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## Stop Workfare — Jobs for All!

by Evelyn Kaye

Workers don't need a crystal ball to see their future. All they have to do is to watch the sleazeball in the White House. Last summer the President signed a "welfare reform" bill. People who work for a living are being told that a bunch of freeloaders "who don't want to work" are being dumped. Add the code language that reads, "Anyway, those people are Blacks and Latinos — mostly women who drop kids by the bucketload in order to live like queens."

So goes the ruling-class line. But the real bucketload is coming from Washington.

"Welfare reform" is a vicious attack on an important gain of the working class. How vicious? Not only does it knock adult workers off the welfare rolls; it also cuts off all those "dependent" children, disabled and elderly poor. It weans them off their welfare "dependency" by letting them starve! What's more, it cancels food stamps for millions of working-class families, including all legal immigrants. And finally, it literally robs hundreds of thousands of legal immigrants of their right to Supplementary Social Security (SSI) benefits.

The anti-welfare campaign has an even broader target: the vast majority of the working class, including the better-off workers, a good number of whom are buying into Clinton's anti-welfare scam. The attack whips up and plays on reactionary attitudes toward women, racial and ethnic minorities and immigrants. It is calculated to redirect the fears of the more stably employed workers away from their real enemies and



Protest against Calif. Gov. Wilson's brutal anti-immigrant and welfare "reform" plans.

toward the more beleaguered members of their class.

Clinton's bill is not just a big leap in the continuing attack on poor people. Slick Willie has added some ominous new manipulations which spell even greater trouble for the working class. He has managed to appeal to not only the economically endangered sections of the white petty bourgeoisie and labor aristocrats who have lurched to the right over the years, but to other layers of the working class — including many people of color.

The capitalists and their state, in their never-ending grasp for higher profits, are willing to make the U.S. a den of misery for a majority of working people. In contrast, the working class, if it were united, could not only stop the assault in its tracks, it could turn this country and this planet into a storehouse of plenty for all. The problem is that people accept capitalism and its logic and therefore see no alternative to the current misleaders who defend that system at all costs.

### THE WELFARE DISGUISE

Under capitalism welfare has always been a working-class issue, but it has been disguised. It is critical to understand  
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# COFI and LRP Report

## INTERNATIONAL

An LRP representative visited South Africa this winter to observe the founding congress of the Workers International Vanguard League (WIVL) in Cape Town, attended by workers from many different parts of South Africa. He was able to participate in the political discussions, share with the WIVL comrades the LRP's views and experiences in the class struggle and in turn learn much from and about this important group. (See p. 40 for documents by the WIVL.)

Our comrade saw first hand how the exploitation and suffering of the masses continues in the New South Africa. Many workers told him of the rising anger at the ANC government's broken promises to the masses and support for capitalist interests. He met with a number of political and union groups, deepening our understanding of the struggle for socialism in South Africa.

## LRP CONVENTION

The LRP is holding a convention in late April which will include a discussion of our international work as well as our national perspectives and tasks. Political guests from the South African WIVL as well as Germany have been invited. A report will be featured in our next issue.

## NEW YORK

On January 20, the LRP participated in a rally against

police brutality in the Bronx. The rally had commemorated a long list of Latino and Black victims of cop violence in the area. Our leaflet exposes the fraud that the police can be successfully reformed, an illusion which plagues this movement. (It is available in English or Spanish on request.)

Unfortunately, the Congress for Puerto Rican Rights, which has attained influence in this struggle, has been using militant rhetoric to guide participants in a "vote Democratic" direction. Democratic Party mayoral candidate Al Sharpton showed up late to the January 20 rally, gave a typical campaign speech and left — rather than marching with the families of the victims. It was tragic to see people who have lost their children to police brutality providing a platform for this militant-talking faker; Sharpton has backed politicians like Dinkins in New York and Clinton in Washington, who boast of having increased funding for cops at the expense of vital public services.

On March 26, we attempted to attend a publicly advertised panel discussion, "Racist Cops & Kangaroo Courts: America's Killing Justice," which advertised speakers from the Parents against Police Brutality group as well as well known defense attorney Ron Kuby. Sponsors of the meeting listed included the International Socialist Organization and the Latino Political Action Committee.

Nevertheless, the ISO used the clearly fabricated excuse that the forum was a "branch meeting" to exclude our attendance. Thus the ISO continues its record of political cowardice and hypocrisy. (See "ISO's Right Turn," PR 51.)

## WELFARE AND WORKFARE

The LRP has attended a range of demonstrations and meetings regarding the workfare issue in recent months. There has been some interest in the article on New York workfare in PR 53. The demonstrations have all been unnecessarily small: for example, on March 24 WEP Workers Together held a rally; on April 1, another demo featured speakers from the community organizations associated with WWT; and April 4 found Workers World hosting a Work-fairness demo. All three rallies drew about 100 people. Thus despite all the bragging these groups have done about signing up members, their sectarianism as well as their lack of a galvanizing strategy impedes the growth of a fighting movement.

Mayor Giuliani is utilizing the Work Experience Program to force the most oppressed students out of the City University system: workfare assignments are imposed that conflict with school attendance. On March 1, LRPers attended a workshop on this topic at the Hunter School for *continued on page 13*

### South African Revolutionary Speaks:

## Exposing the Lie of the "New" South Africa

The masses' struggle against apartheid inspired us all, but how much has really changed in the "New" South Africa?

- The ANC government is defending the profits of the capitalists who oppressed the masses during apartheid.
- The ANC courts are letting apartheid killers go unpunished for their crimes.

Hear why more and more South African workers and poor feel betrayed by the government. And hear about the newly formed Workers International Vanguard League, what it stands for and why it is gaining support in the unions and townships and in elections.

**Speaker: Leon Caesar, National Secretary of the Workers International Vanguard League and former National Secretary of the COSATU Unemployed Project.**

New York May 10 (212)-330-9017

Chicago May 17 (773)-463-1340

Public forums and discussions sponsored by the LRP. Call for more information.

## Proletarian Revolution

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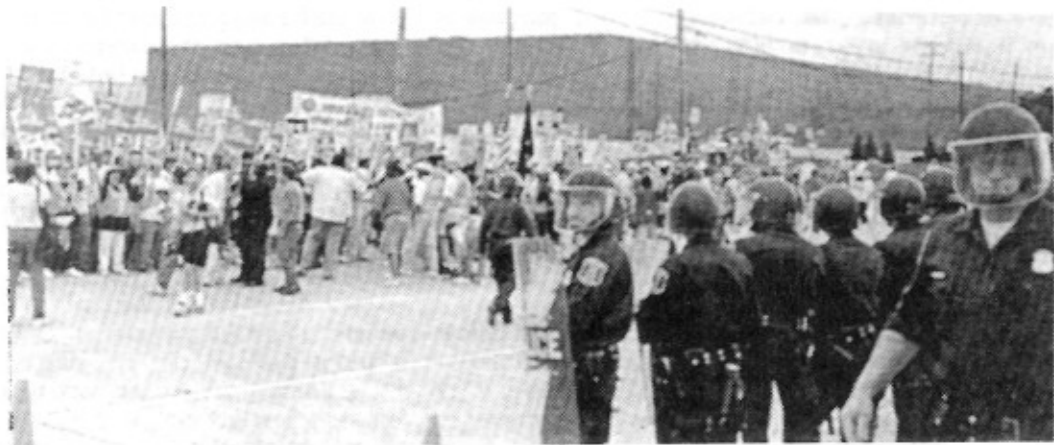
# Why the Detroit Strike Was Knifed

by Bob Wolfe

A murderous campaign has been waged against the working class in Detroit — not just by the bosses, but by the labor leadership itself. As a result, the newspaper workers' strike that began almost two years ago has been left for dead. Worst of all, this is a tale of a death foretold.

The latest crime was an "unconditional back-to-work offer" — in reality, an unconditional surrender. The offer was announced by Al Derey, president of the Metropolitan Council of Newspaper Unions (MCNU). But it was engineered by the international presidents of the Teamsters, the Communications Workers (CWA) and Graphic Communica-

September 1995: Fighting Detroit strikers outside printing plant. Now union leaders want them to crawl back on their knees.



tions International Union (GCIU), three of the six striking unions, when they met in Washington February 11.

The bureaucrats' argument is that the unconditional offer is a clever maneuver with a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. By not offering jobs to all the strikers, management has turned the strike into a lockout, thereby entitling the strikers to large back-pay settlements — if they win their case down the line. So the workers have been forced to throw themselves on the mercy of the NLRB, whose record shows that a legal victory is far from guaranteed.

The deal is a deathblow to militancy. The 300 strikers who suffered arrest due to strike activity are officially excluded from the deal. As well, the legalistic lockout strategy forbids picketing. Out of 2500 original strikers, 450 have scabbed on the strike, joining 1300 outside scabs working in the plant. As we write, less than 50 strikers have been offered their jobs back. And all the talk of the strike representing a struggle not just for newspaper workers but to turn around the whole labor movement now seems like empty rhetoric.

Only one of the striking locals was allowed to vote on the return, the Newspaper Guild, and they barely approved it — after the other five had been forced to accept. The typographical union held a subsequent advisory vote that rejected the back-to-work scheme *unanimously*. But it wasn't just the lack of democracy that allowed the latest sabotage. The strike had been losing by attrition for quite a while.

Chief responsibility lies with the international labor leadership: from John Sweeney and Richard Trumka to Teamsters president and left hero Ron Carey, along with Morton Bahr of the CWA and James Norton of the GCIU. Sharing the blame are fake-militant leaders like Bob Wages and Tony

Mazzocchi of the so-called Labor Party, along with local leaders like Derey. Spicing up the mix are various left hangers-on who supposedly see through the pro-capitalist union officials but won't challenge them in front of the workers.

## THE FIRST STAB IN THE BACK

To understand how the bureaucrats on all levels got away with their surrender tactic, one has to review the history of the crimes they had already perpetrated on the strike.

The strike by Detroit News and Free Press workers was launched in July 1995 and initially showed much militancy

and determination to win. On Labor Day that year, TV news across the country featured workers battling scabs, cops and hired goons. Here is how the situation was summed up by David Sole, president of UAW Local 2334 in his opening address to a December 1996 conference of the new ACOSS group (Action Coalition of Strikers and Supporters):

**Last year, in the week following Labor Day, the newspaper strike stood at the edge of such a great confrontation. All eyes were on the struggle. Thousands of strikers and supporters stood shoulder to shoulder, unafraid of hundreds of riot cops, spitting in the face of injunctions, ready to do whatever it took to win the strike. Behind these thousands stood tens of thousands more workers ready to come forward. Ten union locals, some of the biggest in the UAW, as well as locals on strike, even voted to support the call for a general strike to back the newspaper strike. A real workers' militia was forming in combat operations every Saturday night.**

What Sole did not say was why this momentum collapsed: the union bureaucrats panicked. When they saw the growing militancy and working-class support the strikers were receiving, they insisted that workers honor the injunctions against mass pickets. So mass actions and confrontations at the plants were replaced by the passive corporate campaign/consumer boycott strategy. Once the militancy of the strikers and supporters was undermined, the opportunity to defeat union-busting was virtually lost.

We underscored this point in our article, "Detroit Strike Exposes Labor Leaders" (PR 50). We also pointed out that the Sweeney team, which had used the Detroit strike and other struggles as vehicles for their campaign to oust

Kirkland, would offer no winning leadership. We wrote:

**The Sweeney wing ... is more of a facelift to boost the sagging popularity of the decrepit AFL-CIO rather than a reflection of mass working-class struggle. This truth has been borne out in Detroit, Decatur, Seattle and other local struggles where the Sweeney slate distinguished itself in rhetoric but not in action. As well, Sweeney's "action" plan, civil disobedience, has already lost strikes with real potential — Hormel and Staley.**

In contrast to our warnings, much of the left played a role of dressing up the bureaucracy in militant clothing. Both the Labor/Communist/Religious Coalition (including the Workers World Party) and the Unity Victory Caucus (touted by Solidarity, the Trotskyist League, Socialist Organizer, and Socialist Action) wanted militant action in Detroit, but were most concerned with sidestepping any fight with the bureaucracy. We wrote at the time:

**The Caucus's initial statement said that "our purpose is to supplement the programs already implemented by the ... unions." When the statement was issued in October, the ... bureaucracy had just proposed a sellout deal, offering a return to work without a contract, plus substantive concessions. ("Detroit Left Strikes Out," PR 51.)**

A back-to-work offer had been in the air for over a year, yet the left was unwilling to expose the plans of its union bureaucrat friends or to call for action to stop them.

#### **LABOR DAY '96: THE SECOND KNIFING**

Strikers held on, buoyed by news of support from fellow workers. Over time the focus turned to the call for a Solidarity Day III, a national march in Detroit over Labor Day weekend 1996. A march of dozens or even hundreds of thousands could have shut down production and revived not only the strike but the whole dormant labor movement. But it was pushed by the local bureaucrats and the pro-bureaucratic left as an extension of the pacifist strategy.

For the top labor bureaucrats, such a march would have come at an inconvenient time: right in the middle of their multi-million dollar electoral campaign for Clinton and the Congressional Democrats. No mere workers' struggle was going to stand in the way! So Sweeney dodged the request. Sweeney and Trumka covered their own inaction by showing up with a few other bureaucrats and celebrities in Detroit Labor Day weekend and getting themselves token arrests for blocking the Detroit News building.

And although Labor Party tops Bob Wages and Tony Mazzocchi had endorsed the call for the march at the LP's convention in June, they remained silent while Sweeney & Co. undermined the potential mass action. Their refusal to fight for an independent action policy that actually countered Sweeney's passive dependence on the Democrats shows they are no real alternative.

After the November election, the last faint glimmer of hope for the strike focused again on the call for a national solidarity march in Detroit. While the slogan offered was "Shutdown Motown," the idea of a militant plant shutdown was not really fought for by its left proponents: that would have meant a direct confrontation with the bureaucracy on the national and local levels.

For example, ACOSS, featuring the same mix of leftists, striker activists and local bureaucrats as the former Unity Victory Caucus and Religious/Labor Coalition, endorsed the renewed appeal at its December conference without stressing the indispensable need for shutdown action. Instead the

meeting gave a standing ovation to Congressman John Conyers and his "Vote Democratic" crap.

David Sole's opening speech, so militant about the past, was coy about what could be done now:

**We must all get behind this effort and build it from below. But we need to let our leaders know that we cannot continue as before, that masses of Detroit newspaper strikers ought to be listened to and they are demanding action now! And who is to say what could happen if hundreds of thousands of workers start out in a march? Who is to say what inventive new or old tactics wouldn't arise from such a massive mobilization?**

Sole also pointed out that back-to-work moves were already under discussion behind the scenes by union officers. And activist Kate DeSmet guaranteed to the audience that Guild President Linda Foley's campaign for a back-to-work offer would never take root.

LRP supporters at the conference directly addressed the need for stopping production and linked the bureaucrats' refusal to their ties to the Democrats. For our pains, we were heckled and physically ejected. After vigorously protesting, we were later readmitted. However, supporters of the RWL, the only group on the Detroit scene with at least a reputation for fighting the bureaucrats on the question of picket militancy (see our criticism in PR 50), were excluded entirely.

#### **THE FINAL BLOW**

This February the strikers finally won their demand for a national solidarity march. The AFL-CIO Executive Council adopted a resolution pledging support to the Detroit workers' call for a march, now renamed "Action! Motown '97" to avoid even the implication of a shutdown. But the cost of this "victory" was the previous unconditional surrender of the strike. The bureaucrats finally said, in effect, sure we'll endorse your march — but only over your dead bodies.

As long as there was any possibility of militant working-class action to try to win the strike, the bureaucrats opposed any national march. Having now reduced the issue to a lock-out and a court battle, Sweeney feels a march in June would be safe enough to endorse. What they're planning amounts to a funeral march disguised as a parade.

Sweeney's letter of endorsement specifically referred to the return to work, cynically hailing the strikes' "new phase": the locals' "effort to take back the plant and set up the contract campaign both in Detroit and throughout the companies' corporate empires." "Taking back the plant" is a cynical cover for begging to get back into it under the bosses' terms. As for Sweeney's contract "campaign," as of now he has done little to build it. Not only did the Council promise no financial support, but Sweeney's letter to union presidents tells them to contact Detroit for information, a sure sign the top leadership has no intention of mobilizing the unions. Sweeney's trendy new publication, *America@Work*, covered other Council decisions in its March issue but failed to even mention the Detroit march.

#### **WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM THE LEFT**

Clearly the AFL-CIO endorsement for the Detroit march is a transparent cover for the unions selling out the strike. As we go to press, the bureaucrats' cynical maneuver appears to be working to some extent — with a little help from their friends in the left.

A February 27 report by Richard Scully, written for the *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism (BIDOM)* and publicly circu-

lated on the Internet, calls the AFL-CIO's march endorsement "an extraordinary victory for rank-and-file newspaper workers." Scully adds that "now the strikers' spirits are greatly elevated, overcoming much of the damage done by the unconditional offer."

The article claims that the march itself will turn things around. Ironically, it raises the slogan "No more PATCO's" — for a demonstration that promises to do for the Detroit strikers exactly what the AFL-CIO did for the air traffic controllers a decade and a half ago — parade them around not to defend the union but to lead them to the slaughter. Only this time the strikers have already been knifed.

*BIDOM* is not alone in its cheerleading. The so-called Trotskyists of the Socialist Action and Socialist Organizer groups have managed to not only swallow the bureaucrats' party line — they're running with it. *Socialist Action* says:

**Strikers have been powerfully energized by the steps being taken to expand their struggle. The only thing that has changed is the technicality that the strike has formally become a lockout. (March 1997.)**

According to SA, it's no sellout; this is a new and improved strategy — end the strike, unconditionally offer to go back to work, and carry out a corporate campaign, consumer boycott and legal fight. By parroting the bureaucrats' line, SA shows that even at this point it would rather align itself with the hacks than fight for a real action in Detroit, i.e. shutting the plants down and telling fellow workers the truth.

Not to be outdone, *The Organizer* proclaimed the march call to be "a giant step forward for all working people in this country." As for the fact that the march was called only after the unconditional offer to return to work, we're told, "the answer is complex." And after three pages of citing the twisted history of the march demand, *The Organizer* concludes:

**It is important to stress the point that it was the rank-and-file movement primarily in Detroit that forced the union leadership to take action in support of a national march. The top union officials were brought into this kicking and screaming.**

Sure. It was the rank and file that pushed the issue — but the ranks in this case were led by a layer of leftists and local strike leaders who had a strategy of capitulation. What was necessary was to fight not just for a march but for one that would help rescue the strike by building working-class action, not burying it.

## THE JUNE MARCH

The unions nationally will do nothing to mobilize members to go to Detroit. Left to themselves, the officials may talk tough but will not lift a finger for a mass march. Except for being able to say the march is now sanctioned by Sweeney, the rank-and-file strikers are no better off than before the AFL-CIO endorsement. Of course, because of the devastating return-to-work offer, the prospects for a massive working-class action in June are much weaker than before.

If the bureaucrats had been openly challenged from the beginning, the workers could have forced the top officials to endorse a real march. The only thing "complex" about the treacherous deal that went down was that phony socialists tried to outmaneuver the bureaucracy and failed. They also misled their fellow workers into doing the same, to avoid an open fight. Now they are painting a consolation prize to look like a gold medal.

Yet if after all the struggle and sacrifice to get this

march, if people come to Detroit to just parade around, or even to lie down and get arrested in Detroit like they've been doing in various labor battles in the past few years, it would be a shame and a defeat.

How many times have militants rallied to a solidarity call only to end up demoralized because the demonstrators were so corralled by the bureaucracy that no hoped-for action took place? Given the history of the labor leaders' use of marches in past strikes, and given that the "socialist" papers of all the left groups involved presented arguments for a plant shutdown, it was striking that not one group actually fought for the march to be clearly associated with a plant shutdown strategy. Calling for a march to shut down the plant — as opposed to just waiting to see what would happen "spontaneously" — would have made the action a direct challenge to the bureaucracy. Even if some bureaucrats mouthed support, it would be necessary to warn in advance that they would try to sabotage the mass action and that an action committee would have to be elected to lead the march.

We are not on the scene in Detroit, and so we cannot fully gauge the mood of the strikers and the working-class generally at this time. We don't know whether real action is possible on June 20-22. We do know that if there is to be action, it must be not passive "civil disobedience" but massive shows of power at the plants: production must be halted. But we don't argue just for action: revolutionary speakers at the march would use the opportunity to draw sharp lessons exposing the forces that have been arrayed against the necessary action at every point. Above all this means telling the truth about the lies and deceptions of the bureaucrats, nationally and locally. It is guaranteed that the "socialists" in union clothing who get to speak will do nothing of the kind.

## WORKERS' CONSCIOUSNESS

The LRP has a basic belief that the working class is capable of revolutionary consciousness, that it is capable of developing a communist understanding of capitalist reality through the experiences of the class struggle. However, there is nothing automatic about this. As participants on the U.S. American labor scene for the past two decades, we have been able to predict correctly the outcome of a number of major union battles — defeats for our class and victories for the bureaucracy. Our insight is no compensation for the fact that defeats in general don't raise political consciousness; rather they breed demoralization. They can teach important lessons to advanced workers, but only if revolutionaries are willing to say the truth. Experience in itself guarantees nothing.

Beset by one unnecessary defeat after another, the ranks of our class have still not learned that they can discard the bureaucracy. That is because the class in recent times has not had the opportunity to know its own power and capacity to build the leadership it actually needs.

In strike after strike, from Hormel to Staley to Detroit, as workers in motion sought to overcome their isolation, and the most conscious sought answers beyond the usual bureaucratic claptrap, they met the left. Strikers looked in general to the left for support, but some were searching further, they were looking for an alternative to the current leadership. Instead they fell into the arms of an accomplice. This is why, while we intend to march loyally with our fellow workers in June, we can not betray our main obligation to our class to speak the truth. The main task in Detroit and everywhere is to build the internationalist revolutionary party leadership, the only way to stop the betrayals. ● *April 7, 1997*

# Revolutionary Campaign in New York Transit

The upcoming elections in Transport Workers Union (TWU) Local 100 in New York looks to be a hot race. New Directions (ND), the house opposition, is expected to make significant gains.

This should be of particular interest to socialist-minded workers. ND's Presidential candidate, Tim Schermerhorn, is a supporter of the supposedly socialist Solidarity organization, which has a heavy influence on ND. Yet having started out as a "rank and filist" opposition, ND has increasingly relied on suing the union in the courts and bureaucratic maneuvering, rather than on mobilizing the ranks for action. They have failed to present a fighting alternative to the sellout Willie James leadership. (See PR 53 for background on the recent contract.) This is a direct consequence of ND's rank-and-filist, i.e. reformist, approach.

ND's consistent reliance on courts and elections, and its growing disdain for mass action, contributed to the unnecessary contract defeat last year — and has now embroiled them in another suit against the union, related to a rotten pension giveback deal secretly negotiated by the incumbents in 1994. All this has demoralized rather than energized the ranks.

A revolutionary alternative is being put forward. The LRP is supporting the campaign of Eric Josephson for Executive Board Member. In the transit union there exist a small number of subjectively revolutionary workers, people who see the lack of militancy of the U.S. workforce as the main problem in posing socialist goals. As well, there is a larger layer of militant workers who are not currently drawn to revolutionary views. Both of these groupings to one degree or another supports New Directions — because they feel it is better than nothing, not because it represents a real fighting defense for workers.

Eric's campaign aims to address both layers of workers and actively argue for a fighting alternative. Campaigning as an open revolutionary, Eric will demonstrate that New Directions shies from mass action and the necessary fightback precisely because of its reformist politics.

Eric's initial campaign statement follows below.

I am running for Executive Board Member from Track Division in the upcoming fall elections. I am a revolutionary socialist. I believe that the only way to end the increasing attacks on workers, especially Blacks and Latinos, in the U.S. and end increasing poverty and misery at home and around the world is to build an international revolutionary party to lead a socialist revolution.

I know that most transit workers today do not consider themselves revolutionaries, but I also know that transit workers need a voice in this election. My candidacy will present that opportunity. I don't believe that either of the well-known slates — the Sonny Hall/ Willie James grouping on one hand, or the New Directions grouping on the other — represent the needs of transit workers on any of the critical issues. I also don't believe it is possible to defend transit workers without a strategy for action and working class unity. This strategy must meet our economic needs. It must oppose racism, sexism, anti-immigrant chauvinism, and all the other divide and conquer dictates of the bosses' system, capitalism. It must stand for working class independence and refuse to support either the Democrats or Republicans, two racist anti-worker capitalist parties.

## Lessons of the 1996 Contract: Failure of Leadership

The recent contract debacle was a perfect example of why we need a change. TWU Local 100 President Willie James openly invited TA management to freeze our wages, raid our health fund and even worse — threaten us with 2,000 layoffs if we didn't approve his racist slave labor deal to force welfare recipients to replace union cleaner positions — the so-called Work Experience Program (WEP), or workfare. WEP workers would get benefits equal to subminimum wages and union members would get a supposed guarantee of no layoffs. All in all, a rotten deal.

None other than the racist anti-worker Mayor Giuliani has stalled implementation of workfare in transit. His beef is that it too nakedly exposes the union-busting connection between the expansion of workfare and the shrinking of union jobs. It harms his ability to impose more workfare across the city. The transit deal showed what workfare is all about, super-exploiting WEP workers in order to destroy the unionized city workforce. While other labor bureaucrats at least pretend to oppose workfare, the TWU is the only union in this city officially on record in support of workfare!

However, the lessons of the 1996 contract go beyond the treachery of James and the hypocrisy of Giuliani. The contract struggle also showed the bankruptcy of New Directions, the nominal opposition in our union. When it came time to lead a real fight for a decent contract, when it came time to propose a serious fight against both workfare and layoffs, ND came up short. They went on record for a "no" vote against the Hall contract but in practice their opposition was weak. They didn't offer any way to fight management's threat of layoffs. Instead, in response to the layoff threat, Tim Schermerhorn, ND's perennial candidate for President, told reporters that ND's "Vote No" line on the contract "might cost some people their jobs." In other words, accept layoffs!

Other than this miserable idea, ND had nothing worth saying — or doing during the contract struggle. They didn't even organize one rally against the contract, which is well within their capacity — especially considering they *already* lead the train operators and conductors divisions. They said just wait until after the next elections; once ND is elected into *more* positions, things will change. This is like the old line, "vote for me and I'll set you free." Workers own actions, not simply elections, will change things for us. ND's approach lost an important opportunity to mobilize a real fight against the contract.

I campaigned heavily against the contract, proposing an action strategy that included demonstrations and other mobilizations. My motion for a mass rally passed in the Track Division. However, the ND leadership of the Car Equipment Department refused to take up my motion for a rally. As well, the Track Division leadership, which is independent although usually allied with ND, never acted to organize the rally that the members had voted for. (My leaflets and union motions regarding the contract are available upon request.)

My proposals for protest action were based on a perspective of building toward strike action. It's understandable why transit workers have grown to fear strikes; under the leadership of the treacherous bureaucrats, quite a number of strikes in various unions have been real

losers. When the transit union went on strike in 1980, the leaders accepted Taylor Law penalties when the union had the power to defy the Law. All this has left workers with a false sense of weakness. It has tended to bury the fighting spirit of transit workers and the knowledge of our strategic position in the workforce. Transit workers have the power to shut down the whole transit system. Furthermore, united with other workers across the city, we can shut down the whole city. This is not a power that the bosses can ignore.

The TWU is a powerful union which could play a pivotal role in reviving class struggle in this city. In my view, any move toward a strike in transit should aim to kick off a general strike, where the entire class could make a powerful display of unity and avoid the isolation that has led to many local strike defeats. More critically the general strike could begin to wage the political struggle to defend the working class, which goes way beyond the questions of one contract.

#### **What I Stand For**

Since we have seen the bankruptcy of the other factions in the division and the whole Local, isn't it time to give a revolutionary a chance to be heard? My program is based around the essential needs of transit workers and all workers.

#### ***Fight Layoffs and Cutbacks with Mass Action!***

The recent history of the transit union and its contracts has been almost the same as that of every other union. Facing a constant threat of layoffs and cutbacks our so-called leaders make concession after concession at our expense. This has got to stop once and for all. My policy on these questions is clear: No Layoffs! No Cutbacks! As executive board member, I will fight in opposition to all layoffs and cutbacks in transit and use the board position to mobilize the membership for a mass action fightback against all attacks. Remember, a contract is only a piece of paper that means nothing unless we back it up with action by a mobilized membership.

#### ***Jobs for All! Equal Pay for Equal Work! Union and WEP Workers Unite to Fight Slave Labor! All Jobs with Full Union Wages, Benefits and Protection!***

Throughout the country workers are being threatened with the club of unemployment by the capitalists. When workers protest against lousy pay and lousy conditions, the bosses remind us that there are millions of workers without jobs who would gladly take our positions. One reason there are so few strikes today is that the capitalists are quick to bring in scabs in order to bust the unions. Another union-busting weapon is workfare, which replaces union jobs with slave labor. Given that the imposition of workfare is growing everywhere and will remain a threat to our jobs, I will fight to reverse this trend through a campaign for full employment. The transit union and all unions must stop bowing before the bosses and start fighting for Jobs for All!

In addition, we must be prepared to fight any further attempts to impose slave labor workfare. During the contract struggle, I led a fight that succeeded in passing motions in the Track Division that included Union and WEP Workers Unite to Fight Slave Labor! All Jobs with Full Union Wages, Benefits and Protection! Along with these I propose to add Equal Pay for Equal Work! This means not only opposition to slave labor workfare but a fight against divisive two-tier wage structures. Otherwise union members, Work Experience Program (WEP) workers, and other workers will continue to

be pitted against each other for a shrinking number of jobs. Only the bosses can benefit from that.

#### ***General Strike Against Capitalist Attacks***

In my years of union activity, I have become known not only as a revolutionary, but also as a militant and an advocate of the general strike strategy. In my view, the general strike is a tool of the working class that can begin to address real problems, such as unemployment, which go way beyond the items that come up in the contract. The general strike can provide a real defense against layoffs, cutbacks and unemployment; and by uniting the working class against its real enemy, the ruling class, it can build the fight against the growing racism, sexism and anti-immigrant agenda which is dividing workers in today's capitalist society.

While today only a few workers are revolutionaries, over time through workers seeing their own power in action, more and more workers will see that we could run society ourselves and do away with capitalism. The revolutionary alternative that I advocate today will become more widespread. More and more workers will join to build the revolutionary party of the working class.

#### **My Record and Perspective**

I've been a shop steward in the Track Division for over 11 years. I have been an open revolutionary socialist and supporter of the League for the Revolutionary Party. In addition to my fight during the recent contract, I have campaigned against previous sell-out contracts. When then-Local President Sonny Hall tried to force the '91 contract down our throats, I joined with thousands who marched and voted against it. Unlike ND, which had no strategy to move the struggle forward, I attempted to convince my fellow workers of the need to fight for a strike to win our demands. ND's failure to mobilize workers for strike action allowed Hall to push through a contract similar to the one we voted down. Again in '94 I fought for rallies to build for a strike. ND made no effort to mobilize the ranks.

While I have fought numerous grievances, I have also worked to expose the grievance and arbitration procedures as stacked against the workers. I have spoken out against safety violations and organized refusals of supervisory orders dangerous to life and limb. When Probationary Trackworker James Frazier almost died from a racist police shooting and was framed for a crime he didn't commit, I joined with fellow workers to defend him from firing and legal prosecution. I have consistently urged mass action and boycotts against lousy picks: the recent Structure Maintainers' fight shows that I was right. Despite my political opposition to New Directions and the current Track Division leaders — Tous-saint, Rivera, Iglesias, Fredericson and McCarthy — I have consistently defended them against unjust attacks from the top local leadership and their flunkies. I consistently fight management attacks and work to organize resistance throughout the division and the local.

My perspective can be summed up as follows: I am a revolutionary who believes that united action is necessary and also the best way to convince workers of the socialist alternative. *If you agree with my perspective for mass action, if you see the need to turn the TWU back into a fighting union that can play a big role in turning back the tide of layoffs, cutbacks, union-busting and racist attacks, you should vote for me as one step in building the alternative that we desperately need.*

March 26, 1997

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# Korean Strikes Shatter Capitalist Order

by Jeff Covington

The struggle of the Korean working class stands at a critical juncture. Hundreds of thousands of workers showed the power of united working-class action in a three-week general strike in December and January against the South Korean government's new labor law, which legalizes mass layoffs and the use of scabs to break strikes. They resisted direct state repression and forced the ruling party of President Kim Young-Sam to agree to "reconsider" the law — by debating it with the two bourgeois opposition parties.

All this was a qualitative step forward for the Korean working class. Students have been battling the regime for years, but this strike was a classic confirmation of the Marxist view that the proletariat is the leading force for progressive change in our society. Also, it was the first time the South Korean regime did not answer a militant opposition with full-scale military repression (aided by the United States forces in Korea). The regime is weaker, the workers in struggle feel themselves stronger.

But the workers have not won any of their concrete demands yet. The trade-union group leading the struggle, the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), has half a million militant members and is not officially recognized by the government, but its leadership holds a slavishly pro-capitalist ideology. The KCTU leadership was responsible for slowing the momentum of the strike and finally liquidating it into once-a-week protests in exchange for the promise of "reconsideration."

Months later, even the KCTU heads see that their strategy has failed to achieve significant changes in the labor law. Their call in March for a new political force reflects two lessons the Korean working class has learned:

- (1) The promises of the government and ruling party to reconsider the law are worthless diversions.
- (2) The two opposition parties, who did nothing to advance any of the workers' demands in the latest round of negotiations, are no allies of the working class.

## ONE STEP FORWARD, TEN STEPS BACK

The KCTU leaders have apparently backed off earlier suggestions that they would support the bourgeois opposition in the next election. Still, the latest communiqués from the KCTU reveal many dangerous illusions and capitulations, clearly showing why revolutionaries have to challenge the misleaders in the unions even to win a defensive battle like defeating the labor law.

First, it is not clear that the unions' new political force would be independent of the existing opposition parties. Especially outrageous was the statement that "the successful resumption of the general strike, a daunting task due to the cooling off effect, has demonstrated the maturity and capacity of the KCTU." The KCTU leaders congratulate themselves for struggling with a problem of their own making!



The momentum of the first wave of the strike "cooled off" because of critical undermining decisions by the leadership.

In the vital first days of the strike, the KCTU made a treacherous decision to send subway workers in Seoul and other cities back to work. This facilitated the state's aim of keeping business operating as normally as possible. The rationale for this cave-in would boggle the mind of anyone who understands what the power of the working class is all about: the government brought in scabs to run the trains and when scab incompetence got a train stuck underground for an hour and a half, the KCTU said it feared public opinion would turn against the strike! It is almost too obvious to be stated that a scab accident should give striking workers extra ammunition to force the state to accept their demands.

The general strike was halted for the New Year's holiday — right when it was at its strongest, a week into the strike. Again the union leaders compromised the workers' position in the struggle with the state, for fear of offending what they perceived as "public opinion." In reality, resolute and decisive action by the working class is what *changes* public opinion in favor of the workers' struggle.

The KCTU never did call out more than 200,000 of its 500,000 members at any one time. Full mobilization was always a "threat" but never close to being carried out. The officially recognized union group, the Federation of Korean Trade Unions (FKTU), called out 700,000 of its 1.2 million members, but only for a one-time 39-hour general strike.

These numbers expose the hesitation and vacillation of the union heads. They also hold an important lesson for revolutionary-minded workers, youth and leftists around the world: the existing trade union organizations have a tremendous capacity to fight the capitalist system. If a half-mobilization by craven misleaders can make the South Korean regime reel, a full unleashing of the power of the mass organizations of the working class could pose the question of who runs society, of which class must hold state power. This requires constant, relentless intervention inside the trade unions by revolutionaries.

Finally, of course, the KCTU tops went from cooling off to deep freeze by completely demobilizing the workers, to the promise of a mess of pottage to be named later. Even the pottage has not been forthcoming, so the union leaders feel compelled to re-start the strike movement.

The KCTU's call for this next wave of the general strike originally listed ten demands. One example of how the union leaders continue to play by bourgeois rules is the demand to "narrow the scope of 'essential services' which [are] subject to compulsory arbitration." The class-conscious proletarian demand, in contrast, is No Compulsory Arbitration!

But even the ten demands did not last. Within days the Central Committee of the KCTU pared the list to four:

- legal recognition for the teachers union;
- complete withdrawal of the legislative provisions for layoffs;
- revocation of the ban on payment of wage to full-time union officers/representatives at the company level; and
- ending the reprisals against unionists for their just actions of resistance against the repressive labor laws.

While these are important and fundamental demands, it should be noted that two of the demands dropped were:

- reinstitution of the ban on replacement of striking workers from outside the plant under dispute; and
- cancellation of the ban on industrial action within production facilities.

Thus the KCTU puts a higher priority on the right to have paid full-time union officers at the company level than it does on stopping scabs or defending industrial action.

## THE KCTU AND THE KOREAN ECONOMY

The undermining effects of the unions' pro-capitalist ideology have been apparent already, but they pose the danger of far greater defeats for the working class in the near future if they are not exposed and challenged now.

It is hardly accidental that the South Korean capitalists are mounting these attacks now. They are a direct result of an economic crisis that only promises to get worse. Seoul's rise from the ashes of the war launched by imperialism in the early 1950's has been a centerpiece of capitalism's supposed "Asian miracle." But the boom is over, a casualty of the crisis of world and Asian capitalism and South Korea's overextended role in it.

South Korea, more than any other country, has been claimed by capitalist ideologues as proof that so-called underdeveloped countries can achieve prosperity for all under "free market" capitalism. South Korea's development after

the early 1950's, however, was based on intense exploitation of its workers, enforced by a brutal military dictatorship. The ruling class used its command of huge state industries to plan production and restrict foreign competition. Thus South Korea was hardly a "miracle" of freedom.

Nor is it a model that can be followed by other capitalist countries: fortuitous political alliances, geographic positioning and timing were also key to its rise. Seeing it as a strategic base for opposing Soviet influence during the Cold War in general and the Vietnam war in particular, the U.S. backed South Korean economic development. Imperialism could afford to allow the growth of South Korea into a new competitor because this took place at the time of the post-World War II boom of unprecedented profits.

Under these conditions, the South Korean economy developed for the first time a significant manufacturing sector producing for export — first in labor-intensive industries, then in high-tech automated manufacturing. By the last 1980's, South Korea had become a significant player in the world economy, an Asian "tiger."

But the product of this development was a large, concentrated and sophisticated working class determined to realize the fruits of its back-breaking labor. This was most apparent in emerging strategic sectors like ship-building and auto. The massive upsurge by auto workers in the late '80's was a continuation of increasingly overt struggles, a dramatic challenge to the ruling class.

Predictably the strikes were met with severe repression. But the workers were not smashed, and the ruling class realized that carrots must go with the sticks. Wage gains were won and limited democratic reforms introduced. The costs of these gains led the bourgeoisie to an intensive effort to move up the economic ladder. Much of the low-end industry was outsourced to lower-wage areas — notably China, a veritable prisonhouse for masses of cheap labor. Korean capital went on a spending spree at home and abroad to buy and build new swaths of heavy and high-tech industry.

Recently the Korean bourgeoisie seemed to have secured the perks of imperialist privilege: advanced economic sectors, an emerging labor aristocracy, and a regime stable enough to get rid of its most hated and corrupt elements. Its acceptance by the U.S.-dominated Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development was a recognition of its arrival as a junior partner of imperialism.

But there were fundamental problems. While laws had prevented foreign powers from directly owning much Korean industry, many of South Korea's new ventures were heavily mortgaged, particularly to its neighboring and most hated rival, Japanese capital. Many financial practices were based on patronage and were unsound even by bourgeois standards. And industries like textiles, steel and semi-conductors were experiencing a severe case of overproduction, as with much of Asia. In the end, South Korea was caught in a vise between cheap-labor competitors like China and Vietnam and more advanced producers like the U.S. and Japan.

Korean capital has become increasingly aware of its looming problems. Its pre-emptive blow against the workers was a classical response of capitalists the world over to crises of their own making.

An early sign of this crisis was the collapse of the \$10-billion conglomerate Hanbo at the end of January. The union leaders made this response to the Hanbo collapse:

**Finally, in regards to the Hanbo incident, the KCTU is closely watching the bureaucratic and plutocratic folly**

which resulted from immoral and unjust business activities which are ruining the nation's economic standing.

This is wrong, and dangerously disorienting for the working class. It is not "immoral activities" that threaten the Korean economy, it is the internal drives of the capitalist system. The KCTU is only demanding anti-corruption investigations and prosecution of violators of bourgeois law as the solution to the economic crisis. The government may well do this and the economy will still be in crisis. Then the confused union leaders will have no basis to lead a workers'



struggle against deep austerity attacks.

Then there will be two equally disastrous possibilities. One is that the misleaders will lead the workers into submission and sell them out completely. Or, if the workers continue to fight back without an understanding of the capitalist crisis and a program to take it on, the South Korean state will not hesitate to use mass slaughter and martial law to implement the austerity measures needed to preserve profits. The capitalist state will stop vacillating long before the trade-union bureaucrats do.

#### TASKS OF REVOLUTIONARIES IN KOREA

It is the task of revolutionary Marxists to arm the working class with such an understanding and program. This must be done both by challenging the pro-capitalist leadership within the unions and by appealing to the broader layers of the Korean working class.

The crisis in Korea is moving toward a decisive conjuncture. Either the proletariat will seize power and create its own workers' state, or the bourgeois state will crush the workers and rivers will run red with their blood. A revolutionary workers' party in Korea must be formed; it is not a matter of choice.

It would not be easy for a revolutionary party organizing

opposition to the union leaders to make itself known. The South Korean state enforces severe political repression against its citizens: it is illegal just to talk about socialism or revolution. Even the use of phrases like "capitalist oppression" is not tolerated under South Korean law; nor is merely viewing the North Korean press agency's Internet site!

This of course complicates the work of revolutionaries there. Propaganda that clearly exposes the true nature of the capitalist state and calls for socialist revolution must be conducted from underground. It is essential that the under-

ground party reach the most politically advanced layers of the working class.

The majority of Korean workers, like their leaders, still accept the legitimacy of capitalism and its state. Their union leaders understand that capitalism cannot fulfill the workers' basic needs, so they must undermine the struggle; the workers believe capitalism can deliver on their demands. Therefore, in the context of a mass struggle like the Korean general strike, it is necessary for revolutionaries to raise transitional demands in open public propaganda and agitation. These are demands for which militant as well as revolutionary workers can join in common struggle. Revolutionaries point out that the struggle itself will prove the need to overthrow the capitalist state and create a new proletarian state.

While the choice of particular demands and formulations has to be made tactically in the day-to-day struggle, it seems to us that the following demands would be in order for the Korean mass strikes:

- Mass Working-Class Armed Self-Defense.* The bloody attacks by the South Korean police and military on strike demonstrations in January are yet another example of why the working class must arm itself just to defend itself in current struggles.

- Factory Committees and Strike Committees.* This slogan

gives organized expression to the question of who is the boss of the factory: the capitalist or the workers? Elected by all factory employees, the factory committee immediately creates a counterweight to the will of the administration. It heads in the direction of establishing a workers' alternative means of rule to that of the present state.

• *A Workers' Party and A Workers' Government.* While posed within the context of the political system of the capitalist state, these demands expose the class nature of that very state and thus point the way to the necessity of the working class overthrowing it. The prompt withdrawal of the South Korean bourgeois opposition parties' support for the strike after "private meetings" with the President shows the need for a workers' party in Korea today. It dares the union leaders, who claim to represent the workers, to take office and answer class needs.

One possible way to concretize the demand for workers' challenging bourgeois rule might have been to raise the slogan "KCTU to Power." As we explained in discussing similar slogans for the French mass strikes of late 1995, the aim is to call for a government of the strike and thereby make the issue of state power concrete — to say "workers to power" in a way that is understandable by masses in motion who do not yet accept the need for socialist revolution.

The situation in Korea obviously requires democratic demands in addition to transitional slogans: freedom of speech and the right of workers to form unions and political organizations of their choice are clearly necessary.

Given the limits of our knowledge of the present scene in Korea, the demands we cite are really suggestions to revolutionaries there. We feel that they point to the central questions at stake and are designed to open up an international dialogue with Korean and other comrades.

#### **NORTH KOREA, STALINISM AND THE LEFT**

The history of the Korean War and the extreme political repression in South Korea have resulted in many radical workers and leftists there having illusions in North Korea, for its supposed leadership of the struggle against world imperialism and the South Korean regime.

We stand for the defense of North Korea against the constant military threats by U.S. imperialism and its South Korean junior partners. We demand the withdrawal of all American troops. We demand an end to the U.S.'s economic sanctions, which victimize only the North Korean people. We of course defend Stalinists in South Korea against the repression, attacks, arrest, imprisonment and torture that many of them have suffered. But their political program cannot be defended, for Stalinism has always stood for class collaboration and outright capitulation to the same governments that sometimes repress them — and South Korean Stalinists are no exception. This is apparent from one of the demands that dominates the public work of their front groups and sympathizers: the reunification of Korea.

The Stalinists are vague about how reunification should occur, but they don't say a word about revolution in this context, even for South Korea. The logic of their program is to favor reunification through negotiations between the current regimes.

The North Korean state, however, has nothing in common with socialism or workers' power: it is a repressive, statified capitalist regime whose existence rests on the immiseration and exploitation of workers and peasants in a backward country. Its almost monarchical regime presides

over an increasingly collapsing economy; mass starvation is only a hair's breadth away. While South Korean prosecutors charged in January that labor unrest could be taken advantage of by North Korea and that documents espousing the North's philosophy had been found at sites of workers' demonstrations, for all their socialist pretensions the North Korean rulers made no move to support the South Korean strikes.

As for negotiations, the recent rounds of high-level talks between North Korea, South Korea, the U.S. and other imperialists — about famine relief for North Korea in return for concessions — provide more evidence of the nature of the North Korean regime and imperialism's aims. South Korea's monopolies already have investments in the Rajin-Sonbong "Free Economic and Trade Zone" in the North. They would like more openings to North Korea's cheap labor, whose wages average less than 20 percent of those in the South.

Currently the Clinton administration is debating two alternative policies toward North Korea. One is to maintain a hard line, in order to foster an economic collapse and thus the absorption of the North by the South. The second is to bring about a "soft landing" by aiding the North to transform itself along Chinese lines. As we showed in our analysis of China in *PR 53*, this points to the deeper exploitation of the Korean masses.

It is theoretically possible for Korea to be united on a non-imperialist basis without a socialist revolution. But practically this is almost impossible. Certainly a negotiated deal would mean a semi-colonial status for the North. Inevitably the deal would not only benefit South Korean capital; it would have to serve the interests of U.S. and Japanese imperialism as well as China's regional power plays.

Authentic Marxists in Korea should consider the demand for an all-Korean constituent assembly to forge reunification. This would be a mass, democratic and popular alternative to an imperialist-brokered deal, one which all democrats as well as revolutionary communists could support. In our opinion, the struggle for such a representative assembly would end any belief in the popular character of the Northern regime, as well as blow away any vestigial illusions in the democracy of the South. Even if the struggle for an all-Korean constituent assembly were initially confined to one side of the border, the disaster in the North and the unrest in the South would soon stir up mass revolutionary pressure on both sides.

For years the LRP has pointed to "uneven and combined" countries where large modern working classes coexist with backward conditions as the most likely detonators of the coming round of world revolutionary explosions. South Africa is key in this regard, as is China. We believe that South Korea, like some of the other Asian "tigers," is not far behind.●

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## **Correction**

In the article "China's Capitalist Revolutions" in *PR 53*, the first paragraph under the subhead on page 17 was garbled. It should have read:

**Economic disaster, wars of mass destruction, heavy repression — the specific mix cannot be predicted, but these are the ingredients of the capitalist future. But the worst can be averted by the masses, above all the working class, if a revolutionary leadership can be built.**

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## COFI/LRP

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*continued from page 2*

Social Work with the well known left reformist, Mimi Abramovitz, as the lead panelist. Abramovitz gave a well-informed history of the attacks on welfare — but absolutely no insight into how these attacks had succeeded and how they could be overcome.

The student representative, Maureen Lane, speaking for the Welfare Rights Initiative, argued that overturning this policy was a matter of educating people that since college led to higher chances for employment, this was a more successful method of weaning people off welfare than forcing students to drop out of school. This viewpoint, however, assumes that the purpose of "welfare reform" is actual concern with enhancing the ability of poor people to get decent jobs — as opposed to simply cutting them off welfare, making them more desperate, and weakening the whole working class.

The LRP held a public forum at City College, "Behind the Attacks on Welfare: Racism, Sexism and Exploitation," which outlined the analysis given in the lead article in this magazine.

### HEALTH CARE ATTACKS

The LRP has also made the connections between the growing use of workfare and other attacks on workers across the city. At the February 25 Joint Delegate Assembly of Local 1199, the hospital workers' union, President Dennis Rivera bemoaned the 1000 layoffs in voluntary hospitals in the past year; he noted that despite the pro-organizing "New Voice" leadership of the AFL-CIO, the hospital union was shrinking. He posed another contract re-opener as an attempt to gain further job security clauses.

An LRPer who works at Bellevue Hospital pointed out that at Bellevue alone there were over 300 workfare workers. She noted that the same union bureaucracy — from Sweeney to the supposed "progressive" Rivera — that did nothing to fight layoffs had also done nothing to fight workfare.

Despite Rivera's increasingly capitulatory leadership, there are opportunities for struggle in this important political arena. LRPer have joined in demonstrations against Cornell Medical Center. A strike of nurses at Booth Memorial Hospital, one of the victims of Cornell's takeover policies, has just begun as we go to press.

On January 6, Luis Marcos, head of the Health and Hospitals Corporation, visited Bellevue to talk about the threat to an affiliation agreement between Bellevue and New York University Hospital which would threaten the status of 1199 workers. An LRP supporter took the opportunity to denounce Marcos for what he is, a frontman for Mayor Giuliani's killer plan for closing public facilities, imposing workfare and busting unions. Her intervention received a lot of support from 1199ers present. Readers interested in discussing our hospital work are urged to contact us.

### SOLIDARITY AND RON CAREY

On March 21, LRPer attended a forum on rank and file movements and the Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) sponsored by the Labor Party and chaired by Tim Schermerhorn of the New Directions caucus in the Transit union and the "socialist" Solidarity group.

Speaker Ken Paff, a TDU founder, cited the Detroit

newspaper strike and pointed to the planned national march in Detroit as a great step forward. Disingenuously to say the least, he claimed that reform Teamster President Ron Carey, a hero of Solidarity and the TDU, had helped force Sweeney to call the march. In intervening, an LRPer exposed Carey's capitulation to the newspaper bosses and his role in imposing a shameful defeat on the strikers. The Teamsters are the most powerful of the striking unions, and Carey's progressive reputation made his betrayal even more profound.

As well, the LRP cited the TDU's and New Directions' reliance on the capitalist government to manage internal union disputes. The reliance on the government gives the lie to the claim to stand for the "rank and file mobilization" Paff had spouted, since it means they have no confidence that the ranks can save their own union.

At the Solidarity panel on "Unionism from Below" at the Socialist Scholars Conference in March, the LRP had another opportunity to challenge Solidarity's reformist politics. The chair introduced Schermerhorn as a leading member of Solidarity and presidential candidate of New Directions in the upcoming TWU Local 100 elections. He spoke against the current TWU leaders' policy of collaboration with management and their giveback of past gains.

During the discussion, a Spartacist supporter made the very correct point about Solidarity's support for government intervention in the unions. When the chair finally called on Eric Josephson, also a candidate in the TWU elections (see p.6), the chair sarcastically commented, "I suppose we'll hear another speech about court intervention in unions."

Josephson in fact did reaffirm the revolutionary position — and again expressed outrage at Solidarity's cover-up of the betrayal of the Detroit strike. He also talked about the need to link the day-to-day struggles in the unions with the fight for socialist revolution, something which Solidarity as an avowedly socialist organization should be interested in doing. The revolutionary approach, he noted, was to use the election to focus on the need for mass action against the capitalist attacks, a goal of his campaign for Executive Board.

### UPCOMING DEBATES

We have planned a series of debates with the Workers Voice group. The first is set for the June 20-22 weekend in Detroit on the topic, "Building a Working-Class Alternative Today." Further debates on U.S. and international questions will follow in Chicago, Oakland and New York. Please call the New York LRP at (212)-330-9017 for specifics.

### CHICAGO

The Chicago LRP continues to participate in defense activities around the Anti-Klan Three. (See *PR* 53). In February, the Circuit Court judge denied a motion to dismiss the false charges against the remaining defendants. The anti-fascist militants still face trumped-up felony counts for assault and battery of police officers. The trial date is set for May 5, 1997 starting at 9:00 am, at 1340 S. Michigan. We strongly urge readers of *Proletarian Revolution* to turn out and help pack the courtroom in a show of support. *Drop All Charges Against the Anti-Klan Defendants!*

The Chicago comrades have intervened at a number of meetings about the case of freedom fighter Mumia Abu Jamal, under sentence of death in Pennsylvania. We have also distributed propaganda on this case in our ongoing campus work. Call the Chicago LRP for more info about current and upcoming activities at (773)-463-1340.●

# Behind Taliban's Reaction in Afghanistan

by A. Holberg

The Taliban forces which now rule most of Afghanistan operate from a triple power base: Pakistani (i.e. Saudi and U.S.) money, religious obscurantism, and Pashtu chauvinism. Taliban may be even more a product of the Pakistani secret service than of religious seminars. Should they cling to power, they will undoubtedly be asked by their sponsors to prove themselves grateful. What makes the Taliban valuable for Pakistan — and behind the scenes, for the U.S.?

More than two years ago, Pakistan started to build up the Taliban militias. Since then it has supported them comprehensively, in order to secure a planned Saudi/U.S. oil and gas pipeline to the Pakistani port of Karachi on the Indian Ocean from the Caspian Sea region. (This region has the world's largest known oil and gas reserves, largely unexploited, and is therefore of interest for powers near and far.) Transport of gas from Turkmenistan is a step towards further exploitation of the whole Caspian region by imperialism.

The parties of the former Mojahedin warlord government of Afghanistan, though also financially and militarily supported by the U.S. via Pakistan in their fight against the Soviet occupation, were too divided among themselves to secure the necessary stability for the country. As well, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-e Islami, the party most strongly supported by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the U.S., has not been able to replace the government of Burhannudin Rabbani and Ahmed Shah Massoud, which was closer to Pakistan's traditional rival, India.

Taliban recruited mostly among very young men who had grown up in the Pakistani refugee camps and were generally not linked to the Mojahedin parties. Notwithstanding their particularly reactionary ideas (often closer to traditional tribal values than to Islam proper), they were helped to power in the hope that they could stabilize the country — and counter the interests of neighboring Iran, under the present Islamist regime the big regional foe of the U.S. and also a competitor with Pakistan.

The fact that Pakistan is a professedly Sunni state, albeit with a strong Shi'a minority, while Iran is the stronghold of the Shi'a brand of Islam, is not the most important factor but it plays a certain role. With a viable government in Kabul, albeit as much Mullah-run as Iran's, Teheran could be bypassed in the pipeline project of the U.S. company Unocal and the Saudis' Delta Oil. To win the Central Asian market against the competition of both India and Iran would be a big boost for the Pakistani bourgeoisie.

Internal Pakistani politics is also a factor in the rise of Taliban. The Pakistani government that sponsored Taliban was the now defunct regime of Benazir Bhutto, leader of the populist Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), one-time favorite of Western leftists. Hekmatyar's Hezb-e Islami was supported by the Islamists of the Pakistani Jamaat-e Islami, who also backed the military dictatorship of General Zia ul-Haq, which had toppled the first PPP regime and executed Bhutto's father. The social-demagogic PPP, in reality led by a class of big landowners with traditional roots, was supported by another competing Islamist party, the Jamiat Ulema-e Islami. When the PPP returned to power, the Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) led by interior minister Nasrullah Babar now backed the religious scholars (taliban) who had been educated by the Jamiat Ulema-e Islami.

The Taliban are of course no mere puppets of any foreign power. They will certainly be able to maneuver a lot between the competing forces, and they have already been approached by Iran. Thus they may face some problems from Pakistan, where the February elections brought back into power a coalition including the Jamaat-e Islami, rival to the pro-Taliban Jamiat Ulema-e Islami.

## ETHNIC OPPRESSION

While the Taliban as much as the Hezb-e Islami declares itself Islamist and therefore claims not to be ethnically based, it is even more plain in their case that they are primarily a Pashtu force. Taliban attacked the former Islamist government in Kabul, arguing that Rabbani and his field commander Shah Massoud were Tajiks, making theirs a Tajik government. Thus when the Taliban conquered parts of the opposition base of Shah Massoud north of Kabul in late January, they "cleansed" the Gulbahar region of its Tajik majority. With the exception of one dissident Tajik, all of the Taliban's leaders belong to the Pashtu people, which has been dominant since the formation of the Afghan kingdom. About half the Afghan population is Pashtu. Pashtus are also the predominant population of Pakistan's North-Western Frontier Province (NWFP) adjacent to Afghanistan.

The Pakistan-Afghanistan border was drawn by the British colonialists; it has always been detested by Pashtu nationalists who seek an Afghan-centered reunification of the Pashtu nation. While the conservative wing of the Pakistani Pashtus supported their brothers in their fight against the "godless" government in Kabul and their Russian masters, the more progressive ones supported the "communist" government as an ally in their struggle to break the NWFP from the hated Pakistani state and "reunify" it with the "motherland." So while Taliban's almost exclusively Pashtu character certainly strengthens links to Pakistan, it has also potential implications dangerous for the Pakistani interests.

For the time being, however, the potential dangers for Pakistan do not compare to the influence Pakistan has established inside Afghanistan. While the Pashtu tribes of Pakistan's NWFP traditionally enjoy far-reaching political autonomy, the Pakistani state has integrated the region economically to a great extent by building agricultural banks, boys' schools and hospitals there. These services have meanwhile been extended into Afghan territory. In a sense, large parts of Afghanistan where Pashtu tribes close to the Taliban live have been turned into a Pakistani semi-colony.

The Taliban are of interest to their foreign backers in a totally different context as well: they control the world's biggest supply of poppy crops. In the last four years, the yield of raw opium has increased from 10,000 to 30,000 tons. The U.N. Drug Control Program estimated that heroin with a street value of \$50 billion — half the world's demand — will flood Europe.

## COUNTRY IN CHAOS

Notwithstanding all this support for Taliban, their rapid success was due to the fact that their rivals, the various Mojahedin warlords, had prove so incapable of anything but all-out destruction. In their infighting, the Mojahedin not only harshly mistreated the population but also devastated the country economically. (For example, they sold much of

Afghanistan's telephone, water and electricity equipment to Pakistan.) The Taliban has promised to end this mess.

So for the moment there is no doubt that Taliban enjoys some popularity with the masses weary of the former anarchy, robbing and plunder, even though their methods are thoroughly brutal. People are beaten because they have listened to music cassettes, women are prevented from being doctors or nurses (but also may not be treated by male doctors). Women are in fact so excluded from public life that in many cases children are forced to provide for their families because the fathers have been killed during the war. In Kandahar, the region from where most of the Taliban mullahs originate, and in Herat, both cities under Taliban control for more than two years, correspondents report that neither the ruins left by the civil war have been cleared away nor have water and electricity been supplied anew.

The Taliban have no basis for power other than their particularly obscurantist theology and their rather simple military equipment. They will not be able, even if they wanted, to take their country out of its extreme economic underdevelopment and end its political and cultural barbarism. It's open to question how long the population, even if traumatized by the long civil war, will take this.

#### U.S. AND SOVIET INTERVENTION

The present situation is primarily the result of the following factors: a particularly backward social structure, where a working class in the traditional sense is now absent in the devastated country itself (there are a lot of Afghan workers in Pakistan, Iran and elsewhere); the bureaucratically brutal policies of the middle-class revolutionaries of the self-professedly "Marxist" People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), which had leaned on the army to topple the Daud dictatorship in the revolution in 1978 (see our analysis from that period in *SV 9*), and most of all the involvement of Soviet and U.S. imperialism.

While the financing and the arming of the counter-revolutionary forces of the Mojahedin by U.S. imperialism was no secret, it has to be stressed that the Soviet intervention had nothing to do with the defense of any revolution or even of the limited state-capitalist reforms implemented by the PDPA. It was exclusively the power interests of the Soviet ruling class that motivated their decision to intervene. In fact repeated calls by Hafizullah Amin, the leader of the radical Khalq faction of the PDPA and at that time head of the government, for Soviet military aid went unheard.

Moscow first organized a palace coup by the right-wing Parcham faction of the party led by Barbrak Karmal, as well as the murder of Amin, before it sent its troops. Under Karmal, some tactical mistakes of Amin's were rectified, but the whole political line was changed. Whereas Amin had bureaucratically fought the reactionary Islamic forces, Karmal appeased them, even endorsing the slogan "Allah is Great" — without success, as could be expected.

Notwithstanding the deadly contradictions between both factions of the PDPA, it must not be forgotten that it was not the working class that had made the April revolution of 1978 but the modernizing anti-monarchist middle class, strongly linked to the most modern institution of the state, the army. So it is not astonishing to see that many figures from both factions of the regime have worked with the Mojahedin or the Taliban after being ousted for one reason or another.

One of the best known cases is that of General Shah Na-

was Tanai, a Khalqi minister of defense who tried to topple the Parchami President Najibullah in March 1990 with the help of Hekmatyar's Hezb-e Islami, whom he had joined along with many of his senior officers. Living since then in the ISI-base of Chaklala near Islamabad, he now pretends to think very well of the Taliban. Another was Touran Abdul Rahman, code-named Mollah Borjan, a leading Taliban commander who died two days before the Taliban took Kabul. He had supported Hafizullah Amin when he shot Nur Mohammed Taraki, the first president after the 1978 revolution, in September 1979.

When the Russians ousted and killed Amin in December 1979, Rahman left for Pakistan and joined the Harakat-e-Inqilab-e-Islami, a party that also included Mollah Mohammed Omar, the present leader of the Taliban. Further well known names are Shah Sawar, who fought alongside the Soviet army; Mohammed Akbar, former officer of the Afghan intelligence service Khad, who is doing the same job now; General Mohammed Gilani, who had served in the army until 1992; and the former interior minister, General Sayed Gulabzoy, who helped Taliban with pilots and tank-crews.

Others, however, are working for Taliban's most important rival, General Dustam. He has been the commander of rather efficient Uzbeki forces under several regimes and has retreated to his fief in the north of Afghanistan, a rather rich part of the country in terms of agriculture and minerals. His capital, Mazar-e Sharif, is now more important than Kabul and is the center of a quasi-independent state bordering the former Soviet Central Asia.

It is highly improbable that the Taliban will be able to conquer this part of the country, which also serves as a refuge for many Afghans who do not accept living under strict Islamic law, without schools for girls and with forced veiling. It does not seem that General Dustam wants to officially break from Afghanistan, but he does want to be recognized for the powerful man he is. On the other hand, there is no sign that his regime could replace Taliban as the central power.

#### SOVIET ALLIES IN TALIBAN CAMP

At the time of the Afghan revolution in 1978, the LRP supported the democratic reforms carried out by the bourgeois nationalist revolutionaries led by the PDPA. When the Soviet-backed Parcham wing took over, the revolution was sacrificed in favor of attempts to placate the armed reactionaries backed by the U.S., China and Pakistan. At best, bourgeois revolutions cannot carry out the needed democratic and economic demands of workers, peasants and women, since the rulers are subservient to property, not the propertyless.

It is therefore no accident that figures allied with the USSR and the revolution are now in the camps of Taliban or their nationalist rivals. Those in the West who supported Karmal & Co. are reminiscent of the Stalinists in the late 1920's who backed the Chinese warlords allied to Chiang Kai-Shek. They have as much to answer for as those who directly capitulated to the Islamist reactionaries.

The LRP pointed out in 1978 that there was no national solution for Afghanistan. The best hope for Afghan liberation at the time was the revolutionary rise of the neighboring Iranian proletariat, not yet crushed by Khomeini's reaction. Today the huge struggle of the Iranian oil workers means that the proletariat of Central Asia is awakening again. ●

# Welfare

*continued from page 1*

that welfare was a gain won through massive workers' struggles. It was hardly an unadulterated gain, but at least it has meant survival for many poor people.

After the 1929 crash, masses of near-starving unemployed workers radicalized and joined in with the larger working-class struggle that exploded in the early 1930's. As the inherent crisis of the system became nakedly exposed, more and more workers developed a hatred of capitalism and a desire for revolution. The movement fought not only for emergency relief but for demands like "jobs for all," which embraced the needs of the entire working class. They raised demands against racism, sexism and other horrors of capitalism. The Communist Party, acting on the strength it had acquired through its Popular Front policy, sold out the workers' struggles by its support for the Democratic Party, class collaboration and preparation for the coming imperialist war. Nevertheless, the capitalist government was forced to give concessions under the enormous mass pressure. With the adoption of the Social Security Act in 1935, the New Deal grudgingly dispensed relief of various kinds as part of a new welfare state system.

What Americans think of as "welfare" was originally called Aid to Dependent Children, ADC. ADC was a gain in that it legislated federal responsibility for providing a minimum income to impoverished women with children in families that did not include a male breadwinner. Before that there had been several state programs under the heading of "mothers" or "widows' pensions," but there was no overall program.

What we now call "social security" was then called Old Age Insurance (OAI), another part of the Social Security Act. From the start, it was conceptualized as a far more substantive benefit than ADC. The terminological separation of "welfare" from "social security" was meant to reflect a divisive two-tier program. OAI and unemployment benefits, intended mainly for white male workers, provided a higher benefit level than what ADC offered to women and children. Further, the ADC recipients would be socially supervised, and their benefits were made dependent on the changing standards of the social work bureaucrats who would judge the recipients' morals, need and employability. The justification was that Social Security and unemployment benefits were "social insurance" that the man had rightfully earned by working — whereas what women got was handouts.

Benefits from free public schools to ADC have been yielded to the working class by the capitalists in response to social struggles. These are not handouts but gains that are part of the "social wage" won by our class. The direct wage is the actual paycheck workers bring home based on their exchange of labor time for money. But because of exploitation, workers do not get back the equivalent in labor to what they give to the capitalists. The difference (taken from workers at home and abroad) is the source of profit for the system. However, with the introduction of modern capitalism and the need for a sophisticated working class, both the ruling and working classes learned that this direct wage was not enough to sustain the class. Thus came the need for the state to step in and provide a social wage to maintain the workers in a more far-sighted way than an individual boss could do. The state did this in a way to minimize both the economic and political costs of the working class's dissatisfaction at its miserable conditions.

Welfare benefits, while they did provide a subsistence income for women and children, were an especially distorted gain. Welfare provided peanuts, it was narrowly selective in who would benefit, and it intentionally degraded the recipient. Capitalism does not gain in response to struggle, but it discriminates even then. Given that both racism and sexism are vital for the survival of capitalist society, it is no surprise that from day one the ADC program incorporated both these forms of attack.

## RESERVE ARMY OF LABOR

Capitalism fundamentally depends on a reserve army of labor. The reserve army is composed of underemployed and poorly paid workers as well as the jobless, whom the system can use as a threat against higher paid and organized sectors. Women are used chiefly as part of what Marx called the "floating" section of this reserve. Since women's role is to give priority to home and child-care duties, they often have to accept part-time jobs and lower wages. Competition forces men to compete by accepting lower wages or else risk replacement by the less well-paid women workers. Historically, when organized workers have fought and gone on strike, women often have been among the unemployed and underemployed workers who have been used as scabs to undercut the organized workers. (See PR 34, "Women and the Family" for more discussion on women's oppression.)

As we have often pointed out, racism against Blacks in the U.S. has always been the prime method of maintaining exploitation. Blacks have also been used historically as a core of the reserve army of labor. Racism enables the system to pay Blacks less than white workers and to force Blacks into

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the reserve army.

The Social Security Act and ADC in particular were formed in accordance with the American race-caste system. Initially most Blacks were denied benefits. This was neatly done by denying unemployment insurance, OAI and ADC to low-wage and part-time workers and people with limited time in the workforce — categories which then covered many Black workers. As well, agricultural and domestic work, the major areas of employment for Blacks and Latinos at the time and women of color in particular, were excluded.

ADC recipients were means-tested, and the women also had to pass work tests and morals tests that varied from state to state in order to get the meager benefits. The liberal New Deal deliberately handed implementation to the states to allow racist determinations of eligibility and benefit levels. Congress was controlled by Southern Democrats determined to block Blacks from receiving even the miserable welfare benefit; if they were entitled to welfare they might have been able to reject jobs as agricultural laborers and domestic servants at wretched wages.

### DIVISIVE PROGRAM

As already indicated, ADC was also sexist. It was premised on the “family wage” myth, which claims that the family only requires a male wage earner, with the woman staying home to cook, clean and mind the children. This fairy tale denies the reality that many working-class women always had to work outside the home — and of course do so today. The capitalist system has always falsely defined women as wives and mothers who depend on their husbands for income — whether or not they are working themselves and whether or not they have husbands!

This myth has of course some historical reality, in that layers of aristocratic workers have been able to earn enough to keep their wives at home. But for a far greater number, the reality is that the woman works after marriage as before. As well, increasing numbers of women are single heads of households: either never married, divorced, separated or widowed; these women are the main wage earners for their families. Nevertheless, the family rationale — that women's income is supplementary and optional — is used to justify keeping wages and jobs limited for all women. Thus the family wage myth is utilized, along with other demeaning notions about women being less capable, intelligent or whatever, to justify keeping women part of the reserve army of labor.

It is important to note that the sparse benefits of the Social Security Act of 1935 hardly ended struggles; the radical actions of employed and unemployed workers continued. Relief allotments and job provisions were never sufficient and were constantly fluctuating. At its peak the work relief program only provided jobs for 25 percent of the jobless, at about one-fourth of union scale. As Art Preis noted in his history of the CIO, *Labor's Giant Step*:

**Relief jobs were systematically increased before national elections and hundreds of thousands were fired shortly after the votes were counted. In 1935, for instance, mass WPA layoffs were discontinued in the fall before Roosevelt's second-term election. Immediately afterwards, 400,000 WPA workers were fired en masse, most of them still displaying their Roosevelt campaign buttons. ... Throughout the entire first two terms of the Roosevelt administration, there were continuous unemployed demonstrations, relief works strikes and riots. The highest relief,**

**the most relief jobs and the biggest wages were in direct proportion to the number of unemployed struggles.**

A main lesson of the '30's was that gains were won through mass action, not electoral combinations. Moreover, even when temporary prosperity returned after World War II, capitalism was unwilling and unable to answer the full needs of the working class and oppressed.

### BLACK STRUGGLE AND WELFARE

Excluded groups — minorities, the very poor, and out-of-wedlock mothers — won inclusion in ADC through a series of amendments won through struggles from the '40's through the '60's and early '70's. The program changed its name to



Aid to Families of Dependent Children (AFDC) in 1962 when single male fathers were included.

Liberals like to argue that Blacks have been stereotyped as welfare recipients by racists, when in fact a good number of whites are on the rolls. This is certainly true but in itself does not explain the full political reality. First, there is no question that the expansion of welfare, as well as Medicaid and Medicare came chiefly as a result of the Black rebellions in the '60's. All poor people benefited from the Black struggle, a fact that the racists of course bury deeply.

The limited gains won by Martin Luther King's pacifist protests had led to the far more radical ghetto rebellions and riots, spearheaded by marginal and unemployed workers who had migrated from the rural South to the industrial North. In response to the ghetto riots, Blacks and Latinos became disproportionately represented on the welfare rolls — and how could it be otherwise, given that the racism of this country keeps the majority of people of color in poverty?

Thus the welfare system went from racist exclusion to social and racist control. The number of families on ADC rose from 803,000 in 1960 to about 1 million in 1965 and

then to 1.9 million in 1970 and almost 3 million in 1972. The proportion of Blacks grew to a peak of 49 percent in 1967. From a small program that was hardly a factor in national politics, it became a major political battlefield.

In addition to public welfare, during this time there came an expansion of associated programs including public housing, food programs, clinics and hospitals, legal aid and educational assistance from Head Start to the college level. The Black struggle of the 1960's had truly shaken the American system to its roots. And everywhere that Blacks rose up and demanded their rights, other oppressed groups were inspired to do the same; Latinos, women, gays, etc., all looked to the Black struggle as a model.

With the rise of Blacks as an urban and industrial force, the greatest danger for the bourgeoisie was that the radicalizing Black workers would recognize their power not simply on the streets but in industry as well — and that white workers would connect with them and together become a powerful challenge to the system. In fact, in a number of industries discontented white workers were following Black-led strike actions for the first time. From capitalism's point of view, what was lacking was a reliable stratum of Blacks that carried weight with poor ghetto workers and could curb their dangerous eruptions. Thus the state had to make concessions, incorporate and give some clout to community leaders within existing agencies, foster the creation of new "community" organizations, and create a bureaucratic maze of detours, speed bumps and safety valves to prevent further mass actions.

The Black struggle won real gains. But another change that came with the expansion of welfare was greater intervention of the state into Black life — in a way that further promoted both racism and sexism. While welfare now included Black women, it was used as a means of social control, not social mobility. The system still pretended that women were not part of the working class, by redefining women on welfare as part of an "underclass" dependent on society. It ignored the fact that many were actually using welfare to add to their sub-poverty level wages or as aid between jobs. As Miriam Abramovitz points out in *Under Attack, Fighting Back*:

A study by the Washington, D.C.-based Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) found that the average AFDC mother works about 950 hours a year, approximately the same as all mothers in the workforce; that over 40 percent of women on welfare "package" AFDC with wages, either simultaneously or sequentially; and that an additional 30 percent spend substantial time looking for work but cannot find it. The IWPR also reported that the state of the local labor market made a big difference:

welfare mothers living in states with unemployment rates of 10 percent had only a 13 percent chance of finding jobs, while those in states where unemployment as 3.5 percent or less had a 29 percent chance. In addition, many working welfare mothers had sporadic full-time jobs rather than steady part-time ones, and the majority are in low-wage women's occupations. ... These women earned an average of \$4.29 an hour (in 1990 dollars) on their primary job, compared to \$10.03 for non-farm private sector employees in 1990. The IWPR researchers concluded that "recipients use AFDC for many reasons, including to supplement their low-wage work effort and to provide a safety net during periods of unemployment, disability and family crises."

Thus the majority of AFDC "welfare mothers" were either part-time, full-time, sporadically employed workers or unemployed workers seeking work. Of course, some women faced with the burdens of poverty, racism, sexism and more fell into a situation of total despair. Naturally the system blamed the victims — the racist rulers found it useful to claim that welfare women were indolent or apathetic by nature.

As the system successfully defined welfare recipients as outside the working class, the trade unions, the only strong institutions of the working class in this country, were let off the hook, rarely challenged to take up the cause of this layer of workers. Thus the division between low-wage workers and the official labor movement, i.e., the better-off union workers, was deepened.

Sexism was also used to divide poor Blacks from each other. For example, President Johnson's "War on Poverty" appointed "experts" to identify how to fight poverty among poor urban Blacks. The famous liberal response was the Moynihan report of 1965 (authored by Pat Moynihan, later a Nixon adviser and now Democratic Senator), which said the problem was the "pathology" of the Black family. He said:

At the heart of the deterioration of the fabric of the Negro society is the deterioration of the Negro family. It is the fundamental cause of weakness in the Negro community. Unless the damage is repaired all the effort to end discrimination, poverty and injustice will come to little.

As usual, the call for family values was a call for the subordination of women. According to Moynihan's report, Black men — who have experienced disastrous levels of unemployment, are continually discriminated against and pushed into an unlivable urban environment — were "dispirited," because of the fact that in too many Black families the wife was "dominant." As Black feminist historian Paula Giddings noted (*Where and When I Enter*):

Though many took issue with Moynihan's view of the prob-

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lem, however, few criticized his suggestion for resolving it — which was even more malevolent. Moynihan concluded ... that Black family stability could be achieved only if Black men could “strut,” even if need be, at the expense of women. This was epitomized in his program for eradicating Black poverty. He believed, as an analysis of the report points out, “that jobs had primacy and the government should not rest until every able-bodied Negro man was working even if this meant that some women’s jobs had to be redesigned to enable men to fulfill them.”

Thus Moynihan called for women to step back to allow Black men to advance. And Black women were not just being put down by white liberal racists but by far too many Black political leaders as well, as if the government would tirelessly work toward the goal of jobs for “every able-bodied Negro man” if Black women were put in their place. Propagation of the sexist notion that women should step back meant that the question of jobs for women — and jobs for the jobless in general — was still largely avoided.

Under the pressure of the riots, young Black men got factory jobs in auto in Detroit and in other industrial centers, and Blacks were also hired in greater numbers in public service jobs. These gains were set back with the layoffs of the 1970’s. The only government program that ended up with any meat on it was welfare — a program designed to make women and other recipients look and feel helpless and dependent..

Johnnie Tilmon, past president of the National Welfare Rights Organization, pointed out:

**There are a lot of other lies that male society tells about welfare mothers; that AFDC mothers are immoral, that AFDC mothers are lazy, misuse their welfare checks, spend it all on booze and are stupid and incompetent. If people are willing to believe these lies, it’s partly because they are just special version of the lies that society tells about all women. For instance, the notion that AFDC women don’t work and don’t want to. It’s a way of rationalizing the male policy of keeping women as domestic slaves. (Cited by Abramovitz in *Under Attack* . . .)**

Yet the maligning of women on welfare and the lies told about them were just as much a product of racism as sexism. In fact, the “underclass” epithet was mainly hurled at Black men who were unemployed or underemployed. When welfare was extended to men suffering long term unemployment, mainly through a general or home relief program (varying by locale), it also propagated racism against Black men as a matter of course. The small relief sums could not possibly lift them out of poverty either, and while decent jobs were not available to unskilled and poorly educated Black men, they were continually accused of being loafers, sponging off society and refusing to support their children. The welfare system pretended that it was doing everything to help Blacks; over time it built up the case that if Blacks remained poor there was something wrong with *them*. That was the heart of the problem.

But what really occurred was that oppressed people whom society had already bombarded with a message of their

inferiority were being caught up in a program designed to debase them even further. Some inevitably joined the ranks of the anti-social lumpenproletariat, but the vast majority was simply oppressed and then vilified over and again.

On the other hand, a few did find the welfare program useful: they attained careers because the state needed social workers and other buffers in those programs in large numbers. Some achieved middle class status, allowing themselves to be used as the disciplining and incorporative agency among poor workers that the system previously lacked. They



*New York, 1932. Unemployed women demonstrating. Women were discriminated against by government emergency relief programs.*

have had a stake in defending and expanding the welfare state’s pacification program.

We note that our review of this period has focused on the relation between the Black struggle and the welfare state. Latinos were affected by and responded to welfare and the system in similar ways, given the common oppression suffered. However, distinct Latino communities have specific histories of struggle, a subject to which *Proletarian Revolution* plans to return in future issues.

#### **ECONOMIC CRISIS AND POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES**

With the return of the system’s deepening economic crisis by the early ’70’s, welfare became increasingly exposed as a failure in the eyes of the masses. The War on Poverty and other “Great Society” programs would not allow most Black and Latino recipients to rise off welfare. As this became more obvious, the program became more discredited. It was hated by the recipients for its failure, as well as for the patronizing social control it represented.

It was hated by better-off white workers too, but for reactionary reasons. Now under the gun financially themselves, many of the labor-aristocratic skilled workers were susceptible pawns for racist scapegoating. In the racist view of angry labor aristocrats, the reason for their dwindling paychecks and sense of instability was that their tax dollars were being misused by the liberal elite who cared nothing for the white working man and was giving everything to “shiftless Blacks” instead.

Such right-wing populism was essential to the eventual dismantling of the welfare system. But it was not enough. Without support from even broader sectors of the working

class as well as the petty bourgeoisie, the job could not have been done.

With the resurgence of crisis, removing welfare became more than a racist bone thrown to blue-collar white aristocrats. It became an important part of the effort to undercut the income of *all* workers. Capitalism's need to restore its rate of profit meant that the ruling class has to deepen exploitation and force down the income returned to workers for their labor. Ending welfare means lowering the real minimum wage of the poorest workers. There is still a need for social control of Blacks and Latinos, but an opportunity to deepen the offensive against them beckoned when their struggle receded. As well, it opened the way to undermining Social Security and other more expensive social services that even wider layers of the class depend on.

This attack could not be packaged only by wrapping it in right-wing populism. The Clinton touch was also necessary: downplaying the racist and sexist scapegoating and pushing a mildly populist message appealing to the common-sense preference for jobs over welfare, a sentiment prevalent among workers of all colors and sexes.

#### ABYSMAL LEADERSHIP

The anti-welfare campaign snowballed because the bourgeoisie's austerity campaign was never countered effectively by either the labor or the Black and Latino leadership. The fundamental problem is that working people accede to capitalism, not out of love for exploitation but because it seems to be the permanent reality: they see no alternative. Therefore they accept leaders who defend the system. And since capitalism can't provide jobs for all at decent wages without self-destructing, the labor bureaucrats and the other misleaders pursue policies which, rhetoric aside, accept that reality.

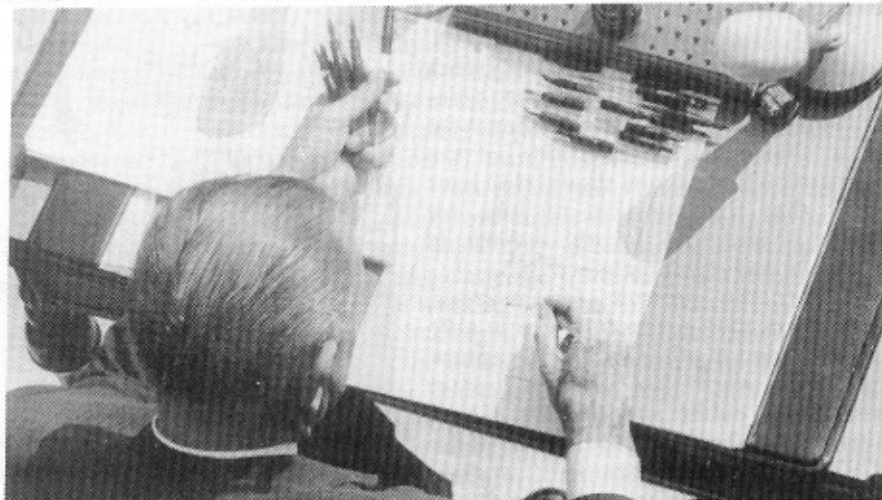
Therefore the policies they pursue inexorably lead to accepting capitalism's war of all against all; each sector of the working class must fight other sectors for the crumbs. This becomes especially intense when the pie grows smaller and the crumbs are fewer. Since the present crisis reflects the system's underlying decay, that's what the future holds for humankind under capitalism.

To keep their grip on the masses, the liberal/progressive leaders promise to fight back and make coalitions with all colors of the rainbow; but increasingly many workers perceive these alliances to be hollow and move toward defending the gains of their particular group going it alone — even if that means (as it inevitably does) at the expense of the others. We have already traced the racist reaction of the white blue-collar labor aristocrats who scornfully rejected their liberal labor leaders and claimed the banner of America in opposition to Blacks, Latinos and immigrants. With the growth of racism in mind, we can easily see many reasons for the defensive "circle the wagons" outlook which, mislabeled Black nationalism, has become a prominent sentiment among Black workers and middle-class elements.

How then has Clinton managed to enhance his vote among Blacks? First we note that his success was among the Black middle class and the new Black labor aristocracy. This tended to be true for Latinos as well. The less well-off Black and Latino workers, many of whom were affected by "welfare

reform" themselves, saw no reason to vote, and Clinton made no overture to them.

Even so, many people were shocked at the mildness of the negative reaction to welfare reform from the Black political leadership, stretching from Congressional Democrats to Jesse Jackson to Louis Farrakhan. There is a class explanation for this. The truth is that the income gap within the Black communities has grown very wide. While sections of the middle class and the aristocracy have suffered under the economic assault, others have at least maintained their position. It is the less well off and the poorest strata which have been truly devastated. All Blacks suffer from the growing racist attacks. Yet the Black middle strata can see Clinton



*Pres. Johnson signing War on Poverty bill in 1964, marking the historic expansion of U.S. welfare state in response to the Black struggle.*

as something of a barrier against right-wing racism and a more complete demolition of the welfare state, their positions and subsidies.

As well, the tendency has grown among the middle layers of the Black community to blame at least a portion of the racist attack on the victims themselves, especially the impoverished layers in the ghettos. We have already looked at the anti-welfare stereotyping that goes on. However, the poorer workers and the work-seeking jobless are lumped together with the lumpenproletariat as an underclass — by Black scholars as well as white. The increasing putdown of welfare by Black conservatives takes one grain of truth — the debasement involved in being a "recipient" — and uses that insight to falsely defend capitalism's "opportunities" — i.e. the false promise of jobs on which Clinton rested his case for decimating the welfare safety net.

The spurious need for Black "atonement" that saturated the Million Man March in Fall 1995 (PR 50) also reflected the mood that blames "Black on Black crime" and socially deviant behavior on Black ghetto dwellers as such — thereby exonerating the murderous capitalist system that fomented drug-dealing and other crimes against the masses. As well, the theme of Black men getting their act together at the expense of Black women, who were once again told to stay home, hardly helped the cause of liberation.

The focus on the abysmal role of Black leadership in defending welfare is well deserved. The labor unions also did their bit, spending millions to get Clinton and the moderate conservative bourgeoisie the support of the "Reagan Democrat" labor aristocrats, rather than leading a fight against the welfare attack on the whole working class.

The union bureaucrats, under the leadership of John Sweeney, put out the phony message that they were fighting for the ranks by proclaiming the need to organize. The real message was that it was necessary to re-enter the realm of active electoral politics at any cost. No serious opposition to welfare attacks was posited, and the ranks of labor — white, Black and Latino — got that message.

### BALANCE OF FORCES

In mobilizing its attack on working-class incomes over the last two decades, the bourgeoisie has moved hesitantly, knowing it could touch off an explosion of class struggle. Reassured by the restraining ability of its lieutenants among the workers and the oppressed, it took an important leap forward by dumping welfare. Having taken that step without a detonation, it is now moving on Social Security and Medicare. But knowing it is going through a minefield, it still moves by manipulation rather than a flat-out charge.

The present balance of forces, the equilibrium between warring elements that Slick Willie achieved for the Democrats and the Wall Street establishment, can only be momentary. The class struggle cannot be held in check for much longer while the bourgeoisie moves into riskier assaults. The increasing working-class eruptions in Asia and Europe are only a taste of what will come in the U.S. when the pent-up fury of workers finally bursts through.

A working class that does not see its own power today certainly doesn't see that it can generate a real alternative to capitalism. Marx always stressed that action preceded consciousness, not vice versa. Tomorrow, when the explosions occur, all things including socialism will seem both possible and necessary. There are already currents developing among workers and oppressed people, including those directly hit by the attack on welfare, that point to the future class confrontation.

But along with them come the leftish reformists, many of whom consider themselves socialists but keep this information under wraps for now. When the big fightback occurs, they know it will be necessary to present their radical face, and lo and behold, their "socialism" will emerge. Today, they are reticent because of their desire for labor/liberal allies among the present misleaderships; they often argue condescendingly that they can't scare those workers who they seek to organize. Their role in the future will be similar to that of the Communist Party in the '30's; they too understand politics to be manipulation. In contrast, the Marxist method is simply to tell the truth to our fellow workers: the revolution will not come through condescending saviors but through the actions and the consciousness of the working class itself.

### WORKERS' REVOLUTION IS THE ONLY SOLUTION!

The truth is that the welfare attacks point to the need for revolution: they are dramatic evidence of the LRP's contention that trying to reform capitalism is no solution for the working class and oppressed. Even in response to the earthshaking Black revolts, at a time when the system could afford concessions, "welfare" never meant raising people out of poverty and providing a better life for them and their families. It is one thing to defend all the crumbs, like welfare benefits, that have been won. It is quite another thing to pose more or better welfare as a real solution.

The answer to unemployment and poverty is not welfare but a new society which will have real solutions for all. A workers' state, the beginning of a new society based on

human needs, not profits, would provide jobs for all by dividing the necessary work among all available workers. By expropriating the major banks and corporations and thereby using all the resources of society for the benefit of all, it would ensure an advancing standard of living for the masses. Such a program can also be fought for under capitalism as long as revolutionaries explain clearly what will be necessary to achieve it: socialist revolution.

We raise the slogan *Jobs for All* along with *A Full Program of Public Works*. This is especially critical for working-class women. To enable the participation of women in the workforce on an equal basis, and to actually facilitate the liberation of working-class and oppressed women, we fight for a society that provides extensive child care, as well as kitchen, laundry and other collective facilities to release women from the drudgery of individuated household labor and caretaking.

Our slogans *A Sliding Scale of Hours* and *An Escalating Scale of Wages* express the need for sharing the necessary work without loss of wages. This idea was fought for in this country in the '30's under the popular slogan "30 for 40" (30 hours work for 40 hours pay). Such demands begin to meet the immediate problems of working women, whose responsibilities in caring for children and other family members leave them without free time for political or personal development. The escalating scale of wages is also a way of ensuring that workers' pay meets the rising cost of living. Today most workers know they are not doing well and that low wages — whether in the form of workfare, multi-tier contracts, non-union shops, etc. — are key to the attack on them. Therefore we also advance immediate demands for universal wage hikes to roll back this trend.

Such demands provide for the needs of the whole working class — young and old, Black, Latino and white, women and men. Free quality transport, health care, education and housing are other needs that are critical to impoverished women, men and children today but are actually needed by all members of society. The program of public works would provide such needed services and good, useful jobs for society's members. A guaranteed income to disabled and incapacitated members of society who are unable to work would certainly have to be included.

This program meets the interests of all workers, and when our class begins to really fight back, legions will take up these demands. Many workers will believe that the capitalist state can deliver on them. While fighting side by side with these fellow workers, we will always point out that under capitalism such a program is unrealizable. We believe that the struggle will show more and more workers that we revolutionaries are right and that our class must seize power. Decaying capitalism cannot even sustain a renewed welfare state; its attacks will inevitably increase if we allow the system to continue. Then we will see a depression far deeper than the 1930's, and moves toward fascism and another imperialist world war.

### CAPITALISM'S LEFT DEFENDERS

Racism and sexism, as we have also seen, are not just economic weapons but flexible social tools. These reactionary ideologies have been perpetrated by the system for so long that they have a strong hold even among oppressed workers. They divide and weaken the struggle and sap the working class of its consciousness as to who the real enemy is.

However, it is not just "the system" in the abstract that

perpetuates these divisive reactionary ideas. Sexism, racism and other divisions are also growing because the current liberal/progressive leaders are all sectoralist: they purposely propose strategies which teach the working class not to identify with their class as a whole but with only one sector.

In the "welfare rights movement," Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward have been central figures, well known reform advocates for the poor for almost three decades. From the standpoint of today's reality, it is notable that these experts came to a new and crucial theoretical conclusion in their book, *The New Class War*, written in response to Reagan's attacks in 1981. While President Carter had made some quiet attempts at welfare cuts, Reagan's attacks were clearly the first major battle cry. Yet in response, Piven and Cloward boldly predicted that, unlike in the past when welfare benefits rose and fell in accordance with mass movements, the modern welfare state could not be dismantled because it had become too entrenched. They wrote:

The great expansion of other social welfare programs which were initiated in either the 1930's or the 1960's was not aborted with the ebbing of protests in the 1970's. Relief recipients benefit enormously from some of these programs, especially those providing subsidies for food, fuel, and medical care, so that their condition has not worsened on the whole. Public relief, once the sole form of state intervention to ameliorate destitution, has thus come to be embedded in a general structure of income support programs for a wide range of constituencies, from the aged to the disabled to the unemployed. The changes in American society that gave rise to this development lead us to the conclusion that the cyclical pattern of providing subsistence resources by the state have been replaced by a variety of permanent income-maintenance entitlements . . . . The political economy of the late 20th century is not that of either the 18th or the 19th century. The relationship of

state to economy has been drastically altered in ways that provide powerful support for the idea that people have a right to subsistence, and particular legislative or executive actions will not extinguish that idea.

Marxists, in contrast, have long understood that the epochal crisis of capitalism precludes a permanent capitalist recovery; we were able to predict the return of crisis despite the temporary prosperity bubble. The reformists display little sense of the realities of capitalism; many believe that the growth of the welfare state will turn into a mixed or socialistic state as time goes on. Thus, even after the crisis resurfaced, they have managed to ignore its meaning. That this new "theory" was put forward in 1981 was not just a quirk on the part of the authors. The idea that decaying capitalism was going to provide "permanent income maintenance programs," or at least a guaranteed "right to subsistence," was inherent in a view that denies the need for revolution.

### ILLUSIONS IN CAPITALISM

Faith that capitalism can be reformed is prevalent in the middle-class social-work intelligentsia for good reason. These are the people whose careers are based on the existence and expansion of the welfare state. As a rule, the middle class views itself as the benevolent go-between, needed to barter and compromise between the crudely greedy rulers on the one hand and the uneducated, pitiable, impoverished masses on the other. Unlike the traditional petty-bourgeois shopkeepers, whose narrow interests make them view big state controls with suspicion, the liberal middle layers spawned by the growth of the capitalist state see that state as fulfilling their desires for social peace. They want state benefits aimed at those constituencies they have assigned themselves to manage, like "the poor."

Still, they do not insist that the poor be given a welfare benefit which would raise them to the middle-class living standards they themselves enjoy. No, when push comes to shove they settle for "the right to subsistence," or even less. They push illusions in what capitalism can offer while accommodating to capitalist misery — on behalf of the poor. Thus reformism today means acceptance of austerity, cloaked in the illusions of a return to prosperity.

Piven and Cloward, as the left wing of this stratum, often attempt to disguise their middle-class bias by praising "movements" of the poor. The National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO) reflected this type of do-good reformist strategy, and was associated with Piven and Cloward. Its strategy pretended to rely on the movement of poor people and claimed it could win significant gains for them. But it really was based on trying to settle for what was realistic. This "realistic" strategy failed.

A discussion among various reformists prior to the launching of the welfare rights campaign by NWRO appeared in the chapter "A Strategy to End Poverty" in Piven and Cloward's *The Politics of Turmoil: Poverty, Race and the Urban Crisis*. It gives a good illustration of Piven's ideas:

A series of welfare drives in large cities would, we believe, impel action on a new federal program to distribute income, eliminating the present public-welfare system and alleviating the abject poverty which it perpetrates. Widespread campaigns to register the eligible poor for welfare aid, and to help existing recipients obtain their full benefits, would produce bureaucratic disruption in welfare agencies and fiscal disruption in local and state govern-

## REVOLUTIONARY HISTORY

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ments. These disruptions would generate severe political strains and deepen existing divisions among elements in the big-city Democratic coalition: the remaining white middle class, the white-working class ethnic groups and the growing minority poor. To avoid a further weakening of that historic coalition, a national Democratic administration would be constrained to advance a federal solution to poverty that would override local welfare failures, local class and racial conflicts and local revenue dilemmas. . . . The ultimate objective of this strategy — to wipe out poverty by establishing a guaranteed annual income — will be questioned by some.

Not only did the reformist welfare strategy demonstrate no anticipation of the resurfacing economic crisis that would force the government to embark on austerity attacks; there was also no clue as to the role the capitalist Democratic Party would play. The hope that the Democrats would have to play a unifying role based on practical self-interest was pure fantasy. Rather than sustaining itself in the old way by doling out benefits and letting the sectors fight over the pieces, the Democrats now carry out the systemic divide-and-conquer drive by letting the sectors fight over who will give up what.

Piven's reformist strategy was adopted not only because of such wishful thinking, but also because of the assessment that the demand for decent jobs (the real route out of deep poverty and oppression) was unrealistic. As Piven put it:

The fact of the matter is that most of the people whom we now call very poor are not going to participate in occupational roles, at least not in this generation. And so, therefore, to say that this strategy doesn't give people jobs, which everybody really wants, is to forfeit the income goal for an aspiration which isn't going to be realizable for most of the very poor. . . . that the sharp differential between classes in our society will be maintained I think [is] true.

One might ask: if capitalism can't provide jobs for all, and therefore a strategy fighting for jobs should be rejected in advance, how is it that a strategy of excessive demands for welfare could lead to a decent guaranteed income from the same system? The reality was that the real intent of Piven et al was to extend the welfare system, not eliminate it; the guaranteed annual income, the "ultimate" objective, was just a left cover.

#### POOR AS BATTERING RAM

In pushing her strategy, Piven also pointed out condescendingly that one of its great advantages was that "one need not ask more of the poor than that they claim lawful benefits. Thus the plan has the extraordinary capability of yielding mass influence *without* mass participation . . ." In other words, it is really up to the Pivens and Clowards to mobilize the poor as a battering ram manipulated by experts. The poor don't have to worry about demanding jobs or becoming aware of their power (or of other steps that might actually increase that power); they don't even need much ability to do any thinking or planning. Piven and Co. will take care of all that.

The NWRO collapsed in the early 70's, well after the collapse of the actual social movement out of which it was manufactured. Harsh reality was no problem for Piven and

Cloward, who in their subsequent book, *Poor People's Movements*, still touted their guerrilla strategy of jamming the system. But clearly it was the fear instilled by the riots that gave the demands of the welfare rights movement a ready ear in the system. And once the riots and the entire Black movement was decisively sold out, the "welfare rights" notion petered out with the return of recession.

As well, the sectoralism of their reformist strategy of just demanding more welfare played right into the hands of the anti-welfare campaign the bourgeoisie was revving up. Demands for decent welfare benefits for all those who need them are absolutely necessary. However, had the welfare struggle demanded class-wide demands like jobs for all, free



February 1997: WEP Workers Together leads welfare laborers' protest against dangerous and unsanitary working conditions.

child care, free health care, etc. — which would have better served the welfare recipients own needs — they would have also connected to union and non-union workers who were suffering from increasing job instability, shrinking paychecks and lowering living standards. The class connection could have been made and fought for and the bourgeoisie's scapegoating lies about welfare recipients — based on the notion that welfare recipients are not part of the working class — would have met substantial resistance.

The left liberals' opposition to "jobs for all" really reflected the absence of a working-class strategy. It also indicated that they saw the "poor" not in working-class terms but from the vantage point of the middle class: people to be helped and controlled with more and better benevolent capitalist programs, rather than people who could forge their own destiny through working-class power.

The failure to fight for jobs for welfare mothers was sometimes justified by rhetoric about a woman's right to choose whether to work or to stay home and be paid for family duties like child-rearing. Capitalism is not about to give wages for housework to middle-class women, much yet to welfare mothers. Women on welfare, and poor women with children in general, have always worked; the reality is that the middle-class women's movement was not as interested in fighting for better jobs and child care for working-class women as in gaining more "choices" and career ladders for themselves.

In this century the drive of society has been overwhelm-

ingly in the direction of women working outside the home, especially in the case of lower working-class women — increasingly so in recent decades. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, a “socialist feminist,” grabbed the essence of the question in 1916 and lectured the middle-class do-gooders of her day:

**The first steps of working motherhood, usually enforced by extreme poverty, bring the woman and the child in contact with some of our worst conditions; and we, in our dull social conscience, seeing evil fall upon mother and baby, seek only to push them back where they came from — instead of striving to make conditions fit for them. What we must recognize is this: Women: wives and mothers: are becoming a permanent half of the world workers. . . . That children should be forced to work for their living is an unnatural outrage. . . . That adult women should do it, is in no way harmful, if the hours and conditions . . . are suitable; and they never will be made suitable until overwhelming numbers of working women compel them.** (Quoted by Linda Gordon in *Pitied But Not Entitled*.)

This was a partial exposition of the Marxist view of women’s liberation. Lenin heralded the drawing of women into the factories as “progressive,” not only because it posited a fight for better conditions, but because it strengthened tremendously the working-class forces available for revolution and liberation. Rather than campaigning for women to stay home, Marxists stress the strength that women as workers can exert, in the fight both for their own liberation and for the workers’ revolution.

By now it has been decisively demonstrated that the question for the working class in the modern capitalist epoch — “pro-family” rhetoric notwithstanding — has been and will continue to be not whether women are going to work but under what conditions, wages etc. With the political momentum going to the right, over time the notion of welfare as preferable to work gained prominence. The bourgeois ambivalence between the notion of “women’s place is in the home” vs. forcing women to be exploited at work was partially resolved by the fact that the rulers were dealing with a large number of Blacks and Latinos in the welfare system. Racism allows the ruling class to stereotype women of color as fit for menial labor, while white women are enshrined as mothers.

But the policies are still contradictory. In fact, with the return of economic crisis, the bourgeoisie is escalating its family-values rhetoric. It pushes the family line to justify cuts in social services; it claims that care for children, the sick and the elderly is rightfully the job of the family — i.e., the woman in the home — rather than society. Of course, ever hypocritical, the bourgeois preachers have no qualms about pushing women into low wage jobs that make it impossible to maintain the family at the same time.

During the 60’s and 70’s, the NWRO and other forces successfully fought against some of the more invasive features of the AFDC program, such as “midnight raids” (where case workers showed up unannounced to see if there was a man in the house) and forced birth control and sterilization. With Clinton’s welfare “reform,” the invasive approach is returning with a vengeance.” For example, according to welfare rights activist Betsy Reid Mandell, this law “requires states to impose harsher sanctions than allowed under current law on families where the parent does not ‘cooperate fully’ in establishing paternity and collecting child support.”

Before Clinton the federal government regulated welfare; now any state can just about set its own standards, and

Clinton’s bill encourages such action. States can deny aid to children born while the family is on assistance, deny aid to parents who fail to immunize their children or fail to keep them in school. Under New York Governor Pataki’s current proposal, teen parents will be forced to finish high school, regardless of the availability of child care. Any teenagers failing to show up for school will be punished by having their family’s benefits reduced.

This kind of regulation shows that the bourgeoisie is hardly interested in bolstering families in the abstract, but only in propping up minimally those women and families who play by their rules. Families that don’t will be duly punished.

#### FROM WELFARE TO SLAVE LABOR

The racist categorization of Black (and Latino) women as fit only for menial labor — as well as the “fact” that these “welfare mothers” had proven themselves unfit mothers despite all the wonderful efforts of the welfare system — helped justify the line that women on welfare should be forced to work through “workfare.” Some welfare-to-work programs have been in effect since the 1980’s in various localities, but they failed basically because training was costly and there weren’t actual jobs to be found. The earlier programs, including those under the supposedly more “mean-spirited” Republican presidents, still assumed funding for training and stipends for child care — and thus didn’t get very far, given the economic and social realities. The idea was to spend a lot of money in the short run for long-term gains.

Clinton actually upped the ante: the only way that welfare could actually be ended was to make workfare compulsory. And jobs would be provided the only way capitalism could do it: without training, without decent wages and without child care. Money would still be spent, but mainly in the form of subsidies to private companies.

Workfare today creates jobs by taking them away from public service unions and giving incentives to private industry, both to run privatized welfare programs for profit and to hire welfare recipients and let the federal government foot part of the tab. But the new workfare workforce is as yet uncontrolled and prone to volatility, a problem the bosses are hardly looking for. And the numbers currently on board are nothing compared to what the system is planning just in the next year. Thus despite all the hoopla and financial incentives Clinton can come up with, private industry is not jumping to hire masses of welfare recipients.

Now that welfare recipients are being drawn into the workforce, the basic question is: will workfare workers be able to use their new power as part of the workforce to defend themselves and also spark a wider struggle, or will reformist leaderships be able to regroup and once again succeed in stifling the class struggle?

Our article in *PR 53* on welfare reform examined the New York workfare scene, a test project for the nationwide expansion of union-busting slave labor. (Over 35,000 have already been placed in workfare slots in city agencies, and

### Letters Welcome

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the number is slated to rise to over 100,000.) We showed that the labor bureaucrats had no intention of fighting for the needs of workfare workers and were in large part responsible for their situation in the first place.

We argued therefore that what was necessary was an independent organization of workfare workers based on a fighting movement. Such an organization would fight for full union rights for all workfare workers. The demand for "equal pay for equal work" could be concretized as "all jobs at union wages," in order to fight the assignment of workfare workers to the same jobs as unionized workers but at miserable wages. The workfare struggle would also have to raise class-wide demands such as "Jobs for All" in order to link the workfare fight with a revitalization of the entire working-class struggle; it would require open combat against the pro-capitalist labor bureaucracy.

In the past few months, we have distributed leaflets with our revolutionary ideas on this issue at meetings and demonstrations. It is clear from the workfare workers we have met that these women and men want permanent jobs, not a return to welfare.

### WORKFARE ORGANIZING IN NEW YORK

As we prepare this issue, it has become even clearer that New York is also a test project for how the labor bureaucracy is going to handle the workfare problem. The AFL-CIO's shift in position following its Los Angeles Executive Council meeting in February officially put union organizing of workfare workers on the agenda. While this should present opportunities, it has hardly plunged the bureaucracy into a radical change in strategy or action. Rather, it is clearly something the bureaucrats feel forced to attempt from the narrow perspective of defending their traditional base. And they intend to do it in the same minimal and losing way they defend the already organized workers.

As evidence of this, Stanley Hill, head of District Council 37, the large umbrella union for New York City employees, had this to say when he "reversed" his position against organizing workfare workers: "The law is that they're not defined as employees, but we're going to try to get that changed, possibly down in Washington or at the state level." (*New York Times*, February 9.) But as the *Times* pointed out:

**Union officials acknowledge, however, that it will not be easy to persuade the Republican Congress in Washington or the Republican State Senate in Albany to pass legislation that would enable workfare laborers to form unions. Such legislation could be expected to make workfare more expensive at a time when Federal and state governments are eager to reduce welfare spending and budget deficits.**

What the *Times* doesn't say is that the "new" strategy of trying to change local and federal laws is exactly the do-nothing position that Hill and the entire bureaucracy had before the AFL-CIO decision. At a meeting at Bellevue Hospital in October, an LRP supporter confronted Hill over exactly this legalistic strategy, raising the alternative of mass action. Hill dodged her proposal and denied that the 2000 welfare recipients slated for workfare in the city hospitals had any relation to the layoffs of unionized hospital workers that had just been announced!

There is something relatively new in the organizing scene when it comes to workfare, however. The labor bureaucrats

as a rule are totally out of touch with the rank and file. They are even more distant in every sense from the new layer of workfare workers, since the unions in recent decades turned their backs on "the poor" and left leadership of the most beleaguered workers to the liberal welfare rights advocates and community organizers.

So in their approach to this new sector, the unions have formed an overt alliance with these groupings in order to utilize their skills and experience. Now the welfare advocates, community organizers and AFL-CIO are joining hands and



ACORN leads small rally against New York City Sanitation Dept. 40 percent of sanitation workers today are workfare workers.

are figuring out how to both fight for and control the bargaining rights of the new slave-labor force.

Hill announced that he would meet with ACORN (the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now), a group that recently moved into the organizing scene in New York. It claims to have 6500 WEP workers' signatures from their union organizing drive as of March, half of whom pay \$5-a-month dues. (WEP, the Work Experience Program, is the New York City euphemism for workfare.) It touts itself as the largest national community organization representing the poor. Like other such groups, it appeals to idealistic middle-class college students who often come aboard as organizers and staff members.

ACORN's "vanguard constituency" (in the terminology of the group: see the informative book *Organizing the Movement, The Roots and Growth of Acorn* by former ACORN organizer Gary Delgado) is conceived of as a layer of generally poor working-class people who are to be mobilized in action on the lowest common denominator that ACORN organizers, like bourgeois politicians at large, decide their "constituents" can understand. Since ACORN was originally founded as a NWRO-sponsored experiment, the similarity in approach to the poor should be no surprise.

ACORN formed a "sister organization," the United Labor Unions, around 1977, which in the early '80's affiliated with the SEIU. The ULU had been organizing house cleaners, farm workers and other marginalized low-wage workers before its turn to workfare sites. As the ACORN web page says, "the United Labor Unions, now Locals 100 and 880 of the Service Employees International Union, became labor organizing arms of ACORN which organize people where

they work." Clearly for ACORN union organizing is just one more way of reaching the same strata of poor workers it had already been organizing around welfare, housing, education and other issues.

ACORN's independence as an organization was supposed to be based on its commitment to the poor as opposed to other constituencies. From this framework, ACORN's view on labor in the 80's was expressed by organizer Danny Cantor (also a New Party leader), who observed:

**These are not revolutionary times, so neither the unions nor ACORN are revolutionary organizations ... though labor is heavily invested in the mythology of labor/management cooperation, the labor movement is objectively on our side. We cannot do away with their worldview but we can ... create situations that change the way discourse is conducted by opening things up for our own members and theirs in a way that moves both organizations to a more radical plane.**

In other words, the pro-imperialist and chauvinist bureaucracy can't be challenged — but it can be pushed to the left by organizing the poor to push on them.

Despite its claims to represent the poor, as ACORN has escalated its union activity it has also increasingly entered the Democratic Party. This fits with its affiliation to the New Party, whose strategy is to campaign both inside and outside the Democrats. As the web page puts it:

**Reaching its heights in the Rainbow Lobby work in 1988, ACORN found ways to work effectively with other progressive groups, such as labor, churches and political movements. The Rainbow Lobby was a strong force in Democratic Party politics in 1988 because of ACORN's hard work and ability to coordinate efforts with other groups. This experience confirmed the value of building and working within alliances.**

Although it only started its workfare organizing drive in late fall, ACORN threatened to quickly out-organize two groups that had started earlier, Workfairness and WEP Workers Together (WWT). A *Village Voice* article (January 28) described the bureaucratic turf squabbles, typical of AFL-CIO organizing drives, that characterized the contest for workfare workers' signatures. Despite their competition, the groups' behaviors are very similar. They all emphasize getting signatures and seeking negotiations, they all do favor actions on occasion, and above all they all agree that the labor bureaucrats should go uncriticized when they conduct business as usual, i.e., do nothing. For this reason, there has not even been one united mass demonstration in New York against slave-labor workfare. And that is criminal negligence, considering all the months of "organizing," meetings and signature gathering that has been going on.

So far, ACORN does seem to pose a marginally more militant stance than WWT. The latter was formed by an association of community groups which seem politically indistinguishable from ACORN; early on it got the backing of CWA Local 1180 (a city supervisors' local in New York headed by a leftist bureaucrat, Arthur Cheliotis), and has to date stuck with the specific aim of organizing an association not a union — because of legal restraints on organizing workfare workers into unions in New York. WWT meetings, only open to WEP workers, emphasize legal rights and a legalistic strategy, although WWT has led worksite actions for specific demands.

ACORN states it will organize a union. They mean not that they will lead mass actions to defy the anti-union laws, but that they will amass enough signatures to impress Mayor

Giuliani. They also have led small worksite actions for specific demands on local conditions at worksites, using rhetoric similar to WWT's. Both groups emphasize bargaining around immediate and local conditions right now, ahead of more broadly challenging the enforced slave-wage structure.

The Workfairness group, organized by the Workers World Party, seemed to pose a more militant attitude toward organizing workfare workers when it came onto the scene in early Fall. For example, a militant rally in late November, attended by about 100 workfare workers, featured rank and file workfare workers and a freewheeling political discussion at an open mike, where calls for taking to the streets and even "revolution" were given an enthusiastic hearing. This was a far cry from the ACORN and WWT's restrained focus on smaller grievances like proper rain gear or toilet facilities. However, Workfairness's next big move was to call off a planned mass rally for January 15, in favor of a controlled press conference arranged by liberal City Councilman Tom Duane on the steps of City Hall on January 20. Its April 4 rally featured bureaucrats and Democratic politicians who were treated as close family members. It was indistinguishable from any reformist-led rally against workfare.

Workfairness leader Larry Holmes and other WWP representatives are centrists who alternate in their speeches between the themes of building Workfairness as a union-type formation through getting bureaucratic endorsements, favors from politicians, etc. — that is, the same way union bureaucrats operate — and the need for a "movement" of poor against rich.

They do not specifically name capitalism as the problem or call for revolution as the answer. Nor do they ever point out the need for revolutionary leadership, which would at least account for the existence of their own party. Instead, Workers World hailed the recent move toward workfare organizing by John Sweeney's "new" AFL-CIO, without mentioning the need for a real fighting leadership for the workfare struggles. As Holmes put it:

**We knew that the unions would have to do something like this at some point. ... But they're acting faster than anyone might have predicted. ... It is a tremendous thing that the AFL-CIO is going to act on organizing workfare workers. The old Lane Kirkland leadership that was pushed out — you can't imagine them doing this. It's a victory. It's a big step forward, and opens a new phase in this struggle. (*Workers World*, March 6.)**

While Holmes goes on to criticize the labor tops' ties to the Democratic Party, he never reaches the obvious conclusion that the AFL-CIO's support of capitalism means betrayal of the workfare struggle, whether "New Voice" or old guard; therefore the argument for an anti-capitalist leadership is never made. There is no warning that the AFL-CIO will sell out even the immediate defensive struggles of workfare workers, in a period when such sellouts have been staggering (see p. 3 on the Detroit newspaper strike).

Instead, Holmes concludes with "our conception of how to organize workfare workers":

**Organize everybody on public assistance into the union. That means you'll have several million members right away. At the same time, bring in all of the women's organizations. Solidarize yourself with the women's movement, and particularly the poorer women and Latinas and Blacks women, Jamaicans.**

**And bring in the radicals. It's got to be a political**

movement. Get the students in it. The workfare workers need supporters. They need militants, they need rank-and-file trade unionists, they need community leaders, they need women leaders.

**Force the issue. Try to make it more militant. We're not for an adventure, something premature or something gimmicky. But don't wait. The time to act is now. Organize! Organize!**

Thus the speech as a whole argues that a more militant, more representative movement is needed — but it never quite connects this with an understanding of what kind of leadership is needed to encourage such a movement. When it comes to politics, the most it says is “bring in the radicals.” No where does it explain that the workfare attack is a result of the capitalist crisis, and that the solution, jobs for all, requires socialist revolution and revolutionary leadership.

#### **BUREAUCRACY'S LEFT TAILS**

In sum, ACORN, Workers World and others are trying to organize workfare workers in line with the bureaucratic methods of the Sweeney's AFL-CIO. Whatever their hopes or claims, it is the bureaucracy that holds the reins in these campaigns, not the “community” or “left” organizers who do the legwork. The reformists like ACORN and centrists like the WWP are a necessary aid in reining in these new workers, who are not yet under the grip of the labor bureaucracy.

If these new misleaderships succeed in their mission, it does not bode well for the workfare struggle. But it is far from guaranteed. The struggle against workfare demands a real fight against the labor bureaucracy. That is because labor-aristocratic reformism dominates the entire bureaucracy, including officials like Stanley Hill who reign over unions representing masses of low-paid Black and Latino blue-collar workers. Their business-as-usual attitude toward workfare overlooks the fact that deals with the system cannot meet the needs of workfare workers today, nor will they prevent the growth of the army of the unemployed, homeless and desperate people that capitalism is recruiting. The need is for revolutionary leadership and mass action, not another try at reformist leadership and bureaucratic organizing.

As revolutionaries who are loyal to our class, we support every effort on the part of workfare workers to better their situation. We are open about the fact that we not only want to build and participate in such struggles — we want to use the opportunities to explain the need for socialist revolution and its connection to a winning strategy for our class. An action strategy can start with demonstrations and marches of workfare workers and their allies, which, if unified, would already be an improvement over the current activities.

But we also look for opportunities to place demands on the labor bureaucrats, the biggest obstacles facing our class, for major mobilizations that can show our fellow workers the power the working class has when united. While there is no immediate agitation possible for strikes over workfare and jobs issues in New York, this situation can change quickly, since the underlying tensions are so explosive. Revolutionary minded workers should already be discussing class-wide action, the general strike, along with demands like “Jobs for All” which will be essential to unifying the class and pointing the way to revolutionary answers.

We do not wish to be like Chicken Little saying the sky is falling. Workfare is clearly at an experimental phase, not only in the U.S. but in several European countries as well. The current political situation and balance of forces shows

## **An Appeal for Donations**

We sent an appeal to subscribers with PR 53, and we are happy to report that there was a good response. As a result, we did do a fair amount of subsidized distribution of our last issue at workfare demos and meetings. We hope to do more with PR 54. With the help of the contributions, we are able to continue our special subscription offer at the rate of \$1 to the unemployed, workfare workers and strikers.

As well, we are planning to step up our international efforts. We will be sending LRPers abroad in the near future and are sponsoring forums for a WIVL South African revolutionary speaker here in the U.S. For all these good reasons, we once again have to ask our readers and friends to pitch in. Continued donations are sorely needed -- and will assuredly be put to an important use.

Please send as much as you can afford to: Socialist Voice, P.O. Box 3573, Church St. Station, New York, NY 10008-3573.

that capitalism has escalated the speed and depth of its attacks, but the bourgeoisie is still cautious. Most decisively, the class struggle in this country hasn't yet shown its muscle. Like a sleeping tiger, it still must be approached with some caution. What will happen when workfare is implemented widely is mainly up to the class struggle, which can turn policy makers on their heads.

Unless such struggle takes a revolutionary direction, the worst is truly yet to come. This means that we must fight for revolutionary leadership and the revolutionary program now, and do everything possible to build the LRP into a fighting force that can attract revolutionary minded workers in the unions, among workfare workers and the unemployed, and working-class students and youth. The fundamental direction of capitalism in this country is to descend back toward slavery-like situations for people of color, and to 19th-century conditions for working-class families in general. In several imperialized countries, genuine slavery has returned. No return to the prosperity period that sustained the American “welfare state” is possible.

**Smash the Slave Labor Plan! Equal Pay for Equal Work!  
Stop All Welfare Cutbacks! Jobs for All!  
A Full Program of Public Works!  
Free Child Care on Demand!  
Sliding Scale of Hours! Escalating Scale of Wages!  
Workers' Socialist Revolution is the Only Solution!**

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## South Africa

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*continued from page 40*

lutionary alliance of workers' organizations with capitalist parties. They opposed from the first opportunity the WIRFI's rotten bloc with the bourgeois-reactionary United Democratic Front in Namibia's 1989 elections (which we discussed at the time in *PR 36* and returned to recently in *PR 52* in a polemic with the WIRFI's Namibian group). As the WIVL comrades have written, "Marxists cannot support such a multi-class alliance ... for there can be no progressive popular frontism. ... This class collaborationist episode is reminiscent of the alliances between Healy [ex-leader of the WRP(B)] and the various Arab nationalist movements."

Similarly, the WIVL comrades opposed the way the WIRFI used the need to militarily defend various oppressed peoples from imperialist attack as an excuse for giving political support to bourgeois nationalist leaders. For example, they condemned the WIRFI for in effect becoming a mouthpiece for the Bosnian Izetbegovich government, and for supporting imperialism by not opposing the NATO bombing of Serbia in 1995.

Indeed, the WIVL comrades also exposed the pro-imperialism of the WIRFI's position of calling for intervention by imperialist governments in Rwanda under the guise of preventing mass starvation — as if the presence of murderous imperialism will ever help the masses of the "Third World."

### 3. Exposure of WIRFI-LIT Opportunism

In 1995 the WIRFI and the International Workers League (LIT) announced that they were creating a Liaison Committee for the purpose of fusing their two organizations. The LIT has a political history as rotten as the WIRFI's, most notably under the leadership of the late Nahuel Moreno, when it gave political support — not just military defense from imperialism — to bourgeois nationalist forces including the Peronists in Argentina and the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. (See *PR 29*.) The political basis of the Liaison Committee was elaborated in a statement of 21 points of political agreement between the two groups.

The WIRFI and LIT had previously formed such a bloc in 1987 (see *PR 28* and *29*). A sure sign of the character of the new Liaison Committee was that its announcement and statement of agreement contained no comment on the reasons for the failure of their previous bloc: this was to be an unprincipled fusion to be achieved by ignoring differences on decisive political questions and events in the class struggle rather than resolving them. Consistent with this was the Liaison Committee's "21 Points" which watered down their 1987 statement and declared agreement on general "principled" political positions which both groups have violated in the past.

The WIVL opposed this opportunist lash-up: **Instead of openly characterizing the opportunist vacillations of the LIT during its entire history, this history was whitewashed and the LIT declared as one of those forces who represented the continuity of the Fourth International. In order to make this absurdity plausible for the not so naive, the Preparatory Committee had to declare that the process of continuity of the Fourth International was quite "contradictory."**

The WIVL challenged the Liaison Committee:

**The reference to political collaboration attempted in 1987 is misleading without an analysis of what went wrong in the relationship previously ... and what has changed since then. Failure to do this could lead to opportunism on either or both sides, and a repetition of the breakdown of 1987 ... Instead of the point on continuity, the document would be much better if it included a proper balance sheet of the Trotskyist movement, including the deviations of the WRP and LIT.**

Raising many criticisms of the "21 Points," the comrades in particular demanded that "a balance sheet be drawn up on the alliance of the WRP (Namibia) with the pro-imperialist petty-bourgeois reactionary UDF during the independence elections, as well as similar alliances the LIT got involved in during previous years, including alliances with the Peronists."

### WIRFI: NEO-COLONIAL ARROGANCE

The greatest strength of a revolutionary organization is that it brings together workers with a variety of different experiences in the class struggle (from different countries, ages, social positions etc.) which can be generalized and learned from. A party will only be able to lead its class to power if it has been able to continually learn from its own class. Right or wrong, all opinions must be listened to, not just as an elementary democratic right but as a political necessity. This can only be emphasized in the case of workers with such rich histories in the class struggle like those of the WIVL. But the WIRFI leadership apparently had little interest in learning anything from them.

For example, the WIVL comrades have experience building and leading more than one COSATU union, yet their suggestions to the WIRFI on carrying out trade union work went unanswered, along with numerous other contributions.

Often insult was added to injury. For example, when WIVL challenged the WIRFI leaders to explain why they did not fight ex-WRP(B) leader Gerry Healy on a political basis, a WIRFI leader from Britain responded that they clearly did not understand the effects Stalinism had in the workers' movement and the importance of opposing undemocratic practices like Healy's — this told to people who have personally survived very real and murderous attacks by Stalinist thugs!

In a neo-colonial style exhibited by many political groups based in the imperialist countries, the WIRFI leaders seemed happy to use their Southern African groups as mascots to aid their recruitment at home. But these groups were not expected to think for themselves, let alone play a role in leading the international. Like some adults' attitude toward children, the South Africans were to be seen but not heard.

Predictably, when the WIVL comrades did begin questioning the political positions of the WIRFI leadership, the latter initiated all sorts of bureaucratic intrigues in a vain attempt to maintain control. The most consistent method was to set members in other cities and countries against those who initiated the fight in Cape Town. The most shameful example came with the WIRFI leaders' supporting a suspension of ties between their group in the city of Durban with Cape Town comrades over political questions which were still being discussed. By this act the WIRFI leadership supported splitting the South African group, thus preventing a proper political debate or common work in the class struggle. The decision was later condemned by the *majority* of the Durban group, which split from the WIRFI and joined with the Cape Town comrades in forming the WIVL.

The WIRFI facilitated its splitting efforts through its bureaucratic policy of appointing leaders of its Southern African groups without regard for the opinions of the members of the groups. This seems to have been a key to the WIRFI leaders' maintaining control of their political colonies. For example, the WIVL comrades are convinced that the timing of Durban's suspension of ties with them in Cape Town, soon after the WIRFI's appointed leader in Southern Africa held discussions with the WIRFI leadership in Britain, was no coincidence.

#### A PRINCIPLED SPLIT

But the WIVL did not split from the WIRFI in response to these provocations. Instead, the comrades knew it was necessary to continue their fight for a revolutionary program within the WIRFI in order to win any potentially revolutionary elements from it, and to expose the connection between the WIRFI's politics and its internal bureaucracy. By doing so, the WIVL comrades presented revolutionaries everywhere with an example to follow.

The numerous opportunist fusions (like that attempted between the WIRFI and the LIT) that litter the history of pseudo-Trotskyism are matched by even more opportunist splits which take place over unjustifiable issues like tactical differences, internal bureaucracy or even less. Followers of the late Ernest Mandel's United Secretariat, as well as supporters of the politics of the Cliffite International Socialism tendency, continue to maintain competing groups in country after country. This incestuous war of all-against-all is an expression of the petty-bourgeois character of the left.

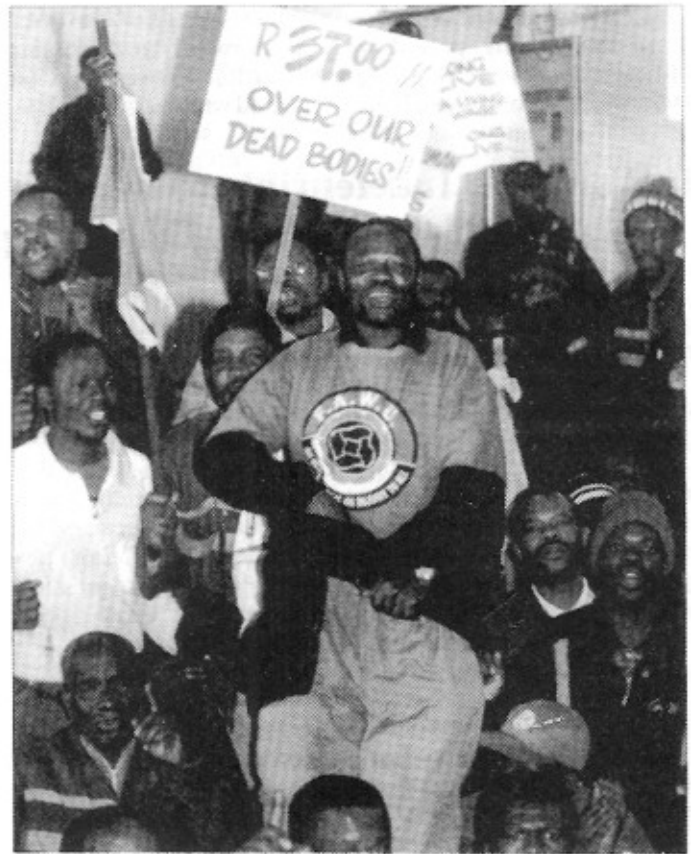
Splits of revolutionary organizations, on the other hand, can only be justified when the differences separating the groups are of a principled, class character. Because the historic interests of the proletariat are international, a revolutionary split should counterpose an *international* working-class perspective to that of its opponents.

The WIVL has counterposed such an international program to the WIRFI's. Indeed, pointing to the efforts of Lenin and Trotsky to uncover the class basis of various splits in the revolutionary movement, they argue that the WIRFI's political views are symptomatic of the class position of the labor aristocracy and intelligentsia.

#### WEAKNESSES OF THE FIGHT

An important weakness of the WIVL's fight, however, was their failure to declare themselves as a faction. Such a declaration is a formal statement of organization within a party around a program counterposed on a class basis to that of the current leadership. It means that while carrying out the party's directives publicly, the faction fights internally to become the party leadership on the basis of its program. A declaration of faction would have put pressure on the members of the international affiliates of the WIRFI to declare their positions on the issues in question. It would also have made clear their right to be represented on international committees and discussions. As it was, the comrades did appeal to the WIRFI members around the world to take a stand but received little response. While the WIVL are probably right in saying that this shows that "it was impossible to form an international faction," it does not mean that they could not have declared themselves a faction. We suspect they now agree with this.

A crucial issue the WIVL comrades did not raise in their fight with the WIRFI was the class nature of the Stalinist



July 1996: FAWU strike at Distillers. Class-conscious workers continue liberation struggle.

states and their role in world politics. The pressure of debate in faction fights generally presents revolutionaries with a unique opportunity to develop theoretically. By raising questions, challenging false positions and fighting around them, revolutionaries can learn very quickly. The lack of political response from the WIRFI leaders to the WIVL's documents, however, as well as the time pressures on the comrades, probably means that a debate over Stalinism and the WIRFI's hopeless misunderstanding of it was impossible. But it would have been better had the effort been made.

The comrades tell us that they are still developing their position on Stalinism. Good: while they have made great political gains in their fight with the WIRFI, it is impossible to have a rounded Marxist world view without coming to terms with the nature of Stalinism. We look forward to discussing this and other questions with the WIVL in the future.

#### THE FUTURE

The WIRFI is one of the final products of the political tendency once led by Gerry Healy, a tendency notorious for betraying Marxism through support for Third World nationalism as well as British chauvinism. (See our articles in *PR* 29 and 37.) For years it recruited and destroyed many sincere working class would-be revolutionaries. It also spawned a number of splits and faction fights. But through their determined political fight, the WIVL comrades succeeded where all these others failed: in exposing and politically defeating Healyism.

This political fight stamps the WIVL as a group that can be said to be developing in a genuinely revolutionary direction. The meetings we have had with their comrades confirm

this positive opinion.

In the coming period we look forward to discussing political questions with the group further, to see to what extent we agree on political program, and whether, therefore,

we belong in the same organization. Consistent with both our groups' seriousness, we are not interested in rushing into any premature relationship, but expect to have patient and thorough political discussions. ●

## **It Would Be Indefensible to Remain Any Longer in the Same International with the Current Leadership of the Workers International**

The Cape Town group of the Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International hereby announces that it is breaking all political ties with the International. This break is the culmination of a political struggle that the group has been waging against the incorrect line of the leadership over a period of four years.

The group plans to publish the main documents of this struggle in book form so that revolutionary workers and militants the world over can share in our experience and be forewarned about centrist organizations that claim to represent their interests, but who in reality are transmission belts for ruling class ideology into the working class.

### **1. Origins of the Cape Town group**

The Cape Town comrades joined the Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International as a group in 1991. The group emerged as a product of the struggle in South Africa for a revolutionary party based on Bolshevik foundations. At the time of joining the International, the group was composed of two streams. Those who belonged to a Trotskyist group active in Cape Town for most of the 1960's, which collapsed due to the weight of its own contradictions. Then there are those who broke away from a Trotskyist group which was founded in the 1970's [the Workers International League of South Africa (WILSA)], and which became part of the Preparatory Committee until the latter broke political ties with it.

The break from this latter group was based on a fundamental programmatic issue, namely the liquidation of the revolutionary party. The leadership of this group, bewildered by the pressures of the class struggle, forsook the fundamental principles of Marxism and came out in favor of the Pabloite program centered on the aim of transforming the ANC into a socialist party. A number of oppositions developed against this program, but only a tiny revolutionary opposition, which composed the second stream making up the Cape Town group, joined the Workers International in 1991.

After the above split the initial Cape Town comrades formed an independent political organization, named the Trotskyist Revolutionaries. The organization brought out a newspaper, *Proletarian Revolution*, of which two editions appeared before the organization joined the Workers International.

### **2. How we came to join the Workers International**

Our joining of the International occurred as a result of two factors:

i) The previous dominant perception of the South African revolutionary left that the International Committee of the Fourth International represented the fight for the continuity of the Fourth International and that the elements who expelled Healy in 1985, together with the group GOCQI [Group of Opposition and Continuity of the Fourth International, led by Balasz Nagy], represented the healthiest

elements to emerge from the tradition of the International Committee.

ii) Our belief that the criticisms (mainly distorted, as we later discovered) made against the Preparatory Committee by the leadership of the group who capitulated to the ANC, were not adequate to warrant rejection of the Preparatory Committee, but meant that revolutionary elements should fight inside the Preparatory Committee for a consistent revolutionary line.

The first mentioned factor arose out of South Africa's then general isolation from international political developments in the working class revolutionary movement. In addition there was an acute shortage of Marxist literature, most of which was banned inside the country. This situation was the result of the highly repressive nature of the Apartheid regime. In this dark era bits of information on international developments filtered into the country, and the odd text popped up here and there. This generally half-baked information was hungrily seized upon by revolutionaries who were sympathetic to the Fourth International. Ignorance held sway.

In this situation, the International Committee and some of its leading elements, mainly Cliff Slaughter, were held in the awe of legendary mystique by South African revolutionaries. To us they were giants doing battle against the dragons of Stalinism and revisionism. Alas, once our isolation was overcome, reality proved quite different. Their fight against revisionism was a cover to mask their own revisionism.

They turned out to be the subjects of Marx's lamentation, "I have sown dragons, but I have reaped fleas."

Before breaking from the aforementioned South African group, we learned of the existence of the Namibian WRP, which had before us broken away from this same group and joined the Preparatory Committee. We dispatched a delegation to Namibia, without any name, address or contact number, to search for the WRP with the purpose of making contact with the Preparatory Committee. It was from them that we heard that the Preparatory Committee had given birth to the Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International. We were put in touch with the small existing group the International had in South Africa, and after a series of political discussions with them, our group joined the Workers International.

### **3. The Preparatory Committee, a left-moving centrist organization**

From the outset, the Preparatory Committee was caught in the grip of a serious political contradiction.

The expulsion of Healy from the WRP(B), despite the limited political nature of this expulsion, was an important political development which impelled the British party in a sharp leftward direction. The linking up of this party with GOCQI, an organization which had fought long and hard battles for the program of the Fourth International, provided a possibility for a real and genuine refounding of the Marxist

program, tactics and organization. But this was not to be.

The underlying political weaknesses of the forces that came to lead the Preparatory Committee, asserted themselves from the outset in the following:

i) Failure to draw up a proper balance sheet of the degeneration of the WRP under Healy, analyzing the various political forces which led to and were fed on this degeneration. Instead the bad man theory of history was given another lease on life as all the political blame was heaped on Healy, and the history of the WRP was rewritten to whitewash the roles of elements who came to lead the Preparatory Committee and afterwards the Workers International.

ii) Unprincipled conciliationism towards the LIT because of the desire to keep it inside the Preparatory Committee. Instead of openly characterizing the opportunist vacillations of the LIT during its entire history, this history was also whitewashed and the LIT declared as one of those forces who represented the continuity of the Fourth International. In order to make this absurdity plausible for the not so naive, the Preparatory Committee had to declare that the process of continuity of the Fourth International was quite "contradictory."

iii) Supporting the electoral alliance between the Namibian WRP and the UDF, a reactionary tribal and pro-imperialist organization, in the Namibian independence election.

iv) Blaming Stalinism for the inability of the Trotskyists to find the road to the masses. By making a scapegoat of Stalinism for their own weaknesses, they justified their own failures instead of drawing the lessons from those failures. We agree with their characterization of Stalinism, except this aspect. They were paralysed and awe-struck by the surface appearances of the strength of Stalinism.

How do we characterize the Preparatory Committee? Our assessment reveals to us that in essence, it was a centrist organization, leftward moving, but with opportunist tendencies which reared its head from the start. It was an organization the political of nature of which was in flux. It was either going to rectify its political errors, or it was going to capitulate to opportunism wholesale, when quantity becomes transformed into quality.

#### **4. The slide to the right by the Workers International leadership**

The Workers International carried over all the above-mentioned problems of the Preparatory Committee, and defends each and every one of them.

The political errors of the Preparatory Committee evolved into a system in the International, into its political essence. Below we deal with the main issues in this slide to the right that we elaborate in our main documents.

#### **A. Opportunist characterization of the political situation out of Stalinism's collapse**

The leadership of the International regards Stalinism as "dead" and states that as a result of this death, the conditions for the rebuilding of the Fourth International are immediately favorable, very favorable. In line with this they express the belief that the Workers International will now easily make massive inroads into the working class. This is seen as mechanical, automatic. All they have to do is to continue applying Marxism as they have hitherto.

This is a one-sided, self-serving appraisal. To be exact, the international Stalinist machine is dead, but Stalinism is still very much alive in quite a number of countries. It does

not serve the working class at all to downplay the obstacles in this way.

Secondly, Stalinism was not the *only* cause of the isolation of the Trotskyist groups from the working class. Another crucial cause was the opportunist politics of the leaderships of these groups. It is this fundamental point which the leadership of the International is denying, as they make a virtue of their errors.

Therefore, the truly favorable conditions resulting from Stalinism's collapse will not lead to overcoming the isolation of the Trotskyists from the masses, unless this lesson is drawn and guides the struggle to rebuild the Fourth International.

This one-sided characterization of the present situation is the flip side of the conception according to which this leadership saw in Stalinism an insurmountable obstacle in the path of the revolution. This position reflects a lack of confidence in the working class and in the vanguard party to fulfil its historical tasks.

#### **B. Capitulation to non-proletarian forces**

As we detail in our documents, over the past few years the leadership has more and more defended positions which are alien to the interests of the working class.

The leadership brought out a statement on the Rwandan crisis which creates illusions in the imperialist governments with its call for a struggle to force the imperialist governments to end the starvation of the Rwandan masses. In our reply we called this statement "pro-imperialist."

On Bosnia, a politically inconsistent line had been followed. We did not have the opportunity to yet write any submission on our views concerning the line on Bosnia, and will here make only a few points.

At times *Workers Press* became a spokesperson for the nationalist and restorationist Izetbegovich government, by uncritically relaying the views of representatives of this government. As correctly pointed out by [Simon] Pirani in *Workers Press*, the leadership conveniently overlooked the reactionary role of the Croatian regime in the last few months before the Dayton agreement. There was also failure to condemn the last NATO bombings in Bosnia before the above agreement. The leadership also failed to go beyond the philanthropic convoys. [Here the comrades refer to the Workers Aid to Bosnia campaign led by the WRP(B), which sent convoys of aid to Bosnia.]

In the political founding document of the Liaison Committee between the Workers International and the LIT, the leadership of the International revises many of the points in the "Ten Point Call," which was the platform of the Preparatory Committee, and which was adopted by the

## **South Africa and Proletarian Revolution**

The South African black working class is the leading mass force in the struggle to overthrow world imperialism and free the human race. This 1994 pamphlet, a collection of articles by Matthew Richardson, details the revolutionary lessons of the rich experience of the South African proletariat.

**A COFI Pamphlet**

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Workers International. This watering down of the political foundation of the International meant to smooth the path for an opportunist alliance with the LIT. We explain the problems with this document in our "Response to the twenty-one points."

Lastly we want to draw attention to the leadership's liquidationist view on the so-called "new party" which they are calling for in Britain, but it now seems, not for Britain



1977: Steve Biko, martyred victim of apartheid. Today: ANC/SACP regime gives killer cops amnesty.

alone. We explain our opposition to this revisionist notion in our paper, "Liquidationism in the Workers International ...". We are not opposed to the workers party as a tactic, but the leadership's view runs counter to the experience of the Trotskyist movement.

It seeks to build a party with a centrist program, into which the WRP and its program will be dissolved. Our paper correctly criticizes the "fighting program" of this new party as non-revolutionary. Demands for nationalization and a workers' government mislead the working class if not accompanied by the explanation that revolution is indispensable for the achievement of such objectives. The Comintern theses "On Tactics" adopted in 1921 puts the issue as follows:

**The demand advanced by the centrists parties for the socialization or nationalization of the most basic branches of industry is equally a deception because it is not linked to demand for victory over the bourgeoisie.**

The "Theses on Comintern Tactics", adopted by the fourth congress, stated clearly:

**... the Communists will still openly declare to the masses that the workers' government can be neither won nor maintained without a revolutionary struggle against the bourgeoisie.**

By avoiding this fundamental task, the leadership is firmly in the camp of centrism on this issue.

In his pamphlet, *A Socialist Party for the Working Class*, Slaughter explains the theoretical source of the leadership's method; "Marxism", writes he, "is not written in tablets of stone. ... We have to work might and main ... to develop the program, to make it adequate to the greatly changed situation which has come into existence." (p.16; our emphasis.)

These nice-sounding phrases are nothing but a justifi-

cation for revising the Marxist program, of course, in the name of that same Marxism. As Geoff Pilling wrote on this subject: they are tired of swimming against the tide, all this means is that they want to go with the flow.

They realize not the fundamental contradiction in their conception: If the conditions are all that favorable for the revolutionary party, why, why liquidate the party?

Of course they will answer that they are not liquidationists, but that they are merely applying Marxism to the changed conditions, and that anything else would be doctrinaire, and, no doubt sectarian. You can never win with such people.

The Trotskyist position is to fight for the labor party to adopt the revolutionary program, without illusions in the immediate success of this approach. The purpose of this approach is to explain the programmatic questions truthfully to the advanced workers. Once discussion on the program is finalized by the new party, and the revolutionaries have lost out, we still join the new party under favorable conditions but with our own program, which we will continue to fight for in the new party. We never give up our program. We are our program.

From the moment of our first contact with the International, we opposed and criticized the opportunist alliance with the UDF in Namibia. In

all this time the leading members of the International never defended the alliance, making all sorts of half-hearted apologies, which we never accepted. But recently all this changed. The occasion for this change was Dot Gibson's "Response to E. Landman," in which she puts up an energetic defense for this opportunistic alliance. We were amazed. After all this time? It is no surprise really that this defense is made right now, as it reflects just how far to the right the leadership has shifted.

## 5. Reactionary role in South Africa

As we explain in our documents, the leadership of the International constantly acted to break up the unity of our section. Consequently our section could never achieve national unity, as a result of the maneuvering of the leadership.

This is one of the greatest crimes against the working class, and is nothing else but an attack on the unity of the revolutionary vanguard of South Africa. This crippled our section.

The last episode in their unity-wrecking activities was especially contemptible. At a national meeting in October 1994, where Cliff Slaughter was present, it was decided that the most important task of the section was to achieve national unity. This was felt by everybody present, and all gave a commitment to realize this unity. An expression of this sentiment was the election of a national secretary, comrade Simon from Cape Town. A few months later, the national secretary visited Durban for discussions, and after the first meeting was informed by Nelson, a member of the IEC and a leading member of Durban, that the Durban group had suspended ties with the Cape Town group due to its criticisms of the leadership! But, protested the secretary,



we were never informed of this "suspension of relations", but, the issues are still under discussion, but ...

We were taken aback. What happened? The only thing that happened between October and Simon's visit, was that Nelson had been on a visit to London. We are convinced that this suspension was conceived and concocted in London.

We can no longer tolerate this obstacle to the revolutionary unity of the South African vanguard, otherwise we would ourselves become guilty of obstructing such unity.

## 6. Destructive methods of discussion

During the four years of discussion, in which we submitted a number of documents, we never got any objective response. The leadership has always responded subjectively, refusing to listen to us, and has been quick to call us names — from petty bourgeois to sectarian, and now, anarchist!

The IEC has never responded to our arguments, except for the attempts by individual leading elements. Decisions by the IEC on the discussions had always been taken in our absence with all those who participated in the discussion against us present. These were real anti-Cape Town feasts. We do not have a representative on the IEC, but any responsible leadership would have ensured that international discussions on a matter of such seriousness included all parties concerned.

Of late the leadership had become impatient in the discussion, trying to provoke us into a premature split. A tactic we have opposed.

After a heated regional conference in Cape Town in 1993, attended by Bob Myers from the IEC, the latter gave a report to the IEC on the conference, on the basis of which the IEC adopted positions against the Cape Town group. Despite repeated requests we never received a copy of that report. We do not expect a copy as the report was a distortion. This much we gleaned from a discussion with comrade Temple of Britain who visited Cape Town some time after the regional conference. We raised with him our concerns about Myers' report. He stated that what he could remember of the report is that it stated that the Cape Town comrades stated in the meeting that the center was involved in a conspiracy against them which included the Namibians and the Stellenbosch students. It was this aspect of the report that united the IEC against the Cape Town group. Leaving the merits of the alleged charge of conspiracy aside, as we explained to comrade Temple, this allegation was made, but within minutes it was *withdrawn*!

The comrade promised us he would raise with the secretariat our request for a copy of the report. We are still waiting for it.

In order to find a constructive way forward for the discussion, and to resolve the major issues, the Cape Town comrades proposed that the IEC form a one-person commission to investigate and lay bare all the issues involved, and to recommend a way forward for the international. This proposal was rejected out of hand by the International Secretary, and the IEC did not even make any reference to it. Instead the IEC adopted a resolution on the latest phase of the discussion, in our absence of course, and decided to organize a national meeting of our section where Nelson and an additional member of the IEC would "implement" this resolution. This resolution already takes a firm stand against the Cape Town comrades, and supports the atrocious and pathetic suspension of ties with our group by the Durban comrades. Hence the center does not have any constructive

proposal to attempt a resolution of the conflict.

## 7. Class character of the Workers International Leadership

"Any serious factional fight in a party always in the final analysis is a reflection of the class struggle." (Trotsky, *In Defense of Marxism*.) On the basis of this Marxist principle, Lenin sought the class basis of the capitulation of the leadership of the Second International to imperialism.

He drew this crucial lesson for the working class as follows:

... objectively the *opportunists* are a section of the petty bourgeoisie and of certain working class strata that have been bribed out of the imperialist super-profits and converted into *watchdogs* of capitalism and *corrupters* of the working class movement. (*Imperialism and the Split in Socialism*.)

In "Something Rotten ..." we explain that the leadership of the International represents the interests of the labor aristocracy and the intelligentsia. Both layers are threatened by the deepening crisis of imperialism, and fear the political instability arising out of the collapse of Stalinism and the decline in the Social Democratic Parties. They feel the need to put in place new organizations to take over the role of Stalinism and social democracy to chain the working class to the chariot of capitalism, or at best to assist these tottering forces.

In short, the leadership of the Workers International is a petty-bourgeois leadership.

## 8. Its philosophy is empiricism-impressionism

The leadership promotes its anti-proletarian line in the name of Marxism and of dialectical materialism. They are merely doing what all revisionists do, trying to cloak their petty-bourgeois political content in a pseudo-Marxist form.

It is well known that under Healy's leadership the entire British party had been turned toward a study of dialectical materialism. In reality, this was a negation of the Marxist philosophy and was used to give profundity to the opportunistic line of the leadership.

The philosophy of the Workers International's leadership, as well as that of the Healyite party, is empiricism. The world view of empiricists is dominated by events, developments and bourgeois public opinion. They are unable to comprehend the relations and forces making up and underlying these developments and events. When Stalinism dominated the working-class movement, these leaders saw not the power of the working class but were paralysed in front of the Stalinist machine. Now with the collapse of Stalinism, they make a falsely optimistic assessment of the prospects for rebuilding the Fourth International. It is no coincidence that they were oblivious of the development and gathering of the crisis of Stalinism which led to its collapse until it blew up in their faces.

This is because they never made any independent analysis aimed at developing Marxism, but fed on what they wanted to see in Trotsky's writings of decades ago.

By its very nature, empiricism leads to political inconsistency. Trotsky, in *In Defense of Marxism*, explains the issue in a manner that fits the leadership perfectly when he wrote:

Every new turn of events catches the empiricist-impressionist unawares, compels him to forget what he himself wrote yesterday, and produces a consuming desire for new formulas before new ideas have appeared in his head. (p.56.) When thrown against great events they are

easily lost and relapse again into petty bourgeois ways of thinking. (p.45.) And, But with the petty bourgeoisie bewilderment, especially in the face of great events, is an inescapable and, so to speak, congenital condition. The intellectuals attempt to express their state of bewilderment in the language of "science."

The international's leadership is fully armed with its "formulas" and special language, which are as follows: reconstruction of the working class movement; reconstruction of the "damaged" consciousness of the working class; reconstruction of the working class' internationalism and everything else. This empty metaphysical phrase-mongering we call: putting the con in reconstruction!

The emphasis on reconstruction shows a desire not to base themselves on the present and move into the future.

They are rather yearning after the past, which they want to reconstruct. But the class struggles moves not backward but forward. Ebbs and flows are inevitable, but the march of events are forward in the historical sense.

#### 9. No possibility for forming an international left faction

The overall political and organizational weakness of the International has been laid bare by this discussion. It had been effectively demonstrated by the absence, during the four years of discussion, of contributions to the debate from any of the sections. (An exception is the few references made by Beukes of Namibia in his "Critique of WI politics in Southern Africa.")

On the other hand, we were not the only comrades to struggle politically against this leadership. Even before we joined the International, the Namibian section had been engaged in a fight against the leadership. A few British comrades initially opposed the line on the new party. Janos Borovi fought and continues to fight against the center's bureaucratic method, its approach to the new party, and its

inconsistent line on Bosnia. Simon Pirani has been struggling against the opportunist characterization of the new situation arising out of the collapse of Stalinism, the new party and the unfolding events in the former USSR and eastern Europe.

The great weakness in these oppositions (for lack of a better expression) is that they fail to rise from the specific problems they are identifying to general political conclusions. Borovi's opposition is politically consistent and the most far-reaching of all the above, but he refuses to make a class analysis of the differences. He is still tied to the leadership with an umbilical cord. Once he realizes that he is dealing with a petty-bourgeois leadership, he would be able to raise his opposition to higher political levels, and would become more decisive in his political criticisms.

All the other mentioned oppositions make concessions to the leadership at every turn, and are therefore politically inconsistent. The worst of these had been the Namibians, who made very far-reaching criticisms, only to bend them and explain them away.

Due to these political weaknesses, the various oppositions fought separately, and at different levels. Hitherto it was therefore impossible to form an international faction, as such a development would have had to be unprincipled.

It is because of this that Nagy's provocation to Borovi and Pirani, who shared no fundamental principle, to declare an open faction in the international, is so opportunistic and contemptible.

Should any of the above forces move further to the left, we would be willing to collaborate politically with them on a principled basis.

#### 10. Another Trotskyist split?

Yes, we call things by their right names: this is another split! What is the significance of this split?

In order to achieve its revolutionary objectives, the working class needs unity. But, as Lenin writes in his article "Working-class unity," "Unity can be effected only by a united organization whose decisions are conscientiously carried out by all class-conscious workers."

Yet the history of working-class parties and the experiences of building such parties has been and still is a history of splits. No Marxist treats splits lightly, but at times certain splits are inevitable and necessary.

Splits are necessary only when they are based on clear principled political issues, when a failure to split will lead to confusion, and other ways of hampering the growth of the revolutionary party. Splits are only justified if all the political and theoretical issues had been laid bare to all the members of the organization. Every split has a class basis.

Wrote Lenin: "At all events, a split is better than confusion, which hampers the ideological, theoretical and revolutionary growth and maturing of the party." (*Left-wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder.*)

The unity of the party is not mechanical but ideological, programmatic. Only ideological and programmatic clarity will enable the party to unite the working class effectively and on a clear basis. Many times, in order to promote the principled unity of the working class, a split is inevitable against alien political forces inside the revolutionary party.

The occasion of every split in the Marxist movement is seized upon by the bourgeoisie and its agents to ridicule and denigrate the revolutionary movement. And Trotskyism, the Marxism of today, has come under the worst fire. We must expect nothing less from the ruling class and its agents. S/he

### South African Workers' Library

In past issues we have noted the urgent need for Marxist literature in South Africa. There are many revolutionary workers in that country with a real thirst for learning about the theory, history and practice of the world communist movement.

Tragically, there are few copies of the great Marxist works to be found there, and they are financially out of the question for proletarian youth barely scraping out a living in the townships. So we decided to establish a Workers' Library and to create a fund to achieve that end.

In memory of a comrade who had devoted much of his life to the education of youth, the fight for Black liberation and revolutionary communism, we created the Steve Russell Fund. We asked for financial donations or books and pamphlets by Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky and Luxemburg. We have received some response so far, but much more is needed.

Please send books or contributions to: Socialist Voice, P.O. Box 3573, New York, N.Y. 10008. Checks should be made out to *Socialist Voice* and earmarked for the Steve Russell Fund.

is no revolutionary who capitulates to bourgeois criticisms of this type.

Every split has a demoralizing effect on the less politically developed party members and sympathizers. The temporary insecurities and confusions arising from every big split, tend to cause them to lose their sense of political stability. They must be patiently made to understand the political nature of the splits, and that every correct split clarifies the Marxist program, thereby strengthening the party, preparing it politically for the great battles ahead. They must know that more splits and convulsions in the party in the future cannot be excluded, and when the time comes, they must be prepared to defend the principles of Marxism against petty bourgeois oppositions forming in the party.

A split must make us stronger. As Lasalle put it, "**Party struggles lend a party strength and vitality; the greatest proof of a party's weakness is its diffuseness and the blurring of clear demarcations; a party becomes stronger by purging itself.**" (From a letter to Marx, June 24, 1852.)

#### 11. What way forward for the Cape Town group?

Firstly we will complete our political work around the

struggle against the opportunism of the leadership by bringing out the book we mentioned previously.

On the other hand we are not aware of the existence of any principled and truly proletarian international organization of Marxists. We remain committed to the task of rebuilding the Fourth International, and will put much more effort into our International work. We shall debate with and participate in joint activities with other revolutionary groups around the globe, on a principled political basis.

We note that over the past few years all the major international Trotskyist groups have been racked by convulsions and splits. We are hopeful that more and more elements in the international working class movement will find the road to revolutionary Marxism.

Of utmost importance to us now is the formation of a nationally united organization of the revolutionary vanguard in South Africa. We call on all revolutionary workers and militants worldwide to take a stand against petty-bourgeois deviationism in the Trotskyist movement, and to join us in the task of rebuilding the Fourth International along genuine revolutionary Marxist principles and methods. ●

## Liquidationism in the Workers International

### *A Response to the WRP Discussion Paper "A Socialist Party for the Working Class"*

#### Introduction by the LRP

The following document was written by leading comrades of the WIVL in 1995 while they were still members of the WIRFI. It is a polemic against the WIRFI leadership's decision to dissolve the Workers Revolutionary Party of Britain and form a new reformist pseudo-party. The document refers to the draft pamphlet *A Socialist Party for the Working Class* by the WRP.

We reprint this document because of its significance as a defense of the need for a revolutionary party. It is also timely: the WRP recently followed through on its promise to dissolve itself, launching the newspaper *Reclaim the Future* which in turn claims to be the organ of a movement for a new mass socialist party.

Besides exposing the WRP's opportunist new party orientation, the WIVL comrades' document has a greater, international, significance. Recent years have witnessed a significant weakening of the reformist parties that have long misled workers' struggles. The growing economic crisis of capitalism is eroding the privileges of the middle classes; these privileges have been the material basis for illusions in the possibility of reforming capitalism. The subsequent crisis of the Western social democratic parties, along with the collapse of Stalinism and its Communist Parties, have greatly weakened the reformist forces capable of misleading the coming revolutionary struggles of the working class.

But reformism is far from dead. In particular, we have identified the tendency of centrist groups (those who vacillate between their revolutionary rhetoric and reformist practice) to act to resuscitate reformism by creating new reformist parties. We have seen this most recently in the United States (see our pamphlet *The New "Labor Party": Democratic Party Advocates?* and PR 52), and in Britain, with the creation of Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party (see PR 52) and the Militant Tendency's Socialist Party. In South Africa a new

reformist party, the Workers List Party, was launched by centrists but has subsequently collapsed, in no small part because they were effectively opposed by the comrades now making up the WIVL (see our pamphlet *South Africa and Proletarian Revolution*).

The struggle against the creation of new reformist parties is one of the key battles in the coming world revolutionary struggles. The WIVL's fight against the WRP's orientation is an important contribution to this struggle. We hope that future discussions with the WIVL will find that they also share our general perspective of opposing such reformist party developments.

We comment on one difference we have with the WIVL comrades in the Afterword following the document.

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This response is by no means comprehensive but hopes to deal with the essential fundamental points raised in the pamphlet *A Socialist Party for the Working Class*.

#### Basic Principles of a Marxist Revolutionary Party

We outline below what we believe to be basic principles of a Marxist revolutionary party:

1. "That a Marxist, a proletarian revolutionist cannot present himself before the working class with two banners. He cannot say at a workers' meeting 'I have a ticket for a first class party, and another cheaper ticket for the backward workers.' If I am a Communist then I must fight for a Communist Party."

We do not believe that Trotsky changed his mind in the 1938 discussions with comrades of the American SWP. Whereas in the USA at the time there was a movement in the masses for the formation of a labor party, there is no such movement in Britain today. It is in fact the WRP(B)

who is proposing to set up this new labor party in Britain. Further Trotsky in 1938 was at pains to point out that in all circumstances, whether the party has a loose structure, or is centralized or ultimately becomes a centralized revolutionary party on a revolutionary program, organizational principles and tactics remain intact. What the WRP(B) is proposing is a watered-down, reformist program and an abandonment of revolutionary organizational principles.

2. A revolutionary workers party is a Marxist party based on a definite program, whose aim is the organization of the working class in the struggle for power, and the transformation of the existing social order. All of its activities, its methods and its internal regime are subordinated to this aim and are designed to serve it.

3. The struggle for power organized and led by the revolutionary party is the most ruthless and irreconcilable struggle in all of history. A loosely knit, heterogenous, undisciplined, untrained organization is utterly incapable of accomplishing such world historical tasks as the proletariat and the revolutionary party are confronted with in the present era.

4. Leadership and centralized direction are indispensable for any sustained and disciplined action, especially in the party that sets itself the aim of leading the collective efforts of the proletariat, in its struggle against capitalism.

5. Membership to the revolutionary workers party implies:

- a) the total acceptance of the party's program;
- b) actively participating in the party organization;
- c) fulfilling all the tasks the party assigns to each member;
- d) contributing materially to support the organization in accordance with his or her means.

It follows from the above that the party seeks to include in its ranks all the revolutionary class conscious and militant workers who stand on its program and are active in building the movement in a disciplined manner.

6. The all-inclusiveness principle which allows sympathizers and fellow travellers to become party members must be rejected. This all-inclusiveness principle paralyses the party and blunts its revolutionary thrust.

7. To build a combat organization capable of conquering state power, the party must have as its general staff a core of professional revolutionists who devote their entire life to the direction and the building of the revolutionary party, and its influence in the mass movement.

8. The working class is the only class in modern society that is progressive and truly revolutionary; a truly revolutionary party can lead the revolutionary proletariat to victory only if it is deeply rooted among the workers. It must be composed predominantly of workers and enjoy the respect and confidence of the workers. A party of non-workers is subject to all the reactionary influences of suspicion, cynicism and capitulatory despair transmitted through its petit bourgeois environment.

9. A revolutionary party must make a concerted, determined and systematic effort, consciously directed by the leadership of the party, to penetrate the workers movement, establish the roots of the party in the trade unions, the mass labor organizations and in the workers neighborhoods, and recruit worker militants into the party.

10. Militancy alone will not topple capitalism. The advanced layers of the working class must become conscious of the irreconcilable antagonisms between capital and labor, and that the resolution of this conflict can only be achieved

by the overthrow of the state, and the destruction of the capitalist system, thereby laying the basis for a new social order — socialism.

11. The integration of the party into the workers movement is indispensable for the progress of the party, such integration can only be accomplished by adjusting the party campaigns to the demands and direction of the workers movement. We define the workers movement as the organized self-activity of the working class to improve its conditions of life under capitalism/imperialism. Hence civic organizations fighting to improve facilities such as housing, roads, transport, electrification, etc. in the various working class districts, hence the demand by local sporting clubs for better facilities and sports fields, etc.

The revolutionary party will be at the forefront of the fight to achieve these demands, at the same time, propagating to the working class that real equality, real change, a real rise in their standard of living, that real security for themselves and their families cannot be achieved within the context of the capitalist system. The overthrow of the capitalist system and the crushing of the capitalist state is a *sine qua non* for the emancipation of the working class from poverty and drudgery. Thus every agitation and every intervention must include at all times this ultimate objective.

#### **On the Socialist Party for the Working Class Pamphlet**

Turning now in greater detail to the pamphlet *A Socialist Party for the Working Class*:

It appears the reasons for the new working class party are:

a) there is great disillusionment in the working class towards the British Labour Party; and

b) the present and impending working class struggles (particularly trade union struggles) against the capitalists need to be united organizationally.

Any revolutionary working class party worthy of its name must be an internationalist party in the sense that the success of its revolutionary struggles are directly related to the struggle of its national working class and the support (in various forms) given by the international working class to this struggle. A revolutionary party in Great Britain therefore would be a section of the International Party of the World Proletariat (the Fourth International). Does the proposal for this new party mean that it will be a section of the Fourth International and will fight on the program and organizational principles of the Fourth International? Are the WRP(B) proposing two parties of the Fourth International for Great Britain? If the present WRP(B) is to be disbanded, then detailed and thorough reasons must be forwarded for such an action. Here the question can be legitimately posed: Is the impotence of the WRP(B) to take up the leadership of the struggles of the British working class to be blamed on the program and organizational principles or on the actual leadership?

The WRP have now suddenly discovered that the various struggles of the working class in Britain have to "politically be united" so that the working-class struggles can have, as an entire class, an effective force in the struggles against the employers and the government; and for this political unity of the class struggles you require a political organization of the working class. This great discovery of the WRP(B) makes Lenin's thesis on the party more profound. How can a party of revolution achieve its objective of violently overthrowing the bourgeois state if it does not have the support of major

sections of the working class? And how does it get this support from the working class?

Uniting the struggle of the working class has always been the function of the revolutionary working class party; this is the ABC of Leninism. But uniting the struggles of the class for the WRP has a different meaning, to it, it simply means the bringing together of forces which oppose the capitalists and the state. Whereas the revolutionary party will unite the working class in it and behind it for the purpose of overthrowing the capitalist class and state.

No explanation for the impotence of the WRP is provided by the authors of the pamphlet, rather it is camouflaged by the WRP's struggle to rebuild the Fourth Inter-



national. The impotence on the national scene is supposed to be overshadowed by the supposed successes on the international scene — the creation of the Workers International, the Workers Aid for Bosnia, etc.

Furthermore, the draft theses of the WRP say "We in the WRP (*Workers Press*) will fight to make sure that such a new party is a section of the Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International." From this quote one draws the conclusion that this new party will be formed on the program and principles of the Fourth International, i.e. a revolutionary party based on Marxism. But in *Workers Press* of 5 June, 1994 in reply to Fred Potter's question whether the party would be a revolutionary Marxist party or a reformist party, G. Pilling says: "The question cannot be answered by abstract speculation, but only in the course of struggle."

The question must be bluntly posed to the WRP(B): are you proposing a revolutionary party or a reformist party? It is utter nonsense to proclaim that the program of the party will be formulated during and after the struggle of the working class. G. Pilling's answer is a rejection of party building whether proletarian or bourgeois. We expect him to be honest enough to proclaim that this party will be an amorphous body with no head, no direction; blind, it will feel

its way in the midst of this amorphous mass to whatever destination it takes them.

The objective effect of this strategy is the betrayal of the working class struggle. A further conclusion must be drawn, that the Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International will now have a centrist/reformist party as one of its sections in Britain.

Lenin categorizes such actions by an organization in the following words: "adaptation to the average, or even to the lowest level of consciousness of the class is in the nature of opportunism." This does not imply that a revolutionary centralized party organization will ignore the average worker, but rather will use the organization as a lever to raise the level of activity and consciousness among the workers. Let us guard against the trap of falling into opportunism.

A rebuttal of the above contention of a headless, leaderless party will be made by the WRP, that although no organizational principles are enunciated for this new party, nevertheless there is the so-called fighting program drawn up for this new party.

Let us examine this fighting program: one seeks in vain for the fundamental objective of a revolutionary working class party, i.e. the violent overthrow of the capitalist state, the destruction of the capitalist system and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat for the suppression of the counterrevolution of the capitalist class and imperialism.

Further, what this "fighting program" reflects is a lack of a clear WIRFI program for Britain, for example, nowhere is the economic relation of Britain to the colonies reflected on — a revolutionary overthrow in Britain would spill over into those countries

currently economically enslaved by the bourgeoisie of Britain; what would imperialism do if the means of production together with the London Stock Exchange was captured through a revolutionary overthrow? The absence of an analysis of a revolutionary overthrow in Britain leads one to the conclusion that this "fighting program" is essentially nationalist with international solidarity being reduced to efforts like Workers Aid for Bosnia.

So it seems that this "fighting program" is for the new party. So what is the program of the WIRFI for Britain and how does one fight for the new party to become part of the WIRFI, i.e. adopt the WIRFI program for Britain. All this the pamphlet does not go into. Or is the implication that the WIRFI program should reduce itself to the "fighting program" of the new party?

When the pamphlet proposes that the WRP comrades fight for the new party to be a part of the WIRFI, the authors assume the new party will not be a part of the WIRFI to begin with. The question then arises: who is setting up this new party? Is there a mass movement to set up a new Labour Party?

At least Balasz [Nagy, leader of the WIRFI's Hungarian section] in his paper, "The Party as the Highest Embodiment of Class Consciousness," is clear that the party must be a

vanguard party and quotes the circumstances [in the Soviet Union] in 1919 (during the civil war) when the conditions allowed primarily the vanguard to join even though the doors of the party were thrown open to all to join. Are similar circumstances existing now in Britain? Undoubtedly not!

Under the heading "Reconstructing the Working Class Movement: A Political Party of the Working Class," the pamphlet states that no "left" group knows how this reconstruction will come about. Does this approach not open the way for the unprincipled linking of the WRP and eventually the WIRFI to other groups?

The pamphlet is clear that the new party won't be a Marxist party: It says it would include Marxists and some students, youth and intellectuals who would become socialists!

The pamphlet asks the question: How can you in the same pamphlet call for workers to join the WRP and also say that they need their own party? But what is the answer? Trotsky says that revolutionaries must present a single unambiguous banner to the working class — not a first class

destruction — how much different is the consciousness of the working class in the capitalist countries from those in the Stalinist and ex-Stalinist controlled countries? The pamphlet's approach amounts to defeatism! In the context of the collapse of Stalinism we should be able to make strong gains, clarifying the role of Stalinism and exploiting the current deep economic crisis of capitalism.

There is a call for the "unity and single direction of struggle of the working class as a class" — this is consistent with the proposed "fighting program" which virtually equates the fight for power with the struggle for reforms (the "fighting program" is virtually reforms plus clause 4 [the old British Labour Party clause calling for nationalization]!) As far back as the Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels contradict this approach, warning us that class struggle is not the point, but the object of that struggle is!!

#### Afterword by the LRP

We in the LRP consider the WIVL's document to be a solid defense of the necessity of the revolutionary party and a counterposition to at least one perspective of building new reformist parties. The relatively minor difference we have with the document is its comment on Trotsky's attitude to the labor party tactic in the United States.

The comrades quote Trotsky's opposition to presenting the working class with two parties, one for the advanced and one for the politically backward, and correctly point out that he made this statement in 1932 in opposition to those U.S. Trotskyists who wished to call for a labor party. By 1938 Trotsky had changed his attitude toward calling for a labor party and now advocated it, and the WIVL's document implies that the reason for this was that by 1938 "there was a movement in the masses for the formation of a labor party".

But this is not true and could lead to mistaken conclusions. One conclusion that could be drawn is that revolutionaries can only support the call for a labor party if there is already such a movement among the workers. This is neither an accurate description of Trotsky's thinking, nor of the correct attitude toward the labor party tactic.

Conversations with WIVL comrades suggest that they do not agree with the formulation in their document; they indicated that they had hoped to be able to write a document on the labor party question in general but have been prevented from doing so by time limitations. Nonetheless we want to correct the document's position here for our readers.

Trotsky based his support for the call for a Labor party in 1938 on his belief that the massive union struggles of the 1930's would be brought to a halt by the significant deepening of the economic crisis in the U.S. Finding it increasingly difficult to wage successful struggles for better wages and conditions in a bankrupt economy, the workers would be pushed toward political action — and revolutionaries could best help their fellow workers advance their struggle by calling for a Labor party. For Trotsky, what was decisive was not whether the workers were already for a Labor party, but that the objective conditions would push them towards it. As Trotsky explained in a discussion with comrades:

**The question reads, "There is no evidence to indicate any widespread sentiment for such a party." ... I cannot judge whether sentiment for a labor party exists or not, because I have no personal observations or impressions; but I do not find it decisive as to what degree the leaders of the trade unions or the rank and file are ready or inclined to build a political party. ... What we can say is that the**



*COSATU workers oppose vicious ANC tax law.*

ticket for some workers and a cheaper ticket for the less advanced workers. What the pamphlet is proposing is that we all rush for the cheaper ticket!

The pamphlet proposes the setting up of International Solidarity Committees (ISC) as broader than the International Trade Union Solidarity Campaign (ITUSC) [a trade union rank-and-file front group set up by the WIRFI] and that somehow out of this the new party will emerge. But the relation between ITUSC, the ISC and the new party is not spelled out in detail. This is important especially as since 1991 the ITUSC failed to get off the ground!

#### Concluding Remarks

The pamphlet motivates the need for a new party in the new period after the collapse of Stalinism. Surely in this period when the Stalinist forces are divided, their world view shattered, the ground should be much more favorable for the revolutionary party to make gains. It is not time for diluting the basis of our party.

The pamphlet says that [as a result of Stalinism] the working-class socialist consciousness suffered long-term

objective situation is absolutely decisive. ...

The problem is not the mood of the masses but the objective situation, and our job is to confront the backward material of the masses with the tasks which are determined by objective facts and not by psychology. The same is absolutely correct for this specific question on the labor party. If the class struggle is not to be crushed, replaced by demoralization, then the movement must find a new channel, and this channel is political. That is the fundamental argument in favor of this slogan.

Trotsky continued by emphasizing that the call for a labor party was a *tactic* made appropriate by newly developed conditions, pointing to why the SWP was correct to have opposed the call for a labor party under previous conditions.

One can ask why we didn't foresee this development five, six, seven years ago. Why did we declare in the past period that we were not willing to fight for this slogan of the labor party? The explanation is very simple. We were absolutely sure ... that world capitalism had entered into a period of decline. ... The direction was the same in the United States, but the question of direction is not sufficient. The other question is the speed of development; and in this respect, in view of the strength of American capitalism, some of us, and myself among them, imagined that the ability of American capitalism to resist against the destructive inner contradictions would be greater and that for a certain period American capitalism might ... cover a period of prosperity before its own decline. ...

That is why, eight years ago ... I was very cautious in my prognosis. My opinion was that we couldn't foresee when the American trade unions would come into a period where they would be forced into political action. ... That is why it would have been absolutely pedantic, abstract,

artificial, to proclaim the necessity of a labor party in 1930, and this abstract slogan would have been a handicap to our own party. ... Now we must reckon not by our prognosis of yesterday but by the situation of today. ... We must change our program because the objective situation is totally different from our former prognosis. ("U.S. and European Labor Movements: A Comparison," *The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution*.)

It has been important to correct this misunderstanding not just to avoid inadvertently supporting the idea that revolutionaries cannot advocate the creation of a labor party unless workers are already moving towards it.

Confusion on Trotsky's changed position has been used by many pseudo-Trotskyists to advocate the labor party tactic regardless of the objective conditions. Thus Workers Power of Britain and its international followers say that Trotsky's advocacy of a labor party in 1938 represented a repudiation of his earlier opposition to calling for a labor party and represented a fundamental change in his attitude toward the question. This false interpretation is convenient for their permanent advocacy of a labor party, even under conditions where such a party could only be reformist.

The WIVL comrades were right to assert that Trotsky did not change his belief that revolutionaries cannot be for a first and second class party; that revolutionaries can only fight for the revolutionary party. How then, can revolutionaries call for a labor party and not mean a separate party from the revolutionary party? As the WIVL understands, it is the movement of workers toward building a mass party that allows the revolutionaries to say to their fellow workers: we will join with you in building the mass party and seek to convince you through the course of struggle that the party must be revolutionary socialist if it is to lead us to victory. ●

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## New Revolutionary Group in South Africa

A new revolutionary socialist group has been formed in South Africa. The Workers International Vanguard League (WIVL) held its founding congress in Cape Town in December 1996. It consists of ex-members of the South African section of the Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International (WIRFI) who split from that tendency some months earlier, ending an internal political struggle that had lasted four years.

The WIVL plans to release to the public the documents of their fight with the WIRFI leadership. They have already shared these documents with us in the LRP. Below we reprint the statement the WIVL's Cape Town comrades released upon their split, summarizing the history of their group and the central points of their fight with the WIRFI. As well, we reprint one of the key documents of their fight defending the need for a vanguard party against the decision of the WIRFI's leading party, the Workers Revolutionary Party of Britain (WRP[B]), to dissolve itself and form a reformist "mass party." (The documents have been slightly edited for U.S. spelling and usage.) Here we provide an overview of what we see as the key strengths and weaknesses of the WIVL's split. We encourage our readers to study all the documents when they become available.

### A REVOLUTIONARY FIGHT

We have already reported on the WIVL comrades' excellent political record in South Africa. They distinguished themselves from the reformist and centrist left by their consistent fight for the independence of the working class from the capitalist ANC, and their intransigent battle for a revolutionary workers' party as opposed to a reformist one. Indeed, the revolutionary character of their work in South Africa made a clash with the centrist WIRFI leaders inevitable. In PR 50 we wrote:

**The WI(SA)'s development toward revolutionary politics cannot continue with its allegiance to the WIRFI: either they degenerate into the right-centrist swamp that is the WIRFI, or they see through the WIRFI's opportunism and break from this international tendency. Only then will we be able to determine the real character of the WI(SA).**

The documents of the WIVL comrades' fight with the WIRFI show that they have separated themselves from the rotten politics of the WIRFI as clearly as they have from the centrist milieu in South Africa. In fact, the WIVL developed some of the same political positions that have distinguished

the LRP(COFI) as a genuine Marxist revolutionary organization from the fake-revolutionaries on the left.



Johannesburg, 1996: Union members march against ANC government's anti-worker privatization plans.

### 1. Revolutionary Party Leadership Always Necessary

For the working class to do away with the misery of capitalism it must become conscious that its mission is to make the socialist revolution. To achieve this, the most politically advanced workers must come together in a disciplined organization to fight for their socialist ideas. This organization is a vanguard revolutionary party.

Most important of all the ideas the WIVL comrades fought for in their battle with the WIRFI is the necessity of building a communist revolutionary party of the working class. No one familiar with their long history in the class struggle and their leading positions in various workers' organizations could accuse them of sectarianism. But unlike so many left groups around the world who hide their "revolutionary" programs under the cover of "rank-and-file" militancy, the WIVL asserts that participation in the partial struggles of workers must include an explanation that "the overthrow of the capitalist system and the crushing of the capitalist state is a *sine qua non* [necessity] for the emancipation of the working class from poverty and drudgery."

The WIVL defended this Leninist understanding against the WRP(B)'s decision to dissolve itself and form a reformist pseudo-party. A longer introduction to this particular struggle accompanies their major document on this question. (p. 35.)

### 2. Opposition to Popular Frontism

The WIVL comrades fought the WIRFI's increasingly frequent support for popular frontism — the counter-revo-

*continued on page 28*