

# PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION



Re-Create  
the Fourth International

Published by the League for the Revolutionary Party  
(COMMUNIST ORGANIZATION FOR THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL)

## U.S. Out of Iraq!

They were supposed to be greeted as liberators. But after winning a swift victory against the outgunned and despised forces of Saddam Hussein’s dictatorship, the U.S. and allied military forces in Iraq are being greeted as the colonial oppressors they are – with rocks, bullets and bombs. After briefly strutting atop the world as its lone and apparently invincible superpower, the U.S. is fast becoming stuck in what one U.S. general described as a “quagmire” of “guerrilla war.” Having at first promised a speedy withdrawal from Iraq, U.S. military leaders now admit that they will occupy the country for years, at a current cost of over a billion dollars a week and an increasing number of dead soldiers.



*Iraqis celebrate atop U.S. military vehicle destroyed in Baghdad, May 26. Opposition to imperialist occupation is much broader than just Saddam supporters.*

The people of Iraq are now undergoing the latest stage in their country’s recent history of oppression by the U.S. and other imperialist powers. For decades they had aided Saddam and his brutal rule; then they devastated the country in the first Gulf War after Saddam got out of line. When masses revolted against Saddam, George Bush I allowed him to crush the rebels and remain in power; then the imperialists imposed deadly sanctions on Iraq for a decade.

The working classes in the imperialist countries, and especially in the United States, must make their position absolutely clear: the U.S. has no right to occupy Iraq or any other country. We call for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all U.S. and British forces from Iraq.

### GROWING OPPOSITION TO OCCUPATION

The White House’s public relations hacks hope that reports of more arrests and killings of Saddam Hussein’s inner circle will allay growing fears at home that the U.S. occupation of Iraq is turning into a disaster. Perhaps they will even succeed in capturing or killing Saddam himself. But the occupying forces in Iraq face daily attack not just from remnants of Saddam Hussein’s forces and the Sunni minority, which formed the broader base of support of his regime. They are also under attack from elements of the Shi’ite majority who were brutally oppressed by the old regime.

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# LRP/COFI Report

## CHICAGO LRP

Following demonstrations on March 20 and 21 marking the beginning of the imperialist invasion of Iraq and the smaller April 5 protest (reported in our previous issue), the antiwar movement has seriously receded in Chicago as elsewhere. Demoralization set in among many activists, especially in the wake of the quick U.S. military victory in Iraq and the mass arrests in Chicago.

The LRP has attended meetings and events of the newly-formed Committee for the Right to Dissent. The CRTD is a small ad hoc committee formed in solidarity with the hundreds of people who have faced trumped-up criminal charges in the wake of the mass arrests on March 20. The June 19 rally at the courthouse where many activists were scheduled for a hearing was very small. However, more than a hundred defendants, nearly all of those appearing, had the charges against them dismissed. Our comrade's charges were also dismissed. We are of course committed to continued work in solidarity with the March 20 defendants until all the charges are dropped.

Another major focus of the Chicago LRP is work in the Chicago Teachers' Union (CTU). The union is in the midst of a contract struggle, and an LRP supporter is once again leading a fight against the betraying misleadership of local president Deborah Lynch and her PACT faction. He has argued against Lynch's policy of secret negotiations with the board, for open discussion and for the union to prepare for a strike. The Chicago Public Schools have already laid off 270 janitors and other employees, and the teachers will probably need to strike in order to win a decent contract.

Our approach of consistently warning against the betrayals of Lynch and other pro-capitalist union bureaucrats contrasts sharply with the method of the International Socialist Organization (ISO), which is also active in the CTU. A recent article in the ISO paper posits that the Lynch leadership has a choice whether to fight for a favorable contract like good trade unionists or to betray. While it implies that Lynch's secret negotiations are a step in the wrong direction, the piece is written as though she had a blank slate, ignoring her numerous betrayals: supporting the Democrat Rod Blagojevich for governor, bureaucratically quashing opposition to

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the imperialist war in Afghanistan and sabotaging the struggle against Article 4.5, to name a few. (See *PR* 65.)

This spring and summer the LRP has been giving a class series on the theory of permanent revolution, a linchpin of Trotskyism. Discussion has been vigorous among supporters and friends of the League. For further information about LRP activities in Chicago, please call 773-463-1340.

## BENTON HARBOR PROTEST

On July 12, Chicago LRPers participated in a demonstration of a few hundred people in Benton Harbor, Michigan, protesting the town's rampant, racist police brutality. Benton Harbor is a practically all-Black town governed by Black officials but in reality ruled by the white establishment of surrounding Berrien County. The police chased a young Black motorcyclist, Terrance Shurn, to his death in front of many witnesses on June 16. But even this murder wasn't enough for the cops: that night they broke up a peaceful vigil for Shurn too. A youth-led rebellion broke out which took the police two nights to quell.

The aftermath of the rebellion shows once again the true face of racist capitalist "justice" in America: authorities brought no charges at all against the cops who killed Shurn, while the notoriously racist Berrien County Court system has already begun bringing felony charges against participants in the rebellion. And the weekend after the rebellion the cops went on yet another

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## CORRECTION

There was a misstatement in the last issue of *Proletarian Revolution*. Our supporter in the Chicago Teachers Union did not win the election for Delegate; he lost by two votes. However, he did handily win the follow-up election for Associate Delegate, thus allowing the LRP to carry out revolutionary work in the CTU's House of Delegates for three more years.

In the campaign for Delegate, his opponent, a member of the "progressive" PACT caucus, denounced his opposition to the U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and his support for Palestinian rights, which in her mind meant support for "terrorists." Under these circumstances, the voting was divided along racial lines: our supporter won the great majority of Black and Latino votes.

## *Proletarian Revolution*

Published by the Socialist Voice Publishing Co. for the League for the Revolutionary Party (Communist Organization for the Fourth International). ISSN: 0894-0754.

Editorial Board: Walter Daum, editor; Evelyn Kaye, Sy Landy, Matthew Richardson. Production: Jim Morgan

Subscriptions: \$7.00 for 8 issues; \$15.00 overseas airmail, supporting subscriptions and institutions. Striking, unemployed and workfare workers may subscribe for \$1.00.

Send to: **SV Publishing**

**P.O. Box 769, Washington Bridge Station  
New York, NY 10033, USA.**

## *PTS and the Boycott Tactic*

# Lessons of the Argentine Elections

by Evelyn Kaye

The recent election of a new president in Argentina, Nestor Kirchner, was a significant setback for the working class. If Kirchner's two-faced attempt to undermine the working class is to be defeated, there are critical lessons that must be learned, particularly in regard to the election tactics used by the left.

Using elections to propagandize for the revolutionary program and party is an essential way to arm the proletariat. In Argentina, the electoral message should include the fact that the interests of the beleaguered working class can only be secured through transcending the current level of struggles and guiding them into a fight for state power. Socialist revolution is a necessity if the Argentine working class is to avoid far greater attacks at the hands of the bourgeois state.

Despite the populist hoopla surrounding Kirchner's inauguration – where he was flanked by Brazil's "Lula," Hugo Chavez of Venezuela and Fidel Castro of Cuba – this mainstream politician spells further disaster for an already besieged population. Kirchner's plans can only be a more drastic version of what Lula has already initiated in Brazil. Nothing could disguise the fact this bourgeois politician is intent on curbing the Argentine mass eruptions.

Kirchner's plans are in dramatic conflict with the valiant uprising that the masses launched just a year and a half ago. His counterattack can be stopped, but only if proletarian revolutionaries expose it and offer an alternative leadership that re-invigorates the struggles and fights to arm them with communist working-class consciousness.

### THE HISTORIC UPRISING

Kirchner's election, and what must now be done to cripple his attack, can only be understood in the light of the huge events of the last few years. In December 2001 the Argentine masses made history by overthrowing, not a military dictatorship, but a bourgeois democratic regime. The uprising was mainly a confluence of struggles by the piqueteros (unemployed activists), explosive food riots by the desperate poor, and the pot-banging demonstrations called cacerolazos.

The cacerolazos were the force that at that time tipped the scales. That month, the strapped government had frozen the savings accounts of small savers, severely limiting withdrawals. (The freezing of the savings was called "el corralito.") This outraged and activated the middle class and petty bourgeoisie, who saw that the system did not care more about them than it did the working class. "Que Se Vayan Todos!" (Down with Them All!) was the angry battle cry of the whole movement. The presidency of Fernando de la Rúa of the Radical Party (officially, the Unión Cívica Radical or UCR) was abruptly terminated by the masses.

Popular assemblies sprung up everywhere, alive with discussions of possibilities for reorganizing society. The piqueteros, who had for years been protesting their plight with road blockades, were now moving toward center-stage. They were gaining in strength and support from the assemblies and other popular sectors. But the understandable raw rage expressed in "Que Se Vayan Todos!" could not by itself point the way forward. The slogan showed mainly that the masses did not yet have an alternative for state power. As we commented at the time:



*Historic uprising in Argentina in Dec. 2001 opened up new stage of struggle.*

**In Argentina and elsewhere what predominates on the anti-establishment political scene is the popular notion that "politicians can't be trusted", "they are all corrupt" and so forth. Obviously hatred of politicians can be a starting point for developing a class understanding, but only if bourgeois politicians are openly countered by a proletarian revolutionary party. To the politicians, the left in one form or another counterposes the mass movement, just "us" versus "them." No! We must tell the masses that our problem is not politicians and political parties but capitalist politicians and all their political parties.** ("Letter to the Liga Obrera Internacionalista [LOI]," December 26, 2002. This letter is on our website and, like all our public letters and leaflets, is available to readers upon request.)

While the bourgeoisie was clearly suffering a crisis of leadership, the proletariat's leadership crisis was even worse. There was no revolutionary party alternative intervening on the scene, explicitly countering proletarian to bourgeois leadership. The union bureaucrats – Peronists and traditional reformists alike – kept the powerful big battalions of industrial workers out of the uprising. Therefore a shaky pre-revolutionary situation prevailed, but the bourgeoisie was able to retain the balance of power and the initiative.

The Peronist Party (officially called the Partido Justicialista, or PJ) was the party which had long commanded the support of

labor. It was called upon to rule once again. And, after some shake-ups in personnel, it was able to do so. Eduardo Duhalde became the appointed “caretaker” president. (See *Proletarian Revolution* No. 64 for the full background.) For a while, mass resistance continued. The media openly questioned whether Duhalde could maintain the government’s grip over the masses. Frightened by the huge throngs gathering in the streets and neighborhoods, they wondered whether or not Argentina would survive at all or whether it would “cease to exist.”

### ARGENTINA’S “RECOVERY”

In the absence of a serious alternative, a year or so later the ruling class felt that it was on less shaky ground. The politicians were ready to go for new elections, to try to stabilize bourgeois rule. There was a material foundation for this step. The economy had grown by 1 percent in 2002; this was considered a near miracle, given the depression-like conditions and the lack of assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). By January 2003, credit had returned to Argentina and President Bush had called Duhalde to congratulate him for a successful “pacification” of the country.

Even this minor “recovery” could only be temporary, given new IMF negotiations coming up without any real solution in sight. The ruling class did the best it could with the little it had. It gave pitiful raises to the most heavily unionized sectors of industrial labor. These crumbs released some pressure on the union tops from the ranks, while leaving the rest of the working class out in the cold. Likewise, in a plan funded by the World Bank, it doled out temporary jobs and workfare plans to particular bureaucrats to let them buy off and get more support from particular unemployed groupings. It even managed to release some of the frozen funds belonging to small savers. Thus the ruling class could move on to new elections.

Duhalde bragged that his government had set a rare example by “rejecting the shock measures the IMF uses to impose on nations in crisis.” What he didn’t stress was that he had defaulted on IMF payments, so that the enormous debt owed to imperialist financiers had actually mounted enormously during his term. And in reality he had carried out much of a typically oppressive IMF program, while posturing that he was doing so independently. His main economic measure had been the conversion of the monetary system from a rigid dollar standard to the floating peso. The result of this “pesification” was that small savings were reduced in value by 70 percent. The real value of workers’ salaries dropped at least 30 percent, even for those who still had a job, and more busi-



*A rally of supporters of right wing candidate, Lopez Murphy. Election results showed strong middle-class polarization.*

nesses and factories were forced to close. Meanwhile the government paid off the banks for their losses.

What Duhalde really did was to preside over an unprecedented massive transfer of funds from the already suffering population to pay off the big capitalists. Only by impoverishing the middle classes, on top of extracting more blood from the already superexploited workers and poor, was this so-called recovery achieved. His successor will have to deal with the impending IMF negotiations this August, which will inevitably mean more imperialist bloodsucking. He will have to try to stabilize bourgeois rule while inevitably facing more fury from the exploited masses. Stabilization therefore can only be achieved with a drastic level of repression.

### THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

When two piqueteros were killed by the police in June 2002, there was a massive outpouring of protest. Duhalde sought to escape by announcing early elections. When things got calmer later, rumors surfaced that he wouldn’t step down after all. But, again after much shuffling, the presidential elections originally announced for September 2003 ended up being set for two rounds, in April and May.

Three Peronists ran in the first round; Kirchner won in the end because people were frightened of the specter of another government led by Carlos Menem, the former president known for his savage neo-liberal attacks throughout the 90’s. Yet Menem was supported by the biggest trade union federation and had taken the lead in the first round with 24 percent of the vote. Kirchner got 22 percent, largely because of Duhalde’s strong efforts for him, given that he was a virtual unknown and had run a lackluster campaign.

Once the first round results were in, it was clear that Menem had peaked and would lose the second round. So he dropped out, making Kirchner president by default. The lack of a clear mandate for Kirchner – he was not the candidate of choice of any major union, a big failing for any Peronist – demonstrates that the capitalists have not resolved their crisis of leadership. Kirchner has been given a honeymoon with the public for about three months: the temporary IMF package granted earlier expires in August and must be renegotiated. Before the big guns come to town, he rushed to try to establish a more decisive and impressive image of “change” and “national pride.”

In addition to his populist inauguration show, he has put new people in the armed forces’ leadership and the Supreme Court, in an effort to show he is cleaning house. Above all he has made all sorts of promises on issues from economic growth to human rights. Menem likewise had run on an even more left populist campaign when he won in 1989 and then did exactly the opposite in office. Not without reason did the London *Financial Times* label Kirchner “Menem Lite.” (May 21.) For the moment, his election was a striking success for the bourgeoisie, especially compared to the crisis and instability that had rocked the ruling class.

### FAILURE OF THE LEFT

Kirchner’s election does not mean he will actually be able to impose stepped-up neo-liberal attacks, even though that is what he is there for. There is a tremendous potential for a new upsurge that could defeat his assault. It would have to include showing the way to overcome the debt, and wedding a political program to the power of the masses to fight for it.

After the mass uprising in 2001, the ruling class’s ability to continue its attacks was hardly inevitable. At the onset, there was no revolutionary party willing to fight for leadership in the mass upsurges, based on demonstrating that socialist revolution is the

only solution to the crisis. But during such times of crisis, new fighting layers of workers and youth are generated who can be won to building the revolutionary party. Crisis can generate rapid development of the vanguard.

An authentic proletarian revolutionary group, since it would have no stake in the capitalist system at all, could have fought honestly and openly for the overall interests of the working class. It could have fought against any kind of artificial and bourgeois-inspired division used to hamper the powerful unity in action of the working class that was so desperately needed.

When it is under attack, the working class naturally seeks strength through unity, and there is also an objective need for a united defense. That is why authentic Trotskyists have always fought for united-front action whenever possible. The Bolshevik motto “march separately, strike together” is meant to encourage united class action, ranging from mass meetings to protest marches to strikes and street confrontations. Unity in action among workers who have varying levels of political consciousness and disagreements is a precondition both for creating an immediate defense and for attaining more advanced socialist consciousness. “March separately” means that all participating political tendencies openly display their banner and slogans and fight for their political strategy and program. Raising working-class consciousness means giving our fellow workers the chance to judge which political tendency has the program that represents their actual interests and shows the way forward. For Leninists, the united front has always been a demand for united action, not an elitist ultimatum demanding political agreement beforehand.

Unfortunately, the Argentine left has become a model for the opposite conduct. Organizational sectarianism has been entangled with political opportunism. Petty-bourgeois reformist and left outfits have divided and weakened working-class action for their narrow organizational gains: to ward off their supporters from exposure to alternative politics. Thus we saw the sizable and fighting piquetero movement divided into at least three different organizations, led by rival bureaucracies competing for control over workfare plans and other deals, which they then dole out to the piqueteros selectively. They call separate and competing mass meetings, marches and actions. An even newer development has been the growing factory occupation movement. The occupations involve about 200 small-scale factories that have been taken over by workers trying to save their jobs when the owners abandon or shut down their workplaces. This movement has been subjected to similar divisiveness, despite ongoing efforts at maintaining solidarity.

## A STRUGGLE HELD BACK

The left’s failure is even more striking with respect to the major unions. Even with massive unemployment, there are still over 8 million wage-earning urban workers. Even though only about one-third of these are currently represented by the unions (with the majority of workers now either underemployed or in the “gray economy”), employed workers – and particularly those in industry and transport – are still clearly central to the political economy of the country. And Marxists know that strategic emplacement within production carries more weight than numbers alone.

The gulf within the working class has persisted, since the major battalions of the employed industrial and transport workers have been fundamentally disengaged from the struggle from the time of the uprising until now. No leading trade union figure has



*In May, Brukman workers rallied with supporters. Violently attacked by over 500 policemen in late April, the workers suffered a major defeat. Mass armed self-defense is a necessity in Argentina.*

been willing to stand for any kind of working-class fightback or class independence. Of course, union bureaucrats generally avoid such efforts, except when under tremendous pressure from the ranks. But now, with the stakes so high, to a man they are unwilling to lead even limited strikes, as they used to do. If the bourgeoisie has been shaken by the crisis, the pro-capitalist trade union bureaucracy is virtually paralyzed.

Faced with this critical impasse, the left has raised no real alternative. It talks very radically but follows policies that perpetuate both the misleadership and the division of our class. Refusing to place demands on the big unions reached an extreme after the uprising: the left immersed itself in the existing movements of popular assemblies, piqueteros and factory take-overs. But it neither carried out a strategy to reach the mass of workers nor provided one to the militant workers in its immediate audience. (See *PR* 64 and the “Letter to the LOI” on our website for our debates with Argentine left organizations over trade union policy.)

As one example, where groups of unionized workers have already become very militant, a rather rare phenomenon now, the left has often supported split-away locals and the notion of separate “combative” unions. Splitting became a pseudo-militant way to run away from the fight for the leadership of the central core of the proletariat. It actually means abandoning the less advanced fellow workers, instead of staying within the larger union in order to fight alongside and convince fellow workers. Orienting mainly to “combative” unions is part of a general, long-held tendency to evade the fight for revolutionary leadership within the main federations, where the masses of workers still are.

Since the upsurge, we have been arguing that the gulf between the existing movements and the bulk of the working class is a primary problem that has to be overcome. We argued that building the revolutionary party itself had to be the key propaganda slogan, the central idea addressed to advanced workers. Such a party would fight to build a revolutionary opposition within all the unions and unemployed organizations, as well as the other mass sectors. Such union work is necessary in the two major union federations currently led mainly by Peronists; they are identified by their top leaders’ names as the CGT-Daer, the more conservative one, and the CGT-Moyano, the more militant-appearing one. Revolutionaries would also fight inside the CTA,



*Carlos Menem won the 1989 elections by appealing to workers and poor in the name of Peron. In office, he stood for “free market” policies, attacks on unions and an alliance with the U.S.*

whose leadership is social-democratic and which leads a significant organization of piqueteros as well.

### REVOLUTIONARY PROGRAM AND THE ELECTIONS

We have contended in particular that the leading action demand should be “General Strike to Repudiate the Debt!” (See *PR* 64.) The centrist left has also voiced the words “general strike,” but again they use a militant phrase to avoid the practical struggle. The demand for a general strike is hollow unless it is placed as a challenge on the unions, the only institutions which have the power to carry out such a struggle and shut the country down. Unless they are brought into the decisive struggles, or at least made aware of their own power and what kind of struggle they are capable of waging, it was absolutely predictable that the mass of workers would vote for the Peronists.

As we have argued, workers not only had to understand that their union leaders and the Peronist politicians were bad, which many already know; they have to learn through their own experience that the working class has the power to build a meaningful alternative. Only then can independent working-class politics become realistically attractive to the mass of workers, who want concrete results rather than nice-sounding rhetoric. The important programmatic demands which the left sometimes advances, even correct ones, remain just words in the minds of most workers. Unless they can see that their class has the muscle to win something through mass united class struggle, they feel they must stick with the Peronists, who they think are at least better than the open bourgeois enemy.

With this in mind, we foresaw the electoral result even from afar:

**Despite the evident crisis of Peronism today, capitalism has proven many times over, unfortunately, that it will not permanently collapse by itself, but only via a successful revolutionary alternative. If it proves impossible for some wing of Peronism to resurrect itself then there can be a bourgeois alternative to fool and repress the masses with another name. But at the present time a significant percentage of workers will vote Peronist.** (“Letter to the LOI.”)

The main reason for the large Peronist vote was the failure of a serious alternative. This is not to say that the masses of workers would have changed their minds overnight if offered the right program. But important inroads into the consciousness of the work-

ing class could have been made by fighting for a revolutionary program before and during the elections.

### THE WORKING CLASS AND PERONISM

Peronism has cast a long shadow over the working class. The historic memory of the rapid rise in living standards in the initial period of Juan Peron’s reign half a century ago, and the tremendous mobilizations of workers that took place then, are big factors. Also important is the fact that the Peronist politicians speak to the industrial workers in terms of their interest in an industrialization program for the country. Industrial workers are not only worried about keeping jobs. Their jobs and the destinies of their families and friends are also materially linked to the resurgence of an economy based on industrial production. Only the Peronist PJ, the so-called “party of production,” claims to have such a program. This bond between large sections of the workers and Peronism is only a vestige of the past strong allegiance. Its continued existence is all the more tragic since the workers’ hopes for industrial expansion cannot be achieved under imperialism today.

The elections were a specific opportunity for the left to raise a revolutionary program which could meet the working class’s aspirations. An open communist campaign could have raised the need for the revolutionary party, working-class independence, and socialist revolution. It could have put forward demands from the Trotskyist Transitional Program to link socialism with the current struggle: jobs for all, public works, an escalating scale of wages, a sliding scale of hours to spread the work around, expropriation of industry and the banks and credit institutions without compensating the capitalists. Expropriation of the large landowners is also critical. A real plan for the resurgence of industry could have been outlined.

Revolutionaries could have challenged the Peronist union leaders not just by denouncing them from the outside but by exposing them in practice, addressing our fellow workers along the following lines:

“In Argentina, the working class built an important industrial infrastructure. But the Peronist party has joined in selling it off and taking it apart piece by piece. Some say they are still for us, but they have to deal with the ‘reality’ of the economic crisis and the power of imperialist capital. But we say the union leaders are not worth anything if we cannot push them to respond to our needs.

“There is an action they can take, the only way to get the funds for industry that the Argentine working class needs. They can mobilize the unions to launch a general strike to demand that the state repudiate the debt! Everybody knows that we are slaving away to pay the imperialists, and yet the debt keeps mounting. The capital we produced should go back to the class that made it in the first place, the working class. It can also win over the middle-class savers. But as long as we let the ruling class pay off the parasitic banks and the IMF, working-class Argentines will starve. Debt repudiation is our only choice.

“We all know that the union leaders have the power to call out the workers and stop industry and profit making. You still hope that they can still be used to mount some kind of defense. But they are not worth anything if we cannot push them to respond to our needs. We revolutionary workers say that the bureaucrats are so glued to the PJ and the capitalist system, that they would prefer to see the working class and the unions sink rather than to carry out such a demand.

“We say that only revolutionaries will fight for debt repudiation, for all the workers’ needs. So these union bureaucrats have to be replaced. We predict they will try everything to betray us. But let’s put them to the maximum test by raising our demands on them and at the same time build strike committees to fight for and

organize the general strike. Then we will see who is right.”

Another key element of the revolutionary program, particularly vital to counter illusions in bourgeois electoralism, is the call for mass armed self-defense. This has been strikingly missing from the propaganda of most of the far left – and missing in action too. A few days before the first round of elections in late April, Buenos Aires police attacked the workers occupying the Brukman textile factory. Thousands of supporters, including the major left groups, valiantly showed up to join the workers’ battle. This was not the first eviction attempt, but this time it was successful because of the significant force used. In the whole period leading up to it, no major left group had propagandized or agitated for mass self-defense, nor have they raised it since. (An LRP statement on the Brukman fight is on our website.)

## ELECTION BOYCOTT

Rather than put forward a revolutionary program, sections of the left ran in the election on fairly standard centrist programs. The Partido Obrero (PO; Workers Party) campaigned for their perennial call for a constituent assembly. (See our website or *PR* 64 for an analysis of this issue and the PO.) The Partido de Trabajadores por el Socialismo (PTS: Party of Workers for Socialism), on the other hand, engaged in an electoral boycott campaign, criticizing the leftists who ran candidates as “participationist.” Since the PTS is the farthest left of the prominent groups, and since the boycott tactic attracted the most left-wing elements, it is important to look at it more closely.

In an article, “Active Boycott Against The Phony Elections” the PTS initiated their boycott call with all guns blazing. They wrote:

**The PTS has put forward a unitary call in an Open Letter distributed in thousands . . . . We call on all picketer organizations, popular assemblies, occupied factories, combative unions, combative students federations and leftist parties to put forward a great national rally and to form a united committee to call all peoples to carry out an active boycott . . . .**

**We must all break down the electoral trap. We put forward this campaign in factories, state buildings, schools, workers and peoples quarters, as part of the fight to build a national congress of all the expressions of the struggle and to prepare an active general strike which will surpass in organization the actions of December 19 and 20, to put an end to the government of Duhalde. Only with this perspective and over the ruins of the present regime can we call for a Constituent Assembly, in which the mobilized masses can discuss the democratic resolution of the great national problems. . . .**

**Down with Duhalde! Active boycott against the phony elections! . . . General strike until they are all kicked out to impose a Revolutionary Constituent Assembly! (*La Verdad Obrera* 109, October 1, 2002.)**

This passage is representative of the PTS’s work from that time until the day Menem dropped out. Some key points: First, the PTS does on occasion formally recognize the need to address the organized working class. But in practice it addresses a movement that does not include the major union federations and their leaders but only the “combative” unions.

Second, it claims that an “active” electoral boycott will lead to a big congress to launch a general strike and hopefully bring down the regime. But there is absolutely no argument made for how the existing movement would gain the ear of the whole organized working class in order for it to boycott the elections. Nor are they even challenging the union leaders to drop their support to bourgeois candidates, or even advising the rank and file to fight for

the PTS’s boycott policy in their currently non-combative unions.

Third, there is no mention of smashing the state. Nor do they mention the need for the revolutionary party here, or in most of their material.

## BOYCOTT’S FAILURE

The PTS deceived and miseducated the ranks of the movement, which in fact never had the forces to call an active boycott that could have affected the election. We, like Lenin, do not generally believe in an electoral boycott tactic except where an immediate working-class seizure of power is possible. But certainly an “active” boycott had to mean at least unified large-scale demonstrations, if not strikes, at a minimum. The PTS never had the power to call any such mass actions. But it did try to cover some of its tracks by formally recognizing in advance that the proposed successful boycott wouldn’t actually stop the elections. So they also said:

**Even if we cannot win this battle and Duhalde’s elections take place, a great movement for active boycott will ensure that the upcoming government starts out as illegitimate and unrepresentative, weakening its ability to pass measures against working people, who will be in better conditions to confront and defeat them.**

That is, they claimed that the boycott movement would at least weaken the new regime. But this too proved utterly false. Even though none of the candidates’ votes were impressive (they were all under 25 percent), the total turnout was high, especially compared to the promises of the boycott movement. While the historic average of electoral participation since 1911 (when voting became legally mandatory) has been 79.5 percent, in the first round this year the level was 77.5 percent, an insignificant difference.

In the October 2001 provincial elections, abstentionism had hit a record high for Argentina. But that in itself did absolutely nothing to weaken the attacks, as the PTS argued it would in 2003. In fact the attacks escalated more after the 2001 elections – until the potentially revolutionary mass struggle overthrew the elected regime in December. But even that action did not stop the attacks, because capitalism was not facing a conscious challenge to its state power. The overall lesson, which was eminently predictable by Leninists, was that without a revolutionary alternative for state power, any government would remain bourgeois.

The PTS ran in the 2001 elections. They did not argue at that time that their campaign strengthened the legitimacy of the de la Rúa regime. While we do not agree with the political program on which they ran, their analysis showed a nodding acquaintance with the Leninist tradition of participating in parliament in order to present a working-class alternative. And it showed their ability to provide a critical eye on the concrete events as they unfolded. Here is how they explain their participation then:

**We do not abstain from all elections in general. The PTS stood its own working-class candidates in the 1999 general elections, which we reiterated in the October 2001 legislative elections. We did this at a time when the “rage vote” [not voting in one form or another out of anger with the system] had surfaced, because we deemed that such an option, which the middle classes turned to in the main, lacked a precise class orientation. On the contrary, it was sponsored by a bewildering array of forces, from some picketers’ movements to the fascist-minded TV presenter Daniel Hadad. (*LVO* 114, January 17, 2003.)**

## LENINIST METHOD

The PTS, failing in the task of educating its audience, did not even address why the long-standing Leninist position against

election boycotts, which it had previously acknowledged, should be discarded for this election. As Lenin wrote in his pamphlet *“Left-Wing” Communism, An Infantile Disorder*:

**It has been proved that participation in a bourgeois-democratic parliament even a few weeks before the victory of a Soviet republic, and even after such a victory, not only does not harm the revolutionary proletariat, but actually helps it to prove to the backward masses why such parliaments deserve to be dispersed; it helps their successful dispersal, and helps bourgeois parliamentarism to become “politically obsolete.” To refuse to take this experience into account and at the same time to claim affiliation to the Communist International, which must work out its tactics internationally (not narrow or one-sided national tactics, but international tactics), is to commit the gravest blunder and actually to retreat from real internationalism while paying lip service to it.**

Instead, of dealing with the traditional Leninist arguments, the PTS complained that the presidential elections would leave all the other “corrupt politicians in their seats” and not give even a chance “for workers and the left to gain seats.”

But what bourgeois elections did not put forward corrupt politicians? Or give workers and the left a fair chance? For Bolsheviks, participation in elections was not based on the fairness of the elections or the chance of winning. Lenin always denounced electoralism as an end in itself, since no meaningful change can come through elections. He always argued for the far greater value of mass action over elections.

The heart of the PTS position was really their desire to echo the “Down with Them All” sentiment of the movement. Therefore, to contrast with the middle-class abstentionism or “rage vote” in 2001, they analyzed the boycott tactic for this election as follows, in an article entitled “Duhalde’s electoral trickery and the tactics of the left: realism in revolutionary politics”:

**The present situation is very different now. After the extraordinary situation ushered in by the December uprising, new actors have come onto the scene. In stark contrast to the October 2001 elections – when the so-called ‘rage vote’ was not a driving force for the organization of both the workers and the people – we now see real organizations that we should come together with in rejecting the electoral trickery: the assemblies, the picketers’ movements, the occupied factories and the left. All of these strands came together in the December 20 rally at Plaza de Mayo, on the first anniversary of the uprising. By coming together, we should be able to put forward a unified position addressing the wide layers of the population and the workers who stand in rejection of the present elections. (LVO 114, January 17, 2003.)**

This shows that they thought the middle-class-dominated abstentionist vote in the October 2001 congressional elections could be converted into a working-class stance, based on the unity of the existing movements inspiring the rest of the workers. On

what basis was this “realism in revolutionary politics”?

Last year, we wrote about the left’s heady celebration of the middle-class-led popular assemblies and foresaw the consequences of its failure to raise a direct call for working-class independence and leadership:

**The Argentinean bourgeoisie, in conjunction with U.S. imperialism, has been given more time to concoct a more useful solution. It aims to break off middle-class support from the working class and over time to win support for increased repression as well. The more weeks and months that the undefined slogan “Down with Them All” continues to be the rallying call, celebrated uncritically by the PO, the PTS and the bulk of the left – without a sharp class alternative even suggested – the more hollow it becomes. And because there is no such thing as a municipality, province or nation with no politicians, it can only strengthen the middle-class populist influence that the PO already acknowledged is at work. (PR 64.)**

The PTS, on the other hand, used the same slogan as a reason to boycott the election, believing that now the working class as well as the middle class really would vote against all politicians. They claimed afterward that “the election results stabbed the movement that had massively called for ‘Down With Them All’ in the back.” (LVO 119, April 30.) They also blamed “the participationist left” that “destroyed the unitary call that was made by the PTS and other forces.” (LVO 120, May 21.) In reality, it was the PTS that had been swept away by its fantasy interpretation of the slogan.

The PTS simply tailed what it judged to be the mood of the already existing sectoral movements. On that basis it addressed that audience with the dream of a big class-wide boycott movement which would dampen the attacks and fortify the possibility of overthrowing the regime. Apparently, it was not a dream held by much of its own imagined audience, or the abstention rate would have been significantly higher. Even knowing that the past abstentionism was a middle-class rather than a working-class phenomenon did not impede the PTS’s effort to cater to non-communist consciousness under the guise of a working-class act.

## NO SELF-CRITICISM

After the results of the first round came in, the PTS refused to state explicitly that their tactic had been wrong, although they did analyze the results fairly well. They stated:

**The most striking feature of these elections was that they revealed a political and social fragmentation that we haven’t seen since the days of the uprising. In that moment it seemed (and only seemed) that the forces of the right had disappeared. The “block of December” that was reuniting all those who came out to confront the dying government of de la Rúa seemed to unite in an alliance, atypical in its heterogeneity. . . . This alliance that raised the slogan “Down with Them All” came unglued, and it gave way to a major social and political polarization.**

The article went on to say that the “anti-vote” (including abstentions, blank and spoiled ballots, etc.) decreased because the middle class voted! The PTS recognizes that the middle class “historically vacillates,” but without a word of self-criticism! Instead they offer a self-defense:

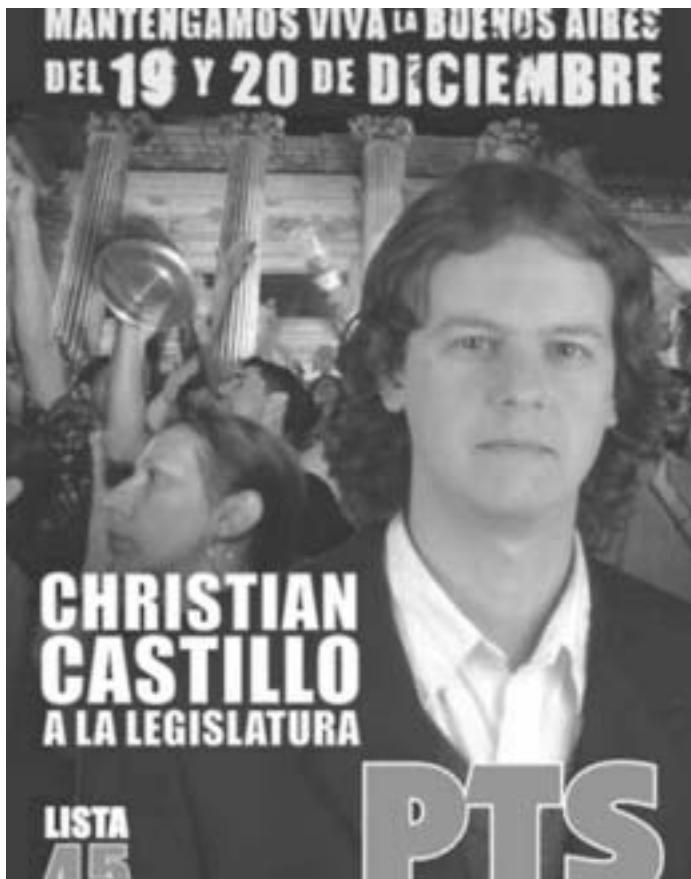
**Our party attempted the task that in that moment seemed less glamorous and more difficult, that of establishing a systematic work in the heart of the working class and that of formulating for the vanguard of December the necessity of establishing a fuller workers’ and popular unity. . . . What happened is that the vanguard suffered a sharp lack of**

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*Christian Castillo leads the PTS slate for legislative posts in Buenos Aires elections. After boycott failure, PTS switched back to participation in elections.*

**revolutionary leadership, and it has remained in these circumstances on the defensive.”** (LVO 119, April 30, 2003.)

What does it mean to say that “the vanguard didn’t have revolutionary leadership?” Clarity in terminology is called for. For Lenin and Trotsky the vanguard meant the revolutionary party leadership. But there is the relative “vanguard”: those engaged in the struggle right now. For one thing, identifying the most active today doesn’t automatically determine which strata will be in the action vanguard of future upheavals, since this layer that is out front in today’s actions does not necessarily have communist class consciousness. The militant action vanguard in Argentina today represents advancing consciousness, both because of the heroic struggles and sacrifices it has made, in many cases taking on the police and the bosses, and a good part is even subjectively socialist. But it is limited or backward in relation to the need for the communist class consciousness of the Leninist vanguard.

The PTS incessantly refers to the militant factory takeover movement, along with the “combative” union militants and piqueteros, as the vanguard, making clear that they really do see these layers as the vanguard for the whole class. There are many problems with this. Their terminological “ambiguity” also covers up the fact that industrial workers must form a core part of the revolutionary vanguard. It also covers up the fact that it is the PTS itself which was supposed to be the *revolutionary* vanguard providing revolutionary guidance, i.e. leadership, to all the advancing workers. If the question of revolutionary leadership is decisive, then why were the revolutionaries of the PTS only tailing the action vanguard? Supposed revolutionaries with communist consciousness were tailing non-communist consciousness, cheerleading for the slogan “Down with Them All!”

The PTS has not produced a serious balance sheet of the major tactic which they employed in the heat of the Argentine struggle. This is the case even though they made the campaign for a boycott a key question in issue after issue of their newspaper for over a year, denouncing all those who wanted to run and by extension the workers who wanted to vote.

## REALITY TEST

The boycott tactic was ultra-left in appearance, opportunist in essence. But as opportunist maneuvers go, what a flop this one was! Since the uprising, the tendency toward abstention seemed to be growing – but only within the currents cordoned off from the big battalions of the working class. The PTS swam so vigorously with that boycott current that it didn’t see how weak the current actually was becoming. In reality the boycott movement had not advanced politically past the dead-end notion of frustration with all politicians, encapsulated in the perennial slogan “Que Se Vayan Todos,” which of course the PTS, like other leftists, had uncritically championed.

The sectoral movements had been going on for over a year and a half without seeing any solution to the crisis, much less a revolutionary alternative. Abstention as an answer to the problem of treacherous politicians, carried out in October 2001, had already proven to be no answer to anything. Therefore, those workers and middle-class activists involved in the sectoral uprisings voted for what was there. We agree with the PTS that there are vital layers of workers, employed and unemployed, as well as youth that must be addressed right now with what to do. The boycott gave them the wrong answer.

Above all, the boycott campaign never had a chance to reach the crucial industrial workers and even begin to break their ties to the Peronist bureaucrats and candidates. The decisive question that the PTS refuses to face is that unified mass action will never occur in Argentina without the unionized industrial proletariat. The only solution is proletarian revolution and for that, working-class consciousness must be fought for in direct political opposition to the bureaucracy. It is the only way, as Marx pointed out long ago, that “the working class fits itself for power.” The advanced layers of the proletariat embodied in its own revolutionary party must win the leadership of our class from the hands of a bureaucracy which has to be fought, not evaded.

In the presidential election, not only did abstentions go down dramatically compared to October 2001; so did the vote for the left. If the PTS sensed one thing right, perhaps they realized that if they had run on their centrist program, they would have had a similar result.

Some mistakes are unavoidable. This one was not. But in any case mistakes can at least be learned from. Tactics embody a dialogue, from which Bolsheviks can learn from the masses whether or not they conveyed their message and whether or not their tactic worked. By critically assessing what they have done, authentic revolutionaries learn from their experiences. Not the PTS.

As consummate opportunists, the PTS used its boycott as just a passing phase: they have quickly announced that they support participation in the upcoming provincial elections. But the underlying centrism is no passing matter. Rather than learning the lessons of their failed boycott agitation, their method is apparently to move on and forget about it.

The PTS either did not understand mixed consciousness among workers or didn’t care to. Worse still, they do not get it now. They could have written their appraisal before the results, since they had been condemning the “participationists” all year. Trotsky’s rules for Fourth Internationalists encapsulated a different spirit. As he said, “Face reality squarely.”●

# On The Sixtieth Anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

Lenin described the history of each culture as having two component parts, the democratic culture of the toiling masses and the elitist culture of the ruling classes. In graphic strokes, a well-documented record of monumental events – often bloody – testifies to the presence of these two entwined opposites embedded within the history of the Jewish people.

For centuries under feudalism, Jews were a pariah caste in Europe. The craftsmen and other usually impoverished laborers served their exploiters, the upper class – the Rothschilds and their ilk. In turn, these “court Jews” served their masters, the Christian lords, as their merchants and usurers. When

scapegoats were necessary, it was the Jewish masses who were persecuted and did the suffering, far more often than the treacherous traders and bankers.

Of course, the wealthy merchants had their Jewish pawns, including the clerics. The rabbis served as the ideological prison guards for the craftsmen, chaining them to their exploiters by preaching hatred of the “enemy,” the gentiles – meaning in reality their fellow urban toilers and serfs who were Christian, not the Christian lords. When mind-rotting religious superstition failed to quash rebellions against the upper classes, the armed lackeys of the lords and their deluded anti-Semitic followers invaded the ghettos to kill, rape and repress – inspired by their own priests and their own godly drivel. In Eastern Europe, these deadly rampages were known as “pogroms” and their gentile perpetrators were often known as “the cossacks.”

In Western Europe, the advent of capitalism, the bourgeois democratic revolution and the “age of reason” broke down much of the old caste barriers, along with their prejudices and religious furies. At the end of the 19th century, however, with the development of imperialist and counterrevolutionary capitalism, the old anti-Jewish crap began to return with a vengeance, in far more devastating forms. Soon Nazism, decadent capitalism’s last resort, spawned the genocidal massacre of millions of working-class and middle-class Jews across Europe, in addition to untold numbers of other human beings.

Communist revolutionaries insist upon the absolutely critical need for leadership, proletarian leadership. This is not because leadership is inherently good; it is merely inherently necessary. The working class must have its own vanguard party if it is to successfully make the socialist revolution. But the ruling class also depends upon having its leadership accepted. The highly organized Jewish communities were dominated by leaderships which served the upper classes and sought to collaborate with the Nazi



*Warsaw ghetto fighters arrested as a result of uprising.*

masters. Their Jewish police minions, right-wing pro-Nazi Zionist thugs, served as the fist within the ghettos by repressing potential anti-Nazi mass revolts. Once again, they fulfilled their contemptible duty of serving their Jewish and gentile rulers by trying to ensure the subordination of the oppressed and exploited workers and craftsmen.

## OUR 1983 ARTICLE

To their everlasting glory, the socialist workers of the Warsaw Ghetto rose up to fight the Nazis in spite of the Jewish bourgeoisie and its pro-fascist thugs, and in spite of the absence of aid by the imperialist “democratic” West or the Stalinists

in Moscow. We recount the story of this doomed but profoundly heroic revolt in an all-too compressed summary below. This account originally appeared in this magazine twenty years ago, commemorating the fortieth anniversary of the event. We add only a few comments now to place the account in context.

Overwhelmingly, the traumatized survivors of the Holocaust were not Zionists. Unable to stay in countries still swimming in the blood of their families, they found the doors to the victorious “democratic” imperialist nations shut in their faces. With the connivance of the British imperialists, they were shoved into Palestine. These Jews were thrown into a conflict designed to repress the rebellious anti-colonial Arab population.

In 1948, Israel was founded on stolen Arab land – with the support of Washington, London and Moscow – in a war of ethnic cleansing. Once again, the interests of the Jewish masses were diverted into the service of the Jewish upper classes. Once again, the Jewish upper classes and their thugs serve not only their own interests but the interests of their dominant allies and masters, the lords of Western imperialism, especially those in Washington.

There are certainly vast differences between the class relationships of the past and those of today with respect to Jews and with the creation of Israel. One important role that has been transformed is that the armed fist of murderous repression is no longer solely that of the gentiles. The Israeli colonial-settlers now conduct their own pogroms against other Semites, the Palestinian Arabs, and are now cossacks in the service of the imperialist lords and masters: “Guardians of Western Civilization.”

Ronald Reagan’s invasion of Lebanon in 1983 in defense of both U.S. imperialist interests and those of its Israeli junior partner, referred to in the reprinted article, has now been trumped by his successor’s bloody invasion of Iraq, designed to achieve the same purpose more successfully. The murderous anti-Palestinian role played by the Zionist leader Menachem Begin, the descen-

dent of the pro-Nazi Jewish police force in Europe, is now played by the even more bloody-handed monster, Ariel Sharon.

### GHETTO REVOLT AND INTIFADA

The role of the heroic Jewish workers who led the Warsaw Ghetto Revolt is now largely played by the Palestinian workers, artisans and small farmers who are the backbone of the *intifada*, the daily battle of the Arab masses against the imperialist colonial-settler pogromists.

The Arab masses have their own traitors and false leaders, secular in the form of Arafat and Abbas, religious obscurantist in the form of Hamas and its kind. Arabs, like Jews and all other peoples, have a mass democratic class component and an elitist and treacherous upper class component. We note with elation the reports that a rising number of Palestinians are now searching for Marxist and revolutionary answers. Indeed, Marxist internationalism is the only hope for their survival; it is the same consciousness that motivated so many of the Warsaw ghetto workers, whose memory is so befouled by Israel today.

We are also moved by the re-emergence in occupied Palestine – Israel – of a very small but growing number of young

Jewish workers who reflect the spirit of the Warsaw Jewish working-class revolt. We are now engaged in discussion with these comrades, who are so seriously trying to find their way to engage in the Arab struggle for liberation. They are firm in the knowledge that it can only succeed if it becomes a working class-led struggle for a Palestinian workers' state, part of a federation of Middle Eastern socialist states. Jewish workers can attain freedom, economic well-being and all their independent cultural aspirations in such a workers' state. They can never be free living on stolen land in a sea of hostility.

They know that the bourgeois Zionists have led the Jewish masses into a disaster in Palestine, an eternal war that means not only the continual murder of fellow Arab workers, but in the long run, a death trap for the Jewish workers. Sooner or later, if the Palestinian socialist revolution does not triumph, once again the Jewish masses will be faced with an ultimate betrayal by their own treacherous secular leaders and rabbis. We certainly may add their Western imperialist lords and masters, as well as their new "allies," the Christian fundamentalists, who have always been such good friends to the Jewish pariahs they treated so well throughout history.

# Warsaw Ghetto Fighters

Reprinted from *Socialist Voice* No. 19, Summer 1983.

This is the fortieth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising which began on April 19, 1943. The courageous Jewish fighters, armed with only Molotov cocktails and a puny assortment of guns, took on the armored might of Nazi legions and held on for months before being overwhelmed. The "anti-fascist" imperialist powers, Great Britain, the Soviet Union and, above all, the United States, did nothing. Now they do too much.

Today, hired word-merchants dust off the requisite phrases lauding the Warsaw Ghetto martyrs. And the world's statesmen mouth them. When those oppressed Jews fought tanks and artillery with their hands to stay alive and keep their families out of the ovens, they were a damned nuisance. Now they are damned by great praise.

Did you notice how many official Expressions of Sympathy the Palestinians in Lebanon received from the capitals of the world *after* they were crushed by the Israeli blitzkrieg? Take heart that we live in a world where even the mightiest of imperialists are still capable of shedding a tear for the unfortunate and oppressed – so long as they are, safely, the victims and in no danger of becoming the victors.

Praise today from the Reagans and the Beginns seeks to replace the real heroism of the ghetto masses with cardboard images to suit contemporary national chauvinist (Zionist) needs. The true heroism of the stalwart Jewish fighters of Warsaw came not from the fact that Jews as a whole people were "chosen" or especially ennobled by their centuries of oppression. In the ghetto there were Jews who were capitalists and made profits by trafficking with their Nazi overlords, just as their fellow capitalists from other occupied sections of Europe did. The Jewish capitalists ran the ghetto council (Judenrat), which carried on administrative tasks for the Germans while ghetto dwellers were being shipped out to the camps. There were the Jewish police who guarded the ghetto for their Nazi masters. Not by accident many of these police were Revisionists, the Jewish fascist progenitors of the Begin crew of today. Jews like every other people are divided into classes,

classes which in crisis behave very differently from each other. That is why the bourgeoisie collaborated and that is why it was the working class which fought. But given their particular oppression as Jews, these workers fought with particular strength.

It was the Jewish workers who formed out of their own ranks the Jewish Fighting Organization (JFO) which conducted the bitter, doomed war against the Nazis. It was house to house combat – and when the houses were burned down and blasted apart, rubble to rubble combat. And when the few who remained alive were forced from the rubble, they continued the war from the sewers and newly dug tunnels, until in July they were finally annihilated. With them perished the hopes of the last of the 70,000 Jews who had been penned up in the ghetto.

The JFO was overwhelmingly manned and led by workers, class-conscious and imbued with socialist ideals and principles. They fought fascism not on national grounds alone but out of the deep commitment to the struggle for a socialist world so long nurtured in the hearts of beleaguered Jewish workers in East Europe. These were the Jews who began their struggle by shooting Jewish capitalists and Jewish police as they sought to unify themselves in the combat against Nazism. These were the warriors who could have escaped through the sewers to the safety offered them by their allies in the underground Polish workers' movement. Instead, they chose to stay to fight and die with their families, their people and their class.

However, it would be a lie to leave it at that. Present in the leadership of the Jewish workers were other ideas in addition to socialist consciousness. And these ideas reflected, in part, the mixed consciousness of the Jewish masses. There were illusions in the Western imperialist allies, in the Stalinist Soviet Union, in Zionism and other forms of Jewish nationalism. Each of these viewpoints provided a barrier in the struggle; they helped delay it, they helped give a false sense of the possibility of rescue until it was too late, and more.

*continued on page 36*

# LRP Trounces Spartacists in Imperialism Debate

*This is a shortened version of the article that we posted on our website shortly after the debate.*

It was no contest. The League for the Revolutionary Party met the Spartacist League on Saturday, May 10, for a debate on “The Fight Against Imperialist War: Which Way Forward?” Close to 200 people attended, perhaps half of them Spartacist supporters. But while the SL, a much larger organization, showed up in numbers, they were politically absent. We outline here the LRP’s main presentation, describe the Spartacists’ speech, and sketch a number of the comments during the discussion period.



*New York, May 10: Part of the audience at the LRP-SL debate.*

## FIGHTING IMPERIALISM

In his opening half-hour presentation for the LRP, Comrade Matthew Richardson began by summarizing the Marxist and Leninist theory of imperialism and our approach to the anti-war movement. He explained that imperialism is the very nature of the capitalist world today. Not simply an evil policy, the great powers’ domination and super-exploitation of the so-called “Third World” of colonies and semi-colonies is essential to the system’s survival. Imperialist super-exploitation, backed by military aggression, will only intensify as capitalism plunges toward another world depression.

His theme was that “working-class communist revolution to overthrow imperialist capitalism is the only answer.” But it is not enough to just say so. Revolutionaries today must actively participate in the struggles of the workers and oppressed to demonstrate the role of imperialism and prove in struggle the power that our class has to overthrow the capitalist system and replace it with a world of freedom and abundance for all.

## THE ROLE OF STALINISM

Cde. Richardson then commented that if he were speaking only on the LRP’s views on opposing imperialist war, he would concentrate on the struggles of the workers and oppressed. “But this is a debate and I’ve got to start with the Spartacists’ world view, which begins and ends not with the working class but with Stalinism and the fate of the Stalinist states, particularly Stalinist Russia.”

Therefore he outlined both Trotsky’s understanding of Stalinism and our own theory. Trotsky argued until his death in 1940 that the Stalinist bureaucracy in the USSR was not a new ruling class; rather, he insisted it was a parasitic caste sitting uneasily atop the degenerating workers’ state. He regarded Stalinism as profoundly weak and unstable, predicting that it would not survive much longer.

Stalinism not only strengthened its rule in the Soviet Union; it survived the Second World War and extended its empire after the war. Cde. Richardson said that it was necessary for revolutionaries to recognize that Trotsky had clearly been wrong in underestimating the strength of Stalinism, and explain why: Stalinism had transformed itself into a new ruling class. The social counterrevolution was completed with the Great Purges of the late 1930’s, when the Stalinists jailed and killed every last living connection with the October revolution. They established themselves as a state-capitalist ruling class.

The degenerating Trotskyist movement of the time drew opposite conclusions. They argued that Stalinism had proved capable of being revolutionary by supposedly overthrowing capitalism and building “deformed” workers’ states in Eastern Europe and elsewhere.

Our theory of Stalinism as statified capitalism was the only way to remain loyal to Trotsky’s and Marx’s revolutionary principles. With our theory, the LRP is the only group in the world to have predicted the crisis of Stalinism, its rulers’ attempts to privatize and bourgeoisify their economies, and their inevitable failure. It was also the only theory that could guide the working class in the Stalinist states in an effective struggle to defend their interests.

Cde. Richardson pointed out that the Spartacists, in contrast, embraced all of the anti-Marxist conclusions of the degenerating Trotskyists and provided some of their most anti-working class conclusions. The differences between the LRP and the SL could not be clearer. We regarded the USSR as not just a statified capitalist state after the late 1930’s, but an imperialist one; the Spartacists regarded it as a workers’ state and an anti-imperialist bastion. History has left no doubt as to who was right.

The Spartacists took their theory to its reactionary conclusions: for example, they defended the Stalinists’ crushing of the Polish workers’ movement in 1981. They hailed the “Red Army” that invaded Afghanistan in 1979 to replace the Stalinist bourgeois-democratic revolutionary government with one that would accommodate to Islamic “traditions.” This vain effort to propitiate the CIA-backed Islamist guerrillas undermined the deeper social revolution that was brewing in neighboring Iran and in the whole unstable region.

The argument that socialists who couldn’t defend the past gains of the working class can’t lead the struggle to win new gains is correct. By defending the Stalinist states against the workers, and by supporting the Stalinists’ imperialist military adventures internationally, the Spartacists not only failed to defend the working class, but frequently called for the masses’ defeat.

## INTERNATIONALISM VS. CHAUVINISM

Cde. Richardson explained that in the fight against imperialism and for communist revolution it is a principle for revolutionaries to defend oppressed nations against every imperialist

attack, giving them military support and fighting for the defeat of the imperialists. While the LRP has taken this stand in every confrontation between imperialism and its victims, the same cannot be said of the Spartacists. When the Soviet Union was not directly involved, they often failed to support liberation struggles against imperialism. Richardson gave the examples of Angola in 1975, Argentina in 1982, Lebanon in 1983 – and above all, the various wars that the U.S.’s apartheidist ally, Israel, fought against the Arab states and for the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian masses.

Richardson then made the case for another essential principle in the revolutionary communist fight against imperialism: the defense of the right to self-determination of oppressed nations. He argued that the internationalist unity of the working class will only be forged through an uncompromising struggle for the rights of the oppressed against imperialism. He took aim at the Spartacists’ position that this right should apply to oppressor nations also, and that in cases where both oppressor and oppressed claim the same territory, the oppressed must sacrifice their rights. Thus the Spartacists oppose the democratic demand of the oppressed Catholics of Northern Ireland for a united Ireland out of concern for the British-backed Protestants, and defend Israel’s right to exist at the expense of the Palestinians.

Richardson argued that in the case of Palestine, revolutionaries maintain the Palestinian liberation slogan that “All Israel is Occupied Territory!” and fight for Arab workers’ revolution to overthrow the Israeli state and establish a Palestinian workers’ state. In that state, Israeli Jews will have the right to live free from discrimination and have their cultural rights, but they will have to accept the rule of the majority, the Palestinians, and relinquish control of all that they have stolen. The Spartacists, on the other hand, defend Israel’s right to exist, and this means either that the Israelis have a right to keep land stolen from the Palestinians, or that if Palestinians are allowed to return to their lands and thus outnumber the Israelis, Israelis will be allowed minority apartheid rule over the Palestinian majority.

Richardson made a point of taking up the Spartacists’ claim that their position is the same as Lenin’s. Of course, the SL can find quotes where Lenin says that all nations have the right to self-determination. It would never have occurred to Lenin to say otherwise, because oppressor nations already had their self-determination; it was the oppressed who needed it. Moreover Lenin only wrote that way, Richardson argued, because he lived before the age of apartheid in South Africa and Israel.

Trotsky, however, did live to see South Africa develop. When asked about the “national” character of the future workers’ state in that country, he made no mention of rights of self-determination for whites in general, or for Afrikaners in particular, but rather insisted on the rule of the African majority. In words that were coincidentally re-printed in the edition of the Spartacists’ Workers Vanguard current at the time of the debate (quoted not by the SL but in a letter arguing against their position on Palestine), Trotsky explained:

**A victorious revolution is unthinkable without the awakening of the native masses; in its turn it will give them what they are so lacking today, confidence in their strength, a heightened personal consciousness, a cultural growth. Under these conditions the South African Republic will emerge first of all as a “black” Republic; this does not exclude, of course, either full equality for whites or brotherly relations between the two races (which depends mainly upon the conduct of the whites). ... We have not the slightest reason to close our eyes to this side of the question or diminish its significance. On the contrary the proletarian**

**party should in words and in deeds openly and boldly take the solution of the national (racial) problem in its hands.**

(“On the South African Theses,” in Trotsky’s *Writings 1934-35*.)

A “black Republic” means a state of the oppressed and not the oppressor, precisely the position of the LRP in the case of Palestine.

Further, Richardson pointed out that Trotsky also addressed the question of Lenin’s attitude toward the rights of oppressor nations. In a discussion of Ukrainian self-determination, Trotsky wrote:

**The right to self-determination, i.e., to separation, Lenin extended to the Poles and the Ukrainians alike. He did not recognize aristocratic nations. To any tendency to be silent about or to put off the problem of an oppressed nationality, Lenin related as he did to expressions of Great-Russian chauvinism.** (“On the Independence of Ukraine and Sectarian Muddleheads,” *Writings 1938-39*.)

As Cde. Richardson stated, “Let those words ring in the ears of every Spartacist today: Lenin did not recognize the rights of aristocratic nations, and any tendency to put off the rights of the oppressed he condemned as great-power chauvinism!”

Even a quotation cited by the SL in their preparation for the debate makes our point, not theirs:

**Wherever we see compulsory ties between nations we, while by no means insisting that every nation must secede, do absolutely and emphatically insist on the right of every nation to political self-determination, that is, to secession.** (“On the Question of National Policy,” 1914.)

If oppressor nations need to have Leninists defend their right to self-determination – that is, to secession – what are they supposed to secede from? Are communists supposed to argue for the U.S.’s right to secede from Puerto Rico?

## DEFENDING IMMIGRANTS’ RIGHTS

Richardson completed his discussion of the revolutionary principles of internationalism against the Spartacists’ record of Great Power chauvinism by citing the struggle for immigrant rights. Revolutionaries fight for an end to all restrictions on immigration, and do not give an inch to chauvinist hysteria about immigrants from the Third World flooding the white imperialist nations. The Spartacists, on the other hand, defend the rights of immigrants if they manage to get into imperialist countries but oppose the demand for an end to all the restrictions on them get-



*Immigrants from northern Africa detained by Spanish police after being arrested while crossing the Mediterranean Sea trying to reach Europe. Spartacist League opposes demand to end all restrictions on immigrants and refugees.*

ting there in the first place. Again, the Spartacists' rationale is concern for the supposed rights of imperialists, in this case to their "national identity".

"The same need to super-exploit and divide the working class that drives the imperialists' oppression abroad," Richardson noted, "drives its racist oppression at home." So he turned his attention to the struggle against racism in the U.S. and outlined the LRP's strategy of working-class interracialism in the U.S., as opposed to the bourgeois alternatives of Black nationalism and integrationism (assimilationism), of which the Spartacists' "revolutionary integrationism" is a variant.

Analogous to Lenin's method of forging international working-class unity through the fight for the right to self-determination of oppressed nations, working-class interracialism insists that class unity can be forged across the racial divide only by defending the right of Blacks and all people of color to choose either a united struggle or to build their own organizations and conduct their own struggles if they desire.

We fight for a united working-class struggle whenever possible. But often the Black masses have no choice but to launch their own struggles and build their own organizations rather than wait for white workers to join them. Revolutionary interracialists do not feel threatened by this; on the contrary, where such independent struggles are necessary they advocate them, and seek to show how independent struggles by Black workers and poor can offer leadership to the rest of the working class and thus can and should lead toward a united working-class struggle.

In general, integrationism can only mean demanding that Black people dispense with their own identity, culture and organizations and assimilate into the dominant white nationalist society. Thus integrationism is just another form of American nationalism. Black people have tried every possible way to be accepted by America, and white capitalist America has rejected them every time. Thus as Black people's sense of militancy and power has grown in the course of struggle, they have always rejected integrationism.

In practice, integrationism necessarily means fear of, and hostility to, independent struggles of the Black masses. Thus it was no coincidence that the Spartacists dismiss the great ghetto rebellions of the late 1960's as a "final spasm of frustration and fury ... in the wake of a movement which had raised great hopes and activated enormous energy only to accomplish nothing ..." and left Black people feeling more powerless than before (*Marxist Bulletin* No. 5.) On the contrary, as Cde. Richardson explained, the ghetto rebellions were a high point of the Black liberation struggle in the U.S. They forced the ruling class to grant unprecedented concessions of jobs, education and civil rights, and emboldened the Black working class to even greater struggles.

### **FIGHTING THE CLASS STRUGGLE AT HOME**

Richardson then turned to the immediate class struggle at home, spelling out the LRP's strategy for advancing mass struggles while exposing the trade union bureaucrats. These officials time and again prevent workers from defending their interests through militant strikes and thereby give the ruling class the freedom to wage imperialist war without a major challenge at home. He ended with the crucial example of how the LRP fought for a strike by the New York City transit workers (TWU Local 100) in December that would have shut down the capital of world imperialism and thereby dealt a devastating blow to Washington's war drive against Iraq.

The LRP played a major role in building the strike movement: fighting for a strike in mass meetings, exposing the betrayals of the Toussaint leadership of the union, and campaigning

against Toussaint's sell-out contract. The Spartacists, with more supporters in the union, refused to advocate a strike, and did absolutely nothing in this decisive struggle.

Richardson concluded his presentation by posing five specific questions to the Spartacists that summed up the challenges of his speech.

1. Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky all said that only the working class could overthrow capitalism and build workers' states. Trotsky said that Stalinism was counterrevolutionary and that anyone who said he thought it could play a revolutionary role was dishonest and disloyal. So how in their name can you say Stalinism created workers' states?

2. We have proven that as far as Trotsky was concerned, neither he nor Lenin, defended the rights of aristocratic imperialist nations, and condemned any putting off of the rights of the oppressed as Great Power chauvinism. So explain to us how you can defend imperialist Israel's existence on Palestinian land, in their name? And for the sake of clarity, since Israel can only exist by either keeping Palestinians' land or by allowing Palestinians to return to their land but denying them the right to vote, what are you for: colonialist land theft, or apartheid?

3. Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky said that the workers have no country, so how in their name can you defend the national identity of imperialist countries?

4. Lenin said that any American socialist who supports any restrictions on immigration is a jingo, a chauvinist. So how can you be prepared to support such restrictions in his name?

5. Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky all believed that revolutionaries are militant fighters in the class struggle. So how, in their name, can you refuse to be active in the union struggles where you have supporters?

"Don't try to leave this debate without answering these questions." Richardson demanded, "and don't try to write about this debate in your newspaper without recording these questions and your answers to them."

### **NO WAY FORWARD**

The Spartacists presented no strategy at all. Their debater, Don Alexander, spent much of his time denouncing the LRP for not defending the former Soviet Union. He gave no analysis of Stalinism, imperialism, or anything else. His argument was purely negative: if you couldn't defend the working class's gains of the past (for the Spartacists, the imaginary workers' states of the post-war USSR and Eastern Europe), you can't win new gains for the working class. But how the SL proposes to lead working-class struggles to future victories, Alexander didn't even think to say. Even though the Spartacists had proposed the debate topic, "The Fight Against Imperialist War: Which Way Forward?" their speaker barely mentioned the subject.

Shockingly, Alexander did not even acknowledge let alone try to answer any of Richardson's challenges. Nor did he respond to Cde. Richardson's argument that you couldn't defend the workers' past gains in the Stalinist states, nor defend workers' gains against imperialism elsewhere, by supporting the Stalinist states.

The Spartacists mocked the LRP's fight to speak from anti-war platforms to denounce the Democratic imperialists; continued to equate the rights of oppressed and imperialist nations; did not even try to defend their opposition to ending all restrictions on immigrants and refugees to the imperialist countries; and refused to say why they did not fight for strikes inside the New York transit union.

In his talk, Alexander repeated the SL's usual litany of lies about the LRP: that we endorse segregation, that we supported the Islamic counterrevolution in Afghanistan, and that we endorsed the "Yeltsin-Bush capitalist counterrevolution" in Russia. These

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— Al Richardson, *Revolutionary History*

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charges have been thoroughly dealt with in our press, and we issued for the dSebate a small pamphlet summarizing our replies, *The Spartacist School of Falsification*, in order not to have to spend time with this sort of crap during the debate.

Alexander and other Spartacists added some new whoppers about what the LRP had said and done: that we said Trotsky gave political, not just military, support to the bourgeois Spanish Republic in the 1930's; that we are "marching in lockstep with Black Democrats like Charles Rangel" who call for the reinstatement of the draft, and that we "support the integration of Blacks into the imperialist armed forces;" that we say "white workers [in the U.S.] are a labor aristocracy" whom we "lump with the white racist rulers"; that we "spat on" a rally in defense of the MOVE organization that was bombed by the Philadelphia cops; that we deny the existence of a "Hebrew-speaking" Israeli nation; that we "weren't for the defeat of American imperialism by China or North Korea." Given the Spartacists' record, these are not honest misunderstandings but deliberate misrepresentations of what we have stated clearly in print.

## DEBATING THE UNITED FRONT

In reporting highlights of the floor discussion, we will take some contributions out of the order in which they were made, in order to group together points on related subjects.

An LRPer from Chicago summarized our united front method with the example of our participation in a rally of five thousand against the Iraq war on April 5.

**Our comrade was the only speaker to attack the Democrats. ... We exposed the role and hypocrisy of the U.N. We combated pacifism by calling for the military defense of Iraq and the defeat of U.S./U.K. imperialism. We drew applause for raising the need for a general strike to stop the war,**

explaining that this begins with a political fight against the pro-Democratic Party union bureaucracy. ... And we argued the need for revolutionary party leadership and the socialist revolution to put an end to imperialist wars for good. ... This is not "left cover" for [an alliance with] liberals; this is political combat. ... We are not afraid of standing on stage or in the union hall and put our Leninist method in the clearest possible relief to that of the pro-capitalist misleaders. However, the SL is, that's why they refuse to play a role on stage or in the union hall and, instead, stand at the margins with their press.

One Spartacist floor speaker chose to misrepresent the LRP's united front position. At a demonstration against a Ku Klux Klan rally in New York in 1999, the SL had attacked the ISO for speaking on the same platform with a cop, a representative of the Latino Officers Association. According to the SLer, we wrote that "It is not unprincipled to stand on the same podium as Latino officers at an anti-fascist protest." And so we did, but as a later LRP speaker observed, she deliberately failed to point out that in the very next sentence we explained: "The point is to denounce the cops and their pro-capitalist and pro-Klan role from that podium, so that the protesters draw the right lesson. This is what the ISO deserves to be criticized for." (The reference is to the articles "New York: Why the Klan Wasn't Smashed" and "Workers Vanguard's Fabrications" in *Proletarian Revolution* No. 60.)

When the Spartacists continued to denounce us for our supposed bloc with police, Cde. Richardson dared them to ask him to cite Trotsky on the subject. That silenced them except for some nervous laughter, so he went on to cite Trotsky's advocacy of a bloc with the Social Democratic police chief in Berlin in 1932 in order to expose the Social Democracy's unwillingness to really fight the fascists. When the Latino cops pretend to be against fascism and racism, they have to be exposed. Precisely because illusions in the cops can be so deadly, the LRP wants to be able to denounce cops and Democratic politicians in front of thousands as the bourgeois agents they are. The Spartacists are too sectarian and too cowardly to do anything but stand on the sidelines.

At the start of the debate, the Spartacists had distributed to all attendees a copy of their 1999 *Workers Vanguard* supplement headlined, "Labor/Black Mobilization Rides KKK Out of NYC," in which the SL claims to have led the action that mobilized about 10,000 anti-Klan militants. This lie is dealt with in the PR 60 article just cited and is available on our website.

The Spartacists, even though they had initiated the call for mobilizing against the Klan, were outmaneuvered by liberal politicians, who secured a permit for a rally close to where the Klan was scheduled to be, while the SL ended up with a separate anti-Klan rally two blocks away. Of course, given their objective of smashing the Klan, the thousands of protesters went to the liberals' rally because they wanted the best chance to get at the Klan. When the thousands of protesters at the main rally, including many LRPer, surged forward and fought the police to get at the Klan, the cops were forced to lead the Klan away; the SL was at its own rally, spewing empty rhetoric. The union leader whom the SL featured at the rally and in their coverage was Charles Ensley of AFSCME. At a later labor meeting, we asked Ensley whether he really thought the rally he had spoken at had run the Klan out. He laughed, "That's what we'd like our members to think, but the other crowd really did it."

## IMPERIALIST WARS AND ZIONISM

Returning to the floor discussion, an LRP speaker noted the contrast between the LRP and the SL in response to the September 11 terrorist attacks "After September 11," she noted,



*Palestinians demonstrate against wall being built by Israel. All Israel is occupied territory!*

“our propaganda was dedicated to convincing our fellow workers, American workers, of the need to call explicitly for the defeat of U.S. imperialism. This was not popular, but we did not flinch, and the same could not be said about the Spartacist League. This was not an isolated accident, she continued. In 1975, the SL abstained on the Angolan struggle for national liberation, until the USSR got involved. In Lebanon in 1983, their slogan was “U.S. Marines Out, Alive” – a slogan defending the lives of the imperialist troops, not the victimized Lebanese. In 1982, they took no side in the war between Argentina and imperialist Britain, on the grounds that Argentina was not an oppressed nation. “It was united imperialism against Argentina,” she added. Not only did the U.S. back its British ally, but even the SL’s favorite, the USSR, refused to use its U.N. veto to stop the war.

Another LRPer expanded on Cde. Richardson’s challenge to the SL on Israel. He noted that the SL’s original position in the 1948 war that created Israel was to side with the Israelis, a position inherited from the Shachtmanite renegades from Trotskyism whose name the Spartacists like to label the LRP with. In 1974, they changed their line since Israel’s existence had never been imperiled. But they insisted that if it had been, they would have defended Israel; what remains consistent is their defense of the oppressor nation, which is now a small imperialist power in its own right.

A self-identified “socialist-Zionist” speaker from the floor, sporting an Israeli flag button on his shirt, announced his “great sympathy” for the politics of the SL, especially on the Israel-Arab wars. He urged them only to return to their original line of supporting the Israeli side in the 1948 war. As an LRP speaker noted, despite his differences with the SL, this Israeli nationalist had correctly recognized his commonality with the Spartacists in the ongoing war against the Palestinians. Since the SL was obviously embarrassed by this unwanted support, we point out that in their paper issued just before the debate, they printed a letter that concluded:

**Your article “LRP: Apologists for Arab Nationalism” ... was the most intelligent piece I’ve read on the subject in a long time. My wife, who is not a Marxist but who is an Israeli Jew, said, “That’s my position!” Good work.**

That a non-Marxist Israeli and a labor Zionist endorse the Spartacist position does not exactly support their claim that it is Marxist and anti-Zionist.

On a related matter, the Spartacists’ Len Meyers also demanded to know, since the LRP raised the slogan that “All Israel Is Occupied Territory,” why we didn’t say the same of the United States, which had stolen its land from the Indians? In answer, Cde. Richardson stated the obvious: Native Americans were victims of an almost complete genocide, which the Zionists have never been able to come close to emulating against the Palestinians, in spite of their desire for it. Undeclared and continuing to demand their country back from the colonizers who stole it, the Palestinian masses struggle is thus headline news every day. For good reason, American Indians are not fighting a similar struggle and do not demand this country back; their struggle for democratic rights and liberation is thus a part of the U.S. class struggle. For these reasons Meyers’ question was as stupid as it was offensive.

#### CONTEMPT FOR WORKERS, “WORKERS’ STATES”

One LRP intervention cited the SL’s self-definition as a party of “declassed intellectuals” intervening in the class struggle “from a vantage point outside bourgeois society altogether.” He noted their contempt for workers in theory and in practice, citing their defense of Stalinist suppression of the working class. He described their matching contempt for the very societies they term workers’ states, pointing out that they had denounced the Polish workers – who rose up in 1980 against their Stalinist rulers in the millions to protest their exploitation – for demanding a “free lunch.” They had even called on their favorite “workers’ state,” the USSR, to stage a nuclear attack on another, China, when it was militarily invading a third, Vietnam, in 1979. Spartacists from the audience vehemently denied the charge, but that quotation too was posted on the wall:

**As for Moscow’s ultimate option, there is much that it could do to bring China around if Brezhnev & Co. were really committed to the international solidarity they cynically profess. Peking has an extremely narrow nuclear establishment, all of it targeted by the USSR. Likewise the Chinese oil industry is extremely vulnerable even to a surgical attack by conventional forces in Sinkiang and Manchuria. And the Russian bureaucracy could find its hand forced so that it must take action, not out of devotion to defending the Vietnamese Revolution but rather in order to ensure its own survival.** (*Workers Vanguard*, March 2, 1979.)

Let’s spell it out. First, the SL did not refer to Moscow’s “next” or “almost” ultimate option, but rather it’s “ultimate option”, which of course meant nuclear attack. Second, if “even” conventional forces could take out China’s oil industry, that



means that China's nuclear industry would require non-conventional forces – that very “ultimate option.” And the SL certainly did not raise any objection on principle to one workers’ state launching a nuclear attack against another.

The Spartacists after the debate insisted that they had only called on Russia to extend its “nuclear umbrella” over Vietnam. What is that supposed to mean, if not to threaten the use of nuclear weapons against a country that attacked Vietnam? Do they think nuclear umbrellas keep countries dry when it rains? Anyway you look at it, the Spartacists were proposing that Russia nuke China. Their cynicism and contempt for their own theory, not to mention humanity, are breathtaking.

## STRUGGLES OF THE OPPRESSED AND LABOR

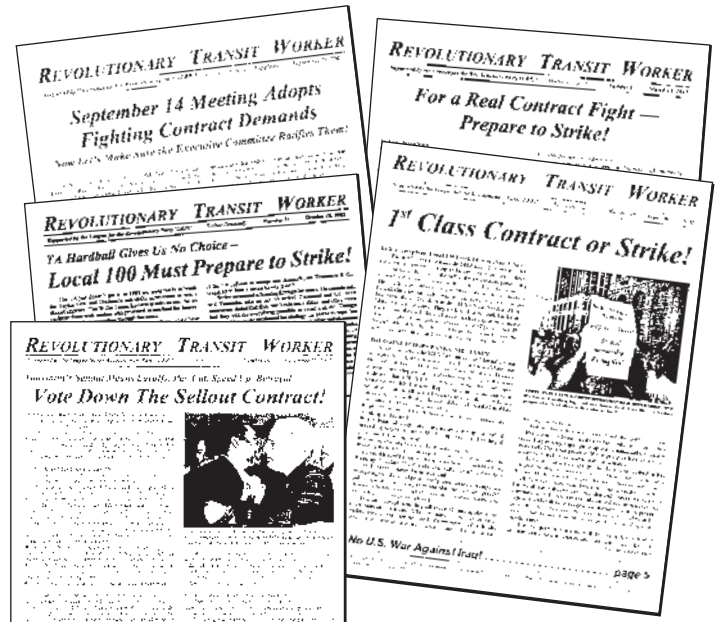
One independent speaker introduced himself as a carpenter who runs the “Gangbox” internet discussion site. He began by noting that Alexander hadn’t answered any of the questions that Richardson had put to him. Further, he cited the struggle of Black and Latino construction workers that broke the color bar and won him and others their union cards. Stating that he was a neither a Trotskyist nor a supporter of either the LRP or the SL, he sharply disagreed with the SL’s approach to the Black struggle: “The reality of the situation is that if white workers aren’t willing to join hands with Black workers ... Black workers have to struggle on their own.”

One LRPer recounted our fight in the hospital workers’ union, Local 1199, against the pro-imperialist resolutions of the “progressive” union leader, Dennis Rivera, and for genuine anti-war statements over both Afghanistan and Iraq. Other LRP speakers echoed Cde. Richardson’s challenge that the SL explain why they never fight for a strike in the trade unions, particularly in New York City transit. An LRP transit worker explained that our use of the critical support tactic towards the TWU’s sellout leader, Roger Toussaint, was a weapon used to expose the bureaucrats’ betrayals, just as Lenin advocated support for the British Labour Party “as a rope supports a hanged man.”

Two SLers who identified themselves as transit workers spoke and attempted to trick the audience into thinking that they were militant fighters in the union, contrary to our exposure of their refusal to fight for a strike. They described what they had said and done in their division of Local 100, like raising motions against the war on Iraq – hardly courageous, since the Local’s President had already made opposition to the war official policy. (In the process they claimed that the LRP had not participated in the 1999 anti-Klan protest; this lie is also refuted in the PR 60 article cited above.) But as the last LRP speaker from the floor, National Secretary Sy Landy, noted, neither of the SL TWUers gave any response to our challenge: when the LRP was fighting for a strike in the vital 1999 and 2002 contract struggles, “Where the hell were you?”

Two other left organizations took part in the discussion, both founded by former SL members: the Bolshevik Tendency and the Internationalist Group. One BTer complained that the LRP had “manufactured differences that don’t exist” by bringing up the Spartacists’ chauvinist position on immigrants. A handy evasion: the BT shares the SL line and has every reason to be ashamed of it. Not to defend the right of immigrants to enter the imperialist countries is a very big “difference” that does indeed exist.

The IG’s leader, Jan Norden, expanded on the SL’s record of slanders. He repeated the charge in his organization’s leaflet that the LRP’s supporter in the TWU got “elected as a mid-level bureaucrat as a quid pro quo” with Roger Toussaint’s New Directions (ND) slate. That is an outright and deliberate lie, since our comrade ran against ND, and his victory was bitterly challenged by ND. The IG also repeated the slander in its press



The League for the Revolutionary Party and Revolutionary Transit Worker campaigned for a militant fight in Local 100 of the Transport Workers Union. In contrast, the Spartacist League sat on the sidelines.

that the LRPer in the union’s Track Division had done nothing to shut down unsafe working conditions, even though we refuted the obnoxious charge in PR 66. Norden, who had been responsible for the Spartacists’ addiction to lies and slander as the long-time editor of *Workers Vanguard*, is building an equally corrupt organization.

The Spartacists refusal to really debate the LRP, and the pathetic contributions of their splinter groups, confirmed the observation made by Cde. Richardson in his opening remarks that the collapse of Stalinism had left the Spartacists demoralized, dis-oriented and doomed:

**They sent as many supporters as they could to Russia and East Germany in 1989 to rally the workers in defense of the Stalinist states, even in defense of the Berlin Wall, and invested huge amounts of money to fund the effort, only to find that the working class rejected their ideas. They came back with nothing. Since then they’ve retreated from participating in the class struggle: after all, if the working class is so stupid to not know it’s in power, and even helps overthrow itself, what hope is there for them? Why should they fight for a strike of transit workers in New York? Today they live in their newspaper offices, try to sell their paper at protests, attack left opponents and do nothing in the real class struggle.**

**Stalinism has collapsed, and the Spartacist League is in the process of collapsing too. Some of the wreckage, in the form of its splits, the Bolshevik Tendency and the Internationalist Group, are here today. The Spartacists sat on the Berlin Wall and the Spartacists had a very great fall, and all the kings horses and all the kings men ... well, you know how it ends.**

Cde. Richardson began his summary by apologizing to the audience for their having been invited to a debate, since none had taken place. He added that none of his five questions had been answered, whereas he had responded to all the questions posed by the SL. He concluded:

**The working class will rise up in struggle again, as it always has. And it’s beginning to. And when it rises up in**

struggle, it will demand more than crumbs. It will demand more than the scraps of their land back that was stolen by imperialism; they'll demand all the land back. They will demand more than a "free lunch"; they will be bound to respect no rights of their oppressors. And when they rise up, the least that they can expect to find is a revolutionary leadership willing to fight for those demands. The Spartacist League has admitted that they're not willing to fight for them. What the workers need is a revolutionary party leadership that can win those demands.

As Trotsky argued, the objective conditions for the overthrow of capitalism and the building of communism are more than ripe. What holds the working class back from challenging the system is its reformist misleaders, and the fake-revolutionary groups like the Spartacists who try to confuse and demoralize the most radical workers and youth. The crisis of humanity is the crisis of working class leadership.

Building the vanguard revolutionary party in the U.S., as a section of the re-created authentic Trotskyist Fourth International,

the world party of socialist revolution, is the most urgent task of the day. The League for the Revolutionary Party is dedicated to building this party, most importantly in the living struggles of our class. Our debate with the Spartacists was a step in our struggle to sweep aside the political refuse of the past, and clear the way for revolutionary-minded workers to build the revolutionary party and lead the great struggles of the future to victory.

**Postscript:** We have no doubt the Spartacists will claim to have won a great victory over the LRP in the debate. After all, if they can claim to have run the Klan out of New York City in 1999 when they were in fact blocks away from the struggle, they can claim anything. The Spartacists' affinity for Stalinism goes beyond political program to its methods of historical falsification. We eagerly await the Spartacists' account of the debate. We will of course respond to it. But most importantly, we repeat our commitment to transcribe and publish every word of the debate, so that all those interested can judge for themselves.●

May 22, 2003

## Spartacists Claim "No Victory"

The Spartacist League finally issued their account of the debate between our organizations in an article, "LRP Exposes Itself," (*Workers Vanguard*, June 6.) Our report of the debate concluded: "We have no doubt the Spartacists will claim to have won a great victory." Instead, the SL came up with this retort: "It is difficult to imagine just how one could claim 'great victory' on the basis of defending elementary Leninism and Trotskyism against

the vicarious 'Third World' nationalism and garden-variety reformist practice – occasionally masked by radical-sounding rhetoric – of this minuscule 'third camp' – outfit."

Okay, we were wrong. We expected, given their history of lies about our views and wildly inflating their own accomplishments, that they would declare victory. The magnitude of their debate debacle evidently made that impossible. But it should have been possible to come up with something with more pizzazz than the embarrassing statement that great victories are difficult to claim. One would think that anyone claiming the banner of Bolshevism would remember Lenin's polemical annihilation of Karl Kautsky, for example, as one historical example that such victories were perfectly possible – and extremely valuable!

The SL, of course, is playing games. The Spartacists were soundly defeated precisely because they could not defend "elementary Leninism and Trotskyism." If you have read their own speaker's presentation (available along with the *WV* report on their website, [www.icl-fi.org](http://www.icl-fi.org)), you may have already noticed that Don Alexander did not offer a coherent view of the world today, much less a guideline for intervening in it. In contrast, the SL's strategy for the debate – which they had proposed to be on the topic "Which Way Forward" – was to rely on trumpeting the alleged glories of the deceased Soviet Union. Aside from hollow hosannahs to the shattered Stalinist bloc, the SL's speakers mostly regurgitated their usual bucketload of false accusations against us. The SL is accustomed to bullying and taking potshots against its opponents. They couldn't win with that this time.

We believe that the Marxist and Leninist outlook we presented arms revolutionaries with a fundamental proletarian class perspective. Our understanding has allowed us to make accurate predictions of major world events, like the collapse of Stalinism. Cde. Richardson, our speaker at the debate, discussed the essentials of what must be done to fight capitalist imperialism in today's world. In response to our discussion of critical support, united fronts and military support – all tactical weapons developed by Lenin and Trotsky – the SL answered with "defense of the Soviet Union" and "we never support liberals or reformists." This is supposed to prove that they are always on the right side of the class line. As they say, you be the judge.

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In responding to their article, we cannot possibly repeat our answers to everything they have brought up in the past. We will try to re-explain some basics. We encourage our readers to get a copy of the full transcript of the debate (which, no surprise, the LRP and not the SL has made available). Read it all, study the positions of both groups. And check out our new pamphlets (see the box on page 18), which provide detailed analyses of the questions in dispute. Let us know if you feel there are any questions raised at the debate or in their account of it that we have not taken up. We will answer them. After all, isn't that what a debate is for?

### WHY THE SL CAN'T ANSWER

The SL's self-conception is that they are a group of "declassed intellectuals" bringing the wisdom of Marxism to the working class from outside. We have always agreed that they are a non-working class grouping; but we have argued that they defend opportunist middle-class anti-worker positions and practices, whereas they see themselves as coming from outside of class society altogether, a thoroughly anti-materialist view. (See our article, "The Marxism of the Petty-Bourgeoisie," in *Socialist Voice* No. 4.) It flows from this, we believe, that they cannot find the proletarian way forward against imperialism. Rather than just present our interpretation at the debate, we chose to challenge the SL to explain their own positions.

At the end of his presentation, our speaker posed five basic questions. From our point of view, if the SL responded to the challenge, they would demonstrate our contentions about their politics better than our assertions alone would. Again, this is what a debate is for. But for good reason the SL refused to take up the challenges. So we will go through the questions (not in the same order) and explain what we think the answers really are.

### AVOIDING THE CLASS STRUGGLE

One of our questions was based on our perception that the Spartacists have been going through an ultra-sectarian turn. Since the fall of the Stalinist empire, they have gone out of their way to keep a distance from the struggles of the working class. This is most evident in the U.S., where they have their largest group and therefore the best chance of putting their politics into practice. That is why our speaker asked: "Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky all believed that revolutionaries are militant fighters in the class struggle. So how in their name can you refuse to be active in the unions where you have supporters?"

Since their speaker refused to answer, we repeated the challenge from the floor. Specifically, since both groups are present in the important Transport Workers Union Local 100 in New York, we used that as a key example. When the 34,000 transit workers were building momentum toward all-out clashes with the bosses in 1999 and 2002-3, we were actively fighting for strike action from the start. Thousands of workers in Local 100 read each issue of our *Revolutionary Transit Worker* bulletin (*RTW*) and know the leading role that we played in the fight for a strike during both struggles.

In 1999, when an LRP supporter in the local made the motion to strike – which was passed unanimously by thousands of angry, fighting workers – the union reformers in New Directions (ND) at first tried to detour it and the Willie James bureaucracy opposed it. The SL has a few more supporters in the local than we do, but they did not champion a strike or even speak in favor of it. In 2002, when the strike momentum was again building up, the SL again refused to endorse a strike, let alone fight for one – until Roger Toussaint, the newly elected ND president of the local, had his own strike motion passed. And these people call themselves



*Transport Workers Union member with placard from Revolutionary Transit Worker (RTW) along with placard from union leadership – LRP/RTW's united front tactics in action.*

the "workers' vanguard"!

Two of the SL's speakers from the floor at the debate were transit workers. They too dodged our question; they talked instead about their purported work in the union on other issues – even though the SL itself acknowledged the key importance that a strike in 2002 would have had (without explaining their abstention from the struggle). Our National Secretary, Sy Landy, speaking from the floor, threw the spotlight on that unbelievable evasion, characterizing the Spartacists scientifically as "chicken-shit" in the face of the living class struggle. The SL still refused to defend their abstentionism from this pointed attack – both at the debate and in their account of it – thus re-proving its accuracy.

### THE CRITICAL SUPPORT WEAPON

The SL's main way of deflecting the question is to attack us for having given Toussaint "critical support" when he ran for president in 2000. Their article says, "But the LRP in its own small way helped boost New Directions (ND) leader Roger Toussaint, who deep-sixed a New York transit strike, into the presidency . . ." It also says, accurately, that Toussaint in office was an unshamed flag-waver and supporter of the capitalist Democratic Party.

"Critical support" is a weapon developed by the Bolsheviks, elaborated by Lenin and then by Trotsky. When reformists have captured the support of militant fighting workers who have illusions in their leadership, it is necessary to do more than issue propaganda attacks upon them; Bolsheviks have to put them to the test of office and expose them *in practice*. That is why we counterposed our program of mass action, revolutionary leadership and socialist revolution to ND's reformism.

When Lenin advocated electoral support to the British Labour Party in 1920 ("as a rope supports a hanged man"), Labour had already proved itself to be counterrevolutionary, imperialist traitors to the working class. The question was how Leninists could intervene to convince their fellow workers of that fact. Anyone who thinks the SL has even a fraction of a case here should at least ask them: why don't you attack Lenin for having "boosted" the murderous Labour Party into power?

When we gave critical support to Toussaint, we openly told militant workers that in office New Directions would sell out. ND leaders demanded that we stop giving them our “support”; they were under no illusions about what it meant. When at the same time, an LRP supporter, as an open revolutionary socialist, ran for and won the office of Track Division Vice-Chair, ND supported an opposing candidate in a desperate effort to stop him. Since then, they have tried to prevent him from functioning by bureaucratic means. And of course, after the election, *RTW* did what it had done before and during the election: it continued to expose ND and Toussaint. (Our Leninist method is spelled out in detail in our article, “Revolutionary vs. Reformist Methods,” in *PR* 63.)

Our difference with the SL on critical support is long-standing. No matter how they wiggle, the fact remains that the SL in no way answered why they didn’t lead a fight for a strike either time. And as for critical support, they say it was urgent to stop Toussaint’s rise to power. If they did not believe critical support was the right tactic, what alternative tactical weapon did they prefer to expose Toussaint and split militant workers away from him? Yes, they sold their paper to a handful of transit workers – propaganda from the sidelines. Of course, revolutionaries must sell their press, and sometimes we have no access to alternative methods. But if you are in a live and important struggle, you have to seize opportunities for mass work. The SLers didn’t run for office themselves or do mass leafleting calling for workers to not vote for ND. We put out thousands of bulletins exposing ND. For all their blather about stopping Toussaint, the SL *did* nothing!

The SL is a demoralized outfit that fears actual involvement in working-class struggles. And our class around the world does press forward in its struggles, even if it does not always take the direct path that the SL would prefer.

## IMMIGRATION AND “NATIONAL IDENTITY”

An even more obvious sign of the Spartacists’ corruption is their disparagement of the oppressed at home and abroad. Because Leninists and Trotskyists have always aligned themselves with the struggles of the most oppressed, three of our five questions were aimed at pointing out the SL’s terrible record on this score. For example, we asked: “Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky said that the workers have no country. So how in their name can you defend the national identity of imperialist countries?” And also: “Lenin said that any American socialist who supports any restrictions on immigration is a jingo chauvinist. So how can you be prepared to support such restrictions in his name?”

The SL has brought up the supposed need to defend the “national identity” of various countries. The danger they see is that too many immigrants will drown the national culture. The SL hasn’t explained its use of the term, but when they have used it they have stressed their concern to preserve the national identity of imperialist countries in particular. We expand here our previous quotations from *Workers Vanguard’s* original article on the subject (January 18, 1974):

**[O]n a sufficiently large scale, immigration flows could wipe out the national identity of recipient countries. ... If, for example, there were unlimited immigration into Northern Europe, the population influx from the Mediterranean basin would tend to dissolve the national identity of small countries like Holland and Belgium. More generally, unlimited immigration as a principle is incompatible with the right of national self-determination; to call for it is tantamount to advocating the abolition of national states under capitalism.**

Holland and Belgium are imperialist countries. Trotsky opposed any attempt to defend their nation-state existence from

“abolition” in two world wars – in the face of domination by other imperialist invaders, let alone from any imagined threat by poor working-class immigrants from the “Mediterranean basin,” i.e., of darker skin. *The SL has repeated this racist and national chauvinist line time and again.* Is this not the same method that right-wing racists in the imperialist countries use to oppose “too much” immigration?

Bolsheviks shed no tears for the “national identity” of the imperialist countries. We do defend such rights with respect to oppressed countries and oppressed people against all imperialisms, large and small.

## THE SL AND BUCHANAN

The *WV* report of the debate quotes one of our speakers saying that their approach to immigration was “like Pat Buchanan’s,” and denounces this as “garbage.” At the same time, they repeat that our call to end all restrictions on immigration amounts to calling for the imperialist states to dissolve themselves.

An LRP floor speaker, a Latino ex-Spartacist, did in fact compare the SL’s line to that of the Buchananites. He quoted Lawrence Auster of the right-wing American Foundation to Control Immigration. Auster had said: “Does the United States, does any nation, have a moral right to preserve its identity? If our answer is yes, then we have the right to open up this issue and re-evaluate our immigration law without fear of the crippling charge of racism.” This quotation was cited and favorably endorsed by Buchanan in his column in the *New York Post* of August 17, 1991.

Of course, sometimes even Leninist positions can appear to be the same as those of right-wingers. For example, unlike liberals and like many reactionaries, we support the right to bear arms. (So does the SL.) However, it is not hard to see that our position comes from a totally opposite class approach: that the working class and oppressed people must be armed, to defend themselves today as well as to make the socialist revolution tomorrow.

But in the Spartacist case against immigration, they not only draw the same conclusion as Auster but they use the same non-class reasoning. In fact they go further, because they say that an attack on national identity is an attack on the right of national self-determination, which for them is a principle applying to imperialist as well as oppressed nations. (More on that in a moment.) So they say that this principle is “incompatible” with unlimited immigration.

Given its reactionary view, the SL must remain vague as to how it proposes to actually stop the supposed threat of an immigrant tidal wave. Their evasion may suffice today. But when the impoverishment of the “third world” turns even more catastrophic and millions more immigrant workers seek to come to the advanced imperialist countries, how will the SL then propose to stop the “flood”? With their line today they are preparing to capitulate to restrictive measures in the future.

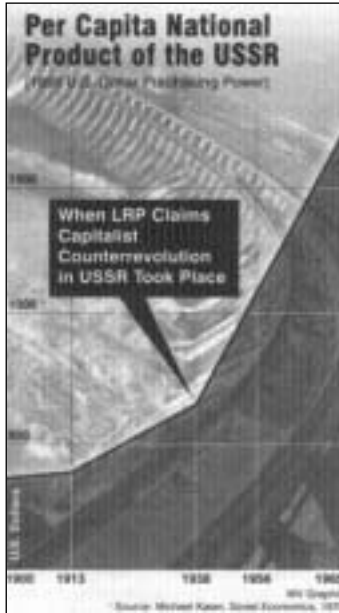
## JINGO-SOCIALISTS

The Spartacists hint at their underlying position by repeatedly referring to their defense of immigrants *once they get here*. This, like “national identity,” is habitual Spartacist jargon, not part of the Leninist tradition at all. For example, in a website statement “The War on Immigrants Is a War on All Workers” (July 2, 2002), their international center writes:

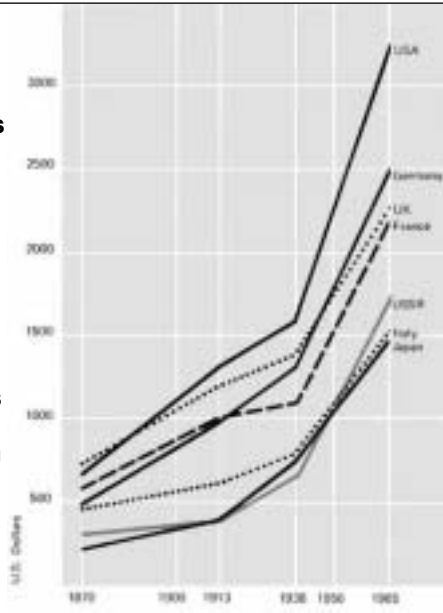
**[W]e seek urgently to mobilise the working class to take up the fight for full citizenship rights for all who manage to cross the borders and to drive home the understanding that the source of exploitation of all labour is the capitalist system of production, which is defended to the bitter end by the capitalist state.** [Emphasis added.]

That is, the SL says they defend immigrants who manage to

# Spartacist Statistics Reveal USSR Didn't Collapse



LEFT:  
**Workers Vanguard's adaptation of Michael Kaser's graph.**



RIGHT:  
**Michael Kaser's original graph**

In its diatribe against the LRP, *Workers Vanguard* printed a graph headlined "Per Capita National Product of the USSR." *WV's* caption reads: "'Statified capitalism' idiocy. Enormous Soviet economic growth was result of planned economy." The slopes of the graph suggest that growth in Russia and the USSR was slow up to 1938 (the year, according to *WV*, when "the LRP claims capitalist counterrevolution in USSR took place") and fast thereafter.

The *WV* graph, and the Spartacists' triumphalist comments, are lies from beginning to end. *WV's* source is the book *Soviet Economics* by Michael Kaser, from which the SL's one graph line is taken. The first distortion is that the rest of Kaser's graph is omitted from *WV*. By comparing the two graphs above, the reader can see that *WV* erased the growth curves of six other countries: the U.S., Germany, the U.K., France, Italy and Japan. All seven curves break sharply upward after 1938: in fact, *all* the countries showed economic acceleration after World War II.

Since the Spartacists say that the USSR's "enormous" post-war growth resulted from its "planned economy" – i.e., that it was a "workers' state" – how do they explain the growth of the Western powers? That doesn't fit their claim, so they deliberately leave it out.

The second trick is that Kaser's graph ends in 1965, understandable for a book published in 1970. But the SL, writing in 2003, had to avoid more current data – which would have completely exploded their case, as we will show.

## STALINIST ECONOMIC COLLAPSE

There is a far more obvious problem. If Soviet growth was so outstanding, why did the USSR's economy collapse? The SL's

graph, like their "theory," leaves that fact unexplained. Any honest graph would at least have to show the need for an explanation.

A serious methodological problem with both graphs above is the choice of overly wide time periods for plotting data. The upshot is that while Kaser's graph and the Spartacist copy show Soviet economic growth accelerating from before World War II to the post-war period, the opposite is far closer to reality.

In the *WV* version, the only periods plotted are 1913-38 and 1938-65. The first embraces both Tsarist Russia and the early USSR! Worse, it lumps together World War I and the Civil War, in which Russia was economically devastated, with the post-war recovery years and the first Five-Year Plans of the 1930's. The second period includes World War II, in which the USSR was overrun by invading armies, along with post-war years when Stalin looted Eastern Europe.

If we break up the first of these periods, we find that in the USSR, gross national product (GNP) per head was the same in 1928 as in 1913: that is, the losses of the war years were only made up by 1928. Between 1928 and 1938, there was an average growth rate of 4.84% annually (more than double

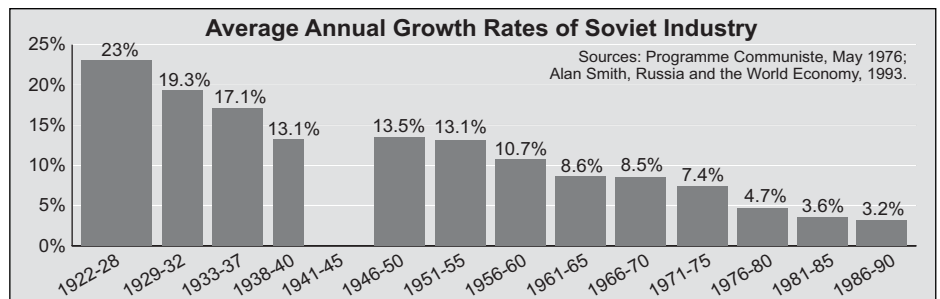
the rate that Kaser and the Spartacists show for 1913-1938). So by including World War I, Kaser and *WV* grossly underestimate the growth of the USSR when it was genuinely a workers' state. (Our source is *The Economic Transformation of the Soviet Union, 1913-1945*, edited in 1994 by R.W. Davies, Mark Harrison and S.G. Wheatcroft.)

For the later years, in the period 1938-1946, which includes World War II, average annual growth rate of Soviet GNP was negative, about -1%. For the 1946-1956 post-war recovery, it was 9.40%, and in 1956-1965 it was 7.49%. (These figures are calculated from *European Historical Statistics, 1750-1970* by B.R. Mitchell, published in 1975; here the data are not per capita, but we can still see the jump and then the downward trend after the war.)

The decline of growth rates in the post-World War II period fits in with a table we published in 1977, in an article dissecting the Spartacist's theory of Stalinism. Our figures were taken from the French left journal *Programme Communiste*, which based them critically on Soviet sources. We have updated those figures, using *Russia and the World Economy* by Alan Smith (1993), and produced the graph at the bottom of the page, which shows the growth of Soviet industrial production.

The difference between this graph and the Spartacists' is striking. Our graph shows the remarkable economic expansion of the USSR when it was a workers' state in the 1920's and 1930's. In contrast, by taking the whole 1913-1928 period as one, *WV* downplays the Soviet state's exceptional growth when the capitalist world was mired in depression. Then, by cutting the post-war period off in 1965, *WV* exaggerates Soviet growth rates after World War II. Thus they turn a gradual collapse into an imaginary economic miracle.

*Workers Vanguard* boasted of high Soviet growth in the 1970's, whereas we explained the USSR's deepening economic crisis and challenged the SL's phony figures. (See *Socialist Voice* No. 4.) But since then the USSR has collapsed in life as well as numbers, confirming our theory and exploding their whole pro-Stalinist world view. "Statified capitalism idiocy" indeed.



get here but not necessarily those who have not yet managed to cross the border. As a general rule, revolutionaries prefer that workers wage the class struggle and fight for socialist revolution at home. But millions are being forced out of their neo-colonialized countries by imperialism's increasingly devastating exploitation and violent oppression. How a "communist" can even suggest defending the right of imperialist nations to exclude them at any stage in their journey we cannot fathom.

The SL has attacked our position of opposition to *all* restrictions on immigration as "utopian" and reactionary. We rejected the slogan "Open the Borders" because it suggests calling for self-dissolution of imperialist nation-states, an illusion. But we refuse to let that prevent us from opposing *every* restriction raised against immigrant workers. (Likewise, it is illusory to call for capitalist imperialist nations to disarm themselves, so we don't call for it. Yet we oppose every dollar spent for the imperialist armies and every armed attack by those armies on the exploited and oppressed anywhere.) It is simple; whose side are you on: the desperate masses being forced to "flood" the imperialist states or those who restrict them so they cannot make it to these shores?

In the debate we cited Lenin's denunciation of American "jingo-socialists." Here is the passage in full:

**In our struggle for true internationalism and against "jingo-socialism" we always quote in our press the example of the opportunist leaders of the S.P. [Socialist Party] in America, who are in favor of restrictions of the immigration of Chinese and Japanese workers. . . . We think that one cannot be an internationalist and be at the same time in favor of such restrictions. And we assert that Socialists in America, especially English Socialists, belonging to the ruling, and oppressing nation, who are not against any restrictions of immigration, against the possession of colonies (Hawaii) and for the entire freedom of colonies, that such Socialists are in reality jingoes.** ("Letter to the Secretary of the Socialist Propaganda League," *Collected Works*, Vol. 21.)

Funny that Lenin never worried about "too much" immigration of Chinese and Japanese workers into the U.S. being "incompatible with the right of national self-determination." In fact, anti-immigrant sentiment is only beginning to intensify in the U.S. It will reach full tide when the economic bottom drops out. Once it was the racist warning raised by open reactionaries and "socialist jingoes" that the "Yellow Peril" will flood the U.S. and take away "American jobs." Reactionaries like Buchanan and many labor fakery today are already talking about "the browning of America," the "immigrant flood destroying the European cultural identity" of the U.S. These "socialists," like their jingo-socialist ancestors, are preparing the way for the coming anti-immigrant tidal wave. Their propaganda today will be their agitation tomorrow. And that is why we warn of the danger now.

## DUCKING ON PALESTINE

The SL didn't like any of our questions, especially the one about Palestinian liberation. In their latest article they attempted to explain their refusal to answer by complaining: "The LRP's 'questions' – like 'Are you for Israeli apartheid rule or Israeli ethnic cleansing?' – were politically analogous to "when did you stop beating your wife?"

Well, as we shall see, the SL has been "beating its wife." First of all, they don't give their readers the full question. It was:

**We have proven that as far as Trotsky was concerned, neither he nor Lenin defended the rights of aristocratic, imperialist nations and condemned any putting off of the rights**

**of the oppressed as great power chauvinism. So explain to us how you can defend imperialist Israel's existence on Palestinian land in the name of Lenin and Trotsky. And for the sake of clarity again, since Israel can only exist by either keeping Palestinians' land or by allowing Palestinians to return to their land but denying them the right to vote, what are you for? Colonialist land theft or apartheid?**

The background to this is that we had pointed out in *PR* 64 that the SL could not consistently defend the "right of return" for Palestinians. *WV* responded that "the LRP resorts to lies and distortions" by asserting "that we oppose the right of return for Palestinian refugees" (January 31.) The fact is that the SL does claim to uphold the right of return, but this position is contradicted by their overall position on Israel.

The Spartacists have always supported the right of self-determination, i.e. existence as a nation-state, for all nations today, imperialist as well as oppressed. In Palestine they support the right of self-determination of two different nations: the "Hebrew-speaking" people (their euphemistic term for the Israeli Jews) and the Palestinian Arabs. They say, however, that since these peoples are "interpenetrated," the situation is unresolvable short of socialist revolution – because of the clash of two equally principled contending rights.

However, for Lenin the right of self-determination was exclusively the right of *secession* for an oppressed colony or submerged nation. Where that right conflicts with the "rights" of an imperialist or oppressor nation, we as Leninists take the side of the oppressed. Thus we do not defend the right of self-determination for Israel – that is, its right to exist as an independent nation-state. Moreover, the so-called theory of "interpenetrated peoples" is itself just a convenient concoction. And their answer that this question can only be solved by socialist revolution is a non-answer.

Yes, Palestinians can only win real liberation through socialist revolution, just like black South Africans. But that does not eliminate the question of self-determination; it means that only the socialist revolution can fulfil this democratic right as part of its program. But revolutionaries must fight side by side with oppressed Palestinians in the struggle now in order to build a defense and prove the need for the proletarian revolutionary solution. That was Lenin's point in terms of the fight for national self-determination of all oppressed nations. He wasn't for postponing the struggle anywhere.

How has the SL's support for the supposedly equal rights of both Israelis and Palestinians been manifested? When Israel was engaged in mass ethnic cleansing during the 1948 war, the SL originally defended Israel. They later changed their position to neutrality, the same position they took on the 1967 war that led to the further subjugation of one million Palestinians. So they have never opposed the original imperialist project of setting up the Israeli colonial-settler state in Palestine, even though they have never been able to deny that Israel occupies land stolen from the Palestinians. A real struggle against Israeli oppression means military defense of the Palestinians in every situation where they are under attack by Israel, as well as defending the Palestinians' right to return to their land. That is the program for today as well as for the future revolutionary workers' state.

## DEFENDING THE ISRAELI STATE

This gets us back to our question about the SL and the right of return. If the Palestinians were allowed to return, they would constitute a sizeable majority throughout occupied Palestine (including what is today called Israel proper). Doesn't that mean that any Jewish state would inevitably mean the rule of a minority over a majority?

So either the SL must end up opposing the right of return in favor of “Hebrew-speaking” self-determination – which means defending the results of Israel’s ethnic cleansing and land theft – or they would grant Israeli Jews minority apartheid rule over the Palestinian majority in part of now-occupied Palestine in order to create the new “Hebrew-speaking workers’ state”. That’s why in *PR* 64 we raised the challenge: “It’s time for the SL to put up or shut up: are you for Israeli minority rule, or Israeli ethnic cleansing? It must be one or the other.” And that is the same question we raised at the debate. The SL has not stopped “beating its wife” because it has not stopped defending Israeli self-determination.

At the debate an SL speaker from the floor covered up the real question in their standard demagogic way: “But if you don’t have national rights – what are they saying? The Hebrew-speaking people don’t have a right to live? A right to be?”

This mirrors the Zionist theme that the self-assertion of the Palestinian struggle is an innate threat to Jewish survival. The answer is that a genuine Palestinian workers’ state, part of a socialist federation of the Middle East, would offer Jews the right to have all their cultural, personal and civil rights protected. But the right to exist does not mean the right to maintain separate colonial-settler states on stolen land claimed by masses of their original inhabitants. That is why we say that “All Israel Is Occupied Territory!”

A self-revealing comment was made by another SL contributor from the floor who said: “the LRP, aside from the Zionist Ministry of Information, are about the only two entities in the world that don’t seem to acknowledge that Israel has several hundred nuclear weapons. So you want to deny them their national rights? Get those weapons!”

The SL has always denied that their call for self-determination for the “Hebrew-speaking people” means defending the existence of the current Zionist state. Likewise, they have always claimed that they are interested in drawing the class line in Israel, separating both Jewish and Arab workers from the ruling classes. But Israel’s nuclear power is in the hands of the Zionist ruling class, not the Jewish workers! It is exactly the “national rights” of the Israeli state that they defend.

#### STALINISM AND “DEFORMED WORKERS’ STATES”

It was perhaps most stunning that the SL did not answer our question regarding the so-called “deformed workers’ states.” For the SL, the defense of these remaining “workers’ states” is the main question of the international struggle against imperialism today, the ultimate proof of their adherence to the class line.

The “deformed workers’ state” theory was devised by Michel Pablo in the 1940’s to account for the takeovers in Eastern Europe that created systems modeled on the Stalinist USSR. Since it says that counterrevolutionary Stalinism could carry out the socialist revolution, it was from the beginning nothing more than an anti-Marxist theory to rationalize the suppression of the working class. It represented a qualitative leap in the degeneration of the Fourth International historically. (And since all factions in the International at the time embraced the “deformed workers’ state” rationalization, we designate them all as Pabloites. This issue outweighs the secondary factional disputes.)

To this point, our speaker asked: “Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Trotsky all said that only the working class could overthrow capitalism and build workers’ states. Trotsky said Stalinism was counterrevolutionary and that anyone who said he thought it could play a revolutionary role was dishonest and disloyal. So how in their name could you say that Stalinism created workers’ states?”

In the past the SL embalmed Trotsky’s final statements on the defense of the Soviet Union and exhibited them as a substitute for

a living theory, which for Marxists must be tested by its ability to explain and predict social developments. (See the box on page 21 for an example of the SL’s pseudo-science regarding the USSR.) But unlike the LRP, which openly acknowledges and debates our difference with Trotsky on the “Russian question,” the SL tries to bury theirs.

To elaborate, our speaker had noted: “Trotsky taught that Stalinism after the mid-’30’s was “thoroughly reactionary” and “the chief obstacle on the road to world revolution.” He condemned the assertion that a “bureaucratic revolution” of the proletariat, that is, by the Stalinists, was possible. He condemned such a notion as “not only incorrect, but disloyal.” (The citations are to Trotsky’s *In Defense of Marxism*, pages 19 and 130.)

The SL’s adherence to the Pabloite theory testifies to their belief in the revolutionary capacity of Stalinism internationally. By accepting this notion, the SL not only opposed Trotsky’s understanding that Stalinism could no longer play a revolutionary role internationally. If Stalinists or other non-working-class forces could create a workers’ state of any stripe, it meant that the working class was not fundamentally necessary for overthrowing capitalism – in defiance of the most fundamental principle of Marxism. It also meant that popular fronts with bourgeois forces could make the revolution, another renunciation of the principle of class independence. Indeed, the working class could be crushed (as the Soviet Army did in East Europe) and still considered to be holding state power, albeit in a “deformed” way. All these anti-worker conclusions were eventually adopted by the leaders of the degenerating Trotskyist movement.

#### THE SPARTACISTS’ ULTRA-PABLOISM

What distinguishes the Spartacists (and the ex-SL groups like the International Bolshevik Tendency and the Internationalist Group) is their zeal in expressing the most anti-worker conclusions of the “deformed” theory. This became clear during the massive strike movement of the Polish working class in 1980 and 1981, and it is here that the debate between the SL and the LRP over their defense of the Stalinist bureaucracy versus the working class was at its sharpest. Our position was to support the workers’ struggles against the Stalinist ruling class, while always warning that workers’ leaders in the organization Solidarnosc would betray them.



1982 cartoon in U.S. bourgeois papers showed dependency on U.S. imperialism of Poland's Stalinist rulers. Spartacists hailed General Jaruzelski's military crackdown on the Polish workers, which helped deepen their exploitation for the benefit of Western creditors.

The workers had occupied factories and established workers' councils, dual power organizations of the working class. The Spartacists from the start slandered the Polish working class as lazy: for challenging Stalinist rule, they were "demanding the biggest free lunch the world has ever seen." (*Workers Vanguard*, September 5, 1980.) Because the workers' reformist leaders embraced the reactionary line of the Catholic Church and were receiving aid from the CIA, the SL attributed these counter-revolutionary acts to the working class as a whole. In fact, the church and the Western powers were backing the Solidarnosc leaders because they were doing all they could to prevent the workers' struggles from threatening the stability of the regime. (For background, see our 1981 article "Church and State vs. Workers; A Marxist Analysis of Polish Events" in *Socialist Voice* No. 12; it is also in our pamphlet of reprints prepared for the debate, *LRP vs. SL*.) If the SL were to follow its own reasoning consistently in the United States, it would have to condemn all workers in the unions here as counterrevolutionaries too, given the track record of American union leaders.

Soon the Spartacists were calling for the Soviet Union to invade Poland to crush the workers: "If the Kremlin Stalinists, in their necessarily brutal, stupid way, intervene militarily to stop it, we will support this. And we take responsibility in advance . . ." (*Workers Vanguard*, September 25, 1981.) As we pointed out at the time and in the debate, the *Wall Street Journal* also endorsed the Stalinist military crackdown. In its account of the debate, *Workers Vanguard* cited our claim about the *WSJ* (along with others equally true) and asserted: "Manifestly, no lie is too big for this little league."

Well, they could have looked it up. We quoted it in *Socialist Voice* 16:

**The imposition of military control in Poland could in the long run be reassuring to Western creditors, if it provides greater economic stability, an end to labor unrest and increased worker productivity – even at the point of a bayonet.** (*Wall Street Journal*, December 16, 1981.)

Like this reactionary bourgeois organ, like the reactionary Stalinist ruling class, the Spartacists demanded an end to labor unrest and increased labor productivity (no "free lunch") – "even at the point of a bayonet." We have to amend our National Secretary's label: the Spartacists are definitely not chickenshit when it comes to endorsing counterrevolution against the working class.

Under the Spartacists' hero, General Jaruzelski, the Polish regime enforced an IMF-backed austerity policy and ultimately tried to privatize state-owned industries when Stalinism was on the verge of its economic collapse, and the workers rose up to defend nationalized property. (See for example "Polish Workers Erupt," in *PR* 32.) In 1989, Jaruzelski proved our analysis of the Stalinist regime as capitalist one hundred percent right. He formed a coalition government with the Solidarnosc leaders in order to better carry out the bourgeois reforms that the Stalinists had failed to do alone. The SL, having hailed Jaruzelski's crackdown, shared the blame for these attacks on the working class, along with all those who hailed the Walesa leadership of Solidarnosc. But did the Spartacists "take responsibility" for their alleged workers' state's anti-worker crimes, in advance or otherwise? No, but they have every right to: their *Wall Street Vanguard* called the shots.

## WORKING CLASS REGRESSION?

The failure of the working class to defend the collapsing Stalinist "workers' states" deepened the Spartacists' contempt for the proletariat. Their "declassed intellectuals" began to treat their

own isolation from the class struggle as a positive necessity, a way to avoid contamination by a class that didn't live up to SL ultimatums. The fall of Stalinism deepened their self-satisfied justifications for anti-worker and abstentionist policies in the face of the class struggle and the struggles of all the oppressed.

We have also demonstrated that their abstention, when it takes the form of supposed neutrality between the rights of the oppressed and the oppressor, is actually a grossly opportunist policy of supporting oppressor nations like the Israel Jews. We then showed that in the name of Trotsky they have buried the proletarian essence of Trotskyism and supported atrocities against our class.

To sum all this up, we can do no better than to quote from the SL's own "Declaration of Principles and Some Elements of Program" (*Spartacist* No. 54, Spring 1998.)

**Trotsky's assertion in the 1938 Transitional Program that "the world political situation as a whole is chiefly characterized by a historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat" predates the present deep regression of proletarian consciousness.**

The SL is blaming the loss of working-class consciousness on the working class. In reality, both Stalinism and traditional reformism served as crucial capitalist tools in undermining and devastating class consciousness and the struggle against imperialism and oppression around the world.

The League for the Revolutionary Party and the Communist Organization for the Fourth International share the view of Marx, Engels, Lenin (post-1905) and Trotsky that the working class comes to consciousness as a result of its actual experience in the mass class struggle. The present developing struggles now erupting around the world are the seedbed for the resurrection of working-class consciousness, which is why we so actively intervene in the battles of our class.

For us, spontaneous mass struggles of the exploited and the oppressed are not in themselves the answer to capitalism, but they are a vital component to the fight for socialist revolution. What is decisive is the intervention of proletarian revolutionaries. The advanced workers, the vanguard, must go through the struggle with their fellow workers, exposing the sell-out leaderships and pointing out the necessity of the authentic communist party and the socialist revolution.

This is what the SL denies at every step. The debate was a part of the class struggle, on the level of ideas and theory to be tested in front of a revolutionary-minded audience. No wonder they went through the motions but virtually abstained from the debate, too.●

## *Exchange with the IBT*

The International Bolshevik Tendency has sent us an open letter and posted it on their website and elsewhere, reprimanding us for inaccurately reporting their position on immigrant rights in our web report of the debate (reprinted in this issue). See their website at [www.bolshevik.org](http://www.bolshevik.org). They write that they stand for the rights of *all* immigrants, including "the right of immigrants to enter the imperialist countries."

We will reply on our website. We acknowledge that the IBT has defended in practice the rights of immigrants in relation to the imperialist countries in more sweeping terms than has the Spartacist League. But the IBT position is confused and ambivalent, given that they insist that they share the SL line, which is palpably chauvinist.



# Black Liberation and the Working Class

In the *Workers Vanguard* article responding to our debate report, as well as in Don Alexander's speech, the SL "exposed" itself as an opponent of Black workers' initiative in the class struggle. For one thing, they chose to reprint an absurd charge against the LRP from Alexander's speech. Because it reveals the SL's own backward stance on Black liberation, it is unfortunately worthwhile to quote it at length and take it apart.

Alexander said:

**So the LRP also claims that white workers are a "labor aristocracy," which means that they're bought off, and they lump them with the white racist rulers. This is how they put it: "Black workers no longer have to wait upon whether or not white workers will lead a struggle or not. Black – and Latino – workers are now strategically placed in major industries and in the dominant cities. Their militancy and their actions can be a decisive pole in what the white workers do." This is a pseudo-leftist rejection of the centrality of the working class in the fight to abolish the racist capitalist system. If white and black workers don't have common interests, which means a common fight against the racist exploiters, then you drive the white workers into the arms of the white ruling class and, at worst, the fascists!**

**How can any serious struggle for proletarian power be undertaken by an organization that has just consigned a significant section of the American working class to the scrap heap! In the late 1960's, when the radical-nationalist League of Revolutionary Black Workers refused to hand out their leaflets at Detroit auto factories to white workers, this was a big blow against working-class unity, and a missed opportunity to win them to a program of revolutionary struggle. So this is what the LRP passes off as revolutionary strategy in the imperialist epoch.**

Read it twice. The SL speaker claimed that the working-class struggle is doomed if – as Matthew Richardson put it – "Black workers no longer have to wait upon whether or not white workers will lead a struggle or not . . . ."

If indeed we had just written off the white working class forever, it would not be just a rejection of "a significant section of the American working class," but given the numbers of white workers, it would indeed have meant that we were giving up all hope for proletarian revolution in the U.S. The contention is obvious nonsense. We meant exactly what we said: Black workers do not have to wait for white workers to fight back; they themselves can initiate and lead struggles.

Why is this *not* what the SL is hearing? Does the working class have to be led by white workers rather than Black on every occasion and at every step to merit the SL stamp of approval? Other than that, we can find no sense to the inflamed objections from the SL.

## CENTRALITY OF BLACK WORKERS

We are interracialists as well as internationalists. Therefore we do not question the desirability and ironclad necessity of united working class struggle. The question is how and on what basis to reach these goals. Our booklet *Marxism, Interracialism and the Black Struggle* argued that working-class unity will not occur immediately by decree but through struggle, and sometimes not by the direct or pure path that the SL prefers. We pointed out, however, that the Black working class was now in a far better strategic position to play a decisive role in the class struggle than

ever before. Black and other workers of color toil in large numbers in the heavy industries and the essential urban occupations which keep the nation running. Despite suffering disproportionate layoffs in recent decades, they still have enormous power.

In any given working class there are different strata with differing levels of consciousness due to different material, historical and social experience. Since Black workers are generally more advanced in their consciousness, out of proportion to their numbers in society, we ask the SL: why is the likelihood of encouraging a vanguard role a terrible thing? Only if one has an integrationist, i.e. assimilationist, mentality that denies both the inevitability and desirability of independent Black action, could such objections seem to have any "logic". Trotsky already pointed out the vanguard role of Black workers in the 1930's; the SL still hasn't learned the lesson.

We say Black workers must assert their fighting demands and not subordinate them. And we provide concrete examples where this led to advances for Black workers and all workers. In the early 1970's, for the first time in U.S. history, white workers followed Black workers in serious strikes and struggles (even in the South!). Black working-class presence had become vital in industry, and Blacks had become self-confident militant fighters.

The SL charges us with seeing the whole white working class as an aristocracy of labor. That is not our view. But we do think that white workers in general are in an aristocratic relationship to Black workers, in the relative sense: white workers still earn more on the average for equal work; they still have more advantages and opportunities by far than do Black workers. And of course the totality of racism goes far beyond economics into every crack and crevice of society. Can there be any doubt that white workers have these advantages? Does the SL wish to deny all the material and social differences?

But recognizing the relative advantages in no way means that we see the white working class as a whole as a hardened, permanent aristocracy of labor. The working class contains various strata, with better-off white workers forming the bulk of the aristocracy and oppressed workers of color forming the bulk of the worst-off layers. Moreover, capitalism's ability to maintain that transitory material stake in the system is getting more and more problematic, as the sops granted to the middle strata and the labor aristocracy get smaller as the crisis of profitability deepens. A united fighting working class could win far greater gains than the racially-based sops capitalism dispenses unequally.

White workers' vested interest in the system still exists but is diminishing. But unless revolutionaries militantly intervene, the response will be a movement to recover a greater racial differential, based on reinvigorated racism and the growing state persecu-

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tion of immigrants, offsetting the movement toward class solidarity, egalitarianism and revolution. We can win, provided that Black workers take the lead in pressing the struggle for the common fighting interests of the interracial working class as a whole.

### **BLACK SELF-ORGANIZATION**

The SL also opposes Black self-organization. As our speaker spelled out, our view is parallel to our support for the right to self-determination for oppressed nations. Given the racism of U.S. society, including that within the working class under its present leadership, we recognize the right of Black people to organize independently. Further, situations arise where it is not only correct to recognize the right but to actually advocate separate organization.

That doesn't mean that we advocate or agree with the decision of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers to refuse to distribute leaflets to white workers, as the SL implies. But even when we disagree, we understand why Black workers would choose to organize separately, under the concrete conditions of the auto industry and the autoworkers' union at that time. To not recognize this is, again, to ignore the reality of racism. The SL hurls out one example, a mistaken policy of the LRBW over thirty years ago, to denigrate the whole notion of Black self-organization. Their LRBW example hardly proves the undesirability of Black self-organization or independent Black struggle.

### **GHETTO REBELLIONS**

The SL went into even greater apoplexy over our support for the Black rebellions against police brutality that swept America in the late 60's. Their report proudly quoted an SL floor speaker who "ripped apart the LRP's empty cheering over the ghetto upheavals":

**Yes, there are spontaneous outbursts of rage and yes, they are understandable. And from '64 on, we defended them. ... We sought labor defense of the ghetto masses, linking the ghetto to the factory floor where minority workers have real social power. ... Look at the neighborhoods where those ghetto rebellions happened. What was the outcome? Whole swathes of neighborhoods destroyed and never rebuilt.**

## **Marxism, Interracialism and the Black Struggle**

### ***A Proletarian Revolution* pamphlet**

**by Sy Landy**

An overview of the Marxist understanding of revolutionary proletarian interracialism and the historical course of the U.S. Black struggle.

The pamphlet discusses the idea of Black liberation through socialist revolution as the alternative to integrationism and nationalism, whose failure it analyzes in detail.

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Our difference with the SL is not over the desirability of transcending partial struggles in favor of generalized working-class struggle – whether the struggles are by Black communities under siege in the United States or oppressed peoples under siege anywhere in the world. The best response is the united working-class response. Our difference is that the SL does not see these community rebellions as expressions of the working class at all. Therefore they do not intervene in them as class struggle, even though they do "defend" them.

Their unwarranted fear of independent Black action has caused them to terribly denigrate these struggles rather than intervene in them to fight for a revolutionary path. This is demonstrated by their need to distort history. The SL says that they defended these uprisings but that basically they were reflections of lumpen (hoodlum) rage against the system, which accomplished nothing. The SL sneeringly claims that Blacks just destroyed their own communities.

It is no accident that the SL, wedded to an integrationist-assimilationist outlook, would not want to face the fact that these riots occurred precisely because of the dead-end of integrationism. As we pointed out at the debate, the ghetto rebellions were spearheaded by masses of angry unemployed and underemployed Black workers who didn't have middle-class aspirations and wanted their own gains – jobs, decent wages, real equality, etc., which Martin Luther King et al didn't get for them. These rebellions were in fact only marginally backed by the Black hoodlum lumpen proletariat that the SL always likes to invoke. Even though they were not centered around the industrial core of the working class, they were working-class rebellions.

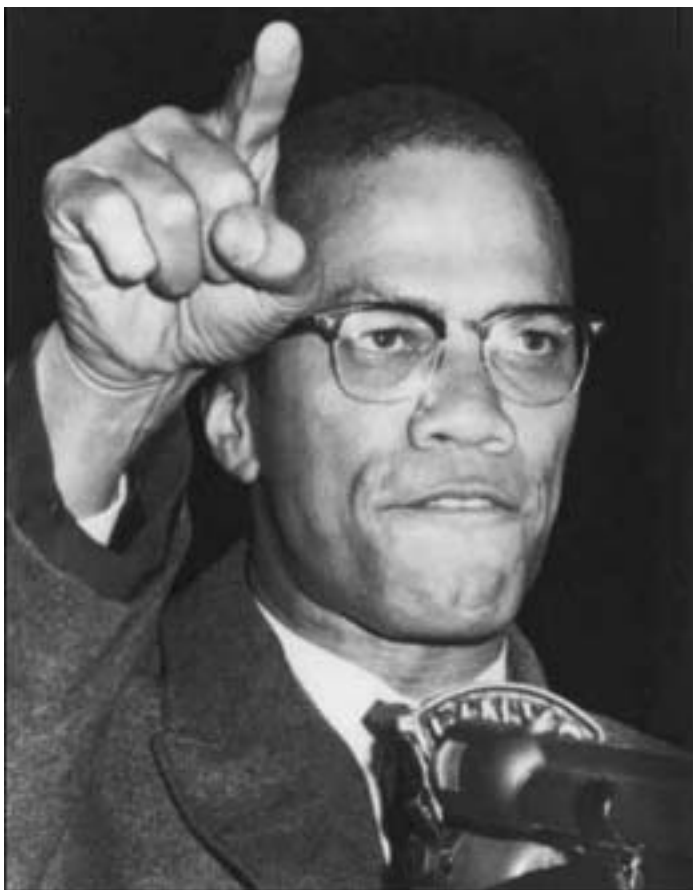
Moreover, they threatened to get completely out of hand and expose the U.S. during the period where the colonial revolution around the world was escalating. Consequently, even in the absence of a class-conscious proletarian party leadership in the struggles, the American bourgeoisie still felt tremendous pressure and ceded very real, if only limited and still unequal, gains to the Black revolts – in terms of jobs, "affirmative action" and educational opportunities. Young Black workers in Detroit, for example, got more jobs in the auto industry than were ever thought possible before – leading exactly to the period of Black worker militancy just discussed. Was not the emplacement of more Black workers in industry a terrific gain for the class struggle? For the LRP, the answer is obvious. Across the country, employment and educational opportunities, albeit limited, opened up for Black people to a degree never seen before in the U.S.

But for the SL none of this exists. The speaker they quoted went on: "What was the real gain of those rebellions? Black mayors, Democratic Party mayors in cities across the country for the purpose of keeping the lid on the struggles." For the SL, that is all.

This is both denial and cynicism. There was nothing inevitable about the system succeeding in putting a lid on the struggles. Nor have the gains of the struggles been completely erased. What is necessary is to intervene in all working-class struggles where possible, not only in the unions, to fight for revolutionary leadership and program.

Despite the fact that rebellions today cannot even win temporarily what they won in the past, they are still happening. (See our Benton Harbor report on page 2, for example.) It is happening because of the overwhelming fact that white workers still do not see racist police brutality as their issue, and that Black working class people and youth cannot and should not wait to begin their struggles.

Why the denigration of independent Black struggle, not only in community riots but also in the workplace? Why the denial of the necessity for independent initiative in the face of racist police brutality and other attacks where white workers are not yet ready



Malcolm X on integrationism: "...the masses of non-white people would remain unequal and unbenefited."

to take action? All of this (and more) is rooted in the Spartacists' denial of the decisive character of the imperialist epoch, which deepens all the divisions within the international working class by its very nature. The same thinking that denies the inevitable conflict between the recognition of the rights of oppressor and oppressed nations, that place an equal sign between the defense of imperialist "national identity" and the rights of immigrant workers, can't see that assimilationism-integrationism is a doomed perspective for the imperialist epoch.

#### ASSIMILATION AND MALCOLM X

To help make our point, Alexander objected furiously to our polemics on assimilationism. And a leading member speaking from the floor challenged us to find any proof that Trotsky opposed assimilationism. Our speaker had no problem with that. He quoted Trotsky in his summary: "During my youth I rather leaned toward the prognosis that the Jews of different countries would be assimilated and that the Jewish question would thus disappear in a quasi-automatic fashion. The historical development of the last quarter of a century has not confirmed this perspective."

Not only does the SL not answer our questions, but when we meet their challenges and answer theirs, they pretend it didn't happen.

If assimilationism was an impossible perspective for Jews earlier in the epoch, it is certainly an impossibility for American Blacks today. "Revolutionary integrationism" or "revolutionary assimilationism" is a contradiction in terms. Malcolm X, who was not a revolutionary socialist but a heroic and incisive Black leader who was a master at peeling away the middle-class liberal pap being fed to Black people, understood the essence of this question better than the SL. In fact, some of the most penetrating remarks came in the fundamental programmatic statement made by the group he founded after he declared that he was no longer a Black nationalist. The Basic Unity Program of the Organization of Afro-American Unity stated:

**Careful evaluation of recent experiences shows that "integration" actually describes the process by which a white society is (remains) set in a position to use, whenever it chooses to use and however it chooses to use, the best talents of nonwhite people. This power-web continues to build a society wherein the best contributions of Afro-Americans, in fact of all non-white people, would continue to be absorbed without note or exploited to benefit a fortunate few while the masses of both white and non-white people would remain unequal and unbenefited.**

Significantly, the program document went on to add, "Therefore, we must reject this term as one used by all persons who intend to mislead Afro-Americans."

Not only did Malcolm understand the racist manipulation inherent in integrationism, his non-socialist organization was pointing out that integrationism was a defense of exploitation, which of course goes unnoticed by the pseudo-socialist Spartacist League.●

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## Iraq

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*continued from page 1*

What makes these attacks possible is the support they find among the masses. Iraqis are enraged that the imperialists have broken their promises of democracy and economic reconstruction, and are rebelling against the U.S.'s colonial occupation and its dictatorial violence and exploitation. Having suffered under Saddam's dictatorship, they are unwilling to bow down before new oppressors.

As a result, demoralization and rebelliousness are spreading among the ranks of U.S. soldiers on the ground in Iraq. The Pentagon has had to extend their tours of duty, repeatedly breaking assurances that soldiers would return home soon. Numerous soldiers have expressed to reporters, and even through anonymous letters, their sense of having been betrayed by the Pentagon and the White House. These public expressions of rebelliousness reached a high point when ABC News aired interviews with soldiers in which they expressed opinions ranging from calls for the U.S. to withdraw from Iraq, to demands for Defense Secretary Rumsfeld's resignation and worse. "I've got my own 'Most Wanted List,'" one sergeant vented. "The aces in my deck are Paul Bremer, Donald Rumsfeld, George Bush and Paul Wolfowitz."

What's more, it is not just Iraqis who are causing problems for the war's principal leaders, Bush and Blair. The exposure of their lies about the purported threat posed by Saddam's supposed "weapons of mass destruction" (WMDs) have become a lightning rod for popular discontent at home. Blair is struggling to maintain power in Britain, while in the U.S. Bush's popularity is sinking. The sense of patriotic unity that swept the working class after September 11, overcoming years of growing contempt for all politicians, is beginning to wane. The war had served as a "weapon of mass distraction" from deepening economic crisis. Now distrust of the warmongers is magnifying anger at growing unemployment and declining living standards.

### WASHINGTON'S WAR AIMS

The Bush Administration and the imperialist capitalist class they serve seemed to think that ruling the world would be easier than this. They are being reminded that the masses do not like to be ruled, and further reminders are in store. Worsening economic

crisis will only increase the pressure on the imperialists to launch further military adventures abroad as well as to intensify the exploitation of the workers and poor at home. Growing mass struggles are inevitable, both abroad and at home. These struggles demand a revolutionary leadership with a clear understanding of the forces at work behind the imperialists' growing aggression, the better to lead the workers and oppressed to overthrow the rotten capitalist system.

The invasion of Iraq was always going to be very risky for the U.S. ruling class and its allies. But as we explained in *Proletarian Revolution* No. 67, with all the risks it entailed, the war was an attempt to answer fundamental needs of the international capitalist system, and of American capital in particular. The invasion of Iraq was a bipartisan policy of both Republicans and Democrats, to which bourgeois critics had no real alternative.

First, the U.S. ruling class was aware that with economic crisis spreading, they would face rising mass struggles, at first most explosively in the "third world." Imperialist stability demands an all-powerful military threat to keep the masses down and rival states in line. The September 11 terrorist attacks challenged the U.S.'s authority as the world's lone superpower, and it had to respond with a massive show of force that would terrorize the Arab masses in particular, and force the whole world to cower. As we wrote immediately after the terrorist attacks:

**George W. Bush and the rest of the scum who rule America are angry. ... Somebody has humiliated them; their place as the world's most powerful and seemingly invincible terrorist has been challenged! ... Soon, as Bush & Co. intimate, the masses abroad will receive a bloody response which will dwarf past atrocities and re-establish who has the only "God-given right" to engage in mass murder on this planet. Terror does rule the world, and Bush wants to make it clear who is going to exercise it.** ("Behind the Terror Attacks Stands Bloody U.S. Imperialism," Sept. 13, 2001.)

In the lead-up to the war we continued this reasoning:  
**The U.S. war on Afghanistan was only a limited success in this respect. It did succeed in toppling the Taliban and installing a puppet regime, slaughtering thousands of civilians in the process. But even against this weak enemy, the U.S. failed to kill or capture the top Taliban or al Qaeda leadership. By invading Iraq, the U.S. plans to send the message to the masses of the world that it has the power and will to smash even bigger enemies without regard for**

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*Iraqi pensioners waiting to receive long overdue funds from occupation regime.*

**diplomacy or international law.** (“Defend Iraq – Defeat U.S. Imperialism!” March 21, 2003.)

#### “BECAUSE WE COULD”

Since the ouster of Saddam’s regime and the growing scandal over the imperialists’ failure to find any WMDs, some ruling-class figures have edged toward admitting a few of the real reasons for the invasion. On June 4, the *New York Times*’s arrogantly imperialist but often well informed foreign policy columnist Thomas Friedman, nearly borrowed his line from *PR*:

**The failure of the Bush team to produce any weapons of mass destruction ... in Iraq is becoming a big, big story. But is it the real story we should be concerned with? No. It was the wrong issue before the war, and it’s the wrong issue now. ... The “real reason” for this war, which was never stated, was that after 9/11 America needed to hit someone in the Arab-Muslim world. Afghanistan wasn’t enough ... Smashing Saudi Arabia or Syria would have been fine. But we hit Saddam for one simple reason: *because we could* ... .**

Earlier, sensing the weakness of the Bush Administration’s lying claims that Iraq had to be invaded to prevent Saddam from using his supposed WMDs, Friedman had tried to incorporate the WMD-hysteria into a more realistic explanation:

**Let’s cut the nonsense. The primary reason the Bush team is more focused on Saddam [than on North Korea] is because if he were to acquire weapons of mass destruction, it might give him the leverage he has long sought – not to attack us, but to extend his influence over the world’s largest source of oil, the Persian Gulf. ... the natural resource that powers the world’s industrial base.** (January 5.)

Subtract the now thoroughly discredited idea that Iraq was assembling a huge arsenal of WMDs and Friedman has, in his typically crude way, presented Washington’s key war aims: asserting U.S. military and economic power over an increasingly crisis-ridden and rebellious world.

#### ANOTHER BUSH NEW WORLD ORDER FAILS

However, unilaterally overthrowing a troublesome Arab dictatorship and thereby tightening their grip on the world’s oil supplies were not ends in themselves for the U.S. rulers. Rather, they were means by which the Bush Administration hoped to establish

a new world order of unrivaled U.S. domination over imperialist rivals and local “third world” rulers as well as the masses. Bush I tried it in 1991, but the end of the Cold War did not bring about the worldwide stabilization the imperialists hoped for. So in the wake of September 11 they are trying once more. While the imperialists again won the war against Saddam’s regime, the U.S. is failing to win the “peace” it wants.

#### 1. Crisis of Unilateralism

Washington’s flouting of the United Nations, plus the opposition to its war aims by Germany, France and Russia, highlighted the fact that the U.S.’s invasion of Iraq was in part aimed against its imperialist rivals. As the world economic crisis deepens, economic competition between the imperialists intensifies, pointing toward trade war. By tightening its grip on the world’s oil supplies, the U.S.’s invasion of

Iraq was designed to strengthen its economic advantage over its main imperialist rivals, Germany, France and Japan, who are far more dependent on oil imports than is the U.S. Asserting its preparedness to defy international law and use its superpower military to brutally enforce its interests in Iraq was necessary preparation for the U.S. using its huge military advantage elsewhere in the future.

In this spirit, Friedman wrote a few years ago:

**For globalization to work, America can’t be afraid to act like the almighty superpower that it is ... The hidden hand of the market will never work without the hidden fist – McDonald’s cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas, the designer of the F-15. And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley’s technologies is called the U.S. Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps.** (*New York Times*, March 28, 1999.)

The Bush Administration’s bold assertion of U.S. military power had seemed for a moment to work. The U.S.’s quick victory appeared to give the rival imperialists, anxious to secure even a tiny amount of influence in post-Saddam Iraq, no choice but to swallow their earlier objections and give their stamp of approval to the U.S. occupation. Thus in May the U.N. Security Council resolved that the U.S. proconsul in Baghdad, L. Paul Bremer III, “has ultimate authority in Iraq under a United Nations resolution that recognized the United States and Britain as occupation powers.”

But now that the occupation is becoming bogged down in an intensifying guerrilla war and its military and financial resources are becoming stretched, the U.S. is struggling to maintain its unilateralism. Washington’s attempts to secure troop commitments from U.N. Security Council states have been rebuffed, and they are having to rely on token contributions of troops from other NATO countries. There are even calls coming from some figures associated with the Bush Administration for the U.S. to surrender control of Iraq to the U.N. before it becomes trapped in a protracted and costly guerrilla war. Such a retreat would mean a humiliating failure to achieve key aims of the war, so the U.S. will do all it can to avoid it.

The rival imperialists have an interest in restraining the U.S. in order to limit the growth of its military and economic power against them. But they cannot afford to allow the U.S. to suffer too great a defeat. Still comparatively weak militarily, they need

U.S. imperialism's strength to maintain international stability for their own interests. Beneath the diplomatic maneuvers between the powers is the underlying drive of the capitalist system that propels the rival imperialists toward trade war and ultimately another world war. In the long term the U.S.'s competitors will be forced to develop their own military power to back their need for international imperialist expansion.

## 2. Redrawing the Political Map of the Middle East

The U.S. has so far met with more success in its broader war aims for the Middle East. It aimed to send a bloody message to the masses of the Middle East that it is prepared to unleash military terror to maintain order. With its occupation of Iraq, the U.S. succeeded in establishing a new and massive permanent military presence in the Middle East, while preparing to largely remove its forces from Saudi Arabia in the hope of alleviating hostility to the Saudi rulers' alliance with the U.S.

An initial measure of the U.S.'s success in terrorizing the masses throughout the region was its ability to force the official misleadership of the Palestinian people to accept a "road map" leading to further domination by the Israeli occupiers. It has gained similar acquiescence from Syria, which refused to harbor Saddam and his cronies after his regime's collapse. Syria, a member of the U.N. Security Council, also failed to vote against the resolution giving the U.S. governmental authority in Iraq.

But Washington has a broader dream: redrawing the political map of the Middle East and gradually replacing the clerical and monarchist rulers with ostensibly democratic regimes that will enforce compliance with imperialist domination of the world. Saudi Arabia and Iran are the next targets. The U.S. sees that their theocratic regimes breed and support anti-Western terrorists, and asserts that its pseudo-democracy will solve the problem.

This hope is already proving illusory. Bush & Co. have rattled their sabres at Iran, calling for "regime change," advocating inspections of its purported WMD programs and even discussing economic sanctions. But the deepening instability of Iraq and the U.S.'s stretched resources make its threats sound increasingly hollow, at least for the moment. Further, the U.S.'s inability to construct its own stable regime in Iraq, let alone an indigenous one, underscores the consequences of the weakening of any of the other dictatorships in the region.

## PLUNDER, OPPRESSION AND MASS STRUGGLE

In motivating its invasion of Iraq, the Bush Administration promised the Iraqi people democratic rights and freedom from tyranny. It also promised to not just rebuild Iraq after the war but to create a new prosperity for the masses in which the profits of its oil industry would benefit its people and not just a powerful ruling clique with its expensive weapons programs.

Instead, having bombed Iraq into a "pre-industrial state" in the first Gulf War (according to a U.N. report), killed over a million people through malnutrition and disease with its decade of sanctions, and wreaked further destruction upon the country with its latest invasion, the U.S. has casually left the masses to suffer. Electricity is still far from being completely restored, even in Baghdad, meaning that there is no way for families to store perishable food or even run fans in the summer heat. Most of the country is still without clean drinking water, and diseases are rapidly spreading because people have no choice but to drink contaminated water. Before the war, 67 percent of the population relied on meager food rations to survive; that figure is now close to 100 percent.

While restoring essential services to the people is unprofitable and therefore a low priority for the imperialist occupiers, they have wasted no time in plundering the country's economy. Before the war had even begun, the White House had signed billions of dollars worth of contracts to favored capitalists. Oil production was restored within weeks of Saddam's overthrow. The U.S. administration quickly created ministries for all areas of the economy, headed by prominent Western capitalists. Their priority has been to privatize all major industries from petroleum to agriculture and open them up for imperialist ownership. They have also made clear that all the tariffs and other measures used to protect domestic industry in Iraq would be removed. Based on these policies, Bush has announced plans for the creation of a Free Trade Area of the Middle East with the hope of forcing neighboring states to further open their economies to imperialist exploitation.

The Iraqi masses took advantage of the fall of Saddam's dictatorship to break into the mansions and offices of their previous rulers and seize



*Iraqis protest against abusive rule by U.S. forces: "Sooner or Later U.S. Killers We'll Kick You Out!"*



*U.S. soldiers arrest Iraqi protester.*

everything they could. It has since become clear that freedom to pick at the bones of the fallen regime was all the imperialists would offer them. But by overthrowing Saddam, the U.S. destroyed the force that had been keeping the masses down. It thereby unleashed the mass rebelliousness that had been brutally repressed for so long.

No sooner had Saddam's regime been overthrown than rival opposition groups – religious, ethnic and secular – throughout the country began attempting to mobilize support and pursue their aspirations to power. By far the most prominent role has so far been played by the Shi'ite religious leaders.

#### **SHI'ITES SHOCK AND AWE U.S.**

In planning their occupation of Iraq, the U.S. grossly underestimated the role the Shi'ites would play in fighting for their rights, expecting them to essentially remain passive. Saddam's dictatorship had relied on using moderate Shi'ite leaders to keep the masses of Shi'ites in check, while viciously repressing those opposed to his regime. The U.S. planned on inheriting those moderate leaders, figuring the Shi'ite masses would be too "shocked and awed" by the U.S. military to resist.

Initially they saw signs that their plan would work. The supreme leader of Iraq's Shi'ites, Grand Ayatollah Ali Hussein Sistani, was a cautious collaborator with Saddam's dictatorship and, before the war, had called on Shi'ites to defend the country against the invaders. But as the U.S. took control of the country, Sistani made a declaration directing all Muslims not to hinder the invading forces – which Deputy Defense Secretary Wolfowitz immediately hailed as "the first pro-American *fatwa*" [religious edict]. But since then it has been the U.S. who have been shocked and awed, and their plans for rule in Iraq thrown into chaos.

Within a week of his pro-U.S. *fatwa*, Sistani found himself surrounded in his house in Najaf by a crowd of armed supporters

of the militant Islamic organization *Jimaat-i-Sadr-Thani* (JST), demanding that he leave the country. This was a serious threat, since the previous week JST supporters had rallied at the Shi'ites' holiest shrine, also in Najaf, to protest the meeting of a U.S.-aligned cleric returning from exile to meet with the previously Saddam-aligned caretaker of the shrine – and killed them both.

The JST won loyal support from many of the most downtrodden Shi'ites through its opposition to Saddam's dictatorship, for which its leaders and members were brutally repressed. It is led by Muqtada al-Sadr, son of the late Mohammed Sadek al-Sadr, a militant Shia cleric killed by Saddam in 1999. The JST is still vying for power with the supporters of Sistani. It has retreated from its demand for Sistani to leave. But its popular support is indicated by the fact that the largest Shi'ite urban population center, located in what had been called "Saddam City" in Baghdad, was immediately renamed "Sadr City" following Saddam's downfall, and a JST cleric, Sheikh

Mohammed al-Fartousi, was acknowledged as Baghdad's most powerful cleric.

Hopelessly out of touch with these developments, the U.S.'s first efforts to form an Iraqi fig leaf for its occupation centered on exiled figures with proven commitments as servants of imperialism: Ahmad Chalabi of the Iraqi National Congress and Iyad Alawi of the Iraqi National Accord. When the U.S. occupation's initial chief, General Jay Garner, called the first conference of Iraqi organizations to prepare for an "Iraqi Interim Authority," he excluded essentially every leader with an organized following beside the pro-imperialist Kurdish leaders Massoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani. Thus the U.S. did not even try to incorporate into its front Shi'ite groups more willing to collaborate with it, like Mohammed Bakr al-Sadr's al-Dawa Party, on the grounds that it was committed to an Islamic state – let alone Ayatollah Mohammed Baqir al-Hakim's Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), which is aligned with Iran.

#### **BREMER'S IRON FIST IN A THREADBARE GLOVE**

Such moves by Garner only added to the most militant Shi'ite forces' support, triggering demonstrations of thousands across the country, including well over ten thousand in Baghdad demanding an end to the U.S. occupation and an elected government. Garner's loss of authority and the need for a more conciliatory approach to some Shi'ite leaders was most likely what prompted the White House to suddenly replace Garner with Bremer as the head of the U.S. occupation regime, the "Coalition Provisional Authority" (CPA).

Shortly after its establishment, the CPA announced that it would appoint an interim government to rule the country until a constitution could be drawn up and elections held. Apparently thinking he would display his commitment to bar any return to power of figures from Saddam's dictatorship, Bremer not only



A relative of Tariq Hussein Mohammed shouts slogans against the U.S. presence in Iraq as they carry his body to a mosque, Baghdad, June 19. Hussein Mohammed was killed by U.S. troops during a protest by former Iraqi soldiers demanding their back pay.

fired tens of thousands of former civil servants but unilaterally dissolved the Iraqi army. This last decision meant that almost half a million Sunnis and Shi'ites with military training were suddenly unemployed. Not surprisingly, the sporadic armed attacks against the occupying forces that had been just beginning now escalated greatly; desperate soldiers linked up in underground cells or joined the armed wings of political and religious parties taking advantage of the growing popular opposition to the occupation.

As mass protests continued to grow and armed attacks on its occupying forces escalated, the U.S. realized that it could not yet afford to create a figurehead government. For even if it were made up of Iraqis of its own choosing, its members could be pressured to adopt policies counter to the imperialists' wishes. The U.S. would have to combine repression of the growing anti-occupation movement with attempts to forge alliances with broader forces among the Shi'ites, hoping to win to its side those willing to collaborate while setting up the more militant groups for a crackdown.

On June 1 the CPA issued a new "weapons control order" requiring all Iraqi militias outside of Kurdish-held northern Iraq, as well as individuals, to disarm. The occupation forces then began a series of sweeps seeking to disarm the population. Thousands of homes were invaded and families brutalized; there were a number of deaths and many hundreds were arrested, only to be released without charges days later. Soon after, the CPA issued a decree banning all "gatherings, pronouncements or publications" in "opposition to the U.S. occupation."

But these policies only outraged the masses further and made the colonial nature of the occupation of the country more glaringly obvious. The U.S. then appointed a sham interim government of Iraqi leaders as window-dressing, an Interim Governing Council (IGC) which would have the power to make governing decisions as long as the CPA agreed with them. The U.S. hoped that this would provide an Iraqi face for its rule and also redirect some of the masses' anger toward their own leaders. For example, by making the IGC responsible for decisions on budgetary spending (though not for how much money it has to spend, which is up to the CPA) it hoped to spread the blame for the masses' suffering.

The CPA had hoped that the IGC would be dominated by Iraqi political figures who were tested collaborators with the U.S. like Chalabi, Alawi, Barzani, Talabani, a few token tribal and other ethnic leaders, as well as more moderate Shi'ite leaders. Unsure of how far it could afford to go in incorporating other Shi'ite leaders, the CPA alternately acted against SCIRI (sending military forces to occupy and ransack its offices) and conducted negotiations with it to afford it a place in the Council.

To win support from among the radicalizing Shi'ite masses, SCIRI leaders spoke out against foreign occupation of the country. But having abandoned its presence in the country's urban areas years ago in favor of conducting military operations from the marshes of Southern Iraq and collaborating with the imperialists, SCIRI has found itself with little popular support outside of a couple of small cities near the Iranian border. It also seems to have lost much of its support from Iran, which has made moves to back the JST. Thus SCIRI knew its only hope for a slice of power was to tie itself to the occupation forces. SCIRI thus sought to show the

CPA that it was prepared to act "responsibly," for example, by promising to disband its 10-15,000-strong militia. Seeing the U.S.'s urgent need for Shi'ite allies and needing cover for its collaboration, SCIRI demanded that a majority of the positions on the IGC be allotted to Shi'ites, a demand the U.S. agreed to. Bremer even agreed to appoint a representative of the Iraqi Communist Party to the IGC in the hope of winning urban workers' support while stifling the emergence of workers' struggles.

But by the time the IGC held its first meeting, it was clear that it had failed to win to its side any Shi'ite leaders commanding mass support, as militant anti-occupation demonstrations by Shi'ites grew. Pressure to come out against the occupation and the CPA's betrayal of its promises of democracy had become so great that Ayatollah Sistani issued a *fatwa* at the beginning of July condemning Bremer's plan to appoint an IGC rather than have the people elect one.

The JST has continued to hold weekly mass rallies of tens of thousands. In a recent speech at one such rally, Muqtada al-Sadr declared the IGC illegitimate and without popular support. Sadr announced the formation of an alternative governing council and an army to defend it. The thousands gathered then marched to the U.S. military headquarters chanting slogans like "No Americans after today!", "No to America! No to colonialism!", "Down with the invaders!" and "Long Live Sadr! America and the Council are infidels! Muqtada, go ahead; we are your soldiers of liberation!"

#### MILITANT ISLAM AND THE WORKING CLASS

Bourgeois observers of Iraq have been shocked by the rapid rise of Iraq's militant Islamic movement and its demands for an Islamic state. Their standard description of the Shi'ites as largely secular, with a mostly non-political clergy, was a product of their ignorance of the class struggle in Iraq under Saddam's dictatorship. The mainstream Shi'ite clerical leaders avoided political involvement, not out of theological commitment but out of fear for their lives. With Saddam's dictatorship gone and the masses increasingly rebellious, their clerical leaders have no choice but to chart a course to political power.



But there is a deep source of secularism in Iraq – the multi-millioned working class. Tearing peasants from rural life and drawing them into modern industry and urban life, capitalism greatly undermined the grip of religion on the Iraqi working class. Many Shi'ites and Sunnis alike identified themselves more as Iraqis than followers of either creed. They shunned Islam's more reactionary and puritanical aspects, from its oppression of women to its forbidding of the consumption of alcohol.

It is no coincidence that the JST bases its support not on the working-class masses but on the most desperate, impoverished and permanently unemployed masses of the slums of Sadr City and other areas. It is mobilizing these elements not just against the imperialist occupiers but also against the democratic rights of the working masses. Thus its leader in Sadr City, Sheikh Mohammed al-Fartousi, has moved to implement a brutal version of *sharia* (Islamic law), calling for physical attacks on all women found not to be wearing veils and for the murder of prostitutes. He has also been behind the bombing of alcohol distilleries and cinemas.

Similarly in other cities, various religious and ethnic bourgeois leaders have sought to overcome the traditions of secular and national unity among the working class and instigate pogroms against rival groups. In the northern oil center Kirkuk, where Kurdish and Arab workers, along with Turkmen and Assyrians, have long lived and worked together, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan has encouraged murderous attacks on Arabs.

At the root of the fratricidal war of all against all that the various religious and ethnic leaders are attempting to spur the Iraqi masses toward is the poverty and desperation that imperialism enforces. With jobs, food and shelter scarce, pro-capitalist leaders of all stripes seek to mobilize support for a fight over who gets how much. Religious demagoguery serves to discipline the poor and solidify their support for leaders with very modern economic interests.

Democracy is possible even in its attenuated bourgeois form only in imperialist countries, whose ruling class's exploitation of the "Third World" allows them to use a portion of their super-profits to buy stability. In the neo-colonial world, democracy is unaffordable. That is why the U.S. allowed the defeated Saddam to survive in 1991. Today it may be able to hold Iraq together for some time through military power, but its search for an indigenous front demands that it find another strongman, lest Iraq and therefore the rest of the Middle East be torn apart. They pray that the next Saddam can be kept on a tighter leash, one held more directly by the U.S. military.

## **WORKERS' SOCIALIST REVOLUTION**

Only the working class of Iraq can lead the masses out of this nightmare. It is the only class with no interest in maintaining capitalist exploitation and imperialist domination. The revolutionary overthrow of imperialist capitalist rule in Iraq and the building of a workers' state committed to socialism is the only way the masses' democratic rights will be secured.

The imperialist invasion has no doubt thrown the working class into disarray. Mass unemployment has skyrocketed and many industries are yet to resume work. Yet there have already been signs of working-class struggle. Protests by unemployed and unpaid workers have become a regular occurrence in Baghdad and other cities, and imperialist investment in the oil industry will provide the basis for revived struggles by the most powerful section of Iraq's working class.

Revolutionaries in Iraq must participate in these struggles, helping their fellow workers' learn their class interests in the course of the struggle. But they must not ignore the masses' struggle against imperialism and for democratic rights; these struggles are the key to the current struggle. The Shi'ite clerical leaders are

winning most of their support not because of their religious edicts but because they claim to represent a courageous fight against imperialism and its local enforcers. The bourgeois Kurdish leaders are encouraging pogromist attacks on Arabs to deflect attention away from their betrayal of the masses' quest for an independent Kurdistan.

These demagogues can be undermined by revolutionaries fighting as the most determined champions of anti-imperialism. In the course of that struggle, they must be the best fighters against religious and nationalist attacks on democratic freedoms. The clerics and bourgeois leaders must be exposed as a dire threat to the anti-imperialist struggle. Revolutionaries fight for the defeat of the imperialist forces in every clash with Iraqi forces of all stripes, but would at all points seek to mobilize and arm the working class independently.

Given the present balance of forces, the working class cannot simply pronounce itself the leadership. By its power to control oil production and much of the economy, and through a program of consistent internationalism and socialist revolution, it can win and unite the masses. Only such a program – permanent revolution – can fulfill the democratic yearnings of the Iraqi people. Without a doubt, a massive working-class anti-imperialist struggle in Iraq would light a match to the whole Middle Eastern tinderbox and send imperialism reeling throughout the region.

Genuine communists would fight for a revolutionary constituent assembly to democratically decide on a new constitution and government to replace the imperialist fraud. Communist revolutionary delegates would argue for the overthrow of capitalism and the creation of a working-class state. They would fight for democratic rights for all ethnic and religious minorities. They would champion Kurdish self-determination and favor a united and independent Kurdistan which would shake Turkey, Iran and Syria – and which could only occur through socialist revolution. They would proclaim that only revolutionary workers' states united in a Socialist Federation of the Middle East could meet the democratic and economic needs of the masses.

We are not aware of any genuinely revolutionary communist force active in Iraq today. The Communist Party has long collaborated with various bourgeois opposition forces and has now openly gone over to the side of imperialism and joined the Interim Governing Council. A new group split from it in protest, but embraces Islam and nationalism. The far more left-wing Worker-Communist Party of Iraq is, according to reports, advocating workers' struggles and opposing the Islamists and nationalists. But the WCPI calls for an end to the U.S. and British imperialist occupation only to favor interim rule by the United Nations, an unprincipled concession to "multilateral" imperialism made all the more ridiculous because the U.N. has endorsed Bremer's CPA.

The Iraqi masses are only just beginning their courageous struggle against their new dictator. But they will only find the road to victory if a genuinely revolutionary Trotskyist party made up of the most class-conscious workers is built to help show the way. In the meantime, the growing mass resistance will serve as an inspiration to the workers and oppressed everywhere that we need not be shocked and awed by the imperialists' military might nor bowed down by the poverty and exploitation they enforce.●

### *Letters Welcome*

We invite readers of *Proletarian Revolution* to send letters to the magazine. Names will be withheld on request. Write us at P.O. 769, Washington Bridge Station, New York, NY 10033, USA.

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## LRP/COFI

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*continued from page 2*

rampage in Benton Harbor, arresting 32 people in one night on old outstanding warrants for offenses like drug possession.

At the rally, we distributed a bulletin, "Fight Racist Police Terror in Benton Harbor! Long Live the Rebellion!" (available on request). It pointed out that Benton Harbor was the first major urban rebellion in the U.S. since September 11, 2001. Our statement warned against the reforms that have been raised in practically every city in the country and have proven useless in fighting police terror: boycotts, letters of protest and complaint and demands for special prosecutors. It called for "a new leadership that won't compromise with the system because it is dedicated to its overthrow – a revolutionary leadership . . . that will primarily come from youth like those who made the rebellion themselves." It concluded:

**These mass struggles must spread to the workplaces, to the key industries and unions where Black workers have a decisive presence. They have the power and organization to protest police killings and other racist atrocities with strikes that hit the enemy where it hurts most, their wallets. The youth of Benton Harbor showed the world what the slogan "No Justice, No Peace!" means in practice; industrial workers have the power to do the same for "No Justice, No Peace, No Profits!"**

### ISO SCHOOL WELCOMES DEMOCRATS

Chicago LRPers attended "Socialism 2003," the summer school hosted by the ISO. In a session entitled "Should the Left Support a Democrat Against Bush?" the ISO made the standard left arguments against voting for the bourgeois Democrats. However, the speaker and several other ISOers also invited those who wanted to vote for the Democrats to join their group. Lest anyone miss the point, the offer was repeated, in response to an LRP intervention, in a session misleadingly entitled "Why We Need a Revolutionary Party."

Openness to Democrats seems to be a developing right turn by the ISO, a step beyond their support for the minor pro-capitalist Ralph Nader in 2000. (See "Nader: Saving Capitalist America from Itself" in *PR* 62.) In the June 20 *Socialist Worker*, they wrote:

**An independent political alternative that stands uncompromisingly against the two-party "duopoly" in Washington is every bit as necessary today as in 2000. Ralph Nader has not said yet whether he will run again in 2004, though Green Party members say that he is inclined toward another campaign. Another potential presidential candidate for the Greens is former Rep. Cynthia McKinney, who lost her seat in Congress last year after she was targeted by a right-wing crusade – and the national Democratic Party abandoned her.**

Supporting a Democratic Party politician for office would be a new low for the ISO. McKinney is as left as Democrats go these days, but still after September 11, 2001, she voted to give open-ended approval to U.S. military action in Afghanistan. The ISO would no doubt insist that as an organization they would never support her running as a candidate of one of the two major capitalist parties, only as a Green. But at the time of the *SW* article, it was already clear that McKinney was unlikely to change parties; she wanted to run for her former Congressional seat, as a Democrat. Whatever her future maneuvers, the permeability of the Green-Democratic line proves once again that, despite the ISO's daydreams, the Greens are a capitalist party.



*Benton Harbor rally July 12 protesting rampant, racist police brutality*

The ISO now seems to be pitching itself to a milieu even further right than the Naderites, no doubt in response to the "anybody but Bush" line being pushed among anti-war activists by liberal leaders. Two things define this milieu: they really hate Bush and they are really demoralized. A comment in the session on the Democrats that "there are no bumper stickers to describe how much I hate George Bush" got near-universal sympathetic reactions. The ISO's turn to Nader in 2000 on the trail of this milieu will have further rightward consequences.

### NEW YORK LRP

LRP union members continue to fight in the transit workers' union (TWU Local 100) and the hospital workers' 1199-SEIU. A new issue of *Revolutionary Transit Worker* is out, covering the latest attacks by the bosses and electoral maneuvers against the new Roger Toussaint machine by the left-supported "rank and filists" along with the discredited Sonny Hall machine. Copies are available to our readers on request. In 1199, our comrades continued to speak out against President Dennis Rivera's futile and divisive maneuvers with Republican and Democratic politicians.

On April 29, District Council 37 (the largest of the city's municipal unions) held a demonstration at City Hall to protest the mayor's planned budget cuts and layoffs. While the police barricades made it impossible to get an accurate count of the size of the rally, it is clear that tens of thousands attended. To counter the pro-capitalist electoral strategy of the union tops and point the way to win the struggle we carried a large banner advocating a "General Strike Against Budget Cuts and Layoffs!" We also had placards saying "U.S. Imperialism in Iraq, U.S. Bosses at Home, Same Enemy, Same Fight!"; "Stop the Attacks on Immigrant Workers! Stop the War on Workers at Home and Abroad!"; "No Layoffs! No Budget Cuts! No Closings! No Fare Hikes!" and "Democrats and Republicans: Two Parties of War, Racism and Budget Cuts; Build the Revolutionary Party of the Working Class!" (Our leaflet for this demonstration is available to our readers on request.)

Our highly successful debate on May 10 with the Spartacist League is covered in a separate article on page 12.

On May 17, we attended the National Conference of the ANSWER coalition, a front group of the Workers World Party (WWP). Roughly 250 people were in attendance. We intervened strongly in the workshops countering the WWP's lack of criticism of the Democratic Party. Perhaps our most important intervention

was an unusually high rate of sales. Over the course of the day, we sold 26 copies of *PR* and made a number of contacts. Also on May 17, we participated in a small counter-demonstration to an even smaller anti-Castro demonstration in front of the Cuban mission to the United Nations.

On May 25, the LRP participated in a small demonstration protesting the death of Alberta Spruill at the hands of the police. This latest police killing of a Black person was accompanied by two other acts of police terror in the same week. Yet the rally drew no more than 100 people. The leadership of the unions and of the organizations of Blacks and Latinos is responsible for the small turnout. Indeed, Al Sharpton is behaving as a respectable establishment politician these days, and didn't show up.

On June 1, we attended a pro-Palestinian counter-demonstration to the "Salute to Israel" parade. The crowd, though spirited and angry, was much smaller than in past years. This was partly due to the pre-announced policy by the Palestine Activist Forum of New York of censoring placards and slogans. A mild attempt was made to censor our "All Israel Is Occupied Territory" placard, without success.

### **PUERTO RICO**

Our supporter in Puerto Rico set up an LRP literature table for the first time, at the National Convention of the Frente Socialista in San Juan on June 22. We asked pointed political questions from the floor that stirred the hornets nest and caused a dash to our table during the final hour of the convention. One question was whether the FS would support the bourgeois Independence party (PIP) in the next election, as it did last time. One "left" leader, Rafael Bernabe, answered that the FS did not publicly support the PIP – an outright lie – but it instructed its members to vote for independentista candidates. Well, the only independentista candidates were the PIP's – an exercise in Orwellian doublespeak. The question was referred to a committee for further study.

### **LA FETE DE LUTTE OUVRIERE**

Several U.S. and German COFI comrades attended this annual event, a political and family weekend festival outside Paris sponsored by the French group Lutte Ouvrière (LO: Workers' Struggle). The fête took place amid a massive strike wave in France and other European countries in response to governmental attacks on pensions and other benefits. We held a forum on the U.S. working class and the anti-Iraq war movement, and also participated in forums by other groups.

Before the weekend, there were hundreds of thousands of people in the streets chanting for a general strike. (See the box on page 38.) Afterwards thousands battled with the police in front of the parliament building. We were struck by how little the mass struggles in France affected the sponsoring organizations. There was one debate on the question, between LO and the other leading pseudo-Trotskyist group in France, the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR), on how revolutionaries intervene in those struggles. The debate drew well over 100 people, standing room only. The LCR argued that it was necessary to call for the general strike and to work for unity of all left forces in building a new mass party. LO argued that, though a general strike was necessary, for the moment one should call only for the "generalization" of the strikes. To demand that the union leaders call a general strike would only spread illusions in the union bureaucracy, they claimed.

One forum was of particular interest to New York workers. Anthony Arnove of the ISO (U.S.) showed up with Brenda Stokely, the president of AFSCME's DC 1707 and a long-time

"progressive" union leader. They were there to plug the French translation of a book edited by Arnove proving that U.S. imperialism has grossly mistreated the Iraqi people. Stokely said she came with good news: things might be starting to get better in the U.S. She had just attended a forum at the New York City Central Labor Council, where various union leaders, including Roger Toussaint, had finally come out for massive defiance of the New York State Taylor Law, which forbids strikes by public-sector workers. She attacked the pro-Democratic Party approach of U.S. union leaders, and observed correctly that the AFL-CIO heads have been involved with suppressing workers' movements in Latin America and elsewhere. (If DC 1707 members want to hear their president say such things in public, they'll have to go to France.)

But at the start of the war drive against Iraq, she said, the traditional conservative stance of the unions started changing: NYCLAW (New York City Labor Against the War), which she is a leader of, passed some brave anti-imperialist resolutions, while various unions across the U.S. also passed anti-war resolutions. Most of these, we note, blamed Bush and the Republicans only, letting the imperialist Democrats off the hook.

In the ensuing discussion, the chair tried to shut up a COFI speaker who explained that the NYCLAW statement was actually pro-imperialist, since it calls on the imperialists to "investigate, apprehend and try those responsible for the September 11 attack." The chair objected that "We are not here for textual criticism." It turned out that the chair was a former member of the ISO's French affiliate, which had recently joined the LCR. Our comrade, to the applause of about a quarter of the audience, shouted over the chair's interruptions that Sister Stokely should tell her members what she had told us; that the union leaders at the anti-Taylor Law forum had themselves refused to strike when it was necessary in the past year; and that we needed a general strike against the attacks in the U.S., as in France. (Our leaflet from 2001, "What's Wrong with the NYCLAW Statement," is still available.)

### **MOSCOW DEBATE**

At a university conference on nationalism in Moscow in June, a debate took place between a comrade from the Revolutionary Workers Organization (RWO-COFI) and a representative of the Revolutionary Communist Youth (RCY), the youth group of the Russian Communist Workers Party (RKRK).

The main thesis of the RCY speaker was that the national question had been solved in the USSR by the Leninist method of national and cultural autonomy; national problems appeared only as a result of the "restoration" of capitalism in Russia. National movements in the USSR were mostly reactionary and controlled by the imperialists to destroy socialism, he said. In present-day

## ***Stalinism and the Fourth International***

In *Proletarian Revolution* No. 64, we published a letter on Stalinism, the Fourth International and related questions by an Argentine comrade, Daniel Bengoechea. Our response to this letter, which states certain agreements and disagreements with us on the nature of Stalinism in particular, goes into careful detail but has not been published in our magazine because of its length. We have therefore decided to post it on our website. Readers without web access, please write to us for copies.

Russia, in his view, there are national problems because of the chauvinist nature of Putin's regime. But at the same time, some national movements are also reactionary because they divide the unity of the workers for the struggle against capitalism in Russia. Examples he gave include the Tatars, Karels, Buryats and other minority movements. Some of these movements also use a reactionary Islamic morality of unity between workers and exploiters, he said.

Our comrade replied that the October revolution was victorious because of the Bolsheviks' Marxist and internationalist approach to national independence – for Ukraine, the Caucasus, Chechnya, Central Asia, etc. After the victory of Stalinism, the old Tsarist policy on the national question was revived. "Autonomization" and the theory of Russia as the "older brother" in a "happy family of Soviet peoples" were neither Leninist nor socialist. After World War II, national contradictions grew as a result of the deportation of a number of nations which allegedly

had collaborated with the Nazis. The big anti-Soviet movement in the Baltic countries and Western Ukraine was a result of the Kremlin's chauvinist policy.

The collapse of the USSR didn't create this contradiction – rather it showed it more clearly. The nature of these national movements was very contradictory. There were many workers in them, like the Ukrainian miners who stood for independence of Ukraine and workers' control in the mines during the strike in the summer of 1991. The real solution of the national question must be based on the Marxist program of the right to national self-determination. We do not call for a new USSR, which wasn't socialist, but fight to build an international party of proletarian revolution to change society.

After the debate there was a very interesting discussion; our comrade was asked a lot of questions by the students. The Stalinists looked very poor at this meeting. The RWO proposed to continue discussions like this in the fall.●

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## Warsaw

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*continued from page 11*

The Polish and Jewish workers' movements had a rich history of political dialogue and polemic. They regarded political debate as a vital part of the class struggle. This was not lost in the ghetto even under the Nazi heel prior to the "final solution." Dozens of left political tendencies and publications flourished, and political life was intense – as questions of how to fight Nazism and how to win socialism were debated. Exchange, criticisms and polemics from abroad had always been encouraged as part of the vitality of a self-confident movement which, no matter its current state, acknowledged its internationalist heritage.

We too make no apologies for seeking to iron out in debate questions of principle, strategy and tactics based upon past gains and past experience. In fact we learned this, the Marxist form of politics, from precisely such progenitors as the ghetto fighters for socialism. We would do them less than honor if we were to join the ranks of hypocrites and bury their political and military accomplishments in false flattery.

In not giving political support to the dominant political leaderships which carried out the ghetto struggle, we certainly do not wish to forget the small force present at the time to whom we do give our allegiance, the Trotskyists. We have at best incomplete knowledge of their work, but we do know that they fought and died beside their working-class brothers and sisters with honor. We like they give military support and fight alongside our class even when we cannot agree with its current political leadership.

It is not only in Poland that the new round of proletarian struggles are brewing. The whole world is on the eve. As our Trotskyist ancestors did in the Warsaw Ghetto we shall do now. The movement will have all its hesitations and mistakes which will cost it in blood, but Bolsheviks shall fight alongside their class, always trying to point the way, confident that the mass struggle itself will teach the class its path to a communist world. This time the struggle of the Warsaw Ghetto – writ large – will not be defeated. Our class can and does learn from its history.

***Remember the Warsaw Ghetto!  
Forward to the Re-creation of the Fourth International!***

# Fight Police Terror!

## ***No Support to Capitalism's Racist Anti-Worker Police!***

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- Why a revolutionary party must be built by the workers and poor if we are to stop being sold out.

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## Budget Crisis

*continued from page 40*

*Collapse*.) It is no accident that the procession of urban budget crises began in the early 1970's, when the post-World War II economic boom ended. The sops that the capitalists had conceded to the working class had to be taken away. To blame the fiscal crisis on the business cycle is to really blame capitalism itself. Moreover, the world is returning to a status parallel to pre-war years of widening depression conditions and intensifying inter-imperialist rivalries.

Cutting taxes on the wealthy, therefore, was a logical capitalist method to try to restore profit levels. That this meant cutting municipal and other public services is also a deliberate choice for the capitalist class, since those services are used mainly by working-class people. It goes hand in hand with the rulers' imperialist wars abroad, aimed at controlling the world's resources and solidifying the superexploitation of its cheap labor.

Capitalism's ups and downs are lawful within the system but not inexorable laws of nature. On the contrary: humanity has reached a stage in its history where the productive forces of the world economy are advanced enough to feed, house and care for everyone on Earth at a decent level; it is the capitalist system of class rule and its need for profitability that prevents it. The capitalists use the crises as part of the class struggle, as a particular form of war against their enemy, the working class. But for the working class, the solution is getting rid of capitalism through proletarian revolution.

### LABOR LEADERS' "FIGHTBACK" IN NEW YORK

To get away with their attacks, the bosses and the government count on spineless acquiescence or outright cooperation from the unions. The leaders of our unions are wedded to the needs of capitalism and therefore inevitably sell workers out by going along with most of the attacks while begging to negotiate cooperatively over a few crumbs. For example, Randi Weingarten, president of the United Federation of Teachers (the New York City local of the AFT) and chair of the Municipal Labor Committee, summed up the attitude of the union bureaucracy last fall by comparing Bloomberg with the city's previous mayor, the openly anti-union Rudolph Giuliani:

**The climate is different, because the mayor, instead of going right after labor or services, has really tried to share the pain by calling for tax revenues. Even though we are very leery of contributions by people who shoulder a lot during a budget crisis, we recognize that there is a budget problem and there is a willingness to sit down and explore solutions.** (*New York Times*, Nov. 16.)

This was pure cover-up. The mayor was not trying to "share the pain" – he wanted the working class to pay most for the crisis. His commuter tax proposal and the whopping real estate tax hike that the Democratic Party-controlled City Council passed are meant to convince workers that the rich will shoulder much of the burden, but that was a deception. The property tax hike will hurt plenty of working-class homeowners and be passed on as higher rent for millions of other workers.

Under pressure from their members, the union leaders have made a show of resistance.

This spring in New York, several unions mobilized tens of thousands to protest the cuts that affect them. But instead of class solidarity there was division: there were separate rallies by teachers, hospital workers and municipal workers. One of the largest rallies, called by AFSCME District Council 37 on April 29, drew 20,000 people but only token contingents from other unions, despite the presence of all the top officials on the podium.

The rallies mainly served the union leaders' need to let their members show their anger and blow off some steam – as well as to give platforms to their favorite Democratic Party politicians. The bureaucrats' real strategy is, as always, resisting demands for mass struggle and instead lobbying politicians in the state capitol in Albany and in City Hall.

The union leaders' penchant for stabbing other unions' members in the back was spelled out in *The Chief*, an independent New York civil service newspaper, of June 27:

**One union adviser explained it this way during the 2001 mayoral campaign: he hoped his union's candidate got enough labor endorsements to elect him, but not so many that the rewards for backing a winner got spread too thin.**

Given the union leaders' record, it is no surprise that they cheered when the state legislature in May overrode the governor's vetoes and passed a number of tax increases, not only on upper incomes. For example, the restored sales tax on clothing under \$100 aims directly at the working class. These hikes allegedly saved most city services – by sticking the cost to workers in general. And thousands of city workers were laid off. The moral of the story is that relying on pro-capitalist liberal politicians or union leaders for "practical" solutions just gives them cover to raise the burden on the working class in the name of "fairness."

### WHY WE CALL FOR A GENERAL STRIKE

For years the union bureaucrats, in New York as elsewhere, have allowed one mayor and governor after another, Republicans and Democrats, to get away with vicious cutbacks and give-back contracts. Even though workers often are contemptuous of the cowardly leaders, the practical effects of the bureaucrats' inaction instill a feeling of powerlessness in the ranks.

Half-measures will not stop the attacks. Indeed, the worsening crisis coupled to feeble responses will lead to further racist and chauvinist attacks designed to divide, conquer and milk the



*April rally, New York City. Union officials and Democratic politicians on podium are all dedicated to keeping New York working for capitalists.*

working class. Private-sector workers will be turned against municipal workers, whites will be whipped up against Blacks, U.S.-born workers against immigrants, each immigrant nationality against the others – in a war of all against all. In this context, abstract words about brotherhood are no answer. Only a powerful unified action can show our class that its common interests are paramount and prove the power of class unity.

One advantage the urban working class has is that cities cannot function without their municipal workers. Imagine if the transit workers' leaders in New York City had been forced to allow them to strike when faced with a miserable contract last December (as they voted to do, unanimously, in mass meetings; see our accounts in *Proletarian Revolution* No. 66). A transit strike, supported by the rest of the city's workers, would have stopped the ruling class attack in its tracks.

Indeed, a strike by any major municipal union, if directed against the whole range of anti-working-class attacks, could inspire the workers of other unions to join in a citywide strike. It could rally to its side millions of workers and poor people outside the unions, who are equally targeted by the budget cuts and who have for decades seen no way to fight against the perennial attacks. It could win the support of immigrants and Black and Latino workers who face rising racist attacks and police brutality along with the budget cuts.

That is why the LRP and other advanced workers in the U.S. fight for a "General Strike to Stop the Layoffs and Budget Cuts!" Mass working-class united action is the means by which class consciousness accelerates. Once workers feel their own power to shut industry and the cities down – and halt profit-making, the life blood of the system – then all things become possible.

As revolutionary workers, we do not hide our view that mass strike action leading to a general strike can not only halt the attacks but point the way to a socialist revolution that can end the power of the capitalists forever. The union officials think along similar lines but in reverse: they hold back struggles because they are afraid they will get out of hand. They support the capitalist system, benefit from their own role in it as brokers of labor power and avoid any struggle that might endanger it.

### **"TAX THE RICH"?**

Because of their stake in preserving the system, the bureaucrats will always oppose not just drastic actions like a general strike but also "impractical" solutions that threaten capitalist property rights. Instead they come up with seemingly practical reforms.

This past spring, New York's municipal unions ran a series of TV ads targeting Mayor Bloomberg and urging him to raise taxes on the rich. This demand seems to draw a clear class line and also seems to provide a fair solution, since the rich were paying higher taxes only a few years ago. Returning to the tax rates of the recent past is presented as a popular and not even particularly controversial way to plug the financial drain. And since the most liberal politicians will go along rhetorically, for the union bureaucrats "Tax the Rich" becomes a more populist way of saying "Elect Democrats."

In this spirit, the union-linked Coalition for a Livable New York called for a restoration of the city's stock transfer tax and commuter tax, plus a tax increase on higher incomes and closing certain corporate tax loopholes. These proposals would take in \$6 or \$7 billion per year in new revenue. The Coalition prepared a detailed legislative proposal, only to find that the legislature "saved" the city by taxing workers again.

Many organizations that claim the name of socialism have also raised "Tax the Rich" or its equivalent. Some of them likewise assure workers that it is an eminently practical demand. For example, the Socialist Alternative (SA) group says in a leaflet that

## **French Workers Demand General Strike**

During May and June, hundreds of thousands of French workers marched in protest against government plans to cut back their hard-won pension rights. At one massive rally on June 3, at which COFI members were present, the preponderant chants were for a general strike. "All Together, General Strike," "General Strike of all Occupations," "General Strike – Public and Private," were among the variants heard. At a mass workers' meeting in Marseilles on June 12, one union leader, Marc Blondel of the Force Ouvrière was cheered to the rafters when he said vaguely that his union had voted for a general strike. Another leader, Bernard Thibault of the main labor federation, the CGT, was booed and whistled off the podium for suggesting a less militant alternative.

It is not that French workers are inherently more militant than Americans. But when workers see the power of their class in struggle, they look for ways to fight and to win. They agree with the statement of the French labor minister François Fillon, who commented that "in order for the [government's pension] reforms to be defeated, it is necessary for the country to be paralyzed by a general strike." Former New York mayor Ed Koch once said the general strike is labor's "nuclear weapon." The bosses know it, and that is why they and the labor leaders subservient to them prefer workers' unilateral disarmament.

"An income tax increase of just 1% on New York's super-wealthy could more than pay the \$600 million that the unions are being asked to sacrifice." The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) urges that "labor should call for a steeply graduated income tax on the income from profits, dividends, interest, and rents of the capitalists and other wealthy layers." (*The Militant*, Nov. 18, 2002.) The International Socialist Organization (ISO) chimes in: "The best solution to the budget crisis is a simple one: Tax the rich!" (*Socialist Worker*, March 29, 2002.)

This is all meant to sound very reasonable. But the obvious problem that any socialist should understand is that governments at all levels in this country are run by and for the capitalists. Boosting tax rates on the wealthy won't just happen because it makes sense to a majority of workers. It is a question of power.

Moreover, when the capitalist system is facing an economic crisis, the ruling class fights for its booty tooth and nail. As we noted above, the capitalists needed their decades of tax breaks to counter the long-term decline in profit rates. If one locality were to raise taxes on the rich enough to ease the crisis, the capitalists would move their assets and companies elsewhere. (If stuck in one locale, the corporations pass on the taxes through higher prices to working class consumers.)

That is why the LRP does not advocate "Tax the Rich." No matter how radical a twist is put upon it, the demand is cosmetic rather than confrontational; its built-in aim is reforming the capitalist system. And we believe that the capitalist crisis requires socialist solutions, not taxes that accept the continued existence of rich and poor.

Nevertheless, if a fighting working-class mass movement existed, the bosses' ability to pass on the taxes could be at least delayed. And if a united working class were to fight for such a demand with teeth in it, that would require an all-out class war against the capitalists, despite the assurances of liberals and leftists who propose this "simple" demand.

So we would actively participate in the struggle, openly fighting for confiscatory taxes and placing demands for a general

strike on the union leaderships. We would as always fight to expose the reformist politicians and bureaucrats who always seek to save the profit system from serious costs. The struggle itself outweighs the limitations of its reform demands. Victorious struggles can show our class it has the power to change society.

### **REPUDIATE THE DEBTS TO WALL STREET!**

We favor demands and struggles that frankly challenge property rights and point to the expropriation of the capitalists, rather than populist demands which seek to line workers up behind middle-class bourgeois reform leaders.

One major tool for capitalists to squeeze out extra profits from the workers is the public debt, a major source of financing for many state and municipal expenses. The government borrows from banks and other financial institutions and pays off the debt with interest over several decades. In the case of New York City, through its general obligation bonds and additional borrowing authority, service on its debt (principal and interest payments) amounts to over 17 percent of its tax revenues. This figure increased substantially during the mayoralty of the supposedly conservative Giuliani, who relished giving tax breaks and hand-outs to his fellow capitalists while imposing repressive and racist austerity on the working class.

From the working-class point of view, public debt is a scheme for paying the rich for the use of their money rather than simply taking it from them, as the state does from working-class people through taxes. Moreover, the wealthy lenders are exempted from taxes on their income from this debt. The underlying economic crisis has been used to accelerate the city and state debt obligations – just as internationally, crisis-ridden countries like Argentina have been plunged into deeper financial crises by their staggering debt obligations to the International Monetary Fund and other imperialist agencies.

To defend the working class from the banks' usurious debt repayment demands, the attacks on spending and the pay packets of government workers, the LRP raises the demand "Repudiate the Debt!" This demand exposes the role of the banks in manipulating the capitalist crisis. It openly defies the bourgeois legality which cloaks their extortions. Objectively, it answers the immediate needs of the increasingly beleaguered working class, and it points to a far more conscious class struggle to seize and nationalize the banks. It connects the struggles of workers in the imperialist countries with those in the oppressed nations, showing that imperialism is the common enemy.

### **METHOD OF THE TRANSITIONAL PROGRAM**

In this we follow the method of the revolutionary Communist International in the 1920's, as summarized by Leon Trotsky in his writings on the Transitional Program (TP) in the late 1930's, a program written for the newly-founded Fourth International. Trotsky advocated raising demands like jobs for all, a massive public works program, a shortened workweek with no loss in pay and expropriation of capitalist property, the banks and industry. Such demands concretely spell out the steps that a revolutionary workers' state would take in order to move the economy out of the impasse capitalism had led it into. (The method of the Transitional Program outlined here is spelled out in detail in the article "Myth and Reality of the Transitional Program" in issue No. 9 of this magazine and on our website.)

In the U.S., Trotsky was addressing a setting created by the powerful movement of the working class in the 1930's, which had fought major and victorious strikes, built industrial unions – and needed at that point to combine its industrial militancy with a political confrontation against the capitalist state. The TP was

designed to substitute for minimum reform demands. Its series of demands placed on capitalism and its state to take actions in defense of working-class needs is designed to expose reformism in practice.

The politically advanced layer of workers will understand that only a revolutionary workers' state can fulfill the interests of the masses. But the majority of workers are not revolutionary from the start. They will test the possibility of achieving their goals by pressing the existing state for every need before they see the necessity for socialist revolution. The transitional demands reflect immediate needs and can be fought for in united struggles by the less advanced workers as well as vanguard workers.

In struggle, different layers of workers become class conscious at different rates. The role of the vanguard workers and their revolutionary party is to fight alongside their class brothers and sisters, constantly exposing the reformist misleaders and pointing out the need for socialist revolution and for workers to join the communist revolutionary party which is the key to its success.

### **BUILDING THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY**

In the U.S., where there has been for decades no workers' movement with a record of victories on the economic plane, raising transitional demands agitationaly is possible only when the struggle accelerates. But it is still necessary to prepare advanced workers for taking the leadership of their class when the struggle does explode. Raising the political consciousness of the advanced layer is the primary task of revolutionaries today.

One fake socialist approach is based on the raising of reform ideas without connecting them to revolution; this reflects the idea that the masses of workers do not have to know where "revolutionaries" believe their demands will lead to. In contrast, the task of working-class revolutionaries is to show the most advanced workers how they can persuade their fellow workers through heightened class struggle that their class has the power to defend itself against the attacks. The struggle would point to working-class socialist revolution as the only solution to the economic crisis now wracking the U.S. and the world.

There are important harbingers of struggle on the horizon. The economic crisis has fomented increasing proletarian mass explosions in country after country. The world economy is interpenetrated; the fightback here too is inevitable. Given how delayed the struggle has been, its outbreak is likely to be a sudden and cataclysmic eruption unexpected by even the workers who launch it. We note that almost the entire working class in the New York region was looking to see if the December transit confrontation would point a way for them too to resist the current attacks.

Mass class struggle helps develop class consciousness. That is why the LRP takes every opportunity to raise the idea of general strikes as the means to fight the present capitalist onslaught. Our class must learn that today's "practical" answers only seem reasonable because the fightback is still at such a low level. But they won't work. Workers are searching for a way to fight, a leadership that can win. That is why our class needs revolutionaries who will show the way to the mass general strike, the proletarian revolutionary party and socialist revolution.●

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Our website features basic documents of the LRP/COFI in English, German, Russian and Spanish, as well as statements, leaflets and news items to help keep readers informed of our activities.

Visit our website at [www.lrp-cofi.org](http://www.lrp-cofi.org)

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# PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION

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Fall 2003

## Budget Crisis Ravages Cities and States *General Strike to Fight Layoffs and Cutbacks!*

by Arthur Rymer

It was officially announced this summer that the recession in the U.S. is over. No working-class person believes this. Major job cuts continue in the private sector, and the official unemployment figure hit a nine-year high of 6.4 percent in June. The crisis is real. Its biggest effect is the severe budget shortfall faced by over forty states and many cities.

To make the working class pay, public services are being slashed and taxes on working people are escalating. Job losses and health-care cutbacks are the worst features of the current attack, which is being

widely referred to as the deepest fiscal crisis in the U.S. since the Great Depression of the 1930's. The cuts in municipal jobs and services disproportionately target Black, Latino and immigrant workers. But the working class as a whole has to fight back.

President Bush and Congress's whopping tax cuts that favor the rich are setting up a half-a-trillion dollar federal deficit – a gigantic act of looting that dwarfs the mere billion-dollar swindles of firms like Enron and WorldCom. Looting aside, one obvious aim is to force big cuts in programs, and to force the states to slash budgets and raise their taxes. The federal government's promises to aid New York and other crisis-ridden cities and states have gone up in the smoke of the wars against Afghanistan and Iraq. The *Daily News's* New Yorkese headline about the president in 1975 – “Ford to City: Drop Dead” – applies today not only to New York but to practically every city in the country.

### NEW YORK, CALIFORNIA UNDER ATTACK

California and New York have been hit especially hard, since their tax revenues were heavily based on the overblown stock market bubble of the 1990's. Since 2000, Wall Street's profits have fallen by over 50 percent, from over \$20 billion to under \$10 billion.

California is also still suffering from the energy crisis of 2001 induced by profit-gouging corporations like Enron. The state deficit is over \$30 billion, and Democratic Governor Davis has called for devastating public service cuts of over \$20 billion. Medicaid and public education at all levels will be slashed, while repressive agencies like the prison system and state police are getting increases. The Republicans, demanding even harsher measures, have organized a ballot recall of Gov. Davis.

In New York City, workers went through a similar round of severe budget crisis, cutbacks and austerity in the mid-1970's (along with lesser crises several times in between). The current assault is



*LRP slogans at New York City Hall demonstration against anti-worker attacks.*

blamed on the September 11 terrorist attacks, but in reality the city's economy has been in decline since early 2001.

Sept. 11 did have its effect; in its aftermath, thousands of businesses and offices in the commercial area of Lower Manhattan near the former World Trade Center closed down. And the capitalists wasted no time in using Sept. 11 as the handy cover to make the working class pay for the underlying systemic crisis. Overall, New York State lost almost 300,000 jobs in 2001 and 2002, over two-thirds of them in New York City. (U.S. cities combined lost over a million jobs in that period.) Mayor

Michael Bloomberg at one point threatened to lay off 10,000 city workers. The prospect for state aid is limited, since New York State's budget shortfall is at least \$10 billion.

Particularly bitter were the cuts proposed to the Fire Department, whose workers were hailed as heroes after 350 fire-fighters lost their lives in the World Trade Center collapse. Neighborhood protests saved some firehouses from planned cuts. Other protests have arisen over transit fare hikes of up to 33 percent, which affect almost all working people in the city. The Metropolitan Transit Authority, which runs the subways and buses, claimed a sudden budget deficit when faced with union contract demands last December. Since then, city and state officials have exposed the claim as fraudulent bookkeeping. Opponents of the increases won initial victories in the courts, but in the absence of mass actions, these were overturned.

### CAPITALISM AND CLASS CONFLICT

The reason for the nationwide budget crisis given by governmental authorities and the bourgeois media is the downturn in the U.S. economy, which has reduced income for rich and poor and therefore meant lower tax revenues at all levels of government. Liberal observers add that the downturn is exacerbated by the fact that during the profit boom of the 1990's, tax rates were cut back on businesses and the wealthy, on the excuse that high profit levels would generate enough tax revenue even at lower rates.

There is some truth to these arguments, but both mask the fundamental causes. The economy's business cycles are part of the capitalist system's blind laws; they can be dampened by government intervention, but not eliminated. And beyond the cyclical ups and downs, there is the long-term downward trend in profit rates. (See the LRP pamphlet, *The Specter of Economic*

*continued on page 37*