on the street to advice on how the meters might accidentally cease to function. Workers directly employed by Irish Water are in SIPTU and IMPACT, and their support will be key to a mass non-payment campaign. When the Revenue was deployed two years ago to collect the household tax, there was no movement to mobilise Revenue workers to stop this. While a similar tactic with the water charges is more difficult, it is not impossible and the mobilisation of workers in Irish Water could be crucial for a successful campaign, building if possible to a general strike against the water charges. This will need to take place in the face of resistance from the current union leaders, who are deeply tied to the political establishment through a series of convenient arrangements such as the Croke Park and Haddington Road deals. A successful struggle could be the spark for revitalising a once militant trade-union movement.

It will also be necessary to draw out the political lessons of these protests, one of which is that it is illusory to imagine that water can be equally owned and controlled by all “citizens” while capitalism still exists, regardless of how many TDs are elected from the AAA. Another key example has been the role of Gardaí as defenders of private property and armed thugs of capitalism. Working people are seeing this with their own eyes—the beginning of recognition of the real social role of the cops. These, and other political issues arising from the struggle, need to be debated out in the street meetings, on protests and in the workplace.

The role of the guards in defence of capitalist austerity is not a case of bad policy on the part of the government, but illustrates the fundamental role of the state. In order to overcome the irrationality of a system that ricochets between bust and boom and always works for the benefit of the rich rather than those who create value in society, it will be necessary to build a working-class party with revolutionary politics. Such a party will intervene in struggles large and small, advocating democratic workers’ representation at every level, but also put forward a cohesive programme for the working class to seize power and share natural resources and the wealth of society among all those who need them. ■

Ukraine...

continued from page 2

would also advance the larger strategic project of subordinating Russia:

“Russian democracy also can benefit from this process. Ukraine’s choice to join Europe will accelerate the demise of the ideology of Russian imperialism that Putin represents....

“Russians, too, face a choice, and Putin may find himself on the losing end not just in the near abroad but within Russia itself.”

Gershman also observed that only a few weeks earlier “Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich called association with the European Union (EU) ‘an important stimulus for forming a modern European state.’ In short order, Ukraine’s parliament passed reforms required by the E.U.”¹

Ukraine’s future was the focus of a September 2013 conference held in Yalta, Crimea, in the very building where Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt held their famous 1945 confab. Attendees included Tony Blair, Bill and Hillary Clinton, former CIA head David Petraeus, former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, former World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) chiefs and leading politicians from Sweden, Poland and other countries. Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich participated, as did Petro Poroshenko, the current president. Also in attendance was Sergei Glazyev, one of Vladimir Putin’s inner circle.

While most speakers painted a rosy picture of Ukraine’s future under the EU, Glazyev was far less upbeat about the consequences of an imperialist takeover. In a 23 September 2013 posting, Mark Adomanis, who covers Russia for the leading American business journal *Forbes*, wrote: “For most of the past five years Ukraine was basically playing a double game maneuvering between Russia and the EU,” and observed that “the stark differences between the Russian and Western views [at the conference were] not over the advisability of Ukraine’s integration with the EU, but over its likely *impact*.” While the imperialist contingent gushed about how opening up to the EU would put “Ukraine on a path of rapid economic convergence with the developed West,” the Kremlin representative projected an economic collapse that would require a massive bailout to avoid a default. Adomanis, whose readers are investors with a preference for hard information over spin, observed “there is some merit in the Russian position”:

“After all, in a perfectly equal competition between, say, German and Ukrainian consumer goods producers, who do you think is going to win? I hardly think it’s crazy to suggest that, in the short-term, leading firms from Western Europe are going to be able to significantly out-compete their Ukrainian counterparts.”

Of course, as Adomanis is well aware, very few Ukrainian producers are likely to survive long enough to see even the beginning of the “short term.” He concluded:

“the Russian position is far closer to the truth than the happy talk coming from Brussels and Kiev. Ukraine is going to need some *serious* financial assistance during the process of integration, and the Russians were absolutely



Kiev, 15 December 2013: U.S. Senator John McCain speaks to Maidan protesters in Independence Square alongside Oleh Tyahnybok, leader of fascist Svoboda party

adamant that they would *not* be the ones to provide it. So, who is going to cover these costs? Before the crisis I would have said ‘the European Union,’ but in 2013 that doesn’t seem particularly likely.”

The mechanism for “covering the costs” was contained in the IMF austerity plan attached to the EU accord, which proposed to eliminate government subsidies and slash social spending to protect the assets of Ukraine’s oligarchs and their Western financial partners. As Michael Hudson, a professor of economics at the University of Missouri, observed:

“The IMF was not set up to finance domestic government budget deficits. Its loans are earmarked to pay foreign creditors, mainly to maintain a country’s exchange rate. The effect usually is to subsidize flight capital out of the country—at a high exchange rate rather than depositors and creditors getting fewer dollars or euros.”

—rt.com, 7 July 2014

When Moscow offered a \$15 billion loan on relatively generous terms, including a promise to continue to subsidize Ukraine’s energy purchases, Yanukovich, a corrupt servant of Ukraine’s billionaire oligarchs, abruptly changed course and turned down the EU. The response of the leaders of the “free world” was to engineer a coup.

While the foreign-policy establishment and news media generally blame Putin for the chaos engulfing Ukraine, “realist” analysts have taken a different view. John J. Mearsheimer, a prominent “realist” from the University of Chicago, published an article in the September 2014 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, the premier American foreign-policy journal, entitled “Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West’s



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Ukrainian Azov Brigade fights for Kiev government under the banner of the Wolfsangel, symbol of 2nd SS Panzer Division in Nazi Germany

Fault,” in which he noted:

“For Putin, the illegal overthrow of Ukraine’s democratically elected and pro-Russian president—which he rightly labeled a ‘coup’—was the final straw. He responded by taking Crimea, a peninsula he feared would host a NATO naval base, and working to destabilize Ukraine until it abandoned its efforts to join the West.”

An earlier op ed by Brown University’s Stephen Kinzer, entitled “US a full partner in Ukraine debacle,” provided some historical context:

“From the moment the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the United States has relentlessly pursued a strategy of encircling Russia, just as it has with other perceived enemies like China and Iran. It has brought 12 countries in central Europe, all of them formerly allied with Moscow, into the NATO alliance. US military power is now directly on Russia’s borders.... This crisis is in part the result of a zero-sum calculation that has shaped US policy toward Moscow since the Cold War: Any loss for Russia is an American victory, and anything positive that happens to, for, or in Russia is bad for the United States. This is an approach that intensifies confrontation, rather than soothing it.”

—*Boston Globe*, 3 March 2014

After Russia’s capitalist rulers spent a decade and a half unsuccessfully seeking a place at the table as a junior partner/ally of the U.S., they began to have second thoughts,

as Putin explained to a *Wall Street Journal* reporter in February 2007:

“we have removed all of our heavy weapons from the European part of Russia and put them behind the Urals. We have reduced our Armed Forces by 300,000. We have taken several other steps required by the [Conventional Armed Forces in Europe treaty]. But what have we seen in response? Eastern Europe is receiving new weapons, two new military bases are being set up in Romania and in Bulgaria, and there are two new missile launch areas—a radar in Czech Republic and missile systems in Poland. And we are asking ourselves the question: what is going on? Russia is disarming unilaterally. But if we disarm unilaterally then we would like to see our partners be willing to do the same thing in Europe. On the contrary, Europe is being pumped full of new weapons systems. And of course we cannot help but be concerned.”

—*The Pornography of Power: How Defense Hawks Hijacked 9/11 and Weakened America* by Robert Scheer

Maidan Protest—Orange Revolution Mk II

A few weeks after the U.S. “regime change” project commenced, Victoria Nuland, a former aide to Vice President Dick Cheney who had been handed the Ukraine file by Obama, told a “Ukraine in Washington 2013

Business Conference” that the U.S. had invested a whopping \$5 billion to develop a network of clients and agents to influence Ukraine’s future political direction. U.S. hirelings helped initiate the revolt against Yanukovich and also helped shape its outcome, but the massive support for the Maidan protests was an expression of the profound social contradictions within Ukrainian society, which overlay longstanding ethno-linguistic divisions. While 70 percent of the population considers Ukrainian to be their first language, a significant minority identify as ethnically Russian. This minority, which constitutes a majority of the industrial working class, is concentrated in the eastern oblasts (provinces).

The Maidan protests were significantly more popular in the west than in southern or eastern Ukraine. This conforms to the pattern of the 2004 “Orange Revolution” when imperialist-supported protests, triggered by an attempt by Yanukovich’s supporters to steal an election, resulted in a change of regime. In the 2010 election, when Yanukovich (at that time in opposition) defeated Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko (a prominent oppositional figurehead in the 2014 protests), most of his support came from the south and east of the country.

The Maidan protests against Yanukovich began on 21 November 2013. Senator John McCain and other high-level U.S. political figures soon arrived to proclaim “America is with you!” Young people disgusted with the corruption and incompetence of the existing regime were quickly drawn into the demonstrations. Marxists would certainly have sought to intervene in these mobilizations to direct the anger of the participants to the root of the problem—capitalism—and the obscene social inequality created by the massive handover of public property to a tiny handful of wealthy oligarchs.

Yanukovich and his cronies were corrupt and self-serving, but their EU-oriented rivals, personified by Tymoshenko, were no better. By linking opposition to Yanukovich to demands to expropriate the oligarchs, restore social services and reorient economic activity to meet the needs of working people, socialists could have sought to turn the protests in a revolutionary direction, a development which would have been enthusiastically supported by tens of millions in Russia, East Europe and beyond. In the absence of any significant challenge from the left, the protest remained a dispute within the parasitic oligarchic elite over whether to tie themselves to Russia or the EU.

The Role of Fascists in the Maidan

The Maidan protest was described as “peaceful” and “democratic” in the imperialist media, despite the frequent use of Molotov cocktails and other weapons against the riot police. The mainstream Western media also avoided any discussion of the central role played by two fascist organizations, Svoboda and Right Sector, which, when they were mentioned, were described as hardline “nationalists.” Both groups openly identify with Ukrainian Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera,² whose Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) carried out the mass murder of Communists, Poles and Jews during World War Two.³ Both Svoboda and the Right Sector advocate an ethnically pure Ukraine free of what Svoboda leader Oleh Tyahnybok described as the “Moscow-Jewish mafia,” as

well as feminists, leftists and LGBTQ people.

Those leftist groups that welcomed the Maidan demonstrations as a popular revolt with potentially revolutionary implications naturally downplayed the role of the fascists. At the height of the conflict in Kiev, the ultra-opportunist continuators of the late Ernest Mandel’s United Secretariat (USec) proclaimed:

“We support the popular discontent and aspiration to live freely and decently, in a democratic state and to get rid of an oligarchic and criminal regime, expressed in the so-called Euro Maidan movement and throughout the country—while we are convinced that the EU is unable to satisfy such aspirations, and we say so.”

— “Statement on Ukraine by the IC of the Fourth International,” 25 February 2014

However, by this point it was clear that the Maidan protests were not led by people who aspired to live in a democracy, but rather by the heirs of Bandera whose goal was to rid Ukraine of Russians, Jews and Communists. Yet the USec “Trotskyists” continued to cling to the Maidan movement:

“While the main organized political forces are, for now, from the right and the far right, we support the social and political forces which are trying to build a left opposition within that movement. In so doing, they have refused to stay outside the movement and to identify the whole movement with its far-right component.”

— *Ibid.*

The suggestion that Ukrainian workers and leftists should help build a “movement” against Yanukovich alongside their would-be executioners inverts Leon Trotsky’s policy of a united front of communists and social democrats to smash Hitler’s Nazis. The potentially suicidal strategy of maintaining “unity” with the sworn enemies of the workers’ movement is the logical outcome of an objectivist methodology that invests mass popular mobilizations with a necessarily and inevitably “revolutionary” dynamic regardless of their leadership and political program.

The USec adaptation to the Maidan reactionaries parallels its earlier support to various counterrevolutionaries in the former Soviet bloc—from the clerical reactionaries of Poland’s Solidarnosc in the early 1980s to Boris Yeltsin’s capitalist-restorationist rabble in 1991. Perhaps the lowest point in this sordid record came in 1989, when the USec solidarized with “Forest Brothers”—Nazi collaborators in the Baltics (see “How Low Can Mandel Go?,” 1917 No. 7, 1990).

Socialist Action, the USec’s American affiliate, which had no objections to supporting these counterrevolutionary forces a couple of decades ago, was less eager to be associated with the fascists of the Maidan, noting that “the leading political groups in the protest movement clearly point to a reactionary character” (“Ukraine protests: What’s at stake?,” 19 January 2014). The idea that socialists should work together with the political descendents of Stepan Bandera is a dangerous absurdity, yet entirely consistent with the USec’s historic record, which Socialist Action stands on.

The vast majority of participants in the mass protest against Yanukovich (which involved hundreds of thousands of people at its height) were clearly not fascists. But the fascists played a critical role, as Volodymyr Ishchenko,

a leftist Ukrainian sociologist, described:

"In reality, only a tiny minority of the protesters at the rallies were from the far right. But in the tent camp on Independence Square they were not such a small group, when you consider that only a few thousand people were staying there permanently. More importantly, they had the force of an organized minority: they had a clear ideology, they operated efficiently, established their own 'hundreds' within the self-defence structures. They also succeeded in mainstreaming their slogans: 'Glory to Ukraine', 'Glory to the Heroes', 'Death to the Enemies', 'Ukraine Above Everything'—an adaptation of *Deutschland über Alles*. Before Euromaidan, these were used only in the nationalist subculture; now they became commonplace."

—*New Left Review*, May-June 2014

Most protesters who chanted "Glory to the Heroes!" were not thinking of Bandera's OUN of the 1940s, but the contemporary "heroes of Maidan." Ishchenko observed that "liberals and progressives" who supported the Maidan protests "adopted this rhetorical strategy of downplaying the role of the far right, claiming it was being exaggerated by Russian propaganda." The Banderaites refused to play along. When a group of anarchists sought to participate in the defense of the Maidan encampment, the fascists drove them off. Leftists and trade-unionists who dared to speak or distribute literature at the protests were routinely denounced as "communists" and often attacked.

U.S. Democrats & Neo-Cons Agree: 'Fuck the EU!'

One of the key strategic objectives of American intervention in Russia's "near abroad" has been to arrest the tendency toward economic integration between the EU and its chief energy supplier. Washington is particularly concerned about the possible implications of any rapprochement between Berlin and Moscow. Despite talk of a "reset" in relations with the Kremlin, the Democratic Obama administration has stayed the course set by the Republicans under George W. Bush.

In a January 2014 chat with U.S. ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt, Nuland expressed her preference for having the United Nations, rather than the European Union, mediate the crisis with the infamous phrase "Fuck the EU." They also discussed which oppositionist should be handed the reins in Kiev once Yanukovich was gone. The Germans favored Vitaly Klitschko, a former heavyweight boxer, but the U.S. preferred Arseniy Yatsenyuk, aka "Yats," a technocrat who supported IMF austerity and Ukrainian membership in the EU and NATO.

On 20 February 2014, dozens of people, including a number of riot police, were killed when snipers opened fire in the Maidan. These killings, which the opposition and imperialist media immediately blamed on Yanukovich, produced an enormous outpouring of anger. In the face of this pressure, Yanukovich agreed to conditions negotiated by the foreign ministers of Poland, France and Germany (in consultation with Maidan protest leaders) to move up the election date, restore the 2004 Orange Revolution constitution and withdraw riot police from central Kiev. As soon as the police pulled back, the fascist-led fighting

squads took control of the parliament and other government buildings. Yanukovich fled, and on 27 February 2014 a new emergency government, with Yatsenyuk as interim prime minister, was sworn in. Four fascists were given ministries in the new government. Andriy Parubiy, co-founder of Svoboda, became head of National Security with Dmytro Yarosh, leader of the Right Sector, as his deputy. President Obama, who lost no time inviting "Yats" to the White House, congratulated the coupsters for following a "constitutional process."⁴

Vadym Karasyov, a former senior adviser to President Viktor Yushchenko, described the scramble at the top following the change of regime:

"Under recently ousted president Viktor Yanukovich, the oligarchs' interests were threatened by his 'Family' of owners of interlinked companies. These interests are now likely to be shared out among the remaining tycoons. 'Today they can say they are Ukrainian patriots who are making sure the country stays united,' says Karasyov."

"All of the oligarchs were financing the protests. European association suits them well as it expands the metallurgical quota for Pinchuk and Akhmetov, both of whom have already done so much to legalise their capital in the west,' says Karasyov, who is also Ukraine's best-known TV political pundit."

—*Financial Times*, 27 March 2014

One of the first acts of the new regime was to repeal a 2012 law passed by Yanukovich giving languages spoken by 10 percent of the population in a given locality official status alongside Ukrainian. This legislation made Russian an official language in eastern Ukraine, and conferred similar status on Hungarian, Romanian and Moldovan in parts of the west. The outrage generated in Crimea and eastern Ukraine by the revocation of Russian language rights did not dissipate when the repeal was hastily reversed.

While the U.S. State Department immediately certified the new regime as "legitimate," much of the population in eastern and southern Ukraine took a different view. When they began to demonstrate and occupy public spaces (employing tactics used by the Maidan protesters), the imperialist media denounced them as pawns of the Kremlin and blamed Putin for "meddling."

Crimea Opts Out of Ukraine, Rejoins Russia

Opposition to the new regime was particularly strong in Crimea, a region which was only attached to Ukraine in 1954 by Nikita Khrushchev to mark the 300th anniversary of Ukraine's incorporation into Tsarist Russia. The loss of Sevastopol, the base for Russia's Black Sea fleet as well as a crucial transport link in its energy export system, would have been a devastating blow economically and, particularly, militarily to the Kremlin. But Putin had a strong hand to play.

In a hastily organized referendum on 16 March 2014, residents of the Crimea voted overwhelmingly (95 percent) to rejoin Russia rather than remain in Ukraine under the terms of the 1992 Crimean constitution, which had given it autonomous status within Ukraine. Almost 60 percent of Crimea's population are Russian-speakers, while Ukrainian speakers account for 24 percent of the popula-



REUTERS—ANDREW KRAVCHENKO—POOL

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Victoria ‘Fuck the EU’ Nuland greets Maidan protesters

tion. Crimea’s Tatar minority (which largely boycotted the referendum) makes up another 12 percent. The imperialist media ignored the results of the referendum⁵ and acted as if the Kremlin had subjected Crimea to the “shock and awe” treatment meted out to Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya by the U.S. and its partners. Secretary of State John Kerry cynically sputtered: “You just don’t invade another country on [a] phony pretext in order to assert your interests. This is an act of aggression that is completely trumped up in terms of its pretext.” But there was no aggression, merely a democratic vote, as the rightwing libertarians of the U.S. Ron Paul Institute pointed out:

“We reject the “referendum” that took place today in the Crimean region of Ukraine. This referendum is contrary to Ukraine’s constitution,’ said the White House immediately after the March [2014] vote in that region. The February coup was also contrary to Ukraine’s constitution but that did apparently not bother Washington. “Similarly, when referenda were held in eastern Ukraine this spring to determine that region’s future course, the White House spokesman [in a 12 May 2014 press conference] condemned them as ‘illegal under Ukrainian law and a transparent attempt to create further division and disorder.’

“When the wrong people hold votes, it seems, ‘division and disorder’ are the result.”

While imperialist mouthpieces brayed about violations of “international law,” Marxists have no reason to complain, given that the result clearly reflected popular sentiment. Indeed even Ukrainian military personnel in Crimea chose Moscow over Kiev:

“According to [Ihor] Tenyukh [a Svoboda member who was then minister of defense], about 6,500 Ukrainian soldiers and their family members are leaving Crimea—about a third of the 18,000-strong Ukrainian military force based there. The other two-thirds plus dependents had opted to stay on the peninsula, which the Russian Federation annexed last week. ‘4,300 servicemen and 2,200 family members who wish to continue serving in Ukraine’s armed forces will be evacuated,’ Tenyukh said.”

—*Guardian*, 25 March 2014

In the aftermath of the Crimean vote, Putin pointed to some of the inconsistencies in NATO’s interpretation of international legality:

“Moreover, the Crimean authorities referred to the well-known Kosovo precedent—a precedent our Western colleagues created with their own hands in a very similar situation, when they agreed that the unilateral separation of Kosovo from Serbia, exactly what Crimea is doing now, was legitimate and did not require any permission from the country’s central authorities. Pursuant to Article 2, Chapter 1 of the United Nations Charter, the UN



VIKTOR DRACHEV—AFP

Coal miners rally in Donetsk against fascist-supported Kiev government, 28 May 2014

International Court agreed with this approach and made the following comment in its ruling of July 22, 2010, and I quote: ‘No general prohibition may be inferred from the practice of the Security Council with regard to declarations of independence,’ and ‘General international law contains no prohibition on declarations of independence.’ Crystal clear, as they say.

“I do not like to resort to quotes, but in this case, I cannot help it. Here is a quote from another official document: the Written Statement of the United States [of] America of April 17, 2009, submitted to the same UN International Court in connection with the hearings on Kosovo. Again, I quote: ‘Declarations of independence may, and often do, violate domestic legislation. However, this does not make them violations of international law.’ End of quote.

They wrote this, disseminated it all over the world, had everyone agree and now they are outraged. Over what?”
—bbc.com, 19 March 2014

Putin has a point regarding Kosovo and Crimea, but Marxists also extend the democratic right to self-determination to the people of Chechnya, who clearly wish to leave the Russian Federation. In this case, the Kremlin response has been to repress the separatists with savage brutality.

While the Western media has celebrated Russia’s international “isolation” over Crimea, in fact much of the world sided with Putin:

“Namely the BRICS grouping (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) has unanimously and, in many

ways, forcefully backed Russia’s position on Crimea.”

“Since many of its members are former Western colonies or quasi-colonies, the BRICS are highly suspicious of Western claims that sovereignty can be trumped by so-called universal principles of the humanitarian and anti-proliferation variety. Thus, they have been highly critical of NATO’s decision to serve as the air wing of the anti-Qaddafi opposition that overthrew the Libyan government in 2011, as well as what they perceive as attempts by the West to now overthrow Bashar al-Assad in Syria.”

—*Diplomat* [Tokyo], 31 March 2014

In the November 2014 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, editor Richard Haas alluded to the declining effectiveness of NATO’s cover stories: “the concept of ‘the responsibility to protect’ no longer enjoys broad support, and there is no shared agreement on what constitutes legitimate involvement in the affairs of other countries.” The cynicism of imperialist propaganda is widely recognized:

“Brazilians recall that ‘despite its principled rhetoric’ the West wasted no time in recognizing illegitimate putsch regimes—in Venezuela (2002), in Honduras (2009), and in Egypt (2013) and ‘actively support repressive governments when they used force against protest movements, e.g. in Bahrain.’ Brazilian observers ask, why did nobody propose excluding the U.S. from the G-8 in 2003 when it violated international law by invading Iraq? Why is Iran an ‘international pariah,’ while Israel’s nuclear weapons are quietly tolerated? Why are systematic human rights

abuses and a lack of democratic legitimacy ‘in countries supportive of the U.S. acceptable, but not in others?’”

—German-Foreign-Policy.com, 10 December 2014

Revolt in the East

While opposition to the new regime in Kiev was strongest in Crimea, similar sentiment existed throughout the southeast, particularly in the industrial Donbass region (comprised of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts), where opponents of the coup began staging their own protests. In April 2014, after dissidents proclaimed “People’s Republics” in Donetsk and Luhansk, the central authorities announcing their intention to preserve the “territorial integrity of Ukraine” launched a brutal “anti-terrorist” operation.

The regular Ukrainian Army units initially sent to combat the eastern rebels exhibited little enthusiasm, and often openly sympathized with the dissidents. Some whole units joined those they had been sent to repress. To assert control, the new regime established a National Guard, which recruited many of the far-right thugs from the Maidan protests. The fascist character of many of Kiev’s new units was noted by British conservative newspaper the *Telegraph* (11 August 2014):

“Kiev’s use of volunteer paramilitaries to stamp out the Russian-backed Donetsk and Luhansk ‘people’s republics’, proclaimed in eastern Ukraine in March [2014], should send a shiver down Europe’s spine. Recently formed battalions such as Donbas, Dnipro and Azov, with several thousand men under their command, are officially under the control of the interior ministry but their financing is murky, their training inadequate and their ideology often alarming.

“The Azov [battalion] men use the neo-Nazi Wolfsangel (Wolf’s Hook) symbol on their banner and members of the battalion are openly white supremacists, or anti-Semites.”

Given the character of these forces, it is not surprising that the campaign to subdue the east was accompanied by a wave of ugly chauvinism:

“One very disturbing development has been the spread of dehumanizing rhetoric against the movement in eastern Ukraine. People there adopted as their symbol the black-and-orange St George’s ribbon, commemorating victory over the Nazis in what the Soviets called the Great Patriotic War. The far right then started to call eastern Ukrainians ‘Colorado beetles’, after the black and orange stripes, and now the metaphor has moved firmly into the mainstream.”

—Ishchenko, op. cit.

On 2 May 2014, ultra-rightists in Odessa chased anti-Kiev protesters into a building, which was then set on fire. More than 40 people were slaughtered—some shot, some burned to death and others killed as they tried to escape. The vicious psychopaths responsible for this atrocity, which set the tone for Kiev’s subsequent scorched earth campaign, recorded this brutal crime and posted it on the internet.

In the rebel camp there was a symmetrical wave of reactionary Russian nationalism “with the arrival of Russian volunteers, very well equipped, who organized the armed seizure of Sloviansk”:

“Many of these are far-right Russian nationalists with very conservative views, whose interests go far beyond the Donbass—for them, Kiev is the mother of Russian cities, and they think they should annex a much larger part of Ukraine than just the east. These people really had an influence on the ideological complexion of the Donetsk People’s Republic that was declared in early April [2014]. For example the Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate was effectively declared the state church of the DPR, and the DPR constitution banned abortions, on the grounds that the defence of human rights starts at conception. The separatists’ appreciation for the Soviet past was based mainly on the imperial ideal of a great country that could compete with the American superpower; any socialist elements of that legacy were very weak. Some leftists voiced admiration for the Donetsk People’s Republic because it advocated nationalization. But their constitution gave no priority to state ownership, in fact they put private property first.”

—Ishchenko, op.cit.

From the outset the imperialist media treated the Donbass rebels as agents of Moscow and downplayed their popular support. Yet while Russia provided arms and “volunteers,” the eastern separatists can legitimately claim to be “self defense” fighters, as Stephen F. Cohen pointed out:

“They did not begin the combat; their land is being invaded and assaulted by a government whose political legitimacy is arguably no greater than their own, two of their large regions having voted overwhelmingly for autonomy referenda; and, unlike actual terrorists, they have not committed acts of war outside their own communities.”

—*The Nation*, 30 June 2014

The leaders of the Donetsk and Luhansk Peoples’ Republics pointedly ignored Putin’s advice and carried out a referendum on 11 May 2014, two weeks before Kiev’s presidential elections. Donbass voters overwhelmingly opposed the new regime in Kiev, but what was less evident, because of the ambiguously worded referendum question, was whether they favored autonomy within a federated Ukraine (Moscow’s preference) or outright fusion with Russia (the policy favored by most of the separatist leadership). Attitudes toward issues of nationality in the region have traditionally been somewhat ambivalent:

“Another particularity of the Donbass is that ethnic identity has historically been much weaker than regional and professional identities. They have always had a mix of nationalities there, but this wasn’t considered important. They have always seen themselves as Donbass people or as miners first. In western Ukraine it’s the other way around: national identity is much more significant. It partly explains why the people in the Donbass rejected Ukrainian nationalism, which seemed completely alien to them. The Maidan’s tolerance for the far-right groups’ veneration of Bandera was also a factor mobilizing people in the east.”

—Ishchenko, op. cit.

Rinat Akhmetov, Ukraine’s richest oligarch and a long-time Yanukovych backer who opposes the separatists, held a series of mass workplace meetings to persuade his



REUTERS—STRINGER

Fascist killers firebomb trade-union building in Odessa, May 2014

300,000 Donbass employees to go along with the new rulers in Kiev. The workers were not impressed:

“Most of them, when questioned, said they actually supported the Donetsk People’s Republic, though they also expressed worry that the current situation could impact jobs and regional stability.

“‘Some people are for joining Russia and others are for staying in Ukraine,’ said Vladimir Sadovoy, the head of the factory trade union. ‘But everyone is against the current Kiev government.’”

—*Guardian*, 20 May 2014

Boris Kargalitsky made the following observations on Moscow’s attitude toward the eastern rebellion:

“The Kremlin faced a dual problem. On the one hand, it was essential to stop the movement developing in the direction of social revolution—rebel workers were variously seizing control of enterprises, or demanding nationalisation, or advancing anti-oligarchic and anti-capitalist slogans.

“In both Lugansk and Donetsk, the leaders of the republics were constantly declaring the need to set in place ‘elements of socialism’. In practice, everything was restricted to general utterances, but in themselves these statements bore witness to a growing pressure from below, while the demands put forward in Donetsk were also finding clear support on the other side of the Ukraine-Russia border.

“On the other hand, it was necessary to restrain the radi-

cals who were anxious to pursue the war with the Kiev government to a victorious end, overthrowing the existing Ukrainian authorities. For all the frictions that now exist between Moscow and Kiev, preserving the current regime in Ukraine is the Kremlin’s most important policy priority. The oligarchic regime of Petro Poroshenko is more or less understandable and predictable. Its fall would automatically set in train a cycle of far-reaching changes in both countries, putting in question the survival of the existing order in both Ukraine and Russia.”

—*Links*, 10 November 2014

According to Kargalitsky, by late August 2014 the Kremlin gained effective control over the insurgents through a combination of carrots and sticks:

“Either cutting or increasing supplies of foodstuffs, weapons and ammunition, and directing these supplies to certain sub-units or to others, the Russian administrators gradually established the configuration of forces they needed, blackmailing the dissatisfied and encouraging the loyal.”

—*Ibid.*

The majority of the population of the Donbass clearly thinks that they would be better served by a different arrangement of bourgeois state power (whether through separation or autonomy). Many would prefer to remain part of Ukraine, but not on the terms laid down by those running the murderous “anti-terrorist” campaign against them.

Marxists approach questions of national (and sub-national/communal) conflicts from the perspective of resolving differences in the most democratic fashion—which usually means acceding to the desire of a subject population wishing to separate from a state which they find oppressive. We support the right of nations to exercise self-determination not because we favor smaller national units, but because this is the shortest path to the elimination of national antagonisms. In some cases the separation of peoples is necessary in order to bring class contradictions to the fore (thereby clearing the way for eventual voluntary assimilation).

Leninists have no reason to oppose the desire of the people of the Donbass to be free of Kiev's control. Their separation would pose no threat to the rights of any other people. In the bloody conflict in eastern Ukraine, we therefore side militarily with the indigenous Russophone resistance against the oppressor nationalist centralizers. The fact that the latter are relying on fascists to spearhead their attacks is not a decisive consideration, as many of those resisting Kiev's forces are far-right Russian nationalists with similarly abhorrent politics.

IMF Plans to Ravage Ukraine

Popular disaffection with the new regime in Kiev is based on perceived material interests as well as cultural and historic differences. It is common knowledge that the agreement signed with the IMF is going to impose a lot of pain on the population:

“Ordinary people will be the undisputed losers in Ukraine, since they'll pay for the so-called reform program rather than the oligarchs who continue to freely move billions of dollars to offshore tax havens. The biggest winners will be currency speculators; Western banks whose loans will be repaid via austerity measures; and European corporations who will gain access to the country's markets and cheap Ukrainian labor under an EU association agreement set to be signed in May [2014].”

—*The Nation*, 7 April 2014

The IMF “structural adjustment” plan does not even pretend to begin to revive Ukraine's collapsing economy. The oligarchs, who seized chunks of state property after the 1991 counterrevolution, will function as local agents for the global financiers carving up the country:

“Ukraine's leaders are mainly kleptocrats. Their aim is not to help the country, but to help consolidate their own power. George Soros has written that their best way to do this is to find Western partners. This will provide US and European backing for the kleptocrats tightening their hold on the economy. Western support will provide more IMF and European lending to support the currency so that the Ukrainian oligarchs can move their money safely to the West, to British banks and US banks.”

—Michael Hudson interview, *rt.com*, 7 July 2014

While the oligarchs and their foreign partners will do well, working people can look forward to reduced wages and pensions, higher taxes and soaring heating bills. A central feature in the IMF playbook is the privatization of public assets:

“The effect is to turn the economy into a renting ‘tollbooth economy.’ Hitherto free public roads are turned into toll

roads, and other transportation, water and sewer systems also are privatized. This raises the cost of living, and hence the cost of labor—while overall wage levels are squeezed by the financial austerity that shrinks markets and raises unemployment.”

—*Ibid.*

Ukraine has already suffered two decades of the “free market,” during which the country's “rapacious leadership have left the average Ukrainian about 20% poorer than she was when the Soviet Union collapsed” (*Economist*, 15 November 2014). The campaign against the Donbass has severely damaged an economy already in bad shape:

“The war in the provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk, the country's industrial power-house, has compounded these failings. The two normally account for 16% of Ukraine's GDP, supply 95% of its coal [which produces 40 percent of the country's electricity] and produce a disproportionate share of exports. In September [2014] industrial production in Luhansk fell by 85% year-on-year; in Donetsk it fell by 60%.”

—*Ibid.*

The situation in Ukraine, already desperate, will get worse, as some \$14 billion in debt (payable in foreign currency) comes due by 2016.

Ukraine's economic value to Russia is mainly as a transit route for oil and gas pipelines to Europe. Russia is much more important to Ukraine, as a recent study by the Brookings Institution bluntly observed: “The simple fact is that Russia today supports the Ukrainian economy to the tune of at least \$5 billion, perhaps as much as \$10 billion, each year.” Most readers of the “serious” business press in the U.S., along with many leftists, presume that Russia's relationship to Ukraine has roughly approximated that of an imperial power to a colony. But the reality is very different:

“When we talk about subsidies, we usually think of Russia's ability to offer Ukraine cheap gas—which it does when it wants to. But there are many more ways Russia supports Ukraine, only they are hidden. The main support comes in form of Russian orders to Ukrainian heavy manufacturing enterprises. This part of Ukrainian industry depends almost entirely on demand from Russia. They wouldn't be able to sell to anyone else. The southern and eastern provinces of Ukraine are dominated by Soviet-era dinosaur enterprises similar to Russia's. They were all built in Soviet times as part of a single, integrated energy-abundant economy. They could be sustained only thanks to the rents from Soviet (overwhelmingly Russian) oil and gas. Russian subsidies have continued to maintain the structure in the post-Soviet era. Because most of these subsidies are informal, they do not appear in official statistics. (In fact, not even Putin talks about them, though it might be to his advantage to do so, because acknowledging the existence of hidden Russian subsidies to value-destroying Ukrainian enterprises would expose the fact that the same thing goes on, on a much greater scale, with their Russian counterparts. They, too, are not producing real value.)”

—“Ukraine: A Prize Neither Russia Nor the West Can Afford to Win,” 22 May 2014

In an article entitled “Ukraine Is On The Brink Of Total Economic Collapse,” the Business Insider website reported:



ORIENTALREVIEW.ORG

Ukrainian army meets stiff resistance in the east

“Deep economic ties with Russia have resulted in painful adjustments in recent months. The nation’s exports are down some 19% from last year in dollar terms and expected to fall further. A great example of Ukraine’s export challenges is the Antonov aircraft company known for its Soviet era large transport planes as well as other types of aircraft.

“As the military cooperation with Russia ended, Antonov was in trouble. It had to take a \$150 million hit recently by not delivering the medium-range An-148 planes to the Russian Air Force. The Russians will find a replacement for this aircraft, but in the highly competitive global aircraft market, it’s far less likely that Antonov will find another client.”

—21 September 2014

With GDP shrinking, public debt soaring, industrial production collapsing, currency reserves exhausted and the value of the *hryvnia* (Ukraine’s currency) plunging, the article concludes: “the country’s public debt problem is simply unsustainable and default is becoming increasingly likely.” Kiev’s NATO friends, who have no intention of refloating its economy nor providing significant aid to its stricken population, are pushing for Ukraine’s full “integration” into the “free world” as an impoverished neocolony, as Diana Johnstone describes:

“Ukraine has some of the largest shale gas reserves in Europe. Like other Europeans, Ukrainians had demonstrated against the harmful environmental results of

fracking on their lands, but unlike some other countries, Ukraine has no restrictive legislation. Chevron is already getting involved.

“As of last May, R. Hunter Biden, son of the U.S. Vice President, is on the Board of Directors of Burisma Holdings, Ukraine’s largest private gas producer. The young Biden will be in charge of the Holdings’ legal unit and contribute to its ‘international expansion.’

“Ukraine has rich soil as well as shale oil reserves. The U.S. agribusiness giant Cargill is particularly active in Ukraine, investing in grain elevators, animal feed, a major egg producer and agribusiness firm, UkrLandFarming, as well as the Black Sea port at Novorossiysk. The very active U.S.-Ukraine Business Council includes executives of Monsanto, John Deere, agriculture equipment-maker CNH Industrial, DuPont Pioneer, Eli Lilly & Company. Monsanto plans to build a \$140 million ‘non-GMO corn seed plant in Ukraine,’ evidently targeting the GMO-shy European market. It was in her speech at a Chevron-sponsored meeting of the U.S.-Ukraine Business Council a year ago that Victoria Nuland mentioned the five billion dollars spent by the U.S. in the last twenty years to win over Ukraine.”

—Counterpunch, 9 December 2014

The full implementation of the IMF austerity package has been postponed until 2016, presumably to gain time to stabilize eastern Ukraine, but essential groundwork for the upcoming sell-off of public assets is being laid. The

U.S. State Department felt it best not to entrust this important task to anyone who might harbor some sentimental attachment to either Ukraine or its people, so it was decided that three key portfolios should go to foreigners.

The new finance minister is Natalie Jaresko, an American citizen and former State Department employee who has long headed a private-equity fund. Jaresko was originally sent to Ukraine in 1992 “to head the economic department of the newly opened U.S. embassy” in Kiev:

“In 1995, she left the U.S. Embassy to work for the Western NIS Enterprise Fund (WNISEF), an equity fund financed by the U.S. government, where she rose to the position of chief executive officer.

“She established her own fund, Horizon Capital, in 2004. “During the Orange Revolution, Jaresko made no secret of her sympathies for the pro-Western uprising. She went on [to] serve on then-President Viktor Yushchenko’s Foreign Investors Advisory Council.”

—Radio Free Europe, 3 December 2014

With her vulture fund background, Jaresko is seen as well qualified to oversee the sell-off of Ukraine’s farmland and other tangible assets. As backup, another U.S. favorite, Lithuanian banker Aivaras Abromavicius, has been appointed economics minister. Abromavicius was “a partner and fund manager at the East Capital asset management group,” which RFE describes as “a major player in Ukraine, where it invested almost \$100 million in 2012.” Abromavicius has “pledged ‘radical measures’ to overhaul the country’s battered economy.”

The third foreign appointee is Alexander Kvitashvili, a Georgian who trained in the U.S. prior to becoming minister of health under President Mikheil Saakashvili, an American asset who came to power in Georgia courtesy of the 2003 “Rose Revolution.” Kvitashvili, who does not speak Ukrainian and has never lived in the country, is promising to introduce “sweeping reforms to tackle rampant corruption among health authorities,” according to RFE. In other words, he will be attempting to squeeze more blood out of a health service that has already been gutted according to the World Health Organization:

“‘Universal health care exists only on paper,’ says Dr [Dorit] Nitzan [WHO representative for Ukraine], referring to the general situation in Ukraine. ‘People have to pay for a large portion of health services, procure their own medicines and there are no set prices for these essentials,’ she says. The war and the financial crisis are making the poor even poorer, so they effectively have no access to health care, medicines or vaccines.”

—WHO, 10 December 2014

Imperialist Sanctions: ‘Intended to Cripple the Russian Economy’

Petro Poroshenko, the “chocolate king” oligarch who was elected president in May 2014 on a pledge to peacefully resolve the problems in the east, promptly reneged and redoubled the effort to militarily crush the rebels. This is hardly surprising, as the IMF had made its \$17 billion dollar bailout conditional on regaining control in the east.⁶ The shelling of civilian areas and use of ultra-rightist shock troops indicate that Kiev is not concerned about winning “hearts and minds” in the Donbass. But the Kremlin is not prepared to see the rebels defeated,

and has provided enough semi-covert support to maintain the status quo.

Putin has stated that Russian troops would intervene in the “near abroad” only to prevent massacres of people “who consider themselves part of the broad Russian community.” In Ukraine his objective is to negotiate a settlement that grants the Donbass substantial regional autonomy. Russia and its imperialist European “partners” have a lot to lose from a prolonged military conflict, but the U.S., which has only a tenth of the EU’s trade with Russia, has little at stake and is eager to drive a wedge between Europe and the Kremlin.

In July 2014, EU reluctance to more than symbolic sanctions was overcome, at least temporarily, when Malaysian Air flight MH17 was shot down, killing 298 civilians. Washington immediately blamed the Donbass rebels and Russia, but it may have been a “false flag event” carried out by the Kiev regime in collusion with its imperial mentors.⁷ In any case, the downing of MH17 provided Washington with an opportunity to enlist EU support for much harsher sanctions:

“The EU announcement of sweeping measures intended to cripple the Russian economy and convince the Kremlin to abandon its support for separatists in Ukraine was quickly followed by a new round of similar US penalties.”

“Despite intense pressure from the Obama administration, the US and EU had seemed only weeks ago to be far apart on the action they were prepared to take against Russia. Those differences have narrowed sharply since the crash two weeks ago of flight MH17, which the US has blamed on pro-Russian separatists.”

—*Financial Times*, 29 July 2014

The *New York Times* (29 July 2014) candidly described the measures as “intended to curb Russia’s long-term ability to develop new oil resources, taking aim at the Kremlin’s premier source of wealth and power.”

German industrialists, who have significant investments in Russia and exported a total of \$36 billion in goods in 2013, have strongly opposed the sanctions. In an 8 August 2014 article, Gabor Steingart, publisher of *Handelsblatt*, a leading German financial newspaper, acidly contrasted the political calculations in Berlin with those in Washington:

“Threats and posturing are simply part of the election preparations [in the U.S.]. When Hillary Clinton compares Putin with Hitler, she does so only to appeal to the Republican vote, i.e. people who do not own a passport. For many of them, Hitler is the only foreigner they know, which is why Adolf Putin is a very welcome fictitious campaign effigy. In this respect, Clinton and Obama have a realistic goal: to appeal to the people, to win elections, to win another Democratic presidency.

“Angela Merkel can hardly claim these mitigating circumstances for herself. Geography forces every German Chancellor to be a bit more serious. As neighbors of Russia, as part of the European community bound in destiny, as recipient of energy and supplier of this and that, we Germans have a clearly more vital interest in stability and communication. We cannot afford to look at Russia through the eyes of the American Tea Party.”

—*Handelsblatt*, 8 August 2014

The German bourgeoisie has tended to support Russia



Donbass rebels secure Donetsk airport

in maintaining Ukraine as a buffer with NATO. In 2008 when the U.S. proposed to put Ukraine on a track for NATO membership, Merkel objected. She did so again in November 2014 when Poroshenko announced plans to hold a referendum on the issue:

“German industry is also wary of Poroshenko’s plans. His push toward NATO ‘will lead to further worsening of Russian-Ukrainian relations,’ Rainer Lindner, the head of Germany’s Ost-Ausschuss that fosters business ties with Russia, said in Hamburg. That’s ‘something we don’t want to see.’”

—Bloomberg, 26 November 2014

On 1 December 2014 Putin made a surprise announcement that the South Stream pipeline to supply Russian gas to southern Europe without going through Ukraine was cancelled because of EU attempts to retroactively impose new conditions on a previously negotiated agreement:

“However, observers see a clear correlation between the power struggles over Ukraine and the sudden increase of pressure from Brussels and Washington on Sofia [Bulgaria’s capital] to delay the pipeline construction. Sofia would have greatly profited from South Stream....”

—German-Foreign-Policy.com, 3 December 2014

South Stream was to have routed gas across the Black Sea through Bulgaria, Serbia and Hungary and on to an Austrian hub. Branch lines were planned to Slovenia and Italy as well as to Croatia. The cancellation of the project, long a U.S. objective, gored many EU oxes:

“South Stream has an Italian focus with Italy’s ENI holding 20 percent (Gazprom 50 percent). However, the French EDF and the German Wintershall are also shareholders, with 15 percent each. A German (Gerhard Schröder) is North Stream’s board chairman and another German (Henning Voscherau) South Stream’s. The implementation of this project would therefore have expanded German influence over the European gas supply.”

—*Ibid.*

Russia has already sunk \$4.5 billion into constructing the initial leg of the pipeline, which it now plans to use to redirect gas intended for South Stream to Turkey, which depends on Russia for most of its energy. The new plan would quadruple the amount presently going to Turkey and turn it into a major distribution hub for the EU, thus significantly increasing Turkey’s influence in the EU while

tightening links between Ankara and Moscow. Although Turkey is a member of NATO and a partner in the U.S. campaign to impose “regime change” on Russia’s Syrian ally, it had sharp differences with the U.S. over the 2013 military coup in Egypt. If the pipeline deal is realized, the Turks stand to collect a big dividend from their refusal to join the U.S./EU sanctions campaign against Russia.

The EU is treating the South Stream cancellation as reversible, and Germany still wants to reach an agreement with Moscow:

“For Europe, as a whole, it would be good if the project is not dead,” German Minister of the Economy, Sigmar Gabriel (SPD) was quoted saying. One must ‘simply hope’ that ‘the situation between Russia, Ukraine and the European Union’ is again stabilized and ‘talks renewed.’”

—German-Foreign-Policy.com, 3 December 2014

Geopolitics of Global Oil Pricing

Russia’s economy, which is projected to contract by five percent in 2015, has been hit much harder by the steep fall in the price of oil than by sanctions. Saudi Arabia, which has the world’s lowest production costs, is blamed for failing to restrict oil production to keep prices up as it used to do:

“The [Saudi] kingdom has two targets in its latest oil war: it is trying to squeeze U.S. shale oil—which requires higher prices to remain competitive with conventional production—out of the market. More broadly, the Saudis are also punishing two rivals, Russia and Iran, for their support of Bashar al-Assad’s regime in the Syrian civil war.”

—Reuters, 15 December 2014

Washington seems to approve of the actions of its Saudi client, despite the objections of America’s powerful oil lobby:

“with the help of its Saudi ally, Washington is trying to drive down the oil price by flooding an already weak market with crude. As the Russians and the Iranians are heavily dependent on oil exports, the assumption is that they will become easier to deal with.

“John Kerry, the US secretary of state, allegedly struck a deal with King Abdullah in September [2014] under which the Saudis would sell crude at below the prevailing market price. That would help explain why the price has been falling at a time when, given the turmoil in Iraq and Syria caused by Islamic State, it would normally have been rising.”

—Guardian, 9 November 2014

As commentator Mike Whitney observed, this policy is not without serious risk for the highly leveraged American economy:

“Plummeting oil prices are making it harder for energy companies to get the funding they need to roll over their debt or maintain current operations. Companies borrow based on the size of their reserves, but when prices tumble by nearly 50 percent—as they have in the last six months—the value of those reserves falls sharply which cuts off access to the market leaving CEO’s with the dismal prospect of either selling assets at firesale prices or facing default. If the problem could be contained within the sector, there’d be no reason for concern. But what worries Wall Street is that a surge in energy company

failures could ripple through the financial system and wallop the banks.”

—Counterpunch, 17 December 2014

Russia’s Asian Pivot: Going Down the New Silk Road

The Chinese bureaucracy shares the Kremlin’s objective of a “multi-polar” global political order in which the U.S. is only one of several great powers. During a visit to Kazakhstan in September 2013, President Xi Jinping announced plans to build a “New Silk Road Economic Belt” from China, across Central Asia into Europe. A month later he sketched a future “Maritime Silk Road” involving the creation of a string of major ports and special economic zones to China, Southeast Asia and the Bay of Bengal. The objective is to massively increase the economic integration of Eurasia through the creation of new networks of roads, high-speed railways, energy pipelines and marine installations.

China has already signed some \$50 billion in energy and infrastructure contracts with Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Sri Lanka has been allocated \$1.4 billion to develop its maritime shipping capacity. Preliminary work has also begun in Eastern Europe:

“A Chinese agreement to finance a high-speed railway from Belgrade to Bucharest was one of around \$10bn worth of investments, mainly in the energy and infrastructure sectors, signed during a China-Central and Eastern Europe summit this week.”

—bne IntelliNews, 18 December 2014

Taiwan’s *Want China Times* (16 September 2014) reports total projected investment to be a staggering \$21 trillion:

“If brought to fruition, the Silk Roads would boost China’s trade with effectively the whole Eurasian continent. Meanwhile, with Beijing footing the bill for much of the requisite infrastructure development, the vast trade network would increase the number of regional governments that view China as a patron and benefactor rather than a threat....

“China’s economic powers are riding high, and still growing. Beijing is naturally trying to take advantage of its advantageous financial situation to boost foreign policy influence. It’s no coincidence that some are comparing China’s Silk Road Economic Belt and Maritime Silk Road to the Marshall Plan enacted by the U.S. after World War II. In both situations, a rising global power wants to use its economic strengths to secure foreign policy goals (including the basic goal of sustaining its own domestic economy).”

—The Diplomat, 6 November 2014

Participants at the October 2014 meeting of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) endorsed Beijing’s Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP). A competing American proposal for a 12-nation Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) was received less enthusiastically. Twenty-one countries agreed to participate in a proposed Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) for which China is to provide half the initial capitalization of \$50 billion (India will contribute the next largest share). Like the recently launched BRICS Development Bank, the AIIB will be headquartered in China. Both are designed to finance

infrastructure projects independently of the IMF, World Bank and the other U.S.-dominated international financial agencies:

“China will use the new bank to expand its influence at the expense of America and Japan, Asia’s established powers. China’s decision to fund a new multilateral bank rather than give more to existing ones reflects its exasperation with the glacial pace of global economic governance reform. The same motivation lies behind the New Development Bank established by the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa).”

—*Economist*, 11 November 2014

Washington’s attempt to hobble Russia with economic sanctions was countered by the Kremlin with two massive deals, totaling more than \$700 billion, to supply gas to China over the next several decades:

“China and Russia deepened their energy ties with a second blockbuster deal that lessens Russian reliance on Europe and would secure almost a fifth of the gas supplies China needs by the end of the decade.

“Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping signed the preliminary gas-supply agreement in Beijing as U.S. President Barack Obama arrived in the Chinese capital for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit. The deal is slightly smaller than the \$400 billion pact reached earlier this year, shortly after Russia annexed Crimea.

“Once deliveries begin, China would supplant Germany as Russia’s biggest gas market, even as relations have soured with the U.S. and Europe over the Ukraine crisis.”

—Bloomberg, 10 November 2014

While Russia ended up making concessions on price, the agreement represents the consolidation of a major strategic alliance between the Kremlin and the Chinese bureaucracy. This was demonstrated in December 2014 when Beijing offered to extend economic credits to the Kremlin to counter American attempts to drive down the ruble and panic Russian investors:

“‘Russia is an irreplaceable strategic partner on the international stage,’ according to an editorial today in the *Global Times*, a Beijing-based daily affiliated with the Communist Party. ‘China must take a proactive attitude in helping Russia walk out of the current crisis.’”

—Bloomberg, 22 December 2014

As Pepe Escobar observed, if the Silk Road project proceeds (and that is a big “if”), its gravitational pull could realign the priorities of German imperialism, the main shareholder in the EU condominium:

“Berlin’s geostrategic interests seem to be slowly diverging from Washington’s. German industrialists, in particular, appear eager to pursue unlimited commercial deals with Russia and China. These might set their country on a path to global power unlimited by the EU’s borders and, in the long term, signal the end of the era in which Germany, however politely dealt with, was essentially an American satellite.

“It will be a long and winding road. The Bundestag, Germany’s parliament, is still addicted to a strong Atlanticist agenda and a preemptive obedience to Washington.”

—TomDispatch.com, 5 October 2014

On 3 October 2014, U.S. Vice President Joe Biden can-

didly admitted that America’s European allies had not been inclined to “impose costs” on Russia out of fear that the EU would “take economic hits”:

“Throughout we’ve given Putin a simple choice: Respect Ukraine’s sovereignty or face increasing consequences. That has allowed us to rally the world’s major developed countries to impose real cost on Russia.

“It is true they did not want to do that. But again, it was America’s leadership and the President of the United States insisting, oft times almost having to embarrass Europe to stand up and take economic hits to impose costs. And the results have been massive capital flight from Russia, a virtual freeze on foreign direct investment, a ruble at an all-time low against the dollar, and the Russian economy teetering on the brink of recession.”

—Whitehouse press office

The majority of the German ruling class has opted to continue accepting U.S. “leadership” for the time being, but the sun is setting on the “American Century”:

“According to the latest edition of a German military journal, the current intra-Western tensions have primarily arisen from the fact that in the course of its development the EU has ‘inevitably become a competitor to NATO.’ It cannot be excluded that this could cause a serious ‘rupture in transatlantic relations’ and that NATO could even disintegrate into conflicts. However, as long as the EU does not have strong military power, it should ‘grit its teeth and continue to flexibly attempt to benefit from US capabilities.’ This must also be seen in the context of the fact that western hegemony no longer seems assured. Moscow has announced its intentions to carry out joint maneuvers with China in the Mediterranean, thus breaching another western hegemonic privilege.”

—German-Foreign-Policy.com, 1 December 2014

On ‘Russian Imperialism’

Many leftists, viewing events in Ukraine, started from the false premise that the axis of the conflict was between upstart “Russian imperialism” and the well-established EU/U.S imperial powers. The chronic impressionists of the League for the Fifth International (L5I) are typical of those who characterize Russia as “imperialist” on the basis of its military strength:

“To that extent, the strategy of the Russian government is also clear; what Russian imperialism lacks in economic strength, which threatens it with a crash, will be made up for by military strength.”

—fifthinternational.org, 9 April 2014

The L5I has yet to explain why it supports the reintegration of Crimea into “imperialist” Russia, or why it sides with the Russian-backed Donbass rebels against Kiev.

Russia’s rulers may have imperial ambitions, but Russia hardly qualifies as one of “a small number of financially ‘powerful’ states [that] stand out among all the rest,” Lenin’s thumbnail description in *Imperialism—The Highest Stage of Capitalism*. Russia’s financial sector is comparable to Brazil’s, not Britain, the U.S. or Germany.

A *New York Times* article entitled “Moscow Tries to Reinvent Itself as Financial Hub” (3 April 2013) described the difficulties Moscow has in competing with Warsaw as



GETTY IMAGES

Supporters of 'People's Republic of Donetsk' and 'People's Republic of Luhansk' rally in Moscow

a regional financial center:

"The midsize companies in neighboring Ukraine or other former Soviet republics are choosing to go public in Warsaw. They are hardly bothering to look at the carefully laid out welcome mat in Russia."

The article continued:

"Mr. Medvedev had named senior Western bank executives to an advisory council for transforming Moscow's financial sector. They included Jamie Dimon, the chief executive of JPMorgan Chase; Vikram S. Pandit, the former chief executive of Citigroup; and Lloyd C. Blankfein, the chief executive of Goldman Sachs. "But the Global Financial Center Index, published in March by Z/Yen, a consulting agency, placed Moscow 65th out of 79 cities studied. London was first, followed by New York and Hong Kong. The ranking placed Moscow between Bahrain and Mumbai."

Russia today plays little or no role in the global institutions established after World War II through which imperialist policy (e.g., the "Washington Consensus") is implemented in the neocolonies. Russian banks and corporations have derived no benefit from the give-away privatizations imposed by IMF "structural adjustment"

policies. Nor does the Russian bourgeoisie operate a separate, or parallel, state system, through which it dominates and oppresses weaker countries. There are no mechanisms, beyond the sale of oil and gas at world market prices, by which Russia extracts wealth from less developed countries on any significant scale. Indeed in recent years Russia, despite a near-monopoly position as an energy supplier in neighboring former Soviet republics, has provided subsidies rather than pursuing superprofits.⁸

Nouriel Roubini, one of the handful of analysts to predict the 2008 financial crash, described Russia's economic situation in its aftermath:

"The weakness of the Russian economy and its highly leveraged banks and corporations, in particular, which was masked in recent years by the windfall brought by spiking oil and gas prices, burst into full view as the global economy tumbled. Saddled with a rust-belt infrastructure, Russia further disqualifies itself with dysfunctional and revanchist politics and a demographic trend in near-terminal decline."

—"Another BRIC in the Wall?," 15 October 2009

Russia's formidable military, inherited from the Soviet Union, allows it to play a major role in global politics.

It also possesses enormously valuable natural resources. Yet, with few exceptions, Russian products are not competitive on the world market and the corrupt, parvenu Russian bourgeoisie shows no sign of being able to narrow the gap separating it from its more advanced capitalist rivals. In a report on "The state of Russia," the *Economist* wrote:

"By 2005 the bribes market, according to INDEM, a think-tank, had risen to \$300 billion, or 20% of GDP. As Mr Khodorkovsky said in a recent interview, most of this was not the bribes paid to traffic police or doctors, but contracts awarded by bureaucrats to their affiliated companies.

"Unlike private businessmen, who started to invest in their core businesses (Yukos among them) in the late 1990s, bureaucrat-entrepreneurs have little incentive to do so. Their wealth is dependent on their administrative power, rather than newfangled property rights. The profits are often stashed away in foreign bank accounts or quickly spent: on luxury property in European capitals, or on their children's education in British private schools. All this is inevitably accompanied by anti-Western rhetoric and claims of Russia's resurgence.

"Unsurprisingly, surveys now show that the young would rather have a job in the government or a state firm than in a private business. Over the past ten years the number of bureaucrats has gone up by 66%, from 527,000 to 878,000, and the cost of maintaining such a state machine has risen from 15% to 20% of GDP. At the same time, Russia's standing in indices of corruption, property rights and business freedom has deteriorated."

—*Economist*, 9 December 2010

The Russian economy is integrated into the world market and overwhelmingly dependent on resource extraction. Despite repeated exhortations from the Kremlin to diversify production, Russia's economy remains centered on the export of fossil fuels. And even in this sector the relative technological backwardness of Russian corporations, much of whose equipment dates back to Soviet times, often forces them to rely on joint ventures with U.S., French, Italian, British or Dutch firms in developing new fields. When Lukoil (a major Russian producer) won a contract to develop a portion of Iraq's oil fields, it had to subcontract most of the work to U.S. companies with more advanced technology, which stood to reap most of the benefits.⁹

Ukraine & the Crisis of Revolutionary Leadership

The situation in Ukraine today remains extremely unstable. The ruling clique is well aware that it lacks significant popular support and that its austerity program is likely to spark serious resistance. The historic party of the working class—the Communist Party of Ukraine (CPU)—is discredited by a history of craven class collaboration and passivity in the face of capitalist attacks. The rest of the Ukrainian left is relatively small and without significant social weight. Yet the enormous catastrophe being orchestrated by the new regime would seem to guarantee a mass constituency for any formation that appears capable of initiating resistance to the IMF and its Kiev stooges. As the "reforms" begin to bite, even the traditionally con-

servative sections of the population are likely to be driven to resist, thus opening the possibility of joint class struggle across the linguistic and cultural divide.

The most important formation to the left of the CPU is the Union Borotba (Struggle), founded in 2012 by several small groups, mostly left splits from the CPU. Before being driven underground by the coupsters, Borotba distinguished itself by attempting to revive pro-socialist sentiment within the working class, calling for renationalizing the ill-gotten gains of the oligarchs and organizing resistance to the rise of the far right.

In late 2014, *Workers World* published a lengthy interview (serialized over five issues) with Victor Shapinov, a Borotba leader who described the conditions Ukrainian leftists have faced since the coup: "If you are a communist or leftist, you cannot speak freely—not in the media, not in the street, not anywhere. It is an underground situation." Shapinov compared the situation to that in Spain under Franco or various Latin American countries under rightwing dictatorships in the 1970s and 80s. He pointed to parallels between Ukraine and Greece:

"Some European countries are already close to this situation. For example, in Greece there is the Golden Dawn, which is something like the Right Sector. I'm sure they have armed militarist squads. When the political struggle develops, it will have a military aspect. We should learn from this situation and see what political blocs are forming."

Shapinov described the abject prostration of the CPU as a key factor in the emergence of Borotba:

"It's important to explain about the Communist Party of Ukraine. At that time, its leadership was always seeking alliances in parliament with whichever capitalist party was strongest. Not many people in the West know this, but before allying with the Party of Regions of (deposed President Victor) Yanukovich, they were partners with the party of Yulia Timoshenko (far-right politician associated with the 2004 'Orange Revolution' and today part of the Kiev junta).

"It was an unprincipled position by the KPU leadership, and for us, it meant we couldn't just be the left wing of the Communist Party. Besides, comrades who wanted to be the left wing of the party were always swept out. Every year groups of good communists were expelled."

Shapinov aptly characterized the rightward trajectory of the European left:

"I've been in Europe many times. I've observed that in a situation where the world system is dissolving and crashing, much of the European left is not trying to go forward, but only to save some social guarantees they had in 1970s or 1980s.

"People start to see some of the left as a conservative force. It's a weak position because their base will only get smaller and smaller."

He linked the rise of fascist groups to the reformist left's passive accommodation to the status quo:

"And we see some far-right and right-populist organizations, which see that the system is dissolving, present themselves to the people as agents of destroying the system, while the left is portrayed as pro-system. So in France, for example, we see that parts of the working class, which voted for communists for years, are now voting for the National Front."

Borotba at least recognizes the necessity to fight, rather than curry favor with the exploiters. But, while a willingness to struggle is essential, it is not sufficient. Any organization capable of providing revolutionary leadership in a struggle to defeat the oligarchs and their imperial patrons can only be forged through assimilating the essential lessons of the history of the international workers' movement—particularly those of the Bolshevik Revolution.

Borotba's political break with the CPU is both limited and empirical. It naively imagines it can sidestep essential historical and programmatic issues by embracing any forces claiming to be revolutionary and which agree on immediate practical tasks:

"We see that the splits that were part of the communist movement in the past are not so important now, or we see them in a very different way. We saw that there were some groups that are like reconstructors (this term refers to people who re-enact historic military battles, like Civil War re-enactors in the U.S.). They want to refight the old battles.

"We don't want to be like this. We want to make real politics for the working class and oppressed peoples, and not play at being Stalin, or Trotsky, or Mao Zedong, or whatever."

The politics of Lenin and Trotsky are counterposed to those of Kautsky, Stalin and Mao. To embrace the heritage of the October Revolution—the first and only time a politically-conscious working class took power and successfully held it—is to reject the politics of parliamentary reformism and popular-frontist unity with a hypothetical "progressive" wing of the capitalists, as well as the strategy of peasant-based guerrilla warfare.

After Lenin's death in 1924, only the Trotskyists upheld the internationalist traditions of the early Communist International against the narrow Russian nationalism of "socialism in one country" promoted by the parasitic bureaucratic caste headed by Stalin, who ultimately liquidated most members of Lenin's Central Committee in the grotesque purge trials of the 1930s before having Trotsky assassinated in Mexico.

Lenin's party was defined above all by its willingness to draw "lines of demarcation" with opportunists. By contrast, Shapinov and his comrades imagine that avoiding clear political differentiation from other leftists will make it easier to appeal directly to the masses:

"From the organizational side, when we started to create Borotba, we decided to try and look upon ourselves and what we were doing through the eyes of the people, not through the eyes of competing leftist groups.

"How do the common people see us? That is a practical criterion for our work, not the opinions of some publi-

cations that spend all their time critiquing other leftists. If you don't waste a lot of time on that, you have more time to observe how the people see you and how to reach them."

The attempt to ignore vital historical questions faced by previous generations of socialist fighters is doomed to fail. Lenin's party was only forged by combining practical mass work and continuous political struggle against the purveyors of false consciousness within the working class—particularly those claiming to provide revolutionary leadership. Lenin's most important political contribution was to reject the social-democratic model of a broad, all-inclusive party in favor of a disciplined vanguard comprised solely of the most advanced workers. The democratic-centralist discipline that cohered the Bolsheviks as an effective combat party was based on a high level of political understanding and clear programmatic agreement. This relationship cannot be inverted—i.e., discipline cannot precede political consciousness—if a genuinely Marxist organization is to be built.

Trotsky's prediction that if the Soviet workers did not rise in a proletarian political revolution and overthrow the Kremlin oligarchy the Soviet Union would ultimately fall to capitalist restoration was, unfortunately, confirmed. The combination of Stalinist police-state oppression and bureaucratic incompetence led many working people in the former Soviet bloc to mistakenly conclude that the socialist project itself was bankrupt. But there is not, and cannot be, any solution to the fundamental problems of humanity—racism, sexism, hunger, ecological destruction and war—except socialism. Collectivizing the means of transport, production and communication and introducing a system of rational planning in which economic activity is geared to meeting human need, not maximizing private profit is the only alternative to capitalist barbarism.

There is nothing inevitable about the victory of the working class. To carry out its historic task of getting rid of capitalist exploitation and its associated pathologies, the advanced layers of the working class must be won to a consistently revolutionary program. The indispensable political arsenal from which a new generation of class-conscious fighters can obtain the weapons for revolutionary combat is that of the October Revolution of 1917. The International Bolshevik Tendency, committed to the struggle to politically rearm the workers' movement, seeks to engage with all who share the goal of forging an internationalist political party capable of leading the proletarian revolutions of the future. ■

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¹ A Washington, D.C. think-tank recounted how Yanukovich, who was later to renege on the deal, initially steamrollered all opposition to the EU:

"Yanukovich told national TV on August 29 [2013] that Ukraine would meet all the EU conditions to sign the association agreement. The EU, for its part, visibly warmed to Ukraine after the customs spat [when Moscow had tried to pressure Kiev to distance itself from the EU]. After a

meeting between Ukraine's opposition leaders and EU Enlargement Commissioner Stefan Fule, the business daily *Kommersant-Ukraine* reported on August 30 [2013] that the EU no longer insisted on the adoption of new election laws. The EU wants Ukraine to release [Yanukovich rival Yulia] Tymoshenko from prison, but this is not a must-do. Brussels also warned Moscow against threatening Ukraine (UNIAN, August 23 [2013]).

“On September 4 [2013], Yanukovich gathered lawmakers from his Party of Regions (PRU), who control a comfortable majority in Ukraine’s unicameral parliament, and instructed them to approve all the bills that the EU deemed necessary for the signing of the agreement in November. He reportedly made it clear that dissenters would be expelled (Ukrainska Pravda, September 5, 6 [2013]; Zerkalo Nedeli, September 7 [2013]). On September 5 [2013], parliament approved all five bills needed for EU integration that were on the agenda.”

—The Jamestown Foundation, 11 September 2013,

² A banner honoring Stepan Bandera adorned the stage from which John McCain proclaimed his support to the Maidan protests.

³ Western apologists for Svoboda and Right Sector tend to depict Bandera and his organization as anti-Soviet resistance fighters rather than Nazi collaborators. In fact they were both:

“At a congress of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) which met in Krakow in April 1941, a resolution was adopted calling the Jews in the USSR ‘the most faithful support of the ruling Bolshevik regime,’ the ‘principal foe’ of the Ukrainians. Some factions had dreams of an independent Ukrainian state and were disposed of by the Nazis. But the Ukrainian auxiliary police and the Bandera units (paramilitary anti-Soviet units led by Stepan Bandera), as well as thousands of Ukrainian pro-Nazi collaborators, contributed heavily to the torture and killing of Jews. ‘Pogroms,’ wrote Philip Friedman, foremost Holocaust scholar, ‘took place in the very first weeks of the occupation. They were mainly wild, spontaneous outbursts of the urban or rural population.’ In several places, on their own, Ukrainians set up concentration camps for Jews. The principal collaboration with the Germans was through the Ukrainian semi-military and police formations which convoyed transports to death camps, seized Jews, and massacred them. The first SS Ukrainian division was organized in the spring of 1943 and by July numbered 28,000 volunteers. In 1944 it is estimated that 220,000 Ukrainians were fighting on the German side.”

—Nora Levin, *The Jews In The Early Soviet Union Since 1917*, 1988

⁴ The 19 December 2014 issue of the Russian publication *Sputnik* reported that George Friedman, head of the CIA-connected intelligence provider Stratfor, told an interviewer from *Kommersant* that the U.S. was “behind the February coup in Kiev, which came in response to Russia’s stance on Syria.” Friedman described the overturn in Ukraine as “the most overt coup in history,” launched “following Russia’s successes in the Middle East, a key region for the US.”

⁵ An April 2014 Gallup Poll reported that 82.8 percent of Crimeans agreed that the referendum results “likely reflect the views of most people there” as opposed to 6.7 percent who disagreed. As might be expected, this view had more support among ethnic Russians (93.6 percent) than among ethnic Ukrainians, but they too agreed (by a margin of 68.4 to 14.5 percent). Similar levels of agreement (59.3 percent among ethnic Ukrainians and 83.5 percent among ethnic Russians) were reported in response to the statement that “Crimea’s becoming part of Russia will make life better for me and my family.”

⁶ See: “IMF Warns Ukraine: Fight For The East Or No Money,” *Zerohedge*, 1 May 2014.

⁷ See, for example, <http://21stcenturywire.com/2014/07/25/mh17-verdict-real-evidence-points-to-us-kiev-cover-up-of-failed-false-flag-attack/>.

⁸ A 2012 report by the conservative American Heritage Foundation noted:

“The average price of crude oil exported by Russia has consistently been considerably lower for the former Soviet states than for the rest of the world. In 2010 CIS states

bought the Russian crude at a 35 percent discount, paying an average of \$56.20 per barrel, while the rest of the world paid \$76.24. This figure does include the prices charged to Belarus and Kazakhstan, members of the Customs Union. In the past, the discount was even deeper. The largest discount—44 percent—was extended in 2008. In the year when oil prices spiked to over \$100 a barrel for a time, CIS countries paid \$66.11 per barrel of crude from Russia while the rest of the world paid \$95.27 on average. This is the cost of doing business, or more accurately, of keeping the sphere of influence—excuse the pun—oiled.

“The average price per barrel of crude was \$20.04 less for countries of the former Soviet Union than the rest of the world. This amounts to \$1,090.9 million worth of oil sold at a discounted rate. To put it another way, if Russia charged CIS countries the same price as the rest of the world in 2010 for crude, it would have made an additional \$3.891 billion in revenue from exports. Not a paltry sum by any means.”

—Ariel Cohen, *Politicized Oil Trade: Russia and its Neighbors*

⁹ The Fourth World Congress of the Communist International in 1922 unanimously adopted the “Theses on the Eastern Question” which described “the essence of imperialism” as the “exploitation of the different levels of development of the productive forces in the different sectors of the world economy, in order to extract monopoly super-profits” (John Riddell, *Towards the United Front, Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, 1922*). This distinction was evident in the reconstruction of Iraq’s oil sector:

“The [oil contract] auction’s outcome helped defuse criticism in the Arab world that the United States had invaded Iraq for its oil. ‘No one, even the United States, can steal the oil,’ the Iraqi government spokesman, Ali al-Dabbagh, said at the time.

“But American companies can, apparently, drill for the oil. ‘In fact, American drilling companies stand to make tens of billions of dollars from the new petroleum activity in Iraq long before any of the oil producers start seeing any returns on their investments.

“Lukoil and many of the other international oil companies that won fields in the auction are now subcontracting mostly with the four largely American oil services companies that are global leaders in their field: Halliburton, Baker Hughes, Weatherford International and Schlumberger. Those four have won the largest portion of the subcontracts to drill for oil, build wells and refurbish old equipment.”

“Michael Klare, professor of peace and world security studies at Hampshire College and an authority on oil and conflict, said that American oil services companies were generally dominant both in the Middle East and globally because of their advanced drilling technology. So it is no surprise, he said, they came out on top in Iraq, too—whatever the initial diplomatic appearances.”

“By the time Lukoil was eventually compelled to bid again for the field at the 2009 auction, sentiment in both the United States and Iraqi governments seemed to have shifted to favoring non-American companies in awarding the main contracts. But one of Lukoil’s first steps after securing the West Qurna 2 deal was to subcontract the oil well refurbishment work to Baker Hughes. “While Baker and its American peers are poised to make significant profits from such work in Iraq, wafer-thin margins seem to await Lukoil....”

—*New York Times*, 16 June 2011

Confronting a World in Turmoil

Seventh International Conference of the IBT

The International Bolshevik Tendency held its Seventh International Conference in 2014 in the United States. Delegates and non-delegate members from the U.S., Canada, Britain, Germany, Poland, New Zealand and East Asia gathered for a week to discuss and vote on outstanding questions of program, participate in educational sessions and elect a new International Executive Committee, which completed the transfer of leadership to a younger generation.

International conferences are the highest decision-making bodies in a Leninist organization and are tasked with assessing the group's work over the preceding period and analyzing changing political dynamics on both a global and local scale. Today, the situation as a whole is one of turmoil—the world economy has failed to pull itself out of the slump that followed the crisis of 2007-08, and there are signs of an impending second implosion of the financial system, the consequences of which seem likely to be catastrophic. The toll on the working class has been heavy, as governments and employers continue to drive down living standards. The anarchic character of capitalist production is devastating the environment, with the effects of global climate change already being felt and incalculable destruction to come. The imperialists have responded to the interlocking crises of capitalism-in-decline with renewed militarism and attacks on democratic rights, most egregiously represented by the mass surveillance of the “Five Eyes” of the Anglo-American intelligence apparatus.

The IBT conference convened in the context of the unfolding crisis in Ukraine, shortly after Crimea had opted to join Russia. The re-configuration of Ukrainian territory, which came against the backdrop of U.S. and German imperialist assistance to the Maidan movement and coup, provided the assembled comrades with an opportunity to discuss the significance and meaning of these events in a global context. Our conclusions are outlined in detail in the article “Ukraine, Russia & the Struggle for Eurasia” (see page 1).

The Tasks & Perspectives document, adopted at the end of the conference, noted our capacity to produce “high quality propaganda applying the revolutionary program to world events and to intervene on a limited scale in areas where we are present.” The IBT remains a small propaganda group primarily concentrated in imperialist countries. In the recent period, we have continued to publish regularly in English, German and French, and our website features articles in 12 different languages. The conference discussed the changing nature of revolutionary propaganda, and in particular the role of our journals *1917* and *Bolshevik* in an age in which most readers access our material online, often via social media. We agreed that henceforth articles would usually be published on our website as soon as available and later printed in *1917* and *Bolshevik*.

We have published analyses of events in the Middle East (Egypt, Libya, Syria) and noted the weaknesses and inconsistencies of many of our leftist opponents on these questions. We have written on the European Union and on the specific effects of the financial crisis on Greece and Ireland. We have also commented on a wide variety of other issues, including abortion rights, gay marriage and the necessity to defend Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning, and noted the intersection in both cases with questions of special oppression.

Our extremely limited resources and the quiescence of the labor movement in most localities in which we are active have largely prevented us from directly impacting the class struggle or mass movements of the oppressed, but where possible we have attempted to intervene, as the Tasks & Perspectives document observed:

“Instances of class combativeness often occur in areas of the world where we have little capacity to intervene, for instance Latin America, where our lack of Spanish language capacity excludes us from participation in this very important milieu. Two exceptions in which we were able to stage limited interventions with accompanying propaganda were the Occupy movement and the Quebec student strike. Both showed the potential for upsurges, but also the general political weakness of resistance amid rightward movement in society.”

Our Competitors: The Disintegrating Left

Through our publications we continue to act as a pole of attraction for subjectively revolutionary militants. The primary function of the IBT has always been that of a propaganda group, focusing our polemical fire on self-identified revolutionary organizations and attempting to intersect those who already have some familiarity with Marxism. As this leftist milieu disintegrates and shrinks, we must attempt to address our propaganda to people with little or no background in the ideas of socialism without forgetting the importance of drawing “lines of demarcation” with ostensibly revolutionary organizations.

The conference spent some time discussing the international organizations that lay claim to the Trotskyist tradition, many of which have recently suffered splits and, as a result, are smaller and weaker. Not only have they shrunk in size but many have shifted their politics even further to the right, adapting to existing low consciousness. The nominally Marxist left has entered a period of identity crisis: fundamental concepts like class, party and revolution have been discarded by many in the hope of “staying relevant.”

Two organizations that on many questions still retain a certain programmatic identity with their Trotskyist past are the International Communist League (ICL, based on the Spartacist League/U.S.) and its 1996 offspring, the



'Precisely in the periods of revolutionary ebb tide are cadres formed and tempered which will later be called upon to lead the masses in the new assault.'—Leon Trotsky

Internationalist Group (IG) whose international affiliates are organized as the League for the Fourth International. The ICL appears to be comfortably ensconced in its sectarian isolation, reinforced by the introduction of the occasional bizarre novelty position and an increasing programmatic codification of its departure from Trotskyism. It is of less interest than ever before. The IG is more dynamic, less given to overt programmatic revisions and actively seeks to intervene in the struggles of the oppressed. Yet its leadership continues to place personal prestige over political program, as evidenced by its refusal to engage with the IBT, despite the close proximity of the formal positions of our two organizations on many issues. This unwillingness to attempt a study of the depth and scope of the issues that separate us is an expression of sectarianism born of political insecurity. During almost two decades of existence, the IG has studiously avoided any serious assessment of the roots and development of the political degeneration of the once-revolutionary Spartacist tendency, instead insisting that all was well until exactly the point that their founding cadres were driven out.

One of the more interesting political tendencies internationally is the Trotskyist Fraction-Fourth International, which continues to produce propaganda combining orthodox formulations with political adaptations to petty-bourgeois radicalism. While the group mainly exists in Latin America, they have comrades in Spain and France (where they lead a grouping inside the NPA—the *Courant Communiste Révolutionnaire*) and have obtained the adherence

of the German *Revolutionären Internationalistischen Organisation*. In most countries they operate as small propaganda groups, though the *Partido de los Trabajadores Socialistas* in Argentina is large enough to engage in limited mass work.

The International Socialist Tendency has suffered dramatic (and well publicized) setbacks in recent years. In 2010 a few dozen people, including some leading cadres, left Britain's Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and formed Counterfire. More recently, the SWP has lost significantly more members, particularly youth, over accusations of leadership bureaucratic abuse and cover-up of sexual assault, with some forming alternative groupings with rightist trajectories. Similar, although smaller, departures took place from the American International Socialist Organization amid complaints about bureaucratic abuse. Taken together, these splits represent significant setbacks for the political trend identified with the late Tony Cliff.

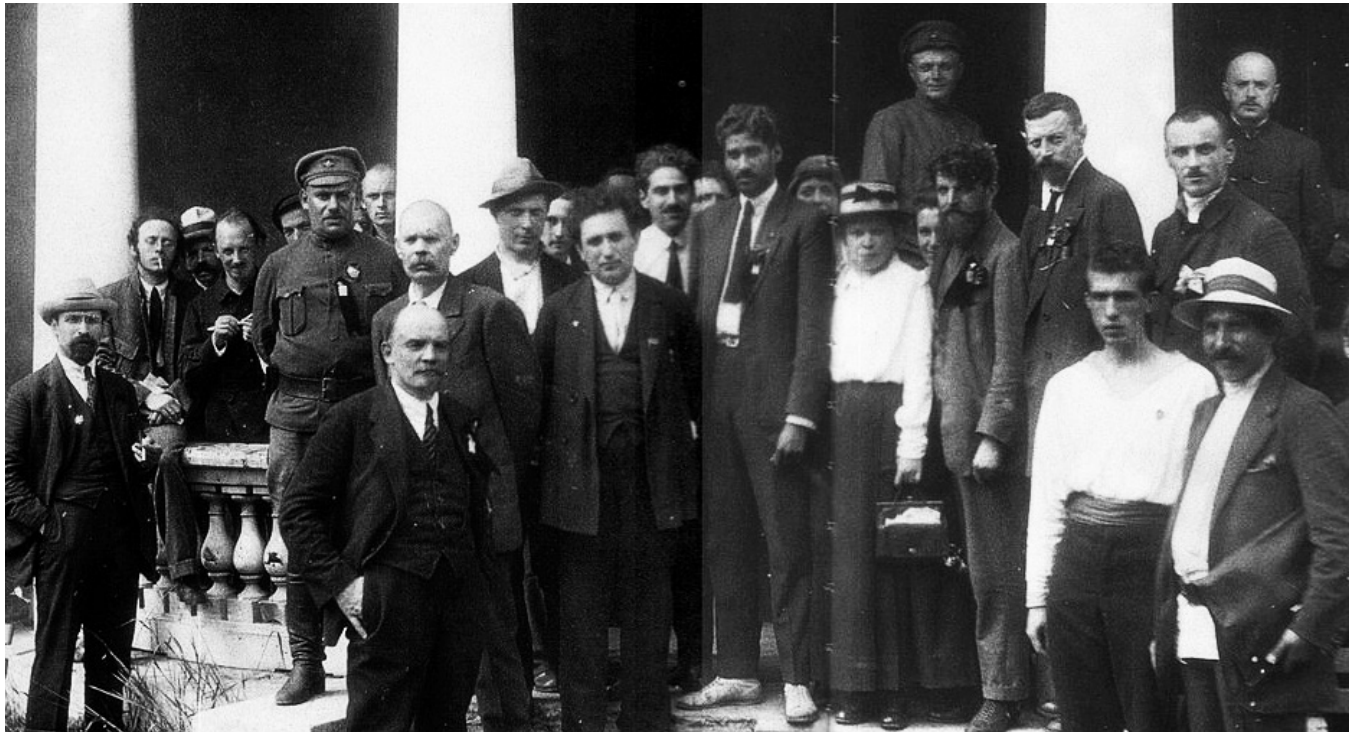
The Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), which can at times present a more or less orthodox Marxist face, has a history of adaptation to reformist illusions regarding parliamentarianism and the bourgeois state. For some years there have been indications of leftist dissent within the ranks of its leading section (the Socialist Party of England and Wales [SP]). To date, the only substantial difference to break out into the open has centered on the source of the global economic slump and the validity of Marx's observations regarding the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. This dispute resulted in a number of expulsions and resignations. The CWI was buoyed by the electoral victory of Kshama Sawant in Seattle, yet while she was elected after campaigning as an open socialist (itself a significant development in the context of U.S. politics), her success was achieved by dispensing with any Trotskyist pretenses and wholeheartedly embracing social-democratic reformism.

The International Marxist Tendency (IMT) is significant in size internationally and growing in some areas, while suffering substantial losses in others. Its modus operandi continues to be entrism. In some cases this involves operating inside bourgeois political parties (e.g., in Pakistan), but most frequently it means constituting a ginger group inside mass social-democratic parties (usually of the most moderate variety, e.g., Britain's Labour Party or Canada's New Democratic Party).

The United Secretariat, which claims the banner of the Fourth International, is about as far removed from the politics of Trotsky's organization as it is possible to be while retaining the moniker. And it is a house deeply divided. On the right are the likes of Alan Thornett who advocate the formation of social-democratic parties and hail the Greek Syriza as a model. The former members of the French *Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire* who disbanded to form a "New Anticapitalist Party" on an overtly reformist basis also belong in this wing. Espousing views somewhat to the left of this current are formations such as the *Revolutionär Sozialistischer Bund* (RSB) in Germany, Socialist Action in the U.S. and the OKDE Spartakos group in Greece—but none of these have shown the capacity to break decisively with the liquidationist methodology that the more rightwing elements have followed to its logical conclusion.

After the departure of most of its older cadres (who

Unity, Class, Program



Delegates to Second Congress of the Communist International, 1920

Edited version of a contribution by IBT supporter Barbara Dorn to a panel discussion on “Is there a need for left unity?” at the Platypus European Conference, London, 19 July 2014. Published 22 July 2014 on bolshevik.org.

One of the questions we often encounter is, “Why can’t all you left groups just get together?” It’s a good question that deserves a serious answer, whether it comes from people who lack experience in politics or more seasoned comrades who should already know the answer and frame it in seemingly more sophisticated terms like “left unity.”

It poses two other questions: What do we mean by “left”? and What do we mean by “unity”?

“Left” is used to refer to everything from the Lib Dems to the Greens to the Labour left to self-defined socialists of various types to anarchists to genuine communists and everything in between. What the term “left” does not refer to is the *working class*.

It is the political consciousness of the working class that is of central importance to achieving the goals that many of us share, whether it’s winning a particular strike or carrying out a successful socialist revolution. The broadest possible unity of the working class *against* the capitalists and their states—*that* is what we need.

On the face of it, it might seem that the best way to achieve such unity would be to unify the existing tendencies that represent or seek to represent the working class (and exclude bourgeois forces like the Greens) and then democratically sort out our differences as we engage in real-life struggle. Something like this was the model for the First International, in which Karl Marx played a prominent role in the 1860s and early 1870s, and for the Second

International, founded in 1889, which came to encompass such disparate formations as the British Labour Party, the German SDP, or the Russian SDLP. There were always elements that could not be contained within the common framework, but the idea of working-class political unity in the form of a single party was defended by virtually every leading socialist—in Karl Kautsky’s formulation, “one class, one party” (or, to put it the other way round, a “party of the whole class”).

On the revolutionary left wing of the Second International—principally Lenin’s Bolshevik faction in the fragmented Russian party—the idea of the “party of the whole class” had, as early as 1912, come into conflict with the need to defend the program of “working-class unity” in the form of *socialist revolution*. As Lenin noted in April 1914, “Unity is a great thing and a great slogan. But what the workers’ cause needs is the *unity of Marxists*, not unity between Marxists, and opponents and distorters of Marxism.”

It would take two related world-historic events to definitively break genuine Marxists from the old organizational framework, radically changing our understanding of how to achieve revolutionary working-class unity. On 4 August 1914, deputies of the SDP betrayed the working class by voting in the Reichstag to grant funds to Germany to wage the imperialist war that had just broken out. In October 1917, Lenin’s Bolsheviks overthrew the Russian bourgeoisie in the face of opposition from the right wing of the Russian workers’ movement—the Mensheviks and right-wing Social Revolutionaries.

It had become clear that political unity with forces com-

mitted, openly or not, to preserving the bourgeois order meant unity with the capitalist class *against* the working class. Achieving working-class unity against the bourgeoisie would require Marxists to *win over* a majority of the working class through sharp political struggle against—and organizational independence from—the reformists and centrists. In 1919, the Third (or Communist) International was founded on an explicitly revolutionary basis.

During the first few years of its existence steps were taken to ensure that reformists and centrists were not admitted to the Comintern. Combined with disgust over the outright treachery of the Second International, these measures were used by some ultra-left tendencies to argue against working with social democrats in *any* fashion.

But organizational unity of genuine Marxists against non-Marxist tendencies does not preclude unity *in action* with reformists and other political currents. After intense debate, the Comintern thus came to advocate the “united front”—precisely this sort of temporary unity in action around clear objectives, e.g., a strike, a demonstration against imperialist war, preventing a fascist mobilization, or a defense campaign for a working-class political prisoner. In a united front, Marxists maintain their own separate political organization and do not stop criticizing their bloc partners. The united front is an opportunity for Marxists to demonstrate in practice and through propaganda that they, and not the reformists, are the most consistent fighters for the workers’ cause.

There is a fashion these days for “unity initiatives” like Die Linke, Syriza, the French NPA and a long line of attempts in Britain of which Left Unity is the latest manifestation. These go beyond unity in action to attempt to build unity around a lowest common-denominator program and common propaganda by groups and individuals who do not in fact share a program. This is a step backwards from the Leninist vanguard party model of *breaking* with the reformists. Marxists may work with this type of organization in common actions. In rare cases where there is a clear trajectory to the left and room for political debate, we may even join such a formation in order to attempt to influence that trajectory (as we did with the Socialist Labour Party in Britain in the mid-1990s). But always our perspective is that of an uncompromising fight to win revolutionary forces by exposing the political dead end reformism represents for workers and oppressed.

At an anti-austerity demonstration in London a few weeks ago, I met a comrade who challenged me to tell him the three most important reasons why the IBT maintained a separate existence. I’d like to end today by answering that question, because this is very much related to the key question we need to answer as Marxist revolutionaries: What program do we need to overthrow capitalism?

1. The state

Capitalism cannot be gradually reformed—it must be destroyed. We have important political differences with those on the left who believe in a parliamentary road to socialism, or who vote for Labour in the belief that it can be “reclaimed.” We do not seek unity with those that believe the armed bodies of the state (e.g., police, prison guards) are part of the workers’ movement. Or with those who call on the state to ban fascist marches (bans which are then inevitably used against the left). Or those who

are not prepared to defy the punitive anti-union laws but instead plead for them to be repealed through legal channels. Or with those who take or share power in capitalist administrations and participate in the imposition of austerity budgets, as Die Linke have done in Berlin and the Green Party in Brighton.

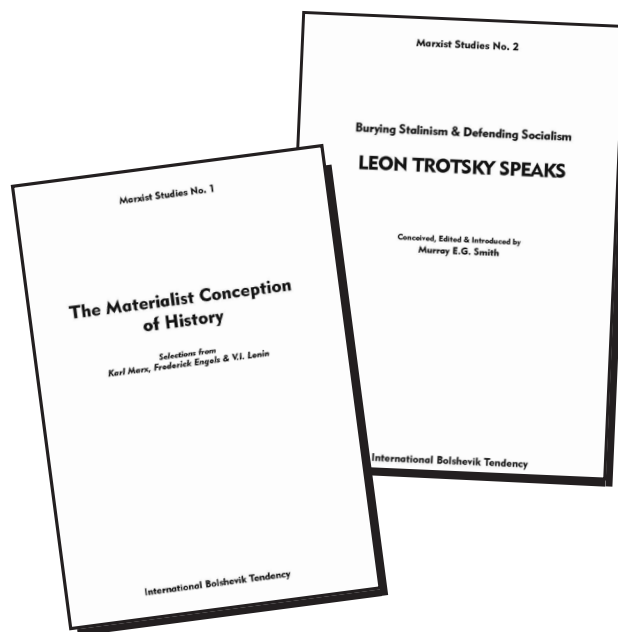
2. Internationalism

Those who support their own ruling class in war, or who maintain neutrality in the face of imperialist attack on a semi-colony, are no friends of working-class unity against capitalism. We defend the right of nations to self-determination, but are opposed to so-called socialists who see the ideology of nationalism as in some way progressive, as many are now doing over Scotland.

3. Independence of the working class

The working class must defend the rights of all the oppressed, but we do not share ideologies such as feminism that call for unity of women across class lines. We do not seek unity with those who wish to work in collaboration with the bourgeoisie, or vote for popular-front coalitions between bourgeois and workers’ organizations. Getting this question wrong is no small matter and has caused the workers’ movement to go down to bloody defeat many times over, for example, Spain in the 1930s, Chile in the 1970s. Trotsky described this as “the *main question of proletarian class strategy* for this epoch.”

We do need unity of the working class under the leadership of a party based on a program like the one I have just described—and for the working class to use that program to take power. The long road to that point will involve many episodes of unity in action, but it will also require Marxists to reject unity with those whose politics are contrary to the historic interests of the working class. ■



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Austerity, Nationalism & Class Collaboration Scotland's Independence Referendum

Published 14 September 2014 on bolshevik.org, shortly before the referendum on Scottish independence.

On 18 September, residents of Scotland aged 16 and older will be asked a simple question: 'Should Scotland be an independent country?' As the referendum on independence draws near, the considerable number of undecided voters are moving towards voting 'Yes', and the polls are too close to call. Both sides are wheeling out celebrity endorsers and trading accusations and statistics, while the pros and cons are argued in pubs, homes and workplaces across the country.

The British establishment never expected it to come to this. When the Scottish parliament was created a decade and a half ago, the election rules were designed to make it difficult for any one party to gain an absolute majority. The Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) defied expectations in the 2011 election, taking Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat seats—laying the basis for the current referendum, which pits the SNP-sponsored 'Yes' campaign against 'Better Together', a coalition led by the Labour Party, the main opposition party in the Scottish parliament. In the closing days of the campaign, Labour and their Tory and Lib Dem allies are close to panic, promising various increases in devolutionary power in an attempt to bolster the 'No' campaign.

The SNP's success can be partly attributed to their posture as social democrats opposed to the austerity policies implemented by the Tory/Lib Dem government in Westminster and to Labour's refusal even to claim they would present any real alternative. It did not take much to popularise the idea that life in an independent Scotland could be easier for ordinary people.

Yet the root cause of austerity in Scotland is not English antipathy towards the Scots—the same anti-working class campaign has been waged across Britain, Europe and beyond. Rather, it is the fact that the capitalists' economic system is plagued by inherent contradictions and irrationalities. While the bourgeois nationalist SNP takes a nominal anti-austerity stance in the interests of furthering the goal of independence, their project for an independent capitalist Scotland is not going to improve the lives of Scottish working people.

Scottish Bourgeoisie: A House Divided

A Scottish government White Paper, 'Building Security and Creating Opportunity: Economic Policy Choices in an Independent Scotland' (November 2013), outlines detailed plans for independence, including reforms such as renationalisation of the post, scrapping the bedroom tax, more hours of free childcare and removing nuclear weapons from the Clyde. All of these proposals are intended to facilitate the smoother running of Scottish capitalism with

a kinder facade:

'Independence would allow future Scottish governments to combine powers over business investment, employment creation, taxation and welfare to secure stronger levels of economic growth from which all the people of Scotland could benefit. It would ensure economic policy is designed for the needs and opportunities of the Scottish economy, provide greater flexibility in decision making and offer an opportunity to rebalance the economy.'

The SNP has promised to cut corporation tax by three percent after achieving independence, creating an environment in which global finance will see Scotland as a profitable investment opportunity. Ireland, with an even lower rate of tax on business, took the same route to 'prosperity' and has been ravaged by brutal austerity as the government seeks to entice foreign investment. Scottish capital, as a constituent component of British imperialism, is of course much stronger than Irish capital, and will continue to pursue its own 'investment opportunities' abroad. But the SNP's pledge to create a more 'business-friendly' environment than David Cameron has done should leave no room for doubting whose interests will be served in an independent Scotland.

At the same time, Scotland's business interests are divided over how best to 'rebalance the economy' in their favour. Big capitalists in the leading sectors of the Scottish economy (oil, banking, whiskey and fisheries) are more inclined to the 'No' camp, while smaller businesses tend towards 'Yes', though it is by no means a clear divide. Much of the division hangs on calculations over the uncertainty of future income from North Sea oil and the financial viability of an independent Scotland.

English and Scottish capital, and their respective ruling classes, are deeply intertwined, going back beyond the union of 1707. Even with political independence, many of those ties are likely to remain. The SNP's nationalist dream of an independent Scotland (with about one-tenth the population of its neighbour to the south) charting its own economic course is unachievable, as a leaked paper presented to the SNP cabinet last year suggested (*The Scotsman*, 11 September 2014). Nothing demonstrates this dependence more clearly than the desire of SNP leader Alex Salmond to retain the pound sterling, with the external economic constraints that would entail.

The high degree of economic integration—indeed, virtual fusion—is the source not only of divisions within the Scottish ruling class but of the leverage that London has over Edinburgh. Britain's Chancellor George Osborne has attempted to apply pressure on Scottish capital by stating that his government is opposed to a joint currency. On the other hand, the SNP has a considerable bargaining chip in the UK's Trident nuclear arsenal, currently located at the deep water Faslane Naval Base near Glasgow. The White

Paper projects a Scottish refusal to house the weapons, which would create considerable difficulty and expense for the British state. There are also related disputes and unresolved questions around the SNP's objectives of retaining Scottish membership of NATO and the European Union, which may not be as straightforward as Salmond implies.

Marxism & the Scottish National Question

Some elements of the Scottish bourgeoisie clearly feel oppressed in some manner, while others—among them the dominant fractions—are satisfied with their representation within the institutions of British capitalism, including the state apparatus.

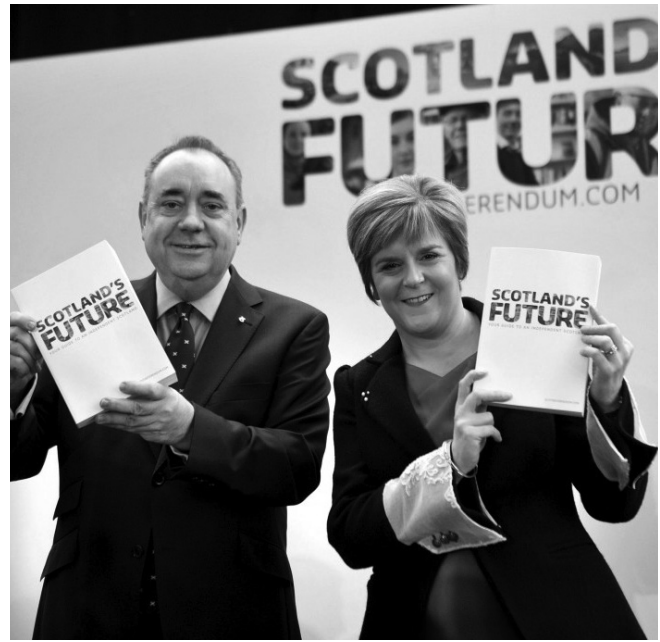
Among the working class, the sense of national oppression—wider spread than among the ruling strata—is largely an ideological expression of the very real material insecurity experienced by the majority of Scots. Yet this precariousness is qualitatively the same as that found over the border in the north of England and other regions. Glasgow contains some of the most deprived areas of Britain, with shocking levels of poverty, but parts of Liverpool, Manchester and London are not far behind. The central issue is class, not nationality.

Nevertheless, Marxists recognise that the Scots constitute a nation. As such, they have the democratic right to self-determination—that is, the right to separate from Britain and form an independent state (or the right to remain in Britain if they so choose). Whatever a majority of voters decide in the referendum, it is the duty of socialists to defend that right. English revolutionaries have a particular responsibility to oppose anti-Scottish chauvinism and efforts by London to bully or curtail the rights of the Scots.

In his 'Theses on the National Question' (1913), V.I. Lenin noted that defending a nation's right to self-determination does not mean that revolutionaries 'reject an independent appraisal of the advisability of the state secession of any nation in each separate case'. Marxists must appraise each concrete situation, deciding whether or not to advocate separation on the basis of how best to advance 'the proletarian class struggle for socialism'.

In cases where national antagonisms have poisoned relations between workers of the dominant and subordinate nationalities so much that significant joint class struggle is precluded, Marxists move from simple defence of the right to separate to active advocacy of the exercise of that right through secession. In this manner, it is hoped, the national question may be removed from the agenda, or at least sufficiently sidelined to allow class questions to come to the fore once again. In situations where joint class struggle across national lines remains a reality, Marxists do not advocate independence, and would counsel against separation.

Scottish and English (and Welsh) workers possess common class institutions. The vast majority of British trade unions organise countrywide, affiliating to the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC) as well as the British TUC. From the largely ineffective one-day public-sector strikes organised by the union bureaucrats to the wildcat strikes that have spread among electricians across the country over the past few years, Scottish and English workers routinely engage in joint struggle against British capitalists. The 2013 strike at the vast Grangemouth oil refinery



ANDY BUCHANAN—AFP—GETTY IMAGES

26 November 2013: Scottish First Minister Alex Salmond and Deputy First Minister Nicola Sturgeon tout White Paper

near Falkirk failed to spread to other refineries across the border due not to national hostilities but to the sell-out policies of the Unite union bureaucrats who surrendered without a fight.

Although it remains a very real feature of the class struggle in Britain, solidarity across national lines has, it is true, been weakened over the past period, threatened by the changed configuration of state power confronting the trade-union bureaucracy (which needs few excuses to avoid waging a concerted struggle on the broader basis provided by a unitary state):

'Cross-border ties between unions, which for so long helped cement solidarity among Scottish and English workers, also seem to have deteriorated over the last ten or twenty years. The onset of devolution and the transfer of control to Edinburgh of, among other things, transport, health and education policy, created a new layer of state power with which Scottish branches of British unions had to negotiate, reducing their reliance on larger, Westminster-focused, UK-wide structures.'

—*New Statesman*, 2 April 2013

While defending the right of the Scots to secede from Britain and establish their own state, we recognise that the creation of a Scottish state would reflect—or constitute—a setback for the class struggle. Given the continued possibility of joint class struggle against the capitalist class within Britain, we would advise workers to vote 'No' in the referendum on 18 September. Needless to say, this does not imply support for the status quo of British capitalism, nor a refusal to defend the right of the Scots to separate if, in their majority, they vote 'Yes'.

Reformists Push Class Collaboration with Scottish Capitalists

Traditionally, the trade-union bureaucracy in Scotland has opposed independence, reflecting the general attitude of the leadership of the Labour Party. Recently, the trend

has shifted towards a pro-independence stance, or at least neutrality (the position of the STUC). In part this represents changing attitudes among Scottish capitalists and petty-bourgeois layers, whose ideology the trade-union bureaucracy helps transmit into the working class. Yet it also represents the view of many rank-and-file workers responding to decades of defeats (which they have no faith Labour will do anything to reverse) and to the failure of the union leaders to mount a co-ordinated defence of their members. Instead of channelling working-class discontent into a proletarian-internationalist campaign against austerity, the trade-union bureaucracy reinforces the nationalist consciousness they helped to foster.

Many self-defined socialist organisations adopt essentially the same position. The left wing of the ‘Yes’ campaign is gathered in the Radical Independence Campaign (RIC) under the left-nationalist slogan ‘Britain is for the rich: Scotland can be ours’. The components of the RIC—including the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP), the Socialist Party Scotland (section of the Committee for a Workers’ International/CWI) and the International Socialist Group (ISG)—falsely argue that the only way to fight the bosses and government attacks is to achieve independence for Scotland:

‘Only with a Yes vote can we end benefit sanctions and demeaning work capability assessments, abolish the Bedroom Tax, raise the minimum wage, improve childcare and begin a mass programme of job creation.’

—radicalindependence.org, 13 August 2014

For Jonathan Shafi, a leader of the ISG and the RIC, the problem with the SNP’s White Paper is that it does not propose enough reforms to improve capitalism for ‘the Scottish people’:

‘The priorities which the independence movements are bringing forward—things like democracy, equality—we want to start thinking about our economy, whether there can be a democratic participation involved in our national resources, nationalization of key industries, though not all this is contained in the White Paper, not all of this is contained in the Scottish government’s plan. This is not just about the Scottish government, this is about the hopes and dreams of the Scottish people.’

—rt.com 26 November 2013

Shafi’s preference is for a slightly more left-wing version of the White Paper, which despite his criticisms he describes as ‘something far more progressive than the mainstream and Westminster is currently giving, and far more progressive than anything that Westminster will be able to do over the coming years’. Shafi justifies his critical defence of the bourgeois nationalist SNP’s perspective document as predicated on the ‘need to have some level of agreement’ within the broader ‘Yes’ campaign (*ibid.*).

Adopting a somewhat more militant position, the CWI claims: ‘A Yes vote would represent a protest against the endless austerity of the past period, a chance to raise opposition to inequality and cuts that the main political parties will not contemplate’; (socialistworld.net, 4 September 2014). It may indeed be true that a majority of working-class people will vote ‘Yes’ as a protest against austerity, but that does not mean that Scottish independence will in any way be an effective means of stopping the cuts. To provide itself with left cover, the CWI calls

for ‘an independent socialist Scotland’, but presents no evidence that independence will take Scotland any closer to socialism. The Socialist Party Scotland/CWI is quite happy to subordinate itself to a political campaign dominated by bourgeois forces pushing for an independent capitalist Scotland.

A prominent advocate of left-wing arguments in favour of Scottish independence is Neil Davidson of the SWP split RS21. As a lead writer for the SWP over many years, Davidson manoeuvred their position from opposing independence to a left-nationalist call for separation as secession grew in popularity. His main argument is that independence would weaken British imperialism:

‘Britain is an imperial state at war. A referendum called while the occupation of Afghanistan is still ongoing, with the Iraqi and Libyan interventions a recent memory, would be inseparable from the arguments against these wars and the British state’s subordinate alliance with the American empire. Scottish secession would at the very least make it more difficult for Britain to play this role, if only by reducing its practical importance for the US. Britain has always been an imperialist state, but socialists have not always called for support for independence and in other situations they were correct to oppose it, for example in the early 1920s. But devolution has changed the context in which we operate. The British state has already begun to fragment and so to call for its further fragmentation on an anti-war basis, in a situation where a majority opposed the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, means that independence can be supported as a means to an anti-imperialist end, rather than as the political logic of Scottish nationalism.’

—*International Socialism*, 27 March 2012

The SNP’s vision of Scotland as an independent country includes remaining in NATO and playing its part in the same imperialist alliance that was responsible for the wars on Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya. The Scottish ruling class, regardless of which bourgeois party dominates, have no intention of fulfilling Davidson’s nationalist fantasy of breaking with the ‘American Empire’, as shown by Salmond’s April visit to the United States to drum up support. Independence would of course be something of a moral defeat for the Tories, who pride themselves on being the ‘Conservative and Unionist Party’, but it is in the interests of the bourgeoisie on both sides of the border to maintain strong personal, economic and military links whatever the result. An independent capitalist Scotland would itself be an imperialist power, albeit a relatively minor one.

Workers in Scotland, England, Wales and internationally are all subject to the depredations of global capitalism. Marxists support the right of the Scottish people to secede, but, in opposition to nationalists, we put forward an internationalist class-struggle perspective aimed at winning working people to the project of building a mass revolutionary party. Should the Scots vote for independence on 18 September, we will defend their right to form their own state and will advocate the greatest possible working-class unity against capitalists on both sides of the border. Whatever the outcome, workers in Scotland and the rest of Britain need an internationalist revolutionary party, fighting for a socialist federation of Europe and a society free of want and oppression. ■

SL & IG Flounder on Scotland and Quebec

Spartacist Confusionists & the Scottish Referendum



Glasgow: pro-independence demonstrators rally one day before referendum

Published 8 December 2014 on bolshhevik.org

In September's referendum on Scottish independence, a clear majority of voters (55 percent) chose to remain within the "United Kingdom." While upholding the right of all nations (e.g., Scotland) to self-determination, Leninists actively advocate separation only when national antagonisms pose a significant obstacle to joint working-class struggle. As there is little evidence that this is the case today, we advised a "No" vote (see "Scotland's Independence Referendum: Austerity, Nationalism & Class Collaboration," page 28).

The Spartacist League/Britain (SL/B, section of the International Communist League [ICL]) took a different view, refusing to opt for either a "Yes" or "No" vote, a policy they initially described as one of "indifference." This characterization was subsequently "corrected" with the non-sensical claim that they were in fact "not indifferent to the outcome" despite not supporting either side, ostensibly on the grounds of an inability to gauge the "depth of national antagonisms" in view of their assertion that "the evidence is contradictory" (*Workers Hammer*, Autumn 2014).

Over the years, the Spartacist tendency has published a series of rather peculiar statements on Scotland, most of which are attributable to the fondness of James Robertson, the group's founder/leader, for all things Scottish. (Robertson fancies himself a descendant of Robert the Bruce, the 14th

century Scottish king.) The Autumn 2006 edition of *Workers Hammer* reprised some of these strange positions:

"the Scottish proletariat [has ...] historically openly identified with the Soviet Union and Communism. During the 1980s Cold War we appealed to such sentiments by raising evocative slogans such as 'Turn Holy Loch into a Soviet U-boat pen!' and 'For a Scottish workers republic as part of the USSR!'"

A decade earlier, Robertson's Canadian acolytes published a piece by Oliver Stephens that included a paean to Scottish nationalism ranking among the most cringe-worthy passages ever produced by these political degenerates:

"So the concept of a nation, as we know it in the latter 20th century, is historically a recent development. This of course has not prevented various nationalists from inventing a glorious 'history' for their own particular nation. Most of this is nonsense, but the Scots may be an exception to the rule. In 1320 the Scottish lords petitioned the Pope—in writing, quite a novelty at the time!—for succor against the predations of the English king. In their 'Declaration of Arbroath' they noted that:

"... we find that among other famous nations our own, the Scots, has been graced with widespread renown. They journeyed from Greater Scythia by way of the Tyrrhenian Sea and the Pillars of Hercules, and dwelt for a long course of time in Spain among the most savage tribes, but nowhere could they be sub-

duced by any race, however barbarous. Thence they came, twelve hundred years after the people of Israel crossed the Red Sea, to their home in the west where they still live today... In their kingdom there have reigned one hundred and thirteen kings of their own royal stock, the line unbroken by a single foreigner.”

—*Spartacist Canada*, March 1996

During a public debate on Quebec in 1999 (see *Marxism and the Quebec National Question*, bolshevik.org), we suggested that this Scottish exceptionalist drivel originated in the cultish internal structure of the Spartacist tendency.

In its statement on the recent referendum (“For a Scottish Workers Republic in a Socialist Federation of the British Isles,” September 2014, internationalist.org), Jan Norden’s Internationalist Group (IG—an organization whose founders were ejected from the ICL in 1996) aptly characterized the SL’s “no line, but ‘not indifferent’” posture as confusionist. The IG advocated a “Yes” vote while, at the same time, distancing themselves from the Robertsonians’ “long history of idle flirtation with Scottish nationalism without consummation” and “the kitsch ‘Braveheart’ mythology shared by both left and right nationalists.”

The IG demagogically asserted that by supporting a “No” vote, the IBT was “lining up with Cameron, Tony Blair and the Orange Order.” This sort of guilt-by-association argument rarely advances any discussion—in politics, widely divergent formations frequently end up taking the same position on particular questions. When France’s far-right Front National criticizes NATO attacks in the Middle East, are leftists who oppose imperialist intervention “lining up” with them? Of course not.

Our September statement on the referendum was unambiguous:

“Marxists recognise that the Scots constitute a nation. As such, they have the democratic right to self-determination—that is, the right to separate from Britain and form an independent state (or the right to remain in Britain if they so choose). Whatever a majority of voters decide in the referendum, it is the duty of socialists to defend that right. English revolutionaries have a particular responsibility to oppose anti-Scottish chauvinism and efforts by London to bully or curtail the rights of the Scots.”

Lenin compared the right of nations to self-determination to the right to divorce—to uphold the right to separate is not to demand its exercise at a given moment. Whether or not Marxists *advocate* independence at a particular juncture is a tactical question as to how best to advance the class struggle.

When it was founded, three and a half decades ago, the SL/B’s position on Scotland was identical to our own today—support “for the *right* of self-determination, but call[ing] on the Scottish people to exercise that right by choosing to stay in the same state as the other peoples of Britain” (*Spartacist Britain*, No.1, April 1978). At that time, as today, there was little evidence of national hostilities presenting a major obstacle to joint class struggle between Scottish and English workers. As there has been no qualitative change in the situation, the IG has considerable difficulty explaining why a position that was correct in 1978 reflects “chauvinist, social-democratic/Labourite economism” today.

Starting from the premise that Scottish independence is necessary, the IG works backwards to try to rationalize its

decision. Yet their arguments, which necessarily have to downplay the central issue of the actual relations between workers across national lines, are far from compelling. While claiming that “a critical ‘yes’ vote” is necessary “to get the national question off the agenda” and thus “focus Scottish workers’ struggle against the Scottish bosses,” the IG cites no concrete instances of national antagonisms between Scottish and English (or Welsh) workers preventing class struggle.

The IG does make an effort to find a proletarian axis for their advocacy of Scottish independence:

“such trade-union struggles as there are, are becoming increasingly disconnected. A UK-wide strike of teachers this year did not include Scotland; teachers there are not in the National Union of Teachers but rather the Educational Institute of Scotland (a rather right-wing union) and faced with a quite different educational system.”

But in fact many English teachers are also not in the NUT—they are members of NASUWT, which organizes across Britain (including Scotland). There has certainly been a decline in struggle in recent decades, but this is chiefly attributable to the slavish adherence of the trade-union bureaucracy to bourgeois legality.

The most significant setback suffered by Scottish workers in recent years was, as the IG acknowledges, caused by the sabotage of pro-capitalist trade-union leaders:

“Last October, refinery workers at Grangemouth suffered a decisive defeat when they were blackmailed by threat of closure of the plant into accepting an agreement (brokered by Salmond) cutting jobs, pensions and pay, although a previous strike in February had defeated an attack on pensions. The walkout was sparked by the Labour Party, and they were stabbed in the back by [the] trade-union bureaucracy of Unite.”

While a majority of Scottish workers are probably inclined toward independence, the class is seriously divided on the question, which is why most unions refused to take a position on the referendum, as the IG statement noted.

With little evidence to back claims of bitter national antagonism, the IG falls back on an entirely different line of argument:

“An opportunity is posed to accelerate the break-up of imperialist Britain—it should be seized.... It would strike a blow against decrepit British imperialism (it’s been a long time since Britannia ruled the waves), and while the SNP has dropped its opposition to NATO, Scottish independence could still cause problems for that imperialist alliance.”

This argument could have been made in virtually any multinational imperialist country for the last century, and yet it was never advanced by any organization that we (or the IG) would regard as standing in the Leninist-Trotskyist tradition. Revolutionaries do not determine their position on national questions on the basis of such mechanical, objectivist calculations, but rather by the necessity to promote working-class solidarity across national lines.

The IG statement also acknowledges that “Scottish independence would result in the creation of another minor imperialist power—hardly a goal for working people.” Indeed. So how does this fit with the whole logic of seizing the “opportunity” to “cause problems” for NATO?

In a polemical aside, the IG suggests that the SL/B’s recent “correction” regarding its indifference was “continuing its recent pattern of abrupt turnabouts.” In fact,



NO CREDIT

Thousands of Francophone and Anglophone protesters march together in Quebec, 2012

as Norden et al well know, this pattern is not so recent.¹ In any case, the ICL's 2014 shift to neutrality on Scottish independence is less dramatic than its complete reversal on Quebec in 1995, when it adopted a position of unconditional support for immediate separation.

The IG polemicists observe that, contrary to the ICL, the IBT "repeats its policy of voting against Quebec independence in the 1995 referendum there. The IBT is at least consistent in its chauvinist, social-democratic/Labourite economism." The IG is also consistent on Scotland and Quebec, but consistently *wrong*.

For the Quebecois, according to the IG, the turning point came "in 1972 [when] a Quebec general strike provoked not the slightest echo from the rest of Canadian labor. From that point on, revolutionary Marxists should have called for Quebec independence." The IG claims that "In Quebec the left is dominated by nationalism and class confrontation will not likely come to the fore until separation from Canada." In fact, most Quebecois far leftists (as opposed to the labor bureaucracy and some of the ostensibly Trotskyist left) are not particularly nationalist. This was obvious in the epic 2012 student struggle to resist government austerity measures in which hundreds of thousands of youth, backed by a broad spectrum of working people, successfully beat back the provincial Liberal government's attempts to drastically hike tuition fees (see "Quebec Students Fight Back," 1917 No. 35). There was no nationalist element to these mobilizations and few overt expressions of separatist sentiment among the young militants.

In an 8 June 2012 letter to the IG ("Learn to Think," 1917 No. 35), we pointed out that this experience, which the IG itself described as "one of the most bitter social struggles in Canada for decades," refuted the notion that without independence significant social struggle is impossible.

In their coverage of this mass struggle, both the IG and the ICL ignored the impact that the Quebec events were having in English Canada. The *Globe and Mail* (2 June 2012) reported that "scattered protests have begun to appear in other [English] Canadian cities, leading many to suggest

that ... the rest of Canada may yet be in for and [sic] awakening of its own." Even more significant was the fact that English Canadian trade-union locals began sending financial assistance to the students, a development that alarmed Quebec's labor bureaucrats, who appealed to their Anglo equivalents to try to cut off further support. This betrayal was documented in an exchange of letters that was widely reported on the left (and reproduced in "Quebec Students Fight Back"). The amazing display of proletarian solidarity across the national divide powerfully vindicated the original Spartacist analysis, which Robertson/Norden erroneously reversed in 1995.

It has been a long time since the leaders of the ICL and IG have been able to approach the national question as Marxists. They still mouth the formulas about it being a tactical question and the consequent necessity to assess "the depth of national antagonisms between the working people of the different nations" in order to determine policy from one moment to the next. But, at least in Scotland and Quebec, they are incapable of either seriously grappling with the concrete realities or addressing the political imperatives that flow from them. ■

¹ In fact there were many "abrupt turnabouts" prior to the purge of Norden and his comrades (see *Whatever Happened to the Spartacist League, bolshevik.org*). In 1982 the SL leadership abandoned a longstanding policy and instructed its members to march under the flag of the Salvadoran popular front. The following year the SL developed a sudden concern for the welfare of the U.S. Marines when they encountered resistance to their intervention in Lebanon's civil war. In 1984 the SL's reversal of its traditional view that there is not a "dime's worth of difference" between the twin parties of U.S. imperialism prefigured a groveling offer to defend the Democrats' convention against an imaginary Ku Klux Klan/Reaganite attack. In 1991 the SL refused to choose between the Stalinist remnants of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and Boris Yeltsin's counterrevolutionary rabble. Two years later, when the Yeltsinites fell out, the SL initially took a correct position of backing neither side, only to subsequently reverse this without explanation.

Belated Rationalization for Abandonment of Trade-Union Work

Spartacists Repudiate Class-Struggle Caucuses

Bryan D. Palmer's excellent book, *Revolutionary Teamsters*, on the Minneapolis general strikes of 1934, illuminates the struggle that remains to this day the high point of American Trotskyist trade-union work. The Spartacist League (SL) recently published a two-part review of the book that is, for the most part, informed and positive. It is, however, marred by the degenerated political character of the SL, whose departure from genuine Trotskyism more than 30 years ago coincided with its withdrawal in practice from revolutionary trade-union work. The review, by Emily Tanner of the Prometheus Research Library, for the first time formally repudiates the conception developed by the SL in its revolutionary period of building programmatically defined alternative leadership formations (i.e., caucuses) within the unions.

In the first part of her review (*Workers Vanguard*, 19 September 2014), Tanner makes the following criticism: "Notably absent from Palmer's book, however, is any substantial discussion of the party body responsible for the work in Local 574—the Teamster *fraction* of the Minneapolis CLA [Communist League of America] branch," an omission she attributes to Palmer's "academic" background.

Tanner defines a party fraction as "the organization of party cadre in working bodies that regularly meet, discuss how to implement party perspectives, and continually evaluate ongoing work." The charge that the book neglects the role of the party fraction is belied by Tanner's own acknowledgment that "Palmer places the CLA leadership ... at the center of his narrative, detailing the ways in which they 'proved undeniably more resolute and far-seeing' and 'more decisively in control of the events' than the other left-wing 1934 strike leaderships." *Revolutionary Teamsters* provides a wealth of information about the disciplined intervention of CLA members, including national leadership figures such as James P. Cannon, Herbert Solow, Albert Goldman and Max Shachtman. As Palmer documents, the expanded CLA leadership collective effectively provided political direction for the strike—with the active support of the president and other officers of Teamster Local 574 who were not CLA members. The CLA had an internal division of labor, in which the leading party cadre within the union and outside it worked closely together. There was no fraction separate and apart from the grouping Tanner refers to as "the CLA strike leadership team." Her complaint that Palmer paid insufficient attention to the CLA "fraction" in the first part of the review appeared to be pointless nitpicking—a distinction without a difference.

The political significance of Tanner's criticism becomes somewhat clearer in the second part of her review (*Workers Vanguard*, 3 October 2014) when she complains: "Palmer finds fault with the failure to build caucuses based on the Transitional Program." She continues:

"Palmer echoes the line of a series of articles based on partial and now-dated research by Chris Knox that were

published in early issues of *Workers Vanguard*. These articles were subsequently reprinted by the embittered clot of ex-Spartacists and their hangers-on calling themselves the [International] Bolshevik Tendency."

We reprinted Knox's articles on "Trotskyist Work in the Trade Unions" in America from the 1920s to the 1950s, which were among the very best material ever published by the Spartacist League in its revolutionary period, in our 1998 edition of the *Transitional Program* in order to bring them to the attention of a broader and more contemporary audience. Tanner's dismissive comment suggests that the Prometheus Research Library has transcended Knox's contributions, which are now 40 years old. But, to our knowledge, neither the SL nor anyone else has produced updated research on the trade-union policy of the American adherents of the revolutionary Communist International that would call any of Knox's conclusions into question. Instead of pointing to any such material, Tanner offers the following:

"Palmer follows the BT in fetishizing the organizational form of the trade-union caucus. But the caucus is *not* the fundamental vehicle for communist work in the trade unions. That role is reserved for the *fraction of party members*. The fraction is strategic, the caucus episodic. Whether or not to form a caucus is a tactical question, usually depending on whether or not there exist broader forces with whom the fraction can bloc on key issues in order to fight for leadership in the union."

The caucus is a formation politically based on the Transitional Program as adapted for use in a given union, organized to fight for leadership within that sector of the workforce. This is a *strategic* task, not an "episodic" or tactical one. The fight for leadership will inevitably require a wide variety of tactics, including united fronts and blocs with other forces in the union, but the purpose of a caucus is not to pursue transitory bloc partners on particular issues. The caucus is a transitional organization whose purpose is to develop and expand the influence of the revolutionary party in the union—a function unrelated to the existence of any other political groupings in the union. The degree to which caucus membership coincides with membership of the party and the extent to which party members are able to operate openly will vary depending on concrete circumstances. But the caucus provides a pole to which party members in a particular union can recruit workers who are prepared to fight for a class-struggle program that includes the critical necessity of replacing capitalist rule with workers' power.

The SL arrived at the idea of a programmatically-based caucus through the experience of practical trade-union work in the U.S. in the 1960s and early 70s, particularly in the National Maritime Union. This approach was subsequently validated by the discovery that a parallel conception had guided the trade-union work of the U.S. Communist Party

prior to its Stalinization (see further work by Chris Knox in "Early Communist Work in the [U.S.] Trade Unions," in *The Transitional Program*, IBT edn. 1998).

A resolution passed in January 1974, at the first international meeting of what was to become the international Spartacist tendency, and published in the June 1974 *Internal Discussion Bulletin*, explicitly endorsed the caucus strategy:

"The work of communists in trade unions must aim at the construction of a class struggle group with a membership defined by participation in the group and by agreement with the program of the group; a program which is an application of the Transitional Program to the concrete trade union situation and which aims at posing the class struggle group as an alternative revolutionary leadership of the union."

The SL's 8 June 1974 Trade Union Memorandum, an internal document prepared by the Trade Union Commission, discussed the function of SL-supported caucuses:

"Unlike reformists and centrists, therefore, the SL seeks to organize oppositional groupings in the unions founded on the basis of the full application of the Trotskyist Transitional Program to the arena. Such caucuses are organizationally separate from the SL and limited to the unions in which they operate, yet they provide the basis for the *politically unambiguous application* of the SL program directly into the arenas of the class struggle.... They are thus similar in purpose to the early (1922-24) Trade Union Educational League (TUEL), trade union arm of the American [Communist Party] in the 1920's, which was a membership organization [based] on the party's program of transitional, class-struggle demands, including the call for 'a workers republic.'"

The authors presumed that their readers were aware that the role of an SL fraction was to prepare the ground to launch a caucus, referring at one point to "pre-caucus fraction development" and at another to "one fraction which faces the danger of being completely wiped out through layoffs in the expected downturn, requiring a probable long delay in caucus perspectives."

The memorandum observed that "Although recruitment [from the workforce] depends on the existence of a caucus to attract militants, it [recruitment] is a function of the fraction which furthermore must be accorded the highest priority." In other words, recruitment to the caucus is an essential aspect of the ability to pose an alternative leadership. Within that framework, an explicit distinction was drawn between the "politically unambiguous" caucus and a coalition or united front involving politically disparate elements:

"Despite the often-times close connection between caucus building and united-front work in the unions, the caucus is not a form of the united front itself. Confusion on this point aided the Stalinist degeneration of the American CP's trade union work in the 1920's. The original, programmatically-based, membership conception of the TUEL was replaced with a politically watered-down, permanent 'united front' coalition, in which all oppositional bureaucrats were welcome."

In 1983 we published a critique of the SL leadership's decision to junk its caucus perspective ("Stop The Liquidation Of The Trade Union Work!," bolshevik.org). The SL raised this issue in a 1995 polemic against us, which we reprinted with a point-by-point response in our bulletin

ICL vs. IBT (see in particular point 7). In disbanding its caucuses, the SL was not making some sort of "tactical" move to further the goal of building party fractions—it was making a strategic shift away from fighting for leadership in the unions at all.

One of the few places where SL members have had some sort of political profile in the past few decades is in New York City's Transport Workers Union (TWU) Local 100. But even here, where presumably they constitute some sort of fraction (albeit with no perspective of building a caucus), SL supporters have, to our knowledge, played no significant role in the internal political life of the union. In December 2005, when 33,000 members of Local 100 struck in defiance of anti-labor legislation and the union's international leadership, an SL statement supporting the workers sidestepped any criticism of the local's pro-capitalist leadership. This was no mere oversight, as *Workers Vanguard* later explained: "The [SL] leaflet did not directly attack Toussaint. Since we could not point to an alternative leadership of the strike, to do so would only have served to weaken the strike" (*Workers Vanguard*, 9 June 2006).

In a 10 July 2006 response ("On Criticism of Misleaders," bolshevik.org), we observed: "This simple statement is nothing less than a repudiation of one of the most basic precepts of Trotskyism—the necessity 'to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be.'" A policy of political prostration could only weaken the strike, as we pointed out:

"Defending [Local 100 President Roger Toussaint], and the strike, from capitalist attacks did not preclude attempting to advise the strikers, many of whom may have had illusions in Toussaint, of the possibility that their leadership might capitulate [which it did]. Alerting the more militant layers to this danger would not have weakened, but rather *strengthened* the strike and improved the chances of victory."

Because SL fractions no longer "seek to organize oppositional groups in the unions" capable of posing "an alternative revolutionary leadership," its supporters in Local 100 could only stand by passively as Toussaint and the other pro-Democratic Party bureaucrats pulled the plug on this important struggle, leaving *Workers Vanguard* to retroactively lament the lack of "an alternative leadership of the strike." ■

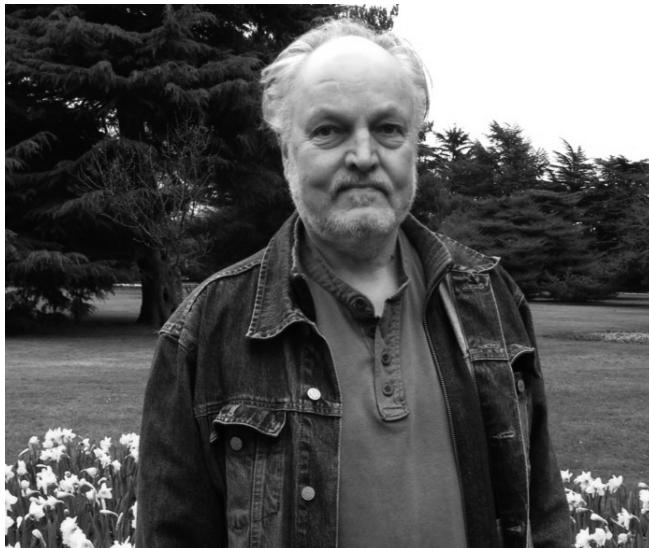
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Adrian Blakelock: 1948–2014



In June 2014, Adrian Blakelock, a supporter of the International Bolshevik Tendency, died in London after complications from liver failure.

Adrian will be remembered for his empathy and wit, as well as his enthusiasm for ideas and the need for revolutionary change. He was a link to earlier, if distorted, manifestations of Trotskyism in Britain. A creative man, a poet, a painter and an imaginative thinker, he had a passion and talent for cricket.

Adrian was influenced at an early age by the politics of his mother's family. His grandmother Muriel MacSwiney was a Communist with a strong nationalist tilt who was married to an Irish freedom fighter, Terence MacSwiney. This sparked in Adrian a lifelong interest in Irish republicanism and independence. His mother's father, Pierre Kahn, was a leading figure in the French resistance and a journalist for the French Communist paper, *L'Humanité*.

At home in Kent, his parents were involved in the Labour Party, and Adrian grew up in an atmosphere of leftist activism. He left school with few qualifications and worked in low-paid jobs until his mid 20s, when he began to study social work at Croydon College, a career move that also took him in the direction of the struggle for justice and a better world. His political journey was a long one.

Moving further to the left as he became actively involved with trade-union work in the Croydon branch of NALGO (the National and Local Government Officers' Association—forerunner of today's UNISON), Adrian was a union leader within the social services department throughout the late 1970s and 1980s. He also shared responsibility for building a new leadership of the Croydon branch by serving as an elected Executive Committee member in 1981–82 and 1983–84. He offered a radical perspective on national and international issues, and was actively involved in mobilizing support for miners and their families throughout the year-long miners' strike of 1984–85.

Adrian recognized the need to resist attacks on jobs, salaries and services and therefore the need to challenge

the right-wing leaders of his branch. He believed in solidarity with other trade unionists. For example, on 2 April 1980, he helped organize a NALGO delegation in support of an "Education Action Committee" lobby confronting the Tory-controlled council. Adrian's report about this lobby was circulated to hundreds of local NALGO members. He explained how Tory proposals would reduce building maintenance in schools, reduce support for pupils with special educational needs, decrease the nutritional standards of school meals and impose massive cuts in adult education.

Frustrated by the union leadership's lack of action, Adrian started to explore what the avowedly socialist groups could offer. He studied the publications of the International Socialists (forerunner of the Socialist Workers Party), the International Marxist Group and the Workers Revolutionary Party, and actively engaged in numerous discussions with each of them. In 1981, as a result of this careful process, he chose to join the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) together with his wife Lin.

While a member of the WRP, as part of the Croydon branch with Dot and Peter Gibson and others, Adrian participated in demonstrations, organized community events, attended educationals and took part in the WRP's hard regime of selling its daily paper, *Newslines*. When the WRP imploded in October 1985, like many others, Adrian became disillusioned with left politics. He continued to attend major events of the Cliff Slaughter splinter until about 1988 but was no longer as active as he had been. In the following years, he maintained contact with his comrades in the party, searching for answers, exchanging ideas and never losing interest in world events.

On 15 February 2003, Adrian marched in London with up to 2 million others against the Iraq war. It was on this demonstration that he met comrades of the International Bolshevik Tendency (IBT) and recognized the historical tradition of the IBT as containing the better elements of what he had learned in the WRP. He still retained his perspective of the need for a revolutionary vanguard party of the working class and shared this understanding with the IBT. After a few months of discussions in which he began to properly reassess some of the revisionist politics he had defended during his time in the WRP, and once again reviewing the British left, Adrian joined the IBT. He was an active member for a couple of years but then dropped to sympathizer status when ill health prevented him from contributing in the fuller way he would have liked. Adrian struggled with bipolar disorder, a debilitating mental health condition, and, sadly, in the last year of his life, his physical health also deteriorated fairly rapidly, due to alcoholism. This prevented him from engaging in many activities, political or otherwise.

Adrian will be remembered fondly for his passionate hatred of inequality and oppression, his admirable ability to reassess his political outlook relatively late in life and his dedication to the IBT's revolutionary program. Right to the end, he maintained his will to make sense of the world through his Marxist understanding. Adrian was proud that his daughter and her partner are supporters of the IBT. To them and to his wider family, we express our condolences. ■

Posted to bolshevik.org on 22 December 2014

From Ferguson to New York – Jail the Killer Cops! Down with Racist Police Terror!



SCOTT OLSON—GETTY IMAGES

Ferguson, 11 August 2014: police-state tactics terrorize local black population

Published 14 December on bolshevik.org.

In 1857, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that people of African descent had “no rights which the white man was bound to respect.” Whether slaves or freemen, blacks were not citizens, and were unequal to whites before the law. This ruling—the infamous Dred Scott decision—codified what had been a guiding principle for generations, i.e., the racist belief that blacks are inferior to whites.

It took a bloody civil war to destroy slavery and put in place a regime of formal equality, subsequently undermined in both the Jim Crow South and the North. A sustained civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s, threatening to unleash the power of the black masses, frightened the authorities into adopting a series of measures, most notably the Civil Rights Act of 1964, to enshrine legal equality and prohibit overt racial discrimination.

While the overturn of state-sanctioned segregation and other forms of institutionalized racism was a victory for all the oppressed, it could only be a half-victory in a society whose maintenance—both historically *and* today—requires a divided-and-conquered working population. Racism is a defining feature of capitalism in the “world’s greatest democracy.” Even with a black man in the White House, people of color in the U.S. are essentially second-class citizens.

Michael Brown & Eric Garner: Victims of Police Terror

On average, a white cop kills a black person every three or four days in the United States. Michael Brown

of Ferguson, Missouri and Eric Garner of Staten Island, New York—both of them unarmed when killed by a white police officer—became emblematic of this routine violence particularly after the outrageous decisions of grand juries not to indict their killers, Darren Wilson and Daniel Pantaleo.

“You can indict a ham sandwich,” famously quipped former New York State Chief Judge Sol Wachtler. If a prosecutor actually *wants* a grand jury to indict someone, it is exceedingly easy: “U.S. attorneys prosecuted 162,000 federal cases in 2010, the most recent year for which we have data. Grand juries declined to return an indictment in 11 of them” (fivethirtyeight.com, 24 November 2014). At the state level, where cases of police brutality are normally handled, the “failure” rate would appear to be higher, as cops frequently escape indictment for killing black people.

The Brown and Garner decisions are illustrative: grand juries let the cops off the hook after prosecutors presented what amounted to a case *for the defense* instead of seeking to secure an indictment by offering evidence and a narrative pointing to the need for a trial. St. Louis County Prosecuting Attorney Robert McCulloch, the prosecutor in the Brown case, has brought before a grand jury a total of five police officers who shot and killed suspects while on duty, “failing” to get an indictment *every single time*.

Garner’s murder was captured on a now-infamous video of Pantaleo, aided by several other cops, choking the father of six as he pleaded “I can’t breathe” before losing consciousness. The coroner “found that Mr. Garner’s



1917 PHOTO

IBT contingent, Toronto, December 2014

death was a homicide resulting from the chokehold—a maneuver banned by the Police Department in 1993—and the compression of his chest by police officers” (*New York Times*, 4 December 2014).

As if to underscore the injustice in the Garner case, New York prosecutors *did* manage to get a grand jury to indict Ramsey Orta, the man who filmed Garner’s murder, on weapons charges related to an incident alleged to have happened three weeks after the killing. That Orta is being railroaded for his role in exposing Pantaleo’s crime is suggested by the assertion of the cop “union,” the New York City Patrolmen’s Benevolent Association, that it is “criminals like Mr. Orta who carry illegal firearms who stand to benefit the most by demonizing the good work of police officers” (Reuters, 3 August 2014).

As thousands of demonstrators took to the streets to protest the “good work of police officers” in reaction to the grand jury decision in the Garner case, NYPD thugs arrested more than two hundred protestors. Cops in Berkeley, California arrested over a hundred, as they have in Ferguson, ground zero of recent mass unrest. Ferguson has become a virtual police state with National Guard deployments ordered by Democratic Governor Jay Nixon and local cops equipped with military-grade weaponry.

Cops & the State

Although sometimes of humble origin, cops are not part of the working class. They are the “first line of defense” of a social order that systematically subordinates working people. They are the domestic forces of repression who step in when the “normal” mechanisms of social pacification (e.g., the free market, the perception of the legitimacy of the government) fail to contain mass anger over the conditions of life in a class-divided, racist society. (See “Cops, Crime & Capitalism,” 1992, bolshevik.org)

Police, prosecutors, judges and government officials are, along with the military, the core elements of the state. History shows that all states serve the interests of a definite class, and in the U.S. today the state serves the interests of the capitalist ruling class. Working people may wrest concessions from the state—important gains such as formal

equality before the law and civil rights—but they cannot control it, cannot bend it to serve their will.

Even the most “democratic” political systems under capitalism are governed by states committed to ensuring the wealth and privileges of a class of exploiters, i.e., those who own the major means of production and distribution. As capitalism descends further and further into irrationality—deepening economic crises and environmental destruction—the intensification of social contradictions finds expression in the increasingly draconian actions of the state, which engages in mass surveillance of the population, mass incarceration of minorities, foreign wars of aggression and so on.

In the struggle against oppression, opponents of the system must fight every incursion on democratic rights and freedoms, such as the right of black people not to be murdered with impunity by racist police. It is necessary to demand that the killer cops be jailed, just as it is necessary to call for charges to be dropped against demonstrators. While locking up Wilson and Pantaleo or freeing arrested protestors will not overturn the system, it would be a small victory for the oppressed and a small setback for the oppressors. (See “On Jailing Killer Cops,” 1917 No. 31.)

Thousands of people in every major U.S. city have staged “die-ins” and marched to chants of “Black lives matter,” “Hands up, don’t shoot!” and “I can’t breathe!” Police and politicians are scrambling to put a lid back on the situation. They are using both the “carrot” of proposing band-aid reforms (e.g., making cops display their badge numbers, outlawing police chokeholds) and the “stick” of violently repressing protestors demonized as “rioters” and “looters.” U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder has opened a federal civil rights investigation into the Garner case, while New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio and Police Commissioner William Bratton have announced that NYPD officers will have to take a new three-day retraining course. Obama has launched a “task force” to propose remedial measures such as body cameras on cops. Black minister Al Sharpton, advisor to Obama and one-time FBI informant, has sought to calm tempers by begging the white millionaires’ club in Congress “to follow in the president’s footsteps and take legislative action to protect us, the citizens” (*Huffington Post*, 8 December 2014).

Sharpton and his ilk want to channel mass anger into dead-end campaigns to reform the police—when the truth is that the capitalist state can never be turned into an instrument serving the interests of its victims. Regardless of what is permitted by the “legislative action” of Congress, black people and the broader working class have a right to defend themselves against cop violence *by any means necessary*.

End Racism through Socialist Revolution!

The power to uproot capitalism is in the hands of those who keep its wheels turning by going to work every day in the factories, construction sites, office towers, retail outlets and other places in which wage labor is employed by capital. The working class—comprised of people of all ethnicities, genders and sexual orientations—is uniquely situated in modern society: it alone has the objective interests and ability to overturn capitalism and create a socialist world free of racism and other forms of oppression.

In its present condition, however, the working class is



AP

23 August 2014: Demonstrators protest murder of Eric Garner in Staten Island, New York

not ready—and is not even conscious of the need—to carry out its great historic task. Its organizations, primarily the trade unions, are weak and led by bureaucrats more interested in preserving what remains of their petty privileges than in bettering the lives of their members. The labor bureaucracy is wedded to the Democratic Party and a policy of collaboration with the capitalists, not class struggle.

Yet the grip of the bureaucrats on the working class can be challenged by the intervention of class-struggle militants, who are sometimes able to initiate important actions even in ordinary times. One of the clearest examples is provided by the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU). In 1984, black and white members of ILWU Local 10 (San Francisco) engaged in an 11-day illegal strike, refusing to unload apartheid cargo in solidarity with the masses of South Africa (see “11-Day Anti-Apartheid Struggle On San Francisco Docks,” *Bulletin of the External Tendency of the iSt*, No. 4). On 24 April 1999, the ILWU shut down the entire west coast of the U.S. in defense of black political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal (see “Labor: Fight to Free Mumia,” *1917* No.21). And after white cop Johannes Mehserle gunned down Oscar Grant, a young unarmed black man, in Oakland on New Year’s Day 2009, Locals 10 and 34 of the ILWU, along with workers in the Service Employees International Union Local 1021, closed down all ports in the Bay Area on 23 October 2010 (see “Killer Cops & Democrats,” *1917* No.33).

Such actions are glimmers of what would be possible on a broader scale if the multiracial working class, unrestrained by sell-out leaders, were to flex its muscle. Beyond instilling fear in the hearts of the powers-that-be, militant labor actions are training exercises for working-class activists. Capitalism inevitably generates crises, and on rare occasions these crises create revolutionary opportunities during which bold moves by experienced militants can galvanize millions of workers and open the road to fundamental change.

It is necessary to gather the most politically advanced elements of the working class and oppressed together in a revolutionary organization committed to advancing a program that connects the immediate, day-to-day needs and concerns of working people (whether for a decent living or for protection against racist police violence) to the historical project of expropriating capitalist property and supplanting the capitalist state with institutions of workers’ power. A mass revolutionary party with deep roots in all sectors of the working class can be built, but it requires the dedication of smaller numbers of activists *today* to begin to take seriously the need to study history—above all the lessons of the Russian Revolution of October 1917 led by the Bolshevik Party of V.I. Lenin and Leon Trotsky—and engage in vigorous discussion and debate of the essential elements of a revolutionary program. The International Bolshevik Tendency seeks to participate in the process of building a revolutionary party in the U.S. and around the world. ■

Revolutionary Thought and Practice

Platypus & the Maoists

The following is an edited version of a talk by IBT supporter Jason Wright, participating in a panel discussion on "Revolutionary Thought and Politics" at the Left Forum in New York City organized by the Platypus Affiliated Society on 1 June 2014. Joining him on the panel were Benjamin Blumberg from Platypus and Raymond Lotta of the Revolutionary Community Party (RCP). During Jason's speech, supporters of the Maoist RCP became noticeably agitated at some of his comments and, following his contribution, walked out of the forum in protest. Published 24 June 2014 on bolshevik.org. Full audio of the meeting is available at archive.org/details/RevolutionaryThoughtandPoliticsLeftForum.

As always, I welcome the opportunity to speak at the Left Forum and thank the Platypus Affiliated Society for inviting us. This particular session has had a long gestation. It seems for a while now that it has been the desire of Platypus to have a three-way presentation between New Left Maoism, as one of the more palatable faces of Stalinism, orthodox Trotskyism, as it was preserved via the anti-revisionist tradition of the Revolutionary Tendency of the American Socialist Workers Party and its successors, and of course the Platypus Affiliated Society, which as I have come to understand is heavily influenced by the Frankfurt School. I've deferred the engagement for a little while ... not because I think these are bad subjects to discuss and think about, but because I'm not sure some sort of gladiatorial combat enacted between the last Maoist and the last Trotskyist for Platypus's entertainment is all that productive.

Of course our tendency welcomes debate. There are some good questions posed by this forum, questions I answered for myself some 20 years ago. I think the membership of Platypus should be engaging with and answering these questions for themselves. That is assuming that there are members (and I hope that there are) who are attracted to Platypus and to Marxism because Marxism provides them not only with a critique of the society they live in, but also a program for transforming that society and liberating humanity.

Platypus itself is a reflection and crystallization of the "academicization of intellectual life." There are a lot of reasons why this occurred, from the large number of New Left era "revolutionaries" like Bill Ayres and Angela Davis who reinvented themselves as radical profs, to the partial deindustrialization of America and the accompanying union-busting campaigns that severely reduced the scope in which an (itself greatly diminished) ostensibly "socialist" left could operate. Platypus can be partially attributed to this phenomenon, but it is hardly unique. When I was in my late teens and first attending demonstrations in solidarity with the Sandinistas and the FMLN, the ISO [International Socialist Organization] was one of the more activist groups with pretty aggressive paper sellers. Today the ISO's spheres of activity seem to be largely reduced to maneuvering within the trade-union bureaucracy and to an academic existence. Though I suppose Haymarket Books is where the left wing of American social democ-

racy does the least harm and at least manages to publish some interesting material in affordable paperbacks that would be otherwise inaccessible.

From what I've been able to discern from Platypus's "synthesis" of Marxism, there are two tendencies that have overwhelmingly influenced the vision of Platypus. One is Trotskyism, primarily as embodied by at least two of the founding members' encounters with the already severely degenerated Spartacist League of the late 1980s and early 1990s, but also reflecting the struggle for Leninist orthodoxy embodied in the early SL and its predecessor, the Revolutionary Tendency of the SWP. Platypus uses the literature of this tendency in their study groups, as do we.

These Platypus founders are also aware that the Spartacist League's rapid expansion in the 1970s came as the upsurge that we have come to think of as the New Left was waning. The SL at its best was able to win some of the more thoughtful elements of Maoism to Trotskyism. It also competed, in its interventions in SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] and other campaigns, with groups such as Progressive Labor. So Platypus has an ancillary and subordinate interest in Maoism as the "other" and more prominently visible current of Marxism in the 1960s and 1970s. I want to acknowledge that, but not go into details since our time is limited and I think that this has already been addressed in the May 2011 forum at which our comrade Tom Riley spoke ["The Marxist turn: The New Left in the 1970s," platypus1917.org]. Since PL is a lot less interesting today and the Kasama Project has been hosted before (and perhaps represents a less useful foil in this battle royale), we are here today with the comrades of the RCP, who represent the most activist element of what remains of Maoism in the U.S. They are the logical choice.

Frankfurt School: Theory Without Praxis

The other tendency that influences, and at this point seems to dominate, Platypus is the Frankfurt School. Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Fromm and Habermas were clever men, and when they address cultural matters some of them occasionally had useful insights. But I think there is also something in the way in which "being" determined consciousness in this crowd. It's hard to talk of it as a cohesive whole, since it certainly wasn't a democratic-centralist party, but the general tendency was for theory to be abstracted from praxis. By and large there was a lack of engagement by these men in their youth in the pivotal struggles that occurred within the communist movement. They then witnessed the trauma of the midnight of the 20th century with the hegemony of a totalitarian bureaucracy in the USSR and the ascendancy of fascism throughout much of Europe. It is certainly understandable that most of the Frankfurt School fled for their lives, first to Geneva, then to the U.S. But ultimately the relocation marched in lockstep with an accommodation to the imperialist status quo in their country of exile. This was reflected in a further withdrawal into pure academia, in perhaps what was

even a calculated move to gain citizenship and prove their legitimacy by divorcing theory from social movements and working-class struggle.

I suppose that our own period, also being a product of defeat, in the wake of the counterrevolution that swept away the degenerated Soviet Union and the deformed workers states of Eastern Europe, parallels the defeat experienced by the Frankfurt School. So it is not surprising that it gives birth to a pessimism and a retreat by some clever men and women that also parallels that of the Frankfurt School. In one sense, I can see the seduction of it all. Many people undeniably feel a frustration in the streets when struggle is at a nadir, a feeling that activism is pointless, that every demonstration brings out only the “usual suspects” and that it is more an act of bearing moral witness than any sort of step forward. But one could also argue that, while many Platypus events are useful and at their best illuminating, the framework also has a certain sterility, theoretical acrobatics that seem more like mental masturbation than a genuine attempt to produce a new “unity of theory and practice.”

Contradictions of the RCP

Despite numerous references made by the RCP to the “new synthesis brought forward by Bob Avakian,” I don’t think future generations will condemn the RCP for withdrawing into an ivory tower or over-thinking questions of Marxist theory. In addition to the ISO, when I was first coming around politics, the RCP was another group you saw a lot of and I always appreciated its militancy. I was recruited to an ostensibly Trotskyist organization in 1992, via a front group they were running that was involved in a lot of abortion clinic defense work. These were direct-action campaigns that involved physically removing thugs from the pro-life organization Operation Rescue. Our best military bloc partners were Refuse and Resist, which was a sort of front group of the RCP. I had a certain respect for their tactics on the ground.

One thing I noticed even then, as a raw newbie, was that we did much better recruiting to our party and consolidating our members. A young lesbian comrade of mine, who had been around Refuse and Resist previously, explained to me that this was because the RCP had some truly backward position on sexual politics—essentially that gay men and lesbians were barred from joining the RCP. She characterized the RCP’s position as being that gay men preferred other men because they were too misogynistic to have relationships with women, and lesbians were lesbians out of a deformed reaction to patriarchal oppression. It seemed to me a total contradiction that a group that could have understood the need to fight for abortion rights, for the right of women to control their own bodies and reproductive choices, could have been so bad when it came to people’s sexual orientation. It made sense to me that no one from my generation who was attracted to the “left” would be able to stomach such a reactionary position. Certainly not the anarchist types who entered Refuse and Resist, presumably because of its militancy and military prowess, and then seemed to quickly exit via a revolving door.

This impression was confirmed to me when I had the opportunity to read the Kasama Projects pamphlet “Out of the Red Closet,” kasamaproject.org. The experiences related in this all too accurately reflect my erstwhile comrade’s

assessment. It is both heartbreaking and sickening to read the experiences of these former RCP contacts and comrades and reflect that this conduct was occurring in the last quarter of the 20th century within a party that trumpets itself as fighting for the emancipation of humanity.

I recently read the RCP’s 2010 publication, “Constitution for the New Socialist Republic in North America (Draft proposal),” revcom.us. In addition to reaffirming that Marx and Engels were correct—in contrast to their utopian predecessors—to resist this kind of elaborate speculation about what a future communist society would concretely look like, I must say that this is a strange book that reminds me a bit of Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* and a bit of Robert’s *Rules of Order*. But it does offer an interesting window into the mindset of the RCP. The 91-page book is “intended to set forth a basic model, and fundamental principles and guidelines, for the nature and functioning of a vastly different society and government than now exists: the New Socialist Republic in North America.” This “New Socialist Republic in North America” could, according to the RCP “only have been brought into being as a result of the heroic, self-sacrificing struggle carried out by millions of people ... with the leadership of the ... Revolutionary Communist Party, acting as the vanguard of the revolutionary process.” No false modesty there.

And so it goes through an 8-page preamble, followed by a 38-page article, outlining the future central government, including the legislature and how it will be elected, down to an 18-year-old voting age and special provisions to guarantee RCP electoral representation, the election from this body of an executive council, the future spheres of government, the economy, the environment, defense and security, justice and the rights of the people, international relations, education, science, health and medicine, the media and art and culture.

In the final 50 pages the RCP primarily focuses on many important issues of special oppression in the U.S., including black Americans (for whom they propose a referendum for an “autonomous African-American region”) and Mexican Americans (parts of the Mexican majority regions may be returned to Mexico or exercise self-determination to form an autonomous region). They also have chapters on Native Americans, Puerto Rico and Hawaii, and on the oppression of women. I don’t generally think it’s good practice to polemicize against omissions since, as political people, we often have more to say than we have time to say it in or pages to print it on. But I find it interesting that in 91 pages there is only one reference to gays and lesbians, within a chapter dealing with the organization of the military of the future socialist state, where “discrimination against people on the basis of sexual orientation is prohibited.” In other words, it appears the RCP is now in sync with where liberal Democrats and the most conservative wing of the LGBT movement were at a quarter century ago. The RCP advocates nothing more than the same policy Barack Obama has already technically instituted in the imperialist U.S. military. They spent more time elaborating their plans for gun control than they spent on gay rights.

It also might be worth reminding those with short historical memories that the RCP’s direct predecessor, the Revolutionary Union, opposed busing for school integration—the front page headline of the October 1974 issue of *Revolution* blared: “People must unite to smash Boston

busing plan” (reprinted in “The Fight to Implement Busing: For Labor/Black Defence to Stop Racist Attacks and to Smash Fascist Threats,” bolshevik.org, p29). After capitulating to black-nationalist rhetoric on the subject of community control, they applied this with a consistency that led them to side with the white racists of Boston in their opposition to school integration.

Of course the problem with the RCP is not primarily that they are bad on gay rights, though this does perhaps reflect the social conservatism of Stalinism, the attitudes of party chairman Avakian and the role that party leaders play in Stalinist obedience cults.

Maoism is historically rooted in the Stalinized Chinese Communist Party. Aside from the U.S., the Chinese party is the only other one I can think of where a primary section of the leadership and founding cadre went over to the Left Opposition and was purged in a fairly hegemonic bloc. There are some interesting memoirs by Chinese Trotskyists that are recommended reading on this, including Wang Fan-hsi [*Memoirs of a Chinese Revolutionary 1919–1949*] and Zheng Chaolin [*An Oppositionist for Life*]. It is true, as I understand it, that Mao had significant autonomy from the Moscow line, probably at least partially attributable to the conditions of leading a guerilla resistance in isolated mountains. It was this Stalinized party, schooled in resistance, that led the massive peasant uprising to destroy capitalism in China and establish a workers’ state that was deformed at birth. The pressure of imperialism forced the Maoist bureaucracy to remain aligned with the USSR. It was ultimately the Chinese bureaucracy’s desire to escape the shadow of Moscow that led to the Sino-Soviet split rather than the absurd and metaphysical notion that the USSR became “state capitalist” when the last breath escaped from Joseph Stalin’s body.

The Chinese Stalinists received a rude awakening when it turned out that China was simply too poor to apply Soviet-style industrialization. This crisis culminated in the Great Leap Forward of 1958, a utopian-reactionary fantasy plan in which the party worked the peasantry to the limits of physical endurance. Mao was responsible for the Great Leap Forward, even defending the absurdity of backyard steel furnaces, and he never rejected the principles underlying this program that led China to the brink of starvation. During 1959–61, Mao lost stature due to the failure of this policy. The Liu regime that followed offered no more of a revolutionary solution, but rather relied on Bukharinist (that is, a right-Communist) economic policy. The inter-party struggle that followed between Mao and Liu represented no significant difference or alternative for the Chinese proletariat, nor did the anti-proletarian Cultural Revolution of the 1960s, in which Mao’s faction reconsolidated control of the party and conducted a vicious score-settling campaign against their opponents.

There is no rhyme or reason to these Stalinist zigzags except for capitulation to external pressures and an inconsistent program. In this sense, Chinese Stalinism too is a pessimistic capitulation to “actually existing reality.” And American Maoists, as its cheerleaders, implicitly accept responsibility for its irrational absurdities and numerous crimes.

Program and Theory

Platypus mentions both Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg in the short document they circulated to prompt discussion

for this session. And that, I think, brings up a good point. I just finished reading Pierre Broué’s excellent history of the failed revolutions in Germany [*The German Revolution 1917–1923*], failures that reinforced the isolation of the USSR and encouraged those conservative and retreating elements in the USSR who supported Stalin’s “socialism in one country,” and led to the fascist triumph of Hitler within Germany itself. Much of the history of the 20th century is written large in the failure of the German revolutions.

Rosa Luxemburg was a great revolutionary. She saw, long before Lenin, the rot that had infested social democracy, particularly the flagship German section. But she was not won over to Lenin’s position on the vanguard party. Despite wishing to see the rightist and opportunist tendencies in German social democracy defeated, she had a hard time breaking from the conception of the party of the whole class. Only in the final days of her life, by which time it was too late, did she begin to recognize the need for German communists to strike out on their own as something more than an external faction. Partially this was because she looked to spontaneous renewal from the mass rank-and-file, but also because she pessimistically believed that a successful party could only be founded under more auspicious circumstances.

This reminds me, lest I be accused of living in a glasshouse, that historical pessimism took its toll on the Trotskyist movement as well. Isaac Deutscher, Trotsky’s biographer, was, as a representative of Polish Trotskyists, opposed to the founding the Fourth International. He believed, like Luxemburg, that the moment was waning and not ripe. This attitude finds reflection in the third and final volume of Deutscher’s biography of Trotsky [*The Prophet Outcast*], where he gives the crisis of the French section and Trotsky’s involvement with his U.S. supporters short shrift, regarding them apparently as distractions from the literary work Trotsky ought to be concentrating on. This is an assessment based on not understanding or not wanting to see the critical hopes Trotsky placed first on the French, then on the Americans, to lead the campaign to found the Fourth International. The American Trotskyist leader James P. Cannon was able to see the thread of continuity that ran between Deutscher’s ideas and the theoretical foundation of Pabloite revisionism that wrecked the Fourth International.

Trotsky, like Luxemburg, was not an early adopter of Lenin’s vision of the party. He was won to it late and won to it the hard way. But once won to it, he didn’t waver. So, I know Platypus may struggle to understand this, since the IBT has a certain academic reputation ourselves, but at the end of the day program is paramount—a party based on the program and the revolutionary will to carry it out. There is a quote from Trotsky we really like. In fact we like it so much we put it on the cover of every issue of our paper:

“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.”

Down with the National Security Law! Defend Democratic Rights!

UPP Banned in South Korea



December 2014: UPP members protest decision of Constitutional Court

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On 19 December 2014, the Constitutional Court of South Korea ordered the disbanding of the Unified Progressive Party (UPP) on the grounds of alleged “support to North Korea,” expelling the party’s five deputies from parliament. Judicial and police agencies announced that any gathering related to the UPP is henceforth illegal.

In the 2012 elections, the UPP received more than 2 million votes, over 10 percent of the total. The attack on the party comes after decades of fierce political repression in a climate of anti-communist hysteria, which has seen the UPP condemned for “conspiracy to rebellion,” resulting in various repressive measures (see “Crackdown in Korea: Defend the UPP from state oppression!,” bolshevik.org, 5 September 2013).

The ban shows South Korea for what it really is – a semi-police state, which denies working people the right to free association and the free expression of political views. The IBT defends the UPP against state repression, just as we defend the right of all political tendencies within the workers’ movement to organize, to argue their politics, to stand for parliamentary elections and to take their seats when elected. This basic democratic right has particular importance for the working class and oppressed. Only through the full and free exchange of ideas will revolutionaries be able to combat the influence of political programs that lead workers to act against their own class interests. It is the duty of the left and workers’ movement in Korea to rally in defense of the UPP. *An injury to one is an injury to all!*

Although the UPP has never been a real threat to the bourgeois order in South Korea, the capitalists fear it as an expression of independent working-class political organization. But the UPP’s bureaucratic, Stalinist and nationalist political program does not provide a way forward for the Korean working class. In 2011, the UPP split from the Korean Democratic Labor Party, but carried forward that party’s traditions of reformism and class collaborationism, graphically illustrated in the 2012 presidential election when they withdrew from the race in favor of the Liberal candidate.

Overt support to the North Korean regime is illegal in the South under the National Security Law, and the UPP leadership has always been cautious about linking the party too closely. It is necessary to defend the UPP against state repression regardless of its views on North Korea.

Similarly, it is necessary to defend the North Korean state against capitalist counterrevolution and imperialist attack. It is not the undemocratic character of the Kim regime, but the fact that North Korea is a deformed workers’ state resting on collectivized property forms, that so enrages the Park Geun-hye government in the South.

Only the socialist transformation of Korea can protect and expand the rights of working people and the oppressed, who have a material interest in overturning both the Kim and Park governments and establishing the organs of workers’ rule – a workers’ political revolution in the North, combined with a social revolution in the South, uniting the Korean peninsula on a revolutionary basis. ■

For International Labor Action against Israeli Apartheid!
Down with Zionist Terrorism!
Defend the Palestinians!



JUSTIN BENTININ—THE GUARDIAN

August 2014: Pro-Palestinian activists in Oakland prevented unloading of Israeli ship

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The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) launched “Operation Protective Edge” against the Hamas-run Gaza Strip on 8 July, placing the Palestinian population in Gaza under brutal military assault and occupation. Ostensibly designed to neutralize Hamas militants’ ability to fire rockets into Israel, the military campaign launched by the Zionist apartheid state quickly expanded into a ground-invasion force of tens of thousands of troops aiming to destroy Gaza’s network of underground tunnels. The result was mass civilian casualties on the Palestinian side, with the IDF ruthlessly targeting homes and schools.

Tel Aviv’s imperialist patron in Washington distanced itself from these war crimes by feigning concern for the Palestinian victims and asking Israel to tone

things down, while liberals called for fact-finding investigations by the UN and the “international community.” Several ceasefires collapsed into renewed fighting until an Egyptian-brokered deal eventually brought this latest episode of Zionist military aggression to a conclusion after seven weeks. Gaza now lies in waste, and Israel’s racist rulers have asserted their right to renew hostilities at any point, while continuing non-military aggression by appropriating 400 hectares of Palestinian land on the West Bank

The situation today is desperate. Since withdrawing its occupation army in 2005, Israel has isolated and controlled Gaza with a crippling air, sea and land blockade designed to make daily life unbearable. Before this most recent assault, unemployment stood at 40 percent and more than 80 percent of Gaza’s 1.6 million people relied on interna-

tional aid of some sort to merely survive. Almost 1 million Gazans are UN-registered refugees, the current slaughter displacing a fourth of Gaza's population. Over 2,000 have been killed and 11,000 wounded, approximately 70 percent of them civilians.

While the bourgeois press poses the issue as one of "Israel's right to defend itself" against Hamas "terrorists," the reality is a crushing one-sided victory for the Zionists, the largely ineffective home-made rockets fired from within Gaza proving no match for the IDF's "Iron Dome," F-16 fighter jets and 175,000 active personnel. Yet the Zionist war machine is not invincible and ran into some effective resistance from Hamas fighters on the ground who managed to kill 64 Israeli soldiers, mainly in house-to-house fighting.

The Israeli rulers' wanton brutality has provoked growing opposition to Zionist crimes around the world. Over the past few years one of the most prominent expressions of this sentiment is the "Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions" (BDS) campaign, which has managed to focus attention on Israeli apartheid, challenge the bogus claim that Israel is "the only democracy in the Middle East" and animate an important layer of solidarity activists. However, as we noted in "Strategies for Palestinian Liberation: On the 'Boycott, Divestment & Sanctions' Campaign" (1917 No.33), this approach tends to "express and reinforce the debilitating illusion that the institutions of monopoly capitalism and global imperialism can be employed as tools of liberation for the oppressed." The key to effective international solidarity is to pursue a strategy with the main axis focussed on labor action rather than consumer boycotts and appeals for imperialist sanctions:

"the logic of workers' solidarity actions is in fact *counterposed* to a strategy premised on the illusion that opponents of Israeli apartheid can find allies in corporate boardrooms and among the Zionists' imperialist patrons. The reason that the international workers' movement is a potentially powerful ally of the Palestinians is that it can deal tangible blows to the oppressors by paralyzing the means of production, communication and transportation."

On 16 August, at the Port of Oakland in the San Francisco Bay Area, the IBT participated in a five-day community picket initiated by pro-Palestinian and labor militants that successfully prevented the unloading of the Israeli container ship *Zim Piraeus*—the longest ever blockade of an Israeli vessel. Although carried out by external activists rather than members of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU), the action would not have been successful without the support of port workers who for several days refused to cross the community picket lines.

Defense of Gaza against the Zionist oppressors is an issue of vital importance to the entire international workers' movement and can become a focus for militant labor action by class-conscious union militants. The Palestinians have every right to self-defense—in any military confrontation between Palestinian forces and the IDF, workers and the oppressed unconditionally side with the Palestinians and should be prepared to take action to defeat the imperialist-backed Zionist war machine. But a class-struggle approach needs to go beyond simple solidarity. The Marxist framework for



Palestinians in Gaza Strip: victims of Zionist terror

solving the seemingly intractable problems in present-day Israel-Palestine is: not Jew against Arab, but class against class!

"The Zionist behemoth can only be destroyed through proletarian revolution from the inside. This requires the construction of a bi-national Leninist-Trotskyist party in Israel-Palestine, intransigently committed to the defense of Palestinian national rights. A revolutionary workers' party would side militarily with any Palestinian resistance to Zionist repression, while opposing indiscriminate attacks on Jewish civilians and making no political concessions to bourgeois-nationalist, Islamist or other petty-bourgeois misleaders.

"It is a profound mistake to view the Jewish working class as one large undifferentiated reactionary mass. There has always been a layer of Jewish Israelis who have had the courage to oppose the crimes of their rulers. While mercilessly combating all variants of Zionism as inherently reactionary and anti-working class, Marxists must seek to develop connections with the more advanced elements of the Jewish proletariat and find ways to intervene in their conflicts with the Zionist master class.

"The struggle to build a vanguard party rooted in both communities that is committed to the creation of a bi-national workers' state within a Socialist Federation of the Middle East will be an extremely difficult one. But there is no other historically progressive solution to the poisonous morass that imperialism and Zionism have created. Only a perspective of joint class struggle by Jewish and Palestinian workers against Zionist tyranny can lay the basis for the equitable resolution of the deep-seated national antagonisms and open the road to social emancipation for all the exploited and oppressed peoples of the region."

—"Israeli Apartheid & Palestinian Oppression,"
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Greek Crisis...

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closer to the possibility of taking office, Tsipras has been softening his image and signaling that he is no threat to the Greek capitalists whose state he hopes to administer. The *Observer* explains:

“Aware that the vast majority want to remain in the eurozone, Tsipras, who turned 40 last year, has toned down his anti-European rhetoric. Gone are the references to ‘tearing up’ the memoranda of conditions attached to the country’s rescue programmes. Last week he went out of his way to placate German taxpayers, saying that they had ‘nothing to fear from a Syriza government.’ ‘Our aim is not for a confrontation with our partners, to get more credits or a licence for new deficits,’ he wrote in the economic daily *Handelsblatt*. ‘It is to stabilise the country, reach a balanced primary budget and end the bloodletting from German and Greek taxpayers.’”

—*Ibid.*

In his forthcoming book, *My Left*, Tsipras suggests the possibility that a Syriza government could introduce its own version of austerity: “Holding to a budget balance goal is really a key point in our strategy, as it gives us the possibility to negotiate from a strong position. That said, we need to say that budget balance doesn’t mean resorting to austerity per se” (Bloomberg, 8 January 2015).

The prospect of holding office has also led Syriza to tone down its foreign policy rhetoric, as the business news agency Bloomberg (14 January 2015) notes:

“As it comes closer to gaining power in Greece, the anti-establishment Syriza party that once advocated a pull-out from NATO and expulsion of the U.S. Navy from a base in Crete is moving toward the foreign-policy mainstream.... With the party holding a slim lead in the polls for the Jan. 25 election, even Syriza’s commitment to rolling back European sanctions on Russia is in question.”

No Coalition with Capitalist Parties!

A Syriza government cannot lift Greek capitalism out of its crisis. The pain inflicted on the population is likely to intensify—quite possibly resulting in mass upheavals. Greece’s ruling class has a tradition of resorting to military dictatorship to restore “order,” and it is entirely conceivable they will do so again if they find that parliamentary maneuvers are not enough to maintain social peace. The growing forces of Golden Dawn will undoubtedly play a role in the calculations of the bourgeoisie. Since Syriza has no intention of launching a serious assault on the power of the ruling class by expropriating the holdings of domestic and foreign capital, and is promising instead to somehow make capitalism work for a majority of the Greek population, it is laying the groundwork not simply for disappointed voters but for a potentially bloody outcome to the crisis.

The 35 percent of Greeks who support Syriza do not yet understand this. Beaten down, under attack on many fronts and without a genuinely revolutionary alternative, they desperately yearn for some improvements in their lives and see Syriza—untested in office but with concrete promises for reforms—as willing to fight the established powers.

It is widely expected that Syriza will win the election but fail to gain an absolute majority, and will therefore seek coalition partners in order to govern. The only other explicitly working-class party of any size, the KKE, has consistently refused to consider participation in a coalition. Syriza itself has declared it will not govern with either of the parties of the existing ruling alliance or with To Potami, a petty-bourgeois “anti-corruption” formation that has declared its willingness to form a coalition with either Syriza or New Democracy. To Potami is seen by most bourgeois commentators as a likely kingmaker, and it would be naïve to presume, particularly in light of the flexibility Tsipras has displayed on austerity, that Syriza could not find “pragmatic” rationalizations for reversing its earlier posture if forming a government required it. Notably, Syriza has failed to exclude the possibility of a coalition with the right-wing populist Independent Greeks.

Tsipras speaks vaguely of leading a “government of the left,” but Syriza has made no commitment to unite only with working-class parties, thus leaving open the possibility of entering into a popular front, a coalition with bourgeois or petty-bourgeois parties. The *New York Times* (20 January 2015) notes that a bourgeois coalition partner could be quite convenient for Tsipras in explaining why a government headed by Syriza is unable to carry out its promises to defend workers’ interests:

“For Mr. Tsipras in particular, an alliance with To Potami, which has cast itself as the party of moderation and preached the need to stay in the eurozone at all costs, could be politically useful. It could help soothe the fears of creditors and financial markets that have been unnerved by earlier statements from Mr. Tsipras about renegotiating Greece’s bailout agreements. And it could provide him political cover should he need to shift away from the more radical demands of the far left wing of his party and compromise with the so-called troika.”

Whenever parties rooted in the working class have governed in coalitions with bourgeois partners, workers’ struggles have been demobilized. In some cases this has paved the way for a rightist dictatorship. In 1936, the Greek Communist Party, which had been leading a mass strike wave, abandoned class-struggle tactics in favor of seeking to form a government with the Liberal Party of Eleftherios Venizelos. The result was the brutal military dictatorship of Ioannis Metaxas:

“All the major strike movements of 1936, moreover, were under the direct leadership of the Communist Party.... By 1936, on instructions from the Comintern, they had made an about face and began their ultra-opportunist course of the People’s Front. Instead of organizing the workers for decisive revolutionary action and working to draw the peasants of the countryside into the struggle, throughout the fateful months between April and August 1936, when the working class was in deep revolutionary ferment, the Stalinists busied themselves with a campaign to force the Liberal Party to organize with them a People’s Front. The Liberal Party, however, had heard its master’s voice and turned down the Stalinist offer. They were busy easing the way for Metaxas. The Stalinists wasted the whole six months in these criminal negotiations—six months that should have been employed to mobilize the broad masses for the revolutionary assault on the capitalist government. Just as in Spain, bourgeois democracy had



Sinister neo-Nazi Golden Dawn poses deadly danger to Greek workers' movement

become an illusion, a reactionary snare in Greece in 1936. The only alternatives were Metaxas or Soviet power. There existed in Greece in 1936 no third alternative."

— "Civil War in Greece," *Fourth International*,
February 1945

If Syriza were campaigning as a workers' party committed to a serious fight against the capitalists, it would rule out any possibility of a coalition with bourgeois forces. In that situation, the struggle to build a revolutionary party in Greece might best be advanced by Marxists giving critical support to Syriza in the election—that is, by pointing out the reformist core of Syriza's program and its inability to solve the most fundamental problems faced by workers yet advocating that Syriza be put to the test of office to expose it before the eyes of the working class. Such a tactic could help in the task of politically defeating Syriza and breaking its most militant working-class supporters away to the project of a revolutionary socialist party.

But while Syriza entertains the possibility of governing with one of the minor capitalist parties, it is impossible for Marxists to extend this kind of electoral support. A coalition with the Independent Greeks or To Potami would remove even the pretense that Syriza stands for the interests of the poor, the oppressed and the working class.

Two years ago, in "Greece: A Crisis of Leadership" (1917 No. 35), we outlined the perspective around which militants in Greece can build a revolutionary alternative to Syriza:

"Greek workers need an internationalist communist party committed to the fight for proletarian power. Following the example of the Bolsheviks, such a party would advance *transitional demands* aimed at deepening workers' struggles and exposing the pro-capitalist politics of the union bureaucrats and their partners in the reformist left. To address the problem of growing unemployment,

revolutionaries would demand the construction of public works on a massive scale, as well as a sliding scale of wages and hours to distribute work among all those able to perform it, while also ensuring that purchasing power is not eroded by inflation. A mobilized, militant workers' movement would demand an end to capitalist secrecy and an opening of the books of the banks and commercial and industrial enterprises to expose the massive swindles and outright theft that have helped bring Greek society to the brink of the abyss. When the imperialist financial agencies demand the dissolution of public sector companies as part of their 'rescue' plans, the workers' movement must respond by mobilizing the masses to seize the means of production, transport and communication in order to lay the basis for constructing a new society in which planning replaces irrational speculation.

"A socialist revolution requires the expropriation of the capitalists—both foreign and domestic. It can only be secured by dismantling of the capitalists' repressive apparatus, and replacing it with new institutions of proletarian rule. On this basis, the road is open for humanity to eliminate the insanity of an economy geared to maximizing private profit for the few, and create a social system dedicated to meeting the needs of all. "A revolutionary breakthrough in Greece would, of course, immediately be targeted by every imperialist power on earth. But the victorious Greek workers could count on an enormous outpouring of enthusiastic support from billions of victims of capitalist austerity—just as the Russian workers could after their revolution in October 1917. The birth of a Greek workers' republic would dramatically reconfigure global politics and signal the beginning of a struggle to create the Socialist United States of Europe—an event of world-historic importance."

Syriza & the Dangers of Popular Frontism

Managing the Greek Crisis



Posted on bolshevik.org on 24 January 2015, on the eve of Greek election

Since the outbreak of the global financial crisis and the imposition of severe austerity measures dictated by the Troika (International Monetary Fund, European Central Bank and European Commission), life in Greece has become considerably harder for the mass of the population. One in five workers, and half of youth, are unemployed. Government spending, the minimum wage and unemployment benefits have all been slashed by one-fifth, and education spending and civil servants' salaries have been cut by one-third. Pensions are shrinking while the pension contribution period has been extended by five years. Suicides are averaging 70 per month, and homelessness is widespread.

In this climate of social devastation, rooted in the irrationality of the capitalist system and Greece's dependency on foreign capital (primarily German and French), the authority of the ruling coalition of New Democracy and PASOK has increasingly diminished. Popular support for PASOK in particular has fallen dramatically. With the political center collapsing, the neo-Nazis of Golden Dawn have grown in size. This political polarization has included an enormous advance for Syriza, a reformist "far left" organization. A week before the legislative elections on 25 January 2015, a public opinion poll conducted by the newspaper *Parapolitika* put Syriza at 35 percent, New Democracy at 30 percent, To Potami (The River) at 7 per-

cent, Golden Dawn and the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) each at 5 percent, PASOK at 4 percent and the Independent Greeks at 3 percent.

Syriza gained international attention when it was placed second in the June 2012 elections on the basis of advocating a reform program its leaders dubbed a "European New Deal" after Franklin D. Roosevelt's "New Deal" of the 1930s. Syriza pledges to provide free electricity, housing, meal subsidies, medical care and public transport for those below the poverty line and to raise the minimum wage by 50 percent—from less than €500 to €750 per month. To fund these proposals, it promises to go after the privileges enjoyed by the Greek Orthodox Church and the shipyard owners (representing most of Greece's richest capitalists), introduce a tax on incomes above €500,000 and increase taxes for the biggest companies. Syriza claims that after assuming office it will be able to negotiate a deal in which Greece's international debt will "be drastically reduced and interest repayments cut" (*Observer*, 17 January 2015).

Syriza has postured as the champion of the exploited and has supported workers' struggles, including that of cleaners at the Finance Ministry who struck against redundancy last year and have since camped out in tents in central Athens, occasionally clashing with the police. Syriza's leader, Alexis Tsipras, has vowed: "We will introduce labour legislation in collaboration with the World Labour Organization repealing anti-labour memoranda legislation" (left.gr, 18 January 2015).

Despite the pro-worker rhetoric, as Syriza comes

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